MAREK GEDL

STUDIES ON SETTLEMENT OF THE RIVER LISWARTA BASIN IN THE BRONZE AND EARLY IRON AGE

The river Liswarta is the largest left-side tributary of the river Warta higher course (fig. 1). The areas placed within the basin of the Liswarta were till recently very scarcely known in archaeological respect. Only in 1955 were investigations started in this area on all of the settlements development, in prehistoric as well as in the early Middle Ages. Systematic preliminary research embracing the entire Liswarta basin and excavation works conducted on a large scale in selected sites, with the help of scientists representing auxiliary disciplines, have now allowed a reconstruction of the development of settlement in this region.

Fig. 1. Location of the river Liswarta (A) basin in the territory of Poland

The Liswarta basin was in all those periods situated far from any main settlement centres. It is a border area lying between Little-Poland, Upper Silesia and the so called Central Poland. The evolution of settlement did not display any continuity here. Periods of very intense settlement life used to be broken by long periods during which the inhabitants abandoned their abodes—in those times no traces of human existence could be detected here. Observations provided by archaeological sources have been confirmed owing to the results of intense palynological studies.

At the beginning of the Bronze Age the areas enclosed in the Liswarta basin formed a zone stretching out at a considerable distance from the influence of any centres, in which early Bronze Age cultures were then developing. Only in period II of the Bronze Age appeared here, coming from the West or the South-West, a group of population which has been classified as one belonging to an early Lusatian Culture. This group formed a small settlement centre over the Liswarta middle course. Situated to the east of today’s town Krzepice (fig. 2), it lasted far into the Bronze Age. In the territory of the Liswarta basin no traces of the existence of Trzciniec Culture could be stated, it is therefore to be presumed that the Jura ridge of the Cracow-Częstochowa Upland, was a barrier separating the population inhabiting the higher Warta and Liswarta basin from any contacts with the eastern regions.

In period II of the Bronze Age the population of the pre-Lusatian Culture buried here their dead non-cremated. In the cemeteries of Opatów and Zbrojewsko, Kłobuck distr., a number of skeleton graves, equipped with only bronze ornaments have been found. They were mostly large pins and bracelets, characteristic for this early Lusatian Culture (figs. 3 and 4). The dead were laid with heads directed to the south. No traces have been found to allow the supposition of graves having been covered by mounds. This pre-Lusatian Culture continues here up to period III of the Bronze Age. The dead used to be buried further without cremation and only bronze ornaments were laid in the graves (fig. 5). This is, therefore, a later phase of the so-called pre-Lusatian Culture. Both those phases, the early and the later one, discovered in the investigated area, are known only from grave materials. No other well dated traces of settlement from period II or III of the Bronze Age have so far been found.

New culture currents are seen to appear in the Liswarta basin territory during period II of the Bronze Age. They acted on the local population changing many of its customs in all sorts of fields of culture. A local kind of early Lusatian Culture4 started to be formed. Cremation began to spread with the character of a general funeral custom. One part, however, of the local society still kept to the former rite of burying their dead not cremated in regular graves (fig. 6). Ash-urns, cremation burials
and skeleton graves are seen to lie next to each other. Not only metal ornaments but also pottery occurs in grave equipment. The dead were laid in oblong pits, directed more or less along a south-west axis, with heads turned mostly to the south. Some of the skeleton graves were encircled by stones or covered with stone pavements. Inside the cremation graves
there is generally only an urn filled with charred bones, sometimes covered by another dish. In graves lacking urns the burnt bones are heaped together in the sand. The above mentioned graves, as well as those having no urns, can be connected with similar Lusatian graves from Silesia, or from south-west Little-Poland. Bell graves are very seldom found.
Fig. 4. Bronze artefacts from graves of pre-Lusatian Culture, period II of the Bronze Age
1: Zbrojewsko, Klobuck distr., site 3, grave No. 96; 2-3: Opatów, Klobuck distr., site 1, from the destroyed graves

here (fig. 7), and quite an exception is grave No. 347 from the cemetery of Danków, Klobuck district. This was a large, bath-like stone structure, 150 by 470 cm size, containing two distinct burials, one of which was of skeleton rite, the other cremated but with no urn.

The early Lusatian style spreading in period III of the Bronze Age brought a new way of ornamenting pottery by protruding knobs (fig. 8).
Next to these vessels, typical for the western part of an early Lusatian phase, many local forms of vessels appear here (fig. 9). Some of them remind specimens of the Konstantynów group, which was being simultaneously formed in Middle Poland. Late forms of large-eared pins (fig. 10) are the most characteristic among bronze ornaments.
Fig. 6. Zbrojewsko, Klobuck distr. Site 3. Plan and profile of skeleton grave from an early phase of per-Lusatian Culture of period III, of the Bronze Age, grave No. 3
1: late variety of bronze eared pin; 2: remainders of dead individual's teeth

Fig. 7. Zbrojewsko, Klobuck distr. site 3. Plan and profile of cremation ashurn bell grave (No. 47) from an early phase of Lusatian Culture, Bronze Age, period III
Fig. 8. Zbrojewsko, Klobuck distr., site 3. Pottery ornamented with knob motive from graves of an early phase of Lusatian Culture, Bronze Age, period III

1: — grave No. 94; 2: — grave No. 104

Fig. 9. Zbrojewsko, Klobuck distr. site 3. Pottery from graves of an early phase of Lusatian Culture, Bronze Age, period III

1: grave No. 103; 2: grave No. 7; 3: grave No. 30; 4: grave 74
The settlement centre formed during period II of the Bronze Age over the Liswarta middle course, is seen to develop in period III. It seems that the population may have increased and had joined new territories to the former dimensions of settlement. The range, however, of quite intense settlement continues to be restricted to a very limited area (fig. 2). Part of the population moved then down towards the mouth of the Liswarta, forming there another, much smaller, early Lusatian settlement centre in the neighbourhood of the today's locality Wąsosz Górny, Kloßuck distr.

In period IV of the Bronze Age the larger settlement centre over the middle course of the Liswarta, and the smaller one at its mouth, continue to exist. No very intense development of culture is then confirmed among the people covering the Liswarta basin. There can even be observed traces of a certain regression, or was it only some king of stagnation, possible after considerable changes that had occurred in period III of the Bronze Age. The small number of graves equipped with metal ornaments, typical for period IV of the Bronze Age, may be proof of the population having fallen to some kind of poverty, or perhaps was it a lack of lively contacts.
Fig. 11. Disposition of sites from the declining phase of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age (period V of the Bronze Age and Hallstatt C) in the Líswarta basin territory

with any leading centres of that time, particularly with the Silesian centre.

A true turning point in this state of affairs occurred at the end of period IV of the Bronze Age, or even at the beginning of period V. The settlement displays then very strong development. The Lusatian Culture population is seen to cover rapidly all the area of the Liswarta basin, not limiting its expansion to that territory only. Areas till now void of settlement, such as the region situated between the higher course of Odra and the Cracow-Częstochowa Jura range, were now decidedly turned into colonies. This part of the country became inhabited by a population of uniform culture, similar to that of the dwellers of the Liswarta basin. It has been determined as the sub-group Częstochowa-Gliwice, belonging to the well known Higher Silesia-Little-Poland group of Lusatian Culture.

Several scores of new settlement points and over a dozen new cemeteries can be noted to have appeared at that time in the Liswarta basin (fig. 11). But the dead continue to be buried in cemeteries of the former ages (Danków, Opatów, Zbrojewsko). Particularly interesting observations could be done in the cemeteries of Danków and Zbrojewsko. In both these cases new graves dated to period V, had been laid over older ones used in the periods II and III of the Bronze Age. It has been doubtlessly stated that the old graves used to be destroyed when laying new ones over them. This would evidence the breaking of all bonds of tradition between the former and the latter inhabitants of the same region.

Among archaeological sites dated to period V of the Bronze Age, or to an early Hallstatt phase (Hallstatt C), the best known are cemeteries where skeleton graves and cremation graves appear next to each other. A characteristic feature of graves dated to the decline of the Bronze Age and the first period of an early Iron Age in the area under discussion, is their strengthening by a stone construction (fig. 12). They were most often surrounded by granite stones of glacier origin. Often several layers of tightly fitted pavement stones cover the burials. Bigger or smaller sherds and fragments of vessels may be found among the stones, lost

perhaps during the funeral or by fulfilling other rites connected with keeping memory of the deceased.

Skeleton graves were always lined more or less along a north-south axis. They were as a rule surrounded or covered by field stones. Inside an oblong, oval and sometimes square pit the dead individual used to be laid supine, stretched out horizontally with head to the south. In most cases were the bones completely decayed. Only small fragments lying close to bronze objects were found whole. Relatively well preserved skeletons were quite an exception (Opatów). The dead were always given earthenware vessels, generally placed near the head or the feet. Sometimes was the deceased provided with bronze ornaments. The head may have been dressed by a leather or fabric frontlet set with little bronze knobs. Some of the ornaments were spirally twisted pieces of bronze wire or bronze rings hung on both sides of the head; moreover pins.
necklaces and bracelets. Other metal objects, such as razors or bronze axes are found very rarely.

Next to skeleton graves also cinerary pit burials are found in the same graveyards. The pits are oblong, their outlook and dimensions are similar to the former ones (fig. 13). They are also encircled or covered by pavement stones and directed likewise north-south. The bottom contains scattered and charred bone fragments instead of the remainders of a skeleton. Single cases have shown bone fragments scattered according to the anatomic order, the remainders of a skull placed in the south end of the grave pit, exactly like in skeleton graves. The equipment of cinerary graves of the mentioned type does not differ much from what used to be laid in skeleton graves. Pottery and small bronze ornaments are frequent here also.

Fig. 13. Zbrojewsko, Klobuck distr., site 3. Plans of cremation grave No. 173, with aspect related to skeleton grave
A: layer of pavement stones over the grave; B: grave pit with stones around, charred bones are marked by crosses; 1-3 — vessels constituting the grave equipment
Cremation graves lacking ash-urns are somewhat different; their pits are small, round or oval (fig. 14), often encircled with stones or covered by pavement. Their equipment, vessels or small bronze ornaments, are found among burned bones inside the pit. Some cemeteries displayed also graves with ash-urns.

![Diagram of small cremation pit-grave](image)

Fig. 14. Zbrojewsko, Klobuck distr., site 3. Plan of small cremation pit-grave No. 39

1-7: vessel constituting the grave's equipment. Crosses mark charred bones

The remainders of cemeteries are able to provide more archaeological information than all that is left of simultaneous settlements. We may, it is true, mention 30 sites in which settlements dated to the decline of the Bronze Age and the Hallstatt period are sure to have existed (fig. 11). Excavation works have however been carried out only in seven of them. An interesting result is the discovery of remainders of rectangular buildings, the size of which was 300 by 450 cm (Cykarzew Północny, Częstochowa distr.). These buildings had pillar construction. In some other places the culture layer disclosed storage pits and firebeds.

It has been stated that settlements of Lusatian Culture may have often expanded over long ranges of territory. Their traces stretch out sometimes along several hundred meters and up to two km. Artefact material is, however, very scarce. It can be surmised that a particular settlement consisted of several or over a dozen of loosely placed buildings raised on the edge of a terrace, situated over the flood plain of a river or stream. A typical example of such an irregularly scattered settlement, spread on a large part of a river terrace, is the site assemblage of the locality Bodzanowice, Olesno distr. (fig. 15). Other cases show settlements distinctly concentrated on points protruding towards the flood plain (e.g. Danków, Klobuck distr. site 6). None of these settlements of Lusatian Culture in the area under discussion have shown traces of any fortification elements. They were all open settlements of a rural character.

The relic inventory dated to the decline of the Bronze Age in the described territory fits perfectly into forms characteristic for the Upper Silesia-Little-Poland group. Their vessels are often egg-shaped pots, bowls and dippers as well as small vase-like dishes (fig. 16). Large vessels are less frequent. Round earthenware disks and rattles supplement these
Fig. 15. Bodzanowice, Olesno distr. Disposition of sites of Lusatian Culture from the decline of the Bronze Age
1: settlement, 2: cemetery
ceramic forms. No ornaments are applied to pottery. Very seldom have we met vessels covered by engraved geometric figures, such as lines of notches or grooves, accompanied sometimes by dimples.

The pottery forms mentioned above are in principle typical for the decline of the Bronze Age. They appear, however, also at the beginning of the early Iron Age. The Liswarta basin territory is a very conservative area in the range of the Higher Silesia-Little Poland group of Lusatian Culture. New forms in the production of vessels and their ornamentation brought by a Hallstatt style at the start of an early Iron Age, do not penetrate into this region. Therefore in the Hallstatt C period pottery keeps here forms still typical for period V of the Bronze Age. This raises difficulties in the dating of particular collections, especially those lacking more typical artefacts. Relatively scarce are specimens of small plastic figures made in clay. Beside a clay animal head, some clay wheels with spokes were found in the Danków cemetery; they may have been the model of a cart.

Metal artefacts are mostly ornaments and parts of attire, made in bronze (fig. 17). Headgear ornaments are bronze knobs with little apertures sown on to frontlets, twisted wires or bronze ringlets hung up to the temples and fixed to frontlets. Bronze necklaces used to claps the neck, bracelets were found on the dead people’s wrists and rings made out of bronze tape on their fingers. Bronze pins with flattened and curled up end are frequent. Shinguards dressing the legs and all sorts of bronze pendants appear seldom. All the ornaments found in graves, even those from the beginning of Hallstatt C period were made here in bronze. One ornament made out of electron (Dąbrowa, Klobuck distr.) is quite an exception. Other metal artefacts are bronze socketed axes (fig. 18, 2, 3)
and razors (fig. 18, 1). Single sites in the territory of the Lisiwarta basin display only few metal objects. An exception is the large cemetery of Opatów, Klobuck distr. where a relatively big concentration of bronze artefacts has been found in the graves. Some of the richly equipped skeleton graves of this cemetery are considered to be the wealthiest burials of Lusatian Culture in the south part of Poland.
Most intense settlement at the decline of the Bronze Age developed in the central part of the Liswarta basin, particularly in zones overlying the river's middle course, the higher and middle course of Opatówka and the countryside of Klobuck, spreading over the higher course of Biała and Czarna Oksza. On the contrary the area of the river Liswarta higher basin and the territories covering its lower course, and those over the lower Oksza and lower Kocinka, display very weak contemporary settlement. This picture is by no means the result of insufficient research, for all the Liswarta basin has been thoroughly and equally investigated. The cause may be sought in natural conditions. Settlers of the Lusatian Culture population push in a tight mass to the threshold of the Jura Upland, they are, however, not willing to penetrate into this territory. There may also have been other factors inhibiting the advance of settlement of this group of population down the river Liswarta and some of its tributaries.

Among single groups of the territory under discussion most interesting is the great cemetery in Opatów, covering an area of several hectares. Although investigations lasted here many years, its boundaries are still uncertain. It is probably the only specimen in all of the Liswarta basin used from period II of the Bronze Age till Hallstatt D included. A second contemporary cemetery (site 7) lies close by. Both cemeteries are separated by a settlement lying on the Witocin hamlet. The close neighbourhood of two large, contemporary cemeteries, surrounded by a number of settlement objects, proved the outstanding role of the Opatów cemetery assembly, lasting throughout all the period of Lusatian Culture persisting in the described territory. It should be added that the rich equipment of many of its graves raises the Opatów cemetery to a most eminent rank among all cemeteries of the Bronze Age, period V and Hallstatt C in the territory of the Liswarta basin.

Another interesting settlement assemblage has been recognized at a distance of several kilometers south-west from Opatów, over the Liswarta, in today's locality Danków, Klobuck distr. The assemblage consisted of a large cemetery and several homesteads. Its boundaries are difficult to be exactly determined, because of the close neighbourhood of a second assemblage in today's Zbrojewsko, Klobuck distr., which presents also a large and longlasting cemetery, and several contemporary settlements. Moreover, very interesting is a cemetery assemblage discovered in the region of the locality Walenczów, Klobuck distr. Four separate cemeteries of Lusatian Culture have here been distinguished, they may all have been the remainders of one large graveyard, already much destroyed. Settlements discovered in the near neighbourhood had certainly existed
there simultaneously. The remaining cemeteries of this region were presumably smaller and had belonged to smaller settlement assemblages.

In period V of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age (Hallstatt C) peak development of Lusatian Culture settlement in the Liswarta basin may be noted. However, still in the Hallstatt C period settlement in this region became weaker. Cemeteries used in the Bronze Age (Danków, Zbrojewsko) seem to become neglected. New objects appeared, but they were not numerous. The regression of settlement become deeper in the Hallstatt D period. We know only scarce material from that time (Stare Kamionki, Olesno distr., Starokrzepice, Kłobuck distr., Opatów, Kłobuck distr.). The Liswarta basin clearly underwent depopulation, forests grew over areas formerly densely inhabited. We lack completely materials that could be dated to the declining phase of Lusatian Culture.\(^1\) Neither did Pomeranian Culture from an early or middle La Tène phase penetrate this region with its bell- and chest-form graves. New colonisation of the territories situated in the Liswarta basin occurred only at the time of the Roman influence.

NOTES


2 Among others things, anthropology, palaeobotanic, metallurgy.

3 M. Gedl, B. Ginter, K. Godłowski, Pradzieje i wczesne średniowiecze dorzecza Liswarty [The Prehistory and Early Middle Ages in the Liswarta Basin], Part I, Katowice 1970, part II in print.


5 H. Wiklak, Początki kultury łużyckiej w Polsce środkowej [The Beginnings of Lusatian Culture in Central Poland], Łódź 1963, pp. 13–32.


12 It was represented by cemeteries in Małusy Wielkie, Częstochowa distr., Ziemieście, Gliwice distr. and Kuśmierki, Częstochowa distr. K. S a l e w i c z, Cmentarzysko ciałopalne w Małusach Wielkich [Cremation Cemetery in Małusy Wielkie], “Wiadomości Archeologiczne,” Vol. XV, 1938, pp. 149–157; i d e m, Cmentarzysko łużyckie w Małusach Wielkich i zagadnienie związków kultury łużyckiej z t. zw. kulturą "grobow kłoszowych" [Lusatian Cemetery in Małusy Wielkie and the Problem of Bonds Existing between Them and the so-called “Bell Grave” Culture], “Wiadomości Archeologiczne,” Vol. XVI, 1939, pp. 53–75; E. D o b r z a n s k a, Późnokulturowe cmentarzysko ciałopalne w Ziemieścicach w powiecie gliwickim [Late Hallstatt Cremation Cemetery of Lusatian Culture in Ziemieście, Gliwice Distr.], “Przegląd Archeologiczny,” Vol. XIII, 1961, pp. 150–175; M. C a b a l s k a, Cmentarzysko kultury łużyckiej w Kuśmierkach w powiecie częstochowskim, a zagadnienie początków i rozpowszechnianie się zwyczaju palenia zmarłych [Lusatian Culture Cemetery in Kuśmierki, Częstochowa Distr. and the Problem of the Beginning and Spread of the Cremation Rite], “Przegląd Archeologiczny,” Vol. XVIII, 1968, pp. 122–150.