

MOUND

Barrow builders from the 2nd millennium BC from south-western Poland in a spatio-temporal and bioarchaeological perspective

Walking through the forest or park, we can notice various types of hillock, often covered with moss, grass or trees. Many of them are naturally shaped forms, but some were built by man. Some such mounds were built quite recently, e.g. in order to install a mound septic system, but some of them may have been built in prehistory over the graves of deceased members of communities of various archaeological cultures. Therefore, the word MOUND became the project's acronym, reflecting the most important research problems, i.e. mobility, diet and funeral rite of the builders of these monumental structures.

The societies that were included in the project are associated with archaeological cultures living in the 2nd millennium BC in SW Poland. Interestingly, at that time, cremation spread throughout Europe in a relatively short time. Until recently, scientists maintained that changes in the worldview and beliefs of people were the cause of these transformation in the funeral rite in prehistory. However, some recent scientific discoveries may suggest that it was the increased movement of people and the associated spread of infectious diseases, especially flea/lice-borne plague, that may have contributed to the expansion of cremation, reflecting the symbolic "cleansing power of fire".

The main goal of the project is to verify the hypothesis about the increased migration of Early and Middle Bronze Age societies and its impact on the transformation of the burial rite from inhumation to cremation, based on bioarchaeological research of human remains. The research assumptions concern the recognition of the mobility of individuals, the identification of differences in biological condition as well as mortuary and funerary practices between inhumed and cremated individuals within one cemetery and between selected cemeteries of different archaeological cultures of the 2nd millennium BC from SW Poland. The indirect goal of the project is to implement a procedure to maximize the results of bioarchaeological research, especially the destructive ones, obtained from a single bone or tooth sample.

Human cremated and skeletal remains of archaeological cultures such as Únětice culture (UC), Tumulus culture (TC) and early Lusatian Urnfield culture (LUC) from SW Poland will be the analytical material of the project. These studies will be embedded in a spatio-temporal perspective thanks to geophysical (magnetic survey) studies of selected barrow cemeteries, as well as relative and absolute dating. In total, at least 260 individuals from over 200 flat and barrow graves from 9 cemeteries will be subjected to bioarchaeological research. Bioarchaeological analyzes will be carried out in the field of diagnostic imaging, physical (biological) anthropology, proteomics, genomics, histology, microscopy and isotopes (^{14}C , d^{13}C , d^{15}N , $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$). The results of the project's research will be disseminated in the form of press releases, national and international conference presentations and scientific articles.