

DISCUSSIONS AND POLEMICS

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ABOUT THE BURIAL-FREE KURGANS ONCE AGAIN

ABSTRACT

Janiak R. 2017. About the burial-free kurgans once again. *Sprawozdania Archeologiczne* 69, 421-431.

One of the features of the burial mound necropolises of Pomeranian culture in the Kashubian Lake District is the presence, beside the mounds, of burial-free constructions. Their form resembles burial mounds or kurgans and their function can often raise questions. This may sometimes result from the fact that such structures are formed in distinct clusters in the cemeteries. At the current stage of research, it can be hypothesized that they represent an integral part of the necropolis.

Key words: burial mounds, Kashubian Lake District, Pomeranian culture, Early Iron Age.

Received: 02.02.2017; Revised: 19.03.2017; Accepted: 25.05.2017

The following text is a response to the comments by Rzepecki (2016) with regards to the selected issues included in my book titled "Burial mounds of the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age", Łódź 2014.

The discussed monograph presents the results of research on the place and role of the mound in the burial rites of societies of Lusatian culture, the Wielka Wies group, and the Pomeranian culture in the Kashubian Lake District. These societies placed the remains of their dead in mounds of stone, stone and earth, and in a few cases also just earth. On kurgan necropolises, these forms of structures represented almost all the manifestations of the funeral rituals of the aforementioned cultural groupings in the Lake District area.

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In exceptional cases, there were graves beside them without any markings on the surface of the earth.

Research conducted at four cemeteries has revealed the existence of other structures within them, including mounds deprived of burials. One of the theses of the monograph is that burial-free constructions are an integral part of the necropolis. As studies have shown, these were buildings of almost identical design to the mounds accommodating burned human bones. The author of the review of my book devoted a large part to that particular issue. What's interesting for researchers of prehistory, to which group I dare classify myself, is that Mr. Rzepecki links his remarks closely to the question of potato cultivation. I admit that the latter issue is foreign to me – unfortunately my university degree is not in agriculture. However, I believe that I am competent enough to answer to my honorable colleague, himself a Neolithic period specialist.

The basic objection raised by Rzepecki (2016) refers to the inclusion of burial-free stone embankments in the research. As I indicated, I treated them as an inherent part of two cemeteries I examined in the years 2002-2008 and 2012-2015. The author of the review focused in particular on the examples coming from the necropolis in Nowa Sikorska Huta, site 2, Stężycza community, but also Żakowo, site 3, Sulęczyno community (both objects are located in Kartuzy county). According to Rzepecki, to put it briefly, objects without burials should be identified with prisms of stones discarded from the fields in the process of cleaning and preparing land for cultivation. Such an assessment would, in his opinion, be consistent with the requirements of potato cultivation in Poland. I disagree with this statement. Based on the analysis of the collected material, I concluded that the objects in question, resembling burial mounds in their form, should be considered part of the burial grounds on which they are located and studied. Within the cemetery, they formed a distinct cluster, the case in Nowa Sikorska Huta, site 2, where they comprised the western part of the necropolis. Some of the structures were located in the immediate vicinity of mounds, under the embankments of which burial was found. That is how the space can be characterized in the cemetery in Żakowo, site 3, where burial-deprived mounds constituted its western part, but in the eastern part coexisted with constructions containing graves. The distinguishing features of the burial-free mounds – apart from the lack of grave – were a smaller size and the lack of stone wreaths defining the range of the object. However, both types of objects followed a similar structural diagram. It consisted of the selective choice of building blocks required to execute the base of the construction – usually large stones, topped with a stone mantle of pebbles and smaller stones. This scheme, which can also be observed in the construction of embankments containing burial mounds, justifies the inclusion of the objects without graves in the considerations of the funeral rites of the population cycle: Lusatian culture – Wielka Wieś group – Pomeranian culture, inhabiting the Kashubian Lake District.

The second argument in favor of the recognition of the burial-deprived kurgans as a part of the burial ground was the stratigraphy of layers in the immediate vicinity of the

object. I spoke in my publication (Janiak 2014) about the situation registered in site 2 in Nowa Sikorska, and I will not repeat my descriptions of the objects here. I do want, however, to use the example of two constructions from the cemetery in Żakowo that were studied after the submission of the book for publication. I believe the two stone structures (Kurgans V/2014 – Fig. 2 and VI/2014 – Fig. 3) illustrate this issue well. These mounds were in the lowest-lying area of the necropolis (Fig. 1). This section of the cemetery was marked by a slight slope in the ground in a northern direction and toward the southern shoreline of Lake Gowidlińskie. The first of these constructions was related to two clusters of burned bones. One of them was located in the central point of the mound, while the second was under the stone pavement encircling the stone rim from the outside. Mound VI/2014 was deprived of a burial. It is worth noting that both objects shown here had been placed side by side at a distance of 16 m. The structure of the layers associated with burial-free kurgans only slightly differed from that associated with grave mounds. The profiles of the surveyed constructions showed visible stratification (yellow-brown sand), whose roof was interpreted as the then ground level. A layer of sand devoid of historical material was deposited above it. Due to the placement of these stone structures on the slopes, this layer must be considered the effect of blowing sand from higher ground. An almost identical

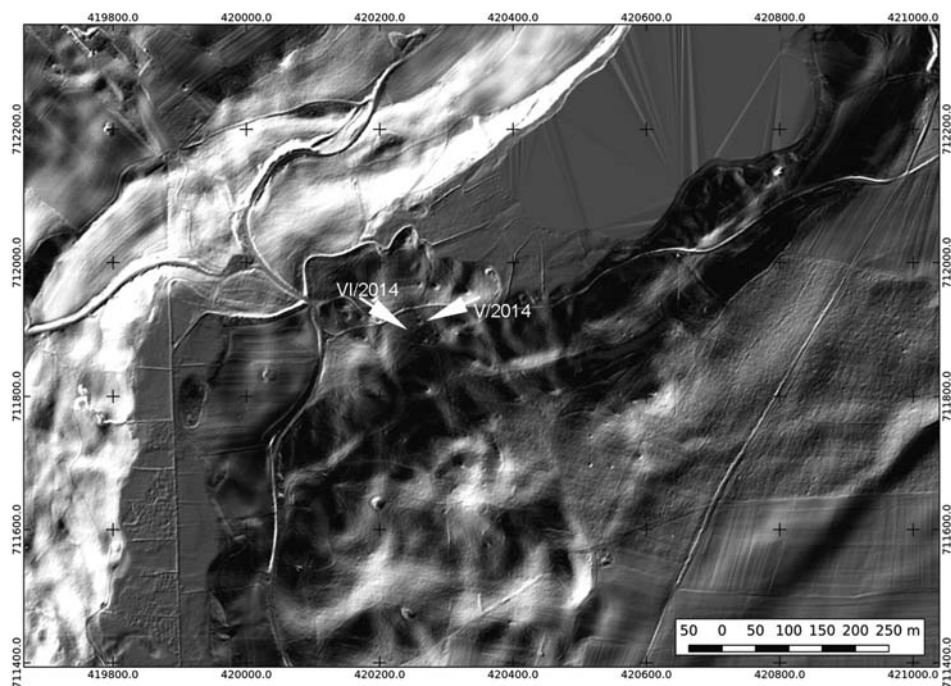


Fig. 1. Żakowo, site 3, Sulęczyno community. The location of kurgans VI/2014 and VII/2014

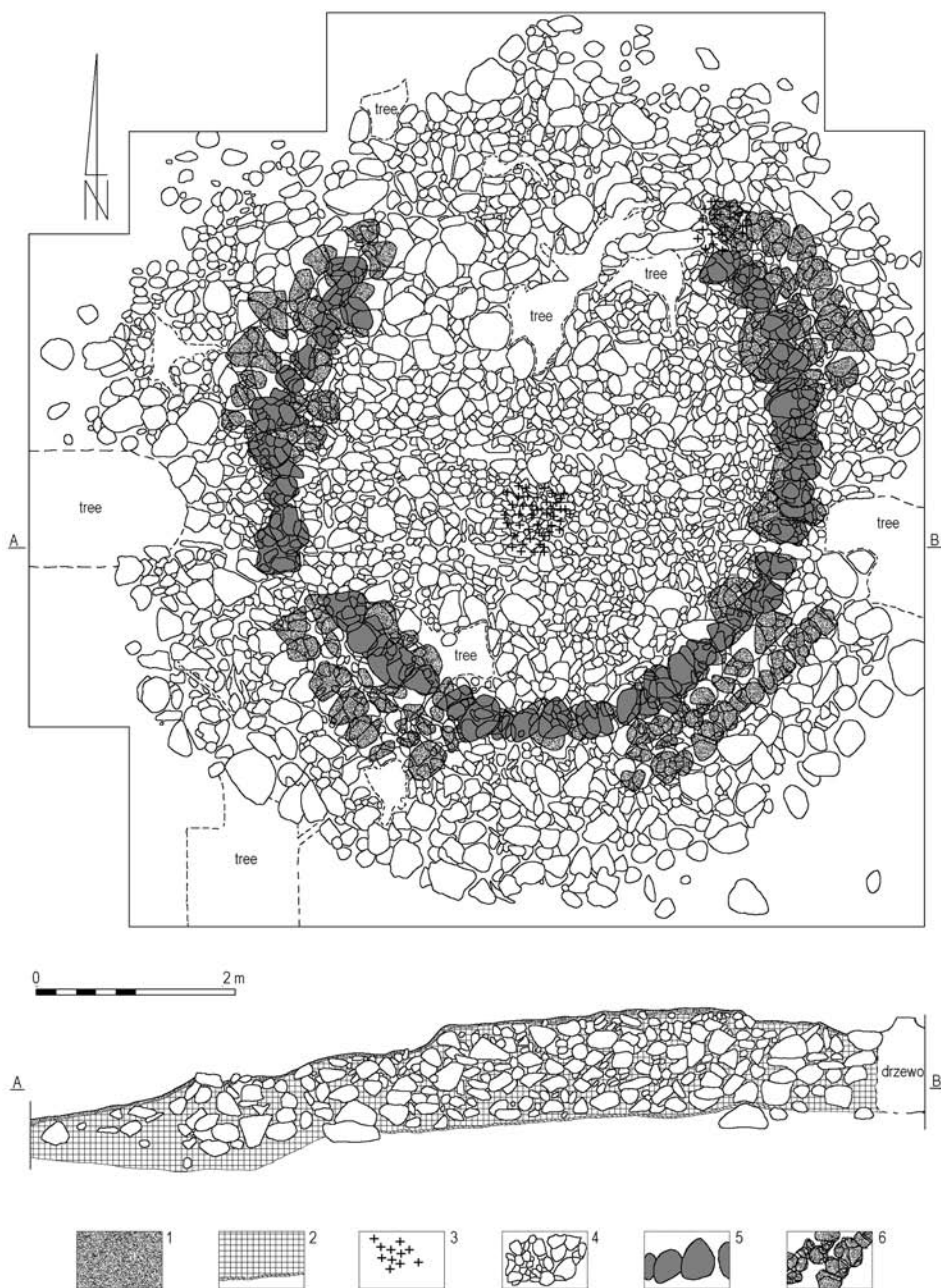


Fig. 2. Żakowo, site 3, Sulęczyno community. Kurgan V/2014: outline and north profile (1 – brown sand; 2 – yellow sand, below in yellow-brown sand; 3 – crematory human bone ash; 4 – rocks; 5 – stone rim; 5 – “crepidoma”)

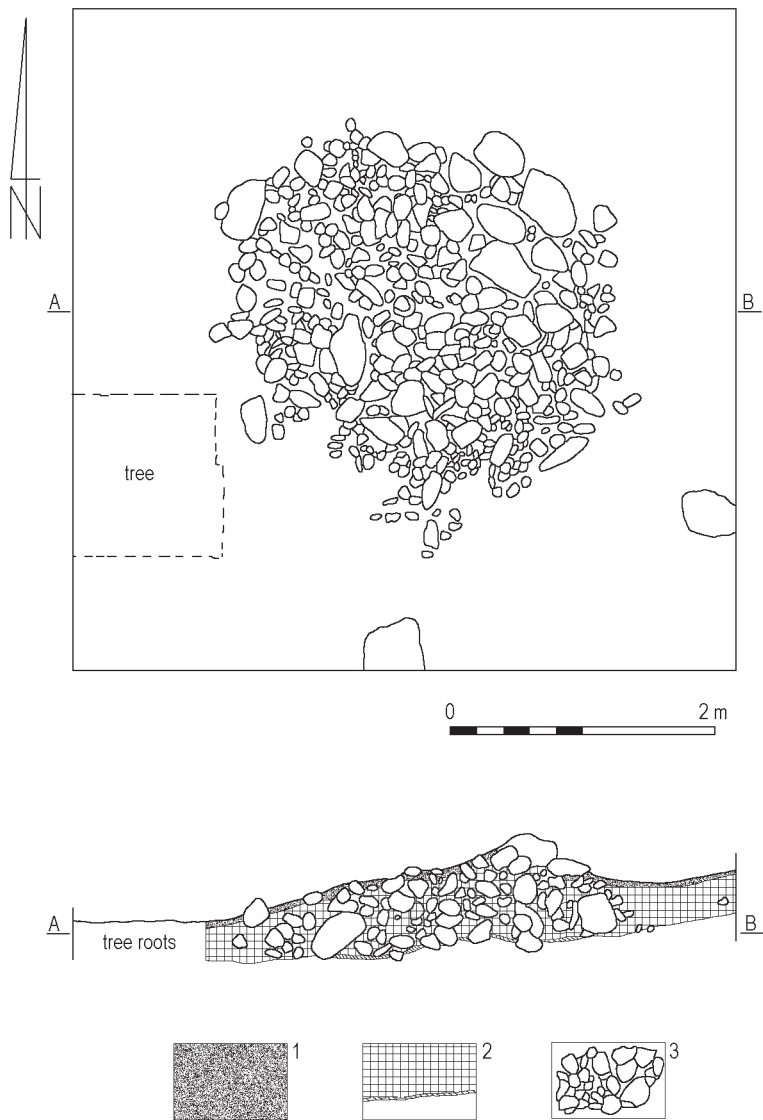


Fig. 3. Żakowo, site 3, Sulęcyno community. Kurgan VI/2014: outline and north profile (1 – brown sand; 2 – yellow sand, belowit yellow-brown sand; 3 – rocks)



Fig. 4. Nowa Sikorska Huta, Steżycza community. View of the cultivated field in the immediate vicinity of Site 2 (kurgan cemetery). The arrow indicates a collection of rocks discarded from the field



Fig. 5. Nowa Sikorska Huta, Steżycza community. Enlargement of the collection of stones discarded from the field

stratigraphic situation was found in the area of site 2 in Nowa Sikorska Huta, which I wrote about in my book (Janiak 2014, 38).

My studies have shown, therefore, that both types of objects – those with and without burned human bones – were located within the same stratigraphic layer. Indisputably, it can thus be assumed that the structures were built around the same time frame. It therefore precludes, as Rzepecki suggests, their emergence in a later period and thus the intentional movement of stones in the nineteenth century in order to create the area for cultivation. Rzepecki (2016, 415-416) also draws attention to the one-sided interpretations of stone mounds without burials as symbolic. In his opinion, this is a mistake. The reviewer does not mind, however, declaring – also in a completely one-sided manner – that this type of objects, which indeed accompany kurgans, is the effect of land cultivation. Even omitting the fact relating to the period of the creation of the structure, it should be regarded as impossible that the community utilizing the cemetery would create a kind of refuse dump within it. I regard the vision of discharging stones with no symbolic importance within the sacrum as phantasmagoria.

The thesis that the formation of stone piles within the cemeteries where rocks were to be discarded by the local population when creating agricultural areas, makes one wonder what happened to the great graveyard/graveyards, located around Mściszewice, in Sulęczyño county. Out of the extensive multicultural complex of mounds, which according to estimates, even at the beginning of the twentieth century numbered 350 objects (Tuszyńska 1984, 44), in the present day only five mounds remain (*sic!*). This place is now known as site 3 in Mściszewice (Janiak 2011, 149; 2014, 28). According to the descriptions of the local population, procedures opposite to those described in the review lasted here for years. In fact, stone material from which burial mounds had been made was in the twentieth century acquired for the construction of residential and business buildings, as well as to pave roads. A similar use of mounds in the area of Pomerania was described by researchers as early as in the nineteenth century. Examples of Czarlin, Gostomie and Amalka (earlier: Amalienthal) clearly indicate the destruction of mounds (Ossowski 1881, 24-25). The same fate was also supposedly met by other stone structures, among others those from Chwarzno or Gostomie (Ossowski 1878, 37; 1881, 82). Gotfryd Ossowski (1878, 25-26) explains the absence of burial mounds in the areas of the former counties of Sztum, Kwidzyn, and partly also Grudziądz, all located on the right bank of the Vistula, with a considerable degree of devastation of archaeological sites. The reasons for this state of affairs could be discerned in the demand for stone for economic purposes. Perhaps one example of the cemetery in Kamionka I (Ossowski 1881, 25) will interest my reviewer. The area of the kurgan cemetery was to be buried under stones picked up from the fields. However, from the description of Ossowski it is clear that the stones had been thrown haphazardly. As a result, creating prehistoric inventories and undertaking research of this necropolis had been made impossible.

The above arguments indicate that after the cemeteries ceased being used, no new structures were added. Necropolises located in colonized, more densely populated areas

underwent destruction, so nowadays we find only their meager remains. This process is especially pronounced in areas which were continuously forested from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century.

The map of Friedrich Schroetter (*Karte von Ostpreussen nebst preussisch Litthauen und Westpreussen nebst dem Netzdistrict aufgenommen unter Leitung des Königl. Preuss. Staats Ministers Frey Herrn von Schroetter in den Jahren von 1796 bis 1802*) indicates that at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the areas of both the kurgan cemetery in Nowa Sikorska Huta site 2 and the necropolis at Żakowo site 3 were covered with tight complexes of forests. This situation was also documented later. Archival topographical maps at a scale of 1:25 000 (Meßtischblätter) may prove helpful in this regard. Based on the map from 1877 – the emblem of the sheet in 1774 (459), titled Schönberg – one can observe that the area of site 2 in Nowa Sikorska Huta, Stężycza community, was covered by forest. Some of the later maps of 1902 (1774 Schönberg) and 1940 (Schönberg in Westpreußen) only confirm this state of affairs. In turn, the map of the same scale – 1772 (457) Sullenchin of 1940 – indicates a forested area where site 3 Żakowo, Sulęczyno community, is located.

It is perhaps worthwhile to note the situation observed in the case of the aforementioned burial mound complex in the area of Lake Mściszewickie. Schroetter's map (from the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century) illustrates a complete absence of a wooded area, while the map (Meßtischblatt) 1773 (458) Stendsitz from 1940 documents a small forest complex in the area of the current site 3 in Mściszewice. It can therefore be supposed that it is precisely the forested terrain that prevented the devastation of the last five mounds of their original big clusters.

Mikulski (1996, 24) reports that from the mid-sixteenth to the end of the seventeenth century areas of the western part of the former province of Pomerania were characterized by dense forest cover. Based on the map „The settlement network in the province of Pomeranian at the end of the seventeenth century” included in the study, it appears that the relevant burial mound cemeteries were in wooded area. At present, the areas of both sites are covered with stately beech trees.

In the case of two cemeteries – in Nowa Sikorska Huta and Żakowo – stones removed from the surrounding fields would have had to be carried to the forests. There they would be arranged on the slopes and at the base of elevated terrain. It is really hard to imagine a situation in which farmers would choose these particular clusters of prehistoric mounds to deposit stones collected from the fields. In addition, they would have had to organize the clusters into a regular form. During excavations conducted in Nowa Sikorska Huta, Mściszewice, and Żakowo, I talked many times with employees of the Forest Service and the inhabitants of the nearby Kashubian villages. When asked if a given explored burial-free mound could be considered the effect of clearing away stones from the fields, I repeatedly heard that there was and is simply no time for such „fun” (i.e. for organizing stones in almost regular mounds resembling a kurgan). In the cluster of stones discarded from the

field on the edge of the forest at site 2 in Nowa Sikorska Huta, it is rather difficult to trace any form of regularity (Fig. 4, 5).

In another part of the review, the reviewer (Rzepecki 2016, 412) draws attention to issues relating to the older historic monuments than the burial mounds in which they were discovered. Rzepecki refers to my omission of historic ceramics dating back to the Early Bronze Age, coming from Kurgan I at site 2 in Nowa Sikorska Huta (see: IA 1997, 24). In my opinion, the chronology of these monuments was misstated. After familiarizing myself with them, I decided that they ought to be assigned to the Pomeranian culture. I have not, however, shared these findings in my publications. This new evaluation of the contents of Kurgan I made me analyze it in the context of a Pomeranian culture necropolis (Janiak 2014, 37, 196). Another issue concerns Kurgan IV/2013 from the Żakowo cemetery (Rzepecki 2016, 416), particularly in terms of the presence of four Neolithic flint objects discovered in the embankment of the mound. In the opinion of Rzepecki, these were items that got stuck to the stones at the source of the building materials and were transferred with them to the area where the kurgan was created. Thus, the reviewer challenges my hypothesis about the sand filling in the space between the stones which made up the embankment. Here I would like to refer to the example of Kurgan XVIII from the cemetery in Nowa Sikorska Huta, site 2 (Janiak 2014, 126-127). In this design, not just stones but also sand, which constituted one of the layers, was used. The structure was then covered with a layer of pebbles, which formed a stone mantle. However, in order to execute such a construction layer, first sand had to fill the space below the layers of the stone embankment. In my view, a similar process was followed in the case of Kurgan IV/2013 in Żakowo. Here, however, the sand was not a structural layer, but was only used to fill the space between the stones of the embankment. One may wonder why in the case of „creating” Kurgan IV/2013 as a result of field work typically carried out in early spring, no other monuments to substantiate such a modern genesis of this structure were found.

The same design was also mentioned in a different context; namely, the presence of fragments of vessels under the embankment. A characteristic rite observed in all studied mounds in Żakowo was the use of non-urn cremation. Burned human bones in the form of clusters were laid in the central point of the kurgan at the base of its construction. The funeral rite in the necropolis ruled out the necessity of the use of ceramic vessels as urns. At the same level, next to the burned human bones, fragments of a vessel were discovered. The number of the pieces was too small to allow for a full physical reconstruction of the vessel. Only a restoration sketch was possible. One can suppose that this vessel had been broken outside the kurgan and only some of the vessel fragments were cast at the site of the kurgan. Such a treatment was known not only from the cemetery in Żakowo but also from the cemetery in Mściszewice, site 3 (Kurgans I and II – Janiak 2011, 150, 152). Each of these mounds was accompanied by a collection of ceramic fragments from various vessels. It can only be suggested that the deposited ceramic pieces next to the human remains were a result of a funeral wake and that perhaps after beverages/foods had been

consumed, such dishes were deliberately broken. Only their fragments, probably randomly selected, were thrown into the barrow site, or maybe a little later also on an emerging embankment. This interpretation was also implied by other researchers. Traces of identical procedures (depositing fragments of vessels) were found within the mounds in the cemetery in Siemirowice, site 1, county Lębork (Szymańska 1977, 324). Presumably, similar discoveries can be identified in earlier sites, as in the case of Trzciniec culture burial mounds in Okalew, county Wieluń. The numerous fragments of vessels collected there did not allow for the reconstruction of their forms (Abramek 1971). This type of behavior is also mentioned by Kalaga (2006, 177-178) with regards to early medieval barrows.

The above phenomena laid the ground for my hypothesis that the identified burial-free structures should be regarded as integral parts of the kurgan cemetery. This also applied to Object V laid on the set of the boat, also deprived of the grave. I will not elaborate on this thread here; the reader can find relevant information in my publications (Janiak 2012; 2014, 130, 197-201, Fig. 62). The said Object V was spatially related to three earth embankments (Objects III, IV and LXXII). I presented my hypothesis about their function of being a temporary place where human remains were deposited based on stratigraphic observations. Clearly visible cuts in the central part of embankments and evidence indicating their disposable filling were decisive here. The hypothesis about the purpose of these small earthen embankments also found acceptance from Piotr Kittel (Department of Geomorphology and Palaeography, University of Łódź), archaeologist and geomorphologist present on-site during the study of the earth mounds.

Returning to the „cultivation of potatoes,” Rzepecki’s one-sided interpretation of burial-deprived structures completely ignored one extremely important issue – namely, cultural interactions. I addressed the topic of the kurgan cemetery in Nowa Sikorska Huta in relation to those from the area of southern Scandinavia in one of the subsections of my publication (Janiak 2014, 257-263). Contacts between southern Scandinavia and the areas occupied by the population of the Lusatian culture had already been initiated in the third period of the Bronze Age. However, their intensity increased somewhat later, in IV-VI period of the Bronze Age. In particular, direct contacts between the inhabitants of these regions in the Baltic Sea basin have been emphasized (Kaliff 2001, 49-54). The evidence of such links was the existence of fragments of vessels belonging to the forms typical of Lusatian culture. At the same time, the mutual interactions in the sphere of funeral rites have been noted (Dąbrowski 1987, 72; Kaliff 2001, 56-57). The presence of house urns in burial complexes confirms the influences, which are reflected in the funerary rites of communities inhabiting extensive areas around the Baltic Sea basin. This phenomenon includes among other areas Skåne, Bornholm, Gotland, and Eastern Pomerania (Sabatini 2007, 21, 25, Fig. 4; 2014 Fig. 1). Research conducted by Sabatini (2007, 118-119, fig. 68, 69; 2014, 540-542) showed that house urns appeared in the zone around the Baltic at the end of the fourth period of the Bronze Age and the beginnings of the next period. By contrast, in Eastern Pomerania this type of urn was found in the inventories of the earliest burial at the end of

the fifth period of the Bronze Age. Thus, their use should be associated with the funeral rites of the Wielka Wieś group, acting in this area as a kind of link between the Lusatian and Pomeranian cultures.

Because of the varied forms of stone structures at site 2 in Nowa Sikorska Huta, they can be compared to the graveyard with similar designs situated in Gunnarstorp (Østfold) (Wangen 2009, 56-60, 67, Fig. 7, 12). It may be noted that out of seventy four registered stone constructions without burials, none was deemed to be a pile of stones dropped from nearby cropland. They were treated as part of the cemetery in Gunnarstorp.

The Uppland area also provides important reasons to treat burial-free kurgans as a result of the funeral rite of the population of the area in the time corresponding to the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age on Polish soil. Among the twenty-six surveyed kurgans from the cemetery in Fullerö, only eleven contained burned human bones. The total weight of the bone ash amounted to only 23.5 grams. A similar situation was identified in the cemetery in Vallby, where out of the twenty explored mounds only two contained burials. In Sníret none of the identified nine mounds included human remains. In the group of seven mounds which were discovered in Alby, only one kurgan provided a piece of burnt bone (Häringe Frisber 2005, 148). In describing these findings, constructions without burials are clearly deemed parts of the necropolis. These kinds of structures are assigned symbolic functions, for example, to commemorate the people who died outside their community (Häringe Frisber 2005, 152). It can also be assumed that not all the dead might have been buried, or in fact, that some had been buried in a location other than the dedicated stone embankment (Kaliff, Oestigaard 2004 85; Fahlander, Oestigaard 2008, 2). The characteristics of burial-free mounds, i.e. no stone wreaths and their generally smaller size, were associated with less effort when they were being built. Another interpretation of barrows without graves can be pointed out. In the crematory funeral rite, the stone monuments (sacrificial altars) could obtain the shape characteristic of a kurgan mound with burial (Kaliff 2005, 93-94).

Finally, I would like to point out one more aspect of burial-deprived structures. It is worth remembering that the issue here concerns two necropolises whose creators and users were the populations of Pomeranian culture. And what was recorded on the already mentioned and possibly most famous kurgan cemetery in Eastern Pomerania, located at site 1 in Siemirowice (Szymańska 1977), which was used by the population of Lusatian culture? Within this necropolis, five kurgans (II, VII, IX, XIII, XXI) which were deprived of primary burial were identified (Szymańska 1977, 258, 265, 272, 276, 283; Janiak 2014, 95). In this context, the primary burial should be understood as a grave which would be under the embankment, usually in the central part of the mound. Its structure was supposed to precede the completion of the embankment mound (Janiak 2014, 76-77). This clearly indicates that these mounds were built as structures deliberately deprived of burials. Only at a later time did people interfere with the already existing embankments. Inside, they placed urns with cremated human bones (Kurgans: IX, XXI) or human remains, next

to which fragments of pottery were laid (Kurgans: II, VII, XIII). It's important to note that the burial grounds in Siemirowice, like cemeteries in New Sikorska Huta and Żakowo, are located in the area that is currently forested. Yet the Siemirowice burial mounds had been placed on relatively flat terrain. Therefore, removing stones from cultivated fields to forest and depositing them between prehistoric barrows wouldn't create the same problems as in the case of cemeteries of Pomeranian culture, which are located on the slopes of hills. But such piles of stones are missing in the cemetery. Let us also look at archival maps (Meßtischblätter). The 1672 map (386) Gr. Rakitt released in 1877 indicates that both the necropolis in Siemirowice and its direct surroundings were covered with meadows. The same situation was documented on 1572 maps (325) Zewitz (1930 and 1936 editions).

I consider both my views expressed in the publications (Janiak 2014, 2016), as well as the observations made in this response, sufficient to ensure that the mounds without burials should be treated as a form of manifestation of beliefs among the Pomeranian culture population in Eastern Pomerania. I believe these structures to be a result of intentional actions by the creators and users of the necropolis. In my opinion, there is no definitive evidence that might allow for viewing them in a different way. I take into account that perhaps in the future researchers, including myself, will acquire information which will revise my hypothesis. Meanwhile, at this stage of research, I want to steadfastly emphasize that I deem burial-free kurgans to be an inherent part of the necropolis.

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