

# BARROWS, LONG-DISTANCE MOBILITY AND PERIPHERAL ELITES BETWEEN THE BALTIC AND BLACK SEAS DURING THE 2ND MILLENNIUM BC

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*Abstract: In this paper the distribution of prestige goods in the 2nd millennium in the Baltic-Pontic area has been linked to the emergence of long-distance communication routes<sup>1</sup>. The main initiators and beneficiaries of the communication links were the societies of the Füzesabony culture. Their northern partners in this respect were the ‘Trzciniec circle’ groups whose elites took active part in the organisation and maintenance of the key junctions of routes. ‘Southern-style’ luxury items are often found in the richly furnished graves under barrows of local elites. The scale of exchange, measured by the dispersion of exotic goods, suggests that the transmission of ‘trans-Carpathian’ cultural patterns, ideas, ready-made products and know-how in the Baltic-Pontic region could have been institutionalised.*

*Keywords: barrows, Trzciniec cultural circle, long-distance mobility, communication routes, Füzesabony culture, peripheral elites*

## Introduction

The second millennium BC witnessed dynamic and profound socio-cultural changes in East-Central Europe. In the Baltic-Pontic area, the processes of cultural unification are observable at that time. They led to the rise of the Trzciniec cultural circle (TCC) – the extensive, macro-spatial structure that integrated, to various degrees, regional cultural traditions between the Oder and Dnieper rivers (Figure 1) and stimulated native communities to take up new ‘life styles’ (Makarowicz 2010). The period when the Trzciniec complex grew was a stabilisation stage in the long process of the development of the frontier societies that combined the cultural patterns of the east and west of Europe. This unit shows traits characteristic of Braudel’s *longue durée* structures, which functioned for a long time and covered vast areas. However, this was not a homogeneous structure but rather a polythetic and polymorphic one. Despite an observable unification on the general scale, its individual segments displayed certain regional differences. The major dividing line, related to environmental conditions, preferred settlement and subsistence strategies, and types of social structures and ritual life, ran between its northern – lowland and southern – upland segments.

In the period in question, north of the Carpathians, in modern southeast Poland and southwest Ukraine, settlements of the Füzesabony culture emerged (Gancarski 2002). At least four hillforts (Trzcinica, Trepcza, Jasło and Maszkowice) are known in the Carpathian Foothills in Poland, with two of them having been excavated (Gancarski 1999; 2002; Przybyła *et al.* 2012). They emulate the architectural patterns of such settlements in Slovakia, Hungary and Romania (e.g. Bader 1998; Gašaj 2002; Gogâltan 2008; Jaeger 2011; Olexa 2003; Ordentlich 1968; Vladár 1975).

The form of fortifications in Maszkowice (dry stone wall), design details of buildings and figural ornaments suggest long-distance contacts of the local community within an extensive system of ties, covering the Carpathian Basin and the Balkan Peninsula (Przybyła *et al.* 2012). Judging by the long sequence of radiocarbon dates from the settlement in Trzcinica, the oecumene of the Füzesabony culture crossed the mountain barrier for good, stabilising its northern frontier in the area between the upper Vistula and upper Dniester rivers (Gancarski 1999; Makarowicz 1999).

In the meantime, farther north from the Carpathian arch, at a distance of several dozen kilometres from the Füzesabony culture enclaves, ‘Trzciniec’ centres arose. They formed a stable settlement network made up of micro-regions, consisting of stable, long-lasting settlements, short-lived campsites, and less frequent barrow and flat cemeteries. Trzciniec circle societies were flexible in adapting to almost any conditions, penetrated various landscape types, and successfully operated a parallel farming and animal-breeding economy. In the ritual sphere what we see is entrenched conservatism manifested in cultivating the same group-reaffirming rituals, raising barrows, building collective graves for people and animals, depositing bronze goods in water and earth, and a dichotomous division into male and female social roles (Makarowicz 2010).

## Mobility and long-distance communication routes

From the middle of the 17th century BC, for more than 300 years, intensive contacts ensued between ‘Trzciniec’ societies and their southern neighbours. The interactions, to a large extent, shaped the cultural image of the upland TCC enclaves by inducing the change of collectivist and egalitarian social structures, and forging the identity of re-

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Figure 1: Spatial range of the Trzciniec cultural circle and the Füzesabony culture (after Makarowicz 2012).

gional elites. At that time, there is a growing tendency to individualise funerary rituals and personalise grave goods (Makarowicz 2003; Makarowicz 2009, 330).

What was the nature of the interactions along the south-north axis? How can the archaeometric parameters of this process be defined? In the second quarter of the 2nd millennium BC prestige objects made of bronze, gold, amber, glass, stone and horn started to be more broadly distributed between the Baltic and Black seas (Figure 2). In many cases, the style or chemical composition of bronze goods indicate that they either came from beyond the Carpathians or were produced locally by foreign craftsmen, or by native ones following southern patterns. Valuable objects, often being status symbols or marking individual identity, are recorded in ritual contexts. Their distribution and the dispersion of some more common goods (e.g. specific vessel types displaying 'Füzesabony' style) within the area of the Trzciniec circle indicate the possibility of the existence of long- and short-distance transit routes running close to

local and regional cultural centres (Makarowicz 2009; Fig. 22; Makarowicz 2012, Fig. 20).

Under the world-systems theory, which assumes that every cultural, economic and political space is hierarchically organised, certain phenomena (e.g. bronze metallurgy or chiefdoms) appear only in the regions where a demand for a given innovation is present and suitable conditions for its adaptation exist (Kadrow 2001). Keeping this in mind, it may be assumed that Trzciniec circle elites generated such a demand and became a valuable partner/collaborator for 'Trans-Carpathian' elites – the likely instigators and organisers of the system of communication routes.

The creation of long-distance communication network branches numbering several hundred kilometres in all, required considerable organisational abilities and cooperation with the peoples concerned of the region through which they ran. In the latter part of the first half of the 2nd millennium BC in East-Central Europe only the 'Füzesabony' elites

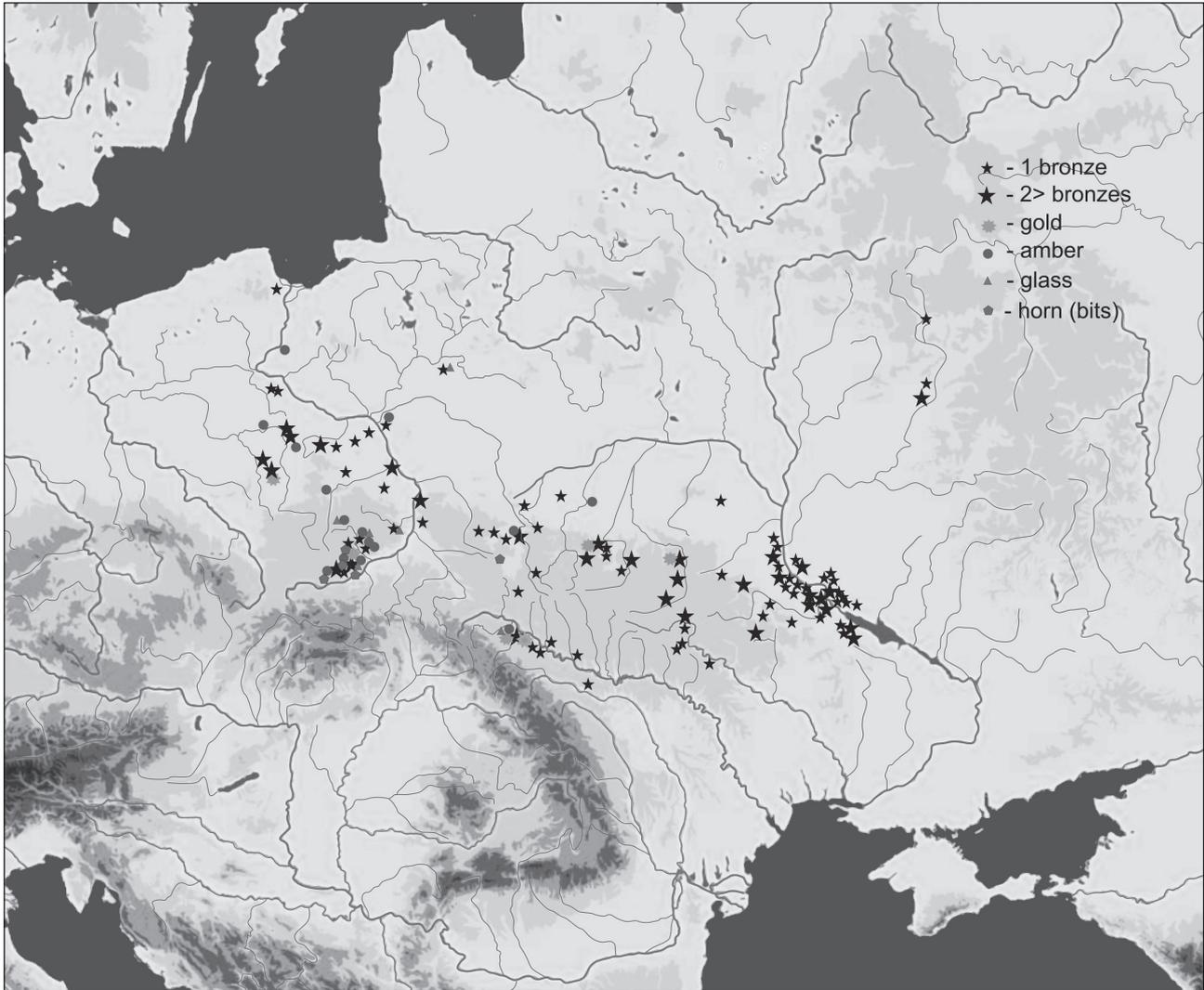


Figure 2: Distribution of Trzciniec circle prestige objects (after Makarowicz 2009 and Makarowicz 2010, with amendments).

had the necessary technological means and ruling caste that allowed for the construction of the northern branch of a widespread contact network. The Füzesabony culture was characterised by a hitherto unknown complexity of socio-political structures that created proto-state organisations.

It seems that an important route-making factor was the demand for northern raw materials such as amber, not only Baltic but also Ukrainian (Makarowicz 2009, Fig. 23), as well as salt deposits from the Baltic and Black Sea, those from the Carpathian Foothills in Ukraine, in Moldavia and north-eastern Romania as well as Kujawy and Central Poland. Copper, potentially, in this regard was also sought in the Carpathian Foothills, upper Dniester region and northern Volhynia and Kryvyi Rog in Ukraine (Makarowicz 2009, Fig. 24) as well as basalt and Volhynia flint. On the other hand, the more advanced south offered knowledge of the technology of making products from bronze, ready-made prestige goods of bronze, gold (as well as the raw material for their production), amber, glass, bone and horn.

After accepting the thesis that a system of long-distance communication routes existed, which linked the largest settlement centres of the Trzciniec circle as well as those within the Carpathian Basin, the need arises to define its organisational form. This could be said to include the actual territory over which they functioned, their fundamental beginning and end points, stopping points, contact zones, principle travellers known as ‘people of the route’ (Koško 2002, 68), as well as the mechanisms of circulation of people and artefacts, transmission of cultural patterns, fashion, innovation, knowledge, and know-how (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005).

Thanks to the northern ‘water/valley’ routes, running across the ‘Trzciniec’ agglomerations on the Małopolska Upland and continuing up the Wisłoka, Wisłok and Dunajec rivers, through Carpathian passes, and along the Laborec, Ondava, Topel and Torysa rivers, amber goods made their way to the Carpathian Basin (Makarowicz 2009, Fig. 22). Similarly, in Füzesabony culture settle-

ments located on the northern side of the Carpathian arch, ‘Trzciniac’ pottery was also registered. In turn, prestige goods made from various, often exotic, materials, including Trans-Carpathian-style bronze goods, were coming to the area between the Prosna and Dnieper rivers, especially to the uplands, accompanied by pottery patterns (Górski 2012; Jaeger 2010; Makarowicz 2012).

An important role in the transmission of cultural patterns and prestige goods was played by the route running down the Sotes river to the Tisza and farther up its reaches. Potential routes along river valleys of the right-bank tributaries of the Tisza (Ush, Latawitsa, Borshava, Rika), leading across Carpathian passes were also significant, as well as those that led to the right-bank tributaries of the Dniester (Striy, Svitch, Limnitsa, Lukva, Bysthycha) and further north and east through the valleys of the Styr, Horyn and Sluch to settlements in Volhynia, Pollissia and the Dnieper upland. The most important long-distance routes of the upland ‘Trzciniac’ peoples ran along the valleys of the Vistula, San, Dniester, Bug, and Boh rivers (Makarowicz 2009, Fig. 22).

Overland communication routes away from river valleys, running through river watersheds can be said to have been the second category of ‘road’ under discussion. A valuable insight into the means of travel, movement of goods (including luxury ones), innovations, and cultural patterns in the past, also in the Bronze Age, is given by the analysis of the course of well-documented long-distance overland routes used by Cossack and Tatar forces. From the Baltic-Pontic area we are familiar with several of them, such as the Kuchmanský – running along the watershed of the Dniester and Boh, the Black (with branches) running between the Dnieper and the Boh, and the Volosky running southwards from the Dniester. Moreover, also of significance proved to be the more ‘trade-like’ Volhynian route that ran from the upper Vistula to Kiev, crossing the fords of the middle Styr, Horyn, Sluch and Teterev rivers (Makarowicz 2009, Fig. 22; Makohonienko 2009, Fig. 22, 23).

The overland long-distance routes running along watersheds did not in fact have the features of a ‘road’ but rather, were wide arteries measuring several hundred metres or even several kilometres of terrain, used for the movement of people, animals and perhaps even carts (Makohonienko 2009, 48-51). These were characterised by the presence of (in some parts) barrows sometimes marking the general direction of the ‘road’. The custom of raising barrows in the line arrangements, in the deforested parts of watershed ridges, could be an indication that such communication arteries were present. Among many other functions, the role of barrows as spatial markers is often emphasised in the literature.

The discovery of horse harness elements, in particular cheek pieces (Makarowicz 2009, Fig. 20), as well as horse graves and numerous deposits of equine bones (Makarowicz 2009, Fig. 21), could testify to the use of horses for horseback riding or as pack or draught animals.

It is difficult to define the status of the ‘peoples of the route’ themselves, those travelling together with goods and at the same time, bearers of cultural models. Clearly, they were communities involved in exchange (artisans, merchants), thus specialising in activities involving travelling across regions known and unknown (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005).

The exchange of raw materials and ready-made goods of bronze and amber was often tied to the institution of ‘itinerant blacksmiths’ who were specialist metallurgists distributing bronze products far afield from their workshops (e.g. Harding 2000, 236; Kristiansen 1998, 379; Vandkilde 1996, 265; Makarowicz 2005). Evidence of indigenous metallurgical production, such as casting forms, tuyères, as well as numerous products of bronze, has been found in both the western and the eastern parts of the Trzciniac complex (Makarowicz 2010, Fig. 3.14 and 3.15).

It ought to be remembered here that the majority of East-Central European societies were kinship-based, made up of families composing larger social units (lineages or clans). Communities such as these are essentially a great deal more active in ad hoc organisation of various local forms of enterprise, though it would appear that stability, the long-term and permanent functioning and maintenance of routes, would have had to mean either breaking the ‘kinship code’ and establishing proto-state societies (as in the case of the Füzesabony culture) or the evolution of kin-related and descent groups that usually created relatively simple segmentary organisms (tribal) developing towards chiefdoms. In the period under discussion, the upland part of the Baltic-Pontic region witnessed the rise of a new type of native elites, which nonetheless had supraregional contacts.

### Barrows and the elite burials

In the southern province of the Trzciniac circle located in the forest and forest-steppe zones of the belt of uplands – Małopolska, Lublin, Volhynia, Podolia, Dnieper, Dniester and Moldavia – more than 90 percent of barrow cemeteries are distributed. ‘Trzciniac’ barrows have a very specific arrangement. They occurred alone, in pairs – relatively close to each other – and occasionally in threes, often in the neighbourhood of settlements located on the same terrain form, but always above them. These monuments formed larger clusters as well. The clusters had linear or linear-group arrangements which followed hill ridges for several hundred metres up to several kilometres, such as in Bukivna (former Bukówna) and Komariv (Komarów), the upper Dniester Basin, or on the hilltops of Grzęda Sokalska, Volhynia Upland (Figure 3; Makarowicz 2010a; Makarowicz *et al.* 2013; Sulimirski 1968). They often consist of over a dozen up to several dozen monuments clustered in several groups. In some places, around larger barrows, smaller ones were built. Note has already been taken of the frequent custom of raising mounds by TCC societies over older Corded Ware culture barrows.

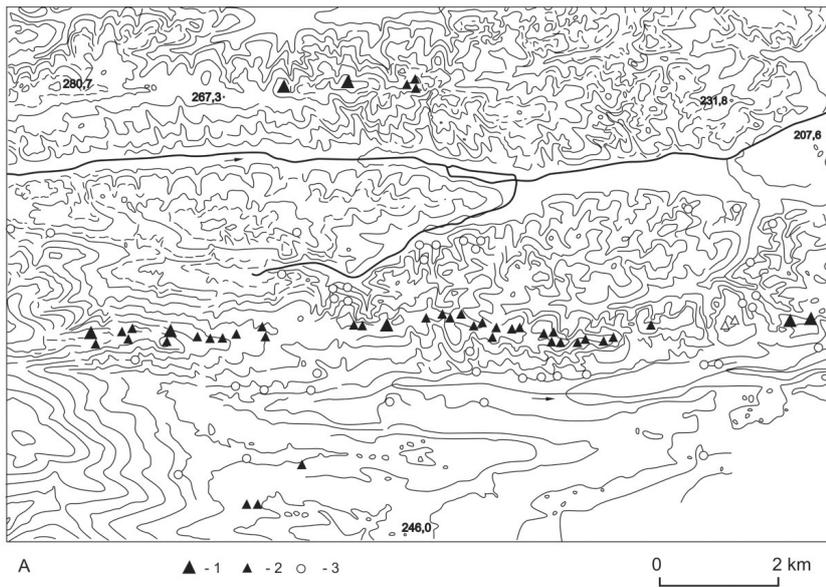
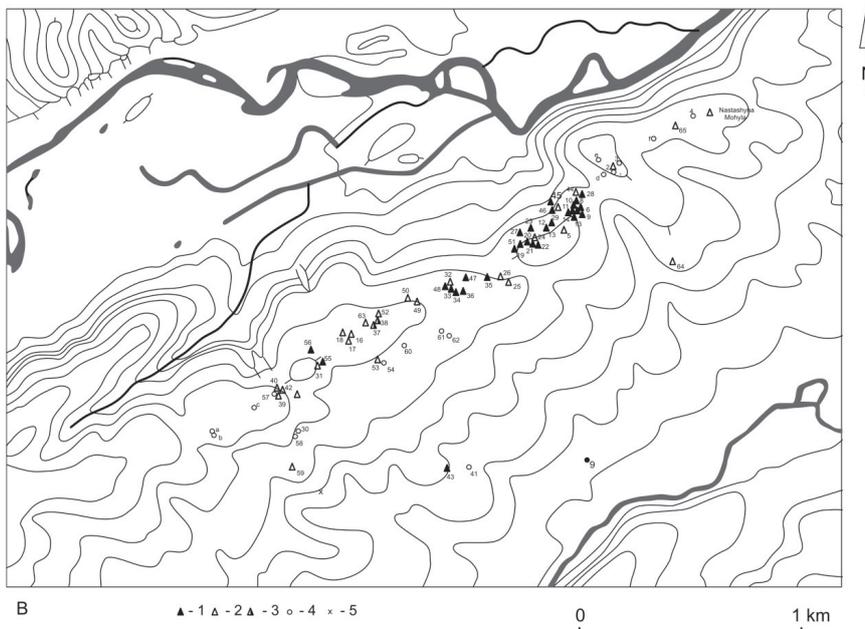


Figure 3: Examples of barrow occurrences in group-linear arrangements in group-linear arrangements. A – Grzęda Sokalska, Volhynia Upland: 1 – ‘Trzciniec’ barrow; 2 – ‘Corded Ware’ barrow; 3 – Neolithic settlement. B – Komariv, upper Dniester Basin: 1 – ‘Trzciniec’ barrow; 2 – ‘Corded Ware’ barrow; 3 – Iron Age barrow; 4 – undetermined barrow; 5 – ‘Trzciniec’ settlement (after Sulimirski 1968 and Makarowicz 2010a).



The ‘Trzciniec’ barrows certainly combined several functions. They were not only burial grounds where ancestors lay but also boundary markers setting the oecumene, tamed space, our world (e.g. jurisdiction of a specific kin or descent-group), different from the world of ‘others’, strangers, people who did not build barrows (Makarowicz 2010a).

‘Trzciniec’ barrow mounds were built on the level of the original humus; their construction was preceded by ground-preparing rituals (levelling and smoothing of the surface and cleaning it with fire; e.g. Florek and Taras 2003; Makarowicz 2010). They were formed from ‘bricks’ of turf and earth cut from the ground close to the monument and piled in layers next to each other. Sometimes, around them, semi-circular, crescent or circular depressions were formed – ditches several metres wide – where excavated soil had once been.

Unlike Corded Ware culture societies, TCC communities on the uplands buried their men and women (including juveniles), as well as children, under barrows. They were buried in collective, paired and single graves. In the case of paired burials, the deceased were a man and a woman, possibly a husband and wife. Many bodies (skeletons?), regardless of their sex and age, were dismembered or decapitated. Often, burials were fragmentary or the corpses were non-anatomically arranged. The membership of some of the deceased in local (regional?) elites may be evidenced by imposing grave structures under barrows and rich grave goods (Makarowicz 2010, 242-253).

Wooden grave structures were recorded on more than ten TCC barrow necropolises, chiefly in the uplands. This is a rather broad category encompassing wooden coffins, layers of tree trunks, ‘piles’ and ‘platforms’, and features with

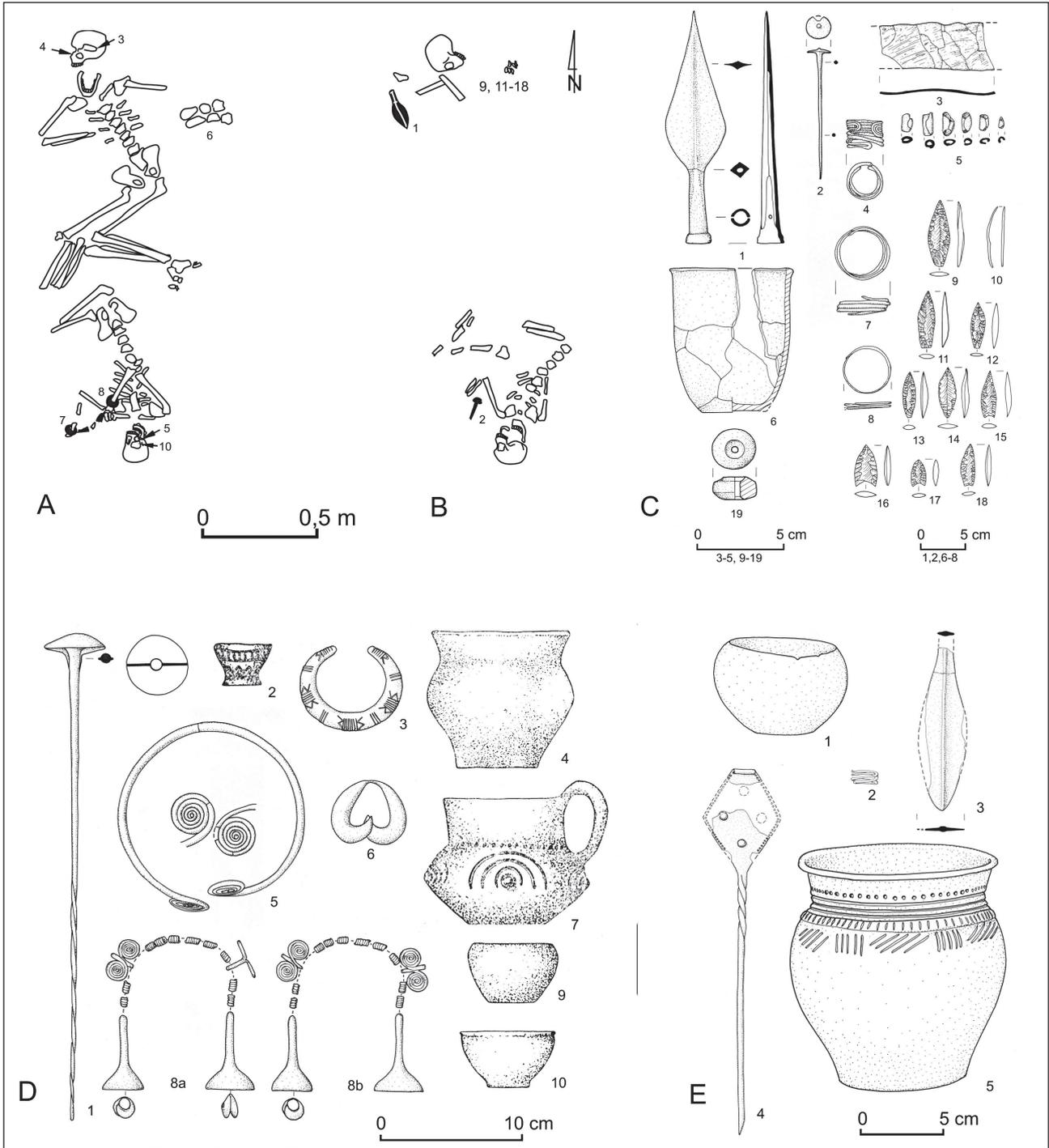


Figure 4: Richly furnished burials from Netishyn, barrow VIII, Volhynia Upland (A-C), and Komariv (Komarów), Podolia Upland, barrow 8 (D) and barrow 6 (E) (after Makarowicz 2009).

a roofing and floor. Structures consisting of posts that supported walls, or of wooden walls, on which a roof must have rested, were found in various TCC enclaves. Such constructions were recorded, for instance, in two graves from a barrow in Ivanye, Volhynia, a grave from barrow 47, Komariv, Podolia Upland, a grave from barrow XIII, site 6, Guciów, Roztocze region, a barrow grave from Kazimierzów, site 3, Lublin Upland, and grave 2 from the ‘eastern’ mound in Rosiejów, Małopolska Upland (Ma-

karowicz 2010, 231-242). Generally, they can be classified as mortuary houses (Bátora 2006 – analogies to this type of features).

Stone-timber and stone graves measure up to several square metres (3-8 sq. m) or even over ten square metres as is the case with graves 1a and 1b, site 1, from Dacharzów, Sandomierz Upland (Florek and Taras 2003). These were structures built of limestone slabs and blocks, and pebbles,

consisting of two rectangular chambers, with their longer sides touching, and having oak floors. Another grave type is represented by a feature from barrow 14, Komariv, on the upper Dniester. It consisted of an almost square stone cist (1.2×1.1m), built of 3-4 layers of stones arranged in two rows, and a paved floor (Sulimirski 1968, Plan 13). Relatively simple rectangular stone-timber structures, found in barrows 1/2010 and 2/2010, Bukivna, on the upper Dniester, were constructed of over a dozen large stones and some wooden planks (Makarowicz *et al.* 2013).

The deceased buried in TCC barrow graves were usually given richer grave goods than individuals inhumed in flat graves. In many cases, prestige and individualised grave goods deposited with men and women show that TCC barrow elites – following the example of elites from the Carpathian Basin – manifested that they differed from the rest of the community in terms of individual characteristics, identity, wealth, status and rank. Against the background of mostly egalitarian and collectivist social structures based on kinship, such ostentatious behaviour must have been noticed.

It is only in barrow graves that gold articles are encountered; they are found to be more popular in female burials than male ones, and only exceptionally were they deposited with children and juveniles. Men were given for their trip to the afterworld – besides vessels – objects made from flint (tools and weapons), stone and bone (tools), bronze (ornaments and weapons) and gold (ornaments). Some of these objects, e.g. bronze diadems and daggers or gold rings (*Noppenringe*), may be considered insignia of authority. Only in male graves do we find any weapons: archer's tackle, with only flint arrow points surviving, bronze javelin points, daggers, bronze axes and battle-axes. Among ornaments one can name bracelets, necklaces, and multi-coil spiral ornaments. Gold ornaments, in turn – apart from the already mentioned rings – included ear wraps. In male graves, no bronze pins were recorded (Makarowicz 2010, 271).

Besides pottery, women were furnished with metal grave goods, chiefly made from bronze, with gold articles being rare (pendants, ear wraps). They were usually inhumed and subsequently furnished with two bracelets and/or two shin ornaments with spiral plates as well as a bronze pin, necklaces, and spiral plates (dress elements). Female graves saw no weapons or tools (Makarowicz 2010, 272).

Some goods were placed in the grave together with the deceased (Makarowicz 2010, 274-276). These included personal articles: jewellery, weapons, insignia of authority and tools, and other article – vessels, ritual food and beverages – were placed in the grave pit after the body had been interred. Ornaments were deposited with the buried individual in the same way as would have been worn by her or him when they were alive. As such, hand ornaments – bracelets and armllets – were usually found on arms, while shin ornaments lay on legs. Pins fastening a funeral gown

(shroud) were most often found on the chest or close nearby. Also close to the chest and neck, spiral plates, flat pieces of metal and other ornaments were discovered. Head ornaments were discovered close to the skull. These were, for instance, bronze pendants, which were sometimes elements of a larger whole, and diadems. Reverse-twist rings (*Noppenringe*) were recorded next to fingers, very rarely next to the head, while necklaces were found close to the neck. Jewellery was an inseparable element of the funeral dress of any deceased person. Burial shrouds have not survived, although in several cases, their one-time presence is suggested by the traces of a decomposed skeleton as for example in a grave 5, site 1, Gabułów, Małopolska Upland (Górski and Jarosz 2006, 440, Fig. 16).

The most spectacular male burials are those found in barrow graves in Netishyn, Volhynia Upland. In barrow VIII, paired graves were unearthed. The grave goods of an adult man (25-30 years), lying on his side in grave 1 (eastern) included: a javelin, of which a bronze point has survived, and eight flint points (very likely the remains of a bow and a quiver for arrows – Figure 4, B, C:9-19). The kind of grave goods and the location they were found in (e.g. a point by the right palm of hand) suggest that the deceased was a warrior or hunter. In turn, a 45-50-year-old man from grave 2 (western) was accompanied to the grave by a bronze diadem (only partially preserved) and a gold ring (Makarowicz 2009).

Judging by the kind of grave goods, it must be men who are buried in a grave from barrow 6, Komariv, on the upper Dniester (skeleton has not survived), as well as in grave 2 (mortuary house; Sulimirski 1968), barrow II, Ivanje, Volhynia Upland (Sveshnikov 1968). The former was furnished with a dagger, gold ring, bronze pin (Figure 4, E) and five vessels, while the grave of the latter yielded a spectacular bronze dagger (Figure 5, 8), suggestive of connections to the Carpathian Basin and inspirations coming from the circle of the Mycenaean culture, a bronze pin (Figure 5, 11) and gold ring (Figure 5, 5) as well as an arrowhead (hence he must have been outfitted with a bow) and a vessel. The style of prestige battle-axe from barrow I in Ivanje (Figure 5, 1) point to its origins in the Carpathian Basin.

Exceptional in terms of the wealth of grave goods, some barrow burials of women were a novelty in regard to the Corded Ware culture and other groups that built such features. In a paired grave, barrow VIII, Netishyn, next to a buried adult woman (25 years), a discovery was made of two bracelets, five bronze beads and another made of stone, a pendant (Figure 4, A, C:2, 5, 7, 8) and two clay 'bolsters' under her head. Standing out in terms of its wealth, the burial, most likely of a woman (the skeleton has not survived), from a grave in barrow 8 in Komariv contained a wooden chest holding bronze articles: a pin, bracelet, necklace and a multi-partite neck ornament with bronze and gold elements, a gold earring and six vessels (Figure 4, D). Spectacular furnishings accompanied bur-

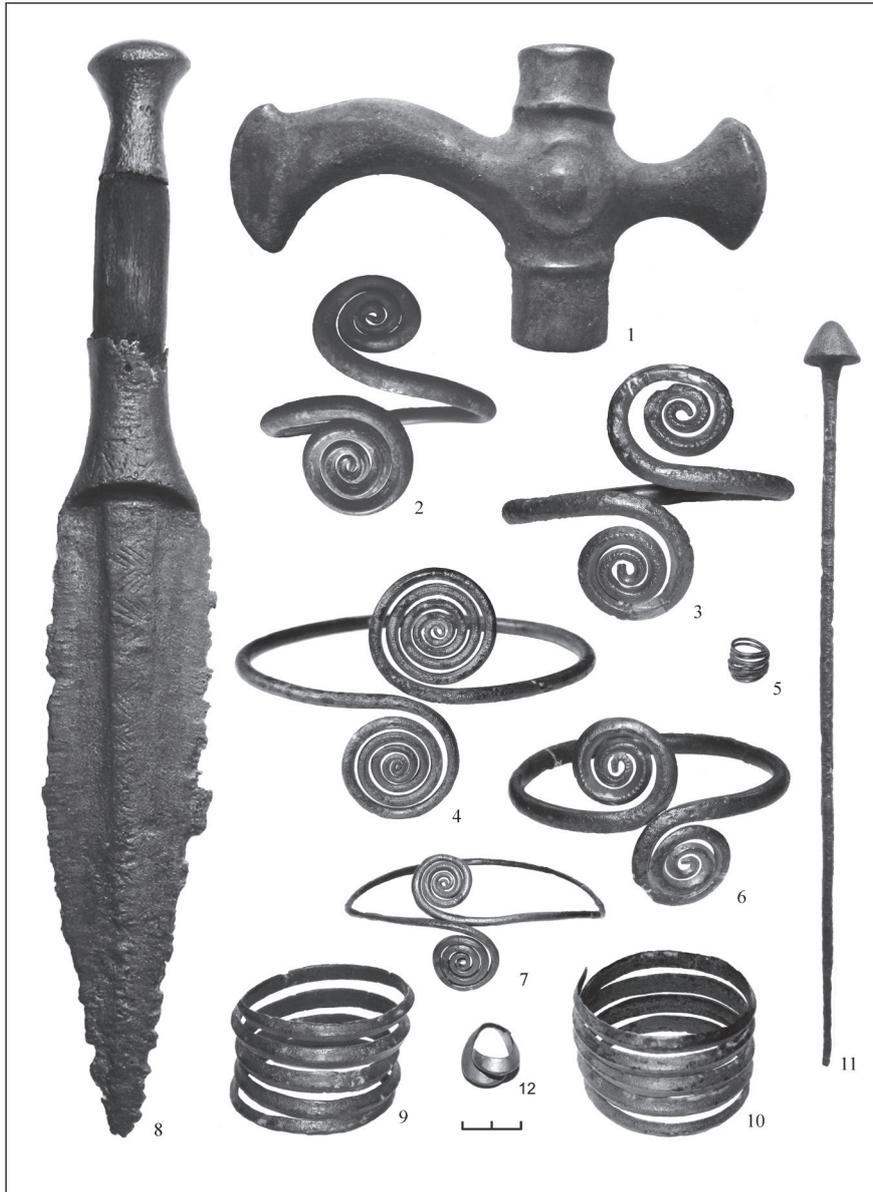


Figure 5: Prestige objects of bronze and gold from Ivanye, Volhynia Upland barrow I (1), barrow II (2-11), and Bukivna (Bukówna), Podolia Upland, barrow 3/2012 (12) (after Makarowicz 2009, Makarowicz 2010a and Makarowicz et al. 2013).

ied women (judging by grave goods) in barrow II, Ivanye. Next to burial 1, grave 1, numerous bronze items were recorded: two spiral bracelets and two armllets or shin ornaments, a necklace, a pin (Figure 5, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9-11), and two vessels, while next to burial 5, grave 2 ('mortuary house'), two bracelets, a bronze shin ornament (Figure 5, 7) and three vessels were found (Svešnikov 1968).

Rich burials were also recorded in several barrows located in Bukivna, on the upper Dniester (Makarowicz *et al.* 2013). Explored in the 1930s and under investigation now, the barrows contained stone-timber graves without, however, any human remains (possibly cenotaphs?) but holding – besides numerous vessels – bronze, gold and flint articles. A bronze pin and armllet were discovered in barrow III/1937. An arrowhead and a twisted pin with a rhomboid head were found in barrow 1/2010. A similar pin specimen and a gold earring of the Sibirian-type came

from grave 1, barrow 3/2012 (Figure 5, 12). Next, in the looted chamber of barrow 2/2010, a bronze pin fragment was discovered. Due to the fact that human bones have either not survived or were never deposited or, if present, are few, burnt and scattered over various sectors and depths of barrow mounds (beyond graves), the sex and age of the deceased cannot be determined.

Several graves in a vast cemetery in Komariv, located on the watershed between the Limnitsa and Lukva rivers – left tributaries of the Dniester – displayed spectacular wealth. In barrows 6, 8, 28 and 33, besides vessels, there were found bronze (barrows 6 and 8), gold (barrows 6, 8 and 28) and glass and amber (barrow 33) goods (Figure 3, B; Sulimirski 1968). The first three of the listed barrows had been built in the central portion of a larger cluster of 'Komariv' mounds, in the east of the cemetery. Barrows 6 and 8, containing single burials, were close to each other,

less than 20m separated them, whereas barrow 28 stood approx. 40m away from them to the northeast. Since barrows stretch for more than 2.5km on the Komariv cemetery, the proximity of the barrows containing graves of individuals furnished with prestige objects must be considered intentional. Around them several other mounds were built in which less prominent persons were buried and furnished only with vessels or flint articles. A similar pattern was observed in another cluster of barrows located west of the previously discussed one in the same cemetery. Here, four barrows containing burials furnished with less valuable goods (vessels, flint articles) surrounded barrow 33 covering a 'Komariv' grave in which numerous vessels, and glass and amber beads (necklace elements?) were discovered. However, in two mounds in this cluster, a massive stone structure (barrow 48) or a timber one (barrow 47) were noticed. More or less imposing timber and stone structures and varied grave goods were recorded in a barrow cluster situated between the two discussed earlier. Admittedly, no burials furnished with articles made of exotic raw materials were found in this case, but some grave inventories may be considered prestigious. For example, a grave in barrow 20 with a timber structure – a mortuary house? – yielded a vessel, stone battle-axe and flint point. It can be presumed that the barrow patterns discussed above were formed by placing successive mounds close to the grave of a person enjoying a high status within the community.

Richly furnished burials of adult men and women testify to their high status. Barrow graves featuring stone-timber and timber structures and containing prestige objects made of exotic materials suggest that individuals interred in them had special status: leaders of lineages/families, chieftains, priests, famous warriors, specialist craftsmen, and influential intermediaries in the exchange of goods – 'people of the route', as well as the wives of chieftains and other important personages in the group. Rich female burials could have emerged as an effect of the appreciation of their role within the social structure. If the matrilineality of lineages is acknowledged, they were the persons through whom descent from a common ancestor was derived, hence the persons who transmitted the relevant consanguinity (Makarowicz 2010).

Generally speaking, TCC societies from the lowland part of this vast oecumene affirmed an ideology favouring collective values manifested in ritual behaviour (collective graves, burials of men, women and children, relatively meagre grave goods, their depersonalisation and de-individualisation, etc). The brief description presented above justifies a hypothesis that 'barrow' elites in the upland zone of the Trzcinec area developed peculiar social strategies (in a ritualised form) with the help of which individual desires and interests could be presented as the needs and achievements of the whole community (lineage or family). In this way, the elites could accumulate personal property and use it as attributes of power, control the distribution of raw materials and resources, and regulate the circulation

of prestige objects. The presence of the markers and patterns of cultural behaviour originating from the Carpathian Basin suggests that this development was directly inspired by the Füzesabony culture.

## Conclusions

In this paper the distribution of prestige goods made of bronze, gold, amber, and glass at the beginning of the Older Bronze Age in the territories between the Baltic and Black seas has been linked to the emergence of long-distance and local communication routes. A significant rise of mobility and exchange in this region came about in the first half of the second millennium BC. The main initiators and beneficiaries of the communication links were the societies of the Füzesabony culture. Their northern partners in this respect were the 'Trzcinec circle' groups whose elites, buried under barrows, took active part in the organisation and maintenance of the key junctions of routes.

The scale of exchange, measured by the dispersion of prestige artefacts, suggests that the mobility of the people, transmission of cultural patterns, ready-made goods, knowledge and know-how in the Baltic-Pontic region could have been to a large extent formalised. In the 2nd millennium BC communication routes became one of the main 'institutions' stimulating cultural progress in this peripheral area and forging the identity of native elites between the Baltic and Black seas.

The 'peripheral' elites played an active role in the organisation and maintenance of the key junctions of long-distance routes. Owing to intensive interactions with the societies of the Carpathian Basin, some marginal communities occupying the uplands of East-Central Europe in the 2nd millennium BC, evolved into organisms showing traits of chiefdoms.

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