

**POTTERY IN CURONIAN CREMATION
BURIALS. SOME ASPECTS OF INTERACTION
ACROSS THE BALTIC SEA IN THE LATE
VIKING AGE AND EARLY MEDIEVAL PERIOD**

Audronė Bliujienė

This article is intended to survey Curonian cremation burials with pottery and reflections of such custom in the Baltic Rim as a part of the contacts across the Baltic Sea. The problem of enclosing pottery to the late Curonian cremation burials is connected with emergence of Baltic ware (Baltic pottery or *Ostseekeramik*) in the whole Baltic environment especially at the end of Merovingian Period and Viking Age. However, Baltic ware and different processes that followed, provoke some changes in Curonian burial practise. One of these changes was an emergence of indigenous shaped by hands vessels used in every-day life in the Curonian cremation burials in the 10th century. Vessels of indigenous types have been used even in the 11th century in the Curonian cremation burials. Baltic ware started its existence in the Curonian cremation burials at the end of the 10th–11th century. All Curonian vessels found in cremation burials were deliberately broken. In general, vessels of indigenous types and Baltic ware displaced miniature pots, which have been enough constant feature of the Curonian burial rites from the Migration Period. It might be that vessels were used as temporary urns or containers to bring cremated bones and fragments of the grave goods from funeral pyre to the burial site. It is very likely that vessels have been used in funeral rituals.

Key words: Curonia (Couronia), Curonians (Cours), miniature pots, vessels of indigenous types, Baltic ware, Baltic Rim.

Audronė Bliujienė, Vilnius University, Faculty of History, Department of Archaeology, 7 St. Universiteto, Vilnius 01513, Lithuania; audrone.b@ldm.lt

**Some aspects of Curonian
burial practice at the end
of the 10th-11th century**

In the Curonian burial practise inhumation and cremation coexisted at the 10th – beginning of the 11th century. However, in the middle of the 11th century cremation became dominating burial practice. Spread of cremation burial practice was synchronised with the movement of Curonians to the north. Cremation burials appeared at Matkule, Sārājī, Zviedri, Priekule and some other cemeteries, in the second part of the 11th century. These cemeteries are located north of the river Venta.

Pottery in the late Curonian cremation burials is connected with emergence

of Baltic ware (Baltic pottery or *Ostseekeramik*) in the south-eastern Baltic environment, especially at the end of Merovingian Period and Viking Age (fig. 1). The process of morphological assimilation of Slavonic, or Slavonic inspired pottery into Baltic environment started in the 7th–8th centuries, perhaps in the territory of Elbląg and Galindia (Wróblewski & Nowakiewicz 2003, 168–178, fig. 1; Кулаков 1994, 37). However, Baltic ware reached southern Curonian lands only at the end of the 10th century and in the 11th century (Žulkus 1997, 214–222). At the same time Curonians used to put into the cremation burials roughly shaped by hands vessels of indigenous types and miniature pots. Baltic ware in the Curonian settlements and

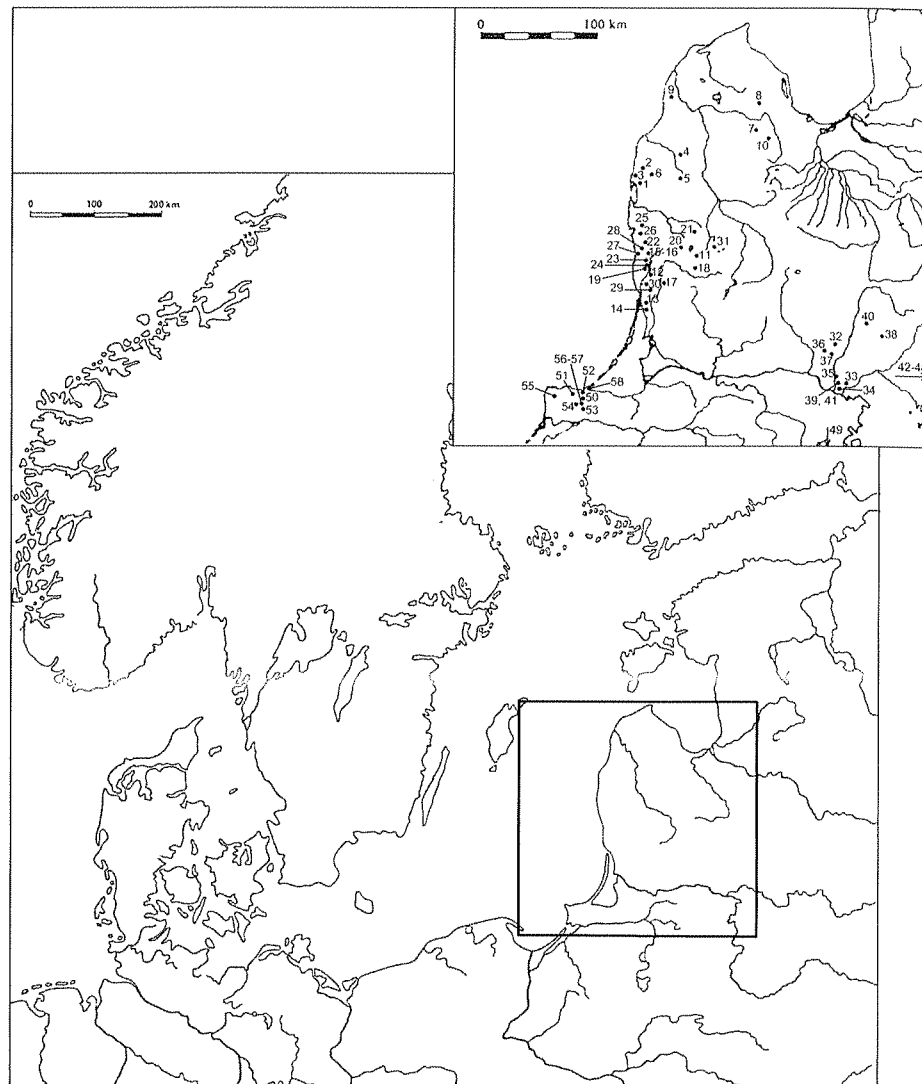


Fig. 1. Distributions of Baltic ware and shaped by hands pottery in the Curonian cemeteries and in burial grounds of the south-eastern Baltic region (Sadauskaitė-Mulevičienė 1965; Žulkus 1997; Кулаков, 1994; Асарис, 1997 and additions by A. Bluijienė).

Curland (Latvia): 1- Atkalni, 2- Dīri Durbes, 3- Grobiņa, 4- Kapenieki Raņķu, 5- Kazdangas Apariņas, 6- Priedena Grobiņas, 7- Sabiles Krievu graves, 8- Sārāji Libagu, 9- Strīki Vārves, 10- Zviedri Pūres; *South-western part of Lithuania:* 11- Akmenskynė, 12- Anduliai, 13- Aukštkiemiai, 14- Bandužiai, 15, 16- Genčai I-II, 17- Gintarai, 18- Gintališkė, 19- Girkaliai, 20- Godeliai, 21- Griežė, 22- Jazdai, 23- Kiauleikiai, 24- Kretinga, 25- Laiviai, 26- Lazdininkai, 27- Palanga, 28- Prysmančiai I-II, 29- Ramučiai, 30- Slengiai, 31- Siraičiai; *Central Lithuania:* 32- Grauziai, 33- Karmėlava, 34- Marvelė, 35- Radikiai, 36- Rimaisiai, 37- Ruseiniai, 38- Obeliai, 39- Sargėnai, 40- Tulpakiemis, 41- Veršvai; *Eastern Lithuania:* 42- Čiobiškis, 43- Kapitoniškės, 44- Rokantiškės, 45- Sausiai-Bevandeniškės, 46- Skubėtai, 47- Stakai, 48- Žvirbliai; *Jatvingian area:* 49- Pamusiai; *Sambian Peninsula (Russia):* 50- Bledau (Sosnovka), 51- Hünenberg (Dobroje "Gora Velikanov"), 52- Irzekapinis (Klincovka), 53- Kleinheide, 54- Laptau (Muromskoje), 55- Schuditten (Orechovo), 56- Schulstein (Volnoje), 57- Vetrovo, 58- Wiskiauten (Mochovoje).

in cemeteries originates simultaneous.

Baltic ware are one of substantial questions for understanding mutual interaction processes between Slavonic, Finnic, Germanic and Baltic cultural groups around the Baltic Sea during the Late Viking Age and Early Medieval period.

Miniature pots in Curonian cremation burials

In order to understand appearance of vessels in Curonian cremation burials at first should be mentioned miniature clay pots. Various shaped miniature pots were often found in the Curonian inhumations from the 5th century till the 9th century or even till the end of the 10th century (Nakaitė 1964, 66–68, fig. 12; Ozere 1986, 48–58, figs. 1–5). Differently shaped miniature pots have been inherited from the West Lithuanian tradition of stone-circle graves dated to the Late Roman Iron Age (Michelbertas 1986, 40; Ozere 1986, 58).

Burials with miniature clay pots formed about one third part of Curonians' inhumation burials of the 7th–9th centuries (Tautavičius 1996, 268–270). Latvian scholar Ingrida Ozere-Virse classified miniature pots into eight groups (Ozere 1986, fig. 2). Miniature pots are known from Curonian male, female and children's inhumation burials during the late Migration Period and early Viking Age. However, only one miniature pot has been found in each inhumation grave.¹ A custom of enclosing miniature pots to the cremation burials was transferred with some modifications.

The main transformation was that the number of miniature pots extremely decreased in Curonian cremation burials in the 10th–11th centuries. Miniature pots were

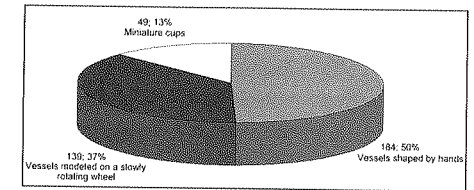


Fig. 2. Vessels of all types of the southern Curonian lands.

found only in 13% of the southern Curonian cremation burials of this period (fig. 2). Decline in the number of miniature pots in burials of the Curonians was synchronised with spread of some new features in cremation burial customs. Appearance of vessels used in every-day life was one of the most important novelties in the Curonian burial practise in the 10th century.

The Curonians transformed the shape of miniature pots and it was another novelty in the custom of depositing miniature pots in their cremation burials. Miniature pots started to be uniform and mostly resembling very little cruet in the 10th century (figs. 23: 4–7; 4: 15–16). Such miniature pots or little cruets belong to the eighth group after the classification proposed by Ozere-Virse (Ozere 1986, 55–56, fig. 4: 8–10). The height of these miniatures is just 1.5–3 cm (sometimes 4 cm); the diameter of the base is 1.5–2 cm; the diameter of the opening is 2–4 cm. All they were manufactured very inaccurately, the sides were curved, the base – irregular, and besides this, they were poorly baked or were not baked at all. Surface and rim of these small cruets are not decorated. All of these miniature pots were not only broken, but in a number of cases only a half, a third part or only some potsherds of a pot have been placed into the burial (figs. 3: 4–7; 4: 15). It should be noted, that two or even four such miniature pots have been found

¹ Two miniature clay pots are huge exception in the southern Curonian inhumation graves. Two miniature clay pots have been found from inhumation burials at Palanga cemetery (graves nos. 118 and 150) and Laiviai cemetery (grave 124).

in the Curonian cremation burials of the 11th century.²

Small pots or little cruets started to appear together with used in every-day life, and mostly shaped by hands, vessels. Such a combination of a small cruet and a big vessel was very substantial feature of the burial customs at the end of the 10th and in the 11th century (fig. 4: 12). At the end of the 11th century miniature pots disappeared from Curonian culture forevermore, because they were displaced by ordinary vessels used in daily life.

Vessels shaped by hands or made on a slowly rotating wheel in the Curonian cremation burials

Vessels used in every-day life appeared together with the development of cremation burial customs in the north-west of Courland in the 10th century (figs. 1; 4: 12; 6: 4). Perhaps, first potsherds belonging to a shaped by hands vessels were found in inhumations in the late 7th century and 9th century in the southern Curonian cemeteries (fig. 7: 4).³ It is noteworthy that the usage of vessels was not a rule but just an exception in the Curonian inhumation burials.

Vessels used in every-day life started to be one of constant features of Curonian cremation burials from the Late Viking Age and early Medieval Period (figs. 4–6). Custom of depositing vessels into Curonian cremation burials was most intensively used in the 11th century and was known till the middle of the 13th century. In Courland vessels are known even from cremation burials of the 14th century.

Several deliberately broken vessels have been found at Grobiņa cemetery (graves nos. 35 and 79; see: Nerman 1958, pl. 25: 145, 35: 203). Only potsherds have been found from eight cremation burials of nine excavated at Zviedri Pūres cemetery, which is the most distant to the east Curonian site (Mugurēvičs 1987, 60–63). Cremation burials at Zviedri Pūres cemetery belong to the 12th–14th centuries. Potsherds are known from the others Curonian cemeteries in the north Courland (Atkalni, Dīri Durbes, Kazdangas Apariņas, Priedeņa Grobiņas, Raņķu Kapenieki, Sāraji Libagu and Stīķi Vārves).

Just potsherds belonging to one to four or even seven different vessels are found in Curonian cremation burials (figs. 4: 12; 5: 3; 6: 4). These potsherds are scattered and dispersed in the grave pits. As a rule, potsherds were not put together in one or in two places, but the main tendency was to disperse potsherds in a grave pit. Potsherds were found in a different depth of the grave pits. All vessels were intentionally broken during funeral ceremonies (Gaerte 1929, 328; Mulevičienė 1971, 119; Stankus 1995, 87). It can be assumed that those vessels were not only intentionally broken, but also sometimes especially smashed into enough small pieces. This conclusion was made after analyses of the 857 burials from 18 southern Curonian sites (fig. 8). Pottery has been found in the 241 cremation burials. It should be mentioned that the Curonians had a tradition to put into the grave pit only one part of a vessel (half or third part) or even just 1–2 potsherds (figs. 4: 12; 5: 3; 6: 4). At Palanga, Gintarai, Girkaliai and Kretinga cemeteries mostly small potsherds of opening, middle part or bottom were dispersed in huge disorder in the burial.

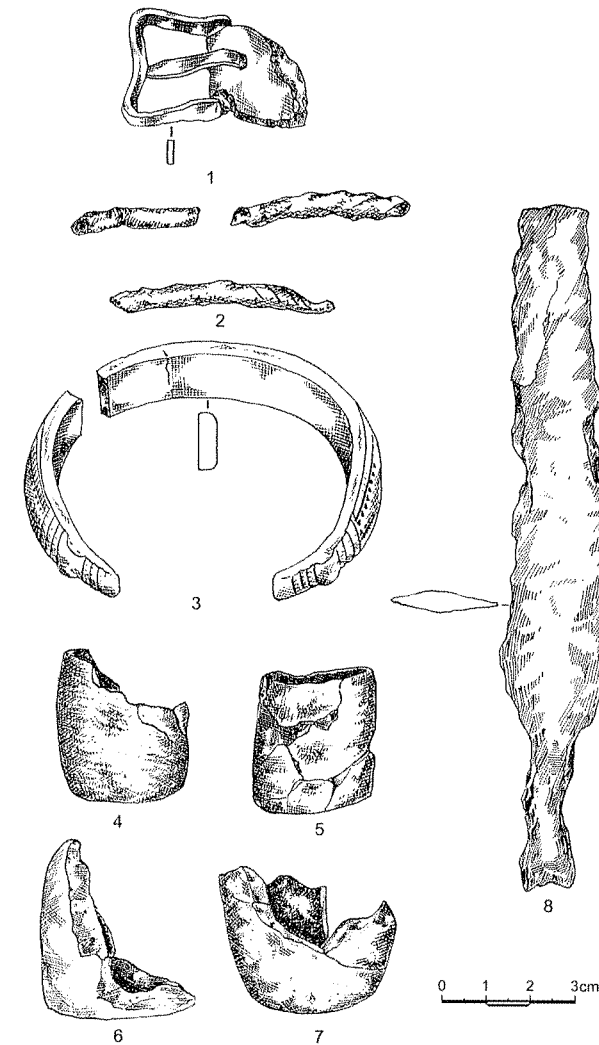


Fig. 3. Cremation burial no. 200 of Palanga. 1- belt buckle, 2- pieces of neck-ring, 3- bracelet with animal terminals, 4-7- miniature pots, 8- socketed spearhead (1-3 bronze, 4-7 clay, 8 iron). LNM AR 396: 1653–1660. (Drawings by Audronė Ruzienė)

Vessels are known from male, female and children's burials (fig. 9). Cremation burial complexes containing vessels prevailing in male graves at Anduliai,⁴ Bandužiai, Lazdininkai and Palanga. At Bandužiai cemetery vessels were found only in male cremation burials (Stankus 1995, 87, fig. 72).

However, only 28% of cremation burials of the southern Curonian cemeteries con-

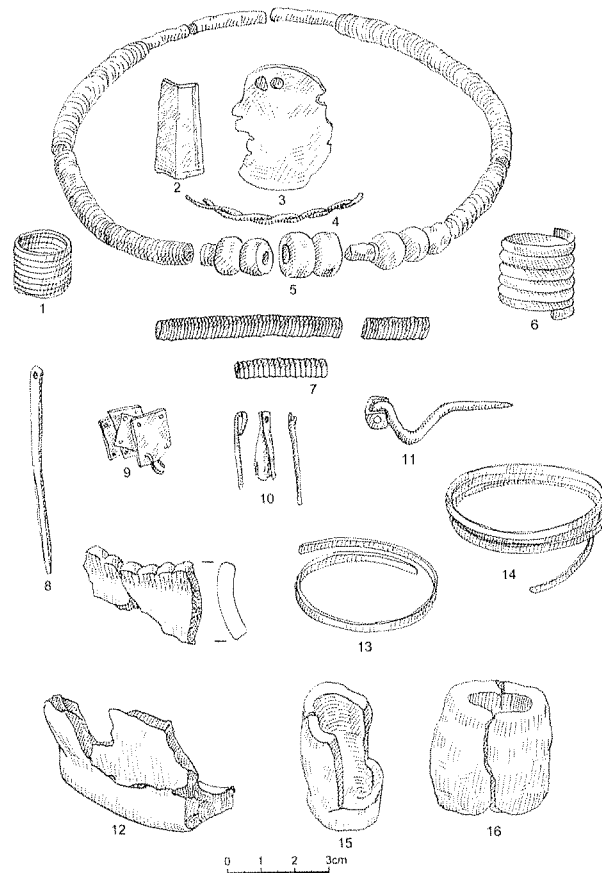
tain vessels (fig. 9). The quality, shapes, measurements, types and ornamentation of vessels found in the Curonian cremation burials and in the settlements are the same (Žulkus 1997, 177–247, fig. 152; Genys 1995, 121–124, fig. V). Vessels shaped by hands and produced by combination of hand shaping followed by throwing on a slowly rotating wheel were prevailing in the Curonian cremation burials in the late

² Southern Curonian cremation burials with two–four miniature pots are: Genčiai I, grave 39/165; Palanga graves 73, 200, 211, 213, 221, 232, 256, 287, 291, 298, 329. Miniature pots have not been found in cremation burials at Akmenšynė, Genčiai II, Gintarai, Girkaliai, Godeliai, Jazdai, Kilauleikiai, Prysmančiai II, Slengiai and Siraičiai cemeteries.

³ Girkaliai, grave 20; Laiviai, grave 78; Palanga, grave 79c.

⁴ Ēgliškiai-Anduliai according to the official register of Lithuanian Heritage Protection. This cemetery is known as Anduln, Zeipen George and Stanz-Schlaudern in the scientific literature as well.

Fig. 4. Cremation burial no. 39 (165) of Genčai I. 1, 6- spiral finger rings, 2- piece of cross-bow fibula, 3- fragment of flat fibula, 4- small fragment of plaited neck-ring, 5- necklace of bronze and glass beads, bronze spirals strung on iron wire, 6- spirals, 8-10- pieces of a set of sash twisting implements: needles, quadrangular plates and whisk, 11- attachment of a pennanular fibula, 12- potsherds of a hand-made vessel, 13-14- pieces two spiral bracelets, 15-16- not baked miniature clay cups (1-4, 6-11, 13-14 bronze, 5 bronze, glass and iron, 12, 15-16 clay). (After Merkevičius 1986)



Viking Age (fig. 2).

Vessels of type A with subtypes⁵ belong to the mostly shaped by hands pottery after classification proposed by Vladas Žulkus (1997, 197-210). In this category only very small amount of earthenware have been slightly turned on a slowly rotating wheel. Only subtypes A-1: a, A-2: b and A-3: a include pottery produced by hand shaping followed by throwing on a slowly rotating wheel, according to the data of cremation burials. Vessels of the types A-1: a (24.9%), A-3: a (12.7%) and A-3: d (12.7%) are prevailing among the vessels shaped by hands (figs. 2, 11: 1-6, 12). All Curonian hand-made pottery is rough with uneven surface and enough big quantity of coarse stone grit. Only small

amount of Curonian vessels belonging to the types A has any ornamentation. Sometimes the rim of a vessel has been incised with small dots or has nail imprints. Very seldom, lower part of a neck or shoulder of a vessel has incisions of rows of sloping lines, dots or stamped horizontal chevron pattern. Vessels shaped by hands or produced by combination of hand shaping followed by throwing on a slowly rotating wheel started to replicate ornamentation (careless drawn horizontal lines and grooves or wavy band). Such examples are known from Gintarai (grave 15), Palanga (graves 61 and 217) and other cemeteries. Vessels which belong to the type A-1 and most of its subtypes have indigenous provenance (Žulkus 1997, 204-209). Ves-

⁵ A-1: a; A-1: b; A-1: d; A-2: a; A-2: b; A-3: a; A-3: b; A-3: c (fig. 11: 1-6).

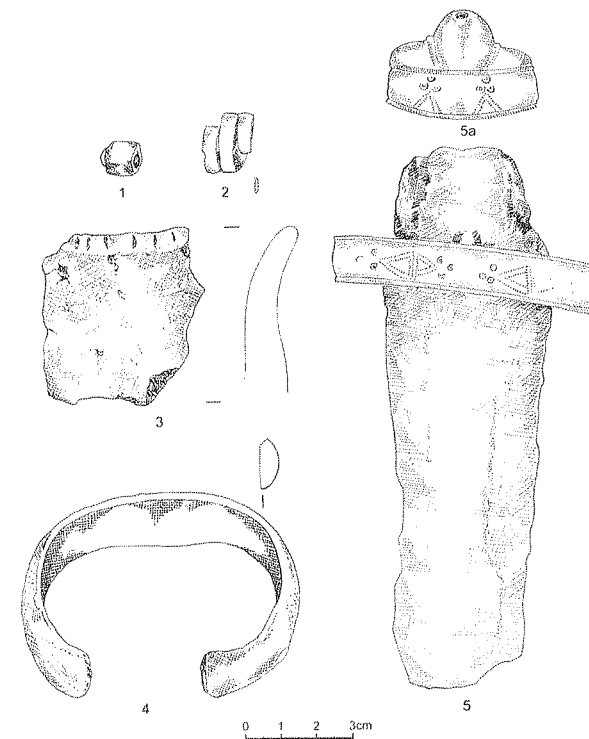


Fig. 5. Cremation burial no. 303b of Palanga. 1- bronze bead, 2- spiral, 3- potsherd of A type vessel, 4- sash like bracelet, 5-5a- sword of T type (1-2, 4 bronze, 3 clay; 5-5a bronze, iron). LNM AR 396: 2297-2301. (Drawings by Audronė Ruzienė)

sels of the type A and its subtypes prevail in the cremation burials of the 10th-11th centuries (figs. 2, 12).

Baltic ware in Curonian cremation burials

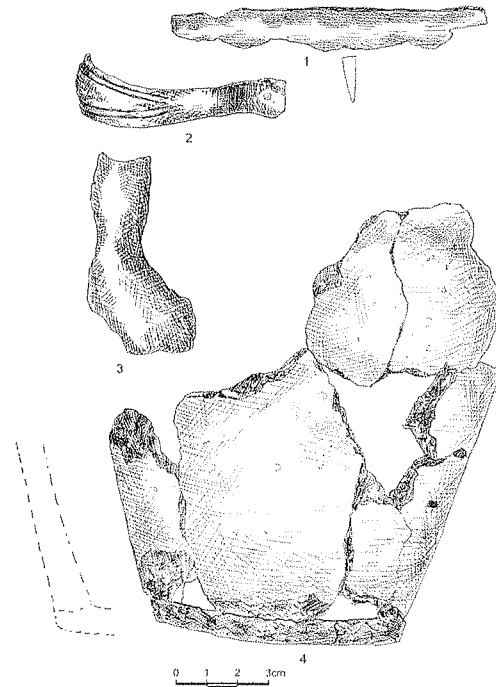
Baltic ware started to appear in the Curonian cremation burials of the very late 10th century and 11th century (Žulkus 1997, 214-222). Such earthenware has been used till the middle of the 13th century in the southern Curonian cremation burials. Baltic ware has been found even in cremations of the 14th century in the north of Courland (Zviedri Pūres). However, vessels of the types A survived with Baltic ware in the majority of southern Curonian cremation burials (Palanga, Girkaliai, Kretinga, Laiviai and others).

According to the classification proposed by Žulkus, Baltic ware belongs to the types B with subtypes⁶ (Žulkus 1997, 210-222) (fig. 11: 7-9). Baltic ware of the types B proposed by Žulkus is different from those (type AI-AIV) ascribed by Dagmar Selling in 1955 (Selling 1955; Žulkus 1997, 210-222).

Vessels which belong to the types B-1: a (22.6%) and B-1: b (12.1%) are dominating among the earthenware produced by a technique of combination of hand shaping followed by throwing on a slowly rotating wheel or made on a wheel in the late Viking Age and early Medieval Periods (fig. 13). Wavy band and concentric grooves decorated neck and body of Baltic ware. Sometimes vessels belonging to the Baltic ware have a rim incised with small dots or nail imprints (Palanga, grave 244, Kretinga, grave 1/1988). Baltic ware found

⁶ B-1: a; B-1: b; B-2: a; B-2: b; B-2: c; B-3: a; B-3: b (fig. 11: 7-9).

Fig. 6. Cremation burial no. 74 of Palanga. 1- knife, 2- piece of bracelet with animal terminals, 3- adze, 4- half of A type vessel (1, 3 iron, 2 bronze, 4 clay). LNM AR 396: 573–577. (Drawings by Audronė Ruzienė)



in the Curonian burial sites has some common features with Teterow and Vipperow pottery (Schuldt 1956, 44–49, pl. XVI, XVII: 1, XVIII: 1; Žulkus 1997, 214). There are no vessels of the Fresendorf (ca 700–950) and Feldberger (ca 700–1000) types in Curonian cremation burials (Schuldt 1956, 17–22, 25–30, pl. III–V; Žulkus 1997, 210–222). Vessels of familiar to the Menkendorf type have been found in the Atkalni and Priedens cemeteries at Grobiņa (Petrenko & Urtāns 1995, 6–9, figs. 9–10; Žulkus 1997, 246).

Vessels of types B have an ordinary ornamentation, like wavy bands and sets of concentric grooves and they are mostly accurately designed (fig. 14). Only few vessels with uncommon ornamentation are known from the southern Curonian sites. A piece of vessel with unusual ornamentation has been found in cremation burial no. 264 at Palanga cemetery, which included potsherds of three vessels. Among potsherds of the middle part of a vessel, only one piece of a neck area has ornamenta-

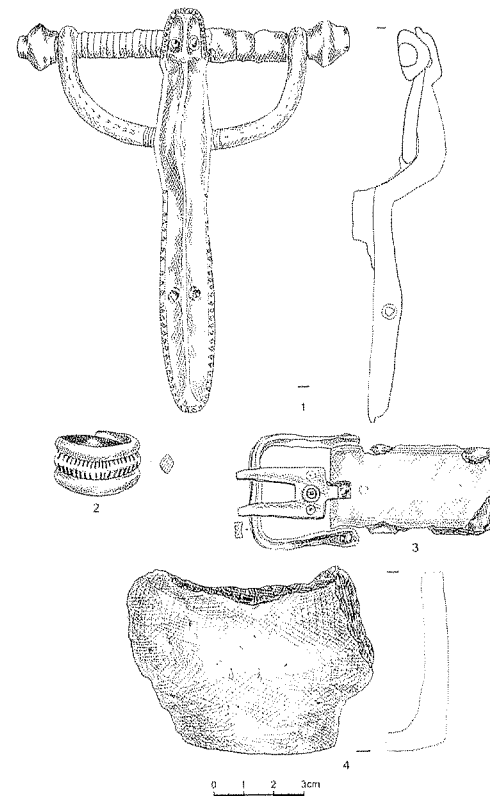
tion of relief spiral grooves. Such pottery is known from the settlement of the late Viking Period at Mölleholmen and other sites of the southern Scania (Sweden) (Larsson 1992, 126, figs. 4, 7).

Baltic ware (*Ostseekeramik*) was formed on the base of indigenous pottery types with influence and inspiration of “Slavonic pottery” and on quick development of its own traditions (Roslund 1992, 167; Genys 1995, 123; Žulkus 1997, 244–247; Paddenberg 2000, 231–306, fig. 3). Evidently, main influence of Slavonic pottery was made on ornamentation and vessels’ shape (extend S profile). In the same way “Slavonic pottery” influenced indigenous vessels shapes in Galindia (Wróblewski & Nowakiewicz 2003, 170–172, fig. 2).

Vessels in funeral ceremonies

There is not clear answer to the question for what purpose the Curonians used vessels in cremation burials. Cremations in urns in the Curonian lands were exceptions.

Fig. 7. Inhumation burial no. 79c of Palanga. 1- crossbow animal headed fibula, 2- spiral finger ring, 3- belt buckle with mount, 4- potsherd of A type vessel (1–3 bronze, 4 clay). LNM AR 396: 588–591. (Drawings by Audronė Ruzienė)



Curonian cremations in urns are known only from Anduliai (grave 11/1988), Slengiai (grave found accidentally in 1972) and perhaps from Ramučiai (grave 205) (Hoffmann 1941, 90, fig. 22; Žulkus 1978, 3; Kanarskas 1988). It might be that vessels were used as temporary urns or containers to bring cremated bones and fragments of the grave goods from funeral pyre to the burial site. However, just a small amount of potsherds has traces of the secondary firing, charcoal, soot and ash on an inner and outer surface. Most of potsherds were found with clean inner and outer surfaces. It means that vessels have not been used as containers to carry cremated bones from funeral pyre to the grave pit. In another hand, it is not clear to indefinite in which way cremated bones and grave goods were transported from funeral pyre to a cemetery, because cremation burials without vessels constitute 72% in the southern Cu-

ronian lands (fig. 10).

Vessels used in Curonians cremation burials might be analysed from a viewpoint of ordinary grave goods. All vessels found in Curonian cremation burials were broken. A custom of deliberately breaking or bending weapons, ornaments and breaking vessels in Curonia occurred with cremation burial practise on a mass scale in the 11th–13th centuries. However, not all grave goods from cremation burials are deliberately demolished artefacts. Mounts of drinking horns were never found bent or demolished by the fire (Bebre 2002, 118). Drinking horns are known from Curonians male, female and children inhumation and cremation burials (Gintautaitė-Butėnienė & Butėnas 2002, 55–56). It has been estimated, that one Curonian cremation burial contains from one to six drinking horns (Bebre 2002, 117). There are enough visible parallels

between quantity of vessels and drinking horns in the Curonian cremation burials. Drinking horns were found in the edges of the grave pit or above the preserved grave goods. This indicates that vessels and drinking horns have been used in funeral ceremonies in different manner, disregarding the common nature of these items of different value. In general, both items might be dishes. More valuable were drinking horns, as it is possible to judge from burials' equipment and to image from funeral ceremonies.

It is possible that vessels were put into the burial with meal for the deceased. However, all vessels were broken or even smashed into small pieces. In the middle of the 16th century Matcey Strykowski (1547–1586) described funeral rites of western Lithuania. Author stressed that neighbours always dressed the deceased in their best clothes. Men were girdled with a sword or an axe and with towel knotted around a neck and some money for buying food (KŽ 1983, 71). For women were given threads and needle that they could stitch up torn clothes in afterlife. Grave goods also include bread with salt and vessel of beer to save the soul from hunger and thirst (KŽ 1983, 71).

Remains of non-cremated animal bones, poultry and hazels nuts have been found in Curonian cremation burials (Hoffman 1941, 169, 175; Sadauskaitė-Mulevičienė 1965, 43; Kanarskas 1988). It is very likely that mentioned things were ritual food for deceased, or it testifies about funeral feast. Vessels in Curonian cremations might to have an aspect of commemoration of the dead as well.

Pottery or just potsherds of different vessels were found in the pits filled with charcoal, ash and soot or sometimes with small pieces of melted artefacts. Broken vessels and even very few cremated bones were found in such pits. Pits filled with charcoal, ash, soot and sometimes with small pieces of melted down arte-

facts and single potsherds are known from Gintališkė, Godeliai, Palanga and Siraičiai cemeteries (Valatka 1970, 93–94; Sadauskaitė-Mulevičienė 1965, 48–50; Valatkienė 1986). These pits have different shape and different measurements. Some scholars assume that such pits were fireplaces or ritual places – remains of funeral feast or commemoration of the dead.⁷ Perhaps such a funeral feast included sacrificial ritual of a meal or some eating ritual and breaking vessels after it.

For instance, in the pit filled with soot, charcoal and mixed soil a huge amount of potsherds have been found in the fireplace no. IV at the Palanga cemetery. A lot of potsherds of a middle part of vessels were dispersed in different depth and a partly broken vessel filled with charcoal and dark mixed soil was found on the bottom of this fireplace (Tautavičius 1962; Sadauskaitė-Mulevičienė 1965, 48–50, figs. 5–6).

It seems likely that the custom of deliberately broken vessels has a very simple explanation: participants of funeral, relatives (kin) or members of family took some of the potsherds for memento. It might be that such custom of deliberately broken vessels is not just a wish “to kill” the artefacts, but here is also a principle *pars pro toto* represented with clear expression: a fragment represents an artefact.

There is one more practical explanation of using vessels in the custom of cremation burials. It might be that the vessels were used for the storage of cremation deposits of decedent who died in the wintertime. Urns and bones could be stored above the ground until the soil thawed. A similar interpretation has been advanced for the Viking Age cemetery at Timerovo in the Jaroslav district (Russia) (Gräslund 1980, 58–61). Funerals performed after several months were not so celebratory and cremation deposits were just thrown into the grave pit.

⁷ Lately pits filled with charcoal have been given interpretation of a particular type of cremation burials (Bertašius 2002, 89–91, fig. 30).

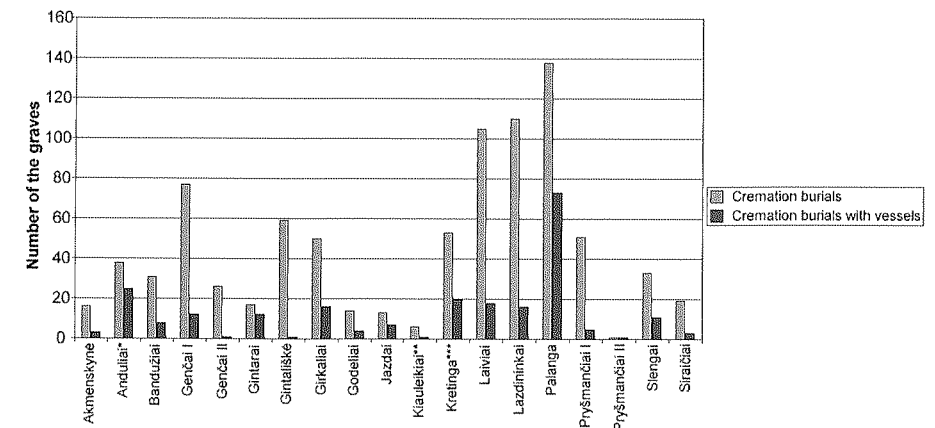


Fig. 8. Vessels in the southern Curonian cremation burials. (Pottery from Anduliat, Kiauleikiai and Kretinga cemeteries is not completely researched, because material is not fully available.)

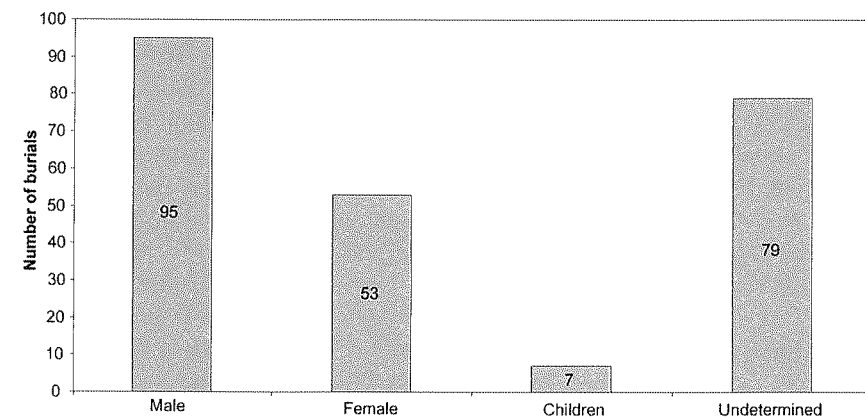


Fig. 9. Vessels in southern Curonian cremation burials according to the gender of the deceased.

Vessels in Finnic cremation burials

Curonians and Finnic people have been dwelled in the northern part of Courland. It makes ethnic composition and material culture much more complicated and material culture much more complicated in north of Courland, in central Courland and in the south-western regions of Lithuania. Constant Curonian movement to the north, over the river Venta, brought cremation burial rites and customs of enclosing Baltic ware and another pottery type to the north of Courland. On the another

hand, Baltic ware was a part of mutual interaction in the burial rites across the Baltic Sea in the Late Viking Age and Early Medieval Period with specific reflections in each part of the Baltic Rim.

In general, of cremation burial practice among the Livs in the north of Courland in the 11th century is a result of the direct contacts with Curonians (Mугуревич 1970, 25–31, figs. 1–3; Асарис 1997, 200–201, fig. 1). Simultaneously, spread of cremation custom among the Finnic population of north Courland demonstrates the

evidentially close relations between the Livs and the island of Saaremaa, where cremation customs were predominating in the Late Viking Age (Mägi 2002, 20).

The Curonians have influenced Finnic culture in the north of Courland (Асарис 1997, fig. 1; Celmiņš 2002, 164–169; Vijuks 2002, fig. 3; Мугуревич 1970, 33). At the same time, Curonian material culture had a lot of in common with other areas of Baltic, such as Saaremaa and Gotland (interregional weaponry types, belt buckles and belts dividers; jewellery: pennanular brooches of a certain types and dress pins with triangular head; see: Jansson 1995, 85–90, figs. 3–9; Bliujienė 1999, 128–133, 139–143, figs. 59, 62, 65, 71; Mägi 2002, 103–104).

In general, inhumation burials have been associated with the Livs and Vends, because inhumation had prevailed in the burial custom of the Finnic population in the northern Courland in the Late Viking Age (Мугуревич 1970, 23–29). Barrows erected of sand, with both inhumation and cremation graves, are left by the Livs in the north of Courland (LPA 1974, 188). Among the grave goods in these barrows it should be observed slightly turned or made by hand vessels (LPA 1974, 188). Vessels were mostly broken, sometimes only several potsherds were put into the burial.

Pottery with polished surface characteristic to Finnic people has been found in the several Curonian sites in Courland (Striķi Vārves, Sabiles Krievu graves, Raņķu Kapenieķi) (Cimermane 1974, 104–105, figs. 1: 1–7; 4; 1; 5: 2). It should be mentioned that vessels with polished surface found in Curonian sites were intentionally broken (Cimermane 1974, fig. 5: 3).

Ritual of enclosing vessels shaped by hands or made on a slowly rotating wheel into the burials is known among the Daugava Livs. Vessels are known from inhumations in the barrows of the Livs of Gauja (Krimulda, Laukskola in Salaspils,

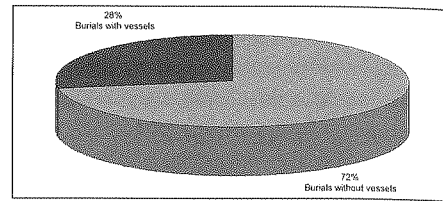


Fig. 10. Proportion between the southern Curonian cremation burials with and without vessels.

Rauši in Dole, Sigulda, Turaida, Vampieši II in Dole and others) (LPA 1974, 195, figs. 115, 119).

Hand-made vessels as well as Baltic ware are known from cremation burials in the East Estonian long barrows in the 10th–12th centuries (Aun 2002, 94–100, figs. 8–10). Vessels were used as urns or supplementary earthenware. Rituals of deliberately broken vessels are known in this region (Aun 2002, 94–100).

On Saaremaa, 87% of cremations contained potsherds (rough and fine ware) at the end of the 10th–12th century (Mägi 2002, 114). One to four vessels have been intentionally broken and dispersed in the burial area of these cremations. A number of potsherds (vessels) in female as well as in male burials is more or less equal. However, in female cremations fine pottery prevails (Mägi 2002, 114, fig. 40). The majority of vessels have been brought directly to the grave, but in some cases, secondary firing has been indicated. Perhaps, some of the vessels took place together with the deceased in the funeral pyre. Judging from the spread of potsherds they were thrown into the grave or were broken while the burial was covered with stones (Mägi 2002, 113–114).

Vessels in cremation burials of the south-eastern Baltic region, Gotland and central Scandinavia

Baltic ware started to be constant element of material culture in the huge south-eastern Baltic Sea region, Gotland as well as

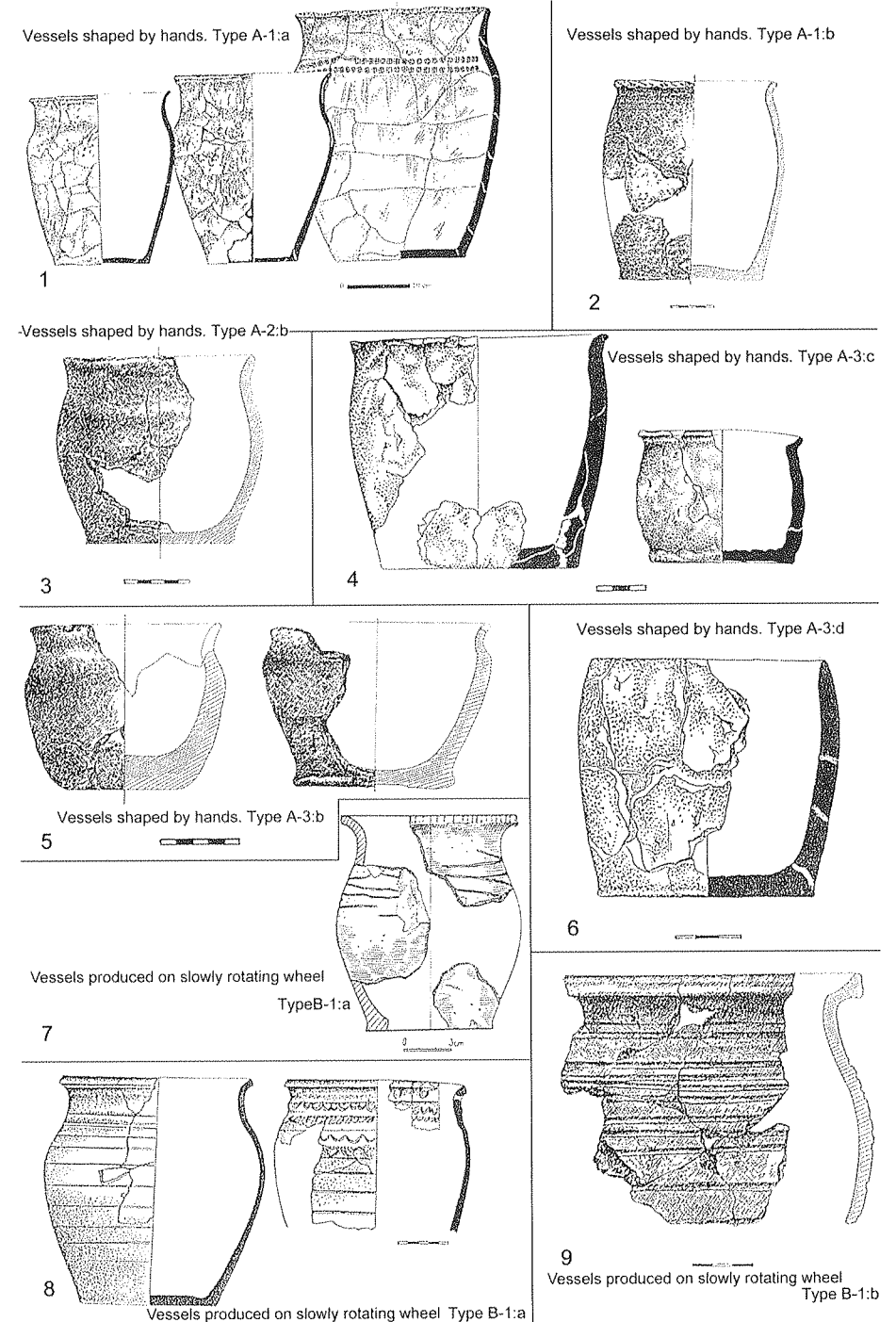


Fig. 11. Types of the southern Curonian hand-made vessels and Baltic ware (after Žulkus 1997).

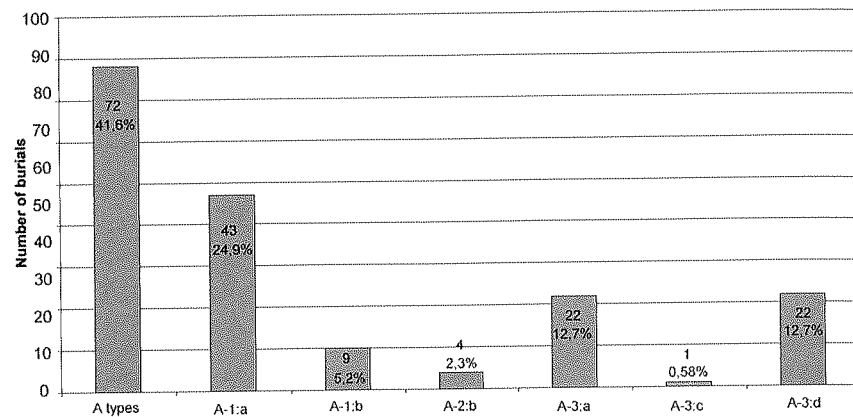


Fig. 12. Types of the southern Curonian hand-made vessels.

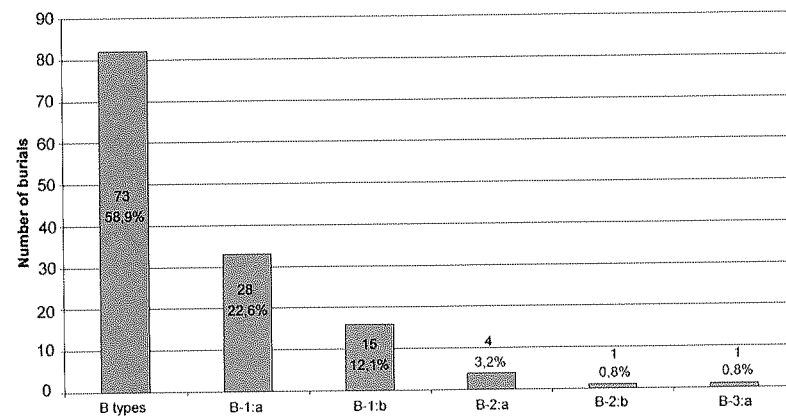


Fig. 13. Types of the southern Curonian vessels produced on a slowly rotating wheel and wheel.

in the central part of Scandinavia in the Late Viking Age and Early Medieval Period. Pottery of the western Slavonic origin occurs in Scandinavia starting from the Early Viking Age mostly as Feldberger and Fresendorfer pottery. Baltic ware is known from sites in Uppland, Västergötland, eastern Denmark and Gotland (Selling 1955; Larsson 1992, 125–134; Roslund 1992, 159–173; Holmquist Olausson 1993, 43–67; Thunmark-Nylén 2000).

In Scandinavia Baltic ware might to originate from both west and east Slavonic culture group (Roslund 1992, 162–163, fig. 1). Baltic ware of various types is char-

acteristic to mentioned areas. A number of ceramics belongs to the types A Ia–A II according to Dagmar Selling classification (Roslund 1992, fig. 3). This pottery is dated to the end of the 10th century – 11th century (Selling 1955).

Customs of using vessels in cremation burials are well known from the western Slavonic barrows. Such custom in Slavonic territory appeared in the middle of the 6th century and continued till the end of the 12th century (Zoll-Adamikowa 1979, 208–219; Paddenberg 2000, 231–304). Vessels were used as urns, temporary urns, and supplementary ware. Smaller vessels or

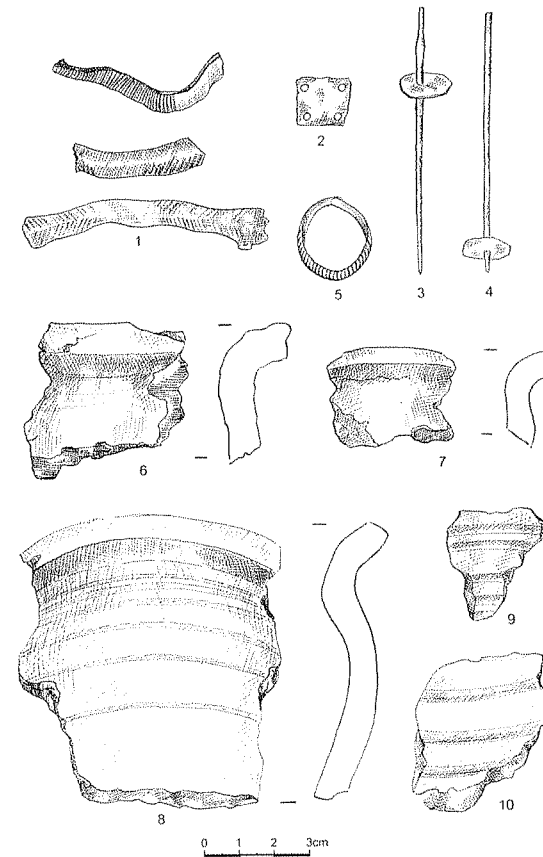


Fig. 14. Cremation burial no. 176 of Laiviai. 1- pieces of spiral bracelet, 2-4- pieces of a miniature set of sash twisting implements: quadrangular plate and distaffs, 5- spiral, 6-10- potsherds of three B:1a type vessels (1-5 bronze, 6-10 clay). LNM AR 2: 930–941. (Drawings by Audronė Ruzienė)

tableware are characteristic to the western Slavonic barrows (Paddenberg 2000, 293). Pottery was used during different burial rituals in the Slavonic environment (Zoll-Adamikowa 1979, 208–219; Paddenberg 2000, 293–295).

Broken vessels or just potsherds are known in cremation burials from the surroundings of Elbląg from the end of the 7th century (Кулаков 1994, 37, fig. 19). Potsherds, as well as cremated bones, are dispersed in huge grave pits. Vessels, which were found in the Elbląg group cemeteries have been imitating west Slavonic pottery made on a slowly rotating wheel or wheel (Кулаков 1994, 37). Burial rites of Galindian cremation burials at Czarny Las (north-eastern Poland) hill-fort shows the similar customs of usage pottery of indigenous types and Baltic ware of the first

half of the 11th century (Wróblewski 2000, 269–276, figs. 8: d-e, 9–10).

Cremation burials with one to two or even four to eight vessels are known from the cemeteries of the Sambian peninsula in the Late Viking Age and Early Medieval Periods. Vessels were found at the Irzeka-pinis (Klinčovka), Kleinheide, Laptau (Muromskoje), Schuditten (Orechovo), Schulstein (Volnoje), Zophen (Suvorovo), Hünenberg close Rantau (Dobroje “Gora Velikanov”), Bledau (Sosnovka), Vetrovo and Wiskiauten (Mochovoje). In the Sambian cremation burials broken vessels belong to the middle and late Viking Age (Hollack 1908, 179; Gaerte 1929, 328, figs. 262–263; Mühlen 1975, 49; Wróblewski & Nowakiewicz 2003, 176, fig. 1; Кулаков 1994, 65–70). Vessels from the cemeteries of Sambian peninsula were intention-

ally broken and used as temporary urns (Кулаков 1994, 36).

Cremations with broken vessels were found in twenty burials at Birka in Mälars area (Gräslund 1980, 58). In these graves cremation deposits and potsherds are scattered in the burial area. Cremations with vessels formed a small concentration at Hemlanden in Birka (Holmquist Olausson 1993, 46–49, figs. 5; 6: b). Cremations with one to four broken vessels are known from other cemeteries on Björko (Ormnös and Kärrbacka). For instance at grave B of Ormnös cremated male bones were put into four different vessels (early Viking Age; Feldberg and Fresendorf ware). At the Kärrbacka cemetery broken vessels of the Fresendorf type (the 10th century) were found in several cremation burials (Holmquist Olausson 1993, 62–64, fig. 5.24). Broken vessels were found in 221 burials of the 69 cemeteries on Gotland (Thunmark-Nylén 2000, 1047–1049).⁸

Conclusions

Variouly shaped miniature pots are often found in the Curonian inhumations from the 5th century till the end of the 10th century. The Curonians inherited miniature pots from the West Lithuanian tradition of stone-circle graves dated to the late Roman Iron Age. Miniature pots started to be uniform and resemble mostly a very small cruet in the 10th century. Miniature pots or small cruets started to appear together with vessels used in every-day life and mostly shaped by hands in the Curonian cremation burials in the 10th–11th centuries. Miniature pots or little cruets and vessels used in every-day life are very substantial feature of the burial customs at the end of the 10th–11th century. At the end of the 11th century miniature pots disappeared from Curonian culture forever-

more, because they were displaced by ordinary vessels used in every-day life.

Vessels used in every-day life appeared together with development of cremation burial custom in the north-west of Lithuania in the 10th century. Just few potsherds from one to four or even seven different vessels were found in Curonian cremation burials. These potsherds are scattered and dispersed in the grave pits. The quality, shapes, measurements, types and ornamentation of vessels found in the Curonian cremation burials and in the settlements are the same. However, vessels contain only 28% cremation burials in the southern Curonian cemeteries.

Vessels of the type A with subtypes mostly belong to the shaped by hand pottery and only small amount of earthenware in this category have been slightly turned on a slowly rotating wheel. Vessels shaped by hands and produced by combination of hand shaping followed by throwing on a slowly rotating wheel were prevailing in the Curonian cremation burials in the late Viking Age.

Baltic ware started to appear in the Curonian cremation burials at the very late 10th century and 11th century. Earthenware of this type has been used till the middle of the 13th century in the southern Curonian cremation burials. In Courland vessels are known even from cremation burials of the 14th century. Baltic ware in the Curonian settlements and in cemeteries occurs simultaneously.

Baltic ware belongs to the types B with subtypes according to the classification proposed by Žulkus. Baltic ware of the type B proposed by Žulkus is different from those (type AI – AIV) ascribed by Dagmar Selling in 1955. Baltic ware (*Ostseekeramik*) originated on the base of indigenous pottery types with influence and inspiration of “Slavonic pottery” and on quick development of its own traditions.

It might be that vessels were used as temporary urns or containers to bring cremated bones and fragments of the grave goods from funeral pyre to the burial site. It is very likely that vessels have been used in funeral rituals. Those vessels served, perhaps, as dishes for food of deceased, or they testify about the funeral feast. Vess-

sels in Curonian cremations might have an aspect of commemoration of the dead as well.

Baltic ware in cremation burials was a part of mutual interaction of burial rites across the Baltic Sea with specific reflections in each part of the Baltic Rim in the Late Viking Age and Early Medieval period.

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⁸ Statistic is made after mentioned publication of Lena Thunmark-Nylén.

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