SYMBOLIC HORSE BURIALS IN THE IRON AGE OF EAST LITHUANIA

LAURYNAS KURILA

Abstract

This article analyses symbolic horse burial rites in the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture of the tenth–eleventh centuries. Single imitative inhumations and cremations are the dominant forms of horse cenotaphs. A variety of group imitative burial forms also was practiced. Funerary rites for symbolic and actual horses were coexistent, and no chronological or spatial differences between them are observed. Grave goods in burials of symbolic horses indicate lower status. Imitative burials of horses were carried out by those who had no resources for the sacrifice of the animal itself as a grave good. The social implications of horse burials or symbolic burials gained substantiality along with growing military activity and social stratification.

Key words: East Lithuanian barrows, horses, symbolic burials, grave goods, equestrian items, status.

Introduction

The horse was one of the few animals that sometimes was provided funerary treatment by people. Although far from being a general rule, horse burials occurred more often and had considerably more features of a proper burial than any other animal species. The economic and military significance of horses revealed itself distinctly in ideology, rites, and views of the afterlife. Horses could assume a wide variety of roles in funerary ritual – that of a grave good, sacrifice or food offering, or possibly simply the object of burial (Jaskanis 1966; Müller-Wille 1970-1971; Vaitkunskienė 1981; Oexle 1984; Trinkaus 1984, p.677; Bond 1996, p.82ff; Bertašius 2002, pp.169-204, Juškaitis 2005). In many cases the horse was granted the attributes of a substantial personage in the funeral, i.e., provided with grave goods or ritual treatment common to humans.

The act of burial is a very symbolic one, but cenotaphs (symbolic burials) contain an additional symbolism within the funerary context itself. In those cases when a dead body cannot or needs not be disposed, or is not at all present, the funeral has no utilitarian function – only an ideological one. Imitative ritual is then more likely to be performed in order to accomplish the objectives of the funeral as a social agency. This kind of ritual would be more a social strategy of the living rather than an assumed need of the symbolically buried individual.

From the point of practicality, symbolic horse burials might be rated as irrational (burying something that actually does not need to be buried, under conditions when no funeral actually is necessary). Still, the fact of a common existence of horse cenotaphs in Late Iron Age East Lithuanian barrows is becoming increasing-ly evident as new excavation data emerge (Kuncienė 1969, p.59ff; Bliujienė 1992, p.113ff; Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė 2001, p.193ff; Juškaitis 2005, p.147ff; Kurila 2005, p.67ff). This inevitably raises the question of the purpose of such a ritual. The phenomenon of symbolic horse burial is unique in the context of the Baltic tribes. Furthermore, it is the only clear example in the region of animals who received symbolic treatment in funerary rites, which could indicate a specific attitude toward horses in East Lithuania. An analysis of the aforementioned graves might render a better understanding of both the position that the horse held in worldview, as well as the general view held regarding the transition from this life to the next.

A study of symbolic horse burials encounters difficulty in the very definition of the subject. The lack of osteological data and the diversity of interpretations regarding the archaeological material hinder the identification of symbolic horse graves among other burials. A chronological analysis also is problematic due to the difficulty of dating particular artefacts. Therefore, the primary goals of this article are to define the features of horse cenotaphs and to set a body of their typology, chronology, and spatial distribution. Only then can the material be addressed with the "why?" and "what for?" questions.

Description and classification of the material

A classification of horse burials in the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture can be built on three parameters: actual or symbolic, inhumation or cremation, single or group (human and horse, or horse and horse) burial. Virtually all possible combinations of these are present in the ar-
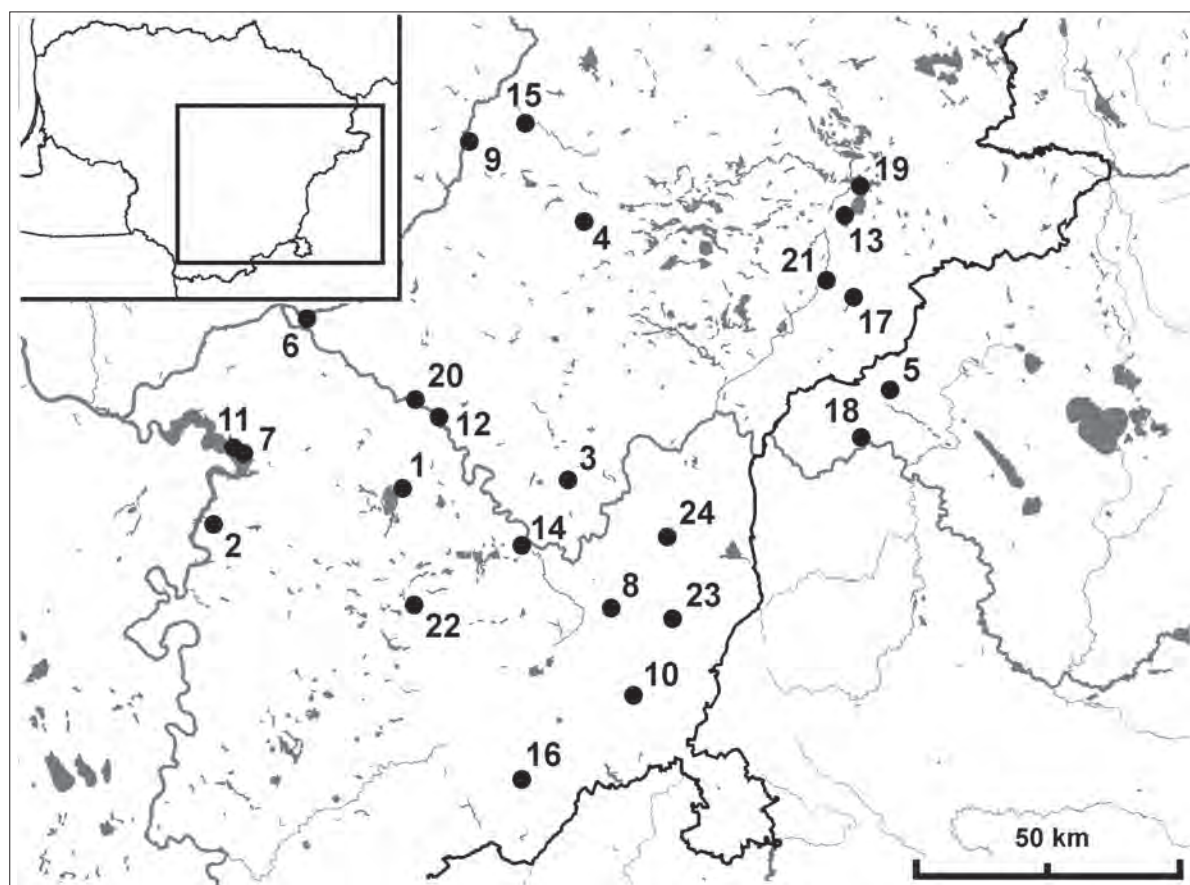
Fig. 1. Locations of symbolic horse burials in the East Lithuanian barrows: 1 Alinka-Raistinė; 2 Atmainai-Darsūniškis; 3 Aukštieji Rusokai; 4 Baltadvaris I; 5 Budriany (Belarus); 6 Dagilioniai; 7 Dovainonys I, II; 8 Dusinėnai II; 9 Jakšiškis; 10 Jašiūnai-Geložė; 11 Kapitoniškės; 12 Kernavė; 13 Kretuonys; 14 Kunigiškės; 15 Kurklių Šilas; 16 Pabarė; 17 Peršaukštis-Kasčiukai III; 18 Pilviny (Belarus); 19 Rėkučiai-Paversmys I; 20 Rusių Ragas; 21 Sudota II; 22 Strėva; 23 Šveicarai; 24 Žvirbliai (map drawn by Kurila).

chaeological record, although represented in very uneven proportions. Since the subject of the present study is limited to symbolic burials, the study deals only with the latter two parameters. A symbolic horse burial is defined as equestrian artefacts (bridle bits, stirrups, whip handles, sickles[1], buckles, bells, etc.) found in a mortuary context that has no actual horse remains.

Symbolic horse burials or graves bearing the features of a symbolic burial so far have been discovered in at least 24 locations with East Lithuanian barrows (Fig. 1). The area of their distribution covers the entire territory of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture (Kurila 2005, p.70ff fig.13). At least 62 horse cenotaphs had been excavated up until 2007 (Tab. 1). Since the structure of the burials is very diverse, six provisory forms of cenotaphs can be distinguished:

1. Single cenotaphs that imitate inhumations are one of the most frequent forms of symbolic horse burials. At least 16 such burials have been excavated so far. The grave goods are usually found at the base, in the centre or in the periphery of the burial mound, without any other interments. The sequence of the burial rite roughly can be defined as placement of the items on the ground and then erection of a mound over them. No apparent effort was put into the performance or imitation of other stages of the funeral. The cenotaphs are arranged slightly differently than actual horse inhumations (most of which had been interred in pits at the base of the barrow). The majority of the graves contain a single artefact: a sickle, stirrup, bridle bit, or whip handle. Only one known burial in the Alinka-Raistinė barrow cemetery's barrow 20 was found to have two items: a sickle and a bridle bit (Bliujienė 1992, p.108ff). Graves of this type are located in the western, northern, and central parts (the basin of the Neris River) of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture area, i.e., a territory that generally corresponds to the distribution

[1] The sickle displays a strong correlation with inhumation and cremation horse burials and equestrian assemblages in the context of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture. This artefact never occurs in contemporaneous women's grave assemblages. Since no solid arguments for other theories are available, the interpretation of a sickle as a tool for fodder production (Szukiewicz 1918, p.11) is still chiefly in use.

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of barrow cemeteries that contain inhumation or biritual horse burials (Ju kaitis 2005, p.143ff fig.3; Kurila 2005, p.66ff fig.10).

2. Single burials that imitate cremation also are a common form of horse cenotaphs. This form is represented by at least 14 excavated graves. Their structure generally is the same as that of the above mentioned burials, but the artefacts bear traces of exposure to fire. One might assume this to be indicative of an additional stage in the funerary rite. The grave goods probably had been charred in imitation of cremation or placed onto a pyre while cremating a human, and then buried in a separate barrow. These graves contain considerably more artefacts. Some examples include that of a sickle, a bridle bit, a buckle, and seven bronze bells in Alinka-Raistinė's barrow 8 (Bliujienė 1992, p.113) (Fig. 2); a sickle, two stirrups, and an iron bell in Pabarė barrow 6 (Kuncienė 1969, p.61 fig.3); and a sickle, a bridle bit, a buckle, a bronze bell, and an unidentified bronze artefact in Strėva barrow 2 (Girininkas 1978, p.124). Single imitative horse cremations have been found distributed mainly in the southeastern and central parts of the culture area where cremations or biritual horse burials had been dominant (Juškaitis 2005, p.140ff fig.2; Kurila 2005, p.66ff fig.10), although they do also occur in the northern part. Since the effect of fire on

Table 1. Symbolic horse burials in the East Lithuanian barrows

Form of the burial	Barrow cemetery	Barrow No.	Burial No. (arbitrary No.)	Position of the burial in the mound	Other burials in the barrow (other remains in a group burial)	Grave goods charred	Grave-goods							
							stirrup	bridle bit	whip handle	sickle	buckle	fitting	bell	unidentified
1	Alinka-Raistinė	3	1	first burial	–	–				1				
		20	1	later burial?	–	–		1		1				
		21	1	first burial	–	–				1				
		12	1	first burial	–	–				1				
		23	1	first burial	–	–				1				
	Atmainai-Darsūniškis	11	1	first burial	–	–				1				
		12	1	first burial?	–	–				1				
	Dovainonys II	4(B)	1	first burial	–	–				1				
	Jakšiškis	8	1	first burial?	–	–			1					
		12	1	first burial	–	–	1							
	Kapitoniškės	24	1	first burial	–	–				1				
		31	1	?	–	–				1				
		36	1	later burial?	–	–	1?							
	Kernavė	2	1	first burial?	–	–				1				
		4(5)	1	first burial?	–	–				1				
	Kurklių Šilas	1(37)	1	first burial?	–	–				1				
2	Alinka-Raistinė	8	1	first burial	–	+		1		1	1		7	
		19	1	first burial?	–	+		1						
	Dusinėnai II	5	1	?	–	+		1						
	Jašiūnai-Geložė	3	1	?	–	+		1						
	Kunigiškės	2	1	later burial	–	+				1				
	Pabarė	3	1	later burial	–	+		1		1		2		
		4	1	first burial	–	+		1		1	1			
		6	1	later burial	–	+	2			1			1	
		8	1	later burial	–	+				1				
		13	1	later burial	–	+		1						
		14	1	later burial	–	+		1		1				
	Sudota II	11	1	first burial	–	+	2				1			
	Strėva	2	1	first burial	–	+		1		1	1		1	?
		4	1	first burial	–	+		1					1	1

	Site	Grave	No.	Burial	Associated burial								
1–2?	Alinka-Raistinė	14	1	first burial	–	?				1			
	Atmainai-Darsūniškis	3	1	first burial	–	?				1			
	Atmainai-Darsūniškis	9	1	?	–	?				1			
	Auk tieji Rusokai	7	1	first burial?	–	?				1			
	Baltadvaris I	32	1	first burial	–	?		1					
	Dagilioniai	3	1	?	–	?		1					
	Dovainonys I	1	1	first burial	–	?				1			
	Dovainonys I	3	1	first burial	–	?				1			
	Dovainonys I	5	1	first burial	–	?				1			
	Dovainonys II	3(A)	1	first burial	–	?				1			
	Dusinėnai II	2	1	?	–	?		1		1			
	Jašiūnai-Geložė	4	1	later burial	–	?				1			
	Kapitoniškės	42	1	later burial	–	?				2			
	Kurklių Šilas	15(36)	1	first burial?	–	?		1				6	
	Peršaukštis-Kasčiukai III	2	1	later burial	–	?				1			
	Peršaukštis-Kasčiukai III	7	1	first burial	–	?	2	1	1	1		5	
	Pilviny (Belarus)	12	1	?	–	?		1			1		
	Rėkučiai-Paversmys I	3(10)	1	later burial	–	?		1					
	Rusių Ragas	D	1	?	–	?		1					
	Sudota II	9	1	first burial	–	?				1			
	Šveicarai	7	1	later burial?	–	?		1		1			
3	Baltadvaris I	31	2	first burial	contemporaneous (?) cremation human burial	?		1					
	Žvirbliai	38	C, D	first burial	3 contemporaneous and later cremation human burials	?				1			1
4	Kernavė	1	1	later burial	human remains	–		1					
	Kretuonys	21(332)	1	later burial	human remains	–		1					
5	Atmainai-Darsūniškis	10	2	first burial	later cremation horse burial	–				1			
	Jašiūnai-Geložė	8	2	first burial	later cremation horse burial	?		1		1	1		
	Kapitoniškės	20	2	first burial	contemporaneous (?) cremation horse burial	–				1			
	Kapitoniškės	37	2	first burial	contemporaneous (?) cremation horse burial	–				1			
3, 5?	Atmainai-Darsūniškis	4	1	?	cremation burial	?				1			
	Budriany (Belarus)	3	1	first burial	contemporaneous (?) cremation burial	?				1			
6	Kernavė	6(13)	1	first burial	contemporaneous cremation human and horse burial	+				1			

Fig. 2. Alinka-Raistinė barrow no. 8, symbolic horse burial *in situ* (Bliujienė 1984).

the artefacts is not always apparent, the form (imitative inhumation or cremation) of a number of single horse cenotaphs (at least 21 cases) remains unidentified.

The following forms of symbolic horse graves are various group burials:

3. Horse grave goods deposited in a barrow that contains human burials constitute a particular form of a human and horse group burial, wherein the latter is entombed symbolically. In Žvirbliai barrow 38, a sickle and another iron artefact were found at the base of the barrow along with three human graves. Planigraphically and stratigraphically, the horse cenotaph showed a close association with a cremated female(?) burial I (Iwanowska 2006, p.100ff and p.202ff). In Baltadvaris I barrow 31, a bridle bit and human remains (identified osteologically) without any grave goods were buried in separate graves (Augustinavičius, Dakanis 2001, p.79ff). No information is available regarding whether the grave goods in these graves had been charred in imitation of cremation.

4. A similar form of human and horse group burial differs only in the construction of the burial: cremated human remains furnished with equestrian items. In Kernavė barrow 1 (Kulikauskas 1982, p.71) and Kretuonys barrow 21(332) (Butėnienė 1977, p.43), the hu-

man graves contained bridle bits. None of them had been charred, thus the imitative funerary rite for the horses excluded cremation. These graves are a symbolic variation of the custom of burying a human and a horse in one grave pit. Other possible recorded cases of such burials (although unconfirmed osteologically as to whether they contain both horse and human remains) are the Kastkiškės barrow 1 (excavations by O. Kuncienė), the Kretuonys barrow 32(341)'s graves 2 and 3, Pabarė barrow 1 (excavations by W. Szukiewicz), Rokantiškės barrow 1, and Zasvir (Belarus) barrow 20 (excavations by F. Pokrovskii).

Other strategies also could have been employed to imitate the burial of a horse together with a human, like the inclusion of a horse tooth within the grave (Kurganai barrow 4, grave 3; Pučkalaukis barrow 1, grave 1; Rimshany (Belarus) barrow 1).

5. Another form of group burial that involves imitative rituals consists of horse cenotaphs found in one barrow with burials of cremated horses. Such burials have been excavated in four barrows. The graves can be interpreted in two different ways. Items buried in a separate area of the mound might be regarded either as additional grave goods of the horse grave or as a distinct symbolic burial. The latter interpretation is supported by chronological gaps between the horse burial and horse cenotaph in some cases, or the absence of evidence of burning on the interred artefacts (charring of the grave goods would be expected if they were associated with a horse buried during the cremation process). The cenotaphs usually contain only a sickle. Only one known case, that of Jašiūnai-Geložė barrow 8, contained three artefacts: a sickle, a bridle bit, and a buckle (Šimėnas 2006, p.93 fig.29).

6. A complex form of group burial is recorded in one of the barrows at Kernavė: barrow 6(13). The cremated remains of a human, horse, and another animal (verified by osteological analysis), without any grave goods, were buried in a grave pit. Afterward, a pyre over the grave pit was used to char a sickle, and the whole ritual place was covered with a mound (Luchtanas 1986). This idiosyncratic grave might be construed as a burial of a human along with two horses (an actual body and a cenotaph), although a range of other interpretations is possible.

While representations of the latter four forms of horse cenotaphs are rare, no framework for their spatial distribution can be estimated. Various forms of symbolic horse burials alongside cremation interments were practiced throughout the entire culture area, and not one form appears to have been dominant.

The variability of symbolic horse burial customs probably had been even higher. An interpretation of

horse cenotaphs also has been proposed for mounds without any burials (Bliujienė 1992, p.119ff), are very frequent phenomenon in East Lithuanian barrow cemeteries. Mounds that contain no traces of burials so far have been excavated in about 50 locations. Some symbolic intention of such barrows is hardly deniable. However, their interpretation as symbols of namely horse burials, while logical, is not supported by any direct evidence.
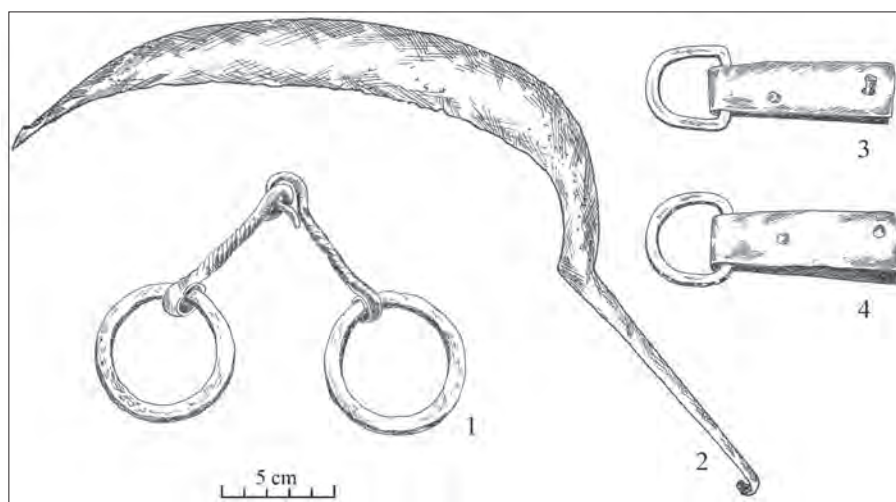
Fig. 3. Grave goods from Pabarė barrow no. 3 symbolic horse burial: 1 bridle bit; 2 sickle; 3, 4 buckles (all iron) (excavations by O. Kuncienė, drawing by A. Ruzienė).

Chronological evaluation

A chronological evaluation of the Late Iron Age East Lithuanian barrows is challenging. The dates of the assemblages seldom fit frames narrower than two centuries or so due to the lack of precisely datable artefacts and proper chronological schemes. A proposal of only provisional dates of horse cenotaphs is attempted here.

Most of the symbolic horse burials have been found in barrows without stone circles, an attribute considered indicative of relatively late (Late Iron Age, ninth–twelfth century) mounds. Only Sudota II's barrow 11 might have had remnants of a stone circle (Merkevičius 1990, p.54ff).

Not all grave goods of horse cenotaphs were available for examination in this study due to poor preservation or other reasons. Those that were examined were dated only approximately (Fig. 3). The stirrups from Jakšiškis barrow 12 (Simniškytė 2007), Pabarė barrow 6 (Kuncienė 1969, p.61), and Sudota II barrow 11 (Merkevičius 1990, p.56) are typologically related to types 6 and 7 according to Antanavičius (1976, p.74ff) and dated to the tenth-twelfth centuries. The vast majority of bridle bits are of the plain or twisted three-sectioned types. This form is assigned to Kirpichnikov (1973, p.17) type 5 which is chiefly dated to the tenth–eleventh centuries. The artefacts from Alinka-Raistinė barrow 19 (Bliujienė 1992, p.123) and Pabarė barrow 3 (Kuncienė 1969, p.62) belong to the broadly dated 1 and 4 types (Kirpichnikov 1973, p.13ff). Their most likely chronology also is tenth–eleventh century. The bridle bit from Peršaukštis-Kasčiukai III barrow 7

(Pokrovskii 1897, p.161ff) falls off of the above typological scheme although it does have features in common with type 1. A narrower chronological span of the second half of the tenth century or the first half of the eleventh century (Butėnas 2001, p.231) can be ascribed to the whip handles from Jakšiškis barrow 8 (Strimaitienė 2006) and Peršaukštis-Kasčiukai III barrow 7 (Pokrovskii 1897, p.162). All sickles found in horse cenotaphs as well as in most inhumations and cremations belong to type 6 according to Minasian (1978, p.82ff), although the forms of the individual artefacts vary considerably. Their dates can only be as accurate as the eighth/ninth–twelfth/thirteenth centuries (and the typological differences of Medieval sickles are minor). A generally similar, broad chronology likewise can be applied to buckles (Butėnas 1999, p.48). Thus, the overall chronology of the horse cenotaphs in the East Lithuanian barrows is tenth–eleventh century. The twelfth century probably covers only the final stage of symbolic horse burial tradition as well as that of the entire East Lithuanian Barrow Culture (Kurila 2003).

Interpreting symbolic horse burials

While a horse might be buried in a number of different ways, the main variable is the alteration between actual and symbolic burial. The choice between the two options must have been closely related to ideology (views concerning the afterlife, the notion of a link between the symbol and the symbolized object, the amount of wealth a society decided to grant the deceased[2]). In this

[2] Osteological analyses of horse remains, while rare, have shown that generally it was young horses that were buried in the East Lithuanian barrows. This confirms the proposition that they had suffered a violent death and were interred as offerings or grave goods. Whether horses always accompanied human burials, or were interred as sacrifices under some other circumstances, might be a matter beyond

article, an effort is made to compare the horse burials and horse cenotaphs from two perspectives: chronological and social.

In stable societies, burial rites are expected to develop toward plainer forms, with progressively fewer grave good deposits through time (Childe 1945, p.17). This rule could explain the gradual replacement of horse cremations and inhumations by symbolic forms in funerary rites. Such a model has been applied to horse burial customs in the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture by A. Bliujienė (1992, p.121). Still, the hypothesis of change through time needs to be tested.

A chronological comparison of symbolic and actual horse burials is possible only in some cases. In Jašiūnai-Geložė barrow 8, the horse cremation was interred later than the cenotaph. However, the grave goods of both graves are identical and thus chronologically parallel to each other from a typological point of view (Šimėnas 2006). Atmainai-Darsūniškis barrow 10 had analogous stratigraphy (Vėlius 2007, p.138). The horse cremation in Kretuonys barrow 54(5) contained a sickle (Butėnienė 1982, p.67) characteristic of a period no later than the ninth century (Minasian 1978, pp.79 and 83); it must therefore be earlier than the horse cenotaph in barrow 21(332) (Butėnienė 1977, p.43). In the comprehensively excavated Alinka-Raistinė (Bliujienė 1992, p.112) and Kapitoniškės (Tautavičius 1957, p.100ff) barrow cemeteries, no typological differences were observed between the furnishings of horse cenotaphs and inhumations or cremations. Barrows 20 and 37 of Kapitoniškės most likely contained contemporaneous horse cremations and cenotaphs (Tautavičius 1957, p.100ff). One theory based on the spatial distribution of the mounds is that the barrows that contain horse inhumations in the central part of the Alinka-Raistinė cemetery were somewhat earlier than the ones with cenotaphs located mostly on the periphery (Bliujienė 1992, p.106). In Kapitoniškės, the expansion of the cemetery might be reconstructed only as horse cremations following the inhumations, or the opposite. However, no spatial patterns are noticeable between the barrows with actual horse burials and symbolic horse burials (Tautavičius 1957, p.97). In Rusių Ragas barrow cemetery, no chronological relationship can be deduced between the horse cenotaph and the inhumations. Still, the whip handle that accompanied a horse in barrow F (Zabiela 2005, p.134) is similar to the ones of the cenotaphs in Peršaukštis-Kasčiukai III barrow 7 (Pokrovskii 1897, p.162) and Jakšiškis barrow 8 (Strimaitienė 2006) which most certainly would mean chronological proximity.

our knowledge. Still, funerals for horses that died naturally were not common.

The few comparative data make it difficult to trace any significant chronological differences between the practices of symbolic and actual horse burials. In general, the period of horse cremation and inhumation rites probably was longer than that of the symbolic burials (which would be entirely logical, since a symbol is not likely to emerge prior to the object it symbolizes). However, the practices of horse inhumations, cremations, and imitative burials were coexistent in roughly the same proportions, for a period that lasted at least two centuries. East Lithuanian burial sites contain horse cenotaphs that preceded, followed, and occurred at the same time as graves that contained actual horse remains. Imitative horse burials never replaced cremations and inhumations. Given that the pattern of horse burial practices was unique in every society, the shift between actual and symbolic horse burials is most likely to have occurred many times at any particular burial site.

While rejecting the hypothesis of a chronologically based difference between symbolic and actual horse burials, the question still remains regarding the nature of the differences between the two types of rituals. The differences might be explained by a social implication model of funerary customs. The general idea of the model is that the higher the status of the individual being buried, the more time, labour, and resource consuming funerary treatment he or she is expected to receive. Greater mortuary variability reflects greater complexity in social organisation (Saxe 1970; Binford 1971; Tainter 1978). The relationship between social status and burial is displayed through the particular symbols of a society. A funeral might be employed by the mourners themselves as a strategy for establishing, maintaining, or claiming a certain social order or position in the society (Hodder 1982, p.195ff; Scarre 1994; O'Shea 1995; Parker Pearson 2003, p.78ff; Oestigaard, Goldhahn 2006). If the horse is considerd a grave good or a funerary sacrifice, one hypothesis would be that a deceased higher status individual might likely be accompanied in the funeral rite by a horse, while individuals of lower status would receive only horse symbols. The willingness of a society to grant the deceased a horse suggests an acknowledged social significance. The value of horses has always been high (Hyland 2003, p.141ff). In the period in question it supposedly was equal to a price of a female slave (Bertašius 2002, p.197) or two swords (Lehtosalo-Hilander 1982, p.38). While the common occurrence of horse burials in East Lithuanian barrows even in relatively poorly furnished cemeteries (a sword is found almost 40 times less often than a horse burial) raises the question of a horse's high value in the societies, the decision of whether to inter

the actual animal or merely items that symbolized the animal, had to be essential.

The fact that horse inhumations, cremations, and symbolic burials commonly occurred separately from human burials makes it difficult to trace the relationship between the form of horse burials and the wealth of human interments. Thus, another methodological approach must be found. A comparison is made between the quantity and diversity of grave goods (number of artefacts and number of artefact types) of horse inhumations or cremations versus cenotaphs in some of the comprehensively excavated cemeteries as well as in the entire East Lithuanian mortuary record of that period (Fig. 4). The comparison suggests a pattern that the horse cenotaphs contain fewer items. Thus, the burial of an actual horse correlates with greater wealth and, subsequenty, with a higher status of the deceased or stronger social objectives of the mourners. Conversely, imitative horse burial is an attribute of lower status. A correlation also is observed between the number of grave goods and the manner of symbolic burial (inhumation versus cremation). Symbolic cremations (form 2) have more than twice as many grave goods as symbolic inhumations (form 1) (although in actual horse burials this is not the case) (Fig. 5). Thus, the imitation of cremation, from the point of resource investment, could also be rated as an attribute of higher status (at least in biritual cemeteries). Different trends in horse burial customs doubtessly could have existed in certain societies that possessed different quantities of horses or overall wealth. A richer community is likely to bury an actual horse. However, no link is noticeable between the general wealth of barrow cemeteries (expressed through the grave goods in human burials) and the actual / symbolic horse burial ratio (Fig. 6). A subtle order that linked the form of horse burial with social status probably existed in every society.

Historical background

A widespread and, it can be claimed, rather rapid diffusion of a symbolic horse burial tradition and its perceptible social
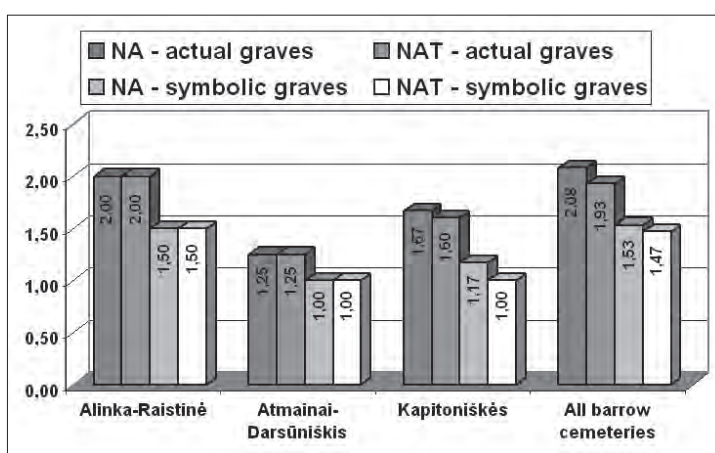

Fig. 4. Average number of artefacts (NA) and number of artefact types (NAT) in actual and symbolic horse burials in East Lithuanian barrows.
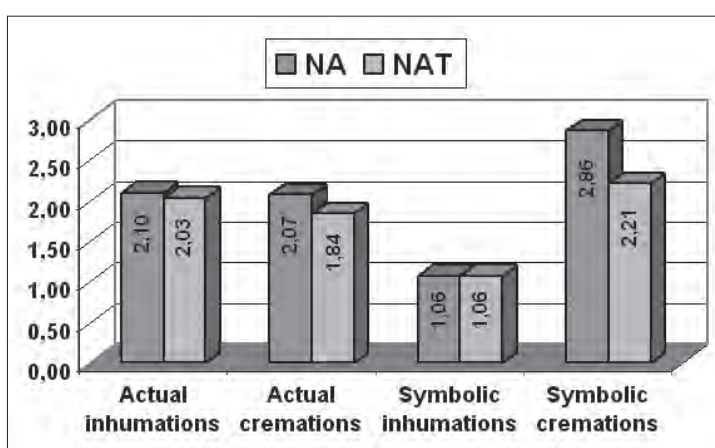

Fig. 5. Average number of artefacts (NA) and number of artefact types (NAT) in actual and symbolic horse inhumations and cremations in East Lithuanian barrows.
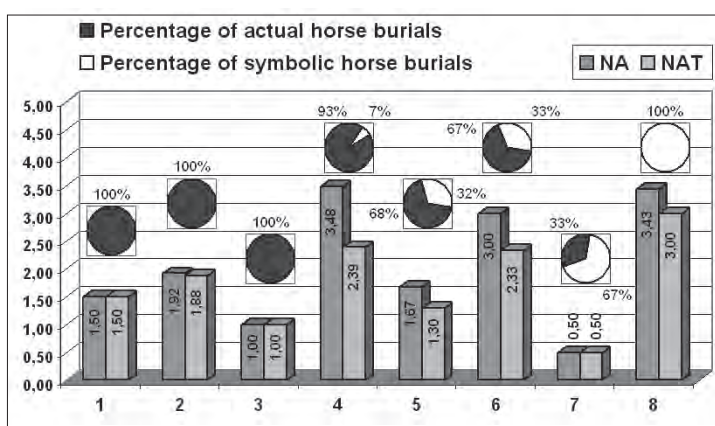

Fig. 6. Average number of artefacts (NA) and number of artefact types (NAT) in human burials found at East Lithuanian barrow cemeteries containing different proportions of actual and symbolic horse burials (1 Didžiuliai; 2 Varliškės; 3 Ziaziulka-Sidarishki (Belarus); 4 Žvirbliai; 5 Kapitoniškės; 6 Budriany (Belarus); 7 Kernavė; 8 Pabarė).

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implications could not be a self-emerging phenomenon. Its foundation lies in the political and social realia of the time. The tenth–eleventh/twelfth centuries was a time of pronounced change in East Lithuania, as it was at the dawn of statehood. The region was involved in struggles against Ruthenia, mainly the Duchy of Polotsk. Growing military activity and an increasing tendency to attack promoted tribal consolidation (Baranauskas 2000, pp.120-124 and 146-156). After several centuries of what could be interpreted as social stagnation, an intense concentration of power is perceptible at the turn of the millenium. Social organisation in East Lithuania gradually developed toward a distinctly ranked society. The evidence for this is visible in the mortuary data (isolated and elaborate, richly furnished graves of warriors – Musianowicz 1968; Iwanowska 2006, p.108ff), the development of a hillfort structure (Zabiela 1997; Baranauskas 2000, p.143ff), and written sources (Gudavičius 1996, p.120ff; Baranauskas 2000, p.139ff). The society became militarized. The activities and capabilities of warfare apparently were the principal agents that patterned the system of rank.

A marked mortuary variability and dominant military aspect of the highest level signal a dynamic social system impacted by a competition for status and claims for legitimizing achieved social roles (Wason 1994, p.84ff). Such a system requires a set of strategies for demonstrating status. In a society that develops a rank system based on military agency as East Lithuania did in the tenth–eleventh/twelfth centuries, horse burial was likely to become an instrument for the display of appropriate aspects of social status. The horse became more important in warfare as warfare became more intensive and professional. The value of horses also had to grow along with the demand for them. Their deposition in burials thus constituted an act that only some within the society could afford. On the other hand, the burial of a horse was an endeavour to implement social claims. Symbolic horse burials thus served as a peculiar balance between the objectives of gaining the ritual benefits of horse burials and saving the actual animal for practical needs. Those who could not afford to bury a horse employed the imitative forms of such rituals.

The various practices of horse burial might have been regulated by certain norms that were uniform throughout the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture or acted out differently within each particular community. Perhaps horse inhumations, cremations, symbolic burials, or the absence of any type of interment was associated with particular elements of the rank system, like an acquired funerary symbolism similar to that of weapons.

Conclusions

Our understanding of the meanings of symbols that were used in bygone societies is limited. The most an archaeologist can manage in this field of study is to propose an interpretation based on his/her own cultural environment. Only some of the statements of this article are proposed with varying degrees of certainty; some interpretative issues are approached more tentatively.

The customs of symbolic horse burials were multiform. The dominant forms of horse cenotaphs were single imitations of inhumations or cremations, although a variety of group burials also have been recorded. Overall, the arrangement of symbolic graves in the majority of the cases corresponds to that of actual burials, the presence or absence of horse remains being the only common variable. This indicates a strong relationship between the two types of ritual.

In general, the tradition of symbolic horse burials was commonplace in the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture in the tenth–eleventh centuries. A more accurate chronology is indeterminate. Symbolic and actual horse burials had been coexistent both in particular areas of interment as well as on the level of the entire archaeological culture.

An analysis of the grave goods suggests a correlation of symbolic funerary rites for horses with lower status. The resolution of the mourners to grant the deceased a horse indicates his authority and prestige, whereas a symbolic horse interment evidences the opposite.

The social implications of horse burial became increasingly substantial under the conditions of growing military activity and social stratification. The symbolic burial of a horse became a means of gaining ritual benefits without heavy material loss. On the other hand, the symbolic horse burial might have been an attribute of a concrete element in the system of rank.

Translated by author,
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Abbreviations

ATL – Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje … metais, Vilnius, from 1967
LA – Lietuvos archeologija, Vilnius, from 1979.
MADA – Lietuvos TSR Mokslų akademijos darbai, A serija, Vilnius, from 1955 till 1989.

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Laurynas Kurila
Lithuanian Institute of History
Kražių g. 5
LT-01108 Vilnius
LITHUANIA
E-mail: kurila@istorija.lt

SIMBOLINIAI ŽIRGŲ LAIDOJIMO PAPROČIAI GELEŽIES AMŽIAUS RYTŲ LIETUVOJE

Laurynas Kurila

Santrauka

Žirgas yra vienas iš nedaugelio gyvūnų, kuriems žmonės kartais rengdavo laidojimo apeigas. Laidojant jis galėjo įgauti įvairių reikšmių: įkapės, aukos, galbūt ir paties laidojimo objekto. Turint omenyje ir šiaip gilią simbolinę laidojimo potekstę, simbolinis žirgo laidojimas yra savitas, vien praktiniais poreikiais nepaaiškinamas reiškinys. Kaupiantis duomenims apie tokio papročio egzistavimą Rytų Lietuvos pilkapių kultūroje vėlyvajame geležies amžiuje (1 pav.), iškyla jo reikšmės klausimas. Šis darbas skirtas simbolinių žirgo kapų tipologijai, chronologijai ir interpretacijai.

Straipsnyje simboliniu žirgo kapu laikomos žirgo įkapės (žąslai, balnakilpės, botkočiai, pjautuvai, sagtys, žvangučiai ir t. t.), rastos kape be žirgo palaikų (2, 3 pav.). Simbolinių kapų klasifikacija yra paremta dviem pagrindiniais parametrais: degintinio ar griautinio ir atskiro ar grupinio (žmogaus ir žirgo arba žirgo ir žirgo) kapo imitacija. Kapų, kuriuos galima laikyti žirgo kenotafais, iki šiol rasta 24-iuose pilkapynuose, išsidėsčiusiuose visoje Rytų Lietuvos pilkapių kultūros teritorijoje. Iki 2007 m. buvo ištirti mažiausiai 62 tokie kapai (1 lent.). Išskiriamos 6 sąlyginės jų formos.

1. Atskiri žirgo inhumaciją imituojantys kapai yra viena pagrindinių žirgo kenotafo formų. Tokių kapų įranga nesudėtinga – virš ant žemės sudėtų įkapių būdavo supilamas pilkapis. Daugumoje kapų rasta po vieną dirbinį. Simbolinių žirgo inhumacijų randama daugiausia vakarinėje, šiaurinėje ir centrinėje kultūrinio arealo dalyje, kur vyravo žirgų inhumacijos paprotys.

2. Kita dažna forma yra simbolinė žirgo kremacija atskirame pilkapyje. Nuo pirmosios formos ji skiriasi tuo, kad žirgo įkapės kapuose randamos apdegusios. Greičiausiai jos būdavo deginamos simboliniame laidotuvių lauže. Tokiuose kapuose randama gerokai daugiau ir įvairesnių įkapių. Simbolinė žirgo kremacija praktikuota pietrytinėje ir centrinėje kultūros teritorijos dalyje, kur vyravo žirgų deginimo paprotys.

Kitos žirgo kenotafo formos yra įvairūs grupiniai kapai:

3. Žirgo įkapės, užkastos viename pilkapyje su degintiniais žmonių kapais, yra simbolinė grupinio žmogaus ir žirgo laidojimo forma. Iki šiol tyrinėti tik du tokie kapai.

4. Kita panaši forma skiriasi tik kapo įranga. Tai žirgo įkapės, rastos degintiniame žmogaus kape (tokiems kapams identifikuoti būtina osteologinė palaikų analizė, todėl tikslus jų skaičius nėra aiškus).

5. Žirgų kenotafai, rasti viename pilkapyje su degintiniais žirgų kapais, yra sunkiau identifikuojama grupinės laidosenos forma. Atskirai palaidotus dirbinius galima laikyti ir papildomomis žirgo įkapėmis. Tačiau tokią interpretaciją paneigia chronologiniai skirtumai tarp žirgo kapo ir kenotafo bei deginimo žymių nebuvimas ant simbolinio kapo įkapių.

6. Sudėtinga laidojimo forma užfiksuota viename Kernavės pilkapių. Jame virš užkastos kapo duobės su degintiniais žmogaus, žirgo ir kito gyvūno palaikais sukurtame lauže buvo apdegintas pjautuvas – antro žirgo simbolis (?).

Simbolinių žirgų kapų datavimas yra nelengvas uždavinys. Dauguma juose rastų dirbinių yra apytiksliai datuojami X–XI a., galbūt XII a. pradžia. Palyginus simbolinių ir griautinių bei degintinių žirgų kapų chronologiją, patikrinta hipotezė, kad simbolinės laidojimo apeigos pamažu pakeitė žirgų laidojimą (kas būtų logiška, turint omenyje stabiliose visuomenėse nuolat paprastėjančių laidojimo papročių modelį). Tačiau negausūs duomenys neleidžia įžvelgti reikšmingų chronologinių skirtumų tarp abiejų laidojimo būdų. Atskiruose pilkapynuose žirgų kenotafai buvo ankstesni, vėlesni ir vienalaikiai su tikrais žirgų kapais. Apskritai žirgų laidosenos praktikavimo laikotarpis buvo

ilgesnis nei simbolinės laidosenos, tačiau abu laidoji-mo būdai koegzistavo mažiausiai du šimtmečius.

Atmetus chronologinės žirgų laidosenos kaitos hipote-zę, simbolinių ir tikrų žirgų kapų skirtumus bandoma paaiškinti laidojimo papročių socialinėmis implikaci-jomis. Šios koncepcijos esmė – sudėtingesnės laidoji-mo apeigos rodo aukštesnį mirusiojo statusą, o didesnė laidosenos įvairovė atskleidžia didesnę socialinę stra-tifikaciją. Laikant žirgą įkape, galima kelti hipotezę, kad aukštesnio statuso individai laidoti su žirgais, tuo tarpu žemesnio statuso – su žirgo simboliais. Deja, vyravusi žirgų ar žirgo simbolių laidosena atskiruose pilkapiuose neleidžia palyginti žirgo laidojimo būdo ir žmonių kapų turtingumo. Tačiau įkapių turtingumo analizė atskleidžia, kad simbolinių žirgų kapų įkapių kompleksai yra skurdesni nei griautinių ir degintinių kapų (4 pav.). Taigi paties žirgo laidojimas koreliuoja su aukštesniu, o žirgo simbolio – su žemesniu statusu. Be to, pastebėta, kad simbolinės žirgo kremacijos buvo gerokai turtingesnės nei inhumacijos (5 pav.). Tuo tar-pu ryšio tarp bendro pilkapyno turtingumo (nustatyto pagal žmonių kapus) ir tikrų bei simbolinių žirgų kapų santykio nepastebėta (6 pav.).

Simbolinės žirgų laidosenos išplitimas vėlyvajame geležies amžiuje ir jos socialinė potekstė aiškintini to meto politine situacija. X–XI/XII a. Rytų Lietuva buvo įtraukta į kovas su Rusia, jos karinis aktyvumas augo ir vis labiau įgavo puolamąjį pobūdį. Dinamiškai socialinei organizacijai, kurioje vyko kovos dėl statu-so ir įgytų pozicijų legitimavimo, buvo būtini statuso demonstravimo būdai. Militarizuotoje visuomenėje tam tiko žirgų, kurių svarba karyboje augo, laidojimas. Žirgo laidojimo apeigas galėjo sau leisti tik dalis vi-suomenės. Taigi simbolinis laidojimas tapo savotiška pusiausvyra tarp ritualinės žirgo laidojimo būtinybės ir praktinės naudos išsaugant gyvūną. Galbūt Rytų Lietu-vos bendruomenėse netgi egzistavo tam tikros normos, siejančios žirgo laidojimą, simbolinį laidojimą ir jokio ritualo nebuvimą su konkrečiais socialinių rangų siste-mos elementais.