

Erratic boulders are not only a significant element of the natural landscape, but also a cultural one. They have had an enormous impact on the perception of space. They were referred to in belief narratives and their origins were mythologization. They were treated as objects of a specific sacral status, functioned as sacrificial sites or were considered to be pre-Christian altars. Paraphrasing the words of Dorothy Vitaliano, we can say that the correlation between the natural environment and cultural expressions was a continuous process characterized by changing configurations. Local narratives associate the existence of these objects with supernatural creatures. The most popular variant of belief narratives in the 19th and early 20th century – known also from other regions of today's Poland, and more widely in Europe – links the occurrence of erratic boulders with the activity of supernatural figures, such as: the Devil (universal); a Giant (northern Germany; northern Poland); a stolem (Kashubia region); a Troll (Scandinavia) or another character with supernatural features. These creatures are characterised by immense strength, height/size, and stupidity. On many of the boulders one can find imprints or cracks interpreted as traces of devil's claws, giant's feet, or a blow with a devil's whip. The main objective of the project is to reconstruct the mythical perspective on the value of erratic boulders and their role in shaping perceptions of the natural landscape and influence on the creation of specific belief motifs occurring in the area of the last glaciations, which covered northern Poland. This will make it possible to isolate belief mythologems correlating with geological events of the declining period of the last glaciation or elements of local knowledge. An attempt will be made to analyse these correlates in the perspective of the long duration of the belief mythologems. It will also make it possible to analyse the phenomenon of convergence and/or migration of motifs referring to erratic boulders, in relation to regional specificity in the ethnographic sense, as well as the search for sources of particular belief motifs in natural determinism. Thanks to this it will be possible to make an attempt to verify the sources of belief motifs preserved in 19th century traditional culture, as well as to define the liminal status of erratic boulders being a part of geocultural heritage. The achievement of the specific objectives will facilitate: identification of boulder geosystems in the area of the last glaciation; selection of geosystems for ethnographic field studies; identification of narrative relationships relating to geosystems of the studied area on the basis of ethnographic and archaeological sources from the 19th and early 20th centuries; identification of cult sites using erratic boulders; identification of dynamics of perception of erratic boulders in particular ethnographic regions and subregions of the Northern Poland; identification of geological and geomorphological processes responsible for formation of “supernatural” microforms on boulders; comparative analysis of the phenomenon of convergence and migration of geomitological motifs characteristic for the Young Glacial areas. The proposed project is a pioneering endeavour aimed at the cultural-geological identification of the significance and value of erratic boulders in the young-glacial landscape in an anthropological and geomorphological perspective, with a particular focus on belief narratives, local knowledge and local legends. In its scope and approach, it corresponds to research in geomitology. The novelty of the project lies in the interdisciplinary approach to the subject of geocultural objects, such as erratic boulders, by a cultural anthropologist and a geomorphologist. Such a comprehensive approach to the mythologisation process of erratic boulders has not been carried out on a larger scale before. The ethnographic field research planned in the project, as well as the interpretation of folklore source materials, will allow for a holistic approach to the problem of erratic boulders that takes into account the complexity of geological-cultural interactions. An interdisciplinary approach to the research will reveal the specificity of geological-cultural relations and allow them to be described from the perspective of long-term human-environmental impacts and interactions.