

Protection and Salvage Archaeology in Poland. An Example from the Historical Region of Wielkopolska (Greater Poland)

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This communication is intended to present some practical aspects of the activities of the Polish Archaeological Protection and Conservation Service, seen from the perspective of one region. The following remarks are based upon the ten years experience, gathered by the author while directing this kind of activity in the Poznańregion (Mid-western Poland).

At the very beginning it must be said that a general transition from one political and economic system to another, which is now under way in our country, influences all sorts of social activities and the Archaeological Service is no exception here. In our present daily work we still face the effects of radical changes in ownership, in the structure of administrative institutions, both central and local, in the financing system of science and culture etc. This general reform of the state, combined with permanent underfinancing, acts as a formidable challenge to our old routines and compels us to become more flexible to adjust to this new situation.

The main tasks of the Polish Archaeological Service are, as in most European countries: a) to discover, map and document archaeological sites, resulting in the compilation of the National Archaeological Record; b) to execute legislative measures in order to protect most of the valuable archaeological sites, so called „scheduled monuments“, by registering them in the National Monuments and Historical Objects Record; c) to cooperate with the planning departments and developers in order to pass qualified judgement on the location of future development, and – if necessary – to carry out and coordinate rescue excavations and inspections of the development areas; d) to supervise all excavation, carried out in the region; e) to intervene in cases of accidental discoveries.

The Poznańregion, historically called ‚Wielkopolska‘, or „Greater Poland“, constitutes one of 49 administrative units, called „voivodships“, or provinces. With an area of over 8.000 sq.km and population of 1.3 million inhabitants, it is middle-sized in both respects; archaeologically, however, it represents one of the richest zones of prehistoric and mediaeval settlement, due to a favourable environment of numerous river valleys and lakes, so typical for the Middle European Lowlands.

The Archaeological Service for the PoznańProvince is based at the Poznań Archaeological Museum, where it forms a separate department with a staff of six persons – all archaeologists. So far, we have recorded ca 25.000 sites from all archaeological periods – from Late Palaeolithic to Post-mediaeval. This systematic and long-term activity has been (and still is) carried out as a part of the

nation-wide site recording project (in operation since 1978) according to standardized rules which regulate both field survey and the documentation of the discovered sites, is coordinated by the Historical Monuments Documentation Centre in Warsaw. It resulted in the creation of huge inventories at each voivodship (i.e. provincial) department of the Archaeological Service (ca. 5.000 – 25.000 filecards) and it soon became clear to us that only a computer database would enable us to use this set of information efficiently. The database that was first designed in the Poznań Archaeological Museum in 1986 was supposed to fulfil the needs of all sorts of specializations within archaeology, but the main intention when creating it was to cover the requirements of Archaeological Service employees for fast, up-to-date and complex information on chosen sites. As we all know, quick access to information is particularly crucial in rescue activities. Our database system was inspired by that of the Danish Archaeological Record, based at the National Museum in Copenhagen. Because of financial limitations, the only real option for us in the introduction of computer technology was to develop dispersed, regional databases, run on PC-class hardware and based on unified data structure and an identical software system. Such a strategy guarantees the possibility of joining all regional data together into one system as soon as more powerful hardware becomes available. So far, we have registered 60 users of our database system on archaeological sites all over Poland and ca. 140.000 records. Therefore, it has become a software standard for this purpose, at least within the Archaeological Service.

Apart from the database inventory on archaeological sites, our fundamental aim, we started to develop a series of similar sets of information on archaeological museum collections (ca. 80.000 records), former excavations in the region, bibliography and cartography. They are compatible with the database inventory and serve as elements of a future integrated system.

As far as computer applications in archaeology are concerned, we have already gathered some experience in European cooperation. We joined an international initiative called EURARCH, or European Archaeological Database, at its initiation in autumn 1991 by the German colleagues (Reinhard Koehler, University of Trier & Uwe Schoenfelder, Stadt- und Kulturhistorisches Museum Duisburg). So far, two meetings have taken place: in Essen, (16.11.1991) and in Aarhus (25.3.1992). The coordination centre was then transferred to Finland (Anne Vikula, University of Helsinki, Department of Archaeology). According to a common statement, EURARCH should include „internationally agreed standards for records of archaeological sites and monuments . . . , guidelines for the creation and maintenance of National Archaeological Records . . . ”, as well as „guidelines for the links between them and other databases concerned with the heritage and environment.“

Another item that still needs some development and improvement is the legislation regulating the protection of archaeological sites. In general, the protection of all Polish historical monuments, archaeological ones included, is guaranteed by the Cultural Heritage Protection and Museums Act of 1962,

amended in 1990. The main changes, following the political and economic reforms of the country, pertain to the new, more independent status of the Voivodship Head of the Historical Monument Protection Service who is no longer a representative of the local authority but of the state administration, and nominated by the Minister of Culture and Fine Arts. It now ensures us greater effectiveness in carrying through requirements placed upon developers, when passing judgements or opinions on construction designs. But when it comes to the details, the problem of covering the costs of necessary rescue work is sometimes a matter of discussion, due to the lack of detailed regulations. At the moment, we are in the course of analysing the best foreign legislative solutions of this problem and preparing a project of our own. These indicate two options:

- a) first, financing is based upon the state or local budget (e.g. in Germany),
- b) second, recovering the cost of archaeological rescue work from the owner of the site, according to the simple rule „who destroys, pays“ (e.g. in England and in some federal states of Germany).

So far, due to a permanent deficit in our central and local budgets, only the second solution seems to have a chance of being adopted under present conditions in Poland.

Other sources of sponsoring archaeological excavations (research and rescue), such as foundations and grants, so popular in the Western Europe, are rarely used in Poland as an adequate infrastructure is still in its infancy. A related issue that needs regulation is the free market of archaeological services, which is now emerging in Poland more or less spontaneously. We need new authorization for the Archaeological Service to control all those engaged in archaeological work to ensure the professional level of every archaeological excavation and inspection.

To sum up, at present the Archaeological Service is in a state of transition, similar to that of the country's administration as a whole, which is moving towards the West European patterns of market economy and modern technology. Therefore, closer cooperation with the developed countries, especially in such fields as legal regulations, financing systems and computer applications, would be highly appreciated.