

POLE CONSTRUCTIONS IN OPEN AIR RITUAL AREAS OF THE NORTHERN SAMBIAN COAST IN THE FIRST MILLENNIUM AD

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Abstract

The open ritual area is one type of pagan cult site. In this article are presented the results of an analysis of wooden pole frames and constructions from six open ritual areas in the northern Sambian peninsula. Their chronological time covers the third to the 13th centuries AD. Open ritual areas coexisted with fireplaces and pits. In the early phase pole constructions are characterised by a rectangular shape, and subsequently a roundish shape. Analogies with open ritual areas are known in Poland, Denmark and Germany.

Key words: open ritual area, Sambia, wooden pole, ritual, fireplace, pit, construction.

The open ritual area (ORA) represents one type of pagan cult site. The term was introduced by I.P. Rusanova (Русанова, Тимошук 1993: 6) for the notation of places for the realisation of repeated rites, which were never contoured or distinguished by artificial banks or ditches. The complexity of their functional attribution and their relative sparsity for a long time made these archaeological sites an “ungrateful theme” for the typology, analysis of components, and describing of chronological and local variants. However, recently researchers from different countries have carried out the cataloguing of ritual areas in the southeast Baltic and nearby territories (Даугудис 1988, Daugudis 1992; Русанова, Тимошук 1993; Słupecki 1994; Vaitkevičius 1998, etc). This has revealed a considerable amount of archaeological sites in this category. Thus, the opportunity has appeared to compare ORA planigraphic characteristics, and to analyse the components and means of structural organisation.

I present the results of an analysis of wooden pole frames and constructions which form one of the organisational components of ritual areas in this quite short publication. (Besides the timber frames and constructions for such sites, stones and pavements, pits, fireplaces and other devices should be mentioned as features of the organisation of the sacral space for ritual activity.) A compact group of six ORAs in the northern Sambian peninsula (Kaliningrad region, Russia) was chosen for analysis (Fig. 1). They probably had a similar ritual function, since all of them are situated in cemeteries or are adjoining them. Their chronological time span is quite wide: the third to the 13th centuries AD. The considerable role of “purgatorial fire” in the rituals of the people who left these sites does not allow

us to date precisely the initial appearance of these ritual complexes; therefore, the relative chronology here can be based only on the abandoning of a complex or an enclosed space. The termination of activity at these sites is as follows:

1. third to fifth centuries AD for the “area with three fireplaces” at Dobroye (Hünenberg);
2. fourth to fifth centuries for the “Moulder workshop” at Dobroye (Hünenberg);
3. not later than the early sixth century for Kovrovo (Dollkeim);
4. late tenth century for Klintsovka 1;
5. tenth century for Mokhovoye (Kaup);
6. not later than the 13th century for Klintsovka 3.

All these ritual places were excavated in 1978–2002 by the Baltic archaeological expedition under Vladimir Kulakov.

We can reconstruct actual timber pole constructions and frames basing ourselves only on preserved post-holes, since unburned timber cannot survive in the local soil. Post-holes traced during excavations allow us to discern two variants:

1. small shallow pits left by thin poles with a diameter of about ten centimetres;
2. post-holes from poles with a large diameter, which have been dug up to a metre into the subsoil.

The physical characteristics of such post-holes vary in particular sites depending on the soil and the probable means of their erection, but in general such differences are seen in the majority of the sites analysed.

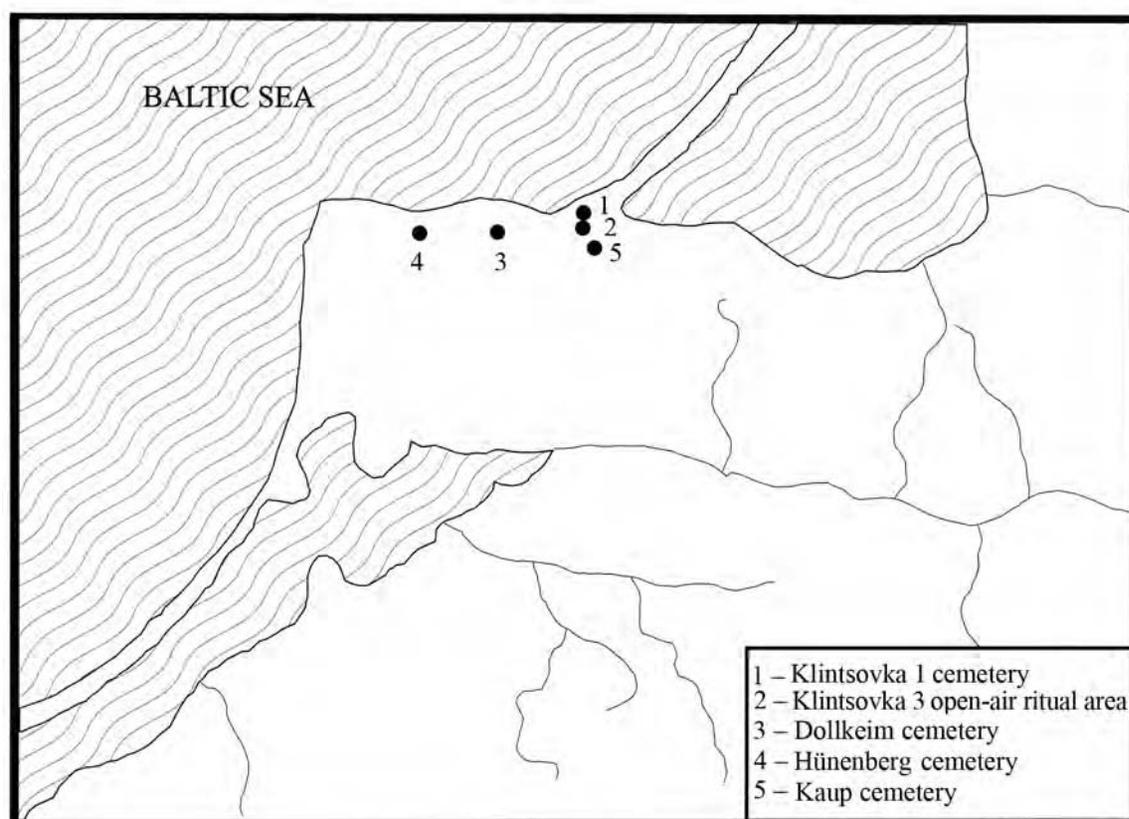


Fig. 1. Open-air ritual areas on the northern coast of Sambia.

The difference between these two variants can be especially clearly seen at Dollkeim (Fig. 2). In contrast to larger post-holes, pits of the first type never form any complex constructions, planigraphically they may be seen as single or forming small groups. Such pits here were frequently dug over already existing holes of other types. Alternatively, poles may also be traced only at the bottom of pits covered by later deposits. This allows us to assume a short period of existence of thin poles.

Massive poles are included here into the original frame, and are discussed below.

Two types of holes are identified at the Hüenberg ORA, but not so evidently as at Dollkeim. At the eastern ritual complex (the “field with three fireplaces” (Fig. 3), pits of a smaller diameter are seen as an irregular group in the eastern part of the eastern construction. Meanwhile, poles of a different diameter were used in the same sites for more complex constructions.

A combination in one construction of poles with a different diameter demonstrates the rather younger western complex (the so-called “moulder workshop”) from the ritual area of this cemetery (Fig. 4).

In the Hüenberg ORA thin poles were probably used as a supplementary material in complex wooden construction. At the same time, they also served as temporary markers: a function recorded not only for the ritual area, but also for the cemetery’s surroundings.

The tendency to use poles of a different diameter in one construction is even more clearly seen in the Klintsovka 3 open ritual area, where holes with variations in diameter of two or three times coexist in the same series during both phases of its functioning (Fig. 5). Only in two cases is it possible to assume a short-term use and a slight replacement of poles, which are located near other ritual objects in the eastern ritual group of the early phase and the late phase of the southern group. These post-holes were dug into pits of a larger diameter, and their characteristics give us reason to suppose that they were not intended as poles.

A few post-holes are recorded at the Klintsovka 1 ORA (Fig. 6), and there is not sufficient data to divide them according to diameter.

Only two post-holes of quite a large diameter were revealed at the Kaup-Mokhovoye ritual area (Fig. 7).

At the ORA under consideration, massive poles were used in two ways: as detached post poles, and for complex pole frames and constructions.

Post poles. These are recorded at Klintsovka 1 ORA, where they were included in ritual groups and combined with other elements of ritual structures. They are related to stone with traces of anthropogenic activity and with a groove-shaped pit. This group is situated at the southern border of the area. Revealed at the north-west border of the same area, stone rings may presu-

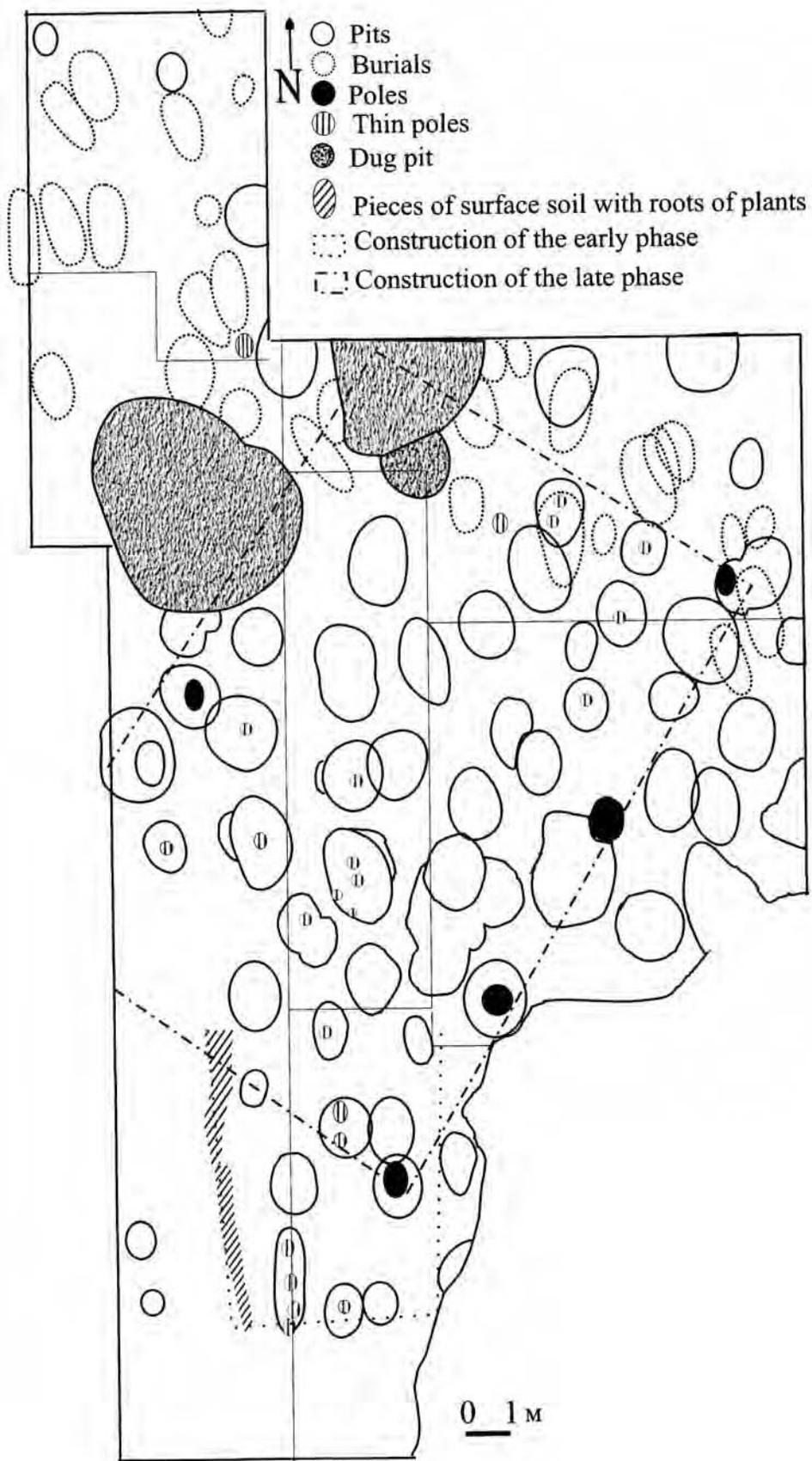


Fig. 2. Dollkeim cemetery. Pole constructions of the early and late phase

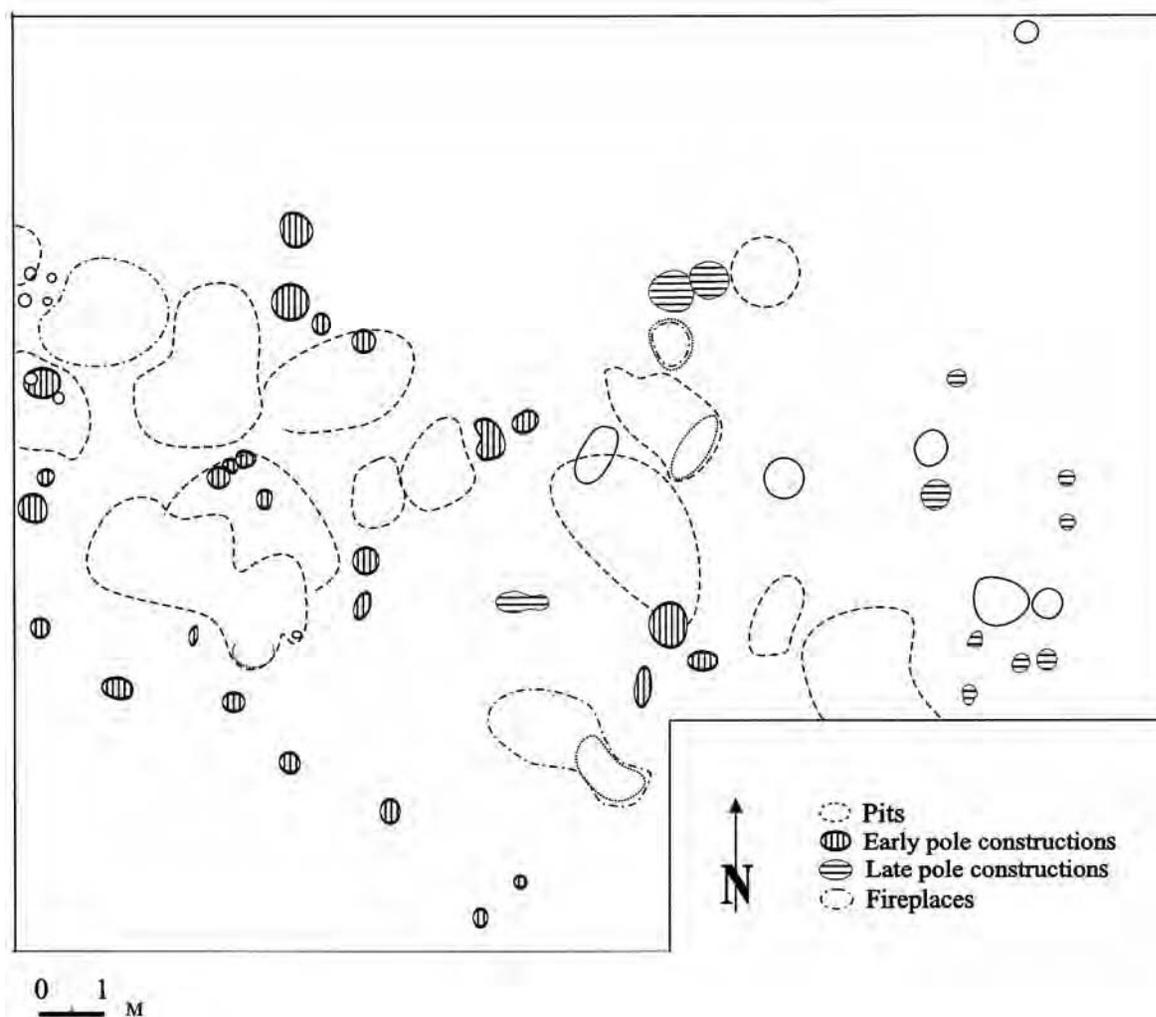


Fig. 3. Early and late pole constructions in the “open-air ritual area with three fireplaces”, Hünenberg cemetery

ably be interpreted as the remains of the strengthening for a pole of considerable diameter. As in the south, it was accompanied by a stone with artificial marks and some pits, which have a function other than the erection of poles.

A ritual group with similar elements (which comprised a pole, a stone, and a pit of another type) marks the western border of the ORA at Klintsovka 3 (Fig. 5).

One more post-pole was traced to the southeast of the stone-paved fireplace.

Two massive poles were elements of a sacral structure of the Mokhovoye-Kaup open-air ritual area (Fig. 7). They are aligned from north to south, and have some stone paving; however, the character of the post-holes' infill differs, so they cannot be considered as elements of one pole construction.

It should be noted that we do not have enough information to discuss whether these poles were decorated with anthropomorphic carvings in their upper part, ie if they were used as idols.

Complex pole constructions and frames. Some variants of pole constructions and frames were recorded in the ritual areas considered.

The earliest construction comes from Dollkeim-Kovrovo (Fig. 2). Here in the south of the ritual area the remains of a rectangular-shaped pole frame are revealed, running from north to south. Pits of an average diameter form its long sides, and there is one more series of pits in the central part, where the pits are aligned in the same direction. Along the western side, at the ancient surface, some residuals of a sod band were found. These pieces of surface soil with roots of plants probably adjoined the bottom of the “wall” line. Unfortunately destroyed by pits on the northern side of the construction, they belonged to the later phase of the ritual area's existence. The construction is dated to the Late Roman Period; it has analogies in Poland, and on the southwest and western shores of the Baltic (Fig. 8) (Mączyńska 1998: 304, abb. 7).

To the north and northeast of this construction another one appeared later, and partly overlapped it. With modifications and rearrangements, it existed right up

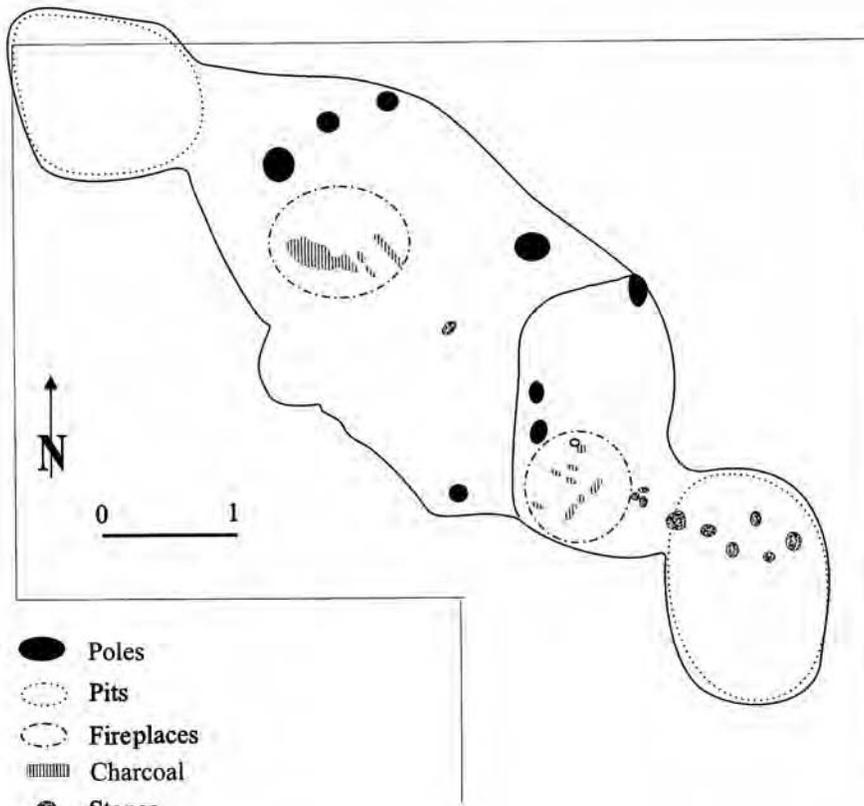


Fig. 4. Pole construction at the “moulder workshop”, Hünenberg cemetery

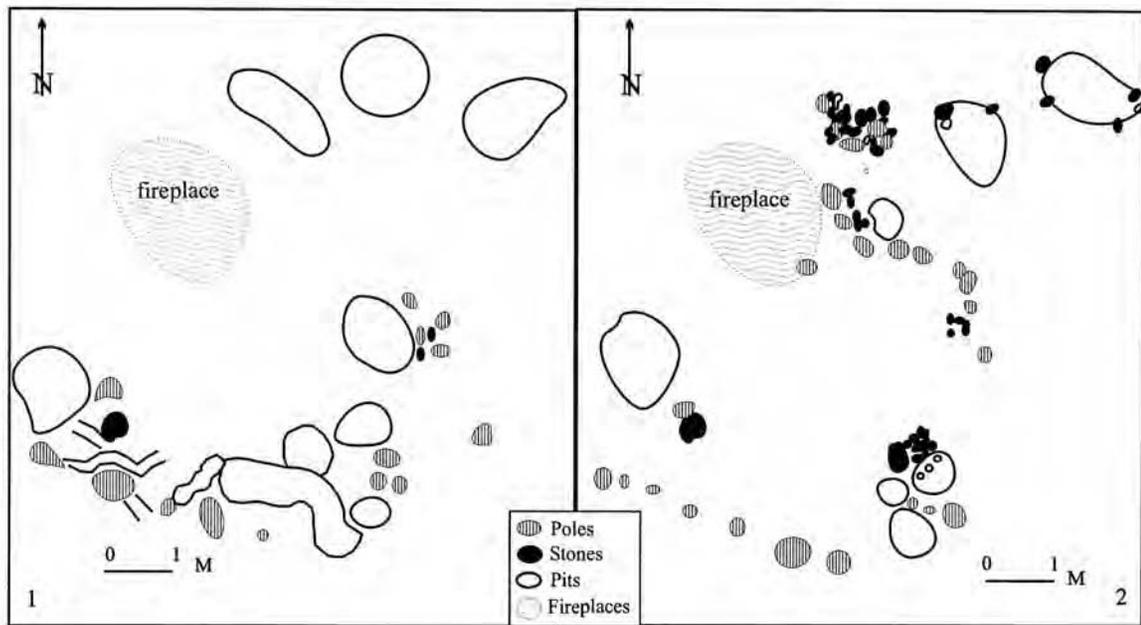


Fig. 5. The open-air ritual area at Klintsovka 3: pole constructions of the early and the late phases

to the turn of the fifth and sixth centuries (Fig. 8). This construction consists of two lines of massive poles, and runs from northeast to southwest.

The southeast line length is 16.5 metres, it included four poles, separated by 4.5 metres from each other. The remnants of the second line are nine metres northwest of it. Only one pole has survived, while others were destroyed by modern pits. The southwest and northwest borders of the area are marked by an irreg-

ular series of thin poles. The basic elements (stones, pits, etc) of construction were found in the frames of the rectangular area.

It is interesting that sections of 4.5 metres in length and divisible by 4.5 metres probably represent a Prussian measure of length in those times, as this length was revealed in other ritual areas, which will be discussed below.

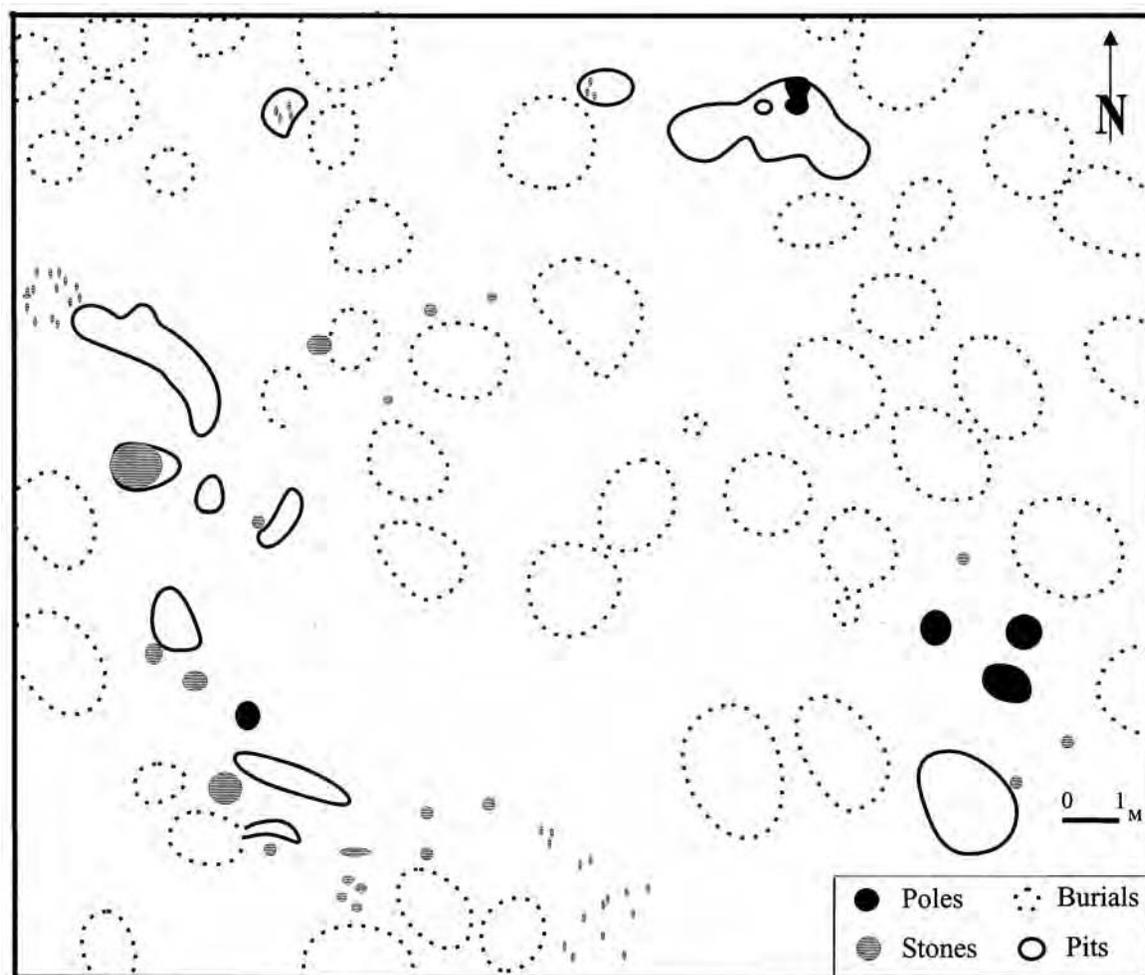


Fig. 6. The open-air ritual area at Klintsovka 1

Attention should be paid to the fact that there were permanent walls between the poles of one series. It may be traced by the location of synchronic pits of another character on each side of the presumable wall, as well as by the lack of either wall remnants or even traces of it.

Stratigraphic observations on pits located inside and outside the frame revealed “aeolian constructions”. The geographer L.A. Zhindarev kindly confirmed that they appear during rainy and stormy seasons in areas with a similar soil (mild loamy sand), which clearly demonstrates the lack of a roof above the considered area. Thus, we are dealing with pole constructions without permanent walls, bounding the central part of the ritual area. The frame, along with other ritual objects of the open-air ritual area under consideration, went out of use no later than the early sixth century AD, when burials cut into the remnants of pits and constructions in the ritual area.

Pole constructions and frames are revealed in a ritual area at Dobroye-Hünenberg cemetery in its eastern as well as its western parts (Fig. 9). In many respects, similar and partly overlapping pole constructions were revealed at the extreme western area (the “area with

three fireplaces” (Fig. 3). The more eastern one was excavated almost completely, while the western one was partly destroyed by a modern sand pit.

The eastern rectangular frame was constructed from coupled poles (with somewhat massive poles erected at the corners). Its longer sides ran from northwest to southeast. The short sides were 4.5 metres long, while the longer ones extended to 8.7 or nine metres. The northwest part was fenced in by a double series of poles. Coupled poles were also found at the centre of the construction. The locating of pits/fireplaces between the poles of the shorter side confirms a lack of permanent walls at least along the shorter sections, at Dollkeim. Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence to discuss the possibility of the existence of a roof. The construction was presumably destroyed by a fire, which may be traced by ash and charcoal in the post-holes.

Planigraphically similar remnants of the second frame, with the same coupled poles and fireplaces on the shorter side, were traced to the east of the above-mentioned construction. Its southeast part was destroyed by the sand pit. Stratigraphic observations give some grounds to suppose its later existence.

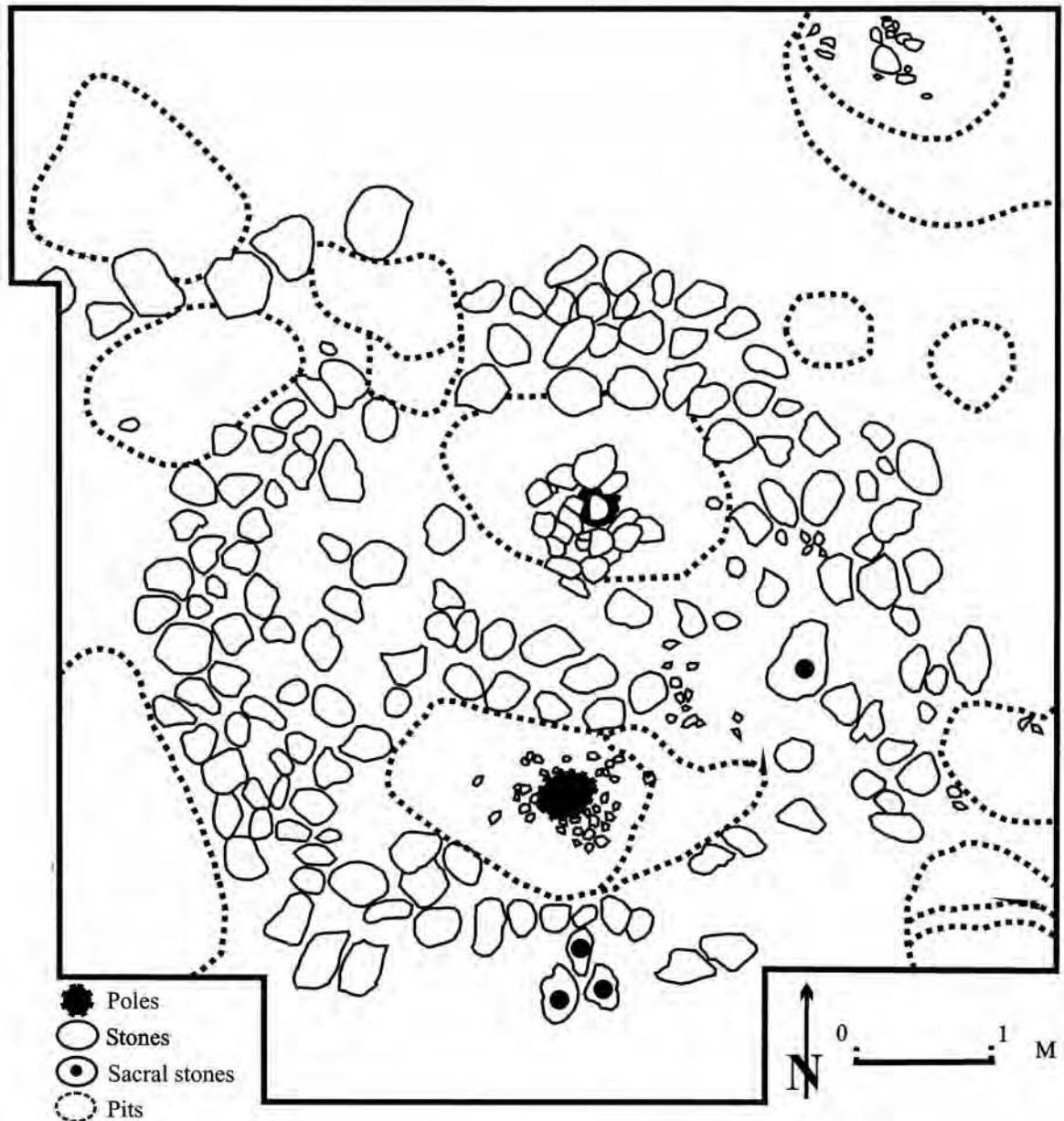


Fig. 7. The open-air ritual area, Kaup cemetery

Inside both frames there were complex ritual areas with clay fireplaces, sacrificial pits, etc.

The distance of 4.5 metres between coupled poles in this frame should be noted as well.

The construction in the western part of the sacral area of the Dobroye-Hünenberg cemetery (the “moulder workshop”) had slightly different characteristics (Fig. 4). It was erected in a small foundation pit of irregular ovoid shape, facing the same way as the constructions in the “area with three fireplaces”. Two symmetrical series of pits left by thin poles were traced near the short sides. Near the longer sides of the foundation pit a similar pit was found in the northeast part, and a wider roundish hollow was recorded in the southwest. The remnants of walls were not revealed. The pole frame had an irregular rectangular shape with sides of two

and 2.9 metres long.

As at the eastern ritual area, the pole construction here coexisted with fireplaces and pits, forming a single complex.

Pole constructions in the open-air ritual area at Klints-ovka 3 may be described as fences. This open-air ritual area is the only one located outside a cemetery. During the early as well as the late phases of its use it consisted of a series of post-hole fencing from south-southwest to southeast, and other elements (Fig. 5). In the late phase, the series of close post-holes continues to the northeast, pits of the early phase have not been recorded there, although they were probably destroyed by the erection of the later pole construction. The planigraphics of the fence demonstrated its irregular roundish shape, with an open space on the northwest side; the

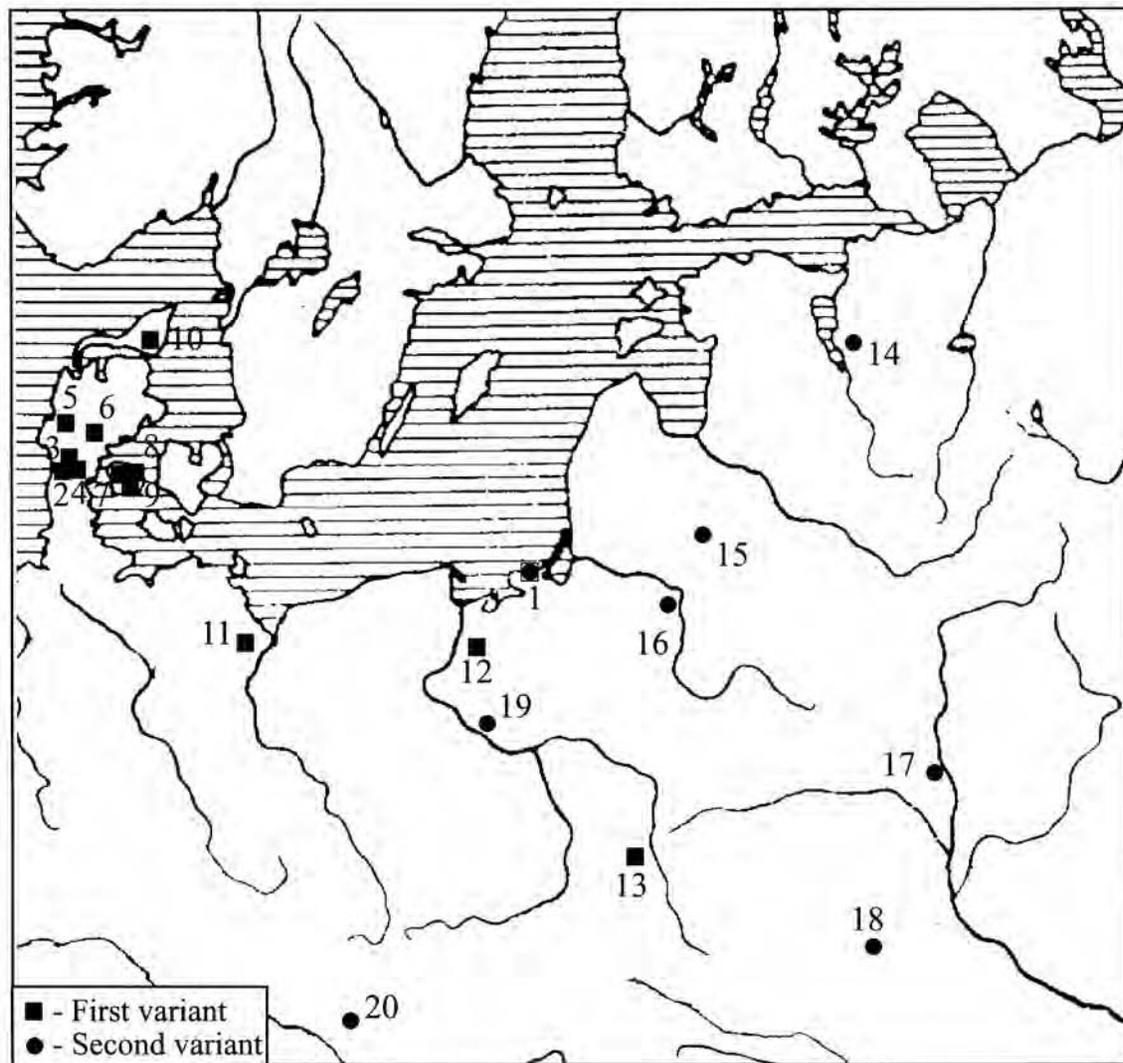


Fig. 8. Analogies with open-air ritual areas of the first and second chronological variants. 1 Open-air ritual areas of the northern Sambian coast; 2 Enderupskov; 3 Højvang; 4 Hørlok; 5 Store Skinberg; 6 Farre; 7 Køstrup; 8 Bitofte; 9 Møllegårdsmarken; 10 Gjurup; 11 Friedland; 12 Novy Targ; 13 Masłomecz; 14 Pskov; 15 Kereliai; 16 Bačkininkėliai; 17 Chodosevichi; 18 Shumsk; 19 Płock; 20 Breczlav-Pohansko

planigraphics of the pits are quite uniform in the early phase.

A roundish paved area situated in the northwest open sector was used as a fireplace. Inside the fence there were pits and small stone paved areas.

Complex pole constructions and frames were not revealed in the Klintsovka 1 and Mokhovoye-Kaup open ritual areas.

Unfortunately, the earliest pole construction belonging to the first phase of the Dollkeim ORA was later destroyed. It is impossible to trace the location of the entrance. Surviving remnants at the sides give reason to suggest an orientation of the long axis from north to south.

The long axis of all constructions from both parts of the Dobroye-Hünenberg ORA was uniformly oriented, and coincided with the sunset point at the summer solstice (astronomic observations were kindly made by

M.G. Gusakiv, in compliance with basic information on the main points of sunrise and sunset, prepared at the Physics Institute of Earth RAS). Taking into consideration the distribution of the fireplaces on the shorter sides of the construction, the location of the pits inside them, and the arrangement of the poles, we may suppose the existence of an entrance at the northeast side of two constructions in the “area with two fireplaces”. In the “moulder workshop” the location of the entrance may be supposed to be on the southwest as well as the northeast sides.

The orientation of the construction’s sides at the Dollkeim ORA during the late phase coincides with the maximum of the moonrise at this latitude. From the location of the construction’s sides, its entrance was also at the northeast.

The alignment of the construction’s sides during the late phase of the Dollkeim ORA (31° NE-SW) coin-

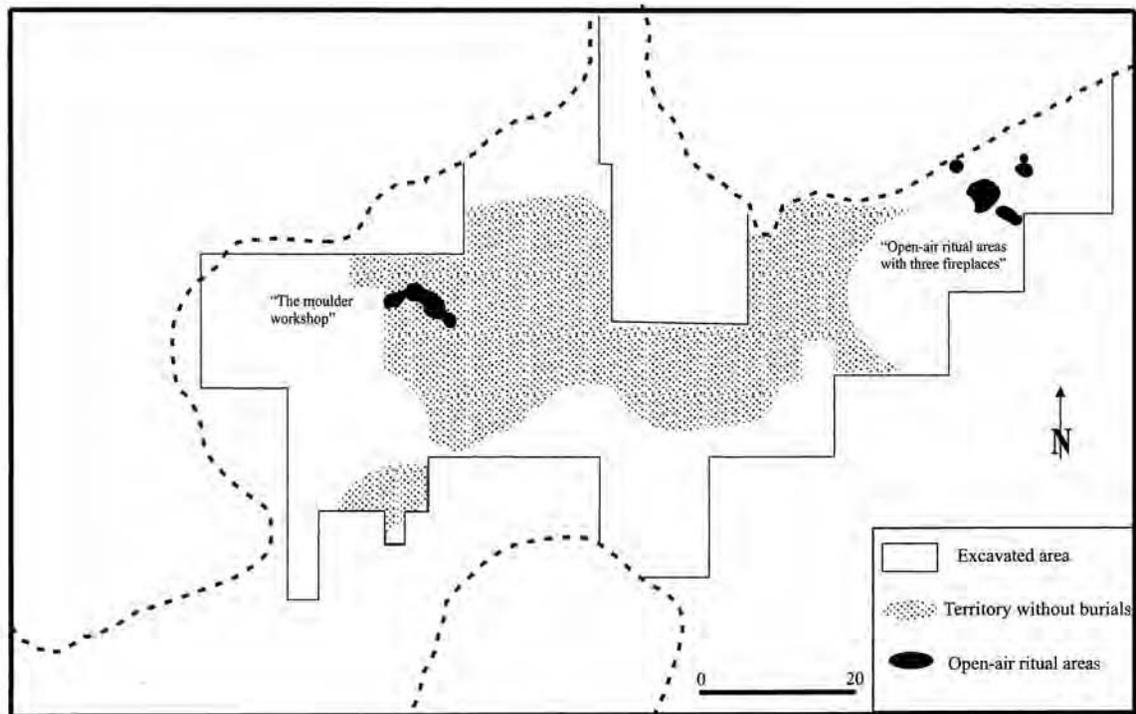


Fig. 9. Hünenberg cemetery. The “open-air ritual area with three fireplaces” and the “moulder workshop” in the cemetery

cides with the maximum point of the high moonrise at the given latitude. By locating the objects in the frame, we may suppose the position of an entrance in the northeast side.

At both stages of the Klintsovka 3 ORA's existence, its “fence” was open to the northwest, where the fireplace was located, so the ORA was oriented to the point of the summer sunset at the solstice. It was in the exact direction from a southeast group of poles and pits through a pole in front of the fireplace and the fireplace itself. The “entrance” was presumably near the fireplace, to the west of it, or less probably to the northwest, where the open sector is shown in the line of poles.

It should be noted that the locating of poles and other objects inside the areas, where timber was traced, mainly follows the same patterns: the orientation is to the sunset at the summer solstice, to the points of sunrise and sunset of the full and new moon, and midday points (north-south).

Such an exact arrangement of construction in accordance with astronomic points is evidence of special accounts and measurements before the construction. Probably, some of the pits of thin poles appeared from the preliminary planning of the area, chosen by the ancient builders for an ORA.

The direction of the sunset point during the summer solstice (there are five examples of such an alignment) and the directions of the midday point, the moon, and the summer sunset were probably the most important; they are recorded for an early ORA (Hünenberg) as

well as for a later ORA (Kaup). So, this direction was important during all the period considered.

Concerning chronological modifications in the form and dimensions of the constructions, it should be mentioned that the rectangular shape and small dimensions apply to more ancient ones (the early stage of Dollkeim, the “area with three fireplaces” from the Hünenberg ORA). Around the middle of the first millennium, ORAs began to acquire other features: the areas were enlarged, ORAs became ovoid or roundish in form.

Analogies with early areas are known in northern Poland (Novy Targ, Masłomęcz), but they are much more numerous in the southwest, in Denmark and in the north of Germany (Enderupskov, Højvang, Hørløk, Store Skinberg, Farre, Køstrup, Bitofte, Møllegårdsmarken, Gjurup, Friedland), where small pole frames of a rectangular shape are known in cemeteries. They are aligned mainly north-south, with a small deviation to the northwest (Maćczyńska 1998: 301–304). Late ORAs have a roundish shape and have analogies in remains from the same period in Lithuanian (Kereliai, Bačkininkėliai, etc [Daugudis 1992: 65–67] and Slavic territories [Płock, Brezslav-Pohansko, Pskov, Chodosevichi, Shumsk, etc] (Slupecki 1994: 130–132; Русанова, Тимошук 1993: 18) (Fig. 8).

Detached post poles are known everywhere.

There are no analogies with the ORA at Dollkeim because of its special features, though some details are the same as at other ORAs considered. Its alignment differs, its main axis depends on the moon instead of the sun.

Thus an analysis of pole constructions and frames in a small area of Sambia allows us to reveal chronological differences in the arrangement of the sacral space in an ORA:

The early phase is characterised by rectangular frames of rather small dimensions.

In the second half of the period considered constructions gained a roundish shape, and detached post poles were used more often.

During all the period under consideration, some technological details of constructions (alignment, measure of length, etc) were kept to. The observance of traditions in funeral rites and the existence of some cemeteries throughout all the period is shown. Under these circumstances, it is possible to explain the modifications in the forms and means of the sacral space organisation in ORAs by changes in funeral rituals, in the participants, in the set of rituals which were followed at these sanctuaries, and finally by changes in ideas about the ties of the participants with the other world, the view of the path of the deceased to the other world.

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I M. E. TŪKSTANTMEČIO RITUALINIŲ VIETŲ STULPŲ KONSTRUKCIJOS ŠIAURINĖJE SAMBIJOJE

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojama pagoniškių apeigų vietų planigrafinė struktūra: stulpaviečių pėdsakai ir jų išsidės-

tymas bei konstrukcija. Minimoms ugniavietėms, akmenys, grindiniai ir duobės.

Analizei pasirinktos šešios pagoniškių apeigų vietos, esančios kompaktiškoje grupėje šiaurinėje Sambijos dalyje (1 pav.). Visos jos tyrinėtos 1978–2002 metais. Tai apeigų vieta Dollkeime (dab. Kovrovo) (2 pav.), dvi tokios paskirties vietos žinomos Dobroje (buv. Hünenberge) (3–5 pav.), Klincovkoje 1 (6 pav.), Klincovkoje 3 (7 pav.), Kaupe (dab. Mochovoje) (8 pav.). Jos galėjo turėti tokias pačias funkcijas, nes yra kapinynų teritorijose arba šliejasi prie jų. Pagoniškių apeigų vietų planigrafija plati – nuo III iki XIII a., tačiau intensyviau kiekviena iš jų buvo naudojama skirtingais laikotarpiais. Antai pirmoji su trimis židiniais Dobroje (buv. Hünenberge) datuotina III–V a., antroji – vadina- moji „liejiko dirbtuvių“ vieta Dobroje – IV–V a., VI a. pradžia datuotina apeigų vieta Dollkeime (Kovrovo), X a. pabaiga – Klincovkoje 1, X a. – Kaupe (dab. Mochovoje) ir ne vėlesniu kaip XIII a. laikotarpiu – Klincovkoje 3.

Šių vietų planigrafinė struktūra atsekama iš išlikusių stulpaviečių. Jų pėdsakus galima suskirstyti į du variantus: pirmasis – nedidelių ir plonų, negiliai įkastų stulpų, kurių skersmuo – apie 10 cm, vietos; antrasis – didesnio skersmens stulpavietės, kuriose stulpai buvo įleisti į gruntą apie 1 metrą. Skirtumai tarp šių dviejų variantų stulpaviečių gerai išryškėjo Dollkeime (2 pav.). Plonieji stulpai nesudarė jokios konstrukcijos. Jie pavieniai arba buvę įkasti nedidelėmis grupėmis. Masyvieji stulpai sudarė kažkokių statinių konstrukcijas. Nėra duomenų, ar stulpai buvo papuošti antropomorfinėmis figūromis ir ar jie buvo laikomi šventais ir garbinami.

Analogiškų apeigų vietų yra aptikta Lenkijoje, Danijoje, šiaurinėje Vokietijoje, kur kvadrato formos stulpaviečių vietos žinomos kapinynų teritorijose (9 pav.). Vėlesnio laikotarpio apeigų vietų planigrafija keičiasi, įgauna apskritą formą. Tokių aptikta Lietuvoje (Bačkinkėliai, Kereliai) ir slavų žemėse – Pskove, Chodosevičiuose, Šumske.

Šiose apeigų vietose buvo atliekamos laidotuvių apeigos, jos buvo tarsi tiltas tarp gyvųjų ir mirusiųjų pasaulių.

Vertė Vytautas Kazakevičius