HORSE SACRIFICES IN PRUSSIA IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES. RITUAL AREA IN POGANOWO SITE IV, OLSZTYN PROVINCE (POLAND)

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Abstract

Authors present problems connected with horse sacrifices in Early Middle Ages in Prussia. Discoveries nearby Poganowo site IV hill-fort, create new possibilities to discuss about Prussian religion in Early Middle Ages. Stone statue, cairns, hearths and remains of sacrificed horses have similarities to numerous cult places in Europe and in Asia.

Key words: horse sacrifice, sacrificial place, Prussia, archaeozoology.

Introduction

Cultural situation on terrain inhabited by Prussians in Early Middle Ages was investigated for a long time. In previous research on Prussian history, the questions about Prussian religion in period before the Teutonic Order conquest, were dedicated little place. In comparison to Slavs, the our vision of Prussian religion in Early Middle Ages looks poorly. Despite the fact, that the first written source of information comes from the ninth century, our knowledge about the system of beliefs, and the religious practice of early-medieval Prussians remains fragmentary.

In numerous publications, authors using written sources, tried to reconstruct Prussian system of mythology, beliefs and to identify the cult places (e.g. Bertuleit 1924; Białuński 1993; 2004, pp.9-10 and 15; Suchocki 1991; Vaitkevičius 2003; 2004). The problem of identification of material relics connected with beliefs and cult looks worse. In studies, summing up the status of archaeological research, it is difficult to find any references to beliefs and cult (Pawłowski 1992; Iwanowska 1991; Wróblewski 2006). This results primarily from the condition of archaeological investigations. Typically, with system of beliefs were connected the burial objects. Those are burials with traces of cult practice, as well as the ritual objects, discovered within the burial-grounds (Gronau 1938; Kulakov 1980; Smirnova 2006). Many authors wrote about primitive stone statues called "Baba", and about stones to which cult functions were attributed (e.g. La Baume 1927; Błażejewska 2007; Gaerte 1926; Gronau 1938; Hoffmann 2000; 2007; Łapo 2007). Unfortunately, no "cult" stone, or stone structure interpreted as a cult place, have not been archaeological investigated in Prussia. Until 2007 none of the well-known stone statues was not found *in situ.* Only statue found in 2007 in sacrificial site in Poganowo confirmed dating this type of monuments for Early Medieval Period (Fig. 1). Remains of sacred animals, mostly of horses, found nearby statue, confirmed a connection between Prussian anthropomorphic statues and cult practices with animal sacrifices.

Many authors writing about the great importance of horses in Prussian funeral ceremonies (e.g. Gręzak 2007; Hoffmann 2006; Jaskanis 1966; Piątkowska-Małecka 1999; Toporov 1990; Vaitkunskienė 1990). The two oldest horse graves in Masuria, in terrain in Early Middle Ages occupied by the Prussians, are dated to the Later Pre-Roman-Early Roman Period (Phase A_3-B_1, Wyszembork, site II, grave 120; Muntowo, grave 45) (Szymański 2005, p.126; Gręzak 2007, p.359). However, most of the graves with burials of horses from Masuria, comes from the Late Roman and Migration Periods, and assumed to be connected with the influences from the north, from the Samland Peninsula (Jaskanis 1974, p.197ff; Szymański 2005, p.96ff). House deposits with horse skulls, discovered in pit 27 in Osinki and in goldsmith's workshop (pit 3/1973) in Tumiany (Baranowski *et al.* 1973, p.213 fig. 2; Okulicz 1963, p.199 fig.27) are estimated to come from late Roman Period and the Migration Period.

End of the ninth century, Wulfstan, a traveller and trader, wrote about the importance of horses in the Viking Age Prussian funeral (Wulfstan, p.734). It was reiterated in the first half of the 14th century, by Petrus de Dusburg (Dusburg, III, cap. 5, p.54). Horse inhumation during funeral ceremonies, was described in 1249 in the text of peace treaty from Dzierzgoń (Christburg) (Urkundenbuch, no. 218, p.161). These information was confirmed by cremation burials with fragments of burned horse bones, dated to the tenth-eleventh century, discovered in Cerkiewnik (Ziemlińska-Odoj 1992, pp.131, 136 and 138).

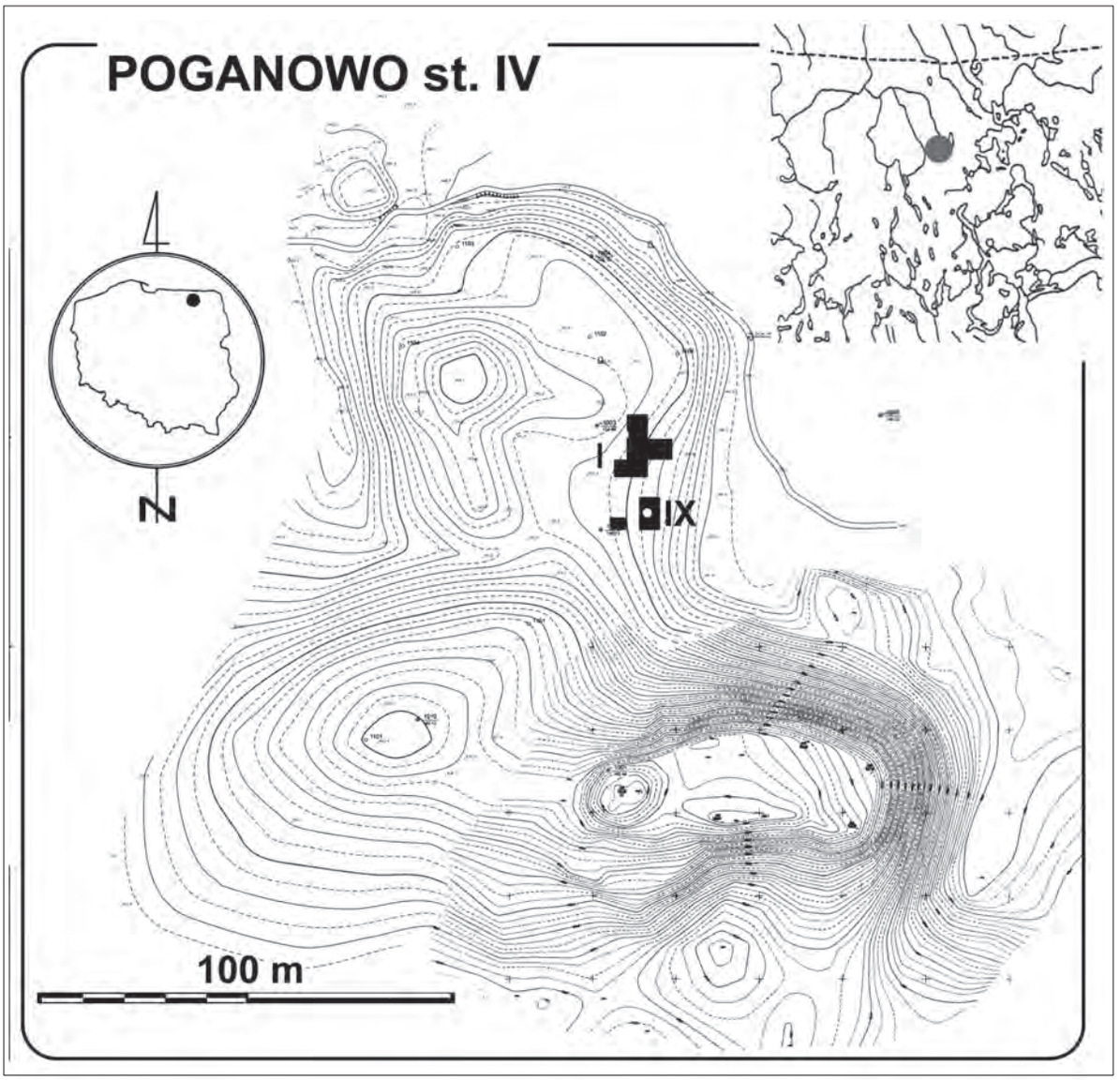

Fig. 1. Poganowo IV, hill-fort (on hill in south part of map), and sacrificial place (north) with excavated area. Excavation area no. IX with bank 19 – place of finding stone statue (compiled by Wyczółkowski).

The results of archaeological research in Poganowo site IV

New discussion, about horse sacrifice in the Prussian religion in the early Middle Ages, allowed the investigations conducted in settlement complex Poganowo IV, in north border of Mrągowo Lakeland, in north-eastern Poland.

Settlement complex Poganowo IV was discovered 2004 accidentally by ornithologists. It is situated on terrain of forest well-known from Teutonic Order documents, from the beginning of the fourteenth century. In 1326 it was a border forest between tribal territories Bartia (Barten) and Galindia (Weber 1876, p.225).

Settlement complex consists of a hill-fort and open settlement. It is situated entirely in the forest and occupies the surface of over 5 hectares. It was founded with use of natural environment conditions – the bend of stream, flood waters, swamp (Fig. 1). Several hundreds of meters to the north and south of central hill-fort there are two little hill-forts, Poganowo V and Wólka IX. Remains, discovered during archaeological excavations in northern part of complex Poganowo IV, were identified as a sacrificial place. This is the first well-known and archaeologically discovered settlement complex, with a cult place in Prussian land.

The parts of the monuments are destroyed by wild boars every year. In the moment of the discovery, we found numerous animal bones and fragments of early-mediaeval pottery lying on the surface. In the first season, during rescue excavation, was discovered a pit hearth (No. 1). In the layer over the hearth, with a lot of charcoal, in 3 square meter, we found over 300 fragments of animal bones, and fragments early-medieval pottery from tenth - eleventh century.

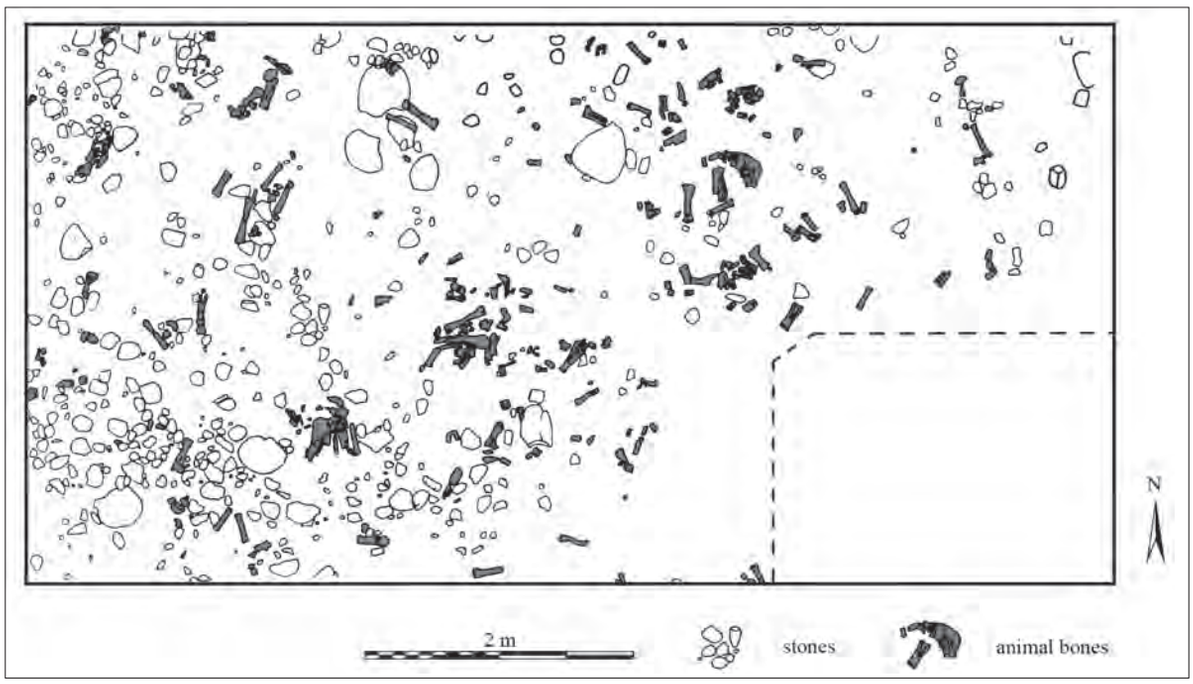

Fig. 2. Poganowo IV, excavation area no. X with concentrations of animal bones (drawing by Wyczółkowski).

Then and in the next two seasons we explored over 180 square meters. Near hearth 1, we discovered the heap of stones, like a cairn (No. 7), and next two small hearths (No. 14 and 15). Besides, we found fragments from two dishes, digging into subsoil under the hearth 14, and line of the 3 post – holes, diameter circa 20 cm (No. 16, 17, and 18). Near pile of stones 7, we found the whetstone and fragments of the iron hoops from the little stave bucket, 5 spindle whorl and one glass bead. Several meters to the south, we found numerous stones. In humus layer and directly under it, depth 20–30 cm, we found a large quantity of animal bones. They formed visible concentrations (Figs. 2, 3; Plate VII.2).

In the excavations area in south part of cult place, were discovered next similar concentrations of stones and bones. In excavation area IX, we found a rectangular stone hearth lined with clay (no. 20). Near the hearth, there was a small oval earthen bank with stone layer, dimensions circa 1.5 x 2.0 m, surrounded by the shallow groove with stone filling (no. 19 and 19a). Nearby, we found the remains of two next oval ditches, probably smaller diameter (no. 22 and 25).

By the ditch in the south side of the bank 19, we discovered a longitudinal stone. This was the first stone statue discovered during archaeological excavations. The sculpture lays on its "facial" part so, we walked upon it almost four weeks of investigations (Plate VII.1; also see: iliustration for chapter VI). The figure was executed in a more primitive way, than those well-known until then (Plate VII.1). During the conservation of the sculpture we did not find any remains of organic or mineral substances on its surface. On the surface of the monument there are several large stones. Especially interesting is the partly worked stone with two hollows lying in northern part of the cult place.

Technological and morphological characteristics of the pottery from the cult place in Poganowo, are very similar to the characteristics of pottery from other early-medieval sites in Prussia. Important is the observation, related to the presence of pottery with technological characteristics similar to the pottery from the Migration Period. It confirms previous hypotheses about a long continuation of an older ceramics tradition, and coexistence of two different trends in the early-medieval Prussian pottery (Antoniewicz, Okulicz 1958, p.61; Wróblewski, Nowakiewicz 2003, p.168ff and p.174; Nowakiewicz 2006, p.165).

In the excavations area we observed undisturbed stratigraphical sequences, we found only one phase of use of the complex in Early Middle Ages. We should assume, that the majority of the parts of the complex came into being simultaneously. On the basis of discovered fragments of pottery, the usage of the cult place can be dated from tenth- eleventh century to the beginning of the twelfth century. In this context, unusually important seems the solution of connections between researched complex Poganowo IV and functioning nearby (about 5–6 km), in the same period, micro-region round Salęt Lake (Nowakiewicz 2006, p.163ff).

Fig. 3. Poganowo IV, excavation area X, animal bones (photograph by Wyczółkowski).

Horse sacrifices – archaeozoological research

During investigations of the cult place, we found over 4,500 fragments of bones. Archaeozoological analysis was carried out by Prof. Daniel Makowiecki from Toruń University. In places not worn out by forest animals, bones found by excavations formed visible concentrations (Figs. 2–4; Plate VII.2). Most often, a part of such concentrations are skulls (maxilla and mandible with teeth) and the fragments of long bones of legs. Investigated bones and teeth, characterized with differential status of preservation. The short bones (the phalanx, tarsal and carpal bones) are most often kept as whole, but only few long bones were found whole. Morphological details of numerous long bones were damaged, as a result of weathering and the post-deposit processes. Besides one example (sic!), on bones were not observed the effects of the man's activity: traces of slaughter of animals, the partition of carcass and the meat processing.

During laboratory investigation, were used methods recommended by archeozoological analysis (Lasota-Moskalewska 1997; Makowiecki 2001; Reitz, Wing 1999). There was established the list of zoological *taxa* and anatomical composition of bones. Affinity to topographical groups of skeleton compared by recommendation of Makowiecki (1998). Belongings to zoological and anatomical *taxa* was proved for over half of pieces. In relation to number of recognised anatomical elements, deciding predominate horse bones, almost 90%, about 10% was cattle remnants.

In the case horses, bones come from all elements of model skeleton, however their participation is differential. The similar anatomical schedule was got for bones of cattle, he differs only in the value of percentages of separate anatomical individuals. It was established for both species, that the most of discovered bones, come from the parts of head and front and hind legs (bones of hand, foot as well as shoulder, forearm and pelvis, thigh with gaskin) (Figs. 2, 3; Plate VII.2).

In case of bones of horses, was estimated the minimal number of individuals, with designate side of bones, in case of even elements, and counting odd bones (first cervical vertebra – atlas). We chose elements represented in great number. In the analysis we took into account the status of bones preservation, to limit possibility of multiple calculation pieces from the same individual. The analysis of the smallest number individuals, depending on the individual elements of skeleton, permitted on obtaining of differential estimates.

Fig. 4. Poganowo IV, concentration of horse bones in pit no. 9 (photograph by Wyczółkowski).

From axial skeleton bones, most numerous individuals was showed by *humerus*, the smallest number – by *calcaneus* and *tarsus*. In the area excavated within the sacrificial place Poganowo IV, we found the remnants of at least 30–40 individuals. We suppose, that the bones we found, come from about 60 horses.

The age of death was established on basis of dentition. In case of horses, based on criteria characterised teeth development: eruption of deciduous teeth, pushing out later by the permanent teeth, and wearing down of incisors (Lutnicki 1972; Habermehl 1975; Levine 1982). In connection with a large number of cheek teeth, in order to established horses age of death, were measured crown heights of teeth (Levine 1982; Matsui 2007).

Analysis of development of horses dentition from Poganowo, permitted to obtain detailed data, on the basis of which, were distinguished age classes and were subordinated to them, individual indication of age. It allowed to establish an unimodal distribution of population. The most numerous group included individuals in age of about 10–14 years. Youngest individuals (foals) were the least represented. The oldest individuals had 20 years and more (Fig. 5).

Participation of the horses individuals in the view of their sex, was estimated on the basis of presence or lack of canines, as well as on basis of *ischium* morphology. Sexual dimorphism can observed only in case of 22 fragments (each probably comes from a different individual). Researched bones belonged both to stallions, as and mareS in equal proportions, because the same number of bones was subordinated to every of sex.

Dimensions of bones were researched according to Driesch's (1976) recommendations. In case of long bones, they were the basis to calculation of height of cattle and horses, with use of Calkin's (1960) and Vitt's (1952) coefficients. The horses from Poganowo were

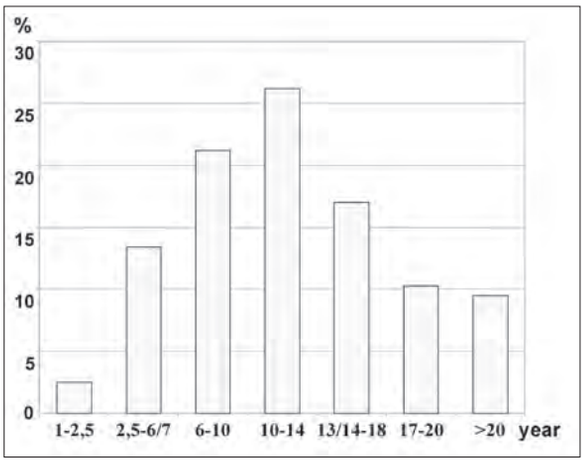

Fig. 5. Poganowo IV, sacrificial place: age of death horses established on basis of dentition (n=359).

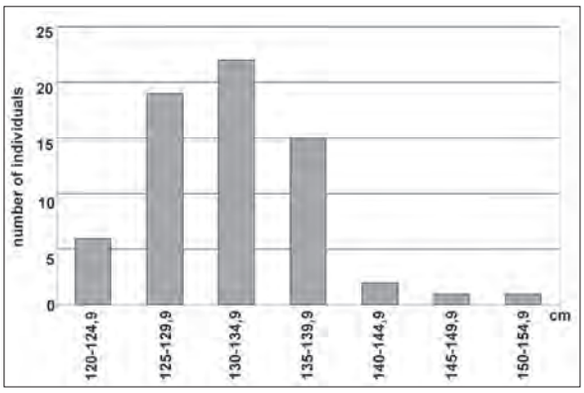

Fig. 6. Poganowo IV, sacrificial place: height of horses.

characterised by differential height, from about 121 cm to 150 cm, with average height about 132 cm (Fig. 6). Distance among indicated extreme values amounts to almost 30 cm, but standard deviation is small – 5.83. This second parameter, and graphic schedule of the horses' height classes, permit to advance thesis, about their morphological homogeneousness.

Except horses, height was estimated for cattle. The smallest individuals did not exceed 100 cm, and the highest achieved about 117 cm, and even 125 cm. On the basis of archaeozoological analysis, we suppose, that the age and the height of animals, were not the criteria for selection of sacrificed horses.

In the present stage of investigations we can affirm, that the archeozoological analyses can confirm cult (ritual) character of the monument. This hypothesis is confirmed by: exceptionally high (in scale of Poland) proportion of horse bones (90%); very low part of the cattle remains; the similar character of collections for both species; the lack of visible signs, showed a post-consumer character of horses and cattle bones, also the lack of data to indication larger parties of skeletons as singular individuals; occurrence at most several osseous elements from several individuals (sometimes both horses and cattle) in one concentration.

Discussion

Previous investigations permitted to find numerous parallels to bones of sacrificed horses found in Poganowo. Bones found in pits 9 (Fig. 2) and 10, and few concentrations of bones, which have been largely preserved, could be interpreted as remains of sacrificed, and then skinned horses. Hide with head and legs in a single piece, was placed on a pole, or tree, and later buried into the ground. This ritual was discovered on sacrificial places in whole Eurasia. Matthäus Prätorius, end of seventeenth century, wrote about open air sacrificial place in Samogitia, with big stone and hanging on high pole hide of sacrificed animal, in that case of a goat (Bertuleit 1924, p.27). Skulls with legs of sacrificed animals were found in Poland in Bronze Age dated settlement in Inowrocław, and in a Roman Period cult place in Otalążka (Makiewicz 1993, pp.70, 73 and 75). This practice was observed in La Tène and Roman Period cult place in Oberdorla (Behm-Blancke 1971, p.946). Similar bones deposits, dated from Roman Iron Age and Migration Period, were discovered on Jutland Peninsula and on sites in south Scandinavia (Müller-Wille 1971, pp.132, 182 and 184 with figs. 44 and 45), as well as on, dated to eighth century ritual place in Vozniesenka (present Zaporozhe in Ukraina) (Ambroz 1982, p.209), and in a cult place nearby fort Eketorp (Öland), dating to tenth-eleventh century (Backe et al. 1993). Parallel rituals were practised in Roman and Migration Periods, on cemeteries in Sambian Peninsula (Kulakov 1990, p.186), as well as later in Lithuania (Vaitkunskienė 1990, p.202 with fig.9.3.), and by steppe nomads, Avars and Magyars (Steuer 2003, pp. 61, 62, 64 and 66). Half tenth century, Ahmed ibn Fadlan, Arab writer and member of an embassy of the Caliph of Baghdad to the king of the Volga Bulgars, described similar ritual, practised during Turkish Oghuz funeral (Müller-Wille 1970-1971, p.182).

Similar autumn sacrifice, called *keremet* by the Finno-Ugric Udmurts, was described end eighteenth century (Minniakhmetova 2001, p.112ff). Late nineteenth and early twentieth century travellers and political exiles, as well as ethnographers and anthropologists recently working in South Siberia and Central Asia, recorded parallel Turkish people cult practices, called in Altai *tailga*, and in Siberia *käräch* (Curtin 1909, p.44ff; Łabęcka-Koecherowa 1998, pp.124 and 126; Sieroszewski 1961, vol.2, p.332ff).

The lack of visible signs, which are typical for post-consumer character of bones, is indeed striking. Parallel

animal bones, without traces, which can be recognised as effects of man's activity, was found nearby hill-fort in Jeziorko (Masuria), in a layer dated for early Iron Age, as well as on Early Medieval hill-forts in Milicz (Silesia), Orszymowo and likely in Szreńsk (Masovia) (Antoniewicz, Okulicz 1958, p.17ff; Krysiak 1958, p.72 plate 1; Kubasiewicz 1957, p.85; Szymański 1968, p.60ff; Piotrowski 1986, pp.10, 11 and 44, note 23, with figs. 6-9). The lack of those signs could be explained only in case of skull and leg bones, which with hide, could be cut off from the rest of the carcass. We supposed, that in case of other bones, it was a special sacrificial ritual, well-known from numerous offering rituals. Its beginnings can be found in hunting societies rituals, e.g. Ob-Ugrians people, dividing bear carcass beware of cutting bones (Haavio 1979, p.38ff). Hunting rituals, to save unbroken bones of killed animals, was characteristic for the most important sacrifices numerous peoples (Eliade 1989, p.159ff). Well-known is prohibition, of breaking any of the bones of the lamb offering Passover. Parallel prohibitions were used during commemorative feast of Turkish nomad peoples, in the thirteenth century (Kyzlasov 1964, p.32), as well during other sacrificial customs of the Turkish peoples, specially during *tailga* horse sacrifice (Curtin 1909, p.44ff; Łabęcka-Koecherowa 1998, p.125; Sieroszewski 1961, vol.2, pp.34 and 155).

Conclusions

All these parallels, create good basis for comparative studies in zoological, historical and cultural (symbolic culture) aspects. Unusually interesting are the similarities to Turkish nomads cult ceremonies connected with horse sacrifices, particularly in the context of occurrence in both cultural groups stone statues, and in context of information, about widespread among Prussian noblemen custom of drinking kumis, characteristic for nomads (Wulfstan, p.733). It open up new interpretative possibilities in research of ancient Prussians religion, as well as investigations of possible cultural influences on Baltic terrains, in Early Middle Ages.

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ARKLIŲ AUKOS PRŪSIJOJE ANKSTYVAISIAIS VIDURAMŽIAIS. RITUALINĖ VIETA POGANOVO IV, OLŠTYNO VAIVADIJOJE (LENKIJA)

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Santrauka

Tyrinėjimai gyvenviečių komplekse Poganovo (Poganowo) 4, kuris yra šiauriniame Mrangovo (Mrągowo) ežeryno pakraštyje (šiaurrytinė Lenkija), leidžia pradėti naują diskusiją apie arklių aukojimą Prūsijos religijoje ankstyvaisiais viduramžiais.

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas gyvenviečių kompleksas susideda iš piliakalnio ir atvirųjų gyvenviečių (1 pav.). Visas kompleksas yra miške ir užima didesnį kaip 5 ha plotą. Šiaurinėje gyvenviečių komplekso Poganovo 4 dalyje archeologinių tyrinėjimų metu aptikta liekanų, kurios interpretuotos kaip aukojimo vieta. Tai pirmasis gerai žinomas ir archeologiškai tyrinėtas gyvenviečių kompleksas su kulto vieta Prūsų žemėse (2–4 pav.; VII: 1–2 iliustr.). Poganovo aukojimo vietoje nerasta židinių, akmenų krūsnių ir kitų akmenų konstrukcijų. Panašių radinių aptikta plačiai žinomose kulto vietose Europoje ir Azijoje. Įdomiausias radinys – akmeninė skulptūra, vadinama boba, yra pirmoji skulptūra, aptikta archeologinių kasinėjimų metu. Poganovo komplekse rasta keramika datuojama X–XI amžiais.

Tyrinėjant kulto vietą rasta daugiau kaip 4500 kaulų fragmentų. Išskyrus vieną atvejį, gyvulių skerdimo, skerdienos dalinimo ar mėsos ruošimo pėdsakų ant kaulų nepastebėta. Tarp atpažintų gyvulių kaulų vyravo arklių kaulai – beveik 90% ir tik 10% sudarė galvijų

liekanos. Tyrinėtoje Poganovo 4 aukojimo vietoje rasta mažiausiai 30–40 individų liekanų. Galima manyti, kad rasti kaulai priklausė maždaug 60 arklių. Lyties dimorfizmas nustatytas tik 22 fragmentų atvejais. Po lygiai buvo rasta eržilų ir kumelių kaulų. Arklius iš Poganovo galima apibūdinti kaip įvairaus ūgio, nuo 121 iki 150 cm, vidutinis ūgis buvo apie 132 cm (6 pav.). Didžiausią grupę sudarė maždaug 10–14 metų amžiaus individai, jaunesnių gyvulių rasta mažiau. Vyriausi individai turėjo 20 ar daugiau metų (5 pav.). Remdamiesi zooarcheologine analize manome, kad gyvulių amžius ir ūgis nebuvo svarbūs kriterijai, atrenkant arklius aukoti (6 pav.).

Ankstesni tyrinėjimai leidžia aptikti daug paralelių Poganovo 4 rastiems paaukotų arklių kaulams Lenkijos ir Lietuvos teritorijose ir ritualuose, žinomuose iš Jutlandijos pusiasalio ir Skandinavijos. Panašius ritualus praktikavo tiurkų nomadų gentys Rytų Europoje, Pietų Sibire, Altajuje ir Centrinėje Azijoje. Kaulai, rasti duobėse Nr. 9 ir 10, bei keletas kaulų sankaupų gali būti interpretuojami kaip paaukotų arklių, kuriems buvo nudirta oda, liekanos. Oda kartu su galva ir kojomis buvo pakabinama ant kuolo ar medžio ir vėliau užkasama žemėje. Toks ritualas aptinkamas aukojimo vietose visoje Eurazijoje. Gyvulių kaulų be žmogaus veiklos pėdsakų sankaupų rasta greta Jeziorko piliakalnio, kuris yra už kelių kilometrų nuo Poganovo, taip pat Oršymovo (Orszymowo) piliakalnyje Mozūrų regione, Milič (Milicz, Silezija) piliakalnyje ir, ko gero, Šrensko (Szreńsk) piliakalnyje. Tai buvo atskiras aukojimo paprotys, gerai žinomas tarp kitų aukojimo ritualų. Draudimas pažeisti aukojamo gyvulio kaulus yra žinomas nuo medžiotojų visuomenių laikų. Paralelių galima rasti, pavyzdžiui, tiurkų genčių ritualuose.

Poganovo kulto vieta atveria naujas interpretacijų galimybes tyrinėjant galimas kultūrines įtakas baltų kraštams ankstyvaisiais viduramžiais.

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