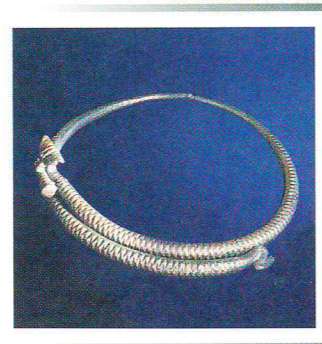
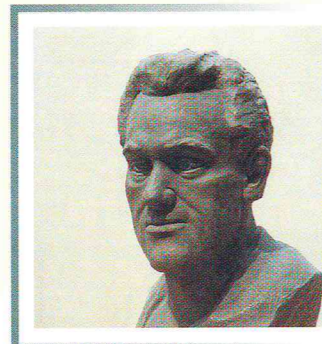


● TAURAPILIS

Adolfas Tautavičius

The well-known Taurapilis hill-fort is located in eastern Lithuania, Utena District, on the southern shore of the Tauragnai lake. There were badly disturbed barrows 400 m south-east of it. The barrow cemetery consisted of two groups - the western and the eastern, separated by 200-300 m. In 1970 and 1971, remains of the barrows were excavated by the Institute of Lithuanian History and the National Museum. A total of 15 barrow sites was excavated and another 12 trenches of different size were dug in an attempt to localize the disturbed barrows. Barrows of the western and eastern group are contemporary in terms of chronology. Remains of 8 barrows were found in the western part, only two of which yielded intact burials. The barrows are from 6-7 to 12-13 m in diameter, they were encircled with rings of boulders. Found in the pit under the earth pile of barrows, were single male inhumation burials of warriors with a riding horse, supplied with a lot of weapons. These are the earliest rich burials of warriors with riding horses in Lithuanian (in the tribal sense) barrows. An exceptional example in terms of dimensions and particularly rich burial equipment, was the central barrow. We may hypothesize that a "duke" was buried in this part of the barrow cemetery together with his "escort". The burials are dated to the second half of the 5th century - beginning of the 6th century. During excavations of the barrows, slightly later cremation burials were found without any grave goods, dated to the 6th century. In the eastern group of the barrows, where 7 barrow sites were excavated and 10 trenches dug in search for destroyed burials (which resulted in finding 2 male graves), ordinary members of the community had been buried. The burial pattern of this barrow group does not differ from that of the western one, though men were buried in smaller pits, grave goods were much more modest, virtually no ornaments were found, and there were no riding horses in the graves. In terms of grave goods, these burials resemble male burials excavated in other barrow cemeteries of the same period in eastern Lithuania (Degsne, Riklikai). Cremation burials which were later destroyed must have most probably existed as well. Excavation evidence from the Taurapilis barrow cemetery suggests a well-advanced social differentiation - formation of tribal aristocracy and emergence of chiefs, and provides information about the material culture of inhabitants of eastern Lithuania in the 5th-6th centuries, as well as their relations with other countries.



TAURAPILIS "DUKE"

Barrow 5 situated in the central position of the western part of the barrow cemetery stands out from the remaining barrows in size (13.5 m in diameter, 1.5 m high) and the exceptional richness of the burial, with some artefacts unique in the Lithuanian archaeological material. The burial of the Taurapilis "Duke" has yielded perhaps the largest set of imported artefacts that have yet been found in cemeteries excavated in the territory of Lithuania.

The skeleton of a 40-50 year-old male was found under piled gravel in the centre of the barrow, in a grave pit measuring 4 m in length and 2.8 m in width, 1.6 m deep from the horizon of the barrow. The individual was buried with his head oriented to the west, his arms folded on the chest. Weapons prevail in the grave equipment, which characterizes the buried individual as a distinguished warrior and chief.

There was a big whetstone at the head of the burial. The garment of the buried individual was fastened with a bronze crossbow brooch, he had a silver spiral ring on his left hand's finger. At his right side, partly on the chest, was an iron double-blade sword, 91 cm long, provided with a wooden hilt. Especially exquisite was the wooden scabbard, covered with leather and decorated with silver, gilded mountings, and embellished with an ornament in relief. The sword was attached to a belt by two decorative massive silver, gilded buckles. Such swords are rare specimens in the Lithuanian archaeological material of the 5th-6th centuries: one more find is

known from a 4th century burial at the Krikštonys burial cemetery (Lazdijai district). More sword scabbards of such an exquisite make have not been found either in the Baltic lands or the neighbouring Slavic countries. Found under the blade of the sword, was a cylinder-shaped bead made of limestone and set in a silver, gilded binding, the shape of which was a semicircle. Following the traditions of the time, it had been most probably fastened to the hilt with a strap, as was very popular with the Hunnish and Germanic tribes. The other two buckles that have been recovered - a massive silver gilt buckle, the shape and ornament of which are characteristic of Crimea and the Balkans, and an oval-shaped iron buckle decorated with garnets, set into gold-plated nests - are also unique finds in the Lithuanian archaeological material. Analogues to the latter buckle are known from the 5th century archaeological material of Yugoslavia and Hungary.

Close to the sword, bronze tweezers, an iron knife, and an imported drinking horn in silver mountings were found. The deceased individual was buried with massive, bronze spurs decorated with silver, typical of western Balts. Two spears had been placed on the right side of the buried individual, as witnessed by the find of socketed spearheads at his feet. On the left side, at the legs, an axe was found. The legs of the buried individual were covered with a thick linen cloth, and a shield was put over him, preserved as an iron umbo. The burial also included a horse without riding bit, buried on his side on the left of the deceased, its head directed to the west.

The above grave presumably represents a burial of a warrior - chief of a few tribes, and, in terms of inventory, it is close to the 6th century "Ducal" burials from Svaicaria (Poland) of the Pro-Jatvingian tribes. On the basis of the burial rites and the prevailing local character of burial goods (ornaments, spears or spearheads, umbo, whetstone), an assumption has been made that the grave belongs to a local inhabitant. The existence of such luxurious imported artefacts, which, judging from the shapes and ornamental patterns, could have originated in the provinces of the Dnieper basin, shows that the buried individual had an exceptional social status.

How had the warrior from Taurapilis got hold of imported artefacts? They might have been a booty of war, brought from other countries, perhaps obtained by exchange, or presented as gifts. According to written sources, the Aestii visited Theodoric in the beginning of the 6th century and received presents from him. There might have been more delegations going to southern countries even earlier, and the warrior from Taurapilis might have taken part in one of such ventures. The above mentioned sword, found in a scabbard so lavishly decorated, could only have been accessible to representatives of tribal aristocracy at that time, and it could have even been a royal present. A sculptural reconstruction of the face of the Taurapilis "Duke" has been made on the basis of skeletal data.

