

In the 7th -5th century BC, a large part of Eastern Europe was under direct influence of Indo-Iranian nomads who came from the depths of Asia and for the next several hundred years settled in the Black Sea steppes. They are known, according to the written sources, to be the Scythians. In the north, in the forest-steppe zone, a distinctive cultural model developed under their influence, of which large hill forts - multi-hectare strongholds - are an important element. In 2016-2017, in Chotyniec near Radymno in the Jarosław province, near the current border with Ukraine, the chronology of an existing settlement was verified. It was established that it comes from the early Iron Age. The artefacts found during the initial excavations (characteristic arrowheads, bronze pins and pottery) very clearly link this site with the forest-steppe variant of the Scythian cultural circle. The most interesting artefact turned out to be a large, painted Greek wine amphora. This is the first case of finding an ancient vessel (7th / 6th century BC) in the present Polish borders. Research conducted in the vicinity of the hill fort revealed at least a dozen of open settlements of the same age and with the same set of movable objects. This allows us to think that a significant settlement centre has been identified, which we called 'the Chotyniec agglomeration'. It is the farthest north-western enclave of the Scythian world, whose border must now be moved by at least 250-300 km.

The aim of the project, which is a field-based, interdisciplinary research, is to examine the entire region in order to learn more about its functioning in terms of chronology, organization, significance, cultural relations and material and spiritual culture. The last of these factors is quite important, because in the Chotyniec hill fort we discovered and only partially explored a cult object, so-called 'zolnik', characteristic of Eastern European settlements. This place is rich in sensational finds (the aforementioned amphora was found here), and also gives a rare chance of studying ritual behaviours. The research plan of the project includes both non-invasive (geophysical) investigations of the entire hill fort and selected open settlements as well as extensive excavations. It intends to complete the study of the cult area (zolnik), make additional excavations through the embankment (in a place where it is well legible and where it is already damaged, but with still legible traces) and explore selected places on the ritual area. The historic material acquired during the fieldwork will be subjected to comprehensive interdisciplinary analyses (archaeozoology, archaeobotany, archaeometry). Radiocarbon dating will be of great importance here.

The implemented project will provide such interesting sources and contextual observations that it will be possible to answer many questions we pose today about the origin, dating, organisation and connections of the Chotyniec agglomeration, a unique microregion located at the border of the Scythian world. At the same time, the previous views on the presence of individual, so-called Scythian artefacts, known from Eastern and central Poland will have to be revised. There is an intriguing hypothesis, according to which it is probable that the region explored during the project is connected with the Neuri people mentioned by Herodotus (who lived in the 5th century BC) as having Scythian customs and living at the source of the Tyras (i.e. Dniester).