

## R E V I E W S

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(review) P. Jarosz, J. Machnik and A. Szczepanek (eds.),  
*Nekropolie ludności kultury ceramiki sznurowej z III tysiąclecia przed Chr. w Mirocinie na Wysoczyźnie Kańczuckiej* [*Cemeteries of Corded Ware culture from 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC at Mirocin on Kańczuga Heights*] (= *Via Archaeologica Ressoiviensia* 15). Rzeszów: Instytut Archeologii Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 241 pages

“Nekropolie ludności kultury ceramiki sznurowej z III tysiąclecia przed Chr. w Mirocinie na Wysoczyźnie Kańczuckiej”, edited by Paweł Jarosz, Jan Machnik and Anita Szczepanek, summarizes the results of archaeological and supportive analyses of materials documented during the excavations of two, final Neolithic cemeteries of the Corded Ware Culture (later CWC) in Mirocin, Przeworsk district. It represents an informal continuation of a previous work addressing similar issues, but in regard to the necropolises unearthed in the vicinity of Szczytina (Hozer *et al.* 2017). In fact, both burial grounds were discovered during the same rescue fieldworks associated with the construction of the A4 motorway. The archaeological record from the sites appears to be unique in many ways, as it vividly depicts the structure of a wide network of social and cultural interactions, which in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC spanned vast areas of south-eastern Poland and the adjacent regions of Eastern Europe. Therefore, a thorough publication of these materials is necessary for the elaboration of our current understanding of the social milieu of the Corded Ware traditions.

The reviewed work was originally planned to be published as a part of a monograph encompassing all CWC funerary sites documented during the previously mentioned excavations. However, due to some adverse circumstances briefly mentioned by the editors, it was impossible. Despite this, “Nekropolie ludności kultury ceramiki sznurowej z III tysiąclecia przed Chr. w Mirocinie na Wysoczyźnie Kańczuckiej”, was eventually published in the same archaeological series entitled *Via*

*Archaeologica Resoviensia*. The structure and layout of this publication relates to the work addressing previously mentioned necropolises in Szczytina and is additionally supplemented with papers presenting the results of more detailed analyses carried out by specialists from different branches. It consists of a brief editorial note, an elaborate archaeological overview of the material record and 7 supplementary papers. The former covers more than half of the volume and for that reason ought to be discussed in a more detailed manner.

The archaeological part is divided into 4 chapters (I–IV). The first one provides a necessary informational background for both sites in Mirocin, marked with the numbers 24 and 27. Fieldwork took place in the winter and spring of 2011, and was conducted as a part of rescue excavations associated with the construction of the A4 motorway, funded by the General Management of State Roads and Motorways and conducted by Mirosław Mazurek, and Mirosław Okoński representing the Foundation of Rzeszów Archaeological Centre. Professor Jan Machnik was appointed to the position of main consultant.

Sites 24 and 27 in Mirocin, Przeworsk district, covered the area of 160 and 308.3 ares, respectively. The total number of 198 archaeological objects, spanning the Neolithic to the Modern Age, were documented on the former site and 385 on the latter. Both necropolises were situated on the flattenings of the two neighbouring loess hills, located few hundred metres to the east and south-east of the locality of Mirocin, on both sites of the road nr 94 from Przeworsk to Jarosław. It lies

within the northern part of the Kańczuga Heights, a microregion constituting the south-eastern border of the Sandomierz Basin, adjacent to the “edge” of Carpathian mountains. Its landscape is mostly rugged, covered with a thick layer of loess soil and most probably offered very favourable conditions for prehistoric economic activities based on agriculture and animal breeding. Probably around the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC it became inhabited by people of the CWC. Their presence is indicated by the remains of 9 structures, one of which contained an animal burial.

Chapter I is rather short, but represents a plausible and well-formatted introduction to the subsequent parts of the book. Photos provided are of good quality and supply valuable insights into the conducted fieldwork. Spatial data are also well-managed. Locations of the discussed and other Corded Ware Culture sites from south-eastern Poland are displayed as a point layer on shaded relief with a mild-coloured hypsometric background, which gives a subtle, but informative hint about settlement preferences and its geographic distribution. As for the second figure (no. 2), a hillshade background with additional vector layers would have been more readable than the topographic map, which does not seem suitable enough for the presentation of such large scale data.

In chapter II, a catalogue of finds is presented. It is divided into two parts referring to sites 24 and 27 respectively and consists of a detailed description of excavated features, as well as their inventory. First, the technical characteristics of the grave features, such as the diameter of the entrance and burial pits, classification of its shape, length and width, orientation according to the cardinal directions, and depth, are given. After that the construction is discussed in detail. The last part of the description is focused on the buried individual(s), and discusses information regarding biological sex, age, body orientation according to cardinal directions, its exact location on the bottom of a burial pit, as well as position of trunk and arrangement of limbs. In the end, brief information about types and number of grave goods, along with their location in the burial pit and spatial relation to the skeleton, is presented. Furthermore, each description is followed by a detailed list of objects found in the grave, including their type, size, material used for production, and observations regarding their state of preservation – naturally with references to adequate figures and analytic papers from the second part of the discussed tome. The inventory always begins with ceramic vessels. The remainder of objects are also presented in a standardized order: bone tools directly after ceramic wares, after that large implements made

of stone and siliceous rocks, with small flint artefacts, such as tools, arrowheads and flakes at the end. All objects are additionally divided into artefacts found *in situ* at the bottom of the burial pit and those extracted from its fill. This is particularly helpful as it simplifies the process of querying data and resolves the problem of time-consuming, and often fruitless examination of features’ description. In general, the whole catalogue part has been prepared according to an established, high standard of the previous volume of the *Via Archaeologica Resoviensia* series. As stated before, the description is comprehensive and provides all necessary information. However, due to the small font-size and line intervals, it is sometimes difficult to “filter” specified information from the text column. Therefore, an additional table comprising the basic metric data of a feature, as well as sex, age, and body orientation of the deceased, could significantly facilitate the process of “extracting” basic information for other research and statistic purposes. Similar solution was included, i.a., in an excellent monograph of the Corded Ware cemetery in Żerniki Górne, site 1, by Andrzej Kempisty and Piotr Włodarczak (2000).

Chapter III begins with a brief overview of the Corded Ware Culture funerary ritual. It includes number, characteristics and location of particular grave features unearthed during the excavation of both necropolises in Mirocin, Przeworsk district. These were situated along the main axis of local summits, in their close vicinity or in the upper parts of their slopes. The authors suggest that graves no. 50, 53, 54 on site 24 could have been originally located at the south-eastern border of a barrow mound, which was most probably levelled. Niches of the catacomb graves show a resemblance to structures previously known from the Sokal Ridge, and are quite different from objects documented in the region of Małopolska Upland – their entrances were located far below the level of the corridor’s floor. Apart from the description, which summarizes previously presented data, characteristic traits of all excavated features have been put into a table (table 1), which facilitates the search for particular attributes. It is worth noting that the authors incorporated A. Hausler’s (1974) classification of lower and upper limbs’ arrangement. Thanks to that, objects from Mirocin can be easily compared to other graves from different parts of south-eastern Poland. All uncommon traits of burials are thoroughly analysed and discussed, usually on the basis of their resemblance to other features from different regions of the CWC ecumene. As a result, the burial rituals of the communities occupying the Kańczuga Heights are presented in a wider scope. One of the commonly

shared burial customs was the deposition of grave goods in the deeper parts of the niche, closer to its inner wall. Unfortunately, the location of artefacts was not systematically examined, as was recently done by Bourgeois and Kroon (2017). Because of that, inter-regional comparative analysis of burial rituals, e.g. in relation to the CWC communities from its western part, requires additional data processing.

In the subsequent, second part of the chapter, the typology of artefacts (movable objects) is presented. Due to their spatial vicinity (1100 m), artefacts from both sites were analysed together. The whole assemblage of grave goods is divided into categories, such as clay vessels, including amphorae, beakers and other forms. Their features are discussed in a very detailed manner and a great emphasis is put on their resemblance to ceramic products from other regions, particularly the Małopolska Upland and the Sokal Ridge, but also the Middle Dnieper area. The latter direction seems to be treated with additional attention, as it constitutes a solid basis for the authors' assumption regarding close contacts between the Corded Ware communities from Kańczuga Heights and populations from the aforementioned Middle Dnieper zone, covering areas of today's Ukraine and Belarus. This hypothesis receives additional and, more importantly, convincing support in the subsequent part of the book (a paper regarding the origin of people from CWC cemeteries in Mirocin). Other classes of analysed objects include stone utensils (battle-axes and grindstones), flint artefacts (axes, tools, arrowheads and half-products), bone tools and objects with marginal or no traces of manufacturing (chisels, awls, boar tusks, beads) and copper adornments. At the end of the second part of chapter III, the authors make an interesting suggestion on the origins of two necklaces made from copper plates found in graves 54 from site 24 and 360 from site 27. According to the text, similar forms could be traced in the assemblages of the Fatyanovo culture, which shows many resemblances to the Corded Ware tradition. Unfortunately, this assumption is based solely on (probably) oral information and therefore appears to be insufficiently embedded in the recent literature. Nonetheless, the whole analytical part is very solid and constitutes an abundant source of valuable information. One of its visible flaws is the lack of analysis regarding patterns of deposition of particular categories of movable objects in different parts of the burial pit's bottom. An attempt to quantify this matter was previously made by Włodarczak (2006). Recently, Quentin Bourgeois and Eric Kroon (2017) published an article addressing the burial ritual of the Corded Ware communities from the western part of its ecumene, which included a func-

tional scheme designed for the discussed purpose. Despite some differences, it could be easily adapted to the analysis of grave goods' location in the context of other parts of the Corded Ware settlement, such as south-eastern Poland. Furthermore, the presence or absence of specific types of grave goods is not discussed in relation to burial traits, be it biological or cultural. The adoption of a more quantitative approach to this issue could lead to the revelation of interesting patterns, such as the preference of placing different kinds of objects in the graves of people of particular sex and age. According to the recent state of knowledge, the association between the deceased and the objects placed in his or her grave offers an invaluable insight into socio-cultural milieu of prehistoric communities and, as such, should not be omitted (Skrzyniecki 2018). It was also noticed that authors sometimes use the term "wealth" in reference to the quantity and quality of artefacts deposited in graves. In general, their purpose is understandable and usually fits the main narration line, but their assumptions would have been more convincing if the wealth had been quantified. Such analysis constitutes a powerful tool for the reconstruction of previously mentioned social background, as it helps to indicate, apart from its limitations, the relative social rank of different groups.

The third part of chapter III deals with chronology. At the beginning, some preliminary assumptions regarding the relative time sequence of the necropolises' development are discussed in relation to the structure of grave features, objects found in their fill, as well as their location in the cemetery. The most important remark of this part of the text concerns the spatial distribution of graves. According to the text and Fig. 59, there is a possibility that features no. 110, 127, 54, 53 and 50 were originally dug into the soil at the southern border of an older barrow mound, which was most probably levelled due to the more recent, intensive agricultural activity. The presence of fragmented ceramic vessels with traits characteristic for the older developmental phases of the Corded Ware culture in the upper parts of burial pits' fills seems to support this hypothesis. In addition, the authors make reference to the similar spatial situation documented on one of the CWC cemeteries from the Sokal Ridge. In the conclusion, it is stated that the construction of the catacomb graves took place after the erection of an older mound, representing a characteristic feature of the Corded Ware burial customs from the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. In the subsequent part of the text, a functional categorisation of grave features, according to chronologically (in relative terms) distinctive traits of ceramic vessels, is presented. It encompasses eight classes of assemblages which,

apart from differences in the quality and quantity of grave goods, also display some resemblances. This observation seems to indicate their socio-cultural, as well as chronological proximity.  $^{14}\text{C}$  dates obtained for 6 out of 8 graves generally fall within the first two centuries of the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium. On the basis of a combination of relative chronology and radiocarbon dating, the authors proposed a hypothetical chronological sequence of the construction of catacomb graves, which also takes into account the resemblance between the artefacts from the Mirocin and Szczytina cemeteries. Chapter III ends with the conclusion that a well-defined chronological scope provides the possibility to examine grave assemblages from the perspective of the intergenerational continuity of cultural traits, as well as the appearance of new features, thus inviting the reader to delve into the last chapter.

The final section of the first, archaeological part of the book starts with a direct statement that materials from Mirocin, due to their overall similarity and spatial proximity to assemblages from Szczytina, must be examined and interpreted in conjunction with the latter. The sparse distribution of grave features, as well as their relative low number, are interpreted in economic terms. The lack of archaeologically traceable settlement structures, along with the presence of animal burials, leads the authors to make the assumption that people using cemeteries in Szczytina and Mirocin were pastoralists, and their (most probably) rotational wanderings with herds could have encompassed also the vast grassland environs of adjacent territories, such as the Sokal Ridge, the eastern part of Roztocze, as well as loess uplands of San and Dniester interfluvium. Contacts with other regions inhabited by populations sharing the Corded Ware tradition left discernible, material traces in archaeological record, such as the presence of Książnice Wielkie jugs, beakers characteristic for the Middle Dnieper culture, copper necklaces made of rectangular plates and quadrangular axes made of Świeciechów flint. These multiple directions of interaction are presented on a map, labelled Fig. 72, which is meritorically correct, but lacks visual polishing. The river network provides an important reference for spatial orientation, however an additional layer consisting of clearly defined borders of geographical regions, as well as polychromatic hypsometry could make the overall effect even more informative. Furthermore, the authors describe the Kańczuga Heights as particularly suitable for a pastoral economy, supporting their assumption with relevant maps depicting soil conditions and natural resources, along with geographical zones. They also mention the presence of salt springs as one of the factors facilitating the exploitation of the region

by groups of pastoralists. However, the map with locations of these springs is not included. The hypothesis of a mobile way of life, although lacking solid evidence, is unceasingly popular among archaeologists dealing with Corded Ware culture settlement from south-eastern Poland. Nonetheless, it still poses an interpretational puzzle which the authors of the book seem to be aware of. One of the passages, in which they point at the incompatibility of the pastoral way of life and the use of ceramic vessels, expresses these doubts quite well. One of the proposed solutions to this problem is to accept the idea that the on-going use of ceramics through the ages did not have any economic reason but was in fact a relic of an old tradition, maintained only in the funerary sphere. Following that line of thought, particular types of ornamentation, as well as differences in vessels' shape might be interpreted as symbolic marks of group identity of the deceased. This perspective is refreshing, as it brings a breath of fresh, dare I say humanistic, air into the archaeological discourse recently dominated by models and numbers. It is regrettable that the authors did not elaborate more on this sociological perspective. For example, nothing is said about the social structure of those people and their potential social roles. Most of the researchers' attention is drawn by the ceramics, which is reasonable and justified. However, other categories of finds, such as weaponry, are equally important, especially in terms of the reconstruction of the previously mentioned prehistoric social milieu. It is worth noting that warrior's equipment also played a crucial role in establishing and maintaining one's identity, be it in life or death. The abundance of arrowheads, as well as different kinds of implements suited for close combat, testifies to this assumption. *Warriorhood*, defined as a collective identity related to the actual engagement in the physical activity of fighting and the sum of material and non-material culture that emerges around it, was probably one of the key factors in the development of inter- and intrasocial relations in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC (Schulting 2013; Vandkilde 2013). With access to the data regarding not only the quantity and quality of grave goods, but also biological (sex, age, potential signs of *trauma*, overall state of health, etc.) and cultural (body orientation, arrangement of limbs) characteristics of the burials, one can analyse the correlations between these traits and produce a robust, bio-archaeological basis for the reconstruction of identity. This, in turn, could be compared to different kinds of data, e.g. that derived from social anthropology, psychology, and so on. While human culture changed dynamically over centuries, basic psychological responses to some external factors, for example confrontation with an enemy, remained the



same. Therefore, the description of modern soldiers' experiences on the battlefield and their reactions to the atrocities of war represents a potential source of knowledge for understanding the nature of conflict in prehistory. With an interregional database storing multidimensional data about Corded Ware culture burial rituals, one can come up with valuable remarks relating not only to *warriorhood*, given here merely as an example, but also other social roles or identities. The reviewed work represents a remarkable source for such analyses, as it focuses on the thorough and detailed presentation of data. Nevertheless, the interpretational part, whilst solid, could be elaborated more.

The second part of the reviewed book consists of seven additional papers in which the results of more specialised analyses are presented and discussed. The first one relates to petrographic analyses, conducted in order to identify mineral composition of ceramics and particular admixtures utilized during their production. According to the author's conclusions, ceramic vessels found in Mirocin and Szczytna, despite their spatial adjacency and many similarities in terms of morphology, were made of different ceramic fabrics.

The next article summarizes the results of the macroscopic analysis of flint artefacts documented on sites 24 and 27 in Mirocin. Materials are presented in a logical manner; their description is detailed and clear. However, the part related to social interpretation raises some doubts. These especially concern the suggestion that at least two arrowheads found in graves 50 and 110 could be interpreted as potential signs of *warfare*-related trauma. The first one was located near the heel of an individual. The second was unearthed during the exploration of the burial pit's fill and therefore does not represent an intentional deposit. Nonetheless, according to the author's opinion, the fact that it was made of radiolarite suggests that an alien, and apparently hostile group used it against the individual buried in Mirocin. Obviously both these interpretations are controversial. In the first case, there is no direct spatial relation between the arrowhead and the remains of the deceased. It was not embedded in the bone, nor did it bear any signs on its surface indicating that it had been stuck in soft tissue. The presence of a loose arrowhead in a burial pit is even less informative and therefore more difficult to associate with an act of interpersonal violence. The assessment of its intensity only on the basis "zamiast "of the presence or absence of prehistoric violence only on the basis of the occurrence of arrowheads in more or less ambiguous burial contexts is often misleading, as thoroughly explained by R. B. Ferguson in one of his papers on pre-state *warfare* (2013). What is

more, at the end of his article the author claims that the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC was a period of recurring conflicts. This is an interesting remark, however the issue should be discussed with more caution. For example, according to Rick Schulting, the number of violence-related signs on skeletons decreased significantly during the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium in comparison to early and middle Neolithic (2013). This rather unexpected observation was interpreted in relation to R. Kelly's idea of *social substitutability* (Kelly 2000). In short, this means that with the emergence of a new social class of *warriors*, the intensity of violence decreased, as the actual activity of fighting had become limited to a group of particular individuals, and therefore ceased to affect the whole population. It is remarkable that a similar situation could be traced in materials associated with Corded Ware communities from Bohemia and Central Germany (Neubert *et al.* 2014). What is more, several *warfare*-related signs of trauma were also documented in a number of graves from the Małopolska Upland. These were almost exclusively associated with the burials of the "weapon-bearers" (Skrzyniecki 2018). One such trace was identified by Anita Szczepanek and discussed in her article, also included in the reviewed book. A male individual from grave 360, site 27, had a healed blunt depression on the left side of his skull. Almost identical injuries were recorded on skulls of males buried on the previously mentioned necropolises from Central Germany and Bohemia.

Other papers cover, *inter alia*, the analysis of faunal remains, archaeometallurgical studies of copper artefacts found in Mirocin, analysis of stable isotopes of carbon and nitrogen extracted from bone collagen of the deceased buried on both sites and, *last but not least*, an article presenting the latest results addressing the origin of individuals from Mirocin, identified on the basis of strontium isotope ratios. Without going into details, all of them provide a significant amount of invaluable information, which is an important step forward in the on-going struggle to better understand and reconstruct the ways of life of the Corded Ware people from both the local and pan-European perspective. This last, conclusive remark might be as well used to summarize the content of the whole book. On one hand, it represents a traditional, descriptive approach to analysis of archaeological record. On the other, it relies on the most up-to-date analytical methods. Whilst it is not revolutionary, it provides a solid basis for future research. To sum up, in this book tradition and modernity complement one another amazingly well, which is a goal that is often difficult to achieve. Therefore, the reviewed publication, despite some minor flaws, deserves recognition.

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