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SEASONAL CAMPS OF THE FUNNEL BEAKER CULTURE PEOPLE IN SOUTH-WESTERN POLAND

Settlements of Funnel Beaker (TRB) culture communities which appeared in the Middle Neolithic on widespread areas north of the Sudeten and Carpathian Mts. differed in that region significantly from settlement patterns of the former agricultural people of the Danubian Cycle. This included both the Central European lowlands and the highland region. New communities engaged in tillage and animal breeding set up usually small settlements comprising merely a few family homesteads. They were generally characterized by a considerable stability. Their development sometimes indicates evidence of slowly progressing changes both in spatial arrangement and in forms of utilized movable inventory. Small camps set up fortuitously, providing periodical abode for small groups of people deriving from permanent settlements, were established simultaneously in and sometimes even outside occupied areas. Traces of such camps make up a dense network of points of the map of the then existing settlements (Kulczycka-Leciejewiczowa 1993, 107 ff.).

Contrary to appearances, research into those small, transient camps is far from easy. Their remains may be conjectured at many archaeological sites where scanty assemblages of movable inventories of the TRB culture or few pits with typical equipment have been discovered. Such estimates remain, however, more or less probable hypotheses until widespread excavations are carried out at those sites. Examples of indubitably complete uncovered camps from those times in south-western Poland could be — in the Silesian Lowlands — two sites at Strachów (Sobótka com.) and, recently discovered, at Partynice, a Wrocław suburb, moreover, nearby situated sites in the village of Śleza (Żurawina com.).

Site 1 at Strachów lies on a hillock rising above surrounding waterlogged meadows of the Czarna Woda valley, one of the more distant, left-bank tributaries of the upper Oder (Fig. 1). This brook surrounding the high Śleza Massif on three sides, collects the waters of numerous streams flowing down its slopes. Seasonal rising of the water level when, due to seasonal precipitation, waters rise and overflow the banks, they spread out and inundate wide areas. The dry

hillock rising above the valley was well fitted for temporary camping. Traces of its utilization derive from the Neolithic and later times. A small stronghold with embankments made from earth raked off the slope was built at the decline of the tenth or beginning of the eleventh centuries (Lodowski 1980). Comprehensive excavation works carried out at this site in the 1950s and the beginning of the 1970s uncovered a considerable part of its surface. Disclosed, among others, was a pit containing Neolithic materials of the TRB culture.

This oval pit measuring 1 by 1.2 m. was not very deep. Sherds found there included at least two pots, one collared flask, moreover 2 clay spindles, fragments of 2 stone tools, probably axes, and several flint implements. Nearby, especially in the earth taken to heap up the stronghold embankment, there were about 20 more sherds, fragments of 3 stone tools, probably likewise axes, and about 20 implements made from local erratic Baltic flint including cores, blades and flakes together with various tools generally made from blades (Lodowski 1980, 210 ff., Figs. 3,4).

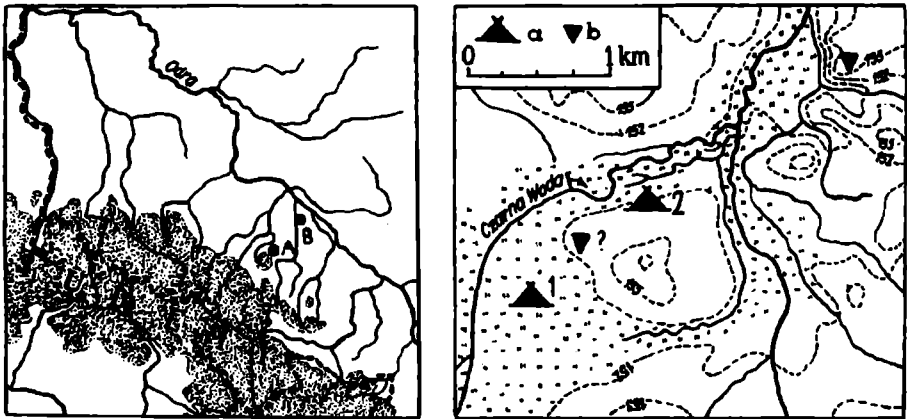


Fig. 1. Traces of camps of Funnel Beaker Culture communities. Left: the situation of investigated microregions on the upper Oder. Right: remains of camps near Czarna Woda. a — traces of a camp, b — loose finds.

The scanty number of finds may indicate a transient use of this place by a small group of people camping there. They remained there, however, long enough that the burrowing of at least one pit serving some economic functions seemed to be worth while. There was obviously a fireplace, some flint implements were accidentally scorched. Food was prepared and eaten there, moreover, wool or flax were spun — proven by found spindles — there were also various implements produced from local raw material. Of the utilized stone tools five were so faulty that remaining fragments were thrown away.

Site 2 at Strachów lies about 1 km NE from site 1, at the edge of the same Czarna Woda valley. There is an elevation there encircled by the river and its right-bank tributary. Excavations carried out at the beginning of the 1970s on

the northern slope of this rise uncovered variously dated settlement remains chiefly from the early Neolithic, later prehistoric periods and the early Middle Ages (Noworyta 1977). A pit containing TRB culture material was discovered among others in the part of the excavation very close to the edge of the valley, about 3 m. above its bottom.

This rather well preserved octagonal pit measured 2 to 1 and 0.7 m. Most of the channelled bottom was more than 80 cm. deep, the smallest part formed a 25 cm. deep step. The pit contained about 20 sherds including fragments of a funnel beaker, remnants of charcoal and pugging. This indicates that a small group of people stayed there for some time. They burrowed that pit to serve economic needs, perhaps for storing food provisions, and lit a fire nearby.

Further traces of small camps have been found at Wrocław-Partynice (Fig. 2). They were discovered on a shallow, right-bank terrace of the Śleza river, on a hillock rising about 3 m. above the bottom of its waterlogged valley crossed by many old river beds. This place must have been especially well adapted for habitation since at least three concentrations of pits, apparently remains of successive, periodical stays of Neolithic settlers (monograph prepared for print), have been discovered there during archaeological researches carried out in 1995, covering an area of 12,500 sq. m. In later times, this section of the terrace was repeatedly inhabited or variously used. Small settlements existed there during the Bronze Age and the La Tène period, a village was there in the early Middle Ages. Relics of the previous oldest settlement were, therefore, for the most part destroyed.

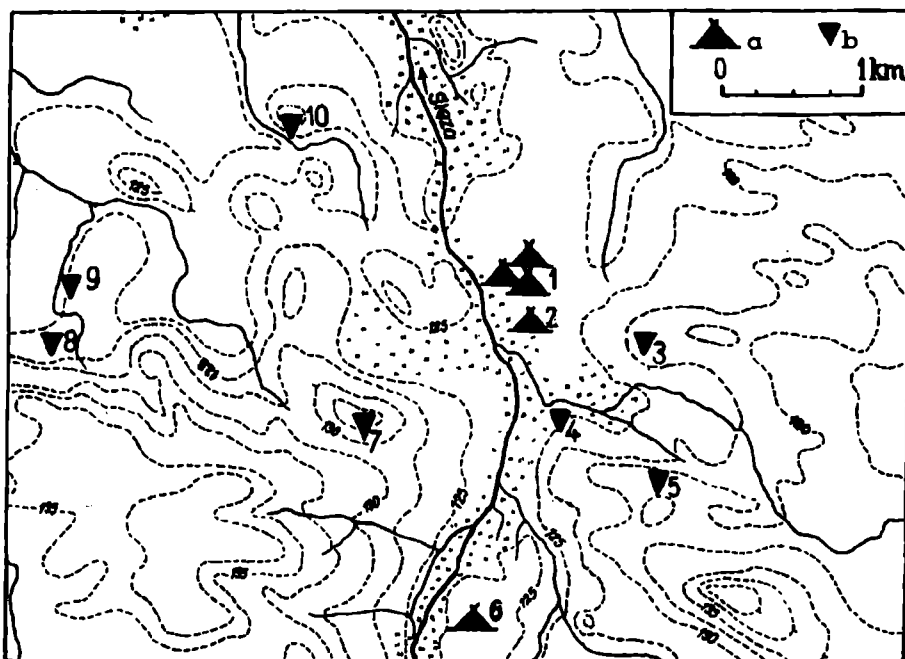


Fig. 2. Remains of camps of Funnel Beaker Culture communities on the Śleza.
a — traces of a camp, b — loose finds.

The small number of pits containing materials of the TRB culture concentrated on elevations in three groups and the rather scanty quantity of movable inventory found outside the pits makes us believe that small groups of people stayed there at least thrice. No traces of surface habitation have been found, such structures were most likely exposed to decay. Only 17 small pits, concentrated by 5 to 7 in each of the three groups have been preserved. These groups occupying an area 30-50 by 25 m. were distributed parallel to the river.

The pits within particular concentrations were generally about 1 m., exceptionally 2 or 3 m. in diameter, and 10 to 50 cm. deep. Two contained fireplaces built of stone. Each of the three camps had at least one large storage vessel sunk into the ground with a capacity of 15-25 l. In three cases those were funnel beakers, in one instance — a pot. It is likely that they substituted pits for storing up food provisions, frequently appearing within each permanent settlement typical especially in the loess zone. The excavation of such objects in the sandy, loose subsoil of the river terrace would be impossible.

The found movable stock did not differ essentially from articles of every-day use known from permanent settlements of those times whence they probably were brought to these camps. They included, above all, vessels, two clay spindles and flint implements most of which were found outside the pits. Particular note should be taken of the scanty set of utilized forms of vessels. The most numerous were funnel beakers and bowls of a similar shape, there were also several semicircular bowls, cups and collared flasks. Pots, the most frequent ceramic items in each of those settlements, was relatively rarely used there. This is quite surprising since such vessels were used for cooking. They were, therefore, produced from clay intentionally mixed with coarse sand or crushed ceramics to ensure a greater fire resistance. Owing to those components they did not crack as easy as pottery lacking those admixtures (Kulczycka-Leciejewiczowa 1997, 175 ff.). This would mean that most food provisions brought to the Słęża camps had been prepared elsewhere and only small amounts were cooked at the campsite. Discovered spindles indicate that textile spinning was sometimes also practised there. Flint treatment was probably likewise among their chores.

Remains of a camp similar to those described were also found, so it seems, at Słęża a village situated at the edge of the same river valley as the site at Wrocław-Partynice, more than two kilometres south of it. During archaeological researches linked with the construction of a motorway several pits containing TRB culture materials were discovered there throughout the vast uncovered surface in 1998 (unpublished, information by courtesy of Prof. G. Domański). This site is currently worked out.

Small camps of the TRB culture population were not an element of the settlement landscape specific only to areas of south-western Poland. They also occurred numerously on areas further north (Wiślański 1969, 159 ff.) and were typical in the loess zone of the upper Vistula riverain (Kruk 1980, 48 ff.; 1981a, 261). Their general presence makes us reflect upon the cause effecting the rise of that type of settlement in those times. We know that small economic assem-

blages constituting branches of permanent settlements had been established earlier by Neolithic communities of the Danubian Cycle. Those camps were set up, however, only on fertile, permanently exploited soil, relatively close to settlements. They served, it seems, chiefly agricultural purposes, as places of shelter and work on cultivated areas far from sites of abode. Nomadic camps of TRB culture people were, however, of a different nature. There is no substantiation for their connection with tilling, fishing or hunting. Camps were often set up far from the utilized agricultural area. Fishing and hunting just like gathering did not require the organization of special camping sites, anyway those pursuits played no great role in that economy. Neither have we found any links between the spatial distribution of camps and places yielding usable, for instance, lithic raw material. It seems, therefore, that those camps were set up chiefly to serve pasturing activities.

In conditions linked with the dawning of the Subboreal climate extensive parts of Central Europe were still covered with a dense primeval forest. The period of more than one thousand years of agricultural activities of the Neolithic people of the Danubian Cycle was, nonetheless, a time of an intensive devastation of forests. Their burning away to gain cultivable land resulted already in those times in the spreading out of open spaces. This situation favoured the development of animal breeding. At the same time, the deforestation limited the possibilities of fertilizing the earth with the ash of burned trees causing a gradual degradation of the soil sliding down the denuded slopes. All this led to a general decline in plant production and thus an increased demand for meat food (Kruk 1981b, 215 ff.). Animal breeding became, therefore, the most essential basis of existence of the Middle Neolithic communities. Pasturing of — especially cattle — became, next to previous domestic forms practised by early agricultural people, a type of transhumance, i.e., the seasonal moving of livestock to regions far from settlements (Valde-Nowak 1995, 129 ff.).

Camps linked with that type of tending cattle were set up most often near rivers, in river valleys or on low lying inundated terraces sometimes also on higher places but always where there were larger deforested tracts or areas thinly covered with trees and a convenient access to watering-places (cf. Tunia 1986). As a rule, those groups were not large, their number probably depended chiefly on local possibilities of feeding the cattle. Anyway, it is usually difficult to estimate their size since the herdsmen returned several times to those convenient places.

The examples of camps referred to indicate that they were used by small groups of people numbering, perhaps, few persons only. Those herdsmen drove the cattle, probable belonging to the whole community, to pastures and tended it throughout the grazing season up to the approach of winter when they returned to their settlements. While camping they built for themselves most likely temporary shack-like shelpers of which no traces remained. In those camps they prepared food cooking it on fires or in stone hearths. Food stock brought from settlements was kept, for instance at Wrocław-Partynice, in pots sunken into the ground or in ordinary pits. When the herdsmen were not tending the cattle they occupied their time — proved for example by discoveries at site 1 in Strachów

— with flint treatment and the production of various implements. The relatively numerous fragments of stone tools found there — most likely axes — imply that they were also occupied with woodcraft. It seems that there were not only men in those camps. Clay spindles found there may suggest the presence of women.

Objects such as vessels and tools were brought to those camps from permanent settlements. The quantity and assemblage of those implements was of course scantier than their like used daily in permanent settlements. The characteristic features of these products indicate, however, that the herdsmen camps must have existed concurrently with settlements. Arguments brought forward at times that those finds could have been remains of the first penetration of TRB culture communities, preceding the development of their agricultural settlement on fertile soil (Kruk 1981a, 260), have not been substantiated by relevant researches.

The individuation of small groups of herdsmen engaged throughout the greater part of the year in tending livestock attests the creation of a social work division according to personal qualifications. Groups of specialists having particular skills that differentiated them among community members appeared already in the early Neolithic in addition to the primary and basic division of work into male and female occupation and those feasible to be performed by various age groups. Most of them were miners who set out to search for lithic deposits including flint and were capable of extracting the required material (Lech 1981, 222 ff.). During the Middle Neolithic there also appeared specialists — herdsmen. The agricultural breeding communities of TRB culture settling, as they developed, more often on the most fertile soils, especially in the loess zone, began to devote themselves to tillage on a wider than previously scale. In their economy, however, animal breeding continued to be important to an even higher degree than was the case among Danubian Circle communities previously inhabiting those lands. As was said before, changing ecological conditions determined its superior position. Occupation with agriculture required the finding of special herdsmen who would take care of the livestock grazing on remote pastures, their status differed, therefore, from that prevailing among the community in general.

The individuation of groups of herdsmen remaining most of the year far away from their native homes resulted in far-reaching cultural consequences. In the Late Neolithic nomadic pastoral life became a basic form of existence of communities throughout Central Europe. This was favoured by the then occurring changes of ecological conditions. Yet, permanent settlements had never completely disappeared. Their inhabitants continued agricultural work, though on a limited scale. They provided, moreover, shelters for man and beast during seasons unsuitable for pasture.

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