

Barczewko – a history written by fire. The lost medieval town and urbanization of the Galindian Forest.

A Warmian Pompeii? A second Biskupin ? A Polish Carcassone? Are we committing a confusing exaggeration to the detriment of the reader by using such comparisons? No, the comparisons are deliberate, meant to draw attention to the scientific potential of sites which are unknown, forgotten, or underappreciated. Today, everyone recognizes the name of Biskupin village, to which a young teacher Walenty Szwajcer was seconded in the 1930s. While he dreamed of travelling the world, the world appeared on his doorstep, thanks to a sensational discovery of a prehistoric settlement. Press reports at the time wrote about a Polish Pompeii to emphasize the importance of the discovery.

Barczewko in Warmia, and first in the Galindia Forest, is a village of medieval lineage, carrying a historical name – Alt Wartenburg. The first part of the name (*Alt*, German for old) implies that the locality preceded the location of today's Barczewo (called *Wartenburg* in German). Warmia is one of the tribal territories of the Baltic Prussians. After the Teutonic crusades, it became a region of considerable autonomy, governed by bishops. It was a land with an extraordinary history, whose destiny was later tied to that of the Polish Commonwealth. The residence of the princes and bishops in Lidzbark, preserved to this day, was called the Wawel of the North.

The history of the little village, one not unlike many others in the region, would not have been exceptional if it was not for an ancient tragedy, a source of "joy" for today's archaeologists. It is a Pompeii-like case on a micro scale, helpful in understanding the process of settlement based on the German law in Central and Eastern Europe. A Teutonic chronicler, Peter of Dusburg, noted that Wartenburg Castle was built in 1325 by the Warmian bishop Eberhard of Nysa. It was a time when the might of the Teutonic state in Prussia and the conflict with the Lithuanians both increased. The retaliatory incursions of the latter were incredibly brutal. The tragedy, which brought on the destruction of the young settlement, is described in a later source by Wigand of Marburg, "*In the year 1354 Kęstutis, Olgiard and the boyars hasten to Wartenburg in the Gunelauken land, which they destroy with fire in accordance with the enemy custom, and no one escapes their hands alive.*" After the incursion, a stronghold remained on the meadow, referred to throughout the centuries as the old town. It is a sort of time capsule from 1354. The relicts of buildings and artefacts, never touched by human hand, are a record of the first two decades of the town's development, as well as the material culture from the mid-fourteenth century and a sudden fall. It is the only surviving cemetery of the first settlers, but also as it turned out the victims of the invasion. During the works carried out in 2018, under the ruins of the fire, a skeleton of a woman lying on her stomach was discovered, probably trying to protect her child with her body. The woman's skull was charred.

A Polish-German project of non-invasive research, realized between 2014/15 and 2017/19, confirmed the chronicle sources. The unique site consists of a preserved spatial system of the planned town, a cemetery of the immigrant population (perhaps Silesians), relicts of buildings of various functions together with the material contents remaining from the time of the incursion. The site belongs to a group of so-called lost sites (old town's), such as Nieszawa, Stary Toruń, Starogród (Culm) or Dzwonowo. Similarly, it is threatened by natural elements (natural planting), and anthropogenic influences (agriculture, site depredation using metal detectors). An exchange of knowledge, methods, and ideas is facilitated by making the project an international one: in 2019/2020, the historic objects from Barczewko were displayed at an international exhibition in Magdeburg entitled *Faszination Stadt: Die Urbanisierung Europas im Mittelalter und das Magdeburger Recht* as well as in Malbork Castle entitled: „Wisdom built a house for herself... The Teutonic Order in Prussia”.

The goal of this project is the undertaking of complex research into the oldest stage of urbanization of the Galindian Forest and settlement in historic Warmia, documenting and securing Barczewko relicts, understanding the spatial system of the new town together with the system of fortifications and economic infrastructure (a mill), comparison to other sites (examp. Old Town Dąbrówno) as well as understanding the relationship between the situation of the settlers and their Prussian neighbours. This will be realized through:

- forming an interdisciplinary and international research team
- performing complex field research with the participation of an international group of students
- conducting of specialized analyses of obtained artefact material, preservation of artefacts and preparation of field documentation
- performing of anthropological research and preparation for aDNA, isotopic analyses and comparative analyses of individuals of the settler population
- preparing of the base for publication by publications of articles and socialization of this discovery