

KALINA SKÓRA

HOW MUCH DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE OPENING OF GRAVES IN THE CEMETERY IN CZARNÓWKO? SOME REMARKS ON THE BASIS OF RESEARCH IN 2017¹

The paper discusses results of research on grave opening in the cemetery of the Wielbark Culture in Czarnówko. It is based on excavation works which were carried out in 2017 and were aimed at preparing a precise documentation of trenches which disturbed burials. Additional support was offered by geomorphologic, anthracological, and anthropological analyses. An interdisciplinary approach offers a chance to provide answers to questions concerning the time and methods of post-funeral interferences at Czarnówko and in other cemeteries of the Wielbark Culture. In the next stage, issues concerning the aim (robbery or ritual) and the cultural identity of originators of grave disturbances can be addressed.

KEY WORDS: Wielbark Culture, Czarnówko, Roman Period, grave opening, robbery, funerary ritual

INTRODUCTION

In a summation of the *Grabraub* phenomenon as discussed from the archaeological point of view, Heiko Steuer (1998) made two conclusions which are relevant for the Roman Period. The first one says that cremation cemeteries in Germania were not plundered or were disturbed to a small degree only. After the discovery of the deposit in Łubiana, Kościerzyna District (Mączyńska 2011) it became

evident that such a view should be modified (Fig. 1). The other one concerns a similar infrequency of disturbance of so-called princely graves from the Early or Later Roman Period. This scale of disturbance was assessed as sporadic and in this period it was in all probability chiefly an effect of comparing our knowledge on grave opening between the Rhine and the Oder in the first centuries AD with that on mass plundering, sometimes referred to as “epidemic” (Klevnäs 2013, 7) which took place in necropoles from the Merovingian Period and earlier ones from the Migration Period. Another period in the history of Europe which was peculiar from this point of view was the Early Bronze Age

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Fig. 1. Górzycza, Słubice District – example on an opened cremation burial of the Wielbark Culture. After Socha 2017

(Steuer 1998, 518). An opinion on this infrequency of grave opening was also expressed by Ch. Kümmel (2009, 176).

This researcher generally accepted previous observations of H. Steuer and other scholars (2009, 178), but noticed differences with regard to this phenomenon between regions of Northern and North-Eastern Central Europe and Northern Europe, as exemplified by cemeteries, among others, in Masłomęcz (Kokowski 2007, 133-141) or in Slusegård in Bornholm (Crumlin-Pedersen 1995). The problem of frequency of opening of magnificent graves cannot be assessed properly. Findings of J. Peška (2002, 56-62, Table 1-2) concerning the publication of materials from a magnificent grave in Mušov in Moravia mention a disturbance of only 6 of out 130 elite graves from the Early and Late Roman Period. These observations are not a direct reflection of the actual status quo, but rather to a great degree they demonstrate the state of research and an amateurish nature of exploration in the late 19th and the first decades of the 20th c.

The problem of “plundering” of graves is rather strongly present in necropoles in Central and Central Eastern Europe from the Roman Period, as well as in those which were later used in the Migration Period. In these cemeteries, the main burial custom is inhumation (or it is of the same importance as cremation). The phenomenon of grave disturbance is also one of key problems of funerary or post-funerary rituals of the Wielbark Culture (Tempelmann-Maczyńska 1989; 1992; Andrzejowski et al. 2002; Kokowski 2007, 133-141; Skóra 2017a; 2017b). An identification of the time of interference is of extreme importance for interpretations; however, there are

no unequivocal grounds for going beyond a general statement that graves were disturbed in the Antiquity or soon after the burial (Okulicz, Bursche 1987, 212; Hahula 1994, 136; Kurzyńska 2015, 95).

In the cemetery of Czarnówko (Fig. 2) the ratio of disturbed graves is about 90%. This means that it is the highest among all known necropoles of the Wielbark Culture². This top place is a result of not only legibility of post-funeral interferences at the site, but to some degree it is an effect of unfavourable soil conditions, which limit the detectability of trenches at other sepulchral sites.

The phenomenon of grave disturbance may have its explanation which goes beyond the level of archaeological evidence. At this stage of identification, a definition of this phenomenon as a robbery is not unequivocally proved. On the other hand, in order to go beyond this easy interpretation it is necessary to analyse finds not only from the cemetery in Czarnówko, but to examine the issue within the entire Wielbark Culture. It seems that using semantically neutral terms such as “opening” or “disturbing” of graves is not burdened with any interpretation, as opposed to “robbery” or “plundering” (cf. Aspöck 2005; 2011, 299-300; Kümmel 2009, 109-120; Dobos 2014, 136).

The cemetery in Czarnówko is above an average with regard to the wealth of grave goods of people who were buried there. Thus, without doubt it could have been attractive for groups of individuals who would undertake grave opening for gain pur-

² Kind information from Agnieszka Krzysiak from the Museum in Lębork.

A question whether the opening of graves was undertaken only for material gain reasons or it is a manifestation of actions which were motivated otherwise will be discussed in another part of this paper. Due to the quality of grave goods from Czarnówko, the “robbery” motivation naturally seems to be the most significant. Of course, on the basis of an elite nature of this cemetery, one must also consider a possibility that the opening of graves may have had a symbolic meaning. It may have been a strategic tool for an exchange of social elites (Kümmel 2009, 55), or possibly an intentional destruction with no gain motivation (cf. Andersen, Lind, Crumlin-Pedersen 1991, 43-48; Crumlin-Pedersen 1995). It is certain that it is necessary to gather more data in order to select one possible answer to the question: robbery or ritual? In the case of Czarnówko this means a need to analyse pieces of information which were acquired for more than 2000 graves which have been recorded so far and to examine the cemetery as a whole³. This, as demonstrated by recent discoveries, is a task for at least a few years (Krzysiak et al. forthcoming). It is also important to identify settlements in the closest neighbourhood. Data on their number and time of use is also significant, e.g., in order to identify the cultural identity of individuals who disturbed graves or to find out whether such actions were socially accepted.

Excavations in 2017 were aimed at preparing a precise documentation of so-called robbery trenches and their relation to grave pits disturbed by them. One of more important research tasks is to obtain such finds from these trenches which would allow to establish a chronology of disturbances. Such attempts are sometimes successful (cf. Stadler et al. 2005; Aspöck 2011, 309; Lau, Pieta 2017), but usually the trenches do not contain finds whose discovery context demonstrates that these items got into the trenches at the time of opening. A precise identification of time is crucial for proposed interpretations. In other cases, what is helpful is an assessment of the state of preservation of dead bodies or wooden structures in grave pits at the time of opening. In result, we obtain a general piece of information which is usually based upon general findings of forensic medicine (it almost never takes particular conditions for a given site or grave into consideration). This general piece of information states that the disturbance took place before, in the course of or after a complete decomposition of the body and wooden structures. Other essential aspects of the discussed phenomenon is the way of treatment of the dead body or the skeleton (manipulation with remains, moving, breaking or destroying of bones or taking them away from the grave) and a determination whether the trenches were filled up. Anthropological and geomorphologic analyses were necessary to discuss these issues.

RESULTS OF RESEARCH IN 2017

In the course of excavations which in 2017 (Fig. 3) focused on the south-western zone of the necropolis, 120 features of various functions were recorded. Apart from inhumation graves of the Wielbark Culture with traces of post-funeral interferences (which were of special interest), cremation graves of the Oksywie Culture, post-holes and

pits of unspecified function were also discovered (Fig. 4). 62 inhumation graves were uncovered altogether and these were generally dated to Phases B2a and C1b. Due to the lack of furnishings in many features, which may reflect the original status quo or be a result of depriving the dead of part or the whole furnishings after the burial, in many

³ The multicultural necropolis (Site 5) in Czarnówko has been excavated for more than 40 years. Starting with the first discoveries in 1972, the fieldwork was led by Doro­ta Rudnicka from the Archaeological Museum in Gdańsk until 2000. These excavations uncovered 443 burials. The next research stage commenced in 2008 upon the initiative of the Museum in Lębork. More than 1800 new features were discovered until 2018, a majority of these being sepulchral features.

The earliest horizon of the necropolis in Czarnówko is marked by a putative burial of the Corded Ware Culture, an

Early Bronze Age grave, and then by graves of a community of the population of the Pomeranian Culture (Kasprzak et al. 2011, 412; Krzysiak 2013, 139-140). The latest phase is represented by inhumation graves from the Early Middle Ages (Wadył 2015). However, burials from these periods are a small fraction of features which were revealed at the site. A vast majority are graves of populations of the Ok­sywie and the Wielbark Cultures (Strobin 2014; Krzysiak, Andrzejowski 2015). In the Migration Period, the cemetery was used by people who probably came from Scandinavia (Schuster 2015).

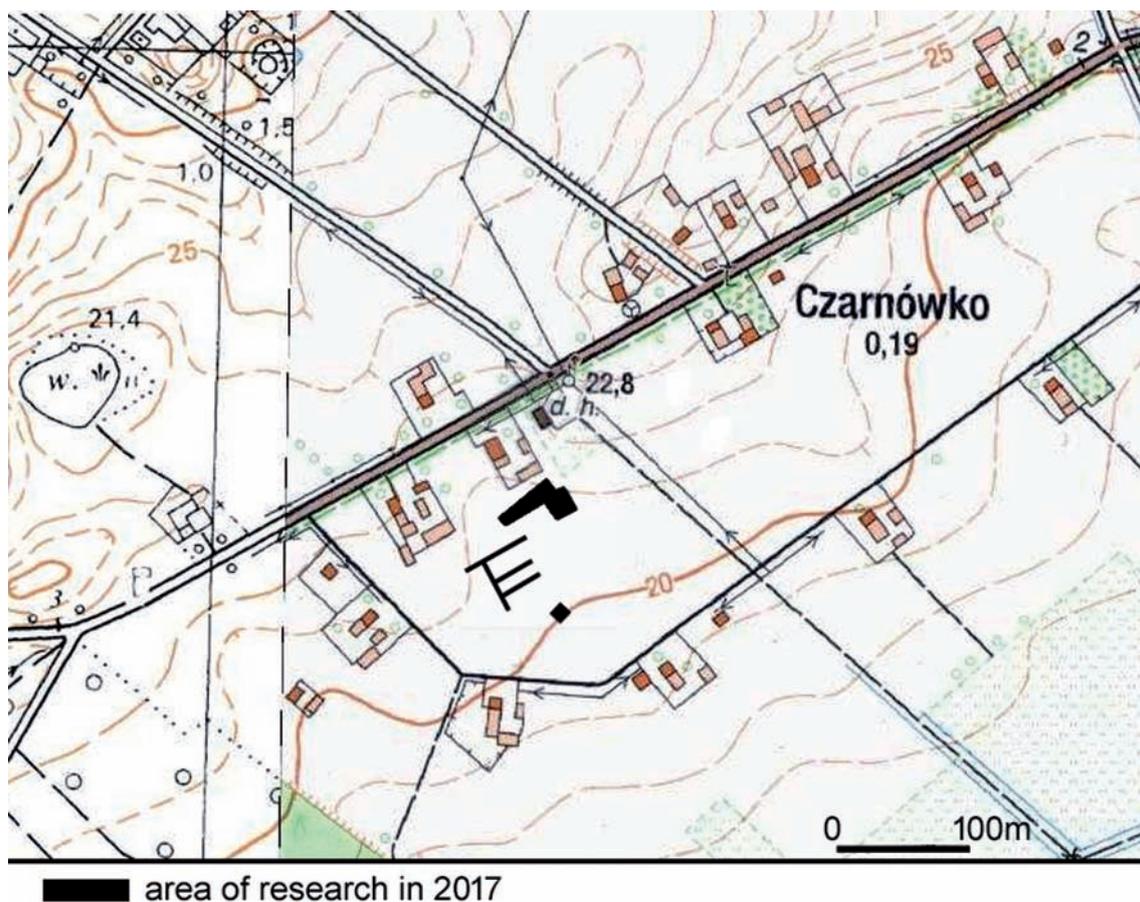


Fig. 3. Extent of examinations in 2017 at Sites 4/5 and 5 in Czarnówko

cases it was impossible to propose a chronology of such features.

Degree of disturbance of the necropolis

The ratio of disturbed graves in 2017 is high and it is close to what is believed to be a norm for the part of the necropolis which has been examined so far – it is 76%. What is responsible for this ratio are first of all numerous undisturbed graves of children. Namely, in the group of graves which were identified as adult burials it was only one grave that was not disturbed.

It is sometimes problematic to assess whether a child grave was opened. On the one hand, trenches can be poorly visible in small pits or such graves could have been dug through as a whole. On the other hand, bones of children are not very durable, which means that if the skeleton is absent, it is difficult to establish whether a post-funeral manipulation actually occurred in the grave (cf. Skorupka 2000; 2001; Skóra 2017a).

Such trenches are more frequently revealed in larger inhumation graves in which children are buried (Fig. 5 and 6). On the other hand, in the case of pits of low length, in which small children were buried (newborns, sucklings or those belonging to other phases of the *infans I* category), such traces of interferences are difficult to identify. A proper interpretation of events is rendered difficult by the lack of furnishings and log coffins in such graves, but first of all by the absence of surviving skeletons. In such circumstances the geomorphologic analysis was indispensable⁴. Doubts concerning disturbances of children's graves were raised for 12 features. It was assessed that three of these were opened and soon filled up, while the remaining ones bear no traces of interference. Graves 1862 (Fig. 5:2) and 1873 (Fig. 5:6), among others, avoided "robbery". In the first

⁴ The geomorphologic assessment of the structure of grave pits and of trenches which disturbed them was carried out by Dr Paweł Woźniak and Damian Moskalewicz MA from the University of Gdańsk. Results of these analyses will be discussed in a separate publication.

of these, vestiges of the mandible and a few teeth of a child, and a Type A V 130 bronze fibula survived in the N part of the grave pit in a log whose structure was not disturbed by the trench. In the other grave only an outline of a container for the dead body of a small child was identified, presumably with no traces of destruction. The grave contained no furnishings and the bones decayed.

A separate issue to be discussed is whether such graves were interesting for “plunderers” in the same way as other graves in the cemetery which belonged to adults. Observations from other cultural spheres demonstrate that children’s burials were actually often not noticed or were intentionally omitted by groups “plundering” cemeteries. In the case of necropolises of the Chernyakhov Culture an increase in disturbances of graves of children older than 10-12 has been observed (Petrauskas 2014, 140, 146). It is sometimes believed that cases of disturbances of children’s graves are possibly a result of an improper classification of a given grave as belonging to an adult person by the originators, due to a considerable size of the grave pit (e.g. Klevnäs 2013, 41). However, as the example of Czarnówko demonstrates, small graves of children were also opened, but more sporadically.

A comparably high degree of post-funeral interferences was not recorded in neighbouring cemeteries of the Wielbark Culture in Lubowidz (241 inhumation graves from Phases B1-B2/C1 – Wołągiewicz 1995, 37) and in Wilkowo Nowowiejskie (283 features – Krzysiak 2018, 47). On the basis of archival documentation of research at

Lubowidz it is difficult to assess a degree of post-funeral disturbances of the necropolis. This assessment is rendered more difficult by a poor state of preservation of skeletons. Therefore, it is not known whether the lack of bones is solely a result of deposition conditions or it was also caused by grave disturbances. The state of preservation of grave furnishings, which is especially visible for women’s burials, allows to assume that not all features were disturbed. With regard to Wilkowo Nowowiejskie, traces of interferences are recorded much more sporadically than at Czarnówko. Such practices were revealed only for 50% of graves (Krzysiak, Marczewski forthcoming). Cases where the opening of graves rather concerns large necropolises which were in use for a long time, while smaller cemeteries in the neighbourhood fall prey to “robberies” to a small degree, are also known for the Merovingian Period. However, no satisfactory explanation for this has been proposed so far (Roth 1978, 61-65; Klevnäs 2013, 35-36). On the other hand, H. Steuer (1982, 499) claims that this may be a result of the quality of social ties. These were stronger in smaller communities which were able to protect their dead. A. Klevnäs paid attention to the fact that the model proposed by H. Steuer does not take the chronological factor into consideration. What is more, robberies must have very often occurred in the course of use of necropolis (Klevnäs 2013, 19). Lubowidz and Wilkowo are in fact smaller necropolises which were used during a shorter period of time (Wołągiewicz 1995; Krzysiak, Marczewski forthcoming).

PRESENT STATE OF EXAMINATION OF THE GRAVE OPENING PHENOMENON AT CZARNÓWKO

The fact of presence of “robbery” trenches in inhumation grave pits in the cemetery in Czarnówko has been stressed in publications of individual magnificent grave assemblages (Mączyńska, Rudnicka 2004; Kasprzak 2016), graves with spurs (Kasprzak 2016) or in research reports (Kasprzak et al. 2011; Krzysiak 2013). In these publications it is assumed that graves were rather plundered already in the Antiquity. On the basis of research results in Seasons 2008 and 2009 it has been stated that such actions concerned a vast majority of graves and only few burials were left undisturbed, e.g., Grave 140/08 (Kasprzak et al. 2011, 412, 417, Fig. 15; Krzysiak

2013, 137) or Grave 872/10. The latter was discovered in 2010 and it contained a Type E125 bronze pitcher (Kasprzak 2016, 321). Tentative conclusions concerning the location and form of the trenches were proposed at that time (Kasprzak et al. 2011, Fig. 16). Attention was paid to a custom of filling the trenches with stones. As skeletons did not survive in grave pits, difficulties in dating the “robbery” were stressed (Krzysiak 2013, 137, 151, Fig. 4). The richest grave in the cemetery in Czarnówko – R430, provided with numerous imports from the Roman world (Type E14 kettle, Type E28 bucket, Type E44 kettle, Type E161 scoop), was also “plun-

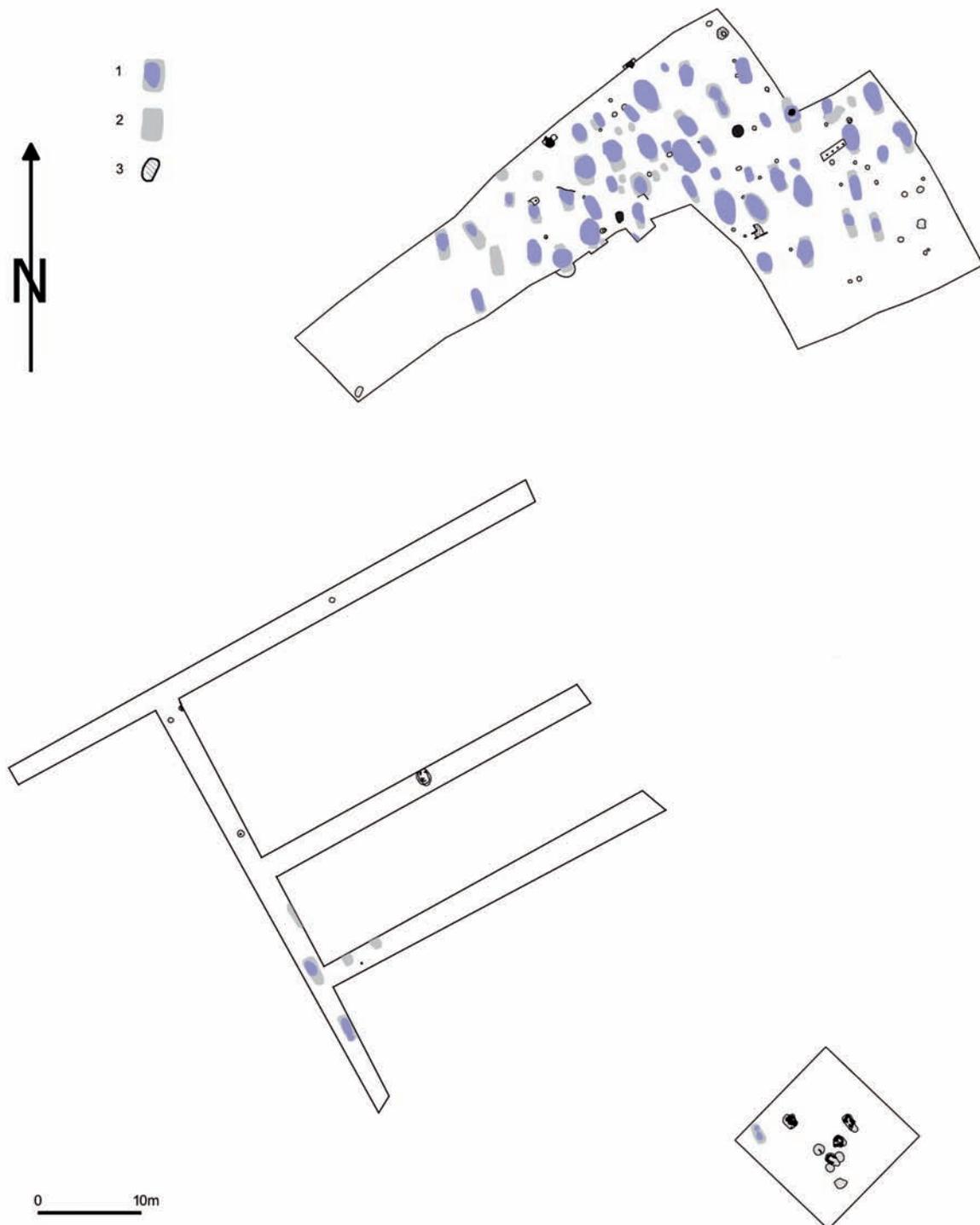


Fig. 4. Plan of the part of the cemetery in Czarnówko which was examined in 2017

dered”. The survival of these artefacts to our days may be due to the fact (as supposed by D. Rudnicka and M. Mączyńska – 2002, 12) that they were covered with stones in the log. As the originators acted in a haste, they also left three precious metal fibulae in the grave. These authors also state that in spite of the fact that furnishings of other rich graves from Phases B2b-C1a which

contained remains of representatives of local elites were depleted by “robbery”, we face a “testimony of enrichment of two generations” (Rudnicka, Mączyńska 2002, 12, 16).

Concerning the interpretation, a more neutral approach to events which took place in the cemetery of Czarnówko was proposed by J. Schuster (2010, 255-258; 2014, 64-65). From his point

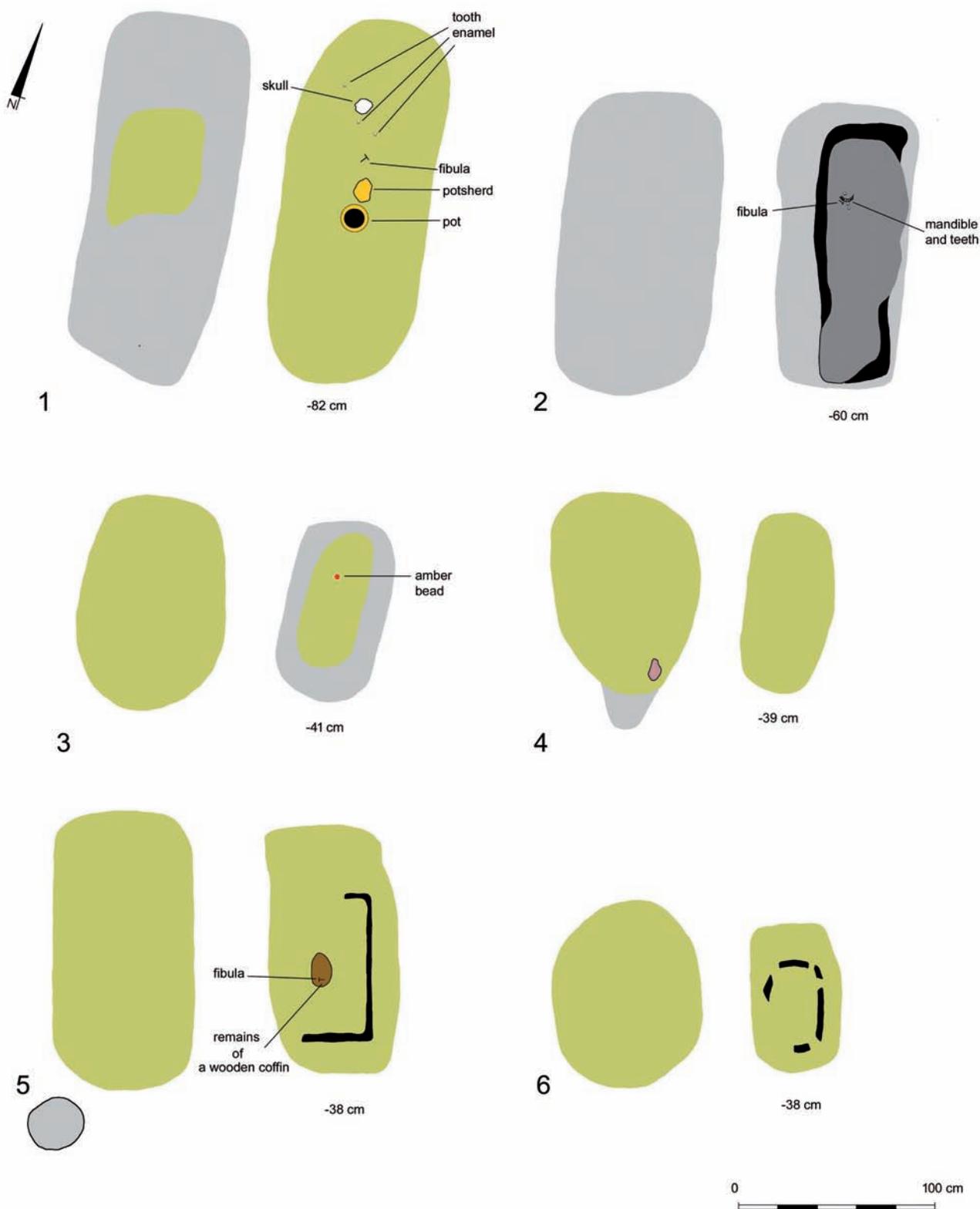


Fig. 5. Czarnówko. Examples of children's graves with traces of post-funerary disturbances:
1 – grave 1830; 2 – grave 1862; 3 – grave 1835; 4 – grave 1837; 5 – grave 1855; 6 – grave 1873

of view, the practice of “secondary opening of graves” encompasses not only motivations related to an intention of acquiring precious artefacts, but also ritual acts, which were related to, e.g., an

“ongoing burial rite”. Partial or bi-ritual burials may have been one of manifestations of such a rite (Andrzejowski et al. 2002; Żórawska 2007; Skóra 2015b).

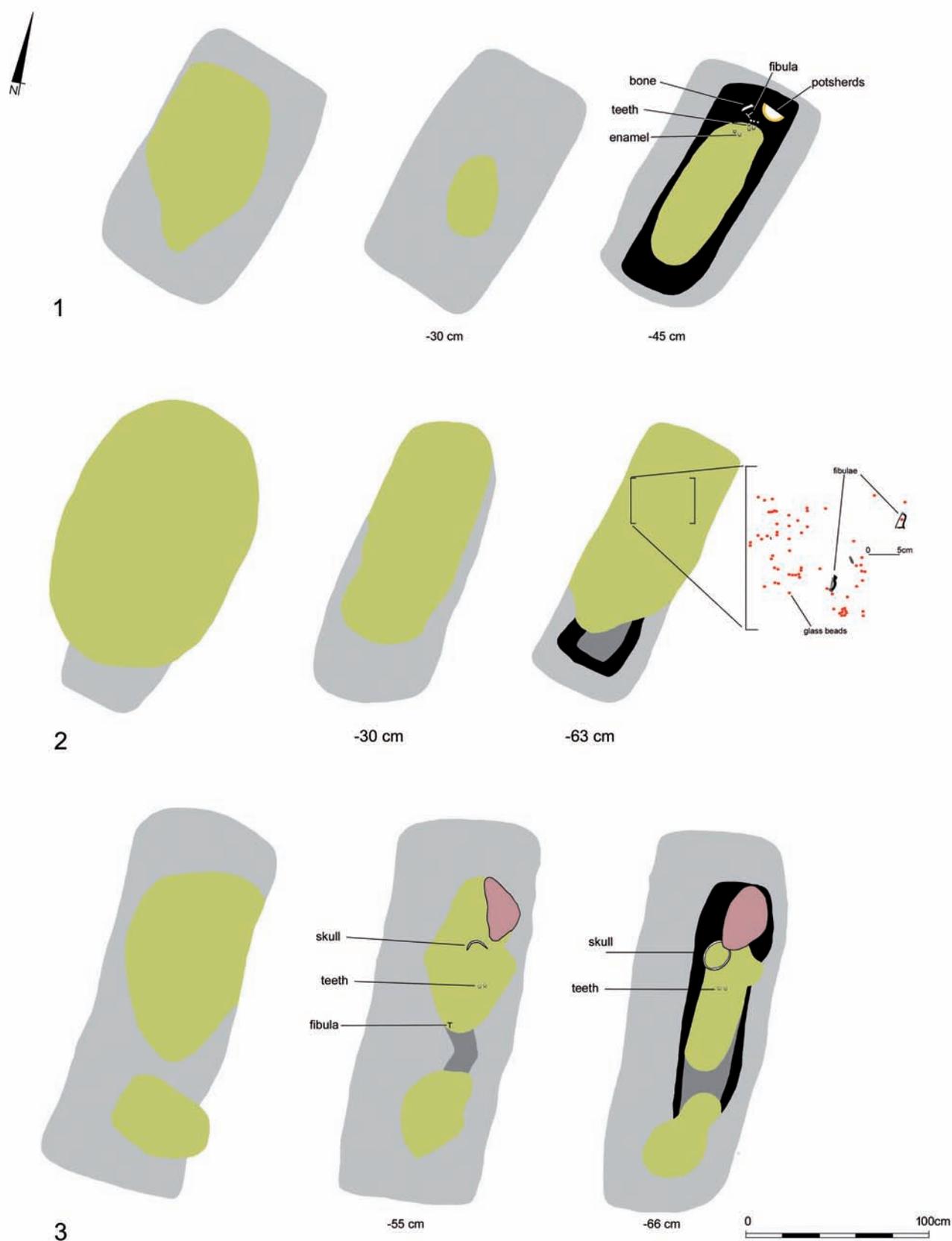


Fig. 6. Czarnówko. Examples of children's graves with traces of post-funery disturbances:
1 – grave 1887; 2 – grave 1904; 3 – grave 1906

The question whether post-funeral practices recorded in the necropolis are robbery or ritual cannot be answered unambiguously in case relevant archaeological sources are missing or if events which were occurring in the cemetery can be classified as both suggested possibilities, which are usually considered as mutually exclusive.

Characteristics of the trenches

The trenches can be equally well seen in inhumation graves from the top part to the bottom of the pit. This is a result of humus and organic matter admixture which came, e.g., from destroyed log coffins which found their way to the trenches together with fill layers. As a rule, one trench is revealed in the grave pit. However, we are also dealing with cases where the pit was destroyed by two trenches (e.g., Feature 1844 – in the northern and in the southern part of the pit – Fig. 10:4). The presence of the other trench is sometimes explained by a failure in the course of digging the first one (e.g., if the originators improperly assessed the state of preservation of the coffin) and by filling the coffin up. The other trench is believed to have been aimed at reaching the undamaged empty space within the log coffin (Sági 1964, 376-377). It is difficult to assess whether such trenches demonstrate a one-time action or the pit was disturbed twice at some intervals.

Location and size of the trenches

There seems not to have been a single modus operandi of the originators with regard to the location of the trench in the top and in relation to the grave pit. First of all, it was found out that all the trenches generally reached the pits in a precise manner. This can suggest a good state of preservation of earth mounds, or stone or wooden structures which marked the burial on the surface in the course of the interference. Some difficulties in identification of the gravepit borders could be suggested by the case of Grave 1905, where a rectangular trench was led from the north-western side of the pit. The fact that furnishings were taken from this direction is testified to by beads of a torn necklace which are scattered in this part of the trench (Fig. 7).

It is probable that these differences in locations of trenches can be seen as a testimony of a roughly similar time of the interferences in the cemetery. Earlier graves were more difficult to identify, while later ones offered no difficulties. It can be assumed that the opening shortly after the burial – which means that each grave was opened individually – should mean a greater and similar precision in localising the trenches, or a similar degree of preservation of the log coffins in the time of opening (see below). This assumption must be additionally verified after a precise chronological and stratigraphic analysis of the cemetery.

The shape and the size of the trenches which were identified in the tops of the grave pits seem to be generally related to the state of preservation of the burial (a degree of decomposition of the body and stability of the coffin structure). The greater extent of the trench in the top, the worse state of preservation of the log coffin in the time of interference. In features where coffin wood in the course of opening was not destroyed, trenches were recorded from the side of the top as small ones. It can be therefore assumed that coffin lids in some graves were still in a good shape. After the lid had been removed, the burial contents could be moved with a tool from the empty space inside the coffin to one place and then they could be extracted. In such a case, there was no need to dig through a considerable part of the grave at the bottom in order to get access to artefacts which were accompanying the dead. In the case of cemeteries of the Wielbark Culture we can assume that such practices occurred at Kowalewko in Greater Poland (Skorupka 2001; Skóra 2017b).

Therefore, on the basis of general observations made in the course of research in 2017, it is possible to isolate the following variants of interferences. In the top of the grave pit, they:

1) encompass the entire surface of the pit or its major part. In the latter case, a small fragment of the top is left untouched, usually in the southern part (Fig. 9:1-8), and more sporadically in the northern zone (Fig. 9:9-13);

2) encompass the central part of the pit only (Fig. 10:5-9) and their extent almost exactly matches the outline of the grave pit. Less often, it is wider than the pit, or it is limited to a circular, narrow or oblong trench in the centre of the grave pit (Fig. 10:10-15 and Fig. 8). The trench diameter is smaller or equal to the width of the pit (or it slightly exceeds the pit width).

These remarks rather apply to operation methods and the degree of visibility of overground markers. What was the aim of the originators was the burial level, especially the northern and the central part of the pit. Instances of interferences aimed at the southern part of the pit are a small fraction of all cases. In some graves, nearly entire bottom of the grave pit was disturbed (Fig. 10:1-3).

In cemeteries of the Merovingian circle one can observe a dependence between the disturbed zone of the grave and the sex of the dead. This results from a diversified assortment of women's and men's grave furnishings. The trenches in women's graves generally aim at the upper part of the torso, where dress parts and ornaments were located. In

the case of men's graves, they aim at the central and lower parts of the grave pit, where weaponry and equipment could be found, while the remaining part of the pit is left untouched in such a case (e.g. Bofinger, Sikora 2008, 51). Such a correlation between the sex and the location of the trench can suggest differences in overground markers, which enabled the originators to recognise whose grave they were dealing with. Another possible explanation is that the originators knew the dead, which is sometimes underlined in the course of analyses of Langobard cemeteries, which were plundered shortly after they had become unused (e.g. Adler 1970, 145-146; Tomka 2005, 254).

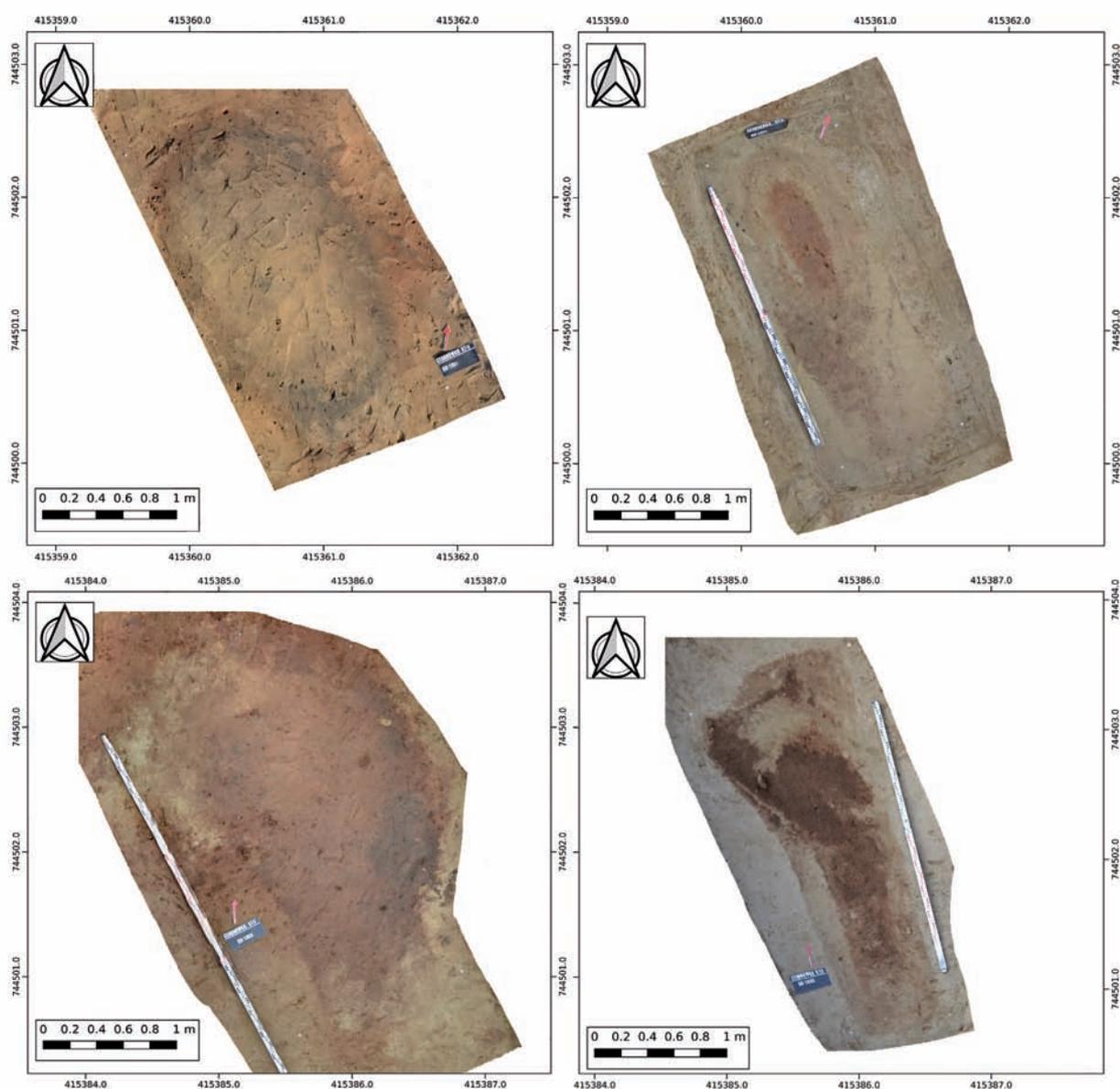


Fig. 7. Czarnówko. 1 – Orthophotoplan of Feature 1881: a – top; b – bottom;
2 – Orthophotoplan of Feature 1905: a – top; b – bottom



Fig. 8. Czarnówko. 1 – Orthophotoplan of Feature 1889: a – top; b – bottom;
2 – Orthophotoplan of Feature 1915: a – top; b – bottom

STONE STRUCTURES

The presence of stones in various number and arrangements was revealed in the “robbery” trenches. It can be expected that stelae and stones of various size were originally used as overground markers of grave pits. In some cases it can be assumed that they come from pit bottoms, where they were used as stone settings of logs or directly of the dead body. Such instances are known from previous years of research.

In 2017, stones were mostly recorded in the top of the trench. Their number varied from one to even

some dozen and they were usually found in the centre of the top. Sometimes stones were revealed not in the top, but at lower levels of the trench. Cases where stones appear from the top to the bottom are also known.

In the trench of Grave 1829 a c. 100 cm high stone stela was found (Fig. 13). It was overturned to the centre of the trench. It was found in its northern part, where a few small stones were also found. It is possible that it slid to the trench on its own when the grave was opened, and it would have been pret-

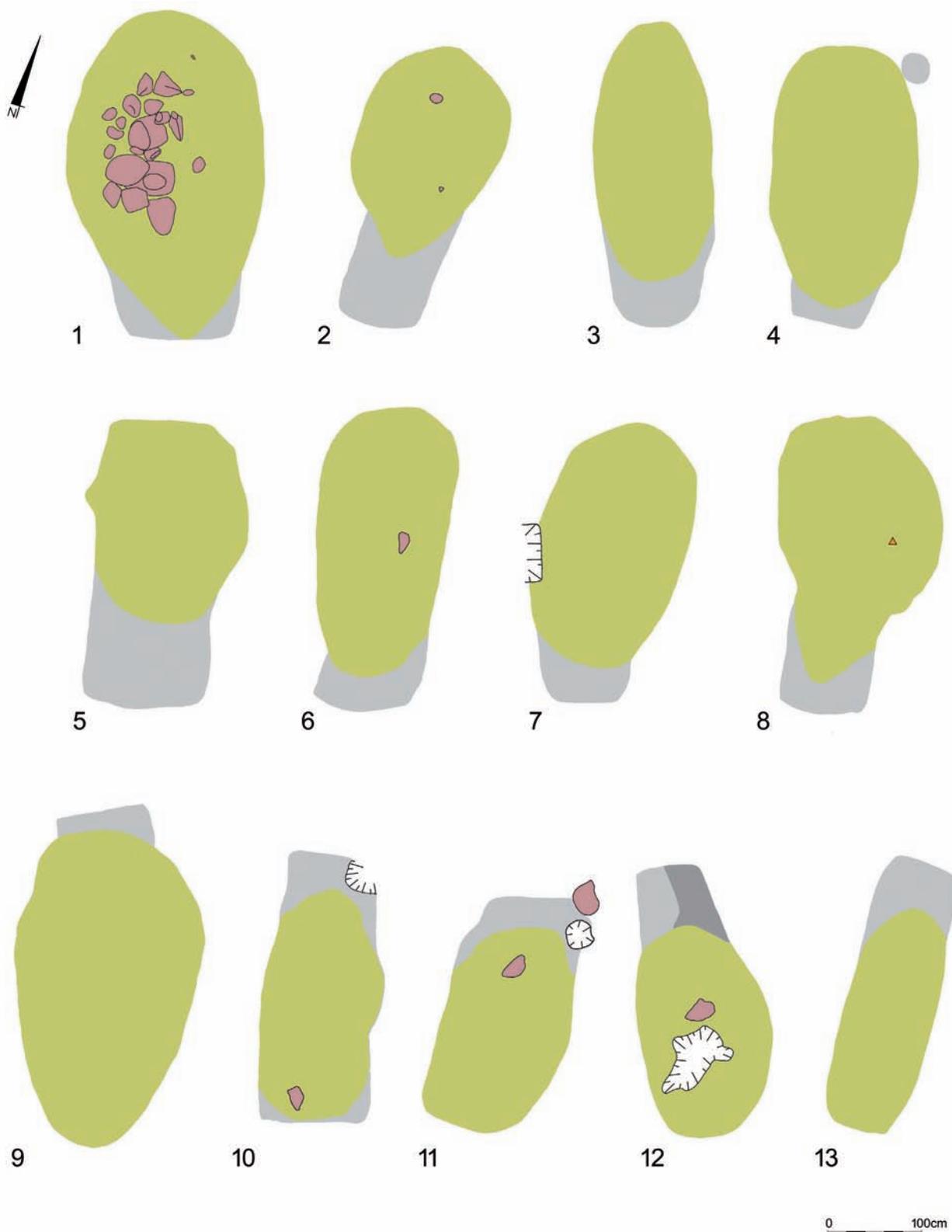


Fig. 9. Czarnówko. Extent of trenches in tops of grave pits – selected examples of inhumation graves: 1-8 – northern part of the grave pit; 9-13 – southern part of the grave pit. 1 – grave 1851; 2 – grave 1861; 3 – grave 1868; 4 – grave 1881; 5 – grave 1888; 6 – grave 1901; 7 – grave 1903; 8 – grave 1905; 9 – grave 1825; 10 – grave 1839; 11 – grave 1843; 12 – grave 1867; 13 – grave 1902

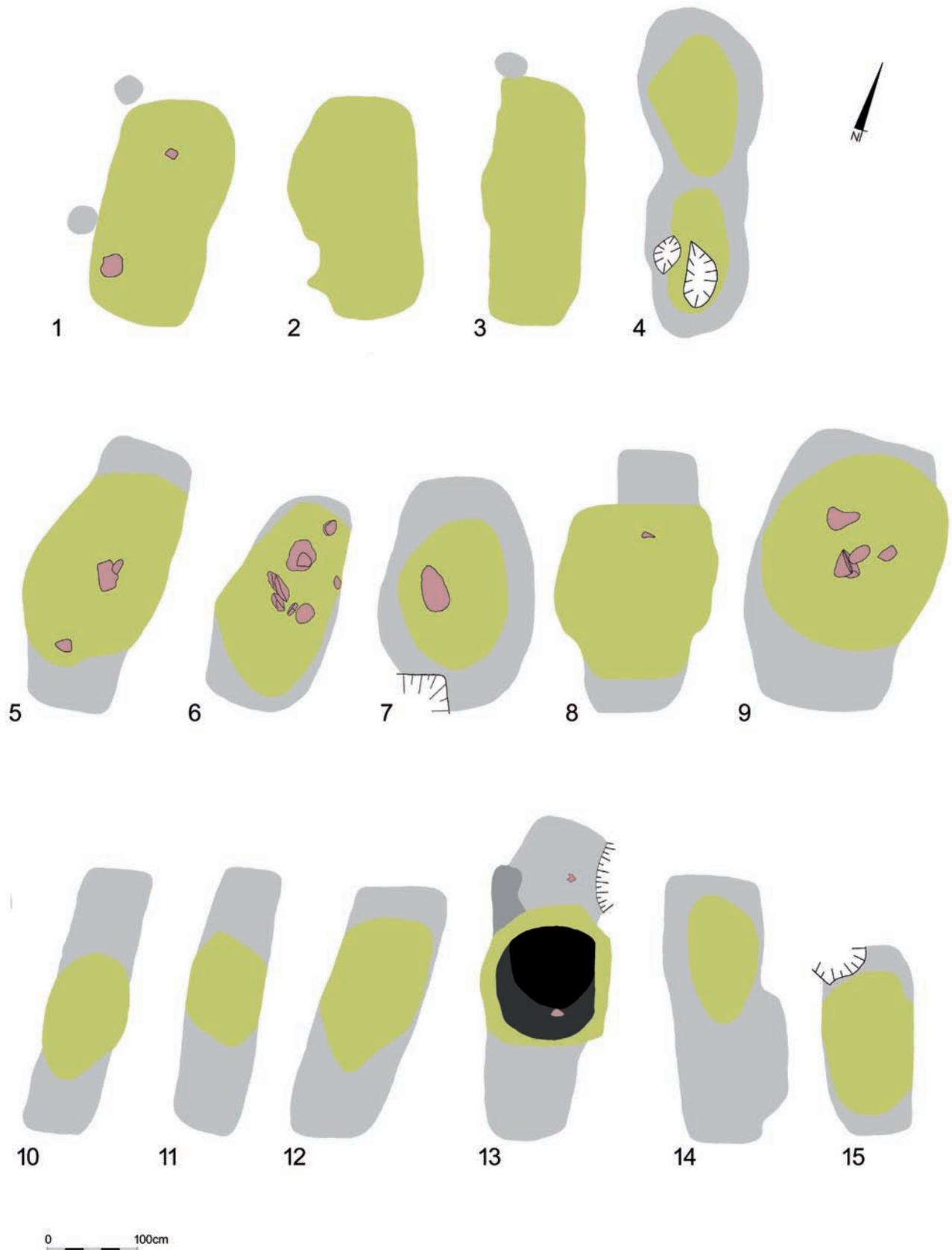


Fig. 10. Czarnówko. Extent of trenches in tops of grave pits – selected examples of inhumation graves:
 1-3 – entire surface of the pit in the top; 4 – two trenches; 5-14 – central part of the grave pit; 1 – grave 1842;
 2 – grave 1883; 3 – grave 1891; 4 – grave 1844; 5 – grave 1821; 6 – grave 1876; 7 – grave 1879; 8 – grave 1889;
 9 – grave 1892; 10 – grave 1915; 11 – grave 1820; 12 – grave 1869; 13 – grave 1840; 14 – grave 1875; 15 – grave 1882

ty difficult to restore it to the original position. As human bones with a fibula and a fragmented comb were discovered under it, our attention is attracted to activities of a possibly apotropaic nature.

Clusters of stones in the trenches is a work of a group of originators. Some individual stones in lower layers of the trenches are also to some degree an effect of their natural sliding inside. They may have also been thrown into the trench together with the soil when the ground was “tidied up” after the interference. In a few cases the location of the stones on the bottom of the trench is not accidental, as exemplified by depositions of the stones on the skull. A stone with a diameter of a dozen or so centimetres was found in Grave 1879 above skull bones in the northern part of the log. On the other hand, tooth enamel of the person who was buried there was discovered in the southern part of the log. It is possible that after the decomposition of ligaments the mandible was moved to this part of the pit (130 cm from the skull, in the vicinity of the legs) when the grave was opened. Furthermore, a 35 cm high boulder was slid on the skull in Grave 1906 (Fig. 6:3). More than 15 small and slaked parts of the skull cap were identified under the stone. Next to it, eight parts of tooth enamel were found. It was not possible to anthropologically assess the sex and age of the deceased person. However, on the basis of the size of the grave pit it can be assumed that a child was buried in the grave.

It can be assumed that stones on skulls or filling the trenches with stones is certainly some sort of interaction between the originators and the dead. The first possible explanation is self-securing against the revenge of the dead whose peace was disturbed. The same method of neutralisation with stones was used for centuries in Europe for dead bodies of persons whose harmful return was feared by the living (e.g. Duma 2015, 121-122; Gardęła 2017, 160-199). E. Aspöck (2018, 9) noted that in Langobard cemeteries manipulations with the head of the dead

were recorded in such graves which were opened before the skeletonisation of the body.

Furthermore, in Feature 1902 (Fig. 14) a small stone mound was formed in the middle part of the trench, which led exactly to the centre of the log. A bronze buckle and a bronze belt end fitting were found under it. Next to it, another belt end fitting and bone fragments (femoral head and part of a hip bone shaft with a section of acetabulum).

It is also significant that stones were generally not recorded in the trenches (which are anyway sparse) which disturbed children’s graves. This can be seen as a resultant of a custom of sporadic marking of children’s burials on the surface. This seems to be one of rules in cemeteries of the Wielbark Culture (Skóra 2015a, 106-107). However, it can also reflect a different position of children in the social structure and suggests that children were not classified into the group of persons whose revenge can be expected after death. It is also underlined that the lack of disturbances of children’s graves is not only an effect of a low value of their furnishings, but perhaps also a result of a taboo (Klevnäs 2013, 41).

A situation with a scale comparable to that identified at Czarnówko was not found in other cemeteries of the Wielbark Culture where graves were disturbed. Filling the trenches which were identified as robbery ones is recorded in many necropolises. Such cases were found, among others, in Jartyporo or in Lešno (Princely Grave IV). At Weklice, boulders in trenches of inhumation graves were identified, but these were usually single stones. In Grave 361, a stela was found. It was overturned to the interior of the pit onto the legs of the dead man and it was originally a burial marker which was placed in its southern part (Natuniewicz-Sekuła, Okulicz-Kozaryn 2011, 96, Table CLVIII). Individual boulders are recorded in various places within grave pits. However, cases of filling the trenches with numerous stones were not recorded (Stadler et al. 2005, 271)⁵.

WOODEN STRUCTURES

A presence of post-holes (one or two) was recorded in Czarnówko in 2017 in the vicinity of a few inhumation graves. It is not always a distance which allows to relate them to a specific burial. In Feature 1842 (Fig. 10:1), in whose immediate vi-

cinity two post-holes were found on the W side of the pit (Features 1846 and 1847), it can be expected

⁵ The fact of filling the trenches with stones from burial markers was testified to, among others, in the Langobard cemetery in Brunn am Gebirge.

that these features are remains of a wooden structure which was situated on the surface.

Regrettably, in no case the surviving remains allow to classify them as relics of a structure in the type of the “house of the dead”, similar to those revealed at Masłomęcz, but also in Funen and Jutland. Such structures seem to be first of all a Danish phenomenon from the Early and Late Roman Period

(Mączyńska 1998). In Wielbark Culture cemeteries remains of wooden structures in the form of post-holes are recorded sporadically⁶.

Overground markers were an obvious hint for persons who emptied graves. They not only helped in a more accurate planning of the trench, but they could also demonstrate the social status of the dead.

LOG COFFINS

A deposition of the dead into the grave in a log coffin is quite a common practice at Czarnówko. As a rule, wood itself does not survive, apart from sporadic situations of supersaturation with metal oxides from artefacts which were in a direct contact with the log. However, coffin outlines are recorded as discolouration of the ground. It is not an ideal situation, but it is enough to make conclusions on their condition in the time of opening and a degree of destruction by the originators. Although the dead were most often buried in halves of hollowed logs, it can be assumed that lids were also in use, analogously to, e.g., Lubowidz (Wołągiewicz 1995, 38) or Bagicz (Wołągiewicz 1982). If coffins were provided with lids and remained in a good shape, in the course of opening they allowed for a relatively easy penetration of the interior which was not filled with the soil.

In 2017, the presence of wooden structures in which bodies of the dead persons were buried was revealed in a majority of graves. Such remains were nearly never found in children’s graves. The use of log coffins for burying small children was not a mandatory part of burial practices of Wielbark Culture communities. It can therefore be assumed that their absence at Czarnówko may perhaps reflect the original status quo. In the case of graves of adults a direct deposition of the dead body into the grave is also possible. On the other hand, an assumption that it is the grave opening in the past that is responsible for the fact that logs were not recorded is also legitimate. In case the log was already in a state of decomposition in the time of opening, the trench and the originators’ action within the pit could only accelerate the log’s destruction. Such a case can be assumed in Grave 1841, in which a large trench encompassed nearly the entire grave pit, from the top to the bottom. On the other hand, the pit of grave 1844 (Fig. 10:4)

was damaged with two trenches which were led in its northern and southern parts. There is no question that this did not offer favourable conditions for preservation of any wooden structures within the pit.

In nearly 20 graves which were examined in 2017 it was assumed that log coffins were in a good shape in the time of post-funeral interferences (Fig. 11:1-2). Trenches which do not destroy logs can be related to the time when the latter were still in a good shape. Assuming that the time of decomposition of coffin wood in gravel is 5-7 years (or at least the lid collapsed in this time), or in clay where the process of decomposition of wooden structures is slower, which means that after 12-15 years coffins are still in a relatively good shape (Neugebauer 1994, 132), one should date the time of opening of some graves at Czarnówko to before the moment of the collapse of lids, that is, no more than 20 years after the burial. However, it is not possible to precisely assess the time which could pass from the burial, even taking the kind of wood used in wooden structures into consideration. Each case of decomposition may be unique and it may depend not only on the quality of wood, soil conditions, but also on other

⁶ Remains of post structures were believed to have been revealed by W. Heym at Stary Targ (1938, 145, Abb. 3). The highest number so far was probably yielded by examinations of the cemetery in Weklice. Some burials are surrounded by post-holes which may be remains of a structure erected over the grave. These are, among others, Graves 15, 27, 45, 208 (Natuniewicz-Sekuła, Okulicz-Kozaryn 2011, 27-28, 31, 25, 65-66, Table III, XII, XX, LXXXIII). Two post-holes situated close to only one side of the grave, analogously to Czarnówko, Feature 1842, were discovered in Grave 84 at Weklice (Natuniewicz-Sekuła, Okulicz-Kozaryn 2011, 42-43, Table XXXVII). Chronologically, such graves at Weklice are dated to between Phase IIB/IIC and Phase IVA of the use of the necropolis (B2b-B2c to C1b).

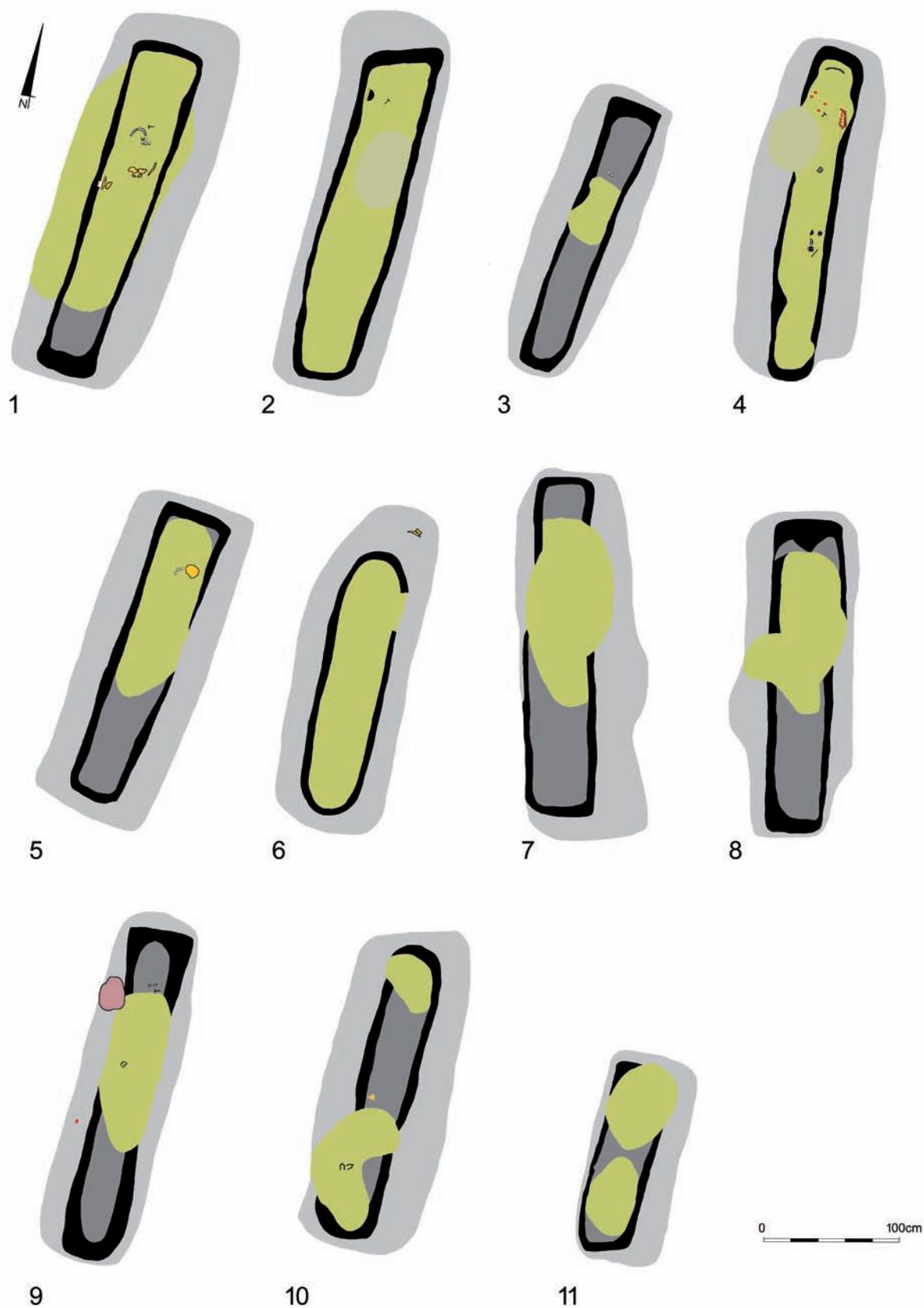


Fig. 11. Czarnówko. Extent of trenches and the degree of preservation of log coffins in the bottom of the grave pit – selected examples of inhumation graves. Log coffins: 1-2 – entirely preserved; 3-14 – partially damaged; 1 – grave 1821; 2 – grave 1829; 3 – grave 1876; 4 – grave 1839; 5 – grave 1869; 6 – grave 1890; 7 – grave 1875; 8 – grave 1888; 9 – grave 1915; 10 – grave 1903; 11 – grave 1860

depositional circumstances. At Czarnówko, soil conditions are not favourable for the preservation of organic matters. Therefore, one perhaps should consider a faster decomposition of logs, even in the case of coffins made from oak wood which were in use at Czarnówko (there are examples of use of less durable wood, e.g., birch – Stępnik 2015). In Season 2017, there were also discoveries of inhumation graves in which the logs were in probability partially decomposed in the time of opening. Due

to this, the disturbance of the grave led to an easy destruction or translocation of the log's walls (Fig. 12:6)⁷. Most often we record such destructions in the northern or the central part (Fig. 11 and 12). However, what is recorded are damages to the log's structure in these parts of grave pits which were not touched by the trench. Such damages can be a result of the logs' collapse under the weight of the soil. This was a natural process which accelerated in result of post-funeral interference.

WAY OF TREATMENT OF THE DEAD BODY/SKELETON

One of more significant issues in considerations on grave opening in the past is the way in which remains of the dead were treated. At Czarnówko our knowledge on this is not complete, as bones usually decompose (Rożnowski, Cymek 2015). Apart from those which are especially resistant to unfavourable soil conditions – skulls, teeth (although often only the enamel survives) – such bone fragments survived whose “structure” was reinforced by copper salts migrating from artefacts which were in contact with bones. These sporadic situations allow to propose two basic conclusions: 1) the opening of some grave took place after a complete decomposition of the dead body, 2) bone remains were not treated with respect, which could deny ritual motivations, e.g., a continuation of burial rites. To put it in a different manner, other motivations than ritual ones seem to be more convincing in such circumstances. Obviously, this remark concerns graves where the presence of bones was revealed and we are not entitled to also apply it to such burials in which bone remains did not survive.

In 2017, a disturbance of the anatomical arrangement of the dead body was recorded in 10 graves. In a few graves tooth enamel was found at a distance of up to some dozen centimetres from the skull. The translocation (perhaps of the teeth only, or originally together with the mandible) demonstrates that the grave was opened after the final skeletonisation of the body, that is, after the decomposition of ligaments and other tissues which hold the skeleton in some form of integrity. In Feature 1839 (Fig. 15:2) tooth enamel commenced to be recorded already in the layer, a dozen or so centimetres above the skull and in the trench, c. 55 cm from the skull. Furthermore, in the course of exploration of Feature 1887 tooth enamel was found in

the southern part of the grave pit, while the skull was situated in the northern part, as envisaged by funeral norms of Wielbark Culture communities. On the other hand, although skull bones did not survive in Grave 1882, two very small fragments of tooth enamel were recorded in a trench which led to the centre of the pit. These fragments were located among parts of grave furnishings which were left in the trench, that is, a glass bead and an amber one. Moreover, Feature 1829 (Fig. 15:1) contained some fragments of long bones in the western part of the log, under a stela which was overturned into the pit. Such a location in all probability enabled the bones to survive and protected them against factors which support the decomposition of bone tissues.

After the skeletonisation of the body, bones which were not connected with ligaments could be freely moved within the pit by the originators in the course of interference, or they could be thrown outside the pit. It cannot be excluded that some metal parts of the dress were taken out together with parts of garment which were not decomposed yet. This obviously caused a disturbance in the anatomical arrangement of the dead body or the skeleton.

The arrangement of the skeleton is a key premise for assessing the degree of decomposition of the body when the “robbers” appeared in the cemetery. This is again a premise for dating this event and for defining the relationship between the originators and the dead. This relationship is assessed on the basis of treating the dead person. As convincingly stated by J. W. Neugebauer or E. Aspöck

⁷ Such a translocation occurred, e.g., at Grzybница, Koszalin District, in Grave 90 (Hahula, Wołagiewicz 2001, Tabl. LXIX, p. 156).

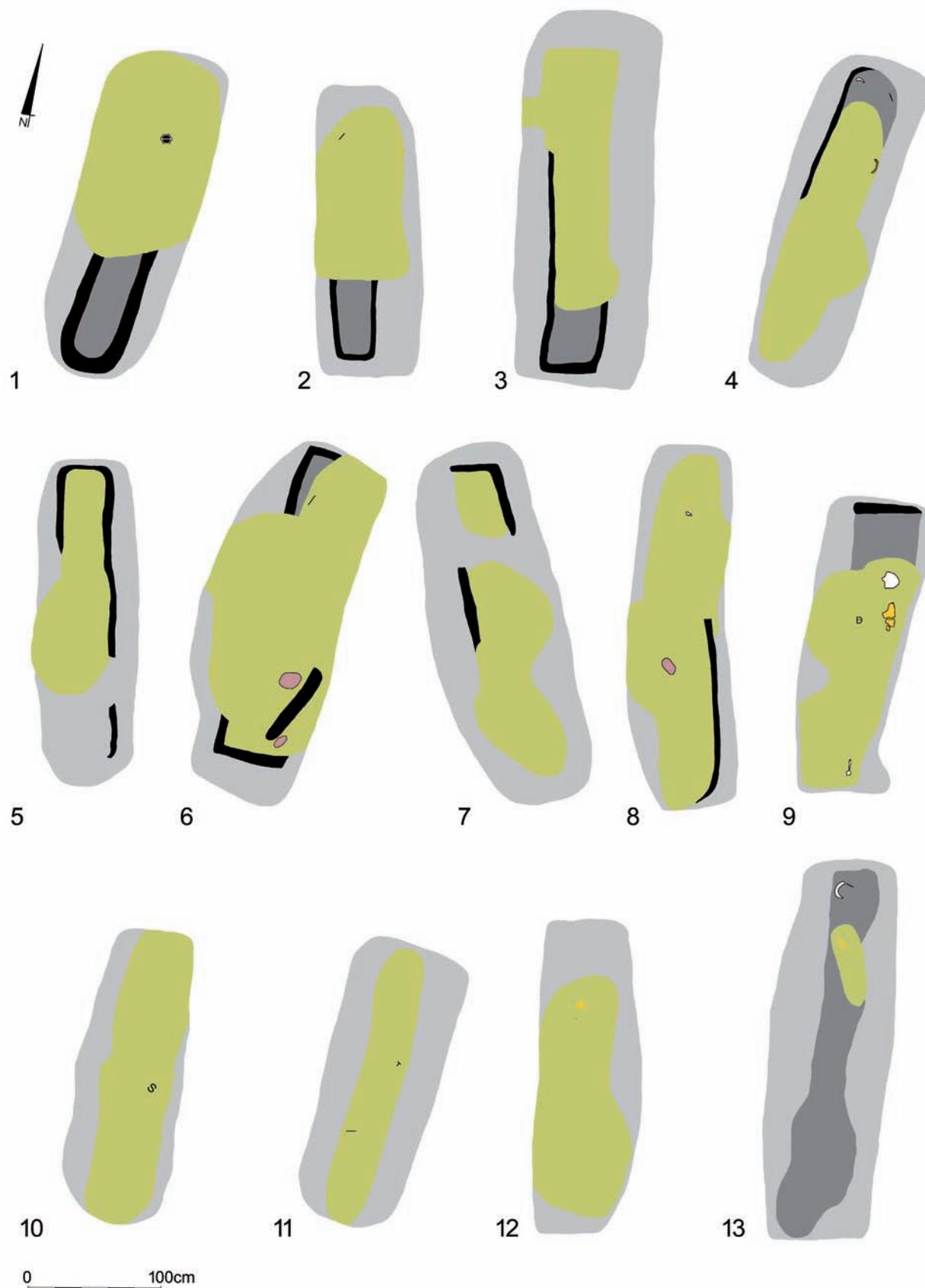


Fig. 12. Czarnówko. Extent of trenches and the degree of preservation of log coffins in the bottom of the grave pit – selected examples of inhumation graves: 1-9 – fragmentarily preserved; 10-13 – no coffin or its complete decomposition; 1 – grave 1880; 2 – grave 1883; 3 – grave 1851; 4 – grave 1861; 5 – grave 1881; 6 – grave 1877; 7 – grave 1867; 8 – grave 1868; 9 – grave 1870; 10 – grave 1842; 11 – grave 1843; 12 – grave 1891; 13 – grave 1901

for Bronze Age or Merovingian Period cemeteries, these pieces of information are a basis for further interpretations. At Czarnówko, such a possibility is strongly limited by a very poor state of preservation of bones. The bone material yields no premises which would unambiguously demonstrate that entire dead bodies or their parts were translocated within the grave pit (in the course of the decomposition process). Nor are there any grounds

for a verification whether parts of the skeleton of the dead were removed from the grave or possibly found their way to a grave of another individual, who was, e.g., buried in the neighbouring grave. Such situations (e.g., surplus skulls or bones of the post-cranial skeleton) are recorded in cemeteries with traces of grave opening from various periods (Neugebauer 1991, 115, Fig. 30; Bofinger, Sikora 2008, 54; Klevnäs 2013, 57).

WAY OF TREATMENT OF ARTEFACTS WHICH WERE ACCOMPANYING THE DEAD

The way of treatment of grave furnishings is one of essential premises which demonstrate the motivation. What is relevant is whether all artefacts were taken out, whether some of these were left due to their state of preservation, raw materials, no

material or symbolic value and whether it came to destroying of parts of grave furnishings.

In Season 2017, artefacts which were not taken from the grave in the course of interference usually bear no evident traces of possible destruction during such actions. There is always a possibility that a given artefact was fragmented in the course of funerary rituals.

It is certain that clay vessels are a category of finds which display the most evident traces of damage. Vessel walls are generally damaged, in most cases above the half of the body. It can be assumed that damages of some vessels can be dated to the time of grave disturbance. However, there are cases which suggest a possibility of deposition of vessels which were already incomplete or damaged in the course of the funeral – Features 1825 and 1887 (Fig. 17). It should be mentioned that at Czarnówko a habit of deposition of urns into pits of inhumation graves was recorded (Krzysiak 2013, 150). Such urns were dug in at various heights above the inhumation burial. It seems therefore quite probable that some part of broken vessels which are found in so-called robbery trenches are remains of destroyed urns. However, on account of the lack of burnt bones (at Czarnówko, such bones generally survive in a better condition than those which were not burnt) it cannot be excluded that we are dealing with damaged additional vessels, which were given to the dead in the course of the burial ceremony. This problem calls for a precise analysis on the basis of finds from the entire necropolis.

It is difficult to make an unequivocal statement concerning the destruction of bone or metal artefacts. In case of delicate artefacts, e.g., such as pins or needles, these are sometimes recorded as broken. However, it is not always possible to prove that it



Fig. 13. Czarnówko. Grave 1829 – stela overturned to the centre of the trench

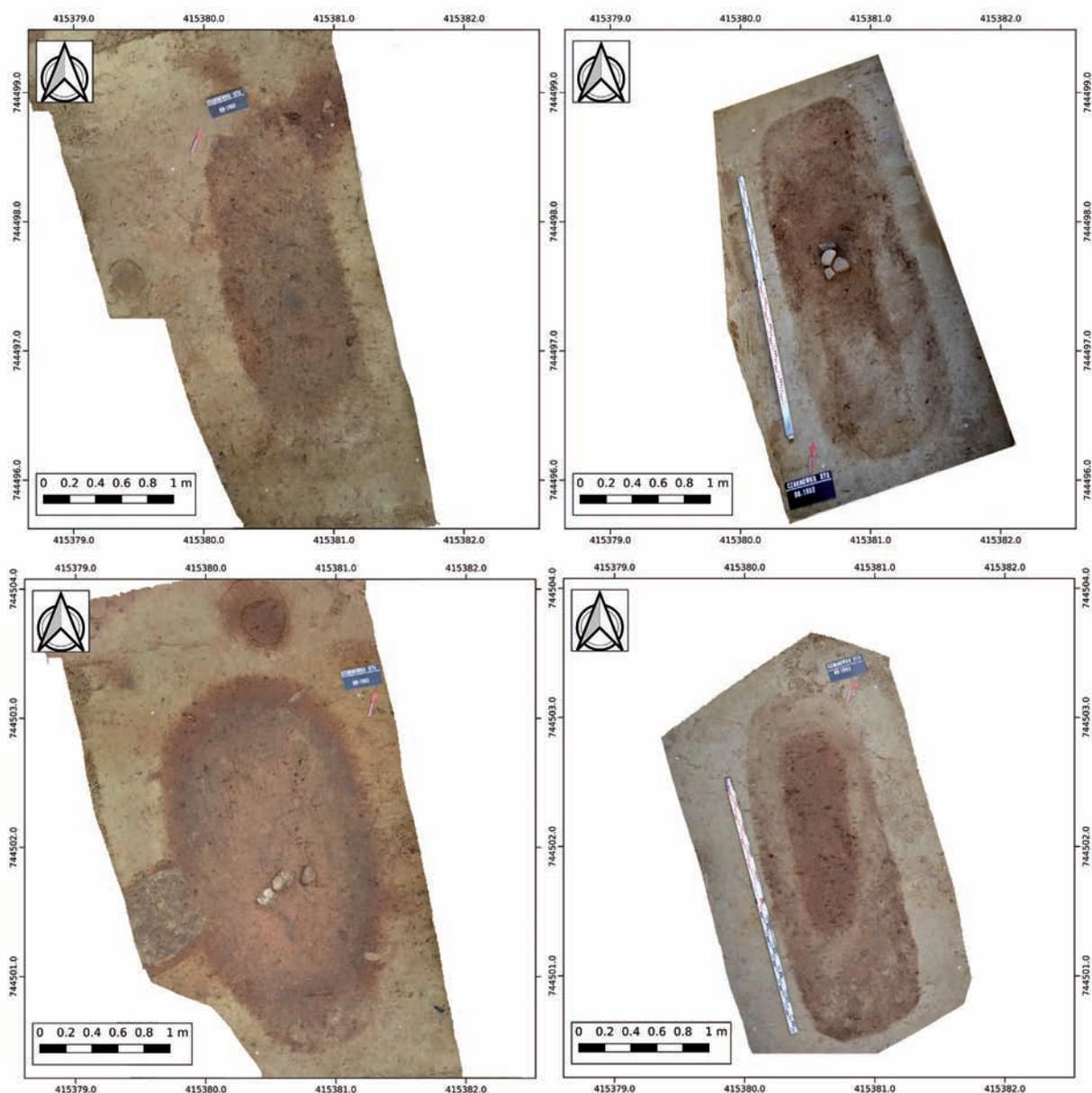


Fig. 14. Czarnówko. 1 – Orthophotoplan of Feature 1902: a – top; b – bottom;
2 – Orthophotoplan of Feature 1903: a – top; b – bottom

came to their destruction in funeral circumstances, in result of post-depositional processes or possibly in the course of opening of the grave.

What raises no doubts is the fact that part of beads which are scattered in trenches and log interiors are a result of tearing the necklace cord by the originators of post-funeral interferences (e.g., Grave 1905 – Fig. 16:3). Scholars who dealt with the problem of why “robbers” in Merovingian and Anglo-Saxon cemeteries showed no interest in some categories of artefacts underlined that the originators left had beads in graves (Koch 1973; Roth 1978, 67-71; Klevnäs 2013). This was be-

lieved to have been caused by their low material or symbolic value. It seems, however, that the reason for this may be simpler. If the cord on which beads were threaded was in a good shape in the time of interference, the necklace could be taken from the grave. In opposite cases such attempts ended with scattering of the beads and no effort was made to gather necklace parts. Of course, a degree of preservation of dead bodies is of importance here. A necklace of amber beads which was found near the log edge in Feature 1839 was in a condition which allowed for its extraction. However, it was in all probability lost in the course of this action.

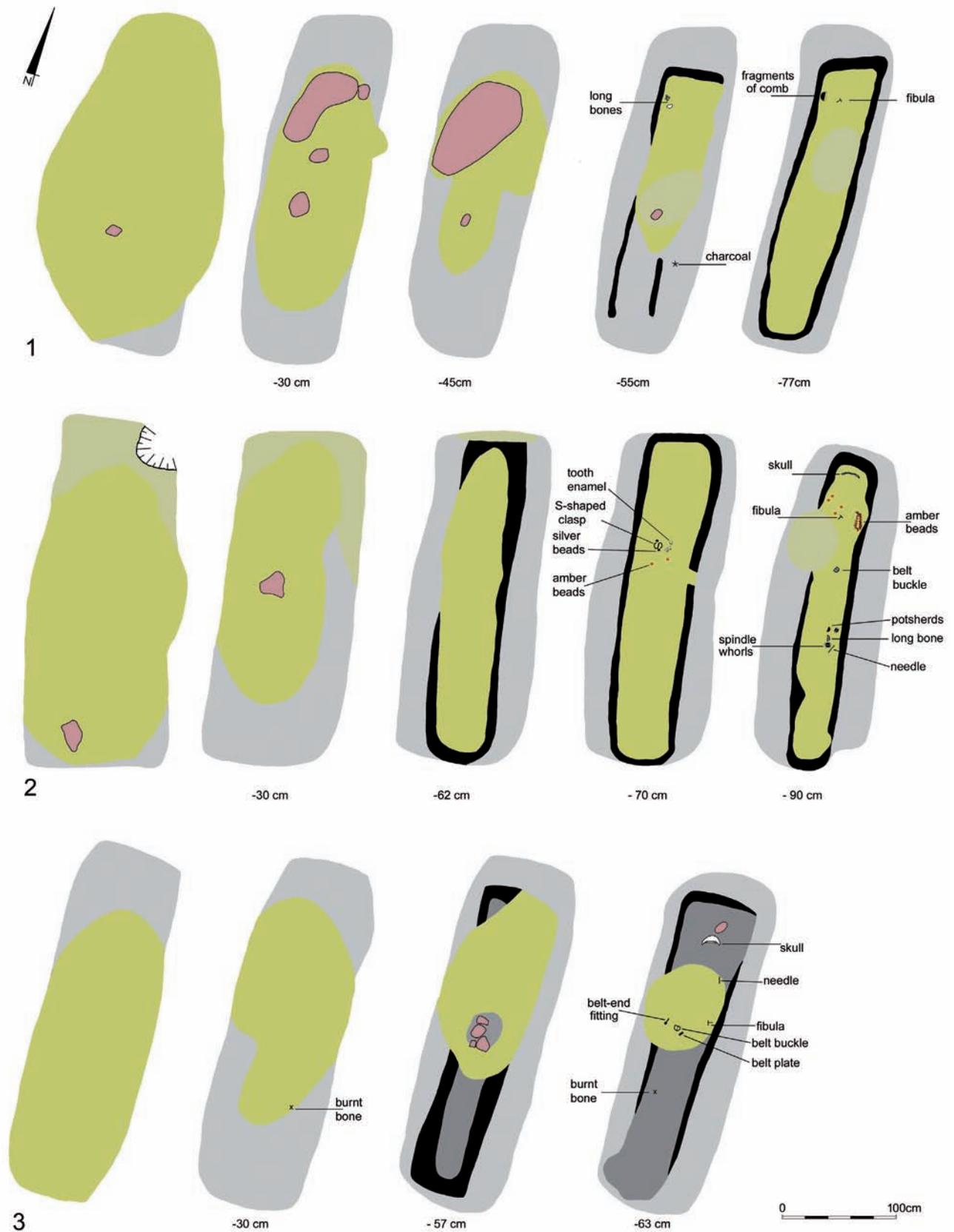


Fig. 15. Czarnówko. Examples of the degree of disturbance of pits of adult's inhumation graves – from the top level to the bottom: 1 – grave 1829; 2 – grave 1839; 3 – grave 1902

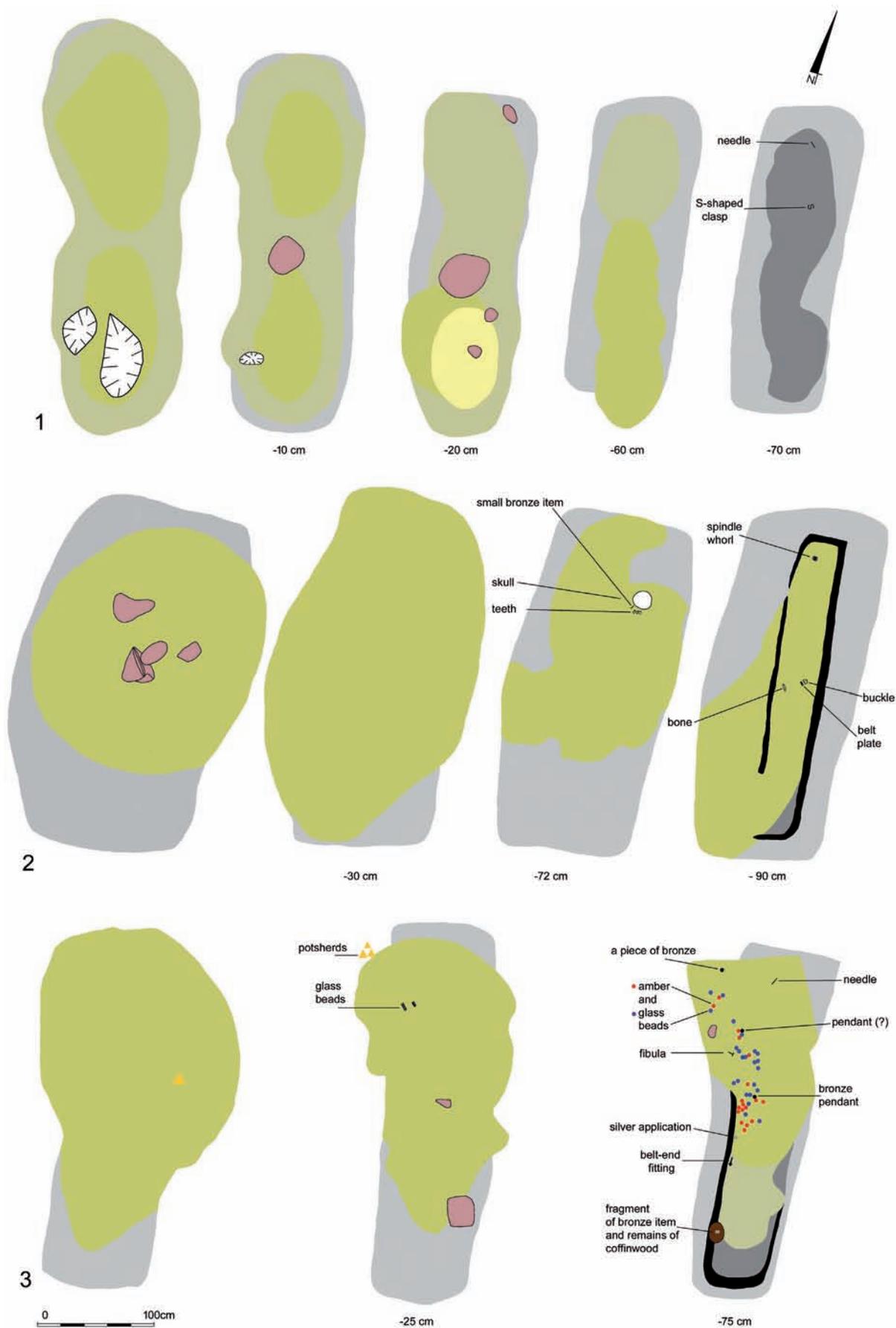


Fig. 16. Czarnówko. Examples of the degree of disturbance of pits of adult's inhumation graves – from the top level to the bottom: 1 – grave 1844; 2 – grave 1892; 3 – grave 1905

Furthermore, in Grave 1905 a fragment of a silver artefact was discovered. This was in all probability part of a fitting which was a relic of a bracelet. In this case it is highly probable that it came to

a damage of an ornament which was taken from the grave in the course of opening. Fragments of damaged bracelets were recorded during previous research⁸.

WHAT IS OF NO INTEREST FOR US? – PARTS OF FURNISHINGS WHICH WERE LEFT IN GRAVES BY THE ORIGINATORS OF OPENING

In general terms, graves which were examined in 2017 at Czarnówko were rather poorly furnished. To some degree, this is an effect of the original condition of the burial, but first of all it is due to the fact that the grave was opened and furnishings were taken out.

Artefacts which remained in pits of inhumation graves are (in order of their quantity): fibulae, a pin or needle, buckles, necklaces of glass or amber beads (Fig. 18), sometimes individual beads, spindle-whorls, an S-shaped clasp, other part of the belt, combs, spurs. What is the most numerous are damaged vessels or vessel fragments.

Some artefacts were found in situ, behind the extent of the trench. However, some finds were abandoned, left in the trench, be it on its bottom or at higher levels. This demonstrates that they were extracted together with the soil to the surface when the grave was being dug up and then they slid to the interior of the trench when it was filled back. Some artefacts left in the trenches are made of or decorated with silver. These are first of all fibulae and such parts of necklaces as S-shaped clasps or beads (cf. Table 1).

These finds are most numerous recorded within the trenches on their bottom, which may result from the afore-mentioned translocation, selection or loss of artefacts. It is also assumed that some ornaments may have been lost in textiles and were not visible, they were in this part of the coffin which was covered with the soil or their acquisition was not possible due to a non-completed process of body decomposition, which rendered it difficult to take an artefact e.g., bracelets, necklaces) off a bone.

At higher levels of the trenches parts of furnishings are not recorded as often as on their bottoms. At Czarnówko, it was chiefly small artefacts that were recorded in such locations: beads, an S-shaped clasp, or possibly small fragments of metal artefacts which are difficult to identify. What is the most numerous are vessel fragments which are

probably parts of vessels which were broken when the grave was opened.

Vessels with damaged walls, not higher than up to the mid-body, most often surviving as bottoms and adjacent parts, were found in a few graves on the bottom. It can be assumed that their damage is dated to the time when the grave was disturbed. On the other hand, there are instances which suggest that vessels which were already incomplete or were damaged in the course of the funeral were deposited (Fig. 17).

It is not easy to determine why certain artefacts were left in the grave pits in case we do not know the intention behind the opening. A source of selection may have been a set of values which is not known to us and which was perhaps partially related to the role of a given artefact in daily and social life or in the funerary ceremony. What was perhaps also of significance was the state of preservation of the artefact, or problems with its extraction, e.g., in case of small beads. Assuming that the opening was done by a group of people who belonged to the same cultural model, one should relate the value of the left artefacts to their place in the prestige hierarchy which was in force. In such a situation, what is surprising is the lack of interest of the perpetrators in, e.g., spurs, including ornamented ones, which were seen as attributes of a group of warriors or elite representatives of this social stratum.

It is also possible that the artefacts that were left were a sort of “compensation” for the dead who were deprived of part of grave goods. Such a compensation could result from respect to them or from fear of their reciprocal actions aimed against the living. Of course, this aspect of the grave opening at Czarnówko calls for a separate analysis and eventual conclusions may prove different from those which are tentatively proposed here.

⁸ Kind information from A. Krzysiak from the Museum in Lębork.



Fig. 17. Czarnówko. Selection of damaged clay vessels from opened graves: 1 – grave 1821; 2 – grave 1889; 3 – grave 1860; 4 – grave 1887; 5 – grave 1840

Archaeological evidence enables one to respond to the question about methods of operation of the perpetrators, provided that traces of these methods are legible. Questions concerning the time and motivation are more important, but these are more difficult to deal with. Generally, at the present stage of research on the cemetery in Czarnówko and on the issue of the opening of graves, it can be stated that

there is no unequivocal evidence that the opening took place very soon after the burial. What is missing is a fundamental proof, that is, completely preserved skeletons whose positions in the grave pit or in the trench would demonstrate their translocation before the decomposition of soft tissues and ligaments.

The total amount of data gathered in 2017 allows to assume that in graves with surviving bone



Fig. 18. Czarnówko. Amber beads found near the “robbery” trench of grave 1839

remains we are dealing with two situations: the skeletal remains are in a putatively anatomical arrangement (bearing in mind such a poor state of preservation and a low number of bones, it is difficult to assess this) or in a non-anatomical arrangement. Therefore, the opening may have taken place in a period of time after the decomposition of not only soft tissues themselves, but also of ligaments, which are more durable. On the other hand, it is difficult to assess the degree of decomposition of dead bodies in open graves which yielded no bone remains. In 10 out of 21 graves which contained bone remains, these were translocated from their original position. We also know that the opening of many graves may have happened in a time period which ended before the decay of log coffins. In many instances their degree of integrity was pretty high and the trench damaged their structure in no way. In other graves, however, the logs were poorly preserved.

For our considerations, of special interest is a group of graves in which the body was decomposed in the time of opening, as evidenced by the fact that the bones were mixed up, but the coffin

itself was in a good shape. We can notice this in, e.g., Graves 1929, 1839, 1887, 1892. In their case the opening may have taken place approximately in a period of between 5-7 to 10 years after the burial, but perhaps not longer than 20-25 years. According to E. Aspöck (2003), such a degree of preservation of the coffin and the body's integrity dates the interference to a period of 10-35 years after the burial. This data is pretty general, but it is helpful for a general depiction of the problem. In reality, the pace of decomposition of the dead body and of wood depends on a number of reasons, be it individual or external ones (Skóra 2017b; cf. Duda 2006; Ferreira, Cunha 2013).

There is also a group of graves at Czarnówko where no bones are present and the coffin was decomposed. This means that the time of interference can be moved to a period about 35 year after the burial.

On the other hand, it must be remembered that this time could not be too long, as the precision of locating the trenches within the pits means that this time was short enough (not more than a couple of

Table 1. List of artefacts which were left in grave pits and in trenches (Season 2017)

	IN THE TRENCH		BEYOND THE OUTLINE OF THE TRENCH
	ON THE BOTTOM	ABOVE THE BOTTOM	
fibula	8 graves		9 graves
buckle	6 graves		2 graves
other belt parts	4 graves		2 graves
amber bead necklace	1 grave		1 grave
glass bead necklace	2 graves		
up to do 5 glass or amber beads	2 graves	2 graves	1 grave
tweezers	1 grave		
S-shaped clasp	4 graves	1 grave	
needle/pin/awl	7 graves		4 graves
spindle-whorl	5 graves		1 grave
spurs	1 grave		1 grave
comb	1 grave		1 grave
bucket-shaped pendant	1 grave		
silver-made or silver-ornamented artefacts	6 graves	2 graves	1 grave
ceramic vessels – damaged	5 graves		2 graves
shards of ceramic vessels	11 graves	8 graves	5 graves
unidentified fragmented metal artefacts	2 graves	1 grave	1 grave

decades) that overground markers (mounds, wooden and stone structures) were still in a very good shape. There are cases that the trench is somewhat moved to the side. This can imply that at the moment of interference the mound was to some degree eroded and it moved in relation to the pit under it.

It is possible that a majority of graves had been opened before newcomers from Scandinavia commenced to bury their dead in this cemetery in the second half of the 5th c. Graves from this phase are not disturbed, apart from one “probable” opening which took place in Grave 909 (Schuster 2015, 17, Table VI) and which could demonstrate that there were numerous stages of the grave disturbance. Apart from that, J. Schuster (2015, 30) believes that the fact that one burial (Feature 903A) was deposited into an earlier “Wielbark” grave pit (Feature 903B) is a testimony that Wielbark graves were not

visible on the surface any more, apart from a mound covering Grave 872.

In my opinion, the opening of graves at Czarnówko was a multi-stage phenomenon and not a one-time action. The size of the trenches demonstrates that the opening of graves was either socially accepted or occurred during the absence of the community which managed the necropolis. This could be evidenced by the fact that some trenches were left unfilled for some time. In the light of geomorphologic assessments there were a few such cases among the graves which were examined in 2017⁹. The opening of graves during the period of use of the necropolis is also testified to by the disturbance

⁹ Cases where so-called open robbery trenches were left, which were half-filled and were filling back on their own in result of natural factors are known, among others, from Langobard necropolis (Stadler et al. 2005, 270).

of graves coming from the earliest phases of its use. It took place relatively soon after the burial, that is, before the decomposition of log coffins.

It is also significant that at Czarnówko the opening of graves concerns about 90% of them, which means that burials from all phases, including the earliest C1b, fell prey to disturbance. This would on the one hand exclude a situation in which the last users of the Wielbark necropolis could be pointed out as the originators. On the other hand, a group of settlers who decided to move to another region and “put the necropolis in order” can be responsible for the extraction of artefacts from graves. Of course, apart from this last act, an “on-going” grave opening in a certain time after the burial took place.

Traces left in the pits of inhumation graves demonstrate that the opening was undertaken for various reasons, sometimes even within one feature. I am not able to identify motivations of the originators, the more so because numerous graves, with special reference to the most elite ones, may have their own “history”. These motivations are certainly not limited to ritual activities or to prac-

tices which could be called robbery or a socially accepted deprivation of the dead of their belonging (which was their property or was entrusted to them for some time, e.g., until they reached the status of ancestors, which usually falls to the same time as the total decomposition of the body – cf. Mierzwiński 2012). There are many possible scenarios of post-funeral activities. Factors which must be taken into consideration are not only the sex and age of the dead, the time that passed from the burial, but also the social status of the dead, family, social and cultural relationships. In each case one must determine the extent of interference (grave pit and wooden and stone structures, trench, parts of furnishings and human remains), the way of interference (translocation, extraction, destruction) and its degree (partially/completely, selectively/with no selection, subsequent stages of manipulation – cf. Kümmel 2009, 163, Fig. 3.44).

An answer to the question what events took place in the cemetery in Czarnówko must be preceded by many analyses, including the chronological and stratigraphic assessment of the site. Examinations of the necropolis still continue.

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Author's address:

Dr Kalina Skóra
 Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology,
 Polish Academy of Sciences
 Tylna 1
 90-364 Łódź
 e-mail: kalina.skora@tlen.pl
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3197-6060>

