Reconstructing
‘Wielbark Culture’ Identity

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A Practice Approach on Biritualistic 'Wielbark' Cemeteries

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Problem with the 'Goths'

> "There is no going back to the fantasy that once upon a time there were settled, coherent and perfectly integrated national or ethnic communities."
>
> (Greenblatt 2010, 2)

For decades, the history of the 'Goths' has fascinated and captured historians, classicists and archaeologists alike. Their influence on Roman history remains significant. Seemingly appearing out of nowhere during the first decades of the 3rd century AD, the 'Goths' started invading the eastern provinces of the *Imperium Romanum*. Their conquest reached its peak in late August of 410 AD, when a grand army lead by the 'Gothic' chief Alaric advanced on the mother city of Rome (Kulikowski 2009, 11).

The Storming or Sack of Rome 410 AD is engraved into our collective memory as one of the greatest turning points of European history and came to symbolically represent the Migration Period (c. 375 AD – c. 568 AD). However, it was not the event itself but rather the immediately following reception history, developing its own dynamics over centuries, that ensured this perspective (Meier 2019, 27).

The Migration Period is understood to be a perspective epochal term not documented in the contemporary sources and represents a good example of the fact that historical events are not only constituted by the actual occurrences of the time, but also of different perceptions, meanings and interpretations (Meier 2019, 99; Pohl 2005a, 20). Church father Hieronymus recalled the event of 410 AD as follows:

> "Rome had been besieged [...]. My voice sticks in my throat; and, as I dictate, sobs choke my utterance. The City which had taken the whole world was itself taken [...]"
>
> (Hieron. *epist.* 127, 12)

Several contemporaries used to interpret the events as indicator of the dissolution of the natural orders and even as a sign of the end of the world. Hectic reactions were triggered by the catastrophe, having long-term effects. For instance, the departure of the 'Goths' on August 28th was still gratefully celebrated decades after the events (Meier 2019, 27).

Despite the great impact the Sack of Rome had, 'Gothic' history actually climaxes with the battle of Adrianople and their settlement by Theodosius in 382 AD, and their background reaches much further into the past. While Alaric's story represents only one of various 'Gothic' encounters that can be retraced from the Migration Period, it is perceived as the most important and symbolic of them all. To the Roman contemporaries and their descendants, Rome was not just raided by some 'Goths' – the Sack of Rome was the doing of king Alaric and *the* 'Goths' (Kulikowski 2009, 20).

However, previous research seems to have greatly overestimated the ethnic cohesion of peoples during the Migration Period, even taken it as granted. As W. Pohl argues, it rather seems to have been a matter of peoples in the making whose cohesion still fluctuated strongly, due to the numerous factors affecting them (Pohl 2005a, 24).

Tracking the erratic movements of what are conventionally considered to be whole 'cultures' remains at a very early stage within research (Greenblatt 2010, 7). The identification of past 'cultures' within archaeology has been predominantly based on the assumption that archaeological cultures – seen as bounded, monolithic cultural entities – coincide with ethnic groups, tribes or races (Childe cited in Jones 1998, 106). This perception has since been subjected to critiques within the framework of culture-historical archaeology, but also within processual and post-processual archaeologies (Jones 1998, 106). By now, modern research views 'peoples' as social structures that have undergone diverse changes over time and can no longer be traced as coherent units throughout the centuries (Meier 2019, 102). Even apparent objective criteria, such as a shared language or possible ancestry, do not longer refer to homogenous associations – instead, the opposite appears to be the case. Therefore, 'peoples' do not generally have to be viewed as pure constructs. It is worth mentioning at this point that – especially regarding the expansion of a historical depth dimension – older ideas of originality, coherence and homogeneity of 'peoples' thus no longer apply (Meier 2019, 102).

The term 'peoples' has been understood and defined in many different ways within research. Pohl for instance understands 'peoples' as a group of individuals with shared origin, language and culture that are to be distinguished from others by their traditional costumes and weaponry and are bound by tradition and law (Pohl

2005b, 16-17). By now, modern research instead regards ‘peoples’ as social constructs that have undergone various diverse changes over time and are not traceable as coherent units throughout the centuries (Meier 2019, 102).

This being said, one finds themselves confronted with some essential questions on the matter: Who were these so-called ‘Goths’ then anyway? Where did the ‘Goths’ supposedly come from? Where and when can we mark the beginning of ‘Gothic’ history? As fundamental topics of the whole discussion concerning the ‘Goths’, these questions have led to several diverse viewpoints among historians (Kulikowski 2009, 21-22).

Despite their discrepancies, most historians reached a consensus on at least one matter: the sixth century AD *Getica* by Jordanes are to be considered an important reference point for the history of the ‘Goths’ (König 2007, 52). The *Getica* took the centre stage in the search for their origins and history since the Renaissance and continue to be heavily relied on to this day (Kulikowski 2009, 54-55).

However, there are numerous issues with this point of view. For one, Jordanes wrote his work centuries after the described events, which is why the source can be deemed as unreliable (Kulikowski 2009, 49). Another problem consists in the originality of the *Getica*: They were based on Cassiodorus’s *Historiae Gothorum* (König 2007, 52), a work consisting of twelve books remaining lost to this day. The *Getica* were written two decades later and could have used Cassiodorus’s work merely as a source, subordinating it to Jordanes’s own ideas and concepts (Goffart 1995, 21-22). More importantly however, the heavy reliance on the *Getica* has severely influenced philological and archaeological research results (Cieśliński 2011, 182): because of the apparently perfect correspondence with the information provided by the literary sources, the ‘Goths’ are thought to have existed on the lower Vistula in strong connection with the so-called ‘Wielbark Culture’. Its relevant archaeological evidence was associated with the *Getica* from an early stage on and has since been identified with the ‘Gothic’ migration from Scandza to Gothiscandza[1] and their movement to the Black Sea coast. According to several researchers, the archaeological traces of the area prove the ‘Gothic’ migration from Pomerania to the Black Sea described in Jordanes’s work

[1] Scandza refers to Scandinavia, the supposed homeland of the ‘Goths’, from where they are thought to have migrated to Gothiscandza, which is generally identified as the lower Vistula area (Mączyńska 2007, 3).

(Mączyńska 2007, 2, 17). However, it must be noted at this point that archaeologists have always attempted to either prove or disprove the assumed veracity of Jordanes's work. At no point has the independent examination of the *archaeological* finds occurred. M. Kazanski, who specialised in the 'Goths', does not even begin to question the truthfulness of the *Getica*. Because Jordanes's script recounts that the 'Goths' were situated in the Baltic Sea region and migrated to Ukraine, the material culture of these regions must therefore be 'Gothic' and studied as such (Kulikowski 2009, 71).

This perception not only views the 'Wielbark Culture' as an archaeological culture reflecting a clear ethnicity, but also relies solely on literary evidence provided centuries later, which proves to be problematic for a variety of reasons. "[...] this notion of archaeological cultures assumes that ethnic groups are uncomplicated categories, clearly bounded and with a material record that is uniquely distinctive to them. The movement of these material attributes then becomes a proxy for the movement of people" (Hakenbeck 2019, 518). New scientific approaches such as genetic samples could provide more certainty and clarity on the matter, however, results have proven to be biased still. Genetic samples come to represent entire archaeological cultures seemingly comprising certain ethnic groups. As a consequence, it is thereby implied that each sampled individual necessarily represents their ethnic group. Numerous ways by which social factors could influence population structure as well as specific social, environmental and economic burial contexts are therewith not considered in any way (Hakenbeck 2019, 519-520).

One such attempt has been sought out by I. Stolarek *et al.*: in their 2019 paper *"Goth migration induced changes in the matrilineal genetic structure of the central-east European population"*, the authors claim to have proven the 'Gothic' origin from Scandinavia. While acknowledging that the issues surrounding the 'Gothic' origin and their migration are a widely debated matter, the authors state that "[...] the lack of new independent data has precluded the evaluation of the existing hypothesis" (Stolarek *et al.* 2019, 1). In order to overcome this problem, they pursued to initiate systematic studies of populations inhabiting the concerned regions of Iron Age Poland and continue to present the data of mitochondrial DNA from 27 'Gothic' individuals (Stolarek *et al.* 2019, 1). The grave furnishings of the examined 'Wielbark' burials have previously been established as character-

istic for ‘Goths’. The human remains showed a close matrilineal relationship with two other Iron Age populations from the Jutland peninsula and the region between the Oder and Vistula rivers (Stolarek *et al.* 2019, 2-3). “Considering the results obtained [...] one can assume that they are, to large extent, consistent with the postulated chronology of early migrations of Goths and their settlement in Central-East Europe. [...] the genetic relationships reported here [...] support the opinion that southern Scandinavia was the homeland of the Goths” (Stolarek *et al.* 2019, 8). To put it concisely, the assumed ‘Gothic’ origin in Scandinavia is identified as such based solely on the genetically examined ‘Wielbark’ individuals and their genetic compliances, without any regard to the complicated factors and changes of the time. Not to mention that the human remains are unquestioningly equated as ‘Gothic’ to begin with. Apart from that and the obvious issues with the authors’ approach, it seems ironic to speak of their research as new independent data whilst relying so strongly on Jordanes’s narration. Despite Stolarek *et al.* mentioning migrations and other social factors briefly in their paper, they do not seem to have taken these issues seriously into account during their research.

Thus, one finds themselves confronted with three major perspectives which may or may not coincide with one another:

(1) The historical and literary perspective, which is to a great extent provided by Jordanes’s *Getica.*

(2) The newer genetic approach, its results comprising specific ethnic groups.

(3) The actual archaeological evidence.

The hitherto greatest problem within the three concerning the discussion on the ‘Goths’ has been the great reliance on the historical and literary sources, resulting into biased and problematic conclusions. While a compliance between them has so far been taken as granted, an actual approach regarding the investigation of inconsistencies and the complex issues surrounding the discussion on the ‘Goths’ remains unimplemented.

During an era of numerous simultaneous occurring migrations and wars, should the ‘Wielbark Culture’ still be uncritically perceived as such a static, bound unit? Should and can it be considered as ‘Gothic’ at all? Is there even anything that

marks it as specifically 'Wielbark', and if so, what and why? What social reality does the 'Wielbark Culture' represent anyway? What are the factors that seem to distinguish this archaeological culture so clearly from all the other migrating groups of the time?

1.2 Practice Approach – A New Way Out?

In her publication *"The Archaeology of Ethnicity"*, S. Jones points out the lack of a developed theory of culture addressing the relationship between subjective perceptions and objective conditions (Jones 1998, 88). Neither primordial nor instrumental theories of ethnicity adequately address the manner in which people recognize their commonalities and it is in this context she draws attention to P. Bourdieu's theory of practice. By developing the concept of the *habitus*, Bourdieu transcends the dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism and therewith associated oppositions, such as a society and an individual (Jones 1998, 88). The habitus is understood as systems of durable and transposable *dispositions* which are formed by the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (Bourdieu 1977, 72). These durable dispositions – produced by the conditions of which a particular social environment is constituted – can be towards certain practices and perceptions, and ultimately become part of an individual's self-sense. However, these dispositions are in no way absolute and can also be transposed between different contexts (Jones 1998, 88-89).

Bourdieu's theory of practice differs from structural and normative theories of culture in the suggestion that structural orientations exist merely "in the form of the embodied knowledge and depositions of the *habitus*, and their very substance depends on the practices and representations of human agents, which in turn contribute to the reproduction and transformation of the objective conditions constitutive of the *habitus*" (Jones 1998, 89). To put it concisely, the dispositions of the habitus not only shape but also *are* shaped by social practice (Jones 1998, 89).

Bourdieu's theory of practice has been extrapolated by G.C. Bentley, who utilized the concept of the habitus to provide an objective foundation for ethnic subjectivity involving the constructs of likeness and difference (Jones 1998, 90). "According to the practice theory of ethnicity, sensations of ethnic affinity are founded on common life experiences that generate similar habitual dispositions [...]. It is the commonality of experience and of the preconscious habitus it generates that gives

members of an ethnic cohort their sense of being both familiar and familial to each other" (Bentley 1987, 27).

This being the case, M. Meier points out that the conviction of belonging among members of a group identity is formed by a complex interplay of self-perception and the perception of others, which also includes delimitations of a group from other groups through the selection of supposedly common characteristics. Particularly in relation to neighbouring groups inclusion- and exclusion-processes represent a key factor in the formation of collectives. The existence of 'the others' allows the emergence of the own association with sufficient contouring – the clearer the own association distinguishes itself from 'the others', the easier it becomes to conceal internal differences (Meier 2019, 111).

According to Jones, due to the potential to surpass the dichotomy of objective and subjective, a practice theory of ethnicity in a wider sense enables the analysis of the relationship between ethnicity and culture. She argues that the intersubjective construction of ethnic identity is based on shared subconscious dispositions of the *habitus*. These in turn shape and are shaped by "objective commonalities of practice" (Jones 1998, 90).

In accordance with the theory of practice, affiliated research has been undertaken by Q. Bourgeois and E. Kroon in their 2017 article "*The impact of the male burials on the construction of Corded Ware identity"*. They argue that "studying the exchange of cultural information is a key complement to the more recent biological perspectives on prehistoric migrations and that it provides a unique insight into how prehistoric society was constituted" (Bourgeois and Kroon 2017, 14). The authors specifically mention the importance of the exchange of cultural information on burial rites as a crucial complement to the exchange of biological information (Bourgeois and Kroon 2017, 1).

A similar point has been made in previous research by T. Oestigaard and J. Goldhahn. They emphasize the fact that "[...] contra-social aspects of death in a society are important because the funeral practices revitalise what is culturally conceived to be most essential to the reproduction of the social order" (Oestigaard and Goldhahn 2006, 45). Within a society, the role of death is both culturally and religiously defined. Funerals might be regarded as symbolic representations of the ritual participants, and it is indicated that numerous considerations had to be made re-

garding the correct performance of funeral rites (Oestigaard and Goldhahn 2006, 32; 45). Therefore, burial sites from illiterate ancient societies represent an important source for gaining insight into their understanding and view of the world around them, because they incorporate important choices motivated by traditions, religious beliefs, preferences et al. (Parker Pearson 1999, 1).

These observations are also approached by D. Fontijn and S. van der Vaart in their 2017 research paper *"Local elites globalized in death"*. Examining Early Iron Age Hallstatt C/D chieftains' burials in northwest Europe by applying a practice approach, the authors draw attention to the idea that, in a sense, objects have agency within society, and thus 'do things' to people by their material and visual characteristics. Because material and visual qualities are merely the foundation for social and cultural evaluations of foreign things, it is argued that the intention for which the object was made is rather trivial – instead, it is what an object has *become* that happens to be more crucial in this context (Fontijn and Van der Vaart 2017, 525). The authors furthermore stress that when meaning and value appear to be emerging in action, it "implies that what people *did* with objects matters and may even be essential to how they came to understand objects" (Fontijn and Van der Vaart 2017, 526). In this way, a coherence between practices in different regions marks at least one empirically verifiable manner of recognizing shared codes of conduct. Within the context of globalization, it is the importance of these *networks of practices* that outweigh *networks of objects* (Fontijn and Van der Vaart 2017, 526). Likewise, one can argue that within the framework of ethnicity and identity it is the networks of practices that allow more reasonable and accurate conclusions on the matter.

Fontijn and Van der Vaart furthermore point out that the "focus on practices is feasible for archaeological studies, as many practices leave signs on the objects or can be deduced from the context in which objects were deposited" (Fontijn and Van der Vaart 2017, 526).

Burials that are discovered during excavations are thus no longer perceived as static units. Instead, they are considered as physical and material remains of an extensive series of substantial decisions and actions between the death and the burial of an individual. These funerary practices involved the active participation of members of the concerned community. Burials therefore also serve as the sim-

ple reflection of a population's ideas about cosmologic and social order (Oestigaard and Goldhahn 2006, 45-46). Revealing shared networks of practices in the regions ascribed to the 'Wielbark Culture' could thus undoubtedly reveal more about their constitution and answer questions regarding their supposed shared identity and ethnicity. It is for this reason that a practice approach corresponding to those undertaken by the referred authors will be applied to this thesis's research.

1.3 Aim of this Research

The objective of this thesis is to study the burial practices carried out by 'Wielbark' individuals alleged to be 'Gothic' in order to make out whether their practices do indeed match this ethnonym as has always been indisputably presumed.

This thesis is a not only a proposal to deal with the 'Goths' anew, but with various migration histories. Perceptions on migration, ethnicity and identity are long outdated and newer approaches could prove to become essential for the re-evaluation of heretofore biased research results. What is referred to as the 'Goths' today not only had a major impact on the Roman Empire, but also the following reception history – in turn influencing historical views immensely – and on the construct of the Migration Period. Being held responsible by various scholars for the Fall of the Roman Empire, it is of great importance to address and evaluate the changes and complex processes of this time anew. This thesis will undertake the attempt of this by reengaging in the research of case studies from the funerary practices of the 'Wielbark Culture'. Not only could the following research prove to be unprecedented and innovative for the 'Gothic' history, but also cast the first stone for researchers to deconstruct outdated migration theories and be aware of the more complicated phenomenon taking place. It is my hope that the undertaken research will not only stem the henceforth independent research of the archaeological material of the 'Wielbark Culture', but also that it may even be regarded as a steppingstone for the reconsideration of several other migration histories.

The focus of this thesis will lie on the hitherto 'Gothic Wielbark Culture'. A similar practice approach as done and suggested by Bourgeois and Kroon and Fontijn and van der Vaart will be attempted in order to gain further insight into ethnical and identity issues focusing on 'Wielbark' burial practices. Based on the study of

these burial sites, what is the ‘Wielbark Culture’ and was it really as coherent as heretofore presumed? Does the research of the burial sites truly enable more accurate perceptions on cultural identity and ethnicity? What can be inferred by the study of ‘Wielbark Culture’ burial practices?

In order to answer these questions, several ‘Wielbark’ burial sites and their practised customs will be examined more closely and, if possible, compared to one another. What consistencies or inconsistencies are to be found, and what stands out? Is there a common feature or characteristic that allows the clear demarcation between ‘Wielbark’ and other archaeological cultures?

Unfortunately, the excavation results of ‘Wielbark’ burial sites were either published in Polish, or remain unpublished to this day. Due to these impediments, I only have restricted access to the full data of ‘Wielbark’ cemeteries and can merely engage with the English or German literature by the specialized archaeologists who sum up relevant excavation results in their publications.

Before the main part of the examination of burials will be approached, a problematisation of identity and ethnicity within archaeology will be addressed. It is worth mentioning that I have previously engaged with the issues surrounding these topics in my Bachelor thesis. I therefore intend to utilize the knowledge earlier obtained and both expand and build upon my previous conclusions in order to provide more elaborate and developed thoughts on the matter that are relevant for this research.

Thereafter follows the chapter on the ‘Wielbark Culture’ itself, which will be introduced by the chronology and a short historical framework it finds itself in. This is necessary in order to understand the concurrent and complex events of the time, that may or may not have influenced the formation and structure of the archaeological culture. Hereafter follows the main research, in which a detailed presentation of the numerous biritual funerary practices evident from ‘Wielbark’ cemeteries takes place.

Finally, the thesis will end with a discussion of the findings of the undertaken research and a conclusion of the results.

2. Identity and Ethnicity within Archaeology

2.1 Issues surrounding Identity and Ethnicity

2.1.1 What is Identity?

> "Identity [...] is an inherently messy, multiple and contradictory subject. Research into identity frequently shows how we hold multiple and intersectional identities all at the same time. [...] identity is not fixed but is always changing, in process, better considered as an event [...]. It also shows that different aspects of identity come to be prioritized in different ways at different moments in time."
>
> (Crellin and Harris 2020, 47)

The concept of identity has spread rapidly across the social sciences during the past decades. However, from a field archaeologist's view, given the basic question whether the term truly advances the understanding of excavated materials, the idea of identity appears to be precarious. Throughout the social sciences, the term has been used in various ways for remarkably diverse concepts (Vroom 2011, 409). Identity is a flexible, volatile and abstract term: One can speak of personal identity, social identity, ethnic identity or cultural identity – to name but a few – making clear that the word itself not only appears to consist of many different identities but also seems to permanently shift its meaning. Defining the term conceptually or empirically therefore proves to be a matter of predicament (Vroom 2011, 409). Still, several attempts to properly define this complex term have been undertaken during the past decades, reaching back even to the preceding century. For instance, S. Brather defines identity as a common correspondence, sameness or entity unit. He sees the identity of an individual to be represented by their more or less conscious, *subjective* self-assignment to a specific social group that uses specific characteristics in certain situations. Brather therefore understands identity as a matter of knowledge, awareness and reflection as a whole (Brather 2000, 158). Moreover, he argues that identity provides basic convictions for building a community, making it an awareness of social belonging. By including certain individuals into a social group, others are consequently excluded. In consequence, the construction of identity would tend to be inextricably linked to the construction of alterities, making the formation of an identity work through demarcation (Brather 2000, 158). Brather further contends that individuals do not derive their respective identities from within themselves, but instead gain it through their

group by actively participating with its correlations – in turn, the collective or group identity only exists through its members that carry it. He concludes that identities are therefore the result of a complex interplay of what he terms "Ich-" and "Wir-Identität" – an *I*- and *We-identity* (Brather 2000, 158).

In a similar manner, S. Jones defines the concept of ethnic identity: According to her, ethnic identity is based upon situational, shifting and *subjective* identifications of *self* and *others*. Jones understands them to be subject to transformation and discontinuity, but also rooted in ongoing daily practice and historical experience (Jones 1998, 14).

Likewise, Meier stresses the fact that it is these inclusion- and exclusion-processes that represent a crucial factor in the formation of collectives, especially in relation to neighbouring groups. His understanding of identity aligns with the interpretations of Brather and Jones, pointing out the complex interplay of self-perception and the perception of others forming the conviction of belonging among members of a group identity (Meier 2019, 111).

It is these so-called group identities that are of special interest to historians and social scientists. Here, with regard to ethnic identities, the constitution of the groups marks the focal point. However, this ultimately represents a methodological limitation for archaeology: Individuals within an archaeological context can hardly be grasped as such. This makes it difficult to assess their role within social groups (Brather 2000, 159).

While some researchers as M. Weber define ethnic groups solely through the subjective belief in a common origin, the disposition to perceive and acknowledge the resulting group by others stands on the other hand. This external perception can at best precede the groups self-attribution or interact with it in complicated ways (Pohl 2005b, 19). Meier points out that this is in fact variously documented by sources and argues that these behavioural patterns may be the reason why the Migration Period is often seen as a sharp confrontation between 'Romans' and 'Barbarians'. However, the social reality is likely to have been much more complex (Meier 2019, 111).

Nowadays, there is an increasing consensus that most known groups of the time were decidedly heterogeneous and complex. Meier stresses the fact that the group identity of the members usually decreased from the centre to the periphery, en-

couraging occasional transfers to neighbouring groups. In fact, this happens to be a typical phenomenon of Late Antiquity and generally characteristic for the so-called 'border societies' of the *Imperium Romanum*. In those cases where collectives supposedly appear in sharp distinction from others in the material culture, as with for instance the 'Goths' and the 'Romans', it is important to be aware that they in the first place reflect mechanisms for the *construction* of identities. The question of the social reality, as Meier points out, has to be asked separately from these mechanisms (Meier 2019, 111).

2.1.2 'Gothic' Identity

Thus, one ultimately finds themselves confronted with the remaining question: What makes someone 'Gothic'? The question alone contains both conclusions and assumptions about the nature of an individual's feeling of a shared identity and therewith also the problem of their distinction to others. What evidence signalled whether an individual was perceived as 'Gothic'? How did different people know whether they were 'Gothic' and where then did 'Romans' get this knowledge from? Kulikowski argues that while language might have been a differentiating criterion, languages are known to be learnable, and sources on the possible existence of certain 'Gothic' accents or dialects to help identify dissimilarities do not exist. What then might have caused a sense of community among the 'Goths' of the 3rd and 4th centuries AD? And on what basis did the 'Romans' presume to know that all these people were, indeed, 'Goths' (Kulikowski 2009, 73-74)?

Based on the previously mentioned ideas on the construction of identity and in agreement with Kulikowski, it appears to be entirely possible that the discourse of the 'Roman' elite may have greatly contributed to the cultivation of a common identity on the borders of the Roman Empire. Contacts with the *Imperium Romanum* not only influenced but also created new social and political hierarchies beyond the borders. 'Roman' ideologies and perceptions may have equally contributed to highlighting certain elements of what was considered 'barbaric culture', which in turn defined the 'barbarians'' own sense of community. In other words, the discourses of the 'Roman' elite about what constitutes a 'Goth' ultimately contributed to how individuals identified themselves as 'Gothic' and allowed the establishment of characteristics that conveyed 'being Gothic' (Kulikowski 2009, 74).

As a matter of fact, similar phenomena are evident in modern times as well. When speaking of one's own culture and ethnic identity, the answers will probably strongly differ from those that external parties have formed on the same culture and identity. In most cases, stereotypes will probably contribute significantly to the objective perception one forms about certain 'peoples'. While modern society might be on the verge of moving away from such preconceptions, they appear to remain very much present in everyday life. What is it that makes a 'German' person 'German'? What makes a 'Dutch' person 'Dutch'? External parties might be surprised to find that 'Germans' do not in fact wear Lederhosen in every part of the country, or that 'Dutch' people do not reside in windmills and only own wooden footwear. Yet, those ethnonyms hold the ability to cast similar objective perceptions on these cultures in the minds of external parties describing them.

It is also important to be aware that with certain ethnonyms come certain associations willingly or unwillingly accompanied by certain histories. The term 'refugee' serves as another example for this issue. What is a 'refugee'? What kind of associations do we have when we talk about a 'refugee'? Most people would automatically think of the raging wars and upheavals in Africa of the past years, perhaps bringing images of capsizing boats on the Mediterranean Sea filled with innocent people to their mind. Yet, when presented with a person introducing themselves as 'Syrian', 'Nigerian' or even 'Turkish', those same people will probably associate entirely different backgrounds and histories with the concerned person.

These same phenomena are highly likely to have occurred with the 'Goths' as well. Who were those people attacking and plundering at the borders to the *Imperium Romanum*? Those 'non-Romans' who suddenly composed part of the 'Roman' military force? This Alaric who purposefully marched on Rome?

Perhaps it was the objective conceptions people made on what was 'Gothic' that ultimately resulted in the formation of what was since considered to be 'Gothic' identity. While this appears to be highly possible, in hindsight there is no certain way to tell. Whereas archaeological research has undertaken many attempts to provide sufficient answers to the discussions surrounding ethnicity and identity issues, those attempts happened to unfold entirely new discussions on the matter.

How, if at all, can archaeology provide an answer to the questions surrounding ethnicity and identity?

2.2 Archaeology on Identity and Ethnicity

2.2.1 The Trouble with Objects

During the history of archaeology, the present material record has always been attributed to past 'peoples'. Tracing the genealogy of present 'peoples' back to envisioned primordial origins has tended to be a great desire within archaeological research and thus came to play a significant role in the development of the discipline (Jones 1998, 1).

However, it has since been established that 'peoples' neither have to correspond to nations and objective criteria – as for instance language or ancestry – nor do 'peoples' necessarily refer to homogeneous associations. It is therefore important to be aware that outdated ideas of coherence, origin and homogeneity should no longer apply to 'peoples', especially regarding the expansion of a historical depth dimension (Meier 2019, 102).

In the interim the realization that contemporary associations and groups were predominantly defined through subjective ascriptions was established. However, this presupposes the existence of different and often changeable criteria that either promoted or hindered these attributions. The flexibility of these criteria is very situational, and it is therefore not possible to summarize them in a catalogue in order to process them for individual 'cultures'. This can be ascribed to the fact that these criteria – taken as granted by research when recording 'peoples' – are anything but objective. Physical characteristics such as armament or clothing do not have sufficient selectivity. Consequently, no general applicable criteria for systematic definitions or delimitations can be obtained from the literary and archaeological sources (Meier 2019, 103-104).

Still, it remains of great interest to ask which characteristics contemporaries used to define not only their own identity, but also those of others. Here, the previously mentioned physical characteristics can certainly be viewed as a manner to create identity or at least to signal a difference from other groupings. Because of their lack of sufficient selectivity though, it can only be a past individual telling us which objects or materials conveyed this sense of identity and how exactly they did this. Unfortunately, the *interpretatio Romana* remains the only human voice in

a sense within the case of 'barbarians' of the late antiquity, embodying an entirely alien perspective. Thus, in the context of preserved material remains, archaeologists can never be sure that 'archaeological cultures' represent anything else than their *own* selection of residues. Consequently, a historical significance is ascribed to objects that they did not necessarily have. An abstract multitude of specific features that were chosen by researchers are in this manner transformed into a historically comprehensible group of 'peoples', who are thereby presumed to hold a shared identity (Kulikowski 2009, 63; 67). In fact, these inherent risks are even further increased when a relationship between 'archaeological cultures' and a historical group mentioned in literary sources is established (Kulikowski 2009, 67) – a matter which happens to be very evident for the 'Wielbark Culture' and the 'Goths'.

2.2.2 Genetic Approaches on Identity and Ethnicity – aDNA

Apart from material culture studies on ethnicity and identity a florescence of interest surrounding ancient DNA (aDNA) has been demonstrated in recent years, with new publications supposedly shedding new light on old debates (Crellin and Harris 2020, 37). Both R. J. Crellin and O. J. T. Harris point out that "aDNA provides ammunition to a wider movement that sees recent advances in archaeological science as providing solutions to questions that have long puzzled the discipline" (Crellin and Harris 2020, 37). The influence and authority held by DNA studies should not be underestimated: Not only is DNA often seen as defining an individual's true self, but it is also widely understood to hold all the significant truths about people (Crellin and Harris 2020, 38). Thus, it seems unsurprising why aDNA studies as the one provided by Stolarek *et al.* appear to continue to hold a status of unquestioned conviction.

While genetic analyses certainly hold the potential to contribute to the archaeological discipline – allowing new insights into ancestry, health or the biological sex of skeletal remains – aDNA cannot be perceived as a neutral arbiter of past identity. Instead, it requires the situating within both nuanced and theoretically sophisticated understandings of past and present, as does every piece of archaeological evidence (Crellin and Harris 2020, 38). Crellin and Harris stress the fact that aDNA researchers work with a model of identity that prioritizes simplistic and singular understandings of what identity is and continue to argue that aDNA data

by itself is not enough for archaeology – the contextual analysis of the human body, architecture and material culture is still, if not particularly, required. Their emphasize lies on the fact that the privileging of one mode of knowing has consequently led to the problems surrounding aDNA (Crellin and Harris 2020, 47): "If DNA results reveal something surprising about your family background this is *only one* aspect of who you are [...]. If aDNA says that people in Bronze Age Britain had large amounts of steppe ancestry, this is only one aspect of our understanding of both who these people were, and *who they thought they were*" (Crellin and Harris 2020, 47-48). Taking this a step further, one might even argue that instead of providing clear and straightforward answers on the questions surrounding an individual's ethnic identity, aDNA may instead rather recount sufficient information on an individual's *ancestry*. This can be illustrated briefly by the following thought experiment: Let it be supposed that an individual with ancestry X, born in country X, has due to specific circumstances of this individual's life barely lived in their native country. While having ancestry X, growing up in another country Y with culture Y causes the individual to not identify as being X but Y. Yet, when applying aDNA studies on this individual in the same way they are applied to archaeological case studies, the following conclusion will be reached: The data provides the information of ancestry X, therefore the individuals identity is X and the individual belonged to ethnic group X. This conclusion does *not*, however, consider the various ways in which identities are formed and instead focuses on one single aspect supposedly forming this person's ethnic identity. In sum, the data provides ample evidence of the individual's heritage and ancestry – but not their *identity*. For this reason, aDNA research will not have a part in the remaining research on the 'Wielbark Culture' of this thesis.

It has been demonstrated that neither physical characteristics nor modern aDNA research appear to have sufficient selectivity when it comes to pinpointing a shared identity of groups, ethnicities or 'cultures'. What approach then, if there is one, might be more suitable and adequate when addressing this matter?

2.2.3 What Objects 'Do' – Material Agency Perspective

Numerous archaeologists have since acknowledged that an intersection of their discipline with contemporary cultural identities is not only extraordinarily complex, but also happens to be overtly political in nature. Still, it remains a great

source of controversy within archaeology of what can and should be done about the arising problems on the matter (Jones 1998, 10).

Jones moreover points out the gap in the treatment of cultural identity in archaeology. While on one hand the empiricist framework of traditional archaeology has been concentrating on the identification of past 'cultures', archaeological knowledge is also known to have been used to construct identities in the present. However, while there has been an increase in the theoretical debate and research about ethnicity since the 1960s, there remain but little explicit analyses on not only the relationship between ethnic identity and material culture, but also of the nature of ethnicity itself (Jones 1998, 13). As is pointed out by Jones, the developments during since the late 1960s entailed numerous significant changes in the understanding of socio-cultural differentiation. Yet, they have been largely ignored by archaeologists, several of which continue to equate 'archaeological cultures' with past ethnic groups (Jones 1998, 13) – which also appears to be the case for the 'Wielbark Culture' and the 'Goths'.

It is important to note that regardless of the context which archaeological material is found in – be it within the remains of a settlement or from a burial ground – it usually tends to reveal a lot about vertical social relationships, viz. relationships across different social classes within a society. While it remains comparatively easy to demonstrate vertical differences within a single collection of archaeological material, comparing separate material collections to one another by contrasting them to each other continues to be a matter of great difficulty (Kulikowski 2009, 66-67). It implies an entirely artificial process which includes the subjective selection of various characteristics as certain styles and objects that must be regarded as substantial for the determination of a specific 'archaeological culture'. However, the selection of supposedly defining characteristics itself already proves to be problematic, given the constant risk that widespread characteristics might be used to provide evidence. Even if this were to be avoided, the assumption that the presumably decisive selected characteristics are the equivalent of those through which contemporaries defined their identity or divergence is still made (Kulikowski 2009, 67).

An interesting point of view on the matter is provided by M.J. Versluys. He argues that instead of being a representation of 'cultural' meaning alone, material

culture is an active agent in its relationship with people (Versluys 2014, 17). Discussing 'Romanization' and what is 'Rome', Versluys stresses the fact that material culture has often been made to merely *represent* various different things in the several meanings of 'Rome'. He then continues to highlight that "if the (potential) meaning of things in Roman contexts is of such bewildering complexity and fluidity – especially when looking for meaning as the outcome of the use of stylistic and material properties in a fixed relation to identity – we should perhaps focus more on what the object in question *does*" (Versluys 2014, 17). In order to do so, one must investigate how an object determines not only its viewer but also its immediate and historical context – in short, one must focus on the object's *agency*. In regard of this, Versluys continues to elaborate his point with the following example:

> "An object called 'Greek statue', for instance, has no fixed meaning as such. It has not necessarily anything to do with ethnic Greeks and often cannot be connected with a desire to acquire a 'Greek identity' in a particular context. Even as a cultural or social concept it is evasive; the same form of Greek statuary can simultaneously be found on a bone amulet worn by a slave and, in original Greek bronze, in an imperial collection."
>
> (Versluys 2014, 17)

Likewise, the appearance of a brooch otherwise assigned to the 'Goths' at a certain location does *not* presuppose that the 'Goths' have actually been there. The remnants of preserved material are in effect not suitable as evidence for ancient ethnic differentiation (Kulikowski 2009, 66).

Thus, the focus of research should not lie on presumed material and stylistic properties of objects, nor on their supposed testification of certain historical narratives. Instead, it is what an object *does* in a certain *context* that research should be focusing on (Versluys 2014, 17).

It is therefore that the following chapter will examine 'Wielbark' burials more closely. The ethnic nomenclatures objects supposedly hold and carry will not be regarded as sufficient or adequate in order to distinguish group identities from one another. Based on the theory of practice, and following the approach undertaken by previously mentioned authors with the underlying conclusion that practices, as for instance burials, serve i.a. as a reflection of a population's ideas about social and cosmologic order, I hope to find indications of a shared mindset within the

‘Wielbark Culture’. Finding corresponding burial practices within the ‘Wielbark Culture’ could indicate the collective or prevailing identity of specific groups and would allow a more appropriate distinction between what is regarded ‘Wielbark’ and other groupings.

Before moving on to the main research however, given the complex processes transpiring during the time this ‘archaeological culture’ finds itself in it is necessary to first provide a short chronological and historical framework.

3. The ‘Wielbark Culture’

3.1 Chronology and Historical Framework

The ‘Wielbark Culture’ is thought to have originated in the early 1st century AD in the lower Vistula area, presumably partly rooted in the previous preceding ‘Oksywie Culture’. Nowadays, it is regarded as one of the most important archaeological complexes of the Roman Empire and the early Migration Period in northern Central Europe (Mączyńska 2007, 1; Cieśliński 2011, 171).

The ‘Wielbark Culture’ was previously outlined by Ryszard Wołągiewicz in the 1970s. Its name was based on the necropolis in Wielbark/Willenberg, a suburb of Malbork/Marienburg. Wołągiewicz continued with the suggestion of ‘Wielbark’ index forms which were almost entirely based on the archaeological finds from ‘Wielbark’ burial sites, since the state of research on the settlements was too poor (Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 227).

Wołągiewicz is also responsible for the division of the ‘Wielbark Culture’ into two chronological stages: The older Lubowidz Phase (B1-B2/C1-C1a) and the younger Cecele Phase (C1b-D1). Both are named after two large and completely excavated burial fields (Mączyńska 2007, 3). Moreover, he differentiated the ‘Wielbark’ distribution area into seven settlement zones (following Mączyńska 2007, 3-4):

> **Zone A** – The lower Vistula area, from the Gdansk Bay to the Elbinger plateau and the Kulmer Land; continuously populated from A1-D1
>
> **Zone B** – Central Pomerania, Słowin and Drawsko Lake District; populated from A2 to the end of B2/C1
>
> **Zone C** – Kashubian and Krajna Lake Districts; populated from B2a, possibly B1 to the end of B2/C1 and exceptionally to C1b/C2
>
> **Zone D** – Iława and Olsztynsee plates, area on the upper Pasłęka / Passarge, Łyna / Aale and Drwęca / Drewenz; populated from B2b to the beginning of C2 and the end of C2
>
> **Zone E** – Mazovia and Podlachia east of the Vistula; populated from B2/C1-C2/D1

Zone F – Polesia and Volhynia; populated from B2/C1-C3/D1

Given the finds of the 'Culture's' earliest burial sites and the continuous population of the region, Wołągiewicz marks Zone A as the core area of the 'Wielbark Culture'. Additionally, he considers Zones A and B to be the autochthonous area in which the 'Wielbark Culture' supposedly originated on the basis of the 'Oksywie Culture' (Mączyńska 2007, 4).

During Phase B of the "ältere Römische Kaiserzeit[2]", the 'Wielbark Culture' is thought to have expanded into other areas of the Pomeranian Lake District in the northern part of Poland as well as regions surrounding the Warmia, east of the lower Vistula. The beginning of the "jüngere Römische Kaiserzeit" from the Phases B2/C1-C1a saw a 'Wielbark' migration east of the lower Vistula. The 'Wielbark Culture' is then believed to have settled within a large area including eastern Poland, western Belarus, and the Ukraine as well as the northern coastal regions of the Black Sea (fig. 1). Here, it is thought to have played an important role in the emergence of the so called 'Černjachov Culture' (Cieśliński 2011, 171).

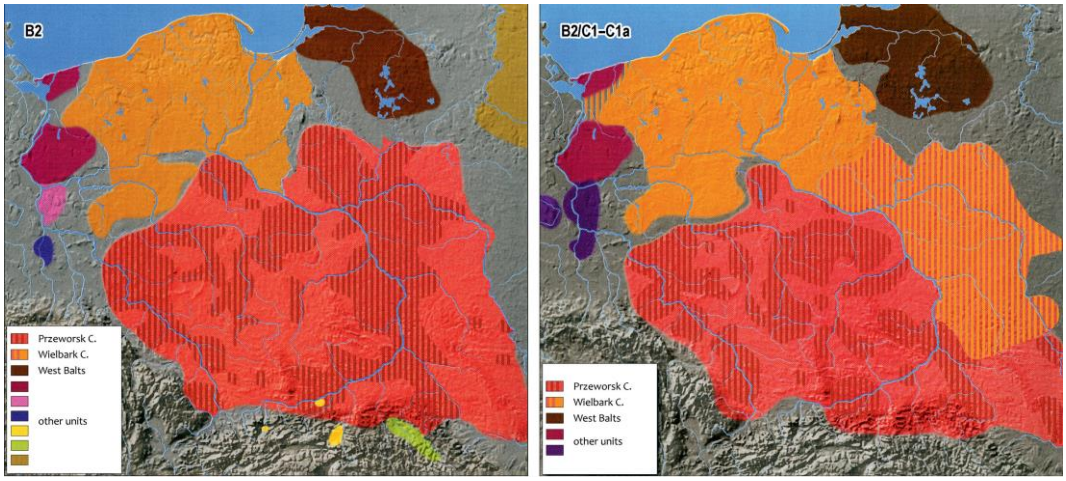

Figure 1 'Wielbark' expansion in Phases B2 (late 1st and first half of the 2nd century AD) and B2/C1-C1a (second half of the 2nd and 2nd/3rd century AD) marked orange (after Kaczanowski and Kozłowski 1998 [revised]).

[2] The "jüngere/ältere Römische Kaiserzeit" are the German terminologies for the Roman Period, but confine a different timeframe than the terminology used in the UK. The "Römische Kaiserzeit" ("R.K.") comprises the period from ca. 1-400 AD and is distinguished into the "jüngere R.K." and "ältere R.K.", with the break being at 166 AD with the beginning of the Marcomannic Wars (www.aid-magazin.de). Because most literature referred to in this thesis uses this terminology and a correct translation is not possible, from this point forward the German terminology will be cited where it has been applied.

Throughout the younger Cecele stage, the 'Wielbark Culture' spread from the Vistula estuary and Warmia to the Lublin area. Phase D during the first half of the 5th century AD marks the end of the 'Wielbark Culture' and is explained by supposed emigrations of large parts of the population (Cieśliński 2011, 171-172).
A. Kokowski (2013) understands the movement of the 'Goths' to be evident in the movement or shift of what he defines as the four 'Gothic' cultures (fig. 2). These are comprised by the 'Wielbark Culture', the 'Černjachov Culture', the 'Sîntana de Mureş Culture' and the 'Masłomęcz group', whose origins he links with the supposed movement of 'Gothic' communities to the Black Sea coast (Kokowski 2013, 71-72).

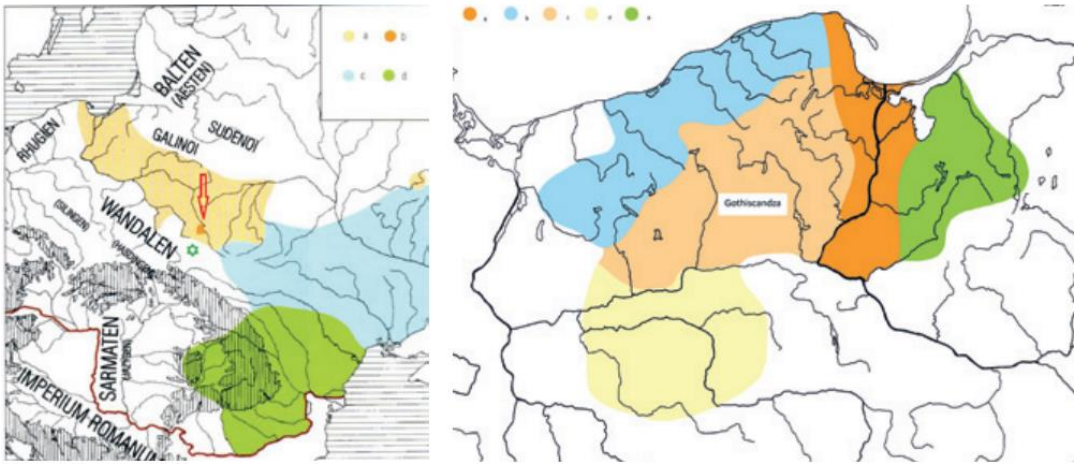

Figure 2 ***Left:*** Kokowski's 'cultures' of the 'Gothic' cultural circle and their neighbours. The arrow indicates the 'Masłomęcz group'; the asterisk the discovery of 'Gothic' settlements and cemeteries from the 4th century AD. ***Right:*** The supposed location of Gothiscandza (c) within the area of the 'Wielbark Culture'. Colours mark areas settled by 'Goths' for different lengths of time, distinguished by Wołągiewicz (a – Zone A, b – Zone B, c – Gothiscandza, d – Zone C south, e – Zone D).

It is rather interesting that authors as A. Cieśliński and K. Skóra note that other tribes such as the 'Gepids', 'Rugians' and 'Lemovii' are also localised in the regions inhabited by the 'Wielbark Culture' – still, the latter has remained exclusively related to the 'Goths' (Cieśliński 2011, 171; Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 229). They even stress the high probability of other tribes living in the same area, whose names are not mentioned by the ancient literary sources. However, despite reiterating that the remaining material culture should not be exclusively identified as 'Gothic', Cieśliński and Skóra argue that the historical narrative provided by Jordanes fits the archaeological evidence well (Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 229).

Unfortunately, a huge contrast remains between the well-researched 'Wielbark' burial sites and the insufficiently excavated 'Wielbark' settlements. It is important to be aware that the examination of the social structure of the 'Wielbark Culture' based solely on the finds from the necropoleis involves the risk of falsely interpreting its relations – it would therefore be beneficial to connect finds from the burial sites, settlements and areas of economic activity when hoping to gain insight on social structures (Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 229).

The 'Wielbark Culture' finds itself in the Migration Period, the beginning of which is traditionally associated with the appearance of the 'Huns' in southern Russia 375 AD and is understood to end with the migration of the 'Lombards' to Italy 568 AD (von Rummel *et al.* 2019, 297). Historians tended to view this period as a time of massive migrations of clearly bound ethnic groups, including the migration of the 'Goths' to the Black Sea Coast presumably evident in the archaeological evidence (see for instance Sehlmeyer 2014, 205-217). However, while the term holds a long history of research and is therefore renown and well established, it has since been determined that it is not only an old-fashioned but also not a really suitable term for the description of the complex events of the time (von Rummel *et al.* 2019, 297-298). Although bigger groups of people were mobile across various regions, archaeologists stress that one cannot speak of migrations with a clear route and destination and certainly not of 'peoples' to our present understanding. Instead, these 'peoples' were usually comprised by heterogenous military units joined around so-called "Traditionskerne" (von Rummel *et al.* 2019, 298). Apart from this, large-scale migrations also occurred before and after the Migration Period. Von Rummel *et al.* (2019) point out that this historical period features dramatic transformations unknown to any other timeframe in Europe in nearly every sphere of life, including politics, economics, religion etc. However, when closely investigating the details of the Migration Period, the complexity and diversity of the processes of this time become clearly evident (von Rummel *et al.* 2019, 298).

A very distinguishing feature of burial rites of the 'Wielbark Culture' is its biritualism of cemeteries (Skóra 2015, 85). As from Phase B1 the following archaeological features are evident within 'Wielbark' cemeteries (following Mączyńska 2007, 2-3):

1. Biritualistic flat grave burial sites with cremations and NS orientated inhumations
2. Cemeteries east of the Vistula featuring flat graves and burial mounds with or without stone circles and stone constructions
3. Lack of burial goods and weapons in male burials
4. Jewelry and attires usually made from bronze, in some cases from silver and gold; tools are rarely given as burial goods and in the few evident cases they were found, tools were made from bronze and seldomly from iron

Regarding the burial goods, the 'Wielbark Culture' features rather simple male attires, which usually consisted only of metal belt fittings and a fibula. On the contrary, female attires comprised local jewelry made from non-ferrous or precious metals and were more differentiated in general (Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 227). Here, bangles made from metal are considered to be a typical attire for female 'Wielbark' burials. In children's graves they appear relatively seldom as they seem to be an attribute rather reserved for adulthood. Still, there remain cases of bangles given as grave goods for children, whose nature has been explored further by Skóra (2014). She points out that in such cases the attire for children usually consists of relatively simple, plain bangles made from copper alloys. Because of their intermittent appearance, Skóra stresses that it remains hard to decide whether the children were given no longer required or broken bangles by the adults, or if their damage was intentional in the context of funerary rituals (Skóra 2014, 221-222). Moreover, the clear absence of male burials on some 'Wielbark' cemeteries has since resulted in the hypothesis that specifically female burial goods as well as female and children's burials are also to be considered a distinct characteristic of the 'Wielbark Culture' during the Phases C2-C3 (Skóra 2019a, 331).

It was previously established that material culture in the archaeological context holds no value for the distinction of different 'peoples', identities or ethnicities. Therefore, typical 'Wielbark' grave goods will not be further discussed in the upcoming chapters, as they do not significantly contribute to the research undertaken in this thesis. On the contrary, the close examination of burial practices is of high

importance for the further evaluation of what constitutes ‘Wielbark’ identity, and will therefore be central to the following sections.

The construction of burial sites followed certain rules which, as Skóra remarks, are not always unambiguously interpretable. However, the biritualism of cemeteries could prove to be reflecting certain social backgrounds and the necropoleis could thus be burial sites of smaller units, such as families or tribes (Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 231). While this will be thoroughly discussed in the following chapter, the determination made by Skóra and Cieśliński makes it even more implausible as to why the ‘Wielbark Culture’ remains to be continuously ascribed to the ‘Goths’.

3.2. Biritualism in the ‘Wielbark Culture’

The biritualistic necropoleis are regarded as one of the most important characteristics of the ‘Wielbark Culture’. They appear since the beginning of the 1st century AD and feature the simultaneous occurrence of various types of cremations next to inhumations (Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 227). According to Skóra, the mutual relation of the share of cremations and inhumations in ‘Wielbark’ cemeteries indicates territorial and chronological differentiations, which could inter alia be explained through influences of funeral traditions of predecessors or the migration of groups following specific burial rites (Skóra 2015, 85). She moreover points out that in “traditional cultures one can observe a relation between cremation and nomadic and warlike tribes. Inhumation is seen as a ritual of peoples who are bound to their lands and abandon the nomadic way of life in favour of agriculture […]. The cremation burial had more practical significance for warriors – it was a form of protection against profanation […]” (Skóra 2015, 85).

Following the narrative of Jordanes, another possible explanation of this phenomenon is thought to be that ‘Gothic’ settlers brought biritualism with them on their migration. As of yet, a clear elucidation of the rule by which a given kind of burial was chosen has not been established (Kokowski 2013, 82-83). However, syncretistic burial traditions are evident for communities practicing different ways of treatment of the dead, although mechanisms of combination and selection of these elements may be of complex nature. Skóra moreover notes that some discoveries from ‘Wielbark’ cemeteries have since been considered proof for separate treat-

ments of inhumation and cremation rituals of the ‘Wielbark Culture’ (Skóra 2015, 86).

As previously mentioned, both Skóra and Cieśliński note that the biritualism evident within the ‘Wielbark Culture’ indicates the involvement of smaller units. The authors continue to explain that unrelated families bound by shared obligations would form a tribe, and the next higher group were tribes merging together to territorial communities referred to as *pagus* and *civitas*. Such kinships are likely to manifest within cemeteries in specific areas. Here, Skóra and Cieśliński explicitly note the burials sites of Odry and Lubowidz, but also mention other important sites (Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 231). Kokowski (2013) also mentions the possibility of an ethnically combined ‘Gothic’ community which is manifested in the spiritual sphere – however, his interpretation still strongly relies on the *Getica*, and he continues to equate the ‘Wielbark Culture’ with the ‘Goths’ (Kokowski 2013, 83).

In order to properly differentiate the social structure of the ‘Wielbark Culture’ by examining specific burial rites, characteristics of surface constructions and grave markings are of great importance. Unfortunately, such structures seldomly persist to this day and usually only remain evident in the form of smaller burial mounds or hills. However, a relatively small group of ‘Wielbark’ burial sites exhibits burial mounds with earth- and stone-earth fillings as well as pillar stones, paving and stone rings and interestingly enough, these cases also produced flat graves arranged around the hills which happen to be greater in number than the actual hill burials (Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 231). A socioeconomic differentiation of the buried individuals is also complicated by the state of the archaeological sources, as numerous mounds appear to have been robbed in antiquity or were destroyed in modern times. For this reason, inventories of the graves are only partly evident or remain completely lost. However, the variety and richness of material in graves does not necessarily reflect great socioeconomic differences in the ‘Wielbark Culture’, as it could also be associated with ‘Wielbark’ funerary rituals such as the lack of burial goods in male burials (Cieśliński 2011, 181).

The following chapters will examine the different biritualistic funerary practices of the ‘Wielbark Culture’ more closely. Before moving on to the graves themselves, the general lack of male burials and the practice of opening of graves will

be briefly presented. Thereafter follows the elaboration of the present evidence of ‘Wielbark’ cremations, inhumations and burial mounds as well as stone circles in order to establish the wide variety included by the biritualistic funerary rituals.

3.2.1 Lack of Male Burials in ‘Wielbark Culture’ Cemeteries

A remarkable feature of ‘Wielbark’ cemeteries is their overall lack of male burials and therefore a highly uneven gender ratio (Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 236). Particularly visible is the deficiency of graves of men aged 15 to 30, which however does not uphold in later times. Skóra and Cieśliński understand this to be linked with an increased mobility for military reasons, which would entail the death and burial of individuals far from home (Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 236).

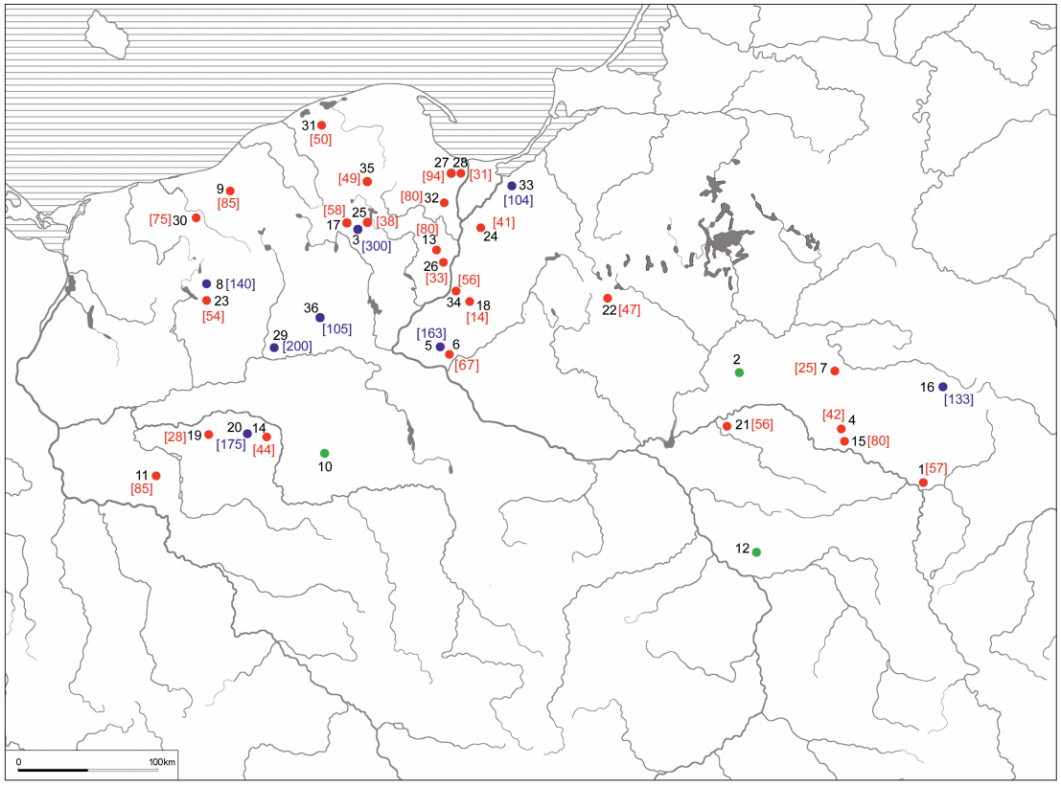

Figure 3 Map depicting gender proportions on ‘Wielbark Culture’ cemeteries (red: MI<100), blue: MI>100, green: only women; [100]: MI). **1**: Brest-Trisin; **2**: Brulino-Koski, pow. Wysokie Mazowieckie; **3**: Brusy, pow. Chojnice; **4**: Cecele, pow. Siemiatycze; **5**: Gostkowo-Folsąg, pow. Toruń; **6**: Grębocin, pow. Toruń; **7**: Grochy Stare, pow. Białystok; **8**: Gronowo, pow. Drawsko Pomorskie; **9**: Grzybnica, pow. Koszalin; **10**: Imielno, pow. Gniezno; **11**: Jordanowo, Fdst. 12, pow. Świebodzin; **12**: Kłoczew, pow. Ryki; **13**: Kościelna Jania, pow. Starogard; **14**: Kowalewko, pow. Oborniki; **15**: Krupice, pow. Siemiatycze; **16**: Kutowa, pow. Hajnówka; **17**: Leśno, Fdst. 2, pow. Chojnice; **18**: Linowo, pow. Grudziądz; **19**: Lutom, pow. Międzychód; **20**: Mutowo, pow. Szamotuły; **21**: Nadkole, Fdst. 1, pow. Węgrów; **22**: Niedanowo, Fdst. 2, pow. Nidzica; **23**: Nowy Łowicz, pow. Kalisz Pomorski; **24**: Nowy Targ, pow. Sztum; **25**: Odry, pow. Chojnice; **26**: Osiek, pow. Świecie; **27**: Pruszcz Gdański, Fdst. 7, pow. Gdańsk; **28**: Pruszcz Gdański, Fdst. 10, pow. Gdańsk; **29**: Rzadkowo, pow. Piła; **30**: Rzyszczewo, pow. Sławno; **31**: Szczypkowice, pow.

Słupsk; **32**: Ulkowy, pow. Gdańsk; **33**: Weklice, pow. Elbląg; **34**: Węgrowo, pow. Grudziądz; **35**: Węsiory, pow. Kartuzy; **36**: Zakrzewska Osada, pow. Sępólno Krajeńskie (by Skóra).

In contrast to other contemporary Central European 'cultures' the male burials of the 'Wielbark Culture' contained no weapons, and agricultural or blacksmith implements were generally not found to be included as grave goods (Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 227). This lack of burial goods complicates the identification of male burials, consequently making men hard to grasp on the burial sites to begin with. However, a clear absence of male burials on some 'Wielbark' sites was successfully proven by anthropologic research during the 60s and 70s (Skóra 2019a, 331).

Skóra (2019) notes a clear overrepresentation of females on a majority of 'Wielbark' cemeteries (fig. 3) – for every 100 women there appear to be only 14-94 men. This is the case for 28 out of 36 investigated burial sites, by which the overrepresentation is evident for 77% of the analyzed cemeteries. Three cemeteries featured exclusively female burials, whereas only eight have been found to display a overrepresentation of men. Here, for every 100 women there are 104-300 men (Skóra 2019a, 332). Skóra uses a Masculinity-Index (MI) to demonstrate the number of men on 100 women, which is calculated as follows: MI = Mx100/F, F being the number of women and M being the number of men (Skóra 2019a, 331). For the entirety of investigated 'Wielbark' cemeteries, the MI is 59,5, meaning that for every 100 women there are only ca. 60 men (Skóra 2019a, 332).

Reasons behind the uneven gender ratio on 'Wielbark' cemeteries could be social and demographic factors, such as mortality, migration, fertility, malnutrition or disease, although polygamy has also been considered. The high mortality rate of young women passing due to child birth related reasons must also be considered, as a high number of female burials is also considered typical for prehistoric times (Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 236). While this would explain the imbalance between male and female 'Wielbark' burials aged *juvenis* to *adultus*, it does not account for the general lack of male burials. According to Skóra and Cieśliński, the common death of women during child birth would result in exogamy, by which men would marry several times during their lifetime. The authors see this as another possible reason for the overrepresentation of female burials on 'Wielbark' necropoleis (Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 236).

3.2.2 Opening of Graves

The phenomenon of opening of graves is commonly known for the 'Wielbark Culture' (Skóra 2017a, 193). This practice comprised the opening of graves sometime after the burial whereby the 'ritual' of disturbing remains of the deceased was performed (Kokowski 2013, 83-84).

A number of graves appear to have been opened several times. One interpretation of this process is provided by Kokowski, who argues that those who performed this practice were not interested in precious objects, but rather in posthumous remains for the production of amulets (Kokowski 2013, 84). However, it is of great importance to be aware that "grave disturbance cannot be simply defined as "looting": this is a multi-aspect phenomenon which involves intra- and inter-group social relations, social structure transformations and political phenomena" (Skóra 2019b, 18).

While this practice mostly concerns 'Wielbark' graves from the Phases B2c-B2/C1, this is not a definitive opinion as a precise definition of the time of grave openings happens to be quite difficult. Skóra understands the intensified interest in features of this period to be related to an abundance of grave furnishings during this time, although she also notes that this relation could be superficial, and the actual issue might happen to be more complex (Skóra 2017a, 208).

In the case of the 'Wielbark Culture', some premises allow for the supposition that interferences with the graves occurred when the body was preserved to an extent where it could be moved within the burial pit, such as into a sitting position (Skóra 2017a, 193-194).

The burial site of Kowalewko in Greater Poland (see fig. 3, 14 for location) will serve as an example for the phenomenon of post-funeral intrusions. Here, a total number of 39 robbed or disturbed inhumation graves have been discovered (fig. 4), whereas no such traces were evident for cremation graves. Methods demonstrated to gain access to the graves include reconnaissance cuts and robbery trenches. While the former is understood as evidence for robbers getting acquainted with funeral rituals, the latter shows clear interest in the entire burial pit and a use of rational methods of work (Skóra 2017a, 194-196). Most of the manipulated graves are situated in the southern part of the site, which is understood in relation to the fact that this zone is richer in burials, which almost exclusively date to

Phase B2/C1. Analyses of the graves revealed that they appear to have been preferred from grave openers and exhibited lavish grave furnishings. According to Skóra, this leads to the assumptions that the grave openers either had knowledge on burial practices and graves that guaranteed value or that they focused on burials with visible aboveground marks (Skóra 2017a, 198-199).

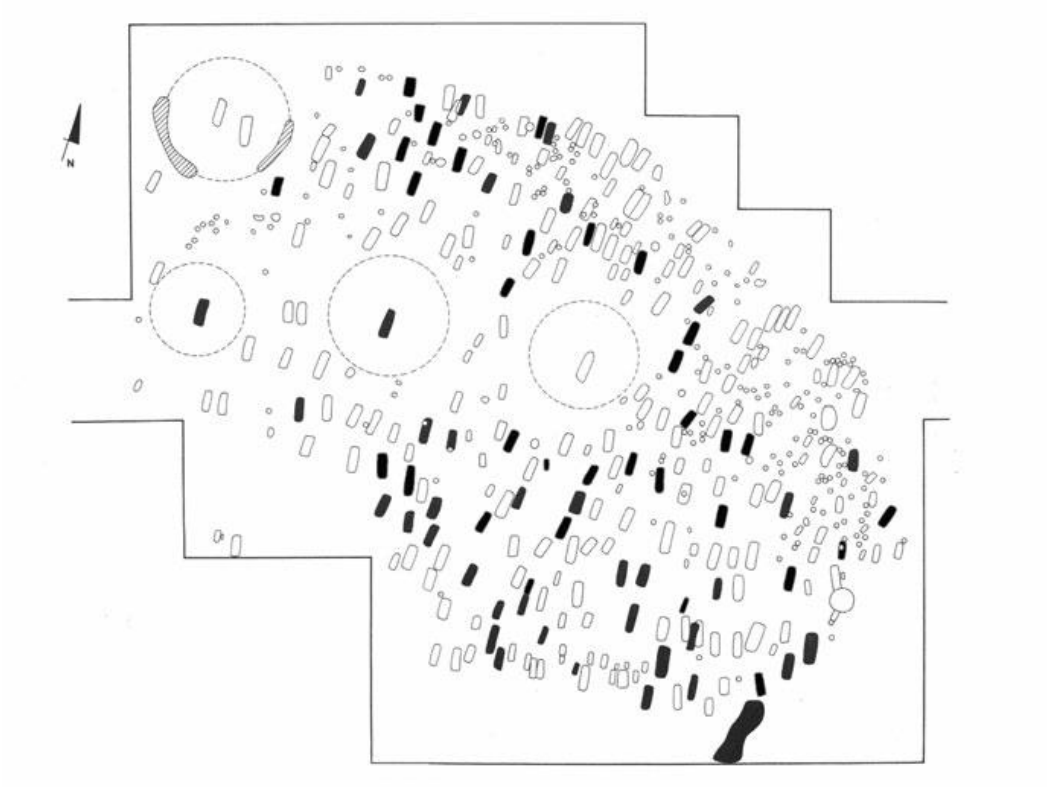

Figure 4 Plan of the cemetery in Kowalewko showing graves with traces of post-funeral intrusions (after Skorupka with additions by Skóra).

Most cases of grave disturbances in Kowalewko demonstrate a complete disturbance of the anatomical arrangement of the deceased. This is evident, inter alia, by the lack of bones which were either thrown outside in order to easily remove artefacts or moved together with the grave goods to one location where an *en masse* extraction of artefacts was easier (Skóra 2017a, 203). Another interesting feature at Kowalewko is evidence for what can be regarded as ritual practices carried out by robbers. Here, different translocations of the skull (fig. 5) such as its placement between the lower limbs (Grave 284), turning it with the facial part down (Grave 327) or positioning it on the chest (Grave 361) are interpreted as measures by the robbers to protect themselves against the revenge of the dead (Skóra 2017a, 203). In addition to such measures, others evident at 'Wielbark' cemeteries also included laying a pavement over the grave. These actions indicate a belief in the 'living

dead' and were most likely undertaken in order to render them harmless (Cieśliński 2016, 236).

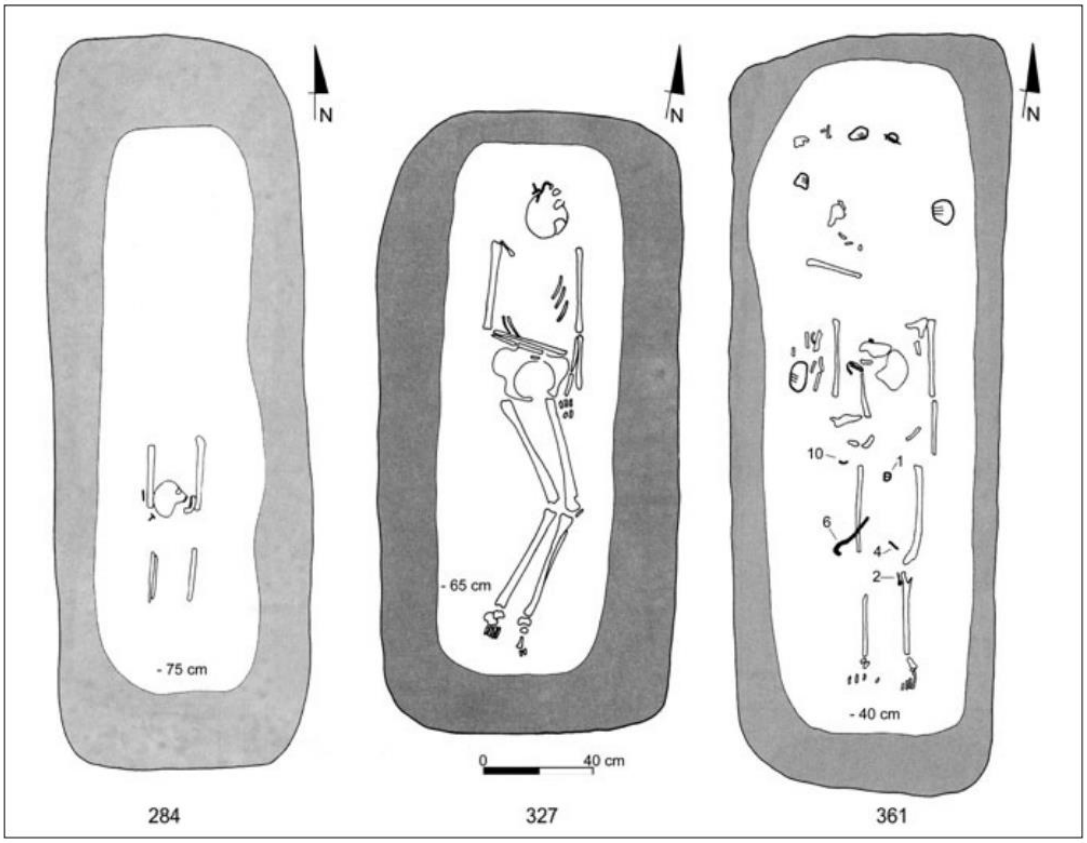

Figure 5 Examples of disturbed graves at Kowalewko where the translocation of the heads of the dead occurred prior to complete skeletonization (after Skorupka).

Skóra points out the problems surrounding the biritualistic nature of 'Wielbark' cemeteries, noting that the issue is also of great importance "for considerations concerning the sense of funeral and post-funeral rituals" (Skóra 2017a, 204). The nature of funeral rites as well as the evaluation of kinship relations between unburnt and burnt remains is difficult to explore, as the anthropological assessment of burnt bone remains is impossible. The site of Kowalewko features a number of inhumation graves at which the presence of cremations or burnt bones was found – whether these burials concerned one and the same individual or rather two deceased persons buried according to two different burial rites remains impossible to say (Skóra 2017a, 204). While there is not enough evidence to render this assumption probable, Skóra mentions that a biritual nature can be assumed for some features (tab. 1) such as the extraction and cremation of unburnt body parts of the buried individual. At the same time, the burnt remains mainly come from fills and trenches of reopened inhumation burials. She understands this as a purposefully

undertaken action, which would suggest other motivations behind the intrusion of 'Wielbark' graves instead of merely acquiring grave goods (Skóra 2017a, 205).

Inhumation grave	Cremation grave	Remarks	Chronology
236, F?, *matures*	238, Unspecified sex and age „urn possibly destroyed in the course of robbery of the inhumation grave"	Numerous burnt bones (referred to as Grave 238), no outline of a grave pit for the urn, what remains of the urn are sparse shards of its bottom	Roman Period and B2b
332, F, *adultus*	333, Unspecified sex and age	Burnt human bones (referred to as Grave 333) in the „robbery" trench together with translocated and unburnt mandible	B2/C1 and B2 (?)
334, ?, *adultus*	335, Unspecified sex and age	Burnt bones in the robbery trench (referred to as destroyed Grave 335)	B2/C1 and Roman Period
349, ?, *juvenis*	350, Unspecified sex and age	Robbery trench in the N part of the pit, 140x80 cm in size. The trench contained pottery shards (urn?), burnt human bones (referred to as Urn Grave 350)	B2/C1 and B2b-B2/C1
66, M?, *adultus*	*infans* I	Burnt *infans* I human bones – in the upper part of a man's skeleton	C1a
224, F, aged 20-25	228, F, *adultus*	Urn 228 dug into the S part of Grave Pit 224	B2b and B2/C1
241, unspecified sex and age	240, adult individual	Urn 240 dug into the central part of Grave Pit 241. The dead in the inhumation grave was covered with charcoals	B2/C1 and B2/C1
253, unspecified sex and age	252, *adultus*?	Urn 252 dug into the top of Inhumation Grave 253	Roman Period and B2/C1
331, Child, aged 6	309, Unspecified sex and age	Urn 309 dug into the pit of Grave 331	B2/C1 and B2/C1

Table 1 Inhumation graves with "robbery" trenches and dug-in cremation burials (based on Skorupka).

For the case of Kowalewko, Skóra concludes that there were multiple reasons and times of grave intrusion. She differs between two chronological perspectives (following Skóra 2017a, 205-206):

1. Actions of contemporary people, perhaps kinship or otherwise social-ritually related to the deceased. Features include (a) inhumation graves exhibiting traces of opening and the presence of human bone remains in "robbery" trenches; (b) inhumation graves with traces of opening before the decomposition of the body.
2. Actions of 'alien' people selecting cemeteries to intrude due to "robbery" intentions.

Skóra also points out the probability of members of the same ethnic group returning to the necropoleis in order to take back goods given to the dead. While a mutual interethnic "grave robbery" remains entirely possible, the consensus on Kow-

alewko remains in an expected "robbery" of the necropoleis by alien people after the discontinuation of use of the cemetery, in the end of the 1st half of the 3rd century AD. The evident reconnaissance cuts in the southern part of the necropolis would clearly indicate the lack of knowledge on both the rules behind furnishing of the dead as well as on the layout of the site (Skóra 2017a, 207).

3.2.3 Cremation Burials

The first cremation burials appeared towards the end of the 1st century AD next to the more dominant inhumations. During this time, they are documented by the presence of pits occasionally containing pyre debris, whereas during the first half of the 2nd century AD cremated remains started to be deposited in urns (Cieśliński 2016, 234). A habit evident in 'Wielbark' cemeteries is the location of cremation pit graves or urn graves above inhumation burials, whereby the center or northern part of the inhumation pit appear to have been preferred. Such cases appear quite frequently in 'Wielbark' cemeteries (Skóra 2015, 109; 112). Cremated remains then tended to be buried in organic containers, including exceptions as a one of a kind interment in a wooden box with an iron lock (Kokowski 2013, 83). Next to the typical urn cremations, cases of urn burials only containing a few or no fragmented bones have also been discovered – the latter is usually interpreted as a manner of symbolic burials (Cieśliński 2016, 234). Overall, the cremations burials of the 'Wielbark Culture' were mostly made up of cremation pit burials and urn graves with or without "Brandschüttung" (Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 227).

A few variants of graves from the 'Wielbark Culture' are shown to have combined traditions of cremation and inhumation. This practice however is not limited to the way of treating the dead, as for example a grave containing cremated and a non-cremated parts of the dead body – instead, "borrowing" appears to have occurred as well (Skóra 2015, 87). This isolated group of graves features standards typical for inhumation rites, including the size and shape of the burial pit and its NS-alignment. But instead of containing unburnt remains, the pits were discovered to contain exclusively cremated remains (Skóra 2015, 87). Interestingly, this practice is evident in various settlement zones of the 'Wielbark Culture' and there appear to be no significant chronological regularities in its distribution. While the dimensions of features are diverse, they correspond with inhumation standards and are found in 'Wielbark' barrow and flat grave cemeteries. The former is dis-

tinguished into burials under the mound or as a secondary grave dug into the mound (Skóra 2015, 88). Moreover, it must be mentioned that usually only a low number of cremated bones is discovered inside the pits, which complicates the identification of the exact manner of their deposition. It is also unknown whether this low number results from decomposition and taphonomic processes, or from a conscious decision to only deposit parts of the cremated skeleton into the grave. Skóra also points out that the presence of elements of cremation appears to be no matter of incident, but rather an intentional action (Skóra 2015, 88).

Hitherto discoveries within 'Wielbark' cemeteries have revealed a wide variety of deposition of bone remains, whereby the cremated remains tend to be located at the bottom of the pit, frequently together with grave goods, or near the top in the fill of the grave pit (fig. 6). However, there are also evident exceptions such as from Szpaki barrow I where the burnt remains were deposited in a log coffin (Skóra 2015, 89).

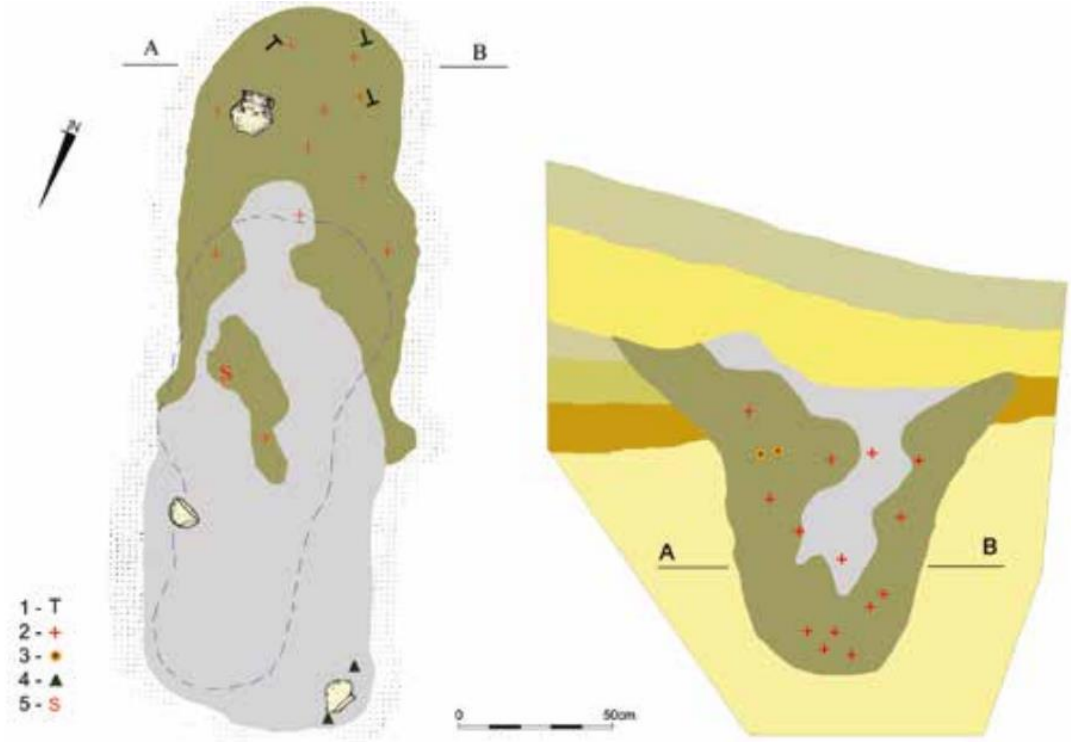

Figure 6 Nowy Łowicz, barrow 63, grave 1: 1 – brooch, 2 – cremated bones, 3 – spindle whorl, 4 – pottery vessel shards, 5 – pin (after Hahuła, elaborated by Skóra).

The most often suggested interpretation for this practice of "borrowing" is a lack of decisiveness in the selection of the funerary type, which could indicate the presence of several communities (Skóra 2015, 91). According to Kokowski, these decisions appear to have been made at a last moment and would undermine the

possibility whereby cremation depended on ethnographic identification, whereas J. Schuster interprets them as "a flexibility or easiness in replacing inhumation with cremation" that "could demonstrate lack of relation between the social position of the dead and the burial rite" (Skóra 2015, 94; Kokowski 2013, 83). Another explanation could lie in phobias related to inhumation concerning the return of the dead, which possibly stimulated cremation burials, or in migrations requiring the need to take remains to a new place (Skóra 2015, 94; 110).

Further forms of biritualistic burials of the 'Wielbark Culture' associated with cremations include (1) grave pits morphologically corresponding to cremation pit burials, but containing exclusively unburnt human remains and (2) grave pits morphologically corresponding to cremation pit burials, containing both cremated and non-cremated human remains. Unfortunately, such graves were so far only recorded sporadically, which is why only limited information on these practices exist (Skóra 2015, 106-107).

3.2.4 Flat Grave Inhumations and Double Burials

The custom of inhumation is regarded as one of the most interesting features of the 'Wielbark Culture': Next to whole corpses that were arranged in different positions fragmented bodies appear to have been buried as well. In most of such cases the upper part of the torso is missing and only the lower part was put in the grave, which seems to have been predominantly applied in women's internments (Kokowski 2013, 83). Certain graves could contain only the limbs or dissected skulls, others featured corpses bisected along the spine or the remains of multiple individuals (Kokowski 2013, 83). These burials deviate from the more standard funeral practices recorded at 'Wielbark' cemeteries, and are considered to be the result of specific burial rituals requiring the opening of the grave sometime after the burial. Additional ritual actions were then carried out, "possibly an expression of special care taken of the dead and the repose of his or her soul" (Cieśliński 2016, 236).

However, a certain consistency of what can be regarded as preferences for the arrangement of bodies of the dead is evident in 'Wielbark' inhumations. For one, this is the arrangement of the deceased in an extended supine position with their limbs resting straight against their body. In a number of cases individuals were also buried in a side position with flexed limbs, whereas burials with entirely re-

versed corpses or the face and torso facing downwards were marginal (Skóra 2017b, 537). Cieśliński points out that such other arrangements of the body opposed to the most common straight, supine position could be of symbolic nature (Cieśliński 2016, 235).

Most commonly, the dead were buried in a grave pit orientated on a north-south axis, with the individual's head resting in the north. Exceptionally during the earlier phases of the 'Wielbark Culture', some inhumations on the lower Vistula were deposited on an east-west axis, with the head resting either in the east or the west. According to Cieśliński, their "appearance indicates either the lingering of a tradition from the younger pre-Roman period, or […] may be interpreted as evidence for the transplanting of burial customs from the western Baltic zone" (Cieśliński 2016, 235). The burials themselves usually consisted of a pit dug in the ground containing the body, although in some cases inhumations are known to have rested in coffins made from hollowed out halves of tree trunks. Very rarely, coffins were built from rough planks (Cieśliński 2016, 235).

Interestingly enough, boat burials were recorded in at least three 'Wielbark' burial sites. In this context, Cieśliński points out the most prominent evidence of the cemetery at Weklice (see fig. 3, 33 for location) where no less than 13 boats or their halves have been used as coffins. This tradition may be traced to Scandinavia, and remains evident on the islands of Denmark, Jutland and Scania during the Roman period. The true nature behind these burials continues to be a challenge: Whether they indicated a connection with sailing of the deceased or a symbolic reflection of more general eschatological perceptions remains to be investigated (Cieśliński 2016, 235).

Another interesting feature within 'Wielbark' inhumation burials are graves containing the remains of one person who was treated according to both inhumation and cremation rites. Here, the unburnt or incomplete skeleton would rest at the bottom of the grave pit, whereas the missing burnt or scorched parts of the skeleton were placed either at the bottom or top of the grave pit and occasionally in cuts disturbing the pit's structure (Skóra 2015, 98). Grave 496 from Weklice (fig. 7) serves as a splendid example for this practice. The lower part of the skeleton of the deceased was found at the bottom of the inhumation grave. In the central part of the pit in the place of the unpreserved rib cage, the circular and compact con-

centration of cremated remains was found at the same level of deposition for the lower limbs. Skóra points out that these bones would correspond to the missing upper part of the unburnt skeleton, at least from an anatomical point of view (Skóra 2015, 98-99).

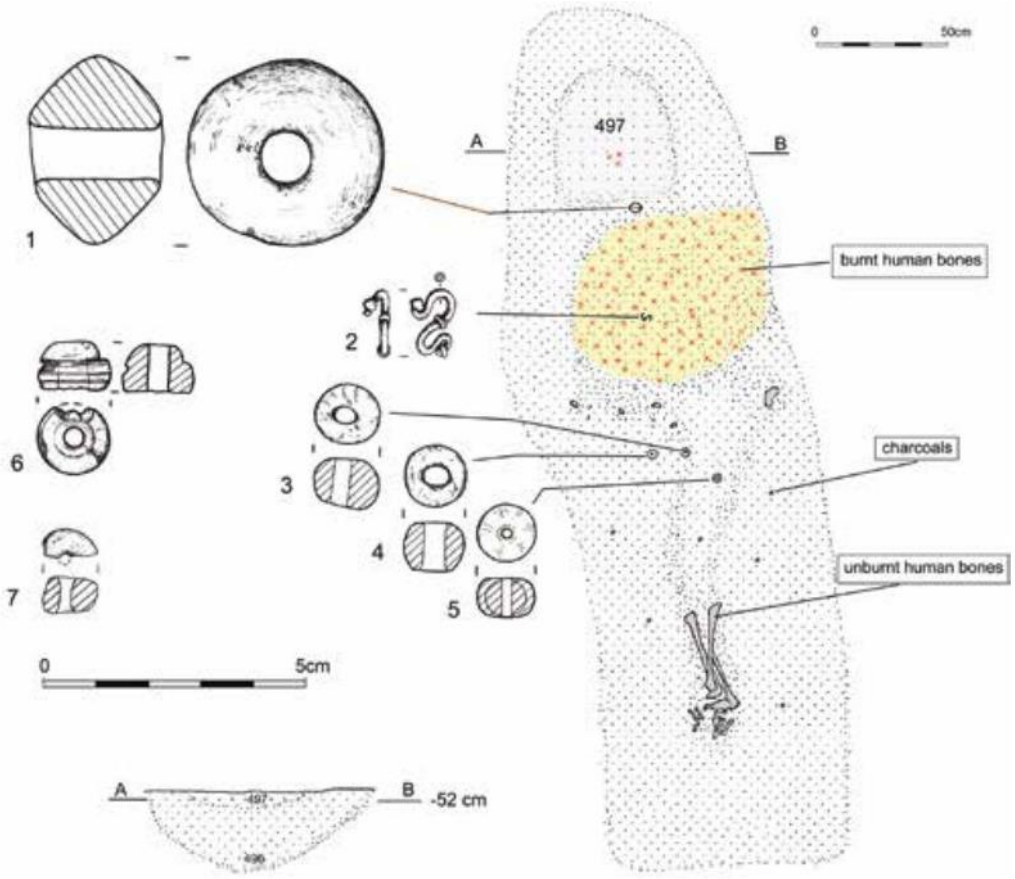

Figure 7 Weklice, grave 496: an example of the simultaneous deposition of burnt (+) and unburnt remains (after Natuniewicz-Sekuła).

Whether the remains truly come from one and the same individual remains to be verified by aDNA examinations (Skóra 2015, 99).

While most 'Wielbark' inhumations are single burials (for an typical example, see chapter 3.2.5 burial mound 29), numerous double burials arranged in vertical or horizontal positions have also been discovered. It is possible that double burials reflect emotional relations between the deceased, such as marriage or consanguinity, although a great difference of quality of grave furnishings between the buried individuals is known to be evident as well, possibly indicating one of the deceased being a companion or human sacrifice to the primary burial (Cieśliński 2016, 235-236).

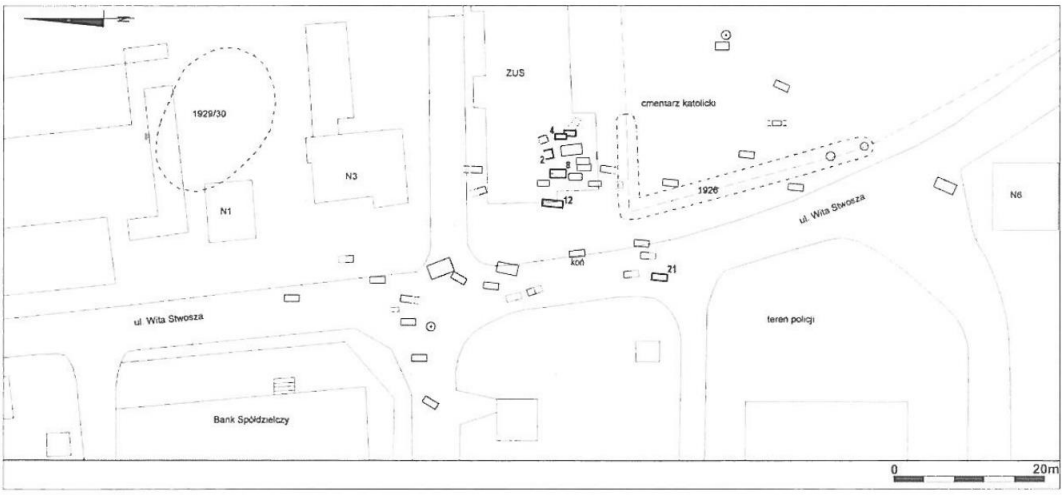

Figure 8 Pruszcz Gdański, site 5. Arrangement of graves on the burial site in the Wita-Stwosza street. The areas where graves have been first opened in 1926 and 1929/30 were taken into account. Double inhumation graves are marked by thicker lines.

At the burial site of Pruszcz Gdański, a number of double burials were discovered where they are concentrated in the middle area of the site (fig. 8). Corresponding with the single inhumation burials, the deceased were laid into the grave pits with their heads facing north. Only in a few cases a slight deviation to the east is evident. Additionally, all deceased were buried directly into the grave pit although Grave 21b makes an exception with one individual being buried in a tree coffin (Pietrzak *et al.* 2008, 252). M. Pietrzak *et al.* (2008) examined five graves which contained a total of ten buried individuals. Women and men were each found in four of the graves and a child in one. The authors moreover point out the interesting position of the deceased to one another. For instance, Grave 12A, B features two women estimated to have been buried aged 16-18 and 25-30 above one another (fig. 9). Both were NS-orientated with a slight deviation to the east. The upper skeleton of 12B belonged to the person aged around 25-30 years and was found without any furnishings. The bottom younger individual of 12A on the other hand was accompanied by pottery, bronze fibulae, spindle whorls, glass beads, bronze belt buckles and a comb (Pietrzak *et al.* 2008, 247-248; 252). This inventory is dated into the Phases C1-D, the latter being part of the Migration Period. Interestingly, only ever one of the two buried individuals was found to have been accompanied by grave goods. Whether or not the deceased of double burials were kinship or otherwise related to one another remains to be examined (Pietrzak *et al.* 2008, 252).

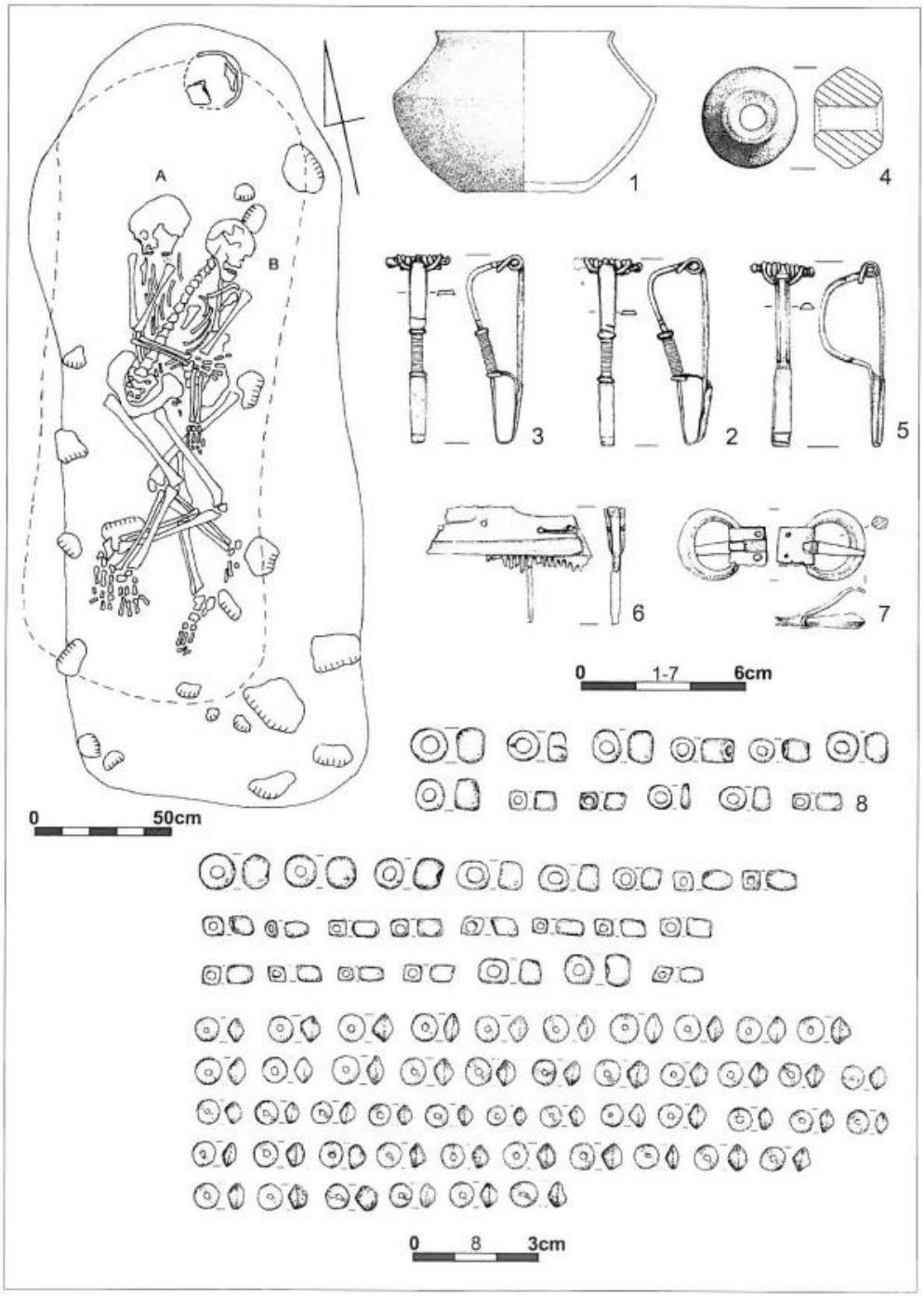

Figure 9 Grave 12A, B. 1,4: Clay; 2-3, 5, 7: Bronze; 6: Bone; 8: Glass.

3.2.5 'Wielbark' Burial Mounds and Stone Circles

Since the Phase B2a, 'Wielbark' cemeteries with burial mounds and stone circles are evident in Zone C (fig. 10). Here, a distinction into seven different construction types has been made that are thought to correspond with types known from south Norway as well as Gotland, Öland, Bornholm in Sweden, including stone circles of the type Domarring (Mączyńska 2007, 4-5). Because of this, 'Wielbark' stone circles and burial mounds are readily brought into the discussion concerning

the supposed origin of the ‘Wielbark Culture’ from Scandinavia, as an argument confirming Jordanes’s narrative on the history of the ‘Goths’ (Cieśliński 2016, 233).

A total number of 300 burial mounds is featured in more than 50 ‘Wielbark’ necropoleis – however, they are not evenly distributed along the entire area ascribed to the ‘Wielbark Culture’. Instead, they remain evident in relatively small concentrations and usually in great distance from one another (Cieśliński 2011, 173).

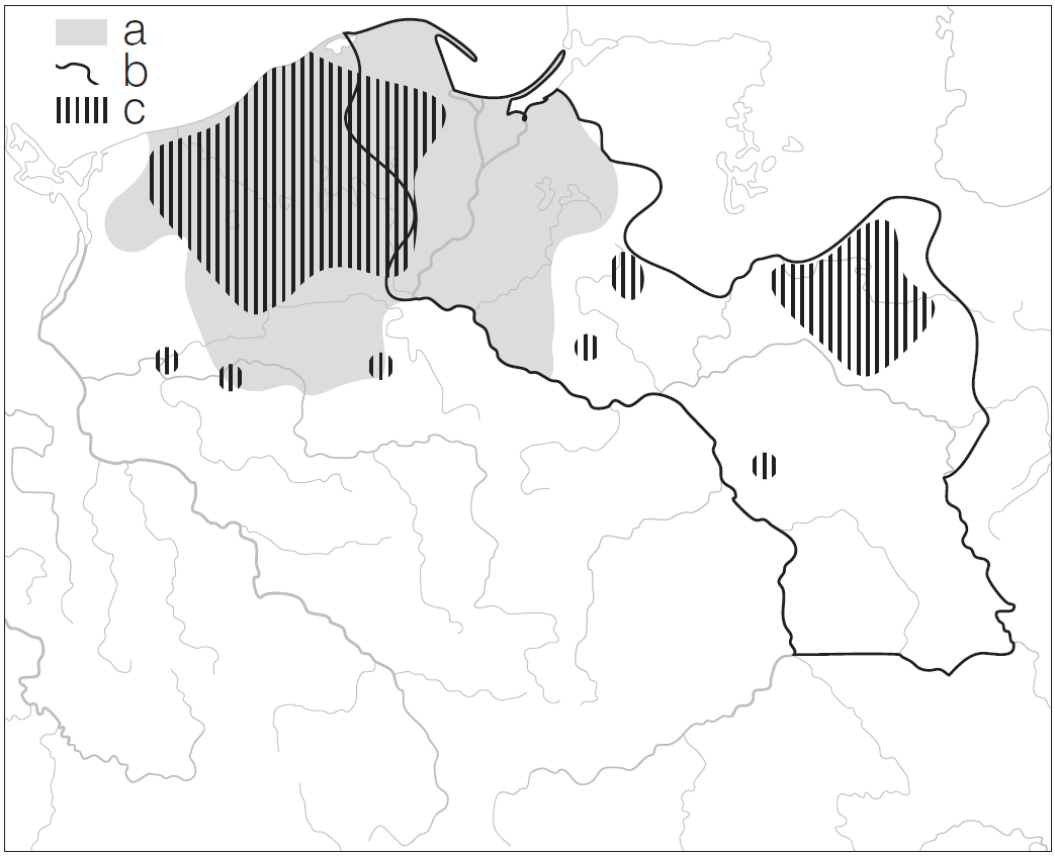

Figure 10 ‘Wielbark’ expansion. ***a*** Phase B2; ***b*** Phase C1b-C2; ***c*** distribution area of burial mound cemeteries (after Cieśliński).

While the burial mounds are widely traceable in Zone C during the Lubowidz phase, they are not recorded for the lower Vistula or Warmia. During the Cecele phase a concentration of burial mounds is evident in Podlachia and northern Mazovia. Cieśliński notes that this burial type cannot be clearly determined for the south-eastern expansion zone of the ‘Wielbark Culture’ (Cieśliński 2011, 173).

Due to wide variations in size and diameter, ‘Wielbark’ burial mounds remain difficult to classify. Still, they can be distinguished into two main types based on their building materials: Mounds with earth fillings and mounds with stone-earth fillings (Cieśliński 2010, 179).

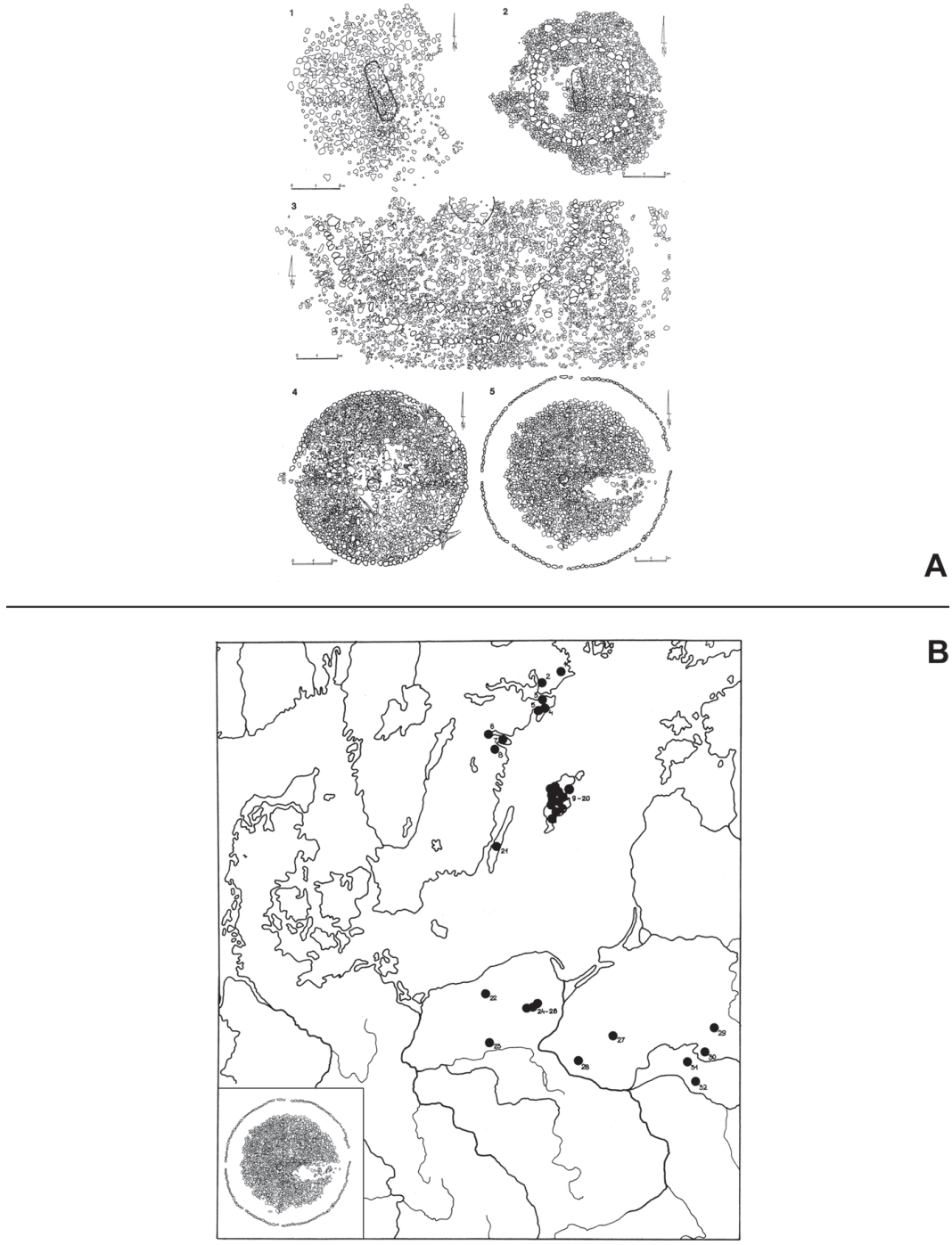

Figure 11 (A) Stone-earth-mounds (after Wołągiewicz); **(B)** Distribution of stone circles with outer stone ring type 5 (after Wołągiewicz).

The burial mounds usually consist of a two-layered stone core covered by a mantle of earth. The whole construction was then surrounded by single or double stone circles and could contain pavement, fireplaces and in some cases simply endowed graves, which are thought to have been secondary burials (Mączyńska 2007 5). These stone constructions are referred to as type 'Odry-Węsiory-Grzybnica', and their appearance has been associated with Scandinavian immi-

grants, although stone circles with a diameter from 14m to more than 40m are considered to have functioned as places of assembly (Mączyńska 2007, 5). The latter is also pointed out by Cieśliński, who clarifies that they may have served as such for local societies in a similar way as a Scandinavian Thingplatz, but they are also interpreted as places for cult practices. He moreover notes the evidence of genealogical relations between 'Wielbark' mounds in the expansion zone in Mazovia and Podlachia and the Pomerian mounds of the "ältere Römische Kaiserzeit", which is thought to be reflected by the distribution of stone circles with outer stone rings (see fig. 11; Cieśliński 2011, 173).

Similar to the flat grave burials, the burial mounds contained rich but simple furnishings – this also serves as evidence that while mounds were more lavish in their construction they were probably not reserved for the exclusive burial of high-status individuals, and other explanations could be conceivable (Mączyńska 2007, 5).

Cieśliński notes that the burial mound sites of the 'Wielbark Culture' are rather rare in comparison to more 'classic' necropoleis without aboveground burial structures. Additionally, there appears to be no area evident in which 'Wielbark' necropoleis with mounds are clearly predominate or exclusively represented (Cieśliński 2011, 174-175).

Gräberfeld	Grabhügelzahl	Grabhügel		Flachzone	
		Körpergräber	Brandgräber	Körpergräber	Brandgräber
Nowy Łowicz	67 (58 ausgegraben)	49	51	65	92
Gronowo	30 (alle ausgegraben)	34	10	1	4
Węsiory	20 (alle ausgegraben)	18	2	5	123
Leśno	15 (11 ausgegraben)	5	8	9 + 8 in Steinkränzen	52 + 8 in Steinkränzen

Table 2 The quantitative relationship between cremations and inhumations on the necropoleis of Nowy Łowicz, Gronowo, Węsiory und Leśno (by Cieśliński).

While individual burials within the mounds appear to be the most prevalent, numerous cases of multiple burials are evident as well. Here, burial mound 22 of the site of Gronowo is the most renown. It demonstrates the burial of five individuals underneath the grave fillings, whereof three have been identified as male, one as female and one as a child. While such burials tend to be interpreted as family

tombs, genetic analyses to confirm or disprove such assumptions remain to be made (Cieśliński 2010, 178).

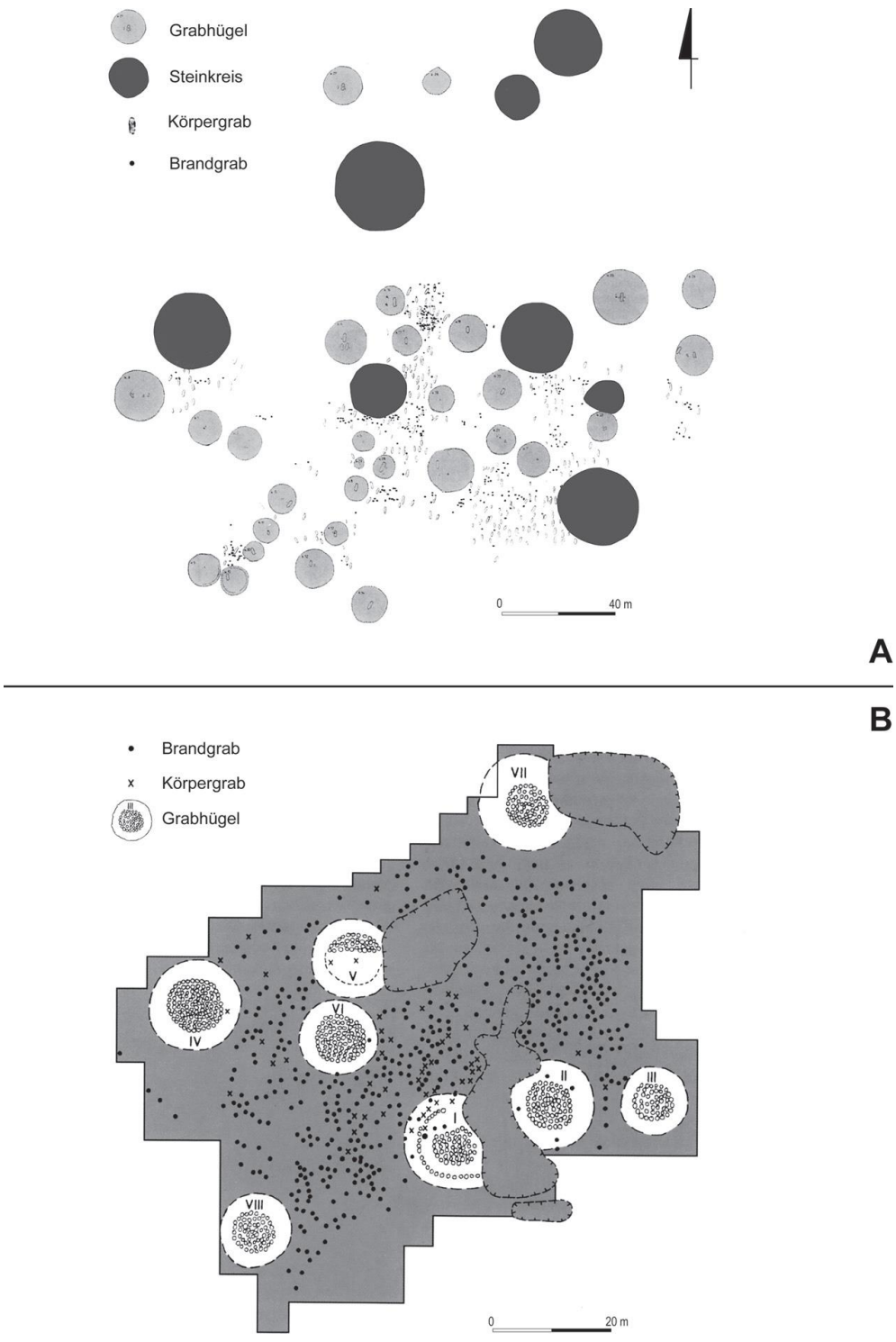

Figure 12 (A) Overall plan of the Odry cemetery (after Kokowski); **(B)** Overall plan of the Cecele cemetery (after Kokowski). Both plans demonstrate the variation in the location and quantity of biritualistic 'Wielbark' burials.

Interestingly enough, the ‘Wielbark’ burial mounds cemeteries are not exclusively characterized by tumuli – flat graves were discovered in every case in which the areas between the burial mounds have been excavated and they demonstrate great differences in burial rites. Particularly the simultaneous presence of cremations and inhumations of various types stands out, although their quantitative relationship widely varies (see tab. 2, fig. 12; Cieśliński 2011, 175).

However, it must be noted that no burial mound site has been completely researched to this day and in most cases the intermediate areas remain unexcavated – Cieśliński therefore points out the possibility of the existence of solely burial mound cemeteries. This assumption requires further excavations and research (Cieśliński 2011, 175).

While most of the burials were covered by grave fillings the appearance of secondary burials inside the fillings is evident for a number of sites, including Nowy Łowicz and Odry. Cieśliński notes that they are particularly evident in the ‘Wielbark’ expansion zone in Cecele. However, both the primary and secondary burials demonstrate biritualistic practices and so far, no correlation between them has been recognized (Cieśliński 2011, 177).

The Nowy Łowicz burial ground is regarded as one of the best researched ‘Wielbark’ cemeteries of the “ältere Römische Kaiserzeit” (Cieśliński 2011, 175). The cemetery has come to play a significant role for the first few centuries AD for the entire Baltic Sea region: Not only does the site hold the greatest number of mounds dated to the “Römische Kaiserzeit”, but it is also regarded as one of the biggest cemeteries of middle and northern Europe. Previous research discovered and examined material culture of great importance for both chronological and stylistic analyses, as well as for the study of ‘Wielbark’ burial rites and the ‘Culture’s’ social structure (Cieśliński and Kasprzak 2010, 373).

Nowy Łowicz consists of 67 mounds of which 58 have been investigated to this date, featuring a total of 100 burials inside the mounds and 157 flat graves in the intermediate areas (Cieśliński 2011, 175). Overall, 49 cremations and 51 inhumations were documented in the burial mounds, and the 157 intermediate flat graves consisted of another 92 cremations and 65 inhumations. Most graves are dated into the Phases B2/C1-C1a – the B2 graves are only evident in the south-western area of the cemetery, while burials of the Phases B2/C1-C1a are located in the

centre and northern area (fig. 13). The few most recent finds are only found at the north-west boarder of the necropolis (Cieśliński and Kasprzak 2010, 366).

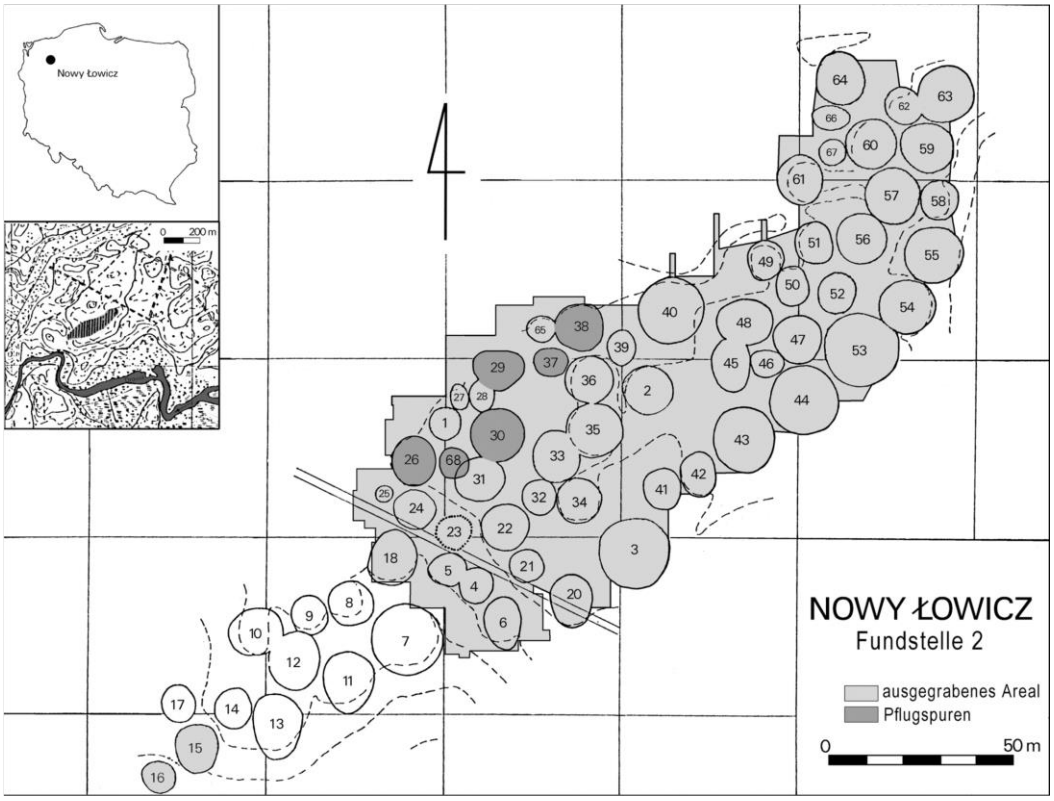

Figure 13 Nowy Łowicz, site 2. Location and overall plan of the site (by Cieśliński).

All mounds were covered by sand fillings and only one was found surrounded by a stone circle. It is worth noting that while burial sites covered by sand fillings usually contain a single burial, several of the excavated mounds were found to contain multiple individuals (Cieśliński and Kasprzak 2010, 365-366). Moreover, a number of flint tools dated into the Late Palaeolithic were also discovered on the site of Nowy Łowicz, as well as a cemetery and settlement ascribed to the 'Lusatian Culture' of the Late Bronze Age (Cieśliński and Kasprzak 2010, 366).

The excavated inhumations of the sites revealed that the individual remains were usually buried NS-orientated in a stretched supine position, with the head resting in the north and the hands positioned against the body. Cieśliński and Kasprzak note that characteristic discolorations found inside the burials indicate the original presence of tree coffins. Additionally, secondary grave pits were detected at a number of the body burials – while they used to be identified as the result of grave robberies, most cases of 'Wielbark' grave re-openings appear to have been of ritualistic nature (Cieśliński and Kasprzak 2010, 366).

The cremations of Nowy Łowicz demonstrate a great heterogeneity: cremations and cremation pit burials with or without remains of funeral pyres, cremations with reversed urns and even entire cremation places are some of the evident cases on the site. The graves were marked by stones in some instances (Cieśliński and Kasprzak 2010, 367).

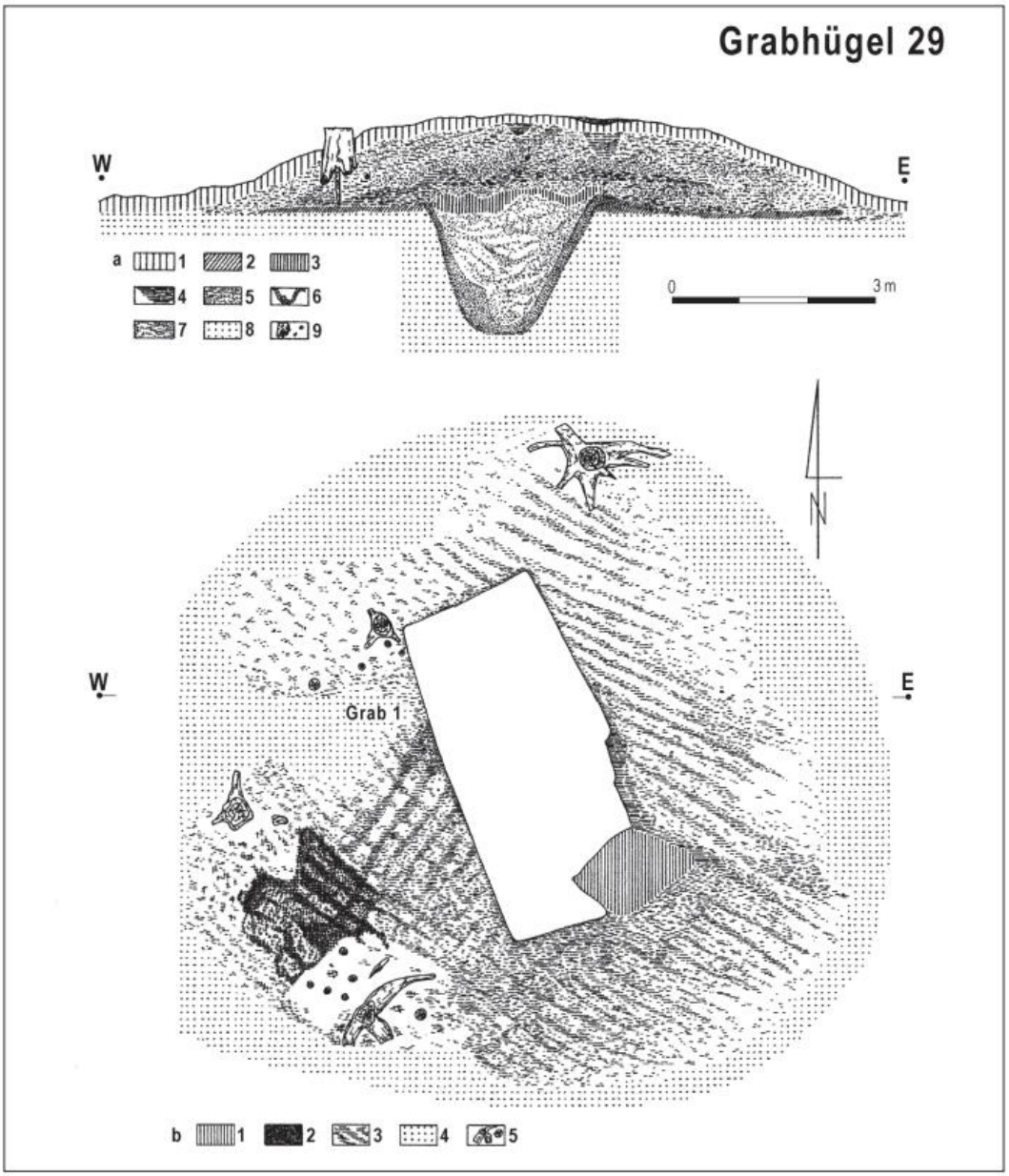

Figure 14 Nowy Łowicz, site 2. Burial mound 29. ***(a)*** 1 – humus soil, 2 – paleosoil, 3 – brown black soil, 4 – root-caused discoloration of the soil, 5 – mixed mound filling, 6 – bright yellow sand, 7 – bright yellow sand mixed with light brown soil, 8 – present sand-ground, 9 – root; ***(b)*** 1 – modern trenches, 2 – burned soil, 3 – paleosoil with plough marks, 4 – present sand-ground, 5 – root (by Kammer).

A number of interesting results were gained at the site during recent excavations. For instance, plough marks were found under the mounds of six mounds located

at the north/western boarder of the central area of the cemetery (see fig. 13). The mound of burial mound 29 (fig. 14) was filled with mixed sand and humus soil underneath which several plough marks were discovered. The latter was disturbed by an inhumation grave of a male individual who appears to have been buried in a tree coffin (fig. 15). It is dated into the Phase C1 and included grave goods such as, inter alia, a fibula on the individual's ribs, a buckle and strap-end at his pelvis and two clay vessels deposited behind his head (Cieśliński and Kasprzak 2010, 367-370).

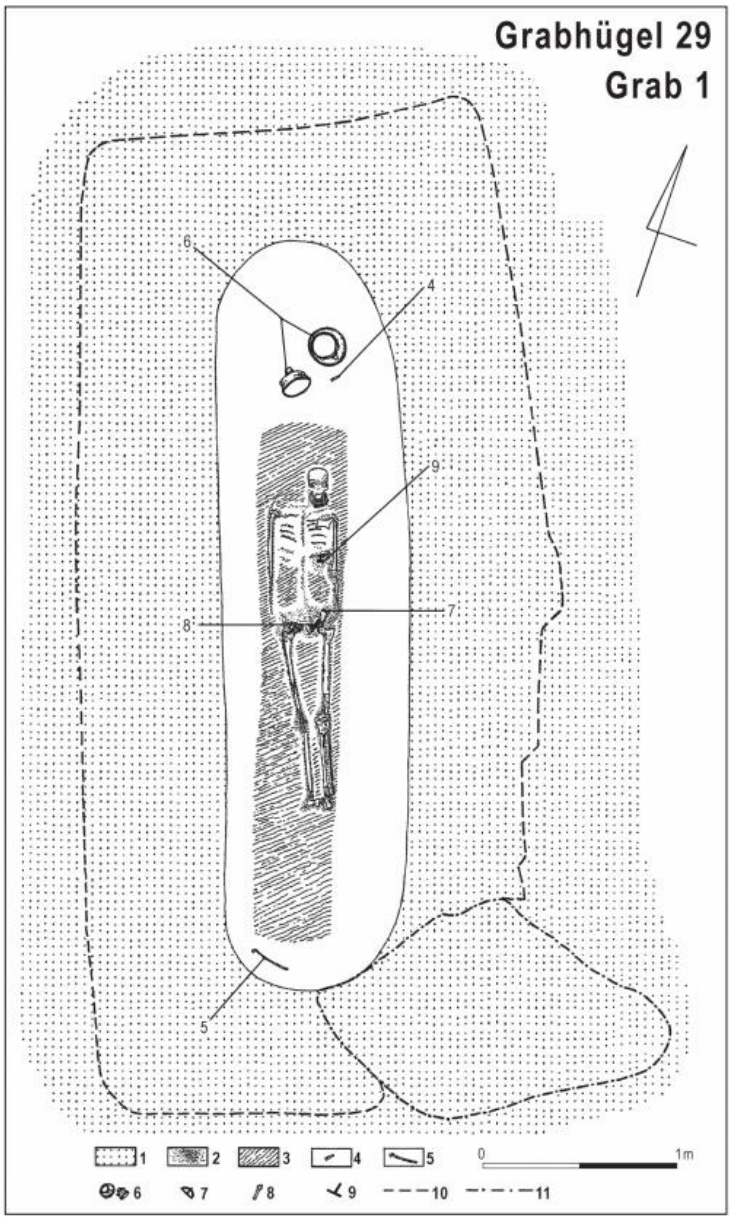

Figure 15 Nowy Łowicz, site 2. Burial mound 29, Grave 1: 1 – present sand-ground, 2 – discoloration of the soil due to body remains, 3 – coffin marks, 4 – animal bones, 5 – charcoal, 6 – clay vessels, 7 – belt buckle, 8 – strap-end, 9 – fibula, 10 – outline of the grave visible above-ground, 11 – modern trenches (by Kammer).

The mounds where plough marks are featured all date into the Phases B2/C1-C1a and allow new interpretations. Cieśliński and Kasprzak point out that plough marks appear relatively seldom in Central Europe during the "Römische Kaiserzeit", but are evident on two other 'Wielbark' cemeteries as well, namely Gronowo and Odry (Cieśliński and Kasprzak 2010, 370). According to the authors, the marks are to be interpreted in a ritualistic context, possibly as being part of a complex burial rite which entailed marking the place on which the burial mound was to be built (Cieśliński and Kasprzak, 371-373).

Several 'Wielbark' burials hills feature one to two and in rare occasions up to five buried individuals under the same mound. Unfortunately, research to determine possible relations or kinships remains to be conducted, but should this assumption hold truth it would indicate that burial mounds containing several individuals could be regarded as family tombs (Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 236).

According to Skóra and Cieśliński, the burial mounds indicate a special social status in some cases, depending on for instance their construction or size. They would then represent the high status of a family or tribe and are assumed to have been erected by local elites. Nevertheless, smaller burial mounds featuring the remains of several individuals are also evident, which led to the interpretation that this type of burial was not exclusively reserved for high status individuals but rather indicates the simultaneous practice of burial traditions by various groups of different social backgrounds (Skóra and Cieśliński 2020, 231-233).

I agree with Cieśliński (2010) that further research of 'Wielbark' burial mounds could contribute immensely to a better understanding of the supposed origin of the 'Goths'. So far, the only archaeological evidence credibly indicating the possibility of a migration from Scandinavia to the southern Baltic Sea coast remains in the stone constructions of the burials, including stone circles and mounds (Cieśliński 2010, 183). Cieśliński argues that their relatively sudden appearance in such varied and developed forms could indeed suggest the immigration of smaller population groups – however, there is no clear connection between the practice of burial mounds and the 'Goths': Mounds appear in a later timeframe than the first mention of 'Goths' in the literary sources, and all in all this burial practice does not seem to deviate much in its character from the more traditional flat grave burial sites (Cieśliński 2010, 183).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to study the funerary practices carried out by allegedly 'Gothic' 'Wielbark' individuals in order to make out whether their practices match this ethnonym as has always been indisputably presumed. Based on the study of 'Wielbark' burial sites, what is the 'Wielbark Culture' and was it really as coherent as heretofore presumed? Does the research of the burial sites truly enable more accurate perceptions on cultural identity and ethnicity? What can be inferred by the study of 'Wielbark Culture' burial practices? What consistencies or inconsistencies are to be found, and what stands out? Is there a common feature or characteristic that allows the clear demarcation between 'Wielbark' and other archaeological cultures?

Through the appliance of a practice approach wherein the main focus was on biritualistic funerary sites of the 'Wielbark Culture', this research provided a broad overview of the different burial rituals discovered to this day. This includes not only the simultaneous occurrence of inhumations, cremations and burial mounds on a single cemetery, but also the conjunction of different funerary elements into one burial. Where the practice approach succeeded in its appliance, the examination of the data itself was found to be affected by impediments due to language barriers and unpublished excavation reports. Unfortunately, the original and primary sources as well as the excavation reports were predominantly published in Polish, which the author of this thesis is not familiar with. Because of this, the majority of the used literature consists of English or German secondary sources written by the leading archaeologists concerned with the 'Wielbark Culture'. Therefore, the possibility that this research misses information due to the encountered impediments should also be noted. While the secondary sources provided substantial data for an comprehensive analysis, even more precise and extensive results could be reached when a complete dataset and detailed excavation reports on the individual burials are available. It is therefore important to be aware that the following conclusions are based entirely upon the available data and that more extensive or different results could be reached during future research.

Nevertheless, significant insights into the wide variety of 'Wielbark' funerary practices were gained through the appliance of a practice approach. Based on the

previously presented evidence of biritualistic cemeteries, the following differentiations of 'Wielbark' burial practices can be made:

(1) Inhumations; these can be classified into a number of subcategories, namely

a. *Inhumations in flat graves*
b. *Inhumations in burial mounds*
c. *Inhumations buried directly into the burial pit*
d. *Inhumations buried inside a coffin*
e. *Inhumations with "borrowing" of other funeral traditions*
f. *Boat burials*
g. *Single inhumation graves*
h. *Double or multiple inhumation graves*
i. *Purposefully incomplete skeletons*

The deposited bodies were found to be buried according to the following rules:

a. *Arrangement of the body in a stretched supine position, the limbs resting straight against the body. The body was NS-orientated, the head of the body rested in the north.*
b. *Arrangement of the body in a stretched supine position, the limbs resting straight against the body. The body was EW-oriented, the head of the body rested either in the east or the west.*
c. *Arrangement of the body in a side position with flexed limbs. The body was either NS-orientated or showed a slight deviation to the east.*
d. *Double burials: Arrangement of the bodies on top of each other, in a side position with flexed limbs. The bodies were NS-orientated or showed a slight deviation to the east.*
e. *Double burials: Arrangement of the bodies on top of each other, individual a in a stretched supine position and individual b in a side position with flexed limbs. The bodies were NS-orientated or showed a slight deviation to the east.*
f. *Double burials: Arrangement of incomplete skeletons next to one another, or on top of one another.*

(2) Cremations; these are more difficult to classify due to the limited sources this author was able to access. Based on the presented results, cremations can be differentiated into the following subcategories:

a. *Cremation pit burials*
b. *Cremation pit burials above inhumations, either in the centre or northern part of the inhumation pit*
c. *Urn graves*

d. *Urn graves above inhumations, either in the centre or northern part of inhumation pit*
e. *Urn graves containing only few or no cremated remains*
f. *Cremations with various forms of "borrowing" of other funerary traditions*

(3) Other special features; these include further interesting variations in 'Wielbark' burial practices, such as

a. *Burial mounds (with or without fillings or aboveground markers such as stone circles)*
b. *Stone circles (around flat graves and burial mounds, or as standalone feature)*
c. *Reopening of graves by contemporary people for ritualistic purposes*
d. *Reopening of graves by contemporary people for "robbery purposes"*
e. *Reopening of graves by 'alien' people for "robbery" purposes*

This overview of funerary practices clearly indicates the extent and shape the widely varying forms of biritualistic practices of the 'Wielbark Culture' took. Again, it is of great importance to be aware that the role of death within a society is culturally and religiously defined. As described in the previous chapters, burials can not only be regarded as the symbolic representations of the ritual participants but they also indicate thorough decision-making processes prior to the burial, regarding the correct performance of funeral rituals. By incorporating these important decisions motivated by religious beliefs, preferences or traditions, burial sites represent a significant source for gaining insight into the view and understanding of the world of illiterate ancient societies. They directly reflect a population's idea about the cosmological and social order. So, in case of the astonishing finds of the burial sites of the 'Wielbark Culture', what conclusions can be reached regarding its supposed coherency?

The biritualistic 'Wielbark' burial sites evoke a picture of numerous funerary traditions and beliefs coming together. According to the referred authors, there appear to be barely any preferences evident in the archaeological material, yet alone a coherent pattern as to how certain decisions on the burial of individuals were made. While certain standards appear to have been primarily followed to some extent, such as the preferred stretched supine position of bodies in inhumations, other features immediately complicate clear categorizations. The sole observation of numerous different variations existing for the subcategory of "borrowing" funerary traditions makes straightforward classifications even more difficult – and

many sites remain unexcavated or unpublished to this day, making it entirely possible that yet more forms of 'Wielbark' burial practices remain to be discovered. Where at one site flat graves appear to be greater in number, another site features entirely different conditions. Not to mention that a number of features has also been destroyed during times of war, which for instance complicates identifications of possible burial mounds.

Based on the cases discussed in this thesis, it appears as though the only clear consistency on every 'Wielbark' cemetery is the occurrence of biritualistic practices – according to the referred authors, not one 'Wielbark' cemetery features exclusively inhumations, cremations or other burial practices. Instead, they are all comprised by biritualistic funerary traditions. In fact, when taking a closer look at the provided evidence, their seem to be rather more inconsistencies than consistencies in the decision and execution of burial practices. This astonishing biritualism of the 'Wielbark Culture' is understood to be what can be considered specifically 'Wielbark' by the addressed authors, and seems to be the only clear demarcation between the 'Wielbark Culture' and neighbouring archaeological cultures. However, I would argue that this can be regarded as a phenomenon of entirely different extent.

When moving away from Jordanes's narrative of the migrating Goths, one finds themselves confronted with a quite confusing archaeological record. Based on the evaluated material, it appears as though the only clear indicator for an 'Gothic' origin from Scandinavia remains in the evident stone circle forms that are only known from this region. Howbeit, it would be far-fetched to say the least to not only assume that these immigrants were part of a homogenous, coherent association, but to then continue to go as far as to refer to the entire archaeological culture as 'Gothic' – despite the clear evidence of burial mounds making only a small percentage of cemeteries compared to the rest of the 'Wielbark Culture'. The time this archaeological culture finds itself in is marked and shaped by the movement of 'peoples', be it of bigger or smaller extent. Who is to say that the individuals who possibly immigrated from Scandinavia where the same as the 'Goths' attacking Rome centuries later? Moreover, the burial mounds and stone circles have so far only been discovered to be restricted to certain regions, and do not appear to be shifting towards the Black Sea Coast. Of course, this could possibly be ex-

plained through ethnic assimilation of practices, amongst other alternatives. Nevertheless, the ‘Gothic’ ethnonym is more than an inappropriate term to designate members of the ‘Wielbark Culture’. The authors also noted the presence of other ethnic groups in the areas ascribed to the ‘Wielbark Culture’. If one goes as far as to equate this archaeological culture with an ethnonym, it seems even more implausible to refer to it as exclusively ‘Gothic’, when other tribes apparently inhabited the same areas as well. If anything, individuals ascribed to the ‘Wielbark Culture’ should rather be regarded as ‘peoples in the making’. There is no apparent reason to refer to these groups with certain ethnonyms, as the biritualistic cemeteries clearly indicate the involvement of individuals holding very different ideas on how to properly deal with and bury their dead. The “borrowing” of funerary traditions for instance could even indicate an indecisiveness on appropriate manners to treat the dead, or combinations of traditions due to different cultural backgrounds of the buried individual or their relatives. Be it the involvement of different families, kinships or tribes using a shared cemetery, or a grouping of people with different social and cultural backgrounds – the evidence unequivocally points to a heterogenous constitution of the ‘Wielbark Culture’. The research of ‘Wielbark’ burial sites has thus proven to demonstrate the vast variety of potentially different cultural identities of ‘Wielbark’ individuals.

However, in order to conclusively retrace the ‘Wielbark’ practice network, it is of great importance for future research to create a more or less complete dataset on ‘Wielbark’ funerary traditions. It goes without saying that this will require an extensive amount of research. Such an dataset must not only comprise a detailed and complete analysis of the burial practices themselves, but also their total amount in percentages as well as their entire distribution range inside ‘Wielbark’ areas. This collection of date would ultimately also allow for irrevocable proof whether or not certain burial practices appear to have been preferred in hindsight. Should this be the case, the results could also indicate a ‘main burial practice’ which was then accompanied by funerary traditions of other kind, perhaps suggesting a coming together of different groupings, families or tribes. Other possible findings could also point to the ‘Wielbark Culture’ comprising numerous smaller networks of practices, rather than one ‘Wielbark’ practice network. To make this possible, it is of high priority to make primary sources and publications available in English, to

publish the undisclosed excavation reports and of course to continue with the extensive study of the 'Wielbark Culture'. Likewise, future research must continue with the studies of the 'Wielbark Culture' as a separate archaeological phenomenon, rather than continuously referring to Jordanes's narrative in hopes of finding correspondences to the migrating 'Goths' – as this thesis has shown, the construct of this ethnonym is highly incompatible with the archaeological findings featured on 'Wielbark Culture' cemeteries. Only when we focus on the archaeological finds as what they are, and discontinue to attach as much weight onto ancient literary sources as has been done thus far, we can hope to gain a better insight into the complex events and networks archaeological cultures such as the 'Wielbark Culture' found themselves in.

5. Abstract

This thesis has studied the funerary practices of allegedly 'Gothic' 'Wielbark' individuals in order to make out whether they truly match this ethnonym as has always been indisputably presumed.

The main research examines the burial sites of the 'Wielbark Culture', which feature a number of biritualistic and widely varying funerary practices, including inhumations, cremations and burial mounds. However, there are also distinctions and various ritualistic combinations evident in between these funerary categories. The burial rites are of great importance as they are considered to be the material and physical remains of an extensive series of substantial decisions and actions between the death and burial of an individual. Moreover, funerary practices involved the active participation of members of the concerned community. For this reason, burials serve as the simple reflection of a population's ideas about both cosmologic and social order. The biritualism evident for 'Wielbark' cemeteries could therefore potentially be the reflection of numerous heterogenous groupings or smaller units rather than a homogenous 'Gothic' tribe as has been suggested by Jordanes's narrative in the *Getica*.

By applying a practice approach, the author researched the true nature behind the supposed coherency of the 'Wielbark Culture' and evaluated whether this approach allows for more accurate perceptions on cultural identity and ethnicity. Central questions of this thesis focused on what can be inferred by the study of 'Wielbark Culture' funerary rites, their consistencies or inconsistencies and the search for a common feature or characteristic possibly allowing the clear demarcation between the 'Wielbark Culture' and other archaeological cultures. This research also included chapters on identity and ethnicity issues within the archaeological discipline, providing an overview of how they have been addressed in the past and suggesting how they should be dealt with for future research.

It has been found that the 'Gothic' ethnonym does not apply to the findings of the 'Wielbark Culture' cemeteries. The vast biritualism evident on its burial sites indicate a widely heterogenous constitution, or at least the involvement of numerous 'peoples' with different cultural backgrounds. In order to conclusively retrace a complete 'Wielbark' practice network, further and more extensive and independent research is urgently required.

6. Bibliography

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7. Figures and Tables

7.1 Figures

7.2 Tables