

## **Detailed description of grave no. 543 from the cemetery at Domasław**

### **Introduction and Site Overview**

The Hallstatt-period cemetery at Domasław, excavated between 2005 and 2007 by the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Wrocław, represents one of the most significant Early Iron Age burial sites in Central Europe. Over 800 graves were documented, approximately 300 of which contained internal wooden constructions. The burials, dated to the Hallstatt C and D phases (HC–HD), included standardized ceramic assemblages alongside numerous imported artefacts such as swords, bronze vessels, personal adornments, and toiletry items. The necropolis reflects strong cultural and economic ties between the local population and major subalpine centres of the Hallstatt culture, as well as direct contacts with the Mediterranean world (Gediga, 2010, 2016; Gediga & Józefowska, 2019).

### **Grave 543: Architecture and Stratigraphy**

Grave 543, dated to the HD1 phase and located in the southeastern sector of the cemetery, stands out as one of the most architecturally complex and richly furnished features at the site (Gediga, 2016; Goslar, 2019). It comprised a timber-lined pit measuring 4.14 × 3.78 m and nearly 2 m deep – the deepest known burial at the necropolis. The rectangular burial chamber was constructed with log walls approximately 1.27 m long and clay-lined on the inside. Impressions of flat-laid wooden slats at 0.8 m depth likely represent a structural lid or covering, with subsequent collapse causing a funnel-shaped depression in the central pit area. The chamber fill contained charcoal fragments, calcined human remains, 252 intentionally broken and burnt ceramic vessels, and melted bronze and iron artefacts.

### **Anthropological Findings**

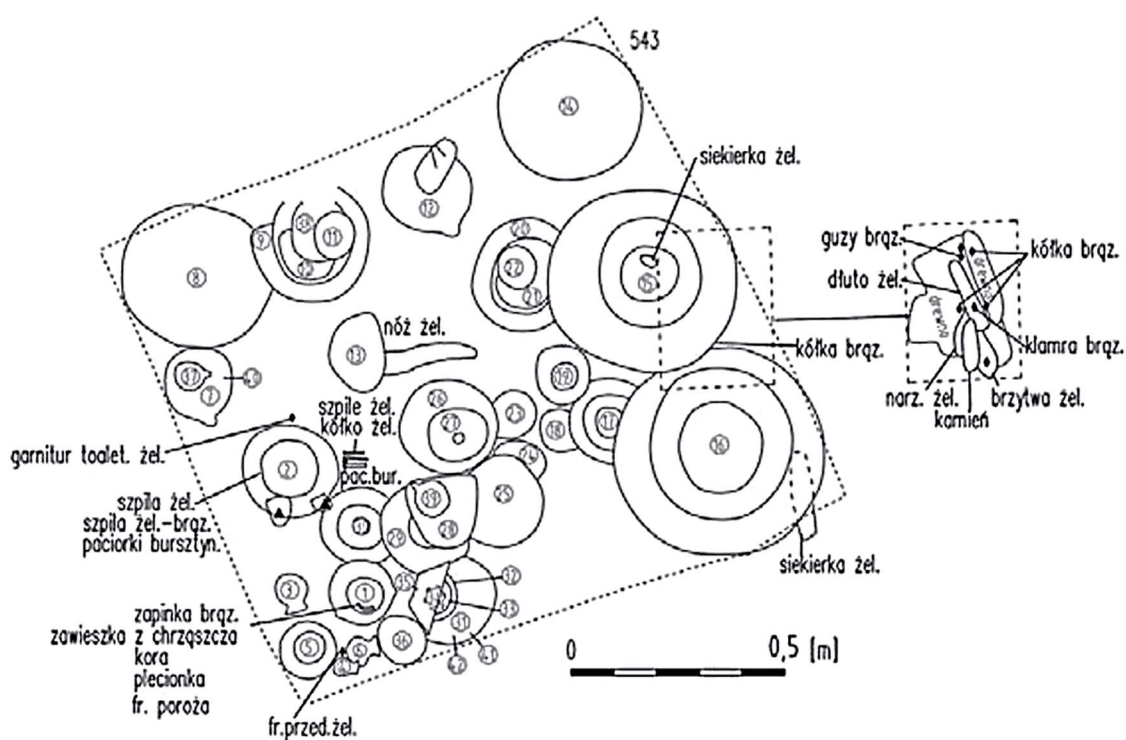
Anthropological analyses of the cremated human remains were conducted in accordance with current standards for the study of cremated human bones (Dąbrowski et al., 2020; Dokládal, 1999; Hałaszkó, 2006; Hunger & Rother, 1978; Ubelaker, 1978). Anthropological analyses of cremated human remains indicate that each urn contained a single individual. Urn 1 held the remains of a juvenile approximately 9–10 years old, of undetermined sex, along with cremated sheep or goat bones (Gediga & Józefowska, 2020). Urn 2 contained an adult individual aged 20–35 years, also of undetermined sex. Urn 5 contained too few bones for biological parameters to be reliably determined.

### **Grave Goods and Spatial Distribution**

The eastern sector of the burial chamber yielded a plate and two large vases. Beneath them lay a socketed axe and the remains of a probable bast-fibre belt with a bronze buckle, decorative knobs, and a small container or "pouch" fastened with rings. The pouch contained a stone smoother, iron tools, and a razor wrapped in leaves of an aquatic plant. A flat axe with lateral projections was driven into the centre of one of the vessels, which subsequently filled with sediment; the original method of suspending or positioning the axe remains unclear.

In the central chamber zone, a goblet covered with a stone was found. Adjacent to the large vases were a plate-shaped bowl with two cups, two small vases, two additional cups, and four bowls. A large iron knife over 19 cm long, the longest of its kind in the cemetery, was deposited beside one smaller bowl.

The southwestern chamber section was densely packed with small ceramic vessels. A large vase-urn (No. 2) contained cremated remains of an adult, amber beads, and fragments of bronze and bronze-iron pins. Nearby were an iron ring, another amber bead, two iron pins, and an iron toiletry set vertically inserted into the floor. A cup (No. 5) contained finely calcined bone fragments and was surrounded by three miniature rhyta or flasks, an iron artefact, a plate-shaped bowl, a bowl, a vase topped with an inverted pot, a ladle, and a lid. A group of stacked ceramics included four cups, a small inverted bowl, and another plate-shaped bowl. One ceramic cup featured a pointed base and a downward-bent lug instead of a traditional handle (Gediga et al., 2020; Gediga & Józefowska, 2018). Such vessels are interpreted as casting spoons used for pouring molten bronze into moulds and have parallels in Late Bronze and Early Iron Age funerary and settlement contexts (Malinowski, 1962).



Spatial distribution of grave goods in burial 543 at the Hallstatt-period cemetery in Domasław (after Gediga & Józefowska, 2018).

## Organic Remains and Textile Evidence

Urn 1 contained the cremated remains of a juvenile individual and an oval birch bark lid (*Betula* sp.) with regularly spaced perforations interpreted as sewing holes (Sady, 2020). Beneath this lay a bronze harp fibula adorned with seventeen elytra of the beetle *Phyllobius viridicollis*, strung onto a blade of grass and affixed to the fibula's spiral disc (Ablamowicz & Józefowska, 2020). Traces of braided vegetal material, likely horsetail (*Equisetum* sp.), were preserved nearby, similar to other graves at Domasław. Deeper in the vessel, fragments of a birch bark container, possibly with wicker or wattlework sides, were found.

Two textile types were identified: a woollen 2/2 twill and a fine flax 1/1 tabby weave (Maik & Rybarczyk 2015; 2016; Józefowska et al. 2023). The woollen twill was wrapped around an iron pin among the cremated remains. These textiles, found in six graves at Domasław, represent the earliest of their kind in Poland and closely resemble Hallstatt cultural zone textiles. Notably, no artefacts in the urn showed evidence of burning.

The urn also contained a fragment of red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) antler, the only wild animal bone identified at the site from the Hallstatt period, and 14 sheep/goat limb bones (21.03 g Ablamowicz, 2020).

## Symbolism and Interpretation

Organic remains in the burial include the beetle elytra, textiles, birch bark containers, and plant fibres, illustrating the importance of natural materials rarely preserved archaeologically. The presence of *Phyllobius viridicollis* elytra attached to a fibula and the pollen of common dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) on a birch bark fragment, with eroded exine spines and coated with sediment, may indicate intentional deposition or seasonal contamination, although modern contamination is unlikely given the winter excavation (Gediga et al., 2020; Gediga & Józefowska, 2020). Macroscopic and SEM-BSE imaging revealed no insect body parts or imprints on the birch bark fragments.

Symbolically, beetles are known for ritual and protective significance in ancient contexts, particularly in Egypt and Roman Europe, where stag beetle amulets were believed to ward off evil and aid healing (Pliny the Elder). The carefully strung beetle shells in grave 543 likely held symbolic or ritual meaning. Combined with other grave goods, such as the razor wrapped in aquatic plant leaves, the red deer antler, and the casting spoon, the burial suggests the individual may have held a specialized role, possibly as a healer, ritual specialist, or outsider with esoteric knowledge.

## Additional Finds: Grave 1264

Outside the wooden chamber, grave 1264 contained a disc-shaped plate with a crescentic idol motif, a pot, three flask-like vessels, two small bowls, and a lid. Nearby, cremated bone mixed with charcoal was discovered inside an organic container, topped by a twisted iron neck ring.

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