
Animal tooth pendants and burial customs at the Kreiči cemetery, south-eastern Latvia

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Abstract

The well-known Zvejnieki cemetery with 330 burials is one of the largest hunter-gatherer cemeteries in northern Europe and has overshadowed the more than 100 other Stone Age burials known from the territory of Latvia. At the Kreiči cemetery, situated in south-eastern Latvia, twenty-three hunter-gatherer burials were excavated in the 1950s, making it one of the major Stone Age cemeteries in the country. This paper presents the little-known Kreiči burials and the "life history" of this hunter-gatherer burial ground. We approach the topic through the analysis of grave properties and burial practices, and especially through the osteological analysis of animal remains from the burials. Funerary practices and grave inventories (including the choice of used animal species) partly differ from the ones recorded at the Zvejnieki site. All in all, Kreiči is characterized by variable and specific features in burial customs (such as numerous double burials and interments in sitting or prone position), and provides spatial depth and nuances to the image of hunter-gatherer burial archaeology and the previous knowledge on the Stone Age mortuary practices in the Eastern Baltic area.

Keywords: Stone Age, hunter, gatherer archaeology, mortuary practices, Latvia, animal tooth pendants

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