

The main problem which is intended to be solved in the project is to define burial rites of the site 8 in Szurpiły (so called “Mosiężysko”), compare it with data from other, less researched cemeteries in Suwałki area and to formulate some initial hypothesis about the character of burial rites in Early Medieval Suwałki area, and – furthermore – living there Early Medieval Yotvingians. This issue has not been dealt with in scholarship so far because of the lack of archaeological sources.

In 2008 the first Yotvingian cemetery was found in the village of Szurpiły. The site was regularly investigated till 2011. It realised that there is no typical, but a layer cemetery. The equipment of the deceased was very rich, it contains parts of dress, weapon, riding gear, ornaments and tools. All of them were precisely destroyed by cutting and breaking, burnt together with the owner and than also spread on the surface.

The main aim of the project is to analyse burial rites observed at “Mosiężysko” and compare it with other known burial practices. In the light of hitherto preliminary analyses it seems that the nearest cemeteries of similar nature can be found in the territories of Finno-Ugric tribes, within the borders of present-day Estonia and Finland. Another question concerns intentional destroying of grave goods. This custom, dominating at “Mosiężysko” cemetery, was observed also at other Baltic (especially Couronian, but also Sambian and Skalovian) cemeteries. Another aim is the chronological and stylistic analysis of finds from the “Mosiężysko” cemetery. It seems that the analysis will demonstrate cultural links with other Baltic territories, both Prussian and Letto-Lithuanian ones. It will be also interesting to study the social order of Yotvingian society. The collective cemeteries, lacking individual graves are usually understood as reflection of egalitarian society. This is new point of view, as up to now Yotvingian society – basing on historical sources – was considered stratified. So another interesting result of the project will be possibility to compare the conclusions drawn in result of archaeological analysis with the historical sources.

The significance of this project for the development of the archaeology of the Early Middle Ages of the Prussian territories is breakthrough also because up to now the reconstruction of Prussians’ history and culture (with an exception of Sambs) based only at settlement data. In result of this project also sepulchral material will be brought into the study, what will open brand new capabilities in the development of Prussian (and also Baltic) archaeology. Providing a definition of the burial rites in Early Medieval Szurpiły (and Suwałki area), a possibly accurate reconstruction of rituals which accompanied the deposition of ashes of the dead within a cemetery, combined with the detailed chronological and stylistic analysis will not only enable the researchers to describe the spiritual culture of the living in area of Suwałki Yotvingians. It will also significantly broaden our knowledge on Yotvingian costume, weaponry, tools and riding gear. As it is the first analysis of this kind, it will be absolutely fundamental.

The description of cemeteries and methods of their localisation and archaeological identification will enable us to discover and examine other sites of this kind in future. A confirmation of possible cultural relations, not only with other Baltic tribes but also with Finno-Ugric ones, will significantly change the image of the Yotvingians which has been offered so far by archaeologists and historians.