

# pca

postclassicalarchaeologies

volume 2/2012

**SAP Società Archeologica s.r.l.**

Mantova 2012



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#### DESIGN

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#### PUBLISHER

SAP Società Archeologica s.r.l.  
Viale Risorgimento 14 - 46100 Mantova  
[www.archeologica.it](http://www.archeologica.it)

#### PRINTED BY

La Serenissima, Contrà Santa Corona 5, Vicenza

Authorised by Mantua court no. 4/2011 of April 8, 2011

## CONTENTS PAGES

<b>EDITORIAL</b>		<b>5</b>
<b>RESEARCH</b>		
<b>G. Dean</b>	GIS, archaeology and neighbourhood assemblages in Medieval York	<b>7</b>
<b>É. Jean-Curret</b>	SIG, morphologie et archives foncières médiévales: dynamiques spatiales d'un quartier de Bordeaux aux XIV <sup>e</sup> et XV <sup>e</sup> s.	<b>31</b>
<b>B. Lefebvre</b>	The study of urban fabric dynamics in long time spans. Modelling, analysis and representation of spatio-temporal transformations	<b>65</b>
<b>T. Bisschops</b>	It is all about location: GIS, property records and the role of space in shaping late medieval urban life. The case of Antwerp around 1400	<b>83</b>
<b>A. Nardini</b>	Siena: un 'prototipo' di GIS di fine millennio a dieci anni dalla creazione	<b>107</b>
<b>V. Valente</b>	Space syntax and urban form: the case of late medieval Padua	<b>147</b>
<b>C. Citter</b>	Townscape-Landscape. The shaping of the medieval town of Grosseto and its territory (AD 600-1400)	<b>167</b>
<b>K.D. Lilley</b>	Mapping truth? Spatial technologies and the medieval city: a critical cartography	<b>201</b>
<b>BEYOND THE THEME</b>		
<b>V. Caracuta, G. Fiorentino, M. Turchiano, G. Volpe</b>	Processi di formazione di due discariche altomedievali del sito di Faragola: il contributo dell'analisi archeobotanica	<b>225</b>
<b>P. Forlin</b>	Airborne LiDAR Data analysis of Trentino Alpine landscapes: a methodological approach	<b>247</b>

## DOSSIER - PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY IN EUROPE

- G.P. Brogiolo** Archeologia pubblica in Italia: quale futuro? 269
- J. Flatman** The past, present and future of rescue archaeology in England 279
- F. Iversen** The land of milk and honey? Rescue archaeology in Norway 299
- I. Catteddu, M.A. Baillieu, P. Depaepae, A. Roffignon** L'archéologie préventive en France: un service public original 319
- A. León** Public administration of archaeology in Spain. Notes on the current situation and future prospects 337

## RETROSPECT

- A. Buko** Early Medieval archaeology in Poland: the beginnings and development stages 361

## PROJECT

- P. Chevalier** *Le Corpus architecturae religiosae europaeae, saec. IV-X, en France et la base de données Wikibridge CARE* 379

## REVIEWS

- G. Bertelli, G. Lepore, *Masseria Seppannibale Grande in agro di Fasano (BR). Indagini in un sito rurale (aa. 2003-2006)* - by **M. Valenti** 385
- E. Vaccaro, *Sites and Pots. Settlement and Economy in Southern Tuscany (AD 300-900)* - by **M. Valenti**
- S. Hakenbeck, *Local and Ethnic Identities in Early Medieval Cemeteries in Bavaria* - by **F. Benetti**
- J. Buckberry, A. Cherryson, *Burial in Later Anglo-Saxon England c.650-1100 AD* - by **A. Chavarria Arnau**
- N. Christie, P. Stamper (eds), *Medieval Rural Settlement. Britain and Ireland, AD 800-1600* - by **C. Citter**
- A.J. Boas, *Domestic Settings. Sources on Domestic Architecture and Day-to-day Activities in the Crusader States* - by **F. Benetti**
- A. Plata Montero, *Génesis de una villa medieval. Arqueología, paisaje y arquitectura del valle salado de Añana (Alava)* - by **J. Sarabia**
- J.D. Bodenhamer, J. Corrigan, T.M. Harris (eds), *The Spatial Humanities. GIS and the future of humanities scholarship* - by **P. Marcato**
- F. Cambi, *Manuale di archeologia dei paesaggi. Metodologie, fonti, contesti* - by **M. Valenti**
- N. Marquez Grant, L. Fibiger (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeological Human Remains and Legislation* - by **M. Marinato**
- V. Pace (ed), *L'VIII secolo: un secolo inquieto* - by **M. Camerin**
- G. Pantò (ed), *Archeologia a Chieri. Da Carreum Potentia al Comune basso-medievale* - by **M. Smanio**
- I. Ahumada Silva, *La collina di San Mauro a Cividale del Friuli. Dalla necropoli longobarda alla chiesetta bassomedievale* - by **M. Valenti**

# Early Medieval archaeology in Poland: the beginnings and development stages

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## 1. Introduction

Although interest on Polish Middle Ages has long tradition, going back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Kiersnowski 1955; Abramowicz 1992, with literature), they became clearly more advanced in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> and, the more so, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was inspired by the increased curiosity about the Slavic origins of Poland. A key figure of the period was king Stanisław August Poniatowski (1732-1795), who took interest, among other things, in the discoveries of Early Medieval burial grounds. His example was followed by the others. Tadeusz Czacki (1765-1813) went down in history as the explorer of the royal tombs at Wawel, which he opened in 1791 and then described the remains and objects found in them (cf. Czacki 1819). Count Jan Potocki (1761-1815) was able to appreciate the role of archaeological monuments in the study of the Slavs' earliest history. He identified with that people the earthwork strongholds on Polish lands and in search of Slavic ancient monuments he even traveled to Lower Saxony (cf. Kukulski 1959).

Paradoxically, the new impulse for the development of the studies on the Slavs was brought about by the partitions of Poland. They spurred the need to collect the national mementos, also the ones preserved in the soil. A collection started by Duchess Izabela Czartoryska (1746-1835) in Puławy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century contained Medieval artefacts among curiosities from various epochs (Abramowicz 1991, pp. 40 ff.).

## 2. Institutional framework of early research: scholars, discoveries and first publications

The development of studies on the Early Middle Ages was enhanced after the Warsaw Society of Friends of Science was established in 1800. As one of its main aims, its members adopted the study of the history of Poland connected with that of the Slavic nations. The turning point was the publication on the Pre-Christian Slavs by Zorian Dołęga Chodakowski (Adam Czarnocki, 1918). The author (1784-1825) was also a diligent investigator of the earthwork strongholds and compiled the first map of them. Some years later a book on the Origins of Slavic Nation was issued (Surowiecki 1824, reprint in 1964). Many researchers believe that it marked the beginning of Polish historical archaeology. Surowiecki raised many pivotal questions concerning, among other things, the original homeland of the Slavs and their burial rites. Another important personality of the Romantic period was historian Joachim Lelewel (1786-1861). For the first time he appreciated the role of archaeology in explaining the Slavs' history and stressed the importance of Early Medieval sites for establishing chronology.

Besides the Warsaw milieu, some regional associations made important contributions. The leading one was the Płock Scientific Society, which inspired the investigations conducted in Płock Cathedral in 1826. They resulted in discovering and then a solemn reburial of the remains of two Polish rulers: Władysław Herman and Władysław Krzywousty (Wry Mouth). In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the first excavations of the specific local form of graves with stone constructions were conducted in Mazovia (cf. Buko 2008, pp. 414 ff.).

After the defeat of the November Uprising in 1830 many scientific societies were closed and some scholars were forced to leave the country. At the same time in many regions, especially in Great Poland, there appeared conditions suitable for scientific research. In Great Poland Jerzy Moraczewski, set up the Association of the Collectors of the National Antiquities. One of its aims was to record the archaeological features visible on the ground, which included many Early Medieval earthwork strongholds and barrow cemeteries. Records of numerous strongholds in Great Poland were made thus creating a base for regional studies, which has been developed since then. The Association launched the initial investigations of the site at Lech's Hill in Gniezno.

In the Russian zone of partitioned Poland, the Vilnius milieu actively developed. One of its representatives was count Eustachy Tyszkiewicz (1814-1873), the key specialist in the Slavic epoch in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, who created a rich collection of finds on his estate and compiled

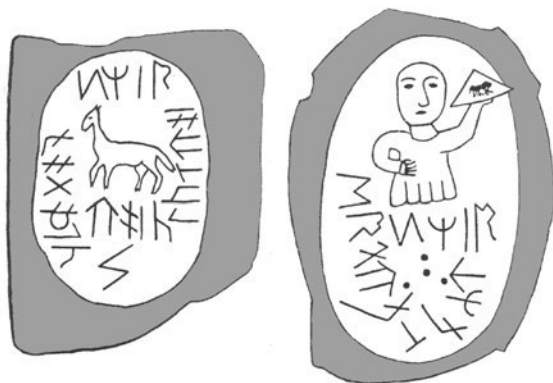


Fig. 1. So-called „mikorzyńskie stones” with presumed runic inscriptions (after F. Piekosiński, computer processing A. Buko).

their description (cf. Tyszkiewicz 1868). At the same time in the Congress Kingdom of Poland, the most eminent researcher was Franciszek M. Sobieszkański (1814-1878), who believed that the Slavs represented a high level of civilization. He conducted excavations of a pagan burial ground at the village of Nietulisko and a cremation barrow at Kotarszyn, dated between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. After the excavations he ordered the barrow to be reconstructed and so he can be considered a forerunner of archaeological conservation (Abramowicz 1991, p. 64).

At that time some scholars were fascinated with the problem of the earliest Slavs' writing, and the possibility that in pagan times they used runes. Many eminent specialists believed that the Slavs, like other peoples, had their own script (cf. Surowiecki 1823), whereas other scholars were more cautious. It was in this context that the so-called Mikorzyń stones with an apparent runic inscription appeared. They resembled quern stones and bore drawings of human and animal figures (fig. 1). The opinions that these were representations of a Slavic god, Prowe, accompanied by a runic script were contradicted by the claims that these were evident fakes. And although the latter view was finally accepted, the issue created discord in the academic milieu for many years.

From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, research activity began in Cracow. The Archaeological Department was distinguished within the local Society of Friends of Science, whose member was, among others, Teofil Żebrawski. In 1851 the Annual Journal of Science presented the information about the discovery of a famous square sectioned stone pillar more than two and a half meters tall with reliefs on its sides and four faces at the top, probably a pagan idol representing the god Svantevit (fig. 2). This had been found in the bed of the Zbrucz river; in the same year the statue was brought to Cracow and displayed in *Collegium Juridicum* of the Jagiellonian University (cf. Leńczyk 1964).



Fig. 2. The stone monument of Światowit from Zbrucz (after F. Piekosiński).

As early as the mid 1840s, investigations of the ruins on the island at Ostrów Lednicki in Great Poland were begun. There was no agreement about the interpretation of the site (cf. Sokołowski 1876). Some believed that these were remains of a pagan shrine while others assumed that it was a residence from the times of King Bolesław I, 'the Brave' (992-1025). The debate on the interpretation of these ruins begun in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century has continued to our times, the excavations at the site have also been continued until the present day.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century one of the greatest Polish scholars of the time, Włodzimierz Demetrykiewicz (1859-1937), conducted his own investigations. From 1891 he was the state conservator of the historical monuments in Galicia and also a professor of Cracow University and the director of the Archaeological Museum of the Polish Academy of Learning.

It is difficult to treat the early archaeological investigations as a scientific discipline. The problem of the Slavs was considered from an excessively long chronological perspective, or in other words, no attempts at establishing the dating of the finds concerning the Slavs were made. On the contrary, there was a tendency to assume that the Slavs existed in periods earlier than the Middle Ages, or even in prehistoric times. The Early Middle Ages impinged on scholarly awareness mainly in the context of discoveries of other periods, there was a certain lack of agreement over when one could say that the history of the Slavs had actually begun. For that reason it was not the archaeology of the Early Medieval Slavs, but prehistory and anthropology supported by the natural sciences, which determined the trends of interest and research in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3. The medieval archaeology in Poland during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

In the early period of Poland's independence, three main academic centres developed, in Warsaw, Poznań and Cracow. In subsequent years



they were to become the leading ones. In Warsaw the greatest personality in the archaeological milieu was Włodzimierz Antoniewicz, who in 1919 was employed by the Ministry of Education to organize the National Group of Conservators of Prehistoric Monuments. At the same time he replaced the ill Erazm Majewski and set up the Department of Prehistoric Archaeology at Warsaw University. Another important personality who made a large contribution to the development of the Early Medieval archaeology was Roman Jakimowicz, nominated in 1928 as the director of the recently established Archaeological Museum in Warsaw.

Already in the late 1920s, some doctoral dissertations reflecting the increased interest in the Early Middle Ages were written in the Warsaw milieu. One of them was the paper by Janina Kamińska on the early historical stone monuments found in Polish lands and the doctoral dissertation of Father Władysław Łęga concerning Pomerania in the Early Middle Ages defended in the academic year 1927/1928 in Poznań and later published as a separate monograph (Łęga 1929-1930).

The changes and preferences in research were marked by the fact that out of the 287 archaeological publications issued in 1925-1928 as many as 12% were devoted to topics related to the Early Middle Ages (in contrast to the 5% from the previous period). In this way, the need of in-depth studies of the Early Middle Ages began to arise and was fulfilled. Nevertheless the majority of the university lectures offered to students at that time concerned prehistoric archaeology.

In the Poznań milieu, a key role was played by Józef Kostrzewski, the greatest researcher of the inter-war period (fig. 3). For him two issues were the most important: typological classification of archaeological evidence and ethnic problems in archaeology. He also made use of ethnographic and linguistic evidence to a considerable degree, and also the first analyses of preserved remains by representatives of the natural sciences. His book on the



Fig. 3. Professor Józef Kostrzewski (Archive Archaeological Museum in Poznań).



Fig. 4. Excavations carried out in the 1926 on the medieval cemetery (11<sup>th</sup> century) in Końskie (central Poland) (after H.S. Zawadzki).

Pre-Polish culture became a classic textbook which was an inspiration for many people who made their own mark on the study of the Early Middle Ages (Kostrzewski 1947). Kostrzewski made his name as the originator of the hypothesis of the occupation of Polish lands by the Slavs from ancient times, an idea which had many followers and imitators. Early Medieval archaeology thus gained a chance for an independent existence. This possibility was enhanced by the lively debate in this period about the relationship between prehistoric archaeology and history.

In that time the Early Middle Ages appeared to be a natural bridge between the two disciplines. It seems that this was the context where the two notions were first distinguished. Besides the Prehistoric Institute at Poznań University, the above-mentioned Department of Prehistoric Archaeology was created at Warsaw University founded by Włodzimierz Antoniewicz. In his book (Antoniewicz 1928) the Early Medieval period for the first time was divided into pre-Piast (600-900 AD) and early-Piast (900-1100 AD) periods. The author treated the chronological boundary at which he finished his text as the point where archaeologists made way for historians as the principal investigators (cf. Antoniewicz 1929). The tendency to separate the Early Middle Ages from prehistory can also be noticed in the subheadings of the specialist journals of that time.

In 1926 the excavations at Złota near Sandomierz were started. Besides finds from various periods of prehistory, remains of Early Medieval

settlement from the beginning of the Middle Ages till the early 10<sup>th</sup> century, were found. At the same time rescue excavations near St James' Church (11<sup>th</sup> c. cemetery) in nearby Sandomierz were undertaken. At Końskie near Radom a cemetery of the same period was discovered during intensive rescue works: more than 170 burials were explored and recorded (fig. 4). This and many other undertakings created a material basis and a suitable climate for the further development of Early Medieval archaeology in the inter-war period (more on this subject in Buko 2008, with literature).

#### **4. The decade 1930s: between ethnic theory and systematic excavations of Early Medieval sites**

The ethnic theory of archaeological cultures elaborated in the 1920s by the school of the prehistorian Gustaf Kossina assumed that the areas occupied by each archaeological culture were equivalent to the territories of the ethnic groups which had created them. According to the German researchers, the area of modern Poland was occupied by Germanic people from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC till the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. According to this model, the Slavs were latecomers to the Polish lands. In reply the Polish side (mostly Józef Kostrzewski school) began investigations in order to prove the 'eternal Polishness' of the lands between the Oder and Vistula rivers. In this manner, in the 1930s there arose huge possibilities to turn the spotlight of history on the Slavs. Although many errors in assessment and interpretation of archaeological evidence were made, this work created a good atmosphere for the development of the research on the Early Middle Ages and provided new archaeological evidence for the studies on the origins of the Polish state (Kostrzewski 1959).

The greatest research undertaking of the 1930s were the excavations of the monumental Krak Mound in Cracow (fig. 5). Although the way in which the site was explored and the obtained results became a subject of criticism and contention in the scientific milieu for many years, it should be stated that the field work was conducted according to the then current European standards for investigating such features, with participation of the scientific elite of Poland represented both by archaeologists and representatives of other sciences (cf. Jamka 1965).

From that time many important studies appeared. Of primary importance was Zdzisław Rajewski's doctoral dissertation, which dealt with the Early Medieval inhumation cemeteries in Great Poland and Władysław Kowalenko's thesis on the strongholds of the same region in Early Medieval times. In Warsaw, numerous Master's theses were written on Medieval finds: by Alina Kietlińska on battle axes from the 8<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>

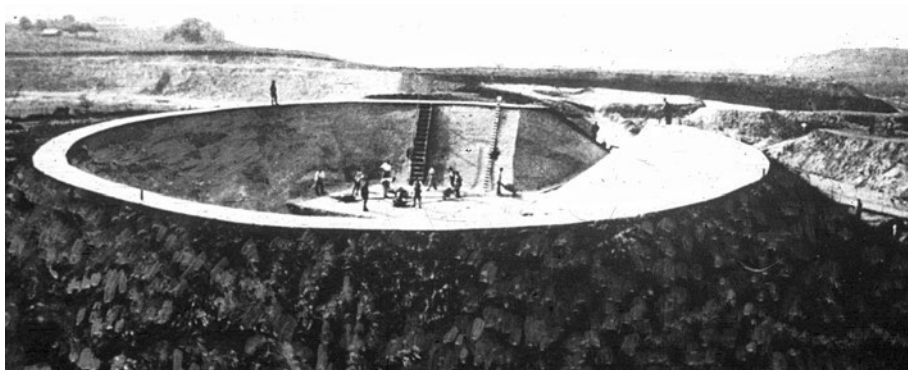


Fig. 5. Excavations in the 1930s of the monumental Krak Mound in Cracow (Archive Archaeological Museum in Cracow).

centuries among the Eastern and Western Slavs, by Wanda Sarnowska on Medieval swords, and by Zofia Wartołowska on the strongholds between the Vistula, Bug and San rivers. In 1939 Krystyna Musianowicz completed her doctoral dissertation on the Early Medieval 'temple rings'. The above mentioned and many other works were a lasting contribution to Early Medieval archaeology and a basis for further work after the second World War (cf. Abramowicz 1991, with literature).

##### **5. The first decade after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War: the coming Millennium, Marxist ideology and the problem of the origins of the Polish state**

After the Second World War there appeared good prospects for the development of Early Medieval archaeology in Poland. The creation of a new structure of academic teaching system in the principal academic urban centres was a favourable circumstance, as the needs of the discipline were taken into account. It was also an important factor that it was created by people involved in Early Medieval archaeology.

Soon after the war there was another eruption of interest and ideas for solving the question of the Slavs' origin. Besides the archaeologists, the debate was taken up by linguists (Tadeusz Lehr-Spławiński), anthropologists (Jan Czekanowski), ethnologists (Kazimierz Moszyński) and historians (Kazimierz Tymieniecki). The particularly fruitful field of research on the Slavs proved to be the western and northern lands which had to be incorporated into Poland not only in the economic but also scientific terms. It is not surprising that as early as in 1946, excavations were started in Wrocław and then in Opole, Wolin and Szczecin.

However, undoubtedly the greatest event of the early post-war years was the radical change in methodology unwanted by the scientific milieu and connected with the necessity to adapt science to the needs of the Marxist ideology. The archaeologists of these times accepted this new vision of history to varying degrees. Some, like e.g. Włodzimierz Hołubowicz, were fascinated with the new ideas whereas others used the slogans of the new ideology without any practical consequences only to keep their positions and the possibility to do their work. The more resistant, for example Józef Kostrzewski, faced loss of importance and were forced to give up their positions to make way for those more obedient to the new rulers. In 1950 the Center of the History of Material Culture was set up, and it was obligatory for all the students to study there for three years regardless of their future specialization.

This new methodological approach meant an important focus on studies of the material basis of life. This led to a number of studies of different areas of economy, especially agriculture and crafts, which was in many cases undoubtedly advantageous (cf. Hołubowicz 1950). However, one should not forget in this context the simplified interpretational patterns which were employed on as a large scale at this time and which have existed till today. Their effects, especially in the sphere of terminology, can be seen even in the most recent publications.

A milestone in the development of Early Medieval archaeology in Poland was the approaching 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Polish state. In 1947 committee at the Ministry of Culture and Arts acknowledged the particular role of archaeology in the studies of the origins of the state. The investigations, often undertaken spontaneously in various parts of the country, were fostered by the fact that many cities lay in ruins and thus there appeared good conditions for fieldwork in places which were not accessible in normal conditions; this concerned not only the historical centres of towns but also the interiors of churches and monastic houses which required renovation or even reconstruction after the War.

The Directorate of the Research on the Origins of the Polish headed by the historian Aleksander Gieysztor was set up (cf. Gieysztor 1953). A year earlier, however, field work at more than a dozen sites had been initiated. In the following years the number of investigated sites grew continually, reaching more than fifty in 1959 (fig. 6). The size of the undertaking can be demonstrated by the fact that the KBPPP employed as many as 231 people, including 119 full time workers, among them 50 professors. The scope of the program was impressive: at the same time several dozen archaeological sites of the Early Middle Ages were excavated. They included both defensive structures of earthwork strongholds, religious cult centres and Early Medieval towns, ports, rural set-

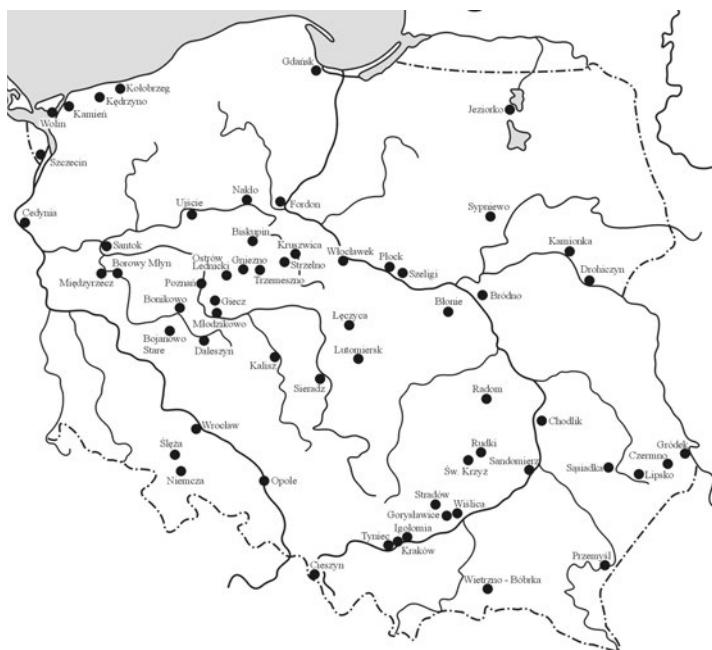


Fig. 6. Map of archaeological sites excavated after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War during the Millennium Program (after A. Buko).

tlements and many other sites. The discoveries of monuments of sacral architecture in the earliest centres of the Polish state fostered interdisciplinary cooperation with historians of art and architecture.

The long-term effect of this work was the foundation of the Institute of the History of Material Culture (today: the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology) of the Polish Academy of Sciences, in November 1953. Its tasks included coordination, through its regional branches, of research work in various parts of Poland.

The research program was implemented in cooperation with university and museum centres from the whole country. The quality of the field work was improved by discussions on the methods of exploration and documentation, including the use of the stratigraphic method at multi stratified sites. Many excavations of that time may be considered as among the most advanced in Europe, taking into account the scientific level and advanced research techniques and methods of documentation used. Their interdisciplinary nature created favourable conditions for the promotion of Polish Early Medieval archaeology abroad.

Interim reports of the results of the excavations were immediately published and presented at national and international conferences. This

helped to disseminate across Europe the image of the Polish Early Medieval archaeology of the 1950s and 1960s as a scientific discipline using the most up-to-date research methodology. All those achievements resulted in an increase of interest of the Polish school of medieval archaeology. It was just the early 60s that were at the beginnings of long-term cooperation in Italy, then in France, North Africa and Spain, where the Polish investigators were seen as forerunners of medieval archaeology in Europe. Let's mention about very fruitful and long-term Polish-Italian cooperation on the origins of Venice, or Longobards settlements in northern and southern Italy (cf. Baranowski 2002; Hensel, Tabaczyński 1981; Tabaczyński 1987, pp. 227 ff.; Tabaczyńska 1980 with literature).

## 6. The 1970s and 1980s: millennium program and, what's next?

In the mid-1960s, after the end of the Millennium program, the trends in the field research did not change. On the contrary, in the 1967-1980, Early Medieval archaeology saw its greatest number of archaeological expeditions. Many of them, as the international expedition in Sandomierz operating in the early 1970s comprised several dozen people (cf. Buko, Świechowski 2000).

Among the latter, the greatest influence on the development of the Early Medieval archaeology was exerted by Witold Hensel, who for many years was the director of the Institute of the History of Material Culture of the Polish Academy of Sciences, a position he held for many years together with being the director of the Department of Archaeology at Warsaw University. Hensel (fig. 7) initiated many new trends of research, e.g. in regional and micro-regional studies; the last mentioned ones were consistently implemented in Great Poland and Pomerania. The chronological periodization of the Early Middle Ages which he elaborated for



Fig. 7. Professor Witold Hensel (Archive Archaeological Museum in Poznań).

Great Poland is still being used, especially in the Poznań milieu. He is the author of works of fundamental importance, among which the one devoted to the Slavs in the Early Middle Ages (until 1965 issued six times since its first publication in 1956) is the most important (Hensel 1956). Regardless of the aspects of the period that can be criticized, this was undoubtedly a period of unprecedented development of Polish Early Medieval archaeology, for the increase in the scale and widening of the scope of investigations as well as of a wide-reaching international cooperation in joint investigations with the participation of Polish scholars in work on several Medieval sites in Europe and North Africa. It yielded also large monographs publishing the results of excavations of leading Early Polish sites, such as Płock, Łęczycza, Sandomierz, Szczecin, and Opole.

There were in this period, however, no syntheses. The researchers from the Cracow milieu tried to fill in this gap. In 1974 Andrzej Źaki issued a monumental work on Archaeology of Early Medieval Little Poland, which was the first regional synthesis in Polish Medieval archaeology (Źaki 1974). In the 1980s Early Medieval archaeology gained a lasting place within the archaeological specializations. A culmination of the period of its 'childhood' and 'teen age' was the book on Medieval Archaeology published by Stanisław Tabaczyński (1987). Its contents clearly indicate that it actually focuses on the problems of Early Medieval archaeology. The subtitle suggests at the same time that this specialization can be clearly defined as an entity, well-differentiated from others.

The origin of the Slavs remained an important subject of interest. However, during the Millennium studies it had been somewhat dominated by the needs of the research connected with the 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the state. Another reason for the lack of debate in that period was the fact that a large proportion of the important milieus in the Millennium period shared the opinion of the most eminent scholars about the autochthonous origin of Slavic culture in Poland. From the mid-1970s, mainly due to the seminal publication of Kazimierz Godłowski (1979), the debate entered a new stage. Godłowski's works created a suitable atmosphere for a new increase of interest in the question of the Slavs' allochthonism. But conferences, discussions which arose at the occasion, did not, however, lead to any breakthrough. On the contrary, they indicated the existence of differences which more and more divided the archaeological milieu.

In the 1980s we also see a clear increase of interest in Late Medieval, post-Medieval and modern archaeology. The last mentioned tendencies were particularly fostered by the academic centres in Toruń, Łódź and Wrocław.



## 7. The last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: old questions and new methods for obtaining answers

The last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was also an especially favourable period for Polish Early Medieval archaeology. In Great Poland many conclusions about the chronology of the strongholds from the pre-state (tribal) and early state periods were considerably modified, mainly owing to the broad application of dendrochronology and <sup>14</sup>C datings. At the same time detailed cartographic presentations created the outline of the new vision of the origins of the first Polish state and its main centres. At that period some critical reflections dealing with the bases of Early Medieval chronology, including that of the strongholds of the pre-state period, were undertaken (i.e. Poleski 1992).

A new impulse for research work was given by the preparations for the 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gniezno Summit in the year 1000, an historic meeting between Emperor Otto III and the Polish ruler Bolesław the Brave which was celebrated in the year 2000. To that end two all-Polish research programs started: *Poland at the time of the Gniezno Summit*, established by the Committee for Scientific Research, and the *Thousandth Anniversary of the Gniezno Summit* set up by the Bureau of the Conservator General of Historical Monuments. Both programs, implemented by the researchers from various milieus from all over Poland, aimed at verifying the old conclusions. For that purpose fresh studies of the previously unpublished material from the Millennium investigations were conducted as well as verification works at key settlement and architectural sites. This was the largest interdisciplinary program in the sphere of the Early Medieval archaeology since the Millennium and a large number of specialists took part. The results of this work were presented in 2000 in a separate monograph (cf. Buko, Świechowski 2000).

During the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, opinions in the debate on the origins of the Slavs became more fixed. This was reflected at the international conference on the subject organized in Cracow in 2001 at which scholars representing various outlooks and scientific disciplines presented their views. The debate, clearly revealed that at the outset of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium not only does there exist a profound lack of agreement but also the participants in the discussions are less and less willing to seek a compromise (cf. Kaczanowski, Parczewski 2005).

The good state of the Early Medieval archaeology at the beginning of the third millennium is strengthened by its closer and closer cooperation with historians, which is a symbolic return to the its origin and sources of development. A great contribution in this respect was made by Aleksander Gięsztor who as early as in the 1950s maintained close scien-

tific contacts with the milieu of Medieval archaeologists connected with the studies of the origins of the Polish state. The same can be said about Henryk Samsonowicz who continued this tradition in the 1990s and was also behind the large research programs described above. An important part of this cooperation was the jubilee conference organized by the Foundation For Polish Science in Kalisz. It was crowned with the synthesis on the Polish lands in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and their place in shaping the new map of Europe (cf. Samsonowicz 2000).

At the time of writing this paper, the most recent important event in the history of Early Medieval archaeology is the program entitled Poland at the turn of the millennia initiated within a project originated in 2001 by the Committee for Scientific Research. Its aim is to process and publish the previously unpublished materials from the important strongholds and towns which were investigated during the research program associated with the celebration of Poland's millennium (cf. Urbańczyk 2004). They are also example of new generation publications devoted to archaeology of Early Medieval Poland (cf. Buko 2008) or nodal questions concerning the beginnings of Polish statehood (cf. Kurnatowska 2002; Urbańczyk 2008).

Neither have I considered here the development of Early Medieval numismatics, although the latter is arguably a separate specialization, it has quite a lot in common with the archaeological studies of the Early Middle Ages. This is so mainly thanks to the materials gained by excavations and the wide use made by archaeologists of coin finds in order to date the layers and features and also study Early Medieval economy. Hence many eminent numismatists, such as Ryszard Kiersnowski or Stanisław Suchodolski, have been closely connected with the development of Polish medieval archaeology (cf. Suchodolski 2008).

## **8. An archaeology of regions or archaeology without borders?**

The state of Polish Early Medieval archaeology is today best assessed through regional achievements. This is where the most interesting discoveries are being made, and the regional academic centres employ renowned researchers.

Due to the variety of topics, the archaeology of Early Medieval Poland is and will probably remain the archaeology of individual regions. However, it should not be forgotten that it also embraces many extra-regional issues such as the origins of Christianity, cult centres, origins of towns and of the Polish state, etc., which demand a cooperation of researchers from various centres. The other option would be the increasing lack of balance



Fig. 8. Kalisz-Zawodzie: reconstruction of the stronghold (11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century) (photo L. Ziąbka).

in the progress of the research, which exists today, for example, in the case of the chronology of strongholds in Great Poland seen against the background of the other regions. Interregional research groups may thus have a positive impact on the development of the whole discipline.

As a result the researchers have to treat the evidence from various chronological periods in an equal way and at the same time they have to create teams composed of specialists in other archaeological periods as well as representatives of different branches of science. In this way we get closer to a broader approach to the discipline based not on respective classes of sites such as a settlement, burial ground or the earliest phases of a town centre, but on interdisciplinary studies on the territory at which they are located viewed from the synchronic and diachronic perspectives. In such an approach, typical especially of the leading European countries, the direct topic of interest is not an entity isolated in space and time but a structural element of a settlement undergoing continual dynamic changes in connection with a broader environmental context. In such cases, no formal chronological turning points can be applied; life in rural settlement centres had a different pace than in the urban ones. It is also difficult to accept in this context the strategy of excavat-

ing only burials as they were functionally connected with the other elements of the settlement complex such as the church and the settlement. Thus it seems justified to state that in such cases not the Early Medieval phase but the settlement potential and the natural environment determine the borders and thus the scope of interest of the archaeologist. The recent medieval archaeology in Poland more and more offer to the local societies visible in the landscape reconstructions, what makes it at the same time not only scientific, but also the public archaeology (fig. 8).

The end of the 1990s and the beginning of the millennium marked a great generation change. Many eminent scholars who had begun their careers in the early 1950s retired. In recent years they have greatly enhanced in a lasting manner the output of Polish Early Medieval archaeology. Today the researchers who began work in the 1970s are in their scientific prime. Their works are a natural continuation of their predecessors' achievements but they are often different in quality. Such a state of affairs is due to various factors, especially the inevitable changes in methodological orientations and theoretical foundations as well as the development of research and analyses methods in archaeology.

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