

Contrary, the cemeteries can bring the most of information concerning life of prehistoric people. The deceased were buried in their festive dress, which is not only a reflection of those days' fashion changes, but first of all, a marker of a social position. The "dress code" of the time included also weapons: a warrior, equipped in a complete set of weaponry, which besides spear and shield was comprised of sword – expensive, and frequently imported – was a man of higher position than his companion in arms with only a battle javelin. For these reasons archaeologist are particularly interested in cemeteries' investigation, which can deliver not only effective finds, but also can give a variegated picture of past societies. In Masuria the time of the highest development of the most fascinating necropolises falls on the 1st-4th century A.D. The burial practice of those times was cremation; the remains of dead were buried in urns or bundles made of organic materials. This kind of burial ritual makes a potential anthropological analysis very difficult; in most cases it is limited to (frequently questionable) determination of age and sex of the deceased. Luckily, the relatively rich grave offerings, the above-mentioned festive dress and weaponry, but also tools or, exceptionally, elements of horse tack, can complete the picture of the cemetery. Basing on that, it is possible to set that many of necropolises had been used for several centuries, which indicates on stable settlement on Masurian Lakeland in those ages and at the same time shows the range of cross-cultural contacts reaching (by the famous Amber Road) to the boundaries of *Imperium Romanum*.

Another distinguishing feature of the Masurian archaeology is a question of extensive excavations conducted in the region in the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The question applies particularly to the cemeteries dated to the 1st-4th centuries A.D. Old methods of excavations (or rather lack of them, as the whole descriptions of the excavations' results were limited to short notes) translated to very fast fieldworks on the sites. In a result, dozen of necropolises were simply dug through, while the artifacts discovered in the graves were send to the Kaliningrad museum.

Destruction caused by the World War II and especially dislocation of museum pieces in the last phase of the were the reasons the major part of survived files and artifacts from the area of Masuria remained beyond the reach of Polish archaeologists until the nineties of the 20th century. Not until 25 years ago the works have been started to eventually reconstruct the available sources from before 1945. The way to the goal is a time-consuming reconstruction of the Masurian grave equipments on a base of museum inventories, notes done by archaeologists working in the region before war, short mentions in the literature and studies on infrequent survived artifacts. Having the artifact assigned to the archaeological site often requires detective skills!

One of the archaeological sites especially predestinated for such "revitalization" is a cemetery in Miętke, western Masuria. This huge necropolis was established in the 2nd century and developed until at least the 7th century A.D. In this timespan ca. fifty hundreds of burials had been located there. Over a thousand of them were discovered during only several archaeological campaigns conducted at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. The unearthed artifacts were then sent to Kaliningrad and, a small part amount, to Berlin – the last group of materials survived the war in relatively good condition. Moreover, the files and data that remained can help to reconstruct a long sequence of grave complexes. It is necessary to establish a kind of "demographic rhythm" of the necropolis: defining the periods of growth or decline of number of population using the cemetery. At the same time the graves dislocation, and especially occurrence of apparent concentration of contemporary burials, can give a chance to distinguish smaller units among the cemetery, maybe groups of relatives' graves inside the community. Those data, for the lack of anthropological materials from the graves (collecting and analyzing of which none even bother a hundred years ago) bring the only possibility to recognize of internal divisions and connections among the people who buried their dead on the Miętkie cemetery. Recognizing of differences in the grave equipment, both inside the concentrations of graves and between them, could be a starting point for the social structure interpretation. The Miętkie cemetery, with a history going back several hundred years, may also help to recognize the process of formation of ethnic communities in Middle Europe; it sounds a bit megalomaniac however it is realistic! In the 2nd century A.D. a geographer of Alexandria, Ptolemy, mentioned in his description of the world people named *Galindai*; they were supposed to settle the land east of the lower Vistula River. Moreover, in the annals of the Teutonic Order one can find description of the *Galinditae* tribe, living on western Masuria. Similarity of both names caused the theory of stability and continuity of the Balts tribes' settlement on the Masurian Lakeland during the whole 1st millennium A.D., the theory that dominates in history and archaeology for nearly four hundred years. The several hundred years history of the Miętkie cemetery seems to prove this traditional opinion and the results of our works can unveil the mechanisms of transformation of social structures from the Roman Period to the tribal organization of early medieval Prussia.