

## COLLECTIVE BURIALS OF COMB WARE CULTURE AT ZVEJNIEKI CEMETERY

### *А. Мацане, И. Загорска. Коллективные погребения культуры гребенчато-ямочной керамики на могильнике Звейниеки*

*На примере знаменитого могильника Звейниеки в Латвии погребальный обряд рассматривается как отражение систем коммуникаций прошлого. Показаны отличия между погребальной обрядностью мезолита — раннего неолита и временем распространения традиции гребенчато-ямочной керамики. Подробно рассмотрены особенности коллективных погребений периода гребенчато-ямочной керамики.*

Burials are one of the best reflection for studying social relations and networks in the past. The hunter-gatherer cemeteries around the Baltic Sea reveal complex burial practices. Various theoretical and methodological tools can be used for studying these questions. Posthumanism perspective offers new possibilities for investigating relationships and social networks. Social relations can be studied not only between people, but also between humans and animals, and surrounding environment. This paper explores hunter-gatherer social networks during the Middle Neolithic with focus on Comb Ware Culture collective burials at Zvejnieki cemetery in Northern Latvia.

Zvejnieki complex is situated in Northern Latvia and consists of a cemetery and two settlements, one from Mesolithic and one from Neolithic that are situated in a vicinity of the cemetery. Zvejnieki complex was mainly excavated during the 1960's and 1970's, while during 2005–2009 new excavations have been carried out as part of a research project between the Institute of Latvian History and the Lund University. In total more than 330 burials have been discovered. Zvejnieki is the largest hunter-gatherer cemetery in Northern Europe, as well as covering the longest time period. According to the radiocarbon dating's, available so far, the cemetery has been in use for over several millennia that is from the Middle Mesolithic until Late Neolithic, 7500 cal. BC — 2600 cal. BC (8240–4190 bp). The chronology of cemetery has lately been corrected in accordance with studies of reservoir effect (J. Meadow).

Various burial traditions can be traced at Zvejnieki cemetery, illustrating cultural, as well as periodical variations. Some traditions can be regarded as continuation from the Mesolithic period, while others show new influences. During the Middle Neolithic new burial traditions appear at Zvejnieki cemetery. The most distinctive feature from this period is multiple graves with different set of grave inventory and particular burial arrangements. Instead of animal tooth pendants that have been the most common grave good in the previous periods, amber ornaments and flint hunting equipment take more pronounced role in the grave inventory. Red ochre has been intensively used in the collective grave arrangements. Votive deposits (sacrifices), sometimes with intentionally destroyed artefacts, appear beside graves. There are several collective graves that have been interpreted as belonging to Comb Ware Culture. The collective graves were concentrated in the second group of burials at the south-eastern end of the gravel ridge, near Zvejnieki farmstead (see Fig.1). Between two to six individuals in a supine position have been buried in the multiple graves, often with heads facing in opposite directions. Male, female and children have been laid in graves, sometimes in several layers and most probably, simultaneously. However, further scientific analysis would be necessarily to establish relations between individuals buried in the collective burials. Most of collective graves share some similar patterns in the burial arrangement, such as amber grave inventory, rich usage of red ochre, face masks from clay with amber discs in the eye sockets. However, there are also differences between burials, e.g. votive deposits have been encountered only in one case among these collective burials. Also finds of typical Comb Ware pottery are rare within these burials. The collective grave 206–209 illustrates a typical example of the Comb Ware Culture collective burials, where two children and two male adults have been buried simultaneously in two layers. The burial was richly sprinkled with red ochre, both under and around skeletons. An amber pendant was found near the head of 206 and two amber discs in the eye sockets. A clay vessel with comb and pit decoration was found over graves 208 and 209. There was a votive deposition in the southwest corner in grave 207. The deposition consisted of 33 items placed in the rich ochre layer, among which flint tools, amber pendants, sandstone tools, animal teeth, antler and bone tools and fragments were discovered.

Usually, rich personal ornaments were found on one or two individuals in the collective graves while others had some or no grave goods. Six individuals were buried in the collective grave 220–225, but very rich grave inventory was found with the dead in grave 221 and 225. Personal ornaments in grave 221 consisted of amber, antler, bone, flint, stone, sandstone tools and ornaments. There was also clay figurine in rich ochre layer besides the left leg and waterfowl figurine near lower right limbs. 56 amber ornaments were placed between pelvic area and knees. Adult male in grave 225 had intensive ochre layer around head and chest area, while forehead and face was covered with mask of red clay. When removing the clay mask two amber discs were discovered in the eye sockets. The chest area was decorated with rich amber ornaments. The clay masks with amber discs in the eye sockets were also found in grave 263 and multiple grave 274–278. Individual in grave 275 had amber discs in the eye sockets, while in grave 277 they were missing. A blue clay was mixed with red ochre and placed around the face and blue clay without ochre infusion under the head. Male in grave 277 also had two metal rings, which are considered to be the earliest metal finds in the territory of Latvia. The grave inventory also included a stuff depicting an animal head, rich amber adornments and four pine marten tooth pendants. This is one of few examples where animal tooth pendants have been found in collective burials.

During the recent excavations, several collective burials were discovered. Two double graves from the Middle Neolithic contained some of the typical grave inventory of Comb Ware Culture. Fragments of ceramics with comb and pit ornament along with four flint arrowheads were found with individual in grave 325. However, this burial was lacking one of the typical characteristics — red ochre layer. Rich grave inventory with red ochre had double grave 316–317, where amber ornaments were arranged in a similar manner as in grave 221. This burial is one of the wealthiest in whole cemetery and contained also two amber rings and several hundred of bone beads.

The collective graves of Comb Ware Culture represent part of the Middle Neolithic burials at Zvejnieki cemetery. There were also isolated individual burials from this time period at Zvejnieki. However, these differ from collective graves in terms of grave inventory and us-

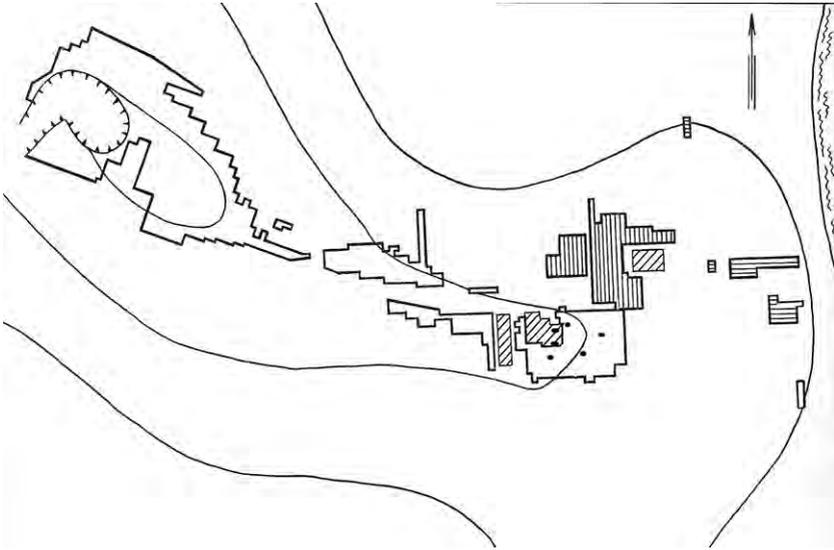


Fig. 1. Map of Zvejnieki site

Рис. 1. План археологического комплекса Звейниеки

age of red ochre. Animal tooth pendants (especially from carnivores) have been more common grave goods for individual burials, along buttons and trapezoidal pendants, which were dominating among the amber ornaments. However, there are many unfurnished burials around Zvejnieki house that make chronological interpretation more complicated.

Comb Ware Culture expressions in the East Baltic, what we can see in mentioned collective burials at Zvejnieki, has strong similarities with North-western Russia and upper Volga region. As already mentioned by Timofeev it is not only result of mutual influences and exchange of raw materials and trade, but could also be explained by direct connections (migrations) and intensive contacts between East and West. Parallels in Russian materials indicate the rich depositions near collective burials as typical Comb Ware Culture expression. The phenomenon of Comb Ware Culture is dominating short period in the region of eastern Baltic, and later is assimilated by local cultural groups.