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# Things to be taken to the underworld: some elements of Pre-Christian beliefs in funerary rites in Kałdus in East Pomerania (from the 10th to the 13th century)

*Abstract.* The transition from cremation to inhumation in the early medieval Poland had a varied course and character. The change of the funeral ritual did not have to be initially the result of Christianisation, nor did it have to involve the deconstruction of eschatological views. In this article, I try to find an answer to the question of whether the unusual phenomena present in funeral practices that are in conflict with the principles of Christian burial were the result of the persistence of older traditions, or perhaps a reaction to changes introduced by the new religion. Is it likely that the old and the new practices were in use concurrently and that the pagan images of the hereafter influenced the beliefs about afterlife in newly Christianised communities? An analysis of the funerary rites recorded at one of the largest and best-researched cemetery complexes in Kałdus, East Pomerania, Poland, may provide an answer to this question. Situated on the periphery of the developing Polish state, in the orbit of which it found itself at the end of the 10th century, Kałdus (identified with Chełmno predating the charter) is suitable for tracing various kinds of phenomena on a local scale – relating to the Chełmno land – and on a supra-regional scale – due to its borderland location between the culturally, ethnically, and politically diverse regions of East Pomerania, Greater Poland with Kuyavia and Mazovia, and the areas inhabited by Prussian tribes.

*Keywords:* burial rites, early Middle Ages, East Pomerania, Kałdus near Chełmno, Poland, pre-Christian beliefs, relics of paganism.

## *Introduction*

Funerary rites of the early Middle Ages may be viewed as a lens that focuses on various behaviours of a society when one of its members dies. On the one hand, people felt sadness and regret mixed with anxiety and fear that made them dispose of the corpse; on the other hand, a need to honour and commemorate the dead individual resulted in rich contents of funerary rituals. The last act of a funeral, namely, the

burial of the ashes or the body of the deceased, was an occasion to manifest the eschatological views not only by the participants of the funeral feast, but also by the former. Undoubtedly, the death of a member of a family and/or of a community was an occasion for organising funeral feasts, and the dead one was in the centre of those events, as they affected those specially prepared *theatra* and influenced the selection of the objects that were placed in their graves (Sofaer 2006, p. 43). And in spite of the fact that the dead did not bury themselves (Parker Pearson 2003, p. 3), their final will had to be taken into consideration – not only because of the respect they enjoyed, but also due to some fear of their harmful actions from beyond the grave should that will be disrespected. Fear of the dead appeared primarily in the case of an unusual, "bad death", that is, one that occurred prematurely under unexplained or unnatural circumstances. Over time, this category also included people who died before being baptised, without having received absolution, or those who practiced witchcraft and possibly were in contact with demons. The idea of "bad death" is the reason most often connected with unusual, "deviant" burials as well as practices recorded in cemeteries that seem to have been behind beliefs in vampires and revenants (Krumphanzlová 1961; Limisiewicz 1983; Wrzesiński 2000; Żydok 2004; Gardeła 2017; regarding the British Isles – e.g., Simpson 2003)[1].

This fear of the Death and the deceased is common and well-attested by central and eastern european ethnographic sources from the 18th to the early 20th centuries (Fischer 1921, pp. 348–350; Moszyński 1934, pp. 661–666; Biegeleisen 2017, pp. 101–126). While there is no evidence of fear of the dead in early medieval Slavic sources (enigmatic accounts found in some early Rus' sources, such as the early-12th-century *Primary Chronicle*, of demonic spirits called "bies" or "navja" attacking horses and killing humans (*The Russian Primary* 1953; *Powieść* 1999), can hardly be regarded as such), Western Europen sources are known to tell tales of ghosts and living corpses. The most evident examples of the belief in the harmful deceased coming out of graves are contained in the early-11th-century *Decretorum* (1992) by Burchard of Worms and the *Historia rerum anglicarum* (1856) by William of Newburgh from the late 12th century. Some show similarities to accounts known from the Scandinavian world, such as the Icelandic *draugr* phenomena (e.g., Chadwick 1946), or the tales of the living dead from *Grettis Saga* (Potkowski 1973; Lecouteux 1987, pp. 122–39; Schmitt 2002, pp. 29–33; Jakobsson 2009).

When observing the material traces of the rituals accompanying burials, the researcher faces numerous questions: what did people who lived back then think about death? Was it the end of their existence to them? Or did they expect any further form of being for their material bodies and immaterial spirits or souls imagined as something separate? Was the grave a temporary abode on their path

[1] For a discussion on all the cases of atypical burials in the cemeteries at Kałdus – see Bojarski 2020a, pp. 277–295.

to the underworld? Were grave goods given to the dead in order to make it easier for them to reach the Land of the Dead, or were those objects only a requisite for them to reside there? Or, perhaps, were they but a last goodbye to the dead, special gifts from their loved ones who wanted to show their utmost respect, emphasise the social and political roles that the deceased person had played, and demonstrate their own position, power, and prestige? Studies on the subject of sepulchral furnishings and grave goods in the areas inhabited by Western Slavs in the early Middle Ages are still insufficient (e.g., *Kobieta* 2005; Bojarski 2020a, pp. 319–22), and there are no conclusive answers to the questions of what caused people to equip graves with different items in both the pre-Christian era and after Christianisation[2].

New light has been shed on these issues by the archaeological research carried out since the mid-1990s at the early medieval complex in Kałdus near Chełmno. From the tenth to first half of the 13th century, the stronghold including its settlement facilities was an important centre of production and long-distance exchange identified with Chełmno predating the charter. Its boundaries were holding four cemeteries where over 800 skeletal graves were discovered (the largest necropolis in Eastern Pomerania), including burials associated with the first stage of the Christianisation of Pomerania (from the second half of the 10th century to the early 11th century)[3] (Fig. 1). The varied forms of the burials and the grave structures, as well as the rich grave goods are an excellent source for learning about the early medieval burial rites of the local community. Kałdus was an important political, administrative and religious centre within the Piast state (Chudziak, Bojarski 2015, pp. 83–105; Bojarski *et al.* 2017, pp. 304–309). At that time, the stronghold was inhabited by a society that was multi-ethnical and diversified, both in terms of culture and, likely, religion (Chudziak 2003). It is indicated indirectly by the varied forms of the burials, their different structures and their furnishing with objects

[2] Marian Rębkowski (2007) commented on the process of the Christianisation of West Pomerania in a monograph. He analysed the characteristic elements of a Christian burial and discussed the objects and the symbols of the Christian religion, including those found in the skeleton graves in this area.

[3] The chamber graves (burials of members of the local elite, possibly of foreign origin) are considered to be the earliest graves at site 4 in Kałdus. Radiocarbon dating of the bones and wood from chamber graves 13 and 364, as well as from burials 14, 30, 93, 134, 204, and 256, showed all of them to be from the same phase of the cemetery. The conventional dating ranged from 1167±48 BP to 1080±60 BP (fourth quarter of the 10th century – first quarter of the 11th century). These graves also contained objects dated to the 10th century, including a Petersen Type V sword (grave 364) and a Saxon Cross Denarius Type I from the second half of the 10th century (grave 13), as well as a set of jewellery and luxury vessels of a similar chronology (Bojarski, Chudziak 2023, pp. 88–94; Fig. 50). A chronological analysis of the three cemeteries located within the settlement complex at St Lawrence's Hill in Kałdus has enabled the identification of three successive phases: I – 4th quarter of the 10th century–1st half of the 11th century (the deceased were buried at site 4); II – 2nd half of the 11th–1st half of the 12th century (three separate necropolises operated simultaneously at site 4, alongside younger ones at sites 1 and 2); III – 2nd half of the 12th–1st quarter of the 13th century (burials continued at the three necropolises, with site 2 being the longest-used) (Bojarski 2020a, pp. 391–392; Table 58; Bojarski, Chudziak 2023, Fig. 12).

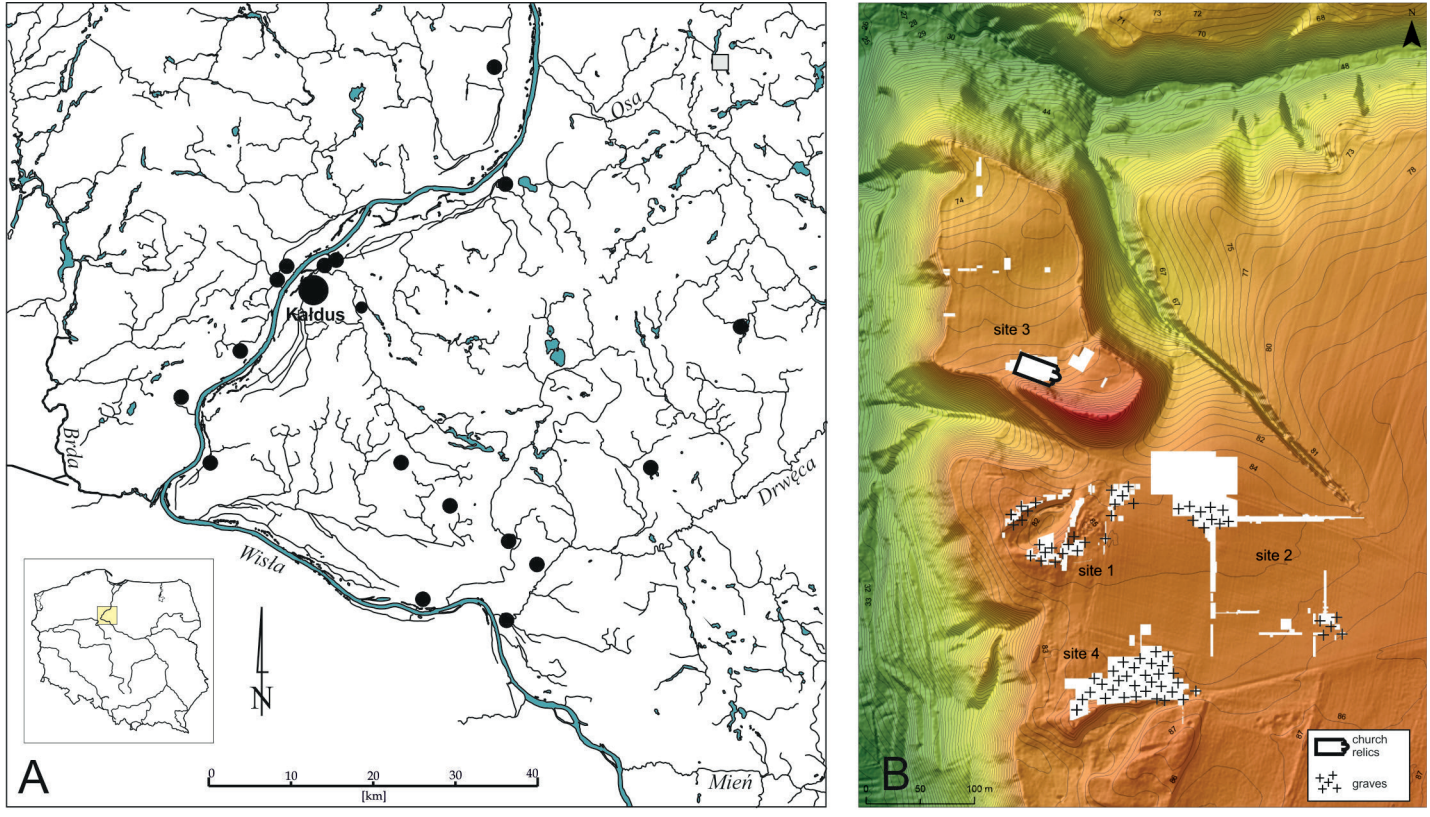



Fig. 1. The early-medieval settlement complex in Kałdus in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship. A – localisation of the necropolis complex in Kałdus among other cemeteries in the western part of the Chełmno Land, B – localisation of cemeteries within the settlement complex in Kałdus (drawing by J. Bojarski)

of foreign origin that the city inhabitants originated from various regions, such as the West Slavdom, the early Rus' (today's Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia), or even Scandinavia. Direct evidence of multi-ethnicity (and certainly foreign origin from outside the Chełmno Land) is provided by the results of mtDNA and strontium content analyses conducted on the remains of a selected group of the dead from site 4 in Kałdus (Bojarski 2020a, p. 426).

Most of the skeletal graves recorded at Kałdus are in-ground burials typical of Christian burial practices, oriented along the east-west axis. A numerous group is formed by graves that are distinguished by the form and design of the grave pit (chamber graves), burial orientation (with the deceased placed on their side, stomach or in other unusual positions), and graves containing rich sets of objects, including those that may be associated with a belief in afterlife.

The analysis of the selected atypical practices provides a basis for interpreting the burial customs and learning about the eschatological imagery of the inhabitants of the early medieval Kałdus. The observation of these dissimilarities allows one to raise some fundamental questions, specifically, why did burials equipped with numerous and varied objects occur in this cemetery practically until the end of the early Middle Ages? – even though, according to the requirements of Christianity, the dead did not need anything anymore. Was there some older, pre-Christian ritual tradition underlying this phenomenon? Were objects such as coins, food dishes, and fire-making sets placed in graves because the deceased needed them in afterlife? Did the deceased need special means of transport to complete their crossing to the otherworld (for example, boats, symbolised by coffins hollowed out by a log)? Is it likely that elements of the old beliefs survived and became part of the new eschatology, combining the Christian vision of afterlife with its pagan counterpart?

I will try to answer these questions on the basis of a comparative analysis of selected graves from the cemeteries in Kałdus. Due to the long period that the cemeteries operated in (from the end of the 10$^{th}$ to the beginning of the 13$^{th}$ century), it is possible to conduct comparative studies. The conclusions drawn on this basis are a solid foundation for obtaining an answer to the question posed in the title, that is, what were the grave goods that the deceased were sent off to the otherworld with and what was the source of such action? Finally, is it still worth considering whether the funerary customs followed by the inhabitants of the early medieval Kałdus were part of the common heritage of the Western Slavs?

## *Images of the slavic underworld in written and ethnographic sources*

In the mental images of many traditional societies, the physical world and the otherworld form two separate topographic spaces divided by a clear border zone that constitutes a central element of funerary rites (Leach 1989, pp. 81–85). Other

than nowadays, death was not the opposite of life, but its continuation. It was a gate to be crossed when passing from the worldly reality to the other one (Durkheim 1990, p. 264; 1995). The approach to death itself was ambiguous, as it was considered neither good nor bad, the former position entailing the potential to be reborn and live in afterlife, whereas the other stance meant losing the facility to live on and a harmful impact on the environment and the people (Pawlik 2002, p. 36)[4]. This outcome was believed to be preventable by means of performing appropriate rituals, some of which were likely included into the *rites de passages* (van Gennep 2006; 2019). It seems that the view that the spirit of a dead person continues to exist after death is common in the heritage of the Indo-European societies. In the archaic-period Greece, for example, it was believed that after the body dies, a phantom spirit-image resides in its grave; a reason used for explaining the need of placing various objects inside (Kubiak 2008, pp. 200–201). Various similar beliefs in afterlife were also attested to in sources from Ancient Rome or Viking-Age Scandinavia (*Zaświaty* 1999, p. 116; Gardeła 2011; 2019).

However, reconstructing Slavic beliefs about the fate of the dead poses much difficulties. The almost complete lack of contemporary written sources is hardly compensated by much later historic records or ethnographic data (Łowmiański 1986, p. 133; Bylina 1992, p. 8; 1995, p. 9)[5]. Yet only they make it possible to conclude that the Slavs believed in the existence of a specially segregated space where the dead to resided, called *Nav* or *Nawia* (Brückner 1985, p. 54). Little is known about it, since the sources describe it using only vague phrases, such as "mystery land", "strange land", or "the unknown" (Bylina 1995); likewise, not much is explained by the words *Raj*, *Vyraj*, or *Iriy* associated in the Slavic folklore with a form of a reward for living a decent life (Szyjewski 2003, pp. 77–78)[6].

The road to the underworld led across the waters – a motif known from many archaic religions. The name of those waters has been preserved in Russian literature as "the river of forgetfulness", an equivalent of *Lethe* in Greek mythology (Uspieński 1985, p. 91). Furthermore, ethnographic records mention that it was deemed natural to have regular contacts with the spirits of the dead, as they were hosted, fed, and

[4] The topic of bad and good death has been discussed in the context of written and archaeological sources by, among others, Claude Lecouteux (1987, pp. 232–248) and Lesszek Gardeła (2017).

[5] Most likely, Thietmar of Merseburg, a chronicler of those times, did not fully understand what the Slavs had to say about afterlife when he wrote in his chronicle that everything ended with corporal death for them. In the same chapter, he also wrote that some pagans claimed that the soulwas immortal and had other duties after death *(Kronika Thietmara* 1953, 1, 14; *Ottonian Germany* 2001). Some researchers of Slavic beliefs have spoken on the essence and nature of the soul in the religions of the Slavs (e.g., Gieysztor 1986, p. 216; Łowmiański 1986, p. 385; Szyjewski 2003, p. 199; for more information on this subject – see Kajkowski 2017, pp. 207–22; Sikorski 2018, pp. 315–20; Szczepanik 2018, p. 107).

[6] This may be indicated by the etymology of these words probably originating from Indo-Iranian *rayí* meaning "wealth" or "happiness" (*Zaświaty* 1999, p. 239).

worshipped during ceremonies prepared specially for them, with the intention to placate them (Łowmiański 1986, p. 146; Szyjewski 2003, p. 209).

### *Christianisation as a major factor in changing funeral practices*

As in the case of the neighbouring Germanic peoples, the Christianisation of the Western Slavs meant not only a rejection of their previous religion and the old gods, and – in the political sense – incorporation into the European *christianitas* (Kłoczowski 2000; Modzelewski 2004, pp. 6–8), but predominantly, a total remodelling of those of their worldviews and concepts about the roles of human beings, and the sense of their existence that were incongruent with Christian rules. It also meant the need to alter numerous rites deemed very old and unchangeable, including funeral by cremation, a practice deeply rooted in the traditions of pre-Christian societies (Paxton 1996; Rębkowski 2007, p. 89).

The abandonment of cremation in favour of inhumation had a varied course and character among the Western Slavs (also in Poland and among the Polabian Slavs) (Zoll-Adamikowa 1988, pp. 183–184; Štefan 2007; Pollex 2010, pp. 28, 264). In some areas, the process occurred in a relatively short time, while in some others (areas located peripherally, away from major state centres), the acceptance of inhumation took longer, and for some time, both ritual forms were practiced at the same time, as demonstrated by bi-ritual cemeteries (Lippok 2020; Williams, Lippok 2024). There is no sufficient evidence that would indicate those changes had a revolutionary nature; on the contrary, it was rather a long-lasting process that had to be accepted both by individuals and by society as a whole (Urbańczyk 2015)[7]. Archaeologically excavated burials dated to the late or possibly even mid-10$^{th}$ century occur in several cemeteries in Poland, including those in Dziekanowice, Kałdus, Pień, Lutomiersk, or Gdańsk. Most of the graves so dated refer to elites of the time, for whom the change in burial rites was not necessarily related to a shift in religious views (Sikora 2015, pp. 160–161). The process of conversion is further confirmed by inhumation burials occurring not only on the periphery of the Piast state, but even in central Greater Poland (Błaszczyk 2023; Sikora 2023, p. 121).

It seems, however, that the change of the funeral ritual itself was neither connected with Christianisation, nor accompanied by an immediate reconstruction of eschatological visions and the transformation of the previous practices of the

[7] Old ritual traditions, such as the burial of the dead in fields and forests (*in campus et silvis*), as mentioned in the *Chronica Boemorum* (*Kosmas* 1968, III, 1; *Cosmae Pragensis* 2020), for example, and the accompanying masked dance processions, while condemned by the Church, were still practised long after the official Christianisation (Szczepanik 2020).

treatment of the dead[8]. For social elites, the abandonment of cremation did not necessarily involve a change in beliefs (Effros 2002; Lippok 2020)[9].

What poses the crucial problem when interpreting the ways of burying the dead by the Western Slavs before their Christianisation is the scarcity of cremation graves. The entire region of Pomerania, including the areas located among the rivers Brda, Vistula, and Drwęca (the so-called Chełmno-Dobrzyń zone), lies in the so-called "non-burial zone" (Zoll-Adamikowa 1988); for the period between the 7th and the 9th centuries, there are only two alleged cremation graves in the Chełmno-Dobrzyń zone – one in the vicinity of Bydgoszcz (Bojarski 2020a, pp. 123–24) and one in a multi-cultural cemetery in Małe Czyste near Chełmno, which is considered an example of the Alt-Käbelich graves common in Pomerania and the northern Polabian region (Schmidt 1991; 1993; Stawska 1994)[10]. Early medieval cemeteries discovered in the area are dated from the end of the 10th to the beginning to the 13th centuries and are inhumation grave-fields, without exceptions.

## *Christianisation and the issue of grave goods*

In Poland, the custom of putting various objects in graves continues throughout the early Middle Ages. The reduction of furnishings is more rapid in church cemeteries, while in rural necropolises (not directly connected with the church building) and outside the main political centres, grave inventories are still recorded in burials from the 12th and 13th centuries (Zoll-Adamikowa 1967, p. 43; Wachowski 1992, p. 149; Valk 1998, p. 243; Biermann 2004, p. 14). These necropolises are distinguished by more abundant sepulchral equipment and a wider range of grave goods. For many of these cemeteries, the proportion of graves containing one to several objects ranges from 40% to more than 80% (Rębkowski 2007, p. 141). Similar values have been noted for the Chełmno-Dobrzyń zone (Bojarski 2020a, p. 323). The persistence of the tradition of richly furnished graves in Kałdus, the capital of the Teutonic castellany of Chełmno, until the end of the early Middle Ages, requires further research.

[8] There are no clear-cut guidelines on how a Christian burial should look like and there are no specific records apart from the general requirement to bury corpses in consecrated ground (Labudda 1983, p. 55). A more formalised approach was applied for burying clergymen (Dąbrowska 1997, p. 13). In practical archaeology, it is accepted that a Christian burial should comply with four criteria: 1) inhumation; 2) supine position with the head westwards; 3) few grave goods; 4) optionally: a coffin or a shroud (e.g., Gräslund 1980, p. 43; Zoll-Adamikowa 1995, pp. 173–174; Valk 1998, p. 237; Rębkowski 2007, pp. 91–97).

[9] Similar processes had taken place before in Europe, e.g., in the Bronze Age, in the pre-Merovingian period, or in the Migration Period (Sørensen, Rebay 2008; Appleby 2013; Lippok 2020).

[10] The exception is the multiphase necropolis at Czarnówek near Lębork, where both Sukow-Dziedzice-phase (the 8th century) inhumation graves and Alt-Käbelich burials were found (Wadyl 2015).

It is reasonable to think that the discovery of rich furnishings in inhumation graves in the first post-Christianisation period was simply due to the fact that – in contrast to cremation burials – the objects were not destroyed by fire in the funeral pyre. Recently, the simple explanation that grave goods were intended to serve the dead in afterlife has been subjected to strong criticism, as there could be other reasons behinds this custom (e.g., Härke 2014); most likely, the role of grave goods was not solely to highlight the social and material status of the dead and their families, but also to manifest their identities and their roles in life. Some objects might have been unalienable properties of the dead person, which could not be inherited by anyone alive and had to be deposited in their graves (Brownlee 2020, pp. 409–411). What is more, the concept of a personal "gift" cannot be disregarded either, as it demonstrates a close relationship between the giver and the recipient (Mauss 1973; 2016).

Since grave goods were such a common custom practised by almost all traditional societies, it may come as a surprise that cremation burials in the north-west Slavic territories were furnished so poorly and basically did not contain any objects apart from pottery vessels (Zoll-Adamikowa 1975)[11]. In contrast, inhumation graves contain a rich inventory consisting of objects of everyday use, elements of clothing, jewellery, weapons, or special gifts (such as coins and containers with beverages and food).

Obviously, it cannot be precluded that the graves of the dead who were cremated on pyres were also equipped with numerous objects. Those, however, were burned in the course of cremation or intentionally destroyed beforehand, so that eventually, only a few of these items were put into the graves. Thus, the abundant and varied representation of objects in inhumation burials would be of a relic character, which usually could be understood as a pagan one (Zoll-Adamikowa 1971, p. 160; Łydkowska-Sowina 1980, pp. 170–172).

## *Things to be taken to the otherworld*

Most often, as in other early medieval cemeteries, the goods deposited in the graves from Kałdus included personal items of the deceased, such as metal parts of clothing, jewellery, and a set of everyday objects (small tools). In addition to the obvious belongings of the buried individual, it is possible to distinguish a group of objects whose presence is likely due to symbolic-magical or religious reasons. I think it is

[11] This refers mostly to the burials of the older phases of the early Middle Ages. A separate approach is required for chronologically younger cremation or bi-ritual cemeteries in Pomerania, where the practice resulted from merging various eschatological ideas and cultural traditions adapted by the local societies that were undoubtedly under a strong cultural, political, and economic influence of their neighbouring countries that had been already Christianised (Rębkowski 2007, p. 98).

a legitimate view that the reason for placing certain objects in the tomb was a deep conviction that they would make it easier for the deceased to reach afterlife and to exist in it. It is likely that this belief was not altered by the Christianity, and may even have strengthened the need to supply the deceased with necessary items in anticipation of resurrection.

In this section, I discuss a selected group of objects discovered in the burials from Kałdus that may prove this thesis valid. I begin with tree-trunk coffins, which look like dugouts; symbolically, coffins of this type likely facilitated reaching the "other side". On their way to the otherworld, the dead person needed light to illuminate the darkness and fire to warm themselves (fire-making sets could have served this purpose), food and drink (vessels with nourishments) and special objects to protect them from all dangers (this function was performed by various types of apotropaics/amulets connected with magic or Christian religion).

## Tree trunk coffins

Given the issues in question, particular interest is evoked by the tree trunk coffins that were found in Kałdus[12]. Some of them rectangular in shape, while others had one or both ends rounded off, thus resembling dugout canoes (Bojarski 2020a, pp. 232–234, Fig. 68). The shape of the dugout was the basis for distinguishing three types of coffins (Fig. 2).

Tree trunk coffins may be viewed as one of the oldest types of portable funerary structures and have been frequently found in the first phase of the necropolis (late 10$^{th}$ to the first half of the 11$^{th}$ centuries). More often, they were used for male burials as opposed to female burials, and only sporadically for child burials[13].

The best-preserved negative of the chisel was unearthed in grave 180 (Fig. 3). The coffin was 266 cm long, 70 cm wide, and 20 cm tall. It was most likely covered by a wooden lid. It held a corpse of an adult male, his head facing northwest. He was buried with an iron knife along with the remains of scabbard fittings.

Thought-provoking, however, is the fact that such graves were furnished with a quite limited set of objects. Above all, they lacked any items that could be associated with the journey made after death. Only two boat burials contained coins, which may allude to a motif known from the Greek mythology, that is, the fee paid to Charon, the soul ferryman.

[12] In total, remains of seventy-one tree trunk coffins have been recorded at site 4; they occur in almost 30% of its sepulchral structures (apart from them, various types of plank surroundings, coffins, and chests have been found). Tree trunk coffins are also known from site 2, where their ratio exceeds 23% (Bojarski 2020a, Table 4).

[13] Some other conclusions have been drawn by Aleksander Limisiewicz (2016, p. 59), who attributed that coffin type to women.

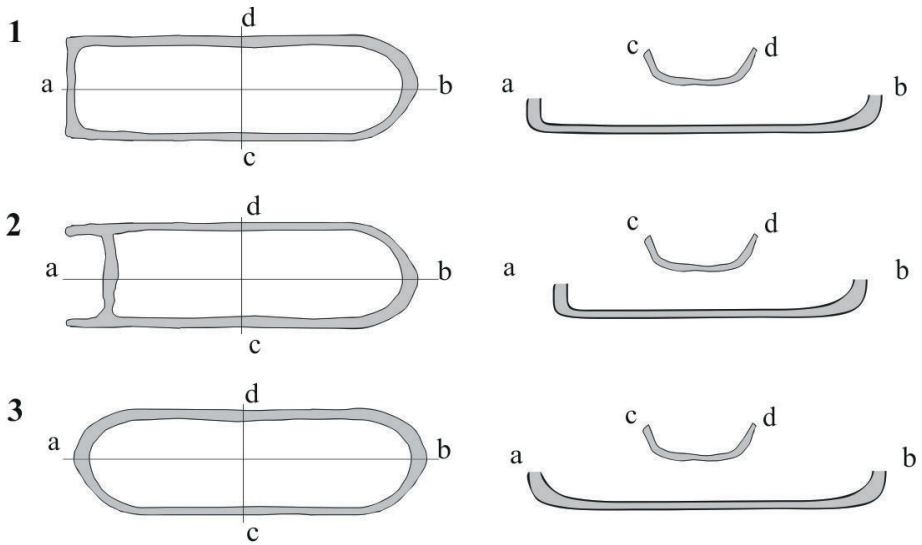



Fig. 2. Types of dugout-canoe-like tree-trunk coffins (after Stawska *et al.* 2010, Figs. 18–20; drawing V. Stawska)

Due to the nature of the material, burials in tree trunk coffins do not represent a large group of findings. Singular cases are known from several early-medieval cemeteries in Poland, e.g., Lubień (Kurasiński, Skóra 2012), Niemcza, Stary Zamek (Wachowski 1992, p. 93, Fig. 62), and Poznań-Śródka (Pawlak 1999, p. 129)[14]. Most often, such coffins were rectangular with a troughlike bottom; their resemblance to dugout canoes is not that obvious.

Aleksander Limisiewicz (2016) presented his own view on the tree trunk coffins, linking them with agrarian symbolism, and indicated grain storage as the primary use of such containers. In a similar way as they were to store grain until the next seeding, they were also, in the eschatological context, to preserve the bodies of the dead and prepare them for their expected in a Christian resurrection. Even if this interpretation was accepted for the coffins formed as rectangular chests, the canoe-shaped tree trunk coffins must be viewed differently. The boat form is uniquely associated with waterway transport. In numerous traditional pre-Christian beliefs, the underworld was separated from forelife by water, making an appropriate means of transport essential for crossing it (Kobyliński 1988, pp. 189–190; Kowalski A.

[14] Much more frequent findings of tree-trunk coffins originate from barrow burials dated to the times of the Roman Period (Wołągiewicz 1984, pp. 50–51).




Fig. 3. Kałdus, site 4, Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship. Grave 180: plan (a, b) and section of relics of a dugout-canoe-liketree-trunk coffin (after Chudziak 2010, Photo 33; photo by A. Koperkiewicz)

1999)[15]. Therefore, it is safe to assume that in order to get to the land of the dead, one had to get across the water, and that required a suitable means of transport.

It cannot, of course, be inferred that the above interpretation is the only one that is valid. The explanation for the remains of the boat in the grave is threefold, the first rationale being that actual boats were used for taking corpses to the cemetery – that referred to small-size objects or fragments of destroyed of larger units. In the second interpretation, the "boat" is mostly of a symbolic meaning and thus does not have to meet the functional criteria (floatage); instead, it may be but a makeshift, a downgraded copy of a real boat, prepared only for funerary purposes. In this respect, the burial becomes an image of a dead person's journey to the underworld. Thirdly, a boat may be not only a practical or a symbolic means of transport, but also an element of sepulchral equipment and, hence, an attribute of the profession of the person buried in it; more importantly, large boats were frequently a determinant of a high social position and prestige (Kobyliński 1988, p. 190; Kajkowski 2016, p. 74).

Boat-shaped graves as well as burials in boats in the Western Slavs territories are viewed as traces of funeral rites connected with North-European and, particularly, Scandinavian societies, where burials within boat-shaped stone surroundings or in boats covered by barrows were practised since the early Iron Age (Müller-Wille 1970; Rębkowski 2007, p. 139; Biermann 2012, pp. 85–86; Urbańczyk 2012). Findings of this kind in Pomerania and the northern Elbe river basin have been collected and discussed by Kamil Kajkowski (2016), who divides the group into a) boat-shaped stone structures (Menzlin, Rusinowo, Słonowice); b) burned boats preserved as negatives and/or by the iron rivets that held their strakes together (Ralswiek, Groß Strömkendorf, Wolin-Młynkówka, Wolin-Wzgórze Wisielców, Świelubie); c) tree-trunk boats (Góra Chełmska, Cedynia, Ostrowite near Chojnice); d) plank boats (Groß Strömkendorf, two cemeteries in Usedom, Ralswiek). The vast majority of the graves mentioned differ, however, from the ones discovered in Kałdus – small and lacking iron fittings. Both the stone enclosures symbolising boats and the remains of the wooden boats themselves discovered in Pomerania are similar in size to actual marine vessels and, in the case of wooden boats, their presence is confirmed by the legible negatives of timber and iron fittings of the hull discovered *in situ*, arranged along the presumed sides (Kajkowski 2016). It is valid to seek to connect this ritual element, foreign to the Slavs, with the multi-ethnical societies living on the south shore of the Baltic Sea. In Menzlin, Groß Strömkendorf, Ralswiek, or Bardy-Świelubie, some important centres of specialised production

[15] The motif of a river or an inlet of the sea that separates both worlds is present in the mythologies of Celtic, Germanic, and Finnic tribes, as well as in that of the Greeks and the Slavs. In various mythologies, the dead make use of a bridge instead of a ferry (Bylina 1992, pp. 80–82; 1999, p. 17; *Zaświaty* 1999, pp. 232–234; Kotowicz 2007).

and trade of goods were in operation in the 8th and 9th centuries (Müller-Wille 1970; Biermann 2012, pp. 86–92).

The tree-trunk boat burials discovered in Wolin, Góra Chełmska, Cedynia, and some other locations may be viewed differently. The burials were dated to the 11th and 12th centuries (Rębkowski 2007, p. 139; 2022, p. 350). What may be seen here is, most likely, that the idea of the dead's' journey to the underworld was transferred to the societies that were Christianised before and that cultivated those beliefs also in churchyards (Cedynia, Góra Chełmska, Ostrowite, Usedom "Am Hain") (Kajkowski 2016, pp. 56–60). The single stemmed boats used as coffins were similar in length to the log coffins from Kałdus. The only difference was the presence of nails, which may have been a trace of the attachment of the sides. They were also more commonly used for male burials.

### *Burial equipment*

Various terms are used to describe what is in a grave beyond the biological remains of a human being. From the most general term, such as "grave inventory" or "cultural content", one moves on to more strongly semantic names, such as "equipment of the deceased", "grave gifts" (Miśkiewicz 1969, pp. 265–66; Zoll-Adamikowa 1975, pp. 30–31). In more recent scientific literature, neutral terms are used such as "grave inventories" or "source materials" (Kurasiński, Skóra 2012). For the purposes of our discussion, the appropriate term – with reference to materials intentionally related to the buried person – seems to be "burial equipment".

The placing of selected objects in the grave could be motivated in various ways. Personal belongings, either individually owned or part of a collective property, such as that of a family or a social group, that the deceased was using out of necessity on a daily basis. These included garments and items of clothing, a basic set of tools and some ornaments, also worn on festive occasions or special celebrations (such as a funeral, for example). One can imagine that the majority of community members, regardless of age, gender, or wealth, owned a basic set of items. Nonetheless, after death, only some of these were deposited in the grave. Unfortunately, we do not know the rationale that selecting these objects was based on. Why did some people receive more items and others but a few? Was it due to gender, age, origin, religion, or perhaps social status? There is no doubt that, just as it was the living who decided how to be buried, it was their loved ones who decided on the objects to be deposited with the dead. From this perspective, every object placed in the grave became a "gift".

Of course, in our imagination, the same object can evoke different associations depending on the changing socio-cultural or religious-ideological system. And this is what happened to the barbarian communities of Europe after their

Christianisation, when previous symbols and objects acquired a new meaning or were enriched with new content (Guriewicz 1976, p. 72; Gurevich 1985; Dulinicz, Łoźny 1988; Koperkiewicz 2005; Brather 2012, p. 341; Wawrzeniuk 2016, pp. 106–163). Likely, the objects themselves – their form, colour, raw material, or motif decorating the surface – and the way they were arranged in (including the context) have become significant. Consequently, it seems valid that a complex procedure of reading the meaning contained in the source material is conducted in both these cases, such as for the equipment of the deceased. Furthermore, it is always necessary to categorise objects, distinguishing "personal items" from "gifts", "accidental" from "intentional" items, and those "insignificant" from "significant" ones.

The burials contain a large group of objects whose functions, due to their forms, should be viewed as a special category of grave goods – inconsistent with the requirements of Christian eschatology. Contrary to the Church's teachings that a Christian does not need anything after death, efforts were made to adequately provide the deceased for this "last journey", regardless. This explains the placing of vessels with food and the most useful items of daily use in the graves. For the same reason, a coin was placed in the hand to pay for the passage to the other side. Another reason behind the deposition of such gifts may have been the compulsion to repay the family's obligations to the deceased, so that the deceased would not take revenge on the living (Kempiński 2001, p. 114; Kowalski A. 2005, pp. 28–30).

If we assume that death was imagined as a journey into afterlife, then the objects placed in the graves become an indispensable tool that would make it easier for the deceased to reach their destination. Just as a traveler had to take some food and money with them along with items that warded off evil or increased their strength, so did the deceased who was about to embark on their way to the otherworld.

Due to their symbolic meaning, the items may be divided into four groups, specifically, a) instruments intended to lighten the darkness and to warm the grave (fire striker and flints); b) foodstuffs (vessels and their contents); c) monetary resources (obols) and their equivalents as a toll for crossing the gate to the underworld; d) *apotropaia* of various types protecting the living from the living dead (*defuncti vivi*), or the dead from threats (amulets and devotional objects).

a. Instrument for light and fire

In Kałdus, separate iron tinderboxes occurred less frequently compared to a complete set together with a flint. Fire strikers were also found separately or, sometimes, together with other iron objects of everyday use, such as knives or awls. Iron tinderboxes were unearthed in twenty-one graves in three cemeteries. Burials containing tinder were more frequent, with twenty-eight of them identified. A connection between the tools for striking fire and the male sphere of activity is quite clearly visible, as most frequently, they were unearthed in male graves, only rarely in female graves (two cases), and even less often in child graves.

The occurrence of such offerings increased in the later phases of the cemeteries (from the mid-12th century) (Bojarski 2020a, pp. 375–77).

b. Foodstuffs and food containers

The second group of objects consists of food of plant or animal origin together with utensils used for storing it, as well as vessels only. As for the food containers, various types have been distinguished, all deposited in the graves as an attribute defining the high social status of the deceased and their family, their position or function, and as a certificate of access to exclusive goods (Janowski 2003; Krzyszowski 2014, p. 151; Bojarski 2020a, p. 385). In addition to exclusive (imported) utensils, the graves held also utensils made of cheaper raw materials, such as clay, wood, bast fibres, and wicker. This type of vessels is more often considered containers for food and drink. For this reason, in addition to their practical function, they are also given a symbolic or ritual meaning (Profantová 2007; Janowski 2019, p. 277). In most cases, analyses carried out on the vessels from Kałdus yielded negative results. Only in two vessels some plant remains have been identified. In the first case, it was a shell of a hazelnut (*Corylus avellana*) and a few grains of wheat (*Triticum sp.*); in the other one, there were a few peas (*Pisum sativum*) (Bienias, Chudziak 2016, Table 5; Bojarski 2020a, p. 390). Similarly to cereals, leguminous vegetables were basic human food in the early Middle Ages. Hazelnuts, however, should be viewed differently, imbued by medieval Slavs with the symbolic meaning of abundance and profusion, the foreboding of death, as well as some protection against evil powers (Niewęgłowski 1993; Kowalski P. 1998, pp. 275–276, 397–399).

At Kałdus, pots usually were placed at the dead person's feet and near the head only by way of exception. The custom of equipping the dead with utensils was mostly practised in the older phases of the cemetery and was gradually abandoned; the latest graves with ceramics only were dated to a period from the second half of the 12th century to the early 13th century. Stave buckets were quicker to disappear from the archaeological record. Children were given offerings sporadically and their grave goods consisted solely of clay containers. Wooden utensils were deposited only in graves of adults. Sometimes, larger fragments were provided instead of entire vessels (such as bottoms of clay vessels)[16].

In several graves one can guess the deliberated position of meat and plant foods. A swine shovel wrapped in organic material, found in one of the chamber graves, provides a wide scope for interpretation, including in the context of feeding the dead. It is possible that similar portions meat, albeit boneless, were left in the graves

[16] It is worth noting that there is another symbolic aspect associated with clay as a pottery-making material. In numerous traditional beliefs, clay or earth mixed with water was a substance that the human body was made with, with life breathed into it by a demiurge-god. Breaking the pottery becomes not only a visible symbol of the end of life, but also a symbol of its fragility and imperfection (Forstner 1990, pp. 417–418; Zamelska-Monczak 2016, p. 267).

and decomposed leaving no visible trace[17]. A number of the graves at Kałdus have been associated with animal bones (Makowiecki 2010, pp. 103–108); however, it must be assumed that these bones got into the pits as they were backfilled, and originated from older layers[18]. Single cereal grains (*Cerealia*) were identified in three Kałdus graves, one of them containing also peas (*Pisum sativum*). In one burial pit, millet grains (*Panicum miliaceum*) and hazelnuts (*Corylus avellana*) were also recorded. The presence of single grains does not serve as evidence for the deliberate depositing of cereal seeds in the graves. These plants may have found their way into the pit backfill accidentally (Bienias, Chudziak 2016, Table 5; Bojarski 2020a, p. 390).

c. Coins

Coins have been found in 30 graves in Kałdus (26 from site 4, which accounts for 5% of all burials), usually one in each burial; however, two of the burials contained two and three coins, respectively. Two grave held larger deposits, one including 168 complete and fragmentary coins, scrap silver jewellery, and pieces of raw material weighting 124.7 g in total; the other one contained sixteen complete or fragmented coins and a piece of silver wire (Musiałowski 2010; Drozd-Lipińska 2014; Bojarski 2020a, pp. 382–83)[19].

As it seems, coins were deposited in the graves regardless of gender. They were discovered in the burials of mature women (eleven graves), men (ten burials) and children (six burials). In the grave of a child who died at the age of about nine months, a cross denarius was found in the form of a pendant that was part of a necklace made up of several glass beads. In my opinion, it is likely that it was a Christian pendant. Having analysed the chronological distribution of the coins

[17] In some cases, samples collected for chemical analysis from wooden utensils found in the cemetery of Sowinki have confirmed the presence of some traces of animal protein (Krzyszowski 2014, p. 146).

[18] In both cases, cemeteries were created in the place of older, early medieval settlements. Obviously, it cannot be categorically rejected that, similarly to the fragments of ceramics discovered in the burial pits, some of them may be traces of feasts held at funerary ceremonies (Dzik 2003).

[19] Most of the coins came from the burial ground at site 4. A total of 211 coins were recorded, including 97 coins from the hoard in grave 210 and 16 coins from grave 444. Alongside whole coins or larger fragments with legible dies, there were small fragments of unspecified origin. These coins were classified into three chronological and typological groups (Musiałowski 2010, Table 1). Group I – comprises coins minted at the end of the second half of the 10th century and in the first quarter of the 11th century; including, for example, coins of Æthelred II (1009–1017) and Canute the Great (1016–1023), as well as denarii of Otto III and Adelaide (983–1010/1020), Hungarian coins of Stephen I (997–1038), and Czech coins of Sobiesław (985–995) and Udalryk (1012–1023). Group II – comprised coins minted in the second to fourth quarters of the 11th century; including Frankish denarii of Conrad II (1027–1039) and Henry II (1039–1046) as well as Moravian and Bohemian denarii of Břetislav I (1033–1049). Group III – coins minted in the second half of the 12th century (mainly Polish coins of Bolesław the Curly (1157–1164/66) and Hungarian denarii of Huszar 99. This last group included a coin from site 1 minted in the early 13th century and two fragments of bracteates from site 2, dated to the first quarter of the 13th century (Bojarski 2020a, pp. 58–59).

in cemeteries, it is difficult to confirm the hypothesis quoted in the literature on a larger proportion of coins in younger cemeteries, used in the 11th and 12th centuries (Miechowicz 2012, p. 614). In Kałdus, the proportions are, more or less, spread equally among the three phases that span from the end of the 10th century to the beginning of the 13th century (Chudziak *et al.* 2010, pp. 114–120).

What seems crucial for the issues analysed here is the connection between the amount of the grave goods and the level of coin fragmentation. Complete coins have been found in the graves of two adult men and two children. In the male burials, they constituted the only objects, while in the child burials, they may be considered parts of necklaces. In the graves of women, halved coins were more frequent, in addition to elements of personal jewellery, such as glass beads, finger rings, and temple rings. Most often, but not in male burials, coins were the only objects, in the form of pieces of coins of rather small value, usually accompanied by some goods of higher diversity and opulence. Owing to these observations, it was possible to draw one conclusion: to some degree, coins were viewed as an equivalent of or a supplement for missing goods, as the graves with a complete coin or a larger fragment usually contained fewer other objects, including those considered personal belongings, while those graves that contained smaller coin pieces were more abundant in such goods.

Instead of a coin, the role of the obol could also be played by other valuable objects, usually imported ones. In Kałdus, these were beads made of green glass and ornamented with gold sheet or of semiprecious stone as well as amber nuggets or discs. These were put in the dead persons' hands or next to their skulls, in the same places where coins usually were deposited (Bojarski 2020a, pp. 381–382).

The custom of putting an obol into a grave is of ancient origin, associated with the fare paid to the boatman Charon to be ferried across the river Styx (Acheron) (Kubiak 2008, p. 205). The custom was also practised in later times, regardless of the dead individual's religion, as it seems (Kiersnowski 1988, p. 57; Suchodolski 2012, p. 213). The reasons for depositing coins in graves in the Slavic territories have been analysed in detail by Łukasz Miechowicz (2007; 2019): the motifs that come to the foreground are, specifically, a toll for entering "the land of the dead", the need of paying the dead their dues, and the notion that coins represent the equivalents of objects that the dead could not take with them to the otherworld. Finally, the Church's ban on putting any objects other than personal clothing, integral jewellery, and some things of everyday use into graves (Effros 2002, pp. 205–206) led to the custom of replacing the banned objects with a coin (Zoll-Adamikowa 1971, p. 118).

d. Amulets and items of Christian worship

The last group are objects connected with eschatological beliefs or with magic. On the one hand, amulets were intended to protect the dead from bad fate that might awaited them after death; on the other hand, they were to neutralise a dead persons'

evil intentions against the living and keep them in their graves. They were imbued with healing, protective, and deterrent properties. It was believed that they could pass on some of their magical power to the person who wore them (Jaguś 2003; Jäggi 2016, p. 236; Wawrzeniuk 2016, p. 108). The belief in the magical properties of amulets can be found in late medieval records written by monk Rudolf from a monastery in Silesia (*Katalog magii* 1955, pp. 20–22) and rector of the Krakow Academy Stanisław from Skarbimierz (Olszewski 2002). They were commonly worn despite the prohibitions of the Church. Their use is confirmed by numerous finds in early medieval cemeteries. Perhaps, over time, amulets in their function were replaced by objects of Christian worship, representing not only a symbol of faith, but also an effective means of waring off evil personified by the Devil.

The objects found in Kałdus that are regarded as connected with protective magic include belemnites, pendants, small bells, cross pendants or finger rings with inscriptions (referring, for example, to the name of God). A part of a necklace composed of glass beads was an animal fang and the claw of a bird (Fig. 4: a, b)[20]. It was unearthed in the grave of a woman who died at the age of *maturus*.

Metal small bells and rattles are not only sound toys but also apotropaic objects (Fig. 4: c–f). As other idiophones, their sounds were intended to ward off not only wild animals, but also evil powers that might lay in wait for the health and souls of little children and young women (Malinowski 1993, p. 107; Wawrzeniuk 2016, pp. 151–157). A rattle in the shape of an egg has been found in the grave of a child (*infans I*), together with some remains of metal elements of a belt. The bells found in four graves also belonged to children, died at ages of 0.5–6 years. Their locations show that they were worn as pendants on the children's necks or as elements of their clothing (Bojarski 2020a, p. 352). The bells in children's graves may have acted as toys, to help put a child to sleep (forever) or to soothe them.

Cross pendants usually are accepted as the most characteristic objects connected with the Christian religion[21]. In Kałdus, personal crosses were found in two graves. The first was cast in lead and shaped as a Roman cross (Fig. 4: g). Its sloppy form and lack of an eyelet indicates that it was produced specifically for a funeral, in order to be placed on a corpse. It was given into the grave of a child who died at the age of about eight years, probably a girl, as apart from the cross, the body was adorned with eight temple rings and a necklace of tiny glass beads, next to which

[20] Pendants of this type are the most common in the sepulchral equipment recorded in few early medieval cemeteries in north-eastern Poland (Mazovia and Podlasie; Miśkiewicz 1969, p. 267; Bronicka-Rauhut 1998, p. 33) and West Pomerania (Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982; Pollex 2010, p. 118). They symbolised courage, bravery, and shrewdness. They usually were given to dead women and children, who – being the weaker ones – deserved additional care (Jaguś 2003, p. 8).

[21] Not only in the area in question, but in the whole of north-western Slavonia, they are a unique find (Kóčka-Krenz 2002; Rębkowski 2007, p. 193), in contrast to the neighbouring Scandinavia or Ruthenia (Staecker 1999; Wołoszyn 2011).

three coins were stacked. The second cross, made of amber, was reminiscent of a Thor's hammer (Fig. 4: h). It was found in the grave of an adult (man?) that also contained an iron knife (Bojarski 2020a, p. 388; 2020b, pp. 83–84). The presence of crosses in graves can be seen as an individual reminder of baptism. They may also have been given to people who were not so much not only to those with particular faith, but also to those in need of additional or special protection. This is not necessarily a contradiction between the Christian religion and the belief in the magical power of objects, as in the culture of the early Middle Ages these orders co-existed, despite the formal suppression of pagan beliefs (Szczepanik 2023, p. 290).

A different set of devotional objects consists of three decorated finger rings found in Kałdus. One of them, referred to as the "signet ring", bears an engraved crutch cross (Fig. 4: i), a motif also known from some finds in Silesia or Pomerania, for example the cemetery of Gruczno (Bojarski 2020b, p. 88), but most frequently in the cemeteries of Mazovia in East Poland (Jaskanis 2008, pp. 224–226)[22]. Two rings unearthed in the graves of young women bear inscriptions (Bojarski 2017; 2020b, pp. 90–92): one ring made of silver ribbon bore an inscription that can be read as either *sion* or *iohannes* (Fig. 4: j)[23]. The first reading would refer to the Mont Zion – the dwelling of God in Jerusalem (Forstner 1977; 1990, pp. 376–77), the second, most likely, to the name of St. John the Baptist. The second ring, preserved only as fragments, also was found in the grave of a young woman, on the left hand (Fig. 4: k). The surviving inscription reads *cn*, which may be reconstructed either as the initials of *Christos Nika* (Christ the Conqueror) or as part of the longer acronym ic *xc nika* (Jesus Christ conquers), which also was found engraved on Ruthenian and Byzantine reliquary crosses (Staecker 1997, pp. 70–73). Both rings were accompanied by some very abundant grave goods that included head and neck trimmings, finger rings, and knives, as well as – in one case – a fragment of a bracteates, that was minted in the early 13th century (Bojarski 2017; pp. 1120–1124; 2020b, p. 90). Early medieval rings with inscriptions are a rare find in North-West Slavic lands; several have been discovered in Poland (Kóčka-Krenz 1993, pp. 119–20; Chudzińska 2004). They can be included in the group of rings of the type Thetragramaton (with a four-letter abbreviation of the name of God or Jesus Christ – JHWH or INRI), as well as in rings of the AGLA or Thetragrammaton type. The apotropaic significance of these rings was linked to the belief in the magical function of the letters, behind which was hidden the sacred name of God, and the conviction that this inscription enhanced the protective effect of the object (Lorenzen 1997, p. 147; Hermann

[22] Its higher frequency in that region is connected to the influence of the Ruthenian and Byzantine culture. Various types of such rings are known from northern Ruthenia from the sites dated back to times from the end of the 12th century to the 14th century (Sedova 1981, p. 135, Figs. 50–51).

[23] For a detailed interpretation of the writings engraved on both rings – see Bojarski 2017, pp. 1120–1124.

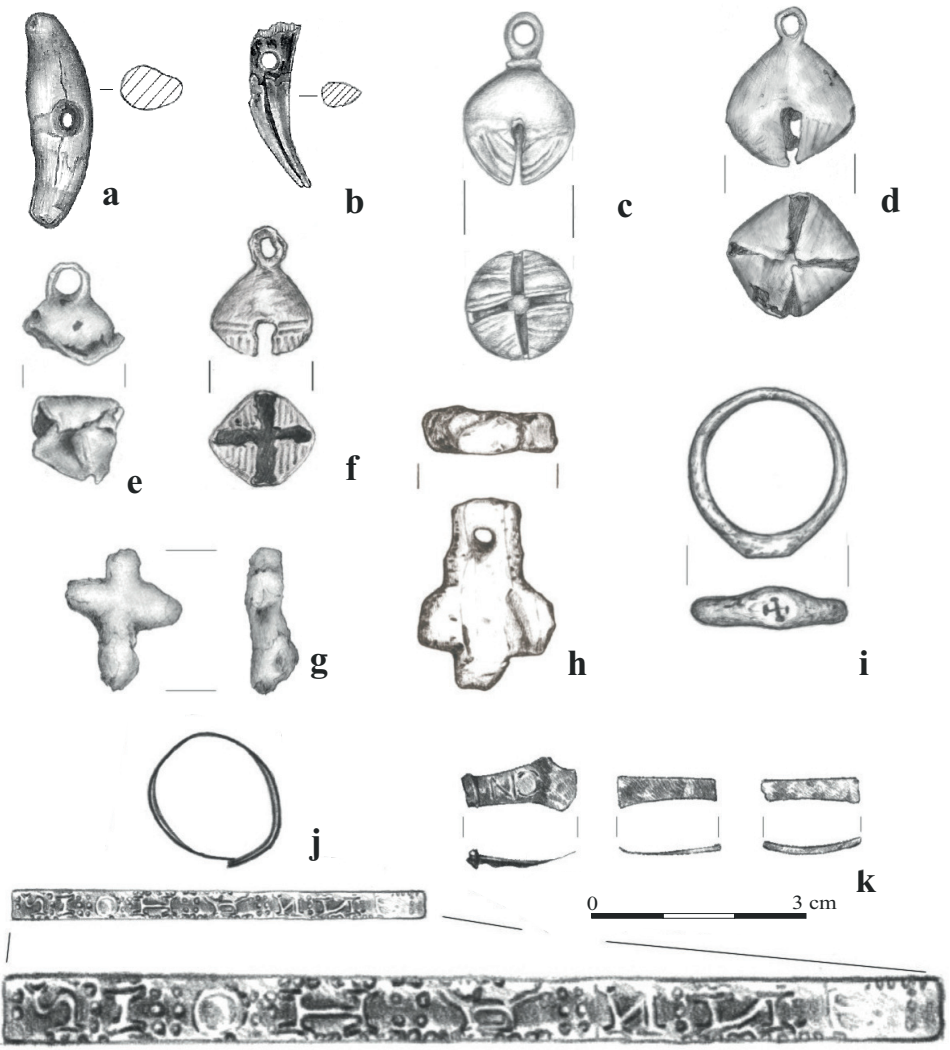



Fig. 4. Examples of amulets and cult objects from Kałdus: a – fang; b: talon (grave 163, site 1); c–f – bronze bells; g – lead cross (grave 121, site 4); h – amber cross (grave 364, site 4); i – finger ring with crutch cross (grave 9, site 2); j – ribbon finger ring (grave 34, site 2); k – fragments of finger ring with eyelet (?) (grave 42, site 2) (after Bojarski 2020a, Figs. 100, 104)

2009, p. 222). Most rings of this type have been dated from late 12th to 15th century (Kóčka-Krenz 1993, p. 120; Lorenzen 1997, p. 147; Hermann 2009, p. 226).

Such unique finger rings clearly indicate, at first, both young women's Christian religion and their high social position. As in the case of the crosses worn on the body, one may wonder whether the rings and especially the signs engraved on them were a testimony to the Christian faith or whether they were intended to replace the amulets previously used (and forbidden by the Church) to protect the deceased from an uncertain fate.

The last item included in the amulet group is a belemnite. These so-called "thunderbolts" were attributed with the power of curing various illnesses and protecting from bad fate due to their extramundane origin (Mazurkiewicz 1991, p. 149; Szyjewski 2003, p. 46; Banasiak 2017, p. 74; 2018). The Polish common name for belemnite – *kamień piorunowy* ("lightning stone"), *laska piorunowa* ("lightning rod"), or *strzałka piorunowa* ("lightning arrow") – indicates its association with the name Perun, the Thunder God of the Slavs (Gieysztor 1986, pp. 87–88). In other languages, likewise, the connection with the lightning deity is noticeable. The belief in the magical and protective and healing effects of lightning stones has been shared by all communities since ancient times to this day; opinions on this subject can be found in also medieval accounts (Kurasiński 2021, pp. 6, 30–31)[24]. In Kałdus one "thunderbolt" was discovered in the grave of an elderly woman suffering from rheumatic disorders. From the perspective of the funeral attendees (family?), the object symbolising the healing power of lightning may have alleviated the pain experienced by the woman during her lifetime. It can also not be excluded that it was carried by her on and then with the body was put into the grave (Bojarski 2020a, p. 387).

## *Pagan or Christian? – funerary rites from the 10th to 13th centuries*

In every traditional society, magic and religious precepts served as fundamentals of all actions, legal regulations, norms of everyday life and holidays, but mostly as stabilisers of general life. Part of that was done by funerary rites that were followed by the pre-Christian Slavs, and it may be supposed that after conversion to Christianity, some of those practices were continued and grew into new kinds of funerary rituals inspired by the Church. Occurrences of practices in consistent with Christian dogma and eschatology most often are explained by the fact that the

[24] The name "lightning stone" can hide various archaeological finds, including fossils, minerals, as well as other prehistoric stone artifacts, to which the folk imagination attributed a relationship with the sky. The belief in the magical, protective, and healing effects of lightning stones has been shared by all communities since ancient times to this day; opinions on this subject can be found in medieval accounts (Kurasinski 2021, pp. 6–7, 30–31).

Christianisation process was extended in time and that its course in the Western Slavs territories was particularly complicated and multi-stage (Urbańczyk, Rosik 2007; Urbańczyk 2015, pp. 135–138). In the first place, the changes involved elites, whose members were more willing to draw on patterns of behaviour borrowed from previously Christianised neighbouring communities. Among the elite section of society could be people of foreign origin who professed Christianity. Such a situation could have occurred in Kałdus, to which merchants and artisans, as well as representatives of the Piasts State, could have reached from distant places via trade routes. Burial could be one of the ways to distinguish oneself from the local community, highlighting one's uniqueness and prestige. Probably in this first phase the traditional cremation of the dead was still tolerated. However, so far, no traces of burials from this period have been discovered either in Kałdus or in the immediate vicinity.

In Kałdus, as in the lands of the Polish state, the cremation ritual was replaced by burial between the end of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th century. This fact is strongly confirmed in the form of numerous discovered skeletal graves (Bojarski 2020a, pp. 425–33). We do not know, however, whether pagan eschatological ideas were replaced just as quickly. It can be surmised that, as a traditional element of culture, a testimony of its own identity, it persisted in the form of various relics tolerated by the still poorly developed Church.

This is confirmed indirectly by various non-standard behaviour towards the bodies of people buried in graves (untypical arrangement) and, above all, in the furnishings, which may – in my opinion – indicate the practice of belief in the afterlife.

On the basis of the objects discovered in the graves, we can try to imagine in very general outlines what the Slavic afterlife looked like.

The deceased, crossing the threshold of death, entered an unknown, dark and probably cold space. It may be indicated by the presence of fire-breathing objects. The flame of fire or candle warmed and illuminated the darkness of the graves and provided security. For most traditional societies, fire contains a divine element or is a revelation of the sacred and life-giving powers of the sun. Fire and its light were used in many ceremonies, including funerals. Its symbolic significance was clearly emphasized by the burial liturgy of Christians. It was believed that fire consumed sinners, but also purified them from sin. Fire and light symbolized the risen Christ and played an important role in the resurrection rites (Forstner 1990, pp. 72–75, 410; Kowalski P. 1998, p. 378; Cirlot 2000, 281–82; Kopaliński 2006, pp. 265–68)[25]. Pagan and Christian ideas could be combined in this one symbol. The journey into

[25] Candles also served this function in burials. Examples of such finds come primarily from chamber graves in the Eastern Slavic region, from boat graves in Norway, and from chamber graves in Denmark, dating from the 8th to the 10th century (Janowski 2014, pp. 128–130, Fig. 1). This custom has a long tradition dating back to the Roman Period (Menzel 1953).

the afterlife required an adequate supply of food (this would explain the presence of vessels in the graves or traces of plant or animal food). It can be assumed that the land of the dead was beyond the water and had to be conquered with the help of a boat; but can this be confirmed by the discovery of burials, especially in the oldest phase of the cemetery of Kałdus, in trunk coffins resembling a boat? The passage through the water required the deceased to pay a fee to the carrier (pain).

A part of the objects probably was regarded as a specific "ransom" to pay dues to the dead, to compensate for any damages done to them and thus make them sympathetic towards the living. It seems that since the times when cremation was no longer practised, beliefs in harmful actions performed by the dead on their return to the world of the living (as the "living dead", "undead", *defuncti vivi*) became quite common (also regarding the Church). The Christian funeral ritual – the forgiveness of sins, the administration of the sacraments was to be a sufficient way of saying goodbye to the deceased and his immortal soul, who was to wait in the tomb for the Resurrection. Not for all members of the community of that time was the ritual of absolution an effective way of excommunicating the deceased to the afterlife. Perhaps people attached to traditional pre-Christian beliefs needed additional activities and attributes that were associated with magic.

In my opinion, the new religion was not quite convincing; apparently, it did not guarantee that the funerary methods imposed by the Church would prove effective. Fear of the dead and the desire to ward them off prompted people to place both pagan amulets and objects of the Christian cult in graves. Thus, instances where Christian crosses occur next to animal teeth or other magic pendants in one set of grave goods are quite common in inhumation cemeteries from north-east Poland (Bronicka-Rauhut 1988, p. 89; Koperkiewicz, Krasnodębski 2006, p. 472; Jaskanis 2008, p. 259). Similar instances of Christian pendants occurring next to amulets bearing pagan motifs have been confirmed in several graves at the Gruczno burial ground in Eastern Pomerania (Bojarski 2020a, p. 414).

The mistrust in the power of the new religion is also manifested in the custom of wearing several crosses at the same time, as if one was not enough and its power had to be multiplied. This fact is not confirmed in Kałdus, but it is known from cemeteries in Eastern Poland (Koperkiewicz 2011) and in Gruczno[26] in Eastern Pomerania (Bojarski 2020a, p. 413; Bojarski *et al.* 2024, pp. 136–137, Fig. 10.24). Although the double belief, known as religious syncretism (Łydkowska-Sowina 1980; Dulinicz,

[26] The custom of wearing several cross-shaped pendants or pendants bearing a cross symbol simultaneously in Early Rus' and in Eastern Poland, which was under the influence of Orthodox culture (Podlasie and Eastern Mazovia), is confirmed by numerous finds from this area (Wołoszyn 2011). However, this custom is absent from cemeteries situated within the sphere of influence of the Western Church. An exception is Gruczno, where the presence of burials containing several devotional pendants (particularly of Ruthenian origin) may indicate the presence of Orthodox believers within the local community (Bojarski *et al.* 2024, pp. 131–133, 156).

Łoźny 1988, p. 128; Jaguś 2000, p. 110; Osadczy 2004; Rock 2007; Baškov 2011, p. 18), is attributed mostly to the Eastern Slavs, its occurrence is confirmed in other areas Christianised earlier (Jäggi 2016, pp. 235–37). What makes an emphatic example of that are the Church's numerous bans on the wearing of amulets, including objects of Christian *sacrum*, that had taken over the role formerly played by pagan magic objects (Muhl 2003, p. 86; Brather-Walter, Brather 2012, pp. 129–133).

All the above clearly indicates that numerous behaviours the traces of which have been found in the cemeteries of Kałdus were connected with pre-Christian beliefs that still played a crucial role in funerary practices of the local society. Covered by a thin layer of Christian theology, they were still existent and not only influenced the funerary ceremonies taking place when the dead were buried, but also helped create a new image of the underworld that was formed under these circumstances. The new vision absorbed some old concepts, such as the beliefs in afterlife or the journey of the dead, or the notion that the dead must be provided for and placated. The new concept was accepted by the Church and became the unrealised or hidden heritage of the pre-Christian era.

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