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Descendants of Great Ancestors? Corded Ware Culture Barrows in Trzciniec Circle Cultural Landscapes

Przemysław Makarowicz[a]

The paper focuses on the influence of the Corded Ware culture barrow landscape on the rise of barrow building among Trzciniec Cultural circle communities. It presents a research thesis that explains the mechanisms of the trans-cultural and "timeless" impact of "Corded" mounds, which formed part of the cultural landscape of east-central European uplands in the 2nd millennium BC. The barrows of both cultures certainly combined several functions. They were burial grounds not only where ancestors lay, but also boundary markers defining the familiar area. "Corded Ware" monuments and their arrangements were a source of inspiration and imitation for "Trzciniec" arrivals. The revival of kurgan building by these newcomers and their use of earthen mounds as instruments for asserting their rights to a specific territory, can be viewed a sort of "posthumous heritage" left behind by Corded Ware communities.

KEY-WORDS: Corded Ware culture, Trzciniec Cultural circle, barrow, kurgan, barrows' arrangements, cultural landscape, newcomers, impact, under-mound space

INTRODUCTION

In the late 5th and 4th millennia BC, across the vast expanses of Europe, new architectural monuments – round barrows – began to stand out against the landscape. Their origins are related to the pre-Yamna cultures of the Eurasian steppes, but their successive dispersal in the Carpathian Basin and the Balkans and then central and western part of the continent in the late 4th and early 3rd millennia BC is owed to Yamna culture and Corded Ware culture (CWC) communities (Kośko 1997; Rassamakin 1997: 360–362; 2002: 61; Kruk and Milisauskas 1999; Włodarczak 2006: 156–158; 2011; 2021; Anthony 2007; Kowalewska-Marszałek and Włodarczak 2011; Furholt 2014).

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Fig. 1. Spatial range of the Corded Ware culture. After Cunliffe 2011.

Leaving aside the mechanisms that brought these communities to life as it were, it is certain that in a short time, spanning only a few generations, the CWC, owing to its mobility and a new type of socio-organization, settled the lands stretching between the Volga and the Rhine rivers (Fig. 1; see Sulimirski 1968; Machnik 1979; Buchvaldek 1986; Siemen 1997; Furholt 2003; 2014; Włodarczak 2006: 156–158; Kristiansen *et al.*, 2017; Nordquist and Heyd 2020). Moreover, it disseminated spectacular ritual behaviour and attractive models of material culture among local Late Neolithic communities. Further, the CWC developed an entirely new type of individualised elites, standing in contrast to the rather egalitarian and collectivist elites of earlier stable groups, relying on the parallel forms of farming and animal raising economy. Extended barrow cemeteries, and with time also flat ones, frequently standardised furniture in "flat" burials and those under mounds. The main characteristics of this cultural formation are a binary division into male and female roles and a social structure dominated by groups of men endowed with a clear hunter/warrior identity, and both of these features are often reflected in inventories of grave goods (e.g., Vandkilde 2006: 410–417; Szmyt and Czebreszuk 2010; Furholt 2014).



Fig. 2. Spatial range of the Trzciniec Cultural circle. After Makarowicz 2010a.

In the 18th century BC, about 300 years after CWC communities had built their last barrows on the uplands of east-central Europe, there appeared Trzciniec cultural circle (TCC) groups (Fig. 2; Makarowicz 2011: fig. 1; Jarosz and Włodarczak 2022). Their presence in this area is explained well by the conception of migrations from the north – from the lowlands (Kempisty 1978: 404; Górski 1996: 207f.; Górski and Kadrow 1996; Makarowicz 2010a: 372; 2010b; 2011; Chyleński *et al.*, 2023). The new cultural formation represented the type of polymorphic culture, visible in TCC communities flexibly adjusting to almost any conditions, penetrating different types of landscape, and successfully subsisting on farming and animal raising, by supplementing this dual economy with foraging strategies. However, their social structure and funerary rituals, and thus the ideological and mental spheres of their life, were absolutely conservative. Egalitarian social relations were organized by strictly followed kinship rules and the division of labour depending on sex (Makarowicz 2010a). For several hundred years, these communities laid out barrow and "flat" cemeteries, built single and collective graves, cremated and inhumed their dead, and interred them keeping the anatomical order or dismembering corpses (Makarowicz

2010a: 263–269; Górski 2017). The status and rank of the dead – especially in predominant collective graves – were rarely underscored with grave goods. The most intriguing aspect of the funerary ritual was the fact that barrow raising was unknown in the oldest phase of the TCC on the lowlands. In the uplands, it was started only in the classic phase by "Trzciniec" colonists, which is borne out by radiocarbon dates and the examination of materials from barrows (Górski 1996; 2007; Makarowicz 2010a; 2010b; 2011; Makarowicz *et al.*, 2021).

This paper gives a brief comparison of "Corded" and "Trzciniec" barrows, focusing on their construction, spatial arrangement, function and funerary ritual elements. The greatest emphasis, however, is laid on the impact of the CWC barrow landscape on the rise of barrow building among TCC communities in the 2nd millennium BC. This custom was of utmost importance for the "taming" of the east-central European uplands by the northern migrants.

STRUCTURE AND UNDERGROUND BARROW DESIGN

Generally speaking, TCC barrows are usually larger than CWC ones. This regularity is noticed mainly on the Lesser Poland Upland, the Roztocze region and in the drainage basin of the upper Dnister (Kempisty 1978; Machnik 1979; Kruk and Milisauskas 1999; Machnik *et al.*, 2006a; 2006b; 2006c; 2011; Włodarczak 2006; Górski and Jarosz 2007: 243, 245; Makarowicz 2010a: 375; Kowalewska-Marszałek and Włodarczak 2011; Makarowicz *et al.*, 2016; Szczepanek *et al.*, 2022). This can be explained in two ways. One interpretation involves the state of preservation of barrows. CWC monuments were often more damaged due to natural factors and human activity (deforestation, terrain levelling by ploughing, etc.). The other relies on actual differences in size between such mounds. Many observations of barrows of both cultures located in the same environment, sometimes next to each other, suggest that the latter explanation is more plausible (Makarowicz 2010a).

Communities of both cultures used a similar way of barrows' raising (Table 1). They were built from "bricks" of sod (turf) and earth cut from the ground close to the monument and arranged in layers next to each other (Hildebrandt-Radke *et al.*, 2019), hence sometimes, around barrows, semi-circular, crescent or circular depressions were formed, ditches several metres wide. In some places, they are noticeable until today. Barrows were built usually on the ancient ground but their construction was preceded by ground-preparing rituals: levelling and smoothing of the surface and cleaning it with fire (e.g., Florek and Taras 2003; Makarowicz 2010a; Jarosz 2011: 258).

Table 1. Comparison of Corded Ware culture and Trzciniec Cultural circle barrows

Characteristic	Corded Ware Culture	Trzciniec Cultural Circle
Topography	Higher grounds, elevations on higher or meadow terraces, promontories	Higher grounds, elevations on higher or meadow terraces, promontories
Spatial arrangement	Individual occurrence or in pairs, linear and linear-group arrangements	Individual occurrence or in pairs, less often in threes, linear and linear-group arrangements
Construction	Turf blocks and soil taken from the immediate environs, usually multi-layer	Turf blocks taken from the immediate environs, usually multi-layer
Primary function	Sepulchral	Sepulchral
'Secondary' functions	Boundary markers, social functions	Boundary markers, social functions, religious functions
Ground-level and underground design	Occurrence of graves, cenotaphs, hearths, bonfires, pits, ditches, palisades, ritual structures	Occurrence of graves, cenotaphs, hearths, bonfires, charred layers, ritual structures
Kinds of graves	Simple pits, timber structures, rarely stone or timber-stone structures	Simple pits, timber structures, stone and timber-stone structures ("mortuary houses")
Grave location and orientation	In the centre of a barrow as a rule; incidental accompanying burials; dominant orientation: E-W	In the centre of a barrow or in other portions; rarely accompanying burials; dominant orientation: NW-SE
Kinds of burials	Individual burials – dominant, collective burials – incidental Sex of deceased: male – dominant	Individual and collective Sex of decedased: male, female and children
Ritual structures	Ditches with a palisade	Various non-grave timber and stone structures
Manner of disposing of the dead	Inhumation – a dominant rule, anatomical order	Inhumation and cremation, anatomical and non-anatomical order, corpse dismemberment
Categories of grave goods	Grave goods showing identity, personal and individualized	Few grave goods for the selected dead. Goods showing identity or sex. In collective burials: depersonalization and de-individualization of grave goods
Funerary rituals	Funerary feasts: libations? Ritual destruction of vessels, consumption of meals, burning of fires	Funerary feasts: libations? Ritual destruction of vessels, consumption of meals, burning of fires

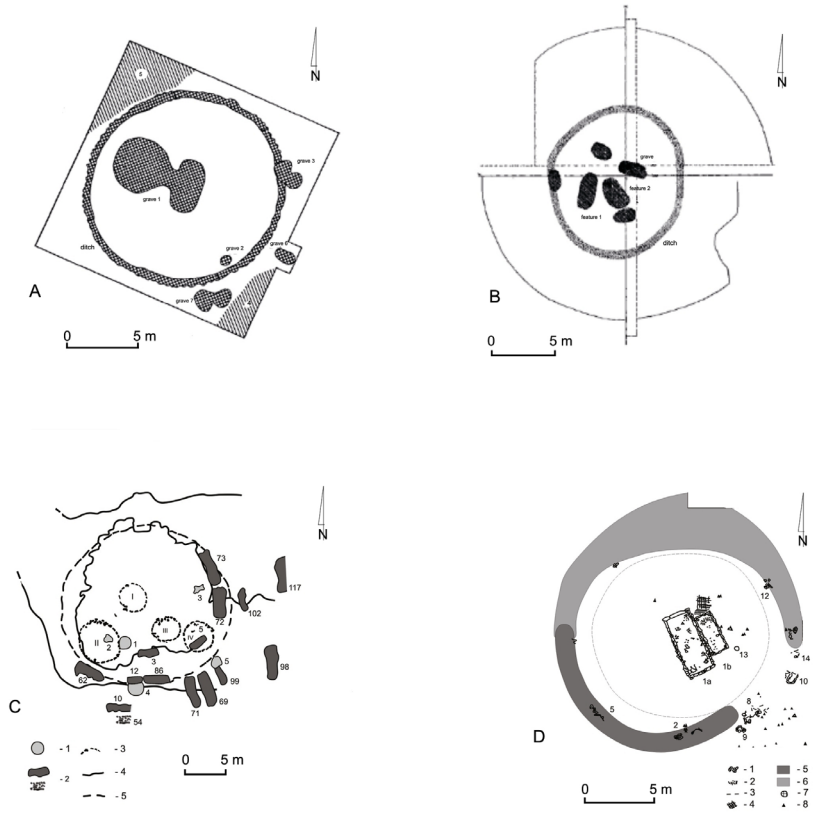


Fig. 3. Structures under the barrows of the Corded Ware culture (A, B) and the Trzciniec Cultural circle (C, D): A – Pałecznica, Lesser Poland Upland. 1 – primary grave; 2, 3, 6, 7 – secondary graves of the Corded Ware culture, 4, 5 – other features. After Włodarczak 2006; B – Średnia, barrow 2, Lesser Poland Upland. After Jarosz 2011; B–C – Żerniki Górne, site 1, Lesser Poland Upland. After Włodarczak 1998; Makarowicz 2010a. 1 – pit; 2 – grave; 3 – stone circle; 4 – present-day limit of the mound; 5 – reconstructed limit of the mound. D – Dacharzów, site 1, Sandomierz Upland. 1 – stones; 2 – human bones; 3 – original barrow limit; 4 – traces of ploughing; 5 – ditch; 6 – site from where earth was dug for the mound; 7 – trace of a post; 8 – pottery and pottery fragments. After Florek and Taras 2003; Makarowicz 2010a.

Trzciniec circle barrows were usually built in a single effortalbeit a long-lasting one – by the whole local community (a lineage?); they were enlarged only sometimes by putting more earth on top, in particular, when a subsequent grave was sunk into the mound (Górski 1996: 208; Makarowicz 2010a: 370f.; 2010b; Makarowicz and Kochkin 2025).

In the mounds and in the space beneath CWC and TCC barrows, many features can be found which together make up a peculiar "sub-barrow landscape" (Fig. 3). Common features consist of graves (including mortuary houses and cenotaphs) and non-grave ones: the relics of funeral feasts and accompanying rituals, leaving behind broken vessels, post-consumption animal bones, charred layers, hearths, fires and various pits. Corded Ware kurgans have also ditches and palisades marking the original mound range and separating the spheres of the sacred and the profane (Czebreszuk and Szmyt 2011: 123f.; Jarosz 2011: 260; Bourgeois 2013). This custom has not been observed in the case of TCC monuments. In turn, Trzciniec circle barrows are occasionally accompanied by complex ritual structures of a non-grave nature (stone and timber ones), deposits of vessels, as well as animal burials frequently keeping the anatomical order (Górski 2008; Makarowicz 2010a: 253–262; Makarowicz *et al.*, 2016; Makarowicz and Kochkin 2025).

CWC graves, generally single ones, were most often located in the centre of a barrow. Rare secondary funeral features were sunk into various mound sections. There was a clear opposition between the primary (central, the most important) burial and secondary ("minor", later) burials (Furholt 2014). Rectangular or oval grave pits with rounded corners were oriented E–W (most frequently) as well as SW–NE or NW–SE. Inside, there were timber protective structures: log ones, planking or coffins (Włodarczak 2022). Sometimes, these features resembled mortuary houses: they consisted of four posts supporting a wooden roofing. Several observations (state of preservation of bones, stratigraphy) indicate that barrows were not built immediately after interring the dead. Graves must have been left open for some time. Usually, prior to the building of the mound, the timber structure was burnt down (Jarosz 2011: 261f.).

TCC funerary features are usually found in various sectors of the barrow (including its centre). Rectangular or oval graves were oriented NW–SE or NE–SW, less often N–S and E–W. Next to simple pits, barrows hid funeral features with burnt timber structures; graves containing stone or stone-timber elements were fewer. Inner containment in grave pits, taking the form of "planking" or coffins, is evidenced by the regular shape of bone "piles" in many collective graves and their relatively identical distance from the walls. TCC barrow cemeteries are known to include the relics of mortuary houses comprising several posts supporting a roof (Makarowicz 2010a; 2019). As in the case of the CWC, such features were often burnt prior to building a mound. Until then, they were accessible, which was quite important because of the dominant practice of collective funerary rituals (successive burying of the dead in the one grave; Makarowicz 2010a: 228–242; Makarowicz *et al.*, 2021).

SPATIAL ARRANGEMENTS AND CONTINUITY OF OCCURRENCE SITES

Barrows built by the communities of both cultural groupings stand out against the landscape, their mounds are visible from a distance even today. In most cases the numbers of these monuments are underestimated, since originally there must have been several times more barrows. Many have been destroyed due, above all, to intensive land cultivation, deforestation and urbanization.

CWC features were built in prominent places, usually on top of hills, on watersheds, along upland edges, and on the higher grounds of meadow terraces (Table 1). These areas were partially deforested, which is attested by palynological indicators, for instance, in the upper Dnister drainage area (Harmata *et al.*, eds 2013; Makarowicz and Kochkin 2025). Barrows form chains consisting of several barrows, often over a dozen or even several dozen mounds differing in size (both in height and diameter) and age (Fig. 4). The distances between them vary from several to several dozen metres (Sulimirski 1968). As a rule, the largest kurgans occupied a central position within a linear-group arrangement (Jarosz 2011: 256f.). Occasionally, "Corded" mounds occur also alone or in pairs (Fig. 5; Makarowicz 2010b: 205–208).

In the western part of TCC, barrows occurred solitarily, sometimes in pairs (relatively close to each other) rarely in threes, often in the vicinity of settlements placed on the same terrain form, but always above them (Fig. 6; Górski 1996). Only in the upper Dnister basin do they form large groups that had linear or linear-group arrangements which followed hill ridges for several hundred metres up to several kilometres (Sulimirski 1968; Makarowicz *et al.*, 2016; 2019). They stood on elevations (on summits or close to them), along watersheds and upland edges or on the higher grounds of meadow terraces. However, they are virtually absent from floodplains. They often consist of over a dozen (up to several dozen) monuments clustered in several groups. In some instances, smaller barrows were built around larger ones; there are also examples of double barrows (Romaniszyn *et al.*, 2021). Their chronology varies (see also: Makarowicz 2010a: 372f.; 2010b; 2011; Makarowicz *et al.*, 2019).

Sometimes the "Trzciniec" barrows were built over the older "Corded Ware" mounds. For instance in Miernów, Barrow I, Lesser Poland Upland, the first activity was the deposition of vessels on the surface of an older monument (Górski 2010). In TCC monuments in Bukivna, on the upper Dnister, vessels were sometimes deposited on the edge of space later covered by the mound (Makarowicz *et al.*, 2013; Makarowicz and Kochkin 2025). Sometimes, TCC graves were sunk into the mounds of older barrows. What else is frequently observed is the introduction

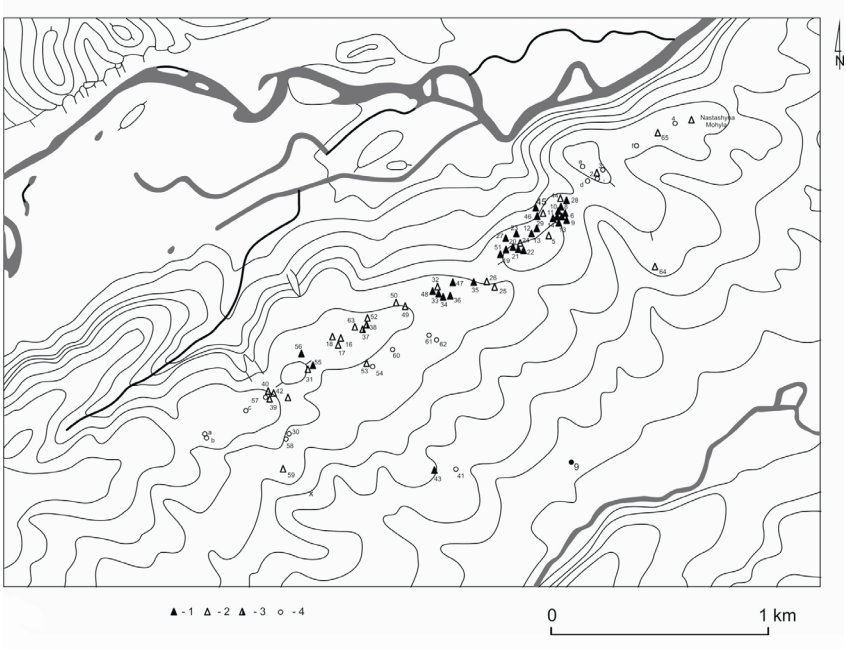


Fig. 4. Relationships between barrows in Komarów, Podolia Upland: 1 – Trzciniec Cultural circle (TCC) barrows; 2 – Corded Ware culture (CWC) barrows; 3 – CWC barrows with secondary TCC burials; 4 – barrows of unknown chronology. After Sulimirski 1968; Makarowicz 2010b.

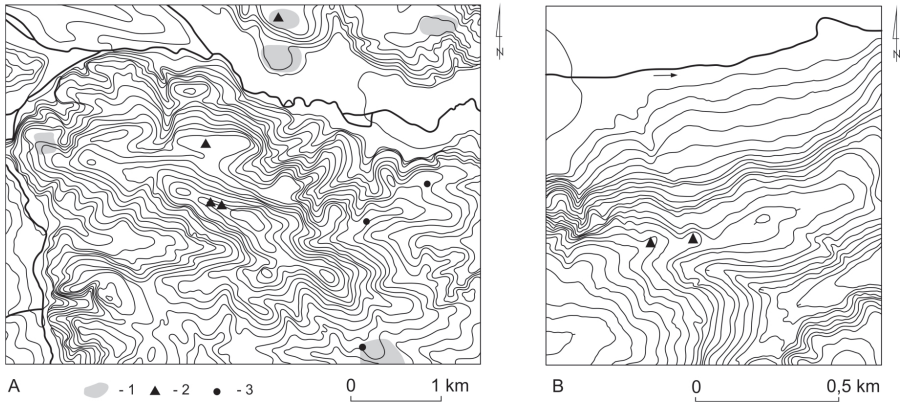


Fig. 5. Arrangements of Corded Ware culture (CWC) barrows. A – Koniusza, Lesser Poland Upland. 1 – TRB settlements; 2 – barrows; 3 – other CWC graves. B – Dobrocice, Sandomierz Upland. After Machnik 1979; Makarowicz 2010b.

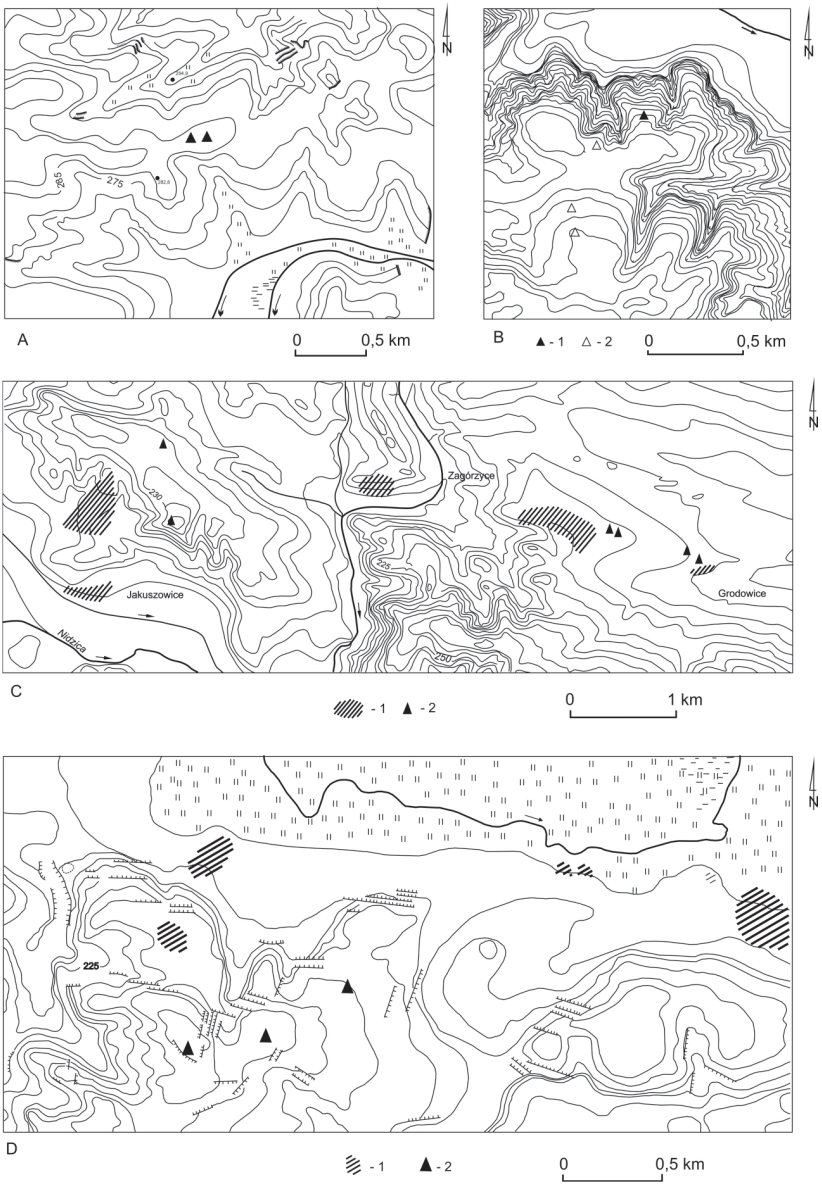


Fig. 6. Arrangements of Trzciniec Cultural circle barrows in Lesser Poland and Sandomierz Uplands. A – Rosiejów; B – Dacharzów, site 1; C – neighbourhood of Jakuszowice, Zagórzyce and Grodowice: 1 – settlement; 2 – barrow; D – neighbourhood of Proszowice: 1 – settlement; 2 – barrow. After Makarowicz 2010b.

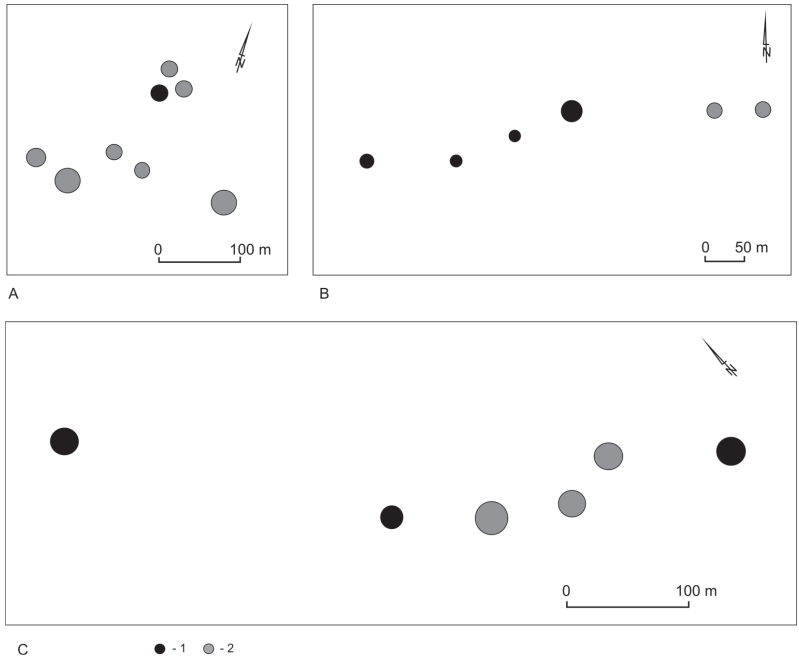


Fig. 7. Relationships between Corded Ware culture (2) and Trzciniec Cultural circle (1) barrows in Podolia Upland A. Kołpiec, B. Krasów, C. Sarniki. After Sulimirski 1968; Makarowicz 2010b.

of TCC monuments in the linear and linear-group arrangements of CWC barrows erected earlier (Fig. 7; Makarowicz 2010b: 204–208, 210). We witness this practice in the TCC eastern province, in particular on the Podilla and Volhyn uplands as well as in the drainage of the upper and middle Dnister (Makarowicz *et al.*, 2016; 2019). It is also encountered in the TCC western province, specifically on the Lesser Poland and Lublin uplands and in Roztocze (e.g., on the hilltops of the Grzęda Sokalska ridge). The same may be true for some barrow cemeteries and single barrows (in most cases, of unknown chronology) recorded on the loess soils of the Sandomierz-Opatów region (Florek 2011). Hence, the rule of continuation of burial places was very clear. TCC barrows were raised in the places which had already been included in the sacred space centuries earlier.

Thus it can be claimed that barrow clusters of both cultures represented a mental map of a sort, that they were a record – written by the community – of individual and collective history and were built over several dozen generations in each of the cultural units under discussion (Ślusarska 2007).

FUNCTIONS/ROLES OF BARROWS

In the literature, one can encounter opinions that barrows had various functions in the social life of both the CWC and TCC (Table 1; e.g., Bourgeois 2013; Arnoldussen and Drenth 2015; Makarowicz *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, their role certainly had more than one dimension. Whereas, in the case of "Corded" societies, the primary function of barrows – as a special type of graves for men, mainly for a single individual, is widely recognized (e.g., Włodarczak 2006; 2022; Furholt 2014), the same is not as obvious in the case of "Trzciniec" populations. TCC barrows often covered collective graves holding the remains of men, women and children (Górski 1996; Makarowicz 2010a). Unquestionably, the main reason behind raising another barrow by CWC communities was the death of a member of the group. It seems that in most cases "Trzciniec" communities too built barrows to bury people under them. However, in both cultures, only a fraction of their populations was buried under barrows. These monuments could become markers only secondarily, owing to their visibility in the landscape and peculiar spatial arrangement, defining the bounds of area of interest of a given community (lineage?), asserting their rights to the area they occupied, and setting the boundaries of the "tamed" universe. Their linear and group-linear arrangement, observed in both cultures, can be taken to be a metaphor of succession or the continuity of generations of lineages/families. The funeral function, as the resting place of the ancestors and progenitors of a lineage or a family, or their outstanding members, corresponded no doubt with their secondary "role", namely, the defining of the settled area and signalling from a distance, through their monumental form, the territorial claims of particular group. For Trzciniec circle communities, a barrow occasionally formed part of a larger ritual complex, having a sacred and sepulchral nature (e.g., Żerniki Górne, Lesser Poland Upland; Kempisty 1978; Włodarczak 1998; Makarowicz 2010a: 221f.).

The occurrence of barrows on the elevations of watersheds or on higher grounds within valley terraces or around strategic communication hubs suggests also their potential connection with long- and short-distance transit routes. Barrows may have marked the places/zones of entrance onto routes or only may have shown directions to those who travelled over long distances (Makarowicz 2009).

For both cultures, kurgans were important elements of a settlement network around which social and ritual life concentrated. Because of the ephemeral nature of settlements and high mobility of CWC communities in east-central Europe, barrows would have served as major reference points in space and the centres of socio-religious life in and around which a group's history and mythology spun. "Trzciniec" barrows, often built next to settlements, at a distance varying from less than a hundred

or up to several hundred metres away, were always located on landforms situated higher than neighbouring settlements (Górski 1996; Makarowicz *et al.*, 2019). In the classic phase of the TCC, there appeared long-lasting settlements, developing over many construction phases and occasionally spanning hundreds of years, which stabilised the "Trzciniec" settlement network by creating an additional permanent component of the settled space (Górski 1996; Makarowicz 2010a). Barrows, however, remained important elements of the ritual space, communally built and long used. They were cosmologic and myth-making centres where the present met the past (Ślusarska 2007). Covered with mounds, collective graves were sometimes used for 200–300 years (Makarowicz *et al.*, 2021). As an example may serve a barrow in Polesie on the Bzura River, central Poland, which was used over many generations (Górski *et al.*, 2011: 143f.). Hence, the barrows of both cultures may be considered, in the first place, to have been the physical and visible markers of the metaphysical and invisible presence of ancestors. The visibility of barrow constructions was also used for purposes going beyond funeral functions but generally related to the socio-political aspect of life in a given community.

FUNERARY RITUALS

Both CWC and TCC societies practised unusually complex rites of passage related to the preparation of the burial ground, construction of graves, deposition of the dead and grave goods, building a mound and forming the space above the mound, funeral feasts and accompanying rituals and ceremonies (Table 1).

The "Corded" barrow funerary rituals were dominated by inhumation (Furholt 2014; Włodarczak 2022). As a rule, the dead were interred individually, in the contracted position, mainly on the right side, rarely on the left. Other cases, paired and collective burials, are sporadic. Burials were accorded to adult men; male juveniles and children only rarely were granted this privilege. Sometimes, no burial is recorded in a barrow, which may suggest that it was a "symbolic" mound, a cenotaph or a non-funeral ritual feature. It is also possible of course, that in such cases, due to unfavourable conditions (e.g., high soil acidity) no bones have survived (Jarosz 2011).

Not all the dead were given grave goods; neither are grave goods entirely standardised. They are dominated by vessels (beakers or amphorae) with stone battle-axes, flint axes, blade knives, blades or archer tackle sets being less frequent. Men laid to rest on the left side were not furnished with battle-axes, but were given axes (Włodarczak 2006; Jarosz 2011; Furholt 2014; Szczepanek *et al.*, 2022). It can be said that grave goods given to most men buried in graves covered with barrows were personalised

and identified them as warriors (warriors/hunters) or potential warriors – male children and juveniles (Vandkilde 2006).

TCC societies buried their deacesed in barrows uncremated; however, they did practise cremation *in situ* as well. Occasionally, corpses were only partially burnt and dismembered (fragmentary burials), with some bones being placed in the graves of other individuals. The dead were buried individually or collectively in anatomical order or not. A burial in a barrow grave was accorded to individuals of both sexes as well as to children (Makarowicz 2010a: 246f.; Górski 2017).

Only a few individuals were furnished with grave goods. In the case of collective burials, because of the moving of bones of those who died earlier, it is rarely possible to attribute a specific object to a given individual. In such situations, it can be said that grave goods were depersonalised and de-individualised. Possibly, in the case of mass burials, grave goods were rather the "property" of the group ("collective gifts") than a specific deceased individual within the group. In collective barrow graves, virtually the same kinds of objects are recorded as in single sepulchral features (Makarowicz 2010a: 269–276; Górski 2017).

In the "Trzciniec" funerary ritual, the dead were sometimes furnished with objects of a specific type (function), depending on the sex and age of the people buried. Certain categories of grave goods were specific to men: insignia of power (bronze diadems, gold rings and weapons). The last-mentioned category included daggers, battle-axes, axes, javelins, and archery equipment. Grave goods placed in "female" graves were dominated by vessels, bronze hand and leg ornaments (bracelets, armlets, shin ornaments), which often came in pairs (worn on both legs or hands), and dress ornaments (pins). Interestingly enough, some categories of grave goods found in child and juvenile graves are related to their sex (Makarowicz 2010a; Górski 2017).

"TRZCINIEC" SOCIETIES AND THE LANDSCAPE OF BARROWS ON THE EAST-CENTRAL EUROPEAN UPLANDS

A framework for interpreting the adoption of round mounds by "Trzciniec" communities may be established through an examination of how populations of the Trzciniec Cultural Circle in the upper Vistula and upper Dnister basins embraced the tradition of barrow construction. In these upland settings, such groups represented an intrusive element within the local cultural landscape (Kempisty 1978; Górski and Kadrow 1996; Makarowicz 2010a). From the standpoint of archaeological classification, their material culture displays the diagnostic attributes of the classic phase. In their northern homeland, stretching between the lower and middle Vistula, the Neman, and

the upper Pripet basins, these communities had not practised barrow construction (Makarowicz 2010b: 208; 2011). However, while migrating southward in successive stages, they may have encountered and observed "Corded" barrows on their route toward the uplands.

Upon their arrival on the Lesser Poland Upland (prior to 1700 BC) and within the upper Dnister basin (shortly after 1800 BC?), the TCC communities could interact solely with local populations of the Mierzanowice culture, who generally did not construct barrows (except for the so-called Gródek-Zdolbytsa group in Volhynia and Podolia; Kadrow and Machnik 1997). Initially, the northern newcomers established their settlements in environmental zones distinct from those inhabited by Mierzanowice groups (Górski and Kadrow 1996). Nonetheless, round earthen mounds were present in those territories, constructed earlier by populations belonging to the "traditionalist" branch of the CWC (Machnik 1979; Kruk and Milisauskas 1999). The latest Corded barrows, dated to the end of the 3rd millennium BC, are known from the upper Dnister drainage area; in the upper Vistula region, this practice had ceased even earlier (Jarosz and Włodarczak 2022; Makarowicz and Kochkin 2025). A few centuries (approximately 300 years) separated the decline of Corded Ware groups from the emergence of early Trzciniec societies in these areas (Jarosz and Włodarczak 2022). Consequently, direct contact between both cultural formations was impossible. The adoption of the "Corded" custom of barrow construction by Trzciniec populations, therefore, occurred without physical interaction, but by imitation through observation of the spatial distribution and form of the older CWC barrows. These "Corded" kurgans would have been highly visible to TCC settlers approaching from the north, as they were typically positioned in prominent landscape locations, particularly on hilltops along watersheds. Palynological and pedological evidence confirms that these terrains were deforested at that time (Harmata *et al.*, 2013; Makarowicz and Kochkin 2025). Hence, in numerous instances, Trzciniec communities consciously reproduced the practices of Corded Ware populations. What played a crucial role in this emulation was the perpetuation of an older tradition of ritual topography, one of using and re-using sacred/funereal places. Although "Corded" mounds primarily served as burial monuments, their spatial layouts suggest that they also functioned as orientation landmarks and territorial markers, with their linear and grouped configurations symbolically expressing the continuity of descent lines and broader community bonds.

The incoming Trzciniec populations may have understood the symbolic significance originally associated with the "Corded" tradition of raising barrows, or alternatively, may have reproduced it more mechanically, re-inscribing their own social and cultural presence into a pre-existing (*in illo tempore*) ritualised landscape.

Numerous barrows scattered across the upland zones, especially in the upper Vistula and upper Dnister catchments, might have evoked for TCC colonists memories of "Corded" mounds known from their northern lowland homeland. The Trzciniec societies could have adopted barrow building as a means of differentiating themselves from Mierzanowice culture populations, who in turn refrained from such practices to emphasise their distance from the conservative "Corded" tradition (Kruk and Milisauskas 1999). Although difficult to verify, the hypothesis of deliberate imitation seems more convincing. By embracing the custom, the Trzciniec groups could have sought to legitimise their occupation of new lands and to visually assert their distinctiveness (their "ethnicity") in contrast to the indigenous inhabitants. Barrows, as tangible and visible monuments, would have expressed this identity while simultaneously serving as burial sites, often containing both individual and collective interments of men, women, and children. The architectural elaboration of some mounds, as well as the presence of rich grave inventories, testifies to the high social status of certain individuals or lineages (Makarowicz *et al.*, 2021). The construction of barrows in linear sequences on deforested watershed elevations also points to communication corridors that probably followed those same ridges (Makarowicz *et al.*, 2019). The mounds merely marked the general routes, paths (rather than formal roads), that consisted of broad landscape zones facilitating, from the early 2nd millennium BC onwards, the movement of people, livestock, goods, and probably wheeled vehicles as well (Makarowicz 2009).

If we accept the assumption that TCC groups, while progressing southward, saw the "Corded" barrows and were aware of their significance, we may imagine their initial astonishment upon encountering landscapes densely populated with such monuments. The few kurgans that they may have known from the northern plains (monumental relics of vaguely remembered predecessors, perhaps even ancestral figures), now appeared in striking abundance within their newly-occupied territories, especially in the upper Dnister region. The Mierzanowice communities, in contrast, showed no particular interest in them. They were egalitarian and territorially organised, residing in large settlements and using communal cemeteries within settlement microregions located in landscape zones distinct from the barrow areas (Górski and Kadrow 1996; Kadrow 2001). On the contrary, anthropological, genetic and funerary data indicate that TCC societies were organised along kinship or lineage lines (Makarowicz 2010a: 293; Chyleński *et al.*, 2023), resembling in this respect the social structures of Corded Ware groups.

Scholarly literature has not addressed the motivations behind the southward movement of Trzciniec communities. However, the dense concentration of settlement sites in their lowland homeland suggests that demographic pressure in regions

of poor soils – between the middle Vistula, upper Pripet, and middle Neman rivers – may have triggered an ecological crisis (Makarowicz 2010b; Górski 2017). The fertile loess and chernozem soils of the uplands thus became highly desirable. Competition for access to these productive lands must have arisen among migrant families and lineages advancing from the north.

For any society settling in a new cultural environment, the preservation of identity – its continuity, distinctiveness, and internal cohesion – is paramount. These elements are typically maintained through rituals and ceremonial acts that reaffirm connections with the ancestors and the past. The building of barrows constitutes precisely such a practice. The adoption of mound construction may have represented a material expression of a new foundation myth, symbolically rooting the newcomers in their unfamiliar surroundings among the territorially organised Mierzanowice communities. The act of barrow building might be interpreted as a kind of foundation sacrifice (Górski 1996). By erecting kurgans in locations previously occupied by Corded Ware barrow clusters, TCC communities could have sought to appropriate the "pre-Mierzanowice" past to legitimise their claims to the land (Makarowicz 2010b). The continuation of "Corded" mound lines may have served as a deliberate statement, signaling to local populations that the newcomers were the heirs (self-proclaimed heirs) of the ancient settlers once inhabiting these lands. In this way, they usurped the right of succession and grounded their legitimacy in tradition, a principle carrying decisive weight in non-literate societies (Weber 2002). The colonisers thus presented themselves as descendants of the renowned Corded ancestors, perhaps even mythical progenitors. As noted earlier, Trzciniec mounds tend to be larger than those of the Corded Ware Culture, not simply due to poorer preservation of the latter. It seems that the Trzciniec builders sought not only to emulate their ancient predecessors but also to surpass them.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study advances a thesis explaining the mechanisms underlying the transcultural and "timeless" influence of Corded Ware barrows within the cultural landscape of the east-central European uplands.

Among both Corded Ware and Trzciniec communities, barrow construction was accompanied by elaborate rites of passage, reflected in the presence of graves and associated subsurface structures – sometimes of considerable complexity – as well as in traces of funerary feasting: hearths, animal bones, and fragmented vessels. Mounds were raised by extended kin groups or lineages in conspicuous positions within

the landscape: on or near hilltops and along watersheds, where they were visible from afar, their prominence often enhanced by deforestation. The Trzciniec builders followed earlier spatial patterns, arranging barrows in lines, clusters, or occasionally as solitary or paired monuments.

Barrows within both cultural systems fulfilled multiple roles. They served as burial places of ancestors and simultaneously as territorial markers delineating the oecumene, the domesticated, familiar space, distinguishing it from that of outsiders who did not build such monuments. For Trzciniec migrants arriving from the north, Corded Ware barrows and their spatial organisation provided both an inspiration and a model for imitation. The renewed practice of mound construction among the newcomers, and its use as a means of asserting territorial claims, can thus be interpreted as a remarkable instance of cultural landscape inheritance: a "posthumous heritage" transmitted from Corded Ware communities to their distant successors.

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