

# ROMAN IRON AGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN THE MICRO-REGION OF THE LOWER REACHES OF THE RIVER ŠVENTOJI. ARCHIVAL STUDIES AND OTHER INVESTIGATIONS

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## Abstract

The micro-region of the lower reaches of the River Šventoji in the Roman Iron Age falls into the range of flat cemeteries surrounded by stone circles. The territory to the north of the River Šventoji is considered the periphery of this culture, which has characteristic burial rites, one of which is the absence of stone circles. This peripheral culture in the territory of Latvia is described by using the results of the Mazkatuži (Rucava parish) cemetery investigations. The surviving research material and archival data about artefacts found in the lower reaches of the River Šventoji allow us to review and revise the data about burial rites and settlement structures in Kurzeme during the Roman Iron Age.

Key words: southwest Latvia, migro-region, periphery of graves surrounded by stone circles, burial rites, Mazkatuži (Rucava parish) cemetery, Roman Iron Age.

## The Micro-Region of the lower reaches of the River Šventoji

There is no doubt that in the Roman Iron Age southwest Kurzeme was the periphery of the widespread flat cemeteries surrounded by stone circles of the Lithuanian coastal region. It was an exclusively Kurzeme burial custom to form a small barrow over the deceased person without surrounding the grave with stone circles. This peripheral zone covers the area from the River Tebra in the north and northeast, and reaches the River Venta in the west. A few first to fourth-century burial sites in this region are known (Rucavas Mazkatuži, Virgas Kalnazīverti, Grobiņas Atkalni, Grobiņas Priedienas, Medzes Kapsēde), as well as some find spots that can be connected to the cemeteries (next to Alekšu and the Mārtuļi homestead [in the parish of Gaviezes] and others).<sup>1</sup> The modest number of sites in the region can be interpreted in the light of the low number of settlements, as well as the small amount of research about the region that has been carried out.

Roman Iron Age burial rites in the region are described in accordance with the Rucavas Mazkatuži cemetery research material. This second to fourth-century burial ground is the only one that has been extensively explored in southwest Kurzeme (LPA 1974, p.102ff.; Vasks 2001, p.214ff.; Vasks *et al.* 1997, p.129ff.; Rādiņš 2012, p.91ff.). Thorough research of the archival material, and the latest investigations in

the lower reaches of the River Šventoji, allow us to supplement, and in some cases to update, our information about burial rites and settlement structures in the region during the Roman Iron Age.

The micro-region of the lower reaches of the River Šventoji in Latvia covers the present-day southeastern part of Rucava parish, up to Ķāķišķe-Palaipe in the north (Fig. 1). Rucavas Mazkatuži cemetery and other find spots in this area are ascribed to the Roman Iron Age. All information, study reports and artefacts that have been found are kept in the National History Museum of Latvia and the Museum of Liepāja.

Rucavas Mazkatuži cemetery is situated on a flat hill about 500 metres from the right bank of the River Šventoji, and about six kilometres from the Baltic Sea. The cemetery was excavated for a couple of seasons. Ernst Wahle (Ernsts Vāle), Eduards Šturms and Pēteris Stepiņš led the excavations. The surviving study material and publications show that each researcher had a different understanding of this monument. Ingrīda Līga Virse (2008) reviewed the history of the research into the cemetery. The area of the cemetery is thought to be 2.8 to 3.5 hectares (Stepiņš 1960; LPA 1974, p.103), even though the boundary of the site has not been determined. Nowadays, the micro-landscape has changed dramatically: new buildings have appeared and trees have grown, which changes the situation of the cemetery in the landscape. Part of the cemetery was most likely destroyed when a gravel pit was dug in it.

<sup>1</sup> All these cemeteries are in the Liepāja district.

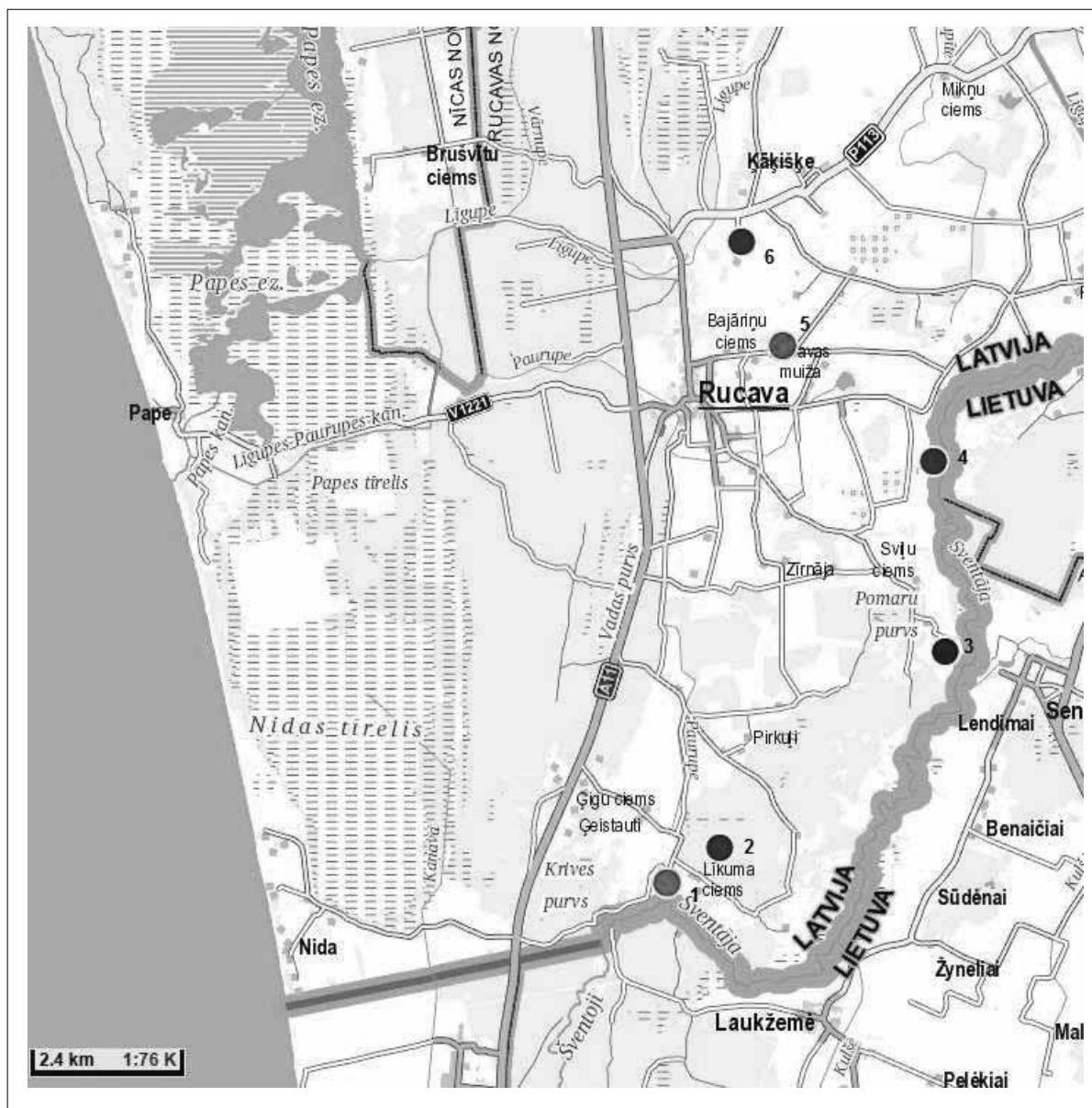


Fig. 1. Roman Iron Age archaeological sites in the lower reaches of the River Šventoji:

1 Mazkatuži cemetery; 2 Vālodzes find spot; 3 Ķišķu-Čukānu settlement; 4 Lejas find spot; 5 Kalnaurbāni cemetery; 6 Dūdas find spot.

### Archival studies

In around 1900, the oldest artefacts (11 bronze bracelets, round fibula, bronze finger-rings and fibulae, blue glass beads, an iron spearhead, an iron spur spike, and one Roman coin) probably from Rucavas Mazkatuži cemetery found their way to the Courland Province Museum. These artefacts were collected during the agricultural season (Sb. Kurl. 1900, p.24; Moora 1929, p.172). In 1924, the Rucava teacher Kārlis Grants provided an account with information about the finds to the Board of Monuments. The account mentioned that in 1913 artefacts<sup>2</sup> were discovered next to the

<sup>2</sup> K. Grants wrote in his publication that the artefacts were found next to the Mazkatuži homestead in 1923 (Grants 1928, p.150).

Mazkatuži homestead. Grants described the location, specifying a 0.5-hectare cemetery area, with distinguishable barrows. According to the account, one of the barrows was covered in a burnt (Vāle 1924) layer of stones. The account also provided a map, on which Grants marked the barrows (Fig. 2). In the same year, Eduards Šturms, an archaeologist from the Board of Monuments, came to the area to measure and describe the Rucavas Mazkatuži cemetery. During his visit, he measured six flattened and ploughed knolls (barrows). The most accurate data was given about barrow I. The height of this barrow was 50 to 75 centimetres, and its diameter was 25 paces. All of the artefacts were found in a small gravel pit on the west side of the knoll (barrow). Šturms noted that barrow IV had a 40-centimetre



Fig. 2. Mazkatuži cemetery on the map by K. Grants (Vāle 1924).

layer of burnt stones covering it. Small-scale investigations have been made in Rucavas Mazkatuži cemetery, during which inconsiderable artefacts have been discovered at a depth of 30 to 40 centimetres. The owner of the Mazkatuži homestead also produced seven Roman coins; unfortunately, their exact find spot has never been determined (Vāle 1924). The archaeologist Ernst Wahle from Heidelberg University was invited by the Board of Monuments to continue the excavations of the cemetery. Wahle did not know much about the flat cemeteries of west Lithuania and southwest Latvia, but his excavations are characterised by very thorough and meticulous documentation of the findings. The Latvian National Museum of History in Riga holds the excava-

tion documentation, with the author's inventory, maps, photographs, and the results of the analysis of archaeological textiles, organic remains and other analyses received later. Wahle's research material was published in 1928 (Wahle 1928; Virse 2008, p.11).

The most promising place for excavations was considered to be barrow I, which was described by Šturms, where an area of 320 square metres was investigated (Fig. 3). The artefacts were found at a depth of 20 to 65 centimetres, where the soil and moisture were not favourable to the metal. Still, the conditions were favourable for amber artefacts, textile fragments and organic remains. In many cases, pieces of birch bark were found under bronze artefacts (Wahle 1928, p.35). As

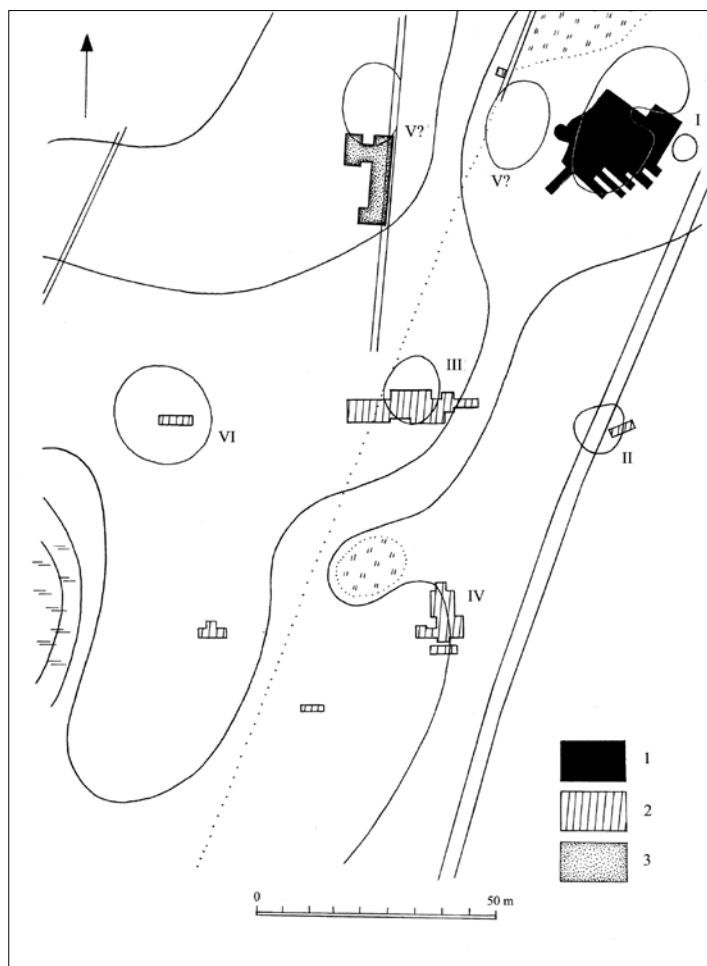


Fig. 3. Mazkatuži cemetery: 1 plots excavated by E. Wahle (Vāle) in 1924; 2 plots excavated by E. Šturms in 1941 and 1942; 3 plots excavated by P. Stepiņš in 1960 (drawing by A. Ivbule).

in Šturms' report, Wahle indicated that no stones were found in the cemetery area (Vāle 1924; Wahle 1928, p.9), even though the excavation photographs show various sizes of stones (Fig. 4). Twenty-six objects were uncovered during the excavations in 1924: pits or find spots that were wrongly interpreted as graves (LPA 1974, p.103; Vasks et al. 1997, p.130; Stepiņš 1960). When examining the 1924 documentation, ten grave complexes were distinguished: three were male graves (11, 12, 19), five were female graves (4, 6, 9, 15, 23), and two were undetermined (10, 24). In five cases, the objects uncovered were treated as random finds (1, 2, 3, 5, 14), and the rest were pits without artefacts (Fig. 5). During the excavations, four round pits (semi-circular in cross-section) were uncovered (13, 16, 18, 26). It is believed that they were related to burial rituals. There was charcoal found in the pits. In one case, a layer of charcoal was found (13), and two pits had several burnt stones (7, 8). The hearth is related to fire rituals; burnt stones mark its location (8). Its diameter was 60 centimetres, and its depth 55 centimetres. Wahle presumed that the fire was never stoked in this particular hearth, for there was not a considerable layer of ash among the burnt stones, and there was only a small concentration of charcoal around the hearth (Wahle 1928, pp.15, 38; Virse 2008, p.15).

At the beginning of the excavation, Wahle did not link the artefacts found with graves; he believed them to be cult objects (Vāle 1924). Later on, he changed his opinion, and assumed that this could be a cemetery where there were larger grave pits for deceased persons who were buried using inhumation burial rites, and smaller grave pits for cremated deceased (Wahle 1928, p.38ff.). We should agree with Wahle's conclusion that the artefacts from Rucavas Mazkatuži cemetery can be dated to period C, and that they are typologically close to artefacts found in Aukštkiemiai (Oberhof) cemetery in the Klaipėda region, and eventually come under the cultural influence of the East Prussian Roman Iron Age (Wahle 1928, p.44ff.).

Eduards Šturms, the chief archaeologist in the Archaeology Section at the Board of Monuments, continued the Rucavas Mazkatuži cemetery research. His research report, dated 1942, has survived in the Latvian National Museum of History in Riga, but judging from the museum record in the Artefact Catalogue and the inscriptions on plans, the research was carried out in 1941 (Šturms 1942a). A report by him dated 5 September 1942 has also survived: it states that excavations were carried out in the Rucava parish next to the Ģeistauti school and the Mazkatuži homestead



Fig. 4. Excavations by E. Wahle (Vāle) in the Mazkatuži cemetery in 1924 (LNVM photograph archive, No 20342).

between 20 August and 4 September 1942, where 13 graves were excavated in 1941 (Šturms 1942b). The report has a description of the inventories of 25 graves, plans and photographs. In 1942, the researcher Kārlis Ošs at the History Museum, who participated in Šturms' excavations, excavated one male grave.

The artefacts recorded in the Artefact Catalogue were recorded as grave 26 (A 9955:1-5). However, information on how the grave was found or its plans or photographs did not survive. There is reason to believe that Šturms' report about the excavations in Mazkatuži cemetery was later written by Lūcija Vankina, a former head of the Latvian History Museum's Department of Archaeology, who used Šturms' grave descriptions and plans that he made during the excavations. Unfortunately, the entire plan of the cemetery with marked excavation plots<sup>3</sup> has not survived, only the northern profile plan of barrow III and sectional drawings of many graves are extant. According to the plans, at first only a small excavation trench would be measured and explored: if a grave was found, then that trench would be expanded. The drawings and plans are of varying quality, and sometimes unfinished. It

<sup>3</sup> We know that a situation plan was drawn, as P. Stepiņš mentions it in the investigation report. Stepiņš writes that the Board of Monuments topographer F. Vīksne drew up a cemetery situation plan, and marked the areas Šturms and Wahle explored (Stepiņš 1960).

is very important to have full information about grave schemes, plans, the grave inventory and photographs, in order to understand the burial rituals. As the artefacts from Rucavas Mazkatuži have not survived well (some are broken or did not survive at all), the artefact photographs and their descriptions are priceless. The report also has results from a textile examination made by Auguste Siliņa. Part of the excavation records have probably survived in Šturms' personal papers. These personal records were used in his article published in 1950, about his excavations at Rucava and Bauska (Šturms 1950; Virse 2008, p.12).

In 1941 and 1942, excavations were carried out in seven places, from which graves were uncovered in three excavations plots (barrows II, III, IV) (Fig. 3). An area of 200 square metres was explored, and 25 graves were found in total, of which 16 were described as male graves, eight female, and one of a child. Barrow III had most of the graves. In an area of 70 square metres, 18 graves were uncovered (Fig. 6).

There were no round pits or pits of indeterminate form found during the excavations that would relate to burial rituals, even though Šturms specified that the area profiles had funnel-shaped pits that were filled with darker mixed ground. These deepening can be seen in the northern profile plan of barrow III (Šturms 1942a) (Fig. 7). However, we lack coherent records

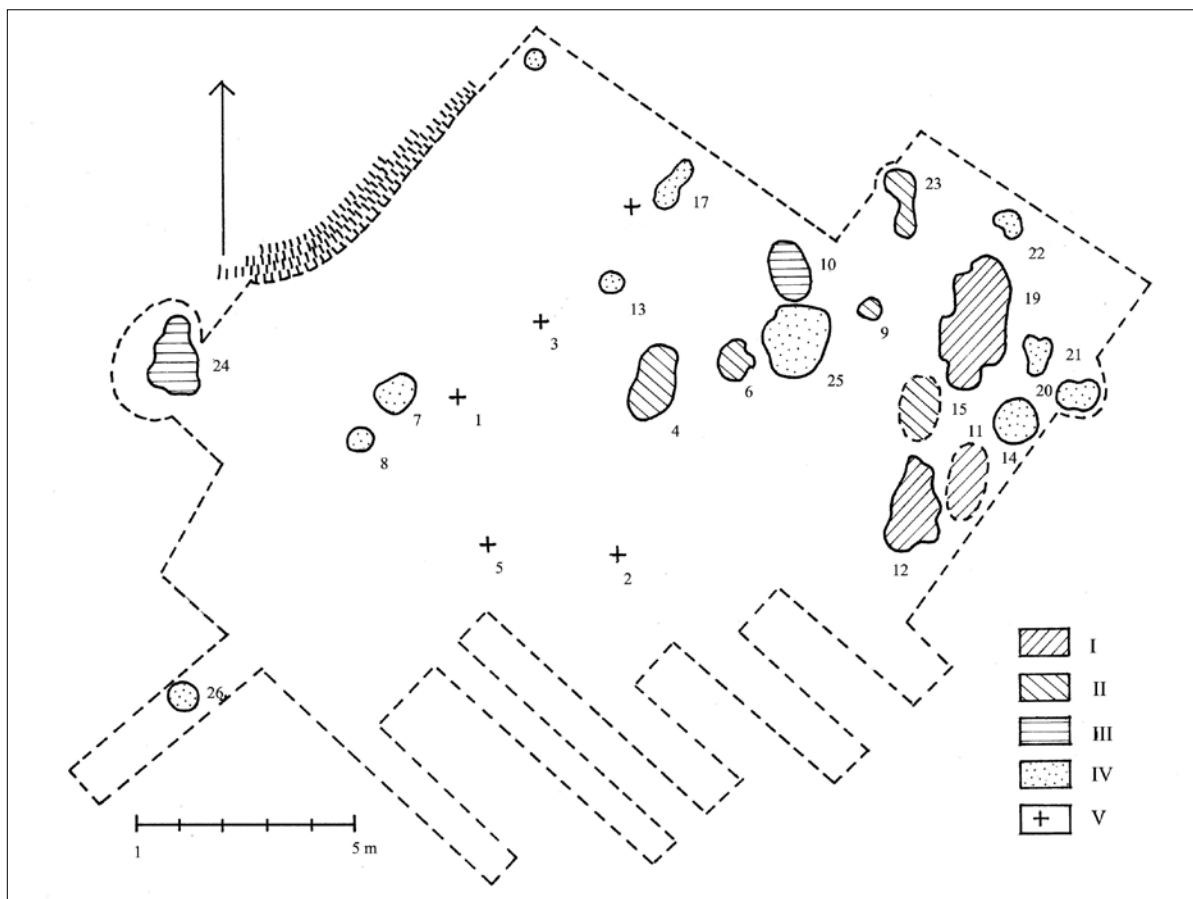


Fig. 5. Plan of the Mazkatuži cemetery by E. Wahle: I men's graves; II women's graves; III persons of undetermined gender; IV pits; V unidentified places (drawing by A. Ivbule).

that would relate these pits to ritual pits, which would be dug out during funerals and then filled in. Šturms also did not find any cremations (Šturms 1950, p.65).

Unlike Wahle, Šturms recorded single large stones, or groups of stones, next to the graves (5, 7, 18, 22, 23, 24) (Fig. 6). In two cases (16, 17) (Fig. 6), the plans have the marks of larger charcoal spots. In two cases (1, 3), burials were recorded on primal soil (Šturms 1942a; Virse 2008, p.12) (Fig. 8). According to Šturms, in Rucava Mazkatuži cemetery the deceased individuals were buried in rows: he believed that men, women and children were buried in different rows (Šturms 1950, p.66; Virse 2008, p.12).

In 1941 and 1942, excavations were also carried out in a barrow with a layer of stones. The size of the explored area was 65 square metres, in which five male graves were uncovered, four of which were buried in a compact group (11, 12, 21, 22), and one grave (23) was further away from the others. Šturms' publication mentions that the grave 11 of a warrior from period C, with the residue of a wooden or a leather shield, was uncovered under a layer of burnt stones (Šturms 1950, p.66). When describing Curonian burial rites of the second to fourth centuries, a barrow with a stone

covering and a warrior's grave is often mentioned in generalised archaeological publications (LPA 1974, p.103). But neither burial descriptions nor grave schemes or photographs show any data about a stone covering (Virse 2013, p.111). It should be noted that the cross-section plan of barrow IV has not survived.

All five burials that are related to barrow IV (11, 12, 21, 22, 23) were different from others in their grave goods or burial rites (Virse 2013). A similar shield residue as in grave 11 was found in grave 22.<sup>4</sup> Four graves had Roman coins; two graves had axes with narrow blades and blunt ends that were not common in this region (Virse 2013, p.115ff.). Grave 23 stands out, as a horse was buried next to a man. Another peculiarity of this burial group was a pit, 1.5 metres away from the horse in grave 23; its substance was made up of dark ground with charcoal and slag. Šturms did not describe the pit further, but mentioned that it could be connected to a blacksmith's grave that was discovered in another section of the cemetery (Šturms 1950, p.66). Šturms probably connected the pit with grave 19, which not

<sup>4</sup> Šturms made a mistake about finding shield residue in grave 13, as this was the grave of a rich female (Šturms 1950, p.66; Virse 2008, p.13).

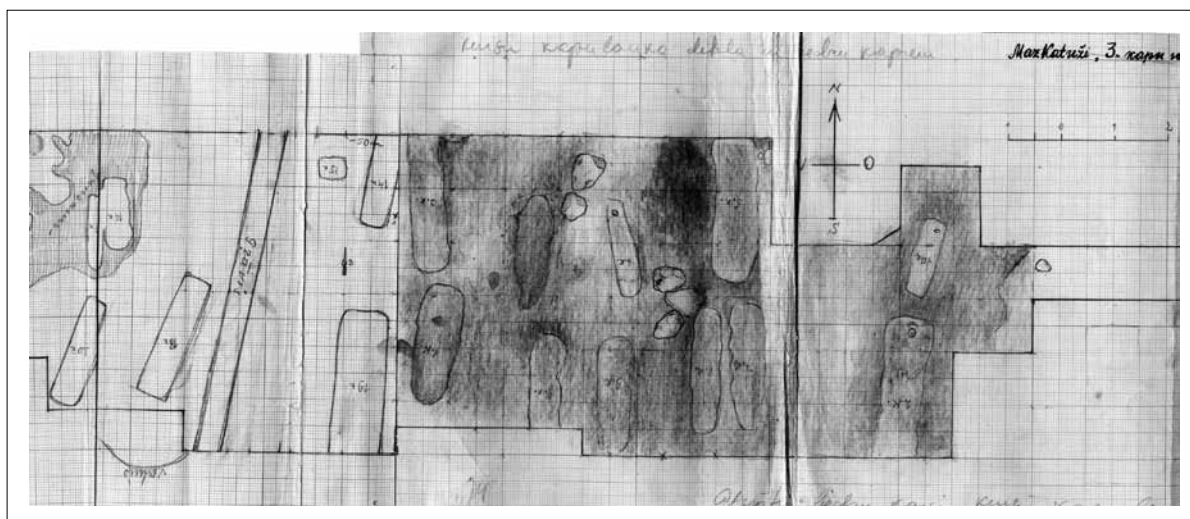


Fig. 6. Mazkatuži cemetery: the arrangement of inhumation graves in barrow III (Šturms 1942a).

only had grave goods characteristic of men (socketed axe, socketed spearhead, scythe, horse bridles), but also had a blacksmith's tools (iron pincers, a hammer and a skewer) (LPA 1974, p.103). Grave 19 is 30 metres away from the slag pit, and therefore there is most likely no connection between these two objects.

The last excavations in Rucavas Mazkatuži cemetery were made for emergency reasons, as a drainage channel was being dug through the cemetery. Pēteris Stepiņš, an employee of the Liepāja Museum, made the excavations between 11 and 13 July 1960. The Latvian National Museum of History in Riga holds a comprehensive excavation report, with an extensive inventory, data on analysis, cemetery situation plan, excavation territory plan, grave plans, and photographs from this excavating season (Stepiņš 1960). All the artefacts that were found are in the Museum of Liepāja. A modest excavation account was published (Stepiņš 1961).

The situation plan of the cemetery drawn up by Stepiņš is truly valuable, as in 1960 one could still see Wahle's and Šturms' excavation plots, which he marked. Stepiņš explored the area 125 metres south of a collective farm grain-drying barn on the west side of the drainage channel (Fig. 3). The grain-drying barn survives to this day, and is the only landmark allowing us to site the excavation plots in the landscape. An area of 110 square metres was excavated. It uncovered 11 burials (two male, seven female, and two graves of undetermined sex).

Like Šturms' excavations, in 1960, besides graves, single stones or groups of them were uncovered, but the stones were not in stone circles (Fig. 9). Spots of charred ground were also uncovered. Similarly to Šturms' excavations, the spots of charred ground

matched burial places. In one case, charred ground made an irregular-shaped shallow pit with a flat bottom; the depth of this pit was only 25 centimetres. No artefacts were found in this pit. Another square-shaped pit of four by 3.5 metres was found filled with charcoal, burnt stones and gravel. On the east side of the pit were three large stones, and one large stone was found on the south side (Stepiņš 1960) (Fig. 9).

In total, an area of 630 square metres was excavated in Rucava Mazkatuži cemetery, and a total of 47 graves were uncovered. Burial rites were determined that are consistent with the whole region, as well as ones that are specific to a particular site. Subjective causes may be attributed to the burial rites reported: their discovery and recording are mostly related to the researcher's knowledge about the monument and the quality of the research. We should also take into account the survival of excavation data.

The investigations at Rucava Mazkatuži were carried out on higher places in the landscape, which Stepiņš described as 'made by human hands' (Stepiņš 1960). Not all knolls and small barrows are linked to graves. This is shown clearly in the 1960 cemetery plan (Fig. 9). Graves were ascertained as being buried in barrows I to IV (E. Wahle's and E. Šturms' excavations), barrow V has most likely not been investigated (because the plot excavated by Stepiņš did not include barrow V), and barrow VI did not have any graves (investigated by Šturms). The areas between the barrows have not been excavated either, but there is reason to believe that there should be graves (according to Stepiņš' excavations) (Virse 2008, p.16ff.). It is believed that the barrows were formed when the mounds were amalgamated under the graves. The deceased individuals were laid on an old surface or in shallow ten

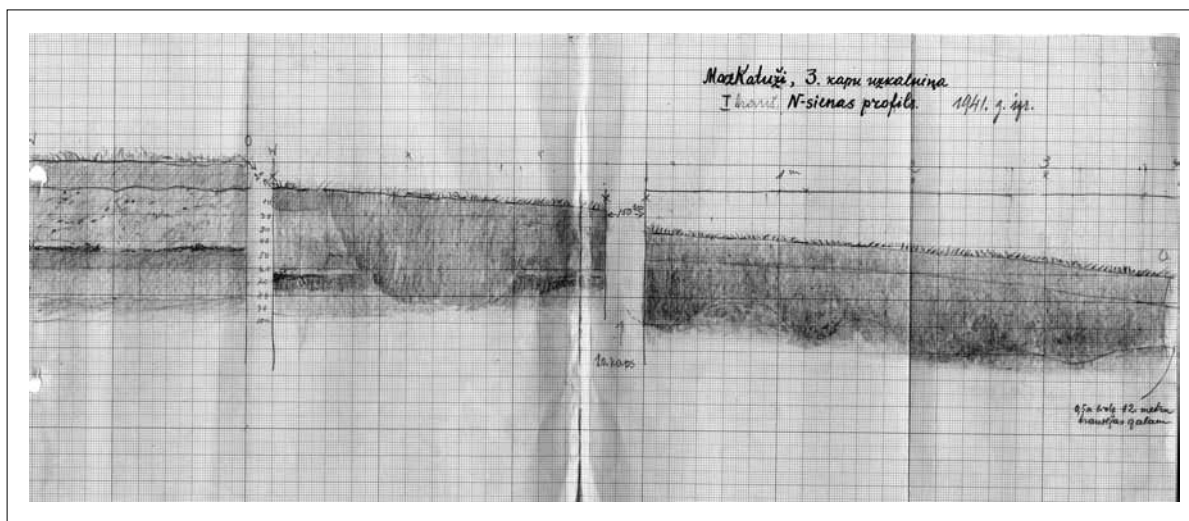


Fig. 7. Mazkatuži cemetery: a north cross-section of barrow III (Šturms 1942a).

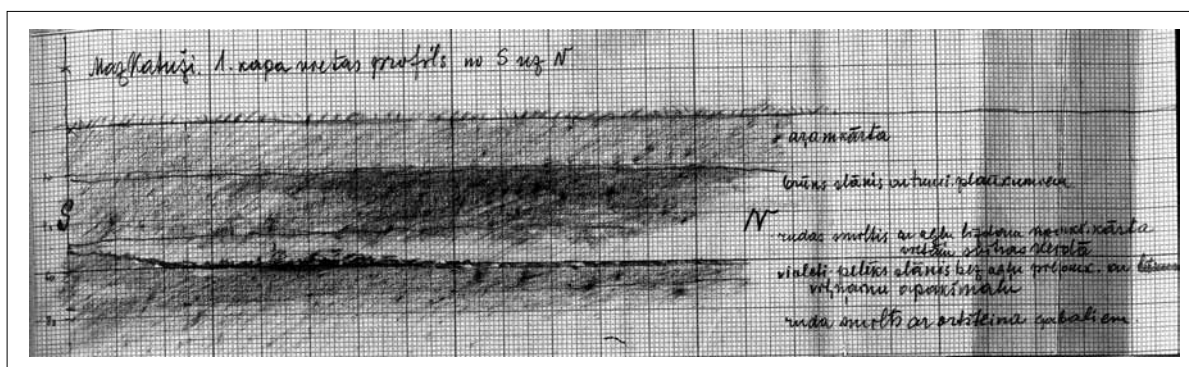


Fig. 8. Mazkatuži cemetery: burials on primal soil. Grave 1 (Šturms 1942a).

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to 20-centimetre-deep grave pits. The artefacts were uncovered at a depth of 25 to 70 centimetres, or more often 40 to 60 centimetres. In areas where the burials are denser, or where the deceased individuals were buried deeper, the graves were not destroyed by the plough. Many artefacts were found during earthworks at around a depth of 20 centimetres.

One large and a few small Roman Iron Age barrows were found at Kapsēde (Kruse 1842, p.10, Table 61, IV). In a square five-by-five-metre barrow, and 0.5 metres high, next to Alekšu homestead in the Gaviezēs parish, artefacts and Roman coins dating back to the Iron Age were found (AO 4422:1-2). Also, in the Kalnāzvertu cemetery in the Virgas parish, a few barely visible knolls or small barrows were seen. Professor Andrejs Vasks thought that these could have been ploughed barrows (AO 4765:3). It is most likely that in the Ošeniēki barrow cemetery in the Vērgales parish, dated to the seventh or eighth century, the graves were formed when single burials were amalgamated (Virse 2002 p.191). In 1924, the local people talked

about small barrows to the north of Ģeistauti school (Rucavas parish) (AO 4642:1). Today, we do not have the landmarks to check this information. A couple of small barrows were found during a 2013 archaeological field-walking survey in the Rucava parish woods (between the Mazkatuži and Ģeistauti cemeteries). Without further investigation, it is hard to tell if they are archaeological features. On the other hand, Roman Iron Age burials are known where barrows have not been found. These are: Rucavas Kalnaurbānu (seventh and eighth centuries BC), Grobiņas Atkalnu (third to sixth centuries AD), and Grobiņas Priediena (second to ninth centuries AD) Curonian cemeteries (Stepiņš 1965; Stepiņš 1969; Petrenko, Ozere 1984; Virse, Rītums 2012, p.63).

Another peculiarity that distinguishes southwest Kurzeme cemeteries from Lithuanian coastal flat burial traditions is burials without stone circles. As we discovered, there were no stone circles found in Rucavas Mazkatuži cemetery; still, we must take into consideration the researcher's subjective approach.



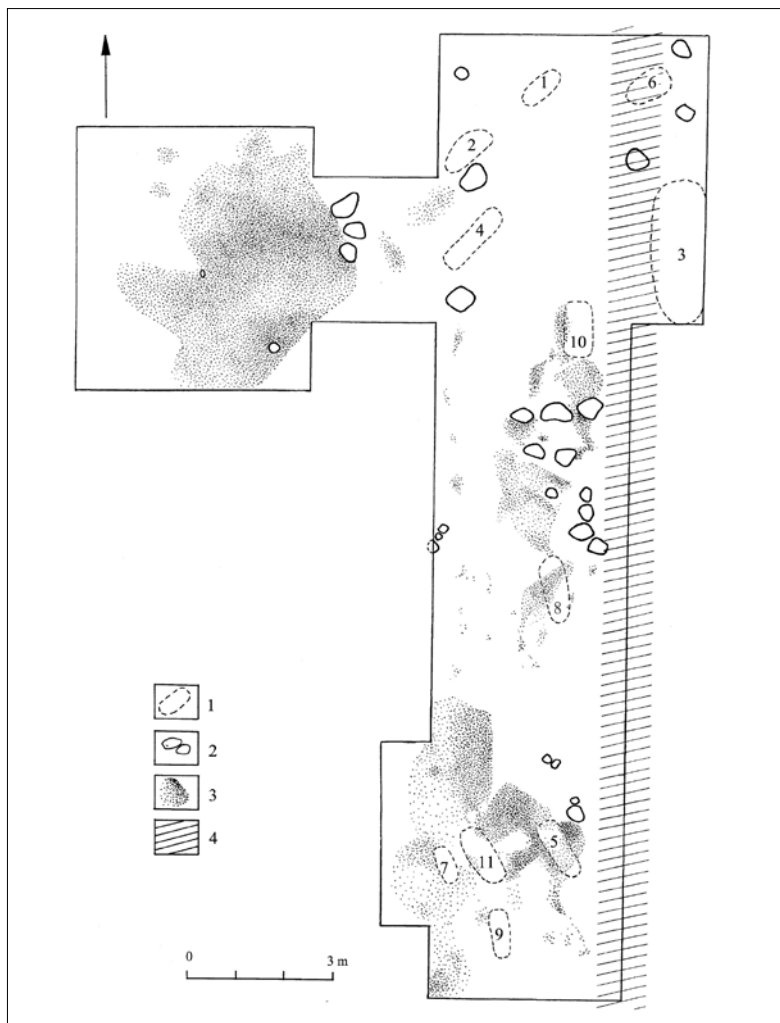


Fig. 9. Mazkatuži cemetery: P. Stepiņš' excavations in 1960 (drawing by A. Ivbule).

Wahle did not notice any stone constructions next to the graves, but Šturms and Stepiņš, for example, indicated them in their plans. Rows of stones, semi-circles and stone groups have been discovered in Kalnaurbānu, Kalnazīvertu and Priediena cemeteries (Stepiņš 1965; Stepiņš 1969; Vasks 1975; AO 4765:2) (Fig. 10). Stone constructions next to graves are also known from later cemeteries (Grobiņas Priediens, Vērgales Ošenieki, Rucavas Ģeistauti). There is also a chance that the stones were dismantled in order to plough the fields. We can probably see a modification of the Lithuanian coastal region tradition when a stone circle was symbolised by simpler constructions (Virse 2008 p.6).

Some peculiarities of burial rites in archaeological literature were groundlessly elevated, generalised, badly interpreted, or reprinted. Reports on Rucavas Mazkatuži cemetery, for example, state that the deceased individuals were buried in oval or square grave pits up two metres long and 1.5 metres wide (LPA 1974, p.103; Radiņš 2012, p.91). In reality, only 16 graves out of 47 clearly have oval or square-shaped grave pits with rounded corners, and their depth was never more than 25 centimetres. Furthermore, in two

or more cases, the deceased individuals were laid on old land or in shallow grave pits, which made them hard to distinguish. Only in one case were the remains of a hollowed-out log coffin found in this particular cemetery (grave 4; P. Stepiņš' excavations). According to the grave report and photographs, it may be assumed that at first the grave pit was filled with light sand, followed by the coffin (Virse 2008, p.15). Contrary to what was believed, that the deceased individuals in the Mazkatuži cemetery were laid with the head facing north or vice versa (LPA 1974, p.103; Vasks *et al.* 1997, p.130; Radiņš 2012, p.91), only half of the deceased individuals were in this position. It may be said that burials kept to a tradition to put the deceased individual with the head facing north, with deviations to the northwest or northeast. The north direction (north, northwest and northeast) also dominates in Lithuanian coastal region graves with stone circles (Gricuvienė, Buža 2009, p.11). From Šturms' excavations, graves found in barrow III mound can be distinguished (Fig. 6). Eighteen graves have been found in this barrow, of which 11 face north-south, two south-north, three northeast, one northwest, and in one case the burial direction was not determined. Also, it was not noticed

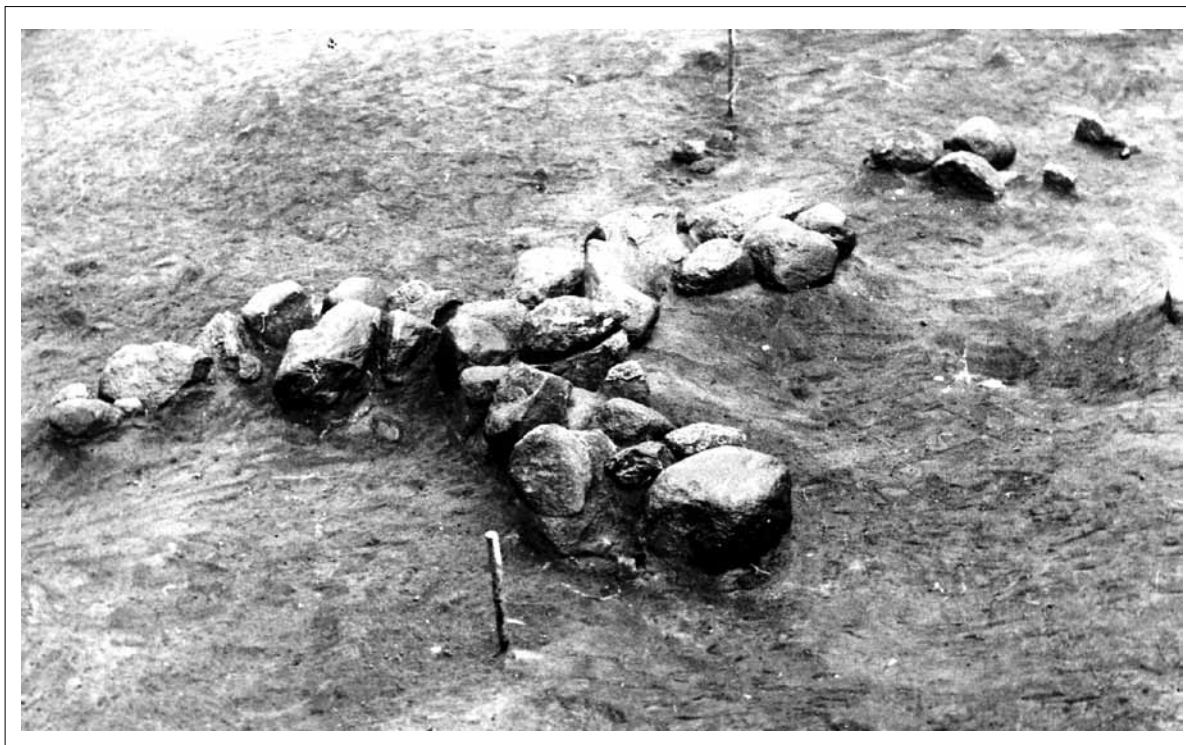


Fig. 10. Kalnazīverti cemetery: a stone construction in situ in 1975 (photograph by A. Vasks).

that male and female graves were placed in opposite directions: out of 18 burials, seven are female, and one is of a child, of which only one female and one child's grave were oriented with the head facing south. The graves were structured in two east-west oriented lines, in which the deceased individuals were laid parallel to each other. The barrow was not explored entirely; therefore, there is a possibility that there may have been another row. Grave rows were not found in all the other areas investigated by Wahle, Šturms and Stepiņš: in their cases, the burials were structured more as groups of graves. The graves were most likely marked above the ground somehow, as they never overlapped.

Fire rituals can be connected to some of the charcoal patches located next to the graves, thin charcoal layers in pits and graves, and charcoal found in the investigated hearth. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that Wahle found pits that consisted of earth mixed with charcoal and artefacts (LPA 1974, p.103; Gricuvienė, Buža 2009, p.11; Virse 2008, p.15). When Wahle and Stepiņš described the pits they found, they noted that there was a very small amount of charcoal admixture in the sand that filled the grave pits, and even that was not distinguishable from the surrounding ground. Also, it was noted that the pits filled with charcoal only partly overlapped with the burial sites.

It is worth mentioning that Stepiņš found square-shaped charcoal and gravel patches during his excavations (Fig. 9). A pit with charcoal in the ground and burnt

and crumbled stones was uncovered at the surface, and it was 43 centimetres thick. There were no artefacts or potsherds found, but it had a single piece of raw amber. The researcher linked this burnt ground with stones to a supposed house location (Stepiņš 1960). This guess can be confirmed by fragments of clay and plaster found nearby. Furthermore, the report written in 1924 of a barrow with burnt stones could be linked to a similar structure.

Southwest Kurzeme was the periphery of the culture of flat grave cemeteries surrounded with stone circles, which can be attested to by the smaller number of burials and the density of the population in the area compared with the cultural nucleus. In Lithuania, 35 flat cemeteries from the first to the fourth century are known that are surrounded by stone circles (Michelbertas 1989, p.15ff.; Gricuvienė, Buža 2009, p.11). Accordingly, there could be many more Roman Iron Age artefacts and archaeological sites in southwest Kurzeme, as seen in the archival data. As was mentioned before, in 1900 a pharmacist from Rucava gave the Courland Province Museum some artefacts and a Roman coin that was found after ploughing a field. There is also a document surviving from 1924 in which Fiodor Jegorov reported that his brother collected and bought artefacts in Rucava. During that time, they offered to sell 27 Roman coins to the History Museum. Meanwhile, the Museum of War in Riga has a treasure of 23 Roman coins, two spearheads and a broken sword from Rucava. These artefacts were

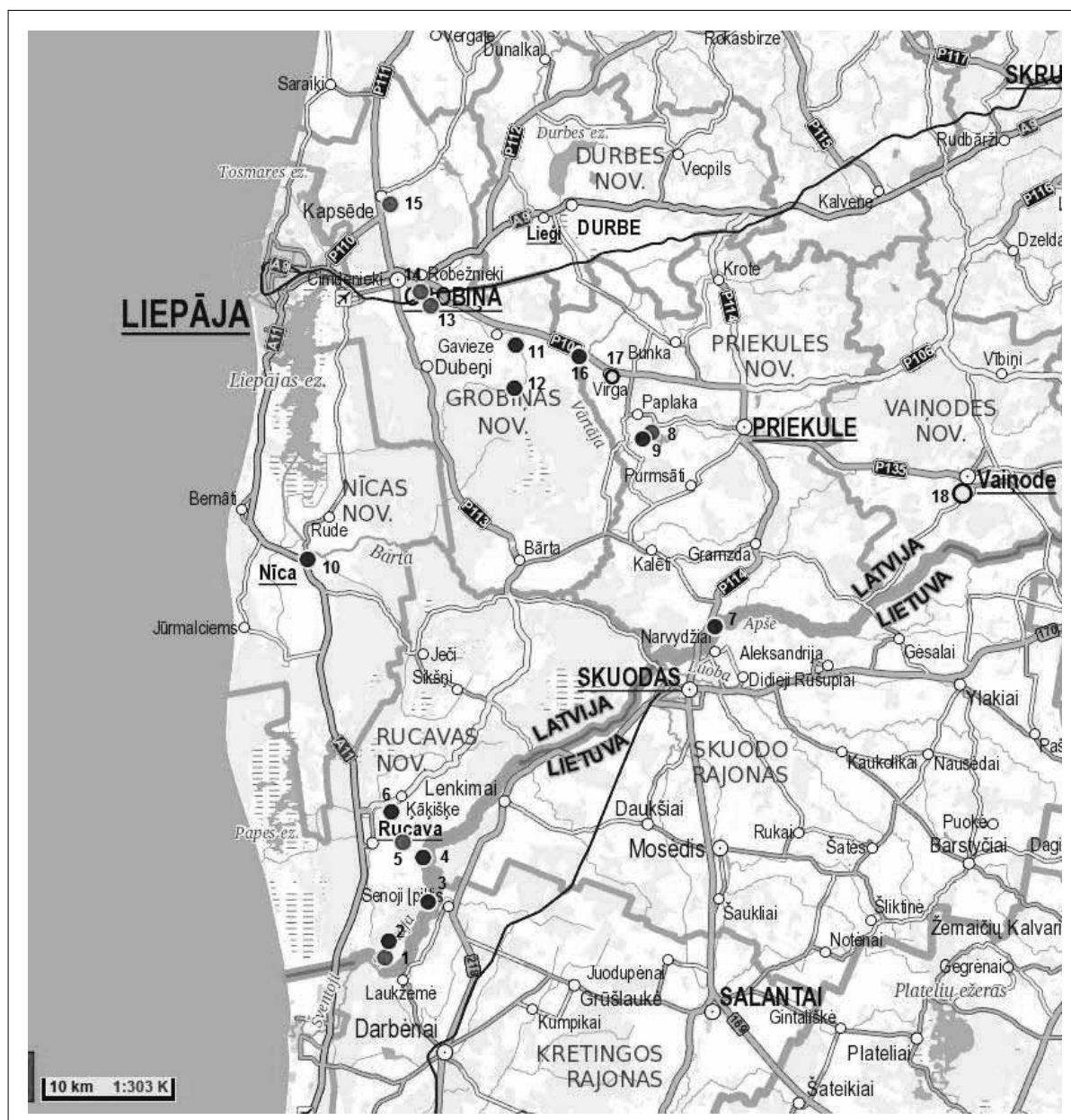


Fig. 11. Roman Iron Age archaeological sites in southwest Kurzeme. Rucavas parish: 1 Mazkatuži cemetery; 2 Vālodzes find spot; 3 Čiņi-Čukāni settlement; 4 Lejas Roman coin find spot; 5 Kalnaurbāni cemetery; 6 Dūdas find spot. Kalētu parish: 7 Rači settlement. Virgas parish: 8 Kalnazīverti cemetery; 9 Paplaka Roman coin hoard. Nīcas parish: 10 Nīca coin find spot. Gaviezes parish: 11 Alekši find spot; 12 Mārtuļi find spot; 16 Vārtājas hill-fort and settlement. Grobiņas parish: 13 Atkalni cemetery; 14 Priediens cemetery. Medzes parish: 15 Kapsēde cemetery. Asītes parish: 16 Jaunarāji find spot; Vainodes parish: 18 Vainode Roman coin hoard.

found in 1931 during gravel digging (AO 4619:1-2). Roman coins were also found in the Rucava parish in the Lejas cemetery (AO 4656:7). In the Late Iron Age village next to the Čukāni homestead (Urtāns 1991), fragments of ancient amphorae were found between wares.<sup>5</sup> Also, artefacts from the third century were found at a find spot next to the Vālodze homestead; and an openwork flat fibula was found (Fig. 1) next to the village of Čāķišķe. It is strongly believed that these stray finds come from destroyed graves that have not

<sup>5</sup> The artefacts are kept in the Museum of Liepāja. Information received from Baiba Dumpe.

yet been discovered or documented. This shows that the lower reaches of the River Šventoji in the Rucava district were quite densely populated in the Roman Iron Age, and it might have been some sort of a centre. The topography of first to fourth-century sites and stray finds in the context of the wider region indicates that the banks of the rivers Šventoji, Bārta, Vārtāja and Otaņķe, and the smaller streams connected to them, were populated (Fig. 11). The topography of sites also shows river basins that could be areas for further investigation. In the meantime, the coastal swamp areas to the north of Rucava, up to Grobiņa in the north

and the River Bārta in the west, were not populated. It is most likely that in the Roman Iron Age, the rivers mentioned were an important trading route that started from the Lithuanian coast, reached Grobiņa, and led further north along the coast all the way up to Kapsēde. The idea that the trading route went along the coast cannot be excluded. This may be confirmed, as some Roman coins were found in Nīca (Sb. Rig. 1905, p.71; Moora 1929, p.171), although, in this case, we are missing reliable information on how these coins were found. Bearing in mind that no Roman Iron Age artefacts were found in the area of Nīca, it may be assumed that the coins were found elsewhere. The oldest settlement in this area is connected to the Late Iron Age.

## Abbreviations

AA – Latvian National Museum of History, Collections, Riga

AA, AO – Latvian National Museum of History, Archive, Riga

LNVM – Latvian National Museum of History, Riga

Sb. Kurl.1900. – Sitzungsberichte der Kurländischen Gesellschaft für Literatur und

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ŠVENTOSIOS ŽEMUPIO  
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Santrauka

Šventosios žemupio mikroregionas patenka į romėniškojo geležies amžiaus plokštinių kapų su akmenų vainikais arealą (1; 11 pav.). Teritorija į šiaurę nuo Šventosios upės yra laikoma šios kultūros periferija, kuriai būdingi tam tikri laidojimo papročiai, vienas jų – akmenų vainiko nebuvimas. Ši sritis Latvijos teritorijoje apibūdinama pagal Mazkatuži kapinyno (Rucava apylinkė) tyrimų rezultatus. Išlikusi tyrinėjimų medžiaga ir archyviniai duomenys apie radinius Šventosios žemupyje leidžia peržiūrėti ir patikslinti informaciją apie laidosenos papročius ir apgyvendinimą Kurše romėniškajame geležies amžiuje.

Vertė Ernestas Vasiliauskas