THE SWASTIKA IN LITHUANIA: THE HORIZON OF THE 13TH AND 14TH CENTURIES

VYKINTAS VAITKEVIČIUS*

Klaipėda University, 84 Herkaus Manto St, LT-92294, Klaipėda, Lithuania

Abstract

The paper focuses on the swastika, artefacts of antler, wood, metal and clay marked with the swastika, and swastika-shaped items from the 13th and 14th centuries in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. An answer is sought to the question what the swastika, a universal sign and symbol, represented in ancient Lithuanian culture and religion, and what kinds of shapes and accompanying mythological meanings it possessed.

It is concluded that in the 13th and 14th centuries, the swastika did not have a canon of representation, and its perpendiculars on one-sided items faced in one or the other rotary direction (clockwise or anti-clockwise), while on two-sided ones they faced in both directions simultaneously. Two Lithuanian gods, Perkūnas (Thunder) and Kalvelis (Blacksmith), emerged in the explored contexts of items marked with a swastika. This confirms the genetic connection between the swastika and an equilateral cross, the sign of fire or Thunder, characteristic of the Baltic and ancient Lithuanian religious tradition. To date, there is no reason to believe that the perpendiculars could change the symbolic meaning.

Introduction

Professor William Balchin was right when he wrote in December 1944 that the swastika, an old and special symbol of mankind, was to soon disappear from the public and academic discourse (1944, p. 167). Extensive research into the swastika began as early as the 19th century, as is evidenced by publications, manuals and encyclopedias; however, for well-known reasons, by the end of the Second World War, it had ceased. The word *swastika* is Sanskrit for prosperity and happiness. Items marked with a swastika are common in many cultures of the world (see Wilson 1896). As has been suggested in historiography, the swastika probably migrated from Troy via the Caucasus to India, and simultaneously via Italy to the rest of Europe (D'Alviella 1894, Plate III). Later swastika-marked artefacts were discovered during excavations of Neolithic and Bronze Age sites in the Middle East and Europe (Loewenstein 1941; Gimbutas 1958, pp. 124–127). Moreover, as is well known, the sign was characteristic of the Roman Empire, and was used by the early Christians (Bliujienė 2000, pp. 16–17).

In the contemporary world, the swastika has survived in Buddhist monasteries in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and other countries, where it adorns their exteriors and interiors. The sacred sign of happiness and success also marks religious articles, and is woven into textiles, inserted into texts, etc (cf. Beer 2003, pp. 97–98).

In Lithuania, archaeological finds marked with swastikas always attract attention. Naturally, the sign is easy to recognise, and its importance is felt intuitively: it is part of the Baltic, and simultaneously pre-Christian, identity. However, for political, cultural, and a number of other reasons, the interpretations of the swastika arouse not only interest but also a certain tension. Some people tend to believe it is an old national sign, while for others it is still an element of Nazi ideology (e.g. Tumėnas 2015).

It should be noted that in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, the swastika was part of traditional Lithuanian culture: sometimes it was embroidered on towels, it was used to decorate the *nuometas* (a married woman's headdress) and Easter eggs, and it marked personal belongings. However, it remained unrecorded what the swastika was called at that time. It is true that the swastika emerging in the sashes of the period was called *grėbliukai* (small rakes), and a half-swastika, *kryželis* (a small cross) by villagers surveyed several decades ago (Tumėnas 2002, pp. 82, 84, 113). For comparison, in Latvia, the swastika was called *krusts* (a cross), *krustiņš* (a small cross), or *ugunskrusts* (the cross of fire) (Brastiņš 1923, p. 72; Dzērvīts 1925, p. 339; Ģinters 1936, p. 36).

Gintaras Beresnevičius (1992) studied the swastika, based on sources from Baltic religion and mythology. He showed how, with perpendiculars emerging at the ends of the arms of an equilateral cross, it turned into the swastika, and when it began to rotate, it became a circle with a cross in the middle. It should be noted that all three signs, the cross,[1] the swastika and the cross in the circle, are connected in a close mythological relationship, while their shape remains unstable, i.e. easily changeable, adaptable, and able at any time to become again what it already was.

Audronė Bliujienė (2000) studied the swastika and finds marked with the swastika in archaeological material, and came to the conclusion that the shape was found in Iron Age Baltic applied art, but it was not a very common motif. According to Bliujienė, throughout the 1st millennium, Baltic culture 'accepted and integrated the cultural influences of Rome and its provinces, and later of the Migration period and the Viking Age' (Bliujienė 2000, p. 22).

To date, the oldest known image of the swastika, dating from the first centuries AD, was found on an urn from the Nocha (in Belarusian Нача) cemetery on the border between Belarus and Lithuania. In about the 3rd or 4th century, the swastika decorated openwork brooches and belt spacer plates of the West Baltic tribes, in the 7th and 8th centuries Samogitian wide bracelets, in the 9th to the 12th century Curonian flat brooches, in the 9th to the 11th century Semigallian headband plates, and in the 12th to the 13th centuries Latgalian wraps (*vilaines*). However, on presenting illustrations of most finds and describing the chronological development of the integration of the swastika into Baltic culture before the 13th century, Bliujienė basically did not ask how the process took place, or what archaeologists found when studying 13th and 14th-century sites. That is the starting point of the present paper.

In our case, archaeological finds marked with swastikas will not be precisely classified or accurately calculated: that does not affect the content of the paper, and therefore also the search for an answer to the question what happened to the universal symbol which entered the Baltic, and specifically ancient Lithuanian, cultural environment. The author of the paper speculates that, in interaction with other phenomena of Baltic culture, the swastika as a sign may have acquired new shapes, and the swastika as a symbol, meanings less characteristic, or even untypical, of other nations.

In the 13th century, with the rise of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, until the introduction of Christianity in 1387 (and in Samogitia, in 1413), the unique history, culture and religion of the duchy developed and existed under the influence of local traditions of Baltic tribes and factors from the outside world. To date, it is best known from the exploration of the custom of cremation, which was common across the state, and the excavations of cemeteries. With the disappearance of the tribal identity, cremation spread and prevailed, and quite a few differences in the material culture disappeared (e.g. Petrauskas 2017, pp. 208–213). These conclusions are in line with the findings from excavations in administrative centres of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: the Kernavė archaeological site, the Old Trakai Castle site, and the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania in Vilnius and the Upper and Lower Castles surrounding it. However, the correlation of all this significant data remains a challenge for future research.

The axe from Gediminas' Castle

In 1982, during excavations of the Gediminas Hill site, an 11-centimetre-long double-edged antler axe was found. Among the many intersecting lines carved on its surface, four swastikas can be seen: a couple of clockwise-facing signs on one plane, and an anti-clockwise-facing one on the other plane; the fourth swastika was at the broken part of the axe (Fig. 1).

This unique find was reported to have been trapped between the paving stones on the sixth horizon of the cultural layer of the hillfort. The purpose of the pavement, dating from no later than the 11th century, remained unclear; its dating was based on ceramics and the chronology of antler axes proposed many years ago (e.g. G. Vaitkevičius 2010a). Given the fact that those archaeological excavations lacked basic discipline,[2] and that Peter Paulsen's data on the antler axes found in Central and Eastern Europe (1956, pp. 52–59) had long since failed to correspond to the factual situation, the dating of the Gediminas Castle axe should be viewed critically.

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[1] It is also known to have been called *krikštas* (cf. Tumėnas 2002, p. 82).

[2] That was also noted in the diary of Adolfas Tautavičius, head of the Archaeology Department of the Lithuanian Institute of History, who issued the permit for those excavations (2016, p. 137).
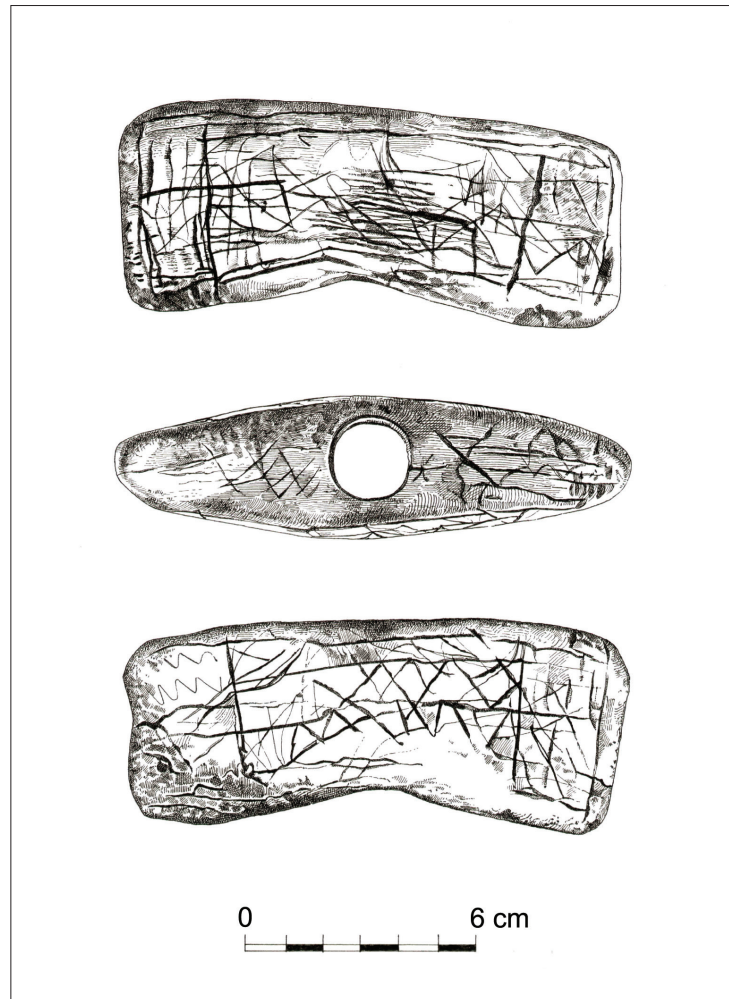
Figure 1. An axe found on Gediminas Hill in Vilnius. Antler. LNM EM2398 (after G. Vaitkevičius 2010a, Fig. 16).

Even before the First World War, an antler axe from the Rokiškis area was apparently taken to Berlin (Reich 2013, p. 164, Plate 19.2), while in 1934, two axes found in the River Jara, 0.25 kilometres from the Miškiniai barrows in the Anykščiai district, were brought to the Kaunas Museum (currently stored in VDKM AR 874:1–2; e.g. Paulsen 1956, p. 56, Fig. 21a). In this century, while excavating Jurgaičiai hillfort (in the Šiauliai district) and the settlement at its foot, three antler axes without any distinct decorations were found: one with a narrow blade, one double-edged, and an atypically shaped miniature axe (Mačiulis and Kuzmickas 2012, pp. 86–87; Kazimieraitytė, 2016, p. 9, Fig. 8). In Ukmergė, on the River Šventoji, a particularly abundantly carved axe with a wide blade was accidentally found.[3]

The Jurgaičiai axes were discovered in the 13th and 14th-century cultural layer. It is reasonably believed that the castle that burnt down there in 1348 was not rebuilt. Finds

from Latvia present more opportunities for research: 13 axes made of elk antler have so far been found there, all dating back to early historical times (the 12th to the 14th century), except for the find from Jaungulbene, the circumstances of its discovery being unknown, as well as one of the axes from Koknese hillfort, found in the Iron Age layer (e.g. Mugurēvičs 2000).

The axes found in Latvia have wide blades and are double-edged, or they come in the shape of a massive hammer. They are quite rough (some of them being blanks?), moderately decorated with hollows, except for an axe from the 14th-century cultural layer of Dinaburg hillfort (Daugavpils district), which is engraved with geometric figures and concentric wheels. One item deserves a special mention: probably the closest analogy to the artefact found in Gediminas' Castle, it is an 11.3-centimetre-long double-edged axe, with the remains of a wooden handle and a seven-centimetre-long iron nail in the handle, found in the Jaunpiebalga barrow cemetery, in man's grave 4, together with a 14th-century spearhead[4] and the remains

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[3] In 2013, it ended up in the collection of the National Museum of Lithuania (GRD 116158).

[4] Type G2, according to R. Brūzis G (2012, p. 47).

of a belt (Mugurēvičs 2000, pp. 63–64). But who needs an antler axe in the metal age?

We have shown that the axe found on Gediminas Hill was lost no earlier than the 12th century, and presumably no later than the mid-13th century, when a levelling layer with individual potsherds of pre-Gothic ceramics was formed above the 5th and 6th horizons of the hillfort site cultural layer (G. Vaitkevičius 2010b, pp. 49–50, 99, Fig. 8).[5] That was the period when, according to the oral tradition first recorded in the 16th century, by the will of the legendary duke Šventaragis, Vilnius was made the place of cremation and burial of the bodies of deceased dukes and nobles. And only later did Gediminas go there to hunt, stayed for the night, and had an extraordinary dream, the meaning of which was explained by the pagan priest Lizdeika, and which predetermined the glorious future of Vilnius, the eternal city (e.g. Ališauskas 2014).

We believe that the axe found in Gediminas' Castle was used in the middle or the 2nd half of the 13th century, and should be associated with the governor of the castle(s) of Vilnius, i.e. the grand duke or his vicegerent, who encouraged the settlements to grow and prosper.

In the 13th century, the distribution area of antler axes extended further north of Vilnius, to Latgale (Dinaburg hillfort), Vidzeme (Koknese hillfort), and Curonia (Sabilė hillfort); however, the opinion was recently expressed that an important role in the development of Vilnius in the 1280s was played by Yotvingians in the south, in the upper reaches of the River Nemunas, and/or Sudovia, when it was conquered by the Teutonic Order in 1278, and forced to apply for asylum to Traidenis, Grand Duke of Lithuania (Vaitkiavichius 2013, pp. 86–88).

In the 13th and 14th centuries, one or more stone or flint axes used for spells and rites in Lithuania were found in Stone Age or Bronze Age settlements (cf. Zabiela 1995, p. 153). Pendants in the shape of axes with a wide blade were made of amber and worn for magic purposes in some places (cf. Mugurēvičs 2003, p. 92, Fig. 1). In a similar context, axes made of antler should be considered: they reproduced rather accurately the shape of axes with narrow or wide blades, but, unlike them, had a thick and therefore quite blunt blade. For this reason, the double-

edged axe from Gediminas' Castle, from a functional point of view, was more like a small hammer.

Forensic tests have proven that this artefact was used for a long time, and that marks on the surface of its blade could have appeared 'by forging a surface whose hardness corresponded, for example, with the hardness of wood'. Moreover, no traces left by metal tools were found on examination of the notches by diffusion copying (G. Vaitkevičius 1983). Was the double-edged axe (hammer?) discovered in Gediminas' Castle once made in accordance with the taboo on metal as a material and on metal as antler-processing tools?

In ancient Baltic and Lithuanian mythology, one god was known who could not bear iron, and that was Perkūnas, or the Thunderer. The cause of that hatred was his discord with Velinas, the ruler of the underground kingdom and natural resources, whom Christianity later equated to an evil spirit. Universally known names such as a Thunder axe, a Thunder bullet, and a Thunder arrow, names for polished flint axes, stone axes with a hole for a shaft, and the bore-holes of the latter axes, indicated that Perkūnas was still armed with a flint or stone axe as late as the Iron Age (e.g. Laurinkienė 1996, pp. 107–113). This depiction of the Thunderer may, of course, have changed during the creation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, when Kalvelis, a god close to Perkūnas, defeated Velinas by acquiring the secret of iron processing and welding, and took his place in the pantheon. Moreover, after going to heaven, Kalvelis began to perform the functions of Perkūnas himself: by hammering, he produced thunder, and when hitting the anvil, he produced sparks, lightning (cf. Vaitkevičienė and Vaitkevičius 2001, pp. 319–322).

Since Neolithic times, the axe was a symbol of power. It was also apparently used by the rulers of emerging European countries fighting for influence who concentrated political and religious sacrificial powers in one pair of hands (cf. Dobat 2006).[6] It should be noted that 13th-century sources of Lithuanian mythology also called Perkūnas, one of the four sovereign gods, the *rikis* of all gods, i.e. their overseer/supervisor, or in other words, the minister of the interior (Greimas 1990, p. 419).

The question remains whether the antler axe decorated with swastikas found in Gediminas' Castle, in the hands of the duke (or perhaps his vicegerent?) in the 13th century, represented a symbol of the guardian of law and order, authorised by gods and displayed on every public occasion, or whether it was just a ceremonial accessory. In-depth studies of Roman sacrificial tools (axes and hammers made of iron) suggest that a double-edged antler axe

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5 Given the 14C dates, the construction period of the wooden castle is 1216–1264 (1σ – 1224–1252; Šmigelskas 2018, p. 115). For comparison, the dendrochronological date of a floorboard from a small outbuilding found at the northern foot of Gediminas Hill is 1259, and of a log from a house, 1271 (Pukienė 2009, pp. 88–89; cf. Striška 2007, pp. 177–179), while in the period from 1289 to 1297, in various places in the Lower Castle area, a layer of loose sand and construction timber processing waste formed which can be related to large-scale works, such as the construction or reconstruction of castles (G. Vaitkevičius 2010b, pp. 53–55).

6 It was still practised by the sovereigns of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 14th century: written sources describe the sacrifice of a bull by Grand Duke Kęstutis in 1351 to confirm a peace treaty with the King of Hungary (Vėlius 1996, p. 403).

(hammer?) could only have been used to sacrifice calves, pigs and smaller animals (e.g. Aldrete 2014).

To conclude the analysis of the case of the axe (hammer?) from Gediminas' Castle, we should note that the swastikas on its sides were aligned with the edges of the artefact, and engraved in pairs, one right-facing and one left-facing (Fig. 1). In other words, both ends of the double-edged axe (hammer?) had two swastikas each, engraved on opposite sides, and facing in opposite directions. This opposition, together with the mythological balance, could have played a significant role in the use of the axe (hammer?) in sacrificial rites.[7]

A horse collar in the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania

Swastikas are rare in the archaeological material from the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania, located in the Lower Castle in Vilnius, where systematic excavations started in 1987: two bronze rings from the late 14th and 15th century were marked with the icon (National Museum - Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania, Inventory Nos M 13 and M 1803; Puškorius 2011, p. 100, Fig. 261).

In 2014, during the explorations of the U basement of the palace, one of the best-preserved parts of the entire archaeological complex, built of timber hewn in 1281 or 1282, was found at the third level of the wooden building (Baubaitė et al., 2016, p. 19). A layer of manure that formed above the rough floorboards testifies to the economic function of the building. Below the floor level, a 0.6 by 1.75-metre and 65 to 75-centimetre-deep pit was found, its walls reinforced with upright boards, and a clean layer of peat with sand admixtures at the top; eight brooms, a saddle with polychrome painting and bone bindings, a shaft bow, a carrying pole, an oven peel, parts of a leather saddle, some pieces of leather, and other objects were found on the bottom (Kuncevičius et al., 2015, pp. 203–204).

According to researchers, before the demolition of the building outside castle wall M1, which could have been an obstacle in anticipation of an enemy attack, these items were placed in an empty pit of unidentified purpose and left there. In the same pit, along with parts of the saddle and a shaft bow, a unique wooden fragment of a harness was found: a two-part horse collar marked with swastikas and other signs (Kuncevičius 2015, p. 66, 111, Fig. 2; Kaminskaitė 2016, p. 198) (Fig. 2). The exact number of swastikas and their composition remains unclear, since before the archaeological excavations, the fragile artefact had been damaged by construction workers.

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[7]   In the near future, we plan to date the axe from Gediminas' Castle using the 14C (AMS) method, and to continue its comprehensive investigation.

As is well known, the Baltic tribes in the period from the 9th to the 12th century, and mounted warriors of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 13th and 14th centuries, paid special attention to horses. From the excavations of horse burial pits in cemeteries and barrow cemeteries, ornate bone bridle mounts and metal saddle mounts were known (Kulikauskienė and Rimantienė 1966, Figs. 87–228). For understandable reasons, there is so far a lack of information about the wooden parts of a harness.

In accordance with ethnographic data, in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, the craftsmen who made harnesses used to decorate shaft bows and horse collars. The latter used to be ornamented from the bottom to about the middle (cf. Galaunė 1958, Figs. 484; 485), while a straw pad was placed on the horse's neck at the top, or the horse collar there was covered with leather (e.g. Kulnytė and Lazauskaitė 2015, pp. 113, 199, 206) (Fig. 3). Why decorate a horse collar?

Naturally, we are talking about a good collar intended for show; however, we have little information about celebrations in the 13th and 14th centuries. Until the mid-20th century, both in Lithuania and in neighbouring countries, there was a tradition of decorating a harness for a carriage or sleigh ride in the case of a *piršlybos* (a matchmaking 'mission', making an official offer of marriage to the bride's parents) or a wedding. The loud bells of the harness also survived, i.e. closed bells with a pebble inside, which were fastened to the bridle strap around the 13th and 14th centuries, while in the late 19th and 20th centuries, a separate leather belt with 12 bells was put on a horse's neck. Numerous examples from the living language show the importance of riding in matchmaking and wedding ceremonies, with bells ringing, e.g. 'Carts are decorated, bells ring, and the bride, (beautiful) as rue, gets into the carriage' (Kazimieraitytė 2013, pp. 5–6).

Fairy tales and legends usually depict Perkūnas as an active participant in weddings, as a matchmaker or a musician (Balys 1939, pp. 137–145). Horses and festive harnesses are also associated with him in riddles, cf. *Toli žirgas žvengia, arti kamanos skamba* (The horse neighs far away, and the bridle sounds nearby) (the answer is Dievaitis [God], one of the names of Perkūnas [Grigas 1968, p. 465]). Recent research on Lithuanian and Latvian wedding customs shows the matchmaker, or the bride's coachman, making the sign of the cross in front of the bride or the place where she was soon to be sitting. In that way, Perkūnas' thunderbolt hitting an oak tree in the mythical wedding of the gods of heaven was repeated with the aim of protecting the bride from evil spirits and envy, and of consecrating the house (e.g. Sinkevičius 2018, pp. 92–94). However, whenever the descriptions of customs referred to the cutting or drawing of the sign of the cross with a sword or a whip, but did not specify the shape of the cross,
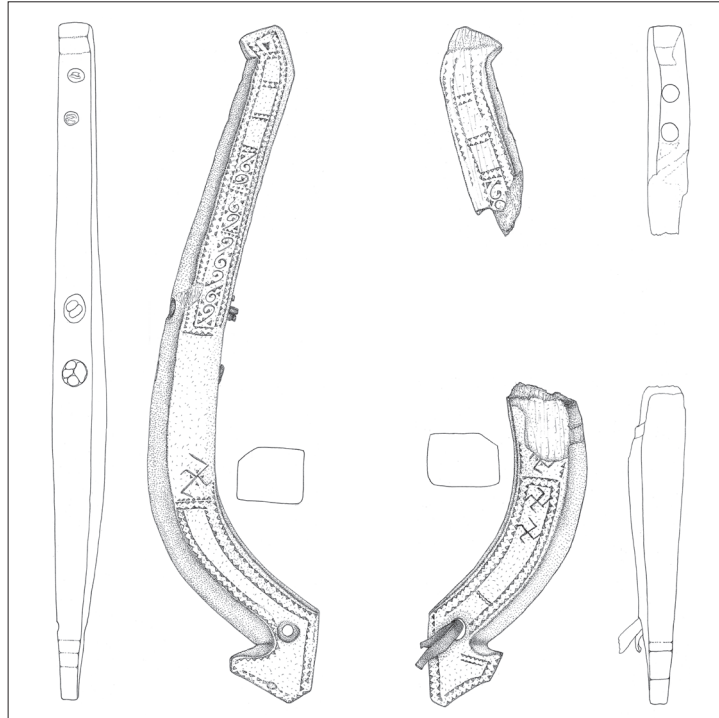
Figure 2. A horse collar decorated with swastikas and other patterns found in the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania in the Lower Castle in Vilnius. Height 560 mm. Sycamore wood (after Kuncevičius et al., 2015, p. 204, Fig. 7) (drawing by R. Manomaitienė).
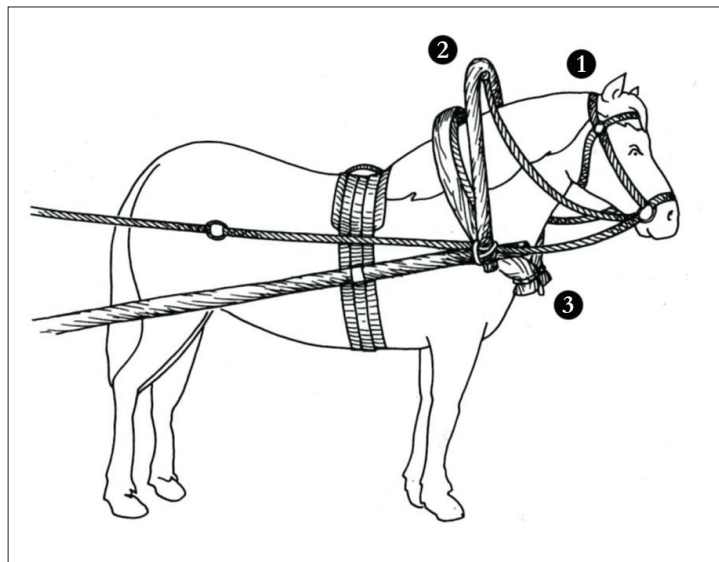

Figure 3. Parts of a harness: 1. bridle; 2. shaft bow; 3. horse collar (according to Kulnytė, Lazauskaitė 2015, p. 199, Fig. a) (drawing by E. Prelgauskienė).

it was difficult to recognise the religious tradition of the Balts. It was certainly not a Christian cross, when the cross of interest to the present research was called special (*īpašu zīme* [a special sign], Sinkevičius 2018, p. 94).[8]

It is necessary to pay additional attention to the research on the construction of old wooden buildings and their door decorations carried out by Aistė Andriušytė, in which important conclusions are made on the meaning of the equilateral cross motif, depending on the angle of turning the symbol: a cross parallel to the main axes of symmetry was static, and emphasised stability; whereas, when turned at a 45-degree angle, it became dynamic, and actively protected the entrance to the house from unwanted forces (Andriušytė 1997, pp. 204–205). Therefore, it is essential to look at all diagonally turned crosses, as well as swastikas, with extra care, and to consider whether it was not intended to attach a protective function to the symbol and/or the object marked with it.

The turned swastikas on the horse collar found in the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania (Fig. 3) are believed to have been related to the mythical sphere of Perkūnas and his powers, such as assisting the matchmaker in finding a bride, or the protection of the latter on a dangerous journey to the bridegroom's home. Ultimately, however, it should be noted that the swastika on the left[9] differed in its shape and performance technique from the other surviving swastikas on the right, and was more reminiscent of unprofessionally carved personal property marks on objects used in a group of people, such as flax processing tools or fishing tackle (cf. Lielozols 1926, p. 530). The question remains whether the mark, engraved later than the rest that formed a separate distinctive composition, simply allowed the owner to distinguish his horse collar from other similar (and also engraved?) collars, or strengthened and provided the owner with some additional protection.

The swastikas in Kernavė

The development of Kernavė began in the mid-13th century, and over a short time, a large part of the Lower Town in the Pajauta Valley was inhabited (Vėlius 2005, pp. 20–22; cf. Vengalis and Vėlius 2019, p. 108). In 1279, the Livonian Master attacked Kernavė, the land of King Traidenis,[10] and suffered a crushing defeat by the Lithuanians in a battle near Aizkraukle.

There is no doubt about Kernavė being the political, military and trading centre during Traidenis' rule (Dubonis 2009, p. 165). Around 1285, after the Gediminaičiai, the brothers Butigeidas and later Pukuveras (otherwise known as Butvydas), occupied the throne of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Vilnius became the political and religious centre (Rowell 2001, p. 142). A significant fact for comprehensive research into the 13th and 14th centuries is that the archaeological material from Kernavė and the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania in the Lower Castle, as well as the cemeteries in Bokšto Street and the suburb of Verkiai in Vilnius, had much in common. The excavations in Kernavė were very important in terms of the diversity both of the material and the shape of the swastika: adhering to the main axes of symmetry, the swastika was used as a decoration for luxurious headband plates; on silver alloy rings, swastikas were turned at a 45-degree angle. Moreover, a wooden oven peel and at least one bottom of a wheel-thrown pot were marked with a swastika (Baltramiejūnaitė et al., 2017, pp. 158, 197, 203).

In 1986, the archaeologists Aleksiejus Luchtanas and Valdemaras Šimėnas discovered a swastika-shaped mounting[11] on the surface of a ploughed field in Kernavė's Lower Town (Fig. 4). No other article of this kind had been found before; therefore, we can only guess that it was riveted to a leather belt, bridle or pouch. No less important to us is the fact that the swastika had a centre which was accentuated. The centre of the cross, the sign of fire, was important as the essential place of the sign. Incidentally, the four triangles supplementing the swastikas on the bridle found in the Palace of the Great Dukes of Lithuania were also directed towards it (Fig. 3).

From a mythological point of view, the fire hides and starts and is given the main role at the crossing, the centre of the swastika. These analogies are not difficult to find in ethnographic material. For example, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Easter eggs were also decorated in this way (Eimaitytė 1995, Figs. 1, 2, 7, 8). In addition, it should be noted that the same elements of the Kernavė mounting, the cross and the rosette, by changing their places, i.e. enlarging the ring and reducing the cross, are similar to the symbol of the Sun (*Saules zīme*). This is nothing other than an ornamental representation of a rose, and it is in the shape of a rose that the Sun 'blooms' every Christmas morning (e.g. Greimas 1990, p. 472; Vaitkevičienė 2001, pp. 36–40).

The fiery nature of the swastika is also evidenced by the spatula-shaped oven peel marked with a swastika[12] found in the Lower Town at Kernavė (Fig. 5). The artefact was found near the house of a jeweller's homestead from the

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8 For comparison, in accordance with valuable testimony from Alanta (in the Molėtai district), Perkūno kryžius (Perkūnas' cross) is a cross 'with two parallel crossbars and all six ends of the same length'. It used to be cut or written on the south or east wall of a house from the outside: 'then the thunder did not hit those houses [or buildings]' (LTR 1627/162).

9 On the right-hand side of a horse.

10 Traidenis ruled Lithuania in the period 1270 to 1282.

11 It should be noted that these archaeologists were the first to dare publicly write the word 'swastika' during the occupation.

12 In the research, it was called a spindle.

Figure 4. A mounting found in the Lower Town at Kernavė, 27x27 mm. Copper alloy. KMR A3763.

period 1365 to 1390, in a pit for wood chips and bark, which eventually turned into a waste site (Luchtanas 1986, pp. 15–16).

Sixteenth-century sources of Baltic religion and mythology indicate that a housewife used to mark the first loaf of bread put into the oven with her finger (*digitoque notata*, Lasickis 1969, p. 42). The custom of marking bread with a cross, so that it would be nourishing and long lasting, survived until the mid-20th century; the sign of the cross was also made over the oven and the fire itself to receive God's blessing. However, we have no accurate information about the use of an equilateral cross, the cross of fire, for the purpose. On the other hand, testimonies of other hitherto unseen shapes of the cross on a loaf of bread have survived, for example, not with two, but with four crosspieces (Šmits 1940, No 18310).[13]

A loaf of bread marked with a cross contained the mythical essence of fire, and therefore it was taken to address the gods, while in practice the power of fire allowed for raw dough to be turned into holy, blessed bread (Vaitkevičienė 2001, pp. 71–73). In this way, it is possible that the swastika sign on the Kernavė oven peel complemented the extraordinary chain of crosses drawn by the housewife's hand in the air and marked on dough, and testified to the holiness that surrounded the process of making food on a fire in general. The topic can be further developed thanks to another stray find from the late 13th and 14th century

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[13] The loaf of bread thus marked was also sprinkled with water, to make it even holier.

from the field of the Lower Town at Kernavė: part of the bottom of a vessel marked with a swastika.

The lines of the Kernavė swastika were straight, intersecting at right angles, and the perpendiculars were very short, and, it would seem, even slightly thicker than the main crosspieces (Fig. 6). Very similarly marked vessels were found during excavations of Darbutai hillfort (Raseiniai district; Mulevičienė 1970, p. 138, Fig. 2). In general, such finds are rare. By 1970, the number in Lithuania amounted to merely 14, while from 1979 to the present day, in the excavations of the archaeological site at Kernavė, only 13 marked potsherds of the bottoms of vessels have been found (Baltramiejūnaitė 2016, p. 116, Baltramiejūnaitė et al., 2017, p. 203). For comparison, vessels with marked bottoms from about the 11th to the 13th century have been found in ancient settlements in neighbouring Belarus, but most of these finds are concentrated in barrows and cemeteries (Zdanovič et al., 1993; Dziarnovich and Kviatkouskaia 1994, pp. 81–83). Let us look at the excavation results from Bajorai cemetery (Elektrėnai municipality).

Vessels from Bajorai cemetery

In Bajorai cemetery, cremated human remains, burnt animal bones, potsherds, grave goods and fragments from the fireplace used to be deposited on a small shoal of Lake Briaunis, and into the water at its foot (cf. Vaitkevičius 2012). That 14th and early 15th-century burial site belongs to the cultural field of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and most of the artefacts found there, including tools, weapons and jewellery, are similar or identical to those found at Kernavė and in the Lower Castle in Vilnius. Some of them testify to relationships with Livonia, western and central Belarus, and the lands of enslaved Prussians.

Out of over 14,408 fragments of wheel-thrown pottery, their total weight exceeding 20 kilograms, 188 pieces were base sherds, and 68 were bottom sherds. On the latter, 24 signs were discovered, which could have been used to mark 22 vessels. If one pot weighed 500 grams on average, then half or even more of the vessels found so far in Bajorai cemetery, moulded and wheel-thrown on a *stovylas*, a wooden table for a potter's wheel, could have been marked. On their bottom, there was a sign engraved on a round wooden table, or more precisely, a mirror image of it, impressed.

Not all signs of the Bajorai potters are recognisable and understandable. However, the swastika poses no doubts: at least two vessels are marked with broken lines, and some others with fluidly intertwined swastikas, which were not found in Lithuania before (Figs. 7–9). At least two potter's wheels (of the master and an apprentice?) were marked with such a sign in Bajorai, and the closest

Figure 5. An oven peel marked with a swastika found in the Lower Town at Kernavė. Height 610 mm. Wood. KMR A3742.

analogies come from the cultural layer of the old town of Volkovysk (Grodno region, Belarus; Zverugo 1989, p. 141) and the Yudichi barrows (Gomel region, Belarus) (Plavinski 1998, p. 64).

In accordance with the opinion that became established among Russian archaeologists over the last century, marked vessels bore witness to the origins and development of the craft of pottery: a craftsman, or several craftsmen working in the same workshop, would mark their products for economic success[14] (e.g. Iouv 2009, p. 69). Potters may also have used a customer's (the future owner's) property mark (personal mark), while the meanings

[14] Allegedly, the first vessel in each new batch could have been marked.

of religious symbols, if they ever existed, eventually disappeared.

In one way or another, vessels marked with the cross of fire were part of an entire long chain of fire-related mythological images: the sign contributed to the raw clay mould becoming a vessel, which seemed to give it some vital power (cf. Grigas 1968, No 6841). Later, the sign on the bottom of the vessel mediated and assisted in cooking food on fire, and in terms of the possible symbolic meanings of the marked dishes at the funeral, the swastika sign was believed to imply fire itself and its divine powers. In the 13th-century pantheon of gods in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Perkūnas and his close associate Kalvelis were closely connected with the custom of cremation (and, as is reasonably believed, even with the cremation technique), as well as the transport of souls from one sacred underground sphere to another one in heaven, the *dausos* (Vaitkevičienė and Vaitkevičius 2001, pp. 319–322).

An obvious connection between the marked vessels and the specific burial customs of the community in the 14th and early 15th centuries was demonstrated by a complex of finds from the cremations of the village of Bajorai. Today, it is difficult to say whether the Bajorai potters marked the bottoms of all vessels meant for celebrations and sacrifices in general, or whether the vessels marked were intended exclusively for funerals. In the larger ones, the remains of cremated bodies could have been transported, and the coal and ashes from the ritual fire transferred; and in the smaller ones, food could have been sacrificed (Fig. 10). The bases and sherds of the bottoms of the vessels, as well as the degree of survival of the marks on them, testify to the custom of breaking the marked vessels into sherds at the burial site, and possibly even of further crushing them.

The swastika: its shapes and mythological meaning

In Lithuanian archaeological material from the 13th and 14th centuries, swastikas are not numerous; however, they occupy an important place. They mark unique ceremonial artefacts, such as the axe (hammer?) of Gediminas' Castle in Vilnius, and expensive items such as the silver alloy rings discovered in Kernavė (Kriveikiškis) cemetery. It should be noted that metal items marked with the swastika, probably the most durable finds from the 13th and 14th centuries, account for only some of the artefacts shaped or marked with swastikas. Not much information has been gathered about bone, antler, wooden and clay artefacts, and so far none at all has been found about the swastika in Lithuanian archaeological textiles.

Just the unique 12th and 13th-century remains of woollen wraps in Latgalian inhumations in Latvia testifies to the complex, multi-stage shapes of swastikas, not known

Figure 6. A marked bottom potsherd found in the Lower Town at Kernavė, 32x70 mm. KMR A8991.

anywhere else at that time (e.g. Ģinters 1936, pp. 33–57; Zariņa 1970, pp. 60–107; Vaska 2019, pp. 294–297) (Fig. 11). A comparison with 13th and 14th-century finds in Lithuania indicates that in the Baltic countries, the symbol had different shapes during the same period. This may have been due to the eastern and western routes by which the swastika travelled to the Baltic world (cf. Bliujienė 2000, p. 20); however, at the same time, we cannot rule out the local origins of the swastika symbol, and its independent development.

In fact, 'the swastika can by no means be considered as an attribute of the Baltic character' (Bliujienė 2000, p. 22), but its shapes, known from the above-mentioned graves of the Latgalian tribe, were in many cases unique, and therefore undoubtedly represent part of the Baltic identity. Another question is how to explain the simple and clear swastikas of the 13th and 14th centuries, known from Vilnius and Kernavė.[15] Maybe the return to the original shapes of the symbol during the formation of the culture and religion of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was conscious?

It should be emphasised that no canonical swastika can be found on the 13th and 14th-century horizon of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Moreover, on flat surfaces of one-sided artefacts, it did not have a constant right or left rotary direction: often the symbol in one direction was substituted by one in the opposite direction (cf. Vėlius 2005, p. 46). On two-sided artefacts, such as the axe from Gediminas' Castle, the swastika is also facing both directions

(Fig. 1). For comparison, the direction of the swastikas of Latgalian wraps depended on the formation of their folds, and the side of the swastika which was to be at the top. In addition, some of the latter signs had perpendiculars facing one direction and immediately bent in the opposite direction (Fig. 11).

The fourth type of swastika, simultaneously facing in opposite directions, was a symbol coinciding with the principle of the mirror, engraved on the wooden table for the potter's wheel from Bajorai (a right-facing symbol) and impressed on the bottom of the moulded vessel (a left-facing symbol, Figs. 8–10).

The differences emerging in the exploration of the symbol drawing schema may also be significant. At least three types of swastika were engraved on antler and wood: (1) the crosspieces were simply crossed at a right angle; (2) to one crosspiece, halves of the other crosspiece were attached; and (3) all four swastika elbows were carved separately from the centre (Fig. 12).

As is evidenced by archaeological data, the first shape of the swastika was original, probably the most widely distributed and constantly recurring in 19th and early 20th-century ethnographic material. It indicated the genetic connection of the swastika with the cross, the sign of fire, characteristic of the religious traditions of ancient Lithuanians and all Balts (cf. Zariņa 1999, Plate 18:4, 19:8). The regular, equal proportions of that swastika were not as significant as the intersection of the crosspieces themselves, because that was where the mythical power of the sign lay.

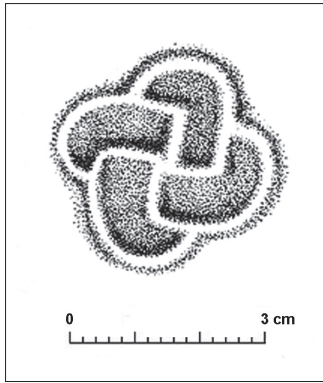[15] Only some of the vessels from Bajorai cemetery were marked with a complex swastika.

Figure 7. The swastika on a bottom potsherd found in Bajorai cemetery (a negative). Excavations of 2006, find No 1259 (KšM) (drawing by D. Tomkuvienė).
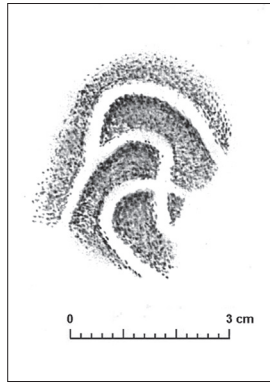
Figure 8. The swastika on a bottom potsherd found in Bajorai cemetery (a negative). Excavations of 2011, finds Nos 2793 and 2973 (KšM) (drawing by V. Vaitkevičiūtė).
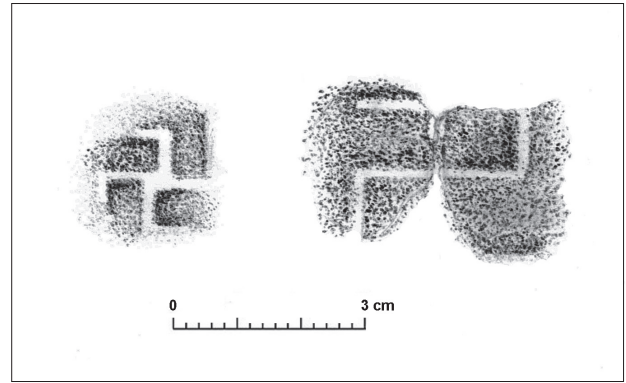
Figure 9. The swastikas on bottom potsherds found in Bajorai cemetery (negatives). Excavations of 2006, find No 440 (left); and of 2007, finds No 1437, 1527 (right) (KšM) (drawings by V. Vaitkevičiūtė).

Figure 10. Three vessels found in Bajorai cemetery and restored based on potsherds at Vilniaus puodžių cechas (Vilnius Potters' Unit) in 2012, 14th–early 15th century (photograph by K. Stoškus).

Figure 11. Stāmeriena Anna cemetery (Gulbene district, Latvia). A reconstruction of a wrap and its weft (detail), 12th–13th century (based on Balgalve-Treimane 2018, p. 45).

The second shape of the swastika was close to variants of the half-swastika, mostly known from plaited sashes and other archaeological and ethnographic artefacts (cf. Tumėnas 2002, Plate XIV:10). It was also reminiscent of the shape of the swastika marking the Kernavė oven peel (Fig. 6). That, in turn, showed that the perpendiculars of the swastika were not the main focus; two perpendiculars on opposite sides bending in two different directions would have sufficed for the mythological load of the symbol.

The third swastika was fundamentally different from the first two. However, a similar sign already existed in deep prehistory (cf. Baldwin 1915, pp. 155–166). That shape seemed to be the closest to the swastika with an empty framed area left in the centre (Fig. 11), which was one of the two Sun sign (*Saules zīme*) types (e.g. Vaitkevičienė 2001, pp. 38–39).

It was widely believed that the swastika was a solar sign (Healey 1977, p. 294; Zemītis 2004; Vėlius 2005, p. 49), and the direction of its perpendiculars was related to the direction of the movement of celestial bodies (cf. D'Alviella 1894, pp. 57–76). However, in the 13th and 14th centuries in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the core of the swastika, an equilateral cross, meant fire. There is no reason to believe that two or four perpendiculars of the cross, which in that case should be regarded as an image of tongues of fire, could change the symbolic meaning of the cross. It is quite a different matter if the swastika is placed within

the frame and becomes part of the Sun sign (Zariņa 1999, Plate 18:3).

Perkūnas and/or Kalvelis, another god of the 13th-century pantheon close to the former, emerge in all the contexts of artefacts marked with the swastika that are important to us. Sources of Baltic religion and mythology, as well as ethnographic data, confirm the direct connection between the cross as a symbol of fire and the thunderer Perkūnas.[16] It is believed that may have given the god Perkūnas a certain advantage. However, today we can only guess how in the 14th century a collision of two outwardly similar signs, the Baltic fire cross and the Christian cross, took place.

Attention is drawn to the fact that most of the cruciform-shaped pendants of the second half of the 14th and the 15th century found in Lithuania had exactly the shape of the cross of fire (e.g. Svetikas 2007; also see Iwanowska and Niemyjska 2004, p. 98, Plate II). The most critical archaeologists can allegedly understand them as 'sources of Lithuanian Christianisation' acquired during pilgrimages (e.g. Svetikas 2007, pp. 51–52). However, this interpretation is contradicted by the excavations of the Bajorai and Obeliai cremations. Moreover, in inhumations, these crosses were usually found in necklaces together with bells belonging to the sphere of Perkūnas' sacredness (Kazimieraitytė 2013, pp. 50–52; also see: Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė and Luchtanas 1979, p. 107).

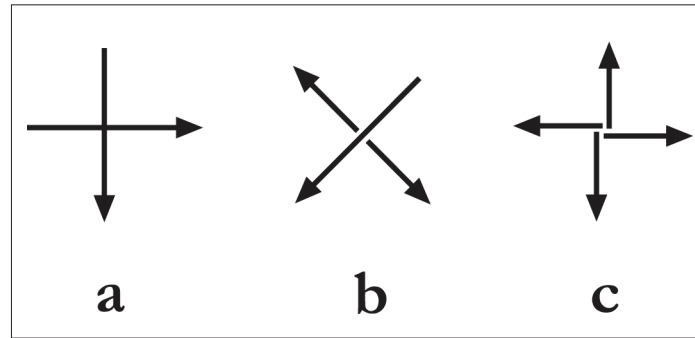[16] Fire was the central feature of the religion of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (cf. Vaitkevičius 2015).

Figure 12. The differences that emerge when engraving the cross at the centre of a swastika (a. an axe from Gediminas' Castle; b. a horse collar from the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania; c. a wooden table for a potter's wheel from Bajorai (the author's schema).

Therefore, the meaning attached to his article by, say, a Christian craftsman in Livonia was not so important in that particular case, because in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the owner of a cross who professed the old religion saw in it the sign of fire, or Perkūnas, the image of which was vivid both in his mythological imagination and in the reality of life at that time, as well as in later centuries (cf. Vaitkevičius 2008).[17] The connection between fire, or Perkūnas, and the Christian cross may in the future also contribute to finding an answer to the question how such vivid character traits, typical of Perkūnas, emerged in the Lithuanian and Latvian folklore image of 'God' (e.g. God thunders and sends rain) (Vaitkevičienė 2001, pp. 27–29).

Conclusions

The period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania before the introduction of Christianity was interesting in many ways. It is important that a new Lithuanian identity emerged, under the influence of the traditions of the Baltic tribes and the outside world. Changes in the ideology and mythology of that time have been noted and explored, and, after an analysis in the present paper of the case of the swastika as a typical symbol of the 13th and 14th centuries, the following conclusions have been drawn:

1) During the period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, some artefacts made of antler, wood, clay and non-ferrous metals, intended for everyday life and celebrations, or for specific ceremonies, were marked with the swastika;

2) The swastika did not have a canon of representation at that time. Its perpendiculars on one-sided items were often in one or the other rotary direction, while on two-sided objects, the swastika simultaneously faced both directions, which can also be said of its coinciding mirror images;

3) In the context of artefacts shaped or marked with a swastika, two sovereign gods of the 13th-century Lithuanian pantheon emerge: Perkūnas and Kalvelis. This confirms the genetic connection of the swastika with the symbol of fire, characteristic of the Baltic and ancient Lithuanian religious tradition, i.e. the equilateral cross. There is no reason to believe that two or four of its perpendiculars could change their symbolic meaning. However, an additional protective function was provided by turning the entire symbol 45 degrees;

4) The connection with fire and Perkūnas separates the ancient Lithuanian swastika from the universal symbol. There is still a lack of information today to decide whether the difference arose from the swastika as a solar symbol that entered the Baltic environment, or whether it was the result of the independent development of the symbol, familiar to all Indo-European and many other cultures.

Acknowledgments

Abbreviations

Literature

Arch. Lituana – Archaeologia Lituana

ATL – Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje ... metais. Vilnius (since 1967)

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[17] Interestingly, when baptised and taught how to cross themselves at the holy Dubuliai Oak, the inhabitants of Kernavė complained that Perkūnas was sending them bone pain (Piasecka et al., 2005, pp. 238, 248).

Museums and institutions

KMR – Museum of Kernavė Archaeological Site / Kernavės archeologinės vietovės muziejus

KšM – Kaišiadorys Museum / Kaišiadorių muziejus

LNM – National Museum of Lithuania / Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus

LTR – Lithuanian Folklore Archives of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore (collection number and folklore unit indicated)

VDKM – Vytautas the Great War Museum / Vytauto Didžiojo karo muziejus

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SVASTIKA LIETUVOJE: XIII–XIV A. HORIZONTAS

VYKINTAS VAITKEVIČIUS

Santrauka

Straipsnis skirtas svastikai, ja paženklintiems arba svastikos formą turintiems daiktams, kurie priklauso XIII–XIV a. Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės laikotarpio horizontui. Ieškoma atsakymo į klausimą, koks jis – universalus ženklas ir simbolis – senovės lietuvių kultūros ir religijos terpėje, kokių būta svastikos formų ir ją lydinčių mitinių reikšmių.

XIII–XIV a. archeologinėje medžiagoje svastikos nėra gausios, tačiau užima reikšmingą vietą. Jos ženklina tokius vienetinius apeiginius daiktus kaip Vilniaus Gedimino pilies kieme rastas raginis dviašmenis kirvis (1 pav.) ir tokius brangius dirbinius kaip Kernavės (Kriveikiškio) kapinyno kapuose rasti sidabro lydinio žiedai. Apskritai svastika buvo ženklinami ir kasdienei apyvokai, ir šventėms (ar konkrečioms apeigoms) skirti daiktai, pagaminti iš rago, medžio, molio, spalvotų metalų (2–6, 10, 11 pav.). Tačiau ženklas turėjo skirtingas formas, jo vaizdavimo kanono nebūta (7–9 pav.). Beje, svastikos statiniai ant vienpusių daiktų vienodai dažnai buvo kreipiami abiem kryptimis, o ant dvipusių daiktų svastika vienu metu žiūrėjo į abi puses, kas pasakytina ir apie sutampančius veidrodinius jos atvaizdus.

Reikšmingi taip pat gali būti tyrinėjant ženklo braižymo schemą išryškėję skirtumai – ant rago ir medžio svastikos raižytos bent jau trejopai (12 pav.): 1) Kryžmos viena su kita stačiu kampu buvo kryžiuojamos paprastai, ir tai yra pirminė, bene labiausiai paplitusi, forma, kuri nuolat kartojasi XIX a. – XX a. pirmosios pusės etnografinėje medžiagoje; 2) Prie vienos iš kryžmų buvo jungiamos kitos kryžmos pusės – ši forma artima daugiausia iš vytinių juostų ir kitų archeologinių bei etnografinių objektų žinomiems pusinės svastikos variantams; 3) Visos keturios svastikos alkūnės iš centro buvo rėžiamos atskirai, ir ši svastikos schema iš esmės skiriasi nuo pirmųjų dviejų. Tokia forma artima svastikai, kurios centre buvo paliekamas tuščias įrėmintas plotas, o tai yra vienas iš dviejų Saulės ženklo tipų.

Svastika paženklintų arba svastikos formą turinčių daiktų kontekstuose išniro du XIII a. lietuvių panteono dievai suverenai – Perkūnas ir Kalvelis. Tai patvirtina genetinį svastikos ryšį su baltų ir senovės lietuvių religinei tradicijai būdingu ugnies ženklu – lygiakraščiu kryžiumi. Nėra pagrindo manyti, kad du arba keturi jo statiniai keistų

simbolinę reikšmę. Tačiau papildomą apsauginę funkciją teikė viso šio ženklo pasukimas 45 laipsnių kampu.

Ryšys su ugnimi ir Perkūnu senovės lietuvių svastiką skiria nuo universalaus simbolio. Šiandien dar trūksta duomenų pasakyti, ar šis skirtumas kilo kitados svastikai su soliarine simbolika patekus į baltiškąją terpę, ar yra nepriklausomos šio ženklo, pažįstamo visoms indoeuropiečių ir daugeliui kitų kultūrų, raidos pasekmė.