

THE CEMETERY OF OBERHOF (AUKŠTKIEMIAI) – HORSE GRAVES AND EQUESTRIAN EQUIPMENT

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Abstract

In Oberhof (Aukštkiemiai, western Lithuania) all forms of horse burials or offerings can be found: complete horses, horse skulls or the skull and the limbs. In every case where a description is preserved the horse parts were placed to the left of all other items or to the left of the human body, which might be a sign that the horse was used for riding. Horse remains, bridle bits or spurs usually occur in men's burials that contain weapons. In the community of Oberhof it was not necessary to be on top of the military hierarchy to be a rider or to receive riding gear as grave goods. On the other hand bridles, spurs or horse parts are found quite often in very well furnished graves. So even if these offerings are often connected with warriors, it has to be considered that they might be not only an indicator for the doubtlessly existing cavalry but also for different social phenomena.

Keywords: Roman Period, Migration Period, Viking Age, burials with horses, riding gear, cross shaped fittings.

Introduction

The cemetery of Oberhof (Aukštkiemiai, district Klaipėda) is situated in what today is western Lithuania, northeast of the city of Klaipėda. It was excavated from 1886 to 1888 by Otto Tischler and in 1894 by Alfred Jentzsch, Heinrich Kemke and Carl Kretschmann. They investigated more than 4225 m² and 452 graves. The burial ground was in use from the Roman Age up to the Middle Ages, i.e. from the third to the 12th century AD. Oberhof has always been perceived as one of the reference cemeteries providing the basis of Otto Tischler's chronological phasing of Eastern Prussia. Nevertheless, apart from short reports by Tischler (1888; 1889; 1890), some illustrations, mentions and references in the literature the material remained unpublished. Until World War II the material and documentation were housed in the *Prussia* Museum in Königsberg. During and after the war the archaeological collection of the Prussia Museum resp. of the *Landesamt für Vorgeschichte* was torn apart and badly damaged. For more than 40 years the whereabouts of the whole collection were unknown. Today, a part of the collection is kept in the *Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz* (Reich 2004/05; Reich, Menghin 2008). As no inventory books, especially no catalogue of Oberhof, have survived, the grave units had to be reconstructed. This is possible by means of the preserved objects and the archive material now kept in Berlin – combined with references in literature, old photographs, drawings and notes in other archives¹.

Before entering into the main discussion of this paper it is worthwhile to give a short overview of the sources and their quality, since these factors naturally affect the derivation of subsequent conclusions. Originally 3076 inventory numbers existed, 1541 of them are kept in Berlin today. In addition 31 ceramic vessels reside in the *Muzeum Warmii i Mazur* in Olsztyn, Poland. Every item originally carried a small tag with a consecutive number. The objects were fixed on cardboards organized by graves. Only a part of these cardboards have survived and many objects have fallen off. Sometimes the tags were also lost. In the process of reconstruction and re-identification many of these objects were successfully reassigned to the corresponding graves.

The preserved archive material includes Tischler's descriptions of the graves. These are complemented by typed copies made in 1943. Sometimes they are accompanied by small sketches or plans of the burials on graph paper. Such descriptions are provided for 230 graves respective 313 graves and findings. In some cases the original descriptions as well as the typed-up copies are very badly preserved. In addition, the typed copies contain numerous mistakes caused by misinterpretations of the original. There are no descriptions for the burials discovered in 1894.

Other important sources which connect inventory numbers with grave numbers are a list of Roman coins found in Oberhof and small "inventory cards" that were possibly fashioned for storage purposes. Photos, illustrations in the literature and sketches in archives² give further hints. All this information provides a rough

¹ The project is sponsored by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (research grant Me 525/7).

² Information on objects from Oberhof can be found in the archives of Nils Åberg, Marta Schmiedehelm, Herbert Jankuhn, Rudolf Grenz, Carl Engel, Bernhard Salin, Carl-Axel Moberg and Fēliks Jākobsons.

framework of association between inventory numbers and graves.

The most important resource concerning the reconstruction is the so called “*Tischlerscher Zettelkatalog*”. It is a card-file collection which today is kept in the *Muzeum Warmii i Mazur* in Olsztyn. It includes 341 file cards referring to Oberhof. Although its original function is unknown, it seems to reflect the state of the former inventory. Probably it was used in order to check the collection. Every card lists the contents of a grave, albeit without inventory numbers. The *Zettelkatalog* hence allows determining the range of inventory numbers for a grave by comparison with preserved objects, other sources and counting³. Naturally this method does not lead to exact results for every grave, since not all file cards of the *Zettelkatalog* are preserved⁴, and the other available sources are similarly more or less incomplete (Reich 2007, 195ff; 2008, p.21ff).

Graves with horse remains or riding gear

There are several problems concerning graves with horses or horse equipment in Oberhof in particular. In Oberhof almost no bones are preserved, neither human nor horse ones. Even if a detailed description with the corresponding plans – like in case of grave no. 7 (Fig. 1) – exists, it is difficult to reconstruct the position of the deceased. The items that were found in grave no. 7 fall into three groups. At Z11 the socketed axe was placed above the spearhead; beside them a sickle had been deposited. At E12 a silver neck ring with glass and amber beads and a brooch were found. Next to them a spearhead, a Roman coin, a knife and an iron fragment were situated. At F12 horse teeth with a bridle bit, fragments from the bridle and a spur were found. This means that the horse skull was situated to the left of all other items, but it is not completely sure where to place the head of the dead man. This of course is important to determine on which side of the rider the horse skull or the horse was put.

The silver neck ring and the glass and amber beads do not give a clue either. Remains of birch bark were found on the amber beads. Even if it seems possible that the neck ring and the beads could have been worn by the deceased, they could also have been placed in a box or package of birch bark, which is a well docu-

³ The procedure used in the reconstruction of the contents of a burial is explained in Reich 2007, p.196 plate II.2.

⁴ There is – besides occasional missing cards – a particularly big gap between grave no. 304 and 358. Distinctively fewer cards are preserved for graves with higher numbers than that. However for the burials excavated in 1894 the *Tischlersche Zettelkatalog* is often the only source of information.

mented custom in Oberhof. In this case the ornaments were not attached to the costume and therefore cannot be used as an indication of the orientation of the body.

If no descriptions or plans of a grave are preserved, one cannot say anything about the relation of horse and man. The poor preservation of bones also makes it hard to decide if a complete horse or which parts of a horse have been buried. It would also be conceivable all bones of a horse burial could have completely decomposed as it happened with most of the human bones. In this case it is hard to tell if it is a horse burial, if a complete or only parts of the horse were offered or if it is the burial of a rider without the offering of a real horse.

For grave no. 2 (Fig. 2) there is no plan, but a description⁵ exists. Looking at the preserved objects, especially because of the arm rings and arm spirals, one gets the impression of a woman’s burial. But the description makes it quite clear, that this very shallow grave was obviously disturbed. Only fragments of the iron objects (tools or weapons) could be excavated. The ornaments, like in grave no. 7, could be also a genuine offering that did not belong to the costume of the buried man. Moreover in Oberhof the conditions for the preservation of iron or metal in general are pretty bad⁶. This means that not all grave items, e.g. weapons, have necessarily survived.

There are only few harnesses in Oberhof with metal fittings; bridles with bronze chains are missing totally. Exceptional fittings were found in grave no. 2. Already Tischler (1889, p.28) mentioned them in one of his preliminary reports. According to his description of the grave⁷ a horse skull, of which only the teeth were left, with an iron bridle bit was found. The leather bridle was rotten. Near the teeth four cross-shaped fittings were situated, the two smaller ones nearer to the teeth, the two bigger ones with enamel decoration at the temples. The bronze buckle found nearby should have been part of the bridle as well.

The two bigger bronze cross-shaped fittings are silver-plated. In the centre of each is a circle of red enamel with a bronze star and a hemispherical-headed rivet on

⁵ „Ganz flach unter dem Iten Spatenstich Pferdekopf (sehr verwittert, nur Zähne) mit Eisengebiss (zerbrochen); Der Lederzaum ganz vermodert: am Gebiss sassen 4 kreuzförmige Zierplatten, 2 kleinere liefen, näher dem Gebiss. 2 grosse mit rothem Email höher; also wohl an den Schläfen. Dabei sind noch einige Bronzen, die mit der Erde zusammen ausgehoben wurden. Ferner dabei 1 Bronzeschnalle. In der Nachbarschaft dieser Stücke ein ... Eisenstück. Dicht dabei ein Eisensporn. In der Nähe im hellen Niveau noch einiges Eisen verstreut. Auch die Spirale einer Fibel.“ (PM-A 1246/1, Bl. 2 u. 4).

⁶ Several metal objects were recovered “en block” in order to save them at all (Tischler 1888, p.6).

⁷ See footnote 5.

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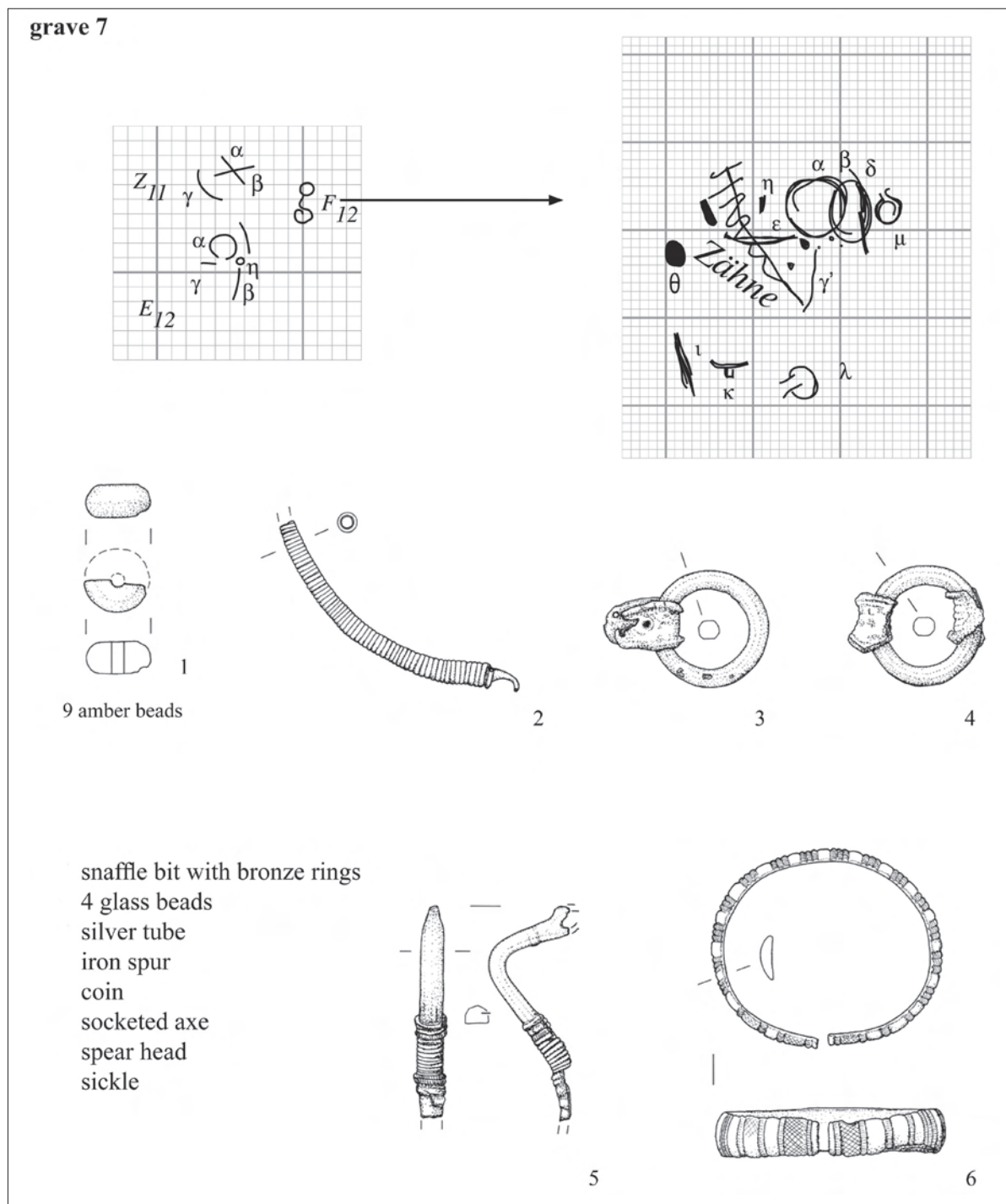


Fig. 1. Grave no. 7 from Oberhof.

top. The smaller fittings are lacking the enamel circle and the star. All fittings have hemispherical-headed rivets at the end of each arm; fine wire is applied along the borders.

Similar cross-shaped fittings are not only known from western Lithuania, but also from Mazuria and Sudovia. Occasionally they are found on the Sambian peninsula, in Nadruvia (*Nadrauen*) and in the western part of so-called Samogitia (Fig. 3)⁸. Apart from the fittings from

trict), grave no. 9/1992; (Bliujienė, Butkus 2007, fig.10); Lazdininkai, grave no. 6/1992 (Bliujienė, Butkus 2007, fig.8.2); Mazkatuži (Liepāja district, Latvia), grave no. 23/1942 (Bliujienė, Butkus 2007, fig.8.1); Stragnai (Klaipėda district), grave context presently unclear (Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė 1971, fig.5); Žviliai (Šilalė district), grave no. 47 (Vaitkuskienė 1999, fig.214); Netta (Augustów district, Podlaskie voivodeship, Poland), grave no. 79 (Bitner-Wróblewska 2007, Taf.38); Althof-Insterburg (Tel'manova, Kaliningrad region, Russia), grave no. 135 (Bliujienė, Butkus 2007, fig.8.3); Greibau (Gaerte 1929, fig.245.b); Pruschinoven-Wolka (Wólka Prusinowska, Mrągowo district, Warmińsko-Mazurskie

⁸ Oberhof (Aukštėmėiai, Klaipėda district), grave no. 2 (Gaerte 1929, fig.245.a); Lazdininkai (Kretinga dis-

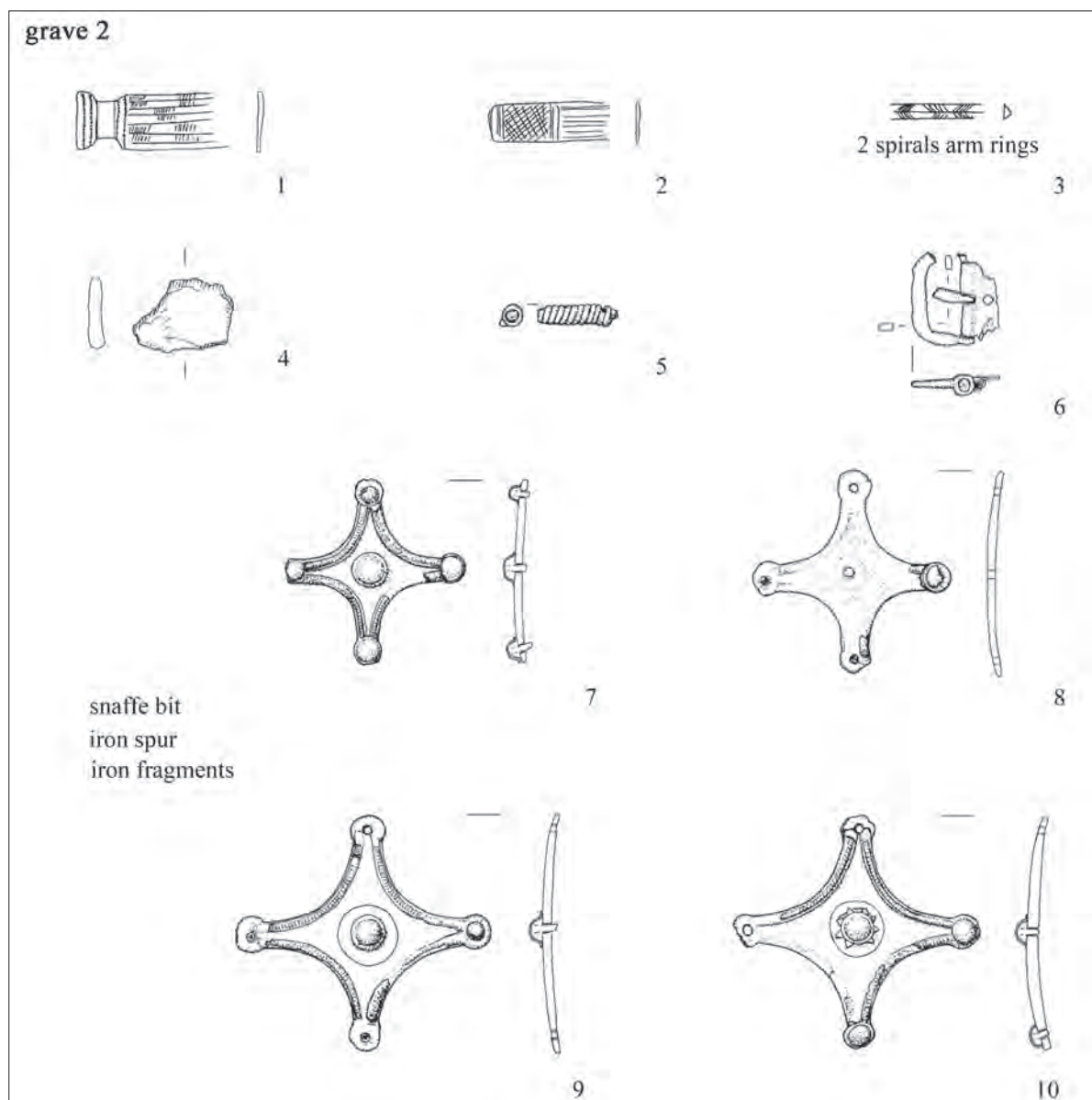


Fig. 2. Grave no. 2 from Oberhof.

Oberhof only the ones from Bandužiai and Stragnai⁹ show enamel. All items from Pruschinoven-Wolka (Wólka Prusinowska) are disc fibulae. The objects

voivodeship, Poland), grave no. 5 (Inv. Nr. V, 176, 7991; Prussia Archive, Voigtmann-Kartei; Fotoplatte PM-F 922); Pruschinoven-Wolka (Wólka Prusinowska), grave no. 36 (Voigtmann-Kartei); Pruschinoven-Wolka (Wólka Prusinowska) (Gaerte 1929, fig.245.c); Szwajcaria (Suwałki district, Podlaskie voivodeship, Poland), barrow 32 (Antoniewicz 1963, fig.1.1); Audinischken (Audyniszki, Gołdap district, Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship, Poland) (Voigtmann-Kartei); Adlig-Heydekrug (Šilutė) (Jankuhn archive; Nowakowski, Banytė-Rowell 2001, fig.3a.b); Bandužiai (Klaipėda city), presently grave contexts unclear (Bliujienė, Bračiulienė 2007, p.40 fig.1 (Puzinas archive); Paprotki Kolonia, site 1 (Giżycko district, Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship, Poland), grave no. 72 (Bitner-Wróblewska, Karczewska, Karczewski 2001, fig.10.10-12).

⁹ It is not recognizable doubtlessly on the published photo.

from Lazdininkai, grave 9/1992 and Paprotki Kolonia, site 1, grave 72 served as belt fittings. It strikes that the rivet in the middle and the applied fine wire are missing. This simple form was found also in Illerup Ådal, where the fittings were fixed on the container for the bridle chains (Carnap-Bornheim, Ilkjær 1996, plate 149; particularly UAY and ULH). In case of the fitting from Greibau the rivet in the middle and the fine wire are replaced by punched ornaments. Most of the cross shaped fittings are known from the Late Roman Period, only the ones from Žviliai, grave 47 have to be dated in the Early Migration Period (Bitner-Wróblewska 2007, p.82).

The harness from Oberhof, grave no. 360 was decorated with 36 rivets and two fittings: one of them a square with a rivet at each edge, the second a flat square with drawn-in sides. Also part of the harness were two strap ends with attached rings and two iron buckles.



Fig. 3. Distribution of cross-shaped fittings.

The common form of bridle bits in Oberhof are made of iron and have a bit with two bars and rings. In grave no. 7 a bridle bit with bronze rings was found. Grave no. 75 contained a very special bridle bit (also see: illustration for chapter III). The rings have horse-shaped extensions (Reich 2007, plate II.2). The only known analogy so far was mentioned by Tischler (1888, p.20): a bridle bit from a cemetery near Heydekrug (Šilutė) that was kept in the *Mineralogisches* Museum in Dresden. Its finding circumstances as well as its present-day whereabouts are unknown. It seems that this type might be restricted to the former *Memel* Land.

Furnishings of burials with horse remains or equestrian equipment

In Oberhof there are 29 burials with horse bones or teeth, bridle bits or spurs (Fig. 4). These items usually occur in men's burials that contain weapons. A rela-

tively high percentage of them is very well equipped: three are furnished with a sword or a big battle knife, five with two spearheads, whereas one spearhead and an axe is the usual equipment (Reich 2007, p.197ff.). In this first group, characterised by the offering of a more or less extensive weapons set, frequently coins were found. These burials also show ornaments, in two cases silver neck rings.

The medieval graves of Oberhof (graves nos. 435, 436 and 440) with horse equipment show a different composition of grave goods. They regularly contain a wide range of ornaments (brooches, neck-rings, arm-rings and finger-rings) combined with spearheads, miniatures axes and knives. The bridle bits have rings and are made of iron. As there are no descriptions of these graves preserved, it is unknown if there have been any horse remains. The spurs are (with one exception in grave no. 435) all miniature spurs. They are made of thin bronze sheet metal with a short, thin prick and

grave	brooch	pin	neck ring	arm ring	splarm ring	finger ring	chain	beads	spiral	mini weaving plate	mini spindle	mini comb	mini spur	buckle	strap end	fitting	rivet	strap-distributor	bridle fitting	snaffle bit	spur	knife	sword	spearhead	socketed axe	mini axe	shield boss	sickle	wet stone	fire steel	coin	pot	other items	complete ?	dating	remarks										
75	2	1Ag	1	2				3													1		1	2	1	1	1	1					E snaffle bit left of all other items													
15	1		1					1					1 Fe								1		17	1	2	2	1	1	1	5	1		BZ/C1-C1a horse on the left													
296	7	1Ag	1					4+9													1	1		1+17	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		BZ/C1-C1a horse on the left													
188														1Bz							1	1		2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		snaffle bit left of spearheads													
111																					1F	1	1+1gr	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		VWZ													
365	1																				1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3		KZ													
155	1F-Fe																				1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1F															
231																					1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2		KZ													
193	1Fe?													1Fe							1?			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2															
2	1F													1							4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1															
360														1+2Fe							2	2	1	1F	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		BZ/C1 disturbed													
436	1													1Bz							3F	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		BZ/C1													
440	3																				1	1	1	2?	1	1	1	2	1	1	1		H cremation													
435	1-4																				1F	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		H cremation													
238																					17			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		H7/MAA, cremation, disturbed?, left													
224		1Fe																			1			1F	1	1	1	1	1	1	1															
126																					1			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1															
150																					1			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1															
363																					1			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1															
10																					1			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1															
108	1																				1Bz?			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3		KZ												
114																							1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1														
73																							1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1														
390																							1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1						Fe-fibula?								
375																							2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5							BZ/C1-C1a						
109	1F																						2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1										BZ/C1-C1a				
257																							2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1												D horse grave		
270																																														F?

Fig. 4. Table of associated grave items in graves with horse remains and riding gear at Oberhof. Abbreviations: Ag: silver; Fe: iron; Bz: bronze; F: fragment; gr: large; KZ: Roman Iron Age; VWZ: Migration Period; MA: Early Medieval Period.

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small rivet holes at the end of each arm. Doubtlessly they were never used in practice. Curiously no stirrups have been found in the cemetery of Oberhof.

The third group can be described as containing a bridle bit and few weapons or tools, but almost no ornaments. Possibly this might be due to preservation conditions. None of these graves can be dated because not enough relevant objects have survived.

Graves with spurs but without a bridle bit are generally furnished a bit poorer, especially concerning ornaments. Only three of them contain a spearhead or a socketed axe.

All forms of horse burials or offerings as described recently by Bliujienė and Butkus (2007) can be found in Oberhof. Only grave no. 257 was called a “horse grave” by Tischler. However, no detailed description of it is preserved, the only item is a buckle¹⁰. Only a horse skull was buried in graves nos. 2 and grave 365. Teeth that might have been the leftovers of a horse skull were found in graves nos. 7 and 150. In graves nos. 360, 238 and 109 horse bones – in the last two cases also with horse teeth – point at least to a burying of the sacrificial parts of the horse, those being the skull and the limbs, maybe connected with the skin¹¹.

In every case where a description is preserved the horse parts were placed to the left of all other items or to the left of the human body. This is common custom during the Roman and Migration Period in western Lithuania; it is seen as a sign that the horse was used for riding (Bliujienė, Butkus 2007, p.96 ff.).

A single tooth of a horse was found in grave no. 270. This grave contained a small pin with a cross-shaped head and bronze spirals, nearby a pot was found¹². As no weapons or tools belonged to his burial, the tooth might have had the character of an amulet¹³.

Apart from grave no. 257, where we cannot be sure entirely that it really contained a complete skeleton, only one other horse skeleton was completely pre-

¹⁰ This bronze buckle has an oval frame and can be assigned to group H, type 16 according to Madyda-Legutko (1986), which is to be set in the early Migration Period (phase D).

¹¹ At least in case of grave 238 a complete horse may have been offered. The description is not clear and according to it, the part where the horse was found was disturbed.

¹² None of these items is preserved. There is a sketch of the pin in the archive of M. Schmiedehelm. The grave is situated within a grave group that was formed during Period F (seventh/eighth century).

¹³ In the *Tischlerscher Zettelkatalog* an „Eisenpfriem mit Bronzering“ (iron awl with bronze ring) is recorded but was crossed out later. So it is unclear if this item really belonged to this grave. On the other hand it might be that these are the remains of a snaffle bit with bronze rings. In that case a horse skull with a bridle would have been offered.

served (feature B 29). Unfortunately no further description other than a short note and a plan is preserved. The horse had no bridle bit in its mouth, but one bridle bit, a spearhead and one or two sickles were found nearby. None of these items has survived, so nothing can be said about their age. The horse skeleton was found in an area that might have been an *Aschenplatz* but was at least a burial ground in medieval times. On the other hand this area had been used in the Roman Age already, so it is also possible that the horse grave belongs to this period.

Distribution of burials with horse remains or riding gear on the cemetery

The distribution map of horse remains in Oberhof¹⁴ (Fig. 5) shows that graves or features with horse teeth or skull fragments are widespread over the whole cemetery. Burials with horse limbs on the other hand are found in the northern part and in one case in the western grave group. Except for graves nos. 109 and 257 that can be dated to the Migration Period for sure and grave no. 270 that is to be set in period F all other burials or features, as far as they are datable, belong to the Roman Period. The features that are situated in an area that was also used in medieval times overlay and disturbed graves of the Roman Iron Age. So it can be stated that within the area used in the Roman Period the graves with horse limb bones are situated in the north, whereas the burials in the southern part contained only horse skulls.

Bridle bits are distributed in more or less the same area (Fig. 6), that is to say scattered across the whole burial ground. They are absent only in the very Northern group that was used mainly during the Migration Period and in the northwestern group where graves of Period F were excavated. In all they cover a broader area than that taken by burials or features with horse remains. Obviously in the Migration Period as well as in the Viking Age it was more common to offer only the bridle instead of parts of the horse.

Compared to burials with bridle bits, graves with spurs take more peripheral positions. This might indicate a somehow lower status of the deceased. A spur marks a person only as a rider, he does not necessarily have to have possessed a horse. It is also conceivable that the horse was not buried with him for economical reasons (e.g. because it was needed by the bereaved). This would indicate a lower status related to wealth and

¹⁴ For the reconstruction of the plan of the cemetery: Reich 2007, p.196ff.

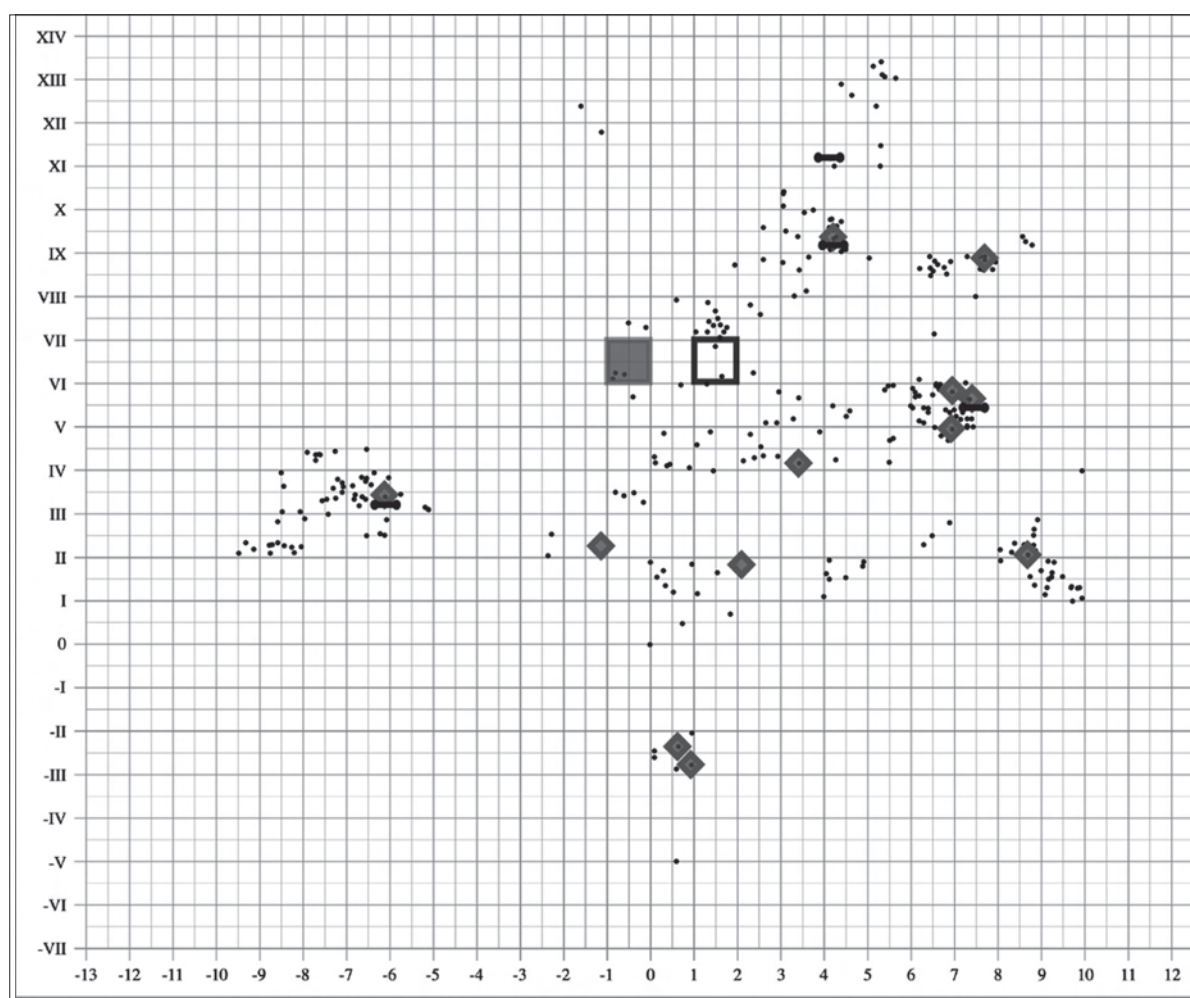


Fig. 5. Distribution of horse skulls or teeth (◆) and horse bones (→) in Oberhof.

might have led to a more external position of the burial within a grave group as well.

One of the few quite well documented areas in Oberhof is the western grave group (Reich 2007, p.201ff. fig.3; 4). It was mainly used during the Migration Period. At least three, maybe four subgroups can be distinguished. These groups are based not so much on families but on allegiance or loyalty groups. Sword graves occupy a central position within these groups. The number of weapons decreases the further away from these centres the burials are located.

In each of these subgroups there is at least one grave with a bridle bit or a spur. Grave no. 109 in the eastern subgroup takes a special position because it is the only burial with horse remains. While there is a spur in this grave, a bridle bit as well as weapons are missing. Only a sickle marks the deceased as male. This might be due to the poor preservation conditions of the iron objects¹⁵. Because of the spur, that can be assigned to type Leuna

¹⁵ In the Zettelkatalog „*verschiedenes verkrautet*“ is recorded and furthermore in the description not all objects are clearly addressed. Sickle and knife were obviously identified and prepared in the process of restoration and conservation.

described by Giesler (1978)¹⁶, this burial can at least be set in period D¹⁷. Therefore it might be older than the other graves in the western grave group that contain equestrian equipment, but no horse remains.

In two cases (graves nos. 111 and 75) a bridle bit was found in sword graves. On the other hand several warriors with a sword or a big knife were offered neither a bridle nor spurs. This is the most apparent in the south-western subgroup, where two men with swords and one man with two spears and an axe were buried. Grave no. 73 however contained only a spur and perhaps an iron fibula. Looking at the graves with riding gear or horse parts (Fig. 4) or at the combination of grave goods in the male burials of Oberhof in general (Reich 2007, fig.2) this fact can be observed in burials of the Roman Age and medieval burials as well.

Concluding it can be stated, that in the community of Oberhof it was not necessary to be on top of the military hierarchy to be a rider or to receive riding gear

¹⁶ For help with the classification I am grateful to Bartosz Kontny.

¹⁷ About similar spurs recently: Kontny, Natuniewicz-Sekuła 2009, forthcoming.

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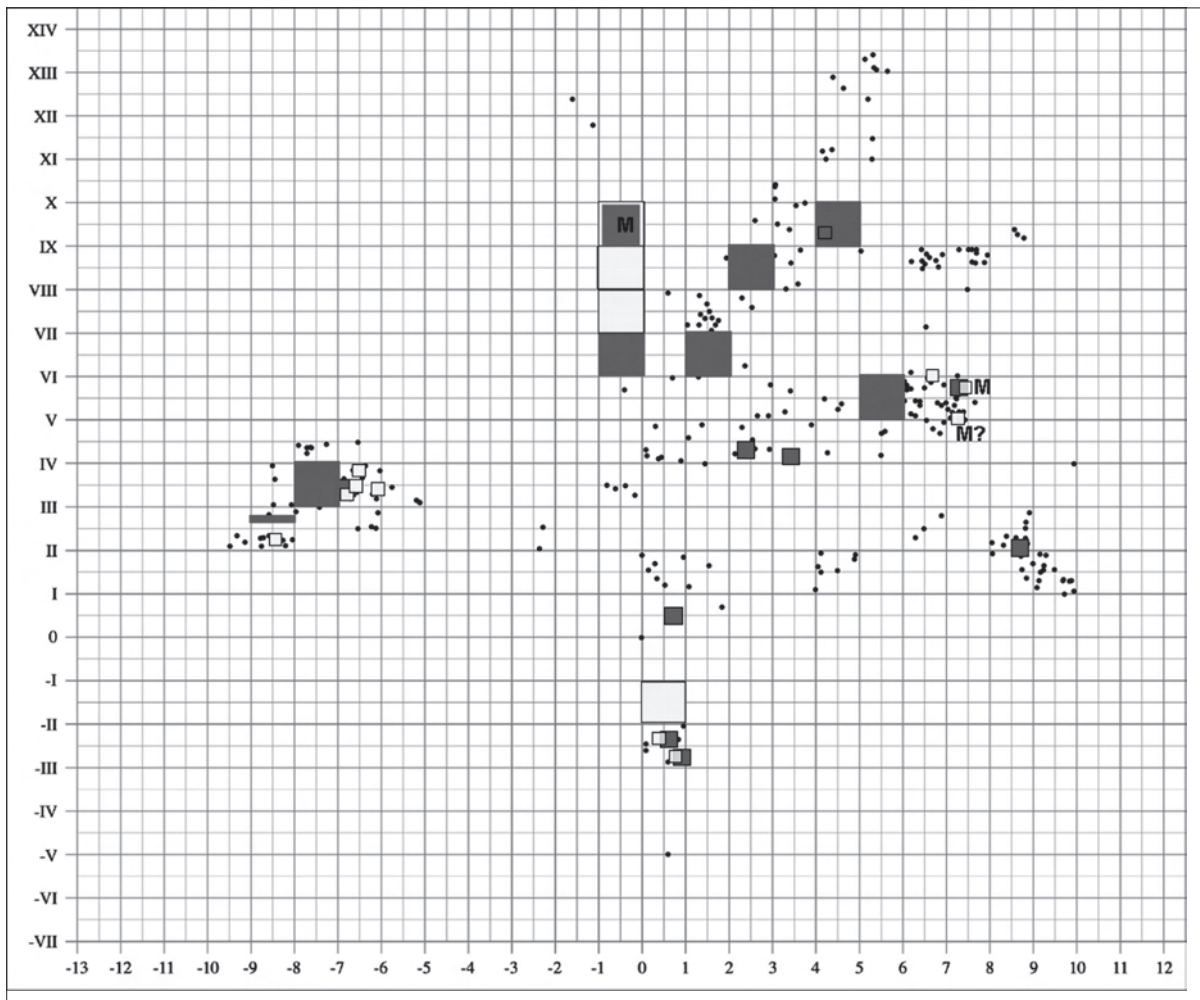


Fig. 6. Distribution of bridle bits (dark) and spurs (light; M miniature spur) in Oberhof.

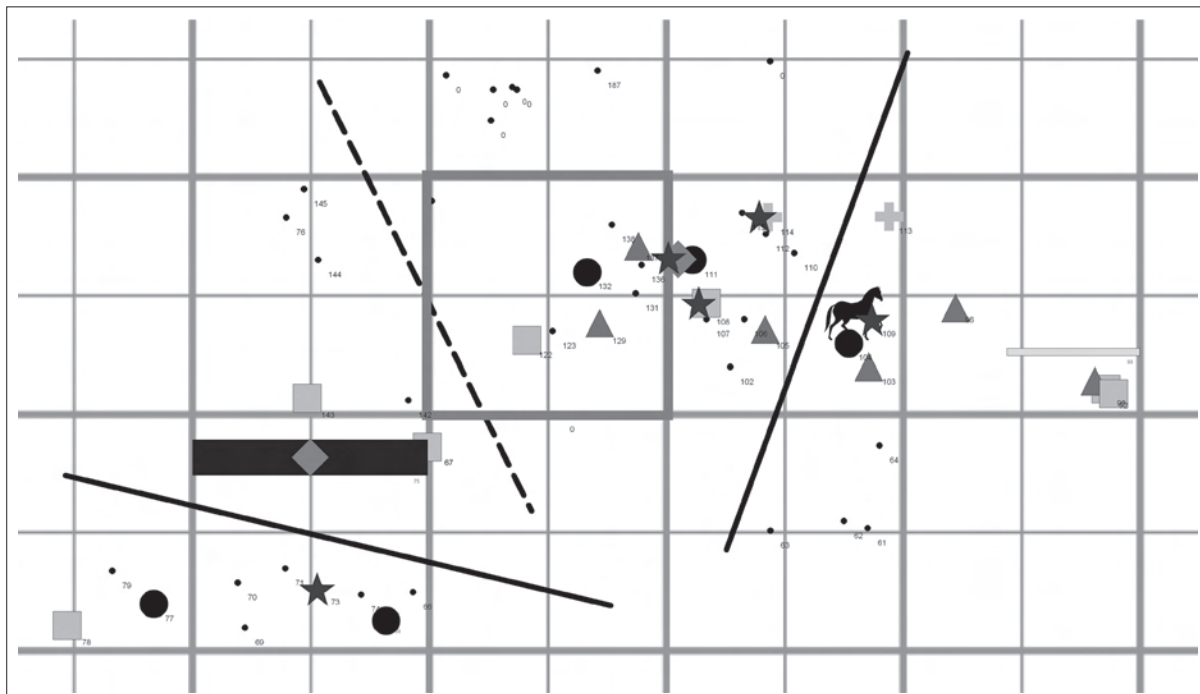


Fig. 7. Distribution of weapon furnishings, horse remains and riding gear in the south-western grave group: burials with a sword or a large knife (●); with two spearheads (▲); with one spearhead (■); with only an axe (✚); with a bridle bit (◆); with a spur (★) or with horse remains (🐎).

as grave goods. On the other hand bridles, spurs or horse parts are found quite often in very well furnished graves. So even if these offerings are often connected with warriors, it has to be considered that they might be not only an indicator for the doubtlessly existing cavalry but also for different social phenomena, for example wealth.

Translated by author

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OBERHOFO (AUKŠTKIEMIO) KAPINYNO ŽIRGŲ KAPAI IR RAITELIŲ APRANGA

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Santrauka

Oberhofo (dabar Aukštkiemis, Klaipėdos r.) kapinynas yra šiauriau Klaipėdos. Kapinyne rasta vos keletas kamanų su metaliniais apkalais (1–2 pav.). Išskirtinis kryžiaus pavidalo sidabro plokšte dengtas kamanų apkalas, puoštas raudonu emaliu, rastas kape 2 (2 pav.). Panašių kryžiaus pavidalo apkalų rasta ne tik Vakarų Lietuvoje, bet ir Mozūrijoje bei Sūduvoje. Rečiau jų randama Sembos pusiasalyje, Nadruvoje ir šiaurės vakarinėje Žemaitijos dalyje (3 pav.).

Be įprastų žąsų, randamų kapinyne, kape 75 rasti žąslai, kurių bronziniuose žieduose buvo įkomponuota po žirgo figūrėlę (žr. skyriaus III užsklandą). Kapinyne

III

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rasti 29 kapai su žirgų kaulais ar dantimis, žąslais ar pentiniais (4 pav.). Jų paprastai randama vyrų kapuose su ginklais.

Vėlyvuojū geležies amžiumi datuojamuose kapinyne kapuose (435, 436 ir 440) rasta žirgų aprangos elementų ir ietigalių, miniatiūrinių kirvių ir peilių.

Kapinyne randama visų įmanomų žirgų kapų ir aukų tipų: žirgo kapas (257); žirgo galvos aukos (kapai 2 ir 365); žirgo dantys, greičiausiai žirgų aukų kapų (7 ir 150) liekanos, žirgo galūnių palaidojimai (kapai 360, 238 ir 108). Visais atvejais žirgų liekanų randama į kairę nuo kitų daiktų arba žmogaus kapo.

Kapinyne žirgų kapų ir jų liekanų paplitimas (5 pav.) rodo, kad šie kapai yra pasklidę po visą kapinyną. Kapai su žirgų galūnių liekanomis paplitę šiaurinėje kapinyne dalyje (vienas kapas rastas vakarinėje kapinyne dalyje). Beveik visi žirgų kapai (su retomis išimtimis – kapai 109; 257 ir 270) priklauso romėniškajam laikotarpiui.

Kapai su žąslais paplitę didesnėje kapinyne dalyje (6 pav.). Jų nėra tik pačiame šiauriausiame kapinyne pakraštyje, kur laidota tautų kraustymosi laikotarpiu, ir šiaurės rytų dalyje, kur laidota F periode. Šiaip jau dėti į kapus žąslus vietoje žirgų labiau įprasta tautų kraustymosi ir vikingų laikais. Lyginant kapus su žąslais ir kapus su pentiniais, reikia pabrėžti, kad kapų su pentiniais daugiau yra kapinyne periferijoje, kas lyg ir liudytų žemesnį palaidotųjų statusą. Pentinas tik patvirtina, kad žmogus yra raitelis, bet jis nebūtinai yra žirgo savininkas. Bet visai įmanoma, kad žirgas nebuvo palaidotas kartu su mirusiuoju tik dėl ekonominių priežasčių.

Viena iš geriausiai dokumentuotų kapinyne dalių yra vakarinė kapų grupė. Čia daugiausia laidota tautų kraustymosi laikotarpiu. Galima išskirti 3 ar net 4 kapų pogrupius. Jų pagrindas yra ne tiek šeimyninė, kiek „vasalinė“ priklausomybė. Kapai su kalavijais sudaro centrinę kapų grupę. Kuo toliau nuo šios grupės, tuo mažiau ginklų randama kapuose. Tolimesnėse grupėse yra bent vienas kapas su žąslais ar pentinu (7 pav.).

Baigiant reikėtų pabrėžti, kad raitelis Aukštkiemiu bendruomenėje nebūtinai turėjo būti karinės hierarchijos atstovas. Pentinų ar žirgo dalių dažnai randama ir turtingųjų kapuose. Net jei šios aukos kažkaip susijusios su kariais, negalima tvirtinti, kad taip palaidotieji neabejotinai buvo raiteliai. Tokie kapai galėjo būti, pavyzdžiui, turtinės ir socialinės diferenciacijos reiškinys.

Vertė Audronė Bliujienė