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Mosiężysko. The early medieval site in Szurpiły (Podlaskie voiv.). Sources, analyses, interpretations

The aim of the work was to describe the burial customs, the relics of which were recorded during archaeological investigations of Mosiężysko (Szurpiły, site 8), and to determine the time during which the site was used. For the first time, the use of the term Jaćwież, as defined by historians, was abandoned and a concentration of archaeological sites from the early Middle Ages was used as a reference point, including the sites in Szurpiły. This area was called „Czarna Hańcza group”.

The described history of the exploration of cemeteries within this group has shown that, over the course of more than a hundred years, researchers from different countries have discovered similar cemeteries. They were located within several countries (first Russia and Ostpreussen, then Lithuania and Poland), were excavated on a small scale and never merged. This was only possible after the use of appropriate tools of archaeology, i. e. the analysis of the data within the separate Czarna Hańcza group of sites.

The cemetery at Mosiężysko was the first necropolis of its kind to be discovered in this group today. As a result of the excavations and survey, a theoretically simple stratigraphic situation was found at this point: almost all finds were located within a one layer (humus). This simplicity made the interpretation of the whole very difficult. The reconstruction of funeral practices had to be based on the analysis of artefacts. They have been subjected to different types of studies. The distribution was analysed using the tools available in the GIS, a stylistic analysis of the different categories of finds was carried out, their chronology was determined on the basis of the analogies mentioned and the results were compared with data from historical sources. In addition, several subject-specific analyses were carried out. Metallographic investigations, microscopic investigations and archaeometric analysis of pottery are the first of their kind for materials from the Suwałki area dated to the early Middle Ages.

In all these activities, it was found that the remains of the burnt dead were buried on the surface of the earth and that cremation most likely took place in situ. The cemetery was built on a post-ice age boulder in which minor transformations were carried out, in which two stone pavements were laid and irregular stone formations formed on or within the incineration layer left after cremation. All of the deceased's equipment, including clothing, jewelry, tools,

weapons and harnesses, was intentionally destroyed (cut or broken) and then burned at the stake together with the owner. Possibly, after the burning, the remaining larger bone fragments were crushed or taken from the pyre and carried out from the cemetery. This cemetery was probably used by a single middle class family.

Relatively few items of weapons and equestrian equipment were discovered in the cemetery in question. Moreover, some of the few finds that belong to this category raise doubts as to whether they really belong to the furnishings of the dead buried here.

The analysis of the different categories of finds revealed that a large number of them have their analogies on the other sites of the Czarna Hańcza group. Necklaces of the Totenkronen type, bronze tin pendants, horseshoe fibulas with zoomorphic, banded and rolled ends and bells similar to the type R5 appear to be characteristic of this region. Outside the Czarna Hańcza group, the greatest similarities in material culture can be seen with the artefacts of Mosiężysko in Curonia, especially in the northern part, as well as in Sambia and Podlasie. On the basis of the analysis of the finds, the chronology of the site was fixed at XII–XIII century.

The analysis of the characteristics of the burial rite in Szurpiły is the first extended attempt to characterize the funeral practices of the Suwałki area in the early Middle Ages. It showed many similarities between the cemetery and the necropolises of western Estonia and Finland. In the wide area of the southeastern Baltic Sea coast there are often shallow mass burials in extensive pits with incineration. These include the Aschenplatz graves in Sambia and other similar, which have been discovered in Curonia, other Prussian regions and in Central Lithuania. In the Baltic regions, however, it is one of several variants of the burial rite, which in most cases is not very well represented.