

# Stable settlements of the Trzciniec Cultural Circle in the Polish uplands and lowlands

Jacek Górski\*, Przemysław Makarowicz\*\*

## Abstract

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Traditionally the differences in the nature of settlement system in the south (uplands) and the north (lowlands) of Poland are emphasized. It turned out that in both of these areas communities of the Trzciniec cultural circle formed stable, although qualitatively different settlement systems. In both cases inhabitants moved their settlements in frames of selected regions in the decades-cycles. On the lowlands, in northern part of Poland, settlements usually consisted of one household. Sometimes they created greater settlement complexes. However, on the loess uplands, the settlement could count up to ten households used at one time.

**Key words:** settlements, settlement system, Trzciniec culture circle, Bronze Age

## Introduction

Communities of the Trzciniec cultural circle (TCC) inhabited diverse ecosystems, ranging from the rich loess areas of southern Poland, favourable to agriculture, to poor sandy environments in the Polish lowlands. Successful settlement of the ‘Trzciniec’ population resulted from the ability to adapt and to work the land in various ecological zones (Górski *et al.* 2004, 209).

Researchers tend to contrast the TCC settlement in the uplands with that in the lowlands. This “ecological” criterion seems to have been the basis for combining the Opatów and the Lublin groups, as distinguished by Aleksander Gardawski (1959), into one taxonomic unit, the Małopolska group (Miśkiewicz 1978). Moreover, settlements in the uplands, compared to those in

the lowlands, have traditionally been regarded as more stable in their size, layout and duration (Czebreszuk 1996; Górski 1997; 2007; Makarowicz 1998; 2010; Górski *et al.* 2004). This paper presents several examples that may complicate this bipartite approach, showing that TCC communities were able to create stable, though qualitatively different, settlement systems in both zones (cf. Rydzewski 1986; Górski *et al.* 2011). The earlier views, therefore, should be considerably mitigated. We draw on results of exploration related to large-scale projects carried out in recent years. Some of the data have already been published, while some are still as manuscripts (more in Makarowicz 2010; 2013, and Górski *et al.* 2011).

While describing stable forms of ‘Trzciniec’ society settlement (types of settlements) in these zones we use analytic categories defined in earlier literature (Makarowicz 2010, 83 ff). The notion of long-term settlement has been taken from Jacek Górski's

\* Archaeological Museum, Senacka 3 st., 31-002 Kraków, Poland; jacek.gorski@ma.krakow.pl

\*\* Institute of Prehistory, Adam Mickiewicz University, Św. Marcin 78 st., Poznań, Poland; przemom@amu.edu.pl

publication (1997; cf. also Górski *et al.* 2004, 197–202; Makarowicz 2010, 84) and signifies a sum of the remains of settlement and economic activity, sometimes lasting for several centuries. Settlements like these were stable and contained dwelling houses, but this did not always mean they were long-lived, especially in the lowland part of the TCC ecumene. It is necessary, therefore, to divide stable settlements into long-term ones, with many building phases (cf. Kadorow 1991), multi-seasonal ones inhabited for several years, and seasonal ones, usually

related to certain temporary activities. It is always possible, however, to discern or assume the existence of stable dwellings or at least shelters. In the hierarchy of settlements, one can also distinguish those which should be regarded as central because of their spatial range and accumulated traces of activity from various phases. The notions of large, medium or small settlements are the most difficult to define; size has to be determined arbitrarily, according to the local natural environment and to settlement traditions in individual regions.

## Description of settlements

According to the criteria presented above, the following categories of settlements have been distinguished (Makarowicz 2010, 84): **I** – long-term stable settlements with many building phases, **II** – multi-seasonal stable settlements, and **III** – seasonal, relatively stable settlements (also those lasting for one season). It should be emphasised that this is one of a more numerous possible conventional categorisations, adopted in this paper and unproblematic only in the case of settlements that have been well excavated over a large area. A single site may often be assigned to two different groups. However, the categorisation, combining spatial, functional and temporal criteria, seems to be justified analytically as it helps to establish the principle or principles of social organisation of human groups and to propose specific models of settlement.

**I.** This category of settlements includes:

- a) site 1 at Polesie (Górski *et al.* 2011) in the lowlands, and
- b) site 55 at Nowa Huta-Mogiła (the Wanda Mound; Górski 1994) in the loess uplands. The former site, published recently, requires a broader presentation; the latter has been discussed several times (Górski 2010, quoting earlier literature).

**a.** The site at Polesie, Łowicz district, lies in the south-western Masovian Lowland, on a vast plateau of eolian sands situated between two valleys. The site covers an area of about 14 ha (Fig. 1). Analysis of 43 radiocarbon dates shows that its Trzciniec settlement phase lasted from 1700 to 1100/1050 BC. The first

stage, 1700–1650 BC, involved construction of three small settlements: A, B and C, possibly comprising single farmsteads, and a cremation cemetery (I). Zones B and C occupied 0.3–0.5 ha, while the larger zone A, covering an area up to 1 ha, was a sum of subsequent, more prolonged settlement processes. The cemetery functioned for about 400 years, at least until the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century BC. At the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries BC a collective inhumation grave was built in the central part of the site (sepulchral zone III), in place of the A zone settlement, and it was later covered with an earthen mound (barrow). Nearby, another necropolis was established (sepulchral zone IV). The transformation of the centre of the site necessitated relocation of the earlier zone A settlement, which corresponds with the first traces of settlement recorded in the western part of the site, occupying 0.3–0.4 ha (settlement D). After that the central part was used as the main ritual area surrounded by structures arranged at a distance of about 200 m symmetrically to the new burial ground. In the next phases, three or four small settlements functioned at the site. The system changed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century BC, when several smaller settlements consolidated west of the ritual area, forming a unit over about 1 ha, twice the size of the previous structures. Since the site has been damaged to a considerable degree we have no reliable information to interpret in detail the spatial layouts of the settlement zones. Each of them probably comprised no more than several farmsteads simultaneously. The farmsteads made up “hamlets” which, together with the cemeteries, formed a complex

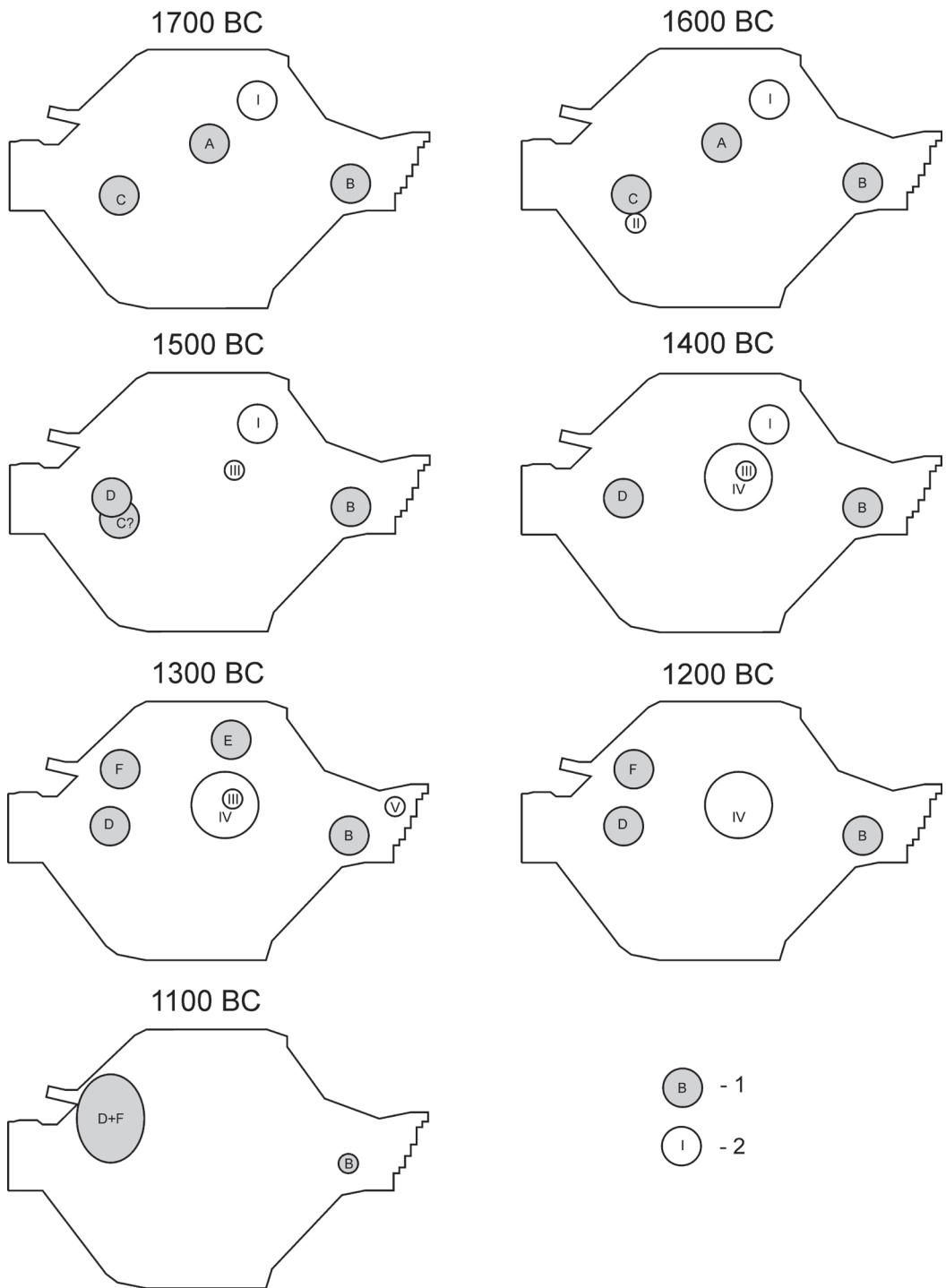


Fig. 1. Polesie, distr. Łowicz. Diagram of a model of mechanics of spatial settlement of the area changes: settlement zones (1); sepulchral zones (2) – Acc. to Górski et al. 2011.

inhabited for at least 600 years. The change of this “hamlet” model in the late phase of settlement, when the larger spatial arrangement was established in the west of the site, seems particularly interesting.

**b.** The multi-phase settlement at Nowa Huta-Mogiła, site 55 (at the Wanda Mound) lies at the back of the Vistula terrace in the loess areas near Krakow. Its exploration has shown the continuity of settlement and of stylistic development of ceramics from the early classical phase to the late phase (ca.

1650/1600–1200/1100 BC); its decline coincided with the early Lusatian culture. One of characteristic traits of the Bronze Age settlements is the rarity of dwellings sunk into the ground (dugouts or half-dugouts) and of regular groupings of postholes, traces of dwellings and outbuildings. The only elements of the original infrastructure are various pits, including large trapezoid or sack-like features. In the Mogiła settlement, features containing stylistically similar materials form regular structures of circular

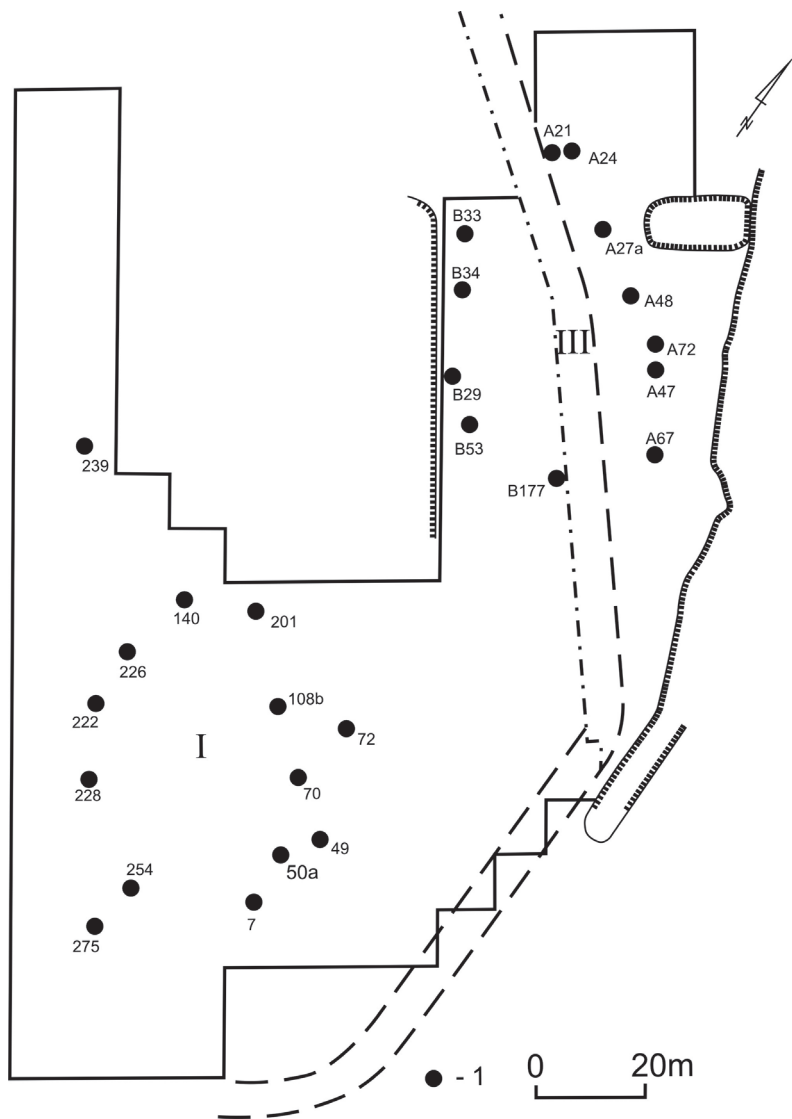


Fig. 2. Kraków-Nowa Huta-Mogiła, site 55. Settlement lay-out in the 1st and 3rd building phases. 1 – features with trapezium fills (Acc. to Górski 1994).

or lenticular shapes, regarded as building phases where one pit represents one farmstead that has left no other traces (Fig. 2). Researchers have distinguished eight phases (I–VII, VIIa), each lasting for 60–80 years, on the basis of the cellars spaced at intervals from 12 m to 15 m (phases I and II) to 25–30 m (phase VII). Since the phases (settlements) excluded one another spatially, they had to involve different parts of the site. The features in each building phase covered an area of about 0.3–0.35 ha (phases I–IV) to 0.8 ha (phases VII and VIIa). If we calculate the hypothetical surface of a single farmstead, the area of the whole settlement varies from 0.5 ha in the older phases to 1 ha in the youngest phase. Judging by the large features, the number of farmsteads functioning at the same time should be estimated at 10–15 in the individual phases (Górski 1994, 102 ff). This model of settlement changed after the local community adopted traits of the early

Lusatian culture (Górski 1994, 98 ff; 2010). The sum of recorded traces of activity in various building phases indicates that the area of the multi-phase settlements, and the Mogiła settlement, seems to have covered 3.5–4.5 ha (Górski 1999, 157).

## II. The multi-seasonal stable settlements include:

- a) site 7/8 at Janowice, site 6 in Babia and site 5 at Roźniatów Kolonia in the lowlands, and
- b) site 158 at Jarosław in the uplands.

a. At Janowice, site 7/8 in the eastern part of the Wielkopolska-Kujawy Lowland, researchers have discovered a settlement situated on the summit and slopes of a sandy elevation above a small valley. This elliptical settlement, 180×80 m (Makarowicz 2010, 90, fig 2.32), comprised at least 102 TCC features. Analysis of their distribution and the arrangement of artefacts point to the presence of several farmsteads (max. 14), i.e. above ground houses and other constructions in their immediate vicinity (Fig. 3). Each farmstead covered 60–200 sq. m (usually 80–100 sq. m), mostly consisting of several features, including deep pits interpreted as small cellars. Only one post-construction dwelling has survived in a distinct form, and there are no buildings sunk into the ground. The stylistic traits of the pottery suggest that the settlement is dated to the early Trzciniec horizon, ca. 1900–1800 BC (Makarowicz 2013).

The settlement at Babia, site 6, also situated in the east of the Wielkopolska-Kujawy Lowland on the summit and slopes of a large elevation at the back of a flood terrace of the Warta, covers ca. 1.5 ha. Various sections of the site have produced over 100 ‘Trzciniec’ features (Makarowicz 1995, 160 ff, fig. 3; 2010, 90; 2013). Several remains of farmsteads with above ground post constructions have been recorded in two main concentrations on different parts of the site (Fig. 4). Individual farmsteads, covering an area of 80–150 sq. m, have left remains of houses and clusters of other features, including deep pits probably used as cellars. In the centre of the excavated area, several adjacent or cross-cutting constructions, roughly rectangular in shape, have been recorded. Diverse orientation of the identified buildings may indicate their different chronology. The settlement may have functioned for several years between



Fig. 3. Janowice, site 7/8, distr. Konin. Settlement lay-out. 1 – “Trzciniec” features; 2 – outlines of presumed household clusters; 3 – contemporary pits (Acc. to Makarowicz 2010).

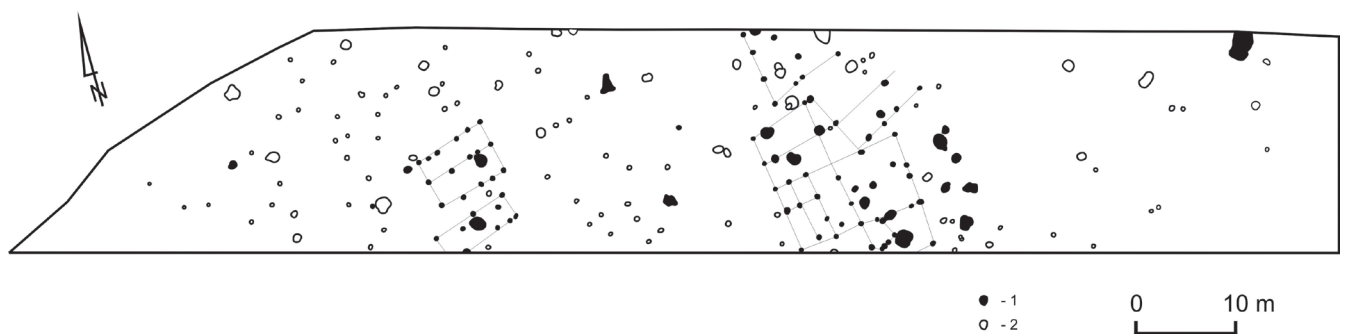


Fig. 4. Babia, site 6, distr. Konin. Settlement lay-out. 1 – “Trzciniec” features; 2 – features of other cultures; lines represent hypothetical reconstructions of walls (Acc. to Makarowicz 2010).

1700 and 1600 BC, as suggested by distinct stylistic traits of pottery typical of the classical TCC horizon (Makarowicz 1995; 2013).

The ‘Trzciniec’ settlement at Rożniatów Kolonia, site 5, is located on the gentle slope of a small valley and covers ca. 1.5 ha (Makarowicz *et al.* 2010, 113f.). Researchers have recorded at least 95 features related to that settlement phase, including at least two above ground dwelling houses with post construction, pits used as cellars or refuse dumps and hearths (Fig. 5). Concentrations of features, probably remains of other farmsteads, have been identified in various sections of the settlement. Clusters of utility constructions, occupying 200–300 sq. m, were situated west and north of the dwelling houses. The larg-

est grouping of several dozen features, covering an area of ca. 400–500 sq. m, was found in the north-central part of the site. Pottery discovered, though dated to two stylistic phases, should in its definite majority be linked with the classical horizon (Makarowicz 1998, Table 13). The settlement may have been inhabited for a dozen or several dozen years. The stylistic traits of the pottery and radiocarbon dates point to the period 1850–1750 BC (Makarowicz *et al.* 2010).

**b.** The site at Jarosław represents a type of high-plain settlement in the loess region of the Rzeszów Foothills (Czopek 2011). Settlements located on upland elevations were a regular feature of the TCC system (Rydzewski 1986, 146). The layout of the site

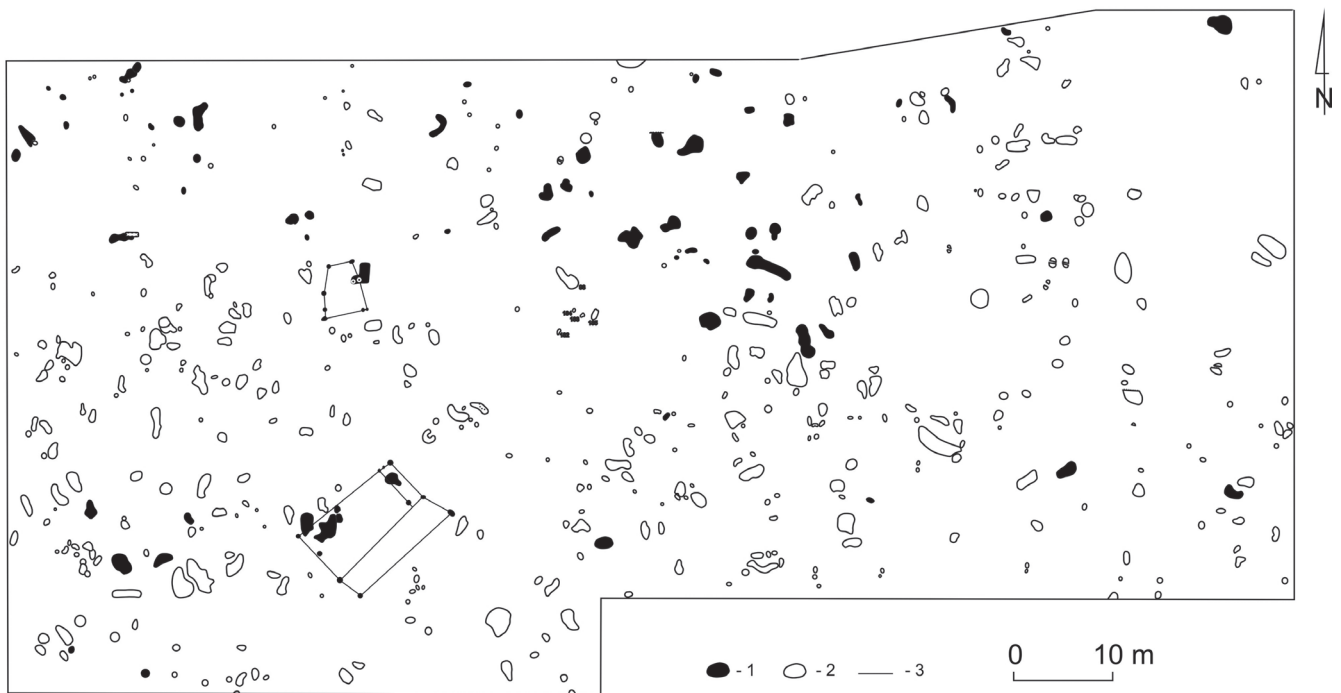


Fig. 5. Roźniatów-Kolonia, site 5. distr. Poddębice. Settlement lay-out. 1 – “Trzciniec” features; 2 – features of other cultures; 3 – hypothetical outline of basement walls (Acc. to Makarowicz et al. 2010).

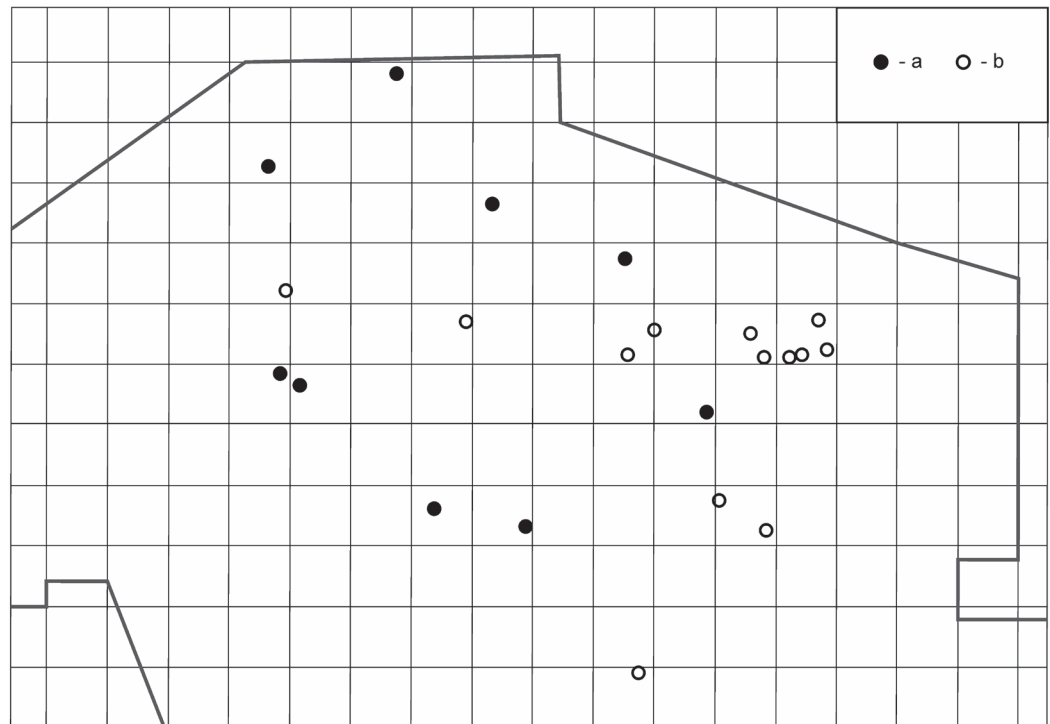


Fig. 6. Jarosław, site 158. Settlement lay-out. a – trapezoidal features; b – other features (Acc. to Czopek 2011).

at Jarosław is analogous to site 55 at Nowa Huta-Mogiła. Within a relatively large area, researchers have found nine storage pits (cellars) at the edges of an empty oval yard, 80×50 m (Fig. 6). Other pits, mostly trough-like, used in production or as refuse dumps were situated outside that structure, forming a distinct cluster in the eastern part of the site. According to the model proposed for site 55 at Mogiła (cf. also Kadrow 1991), we may assume that the Jarosław settlement

was originally a large one, consisting of nine farmsteads inhabited at the same time. However, the duration of its functioning was relatively short, limited to one building phase, lasting probably for 60–80 years.

**III.** Relatively stable one-season settlements include, in the lowlands, site 49 at Rzychów, site 3 at Roźniatów, and site 6 at Krągola in the central Warta basin of the Wielkopolska-Kujawy Lowland.

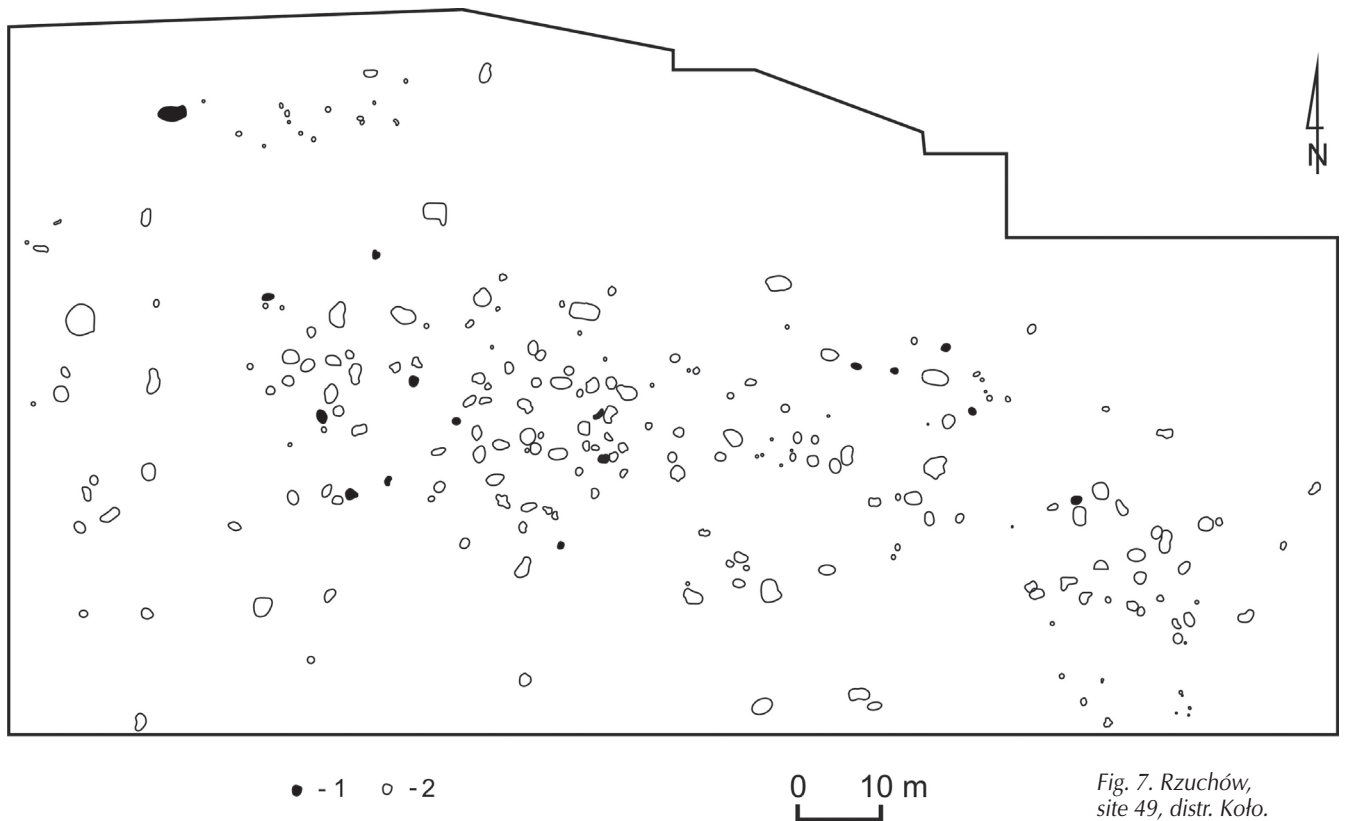


Fig. 7. Rzuchów, site 49, distr. Koło. Settlement lay-out. a – trapezoidal features; b – other features (Acc. to Makarowicz *et al.* 2010).

At site 49 at Rzuchów, remains of a TCC seasonal settlement consisted of 16 features, presumably storage pits (Makarowicz *et al.* 2010, 130), which instead of forming a compact concentration were documented in several small clusters, 90×50 m (Fig. 7). They were mostly one-layer features, which may confirm the seasonal nature of the settlement. Vessels recovered from the site come from the classical TCC complex (1800–1600/1500 BC).

Site 3 at Roźniatów Kolonia, similar in character, comprised 19 ‘Trzciniec’ features in two clusters (Makarowicz *et al.* 2010, 129). The features did not form regular arrangements. A dwelling with a sunken floor or a large storage pit has been recorded in the western part of the site.

An elliptical settlement, 170×70 m, at Kragola, site 6, dated to the classical horizon, was situated partly on the summit and on the

slopes of a small dune surrounded by boggy land. Researchers recorded several clusters of features and accompanying artefacts. In the central part of the settlement there is an area of over 1000 sq. m practically without TCC features, possibly a central yard. The size and layout of the clusters, each comprising several features and covering an area ranging from several dozen to several hundred square metres, suggest that the clusters should be interpreted as remains of farmsteads. Surviving remains include pits of an indeterminate function, a small number of cellars/storage pits, postholes and hearths. No regularly arranged remains of posts have been identified. It is likely that the settlement comprised light constructions that have left no traces in the ground (Makarowicz 2010, 125 f.). Some of the large features classified as pits may have been used as dwellings.

## Conclusions

In recent years, due to large-scale excavations related to the construction of highways, many TCC settlements have been identified in Poland, also in areas which have scarcely been archeologically explored to date. The research has brought new information on

stable forms of settlement in the Trzciniec circle period (ca. 1800–1200/1100 BC). The data presented in this paper may lead to two conclusions. Firstly, that long-term stable settlements existed not only in the loess areas in the southern enclave of the TCC. A num-

ber of them have been documented in the basins of the central Warta, Ner and Bzura, though no settlements of that kind have been discovered in the lowlands east of the Wisła. Secondly, that even in long-term settlements like those at Nowa Huta–Mogiła and at Polesie site 1, dwelling houses and other features were not limited to one zone for the whole period of inhabitation, sometimes lasting for hundreds of years. The TCC com-

munities slightly relocated their settlements every several dozen years. In fact, individual ‘hamlets’, some of them probably comprising a single farmstead, took up a relatively small area. When considered as objects of surface exploration, hamlets located several hundred metres apart from one another and forming one organism may be interpreted as separate sites.

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