

Stone casting moulds from Tērvete hill-fort

Summary

The article analyses 25 finished and semi-manufactured stone casting moulds found at the hill-fort of Tērvete, dated to the 11th–13th century.

In terms of construction they all are two-part moulds, consisting of two plaques, one of which has a carved cavity of the object to be cast, while the other (the lid) has a small carved recess for casting a loop. The moulds in the series examined here have such small runners that they would have been suitable only for casting tin. The depth of the cavities generally varies between 1 mm and 1.5 mm, less commonly reaching 2 mm or more. In some cases the edges have been very finely ground, even polished.

In accordance with the conclusions of E.Brīvkalne, who directed the excavation, one section of the moulds (16 pieces) were found almost in one place within a structure that she denoted as building F (Fig. 1). Two of the moulds were found in building C, which Brīvkalne regarded as a foundry. Only 8 moulds and one semi-manufactured piece were found outside of buildings F and C.

Ten moulds have been used for casting metal; another eleven are unused. In the case of two moulds it is not determinable whether or not they have been used. In two cases production of the mould has only begun: they are semi-manufactured piece.

Analysis of the moulds provides information on the working of stone: cutting, grinding and polishing. Among the moulds there are seven reversible moulds having two sprues: one at the top and another at the bottom of the face of the mould, these being technically somewhat more complex than moulds with a single sprue (Fig. 2, 3, 7, 8, 18, 22).

Tin objects cast in the moulds are rare finds, on account of what is known as tin pest, and so it is necessary to investigate the cavities of the moulds, which provide additional information about the diversity and distribution of dress decorations and pendants.

Mould lids make up the largest number of finds (Fig.2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13. followed by moulds for floral-design dress elements (Fig2., 3, 18, 22, 23. 24, 25), and

circular pendants (Fig. 5, 6, 18, 21). There are two particularly significant moulds: for a two-winged insect (Fig. 3) and a rhombic pendant (Fig. 4).

Particularly interesting is a mould for making bird pendants (Fig. 20), which, along with the great number of bronze bird figurines, both flat, openwork examples and figurines in the round, as well as lunulae, miniature axes and circular pendants or solar symbols, supplement the evidence regarding ancient Semigallian beliefs. The strong resemblance of the Semigallian pendants, especially the various bird pendants, to the Late Iron Age pendants of the Livs can be explained in terms of the close cultural and trading links between the Livs and the Semigallians. Confirmation of these links comes from Daugmale hill-fort, which had a mixed ethnic composition in the 10th–12th century, being inhabited by Semigallians and Livs.