

● **THE PLINKAIGALIS BURIAL GROUND**

Vytautas Kazakevičius

The Plinkaigalis Burial Ground was investigated in 1977-1984. It is dated to the 5th-6th centuries, and is located in the Kėdainiai District. An area of 4 500 sq m was investigated, and 364 inhumation graves (with 379 skeletons), 8 cremation graves, and 3 graves of horses were uncovered. Out of these graves, four ones belonged to the Late Neolithic Corded Ware Culture. Buried in the cemetery, were 142 children of both sexes, 88 women and 120 men. Thus, during the period of 200 years, Plinkaigalis had been inhabited by a population of about 35-43 people.

Stones are characteristic of the inner structure of grave pits of the Plinkaigalis Burial Ground, which corresponds to the burial traditions of Central Lithuania in the first centuries. Stones were placed at the bottom of the pits, beside the dead or the coffins. They were found in 173 graves. There were from 1 to 21 stones per grave. In 83 graves in Plinkaigalis, traces of wooden coffins were noticed. Another important burial feature is orientation of the dead. In Plinkaigalis, orientation of 376 skeletons was analysed, except for 4 skeletons dating back to the Stone Age. Skeletal orientation falls into 48 groups. Most of the graves were directed E. 33 dead were directed W. A more detailed analysis of the orientation of the skeletons shows that men and women in Plinkaigalis were buried in different directions. Men were oriented W, NW and SW with slight deviations to N, NE. Women were oriented E, SW, NE with slight deviations to S. An absolute majority of the dead were buried on their backs, their arms bent on the chest, waist or pelvis, with legs outstretched. Multiple burials comprise a separate category. Ten graves of this kind were uncovered in Plinkaigalis. There were 8 cremation graves. In Plinkaigalis, the rite of cremation was accepted gradually, and for some time the dead were buried inhumed along with cremations. All the cremation graves are dated to the 7th century. Three graves of horses with 4 skeletons of horses were uncovered in the western part of the burial ground, in the region of human cremation graves.

Plinkaigalis yielded more than 2200 artifacts of metal, glass, amber, stone, and clay. Most of these artifacts had been used by their owners, and were put into their graves when they passed away. For instance, 91 male graves contained socketed axes or narrow-edged axes with a butt. In 72 men's and boy's graves, work knives were found. As far as weapons are concerned, 39 male graves yielded battle knives which were most often placed on both sides of the waist (20 graves). Six

spearheads were found, 2 of which were in inhumation graves, placed near the head and the left side. Eight large drinking horns were found. They had been used in everyday life and for ritual ceremonies.

A total of 103 axes, 85 knives, 8 knife-sickles, 57 awls, 20 spinning-whorls, 4 whetstones, 41 battle knives, 6 spearheads, a sword and other tools and weapons were found in Plinkaigalis.

Ethnic identification of the Plinkaigalis Burial Ground is very important, as it is located on the border of the ethnocultural areas of Central Lithuania and Samogitia. The burials of Plinkaigalis, with stones at the bottom of the grave pits, orientation of the dead men and women towards different parts of the world, beginning of cremation in the 7th century, graves with skeletons of horses, types of artifacts of the material culture and adornments, all point to the fact that Plinkaigalis Burial Ground belonged to the community of Aukštaičiai (Highlanders).



● **MARVELĖ**

Audrius Astrauskas

The Marvelė burial-ground is located on the south-west border of Kaunas, on the left bank of the Nemunas, about one kilometer east of the Marvelė hill-fort and nearby manor. Although the first information about artifact findings at Marvelė dates back to the mid-19th century, it was only in 1991, during preparations to build a waste water cleaning plant, that modern archaeological investigations were initiated by Mindaugas Bertašius. Three graves from the Old Iron Age (i.e. the Roman period) were found at that time. In the same year, an expedition by the Department of Archaeology at Vilnius University (A. Astrauskas and M. Bertašius) began systematic exploration of the site. The findings of the first year demonstrated that Marvelė was a rich and well preserved cemetery which belongs to the flat burial-ground culture of Central Lithuania. During eight years (1991-1998) of investigation an area of 20 700 m was excavated and the graves of 1 140 humans and 205 horses have been found. These numbers leave no doubt that Marvelė is the biggest burial-ground in Lithuania dating to the first millennium AD.

The present data indicate that the earliest burials at Marvelė date to the middle of the 2nd century AD, the latest graves to the 11-12th centuries.

During that millennium, both burial customs and trade relations of the native people changed dynamically.

Inhumations predominated during the Old Iron Age, as elsewhere in the flat burial-grounds of Central Lithuania. Males had their heads oriented westward and women eastward. This custom is strictly observed, however, only in the beginning of the period. Another custom was to arrange stones at the bottom of the grave. It is thought that stones may have propped up the sides of the log coffins, as well as to symbolise the "house" of the dead.

The archaeological data show that during the middle of the Roman period, the inhabitants of Marvelė maintained active trade relations with their southern neighbours, the Bogaczewo Culture (Mazovia) who may have been related to the West Balts. The Old Iron Age undoubtedly represented one of the richest periods in the prehistory of the region. Not without reason M. Gimbutienė called it the "Golden Age" of the Balts. A high level of cultural development is indicated by several graves at Marvelė, dating to the third century, which show that the individuals had successfully survived head trepanation surgery.

By the late third century, the community of Marvelė underwent a crisis. The population decreased, as did the number of burial goods. Traditional trade relations were severed, and trade routes began to shift to eastern neighbours. Marvelė society regained its vigour, however, at the beginning of the Middle Iron Age (5th c.). The number of the inhabitants began to increase, and a prosperous sector in the community developed. The role of the war-

rior became more important. Males were often buried with a large number of weapons and ornaments. Silver ornaments came into fashion. Changes are also evident in burial customs - the cremation of bodies began. The earliest cremations, dated to the middle of the 5th century, were scarce. This custom became firmly established only after several centuries.

Cremation graves differed from earlier burials. The earliest were arranged in small individual pits, with fragments of burnt bones that are massive and cleanly picked up from the ritual funeral pyre. The later graves contain smaller parts of bones with plenty of charred material, together with burned or broken burial goods. The grave-sites at the end of the first millennium and the beginning of the second represent a collective cemetery.

A very interesting aspect of burial monuments in Central Lithuania is the presence of horse burials. Some 205 graves of horses were found at Marvelė. Many of them were buried in a separate part of the burial-ground, away from the contemporary graves of people. Small grave pits, with one side that is sloped, were often dug for the horses. Archaeological and osteological data suggest that many horses were killed in the grave itself. Thus they were clearly being offered to their dead masters.

The investigations at Marvelė are ongoing, and we hope that they will continue to provide important new evidence on the

prehistory of Central Lithuania.

