

# The Sun, the Moon, and the Orientation of Baltic Graves: A Mythological Approach to an Archaeological Problem

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This paper focuses on the predominating east-west orientation of Iron Age graves (5<sup>th</sup> century BC to the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD) and the reasons that could have caused the custom. Based on the data of Baltic mythology and their reflections in folklore, the authors argue that the mythological conception of grave orientation is closely related to the mythological path of the Sun and the image of souls leaving the world of the living. Given the astronomical opposition of the Sun and the Moon, the hypothesis is justified by the fact that, when the graves of men and of women in the Baltic burial grounds adhering to the east-west axis, were oriented in opposite directions, the burial customs could have been affected by the mythological images of the heavenly family: the Sun (wife) and the Moon (husband).

KEYWORDS: Balts, Iron Age, burial rites, archaeoastronomy, mythology, folklore

The search for symbolic meanings in archaeology is an attractive but challenging task. A theoretical possibility of research, cognitive archaeology in our case, requires special thoroughness and attention. When seeking harmony between the archaeological finds and the mythological images, a number of difficult questions have to be answered; it is necessary to renounce any preconceived ideas and to substantiate research assumptions and hypotheses in a consistent manner, by providing substantial arguments.

The orientation of grave pits and the bodies of the dead is a part of the burial rite, an expression of mythological images. However, hitherto existing attempts of archaeologists to explain why a grave is oriented toward one or another cardinal point have not fully exhausted the opportunities of research on ancient religion and society. At the choice of researchers, contemporary scientific knowledge of the universe has frequently been unjustifiably transferred to prehistoric times, e.g., cosmological images that have a religious meaning have frequently been considered to be the expression of ancient astronomical achievements (Jovaiša 2002: 13).

The authors of this paper are offering an opportunity to study the directions of the burial of the dead from the viewpoint of mythology instead of that of astronomy. This will be done based on the provision that mythological studies do not mean the interpretation of single disassociated images, underpinned by certain astronomical knowledge; rather,

they mean an analysis of the mythological logic, which has penetrated into the culture, and a system of interconnected meanings.

It is not easy to find data on the conception of the orientation of the dead prior to the introduction of Christianity, as burial rites, described in greater detail as late as in the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the folk beliefs related to them have been covered with a thick layer of the Christian worldview. The main source of our reconstruction of the pre-Christian worldview is folklore that preserved the reflections of mythological images and ancient rites. The archaic traits of burials in ancient times can be traced in oral folklore and songs (cf. Greimas 1990: 113–253; Korzonaitė 2003; Racėnaitė 2011; Vaitkevičienė 2013).

Folklore is a multilayer fabric in which the worldview provisions of different epochs can be detected. Thus, for example, the studies of fairy tales open up the knowledge preserved in the narrative tradition in the form of the images, motifs, and logical structures of different ways of burial: the burial of dead bodies in the earth or cremation, as well as secondary burial of bones (for more detail, see Vaitkevičienė 2013: 102–103). Folklore is a depository of the knowledge of the past in which one can discover a set of moral choices and solutions. From that totality existing in a latent form, in specific historical periods, only a small part of values-based provisions is used and start functioning in the religious life of society. Based on the same mythological narratives, over time, ever new solutions are actualized in compliance with the worldview and the moral provisions of that period.

An analysis of a mythological way of thinking alone does not allow researchers to identify the structures found in myths and folklore with the cultural models of specific prehistorical societies. Such an opportunity arises only upon disclosure of the correlation between the folklore and the archaeological data, and in the case in question, between the images of the afterlife and the traits of the burial rites identified in archaeological excavations. Unfortunately, some larger-scale research on the orientation of the dead still needs systematized statistical data on the pre-historical burial grounds in Lithuania and the directions of grave pits.

The plans of the hitherto excavated barrows and burial grounds witness that the grave orientation was affected by various factors: the geography of the burial place, the topographical position, customs, etc. Thus, the grave of the first deceased in Paragaudis barrow XXIV (Šilalė district), dating back to the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, was oriented precisely toward the north, while the second, equipped by extending the barrow in the south-east direction, along the longitudinal axis of the annex (Fig.1) (cf. Apals et al. 2001: 269, Fig. 193). The graves in the Baliuliai barrow cemeteries (Švenčionys district), dating back to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century AD, were directed toward a sand hill in the environment of the burial site whose archaeological exploratory excavation did not produce any significant results (Kurila 2013). In the Gintališkė burial ground (Plungė district), inhumations of the Late Iron Age, as well as cremated human remains in inhumation pits, were parallel to the flow of the Salantas stream (Fig. 2).

Even when the deceased were buried in rows, the orientation of the grave pits often varied. That could have been affected by the visible and invisible objects of the environment; for example, in Stungiai, Joniškis district, a row of graves of the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD was curving, as if the pit of each grave was directed toward a hill or a stone

in the west (Fig. 3). Finally, it is worth noting that, in the burial grounds used for a longer time, different chronological groups of graves were characterized by a great variety of orientation directions (cf. Kazakevičius 1993: 10–11, Fig. 9). One of the predetermining factors for that is believed to have been the orientation of the grave pits toward celestial bodies. Moreover, it is important to emphasize that numerous Baltic burial grounds of the Iron Age were characterized by the burial of men and of women in the pits dug in precisely the same directions; however, men were laid with their heads towards the west, and women, towards the east (Fig.4).

The present paper focuses on the predominating orientation of the Iron Age graves (the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC to the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD) in the west-east direction. The key points of the study include the position of a non-cremated body of the deceased (what is oriented) and the position of celestial bodies with respect to the cardinal points (what the body of the deceased is oriented toward). The authors chose the interpretive models that were most clearly visible in Baltic mythology; however, their identification with specific archaeological cultures, or even with burial sites, is the task of future research.

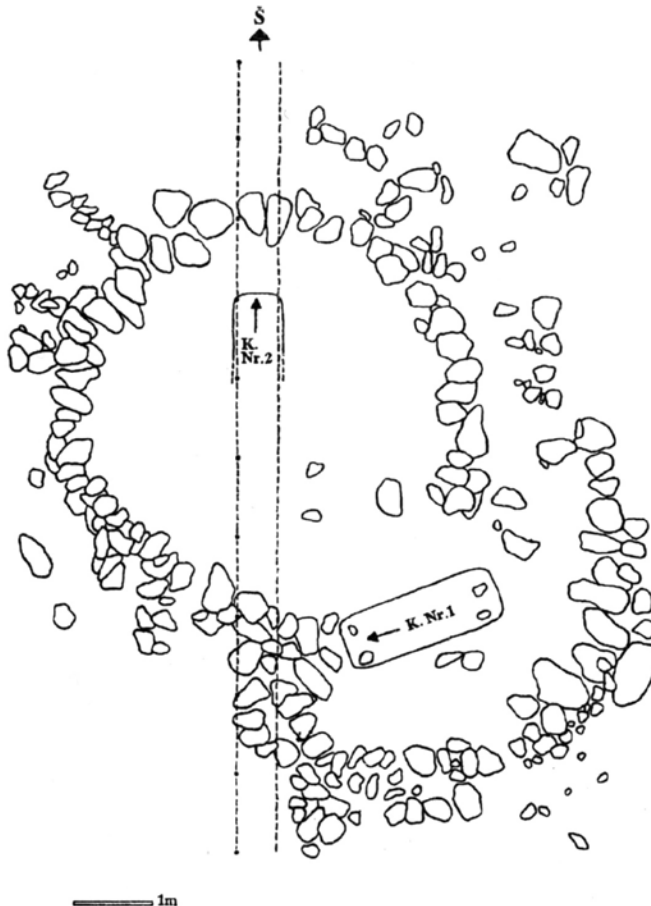


Fig. 1: Plan of Paragaudis barrow XXIV (Michelbertas 1997: 177, Fig. 189)

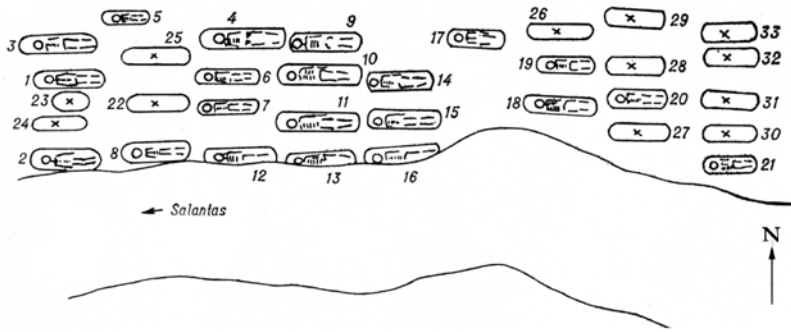


Fig. 2: Excerpt from the Gintališkė burial ground excavation plan (x: cremation graves; without scale) (Vaitkunskienė 1979: 45, Fig. 2)

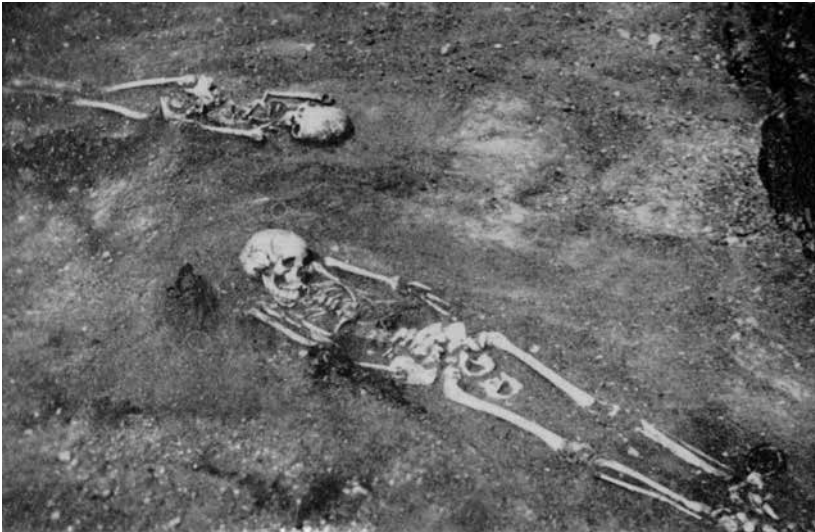


Fig. 3: The Pagrybis burial ground (Šilalė district). Men's and women's graves. The 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century. (Vaitkunskienė 1995: 159)

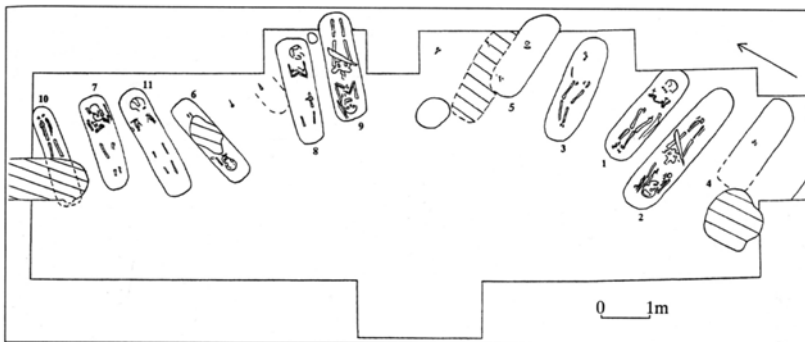


Fig. 4: Excerpt from the Stungiai burial ground excavation plan (Vaškevičiūtė 2000: 227, Fig. 1)

## ASTRONOMY IN LITHUANIAN ARCHAEOLOGY

Astronomical interpretation of archaeological monuments and phenomena has been known in Europe for years. In Lithuania, astronomy acquired significance in the 1980s, when an archaeological expedition led by Vldas Žulkus discovered postholes on the Birutė Hill in Palanga (Žulkus 1986), interpreted as a Curonian place for the observation of celestial bodies on the Baltic seacoast, dating to the late 14<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century AD (Klimka 1986). Shortly thereafter, data were made public about a stone circle discovered in the Užpelkiai burial ground (Kretinga district) from which the points of the sunrise and the sunset on the horizon were sought (Bliujienė 1992: 76–77), as well as on the pits in the ancient settlement of Dauglaukis considered by researchers to have been “a site of spatial orientation” (Tauragė district) (Malonaitis 1992: 47)

Astronomical models were also applied to the interpretation of burial monuments. Mykolas Michelbertas related the orientation of the Late Iron Age grave pits to the directions of the sunrise and explained the variety of the burial directions by the fact that the deceased were buried in different seasons (Michelbertas 1986: 228; cf. Jaskanis 1974: 216–218). Eugenijus Jovaiša developed the statements in the dissertation devoted to the burial grounds of the 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries in Central Lithuania (Йовайша 1987; 1989). In his opinion, on the day of the burial, the ancient inhabitants used to direct the bodies toward the visible point of the sunrise or the sunset: the bodies of women were oriented toward the point of the sunrise, and of men, toward the point of the sunset (Jovaiša 2002: 8). Jovaiša assumed that the graves beyond the boundaries of the interval of the sunrise directions (i.e., the solar arc) were directed toward the rising high Moon<sup>1</sup> or the position of the Little Bear constellation (Йовайша 1989: 101; Jovaiša 2002: 8). When considering the setting of the sunrise and sunset azimuths on cloudy days, the author stated that, for such cases, “some astronomical equipment must have existed in the environment of the burial grounds” (Jovaiša 2002: 13).

Jovaiša acknowledged that the numbers of the dead buried in different directions were very different and explained the fact by certain periods of an increased mortality rate:

In winter and summer, burials were rare; most of the burials happened in spring (the end of February and March) and in autumn (the second half of October and the beginning of November). As one becomes familiar with works on medicine and biological climatology, the phenomenon no longer seems difficult to believe and even looks natural. (2002: 9)

To substantiate the argument, the author presented the statistical data on the Lithuanian population mortality rates for 1925 to 1926. As demonstrated by them, the highest mortality rate in those years was in March and August, and especially high in December (18.63% of all the deceased over 1926), while in June, the mortality rate dropped to 15.75% (Jovaiša 2002:10).

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<sup>1</sup> Every 18.61 years, the Moon rises further north and south of the sunrise and sunset azimuths.

Even though seasons affect people's physical and mental health, and therefore can affect the mortality rate, Jovaiša's substantiation to the effect that in the environs of Kaunas, Central Lithuania, over the period of the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, most women died and were buried at the end of January through February and at the end of September through October, while most men died in the periods of February to the beginning of March and the end of September through October, seems unjustified (Jovaiša 2002: Fig. 8–9).<sup>2</sup>

A similar hypothesis of the directions of grave pits demonstrating seasonal trends in mortality rate was raised by the Danish researchers Klavs Randsborg and Klaus Nybo, who believed the orientation of bodies in the Bronze Age graves to have depended on the day of the funeral. In their opinion, bodies in the Viking Age burial grounds near Birka in Central Sweden were buried in accordance with the season: in winter, in the North Hermland burial ground, during equinoxes, in the South Hermland burial ground, and in summer, in Borg (Randsborg, Nybo 1986: 170–171).

In different areas of Lithuania, the directions of the burial of the dead in the Iron Age differed and were based on different models. To explain that, Jovaiša argued that, in the period of the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, the cult of the Little Bear prevailed in the lower reaches of the Nemunas River, while in Central Lithuania, “the cult of the Sun predominated, while the cult of the Moon and the Little Bear was much less noticeable” (2002: 15). Jovaiša accounted for the differences in the worldviews by relating them to economic activities (without any more detailed discussion); he also suggested that the increase in the graves oriented toward the north-south in Central Lithuania in the 3<sup>rd</sup> through the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD reflected the changes in the society: the rise of nobility whose graves could have been oriented toward the Little Bear in the north (2002: 14–15). To substantiate all these hypotheses, the author did not refer to the data of the Baltic mythology, Lithuanian ethnic astronomy, or the comparative research of cultural anthropology; therefore, they are to be considered mere guesses.

#### ORIENTATION OF THE DEAD BODIES: ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND MYTHOLOGICAL CONCEPTIONS

In their research documentation, archaeologists measure and indicate the position of the head of the deceased with respect to the cardinal points. If the bones of the body are entirely decayed, the axis of the grave pit is measured. Frequently the dimensions become very important characteristics of the archaeological culture or the ethnic burial custom; thus, for example, the Roman Iron Age Sudovian graves in barrow cemeteries are characterized by a north-south orientation (for more detail, see Michelbertas 1986: 73–77).

Archaeologists are well aware of the fact that, after the introduction of Christianity, the heads of the deceased were first directed westwards. Thus, in the late 14<sup>th</sup> through

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<sup>2</sup> The celebration of the Eve of Lent (Mardi Gras) in spring (around February to March) was associated by some researchers with the burial of those who died in winter; however, in summer, there was no necessity or possibility to keep the bodies of the deceased unburied until autumn.

the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in the Alytus burial ground, as many as 912 bodies (82.2%) were buried with their heads towards the northwest, west, and southwest (Svetikas 2003: 147–149). Based on the Christian worldview, the deceased were obliged to look eastward: on the Last Judgment day, the Lord was to appear from there; only the deceased clergy could allegedly turn towards the deceased and thus face the west (Svetikas 2003: 49–150; cf. Zugaiar 2012: 6). For comparison, Lithuanians in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century believed that the head of the deceased was to be directed southward or towards the tombstone crucifix: “it will be easier to suffer in hell” (Balys 1981: 821, 822). As argued by others, it was important to have “one of the grave pits facing the church, since, when the deceased stands up for the Last Judgement, he has to face the throne of God” (Balys 1981: 823, 824).

As shown by the examples, the interpretation of the body orientation in the grave could have been based on different starting points: either refer to the direction of the face of the deceased, whose significance was emphasized by the Church, or to the direction of the head, usually recorded in the reports of archaeological excavations.

In his statistical calculations, Jovaiša chose the direction of the head of the deceased as a reference point (Йовайша 1987), while Michelbertas spoke of the importance of the direction in which the deceased faced: “The faces of the dead were turned eastward, towards the land of the rising Sun, or westward, towards the one of the setting Sun” (Michelbertas 1986: 228). Žulkus, who investigated Western Lithuanian burial rites of the 8<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD, also settled for the direction in which the deceased faced: “The deceased men were buried so as to ‘see’ the world of the dead, and women, so as to ‘see’ the husband [...] In a patriarchal family, the supremacy of a man did not give rise to doubts” (Žulkus 1993: 32).

Randsborg and Nybo, when studying the Bronze Age burial rites in Denmark, also chose the viewpoint as a reference point; they stated that the dead were buried facing the Sun: “At the same time we have supported the suggestion that we are not seeing different rules for graves with heads to the east and to the west. The ‘facing’ direction seems to be what is important in both cases” (Randsborg, Nybo 1986: 165).

Given the fact that the reference point in archaeological research can be diametrically opposed – the direction of the head or the face of the deceased leads to different interpretations – it is necessary to look for new, hitherto unused data. We shall attempt to determine how the issue can be accounted for by Baltic mythology.

It is very difficult to find arguments to justify the direction of the head of the deceased, as there are almost no mythological data on the subject, and any such considerations are essentially not promising. The direction of the face of the deceased, typical of the Christian tradition, looks much more promising: in accordance with it, a grave is understood as the place for the deceased to lie (rest) until the day of the Last Judgement comes. That is associated with keeping the vigil, watching, and waiting: the deceased is facing “the throne of God” which is to appear in the east. However, in the case of the prehistoric Baltic graves, the mythologemes of the vigil and resurrection do not apply. The sources of the Baltic mythology reflect a different way of thinking – the efforts made for the deceased to reach the world of the dead as quickly as possible and to negotiate the intermediate space in the shortest possible time; since that was related to the body

decay process, the cremation of the body or other rites were used for the purpose. Proper burial of the body predetermined a successful transfer of the deceased to another world, while the deceased who was not buried could not leave the world of the living (for more detail, see Vaitkevičienė 2013).

Different conceptions of the after-death state (the deceased person's waiting *vs* leaving, lying *vs* moving) encouraged us to turn toward the Baltic burial grounds for the data related to the ability of the deceased to move and also to invite researchers to change the focus from the direction of the view of the deceased to that of the legs (feet, soles) and to the images of their leaving for another world. At that point, it is worth remembering Žulkus' reflections about the direction of orientation of the 8<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD graves in the peripheries of the Curonian and Samogitian lands, which could have depended on the topography of inter-tribal wastelands or larger or smaller uninhabited areas between the lands: "The graves of peripheral burial grounds were usually oriented towards the outside of the tribes and lands [...], depending on the direction in which the world of the dead was imagined to be" (Žulkus 1989: 108–110; 1993: 28–29)<sup>3</sup>. For comparison, a similar logic of burial was typical of the Viking Age burial grounds in Iceland, where the deceased were mainly buried in a position to have them looking away from homesteads (Zugaiar 2012: 158).

In accordance with Lithuanian folklore, the souls of the buried dead never stayed in one place: they did not keep vigil but moved, walked, and travelled. Thus, for example, the retold dreams dealt with the inconveniences caused by improper grave goods: the daughter who had had the dowry linen cloth rolls put into her grave by her mother had to carry them everywhere and found it very difficult to walk. The mother who had had her daughter's dress put into the coffin by her sister had to keep the dress in her hands when walking so as not to drop it (Marcinkevičienė 1997: 24). It was very important not to bury a body with the legs tied (as they would not be able to walk); great attention was devoted to shoes that had to be convenient, not too tight or too large (Balys 1981: 546; Vaitkevičienė, Vaitkevičius 1998: 131, 132). Alternatively, the issue of shoes may have reflected the significance attached to them later, as, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, people in Dieveniškės (Šalčininkai district) still believed that the deceased ought to be buried barefoot: "barefoot, they will run to God's judgment faster" (Racėnaitė 2011: 233).

In addition, tales told about the paths of the souls, and in laments, the deceased was referred to as a "dear traveller" who was on a journey to his dead relatives (Žičkienė 2003: 31; Racėnaitė 2011: 230). The Lithuanian burial rites of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed close attention to the footwear of the deceased or to their feet, cf.: "in order not to be afraid of the dead, one has to kiss their soles or the big toe," or "when the father dies, the daughters and sons have to kiss his feet in order to live to the father's age" (Balys 1981: 483, 485). "Do not kiss the face, as you will mourn and cry for a long time. Kiss the feet; then you will promptly forget" (Vyšniauskaitė et al. 1995: 495).

<sup>3</sup> However, it has to be noted that the precise boundaries between lands and tribes can be clearly seen only on small-scale maps (e.g., 1: 10,000,000), while detailed grave distribution plans witness, with some exceptions, the diversity of the orientation of the deceased, predetermined by a number of different factors.



The direction of orientation of the deceased, based on the feet as a point of reference, was witnessed by abundant ethnographical materials: the body was taken to the cemetery only feet first (Vyšniauskaitė et al. 1995: 454). For comparison, the adages “to turn the feet towards the door” (LKŽ: XIV 65), “You will have enough of everything when you are lying feet to the door” (LTR 2746/202), or “(Somebody) returned home feet first” (LTR 5598/246) also referred to death.

All these data provide grounds to believe that the image of the leaving deceased was typical of Baltic mythology, and it was specifically on this basis that the mythological conception of the grave orientation could have formed. Such a hypothesis contradicts the conclusions of Jovaiša’s research, which placed emphasis on the direction of the head of the deceased, however, as we shall soon see, it supports the idea of his and other archaeologists that, in the equipment on the grave and the burial of the deceased, attention was paid to the Sun.

### SOULS AND THE SUN

In the collection of Lithuanian folklore of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, compiled by Lithuanian folklore collector Hubertas Gudelaitis, an adage from Švenčionys district was recorded: “Have you put your feet together with the Sun’s feet if you know so much of everything?” (LMD III 29/19-4). The saying “to put your feet together with somebody else’s feet” means nothing else but lying in such a way that the soles of two individuals’ feet would rest against one another. The adage looks puzzling and, at first glance, difficult to interpret due to an unexpected image: a reclining man puts his feet together with the Sun’s feet. It calls for a wider explanation of the mythological context.

Sunset in Baltic mythology was seen as the travelling of the Sun to another world. By setting each evening, the Sun went down a mythological road. Typically, from the sunset to nightfall, people used to set aside all their work, and they would call the time “the gray hour”, a holy evening, or the Sun’s path, cf. “After the sunset, the mistress of the house allowed the hired girls to leave their works: it was the time to celebrate the Sun’s path” (LTT: 26323). It was a must to celebrate that time, and nobody could do any work, and particularly to spin, in order not to “spin” (to block up) the Sun’s way. “Nobody can spin at sunset not to spin the Sun’s feet (to block its movement)” (LTT: 26314), cf. “By spinning, you will spin (block) the Sun’s paths” (LTR 792/131-44).

The Balts believed that those who did not celebrate the “Sun’s path” and ignored the prohibition would never be able to enter heaven (Viķe-Freiberga 1995; Vaitkevičienė 2001: 136). In accordance with the Baltic worldview, the souls of the leaving dead were following the Sun along its path, and the rose garden cultivated by the Sun in heaven became their temporary abode (for more detail, see Vaitkevičienė 1997: 29–31).

The adage “Have you put your feet together with the Sun’s feet” was not the only one. It belonged to a large adage group in 55 versions, with the majority of them using *God* instead of *the Sun*, e.g. “You have not put your feet together with God’s feet” (LTR 545/131-45). The comments of folklore collectors made it clear that the adage was used

when doubting the possibility of predicting the future or knowing the time of death: “You never know what will be”, “Do not pretend to know everything”, “You are not in the coffin yet, so all kind of things may happen to you”, “You do not know when you will die”, “None of us negotiated our death with God, so we do not know”, etc. (LPP: 515–516). The adages largely referred not to the general prediction of the future, but rather to not knowing the time of one’s death, which was mentioned in the vast majority of the explanations and named in adages in which the Sun or the Moon were replaced by death personified, e.g. “You never know, having not put your fingers together with Death’s fingers” (LTR 5213/214). Therefore, the adage “Have you put your feet together with the Sun’s feet” could be seen as one of those rare cases when the adages could have preserved the message about the orientation of the deceased person’s feet toward the sunset.

The earliest source of the adage in question was *Lexicon Germanico-Lithvanicum et Lithvanico-Germanicum* by lexicographer Jokūbas Brodovskis of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, which recorded the following version: *Dar fu Diewu Pirβtais ne fudurei, pamokis Leilios Dienos* [You have not yet put your fingers together with God’s fingers, and hard days will teach you] (Lebedys 1956: 342). Brodovskis explained the meaning of the adage as “you have not yet seen the evenings of all the days”, in other words, “you have not yet lived all of your life”. Even if the Sun was not named in the adage, the evening mentioned in Brodovskis’ explanation was a typical metaphor of the end of a human life.

There were more Lithuanian proverbs and adages that referred to ancient burial rites; for example, when speaking of a debtor, people would say: “He will repay in ash after death” (LTR 545/131-85), “After his death, he will repay in coals” (LTR 3017/38), or “After my death, I’ll repay in embers” (LTR 3859/841a). The proverbs take us back to the time when the cremation of the dead was practised in Lithuania (the earliest facts of cremation were known from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, see Petrauskas 2017).

When discussing the relationship between the burial rites and the Sun, it is important to note that the funeral time could have been adjusted to the position of the Sun in the sky. The idea is suggested by folk songs that revealed that funerals took place at sunrises or sunsets: in the transitional period when day turned into night or vice versa (the time is called *sqvartos* in Lithuanian, i.e. the shift or the change). As indicated by folk beliefs, the said period was also considered to be a typical time of death: people believed that “[nobody] died either in the daytime or at night, and if they died, it happened just seldom. What was different was the time of the *sunvartos*, i.e. either it was the end of the night or the end of the day” (Kriauza 1944: 21).

Folklore and ethnographic data attached more importance to the sunset and night than to the sunrise. Night was directly related to the time of the dead, i.e. feasts to honour the dead were held in the night time (Vaitkevičienė, Vaitkevičius 1996: 214), and the eve of Christmas dinner, devoted to the dead of the family, would start after sunset, with the rise of the Evening Star (Venus) (Kudirka 1993: 86).<sup>4</sup> The sunset brought the longing

<sup>4</sup> Cf. The remains of the funeral dinner would be left on the table until sunrise, as the deceased, if they are satisfied with the funeral ceremony, return to the community that night and thank for the attention to them (Balys 1981: 94).

for dear people who were no longer alive; there is a tale about the mother who buried her daughter and who “in the evenings, after the Sun would hide behind the hill, would call: *Buže, Buže, come home*” (Basanavičius 1998: 227).

The importance of the sunrise and sunset in the Baltic worldview is obvious; however, the need or the ability to accurately measure the point of the sunrise or sunset when digging a grave pit in prehistoric times gives rise to doubts. Based on Swedish archaeological materials, Jonathan Lindström pointed out that all the prehistoric graves in Sweden were basically oriented toward one of the cardinal points (directions), but not toward any specific astronomical azimuth (Lindström 1997: 119–121).

Unfortunately, currently, we do not have sufficient knowledge or studies of the awareness of the cardinal points in the Baltic countries. Lithuanian ethno-astronomer Jonas Vaiškūnas argued that the point of the midsummer sunrise in Lithuania was called high summer mornings, and of the sunset, high summer evenings; accordingly, the midwinter sun was rising in high winter mornings and setting in high winter evenings (Vaiškūnas 2006: 171). In the 1784 topographical descriptions of parishes in Vilnius Deanery, the cardinal points were defined as summer and winter mornings (i.e. northeast and southeast) and summer and winter evenings (i.e. northwest and southwest). Between the summer and winter evenings, there was the north, or midnight, and between the winter mornings and evenings, the south, or midday. The remaining points were described as intermediate, e.g., between the north and summer mornings, between the summer and winter evenings, or between winter mornings and the south.

In order to coordinate the mythological understanding of the orientation of the deceased, the data on the Sun’s relationship with the souls, and the fact that, in a number of prehistoric burial grounds in Lithuania, men and women were buried in opposite directions, we need to examine the case of the Moon.

## THE SUN AND THE MOON

The Sun had a great significance in the conceptions of death and burial, and its divine role in Baltic mythology was no less important, as reflected in hundreds of Latvian songs (Viķe-Freiberga 1995). As gods and goddesses seldom acted alone, their significance and content were revealed as a result of their relationships with other gods. In Baltic mythology, the Sun, as the Goddess Sun, had a family: she was married to the Moon (a male God Moon), and their children were stars (Razauskas 2011: 137).<sup>5</sup> At first, the heavenly family lived in harmony, but later they quarrelled and separated, and therefore, “now the Moon and the Sun never rise or set together” (Balys 1951: 8). The myth was based on the astronomical lunar cycle: the Waxing Crescent rose immediately after the sunset, and, as it got fuller, it started staying behind and appearing increasingly further away from the point of the sunset with every night. Finally, at the phase of the Full Moon,

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<sup>5</sup> The Moon and the Sun are extremely rarely called brother and sister; orphans would call them father and mother.

the Moon rose in the east after the sunset and, after shining the whole night on the sky, towards the morning, he met the morning star Aušrinė (Venus). According to the myth, he fell in love with her. The marriage of the Sun and the Moon was destroyed. Then God Perkūnas of Lighting and Thunder, to defend order and justice, split the Moon with a sword, and it started shrinking (Rėza 1958: 93).

The Moon, often called “young God” in Lithuanian, like the Sun, was related to the souls of the dead, only in his own way. In Lithuanian prayers to the Moon, people asked, after their death, to stay in heaven with the Moon: “Oh young Moon, the Prince of Heaven – let my soul after my death be together with you in heaven” (Balys 1951: 12; Greimas 1990: 173).

The studies of the mythological meanings of the Sun and the Moon’s movement on the sky demonstrated that the round-the-clock solar cycle and the directions of its rise and setting, from the semantic viewpoint, correlated with the change in the lunar phases over a month, but not with the Moon’s movement per 24 hours (for more detail, see Vaitkevičienė 2001: 134). *The sunset* and the meanings of the *eastern* direction (growth and vitality) corresponded to the meanings assigned to the *Waxing Crescent*; the time of the *sunset* and the *western* direction, which in folk beliefs was related to decay and death, correlated with the *Waning Crescent*, while the Sun’s rise to the zenith *at midday* (the direction of *the south*) semantically corresponded to the *Full Moon* (Fig. 5)<sup>6</sup>.



Fig. 5: A schematic of correlation of the Sun’s movement on the sky and the mythological meanings of lunar phases. (Vaitkevičienė 2001: 134)

In the case of the Moon, its appearance and disappearance during certain specific phases were given special prominence, as well as the fact that the direction of its appearance could change dramatically: from the west to the east. The Waxing Crescent, which was considered sacred in the Baltic tradition, appeared in the west, and this point more or less corresponded to the direction of the Sun’s setting. However, the Full Moon, whenever it was the largest and the brightest, and by its shape similar to the solar disc, rose in the opposite side, in the east, like the Sun. The Full Moon that rose in the east,

<sup>6</sup> True, the large annual solar cycle also has analogous meanings; however, we do not have any significant data on the mythological content of the time of the Moon’s rise or setting.

only not in the morning, as the Sun, but in the evening, was the night-time equivalent of the Sun, moving along the same path of the sky, yet at a different time of the day. The Sun stayed on the sky in the daytime, and the Moon, at night; they replaced each other, as emphasized by a Latvian folk song:

Oh, dear Sun, dear Moon,  
 How nicely you change places:  
 Where the Sun rises in the morning,  
 The Moon comes in the evening (LDe 33735)

In contrast, the opposition was evident not only when comparing the time of the day, but also the trajectory, which varied depending on the season: as proved by the materials of ethnoastronomy, the path on the sky travelled by the Sun in summer (rising in the northeast, rising high, and setting in the northwest) was travelled by the Moon in winter. Conversely, in winter, the Sun rose in the southeast, rose low, and set in the southwest, while in summer, that was a typical route of the Moon, as “the Moon follows the paths of the Sun” (Vaiškūnas 2009: 14). Therefore, the directions of the rise and setting of the Sun and the Full Moon represented basically the same path, travelled by the celestial bodies at different times.

The close relationships of the Sun and the Moon in the phase of the Waxing Crescent, followed by the disintegrating balance between them which led to the emerging opposition, were significant in many respects. That was the mythological reflection of the family ties of the gods in heaven. The story that repeated each month was dramatic; the setting Sun left its place to the Moon rising on the opposite side of the vault of heaven. At the breaking point, the Sun and the Full Moon were on one axis (the Sun in the west, and the Moon in the east), and they were almost equal in size, appearance, and power. All the power area, space, and time were equally divided between them.

The opposition of the Sun and the Moon did not depend on the season, it repeated every month and could be clearly observed in the sky, and especially in a Full Moon, when, after the Sun had set in the west, the Moon rose in the east. The mythological model, which expressed the differences between the Sun and the Moon in their heavenly family, could have been used to interpret the directions of burial in the Baltic burial grounds. As the points of the rise and setting of the Sun, the appearance and disappearance of the Moon overlapped, it would be impossible to identify which celestial body they had been oriented toward, based merely on the directions of the body orientation. However, in such cases when men and women in the same burial ground were oriented in the opposite directions, as in Central Lithuania in the 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century AD and in a number of other burial sites where the graves of men and women in the same (or parallel) rows<sup>7</sup> were oriented in opposite directions (for illustration see Bertašius 2005: 140, 147, 169, 183, etc.), the probability was high that not one, but two components had been used as

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<sup>7</sup> Based on the data of archaeological excavations, man and woman on that straight line evidently ought to be depicted with their heads put close together.

reference points and that the gender polarization was based on the opposition of the Sun and the Moon. Both celestial bodies moved along the same route, and their travel time was synchronized: when setting (leaving), the Sun took away the day (light) to the world of the dead, while the Moon, bringing the night (darkness), opened the gate for souls. In compliance with such logic, in the model with two cosmological components, the best time for funerals was the sunset.

## CONCLUSIONS

The statement by Eugenijus Jovaiša, established in the historiography of Lithuania, to the effect that, on the day of the funeral, Ancient Balts turned the dead bodies toward the visible points of the sunrise (women) or sunset (men) and that the directions of the grave pits in the burial grounds of Central Lithuania dating back to the 1<sup>st</sup> through the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD reflected seasonal trends in the mortality rates of the population, were supported by mere astronomical calculations, but not by the cultural research data. The authors of the present paper, in search for cultural justification, propose to apply the materials of Baltic mythology to the archaeological interpretation of the burial directions. The studies prove that the pre-Christian period was characterized not by the image of the waiting deceased, as in Christianity, but by that of leaving souls. The latter formed the mythological conception of the grave orientation in which significance was assigned to the direction of the feet, and not of the head, of the deceased; for the reconstruction, adages are meaningful that depict a human being, resting the feet against the feet of the Sun (God, Death). In Baltic mythology, the image of the Sun's feet is closely related to the sunset, which is represented as the setting of the Sun, i.e. its leaving for another world along with a mythological path.

Given the fact that, in numerous Baltic prehistoric burial grounds, men and women were buried in opposite directions, not only the data on the Sun but also on the Moon are significant. The astronomical confrontation of the Sun and the Moon in the sky makes it possible to hypothesize that in such cases, when the graves of men and women, by observing the east-west axis, were oriented in opposite directions, the burial rites could have been affected by the mythological images of the heavenly family – the Sun (wife) and the Moon (husband). However, the impact of those two celestial bodies on burial rites is believed to have been based not on the azimuth calculations, but on the division of the surrounding environment into two, four, six, and possibly even eight parts. The mythological meanings of those spatial sections have yet to be thoroughly investigated.

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## СОЛНЦЕ, ЛУНА И ОРИЕНТАЦИЯ БАЛТСКИХ ПОГРЕБЕНИЙ: МИФОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ ВЗГЛЯД НА АРХЕОЛОГИЧЕСКУЮ ПРОБЛЕМУ

ДАЙВА ВАЙТКЯВИЧЕНЕ, ВИКИНТАС ВАЙТКЯВИЧЮС



В литовской историографии закреплено положение археолога Э. Йовайша о том, что древние балты своих покойников в день похорон ориентировали в точку восхода (женщин) либо захода Солнца (мужчин); ориентация могильных ям в могильниках Центральной Литвы I–IV вв. якобы отражает сезонные тенденции смертности и свидетельствует о том, что в течении года были два основных периода похорон – весенний и осенний, которые в свою очередь могут быть сопоставлены с некими календарными праздниками. Эти и некоторые другие положения не были автором обоснованы данными балтской мифологии, литовской этноастрономии, исследованиями культурных антропологов других стран и народов. По этому положения Э. Йовайша автора статьи считают лишь предположениями.

В данном исследовании материалы балтской археологии наш взгляд от религии спасения – для христианства характерно обращение лица покойника на восток – направляет на ноги либо ступни; живые стремились что-бы душа покойника достигла мир умерших за самое короткое время. Обосновано мнение, что для периода балтской религии было характерно представление не ожидающих, а уходящих душ. Именно таково представление существенно влияло на мифологическое понимание ориентации могил древних балтов. Для данной реконструкции большое значение имеют поговорки (самая древняя из них была включена в литовско-немецкий словарь начала XVIII в.), которые изображают человека и Солнце стыкнутыми между собой ногами (в некоторых вариантах на месте Солнце также изображается Бог либо Смерть).

В балтской мифологии мифическое представление о ногах Солнца является тесно связанным с заходом Солнца, который по своей мере изображается как уход по мифической дорожке в иной мир. Известно также поверие о том, что все те, которые неотмечают «дороги Солнца» (это пора дня между заходом Солнца и сплошных сумерек) после смерти не попадут в небесное царство.

Стремясь соотнести между мифическим пониманием ориентации покойников и данных о связи Солнца с душами мертвых, а также учитывая факт что в большинстве предисторических могильников древних балтов с труположениями мужчины и женщины были похоронены в противоположных направлениях, в дальнейшее исследование была включена также Луна.

В балтской мифологии Солнце (Lith. *Saulė*, fem.) имеет семью: она выходит замуж за Луну (Lith. *Mėnulis*, masc.), звезды считаются их детьми. Тесные связи между Солнцем и Луной, которые позже разваливаются и превращаются в конфронтацию, во многих отношениях важны. По существу, это мифическое отражение семейных связей человечества, семейная драма небесных богов, которая повторяется каждый месяц. Необходимо

подчеркнуть, что в точке разлома Солнце и Луна находятся точно на прямую, они равноценны величиной, видом и силой; по ровным полом между ними разделена вся власть, пространство и время.

Заходя на западе Солнце уступает место для полной Луны, которая становится видимой на востоке. Это астрономическое явление является мифологическим отражением биологических различий между полами. Появляется возможность по другому смотреть на ориентацию умерших у древних балтов: основным факторов для ориентации могил мужчин и женщин в противоположном направлении в могильниках Центральной Литвы I–IV вв. является не один из азимутов (напр., точки восхода Солнца), выбранный археологами, а очная ставка между Солнцем и Луной, для которой пора года не имеет никакого значения; она очевидна каждый месяц при полной Луне.

Азимуты восхода и захода Солнца, также точки появления Луны пересекаются, по этому ориентация умерших по направлению восток–запад не может ответить на конкретный вопрос в сторону Солнца либо Луны они были направлены. В этих случаях, когда в одном могильнике мужчины и женщины захоронены по противоположным направлениям, вероятно, влияние на это произвели оба небесные тела, также общая половая поляризация, основанная на конфронтации Солнца и Луны; кроме того, следя за моделью с двумя космологическими компонентами, самым правильным временем для похорон являлся заход Солнца.

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