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**CONCENTRATION OF AUTHORITY AND POWER  
IN EAST LITHUANIA, BETWEEN TAURAGNAS LAKE  
AND THE MIDDLE REACHES OF THE ŽEIMENA  
RIVER, DURING THE MIGRATION PERIOD**

The paper aims to define the structure of the population of a relatively small East Lithuanian Barrow Cemeteries culture territory and the causes that could have predetermined the emergence of the rich inter-regional warrior elite graves and their rather abrupt disappearance.

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**Introduction**

The accumulated archaeological material and recent archaeological investigations, based on different theoretical approaches, highlighted obvious differences between the Late Roman and the Migration Period territorial coverage of the East Lithuanian barrows. The paper deals with a part of East Lithuania's cultural area of barrow cemeteries between Tauragnas Lake and the middle reaches of the Žeimena River, the structure of its population during the Migration Period, and the social-cultural aspects of the communities' lifestyle. The structure of the area population shall be analysed through four different accumulations of barrow cemeteries to be regarded as individual four microregions. In the said microregions, starting with the 5th century, graves of rich interregional warrior elite graves<sup>1</sup>, and armed

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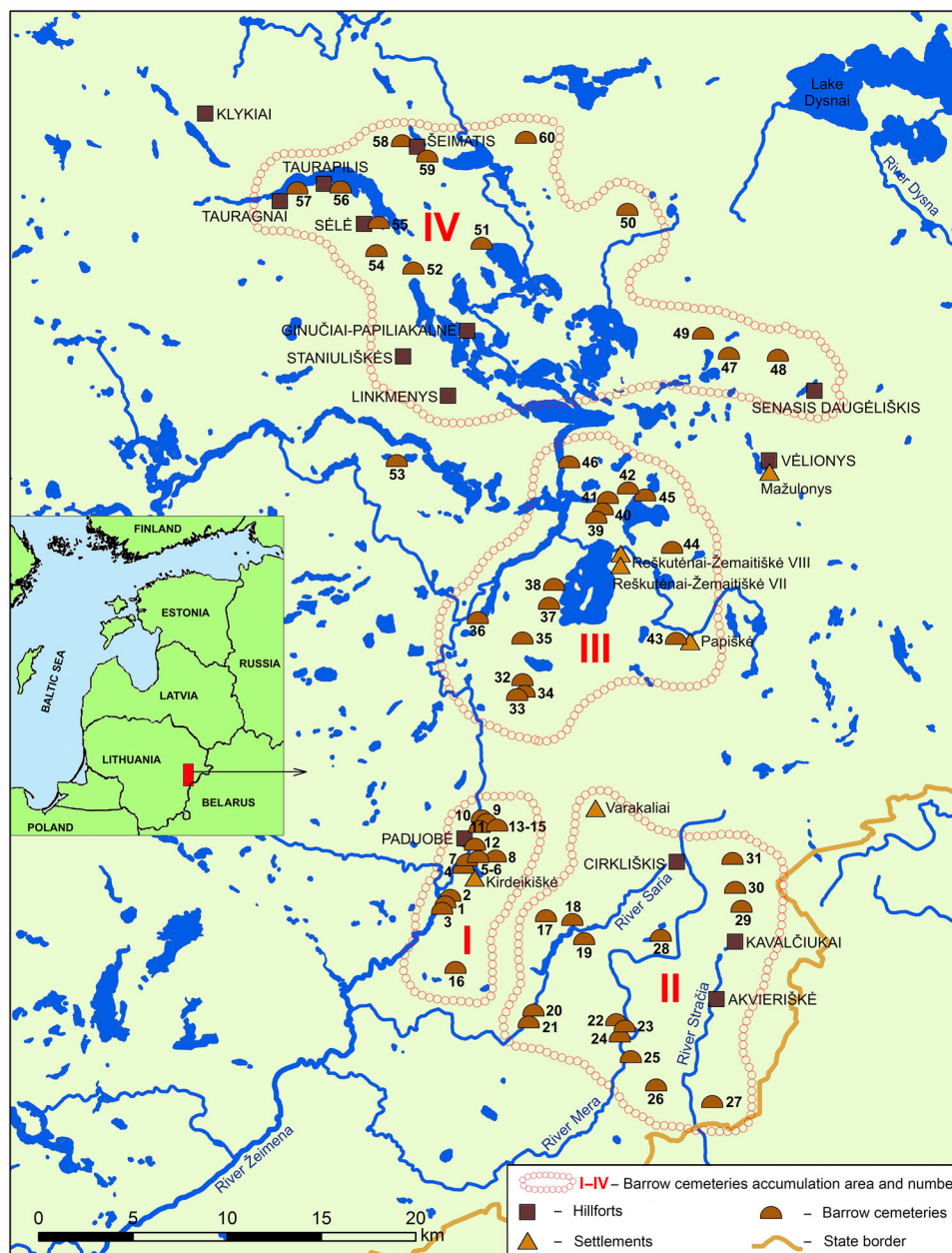
<sup>1</sup> In European archaeological literature, similar graves are also known under the names royal or princely (see: Nicolay 2014).

people and the chieftains of the microregional warrior elite emerged and began accumulating, boasting insignias and weapon sets corresponding to the social status of the buried. The emergence of wealth in the form of silver and gold in East Lithuania accelerated the process of social stratification and led to the formation of a complex chiefdom as a governance authority. However, the complex chiefdom that formed as a consequence of the Migration Period events and migration processes during the reference period, due to the rather abruptly broken ties with the middle reaches of the Danube region and other European centres, lasted just until the first quarter of the 6th century or a slightly later period. The graves of the chieftains of the microregional warrior elite containing imported silver and gold artefacts and weapons disappeared in an equally abrupt way. The East Lithuanian Barrow Cemeteries culture (hereinafter: ELB culture) experienced new social, economic, and cultural transformations that predetermined its further development and territorial expansion.

#### **The structure of the population in the area between Tauragnas Lake and the middle reaches of the Žeimena River**

In the analysed area, barrow cemeteries and settlements were arranged as a long chain that stretched south-east from Tauragnas Lake along the coasts of Baluošas, Pakasas, and Ūkojas Lakes as far as the north-eastern border of Ignalina environs and there, by turning in the south–south-western direction, it continued along the coasts of Vajuonis, Kretuonas, and Šventas Lakes almost as far as the confluence of the Žeimena and Mera Rivers. The Žeimena flows out of Žeimenys Lake in the southern–south-western direction. We should note that both the barrow cemeteries and the settlements were situated merely on the left bank of the river (Fig. 1; Appendix).

The Švenčionys upland, stretching along the left bank of the Žeimena, and the Tauragnai hilly morainic area, traversed by the above mentioned lake chains, predetermined the emerging population structure of the ELB culture. In the Migration Period, the Žeimena was a western border of the east Lithuanian barrows extension and the principal communication artery in the region. Moreover, the western border both of the reference area and the culture was rather distinctly marked by the not overpassed natural barrier of the Labanoras Woods, covering the area of infertile glaciofluvial sandy-gravel plain. Up to the present time, just a few barrow cemeteries had been known on the north-western and northern edge of the Labanoras Woods (Baubonis & Zabiela 2005, vol. III, 68; Bliujienė 2013a, 332, fig. 222, Map VI). South of the area, barrow cemeteries were again found on the southern outskirts of the sandy North-Eastern Lithuanian plain, where, on the banks of the lower reaches of the Mera River, several groups of Baliuliai barrows of the late 4th to the first half of the 5th century, as well as a hill fort with a foot settlement and the assumed Zalavas barrow cemeteries intervened; however, the said sites accounted for a small separate microregion (Balakauskas & Kurila 2012, 129 f., fig. 7). Further to the west and south-west, other significantly larger



**Fig. 1.** The structure of the population in the area between Tauragnas Lake and the middle reaches of the Žeimena River (for the names of sites see Appendix; after A. Bluijienė, E. Šatavičius).

accumulations of east Lithuanian barrow cemeteries were found on the shores of the old ice-marginal valley on the south-western edge of the sandy North-Eastern Lithuanian plain (Vaitkevičius 2004, 54 ff.; 2007, 181 f., fig. 1; Grižas & Steponaitis 2005, 61; Bliujienė 2006, 123 f.; Kurila 2015, fig. 4). In the mid-first millennium, in the north of Lithuania, culturally different barrow cemeteries of Selonia and eastern Lithuania were separated by several kilometres of wasteland, as the south-western border of the spread of Selonian barrows with stone circles and inhumation burials was stretching along the eastern coast of Sartai Lake (Simniškytė 2013, 132 ff., fig. 54, Maps 4–5). Evidently a certain northern border of the reference area was a chain of lakes, connected by channels and streams, from Tauragnas to Lūšiai and Žeimenys and the area between Žiežūlnis and Baluošas lakes. However, the eastern border of the territory was rather vague (Fig. 1).

The total length of the reference area between Tauragnas Lake and the middle reaches of Žeimena in the NW–SE–S directions amounted to about 62 km, the width varied between 6 to 17 km, and the covered area was around 700 km<sup>2</sup>. Based on the external barrow characteristics and the data of several or a dozen excavated barrows in the cemetery, in the area between Tauragnas Lake and the middle reaches of the Žeimena River, 59 barrow cemeteries with over 1,832 barrows could be assigned to the Migration Period<sup>2</sup>. Merely over 165 barrows were excavated, and over 265 graves were found (Fig. 1; Appendix). Landscape wise, the said barrow cemeteries were situated on higher river banks or lakeshores in four barrow accumulations of a certain size and unequal concentration of objects. The four barrow accumulations were surrounded by uninhabited areas – former wastelands with a width ranging from 5.5 or 9 to around 21 km (Fig. 1).

Regretfully, the presented statistical data are of tentative character, as in the course of time, most of the barrow cemeteries were substantially destroyed by natural erosive processes and human economic activities. In a number of cases, individual barrow cemeteries or their large parts were totally destroyed. The scale of amateur excavations in the 19th century and the fate of the finds are only partially known, as well as the chronology of the objects. The excavations of smaller barrow cemeteries, more intensely carried out over the past few decades for protective purposes, did not aim to identify the development of the objects. The chronology of individual excavated barrows therefore reflected just one or another stage of their development. Despite the shortage of empirical data, the emergence and development of the ELB culture, the shifts in the territorial coverage, the structure of population, paleodemography, and the graves of the interregional warrior elite have been studied (Tautavičius 1981; 1996, 46 ff.; Vaitkevičius 2005a; 2005b; Bliujienė 2006; 2013b; Kurila 2009a; 2011; Bliujienė & Curta 2011). As suggested by the available data, in the area between Tauragnas Lake and the middle reaches of the Žeimena River, individual graves of the Late Roman period have so far been found only in the Mėžionys-Paulinava and

<sup>2</sup> A large Sidariškiai-Krivasalis barrow cemetery remained unassigned to any microregional group, as it was some distance away from them. There might have been a separate small microregion there.

Tauragnai barrow cemeteries. Therefore, due to the not completely efficient barrow cemeteries excavation strategy, the Roman Period graves may have been not yet discovered, or the territory at the time was still populated by the people of the Brushed Pottery culture. In other words, no relation has been established between the people who constructed ELB culture and the culture of the Late Brushed Pottery.

The number of the barrow cemeteries significantly increased during the transition from the Roman to Migration Period. However, the majority of the excavated graves in the reference period were dated back to different stages of the Migration Period. Between the second quarter of the 6th and the 7th century, the development of the ELB culture moved into a new stage of an ethnoculturally more homogeneous area and of territorial expansion, as the number of the barrow cemeteries increased by almost one third (see: Appendix). In barrow often more than one person has been buried. Therefore, burial sites increasingly testify a larger population. Again, as witnessed by the accumulated data, in the second half of the 7th and the early 8th century (at the beginning of Period F ~650/700), the number of barrow cemeteries that dated back to that period substantially decreased (Appendix). In the typical case of a barrow of the Migration Period, the mound was built of sand, and the perimeter of the barrow base was encircled with a stone circle, delimited by oblong pits or ditches; they provided the ground for the mound. Later, barrows no longer had a stone circle, and their perimeter was externally merely delimited by oblong pits or ditches. The stone circles, typical of the Migration Period, were mainly built of either one or one-two rows of field stones that resembled a vertical wall, with one or several boulders incorporated. In frequent cases, the circle was made of very large vertically lined-up boulders, with the spaces between them filled with smaller stones (Tautavičius 1996, 47 ff.; Vaitkevičius 2004, 51 ff.; 2007, 185 ff., figs 10, 14; Kurila & Kliaugaitė 2007, 127; 2008; Šatavičius 2012, 33). When building barrow cemeteries in the Žeimena valley, the boulders were sometimes transported from the distance exceeding 1 km, and the weight could amount to 1 tonne.

Beside barrow cemeteries, the reference area also contained Tauragnai, Taurapilis, Šeimatis, Sėlė, Paduobė, Akvieriškė and Kavalčiukai hill forts, with all of them, except for Paduobė and Taurapilis ones, never excavated and dated back to a broad chronological period, covering the 1st millennium through the early 2nd millennium. Therefore, the relations between the hill forts and the barrow cemeteries remained rather *a priori*, despite the fact that some barrow cemeteries were only 150 to 800 meters away from the hillforts (Baubonis & Zabiela 2005; Messal et al. 2015, 103 ff., figs 12–13). On the other hand, close to some hill forts, located in the border zones of the identified accumulations of barrow cemeteries, no burial objects were found. As witnessed by the excavations of the Taurapilis archaeological complex, no chronological evidence was found that the hill fort and/or the foot settlement was inhabited at the time when burials took place in the western group of barrows (Baubonis & Zabiela 2005, vol. III, 270 ff.; Messal et al. 2015, 103 ff., figs 11–12).

Paduobė hillfort was only 150 m north-west of Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė 3 barrow cemetery. Small-scale excavations witnessed that the hill fort was abandoned before the second half of the 4th century or in the early 5th century. No remains of the foot settlement were found close to the hill fort (Vėlius 2009, 14). In the neighbouring Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė 3 barrow cemetery, to date, only the graves of the 5th to the 11th/12th centuries had been excavated; therefore, the relation of Paduobė hill fort with the barrow cemetery of the Migration Period so far remained unclear. Another neighbouring Kirdeikiškė open settlement (dating back to the period of the third to 5th century) was about 0.5 to 0.9 km east-south-east of Sudota 1 and 4 barrow cemeteries (Šatavičius 2008a, 104 ff.). Although no graves of the Late Roman Period had been found in the barrow cemetery, at some stage of their development, both objects formed a structure typical of a residential site (Fig. 1).

Reškutėnai-Žemaitiškė settlements 7 and 8 dated back to the end of the Roman Period and the Migration Period, however, those two residential sites were over 2.2 to 2.4 km away from the nearest known barrow cemeteries (Šatavičius 2008b, 491 ff., figs 3–4). Thus, the possessed data suggested no obvious links between the hill forts and settlements, on the one hand, and the neighbouring barrow cemeteries, on the other hand.

### **Microregional groups of the barrow spread**

As mentioned above, in the area between Tauragnai Lake and the middle reaches of the Žeimena River, four microregional groups of the barrow cemeteries spread could be identified. The barrow cemeteries of the first microregion (the south-western group) were located on the left bank of the Žeimena River, between the town of Švenčionėliai and the village of Liūlinė. Only the southernmost Melagėnėliai barrow cemetery was constructed over 3.1 km away from the others, on the higher reaches of the Karvinė, the tributary of the Žeimena River. Structurally, it was one of the smallest, however, a very compact group of barrow cemeteries (Fig. 1: I; Appendix). The area of the accumulation was about 33 km<sup>2</sup>. The barrow cemeteries spread in the Žeimena valley were in a particularly favourable spot from the viewpoint of communication. The Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė and Sudota barrow groups must have once formed one large group of barrows, stretching for more than 2.1 km. That large and compact accumulation of barrows due to different human economic activities had been split into separate groups of barrows (Merkevičius 1988; 1990; Steponaitis 1991; Šatavičius 1997; 2004; Semėnas 2000). The first barrow accumulation consisted of 13 barrow cemeteries with over 524 barrows and three individual barrows; 56 barrows were excavated, and over 125 graves were found. Currently, in Sudota 1 barrow cemetery alone, over 200 barrows were counted, and in all of the Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė barrow groups, over 183 mounds. A barrow in Liūlinė 2 barrow cemetery stood out by its size: an almost 2 m high and 35 m in diameter barrow with an almost flat top

also boasted a unique design. Several large mounds were found in Sudota 1 barrow cemetery, including 10, or the so-called *Kurhan Wielki*, excavated in 1934. The diameter of the barrow was 15 m, and 6(9) cremations were discovered in it (Kaczyński 1963, 139, 150, fig. 3). In Liūlinė 3, Sudota 3, and even Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė 3 barrow cemeteries, individual non-cremation graves were found. However, in that barrow accumulation, cremation graves predominated (Merkevičius 1988; Kliaugaitė 2006, 90 f.; Steponaitis 2007).

The barrow cemeteries of the second microregion (the south-eastern group) were located on the banks of the higher and middle reaches of Mera and Saria, the left-side tributaries of the Žeimena River, while one barrow cemetery (Kulbokiškė) was on the bank of the higher reaches of the Strūna River. In the watershed between the Mera and Strūna rivers, there was Šilinė 2 (Borava) barrow cemetery (Fig. 1: II; Appendix). Geomorphologically, the barrow cemeteries of the group had been constructed in the south-eastern part of Švenčionys upland, at the junction of the landscapes formed by the penultimate Warthe/Warta (in northern part) and the last Weichsel/Vistula/Wisła (in southern part) glacial periods. Structurally, it was a rather widely and erratically scattered group of barrow cemeteries, with 10 to 20 mounds counted in most of them. Only Sariai-Laukiai, Myliai, and Trakai barrow cemeteries boasted a twice or thrice larger number of mounds. The area of that accumulation was around 162 km<sup>2</sup>. The barrow cemeteries lost between the Saria, Mera and Stračia rivers, and the distance between the rivers varied from 1.2 to 4 km. That accumulation of barrow cemeteries contained Kavalčiukai and Cirkliškis hill forts with foot settlements, whose rusticated pottery dated back to the 4th through the 8th century. That second accumulation consisted of at least 15 barrow cemeteries with over 280 barrows, including 43 excavated mounds and containing over 54 graves. In Mėžionys-Paulinava, Peršaukštis-Kasčiukai 2, and Borava (Šilinė) barrow cemeteries, non-cremation graves were found; however, it was the cremation graves that predominated in that south-eastern accumulation of barrow cemeteries (Pokrovskij 1897, 168 ff.; Kaczyński 1963; Kurila & Kliaugaitė 2008, 16, table 2).

The third barrow cemetery accumulation (the central group), which spread mainly on the coasts of Šventas, Kretuonas, Vajuonis, and Žeimenys lakes, contained three barrow cemeteries and two individual barrows with the total of over 716 mounds; however, only 20(21) barrows that could be assigned to the Migration Period were excavated, and 26 graves were found (Fig. 1: III; Appendix). The area of the accumulation was around 124 km<sup>2</sup>. The said accumulation, Pavajuonis-Rėkučiai barrow cemetery, boasted the largest known Lithuanian barrow: the diameter of its mound amounted to 42–44 m, and the height to 1.8 m (Kurila 2011, 148). The latter barrow, like the other 4 large barrows found in that barrow cemetery, was of a specific “double” form and analogous to the one from Liūlinė 2 barrow cemetery, mentioned above. Almost all the barrow cemeteries, except for the ones of Kaltanėnai-Degutinė and Šakarva 1, were at a larger distance from the left edge of the Žeimena valley and spread between the above

named lakes and on their coasts, while two barrow cemeteries were closer to the small streams of Tuola and Šventelė passing the lakes. Therefore, their general distance to the closest water body amounted from 70 m to almost 1 km. Geomorphologically, most of the barrow cemeteries had been constructed on the sandy-gravelly outwash plain, and merely Šakarva 1 and Kaltanėnai-Degutinė barrow cemeteries, in an old ice-marginal valley of a glaciofluvial origin.

As many as 8 barrow cemeteries and 2 individual barrows were situated on a 13 km long strip of land between Žeimenys, Vajuonis, Kretuonas, and Šventas Lakes. Three barrow cemeteries of Rėkučiai-Pakretuonė, Rėkučiai-Paversmis, and Pavajuonis-Rėkučiai were separated by the distances from 100 to 300 metres, while the fourth barrow cemetery, that of Pavajuonis-Cegelnė, was at a slightly larger distance, 0.73 km away. All those barrow cemeteries were believed to once have formed one chronologically extended barrow accumulation, stretching for about 2.6 km in the south-western–northern direction. The accumulation contained barrow cemeteries of a different size. The largest one was Kretuonas 1 barrow cemetery with around 270 barrows. However, so far merely 5 excavated barrows with 7 cremation graves could be assigned to the period between the 5th to 8th centuries (Appendix). In the accumulation of the barrow cemeteries, both non-cremation and cremation graves were found, however, the latter clearly prevailed. The earliest non-cremation graves were found in Pavajuonis-Rėkučiai, Pavajuonis-Cegelnė, and Kaltanėnai-Degutinė barrow cemeteries (Semėnas 1998; Kliaugaitė 2005; Kurila 2011). In that microregion, 2 settlements were excavated and potsherds of the brushed and rusticated pottery dating back to the 1st century BC through the 8th century AD were found; however, they were at a distance of over 2.1 km from the nearest barrow cemeteries (Šatavičius 2008b, 491 ff., figs 3–4).

The fourth, or the northern barrow cemetery accumulation was spread on the coasts of two or three large and parallel tunnel valley lakes, where the present group of lakes between Tauragnai and Ignalina stretched. One branch consisted of Alksnas, Ūkojas, Pakasas, and Tauragnas, and the other of Lukštinis, Balčis, Baluošas, Utenis, and Žiežulnis Lakes (Fig. 1: IV; Appendix). The two branches with barrow cemeteries on their coasts were separated by a 3 to 3.5 km wide area, covered with gravel and sand of glaciofluvial origin, where no barrow cemeteries had been found so far. Only a small part of that group of barrow cemeteries was constructed further away from those ravines with lakes. By the way, the barrow cemeteries and hill forts of western–north-western part of this accumulation are located on the slopes of Tauragnai hilly morainic area. The density of population of that barrow cemetery accumulation was not large: 14 barrow cemeteries with over 487 barrows were known, including 46 excavated barrows in which 57 graves had been found (Appendix). The area of the fourth accumulation seemed to be the largest and amounted to 246 km<sup>2</sup>. The barrow cemeteries were not large and contained from four to approximately 30 mounds. Only some of them (Poviliškė, Vyžiai-Ripelialaukis, and Sidariškiai-Krivasalis)



were significantly larger and were evidently used for a longer period of time. The Taurapolis barrow cemetery, constructed on a small hill (180 × 30–40 m) is the best known site in European historiography. In the western group of that cemetery, all eight barrows seen on the surface were excavated, including the famous Taurapolis chieftain's grave (barrow 5) (Tautavičius 1981, 19 f.). Inhumation graves of the earlier period were likely to have been in Tauragnai barrow cemetery, where artefacts of the 3rd to 6th centuries were found (Balčiūnas 2000, 151 f.). The microregion was distinguished by an abundance of hillforts offering numerous potsherds of rusticated pottery.

The archaeological objects from the area between Tauragnai Lake and the middle reaches of the Žeimena River, almost exclusively barrow cemetery accumulations, reflected the model of population of the area in the Migration Period: it was populated on river banks and lake coasts by certain size object accumulations, surrounded by uninhabited areas, or wastelands, which separated barrow cemetery accumulations and thus, on the one hand, for the community chieftains defined the boundaries of the managed territories and marked their administrative autonomy; on the other hand, wastelands were reserve areas for further economic expansion of the community. The accumulations of barrow cemeteries and other objects, delimited by wastelands, presented four different-sized microregions, defined on the basis of possibly contemporaneous sites spread in different landscapes. The smallest microregion was the southern one, with the area of only around 32 km<sup>2</sup>. The areas of the south-eastern and the central microregions were relatively similar and covered around 162 km<sup>2</sup> and 124 km<sup>2</sup>, respectively. Meanwhile, the area of the northern microregion was around 246 km<sup>2</sup>, twice exceeding the area of the central microregion. The entire investigated territory covered around 700 km<sup>2</sup>: the total area of the microregions was around 564 km<sup>2</sup>, and the wastelands (included in the area of the accumulations), together with lakes, river beds, wetlands, and forests, covered the area under 140 km<sup>2</sup>. Even with the issue of the contemporaneity of barrow cemeteries taken into account, the methods of paleodemography enabled us to calculate the potential density of people per square kilometer. In east Lithuania, the indicator amounted to 0.3–0.6 persons per 1 km<sup>2</sup> (Kurila 2014, 194 ff., fig. 4). In other words, the population density was not high. The small number of known graves in the barrow cemeteries might have been predetermined by the methodology of previous archaeological excavations, however, it could not distort the empirical data. The low population density indicated that people had sufficient natural resources, and the microregions covered arable lands, pastures, and other economic activity zones. However, a too low population density indicator raised serious doubts about whether or not all the community members were buried in barrow cemeteries.

Based on formalized criteria, defining the microregions or other structural derivatives of the reference area is not an easy task. On the other hand, due to the difference of theoretical approaches or views, microregions in the same area were identified in different ways (Bliujienė & Steponaitis 2009; Kurila 2011, 102 ff., figs 1–3; 2014, 184 ff.; figs 1–2; Balakauskas & Kurila 2012, 123 ff.,

fig. 1; Kuncevičius et al. 2015, 282 ff.). A microregion, next to the landscape specificity, ought to be identified in the immediate environment by its economic, technological, and cultural variance and by close and regular contacts, covering the lifestyle of the communities in the territories assigned to the microregion (Kuncevičius et al. 2015, 87). However, the probability of noticing the contemporaneous, although insignificant economic, cultural, and technological differences in such derivatives is not high, while a deeper understanding of the community lifestyle and close relations, or, on the contrary, the absence of contacts, is frequently impossible due to an insufficient level of excavation of residential and burial sites, in other words, due to the lack of empirical data. Therefore, in our attempts to define the population structure in a particular area at a definite period, we have to take into account several factors that can have been significant for the researched issue. Beside the characteristics of the natural conditions, such factors could include the sociocultural genesis of the region and the common European processes of the 5th through the first quarter of the 6th century, as well as slightly later ones that greatly predetermined the development of the region. As evidenced by the microregional population structure in the area between Tauragnas Lake and the middle reaches of the Žeimena River, as well as the archaeological materials, it was there that the ELB culture formed.

### **The hierarchy of elite in the context of the East Lithuanian Barrow Cemeteries Culture**

The formation of the ELB culture or the first stage of its development, coincided with the Late Roman Period whose marks in the area between Tauragnas Lake and the middle reaches of the Žeimena River at the level of the possessed empirical data were minimal. The barrow cemeteries of the Late Roman Period remained either north or south of the reference region (Vaitkevičius 2004, 54 ff.; Grižas & Steponaitis 2005, 61; Bliujienė 2006, 123 f.; Kurila 2015, fig. 4). Recently, after dating over 40 radiocarbon samples of human bones from the barrows of east Lithuania, we failed to specify the chronology, even though individual AMS dates for human bones proved that at the turn of the 5th century the dead in east Lithuania were not cremated (Kuncevičius et al. 2015, 62). However, cremations are believed to have appeared in the period from the late 4th to the early 5th century, while the dead could have been buried not cremated as late as in the second half of the 5th and the early 6th century (Kurila & Kliaugaitė 2008, 25; Šatavičius 2012, 34). Still, part of the radiocarbon dates seemed too early, even in such cases when the later typological method-based grave dating was hardly questionable, as it was related to the European typological schemas<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> The main issues of the discrepancies between the radiocarbon dating and the archaeological materials were discussed in: Kuncevičius et al. 2015, 47 ff.; Kurila 2015, 69 ff., figs 2–3.

The development of the ELB culture in the Migration Period marks the spread of a rich inhumation graves containing silver artefacts and the establishment of the cremation custom, as early as in the second quarter of the 5th through the mid-5th century, when the dead were almost exclusively cremated (Bliujienė 2006, 131 ff.; Kurila & Kliaugaitė 2007, 138; 2008, 25)<sup>4</sup>. However, from the third quarter of the 5th century, mostly or even only chieftains of the highest social status have been buried in accordance with the inhumation custom together with their horses. In Taurapolis (barrow 5) and Paduobė–Šaltaliūnė 3 (barrow 17) cemeteries, chieftains of the interregional warrior elite of undoubtedly polyethnic groups who had got to east Lithuania, were buried (Tautavičius 1981, 20 ff.; Bliujienė & Steponaitis 2009, 187 ff.) (Figs 2–3: a–b).

The non-cremation graves indicated that such groups of people who had wandered so far to the north could have consisted of people of different nationalities (Bliujienė & Steponaitis 2009, 201; Kurila 2009a, 145 ff.). Moreover, the graves



**Fig. 2.** Paduobė–Šaltaliūnė 3 cemetery, barrow 17. 1 a belt buckle tongue, gilded silver, photo by Kęstutis Stoškus, 2 barrow 17 during excavations, 3 robbed grave *in situ* (2; 3 photos by Valdas Steponaitis).

<sup>4</sup> Inhumation graves of a well-armed men found in Peršaukštis-Kasčiukai 2 and Degsnė-Labotiškės 2 barrow cemeteries might belong to the mid-third quarter of the 5th century or a bit later (Bliujienė 2006, 139; Kurila & Kliaugaitė 2008, 25).



**Fig. 3.** (a) Taurapolis interregional chieftain's social status insignias – two-edged sword with gild silver sword scabbard bindings, buckles, chape, and the “magic sword pendant” made of *Cacholong* stone (drawings from LNM AR 540: 16–20, 26 catalogue card, photos by Audronė Bliujienė). (b) Part of Taurapolis interregional chieftain's grave goods: an iron belt buckle with garnet inlays (drawings from LNM AR 540: 22 catalogue card, photos by Audronė Bliujienė).

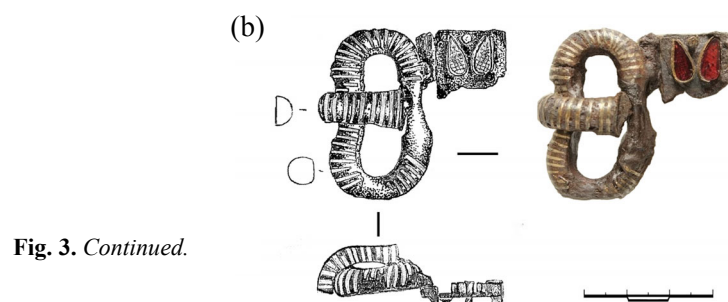
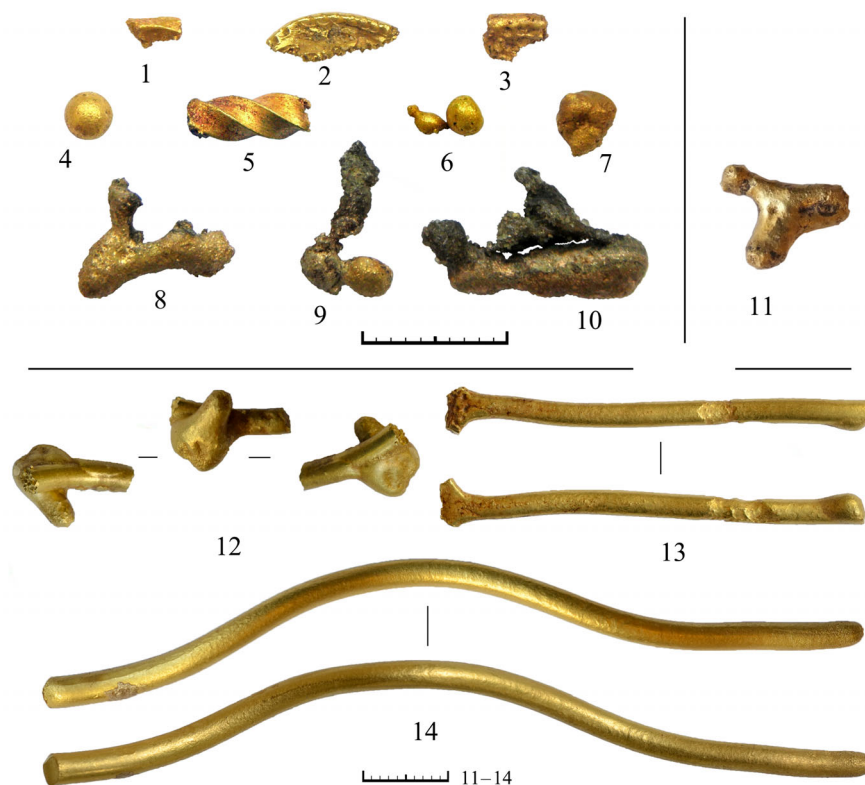


Fig. 3. Continued.

witnessed not the long-lasting custom of inhumation as a way of burial, but rather the fact that the people buried in the above-mentioned barrow cemeteries must have come from different migration-affected regions of Europe. The hypothesis was confirmed by contemporaneous cremation graves of the interregional warrior elite found in Sudota 1 and 4 barrow cemeteries (Fig. 4: 1–10, 12–14).



**Fig. 4.** Grave goods from cremation graves. 1–10 Sudota 4 barrow cemetery, barrow 1, child's grave 2 (gold, bronze), 12–14 Sudota 4 barrow cemetery, barrow 1, man's grave 1 (gold), 11 Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė 3 barrow cemetery, barrow 4, man's grave 2 (gold). Photo by Egidijus Štavičius and Valdas Steponaitis (11).

On the other hand, Taurapilis chieftain's retinue members, as well as contemporaneous people of a lower social status in the eastern group of Taurapilis barrow cemetery, were buried, not cremated (Tautavičius 1981, 38 ff.). The group of people that found themselves in Taurapilis was well-organized and lived under a strictly regulated multi-tiered subordination hierarchy, therefore, they managed to impose on the local community the ideology and a religious images-based inhumation custom which in that case could have been understood as a form of expression of a higher social status. The last representatives of the migrant generation in Lithuania could have adopted the cremation burial custom, universally spread in east Lithuania, as cremated remains were dug in the mounds of Taurapilis barrows 1 and 6. However, the majority of cremation graves did not contain any grave goods, therefore, a more accurate chronology of such burials remains unclear.

In the Lithuanian historiographical tradition, the differences in the social status of the Migration Period were defined, based on the criterion of certain exclusive traits of the burial style, including horses and special sets of grave goods (Kurila 2009a, 48 ff.; Bliujienė 2013a, 539–564). The elite of the third quarter of the 5th century through the first half of the 6th century could be defined on the basis of the following criteria: exclusive and sophisticated characteristics of the burial customs (1), burial in one pit with a horse (2), a full set of weapons, including a belt (3) and silver and gold jewelry and drinking horns as the insignias of the social status (4). Those marks of the status that for different reasons varied in burial aspects and the sets of the status-related insignias were found in the graves of European persons of the highest social status (Lund Hansen 2001, 178 f.; Nicolay 2014, 222 ff.). In the third quarter of the 5th century through the first quarter of the 6th century and a slightly later period, the above-indicated criteria of the social status were differently reflected in the elite graves, which led to the conclusion that hierarchy existed inside the elite. The highest status in the elite hierarchy had been held by individuals buried with the observance of all the four status-indicating criteria. Those were representatives of the interregional warrior elite, driven away from home by the circumstances of the Migration Period events, who for some reason had ended up in the remote east Lithuania (Zabiela 1995, 49 f.; Bliujienė & Steponaitis 2009, 201 f.; Bliujienė 2013b, 148 ff.).<sup>5</sup> The individuals, in accordance with their social status, could have belonged to the territory between Tauragnas Lake and the middle reaches of the Žeimena River where, due to their efforts, a complex chiefdom was formed in the third quarter of the 5th century, and those individuals became its supreme leaders. The individuals having belonged to that elite stratum were buried so as to differentiate

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<sup>5</sup> Lithuanian historiographical tradition assumes that no distinct immigrations or changes in the ethnic compositions of the population occurred, and all of the east Lithuanian barrow cemeteries were left by local communities, and all non-local prestigious artefacts may have been brought to the region as commodities, gifts or booty carried by warriors that were returning from the Migration Period events in Europe (for this see: Kurila 2016, 201).

and emphasize their status, in accordance with the exclusive characteristics of the burial style and, as evidenced by the possessed data, by observing the inhumation custom. The exclusive characteristics of the burial style included the size of the barrow, a complex construction of the mound of the barrow and the stone circle (vertically standing boulders), pits or ditches surrounding the mound, additional empty pits in the mound, the position of the grave in the mound, and a horse buried together with the dead (Fig. 2: 2–3). Moreover, the existence of the ruling hierarchical stratum was witnessed by the remaining toponyms; e.g. at the edge of Sudota 1 barrow cemetery, once there was a “King Stone”, called by the locals in the late 19th century a “Duke Stone” (Pokrovskij 1893, 54)<sup>6</sup>. Since almost all east Lithuanian graves with horses had been robbed, the second criterion was reflected in several graves to be assigned to different elite strata. Beside the interregional warrior elite chieftains buried in Taurapolis (barrow 5) and Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė 3 (barrow 17), part of the Taurapolis chieftain’s retinue were also buried in one pit with the horses (barrows 1, 4, and 6). Men’s graves with horses in the same pit were found in the excavations of Sariai-Laukiai (barrows 1 and 5) and Pavajuonis-Rėkučiai (barrow 6) cemeteries (Pokrovskij 1897, 164 ff.; Bliujienė & Steponaitis 2009, 185 ff., figs 2–3).

A complete set of weapons assigned to the interregional elite consisted of a double-edged sword with its ornate scabbard and “magic sword pendant”, a battle knife, a shield boss, two spears, and an axe. A sword was undoubtedly a mark of the supreme status of an individual. Such a full set of weapons was found only in the Taurapolis chieftain’s grave; incidentally, a luxurious drinking horn with a wrought-iron handle was also found only in his grave. The battle axe, typical of the ELB culture, the spears, and a shield boss, together with a sword in the set of weapons of the Taurapolis chieftain evidently meant more than just an emphasis on his supreme status: for the aliens, those weapons typical of the local culture witnessed their right to that particular territory. Moreover, the axe, the spear, and the sword were symbols of authority and power. The best example of that symbolism was a butted axe (*Francisca*), a shield boss, and a spear (*Framea*) found in Childeric’s (440–481/82) grave (Quast 2015, 172 ff., Pl. 11.1–3).

The graves of the interregional elite, beside the generally larger amount of grave goods exceeding that found in other graves, contained also unique artefacts, marked by the social status-indicating insignias, usually made of precious metals and sometimes decorated with semi-precious stones. As evidenced by the discovered grave goods in such graves, those included a belt with an ornate buckle, a brooch, and a drinking horn (Figs 2, 3b). In German lands, the range of the supreme status insignias was much wider and included gold neck rings, the so-called *Kolbenarmring*, finger rings, brooches, and bracteates (Lund Hansen 2001, 178 f.). From the third quarter of the 5th century through the first quarter of the 6th century and a slightly later period, in the graves of the east Lithuanian interregional warrior elite and the persons from their intermediate environment, in

<sup>6</sup> In the mid-20th century, the boulder was broken and taken away.

terms of precious metals, artefacts of gilded silver, silver, gold, and gilded bronze prevailed, which, as proved by spectrometric methods<sup>7</sup>, had been made of good quality silver and gold: alloys of a similar composition had been known in contemporaneous European burials and treasures. In the examined silver alloys from Taurapolis, Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė, Ziboliškė 3, and other, silver accounted for 83.7 to 94.4%. For the gilding of the silver artefact surfaces, a mercury amalgam was used, containing 70.0 to 94.5% of gold and 1.8 to 11.4% of mercury. In Sudota 4 barrow cemetery, barrow 1, in the graves of man and child, parts of a neck ring were found made of the alloy containing about 85.0/88.3 to 92.6% of gold (Fig. 4: 1–10, 12–14). Due to the diversity in the presentation of the published data of spectral analyses, it is difficult to compare the data of the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the alloys. However, similar results were obtained by examining the 5th century gold artefacts, found in the burial grounds and treasures on the higher reaches of the Dnieper, the Crimean Goths, the Gepids of the middle reaches of the Danube, and, naturally, of Huns (e.g., in the Nagyszéksós treasure, the gold in the alloys accounted for between 80 to 99%) (Nagy 2005, tables 1–2; Craddock et al. 2010, table 1; Giunlia-Mair 2013, 29 ff., Histogram 1; Khavrin et al. 2014).

For the east Baltic region, an iron belt buckle with a rectangular mounting produced by the *Cloisonné* technique remained unique: 4 garnet cabochons inserted in the copper alloy mounts, with thin gold sieve-ornamented plates, while the tongue of the belt buckle and its bow were decorated with inserted rows of thin silver cuts (Tautavičius 1981, 25, fig. 17; Bliujienė & Steponaitis 2009, fig. 11) (Fig. 3b). In the *Cloisonné* technique artefacts, gold plates were inlaid to accentuate the light effects (Fabech & Näsman 2013; Nicolay 2014, fig. 9.20; Radyush & Shcheglova 2014; Quast 2015, 174, fig. 3, table 10).

Another important factor in the expression of the social elite hierarchy, beside the wealth and power demonstration elements, was the amount of silver and gold taken to the afterlife. In the Taurapolis chieftain's grave, 272 grams of silver and gilded silver jewelry were found, in addition to those covered with silver coating or plates. A silver gilded tongue of the belt buckle, found in a Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė 3 barrow 17, alone weighed 48.7 grams. Parts of a gold neck-ring, found in Sudota 4 barrow cemetery, barrow 1, weighed 26.84 grams. Although in cremation graves only larger or smaller fragments of gold or silver artefacts remained, the fragments reflected the prestige and wealth of the buried individual and the social status of the family. That was the declaration of the status of an individual who had passed away, as well as a belief that the transferred wealth was to be used in eternity. Moreover, part of the artefacts deliberately put in the grave may have performed the family property storage function, when the wealth was temporarily entrusted to the care of the ancestors. The actual assumption was that the wealth could be taken back from the ancestors at any time. However, a large amount of buried

<sup>7</sup> The artefacts were examined by X-ray fluorescence method, Expert Mobile analyzer made in the Ukraine, in the laboratory of Trakai History Museum.



artefacts made of precious metals encouraged grave robbery<sup>8</sup>, and of course exchange of robbed artefacts, and metal scrap, or alloys made of metal scrap. The scale of the phenomenon was witnessed by the archaeological materials from east and south-east Lithuania and the central, northern, and north-eastern Europe (Kurila 2009b; Levada 2011, figs 3, 6).

In the graves, brooches and neck rings had never been found together, except for cremation grave 4 in barrow 30 of Sudota 1 barrow cemetery, in which more than one individual was buried (Fig. 5). No neck ring had been found in the Taurapolis chieftain's grave. However, an individual who must have belonged to the chieftain's retinue (Taurapolis barrow 6) was buried with a neck ring. The diversity of the types of the status-indicating insignias-jewelry and of the metals they had been made of must have emerged due to the fact that people had come to the reference area from different regions of Europe, and they had brought different insignias produced in different regions and distinct approaches to them.



**Fig. 5.** Sudota 1 barrow cemetery, barrow 30, grave goods of man cremation grave 4. 1, 6, 7 silver, 2–4 bronze, 5 gilded bronze, 8 copper and silver alloy, 9–10, 12–15 iron, 11 iron, bronze (Nalšia Museum in Švenčionys; photo by Audronė Bliujienė).

<sup>8</sup> There are various reasons to propose a hypothesis that it was particular ritual activities which led to reopening graves (for this see: Karczewski 2016).

All the four above-mentioned criteria of the social status hierarchy were found only in the grave of the Taurapolis chieftain, a representative of the interregional warrior elite (barrow 5) (Tautavičius 1981). In the grave of a 25 to 30 year-old man<sup>9</sup>, buried in Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė 3 barrow cemetery, barrow 17, three criteria typical of the interregional warrior elite burials could be partially seen, as the grave had been robbed in ancient times (Steponaitis 2007; Bliujienė & Steponaitis 2009, 194 f., fig. 18). It should be noted that both individuals had been buried in accordance with the inhumation custom. A high status of an individual buried in Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė 3 was witnessed by an exclusive size of the barrow (its diameter was 15–17 m, and together with the ditches, 23 m, and the height was 1.1 m); the barrow was encircled by a stone circle and pits (Fig. 2: 2). The individual was buried in 3.4 × 2.3 m in size and 1.2 m deep pit under the barrow base, with a 7 to 8 year-old and 136–144 cm withers high horse on his left side<sup>10</sup>. No more graves were found in this barrow. Regretfully, from the former social status insignias, only the tongue of the belt and a part of the battle knife were there.

The Taurapolis chieftain, a 40- to 50-year-old man, was buried with a full set of weapons and rich grave goods in barrow 5, which was originally about 13.5 m in diameter and about 1 m in height and was surrounded by a circle of stones. The man's and the horse's skeleton<sup>11</sup>, with their heads oriented towards the west, were found almost in the centre of the barrow, in a 4.0 × 2.8 m large and 1.4–1.6 m deep pit dug into the base of the barrow. A two-year old horse, approximately 135–138 cm withers height and without any riding gear – not even the bridle bits – was buried on its left side and on the deceased person's left (Tautavičius 1981, 20 ff., figs 3–5). As typical of the east Lithuanian warrior elite graves, horses were buried as much as without the simplest bridle or merely with it, and naturally without a saddle, contrary to the custom of the *barbaricum* (Tautavičius 1981, fig. 5; Bliujienė & Steponaitis 2009, 188, fig. 1). Part of the artefacts found in the Taurapolis chieftain's grave were also exclusive insignias of the status: a sword with ornate scabbard and a “magic sword pendant” attached to the hilt and made of *Kascholong/Cacholong* stone and a spherical gilded silver mounting<sup>12</sup>, a belt with garnets encrusted buckle mounting, and a drinking horn used in different rituals (Fig. 3: a–b).

On the elite hierarchical ladder, it was most difficult to find a proper place for individuals buried in barrow 1, Sudota 4 barrow cemetery. The burial of two cremated individuals, a 25 to 30 year-old man (grave 1) and a 5 to 7 year-old

<sup>9</sup> Investigated by Prof PhD Rimantas Jankauskas, Faculty of Medicine at Vilnius University.

<sup>10</sup> Bones investigated PhD Giedrė Piličiauskienė, Department of Archaeology, Faculty of History at Vilnius University.

<sup>11</sup> The chieftain's horse was 2 years old and 144–145 cm the withers height (Tautavičius 1971). However, after recent investigation, it was assumed that the withers height of the horse could have amounted to 135–138 cm, i.e., in any case, it was higher than the other ones found in the barrow cemetery (personal communication PhD G. Piličiauskienė).

<sup>12</sup> Investigated by PhD Arūnas Kleišmantas of the Department of Geology and Mineralogy, Faculty of Natural Sciences at Vilnius University.

child<sup>13</sup> (grave 2), by social gradation could have been close to the Taurapolis and Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė interregional chieftain's environment. Judging by the grave goods, the man could have been the chieftain of the south-western microregion or a person close to the chieftain of the chiefdom, or, in other words, of the territory between Tauragnas Lake and the middle reaches of the Žeimena River. In that way, the hierarchical system of the chiefdom would comply with the known European models (Kazanskij 2010, 35 ff.; Nicolay 2014, 2 ff., fig. 1.3). It seems that both Sudota 4 graves were contemporaneous, and the buried individuals could have been related by close family ties (father and son). If the assumption was correct, then we could reasonably state that children could inherit the social status of the family, which was very important for the formation of the chiefdom institution in the region. It should be noted that, since the second quarter of the 5th century, more double graves related by family or social ties were known in east Lithuania<sup>14</sup>.

The structure of the partially destroyed Sudota 4 barrow (robbed in the period of the 16th to the 19th century) must have been quite complex, as proved not merely by the surviving stone circle (about 12–13 m in diameter) surrounding the barrow. In grave 1 of Sudota 4 barrow cemetery, fragments of a circa half gold neck ring that might have belonged to a neck ring in a plate and hook clasp. The clasp plate was decorated with stamped circles, while the fragments of a small bone plate/s, decorated with stamped circles, witnessed the previous existence of a comb (?) in the tomb. In the grave, several thin (<1 mm) fragmented and bent iron tin remains were found that could have been armour plates (?)<sup>15</sup>. In the child's grave 2, fragments of gold and bronze neck rings with a torqued bow and small melted parts of silver-bronze artefacts were found, with the total weight of about 20 grams (Fig. 4: 1–10). Evidently the back part of the gold neck ring was torqued, and the fringe of the round loop ornamented, simulating beaded wire. Gold neck rings were undoubtedly an insignia of the supreme social status. In Sudota 4 barrow cemetery, barrow 1, grave 1, an axe with a narrow blade and a blunt end and ornamented body, typical of east Lithuania, was found (group 9 in accordance with classification of A. Malonaitis in 2008). Axes of that type were also found in the graves of other groups of Sudota barrow cemetery (Kaczyński 1963, 141 ff.; Merkevičius 1988; 1990). In grave 2, a narrow-bladed battle axe (type 3, version a), a battle knife, a B-shaped iron belt buckle, and several fragmented iron plates, just like in grave 1, were discovered (Štavičius 2012, 32 ff.). No horse, one of the social status indicators in the Migration Period, as well as weapon set or ornate belts common to the interregional chieftain's graves, was found in the partially destroyed Sudota 4 barrow graves.

<sup>13</sup> The child's age was specified.

<sup>14</sup> In Pavajuonis-Cegelnė barrow 2, a man and a woman, and in barrow 4, a woman and a child were buried; in Pavajuonis-Rėkučiai barrow cemetery, a woman and a child were buried.

<sup>15</sup> Probably similar to the armour shirt plates, depicted in the signet ring belonging to Frankish king Childeric (Quast 2015, 175 ff., table 13: 1–3).

In cremation grave 4, barrow 30, Sudota 1 barrow cemetery, perhaps two members of the retinue must have been buried in the grave. The finds of that cremation grave were assorted into two groups: two brooches and two belt buckles suggested that at least two persons had been buried there. In the grave, 2,316 grams of cremated bones were found, one might therefore assume that a horse could have been cremated; however, the last assumption is indeed speculative. Despite the imported grave goods, such as a gilded bronze mounting of a belt buckle, a battle knife with a metal handle, similar to an angon type spear<sup>16</sup>, an iron crossbow brooch with a straight foot and a melted silver crossbow brooch, a massive, melted silver neck-ring with a torqued bow, and other artefacts (Fig. 5). In the composition of silver artefacts, from 72.7 to 97.1% of silver were recorded, and their total weight amounted to over 151.4 grams. The above mentioned axes, brooches, and other finds suggested the dating of the graves back to the second half or the third quarter of the 5th century (Bazhan & Kargapol'cev, 1989, 29, figs 1: V, 3; Tautavičius 1996, 144 f., 175, 178; Malonaitis 2008, 45, 58 f., 70).

Based on the materials from the graves, the rung on the social elite hierarchy ladder below the interregional warrior elite was occupied by persons in whose graves the identified four basic hierarchy elements could be seen only in part. The barrow structure remained complex, as most of the barrows were encircled with stone circles, or circles and pits and a ditch, or even ditches (e.g., Sudota 2, barrow 1). In that group assigned to the elite, however, a lower position in the elite social hierarchical structure, mostly cremation graves were found. The occurring non-cremation graves dated back to the second half to the mid-5th century. Such graves were found in Šilinė 1 (Borava) or Pavajuonis-Cegelnė barrow cemeteries. Still, even if the grave(s) of persons of a high social status occupied the central place, frequently more than one grave was found in the mound. In such elite graves, well-armed persons were buried, but their sets of weapons were not full. The graves contained no swords, although battle knives, shield bosses, and spearheads were there (Fig. 5). In Taurapolis barrow cemetery, some persons assigned to the elite of that group, i.e. the chieftain's retinue members, were buried with horses.

In the graves of that social hierarchy level, silver neck rings and iron belt buckles were found, and even rare finds unique for the region. Still, that group of elite persons would wear a simple iron B-shaped belt buckle, and merely several graves contained luxurious silver or gilded bronze belt buckles with mountings (Pokrovskij 1897, 155 f., fig. X: 11–12; Semėnas 1999, 8; 2000, 198). The graves also contained silver and gold artefacts, mainly their melted fragments (Fig. 4: 11). The persons assigned to that group may have included both the migrant and the local elite representatives who had acquired those rare and unique finds in different ways (e.g. war booty, chieftain's gifts or reward). Those people could have been

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<sup>16</sup> V. Kazakevičius ascribed spearhead from Sudota barrow cemetery 2, barrow 2, grave 1 as an angon type (Kazakyavichyus 1988, 60 f., fig. 23: 1, Map 13).

leaders of local communities and/or of the warrior retinue. Such graves were found in all the microregions.

In the east Lithuanian cremation graves of a high social status with the insignias of the interregional warrior elite of the second half of the 5th century, merely men and children had been found buried so far, except for a cremation grave of a 25- to 30-years-old woman buried in Ziboliškė 3 burial grave (Kliaugaitė 2000) (Fig. 6)<sup>17</sup>. As no grave goods were found in it, the lack of data prevented more precise definition of her social status. Moreover, due to a small amount of the data, it was impossible to say whether the processes of social stratification had been so strong that, in the formation of the elite hierarchy and the stratum of warriors, a situation might have occurred when men and women were buried in separate barrow cemeteries (as, e.g., in the western part of Taurapilis barrow cemetery, where exclusively men's graves were found: of the chieftain and his retinue). As witnessed by the excavations of the remains of Peršaukštis-Kasčiukai barrow cemetery, judging by the grave goods and the examination of the osteological materials, merely men were buried in all 8 barrows (Kurila & Kliaugaitė 2008, 16). However, a small number of excavated graves and the destruction of the barrow cemetery may have provided the data, little complying with that time reality.

In terms of the social structure of the society, from the mid-5th century a group of men's graves was identified, given the standard weapon sets (a spear, frequently a shield, and a battle knife) and uniform clothing (a belt with a metal buckle and sometimes a bronze or an iron brooch), and it kept increasing: it formed simultaneously with the wealth and power concentration in the reference area. Judging by the grave goods, the men participated in military conflicts as foot warriors. In the social structure of the east Lithuanian society, given the grave materials, there might have been another interlayer: it was reflected by graves, poor in grave goods or their diversity, in which no weapons were found, but fragments of silver and even gold artefacts were discovered. Such graves were found in Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė 3 barrow



**Fig. 6.** Gilded silver belt buckle with binding found in Ziboliškė 3 barrow cemetery, woman cremation grave 3 (LNM AR 761: 1, photo by Audronė Bliujienė).

<sup>17</sup> Cremated bones were examined by prof. PhD Rimantas Jankauskas.

cemetery, where in cremation graves 1 and 4, melted fragments of gold and silver artefacts were found (Steponaitis 1991) (Fig. 5: 11). On the one hand, that could witness east Lithuania having been a part of the common process: an increase in the amount of silver (and gold) artefacts in all the eastern region of the Baltic Sea during the early 5th century and a subsequent decline in their amount in the first half of the 6th century (Vaitkuskienė 1981, table 1; Bliujienė 2013a, 559 ff., fig. 386). East Lithuania stood out in the process by its gold artefacts, regrettably just their fragments, part of which melted into drops. On the other hand, the graves with precious metals indicated that the social structure was much more complex and had more interlayers that could not be defined by archaeological data.

Each of the barrow cemetery accumulations of the third quarter of the 5th century, equal to microregions, and the emerging rich graves, based on the burial style and finds, from the viewpoint of society stratification could be differentiated into separate categories: the interregional elite, i.e. chieftains of complex chiefdoms, their dependents and believable microregion leaders close to them, chieftains of warrior armies, a rich society stratum that included members of the chieftain retinue, and ordinary and dependent society members. Part of the army, as witnessed by a rather large amount of imported silver and gold finds, just as their leaders, must have been multiethnic. However, a number of uniformed men unquestionably indicated that in that period of social development, both the community elite and the well-, however, uniformly-armed men included representatives of the local nobility. Thus, the structure of population in the territory between Tauragnas Lake and the middle reaches of the Žeimena and a social section of the society indicated that a complex chiefdom had formed on the territory, and it had consisted of four more or less independent administrative units, microregions (in other words, accumulations of archaeological objects) that had been managed by their leaders and supported by armed riders and foot warriors of a different social status. The accumulated archaeological data witnessed that the chiefdom had had its chieftain, a person of the supreme status to whom the leaders of the microregions had been subordinated. The leaders of the chiefdom between Tauragnas Lake and the middle reaches of the Žeimena could have been the chieftains of Taurapilis and Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė interregional warrior elite. Evidently the two chieftains of Taurapilis and Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė interregional warrior elite did not rule at the same time; their periods of rule must have differed in at least several years, as the chiefdom, as well as the chieftains, due to the fast-changing situations in the Migration Period was neither durable nor long-term (Bliujienė 2013a, 562 f.; 2013b, 147 ff.).

### **Discussion and conclusions**

By the accumulations of archaeological sites in microregions, delimited by wastelands, and the concentration of the wealth, power, and weapons, the structure of the population in the area between Tauragnas Lake and the middle reaches of

the Žeimena River witnessed a significant process of social differentiation and the existence of a complex chiefdom institution (Bliujienė & Steponaitis 2009; Kurila 2009a; Bliujienė & Curta 2011; Bliujienė 2013b). In the Migration Period, a similar territory population structure and the society stratification based on wealth and the power of military strength, in some characteristics close to that of east Lithuania, existed in different European regions (cf. Kazanskij 2010, 35 ff., figs 16–17, 19; Nicolay 2014, 12 ff., figs 1.7, 3.14). Prestigious weapons, weaponry elements, belt buckles and their mountings, and the social status insignias, analogous and close to those discovered in east Lithuania, were spread over the area between the Iberian Peninsula in the west, southern Scandinavia in the north-west, North-Eastern European forest zone in the east, and as far as northern Italy in the south, and they were produced in different jewelry and weapons manufacturing workshops. The main workshops that had mastered quality processing of precious metals and semi-precious stones, as well as sophisticated production technologies, had concentrated within the boundaries of the former Roman Empire and its provinces. On the other hand, part of such artefacts were undoubtedly ordered personally. Therefore, when searching for the contact zones from which the artefacts made of precious metals travelled to Lithuania, the areas considered first and foremost included the region of the middle reaches of the Danube, the Eastern European forest belt, the sites of the higher reaches of the Danube basin, and the former Chernyakhov culture area (Zabiela 1995, 49 f., fig. 37; Pinar & Ripol' 2006; Gavritukhin & Kazanski 2010, figs 4.22, 4.23; Kazanskij 2010, 104 ff., figs 49, 78; Levada 2011, 115 ff., figs 1–13; Bliujienė 2013b; Fabech & Näsman 2013, 87 ff., fig. 4).

The present paper discussed prestigious artefacts that spread in different ways due to the Migration Period processes: e.g. an exchange of luxurious gifts among the nobles, as gifts were also an insignia of the status. Undoubtedly there was some form of taxes and of bribes to the local nobility. Prestigious artefacts could have spread as a bride's dowry, the booty, a contribution, an exchange of the spoils, and ultimately, as commodity exchange. The luxury items in question may have served as a prestigious gift in one situation, a tax or a part of the contribution in another, and in another one, they may have been acquired as war spoils or a precious article acquired by robbery, and it travelled further on with its new master. In other words, prestigious artefacts would change hands and the movement direction and thus travelled thousand of kilometres, until finally they went to the grave along with their ultimate owners (Bliujienė & Steponaitis 2009, 201 f.). Therefore, the finds in the Taurapolis and Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė interregional chieftains' graves have their analogues both in southern Scandinavia and in Central and Eastern Europe.

The materials on the territory between Tauragnas Lake and the middle reaches of the Žeimena River in the Migration Period increased our understanding of the migration processes that were also relevant to east Lithuania. Prestigious artefacts could be assumed to have come to Lithuania together with their owners who kept

penetrating further into the Northern European forest belt after Attila's Empire (Attila, c. 406–453) had collapsed after the battle on the Nedao River. Evidently, small multiethnic groups of aliens that could have included Heruls, Gepids, and Ostrogoths, reached east Lithuania and managed to get established there (Zabiela 1995, 47 ff., fig. 35; Lukhtanas 1997, 15 ff.; Kurila 2009a, 145 ff.; Bliujienė 2013b, 146 ff.). The directions of migration, by which the migrants reached a rather remote region of North-Eastern Europe, and of exchange could be defined as southern and south-eastern. Judging by the distribution of the artefacts manufactured in workshops of the middle reaches of the Danube, and in other places of Western Europe, large and abundant in water, one of the final stages in the south–north direction must have been an important route of the middle reaches of the Nemunas (Bliujienė & Curta 2011, 33 ff., fig. 1). The south-eastern and eastern routes were the Dnieper and Berezina Rivers (Kazanski 2013, 159 f., fig. 5). Moreover, the Žeimena River in the Migration Period also served as an important commercial artery that connected the Nemunas and Daugava basins.

In that case, the first (south-western) and the third (central) microregions, identified by us on the banks of the middle and high reaches of the Žeimena River and analysed in the present article, were of a particular strategic importance. Moreover, a narrow strip of land between Žeimenys and Vajuonis-Kretuonas Lakes and other natural barriers provided natural protection and allowed the control of people's movement (Bliujienė 2006, 138; Bliujienė & Steponaitis 2009, 194). Thus, it was possible that the aim of the aliens was the management of several most important route segments and crossroads and the control of the flows of goods and people in a hitherto little-populated area. Cultural isolation was visible between east and central Lithuania. South-eastern Lithuania, even though culturally close to the ELB culture, was also culturally isolated from those territories (Bliujienė 2016, 215 f., fig. 1). In the middle of the first millennium, an unconquered territorial isolation existed between the Selonian barrows with stone circles and non-cremation graves and the east Lithuanian barrows with cremation graves (Simniškytė 2013, 91 f., Map 5). Moreover, neither in Selonia nor in south-eastern Lithuania were so many prestigious artefacts or burials of the interregional warrior elite found (Tautavičius 1996). In central Lithuania, the number of prestigious artefacts kept increasing (Kazakevičius 1993; Bertašius 2007; 2014), however, they got there in different ways and under different circumstances. Of course, the trade in marten and beaver furs, and in honey and wax much in demand in Europe at that time also could have been the reason for aliens to come (Kazanskij 2010, 4; Bliujienė 2013a, 303 ff., fig. 203). Again, in the North-Eastern European forest zone, the majority of people were engaged in those activities. Therefore, it is possible that in the Migration Period in Europe, the said geopolitically remote and sparsely populated area between Tauragnas Lake and the Žeimena River was significant due to its isolation. Or else, the territory might have been a short stop on the way to some more important destination.



Whatever the reason, for the aliens who either came to east Lithuania on purpose or simply found themselves far north, an aspiration to get established in the reached territory became a must. For some time, those people could still maintain indirect relations with their scattered tribesmen. However, the relations broke rather abruptly as early as in the first quarter of the 6th century or slightly later due to the changed political-economic situation and the plague in the years of the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian (527–565), also possibly due to the appearance of Avars who for some time interrupted the established contacts, and other reasons. Moreover, global geological-astronomical events of 536 that led to a sharp deterioration in weather conditions on the northern hemisphere for over a decade may have had a significant effect. Those years of shortages and poor crops were recorded in the annals of some European countries and China (Oppenheimer 2011, 248 ff.; Tvauri 2014). Thus, the migrants who had come to east Lithuania, in the course of three or four generations blended among the local people, just as silver and gold artefacts disappeared.

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### APPENDIX

The main data about barrow cemeteries and their chronology (after A. Bliujienė and E. Šatavičius)

ID	Accumulation No.	Barrow cemetery	Number of barrows <sup>1</sup>	Number of excavated barrows	Number of identified graves	Barrow cemeteries chronology (periods) <sup>2</sup>			
						C	D	E	F
<b>Švenčionys district</b>									
1	I	Liūlinė 1	20	–	–	+	+		
2		Liūlinė 2	3	–	–	+	+		
3		Liūlinė 3	3	1	2	+			
4		Sudota 1	>200	22	55	+	+	+	
5		Sudota 2	12	4	13	+	+	+	
6		Sudota 3	>7	7	11	+	+		
7		Sudota 4	>15	4	4	+	+		
8		Dotenėnai	45	–	–			+	+
9		Paduobė barrow	1	–	–		+	+	

*Continued overleaf*

APPENDIX. *Continued*

ID	Accumulation No.	Barrow cemetery	Number of barrows <sup>1</sup>	Number of excavated barrows	Number of identified graves	Barrow cemeteries chronology (periods) <sup>2</sup>			
						C	D	E	F
10		Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė 1	~90	–	–		+	+	+
11		Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė 2	29	–	–			+	+
12		Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė 3	>63	18	40		+	+	+
13		Švenčionėliai	27	–	–			+	+
14		Švenčionėliai barrow 1	1	–	–			+	+
15		Švenčionėliai barrow 2	1	–	–		+	+	
16		Melagėnėliai	7	–	–			+	
17	<b>II</b>	Mėžionys-Paulinavas	17	16	30	+	+	+	
18		Peršaukštis 1	2	–	–			+	
19		Peršaukštis-Kasčiukai 2	9	9	<7		+	+	
20		Sariai-Laukiai 1	51	12	11			+	+
21		Sariai-Laukiai 2	48	–	–			+	+
22		Ziboliškė 1	2	–	–			+	+
23		Ziboliškė 2	17	–	–			+	+
24		Ziboliškė 3	3	1	1		+	+	
25		Šilinė 1 (Borava)	15	3	3		+	+	
26		Šilinė 2 (Borava)	16	2	2		+	+	+
27		Kulbokiškė	5	–	–			+	
28		Naujas Strūnaitis	14	–	–		+	+	+
29		Andreikos	19	–	–		+	+	
30		Myliai	28	–	–			+	+
31		Trakai	34	–	–		+	+	+
32	<b>III</b>	Veikūnai-Pašaminė 1	<70	1	2			+	+
33		Veikūnai-Pašaminė 2	~60	–	–		+	+	+
34		Veikūnai barrow	1					+	+
35		Kretuonys 1 <sup>3</sup>	~270	5	7			+	+
36		Kaltanėnai-Degutinė	5	1	1		+	+	
37		Pakretuonė barrow	1	–	–		+	+	
38		Pakretuonė	2	–	–			+	
39		Rėkučiai-Pakretuonė	24	1	3			+	+
40		Rėkučiai-Paversmis	13	3(4)	2		+	+	+
41		Pavajuonis-Rėkučiai	76	2	3		+	+	
42		Pavajuonis-Cegelnė	32	4	4		+	+	
43		Papiškės	~45	1	4		+	+	+
		<b>Ignalina district</b>							
44		Medžiūškiai-Akmeniškės	39	–	–		+	+	+
45		Papralė	>45	2	3			+	+
46		Šakarva 1	33	–	–			+	+

APPENDIX. *Continued*

ID	Accumulation No.	Barrow cemetery	Number of barrows <sup>1</sup>	Number of excavated barrows	Number of identified graves	Barrow cemeteries chronology (periods) <sup>2</sup>			
						C	D	E	F
47	IV	Poviliškė	58	6	12		+	+	+
48		Kalviasalis	10	–	–		+	+	+
49		Bališkiai	3	–	–			+	+
50		Lauksteniai 1	35	3	4			+	+
51		Vyžiai-Ripelialaukis	~80	11	15			+	+
52		Stripeikiai I	35	–	–		+	+	+
53	?	Sidariškiai-Krivasalis	175	–	–			+	+
<b>Utena district</b>									
54	IV	Tautiškis	15	2	1		+	+	
55		Sėlė	2	–	–		+	+	
56		Taurapolis (W+E group)	>20	>16	15		+	+	
57		Tauragnai	>10	>1	>1	+	+	+	
58		Šeimatis	7	–	–		+	+	
59		Daunoriai-Paduobiai	30					+	+
60		Želmeniškė-Prūsai	>7	7	9		+	+	
<b>Total</b>			<b>&gt;2007</b>	<b>&gt;165</b>	<b>&gt;265</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>34</b>

<sup>1</sup> Barrows number in the barrow cemetery is indicated after fieldwork survey data. Archival data was used to describe barrow number if the barrow cemetery is destroyed. The number of the grave in the mound was indicated after excavation reports and literature. However, the mentioned sources provide slightly different information.

<sup>2</sup> Chronology: C period 150–350/360 AD; D period ~360/370–480/490 AD; E period ~480/490–650/700; F period ~650/700–800 (Bliujienė 2013a, table 7).

<sup>3</sup> Altogether 54 barrows have been excavated in Kretuonys 1 barrow cemetery, and 55 cremation graves were found. However only in barrows Nos 27, 28, 44, 45 and 46 graves dated from the second half of the 5th c. to the 7th century were found.

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**VÕIMU KONTSENTEERUMINE TAURAGNASE JÄRVE  
JA ŽEIMENA JÕE VAHELISEL ALAL IDA-LEEDUS  
RAHVASTERÄNNUAJAL**

*Resümee*

Artiklis on käsitletud seda osa Ida-Leedu kääbaskalmete kultuuripiirkonnast, mis jääb Tauragnase järve ja Žeimena jõe keskjooksu vahele. On analüüsitud selle elanikkonna struktuuri rahvasterännuajal ja kogukondade elustiili ühiskondlik-kultuurilisi aspekte. Piirkonna rahvastiku struktuuri on uuritud läbi nelja kääbaste kontsentratsiooni ala, mida on vaadeldud eraldi mikrorajoonidena. Nendes ilmuvad alates 5. sajandist rikaste ja relvi sisaldavate panustega matused, mille põhjal võib kõnelda piirkondade sõjalisest eliidist ning pealikest, kes manifesteerisid end sotsiaalsele staatusele vastavate sümbolite ja relvadega. Hõbedat ja kulda sisaldavate rikkuste kuhjumine Ida-Leedus kiirendas sotsiaalset kihistumist ning viis komplekssete pealikudomeenide kui territoriaalsete võimustruktuuride väljakujunemiseni. Artiklis on käsitletud prestiižesemeid ja nende erinevaid liikumisteid rahvasterännuajal, muuhulgas kingituste vahetamist eliidi hulgas, kuivõrd ka kingid kujutasid endast sotsiaalse staatuse sümboleid. Kahtlemata esines ka hõimuliikmete teatavat liiki maksustamist kohaliku eliidi kasuks. Prestiižesemed võisid levida pruudilunana, sõjasaagina, kontributsioonina või lihtsalt kaubavahetuse teel. Kõnealused luksusesemed võisid ühes olukorras olla prestiižse kingituse rollis, teiseskolmandas aga hoopis maksu või sõjasaagi seisundis. Need võisid ka röövsaagiks langeda ja uue omanikuga hoopis kaugele reisida. Teiste sõnadega, prestiižesemed võisid vahetada korduvalt omanikku ja liikumisteid ning levida tuhandete kilomeetrite kaugusele, kuni lõpuks asetati need panusena oma viimase omaniku hauda. Seetõttu võibki Taurapilise ja Paduobė-Šaltaliūnė pealike haualeidudele vasteid leida nii Lõuna-Skandinaaviast kui ka Kesk- ning Ida-Euroopast.

Kompleksne pealikuvõim, mis oli moodustunud rahvasterännuaja sündmuste ja rändeprotsesside tulemusena, kestis sidemete äkilise katkemise tõttu Doonau keskjooksu ning teiste Euroopa keskustega siiski vaid 6. sajandi esimese veerandini või ainult pisut kauem. Piirkondade pealike ja sõdalaste hauad, mis võisid sisaldada hõbe- ja kuldesemeid ning relvi, kadusid niisama kiirelt. Ida-Leedu kääbaskalmete kultuuris toimusid sotsiaalsed, majanduslikud ja kultuurilised arengud, mis viisid selle muutumisele ning territoriaalsele laienemisele.