

Ochre and beads.

The hunter's style of the burials in the Polish Mesolithic

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Résumé

L'ocre et les perles. Les ornements des tombes des chasseurs du Mésolithique en Pologne.

Les auteurs de cet article ont tenté de rassembler les informations concernant toutes les sépultures de Pologne datant, de façon plus ou moins certaine, du Mésolithique. Trente-trois inhumations contenant les restes de 47 individus ont été identifiées sur 15 sites. Ainsi, contrairement aux écrits antérieurs, on dispose aujourd'hui d'un nombre conséquent d'inhumations que l'on peut dater du milieu de l'âge de la pierre et qui nous permettent une analyse plus approfondie.

En se référant à l'examen de ces tombes, nous pouvons désormais décrire les principaux traits des rites funéraires de la période mésolithique en Pologne ou sur les territoires voisins. L'ocre et les dents d'animaux en constituent les éléments les plus intéressants. Ce genre de matériel funéraire est caractéristique des usages des populations de chasseurs. Etre à même de dater les tombes n'est pas essentiel ici. Il faut garder à l'esprit que dans le nord-est de la Pologne, ou encore plus à l'est ou plus au nord, la période mésolithique a duré quelques milliers d'années de plus qu'en Europe méridionale et occidentale ou qu'en Scandinavie. Dès lors, il s'agit de se débarrasser des vieux stéréotypes. Les renseignements culturels et économiques fournis par les rites funéraires nous permettent de classer les tombes en identifiant celles relevant du Mésolithique, qui appartenaient à des populations de chasseurs, et celles des populations agricoles.

It was not until recently that the number of Mesolithic graves in Poland was considered to be insignificant. Only a few of the burials were mentioned in the world-wide publications (Kozłowski 1989). The authors of this article made an attempt to collect the data concerning all the graves, whose origin was either dubiously or unquestionably, Mesolithic. The outcome of the research was announced during The European Association of Archaeologists 4th Annual Meeting in Gothenburg, September 1998.

Polish scholars have examined the Stone Age for more than one hundred years. Thousands of the Mesolithic sites have been discovered during that time. The finds belong mainly to the north and north-eastern technocomplex. Although the amount of sites seems to be pretty large, the grave pits used to be very rare and contained little data. The reasons for this were the specificity of the Mesolithic settlements as well as the fact that the research was concentrated on dune (sandy) sites. The situation has been improving for the past few years. It resulted from the intensification of the excavations in the lake districts in the north and north-eastern part of Poland, including the so called wet sites. Further graves were discovered during these explorations.

The presentation of the collected data begins with the short description of the graves and then is followed by the attempt to characterise the funeral rites of the Mesolithic in Poland. It is based mainly on the most recent finds, which very often have not been published yet. We are not able to present a comprehensive description of the funeral rituals in such a short text. In the authors' opinion, all the sites mentioned in this paper seem to be peculiar to the types of graves created by the hunter and the hunter-

gatherer populations. Even if their chronology or the context diverges from the classic notion the Mesolithic, without any doubt the graves are compatible with the funeral rites of these types of the cultural and economic formations. Basing on the value of the information contained in the graves the sites were classified in two categories. The first group includes seven sites rich in data. The second class comprises of eight sites either deriving from accidental discoveries or explored much earlier, i.e. before the World War II or just after this war. These graves either contained little data or their classification is debatable. However, the authors decided to present them. The total number of human graves deriving from 15 sites (fig. 1)



Figure 1. The map of Mesolithic graves in Poland.

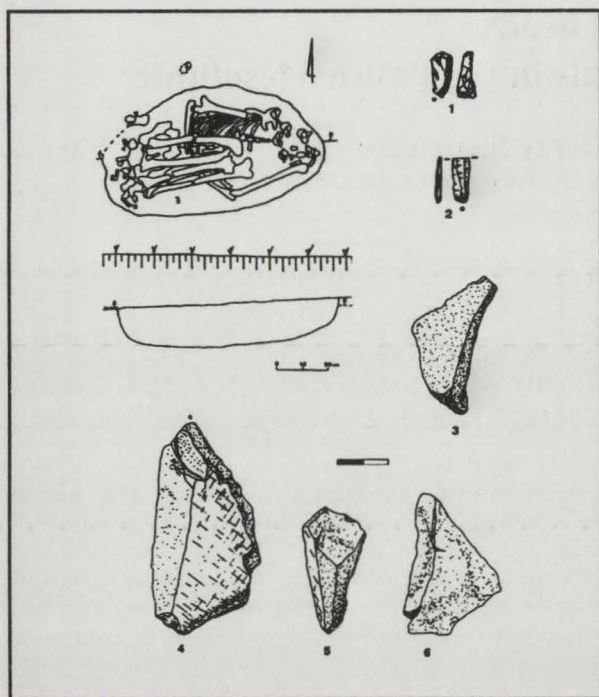


Figure 2. Drestwo, site 10. Grave no. 1.

depicted here is 33. They contain 47 individuals. Two animal's graves are also to be mentioned. It is evident at first sight that the largest number of grave pits is located in the north and north-eastern Poland.

Let us begin our presentation with the site no. 1 in Drestwo, Suwalki province (fig. 1: 1), examined by the authors in the years 1995-1996 (Brzozowski et Siemaszko 1996). Two skeletal graves were excavated within the settlement complex whose chronology ranges from the late Palaeolithic to the early Bronze Age. The site was placed in the outflow of the river from the lake. Grave pit number 1 (fig. 2) of the width 48 cm and the length 85 contained a male individual of the age 35, height 175-180 cm and represented the Cro-Magnon-like type with the addition of the elements of the highland type. The body was laid on the back with the legs drew up to his chin and his arms placed on his abdomen. The skeleton was lain along the axis W-E with his head in the west. Together with ochre the grave contained a miniature end-scraper, intentionally broken microretouched blade and 4 flakes with the traces of processing. The skeleton was AMS C-14 dated to 5980 ± 75 BP. The grave no. 2 (fig. 3) was severely destroyed by ploughing and it comprised the remains of about 30-year-old man. He was lying probably on his back and turned slightly on his side, with his legs drew up. He belonged also to the Cro-Magnon-like type. The skeleton was placed in an N-S direction with his head oriented in the south. The grave pit contained also a small amount of ochre and two flint artifacts, namely a scraper and a broken blade. Despite the second grave it was dated back to the later period (3805 ± 70 BP), the authors included it to the canon of the Mesolithic inhumations. In the plough soil in the vicinity of the grave no. 2 fragments of bones belonging to other two individuals (female and child) were

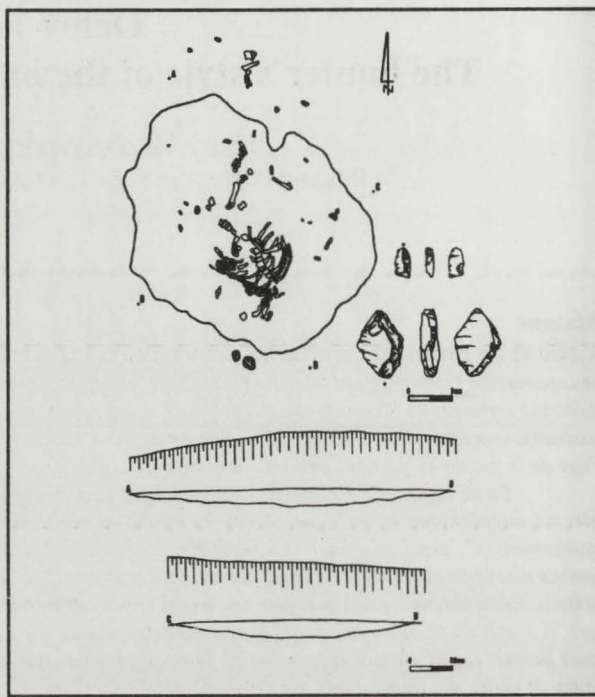


Figure 3. Drestwo, site 10. Grave no. 2.

also found.

Marian Marciniak in Mszano, no. 14, Torun province (fig. 1: 2), examines the second since 1987 (Marciniak 1993). Its studies haven't been fully published yet. On the site located on the dune in the river valley, five human graves and one animal grave with two wild boars have been uncovered so far. All the grave pits were furnished with the set of red deer's elk's and aurochs' incisors and apart from this a large quantity of ochre. The grave pits, sometimes of a very large size (like grave no. 1 - 220 cm long and 120 wide), reach as deep as 1,5 meter below the level of boreal soil level. They were constructed on pine pales of 30-cm diameter. The fact that the pales were fragmentarily burnt indicates the form of the funeral custom, namely partial cremations. The result of bad environmental conditions is that only three graves contained the remains of human burials. The grave number one contained a 20-year-old woman together with a 2 - or 3-year-old child. In the grave number 5 only a human jaw was discovered. It was stated that the bodies in four graves were in the recumbent position (lying along the axis north-east - south-west) and in one of the graves the individual facing the north - eastern direction had his legs placed down in an embedded hollow. The burials were accompanied by the pits in the shape of a funnel, the diameter of which was circa one meter. Animals' cremations, coal powder and charcoal as well as flint artifacts materials could be traced in those pits. Grave number one also contained bone and antler material and 12 beads made of wild boar's incisors. Several lumps of amber were found in the niche above the burial. Amber was also in the grave number five. C-14 dating shows that the graves were constructed between 8890-8100 BP. The nature of the implements lets us associate the burials with the Komornica culture.

The third extremely interesting burial ground is located in Dudka, site no. 1, Suwalki province (fig. 1: 3). During the past three seasons (1997-1999) the exploration of the settlement dated back to the Stone Age revealed 13 human graves containing 24 burials (unpublished data from the archive of Suwalki Province Museum). Additionally, one mass animal grave was found nearby. According to Witold Guminski (1997), who is the author of the excavation, all the graves contain: intensely burnt bones, at least in some cases these are human bones, a lump of red ochre and a fragment of a mandible or teeth of either hog or wild boar. Apart from the above-mentioned items, there was an evident absence of intentional equipment.

The individual graves contained:

- Grave no. 1: a multiple burial of three individuals,
 - Grave no. 2: a multiple burial of three individuals in the sitting position, facing each other (two adults and one 3-or 4-year-old child). Moreover, at the bottom of the grave pit, there was a severely curled up woman with disturbed anatomy,
 - Grave no. 3: one individual in a curled up position, lying on his right side along the axis N-S with his head and face in the East,
 - Grave no. 4: contained cremations of the two individuals,
 - Grave no. 5: one individual in disarray,
 - Grave no. 6: one skeleton in a squatted position with his head directed at the SE;
 - Grave no. 7: a double grave containing a skeleton of an adult in a squatted position and a child in disarray,
 - Grave no. 8: two individuals in disarray,
 - Grave no. 9: contained a mass burial of two dogs in disarray,
 - Grave no. 10: one individual in disarray,
 - Grave no. 11: one skeleton in sitting-lying squatted position,
 - Grave no. 12: child in disarray,
 - Grave no. 13: mass burial of four individuals. Two of them (adult and child) were in the sitting position with the faces directed at S and two others (adult and young) in disarray,
 - Grave no. 14: one adult in sitting position directed at SE.
- The absence of certain bones or their excessive number in some cases as well as the unnatural distribution of some burials let the author speculate that the corpses were not buried immediately after death but much later. Although earlier there had been doubts, after the last season of excavation W. Guminski decided to classify the graves as either Mesolithic or "Paraneolithic" Zedmar culture which at least in the initial stage was characterised with the Mesolithic economy. The speculations are hindered by the lack of dating and detailed analysis (e.g. anthropological or palaeozoological analysis).

It is beyond any doubt that the next grave belongs to the Mesolithic period. Its location is in Kamienskie, site number one, Suwalki province (fig. 1: 4). The skeleton of a 15-year-old girl was uncovered under the barrow from the Bronze Age heaped up next to the lake (Lapo 1998).

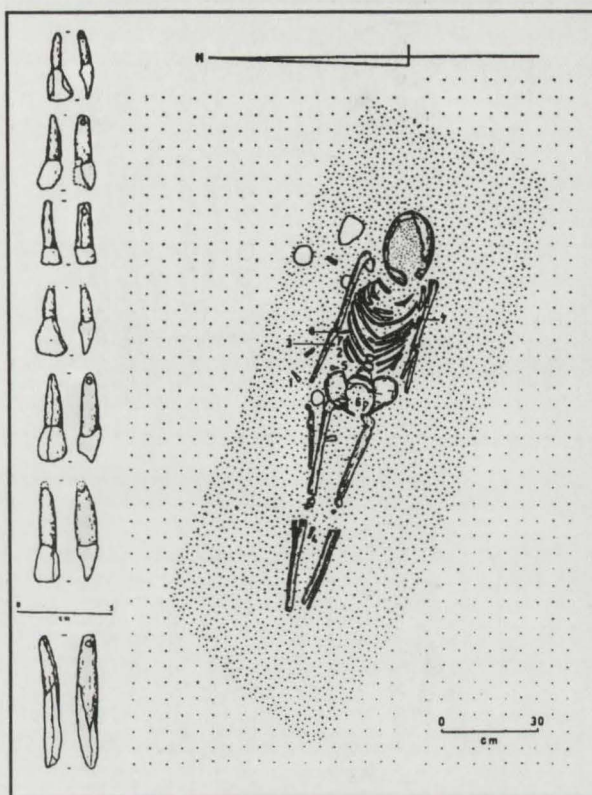


Figure 4. The layout and equipment of the grave in Kamienskie, site 1, according to J. M. Lapo (1998).

The skeleton was coloured with ochre and lied in an extended supine position along the axis SE-NW with the head on the south-east (fig. 4). The outfit of the grave comprised of a fragment of retouched blade and a tooth bead made of 7 animal incisors placed in the lower part of the chest and near the abdomen. Directly above the grave pit, intensely burnt remain of skulls, red deer's and roe deer's antlers, as well as a part of a horses tight bone were discovered. The skeleton was dated to 6940 ± 280 BP. The grave is said to belong to the Kunda cultural circle.

During exploration in 1974 In Wozna Wies, site no. 1, Lomza province (fig. 1: 5), near the Drestwo site, on the riverside, next to the lake shore, one grave was discovered (Sulgostowska 1990). In a hardly distinguishable grave pit human bones were mixed together with horse's bones. The 30-or 35-year-old male skeleton was fragmentarily preserved, however, its distribution let us speculate that it was inhumed in the sitting position. Chemical analysis revealed the presence of ochre. The grave was dated to 5900 ± 100 BP. The author of the research has no clear opinion about the cultural affiliations.

Two burials from Pierkunowo, Suwalki province (fig. 1: 6), explored and published in the sixties' (Glosik 1969), are the examples of the graves with fillers profusely replete with ochre (fig. 5). Grave number one (partially destroyed) contained a skeleton of a 20-or 30 -year-old female in an extended position lying along the axis NE - SW, with his head on the north-east. It belongs to the Lapp-like type and was accompanied by about 2-or 3-

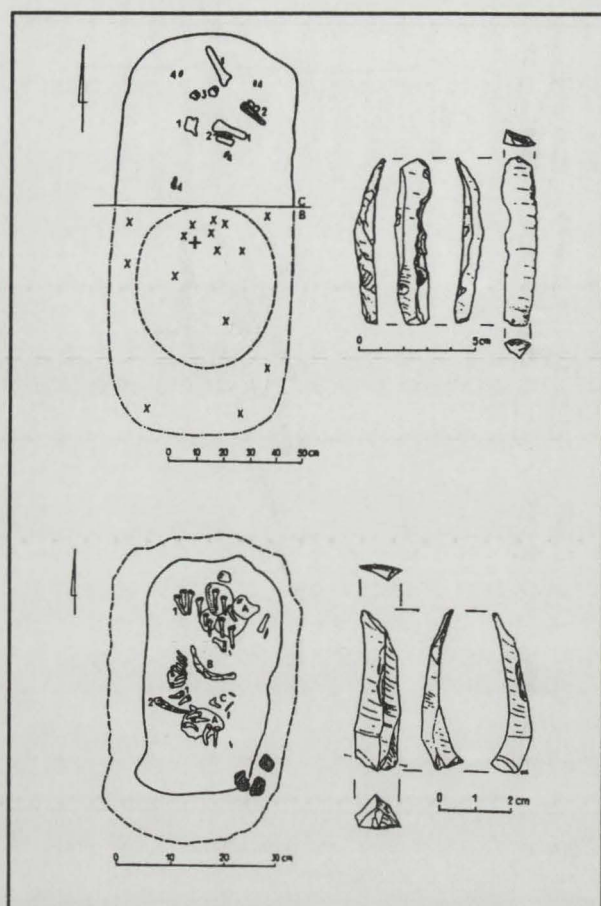


Figure 5. The layout of graves no. 1 and 2 in Pierkunowo, according to J. Głosik (1969).

year-old child. 54-tooth beads and a flint blade constituted the outfit. The grave was dated with a fluorine-apatite method to 5700 ± 150 BP. A one-and-a-half-year-old child's remains were excavated in the grave no. 2. In addition some gifts were found, namely: 24 red deer's incisors and a combined flint tool. The graves were affiliated with Janisławice culture. Nevertheless, the authors however would rather associate the graves with the group of Kunda cultural circle.

The last grave out of the series of burials that are rich in data is one of the most standard Mesolithic graves from Poland. Its location is exceptional, i.e. in the central part of Poland, in Janisławice (fig. 1: 7). It was accidentally discovered in the river valley (Chmielewska 1954). Partially destroyed during earthworks, the grave contained a skeleton of a 30-year-old male, Lapp-like type. The man was of robust posture and was buried in a sitting position with his face in the West (Cyrek et Cyrek 1980). The filler of the grave pit replete with ochre was profusely furnished (fig. 6). It was equipped with beads made of 20 elk's teeth and one red deer's tooth, 41 implements made of chocolate flint, wild boar's tusk, a piece of a shell, otter's and marten's teeth, a mandible of a beaver and 54 bone and antler items. 43 of them were processed. The grave was dated with C14 to 6580 ± 80 BP and is regarded as an eponymic site of Janisławice culture.

Out of the second group of the sites presented here one grave, is standing out. It is situated in Wieliszew, Warszawa province, site no. 11 (fig. 1: 8). Two groups of burnt human bones were placed on the dune in the river valley. This grave was dated with a fluorine-apatite method to the sixth millennium BC. Thus, the authors of the excavation (Wieckowska 1965) regard it as Komornica culture.

The rest of the burials out of this group share two features. First of all, they are coloured with ochre. The second feature concerns the type of funeral custom, which was inhumation.

The following graves belong to this group (Kolosówna 1949):

- Kasparus (fig. 1: 9): with animal tooth beads,
- Prabuty (fig. 1: 10): a double grave equipped with a cylindrical axe and a stone cudgel,
- Brajniki (fig. 1: 11): additionally comprising a human skull furnished with 6 perforated animal teeth (of a bison or aurochs),
- Zurawno (fig. 1: 12): with perforated animal teeth,
- Smolag (fig. 1: 13): equipped with 34 perforated teeth of a red deer, aurochs, and horse,
- Lojewo (fig. 1: 14): comprising a skull of a male aged between 30-40 and 12 red deer's teeth,
- Konne (fig. 1: 15): with fragments of a skull (e.g. mandible) and equipment consisting of 10 teeth, a fragment of antler and a bone hammer with an oval hole (Szymczak et Zalewski 1980).

The sources of data about the graves mentioned above are open field examinations and accidental discoveries. They are devoid of sufficient amount of records. They used to be classified as a Preugrofinnic culture (Kolosówna 1949), but at present they are affiliated with the Forest Zone cultural circle of the north-eastern Europe. The Mesolithic nature of the graves inclined the authors to mention them in this paper.

In order to identify the burial as Mesolithic or to ascribe to it a Mesolithic character (in the case of the graves having late chronology) one has to consider the style of inhumation, lack or presence of the equipment as well as the type of the outfit.

The most distinctive element of the burials described in this paper is the use of ochre either to powder over the body of a dead person or as an addition to the sand with which the corpse was covered. The ochre was found in large quantities. The lumps of this mineral could also be placed either somewhere within the grave pit or just by the corpse (like in Dr?stwo or Dudka). Among the analysed graves, only one did not contain ochre. This is the most problematic and least known to the authors cremation from Wieliszew.

The second feature peculiar to the Mesolithic burials in Poland is the fact that almost all of them are furnished (table 1). The most common grave gifts were teeth, bones and antler of big game, for example: deer, elk, aurochs, and horse. In the majority of cases the teeth were perforated, which means that they were used as a necklace. Bones and antler have the traces of tooling. Apart from the

Serial no. (according to the map)	Site	Number of graves	Number of burials	Presence of ochre	Animal dents	Other gifts
1	Dreństwo	2	2	+	-	+
2	Mszano	5	6	+	+	+
3	Dudka	13	24	+	+	+
4	Kamieńskie	1	1	+	+	+
5	Woźna Wieś	1	1	+	-	+
6	Pierkunowo	2	3	+	+	+
7	Janisławice	1	1	+	+	+
8	Wieliszew	1(?)	1(?)	-(?)	-(?)	-(?)
9	Kasparus	1	1(?)	+	+	-
10	Prabuty	1	2	+	-	+
11	Brajniki	1	1	+	+	-
12	Żórawno	1	1	+	+	-
13	Smolağ	1	1	+	+	-
14	Łojewo	1	1	+	+	-
15	Konne	1	1	+	+	+
		33	47	14	11	9

Table 1. Mesolithic graves in Poland.

Site	Grave no.	Date
Mszano	1	8890±180 BP 8680±130 BP
Mszano	4	8840±170 BP
Mszano	3	8650±140 BP
Mszano	5	8100±70 BP
Wieliszew	1	VI millenary BC
Kamieńskie	1	6940±280 BP
Janisławice	1	6580±80 BP
Dreństwo	1	5980±75 BP
Woźna Wieś	1	5900±100 BP
Pierkunowo	1	5700±150 BP
Dudka	1	4690±40 BP 4730±40 BP
Dreństwo	2	3805±70 BP

Table 2. Dating of Mesolithic graves from Poland.

The position of the body is diversified: sitting, extended or squatted. The body may also lie on the side. There are no rules in this case. As far as the directions of the world are concerned, the arrangement of the body along certain axis is also very differentiated. It is very difficult to define any regularity here. Nevertheless, the location along the axis E-W with the face or head directed at east seems to prevail. Only in Dudka the southern orientation of the corpse is dominant.

The size of the grave pits ranges from large (as in grave no. 1 in Mszano – 220 cm long and 120 cm wide) to small (like in grave no. 1 in Dreństwo- 85 cm long, 48 cm wide - for an adult, or in Pierkunowo - a child's grave 35 cm wide 70 cm long).

All the graves are situated near the body of water: namely at the rivers or, in the case of lake districts, on a small elevations at the lake shores or on the islands.

The dating of the graves varies considerably (table 2). The oldest graves from Mszano are dated back to the Boreal period, whereas the youngest, like in Woźna Wies or Pierkunowo are dated back to the late Atlantic period. When we consider chronology, only the grave no. 2 from Dreństwo is evidently from the Subboreal period.

The wide range of the cultures from the Mesolithic is represented. We identified the Janisławice and Komornica culture as well as the north-eastern cultural circle, namely Kunda and Zedmar cultures.

A very interesting fact is worth mentioning, namely the first multiple animal burials dated back to the Mesolithic were excavated in Poland (dogs in Dudka and wild boar in Mszano).

In the majority of cases, Mesolithic graves in Poland do not differ from the graves existing simultaneously in the neighbouring areas. In comparison to

Scandinavia or the east coast of the Baltic Sea, Poland is devoid of large cemeteries with a very long chronology, sometimes even of thousands years, like in Olenij Ostrov or Zvejnieki. It is difficult to establish whether Poland lacks large cemeteries, or whether they haven't been discovered yet. The second hypothesis seems to be more probable as the main interest was focused on sandy sites. Since the lake districts in Poland resemble the landscape of the South Scandinavia and east coast of the Baltic Sea, it can be expected that the discovery of new sites abounding in interesting data about the middle period of the Stone Age will take place. The proof of it is the cemetery in Dudka, where 13 graves have been uncovered so far. The forms of burials and their outfit are also analogical to the ones from the German Lowlands, Scandinavia or the Baltic States. The two latter ones are situated in the very close distance from the territory described here and for this reason they yield the best material to comparison. In Zvejnieki in Latvia (Zagorski 1987; Zagorska 1994) a large group of 317 graves was excavated. In the majority of cases the body lied in the extended position, with the legs slightly bent. Ochre did not occur only in 45 graves. The remaining graves, especially the burials of children, contained large quantities of this mineral. In half of the cases, the graves were furnished. The prevailing outfit comprised of perforated animal teeth. For example, 340 tooth beads were discovered in the grave no. 122-123 (with child and a male individual). Teeth without perforation occurred rarely. Corpses were variously distributed. The most rare orientation with the head in the northern east was very seldom. Similar funeral rites were registered in the cemeteries in Popovo and Olenij Ostrov (Koltsov ed. 1989) in Russia. Thus it can be stated that the model distinguished on the Polish territory is analogical to the funeral rites in the countries situated on the east coast of the Baltic Sea (Butrimas et Cernys 1987). The only difference is that the canon of the funeral rites was more crystallised in the Baltic States whereas is in Poland - more varied. It should be remembered that this region is situated on the border between western, northern and north-eastern cultural circles. In such a situation the cultural differentiation that is reflected in the funeral rites should not evoke any surprise. Studying the customs of the cemeteries in Scandinavia e.g. Skateholm (Larsson 1984; Larsson 1988) or Vedbaek (Brinch Petersen *et al.*, 1993) as well as single graves in the north-eastern Germany: Charlottenhöhe (Kolosówna 1949), it turns out that the presence of ochre and animal teeth was also very common there.

Now let us compare the funeral rites discussed in this paper with the customs of the particular Neolithic cultures from the territory of Poland. The authors concentrated on two elements: ochre and perforated animal teeth. Ochre occurred only in the early Neolithic Linear Pottery culture, and was situated mainly near the head. There is a lack of rules as far as the type of the outfit is concerned. In the Lengyel-Polgar culture, necklaces made of teeth occurred. However, these were mainly fangs of predators, and not the incisors of the large rumi-

nants like in the case of the Mesolithic graves. There is no analogy between Funnel Beaker culture and the form of the burials described here. In the relatively small number of necklaces one could distinguish the tusks of the wild boar and the fangs of the dog or wolf. The animal bones were registered in the graves stemming from the Globular Amphorae cultural circle, but these were mainly mandibles of the swine or wild boar. Also the Corded Ware Pottery culture bears no similarity to the hunting style of the graves. And as far as the so called „Paraneolithic” is concerned, the authors are of the opinion that this was the final stage of the middle Stone Age, after the pottery had become widespread. Due to the recent mode of defining the Mesolithic as an socio-economic and cultural phenomenon (Fisher 1995, Kozłowski 1989, Zvelebil *et al.*, 1998), the schematic approach based on the chronology is no more accurate. Thus, the authors recognised these “Paraneolithic” graves as Mesolithic, even though some of the scholars from the Baltic States, Belorussia and Russia consider them to be Neolithic.

This shortened presentation points to the fact that ochre, necklaces and pendants or even teeth of wild animals without perforation, constitute a distinctive feature of the Mesolithic style of inhumations on the Polish territory. These two elements occurring together with the orientation of the burial differing from the forms peculiar to Neolithic cultures is a distinctive trait of the graves of the hunters. Especially in the north-eastern zone, where the Polish Mesolithic graves are concentrated, dating is of the secondary importance. In this region the Mesolithic culture survived at least till the beginning of the second millennium BC. To support this thesis we can cite the newest outcome of the pollen analysis. This method revealed that the first traces of breeding the animals stem from the Bronze Age, and the corn cultivation as an ordinary custom took place in the Roman period! It is necessary to underline that apart from a few exceptions, skeletal graves from this area can be associated with the Stone Age, and later with the late Middle Ages and Modern Period. Cremations definitely prevailed from the Bronze Age till the early Middle Ages. It is also significant to determine anthropological types, whenever this is possible. Together with the emergence of the Indo-European population on the Polish territory, the Lapp-like and the Cro-Magnon-like types disappear. Thus, the distinction of these two anthropological types is also important in the initial stage of the identification of the burial chronology.

This article does not cover the subject entirely. This is only the introductory presentation based on the accessible data. We hope that to a certain degree the gap in the knowledge about the Mesolithic graves in Poland has been filled. We also want to draw attention to the fact that it is possible to distinguish the model of burial peculiar to the groups of hunters. This model continued on this territory for a very long period of time. According to the criteria proposed in this paper the scholars, who encounter similar type of inhumation, may classify the grave as Mesolithic, even before receiving the results of the C-14 dating.

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