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UNIQUE STRUCTURE OF A MEGALITHIC TOMB OF THE FUNNEL BEAKER CULTURE FROM STRYCZOWICE, OSTROWIEC ŚWIĘTOKRZYSKI DISTRICT

ABSTRACT

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The cemetery of the Funnel Beaker culture at Stryczowice is situated in the Sandomierz Upland region. Three megalithic tombs and a flat cemetery were discovered and examined. The most well-preserved tomb is about 30 m long, and its plan has a trapezoidal shape. Its stone settings formed a kind of dry-stone wall – a phenomenon on a European scale. In the front part of this tomb, a central grave has been examined, consisting of two stone chests – one at ground level and the other built into the ground. In this second feature, fragments of a male skeleton were discovered. Around the central grave, six burials were uncovered. Each of the megalithic tombs were accompanied by a flat cemetery. Six graves and a stone pavement were excavated. The burial pits were constructed of low, stone chests. Some of the deceased were equipped with burial goods – collared flasks, a shaft-hole axe, re-touched flint blades, and some hematite lumps.

Keywords: Neolithic, Funnel Beaker culture, megalithic tombs, grave constructions, Sandomierz Upland
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The purpose of the article is to present one of the investigated megalithic tombs at the site VII in Stryczowice (Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district) – unique both within Poland and also on a European scale – as well as a description of its stone structure and the central grave within the chamber.

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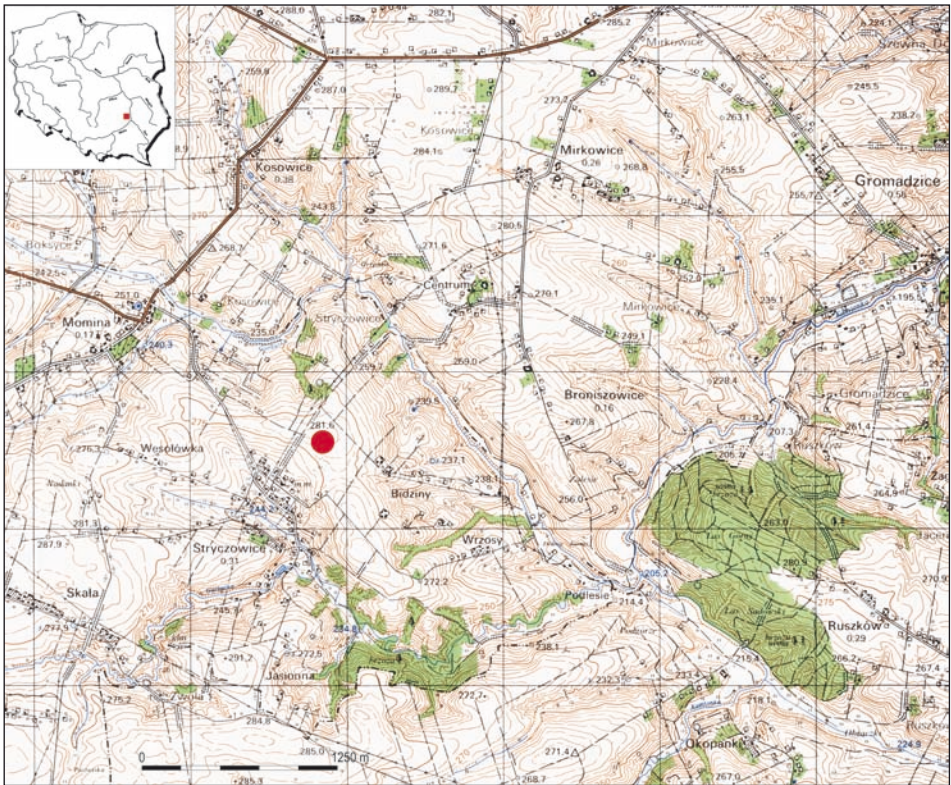


Fig. 1. Stryczowice, site VII, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district. Site location. Topographic map, map emblem Waśniów 144.41. Graphic design B. Sałacińska

The megalithic cemetery of the southeastern group of the Funnel Beaker culture (FBC) at Stryczowice is one of several objects of this type situated in the Sandomierz Upland region. The site is situated in the peak zone (Fig. 1) of a loess upland stretching between the valley of the Garbatka stream (in the south) and the Pokrzywianka stream (in the north-east), at a local, exposed culmination, on an elevation of 281.60 m. ($50^{\circ}52'22''\text{N } 21^{\circ}17'33''$). A picturesque landscape extends from the site, offering excellent conditions for an unobstructed 360-degree view, with a maximum visibility of up to 30 km in a straight line. In the south, the Jeleniowskie Mountain Range dominates, while the silhouette of Mount Łysa Góra in the Łysogóry Mountain Range attracts attention in the west. About 25 km to the north-west, the distant hills of the Sieradowickie Mountain Range, including Mount Sieradowska, can be observed. In the north-east, a forest appears, spreading out over the complex of prehistoric banded flint mines at Krzemionki Opatowskie, 18 km away. In the south-east, one can see the contour of the Sadowski Forest and the dip of the Opatówka

River valley. Other megalithic cemeteries of the FBC, situated at Broniszowice and Garbacz-Skała, are well visible from the site. Preliminary archaeoastronomical research related to the cultural landscape, spatial location and orientation of tombs, as well as the visibility between sepulchral sites and settlements in the microregion of Stryczowice, was conducted in the years 1997-1998 and 2000 by Stanisław Iwaniszewski (2000; 2006, fig. 1; 2016).

Excavations were conducted there by the authors of this article for six seasons between 1997 and 2004 (with interruptions, for a total of seven months). They were financed by the State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw and the Provincial Monument Conservator in Kielce. Help for the expedition was also provided by the authorities of the Waśniów commune. Approximately ten acres have been studied, revealing features of several cultures. Their results were partially published (Matraszek 2001; Matraszek and Sałaciński 2003; 2006).

Excavations were aimed at recognising the megalithic cemetery of the Funnel Beaker culture population. In the course of the excavations, features were explored related to the settlement of the communities of the Early Neolithic groups, as well as a culturally unidentified symbolic burial, a multiple burial (initially linked to the Trzciniec culture), and graves from an early medieval cemetery (initially dated to the XI-XII century, with traces of anti-vampire practices). During the archaeological work, a course of trenches from the Second World War was also noted (Fig. 2).

The cemetery of the FBC population consisted of three megalithic tombs and a flat cemetery. The tombs were oriented along a SE-NW axis, facing SE. The best preserved was megalithic tomb No. 1, which was situated between two other tombs – No. 2 and No. 3. It was partially destroyed by the construction of rifle-pits and today during fieldwork. Tombs Nos. 2 and 3 were recorded in fragmentary form only; they were heavily destroyed during construction of the symbolic grave in prehistory, and thereafter by graves from the early medieval burial ground, as well as by the extraction of stones disturbing the fieldwork.

Megalithic tomb No. 1 had a trapezoidal plan, but had been destroyed in its rear portion (Fig. 3). There was an antechamber in its front part. The length of the tomb was about 30 m, while the width of the inner front was 6.2 m, the width of the front of the antechamber – 5.2 m, the length of the antechamber – 1.5-2.2 m, and the width of the so-called “tail” part – 4.4 m.

The stone settings in tomb No. 1 were preserved to a height of about 60-80 cm. In the tail part they were the lowest as a result of the above-mentioned damage. They were made of stones selected on the basis of their size and shape, piled one on top of another, without mortar, forming a kind of “dry-stone wall” (Figs. 4, 5). In the best-preserved fragments, four layers of stone have survived, but of course, originally there were more. A portion of the stones forming the setting had slipped into the basin-like excavation pits (Matraszek and Sałaciński 2003; 2006, 236-238, Figs. 2-6). Stones vary in size, and can be divided into three categories based on size – large: up to 80-90 cm (50-90×34-40×19); medium:



Fig. 2. Stryczowice, site VII, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district. Combined features plan: a – Early Neolithic features; b – postholes; c – graves of the Funnel Beaker culture at the flat cemetery; d – graves of the Funnel Beaker culture in the megalithic tombs; e – grave of the Trzciniec culture; f – early medieval graves; g – grave number/skeleton number; h – tomb number/skeleton number.

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Fig. 3. Stryczowice, site VII, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district. Megalithic tomb No. 1, exploration work carried out in the area of the so-called "tail". Photo B. Sałacińska



Fig. 4. Stryczowice, site VII, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district. Fragment of the stone setting of tomb No. 1, stone row No. 1. Photo B. Sałacińska



Fig. 5. Stryczowice, site VII, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district. Exploration works in the front area of megalithic tomb No. 1 and the central grave (feature 38). View from SW. Photo. B. Sałacińska



Fig. 6. Stryczowice, site VII, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district. Exploratory works in the forehead area of megalithic tomb No. 1 and the central grave (feature 38). View from SE. Photo. B. Sałacińska

up to 50 cm (30-50×15-32×8-10); and small: up to 30 cm (10-30×10-16×6-10 cm). Mainly sandstones with a red, yellow, white, or sometimes an orange tint were used for construction of the stone structure of megalithic tomb No. 1. Rarely used were conglomerates, limestones and boulders of erratic origin such as granitoids, amphibolites, gneisses (Bąbel 2000; Wróblewski 2006). At the base of megalithic tomb No. 1, two stone settings were exposed, constituting two separate fronts (Fig. 6). The so-called outer front (outside of the structure) was separated from the inner one, dividing the central grave from the antechamber. The outer front structure consisted of end-jointed stones and large-sized stone slabs, which were probably originally placed vertically (Fig. 7). The inner face of tomb No. 1 was made of large sandstones set up vertically or overlapping. The preserved height of the stone setting of the inner tomb face reached 70 cm and consisted of five stone layers (Fig. 8).

Two trough-like excavations – were investigated between the three uncovered tombs, one on either side of tomb No. 1. The excavations measured from about 1 m to 2.3 m wide at the top, with a maximum depth of about 0.75 m to 1.1 m (Fig. 2). Their fills were stratified, showing evidence of bonfires in the frontal part of the tombs, as indicated by preserved clusters of charcoals and burnt layers of loess toward the bottoms of the pits.

During the archaeological excavations of megalithic tomb No. 1, a structure in the frontal part was unearthed, unique not only with respect to its stone settings, but also in terms



Fig. 7. Stryczowice, site VII, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district. The forehead area of megalithic tomb No. 1 with the central grave (feature 38). View from SE. Photo B. Sałacińska



Fig. 8. Stryczowice, site VII, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district. Internal face of megalithic tomb No. 1. View from SE. Photo. B. Sałacińska

of the central grave (feature No. 38). In the front part of this tomb, a central grave oriented on a SW-NE axis was examined. It had a double construction. It consisted of two stone cists; the first was laid on the original ground level, and the second was dug into the ground.

The cist founded on the original ground level was made of large sandstones, stacked on top of each other, overlapping, and covered with massive stone slabs. The outer dimensions of the cist were 1.45-1.75×2.6-2.9 m, and the interior dimensions were 0.9-1×2-2.2 m. Its preserved height reached up to about 60 cm. A stone pavement was uncovered at its base, below which another stone cist was discovered (Fig. 9).

The other cist, dug below the original surface level was built of flat sandstone slabs, less massive than those of the overground one. The internal dimensions of the cist were 0.9×2.1 m, with a height of about 30-40 cm (Fig. 10). It was only in such a cist that the deceased was buried, probably lying extended on his back, and oriented along a SW-NE axis, with the head to the SW (Fig. 11). Unfortunately, the skeleton preserved only in the form of fragments of the lower limb bones and some bones of a very massive cranium – of a male, *adultus* or *maturus* (Wróbel 2006). Unfortunately, the burial was devoid of grave equipment.

In our opinion, the double structure of the central grave cist combines two construction systems: a low cist made of stone slabs covered with stone pavement, which reflects the ideas visible in the flat cemetery and a cist of massive stacked stones, which repeats the construction of the stone settings of the megalithic tomb.



Fig. 9. Stryczowice, site VII, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district. Central grave (feature 38) – stone structure of the ground-based cist. Photo B. Sałacińska



Fig. 10. Stryczowice, site VII, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district. Central grave (feature 38) – ceiling of the cist dug into the ground. Photo B. Sałacińska

Toward the front of the megalithic tomb, 6 burials were discovered, located around the central grave (Fig. 2). There were two single burials – skeleton 5 male? aged 20-X and skeleton 2 woman, aged 20-30 years, as well as two double burials – children's skeleton 9 (aged 4 ± 1 years) and skeleton 10 (aged 7 ± 1 years), and the other with two adults, *matures* (skeletons 18 and 19). One individual burial (skeleton 22, adult) was also found located in the antechamber (Wróbel 2000; 2006). Two of the above described skeletons were destroyed during the digging of trenches during World War II. The dead were deposited inside the grave barrow. They were in an extended position laid on the ground. There were no traces of burial pits; only the double burial of children had a kind of “setting?” of two stones (granitoids; Matraszek and Sałaciński 2006, 238-241, fig. 7). In the double burials, the dead were laid oriented in opposite directions along the axis. These burials, like those in the central grave, were devoid of grave goods.

The orientation of burials corresponds to the orientation of the tomb, *i.e.* on a SE-NW axis. The woman was laid with her head towards the SE, facing SW; the man, whose skull did not preserve, was laid with his head to the NW; the children were laid alternately – one with its head to the SE, the second to the NW. On the other hand, the burials deposited between the central grave and the tomb face, as well as the one in the antechamber were oriented on a SW-NE axis. In the double burial of adults and the single burial in the ante-



Fig. 11. Stryczowice, site VII, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district. Central grave (feature 38) – a burial deposited into the in-ground cist. Photo B. Sałacińska

chamber (both burials destroyed by a rifle-pit) the dead were buried according to the orientation of the central grave, perpendicular to the stone settings of the tomb (Fig. 2).

The dead who were buried around the central grave were probably placed in the megalithic tomb at different times or in different seasons, as the skeletons were uncovered at different heights in relation to the original surface level. The double burial of children, as well as the burials of the adult woman and the adult man, were found at the height of the original level of the earth. The double burial of adults was located at the same height as the top of the ground-based cist from the central grave, in a cultural layer associated with the use of the tomb, including evidence of ceremonies related to the worship of the dead. In this layer a few charred human and animal bones were found, probably related to leftovers from funeral meals or other rituals.

The megalithic tombs were accompanied by a flat cemetery located to the SW (Fig. 2). On the burial ground, seven features (including 6 graves, and one stone pavement lacking a burial pit, burial goods and a skeleton) were uncovered. The graves were oriented along a N-S axis (grave No. 5 – male?, *maturus/senilis* or *senilis*; grave No. 6 – male?, *adultus/maturus*, pavement No. 8) and a W-E axis (grave No. 7A – adult *maturus I*; 7B – male, *maturus II*; 9 – female?, *maturus II*; 21 – adult, *senilis*; Matraszek and Sałaciński 2003; 2006, fig. 8). The burial pits each had a length of about 2 m, and a width of about 90 cm. The construction of the burial pits consisted of a low cist made of flat stone slabs (mainly sandstones, sometimes limestones). They were covered with a compact, multi-layered stone pavement with a thickness up to about 50 cm (Figs. 12, 13).

Some of the dead buried in the flat cemetery were equipped with collared flasks and flint tools (mostly retouched blades) of local Świeciechów flint as well as imported Volhynian flint. Grave No. 5 was the richest grave in terms of discovered grave goods. At the head of the deceased, a shaft hole axe with a knob-like poll was found, and on the left side at the height of the forearm (the hand was not preserved), lay flint tools (a retouched blade, a sickle inset of Volhynian flint and a flake of Volhynian flint). At the left hip (pelvis) a four-legged collared flask was placed, while by the right leg (at the height of the femur), a quartzite object (probably a quartz fire-starter) was found (Fig. 14). However, in grave No. 21 – the most destroyed feature in the flat cemetery – a collared flask and a retouched blade of Volhynian flint (Fig. 15) were found, laid probably next to the head of the deceased (only a few fragments of the skull have survived). Moreover, in grave No. 7A, a large number of hematite lumps (about 1 kg) were found laid down intentionally, and arranged above the head of the deceased (B. Matraszek, S. Sałaciński 2003; 2006, 241-243, Figs. 10-13). A similar type of grave good is known, for example, from the investigations of the megalithic tomb in Miłocin-Kolonia (now Kolonia Miłocin), Lublin district. In the bottom part of the burial pit there, fragments of a collared flask, a retouched blade and lumps of ochre were found (Gurba 1976, 39). According to Jacek Woźny, ochre in Neolithic graves is one manifestation of the ritual expression of the idea of the rebirth of the dead (2011, 66). The magic and symbolic significance is attributed to the dye. Ochre of a red tint could symbolise

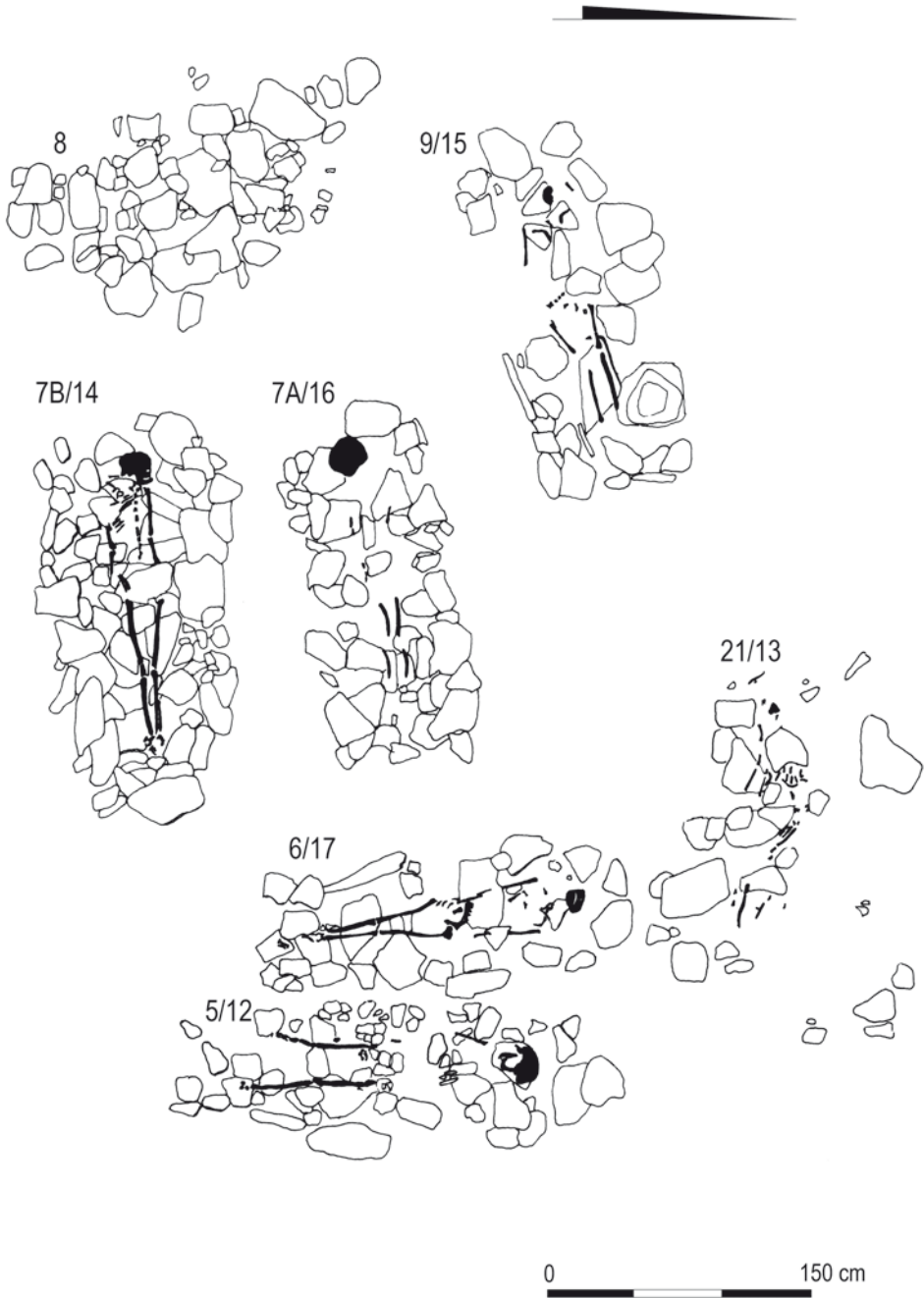


Fig. 12. Stryczowice, site VII, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district. Plan of the flat cemetery.
Drawn by A. Potoczny, graphic design B. Sałacińska

blood, and thus life. Perhaps it was a sign connecting life with death (Kozak-Zychman 2014, 67).

Another important component of the megalithic cemetery in Stryczowice is the region in which the raw stone material used for the construction of the tombs and box graves was probably stored, selected and pre-worked. This place was located to the east of the flat FBC cemetery (features 24, 26). Unearthed there were raw stone materials of different sizes, probably deposited on the original ground level, as no traces of digging or of structures were found during excavations (Fig. 2).

The megalithic features studied in Stryczowice shall be classified as Group B of the general architectural taxonomy (as determined by Seweryn Rzepecki) of tombs equipped with a stone setting, dating back to 4,200-2,900 BC (2011a, 169; 2011b, 218).

The megalithic cemetery of the southeastern FBC group in Stryczowice is one of several objects of this type located in the Sandomierz Upland. Few sites have been recognised through open-area excavations, revealing the studied megalithic cemeteries to a significant extent, including Malice Kościelne, site 1, Opatów district (Bargiel and Florek 2006a), and Pawłów, site 3, Sandomierz district (Bargiel and Florek 2006b). Some were recognised in a limited area, *e.g.* Broniszowice, site V, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district (Bąbel 2006), Czyżów Szlachecki, site 13, Sandomierz district (Florek 2008, 101), Święcica, barrow I, Sandomierz district (Szeliga and Florek 2007, 41, 43, fig. 5; Florek 2008, 101), and Złota, site 6, Sandomierz district (Florek 2008, 101).



Fig. 13. Stryczowice, site VII, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district. Flat cemetery. Photo S. Sałaciński

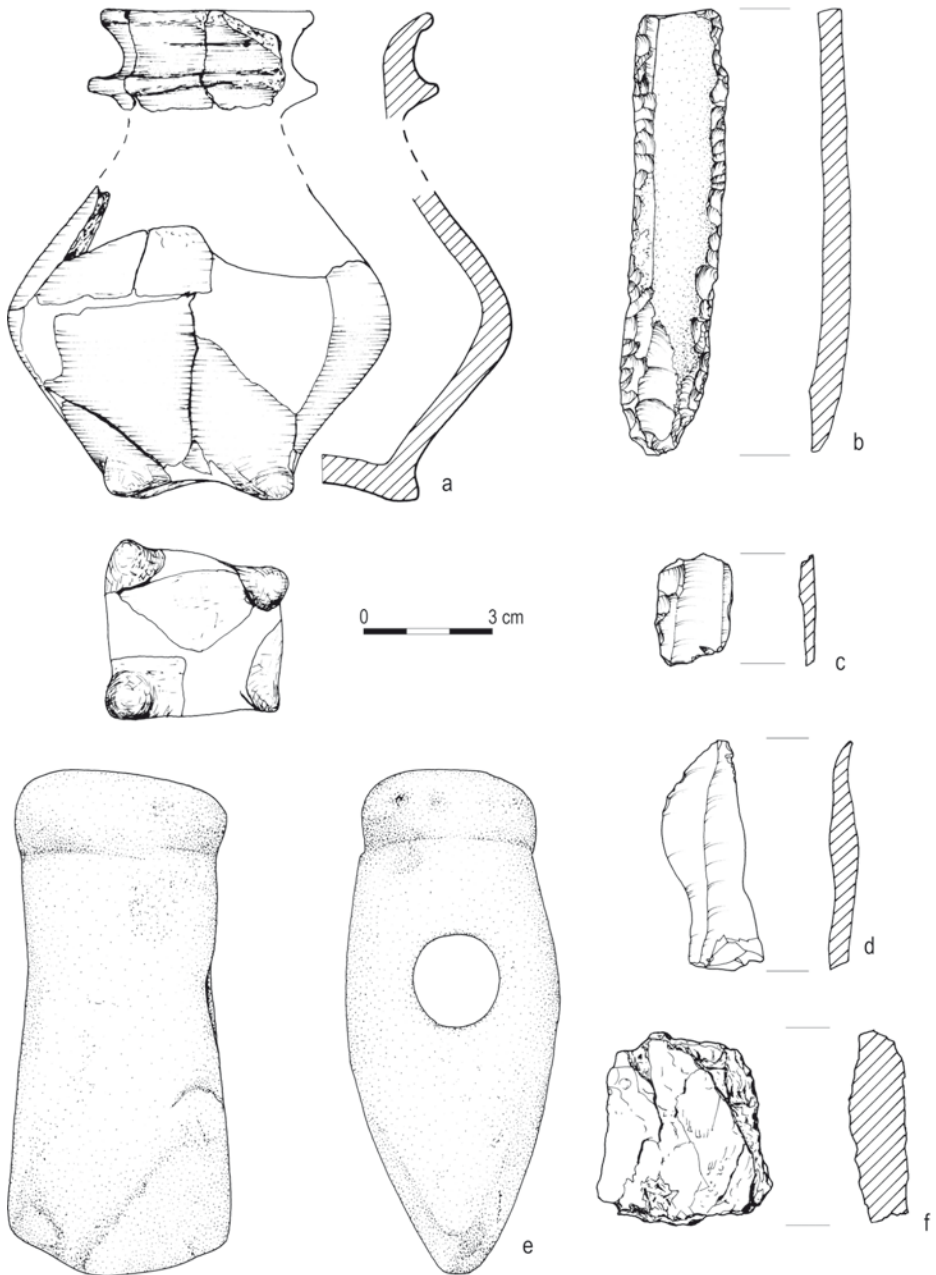


Fig. 14. Stryczowice, site VII, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district. Burial goods from grave No. 5. a – collared flask; b – retouched blade of Świeciechów flint; c – sickle inset of Volhynian flint; d – flake of Volhynian flint; e – shaft-hole axe with a knob-like poll; f – quartz fire-starter. Drawn by G. Nowakowska (a), B. Karch (b-f), graphic design B. Sałacińska

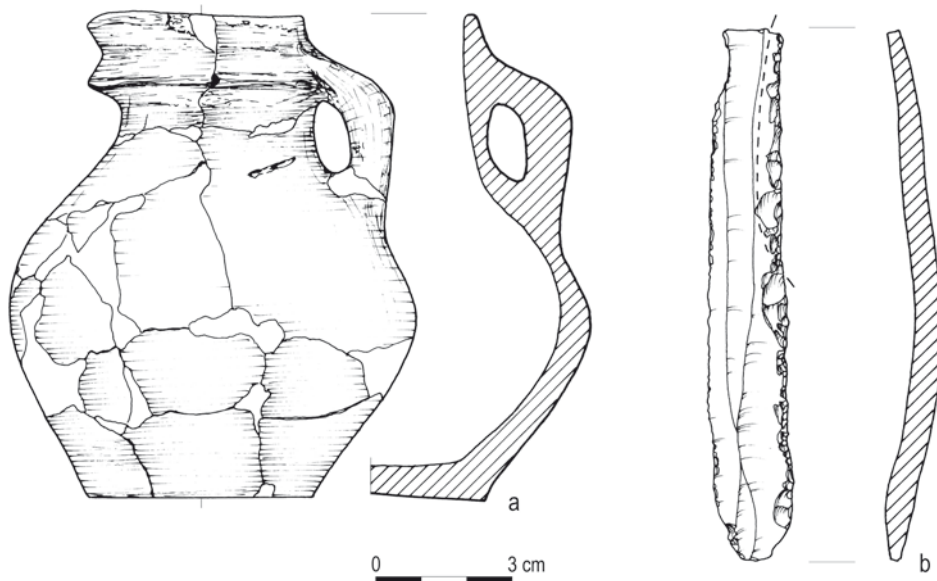


Fig. 15. Stryczowice, site VII, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski district. Burial goods from grave No. 21.
 a – collared flask; b – retouched blade of Volhynian flint.
 Drawn by G. Nowakowska (a), B. Karch (b), graphic design B. Sałacińska

The examined FBC megalithic tombs on the Sandomierz Upland show considerable diversity with regard to their structure outlines at the exposed level, their construction and the materials used, and burial forms (Florek 2008, Tab. 1, Fig 1). Stone and earth structures are known, including Malice Kościelne, site 1 (Bargieł and Florek 2006a), as well as structures of stone, earth, and wood, including Broniszowice, site V (Bąbel 2006), and Pawłów, site 3 (Bargieł and Florek 2006b). It is difficult to express an unequivocal opinion about the type of construction of tombs in partially excavated cemeteries, on which fragments of stone structures have been documented and examined, including Czyżów Szlachecki, site 13, Sandomierz district (Florek 2008, 101), Złota, site 6, Sandomierz district (Florek 2008, 101), and Święcica, barrow I, Sandomierz district (Szeliga and Florek 2007, 41, 43, fig. 5; Florek 2008, 101).

Judging by the megalithic cemeteries that have thus far been located, the population of the southeastern FBC community chose elevated places on the upper parts of valley slopes (*e.g.* Czyżów Szlachecki, site. 13, and Malice Kościelne, site 1), or at the local culminations of the high plain (*e.g.* Pawłów, site 3, and Stryczowice, site VII). Very often, a place was chosen, the terrain of which had already been previously occupied by Neolithic settlement (Florek 2008, 103). The well-situated locations of the FBC megalithic cemeteries were later eagerly chosen and used for sepulchral purposes. There, the communities of the

Corded Ware culture, the Mierzanowice culture (Malice Kościelne, site 1), the Trzciniec culture (Stryczowice, site VII), and – in the case of the cemetery at Stryczowice – communities of the early Middle Ages, deposited their deceased. The attractiveness of these places in terms of sepulchral usefulness contributed to the destruction of megalithic structures already in prehistory. Further destruction was brought by World War II and modern agriculture, as well as the erosion of loess slopes. Unfortunately, all the megalithic structures so far discovered on cemeteries in the southeastern group of the Funnel Beaker culture on the Sandomierz Upland have been largely destroyed.

The structure of the stone setting of megalithic tomb No. 1, and above all its state of preservation, is unique and, so far, there is no analogy on the Sandomierz Upland. However, it could be an example of what such structures may have looked like at other sites, where megalithic tombs were preserved only in the form of closely matched stones (arranged on the surface or slightly dug into the ground) marking their outline, including Malice Kościelne, site 1 (Bargiel and Florek 2006a, 365, Figs. 3, 4, 7-9) and Pawłów, site 3 (Bargiel and Florek 2006b, 387, Fig. 2).

A similar structure of stone settings as in the case of the megalithic tomb I, although less well preserved than the tomb from Stryczowice, was found at site 1 in Grzybów, Staszów district, located in the eastern part of the Nida Basin, in the area adjacent to the Sandomierz Upland. The tomb was built of sandstone blocks arranged vertically and covered from above with smaller stones (sandstones). The largest blocks were found in the frontal part of the tomb (Garbacz 2006, 309-310, Figs. 3, 4-6).

The intention of our article was to present the most important aspects related to the stone structures of megalithic tomb No. 1 and the central grave (feature No. 38) from Stryczowice. The researched stone structures comprise one of the best preserved megalithic tombs on the Sandomierz Upland.

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