

TENTH TO 11TH CENTURY WARRIOR BURIALS WITH HORSE-TRAPPINGS IN THE LATGALLIAN AREA

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Abstract

During the Late Iron Age, the southeastern part of Latvia, particularly the upper and middle course of the River Dubna, was one of the most densely populated areas of Latgallian habitation. In the course of archaeological research at Late Iron Age cemetery sites, various burial practices have been observed that have not been encountered at Latgallian burial sites outside this area. Here, in addition to evidence of the familiar Latgallian burial practices, horse-trappings have been found in several tenth to 11th-century male grave inventories.

Key words: burial practices, horse-trappings, warrior burials, Latgallians, Late Iron Age.

Introduction

The most characteristic feature of Latgallian burial practices is the strictly observed east-west orientation of the body: males are laid with the head towards the east, and females with the head towards the west. Weapons are characteristic of male burials. The axe and the spear were essential elements of the set of weapons: generally two spears at the beginning of the period, and one spear in the later part of the period. In the initial phase of the Late Iron Age, broad single-bladed swords (*scramasaxes*) were used, later supplanted by narrow single-bladed battle knives, worn in leather sheaths with bronze mounts. In many cases, the battle knife is replaced by an ordinary knife. Double-bladed swords also occasionally occur in male graves. The male burials have particular decorated items of dress and a set of ornaments: leather belts decorated with bronze, as well as arm-cloths or arm-windings, armbands, brooches and finger-rings. Sometimes, the headdress and coat was also decorated with bronze spirals and rings. In the ninth to 11th century, we may distinguish male burials with a warrior's armband on the left arm and a solid armband with plane-convex terminals on the right arm, and often a large solid penannular brooch with polyhedral or square terminals for fastening the dress. A characteristic feature of these burials is the provision of weaponry in the grave. Burials with this kind of grave inventory occur during this period throughout the whole area populated by the Latgallians, and are described by researchers as warrior burials. In the southwestern part of the Latgallian area, ie in the basin of the River Dubna, inventories of tenth to 11th-century burials of this kind have been found to include horse-trappings as well.

The position of the horse-trappings in the grave, a description of the finds

Horse-trappings have been found at five excavated cemeteries in the Upper Dubna area: Aglonas Kristapiņi, Aizkalnes Ludvigova, Aizkalnes Maskevičišķi, Višķu Maskava and Šķeltovas Brūveri. They have been discovered in a total of 16 burials with inventories dated to the tenth and early 11th century (Fig. 1).

The inventories of these burials include iron bridle-bits, iron bells and iron whip stocks. In the course of the 2004–2006 excavation at the cemetery of Šķeltovas Brūveri, horse-trappings were found with six male burials, four of which were unfortunately disturbed (Vilcāne 2006, p.80). A full set of horse-trappings, a snaffle bit (or bridle-bits), an iron bell and a whip stock, was present only in grave 38, a disturbed burial. In the inventory of graves 11 and 40, snaffle bits were found together with iron bells, while graves 36 and 44 produced only snaffle bits. In the excavation in the 1970s–1990s at the cemetery of Aglonas Kristapiņi, horse-trappings were found with nine male burials (Kuniga 2000, pp.72-73). At this cemetery, too, only one grave inventory included a full set of horse-trappings (grave 211), while three graves had iron bells and a snaffle bit (graves 141, 174 and 284), another three graves (91, 130 and 280) had only a snaffle bit, while two graves had only an iron bell (76 and 273). In the 1931 excavation at the cemetery of Aizkalnes Maskevičišķi, an iron whip stock was found in grave 5, a disturbed grave (Riekstiņš 1931; LVM V 7339). Some more horse-trappings (an iron whip stock and an iron snaffle bit) have been recovered as stray finds at the cemeteries of Aglonas Kristapiņi, Višķu Maskava (LVM A 10030:29) and Aizkalnes Ludvigova (LVM

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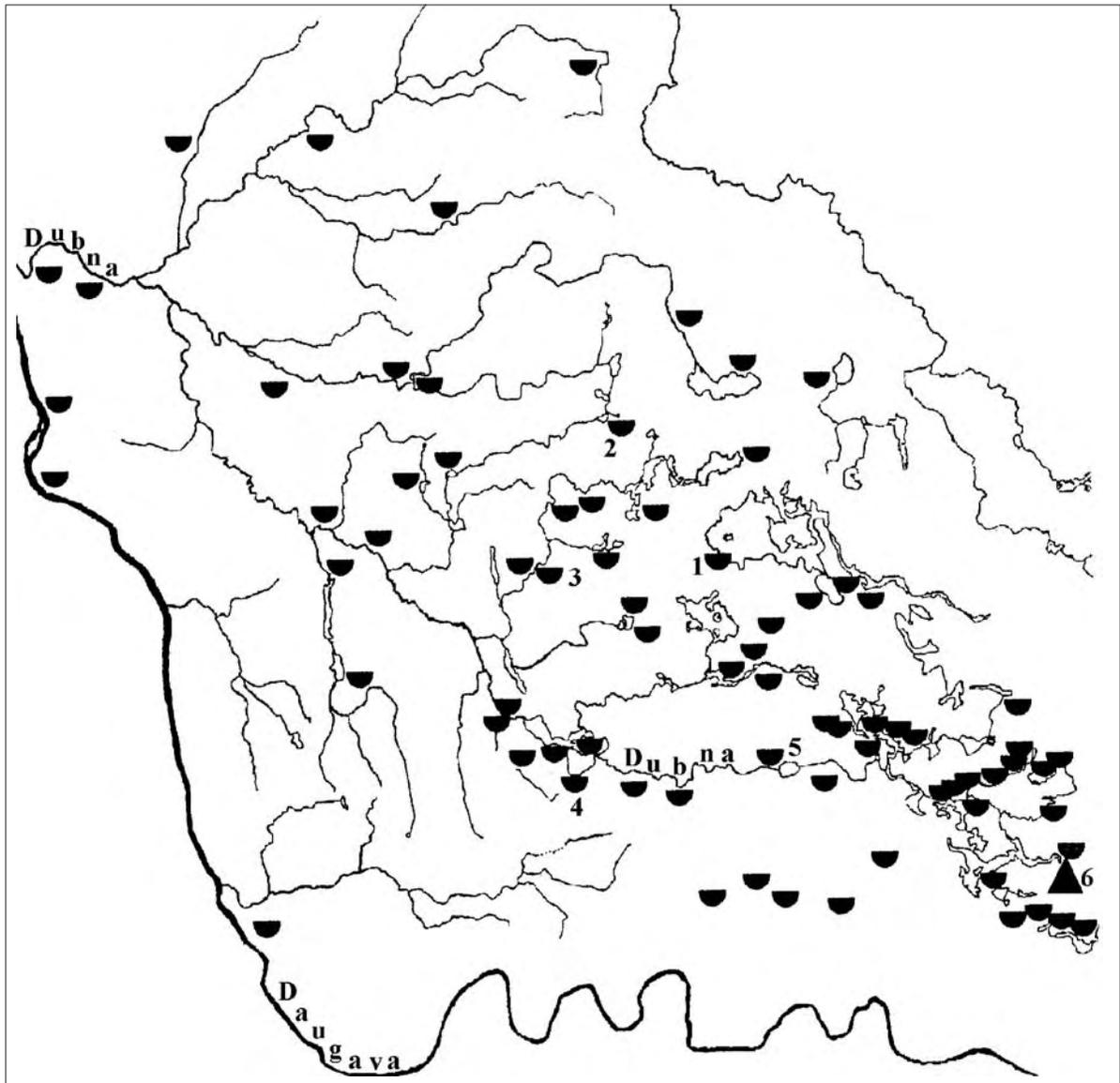


Fig. 1. Cemeteries with horse-trappings in the southwestern part of the Latgallian area: 1 Aglonas Kristapiņi; 2 Aizkalnes Ludvigova; 3 Višķu Maskeviciški; 4 Višķu Maskava; 5 Šķeltovas Brūveri; 6 Sauleskalns hoard.

A 12007:95) (see Table). It should be added that the term “full set of horse-trappings” is a conditional one, reflecting the range of horse-trappings found in grave inventories. Spurs and stirrups may also be included among horse-trappings or accoutrements, but there are no such finds from the above graves.

Horse-trappings were generally placed at the foot of the grave. In graves with a full set of horse-trappings or two objects of this kind, they are usually placed together. Horse-trappings were found at the tips of the toes (Aglonas Kristapiņi, burial 141) (Fig. 2:3), next to the left foot (Aglonas Kristapiņi, grave 174, Šķeltovas Brūveri graves 36 and 40) (Fig. 2:1, 2) or the right foot (Aglonas Kristapiņi, graves 130, 280 and 284) (Fig. 2:4), or on the right side next to the knee (Aglonas Kristapiņi, grave 91). Only grave 38 at Šķeltovas Brūveri had a set of horse-trappings placed at the head of the grave, to the left of the head.

Iron whip stocks are among the rarest forms of horse-trappings. Whip stocks are represented by only five examples at these cemeteries. The best preserved is the iron whip stock from grave 211 at Aglonas Kristapiņi. This was about 25 cm long, with a broadened, socketed lower section (diameter 2.2cm), a thickened, round mid-section and a flattened upper section, through which an iron loop, about 4.6 centimetres in diameter, had been passed, with a pincer-shaped iron fitting for attaching the leather lash and two lyre-shaped pendants (Kuniga 2000, Fig. XXVIII:8). An iron whip stock of similar form was also found in grave 5 at the cemetery of Aizkalnes Maskeviciški, and another at Šķeltovas Brūveri. These belong to Type I in A. Kirpichnikov’s classification (Kirpichnikov 1973, p.72, Fig. 41:1). These whip stocks have a metal handle with a loop, on to which was threaded the metal strap-end of the leather lash, along with lyre-shaped pendants. Such whip stocks are known as “sounding whips”: when the whip was bran-

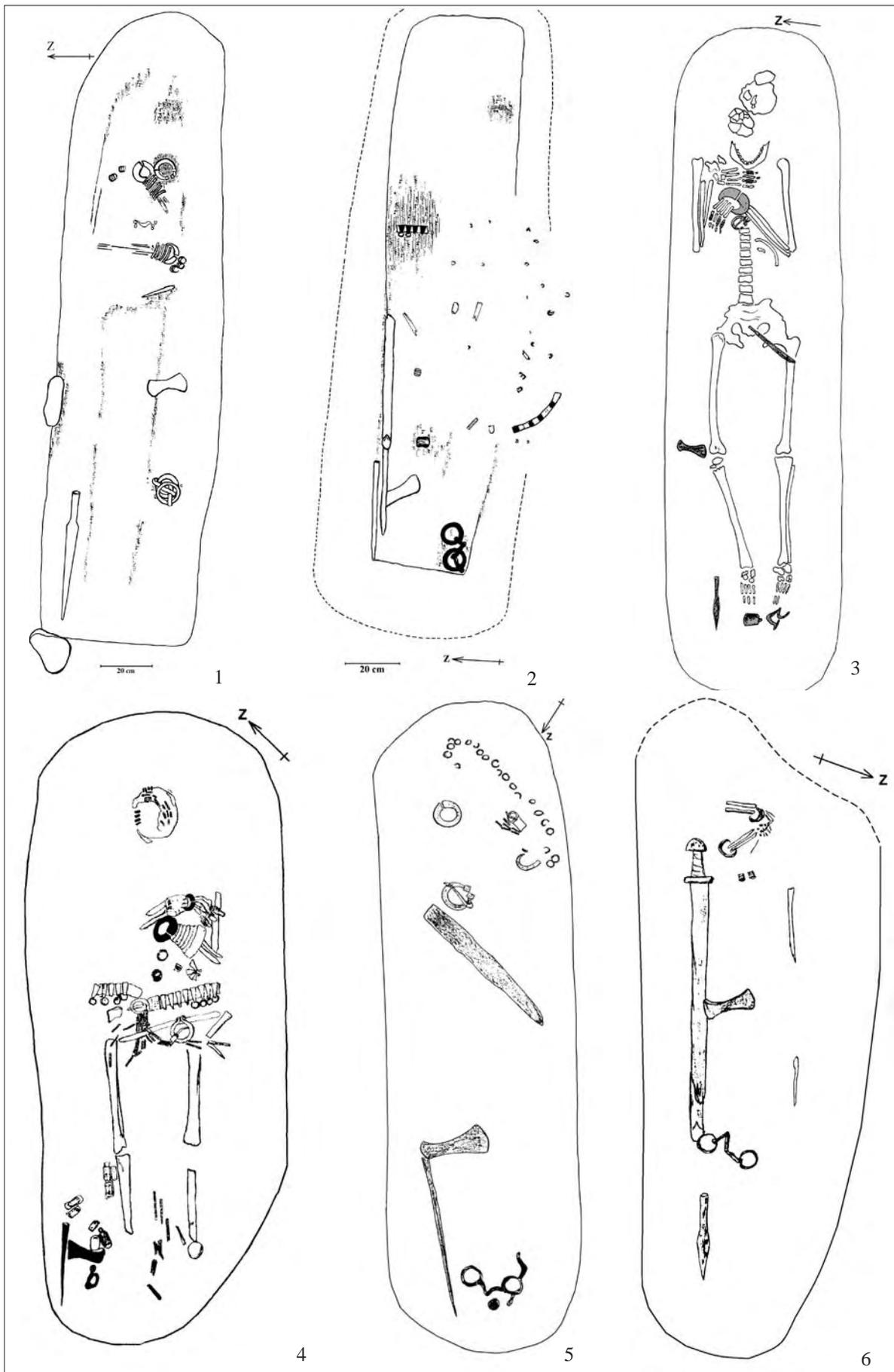


Fig. 2. The position of horse-trappings in the grave: 1 Škeltovas Brūveri grave 36; 2 Škeltovas Brūveri grave 40; 3 Aglonas Kristapiņi grave 141; 4 Aglonas Kristapiņi grave 294; 5 Aglonas Kristapiņi grave 211; 6 Aglonas Kristapiņi grave 280.

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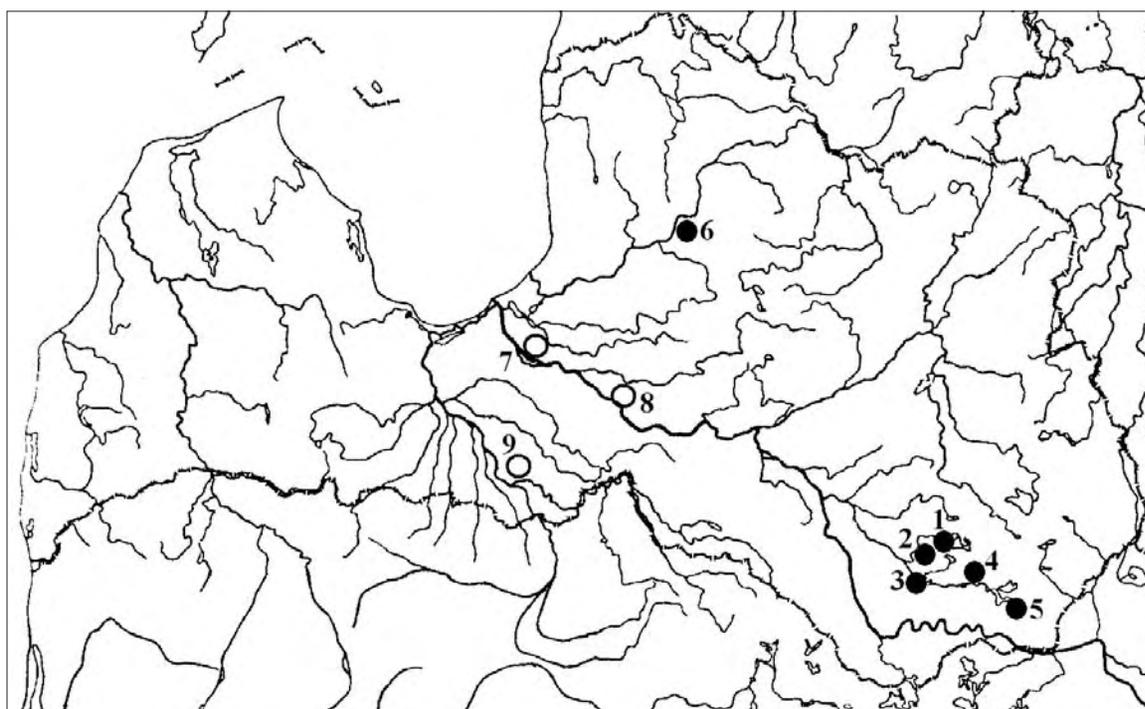


Fig. 3. The distribution of iron whip stocks in central and eastern Latvia: 1 Aglonas Kristapiņi; 2 Aizkalnes Maskeviciški; 3 Višķu Maskeviciški; 4 Šķeltovas Brūveri; 5 Sauleskalns; 6 Āraiši; 7 Laukskola; 8 Lielvārdes pārceltuve; 9 Čunkāni-Dreņģeri; 1–6 whip stocks with a metal handle; 7–9 whip stocks with a wooden handle.

dished, the lyre-shaped pendants made a noise, helping to goad on the horse. In the area populated by the Latgallians, Type I iron whip stocks also occur in the Sauleskalns III hoard and at Āraiši Lake Fortress (two pieces) (Urtāns 1977, p.48, Fig. 85:7; Apals 1977, Fig. 1:10). The whip stock in the Sauleskalns Hoard (length 23cm) has a broadened, hollow lower section (diameter 3.1cm) and a rhombic upper section, while one of the pieces from Āraiši (length 24cm) has a broadened, socketed lower section (2.5cm), tapering evenly towards the top and ending with a rhombic flattened part, with a ring with pendants passing through it. Similar whip stocks in Russia are dated to the tenth or 11th century, and only a small number have been found there, about 20 (Kirpichnikov 1973, p.73). In the area of present-day Lithuania, nine pieces have been found at seven sites, dated to the end of the tenth and the first quarter of the 11th century (Butėnas 2001, p.227). In Latvia, iron whip stocks also occur in burials of the Semigallians (Čunkāni-Dreņģeri, grave 63) and in the Liv-populated area along the Lower Daugava: at the cemeteries of Salaspils Laukskola (three burials) and Lielvārdes pārceltuve (grave 25) (Atgāzis, Bebre 1986, p.23, Fig. 4:1; Zariņa 1977, Fig. 19:60; 2006, p.197) (Fig. 3). In contrast to the examples described above, these whip stocks had a wooden handle, with a loop that passed through a metal fitting or tang. Suspended from the loop were pendants, along with the metal strap-end of the leather lash.

The bells in the grave inventories were made from a piece of iron sheet. They are cylindrical, narrowing at the top. The height of the body of the bell (excluding the loop) varies between 37 and 82 millimetres, with a diameter of 27 to 59 millimetres at the top and 32 to 60 millimetres in the lower part. The bells had a separately made covering part, either convex or flat. They have an attached loop, made of three to five-millimetre diameter iron wire, passing through the cover of the bell. The clapper of the bell consisted of an iron bar, broadened and rounded at the base. The body of some of the bells has been covered in bronze (Kuniga 2000, p.73).

Bells have not been found with burials elsewhere in the territory of Latvia. Bells found at residential sites (Koknese, Daugmale) are of a different form and are regarded as cow-bells (Latvijas 1974, Table 68:4). Bells constitute a characteristic element of the grave inventory at Old Prussian burial sites (for example, they have been found on almost every horse burial at Irzekapinis), where they were attached to the bridle under the neck (Kulakov 1990, p.37, Fig. 21). Bells are also represented in horse graves at sites in central and eastern Lithuania (Kuncienė 1969, p.65, Fig. 3; Bliujienė 1992, p. 123; Juškaitis 2005, p.147).

Snaffle and gag bridle bits for leading and restraining horses have been found in 11 grave inventories at Aglonas Kristapiņi and Šķeltovas Brūveri, and there are another three stray finds from the cemeteries of Višķu

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Maskava, Aglonas Kristapiņi and Aizkalnes Ludvigo-va. A gag bridle bit has been found in only grave 141 at Aglonas Kristapiņi (Kuniga 2000, p.72, Fig. XXVIII:9). This is a double-jointed bit with 16.5-centimetre-long triangular iron cheekpieces. Similar finds are known from the Sauleskalns III hoard and Tērvete hillfort (Urtāns 1974, Fig. 85:5; Latvijas 1974, Table 55:36). More common in male grave inventories at these cemeteries are snaffle bits, with joints that are square in cross-section or twisted, and with rings about five to eight centimetres in diameter at the sides (Fig. 4:10). More widespread are triple-jointed snaffle bits (12 pieces), double-jointed examples being less frequent (Aglonas Kristapiņi, grave 284). In the Late Iron Age in the area of present-day Latvia, both snaffle and gag bits more commonly occur at residential sites, and are present in burials in the areas populated by the Selonians and Couronians (Latvijas 1974, pp.187 and 245).

The composition of grave inventories of burials with horse-trappings

Apart from the horse-trappings, the grave inventories also included weapons and ornaments. An essential element of the inventory of these burials was the socketed spearhead (Fig. 4:6). Generally, a single socketed spearhead was found in a grave inventory, two spearheads occurring rarely (grave 40 at Šķeltovas Brūveri). The spearhead was usually placed by the lower right leg or ankle, with the point towards the foot of the grave (Fig. 2). Only burial 76 at Aglonas Kristapiņi had a spearhead by the right side of the pelvis, with the point towards the head of the grave. A *tanged* spearhead was found in only one grave, 37 at Šķeltovas Brūveri, where it was placed by the left ankle, with the point towards the foot of the grave.

All the burials with horse-trappings also had a narrow-bladed or broad-bladed iron axe (Fig. 4:8). This might be placed by the right elbow, with the blade downwards and the handle towards the head of the grave (grave 76 at Aglonas Kristapiņi), by the right knee (graves 91, 130, 141 and 211 at Aglonas Kristapiņi), by the lower leg (grave 37 at Šķeltovas Brūveri) or by the ankle (graves 11 and 40 at Šķeltovas Brūveri; burials 174 and 284 at Aglonas Kristapiņi) (Fig. 2). The axe in grave 38 at Brūveri was by the right side of the head, with the handle towards the foot of the grave.

Other weapons in the burials include broad iron battle-knives (*scramasaxes*), long, narrow daggers, double-bladed swords and knives. Broad battle-knives have been found in burials with horse-trappings only at Aglonas Kristapiņi. They were placed by the pelvis, obliquely across the upper legs (graves 76 and 211).

The battle-knives were in sheaths: the remains of a decorated sheath were found with grave 91.

In some graves at Aglonas Kristapiņi, the broad battle-knives were replaced by narrower iron daggers (graves 11 and 174), which were placed in the burials in an analogous position to the former.

At Šķeltovas Brūveri, the burials with horse-trappings had only small iron knives in the region of the pelvis (Fig. 2:1, Fig. 4:7). At Aizkalnes Maskevicišķi, a knife was likewise provided as part of the inventory of a male grave with horse-trappings.

The cemeteries of Aglonas Kristapiņi (grave 280) and at Šķeltovas Brūveri (grave 40) have each produced a find of a double-bladed sword in a grave with horse-trappings. Both swords had been placed in scabbards with bronze mounts. One of these had an openwork scabbard chape, while the other had a chape with a stylised bird representation, a so-called “hawk sign”. The piece from Aglonas Kristapiņi is particularly ornate: the pommel and the straight guard are inlaid with pieces of silver and bronze sheet, and the grip is wound with a strip of bronze sheet (Kuniga 2000, p.69, Fig. XX: 1). The sword had been placed by the right leg, with the grip towards the head of the grave (Fig. 2:2, 6). Only a small proportion of the excavated Latgallian cemeteries have produced finds of swords, which generally occur in only one burial, or rarely in two (Kazakevičius 1996, Fig. 1). Thus, at Aglonas Kristapiņi, a sword was found only in this one grave out of a total of 126 male burials.

The set of ornaments in graves with horse-trappings included armbands, brooches and finger-rings. The most characteristic ornament form in these burials was the warrior’s armband, worn on the left arm (found with nine graves) (Fig. 4:1). Worn on the right arm was a solid armband with plane-convex terminals (graves 76 and 284 at Aglonas Kristapiņi) or a ribbon-like armband (grave 36 at Šķeltovas Brūveri; graves 174, 211 and 280 at Aglonas Kristapiņi). Found on burials with warriors’ armbands were arm-windings: the sleeve-end of the shirt had been wound with bronze spirals threaded on to a leather strap (Fig. 4:4, 5). These were found on nine burials, generally on the left arm under the warrior’s armband, although in some cases there were windings on both arms (graves 11 and 36 at Šķeltovas Brūveri). Three of the burials at Aglonas Kristapiņi had an arm-cloth on the left arm, decorated with bronze bars (graves 91, 280 and 284), and an arm-winding on the right arm.

A characteristic ornament form in burials with horse-trappings is the solid penannular brooch with polyhedral or square terminals (Fig. 4:3), occurring in nine

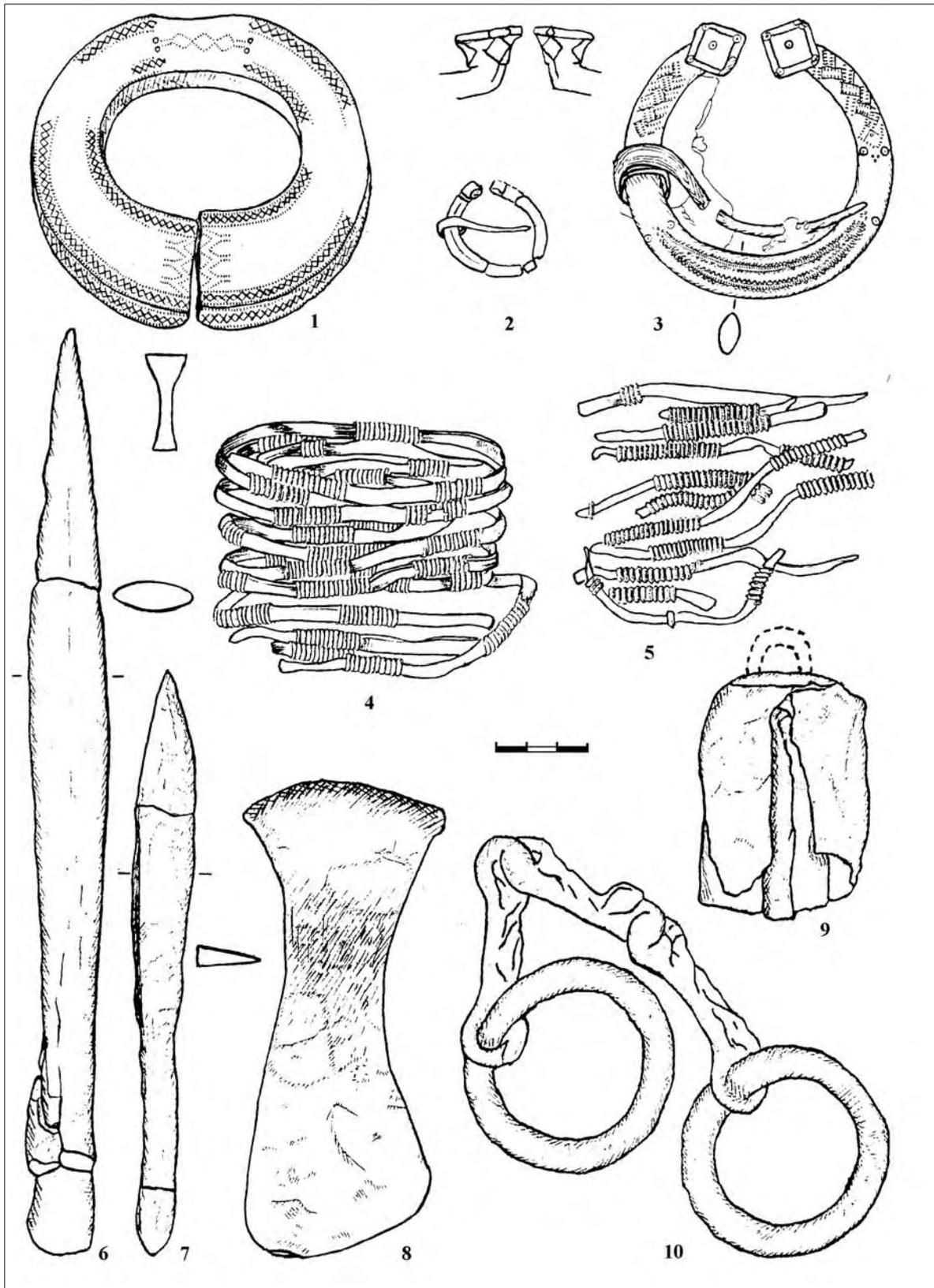


Fig. 4. The inventory of grave 11 at Škeltovas Brūveri: 1 a bronze warrior's armband; 2 a bronze penannular brooch; 3 a bronze solid penannular brooch; 4-5 arm-windings; 6 an iron spearhead; 7 an iron knife; 8 an iron axe; 9 an iron bell; 10 iron snaffle bits (drawing by S. Vītola).

burials, usually found on the chest and used to fasten the coat or cape. Used in addition to these brooches were smaller penannular brooches with rolled-back terminals (Fig. 4:2). Sometimes, several examples were found in a grave: two brooches in graves 91 and 174 at Aglonas Kristapiņi, and four in grave 11 at Brūveri. There were between one and eight rings on the fingers, most commonly spiral rings, less commonly rings with a middle-plate. An unusual ornament form was found in grave 36 at Šķeltovas Brūveri and grave 91 at Aglonas Kristapiņi: two bone (or bronze) duck figurines with trapezoidal pendants threaded into the tail and the beak.

Five burials had a leather belt decorated with bronze fittings around the middle, while grave 211 at Aglonas Kristapiņi had a belt with bronze mounts placed across the chest and over the right shoulder.

Several burials with horse-trappings had rows of bronze spirals or bars in the area of the head, thought to derive from a headcovering. Male grave 11 at Šķeltovas Brūveri possibly had decoration of bronze bars on the dress.

The male graves with horse-trappings can be regarded as rich and elaborate in terms of the range and quantity of objects, and do not differ from burials of a similar kind where horse-trappings have not been found.

Conclusions

As already mentioned, the provision of horse-trappings and riding gear is an unusual feature of Late Iron Age burial practices, observed only along the upper course of the River Dubna, in the southwestern part of the Latgallian-populated area. Riding gear (spurs and stirrups) also occurs more commonly on settlement sites in the Latgallian area, likewise very rare in Late Iron Age graves. An iron spur has been recovered as a stray find at the cemetery of Aizkalnes Ludvigova (LVM A12007:96), at the cemetery of Aizkraukle (LVM A 10512), in a 13th-century burial in barrow 2 at Jaunpiebalga (LVM V 819), and in grave 10 at Ērgļu Jaunākēni cemetery (Graudonis 1971, p.7), while a bronze spur has been found in an 11th-century grave in barrow 10 at Kaunatas Rikopole (Balodis 1925, p.363). Even less common in graves are iron stirrups: there is one stray find from the cemetery of Rēzinas Jusi (LVM A 8717:24). Interestingly enough, neither spurs nor stirrups have been found in any of the burials with horse-trappings in the cemeteries around the upper course of the Dubna basin that are discussed here.

Finds of horse-trappings in burials reflect a burial custom widely represented in Lithuania, where horse-trap-

pings occur in male burials already in the first centuries AD, and in the mid-first millennium AD there was the practice of burying the horse together with the rider (Kulikauskienė 1953, p.211, Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė 1999).

It is possible that this unusual feature of the burial practices in the upper course of the Dubna basin was introduced as a result of contact with Lithuania, as some researchers consider, although it has also been suggested that a population group may have migrated into this area (Kuniga 2000, p.107). It should be added that, had there occurred a migration, the grave inventories of these and other burials would have included ornament or weapon forms not characteristic of the Latgallians, something that has not been observed at the excavated sites.

As is known, the burial inventory reflects the character of the society and the social status of the particular individual. In the Late Iron Age, all the Latgallian cemeteries in eastern Latvia have male burials with a warrior's armband, an axe, a spear, a battle knife, decoration of the dress or headcovering, armbands, brooches and finger-rings. Judging from the expressly military character of the grave goods, particularly the so-called warrior's armband and arm-cloth, the members of this group may be regarded as members of a military retinue. The male burials with horse-trappings in the cemeteries of the upper course of the Dubna basin do not differ from this category of burial in terms of the range of other grave goods or their position in the grave.

Burials with horse-trappings appear in the second half of the tenth century, which, judging by the grave inventories, was a time of social change. An increase in the number of items in the grave inventory, the growing diversity of grave goods, for example, the provision of scales and weights, and the appearance of exceptional, rare, ornate and expensive objects in the grave inventories, all point to the development of social and professional differences in society. Thus, the ornate swords found in the grave inventories were not only an important weapon in battle, but also symbolised might, riches and honour (Kazakevičius 1996, p.93). Researchers have viewed burials with grave inventories of this kind as being those of the economic and political leaders of the community (Radiņš 1999, p.134).

Male grave inventories of a similar character are also encountered among the eastern neighbours of the Latgallians, for example at the cemetery of Zalakhtovye, lying on the eastern shore of Lake Peipus, where a male burial from the second half of the tenth century had a double-bladed sword, and axe, a spearhead, a gag bit, a whip stock and other objects (Hvoshchinskaja 1977,

p.63ff., Fig. 2). Thus, the processes described here were occurring not only in Latgalian society, but in a much wider region.

In this period, a new social and professional group began to emerge: the military retinue, which used armaments of a different kind. These were people of a high rank who possessed military power. The provision of horse-trappings as grave goods reflects only a minor difference in the character of this power, pointing to an increase in the role of cavalry and cavalry leaders in warfare. Likewise, finds of riding gear (spurs, stirrups and bridle-bits) at Late Iron Age settlement sites testify to the growing role of cavalry in the early medieval military retinue.

Translated by Valdis Bērziņš

Abbreviations

LVM A, AA – Latvian National History Museum, Riga
 LA – Lietuvos archeologija, Vilnius
 LVI – LU Latvian Institute of History, Riga
 ZASM par... gadu. – Zinātniskās atskaites sesijas materiāli par arheologu un etnogrāfu 1971.-1989.gada pētījumu rezultātiem. Rīga, 1972–1990.

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X-XI AMŽIAUS LATGALIŪ SRITIES KARIŪ KAPAI SU ŽIRGŪ ATRIBUTAIS

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Santrauka

Tyrinējant vēlyvojo geležies amžiais pietryčū Latvijos kapinynus Dubnos upēs aukštupio baseine, buvo pastebėti tik šiai sričiai būdingi laidojimo papročiai, kurie nėra paplitę už nagrinėjamos srities ribų (1 pav.). IX-XI a. galima išskirti vyrų kapus su karių apyrankėmis ant kairiosios rankos ir masyvias apyrankes su lygias išgaubtais galais, nešiojamas ant dešiniuosios rankos, ir dažnai didelę pasagineę segę su daugiakampėmis ar keturkampėmis galvutėmis, kurios susegdavo drabužį (2; 4: 1, 3 pav.). Šiems kapams būdinga ginkluotė (4: 6-8 pav.). Nagrinėjamo laikotarpio kapų su tokiomis įkapėmis randama visame latgalių gyventame areale. Tokius kapus tyrinėtojai skiria karių palaidojimams. Tačiau tik pietrytinėje latgališkojo arealo dalyje, Dubnos upės baseine, X-XI a. kapų inventoriuose taip pat randama žirgo atributų.

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MILITARY
LEADERSHIP

Žirgo atributų buvo rasta penkiuose tyrinėtuose Dubnos upės aukštupio kapinynuose (Aglonas Kristapiņi, Aizkalnes Ludvigova, Aizkalnes Maskeviciški, Višķu Maskava and Šķeltovas Brūveri). Žirgo aprangos atributų buvo rasta 16-oje kapų, datuojamų X–XI amžiumi (1 pav.; 1 lent.). Tarp šių kapų įkapių rasta geležinių žąslų, geležinių skambalų ir geležinių botagų dalių (lentelė). Dažniausiai žirgo aprangos atributai buvo sudedami kojūgalyje (2 pav.).

Geležiniai botkočiai turi metalinę rankeną su kilpa, į kurią buvo įveriami odinis botagas (I tipas pagal A. N. Kirpichnikovo tipologiją) (3 pav.). Skambalai, rasti kapuose, buvo iš lakštinės skardos, jie yra cilindro formos, viršuje siaurėjantys (4: 9 pav.). Labiau paplitę trinariai žąslai (12 atvejų), dvinarių žąslai yra rasta mažiau (Aglonas Kristapiņi, kapas 284).

Vyrų kapai su žirgų atributais yra laikomi turtingais ir prašmatniais, bet pagal daiktų kiekį, jie nesiskiria nuo kapų, kuriuose žirgų atributų nebuvo rasta.

Gali būti, kad šis neįprastas laidosenos bruožas Dubnos baseino aukštupyje atsirado dėl ryšių su Lietuva, kur žirgų aprangos atributų vyrų kapuose randama jau iš pirmųjų amžių po Kristaus ir I tūkstantmečio vidurio, – žinomas to meto paprotys kartu su raiteliu laidoti žirgą.

Kapų su žirgo atributais atsirado X a. antrojoje pusėje. Šis laikotarpis, sprendžiant iš kapų inventorių, buvo socialinių pokyčių metas. Tuomet kapuose pagausėjo įkapių, padidėjo retų, puošnių ir brangių daiktų skaičius. Visa tai rodo visuomenės socialinės raidos ir profesionaliosios veiklos skirtumus. Šiuo laikotarpiu atsiranda naujų socialinių visuomenės grupių. Viena iš jų – karinė palyda, kuri naudojo įvairią ginkluotę. Tai buvo aukšto socialinio rango žmonės, turintys karinę valdžią. Jų aprūpinimas žirgo atributais kaip įkapėmis atskleidžia tik nedidelį šios valdžios pobūdžio skirtumą, kuris rodo, kad kare išaugo kavalerijos ir jos vadų vaidmuo.