

# A child with a bucket. A study of grave goods in children's graves in the Polish lands in the Early Middle Ages

**Tomasz Kurasinski<sup>a</sup>**

The paper presents stave-built wooden vessels (buckets) as grave goods in children's inhumation graves in the Polish lands (10<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> century). The source base consists of children's burials identified anthropologically in which remains of these vessels have been found. In the light of the current state of research, 15 such graves, from 11 cemeteries, are known from the examined area. The vessels taken into consideration are open containers made of wooden staves and a bottom, with various metal elements, mainly hoops, handles and handle attachments. The presence of buckets in children's burials may have been related to the cult of the dead or constituted a component of initiation rites. The smallest containers can also be identified as playing accessories. However, it seems that most of the data weigh in favour of the theory according to which burying buckets in graves was an important element of establishing and communicating the social status of the dead, which does not mean that the previously mentioned interpretations are wrong.

**KEY-WORDS:** early medieval burial rite, children's grave, bucket, grave good, archaeology of childhood, social status

## INTRODUCTION

In the Middle Ages and in the Early Modern Period, childhood and the attitude of the adult part of society to their offspring was ambiguous. It is reflected in modern historiographic studies of this period of human life, for which a breakthrough was Ph. Ariès' study published in 1960 (Polish translation in 1995). This scholar advanced the thesis that in the Middle Ages and until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, people did not realise the specificity of childhood, which is why they hardly showed their parental feelings. In the course of further debate, by presenting phenomena contradicting the French scholar's view, this paradigm has gradually waned but still has some followers (discussion in Delimata 2004a; 2004b; Lenderová 2012).

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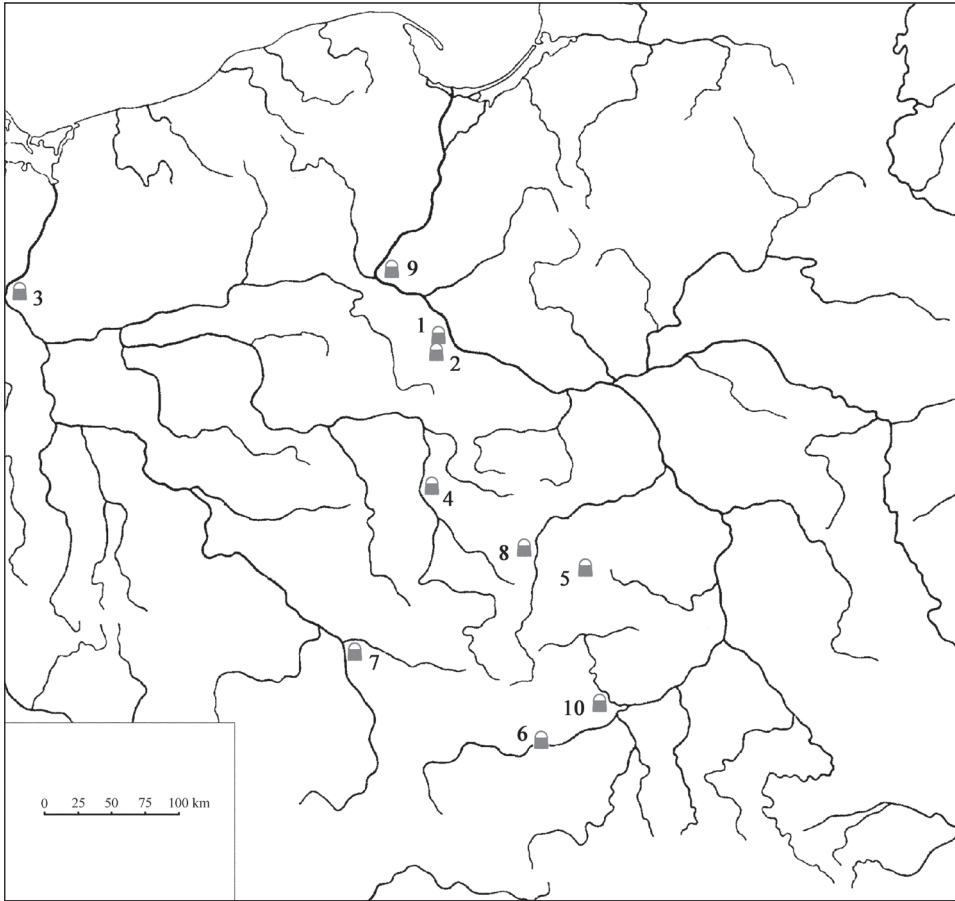
Recently, a large contribution to the research on the perception and role of a child in the past has been made by archaeologists within the specialisation referred to as the 'archaeology of childhood'. According to their findings, the state of childhood is a socially marked category characterised by large temporal-geographical, cultural, economic and legal variability, which does not mean that there are no biological factors (cf. e.g. Sofaer Derevenski 1994; Kamp 2001; Pawleta 2004, 2009, 2013; Baxter 2008; Lillehammer 2010; Krekovič 2011; extensive literature can be found in these studies). At the same time, it seems that excavation material, from cemeteries in particular, reflects the above-mentioned ambivalent attitude to children as well. Early medieval children's burials usually do not contain grave goods or they are very scanty, but some grave pits are distinguished by the quantity and quality of items found inside them. Diversity is also observed as far as the size and form of protection of children's graves are concerned (for the Polish lands see recent Wrzesińska and Wrzesiński 2000; 2002; Andrzejewska 2003; Kurasiński 2004; 2009; 2010; Kurasiński and Skóra 2012). Moreover, a shortage of children's graves at cemeteries is noticeable (Dollhopf 2002; Beilke-Voigt 2004; Kölbl 2004).

The present study concerning the issue of stave-built wooden vessels as grave goods in children's inhumation graves in the Polish lands is a part of the research trend discussed above. It places emphasis on the cultural and social aspects of this phenomenon.

#### ASSESSMENT OF THE SOURCE BASE

The source base consists of identified anthropologically children's burials in which remains of stave-built wooden vessels have been found. In the light of the current state of research, 15 such graves, from 11 cemeteries, are known from the examined area (Fig. 1)<sup>1</sup>. It is about 5% of all discovered burials with the grave goods element in question that I have managed to collect from the Polish lands. The most cases of burying children with a bucket were found at Cedynia, Graves 7, 30 and 171 (Porzeziński 2006: 26, 35–36, 95–97, 173–175, 296, Fig. II7, VI30, XXV171, XXXVg; XXXVIII–n; LIIa–d) and at Pień, Graves 37, 39 and 40 (Drozd *et al.* 2009: 354–355, 359, Fig. 3, 8; Janowski 2013: 397–399, Fig. 1). At other cemeteries, there were isolated cases of children's graves containing this vessel. They were found at Bodzia, Grave E853 (Buko *et al.* 2013: 427, Fig. 3; Zamelska-Monczak 2015: 291, 297, 299, Fig. 14.6), Brześć Kujawski, Grave 161 (Kaszewska and Kaszewski 1971: 392, 432, Fig. 119, IX9–10), Glinno, Grave 12

<sup>1</sup> Grave 24 from Ostrowite, Chojnice District, where the age of one of the children (presumably a female) buried with a bucket was identified as *infans IIIiuuenis*, was not taken into account (Drozd-Lipińska *et al.* 2013: 228).



**Fig. 1.** Distribution of children's graves with a buckets. 1 – Bodzia, Site 1, Włocławek district, Kujawsko-Pomorskie Province; 2 – Brześć Kujawski, Site 5, Włocławek district, Kujawsko-Pomorskie Province; 3 – Cedynia, Site 2a, Gryfino district, Zachodniopomorskie Province; 4 – Glinno, Site 15, Sieradz district, Łódzkie Province; 5 – Końskie, Site 1, *loco* district, Świętokrzyskie Province; 6 – Kraków-Zakrzówek, Site?, *loco* district, Małopolskie Province; 7 – Krzanowice, Site 1, Racibórz district, Śląskie Province; 8 – Lubień, Site 1, Piotrków Trybunalski district, Łódzkie Province; 9 – Pień, Site 9, Bydgoszcz district, Kujawsko-Pomorskie Province; 10 – Złota Pińczowska, Site?, Pińczów district, Świętokrzyskie Province. Elaborated by T. Kurasiński

(Lechowicz 2000: 3, 5, Fig. unnumbered), Końskie, Grave 34 (Dąbski 1950: 183; Gąssowski 1950: 116), Kraków-Zakrzówek, Grave 33 (Kaczanowski 1977: 174; Morawski and Zaitz 1977: 77, 86, 138, Fig. VI, 6), Krzanowice, Grave 26 (Kaźmierczyk 1957: 125, 130, Fig. 7.5), Lubień, Grave 112 (Borowska-Strugińska 2012: 329; Kurasiński and Skóra

2012: 57, 58, 201, Fig. LXX), Tomice, Grave 9 (Miszkiewicz 1973: 265, Fig. 49–50; Wachowski 1973: 178, 198, Fig. 83d; 94p) and Złota Pińczowska, Grave 107 (Miśkiewicz 1967: 130, 121, Fig. 17)<sup>2</sup>.

The chronology can be determined precisely only in two cases. On the basis of a half of a cross denarius from the fourth quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century found in the grave from Kraków-Zakrzówek (Haczewska 1977: 206), it can be concluded that the child was buried at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century at the latest. By contrast, <sup>14</sup>C analyses of child's bones from Grave 40 indicate an earlier period – the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century – the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Drozd *et al.* 2009: 355; Janowski 2013: 399). In the other cases, the dating is based on the time of usage of the entire cemeteries or phases to which the burials in question are attributed. On the basis of this it can be assumed that the population of the Polish lands began burying buckets in children's graves at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and this custom continued no longer than to the middle (or even beginning) of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Tab. 1).

Below, the article presents a summary analysis of the graves, burials and vessels themselves, with special attention to the features relevant to the interpretation of the discussed burial custom.

#### A summary description of the graves

The outlines of the burial pits were mostly rectangular with more or less rounded corners. Only in the case of the features from Krzanowice and Lubień, the shape was irregular and in Cedynia, Grave 171 and Złota Pińczowska trapezoid (Fig. 2–4). Many of the graves were considerably too long for children's burial places (over 2 m).

In seven burial pits, traces of various grave structures were found. The child from Końskie was presumably buried in a grave with a stone lining and/or pavement, which is suggested by the fact that several stones lay above the burial. By contrast, remains of wood in the graves from Cedynia (Graves 7 and 171) and Złota Pińczowska indicate a use of coffin-like structures (Fig. 2b, d, h). Traces of burial chambers were found at Pień. In one of them (Grave 40), the dead person had most probably been buried in a coffin and the whole complex had originally been surrounded by a double four-sided palisade (Fig. 3). One should also mention a burial from Kraków-Zakrzówek, which was a subject of a special study. The post holes found around it should be associated with a wooden structure, which is difficult to reconstruct (Fig. 4). The rest of the children were buried in simple earth pits (Fig. 2a, c, e–g).

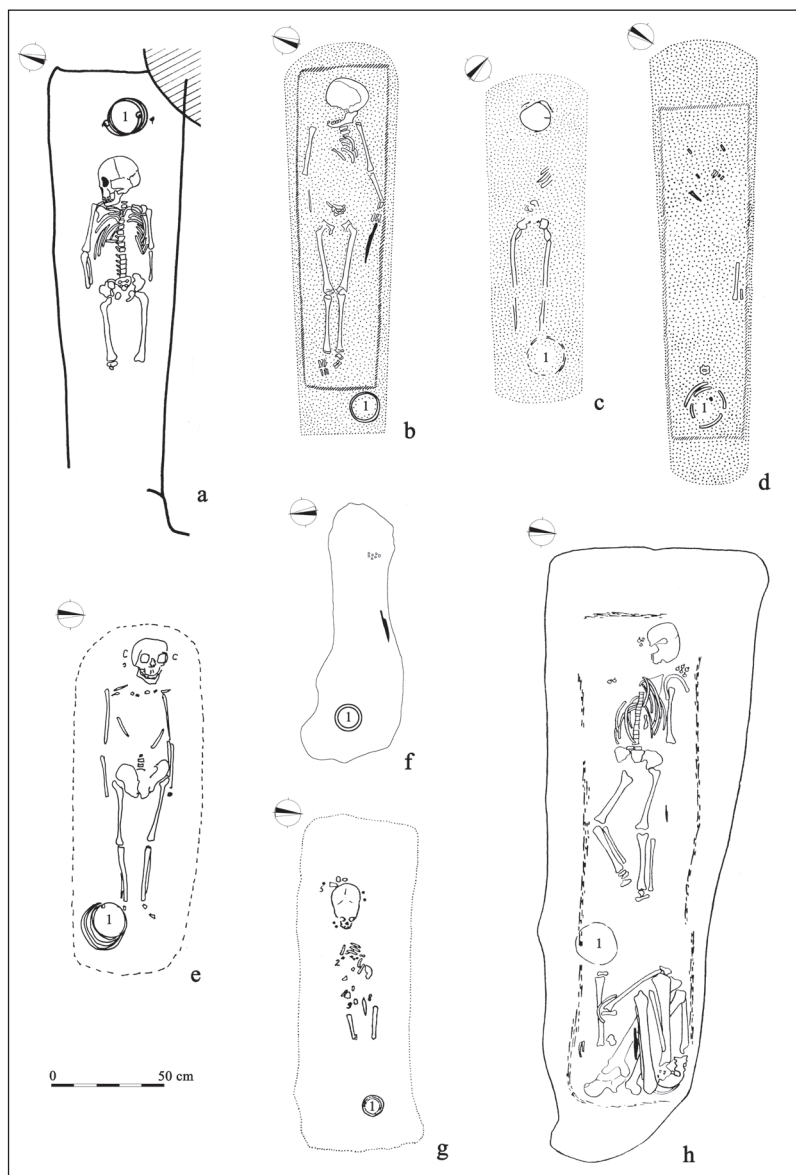
#### A summary description of the bones

The bones were mostly in a poor state of preservation, which is often a result of low bone mineralisation in children. Still it was possible to determine the age of 10 bodies

<sup>2</sup> All the data in the analytical part of this article is taken from those publications, so they will not be mentioned again.

**Table 1.** List of objects co-occurring with buckets in children's graves (except for fragments of pottery and remains of grave structures)

No	Site	Numbers of the grave	Grave goods	Chronology of the grave
1.	Bodzia	E853	3 glass beads; 1 cobalt blue bead; iron knife	end of the 10 <sup>th</sup> c. – beginning of the 11 <sup>th</sup> c.
2.	Brześć Kujawski	161	iron knife	second half of the 11 <sup>th</sup> c. – beginning of the 12 <sup>th</sup> c.
3.	Cedynia, stan. 2a	7	iron knife	second half of the 10 <sup>th</sup> c. – beginning of the 11 <sup>th</sup> c.
4.	Cedynia, stan. 2a	30	bronze <i>kaptorga</i> (?)	second half of the 10 <sup>th</sup> c. – beginning of the 11 <sup>th</sup> c.
5.	Cedynia, stan. 2a	171	bronze temple ring; glass (2 pieces), rock crystal (1 piece) and amber (1 piece) beads; clay rattle; iron knife	second half of the 10 <sup>th</sup> c. – beginning of the 11 <sup>th</sup> c.
6.	Glinno	12	4 glass beads; 3 silver beads; bronze (2 pieces) and lead (1 piece) temple rings; iron knife; spindle whorl	second half of the 10 <sup>th</sup> c. – beginning of the 11 <sup>th</sup> c.
7.	Końskie	34	iron arrowhead; iron knife	second half of the 11 <sup>th</sup> c. – beginning of the 12 <sup>th</sup> c.
8.	Kraków-Zakrzówek	33	silver coin; silver temple ring; glass bead (fragm.); iron knife; 2 blades (flint?)	second half of the 10 <sup>th</sup> c. – beginning of the 12 <sup>th</sup> c.
9.	Krzanowice	26	–	11 <sup>th</sup> c.
10.	Lubień	112	iron knife	11 <sup>th</sup> c. – second–third quarter of the 12 <sup>th</sup> c.
11.	Pień	37	2 iron knives; shell	second half of the 10 <sup>th</sup> c. – beginning of the 11 <sup>th</sup> c.
12.	Pień	39	5 silver temple rings; silver earring; belemnite; tooth of a shark; iron knife	second half of the 10 <sup>th</sup> c. – beginning of the 11 <sup>th</sup> c.
13.	Pień	40	silk belt with gold gilded brass fittings at its ends and 2 gold gilded brass bells; 3 bronze bells; 2 bone cylindrical sockets	second half of the 10 <sup>th</sup> c. – beginning of the 12 <sup>th</sup> c.
14.	Tomice	9	carnelian (6 pieces), quartzite (4 pieces) and glass (1 piece) beads; 5 silver temple rings; iron knife	end of the 10 <sup>th</sup> c. – 11 <sup>th</sup> c.
15.	Złota Pińczowska	107	12 bronze temple rings; glass bead; iron knife	mid-11 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup> c.



**Fig. 2.** Children's graves with a buckets a – Brześć Kujawski, Grave 161 (acc. to Kaszewskis 1971: Fig. 119); b – Cedynia, Grave 7; c – Cedynia, Grave 30; d – Cedynia, Grave 171 (acc. to Porzeziński 2006: Fig. II7, VI30, XXV171); e – Glinno, Grave 12 (acc. to Lechowicz 2000: Fig. unnumbered); f – Lubień, Grave 112 (acc. to Kurasinski and Skóra 2012: Fig. LXX); g – Tomice, Grave 9 (acc. to Wachowski 1973: Fig. 83d); h – Żłota Pińczowska, Grave 107 (acc. to Miśkiewicz 1967: Fig. 17).

1 – bucket. Elaborated by T. Kurasinski

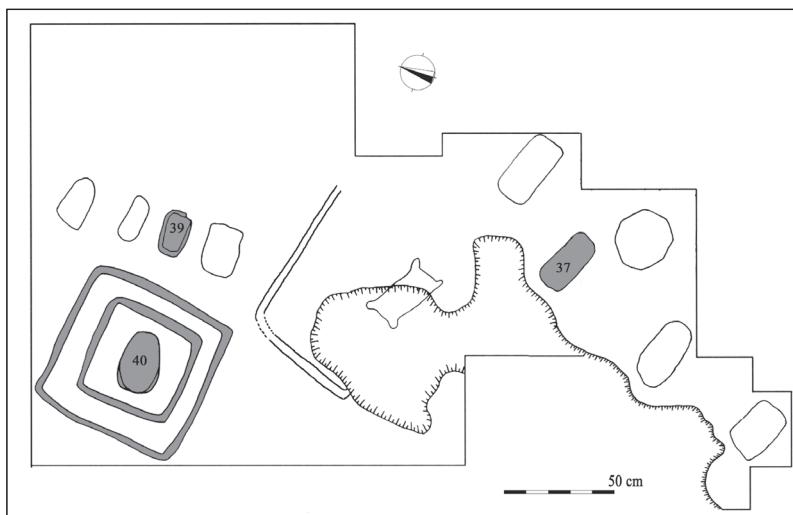


Fig. 3. Cemetery in Pień with children's graves with a buckets – gray (acc. to Janowski 2013: Fig. 1)

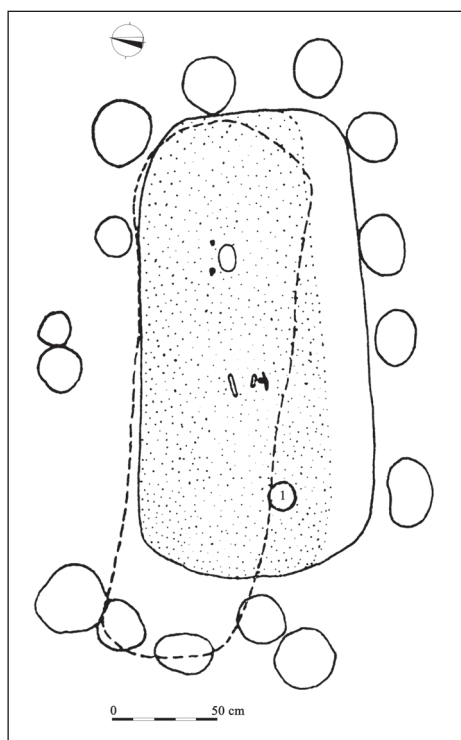


Fig. 4. Child graves with a bucket from Kraków-Zakrzówek, Grave 33 (acc. to Morawski and Zaitz 1977: Fig. VII). 1 – bucket. Elaborated by T. Kurasiński

precisely on the basis of an anthropological analysis. In Grave 40 from Pień, there were remains of a child that reached about 2 years of age. That was the youngest child buried with a bucket. The children from two other graves from this cemetery lived somewhat longer – about 5 years (Grave 37), 5–6 years (Grave 39), and 3–4 years (Grave 112 from Lubień). Six burials were identified as *infans* II (Bodzia, Grave E853; Glinno, Grave 12; Końskie, Grave 34; Kraków-Zakrzówek, Grave 33; Krzanowice, Grave 26; Tomice, Grave 9). Other burials were identified only generally as children's graves (*infans*).

Almost all the burials taken into consideration can be described as single ones. An exception to this is the grave from Złota Pińczowska, where a pile of an adult's bones was found apart from a child's skeleton (Fig. 2h). A knife was found among them (Miśkiewicz 1967: 120, 129, Fig. 17; Zoll-Adamikowa 1971: 21, 23, 191, Fig. 6b).

On the basis of the preserved skeletons, it can be concluded that bodies were buried with arms and legs straight. Only at Złota Pińczowska, one lower extremity was bent at the knee (Fig. 2). In the case of the child from Krzanowice, the arrangement of the bones – as it was described – was 'somewhat chaotic', which was interpreted as a presumable effect of an accident the child had during his or her lifetime (Kaźmierczyk 1957: 125).

The orientation of the head varied (Fig. 2, 4). The skulls of the children buried at Brześć Kujawski, Krzanowice, Lubień and Pień (Grave nr 37) were located in the eastern part of the grave-pit. Also the heads in Cedynia (Grave 7) and Końskie were oriented to the east, although with a slight deviation to the north. The opposite orientation was found more often. The head was oriented to the west (or roughly west) in the case of the children buried at Cedynia (Graves 30 and 171), Glinno, Kraków-Zakrzówek, Pień (Graves 39 and 40), Tomice, and Złota Pińczowska. By contrast, the orientation of the skeleton from Bodzia was totally different from the usual E-W axis, as the skull was directed to the north.

#### A formal analysis of the buckets and their context

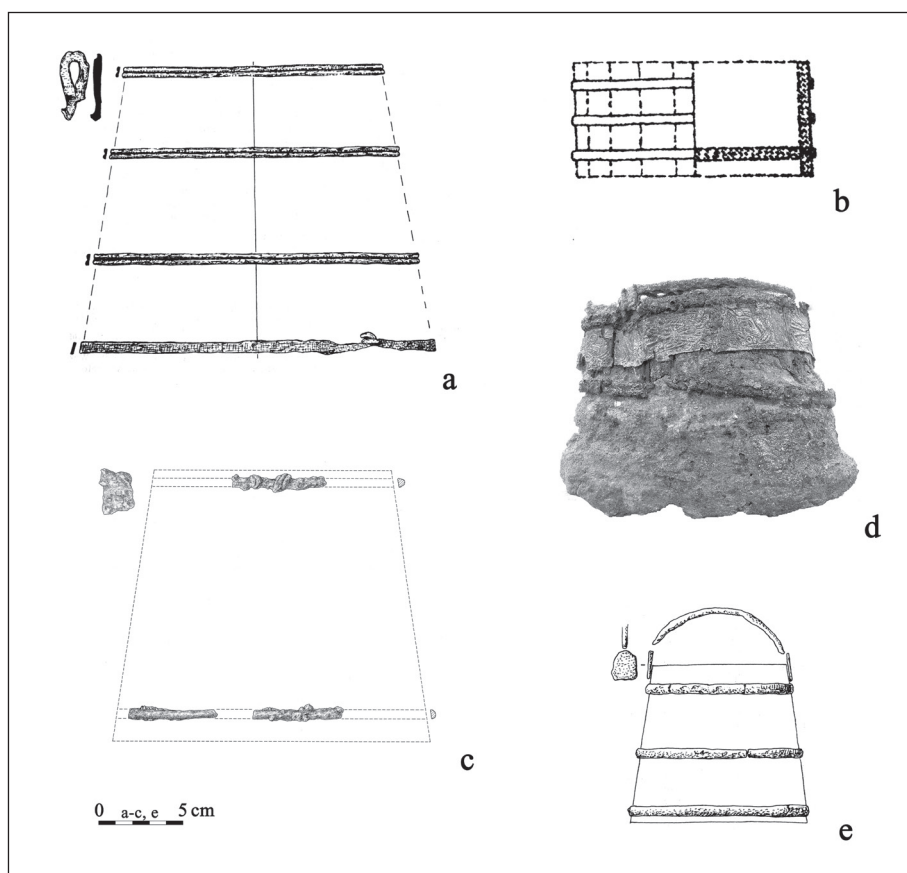
The vessels taken into consideration are open containers made of wooden staves and a bottom with various metal elements, mainly hoops, handles and handle attachments<sup>3</sup>. The main part of the vessels in question was the wooden body made of staves,

<sup>3</sup> According to a basic definition, a bucket should have a handle (Niesiołowska-Wędzka 1980: 407), but some of the containers discovered in the graves, including the items that will be presented in this study, did not have this element, and had a small capacity. Thus, it would be more correct to use the term 'cup' (cf. Barnycz-Gupieniec 1959: 35, Fig. IX2; Woźnicka 1961: 14, 41, Fig. IV2; Kaźmierczyk 1965: 491–493, Fig. 17–18). Not going into details of the nomenclature of wooden vessels, for the sake of simplicity, I will use the term 'bucket' as is usually done in the archaeological literature. Moreover, I do not raise the issue of the possible production of leather or fabric vessels, which has been mentioned recently (Janowski and Kurasiński 2008: 79–80; Drozd *et al.* 2009: 354; Janowski 2013: 399). This conjecture has not been unquestionably proved yet so it should be assumed that containers buried in graves were stave-built wooden vessels.



which degraded easily in soil. This is why most of the containers discovered in the graves were preserved poorly in the form of metal elements, usually heavily corroded and fragmented (Fig. 5–6). Thus, the possibility of reconstructing the buckets is limited to a great extent, and their shapes, sizes and structure are identified mainly on the basis of the *in situ* observations and measurements of individual elements, especially the diameters of the hoops.

Remains of wood have been preserved on the hoops of several buckets, but there are no palaeobotanical data. However, according to specialist analyses, in the Early



**Fig. 5.** Buckets in children's graves (reconstruction and *in situ*). a – Brześć Kujawski, Grave 161 (acc. to Kaszewskis 1971: Fig. IX9–10); b – Kraków-Zakrzówek, Grave 33 (acc. to Morawski and Zaitz 1977: Fig. VI6); c – Lubień, Grave 112 (acc. to Kurasiński and Skóra 2012: Fig. LXX2); d – Pień, Grave 37 (Drozd *et al.* 2009: Fig. 8); e – Tomice, Grave 9 (acc. to Wachowski 1973 : Fig. 94p).  
Elaborated by T. Kurasiński

Middle Ages and earlier, staves were usually made of conifers, especially yew (*Taxus baccata* L.) (with examples Janowski and Kurasiński 2008: 64, note 17; Kurasiński 2012: 292–293; 2015: 196–197).

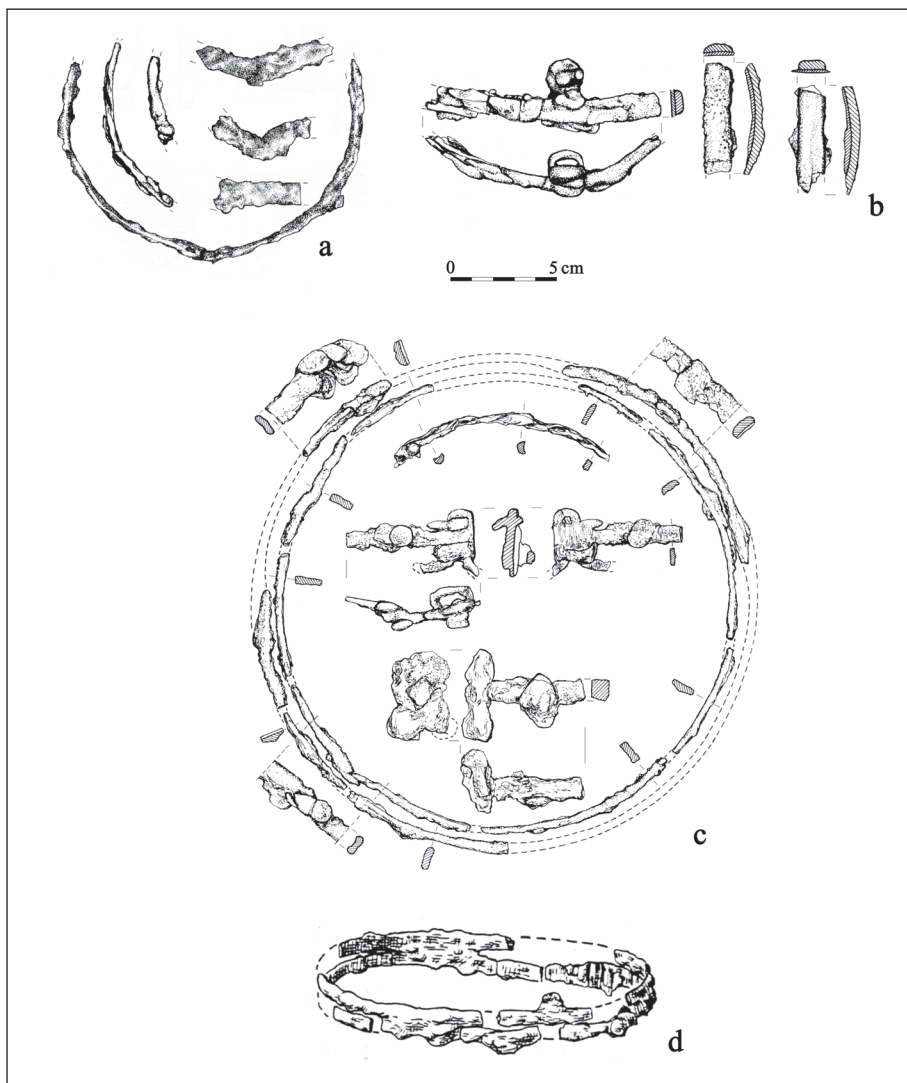


Fig. 6. Bucket fittings in children's graves. a – Cedynia, Grave 7; b – Cedynia, Grave 30; c – Cedynia, Grave 171 (acc. to Porzeziński 2006: XXXVg; XXXVIII–n; LIIa–d), d – Krzanowice, Grave 26 (acc. to Kaźmierczyk 1957: Fig. 7.5). Elaborated by T. Kurasiński

On the basis of the available data, it can be concluded that most of the vessels discovered in children's graves had a form of a truncated cone (Fig. 5a, c–e). It is the most common form in archaeological material from the Early Piast Period. Buckets of different shapes were only occasionally placed inside graves. Therefore, two cylindrical items that were among the grave goods from the children's burials from Kraków-Zakrzówek and Krzanowice are even more interesting (Fig. 5b, 6d).

Not all the basic items had metal elements which can be found in typical buckets, in particular the handles and handle attachments. The absence of the handle in a grave can be explained by its total destruction<sup>4</sup> or the impossibility of identifying it in the grave. The vessel may have also been buried without a handle, which can be proved by the lack of handle attachments, as in the case of the items from Cedynia (Grave 7), Kraków-Zakrzówek, Lubień, and presumably Krzanowice. It is somewhat more difficult to explain the fact that only the handle without handle attachments has been preserved (Cedynia, Grave 30; Glinno; Końskie). The simplest explanation would be total corrosion of the handle attachments. But it is probable that the ends of the handle were fixed into holes made in the staves, as it is done in reconstructions of buckets from Early Medieval settlement sites (cf. Barnycz-Gupieniec 1959: 35, Fig. VIII3; Kaźmierczyk 1965: 486, Fig. 9b).

The other containers had handles fixed to so-called staple-shaped or anchor-shaped handle attachments made of iron (Bodzia; Brześć Kujawski; Cedynia, Grave 171) (Fig. 5a, 6c) or in the form of trapezoidal plates (Pień, Graves 39 and 40; Tomice) (Fig. 5e). It is worth noting that in two cases only one attachment has been preserved: a staple-shaped handle attachment in the above-mentioned grave from Brześć Kujawski and a handle attachment of an unknown shape from Złota Pińczowska.

In the collection of vessels discussed here, the one from the cemetery in Pień stands out the most (Grave 37). It is characterised by an iron covering of the whole wooden body (Fig. 5d). The strips fixed to the staves of the bucket were silver-plated and covered with punched figural and plant motifs, but the state of preservation of the artefact makes more detailed identification impossible (Drozd *et al.* 2009: 354). It is possible that the item from Grave 112 at Lubień had a similar covering as it included a flat, quadrangular piece of metal (Fig. 5c). However, the piece is unrelated to any of the hoops, so it is more probable that it is a relic of a handle attachment (Kurasiński and Skóra 2012: 58, 201).

The number of hoops differed but most of the buckets had three of them. The items from Krzanowice and Lubień had two hoops while the items from Brześć Kujawski

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<sup>4</sup> It is true not only of iron handles, but also of even more vulnerable handles made of bast, string or leather strap, which were used for buckets in the period in question as well. They were tied around a suitably shaped head at the top of a stave or pulled through a hole in it (cf. Barnycz-Gupieniec 1959: 35, Fig. 16b–c, VIII1–2; Wojtasik 1963, s. 287, Fig. 1; Kaźmierczyk 1965: 486, Fig. 9a, 10).

and Pień (Grave 40) had four. By contrast, the vessel from Złota Pińczowska had only one hoop. In cross-section, the hoops were flat on one side and convex on the other side, or less often flat on both sides and rectangular. In the bucket from Brześć Kujawski, three of the four hoops had a groove around them (Fig. 5–6).

The collected vessels differ considerably in size, determined for most of them (see Tab. 2). The diameters of the upper hoops were within the 110–225 mm range, while the diameters of the lower ones were within the 130–265 mm range. The width of the hoops ranged from 6 to 15 mm. The height of the buckets was possible to determine for 11 items and ranged from about 50 to 240 mm, but in most cases did not exceed 140 mm.

The most suitable basis for parametrisation of the studied vessels in terms of size seems to be their capacity. It was possible to assess on the basis of the diameters and heights of the buckets with the use of the formulae for the volumes of solids of revolution corresponding to the forms of the vessels, namely a cylinder [ $V=\pi r^2 h$ ] or a truncated cone [ $V=1/3 \pi h (r_1^2 + r_1 r_2 + r_2^2)$ ]. In order to do so, it was necessary to work on certain assumptions resulting from the morphology of the discussed items (see Pawlak 1999: 118), which is why the results make it possible to estimate the original capacity of the vessels only approximately. In the first place, one should consider the thickness of staves. An average was assumed to be 10 mm, which means that the radii ( $r$ ) are

Table 2. Selected size parameters of buckets discovered in children's graves

No	Site	Number of the grave	Top hoop diameter [mm]	Bottom hoop diameter [mm]	Approximate bucket height [mm]	Capacity [l]
1.	Brześć Kujawski	161	150	210	170	3.46
2.	Cedynia	7	110	140	140	1.22
3.	Cedynia	30	170	190	190	3.82
4.	Cedynia	171	160	203	203	4.47
5.	Glinno	12	225	265	240	8.48
6.	Kraków-Zakrzówek	33	136	136	>50	0.53
7.	Krzanowice	26	150	150	100	1.33
8.	Lubień	112	140	180	140	2.17
9.	Pień	39	130	140	120	1.25
10.	Pień	40	130	140	120	1.25

reduced by this length. Only in the cases of the item from Cedynia (Grave 171) and Glinno, the value of 'r' was reduced by the actual thickness of staves (7 mm and 8 mm respectively). The height (h) of a bucket was considered the distance between the upper and lower hoop assuming that the upper one encircled the edge and the lower one was at the height of the bottom groove, and thus, the bottom (see Pawlak 1999: 118). I elaborate on estimating the capacity of buckets in a publication on the occurrence of these vessels at cemeteries, which has not been published yet.

It was possible to determine the capacity of most items taken into consideration in the study, including truncated cone shaped and cylindrical ones (see Tab. 2). The smallest bucket comes from Tomice. Its capacity was about 0.4 l. The vessel from Kraków-Zakrzówek was slightly bigger, but one should bear in mind that in this case the height was estimated at a little more than 50 mm. At any rate, this item could hold no more than a litre of a liquid. The capacity of most of the buckets was determined to be less than 1.5 l. The item from Lubień slightly exceeded this value (about 2 l). The vessels discovered in Graves 30 and 171 at Cedynia turned out to be bigger – 3.8 l and 4.5 l respectively. The biggest bucket was found in the child's grave at Glinno – almost 9 l.

Also the location of the buckets in the graves and the manner of deposition should be discussed. The more or less accurate location is known for almost all the discussed vessels (except for one item from Pień, Grave 37). In most cases, the bucket was placed near the child's feet, with several different variants of this position. It could be located in line with both feet or with only one of them (Fig. 2b–h, 4). In one case (Krzanowice), the remains of the bucket lay beside the left shin bone. This rule of depositing vessels, proved also for other age categories (Janowski and Kurasiński 2008: 65–66), was not applied only to the bucket from Brześć Kujawski, which was located behind the skull of the child (Fig. 2a).

The buckets were placed with the opening upwards, although in one case a different way was identified. According to J. Kaźmierczyk, in the case of the item from Krzanowice, 'the arrangement of the hoops in the grave indicates that the vessel was placed bottom up' (Kaźmierczyk 1957: 125). However, this statement may be questionable as according to the data given there, backed up with a figure, both of the discovered hoops had the same diameter (150 mm). No remains of the handle were found, whose location might resolve this issue (see Fig. 6d).

One should mention the location of the vessel relative to the wooden grave structures, particularly the supposed coffins. There were cases of placing vessels inside (Cedynia, Grave 171), and outside them (Cedynia, Grave 7) (Fig. 2b, d). They could also have been placed on a 'coffin's which seems to be indicated by the relative locations of the remains of the bucket and of the grave structure in the grave from Żłota Pińczowska (Fig. 2h).

Almost all the burials contained artefacts other than the bucket (see Tab. 1), apart from the grave from Krzanowice. In most cases, it was an iron knife, except for Cedynia

(Grave 30). At Brześć Kujawski, Cedynia (Grave 7) and Lubień, it was the only artefact buried together with the bucket. In the other cases, the quality and quantity of grave goods was higher, especially as far as ornaments and clothing are concerned. Particularly noteworthy is a silk belt shot with gold threads with ferrules and two small bells made of gilded brass. The only military item is an arrowhead from Końskie. A separate group is made up of magical finds, among which a shark's tooth is particularly noteworthy (Janowski *et al.* 2010: 705, Fig. 6). Other items worth mentioning are a clay spindle whorl (Glinno) and a silver coin (Kraków-Zakrzówek).

In the grave from Lubień remains of a thickly woven fabric have been preserved on the outer surfaces of the hoops, but they can not be identified more precisely (Kurasiński and Skóra 2012: 201). This may indicate that the vessel in the grave was covered with or wrapped in some material (cf. Cook 2004: 41). The textile remains might also be a trace of a shroud covering the child's body and the bucket next to it.

## DISCUSSION

The fundamental question related to burying vessels, including buckets, as grave goods is whether these artefacts were made solely for funeral purposes or had been used before they were deposited in the grave. Supporters of the former theory point out that containers placed in graves are smaller in size and capacity than the items found at settlements and strongholds (Pawlak 1999: 120; Trzeciński 2005: 65). Moreover, items with iron hoops and handles increasing the value of the product were supposedly found almost solely at cemeteries (Dzik 2006: 89). Due to the high value of metal hoops, appropriately formed willow, yew or hazel withes are said to have been used instead (see Barnycz-Gupieniec 1959: 35; Kaźmierczyk 1965: 477; Niesiołowska-Wędzka 1980: 407). However, there is not enough evidence in non-cemetery excavation materials which include small vessels with hoops to prove this assumption. Therefore, it can rather be assumed that the vessels placed in the graves were mostly items that had been used before, for example, as tableware for pouring drinks into smaller containers or for drinking directly from them. Some were probably worldly possessions of people with whom they were buried (this issue is elaborated on in Janowski and Kurasiński 2008: 70–72; with more literature). When the vessels were no longer used in a worldly manner and were introduced into the sphere of the funeral rites, they took on a new symbolic dimension, but still performed their practical function. As a result of this process, the buckets or at least some of them could be directly related to the cult of the dead, which was expressed in the form of feasting together with the dead being buried (see Ellmers 1964–1965: 40–41; Steuer 1986: 597, 599; Becker 2006: 392). Some of them may have been gifts in themselves or served as containers holding the necessary 'energy' for the deceased, which was supposed to

make their journey to the spirit world easier (Trzeciecki 2005: 64–65). It is believed that the coopery found in graves may have been used for drinking mead or beer (Ellmers 1964–1965: 34ff; Solberg 2005: 434), and as far as children's graves are concerned, also milk (Szatmári 1980: 109). According to specialist analyses, some burials buckets contained animal and vegetable food, sometimes with an addition of alcohol (Pawlak and Pawlak 2007: 76, 84; Krzyszowski 1995: 61). Also charcoals (Kurasiński and Skóra 2012: 60, 95, 184) and eggshells were found (Szatmári 1979: 809).

Unfortunately, no organic remains have been found in any of the examined vessels, and no vessel has been analysed for the presence of microfossils. Therefore, there is no direct evidence in favour of the theory that vessels in children's graves were related to posthumous veneration of these children, which does not mean that such an interpretation is wrong. Also the perception of buckets as children's personal property is rather debatable, especially in the case of younger children. It can hardly be supposed that they could possess any goods at such an early stage of life. As far as older children are concerned, such a possibility might be thinkable if the vessel buried with a child was (or was intended to be) a part of an initiation rite on the way to adulthood (cf. Kurasiński 2009: 227–229)<sup>5</sup>. As a result of a premature death of a child, a bucket may have been placed in his or her grave as a 'memento' of that event or as compensation for the impossibility of performing the rite. However, these speculations cannot be satisfactorily proved.

The vessels in question can also be interpreted as toys. After all, a bucket (with a shovel) is considered to be one of the main attributes of a child at play. But it should be emphasised that among vessels used for play in the Early Middle Ages, the literature mentions only ceramic (miniature) and not stave-built wooden products (cf. a recent study by Żołądź-Strzelczyk 2013: 11–12)<sup>6</sup>. It does not rule out such an interpretation of buckets but only the smallest ones could possibly have been used as toys. It is rather doubtful that the bucket from Glinno, with a capacity of about 8.5 l, was suitable for play.

Due to the arising doubts about the assessment of the occurrence of buckets in children's graves, one should ask whether the analysed vessels were a material indication of social status. This idea, referring to all the dead buried with a bucket irrespective of their age, has already been presented by some scholars (Steuer 1986: 595; Skalski 1995: 90–91). First of all, prestige was to be expressed by items covered with ornamented

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<sup>5</sup> As already mentioned, buckets are found in the graves of children as young as two or three. It is also true of military items and other objects (Wrzesińska and Wrzesiński 2000: 157; 2002: 282; Kurasiński 2010: 329). However, this issue should be looked into more extensively, as grave goods may have been present in graves of younger children at some cemeteries (Zawadzka-Antosik 1982: 41, 51–55; Rogaczewska 1998: 53–54).

<sup>6</sup> However, there are discoveries of small wooden shovels interpreted as toys (Rulewicz 1958: 329, Fig. VI, 4; VII4).

metal sheet, sometimes described as luxury goods (*Luxusartikeln*) (Arwidsson and Holmquist 1984: 240). It has been noted that buckets often have been found in graves containing pieces of arms and armour, both in the Polish lands and on neighbouring territories (cf. Soudská 1954: 16; Zeman 1956: 99; Kudrnáč 1970: 119; Steuer 1986: 595; Dučyc 1994: 51–52). Due to this, there is a theory that a bucket was a part of a mounted warrior's equipment and his attribute (e.g., Nadolski 1956: 31; Hensel 1987: 710; Skalski 1995: 90; Malinowski 2005: 475–476). Although this hypothesis has not been confirmed because buckets were also placed in graves of ordinary warriors and people buried without weapons (Janowski and Kurasiński 2008: 68, 71; Kurasiński 2012: 296), it can be assumed that they may be regarded as an element related to prestige.

This interpretation may be supported by the estimation of the scale of the phenomenon of putting stave-built wooden vessels in graves. Tab. 3 shows that the number of burials with stave-built wooden vessels is low in comparison to the total number of

Table 3. Numerical data related to graves with buckets

No	Site	Number of identified graves	Number of the graves with buckets	Number of children's graves with the buckets	Source data
1.	Bodzia	57	7	1	Buko <i>et al.</i> 2013; Zamelska-Monczak 2015
2.	Brześć Kujawski	154	7	1	Kaszewska and Kaszewski 1971
3.	Cedynia, stan. 2a	225	9	3	Porzeziński 2006
4.	Glinno	20	3	1	Lechowicz 2000
5.	Końskie	170	17	1	Gąssowski 1950
6.	Kraków-Zakrzówek	76	7	1	Morawski and Zaitz 1977
7.	Krzanowice	40	2	1	Kaźmierczyk 1957
8.	Lubień	126	8	1	Kurasiński and Skóra 2012
9.	Pień	16	5	3	Drozd <i>et al.</i> 2009; 2011
10.	Tomice	47	4	1	Wachowski 1973
11.	Złota Pińczowska	132	2	1	Miśkiewicz 1967



graves known to archaeologists, which is clearly visible in the case of children's burials. Also the fact itself that it was possible to list only 15 burials seems symptomatic, indicating strict ritual selectivity in choosing elements to be buried in the grave pit. A bucket as an 'afterlife' commodity was reserved to a small group of the dead. Apart from the vessels, other artefacts were put into children's graves, including valuable ornaments and items of clothing such as the silk belt, which also suggests that the children buried with these valuables were held in esteem.

## CONCLUSION

The discussion of the collected data does not reveal one fully reliable interpretation of the custom of putting stave-built wooden vessels as grave goods in children's graves. The presence of buckets in children's burials may have been related to the cult of the dead or constituted a component of initiation rites. The smallest containers can also be identified as playing accessories.

However, it seems that most of the data weighs in favour of the theory according to which burying buckets in graves was an important element of establishing and communicating the social status of the dead, which does not mean that the previously mentioned interpretations are wrong, especially those related to the cult of the dead. This might be the evidence of treating children like people in Early Medieval Poland, though it should be said that attempts to stress a special status by particular funeral means elevated not so much the buried person as the celebrants belonging to the circle of his or her close relatives. Similar conclusions were drawn from the research on children's burials with pieces of arms and armour (see Kurasiński 2009).

Only further discoveries of children's burials with buckets may confirm the above-mentioned conclusions. It also seems important to carry out more extensive comparative research, in the first place covering materials from the surrounding area – as there are examples of buckets in graves of the youngest members of society from cemeteries in Bohemia (Smetánka *et al.* 1974: 396), Slovakia (Hanuliak 2004: 191, Fig. 215) and Moravia (Dostál 1966: 86).

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