

ABOUT SOME ASPECTS OF SCALVIAN ARMAMENTS, ON THE BASIS OF INVESTIGATIONS IN VIEŠVILĖ CEMETERY

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Abstract

Viešvilė cemetery, situated in the Jurbarkas district (the lower Nemunas region in Lithuania), belongs to the Scalvian Baltic ethnocultural group and has been investigated for the last six years. The site contains archaeological material characteristic of ninth to 11th-century Scalvians. The research material gathered during the excavations would allow us to state that those who were buried in the cemetery were related to a dominant part of Scalvian society of that time.

Key words: Western Balts, Scalvians, Viešvilė cemetery, spearheads, swords.

Introduction

Viešvilė cemetery (Jurbarkas district), which belongs to the Scalvian ethnocultural group, has been excavated for six years now. The site contains archaeological material characteristic of ninth to 11th-century Scalvians. This cultural area belonging to the Western Balts can already be distinguished in the early Middle Iron Age (fifth to sixth centuries). It lies between the lands of Lamata and Nadravia (Lithuanian Nadruva), being bounded on the east by Aukštaitian (central Lithuanian) cemeteries. But there are few burial sites, especially dating from the ninth to 12th centuries (Kreivėnai, Tauragė district; Viešvilė, Jurbarkas district; and Šinkūnai, former Linkuhnen, now Rzhhevskoe, Kaliningradskaja oblast, Russia) ascribed to the Scalvians (Fig. 1). In addition, only fragmentary material has survived from part of the cemetery (Linkūnai) investigation. Thus, the research data reaching us about this cultural area is very important and interesting. The aim of this work is to present part of the Viešvilė cemetery research material, ie to discuss only one aspect of it, the weaponry.

Viešvilė cemetery is the easternmost site ascribed to the Scalvians. It was discovered during archaeological surveys in 1998 on a hill to the south of the town of Viešvilė and 800 metres to the north of the River Nemunas (Fig. 2). Initial data about a burial site located in this vicinity reached us in 1930 (Schwarzien 1930). The local newspaper *Memeler Dampfboot* mentioned in a short note that many archaeological finds had been discovered at the highest location, on Schwebenberg Hill, near Viešvilė. Some of them most likely ended up in the former *Prussia Museum*, and some of them are preserved in the Vytautas the Great War Museum in Kaunas. It is also known today that a large archaeological site lies in the vicinity of Viešvilė. Four

cemeteries and two settlements have been found, providing information about the daily life and customs of the people who lived in the vicinity of the town from the first millennium BC to the second millennium AD.

Features of the funeral rites of the cremation burials

An area of over 600 square metres has been studied in the cemetery over six years. A total of 17 cremation and six children's inhumation burials have been discovered. It has been determined that the site was severely disturbed at this location by agricultural activities.

The cremation burial pits have an elongated oval form (147x47 to 350x120 cm in size) and are oriented southwest to northeast (graves 1, 4, 5, 9, 21, 22) or southeast to northwest (graves 6, 13, 14, 16, 19). The individuals were buried at a depth of 70 to 105 centimetres. The cremated bones were usually placed in a certain part of the grave in a compact pile. The grave goods were neatly placed on the cremated bones. Weapons and equestrian grave goods were usually placed separately from the ornaments and tools. Mineralised textile fragments remain on many of them. These grave goods were placed in the grave wrapped in linen. In burials 1, 10, 13, 16, 19 and 22 the cremated human remains were probably buried in coffins or wooden boxes.

All the cremation burials belong to males. Artefacts characteristic of the gender predominate among the grave goods that have been found. The cremated remains of a horse or large mammal were found together with the individual in eight burials (graves 6, 9, 10, 13, 14, 17, 21, 22). In addition, all the burials that have survived more intact are distinguished by the richness and abundance of the grave goods, some of which are

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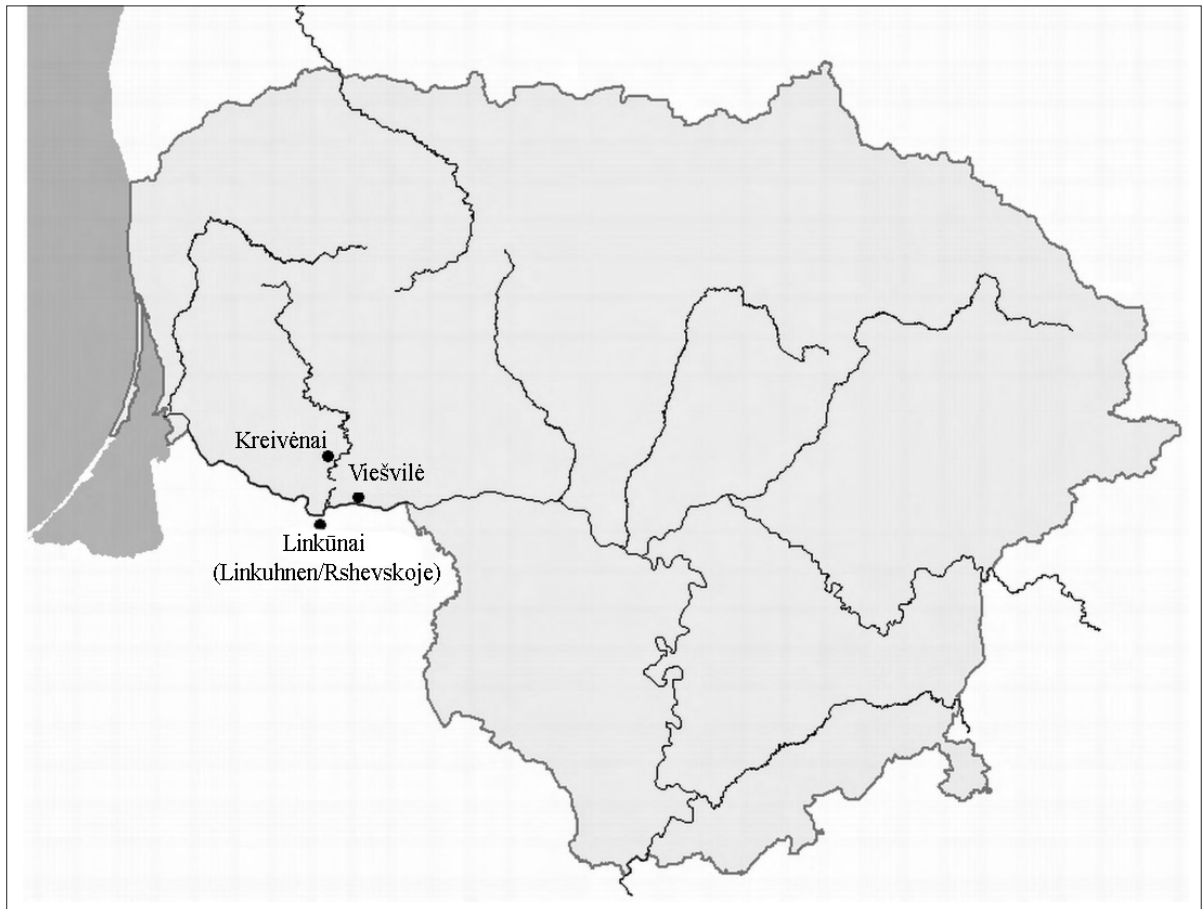


Fig. 1. Ninth to 12th-century Scalvian cemeteries.



Fig. 2. The location of Viešvilė cemetery (Jurbarkas district) in the lower Nemunas region.

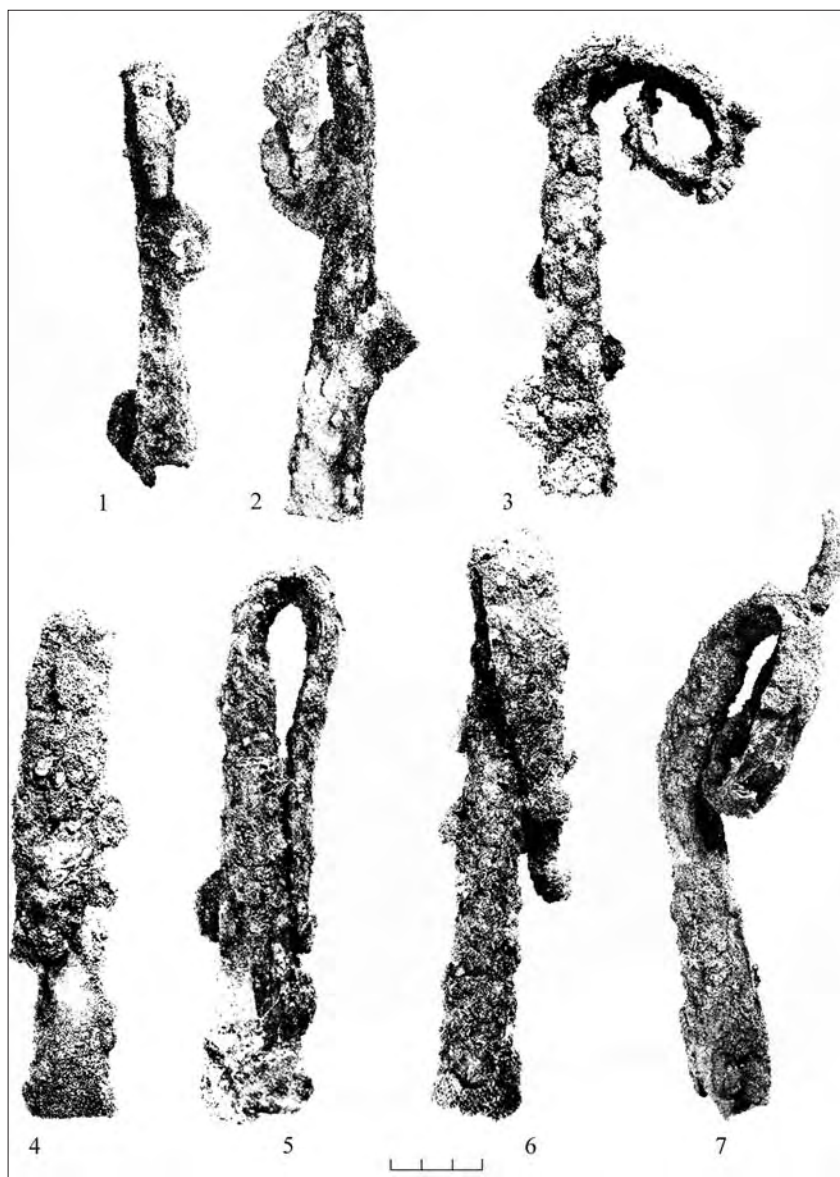


Fig. 3. Jan Petersen type E spearheads: 1 grave 10; 2 graves 14 and 3; 4 grave 21; 5 grave 22; 7 loose find (photograph by Budvydas).

plated or inlaid with silver. This clearly reflects the social status of the individuals buried in this cemetery and the way of life at that time. In all the cremation burials, they have been discovered with weapons and equestrian grave goods (stirrups, spurs, bits and bridle fragments). Some of the individuals (graves 3, 5, 10, 22) were buried with four or five spears, with two swords being found near them. In one burial (grave 5) six swords were found. Swords were discovered in ten burials. A sword was a very expensive and prestigious weapon at that time. Only rich members occupying an exceptional position in the community could acquire one. Considering the small number of burials found in the cemetery, no burial site investigated in Lithuania has been distinguished by such an abundance of weapons. Therefore, the Viešvilė cemetery research material is an excellent source, providing valuable information

about the weapons used by the Scalvians during the Viking Period.

Spears and swords

Although weapons were found in the cremation burials in especially large numbers, they are not diverse. Several spearheads and a sword are usually found in a burial. It is impossible to compare this material with other Scalvian cemeteries investigated because the material has not been systematised.

Almost all the weapons found have been ritually bent or otherwise destroyed. Consequently, there is no possibility of determining precisely their measurements. Spearheads definitely comprise the largest group of weapons found. It was the most effective and cheapest weapon of the time. A spear was best suited for fighting both close up and at a distance, and made it possible to keep an enemy at a safe distance. But the spearhead forms are probably some of the most conservative. There was no great functional difference between them, and some of their shapes remained unchanged for long centuries.

A total of 32 spearheads have been found in burials, and another 17 discovered by chance (seven of them being preserved at the VDKM). Individuals were usually buried with two or even four spears (graves 5, 7, 10, 13, 14, 17, 21, 22). In only two burials (graves 1 and 3) not only were swords placed in the grave for the individual, but also five to six spearheads were discovered beside the other grave goods. Jan Petersen type E and narrow leaf-shaped spearheads were the most popular. All of these artefacts, some of which are currently being restored, are in fact severely corroded. After the corrosion has been cleaned off, it will be possible to determine the type of some of these artefacts.

The most abundant group of spearheads found in the cemetery are J. Petersen type E (Petersen 1919, Fig. 3). Altogether 15 have been discovered (graves 1 [2], 5, 10, 13, 14, 17, 21 [2], 22 [2]) and four spearheads were

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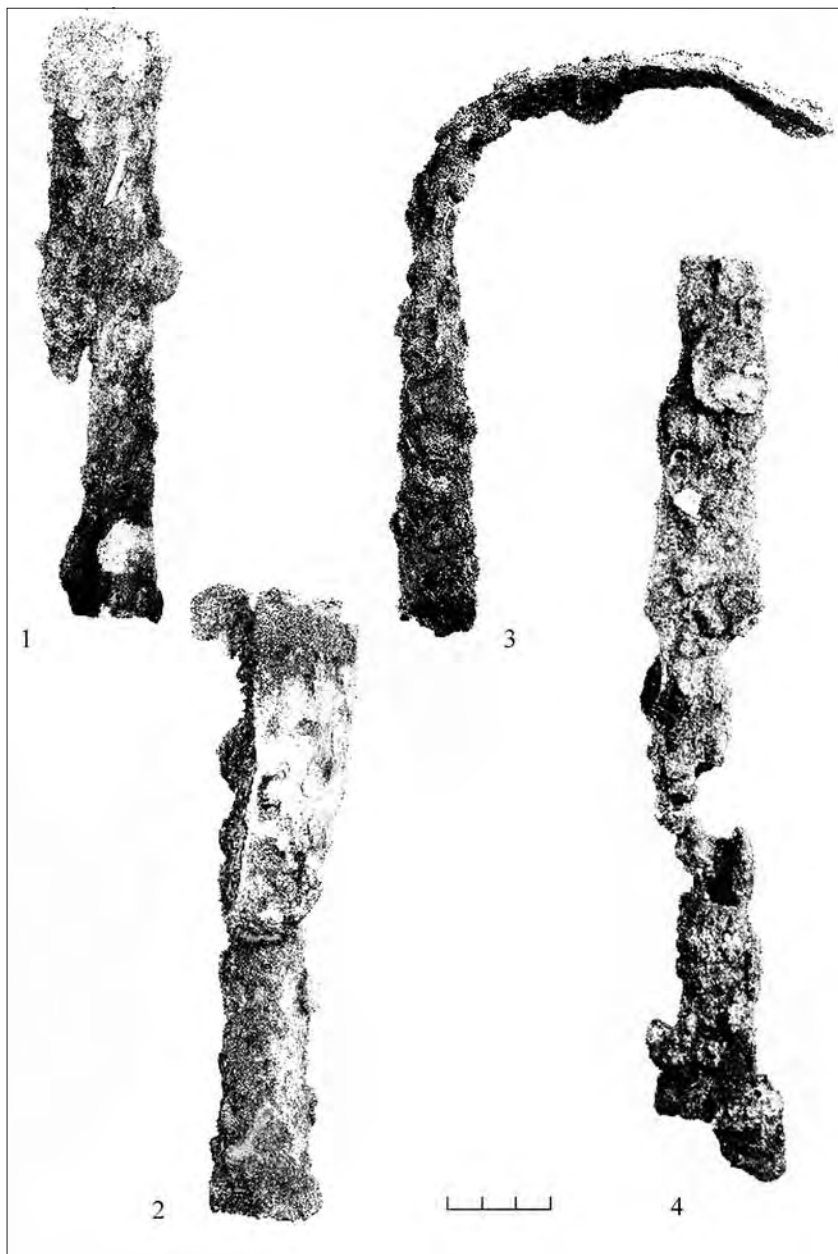


Fig. 4. Spearheads with narrow leaf-shaped blades: 1 grave 13; 2 grave 14; 3 loose find; 4 grave 10 (photograph by Budvydas).

found by chance), and another three are preserved at the VDKM (810: 44, 52, 54). This is one of the most abundant spearhead types, which is encountered frequently not only in Lithuania but also throughout the entire Baltic Sea region. Most of them were manufactured by local blacksmiths, but some (with ornate sockets) reached Lithuania from present-day Scandinavia (Kazakevičius 1999, pp.189-190). In Lithuania they date from the ninth to 11th centuries (Kazakevičius 1999, p.188f.; Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė 1970, p.231). Judging from the long, narrow blades, these spearheads probably belong to the missile group. As has already been mentioned, the spear is a fairly universal weapon. The majority of them are 20 to 33 centimetres long. It is possible to divide them into two types

according to blade shape. The first is characterised by a long narrow blade with a uniform width maintained throughout its entire length (graves 5, 13, 14, 17, 21, 22, etc). The second also lacks a distinct transition from the socket to the blade (graves 1, 10, 21, 22). However, they broaden slightly in the middle or a little closer to the tip. They are indicated in literature as a separate, later variant of the J. Petersen type E spearhead (Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė 1970, p.231). But both types have been discovered together in burials, so chronologically they are contemporaneous. The J. Petersen type E spearheads found at Viešvilė date to the tenth to 11th centuries.

A total of 12 narrow leaf-shaped spearheads have been found in burials (graves 1, 3 [3], 5 [3], 10 [3], 13, 14) and another six by chance (one of which is preserved at the VDKM, 810: 53). This is one of the oldest spearhead shapes manufactured by local smiths (Fig. 4). They appeared in Lithuania in the second century, and survived nearly unchanged until the 11th or 12th century (Michelbertas 1986, p.173; Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė 1970, p.226). The spearheads are 31 to 44 centimetres long.

The blades are flat, broadening near the socket and gradually narrowing towards the tip. The transition of some of the spearheads from the blade to the socket is not very distinct. The blade has a pronounced midrib.

The two broad leaf-shaped spearheads that were discovered in burials 1 and 21 belong to type III (Kazakevičius 2002, p.109). The socket of one of them has a silver-copper alloy inlay (Fig. 5: 1). This is the second such spearhead currently known to exist in Lithuania. The first was a chance find in the vicinity of Vilkija (Kaunas district; Kazakevičius 2002, pp.104-121). The surviving spearhead fragment is 22.2 centimetres long. The inlay decorating the socket belongs to the geometric ornament group (I), which is frequently encountered among the spearheads with inlaid sockets

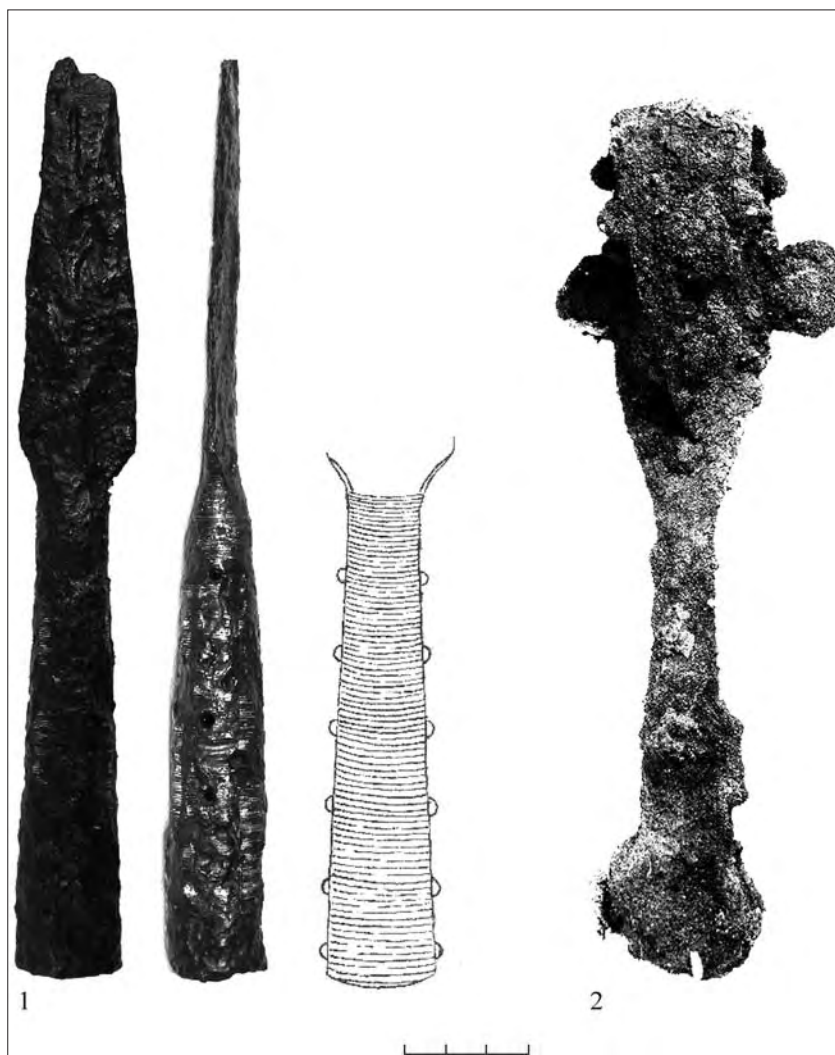


Fig. 5. Spearheads with broad leaf-shaped blades: 1 grave 1 (spearhead with silver inlay); 2 grave 21 (photograph and drawing by Budvydas).

found on the Sambian peninsula (Kazakevičius 2002, p.112, Fig. 7). Many spearheads decorated with similar designs have been found at the Klincovka–Irzekapinis cemetery (former Wikiau, Zelenogradsky district, Kaliningradskaja oblast, Russia; graves 10, 15, 36, 41, etc; Kulakov 1995, pp.218, 221, 229 and 232; Figs. 78, 11, 20 and 24). In addition, six pairs of holes for securing the spearhead to the shaft survive on the sides of the socket. These are arranged symmetrically lengthways along the socket. This manner of fastening had a more decorative than practical value. Similarly decorated spearheads have been found in Norway (Petersen 1919, p.30f and, 163, Figs. 16, 20 and 128). The origin of the spearhead found at Viešvilė should definitely be sought in present-day Scandinavia.

The spearhead was found in the grave together with a group IV ladder brooch, a miniature penannular brooch with upturned terminals, a group II penannular brooch with poppyseed-shaped terminals, a type X sword pommel, a J. Petersen type E spearhead, type III stir-

rups (Antanavičius variety I), and other grave goods, which allow the spearhead to be dated to the 11th century.

Two surviving spearheads (graves 1 and 14) belong to type IV. These spearheads have an elongated triangular blade (Fig. 6) and are large with a length of 32.8 to 42.5 centimetres. A spearhead socket covered with a copper alloy plate was found in burial 14. The spearhead, with its gold-coloured socket, must have appeared very impressive at that time. The upper part of the socket is decorated with four grooves. An X-ray of the blade showed two symmetrical wavy bands running along the blade. These bands are usually characteristic of articles made of Damascus steel. In addition, many spearheads of this type have a blade forged from this metal (Kulakov, Tolmacheva 1987, p. 96).

This type of spearhead is generally found in Lithuania in the western districts. They date from the 11th century (Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė 1970, p.232).

Those found at Viešvilė, judging from the sets of grave goods, can also be ascribed to this period.

Swords belong to the second group of weapons found at the cemetery. Fragments of 19 of them were discovered and another two are preserved at the VGWM (810: 43, 894). In addition, fragments of at least ten blades were discovered during research. The swords that have survived in better condition have been ritually bent or otherwise destroyed, but very few of them have been touched by the flames of a pyre. They can be divided into three types, according to the typology adopted by J. Petersen.

The largest group consists of type X swords, nine of which were discovered (graves 1, 10 [2], 13, 15, 21 [2], 22, VDKM 810: 43): ie they were found in more than half of the burials with swords (Fig. 7: 1-3). According to data from 1996, 32 swords of this type were known to exist on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea (in Lithuania, the Kaliningrad Oblast and Latvia). One was found in the neighbouring Linkūnai cemetery

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Fig. 6. A spearhead with a triangular blade from cremation burial 14 (photograph by Budvydas).

(Kazakevičius 1996, pp.28-33). The abundance of these artefacts allows us to make the assumption that at least some of the type X swords were manufactured by smiths living in the vicinity of Viešvilė. Their blades are 86.7 to 96 centimetres long, while the pommels are semicircular. The bottom guards are straight or curved slightly downward.

This type was widespread throughout Europe, nearly 200, for example, having been found just in Scandinavia. This weapon's excellent characteristics caused its popularity (Peirce 2004, p.116). They date from the tenth to 11th centuries.

A three-section pommel, which has a large central section and belongs to type T swords, was a chance find during the research. The rivets at the bottom for fastening it to the upper guard have survived. The VDKM has a fragment (894) of a sword which was a chance find at Viešvilė, and which is sometimes erroneously ascribed in literature to type V (Kazakevičius 1996, pp.61-62). But the totality of the features definitely allows the sword to be ascribed to type T (Fig. 8: 1). The surviving part of the fragment is 57 centimetres long. The pommel is semicircular and the straight guard is covered with a copper alloy plate, which is decorated with geometric designs. A very similar but much more ornate sword was discovered in grave 53 in the nearby Linkūnai cemetery (Mühlen 1975, p.142, Tafel 10). This is the most widespread type of sword in the lands inhabited by the Balts. It is ascribed to local armourers and was used during the second half of the tenth to the 12th centuries (Kazakevičius 1996, pp.46f.).

The sword discovered in burial 5 is closely related to type Y according to its features (Fig. 8: 2). It is double edged, and the lower guard is curved slightly downwards. The pommel is saddle shaped. This is not a widespread sword type. Only 16 such swords have been discovered in the lands of the Balts. Most of them have been found in the Linkūnai cemetery (Kazakevičius 1996, p.70ff.).

The last sword to be clearly identified typologically was discovered in cremation burial 16 (Fig. 7: 4). It is double edged, 94.4 centimetres long, and belongs to type Z. The upper guard, together with the pommel, curves upwards, while the lower guard curves sharply downwards and has flaring terminals. Although the artefact is corroded, the pommel can be seen to consist of three sections. According to data from 1996, only 17 were known to exist on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea. A somewhat greater number has been discovered in northern Europe (Kazakevičius 1996, p.75ff.).

According to the grave goods that were found in the burial, the sword dates from the 11th century.

Funeral customs and the social aspect in Viešvilė cemetery

In analysing funeral customs, the grave goods found in burials always raise the question of how much the funeral rites actually reflect the social relationships of the time. Certain differences in the sets of grave goods are frequently observed during cemetery research. Some of the burials contain especially modest grave goods, while others are surprising in their abundance and richness. It is possible to explain such differences only by linking the latter burials with certain social

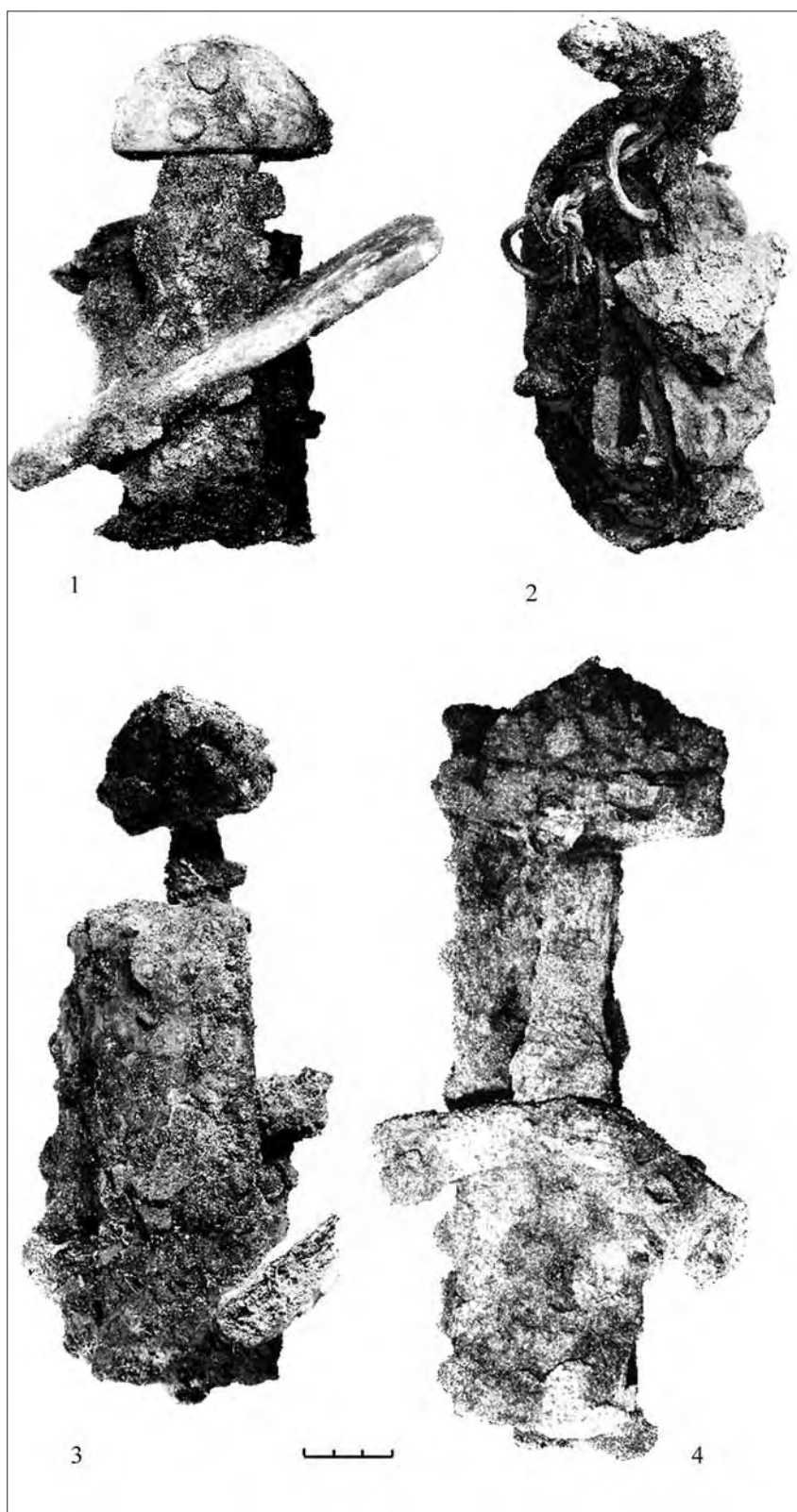


Fig. 7. X and Z type swords: 1 grave 13; 2 grave 10; 3 grave 22; 4 grave 16 (photograph by Budvydas).

groups, which expressed the status they occupied in the community of the time through the funeral rites, thus stressing their specialness in the afterlife. Another question is with which social groups these burials should be linked. It is very unlikely that an individual

who did not have a specially dominant social or economic status would be buried with rich grave goods. It is precisely the totality of the research material from Viešvilė cemetery that allows us to state that the individuals buried in the cemetery should be linked to a certain dominant part of the Scalvian community. First, a small number of burials have been found on the hill. Second, all the cremation burials belong to males. The similarity of the funeral rites and grave goods in the burials shows that people who identified themselves in life with a certain socially dominant group were buried on the hill, which was a dominant feature of the landscape near the settlement. This has also been indirectly confirmed by anthropological research on the cremated bones found in the burials (conducted by Professor Rimantas Jankauskas of Vilnius University), during which it was determined that a child (37% of all the burials), an adult female (12%), or an individual of undetermined gender (6%) was buried together with an adult male in 14 of the 16 burials he researched (87%). The custom whereby a warrior is accompanied into the afterlife by an adult female or a child is already known to have existed in the area of former Prussia in the seventh century and to have survived until the 13th century. The appearance of this custom is connected with the beginning of the formation of a warrior elite (military community) (Kulakov 1994, p.148). I think that this small group of cremation burials found in Viešvilė cemetery is connected with precisely this social aspect. A full set of weapons, ie a spear, a sword and equestrian artefacts, have been found in more than half of the burials. It would even be possible to envisage a certain standardisation



Fig. 8. Type T and Y swords: 1, 1a VDKM inv. No. 894; 2 grave 5 (Kulikauskienė, Rimantienė 1966, Figs. 52 and 53, photograph by Budvydas).

of the weaponry. Several J. Petersen type E or narrow leaf-shaped spearheads and a type X sword are usually found in the burials. On the other hand, these burials belong to the period (tenth to 11th centuries) when the process of forming the warrior elite of the Baltic tribes living on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea reached the high point of its development (Bertašius 2002, pp.200-202 and 215-216; Kulakov 1994, pp.152-154 and 160). This is very clearly reflected in the archaeological material from Viešvilė cemetery. The appearance of this social process was also influenced by the fact that the Scalvian community which lived at Viešvilė established themselves beside one of the main trade routes of the time, the River Nemunas, which was used to carry prestigious wares and the majority of Scandinavian imports deep into Lithuania. In addition, this river was also a constant source of tension. The question of where the remaining members of the community were buried

remains unanswered, but it was probably in the cemetery that was detected about 200 metres to the north. Although research on it has only begun, it is already possible to say that both cemeteries are chronologically close.

Conclusions

1. A total of 17 cremation burials ascribed to males, who were buried not only with an abundance of ornaments but also a full set of weapons, were discovered in Viešvilė cemetery during archaeological research.

2. The weapons found in Viešvilė cemetery belong to types that are widespread in Europe. The majority of these weapons were manufactured in the vicinity of Viešvilė cemetery, but some arrived as the result of trade or as the spoils of war.

3. Spears with narrow leaf-shaped or J. Petersen type E spearheads, as well as type X swords, clearly predominate among the weapons. It is possible to envisage a certain standardisation of the weaponry.

4. The abundance of grave goods and the burial of males together with a child or an adult female allow us to draw the conclusion that some of the individuals buried in Viešvilė cemetery belonged to the Scalvian warrior elite.

Translated by Jeffrey Arthur Bakanauskas

Abbreviation

VDKM – Vytautas the Great War Museum, Kaunas

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SKALVIŲ GINKLUOTĖS ASPEKTAI VIEŠVILĖS KAPINYNŲ TYRIMŲ DUOMENIMIS

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Santrumpa

Skalvių etnokultūrinei grupei priklausantis Viešvilės kapinynas (Jurbarko r.) tyrinėjamas jau šešerius metus. Paminklas reprezentuoja X–XI a. skalviams būdingą archeologinę medžiagą. Šiame straipsnyje pateikiama dalis Viešvilės kapinyno tyrimų medžiagos – ginkluotė.

Kapinynas aptiktas 1998 m. į pietus nuo Viešvilės miestelio, kalvoje, nutolusioje 800 m į šiaurę nuo Nemuno. Per kelerius metus ištirta 17 degintinių ir 6 griautiniai vaikų kapai.

Visi degintiniai kapai priklausytų vyriškosios lyties atstovams. Tarp rastų įkapių dominuoja šiai lyčiai būdingi dirbiniai. Šalia gausių papuošalų bei buities reikmenų aptikta neįprastai daug su ginkluote susijusių įkapių. Kai kurie mirusieji laidoti su 4 ar 5 ietimis, greta aptikta po 2, o viename kape rasti net 6 kalavijai.

Aštuoniuose kapuose kartu su mirusiais buvo sudeginti žirgo ar stambaus žinduolio palaikai.

Laidosenos ir įkapių panašumas rodo, kad kalvoje, kuri šalia to meto gyvenvietės buvo kraštovaizdžio akcentas, laidoti žmonės, priklausę socialiai dominuojančiai bendruomenės daliai. Daugiau nei pusėje kapų aptiktas pilnas ginkluotės komplektas – ietis, kalavijas bei su žirgu ir raiteliu susiję dirbiniai. Galima išvelgti net tam tikrą ginkluotės standartizaciją. Vyriškosios lyties individai paprastai laidoti su keliais juostiniais ar karklo lapo formos ietigaliais bei X tipo kalaviju. Antra vertus, šie kapai priklauso laikotarpiui (X–XI a.), kurio metu Baltijos jūros rytinėje pakrantėje gyvenusių baltų genčių kariaunos formavimosi procesas pasiekia aukščiausią savo raidos tašką. Tai labai aiškiai atsispindi archeologinėje medžiagoje, kuri leidžia daryti prielaidą, kad dalis Viešvilės kapinyne palaidotų mirusiųjų galėjo priklausyti net to meto skalvių kariniam elitui. Šiam procesui nemažą įtaką darė ir tai, kad Viešvilėje gyvenusi skalvių bendruomenė buvo įsikūrusi šalia vieno iš pagrindinių to meto prekybos kelių – Nemuno upės, kuria į Lietuvos gilumą keliaudavo didžioji dalis skandinaviškojo importo.

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