THE ORIGIN OF BURIAL SITES IN EASTERN LATVIA CONSISTING OF TYPICAL STONE GRAVES

JĀNIS CIGLIS

Abstract

This article is dedicated to a chronology of typical stone graves. An attempt is made to date the beginning of these stone graves to a slightly earlier period than was done until now, namely up to the middle of the first century. This date is based on the dating of a few forms of artefacts.

Key words: tarand graves, bracelets, fibulae, neck-rings.

Over the last decade, the Estonian archaeologist Valter Lang has divided burial sites consisting of stone graves, or tarand graves, into two large groups, burial sites of early tarand graves, and burial sites of typical tarand graves (Lang 2007). Burial sites of early tarand graves in Latvia have been found and examined in north Courland, at Laidžes Lazdiņi and Strazde (Šnøre 1970, p.189ff; Vasks 2003, p.142ff). Both burial sites can be dated to the mid-first century AD, and they correspond with the chronological ages of early tarand graves noted by V. Lang. There are no artefacts that can be dated to the end of period B₁ and period B₂.

The situation in eastern Latvia is unclear. According to the archaeological literature of Latvia, the origin of burial sites in Vidzeme and north Latgale is traditionally dated to the second century AD (LPA 1974, 106ff; Vasks 2001, p.225; Lang 2007, p.203). This dating of burial sites in eastern Latvia has existed since the 1930s, when Harri Moora did a typological analysis of the artefacts, and dated the earliest forms (eye fibulae of the main series, fibulae of the 69th type, noted by O. Almgren, and other similar and strongly profiled fibulae) to the beginning of the second century AD (Moora 1938). However, H. Moora’s methodological approach, dating artefacts of a similar form from Latvia later than artefacts from the lower reaches of the River Vistula, was not quite correct. At the beginning of the Early Iron Age, at the end of period B₁, and the beginning of period B₂, on east Baltic territory, from the lower reaches of the River Vistula to the southern part of Finland, types of artefacts characteristic of this region sequentially changed each other without a noticeable delay in the northern part of the Baltic region. Also, the local production of artefacts should be dated a couple of years, not several decades later. It is most likely that there were water trading routes along the east coast of the Baltic Sea that stimulated the export of the latest forms of artefact to present-day Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania.

Going through the artefact collections that were found in stone graves in burial sites in north Vidzeme and north Latgale, in the series of typical stone graves, it is possible to detect well-dated finds of artefacts, some of which have been published in H. Moora’s work about the Iron Age in Latvia, that link the origin of burial sites to a slightly earlier period, the first century AD, or, more precisely, to the mid-first century AD or the second half of the first century AD (the end of period B₁ and period B₂).

The stone graves artefact complex from this period, collected in burial sites in the east Baltic region, is best characterised by the finds from the Triigi (Otenküll) burial site in Estonia (Fig. 1) (Hausmann 1896, Plate IV). Among the finds from the burial site are serial bracelets with an orthogonal cross-section, knob-ended bracelets, fragmentary neck-rings with a hollow wire and hollow trumpet-shaped ends, bracelets with a hollow cross-section, and tutulus fibulae. Not found among the artefacts from this burial site are eye fibulae of the Prussian series, neck-rings with trumpet-shaped ends of group II (according to the classification of M. Michelbertas) (Michelbertas 1986, p.88) and profiled fibulae, typical of the later part of period B₂. The ar-
Fig. 1. The finds from Triigi (Otenküll) burial site in Estonia (after Hausmann 1896).
Fig. 2. Serial bracelets from north Vidzeme: 1 Rūjiena; 2 Salenieki.
Fig. 3. The incidence of serial bracelets in the east Baltic region.
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One of the earliest forms of artefacts found in the stone graves of Vidzeme burial sites and dated to the first century AD are serial bracelets. They can be divided into two groups. The first group consists of thin bracelets with an orthogonal cross-section. The second group consists of chronologically older bracelets from the second century AD with a thicker wire and an almost square cross-section, the wire on the inside is slightly rounded. Most of the first group of serial bracelets with orthogonal cross-sections found in north Latvia have miniature decorations at the ends of the wire. One of each of the early form of serial bracelets has been found at the Slavēkās burial site in Rauna, in the sixth stone grave of the Salenieki burial site in the area of Makašāni and Ružiena (Fig. 2). These bracelets are mostly typical of the burial sites of the Baltic Finns (Fig. 3). Finds from Estonia and Latvia show that these bracelets were worn as a single ornament. Forty-five bracelets of this type are known in Latvia. Thirty-two bracelets (without the already mentioned ornaments) have been found at the Lazdīņi burial site in Laidze, some have been collected at the Drenģeri Čunkāni burial site in Bauska as single finds, and in the Ventspils area. Another five bracelets are stored at the National History Museum of Latvia, with a reference to the place of origin as ‘Latvia’ or ‘Vidzeme’, but (with the exception of find A 212) they have miniature decorations at the ends of the wire, just like the bracelet from the Salenieki burial site. The bracelet which was found in Ružiena has a slightly visible decoration only at one end of the wire. It is possible that a similar find was also found at Stratze burial site (state History Museum in Moscow 35564, file 815:11). Thirty-seven finds of this bracelet type have been found in Lithuania: 31 bracelets at the Ėgliškiai burial site (Grigalavičienė 1979, p.12ff); four bracelets at barrow II of the Sandrausiskės burial site (Michelbertas 1986, p.135); and one bracelet each at the Maironiai burial site (LAA, 1978) and the Karelia burial site from period B2a. The serial bracelets with thin wire and an orthogonal cross-section of the earliest first group in Latvia, as well as in the whole east Baltic region, can be dated to the second century, except serial bracelets. The most complete material, used to date these bracelets, is found in the burial site at Laidze Lazdīņi. It was found in an inhumation grave that is dated to the time of Christ’s birth and the first half of the first century, because in the grave, artefacts were not found that can be dated to the second half of the first century or which are typical of period B. The serial bracelets with thin wire and an orthogonal cross-section of the earliest first group in Latvia, as well as in the whole east Baltic region, can be dated to the short period before the time of Christ’s birth or to the first half of the first century (period A or B). Later examples have small decorations at the ends, they are slightly thicker, and can be dated to the mid-first century, or a little later (the end of period B).
Fig. 4. Knob-ended bracelets in Latvia: 1 Auciems; 2 Smauži; 3 Spietiņi; 4 Kvāpāni; 5 Āraiši; 6 Kalnaķunči.
Fig. 5. The incidence of knob-ended bracelets in the east Baltic region.
The second group of artefacts found in east Latvian stone graves which can be dated to the second half of the first century are knob-ended bracelets. Only two bracelets of this type are found in Latvia, in stone graves at Auciems burial site and Kalna Ķūnci burial site in Priekuļi. Another four bracelets were located at the mound of the Spjetniņi burial site, where the occupation layer of the previous settlement is used, at Āraiši rectory, Smaudžu burial site and Kvāpāni (Fig. 4). These bracelets are widespread in the whole east Baltic region from the lower reaches of the River Vistula to the south of Finland (Fig. 5) (Schmiedehelm 1931, p.399ff). Ernst Blume considers that the oldest bracelets of this type are thin with an evenly thick wire, the later ones with a thickened back of the wire (Blume 1912, p.60ff). E. Blume has mentioned 13 bracelets from six findspots in the lower reaches of the River Vistula (the findspot of one bracelet is unknown) (Blume 1915, p.56). These bracelets are found with fibulae from the late La Tène period, and fibulae of the oldest group (the first century AD). The latest research confirms this chronometric technique: for example, the finds from the Pruszcz Gdański burial site of Oksywie...
Fig. 7. The piece of a strongly profiled fibula from the Saulieši burial site in Jaunburtnieki.

Fig. 8. A plan of the Auciems burial sites (after Latvijas PSR arheoloģija, 1974).
Fig. 9. Artefacts from the Ivaši burial site in Vitrupe.
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The hollow neck-ring with hollow trumpet-shaped ends found in the stone grave at Auciems burial site can be dated to the same period as the neck-ring that was found in grave 27b at the Dollkeim-Kovrovo burial site (Moora 1938, Fig. 35.1). This find of pieces of a neck-ring is unique in Latvia. Neck-rings with hollow trumpet-shaped ends but with a filled wire from a slightly later period were found in the burial sites at Salnieki in Makašāni and Rengeš in Ruba. Two similar neck-rings have been found in Estonia, at Triigi (Otenküll) (Hausmann 1896, Plate IV.15) and Jabara burial sites. This type of neck-ring with a hollow wire have not been discovered in Lithuania; neck-rings with hollow trumpet-shaped ends have been found. The information about neck-rings of this type found in East Prussia and at other locations in the Baltic region is summarised by Aleksandra Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz (2010, pp.315-336). She distinguishes them from others as type I neck-rings with trumpet-shaped ends. The specimen from Auciems falls within the I.1 subtype, specified by A. Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz, and can be dated to the period B₁ or B₂. It is possible to accept this dating of artefacts, with the objection that the dating of the I.2 subtype neck-rings to the Late Roman Iron Age is too late. They can be dated to the end of period B₁ and to period B₂₂, which is suggested by M. Michelbertas.

Another category of artefact which can be dated to the end of period B₁ and the period B₂₂ are hollow tin ankle bracelets. Ankle bracelets were found in the series of Baltic Finn stone graves, but usually only in fragments. Intact ankle bracelets were found at barrow I of Kaugars burial site in Rauna, and at Mušiņas (Fig. 6) burial site in Rauna, and fragments of ankle bracelets at Dumpji in Auciems, Viškas kapusils burial site, Saulieši burial site in Jaunburtnieki, and barrow II at Kaugars burial site in Rauna. The period B₂ is supported by the finds at barrows in northeast Latvian burial sites that did not exist by the period B₂. For example, hollow tin ankle bracelets and armbands were found at three barrows, but not even one was found in stone graves (tarands) at the Salenieki burial site, where the oldest artefacts can be dated to period B₁ (Ciglis 2007, pp.23-38). The barrows are older and can be dated to period B₁ because in one case the stone grave covers the barrow. A similar dating is supported by the fact that anklet bracelets from the stone graves have very similar decorative motifs and characters to the anklet bracelets from Viļaka and Aizezeri in Sakstagsals.

The category analysis of the several artefacts mentioned shows that the oldest burial sites, consisting of typical stone graves (Auciems burial site, Kalnakunči burial site in Priekuļi, Slavēkas burial site, and others)
started to be used in the first century. These artefacts are not the only ones that can be dated to this time. The latest strongly profiled fibulae (the 69th type, noted by O. Almgren) found at the Gaillšu burial site in Taurenes, and fibulae that are similar to the mentioned ones found at Slavčkas and Gaillši in the Laulkalne burial site, can also be dated from the mid-first century to the second half of the first century. It is possible to presume that a fragment of this kind of fibula was found at the Sauliši burial site in Jaunburtnieki (Fig. 7). H. Moora thinks that they are local products, and can be dated to the beginning of the second century (Moora 1938, p.66ff). O. Almgren dated similar fibulae from the end of the La Tène period to the beginning of the Late Roman Iron Age (Almgren 1923). Taking into consideration the fact that it is a local product, it could have been made later than in Central Europe.

The specimens mentioned should be dated to the mid-first century. The several eye fibulae of the main series found in Latvia, at Auciemis and Upmāļi burial site in Baižkalns, which H. Moora dated to the beginning of the second century (Moora 1938, p.57), could be applied to the period from the mid-first century to the second half of the first century. If typological analyses of the bracelets, iron knives, crook-shaped pins, and so on, are carried out, it would be possible to find among the artefacts of the stone graves other ones that can be dated to the first century.

It is possible that in the future it will not be possible to find typical stone graves from a much earlier period by carrying out new excavations in north Vidzeme. Chronologically earlier grave monuments in this area are barrows with different stone constructions. This kind of barrow, where artefacts dated to the time of Christ’s birth are found, is examined at Vilētāji burial site in Sējas (Graudonis 1975, p.43ff). This is why specific interest is caused by stone graves which are located close to chronologically earlier barrows. The best-known is Auciemis burial site, examined by R. Hausmanis, G. Lešče and L.Šrēders. It is assumed that this burial site shows how the tradition of burying people in barrows changed to a new one, burying them in burial sites of stone graves, because tarands of stone graves lie closer to the barrow (Fig. 8). The numbers of artefacts found at the Auciemis burial site is not very large (14), but among the artefacts are the ones described in this article, fragments of a neck-ring with a hollow wire and hollow trumpet-shaped ends (Moora 1938, Fig. 35.1), a knob-ended bracelet and main series eye fibula, fragments of a hollow tin ankle bracelet with well-known and clearly dated analogies.

The latest artefacts, the neck-ring with trumpet-shaped ends, an eye fibula of the Prussian series from group II (by Michelbertas), can be dated from the early to the mid-second century. Artefacts from the first half of the second century found in burial sites of stone graves are already widely represented at the Gaideni (Strīķi) burial site in Lenči, the Mūsiņa burial site in Rauna, the Āķiņi burial site in Rauna, the Tuņiņi burial site in Virāne, the Kaugars I and II burial sites in Rauna, etc.

It might be possible to find artefacts dated to the first century at the unexamined Priedkalni burial site in Jaunbulbene and the Lāčkalni burial site in Mērī. Earlier artefacts are found in the nearby area of the burial sites mentioned: an iron wedge-shaped axe dated to the period before Christ at Priedkalni (Cīgils 2003), and an early form of shaft-hole axe dated to the time of the birth of Christ. A barrow is known near the stone grave of Priedkalni (Graudonis 1967, p.50). Untypically early artefacts for stone graves of north Vidzeme are found at the Ivaši burial site in Vitrupe (Fig. 9). Two iron celts (one of the specimens has a loop) were found in one of the destroyed barrows with stone constructions, a bronze tutulus and six bracelets. It is possible to date the iron celts with a loop to the Iron Age before Christ, just like the tutulus. This dating is supported by the forms of the bracelets, which have close analogies to those found at Lazdiņi burial site in Laidze and material from early tarand grave burial sites. It is possible that a sickle-knife or a bush-knife was found in the second barrow, but the museum did not receive it. It is traditionally considered to be a burial site consisting of stone graves. The conclusion, after getting to know better the Elvīra Šnore preliminary materials and the statement for excavations published in 1937 (AA 290), is that the Ivaši burial site in Vitrupe does not consist of stone graves or tarand graves. Unfortunately, the excavations were done without the help of an archaeologist, and a certain scientific interpretation of this monument is not possible. The barrow examined by E. Šnore was just a pile of stones collected from the field. The barrows with stone constructions at Ivaši in Vitrupe could be similar to the barrow at Siķšņi in Turaida, or to the early tarand graves that are found in Estonia. A clear interpretation of the Ivaši stone barrow in Vitrupe and the Siķši (Pūteļi) stone barrow in Turaida will be possible after further research.
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References


LPA 1974, Tartu.


iš akmenų krauti (akmeniniai) kapai, kitaip vadinami tarandų kapai, yra paminklai, kuriuose rasti šie papuošalai priklauso I a. antrajai pusei, bet ne II a., kaip buvo manyta anksčiau (8 pav.). Prieš tai pilkapiai su įvairiomis skirtingomis akmeninėmis konstrukcijomis buvo paplitę vakarienėje Vidzemės dalyje, o pilkapių su iš žemės supiltais sampilais randama Šiaurės Latgaloje.

Vertė Audronė Bliujienė