

THE TRZCINIEC AREA OF THE EARLY BRONZE AGE CIVILIZATION: 1950-1200 BC

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Editor's Foreword

The Trzciniec Culture, Trzciniec Cultural Circle and Trzciniec Horizon are the names of a cultural area in the borderland of Western and Eastern Europe at the 2nd millennium BC. For over half a century a discussion has been going on over the taxonomic identification (chronological and spatial) and genetic and ethnic interpretation of this cultural unit.

In the debate, the 1980's and 1990's mark a significant cognitive turn caused by the growth of the corpus of sources, the use of systematic methods for the study of mobile sources and the proliferation of regional ^{14}C datings.

The present volume of "Baltic-Pontic Studies" is an attempt to register this breakthrough and a proposal for a new fitting of the Trzciniec phenomenon into the synthesis of Early Bronze Age Europe. The records include rudiments of new regional systematizations, foundations of their chronologies based on radiocarbon datings and a discussion of the mechanisms of socio-cultural changes which gave rise to the Trzciniec cultural area and later contributed to its disintegration.

A long-term intention of this volume giving a multifaceted view of the effects of the said cognitive breakthrough is to encourage a careful scrutiny of the development mechanisms of the European Early Bronze Age Civilization, in particular the role played in them by the societies inhabiting the drainages of the Baltic and Pontic Seas.

Editorial comment

1. All dates in the *B-PS* are calibrated [see: *Radiocarbon* vol.28, 1986, and the next volumes]. Deviations from this rule will be point out in notes.

2. The names of the archaeological cultures (especially from the territory of the Ukraine) are standarized according to the English literature on the subject [e.g. Mallory 1989]. In the case of a new term, the author's original name has been retained.

3. The place names located in the Ukraine have been transliterat from the versions suggested by the author (i.e. from the Belorussian, Ukrainian, Polish or Russian originals).

Sławomir Kadrow

**THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN DIMENSION OF THE
DECLINE OF THE EARLY BRONZE AGE CIVILIZATION.
THE TRZCINIEC SOCIO-CULTURAL SYSTEM AT THE
OUTSET OF ITS CAREER**

I have raised the issue of the necessity to investigate the spreading of the Trzciniec Culture in the western zone of its range in the context of the decline of the Early Bronze Age civilization already in several publications [Kadrow 1995; Górski, Kadrow 1996]. In this paper I shall attempt to reconstruct the fall of the “Early Bronze world”. The fall gave way to the development of cultures where the socio-cultural process unfolded along new principles. One of them was the Trzciniec Culture.

**1. AN OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE
CULTURAL UNITS OF THE EARLY BRONZE AGE IN EUROPE**

In his latest approach, Jan Machnik [Kozłowski, Machnik 1996] places the origins of the Bronze Age in Europe in the drainage of the Middle and Lower Danube in the time corresponding to the decline of the Vučedol Culture. Under the impact of Aegean-Anatolian influences — around 2500-2400 BC — several cultures came into being including Somogyvár-Vinkovci, Makó-Kosihy-Čaka, Schneckenberg-Glina III. They were all characterized by a significant degree of similarity of material culture traits. It should be stressed, however, that these populations knew only the technology of making copper (possibly gold) goods which were produced on a rather small scale.

A comparison of the ranges of such Decline Neolithic cultures as Corded Ware and Bell Beakers with the places where sources of copper and tin were available gives a rough estimate of the borders of the secondary cradle of the European Early Bronze Age civilization [Shennan 1986] or European Early Bronze Age civilization in the strict sense of the term and its immediate “parents”. The cradle could have

been located in southern and central Germany, the Czech Republic and the adjacent portion of Austria. The entirely new cultural quality that was being born there took form, to some degree, under the impact of the said Middle Danube cultural center. At the turn of the 3rd millennium BC, there developed such cultures as Straubing, Adlerberg, Unterwölbling and Únětice (Fig. 1). Only the first two of the above listed cultures had a developed inventory of metal artifacts, mainly ornaments, already around 2200 BC. Somewhat later, about 2000 BC, metallurgy developed in the remaining two cultures, too. It is from that moment that bronze artifacts began to appear in mass quantities. Besides already known small wire and sheet metal products, casting of larger objects, e.g. raised-edge axes, began on a large scale (Fig. 2).

This latter stage of the Early Bronze Age is related to the classical phase of the Únětice Culture. Paradoxically enough, the oldest “classical” Únětice bronze objects appeared in northern (Melz) and central (Helmsdorf and Leubingen) Germany and in Wielkopolska (Łęki Małe). Admittedly, these assemblages do contain elements from the Carpathian Basin (gold *Lockenring* in Helmsdorf) [cf. Größler 1907] and Transylvania (Sanț Dragomirești-type ice-axe in Melz) [cf. Rassmann, Schoknecht 1997], but they no longer decide on the character of the assemblages. Having a peculiar trait of their own, they are representatives of a new and singular civilizational center that came into being in the northern periphery of the emerging Únětice Cultural Circle about 2000 BC (Fig. 1:2). For the next 200 years, the Circle was in its classical phase a dominant cultural factor in broadly understood Central Europe. It also exerted a strong influence on the development of cultural groups in southern England (Wessex), southern Scandinavia (beginnings of the Nordic Circle) and in Spain (El Argar Culture). Emulations or even imports of Únětice daggers are found in Greece and Anatolia, too.

In the period under discussion, areas of Central-Western Europe, despite a division into three fundamentally different provinces of burial rituals (*Blechkreis-kulturen*, Únětice and Nordic), are strongly unified in that they are saturated with huge amounts of diverse metal goods. So numerous an appearance of such goods was a response to a great demand for prestige objects by local communities, which is an indirect indication of advanced processes of their spontaneous social differentiation or ranking [Larsson 1986; Vandkilde 1996]. In addition, these goods took part in ideology materialization processes of societies undergoing transformations [Larsson 1986]. Equally important was the fact that many of these goods (necklaces with eyes, raised-edge axes) served as object money? [Shennan 1993; Sommerfeld 1994]. It has to be made absolutely clear that this “money” did not function then as a measure of market value contrary to the cultures of the contemporaneous Middle East [cf. Klengel 1995]. It was rather a measure of “transactions” entered into with a deity [Hänsel 1997]. Analogies to the Mycenaean world suggest that the Early Bronze Age societies of Central-Western Europe were still completely immersed in various

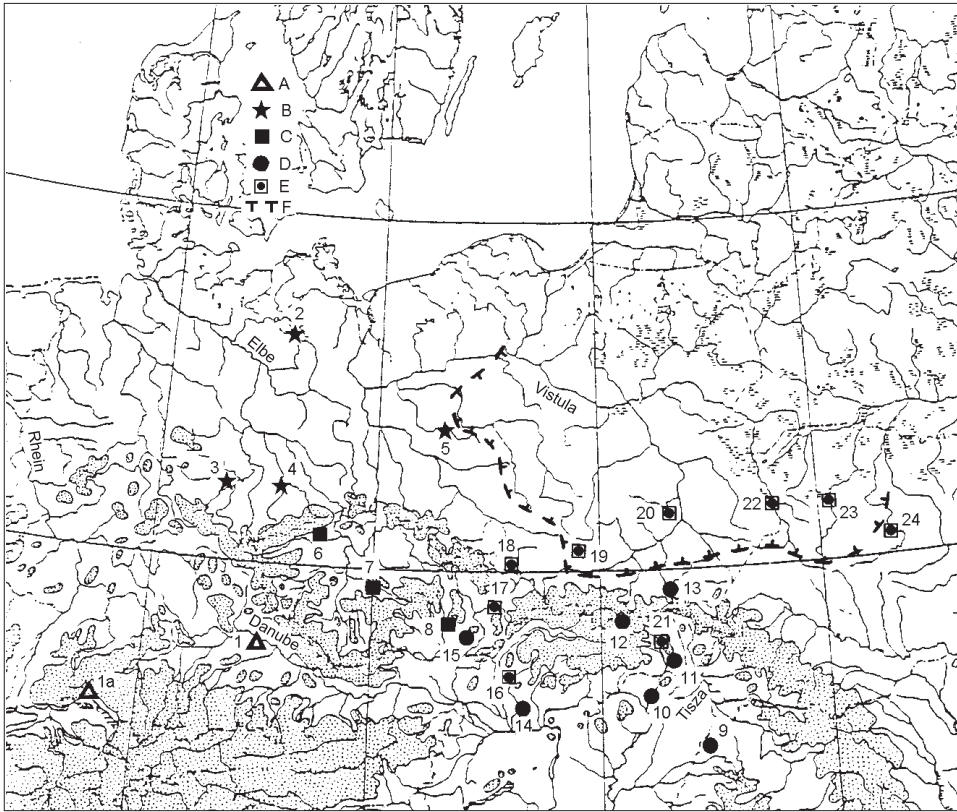


Fig. 1. Map of selected Early Bronze Age sites in Central Europe. A - *Blechkreiskulturen* sites, B - sites of classic phase of the Únětice Culture in the northern zone, C - sites of classic phase of the Únětice Culture in the southern zone, D - Füzesabony/Otomani-Mad'arovce-Věteřov Cultural Circle sites, E - Epi-Corded Carpathian Cultural Circle sites, F - western and southern limits of dense settlement of the Trzciniec Culture; 1 - Straubing, 1a - Singen, 2 - Melz, 3 - Leubingen, 4 - Helmsdorf, 5 - Łęki Małe, 6 - Březno, 7 - Polepy, 8 - Blučina, 9 - Otomani, 10 - Füzesabony, 11 - Nižná Myšľa, 12 - Spišský Štvrtok, 13 - Trzcinica, 14 - Mad'arovce, 15 - Věteřov, 16 - Veselý, 17 - Holešov, 18 - Kietrz, 19 - Iwanowice, 20 - Mierzanowice, 21 - Košice, 22 - Strzyżów, 23 - Gródek, 24 - Zdobica.

types of barter systems. An archaeologically perceivable manifestation of the high complexity of social life in the areas in question was the custom of hoarding.

The Central European civilization type of the Early Bronze Age was a local phenomenon without any counterparts in other parts of the continent and the adjacent portions of the Old World. Let me remind the reader that the magnificent culture of ancient Egypt which used a script, built monumental architecture, organized a vast territorial state, developed stable forms of power of a complex structure and — what is most important — owing to the strength and attractiveness of its

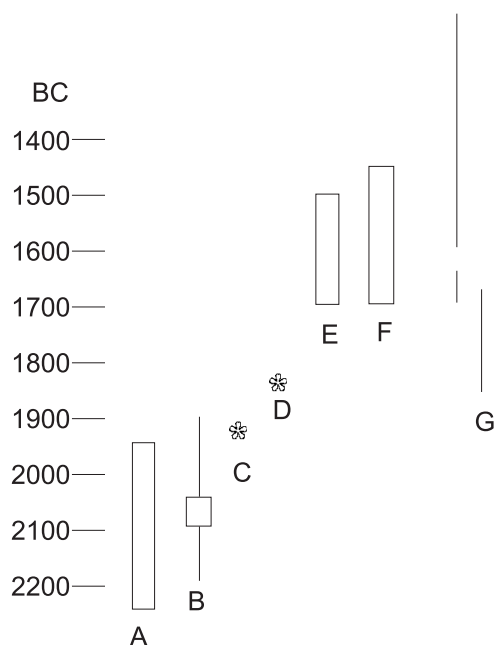


Fig. 2. Synchronization of selected cultural phenomena based on radiocarbon and dendrochronological dating (in part following Furmánek, Veliačik, Vladár 1991; Krause 1996; Rassmann 1996): A - Singen, B - Melz, C - Leubingen, D - Helmsdorf, E - Nižná Myšľa, F - Blučina, Budkovice, Böheimkirchen, Gutfenbrunn, Waidendorf, G - beginnings of the Trzciniec Culture and the period when it became a dominant cultural phenomenon in eastern and central Poland.

civilization developed over the period of more than two thousand years practically made do without bronze metallurgy. Also highly developed territorial states in the Middle East, which, to be sure, knew the technology of smelting bronze already earlier, never developed production of goods made of this alloy on so large a scale as did the societies of the western part of Central Europe.

A specific characteristic of the Central-Western European civilization is then a great advance of processes of internal differentiation of societies in the environment of technologically advanced metallurgy and a developed long-range exchange. This is evidenced by an incredibly heavy demand for symbols of prestige in the form of metal objects. The basic type of social ties must have continued to be blood ties (e.g. clans) with underdeveloped or non-existent territorial or political structures [cf. Harding 1984; Rowlands 1984; Sherratt 1984]. Unlike the Middle Eastern Bronze Age, the social differentiation was not accompanied by elaborate structures of territorial states, urbanization or complex forms of authority. Apart from prestige metal objects, there were not any other means of regulating social life as, for instance, state institutions, coercion of authority, laid down laws of succession, legal

systems (case of Hammurabi), script used to preserve tradition, etc. Consequently, the socio-cultural structures in that area were not permanent while cultural changes did not take the form of a continuous accumulation of experience from the past.

During the first four centuries of the Bronze Age there emerged as many as three independent centers of cultural and technological innovations. The first covered the areas of the Upper Danube (2200-2050 BC), the second stretched over the territory of the northern ranges of the Únětice Culture (2050-1900 BC) while the third comprised Bohemia and Moravia (1900-1750 BC). The last mentioned center was characterized by an unusually high concentration of hoards including so-called "object" money [Gerloff 1993; Innerhofer 1997].

The fourth center, developing in the northeastern part of the Carpathian Basin in 1750-1400 BC as a complex of Füzesabony, Mad'arovce and Věteřov Cultures (Fig. 1), constitutes a new quality in the hitherto civilizational arrangement of the Early Bronze Age. It developed in close contact with the Aegean world. Beginnings of more permanent political and territorial structures, proto-cities (Barca, Otomani) [cf. Bintliff 1984], monumental stone architecture (Spišský Štvrtok), relatively numerous gold objects next to rich bronze production and numerous stylistic elements testify to close similarities to the Mycenaean Culture [Vladár 1973]. It can be suspected that, together with those material culture components, the world known from the oldest strata of Homer's works made its debut in the Carpathian Basin. Next to blood ties that continued to play an important role as a backbone of social life there appeared strong territorial ties as well as loyalty to the dynasty. It is exactly from Homer that we know of the latter characteristic and the cult of heroes whose feats are remembered in songs [Hauser 1974; Hammond 1977; Luce 1987].

The fifth civilizational center, the beginnings of which should be dated as contemporaneous with the Füzesabony, Mad'arovce and Věteřov complex, was the circle of Nordic cultures [Vandkilde 1996]. Despite noticeable influences from the Carpathian Basin it had a very singular character.

Next to the above mentioned cultural centers, the development of Epi-Corded, Carpathian Cultural Circle (ECCC) can be observed [cf. Machnik 1972]. Reaching back at least to 2300 BC, its beginnings precede the mature cultures of the Bronze Age. In its emergence a dominant role was played by the Corded Ware Culture and to some degree the Bell Beaker Culture with persistent southeastern inspirations. Unlike the Únětice circle and *Blechkreiskulturen*, which developed under a predominant influence of the Bell Beaker Culture (BBC), ECCC's image (as the name itself shows) was chiefly formed by the Corded Ware Culture [Kadrow 1995].

A strong territorial behavior of Mierzanowice Culture populations, ECCC's major component, was manifested by a stable network of large and long-lasting head settlements. Extreme consistency was also exhibited in observing strict rules of funerary rites. With the exception of the late phase, the dominating rule of social life organization was based on sex following "Late Neolithic, Corded" patterns. It

was only in local groups of the late phase (e.g. Sambor and Szarbia) that ranking, or spontaneous internal differentiation of societies, came to the fore which had already prevailed elsewhere since the domination of the BBC. A low number of metal objects, practically no bronze goods, with few other types of artifacts which could be taken for prestige objects testify to a very low intensity, as compared to other civilizational centers, of social differentiation processes within the Mierzanowice Culture [Kadrow 1995].

Worth noticing is the fact of independent cultural development of the discussed circle in a long time perspective. However, it is not clear whether it was an effect of not participating in the long-range, intercultural exchange of mainly metal objects. It may have been quite the opposite, namely, the isolationism of human groups of this culture was too difficult an obstacle to overcome for possible initiators of a long-range exchange. Examples of quite a few imitations of metal prestige objects (popular in civilizational centers) which were made by Mierzanowice Culture populations from other raw-materials, mainly stone (flint axes, sickles, spearheads or daggers, etc.), suggest yet another hypothesis. The Mierzanowice culture populations, by the very fact of imitating them, manifested their interest in prestige objects and a great demand for them. Consequently, the absence of metal objects made of those raw-materials that were exploited in Bohemia, Central Germany or on the Upper Danube from their territory can signify a deliberate elimination of these populations from the exchange system of metal goods by their producers and users [Kadrow 1997].

2. THE BEGINNINGS OF THE TRZCINIEC CULTURE

The vast expanses of land to the east and north of the above outlined cultural complexes were occupied by groups identified by a general name of sub-Neolithic, forest or East-European at the onset of the Bronze Age [Koško 1996]. In the 3rd millennium BC, the dominant among them was the Comb-like and Stroked Pottery Culture represented by Linin-type pottery [Wiślański 1979]. The culture's settlement points concentrated in Mazowsze [Koško 1996] while single, dispersed settlements reached as far as the mouth of the Oder in the west and the Middle Dnieper in the east. At the decline of the Neolithic, in this area and in the territories lying farther west, i.e. in Denmark, northern Germany, at the mouth of the Rhine or even in England certain elements appeared that connect together these vast territories. What is meant here are sinuous-profile pots decorated with the so-called "barbed wire" ornament otherwise known as the ornament of "a cord wound around a flint

flake" [Gardawski 1969]. This may be an archaeologically perceivable trace of the slow process of peer polity interaction [cf. Renfrew 1986] across the vast expanses of the European Plain. The early dating of elements bearing out integration processes, consequently leading to the appearance of the Trzciniec Culture in the form of sinuous pots (*Riesenbecher*) and corresponding to the beginnings of the Early Bronze Age [cf. Czebreszuk, "Trzciniec" ..., in this volume and 1998a; Makarowicz 1998], indicates the presence of populations which remained indifferent to the cultural offer of the nascent European Early Bronze civilization. The world of sub-Neolithic populations, slowly developing in the northern and north-eastern fringes of the Early Bronze oecumene, drew mainly on its own cultural traditions ignoring socio-organizational achievements and patterns of the Nordic, Únětice and Epi-Corded Cultural Circles.

While it can be accepted that certain stylistic inspirations (sinuous pot form), which later had a decisive impact on the Trzciniec Culture's ceramic production, came from Danish and North German communities at the decline of the Single Grave Culture and later also from Iwno centers (e.g. many significant ornamentation patterns), it seems wrong to restrict the area of origin of the Trzciniec Culture only to the north-western direction with respect to its location. The apparent coincidence of the ranges of the Comb-like and Stroked Pottery and Trzciniec Cultures [Koško 1996, Fig. 2] suggests that the latter may have also crystallized in the environment of the former. The concentration of sub-Neolithic sites in Mazowsze and the characteristics of Trzciniec Culture pottery found there point to this region as yet another important center (next to Kujawy) of the origin of this culture [Czebreszuk 1996].

3. THE REASONS OF THE FALL OF THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN EARLY BRONZE CIVILIZATION

Kristian Kristiansen [1994] believed that the essence of civilizational and cultural changes in the Bronze Age and in the earlier periods of the Iron Age was the recurrent, rhythmical domination of two successive socio-cultural systems: (a) an agricultural one, settled (frequently with defensive settlements), with large and moderately egalitarian cemeteries and (b) animal-raising one, more mobile, with conspicuous graves of distinguished individuals. These socio-cultural systems were not only interrelated in time (which was mentioned above), but also in space. Type 'a' systems were typical of central areas while type 'b' ones of peripheries. A dynamic picture of relations between these systems — accounting for time and space relations — includes three basic stages. The periods of prosperity (stage I) were

characterized by stable relations between central areas and peripheries. In stage II the civilizational center vanished with its place being taken by the socio-cultural system typical of the periphery. In stage III a new cultural center was formed. In this process an important role was played by the impact from the civilizational advanced regions of the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean [Kristiansen 1994]. The outlined mechanism is very well illustrated by the process of superceding the cultures of the Early Bronze civilization by those of the Tumulus Circle.

In the case under discussion here, i.e. the question of mutual interactions of the central areas of the Central European Early Bronze civilization and the nascent Trzciniec Culture, another structural element should be introduced. What is meant here are socio-cultural systems that did not participate in the vigorous exchange of ideas, goods or population movements along the center-periphery line. From the point of view of the dynamics of change, the adjacent territories of sub-Neolithic cultures neighboring the area in the north-east remained completely dormant. For this reason they cannot be considered a periphery, but they should be defined rather as marginal zones in respect of the center. Only to a very low degree and superficially were the marginal zones affected by the influences from the ECCC, which may be evidenced by the assemblage C pottery of the Linin-type [Kempisty 1973; Wiślański 1979]. Material evidence of mutual permeation of ideas between the earliest stage of the Trzciniec Culture and the groups of the late phase of the Mierzanowice Culture are also extremely scarce [Górski, Kadrow 1996]. The opening of the Trzciniec Culture to extraneous influences, for instance pre-Lusatian metallurgical goods and pottery patterns characteristic of the Füzesabony and Mad'arovce Cultures, took place when the domination of the Early Bronze cultures was broken north of the Carpathians.

Where are the sources then of the crisis of Early Bronze cultures which made it possible for Trzciniec Culture societies to enter the stage of history? Fernand Braudel proved a thesis that all manifestations of human life are subject to change oscillating rhythmically between periods of prosperity and poverty which alternate without an end [Braudel 1992]. Even the longest periods of prosperity end. This also applies to the Central European Early Bronze civilization.

Seemingly we deal here with only one "Early Bronze" development cycle. In fact, as it has been already mentioned, we can follow several microcycles of development within cultures that are traditionally identified as Early Bronze. In each of such cycles, the significance of individual categories of prestige objects must have inflated, which, in turn, made it necessary to search for ever newer objects made of ever more precious materials and ever more elaborately decorated. Such developments followed a rule known from the societies in which competition and rivalry among individuals and clans give rise to a demand for prestige. Good illustrations of the rule are provided in monographs of the Bronze Age in Scandinavia [Larsson 1986; Vandkilde 1996]. In Sweden, the symbolic power of axes from the 1st period

of the Bronze Age is superseded in the 2nd period by the power of spearheads and swords only to yield in this respect to rock art in some areas in the 3rd period of this age. In Denmark, the sequence of the most important prestige objects was opened by flint daggers and flat copper axes and rare ornaments made of gold sheets in the beginnings of the late Neolithic (LN I). Towards the end of the Late Neolithic (LN II), the domination of axes with raised edges, tanged daggers, gold *noppenrings* and heavy bracelet- and armlet-like ornaments of cast bronze is clearly visible. At the dawn of the Danish Bronze Age (B IA), spearheads come to the fore, whereas in the next period (B IB), the role of a symbol of the highest prestige is taken over by swords. In that time spearheads are very elaborately decorated.

In the civilizational centers the process of devaluation of individual prestige objects was accompanied by significant changes in the social structure. Rivalry among clans, finding expression in hoarding, yielded to competition among individuals, which, in turn, was manifested by placing prestige objects in graves [Vandkilde 1996]. An important role in the functioning of the Central European Early Bronze civilization was played by the control of rich and easily accessible deposits of copper ore and the closely related control of the technology of obtaining pure metal from the ore [Shennan 1993]. The simultaneous occurrence of changes on these different planes with the decisive culture-making role being taken over in Central Europe by the Füzesabony Culture (of rather Aegean than Central European character) brought about the downfall of the structures of the Únětice Culture in its classical phase already prior to 1700 BC. The downfall of this center must have caused — in accordance with Braudel's and Wallerstein's theories — serious changes in the peripheries. Conditions conducive to the spreading of the cultures of the Tumulus Circle appeared. The "Aegeanized" Füzesabony-Mad'arovce center, because of too great a socio-organizational distance, could not stimulate the continued existence of Early Bronze structures north of the Carpathians.

The influence exerted on and inspiration provided for the origin and development of the Trzciniec Culture by the world of the European Early Bronze civilization should be deemed insignificant. The Trzciniec Culture was born independently of and in a certain way in spite of the then dominating civilizational trends and cultures. As long as they existed, the Trzciniec Culture survived in a rudimentary form on the margin of the civilized world. Only the downfall of the Early Bronze cultures provided space and favorable conditions for the Trzciniec Culture to fully develop and become an important stage in the socio-cultural process in the vast territories of the Vistula and Dnieper drainages.

Translated by Piotr T. Żebrowski

ABBREVIATIONS

AP	– Archeologia Polski, Warszawa
APL	– Archaeologia Polona, Warszawa
AR	– Arkheologia, Kiev
BPS	– Baltic-Pontic Studies, Poznań
ESA	– Eurasia Septentrionalis Antiqua, Helsinki
KSIA AN USSR	– Kratkiye Soobshcheniya Instituta Arkheologii AN USSR, Kiev
MANH	– Materiały Archeologiczne Nowej Huty, Kraków
MIA	– Materiały i Issledovaniya po Arkheologii SSSR, Moskva
PBF	– Praehistorische Bronzefunde, München
SA	– Sovetskaya Arkheologia, Moskva.
SPA	– Sprawozdania Archeologiczne, Kraków.

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