

**Laurynas Kurila**

## **SOME REMARKS ON THE ORIENTATION OF THE DEAD: EXAMPLES FROM TWO EAST LITHUANIAN BARROW CEMETERIES**

Two east Lithuanian barrow cemeteries, Baliuliai and Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II, which date to the mid-5th century, are distinguished by a specific pattern of burial orientation. The head appears to generally lie to the west and northwest, which is entirely typical of east Lithuanian barrows. But a closer inspection shows an exceptional feature, i.e. the alignment of the deceased towards a single focal point near the cemetery. The present paper seeks to discuss if this spatial organization was intentional, and if so, what significance the focal point possessed and what views of the afterlife and social objectives might lie behind this mortuary treatment. The grave orientation in both cemeteries is examined, with a certain amount of criticism, in the light of the chronological and territorial contexts. The paper proposes a hypothesis that burial direction is a form of symbolic communication between the living and the dead as well as among the dead within a certain interment area. It suggests that an ancestral tradition was established and maintained through this grave orientation. And it also examines the astronomical framework of the burial directions.

Laurynas Kurila, Department of Archaeology, Lithuanian Institute of History, 5 Kražių St., LT-01108 Vilnius, Lithuania; kurila@istorija.lt

### **Introduction**

Burial sites, e.g. flat and barrow cemeteries, tombs, cairns, etc., are not merely disposal areas for dead bodies but also function as an integral part of the cultural and sacral landscapes. The location of a cemetery in a landscape is unlikely *ipso facto* to be accidental, nor is the arrangement of the dead in any specific area within the cemetery. By being placed into a milieu intended for its eternal rest, the human body enters a system encompassing both physical and metaphysical elements: human remains, landscape, burial constructions, views of the afterlife, beliefs and rituals, symbolic meanings, memory, etc. (see e.g. Huntington & Metcalf 1979; Bloch & Parry 1982; Parkin 1992; Silverman & Small 2002; Bendann 2003 [1930]; Parker Pearson 2003; Tilley 2004, 194 ff.; Williams 2006; Fahlander & Oestigaard 2008).

Body orientation is one of the most universal of the many means for establishing a symbolic communication among the dead as well as between them and the environment. Like spatial distribution, it is commonly crucial for a cemetery's internal organization (referring, of course, to those burials that may be oriented, i.e. mainly inhumations). As the interred human body encompasses both location and direction, the body is a way to symbolically stress the deceased's link to the dead around it, to the landscape, and to the whole of the material and immaterial world. Many factors can influence burial orientation: the movement of celestial bodies, especially sunrise and sunset (e.g. Rose 1922, 132 ff.; Gruber 1971, 67 ff.; Wells & Green 1973; Hawkes 1976; 1982, 48; Raths 1978; Fichter & Volk 1980; Clausen et al. 2008, 222 ff.; Hoskin 2009; Szücs-Csillik et al. 2010, 326 ff. and a multitude of other studies; cf. Kendall 1982; Boddington 1990, 191 ff.), the presence of other objects such as other similar burial structures (e.g. Clausen et al. 2008, 219 ff.), ancient monuments (e.g. Evison 1987, 152 ff.; Williams 1998, 97 f.; Longley 2002, 314 f.), settlements, the real landscape or a mythological one (e.g. Parkin 1992, 20 ff.; Carr 1995, 130), religion, beliefs, memory (e.g. Rose 1922; Nicholson 1994; Carr 1995, 157 ff.; Bendann 2003 [1930], 211 ff.; Raven 2005), social status (e.g. Binford 1971, 21 f.), ethnicity, gender, age, etc., all of which can, of course, be interrelated, e.g. a cemetery spatially organized on the basis of an entire system of landmarks (e.g. Evison 1987, 152 ff.). Indeed, very few, if any, studies dealing with ancient cemeteries have found burial orientation to be random (see also Raths 1978, 2 f. for a general review).

Not only can studying grave orientation reveal certain aspects of burial customs, it can probably also contribute considerably to a better understanding of the social structures in past communities and the ideological forces which mediated between those structures and the burial. From this perspective, orientation models, which seem to have functioned at the local level (within a burial ground and its environs), are likely to be more significant than global models (e.g. those based on celestial bodies or fixed cardinal and ordinal directions). The potential of studies in this field, however, has still not been exhausted or even assessed, at least in the east Baltic region. This is why new hypotheses concerning the implications of burial orientation should be noted and carefully tested as a possible promising research programme.

Baltic pre-Christian (Iron Age) cemeteries do not seem to have a single universal rule governing body orientation, with different dimensions of the social and spiritual life appearing to have been stressed through it. Most tribes had their own predominant burial directions. In some areas, orientation reflected the gender roles, males and females being buried in opposite directions (e.g. Michelbertas 1986, 228; Tautavičius 1996, 285; Radiņš 1999, 25; Vaškevičiūtė 2004, 33), while in others, a firm link can be seen between orientation and the movement of celestial bodies (Jovaiša 2002). Of course, the pattern of orientation in individual cemeteries must have been an aggregate of different factors with many particularities arising from both landscape features and specific perceptions of the afterlife.

This paper aims to present a remarkable feature of body orientation presumably observed in two east Lithuanian barrow cemeteries, i.e. orientation towards one focal point near the cemetery, and to discuss it in an ideological and cultural context. The available data (both the small number of cemeteries and the data for the graves in each), however, are insufficient for fixed conclusions. Therefore the scope of the present inquiry is to propose a hypothesis rather than to prove it. The best anticipated result is a response from scientists who have observed similar phenomena in working with other prehistoric societies elsewhere.

### **The orientation pattern in east Lithuanian barrow cemeteries and a review of the available data**

Inhumation was a common manner of burial in the so-called east Lithuanian barrow culture for a relatively short span of time from its formation in the 3rd–4th centuries until approximately the turn of the 6th century. The roughly northward spread of cremation practices lasted over a century (Michelbertas 1986, 72; Tautavičius 1996, 46, 52; Kurila 2009, 12). Inhumations are therefore not very numerous in this region. Up until now, archaeologists, working with various degrees of thoroughness, have discovered uncremated human remains in over 40 barrow cemeteries (around 180 graves), although in most cases, only several burials have been found in each cemetery, which is hindering the precise determination of the burial orientation pattern at specific sites.

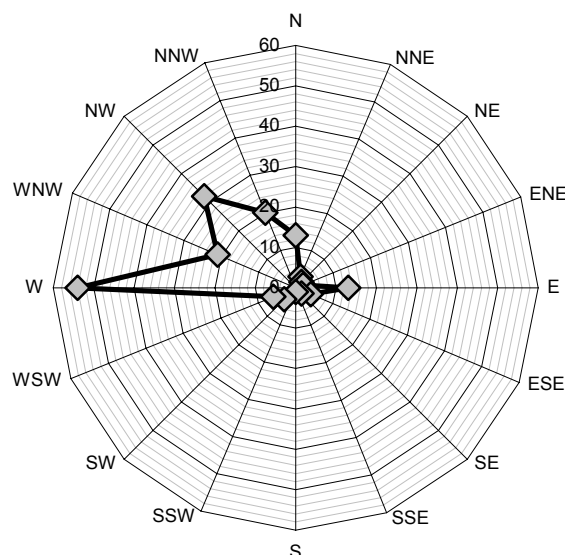
Literature based mainly on earlier excavations argued that in east Lithuania, the heads of males lay predominantly to the west (west orientation), those of females to the east (east orientation) (Tautavičius 1996, 48), or even considered such gender-based orientation a rule (Vaškevičiūtė 2007, 283). However, the latest excavations and a comprehensive survey of all the available data reveal that gender was not the key factor in determining burial direction (males generally showing fewer variations in respect to orientation) (Kurila 2009, 72, 92, 101, 270, 295, 318, figs 28, 77, 119) and that west and northwest orientations were the most common (Fig. 1). The orientations should probably be linked to the equinox and summer solstice sunset azimuths (a southwest orientation corresponding to a winter solstice azimuth being very rare), considering Lithuania's latitude<sup>1</sup>, the possible peculiarities of each specific landscape<sup>2</sup>, and the fact that a human body cannot always be precisely oriented to within a single degree<sup>3</sup>. The ordinal directions

---

<sup>1</sup> The sunset azimuth depends not only on the geographical location of a particular landscape but also on the period under discussion. However, the value of the obliquity of the ecliptic is too small to have any impact on an analysis of body orientation (see Wittmann 1979).

<sup>2</sup> E.g. in Baliuliai barrow cemetery the sunset azimuth is some 10–12 degrees less than at sea level at the same latitude.

<sup>3</sup> This latter reason, together with the rather poor condition of most of the skeletons in the burials under discussion, is why the paper avoids using compass degrees in the descriptions. In the plans, however, attempts have been made to give as precise an orientation as possible considering the available sources. The magnetic declination (6° positive or easterly) was also taken into consideration.



**Fig. 1.** Orientation of the dead in east Lithuanian barrows (based on all of the available data from excavated inhumations). Drawing by Laurynas Kurila.

between west and northwest may reflect the sunset on a specific date with no strict adherence to the outermost points of the sun's journey on the horizon.

Exceptions, however, do actually occur, prompting a search for other possible reasons. In some barrow cemeteries, the orientation can indeed be interpreted as gender related, e.g. in Riklikai (Tautavičius 1970, 55). Certain communities could also have had other burial orientation customs: a fixed northern direction, a sunrise azimuth, possibly some sort of system that oriented some burials towards others or towards objects that existed inside the cemetery or in its vicinity. None of these or other potential explanations have so far been discussed by east Lithuanian barrow researchers. On the whole, this topic is only occasionally approached by Lithuanian archaeologists, a comprehensive study by E. Jovaiša (2002) being one exception.

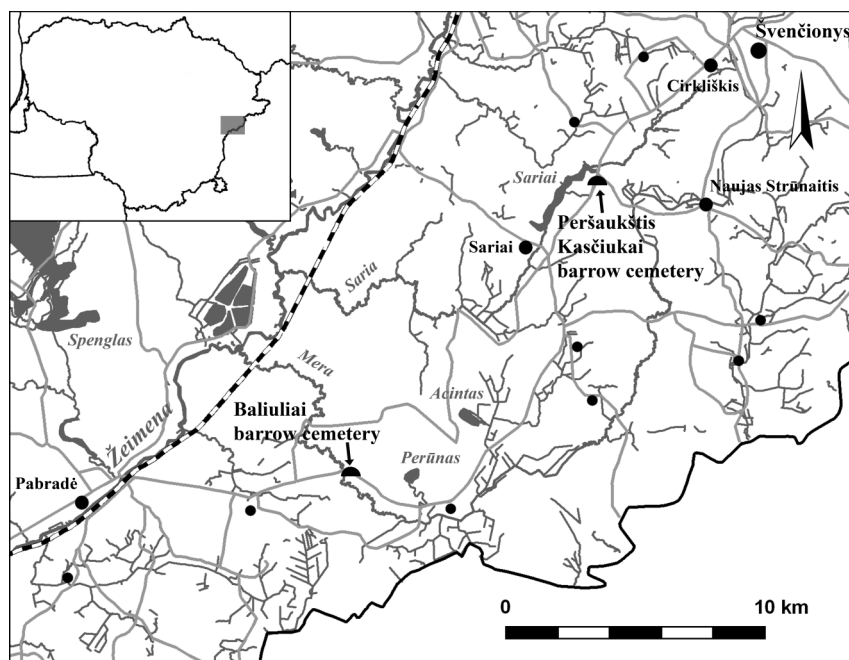
One of the foremost obstacles in research in this field, besides the lack of material, is the insufficient documentation level of some of the earlier excavations. For example, in 1894, F. V. Pokrovskij excavated eight inhumations in Antasariė Laukiai Sariai barrow cemetery and described their orientation but failed to include a plan of the cemetery in the publication (Pokrovskij 1897, 164 ff.). Thus the data about the spatial organization of the burial area was lost. An analogous documentation imperfection occurs in V. A. Kashirskij's account of the 1907 excavation in Pavajuonis Cegelnė barrow cemetery (Kurila 2011, 126 ff.). A total of 30 inhumations were found in Mežionys Paulinavas barrow cemetery, which was excavated in 1894 by F. V. Pokrovskij and in 1934 by W. Antoniewicz, but, due to similarly poor descriptions (Pokrovskij 1897, 169 ff.; Kaczyński 1963),

no regularities, or their absence, can be determined. An overall trait of earlier publications and accounts is a tendency to indicate burial orientation in fixed directions (i.e. using 8 or 16 compass points) rather than in degrees. In addition, the poor preservation of uncremated human remains prevents the exact determination of the body's orientation in many cases.

### Burial orientation in Baliuliai and Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II barrow cemeteries

Baliuliai and Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II barrow cemeteries (both in Švenčionys District) are fairly close, the former being about 14.5 kilometres as the crow flies to the south-west of the latter (Fig. 2), and are near the eastern edge of the range of the east Lithuanian barrow culture.

Baliuliai barrow cemetery is about 100 metres to the north-east of the right bank of the River Mera and about 750 metres to the north-west of Baliuliai hill-fort. Before it was excavated, the cemetery consisted of 16 barrows, including a huge one, 20 metres in diameter. It is highly likely that some barrows were destroyed by the Vilnius–Švenčionys road, which transversed the cemetery's northern periphery. A newly-built segment of this road currently transverses the larger part of the cemetery's grounds. The nearest barrows are two that have

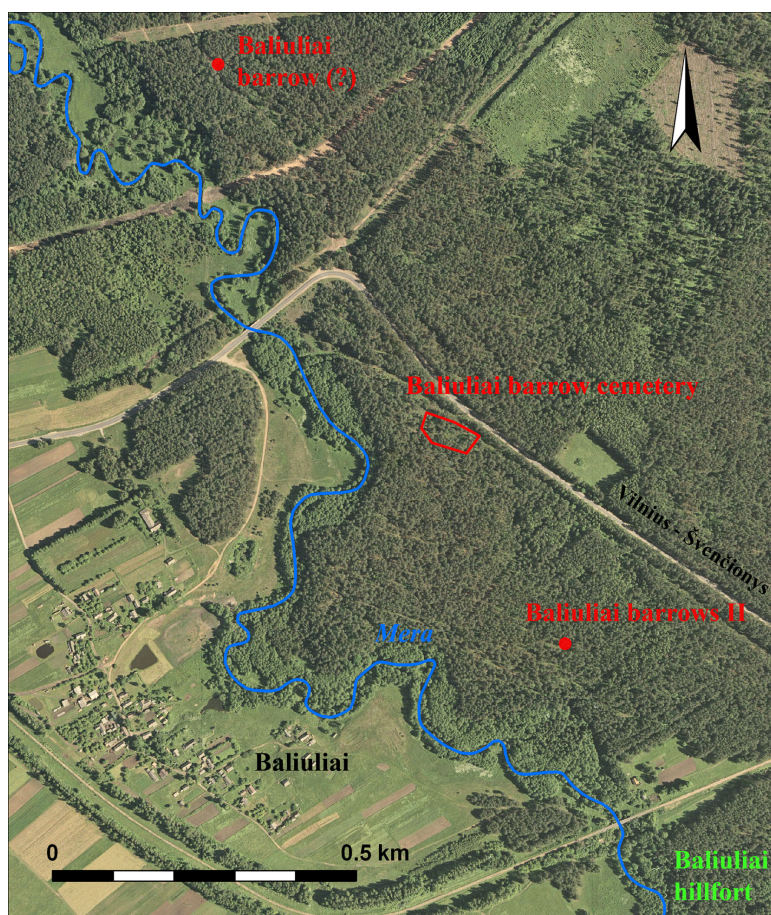


**Fig. 2.** The location of Baliuliai and Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II barrow cemeteries. Drawing by Laurynas Kurila.

been recently discovered about 300 metres to the south-east and been given the name Baliuliai II and one presumed barrow about 600 metres to the north-west (Balakauskas & Kurila 2012, 127, 130, fig. 7) (Fig. 3).

The 1999 and 2000 excavations yielded impressive results. The 5 inhumations and 11 cremations discovered in 12 excavated barrows date back to the very late 4th–5th centuries. Some of the uncharacteristic features of the burial structures as well as the elaborate grave good assemblages allow this cemetery to be considered one of the most idiosyncratic in the whole region (Kurila & Kliaugaitė 2007; Kliaugaitė & Kurila 2012).

Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II barrow cemetery is one of three adjacent barrow groups (together with Peršaukštis Kasčiukai I and III) currently protected as separate objects. They form a series of barrows over 400 metres long about

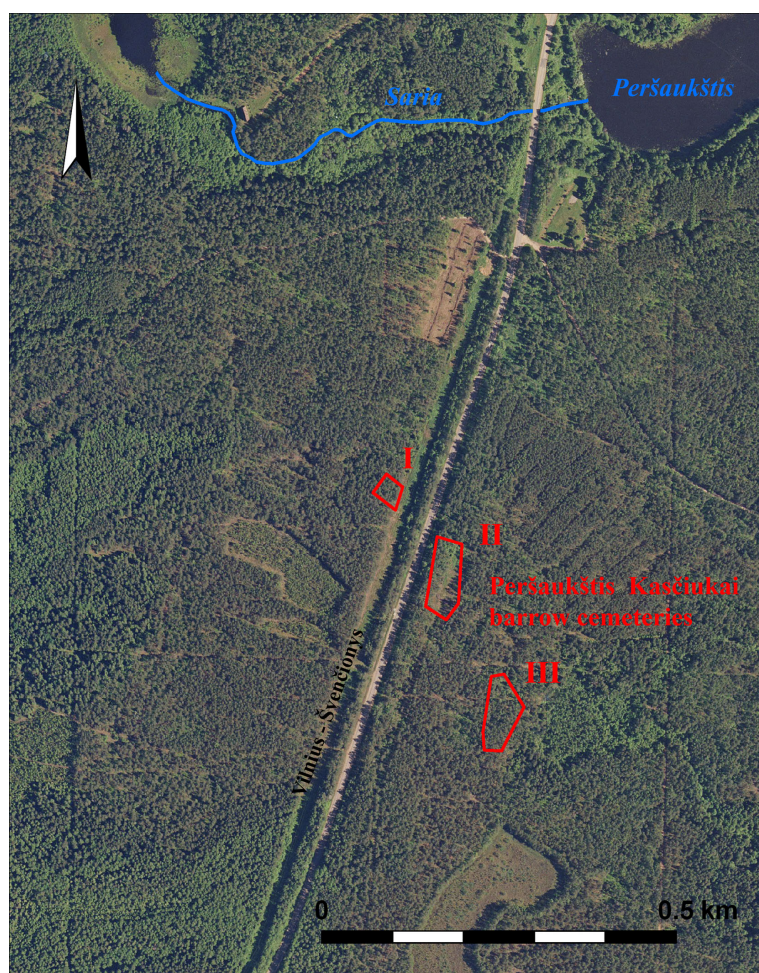


**Fig. 3.** The location of Baliuliai cemetery (protected territory, 2012), Baliuliai II barrow cemetery (territory legally undetermined, 2013) and the presumed lone Baliuliai barrow on an orthophoto map of Lithuanian territory (ORT10LT, 2005–2006; 1 : 10 000). Drawing by Laurynas Kurila.



450 metres to the south of the River Saria and about 0.65–1.4 kilometres to the east of Lake Sariai. The same Vilnius–Švenčionys road transverses this group of cemeteries, separating Peršaukštis Kasčiukai I from the other two, and may have also destroyed some barrows here (Fig. 4). The nearest barrow cemeteries are Kasčiukai cemetery and the lone Kasčiukai barrow (about 350 metres to the south-southeast) and Peršaukštis I and II (about 850 metres to the north-north-west) cemeteries. Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II cemetery, which is primarily referred to in this study, consisted of 8 barrows prior to its excavation.

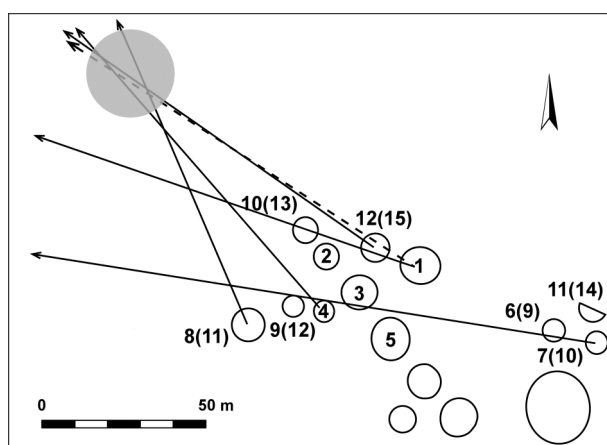
Two excavations were conducted at Peršaukštis Kasčiukai. In 1894, nine barrows were excavated somewhere (their exact location being now unknown) in the three aforementioned barrow groups. Several of the barrows were found



**Fig. 4.** The location of Peršaukštis Kasčiukai I–III barrow cemeteries (protected territories, 2012) on an orthophoto map of Lithuanian territory (ORT10LT, 2005–2006; 1 : 10 000). Drawing by Laurynas Kurila.

to be empty, while others contained symbolic or actual horse burials (Pokrovskij 1897, 158 ff.). All of them can be only approximately dated to the Late Iron Age (9th–11/12th centuries). Over a century later, in 2002–2004, eight more barrows were excavated, three in group I and five in group II. The former contained no burials, the latter three inhumations and four cremations. The inhumations and one cremation date to the mid-5th – early 6th centuries, the rest of the cremations being somewhat later. Barrows without burials are typical for the Late Iron Age (Kurila & Kliaugaitė 2008).

Although the orientation of the inhumations in both cemeteries is not surprising in the context of east Lithuanian barrow cemeteries (ranging from west-north-west to north-northwest in Baliuliai and from west to north-west in Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II), the relationship between the orientation and the location of the burials is noteworthy. In Baliuliai, a regularity is apparent in that the further west a burial is, the more northern its direction, and vice versa, those nearer the eastern part of the cemetery have a more westerly orientation. This ‘rule’ applies to all five barrows with inhumations (Fig. 5). The virtual lines of the orientation azimuths of the burials in barrows 4, 8 (11), and 12 (15) intersect at roughly a point about 50–70 metres to the north-west of the cemetery. The orientation of the inhumations in barrows 1 and 7 (10) is more westerly. The absence of complete precision, however, should not be surprising, considering the cemetery’s size (over 100 metres in length), the very poor condition of the bones, and the aforementioned fact that in a real landscape, the orientation of a body is not necessarily as precise as it might be drawn on a plan. In barrow 1, a coffin (?) seemed to be oriented towards the west-northwest but the burial pit itself was dug along a north-west – south-east axis, with its north-west end pointing directly towards the intersection point of the



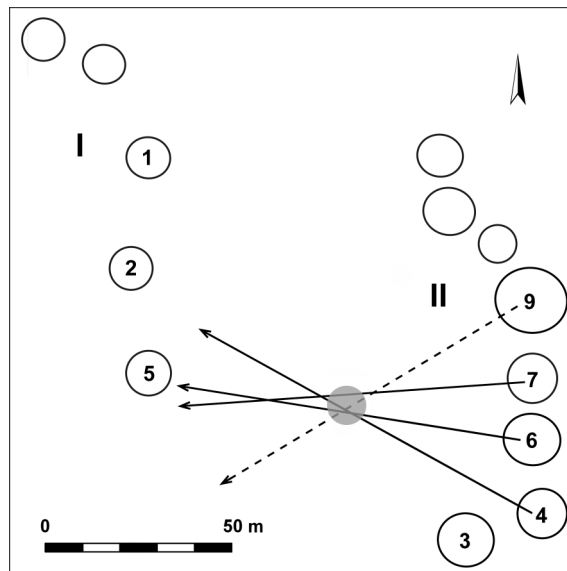
**Fig. 5.** The orientation of the inhumations, inhumation pit (dotted) and the location of the focal point – hill (grey) near Baliuliai barrow cemetery. Drawing by Laurynas Kurila after a drawing by Vida Kliaugaitė.



orientation azimuths of the burials in barrows 4, 8 (11), and 12 (15) (Kurila & Kliaugaitė 2007, 141 ff., fig. 3) (see the dotted line in Fig. 5). Thus the only burial actually oriented somewhat differently than the others was the one in barrow 7 (10). It was located on the cemetery's very eastern edge, about 150–170 metres from the presumed intersection point of the burial azimuths, which probably explains its greater deviation from the general trend.

Many of the cremations found in Baliuliai barrows were also made in oblong pits under the base (but some were also on the base or in the mound above the base). Their orientation (i.e. the west, north-west, or north ends of the pits) can be defined, but it shows no regularities, even though it ranges from west to nearly north.

Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II barrow cemetery displays even more regularity in respect to grave orientation. All three of the inhumations in barrows 4, 6, and 7 were oriented towards roughly one point about 50 metres to the west of the barrows as was the (south-west end of the) pit from the only coeval cremation in barrow 9 (Fig. 6). It is noteworthy that this cremation pit was similar to the inhumation pits both in form and dimensions (Kurila & Kliaugaitė 2008, 18, 34 f., fig. 36). Such cremation pit construction is rare in east Lithuanian barrows and is characteristic of only a very brief period during the change in burial practices. The only trait which distinguishes this burial pit from most of inhumations is its north-east–south-west orientation. In this case, however, this atypical direction prompts one to envisage a firm link between the location of the burials and their orientation. The intersection point of the directions is currently seen to be located



**Fig. 6.** The orientation of the inhumations and the cremation pit (dotted) and the location of the presumed focal point of the burial azimuths (grey) in Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II barrow cemetery. Drawing by Laurynas Kurila after a drawing by Vida Kliaugaitė.

somewhere between Peršaukštis Kasčiukai I and II cemeteries, but, since the former is roughly half of millennium later than the latter, at the time of the burials it was on the cemetery's west or south-west periphery.

### Discussion

By proposing a hypothesis that the regularities presented above are not a result of entirely different causes or simple coincidence, three main questions arise: can such a burial orientation pattern be found in other cemeteries<sup>4</sup>; what lies at the intersection points; and what perceptions of death and the afterlife, or social objectives, lie behind this mortuary treatment? Only the first two can be answered more or less properly, the third remaining more in the realm of speculation.

An examination of other east Lithuanian barrow (and some flat?) cemeteries with inhumations failed to detect anything similar: Eitulionys (Bliujus 1983), Maisiejūnai (Butėnas 1998), Žvirbliai (Iwanowska 2006), Diktarai (Urbanavičienė 1995), Migonys (Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė 1958, 58 ff.), Semeniškės (Baltramiejūnaitė & Vengalis 2010, 100 ff.), Kriokšlys (Zabiela 1998, 48 ff.), etc. Nor is significant evidence of such a burial orientation available for other Baltic cemeteries, except probably several small burial grounds, e.g. the Semigallian cemetery in Stungiai (Vaškevičiūtė 2000, 226 f., figs 2–3)<sup>5</sup>.

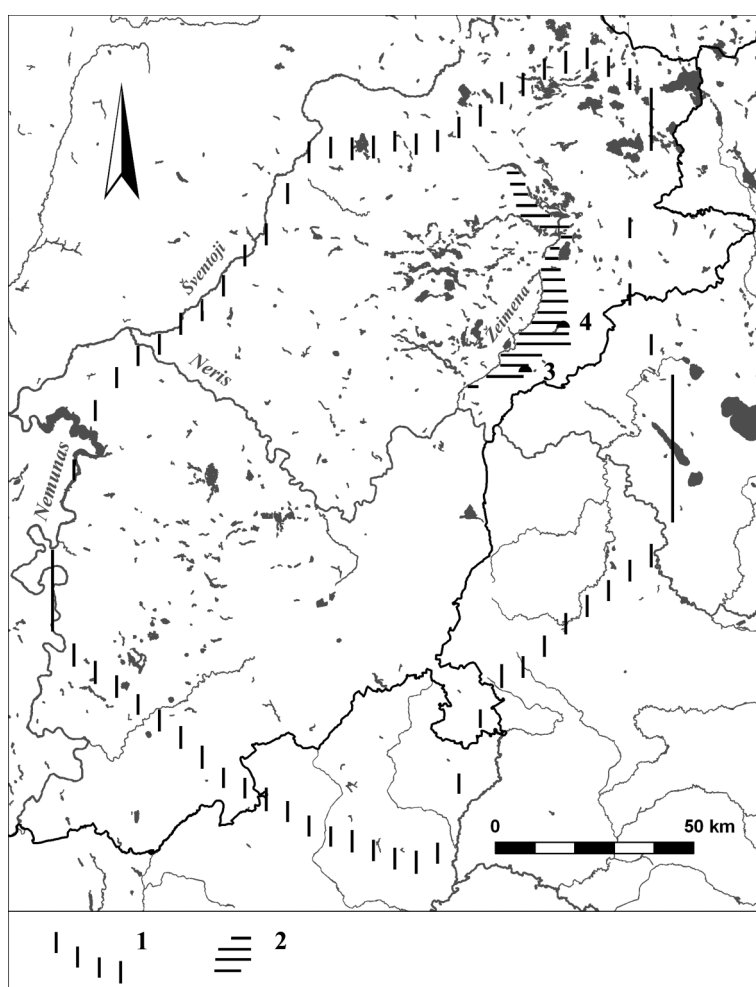
Nonetheless, if Baliuliai and Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II are indeed the only cemeteries showing such regularities, one must note their spatial and chronological proximity. Although the absolute chronology of the cemeteries is defined as widely as late 4th – early 6th century, the actual time span of their use is obviously a great deal shorter, relatively covering the junction the Early and Late Migration Periods (periods D2 and D3) or the mid-5th century. The chronological gap between them is very unlikely to be more than several decades. This is confirmed by cremations arranged as inhumations which is typical for only a very short period, and by some rather rare artefacts, such as Vilkonys-type crossbow brooches, spearheads with long sockets and short blades, and shield bosses. In addition, the dates of these two cemeteries fall into the most distinctive period of the east Lithuanian barrow culture (generally, the 5th century), which is marked not only by a shift from inhumation to cremation, but also by signs of contacts with Central and Southern Europe (witnessed by specific artefacts, e.g. bone combs, specific types of crossbow brooches, buckles, beads, etc.), a sudden increase in the number of tokens of wealth and warfare in the graves, and fairly manifest changes in

---

<sup>4</sup> A system of orienting the dead towards a fixed point might likewise function at a much higher level than within a single cemetery, as seen, for example, in the Muslim custom of laying the deceased facing Qibla (Mecca).

<sup>5</sup> In stating this, the author does not mean, of course, that he has made an exhaustive inquiry into the data from all of the excavated Baltic cemeteries. Christian cemeteries where the burials might prove to have been oriented towards a church or chapel (see e.g. Svetikas 2003, 150), were also excluded from the search for analogies.

social organization (see Werner 1977; Vaitkevičius 2005, 75 ff.; Bliujienė 2006, 125 ff.; Kurila & Kliaugaitė 2007, 134 ff.; Bliujienė & Steponaitis 2009; Kurila 2009, 136 ff., 144 ff.; 2011, 146 f.; Bliujienė & Curta 2011; Kliaugaitė & Kurila 2012, 100 f.). From a territorial point of view, both burial grounds lie in a range, some 50–60 kilometres long, of cemeteries (e.g., Sudota I and IV, Liūlinė III, Paduobė Šaltaliūnė III, Pavajuonis Rėkučiai, Pavajuonis Cegelnė, Taurapolis) distinguished by an abundance of luxurious grave goods of non-local provenance and some atypical traits in the burial structures (for the latter, see Kurila & Kliaugaitė 2008, 13; Bliujienė & Curta 2011, 36; Kurila 2011, 145) (Fig. 7). In



**Fig. 7.** The range of barrow cemeteries embodying the most attributes of non-local origin. 1 the approximate incidence of east Lithuanian barrows (according to the author), 2 the incidence of barrows with the most non-local grave goods and atypical burial customs (according to the author), 3 Baliuliai barrow cemetery, 4 Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II barrow cemetery. Drawing by Laurynas Kurila.

other words, if there is a period and area in the whole of the east Lithuanian barrow culture where any peculiarity in burial customs would raise the least doubt, Baliuliai and Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II cemeteries would be right in the middle of it. The cultural and historical background allows one to expect idiosyncratic funerary behaviour at these sites.<sup>6</sup>

The probable frequency, hence also credibility, of such a spatial organization should not be assessed within the corpus of the whole east Lithuanian barrow culture, but rather within the aforementioned area. However, none of the cemeteries within it have been excavated and sufficiently documented for such presumptions, except those discussed in this paper and probably Taurapilis. In this cemetery, the line of barrows was oriented west–east while most of the burials (3–5 out of 7; due to the severe destruction of the barrows, the orientation of several burials remains unidentified) seem to have had a west orientation (Tautavičius 1981). This, however, might be a result of an orientation either towards geographical west or some fixed point.

The focal points of the grave orientations can be easily detected in the landscape but are now covered by the Vilnius–Švenčionys road in both cemeteries and so have been completely altered. In the case of Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II, the spot seems to lie exactly under the road or its ditch. No data about the initial relief is available, and no specific landscape elements (hill, ravine, scarp, stream, etc.) or any signs of them are noticeable.

Fortunately Baliuliai barrow cemetery fared better. The intriguing focal point to the north-west of the cemetery remained undamaged until the present road segment was built in 2008. Up until then a small round hill, 25–30 metres in diameter, 1–1.2 metres in height, and somewhat similar to a huge flat barrow, existed at the site (Fig. 8). The depression at its centre looked something like the pits typically dug by grave robbers. In 2007, a small-scale archaeological excavation was conducted on the hill (Kurila 2007) and in 2008, in the course of building the road, an archaeological survey (Kurila 2008, 6, 16, figs 31, 32). Neither yielded any results, i.e. no evidence of the hill actually having been a barrow or any traces of a cultural layer or other human activity. Only the west and north-west part of the hill still survives. The fruitless investigation results do not allow any direct link between burial orientation and this hill to be confirmed. On the other hand, the very existence of this clearly dominating hill right at the focal point of the burial directions supports the probability of the hypothesis proposed in this paper.

In summary, the atypical orientation of the dead presumably observed in Baliuliai and Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II barrow cemeteries has not been confirmed by either nearby analogies or empirical excavation data. The absence of any traces

---

<sup>6</sup> The origin of such a burial organization within a cemetery remains obscure. The derivation of atypical burial practices in east Lithuanian barrows is expected to lead to Central and Southern Europe, namely the Middle Danube region, considering the aforementioned historical background. No evidence of such a burial orientation pattern, however, is seen in this region's cemeteries (Prof. Florin Curta, personal communication).



**Fig. 8.** The focal point – hill near Baliuliai barrow cemetery, as seen from the southeast in 2008. Photo by Laurynas Kurila.

of human activity on the hill near Baliuliai barrow cemetery does not allow any speculations about the existence of some kind of temple or ritual site, at least one that would leave vestiges on the ground. This, nonetheless, does not deny its possible significance as a place for performing rituals. One might propose a number of possible explanations for such burial orientation regularities (see Rath 1978, 2 f.). Still, cemeteries, including the two analysed here, could also contain sacral zones functioning on an immaterial level. Bonds between the living and the dead (and also between those of the latter being buried currently and those who departed for the afterlife long time ago) are built through memory, which is at the same time both permanent and constantly changing. Material landscape elements, be they natural or artificial, could be used within sacral zones as a means to embody a symbolic or social communication between the living and the dead, or among those interred in a specific area. In the case of Baliuliai, the pseudo-barrow could be perceived as a tomb of a mythic ancestor, a connection to whom was expressed through burial orientation. The grave orientation around the Early Iron Age barrows in 3rd–10th centuries Lejasbitēni inhumation cemetery Aizkraukle (Latvia) (Atgāzis 2001, 268 f.) can be given as an analogy. An orientation towards ancient monuments can also be seen in some Anglo-Saxon cemeteries (see Evison 1987, 152 ff.; Williams 1998, 97 f.)<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> This remark is not intended to argue that any direct links existed between east Lithuania and the Anglo-Saxons. The orientation of graves happens to be a well-studied topic in British archaeology, which led to the emergence of a considerable number of inferences concerning the spatial organization of the cemeteries in the British Isles.

A society which buries its dead in barrows is unlikely to blindly mistake a natural hill for a barrow. Memory, however, includes not only what people have actually experienced but also what they wish to demonstrate or even believe themselves to have experienced. A great deal of evidence exists that an oral tradition surrounding archaeological objects can emerge in a very brief period.<sup>8</sup> The creation of a memory can occur even faster and be even less dependent on actual experience when the memory is strongly connected with the social life. An aspiration to create an ancestral tradition and to establish and emphasize actual or supposed links to buried ancestors may reflect the society's claims to the territory it occupies (Saxe 1970, 119 ff.; Earle 2000, 52). This would be credible for Baliuliai barrow cemetery, which appeared in an area with no previous burials, perhaps in a territory previously occupied by the community that left Baliuliai hillfort and the settlement at its foot (for the settlement's dating, see Balakauskas & Kurila 2012), in a very dynamic period marked by rivalry for territories, status, and domination (see Kurila 2009, 146). Unfortunately, the area to the west of Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II barrow cemetery is too heavily destroyed to verify a similar presumption for it.

This is certainly not the only possible explanation for the burial orientation regularities in Baliuliai and Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II. The spatial organization of the cemeteries could have also been governed by other factors, e.g., by astronomy alone. It could have depended on the sunset azimuths in different seasons. For example, in Baliuliai, the funerals could have been performed by chance from the late spring to early autumn. Another explanation is also a possibility. In Baliuliai, the focal point of the burial directions lies almost exactly due north-west, or the direction of the summer solstice azimuth, from the largest, still unexcavated barrow, probably that of a high-ranking individual. Perhaps only a north-west orientation was sought here (while a west, or equinox sunset, orientation was sought in Peršaukštis Kačiukai II). A single fixed point was then chosen as a landmark to designate this approximate direction for the entire cemetery, thereby eliminating the need to find the actual sunset azimuth which can be obscured on a cloudy day. In addition, while the summer solstice sunset azimuth for any specific location, i.e. a new barrow, cannot be precisely identified without being at that location on that evening, deaths occur year round. The astronomical and social purports of grave orientation should by no means be regarded as conflicting; they could have been reciprocal and overlapping, jointly framing a specific ideological system.

### **Conclusions**

A precise survey of the burial orientation in Baliuliai and Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II barrow cemeteries (east Lithuania) reveals interesting regularities. In both cemeteries, west and north-west burial orientations dominate, which is typical for east Lithuanian barrows. However, all five inhumations in Baliuliai

---

<sup>8</sup> For example, a very common association of barrows or hill forts to the campaign of the Grande Armée (1812) is registered as early as the late 19th century.



and all three inhumations and one coeval cremation (pit end) in Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II seem to have been directed towards a nearby fixed point. In Baliuliai, a small hill similar to a huge barrow lay at the intersection point of the burial orientation azimuths, while in Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II this spot has been covered by a road and completely destroyed.

Such a spatial structure cannot be found in other east Lithuanian barrow cemeteries and, most likely, in the whole of the Baltic region, which forces one to approach the discussed regularities with a certain degree of criticism. However, considering the chronology and location of the cemeteries, atypical burial customs may not be surprising. Both date to the junction of the Early and Late Migration Periods, the east Lithuanian barrow culture's most dynamic stage, which is marked by intense foreign influences, and both lie in the range of barrow cemeteries displaying the most distinct signs of those influences. This encourages the assumption that the origin of the burial features observed in Baliuliai and Peršaukštis Kasčiukai II may be regions far from east Lithuania. Moreover, examples of somewhat similar burial orientation systems do actually exist.

The interpretation of the burial orientation regularities presented in this paper is only one of many possibilities. It can be argued that in the case of Baliuliai, the hill could have been perceived as an ancient barrow, probably the tomb of a mythical ancestor. The orientation of the dead towards the hill could have been employed as a means to link the dead and the living with their ancestors and probably also to legitimize the society's claims to the territory it occupied. Such a model is fairly credible in the period under discussion. Of course, other possible explanations for the burial orientations can also be suggested, the most credible being astronomical in nature, which does not conflict with the aforementioned social background. The possibility of a simple coincidence can also by no means be rejected. More extensive excavations of nearby coeval barrow cemeteries are required to test the hypothesis proposed here, which so far remains just a hypothesis.

## References

- Atgāzis, M.** 2001. Vidējais dzelzs laikmets. – Latvijas senākā vēsture. 9. g. t. pr. Kr. – 1200. g. Ed. J. Graudonis. Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, Rīga, 232–289.
- Balakauskas, L. & Kurila, L.** 2012. Aplinka ir žmogus holocene Baliulių–Perūno mikroregione (Švenčionių r.): tarpdisciplininis tyrimas. – Lietuvos Archeologija, 38, 121–140.
- Baltramiejūnaitė, D. & Vengalis, R.** 2010. Tyrinėjimai Semeniškėse. – Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 2009 metais. Society of the Lithuanian Archaeology, Vilnius, 99–105.
- Bendann, E.** 2003 [1930]. Death Customs: An Analytical Study of Burial Rites. Kessinger Publishing, Whitefish.
- Binford, L. R.** 1971. Mortuary practices: their study and their potential. – Approaches to the Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices. Ed. J. A. Brown. *Memoirs of the Society for American Archaeology*, 25, issued as *American Antiquity*, 36: 3(2), 6–29.
- Bliujienė, A.** 2006. Watershed between eastern and western Lithuania during the Early and Late Migration Period. – *Archaeologia Lituana*, 7, 123–143.

- Bliujienė, A. & Curta, F.** 2011. Exotic lands, quixotic friends: eastern Lithuania and the Carpathian Basin in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (AD c 380 to c 620). – *Medieval Archaeology*, 55, 29–65.
- Bliujienė, A. & Steponaitis, V.** 2009. Wealthy horsemen in the remote and tenebrous forests of east Lithuania during the Migration Period. – *Archaeologia Baltica*, 11, 185–205.
- Bliujus, A.** 1983. Eitulių pilkapynas. – *Muziejai ir Paminklai*, 5, 31–40.
- Bloch, M. & Parry, J.** (eds). 1982. *Death and the Regeneration of Life*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Boddington, A.** 1990. Models of burial, settlement and worship: the final phase reviewed. – *Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries: A Reappraisal*. Ed. E. Southworth. Alan Sutton, Stroud, 177–199.
- Butėnas, E.** 1998. Maisiejūnų pilkapyno tyrinėjimai. – *Lietuvos Archeologija*, 15, 163–184.
- Carr, C.** 1995. Mortuary practices: their social, philosophical-religious, circumstantial, and physical determinants. – *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, 2, 2, 105–200.
- Clausen, C., Einicke, O. & Kjærgaard, P.** 2008. The orientation of Danish passage graves. – *Acta Archaeologica*, 79, 216–229.
- Earle, T.** 2000. Archaeology, property, and prehistory. – *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 29: 1, 39–60.
- Evison, V. I.** 1987. *Dover: The Buckland Anglo-Saxon Cemetery*. (Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, Archaeological Report, 3.) Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, London.
- Fahlander, F. & Oestigaard, T.** 2008. The materiality of death: bodies, burials, beliefs. – *The Materiality of Death: Bodies, Burials, Beliefs*. Eds F. Fahlander & T. Oestigaard. (BAR International Series, 1768.) Archaeopress, Oxford, 1–16.
- Fichter, G. & Volk, P.** 1980. The eastern orientation of Merovingian graves and the seasonal distribution of morbidity and mortality (using the Sasbach-Behans and Bischoffingen-Bigärten cemeteries as examples). – *Journal of Human Evolution*, 9: 1, 49–59.
- Gruber, J. W.** 1971. Patterning in death in a late prehistoric village in Pennsylvania. – *American Antiquity*, 36: 1, 64–76.
- Hawkes, S. C.** 1976. Orientation at Finglesham: sunrise dating of death and burial in an Anglo-Saxon cemetery. – *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 92, 33–51.
- Hawkes, S. C.** 1982. The archaeology of conversion: cemeteries. – *The Anglo-Saxons*. Ed. J. Campbell. Phaidon, London, 48–49.
- Hoskin, M.** 2009. Orientations of dolmens of western Europe. – *Complutum*, 20: 2, 165–175.
- Huntington, R. & Metcalf, P.** 1979. *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Iwanowska, G.** 2006. Cmentarzysko kurhanowe w Żwirblach pod Wilnem. Wprowadzenie w problematykę. Katalog. Państwowe Muzeum Archeologiczne w Warszawie, Warszawa.
- Jovaiša, E.** 2002. Dangus baltų gyvenime. – *Lietuvos aukštųjų mokyklų mokslo darbai: Istorija*, 54, 3–16.
- Kaczyński, M.** 1963. Materiały cmentarzyska kurhanowego badanego w 1934 r. w miejscowości Mieżany, na Wileńszczyźnie (LSRR). – *Wiadomości Archeologiczne*, 29: 2, 119–137.
- Kendall, G.** 1982. A study of grave orientation in several Roman and post-Roman cemeteries from southern Britain. – *Archaeological Journal*, 139, 101–123.
- Kliaugaitė, V. & Kurila, L.** 2012. Baliuliai barrow cemetery. – *Archaeological Investigations in Independent Lithuania. 1990–2010*. Eds G. Zabiela, Z. Baubonis & E. Marcinkevičiūtė. Society of the Lithuanian Archaeology, Vilnius, 95–101.
- Kurila, L.** 2007. Baliulių pilkapyno (Švenčionių r.) (A1063) aplinkos žvalgomųjų archeologinių tyrinėjimų 2007 metais ataskaita. Manuscript in the Archive of the Lithuanian Institute of History, F. 1, 4824.
- Kurila, L.** 2008. Baliulių pilkapyno (Švenčionių r.) (A1063P) archeologinių žvalgymų 2008 metais ataskaita. Manuscript in the Archive of the Lithuanian Institute of History, F. 1, 4880.
- Kurila, L. V.** 2009. Socialinė organizacija Rytų Lietuvoje III–XII a. (laidojimo paminklų duomenimis). (Doctoral dissertation.) Vilnius University. Available from: [http://vddb.library.lt/fedora/get/LT-eLABa-0001:E.02~2009~D\\_20091109\\_151328-40475/DS.005.0.01.ETD](http://vddb.library.lt/fedora/get/LT-eLABa-0001:E.02~2009~D_20091109_151328-40475/DS.005.0.01.ETD) [Last accessed 7 January 2013].

- Kurila, L.** 2011. Vladimiro Kaširskio kasinėjimai Vajuonio ir Žeimenio tarpežerio pilkapynuose 1906 ir 1907 m. – Lietuvos archeologijos šaltiniai Sankt Peterburge. Eds A. Luchtanas & L. Tamulynas. Vilniaus universitetas, Vilnius, 101–174.
- Kurila, L. & Kliaugaitė, V.** 2007. Baliulių pilkapiai (Švenčionių r.). – Lietuvos Archeologija, 30, 121–180.
- Kurila, L. & Kliaugaitė, V.** 2008. Peršaukščio–Kasčiukų pilkapynas. – Lietuvos Archeologija, 33, 9–40.
- Longley, D.** 2002. Orientation within early medieval cemeteries: some data from north-west Wales. – Antiquaries Journal, 82, 309–321.
- Michelbertas, M.** 1986. Senasis geležies amžius Lietuvoje. I–IV amžius. Mokslas, Vilnius.
- Nicholson, B. A.** 1994. Orientation of burials and patterning in the selection of sites for late prehistoric burial mounds in south-central Manitoba. – The Plains Anthropologist, 39: 148, 161–171.
- Parker Pearson, M.** 2003. The Archaeology of Death and Burial. Sutton Publishing, Stroud.
- Parkin, D.** 1992. Ritual as spatial direction and bodily division. – Understanding Rituals. Ed. D. de Coppet. Routledge, London, 11–25.
- Pokrovskij, F. V.** 1897. = **Покровский Ф. В.** Къ изследованію кургановъ и городищъ на восточной окраине современной Литвы. – Труды девятого археологического съезда въ Вильне 1893. Москва, 138–196.
- Radiņš, A.** 1999. 10.–13. gadsimta senkapi latgaļu apdzīvotajā teritorijā un Austrumlatvijas etniskās, sociālās un politiskās vēstures jautājumi. (Latvijas vēstures muzeja raksti, 5.) N.I.M.S., Rīga.
- Raths, P.** 1978. Grave orientation. – Archaeological Journal, 135, 1–14.
- Raven, M. J.** 2005. Egyptian concepts on the orientation of the human body. – The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, 91, 37–53.
- Rose, H. T.** 1922. Celestial and terrestrial orientation of the dead. – The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 52, 127–140.
- Saxe, A. A.** 1970. Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices. (Doctoral dissertation.) University of Michigan.
- Silverman, H. & Small, D. B.** (eds). 2002. The Place and Space of Death. (Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association, 11: 1. Special issue.)
- Svetikas, E.** 2003. Alytaus kapinynas: christianizacijos šaltiniai. Diemedžio leidykla, Vilnius.
- Szűcs-Csillik, I., Comşa, A., Maxim, Z. & Szűcs, I.** 2010. Case studies of archaeoastronomy in Romania. – Archeologia e Calcolatori, 21, 325–337.
- Tautavičius, A.** 1970. Riklikų pilkapių kasinėjimai 1969 metais. – Archeologiniai ir etnografiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje 1968 ir 1969 metais. Lietuvos TSR mokslų akademija, Istorijos institutas, Vilnius, 53–60.
- Tautavičius, A.** 1981. Taurapilio “kunigaikščio” kapas. – Lietuvos Archeologija, 2, 18–43.
- Tautavičius, A.** 1996. Vidurinis geležies amžius Lietuvoje (V–IX a.). Lietuvos pilys, Vilnius.
- Tilley, C.** 2004. The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology. Berg, Oxford, New York.
- Urbanavičienė, S.** 1995. Diktarų kapinynas. – Lietuvos Archeologija, 11, 169–206.
- Vaitkevičius, V.** 2005. Interpreting the east Lithuanian barrow culture. – Papers from the First Theoretical Seminar of the Baltic Archaeologists (BASE) Held at the University of Tartu, Estonia, October 17th–19th, 2003. Culture and Material Culture. Ed. V. Lang. (Interarchaeologia, 1.) Tartu, Riga, Vilnius, 71–86.
- Vaškevičiūtė, I.** 2000. Stungių kapinynas. – Lietuvos Archeologija, 20, 225–262.
- Vaškevičiūtė, I.** 2004. Žiemgaliai V–XII amžiuje. VPU leidykla, Vilnius.
- Vaškevičiūtė, I.** 2007. Tautų kraustymosi ir baltų genčių sklaidos laikotarpis. – Lietuvos istorija, 2. Geležies amžius. Ed. G. Zabiela. Baltos lankos, Vilnius, 173–297.
- Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė, R.** 1958. Migonių (Jiezno raj.) archeologiniai paminklai. – Iš Lietuvių Kultūros Istorijos, 1, 44–64.
- Wells, C. & Green, C.** 1973. Sunrise dating of death and burial. – Norfolk Archaeology, 35, 435–442.

- Werner, J.** 1977. Der Grabfund von Taurapilis, Rayon Utna (Litauen) und die Verbindung der Balten zum Reich Theoderichs. – Archäologische Beiträge zur Chronologie der Völkerwanderungszeit. Eds G. Kossack & J. Reichstein. Habelt, Bonn, 87–92.
- Williams, H.** 1998. Monuments and the past in early Anglo-Saxon England. – World Archaeology, 30: 1, 90–108.
- Williams, H.** 2006. Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Wittmann, A.** 1979. The obliquity of the ecliptic. – Astronomy and Astrophysics, 73: 1–2, 129–131.
- Zabiela, G.** 1998. Kriokšlio pilkapiai. – Kultūros Paminklai, 5, 48–57.

### Laurynas Kurila

## MÕNINGAID MÄRKUSI MATUSEORIENTATSIOONI KOHTA: NÄITED KAHELT IDA-LEEDU KÄÄBASKALMISTULT

### Resüme

Matmissuund etendab kalmistute ruumilises korralduses olulist osa. See loob sümboolse sideme surnute, aga ka nende ja ümbritseva keskkonna vahel. Raua-aegsetes Balti kalmetes polnud üldkehtivat matmissuunda: enamik hõime järgis neile omaseid praktikaid. Ida-Leedu kääbastes domineeris laibamatuste perioodil (3/4.–5/6. sajand) lääne- ja loodeorientatsioon, mis seostub pööripäevade ning suvise pööripäeva aegse päikeseloojangu asimuudiga. Üksikud erandid julgustavad siiski ka teisi võimalikke seletusi otsima.

Artiklis on käsitletud kaht erandlikku kääbaskalmistut, kus surnud on suunatud peaga ühe, kalmistust eemal oleva punkti suunas. Baliuliai 4. sajandi lõpu – 5. sajandi kääbaskalmistul (1999. ja 2000. aastal kaevati siin 12 kääbast, mis sisaldasid 5 laiba- ning 11 põletusmatust) oli vähemalt 4 luustikku suunatud peaga ühe, kalmistust loodesse jääva punkti poole. Peršaukštise Kasčiukai II kääbaskalmistul (aastail 2002–2004 uuriti 5 kääpas 3 laiba- ja 4 põletusmatust; laibamatused ning üks põletushaud pärinevad 5. sajandi keskpaigast – 6. sajandi algusest, teised põletusmatused on hilisemad) olid kõik laibamatused, nagu ka üks pikliku kujuga põletusmatust, suunatud peaga kalmest läänes või edelas oleva punkti poole.

Ehkki sellist orientatsiooniprintsiipi pole teistes Ida-Leedu ega muudes Balti kalmistutes täheldatud, pole nimetatud seaduspära, arvesse võttes kahe nimetatud kalmistu ajalist ja ruumilist konteksti, arvatavasti juhuslik. Mõlemad matusepaigad olid kasutusel varase ja hilise rahvasterännuaja piirimaadel, st dünaamilisel ajastul, mida iseloomustavad intensiivsed kontaktid Kesk- ning Lõuna-Euroopaga, jõukuse ja sõjakuse kiire kasv ning muutused ühiskonnakorralduses. Käsitletavat kalmistut kuuluvad matusepaikade hulka, kus nimetatud protsessid avalduvad kõige intensiivsemalt.

Peršaukštise Kasčiukai II kalmistul on matuste pikitelgede lõikumispunkt jäänud praeguseks uue maantee alla. Baliuliai kalmistul asus selles punktis kuni

2008. aastani hiiglaslikku kääbast meenutav kungas, mis siis osaliselt hävitati. Arheoloogilise järelevalve käigus ei leitud seal mingeid märke kalmest ega inimtegevusest.

Kuigi alljärgnevat oletust ei saa matmissuundade sihtpunktiks olnud objektide hävimise tõttu kindlalt tõestada, võisid teatavad sakraalsed alad kalmistutega seostuda. Maastikuelemendid, kas siis looduslikud või inimtekkelised, võisid olla tähisteks mälumaastikul, märgistades sümboolset või sotsiaalset kommunikatsiooni elavate ja surnute, aga ka kalmele maetud surnute vahel. Baliuliai pseudo-kääbast võidi tajuda paigana, kuhu on maetud müütiline esivanem, kellega sidemeid väljendati matmissuuna abil. Niisugune soov luua seoseid esivanematega võib väljendada kogukonna püüdlust näidata oma õigusi enda kasutuses olevatele maadele. Välistada ei saa ka orientatsiooniviisi astronoomilisi tagamaid, kuid viimased ei ole vastuolus eelnimetatud ühiskonnasidusa seletusega.