

Soon it will be 100 years from the start of excavations conducted by the German archaeologists outside Marienburg (now Malbork-Wielbark) where in a dense forest on Nogat slope a vast cemetery from early Pre-roman and Roman period was discovered. During systematic studies conducted from 1927 to 1936 an estimated number of 200 to 2000 cremation and inhumation graves were discovered. However, the site was not thoroughly examined, neither did it get a monographic description, partly because most of relics and documentation were scattered and destroyed during World War II. Despite the random state of knowledge about the site, its scientific value is so significant that it constitutes to virtually every study on the history of the Goths from the Pre-roman and Roman periods. The researched materials were the basis for classification of many relic groups from these periods. One of the most important archaeological cultures from the Roman period – Wielbark culture – was named after the cemetery in Malbork-Wielbark. After the Second World War the site was somehow forgotten; researchers became interested in it again in 1984 when Malbork Castle Museum conducted a new series of excavation works during years 1984-1985, but more importantly the interest was stirred again in 2008 due to collaborative work by Humboldt Universität zu Berlin (PhD J. Kleemann) and Marie Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin (PhD P. Łuczkiwicz); in 2013 University of Szczecin joined the research.

The main objective of the project is to reconstruct the prehistoric settlement processes in the Malbork-Wielbark cemetery in terms of archaeology and reconstruction of the environment. This will enable us to get a full picture of the cemetery, verify accumulated myths and legends, and end the long history of the research. Materials obtained from studies carried out in 2008-2015 and from two planned project campaigns are the basis for the works. The project involves using different techniques and methods from various fields of science. Quantitative, comparative, typological and chronological analyses, as well as computer methods (digitalisation of the archaeological documentation, creating databases) will be used in the archaeological part of the project. The main emphasis will be put on verification of the actual number of graves in the cemetery, its dating, presence of one or two different necropolises (contemporary or used within different time spans), the significance of the necropolis in local and sub-regional settlement structures of Oksywie and Wielbark cultures, and finally contacts with other ethnic and cultural circles in Europe. In the last case specialised physico-chemical analyses concerning the chemical composition of metallic relics will be used in order to establish whether the item was produced locally or was imported. The use of physico-chemical methods (C14, dendrochronology, TL) will allow verification of dating the materials.

Physico-chemical examinations of ceramics (MGR, WD-XRF methods, transparent cuts analysis) are of great importance since the ceramics are the bulk of the findings. They can help in clearing up the issue of whether the change of beliefs and burial customs was associated with exchange of the population. If so, then it should be visible in the change of utensils production technique, since hand-modelled ceramics is the most durable element maintaining tradition and is the slowest to change. Imperceptible changes would indicate continuation. Examination of a numerous sample series will also allow us to create a database for further comparison with any other future analyses from the sites of Wielbark and Oksywie culture.

Traces of fabric were preserved on some ornaments; all of these fragments will undergo a number of specialist examinations, which will shed light on the question of what the contemporary outfit looked like and what was it made out of. The compilation of the archaeological materials obtained since 2008 will be complemented by anthropological analyses (and optionally DNA analyses as well) in case of human remains, and archaeozoological analyses in case of animal remains.

Reconstructing the environment in which the graveyard functioned is a significant part of the project. What did the primeval landscape (topography and flora) look like, to what extent was it changed by the people who established and then used the cemetery for about 500 years? Were there any environmental conditions, i.e. why was that particular place chosen? While seeking answers to these questions, natural sciences and geographical methods will be used on a wide scale: paleobotanic examinations (floral macroremains analysis, charcoal analysis, palynology) and paleogeographic examinations (geological sounding, geomorphological and geological mapping, terrain reliefs).

The starting point for any undertaken works is the monograph reconstructing and verifying the results of the German studies, currently being prepared for print (due date: the end of 2016). The results of the works carried out presently are being gradually developed. It is still necessary to complete the excavation works, and above all, to further expand research and analyses – this is what the project is about. The result of the project will be a complete, multi-author monograph about the Malbork-Wielbark cemetery containing the archaeological part, specialist analyses and reconstruction of the prehistoric environment; because of the monograph the site will be restored into full scientific scope throughout the whole Central and Northern European archaeological circles and will thus complete almost a hundred years of research.