

# ROBBERY OR RITUAL ACTIVITIES? SEARCHING FOR A REINTERPRETATION AND GENESIS OF THE 'ROBBED BARROWS' OF SUDOVIAN CULTURE

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## Abstract

One peculiarity of the Suwalska Group of Sudovian culture is the very large number of barrows with destroyed inhumation graves. Since the 1950s, this fact has been interpreted as the result of the robbery of grave goods, which took place in late Antiquity. Common features in the 'robbed graves' observed in cemeteries at Osowa site I, and the villages of Sz wajcaria and Żywa Woda, were: 1) the concavity of the top of the barrow and the lack of stones in the stone lining on the barrow surface; 2) traces of the 'robbery trench'; 3) the multilayer stone pavement (concentration) over the skeleton grave; 4) the complete or partial lack of human bones in the grave, especially the lack of a skull and bones of the post-cranial skeleton, with the exception of the legs; and 5) traces of fire in the grave pits and on the stone pavements. These features and the almost complete lack of human bones in the stratified layers of the barrows, formed as a result of 'robbery', lead us to the conclusion that they were material traces of ritual practices connected with opening the barrows and relocating human bones and grave goods from inhumations. The basis of these activities was probably the principle of the proper burial of the dead. The real moment of death was not the end of the vital functions, but the complete decomposition of the body. After that, the re-deposition and secondary burial of bones took place.

Key words: West Balts, Roman Period, robbed barrows, ritual activities.

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## Introduction: Sudovian culture

The author of the concept of Sudovian culture was Marian Kaczyński. This archaeological unit covers archaeological sources from the Late Roman Period and Migration Period, in an area limited to the east by the middle reaches of the River Nemunas/Neman/Memel, to the west by the Great Masurian Lake District, to the north by the upper reaches of the River Szeszupa/Šešupė, and to the south by the Biebrza Valley (Fig. 1) (Kaczyński 1976, 253).<sup>1</sup> Although the concept of Sudovian culture was regarded by Kaczyński as a preliminary one, it was widely accepted by Polish archaeologists. The idea of separating this cultural unit corresponded with Carl Engel's previous proposal for the cultural distribution of the southeast Baltic Sea region in the Roman Period (Engel 1933, 276ff., Figs. 1, 2). It should be emphasised that in his studies Kaczyński was much more focused on local groups: Augustowska, Suwalska and Gołdapska, than on Sudovian culture itself (Kaczyński 1976, 255ff.).

The question of Sudovian culture as a consistent archaeological unit has been discussed several times. Its

<sup>1</sup> The earliest graves in the cemeteries of the Suwalska Group originated from periods B<sub>2</sub>/C<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>1a</sub>. Sudovian culture 'crystallised' in phase C<sub>1b</sub> (Nowakowski 1995, 76ff.).

substantial internal differences were emphasised, but finally, in general, all authors agreed with Kaczyński's concept, modifying only the chronological and territorial framework (Bitner-Wróblewska 1994, 225ff., 1998, 307ff.). The new concept of the genesis of this culture was also briefly discussed, with the strong visibility of the role of the Gołdapska Group (Engel et al. 2006a, 24ff., 2006b, 185, 200ff.).

In fact, archaeological sources from the area of Sudovian culture should be interpreted again with the use of all new archaeological data collected during the last circa 50 years. The interpretation should include the range of the cultural diversity in the Roman Period and the Migration Period in the borderland of the west (Germanic) cultural province with flat cemeteries and the east province with barrow cemeteries.

## The 'robbed barrows' of Sudovian culture

Data sources of the 'robbed barrows' question in Sudovian culture derive from the results of excavations of three cemeteries of the Suwalska Group, conducted in the 1950s in the framework of the Comprehensive Jatiangan Expedition: the cemeteries at Osowa site I and the villages of Sz wajcaria and Żywa Woda. All these

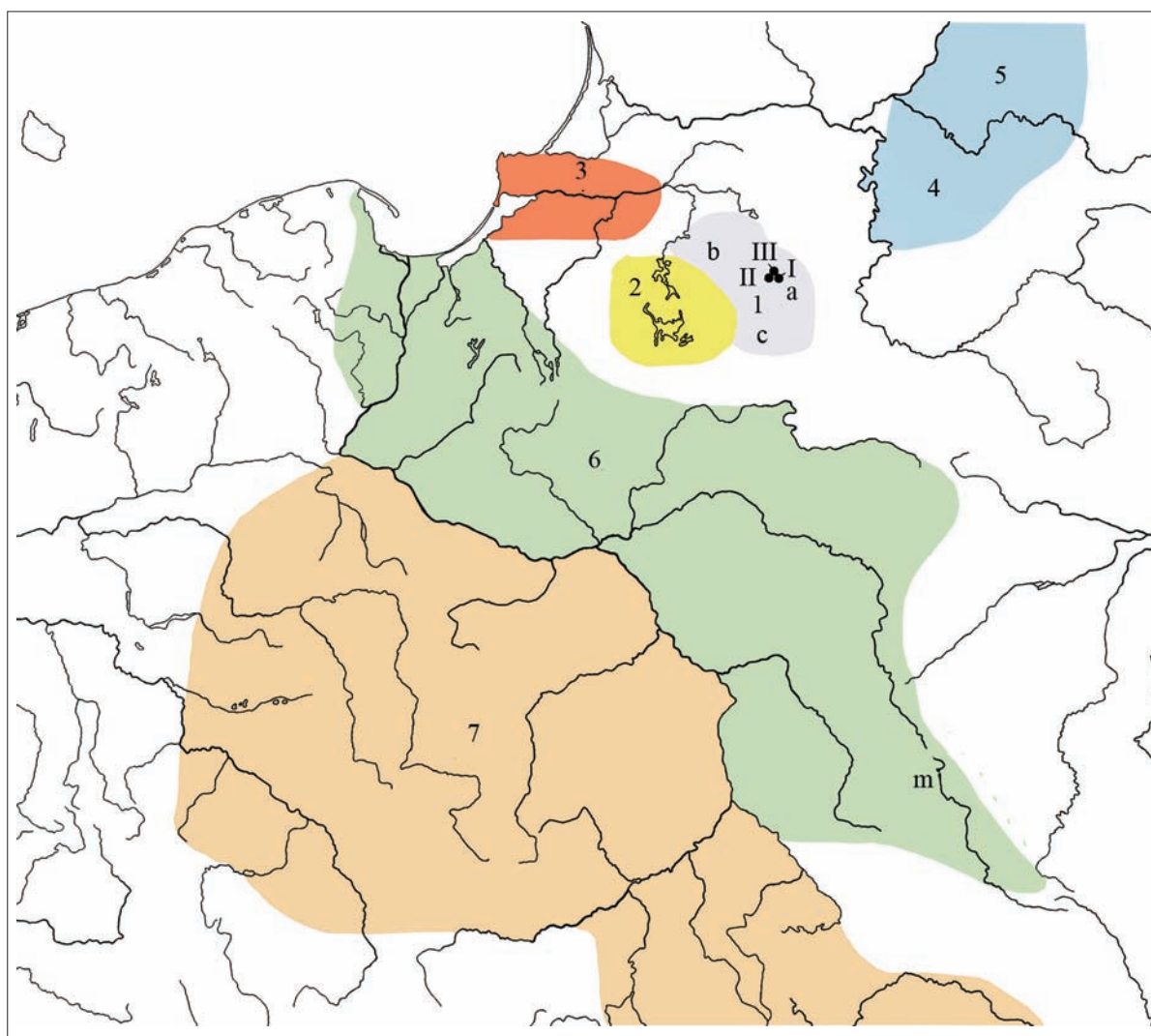


Fig. 1. Sudovian culture and the neighbouring archaeological cultures in the Late Roman Period (after Kaczanowski, Kozłowski 1998, Fig. 159; Kokowski 1995, Fig. 92-94; Miadzvedzeŭ 1999, Fig. 96; Nowakowski 1991, Fig. 1; Bliujienė 2013, Fig. 24). 1 Sudovian culture: a the Suwałska Group; b the Gołdapska Group; c the Augustowska Group. Cemeteries in the villages of Osowa (I), Szwajcaria (II) and ŻywaWoda (III); 2 Bogaczewo culture; 3 Dollkeim-Kovrovo culture; 4 South Lithuanian barrows with stone mounds; 5 East Lithuanian barrows; 6 Wielbark culture, the Masłomęcz Group (m); 7 Przeworsk culture.

cemeteries were located close to each other (Fig. 1). The experiences from the first season of excavating the cemetery in the village of Szwajcaria near the town of Suwałki shaped the methodology for the research and interpretation of the results of all further excavations led by members of this expedition (Antoniewicz et al. 1956, 1958; Antoniewicz 1961, 1963; Jaskanis 2013).

Among the barrows excavated in 1955 at the cemetery in Szwajcaria, Jerzy Antoniewicz, Marian Kaczyński and Jerzy Okulicz-Kozaryn defined two categories. The basis for the distinction was the type of burial. Barrows with a central inhumation, typically located in a large and deep grave pit, belonged to the first category. A characteristic feature of these barrows was charcoal in the barrow mound and on the stone pavement over the burial pit, originating from ‘ceremonial bonfires’

or bonfires lit during the funerary feast. In a few cases (barrows No 14 and 15 in the concentration of north barrows, and barrow No 10 in the south barrows), inhumations were uncovered located asymmetrically under the barrow mounds. These graves were interpreted as the burials of family members. The second type was represented by barrows with several cremation graves (Antoniewicz et al. 1956, 320, 1958, 45ff; Jaskanis 2013, 33, 85ff.).

Common features of the first category were:

- 1) A more or less visible concavity of the top of the barrow;
- 2) A stone circle surrounding the barrow (?). Jan Jaskanis, the author of a monograph about the Szwajcaria cemetery, published in 2013, questions the occurrence

of stone circles surrounding the barrows (Jaskanis 2013, 234);

- 3) Concentrations of charcoal and potsherds between the stones covering the barrow;
- 4) Layers of charcoal under the barrow;
- 5) The form and orientation of the grave pit: a length of three to four metres along a NW-SE axis;
- 6) A multi-layer concentration of stones in the grave pit (three to ten layers);
- 7) An incomplete, partly preserved human skeleton in the central grave pit;
- 8) The presence of grave goods (weapons, ornaments and tools) with the inhumation;
- 9) The presence of sheep skulls and other parts of a sheep skeleton in the grave pit (Fig. 2) (Antoniewicz et al. 1956, 320).

The pits of cremation graves in the second group of barrows resembled graves from the first group in terms of the presence of stone pavements and the remains of pyres in the filling of the grave. The remains of pyres were characteristic only of the central cremation grave. The other cremation graves, placed in the lining of the barrow, contained only fragments of burnt human bones. In relation to barrows of the first type, the pits of graves containing cremations were much smaller. The length of pits of this type was less than one metre. In contrast with the first type of barrow, the stone linings of the second type did not contain concentrations of charcoal. A characteristic feature of these barrows were urn graves and concentrations of fragments of burnt human bones placed between the stones of the lining (Antoniewicz et al. 1956, 322, 1958, 46).

The transitional form between barrows of the first and second types consisted of barrows with a single, central cremation grave, or a grave which contained cremated human bones, placed in large, rectangular pits (grave No 1 in barrow No 12, and graves in barrows Nos 13 and 31). This type of barrow was regarded as evidence of the evolution of the burial rite, the transition from inhumation to cremation (Antoniewicz et al. 1956, 322, 1958, 46).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> It should be emphasised that in the latest monograph on the cemetery in Szwajcaria, descriptions of burials from the mentioned barrows differ from the primary one. According to J. Jaskanis (2013), barrow No 12 contained a skeleton grave, barrow No 13 two graves, No 1 a cremation burial and No 2 a skeleton (?) burial, and barrow No 31 a cremation grave (Jaskanis 2013, 84ff., 97). The author of the monograph does not explain the reason why he changed the descriptions of the graves from these barrows.

The concavity of the top of the barrow, the gap in the stone lining covering it, the filling of the pit dug into the centre of the barrow, visible in its stratigraphy, and the incomplete skeleton in the central grave pit, were interpreted in the case of cemeteries in Osowa site I, and the villages of Szwajcaria and Żywa Woda, as evidence of robbery, which took place in Antiquity (Fig. 2) (Antoniewicz et al. 1956, 315, 1958, 47ff.; Antoniewicz 1963, 183; Jaskanis 1958, 93, 2013, 243; Ziemińska-Odojowa 1958, 104, 1961b, 55).

Layers of charcoal uncovered in the stone linings of barrows and under their mounds were regarded as traces of burnt wooden structures or traces of funerary feasts which took place during the funeral in honour of the deceased. The evidence for the consumption of sheep meat during these ceremonies was the skull of this animal placed in the grave. The choice of sheep meat for ritual feasting reflected, in the opinion of the authors of the excavations, the important role of this species in animal husbandry in the less fertile, wooded areas of the Suwalki Lakeland (Antoniewicz et al. 1956, 320ff.).

Traces of 'robbery' were associated only with the central inhumations. In the opinion of the researchers, the robberies took place at a time when the cemeteries were still in use. The aim of the robbers was to dig up grave goods made of non-ferrous metals. Cremation graves were not robbed, because the robbers were aware that all the metal objects in these graves were destroyed by fire (Antoniewicz et al. 1958, 49). Moreover, only the central inhumations were robbed, because the robbers knew how bodies were placed in the barrow. The location of other inhumations in these barrows was unknown to them. Ignorance of the location of these graves among later generations protected them from 'robbery and devastation' (Antoniewicz et al. 1958, 48; Jaskanis 1958, 93, 1974, 133).

This interpretation, proposed at the very beginning as a characteristic of barrows in the cemetery in Szwajcaria, was then extended to all cemeteries from that time that were excavated in the area of the Suwalska Group of Sudovian culture (Jaskanis 1958, 93, 1961, 174ff.; 1962, 290, 293; 1974, 134ff.; D. Jaskanis, J. Jaskanis 1961, 41ff.; Ziemińska-Odojowa 1961b, 55, 1966, 236). An analysis of the allocation of cemeteries with 'robbed barrows' showed that 'robbery' was common exclusively to cemeteries of the Suwalska Group (Figs. 1, 3, 4, 5). Traces are unknown from cemeteries belonging to the Augustowska and Gołdapska groups of Sudovian culture (Jaskanis 1974, 133ff.; Bitner-Wróblewska 2007, 22, 30ff., 35ff., 40ff., Fig. 2).

## The state of publication of archaeological sources

The verification of the above hypothesis is difficult after almost 60 years. The main problem is the variable state of publication of excavation results, which differs even for subsequent years of excavations at the same cemetery (Antoniewicz et al. 1956, 309ff., 1958, 23ff.; Antoniewicz 1961, 2ff., 1963, 167ff.; Jaskanis 1958, 76ff., 1961, 132ff., 1962, 235ff., 2013, 27ff.; D. Jaskanis, J. Jaskanis 1961, 27ff.; Ziemińska-Odojowa 1958, 100ff., 1961a, 193ff., 1961b, 49ff., 1966, 232ff.). An important factor is also that the hypothesis of 'robbed graves' was approved at the very beginning of the project. It resulted in the 'standardisation' of the excavation method of the 'robbed graves', which did not include the detailed analysis and documentation of the stratigraphy.

A particular difficulty is the frequent lack of illustrations of the stratigraphy of the explored barrows (Antoniewicz 1961, 1963; Jaskanis 1958, 2013; Ziemińska-Odojowa 1958, 1961a, 1961b). A map of the cemetery in Osowa village site 1 was published on several occasions, in parts presenting the progress of the excavations. Its most complete version includes the publication of 1974 (Jaskanis 1974, Fig. 5). However, this map does not include the location of eight barrows excavated at the southern edge of the cemetery (barrows No 71-78), and another eight barrows located in different parts of the necropolis (barrows No 21, 22, 27, 31, 38, 64, 80, 113). Besides, the numeration of barrows No 4, 12, 13, 14, 34, 69, 97 was doubled. The description of the location of some barrows denies their mark on the plan, such as barrows No 79, 80, 81 (Jaskanis 1962, 235ff., 238, 1974, Fig. 5). The locations of barrows No 71-78 were marked on a separate map, but the detailed topography cannot be precisely connected with the map published in 1974 (Fig. 3) (Jaskanis 1961, Fig. 2). A map of the cemetery in the village of Szwałczaria shows the scale of the problems with the reconstruction of a map of a cemetery excavated 50 years ago (Jaskanis 2013, Fig. 5). In his work, Jaskanis used all available archival sources, including earlier published and unpublished maps, drawing documentation, descriptive records, and even the knowledge of the participants in excavations. But even with the use of all these sources, the reconstructed map has several missing pieces of information (Fig. 4) (Jaskanis 2013, 18ff.).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The following barrows are not precisely marked on the plan of the cemetery: Nos 35/165, 44, 45/1961, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 57/1965, 61, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 68A, 69, 70, 71, 73, 73A, 73B, 74, 75, 75A, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83 (Jaskanis 2013, Fig. 5).

In turn, the results of excavations in the cemetery in Korkliny village site II, where inhumations were only uncovered in barrows No IV and V, were published according to a unified scheme, without profiles of most barrows and sections of all grave pits (Jaskanis 1970, 149ff.).

In some cases, a description of the results of the excavations does not allow omitted features to be reconstructed. We can only guess that the lack of information on the gap in the barrow's stone lining over the 'robbed' grave pit, and the filling of the 'robbery trench', resulted from their obviousness. Otherwise, how should we interpret the omission of information on fragments of human bones uncovered in the fillings of 'robbery trenches', as well as charcoal and burning within the stone pavements over 'robbed grave pits', and in the pit itself? In cases where human bones, charcoal or traces of burning were uncovered in barrows, this information was always published (Jaskanis 1958, 1961, 1962, 201; D. Jaskanis, J. Jaskanis 1961; Antoniewicz et al. 1956; Antoniewicz 1961, 1963).

The influence of the lack of full documentation on the possibility of the interpretation of the results of the excavations is clearly visible in the monograph on the cemetery in the village of Szwałczaria. The information on the 'robbed' barrows contained in it is often ambiguous and incomplete. The monograph contains information both on unpublished barrows and on a number of details supporting the earlier descriptions. In some cases, information from articles by J. Antoniewicz, M. Kaczyński and J. Okulicz-Kozaryn differs from that described by J. Jaskanis. For instance, bones from the grave in barrow No 1 were once identified as a 'concentration of unburnt bones' (Antoniewicz 1961, 3), and then as 'scattered small fragments of burnt bones' (Jaskanis 2013, 75). The location of the grave in barrow No 10 was defined as 'central' (Antoniewicz et al. 1956, 313), or 'asymmetrical' (Jaskanis 2013, 83, Fig. 5). The state of preservation of the stone lining of barrow No 25 was once described as 'compact with no loss' (Antoniewicz 1961, 8), and then as 'with defects in construction, particularly in the centre' (Jaskanis 2013, 93). The visibility of barrow No XI on the surface of the cemetery was defined as 'it was characterised by a relatively high prominence above average ground level' (Antoniewicz 1963, 183), or as 'invisible in the area' (Jaskanis 2013, 33). The author of the monograph did not explain these differences. We can only assume that, at least in part, they result from the reinterpretation of the available documentation from the excavations. However, this does not solve the problem, because on one hand, we have information published by authors almost immediately after the end of further seasons of excavation, and on the other hand, information taken from the records of

this research. And in the nature of things, the documentation is secondary to direct observation. Furthermore, descriptions of the stratigraphy of barrows and graves, published by J. Jaskanis, are often less detailed than those given by previous authors (Antoniewicz et al. 1956, 309ff., 1958, 23ff.; Antoniewicz 1961, 2ff., 1963, 167ff.; Jaskanis 2013, 27ff.).

A further complication which results from the state of excavation and documentation of the cemetery at Szwałczaria is the inability to interpret clearly all the barrows and graves. Barrows No 73A, 73B and 75A have been left unexplored (Jaskanis 2013, 114ff., Table CCXXI, CCXXII). Barrows No XXIA, XLVI, LXVII, LXXIII, XCIII and XCIII did not contain any graves (Fig. 4) (Jaskanis 2013, 40, 48, 56, 58, 65, Table XXXIII, LI, LXVI, LXXIII, XCV). This strange fact may reflect either the real situation or an error in exploration. And the state of documentation of barrows No 80, XXVIII and LXXXI does not allow us to interpret in detail the stratigraphy and post-deposition processes (Jaskanis 2013, 42ff., 61, 116, Table XXXIX-XL, LXXXII, CCXXV).

The difficulty in the interpretation of the cemetery at Szwałczaria is also related to the monograph itself. Quite often, the description of the location of graves under barrow mounds differs from the map of the cemetery. A special case is barrow No LXXX. In the catalogue, only the cremation grave from this barrow was described, and on the map of the cemetery, two graves, the oldest an inhumation, and a stratigraphically younger cremation grave, were marked (Fig. 4) (Jaskanis 2013, 60, Fig. 5, Table LXXX). Figure 5 is the only source of information concerning this grave.

In the article presenting the results of the second season of excavations in the cemetery at Szwałczaria, a reduction in detail of the description of inhumation graves is visible. This is particularly noticeable in the description of the state of preservation, the anatomical identification of bones, and the age and sex of the deceased. These descriptions give the impression that an anthropological analysis has not been carried out. However, this contradicts information on the participation of the anthropologist S. Witkowski in the excavations noted at the beginning of the article (Antoniewicz et al. 1958, 22, Note 2). In fact, the results of these analyses were published separately, and were not included in the archaeological report (Dzierżykray-Rogalski 1956, 327ff.; 1958, 131ff.). Anthropologists from the Department of Anatomy of the Medical University of Białystok also took part in the later seasons of excavations, in 1957, 1959 and 1960. The leader of the team was Professor Dzierżykray-Rogalski (Antoniewicz 1961, 1, 1963, 176; Dzierżykray-Rogalski 1962c). Exceptions were excavations conducted in 1958 and

1959 (Antoniewicz 1963, 167, 171), as well as further excavations which took place in the first half of the 1960s (Jaskanis 2013, 27ff.). The only exception was the anthropological analysis of bones from the 'grave of a farmer' (Dzierżykray-Rogalski 1962a).

Anthropologists also took part in excavations carried out in 1956 on cemeteries in Osowa village site 1 and the village of Żywa Woda (Jaskanis 1958, 76, Ziemińska-Odojowa 1958, 99).<sup>4</sup> However, archaeological reports from these excavations did not include information on the results of this analysis (Jaskanis 1958; Ziemińska-Odojowa 1958, 100ff.). In fact, the anthropological reports were published on a very limited scale (Dzierżykray-Rogalski 1958, 137, 1963).<sup>5</sup> The archaeological report from the excavations of the cemetery in Osowa village site 1, carried out in 1956, is sometimes so unclear that we cannot tell if the grave contained a complete or an incomplete skeleton (eg. Jaskanis 1958, 82). In the next excavation seasons at these cemeteries, anthropological analyses were usually not carried out (D. Jaskanis, J. Jaskanis 1961, 27, Note 1; Jaskanis 1961, 131; Ziemińska-Odojowa 1961a, 193, Note 2, 1961b, 49, Note 2, 1966, 229, Note 2). One exception was the excavation in 1961 at the cemetery in Osowa village site 1. The members of this archaeological expedition were anthropologists from the Department of Anatomy of the Medical University of Białystok (Jaskanis 1962, 233).

The osteological material from cemeteries excavated within the framework of the Comprehensive Jatviangan Expedition was analysed mostly by anthropologists from a team led by Professor Tadeusz Dzierżykray-Rogalski. The author of the analysis was also Dr Alina Wiercińska (1970). However, not all the human remains were analysed, or at least their results have not been published. In the case of the osteological material from the cemetery in Osowa village site 1, uncovered in 1957–1959, only the results of the analysis of bones from the cremation graves were published (Dzierżykray-Rogalski 1962b). Bones from inhumations had been separated as a collection for special study, but their results are not known (Dzierżykray-Rogalski, Promińska 1961, 1962; Dzierżykray-Rogalski 1962b). That is why the unburnt human bones from this cemetery are known only from barrows excavated in 1956 (Dzierżykray-Rogalski 1963).

<sup>4</sup> In 1956–1958, anthropological research on the cemetery in the village of Żywa Woda was conducted by A. Wierciński and A. Wiercińska (Ziemińska-Odojowa 1958, 99, Note 6).

<sup>5</sup> From the cemetery in Osowa village site 1, only results of the analysis of human bones from the cremation graves were published, and from the cemetery in Żywa Woda, bones from the 'quarter B of barrow No 2' and the 'west quarter of barrow No 7' (Dzierżykray-Rogalski 1958, 137; 1963, 310ff.).

As has already been stated, the main barrier to reinterpreting the results of the excavations conducted at the cemeteries in Osowa village site 1, and the villages of Szwajcaria and Żywa Woda is the 'robbery' hypothesis. It resulted, from the very beginning of the excavations, in the standardisation of the method of exploration and documentation of the stratigraphy of the 'robbed skeleton graves'.<sup>6</sup> This situation was probably affected by the authority of J. Antoniewicz, the leader of the Comprehensive Jatviangan Expedition. As a result, during the next years of excavations, the 'robbery pits' were recorded in a standard way, without any special attention to their stratigraphy. Of course, a limiting factor was also the state of preservation of the barrow mounds. In extreme cases, as at the cemetery in Osowa village site 1, the complete or almost complete destruction of barrow mounds made it impossible to record the 'robbery pits' in them. Such was the case of barrows Nos 1, 3-11, 13, 14, 16, 19, 20-25, 32, 41, 46, 49, 56, 62, 65, 75-77, 90, 110, 111, 114-118, 120 (Fig. 3) (Jaskanis 1958, 76, 78ff., 82, 84, 86, 90, 93, 1961, 137, 140, 149, 154, 158, 171ff., 1962, 244, 269, 270ff., 274ff., 278, Fig. 25; D. Jaskanis, J. Jaskanis 1961, 28, 30ff., 36, 39).

### The reinterpretation of the 'robbed barrows'

The hypothesis concerning the robbery of central inhumation graves at the cemeteries in Osowa, Szwajcaria and Żywa Woda, which took place in Antiquity, when these cemeteries were still in use, prompts a few questions:

- 1) How did the robbers know which barrow contained a central inhumation and which contained a cremation grave? Did they really not know the location of other inhumation graves in the barrows?
- 2) Why were some inhumation graves, located in the centres of barrows, including the richest 'grave of a prince' from the biggest barrow No 2, at the cemetery in Szwajcaria, not robbed? An insufficient explanation is that the 'grave of a prince' was located asymmetrically according to the top of the barrow. Similarly, the central inhumation graves from two more barrows in this cemetery, three barrows in the cemetery in Osowa village site I, and one barrow in the Korkliny village site II, had no traces of robbery.
- 3) Why were some inhumation graves, located asymmetrically according to the top of the barrow, robbed?

<sup>6</sup> The publication of the results of the excavation of barrows No IV and V in the cemetery at Korkliny village site II did not include the information that they were robbed (Jaskanis 1970, 160ff.).

Examples of 'robbed' inhumations, located asymmetrically according to the top of the barrow in the cemeteries in Osowa, Szwajcaria and Żywa Woda, show that the asymmetrical location did not preserve graves from the 'robbery'.<sup>7</sup>

4) What happened with the human bones from the robbed graves? The results of excavations at the cemeteries in Osowa, Szwajcaria and Żywa Woda showed an almost complete lack of human bones in the fillings of pits dug out by the robbers, as well as on the surfaces of barrows and in their vicinity (Antoniewicz et al. 1956, 309ff., 1958, 23ff.; Antoniewicz 1961, 2ff., 1963, 167-183; Jaskanis 1958, 76ff., 1961, 132ff., 1962, 235ff., 2013, 27ff.; D. Jaskanis, J. Jaskanis 1961, 27ff.; Ziemińska-Odojowa 1958, 100ff., 1961a, 193ff., 1961b, 49ff., 1966, 232ff.). The explanation that all these bones have decomposed is insufficient without taphonomic analysis.

5) Why did the robbers build stone pavements in the robbed graves, usually consisting of several layers of stones, and why did they sometimes replace stones on the tops of barrows? Did they really want to hide traces of the robbery? What was the point of this activity, while human bones from destroyed graves were lying on the surfaces of the barrows?

A detailed analysis of all 'robbed' and 'non-robbed' inhumation graves from barrows in cemeteries in the villages of Osowa, Szwajcaria and Żywa Woda leads us to the conclusion that the robbers certainly knew which graves in the barrow were inhumations. They also knew the position of these graves located asymmetrically relative to the centre of the barrow.

A single central inhumation in barrows at the cemeteries in Korkliny village site II (barrow No IV, graves No 2 and 3), Osowa village site I (barrows Nos 74, 101, 119), and Szwajcaria village (barrows No XXV, LXXXIV) had no traces of 'robbery', and contained complete skeletons and grave goods (Figs. 3, 4) (Jaskanis 1961, 170, Fig. 27; 1962, 259ff., 277f., Fig. 18, 28, 1970, 160ff., Fig. 11, 12; 2013, 41, 62ff., Tables XXXVI, LXXXVII). An explanation why these graves were not 'robbed', on the basis of the results of excavations, is impossible.

The 'grave of a prince' in barrow No 2 in the cemetery in Szwajcaria (Fig. 4) is also regarded as a 'non-robbed'

<sup>7</sup> E.g. barrows Nos VI, VII, XII, XV, XXVI, XLII, LVI, LVIII, LX, LXX, LXXII, LXXVIII, LXXXI, LXXXIII, 3, 11, 13, 15, 18, 19, 72 in the cemetery in the village of Szwajcaria (Jaskanis 2013, 29ff., 34ff., 42, 47, 52ff., 56ff., 80ff., 84ff., 87ff., 114, Tables VIII-XI, XVIII, XXI-XXII, XXXVII-XXXVIII, XLVIII, LIX-LXI, LXIX-LXXIII, LXXVIII-LXXXIX, LXXXI-LXXXII, LXXXV-LXXXVI, CXXVI-CXXVII, CXXXVIII, CXL-CXLI, CXLIV-CXLV, CXLVIII-CXLIX, CLI-CLII, CCXX-CCXXI).

grave (Antoniewicz et al. 1958, 48ff., Table I; Jaskanis 2013, 76ff., 244, Tables CXVIII-CXXV). The authors of the excavations suggested that it was not robbed because it was located asymmetrically according to the centre of the barrow (Antoniewicz et al. 1958, 48ff.). But the barrows of the Suwalska Group of Sudovian culture were not large mounds. Their height did not usually exceed one metre, and the diameter rarely exceeded ten metres. Single exceptions were the 'princely barrows'.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, to dig up the whole barrow was not a major problem. More important is the fact that the asymmetrical location of the inhumation grave in relation to the top of the mound did not prevent it from being robbed. And the state of preservation of the skeleton from the 'grave of a prince' in barrow No 2 shows that, in fact, it was 'robbed'. The skeleton of the old man (*senilis*) was incomplete. The description and illustration of it show clearly that there were no bones in the grave from the area between the mandible and the hips. Only bones of the forearm of the right arm were preserved (Antoniewicz et al. 1958, 25, Table I, Jaskanis 2013, 76ff., 244, Table CXVIII). So the 'robbers' took only part of the skeleton, and left the very rich furnishings of the grave?<sup>9</sup>

Barrow No 2 in the cemetery in Szwajcaria was not the only one in this cemetery to contain an undisturbed inhumation grave with missing skeleton fragments. In grave No 3 in barrow No XXVI, there was a skeleton of a child (*infans* II) in anatomical order, although there were no bones from the hand, the feet, and the right part of the hip (Jaskanis 2013, 42, Table XXXVIII). Missing bones from the left hand, part of the hip and the left foot of a child (*infans* I/II) were also observed in grave No 1 in barrow No XLVIII. The left ribs were slightly out of place in relation to their anatomical position. In this case, the features of the 'robbery' consisted of the 'robbery trench' and a gap in the stone lining of the barrow (Jaskanis 2013, 50, Table LIV). Another, recognized as an undisturbed grave, was grave No 1 in barrow No 52. It lacked the skull of the deceased. Only the mandible was preserved (Antoniewicz 1961, 14; Jaskanis 2013, 106, Table CXC VIII). Further adult skeletons, preserved in anatomical order, with some bones missing from the chest, were uncovered in barrows No LIX, LX, LXX and LXXVII (Jaskanis 2013, 53ff., 56ff., 59, Tables LXI, LXX, LXXIX). The only plausible explanation for the missing fragments of skeletons preserved in these graves in anatomical order is the hypothesis that these bones were removed

after the decomposition of the soft tissue of the body. Only then would the removal of the bones not disturb adjacent parts of the skeleton.

A separate issue, so far not convincingly explained, is the nearly complete lack of human bones in the stratified layers of the barrows, formed as a result of robbery, especially in the fillings of the 'robbery trenches'. The mass occurrence of fragments of bones on the surface of the robbed barrows and in the close vicinity was also unconfirmed. The scale of the 'robbery' was huge. From the 123 barrows in the cemetery in Osowa village site 1, 47 barrows with inhumations were 'robbed' (Fig. 3) (Jaskanis 1958, 76ff., 1961, 132ff., 1962, 235ff.; D. Jaskanis, J. Jaskanis 1961, 27ff.).<sup>10</sup> In the cemetery in Szwajcaria, 156 of the 189 barrows had traces of 'robbery' (Fig. 4) (Antoniewicz et al. 1956, 309ff., 1958, 23ff.; Antoniewicz 1961, 2ff., 1963, 167ff.; Jaskanis 2013, 27ff.). And in the cemetery in Żywa Woda, 14 of the 16 barrows were of this kind (Fig. 5) (Ziemlińska-Odojowa 1958, 100ff., 1961a, 193ff., 1961b, 49ff., 1966, 232ff.). So the explanation that all these bones had decomposed is not convincing (Antoniewicz et al. 1958, 48; Antoniewicz 1961, 5, 11), especially when, in individual cases, bones were uncovered. A calotte of a human skull was found between the stones that covered barrow No 38 in the cemetery in Szwajcaria. At the same cemetery, in the lining of barrow No 39, scattered human long bones were found (Antoniewicz et al. 1958, 40; Antoniewicz 1961, 11; Jaskanis 2013, 100).

Another problem is to identify the advisability of certain actions undertaken by the robbers. Why did they cover the tracks of their robbery by building multi-layer stone pavements (concentrations) over the robbed graves and repaired outer stone layers of barrow linings (Antoniewicz et al. 1958, 48; Ziemlińska-Odojowa 1961b, 55, 1966, 235)? These actions were not justified when human bones excavated and abandoned during the robbery were visible on the surfaces of the barrows.

A consequence of the 'robbery' hypothesis is the interpretation of objects made of iron uncovered in the 'robbed' graves. According to the authors of this hypothesis, all these objects have less material value than ornaments and other items made of non-ferrous metals. They were unusable due to corrosion. Or, on the contrary, the importance of iron, especially a weapon, in the belief of the community, protected them from robbery. That is why the 'robbers' left them in the graves (Antoniewicz et al. 1958, 48ff.; Antoniewicz 1963, 183; Ziemlińska-Odojowa 1961b, 55; Jaskanis 1974, 135, 2013, 244). This interpretation is possible

<sup>8</sup> The dimensions of the mound of barrow 2 were: 21 metres in diameter, and from 0.3 to 0.8 metres in height (Jaskanis 2013, 76).

<sup>9</sup> J. Jaskanis has suggested that the lack of some bones was caused by the relocation of the bones from another place to the grave uncovered in barrow No 2 (Jaskanis 2013, 244).

<sup>10</sup> Sixty-seven barrows in this cemetery contained only cremation graves.

only from the perspective of 20th-century culture and value systems. The authors did not take into account the fact that their hypothesis concerned a prehistoric community.

One important aspect of the interpretation of traces of 'robbery' is the time when the central inhumation graves were 'robbed'. Jerzy Antoniewicz, Marian Kaczyński and Jerzy Okulicz-Kozaryn claimed that it happened at a time when the cemetery in Sz wajcaria was still in use (1958, 49). Of crucial importance in this respect are the results of the excavations of the cemeteries in Osowa and Sz wajcaria. Barrows No 27 and 66 in the cemetery in Osowa village site 1 contained undisturbed cremation graves placed over 'robbed' inhumation graves. So the 'robbery' of these barrows certainly took place at a time when the cemetery was still in use, probably at the end of the second century or the turn of the third century AD, and no later than the first half of the fourth century (Jaskanis, Jaskanis 1961, 35, 41ff., Fig. 13; Jaskanis 1961, 154, 176, Fig. 16, 1974, 138). A similar situation was observed in barrow No 13 in the cemetery in Sz wajcaria. The undisturbed cremation grave No 1 was placed there in the filling of the 'robbery trench', over the robbed inhumation grave No 2, dated to period C<sub>2</sub> (Jaskanis 2013, 85, Table CXLI). In turn, barrow No LXXVI in this cemetery contained a 'robbed' inhumation dated to periods C<sub>1</sub>–C<sub>2</sub>. The area over this grave was covered by the undisturbed stone lining of the neighbouring barrow No LXXV. The 'robbed' inhumation in barrow No LXXV was dated to period C (Jaskanis 2013, 58ff., Table LXXVI, LXXVII). The stratigraphy clearly indicated that the 'robbery' of the grave in barrow No LXXVI took place before the stone lining of barrow No LXXV was built. All these facts confirm the hypothesis presented by J. Antoniewicz, M. Kaczyński and J. Okulicz-Kozaryn. It must therefore be assumed that the phenomenon of the 'robbery' of graves of the Suwalska Group of Sudovian culture took place in the Late Roman Period and at the beginning of the Migration Period.

The interpretation of material traces of practices connected with opening barrows and the relocation of human bones and grave goods from inhumations, as traces of ancient robbery, proposed by J. Antoniewicz, M. Kaczyński and J. Okulicz-Kozaryn, and supported by J. Jaskanis, was probably the result of the intuitive and common sense interpretation of archaeological sources (cf. Antoniewicz 1963, 183; Jaskanis 1974, 135ff., 2013, 243ff.).<sup>11</sup> The basis for these interpretations was 20th-century European culture, and elements of Christianity, assuming the integrity of the graves

<sup>11</sup> On 'common sense' reasoning about religious phenomena in prehistory, cf. S. Kadrow 2006, 136.

(Thomas 1991, 122ff.).<sup>12</sup> This interpretation assumed a priori at least the partial durability of a symbolic culture from the end of Antiquity to the beginning of the second half of the 20th century. However, consciously or not, the verification of these assumptions was devoid of any data sources.

Using the intuitive 'common sense' interpretation of archaeological sources, it should be stated that the mass digging up of inhumations of deceased members of the community, caused exclusively by a desire to extract objects made of non-ferrous metals, would be a violation of fundamental social and moral norms. Of course, this assessment would be made from the perspective of the ethical principles of 20th-century Europe. Can we really say that a community living in the area of the Suwalskie Lakeland in the Late Roman Period and the beginning of the Migration Period was affected by anomie?

Archaeological and anthropological data shows many examples of ritual activities associated with the remains of the dead (Thomas 1991, 7; Pearson 1999, 50, 52; Kerrigan 2009, 41). The basis of these activities was the principle of the proper burial of the dead. The real moment of death was not the end of the vital functions, so much as the complete decomposition of the body. After that, the re-deposition and secondary burial of bones took place. Before it, the dead were in a state of transition between life and real death (Thomas 1991, 45, 91ff., 195ff.; Pearson 1999, 50, 52; Kerrigan 2009, 9ff., 144ff., 149ff.).

Despite the difficulties arising from the state of the source publications, on the basis of the published results of the excavations, it is possible to attempt a new interpretation of the problem of the 'robbed' inhumations in the cemeteries in Osowa village site 1, Sz wajcaria and Żywa Woda. First of all, the authors of the excavations rightly indicated that not all the barrows were robbed at the same time. These graves were opened in at least three different periods: in the Late Roman Period and the beginning of the Migration Period, in unspecified historical times, and in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries (Antoniewicz 1963, 183). Most likely, during each of these periods, barrows were excavated for different reasons. In historical times, and probably also in the 19th and the early 20th centuries, they were opened by local 'treasure hunters'. The 19th century and the early 20th century was a time of amateur archaeological research. However, in the era after the First World War, the development

<sup>12</sup> In fact, Christianity does not stipulate the inviolability of the grave. The transfer of human bones after the decomposition of the body from single graves to mass graves or ossuaries was, and still is, quite common (Ariès 2007, 190, 223ff.).



of academic, museum and conservation archaeology took place. Archaeological research in the cemeteries in Osowa, Sz wajcaria and Żywa Woda was conducted at that time (Jaskanis 1958, 75; Ziemińska-Odojowa 1958, 99, Note 4; Karczewski 2011, 20, 22).

The state of the publication of excavation results of barrow cemeteries in the area of the Suwalki Lakeland rarely allows us to identify barrows excavated in historical times by 'collectors or local treasure hunters', or by archaeologists before the Second World War (Antoniewicz 1963, 185). This situation was identified in the case of barrows No 2, 22, 41 and 91 in the cemetery in Osowa village site 1, barrows No II, XVI and 32 in the cemetery in Sz wajcaria, and barrow No 8 and probably barrows No 1, 4, 8, 9, 14 in the cemetery in Żywa Woda (Figs. 3, 4, 5) (Jaskanis 1958, 77, 1962, 247, Fig. 8, 2013, 36, Table XXIII; D. Jaskanis, J. Jaskanis 1961, 31, 40ff., Figs. 7, 25; Antoniewicz et al. 1958, 44, Antoniewicz 1963, 168, 185, 186; Ziemińska-Odojowa 1958, 100, 102, 1961a, 198 Fig. 4; 1961b, 50, 51, Figs. 2, 5).

The vast majority of inhumations in barrows in the Osowa, Sz wajcaria and Żywa Woda cemeteries were probably opened in the Late Roman Period or the early Migration Period. The repeatability and the type of material evidence uncovered at these cemeteries may be interpreted as the result of ritual practices connected with the cult of the dead. These traces are:

- 1) the concavity of the top of the barrow, and the lack of stones in the stone lining on the barrow surface;
- 2) traces of the 'robbery trench';
- 3) the multi-layer stone pavement (concentration) over the skeleton grave;
- 4) the complete or partial lack of human bones in the grave, especially the lack of a skull and post-cranial bones, with the exception of legs;
- 5) traces of fire in the grave pits and on the stone pavements (Fig. 2).

The material traces form the basis for a reconstruction of some features of the ritual. The first action was the opening of the grave and the extraction of human bones and grave goods related to them. The state of preservation of human bones left in grave pits showed that the graves were opened after the decomposition of the body. A significant difference between bones preserved in situ and mixed in the grave pits was visible. Among bones uncovered in situ, only bones from legs, bones of the lower leg and foot, were uncovered. Sometimes the skull was also preserved in situ. The mixed bones originated from all parts of the skeleton, and it was most of all small bones, i.e. the metacarpus,

metatarsus and vertebrae. After exhumation, at least in some cases, a fire was lit in the grave pit. The material evidence of the next step shows that a stone pavement was built in the grave pit.<sup>13</sup> Charcoal and scorch marks uncovered between stones from the pavements show that the fire was then lit again. The last action was the reconstruction of the barrow embankment, but usually without the stone layer over it. The occurrence of similar stone pavements in both ritually exhumed and undisturbed inhumations suggests that this construction was a common feature in both cases of funerary ritual: the burial of the body and the exhumation of bones.

The state of preservation of bones left in the graves showed clearly the moment when they were reopened. The complete decomposition of the body usually took place between three and six years after the funeral (Louis 1991, 24). So the person opening the grave had to know when the funeral took place. A period of five years after the funeral, as a presumed moment of the robbery, was already indicated by J. Jaskanis (2013, 244).

Except for charcoal and scorch marks, lighting fires in the grave pits was confirmed by the results of the anthropological analysis. Superficial traces of fire were identified on two fragments of bones of an adult man from the central inhumation grave in barrow No 8, as well as on the vertebra, fragments of ribs, and a fragment of the sternum, scattered loosely in the pit of the inhumation grave in barrow No 14 at the cemetery in Sz wajcaria (Dzierżykraj-Rogalski 1956, 329ff.).

Pieces of bones from barrows No 8 and 14 could have been re-deposited in the grave pits, after exposure to fire. But unequivocal evidence of lighting a fire in the reopened grave pit originated from barrow No 12 in this cemetery. Traces of fire were uncovered there on a fragment of the right tibia of an adult woman (?) located in situ (Dzierżykraj-Rogalski 1956, 329). Preserved in a primary arrangement, the bone of the lower leg had come into contact with a fire burning in the grave.

Features indicating the 'robbery' of the central grave were also noticed in the case of barrow No 31 in the cemetery in Sz wajcaria. In contrast to the other 'robbed' graves, this was a cremation. The grave pit

<sup>13</sup> J. Jaskanis does not agree with the hypothesis of J. Antoniewicz, M. Kaczyński and J. Okulicz-Kozaryn, that stone pavements were intentionally built over the 'robbed' graves. According to him, neatly stacked stone pavements were uncovered only in seven cases. The rest were formed by filling the pit with stones originating from the barrow lining (Jaskanis 2013, 241ff.). But the presence of an accumulation of stones placed intentionally over the 'robbed' graves is an undeniable fact. And this fact can be regarded as a ritual activity.

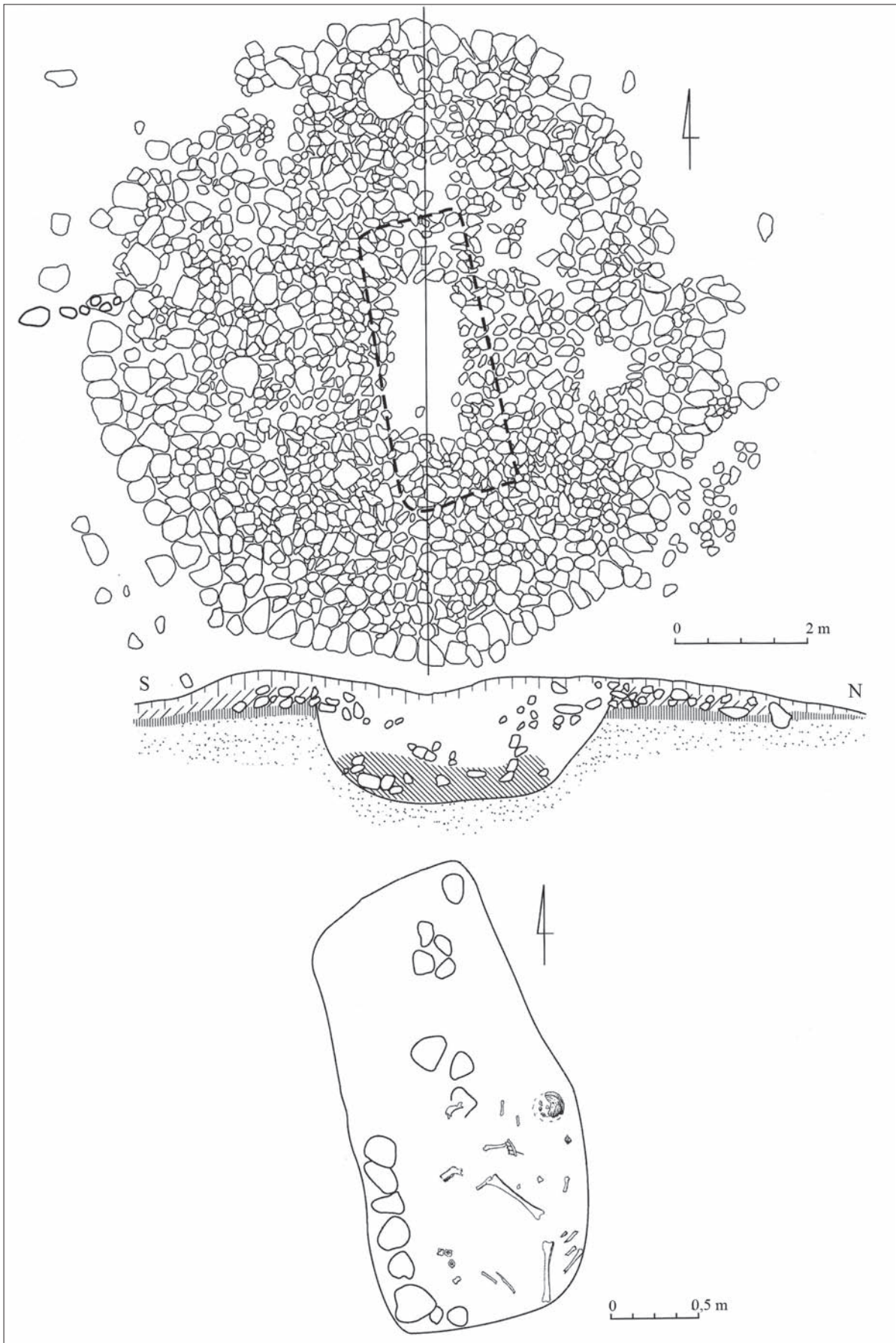


Fig. 2. The cemetery in the village of Szwajcaria, barrow No 2 with an inhumation, and features indicating 'robbery': the concavity of the top of the barrow and a gap in the stone lining, traces of the 'robbery trench', the multi-layer stone pavement (concentration) in the grave pit, an incomplete and partly preserved human skeleton (after J. Jaskanis, 2013, Table II).

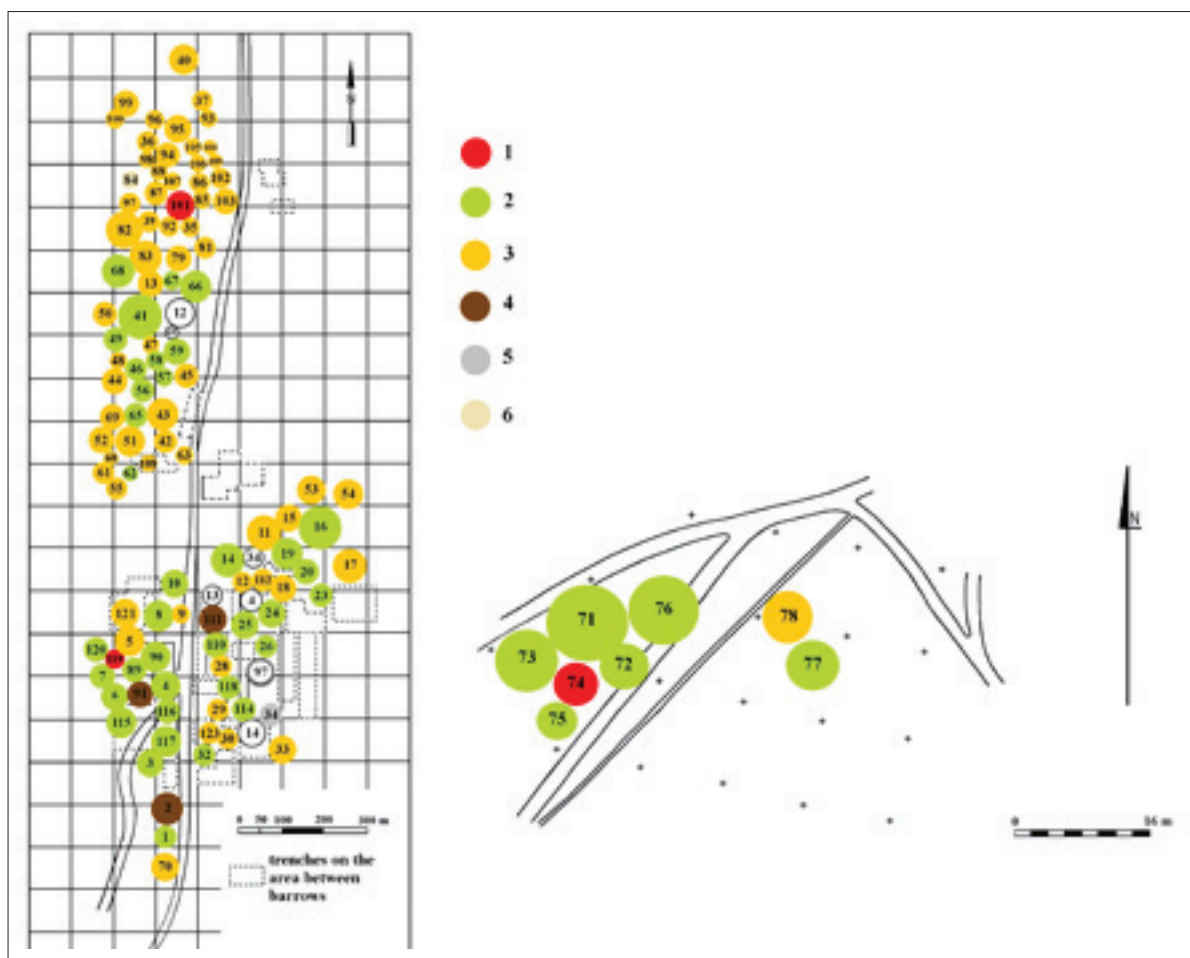


Fig. 3. Osova village site I. A map of the cemetery: 1 barrows with preserved central inhumation; 2 barrows with 'robbed' central inhumation; 3 barrows with cremation graves; 4 barrows dug out in historical times; 5 destroyed barrow; 6 barrow? Barrows with double numbering on the map of the cemetery: 4, 13, 14, 34, 69, 97. Barrows unmarked on the map of the cemetery: 21, 22, 27, 31, 38, 64, 80, 113 (after J. Jaskanis, 1958; 1961; 1962; 1974, Fig. 5; with additions by the author).

was elliptical in shape, measuring 1.4 by three metres. It was covered by a multi-layer stone pavement. Small fragments of burnt bones of an adult were lying in it under an intense black layer (Antoniewicz et al. 1956, 319; Dzierżykraj-Rogalski 1956, 333; Jaskanis 2013, 97, Table CLXXIII). On the basis of the above information, a different interpretation of the grave can be accepted. Probably, the primary grave in the barrow was the inhumation. After reopening the grave and the excavation of some of the bones, a fire was lit in the grave pit, which caused the burning of the bones left in it. It is equally possible that cremated human remains and charcoal from the pyre were placed in the reopened grave as a secondary burial. This observation was confirmed by other cremation graves in the cemetery in Szwajcaria uncovered in a similar context. This situation was observed in the case of barrows No VI, VII, XVII, 13, 18, 19, 30, 46, 53 and 56/1965 (Fig. 4) (Antoniewicz et al. 1956, 318ff., Fig. 10, 1958, 40, Fig. 11; Antoniewicz 1961, 5ff., 15, Fig. 4; Jaskanis 2013, 29ff., 36f., 85, 88ff., 96ff., 104, 107ff., 245,

Tables VIII, IX, XXIV, CXLI, CXLVIII, CXLIX, CLI, CLXXII, CLXXIII, CXCII, CC, CCIV). What is more, these activities were unequivocally confirmed by the results of the excavation of barrow No VII in this cemetery. The concavity of the top of the barrow and the lack of stones in the stone lining, as well as traces of the 'robbery trench', were noticed. Under the trench, the remains of the primary inhumation grave were preserved. A cremation grave was placed over it, in the filling of the 'robbery trench'. Unburnt human bones were scattered both in the inhumation and cremation graves (Antoniewicz 1963, 181; Jaskanis 2013, 30, 245, Table X). Unfortunately, an anthropological analysis of the burnt and unburnt bones from these graves was not conducted. The similarity in the age and sex of the human bones from both graves would suggest that they were the remains of one individual.

The results of the excavation of barrows No VI, VII, XVII, 13, 18, 19, 30, 46, 53 and 56/1965 in the cemetery at Szwajcaria may provide a partial answer to the question, what happened to the human bones exhumed



Fig. 4. Szwajcaria village. A map of the cemetery: 1 the 'robbed' barrows; 2 barrow mounds; 3 barrows of unknown size; 4 barrows of unknown number; 5 flat graves; 6 inhumations; 7 cremation graves; 8 pits with horse skeletons ('horse graves'); 9 pits; 10 control trenches; 11 forest roads; 12 a slope (after Jaskanis J. 2013, Fig. 5, with additions by the author).

from inhumation graves? Cremation and reburial in the same barrows could be a variant of the ritual. The indication of other possibilities, due to a lack of archaeological data, is not possible. But the possibility of the reburial of cremated bones excavated from primary inhumation graves in the same cemetery is of great importance to studies on the population inhabiting the area of the Suwałki Lakeland in the Late Roman Period and the Early Migration Period. In this case, the number of graves would exceed the actual population size.

If ritual exhumation was the rule, the significant question is: why were single inhumations in the cemeteries in Osowa and Szwajcaria left untouched? Why was the ritual not completed? Unfortunately, the available archaeological sources do not provide a basis for an answer. The complex nature of the ritual, without material traces, can only be highlighted. In the absence of other evidence, the fragmentary nature of the archaeological sources means that the question remains unanswered.

Examples of flat inhumation graves Nos S.19, S.22, S.28, S.33, S.37, S.41 and two flat graves without human remains No 43 and S.44 in the cemetery in Szwajcaria, as well as flat inhumation grave No 1 in the cemetery in Żywa Woda, show that the ritual of exhumation concerned not only graves situated in barrows (Figs. 4, 5) (Ziemlińska-Odojowa 1961b, 53ff., Figs. 6, 7; Jaskanis 2013, 70ff., Tables CVII, XVIII, CXI, CXII, CXIII, CXIV).

### The meaning of the ritual

Features of all rituals are formalisation, repeatability and durability (Staszczak 1987, 321ff.; Kadrow S. 2006, 135). The archaeological evidence reflects all these features. There is material evidence for formalizing and repetitive actions: exhumation, stone pavements (concentrations), traces of fire. We can also specify the time. Some human bones left in situ and mixed in the grave pits show that exhumation did not require all the bones of the dead to be gathered. We can assume that the extraction of the skull and essential parts of the post-cranial skeleton fulfilled the requirements of the ritual. In the light of archaeological sources, we cannot identify the reasons for opening the grave and the exhumation. The presence of skulls and other large bones from the middle part of the post-cranial skeleton in some exhumed graves cannot be clearly explained. The examples of barrows No XXVI, XLVIII, LIX, LX, LXX, LXXVII, 2 and 52 in the cemetery in Szwajcaria suggest that we are dealing with material traces of different rituals relating to the cult of the dead, of which a common feature was the

exhumation of part of the skeleton (Antoniewicz et al. 1958, 48ff., Table I; Jaskanis 2013, 42, 50, 53ff., 56ff., 59, 76ff., 106, 244, Tables XXXVIII, LIV, LXI, LXX, LXXIX, CXVIII-CXXV, CXCVIII). The requirement for the deceased individual to make the proper journey into the afterlife can be indicated as the main reason for reopening skeleton graves and the exhumation of bones from these graves at the cemeteries of the Suwałska Group of Sudovian culture. This necessity was inextricably linked to the complete decomposition of the body, and probably also the bones (Louis 1991, 6ff., 45, 195ff.; Pearson 1999, 50, 52). But as a result of the fragmentary archaeological data, the actual meaning and role of this ritual in beliefs and rituals connected with the cult of the deceased is unknown. We can assume with great probability that all these material traces reflected a rite of passage associated with the death of a member of the community (van Gennepe 2006, 151ff.).

### The 'robbery' of barrows of the Suwałska Group of Sudovian culture.

#### A local or regional phenomenon?

Inhumation graves containing only parts of human skeletons are known from the first half of the first millennium AD, from the area of Middle Europe Barbaricum, Scandinavia and the Black Sea steppes. This fact was noted by J. Jaskanis in the context of 'robbed barrows' of Sudovian culture (Jaskanis 1974, 135). The phenomenon was interpreted either as traces of the robbery of graves, or as the remains of religious and magical activities. The magical aspect was highlighted by È.A. Symonovich, in the context of the large number of partly destroyed graves of Czerniachovsk culture. In these violated cemeteries, there were only inhumation graves with the skull oriented towards the east. These activities were designed to protect the living from the influence of the dead (Symonovich 1963, 60). The closest territorial analogies are known from the area of Wielbark culture and the Masłomęcz Group (Fig. 1) (Żórawska 2007, 459, 461; Kokowski 2007, 136). Many traces of the 'robbery' of barrows, similar to the Suwałska Group, were uncovered at cemeteries of East Lithuanian Barrow culture, dated from the third to the sixth centuries (Fig. 1). All of them were interpreted as evidence of robbery (Kurila 2008; Bliujienė, Steponatis 2009, 185ff., 194ff., Fig. 17).

But the fact of violations of inhumation graves known from the areas of different archaeological cultures cannot be regarded as evidence of the same ritual. However, a counter argument is suggested by the diversity of other features of the burial rituals of these cultures. At

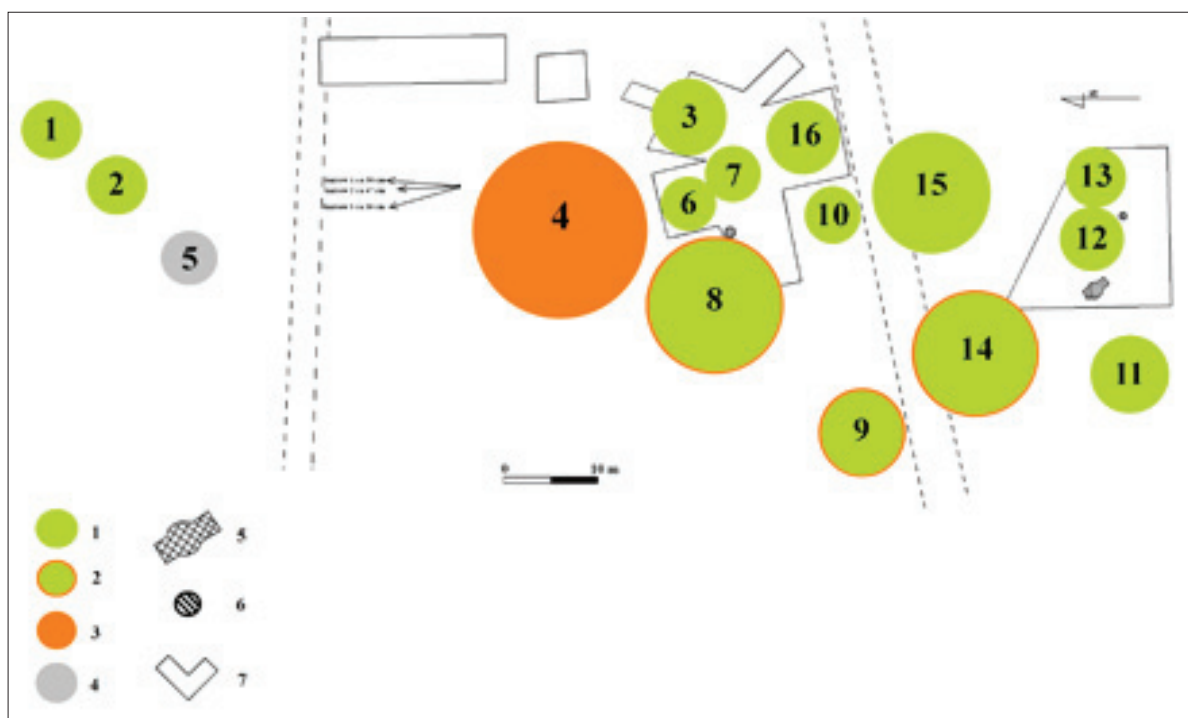


Fig. 5. Żywa Woda village. A map of the cemetery: 1 the ‘robbed’ barrows; 2 barrows with ‘robbed’ central inhumations and traces of digging in historical times; 3 barrows dug in historical times; 4 destroyed barrow; 5 flat inhumation; 6 flat cremation graves; 7 the range of trenches (after W. Ziemińska-Odojowa, 1966, Fig. 2, with additions by the author).

the cemetery of Wielbark culture in the village of Jarty-pory, graves with traces of reopening were uncovered. One of them, grave No 122, contained secondarily burnt bones of the foot, and evidence of fragmentation of the upper part of the body, placed integrally in the grave (Andrzejowski et al. 2002, 254ff., 258ff., Fig. 5). Other graves with traces of reopening are also known from this cemetery. Grave No 107 contained fragments of an unburnt skull and other cremated bones, and cremation grave No 138 contained unburnt fragments of a skull belonging to another individual (Żórawska 2007, 459, 461, 463, 465, Fig. 2, 4). Graves with traces of reopening and only a part of the skeleton, with bones preserved in a non-anatomical arrangement, or without bones, or with a second cremation grave, are also known from other cemeteries of Wielbark culture, the Masłomęcz Group, and Czerniachowski culture. But these graves usually contained skulls, long bones of hands, and other bones which were missing in the ‘robbed’ graves of the Suwalska Group of Sudovian culture (Symonovich 1963, 51, Figs. 1, 2; Mączyńska 1992, 192ff.; Żórawska 2007, 466ff.; Kokowski 2007, 130ff.).

In the cemeteries of the Suwalska Group, material evidence of this ritual were uncovered in barrows dating from phase B<sub>2</sub>/C<sub>1</sub>-C<sub>1a</sub> until C<sub>3</sub>-D<sub>1</sub>. This is parallel to the chronology of the ‘robbed’ or disturbed graves from neighbouring territories. A clear determination of the source of this ritual, in the light of archaeological

sources, is not possible. In fact, from the close territorial vicinity, we have ‘robbed’ barrows of the Rostolty type, traces of the reopening of graves from cemeteries of Wielbark culture and the Masłomęcz Group, and ‘robbed’ barrows of East Lithuanian Barrow culture, but it does not mean that we necessarily need to look for the origin of this ritual there.

The interpretation of archaeological sources dating from the second half of the second century to the beginning of the fourth century originating of the borderland between two large cultural provinces with flat cremation cemeteries and barrow cemeteries, does not result in any major typological and formal problems. The real problems appear when we look for an interpretation of material traces of the symbolic culture of past communities.

### Conclusions. The funeral rite in the context of cultural interpretation

The ‘robbed’ barrows in the area of the Suwalki Lakeland are an important premise for the cultural interpretation of Sudovian culture as a compact taxonomical unit. It indicates the next important difference between barrows dated to the late phase of the Roman Period and the early phase of the Migration Period, and ‘family’ barrows from the developed phase of the Migration Period. These material differences reflect significant differences in the cult of the dead, with the most

durable elements of symbolic culture. Ritual exhumation, which was characteristic only of the Suwalska Group of Sudovian culture, is then an important premise for returning to the question: is Sudovian culture a compact taxonomic unit? This issue does not raise any major objections from a typological point of view. Doubts arise, however, in the case of anthropological interpretations of these archaeological sources, when an attempt at characterising past communities living in the area of the Masurian Lakeland, the Suwałki Lakeland and the Augustów Plain at the end of Antiquity, is made on their basis. Even with the one-sided nature of archaeological sources originating from cemeteries, an important difference is visible, both between territorial units of the culture and within the Suwalska Group itself, at the various stages of its development. And this difference is of basic importance, because it refers to the area of symbolic culture that is most stable and resistant to change: the area of beliefs.

Environmental conditions probably had a strong impact on the diversity of territorial groups of Sudovian culture: the young glacial relief, superficial water reservoirs, soils, and, consequently, biotic elements of the environment, especially plant cover. The Suwalska Group occupied the border zone between young glacial uplands with numerous lakes and an outwash plain. A strongly undulating landscape with lakes is also characteristic of the area of southwest Lithuania. The Augustów Plain, devoid of lakes but with numerous small rivers, was occupied by the Augustowska Group; whereas the Gołdapska Group covered an area of young glacial relief, but which was almost devoid of lakes (Kondracki 1998, 119ff., Figs. 17, 18, 20).

The next stage of research into the cultural diversity of this part of the West Balt Cultural Circle should take into account a number of hitherto neglected or marginalized aspects. First of all: a broad anthropological interpretation of archaeological sources in relation to the reconstructed environmental conditions, which determined the settlement pattern. Of equal importance is the relationship with neighbouring areas: the western area of flat cremation cemeteries, and the eastern area of barrow cemeteries, within a broader context proposed already by J. Okulicz-Kozaryn and W. Nowakowski (Okulicz 1989; Nowakowski 1995).

### Acknowledgement

I am grateful to Aleksander Pluskowski PhD for correcting the language of the text.

### Abbreviations

RB – Rocznik Białostocki. Białystok (Muzeum w Białymstoku 1961–1993).

WA – Wiadomości Archeologiczne (Warsaw, since 1873).

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**PLĖŠIMAS AR  
RITUALINIAI VEIKSMAI?  
NAUJOS „APIPLĖŠTŲ  
PILKAPIŲ“ SŪDUVIŲ  
KULTŪROJE  
INTERPRETACIJOS IR  
GENEZĖS PAIEŠKOS**

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Santrauka

Vienas iš sūduvių kultūros Suvalkų grupės savitumų yra labai didelis skaičius pilkapių su suardytais griautiniais kapais (1–5 pav.). Tai buvo vertinama kaip įkapių išplėšimo, kuris vyko vėlyvaisiais antikiniais laikais, pasekmė. Bendri „išplėštų kapų“ bruožai, pastebėti Osowa I kapinyne bei kapinynuose Sz wajcaria ir Żywa Woda kaimuose, buvo šie: 1. Pilkapių viršūnės įdubimas ir akmenų nebuvimas jų dangoje ant pilkapio paviršiaus, 2. „Plėšimo duobių“ žymės, 3. Keliasluoksnis akmenų klojinys (koncentracija) virš griautinio kapo, 4. Visiškas ar dalinis žmonių kaulų nebuvimas kape, ypač kaukolės ir visų ištiestų griaučių trūkumas, išskyrus kojų kaulus, 5. Ugnies žymės kapų duobėse ir ant akmenų klojinių. Minėti bruožai ir beveik visiškai žmonių kaulų nebuvimas pilkapių sluoksniuose, kurie susiklostė kaip „plėšimo“ pasekmė, įgalina daryti išvadą, kad tai būta medžiaginių pėdsakų ritualų, kurie susiję su pilkapio atvėrimu ir žmonių kaulų bei įkapių pernešimu į kitą vietą. Greičiausiai tokių veiksmų priežastis buvo tikrojo mirusiojo palaidojimo dėsnis. Mirties momentas laikytas dar ne gyvybinių funkcijų pabaiga, kuri siejama su visišku kūno sunykimu. Po jo buvo atliekama ritualinė ekshumacija ir antrinis palaidojimas. Pastebimi svarbūs skirtumai tarp sūduvių kultūros pilkapių, kurie datuojami vėlyvąja romėniškojo laikotarpio ir tautų kraustymosi laikotarpio faze ir vadinamųjų „šeimyninių“ pilkapių iš išvystyto tautų kraustymosi laikotarpio. Šie medžiaginiai pėdsakai atskleidžia žymius skirtumus mirusiųjų kulte.