

BACKGROUND TO BEAKERS



INQUIRIES INTO REGIONAL
CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS OF
THE BELL BEAKER COMPLEX

EDITED BY
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Chapter 6

BELL BEAKERS AND THE CULTURAL MILIEU OF NORTH EUROPEAN PLAIN

Janusz Czebreszuk and Marzena Szmyt

Abstract

It is clear that not only cultural backgrounds for the Bell Beakers in north and south Poland are different, but also that the Bell Beakers in these two parts of the country vary. The authors deal with the northern zone (Pomerania, Wielkopolska and Kujawy regions) where strong connections are observed with the Single Grave Culture (from northern Germany and Jutland) and with the regional Corded Ware Culture. Bell Beaker traits are recorded there mostly on settlements and not in burials. A long typochronological Bell Beaker sequence is established and their important role in the long-lasting cultural developments in the region is proposed.

Keywords

Bell Beakers, northwest Poland, Corded Ware Culture, Single Grave Culture, typochronological sequence, long-lasting cultural development

In the general view of the Bell Beakers in Europe Polish lands constitute north-eastern range (Fig. 1).

The Bell Beaker relics are known there from the western (Western Pomerania, Kujawy, Wielkopolska, Silesia) and southern (Małopolska) parts of the country (Fig. 2) (Czebreszuk 2003).

The last ten years of research have shown that the Bell Beakers were not of the same provenance but derived from three different areas, which shows the activity of three different Bell Beaker centres. More specifically, Bell Beaker traits in the north (Pomerania, Wielkopolska and Kujawy) derive from Jutland and northeast Germany (Czebreszuk 2001) while in Silesia they show affinities with the Bohemian Bell Beakers (Makarowicz 2003). In Małopolska they are an offshoot of the Bell Beakers from Moravia (Budziszewski and Włodarczak 2010). The situation in Małopolska (Fig. 3) is special because we deal there with graves only, the traits of which are rooted in the Moravian Bell Beakers. This link is interpreted as a result of migration north of the Carpathians, most probably across the Moravian Gate, by a small group of people, representing the Moravian Bell Beaker Culture (Budziszewski and Włodarczak 2010). Their presence in Małopolska was an important factor in the origins of the Mierzanowice culture, which flourished best in its early stages of development that grew directly on a 'Beaker' substratum (Kadrow and Machnik 1997).

In Silesia and northwest Poland, the Bell Beakers had an impact on many areas of life and brought about more long-range cultural effects. They are a sign that populations inhabiting these regions took part in far-reaching networks of cultural contacts and witnessed progressive changes in their social structure (Czebreszuk 2001; 2003; Makarowicz 2003). Both regions, however, display clear differences in the origins of the Bell Beakers and in the role they played in regional cultural milieus.

The Silesian Bell Beakers (Fig. 4), known exclusively from funerary contexts, were related to those in the Bohemian Basin. However, not much more can be said on this subject due to the lack of research into the Silesian Bell Beakers. Despite the fact that more recent data are available (*e.g.* Gralak 2007), general findings still rely on publications from the 1970s and 1980s (Wojciechowski 1972; 1987). Similar difficulties hinder the study of the period that precedes the Bell Beakers and that relates to the Corded Ware Culture. By contrast, far more is known on the time horizon following the Bell Beakers, when the Únětice Culture thrived in both regions. At that time, Trans-Sudete cultural ties were strong, which is illustrated by the traits of the Bohemian and Silesian Únětice Culture (Zich 1996; Butent-Stefaniak 1997; Bartelheim 1998).

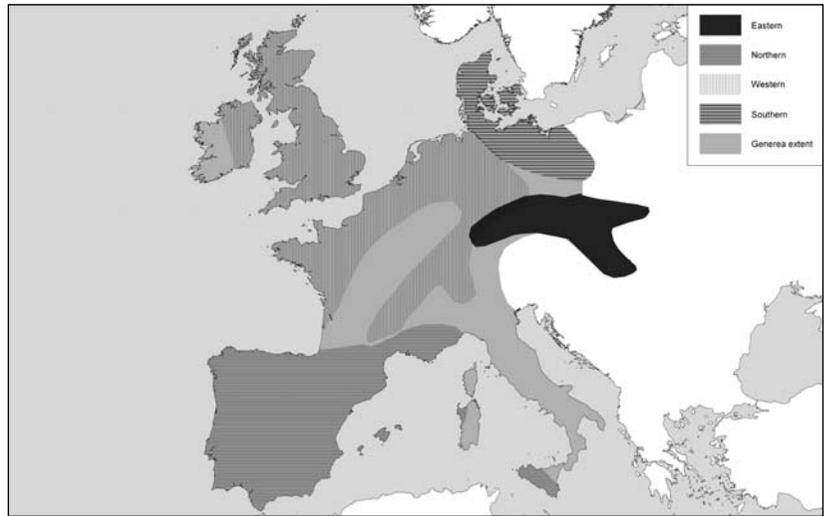


Figure 1. Bell Beakers in Europe: overall view. Czebreszuk 2003, simplified.

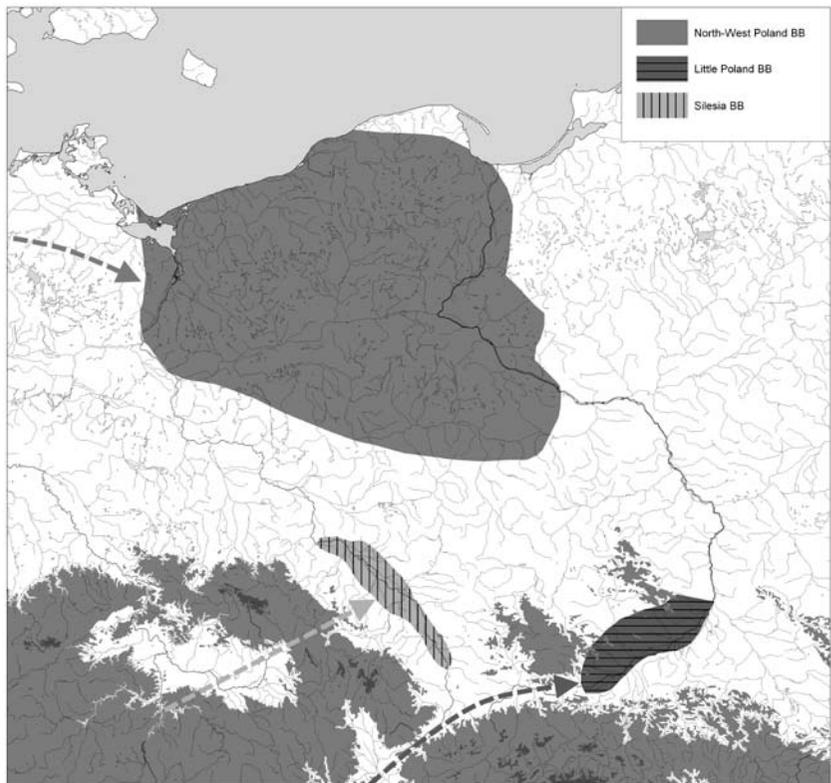


Figure 2. Bell Beakers in Poland and its connections with others centres.

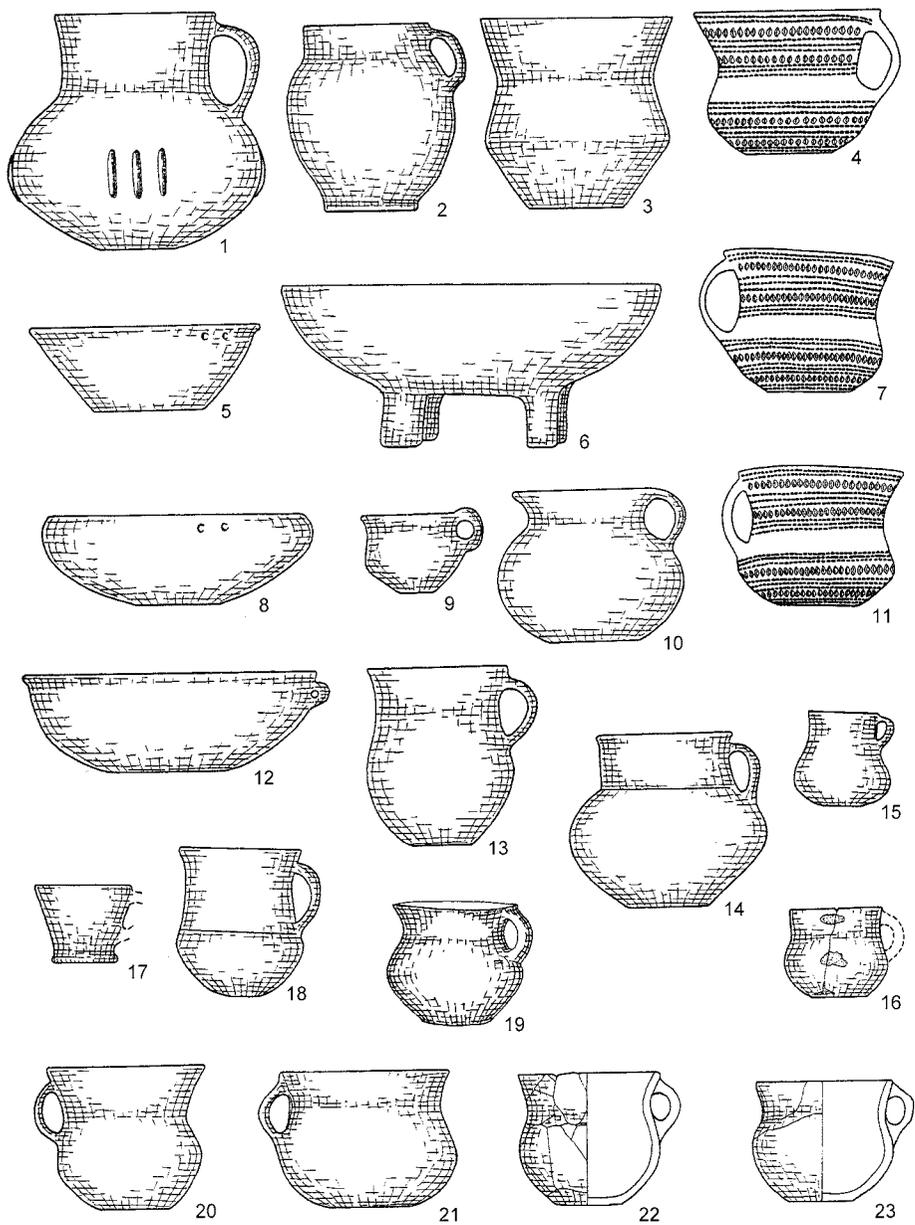


Figure 3. Bell Beaker pottery from Małopolska. Some examples: 1, 2, 5, 6, 12, 14 – Samborzec, 4, 7, 10, 11, 19, 21 – Beradz, 8, 20 – Święcice, 9, 13, 17, 18 – Złota, 22, 23 – Sandomierz. Makarowicz 2003.



Figure 4. Bell Beaker pottery from Lower Silesia. Some examples. 1. Strachów, 2. Wrocław-Oporów, 3, 4, 7-19. Pietrowice Wielkie, 5. Opatowice, 6. Żerniki Wielkie. Makarowicz 2003.

To sum up, a strong case can be made to suggest very dynamic ties between the communities of Silesia and Bohemia in this period of prehistory. This is true for the horizon preceding the Bell Beakers (*i.e.* the Corded Ware Culture) and that following them (*i.e.* the Únětice Culture). From this point of view, the Bell Beakers appear to be a stage in the long participation of Silesian communities in the supra-regional structures of cultural information circulation.

Long-lasting and supraregional relations have been studied the most thoroughly with respect to northwest Poland and Bell Beaker traits. Pomerania (especially areas on the lower Oder River), Wielkopolska and Kujawy periodically displayed close contacts with the areas of north Germany and Jutland. The contacts had continued for a long time or since the Mesolithic, which is attested to by the spread of Post-Maglemosian communities (Fig. 5).

They are referred to in archaeological taxonomy as the Oldesloe and Chojnice-Pieńki Cultures (Kozłowski and Kozłowski 1975; Bagniewski 2001), which existed in the latter half of the Atlantic period and in the early Sub-Boreal period.

Another example of such West-East relations concerns the rise of communities related to the Ertebølle-Ellerbek group (Czerniak and Kabaciński 1997; see also Czekaj-Zastawny, Kabaciński, and Terberger 2011). These were coastal communities, maintaining a sedentary lifestyle and taking advantage of a rich littoral niche.

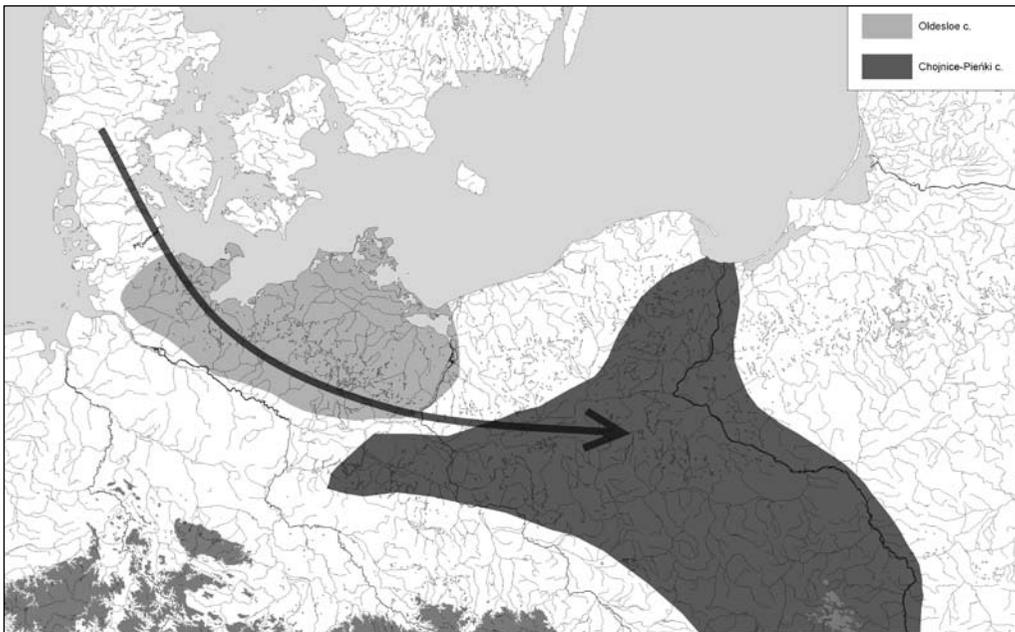


Figure 5. Network of supraregional contacts in the southern Baltic in the late Mesolithic. Kozłowski and Kozłowski 1975.

Their settlements can be found in Pomerania. It is very likely that these represent but a few vestiges of a once very dense network of sites. Due to changes in the Baltic coastline, caused by the rise of the sea level, the most densely settled area in the 5th millennium cal BC is now submerged under water of a few to almost twenty meters deep.

A still further example of sustained cultural ties extending along the southern Baltic coast involves the supra-regional structure of the Funnel Beaker Culture (Fig. 6).

Its significance lies in the relations between two groups recognised in this region: a northern (with its centre on Jutland) and an eastern group (with its major centre in Kujawy) (Koško 1981, 62). In that period, *i.e.* in the late 5th and in the course of the 4th millennia cal BC, Pomerania was a place where information was vigorously exchanged. This is reflected in the presence of traits of both groups (Wierzbicki 1999). The region that deserves special attention in this context, is the lower Oder region, where the line of contacts between Jutland and Kujawy crossed with an east-west line of cultural ties, continuing as far as the Paris Basin (Rzepecki 2004, 158).

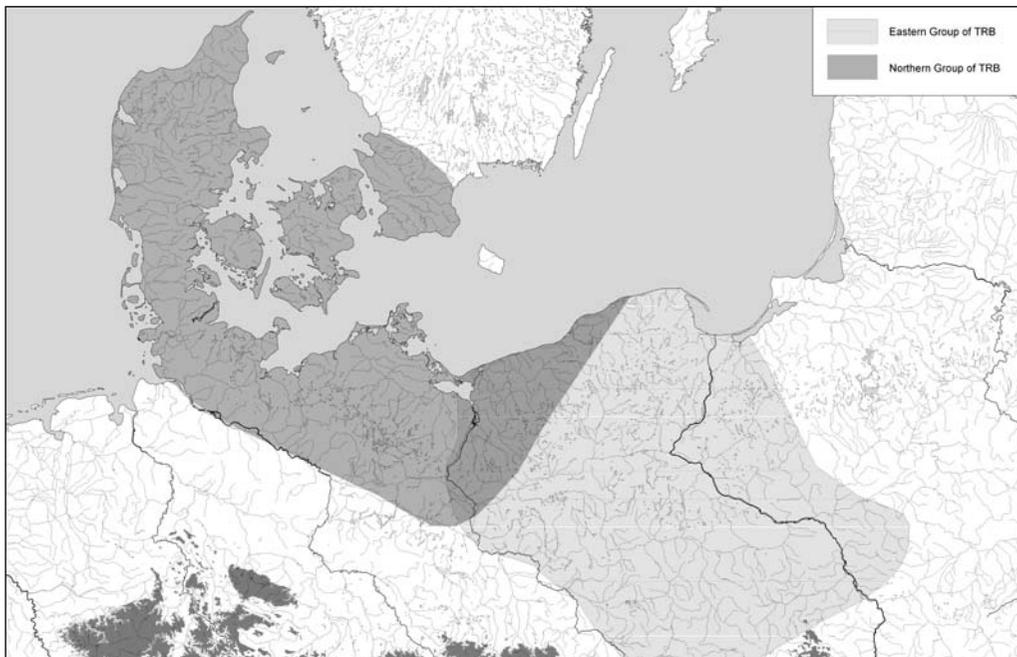


Figure 6. Near Baltic structures of the Funnel Beaker Culture. Wiślański 1979.

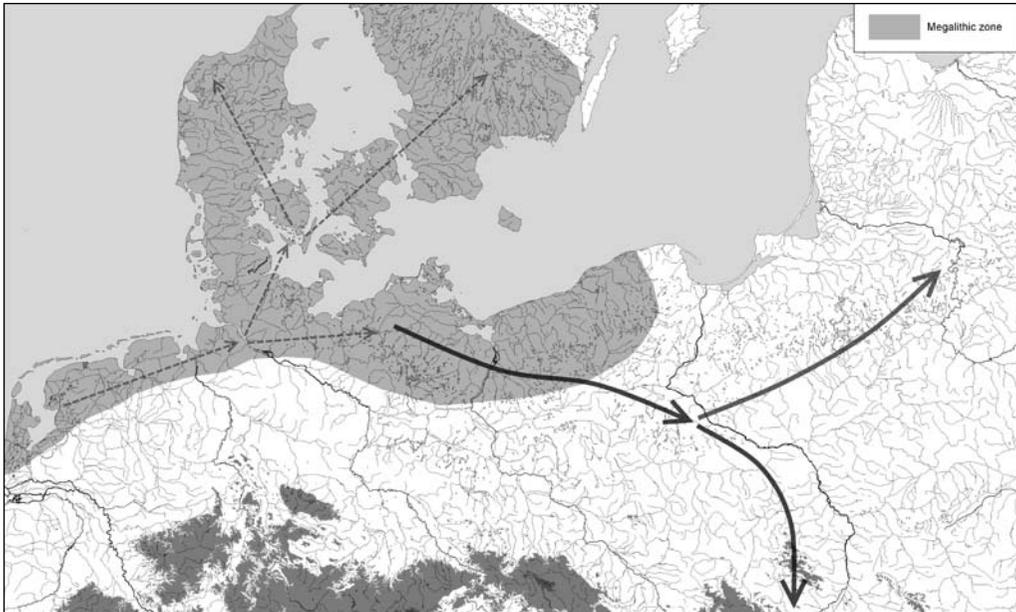


Figure 7. Spread of the megalithic idea in the Baltic zone. Kaczanowska and Kozłowski 2005.

It was to the Funnel Beaker Culture that the spread of the megalithic idea (Fig. 7) was related as well (cf. Libera and Tunia 2006). One of the routes followed by the idea extended along the southern Baltic coast.

From the beginning of the 3rd millennium cal BC a stable network of long-range contacts was created. Its beginning is marked by the earliest stage of the Corded Ware Culture known as Pan-European horizon (Buchvaldek 1986; Furholt 2003). It covered all of central Europe, including the route of cultural contacts along the whole southern Baltic coast.

Towards the end of the first half of the 3rd millennium cal BC the Single Grave Culture (Hübner 2005) (Fig. 8) reached - along the channels of cultural contacts that were already present - from its centre in Jutland to Mecklenburg, Pomerania and Kujawy (Czebreszuk 2001, 88-116).

Recent research shows that the exchange was reciprocal, but that communities that inhabited Kujawy and Wielkopolska in that period nevertheless developed independently, maintaining a clear autonomy and distinct own character (Pospieszny 2009).

Within the framework of the long-range exchange that was organized by the communities of the Single Grave Culture, shortly after 2500 cal BC the first Bell Beaker's traits appeared. From then on in the area from Jutland in the west to Kujawy in the east, a dis-

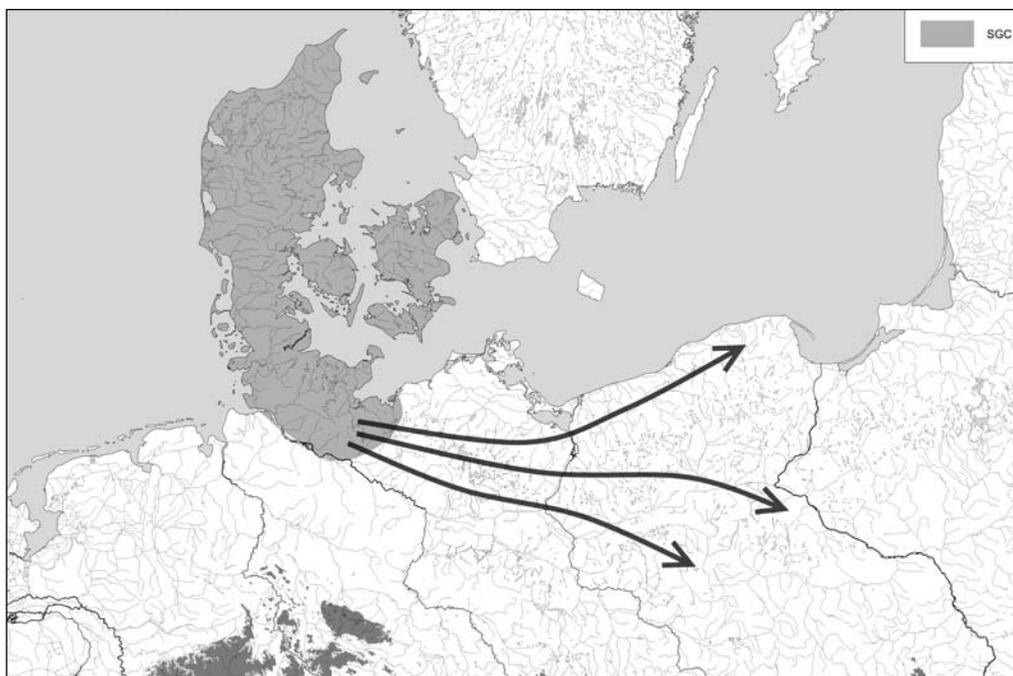


Figure 8. Main directions of cultural influences of the Single Grave Culture in the south Baltic zone.

tinctive node in the pan-European Bell Beaker network took shape referred to as the north group (Czebreszuk 2003).

The special character that distinguishes the north group from other Bell Beaker groups (cf. Vander Linden 2006), is the fact that Bell Beaker traits are found chiefly in settlement contexts, and to a much lesser extend in burial context, which manifests as a few secondary burials in older communal graves (see *e.g.* Czebreszuk 2001; Liversage 2003; Mertens 2003; Rassmann 2003). Bell Beaker traits are visible above all in pottery, specifically in its ornamentation. The development of ornamentation is divided in three phases or horizons. The earliest stage is characterized by the use of a knurling technique to make ornament zones on vessels that in shape resemble bell beakers ((Fig. 9; Czebreszuk 2001).

The zonal arrangement of ornaments was applied not only in the form of patterns made with the knurling technique, but also made with cord impressions or incisions.

Next, zones with metope ornamentation appeared on the pottery (Fig. 10), which in form took on ever more squatty proportions. This change in the form can be described as evolution from slender beakers to visibly shorter and squattier vases. At this stage, ornaments were made using above all the incision technique (Czebreszuk 2001).

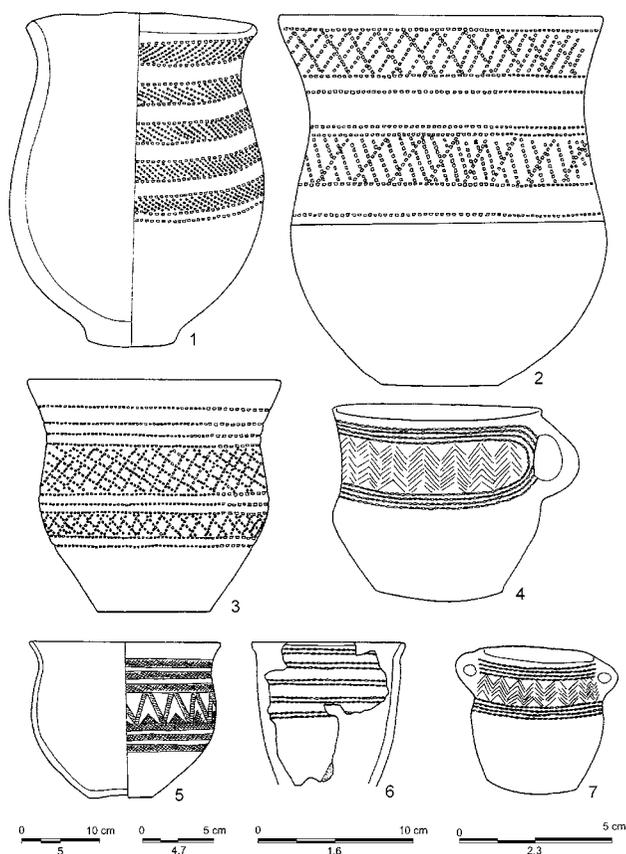


Figure 9. Northern group of the Bell Beakers. Pottery with zone ornamentation. Some examples: 1. Dumsewitz (North Germany), 2. Zikhausen (North Germany), 3. Bobzin (North Germany), 4 and 7. Bobin (Pomerania, Poland), 5. Myrhoj (Denmark), 6. Parchanki (Kujawy, Poland).

The final stage of development of Bell Beaker traits on the south-west Baltic is marked by the so-called *barbed wire* ornament (Fig. 11) (Czebreszuk 2001), which is visibly less accurate and varied than in the previous stages.

In Kujawy and Wielkopolska, this late Bell Beakers stage also marks the inception of a new sequence of changes, taking the form of the so-called Trzciniec horizon (Czebreszuk 1998). Phenomena consistent with the Trzciniec cultural circle can be found across vast areas of central and eastern Europe, from the Warta drainage as far as the middle Dnieper (Makarowicz 2010).

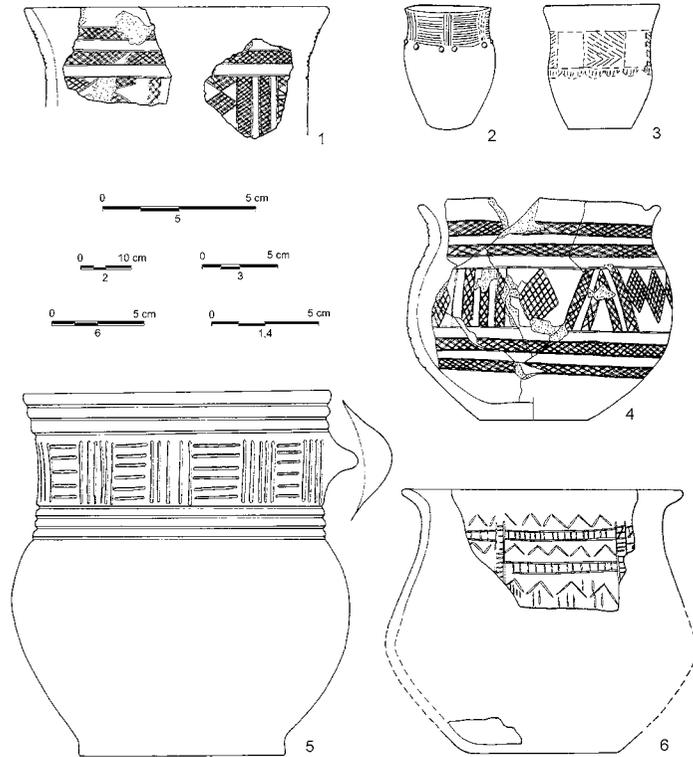


Figure 10. Northern group of the Bell Beakers. Pottery with zone-metopic ornamentation. Some examples: 1 and 4. Myrhøj (Denmark), 2. Nowy Młyn, (Kujawy, Poland), 3. Steinberg (North Germany), 5. Pinow (North Germany), 6. Sulęcinek (Kujawy, Poland).

Taking a more general view, it must be observed that Bell Beaker traits in the northern group fit well into a stable and long sequence of material culture changes (Fig. 12), especially of pottery, that begins with the origins of the Corded Ware Culture, in the early 3rd millennium cal BC, and ends at the developed stage of the Trzciniec horizon (phase TH3), around the middle of the 2nd millennium cal BC (Makarowicz 2010, fig. 1.7).

The sequence looks as follows:

- Corded Ware Culture (in Kujawy, it is divided into phases 1, 2, 3 and 4 for greater accuracy; see Czebreszuk 1996),
- Bell Beakers (in Kujawy: phases 1, 2, and 3, see Czebreszuk 1996),
- Trzciniec horizon (in Kujawy, phases TH 1, 2 and 3; see Makarowicz 1998).

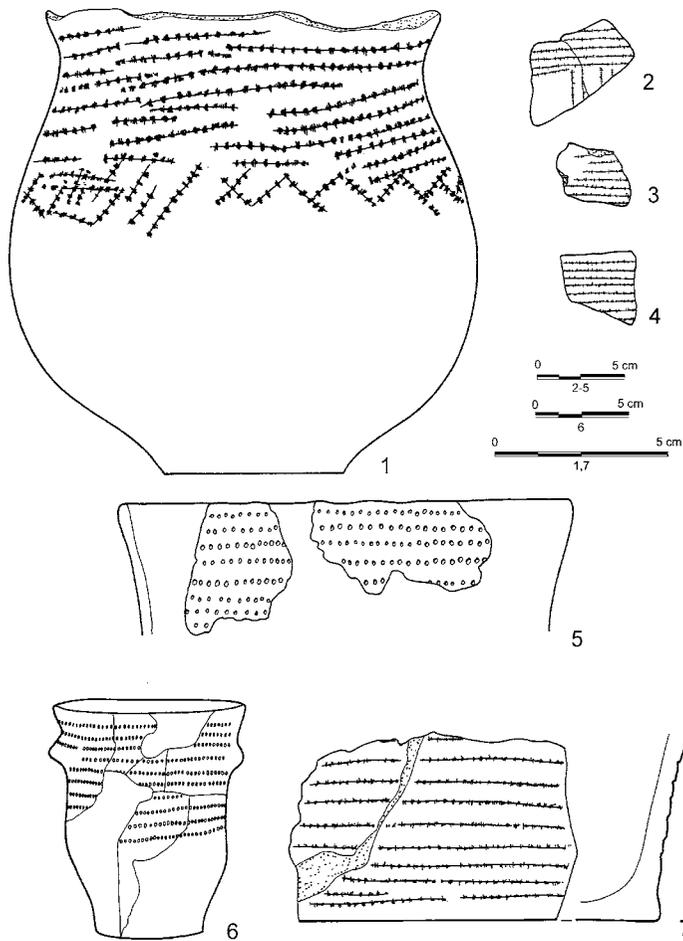


Figure 11. Northern group of the Bell Beakers. Pottery with „barbed wire“ ornamentation. Some examples. 1. Boberg (North Germany), 2–4. Gross Uphal (North Germany), 5. Borstal-Hohensande (North Germany), 6. Ziesendorf (North Germany), 7. Aasbuettel (North Germany).

The northern group is characterised by the concentration of Bell Beaker traits in domestic contexts, which indicates that in the course of the latter half of the 3rd millennium cal BC a settlement organization slowly stabilized in Kujawy. This was a major change after a very mobile stage of the Single Grave Culture (Czebreszuk and Szymt 2008).

One can go even further and claim that the Bell Beakers tradition in the area of interest to us here was a significant accelerator of cultural changes. In western Poland (on the upper and middle Oder) it paved the way ca. 2300/2250 cal BC for the earliest traces of the Únětice Culture (in its proto-Únětice phase) found in

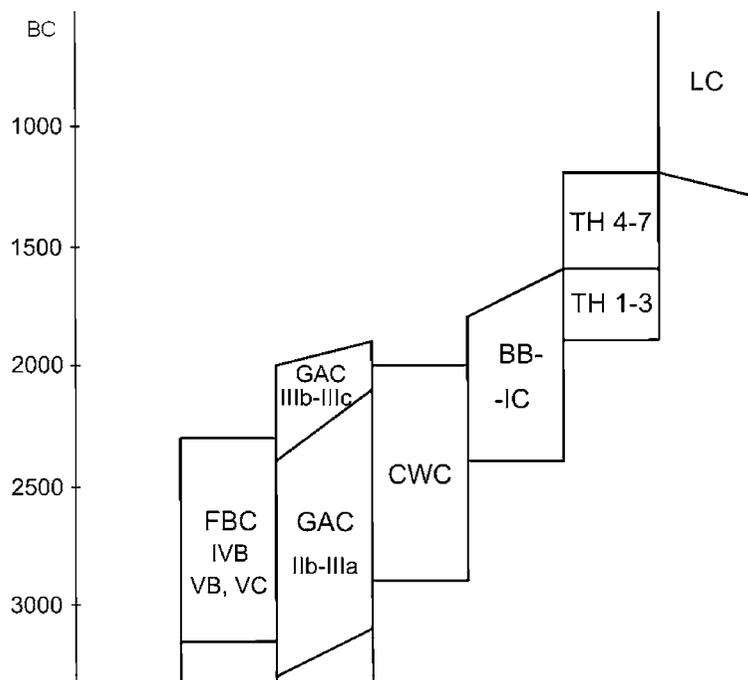


Figure 12. Synchronization of the different cultural structures from the end of the Neolithic and the beginning of the Bronze Age in Kujawy. FBC – Funnel Beaker Culture, GAC – Globular Amphorae Culture, CWC – Corded Ware Culture, Bell Beaker-IC – Bell Beakers – Iwono Culture, TH – Trzciniec Horizon, LC – Lusatian Culture.

Silesia (Machnik 1977). In the course of time its enclaves appeared in Kujawy (Koško 1991) and on the lower Oder (Koško 1991) as well. Particularly in Kujawy a symbiosis can be observed between the societies of the Bell Beaker north group, particularly well visible in pottery and settlement, and the Únětice Culture, to which one should link a concentration of bronze objects in Únětice style (Czebreszuk 1996). At the turn of the 3rd millennium cal BC the regional uniqueness of Kujawy is stressed by the distinction of a separate archaeological culture within its borders, the Iwono Culture. It can be interpreted as a local variety of the Bell Beakers network (Czebreszuk 2001), though it was modified by a permanent contact with the Únětice Culture. In this context, it must be observed that Kujawy lay on the route between the ‘oecumene’ of the Únětice Culture and rich amber deposits located on the Gulf of Gdańsk (Fig. 13; Czebreszuk 2007a).

The region was crossed then by a route for long-range contacts, known as the first amber route (Czebreszuk 2007b). Interestingly enough, in this period, the early 2nd millennium cal BC, a ma-

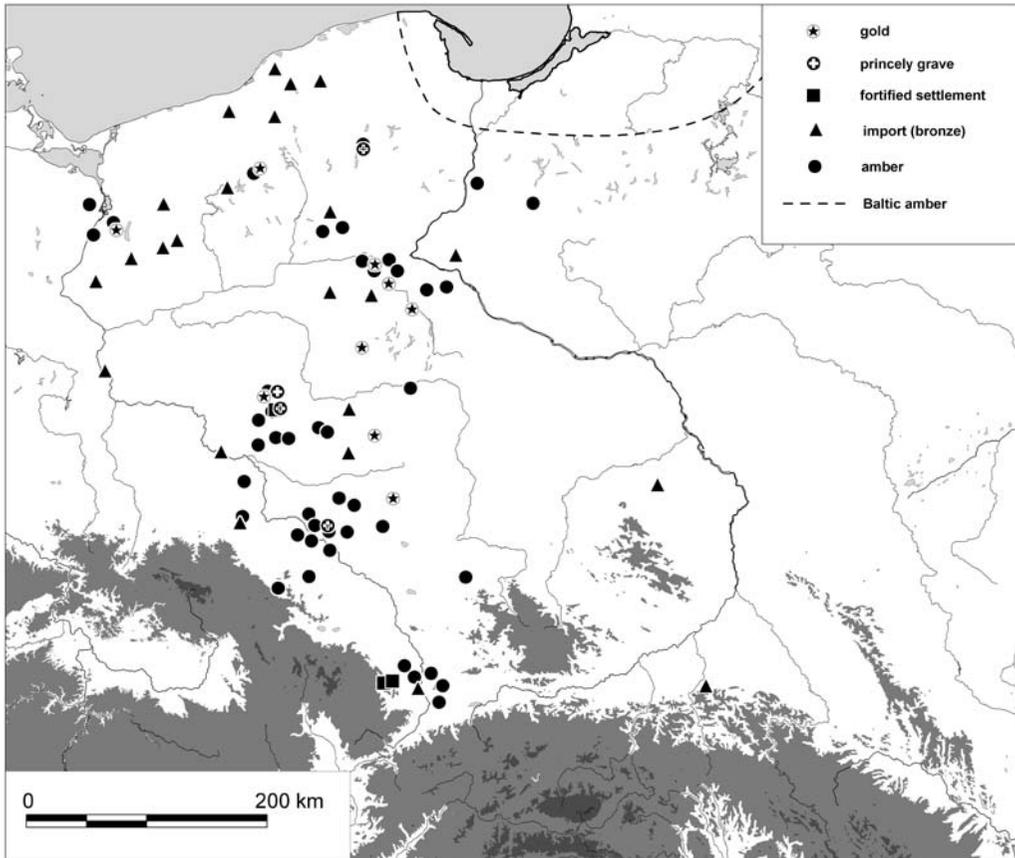


Figure 13. Main roads of long-distance cultural connections in Poland in the Early Bronze Age showed by different kinds of spectacular finds.

major concentration of spectacular metal and amber goods along the southern Baltic coast shows that the line of contacts joining Jutland to Pomerania and Kujawy was very much alive at that time as well.

In the second half of the 3rd millennium cal BC, in the period of the Bell Beakers, the Polish Lowlands were also settled by other cultural groups such as the Globular Amphora Culture (final phase, cf. Szmyt 1996) and sub-Neolithic societies (Józwiak 2003). The relations between the Globular Amphora Culture and the Bell Beaker north group clearly demonstrate a certain regularity. Chronological data tell us that at least in Kujawy both groups co-existed from about 2400 to 2200 cal BC. Given the long period of co-existence in the relatively small region of Kujawy, it is remarkable that there appears to have been a negligible amount of cultural borrowing between the two groups (Czebreszuk 1996, 113-114; Szmyt 1996, 250-251). This can not be explained in terms of low research intensity because

Kujawy is one of the most thoroughly studied regions of Europe with respect to the Late Neolithic and the Early Bronze Age. The most plausible explanation of this discrepancy is to hypothesize a significant cultural barrier between the Globular Amphora Culture and the Bell Beakers. The barrier effectively isolated the two societies from each other during their hundred years of parallel subsistence in the region.

Summing up, what must be emphasized is the heterogeneity of Bell Beaker traits found in the regions of modern-day Poland in the latter half of the 3rd and in the early 2nd millennia cal BC. They were a result of contacts with three different external centres: Moravia (Małopolska enclave), the Bohemian Basin (Silesian concentration) and Jutland (western portion of the Polish Lowlands: Kujawy, Pomerania and Wielkopolska). The concentration on Lowlands supplies us with the most information on the place of the Bell Beakers within the local cultural substratum. For this region, one can suggest a cohesive model of relations between the Bell Beaker phenomenon and other cultural entities present in the region (Fig. 14).

Here the Bell Beaker north group fits into the local sequence of long cultural changes, beginning with the Mesolithic and picking up pace with the advent of the Corded Ware Culture (early 3rd millennium cal BC). It is genetically related to the preceding stage of the Single Grave Culture and forms a substratum for the subsequent stage related to the Trzciniec horizon. Thus, a clear cultural connection (“filiation”) is established. With respect to phenomena contemporaneous with the Bell Beakers, such as the decline phase of the Globular Amphora Culture as well as the early and classic phases of

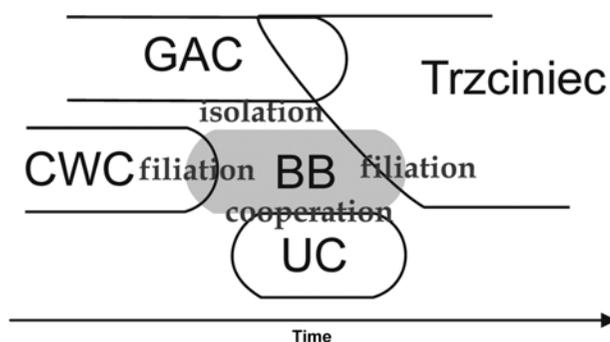


Figure 14. Model of relationships of Bell Beakers with other cultures in western part of the Polish Lowlands. GAC – Globular Amphorae Culture, CWC – Corded Ware Culture, BB – Bell Beakers, UC – Únětice Culture.

the Únětice Culture, two different patterns of behaviour can be discerned. With respect to the former, a distance can be observed, resulting in cultural isolation despite the absence of any geographical barriers. With respect to the latter, a cooperative pattern is clearly seen, following from the advantageous location of the Kujawy Bell Beaker enclave on the route heading north, in the direction of amber deposits on the Gulf of Gdańsk. Owing to such location, these communities profited of an easier access to bronze objects made in the Únětice style.

Hence, the example of the western part of the Polish Lowlands clearly shows that the Bell Beaker north group was firmly-rooted in the local cultural substratum and connected by various cultural ties with other groups settling this area.

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