

CONFERENCES

The 75th Anniversary of the Biskupin Excavations and the Conference “BISKUPIN IN THE PAST, TODAY AND TOMORROW”, Biskupin, 18–19 June 2009

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Biskupin is amongst the most well-known archaeological sites in Central Europe (Rajewski 1959; Piotrowska 1997–1998;). It is also famous far beyond its borders (Piotrowska and Piotrowski 1990; Piotrowski 1998). June 2009 marked the 75th anniversary of the start of excavations on the peninsula of Lake Biskupin by Professor Józef Kostrzewski (1885–1869) from Poznan and his team (Kostrzewski 1938a). To mark the occasion, the Archaeological Museum in Biskupin (AMB), the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IAE PAS) and the State Archaeological Museum (SAM) in Warsaw organised together jubilee celebrations and a scientific conference hosted by the Biskupin Museum, which had been established in 1950 (and from 1956 until 2000 functioned as the department of SAM) on the site of the famous excavations at Site 4. The proposal to create a museum at Biskupin had been suggested by Dr Zdzisław Rajewski (1907–1974; nominated as professor in 1955), who was then the director of the SAM.

The conference gathered many outstanding figures of Polish archaeology, friends and collaborators of the Museum from Poland's leading archaeological centres. Our colleagues from the Museumsdorf Düppel in Berlin also attended. For many years now, Museumsdorf Düppel and the AMB have been linked by strong ties of friendship and cooperation. Representatives of the local authorities were also present. To commemorate the anniversary, a Honorary Committee was created, made up of representatives of the institutions which had been engaged in Biskupin research and protection of the cultural heritage. Two important books have been dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the 1933 discovery of the fortified settlement and the initiation of excavations in June 1934 (Piotrowska 2008; Babiński ed. 2009).

Biskupin, as no other excavations in Poland, entwines the political history of this part of Europe with the individual stories of several generations of researchers, and with the history and problems of Polish archaeology and museum studies. The discovery of the ancient past of the Lake Biskupin peninsula and the development of the museum took place during a stormy period in Polish and European twentieth century history (Piotrowska 1997–1998; Lech 2004). The aim of the conference was to try to define the place of Biskupin in the panorama of Polish culture and science, and to present the state of research and most recent archaeological discoveries in the Lake Biskupin micro region. The significance of the Biskupin excavations and their public response found expression in the comments of speakers and participants on the first day of the symposium.

The conference was opened by Wiesław Zajączkowski, Director of the Biskupin Museum. Prof. Bogusław Gediga, chairman of the Biskupin Museum Council, spoke of the significance that excavations of the fortified settlement of a Lusatian culture community had in shaping national awareness in the years 1934–1939 and the influence of past research (1934–1961) on the character of Polish archaeology. The research model developed then, based on the cooperation of specialists from various fields of the natural sciences and technology, was continued in the programme of studies on the beginnings of the Polish state, begun in 1948. The deputy director of IAE PAS, Dr Marek Dulnicz (1957–2010) noted how highly Biskupin was ranked in post-war Poland. The director of SAM, Dr Wojciech Brzeziński referred to the period when the Biskupin Museum was administered by the SAM and talked about the role that the Branch of the SAM in Biskupin played in creating the modern character of the Museum. The official part of the symposium closed with the unveiling of a plaque commemorating the 75th anniversary of the excavations (Fig. 1) and with a group photograph of the conference participants (Fig. 2).

The official opening of the conference was followed by a scientific section in which ten papers were presented, accompanied by a lively discussion. Wiesław Zajączkowski began by outlining the history of the archaeological excavations and the growth of the Archaeological Museum in Biskupin, the conservation and legal protection of the site and its surroundings, the activities of the Museum and its public outreach work, as well as some of the current problems it is facing. The AMB is the most frequently visited archaeological museum in Poland, with up to 300 000 visitors annually. Zajączkowski also spoke of the Museum's research and conservation work and its cooperation with institutions abroad. Professor Aleksander Bursche from the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Warsaw described the very special event that took place in 2006, when the Museum was awarded the "Europa Nostra" Medal. Among the organisers of the conference were Professor Jacek Lech from the IAE PAS and Danuta Piotrowska from the SAM. They co-authored a paper entitled "Szczególne miejsce wykopalisk biskupińskich w polskiej archeologii XX stulecia" [The extraordinary place



Fig. 1. Biskupin, 18 June, 2009. Bronze plaque cast by Zbigniew Dolski, commemorating the most outstanding archaeologists who excavated at Biskupin – Professor Józef Kostrzewski (on the right) and Professor Zdzisław Rajewski. Photo: J. Mielcarzewicz



Fig. 2. Biskupin, 18 June, 2009. Souvenir photograph of the conference participants.
Photo: P. Szafraniak

of the Biskupin excavations in Polish archaeology of the 20th century]. The authors showed the importance of the excavations at Biskupin in the context of changes in ideology, world view and culture in the past century. As, for many years, the Lusatian culture was considered to be proto-Slavic, right from the start the Biskupin excavations played an exceptional role at the meeting point of scholarship-national ideology-society-state and this role grew as, after 1933, the ideological and political tensions between Poland and Germany increased (Piotrowska 1997–1998: 255–270; Lech 1997–1998: 43–44; 2004). For the first time, the Biskupin excavations were discussed in association with the other great excavations of the interwar period (Gródek [Horodok] near Równe in Volhynia, Złota in the Sandomierz district, the Krakus Mound in Cracow, the early medieval excavations in Gniezno, Poznan and Davidgródek [Davyd-Haradok] in Volhynia). The exceptional place of the Biskupin discovery in Polish archaeology, history, school education and culture after the World War II were also shown. The authors concluded by saying that Biskupin is the only archaeological site to have permanently entered Polish culture of the twentieth century, both the elite (intellectual) and the mass (popular) variety.

The afternoon session was devoted to museum and conservation issues and to the subject of public archaeology. The first topic was discussed in three papers and began

with a presentation given by Professor Ryszard Grygiel, director of the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography in Lodz, who talked about the circumstances that resulted in the creation of the Biskupin Museum in the context of two hundred years of archaeological museology in Poland. The speaker also reviewed the present condition of the Museum, stressing its modern organisation and infrastructure. Wojciech Brzeziński read a paper entitled "Państwowe Muzeum Archeologiczne w Warszawie i wykopaliska biskupińskie: pół wieku wspólnoty" [The State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw and the Biskupin excavations: half a century of community], in which he enlarged on subjects discussed in earlier papers and said more about the work done by Prof. Zdzisław Rajewski and his role in expanding the Museum in Biskupin when he was director of the SAM. In the last years when the Biskupin Museum was functioning as a branch of the SAM, annual archaeological festivals began to be organised, endowing the Museum with a new face. Since 2000 the Biskupin Museum has been an independent institution and the archaeological festivals have come to play an outstanding role in shaping the reception of archaeology in Poland. The next paper, delivered by Dr Jacek Rydzewski, the director of the Museum of Archaeology in Cracow, had more pessimistic overtones. It discussed the problems stemming from the new conditions in which archaeological museums, as institutions of culture, have been functioning after 1989. He noted that the democratically elected, but sometimes incompetent authorities often showed a complete lack of understanding for the needs of such institutions and the way they function (the situation of the Museum in Biskupin is a positive exception to the rule). Dr Rydzewski explained that the obligations of museums, as set out in an Act of the Polish Parliament, are very difficult to reconcile with the demands of local authorities, who are the funding bodies for most museums and who expect these institutions to draw in large numbers of tourists, while expressing little interest in their other responsibilities imposed on them by the Act.

Among the most important problems of the Biskupin Museum is the task of preserving and monitoring the condition of the wood from the excavations left *in situ*. The subject was discussed in two papers: "Wybrane problemy ochrony drewnianych pozostałości osiedla kultury łużyckiej na stanowisku 4 w Biskupinie" [Selected problems of protecting the wooden remains of the Lusatian culture settlement at site 4 in Biskupin] and "Badania nad stanem zachowania archeologicznego drewna ze stanowiska 4 w Biskupinie" [Examination of the condition of the archaeological wood from site 4 in Biskupin] prepared by Dr Leszek Babiński, head of the AMB Department of Conservation of Museum Exhibits and specialists from the Institute of Chemical Wood Technology of the University of Life Sciences in Poznan – Prof. Włodzimierz Prądkzyński, together with Dr Magdalena Zaborowska – and Mariusz Fejfer from the AMB.

The final topic of the first day of the conference was popularising archaeology and promotion of the Museum in Biskupin. Małgorzata Starak, Marek Lewandowski and

Mariusz Kazik from the AMB talked about the museum lessons organised for children and teenagers from schools, promoting the Museum at tourist trade fairs, and of the possibility of digitalising and making available on the Internet documentation from the excavations for research purposes. The last speakers were Professor Aleksander Bursche and Dr Roksana Chowaniec from the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Warsaw who discussed the general idea and organisation of the Biskupin archaeological festivals and reviewed the themes of the fifteen festivals that have taken place so far. The presentation was accompanied by a film documenting some of the events and exhibitions and by an interactive multimedia show “Biskupin without secrets”, which will soon be available on the Internet (Bursche and Chowaniec 2009; Chowaniec 2010).

The discussion at the close of the session on the 18th of June centred on the past of Biskupin archaeology, with comments on the post-war years and the Archaeological Training Camps, which were organised in the first half of the 1950s and were remembered by the oldest participants of the conference (Professors Stanisław Tabaczyński, Zbigniew Bukowski, Bogusław Gediga and Bogdan Balcer, Dr Eleonora Tabaczyńska and Mrs Aleksandra Szymańska-Bukowska). As to the period of the “Biskupin camps” and their significance for the investigations of the fortified settlement and influence on the shape of Polish archaeology, views vary. After the discussion, the guests made their way to the peninsula where a gala dinner had been prepared in one of the reconstructed houses from 2700 years ago. Behind the reconstructed settlement, a full-size replica of part of the first Biskupin Expedition Base from 1934 had been built (Fig. 3).

On the second day of the conference, twelve papers were presented. The pre-noon session continued with the topic of AMB activities in old and new contexts. Professor Danuta Minta-Tworzowska, director of the Institute of Prehistory of Poznan University considered the importance of Biskupin archaeology for the formation of social identities. Prof. Józef Kostrzewski had formulated and defended the view that the inhabitants of the fortified settlement from the end of the Bronze Age were Protoslavs. Owing to a widespread propaganda campaign (films, brochures, newspaper articles) undertaken by his team, Biskupin became an important place of legitimatising the Polish national identity. Today, according to Prof. Minta-Tworzowska, Biskupin is becoming a part of a “pleasure culture”, where new experiences of community and history are being designed. However, this change of identity, in times of transformation of information societies, may bring with it a number of dangers (i.e. simplification of images of the past). Dr Jarmila E. Kaczmarek, Dr Andrzej Prinke and Prof. Marzena Szmyt from the Poznan Archaeological Museum presented the European AREA and ARENA projects, in which the Museum has participated for many years. As part of both projects, digitalisation of photographs and articles, from the daily press and scientific journals, devoted to the first years of the Biskupin excavations was undertaken. The material has been made available on the Poznan Archaeological Museum’s



Fig. 3. Biskupin, June 2009. Reconstruction of part of the excavation site of the Biskupin expedition – the first season in 1934. Photo: M. Kazik

Internet site. In turn, Prof. Włodzimierz Rączkowski from the Institute of Prehistory of the University of Poznań and Łukasz Porzuczek, owner of a private company Proton-Archeo which does geophysical investigations, presented the results of recent surveys carried out in the region of Biskupin and Gąsawa, using non-invasive methods. Among other things, they discovered the remains of a monumental wooden and earthen structure, a so-called roundel (round earthwork enclosure) from the Neolithic and the remains of settlement of the Lengyel culture, equal in size to the famous site 4 in Brześć Kujawski (Bogucki and Grygiel 1993; Grygiel 2004). The title of their paper, “Zmienić obraz Biskupina...” [To change the image of Biskupin...] may soon turn out to be a reality.

A large part of the session on the 19th of June was devoted to presenting the state and perspectives of archaeological research in the Biskupin micro region. The presentations were divided according to archaeological relative chronology. Papers delivered by research workers from AMB were accompanied by papers prepared by acknowledged archaeologists who study the Polish Lowlands. The latter presented and commented on the results of their colleagues from a wider perspective. The starting point for the papers was the summing up of nature and archaeological investigations in the Biskupin micro region published in 1995 (Niewiarowski ed. 1995), which were supplemented by later and most recent results of excavations and research. The Neolithic and Early Bronze Age were presented by Anna Grossman and Szymon Nowaczyk. Considerable space was devoted to the recently discovered material from the late phases of the Funnel Beaker culture. In his accompanying paper, Prof. Ryszard Grygiel concentrated on the recent spectacular discoveries near Biskupin, made by Prof. Włodzimierz Rączkowski on the basis of an analysis of aerial photographs taken in the years 2005–2008 and important for studies of the Middle Neolithic. Wiesław Zajączkowski, Anna Grossman and Jarosław Kopiasz prepared a paper entitled “Badania późnej epoki brązu i początku epoki żelaza na półwyspie i w otoczeniu Jeziora Biskupińskiego” [Investigations of the Late Bronze Age and beginnings of the Iron Age on the peninsula and in the area surrounding Lake Biskupin], presenting the settlement and material culture of communities from the period, as well as new chronologies. The difficulties of preparing a complete monographic study of the excavated fortified settlement on the Lake Biskupin peninsula were also discussed. These difficulties stem from various causes, such as incompleteness and errors in the documentation and storage of the archaeological material (due to the War, grave mistakes in the organisation of the excavations and the Biskupin institution in the first decades after the war). Prof. Zbigniew Bukowski enlarged on this statement with a critical view of the present interpretation of the so-called “Biskupin” type fortified settlements. In his opinion, they should be considered in the wider context of cultural and environmental processes taking place in the border area of the Kuyavia and Greater Poland (Wielkopolska) regions. The period of Roman influences was discussed by Anna Grossman, Mariusz Kazik and

Andrzej Smaruj and the accompanying paper was read by Dr Józef Bednarczyk from the Institute of Prehistory of Poznan University, who described Pałuki as a border area between the Przeworsk and Wielbark cultures. The archaeological characterisation of the Biskupin region closed with a presentation of the early medieval period given by Wojciech Piotrowski. The speaker concentrated on the topic of settlement, considering it in the light of developing research and various interpretations. He concluded that, already in the 1950s, Zdzisław Rajewski had correctly defined the area around the Biskupin and Wenecja lakes as a separate settlement micro region in the early medieval period. A paper by Anna Grossman, Wojciech Piotrowski and Paweł Hildebrant entitled, "Od wystaw polowych do nowoczesnych ekspozycji w Muzeum Archeologicznym w Biskupinie" [From field exhibitions to modern expositions at the Archaeological Museum in Biskupin] ended the main part of the session.

The session was summed up by Prof. Bogusław Gediga. He began by noting that the conference participants repeatedly brought up the issue of there being no comprehensive study of the excavations of the Lusatian culture fortified settlement on the Lake Biskupin peninsula. The results of excavations had only been written up in the form of reports (among others – Kostrzewski *et al.*, 1936; Kostrzewski ed. 1938b; ed. 1950; Gądzikiewicz *et al.*, 1957; Liana and Piętka 1958; Balcer 1961; 1963). Director Wiesław Zajączkowski and the staff of the AMB had pointed out that there were a number of serious deficiencies in the documentation and glaring errors in the ways artefacts were stored during the excavations. For many years, the staff numbers at the Biskupin institution were insufficient and the situation led to a backlog of work. These were obstacles that made the preparation of an archaeological monograph of the fortified settlement from site 4, unfeasible and also hampered the publication of source material in a modern form. The same is true today. The limited staff at AMB and the obligations imposed on the Museum, do not allow for the writing of an archaeological monograph of Biskupin. There is a gulf between the expectations expressed by some of the participants (some of whom, *nota bene*, took part in the excavations) and the state of the documentation of material and of the reports. The writing of a Biskupin monograph would seem to be possible if AMB were to cooperate with one of the larger archaeological institutions and if sufficient means were provided. Parts of the conference proceedings were accompanied by a lively, sometimes even heated discussion. The same was true of the exchange that followed Prof. Gediga's summing up.

The course taken by the conference, the papers, commentaries and the temperature of the discussion clearly indicate that Biskupin continues to hold a special place in Polish archaeology. Few prehistoric monuments are presented on a similar scale. For this reason the Archaeological Museum in Biskupin arouses unflagging interest and draws crowds of tourists from Poland and abroad. The popularity of Biskupin has been considerably increased by its continued presence in Polish elementary school textbooks and programmes, all the time since World War II (paper by J. Lech and D. Piotrowska).

The museum statistics show that Biskupin still is still an attractive site to visit, in spite of the completely changed interpretation of the uncovered remains – papers by W. Zajączkowski, and by A. Bursche and R. Chowaniec (Piotrowska 1997–1998). The social and political contexts of these activities were and are varied, but the archaeology of Biskupin was and is an element of each of these realities – paper by D. Minta-Two rzowska. Among the more important results of recent research are new dates for the fortified settlement based on dendrochronology and studies of changes in the natural environment in the Lake Biskupin micro region in the Holocene (Niewiarowski ed. 1995; Niewiarowski *et al.*, 1995; Grossman *et al.*, 2004; Ważny 2009). One of the achievements of the Biskupin Museum was the creation of a modern wood conservation department and the establishing of cooperation with acknowledged specialists in this field – papers by L. Babiński, M. Fejfer, W. Prądyński and M. Zaborowska. At present, this work continues. Its object is conservation of the wooden structures of this ancient fortified settlement. Nearly thirty percent of the site has been left untouched by archaeologists for future investigators to explore.

The last item on the agenda of the celebrations of the 75th anniversary of the Biskupin excavations was an event known as *sobótka* (an old Slavic tradition going back to pre-Christian time; rites taking place at the end of the longest day of the year), organised on the peninsula of Lake Biskupin. Folk dancers from Kuyavia enacted ancient rituals, wreaths with lighted candles were thrown onto the water, and there was dancing and singing round a fire.

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