

The aim of this project is to investigate the important archaeological site at Ciepłe in Eastern Pomerania, and to learn about the role that it played in incorporating this region into the first Polish state. Until recently Ciepłe was best known for the accidental discovery of an early medieval cemetery where there was a grave of an armed warrior thought to be a Viking. This cemetery is only one part of a vast complex made up of three strongholds, several settlements and two burial grounds. So far, researchers have concentrated on the discoveries made at the cemetery. This is no surprise. New excavations carried out at the cemetery (2004–2014) uncovered further richly furnished graves, which confirmed the remarkable importance of this place.

The settlement complex at Ciepłe is a unique cluster of sites dating from the late 10th/early 11th century. It was probably founded at the end of the 900s by people associated with the first rulers of the Piast dynasty (Mieszko I or Bolesław I the Brave). Gaining supremacy over Eastern Pomerania was one of the steps that helped build a fully formed and strong political structure at the end of the 10th century and the beginning of the 11th century. The Piasts were particularly keen to seize this area for economic reasons (it gave them access to trade and control of the River Vistula).

The centre established at Ciepłe probably played a vital role in the Piast ‘conquest’ of Eastern Pomerania. Its location allowed the inhabitants of Ciepłe to control both river traffic along the Vistula and the crossing point on this river that led towards Prussia. Was Ciepłe the place from which the Piasts later carried out their conquests of the North? This may well have been the case, and so Ciepłe would have been the key to Pomerania for the Piast dynasty. Perhaps governors who exercised power on behalf of the Piasts lived there.

Ciepłe also provides important evidence of early Christianity in Pomerania. We know that in AD 997 Adalbert of Prague visited *urbs Gyddanyzc*, and from there he set off on a missionary expedition to Prussia. It is quite possible that on his way to Gdańsk he stopped in Ciepłe, where he may have baptised members of the local community.

Despite the many clues that point to how important it was, the site at Ciepłe has never received the attention it deserves. The planned research will be conducted on two levels. A multidisciplinary study of the Ciepłe settlement complex will examine the site at a narrow, regional level. The second, broader-level study will look at the site’s wider importance, and will include several innovative research methods. As well as traditional archaeological procedures, we will be using palaeoenvironmental and bioarchaeological studies (including genetic analysis, and analysis of stable isotopes of strontium, carbon nitrogen and sulfur).

Carrying out this project will help us gain a better understanding of key issues not only concerning Pomerania, but also relating to the creation of the first Polish state. All of this will show that Ciepłe was not only significant locally, but also regionally for the whole of Eastern Pomerania and on a wider scale for the Polish state that was taking shape in the 10th century. The Ciepłe complex was probably also an important lynchpin in the network of contacts concentrated around the Baltic basin, which means that there is also an international dimension to this project.