

# A Life in Archaeology and the Specificity of Archaeological Research. Encounters with Stanisław Tabaczyński

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Stanisław Tabaczyński, is one of the foremost archaeologists in Poland. He has been a member of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) since 1994, the honorary chairman of the PAN Committee of Pre-and Proto-historic Sciences. Born in Poznan in 1930, he is today one of the most well known Polish archaeologists whose work has been associated deeply with theoretical and methodological issues. The results of his reflections and teaching in these areas have been disseminated in many publications arising as a result of his work. These include: “Teoria i praktyka badań archeologicznych, T. 1: Przesłanki metodologiczne” [Theory and Practice of Archaeological Investigations, vol. 1, Methodological Basis], eds: W. Hensel, G. Donato and S. Tabaczyński (1986), also translated into Italian; “Kultury archeologiczne a rzeczywistość dziejowa” [Archaeological Cultures and Past Realities], ed. S. Tabaczyński (2000); *Archaeologia Polona* 44: 2006, Special theme: Archaeology – Anthropology – History. Parallel tracks and divergences, eds: S. Tabaczyński, D. Cyngot, A. Zalewska (2006); “Przeszłość społeczna. Próba konceptualizacji” [The Social Past, an Attempt of Conceptualisation], eds: S. Tabaczyński, A. Marciniak, D. Cyngot and A. Zalewska (2012).

Besides his work as a theoretician and methodologist of archaeology, Professor Tabaczyński's field of interest is also Medieval Archaeology. His main works in that field have been: “Z badań nad wczesnośredniowiecznymi skarbami srebrnymi Wielkopolski” [An Investigation of the Early Medieval Silver Hoards of Great Poland] (1958); “Archeologia średniowieczna. Problemy. Źródła. Metody. Cele badawcze” [Medieval Archaeology: Problems, Sources, Methods and Investigative Aims] (1987).

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Much of the Professor's research as a theoretician, methodologist and medievalist has been accompanied by a persistent concentration on the social nature of the past, especially the reasons for and results of an intensification of social changes. This began with his early interest in the material correlates of the process of so-called neolithisation. This was reflected in his two books: "Neolit środkowoeuropejski. Podstawy gospodarcze" [The Central European Neolithic: Economic basis] (1970) and "Rewolucja neolityczna i jej znaczenie dla rozwoju kultury europejskiej" [The Neolithic Revolution and its Significance for the development of European Culture], the latter co-authored with Witold Hensel (1978) and in many articles (e.g. Tabaczyński 1972). This gave rise to his later interest in the phenomena connected with the polysemantism of cultures and cultural entities.

The text below is based on notes taken and transcripts of recordings made during our conversations with S. Tabaczyński between 2013 and 2016. Our discussions touched on many issues, but focussing on reflections on the manner and dynamics of the ways in which archaeological research is conceptualized and implemented, considerations on the specificities of archaeological research and the nature of the past in Poland and beyond. We commenced with discussing some general questions about the nature of archaeology, the humanities and the overlap between sociology and archaeology. Further on, while discussing the concepts and thinkers that have been most inspirational from the Professor's point of view for conceptualisations of material culture, we have approached the specific character and social determinants of archaeological knowledge. Also discussed are a non-dogmatic approach to Marxism and archaeology as a form of study of the sociology of the past, the economic interpretation of coin hoards, the limitations of the positivist culture-historical approach and the importance of a polysemantic approach to culture (especially in cognitive modelling for the interpretation of sites with complex stratigraphy). Finally, we discussed the potential of an archaeological way of thinking about the historical process and the benefits of utilization of the notions of "correlates of culture" and "material correlates of culture".

During our conversation with S. Tabaczyński, we spoke in Polish, in a very lively and digressive manner. Therefore, compiling the results of numerous such conversations into single a text – just to provide an overview to the scope of the spoken content – was not easy. Professor Tabaczyński's answers have here been translated into English by Paul Barford, a British archaeologist living in Poland for a number of years and who in that period has engaged in a long lasting dialogue with the scholar as one of the people collaborating with the Professor and his associates in a number of publications. The final text has been accepted by Professor Tabaczyński.

**DC & AZ:** *Dear Professor Tabaczyński, first of all, we want to express our gratitude to you for taking the time for those enlightening conversations that we had with you between May 2013 and April 2014 (Cyngot and Zalewska 2015) and thank you for the opportunity*

*to continue them. Perhaps we should start with an attempt to sum up our previous discussions with the most general question, what is archaeology?*

**ST:** We should rather start from a reflection on the nature of the humanities themselves. What is their role, and what is the relationship between archaeology, the humanities and other social sciences, and in particular on how to distinguish between and define them? There are of course no simple answers to these questions. Archaeology provides an original and unique view of the past. At the same time it should be noted that archaeology often adapts to itself different concepts and methods from other disciplines and kneads them into an entity of variable form, one that in effect has no individuality. I tend towards identifying those features of archaeology that are specific to the discipline. There are some areas within the discipline, certain types of questions and data that allow us to adopt a logical division of spheres of competence between disciplines. In my research I have referred to many of them, but there seem to me to be three key ones. The first is the interpretation of material culture in social, especially economic terms.

**DC & AZ:** *And your thoughts on this subject related to Early Medieval silver hoards were included in your doctorate “Z badań nad wczesnośredniowiecznymi skarbami srebrnymi Wielkopolski” (1958).*

**ST:** Yes. My proposals met with benevolent interest not only among archaeologists. The numismatist, medievalist and historian Ryszard Kiersnowski (1925–2006) referred positively to the theses that I presented in this work. They were also published in the *Annales* and (Tabaczyński 1962) aroused benevolent comments there too, including from Prof. Gian Piero Bognetti (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Reception by the municipal authorities for the participants of the International Numismatic Congress in Rome, 1961. From the left: Aleksandra Krzyżanowska, Eleonora Tabaczyńska, Stanisław Tabaczyński, Stanisław Suchodolski. Photos from private collection of Eleonora and Stanisław Tabaczyński

**DC & AZ:** *We know you later worked in Italy with G.P. Bognetti (1902–1963), who is considered to be one of the Italian pioneers of medieval archaeology (the author of “Archeologia medievale” 1961, 1962), and excavations on the island of Torcello in Venice Lagoon and at Castelseprio in Lombardy.*

**ST:** Yes, he always expressed favourable opinions of our work and supported my interpretations. He was the initiator of this research as the Director of the Istituto di Storia della Società e dello Stato Veneziano within the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice. From the Polish side, the patron of this research was Prof. Witold Hensel, Director of the Institute of History of Material Culture, Polish Academy of Sciences (now the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology).

**DC & AZ:** *What other areas of reflection do you see as essential?*

**ST:** Secondly, it is a transfer of the model of polysemantisation of culture devised by historian and theoretician Stanisław Piekarczyk to the interpretation of sites of complex stratigraphy. In my opinion this is an achievement, which is a substantial intellectual contribution to broadening the possibilities of interpretation in the study of such sites.

**DC & AZ:** *As you wrote in “Medieval Archaeology” (Tabaczyński 1987: 76), the concept of Piekarczyk (1924–1993) assumes among others that the deposit process on such sites reflects the partial but constantly increasing disintegration of human groups, which causes social stratification, and post factum makes the necessary interpretations taking into account cultural polisemantisation. Was it your interest in polysemantisation, which led you to such close study of the works of David Clarke? This found expression in your extensive discussion of his ideas (Tabaczyński and Pleszczyńska 1974). How do you perceive these theories today, with the perspective of time?*

**ST:** I would assess them as still very relevant, but they must be understood in the context in which they were created, and not absolutise.

**DC & AZ:** *And what is the third of the topics you would see as crucial?*

**ST:** It is reflection on the social nature of culture.

**DC & AZ:** *In the last few years especially, you have often expressed the opinion that archaeology is the sociology of prehistory (cf. Tabaczyński 2012c). Can archaeology be considered the sociology of prehistory and to what extent, in what way would that be manifest? Above all, what are the origins of your strong interest in sociology?*

**ST:** Speaking half-jokingly, a sociological perspective has accompanied me since my childhood. I inherited an interest in sociology from my mother, Helena (née Głowacka). While studying biology at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan in the 1920s, she adopted the tendency then prevailing in that discipline to conceptualise

natural phenomena in a manner appropriate to the social sciences. It was called plant sociology (phytosociology). As a boy, I was fascinated by her stories of the “battle of the plants”; first they are peaceful, then they mature, followed by preparation, and then, expansion...

**DC & AZ:** *This aroused your imagination.*

**ST:** Of course, very much so. Certainly a very important role in the shaping of the interests of my mother, and then my own, was that I was born in Poznan where we lived because of my father’s work. He was an infantry officer, and commandant of the Academic Legion at the University of Poznan. It was in Poznan at the time that a great scholar, a great, internationally well-known and even a somewhat mythical figure, was active. This was the pioneering sociologist Florian Znaniecki (1882–1958), the creator of the concept of the “humanistic coefficient”, so important and appreciated even today in this post-modernist age. Znaniecki was the centre of all sociological activity at the University of Poznan. His spiritual influence was felt even long after his departure for the United States in 1914 just before the outbreak of the First World War.

**DC & AZ:** *Znaniecki lectured at Columbia University and the University of Illinois, where he also fulfilled the role of the President of the American Sociological Association...*

**ST:** His thoughts however still circulated in Poznan. I fell under their spell. I therefore intended to take the entrance exam to study sociology at the University of Poznan, since this discipline seemed at the time to me to be the most modern and attractive. As an aside, it was a subject often chosen by young men who wanted to study something that nobody else did. However, precisely in 1950, when I got my high school diploma, for political reasons, this discipline was taken off the syllabus of universities all over the country. I did not have any idea which other direction of studies I wanted to pursue. And then a friend of my family, the eminent historian Professor Kazimierz Tymieniecki urged me to study the newly created subject, the history of material culture, which was a combination of three disciplines: archaeology, ethnography and history.

**DC & AZ:** *Since 1919, Kazimierz Tymieniecki (1887–1968) directed the Department of Medieval History created by him in the newly-founded University in Poznan.*

**ST:** Yes. It was he who informed me about the scope of the exam. He correctly saw that archaeology could be treated as a route by which one can approach sociology and that this equally applied to the history of material culture. I passed the exam with good results, but was disappointed to learn unofficially, that I was not likely to be admitted to the university due to my “unsuitable social origins”. This was because my father had been a professional officer in the period before the war. For me it was a great blow, but my own case was far from atypical in those times. Luckily, as a result of some

favourably-inclined professors in the selection commission (besides Tymieniecki, there was also Józef Kostrzewski and Wojciech Kóčka), the exam results were given greater weight than my social origins. And in this way, through the authority of Professor Tymieniecki, and a little by accident, I became a student of the history of material culture, specialising in archaeology. All of these early sociological influences, which in a later period were followed by conscious choices, were to find reflection in my later work on different occasions. I attempt to join them all together in the idea of the sociology of prehistory (or more generally – the sociology of the past), which I am currently trying to develop.

**DC & AZ:** *And what were your mature reflections from the overlap between sociology and archaeology?*

**ST:** One should mention the characteristics of the period of my studies. I had great teachers: in archaeology my teachers were Józef Kostrzewski, then (since 1953), Witold Hensel. Władysław Markiewicz (a fascinating and impressively intelligent young lecturer, with whom to this day I maintain friendly contacts), taught sociology (and actually Marxism-Leninism). In this period, an important element of study comprised philosophical discussions inspired by the current socio-political thought (which of course in those times was Marxist in tone). As a young man, however, that interested me. In the case of the historical sciences, I think that a particularly important factor was the discussion started, among others, by Aleksander Gieysztor and Witold Hensel around the topic of the upcoming anniversary of the *Millennium Poloniae*.

**DC & AZ:** *What do you see as being of particular importance in those discussions?*

**ST:** Discussions led to a programme of research, which became the turning point for the whole of Polish archaeology. Witold Hensel had written a groundbreaking text (Hensel 1946) in which he postulated the need to prepare a research project to coincide with the 1000th anniversary of the creation of the Polish state (calculated on the basis of the date of the baptism in 966 of Mieszko I, the first historical Polish ruler). As a result, a series of large-scale archaeological research projects was undertaken, concentrating on sites related to the beginning of the Polish state. The Institute of the History of Material Culture (IHKM) of the Polish Academy of Sciences was created (the first director was Witold Hensel) in order to direct these studies. Also created at this time was the Institute of History, Academy of Sciences, headed by Aleksander Gieysztor, which postulated the development of historical research on the conditions of everyday life (Gieysztor 1954). Contrary to various unfriendly recent opinions that the idea of the IHKM was “brought in a briefcase” from Stalinist Russia, in reality, its inspiration came from a completely different part of Europe, namely the concept of thought related to those of Fernand Braudel, from the intellectual circle developing since the end of the 1920s, the French Annales School. Certainly, this did have some

overlap with classical Marxism, especially in relation to their subjects studied, but it did not derive from it (and indeed exhibited some differences from it as for example rejecting the Marxist belief in the automatism of progress). The main subject of research of the Institute – the history of material culture – was initiated in Poland by Jan Rutkowski before the War. In 1939 he submitted an article devoted to this subject to print, but its publication then was overtaken by historical events.

**DC & AZ:** *The manuscript of that article however survived the destructive horror of the War and was published immediately afterwards (Rutkowski 1946). Over the next few years Rutkowski developed his concept of the history of culture further and created a more systematic classification (Rutkowski 1959).*

**ST:** The IHKM concept was therefore based on his serious and well-considered vision of global history, built in the first place from the perspective of economic history. These ideas were analysed in the Institute in the 1990s during a conference on Braudel and the Annales School.

**DC & AZ:** *Stanisław Trawkowski reminds us that the concept of the history of material culture was established in Poland before World War II; Maria Dembińska called for not losing sight of the Polish contribution to European research on the history of material culture (cf. Sowina 1994: 154–155). Also, according to Jerzy Topolski (1980), the economic historian Jan Rutkowski (1886–1949) was the precursor of the modern paradigm of historical research, which broke with traditional notions of a descriptive history and aimed for an explanatory history. That paradigm has created a strong methodological and theoretical basis to the study of the history of material culture. Rutkowski was able to break away from the superficiality of existing explanations, characteristic of the historiography of the nineteenth- and early twentieth century through direct and indirect influence of Marxism the present in his theory.*

**ST:** It is difficult to resist the impression that the persistent abusive repetition, with a strange satisfaction, of the idea concerning the alleged Soviet origin of the idea of the history of material culture and IHKM are simply tempered by bias and perhaps ignorance.

**DC & AZ:** *Do you, Professor Tabaczyński, consider yourself to be a Marxist?*

**ST:** This is very debatable, and I conduct such a discussion with myself too. Certainly some have called me a Marxist. I have certain reservations about that. We are all aware of the monstrous consequences carried with it by the ideologized and politicized application of a dogmatic Marxism by the communists. My family and I personally were also victims of this system. My father is on the list of victims of the Katyń massacre. I am not a Marxist, and more precisely: today, I do not consider myself a dogmatic, orthodox Marxist. Do you know Andrzej Walicki?

**DC & AZ:** *Yes, that outstanding philosopher and historian of ideas is also concerning the same circle of problems: the situation of the Polish intellectual in the subsequent phases of the real socialism system. He took these threads in a fascinatingly insightful way in his very personal intellectual autobiography “Enslaved mind after years” – titled and tied in relation to Czesław Miłosz seminal opus (Walicki 1993). But, what is interesting, in his publication “Marksizm i skok do królestwa wolności. Dzieje komunistycznej utopii” [Marxism and jump to the kingdom of freedom] among other things, Walicki wrote of the surprising “intellectual poverty of contemporary anti-communist literature in Poland” (Walicki 1996: 7).*

**ST:** I fully agree with this opinion. I am therefore as much of a Marxist as is Walicki. He also says that Marxism (as an immanent, inalienable feature of the European intellectual tradition), should be distinguished from communism, which is a perversion of the theory of Marxism. I get the impression that I was not alone in such attitude, I shared it for example with Jerzy Topolski (1976). I perceive Marxism as one of the scientific theories. It has nothing to do with propaganda, or with any kind of intolerance...

**DC & AZ:** *Would it not be more accurate to say that it should not have?*

**ST:** I would like to give my answer on this topic to its end. To travesty a little the words of Marc Bloch: in the gallery of my spiritual ancestors a prominent, if not foremost place is occupied by the bearded prophets of the Rhineland... (Bloch 1960: 19–20). One can find a very good explanation of this dependence in the book of Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn, “Archaeology. Theories, methods and practice” where the authors discuss the conceptual connections and interdependence between Marxism, Marxist archaeology and processual archaeology (Renfrew and Bahn 2002: 26, 448–451). These authors express the view that in fact one cannot clearly differentiate the analyses of modern functional-processual archaeology from those of Marxist archaeology because the main characteristic of both approaches draw attention to the same phenomena, a holistic approach to the long-term changes occurring in societies and the analysis of the social relationships within them (Renfrew and Bahn 2002: 451).

**DC & AZ:** *The concept of “class war” is part of Marxism. This is of course a concept of antagonism. In your opinion, what does this mean for archaeological interpretation?*

**ST:** Among those who wish to “tame” it, it has recently become very fashionable to discard from Marxism precisely this basic element of antagonism. Yet it is an inherent element not only of Marxism, but sociology as a whole. I am trying to develop this from an archaeological point of view. This whole matter was raised in an extremely pertinent manner by Stanisław Piekarczyk in his discussion of the concept of the polysemantisation of culture.

**DC & AZ:** *Could you please tell us what fascinated you the most in that concept of polysemantization of culture and in its role in archaeological interpretation?*

**ST:** We see a development in the complexity of human society developing some time after the so-called Neolithic Revolution and the growth of urban sites. This development was equally important for the future development of early societies. I have in mind the beginning and further development of social inequality, the formation of an elite and within the community, which until then had been internally relatively homogeneous, the differentiation of the notion of social status, and the accompanying ideologies and attitudes. A historian analysing the behaviour of a social group should, Piekarczyk stresses, accurately recognize two kinds of elements. The first are those linked with factors joining (for the sake of something) a group, these factors are conceived as forming a cultural community group. The second kind represents those elements, which are associated with only one of the subgroups active in a living community, rather than being associated with the entire social group (conceived as a social entity). I consider this to be an issue that has central importance for archaeology today, and one which needs to be given adequate attention as the subject of archaeological analysis.

**DC & AZ:** *You have discussed this question in a number of places, including in your "Processes of polysemantisation of culture and their fossil correlates" (2010), and "Kultura i jej rzeczowe korelaty" (1993), which have entered the canon of works influential on the development of Polish archaeology. Could you say at what stage and in what circumstances the need for the concept in the archaeology of "material correlates of culture" appeared in your work and thinking? Could you please give us a few thoughts on the main benefits and problems associated with its use today?*

**ST:** The necessity to utilize such a concept came to me relatively early, these thoughts began to crystallize in the period of the investigations of Poland's Millennium. Undoubtedly, a great influence was also my discussions with Antonina Kłosowska.

**DC & AZ:** *Yes, Antonina Kłosowska (1919–2001) is well-known sociologist. Her theoretical studies on concept of culture in sociology and anthropology as well as on the history of that concept are very inspiring, as well as her views concerning the formation of cultural universe resulting from the human capacity to create symbolic systems and material culture (see eg. Kłosowska 1962; Tabaczyński 2012b). Do you think it would be helpful to attempt to encourage a wider use of the term "correlate" and "material correlate" in the language of Polish archaeology? It was already substantiated and recommended (Tabaczyński 1993; Tabaczyński and Zalewska 2012: 19–21).*

**ST:** Yes, I believe so, although I would like to emphasise that I am opposed to the separation of reflection on various aspects of correlates between the different

disciplines. I think we need to maintain a multi-aspectual approach to the notion of “correlates” and we also need to take into account the aspects of the *longue durée*.

**DC & AZ:** *It is clear from your writings that for you, one of the more important and permanent inspirations leading to the creation of a sociology of prehistory has been the Annales School. You have devoted a lot of attention to this in your studies (such as for example recently Tabaczyński 2007; 2012a; 2013; 2015).*

**ST:** Yes, certainly. This is mainly because of its integrating and interdisciplinary character, the way it draws on evidence from many sources, and its shift of interest away from *histoire événementielle*, the chronicler’s history of wars, the deaths of kings, the deeds of the elite or eclipses of the sun and notable hailstorms, to Braudel’s considerations of long-term historical structures, and the focus on the daily life of “ordinary people”. These characteristics make it a valuable orientation within historiography which is extremely important for archaeology (that is not to say that it is thus perceived by all archaeologists). Of course what we need to keep in mind is that, regardless of the chosen research perspective, culture is a mental entity, which was emphasized by one of the main (besides Lucien Febvre) founders and editors of the Annales group, Marc Bloch (1866–1944). We should always remember his words, directing us towards history, but also sociology, that in historical investigations, we are investigating not just man, but men, in the plural.

**DC & AZ:** *In the plural, which is (Bloch 1960: 50) “a grammatical form of relativity”. Lucien Febvre also expressed the same idea very appositely: “Not a man, let me repeat, never a man, but human societies, organized groups” (after Bloch 1960: 233). As Witold Kula noted in the introduction to the Polish edition of the work “The historian’s craft”, considered to be the testament of Bloch (Kula 1960: 11–13) there is a clearly discernable influence on the Annalists of the sociological school of Durkheim with its anti-individualist approach, concentrating attention on mass social phenomena.*

**ST:** It is simply not possible to separate individuals from the social community in which they function. Culture, although created by the individual, is inherently of a social nature; you cannot imagine man outside culture and outside society. Incidentally, the same is true of the past that we investigate, an archaeological find without its social context loses its value as evidence. This is the great lesson of the conceptual fathers of the *Annales School*, a vision relating to the historical sciences, which has been creatively continued by its successive representatives, especially the French ones, taking up these themes and conducting interdisciplinary research from a sociological or anthropological perspectives. These are after all complementary perspectives.

**DC & AZ:** *This brings us to your work in France and contacts with French discourse and investigators ...*

**ST:** What linked me to French scholars was that they were then interested in what was, in their opinion, an interesting and original use of non-dogmatic Marxism by Polish scholars.

**DC & AZ:** *But it was not only on these grounds that you developed a strong relationship with the French and the heirs of the Annales heritage. Here we should mention the equally important topic of French and Polish collaboration in fieldwork, especially during the investigations of the deserted medieval villages of Montaigut, Condorcet and Saint-Jean-le-Froid in 1964–1966.*

**ST:** Yes, I had the pleasure of meeting some great thinkers personally, for example Emmanuele Le Roy Ladurie, and working with them and discussing matters of mutual interest during the excavations in France that you have mentioned and during my lectures on archaeological theory which I delivered in the Sorbonne in 1978–1979 (Fig. 2).

**DC & AZ:** *You have many times observed, and your wife Eleonora stressed it a lot, that excavations are often very much more than the physical aspect of digging (Cyngot and Zalewska 2016). They also have a social dimension, establishing a relationship with the local population who are especially interested in research in “their territory”.*



**Fig. 2.** During archaeological research of deserted medieval villages in France. The vicinity of Condorcet, 1966. From the left: Stanisław Suchodolski, Marian Rulewicz, Stanisław Tabaczyński, Jerzy Okulicz, Andrzej Tomaszewski. Photos from private collection of Eleonora and Stanisław Tabaczyński

**ST:** I recall a couple of such situations. During research on Torcello we employed local residents in the excavations. They were former employees of the glassworks on Murano, and they proved to be very helpful in interpreting the finds related to the production of glass. In Capacchio Vecchia, we had working with us local people who had specialized in working on the excavations, employed continuously in the famous Paestum (Fig. 3 and 4). They brought with them tools that they had developed themselves, a combination of a chisel and a narrow putty knife, made by a local blacksmith. In the trenches there was an atmosphere of shared joy in the work and the discoveries in the trenches and a deep involvement of all participants in the investigations. We have also experienced some similar situations in Poland. For example during the examination of the stronghold at Nakło, we were witness to the huge interest of local residents. We organized a meeting right by the excavation trenches, with lectures combined with the exposition of the excavated finds and field documentation (Fig. 5). We did the same thing in Sandomierz. One of the results of this was that the local residents gave information (of varying historical value) of “ancient” things that they had accidentally found on various occasions and the existence of objects in their fields (Fig. 6), sites that we then verified by fieldwork (such as the Góry Wysokie site near Sandomierz).



**Fig. 3.** Excavations in Capaccio Vecchia near Paestum, 1979. Eleonora Tabaczyńska (the first from left) drawing a layer of stones, nearby professional excavation workers (*operai archeologici*) from Paestum. Photos from private collection of Eleonora and Stanisław Tabaczyński



**Fig. 4.** Public lecture “La presenza dell’archeologia polacca in Italia” (“Presence of Polish archaeology in Italia”) given by Stanisław Tabaczyński in the Biblioteca e Centro di Studi, Accademia Polacca delle Scienze (Library and Research Center of the Polish Academy of Sciences), Vicolo Doria street, Palazzo Doria, 1 06 1978, Rome. Photos from private collection of Eleonora and Stanisław Tabaczyński

**DC & AZ:** *What would you consider to be an important value of research carried out in such a manner?*

**ST:** An archaeologist working in a given area allows its residents to get to know about the past of their “little homeland”. This is achieved not only through conducting excavations, which are his main task, but also by many educational activities that can contribute to fostering an awareness of history and local identity.



**Fig. 5.** Open air lecture linked with exhibition for citizens of the town during archaeological excavations of the early medieval stronghold in Nakło on the river Noteć, 1958. Stanisław Tabaczyński is visible in the middle (with a pointer). Photos from private collection of Eleonora and Stanisław Tabaczyńscy

There is much that can still be done in this area. An awareness of the importance of this issue and the responsibilities that result from it should constantly accompany archaeologists in their work.

**DC & AZ:** *You have directed many excavations, have any of them led to the discovery of anything exceptional?*

**ST:** That depends what you mean by exceptional. If you are thinking about something that made the greatest impression on me as the discoverer, I must say that one such discovery was during the excavations in Zawichost in 1996–1999. Here, something unexpected was found, which even though I discovered the physical traces, led to an almost spiritual experience. I was looking for the church of St Maurice mentioned by the fifteenth-century chronicler Jan Długosz. From under our trowels emerged a curved line of stone where we were expecting a straight wall. This detail allowed a correct interpretation of the whole building as a tetrakonchos, which allowed its complete reconstruction (which was drawn by the architectural historian Andrzej Tomaszewski).



**Fig. 6.** Pupils of a primary school visiting the Neolithic cemetery in the village Góry Wysokie, near Sandomierz, during the excavation and hearing a lecture given by Stanisław Tabaczyński, 1971. Photos from private collection of Eleonora and Stanisław Tabaczyńscy

I had similar experiences in southern Italy during the excavations in the 1970s of the Longobard castellum in Civita di Ogliara. When everybody said we were excavating a threshing floor, I had a strange intuition that we should investigate the area to one side, and when we did, we found a grave. The floor we had been exploring had been surrounded by a wall, and I was able to resolve any doubts that what we'd found was an apsidal church.

**DC & AZ:** *Can you tell us something more of the excavations in Poland which you took part in?*

**ST:** I would begin the story from the period when I was a student, that is the period 1950–1955, and especially from the excavations at the First Training Excavation at Biskupin in 1951 (Fig. 7). Every archaeology student in this period was obliged to attend one session at this site. These practical training sessions were very important in the education of the new generation of archaeologists. I took part in the first of these



**Fig. 7.** I (The First) Archaeological Training Camp in Biskupin, 1951. In the second row from top are Stanisław Tabaczyński (the fourth from left) and Eleonora Tabaczyńska (the fifth from left). Photos from private collection of Eleonora and Stanisław Tabaczyńscy

excavations as a first year student, together with Eleonora, also studying archaeology, who later became my wife. During the second season, in 1952, I was one of the instructors, directing part of the excavation. In the same year, I also had the opportunity to take part in excavations being conducted in Poznan by Witold Hensel, and then also on the excavations in Wrocław directed by Elżbieta Ostrowska and Wojciech Kóčka. It was there that Eleonora and I took our first independent steps as excavators. This was followed by four full summer seasons in the coastal city of Kołobrzeg (1954–1957), together with Lech Leciejewicz, where we both excavated the major earthwork site in Budzistowo. This was followed by excavations of the stronghold of Nakło on the Noteć river where I was on my own and responsible for the whole excavation. All the excavations which I took part in since 1956 were part of the major series of interdisciplinary excavations marking the Millennium of the Polish state. They were prepared on the basis of the conceptual and organizational framework created by Aleksander Gieysztor from the side of historiography, and Witold Hensel on the archaeological side. We were working in very difficult conditions, these were still the early Post-War years, but the research teams worked with great enthusiasm and sometimes also sacrifice.

**DC & AZ:** *In these excavations, you were already applying methods of stratigraphic excavation.*

**ST:** Yes, of course. Already in the first training excavations at Biskupin in 1951, we became convinced of the necessity of excavating according to the natural boundaries of stratigraphic units. This was one of the main requirements of the fieldwork there, and much attention was paid in the training to the differentiation of layers and knowledge of geology. All this became part of future investigations. We were learning more over time. An important step in the development of our thinking on stratigraphy was our work (together with Lech Leciejewicz) as part of Polish-Italian teams on the beginnings of Venice on Torcello Island (1961–1962), together with the work on the culture and society of the Longobards in Italy in Castelseprio in Lombardy (1962–1963) and in Capaccio Vecchia and Civita di Ogliara in southern Italy in the 1970s and 1980s. I have already mentioned the work that was implemented in France in Montaigut, Condorcet and Saint-Jean-le-Froid (1963–1966). I took an active part in some of that research, I also followed the results of the work of others closely and on a regular basis. There were also the Polish-Algerian excavations in Algiers and Tlemçen (1967–1968). For me a real stratigraphical challenge were the excavations in Sandomierz in southern Poland. Here we excavated at the Collegium Gostomianum and castle sites in 1969–1973 (Fig. 8). It was only later that we were to read the theoretical deliberations of Edward C. Harris, which gave us terms that could allow discussion (especially after his book was translated into Polish by Zbigniew Kobyliński in 1989).

**DC & AZ:** *But, as you have often observed, despite all this, not everybody in Poland has been able to make full use of these experiences in their own work. What, in your opinion, has been the most serious omission in the theory and practice of Polish archaeology?*

**ST:** My answer may sound a bit radical. But in my opinion it is high time for archaeology to become mature, archaeology must find its own identity. This identity, in my opinion, defies our imagination. It seems to me that this view comes close to that of the recent writings by Ian Hodder (2012) in which he draws attention to the interconnectedness between people and things. My thinking is going in a related direction. Reading Hodder, my imagination is caught by this relationship, and I am extremely interested to learn of what other researchers make of the ideas Hodder lays out. In general, it seems to me that the reaction has been rather muted in relation to the interest of what Hodder has presented. There is a place for all types of archaeological material in his concept and proposed classification of all types of correlates, it seems to me that this is a fully mature concept full of promise for archaeology.

**DC & AZ:** *You have often expressed the opinion that archaeology is, or rather should be, an inherent part of the understanding of the historical process.*



**Fig. 8.** Archaeologists from the Institute of History of Material Culture of the Polish Academy of Sciences (now IAE PAN), Department in Cracow visiting the Collegium Gostomianum site in Sandomierz, 1970, during excavation. Stanisław Tabaczyński is in the archaeological trench. Photos from private collection of Eleonora and Stanisław Tabaczyńscy

**ST:** Yes, this statement might of course arouse astonishment among historians *sensu strictiori*, but I really think that there cannot be a full understanding of history without archaeology. For example, if someone today, flying over New York said something like “this is the most interesting archaeological site that I have ever seen”, a fellow passenger might doubt that, but that is precisely what it is, would you not agree?

**DC & AZ:** Yes, certainly. Fortunately, in recent years also in Poland the nature of contemporaneity that can be explored not only by sociology, history of material culture, but also by archaeology of contemporaneous times has been noticed, discussed, and gradually accepted or even appreciated (Zalewska 2016; 2017; 2019).

**ST:** The archaeological process is permanently linked to such a global vision of the overlapping and interrelated social historical processes. There is simply no historical process without the archaeological one. I add here that I understand the latter as the formation of archaeological correlates to past phenomena through the depositional and postdepositional processes as well as the context of discovery itself, all this is intimately linked with the creation of the archaeological record.



**Fig. 9.** Stanisław Tabaczyński at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, during his jubilee in 2015, celebrated at a session of the Commission of Anthropology of Prehistory and the Middle Ages (in Polish: Komisja Antropologii Pradziejów i Średniowiecza, KAPS) which has operated since 2003 (renamed in 2012 the Team of Anthropology of Prehistory and the Middle Ages, ZAPiS), which Professor has lead since its inception. Photos from private collection of Eleonora and Stanisław Tabaczyńscy

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