
Culture concepts and designed cultures.

Systematic registration of archaeological finds of the Iron Age from Central and Northern Europe – Potential and limits.

International colloquium on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the find catalogue of Erich Blume published in 1915.

Puszczykowo 2015

Hosted by the

Institute of Archaeology Łódź University and Institute of Prehistory Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

Since its emergence, archaeology has been pursuing the most accurate and complete interpretation of its finds, analyzing them through spatially and horizontally organized formal schemes. Archaeological research methods were being shaped into what their current form at the turn of the 20th century, resulting in numerous publications. In addition to the first accounts on prehistoric and early historic periods of various countries and provinces, numerous catalogues documenting different categories of archaeological finds were being increasingly published at that time. They provided solid foundations for future syntheses. The Erich Blume catalogue is one of such works. Published in two volumes, its analytical part came out in 1912 while the catalogue itself was published in 1915, right after the death of the author. The volume presented finds from Pomerania and northern Greater Poland dated to the Roman Iron Age. It presented important empirical foundations which, after almost 60 years, made it possible to define the Wielbark Culture phenomenon. The Blume volume continues to be a pivotal point of reference for studies of the Roman Iron Age in Poland until this day. Its significance is mainly attributed to the fact that a large number of the finds presented in the book perished in the Second World War.

The hundredth anniversary of the Erich Blume volume publication is a good opportunity to challenge well-established traditions, as well as present and discuss new solutions to the hitherto advocated interpretations of archaeological records and attempts to adequately understand the so-called archaeological cultures from the Iron Age.

The symposium aims to address numerous issues including the question of the appropriateness of defining archaeological cultures basing solely on the finds and their spatial distribution, as well as assessing to what extent this method remains to be useful in resolving problems facing modern archaeology. Discussing such issues will allow thinking through the ways in which we can take the place of the origin and ideological stance of the scholars into consideration in our analyses. This is necessary for gaining a better understanding of them as factors influencing, both in the past and today, the perception of archaeological records, as well as their representation and interpretation, which are responsible for the production of a perceived 'real' past. What is the level of archaeologists' auto-reflection?

While discussing these scientific and theoretical variables, it is also necessary to address the different issues emerging from the impact of the most recent history upon the way in which archaeological records are perceived as well as to assess the consequences of modern technologies.

The second major theme of the conference aims at exploring archive archaeology, which is intensively developing in recent years. The destruction of museum collections in the aftermath of the Second World War, and subsequent border shifts that re-defined Central Europe, contributed to a profound increase of the importance of public and private archives that remain to be the only record of lost objects. Their re-discovery provides new and invaluable data for the reconstruction of the past settlement system. However, while using these old catalogues and archive materials, one needs to be aware of their fragmentary character, both in terms of their chronological and spatial dimensions, caused by the very interests of their founders and owners.

The third element of the symposium can be referred to as the 'archaeological photo'. This will cover a wide range of issues related to administrative inventories of archaeological sites in different countries, which will make it possible to compare their protection and management systems. These diverse systems have a direct impact upon the way in which finds distribution and density of settlement networks are defined, making comparison between them difficult.

The fourth aspect of the symposium will cover the ever increasing phenomenon of the so-called amateur search of antiques. From the legal standpoint, it is currently regarded as illegal. However, it is necessary to consider the extent to which it is justified the use of their heuristic potential by archaeology. Some countries have recently introduced regulations making it possible to institutionalize activities of amateurs using metal detectors by redefining their status in a way making them potentially useful for research projects. These involve numerous ethical, scientific, as well as administrative and technical problems related to the need of cataloging and analyzing the objects gathered this way. At the same time, one has to remember here that the number of data potentially acquired this way is huge.

The fifth issue will incorporate a discussion of publication standards of archeological finds catalogues. Selecting subsequent categories of data from the catalogue was, and remains to be the task of one person. A unique exception is the „Corpus der römischen Funde im Barbaricum“. The ever increasing number of data makes any individual efforts here increasingly difficult and sometimes completely impossible. We would like to stress, however, that the state of recognition of empirical data from subsequent parts of central, south-eastern and northern Europe is unbalanced. To what extent are the catalogues of finds representative? Are there any new methods of managing such huge datasets?

The sixth theme tackles issues of definitions of Iron Age cultures of northern and central Europe, as well as the cultural division of *Barbaricum*. Are the traditional interpretations and catalogue categories to be maintained? Should they be expanded or rejected? Are there any alternative models of defining past communities, based upon different assumptions than the hitherto dominant archaeological cultures, that can be approved? Is it possible to point to any other processes shaping the discernible material culture and to explain recognized differences better than existing solutions do? Why are there no archaeological cultures that are distinguished in some wide areas of *Barbaricum*, such as e.g. in Scandinavia?

PROGRAM