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Atypical burial rites or destruction of archaeological source? On the results of rescue excavations at Jakšiškis Barrow Cemetery (East Lithuania)

Abstract

Simniškytė A. 2018. Atypical burial rites or destruction of archaeological source? On the results of rescue excavations at Jakšiškis Barrow Cemetery (East Lithuania). *Raport 13*, 137-153

In Lithuania and, specifically, in its eastern part which falls into the habitat of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture (c. 3/4th–11/12th century AD), rescue archaeology encouraged the search for new archaeological facts, namely, burials between barrows. The first results considerably shattered the established belief that burials had been made in barrows only and provided an argument in favour of the possibility of a dual burial tradition of both barrows and flat burials. This article focuses on these “atypical graves” detected during the rescue excavations at one of the most representative barrow cemeteries, namely, Jakšiškis barrow cemetery. A detailed analysis of the Jakšiškis barrow cemetery research materials implies, however, that adopting the hypothesis of the flat burials as proven might be premature, and the circumstances of their discovery enable more than one alternative interpretation.

Keywords: East Lithuania, barrows, flat burials, post-deposition

Barrows represent one of the main features of the Iron Age landscape in the Eastern Lithuania. They have supplied the name, established in Lithuanian archaeological terminology, for the entire East Lithuania Barrow Culture, dating to c. 3/4th–11/12th century AD (Fig. 1). East Lithuanian barrows are found in the area of roughly 21,000 km², which encompasses the bulk of the present-day Eastern Lithuania and a small part of the Northwestern Belarus. According to different data summaries, it accounts for more than 600 barrow cemeteries of different size ranging from individual barrows to hundreds of them and including both the surviving archaeological sites and the destroyed ones (Myadvedev 1999, 384; Kurila 2016).

Since the mid-19th century, more than 1,450 barrows located at over 180 archaeological sites have been excavated in the Eastern Lithuania (Kurila 2016, 193). For a long time, the researchers were focused primarily on barrows and burials within them, especially on the burial goods, their typology, and chronology. Therefore, the research targeted the best preserved barrows. This

also determined the excavation methods, which focused mostly on excavating mounds; everything beyond that, like ditches, pits or other features outside or in between the mounds, was neglected. Eventually, the research quality increased and more information was acquired but the focus on mounds continued till the end of the 20th century.

After Lithuania regained its independence, a massive research of disturbed barrows, presumed locations of the destroyed ones, and even entire sections of the barrow cemeteries under threat was initiated. In some cases, the scientific value of the collected data degraded. However, as the experiences of other countries show, it has been the rescue archaeology which has revealed the true potential of barrow cemeteries not limited to the mounds themselves but also revealing a much broader data range (e.g. Fontijn *et al.* 2013). In Lithuania and specifically in its eastern part which falls into the habitat of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture, rescue archaeology encouraged the search for new archaeological facts, namely, burials between barrows. The first results

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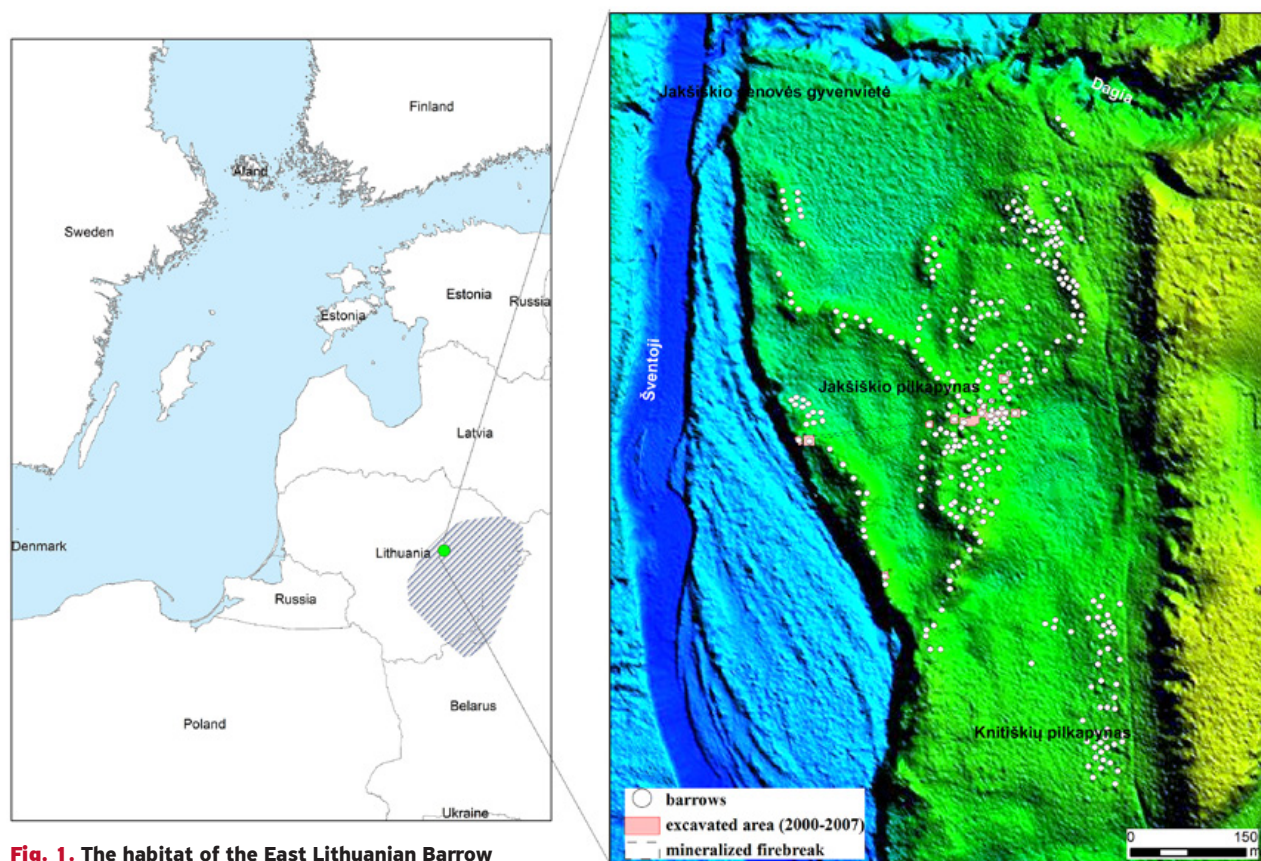


Fig. 1. The habitat of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture (the hatched area) and the Jakšiškis barrow cemetery (marked green)

considerably shattered the established belief that burials had been made in barrows only and gave rise to an assumption that, next to mounds, barrow cemeteries might have hosted flat graves, too (Ivanauskas 2000; Simniškytė 2008; Butėnas 2012; Steponaitis 2012; Šmigelskas 2016). On the other hand, the data acquired from the disturbed areas requires critical assessment taking into account the level of destruction of the archaeological source, the disturbance effect, and the adequacy of the research scope. This article represents a review of these “atypical graves” found at the Eastern Lithuanian barrow cemeteries. It is illustrated with materials acquired during rescue excavations at one of the most representative barrow cemeteries, namely, Jakšiškis barrow cemetery, which were performed in 2000–2007 (Simniškytė 2002a, 2002b, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008).

■ JAKŠIŠKIS BARROW CEMETERY AND ITS INVESTIGATION

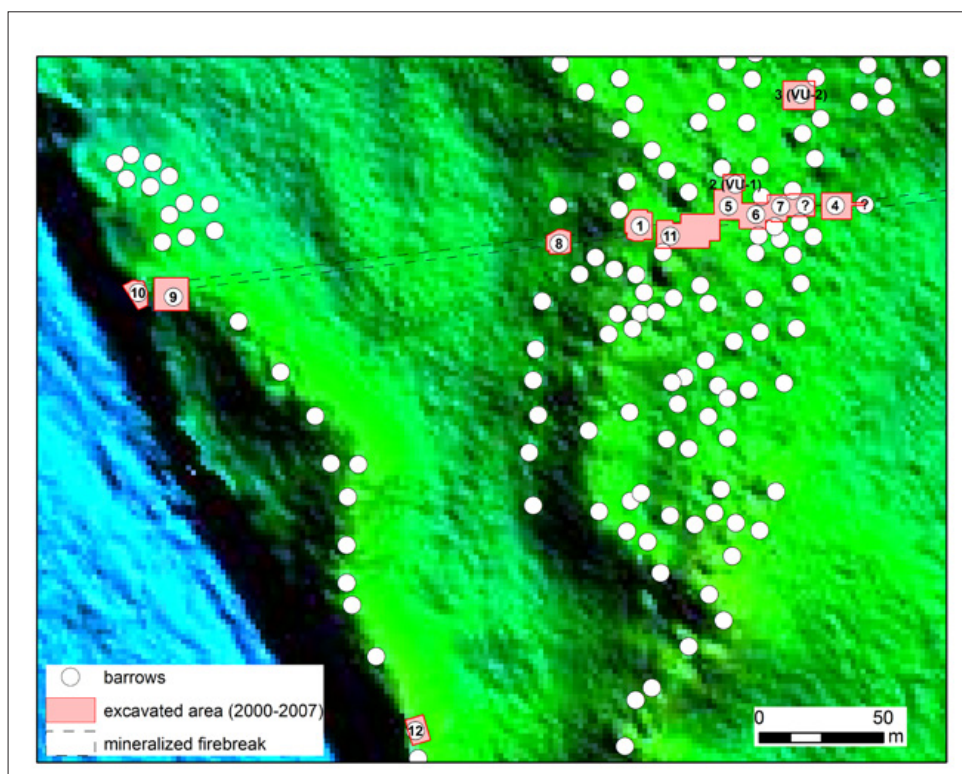
Jakšiškis barrow cemetery of also called the Swedish Graves or Kurgans is located in the Anykščiai District on the left bank of the Šventoji southwards from its confluence with the Dagia Brook at the pine forest called *Šilelis*. The cemetery comprises more than 250 barrows scattered over a 760 m long and 490 m wide territory.

From the south, there is another barrow group, namely, Knitiškiai barrow cemetery, which consists of some 50 barrows. Together those two cemeteries form one of the largest barrow complexes in Lithuania with over 300 barrows scattered in the area of around 25 ha (Fig. 1).

In this cemetery, barrow sizes vary from 5 to 20 m in diameter, and, although most of the barrows are 1–1.5 m high, some of them rise up to 2.5 m. The smaller barrows concentrate in the northeastern part of the cemetery and the bigger ones are located in the centre. However, in many cases, barrows of different sizes are found next to each other. Barrows form a dense network on the terrain ridges, where they stand separated only by the encircling ditches. It is possible to distinguish the central concentration of the barrows located on a 4–5 m high elevation rising 250 m away from the Šventoji River bed westwards and northwards from wetland depression called *Liūnelis* (EN. *mire*, *marsh*). From this concentration, terrain elevations covered with barrows stretch in different directions.

The barrow cemetery has been known since the late 19th century (Pokrovsky 1899, 106 (nr. 93 – Янишки). In 1910, based on the information provided by S. Masalitinov, M. Makarenka wrote that there were many barrows in the forest of the Hopen's manor near *Wawiszki* (the distorted name of Vidiškiai) and that iron

Fig. 2. Areas researched at the Jakšiškis barrow cemetery in 2000-2007



axes and spearheads were found therein (Makarenko 1910, 104). For some time, the area of the barrow cemetery could have been ploughed (VAK b.67, 208-212), but the sandy soil was not suitable for agriculture and most of the barrows must have survived, although, they suffered from treasure hunters. A considerable part of the cemetery must have been weathered by the eroding slope of the Šventoji terrace; the erosion continues till nowadays.

A considerable damage to the central concentration of the barrows was done by the mineralised firebreak which was cut across its area. The barrow cemetery was included into the list of the damaged cultural monuments and its rescue excavations began in 2000 under the order of the Department of Cultural Heritage. During the period of 2000–2007, 10 barrows were excavated (nine of them were the ones damaged by the firebreak and one was the barrow remains on the slope of the Šventoji terrace), one natural mound previously confused for a barrow was checked, and two areas between the barrows covering 102 m² and approximately 220 m² were investigated. During 8 excavation seasons, the total area of 1,437 m² was investigated at the damaged sections. Connecting the research areas, an almost continuous area of dozen meters in width and 120 meters in length (stretching over 1,000 m² in total) was uncovered (Fig. 2) (Simniškytė 2002a; 2002b; 2005a; 2005b; 2006a; 2006b; 2007; 2008).

Besides that, in 2000, an expedition organised by Vilnius University excavated two undisturbed and rather well preserved barrows in the vicinity of the damaged

area (Michelbertas 2002; 2010). This provided a perfect opportunity to compare disturbed and undisturbed barrows and assess the impact of mineralization on archaeological sources. Summarising, 12 barrows and the area of over 300 m² between the barrows (over per 1,600 m² in total) were excavated in 2000–2007.

■ BARROWS

Barrows researched within the framework of the damaged archaeological monuments research programme were levelled during mineralization of the firebreak; the remains of most of them rose only 0.25–0.5 m above the initial ground level identified during the excavations. Actual diameters of the barrows were revealed only after uncovering the ground down to the subsoil where features of the ditches encircling the barrows appeared. The external diameter of the barrows reached 9–12 m. The diameter of the smallest barrow (barrow 8) was 7.5 m and the one of the biggest and highest (barrow 12) had to be some 13–14 m, although, due to the erosion of the slope of the riverbank terrace, only half of the barrow survived.

The barrows were erected of yellowish sand which contained random pieces of charcoal. In the cross sections of the barrows, the initial surface level was visible as an approximately 0.1–0.3 m thick greyish layer well distinguishable from the geological substrate sand underneath.

The researched barrows were encircled with ditches (or pits in some cases). Some of them were not visible prior to the research. For instance, the trench encircling

barrow 12 was covered with a 1 m thick layer of sand. Although the barrows were rather close to each other, every single one of them was encircled with an individual ditch. These ditches varied in depth (0.17–0.9 m) and width (0.3–2 m); these parameters varied even for the same barrow. Shallow ditches could have served as symbolic landmarks of the barrow but in some cases the soil dug out from these ditches was used to form a considerable portion the barrow itself. Some of the ditches were continuous; others had one or several 0.2–3.5 m wide breaks. Barrow 8 was encircled with 1.4–1.9 m wide and 0.6–0.85 m deep pits of a varying length, namely, 2, 2.85, 5, and 8 m (the longer pits could have been formed out of smaller ones which merged eventually). The ditch encircling barrow 9 had four or five breaks and also looked like a formation of several 4–6 m long pits.

There were no stone constructions or circles found at the researched barrows of Jakšiškis barrow cemetery, except for several stones in the ditches encircling barrows 4, 5, and 11.

■ BURIALS AND FINDS WITHIN BARROWS

Out of 10 disturbed barrows researched, only four contained graves with cremated human remains: barrows 4, 6, 7, and 11 had one grave each. Three of the researched

barrows (5, 8, and 12) contained no graves; only accidental artefacts were found in these mounds and/or ditches. Barrow 1 contained a horse burial, and two barrows (namely, barrows 9 and 10) were empty.

As most of the researched barrows were levelled, it is hard to determine the initial number of burials therein. Usually, burials are identified based on the concentrations of bones and artefacts, meanwhile scattered bones or accidental artefacts are not identified as burials: they are interpreted as disturbed fractions of the said concentrations instead. Barrow 6 contained a grave of an adult but, some 3 m away from the said grave, a small quantity of bones was found, too. It was not interpreted as an individual burial assuming that the bones came from the abovementioned grave. However, the osteological analysis revealed that the bones were of a 1- to 5-year-old child. The presence of a child burial in the barrow was also confirmed by the find of a child-size bracelet. Excavations of undisturbed barrows 2 and 3 also imply that there could have been many more graves: the undisturbed barrows contained three graves each; moreover, there were scattered cremated bones as well as artefacts and their fragments therein, too. Some of them could have been related to the mentioned burials but others could have come from unidentified ones.

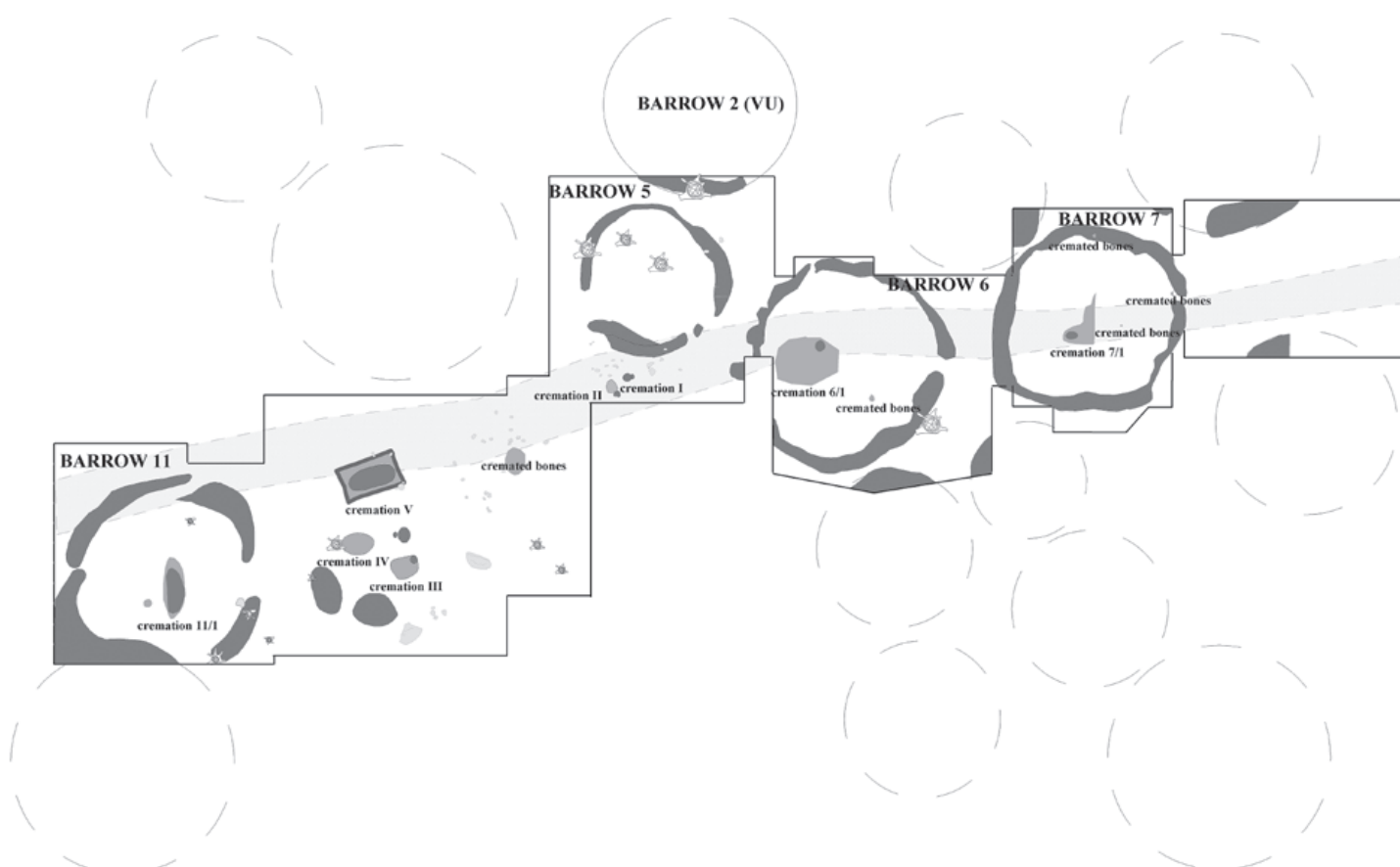


Fig. 3. The researched area within the section of the mineralised firebreak

Cremations took place not at the location of the future grave but somewhere else in an open pyre at the temperature of approximately 800–900°C. The cremated bones were then diligently collected and carried to the location of the future barrow. The bones could have been transported in ceramic vessels. Grave 3/3 (here and further – barrow no./burial no.) excavated by the Vilnius University expedition contained almost a whole vessel. A broken vessel was also found in the ditch of barrow 11. Besides, potsherds were present at grave 1 of barrow 4, although only some 250 g of them were collected.

The outlines of the graves were undistinguishable in the soil in terms of colour. Cremated bones mixed with sand were found spilt in a few to a dozen centimetres thick layers at the basis of the barrows. This could have been the effect of ploughing, too. The initial construction of the graves is not quite clear. Most probably, the remains were buried in small pits or formed small piles. Grave 6/1 was found at the depth of approximately 0.4 m from the current ground level; it lay in a small 0.26 m deep pit which had 0.5 m in diameter. The pit was visually indistinguishable; it could only be sensed during exploration. Ploughing turned the upper section of the grave into a 0.1–0.25 m thick layer mixed with mound sand and scattered the cremated bones over a 5–6 m² large area (Fig. 3). In barrow 7 located nearby, the bones were also scattered in the area of several square meters. The barrow was levelled, so the bones were lying shallow at the depth of only 0.22 m. At the depth of 0.33–0.34 m, the initial ground surface itself was reached. On this level, the bones were scattered over a 0.44 × 0.6 m large area. Some 0.6–0.7 m eastwards from the said concentration of the bones, several artefacts (namely, a knife and a spiral) were discovered: they must have come from this grave. Most probably, in the initial burial, the bones and the burial goods formed a pile which was later scattered by ploughing. In grave 11/1, the cremated bones were found lying in a 0.15–0.2 m thick layer at the level of the barrow basis; the layer covered an area of 2 × 1 m which was orientated northwards/southwards. By the way, this section of the barrow did not fall into the firebreak area and the effect of ploughing should have been minimal (Fig. 3). Bones collected from barrow 4 (some 400 g) used to be buried in several 0.1–0.2 m wide and approximately 0.15 m deep pits excavated at the basis of the barrow. It could have been one pit with an uneven bottom, too. Over that, the area of some 5–6 m² was covered with a 0.2–0.25 m thick sand layer which also contained cremated bones (some 300 g). It is worth to mention

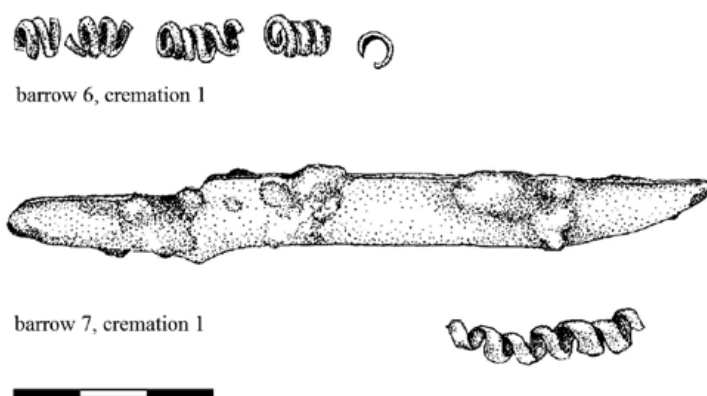


Fig. 4. Finds from barrow burials

that the bones discovered in the pit had more anthropological features of a male (based on the dent of the axis of the second cervical vertebra), whereas the scattered bones had more female features (based on the fragment of the brow ridge of the skull). Highly deformed and fragmented bones featured even charring (at the temperature of some 800° C) and could have belonged to the individuals of similar age. They were related by the burial goods, too: both the pit and the layer with bones contained potsherds of a vessel with a rusticated surface. It has been assumed that this was a burial of two individuals of different genders (Barkus et al. 2002, 277)

In all the cases, graves were found approximately at the centre of the barrow and on the level of their basis (initial ground surface). Therefore, they should be identified as the original burials installed at the time of barrow mounding. Later burials in the barrows, if any, were completely destroyed when levelling the mounds. The research of the better preserved barrows 2 and 3 has proved that such burials could have existed.

In the above described burials within four barrows, remains of 6 individuals have been identified: 1 child and 5 adults (2 males and 2 females among them). Meanwhile, in two barrows researched by the Vilnius University expedition, 6 burials with the remains of 9 individuals have been discovered: 3 children and 6 adults, 5 of which were female.

The graves in the disturbed barrows were rather poor. They contained only one or several burial items represented by deformed fragments (spirals) of an unidentified brass ornament, a burned knife (Fig. 4), and potsherds (graves 4/1, 6/1, and 7/1), and grave 11/1 contained no burial goods at all. The comparison of the find ratio in the disturbed and undisturbed section of the cemetery revealed a devastating impact of the firebreak and erosion on this archaeological monument: the research of two better preserved barrows (181 m²)

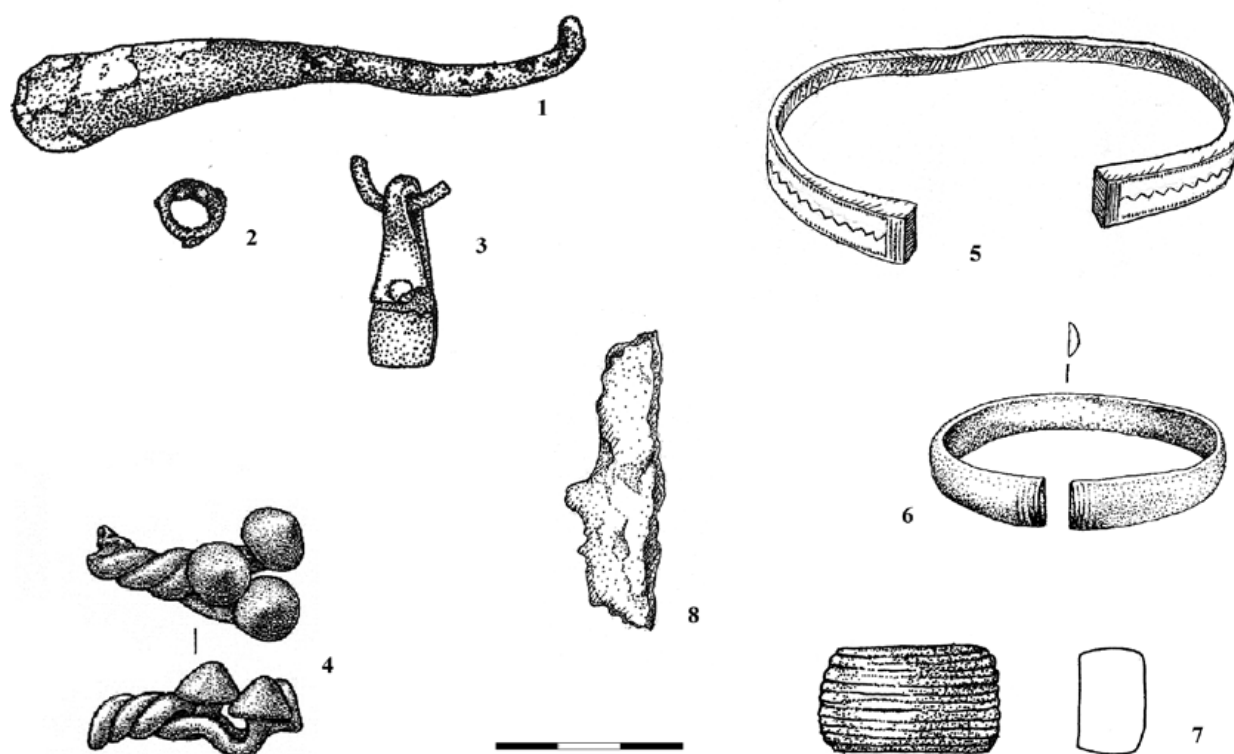


Fig. 5. Accidental finds in barrow mounds, ditches, and outside the ditches

produced 47 finds, (i.e. 0,26 items per m²); whereas ten barrows in the disturbed area (1135 m²) produced only 16 artefacts (0,01 items per m²). Graves within the undisturbed barrows contained from several to 8 burial goods (Michelbertas 2010). A rather high percentage of accidental finds (i.e., 20 units at barrow 3) and bones not attributed to graves imply that the number of burial goods in the graves as well as the number of the graves themselves could have been much higher.

In the disturbed area, the non-grave finds were discovered in mounds, ditches, and even outside them. For instance, in barrow 4, a fitting was discovered near the cremation grave, a loop was found in the sand which slipped into the ditch, and beyond that there was a fragment of a neck-ring with flat overlapping terminals (Fig. 5:1-3). A spindle whorl was found in the mound of barrow 5 (Fig. 5:7). A fragment of a neck-ring with cone-shaped terminals was found outside barrow 11 (Fig. 5:4). The ditches of barrows 8 and 12 revealed riding gear fragments (a whip handle and a stirrup), whereas the ditches of barrows 11 and 12 contained broken vessels. Some of these finds, especially the ones discovered in the topsoil, must have been moved to their locations by ploughing. However, others could have been directly or indirectly relevant to some burial rites: for instance, this can be said about some finds in the ditches which made 50 % of all the finds discovered outside the graves.

The horse burial in barrow 1 should be reviewed separately. A young 6- or 7-year-old stallion was buried in the centre of the barrow in a 2.1x1.2 m large and 0.75 m deep pit below the barrow basis. The front part of its body was orientated southeast (130°) and it had a riding bit with a three-jointed mouthpiece. The position of the skeleton implies that the stallion was pushed into the pit with its head twisted under the body. The features of the grave (its position in the centre of the barrow, the pit under the barrow basis, and the riding bit) are typical to the western circle of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture (Juškaitis 2005).

The dating of the researched disturbed barrows can be established only approximately. Based on the available data, the barrows can be broken into two chronological groups. The first one would include all the barrows containing human cremation burials. However, it is impossible to date the burials based on the burial goods, because the artefacts are scarce and their chronology is too wide. Radiometric dating of the charcoal found in grave 11/1 revealed that the grave and the barrow itself were constructed approximately in the 7th century (610-720 cal AD, 1σ) (Fig. 6). Other features were in line with that: a broken handmade rusticated pot dating approximately to the 7th-8th century was found in the ditch; fragments of the neck-ring with cone-shaped terminals found outside the ditch dated to the same period (Fig. 5:4). Artefacts discovered in barrows 4, 5, 6, and 7 or in their vicinity (potsherds, a neck-ring

with flat overlapping terminals, a sash-like bracelet, and a spindle) (Fig. 5) could also be dated to the 7th–8th century. Besides that, they had analogues in the better-preserved barrows 2 and 3 dating to the 7th–8/9th century, too. Summing up all the materials, the barrows on the eastern slope of the elevation hosting the main group of the cemetery can be dated approximately to the 7th–8th century.

The other group of barrows is represented by the ones containing no human burials: one of them contained a horse burial (barrow 1); in case of two others (barrow 8 and 12), riding gear fragments were found in the ditches, namely, a whip handle and a stirrup dated to the 10th–11th century. The burial of a horse with a riding bit has been preliminary attributed to the same period. Another two (barrow 9 and 10) were completely empty and hard to date, but their construction was similar to the other ones. Sometimes, empty barrows are deemed to be one of the latest stages of the horse burial evolution in the Late Iron Age (Bliujienė 1992); they form separate groups at some barrow cemeteries. All the five barrows were located on the western slope of the elevation hosting the main barrow group of the cemetery. On the other hand, barrows of this group are rather distant from one another. Therefore, their close chronology and the repeated feature of the riding gear may be a pure coincidence.

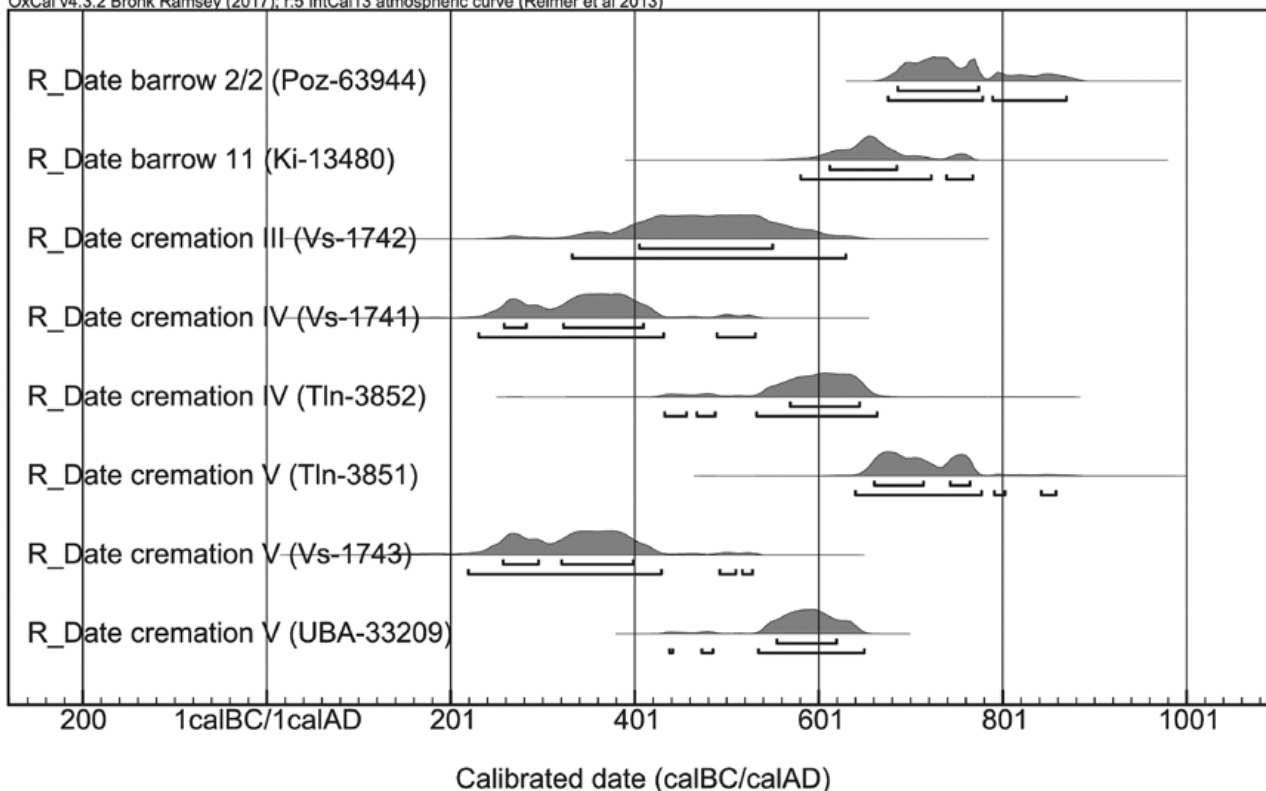
■ NON-BARROW BURIALS

During the excavations, the excavated areas were merged into a continuous track in order to find features of completely levelled barrows (if any) between the surviving ones. A 102 m² large area was excavated between barrows 4 and 7 (see Fig. 2, 3). A fragment of a knife (Fig. 5:8) was found in the topsoil of the uncovered area and there was a bracelet (Fig. 5:5) in the ditch of an adjacent barrow which also fell into the researched area, but traces of actual barrows were absent. Between barrows 5, 6, and 11, an area of approximately 220 m² was excavated (see Fig. 2, 3). There were a lot of 0.1 × 0.11 × 0.14, 0.05 × 0.13 × 0.22, 0.12 × 0.22 × 0.34 m large and similar stones lying at the depth of 0.1 – 0.3 m; the stones must have been scattered by ploughing. Nearby, there were several larger boulders sized 1.3 × 0.7 × 0.64 and 1.2 × 0.9 × 0.6 m. They laid 5 m from each other but that was not their initial position: the boulders were transported there from somewhere else. Besides, there were subsurface features: burials and other structures potentially relevant to burial rites. Cremated bones with or without artefacts have been found at five pits which shall be referred to as graves hereinafter.

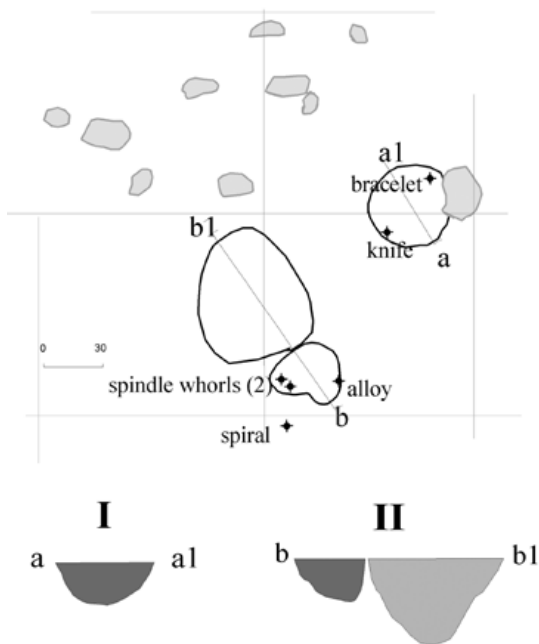
The graves were situated one to several dozen metres from one another. Graves I and II were located several metres outside the ditch encircling barrow 5 and were 1 m away from each other (Fig. 7-10). The graves were

Fig. 6. Breakdown of the radiocarbon dates

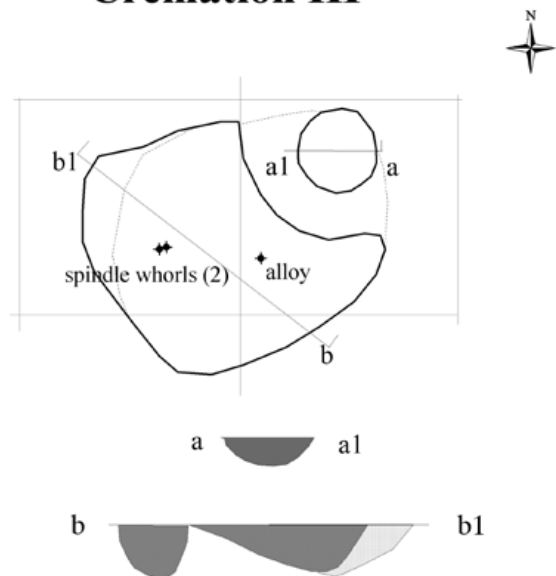
OxCal v4.3.2 Bronk Ramsey (2017); r.5 IntCal13 atmospheric curve (Reimer et al 2013)



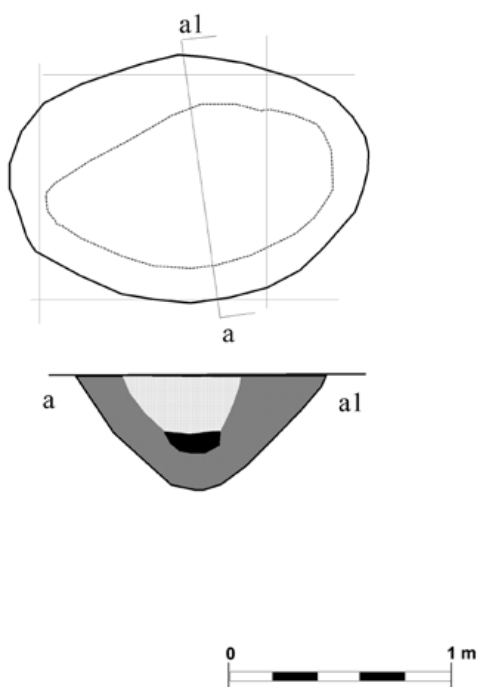
Cremations I and II



Cremation III



Cremation IV



Cremation V

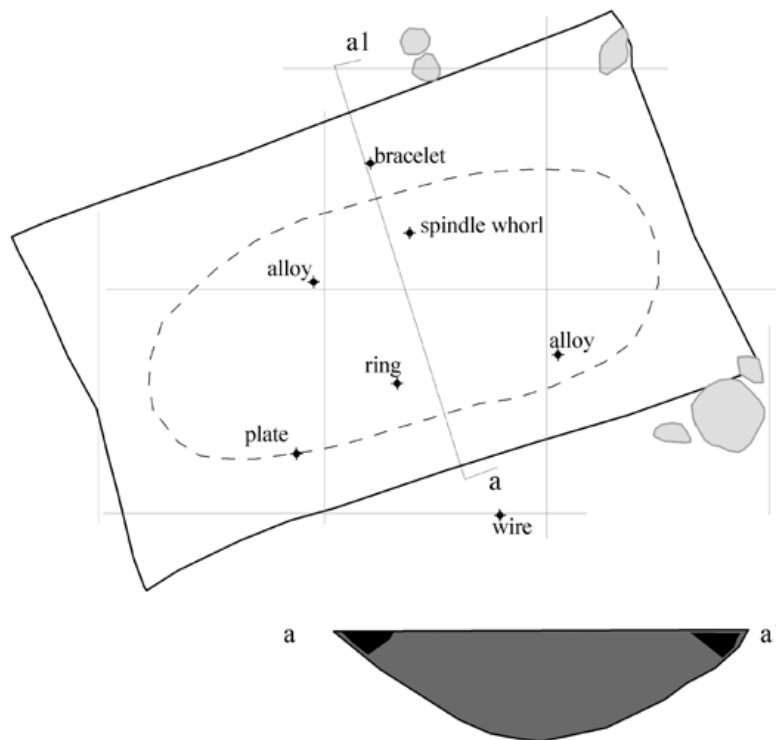


Fig. 7. Cremation burials in-between barrows

recorded at the subsoil level, at the depth of 0.25 m from the current ground surface. They were found in a 0.4 × 0.45 m and 0.35 × 0.4 m large and 0.2–0.25 m deep rounded pits filled with carbonized sand. There was also a pit filled with brown soil nearby grave II. Grave I contained bones of an up to 30-year-old male. Tiny bone fragments were evenly burned in a large pyre at the temperature of about 800° C. The grave also contained a deformed bracelet fragment and a blade of an iron knife unaffected by fire (Fig. 11). Based on the bracelet analogues, the grave was dated to the 7th–8th century. Grave II contained a small amount of unevenly charred bones (burned in a small pyre at the temperature of 600–800° C), several ceramic spindle whorls, fragments of spiral and bronze alloy. The burial was of an adult and presumably of a female (based on the burial goods). Spindle whorl finds are characteristic to the burials of the 1st – early 2nd millennium AD. Their forms hardly changed over time and it is hard to date them. A grave with similar spindle whorls found in the nearby barrow 2/2 was AMS dated to cal. 687–775 AD (1σ) (Michelbertas 2010; Kurila 2015) (Fig. 6). Therefore, both non-barrow graves should be more or less contemporaneous and dating to the 7th–8th century.

A tiny pinch of bones (26 g) found 6 m away from the abovementioned spot at the depth of 0.3–0.46 m has not been identified as an individual grave: the bones could have come from a different place, as they were found in the topsoil of the ploughed area.

Features identified as graves III and IV were found some dozen metres southwest from the first ones (Fig. 12). In fact, grave III was a 0.35 m wide and 0.12 m deep pit which was recorded at the depth of 0.45 m. It contained a tiny bit (only 8 g) of burned human (?) bones. The pit appeared to be a part of another pit, which was 1 m width and 0.24 m depth. The latter contained 2 spindle whorls decorated with a mesh of vertical and horizontal grooves and a melted bronze alloy (Fig. 11). A spindle whorl with a similar ornamentation was found in grave 3/1 which was dated to the 8th–9th century based on finds altogether (Michelbertas 2010).

About 1 m away, at the depth of 0.5 m from the current surface, another pit was recorded as grave IV at the subsoil level (Fig. 7, 12, 13). It was 1.1 × 1.5 m large and 0.5 deep. Burned reddish sand with a layer of charcoal was recorded at its bottom. A tiny bit of cremated bones (3 g) was of a child (?). No other finds were discovered therein. Radiocarbon laboratories of Vilnius and Tallinn established the ¹⁴C for the charcoal as cal. 250–420 AD (1σ) and cal. 556–619 AD (1σ) respectively (Fig. 6) (see below on the deviation of the dates).



Fig. 8. Stones near barrow 5 disturbed by ploughing of the firebreak

Grave V had one of the most interesting constructions. Its features were distinguished at the depth of 0.4 m (Fig. 3, 7, 12, 14). The burial was installed in a 2.8 × 1.7 m rectangular construction made of pinewood and orientated west/southwest–east/northeast. The wood was charred; the sand under its southwestern edge was burned and reddish. The construction enclosed a pit 2.2 × 1 m large and 0.5 m deep. The bottom of the pit was rounded and filled with greyish-brownish soil mixed with cremated bones and artefacts. The upper section of the grave was disturbed and bones were spread widely. Their density was higher along the southern edge of the grave. In the bottom part, the spread of the bones was limited to a 0.3 m large pit in the subsoil. The bones were mixed with sand and pieces of charcoal were few, so the narrowing of the grave at the bottom was visually indistinguishable, it was established only during exploration. The subsoil was reached at the depth of 1 m from

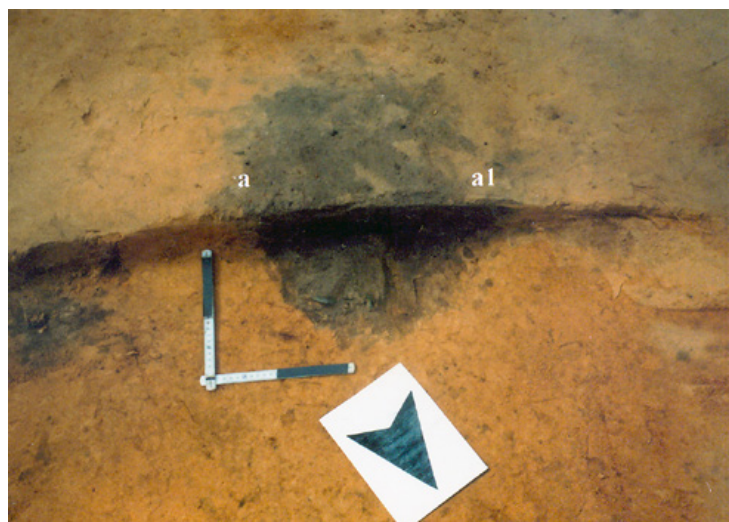


Fig. 9. Cremation burial I, cross-section a-a1



Fig. 10. Cremation burial II, cross-section b-b1

the current ground surface. Over 200 g of fully charred bones were collected. According to the osteological data, they belonged to a 20- to 40-year-old female. The artefacts were concentrated in the middle part of the grave infill (except for potsherds which were spread widely).

The grave pit contained artefacts: potsherds, a fragment of a spindle, and melted pieces of bronze ornaments. (Fig. 11) Among them, there was a fragment of a sash-like type bracelet with an irregular rectangular cross section and slightly thickened and flaring

terminals. The bracelet was decorated with groups of horizontal ridges. Its analogues found at the Grigiškės (Neravai), Sausiai, and Pamusys barrow cemeteries (Kuncienė 1971; 1972; 1983; Tautavičius 1996, 248) are dated to the 8th–10th century. However, thickened terminals of the bracelet imply that it could have been an intermediate version between the earlier bracelets with thickened terminals of the mid-1st millennium AD and the later sash-like bracelets. Other finds, namely, a spiral ring and a fragment of a spindle whorl, had no features for precise chronological diagnostics. Similar artefacts along with two spiral bracelets and two neckrings (one with a saddle-shape clasp and one with wide overlapping terminals) were found at grave 2 of barrow 2 which was better preserved and dated to the 7th–8th century based on the burial goods and the AMS dating (Michelbertas 2010; Kurila 2015) (Fig. 6). The initial forms of other bronze items were impossible to identify: these could have been a fitting (?) rim, a loop, and a piece of wire with a spiral end. Potsherds found in the grave were handmade and had a plain surface. The rims implied that these were pieces of several pots. One of them had slightly barrel-shaped walls and an inwards-bend rim. Such pots found at other barrow cemeteries date to the 6th/7th–9th century (Kuncienė 1983; Vengalis 2008, 61).

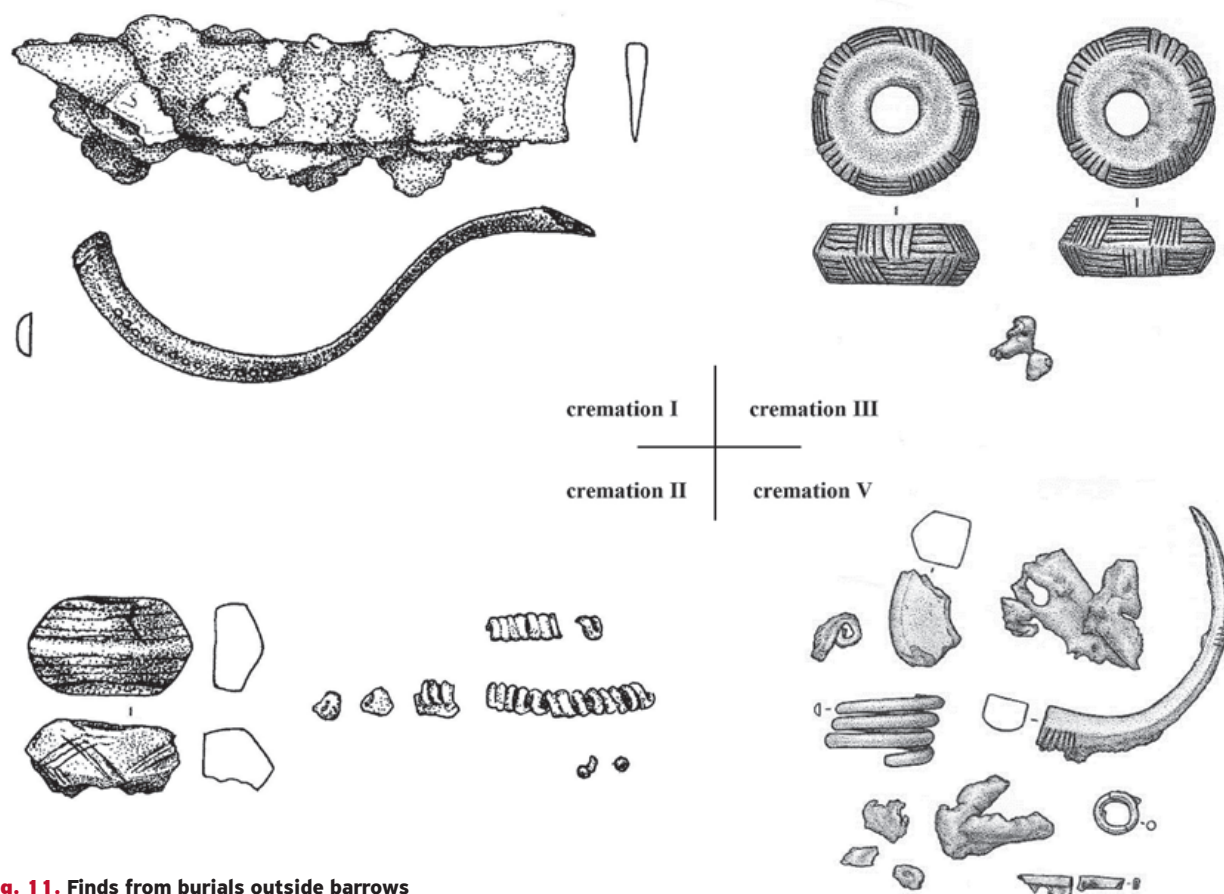


Fig. 11. Finds from burials outside barrows



Fig. 12. View of cremation burials III, IV, and V

Charred pinewood, namely, three samples taken from the same log, were analysed by three different laboratories at a different time and in all three cases different ^{14}C dates were acquired. The Vilnius Radioisotope Research Laboratory dated the grave to the Late Roman Period (cal. 250–410 AD, 1σ). According to this laboratory, the abovementioned burial IV with child (?) bones would have been contemporaneous (cal. 250–420 AD, 1σ) (Fig. 6). However, even recognising that typological dating might be imprecise and too broad, the burial goods of grave V and their analogues imply that the dating was simply incorrect or the acquired dating was strongly affected by the old wood effect (the wooden construction must have been made of a much older wood than the moment of burying). The Tallinn laboratory dated both graves to a later period and the acquired ^{14}C dating of grave V was in line with its typological dating narrowing the period to the mid-7th century (interpreting within both 68.2 % and 94.5 % probability intervals) – early 8th century (1σ) or the 3rd quarter of the 8th century (2σ). According to the AMS dating of the Belfast laboratory, the grave should be attributed to the Late Migration Period (Fig. 6). Variations of the dating results could have been caused by sampling which was rather imprecise a decade ago. Although the test samples were taken from a single piece of wood, some aspects, like the precise position of the specific sample in terms of length or diameter of the log, were neglected when cutting the log into pieces and that could have caused the so called old wood effect. Charring unevenness was not taken into account as well, although

sections with different carbonisation level could have been affected by the soil diagenesis processes differently and that might have distorted dating results in turn.

In the area researched between the barrows, several other $2.2\text{--}2.4 \times 1.3\text{--}1.5$ m large and $0.5\text{--}0.6$ m deep pits were found, too. At the bottom of one of them, there was a layer of burned reddish sand mixed with charcoal; later, the pit was filled with bright sand. The other pit contained 13 sherds of handmade pots (127 g in total). The potsherds were similar to the ones found in grave V: they had an plain surface, barrel-shaped walls, and inwards-bend rims.

■ DISCUSSION

The non-barrow burials at the Jakšiškis barrow cemetery, especially grave V with its distinguished construction, has provided a strong argument in favour of the possibility of a dual burial tradition including both barrows and flat burials. They have also given rise to the assumption that barrow cemeteries could have been used for burials in flat graves throughout the 13th–14th century or even afterwards (Petrauskas 2017), although the rite of mounding barrows itself had been abandoned at the turn of the 11th–12th century (Kurila 2003, 31).

Non-barrow burials are a rare phenomenon in the burial monuments of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture. However, they have also been found at the barrow cemeteries of Dovainonys I and II, Jutonys, and Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė. These non-barrow burials were either contemporaneous to the ones in those barrows or slightly later but still attributable to the period of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture. At Dovainonys,

cremation burials outside barrows have been mentioned since the early 20th century: 2 burials were found at Dovainonys barrow cemetery I and 7 at Dovainonys barrow cemetery II. Archaeological excavations of 1908, 1932, and 1953 and their results have been revised and systemised using archive materials (Kurila, Kurilienė 2011); however, it provided no clear answer to the questions raised. According to the surviving information, burials were identified based on charred bones concentrations and pit outlines; the later were 0.4–0.6 m wide and 0.25–0.28 m deep and contained charcoal. Non-barrow burials at Dovainonys barrow cemetery II must have been located next to visible barrows, whereas at Dovainonys barrow cemetery I they were farther and some of the non-barrow burials were located close to each other. Based on the construction and burial goods, non-barrow burials of Dovainonys barrow cemetery I have been dated to the 5th–8th century and those of Dovainonys barrow cemetery II to the 10th–11th century.

The Jutonys barrow cemetery comprises 124 barrows. After uncovering several trenches between barrows (36 m² in total), cremated human bones and several artefacts were found at a few spots in the topsoil; among the artefacts there were a blue glass bead and tiny potsherds.

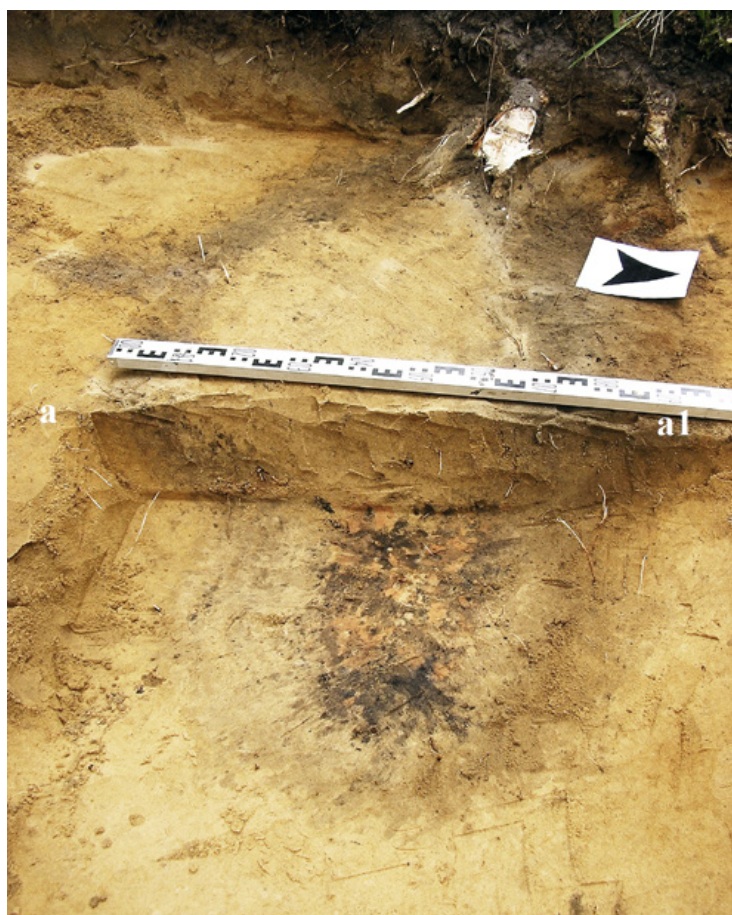


Fig. 13. Cremation burial IV, cross-section a-a1

A piece of charcoal found therein was dated to the late 8th – early 10th century; it was contemporaneous to materials from barrow 62 researched in 2012 (Šmigelskas et al. 2013; Šmigelskas 2017).

As for the present, 18 barrows dating to the 5th–8th century have been excavated at the Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė barrow group III. Besides that, 120 m² were excavated in the northern part of the cemetery in 2005 and 2008. Many isolated and melted artefacts and cremated bones were found at the location but no barrow remains were discovered. Three burials have been distinguished based on the concentrations of the bones. One cremation lay in an about 0.52 × 0.4 m large pit. Cremated bones, fragments of melted artefacts, and a big amount of charcoal were collected from the pyre site and buried in the pit forming a 0.06–0.08 m thick layer. Bones and artefacts were also scattered in the area of some 5–6 m² around the burial itself. The burial dated to the 8th–10th century, and the cremated remains belonged to an over 40-year-old individual. Two other burials contained no human bones suitable for anatomical identification. The structure of the bones found in one of them was more typical for a large animal (presumably a bear); some of the bones in the “burial” were covered with sherds of a secondary burned ceramic vessel; a jointed bronze buckle was found there, too. Based on the materials collected around these “burials”, they are dated to the 10th–12th century (Steponaitis 2012).

Non-barrow burials have also been found at the barrow cemeteries of Kapitoniškės, Kurklių Šilas, and others (see the full list with descriptions – Petrauskas 2017) but, based on the burial goods, they are dated to the 12th–13th century; in other words, these ones are later than the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture, if it is assumed to end on the turn of the 11th–12th century.

A low number of non-barrow burial discoveries in barrow cemeteries can partly be explained by the limited scope of excavations in the areas between barrows. However, even the discovered burials can be taken for locations of levelled barrows: the distance to the nearest barrows is usually small (ranging from several to several dozen metres), non-barrow burials have been found at forest tracts, e.g. at Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė, etc. Basically, the existence of the mounds have never been attempted to be proven or disproven. As the research was focused on finding burial constructions and not barrows, excavations were performed by digging small trenches covering the area of several to 50 m². A larger area of 120 m² was excavated only at the Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė barrow cemetery. Thus, the research of such scope has not been sufficient to deny the possible existence of the barrow.

Certain constructional features of non-barrow burials, for instance, burials in pits excavated in the subsoil at the Dovainonys II and Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė barrow cemeteries, differ from the contemporaneous burials found within the barrow mounds. Their relevance to flat burials between barrows is possible but recognising this phenomenon as the past reality requires more substantial arguments.

In Jakšiškis, construction of the non-barrow burials is also their main distinctive feature compared to barrow burials. The shape of barrow burials, namely, the layer of sand mixed with clean cremated bones spreading across the barrow basis without any distinctive grave outline, may be a result of post-deposition or ploughing, but burials in undisturbed barrows (Michelbertas 2010) as well as in many other barrow cemeteries (Tautavičius 1996, 54) look similarly. Meanwhile, non-barrow burials were found in pits dug out in the subsoil and they had a distinctive outline. Grave I and II were located outside the ditch of barrow 5, though they were attributed to the barrow during the field works as they were discovered during excavation thereof. It is hard to say whether their proximity to the barrow implies any actual relation. The contents of the barrow and these two non-barrow burials is hard to compare in terms of chronology and/or inventory, because the only artefact found in the mound was a ceramic spindle whorl.

Identifying graves III and IV as actual burials is rather provisory: the amount of charred bones therein was negligible (<10 g) and only one of these alleged burials contained other finds. There were several other pits nearby. One of them contained sherds of handmade pots and there was burned soil with a distinct charcoal concentration at the bottom of the other. Burned soil and charcoal were also found within the child "grave". In practice, this indicates that fire was burned at these spots. After investigation of the subsurface features, namely, ditches and pits surrounding barrows, began in the late 20th century, the number of the alleged graves found therein has grown considerably. Such graves were found at Dusiėnai, Grabijolai, Peršaukštis, Staviškės, Vaišniūnai, Vanagiškės, Varliškės, Vigodka (Dūkštas) II, etc. Most probably, these were burials in barrow mound which eventually sloped down into ditches. Some of the graves could have been arranged in ditches intentionally but in neither case it has been assumed that cremations were performed on site, although charcoal and even larger pieces of charred wood found in the ditches and pits have often been interpreted as traces of ritual fires burned therein (e.g. Vaitkevičius 2007, 187-188). In Jakšiškis, along with several pits, burials III and



Fig. 14. Cremation burial V, cross-section a-a1

IV formed sort of a circle surrounding the area which had only several meters in diameter. It is possible that interpreting these "graves" as graves is not quite correct: these could have been the sites of cremation or installations relevant to the cult of the dead.

Burned soil was also found under the wooden construction of grave V which has no analogues in the habitat of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture so far. The burning of the wooden construction must have been symbolic, because the human remains with burial goods had been cremated earlier and at a different place.

Based on the burial complexes, all these constructions should have been more or less contemporaneous with one another and the neighbouring barrows. Their positions are in line with this assumption, too. Surely, they should be contemporaneous in a broad and relative sense as the maximal span of the chronology of the finds covers the period from the 6th/7th to the 9th century and the time difference between individual burials might have been three hundred years or more. The available ¹⁴C and AMS dates slightly narrows down this interval on the level of 1σ reliability to the mid-6th – the 3rd quarter of the 8th century but the question regarding possible coexistence of barrows and flat graves becomes

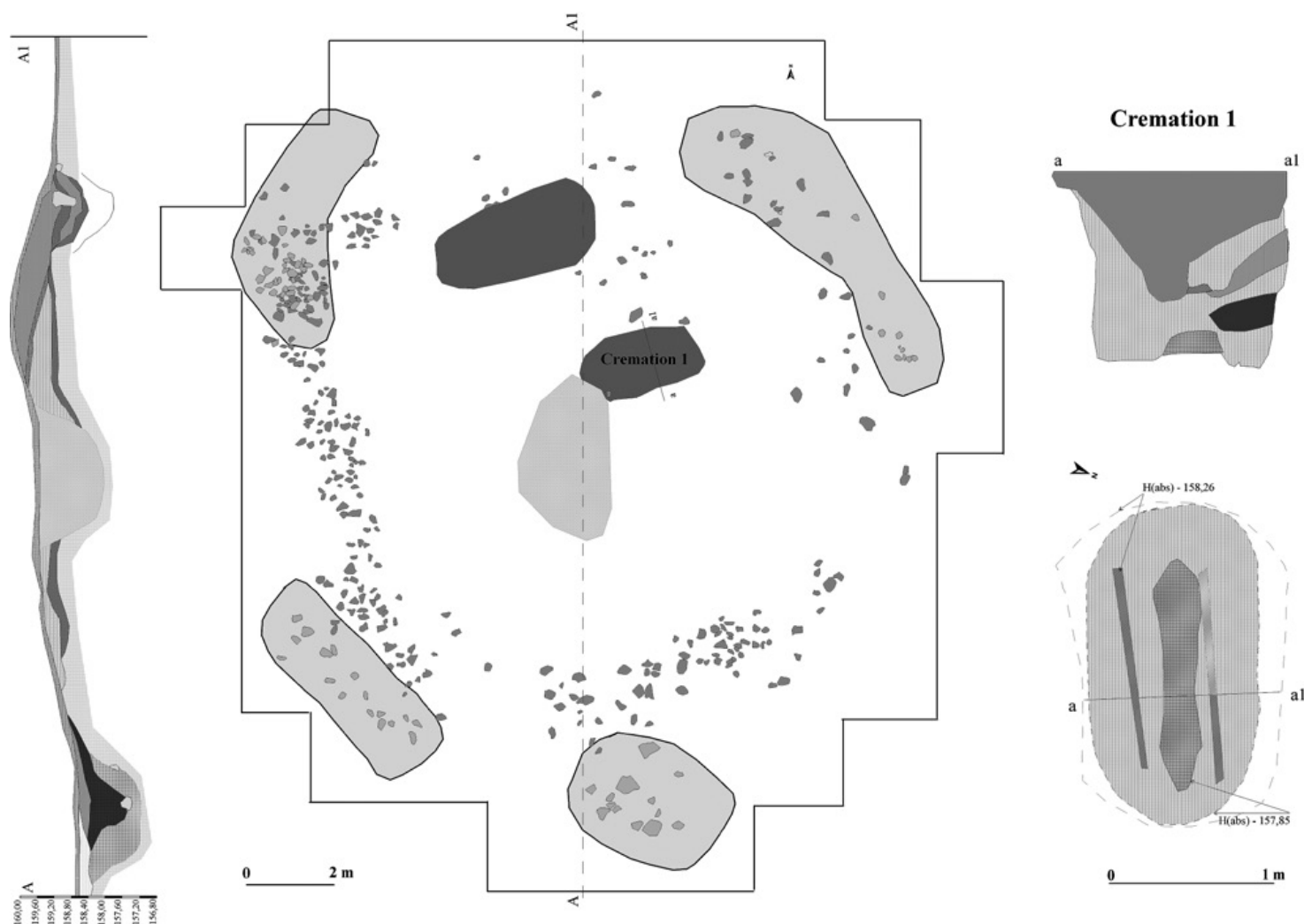


Fig. 15. Plan of the Rėkučiai (Paversmys) barrow 5

even more topical because of that. Even without deeper analysis, one can notice that the materials of non-barrow graves are basically the same as of the graves in barrows: the items line up in typological, biological (age and gender) and social sense (in terms of artefact types, quantity as well as materials). All the abovementioned factors along with the location of the finds in the disturbed area surrounded by numerous barrows encourage the hypothesis that these were barrow graves initially, only the mounds have been levelled.

In Jakšiškis, all the researched barrows were encircled only with ditches and pits; there were no stone constructions around them. In theory, the researched area between barrows could have hosted two medium-size barrows. However, no barrow features characteristic to this barrow cemetery, such as ditches, have been discovered, though usually their traces remain even when the mound itself is levelled. In this context, scattered stones and several larger boulders found in the researched area between barrows deserve a closer attention. The barrow cemetery is located on a non-stony ground; therefore, both smaller and larger stones must have been brought here intentionally (which has also been proven by the

research of the soil near the boulders). The stones have been scattered in a rather narrow (up to 3–5 m wide) and relatively short (up to 20 m long) mineralised section of the firebreak which has also included graves I, II, and V. This section lies on the slope of the terrain elevation; the surface goes down from west to east and the stones could have also been moved in this direction under the influence of mechanic impact (ploughing) and gravity. Grave V was located at the highest point of the section with stones. Stones were also found by the wooden construction. Therefore, it can be assumed that the adjacent area of this construction was the initial location of the stones. The initial arrangement of the stones cannot be identified based on the research data; however, the fact that none of the researched barrows had stone constructions speaks for itself. It can also explain why there were no features of ditches in this area: the stones could have come from the former stone circle(s) which used to surround now completely levelled barrow(s). If more empirical data appeared, the term of a cairn or some other stone construction could also be considered. Grave V was installed in accordance with the burial rites of the

mid-1st millennium AD (Vaitkevičius 2005). During this period, the dead were cremated and buried in barrows with stone circles in slightly prolonged pits imitating earlier inhumation burials at the centre of the basis of the future barrow. These pits were usually rather shallow, approximately 0.2–0.3 m deep, and often orientated along the intermediate geographical axes, for instance, NE-SW. Their length barely reached 1.5 m. Such graves often contain sets of burial goods typical of warriors, namely, shield bosses with cone-shaped tops, B-shaped belt buckles, axes with narrow blades and blunt ends, spearheads of type 2, 3, 4B, and other, the number of which tend to increase in the mid-5th – 6th century, etc. (Vaitkevičius 2005, 50). It is more complicated to date similarly constructed graves without burial goods or with melted or fragmented ones as well as the ones containing broadly dated working tools (spindle whorls, awls, knives, etc.). Based on the overall context of the researched barrow cemeteries, such graves are dated from the 4th–5th century to the 2nd half of the 1st millennium AD (e.g., Grabijolai, barrow 1, Gudeliai, grave 7(62), Lauksteniai, barrow 2, Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė, barrow 10, Popai-Vingeliai, grave 2/2, Rėkučiai-Paversmys, 1(5)/1), Vigodka-Saksoniškės, 2/1, Želmenišė 3/1, 3/6, and 3/9, etc.). Grave V of the Jakšiškis barrow cemetery falls into the pattern of these burials. The available AMS data implies that this could have been one of the earliest burials in the researched area, although the chronological difference is negligible. The presence of the wooden construction is also in line with this assumption. Wooden constructions are rare in the East Lithuanian barrows. Grave 5/1 of the Rėkučiai-Paversmys barrow cemetery I was found in a 1 m deep and 2.43 × 1.55 m large pit excavated below the basis of the barrow and orientated SW-NE. Cremated bones covered the area of 1.4 × 0.3 m and their layer was 0.06–0.07 m thick. It has been assumed that the human remains were buried in a sort of a coffin, namely, in a wooden box or log construction which could have been 1.8 m long and 0.4–0.5 m wide (Fig. 15). There was a deformed iron awl, a bronze cylinder, and coil bead on the bones at the northeastern edge of the grave, too. It has been established that a female with a child were buried therein (Semėnas 1994). Remains of a small wooden coffin (?) have also been reported at grave I/2 of Sudota (Šatavičius 2012, 33), whereas barrow 2 of Poškai contained pieces of charred logs (Tautavičius 1952, 67). The abovementioned burials have been dated approximately to the 4th–5th century.

■ CONCLUSIONS

Non-barrow burials are a rare phenomenon among burial monuments of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture, and investigation at Jakšiškis barrow cemetery, especially distinguishing a burial with wooden construction, has provided a strong argument in favour of the possibility of a dual burial tradition of both barrows and flat burials. The materials of non-barrow graves are basically the same as of the graves in barrows: the finds line up in spatial, chronological, typological, biological and social sense, and the question regarding possible co-existence of barrows and flat graves becomes even more topical because of that.

However, a detailed analysis of the Jakšiškis barrow cemetery research materials and evaluation of the level of destruction of the archaeological source in the disturbed area imply that taking the hypothesis of the flat burials as proven might be premature. Though burials between barrows had a different construction than those found within the researched barrows of the cemetery, the circumstances of their discovery enable more than one alternative interpretation. The burial within a wooden construction used to be considered as the most substantial argument for the presence of flat burials due to its exclusiveness. However, in the final version, the possibility that this could have been the remains of a levelled barrow within a stone circle is considered. The hypothesis of the flat burials is also weakened by the doubts regarding identification of some alleged burials with an extremely small amount of charred bones. Presumably, these were not burials but rather cremation sites or installations of the cult of the dead. On the other hand, some of the burials were similar to the ones found at the Dovainonys and Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė barrow cemeteries. Therefore, the hypothesis of the flat burials cannot be rejected either. One way or another, the future research should focus not only on the search for graves but also on the establishment of the presence or absence of the respective barrows; the scope of the research should be chosen accordingly.

As for the further search for graves between barrows in Jakšiškis, the research area should be extended southwards. There are no visible barrows there and it does not look like they could have ever been present in this area as it has not been affected by the firebreak. If flat burials were found in this area, too, that would be a substantial argument in favour of the hypothesis about their existence.

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