

Łukasz Antosik

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4781-0476>

Magdalena Piotrowska

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8774-2052>

Child Burial of the Przeworsk Culture From the Younger Pre-Roman Iron Age from Site 14 in Kobyla Miejska, Szadek Commune

Pochówek dziecięcy kultury przeworskiej z młodszego okresu przedrzymskiego ze stanowiska Kobyla Miejska 14, gm. Szadek

Abstract: The place, where the site is located, had been destroyed for a long time due to the uncontrolled removal of sand for the needs of local residents. In 2020, the remains of a grave of a Pomeranian culture was recorded. The aim of the fieldwork was to determine the degree of destruction of the cemetery and to capture its extent. The archaeological survey carried out at the site, allowed to discover, among others, one burial of the Przeworsk culture. A metal detector test was also carried out, however, no artefacts which could be associated with this culture were recovered.

The plan of the presented feature was not clearly visible on the sandy soil. At the time of discovery, the vessel was not completely preserved and the fibula was located between fragments of pottery. The heavily corroded brooch was probably originally placed inside a cup which was a container for the burnt human remains. Both

the vessel, due to its micromorphological characteristics – a thickened rim without faceting and a cylindrical handle, and fibula align with type B according to Kostrzewski and group 18 according to Gebhard, date to the A2 phase of the younger pre-Roman Iron Age.

The presented grave might be the only remnant of a burial space of a population of the Przeworsk culture, or an isolated burial of a child located outside the cemetery or on its periphery. There must have been a settlement in the vicinity of the necropolis, which was characterised by its convenient location against the background of the hydrographic network.

Irretrievably lost and destroyed materials of the Przeworsk culture could have contributed to a better knowledge of the Przeworsk settlement in this area, especially in the younger pre-Roman Iron Age, from which sources are less well represented than those from the first centuries AD.

Keywords: grave, Przeworsk culture, younger pre-Roman Iron Age

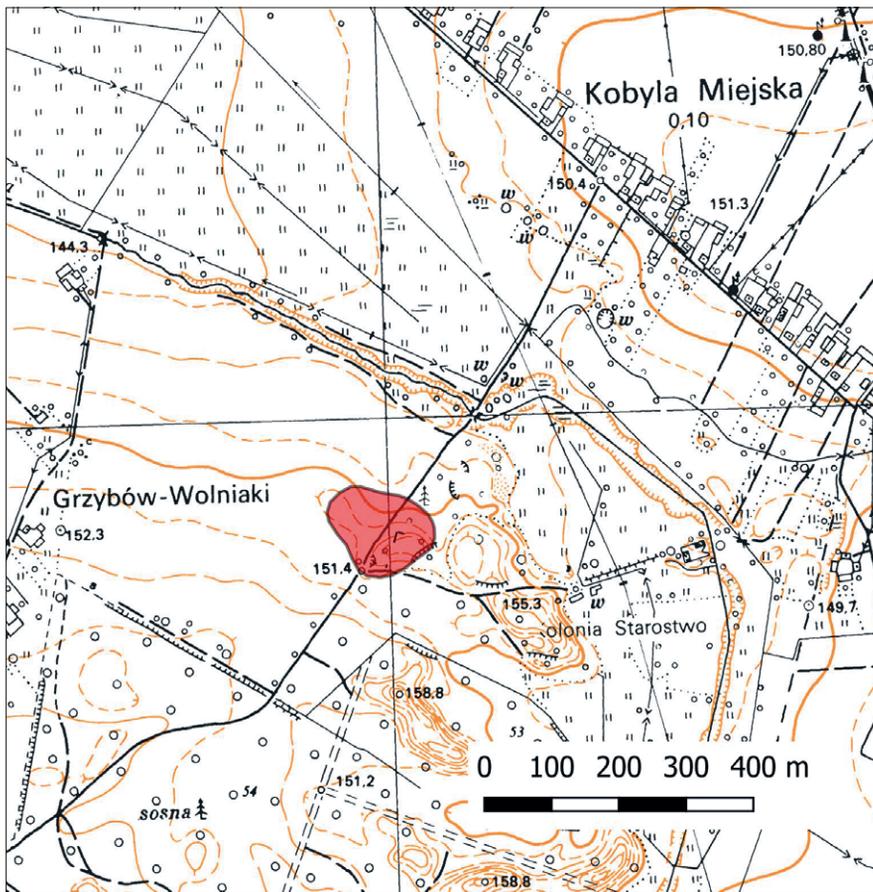


Fig. 1. Kobyla Miejska, Szadek Commune, Łódź Province, site 14. Site location (scale 1:10000) (illustration by P. Muzolf).

Site 14 in Kobyla Miejska is situated to the south of the village buildings, approximately 600 metres away in a straight line. The area is covered by a forest (about 60 years old) predominantly composed of the Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*). The archaeological site was located on a small, sandy elevation, on the edge of the Pichna River valley, with a direct distance of approximately 230 meters from it (Nowak 2001: 102; Fig. 1). The nearby flowing watercourse converges with the Brodnia River near Rzeczyca to form a broad valley with terraces (Czyż, Forysiak 2001: 95).

In the physical-geographical division of Poland, Kobyla Miejska is located on the Szadek Plain, which is a part of the Łask Upland, on a periglacially denuded moraine plain that slopes generally towards the northwest. The area has strings of dunes, moraine hills, and river valleys, which exhibit well-defined terrace

levels and broad valleys. The surface of the Łask Upland is drained by three medium-sized rivers: the Grabia, the Ner, and the Bzura, along with their tributaries (Kondracki 2000: 161). The mesoregion of the Łask Upland lies in the eastern part of the macroregion of the Southern Greater Poland Lowland, a part of the Central Polish Lowlands sub-province (Kondracki 2000; Solon et al. 2018).

The discoveries in Kobyla Miejska were made already before the Second World War, with three sites being recorded during that time (Urbański 2003: 3). An article detailing archaeological findings within the Zduńska Wola District mentions one site in Kobyla Miejska linked to the Przeworsk culture, specifically a cemetery dating from the Roman Iron Age. In the same publication only five sites out of more than twenty associated with the Przeworsk culture in the aforementioned district are attributed to the younger pre-Roman Iron Age (Urbański 2003: 5, 7, map 5; no. 9). According to information from the AZP, eleven archaeological sites were registered in Kobyla Miejska, with six of them containing materials associated with the Przeworsk culture (sheet AZP 67-47).

The location of the site had been deteriorating over an extended period due to uncontrolled sand excavation for the needs of local residents. In 2020, the remains of a grave from the Pomernian culture were discovered (Dobrzycki 2020). In the same year, on the initiative of the Provincial Office for the

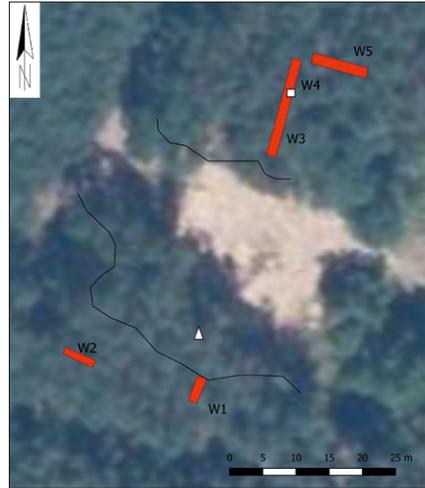


Fig. 2. Arrangement of excavations against the background of the orthophotomap. The triangle represents places where iron rivets were found, and the square denotes the Przeworsk culture grave (illustration by P. Muzolf).

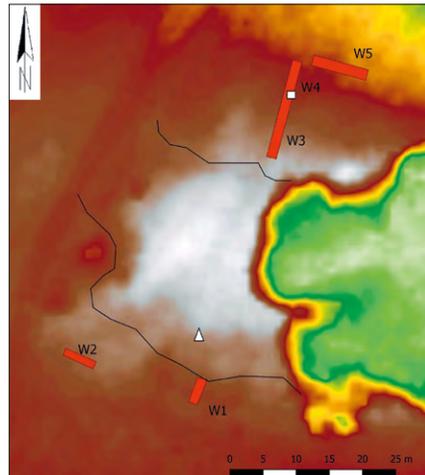


Fig. 3. Arrangement of excavations against the background of dynamic hypsometry showing the extent of the Piaśnica (time unknown) and the present extent (black line). The triangle marks the place where iron rivets with fire patina were found, and the square indicates the Przeworsk culture grave discovered during the research (illustration by P. Muzolf).

Protection of Monuments, a rescue survey was undertaken by the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Łódź¹. The aim of the field work was to determine the degree of the destruction of the cemetery and to capture its extent. In the course of the excavation work, five trenches were dug, with a total area of 50.25 m². Two of them (no. 1 and no. 2) were located on the northern side of the sandpit, while three survey excavations were delineated to the south of the sand extraction site (Fig. 1 and 2). The estimated extent of the damaged area is approximately 7–8 acres. According to oral accounts from the residents of the village of Kobyla Miejska, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the now-excavated hill upon which the cemetery was situated stood about 2–3 meters higher than the edges of the excavation preserved today (Antosik 2020a; Fig. 3).

During the rescue archaeological survey conducted at the site, evidence of human activity was found in only three of the five trenches. A total of 350 archaeological artefacts and three features were documented, including two pits (feature no. 1 and 2) and one burial (feature no. 3) (Antosik 2020a).

In addition to the test trenches a field survey was carried out. The entire area of plot no. 207 was verified using metal detectors, resulting in the excavation of nineteen artefacts. Among these, thirteen finds dating from the twentieth century were identified. Additionally, six artefacts may be associated with the now-destroyed Cloche Grave cemetery, with the recovered artefacts including 2 iron wires (?) and 4 rivets (?) (with one discovered alongside a small fragment of burnt bone)². All artefacts were found at the southern edge of the excavation, 2 to 4 meters from the present escarpment.

In the course of surface survey stray finds were also collected from two adjacent plots nos. 205/1 and 205/2, which were recorded as Grzybów Wolniaki, site no. 1 (AZP 67-47/10) (Godon 1986), approximately 50 m in a straight line away from the excavation site. A total of 52 artefacts were retrieved from their surface, which included fragments of vessels associated with the Lusatian or Pomeranian culture, the Przeworsk culture, and artefacts from the modern period, dating back to the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries. In addition to pottery one flint and two fragments of daub were recorded. Based on this, it appears appropriate to classify this area as remnants of a multiphase settlement complex. Regrettably, it was not possible to ascertain the northern and eastern boundaries of the site (Antosik 2020a).

1 A rescue archaeological survey was conducted between November 16 and 20, 2020, under the direction of mgr Łukasz Antosik by the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Centre for Research on Ancient Technologies in Łódź.

2 Material pertaining to Cloche Grave culture will be the subject of a separate study.



Fig. 4. Kobyła Miejska, Szadek Commune, Łódź Province, site 14. A plan of the feature at the time of discovery (photograph by Ł. Antosik).



Fig. 5. Kobyła Miejska, Szadek Commune, Łódź Province, site 14. Profile of the feature during exploration with a visible cracked vessel and a fibula (photograph by Ł. Antosik).

The title burial was recorded in trench no. 3, measuring 1.5 x 10 m (15 m²), located on the north-south line, on a slope, where the difference between the highest and lowest points was 73 cm.

In addition to the studied grave, the test trench yielded individual fragments of pottery that should be associated with the Pomeranian and Przeworsk cultures, fragments of a Lusatian (?) culture loom weight, and a fragment of a vessel from the modern period.

The outline of the presented feature was not clearly legible against the sandy sterile earth (Fig. 4). At the time of discovery, the vessel was not preserved in its entirety, and a brooch was found nestled amidst pottery fragments (Fig. 5). The heavily corroded fibula³ was likely originally situated inside a cup, serving as a container for the cremated remains.

It is a hand-made, small vessel whose form, as mentioned above, allows it to be classified as a cup (Fig. 6.1). It was reconstructed from eighteen pottery fragments. The diameter of the spout is 12 cm and the height is 9 cm. The surface is smooth, beige in colour. The handle has a cylindrical shape and is somewhat irregularly positioned. The admixture is fine to medium sand with a small amount of crushed stone. The spout is tapered at the top and slightly thickened, with no distinct edge faceting.

According to the classification system established by T. Dąbrowska for materials from Karczewiec, Węgrowski District (Dąbrowska 1973), which is more detailed than the later scheme (Dąbrowska 1988), and following the classification used among others by A. Maciałowicz for vessels from Suchodół, Sochaczew District (Maciałowicz 2006), the presented artefact can be classified as a type I.1 cup. Such forms are characterised, among others, by straight or rounded walls in the upper part of the vessel and a prominently protruding rim (Dąbrowska 1973: 500; Maciałowicz 2006: 309). Similar vessels have been discovered in both the aforementioned cemeteries, as well as in Dąbek, Mława District (cf. Dąbrowska 1973: 415, 500, Table X: 18; Maciałowicz 2006: 330, 338, Table IV, grave 8: 3, Table XII, grave 35: 1; Mistewicz et al. 2021: 362, Table V/11: 5). In one of the burials at the Gola cemetery in Jarocin District, a vessel with a similar form but a different spout was also found (cf. Grygiel et al. 2019: 145, 261, Fig. 103: 5). The chronology of these vessels spans the entirety of the younger pre-Roman Iron Age, and in the Suchodół necropolis they are mainly associated with the A2 phase (Maciałowicz 2006: 309). A slightly thickened spout with indistinct profiling is a distinctive characteristic of the second ceramic phase of the Przeworsk culture (Dąbrowska 1988: 30–31). The crudely finished edges of the spouts and the absence of clear

³ The brooch underwent conservation at the Bio- and Archaeometry Laboratory of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw.

faceting become increasingly common in phase A2 of the younger pre-Roman Iron Age (Maciałowicz 2006: 314–315, Table I–XLIII; Mistewicz et al. 2021: 168).

The examined vessel also exhibits similarities to cups found in the materials of the Oksywie culture, where they are most often associated with the A2 phase (Strobin 2011: 33). The specimen most closely resembling the cup from the presented site comes from Chełmno, capital of the Commune, and shares very similar dimensions (Strobin 2011: 155, Table XXXV: 8). The vessel in question can be compared to cups of the D1a variety, which are typically recognised by their unfaceted spouts, occasionally thickened (Bokiniec 2008, 150).

The chronology of this vessel can be clarified by the fibula found with it. At the time of its discovery, the brooch was in a very poor state of preservation. It is made from iron and is 5.2 cm long (Fig. 6.2). The fibula is distinguished by a four-coil spring and a clearly upward-oriented chord⁴. There is a thickening at the point where the bow transitions into the foot. The connection between the foot and the bow is “shifted” towards back. The bow has an oval cross-section and is symmetrical, featuring a pronounced curvature. In J. Kostrzewski’s typology, the presented artefact finds no equivalent. The fibula can be tentatively compared to type B (Kostrzewski 1919). In order to distinguish between long and short specimens, an “I” is sometimes added to the notation if the artifact is long, while in the case of short fibulae the type is supplemented with “II” (cf. Mistewicz et al. 2021: 81 and further reading there). It seems that this find can be compared to type B.II, i.e., short ones that appear in the A1 phase and are still present in the A2 phase (Mistewicz et al. 2021: 89; Dąbrowska 1988: 18–21, 29). The fibula in question should also be referred to materials from Manching, as it bears resemblance to brooches of 13b, 18b, and 20 groups according to R. Gebhard (1991). The analysed specimen differs, however, in the shape of the cross-section of the bow from fibulae of group 13b and in the position of the connection between the foot and the bow, which is set further to the rear, rather than, as in 13b, more or less in the middle of the bow; moreover, the find in question lacks the rich ornamentation of the foot (Gebhard 1991: 15–16, Table 16–17). Another group to which the fibula in question can be compared is group 18b due to similarities in size, the proportion of bow length to foot length, and the shape and articulation of the bow, but they differ in the position of the bow-to-foot joint, which in their case is more or less in the middle of the bow and not shifted towards the rear (Gebhard 1991: 18–19, Table 31–32). The fibulae of group 20 and the specimen from Kobyla Miejska are similar in size (small), the ratio of the bow length to foot length, and the shape and articulation of the bow, but in

4 The authors would like to thank Prof. P. Łuczkiwicz for his consultation and assistance in the description and analysis of the fibula.

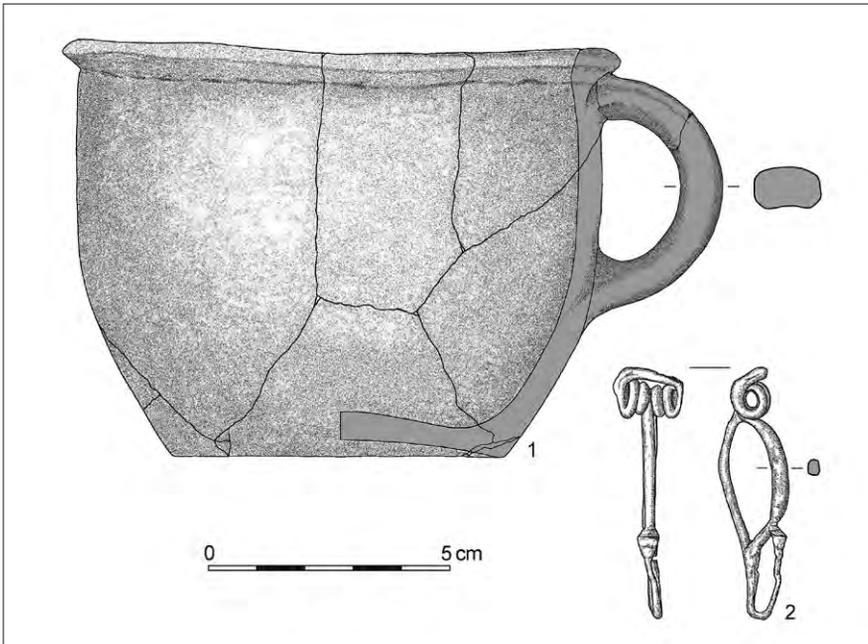


Fig. 6. Kobyla Miejska, Szadek Commune, Łódź Province, site 14. Artefacts obtained from the grave: 1. vessel, 2. fibula (illustration by E. Wtorkiewicz-Marosik).

the analysed brooch the connection of the foot to the leg is set further back and not, as in the mentioned group, more or less in the middle of the bow. Moreover, the artefacts in group 20 are without exception fibulae featuring six-coil springs (Gebhard 1991: 20–21, Table 38). It seems that the analysed fibula should be associated with group 18b as the most related to this group but not as its exact equivalent. This is supported by its small size, the ratio of the bow length to foot length, and the shape and the articulation of the bow. From the aforementioned group, the artifact in question differs significantly by having the foot attached further back to the bow and lacking ornamentation on the foot (Gebhard 1991: 15–16, Table 16–17). Artefacts similar to group 18b according to Gebhard usually have a six-coil spring and the foot attachment is usually in the central part of the bow, but can also be moved forwards or backwards (Grygiel 2018: 49). An artefact from this group was recorded, among others, at the cemetery in Gola (Grygiel et al. 2019: 237, 273, Fig. 148: 7, 7a). The discovery in Kobyla Miejska complements the list of short iron fibulae from the areas of the Polish Lowlands, which includes specimens known for having a long bow and a noticeably shorter foot (Grygiel 2018: 37, 44, 49, 66). Among them are fibulae from Central Poland that align with type B according to Kostrzewski and group 18 according to Gebhard (Grygiel 2018: 45, 49–50, 66,

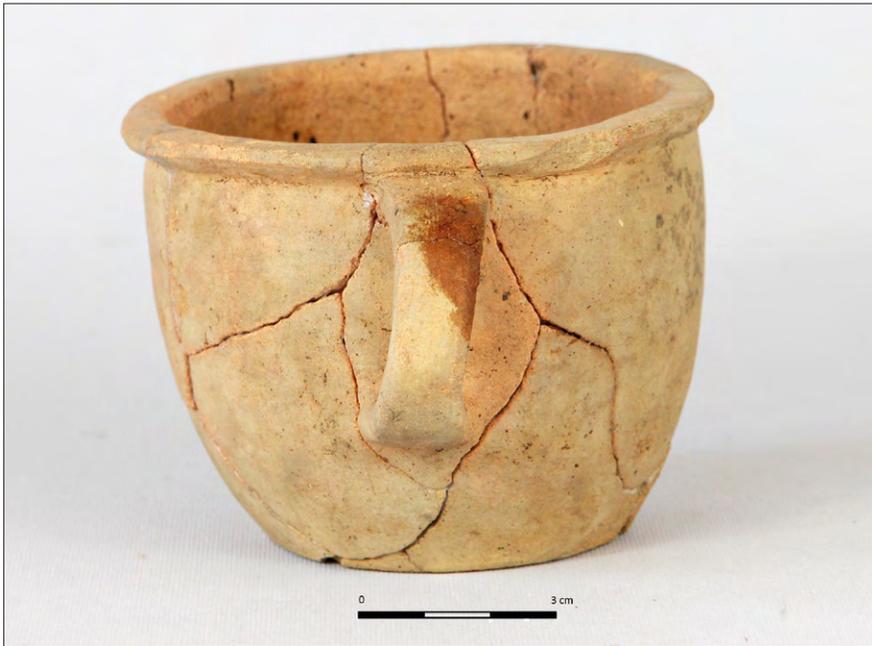


Fig. 7. Kobyla Miejska, Szadek Commune, Łódź Province, site 14. The vessel retrieved from the grave – a cup with a visible crooked handle (photograph by J. Słomska-Bolonek).

Fig. 21). Fibulae featuring a short foot of a middle La Tène structure, encompassing examples attributed to type B according to Kostrzewski and, among others, group 18 according to Gebhard, are primarily associated with the LTC₂ phase (Grygiel 2018: 91 and further reading there; Grygiel et al. 2019: 273). Some of these artefacts, particularly the more recent variations, are dated to the LTD₁ phase (Grygiel 2018: 93, 95, Fig. 47). The find in question should be linked to the A₂ phase of the younger pre-Roman Iron Age. An iron brooch similar to type B.11 and a cup similar in form to the vessel in question, also characterised by a crooked handle, are among the artefacts recovered from grave 11 from Dąbek dated to the A₂ phase of the younger pre-Roman Iron Age (Mistewicz et al. 2021: 42, 43, 362, Table V/11: 5).

Considering the formal characteristics of the vessel and the chronology of the occurrence of B-type fibulae, the presented burial should be dated to the A₂ phase of the younger pre-Roman Iron Age.

In the case of the analysed vessel, the noteworthy feature is the crookedly positioned handle, which contrasts with the rather smooth surface of the cup (Fig. 7). This is either the result of a deliberate choice or the result of an accidental – “careless” – placement of the handle in this way on this vessel. A fragment of a cup with a slanted handle has been recorded among pottery from the younger pre-Roman

Iron Age at site no. 1 in Kobielice, Zakrzewo Commune (Muzolf 2009: 32, 87, Fig. 41: 1). The materials from this settlement exhibit significant affinities with the Jastorf culture circle (Muzolf 2009: 35). Crooked handles can also be found in the pottery of the Gubin group (Domański 1975: 148, Table XVII: e). A cylindrical handle, slightly obliquely attached, was found on a cup from the Obórka site in Gniezno Commune, which featured vessels reminiscent of Jastorf pottery (Sobucki, Woźniak 2004: 208, Fig. 8: 4). It is, however, difficult to determine whether the example of a slightly crooked handle visible here from the presented site should be associated with the Jastorf culture circle.

The burnt bones discovered in the vessel described above were submitted for expert anthropological analysis. The expert analysis revealed that these remains belong to a child who, at the time of death, was determined to be 5 years old +/- 1.5 years (*infans I*)⁵.

The grave presented is an individual burial. In the Przeworsk culture, both such burials and graves in which children were interred alongside adults are found (Madyda-Legutko et al. 2004: 205). The sole item of equipment is a fibula, which is a common discovery in children's burials (*infans I*), in which, however, single brooches made of bronze, and less frequently silver, are by far the most prevalent. Non-ferrous fibulae in the Przeworsk culture definitely dominate in this age category (Czarnecka 1990: 45, 46). In children's graves, these artifacts were deposited along with the remains in an urn, as in the case of the feature in question (cf. Madyda-Legutko et al. 2004: 204, 205). Considering the presence of a single fibula, it is a grave having average equipment; such burials are most numerous among those of younger children (*infans I*) (Czarnecka 1990: 59).

The practice of using small vessels as urns for the remains of children was observed in the Liswarta settlement area, where single brooches were among the most commonly found items in these burials (Zagórska-Telega 2019: 40, 149). Single cups are also vessels frequently discovered in graves, e.g., in the Suchodół necropolis or the cemetery in Dąbek, Mława District, which indicates their special role in funerary rituals (Maciałowicz 2006: 318, 320; Mistewicz et al. 2021: 169, 194–196). The remains of children were usually deposited in vessels of this form acting as urns (Maciałowicz 2006: 321 and further reading there). The characteristics of the analysed grave align with the observations made with regard to child burials of the first age category in the Liswarta basin and are consistent with findings in other Przeworsk cemeteries (Czarnecka 1990: 59; Zagórska-Telega 2019: 148–149).

It is interesting to note the discovery of a single grave of the Przeworsk culture and the complete absence of other materials that could have originated from the

⁵ The anthropological research was carried out by mgr Justyna Karkus.

destroyed cemetery, except for isolated pottery fragments. This could be explained by the complete loss of archaeological sources due to the nearly total destruction of the site, or by the possibility that the test trench captured a grave situated at the periphery of the cemetery. Another explanation may be related to the nature of the burial itself. Ethnographic research has shown that the graves of children could have been situated beyond the conventional burial grounds used by the community. It seems that this observation can also be applied to the burial customs of the Przeworsk culture population. The burial place of a child could be a forest, a crossroads, a field, or the neighbourhood of a settlement – a space not used by a given community (Madyda-Legutko et al. 2004: 210 and further reading there, 212). The treatment of deceased children was different from that of adults, which may also be evidenced by the small number of their burials discovered within cemeteries, which is surprising as mortality rates, particularly among newborns, must have been high. This may be related to the fact that children were not treated as full-fledged members of society, which in turn may be linked to the concept of several types of souls (Czarnecka 1990: 87, 88).

Pit graves equipped with pottery and metal artefacts occurred in Central Poland in the younger pre-Roman Iron Age (Kaszewska 1975: 197). These burials were also marked by a fill of intense black colour (Kaszewska 1975: 204). The grave featured in this article was very poorly legible in profile as well as on the plan. An urn grave from the site in Marcjanów, Turek District, in which a newborn baby and a woman had been interred, also lacked a grave pit outline (Żółkiewski 2008: 245, 248). In the Przeworsk cemeteries, among others, there are burials with elusive or very poorly legible pits and in their case the grave goods were typically placed within an urn (cf. Zagórska-Telega 2019: 39, 44–45).

If the presented burial comes from a destroyed cemetery or its periphery, there must have been a settlement in the vicinity of the necropolis, which was conveniently located near the hydrographic network, thereby confirming the notion that Przeworsk settlements were clustered in proximity to watercourses (Kaszewska 1975: 196). During phases A1 and A2 of the younger pre-Roman Iron Age, among others, the area along the Warta River was where the Przeworsk settlements were concentrated (Godłowski 1985: 28; Urbaniak 2004: 120).

The presented grave might be the only remnant of a burial space of a population of the Przeworsk culture, or an isolated burial of a child located outside the cemetery or on its periphery. As it was mentioned above, this feature should be associated with the A2 phase of the younger pre-Roman Iron Age. It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions from a single grave, but based on its location it may be presumed that if this indeed was part of a cemetery, it was located on a small sandy elevation, which had also previously served as a burial site for people of the Pomeranian culture (cf. Godłowski 1985: 15).

Metal detector prospecting conducted in the vicinity of the analysed grave and its surroundings did not yield any results. If this was not a single grave, it may indicate a complete destruction of a Przeworsk culture cemetery, marking another instance of recent anthropogenic-induced site destruction (cf. Kobyliński 2009). The irretrievably lost and destroyed materials could have contributed to a better knowledge of the Przeworsk settlement in the area, especially during the younger pre-Roman Iron Age, from which sources are less well represented than those from the early centuries AD.

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Streszczenie

Miejsce, na którym zlokalizowane jest stanowisko, od dłuższego czasu ulegało zniszczeniu na skutek niekontrolowanego wybierania piasku na potrzeby okolicznych mieszkańców. W 2020 r. natrafiono na pozostałości grobu ludności kultury pomorskiej. Celem prac terenowych było określenie stopnia zniszczenia cmentarzyska oraz uchwycenie jego zasięgu. W trakcie sondażowych badań archeologicznych przeprowadzonych na stanowisku zarejestrowano m.in. jeden pochówek kultury przeworskiej. Przeprowadzono także badania za pomocą wykrywacza metali, jednak nie uzyskano zabytków, które można byłoby wiązać ze wspomnianą kulturą.

Zarys prezentowanego obiektu nie był wyraźnie czytelny na tle piaszczystego calca. W momencie odkrycia naczynie nie było zachowane w całości, a zapinka znajdowała się między fragmentami ceramiki. Silnie skorodowana fibula prawdopodobnie była pierwotnie umieszczona wewnątrz kubka pełniącego rolę pojemnika na przepalone szczątki. Zarówno naczynie, ze względu na cechy mikromorfologiczne – pogrubiony brzeg bez facetowania oraz wałeczkowate ucho, jak żelazna zapinka nawiązująca do typu B według Kostrzewskiego i grupy 18 według Gebharda, datowane są na fazę A2 młodszego okresu przedrzymskiego.

Zaprezentowany grób może być jedyną pozostałością przestrzeni grzebalnej ludności kultury przeworskiej lub jednostkowym pochówkiem dziecka zlokalizowanym poza cmentarzyskiem lub na jego obrzeżach. W sąsiedztwie nekropolii znajdują się musiały osada, która charakteryzowała się dogodnym położeniem na tle sieci hydrograficznej.

Bezpowrotnie utracone i zniszczone materiały kultury przeworskiej mogły się przyczynić do lepszego poznania osadnictwa przeworskiego w tym rejonie, zwłaszcza w okresie młodszopredrzymskim, z którego źródła są słabiej reprezentowane niż te z pierwszych wieków naszej ery.

Słowa kluczowe: grób, kultura przeworska, młodszy okres przedrzymski

Łukasz Antosik

Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Łódź
e-mail: l.antosik@iaepan.edu.pl

Magdalena Piotrowska

Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Łódź
e-mail: m.piotrowska@iaepan.edu.pl