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WHEN BALTS MET VIKINGS AT THE CURONIAN LAGOON. STRATEGIES OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATION AT THE VIKING-AGE CEMETERY AT LINKUHNEN

ABSTRACT

The cemetery at Linkuhnen by River Memel had a long history of usage by local Baltic tribes, starting in the early Roman Period and continuing to the Viking Age, with the highest number of burials in the 10th–11th centuries AD. When Linkuhnen was excavated in the 1930s by German archaeologists, it was considered a Viking cemetery, since some of the grave goods (especially weaponry) seemed to bear signs of Scandinavian influences. However, the Scandinavian influence was overstated and the interaction between local Balts and Vikings was never thoroughly explained by the excavators. New research on the old excavation archives indicates that Linkuhnen was not a Viking burial ground but that incoming influences

from Scandinavia brought a shift to the internal strategies of representation by local Baltic elites. The burial rite changed from simple single cremation graves to lavishly equipped collective cremation graves for members of powerful families or military units. Another remarkable feature is the large number and ‘international’ character of weaponry in the burials, some of the highest quality (Ulfberht), while the jewellery represents local types only. Unlike other Scandinavian-influenced sites on the southern Baltic coast, the Scandinavian presence in the River Memel area only led to minor interactions between Balts and Vikings, though it had a significant impact on the local Baltic elites’ internal representation of status.

Keywords: Viking Age, East Prussia, cemetery, Scandinavians, Balts, Scalvians, Ulfberht swords

Introduction

The cemetery at Linkuhnen (Rzhevskoye, Linkūnai) by River Memel (Neman, Nemunas) in former East Prussia (Kreis Niederung), now Kaliningrad Oblast, was excavated between 1928 and 1939 by German archaeologists from the Prussia-Museum in Königsberg (now Kaliningrad), mainly by Carl Engel. The excavation results were never thoroughly published before World War II. However, Linkuhnen was considered an important Viking Age site based on two articles by Carl Engel, which mainly discussed results from the excavation campaign in 1929.¹ It needs to be emphasized that most of the graves in Linkuhnen were excavated in later campaigns,² the results of which were only perfunctorily pub-

lished in local newspaper articles and remained unknown to archaeological research. Despite the sparse data, the cemetery at Linkuhnen has been repeatedly discussed as a Scandinavian site or even as a port of trade or an *emporium* in recent archaeological literature.³ Linkuhnen can indeed be considered in the context of other Scandinavian-influenced sites on the southern Baltic coast, like Haithabu, Groß Strömkendorf, Rostock-Dierkow, Ralswiek, Menzlin, Wolin, Świelubie, Ciepłe, Bodzia, Truso, Wiskiauten and Grobiņa.⁴ Each of these sites has had a very different history of research, which was heavily affected by the historic events of the 20th century. The interpretation of Scandinavian-influenced objects at the southern coast of the Baltic Sea had preoccupied archaeological research both before and after World

¹ Engel 1931; 1932.

² Gossler, Jahn 2019, 69, tab. 3.

³ E.g. Wróblewski 2006, 108–110; Bogucki 2006, 94–95; 2012, 85, fig. 1; Żulkus, Bertašius 2009, 198.

⁴ Maixner 2010; Steuer 1984; Kleingärtner 2014; Biermann 2020; Stanisławski 2013; Duczko 2014; 2020; Wadył 2019; Buko 2014; Jagodziński 2015; von zur Mühlen 1975; Ibsen 2009; Petrenko, Urtāns 1995; Bogucki 2006.

War II: Do Scandinavian-influenced grave goods indicate that the buried individuals were Scandinavians, and if so, what was the interaction between those Scandinavians and the local communities?⁵

The archaeological record of the listed sites on the southern Baltic coast shows a common Scandinavian influence on the local burial rites and grave goods as well as settlement features. However, it remains difficult to compare the sites with one another, as the Scandinavians were faced with different cultural and ethnic groups between Haithabu and Grobiņa. Some places are very well studied in their entirety (e.g. Haithabu, Grobiņa), while others have either well-studied cemeteries or well-studied settlements, but the relationship between them remains somewhat unclear (e.g. Wolin, Bodzia, Truso, Wiskiauten).

The ‘international’ character of imports as well as hacked silver scrap, scales and weights are indicators of a network of proto-urban settlements and ports of trade (*Seehandelsplätze*) or *emporia* around the Baltic Sea, which connected Scandinavians, Slavs and Balts in a ‘Baltic economic zone’.⁶ When we look at the two most prominent Viking Age sites of former East Prussia: Linkuhnen and Wiskiauten, it becomes obvious that both places are unique in their own way. Wiskiauten is a burial mound necropolis with many typical Scandinavian grave goods and burial rites. Grave goods like scales and weights as well as Arab dirhams indicate long-distance trade, even if a corresponding Scandinavian trading place has not yet been found near Wiskiauten. The cemetery at Wiskiauten is – like most of the other Scandinavian-influenced cemeteries on the southern Baltic coast – a multi-ethnic site comprising Scandinavian and local population.⁷

In Linkuhnen there are so far only very faint traces of settlement, which cannot be compared in any way with places like Haithabu, Wolin or Grobiņa. No scales or weights were found at the cemetery, the only coins from Linkuhnen date to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD (graves 323/1933 and 342/1933).

While in Grobiņa it is quite possible to distinguish Scandinavian (Rudzukalni 1, Priediens 2) and local cemeteries (Atkalni 2, Priediens and Kapsēde), we must revisit Carl Engel’s question from the 1930s: Who are the individuals buried in Linkuhnen? To answer this question, we need to take a closer look not only at the origin of the grave goods alone, but also at the specific burial rites in which the objects were laid down.

After the lost World War I and the Treaty of Versailles of 1919, the German province of East Prussia was sep-

arated from the rest of Germany. The Memel Region (Memelland, Klaipėdos kraštas) specifically was lost to Lithuania in 1923. In this heated political atmosphere, Germany reaffirmed its territorial claims against Poland in the west and Lithuania in the northeast, and in doing so also used archaeological findings for political propaganda. In the German argumentation, the Scandinavian-influenced finds of Linkuhnen showed the permanent presence of Vikings in East Prussia and ‘proved’ that only Germanic tribes had been settled in East Prussia at all times.⁸ In this context, it is no wonder that Carl Engel overemphasized the Scandinavian influences in Linkuhnen for political reasons.⁹ What is crucial, however, is that this overstatement from the 1930s was uncritically adopted for a long time due to a lack of published archaeological sources from Linkuhnen.

In consideration of that, the history of research at Linkuhnen was extensively reconstructed and reevaluated by the Museum of Pre- and Early History in Berlin during a research project in 2011–2014 related to the Berlin-housed mediaeval finds of the former Prussia Collection.¹⁰ This new perspective on the pre-war German research in Linkuhnen was by and large an excavation of an excavation, involving a recombination of the preserved archaeological objects and different archival sources from institutions throughout Germany, Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Latvia and Sweden. The main goal was to reconstruct and reconnect the available information about the archaeological context, burial rites and grave goods of the cemetery and to review Carl Engel’s interpretations of Linkuhnen from the 1930s. The results of this research were published in 2019.¹¹

Excavations at Linkuhnen, 1928–1939 – the cemetery’s stratigraphy

Linkuhnen is located about 10 km west of Tilsit (today’s Sovetsk, Kaliningrad Oblast, Russia), about 4.5 km southwest of the present course of River Memel, which separates the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad from Lithuania (Fig. 1). The original excavations were executed in 1928, 1929, 1930, 1931, 1933, 1935, 1937, 1938 and 1939 by Herbert Jankuhn, Carl Engel and Fritz Jaensch. Almost 500 graves with at least 526 burials were found in a rather small area of 50 × 50 m (Fig. 2). The cemetery was in use for 1,000 years, and its occupancy can be divided into 7 phases (Fig. 3), starting at the end of the

⁵ Von zur Mühlen 1975; Bogacki *et al.* 2019.

⁶ Bogucki 2012, 85, fig. 1.

⁷ Ibsen 2009.

⁸ Steuer 2004, 426–427; Gossler, Jahn 2019, 43.

⁹ Gossler, Jahn 2019, 45–65

¹⁰ Gossler 2013; 2014; Gossler, Jahn 2013; 2014; 2015; Jahn 2016; Jahn *et al.* 2018.

¹¹ Gossler, Jahn 2019.



Fig. 1. Location of the Linkuhnen cemetery in former East Prussia (Gossler, Jahn 2019, 4, fig. 4).

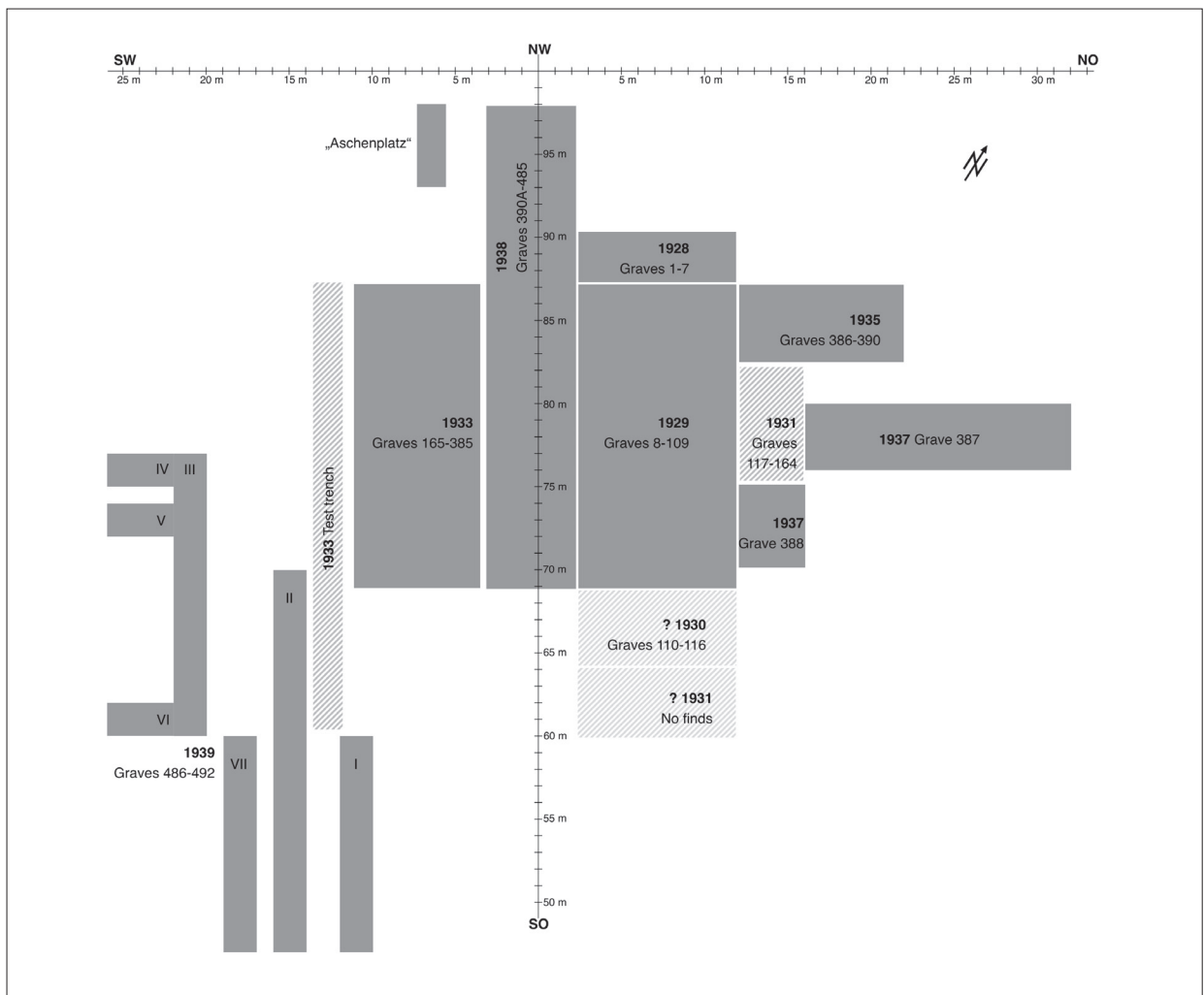


Fig. 2. Plan of the excavation area in the Linkuhnen cemetery, 1928–1939 (Gossler, Jahn 2019, 8, fig.9).

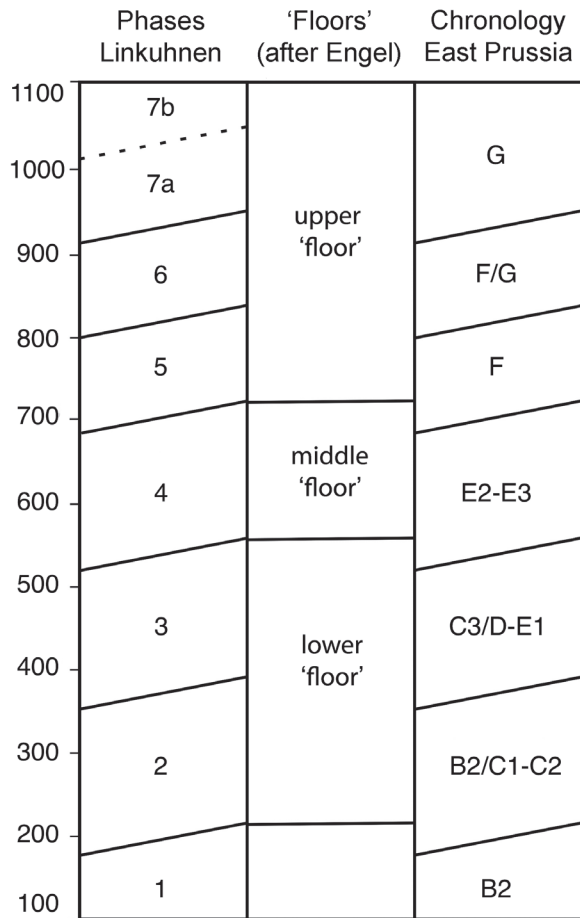


Fig. 3. Chronology of the Linkuhnen cemetery: lower, middle and upper 'floors' (*Stockwerke*) and phases 1–7 (chronology of East Prussia according to Engel 1931, 314; Gossler, Jahn 2019, 226, fig. 97).

Early Roman Period (B2) with a few cremation graves.¹² The main feature of the Linkuhnen cemetery is its stratigraphy and multi-level structure, which Carl Engel divided into so-called lower, middle and upper 'floors' (*Stockwerke*) (Figs 3 and 4).

The lowest layer at a depth of about 1.20–0.90 m was formed by the inhumation graves of the early Migration Period (phases 2–3), where tree coffins had survived in places. All the bodies were in the stretched supine position. In the male graves the buried often held weapons in their hands: spearheads lay in the right arm bent to the shoulder, the left hand was found on the handle of a sword or a dagger at the left hip or on the chest (Fig. 5). In the women's graves finger spirals, arm and neck rings, big hairpins and fibulae worn in pairs on the chest were mostly found (Fig. 6).¹³

The two upper layers were characterized by cremation burials, with the graves of the middle 'floor' at a depth of about 0.90–0.60 m containing the older cremation graves of the younger Migration Period and the transitional phase between the end of the Migration Period and the beginning of the Viking Age (phase 4). These older cremation burials often overlapped with the upper edge of the inhumation burials and contained heaps of coarse cremated remains with relatively few grave goods. Mortuary cremains and grave goods were often wrapped in cloth and interred in small wooden boxes from which wooden fragments had survived. The grave goods in the men's graves usually included an iron sword and two deformed spearheads, in the women's graves finger spirals and arm rings were found, more rarely neck rings and fibulae.¹⁴

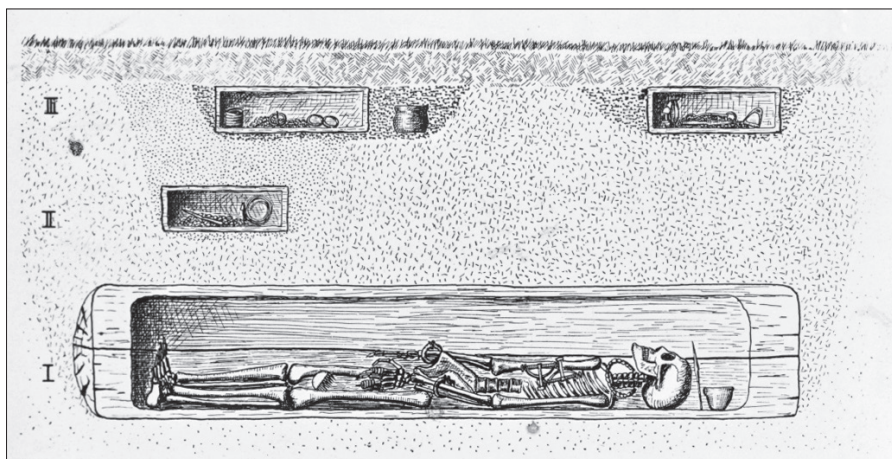


Fig. 4. Schematic representation of the stratigraphic sequence in Linkuhnen: I – lower level inhumation graves of early Migration Period; II – middle level cremation graves of late Migration Period; III – upper level cremation graves of the Viking Age (Gossler, Jahn 2019, 40, fig. 43, after Engel 1931, 315, fig. 1).

¹² Jahn 2016, 155.

¹³ Gossler, Jahn 2015, 75–77; 2019, 229–238.

¹⁴ Gossler, Jahn 2015, 78; 2019, 239–242.

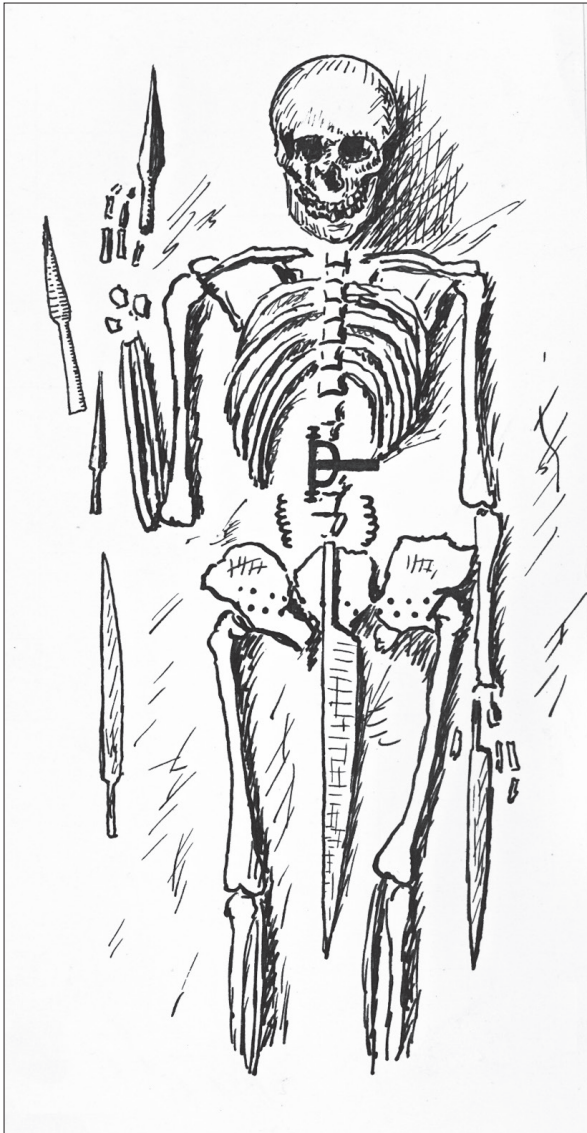


Fig. 5. Linkuhnen, male inhumation grave 104/1929 (Migration Period, 5th century) (Gossler, Jahn 2019, pl. 65, 3).

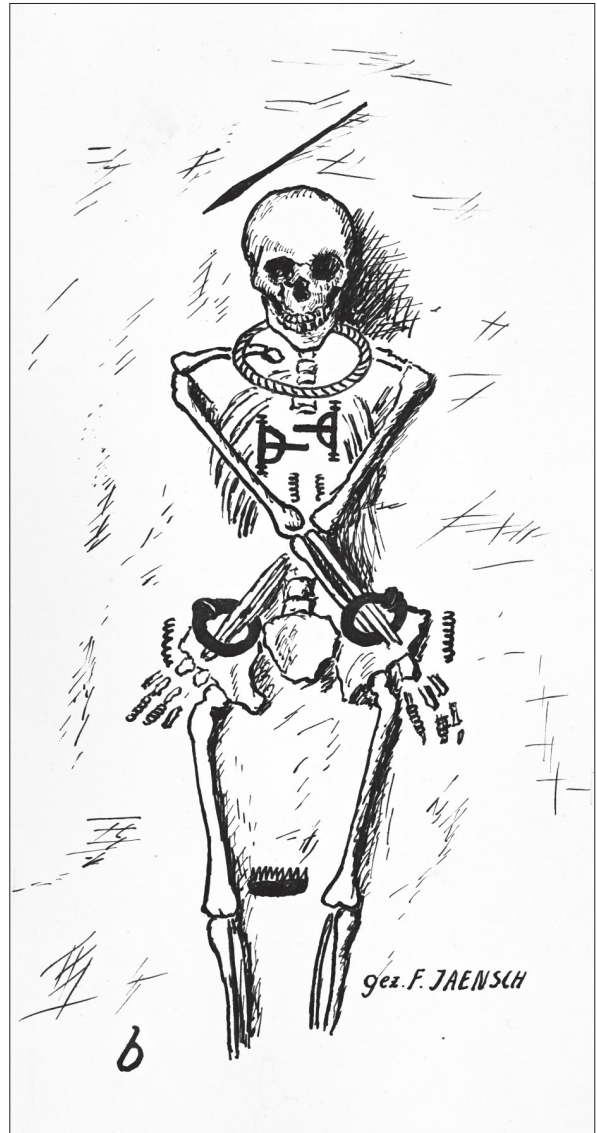


Fig. 6. Linkuhnen, female inhumation grave 52B/1929 (Migration Period, 5th/6th century) (Gossler, Jahn 2019, pl. 40, 1).

With the upper ‘floor’ of the younger cremation graves at a depth of 0.60–0.30 m (phases 5–7), the number of grave goods increased drastically, while the actual burial custom hardly changed: mainly the dimensions of the wooden boxes in which cremated remains and grave goods were placed and the size of the cremation piles increased significantly. In some of men’s graves up to six swords and over 12 spearheads were found, adorned with rich bronze ornaments. The jewellery in the women’s graves was even richer and featured finger spirals, arm rings, fibulae, breast chain pendants, neck spirals, nee-

dles and belt buckles (Fig. 7). In addition, there were spinning and weaving implements, which appeared in women’s as well as men’s graves. The men’s burials also included riding accessories, such as stirrups, bridles and spurs (Fig. 8). Horse burials, which are common on the nearby Sambia Peninsula, are rather rare in Linkuhnen.¹⁵

Weaponry of the Viking Age

The Viking Age graves on the upper ‘floor’ represent the largest portion of burials in Linkuhnen which

¹⁵ Gossler, Jahn 2015, 78–81; 2019, 242–272.

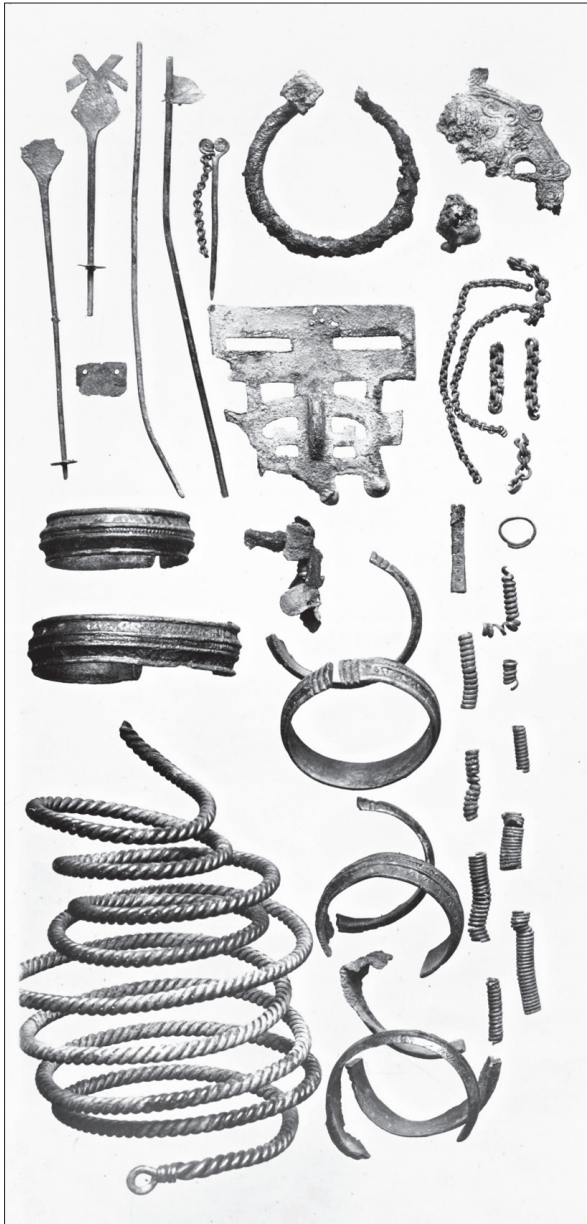


Fig. 7. Linkuhnen, female cremation grave 77/1929 (Viking Age, 10th/11th century) (Gossler, Jahn 2019, pl. 58, 2).



Fig. 8. Linkuhnen, male cremation grave 53/1929 (Viking Age, 10th/11th century) with an Ulfberht sword (Gossler, Jahn 2019, pl. 43, 1).

contain weaponry and riding equipment. A total number of 149 swords and sword fragments from 70 graves of the 10th–11th centuries, including nine Ulfberht blades (Fig. 9), and 373 spearheads from 108 graves were documented in the preserved excavation diaries. Inventories with one or two swords were found in about 85% of all sword graves. The remaining sword graves contained

three to four swords and sometimes even more: six swords in grave 1/1928¹⁶ and ten swords in grave 4/1928.¹⁷ On average, between three and four spearheads were unearthed in each of the graves. Equipment with one to four spearheads comprises 75% of all burials with pole weapons. Larger numbers are also found but rarely more than six spearheads (Tab. 1).

¹⁶ Gossler, Jahn 2019, pl. 2, 1–3, pl. 4, 1–2.

¹⁷ Gossler, Jahn 2019, pl. 8, 1, pl. 10, 2–3.

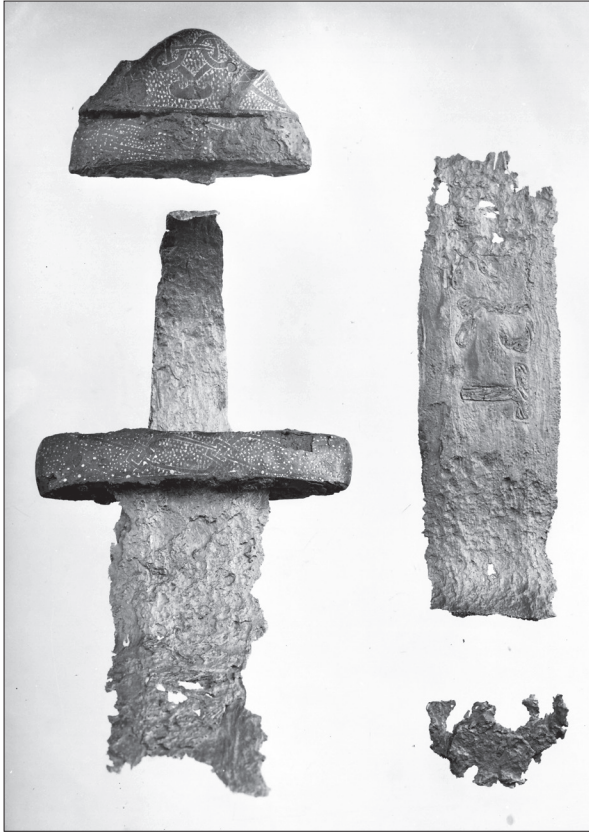


Fig. 9. Sword from Linkuhnen grave 53/1929 with preserved inscription: '[...] ERT' (ULFBERT) (Gossler, Jahn 2019, 67, fig. 52).

Only one grave featured an axe (grave 170/1933).¹⁸ Besides the axe, the burial contained what might be considered 'standard armament' with a sword and two spearheads. The rest of the grave goods, including a penannular brooch, a neck ring, a finger ring and a ceramic vessel, also correspond to the typical burial equipment in Linkuhnen. Axes were among the most important weapons of the Nordic warrior in Viking-Age Scandinavia. In the Western Baltic, on the other hand, they seem to have been found less frequently, as burial grounds from Sambia show.¹⁹

Regarding the frequency of swords, it can be stated that graves with more than one sword also tend to have higher numbers of spearheads. If two or more swords are found in the grave, they are almost always accompanied by just as many or more spearheads. On the other hand, if we look at the ratio of spearhead to sword finds, we notice that large numbers of pole weapons are not necessarily associated with many swords. In most cases, one or two swords occur together with the lance armament.

In individual cases, however, the discrepancy is much greater: e.g. in the well-documented grave 401/1938 the number of spearheads is 20, while only one sword was found there. High numbers of swords in combination with spearheads allow several interpretations. One is that a very extensive armament represents the warrior's elevated position among his peers, possibly he had several spare sets of equipment in his arsenal. The expenditure on weapons could also reflect the social position of his family. Furthermore, it is also conceivable that some large weapon ensembles accompanied several male individuals who were buried as part of a collective burial. In the case of tomb 401/1938, the coffin-like dimensions of the wooden cremation casket certainly suggest such a possibility. In addition to the sword-bearer represented in the tomb, warriors with only lance armament could also have been buried here.

Riding equipment of the Viking Age

In 60 graves, from the occupation phases 5–7, horse and rider equipment was found. More specifically, the items were bridles, stirrups, spurs, buckles, horse bells, bridle fittings and components of saddles. Despite several horse burials, only one 'rider's grave' could be associated with a buried horse (grave 26/1929).²⁰ The most common item of equipment is the bridle, which is documented in 45 burials. In 12 of these complexes two bridles were discovered, in graves 165/1933 and 410/1938 – three and four bridles, respectively. Most of the pieces are two- or three-part ring bridles. The presence of multiple bridles in a number of graves deserves attention: possibly they were spare sets or this burial custom symbolizes the ownership of several riding horses. Such an interpretation is perhaps supported by the fact that in some of the graves in question more than two stirrups appeared (graves 46/1929 and 53/1929 with two bridles and three stirrups each, grave 174/1933 with two bridles and four stirrups and grave 410/1938 with four bridles and three stirrups). It is also conceivable that double or multiple riding sets represent several individuals buried in the grave. For example, grave 46/1929 with two bridles and three stirrups perhaps represents a double burial of a man and a woman due to the composition of the dress accessories (five belt buckles and strap tongues, three cruciform brooches and a crossbow ladder brooch as well as nine arm rings).²¹ Grave 410/1938 included four bridles, four swords and twelve spearheads, a large ensemble of weapons that could have belonged to at least two warriors.²²

¹⁸ Gossler, Jahn 2019, 25, fig. 30; pl. 80, 3.

¹⁹ Gossler 2014, 192–195.

²⁰ Gossler, Jahn 2019, 335.

²¹ Gossler, Jahn 2019, 359.

²² Gossler, Jahn 2019, 401.

Tab. 1. Distribution of swords and spearheads in selected graves of phases 5–7 in Linkuhnen (Gossler, Jahn 2019, 103–105, tab. 8).

Grave	Number of swords	Number of spearheads	Phase	Grave	Number of swords	Number of spearheads	Phase
1/1928	6	8	7	163/1931	1	3	7
4 (a–i)/1928	10	15	7	167A, B/1933	1	5	7
8/1929	3	5	7b	171/1933	2	6	7a
18/1929	1	8	7	174/1933	2	5	7a
21/1929	1	6	7a	175/1933	1	3	7
25/1929	1	8	7a	177/1933	2	4	7a
29/1929	1	4	7	178/1933	2	3	7
37/1929	2	1	5	179/1933	3	7	7
42/42A/1929	2	4	7a	183/1933	1	4	7
43B/1929	2	4	7a	185/1933	3	2	7a
44/1929	2	4	7a	186/1933	1	1	6–7
46/1929	2	5	7a	188/1933	1	3	7
50/1929	3	9	7b	198C/1933	2	4	6–7
62/1929	3	3	7a	200/1933	1	3	7
69/1929	1	6	7	208/1933	1	1	5–7
71/1929	3	9	7	220/1933	1	3	5
74/1929	1	2	7b	229/1933	2	4	6–7
95/1929	1	6	6–7	311/1933	1	2	7
106/1929	2	3	7	388/1935	2	3	6–7
114 I/1930	1	6	7	unnumbered/1935	2	2	7
122/1931	1	9	7	390A/1938	–	4	7
123/1931	1	7	7	394/1938	4	6	7
124/1931	2	8	7	401/1938	1	20	7
125/1931	2	1	7	410/1938	4	12	6–7
126B/1931	1	8	6	426/1938	4	6	7
127/1931	2	2	7b	433A/1938	1	2	7
129/1931	3	1	7	445/1938	1	2	6–7
134/1931	1	3	7	468/1938	1	2	5
141/145/1931	1	3	7	471/1938	2	5	7
142/1931	1	2	7	474/1938	–	5	7a

Compared to the bridles, stirrups were found much less frequently (21 grave complexes). Mostly two pieces were found, three or more pieces are known from four graves (graves 46/1929; 53/1929; 410/1938: three stirrups; grave 174/1933: four stirrups). Only in three graves can bridle fittings and corresponding pendants in the form of bells be proven based on the excavation documents (graves 22/1929, 26/1929 and 53/1929). However, since these bridle fittings are very rare in the Linkuhnen cemetery, there seems to be a gap in the archaeological record for this element of riding equipment. Apparently, the 'rider's graves' of the necropolis did not contain complete sets of horse harness.

Spurs were recovered from 27 graves, thus occurring somewhat more frequently than stirrups but less frequently than bridles. Strikingly, there are only five complete pairs of spurs, in 22 cases only a single spur was found, and two-thirds of the graves with one or more bridles show no stirrups or spurs. This ratio is hardly to be interpreted as missing information; it is rather likely that the deposition of spurs was practiced as a *pars pro toto* custom. All in all, it can be stated that complete sets of riding equipment for horse and rider were rarely found at Linkuhnen. The decision to add individual elements of equipment for horse and rider could therefore also have other reasons, possibly of a ritual or social nature. Finally, only graves 26/1929 and 62/1929 showed almost complete sets of riding equipment.²³

Weaponry and riding equipment in combination

Out of 120 weapon graves, 54 also have riding equipment, which corresponds to a share of 45%. Conversely, 90% of the complexes with riding equipment also contained weapons (54 out of 60 cases). This means that almost all riders carried weapons but only about half of all weapon-bearers were also riders. Of the 54 graves with weapons and riding accessories, 40 complexes contained bridles, which is about three-quarters. In all weapon graves with riding equipment the combination of lance armament and bridles occurs most frequently (39 graves), swords and bridles are combined somewhat less frequently (31 graves). In 30 bridle graves both types of weapons were present together. Stirrups occur in weapon graves with riding accessories less frequently than the bridles (in 18 of 54 complexes). Weapon graves with stirrups contained spearheads in all cases (18 graves), while swords were documented in only 14 graves (78%). Finally, we should take a look at the presence of spurs in weapon graves. It can be traced in 25 graves, i.e. in almost half of the 54 inventories with riding accessories and armament. The noticeable linkage of bridles, stirrups and also spurs to well-equipped weapon graves could indicate a special or higher position of the mounted warriors compared to those without riding equipment (Tab. 2).

Tab. 2. Number of graves with riding equipment combined with swords and spearheads at the Linkuhnen cemetery (phases 5–7).

	Number of swords		Number of spearheads	
	1–2	3+	1–4	5+
Number of graves with weaponry and riding gear	35	8	35	17
Number of graves with swords and bridles	23	8	–	–
Number of graves with spearheads and bridles	–	–	25	14
Number of graves with swords and stirrups	10	4	–	–
Number of graves with spearheads and stirrups	–	–	11	7
Number of graves with swords and spurs	16	5	–	–
Number of graves with spearheads and spurs	–	–	14	10

²³ Gossler, Jahn 2019, 355, 362–363.

Collective graves of local elites

In the cremation graves of the Viking Age in the upper 'floors' of Linkuhnen it is much more difficult to separate male and female inventories than in the preceding phases. The reasons for this are the abundance of grave goods and the fact that a number of cremation graves were apparently collective burials of male and female individuals. As it had been customary since the Roman Period for men to be buried not only with their weapons but also with items of costume, it is almost impossible to distinguish these from the female inventory in a collective grave, especially since both sexes apparently wore largely the same forms of jewellery. Typical female grave goods are hair combs made of bone or antler and symbolic goods in the form of miniaturized spindles and weaving boards. Chain jewellery was undoubtedly worn by both sexes, these mostly very fragmented components show no gender-specific characteristics. In most cases it is no longer possible to tell from the surviving excavation documentation how the cremated remains and the grave goods were arranged within each cremation burial, i.e. whether there were concentrations or associations of certain groups of grave goods.

In some well-documented Viking Age cremations, however, there are indications of a gender-specific dif-

ferentiation of the grave goods. The largest collective cremation grave was excavated in the 1929 campaign and, according to Carl Engel, includes burials 42/42A/1929, 43/1929, 43A/1929, 43B/1929 and 43C/1929 (all date to phase 7) (Fig. 10). Grave 43/1929 contained two pairs of fibulae, six arm rings, a spiral neck ring, bronze chain jewellery (including chain distributors, spiral rolls, pendants, spiral wire beads), a needle, a belt buckle and an amber spindle whorl. There is no evidence of weapons, the grave inventory corresponds to the spectrum of female equipment. The directly connected cremation grave 43A/1929, on the other hand, contained a spearhead, which can be regarded a male attribute, but also the following costume elements: a pair of penannular brooches, an arm ring, 19 fragments of spiral rings, two finger spirals, bronze chain jewellery (including spiral rolls and pendants), two needles (one with a horse head motif) and a hairpin. The equipment also featured a simple knife. In contrast to the woman from grave 43/1929, the man from grave 43A/1929 was equipped with a reduced set of brooch and ring jewellery. However, chain and needle jewellery was obviously present in both sexes. The addition of a hairpin is particularly remarkable. Large hairpins appeared already in female graves of the Migration Period (Fig. 6). The Viking Age hairpins are smaller in size and

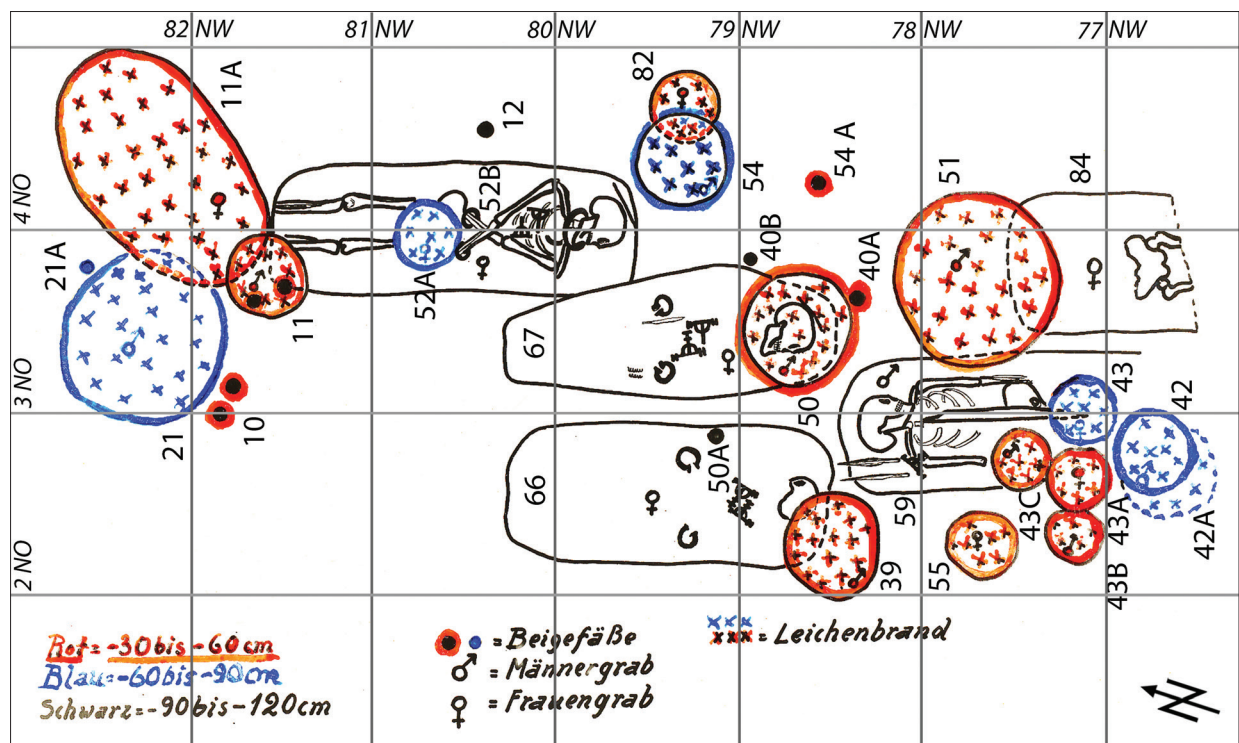


Fig. 10. Part of the 1929 excavation area of in Linkuhnen with graves 42/42A/1929, 43/1929, 43A/1929, 43B/1929 and 43C/1929 (modified original drawing). Features marked in red – graves in the 0.60–0.30 m depth range; blue – graves in 0.90–0.60 m range; black – graves in 1.20–0.90 m range. Beigefäße = ceramic vessels; Männergrab = male grave; Frauengrab = female grave, Leichenbrand = cremation remains (Gossler, Jahn 2019, 42, fig. 45).

may have also been used in textile manufacturing (Figs 7 and 8).²⁴ Carl Engel had pointed out that these hairpins for pinning up a long hairstyle were not only part of the women's equipment in Linkuhnen, but sometimes also appeared in male graves.²⁵

The associated cremation graves 42/42A/1929, 43B/1929 and 43C/1929 also contained weapons and costume objects. In grave 42/42A/1929 two swords, four spearheads and two spurs, two different brooches (large crossbow brooch with ring decoration and crossbow ladder brooch), eleven spiral rings and bronze chain jewellery were found. The inventory from grave 43B/1929 consisted of three swords and four spearheads, combined with two different brooches (penannular brooch and large crossbow brooch with ring decoration and remains of a chain), bronze chain jewellery and a spiral finger ring, while grave 43C/1929 contained a sword, two spurs and some remains of chain jewellery.²⁶

Another 'over-equipped' grave complex comprises graves 126A, 126B and 127/1931, with three swords, ten spearheads, a bridle, a spur, 15 fibulae, an iron needle, a hairpin, a spiral neck ring (fragments), finger rings, a bracelet (fragments), necklaces (fragments), spiral bronze pearls, amber pearls, glass beads, three bronze fittings, two knives, a bone comb, iron fragments, bronze fragments, wood fragments and textile fragments. Cremation graves 126B and 127/1931 could have been 'male' costume inventories, the 'female' components came from grave 126A/1931 (Fig. 11).²⁷

Particularly extensive sets of fibulae were documented during the 1938 excavation campaign in cremation graves 401 and 433A. The nine-piece ensemble of grave 401/1938 consisted of two crossbow fibulae, three disc fibulae and four penannular fibulae, apparently two of bronze and two of iron. Very probably, more than one individual was buried in this grave. This is also supported by the five neck rings and a total of nine knives found in the grave. The likewise extensive cremation remains from this grave were found in a coffin-like wooden box with dimensions of 1.6 × 0.5 m (Fig. 12).²⁸

Grave 433A/1938 has the richest fibula jewellery of phases 5–7. No less than 14 pieces were found here, six penannular fibulae with polyhedral terminals, two cross-shaped fibulae, two disc fibulae as well as a fragment of another fibula of unknown shape. This inventory is also likely to be a multiple burial, of at least one man and one woman (Fig. 13).²⁹

Possible evidence of several individuals may also be present if more than one neck ring appears in the grave



Fig. 11. Linkuhnen graves 126A, 126B (background) and 127/1931 (foreground) (Gossler, Jahn 2019, pl. 71, 1).

(graves 21/1929, 37/1929, 71/1929, 152/1931, 174/1933, 401/1938 and 474/1938). Likewise, several belt buckles (graves 8/1929 and 174/1933), arm rings (graves 8/1929, 25/1929, 71/1929, 401/1938, 433A/1938 and 474/1938), finger rings (grave 474/1938), needles (graves 8/1929, 74/1929, 148/1931 and 174/1933) and hairpins (graves 48/1929 and 174/1933) from one grave could be interpreted in this direction. Among the other grave goods several knives (graves 122/1931, 123/1931 and 174/1933) and drinking horns (grave 178/1933) should be named.

Not only the high number of objects is remarkable but also the considerable size of the fibulae and neck rings. The massive crossbow fibulae with ring decoration³⁰ weight about 200 grams, the spiral neck rings about 500 grams each. All the finds add up to several hundred kilograms of iron and bronze grave goods. In 1929 alone 275 kg of bronze and iron grave goods were excavated.³¹ This is remarkable for a region without any local cooper sources.

The jewellery in male and female graves, however, is almost exclusively of local origin. Combined with the burial rites, which do not reveal any burial architecture, this is the main argument that the people buried in Linkuhnen were not Scandinavians, but belonged to the local Baltic population.

²⁴ Gossler, Jahn 2019, 261–264.

²⁵ Engel 1931, 317.

²⁶ Gossler, Jahn 2019, 357–358, pl. 35, 5–7, pl. 36, 1–4.

²⁷ Gossler, Jahn 2019, 374, pl. 71, 1–2, pl. 72, 1.

²⁸ Gossler, Jahn 2019, 400, pl. 106, 1–2.

²⁹ Gossler, Jahn 2019, 404, pl. 110, 1.

³⁰ Gossler, Jahn 2019, 144, fig. 81.

³¹ Engel 1931, 315.



Fig. 12. Linkuhnen grave 401/1938: a sword, 20 spearheads, a hairpin, nine fibulae, five neck rings and neck ring fragments, three bracelets and bracelet fragments, bronze spirals, seven glass beads, five amber pearls, a pendant, necklace fragments, 28 bronze spiral berlocks, 9 knives, two whorls, a bone comb, bronze fragments, wood fragments and textile fragments (Gossler, Jahn 2019, pl. 106, 1–2).



Fig. 13. Linkuhnen grave 433A/1938: a sword, two spearheads, 14 fibulae, five bracelets, five finger rings and finger ring fragments, necklaces, belt elements, two spindles, iron fragments, bronze fragments, textile fragments, ceramics and animal teeth. All grave goods were wrapped in textile and put in a wooden box (Gossler, Jahn 2019, pl. 110, 1).

The closest comparison to Linkuhnen is the site of Viešvilė,³² situated around 40 km upstream River Memel on the Lithuanian riverside, where two Viking Age cemeteries with the related settlements and another, earlier burial ground have been discovered. In particular, the cremation graves from Necropolis I show numerous direct parallels to Linkuhnen: larger pits with a concentration of cremated remains in wooden caskets, partly wrapped in cloth; grave goods of up to six swords and up to five spearheads in one burial complex (mostly of type E according to Petersen), with the weapons usually

severely bent. Their ensembles of costume elements are also of local origin.

The wealth of the weapon grave goods in Linkuhnen is therefore by no means singular in the Memel area, although still extremely remarkable in comparison to the Prussian or Curonian settlement areas. Such a wealth of weapon grave goods is also unique in the context of other regions of the North and Baltic Seas with noticeable Viking influence. Most remarkably, Linkuhnen is the site with the most Ulfberht swords in Europe.³³ The cultural autonomy of the local burial and settlement communities at sites like Linkuhnen or Viešvilė is beyond question. On the other hand, Weapon finds from the Viking Age and burials from the Roman Period have likewise been ascertained here.³⁴ Sources from the times of the Teutonic Order record a tribe of Scalovians/Skalvians, located between Prussians, Curonians and the Lithuanian Samogitians, with the centre of their lands near Tilsit and Ragnit.³⁵ It is likely that the cemeteries at Linkuhnen and Viešvilė can be associated with this tribe. The burial rites as well as the grave goods show many specifically local patterns;³⁶ at the same time, the groups were also integrated in a transregional network which encompassed the whole of the Baltic Sea region and even included Western and Central Europe.

Conclusions

Linkuhnen is indeed an outstanding site, but of a character different from that postulated by Carl Engel. Even though there is a Scandinavian element in the types of swords and spearheads, and even in some

³² Budvydas 2007a; 2007b; 2012; 2013.

³³ Geibig 1991, 116–123.

³⁴ Von zur Mühlen 1975, pl. 11, 3; Nowakowski 2006.

³⁵ Mugarėvičs 2000.

³⁶ Wróblewski 2006, 110.

jewellery in the grave goods from Linkuhnen, this cemetery is by no means a Viking cemetery: in contrast to other Scandinavian-influenced places on the southern Baltic coast, no Scandinavians were buried in Linkuhnen. There are no Scandinavian grave structures, all Viking Age burials are built directly upon the older Migration Period burials, leaving the deeper graves intact. Linkuhnen is a graveyard of local Baltic elites, most probably Scalvians (Schalauer), who changed their strategy of social representation when Scandinavians appeared on the southern shores of the Baltic Sea and the Balts could benefit from Viking Age long-distance trade.

Many graves are most probably burials of more than one person, often being a double grave of a man and a woman or of even more individuals. The high number of weapons makes us think of groups of warriors but the combination with a variety of jewellery also suggests the representation of clans or families. However, while the weaponry has some Scandinavian character, it is important to note that the other elements of the grave goods are almost entirely of local origin. There is no typical Scandinavian women's jewellery, such as oval brooches known from Wiskiauten. Observations similar to those at Linkuhnen can be made in Lithuania in the cemetery at Viešvilė³⁷ with comparable grave goods and treatment

of weapons, but this cemetery was occupied for a much shorter time and all the grave features are generally less pronounced than in Linkuhnen.

The wealth that we see in Linkuhnen grave goods of the 10th/11th century most probably came from the strategically ideal location of Linkuhnen at the point where all the arms of River Memel (Nemunas) meet. This position allowed for controlling the traffic to and from the Curonian Lagoon and therefore between the Baltic Sea and Scandinavia. The Memel was of interest for Viking-Age Scandinavians, who travelled from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea via the Eastern European river systems. If we assume that the Memel area was part of the long-distance silver trade routes to the Arab world,³⁸ then Linkuhnen was probably not a port of trade in this system but not much more than a transit station, because no trade indicators, such as scales and weights, were found here. The inhabitants of Linkuhnen probably benefitted from this trade by ways of taxes or fees. This would explain the wealth we see in the grave goods. However, this external input did not lead to closer interaction with Scandinavians but to an extended desire of local Baltic elites to show wealth within the community by extensive disposal of metal artefacts in the burial process.

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³⁷ Budvydas 2007a; 2007b.

³⁸ Bogucki 2016, 239, fig. 17.

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