

## **Continuation and change. Barrow societies from the 3rd and 2nd millennium BC in the Upper Dniester drainage basin in light of multidisciplinary studies**

In the 3rd millennium BC and in the first half of the 2nd (decline of the Neolithic and the Bronze Age), today's western Ukraine, in the upper Dniester drainage basin, was settled by human communities that buried their dead in barrows – graves covered by earthen mounds. On the uplands extending north of the East Carpathians arch, there appeared vast barrow cemeteries at that time, located on elevations and easily noticeable, owing to land deforestation. Researchers have observed recurrent spatial arrangements of barrows, extending in some cases in a linear fashion for several kilometres. This rule continued for over one thousand years, whereas funerary rites, grave structures and grave goods did change in successive periods.

The project objective is to investigate cultural development mechanisms in the upper Dniester basin (Forecarpathia, western Podolia) between 2800 and 1500 BC when barrows were built by the representatives of three successive communities, known in archaeological records as the Corded Ware culture, Gródek-Zdołbice group and Komarów culture. The principal research question concerns the identification of periods of continuation and intervals in the construction of barrow cemeteries in the area and time in question. Researchers are interested if cultural changes in that period were of a fundamental nature and were related to the emergence of foreign populations (migrants) or whether we deal here with protracted gradual changes within the same local populations. A crucial question is what significance the barrows had for their builders. Was the funerary/sacral function always the most important or – especially in a later period (2nd millennium BC) – was the social and political role they played equally important? The aim of the project is to provide information on the chronology of construction of selected cemeteries, in particular regular linear arrangements of barrows, and suggest a scenario of their construction and arrangement of various barrow lines. Furthermore, the project attempts to assess changes to the natural environment induced by the construction of the necropolises. Excavations are expected to answer the question who was buried in the barrows at particular stages of cemetery expansion, what kinds of grave structures and other under-barrow features were used, and what grave-goods were deposited with the dead. Whereas, specialist analyses will help solve the puzzle of the origin of barrow builders and relationships between them.

To answer these questions, state-of-the-art research methods will be employed, relying on the humanities and natural sciences: non-invasive surveys and excavations as well as multi-aspectual analyses and examinations such as archaeological, anthropological, palaeozoological, isotopic, genetic, paedological, geochemical, lithological, palynological and palaeobotanical.

The project is yet another stage in the study of prehistoric communities, settling the borderland between eastern and western Europe, conducted by the team of researchers from Poland and Ukraine associated with the journal *Baltic-Pontic Studies* published in Poznań. When the project objectives are accomplished, comprehensive information will be available to reconstruct the cultural development model of 'barrow communities', settling the transition area between the forest-steppe and forest zones in the 3rd and the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC.