Archaeologia Historica Polona
vol. 30, 2022, pp. 7–36, ISSN 1425–3534, DOI: 10.12775/AHP.2022.001

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Grave and cemetery as a manifestation of social behaviours. A few thoughts on the example of early medieval burials from the Chełmno-Dobrzyń zone

Abstract. The starting point for the study of social behaviour based on traces of materials related to funeral rituals is the assumption that to some extent, cemeteries and burials (which are part of the former) constitute a reflection of social relations. Findings obtained for an analysis of the spatial context of necropolis sources can provide plenty of information necessary for describing the social structure, determining the hierarchy and the system of power, specifying the financial status of the deceased, and reconstructing the relationships between individuals and groups existing at that time, whereas in a more general sense, for examining the development and the complexity of organisation of a given society. The article presents several issues regarding social activities manifested in the appearance of graves and entire necropolises (based on graves from cemeteries in the Chełmno-Dobrzyń zone – Kałdus, Gruczno, Pień and Napole, among others). The examples discussed in the article convey socially regulated and consciously undertaken activities expressing a certain consensus that ensured stable development of local communities. An important part of it was played by funeral praactices, which were subordinated to constantly changing social rules, albeit with due consideration of various dissimilarities including sepulchral customs that stemmed from ethnically, religiously, and culturally alien environments. Unusual burials characterised by differences in the body arrangement and the choice of grave goods, as well as non-standard grave structures, are all traces of these practices. Social relations, including family and intergenerational ties expressed, among others, in double and multiple burials, can be found in a cemetery. Hence, necropolises could be considered a mirror image of a "spatialised" social order; an order transferred into the eschatological dimension.

Keywords: social behaviour, motivation behind action, early medieval necropolises, funeral rites.

Introduction

Burial ceremonies combine three aspects of human conduct, namely, the social aspect, the symbolic-religious aspect, and practical activities of technical and operational nature set in a specific time and space. They form a basis on which all communities built their group identity on and encoded their characteristic way of understanding the world around them.

The scientific approach to the deciphering of the content hidden in burial practices transformed over the course of several decades with the approach to funeral sources balancing between utilitarian, symbolic and contextual (Metcalf, Huntingtton 2010, pp. 14–19; Ciesielska 2009; 2012, pp. 20–21; Józefów-Czerwińska 2012; Błaszczyk 2013). The most interest among researchers has always been sparked by the aspects of rituals that could be helpful in reconstructing not only the material sphere of life of past communities, but also the one concerned with beliefs and, particularly, eschatology. This statement was commonly accepted both in traditional archaeology and in subsequent research trends, just like the belief that both tangible remains of burials and the appearance of a cemetery in the spatial sense could be an image of social relations and, indirectly, a manifestation of territorial behaviours of a human as an individual and as a society (Woźny 2000, p. 31; 2015; also, cf. Pleterski 1995, pp. 129–135). Therefore, results of statistic and qualitative analyses were applied for describing social stratification, determining hierarchy and power structure, examining the economic status of the deceased and the existing relations between individuals and groups, and in a more general sense, investigating the development and the degree of complexity of social organisation[1]. Nowadays, reducing the information contained in sepulchral sources solely to the functional aspect of things spurs legitimate concerns. Man-made items did not serve exclusively for satisfying a man's immediate needs but were active elements of a culture system that sustained social ties, gave substance to a complex network of meanings, also regarding the symbolic (Tabaczyński 1993, p. 18; Hodder 1995, pp. 176–177; Szczepanik 2020, p. 69). Therefore, in every instance, an accurate interpretation of the content of burial rites should take into account a given specific socio-cultural context in order to avoid the trap of anachronism that researchers who try to explain the reality of the past using contemporary behavioural patterns fall into (Hodder 1995, pp. 70–73). It is also worth noting that grave finds do not have to represent reality; on the contrary, they can camouflage it thus creating

[1] On the basis of historical materialism, these matters in Polish archaeology have been analysed in the context of the Early Middle Ages by Lech Leciejewicz (1954; 1997) and Jerzy Gąssowski (1957), whereas in the context of the earlier period, they were investigated by Kazimierz Godłowski (1957). A new, shifted approach to funeral materials that are used in the discussion on the ethnic/cultural identity and the interpretation of social relationships are presented in publications from the last several years (Parker Pearson 1999; Williams 2003; *Kim jesteś* 2011; *Królowie i biskupi* 2014).

a polished-up, false image of society that conceals the occurring social and financial inequalities (Parker Pearson 1999, p. 192). This is true, for instance, in the case of medieval graves that are identical in terms of form (according to the principle that death makes everything equal), though serve are burials of people who belonged to various social classes.

Social manifestation of burial rites

The motivations and the nature of activities taken by the early medieval communities facing death and the necessity to carry out a burial ceremony can be put into three crucial theses:

1. A deceased person does not bury him- or herself (Parker Pearson 1999, p. 3); hence the conclusion that the organisation and the course of an entire burial ceremony, the garments and the grave goods the deceased was buried with, as well as the location, form, and structure of the grave are determined by burial organisers, that is, usually immediate relatives of the deceased person and representatives of the community he or she were part of; in this specific context, burial rites become social constructs.

2. A human is a social creature – he or she cannot function outside society, also in the biological sense; hence, in medieval law (but not only) infamy, which entailed depriving a person of dignity and the rights that free people are entitled to, taking away their good reputation, and excluding them socially or exiling them was equivalent to the death penalty (Guriewicz 1976, p. 162; Geremek 1989, p. 708; Modzelewski 2004, p. 405 *ff.*). A bad reputation in this life could also mean dishonour and rejection after death[2]. Therefore, the exceptionally cruel punishment applied to the greatest perpetrators was to abandon their bodies, leaving them for wild animals to prey on, or, in a more lenient form, to refuse duly burial for the deceased, for instance, by isolating the grave and situating it in the border area of a cemetery; in most of the traditional beliefs, this was equivalent to condemning a soul to wander for eternity (Ariés 1982, pp. 54–55).

3. Most of the decisions and the activities pertaining both to an individual and the social life of an entire community required some consensus; a decision made according to the binding custom, moral standards, and legal regulations[3]; nonetheless, each burial became a pretext for negotiating social values and perceptions,

[2] This was sanctioned by the Church with its decrees, as it excluded from the Christian community all the excommunicated and prohibited burying them in consecrated ground (Geremek 1989, p. 708; Wojciechowska 2013, p. 28).

[3] The collective nature of actions, the necessity of a consensus regulated by the principle of acclamation was embedded into the norms of life of barbarian communities in Europe (Modzelewski 2004, pp. 364–365).

particularly when faced with cultural, religious, and ethnic differences between individuals buried in the shared space of a cemetery (Lippok 2020, 156–157; a list of other references is included there).

Analysed in terms of the social aspect, human behaviours should be considered conscious and thought-out actions, often learned or determined by previous experiences, triggered by specific situations, forced by other people or environmental factors (Weber 2002, p. 6). Those of an individual nature can arise for egoistic reasons – one's conviction that it is necessary to satisfy his own needs first or to act in a somewhat altruistic way, though in this case, it cannot be ruled out that there is an expectation of reciprocation in line with the principle *do ut des* (Mauss 1973; Guriewicz 1976, p. 228; Burszta 2005, p. 17). In turn, all collective activities require cooperation and commitment of the immediate family, and often also other people connected in various ways. Social reactions can be (and often are) based on psycho-physical motives inspired by emotions[4], which are exceptionally strong when facing illness, particularly death of loved ones (i. a., Metcalf, Huntington 2010, pp. 43–44).

In the majority of traditional communities, it was death that disrupted the previous order, giving rise to chaos by causing turmoil in the existing social relations. The trauma of a loved one passing away was complemented by sensations and feelings triggered by that event, namely, psychological and physical pain, grief, but also a coinciding feeling of uncertainty of the dead person's fate or an adverse effect of the deceased being mishandled and dishonoured, and thus seeking revenge. Hence, burial rites were intended to restore balance, bring a new social order, and mend broken ties, but also ensure peace for the deceased and his or her family (Brencz 1987, pp. 218–222; Leach 1989, pp. 81–82; Józefów 2010; Urbańczyk 2020, pp. 83–84)[5].

Therefore, it seems valid to believe that burial was and still remains an opportunity to manifest not only religious declarations of the deceased and his or her eschatological ideas, but also social behaviours of individuals participating in the funeral. The dead person was playing his or her last social role, and the burial rite participants did so, too[6]. A separate issue that remains outside of the scope

[4] This pertains both to states of tension caused by various stimuli, both brief ones and those that last longer, are contextual, require a proper reaction that is clear on the social level, manifested – for instance, in burial rites – in mimicking the deceased person, his or her body language, as well as in the choice of items and their configuration (Tarlow 2000).

[5] Restoring disrupted order was facilitated by adequate rituals that involved both the living and the dead, termed "rites of passage" by Arnold van Gennep, a researcher who was the first one to dedicate more attention to them (Gennep van 2006).

[6] A funeral has gradually become a specific *teatrum*, a conscious, staged act where the main role was played by the body of the deceased, whereas grave goods were considered props chosen to suit the position the deceased person had in the social hierarchy (Metcalf, Huntington 2010, p. 80; Sofaer 2006, p. 43).

of scientific research is the answer to the question, to what extent was the social order in the world of the living transferred into the extra-burial dimension and was it reflected in how people imagined the afterlife back then? It seems that by scrutinising several specific aspects of burial practices, we can take the opportunity to learn the social conditionings of medieval funeral rites.

Individual and collective social behaviours on the examples of burials from Chełmno-Dobrzyń zone

A particular value for the description and interpretation of social behaviours from the specified Chełmno-Dobrzyń zone is offered by burials from two major necropolises, namely, a burial ground on the Vistula situated in Kałdus near Chełmno and a settlement complex located on the opposite bank of the Vistula in Gruczno near Świecie. Both these complexes stand out due to their vast necropolises that were in use for a long time; as for Gruczno, the number of burials is close to 500 (from the 12th century to the end of the 13th century), whereas in the case of four cemeteries in Kałdus, we are talking about over 800 skeleton graves that have been examined and yielded published studies (dated back from the end of the second half of the 10th century to the beginning of the 13th century). The majority of the burials in Gruczno and Kałdus are consistent with the model of Christian burial rites; however, particularly when it comes to burials from site 4 in Kałdus, there is also a quite numerous group of graves that show significant deviations that can be interpreted as remains of older traditions or an evidence of cultural influences from outside of the Chełmno-Dobrzyń zone (Bojarski 2020).

The selected cases discussed below show on the one hand care for the deceased, but most of all, they are a proof of conscious social behaviours clear both on the level of a single grave and an entire cemetery.

Let us begin with the grave. Given the scarce nature of medieval written sources and a limited number of tangible evidence subjected to processes of selection and destruction that were unearthed in the course of archaeological studies, we can learn about some elements of the burial rite to a small extent only. However, what is left – the arrangement of bones in the grave, objects that once were part of the grave goods, including the way they were positioned, particularly in relation to the body – must hence be enough in the absence of the oral story about the place that is no longer operating in the memory of contemporary people.

Therefore, every element of the "architecture" of a grave becomes significant, particularly its most important part, that is, body (in an archaeological context – bones). Based on observations of how the skeleton is positioned inside the burial pit, which in many cases appears consciously arranged (Fig. 1), one can guess much care was given to others, especially the smallest and the weakest, who needed the

Fig. 1. Kałdus, province Kuyavian-Pomeranian, site 4. An example of a deliberately posed burial – grave 380 (photo by P. Biarda)

care of the adults. This stands in contrast to opinions expressed in older subject literature on indifference to death of children, who did not deserve better treatment as individuals who were not fully socially developed (e.g., Ariés 1995, p. 8).

In the case of children, even the smallest ones, it is legitimate to talk about sort of tenderness manifested in a meticulous arrangement of the body and the head supported on a pillow (Fig. 2), intended to ensure that the deceased child was

comfortable, while on the other hand, it was additionally shown by positioning the face towards the rising sun, which in Christianity symbolises the direction that Christ was said to come from again (Bojarski 2020, p. 271)[7]. The support could take the form of a stone (e.g., grave 152 on site 4 in Kałdus) perhaps symbolising also the solid sleep of the dead. Another possible manifestation of caring for the posthumous fate of children is the arrangement of the body in the curled-up position, on the side, which is natural for people who are asleep; this position was applied more often for children than for adults. This is probably also linked to the foetal position, which evokes positive associations (Brather 2007, p. 114). This interpretation could apply to five graves from site 4 in Kałdus (no. 114, 253, 353, 370, 427), where skeletons of children who died within the age range *infans* I and *infans* II were unearthed, arranged in the right lateral recumbent position. Since in most of these burials no grave goods were found, perhaps the intention behind treating the body with much care was to compensate for the lack of tangible burial gifts.

It cannot be ruled out that similar concerns applied to grownups, too, whose bodies were in the lateral recumbent position. An intentional arrangement can be assumed for the deceased woman from grave 54, site 4. The woman's body (*maturus*) was lying on the right side, the head directed to the east, her face to the north. One of the lower extremities was bent at the knee, while the left arm, bent at the elbow, was at face height; her entire body resembled the position of a person who is asleep (Bojarski 2020, Fig. 90: d). All the characteristics – the regular pit located among many similar ones and the modest nature of the grave goods in the form of a silver temporal ring – evidence that it was not a grave of a woman rejected by the local community. The lateral recumbent positioning of the skeleton made two other burials of women stand out in this grave field, namely, no. 100 and 408, with both deceased females categorised as *adultus-maturus*. In the former, the body was laid on the right side and decorated with six tin temple rings. As for the latter, the skeleton was in the left lateral recumbent position with no grave goods identified. All the above-mentioned burials were attributed to one of two time horizons that the necropolis operated in, specifically, substage 1b (the turn of the 10/11th century – first half of the 11th century) and stage three (second half of the 12th century – the turn of the 12/13th century) (Chudziak, Bojarski, Stawska 2010, pp. 114–119).

Most likely, similar mechanisms were at work in the case of funerals of individuals who died at the same time and in the same circumstances who had very strong social ties in their lifetime. One can guess that this applies to spouses or couples in close loving relationships that should not be broken apart by anything,

[7] The positive valorisation of the eastern direction originates from the Bible (cf. relevant citations from the Book of Zechariah 6: 12 translated by Jakub Wujek or in the Book of Ezra 43: 1) and echoes in the teachings of the Church Fathers. This was clearly stated by Origen of Alexandria, who referred to Christ by saying, "Oto Mąż a imię jego Wschód" [in literal translation, "Here is the man whose name is the East" – Translator's note] (Forstner 1990, p. 95).

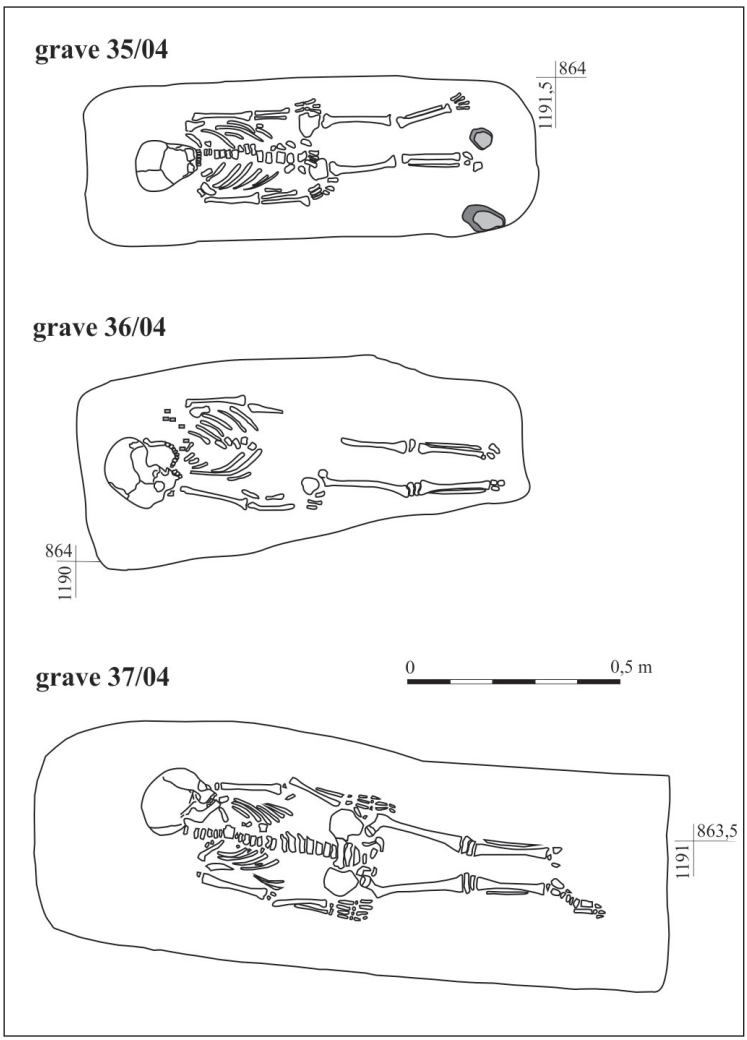

Fig. 2. Kałdus, province Kuyavian-Pomeranian, site 2. Examples of care for dead children – graves 35, 36 and 37 (after Bojarski 2020, Table 18)

not even death. Couple burials of people of different sexes in a single pit happen on grave fields from the early Middle Ages rather sporadically; typically, they do not exceed 1% of all the graves. In this respect, the regions of Masovia and Podlasie are exceptional, with such graves occurring much more frequently (e.g., Bazar Nowy, Święck-Strumiany) (Gardeła, Kajkowski 2014). What is even more rare is a couple burial with a shared wooden coffin. In Kałdus, this pertained to two chamber graves no. 13 and 356, as well as two double burials placed in chest coffins

in grave 261 (same-sex individuals) and grave 194 (woman at the age of *maturus* and a child at the age of *infans* II), site 4 (Bojarski *et al.* 2010, pp. 440–441, 501, 525, 557–558). Aside from couple burials of a woman and a man, which are conclusively interpreted as spousal burials, it is more common in this group to record burials of a woman – interpreted as a mother – and her small child (usually an infant), who likely died at the same time (the cause of death specified as complication during childbirth)[8]. Some of them could have been simultaneous deaths due to illness, war, or a misfortunate accident.

Double burials that contain male and female remains seem especially interesting. One can wonder whether these should be considered a reminiscence of old rite traditions that order a widow to follow her husband out of great love, as accounted by Pseudo Maurycy[9], Saint Boniface[10], and Ibrahim ibn Yaqub[11], or, perhaps, they were coerced by their family and community, a custom of Mieszko I-era as interpreted by Thietmar of Merseburg[12]. It is likely that we should take this lead in the attempt to explain the origin of the shared burial in grave 32/57, site 1, as well as grave 256, site 4 in Kałdus (Fig. 3). Likewise, in a single grave structure (chamber grave no. 13), bodies of a man and a woman were laid; however, our attention should be paid primarily to the first two of the listed graves, which stand out due to the meticulous arrangement of skeletons that can be described as nothing short of performative.

The first of these graves was located in the part of the cemetery (site 1) that had been in use from the end of the 11th century. The dead were buried in a rectangular pit, their heads directed east. The skeleton of the woman was lying in the supine position, though the core was slightly turned left, while the skull was directed towards the male skeleton situated to the left. Both upper extremities were bent at the elbows – the right one resting on the chest with the bones of the hand at the mandible, and the left one at waist height. The male skeleton was lying curled up on the right side, fully turned towards the female skeleton. The extremities were

[8] At site 4 in Kałdus, one double burial of a woman and a foetus was found, both placed inside a single coffin – grave 221 (Bojarski *et al.* 2010, pp. 510–511).

[9] "Likewise, their wives live virtuously beyond the measure of mankind to the point that many of them consider their husband's death to be their own end, and willingly suffocate themselves, as widowhood is not a life in their view" (Plezia 1952, p. 91).

[10] "[…] they observe mutual spousal love so ardently that a woman whose husband dies does not want to live any longer. And a wife who kills herself receives their recognition […]" (Labuda 1999, p. 212).

[11] "Wives of a dead man cut their arms and faces with knives, and if one of them claims she loves him, she hangs a rope, climbs a stool to reach it and then wraps it around her neck. Then they pull the stool away from underneath her…" (Labuda 1999, p. 212).

[12] "In the pagan times of his father [Bolesław the Brave], whenever a man was buried, having been burned at the stake, his wife was then beheaded and thus, she shared his fate after death" (Labuda 1999, p. 213).

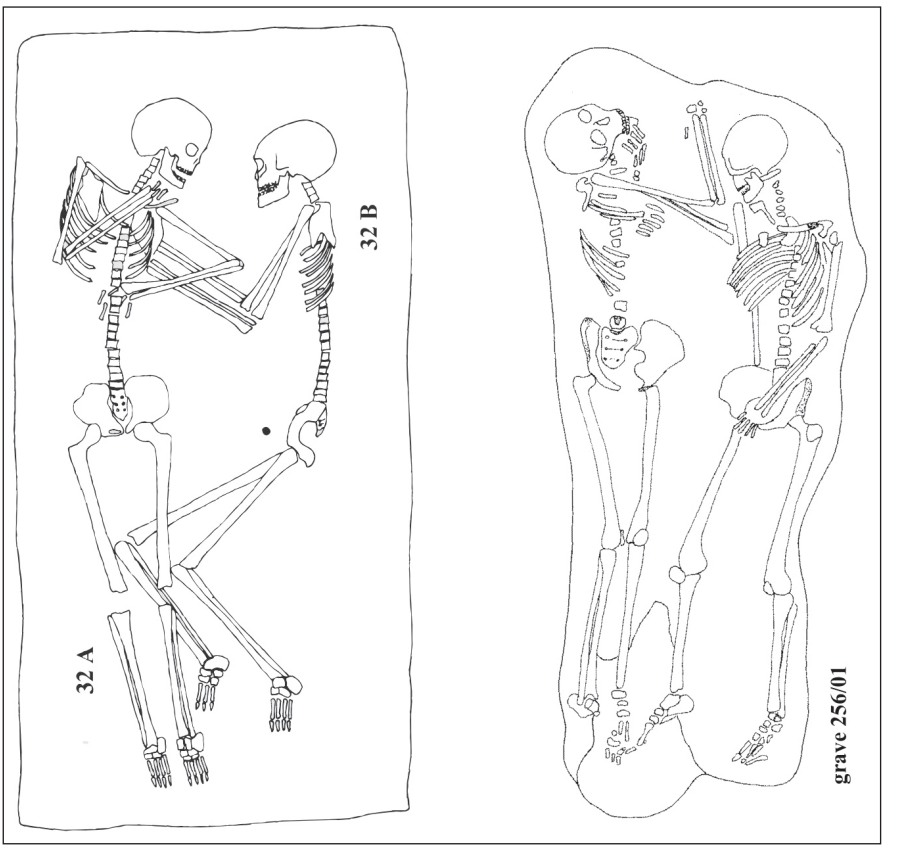

Fig. 3. Kałdus, province Kuyavian-Pomeranian, site 1 and 4. Double burials of a man and a woman – grave 32/57 and 256/01 (after Bojarski 2020, Fig. 93)

as if embracing the chest of the skeleton next to it. The right lower extremity was slid under the left femur of the female skeleton, accentuating the intimate nature of the embrace (Bojarski 2020, p. 299; Table 34). A nearly exact same arrangement characterised bodies from grave 256. The irregular pit held two skeletons – one of a woman who died at the age of *maturus* and one of a man at the age of *adultus*; their cores, skulls and facial structures were turned to each other. Likewise, in this case, the intimate pose that this couple was buried in can be indicative of the strong feelings that connected these two when they were alive. However, some interpretative concerns arise from the fact that this grave was evidently isolated from other graves from the same stage that the necropolis operated in, the atypical orientation of the skulls that were facing south-east, the absence of grave goods, and primarily, traces of cuts made using a sharp tool on the cervical vertebrae and mandibles of both skeletons (Kozłowski 2012, pp. 138–139; Tables 23, 24; Bojarski 2020, p. 312;

Table 36). Even if one would assume that this burial was a result of a murder or a particular type of an offering, it is beyond question that the individuals[13] who conducted the funeral acted on purpose in an attempt to emphasise the exceptional bond between the two deceased.

Undoubtedly, there must have been a strong emotional bond between the individuals buried in the adjacent graves 449 and 450, site 4 in Kałdus, likewise. In this case, the bodies were laid in separate graves and separate coffins in W–E axis configuration with longer sides of the burial pits in direct contact. From the south, there was a burial of a woman in the supine position inside a trapezoidal coffin. To the north (again, to the left of the female skeleton) there was a coffin of the male closed with iron staples, his bones poorly preserved, the arrangement of which suggested that the body was in the right lateral recumbent position facing the burial next to it (Bojarski 2020, p. 316; Table 36).

In the above-described examples, attention is drawn to the same position of the bodies; in each case, the women were to the men's right, which perhaps should be explained by subjugation. However, the male bodies were the ones that were arranged lying in the right lateral recumbent position, thus balancing out the social roles of both sexes and, at the same time, stressing the reciprocity of their feelings for each other. This can also serve as evidence that the individuals who handled the funeral had strong empathy and deep understanding for the need for closeness these two had also after they died, and also suggests that the local community accepted these types of funeral practices.

Another example of social behaviours transferred into the extra-terrestrial dimension can be found in the burials of a child and a male adult that are spatially connected, buried in either one single pit or two separate adjacent pits. This type of relationship was identified in the biggest grave fields of the Chełmno-Dobrzyń zone, that is, in Kałdus (sites 1, 2, and 4), as well as in Gruczno (site 1) (Bojarski 2020, pp. 298–318). A pair of this sort was formed by, among others, graves 49/97 and 50/97 from site 1 in Kałdus. Their pits were in NW–SE axis configuration, while the skeletons were resting on their backs straight up, the skulls directed north-west. Both burials were handled in the same manner and both the man and the child were gifted an iron knife placed by the left femur; additionally, the man received a flint rock. As many as three pairs of such burials were recorded at site 2 in the discussed settlement complex: these were graves 6 and 7, 12 and 21, as well as 15 and 16 (there was only one case where a woman at the age of *juvenis* and a child were buried next to each other, specifically, graves 17 and 27) (Fig. 4). In all the listed cases these were children in the

[13] Obviously, one cannot rule out that this activity aimed at preventing the detrimental effect that souls of the deceased would have had, that the local community was possibly afraid of for some reason (for more information on decapitation and atypical burials in the Chełmno-Dobrzyń zone; Bojarski 2020, p. 291).

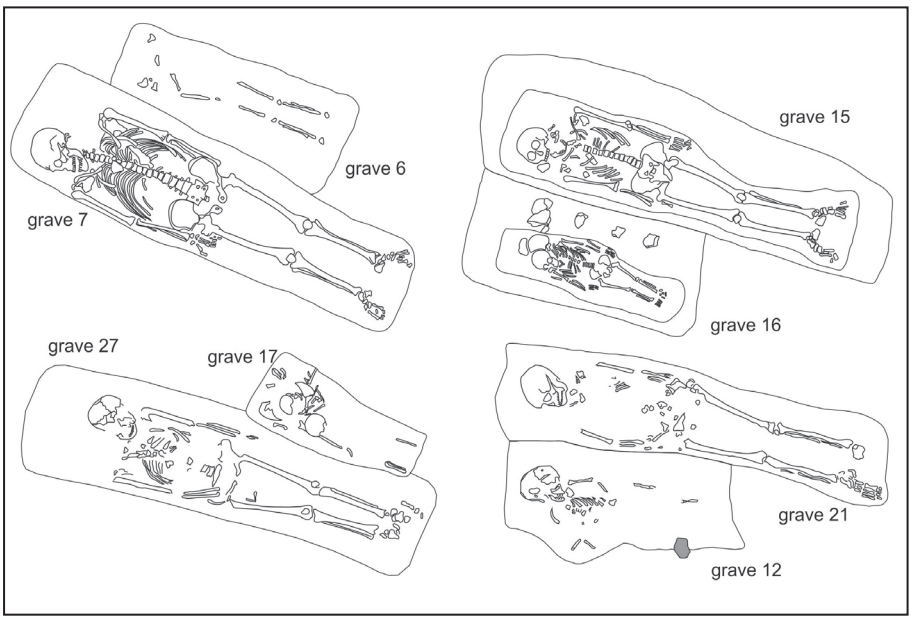

Fig. 4. Kałdus, province Kuyavian-Pomeranian, site 2. Couple burials of adult (male) and child (*infans* I) – graves 6 and 7, 15 and 16, 12 and 21 and women (*juvenis*) and child (*infans* I) – graves 17 and 21 (developed by J. Bojarski)

age group *infans* I, meaning they were still cared for by their mothers. In turn, all the deceased males with no exceptions were of the *matures* category. Interestingly, it was typical of children's burials to include no grave goods, while in these specific pairs grave goods were identified only in the case of one adult (a knife in a sheath, flint and steel, and a nail).

At another site in Kałdus (no. 4) two pairs occurred: graves 6 and 29, as well as 393 and 396. Likewise, the children's age at the time of death was classified as *infans* I, whereas the age of the men was classified as *adultus* (393) and *maturus* (29). Grave goods were not retrieved in any of the listed graves. As for Gruczno, the total number of identified graves containing skeletons of two or more deceased persons in a single pit was 22, most of which were deemed from the same timeframe[14]. In this group, the most numerous were graves of women (sometimes two) and children who died at the age *infans* I–II. Only two shared burials contained skeletons of a man and a child (graves 11 and 78). As in the case of Kałdus, at the time of death,

[14] In the course of the studies conducted at this cemetery, little attention was paid to mutual stratigraphic relations of burial excavations, while the primary focus was put on documenting the skeletons (Bojarski 2020, pp. 125–149, Fig. 44).

the children were no more than 6 years old and, likewise, no grave goods were found in this case, either.

How to interpret this particular type of relations of a man and a child? Obviously, one can seek the simplest solution and conclude that this is the case of a burial of a man (here, a father) and his own child or a close minor relative that occurred in a similar timeframe. Nonetheless, it is possible to point to a completely different just as plausible explanation of this custom. In this case, kinship was not necessarily the main reason for this conduct; possible the purpose was to provide the child with an adult carer and a guide in the afterlife. This interesting and undoubtedly old custom is evidenced in descriptions contained in 19th-century ethnographic sources from Masovia. This would also justify why this type of double burial finds were more common in this area (Dzik 2014, p. 39); it would not be surprising to find them also in the Chełmno Land, which has been culturally and politically linked to Masovia since the time of internal fragmentation of the Polish kingdom. If this custom was motivated by a belief that it was necessary that such a child be guided, as left by itself, it could wander between the worlds to the detriment of the living, then there was also a social aspect to it, and the custom was thus a manifestation of care for a person who still required the protection of a parent or another adult who could step in. The presence of an adult supporting a child after death was possibly a necessary and sufficient compensation for worldly goods non-existent in the daily life (the penurious nature of the burial). However, it is also likely that it was the other way round that perhaps poverty determined the need for an adult person's assistance?

A record of social relations in the context of familiar connections can be identified in the group of double and multiple burials found at the cemeteries in the Chełmno-Dobrzyń zone that were made in different time. At sites 2 and 4 in Kałdus, they formed clusters comprising of a grave of an adult or an adult couple, oftentimes buried in a single pit where older remains were moved to the side, whereas pits situated next to it, with adjacent longer sides, held skeletons of a woman and children (Fig. 5). These peculiar, spatially related burials are much alike today's family graves that form separate cemetery quarters. Loved ones, consanguineal or affinal kins could wish to be buried in the same place or in an adjacent grave. A decisive role was also played by the memory of deceased ancestors and the need for maintaining strong familial bonds also after death. Getting used to death could also consist of not being afraid of opening older graves up in order to make another burial or dig new graves up in a manner that infringed the integrity of the existing burial pits (Bojarski 2020, p. 318).

In the individual context, the social rules for treating the dead can be also seen on the example of atypical burials that up until recently were considered quite commonly and almost blindly cases of anti-vampire practices (more on this topic in Żydok 2004; Gardeła 2017, where an extensive list of references is

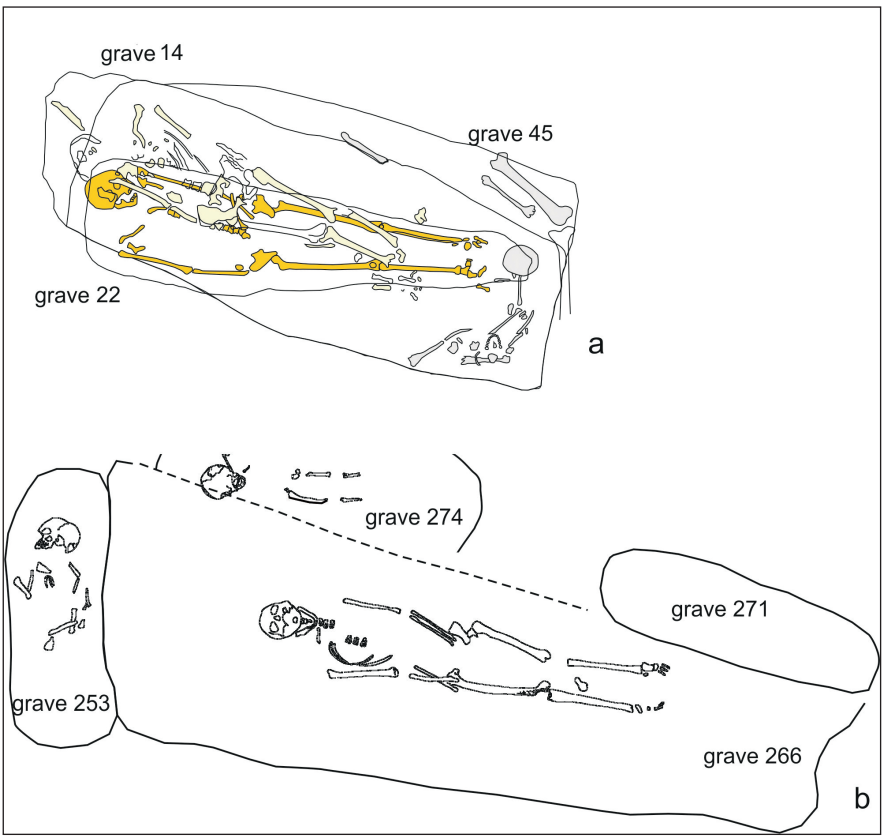

Fig. 5. Kałdus, province Kuyavian-Pomeranian, site 2 and 4. Two cases of family graves: a – site 2, b – site 4 (developed by J. Bojarski)

included). At site 4 in Kałdus, too many graves of this sort were unearthed to interpret them all in this way. This group includes burials where the dead was put face down and curled up in the lateral recumbent position, often with extremities twisted in an unnatural way, which suggests that the extremities were tightly tied up before death (Fig. 6). This group included also graves in which the body of the deceased was crushed with a rock or decapitated; an additional characteristic of these graves is also an orientation different than that in most cases, namely, oftentimes in north-south axis configuration or slightly off this axis (for a detailed description of all the above-mentioned cases; Bojarski 2020, pp. 273–295).

An important characteristic that makes them stand out is the fact that most of them are located on the outskirts or even on the border of the necropolis – in the case of site 4, this is mainly the borders of zone A, which simultaneously is the oldest

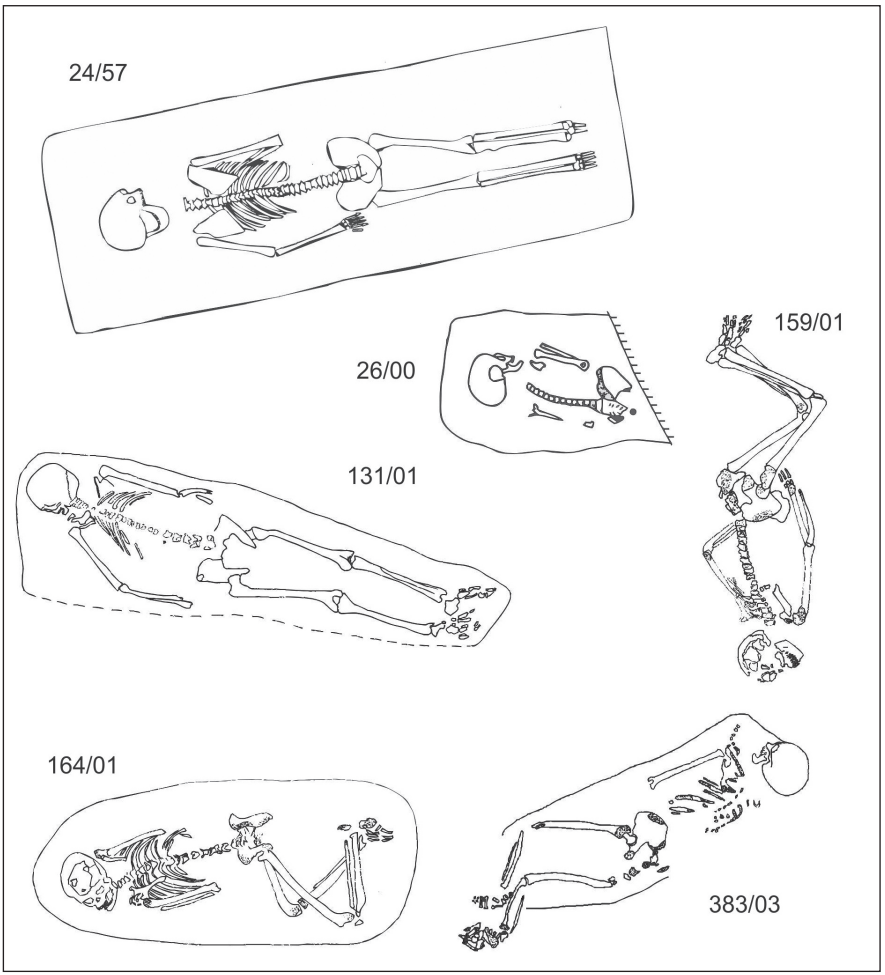

Fig. 6. Kałdus, province Kuyavian-Pomeranian, site 1 and 4. Examples of atypical burials in the stomach position (developed by J. Bojarski)

part of the cemetery (Fig. 7). The interpretation of these burials is significantly affected by the lack of grave goods, though in two graves only coins were found (no. 31 and 358). Another element to be considered characteristic of this atypical group of burials is the sex of the deceased; these were men at the age of *adultus-maturus*. The data collected in this way can be considered sufficient evidence that the individuals buried in these graves were offenders, probably criminals sentenced to death. Condemned while still alive, isolated from society, they also had to be separated after death. An additional penalty exacted after death was burial in the border area of the cemetery.

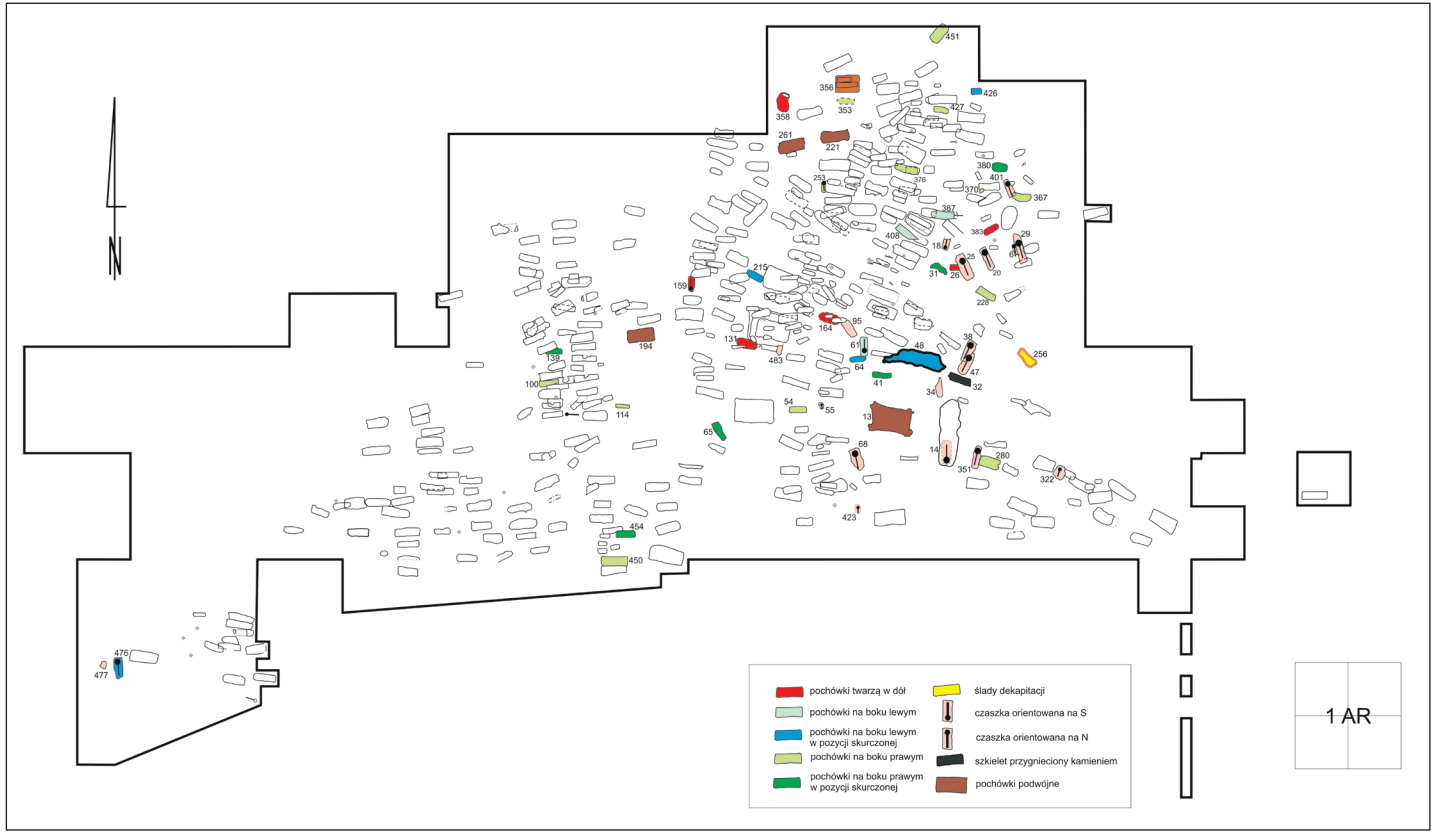

Fig. 7. Kałdus, province Kuyavian-Pomeranian, site 4. Location of atypical burials (developed by J. Bojarski)

Obviously, there could be other reasons for burying a dead man on the periphery of the necropolis. It cannot be ruled out that for some of the deceased, this was about emphasising their different nature, foreign ethnicity, different (non-Christian?) faith. The label of a social outcast could also be earned by breaking moral norms, customs, or principles of conduct generally adopted by the entire community (Gardeła 2017, pp. 230–235). Most likely, some behaviours can be explained also by fear of harmful impact the "living dead" (*defuncti vivi*) could have and his or her immaterial being, with efforts taken to prevent that by using various means to keep it in the grave. The belief in ghosts, spectres, demons, and the living dead was well known back in the Middle Ages (Brückner 1985, pp. 179–182; Lecouteux 1987; Gardeła 2011), and was also present in modern societies inhabiting Slavdom that knew ways for successfully neutralize the threat posed by those who died a bad death (i. a., Fischer 1921, pp. 348–350).

An evident example of this is grave 48, site 4 in Kałdus, dated back to the oldest stage, located on the east border of the necropolis. In an oversized, irregularly shaped pit, a woman who died at the age of *maturus* was buried lying curled up on her side, the core of her body crushed by a giant slab of sandstone – the very same as the one used for building the walls of the hillfort basilica. In this case, the stone played two roles, namely, on the one hand, it served as a physical weight that prevented the deceased from leaving the grave, while on the other, it fulfilled a symbolic and magical function as a building block for raising temple walls (Bojarski 2020, pp. 285, 290).

Social aspect of grave goods of the deceased

The rules of social functioning seem clear in the context of personal items and gift found in graves. In the initial period of introducing Christianity, the Church was forced to be tolerant towards some burial practices due to lack of proper pastoral supervision – the significant distance to main religious centres and the insufficient number of priests. For this reason, grave goods were a significant element of funeral rituals. Just as in daily life, a man can be defined based on his clothing and the objects he surrounds himself with, the items put into graves with the body of the deceased could serve to a considerable extent as identifiers of age, sex, social and financial status, or even as attributes that evidence one's affinity with a specific group, be it social, professional or religious. Obviously, it is necessary to exercise much caution when interpreting attributive meanings of objects unearthed in graves. Just like today, in the past, every human who was part of a community could have several identities related to the functions or roles he or she was fulfilling. These functions merged and intertwined, and could be manifested in different ways, while after death, it was the surroundings of the deceased, including his or

her immediate family, who could decide which of these identities of the deceased should be highlighted by the choice of a specific way to bury that person and a specific set of props.

Among many categories of objects that occur in graves, one can point to those that are well-suited for analysing the social conditions for providing the dead with grave goods. In the Middle Ages, the position taken in the social hierarchy was significantly affected by sex, age, and financial status. Therefore, on each stage of life, a man had specific rights and responsibilities determined by the custom and the intergroup agreement. In societies where social status was determined by physical fitness and vigour, people who were active and mentally capable, that is, who were socially useful, enjoyed more respect. Hence the belief that the youngest children were considered not fully formed beings and thus deprived of most rights that adults had (Ariés 1995, p. 8). In these assessment categories, the elderly and the disabled were just as useless in terms of their capability to serve important functions and socially marginalised, left at the mercy of their close relatives. On the other hand, they were valued for experience, life wisdom, spiritual authority, and the knowledge they accumulated in the course of their long lives (Myśliwski 2001; Biniś-Szkopek 2006).

When it comes to children, an important milestone in life was reaching the age of 7 years, when in the light of the law at the time, a person gained the ability to accurately assess his or her own conduct and acquired basic social skills (Delimata 2004, pp. 106–107, other references are provided there). This would explain why grave goods are relatively abundant in the grave fields of the Chełmno-Dobrzyń zone in graves of children in the anthropological age range of the end of *infans* I/the beginning of *infans* II, that is, individuals who reached that age threshold in their short lives (Bojarski 2020, pp. 398–399). Similar observations were made as regards other areas of medieval Poland (i. a., Zawadzka-Antosik 1982, p. 42; Wrzesińska, Wrzesiński 2002; Kurasiński, Skóra 2016).

If social usefulness was to be measured by the class of grave goods, then small children who died at the age of 0–3 years and individuals at old age, already 55–60 years old (*senilis*), were considered least socially useful. These two age categories were usually provided with very poor grave goods in most of the investigated early medieval grave fields, and as for the children, no grave goods were usually deposited. Naturally, there were exceptions to this general rule. In Kałdus, six graves of children who died at the age of 1–2 years were recorded with small items deposited inside – these included single glass beads placed next to the skulls, one instance of an amber nugget, and likewise, one instance of beads and one of a coin (Fig. 8), two instances of bronze bells. It seems that in the case of children, glass beads and amber might have played the role of an obol, whereas the bells and the coin with a perforation that allowed it to be worn as a pendant served as protective means. Graves pertaining to this age category, exceptionally rich in grave goods, were

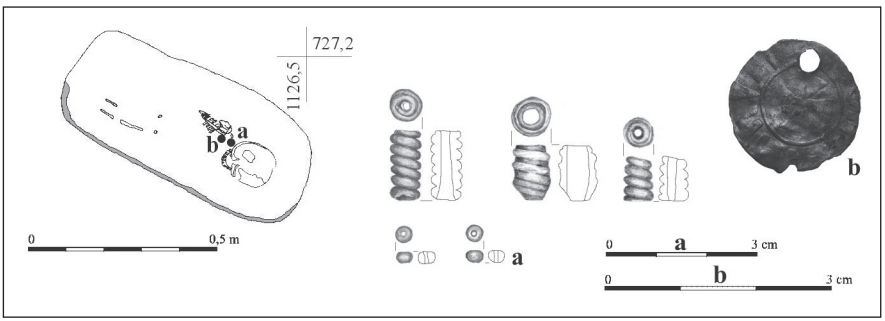

Fig. 8. Kałdus, province Kuyavian-Pomeranian, site 4. Grave 118 – burial of a child about 9 months old (after Bojarski *et al.* 2010, Table 28)

unearthed in the cemetery in Gruczno and Napole (Fig. 9). Nonetheless, it should be stressed that the approach to the youngest children changed over the course of the early Middle Ages (Delimata 2004, pp. 31–34). As for Kałdus, the percentage of graves that contained any grave goods rose from 10% of this group of burials dated back to the first half of the 11th century to over 50% in the second half of the 12th century, and it was even higher for older children (*infans* II), specifically, nearly 60%.

Definitely, a different approach should be adopted for the grave goods of the elderly who despite reaching an old age remained mentally capable, owing to which they could continue fulfilling important social functions – particularly, the function of a guardian of tradition, as well as that of a treasurer of collective memory that the eldest person in the family is entitled to (Sulima 1982, p. 25; Wawrzeniuk 2006). Such individuals were most likely treated with more respect and enjoyed prestige that could be emphasised by higher-class grave goods and a specific kind of burial gifts.

Estimates of the class of grave goods carried out for the early medieval grave fields in Poland show that the ones with the best grave goods (in terms of the quantity and diversity of items) were burials of women at the age of *adultus* and men at the age of *maturus* (Fig. 10). On the one hand, this points to the highest mortality, which falls on these very age categories for both sexes, and also to the high social respect that people at the age of 25–55 enjoyed. However, a man was earning his social status throughout his adult life, and so he owed the prestige and respect received from others to the sum of daily activities and also the wealth that he accumulated. Hence, it is more accurate to assess the class of grave goods based on calculating the parameter of grave goods for each age category individually. Such an analysis shows that the graves of women buried in Kałdus with the most numerous grave goods were those of females who died at the age of *maturus* – as many as 80% of the graves included grave goods. The percentage of such graves in

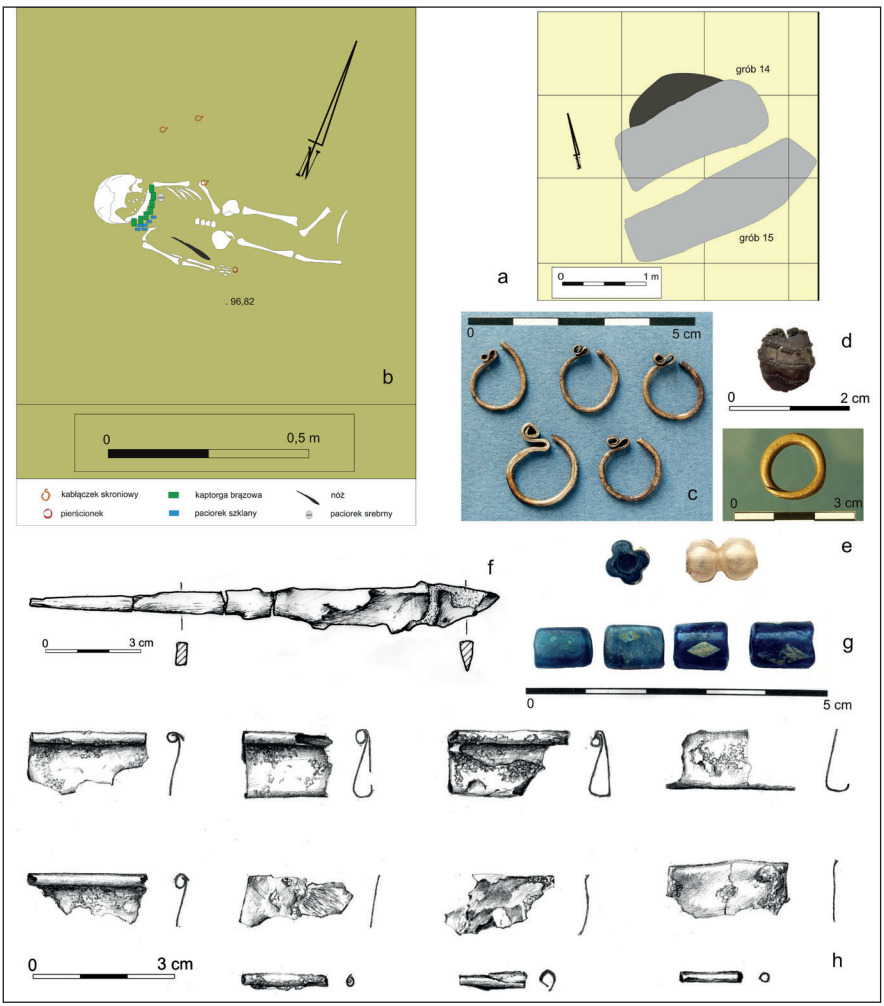

Fig. 9. Napole, province Kuyavian-Pomeranian, site 6. Grave 14 – burial of a child aged 1–2 years (developed by J. Bojarski)

the *senilis* category was only slightly lower. Burials of elderly men with grave goods accounted for nearly 70% of all the graves in this age category, with 50% share of such graves in the *maturus* group (Fig. 11).

This proves that elderly individuals were not treated as poorly as it is commonly believed. Indeed, burials of such persons contain much less items that are not as valuable – from the present-day perspective, as in the case of the deceased in younger age categories. These are emblematic objects, though, associated with age and serving important social functions; specifically, this pertains to flint and steel,

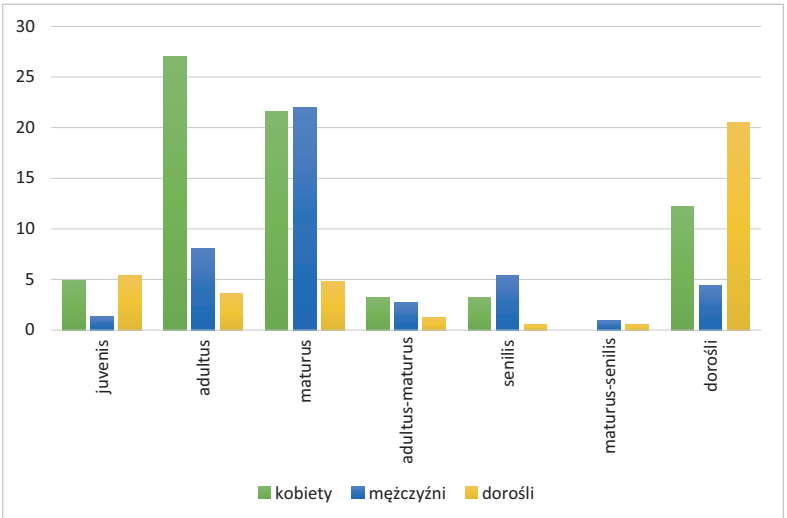

Fig. 10. Kałdus, province Kuyavian-Pomeranian. Percentage of equipped graves of women and men in individual age groups – together for all cemeteries (developed by J. Bojarski)

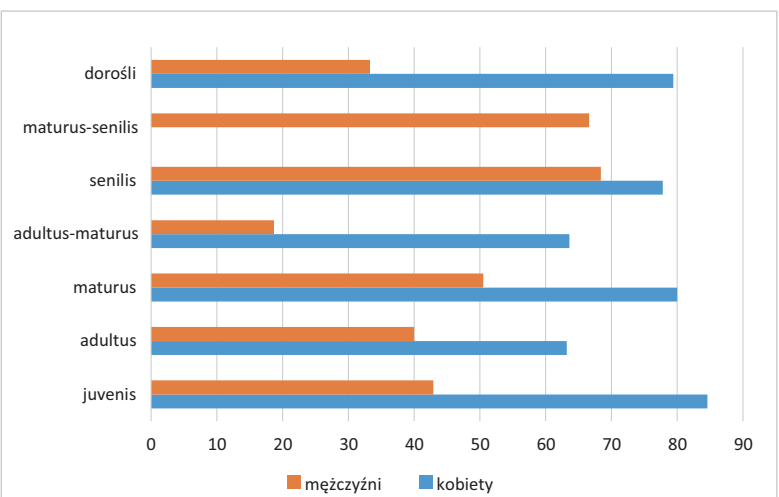

Fig. 11. Kałdus, province Kuyavian-Pomeranian. Percentage of graves equipped in individual age categories in the group of women and men – together for all cemeteries (developed by J. Bojarski)

and whetstones – the former are related to starting fire, an activity of a symbolic or even sacral nature, whereas whetstones, meticulously made with a perforation for threading a string through called touchstones, were considered an attribute of merchants and the rich (Wrzesińska, Wrzesiński 2014).

Analysing the grave goods in the biggest necropolises of the Chełmno-Dobrzyń zone in a longer time perspective, it can be concluded that strictly defined categories of objects were attributed to specific age groups. For instance, pendants and glass beads characterised burials of girls and young women. Flint and steel, or more often flint rocks alone, as well as spindle whorls and needles occurred solely in graves of women in the age category *adultus*, while they were absent in burials of girls and women of the *maturus-senilis* category. Regardless of age, women were buried in a grave with a set of jewellery. However, as for young women – girls and most likely non-married females – sets of bijouterie for the body and garments were particularly rich, comprising a few or even over ten temple rings, glass bead necklaces made up of several tens up to several hundred elements, as well as metal rings. In turn, in graves of older women, typically, only 1–2 temple rings were found, albeit more often made of solid silver, one ring and, as an extra, a necklace made of over ten glass beads (Bojarski 2020, pp. 400–402).

As for adult individuals – this applies equally to women and men – the grave goods included wooden tableware, which, for a change, were not placed inside graves of children and the youth. Their burials involved entire ceramic vessels or fragments of such. Typical vessels attributable to adult men include wooden buckets strengthened by iron rings, which were not found in women's graves (with the exception of two chamber graves from Kałdus).

Grave fields as social space

Lastly, it is worth taking a closer look at grave fields as particular places that serve entire communities (Korzińska 2014). The location for a grave field alone had to be chosen by the decision of the community that had to arrive at unanimity for this purpose. A cemetery was turning not only into the resting place for all inhabitants of a given settlement unit, but also a place where the memory of ancestors was cultivated, passed on from one generation to another, oftentimes an important meeting place, a square where ceremonies that bring the local community together were held, and, finally, a place of retreat (Ariés 1982, pp. 73–74; Kolbuszewski 1996; Härke 2001; Minta-Tworzowska 2013). Most likely, social and religious transformations were reflected in the abundance of meanings in cemetery architecture, too – starting from the division of the necropolis space, the layout of the graves, setting out passageways, and ending in the size and the structure of the graves. It should be

deemed accurate that a cemetery is indeed a text that reflects the social structure and the hierarchy of values, including the prestige of individuals for whom the cemetery has become the place of eternal stay (Sulima 1992, p. 92).

The religious aspect aside, though it is extraordinarily important for the act of creating a cemetery (which in the Christian era remains under the control of the Church), it is worth paying some attention to one particular element that seems to serve as evidence of the social structure being reflected in the space of a cemetery. This is well visible on the example of the analysis of the layout of the graves in Kałdus at site 4 and in Napole (Figs. 12, 13). In both these grave fields, one can

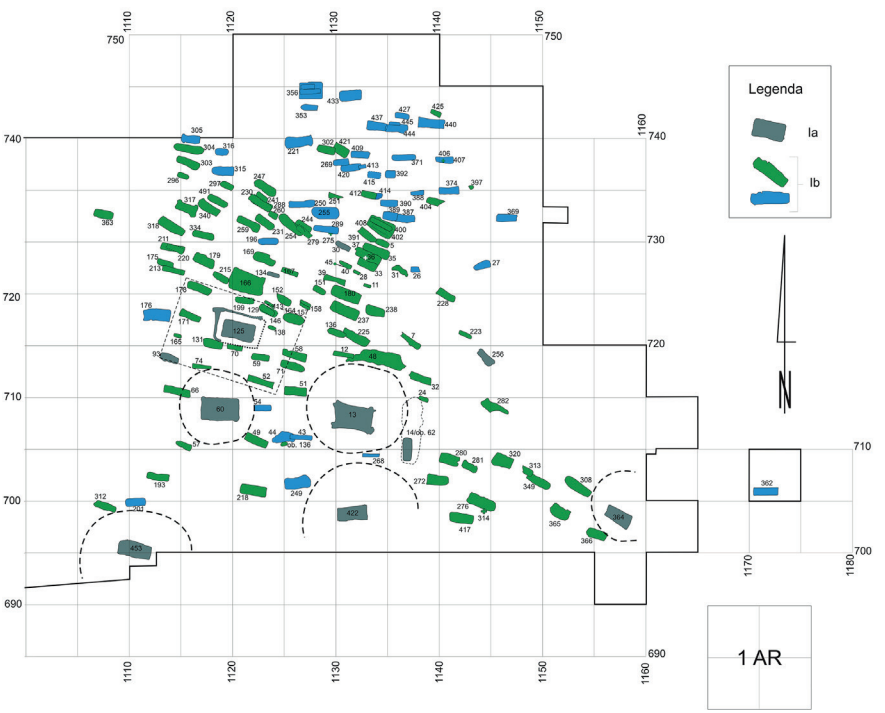

Fig. 12. Kałdus, province Kuyavian-Pomeranian, site 4. Cemetery plan from phase I (2nd half of 10th–1st half of 11th century) (developed by J. Bojarski)

point to burials that have become the origin of a given necropolis. They stand out due to their accurate location and clear distinction from the other cemetery structures. Their own structure and the class of grave goods they contained are just as typical – in both cases, these are chamber graves (marked as no. 13 at both sites); in the necropolis in Kałdus, grave 364 might also come into play. These graves are situated on the border of the eastern part of the grave field. These graves, along with

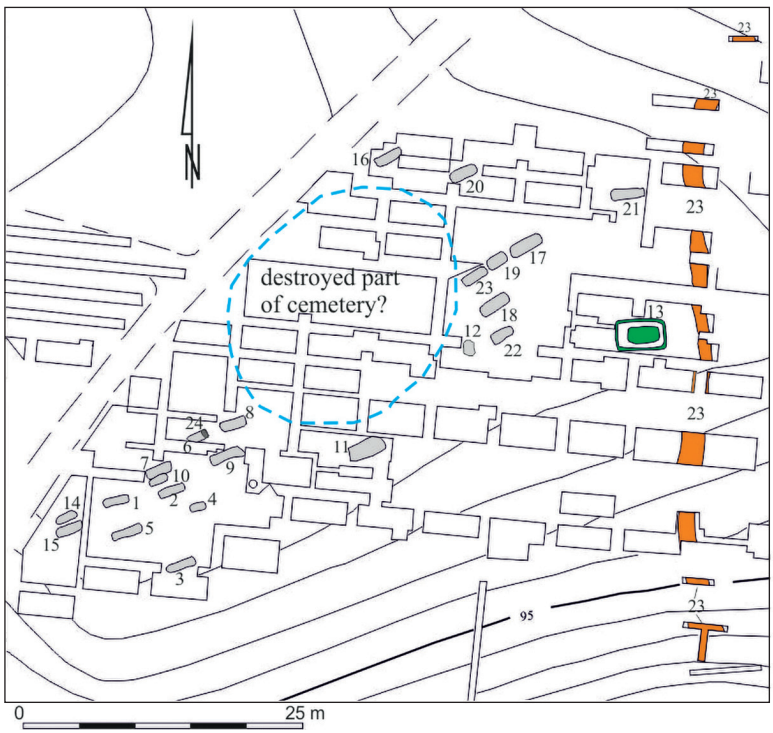

Fig. 13. Napole, province Kuyavian-Pomeranian, site 6. Cemetery plan from the end of 11th–the 12th century (developed by J. Bojarski)

the topography of the area, served as reference points for setting out and digging out other burial pits.

This hierarchization of one's social position is manifested not solely in the exceptional form of a grave or the grave goods it contains, but also in the emphasis of one's high social standing by means of granting him or her a specific place. Spatial solutions of this sort where the status of the deceased was stressed by the location within the cemetery is known from, i.a., Lutomiersk and the alley of burials inscribed into its layout, characterised by stone structures and high-class grave goods (Jażdżewski 1951), or in Kraków-Zakrzówek (Morawski, Zaitz 1977). However, it is a feature almost exclusively typical of extra-church necropolises where the organization of space was not governed by the walls of the temple and its geographic orientation. Likewise, the growth of a cemetery was not restricted by any walls or rules imposed by the Church law either[15].

[15] For instance, the guidelines of the 1059 Council in Rome that ordered to leave up to 60 steps around church walls for burials and to have the area fenced (Bylina 2002; Rębkowski 2014, footnote 24).

Obviously, the Christianization that was progressing in the course of the 11th and 12th century slowly eroded the differences visible in the external elements of a burial that manifested in the form of a grave, the garments of the deceased, the items put inside the grave, as well as the architecture of the cemetery itself. Gradually, social behaviours transformed into ritual activities that were the same for everyone, thus in essence, summarizing a grave as a resting place of the mortal remains of a man. The dead were somewhat subject to equalization since they were equal in the eyes of God and they all awaited the Last Judgment in identical pits situated in even rows.

Conclusions

The social aspect of studies on the early medieval grave fields is the area where archaeology still has a lot to accomplish. One could cite once again the thought referred to at the beginning of the text – repeated both in the Polish and world literature on grave fields – according to which burial practices and cemeteries say more about the living than about the dead.

This article presents but a fraction of what an accurately conducted analysis of the tangible side of burial rites can provide. The space of a grave field seen as a whole, as well as a single grave, each hold a record of meanings that refer to various aspects of human life. In the Middle Ages, death was a dramatic yet daily event. The differences in how the dead were treated – the multitude of forms of burials as well as grave goods show that each of these deaths had an individual nature and despite the existence of ritualised behaviours, each time it was received differently.

The standardization of burial rites that was linked to the Christian doctrine left open doors which were used by individuals who were trying to show respect for a dead person's body in a wat they found most natural (traditional), but also express personal feelings and emotions. This manifested in how bodies of the deceased were treated as well as in the choice of specific items or gifts in the strict sense, which were buried together with the corpse. Undoubtedly, these behaviours regulated the social life rules accepted by the majority, which were a kind of a consensus between what was necessary and what was allowable. The adopted rules left some room for diversity stemming from cultural, ethnic, or worldview (religious) differences. This could explain the high number of exceptions to the norms considered customary visible in the ways the dead were buried (e.g., atypical burials).

The fear and concern about the fate of loved ones after their death provoked specific behaviours. As the presented analysis of burials shows, particular care was given to the smallest and thus the weakest members of a given community. In common awareness, given that while passing away, such persons did not enjoy the

full social rights that adults had, they called for particular treatment and care also after death. These behaviours can be interpreted as an attempt at transferring the worldly social relations onto the eschatological plane.

Not only close interpersonal relationships were transferred into how a cemetery was organised, but entire social structures and intergroup connections present in a given community were, too. In this way, by means of arranging and planning out the physical space, it was symbolically hierarchised and valorised. To this end, a symbolical centre was determined along with borders (peripheries), and, consequently, places intended for burying the better ones, that is, those more well off and more important who enjoyed a higher or well-deserved social status, as well as those intended for the worse ones or those marginalised for various reasons (not solely the condemned ones). The configuration of burial pits indicated how the geographic space was valorised, whereas the connection between location and distance between the graves can be considered a record of the existing relations between the dead, including family relationships that are so well identifiable in double and multiple graves (also multi-generational ones).

Hence, a cemetery gradually became a mirror image of the "spatialised" social order of a given community that owned it. The order formed on the level of a necropolis gave a sense of stability in daily life, served as a cornerstone and the foundation of unity and a sense of local identity on the social, cultural, and religious level.

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