

From a tribe to a state

The archaeology of the early Middle Ages in the interior area between the Odra and Bug rivers – the so-called “tribal period”

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Abstract



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The present chapter is devoted to presenting the complexity of research issues related to the communities which inhabited Polish territory during the so-called tribal period (between the 7th and the middle of the 10th century AD). Despite long years of study, the most elementary questions remain unanswered – as a result of the scarcity of material traces of the said communities and due to the changing nature of scholarly interest or the lack of enthusiasm for studying subjects beyond so-called tribal geography.

The introduction presents the currently available data which may be used in the reconstruction of the natural environment in the area in question, emphasizing the impact it may have had on the stability and structure of settlements. The following subchapter focuses on the forms of architecture and the often discussed issue of the possibly seasonal nature of the structures. A separate subsection discusses defensive structures which began to appear at the end of the period under analysis. It also takes note of the structural differences between the strongholds erected in south-eastern and in north-western regions of Polish territory, emphasizing the ongoing discussion regarding the function of these structures, which indubitably went beyond strictly defensive purposes. The present article also offers a brief overview of the basic tasks and activities performed by the inhabitants of Polish territory, underlining the features which may testify to the considerable level of mobility of the population. This supposition may be supported by the lack of unequivocal data pointing to the existence of stable, hierarchized social structures. Another issue worth discussing in this context is the vagueness of our current knowledge with regard to local beliefs. The lack of specific information indicates that there were no clearly defined places of cult or forms of ritual, that there was a connection between the realm of the symbolic and the cult of ancestors, and that the tradition of cremation burial was widespread in the lands in question.

1. Introduction

Generally speaking, Slavs are warlike and violent, and if not their internal discord and lack of unity, no other nation would be able to match them in strength.

(Ibrâhîm ibn Ya`qûb)

The emergence in the area between the Odra and Bug rivers of the Polish state, with its network of principal centres that to a large extent continued the order developed by its earliest rulers (the Piasts), is a result of socio-economic processes which occurred in the latter half of the first millennium AD. Even the fact that for long centuries a part of the Piast lands operated outside Poland did not obliterate this spatial order; on the contrary, the successive power elites only reinforced it, albeit with many modifications.

The central role in these processes was played by economic laws. The socio-economic life in the Interior¹ was linked with the Baltic zone; this sooner or later had to result in an amalgamation of these two spheres. It seems, however, that before the emergence of the first states, no powers strove towards such an amalgamation or were influential enough to accomplish it. The first attempts at reaching the sea were made under the first Piasts, but they became more consistent only in the late 11th century. The history of the tribal period in the Interior must therefore be analyzed separately, due to the differences in the social and economic structures.

A crucial event in the history of this area, i.e., the appearance of the Slavs, is discernible in terms of both the new quality evident in archaeological finds and the references in written sources. The Slavic culture in that area may constitute a continuation of the cultures of the earlier periods or, conversely, it may have been developed by migrants from the East; but regardless of which of these eventualities actually occurred, the existence of the Polish national/linguistic community in its present shape is the result of this phenomenon. This explains why medieval studies in Poland continue to place such a strong emphasis on the debate pertaining to the beginnings of this community. It also explains why so many myths

have emerged in the process of developing historical identity and why so many sources, both written and archaeological (so-called “intentional history”), have been over-interpreted.

The debate concerning the appearance of the Slavs in the area between the Odra and Bug rivers has been raging in Polish medieval studies for at least a century, and neither side – whether the autochthonists (i.e., supporters of the theory that the Slavic ethnos evolved there) or the allochthonists (who claim that the Slavs arrived to this area from eastern Europe) – seems ready to lay down their arms. Regardless of the conclusion of this debate – which in any case is of a rather local, central-European importance – most scholars agree that the first material attributes of Slavic culture in the territory of Poland are discernible as early as the 6th century AD (see: chapter 1). Contrary to appearances, however, the main subject of the archaeologists’ investigations, i.e., ‘Slavic material culture’, has yet to be defined with adequate precision.

According to medievalists, in the early Middle Ages the territory of Poland belonged to the western-Slavic cultural zone (Fig. 1). The concept of the western-Slavic world, however, is a linguistic construct which denotes the lands settled by Slavs speaking the languages included into the western-Slavic group. This construct has been transferred to denote a geographical construct, i.e., the area between the Elbe, the Bug, the Baltic Sea and the Danube. But the western-Slavic world evolved as a distinct cultural sphere only when the residents of this area found themselves influenced by Latin civilization and Latin culture, whereas the eastern and southern Slavs found themselves in the sphere of influence of the Christianized Greek civilization and culture disseminated by medieval Byzantium.

¹ Henceforward this term will be used to denote the area between the Odra and the Lusatian Neisse rivers in the east, the Noteć, the lower Vistula, and the Narew in the north, the Bug in the east, and the mountain ranges of the Carpathians and the Sudetes in the south (Cf. Fig. 1).

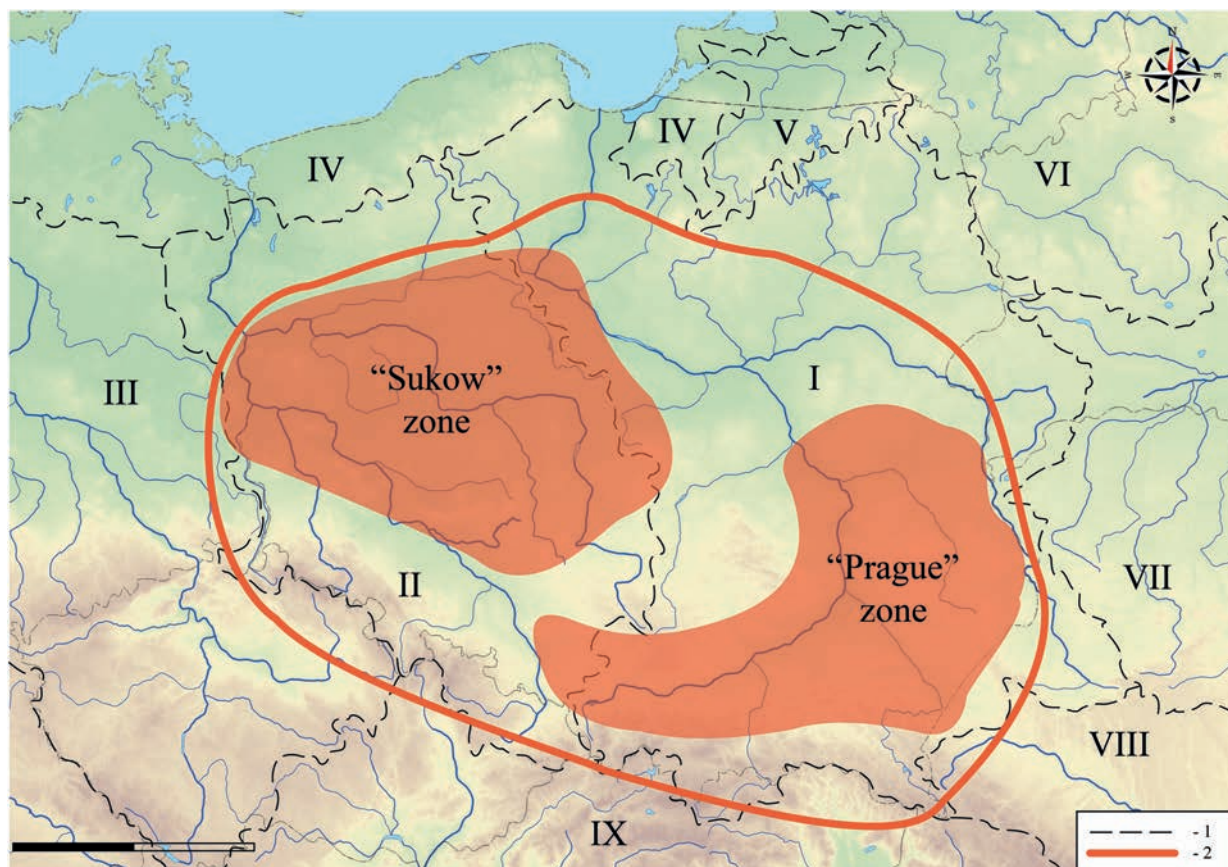


Fig. 1. The area of the Interior in the so-called tribal period (6th-10th century).

1 – the boundaries of the main river basins in the region (I – the Vistula, II – the Odra, III – the Elbe, IV – coastal rivers, V – the Pregolya, VI – the Neman, VII – the Dnieper, VIII – the Dniester, IX – the Danube), 2 – the boundaries of the area referred to in the present work as “the Interior”. By S. Moździoch, digital processing by M. Chwiej.

The ‘tribal’ period (from the 6th to 10th centuries AD) had not yet witnessed such linguistic diversity as is meant by those who use the modern, philological term ‘the western Slavs’. The diversification occurred only after the emergence of the large political entities. i.e., after the 10th century or, according to Jerzy Nalepa, as late as in the 12th century. Thus, we are left with the concept of the Slavic world *sensu largo*. But even in this case it is not entirely clear how the research topic should be defined. The concept of a linguistic community, or “communicative community”, will not be helpful to archaeologists, as they are concerned with material culture.

Many years ago, Kazimierz Godłowski described the early-Slavic cultural model, which supposedly comprised: (1) hand-made, undecorated clay vessels; (2) square sunken houses with an oven in the corner; (3) cremation burials with

urn graves or pit graves (Godłowski 1979). The same, slightly revised model was described by Michał Parczewski (1988: 28-31, 46-64). It refers mainly to the southern part of the Interior and is often described in specialist literature as the Prague culture zone, also known as the Praga-Korčak zone or the Danube-Chodlik zone (Leciejewicz 1976: 56, ryc. 4). It is contrasted with the northern zone, which is termed Sukow or Sukow-Szeligi culture (Poleski 2013: 25; Dulnicz 2001). These zones differ with regard to the aforesaid components, i.e., the shapes of pottery and dwellings and the manner of burying the dead.

In Slavic culture’s earliest phase of development, hand-made pottery dominates in both areas, but the “Prague” vessels have a more slender, S-shaped form, whereas the “Sukow” ones are more squat, resembling vases (Fig. 2). Yet the degree

Fig. 2. Characteristic features of early-Slavic culture:



Hand-made pottery. Source: Buko 2008; Kobusiewicz 2008



A square-planned sunken dwelling with an oven in the corner. Source: Buko 2008; Kobusiewicz 2008

to which the material culture of that period is explored is still insufficient; hence specialist literature abounds in widely divergent opinions. For instance, Michał Kara (2009: 17) is of the opinion that sets of “Prague” pottery are not encountered in Pomorze or in the Warta basin, while Marek Dulnicz (2001: 211) states that “Prague-type pottery is encountered in various parts of the north-western Slavic zone”. It is indeed a fact that “Prague” pottery is increasingly often documented in the northern region of the Interior, e.g., in Napole in the Chełmno area (Bojarski 2012: 307). This diversity of opinions is not surprising given that Sebastian Brather (2001: 58) considers the differences between the Sukow-Dziedzice pottery and the Praga-Korčak pottery to be difficult to detect.

In the 6th-7th centuries, the dwelling typical of the “Prague” zone was a square dugout with an oven (hearth) in the corner. Irregularly shaped pits (occasionally called “bathtub-like objects”) are considered to be a later type of residential structures (Fig. 2). It is assumed that the above-ground part may have been a lean-to, a wattle structure, or a log-frame building. Both types are often found at one site. In fact, according to Wojciech Szymański (2000: 363n) and Władysław Łosiński (2000: 16), in the northern part of the Interior the bathtub-like objects preceded the emergence of the square dugouts (Fig. 3); this undermines the hitherto accepted developmental scheme leading from a dugout to an above-ground residential structure.

The northern and southern zones are supposed to differ with respect to burial methods as well. Urn graves are

recorded as the dominant form in the ‘Prague’ zone, while the rite dominant in the ‘Sukow’ zone cannot be ascertained by archaeological methods. According to Dulnicz (2001: 214), however, “the area under research (i.e., the Sukow culture area – S.M.) yields flat pit and urn graves dating from at least the 7th century”. An increasing number of new discoveries indicates that the Alt-Käbelich-type graves, i.e., pits of varying sizes containing numerous pottery shards and small incinerated human bones, are typical of the zone where burials seemed “unascertainable by archaeological methods”. Until recently, those graves were considered characteristic of only

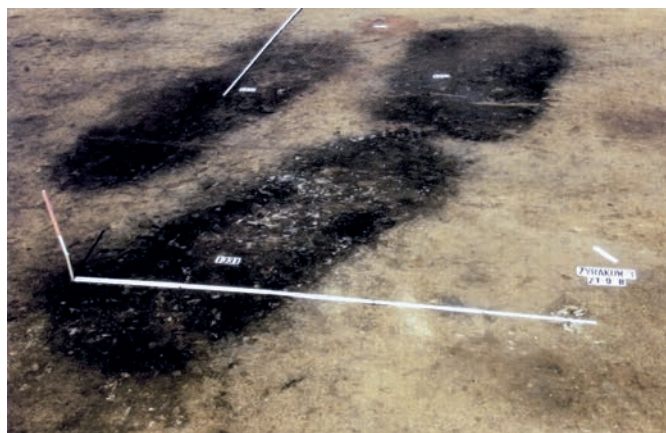
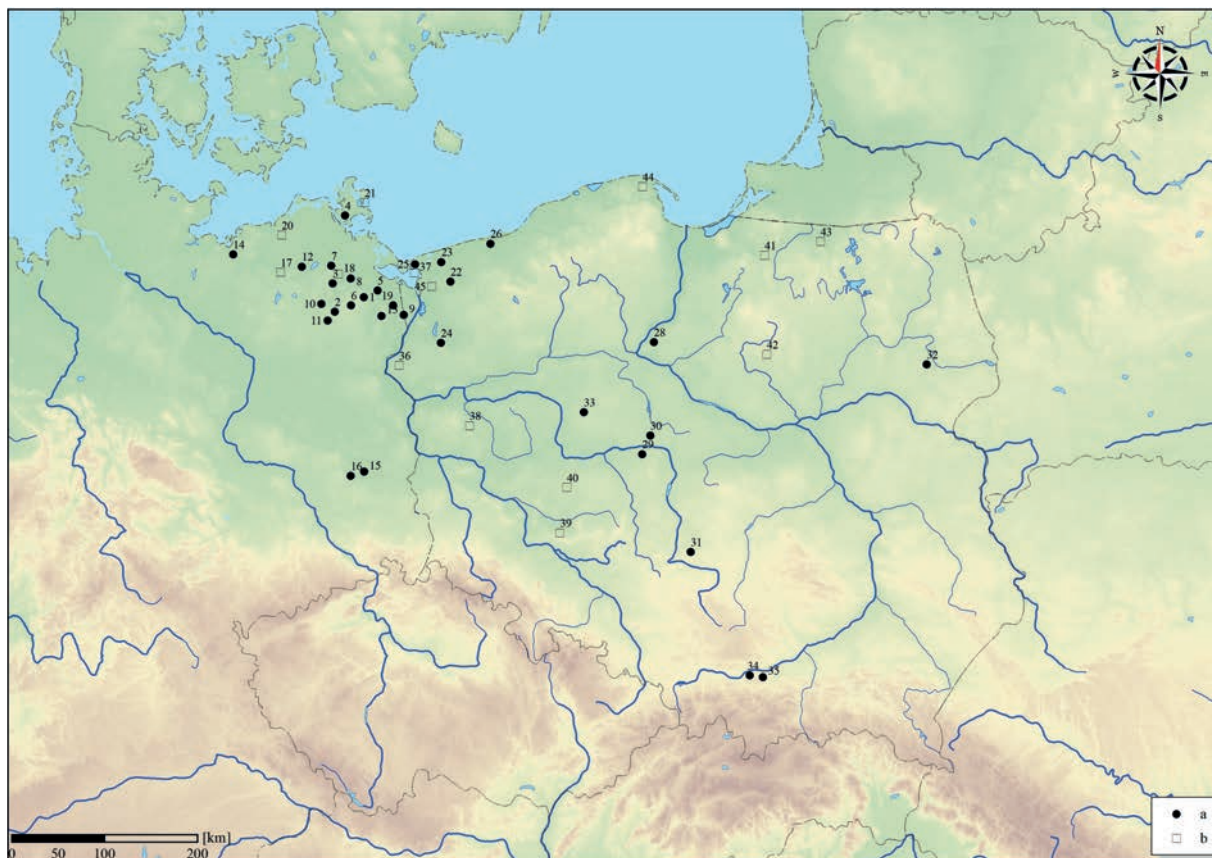


Fig. 3. Żyraków, site no. 3, Żyraków commune, Podkarpackie Voivodeship. Bathtub-like objects and the related hearth.

Source: Okoński 2008.

Fig. 4.



The range of the Alt Kábelich type burials. Source: Szmoniewski, Tynieć 2006; Kobusiewicz 2008.



Examples of cremation burials of the Alt Kábelich type. Source: Szmoniewski, Tynieć 2006; Kobusiewicz 2008.



Examples of cremation burials of the Alt Kábelich type. Source: Szmoniewski, Tynieć 2006; Kobusiewicz 2008.

the northern zone; currently they are being discovered far in the south as well (Fig. 4). The earliest of them are dated to the 8th century. Thus, it seems that the boundary between the northern and the southern zone is rather fluid also with regard to burial methods. After the 8th century, numerous tumulus

graves have been ascertained in the entire southern zone, while in the northern zone they appear sporadically.

The above examples demonstrate that despite many years of research, there is still no distinct, definite model of early-Slavic culture, and the former divisions: the chronolog-

ical one (into the earlier, 'Prague' zone and the later, 'Sukow' zone) and the spatial one (into the 'Prague' zone in the south and the 'Sukow' zone in the north) are getting blurred as new evidence is discovered. These divisions are the most clear in the 6th–7th century, but the number of archaeological sources pertaining to this period is relatively small and the datings are based on the typological schemata for pottery.

In the face of the difficulties posed by the attempt at defining the research subject, the chronological scope may seem easier to determine. But this issue arouses considerable controversy as well. In general, the period of the 'early Middle Ages' is dated to between the latter half of the 5th or the 6th centuries and the middle of the 13th century (Cf. Poleski 2013: 24). Its initial phase, the so-called tribal phase, which is our object of consideration here, is dated to between the 6th and 10th centuries. In the case of the territory of Poland, the emergence of 'classical' Slavic culture is often considered to be the event which opens the early-medieval period.

Chronological systems valid for the early Middle Ages are constructed by archaeologists on the basis of selected features of pottery, chiefly the technique of their production. Hand-made vessels are considered to constitute the earliest Slavic pottery (6th–7th century). Smoothing of the vessel's upper section on the potter's wheel is considered to have been the subsequent improvement in the technique. The movement of the wheel was used only to even out the upper edge of the vessel; its walls were not yet formed on the wheel to any considerable extent (6th–10th century). Only when the technique was perfected did it become possible to form the entire surface of the vessel on the wheel (10th–13th century). This 'techno-chronological' pattern of evolution, with the complementary components: the form and decoration, was used to develop various regional typologies, of which the most popular – at least with regard to pottery of the north-western part of the Interior – is the classification introduced by Ewald Schuldt (1956) for Mecklenburg, with the later addition, introduced by Joachim Herrmann (1972), of, among other things, the Tornow type: biconical vases with a moulded roll above the dip of the vessel's body (Fig. 5). While the proposed sequence in which the particular techniques and types of vessels emerged proved valid, the chronology of this process failed in confrontation with dendrochronological datings, since the latter revealed that some vessel types emerged later than had been assumed. For instance, the appearance of Tornow type pottery, previously dated to the 7th century, is now dated to the late 8th century (Brzostowicz 2002: 34).

The fact that a large number of scholarly works had focused on the typology and classification of pottery collections certainly contributed to making our picture of the transformations that occurred in Interior pottery from the 6th to the 13th centuries more systematic. It seems, however, that the hitherto applied formula for analyzing pottery collections has been exhausted. Unless the questionnaire of research questions is radically changed, subsequent analyses of this kind will not contribute much beyond a systematization and selective presentation of material.

What, then, is the current state of archaeological knowledge regarding the residents of the area between the Odra and the Bug rivers from the 6th to the middle of the 10th century? A brief description of the environment in which they lived will be useful for answering this question.

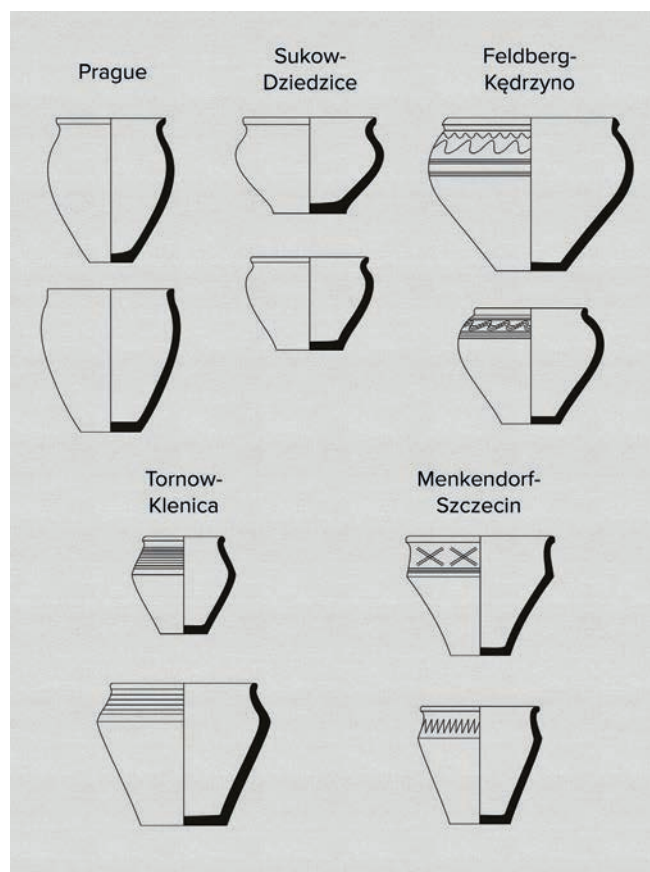


Fig. 5. The types of Slavic pottery from the so-called tribal period.

Source: Herrmann 1972

2. The natural environment

The land of the Slavs is a land of plains and trees amongst which they have their dwellings.

(Ibn Rustah)

The territory stretching between the Odra and the Bug rivers consists mostly of lowlands, which only in the south rise towards the Carpathian and Sudeten mountain ranges. Soils in this upland southern part are fertile but heavy, developed on clay or loess substratum. The remainder of the area has mostly light soils on sand substratum. The geographical distribution of the traces of the earliest Slavic settlements differs from the distribution of the Neolithic agricultural settlements, which were inseparably linked with the areas of heavy, fertile soil. Most probably the Slavic farmers preferred to work on light soils; this may have been caused by the supremacy of animal husbandry coupled with settlement mobility. This mobility of Slavic settlements in the early tribal phase seems to be confirmed by the scarcity of permanent settlement traces in relation to the size of the area ‘colonized’ by the Slavs and by the absence of large and long-used burial grounds. This

point will be discussed in more detail in the section on the economic system.

The territory of the Interior encompasses the basins of the Odra and the Vistula, two large rivers flowing into the Baltic Sea. The characteristic river network facilitated communication not only along the north–south axis, but also in the latitudinal directions. The land’s morphology and the relatively dense river network made this area fairly accessible in spite of dense forestation.

Fortunately for the inhabitants of the Interior, the early phase of the Middle Ages was a period of relatively mild weather; the climate turned considerably colder only a few centuries later, during the Little Ice Age. The 6th–7th centuries witnessed a periodical turn to more wet climatic conditions, and the water level rose accordingly. After the early 8th century the climate gradually returned to being warm and dry:

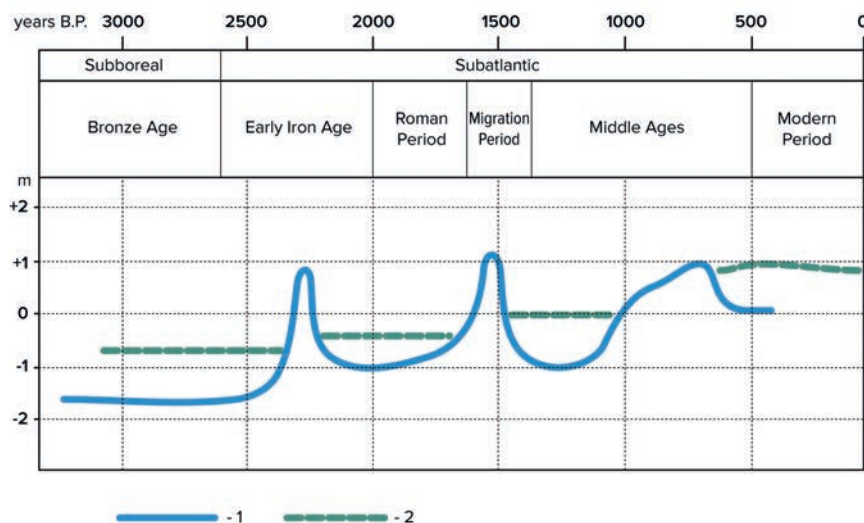


Fig. 6. Water-level fluctuation in the lower Odra since 3000 BP

Source: Brose, Heußner 2002

the water level fell again, to rise only after the middle of the 10th century. This rhythm of water-level fluctuations was recorded for the Odra basin (Fig. 6). A faster increase in the water level occurred only after the year 1280, as confirmed by oak tree growth rings and other data. A similar cycle of water-level fluctuations was recorded for the Vistula in the Fordon Valley and the entire Małopolska region and, as revealed by archaeological observations and environmental data yielded by hydrology, geomorphology and palynology, in other regions of Poland as well.

Low water levels in the period from the 8th to 10th century made it possible to establish settlements in river valleys, which not only provided handy access to water, but also abounded in bog ore, commonly used for iron smelting, and clay used for insulating houses and making pottery. In addition, valley settlement sites supported the economic model based on animal husbandry.

The debate concerning the level to which the Polish lands were economically developed at the threshold of the early Middle Ages continues unabated. Although the (still few) palynological profiles pertaining to the 6th–7th centuries do show a rise in grain pollens, this rise was not steep. The results of palynological analyses referring to both the north-eastern edge of the Interior (Chełmno Land, Fig. 7) and its western edge (Lubusz Land) indicate that until the end of the 8th century the scale of environmental changes was relatively small (Noryśkiewicz 2013: 134; Milecka 2014:

44-45). Along the Lower Odra, the pollen diagrams confirm an increase in the level of settlement and grain farming from the very beginnings of the early Middle Ages; however, the period of dynamic development of an agricultural economy, accompanied by deforestation, began only in the 12th, and in the Chełmno Land in the early 13th century. Paleobotanists and archaeozoologists are of the opinion that, in the initial phase of the early Middle Ages, the economy in the communities settled in this area was based on animal husbandry and hunting rather than on agriculture. How important was the role of forest-based economy in Lubusz Land is indicated by the high percentage of wild-animal bones, occasionally exceeding 20 percent, in the sets of finds dating from the initial phase of the early Middle Ages (Makowiecki et al. 2012).

To sum up the current state of research on the natural environment of the Interior in the initial phase of the early Middle Ages, we may state that starting from the 7th–8th centuries until the 13th–14th centuries, the climatic conditions, and consequently other elements of the natural environment, were exceptionally favourable to human settlement. Research has shown that during the Medieval Climate Optimum temperatures varied little between summer and winter and the vegetation period was long. In fact, the climate of the Interior was so mild that it was possible to cultivate grapevines there. The question arises: did the inhabitants of that area make optimal use of those conditions?

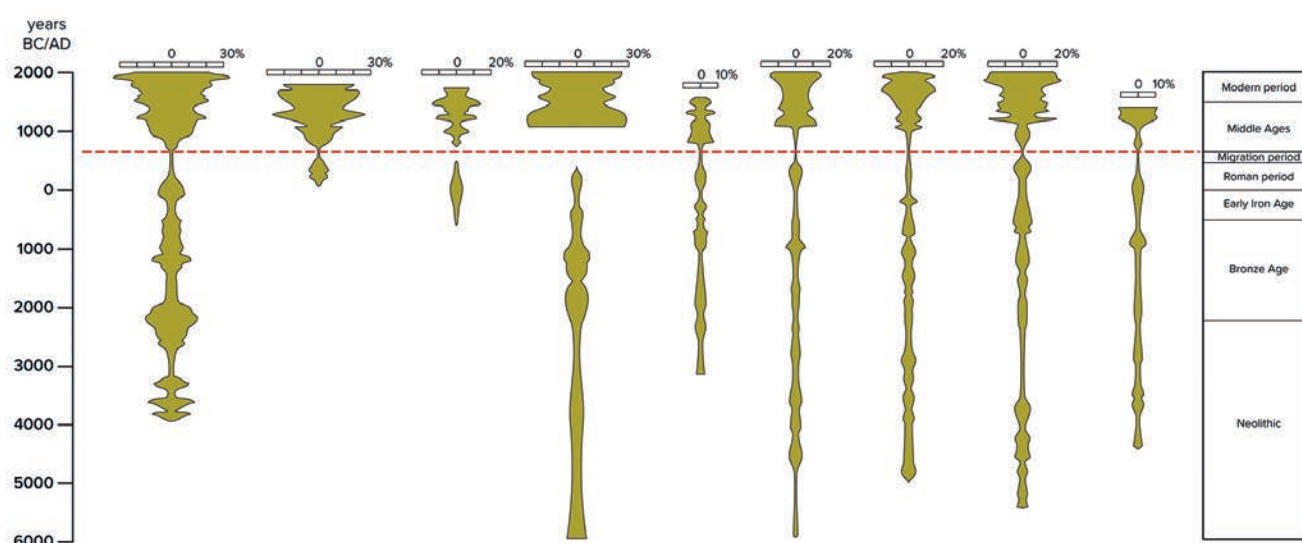


Fig. 7. A compilation of diagrams showing human impact on the environment of Chełmno land on a time scale

Source: Noryśkiewicz 2013

3. The landscape of settlement

They live in pitiful hovels which they set up far apart from one another, but, as a general thing, every man is constantly changing his place of abode.

(Procopius of Caesarea)

The settlements of the Slavs and Antes lie in a row along the rivers very close to one another. In fact, there is practically no space between them, and they are bordered by forests, swamps, beds of reeds.

(Pseudo-Maurice)

The picture of Slavic settlements in the area of the Interior rendered by the archaeological sources much resembles descriptions recorded by these chroniclers. The settlements were evidently few and they were scattered along water courses. In the last four decades, only thirty-nine settlements dating from this period have been discovered in the Małopolska region (Poleski 2013: 35). The largest of those numbered little more than a dozen huts (Fig. 8). Other regions of Poland were

equally scantily settled (Cf. Kurnatowska 2000: 102, ryc. 1). An exception is the area on the border of Śląsk, Wielkopolska, and Lubusz Land, where several dozen early-Slavic sites have recently been discovered (Fig. 9). Judging by the amount of pottery finds on the surface, however, most probably just a few of them constitute remains of settlements; others finds are single pottery shards.

In the period between the 8th and the 10th centuries, the number of settlements increased by at least 50 percent. Settlement clusters which may be interpreted as territorial communities began to emerge in the 9th-10th centuries. In Wielkopolska, almost the entire region was settled, although the settlement pattern was irregular; in Małopolska, a settled belt on both sides of the Vistula and along the lower courses of its larger tributaries, e.g., the Dunajec, is clearly discernible. In the Lublin Land, settlement clusters gravitated towards the Vistula's right-bank tributaries, from the San in the south through the Wyżnica and Chodelka to the Bystra in the north. In Śląsk, large areas of settlement developed in the region of Głogów Urstromtal and Dalków Hills (Fig. 10), in the Kaczawa basin, on Wrocław Plain, on Głubczyce Plateau, and along the Odra basin.

Settlements were established mostly in lowland areas, often on the wetlands. The early Slavs did not settle in areas rising more than 300-350 metres above sea level (Poleski 2013: 35). The preferred areas were river valleys and places on the border of lowlands and plateaus; this was caused by the character of the local economy (Fig. 11). The process of moving settlements to higher ground began only in the 10th, perhaps in the late 9th century; this was associated with cli-

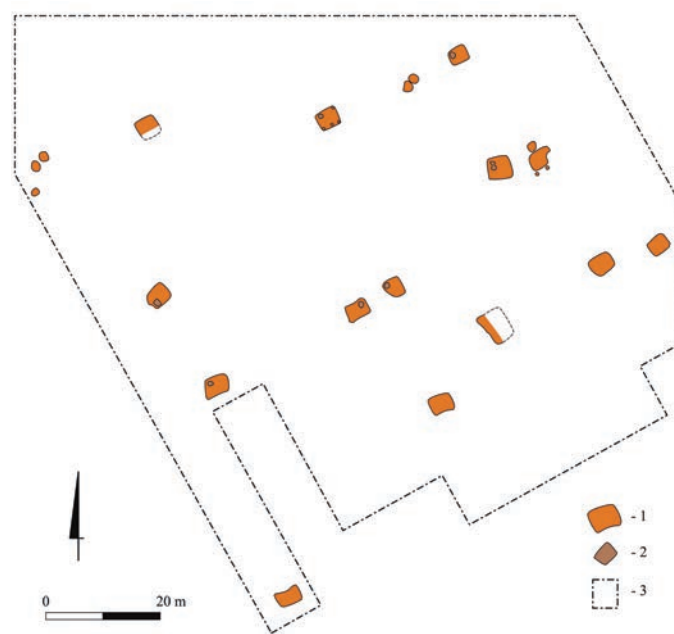


Fig. 8. The layout of the early-Slavic settlement in Ożańsk, site 13

1 – residential buildings and storage pits, 2 – ovens, 3 – the territorial extent of the surveyed area. Source: Wilk, Lasota-Kuś.

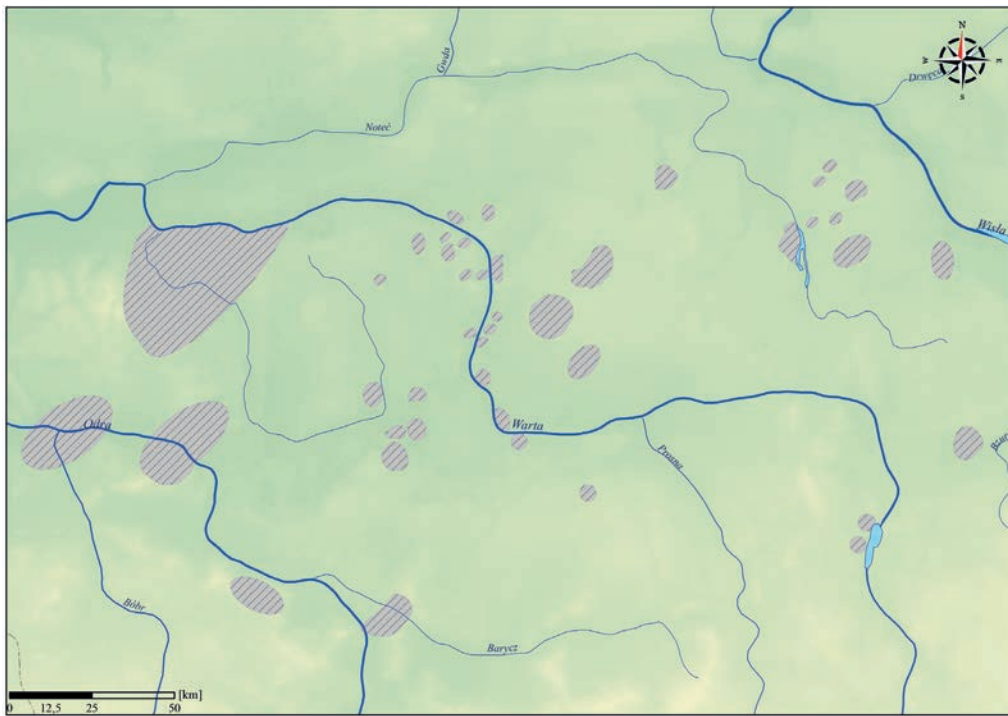


Fig. 9. The range of settlement clusters from phases A to A/B of the early Middle Ages discovered in Wielkopolska, Kujawy and in the northern part of Lower Śląsk

Source: Kara 2009, digital processing by M. Chwiej.

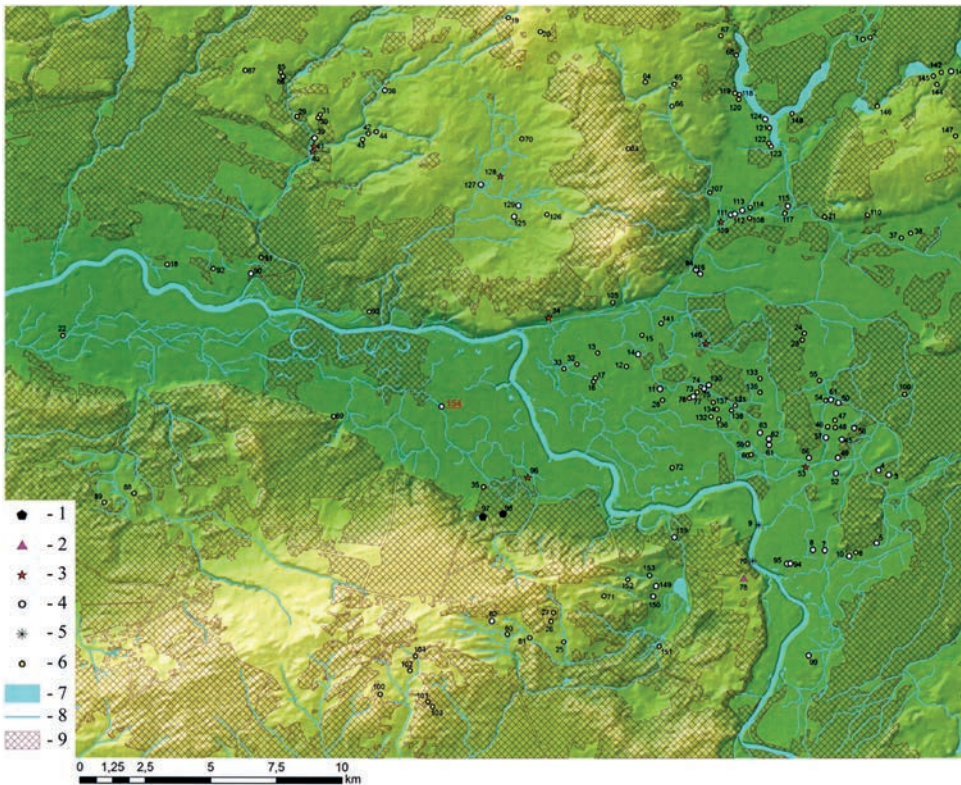


Fig. 10. Archaeological sites dated to the period between the 9th and the 10th/11th century discovered in the middle Odra basin

- 1 – a burial ground with tumulus graves,
- 2 – a burial ground with skeletal graves,
- 3 – a stronghold,
- 4 – a settlement,
- 5 – the remains of a dugout canoe,
- 6 – a settlement trace,
- 7 – bodies of water,
- 8 – bodies of running water,
- 9 – woods.

Source: Łuczak, Gruszka 2014

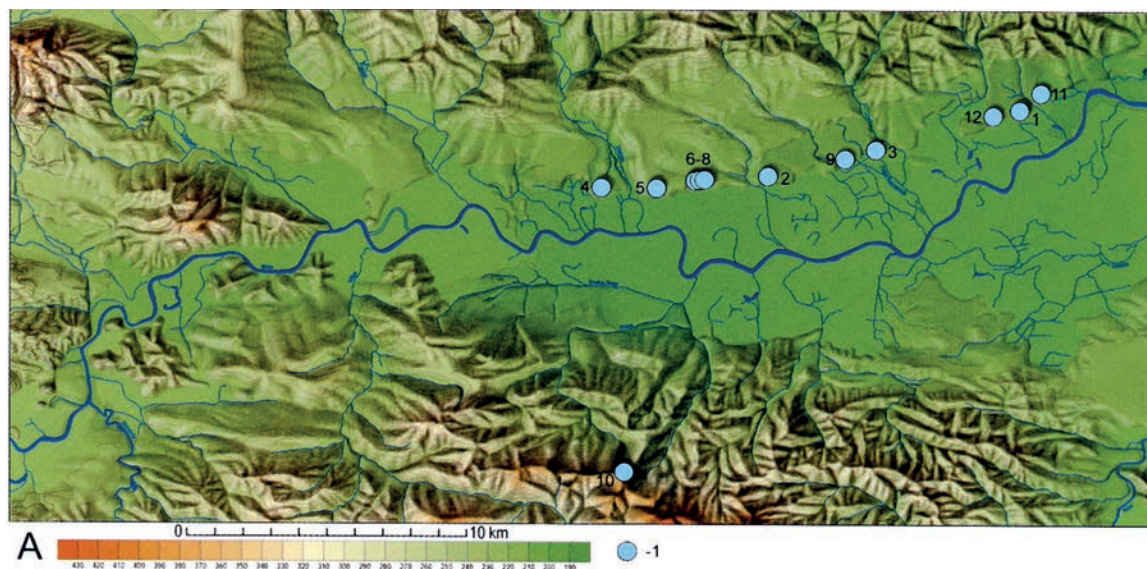


Fig. 11. Early-Slavic settlements (1) in the Kraków area between the 6th and the middle of the 7th century

Source: Poleski 2013

matic changes (including water levels) as much as with the increasingly different model of economy, which by then had been dominated by farming.

The dynamics of the development of early-medieval settlement is difficult to ascertain due to an inadequate source base. At least one-half of settlement sites marked on the archaeological maps of the Interior consists of places known only from surface research; worse still, in most of those sites only one or at most a few shards have been found. The reasons why mainly single finds of pottery shards have been recorded are manifold, even though the number of such finds is a natural effect of the Slavs' mobility in the period in question. Regardless of the reasons, however, it may be assumed that the actual number of stable, permanent settlements was much lower than the number of sites marked on archaeological maps (Fig. 12). The fact that these sites are located in clusters does not confirm that the settlement network was well-developed already in the primary phases of the early medieval period, but it definitely indicates what were the location preferences related to certain micro-regions or ecological niches.

In the course of the 9th and the 10th centuries the potential areas of settlement were gradually filled. This phenomenon reflects a process associated with demographic growth and the evaporation of unoccupied settlement niches. In the course of this process, "genetic societies", which were cemented

by kinship ties, gradually evolved into "territorial societies", i.e., socially diversified and organized human groups with a simple power structure.

The division of Slavic territories *per varias familias et loca* was mentioned by Jordanes as early as the middle of the 6th century. Obviously, there are two criteria for identifying groups of Slavs: the tribal (or perhaps familial) and the territorial. The concept of 'tribe' has been sternly criticized in the historical and archaeological specialist literature due to the absence of precise definition and the simplistic identification of a tribe with an ethnos (Cf.: Boroń 2001: 206ff; Urbańczyk 2008: 69-106); yet it would be pointless to deny that one of the methods of describing space used in the Middle Ages was to enumerate the names of communities which for a longer or shorter period had been resident in the given area and that this method was used regardless of the intended purpose of the description.

The 'tribal' names that can be ascribed to communities resident in the territory of present-day Poland are relatively few. They appeared infrequently in the 9th- and 10th-century sources. When in 1962 Stanisław Zajączkowski published a map of the distribution of conjectural Slavic tribes, he wrote that it was "still not possible to reconstruct tribal divisions on the scale of the entire country by making use of the results of archaeological research" (Zajączkowski 1962: 81). Less than

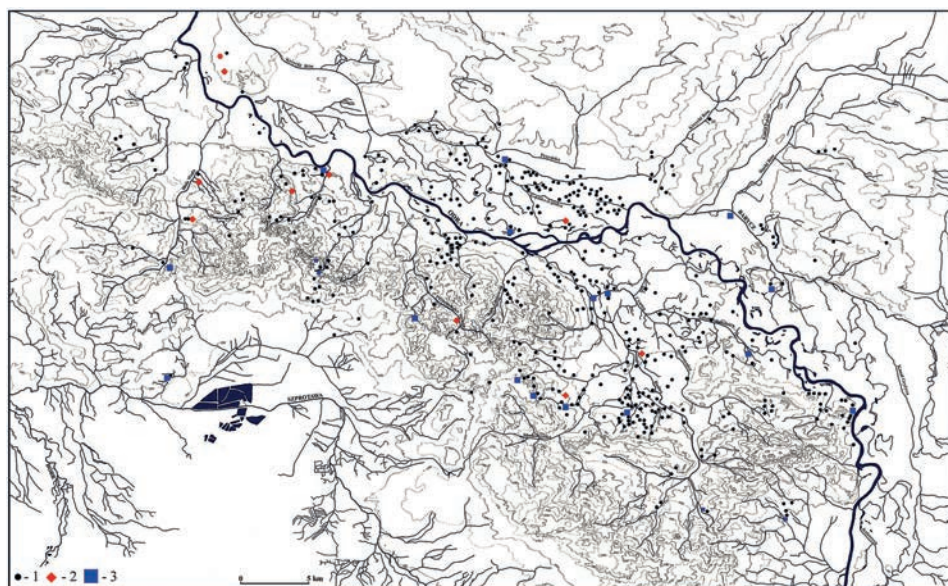


Fig. 12. The location of early-mediaeval archaeological sites dating from the later phase of the tribal period (8th – 10th century)

1 – settlements,
2 – burial grounds,
3 – strongholds.
Source: Czapla 2014

three decades later, a similar map was presented by Lech Leciejewicz, who paired names of tribes known from the written sources with settlement clusters reconstructed on the basis of archaeological research (Leciejewicz 1989: 64). This considerably helped to correct locations proposed by historians, which were erroneous not only because archaeological confirmation that a settlement had indeed been located in the suggested area was lacking, but also because features of the geographical environment, which often excluded any option of a settlement being located in a given spot, went ignored (Cf. Wyrozumski 1999: 65, ryc. 15). Since then, at least several such maps of tribal geography have appeared in the specialist literature. They confirmed the medievalist milieu in the belief that the socio-economic structures in the area of the Interior had been considerably advanced. This conviction was a starting point for the theory that tribes and tribal principalities, states even, existed there; suffice it to mention the so-called ‘Vistulan state’.

In reality, the formation of territorial communities is a not an easy process to observe by means of archaeological methods, mainly due to difficulties in the dating and the still insufficient degree to which the source material has been explored. Some regional differences in pottery stylistics (its form and decoration) between the conjectural tribal territories style are very rarely discernible. They are the most

evident in Śląsk, in reference to two ‘tribal’ names recorded in a 9th-century document written by an anonymous monk whom historians have dubbed the ‘Bavarian Geographer’. Squat biconical vessels are prevalent in the Odra Urstromtal in the vicinity of Głogów and the Lower-Silesian Forest, i.e., an area which is conjecturally identified as the territory settled by the *Dadosezani* tribe (Dziadoszanie). Slender S-shaped forms, in turn, prevail on the Wrocław Plain, ascribed to the *Sleenzane* (Ślężanie) tribe (Lodowski 1980: 156). This, however, may also result from the fact that this is precisely the course of the dividing line between the two great cultural provinces of the western-Slavic world, evident e.g., in dissimilar pottery styles: the northern Tornow-Klenica group and the southern Danube-Chodliik group (Leciejewicz 1976: 56, ryc. 4).

The most recent studies have questioned the older hypotheses, according to which the tribes of the Polans and the Goplans had been resident in Wielkopolska. Gerard Labuda considered it obvious that “the tribal name of the Polans and the country of Poland, referring to the later historical region of Wielkopolska, i.e., Elder Poland, must have dated back to the latter half of the 9th century” (Labuda 1988: 78). But the name ‘Poland’ appeared, in various spellings, not until the early 11th century. Przemysław Urbańczyk (2008: 317-360) rightly noted that the ‘tribe’ of the Polans was invented by historians and that the name *Polanie* was linked only with the Piast state and

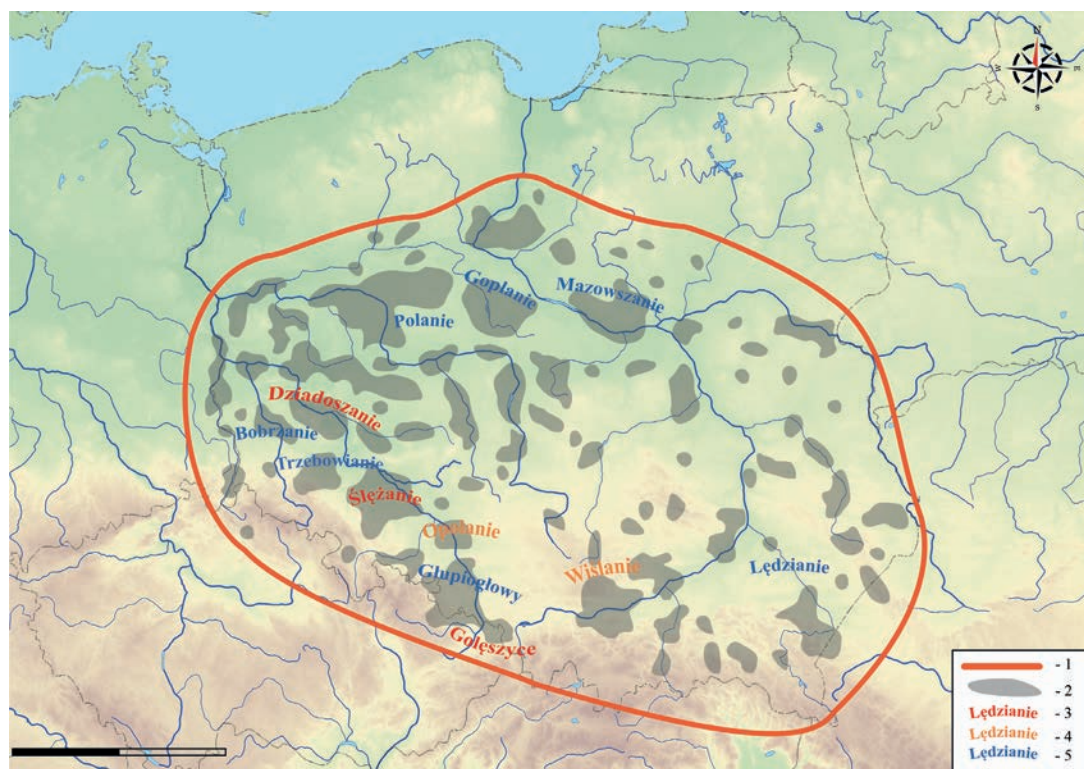


Fig. 13. The tribal geography of the western reaches of the Slavic world; the current state of knowledge

1– the boundaries of the area referred to in the present work as “the Interior”, 2 – settlement zones, 3 – identification confirmed by written and archaeological sources, 4 – names mentioned in written sources with questionable links to the settlement zones; 5 – identification based on associations with local toponyms impossible to verify.

Source: Leciejewicz 2010, modified by the Author, digital processing by M. Chwiej.

denoted its residents. The *Glopeani* (Goplans?) mentioned by the aforesaid Bavarian Geographer are even more problematic. Their settlements were traditionally considered to have been located around Gopło Lake in Kujawy; but their existence is not reflected by the archaeological maps of settlements and the link between the tribal name and the lake is questionable (Kurnatowska 2000a: 103).

Central Poland is supposed to have been occupied by the tribes termed ‘*Łęczykanie*’ and ‘*Sieradzanie*’ (Tymieniecki 1956). These names were created by medievalists and, considering the absence of traces of more consistent settlement, do not find any reflection in the results of archaeological research (Sikora 2007: 8). In light of the recent findings of history and archaeology, Małopolska was settled by large tribes: the already-mentioned Vistulans (*Wiślanie*, Lat. *Vuislane*), with their centre located in Kraków, and the Lendians (*Lędzianie*), whose large stronghold centres, according to archaeologists, were Przemyśl and Lublin. A vast amount

of scholarly literature has been produced regarding both of these tribes, even though the name *Vuislane* is mentioned only by the Bavarian Geographer and the name of the Lendians should be referred mostly to the areas east of the Bug. The entire intellectual structure that situates the Lendians in Małopolska is based on the assumption that they were actually the Lachs, i.e., on the authority of the historian Gerard Labuda (1988). Let us therefore content ourselves with stating that “not one document created in medieval Poland, not one tradition recorded by the later chroniclers mentions the tribe of the Lendians” (Parczewski 2003) and that the assumption that the Lendians resided in eastern Małopolska is an attractive but hardly documented hypothesis.

According to historians as much as to archaeologists, scattered settlements in the Opole area in Śląsk would have belonged to the *Opolini* (Opolanie?) tribe mentioned by the Bavarian Geographer. This assumption is based on the fact that the *Opolini* were mentioned in that text before the Go-



Fig. 14. The plan of the settlement in Czeladź Wielka

1 – residential buildings, 2 – storage pits, 3 – ovens, 4 – the territorial extent of the surveyed area. By D. Nowakowski.

lensizi, so they might have been their neighbours. In addition, the similarity to the place name 'Opole' is suggestive of the same; on the other hand, this name first appeared in the written sources not until the early 13th century. In the case of the *Gołensizi* (*Gołęszyce*), a slightly larger amount of linguistic data supports the assumption that they resided on the Głubczyce Plateau and in the borderland of Poland and Bohemia. Not a single tribal name referring to Mazovia has survived; the name 'Mazovians' (*Mazowszanie*), which is often featured in the maps of 'early-Polish tribes', dates from the 11th century and it originally referred to the inhabitants of this region as a province of the Piast state rather than to a former tribal structure.

Thus, if we look closely at the arguments given in support of one or another version of the tribal name distribution, it will turn out that only the location of the *Dziadoszanie* and *Ślężanie* tribes finds confirmation in written and archaeological sources. The locations of the Vistulans and the *Gołęszyce* tribes are less certain, and the remainder are largely unverifiable conjectures of historians and the archaeologists (Fig. 13). Extensive reconstructions of tribal geography reinforced the belief that the organization of society in the Interior area was considerably advanced. The vision of the 'from a tribe to a state' evolutionary path was founded on this view. It turns out, however, that the absence of clearly confirmed tribal names may result from a long period of instability caused by regular raids or migrations, ones which affected the process of establishing permanent settlements.

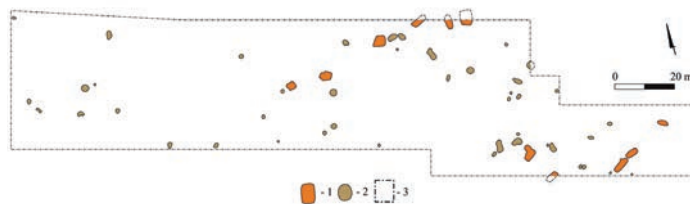


Fig. 15. An example of an early-mediaeval linear settlement; the site in Okopy Nowe

1 – residential buildings, 2 – outbuildings, 3 – the territorial extent of the surveyed area. Source: Dzieńkowski 2010

Although the number of documented settlement sites has increased as a result of recent research, our knowledge regarding the appearance of villages in the Interior remains modest. Not much information is available as to their arrangement or social and economic topography. Research conducted in both villages and cemeteries indicates that these settlements were mostly small, numbering a few families (Fig. 14). The plan of the excavated villages can be described as irregular. In some cases it is oval, with houses clustered around the central green where domestic chores were performed (e.g., Żukowice in Śląsk). In other villages the arrangement of dwellings resembles row housing (e.g., Okopy Nowe in Małopolska, Fig. 15) or even the later linear settlements. Such an arrangement, sometimes oriented along the East-West axis, has been ascertained in sites located in Wielkopolska, Mazovia, Małopolska, and Śląsk. In many cases, we may speak of a nest arrangement, with irregularly spaced clusters of pits (e.g., Horodysko in Chełm Land).

The basic unit in a village was the family homestead. The existence in Slavic villages of crofts (*zagroda*), i.e., separated units consisting of a residential building and outbuildings, is particularly hotly debated. Dense clusters of pits, which are considered to be potential traces of crofts, are found in many excavated settlement sites and are interpreted by the majority of Polish archaeologists as family homesteads. Some German archaeologists dispute this interpretation, saying that the Slavs did not live in distinct, individual homesteads until the 12th century and that earlier their villages had been divided into a dwelling area and a service area, which were shared.

Results of more recent research, especially the large-scale emergency excavations, confirm the existence of clusters of pits which are traces of distinct units measuring ca. 30m by 30m. They have been discovered in Chełmno Land (e.g., Gronowo 2, Okopy Nowe) and in other locations. These crofts,



Fig. 16. Horodysko, site no. 13. The negative traces of the construction walls of a building (structure no. 277)

Source: Dzieńkowski 2010



Fig. 17. Horodysko, site no. 13. An oven from a semi-dugout dwelling (structure no. 58)

Source: Dzieńkowski 2010

sometimes referred to as *siedliska* in specialist literature, consisted of several pits (from a few to over twenty) and constituted remnants of residential buildings and outbuildings, e.g., tar kilns, smokehouses, and ovens or hearths used for various purposes. It seems, therefore, that the hypothesis regarding the absence of crofts in Slavic settlements is unfounded. Weak points in the German archaeologists' theory have recently been pointed out by Sebastian Brather (2001: 101), who observed that a Slavic croft may have consisted of above-ground structures which left no lasting traces except the currently discernible irregular hollows.

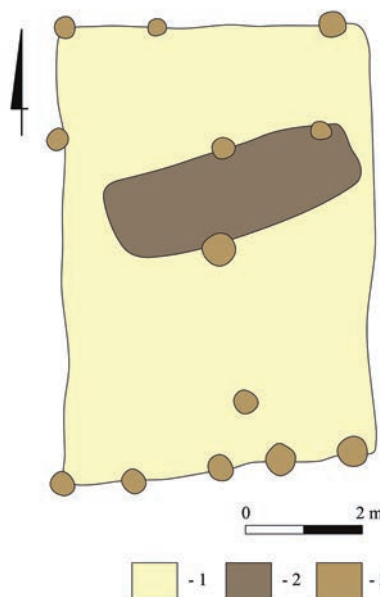


Fig. 18. Horodysko, site no. 13. A reconstruction of an above-ground dwelling structure

1– the outline of the building,
2 – bathtub-like pit,
3 – post holes.

Source: Dzieńkowski 2010

Another problem besides the ideological undercurrent of this debate is that ancient residential structures are undeniably difficult to identify. Only the traces of square dugouts, which were sunk relatively deep into the soil, are clearly discernible; this is one of the reasons why these structures are among the main markers for early-Slavic culture (Fig. 16). They are discovered mainly in Małopolska, Lower Śląsk, and the southern part of Wielkopolska. They were usually provided with a heating device constructed of stones or clay and situated in the north-western or north-eastern corner (Fig. 17). The wall and roof structures were supported on posts positioned inside and sometimes also outside the pit (See: chapter 2).

The “bathtub-like objects”, which are irregular shallow pits with a floor area of 5 to 11m² and a depth of up to 0.5m, may be remnants of above-ground houses. Similar objects are found in the entire western-Slavic region. How the above-ground section of such a building may have looked is not known (Fig. 18). As already mentioned, it may have been a light structure resembling a lean-to, such as the one discovered in Zawada near Tarnów, or a log-frame building, neither of which leaves discernible traces on the surface of the ground (Cf. Chudziak 1988: 193-203; 1996: 111; Kobyliński 1988: 204-210).

The division of the western-Slavic region into two zones depending on the house construction, with above-ground structures dominant in the northern part and square



Fig. 19. Brzezie, site no. 20. The remains of a building interpreted as a bathhouse (structure no. 655)

Source: Tyniec 2015

semi-dugouts prevalent in the southern part, was introduced by Peter Donat (1980). This hypothesis remains valid, in spite of the new discoveries which blunted its clearness. According to Dulnicz, the preference for above-ground structures in the northern zone resulted from settlement instability and by frequent removals caused by the search for new land (Dulnicz 2001: 212).

Regardless of the structural type, the houses of the Slavs were mostly one-roomed, with the floor area usually not exceeding 25m². The walls were insulated with clay or organic materials, e.g., moss, straw or twigs. Also, the insulation method often resulted from cultural conditions; e.g., traces of an earthen floor have not been found in the remains of Slavic houses discovered in Lower Śląsk, and mainly organic materials were used there. Houses were heated by ovens located in a corner, or by open hearths in the centre of the room.

Various outbuildings of a usually unidentifiable purpose are discovered in the environs of the residential buildings. One of the most easily recognized are sweat lodges, which were mentioned by the Arab authors. One of them was discovered in Brzezie near Niepołomice (Fig. 19). Wells are found increasingly frequently, e.g., in Nowa Wieś Wrocławska (ca. 746 AD) or in Brzezie in Małopolska (752 AD, repaired 825 AD). Archaeological studies often mention storage pits, refuse pits, smokehouses, hearths, oven-related pits or smelting pits, but it must be remembered that our identifications are often intuitive. There were no structures intended for stabling livestock; cattle and pigs were kept in the open.

Thus, in spite of the many years of research, the Slavic village in the Interior region remains barely explored, especially in comparison with the areas south of the Carpathians and the Sudetes. The research on fortified locations, the strongholds, is far more advanced, because their state of preservation is better and their location is more visible in the environment.

The early-medieval stronghold is a phenomenon which can be reviewed with regard to various time horizons and diverse functional aspects. Initially, they were perceived mostly as military complexes, large-sized ones being viewed as refuge forts, constructed by territorial communities in order to provide protection to their members in the case of a raid. Strongholds having a smaller inside area were considered to have been residential – the seats of tribal elites. Fortifications located at the intersections of trade routes were considered to have been military outposts. Some were regarded as cult centres surrounded with an earthen wall.

In the specialist literature dating from the second half of the 20th century, the beginnings of Slavic strongholds were associated with the 7th and the 8th centuries on the basis of traditional dating markers (i.e., pottery and isolated relics). Results of dendrochronological analyses considerably changed this picture. In many cases, it turned out that the construction of the given stronghold began a century or even two centuries later than it had been supposed. At the present moment, dendrochronological analyses indicate that the beginnings of stronghold construction in the Interior may be dated to the 9th, and in some cases to the 8th century. Isolated fortified structures dated to the 6th–7th centuries (Hački and Szeligi) most probably functioned primarily as cult centres (see: chapter 2). The discovery that the strongholds are from a considerably later period than previously assumed undermined the former hypotheses regarding the formation of proto-cities in the Interior. For instance, according to older studies, numerous ancillary settlements are supposed to have grown up around the Poznań stronghold in the 9th century, thus beginning the development of the later city. It is now clear that this stronghold was built not earlier than in the 930s or the 940s. Changes in the dating of the strongholds permit us to assert that large settlement agglomerations did not exist in the Interior in the pre-state period, i.e., before the end of the first half of the 10th century.

So far, it is only in the case of Wielkopolska that dendrochronology has made more precise dating possible; a period of vigorous stronghold construction began there in the 9th or early in the 10th century. The parallel occurrence of the earliest

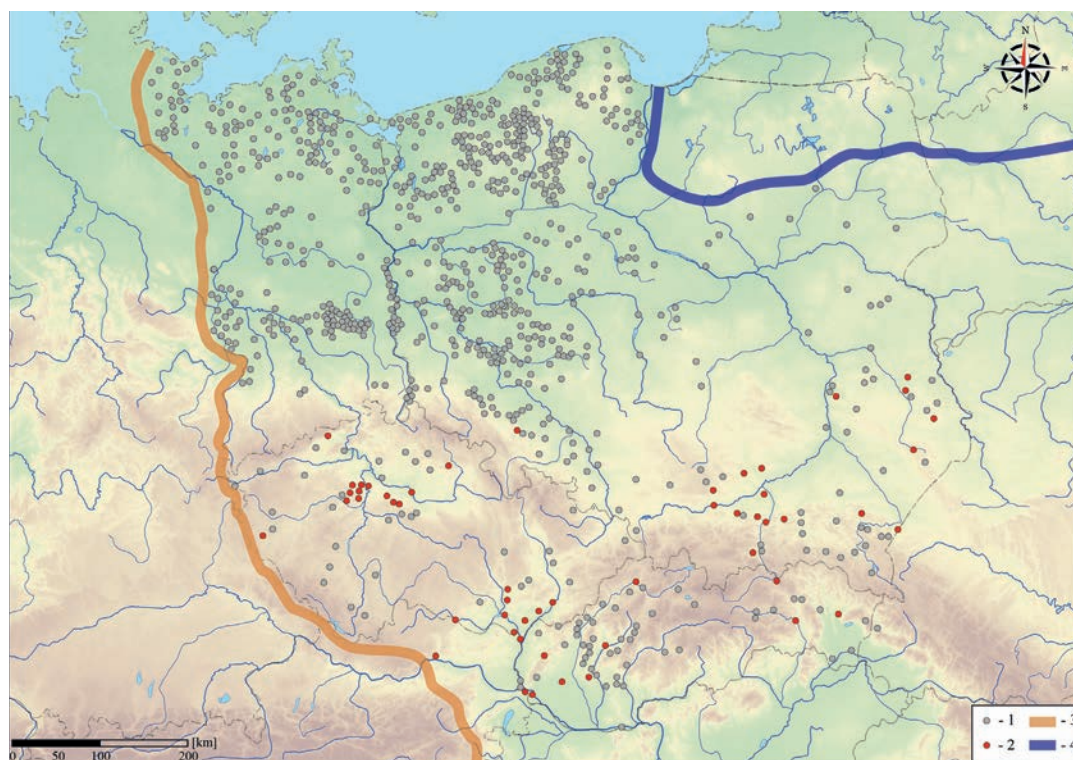


Fig. 20. 8th-, 9th- and early 10th-century strongholds in the western regions of the Slavic domain

1 — a stronghold with an area of less than 12 acres, 2 — a stronghold with an area of more than 12 acres, 3 — eastern border of the Carolingian Empire (9th cent.), 4 — southern border of Baltic settlement. Source: Poleski 2013, digital processing by M. Chwiej.

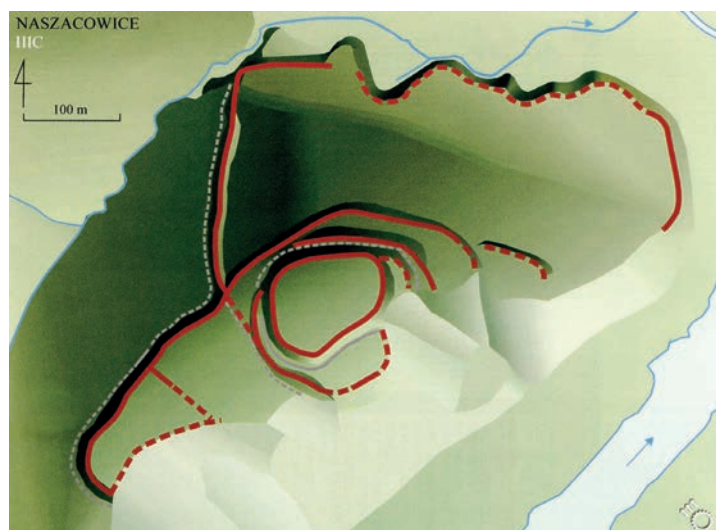
stronghold construction ventures in Mazovia is noteworthy. The successive periods of dynamic stronghold construction are the late 9th/early 10th century, the end of the first quarter of the 10th century, and the period around the year 940. Construction works at thirteen of the fifty-seven stronghold settlements of the tribal period discovered in Małopolska began in the 8th century, thirty-four may have been built in the 9th century, and the remainder dates from the 10th century. Relevant dendrochronological dating, however, is available only in the case of the strongholds in Chodlik, Łapczyca, and Zawada Lanckorońska.

The chronology of strongholds in Małopolska, which in the past were associated with the so-called Vistulan state, is unclear, but neither the stronghold at Kraków nor the one at Wiślica have an archaeologically confirmed 'tribal' provenance (Gliński 1998; Buko 2000; Kukliński 2000). Although dendrochronological dating has determined the construction of the Wawel stronghold fortifications to the early 11th century (ca. 1016), it has still not been ascertained whether this was

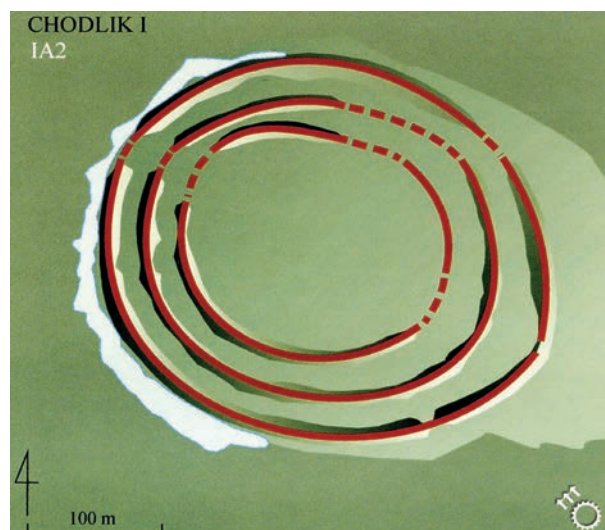
preceded by earlier construction phases, which might even date back to as early as the 8th century (Poleski, Krąpiec 1999: 92).

Relics of the Interior strongholds are distributed irregularly (Wojenka 2014: 277). They are the most numerous in Wielkopolska, Pomorze, and Śląsk, less densely distributed in Małopolska and in the eastern part of the country, and the fewest in central Poland (Fig. 20). Regional differences are evident also in the surface area of the stronghold constructions. In Małopolska, they are usually large, reaching as much as 28 hectares (70 acres). Also, multi-sectioned structures are often in evidence in this region (Fig. 21). Silesian strongholds are much smaller, their surface usually not exceeding 3 hectares (7.5 acres). The lowland strongholds in Wielkopolska are even smaller, but very numerous. Many of them were circular spaces encircled by earthen walls, with the diameter of the central courtyard ranging from 20 to 40 metres (Fig. 22). This was the shape of the stronghold in Tornow in Lusatia, researched by Joachim Herrmann (1966), which became the eponymous

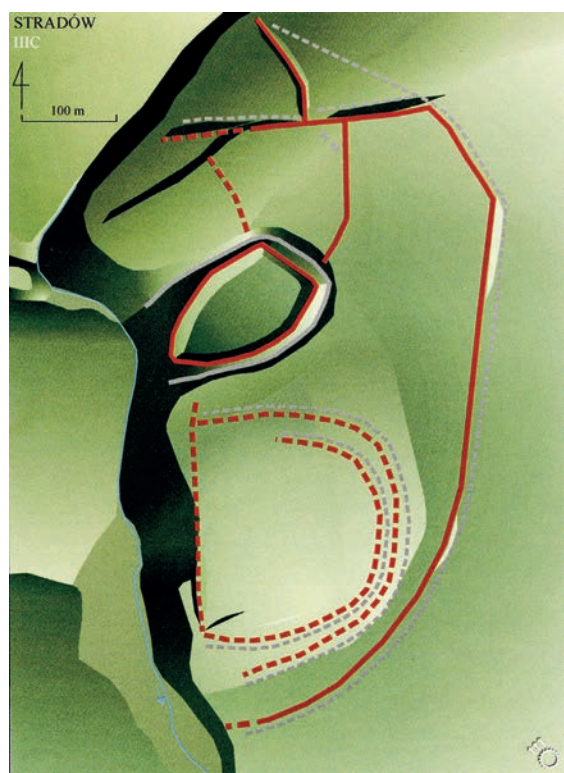
Fig. 21. Example plans of tribal strongholds in Małopolska



1 – Naszacowice. Source: Poleski 2013



3 – Chodlik. Source: Poleski 2013



2 – Stradów. Source: Poleski 2013

site for this type of stronghold structure. In Wielkopolska, Bruszczewo is the best known and best researched stronghold of the Tornow type. It was constructed in the vicinity of two settlements which had functioned since the beginning of the early medieval period. Its courtyard, protected by hook-and-stack walls some 9 meters thick, was only 30m across. Several arrowheads, two spurs, and two axes were excavated inside it, which suggests that a group of men-at-arms, possibly the local ruler's retinue, were stationed there. Military finds were also discovered in the nearby settlements. Similarly sized strongholds as those in Wielkopolska have also been found in central Poland, in Mazovia, Podlachia, and Pomorze, but they were far less numerous.

In eastern Poland, the most often encountered type is a stronghold with ramparts laid concentrically. The Chodlik stronghold is one of its most spectacular examples (Cf. Fig 21). An oval of 350 by 300 metres, it was surrounded by three concentric ramparts. The remains of a well have been discovered in the centre of the courtyard; they have been dated to the 720s on the basis of dendrochronological analysis. In addition, traces of a rectangular hall building measuring 12.5 by 5.5 metres have been found (Poleski 2013: 58).

A multi-segment stronghold, in turn, was typical of the southern and south-eastern areas of the Interior. The stronghold at Naszacowice on the Dunajec, which was under research for many years, had this particular form (Fig. 23). Constructed after the middle of the 8th century, it operated until the mid-11th century. The area enclosed by the ramparts

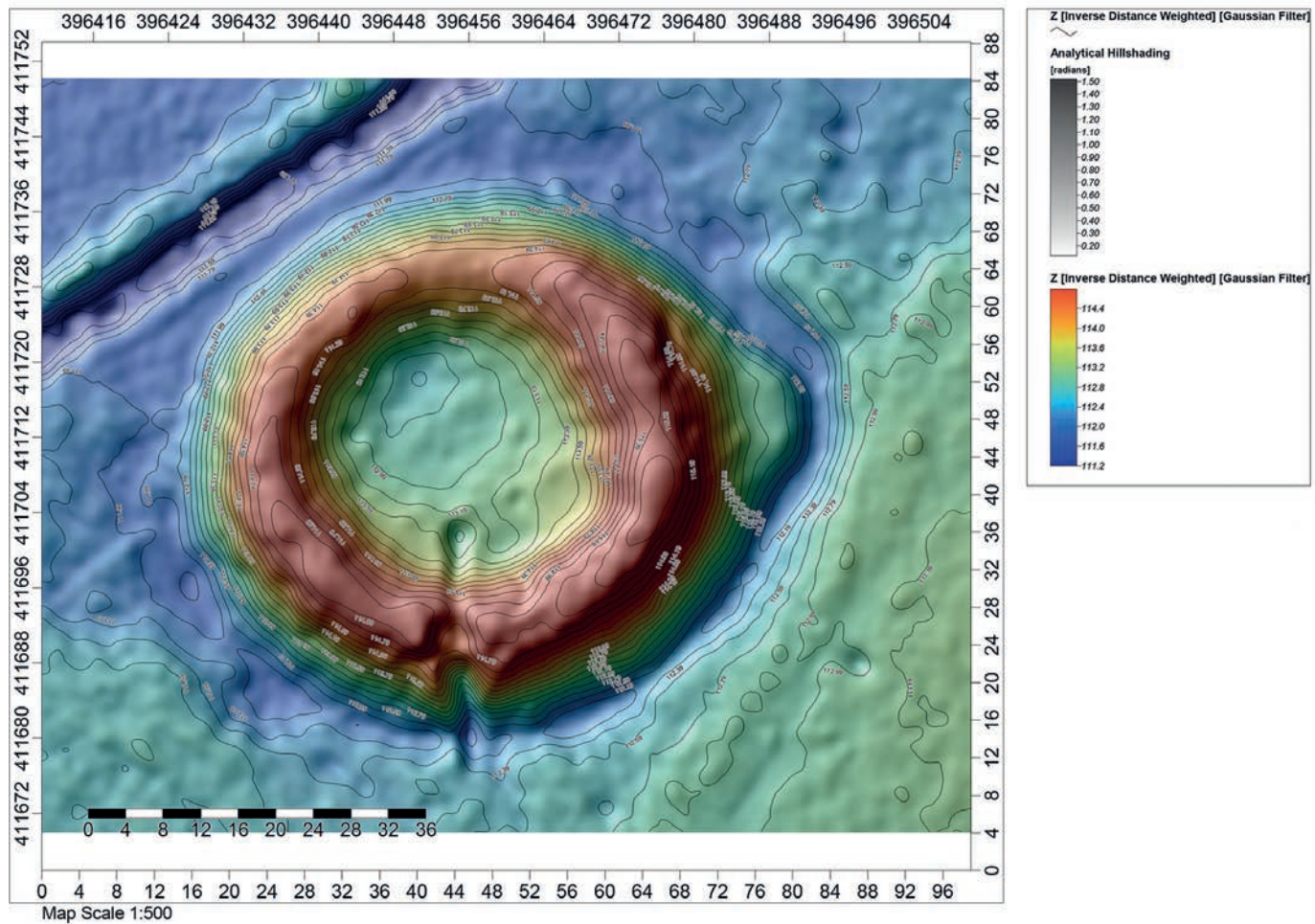


Fig. 22. A stronghold of the Tornow type in Wrocław, Lower Śląsk
By A. Kubicka

totalled ca. 37 acres and, as it turned out, was hardly settled at all. A small number of “bathtub-like objects” was discovered in the courtyard of the main section; they may constitute a remnant of above-ground buildings. In addition, the excavations uncovered a set of trenches and post cavities which delineated the contour of a construction sized 11 by 8 metres. It is not clear, however, if these are traces of a fence or the walls of a roofed hall structure. During the excavations, which lasted for several years, only a few thousand pottery shards were found, along with a few dozen iron objects, including some arrowheads and a similar number of horse tack elements. The largest set of iron objects consisted of knives (ca. 40 items). Considering the scale of the excavations and

the surface of the stronghold, this is not much. The paucity of finds is undoubtedly an obstacle to defining its functions.

In the western region of the Interior, multi-sectioned strongholds are a rarity. Bonikowo is one of the exceptions to this rule (Fig. 24). The stronghold was constructed in the latter half of the 8th century. An inner rampart (I) was added in the first half of the 9th century; a foundation sacrifice in the shape of fifteen vessels filled with grain and pieces of meat was discovered under this rampart. A barrow-shaped stone construction interpreted as a sacrificial site was also discovered under rampart I. According to Michał Kara (2009: 106-109), the stronghold had absorbed a cult site and a place of assembly and served as the seat of a small tribal community.

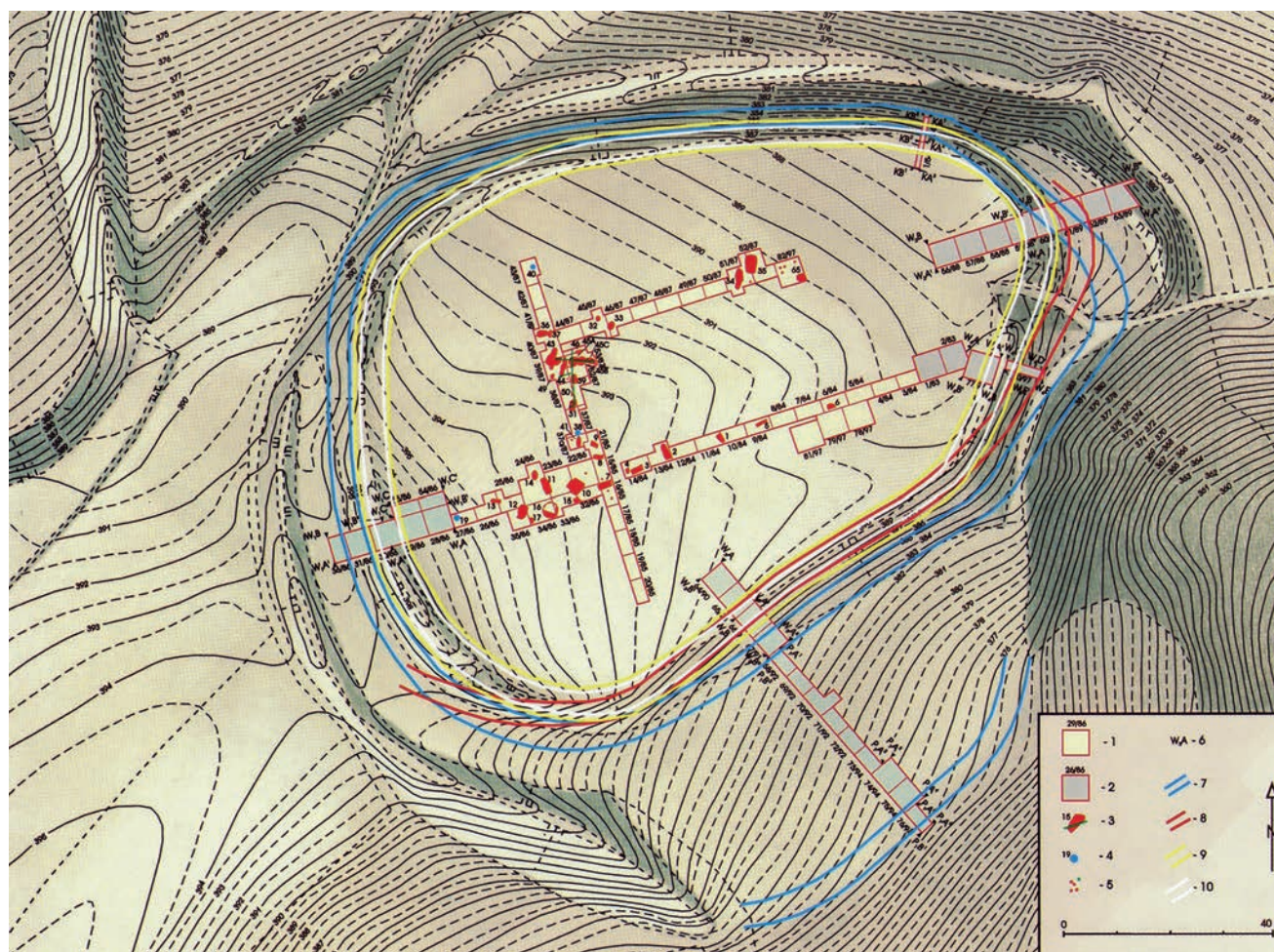


Fig. 23. The plan of the central area of the stronghold in Naszacowice

Source: Poleski 2013

Jacek Poleski (2013), who devoted much attention to the ramparts and moats of early-medieval strongholds, distinguished five types of rampart constructions: (1) a palisade; (2) rammed-earth rampart; (3) hook-and-stack rampart; (4) rampart with vertical walls constructed of timber filled in between with earth and stones; (5) ramparts with a dry wall on the outer side (Fig. 25). Constructions inside the strongholds are still poorly researched. Strongholds located in the south contained rectangular residential buildings sunk into the ground (Naszacowice); in addition to those, remains of above-ground houses: log-frame buildings (Chodlik) or, more rarely, wattle structures (Zawada near Tarnów) were found in the remaining territory of the Interior. Sometimes the residential building was contiguous with the rampart, the inner side of

which constituted one of the building's walls (Naszacowice, phase II). Remains of large houses are rarely seen in the 'tribal' strongholds of the Interior. An impressive pillar structure was discovered in the Lubomia stronghold in Śląsk (9th century), in Chodlik, which has already been mentioned here, and most probably in Naszacowice as well. A large building was discovered in the Moraczewo stronghold in Wielkopolska. In the case of Tornow-type strongholds, i.e., small circular complexes, traces of a circle of buildings contiguous with the rampart were found e.g., in Bruszczewo or Strachowo in Lower Śląsk. They are most often reconstructed as houses built directly by the rampart all around the courtyard. Considering the considerable diversity of types of 'tribal' strongholds and the still insufficient degree to which their inner structures have



Fig. 24. Bonikowo, site no. 1, Kościan commune, Wielkopolska Voivodeship. A contour-line plan of the stronghold

1 – phase I rampart, 2 – phase II rampart, 3 – phase III rampart.
Source: Kara 2009

been explored, it seems impossible to reconstruct a typical stronghold plan.

The archaeologically discernible phenomenon of the emergence of a stronghold network may indicate the period when territorial communities became ready to act in an organized manner not only to reach short-time goals, but also to reach a desired effect that would often be very remote. Individuals able to pilot such group actions probably appeared precisely at that time. Those were the men whom the written sources describe tersely as *duces*. A Slavic *dux* was a headman of the community. He was the main user of a stronghold; the duty to direct the group's actions in the case of a threat was incumbent upon him.

On the basis of finds excavated in the strongholds, which, in many cases are weapons or elements of horse tack that confirm the presence of mounted warriors there, it cannot be ruled out that some of those structures may have been the headquarters of local rulers and their retinues. According to a different hypothesis, they may have served as temporary quarters for groups of warriors arriving from outside the area.

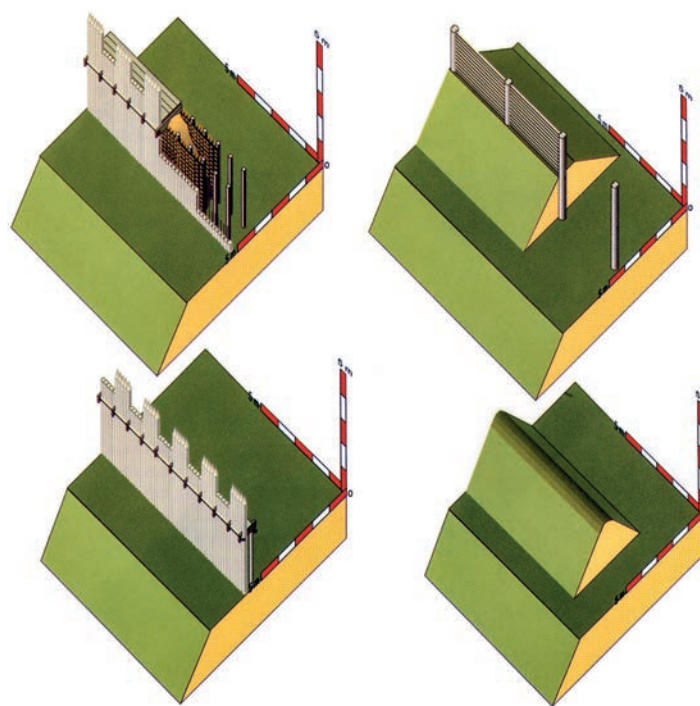
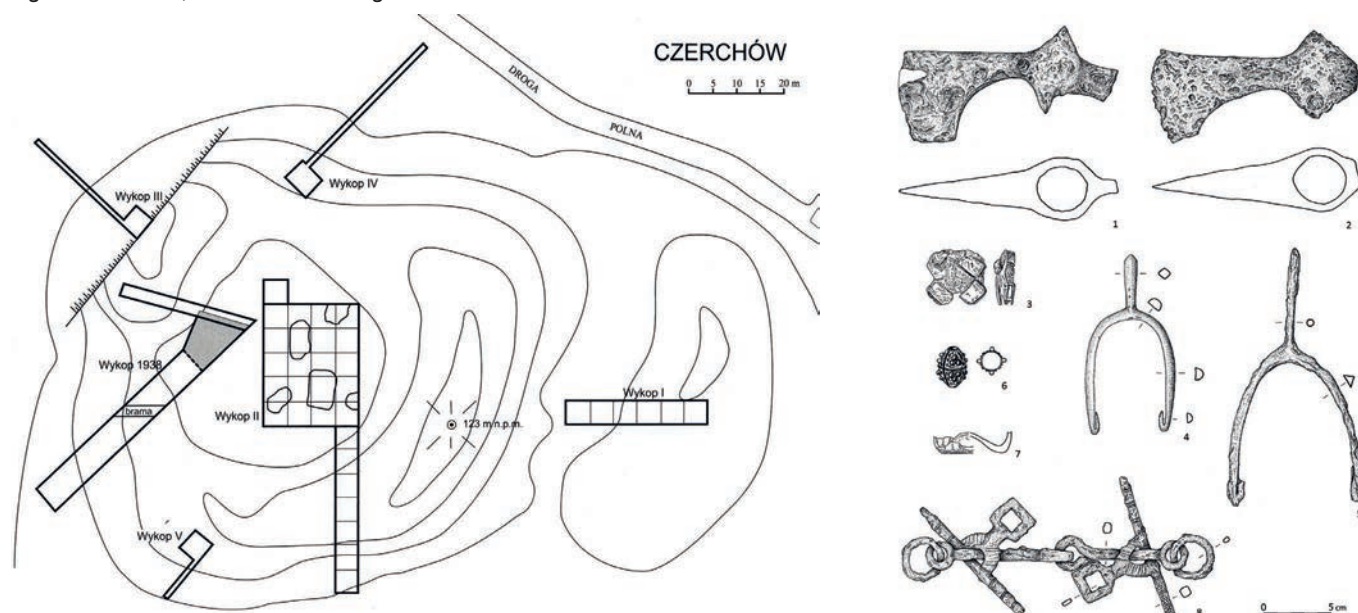


Fig. 25. Examples of reconstructions of early-mediaeval stronghold ramparts in Małopolska

Source: Poleski 2013

Foreign guests were certainly quartered at the strongholds in Czerchów and Łęczycza. The Czerchów stronghold was constructed in the late 9th or early 10th century. According to Tomasz Jurek (2014: 19-20), the numerous finds of horse tack elements, weapons, ornaments and objects constituting commodity money of Great Moravian origin point to the presence of a group of high-status mounted warriors (Fig. 26). Jurek assumes they were refugees from Moravia, but they may also have been former slave traders who settled in an area well known to them from their former raids. The neighbouring stronghold in Łęczycza, built in the 8th or 9th century, does not reveal traces of being in permanent use until the 10th century (Fig. 27). It may have been used as a place of assembly, but it may have also been for gathering slaves or cattle. A permanent garrison appeared there only after the middle of the 10th century; judging by the finds, it consisted of men who originated from a Varangian milieu. Their presence in the Łęczycza stronghold is associated with the Piast era, according to the specialists on Łęczycza with as late as the reign of Bolesław Chrobry (the Brave).

Fig. 26. Czerchów, site no. 1- the stronghold



A contour-line plan of the stronghold with archaeological digs. Source: Trojan 2014

A selection of finds. Source: Trojan 2014

At some of the Interior strongholds, the excavations did not reveal any significant settlement stratum that would have formed if the stronghold had been permanently occupied. This pertains to the small Tornow-type complexes as much as to the large multi-segment strongholds in the south-eastern zone, although it is far more noticeable in the latter. Excavations in those few strongholds of the 'tribal'-period in Małopolska which have been researched to a more significant degree reveal that these complexes were inhabited by a small group of people – or that they were not inhabited at all (Poleski 2004: 151). The question arises as to what their function may have been.

Since the process of stronghold building in the area of interest to us began after the Baltic centres of trade and crafts (8th-9th century) and the settlement agglomerations in Moravia and Slovakia had emerged, it is possible that their construction was linked with that fact. One of the explanations is an increase in the slave trade. The Baltic and Moravian agglomerations acted as intermediaries in the sale of slaves. Whereas those of the small strongholds constructed in the Interior which show traces of long-term occupation may be linked with the activity of the Slavic chieftains, many of those where the traces of use are barely discernible may constitute remnants of a network of forts used by slavers, who, in search for 'supplies', moved far inland along the river cours-

es. The already mentioned 'hall' structure discovered in the Moraczewo stronghold in Wielkopolska, whose beginnings are dated to the late 9th century, revealed numerous finds of pottery shards, including large food containers, and many animal bones bearing marks of consumption. The building was judged to have been a feasting hall used by the power elite, but the absence of traces of permanent occupation and the insignificant number of luxury objects to have been discovered stands at variance to this interpretation. It is possible, then, that this hall was used as a stopover shelter for caravans of slaves.

According to Marek Jankowiak (2012), some of the small lowland strongholds, as well as the large upland strongholds, may have been stopover posts for the captured slaves being led south (or north). Jankowiak explains the differences in the strongholds' surface area by citing different transportation conditions: in the lowland landscape, where the transportation axis was the river, the slavers were able to escort only smaller groups of captives, while in the uplands, where the transportation was conducted overland, much larger groups of slaves could be assembled. Also, the differences in stronghold size may have been conditioned by the geographic environment or the cultural tradition.

Another interesting conception regarding the function of large multi-sectioned strongholds was once presented by



Fig. 27. The early-mediaeval stronghold in Łęczycza. Aerial view of the site during a flood

Source: Grygiel, Stasiak, Trojan 2014

Józef Kaźmierczyk on the basis of the analysis of the form of the Gilów stronghold in Lower Śląsk. Kaźmierczyk suggested that they may have been built as shelters for large herds of cattle being driven along the trade routes – so, perhaps, not only for slaves. It may not be by accident that the architecture of some of the Slavic multi-segment strongholds brings to mind the African kraals. Of course, neither eventuality excludes their fundamental defensive function, but they more deftly explain the fact that in many of the strongholds contain no traces of intensive and permanent construction.

The question remains as to what extent the strongholds may have been the work of the local territorial communities. Did their construction result from the accelerating process of the integration of territorial communities in a reaction to the threat which led to the emergence of small chieftainships visible in the fact that the tribal leaders began to reside in a stronghold?

The example of Bruszczewo indicates that in the 8th–9th centuries small territorial communities and fortified residences of local chieftains were most probably already in existence, but they were relatively few. Often the very fact that the strongholds were built at all is pointed out as a proof that the local elites did, in fact, exist. However, the strongholds do not seem to have contained any larger residential buildings that may have served as the headquarters of the tribal elites. The number of the discovered luxury objects, which would have

been an signal of far-reaching trade exchanges conducted by the tribal chieftains, is small. Also, richly equipped graves that would date from this period are not known, and the sets of grave goods found in the researched cemeteries are relatively similar.

Divergences in the interpretations of the strongholds' functions are a component of a more sweeping phenomenon. As already indicated, the troubles with incontrovertible placement of the tribal names mentioned by the sources on the map of Poland, the relative impermanence of settlements that has been recorded by the archaeologists, the absence of large settlements which would have operated for longer periods of time, the absence of traces of larger cemeteries – all this confirms the theory that the residents of the Interior were not very advanced as to their socio-political organization and that territorial communities having a considerable spatial range and a chieftainship-type system had formed relatively late. What might have been the reason for that?

Topography and a river network favourable to communication made the area of the Polish Plain an easy territory to raid. Forests, marshes, and islands offered the only shelter, which, in fact, often became useful. Archaeological finds confirm contacts with the nearer and more distant neighbours, from the Avars, the Saxons, the Moravians, and the Magyars to the Scandinavians (see: chapter 6). Early on, political and economic contacts with the Danubian regions, especially with the Great Moravian Empire, played an important role (Fig. 28).

Finds of Moravian origin are distributed mainly in Małopolska (Poleski 1997: 18-22, Abb. 4, 5; 2013: 181-183). Prevalent among them are elements of horse tack, discovered mainly in the strongholds. Hammer axes, known as *bradatica*, 'bearded axes', due to their characteristic shape (Cf. Fig. 26), are numerous as well. More than a dozen similar finds have so far been discovered in the entire area of Poland. Only single objects conjectured to be of Great Moravian origin are ornaments and objects of everyday use; their provenance and dating are uncertain, however. The nature of contacts between Great Moravia and the Interior is difficult to ascertain on the basis of these few finds. They may be interpreted as imports or imitations, but they may also constitute traces of Moravian warriors' sporadic visits north of the Carpathians. The latter assumption is supported by the meagre amount of finds which would certainly be far more numerous if trade links had existed or imitations had been produced locally. The limited range of elements of horse tack also speaks in favour of the latter conjecture.

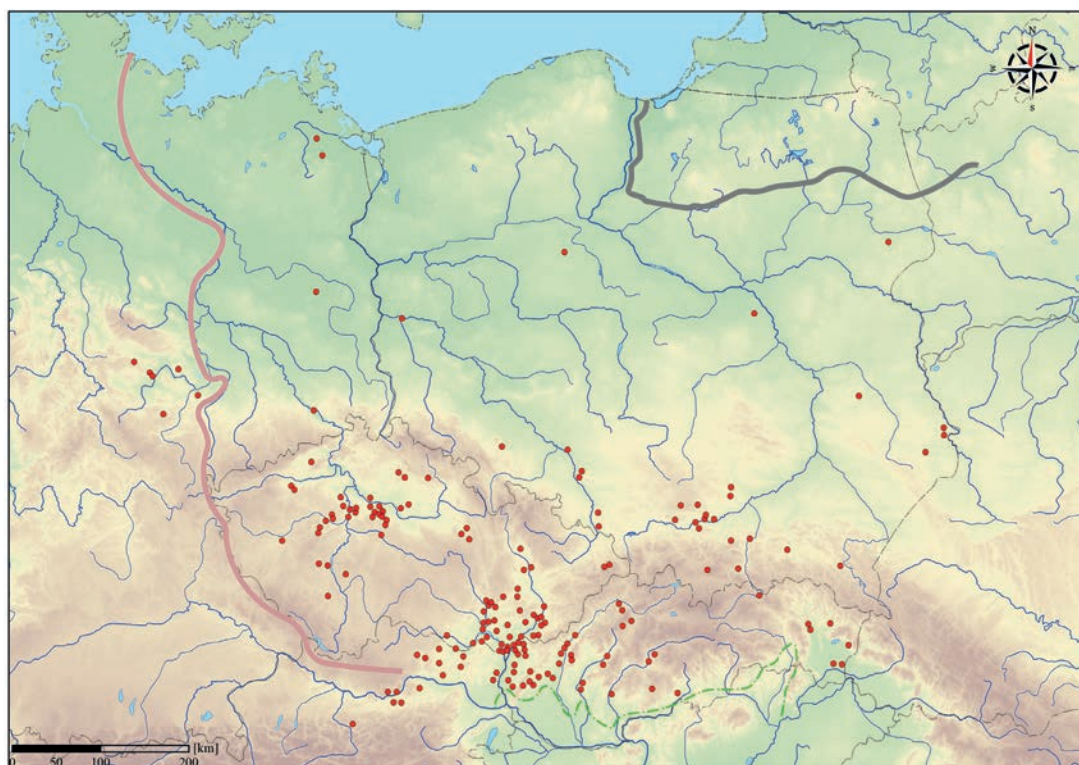


Fig. 28. Findings of Avar and Carolingian items in the western reaches of the Slavic world

Source: Poleski 2013, digital processing by M. Chwiej

It may be assumed that the Interior was mostly the target of raiding expeditions launched from Great Moravia, ones which in the 9th century were organized mostly with acquiring slaves in mind. The Moravian tradition of raiding the *ad aquilonem* regions may have been continued by the Czechs, but on a smaller scale, because from the late 9th and certainly in the 10th century, Polish lands were more vigorously penetrated by the Scandinavians. The Scandinavians constituted an important part of the Piast rulers' retinue, which was responsible for the development of the stronghold network, i.e., the foundation for the territorial and financial organization of the future state. They also participated, although probably only at the initial stage of the state's development, in human traffic, trading slaves and captives. The finds of silver deposits, which are a material indicator of votive practices rooted in the culture of the Baltic area, may point to infiltration by Scandinavian and Varangian warriors in the first half of the 10th century.

The poverty and simplicity of Slavic culture in the area between the Odra and Bug rivers in the period before the emergence of states (chieftdoms?) which provided security to

their subjects may thus be conjecturally explained by the lack of stability and uncertainty of the future, as well as by the fact that the Interior societies were being constantly robbed of young and active individuals. Stable and more complex social structures could not evolve in these conditions, not even in the shape of 'tribal' organizations proposed by historians in reference to the territory of Poland.

The reason for the slow pace of the evolution of social structures may, as stated above, lay in the slave trade that destabilized Slavic communities of the Interior and robbed them of young, energetic men who might otherwise have constituted warrior troops to support the political order in the chieftaindom system. But regardless of who conducted the most devastating raids on the communities resident in the Interior, the question arises as to how the economic system of these communities developed and to what extent its formation was influenced by the constant threat. The image prevalent in historical studies has been that of Slavic tribes being agricultural communities which consensually merged into larger organisms, which in time evolved into the Piast state.

4. The economic landscape

They sow grain in two seasons, in summer and in spring, and they gather two harvests. The chief crop is millet.

(Ibrâhîm ibn Ya`qûb

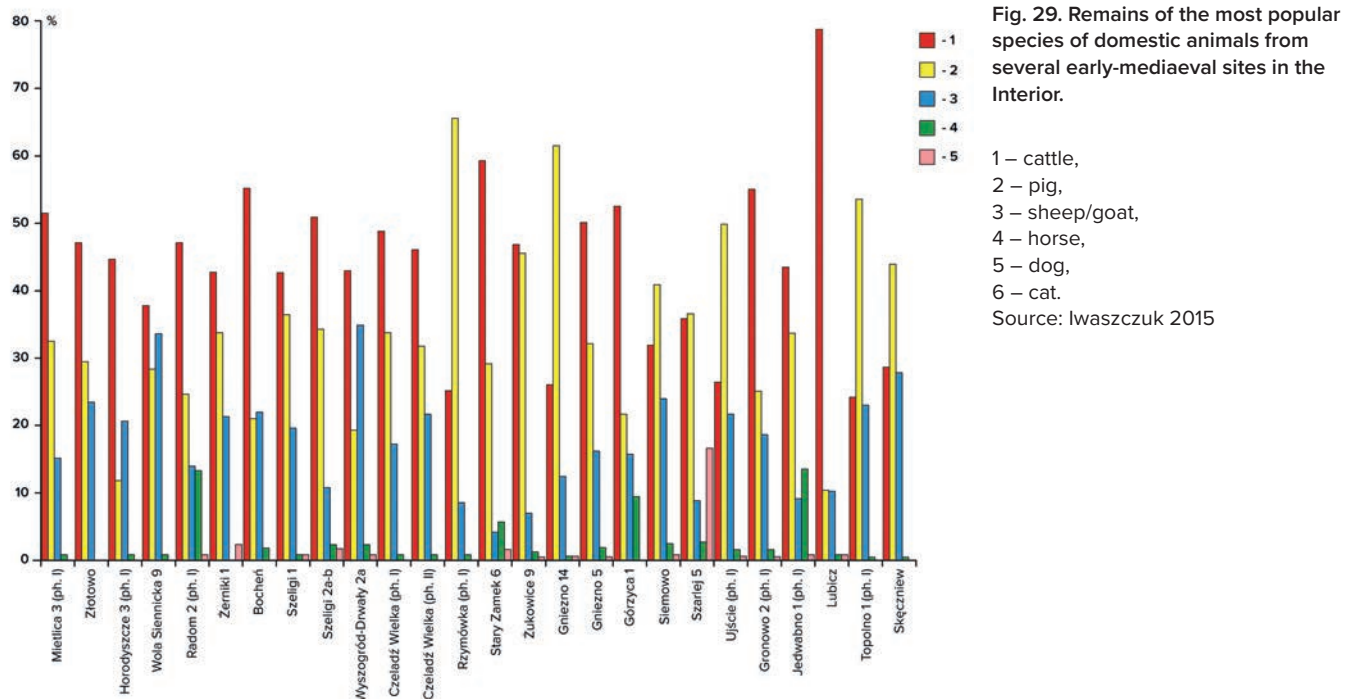
They possess an abundance of livestock and produce, which they store in heaps, especially common millet and Italian millet.

(Pseudo-Maurice)

The view dominant in historical studies dating from the second half of the 20th century was that the Slavic economy was based on agriculture from as early as the 6th century. However, the pattern of scattered settlements in the 7th and 8th centuries does not confirm this thesis. The excavated finds, too, indicate that it was animal husbandry, mainly cattle raising, that dominated the Slavic economy in this period; in the eastern region of the Interior this may have been so until the 9th century (Fig. 29). This was mentioned with some reluctance

by Lech Leciejewicz (2010: 63), who cited Pseudo-Maurice's account of the *Sclaveni* and *Antes*, as well as the results of palynological analyses which confirmed the predominance of pastureland over farmland in the areas along the Elbe in the early Middle Ages. The results of recent archaeobotanical and archaeozoological research support this assumption as well.

Finds of farming tools, including iron shares which reinforced triangular and quadrangular ard ploughs, are mostly dated to the later phase of the 'tribal period'. Hoards of iron



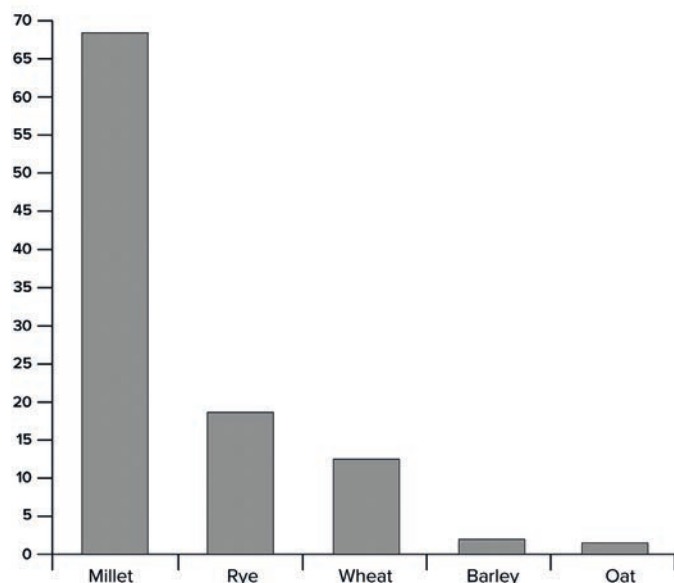


Fig. 30. Bruszczewo, site no. 13, Kościan commune. The percentage of cereals in the archaeological material from the site

Source: Brzostowicz 2002

farming tools predating the 10th century, which are mentioned in specialist literature, were discovered mostly south of the Carpathians and Sudetes. Wooden *sokha* and ard ploughs, which were useful on the light soils prevalent in most of the Polish Plain, did not survive. Not much is known about the farming techniques. Ibrâhîm ibn Ya`qûb provided us only with the information that the Slavs sowed grain twice a year, in summer and in spring, and gathered two harvests.

Until recently it has been assumed that the main types of grains sown by the western Slavs were cereal grains, such as rye and wheat, with the addition of barley and oats, millet occupying a minor position. Contrary to this view, both the written and the archaeological sources indicate that millet, scorned by modern historians, was in fact the dominant crop (Fig. 30).

The multi-strata sites in the Interior (dated only to the latter phase of the early Middle Ages, however) yield numerous indications of cultivation and consumption of fruits, e.g., pears, plums, apples, and peaches. Nuts were eaten as well. Peas, broad beans, beans, lentils, and other crops were grown in household gardens. Finds of macroscopic botanical relics from the period of the 6th to 10th centuries are very rare, so the research results cannot be generalized as applying to a larger area.

Animal bones found in settlements are a source of information on the structure of the animal husbandry system and on food preferences. As a rule, bones of domestic animals are vastly predominant, with the proportion usually above 90 percent. Cattle bones predominated in the early period of the Slavic economy, which may be linked with the prevailing model of animal husbandry and with the itinerant lifestyle (Fig. 31). The proportion of pig bones rose in the following centuries. Results of relevant analyses show that pig breeding was more prevalent in the western part of the Interior. The percentage of goat and sheep bones is smaller but still significant. The breeding of cattle and small domestic ruminants was influenced by the fact that they provided not only meat, but also milk, hides and, in the case of sheep, wool. Horses were bred mainly for riding, but also for transportation. Horsemeat was eaten fairly rarely, mainly in the eastern part of the Interior. Poultry was eaten as well.

Foodstuffs obtained through animal husbandry and agriculture were complemented by hunting and fishing. Remains of wild animal bone rarely exceed 10 percent of finds; the borderlands of Śląsk, Wielkopolska, and Lusatia, where they occasionally exceed 20 percent, are an exception. The main animals hunted were red deer, roe deer, boars, hares, as well as aurochs, bison, bears, and moose. Bones of wild carnivores, such as wolves, lynxes, and foxes are also found (Fig. 31). Beavers and otters were hunted as well. Analyses of fishbone remains, which recently have been conducted on a more extensive scale, confirmed the significant role of fishing in the food supply. However, the data which have been gathered so far pertain mostly to the stronghold agglomerations of the early Piast state, i.e., to the latter phase of the early Middle Ages, when food consumption rose considerably in connection with Christianization.

The target of manufacture was to provide the household with essential tools and furnishings, which were produced from easily obtainable materials, usually from wood, bone and antler, less often from iron. Our perception of the potential diversity of this production is based mostly on finds discovered in other regions; this is because archaeological sites dated to the tribal period and located in the area between the Odra and Bug rivers have yielded few such finds. A monograph centred on the early-medieval economy in Upper Śląsk, which is based on source material yielded by 311 sites dated to the period between the 6th and the 10th century, demonstrates the poverty of the Slavs' material culture in this period. A relatively large area (close to 10,000 km²) yielded only a dozen or so pieces

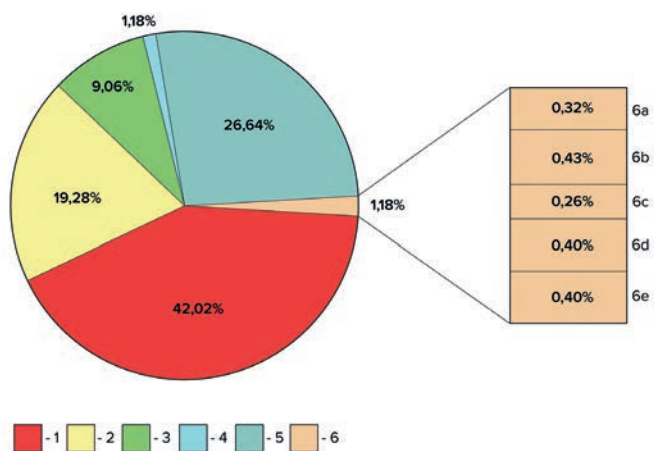


Fig. 31. The remains of animal species found at sites dating from the tribal period

1 – cattle, 2 – pig, 3 – sheep/goat, 4 – dog, 5 – wild game, 6 – other species (6a – sheep, 6b – goat, 6c – horse, 6d – hen, 6e – goose).
By S. Możdziejch.

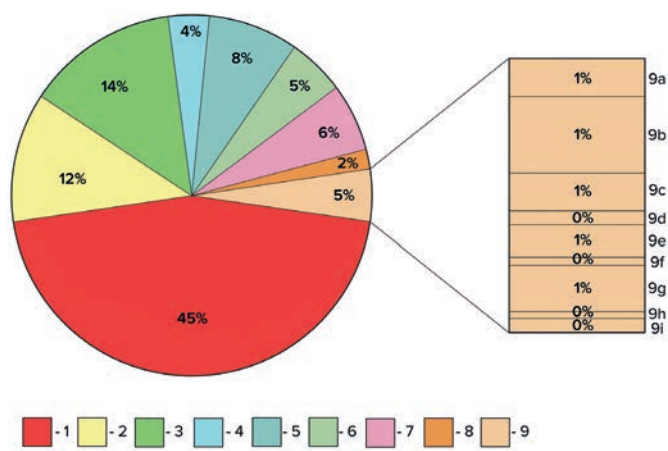


Fig. 32. Remains of vertebrate animals found at early-mediaeval (9th–11th century) sites in the borderlands between Lower Śląsk, Wielkopolska and Lusatia

1 – red deer, 2 – roe deer, 3 – wild boar, 4 – moose, 5 – beaver, 6 – hare, 7 – marten, 8 – squirrel, 9 – other species (9a – fox, 9b – bear, 9c – badger, 9d – wolf, 9e – otter, 9f – wisent, 9g – aurochs, 9h – polecat, 9i – lynx).

Source: Makowiecki et al. 2014

of quern-stones, some sickles, two pairs of scissors, around a hundred whetstones (of which 62 came from a single site, the Lubomia stronghold), over 30 spindle whorls, 60 knives, and some iron bowls.

One product which leaves no doubt as to its local provenance is pottery. Various studies concerning shards of clay vessels have contributed to the development of a range of classifications aimed at making this very common find a chronological marker. As already mentioned, vessels were hand-made, and only their upper sections were smoothed on the wheel. Familiarity with those simple if time-consuming processes was universal, and the vessels were domestically produced. The method of forming an entire vessel on the wheel spread relatively quickly in the 10th century. The mottled colouring of many excavated shards indicates that the vessels were fired in open kilns in temperatures not exceeding 700°C.

Apart from pottery, a craft linked with the food-production section of the economy, equally important were tasks associated with providing shelter and clothing, indispensable even in the momentarily milder climatic conditions. Organic materials were used, e.g., wood, hides of domestic and wild animals, plant fibres (flax, hemp), and sheep wool. The craft

of spinning left traces in the form of very common finds: spindle whorls made of clay, stone, or wood. Unfortunately, textiles dating from the tribal period have not survived. They may occasionally be discerned in the form of impressions on pottery, e.g., impressions of linen fabrics known from the Zawada settlement.

The procurement and processing of iron required more skills than pottery. Raw material in the form of bog ore was easily accessible, but it needed to be correctly processed. Bloomery furnaces were used, as smelting kilns had not yet been introduced. In some of the larger settlements, e.g., in Żukowice in Lower Śląsk, clusters of bloomeries used for smelting and purifying iron have been discovered. The Bieńkowo site in Lower Śląsk yielded many shards of clay nozzles, pieces of iron ore, and iron slag, as well as the remnants of bloomery pits. Iron products found at Slavic sites in the Interior are mainly universal tools, such as knives and axes. Another common find are arrowheads.

Woodworking, including carpentry, was another important branch of production. Surviving house structures dated to later periods (10th–11th centuries), as well as the larger construction ventures, such as stronghold ramparts or bridges,

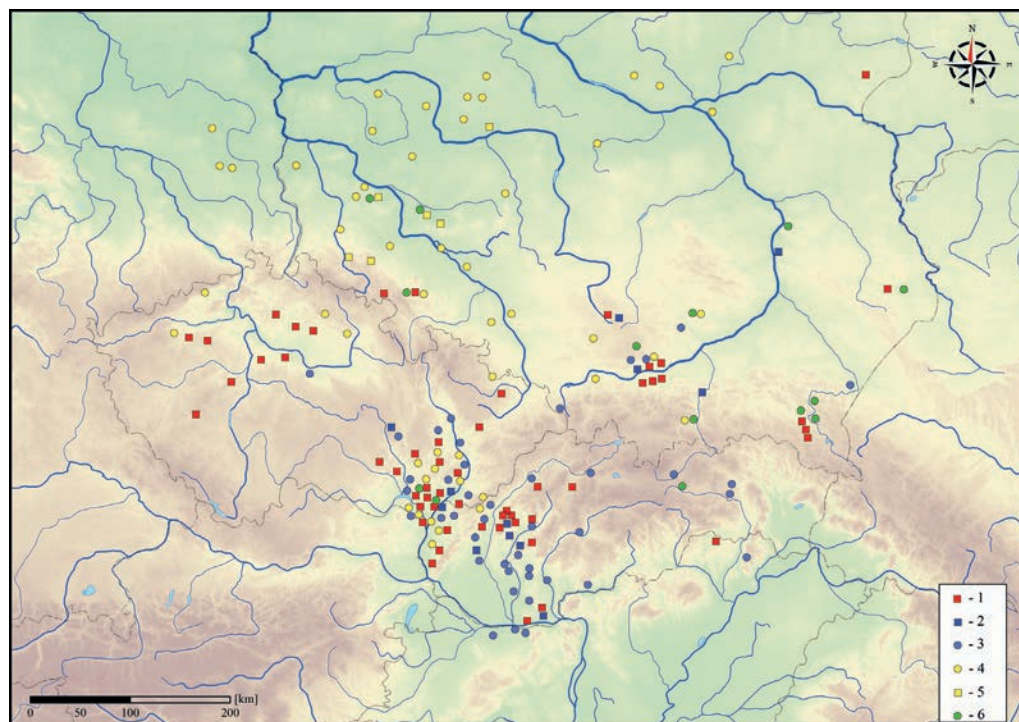


Fig. 33. The southern part of the western-Slavic area of habitation in the early Middle Ages. Hoards of iron items and iron commodity money

- 1 – a hoard of various iron items,
- 2 – a hoard of axe-type grzywna ingots made of iron,
- 3 – a singular finding of axe-type iron grzywna ingots,
- 4 – a singular finding of a Silesian-type iron bowl,
- 5 – a hoard of Silesian-type iron bowls,
- 6 – a finding of one or several arrowhead-shaped iron grzywna ingots.

Source: Poleski 2013, digital processing by M. Chwiej.

confirm that the Interior Slavs possessed considerable skills in this respect. Logging was associated with the making of pine tar and birch tar. Remains of earthen kilns used in their production were discovered in Biskupin, Bruszczewo, and at other sites.

Not much can be said about the attire worn by the residents of the Interior. On the basis of finds alone, something can be ascertained only about ornaments and various metal elements of outfits, such as buckles or brooches. Numerous finds of leather shoes and a few textile pieces are known from the multi-stratum sites in the Baltic area, where items made from organic materials would often survive. Similar items found inland date only from the latter phase of the early-medieval period.

In the Interior communities, production was usually carried out in the framework of domestic craftsmanship and catered to the immediate needs of the household or village. Larger settlement agglomerations, where commodities (hides, slaves, iron?) exchangeable for other commodities brought in from the neighbouring lands were accumulated, evolved only towards the end of the 'tribal period'. But even in their case production was still far from the too-easily used concept

of 'professional craftsmanship' or 'itinerant craftsman'. Most products discovered in the Interior did not require much knowledge or skill to make. Archaeologists, who are usually dilettantes when it comes to many areas of production, tend to overestimate the ancient craftsmen's level of technical skill, "identifying the simplicity of techniques, paid for with the tediousness of the task, with its alleged complexity. Everything they judge 'better' they tend to ascribe to specialists, professionals".

Traces of exchange, which throughout the period in question was conducted in the barter system, are similarly rare. The issue whether the axe-like grzywna ingots or the Silesian-type iron bowls, which are found mainly in southern Poland, were used as commodity money remains controversial (Fig. 33). The view currently prevailing is that the latter were used in food preparation, which explodes the assumption that the local exchange market in Interior was well-developed and reduces it to a much smaller scale.

The existence of long-range exchange may be conjectured on the basis of the discovery of the so-called imports (see: chapter 6). From the 8th century onwards, various items difficult to produce in the framework of domestic craftsman-

ship, mainly ornaments and weapons, were imported into the Interior. They are discovered mostly in strongholds and settlements. They would appear at cemeteries concurrently with skeletal burial rite, i.e., only in the latter phase of the early-medieval period. Hoards containing silver coins (mainly of Arab origin), ornaments, and raw silver were deposited in the area of the Interior from the 10th century onwards. In the case of these deposits, as much as in the case of weapons discovered in the excavated strongholds, the question of their owners is exceedingly important. They may have been members of the local elites, but they may also have been foreigners: merchants or slave traders, who penetrated into the Interior in the company of warrior troops and then resided in strongholds temporarily for stopovers.

Sources relating to trade between western Europe and the Slavic world are scarce. The most important of them is a capitulary, i.e., a collection of legislative acts issued by Charlemagne in Diefenhofen, in 805 (*MGH...*: 122-126), and a customs duty tariff from Rafelstetten, prepared 903/905 for the king of the Franks, Louis IV (*MGH...*: 249-252). The Diefenhofen capitulary includes a prohibition on selling weapons to Slavs, while the Rafelstetten tariff specifies customs duties, including the duty to be paid for slaves driven by Jewish merchants. It also mentions the "Moravians' marketplace", where trade in these two essential commodities, weapons and slaves, was probably conducted.

Exchange places in the Danubian region and the Baltic emporia emerged around the middle of the 8th century and

operated until the second half of the 10th century. It is beyond doubt that the Baltic and Moravian agglomerations were vital hinges in the long-distance trade. The crucial question is why no such centre was established in the Interior. The reasons for this were twofold: firstly, this was a territory distant from any trade route important at the time; secondly, the local communities, which were subjected to constant raiding, lived in conditions that were unfavourable to more complex forms of social organization, so a numerous and powerful stratum of militant merchants did not have an opportunity to develop in that region.

Traces of the economic activities of the residents of the Interior between the 7th and the 10th century are modest indeed. They indicate that their main occupation was production geared to animal husbandry. Concurrently, the forest was of considerable economic importance and the lifestyle was almost itinerant, which did not favour the production and accumulation of tools or furnishings. When danger loomed, an excess of movables was only a burden.

The Slavic population's considerable mobility in the initial phases of the early Middle Ages resulted in the absence of ties which could bind territorial communities into 'tribes'. In the 9th and the 10th centuries, the scattered groups were only rarely able to build centres constituting the headquarters of elites. Only one element united them – and that was the cult centres.

5. The symbolic landscape

The entire population venerates and fears this pool more than the churches...

(Thietmar of Merseburg)

If one of them dies, they burn his body in the fire (...) they celebrate loudly and show their delight, saying that they rejoice because the Lord showed His mercy upon him

(Ibn Rustah)

The universe of the Slavs' symbolic culture has not been thoroughly explored. However, attempts at reconstructing old beliefs, undertaken again and again by historians and archaeologists, have expanded our knowledge of this area of our ancestor's lives. In addition, new archaeological discoveries have appeared that contradicted the earlier vision of a feeble paganism, its spine broken immediately after Mieszko had been baptized. The increasingly frequent finds of cemeteries with pit graves and layered graves in central Poland, in Lusatia or in Małopolska, as well as the verification of previously researched sites permit us to state that we have only just begun to uncover the wealth of Slavic magical and mythical practices, some of which are connected with the well-developed sphere of funerary rituals and the cult of the dead which until today were concealed behind enigmatic phrases referring to a 'burial-less funerary zone'.

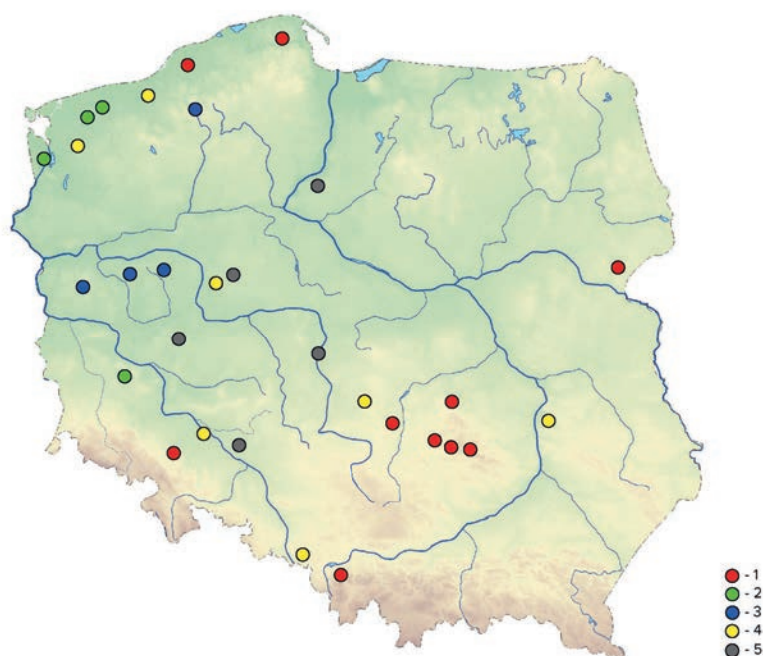
Let us see, then, what paganism was like in the period under examination. For the sake of subsequent considerations, let us assume (following in the footsteps of the medieval chroniclers) that paganism equals non-Christianity. Hence, going back to the period between the 6th and the 10th centuries, which is of interest to us here, it would be worthwhile to search the sphere of symbolic culture for elements which at the end of the Middle Ages may have been magic; earlier – a superstition; and before the adoption of Christianity – a part of a ritual. The scarcity of data concerning Slavic beliefs conveyed by the written sources and the nearly absolute absence (with a few exceptions) of the images of divinities in Slavic material culture permit the archaeologist to make only a cautious statement that nothing is known about Slavic mythology. There is even

less certainty as to the existence of an extensive pantheon of Slavic gods in the early Middle Ages.

In researching religion, we attempt to refer our analyses of archaeological sources to as broad a cultural context as possible to see the sphere of ritual against the background of the natural environment and the landscape of settlement which permeate it. The subject of research are artefacts and eco-facts whose form, as accessible to today's scrutiny, may indicate an original function resulting from the application of the norms of a given religion and from cult procedures linked with the religious calendar. Artefacts linked with magic may be reviewed separately, depending on the accepted definition of religion.

Attempts at identifying ancient cult sites associated with nature worship and ancestor worship can be made during the analyses of archaeological sources. Most probably, these cults were usually local; this would agree with Thietmar's observation: "There are as many shrines, and as many images of idols are worshipped by the heathens, as there are districts in this country", and would confirm the hypothesis that the sphere of Slavic beliefs was characterized by considerable diversity.

The early-medieval cult sites may have been associated with the natural or cultural environment. In the first case, the shrines would not have left traces of their construction in the form of buildings; the latter encompassed mostly Christian temples and, more rarely, e.g., in the case of the Elbe Slavs, also pagan shrines. Also the pagan cemeteries were most often associated with the natural environment, whereas the Christian ones were paired with an ecclesiastical structure and thus with the settled environment.



34. Pagan places of cult in Polish territory in the early Middle Ages

- 1 – sites surrounded with an earthen or stone wall,
- 2 – sites surrounded with a ditch,
- 3 – islands on lakes,
- 4 – traces of cult buildings,
- 5 – stone structures.

Source: Cieślík 2010

In recent years, much attention has been devoted to pagan cult sites discovered in the Interior; hence their numbers in the archaeological site maps have been growing. The fundamental problems are not only to identify them, but also to define the timeframe for their operation.

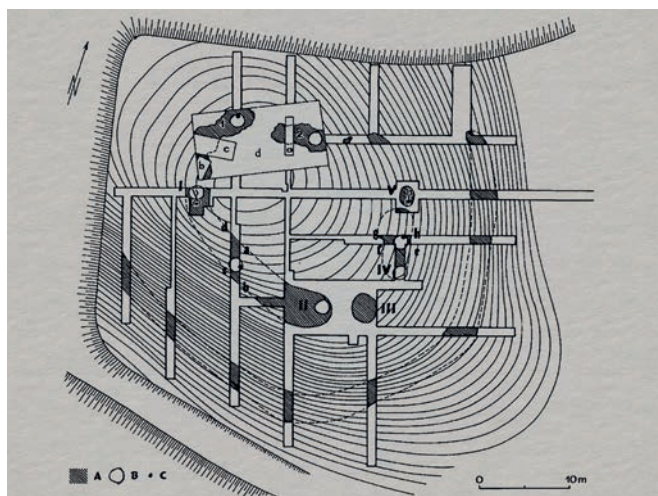
Hill- and mountaintops, springs, islands, and groves are usually mentioned as identified cult sites (Fig. 34); but very few of the sites indicated in specialist literature have been archaeologically researched, and only in the case of a few it is possible to say with more certainty, i.e., on the basis of unequivocal testimony of the written and archaeological sources, that a cult-related centre did indeed operate there.

Mountains with characteristic stone or earth ramparts around their tops were supposedly both objects of cult and locations where pagan rites were performed. Ślęża in Śląsk is the best known of them; others are Góra Grodowa in Tumlin, Łysa Góra, Góra Dobrzyszowska, and Góra Chełmo in central Poland. The perception of the mountaintop constructions as linked with the 'tribal period' poses serious problems. In the case of Ślęża, whose function as a cult site is confirmed by the 11th-century chronicle of Thietmar, the stone ramparts have been finally dated to the 13th century, and it is possible that they were constructed even a few centuries later. A small stronghold on the eastern slope of this mountain, which is interpreted as a cult site from the 'tribal period', was discov-

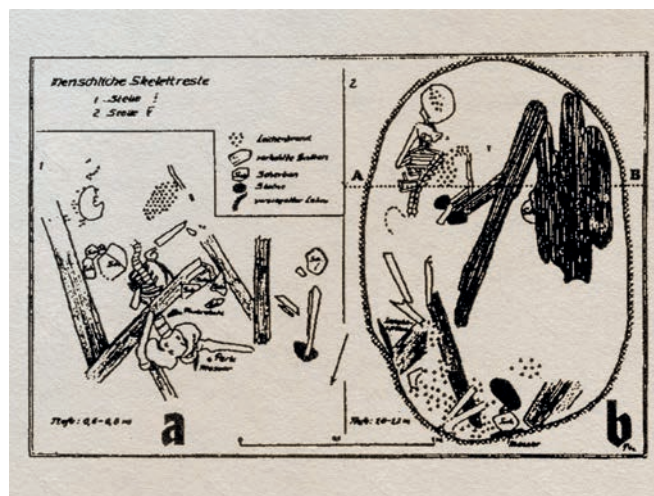
ered only in the late 20th century. Stone ramparts were also discovered at Łysa Góra in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains, but, as in the case of Ślęża, the chronology of these structures is still not certain. At neither of those sites did archaeological excavations yield a significant number of finds that would confirm their 'cult' reading. When it comes to a complex set of ramparts and moats at Góra Chełmo near Radomsko, credible signs pointing to the religious function of the compound are also absent.

Kowalowa Góra in Gostyń in Lower Śląsk is an example of a site whose ritual role seems unquestionable. This site, in earlier archaeological literature considered to have been a stronghold, is located on a hill, access to which was cut off by a ditch ca. 0.5 to 0.7 metres deep and ca. 2 metres wide (Fig. 35). The flattened bottom of the ditch yielded a stratum of pottery shards and numerous pieces of charcoal which were a remnant of fires. The absence of a cult stratum in the hill area is striking. Several pits, considered to be remnants of residential buildings and outbuildings, were revealed at this site; two of them contained human skeletons. Pit I, in the northern section of the site, revealed numerous traces of burnt matter, a few large stones and some clusters of burnt bones with a well-preserved skeleton which bore traces of burning only in the upper part. Pit IV, similarly to Pit I, consisted of two smaller sites which contained stones, a small amount of animal

Fig. 35. Gostyń-Kowalowa Góra



The topography of the cult site. The ditch which bars access to the circle of pits containing cremated remains and two parallel skeletal burials. A — clusters of clay vessels and the remains of a post. B — pits containing a skeleton and cremated remains. By S. Moździoch



Pits containing skeletal burials. By S. Moździoch

bones and a considerable amount of charcoal; in this, it was analogous to the *ustrina* fire-pits discovered at Alt Käbelich. Pit V contained many lumps of well-fired wattle mixed with charcoal and, at the bottom, the remains of a human skeleton (Rzeźnik 1997: 271).

Clusters of charred human remains with partial skeleton burials may constitute remains of the deceased who were incinerated on a pyre and the accompanying offerings. The bones, mainly the skulls, bore traces of fire. The skull of the skeleton discovered in Pit V was crushed, most probably intentionally. Traces of a similar procedure are also discovered in other bi-ritual cemeteries of that period. Considering the data pointing to the special meaning of the head in the pagan Slavs' religious symbolism, finds of pieces of skulls, or complete skulls separated from bodies, may be associated with the sphere of ritual. Numerous finds of clusters of whole vessels (or shards comprising entire vessels), often containing grain (millet) and shards of human bone, some of them charred in the manner characteristic of cremation burials (i.e., in small pieces), are atypical for a settlement site. It is precisely these finds – small fragments of bones (e.g., 1,589 pieces in one of the excavated pits) – that seem to wholly invalidate the assumption that this used to be a stronghold, along with the accompanying explanation that it was taken by surprise and its garrison obliterated. The chronology of the Gostyń site as

one linked with the cult of the dead locates it between the 9th and the middle of the 10th centuries (Moździoch 2000).

The tradition of the long-gone cult site survived in the local toponyms, most probably inherited from the ancient Slavic residents of this area. Pieces of charcoal found at this site served as the explanation for its name: Kowalowa Góra (*Schmiedeberg*), which means 'blacksmith's hill'. Near the site there is a place called the 'altar field' (*Altgrund*). Non-invasive probes conducted recently in Gostyń by Piotr Wroniecki revealed deposits of iron slag occupying large areas, which indicates that iron-smelting and blacksmithing activities were conducted there on a considerable scale (Fig. 36). A kilometre to the north-west of the site in question there is a small chapel of Saint Anne, which in the late Middle Ages was a popular pilgrimage site. Such chapels were often built at or nearby former pagan cult sites. A well-spring in a wooden casing is also situated close by (Langenheim 1939: 93). Another site of the same type, also formerly considered to be a stronghold, was discovered in Zbęchy, in Wielkopolska. The local toponym for this cult/ritual site is, identically as in Gostyń, Kowalowa Góra – blacksmith's hill. Here, too, numerous traces of burning and charred animal and human bones were found. The site is dated to late Antiquity, but it is also assumed to have functioned between the mid-9th and mid-11th centuries (Kara 2009: 173-176).

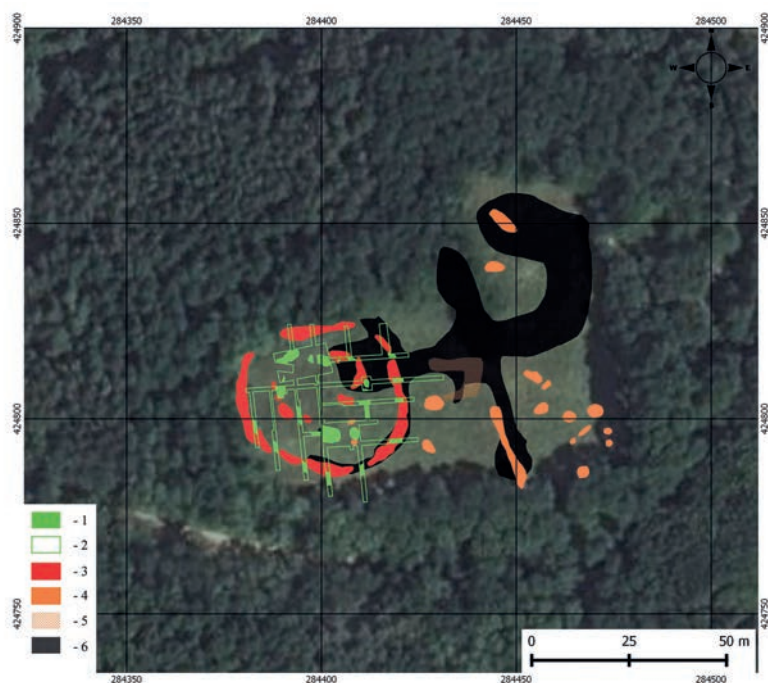


Fig. 36. Gostyń, site no. 1. The interpretation of the results of an archaeological prospection conducted in 2015 superimposed onto an orthophotographic plan.

- 1 – items discovered during excavations,
- 2 – the location of the digs,
- 3 – geophysical anomalies, prospective location of archaeological structures,
- 4 – geophysical anomalies in need of verification,
- 5 – layers of probable anthropogenic origin,
- 6 – high-resistivity layers.

By P. Wroniecki

If confirmation of the conjectured cult character of the Gostyń site can be obtained, it would mean an advance in the exploration of the western Slavs' religious and funerary practices. The following features can be pointed out as typical of such sites: (1) location in a secluded place; (2) a surrounding fence, rampart, or ditch; (3) the presence of atypical burials, both cremation and skeleton ones; (4) a peculiar circular arrangement of pits; (5) pits similar to those found in settlements, containing charred human bones and traces of sacrifices, e.g., clay vessels, and burnt grains of cereals or animal bones.

The peculiar character of the Gostyń site, which is both a cemetery and a ritual site, in connection with the numerous finds of iron objects and slag, may find explanation in ritual practices connected with burning the bodies of the dead in blacksmiths' ovens or fire-pits. According to Goldhahn and Oestigaard, such a custom was practiced in Scandinavia during the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, and the Viking period. According to these scholars, only the blacksmiths' ovens made it possible to obtain such temperatures as is indicated by some of the charred bone remains. A blacksmith was supposedly a *sui generis* priest/mediator who conducted cremation ceremonies, while ordinarily he carried out smelting and metalworking. The remains of an adult woman were discovered in an oven in Gavleån (Gästrikland) in Sweden. She was incinerated together

with a dog, and the entire find is dated to the Viking period. Human remains were also discovered in another oven at the same site (Applegren, Broberg 1996: 36). It is worth pointing out that Pit V in Gostyń, which contained a partially incinerated skeleton, is also considered to have been an oven. It seems possible that these 'blacksmith's hills' were concurrently metalworking centres, cremation sites, and also, in some cases, burial grounds. Perhaps this original combination of the sacred and the profane is the reason why, in spite of the discovery of many cremation burials in the area of the Interior, cremation sites are virtually unknown (Zoll-Adamikowa 1979: 248; Kalaga 2006: 168).

In the "tribal period", the cult/ritual sites were also located in wetland areas and on marshes, sometimes on hummocks which, being elevated above the valley level, resembled islands. Michał Kara identified such a site in Bonikowo, located on a hummock on which a stronghold had been built in the 9th century. According to Kara, it was most probably a cult site with a separate sacrifice site, which was intended to assure the local community of success in farming and animal-raising ventures. The sacrifice site is associated with Stratum IV, excavated inside the western section of the stronghold, which contained a large amount of grain and animal bones. Another element of the sacrifice site was a stone

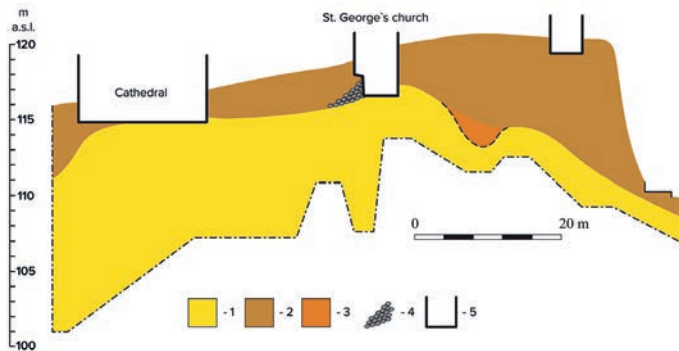
Fig. 37. Stone 'tumulus-like' structures associated with pre-Christian cult discovered in close proximity to stronghold ramparts



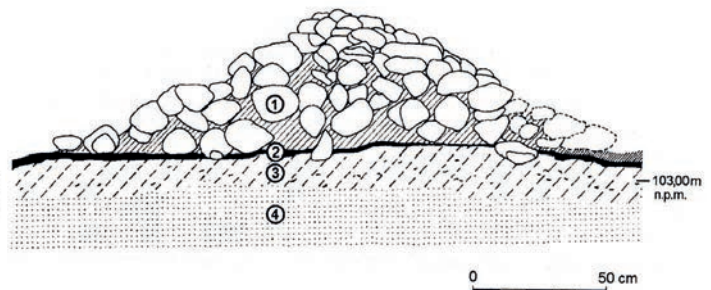
The structure discovered on the summit of Góra Lecha in the Gniezno stronghold. Source: Derwich, Żurek 2002, Kurnatowska 2004, Kara 2009



One of the stone structures found near the rampart of the stronghold in Ryczyn (photo M. Przysiężna-Pizarska). Source: Derwich, Żurek 2002, Kurnatowska 2004, Kara 2009



A section of Góra Lecha in Gniezno showing the location of cult structures (1 – geological layers, 2 – earthwork ramparts of the stronghold, 3 – the infill material of a ditch, 4 – a stone structure, 5 – stone buildings from later periods) Source: Derwich, Żurek 2002, Kurnatowska 2004, Kara 2009



A stone embankment discovered under the earthwork ramparts of the stronghold in Kalisz. Source: Derwich, Żurek 2002, Kurnatowska 2004, Kara 2009

embankment similar to a tumulus, ca. 2.8metres across at the base and 0.5metres high, interpreted as an oven. It is conjectured that an assembly area was located near the sacrifice site. This stratum was covered by the earth-and-timber construction of a rampart built around the middle of the 9th century (Kara 2009: 100-108).

Stone tumuli similar to the one discovered in Bonikowo are in evidence under the ramparts of the strongholds in Kalisz, Gniezno, and Ryczyn (Fig. 37). The stone 'tumulus' in Kalisz is dated to the 7th to mid-9th century; it measured 2.5 metres in diameter and ca. 0.5metres in height. The tumulus also

contained a layer of charcoal, which may be an indication of cremation. Other analogies are the stone structure dated to nearly a century later, discovered at Góra Lecha in Gniezno; the conjectured stone altar discovered in Kałdus; and the 'tumulus-like' embankments from the late 10th century (after 983–984 AD) in Ryczyn in Śląsk. All these conjectural cult sites were located in strongholds, under the inner sides of the ramparts or in their close proximity. With the exception of Góra Lecha, these sites are surrounded with marshy ground. This type of environment was also characteristic of another type of sacrificial site, known from Łagiewniki near Kościan,

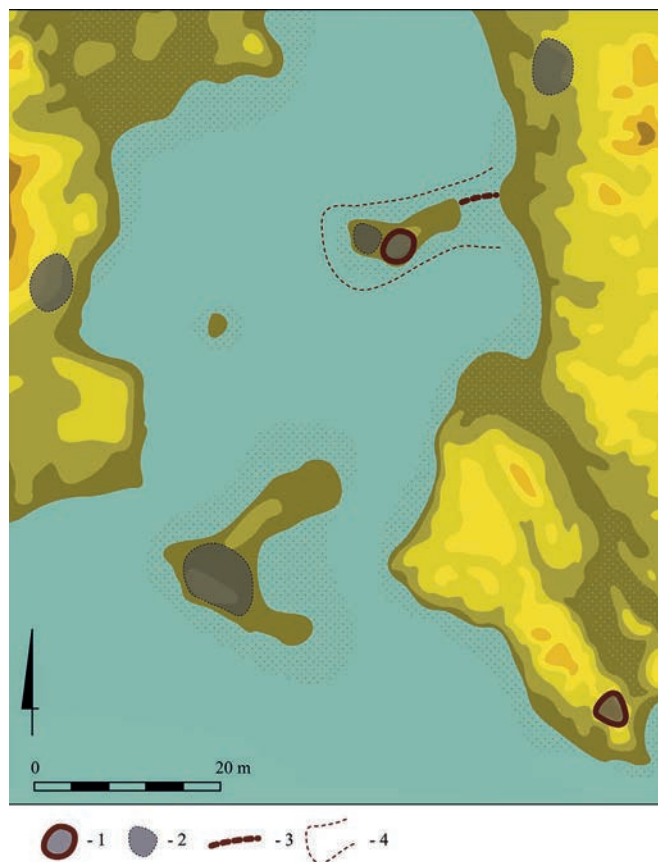


Fig. 38. The early-mediaeval settlement complex by the Niesłysz Lake in Lubuskie Voivodeship

1 – stronghold, 2 – open settlement, 3 – bridge, 4 – the range of wooden structures beneath the water.

Source: Chudziak, Kaźmierczak, Niegowski 2011

Stożne, and the hummock by the Łęczyca stronghold. A similar paludal/aquatic cult site may have functioned in Kąsinowo in the Szamotuły district, where three shards of human skulls dating most probably from the 7th century were found (Kara 2009: 207).

Thus, various stone structures in the shape of either the above-mentioned ‘tumulus-like’ embankments or cobblestones are distinctive to pre-Christian cult sites in the Interior. Cobblestones have been discovered e.g., on the islands on Zarańskie Lake in Pomorze, researched by Wojciech Chudziak and his team (Chudziak, Kaźmierczak, Niegowski 2011; Chudziak, Kaźmierczak 2014). Numerous island strongholds accessed by wooden bridges were discovered in Lubusz Land, in the western part of the Interior. Scholars assume that

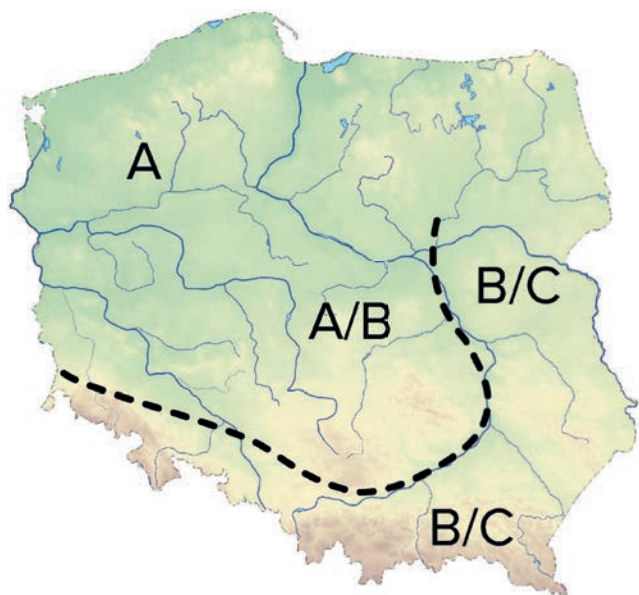
pre-Christian cult sites were located in these places. A complex of sites in the Niesłysz Lake area in Lubusz Land is an example (Fig. 38). The excavations uncovered a stronghold dated to the 9th–10th centuries located on an island connected to the shore by a wooden bridge constructed in the 780s and rebuilt in the 840s and 890s. Cremation graves were discovered on the shore. Low earthen ramparts with a stone facing and scant traces of the utilization of the courtyard in the shape of hearths were discovered inside the stronghold. A second site of a similar character was excavated in Nowy Dworek on Paklicko Wielkie Lake. There, the entire island was filled in with box structures; the wooden bridge which led to it was built in the 940s.

While locating ancient cult sites presents considerable difficulties, archaeologists usually do not find the identification of burial sites to be a significant problem. The question arises whether researching cemeteries contributes any insights to the discussion on the pre-Christian beliefs of the Slavic population in the Interior, and if so, how large this contribution might be.

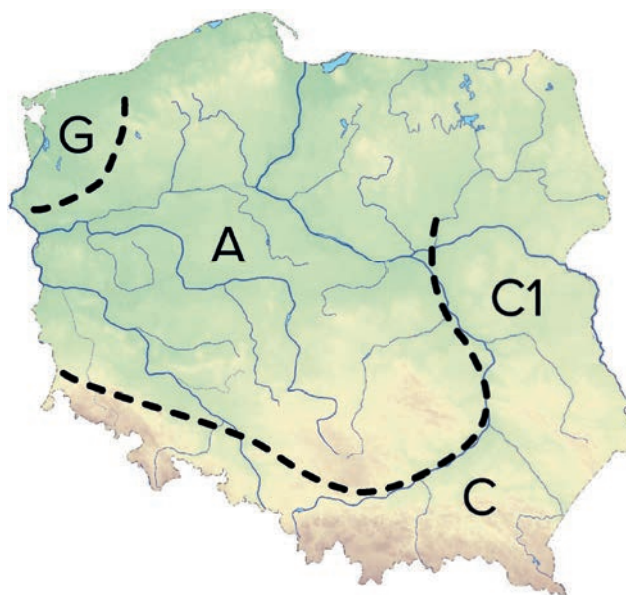
The burial rite practiced by the residents of the Interior in the period from the 6th to the 10th century was considerably diversified both chronologically and spatially. Since the body of the deceased was usually cremated, this diversity referred mostly to the type of burial and the shape of the grave. Ashes were placed in an urn which was then buried in the ground (the urn pit graves) or they were transferred directly into the pit (the urn-less pit graves). The grave was not marked on the surface (flat graves) or it was covered with an earthen embankment (tumulus graves). Sometimes the remains of the deceased were scattered in the fields or thrown in a river, as a result of which the traces of burials are virtually undiscoverable. The urns containing such remains were sometimes positioned on specially erected posts or at the top of the tumulus embankments, which makes this type of burials very difficult to identify. The timeframe for the use of such practices is, unfortunately, unknown.

Helena Zoll-Adamikowa (1979) designed a complete classification of Slavic burial rites, distinguishing a number of developmental phases and zones which encompassed the Interior area (Fig. 39). Phase I is the period until the middle or the end of the 7th century; Phase IIa – until the middle of the 9th century; and Phase IIb – until the middle of the 10th century. According to Zoll-Adamikowa, skeletal graves appear in the territory of Poland after the middle of the 10th century at the earliest. In reference to the western Slavs and Phase I, she distinguished Zone A (the ‘burial-less zone’, already mentioned

Fig. 39. The range of different burial customs



A – burial forms ‘undetectable’ with archaeological means (including Alt-Käbelich-type graves appearing from the 8th century onwards), B – flat graves (urn and pit graves), C – tumulus graves, G – burial customs related to the Scandinavian cultural circle, A/B; B/C – mixed forms.
Source: H. Zoll-Adamikowa, modified by the Author.



A – burial forms ‘undetectable’ with archaeological means (including Alt-Käbelich-type graves appearing from the 8th century onwards), B – flat graves (urn and pit graves), C – tumulus graves, G – burial customs related to the Scandinavian cultural circle, A/B; B/C – mixed forms.
Source: H. Zoll-Adamikowa, modified by the Author.

here), where the dominant burial rite was impossible to detect with excavation methods. To the south, in Zone B, flat graves – urn (B1) and pit (B2) ones – were prevalent. In the eastern and southern parts of the Interior, she distinguished Zone C, with the prevalence of tumulus graves. The custom of burying the ashes of the dead in urns gradually disappeared during Phase II, and the Interior was divided between Zones A and C. An additional Zone D, typified by graves whose form and furnishings are associated with a Scandinavian population, was discerned in the area around the mouth of the Odra.

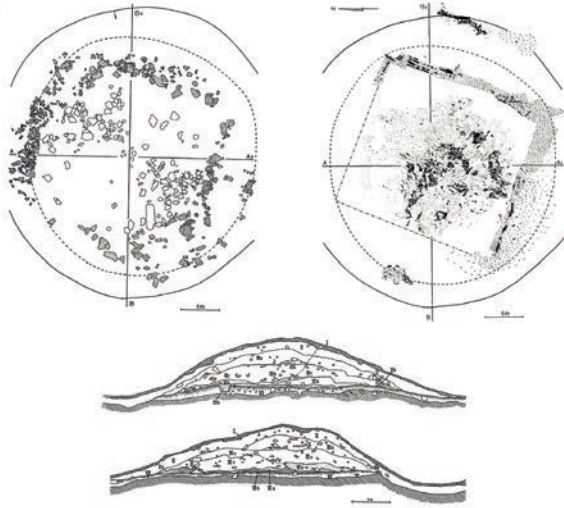
The most important alteration to the above picture to have been introduced in recent years is the identification of a singular type of burial known as the Alt Käbelich-type grave. The presence of these graves is currently dated to the period of 8th–12th centuries. They are found on almost the entire territory of the Interior and in the areas settled by the Elbe Slavs, which is where they were identified for the first time. Alt Käbelich-type graves are pits of varying shapes; their form and size make them resemble relics of sunken residential structures. The infill material contained remains of fires, with pieces of charcoal and shards of charred human bones (sometimes also animal bones). Skeleton burials, in most of

the researched cases those of children, appeared sporadically alongside charred bones. They were often accompanied by stones and numerous shards of pottery. According to their discoverer, V. Schmidt (1984), they were “houses of the dead”, and the pottery constitutes a relic of feasts which accompanied



Fig. 40. Wierzchosławice, Małopolska Voivodeship, site no. 17. A plan of a necropolis of flat cremation burials of the Alt-Käbelich type
1-3 – pits containing human bones, 2 – a ditch likely to have also been used in early-mediaeval times, 3 – the territorial extent of the surveyed area. Source: Poleski 2013

Fig. 41. Examples of tumuli from the tribal period



Plans and sections of a tumulus from the necropolis in Kornatka (Małopolska Voivodeship) with an above-ground cremation burial
Source: Poleski 2013

the burial ceremony. Initially, the emergence of this type of burial was ascribed to Scandinavian influence. According to W. Łosiński, the custom was typical only of the Baltic Slavs. However, the increasingly more numerous discoveries in the southern part of the Interior permit us to associate this burial with the entire north-western part of the Slavic world. For instance, a large cemetery of the Alt Käbelich type was discovered in Wierzchosławice in Małopolska, and similar finds in Wielkopolska and central Poland are increasingly frequent (Fig. 40).

In the 7th and 8th centuries, a tumulus-type grave, which occasionally has the character of a communal grave, appears in the southern and eastern part of the Interior (Fig. 41). A few hundred of such tumuli have been excavated; unfortunately, relevant research results have rarely been published. The diameter of these tumuli varied from a few to less than twenty meters, and their preserved height rarely exceeded 2 metres. Many tumuli were accompanied by ditches and pits from which earth for the construction of the embankment had been dug. Traces of fires were discovered in some of those pits. The urns were most often deposited on top of the tumulus, as confirmed by the fact that charred human bones and shards of vessels are discovered only in the surface layer of the tumuli. Much more rarely, the urns were deposited in pits under the embankment. With the exception of single elements of attire, Slavic tumuli were rarely furnished with grave goods.



An early-mediaeval tumulus in Chodlik during excavations
(photo Ł. Miechowicz)

Many scholars perceived the change in the treatment of the deceased (from cremation to the inhumation of an unburned cadaver) as the sign of Christianization most clearly perceptible from the archaeological point of view. In the area of the Interior, this change was supposed to have occurred in the second half of the 10th century, after Mieszko I was baptized. Recently, however, it has been pointed out that this is a debatable assumption. Arguments to the contrary include the absence of a significant number of skeleton graves dating from this period (the majority of cemeteries of this type is dated to as late as after the middle of the 11th century) and the fact that the custom of incinerating the bodies of the dead continued; in the eastern part of the Interior it is attested to even until the 12th and 13th centuries (see: chapter 7).

The discoveries made in Ryczyn in Śląsk perfectly illustrate the persistence of the cremation burial rite in the by then Christian Piast state (Moździoch, Pizarska 2008). A stronghold was established here in the years 983–984; its area was partially used as a space in which to perform ritual practices associated with the cult of the dead. The bodies were probably cremated in the northern part of the stronghold, by the rampart. Most of the incinerated bones must have been deposited somewhere outside the stronghold; only the smallest bones remained on the site. Complex ‘structures’ raised from animal bones, horse and dog skull burials, as well as the already mentioned stone ‘tumulus-like’ embankments were found close to where the cremation fires had been built (Fig. 42).

Fig. 42. 'Structures' of animal bones found near stronghold ramparts



Animal mandibles discovered in the destroyed rampart layer in Spławie (Wielkopolska; source: Kobusiewicz 2008)



Clusters of animal bones near the stronghold rampart in Ryczyn (Lower Śląsk), photo M. Przysiężna-Pizarska

The dating of the first skeleton-burial cemeteries is difficult, because the graves excavated so far rarely contained relics that constitute dating markers. The picture is further obscured by a rule which archaeologists (and historians) consider axiomatic, i.e., that skeletal-burial cemeteries must be dated to after the Piast ruler's baptism, the fact of which is known from written sources. However, the cemeteries discovered adjacent to Piast strongholds are dated to the second half of the 11th century at the earliest, and at some of the strongholds burial grounds have so far proved impossible to discover. The question arises as to where and in what manner the residents of Piast stronghold centres had been buried before that date. Is it possible that they were still buried in a manner not leaving traces detectable via archaeological methods? In theory, from the moment of the emergence of the Piast state its elites should have kept to the norms and customs resulting from the adoption of the new faith. But the absence of cemeteries in and near the strongholds may be explained by the discoveries made in Ryczyn. In addition, small shards of charred bones, scattered in considerable numbers in the farmed soil stratum, have been discovered near the Piast stronghold in Bytom Odrzański; they may constitute the remains of a layered cemetery. The so-called cult site in Giecz (Site 4), where a Christian cemetery was established after the middle of the 11th century, may have served a similar purpose.

The simultaneous occurrence of cremation burials, skeleton burials, and burials with urns deposited on the tumuli

has posed considerable interpretative problems due to the unfeasibility of precise dating. Their coexistence has been explained either by periods of pagan counter-reaction or as a mark of tolerance typical of missionary work. Most probably not only the residents of the Interior had difficulties in accepting the Christian faith and the new funerary rite that came with it.

Traces of practices associated with depositing the hoards in the ground are an important element of the 'symbolic landscape' of the Interior. Deposits of iron objects (often farming tools) are typical of the southern and south-eastern areas, whereas coins and silver ornaments prevail in the north-east. A vast amount of specialist literature has been devoted to this phenomenon and its interpretation is still a matter of debate (see: chapter 6), but it seems to be more strongly linked with the period when the elites of the early Piast state were developing. The findings of weapons and tools intentionally deposited in the water are very interesting and often unjustly neglected. In addition to the lake islands and peninsulas investigated by Wojciech Chudziak, the most spectacular examples are the mass finds of weapons discovered under the Gniezno Bridge, which used to lead to the early-Piast residence on Ostrów Lednicki and went out of use in the first half of the 11th century – thus, the finds in question date from a later period than those discovered by Wojciech Chudziak. Many scholars link this accumulation of weapons with battles fought on the bridge, but if this justifi-

cation were true, the fact of finding no less than 60 axes sunk in the water, and only four spearheads, would be very hard to explain, a spear being much easier to lose in fighting than an axe (see: chapter 7).

Another explanation, one equally difficult to accept, for the accumulations of weapons found in the water bodies nearby settlements is the existence of a custom of depositing various objects in the water together with the ashes of the deceased. This would also explain the phenomenon of the 'burial-less zone'. Numerous finds of weapons and various items of everyday use are still being made in the vicinity of bridges and wharves of islands on which there were set-

tlements in the early Middle Ages. It is, however, difficult to ascertain which of those finds may be linked with religious beliefs and the funerary rites, and which are simply accidental. The issue is all the more difficult to settle considering that the custom of depositing various objects in the water is a universal phenomenon in terms of chronology as much as in terms of culture.

In bringing to a close these naturally general observations, it is worth emphasizing that the influence of paganism in the area of the Interior was stronger and lasted longer than previously thought, but most probably mainly in the domain of the so-called lower religion.

6. Conclusion

Who speaks of victory? To endure is all.

(Rainer Maria Rilke)

In conclusion, it is worth recalling the fundamental problems pertaining to the archaeology of the earlier phase of the early Middle Ages in the Interior. The ethnogenesis of the Slavs and the definition of the model of Slavic culture remain a matter of debate. Dating methods are still the main trouble of early-medieval archaeology, even though in the course of the last five decades the development of dendrochronology has opened new possibilities in this respect. The model of economic activity before the emergence of the state is an issue that requires in-depth analysis. Another problem is the interpretation of the forms of social organization, which in the majority of the regions in the Interior stopped at the level of small territorial communities, sometimes with the stronghold as the seat of the local ruler and his retinue. The structure and

arrangement of settlements are still insufficiently researched; not much is known about the chronology, socio-topography, and especially the function of the strongholds.

Not questioning the predomination of agriculture in the Slavic economy of the 'tribal period', it is nevertheless worth emphasizing that the assumption that, in the earlier phase of the early Middle Ages, farming predominated over animal husbandry, although frequently encountered in specialist literature, is nevertheless poorly documented by archaeological sources. In addition, the poverty of material culture and, in comparison with the area occupied by the Slavs, the limited number of traces of settlement suggest the instability of socio-economic life. Assuming an allochthonous model of ethnogenesis, this instability would be understandable with respect to the first

or the first two centuries of the Slavs' conjectured migration. However, on the basis of the available research results, I am inclined to believe that this instability continued for a longer time, perhaps even until the 9th century. The material culture of the Interior communities remains modest until the emergence of the Piast state. Also the contemporary burial rite, which in the specialist literature is described as 'burial-less' or barely detectable by archaeological methods, is certainly connected with the temporary character of settlements resulting from the mobility of the population.

All the features of Slavic culture in the Interior area: (1) the unstable settlement; (2) animal husbandry preponderant over farming; (3) the poor material culture; (4) the indiscernible burial rite; (5) the absence of traces of religion with developed paludal/aquatic cults instead are, in my opinion, the results of the continuous threat posed by the belligerent neighbouring communities which constantly penetrated the Interior. In my estimation, the construction of many strongholds founded in the 8th to 10th centuries is sufficiently explained by the atmosphere of constant menace caused by the invaders, whose main goal in coming was to capture Slavic slaves, and the fact that the Interior communities were being constantly robbed of young and active individuals. Some of the strongholds served as forts – assembly places for slave trains or cattle herds to be transported to the Baltic, Moravian, as well as western-European markets (cf. the Rafelstetten tariff).

Thus, in my view, the key to answering many questions regarding the socio-economic changes which occurred in the Interior from the 6th to the 10th centuries lies in, among other factors, the slave trade; this assumption is, however, difficult to prove on the basis of archaeological sources. The Interior

was penetrated mainly by Frankish merchants, secondly by Great Moravian ones; ultimately, the slave trade came to be dominated by the Normans. Sporadic Czech raids may have occurred; however, considering the testimony of the written and archaeological sources – and contrary to the paradigm obligatorily propounded in specialist literature – I am of the opinion that the Přemyslid activity was limited only to the areas south of the Carpathians and the Sudetes.

In the course of the past century, Slavic archaeology has greatly contributed to our knowledge of the culture of the Interior societies. Unfortunately, however, the historical narrative feeds on everything that diverges from the norm; in this, it somewhat resembles the tabloids of today. For this reason, paradoxically, archaeologists tend to describe Slavic culture through the analysis of a variety of imports – even in monographs professing to focus on the Slavs. In archaeological studies, the 'local' culture of the early Middle Ages is still presented solely as an 'import' culture. But the Interior societies, often helpless in the face of warrior societies which specialized in aggression, assimilated the invaders' elites and thus, in the end, emerged victorious from the confrontation.

The demographic potential of the Slavic societies resident in the Interior, as well as their adaptive capabilities and their readiness to accept innovations and foreign leadership, contributed to their survival. Besides the shared language and tradition, an important role in the further integration of those societies was undoubtedly played by that most crucial of 'imports': Christianity.

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