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Burial Y-68 of the Yrzekapinis barrow burial mounds area, Klintsovka 1 archaeological site, North Sambia

Abstract

In this paper archaeological sources of Klintsovka-1 site, Kaliningrad, Russia are revised in the context of new finds. The author presents revised analyses on burial finds and DNA-testing to point out preliminary conclusions of cultural associations of the researched population.

Keywords: Early Medieval, population genetics, paleo-DNA, burials, Kaliningrad

The most thoroughly studied archaeological site, left by the holders of the Prussians culture of the late phase of the Great Migration period and the Viking Age is the Yrzekapinis, Klintsovka-1 barrow burial mounds area. It is located on a very gentle slope of a low moraine upland, 0.3 km to the north of the Village Wikiau/Klintsovka (Zelenograd district of the Kaliningrad Region), 1.7 km to the northwest of the famous barrow burial mounds area of the forest of Kaup (Fig. 1–2). This burial ground was excavated by the Baltic expedition of the Institute of Archeology of the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1977–1986, the materials of these excavations were published by author (Kulakov 1999: 211–273). A new level of our knowledge about the Prussian warriors, buried in the 10th–early 12th centuries, allows us to return to the materials of this interesting archaeological site (Kulakov 1988: 131–136).

Grave Y-68, Klintsovka-1 barrow burial mounds archaeological site

In April 1977, the Baltic Department of the Institute of Archeology of the USSR Academy of Sciences, under the guidance of Victor Kulakov, discovered the Yrzekapinis/Klintsovka-1 barrow burial mounds area and in the same year began excavations of this archaeological site, which was partly damaged by collective farm plowing. In 1978, on the eastern edges of the burial ground (Fig. 2), among others, the burial Y-68 site has been distinguished.

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Fig. 1. Location of the burial ground of Yrzekapinis/Klintsovska-1 (1) and a complex of archaeological monuments around the forest boundary Kaup (2) in the north of Sambia. OpenStreetMap©

The described grave Y-68 is a oval-shape feature (size 1.50×1.30 m, depth 0.47 m) of two layers containing cremation remains. The grave orientation is the northeast-south-west. The lower layer of the grave contained a horse skull covered with felt. In these context two-parted curbs with bone psalia, a headstall decorated with silver coated bronze plates (1×1 cm), a pair of poorly preserved stirrups, a bell, and two iron buckles were occurred. The upper layer of the grave was filled with remains of a funeral fire. In the center of funeral fire debris of calcified bones were concentrated. Human remains were equipped with remains of a rolled sword (the type J.P.T), a bronze dish and circular vessels decorated with slotted linear ornament (Fig. 3). Furthermore in grave deposit an iron awl; scissors, a bronze ring-separator of the swordbelt, a bronze hook with molded “wolf tooth” on the front side and the bronze tip of the sword sheath, the U-shape steel were also distinguished. Grave assemblage also contains a bronze weight with a cross cut on the front side (weighting 37.80 grams which is equal to 19 fractions of 0.5 “dirhem”), a bronze sestertius⁴ of Faustina the Younger (125–175 AD) (weighting 15 grams), a horseshoe brooch form bronze weights, a spur with a straight point, an iron snap buckle and two knives⁵ (Fig. 3). The indexed materials of the grave have been published by author and dated to the second half of the 11th century (Kulakov 1999: 241).

The two-layer grave morphology of the burial Y-68, seem to be typical for the Aestian culture (Prussian ancestors) and dating back to the early Middle Ages (Kulakov 1990: 20).

⁴ The coin is carved around its perimeter to be used as a balance weight (reconstructed weight is 15.28 grams equal to 8 shares of 0.5 “dirhem”).

⁵ One of which is bent.

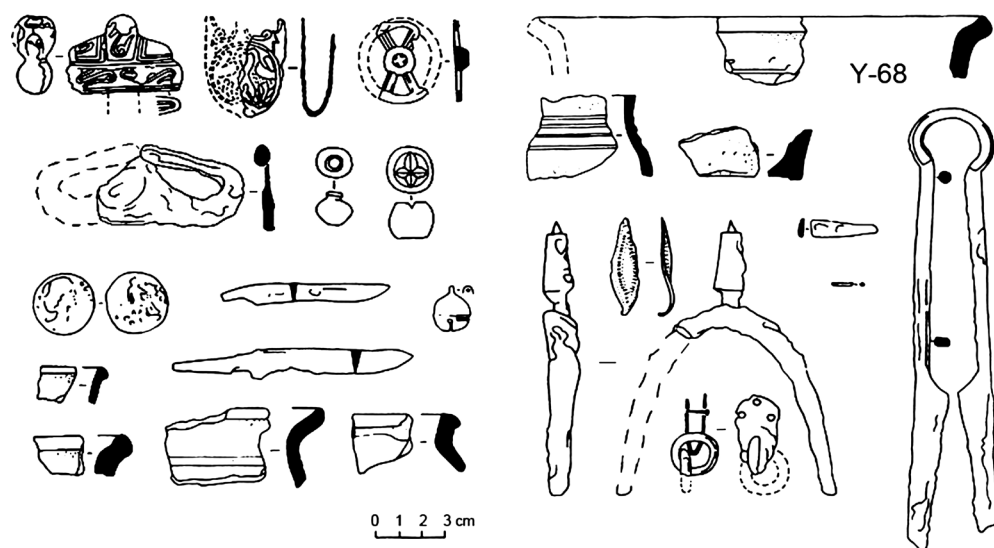


Fig. 3. The item complex of the burial Y-68, Yrzekapinis-Klintsovska-1 archaeological site (Kulakov 1999: Fig. 36)

This observation might be an indication to conclude that in any case, the contemporaries of the warrior, buried within the complex were Prussians and adhered to their cult traditions.

A horse skull, covered with a layer of felt (the proof of placing a horse skin in the grave), found in the burial Y-68, confirms the above-mentioned ethno-cultural interpretation of the complex (Kulakov 1990: 20). Furthermore, to present stronger arguments for the conclusions, the detailed analyses of various components of the grave assemblages were implemented by authors.

Analyses of components of the Y-68 grave assemblage

Analyses of various components of the grave assemblages located in North Sambia has been taken in context of cultural and ethnic connections with researched Y-68 burial.

First, the rites of blended sword folded into the grave has been studied. The sword, burnt on the funeral fire, during this process was rolled up and, as a result of those conditions, its blade was broken. The described funeral rites are typical for the Scalvian warriors, who controlled the western part of the Neman Amber Route in the 11th century (Kulakov 2012: 86, 87). Two poorly preserved fragments of a two-cutting-edge blade of the sword (with traces of bending) and an iron pommel decorated with damascening were found in the grave Y-68 (Fig. 4, 1). Since the central part of the three-part pommel is not distinguished from the rest of its parts by its size, then, as A.N. Kirpichnikov determined, this sword can be attributed to the type J.P. T-2 (Kirpichnikov 1966: 28). Vytautas Kazakevičius did not support the gradation of J.P. T type, proposed by A.N. Kirpichnikov. He connects the decoration of the hilt of this type of swords with the activities of the Curonian masters

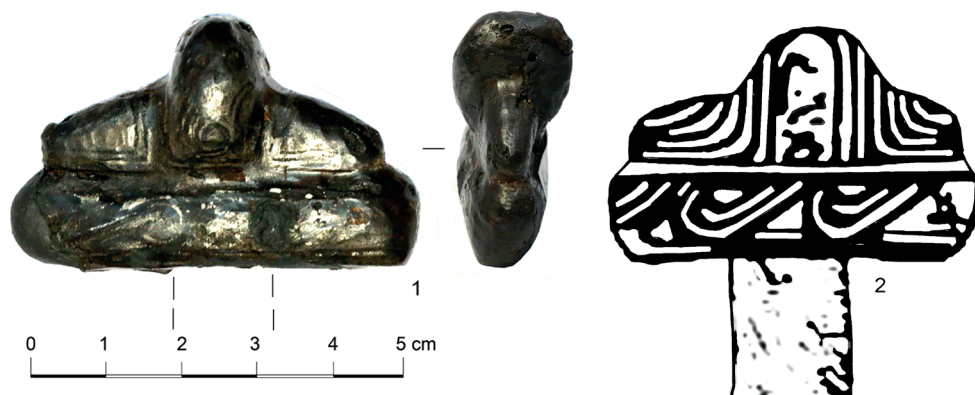


Fig. 4. Details of J.P.T-2 type swords: 1 – the pommel of the hilt of the sword from the burial Y-68 site (Funds of the Kaliningrad Regional Museum of History and Art, Inventory No. 17567.8); 2 – pommel hilt of the sword from the burial 222 of the burial ground Laiviai, Kretingos raj., Lithuania (Kazakevičius 1998: 49 pav.)

(Kazakevičius 1996: 53–57) and dates these swords to the second half of the 10th–11th centuries (Kazakevičius 1996: 47, 49).

Comparable with find from grave Y-68 is pommel excavated in the grave Y-8 located in the grave area of Laiviai, Kretingos raj., Lithuania (Fig. 4: 2). Small sizes of the hilt details of the type J.P. T-2 swords allow to conclude about swords combat value but furthermore consider economic status of their owners.

Another element of Y-68 grave assemblage considered in wider context is the tip of sword sheath. The archaeological find excavated from the grave was strongly damaged by fire. Nevertheless, it has been defined and classified as Kazakevičius IV type (Kazakevičius 1998: 304–307). Following P. Paulsen, he associates the production of these tips with the tribal range of Curonians and dates this detail of the military equipment to the 11th century (Kazakevičius 1998: 305). The archaeologist from Szczecin, Andrzej Janowski, concludes about presence of analogical swords tips mainly in graves of (western) Balts (Janowski, Kurasiński 2009: 90, 4), although he does not correlate this occurrences with a high social status of a sword holders of the Prussian 'tribes' (Janowski 2006: 42). Recent data and studies of the material culture of western Balts of the Viking Age are basis to distinguish two variants of forms of the tips of the Kazakevičius IV type.

Variant 1 (Fig. 5: 1–9), tips of this variant carrying elements of zoomorfolological decoration in its upper part, most realistically represented in an occasional discovery at the Dollkeim/Kovrovo burial ground (Fig. 5: 1). The remaining tips, represented in the upper row of the array of findings in Fig. 5, represent increasingly degrading details of the tip from the Dollkeim/Kovrovo. A pair of "kissing" birds (according to the drawings on the tail on Fig. 5: 4–6 might be considered as peacocks) gradually lose the realistic features of their figures, the medallion in which they are originally located, loses its rounded lines.

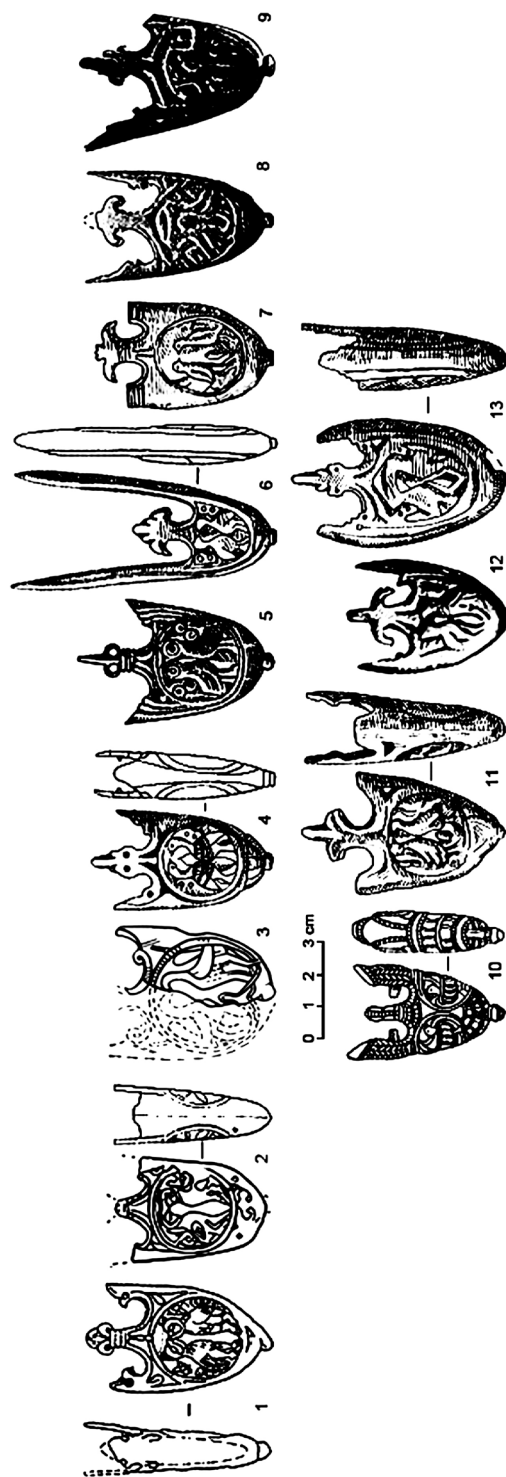


Figure 5. Variants of the tips of the sword sheath of the Kazakevičius IV type: 1 – noncontext find, Dollkeim/Kovrovo culture (Kulakov 2004: Fig. 85.3); 2 – burial Y-33, Yrzekapinis/Klintsovska-1 archaeological site (Kazakevičius 1998: 31 pav., 2); 3 – burial Y-68 of Yrzekapinis/Klintsovska-1 archaeological site (Kulakov 1999: Fig. 36); 4 – noncontext find, Rucavus aleja, Lithuania (Kazakevičius 1998: 31 pav., 1); 5 – Sverige (Kazakevičius 1998: 34 pav.); 6 – burial 34, Libagų Saraja archaeological site, Talsu raj., Lithuania (Kazakevičius 1998: 31 pav., 8); 7, 11 – noncontext finds at the Gintališkis, Plungės raj., Lithuania (Kazakevičius 1998: 31 pav., 3,5); 8 – noncontext find, Grabuppen/Grabupiai, Šilutės raj., Lithuania (Mühlen 1975: Taf., 14,9); 9 – noncontext find, Slengiai, Klaipėdos raj., Lithuania (Kazakevičius 1998: 32 pav.); 10 – noncontext find, Gramzdų Dežniekai, Liepojos raj., Lithuania (Kazakevičius 1998: 31 pav., 4); 12 – noncontext find Dollkeim/Kovrovo culture (Mühlen B 1975: Taf., 14,8); 13 – noncontext find, Šilalės raj., Lietuva (Kazakevičius 1998: 31 pav., 7)

Variant 2, tips of this variant are smaller than variant 1, the zoomorphological figures do not hold the realistic features (Fig. 5, 10–13), birds are depicted with very simple lines and becoming more schematically, the lines around depictions are lost. There is no doubt about a later dating of these artifacts compared to the variant 1 tips. In this case, most likely, we face the final stage of development of the tips of the sword sheaths of the Kazakevičius IV type, which developed during the 11th century.

The fact that the tip from the burial Y-68 fits to the early part of the align of variant 1 tips, confirms the above dating of this complex, most likely, no later than the early 11th century.

The published map of the dispersion of the tips of the sword sheaths of the Kazakevičius IV type sword (Fig. 6) presenting the range of these finds mainly to the south of the mouth of the river Daugava/Western Dvina and on the opposite shore of the Scandinavian coast.



Fig. 6. Discoveries of the tips of the Kazakevičius IV type in Europe (Janowski 2006: gus. 12)

There is no clear view of the origin of images on the tips of sword sheaths of the Kazakevičius IV type among the archaeologists of the Southeastern Baltic. In late antique and Byzantine decorative art of 4th–5th centuries AD, a pair of symmetrically arranged peacocks by the crucifix, alternatively a bowl or a palm tree were a common motif. The details and composition of this motif might be considered as inspired decoration applied by the 12th century. In the 10th–early 11th centuries the symbol of the elite warrior's was the image

of the Icelandic gyrfalcon (including the tip of the sword sheath) (Kulakov, Markowets 2004: 182–184).

Probably the next generation of masters, aware that the tip should include the bird depiction, arranged the image in their own way. These thesis of image inspirations are wider then currently concluded by A. Janowski, who refers the decoration to older Scandinavian ornaments (Janowski 2012: 20). Authors conclude, that traditional Byzantine design of two peacocks might became the model for the works of masters of the Southeastern Baltic. They obviously came by the Dvina and the Neman segments of the route “from the Vikings to the Greeks”. This Byzantine imports naturally spread in the interfluvium of the lower courses of the mentioned rivers, where the tips of Kazakevičius IV type were spread. They appear in the funerary assemblages of the Curonian warriors, who scattered around (at the end of their life journey?) across their tribal range. The tips of the sword sheaths of the subtype Kazakevičius VIb, whose owners found their last home on the banks of the river Daugava/Western Dvina, where they controlled Dvina segment of the route “from the Vikings to the Greeks” have a slightly different view of the distribution (Janowski 2006: 14). Perhaps, the beginning of their manufacture should be attributed to a later date than the date stated above, to the second half of the 11th century.

A weight, equipped with a slotted cross on its upper plane, was found in the grave Y-68 together with a weight, imitating the pommel of a horseshoe brooch of the Mohnkoppfibel type (weights of type 3 – Kulakov 1990: 34). Exactly the same combination of weights was discovered by Adalbert Bezenberger during the excavation of the Possritten/Davydovka (Polessky district) burial ground along with the bracteata of Order times (Bezenberger 1900: 270–271, Abb. 77). The last aspect allows us to regard the surviving of these kinds of weights to the Order times. The beginning of the use of weights with a cross according to the discovery of such a weight in the burial Y-45 (late XI century) of the Yrzekapis burial ground/Klintsovka-1 together with the Steuer B2-type weights (Kulakov 1999: 233, Fig. 26). This aspect of the dating of one of the components of the assemblage of the burial Y-68 enables to move the date of its construction closer to the end of the 11th century.

Conclusions

Thus, the detailed analysis of several items of burial inventory found in the burial Y-68 of the earth burial ground Yrzekapis/Klintsovka-1 (now – the western outskirts of the city of Zelenogradsk, Kaliningrad region) allows us to assume the connection of the buried in the end of the 11th century⁶ high-ranking⁷ member of the Sambian warrior squad, associated with the Curonian ethno-cultural traditions⁸.

The subsequent genetic testing was done and it is described in (Merkulov 2018). Due to the bad quality of preservation only 2 loci were readable. The haplogroup definition

⁶ And not at the beginning, as previously assumed.

⁷ According to the highly decorated sword.

⁸ Merkulov, Vsevolod. DNS hilft historische Fragen zu klären. FederKiel, 11. Ausgabe. Herbst 2014: 8–10, <http://pereformat.ru/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/merkulov-dns.pdf>.

was made by 2 loci (DYS392 = 11, DYS438 = 11) and gave high probability of R1a haplogroup. The principles and discussion of genetic method in history were already presented (Merkulov 2014).

Concluding, firstly, due to the poor preservation of bone remains in the Baltic soil, and also, in context of the cremation rituals, which were wide-spread in ancient Prussia in the early Middle Ages (which entails the possibility of using only accidentally preserved large bone fragments for DNA analyses), the obtaining of a reliable haplogroup profile of the population of the early medieval Prussia requires further researches and funding. However, the above circumstances increase the value of the already obtained data.

Nevertheless, even taking into account the modesty of the results, one can note its representativeness, since the burial contains the remains of an elite warrior, a member of a small military elite, since the warrior squad (in Russian – *druzhina*) in the pre- and early-state societies of Northern Europe usually had a small number of participants, representing a wide variety of tribal groups. Consequently, we can confirm the validity of the hypothesis with fact that a certain group of the military elite of historical Prussia of the Viking Age belongs to the haplogroup R1a. Sample data from public databases show that this combination of markers occurs in subclades R1a-CTS11962, R1a-YP1019, R1a-Y2902, R1a-YP569. This is a group of different Balto-Slavic subclades (to distinguish which other markers are needed). However, the first conclusions need further confirmation and new data analyses.

Summary

In this paper archaeological sources of Klintsovka-1 archaeological site are revised. The site is located within the slope of a low moraine upland, 0.3 km to the north of the Village Wikiau (Zelenograd District, Kaliningrad).

The burial ground dated 10th to 12th century, has been excavated by the Baltic expedition of the Institute of Archeology, USSR Academy of Sciences during the years 1977–1986.

After almost forty years, new conclusions about dispersion and meaning of the burial finds and cultural references are drawn by the author. In this paper new stylistic connections of finds including swords, buckles and horse equipment are discussed.

Based on the finds observation and new preliminary results of DNA-testing of human remains revealed on Yrzekapinis/Klintsovka-1 site the author preliminarily concludes their association to haplogroup R1a, Balto-Slavic subclades. However, final conclusions must be supported by additional data.

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