PEOPLE OF THE CORDED WARE CULTURE IN THE EAST BALTIC REGION, LITHUANIA

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Introduction

The Corded Ware Culture, especially the question of its origin and nature of subsistence, is one of the best-known and the most controversial phenomenon of prehistory. Formed at the beginning 3rd millennium BC this cultural entity had covered the vast area extended from the Rhine River to the lower reaches of the Volga river, and from the modern Finland territory to the Carpathians (fig. 1). Various hypotheses were constructed: the Corded Ware Culture sometimes was determined as the secondary homeland of indo-Europeans or even called as the first migration period. The origin of the Corded Ware Culture in Lithuania, as far as in whole Eastern Baltic, had been analyzed for a century, though no solid opinion on this issue was reached. Three main approaches from the rich disputes on this problem could be derived: the formation of the Corded Ware Culture in the Eastern Baltic region in the middle of 3rd millennium BC is explained by massive migration of new settlers (Gimbutas 1980, 273-317), as the result of their episodic appearance (Girininkas 2002, 73-92), or as the result of the activities of local settlers (Lang 1998, 84-104).

The article proposes an overview of investigations of Corded Ware Culture in Eastern Baltic and discusses essential problems and difficulties in searching the origin and subsistence of the Corded Ware Culture communities with focus on landscape.

The following questions are put forward for analysis:

- what tendencies can be traced in comparing distribution of the Corded Ware Culture monuments with peculiarities of the geographical landscape (fertility, woodenness, bodies of water);
- what ecological niche had been the most suitable for the Corded Ware Culture people?

The nature of the Corded Ware Culture in Eastern Baltic

The Eastern Baltic Corded Ware Culture is represented by a little more than 100 Corded Ware Culture settlements and the similar number of the graves found in territory of modern Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia republics, and only part of them seem to undoubtedly belong to the communities of this culture. The criteria for "identification" of the Corded Ware Culture representatives are their anthropological peculiarities: outstanding massive character, dolichocranic. Other essential cultural criteria are also related to burial materials: the buried individuals were laid on their side in a bent position, the main burial items were a battle boat-shaped axe, a big flint-blade-knife, a flint hafted axe, cord-impressed pottery, sometimes ornaments (fig. 2). Analyzing the Corded Ware Culture burial sites of the East Baltic region, it appears that a few individuals were explored anthropologically and that a small number of radiocarbon dates are available.

The overall majority of the Corded Ware Culture settlements and casual discoveries are not „pure", the material is mixed with the artifacts of other periods and cultures. Also, only few traces of buildings are known. This fact is explained by most researchers by the temporary character of inhabited places. Supporters of non-local origin of Eastern Baltic Corded Ware Culture hypothesis regard these people as pastoralists (Rimantienė 1996, 221; Brazaitis 2005, 237) or some warlike prospectors or individual traders – certain intermediates, who provided the so-called local communities with cattle, grain or some kind of raw material (Girininkas 2002, 87; 2005, 174). The traditional explanation for the invisibility of Corded Ware Culture settlements was based on a nomadic pastoral subsistence strategy. The absence of settlement features in the Corded Ware period in Central and Eastern Europe has been puzzling since the 19th century and only recent

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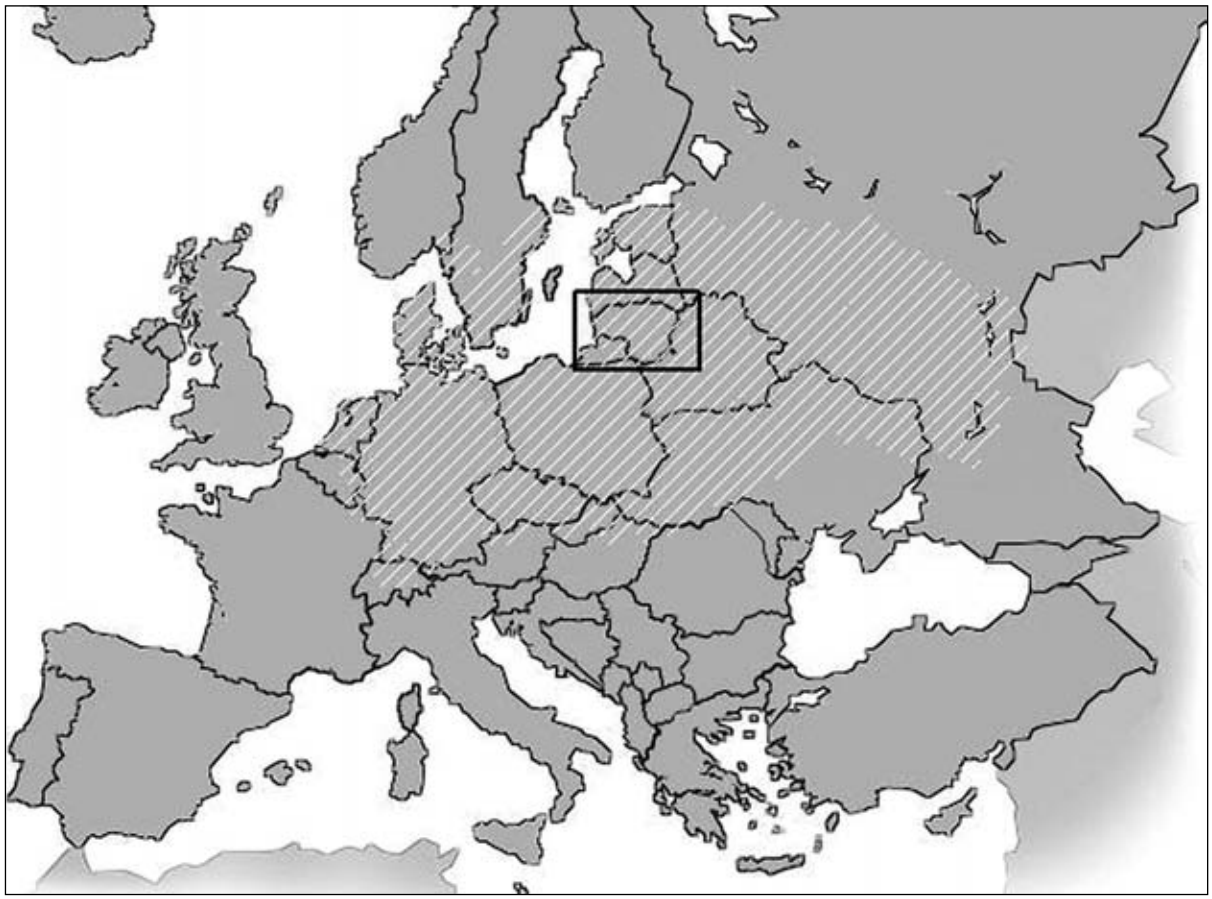

Fig. 1. Map of Corded Ware Culture distribution (with discussed area marked in square).

estimation the Corded Ware Culture groups as fully nomadic pastoral communities has been rejected. The developments from the field of physical anthropology contributed to challenging the nomadic character of Corded Ware Culture communities as well. Recent biomechanical analysis of the Corded Ware Culture's anthropological material did not show difference of mobility in Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age (Sládek, Berner, Sailer 2006, 470-482).

The hypothesis of autochthonous developed states, that the emergence of Corded Ware Culture was connected with the establishment of a new ideology involving new rites of burial custom, as well as changes in subsistence calling for a new, dispersed, settlement pattern, a hypothesis showing the development from collective to individual, could offer another explanation for the scarcity of the settlements. This hypothesis is based on the physical anthropology theses of rejecting anthropological types, meaning that the specific anthropological features of the Corded Ware Culture people – hyperdolichocrany, massive skeleton – fit well within the normal range of craniological variation. According to this model, the transition of local people included stages from the acquirement of primitive farming within previous settlement areas to the gradual relocation of primitive agriculturalists to new areas, and a primary extensive land use in there. In other words, the old lifestyle, foraging, lead to the use of old types in material culture, while farming required a new lifestyle and new forms in material culture (Lang 1998, 85-98).

Geographical landscape and distribution of Corded Ware Culture monuments

Despite the various opinions on Corded Ware Culture communities, most of researchers agree with its subsistence model: the basis of economy was pastoral stock-breeding, similar to the communities called the Globular Amphora Culture. The later has been discovered in Lithuania only during the few past decades and, therefore, there

is a lack of proper investigation about it, but studies in the neighboring countries show that Globular Amphora Culture and Corded Ware Culture people might hold different territories, despite their similar subsistence method (Machnik 1998, 16-27). Palaeobotanical data suggest the introduction and spread of a pastoral economy starting with the Middle Neolithic in the East Baltic (Antanaitis-Jacobs, Stančikaitė 2004, 252-258), which is before the appearance of features of Corded Ware Culture and Globular Amphora Culture, though in the Late Neolithic still existed communities, whose economy was based on hunting and fishing[1]. It is almost certain that the different models of economy determined the choice of the living place: the agrarian communities used to live in the areas with fertile soils and grasslands, and the non-agrarian communities settled in areas with rich natural resources (Brazaitis 2005, 203). Nevertheless, there have been discovered many mixed cultural complexes, but because of the lack of radiocarbon dating, the possibility of synchronizing the finding is narrow and therefore, there are no obvious evidences of territorial division at a first glimpse.

The mapping of the places of discoveries of the Corded Ware Culture (fig. 3), the Forest Neolithic (Narva and Nemunas) Cultures (fig. 4), and the Globular Amphora Culture (fig. 5) on the present Lithuanian territory shows some consistent patterns of distribution, especially the discovery places of boat-shaped battle axes (fig. 3/4) and ground flint axes (fig. 5/2), which are mostly stray finds. Boat-shaped battle axes are attributed to the Corded Ware Culture and ground flint axes – mainly to the Globular Amphora Culture (resent research shows, that ground flint axes appear to be no longer produced after the Late Neolithic; Brazaitis, Piličiauskas 2005, 95-96), they are absent in complexes of the monuments of Forest Neolithic, and, therefore, are good chronological and cultural indicators. Furthermore, the isolated findings, even if out of context, demonstrate the presence of human activity. Some researchers claim that isolated boat-shaped battle axes are from older, plundered, graves (Rimantienė 1974, 18; 1996, 222; Янитс 1952, 60). The biggest density of the Corded Ware Culture monuments can be seen in the western part of Lithuania while most of the Globular Amphora Culture findings are spread in the central and southwestern part. Most of the Forest Neolithic antiquities strings out in the eastern and southeastern territories.

The stock-breeding lifestyle required (and also established) specific environmental conditions. Pastoralists needed open fertile spaces to grass and started clearing woods for this reason. The best areas for pasture would have been where the most fertile soils were. In Lithuania this zone extends north-south in the Central Lowland of Lithuania (fig. 6). If compared to the distribution of the Agrarian Neolithic finding places, the biggest density of the objects falls in the southern parts of the most fertile soils. It seems that the Corded Ware Culture findings are spread along this zone. This could be explained by other advantages and shortcomings of landscape. For example, the relative scarcity of the agrarian (and also non-agrarian) monuments in the fertile Central Lowland of Lithuania could be conditioned by the absence of water resources as there are only few lakes (Kabailienė 2006, 27). Since the Stone Age lifestyle was closely connected to the presence of water resources, it is possible, that the area of Central Lithuania was not very attractive to both agrarian and non-agrarian communities.

The eastern and southeastern part of Lithuania is the territory, where the highest percentage of woodenness exists (fig. 7). Until the beginning of agriculture, forests covered almost the entire territory of present Lithuania, however, by the 18th century, the fields and meadows under cultivation were representing isolated islands within the general background of forests and swamps (Kairiūkštis 2005, 321-322). Unfortunately, there is no cartographical reconstruction of prehistoric forest coverage undertaken; nevertheless, the distribution of the monuments shows the sparse settlement of the agrarian communities, except two lake areas, where large concentrations of objects belonging both to Agrarian and Forest Neolithic communities are found. This is probably related to the importance of some specific peculiarities of the environment, for example, pollen analysis of the surroundings of one of the lakes (Kretuonas) indicated the presence of large fields of pastures in the Late Neolithic (Kabailienė 2006, 371).

[1] During last decades the terms of Forest Neolithic and Agrarian Neolithic began to establish, which describe the synchronic existence of communities with different subsistence methods. For the East Baltic, the first term is used for Late Neolithic Narva and Nemunas Cultures and the second one – for Corded Ware Culture and Globular Amphora Culture.

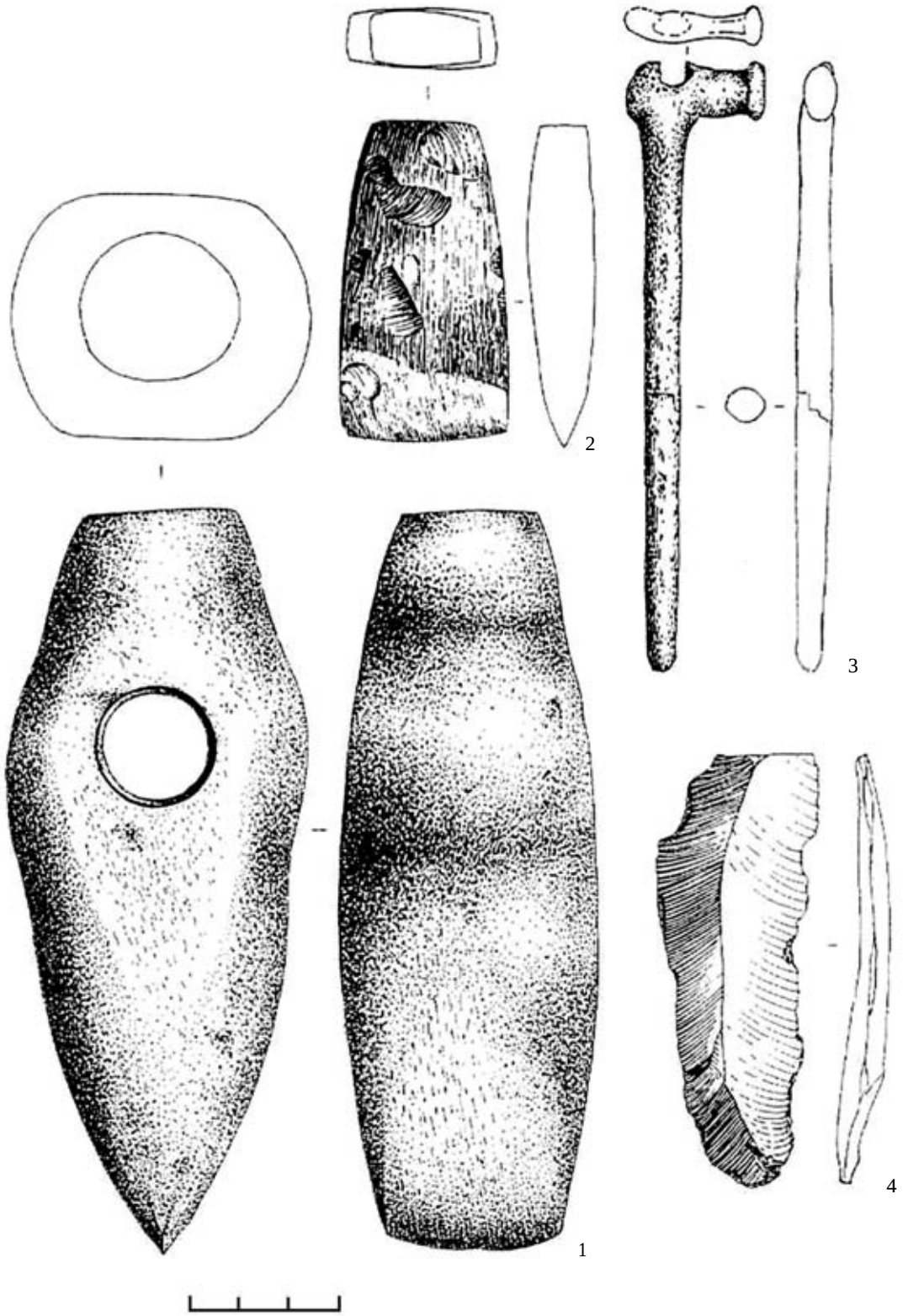

Fig. 2. Inventory of Gyvakarai (Lithuania) Corded Ware Culture grave: 1 - boat-shaped stone axe; 2 - hafted flint axe; 3 - bone hammer-headed pin; 4 - blade-knife (after Tebelškis 2000, 19).

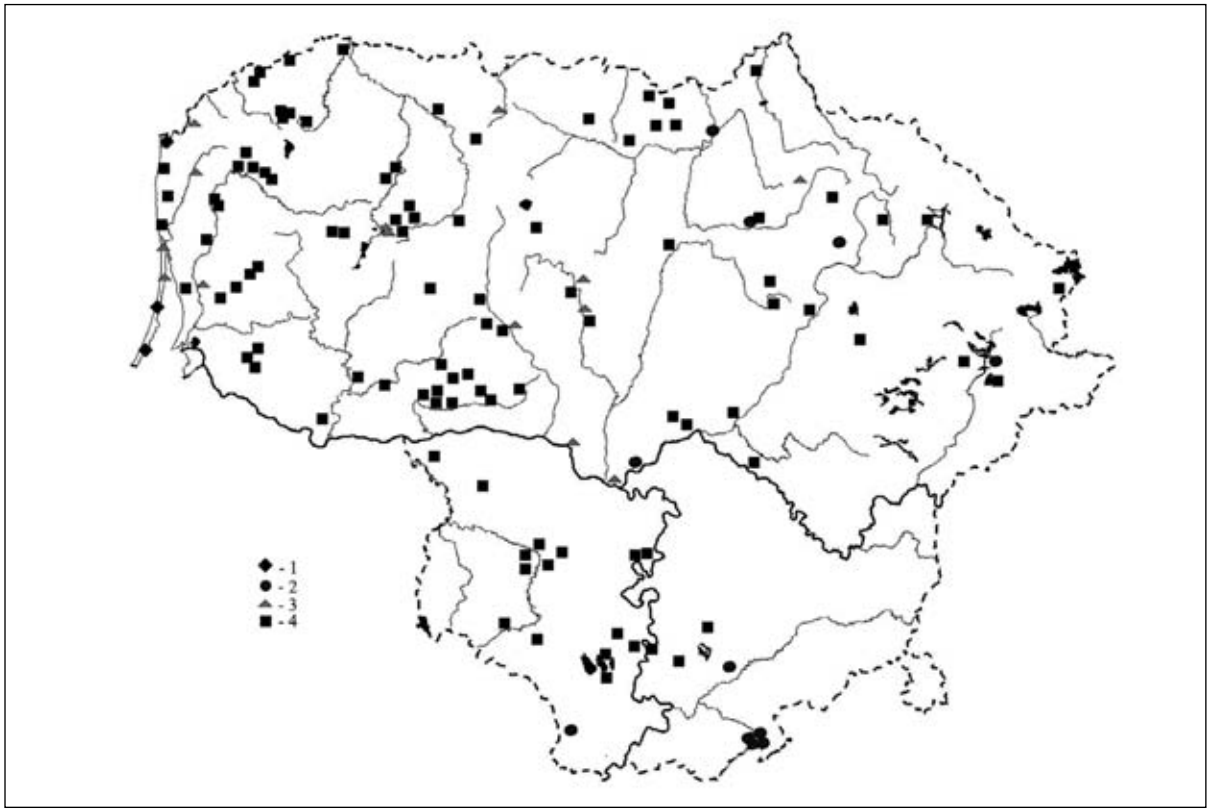

Fig. 3. Corded Ware Culture finds: 1 - settlements and pottery finding places of the Baltic Coastal (Rzucewo) Culture; 2 - settlements and pottery finding places of the Corded Ware Culture; 3 - graves of the Corded Ware Culture; 4 - boat-shaped battle axes' finding places (distribution after Brazaitis 2005, 236).

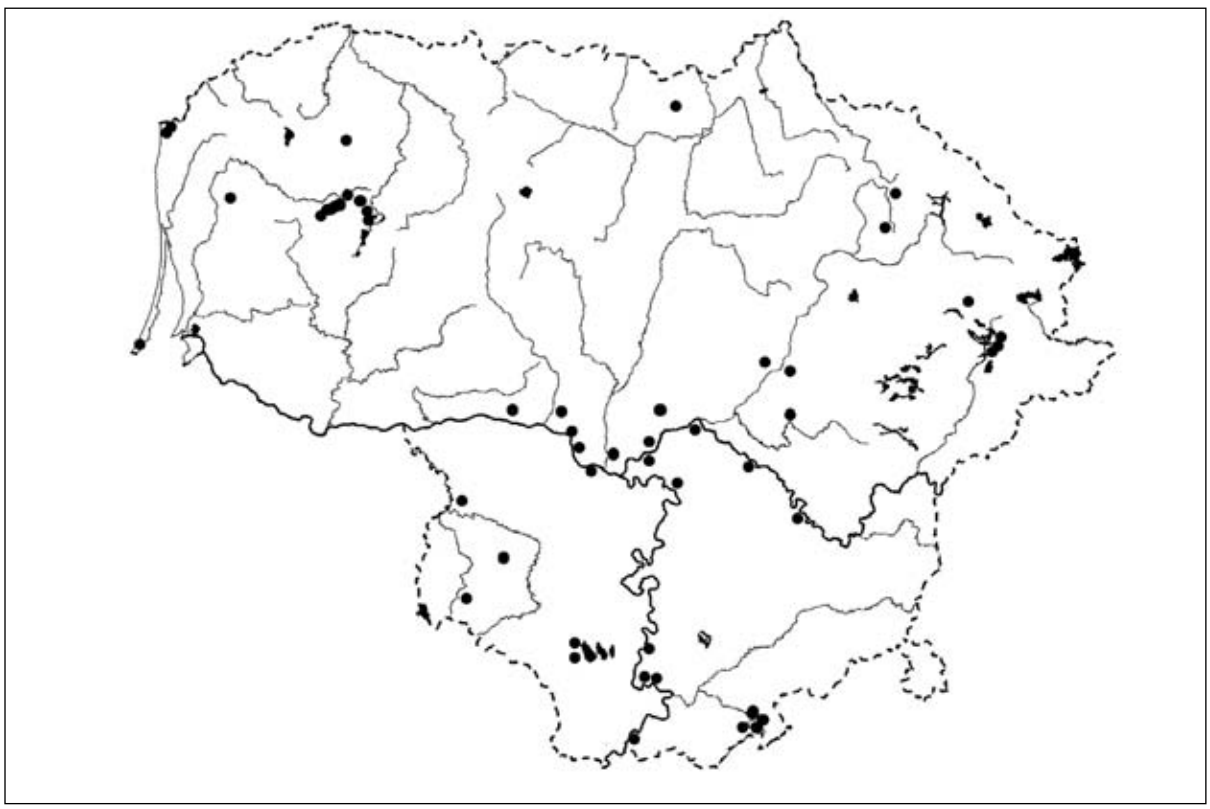

Fig. 4. Forest Neolithic (Narva and Nemunas Cultures) finds (distribution after Rimantienė 1996, 217).

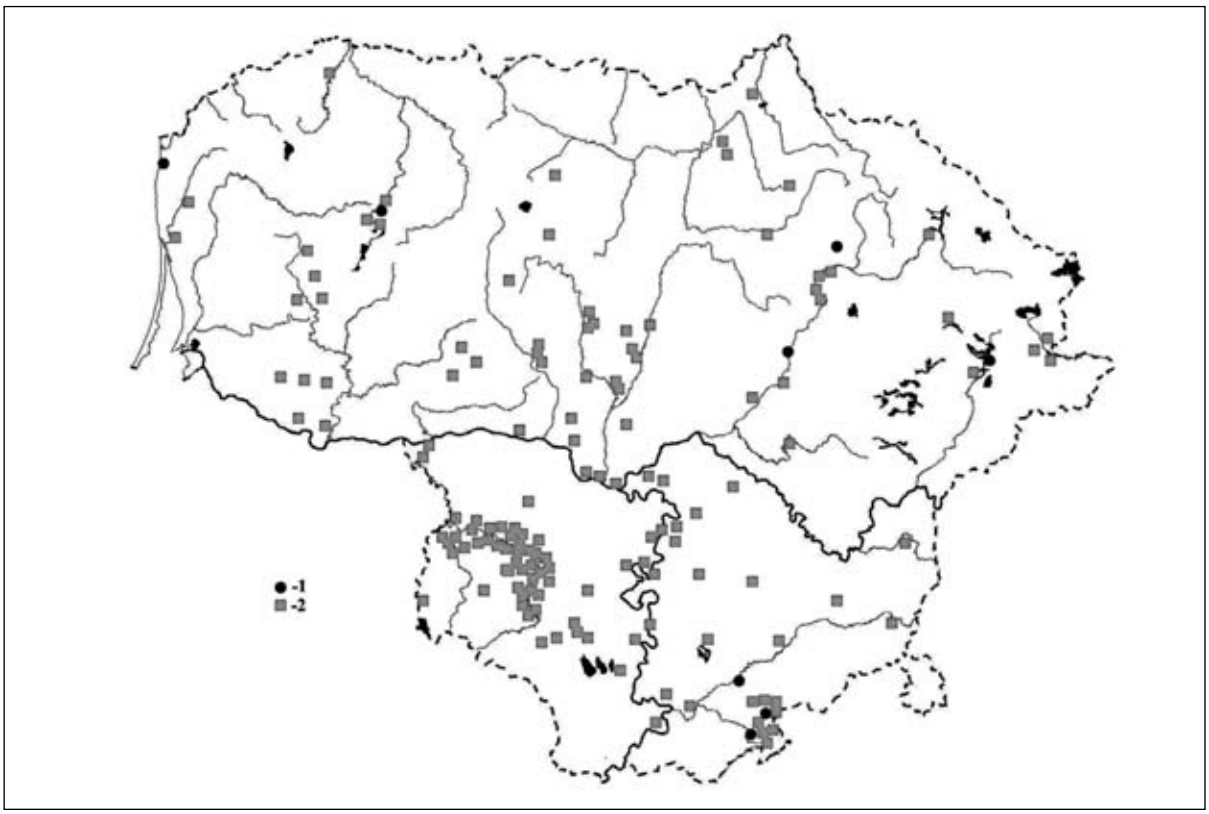

Fig. 5. Agrarian Neolithic (Globular Amphora Culture) finds: 1 - settlements and pottery finding places of the Globular Amphora Culture; 2 - ground flint axes' finding places (distribution after Brazaitis 2005, 222).

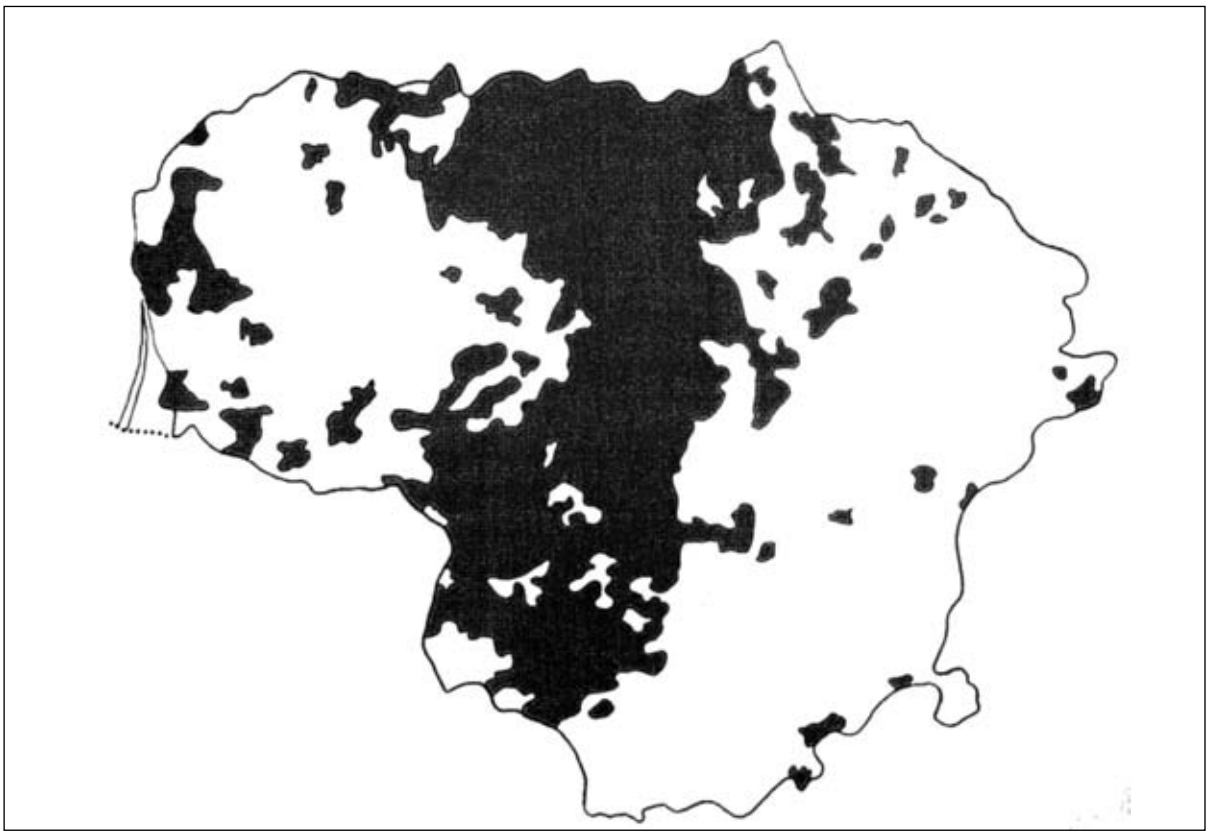

Fig. 6. Zones of fertility in Lithuania: ■ - zone of higher fertility, □ - zone of lower fertility (after Luchtanas, Sidrys 1999, 29).

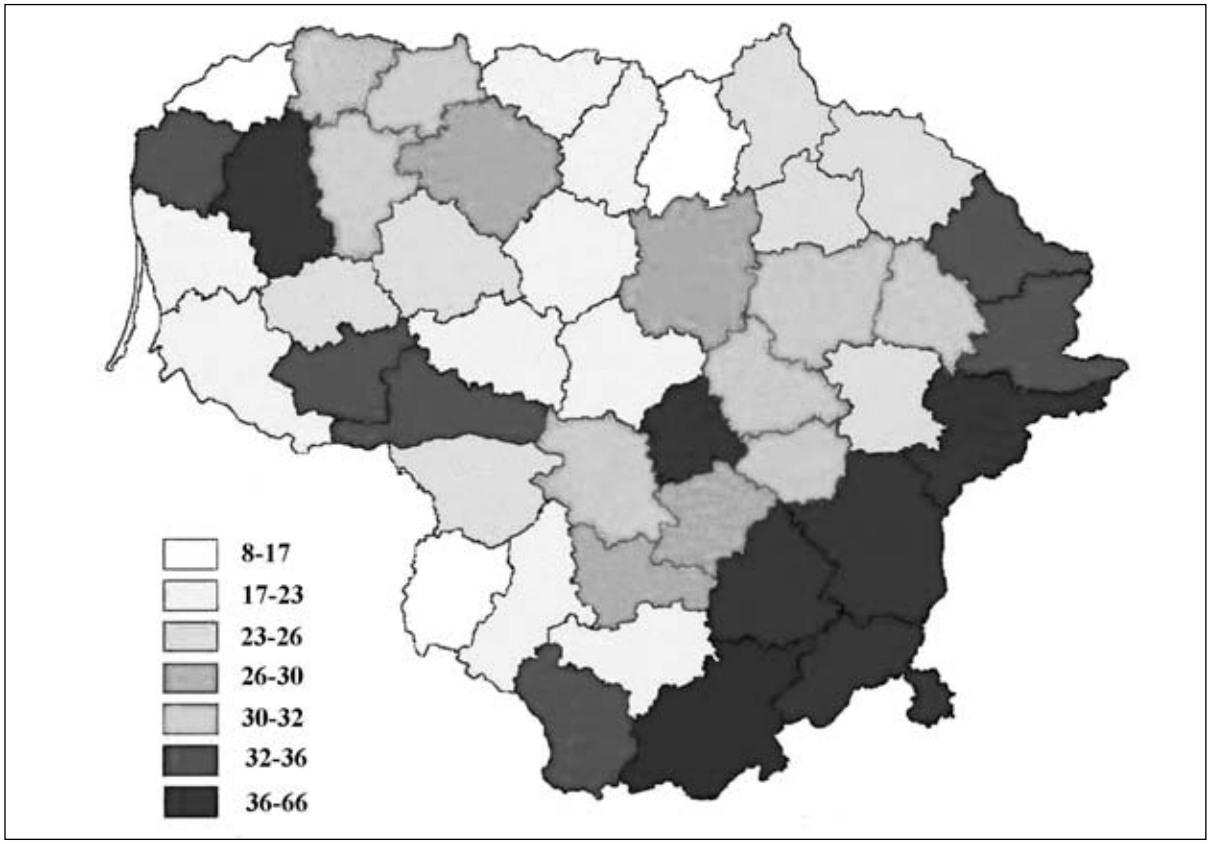

Fig. 7. Woodedness of districts in Lithuania (%) (after Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations project TCP/LIT/6613. State Land Survey Institute, 1998).

Final remarks

In conclusion, the mapping of the archaeological monuments and the confrontation of their distribution with such geographical conditions as soil fertility, woodenness or network of the water bodies, can offer basic information to the questions on cultural communities regionalism. The distribution of Late Neolithic objects shows the divisions of separate cultural groups with some overlapping territories (eg. the southern part of the Lowland of Central Lithuania), and the exceptions, like islands of big density of monuments of various cultures in relatively sparsely populated territories. The reasons of such distribution should be investigated at the micro-regional level.

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Populaţia culturii topoarelor de luptă din estul Mării Baltice, Lituania

Rezumat

Articolul propune spre atenţia cercetătorilor o privire de ansamblu asupra investigaţiilor întreprinse în arealul culturii topoarelor de luptă din estul Mării Baltice, apariţia căreia este datată cu mijlocul mileniul III a. Chr. Sunt discutate problemele originii şi subzistenţei comunităţilor purtătoare ale acestei culturi. Un rol deosebit în răspândirea culturii topoarelor de luptă, după părerea autoarei, au avut particularităţile mediului geografic (fertilitatea solului, gradul de împădurire, resurse acvatice etc.). De asemenea, în articol este întreprinsă încercarea de a localiza nişa ecologică pe care a ocupat-o populaţia culturii topoarelor de luptă.

Lista ilustraţiilor:

Fig. 1. Răspândirea culturii topoarelor de luptă (spaţiul în discuţie marcat în pătrat).

Fig. 2. Inventarul din mormântul culturii topoarelor de luptă Gyvakarai (Lituania): 1 - topor în formă de luntre; 2 - topor cu coadă din silex; 3 - ac din os în formă de toporaş; 4 - lamă de cuţit (după Tebelškis 2000, 19).

Fig. 3. Răspândirea monumentelor culturii topoarelor de luptă: 1 - aşezări şi situri cu descoperiri de ceramică ale culturii baltice de coastă (Rzucewo); 2 - aşezări şi situri cu descoperii de ceramică ale culturii topoarelor de luptă; 3 - morminte ale culturii topoarelor de luptă; 4 - situri cu descoperiri de topoare în formă de luntre (după Brazaitis 2005, 236).

Fig. 4. Descoperi neolitice (culturile Narva şi Nemunas) (după Rimantienė 1996, 217).

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Fig. 6. Zone de fertilitate în Lituania: ■ - zone de fertilitate înaltă, □ - zone de fertilitate joasă (după Luchtanas, Sidrys 1999, 29).

Fig. 7. Împădurirea districtelor în Lituania (%) (după *Food and Agriculture Organization* of the United Nations project TCP/LIT/6613. State Land Survey Institute, 1998).

Население культуры боевых топоров в восточной Прибалтике, Литва

Резюме

В статье рассматриваются основные результаты изысканий в ареале культуры боевых топоров в восточной Прибалтике, начало которой датируется III тыс. до н.э. Обсуждаются проблемы генезиса этой культуры, а также среды обитания. Важную роль в распространении культуры боевых топоров, по мнению автора, сыграли особенности географической среды (плодородность почвы, лесистость, водные ресурсы и др.). В статье, также, предпринята попытка локализации экологической ниши занятой населением культуры боевых топоров.

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Рис. 3. Распространение памятников культуры боевых топоров: 1 - поселения с керамикой культуры побережья залива (Жуцевская культура); 2 - поселения с керамикой культуры боевых топоров; 3 - могильники культуры боевых топоров; 4 - памятники, где были обнаружены топоры в виде лодочки (по Brazaitis 2005, 236).

Рис. 4. Неолитические памятники (культуры Нарва и Нямунас) (по Rimantienė 1996, 217).

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Рис. 7. Распространение лесов на территории Литвы (%) (по *Food and Agriculture Organization* of the United Nations project TCP/LIT/6613. State Land Survey Institute, 1998).

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