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RECENT RESEARCH ON THE EARLY IRON AGE IN THE TERRITORY TO THE EAST OF THE LOWER VISTULA

The present report comprises a short information concerning recent research on the so-called "early Iron Age" in the territory situated to the east of the lower Vistula. It covers the Hallstatt D period as well as the early and middle La Tène periods (550—100 B. C.). Out of several archaeological sites examined during the last four years, the Lidzbark Warmiński site, Łęcze I in the Elbląg district and the lake of Piłaki in the Mrągowo district, being typical of this region (fig. 1) are described in this article in greater detail, whereas materials from other sites are only briefly discussed, as reports in which they will be widely treated will be published by the explorers who are carrying on excavations of these sites. Data concerning earlier excavations were published several years ago.¹

An excavation of rescue of a barrow at Lidzbark Warmiński² was carried out in 1957 by Mrs. W. Ziemińska-Odoj, M. A. and the author of this article, under the auspices of the Conservator of Archaeological Monuments in the Olsztyn Voivodship. The barrow was in a fairly good state of preservation. Now it is 1.5 m. high; its diameter being about 11 metres (fig. 2). It was surrounded at its base by a ring of large stones, at present covered by its mound. In the southern part of the barrow, near the ring, a stone pavement of 1.5 × 3.5 metres, was discovered, running from the south-east to the north-west. At both ends of this stone pavement, there were several large stones vertically placed. The pavement was dug into a layer of original humus, resting on virgin-soil. This humus layer did not appear outside the stone ring on a surface of a few metres around the barrow; so that was the place from which earth for the mound was taken. The stratigraphy shows that the barrow was surrounded by stone ring, after the earth for the mound had been dug out, so originally the stones were not covered. On the top of the barrow another stone structure, at present completely destroyed, must have existed; its remnants: stones that fell down, are still there.

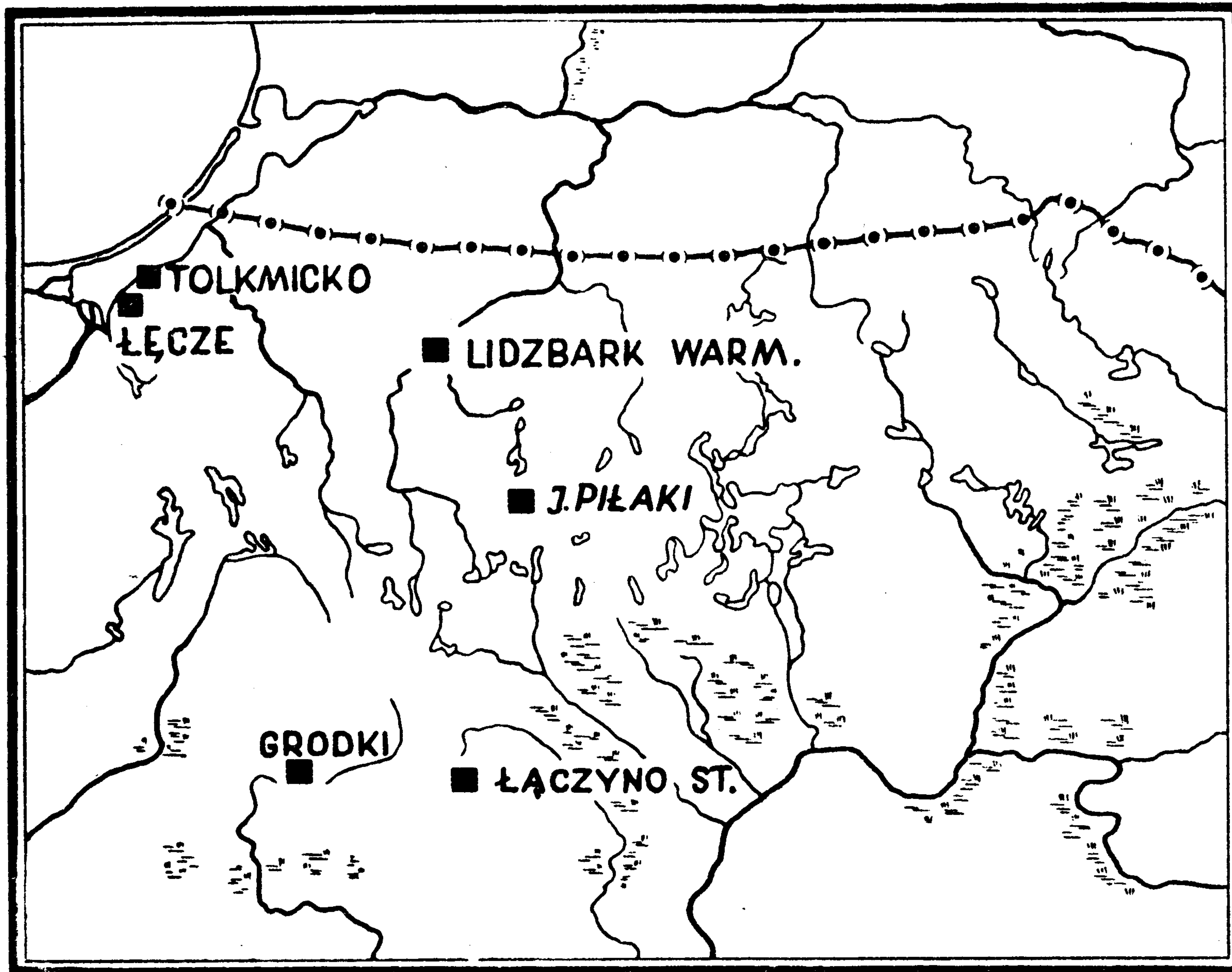


Fig. 1. Early Iron Age sites to the east of the lower Vistula examined in the years 1958—1959. (Drawn by W. Szymanowski)

Cremation graves were discovered on the pavement. Urns were placed near one another, partly in two layers, thus we could distinguish ten stratigraphically earlier burials and eleven later ones. Altogether thirty two graves were discovered on the pavement. If we add those damaged by casual diggings, we may assume that the barrow contained over fifty burials. An average grave furniture consisted of an urn covered with a dish, an associated vessel and, sometimes, also of small fragments of burnt bronze ornaments. In one case, an iron ring was found among burnt bones. Among the pottery the following types were distinguished: big-bellied pots of various types, dishes, bowls, lids, cups and slender pots with double handles (fig. 3). They are ornamented with dashes, with rows of stamps and of "cog-wheel" impressions, with nail-impressions, with hollows, borders and knobs. No difference between finds from both layers of the graves was noticed.

Other barrows, slightly different in structure but also containing many burials, were examined by Mrs. Ł. Okulicz, M. A. at Grodki³ in the Działdowo district and at Łączyno Stare in the Przasnysz district. In both cases there were groups of barrows constructed of stone, containing over twenty graves each. Finds therefrom are similar to those of Lidzbark Warmiński.

Excavations of the Łęcze I earthwork in the Elbląg district, were carried out in 1958 and 1959. They were undertaken by local authorities with a view

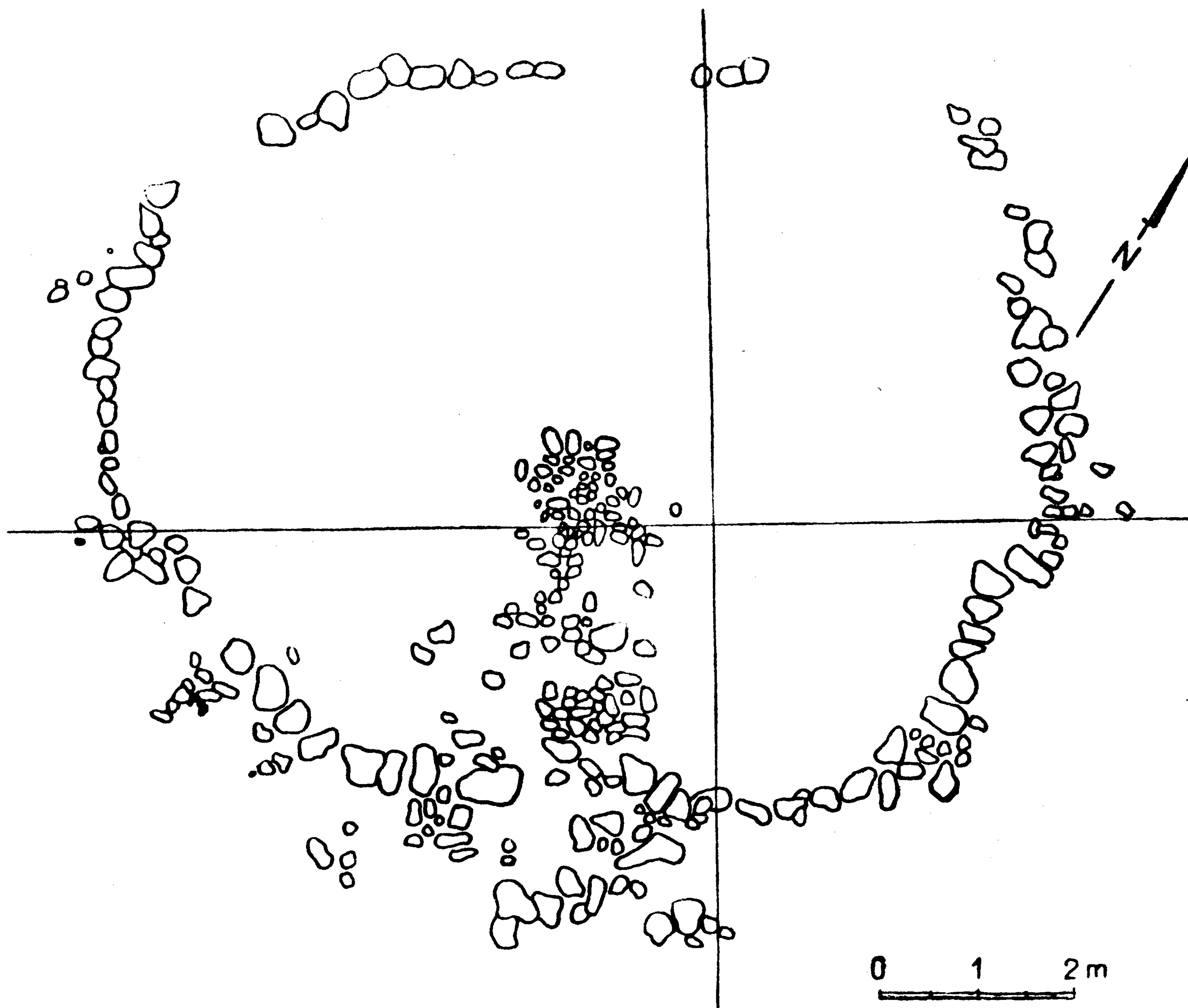


Fig. 2. Lidzbark Warmiński. Plan of the stone structure of a barrow

to verify the results of the German excavations which have never been adequately published⁴ and the objects found were lost. The earthwork is situated above the shore of the Vistula bay, among the hills, on the top of one of them, surrounded on three sides by deep ravines. Its area, about 40×50 metres, is encircled by ramparts preserved to the maximum height of 2.5 metres. The inside of the earthwork is so destroyed by previous diggings that, in spite of numerous sondages, no place was found where a trench could be cut. Only one, fairly thin, culture-bearing layer was discovered there. On the south-western side, four metres beneath the top, there is a lowland on which remains of a small settlement were discovered. A second settlement is situated towards the south-east of the earthwork, 20 metres beneath the top of the hill, in a distance of about 70 metres. The rampart of the earthwork and its rubble was dug through, the small settlement to the south-west of the earthwork was almost completely excavated and the spread of the second settlement was defined. A cemetery, probably connected with these settlements and containing cremation burials

under a stone pavement, was ascertained in a distance of 1.5 kilometres to the south-east.

On the basis of the results obtained, the following facts were ascertained: the trench cut through the rampart showed that the top of the hill had been partly levelled, before the settlement was established. It is traceable in the almost perfectly horizontal top outline of the virgin-soil under the rampart; the earth was pushed down along the slope, thus partly covering the south-western small lowland. The earth pushed down from the top also covered thin dark layers on the slope: probably traces of some strengthening of the slope or of some works done at the levelling of the top. The base of the rampart is about 4 metres wide. Remnants of crossed burnt beams give evidence of the construction of the rampart made probably of earth and strengthened longwise and crosswise with beams and probably with pieces of dry wood. Layers of rubble were discovered beneath. They reach the above mentioned small lowland, covering pits dug into the layers of earth pushed down from the top of the hill. This is a convincing stratigraphical proof that the settlement within the earthwork was contemporary with that on the small lowland. The latter covered a small area and was almost completely excavated. Eleven pits were discovered there; among them several storage pits and probably traces of one seriously destroyed semi-subterraneous hut were noticed. The other settlement, situated to the south-east of the earthwork, was excavated in a lesser degree. It is larger than that described above and covers an area of several hundred square metres at the footing of the hill on a slight slope.

Finds are represented chiefly by pottery, among which various types can be distinguished, namely bowls (fig. 4 : 3), cups (figs. 4 : 5 and 6), plates (figs. 4 : 7), sieve-like and ovoid pots (fig. 4 : 1), big-bellied ones (figs. 4 : 2), biconical pots with funnel necks, vases and small bowls (fig. 4). Each type shows a great diversity in shape, size and ornamentation. Among patterns of the ornamentation were noticed: notches on the edge of the pots (fig. 4 : 1), dashes, nail-impres-sions, hollows, knobs, borders and even stamps. Among other finds the following should be mentioned: an iron sickle, a spear-head (both made of wrought iron⁵), pieces of iron slag, fragments of bracelets of bronze wire, bronze and clay pendants, spindle-whorls and stone polishers. Lumps of amber were exceptionally numerous: 159 pieces; in one pit only (No. 4) thirty two of them were found. Some of the amber lumps show traces of working, but a part of them may have occurred there without human agency. Osteological materials represent remains of mam-malia and of fishes.

Quite the same materials as those of Łęcze occurred at the several kilometres distant earthwork of Tolkmicko.⁶ This earthwork was examined by L. J. Łuka, and his examinations were also undertaken with a view to verify this archaeological site, although it was published more adequately than the Łęcze site.

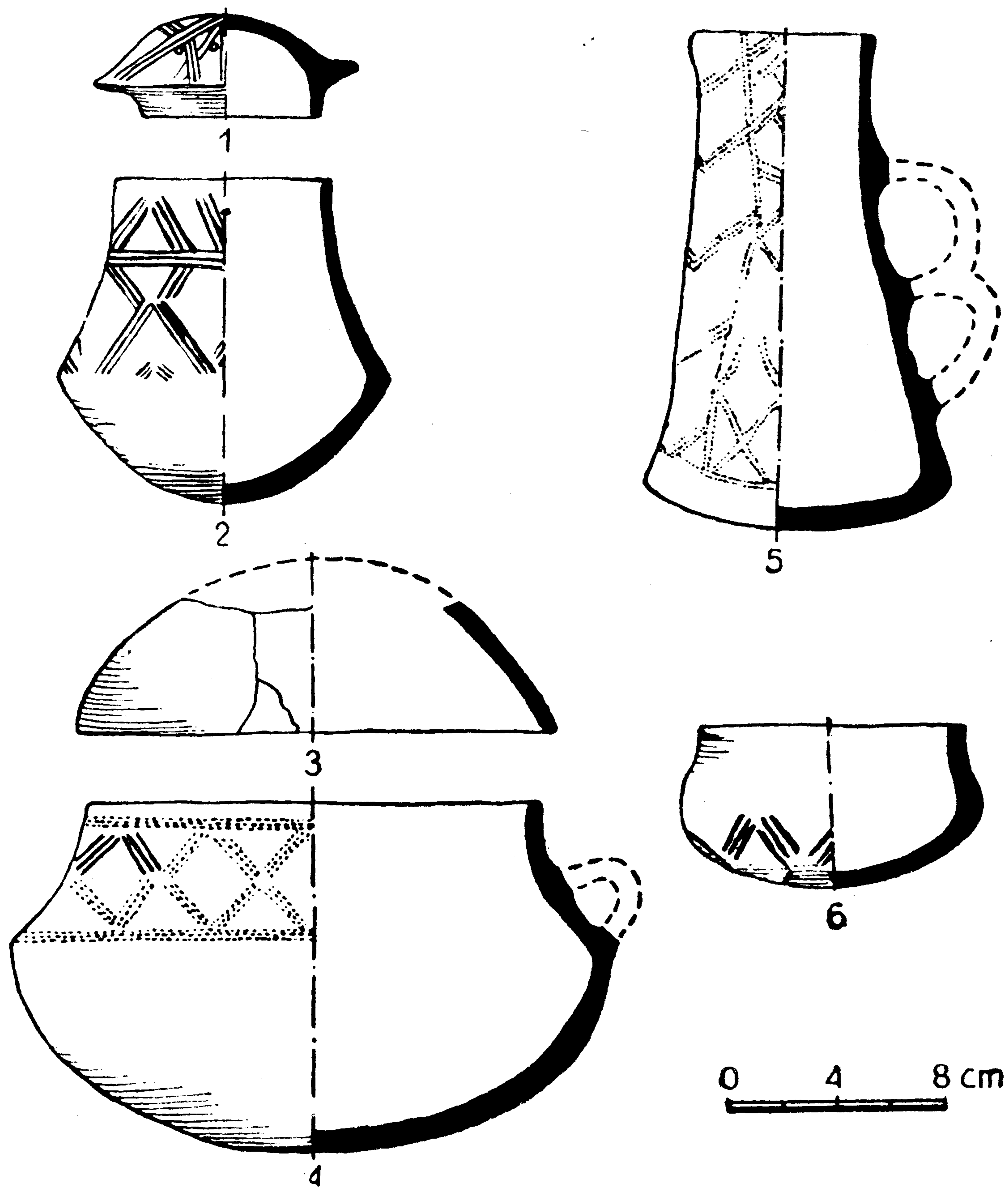


Fig. 3. Lidzbark Warmiński. Pottery from graves. 1,2 — grave XXX;
3, 4, 6 — grave XXII; 5 — grave XX

In 1959 a team of frog-men from the Warsaw Sub-water Club, with a group of archaeologists from the Mazurian Museum in Olsztyn and from the State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw, carried out investigations on a lake settlement submerged with the waters of the Piłaki lake in the Mrągowo district.⁷ It was the so-called "pile-dwelling", situated in a shallow bay, in the south-western part of the lake, several metres from the present line of the shore. Frog-men drew out from the bottom a great deal of pottery and moulded clay, querns, grinders, polishers and pieces of wood. Timber structures are distinctly traceable in the slime, thus the area of the settlement can be ascertained. The members of the group determined the position of the objects drawn out from water in relation to the shores of the lake; they were sitting on pontoons which followed the divers. The pottery found in the water is similar to that of other settlements described here, however, it differs in ornamentation and in proportion of pots

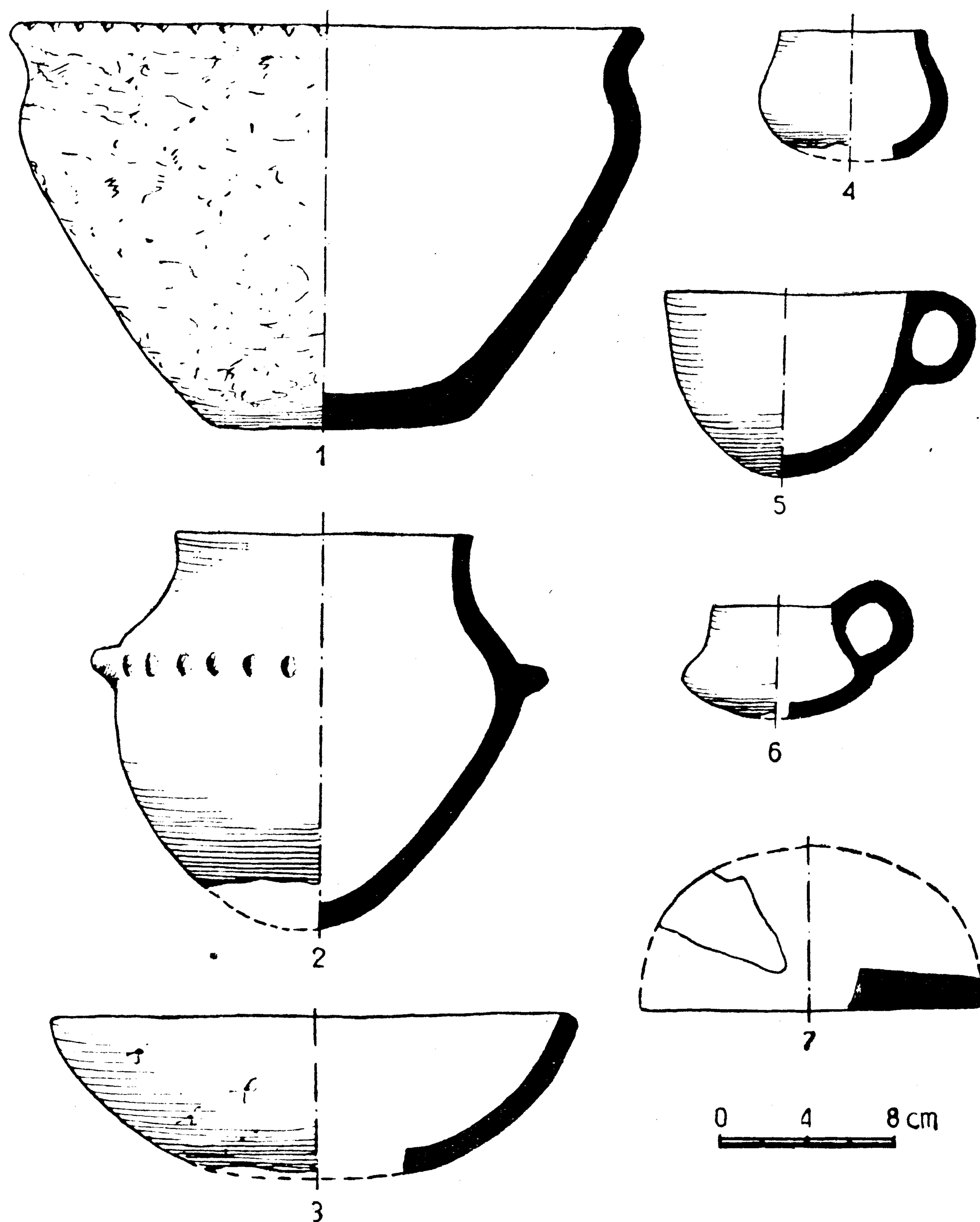


Fig. 4. Łęcze, district of Elbląg. Pottery from settlements

of each type. Plates, big-bellied and ovoid pots, cups, dishes, ladles and miniature vessels were found. Their bottoms are flat or convex. The ornamentation consists of borders, nail impressions and perforations. Further examinations of this interesting site are planned.

All the archaeological sites described above should be assigned to the so-called "early Iron Age" which, so far, has not been studied in detail. The absence of proper chronological indicators, the differences between the finds from these sites and materials from the neighbouring regions and insufficient publica-

tions of materials obtained during former German excavations make the establishment of the precise chronology of this region difficult. It seems that the Łęcze I and the Lidzbark Warmiński sites are dating from the early phases of the La Tène period, and the settlement on the Piłaki lake is probably contemporary with them. Further examinations, first of all those of cemeteries, will give precision to the foregoing suggestion on the dating of the early Iron Age sites in the territory in question.

Archaeological cultures of this region are very interesting. In the Hallstatt period or in the VI period of the Bronze Age (the so-called Baltic culture) the culture of East-Prussian barrows appeared there. It consisted of various cultural elements (the finds from graves differed from those of settlements).⁸ The excavations described in this article provided new interesting data on the above mentioned fact. We can observe the continuity of the earlier tradition of the Mazurian and Warmian group in the Lusatian culture (fig. 4 : 1,3,7) and of Pomeranian culture which originated from the latter one (fig. 3 : 1,4,6), as well as foreign, though similar, elements called "Baltic" which seem to be in part the local variety of the forms of both preceding cultures (fig. 3 : 2,4—6, fig. 4 : 2,5). Similar facts may be observed in the field of ornamentation. We also notice the adaptation of forms, for instance the convex bottoms of pots which originally had flat ones; convex (rounded) bottom is regarded as a particular feature of the Baltic pottery. In the settlements the Lusatian and Pomeranian influences preponderate, whereas the Baltic elements occur chiefly in the pottery from graves. The finds from Łęcze I and Lidzbark Warmiński give evidence of this fact (figs. 3—4). It is interesting that finds from some of the so-called "pile-dwellings", in spite of their similarity to those from other types of settlements bear a strong resemblance to the Lusatian materials from the territory to the south of the Bug and the Narew rivers.⁹

There are several possibilities of explaining the existence of this cultural conglomerate. Such phenomena often occur in the regions where various cultures come into contact; however, this problem has not yet been worked out theoretically. We have here to deal with the mixture and assimilation of human groups "carrying" various material cultures and this resulted in the birth of a culture bearing specific features. This may serve as an evidence of long peaceful contacts, of mutual penetration and perhaps also of the existence of exogamy. The latter is the most convenient explanation of the changes in the pottery which, as it is commonly believed, was being manufactured in those times by women. However, the similar connections of different elements can also be noticed while studying metal objects¹⁰ and this indicates a wider scope of this problem. Undoubtedly further research, mainly comparative studies of the relations on the areas where various cultures come into contact will allow us to examine more precisely the process dealt with in this article.

NOTES

¹ J. Antoniewicz, *Polskie badania archeologiczne nad Baltami w okresie powojennym (1945—1957)* [Polish Archaeological Research on the Baltic Peoples in the Post-War Period (1945—1957)], "Rocznik Olsztyński", Vol. I, 1958, p. 295—317.

² J. Dąbrowski, Ł. Okuliczowa, *Sprawozdanie z badań kurhanu, odkrytego w Lidzbarku Warmińskim* [Report on an Excavation of a Barrow at Lidzbark in Warmia], "Rocznik Olsztyński", Vol. II, 1959, p. 81—117.

³ Materials in print, "Rocznik Olsztyński", Vol. III.

⁴ J. Antoniewicz, *Zagadnienie wczesnożelaznych osiedli obronnych na wschód od dolnej Wisły i w dorzeczu rzeki Pregoly* [The Early Iron Age Defensive Settlements to the East of the Lower Vistula and in the Pregola Basin], "Wiadomości Archeologiczne", Vol. XX, 1954, p. 330; J. Dąbrowski, *Sprawozdanie z badań na grodzisku Łęcze, pow. Elbląg w r. 1958* [Report on the 1958 Excavation of the Łęcze Earthwork in the Elbląg District], "Wiadomości Archeologiczne", Vol. XXVI, 1960.

⁵ J. Piaskowski, *Metaloznawcze badania wyrobów żelaznych z okresu halsztackiego i lateńskiego, znalezionych na Pomorzu i Mazowszu* [Metalographical Examinations of Hallstatt and La Tène Iron Objects Found in Pomerania and Masovia], "Wiadomości Archeologiczne", Vol. XXVI, 1960, p. 273—280.

⁶ Antoniewicz, *Zagadnienie...* [The Early Iron Age...], p. 330.

⁷ K. Rossius, *Die sogenannten Pfahlbauten Ostpreussens*, "Praehistorische Zeitschrift" Vol. XXIV, 1933, p. 25, 87; J. Antoniewicz, *Nowe zabytki z osady halsztackiej w Rybnie, pow. Mrągowo* [New Finds from a Hallstatt Settlement at Rybno, Mrągowo District], "Wiadomości Archeologiczne", Vol. XXIII, 1956, p. 355—356.

⁸ W. Heym, *Eine baltische Siedlung der frühen Eisenzeit am "Kleinem See" bei Kl. Stärkenau*, "Mannus", Vol. XXIX, 1937 p. 3—52 and Z. Hołowińska, *Osadnictwo z okresu wczesnożelaznego w Elblągu* [The Early Iron Age Settlement of Elbląg], "Wiadomości Archeologiczne", Vol. XXV, 1958 p. 212—222.

⁹ Rossius, op. cit., fig. 9; 10 b, g; 12 e, g; 14; J. Dąbrowski, *Some Problems of the Lusatian Culture in North-East Poland*, "Archaeologia Polona", Vol. II, 1959, p. 165—172, pl. II.

¹⁰ J. Kostrzewski, *La cachette du premier âge du fer de Kalinówka Kościelna, arrondissement de Białystok*, "Eurasia Septentrionalis Antiqua", Vol. IV, 1929, p. 155 and E. Šturms, *Regionale Unterschiede in den Beziehungen zwischen dem Ostbaltikum und Skandinavien in der Bronzezeit*, "Contributions of Baltic University", 1947, No. 53, p. 3.