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DEAD ANIMALS AND THE LIVING SOCIETY

MRTVÁ ZVÍŘATA A ŽIJÍCÍ SPOLEČNOST

MARZENA SZMYT

Abstract

This investigation closely examines the so-called animal burials from the Late Neolithic period. The Kujawy site (central Poland), occupied by the globular Amphora culture people, is used here as an example. The information we have on the animal burials from this site suggests important differences from other known animal burial sites. One example is the tendency to place animals in pits within the settlement. In this way, the dead (probably killed) and intentionally buried animals became part of the space used by living people. Another important observation concerns preferences in selecting animals for use in different spheres of human activity including ritual.

Keywords

Late Neolithic, animal graves, Globular Amphora culture, Kujawy region

1. Specification of the subject

It is a truism to say that animals do not only supply food and raw materials for humans. The role of animals in the life of both human societies and individuals has always gone far beyond that. The social life of animals in the societies of the past was mostly that of ritual. We shall have a closer look at this issue by examining the so-called animal burials known from the Late Neolithic in central Europe. The case area will be Kujawy, a region situated in central Poland (Fig. 1).

By the concept of “animal burial” (or better “animal deposition”; see Pollex 1999, 542) we mean an animal whose body (complete or only a part of it), arranged anatomically and bearing no traces of consumption, was intentionally placed in the pit or grave of a human being(s). Thus, the defining characteristics of an animal burial are a lack of traces of consumption, preservation of the anatomical arrangement of the deposited fragment or the whole body and intentionality, primarily observable in the care taken to keep the body deliberately arranged (Węgrzynowicz 1982). An optional, though frequent, element is objects accompanying the animal.

2. “Animal burials” in Neolithic Europe

Deposits of animal remains not intended for consumption are found in central Europe across

a broad time-span (Behrens 1964; Andrałojć 1993; Zalai-Gaál 1998; Kadrow, Makowicz-Poliszot 2000; Józwiak 2004). The first time when their incidence was high was in the Late Neolithic (otherwise called the Eneolithic or Chalcolithic period), i.e. 3500–2200 BC. At that time, “animal burials” are encountered at the sites of different cultural units such as Salzmünde, *Tiefstichkeramik*, late Funnel Beaker, Waternienburg, Bernburg, Corded Ware or Schönfeld; however, the vast majority of the burials are connected with two cultures: Baden and Globular Amphora. Until now, most attention has been given to so-called cattle burials (lately: Pollex 1998 and 1999; Zalai-Gaál 1998; see there for older literature), although remains of various other animals were deposited in a manner interesting to us as well (Behrens 1964; Andrałojć 1993).



Poloha lokality na mapě Evropy.
Location of the site on a map of Europe.

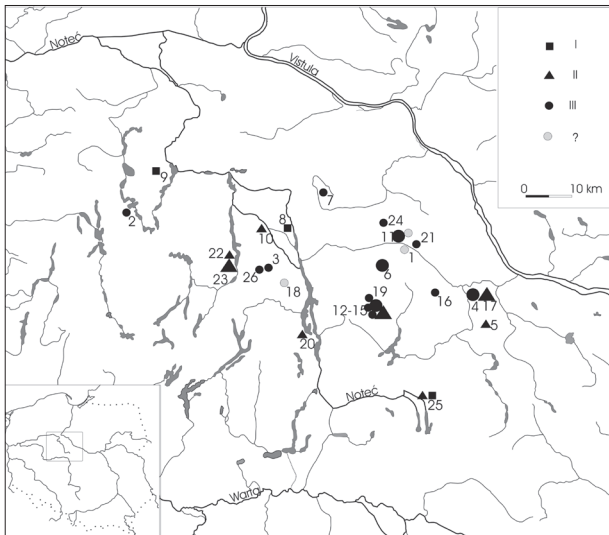


Fig. 1. Distribution of Late Neolithic animal deposits in Kujawy (site name and site number / feature number). Foll. Szmyt 1996, with amendments. **Obr. 1.** Rozšíření zvířecích depozit v pozdním enelitu na Kujavách (jméno a číslo lokality/číslo objektu). Podle Szmyt 1996 s dodatky.

Key: I–III – categories of functional context of deposits (see text); 1 – Adolfin; 2 – Biskupin 2a; 3 – Bożejewice 22/ feature A2; 4 – Brześć Kujawski 4/ features: 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5; 5 – Dębice Kolonia; 6 – Dobre 6/ features: I and II; 7 – Gąski 18; 8 – Inowrocław-Szymborze 1; 9 – Kierzkowo 1; 10 – Krusza Zamkowa 13; 11 – Kuczkowo 1/ features: A132, A136, A148, C2; 12 – Opatowice 1/ features: 1 and 38; 13 – Opatowice 3/ feature 64; 14 – Opatowice 35/ feature 34; 15 – Opatowice 36/ features: 67, 101A and 123; 16 – Oslonki 1; 17 – Pikutkowo 5/ features: I and II; 18 – Polanowice 4; 19 – Radziejów 4; 20 – Rzeszynek 1; 21 – Siniarzewo 1/ feature I48; 22 – Strzelce 2; 23 – Strzelce 3/ two features; 24 – Zarębowo 1; 25 – Zdrojówka 1/ two features; 26 – Żegotki 2/ feature A113.

Legenda: I–III – kategorie funkčního kontextu deposit (viz text); 1 – Adolfin; 2 – Biskupin 2a; 3 – Bożejewice 22/ objekt A2; 4 – Brześć Kujawski 4/ objekt: 1, 2, 3, 4 a 5; 5 – Dębice Kolonia; 6 – Dobre 6/ objekt I a II; 7 – Gąski 18; 8 – Inowrocław-Szymborze 1; 9 – Kierzkowo 1; 10 – Krusza Zamkowa 13; 11 – Kuczkowo 1/ objekt A132, A136, A148, C2; 12 – Opatowice 1/ objekt 1 a 38; 13 – Opatowice 3/ objekt 64; 14 – Opatowice 35/objekt 34; 15 – Opatowice 36/ objekt 67, 101A a 123; 16 – Oslonki 1; 17 – Pikutkowo 5/ objekt I a II; 18 – Polanowice 4; 19 – Radziejów 4; 20 – Rzeszynek 1; 21 – Siniarzewo 1/objekt I48; 22 – Strzelce 2; 23 – Strzelce 3/ 2 objekty; 24 – Zarębowo 1; 25 – Zdrojówka 1/ dva objekty; 26 – Żegotki 2/ objekt A113.

3. “Animal burials” in Late Neolithic Kujawy

Kujawy is one of several regions on the North European Plain where the beginnings of early agrarian settlement, tied to early *Linearbandkeramik*, date back to the middle of the 6th millennium BC (Czeraniak 1994). In the local process of cultural transformations a special role was played by the adaptation of early agrarian societies to lowland ecological conditions, interactions between early farmers and groups of hunter-gatherers and the active participation of the former in supraregional structures of information exchange. It is in such an environment, in the second half of the 5th millennium BC, that we notice the appearance of the first animal deposits, or rather “cattle burials” (14C datings: Siniarzewo 1 – Ki-6887 5470±55, Kuczkowo 1 – Ki-6888 5510±60 BP; Józwiak 2004). In the Late Neolithic, in Kujawy, we find one of the largest concentrations of “animal burials” (26 sites with 43 features), most of which fall in the period from 3250 BC to 2250 BC (Table 1). Of them, 40 (93%) are related to the GAC (Szmyt 1996 and 2000) while only 3 (7%) to the late FBC (Radziejów stage, phase V; see Koško 1989; Koško, Kurzawa 1997; Cofta-Broniewska, Bednarczyk 1998). In further discussion, I shall concentrate only on the series of GAC features. Similar to animal deposits from other regions, they can be discussed from different angles. In this paper, the scope of analysis is set by the following four questions: (1) In what form were animals placed in the features under analysis? (2) What was the functional context of the “burials”? (3) What is the species, sex and age structure of buried animals? (4) What was the relationship between the rules determining meat consumption and those defining the ritual value of animals?

4. Forms of deposits

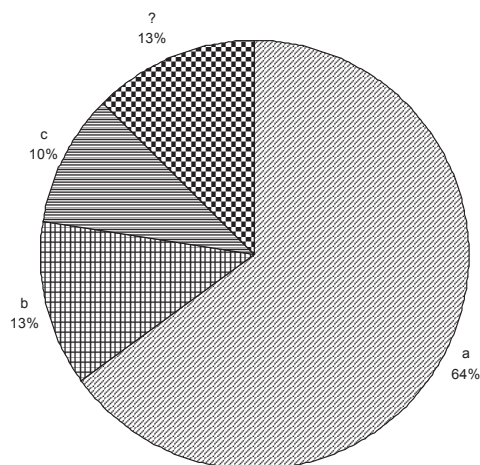
A distinction must be made between two forms of deposits (Fig. 2): (a) a complete animal(s) (26 features = 65%) or (b) a specific part(s) of an animal body (5 features = 12.5%). Finds have also been made of (c) mixed form deposits where a whole animal is accompanied by a part of a carcass of another animal (4 features = 10%).

- a) In the “burials” of whole animals, cattle dominates (Fig. 3). It occurred in 21 such features. A pig was recorded once, a dog four times, a sheep/goat twice and a deer just once. It must be added that 3 features were discovered which contained several (3–6) complete animal carcasses, with dominating cattle carcasses (2–5 individuals) being accompanied by other animals (a single pig or a dog, one instance of a

pig + sheep/goat). In most cases, the animals were laid on their sides (without clear orientation rules) sometimes with strongly flexed legs (originally tied?). Rarely, traces of additional practices were discovered such as, for instance, crushing the animal with a large boulder (Fig. 3). In 23% of the deposits, animals were accompanied by intentionally placed objects (e.g. vessels, bone discs, bone tools). In the case of a further 42%, only a small number of potsherds were found, which gives rise to the question of the intentionality of their placement (a possible effect of destroying vessels during rituals?). Some pits in which animals had been placed had some structural elements such as sides built of rubble or paved floors; the latter were sometimes made out of carefully placed bits of vessels.

- b) Features with partial deposits (Fig. 4) contained the remains of cattle (from 1 to 6 individuals) and only once an aurochs. In the latter case, it was the head of an aurochs. In partial “cattle burials”, legs (Fig. 4) or the front parts of carcasses were deposited. In three features, cattle fragments lay alongside such objects as vessels, a clay drum or a clay spindle bob. The deposits were sporadically accompanied by the stone elements of a structure.
- c) Mixed deposits always contained one or two whole cattle carcasses and body parts of other cows as well as pigs. On a single occasion 2 cows were placed alongside a whole sheep/goat. The arrangement of all the remains gave prominence above all to the bodies of cattle.

In one case, under the remains of an animal (pig), the body of a one-and-a-half-year-old child was found. The goods included vessels, clay drums and bone tools. No additional structures were recorded.



5. Contexts of deposition

Animal deposits were placed (Fig. 5): (I) within the grave of a human being(s) (7.5% of features), (II) close to the grave of a human being(s) (27.5% of features) or (III) within the boundaries of a settlement (57.5% of features; on the description of GAC settlements cf. Szmyt 2001). Most of the features belonged to category III and represented type (a) “burials”. Out of 5 partial deposits, 3 belonged to category II, while 2 represented category III. Out of 3 mixed deposits, 2 belonged to category III, while 1 represented category II. In all the categories “cattle burials” dominated. Accompanying goods were placed with a slightly higher frequency in settlement features (III). Within settlement boundaries, clusters of pits containing animal deposits were found containing 2–5 separate features. In cemeteries, clusters of “animal burials” were less frequent and were made up of two features.

6. Species of buried animals

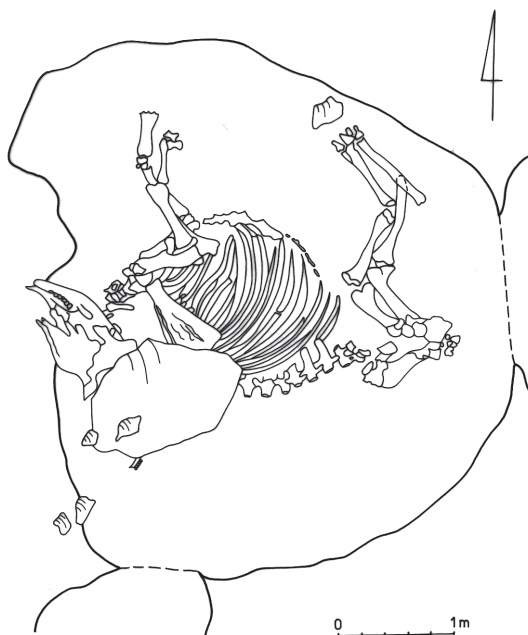
In the GAC “animal burials” in Kujawy, the following species of animals were recorded: cattle, pigs, sheep/goats, a dog and single specimens of deer and aurochs (Fig. 6). The clear dominance of cattle deposits was observed (85% of features), in which remains of animals aged 3–5 years prevailed. Only once were the remains of a very young animal (calf) identified. There is no clear difference in the frequency of the deposition of female or male animals, although female individuals are in the majority in partial deposits (b), whereas males dominate in settlement features (III). What is more, in “burials” containing old individuals (6–10 years) two females and one male were identified. No clear differences in “burial goods” related to the age or sex of the animals were recorded.

Fig. 2. Animal deposits of the Globular Amphora culture in Kujawy. Frequency (%) of basic deposit forms (see text).

Obr. 2. Zvířecí depozita kultury kulovitých amfor na Kujavách. Procentuální zastoupení forem zvířecích deposit (viz text).

7. Eating and non-eating

From GAC sites in Kujawy, we have a diverse set of animal remains that enables us – at least preliminarily – to identify the rules of selecting animal species for consumption and ritual purposes. To be precise, we have three types of collections: (A) postconsumption animal remains from settlements/camps (i.e. remains of “everyday” consumption), (B) postconsumption animal remains from the grave(s) of a human being(s) (interpreted as the remains of ritual consumption – taking place during funerary rituals) and (C) animal remains discussed in this paper bearing no traces of consumption and coming from “animal burials”. Due to the differences in the size of collections and gaps in archival records (concerning features explored long ago), the best method of analysis here seems to be a comparison of the incidence of the remains of particular animal species in the collection types. For the same reason I have limited the study to domesticated animals (cattle, sheep/goat, pig) and to one chronological stage, the so-called classic one (Szmyt 1996; 1999), i.e. to phases IIb and IIIa (c. 3250–2250 BC). A diagram (Fig. 7) shows the considerable differences in the share of animals in individual collection types. It can even be claimed that the collection types give three different pictures of the use made of particular animal species. As it turns out, the pig was mainly eaten, especially frequently during funerary rituals; it did not play an independent role in the sphere of the sacred. The sheep and goat were utility animals of little value in the sphere of the sacred. Only in the case of cattle were their roles in the spheres of the sacred and the profane similar. This species was most often used in “everyday” consumption and absolutely dominated in “animal burials”.



8. Conclusions

So far studies of the question have usually paid most attention to one category of animal deposits, i.e. to “cattle burials”. Without denying their special value for far-reaching interpretations, we should go back, however, to the analysis suggested by H. Behrens (1964), i.e. to attempt to place “cattle burials” against the background of deposits containing the remains of other animal species, in particular domesticated ones. The collection of data on the animal deposits made by the populations of the Globular Amphora culture in Kujawy, discussed in this paper, has – when compared to data for other regions – a number of specific (individual) characteristics. A special mention is deserved by the clear tendency to place deposits in pits within settlement boundaries (category III). A smaller group is made up of deposits in direct or indirect connection with the grave(s) of a human being(s). In this way dead (killed?) and intentionally buried animals became part of the space used by the living members of the community. In some cases we have data indicating a purposeful placing of deposits along the limits of a settlement, where they could have marked its bounds. Another important observation concerns preferences in selecting animals for use in different spheres of human activity including different rituals. Although these observations must not be generalised, they are an important stimulus for further research into “animal burials”.

Note

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Fig. 3. Żegotki site 2, Kujawy-Pomorze voivodeship. “Cattle burial” (feature A113). Foll. Szmyt 2000.

Obr. 3. Żegotki site 2, Kujawy-Pomorze voivodeship. „Zvířecí pohřeb“ (objekt A113). Podle Szmyt 2000; doplněno.

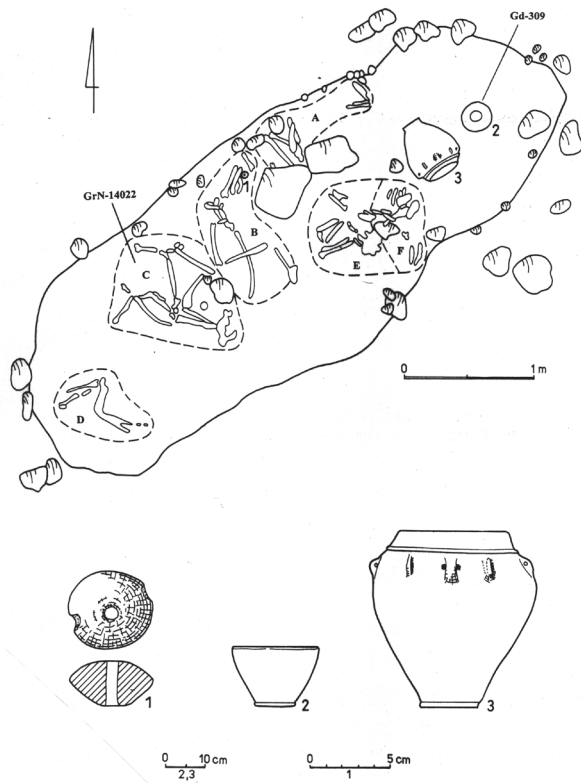


Fig. 4. Krusza Zamkowa site 13, Kujawy-Pomorze voivodeship. "Cattle burial". Foll. Koško 1989.
Obr. 4. Krusza Zamkowa, lokalita 13, Kujawy-Pomorze voivodeship. „Zvířecí pohřeb”. Podle Koško 1989, doplněno.

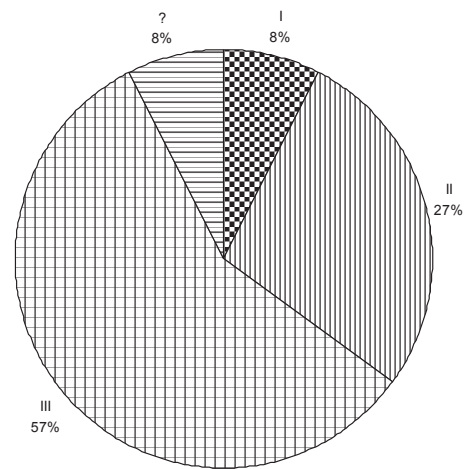


Fig. 5. Animal deposits of the Globular Amphora culture in Kujawy. Frequency of deposits in three forms of the functional context (see text).
Obr. 5. Zvířecí depozita kultury kulovitých amfor na Kujavách. Zastoupení depozit ve třech formách funkčního kontextu (viz text).

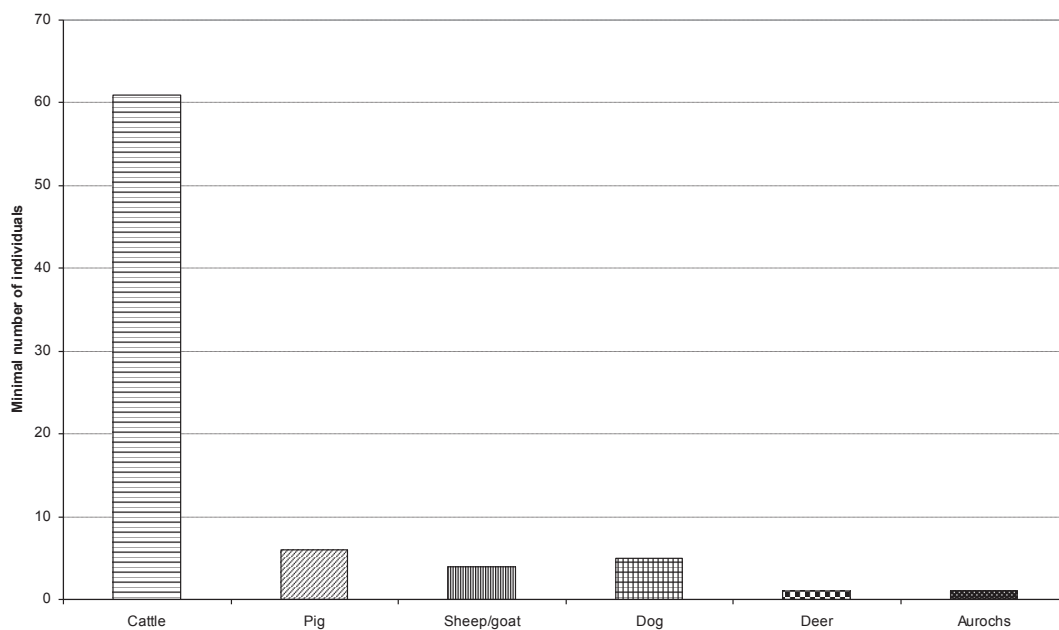


Fig. 6. Animal deposits of the Globular Amphora culture in Kujawy. Number of individuals of different species.
Obr. 6. Zvířecí depozita kultury kulovitých amfor na Kujavách. Počet individuí v různých třídách.

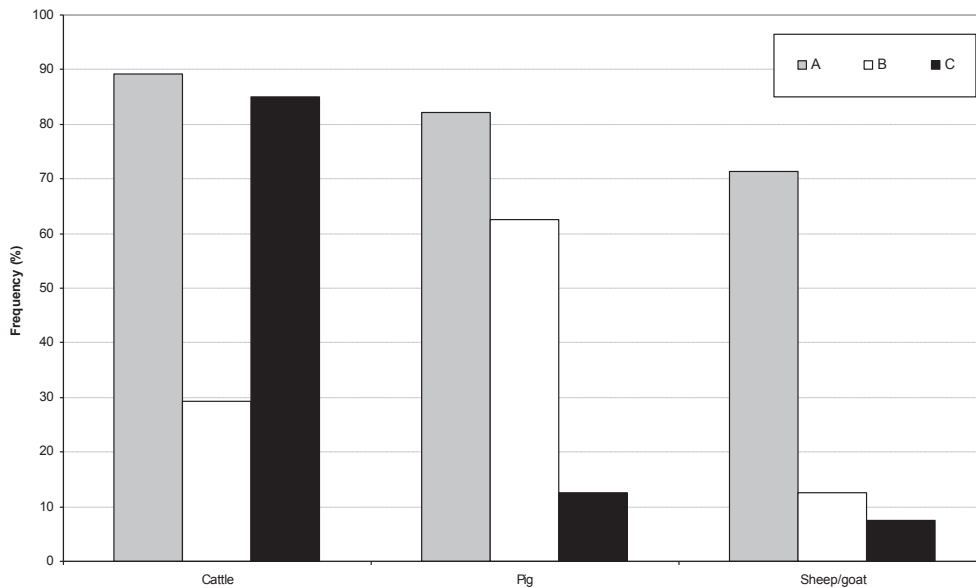


Fig. 7. Animal deposits of the Globular Amphora culture in Kujawy. Incidence of remains of selected species of domesticated animals in three collection types (A, B, C – see text).

Obr. 7. Zwiřećci depozita kultury kulovitých amfor na Kujawách. Výskyt pozůstatků vybraných druhů domestikovaných zviřat ve třech typech souboru (A, B, C – viz text).

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Souhrn

Studie se zabývá problematikou zvířecích pohřbů z období mladého neolitu na Kujavsku ve středním Polsku v prostředí kultury kulovitých amfor. Zvláštní pozornost je věnována pohřbům hovězího dobytka. Na jejich důležitost poukázal již H. Behrens (1964). Kolekce dat spojených s kulturou kulovitých amfor na Kujavsku byla důkladně analyzována v předložené studii a srovnávána s daty z jiných regionů. Zvláštní pozornost si zasloužila snaha umístit deposita v jámách mimo hranice sídliště (kategorie III). Menší skupinu tvoří depozita přímo nebo nepřímo spojená s hroby s lidskými pohřby. V tomto případě mrtvá (usmrčená?) a záměrně pochovaná zvířata se stala součástí prostoru užívaným žijícími členy komunity. V některých případech máme údaje indikující smysluplné umístění podél hranic sídliště, kde by mohli znamenat jejich hranici. Další důležitý poznatek se týká preferencí ve výběru zvířat pro použití v různých sférách lidských aktivit, včetně rozdílných rituálů. Ačkoliv tyto poznatky nemusí být generalizovány, jsou důležitým podnětem pro další studium problematiky zvířecích pohřbů v rámci polského neolitu.

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