

Who are you child? Children from the Wielbark culture site in Cecele

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Identity is one of the most important elements of human functioning in society, but we relatively seldom discuss it directly in archaeological research. It is obvious that each society has its own pattern for burying people. Material culture enables to broadcast the attributes which are a manifestation of the multiplicity of identities. Some codes of them are readable only for certain groups. The main aim of this article is to identify the traces of children in the funeral rites at the example of the Wielbark cemetery in Cecele and to reflect on the external identity given by society to children in different age categories. For this purpose a full statistical analysis was conducted the results of which became the starting point for an interpretation of the cultural background.

KEY-WORDS: Roman Period, Wielbark culture, childhood, burial rites

INTRODUCTION: ARCHAEOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD – AGE, DEATH AND IDENTITY

This article concerns children from the Wielbark site in Cecele. I tried, on the one hand, to consider children from different age groups in the context of culture manifestations, and on the other hand, to rethink the identity given by the society to these categories.

Identity is one of the most important aspects of human functioning in society, but it is relatively seldom discussed by the archaeologists. It is obvious that each society has its own patterns of defining people. Each category of people has their attributes. In E. Goffman's opinion (2005: 31–32), even the first contact with a person leads us to establish the characteristic of him or her. On this basis we can 'read' the social identity of a specific person. Material culture enables to ascribe attributes to recognize possible multiplicity of identities. Some of these codes are readable only for certain groups (see Sørensen 1997: 93–94). Even greater difficulties may be posed when it comes to so-called 'funeral filter'. Besides the difficulties in understanding sometimes very

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complicated divisions ruling each society, we need to take into account the problems which arise from the necessity to understand the eschatological concept realized by the community.

The identity of every individual has to be considered on two different levels, in the external dimension: 'who is he?', and the internal one: 'who am I?'. The internal and external aspect of identity need not necessarily be equivalent. The external identity is the result of broadcasting certain characteristics by the society. The internal identity is a result of self-creation, self-reflection and experience. Another issue is the relation between the external and internal identity, how they complement each other and how much they remain in conflict (Melchior 1990: 389–391). In the course of personal development an individual starts to create their own identity, but the others are a point of reference for it. This allows to set individual limits of their own 'I'. Articulation of a person's own norms and values seems to be real only in juxtaposition with the others' standards (Nowicka 1990: 18).

In archaeological research also the perception of age and gender categories becomes problematic. Social archaeology involves examining the ways in which the past communities were organised in connection with the archaeological data (Chapman 2000: 24). The biological perspective of viewing age and sex is not sufficient. It becomes necessary to take into account also their cultural aspect. Age and sex have, besides the biological dimension, also a symbolical and ideological meaning, different at the subsequent stages of human life.

Periodical division of human life entails complicated social divisions, which have a direct impact on the outer and inner identity of man. From the point of view of my research, the most important will be the chronological age, which is determined by the community in connection with the concept of linear time realized by society. Chronological age is closely related to physiological age, but does not coincide with it in 100%. It depends on the conditions in which the man is functioning (cf. Sofaer Derevenski 1994: 11; Halcrow and Tayles 2008: 192; Wolański 2012: 446–453). Often boundary/transition moments in a particular culture are associated with specific events in human life, not necessarily completely dependent on the threshold of physiological development. Through the rites of passage man can be 'born' again, change his/her social status, gain knowledge and experience. They allow him/her to take a specific place in the community. In such a situation society creates the individual in such a way as to realize their ideal image of man (cf. Buliński 2002: 87, 89).

The identity of the individual has been described by a network of relationships in the society that have been constructed in different ways, at different stages of life. Social position of the individual will not only depend on the material or the unique individual characteristics, but primarily is related to the age and gender, which give it its fundamental importance. Because of that, forms and ways of constructing rules through which the separate social categories are created, should be taken into

consideration (cf. Czarnecka 1990; Sofaer Derevenski 1997; Kamp 2001; Pawleta 2005; Błaszczyk 2010).

Additionally research of the past communities is marked by the actualism. Automatically, involuntarily we move our modern standards onto the past reality. When we think about the child, we bring about modern ideas, linking them with the innocence, childhood as time of joy, fun and learning. Of course, this is a mistake, as it is evidenced by the archaeological, historical and ethnological research. The experience of childhood and its creation is differential in time and space. Therefore, it becomes necessary to go beyond the current understanding of the age and gender categories (cf. e.g. Lillehammer 2000; Baxter 2005; Pawleta 2009).

During the discussion on the identity of the past communities, based on the funeral sources, we have to bear in mind that the living bury the dead. As the result, what we see in the burials must have been given and created for the deceased. On the other hand, the approach to the burial as a dataset is also important. It is more significantly the symbolic mark, processed by archaeological interpretation than a direct image of the social position of the deceased. Therefore, the perception of the death pattern becomes very important for the researcher's point of view (Woźny 2002: 45). During the research on cemeteries we are dealing with a filter in which all the information about the past life of the community is included. We should bear in mind the fact that in people's imagination a corpse need not be completely dead, it may be more than the flesh from which humanity flies away. In many cultures, people talk with the deceased, watch him, sometimes even feed¹. That kind of approach to corpses forces very specific behaviours associated with the ways of burying the dead, however, they are dependent on the position in the social group and external identity (cf. Thomas 2001: 31–32).

Research on child and childhood are more popular now than few years ago, also in Polish archaeology (e.g. Pawleta 2004a; 2004b; 2004c; 2005; 2009; Chmiel 2011; 2013; 2014; Romanowicz 2013; Skóra 2013). However, in western literature often appears allegation that the archaeological children 'have been used' in the research, in order to understand the functioning of adults in society. In other words, archaeology has been focusing on the children but hasn't considered them as fully fledged individuals in the society.

The material culture of children should be analysed in connection with the material culture of adults. The archaeologists engaged in research on children postulated to include into archaeological narration the child as an active individual, focusing on the construction of the child, explaining what it means to be a child in different cultures (e.g. Sofaer Derevenski 1997; 2000; Lillehammer 2000; Baxter 2000; 2005; 2008;

¹ Till today the Gypsies are convinced that people are only sleeping and the real death takes place when body begins to decompose.

Chmiel 2011; 2013). Of course, in most cases, the possibilities are very limited, however, it is not impossible. In the case of those specific aspects such as different categories of age or life cycles, it is necessary to consider almost all the variables for each grave. An omission of one or two variables, such as the depth of the pits, distorts the eventual result of the analysis (Pearson 1999; Lenartowski 2001).

CHILDREN FROM CECELE

The site

The site in Cecele (Fig. 1) is one of the most famous Wielbark culture cemeteries. It was discovered in 1965 and the regular excavations were carried out until 1970 by



Fig. 1. Location of the site at Cecele

Jan Jaskanis. For a few years articles presenting various stages of excavations at the cemetery were published (Jaskanis 1968; 1971; 1972; 1974). The final publication was the site monograph, *Ein Gräberfeld der Wielbark-Kultur in Ost Polen* (Jaskanis 1996), which was released in 1995. The features of this cemetery reflect the changes that took place in the Wielbark culture in the younger Roman Period so well that the name of the site is used to describe the younger phase of the Wielbark culture (the Cecele Phase). One of the most characteristic attributes of the site is that the majority of the graves belong to women and children (cf. Jaskanis and Okulicz 1981: 180–181).

The cemetery was established in Phase C1 of the Roman Period and functioned till Phase D. At the area of about 6 000 m², 579 flat burials and seven barrows were recorded. The anthropological analysis in the cemetery allowed to determine quite precisely, for the Wielbark culture standards, the age of the buried people (Jaskanis 1996: 7).

In order to make the graphs clear and simple I decided to remove the transition categories from the visualization. They were included in the general categories of ‘child’ and ‘adult’. The interval *infans* II/*iuuenis* and *infans* II–*iuuenis* was added to the categories of *iuuenis* and *infans* II, respectively. In terms of culture, transitional categories may belong to both groups as well as to one. Additionally, these categories cannot be assigned either to individuals in adulthood or childhood. This solution allowed to not lose data in the undetermined category. In contrast, individuals whose age was defined as early *infans*, I included to the infant category. Generally, children’s burials formed five separate categories: neonates, infants, *infans* I, *infans* II, and children.

When considering the children from the cemetery in Cecele, I did not take into account the category *iuuenis*, because this age group does not include children. Simultaneously, I realize that the late *infans* II may overlap with the youth.

Statistical analysis

A serious problem in this type of analysis is the issue of unclear definitions of ages. The allocation of different anthropological categories built on the basis of physiological age may be dependent of the publication and the anthropologists who conducted the analysis. Therefore, I found it necessary to unify each category in my considerations, taking into account the physiological age: newborn child: 0–3 months old, infant: 3 months old baby – up to 3 years of age, *infans* I: 0–6,9 years of age, *infans* II: 7–14,9 years old, *iuuenis*: 15–19,9 years old, *adultus*: 20–35 years old, *maturus*: 36–50/55 years of age, *senilis*: over 50/55 years of age (cf. Lewis 2006: 1–2; Halcrow and Tayles 2008: 193–197; Fahlander 2011: 5).

Children represent almost 37% of the total number of individuals from the cemetery in Cecele (Fig. 2). In contrast, the adults are around 41% of the buried. Even though the number of children’s burials is considerable, it seems to be a slightly too low. It can not be excluded that among the unspecified burials there are some children’s

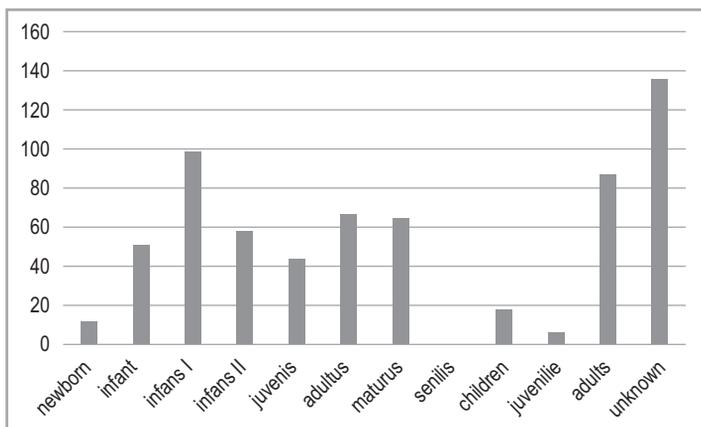


Fig. 2. Proportions of different age groups at Cecele site

burials. The largest category in the chart are converted burials of people in undetermined age. They represent almost 21% of the total number of the graves in the cemetery. This is highly typical and can be associated with the after post-depositional processes and the imperfection of our methods for determining the age and sex. When comparing different categories I always included burials of indefinite age categories to get the most credible results. For the individuals whose age could be determined, the most numerous are the burials of children aged *infans* I, making up slightly more than 15% of the total number of burials. The proportion of the burials of people whose age could be determined quite generally as adults reached almost 13%. The burials of *adultus* and *maturus* people are about 11% and 10%, respectively. Slightly fewer, about 9% of individuals, were in the *infans* II age. A relatively large group comprised the graves where infants were buried, making up about 8% of the total number of burials. Burials of the *iuvenis* amounted to 7%. The graves of children whose age could not be more precisely defined account for almost 3%, while only 1.8% of newborns' graves were recorded. Nearly 0.8% of the graves belonged to juveniles.

The predominant type of burials in Cecele are cremation pit burials. They represent 85% of the graves included in the catalogue. Inhumation graves are about 12% of the general number of burials. The smallest group are cremation urn graves, making up about 2%. The domination of cremation graves in the cemeteries from the Younger Roman Period is a common phenomenon in the Wielbark culture (e.g., Kempisty 1965: 100).

The main kind of graves used in all the age categories of the people buried in the cemetery were pit burials (Fig. 3). As the number of graves from this group is

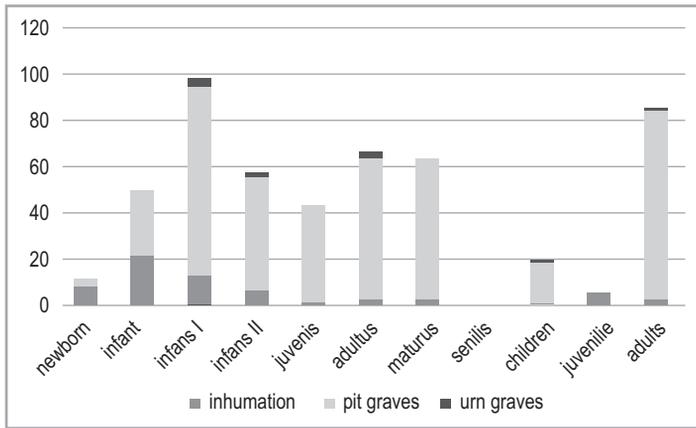


Fig. 3. The relationships between age and funerary rite at Cecele site

considerable, the proportions of different age groups adequately reflect the age distribution across the cemetery. Especially interesting is the age distribution for the inhumation burials, namely, 82% of them contain burials of children, mostly infants and *infans* I. It should be noted that in a few cases children and adults were put together. As the number of urn graves is low, it is not possible to detect any trends.

I have resigned from analysing the length and width of the cremation pits since determination of these dimensions can not bring relevant information from the point of view of my analysis. It is possible to observe changes in the length and width of inhumation burials arising from the differences in the age or gender of the deceased (Pearson 1999; Błaszczuk 2010: 106–110; Chmiel 2013). For the inhumation burials the analysis has been carried out for two categories: children and adults, because of the small number of records. The analysis of the curve on the graphs shows that the children's burials are shorter than those of adults (Fig. 4, 5). However we should remember that the statistical sample of adults' graves is rather small and it can be an insufficient as a point of reference.

The depth of inhumation burials seems to be in some way connected with the age of the deceased (Fig. 6). It appears that children's inhumation burials were shallower than adults' burials. However, we should bear in mind that these results may be influenced by the small size of the sample of burials, excavation methods, and location of a burial in the cemetery. Also the depth of respective pits may be significantly affected by the post-depositional factors. For cremation burials it seems pointless to determine such features as depth and size of the pit.

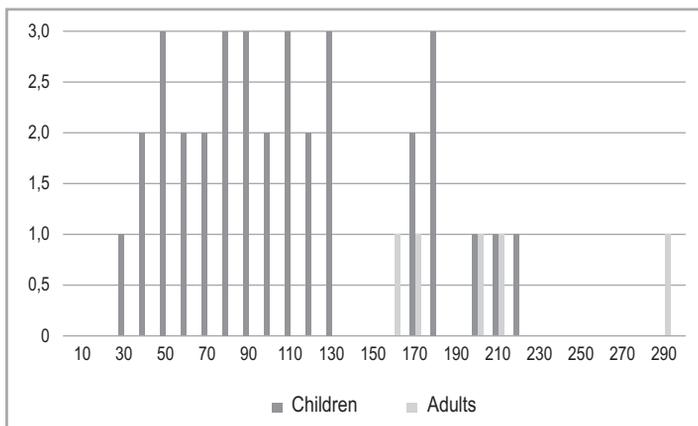


Fig. 4. Length of inhumation graves of children and adult individuals

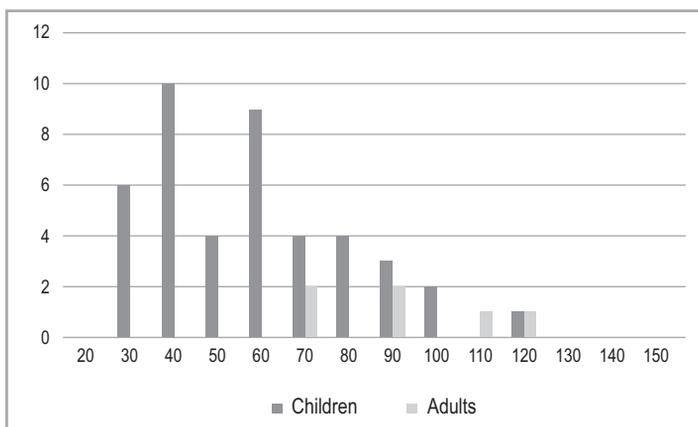


Fig. 5. Width of inhumation graves of children and adult individuals

The inhumation rite gives the opportunity to observe the differences resulting from the age or gender of the deceased (Pearson 1999; Błaszczyk 2010: 106–110). The mean depth of children’s graves is approximately 59 cm, and for adults’ burials, ca. 96 cm. The standard deviation for children’s graves is 18.24 cm and 33.1 cm for adults’ burials. In the case of cremation burials the difference between age groups are not legible.

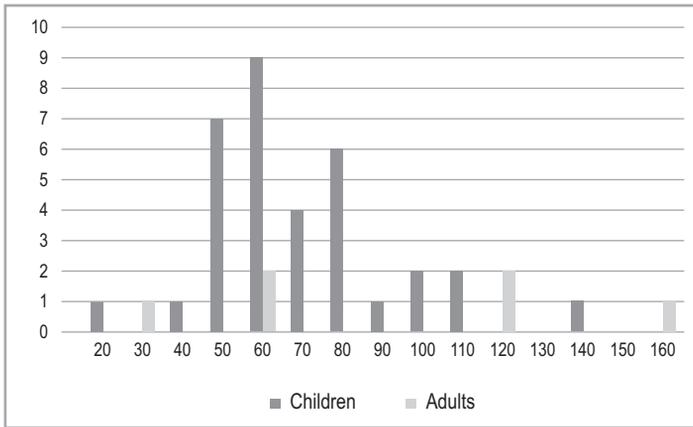


Fig. 6. Depth of inhumation graves of children and adult individuals

The depth of the graves seems to be correlated with the size of the pits. The size of the pits can be also significantly dependent on the soil conditions, season during which they were dug, additional elements such as stones constructions, coffins or rich equipment.

Double burials are relatively numerous in the cemetery at Cecele, and account for 10.4% of the total number of graves. They dominate within pit burials, which seems to be a result of the fact that they are the largest group of graves on the site. The most common configuration are graves of children and women (Tab. 1). An interesting variant of multiple graves is Grave 318 of two children aged *infans* I (grave A: middle *infans* I, grave B: senior *infans* I) (Jaskanis 1996: 46–47). The children are stacked one above the other, both had grave goods. The child from Grave B is richer than that from the Grave A. In addition, the individual from Grave A was laid on his stomach. Both bodies bear traces of burning. This type of burials is known also from Pruszcz Gdański, Site 5, Grave 8, in which two men were buried one over the other (see Pietrzak and Rożnowski 1996: 193–194; Pietrzak *et al.* 2008: 244–247).

Most inhumation graves were orientated to the North. In 17 cases I noted a deviation to the west, which is quite common at various sites, in six cases, to the east. Six graves were orientated in a way untypical for the Wielbark culture: four graves were orientated to the west-east, one, to the east-west. There was also one grave which was north-south orientated. Two burials of newborn children, Grave 114 and 306, had a west-east orientation (Jaskanis 1996: 24, 45). Grave 39 of an *infans* I was also orientated along the west-east (see Jaskanis 1996: 16). Grave 454 also of an *infans* I had an east-west orientation (Jaskanis 1996: 61).

Tab. 1. Summary of multiple burials in which children were buried

Child +Sex	Number of graves
Child+Woman	18
Child+Man	9
Child+Child	6
Child + Adult	15

In determining the possible relationships between age and the specific arrangement, it should be noticed that in inhumation burials children were the dominant age category. The data illustrated in the graph indicate that there is no connection between the orientation of the burial and the age of deceased. Similar derogation could be observed, for example, at the sites in Weklice (Natuniewicz-Sekuła 2007: 476–483; Natuniewicz-Sekuła and Okulicz-Kozaryn 2012: 44, 117, 120), Lasy (Andrzejowski and Martens 1995: 52–53) and Lubieszewo (Wołągiewicz 1995: 34).

The deceased from the inhumation graves in Cecele were buried directly in the pits, on their backs. There were two interesting deviations from this rule. The man in *maturus* age from Grave 26 was not laid on his back but on his stomach. The child aged *infans* I from Grave 318 was laid on top of the *infans* I child, also on its stomach (Jaskanis 1996: 15, 46–47).

Stone elements occurred in 51 graves, which makes 8.7% of the total number of the burials. In 23 cases it was a stone pavement, in 21 there were 1–2 stones at the top of the grave, there are two examples stone covers and in six cases the stones were located at the bottom of the pit. Stone structures were found in the graves of almost every age category. 48% of the total number of the burials are adults, 26% of the burials belong to children, and as many burials of people whose age could not be determined.

Children's burials were grouped mostly in the central part of the cemetery. So far it has not been possible to establish a specific distribution pattern of the graves at the Wielbark culture cemeteries basing on the age or sex. It seems that it was attempted to locate children's burials one next to another and if there was no space, a new 'child zone' was created in a different part of the cemetery. It appears that a similar situation we can be observed in other Wielbark culture cemeteries, for example, Wielbark or Odry (Grzelachowska 1991: 79; Kleeman 2012; 2013). K. Skóra also pointed out the grave of an adult man who was buried between children's burials, on his abdomen, and his only grave goods was pottery (Skóra 2013: 148).

The grave goods

In the Table 2 only the artefacts from single graves were used, since it is impossible to distinguish who owned the respective artefacts in double graves, especially in the cremation ones.

Tab. 2. Summary of grave equipment of children at Cecele site

	Neonantes	Infant	Infans I	Infans II	Children
Brooches	0	13 – 12 bronze, – 1 iron • in 1 grave 4 brooches, • in 4 graves 2 brooches	12 all made of bronze • in 4 graves 2 brooches	10 all made of bronze	1
Buckles	0	0	3	3	2
Beads	2	11 – 7 × amber, – 9 × glass, – 1 × bronze – 1 × bone	13 – 13 × glass – 1 × bronze	10 – 1 × amber – 7 × glass – 1 × bone – 1 × stone	2 – 1 × glass – 1 × stone
Pendants	1	0	0	1	1
Rings	0	0	1	0	0
Needles	0	3	0	1	0
Spindle whorls	0	4	3	1	0
Combs	1	4	17	14	3
Game elements	0	0	0	1	0
Glass vessels	0	0	1	0	0
Pottery vessels	0	15	38	24	13

THE IDENTITY OF THE CHILDREN

Research on the prehistoric and preindustrial societies, which were deprived of access to the advances of modern medicine, shows that the children's and young individuals' mortality rate was approximately 50% (Henneberg 1976; 1977; Roźnowski and Gładkowska-Rzeczycka 1983: 51; Poliński 1993: 8; Séguy *et al.* 2008). In Cecele the percentage of children up to 14 years old is about 37%, therefore it was slightly lower. However it should be borne in mind that there is a very large group of burials for which the age can not be determined. It can not be ruled out that they included some infants' burials. On the other hand, it is also possible that due to the specific ecological and/or cultural factors, the percentage of children buried on the cemetery was lower (Poliński 1993: 8; Sofaer Derewski 1994: 11; Halcrow and Tayles 2008: 192; Wolański 2012: 446–453).

One of the most interesting, in my opinion, phenomena concerning children found at cemeteries from the Roman Period is the absence or very low number of newborns and infants (Czarnecka 1990; Madyda-Legutko *et al.* 2004; Skóra 2013; Chmiel 2014).

Although there is no room here for the examination of all the possible causes of this phenomenon there is no doubt that even after taking into account all the biological factors related to the decomposition of bone tissue, 19 known burials of newborns from the Wielbark culture in Poland are too small a number for the unit of this size and area. The situation is similar in the case of infants, although here the number of burials rises to 99 (newborns' and infants' graves published up till 2014). Therefore the reasons for this phenomenon in my opinion have a cultural meaning (cf. Chmiel 2014).

It is also very interesting that out of the 19 known graves of newborns or late foetuses (because often it is difficult to determine a clear boundary between a late foetus and an early newborn), 12 were found in Cecele. This is the only site of the Wielbark culture which had so many burials of newborns.

It is difficult to distinguish the newborns' burials from other children's and adults' graves. First of all, in Cecele cremation graves are predominant and nearly all newborns were buried in the inhumation rite. Only three cases were multiple burials, the other graves were single. The grave goods in newborns' burials were poorer than in other children's graves, in fact, most of these burials were completely devoid of grave goods or contained single items. No such artefacts as spindle whorls, needles/pins, or elements of belts were unearthed in them; only one grave contained a brooch and another one, a glass bead.

For infants, both the number of graves was much higher and more burials were equipped, but these grave goods were not rich. In most cases, infants' burials contained some glass and amber beads, pottery and brooches. In the better equipped graves usually an adult was buried together with the child so it is not certain to whom the items belonged. The exception is the Grave 81, in which four brooches, a needle, a necklace of amber and glass beads, as well as pottery were found (Jaskanis 1996: 21).

The graves of children in the *infans* I age are the most numerous category of burials in Cecele. This is generally typical of all the Wielbark culture cemeteries. Also, similar age structure can be observed in burial grounds which have been completely excavated, for example, in Kowalewko (Skorupka 2001). The grave goods in the burials of this age category are quite poor, being mainly vessels, single amber or glass beads, and combs. There are no clear differences in this respect between the graves of children in the early and middle *infans* I age. In several burials of individuals whose age was defined as late *infans* I or senior *infans* I, the grave goods were richer. For example, in Grave 58 there were two brooches, a bronze ring, a comb, a glass bead, and a vessel whereas in Grave 318, Burial B, a silver badge was found (Jaskanis 1996: 18; 46–47).

The proportion of graves of individuals in the age of *infans* II is similar to those of *adultus* and *maturus* age groups. The burials of the children in *infans* II age were slightly richer than those of the children aged *infans* I, which may indicate that there existed a separate age group of older children. The most common grave goods in these burials were ceramic vessels, beads, and combs. The brooches are more common, for example, in Grave 533 a brooch made of silver was uncovered, but this burial is a double grave. In Grave 2, located under Tomb V, in which an *infans* II was buried, a brooch, a buckle, a needle, vessels, and a set of discs made of bone, amber, glass, stone, and clay was found. It is the only complete set of game pieces recorded in the cemetery. Similar finds are also known, for example, from the Rostolty type cemeteries. In a child's Grave 59 at Kutowa 2 a glass token was discovered while at Kutowa 1, Barrow 1, Grave 2, a glass token was placed in the burial of a child in the age of early *infans* I located under the barrow while in Barrow 4, in the grave of a child (Jaskanis 2012: 126, 134, 169).

The graves of the newborns and infants were shorter and shallower even than those of *infans* I. The length of the pit increased with the age of the child, yet also longer pits were noted. Shallow graves were certainly more endangered by all types of the post-depositional processes. The differences between the depths of adults' and children's burials are similar to those in Kowalewko (Skorupka 2001), although in Kowalewko only *infans* I and *infans* II categories were analysed, because it was not possible to distinguish the categories of newborns and infants (cf. Chmiel 2013: 97). During the excavations in Węgrowo, M. Kurzyńska and W. Sosnowski also noted that children's graves were shallower. In the northern part of the site scattered bones of children with grave goods were found. According to the researchers, this was due to the shallower placement of children's pits or opening of them (Kurzyńska and Sosnowski 2007: 10), which can be, on the one hand, a result of purely pragmatic issues related to the preparation of the pits, and on the other one, may be connected with an eschatological concept realized by a specific culture (cf. Pearson 1999: 5).

The most frequent cases of double burials were the graves of an adult with a child. They may have been associated either with the contemporaneity of death of the individuals buried in them or kinship. The burials of adults with individuals of *infans* I

age are predominant, yet it seems that this is the result of a greater number, and hence greater mortality in the latter age group. The other age groups of children are represented proportionally. Grave 318, with two children in the age of *infans* I is particularly interesting. The custom of depositing the deceased on the stomach is usually associated with the apotropaic behaviours. Such practices are known from different cultures, e.g., the Przeworsk culture, Nowa Wieś Wrocławska, Grave 119 (Ibragimow 2011: 167), or from sites related to the Elbe Circle, such as Bobrowice, Site 22 (Żychliński 2005: 333). There are also examples of that kind of behaviours from early medieval Slavs or from ethnographic sources (Gardęła 2011). Practices preventing the dead from seeing the person who is burying him or the entrance to the grave can in some way be connected to the belief in the so-called evil eye. Fearing that the dead may put a spell, people try to cover his eyes (Aspöck 2008: 20; Gardęła 2011: 53). Another explanation can be simply the desire to protect oneself against the harmful activities of the deceased, which probably also explains burning. In these situations also sudden death of a child may be possible, or the situation in which one of the deceased was an offering for the other. However, the latest version seems to be unlikely because both graves were equipped. It seems that in this case it is crucial to establish what the relationship between the children was. After all, children were buried face to face, perhaps this is the key to solve this problem.

DISCUSSION

The above considerations may indicate that the newborns were a separate age group in the Wielbark culture community from Cecele and for some reasons they had been treated in a different way. Examples of such behaviours are known both from history and ethnology. The appearance of a new child in the world always had a real impact on the mother and the whole group. In many cultures the social status of women depended on how many children she had and what their sex was. Such a situation is known, for example, from ancient Israel. When a woman had a son, she deserved more respect than if she had a daughter (Machałowska and Elkowicz 2008: 28, 31).

This kind of behaviours can be nowadays observed, for example, in India and China. Selective abortions and killing already born female children are still very prevalent there.

We can also find some examples in the Scandinavian sagas. In the Saga of Gunnlaug Snake Tongue, there is a story of Jofrid, whom Torstein tried to force to kill her child if it was a girl, however, the mother didn't kill her daughter but managed to hide her. On the one hand she was afraid of her husband but on the other one, she didn't want to kill her child (*Gunnlaug...*, III). The killing of newborns was also a common practice among the Germanic tribes, although Tacitus (*Tacitus*: 19) specifically stated

in *Germania* that it was forbidden to kill children, yet it seems that this description was idealized by the author. Plutarch said that the poorest often killed their own children, because they could not afford to maintain them, and treated poverty as the greatest affliction (*Plutarch*: 5). In Scandinavia so called ‘raising up’ was practised, which consisted in leaving sick or unwanted children in a specific place to die (Załoska-Strömberg 1986: 15; *Njal...*: 105). It seems that also in the areas occupied by the Wielbark culture such customs may have existed, although there is no archaeological evidence for that.

The next question to be answered is the time when the child became a full member of society. In what kind of circumstances was the group able to accept the new member and give him identity? It is possible that initially the newborn was not treated as a member of the community. Only as a result of some rites of passage a newborn child could be included. Possibly because of that in Cecele we can observe only few burials of newborns and quite a high number of infants’ graves. However, in this case the possibility of preservation of the bones, which may have been affected by the post-depositional processes, should be taken into account.

In some groups of the Angles and Saxons from continental Europe, the newborns had to pass the ‘test of the water’. If a child survived immersion in water, it became a full member of the society, if not, it was left in the river (Molleson 1991 after Mays 2002: 185). In the Slavic culture a child was a nameless foetus till six weeks of age; after this period a so-called ‘*wywód*’ ceremony took place. This was a ritual of showing the infant to the sun and giving it the first, protective name. The Slavs believed that infants had enormous powers and often because of that dead children were placed under the threshold of the house as a protection sacrifice (Szyjewski 2003: 198). Of course these are only the examples of specific treatment of newborn children. It does not seem that analogous procedures were applied to the smallest children from Cecele. However, low number of newborn graves may suggest that some rituals may have been performed.

Of course, there may have been some rituals associated with the acceptance of the newborn child by the parents. Often, like for example in Ancient Rome, they could be limited to raising a child or naming it (Bugaj 2004: 24). In medieval Scandinavia it was important to give a child a name (e.g., *Harald...*: 25). In most of the Nordic sagas the process of including a child in the community consisted in giving name to a child along with sprinkling of its head with water (e.g., *Egil...*: 31; *Hakon...*: 40; *Njal...*: 14). Children who were abandoned by their parents did not have the right to their own burial (see Czarnecka 1999: 100). This may explain the presence of a higher number of infants burials than newborns. Another way to include the child in the community and a symbol of its acceptance may be to start breastfeeding. In some cultures, it was not possible to kill a child who had already been breastfed, or vice versa, when the mother died, and she was feeding, her baby was killed (Czarnecka

1990: 95; Corbier 2001: 54). Perhaps only those newborns and infants who had been breastfed deserved to be buried in the cemetery.

The rites of including children in the community could be different and depend on the sex. A boy could be approved by ritual of rising, a girl only by being breastfed. Unfortunately, due to the specific physiology of small children and the limitations of the anthropological analysis it is rarely possible to determine the sex of the deceased child. One of the most effective methods of determining age, based on metric indicators, is measuring the teeth. However, infants do not have teeth so this method can not be applied to them. Another method could be the DNA testing (e.g. Witas *et al.* 2004), but it has not been carried out for the bone remains from Cecele. Undoubtedly, if the sex of the children from Cecele was determined, it would be possible to answer at least some of the questions connected with the youngest members of this society buried in the cemetery.

It would be advisable to compare Cecele with the other Wielbark burial grounds from the Younger Roman Period. On the site in Maślomęcz a high number of newborns' and early infants' burials has been recorded (Rutkowska 1989) while in Gródek Nadbużny (Kokowski 1993) there were no burials of the newborns and many burials of infants. At that site, however, a large group of graves of children whose age has not been precisely determined, and these graves may have contained infant. The number of the youngest children's burials in Cecele is definitely higher than at the cemeteries from the Lubowidz Phase (the earlier phase of the Wielbark culture). Did the mortality increase during the Late Roman Period (cf. Skóra 2013)? It seems that the observed situation could be the result of some cultural changes connected with the movement of the Wielbark culture to the east and south-east.

The presence of the grave goods in the infants burials can be explained by the parents' attachment to their children. These goods need not have been owned by the child; they may have belonged to the adults who expressed through them their affection and/or wish to protect their children, by giving them some items with the apotropaic function.

This category of items may include mainly beads and it was a relatively frequently observed category of artefacts in infants' burials. On the other hand, in the Viking Age Scandinavia, gifts were given to the children who had grown their first tooth, therefore, in the discussed case the equipment may have been related to a biological sign of a child's development (cf. Czarnecka 1990: 101; Skóra 2013: 147). In the Scandinavian mythology the fact that Frey got Alfheim from Æsir, who was born as a Vanr between Aces, was explained by the fact that it was a gift on the occasion of the appearance of the first tooth (Ślupecki 2003: 85).

Another point where a rite of passage may have been applied was when the mother stopped breastfeeding, which is understood as the end of infancy. In ancient Israel the children were breastfed until the age of three and at the end of this period great feasts

were arranged (Machałowska and Elkowicz 2008: 28, 31). Plutarch explained breastfeeding as an expression of mother's care and love. He emphasized that women have breasts placed at the top, as opposed to animals which have them on their bellies (*Plutarch*: 2). Therefore it seems that the end of breastfeeding could provide some kind of moment of transition both for the mother and her child. It could be related to the fact that a child had passed the most dangerous period in life. After the third year of life the mortality of children was significantly lower.

In Cecele the group of *infans I* children is quite high so it may have included also the newborns and infants. Generally, if we consider the grave goods, the *infans I* group does not differ much the infants. If we interpreted the age categories basing only on the grave goods, the infants and children up to 7 years would have to be included in one group. However, in the *infans I* group, some more burials can be considered as relatively well equipped, especially in comparison to the whole population of children. It cannot be excluded that in the Wielbark culture society age of 7 years was a some social boundary. In many communities that was the age which had a meaning in the processes of giving the child a social identity. Often this was the period in which a child, depending on its sex, was committed to the education of either the father or the mother. In ancient Sparta a boy in this age became the 'property' of the state, from this moment everything he did had to serve the realization of the archetype of an ideal citizen and hence, the ideal state. The childhood was in Sparta significantly reduced to only a few years in the family home (Możdżeń 2005: 30–31). In the Slav society age of 7 was the time of hair cutting. The ritual hair cutting was combined with naming a child and granting him the status of a regular member of society. The equivalent ritual for girls was called 'wreaths' or 'braiding' (Leciejewicz 1972: 303). The Roman law clearly marked the border of seven years of age. After crossing this border, a boy began to learn outside the home and gained the right to participate in religious and public life (Laurence 2000; Bugaj 2004: 24). For example Theodoric was at this age sent as a hostage to Constantinople (*Jordanes*: 271).

The period after the end of seven years could be a time of learning a profession, the art of war, in the case of girls, time of preparation for the 'housewife duties'. In Scandinavia a child was often sent to be educated by the vassals of the family or relatives (Foote and Wilson 1975: 128). However, as I have already mentioned, there are no clear differences in the equipment of *infans I* and *infans II* children. However, the grave goods in the Cecele Phase were generally poorer than it was in Lubowidz Phase. The clearly richer graves were those of individuals in the *adultus* age, yet the burials of individuals at the age *iuvenis* age are also increasingly better equipped.

The richer grave goods of some children in age the of *infans I* and *II* could have been in some way related with the social status of their families (cf. Domański 1979: 158). The richer graves could be also explained by some 'uniqueness' of the buried children. There are cases of children-heroes known in the literature, e.g., Grimoald, who was

kidnapped by the Avars. The boy was presented by Paul Diacon as a brave child from the Lombard tribe, who could not bear the thought of slavery and killed the kidnaper with his own child sword (*Paul Diacon: 37*). The Scandinavian mythology also knows some cases of exceptional children. A son of Odin, Wali, avenged the death of Baldar, the beloved son of the gods when he was one year old (*Song about Wagtama*).

CONCLUSIONS

It is possible to look in Cecele for some divisions in the generally defined childhood period. Firstly, the youngest children buried in the cemetery are clearly distinguishable. Their number in comparison to other Wielbark cemeteries is surprising. If we consider the youngest age categories from the Wielbark culture cemeteries from the perspective of culture, the external, outside identity broadcast for youngest children will have to be manifested in a very obvious way, by their presence or absence on the cemetery. Unfortunately, so far no newborns' burials have been discovered outside the main area of the cemetery, yet it is not surprising if we consider the examples of 'rising up' from the areas of Scandinavia, as well as the Angles and Saxons' trial of water.

There are also clear differences in grave goods in the burials of children from the other age categories. It seems that, like in the other German cultures, in the Wielbark culture several stages of childhood can be distinguished, so it is possible to follow the changes in identity transferred by the community (cf. Skóra 2013). Undoubtedly, in order to clarify the conclusions it is necessary to reconsider the Wielbark Cecele Phase graves from this point of view, which may allow to resume the discussion of the issues of the youngest members of the Wielbark communities.

Some important information may be contributed to the study of identity in the Wielbark communities by the research on sex of the children buried in the cemeteries. As there is no sufficient data about the sex of the youngest members of the community, no wider conclusions about the possible divisions within the childhood can be drawn.

It is worth to mention the opportunities given by the modern DNA analysis methods, including determining the phenotype and genotype. Although, like the other methods, it depends on the state of preservation of the bone material, it gives significantly greater possibilities in determining the sex (Witas *et al.* 2004).

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