

In memoriam Wojciech Piotrowski (1952–2024) – researcher of Biskupin and “wet archaeology” from Poland

Author: Jacek Lech

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OBITUARY



Somnambulant women,
left behind, move
through emptied kitchens
imagining our slow triumph
towards the mounds.
Seamus Heaney, *Funeral Rites*¹

In memoriam

Wojciech Piotrowski (1952–2024)

– researcher of Biskupin and “wet archaeology” from Poland

Wojciech Piotrowski was born on 25 October 1952 in Warsaw, in the first decade after World War II, when the city was recovering from the ruins. From 1955, he lived with his parents in Zielona Góra (until 1945, the German town of Grünberg), near Poland’s new western border. There, he began his primary school education. He read extensively from his school years onwards. Archaeology was popular at the time, and

¹ From *North*. First published in Faber Paperbacks 1975 by Faber and Faber Limited, London – Boston. Reprinted nine times. Reset 1992.



Fig. 1. Wojtek Piotrowski's ID card as a final-year student at Primary School No. 46 in Łódź, Teacher Training College Practice Schools [Szkoly Ćwiczeń Studium Nauczycielskiego]. Photograph courtesy of D. Piotrowska.

historical themes relating to the Middle Ages were common in novels and in belles-lettres more generally. The year 1966 marked the 1000th anniversary of the baptism of the Polish prince Mieszko I. For the Roman Catholic Church, which then played an important role in the country, it was the millennial anniversary of Christianity in Poland, and for the political authorities controlled by the Soviet Union, which did not see eye to eye with the Church, it was the millennial anniversary of the state. With the creation of the new Polish People's Republic (PRL – officially since 1952, the “dictatorship of the proletariat”), the country saw a return to the borders of the times of Mieszko I and his son, King Bolesław Chrobry “the Brave” of the Piast dynasty (who reigned from 992 to 1025). In scientific programmes related to the preparations for the celebration of the state anniversary, numerous archaeological studies of early medieval sites of the early state were financed. Many reports on the excavations were published for a mass audi-

ence, and numerous radio programmes were broadcast, later followed by television programmes popularising the archaeology of strongholds and early towns, churches, battlefields and cemeteries. The celebrations culminated in 1966, but the subject remained present in the country's public life for the next decade. It served to integrate the state within its new borders and post-war Polish society with the authoritarian regime, which remained stable until 1989 thanks to the support of the Soviet Union and Soviet troops stationed in the People's Republic of Poland (see Gieysztor 1979; Kieniewicz 1979; Lech 1997–1998: 57–105; Davis 2014: 324–325, 1049, 1101–1008, 1236 and 1316).

Wojtek Piotrowski then finished primary school and began attending a comprehensive secondary school in Łódź, in central Poland (Fig. 1). Łódź is the second most populous city in the country. In his final year of secondary school, his family moved to Warsaw. Here, Wojtek graduated from the Stefan Batory High School (named after the 16th-century King of Poland), which is well known in Poland. From October 1970, he studied at the Department of Prehistoric and Early Medieval Archaeology at the University of Warsaw. In the summer of 1971, he was sent on an excavation internship to Tarławki, Węgorzewo district, in north-eastern Poland (the region of the Great Masurian Lakes). Dr J. Okulicz and Ms. E. Gaśowska, MA, were researching



Fig. 2. Tumiany, Olsztyn district, site 2 “Rybaczówka”. Excavations in July 1974. Wojtek Piotrowski explores kneeling in the middle of an archaeological excavation. Photograph courtesy of T. Baranowski.

a defensive settlement of the West Baltic Barrow culture from the La Tène period. The site was located in a forest. Danuta Kowalczyk (later Piotrowska, Wojtek’s wife since 1978), also did her internship there. During his studies, the Institute of Archaeology was established at the University of Warsaw.

In the summer of 1974, Wojtek was in his fourth year of studies. He was again sent to the Masurian Lake District for his summer internship. In the village of Tumiany near Olsztyn, the production part of a settlement from the 5th–7th centuries AD was identified (Fig. 2). The work was supervised by doc. dr Krzysztof Dąbrowski (1931–1979) and his assistant T. Baranowski on behalf of the Team for Research on the Ethnogenesis of Slavs in North-Eastern Poland. It was a unit operating at the Institute of Material Culture History of the Polish Academy of Sciences (today the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences). Wojtek met his future director there, as K. Dąbrowski soon took over the position of director of the State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw (PMA) after the death of Prof. Zdzisław A. Rajewski (1907–1974) in the middle of the year. The new director employed Danuta Kowalczyk at the museum (December 1, 1974), who had



Fig. 3. Tumiany, Olsztyn district, site 2 “Rybaczówka”. July 1974. Danuta Kowalczyk records a small find in the middle of an archaeological excavation. Photograph courtesy of T. Baranowski.

previously participated in his most important excavations in Kalisz and Tumiany (Fig. 3).

In 1976, Wojtek presented his master’s thesis entitled “Przędliki z łupku owruckiego w Polsce na tle handlu polsko-ruskiego w okresie od X do XIII wieku” [“Spindle whorls from the Ovruch slate in Poland in the context of Polish-Ruthenian trade in the period from the 10th to the 13th century”], prepared under the supervision of doc. dr Jerzy Gąssowski (1926–2021).

In the same year, he was employed at the PMA. In July 1976, he and D. Kowalczyk went on holiday to visit friends in Yugoslavia (Fig. 4). At the museum, he initially worked with Danuta in the Scientific, Educational, and Exhibition Department. Both, along with Mitkova-Szubert, participated in preparing the Polish presentation of the renowned exhibition “Treasures of the Thracians. Culture and Art of the Thracians in Bulgarian Lands”, which was exhibited in prestigious museums in Moscow, Leningrad, Paris, Vienna, and London. Thanks to the efforts of K. Dąbrowski, the exhibition was brought to Poland. It was on display at the PMA from 7 September to 15 November 1976. “Treasures of the Thracians” was a cultural showcase of a country with a rich

prehistory, prepared under the patronage of the highest state authorities of the People's Republic of Bulgaria. On the Polish side, the exhibition was held under the patronage of Prof. Henryk Jabłoński, historian and Chairman of the Council of State of the Polish People's Republic. Danuta was one of the exhibition curators, while Wojtek actively participated in the preparatory work. The magnificent gold artefacts from the tombs of Thracian rulers and aristocrats displayed in the showcases attracted crowds of visitors from all over the country to the PMA. During the 67 days of the exhibition, it was seen by 40,000 visitors. It was accompanied by a Thracian symposium (Romanowska 1977a; 1977b; Modrzewska 1978: 116; Piotrowska 2002–2003: 28). At that time, the opening ceremonies at the PMA were attended by representatives of the highest state authorities, sometimes including the influential Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Polish People's Republic, members of the diplomatic corps and the Warsaw establishment. H. Jabłoński was given a tour of the exhibition by the director of the PMA together with D. Kowalczyk. Later, with Wojtek's participation, the exhibition "Charlemagne's Residence in Ingelheim on the Rhine" was mounted.

In 1978, Danuta Piotrowska moved to the PMA branch in Biskupin, while Wojtek remained in the Education Department. In July 1978, he was sent on a month-long scholarship to Finland, and then with his wife to the Malkoto-Kale excavation site in Bulgaria. They also studied Site 17a in Biskupin together (Modrzewska 1979b: 237 and 239).

In 1980, after the death of Director K. Dąbrowski, Wojtek participated in the preparation of the exhibition "Vikings" from the Statens Historiska Museum in Stockholm. In just over a month, it was seen by about 6000 visitors. Warsaw was the second place to exhibit "The Vikings" after Leningrad. From the PMA, the exhibition travelled to Sofia, Havana, Mexico City and Washington. Wojtek then participated in the preparation of the exhibition "Archaeology of Lower Austria in the 1st millennium AD" and worked on the organisation of a large exhibition by the PMA with the somewhat strange title "Eisen und Archäologie: Eisenerzbergbau und Verhüttung vor 2000 Jahren in der VR Polen" [Iron and Archaeology: Iron Ore Mining and Smelting 2000 Years Ago in the People's Republic of Poland] for museums in Bochum and Munich in the Federal Republic of Germany. It was a historic success. The PMA report for 1978 states that 200,000 people visited it in Bochum and 300,000 in Munich. To quote the document further: "No Polish archaeological exhibition has ever enjoyed such attendance figures". However, this raises the question of the reliability of the attendance data (Bero 1979; Bielenin 1979; Modrzewska 1979b: 234; Krzeczowska 1981; Piotrowski 1981).

K. Dąbrowski returned with renewed vigour to the tradition of promoting the Biskupin reserve in Warsaw's international diplomatic circles. He felt very much at home among diplomats. The 1970s created a favourable atmosphere for such undertakings,



Fig. 4. Škofja Loka, Yugoslavia. July 1976. Danuta Kowalczyk and Wojciech Piotrowski on vacation, visiting one of the oldest towns in Slovenia. Photograph courtesy of D. Piotrowska

and the new director was able to take advantage of it. He had close relations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and decision-makers in the Ministry of Culture and Art. After the stagnation of the last years of Prof. Z. Rajewski's directorship, Dąbrowski breathed new life into the rusty Museum (cf., e.g., Radziwił 1977: 100–101). There was a widespread belief that managing the PMA was a stepping stone toward a future career in the MFA. He eagerly involved young employees, who were more dynamic and available than the older staff, in duties related to the PMA's operations. Among them were Danuta and Wojtek. They both participated in the preparation of the exhibition "Biskupin – Polish Pompeii" initiated by Dąbrowski. The idea was obvious. Biskupin is the only archaeological site in Poland known worldwide (see Clark 1952: 155, 160 and 314; Bławatska 1964: 175–176; Alimen 1965: fig. 108; Bray and Trump 1972: 38 and 137; Milisauskas 1978: 284–288; 2011: 8; Alexander 1980: 226; Midgley 1992: 27; Cunliffe 1994: 352; Harding 1994: 332, 334; 2000: 257–260; 2011: 336, 338; Piotrowska 1994; 1997–1998; 2008: 14–15; Bahn 1996a: 108–109; 1996b: 219–221; Matsui 2000: 56–58; Marciniak 2001; Jameson 2002: 117–118; Schöbel 2004: 228; Sherratt 2004: 273; Trigger 2007: 249; Wells 2011: 408 and 426).

In 1965, Grahame Clark wrote in the first edition of *World Prehistory: an outline*:

“The wealth of personal armament and above all the widespread prevalence of military defences in the form both of hill-forts and marsh-fortresses like Biskupin in Poland leave one in no doubt that the period was one of warlike activity, but how far the diffusion of Hallstatt types was due to mere fashion, how far to raids by warriors and how far to anything like folk-movements are problems which need to be considered on their merits in particular cases.” (1965: 170).

Twelve years later, in *World Prehistory in New Perspective*, Clark (1977: 191) did not forget to mention Biskupin. He briefly summarised the issue raised earlier:

“Timber fortresses of the kind erected in marshes like Biskupin in Poland offer further evidence of violence.”

The exhibition “Biskupin – Polish Pompeii” was prepared at the PMA on the sidelines of major exhibitions. It was intended for shipment to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In the Museum’s 1976 report, it was classified as a “school and archaeology popularisation” exhibition. Without an official opening, it was shown for ten days at the PMA before being shipped. As the history lesson about Biskupin, as a site allegedly inhabited by “our proto-Slavic ancestors”, was included in school curricula, it was visited by nearly 7000 visitors in that short time, mainly school classes from Warsaw and the surrounding area. It was a great success (Modrzewska 1978: 116–118). After this episode, the exhibition was transported to Yugoslavia. It opened at the National Museum in Belgrade and was then exhibited in Skopje and at the City Museum in Ljubljana (Węgrzynowicz 1977; Modrzewska 1978: 121). After returning to the PMA, the exhibition “Biskupin – Polish Pompeii” travelled around the country, included in the 1977 report in the category of “national travelling exhibitions”. In 1977, during 176 exhibition days, it was seen by over 21,000 people in two western Polish voivodeships (Modrzewska 1979a: 102–103); it was then shown in other museums. From February 1979, the exhibition was in Algeria, in 1984 in West Berlin, in museums in the Federal Republic of Germany,² and in other European cities. It was well received and aroused interest. Wojtek participated in its assembly and disassembly as well as in the opening ceremonies, sometimes as the official representative of the PMA; he was

2 Museumsdorf Düppel (West Berlin), Schleswig-Holsteinisches Landesmuseum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte (Schleswig), Helms-Museum / Hamburgisches Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte (Hamburg), Niederrheinisches Museum (Duisburg), Museum der Stadt (Regensburg), Westfälisches Museum für Archäologie (Münster).



Fig. 5. Museumdorf Düppel in West Berlin published a booklet devoted to this exhibition.

sometimes accompanied by Danuta (see Lech 2004: 53–54). Museumdorf Düppel in West Berlin published a booklet devoted to this exhibition, consisting of six short articles (Fig. 5). The longest is Wojtek's article on the history of research at Biskupin (Goldmann 1985; Piotrowski 1985). The authors of the other articles are: J. Jaskanis, then the new director of the PMA, W. Zajączkowski – head of the PMA Branch in Biskupin, A. Harding, P. Reynolds, and K. Goldmann. The booklet concludes with a list of 181 objects presented at the exhibition.

In 1981, Wojtek joined the PMA branch in Biskupin (Fig. 6) as a researcher and museologist specialising in the archaeology of the Biskupin Lake peninsula and its surroundings (Nowaczyk 2024). At that time, Polish researchers of Lusatian culture began to believe that the fortified settlement on the Biskupin Lake peninsula was older than its first researchers, Professors J. Kostrzewski (1885–1969) and Z. Rajewski, had assumed.

At the beginning of 1979, the fourth volume of *Prahistoria ziem polskich* [The Pre-history of the Polish Lands], edited by Jan Dąbrowski and Z. Rajewski, was published in Poland. The volume covers the period from the Middle Bronze Age to the Middle La Tène period (the time of the Lusatian culture). The book was written by eight authors.³ The section on the defensive settlement in Biskupin was written over several years by the late Prof. A. Gardawski (1917–1974). His text was still highly regarded and, after some additions, was published (Dąbrowski and Rajewski 1979: 9). It reflected the views of most specialists in Poland in the late 1970s on the pre-historic fortified settlement and the Lusatian culture, including its chronology. The stronghold on the Biskupin Lake peninsula was still dated to the Hallstatt D period. The Biskupin region was considered the best-known archaeological region in Poland. I emphasise this state of knowledge because in the same year, a book by J. M. Coles and A. F. Harding (1979) *The Bronze Age in Europe* was published in London. The authors make partial use of Polish literature on the subject. In their summary of the analysis of radiocarbon dating from Europe, they state:

³ The authors of the volume are: Z. Bukowski, J. Dąbrowski, A. Gardawski, B. Gediga, L. J. Łuka, Ł. Okulicz, T. Węgrzynowicz and Z. Woźniak (1979).



Fig. 6. Rossoszycza, Sieradz district. Christmas 1981 at Danuta’s family home (martial law in Poland). Wojtek with her beloved dog. Photograph courtesy of D. Piotrowska.

“Of some interest are the dates from Biskupin, almost the only sequence we have; it is clear that the material they refer to cannot be much, if any, later than the true Bronze Age in central Poland.” (Coles and Harding 1979: 380).

The British authors were right. Both scholars, members of the British Academy, referred to the Lusatian culture settlement at Biskupin on several occasions. In 2000, A. F. Harding published a comprehensive book, *European Societies in the Bronze Age*, with numerous references to the settlement at Biskupin.

Wojtek initially focused on the early medieval period in Biskupin and the surrounding area from 1978, leading or participating in excavations at various sites, sometimes with Danuta. Over the years, his interests expanded to cover the entire archaeology of this mesoregion. Together with his colleagues from the Museum in Biskupin, he also conducted surface surveys of a large area around Lake Biskupin as part of the central Archaeological Survey of Poland programme. In the early 1980s, he travelled to Austria several times to participate in excavations. He participated in research on the ditched enclosure *zweifache Kreisgrabenanlage*— otherwise known as



Fig. 7. Kamegg, Austria, August 1985. Wojtek participating in excavations led by Dr. Gerhard Trnka from the University of Vienna. Photograph courtesy of D. Piotrowska.

Rondelle in Kamegg on the Kamp River, near Horn (see Neugebauer-Maresch 1999: 82–87). The work was supervised by Dr Gerhard Trnka from the University of Vienna (Figs 7 and 8). Wojtek became friends with Gerhard and remained in contact with him. They exchanged e-mails at least until the end of 2023.

Wojtek also became interested in the production of tar and wood pitch in the early Middle Ages (in connection with experimental archaeology at a late stage). In his book *Kultura prapolska* [The proto-Polish culture], published in 1947, Professor J. Kostrzewski (1947: 291–292) had also discussed the production and use of charcoal, tar and pitch. He emphasised that archaeological finds in Poland confirm their production “only for the late Middle Ages”. Four years later, evidence of the production of wood tar and birch bark tar in the early Middle Ages was discovered during excavations in Biskupin. The work was carried out in 1951 as part of an Archaeological Training Camp organised

by the PMA for students after their first year of studying Material Culture History. This new field of study was introduced in Poland to replace prehistory, following the USSR’s model, as part of the higher education reform during the Stalinist period (1949–1955). In Biskupin, experimental archaeology methods were successfully used in the reconstruction of the early medieval process of producing tar and wood pitch (Kostrzewski 1947: 310; 1962: 264–266; Szafranski 1950a; 1950b: 129–131; Hensel 1952: 114–115, 119, 135; 1965: 226; Rajewski 1970; Lech 1997–1998: 78–82 and 85–91; 2022: 565–569; Piotrowska 1997–1998: 270–274; 2021: 66–75 and 82).

In the early days of his work at the PMA, Wojtek participated in establishing and implementing cooperation between the Museum in Biskupin and Museumsdorf Düppel open air museum in West Berlin reconstructing an early medieval village and showing daily life there. This cooperation was beneficial for the development of both institutions in the fields of experimental archaeology, exhibitions, reconstruction and popularisation. The Archaeological Museum in Biskupin, under the direction of W. Zajączkowski, specialised in prehistoric reconstructions. These attract most visitors to Biskupin. The museum director, who demanded high-quality work, had at his disposal an *ad hoc* work brigade of local villagers who could replace roofs made

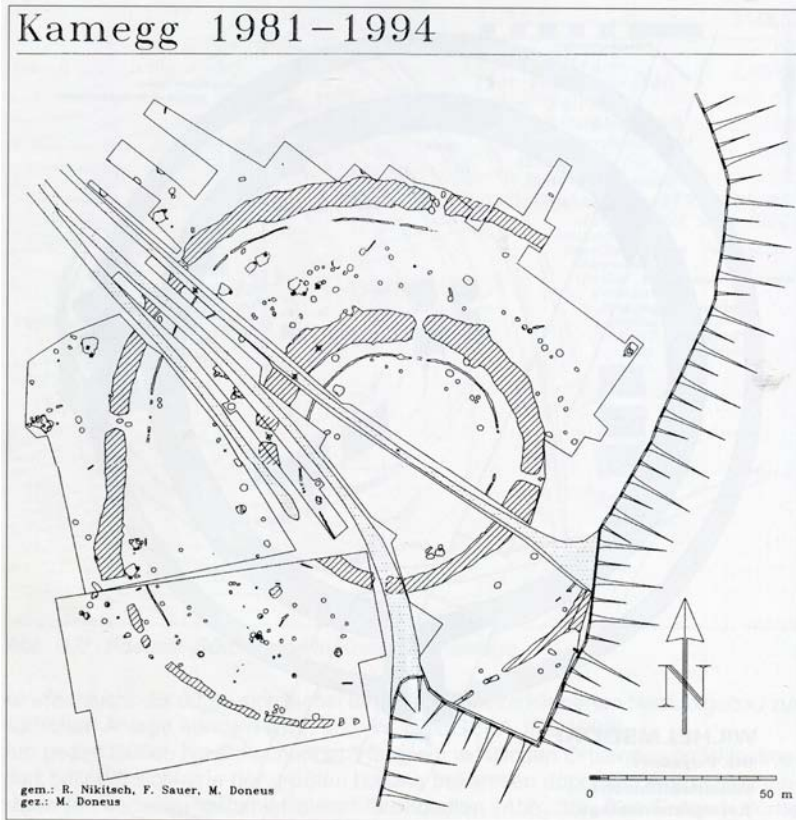


Fig. 8. Kamegg, Austria. Ditched enclosure, also known as Rondelle, on the Kamp River, near Horn. Archaeological features according to *Jungsteinzeit im Osten Österreichs*, St. Pölten–Vienna 1999: 86.

of reeds cut in winter when they began to leak, and erect solid reconstructions. In the vicinity of Biskupin, the local people still remembered how to do this, while in the West, this had long been forgotten. In addition, the lakes around Biskupin provided good quality reed material for this purpose, which was no longer available in Western Europe. It was a good business opportunity for the Biskupin museum and the participating farmers–craftsmen from Biskupin. It was exploited. For some time, the Biskupin brigade also served interested open-air museums in Western Europe. Museum audiences from various countries and European cultures benefited from it. Alongside the manager and later the director of the Museum, Wojtek played an important role in organising this work. This sometimes resulted in interesting trips



Fig. 9. New Grange, Ireland. Wojciech Piotrowski at a boulder with reliefs placed in the frame of a monumental megalithic tomb. After J. Lech (2000: photo VII).

abroad, e.g., to Ireland (Fig. 9). During these contacts with the Museumsdorf Düppel in West Berlin, the idea of an international symposium on the prehistoric production and use of tar and wood pitch was born. It took place in Biskupin on 1–4 July 1993, organised by W. Piotrowski on behalf of the Polish institution and Andreas Kurzweil on behalf of the Berlin museum. It was attended by 120 people from thirteen European countries and the USA, with a large number of researchers from Poland. The 344-page publication of the presentations at this meeting and accompanying articles, entitled, is one of the most carefully edited archaeological books published in Poland after 1989 (Brzeziński and Piotrowski 1997).

In the early 1980s, the PMA established cooperation with British museums. In the spring of 1984, the exhibition “Biskupin, Poland’s Iron Age Lake Village” was sent to the British Museum. To inaugurate the exhibition, the London museum organised a symposium entitled “Biskupin and Its Age”. Between 1984 and 1985, the Polish exhibition was also displayed in several other English museums. The contacts established led to the PMA hosting the exhibition “Hadrian’s Wall” in 1988. On this occasion, it turned out that the British Museum (BM) had a collection of so-called Germanic Antiquities (*Germanische Alterthümer*), purchased in 1868 from the collection



Fig. 10. London, British Museum, 1992. Grażyna Orlińska and Wojciech Piotrowski at work in the Department of Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities. Photograph courtesy of G. Orlińska (PMA).

of Gustav F. Klemm (1802–1867) after his death. Klemm is considered a precursor of anthropology, understood as a broad scientific discipline (as in the USA). For the history of British cultural anthropology, his influence on Edward B. Tylor (1832–1917), considered its “father”, is important, especially on the ethnographic understanding of culture and some other concepts (cf., Lowie 1937: 11–16 and 70–71; Trigger 1978a: 75–76). His classic work (Klemm 1843–1852) was referred to by Franz Boas (1858–1942), an American anthropologist of German origin who made a great contribution to the development of this field of research in the USA (Boas 1911/1965: 138 and 248; 1932/1966: 243; Trigger 1978b: 68–69). Klemm was also referred to by A. L. Kroeber (1876–1960), a leading figure in American anthropology, and his prematurely deceased student Ph. Bagby (1918–1958), who followed in his master’s footsteps by undertaking research at the intersection of cultural history and anthropology (Bagby 1963: 18, 74–75 – first edition 1958).

The British Museum was interested in having the Klemm collection catalogued by a team of PMA employees. The team was led by Grażyna Orlińska, MA (Figs 10 and 11). The team travelled to London in 1992, 1993 and 1994. Mrs Orlińska recalls W. Piotrowski’s participation as follows:



Fig. 11. Grażyna Orlińska, Wojciech Piotrowski, and Wojciech Krajewski (illustrator, killed in 1993 in an avalanche in the Altai Mountains), after work, while relaxing in a London pub. Photograph courtesy of G. Orlińska (State Archaeological Museum, Warsaw).

“During these trips, we had very specific tasks. Wojtek was an excellent translator and mediator in our contacts with the English. He was always calm and smiling, tirelessly photocopying the letters, manuscripts and books purchased along with the artefacts, as well as 19th-century German works that were unavailable in Poland, which he tracked down in the museum library. (...) After work and on weekends, we usually spent time together. Wojtek was like a rock, great to talk to, joke with, travel with, and explore with.”

The Klemm collection was published in London by British Museum Press (Orlińska 2001).

In the early 1990s, Dr T. Ważny used dendrochronology to determine that the Biskupin stronghold was built by the Lusatian culture community using the site between 747 and 722 BCE. Most of the trees were felled in the winter of 738/737 BCE (Ważny 1993). Wojtek considered this dating to be:

“...the good starting point to create a whole absolute dendrochronological scale for the Biskupin settlement” (Piotrowski 1995a: 93. See also: Ważny *et al.*, 1994: 10).

Well-known Kraków archaeologists, Professors P. Kaczanowski and J. K. Kozłowski from the Jagiellonian University, referred to the new dating:

“Recently published results of dendrochronological research indicate a different, much earlier date for the establishment of this settlement: the 730s BC, and more precisely, the winter of 738–737 BC. BC. Confirmation of these findings would be one of the greatest sensations in research on the beginnings of the Iron Age in Central Europe and would necessitate a general revision of views on the dating of the final stages of the development of the Lusatian culture, as well as a verification of hypotheses concerning the origins of Biskupin-type settlements.” (Kozłowski and Kaczanowski 1998: 180).

In 1994, President Lech Wałęsa granted the excavations in Biskupin the status of a Polish Historical Monument. This was followed by the *Europa Nostra* award for the Museum.

At the same time, an idea was born that would influence the popularisation of archaeology in Poland in the following years. Here is how Wojtek Piotrowski (1995: 48–50) described its birth:

“...Dr Aleksander Bursche, deputy director of the Institute of Archaeology at the University of Warsaw, while reflecting on the state of popularisation of archaeology in Poland, recalled his impressions from one of the festivals in Germany. A meeting with Wiesław Zajączkowski, MA, director of the Museum in Biskupin, gave shape to the whole idea. Biskupin was chosen as the most suitable place to implement such a project.”

The Museum in Biskupin, together with the Institute of Archaeology at the University of Warsaw, organised an archaeological festival lasting over a week, dynamic, colourful, brimming with ideas, on a scale unprecedented in Poland. The project aimed to revive:

“...ancient craft techniques through events taking place every day throughout the area, engaging visitors in playful fun, stimulating..... personal participation, learning through jokes and humour, but in order to convey accurately and evocatively certain forgotten truths, which are presented in such a concise and dry – and therefore off-putting – manner in history textbooks.

Every day, fashion shows were held on the crown of the reconstructed defensive rampart of the Biskupin stronghold – from the Stone Age to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Girls and boys dressed in leather, coarse linen, but also in satin, silk and lace gave an overview of styles and tastes from different civilisations.” (Piotrowski 1995b: 56).



Fig. 12. Biskupin, Żnin district. Archaeological Museum. A set of photographs featuring Wojtek Piotrowski showing the reconstruction of the tar and wood tar production cycle at the Archaeological Festival in 2011. Photographs courtesy of D. Piotrowska.

From the very first festival, Wojtek, together with his changing assistants – colleagues employed at the Museum – perfected the skill of dry distillation of wood, producing wood tar and wood pitch in front of the audience. The 1995 Biskupin Festival proved to be a great success. Over the course of nine days, nearly 40,000 spectators visited the Biskupin Lake peninsula, and in the following years, Poland was flooded with similar events of various sizes, none of which, however, could match the imagination, scale and success of the Biskupin festivals. Since then, they have become a permanent fixture in the Museum’s Biskupin calendar of events (Fig. 12).

Dr Szymon Nowaczyk (2024), who was assigned to Wojtek in 1999 as a tanner’s assistant, recalls this collaboration as follows:

“To this day, I remember the incredible aura of this place, where the popularisation of archaeology was inextricably intertwined with the festive atmosphere characteristic of the backstage of the festivals at that time. This was primarily thanks to Mr Wojtek, who, like no other, was able to combine the high substantive level of his demonstrations with extraordinary kindness in his contacts with both tourists and colleagues.”

No wonder that Wojtek was highly valued by organisers throughout Poland and abroad as a demonstrator of forgotten crafts at similar festivals. He was invited to tar-making demonstrations more often than he was able to accept, despite his best intentions. He grew fond of these demonstrations.

In 1999, Wojtek prepared a section devoted to the Middle Ages for a new exhibition in Biskupin, entitled “The Dawn of History on Lake Biskupin”, prepared under the direction of his wife, Danuta Piotrowska, the author of the script (Figs 13 and 14). The new concept of the exhibition developed at that time still forms the basis of the permanent presentation of prehistory and the Middle Ages at the Archaeological Museum in Biskupin.

In 2000, as a result of the country’s local government reform, Director Jan Jaskanis, on behalf of the PMA, handed over the Biskupin Branch to the office of the



Fig. 13. Archaeological Museum in Biskupin. Poster for the permanent exhibition “Dawn of History at Lake Biskupin”, opened in 1999.

Photo: J. Lech.



Fig. 14. Archaeological Museum in Biskupin. The permanent exhibition opened in 1999. Knights against the background of an early medieval stronghold. An attempt at visualisation. Oil painting on canvas (80 x 150 cm), painted by artist Michał Adamczyk based on instructions from W. Piotrowski. Photo: J. Lech.

Marshal of the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship. Although Wojtek lived with his family in Warsaw, he took up the position of scientific secretary at the now independent Archaeological Museum in Biskupin. He held this position until his retirement in 2018. He contributed to advancing knowledge of the early Middle Ages in Biskupin by popularising its archaeology in the northern hemisphere of our globe, from Japan in the east (Figs 15 and 16) to Canada in the west (cf., Piotrowski 1998; 2000), and by organising and exemplifying the Museum's functioning. It attracts the highest visitor attendance among Polish archaeological museums.

As part of his duties at the Museum, Wojtek co-organised numerous conferences and scientific symposia held at the reserve, thanks to the infrastructure developed by W. Zajączkowski, director of the facility since 2000, which was excellently managed (e.g., Piotrowska and Piotrowski 2009). Most of them were held on the initiative and with the organisational cooperation of Prof. B. Gediga (1933–2022) from the Wrocław Branch of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the chairman of the Museum Council. After the conferences, Wojtek devoted a lot of work to preparing for publication, with a changing team, subsequent volumes of the series “Biskupińskie Prace Archeologiczne” [Biskupin Archaeological Papers] with texts by participants from Poland and abroad. They were published by the Museum in cooperation with other

Polish institutions. Wojtek's good knowledge of English and German was very useful in this work. The last volume of the series, in which Wojtek participated, is No. 13 and is entitled *Inspiracje i funkcje sztuki pradziejowej i wczesnośredniowiecznej* [Inspirationen und Funktion der Ur- und Frühgeschichtlichen Kunst]. He finished editing his part in 2018, after his retirement. The book has 584 pages.

Wojtek's scientific expertise and interests covered the entire archaeology of the Biskupin Lake mesoregion, the surrounding areas and the Pałuki region. In addition to scientific issues, Wojtek devoted a lot of energy to popularising this wonderful site in Poland and around the world. At the same time, he was the first and only Polish archaeologist to speak and write about Biskupin in the broad, global context of "wetland archaeology" (e.g., Piotrowski 1992; 1998; cf., Niewiarowski *et al.*, 1992; Piotrowska and Piotrowski 2021). For example, his lecture "Biskupin and Wet Archaeology" began with Swiss research from the early second half of the 19th century, using the works and illustrations of F. Keller (1800–1881), a researcher of aquatic settlements in Swiss lakes, and extensively referring to W. G. Wood-Martin (1886) and the painting "Idyll" by A. Bachelin (cf., Boyd-Dawkins 1880: 291–294 and 353–354; Lord Avebury 1900: 166–192; Sklenář 1983: 74; Trigger 2007: 134). To familiarise his listeners with the specific nature of wetland landscapes, he used photographs from his own collection. He had collected them over many years of travelling around the world. In this field, he owed a great deal to his long-standing collaboration with the aforementioned Prof. John M. Coles, elected Fellow of the British Academy (1978), a scholar of international renown (Piotrowska and Piotrowski 2021). Wojtek and Danuta were friends with J. Coles and his wife Bryony (Fig. 17). John considered Wojtek to be the main representative of "wet archaeology" in Poland. He was invited to important conferences organised around the world within the WARP circle. John and Bryony's knowledge also served the archaeology of Biskupin (see Piotrowska and Piotrowski 2021).

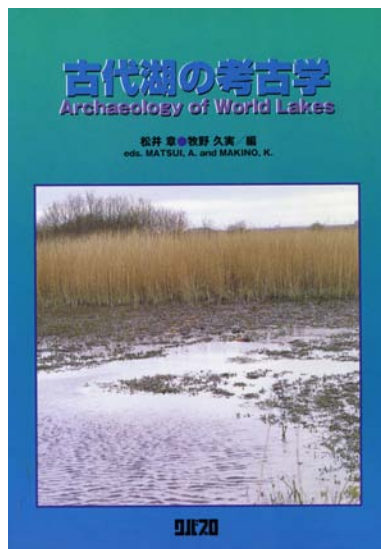


Fig. 15. Cover of the book by A. Matsui and K. Makino (eds), *Archaeology of World Lakes*, 191 pp. + 9, Tokyo 2000. Published by Kuba Pro. Co., Ltd. (in Japanese, with abstracts and short notes about the authors in English). ISBN 4-906347-06-1 and C1022.

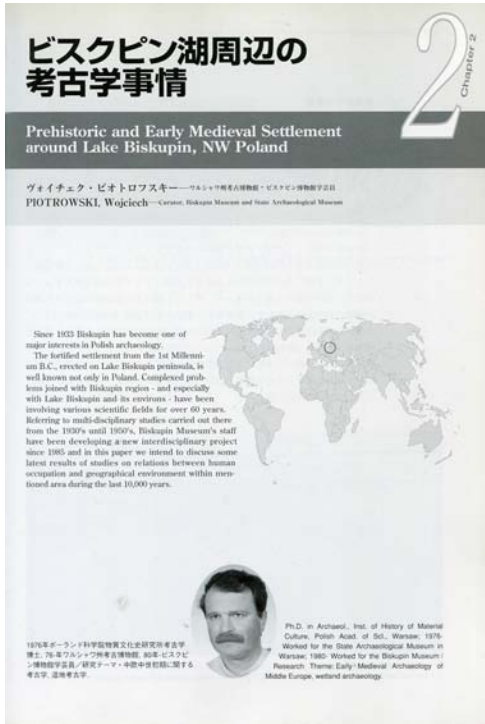


Fig. 16. Title page of the article by Wojciech Piotrowski, “Prehistoric and Early Medieval Settlement around Lake Biskupin, NW Poland”, published in Japanese in the book by A. Matsui and K. Makino (eds), *Archaeology of World Lakes*, 47–56, Tokyo 2000 (see Fig. 15).

In his professional life, Wojciech Piotrowski worked with complete dedication to the archaeological site of Biskupin. In recognition of these achievements, on May 21, 2015, in Toruń, on International Museum Day, he received the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship Award from Piotr Całbecki, Marshal of the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship, in Toruń, with thanks for fulfilling the mission of the museum in Biskupin in a creative, reliable and competent manner (Fig. 18).

Wojtek’s professional and personal qualities were recognised by the Archives of the Polish Academy of Sciences, located in Warsaw, in the Stanisław Staszic Palace. After retiring in 2018, he was employed there on a part-time basis for the rest of his life, helping to expand the valuable collections, preparing and delivering occasional lectures. At the same time, he was active in social organisations. He played a key role in establishing the Walenty Szwajcer Society in Biskupin (named after the local teacher who had helped archaeologists since

1933) and served as its president for many years. He gave lectures on various topics at the Public Library of the Capital City of Warsaw and on tar and pitch for students of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences (agricultural university), in response to invitations from Dr Hubert Lachowicz, a professor at this important Polish university.

The last major work in which Wojtek participated was the preparation, together with Danuta (Fig. 19), of the index for the book *Prehistoric Flint Mines in Europe* (Piotrowska and Piotrowski 2023). He undertook this task with his characteristic optimism and willingness to help. The highly acclaimed cover of this book was designed by Tymoteusz Piotrowski, the son of Danuta and Wojtek. We were delighted to see the work published in November 2023. I remain grateful to them for their friendly help



Fig. 17. Biskupin, 25 May 2007. Professor John M. Coles and Wojciech Piotrowski at the Archaeological Museum after the conclusion of the International Symposium “The history of archaeology and archaeological thought in the 20th century”, dedicated to Professor Grahame Clark (see Piotrowska and Piotrowski 2009). Photo: D. Piotrowska.

and cooperation, together with Prof. Françoise Bostyn from the Université Paris 1 and Dr Dagmara H. Werra from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw.

Despite his serious illness, Wojtek remained one of the leading representatives of the Polish-Swiss Society and the Rapperswil Society until his death. He was also a second lieutenant in the Polish Army reserves.

Wojciech Piotrowski’s extensive knowledge and charming personal culture, his full commitment to the tasks he undertook, his good knowledge of three European congress languages in addition to Polish, and his dedication to his work meant that he played an important role in the development of the Archaeological Museum in Biskupin (Fig. 20). He was an excellent chair of meetings and moderator of discussions. For forty years, Wojtek made a great contribution to the Museum’s international cooperation, both in Europe and beyond our continent (Fig. 21). He effectively popularised the achievements of “wet archaeology” in Poland and Polish achievements in this field worldwide (see Selected Bibliography).

The excavations on the Biskupin Lake peninsula, which began in 1934 under the direction of Prof. J. Kostrzewski, were published in three consecutive reports. They covered



Fig. 18. Toruń, May 21, 2015, International Museum Day. Wojciech Piotrowski receives an award from Mr. Piotr Całbecki, Marshal of the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship. Photograph courtesy of D. Piotrowska



Fig. 19. Warsaw, October 11, 2007, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Danuta Piotrowska and Wojciech Piotrowski during an evening social gathering of participants in a symposium devoted to archaeological journals. Photo: F. M. Stępniewski

research from 1934–1939 and 1946–1948 (Kostrzewski *et al.*, 1936; Kostrzewski 1938; 1950). In 1949, Dr Z. A. Rajewski, a student and assistant to Prof. J. Kostrzewski in Biskupin, took over the management and responsibility for all the work, initially as part of the Management of Research on the Origins of the Polish State committee, and from 1950 as director of the State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw. Z. A. Rajewski and the staff of the PMA published works devoted to excavations in Biskupin and the vicinity of Lake Biskupin, but never in the form of broad, interdisciplinary presentations of the results developed by J. Kostrzewski (e.g., Szafrński 1950a; 1956; 1959a; 1959b, 1960; Rajewski 1956; 1959; Balcer 1961; 1963; Szafrąnczy 1961).

After a long break, the Archaeological Museum in Biskupin resumed publication of the “Biskupin Reports” when W. Piotrowski was its Scientific Secretary. Wojtek was also the co-editor of two subsequent volumes (Nowaczyk *et al.*, 2015; Kopiasz *et al.*, 2017).



Fig. 20. Biskupin. View of a fragment of the reconstructed defensive settlement of the Lusitanian culture community on the peninsula of Lake Biskupin. Photo: A. Zalewska

Wojciech Piotrowski died in Warsaw on Friday, 13 December 2024. We said goodbye to him on 3 January at the Funeral Home at the Powązki Military Cemetery in Warsaw. The ceremony was attended by numerous archaeologists from all over Poland. In accordance with his wishes, the next day we placed Wojtek's urn in his grandparents' grave at the St. Zygmunt Cemetery in Słomczyn, near Konstancin-Jeziorna, south of Warsaw, along the Vistula River.

In reference to an age-old custom, Mr Wojciech Śmielecki, a guide on the "Piast Trail" and cultural activist from Gniezno, the "first capital of Poland" located near Biskupin, ordered a mass dedicated to Wojtek's memory for Sunday, 2 March 2025. It was celebrated in Gniezno, solemnly, at noon, in the bright, sunlit and electrically-lit Gothic cathedral, the famous sanctuary of St. Wojciech in Poland (bishop; lived *c.* 956–997). The church stands on a hill, which until 966 was a place of Slavic pagan worship and the stronghold of the rulers of Greater Poland, and later of all of Poland. A monumental statue of Mieszko's son, King Bolesław Chrobry, was erected a hundred years ago in front of the cathedral, on the southern slope of the hill. In the spring of 2025, a thousand years had passed since the coronation of the powerful monarch. He did a lot to establish the cult of Bishop Wojciech of Prague, the capital of the Bohemia, in the Roman Catholic Church. The Mass

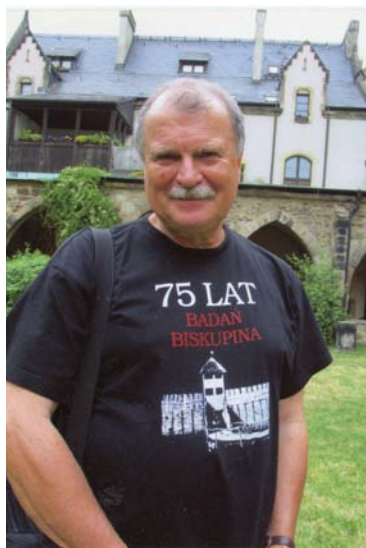


Fig. 21. June 2015. Wojciech Piotrowski (1952–2024). Photo: D. Piotrowska.

on 2 March completed the farewell to Wojciech Piotrowski, a distinguished archaeologist, researcher of Biskupin, expert and specialist in the field of “wet archaeology”, and above all, a good man, kind to people and the world.

8 October – 28 November 2025, Warsaw

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Jacek Lech

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- W. Piotrowski and A. Grossman (eds), *Symposium The History of Archaeology and Archaeological Thought in the 20th Century*. Dedicated to Grahame Clark on the Centenary of his Birth and on the 50th anniversary of the Polish edition of *Prehistoric Europe*. Conference materials, Biskupin 23–25/26 May 2007. Biskupin 2007, Archaeological Museum in Biskupin. ISBN 83-915490-6-2

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