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INTERPRETING THE EAST LITHUANIAN BARROW CULTURE

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In this article the origins and development of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture (from the early 3rd to the late 13th centuries AD) are discussed, and the necessity of paying greater attention to the archaeological evidence is stressed. Correspondingly, various social and religious manifestations within this culture, relating to its formation, existence, and transitional periods are examined, and some new approaches are proposed.

Key words: Iron Age, East Lithuania, burial rites.

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Introduction

In the basins of the Nemunas and Neris rivers there are many archaeological sites from the Roman, Middle and Late Iron Ages that are treated as monuments of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture. This conception is highly important in order to obtain an objective understanding of the history of both Lithuania and Belarus.

At this point I would like to discuss a statement prevalent in the historiography and related to the interpretation of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture. It has been stated that the roots of the Lithuanian nation are already evident in the early period of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture (cf. Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė 2001, 113). The development of this culture during the 1st and early 2nd millennium AD did not undergo any significant interruptions. This cultural formation became a form of the feudalistic organization in the 13th century as a direct result of the gradual development of the institutions and relationships between

the members of the community. Almost all archaeological studies in the former Soviet Union were conducted according to such a pattern. The investigations of these cultures are actually much more sophisticated and should be verified in greater detail.

I would like to add some significant material to the investigation of East Lithuanian Barrow Culture, and interpret it as a much bigger complex of interdependent features including material culture, religious features, burial rites and peculiarities of lifestyle. This article is devoted to two aspects of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture, namely its origins in the late second and early third centuries and the changes that followed in the middle of the fifth century (fig. 1).

Origins of the culture

Researchers only observe closer contacts between western Baltic tribes and Striated Ware Culture during the final period of its existence. Quite a number of rough-

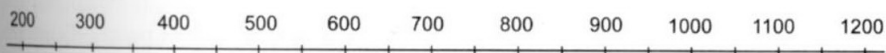


Fig. 1. Presumed stages of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture (drawn by the author).

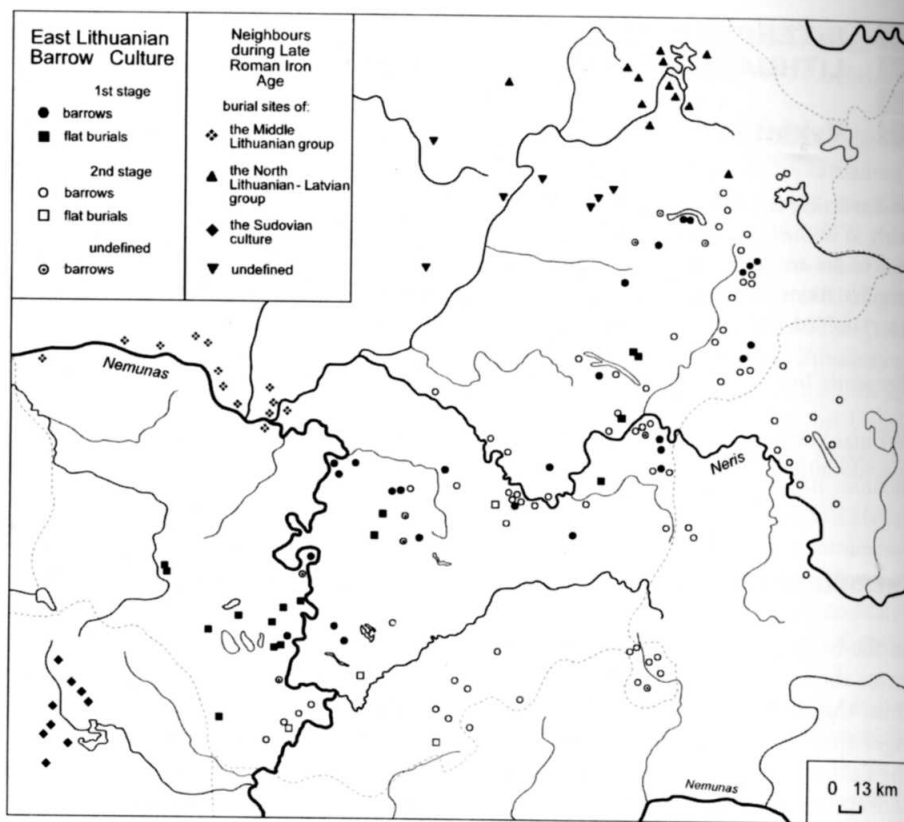


Fig. 2. The East Lithuanian Barrow Culture. Distribution of the burial sites of the Late Roman and Middle Iron Ages (drawn by the author).

surface pottery characteristic of the western Balts began to appear in the area of the Striated Ware Culture at the turn of the first millennium BC (Даугудис 1966; Бобринский 1978, 250; Лухтан 1987, 20; Медведев 1998, 82–84).

The same direction of interaction (from southwest to northeast) is demonstrated by the migration of small groups along the moraine heights of Sudovia, Dzūkija, East Lithuania and Selonia to Suvalkai (Suwałki) region, eastern Lithuania, and Selonia (Шноре 1985, 44–46; Nowakowski 1995, 78; cf. Чеснис 1985, 148). Single flat graves and barrows including both inhumations and cremations illustrate this process (Osowa, Przebród, Raczki, Szwajcaria in Suvalkai region and Bakšiai, Kairėnai, Medžionys, Pakrauglė, Seiliūnai – in Lithuania) (fig.

2). Lesser known recently excavated graves dating from the 3rd century AD are located in Akmeniai-Kurganai, Antasarė, Baliuliai, Migonys, Moša, Pakalnai, Pilviškės, Slabadėlė, Visginai (barrow groups) and Graužiniai, Zapsė (flat graves). A revision of the hillfort materials shows that the end of the Striated Ware Culture and major changes in hillforts should be dated to the late 2nd and early 3rd, but not to 4th or 5th centuries (Лухтанас 2001, 24). The complex of the archaeological sites in Kernavė provides good examples. During the late 2nd and early 3rd century the buildings on the Aukuro kalnas hillfort were burnt down (Luchtanas 1994, 52). On the site where the people of the Striated Ware Culture were buried in the Pajauta valley, a new large settlement was founded (Luchtanas 2002, 22).

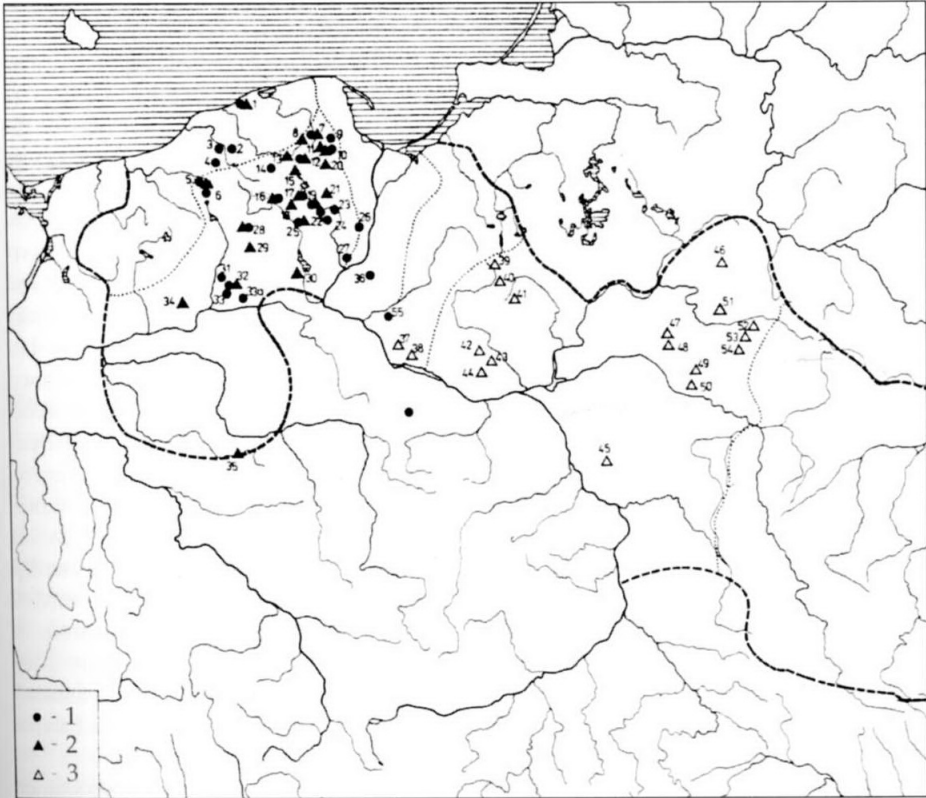


Fig. 3. The Wielbark Culture. Distribution of stone circles and stone-covered barrows dated to the Roman Iron Age (according to Wołagiewicz 1986). 1 – stone circles, 2 – stone-covered barrows of the early Roman Iron Age (Lubowidz's Phase), 3 – stone-covered barrows of the late Roman Iron Age (Cecele Phase).

The goods found in the graves and in some settlements, primarily enamelled penannular fibulae and cuff-shaped bracelets, show direct contacts between eastern Lithuania and the Suvalkai region on the one hand, and Bogaczewo on the other (Nowakowski 1995, 77–78; 1996, 91; Bitner-Wróblewska 1998, 308). So far, however, we have no answers about the origin of the barrows in Suvalkai and eastern Lithuania. At that time, barrows were unknown to the Dollkeim-Kovrovo Culture in Samland and the Bogaczewo Culture in the Mazurian Lakeland (Nowakowski 1995, 79; Bitner-Wróblewska 1998, 308). Bi-ritualism was also unknown to the Bogaczewo Culture (Nowakowski 1998, 15). Big flat burial grounds with crema-

tion graves were prevalent there.

I presume that the appearance of stone-covered barrows in Suvalkai and eastern Lithuanian regions in the 3rd century AD is a phenomenon similar to that in Poles'ye and right-bank Mazovia (see Wołagiewicz 1977, 70; 1986, 70) (fig. 3). In this region barrows did not predominate at that time (cf. Jaskanis, 1996). In 1975, however, 68 barrows were recorded in 21 localities (54 of them recently excavated) (Wołagiewicz 1977, 69–70).

The presumption about the synchrony of the processes in both regions may be illustrated by the following facts.

(1) The construction of the stone-covered barrows in the first centuries AD and especially in the 3rd and 4th centuries in the

Wielbark Culture (types 4a-b; Wołagiewicz 1977, 71–75; 1986, 67–68) is the same as in Suwalkai and eastern Lithuania.

(2) The same should be said about the fact that barrows were mostly established for individual graves; inhumations were more numerous than cremations; burials were usually in pits beneath the foundation of a barrow; the prevalent direction of the graves was towards the north, with some inclination to both east and west (Могильников 1974, 163–164; Jaskanis 1974, 216; Wołagiewicz 1977, 69; Tautavičius 1977, 14).

(3) The tall stones (internationally called *stellas*) so characteristic of burial sites in the Wielbark Culture area (Chyżewska-Sułowska 1971, 139; also see Kmieciński 1962, 101–103) are widespread in south-eastern Lithuania and partly also in western Belarus (see Vaitkevičius 2003, 80–84). The size and height of the stones were the same in both regions. In the Dieveniškės barrow group a tall stone was erected on the northern side of stone-covered barrow no. 3 (fig. 4). The remains of the de-



Fig. 4. Dieveniškės barrow no. 3 and tall stone on a foot. Photo by A. Tautavičius from 1951.

stroyed cremation grave were found there (Tautavičius 1958, 71). Not far from the Migliniškės barrow group, there is also a tall stone, and two tall stones (1.15 and 1.3 m high) at two Noreikiškės hillforts and an open settlement of the first centuries AD. It seems that a similar pair of tall stones also stood by the destroyed Ricieli-ai-Degėsi-ai barrow group (Šneideris 1935, 201).

In general, this presumption conflicts with the fact that assemblages of Balts' grave-goods from the 3rd and 4th centuries often included weaponry (Dirmiškės, Eitulionys, Moša, Visginai), in contrast to those in the Wielbark Culture.

In interpreting the appearance of stone-covered barrows in the Suwalkai and eastern Lithuanian regions, it is important to note two more phenomena. Firstly, many inhumation graves in the barrows dated to the 3rd and 4th centuries have been robbed (Dirmiškės, Eitulionys, Maisiejūnai, Pilviškės) (Астрейккас 1989, 73). The example of the Eitulionys cremation grave, which was found over a robbed inhumation grave, clearly shows that the robberies took place in ancient times. Secondly, stone-covered barrows are often situated on the former open-settlement areas of the Striated Ware Culture (Akmeniai-Kurganai, Eitulionys, Moša, Pilviškės, Sausiai-Maišinė, Vilkiutinis, Visginai; for Latvian examples, see ШHope, 1985, 40).

The first phenomenon may be explained in various ways, among them also as a result of conflict between different/unfriendly communities. In the second case, the behaviour of the people erecting stone-covered barrows in the areas of the former settlements resembles claims to establish their own power in a foreign territory.

In about the middle of the 3rd century the Sudovian Culture appeared in the Suwalkai region (*Kultura Sudowska*) (Nowakowski 1995, 77; 1998, 15). The number of barrows covered by stones and earth increased in eastern and especially in south-eastern Lithuania. Moreover, settlements in open areas (Bakšiai, Nemaitonys, Poškonys, Seiliūnai) and at the foot of small hillforts (Beižionys, Dirmiškės, Graužiniai-Bendžiukai, Lavariškės, Maisiejūnai, Mėžionys-Bogutiškė, Migonys, Moša-Navasodai, Zapsė-Paveisininkai, Žuklijai) became the most prevalent form of dwelling in this region. Although in the northern and eastern localities the hill-

forts of the Striated Ware Culture were common up to the early 5th century AD (Медведев 1996, 63–64), the beginnings of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture should be considered to lie in the first half and the middle of the 3rd century (Лухтанас 2001, 27). This was a time of changes in lifestyle (from big hillforts to open settlements) and of the spread of new burial practices mainly attested by the barrows.

The first stage of the culture (up to the mid-5th century)

The East Lithuanian Barrow Culture absorbed various elements that were of various origins and for a long time were not completely united. This area extended from the Daugava in the north and reached the middle of the Nemunas. The watershed between the Žeimena and Šventoji rivers divided this cultural space into northern and southern areas. The latter, covering the middle Nemunas and Neris regions as well as the whole Žeimena basin, was the main arena of the above-mentioned processes. Taking into consideration the typical grave-good assemblage (see Simniškytė 1998, 20–22) and common collective burials in the barrows, the northern part (in the upper Šventoji region) should be associated with the traditions of the northern Lithuanian and Latvian Barrow Culture (cf. Шноре 1985; Simniškytė 1999).

Sometimes the southern part of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture is divided into the northern area of the 'Lithuanian barrows' and the southern one of the 'stone covered' barrows (Лухтан & Ушинскас 1988, 92–95; Tautavičius 1996, 46, 97; the approximate border would be the Neris river). However, the differences between these areas in about the 4th and 5th centuries were insignificant. In the north, too, there are quite a number of barrows covered by stones (Alinka, Mėžionys, Paraisčiai, Pilviškės, Šilinė-Borava) and in the south

by earth (Migonys, Punios Šilas). In all of the barrows, inhumation graves are found predominately beneath the barrow foundation. The grave-good assemblages are the same in the both areas; and the general northern (western or north-western) grave orientation is also similar.

The comparatively extensively explored barrow groups in Eitulionys, Maisiejūnai and Mėžionys may be regarded as standard monuments of the first stage of the culture (Покровский 1897, 168–181; Kaczyński 1963; Bliujus 1983; Butėnas 1998).

In the barrows covered with stones or earth and surrounded by stone circles, there are burials in pits beneath the barrow foundation. Usually there is one (sometimes more) inhumation grave, which is oriented northwards or westwards. Normally their assemblages of grave-goods consisted of two or three things. Neck-rings with knot terminals, cuff-shaped bracelets, enamelled penannular fibulae, small bronze cylinders, and in sectional view rhombic spiral temple ornaments with overlapping terminals, belong to the standard female assemblage (see Simniškytė 1998, 20–22). Neck-rings with spoon-shaped terminals, also mentioned by Andra Simniškytė, are much more typical of central Lithuania (cf. Lietuvos 1978, 18–20). (Spiral temple ornaments will be discussed below.)

The jewellery of this type has so far been dated to the 4th or 5th centuries (cf. Tautavičius 1996, 161–162). In the meantime, there are serious reasons for dating the appearance of these temple ornaments to an earlier period, namely the 3rd century.

In Baliuliai barrow no. 1, a temple ornament was found in the assemblage, including a fragment of a neck-ring with a 'box', a brooch with a bent-back foot and other goods (Kliaugaitė 2000, 174). In Pakalnai barrow no. 7, such temple ornaments were found together with an enamelled penannular fibula of the 2nd type dated to the turn of the 2nd century (Jabłońska

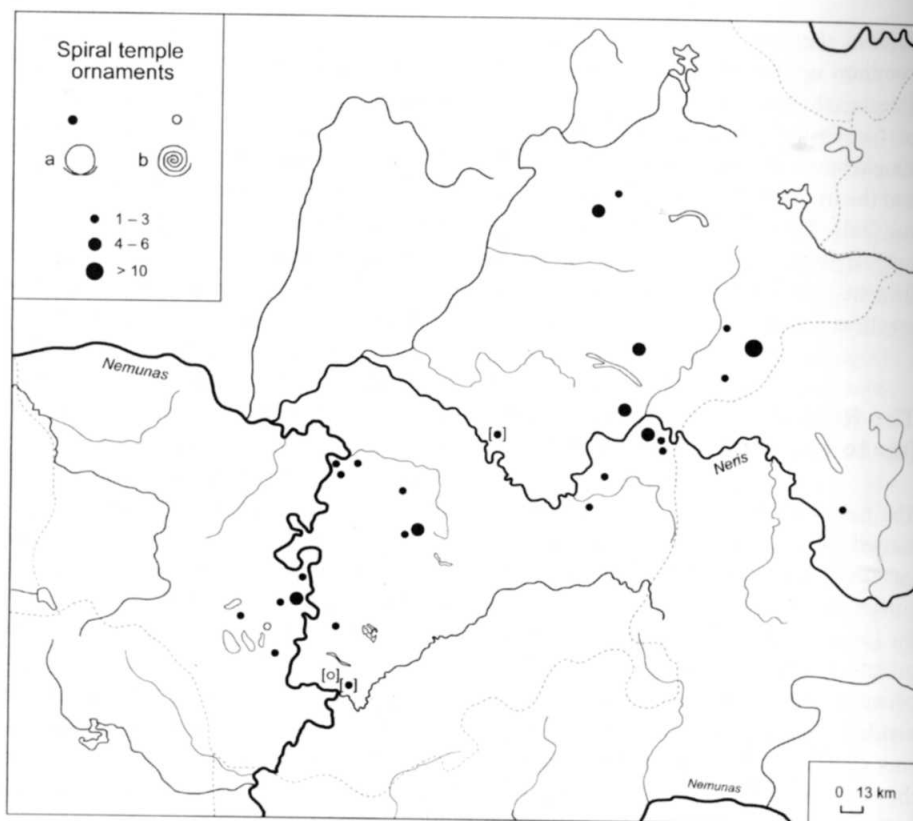


Fig. 5. Distribution of spiral temple ornaments with overlapping terminals (drawn by the author).

1992, 125–128), as well as with beads dated mostly to the 3rd century (types 1–6, 12, 198, 362, 387a–b, 388; according to Tempelmann-Maczyńska 1985) and type A bronze bucket-shaped pendants (see Beilke-Voigt 1998, 63–67). A similar temple ornament was found in Pilviškės barrow no. 1 together with a silver plate of a neckring ‘box’, characteristic of the middle and second half of the 3rd century (see Michelbertas 1986, 97), etc.

The spiral temple ornaments with overlapping terminals whose sectional view is rhombic are observed in a rather compact area (fig. 5). Prevalent among East Lithuanian barrows’ inhumation graves, these temple ornaments may be good indicators of the first stage of the above-discussed culture. Therefore it is impossible to agree

with Valentin Sedov’s statement that these temple ornaments are not standard artefacts of the early East Lithuanian Barrow Culture (Седов 2001, 83).

In contrast to the assemblage of female grave-goods, the male one is not as telling. It mostly includes weaponry and certain types of tools. It has already been duly noticed, however, that in general male objects are the same in large areas and in various cultures (cf. Godłowski 1974, 62–63, 65; Nowakowski 1998, 15). For instance, some finds linked to eastern Lithuania and dated to the 3rd century, demonstrate direct connections with the Pszeworsk Culture in the south: compare spearheads with barbs found in Antasarė-Laukiai, Dirmiškės, and Želmeniškė, a shield boss in Seiliūnai, spurs in Dirmiškės, plate-

shaped fire steels found in Mėžionys and Pilviškės (Godłowski 1974, 65; Kokowski 1985 (type IA2a); Ginalski 1991, 57–59, 66–67 (types C1, F3); Michelbertas 1999). Buckles of the types D17, D20, D29, D30, G1, H11, H13 (according to Madyda-Legutko 1986) and spearheads of the types 1A, 1B, 4A, 4B (according to Каза-квичюс 1988) also often belong to male grave-goods assemblages.

Among standard open settlements of the first stage of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture worth mentioning are those in Bakšiai (materials are still unpublished) and Kernavė (Лухтан 1987).

While exploring hillforts and settlements at their foot, different cultural layers were not always properly chronologically distinguished. In this respect a notable exception would be the recently excavated Aukuro kalnas hillfort in Kernavė.

The settlements had consisted of rectangular post buildings. Pottery with a rough surface was evidenced by the potsherds found there (about 70 per cent). The rest was represented by striated, smooth and polished pottery. Many clay spindle whorls, awls, knives, and finds connected with iron manufacture were also unearthed there (cf. Лухтан 1987; Лухтанас 2001).

The time of abandonment of the open settlements is not completely clear. Cylinder-shaped ribbed spindle whorls and pinched potsherds found in Kernavė indicate that this may have taken place in around the 5th century (Luchtanas 1998, 84).

Burned fortifications and triangular arrowheads peculiar to the Huns would clearly indicate the end of one settlement stage in the hillforts in the mid-5th century (Zabiela 1995, 49; Лухтан 1997, 15–16). However, the changes in burial practices at the same time have not yet been discussed in greater detail. This process seems to have been one of the short and dynamic processes in the history of the

discussed culture.

The barrows of the same type and the location of the early cremation graves in pits beneath barrow foundation illustrate the link between old and new burial customs. Contrary to prevalent opinion, (cf. Лухтан & Ушинскас 1988, 95; Tautavičius 1996, 52) many old burial sites were abandoned (Eitulionys, Maisiejūnai, Mėžionys, Slabadėlė) with the spread of the cremation rite or soon thereafter. During this short transition period it was customary to arrange cremation graves in the mounds of the former erected barrows (Paraisčiai, Rudesa, Taurapilis). In the same period many new burial sites were established, and cremation graves are generally found in such sites (see selected data in the appendix).

Certain geographical features also distinguish old and new burial sites. The newly established burial sites usually did not have any direct relations with hillforts or open settlements. With regard to their environment, the barrows belonging to the first stage of the culture under consideration are located in morainic regions (cf. Шнопе 1985, 45–46; that is also characteristic of the burial sites of the Wielbark culture – Могильников 1974, 162). East Lithuanian barrow groups established in the 5th century are quite often situated in sandy areas (Pabarė, Pamusys, Sudota, Vyžiai).

The spread of the cremation rite led to the disappearance of spiral temple ornaments – indicators of the first stage of the culture. Single spiral temple ornaments, found only in the Chernaiia Luzha barrow no. 2, in the double cremation grave and in barrow no. 7 of the third site at Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė, imply that these goods were sporadically used until the turn of the 5th century (see Покровский 1899, 36–47; Steponaitis 2000, 205).

Following the wide distribution of the cremation rite, standard female grave-goods became spindle whorls and awls

untypical of burials of the former period (Таутавичюс 1953, 144). In the course of the new stage of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture, however, the custom of placing sickles in female graves was still preserved. However, dealing with processes of the 5th century, I will pay special attention to male grave-goods.

A common male grave-goods assemblage of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture appeared in the mid-5th century. It consisted primarily of conical shield bosses and iron fibulae of the so-called Vilkonys and Pilvinai types, B-shaped buckles (types H23, H24 according to Madyda-Legutko 1986), narrow-blade axes (also with elongated backs) and some types of spearheads (2, 3, 4B according to Казакивичюс 1988) and knives (cf. Медведев 1996, 57–58) (fig. 6).

Assemblages of this kind appearing in large areas between the middle Nemunas in the south, the Šventoji in both the west and the north, and the middle Neris in



Fig. 6. Male grave-good assemblage found in Popai-Vingeliai barrow no. 2, cremation grave no. 1 (according to Luchtanas & Vėlius 2002).

the east, have evidently enlarged the area of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture. Many burial sites were established in newly settled areas, for instance along the upper Gauja, the upper Žeimena and at Lake Sviri (see fig. 2).

The above-mentioned male grave-goods assemblage appearing in both in-

humation and cremation graves, could in my opinion point to the false conclusion that the spread of the cremation rite was a long and slow process that took place between the late 4th and early 6th centuries (Tautavičius 1996, 52; cf. Bertašius 2002, 75, 79, 165). Actually, related weaponry in a particular burial site was found only in inhumations or in cremations. For example, conical shield bosses are found only in inhumations (Bauboniai-Musteniai, Degsnė-Labotiskės) or only in cremations (Popai-Vingeliai, Vilkiautinis, Vyžiai). The same phenomenon is evident with respect to other kinds of goods. I therefore doubt whether the male grave-good assemblage of the mid-5th century was characterized by such a long lifespan.

The 'farewell to weaponry' does not seem to have been long and gradual. Most likely only the members of two or three generations (maybe father-son, older son-younger son) were buried with their equipment. The types of goods representing the male assemblage of the 5th century were not local – they were often distributed widely in central and south-eastern Europe (cf. Бажан & Каргапольцев 1989; Гавритухин 1989; Bliujienė 2002, 148–149). From this perspective, it is worth noting that the spread of popular goods such as B-shaped buckles or iron fibulae with lofty bow did not in principle cross the western border of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture. In addition, it is not quite clear why the male assemblage did not include the bracelet with thickened terminals. This ornament was especially popular among the inhabitants of the adjacent central Lithuanian region (see Kazakevičius 1993, 119; Tautavičius 1996, 250–252; also Bertašius 2002, fig. 25).

Some bracelets with thickened terminals, found in cremation graves of eastern Lithuanian barrows belong to female or unidentified assemblages (Bauboniai-Musteniai, Poškonys, Sudota 1st site). The only known exception would be a de-

stroyed inhumation grave in the Taurapolis barrow no. 4, where a silver bracelet of a related type with a conical shield boss was found (Tautavičius 1981, 34, fig. 38).

The main question is why the appearance of the above-mentioned male grave-goods assemblage coincides with the spread of the cremation rite among the inhabitants of eastern Lithuania. I have mentioned cultural changes in eastern Lithuania in the mid-5th century, but at this moment I will emphasize that these changes were parallel to those in other Baltic regions. One can compare the situation in central Lithuania and along the lower Nemunas (Šimėnas 1994), Selonia (Simniškytė 1999, 31, 33), Suvalkai and Mazuria (Antoniewicz 1960, 321; Jaskanis 1974, 37; Nowakowski 1998, 16; Bitner-Wróblewska 1998, 305). The cremation rite appeared in a large area of eastern Lithuanian barrows together with the standard weaponry assemblage (this may be not a special Baltic feature, cf. Steuer 1982, 189). This warrior stratum was united by both weaponry of the same type and similar approaches to the afterlife (predominately to cremation). In addition to the general fact of cremation, the customs of breaking and destroying weapons as well as placing them in particular positions in the burials must be mentioned (Kuncienė 1980, 49; Tautavičius 1996, 55–56; Vėlius 2000, 237).

Discussion

The history of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture is much more complicated than the researchers sometimes suggest. The cultural, social and religious aspects influenced by external and internal factors changed more than once. Various points of view enable us to treat this culture (from the 3rd to the 5th centuries) as dynamic and having interactions with other cultures.

The distribution of stone-covered barrows and tall stones, their location in the

former settlements, grave robberies, and spiral temple ornaments as cultural indicators as well as standard weaponry assemblages and the introduction of the cremation rite should evidently be discussed and verified once again.

It can be presumed that the Wielbark Culture (obviously, as well as the substratum of the Striated Ware Culture) played a significant role in the process of the formation of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture. The interaction between Balts and the Wielbark Culture is an interesting and promising topic of research (cf. Nowakowski 1989). Some examples discussed above indicate that this interaction can be characterized not only by the exchange of goods. In the early 3rd century, direct influences from the south reached the Balts. People from the Wielbark Culture area participated in the formation of a new cultural unit in the former area of the Striated Ware Culture.

Some facts indicate that the first stage of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture, which began in the 3rd century, ended in about the mid-5th century: namely, the changes in male and female grave-goods assemblages; a transition from prevalent individual burials in the barrows to collective ones; the abandonment of the old burial sites and the establishment of new ones, as well as the neglect of the open settlements. One of the stages of hillfort use ended after the Hunnic forays in the same period. In the middle of the 5th century significant cultural changes (in social life, burial customs, and so on) are also observed in the neighbouring regions.

The fact that the innovations in burial practice, supposedly introduced by warriors in the mid-5th century did not completely suppress the old rites should signify a link between the first and second stages of the culture. In this event the warriors buried in the barrows could have been representatives of the same or a closely related culture. In what way they became

bearers of the new burial rite is not clear. Perhaps they were related to the events in central Europe in the 5th century and even its participants. According to some suggestions, the cremation rite could have reached eastern Lithuania from the Dnepr area or some other eastern Baltic region (Nowakowski 1995, 80; Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė 2001, 174, 321).

In my opinion, when speaking about the introduction of the cremation rite it is important to emphasize that this process was not geographically uniform (cf. Волкайте-Куликаускене 1979, 38; Лухтан & Ушинскас 1988, 93). In some localities warrior graves marked the end of the inhumation period, and in others only the beginning of a long period of cremations. Rich male grave-goods assemblages of the mid-5th and early 6th century were unearthed in both inhumation (Taurapolis barrow no. 5) and cremation graves (grave no. 4 in Sudota site no. 1, barrow no. 30) (cf. Bitner-Wróblewska 2001, fig. 33).¹

Conclusions

The history of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture offers numerous examples of social and religious processes as well as many difficulties in the interpretation of the rise and development of the culture.

The appearance of stone-covered barrows in the regions of Suvalkai and eastern Lithuania in the 3rd century AD is in all probability related to the same process in Poles'ye and right-bank Mazovia (in the Wielbark Culture's area).

The first stage of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture is characterized by prevalent inhumation graves. The spiral temple ornaments with overlapping terminals may be regarded as reliable indicators of this stage of the said culture.

The new social and religious processes in eastern Lithuania in the mid-5th century are linked to the significant cultural changes that took place in western and central Europe.

¹ Besides some impressive female inhumation graves of the same period were unearthed in Cegelnė (barrow no. 4; together with an infant) (Zabiela 1996, 45–46), in Pavajuonis-Rėkučiai (barrow no. 11; together with an infant) (Semėnas 1998), in Baliuliai (barrow no. 12) (Kliaugaitė 2002).

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