

Wojciech Borkowski

State Museum of Archaeology, Warszawa

PUSZCZA KURPIOWSKA (KURPIE FOREST) AS A CULTURAL CONTACT ARENA IN THE PREHISTORY

OBSZAR PUSZCZY KURPIOWSKIEJ JAKO ARENA KONTAKTÓW KULTUROWYCH W PRADZIEJACH

The area of the northeastern Mazovia is not a uniform physiographic unit. Within it there are several smaller geographical regions, among which the Kurpie Plain (Polish: Nizina Kurpiowska) has its own specific characteristics. From the Paleolithic to the early Middle Ages, it was a convenient route to move groups of people, both in the north-south and east-west direction. Most migrants did not stay in this area longer. Due to the very unattractive soil conditions, the forest was treated as a temporary or seasonal exploitation area. Exclusively in the Stone Age, in the Kurpie Plain area, there were permanent farming human groups, engaged in hunting, gathering and fishing. In periods related to the manufacturing economy: agriculture and breeding, this area was a region of alternating cultural influences flowing from different directions. This caused that the rhythm of development in the area of the original Puszcza Kurpiowska did not correspond to the changes in neighboring lands¹.

The complicated history of the region should encourage to undertake scientific research. Apparently, a strongly distinguished area, lying in the borderland of large cultural units, could be an excellent field of observation of transformations and cultural processes. Unfortunately, the political history left a negative mark on the knowledge of the region. From the Middle Ages until 1945, along the border edge of the Puszcza Kurpiowska ran the political and cultural boundary, separating two state organisms and societies, sometimes hostile to one another. It was not conducive to comprehensive research, including also the oldest history. An additional element that suppressed broader research activities, was the expected poor evidence of settlement. Compared to areas with more fertile soils, the northeast Mazovia did not attract intensive colonization activities. This, in turn, did not promote spectacular archaeological discoveries and did not be conducive to the formation of private collections. The remoteness from the main scientific centers was also not helping the research. During the Partitions it was an extremely peripheral area, it did not look better after regaining independence.

¹ M. Miśkiewicz, *Badania Archeologiczne na Mazowszu wschodnim*, [In:] *Najstarsze dzieje Podlasia w świetle źródeł archeologicznych*. Eds. B. Bryńczak, P. Urbańczyk. Siedlce 2001, p. 13; W. Borkowski, *Fenomen Puszczy Kurpiowskiej jako przyrodniczego obszaru rozgraniczającego w obrazie archeologiczno-kulturowym w pradziejach do przelomu er* [in print].

Mazovia, already in the beginning of the nineteenth century, entered the orbit of interest of antiquity researchers, but mainly the eastern Masovia. This was the period of the emerging of modern archeology and the scientific approach to the past. In the second half of the 19th century, only amateur archaeologists worked in Mazovia. The Russians: N.P. Avenarius, D.J. And N.F. Biełaszewski, and the Poles, librarian – Józef Przyborowski, painter – Marian Wawrzeński and physician Leon Dudrewicz. Puszcza Kurpiowska was rarely visited. Only Przyborowski studied the Mazovian sand dunes. His search led to the discovery of new flint materials, associated with the Middle Stone Age – the Mesolithic. Wawrzeński and Dudrewicz were active mainly in the area of the Mazovian Province of Płock, but they also performed tours in other regions of Mazovia, described in the magazine “Światowit”².

Also, the period prior to the First World War did not favor the development of research in this area. After the war, with the establishment of the State Conservator of Historic Prehistoric Monuments (PGKZP), the situation gradually began to improve. Professional conservators: Michał Drewko, Roman Jakimowicz, Ludwik Sawicki and Stefan Krukowski not avoided also Masovia, but their expeditions to the north were rather rare. The lack of funds has not improved the recognising of archaeological sites in northern Mazovia. This led to the lack of large-scale excavation research, and the materials obtained until then, were used only to supplement the monographs of archeology of Polish Lands produced during this time.

Ludwik Sawicki was the first professional archaeologist to visit Puszcza Kurpiowska in the years 1914, 1920 and 1923. During his expeditions, he became acquainted with the collection of Eng. Zaporin, in which was the famous Mesolithic *chirunga*. He watched and described the collections of the local branch of the Polish Tourist-Sightseeing Society from the dunes “Czeczotka” in Ostrołęka and took part in the excavation of the “Kościelna Górka” in Dylewo, Gmina Kadzidło³.

Also after the Second World War, systematic archaeological research omitted the north of Masovia. Only in the 1980s and 90s of the twentieth century a large-scale action of the so-called Archeological Map of Poland covered with systematic

² S. Nosek, *Materiały do badań nad historią starożytną i wczesnośredniowieczną międzyrzecza Wisły i Bugu*. Annales UMCS 1951, Vol. VI, p. 17.

³ A cremation cemetery from the period of Roman influence was discovered on a hill called “Kościelna Górka”, only a short distance from the Myszyniec trail. Tombs were destroyed and Ludwik Sawicki made only a visual inspection of the site. He recorded numerous graves and fragments of vessels, two iron spearheads, an umbo and a fragment of shield-handle. The cemetery of Dylewo can be dated to the younger period of the Roman influences (2nd half of the 3rd century AD). Findings from Dylewo disappeared in 1915, during wartime (L. Sawicki, *Zabytki archeologiczne w okolicy Ostrołęki, w ziemi łomżyńskiej*. Wiadomości Archeologiczne (Warszawa) 1921, Vol. VI, Issue 2, pp. 49–50).

research the area of Puszcza Kurpiowska⁴. In the wake of this, the archaeological excavations of several sites were carried out. The picture of the cultural situation in Puszcza Kurpiowska has become more readable.

There are two morphogenetic zones in the surrounding of Puszcza Kurpiowska: the young glacial in the north and east⁵ and the old glacial in the south and west⁶. The territory of the Kurpie Plain, originally formed as a result of the Riss Glaciation (Warta Stadial) and transformed during the Baltic glaciation through the formation of a large sandur area with elements of earlier moraine. The plain sandur area is crossed by the middle and lower river valleys of Omulew, Pisa, Rozoga and Szkwa, and a network of smaller streams and oxbow lakes of a wetland character⁷. This monotonous and rather flat landscape diversifies dunes and dune strips of various sizes with sometimes several meters high relative altitudes⁸. The prevailing soils are the podzolic soils, in the river valleys varied with alluvial and muck bog soils.

The last period of formation of the surface formations in the discussed area were the cool fluctuations of the Dryas II and III period (11th and 10th millennium

⁴ Surface testing of the forest is very difficult. Despite this, hundreds of sites have been discovered from the late Paleolithic to the Middle Ages. In the area of intense research, in the area of the estuaries of Omulew, Rozoga and Szkwa, the tributaries of the Narew, 24 Mesolithic, 32 Neolithic and 46 Bronze Age and Early Iron Age sites have been discovered (E. Kawalkowa, *Specyfika fizjografii w okolicach Ostrołęki na prawym brzegu Narwi i jej wpływ na kształtowanie się i długowieczność osadnictwa mezolitycznego*, [In:] *Kurpiowszczyzna. Identyfikacja – odmiennosc*. Ed. W. Chmielewski. Ostrołęka 2000, p. 18).

⁵ S. Gilewska, *Rzeźba*, [In:] *Geografia Polski. Środowisko przyrodnicze*. Ed. L. Starkel. Warszawa 1991, pp. 248–296.

⁶ J. Kondracki, *Geografia regionalna Polski*. Warszawa 1980, pp. 185–186; Idem, *Mezoregiony fizyczno-geograficzne*. Warszawa 1994, pp. 126–131. The first of them – the Mazurian Plain, occupies the northern part of the Mazurian Sandur, north of the Leszno phase of the Vistulian Glaciation. In turn, the southern old glacial zone includes: the Ciechanów Upland, a wavy plain formed in the Northmazovian Stadial, cut by the valleys of tributaries of Narew and Wkra; The Mława Hills, eskers and moraine ridges formed in the Mława Stadial of the Riss Glaciation and Międzyrzecze Łomżyńskie, lying in the north-eastern part of the Riss Glaciation.

⁷ The Kurpie Plain, laying between the Pisa and Orzyc rivers, was a region connecting the Mazurian Lake District with an Urstromtal, taking its origin in the Nemunas river basin and flowing the present valleys of Biebrza and Narew in direction of the Warsaw Basin through the so-called Warsaw-Berlin Urstromtal (S. Górny, *Przyroda Mazowska Północnego. Ciechanów* 1996, p. 7, map 1).

⁸ Some of the dunes reach a considerable size, for example the dune in Leśna Góra, Gmina Lelis is about 1 km long, another one in Grabówek, Gmina Olszewo Borki, 1.3 km, and in Kołaki, Gmina Młynarze even about 3.6 km long (E. Kawalkowa, *Specyfika fizjografii w okolicach Ostrołęki...*, p. 17).

BC)⁹. From this time come the dunes of the Kurpie Plain, formed as a result of the Aolian activity. The successive, pre-Boreal period, characterised by a moderate climate, favored the formation of a cover of mixed forests. Increasing the share of pine in forest systems, especially on the dune podzolic soils, is associated with the next period – the Boreal period. The warm climate optimum in the Atlantic period, associated with higher than the current one by several degrees of annual temperatures, has ousted the pine forests, limiting them only to the dune strips. In the valleys and on the fluvial terraces, the more compact forests contained a large segment of thermophilic deciduous trees species, such as hornbeam, oak, lime-tree, alder and hazel. So evolved historical forest called Zagajnica, and now Puszcza Kurpiowska¹⁰. In the wake of the changes of flora, followed the displacements of fauna. Reindeer and elk, animals characteristic of the lowland tundra landscape, have migrated to the north and northeast, and their place within the mixed forest was occupied by typical forest mammals: deer, roe deer, wild boar and, in more open spaces, horses. In river valleys with numerous oxbow lakes and changing river beds, beavers and otters existed.

The consequences of the climate and nature variability were migrations of human populations adapted to particular ecosystems. The settlement of the present Puszcza Kurpiowska was connected with the withdrawal of the ice sheet and the gradual afforestation of the sandy plain. About twelve thousand years BC, after the period of glaciation in the Central European Lowlands, there was a relief in climatic conditions. It was a period, the first since many thousands of years, creating the possibility of a permanent settlement. Probably at that time people from the circle of the Hamburg culture were able to penetrate the Kurpie Plain. Unfortunately, so far, there is a lack of certain findings from the area of the northeastern Poland, which could be associated with this episode¹¹. Also, another favorable for settlement, the Allerød period, which was the last warm oscillation of the Pleistocene, did not leave traces of settlement in the area of our interest¹².

⁹ M.J. Weber, S.B. Grimm, M. Baales, *Between warm and cold: Impact of the Younger Dryas on human behavior in Central Europe*. Quaternary International 2011, Vol. 242, pp. 279, 283–287; R. Schild, *Geomorphology, Stratigraphy, Paleology & Radiochronology*, [In:] *Całowanie. A Final Paleolithic & Early Mesolithic site on an Island in the Ancient Vistula Channel*. Ed. R. Schild. Warszawa 2014, pp. 47–55.

¹⁰ M. Ralska-Jasiewiczowa, *Ewolucja szaty roślinnej*, [In:] *Geografia Polski. Środowisko przyrodnicze*. Ed. L. Starkel. Warszawa 1991, pp. 106–126.

¹¹ Findings from the areas of the present-day Lithuania, Kašetos and northern Ukraine – Pribor and western Belarus – area of the Odrižin Lake, indicate the probability of such penetration (K. Szymczak, *Epoka kamienia Polski północno-wschodniej na tle środkowoeuropejskim*. Warszawa 1995, pp.16–20).

¹²As a result of the Aeolian activity traces of earlier settlement could be covered by dunes. During the warmer climate of the Allerød interstadial, in the area of the East Baltic Lake District appeared human groups using the so-called “leaf points”, included in the Perstunka culture. To the south of it we find complexes belonging to the Tardigravettian circle – the Witów culture (Ibidem, pp. 21–27).

The oldest sites in Puszcza Kurpiowska can be certainly attributed only to the second half of Dryas III and the beginning of the pre-Boreal period (11th/10th millennium BC). From this period comes camps of the End Paleolithic reindeer hunters, moving in the pre-Boreal tundra in wake of the migrating herds. It was the time of the development of the classic Swiderian culture, from the circle of the cultures with the leaf points. The groups of this culture occur in the area of the Eastern Baltic and the European Lowlands. However, there is clearly visible a border of the occurrence of leaf point finds to the southeast of the interfluve of the Omulew and Orzyc rivers¹³. Despite the intensive research, there were no Swiderian sites that could be found in the area of the Ciechanów Upland, Mława Hills or Międzyrzecze Łomżyńskie (Łomża Interfluve)¹⁴, and they only appear in the middle valley of the Vistula. Their absence south of the Kurpie Plain seems not to be the result of the nature conditions, but of the existing border between the two raw materials provinces¹⁵.

The second, distinct stage of settlement appeared with the mixed forests of boreal and Atlantic periods and changes of the fauna. Migrating from the southwest, in the wake of the hunted wild animals, the population of the Middle Stone Age – the Mesolithic, led hunting-gathering lifestyle, moving, like trappers, in

¹³ Complexes connected with the Swiderian culture were found in the area of today's Puszcza Kurpiowska in the following places: Dudy Puszczańskie, Łączki, Gmina Łyse, Myszyniec, Gmina loco, Ostrołęka, Leśna Góra, Łęg Starościński, Łasze, Gmina Turośń, Kozłowski, Kurpiewskie-Mierzejewo, Gmina Lelis (Z. Sulgostowska, *Prahistoria międzyrzecza Wisły, Niemna i Dniestru u schyłku plejstocenu*. Warszawa 1989, pp. 113–114; W. Borkowski, *Najstarsze zabytki archeologiczne gminy Kadzidło*, [In:] *Dzieje parafii i kościoła pod wezwaniem Ducha Świętego w Kadzidle*. Ed. M. Przytocka. Kadzidło 2012, pp. 16–18; Probably a Final Paleolithic encampment also existed at the so-called “Holy Place” in Kadzidło. S.K. Kozłowski considered the complex as a mixed Paleolithic-Mesolithic. The main component is the Mesolithic Janisławice culture, other elements are related to the Swiderian culture (S.K. Kozłowski, *Ważniejsze mezolityczne materiały powierzchniowe*. Światowit (Warszawa) 1975, Vol. 34, pp. 149–188, tab. V).

¹⁴ In the area of Międzyrzecze Łomżyńskie only traces of settlement dating from the Stone Age were discovered, among others, in the localities of Stare Jemielite and Uśnik, Gmina Śniadowo (W. Borkowski, *Najstarsze znaleziska archeologiczne na obszarze gminy Śniadowo* [in print]).

¹⁵ The centre of population on the middle Vistula river was based on the use of chocolate flints from the Świętokrzyskie Mountains, while the north-eastern group of the Swiderian culture used only the local erratic flint (W. Borkowski, Z. Miecznikowski, *Początki osadnictwa na terenie pogranicznym północnego Mazowsza*, [In:] *1000 lat pogranicza Chorzel*. Ed. M. Wiśnicki. Chorzele 2011, p. 18).

small family groups¹⁶. Probably the Mesolithic groups included also not numerous natives living on the border of tundra and taiga¹⁷.

The oldest Mesolithic group in the Central European Lowlands, whose representatives wandered into Puszcza Kurpiowska, was the Komornicka culture (from the 8th to the 6th millennium BC)¹⁸. The campsites of this culture, larger – of several huts and smaller ones – with single huts, were located on dunes within river valleys or in the plateau areas. Larger concentrations of settlement traces may be a sign of returning to a given place several times. The economy of the Komornicka culture had a hunter-gatherer character, in some areas fishery was slightly more important. Populations of this culture are to be attributed the horns adzes, sometimes decorated with ornaments. One of the specimens was fished out from the Narew, in environs of Pułusk, and another one, that did not survive to our times was described by L. Sawicki from the dune “Czeczotka” in Ostrołęka.

Another group of hunters reaching the area of the already formed Puszcza Kurpiowska in the 6th–4th millennium BC, was the Late Mesolithic Janisławice culture¹⁹.

As in the previous period, the camps of this culture were short-lived and only tools of flint are remaining after them. The settlements of an open character were built on river banks, on small dunes within the lowest meadow terraces. This is indicative of the seasonal nature of settlement and moving to higher parts of valleys during wetter periods²⁰.

Most researchers distinguish within the Janisławice circle a separate territorial unit of specific characteristics of flint inventories, called the eastern group of

¹⁶ Their traces are observed to the southeast of the middle Orzyc river basin, not appearing practically north of it, where post-Swiderian complexes are experiencing. The only early Mesolithic complex is the site in Witowy Most, Gmina Baranowo (E. Kawalkowa, *Pradzieje Równiny Kurpiowskiej*. Nakły–Jaszczuły 2003, p. 63).

¹⁷ J.K. Kozłowski, S.K. Kozłowski, *Epoka kamienia na ziemiach polskich*. Warszawa 1977, p. 312.

¹⁸ Production of flint tools was based on blade cores and blade-flake cores. Obtained from them were irregular blades and short flakes. From them produced were short endscraper for skin working, burins for the work in bone and perforators. Geometric mikroliths, chunky triangles, and lanceolate blades were used to arm the arrows and fishgigs.

¹⁹ The population of this culture wandered to the Kurpie Plain from the south-east. Flint tools were made of blades obtained from conical cores. These were the characteristic Janisławice blades for arrowheads, triangles and truncated blades, scrapers, endscrapers and burins. The bone tools were mainly made in the form of blades having two notches for insets and daggers from the shoulder blades of aurochs.

²⁰ In the area of the right bank of the Narew river, in the village of Leśna Góra, Gmina Lelis, discovered was a large settlement of Janisławicka culture with housing structures in the pole technology and fireplaces outside the house. The intense cultural layer indicates the long-term occupation of the site or the returning in wet months to the meadow dunes (E. Kawalkowa, *Specyfika fizjografii w okolicach Ostrołęki...*, pp. 18–19).

Janisławice culture, or also a separate Maksimonis culture²¹. Its southwestern border runs in the Omulew and Orzyc interfluve²².

Particularly interesting seems to be the fact that the Mesolithic sites, discovered in environs of Ostrołęka, have been separated²³. At some of them ceramics and tools were found, which may indicate to the Neolithic period. According to the discoverer of the site in the locality of Lelis, prof. W. Chmielewski, the site is not a mechanical mixture of Mesolithic-Neolithic elements²⁴. This is indicated by the distribution of the material on the site of about 400 acres surface²⁵. The economy of these groups was based on gathering, hunting and fishing with a diverse but marginal role in the cultivation of plants and pastoral breeding of semi-wild animals. The skeleton ritual and sprinkling the body with ochre are also universal for all these groups.

The Para-Neolithic cultures, of the so called forest zone²⁶, representing the specific stage of economic development, took possession of Puszcza Kurpiowska about the half of the 4th millennium BC and lasted in this area the next thousands

²¹ K. Szymczak, op. cit., p. 121.

²² From the area of Puszcza Kurpiowska comes a large number of Mesolithic sites: Tyczek Kolonia, Złota Góra, Łyse, Dęby, Serafin, Gmina Łyse. The presence of the Janisławice culture complexes is also known, among others, from sites in Kadzidło "Święte Miejsce" (Holy Place), Gmina loco, Otok, Gmina Ostrołęka and Kruki Kolonia Dobrołęka, Gmina Olszewo Borki (W. Borkowski, *Najstarsze zabytki archeologiczne gminy Kadzidło...*, pp. 16–18; E. Kawałkowa *Pradzieje Równiny Kurpiowskiej...*, pp. 66–75).

²³ In the final stage of the Mesolithic there existed a rich settlement complex of Janisławice culture with settlements in Łęg Starościński-Leśna Góra, in Mała Wioska-Biała Góra, Kurpiewskie-Miezejewo, and a camp in Kozłówek, all in Gmina Lelis (E. Kawałkowa, *Specyfika fizjografii w okolicach Ostrołęki...*, pp. 17–29).

²⁴ W. Chmielewski, *Badania archeologiczne Równiny Kurpiowskiej*, [In:] *Kurpiowszczyzna. Identyczność – odmienność*. Ed. W. Chmielewski. Ostrołęka 2000, pp. 7–16.

²⁵ This confirms the hypothesis of S.K. Kozłowski on the acquisition of the skills of making of pots by the Janisławicka culture, and transforming into a para-Neolithic culture of the Pit-and-Comb Pottery culture (S.K. Kozłowski *Pradzieje ziem Polski od IX do V tysiąclecia p.n.e.* Warszawa 1972, p. 217). Another model was presented by E. Kempisty. She introduced the notion of para-Neolithic cultures as representing the type of hunter-gatherer economy using ceramics, but related to the migration of peoples from the areas to the north-east into Poland. Mesolithic elements would be a mechanical admixture of historical material (E. Kempisty, *Neolityczne kultury strefy leśnej w północnej Polsce*, [In:] *Problemy epoki kamienia na Pomorzu*. Ed. T. Malinowski. Słupsk 1983, pp. 177–179).

²⁶ These are, the occurring in the area of the Kurpie Plain, complexes of the Pit-and-Comb Pottery culture, Niemen culture, Linin group and complexes of Sośnia type. Surface survey yielded historical material whose cultural characteristics are not possible (W. Borkowski, Z. Miecznikowski, *Początki osadnictwa na terenie pogranicznym północnego Mazowsza...*, p. 20). E. Kawałkowa the bulk of material from para-Neolithic sites arbitrarily associates with the Niemen culture, among others, at the site in Dalekie, Gmina Myszyniec, Ostrołęka-Otok, Witowy Most, Gmina Baranowo (E. Kawałkowa, *Pradzieje Równiny Kurpiowskiej...*, pp. 92–95).

of years²⁷. At first they used an identical set of flint tools, deriving from the Janisławicka complexes. The feature distinguishing them from the Mesolithic assemblages, while differentiating them from each other, was ceramics. The characteristic way of forming of pots (with the point and round base), technological features and ornamentation are in practice the only cultural determinants²⁸.

In the discussed, Subboreal phase, there were changes in the forest communities due to natural factors as well as human activities in this period. With the reduction of the presence of the elm and then also of the ash and linden and the increase in the share of the oak and hazel, the expansion of the hornbeam and beech also began. The vegetation approached that of the potential contemporary one²⁹.

The Neolithic cultures were dominant in today's southern and central Poland. In the immediate vicinity of the Omulew and Orzyc interfluvium, the area of the Mława Hills and the Ciechanów Upland, reached the tribes of the Funnel Beaker culture³⁰. Neolithic settlements did not enter the area of the Mazurian Plain nor the Kurpie Region. The sites of the eastern group of this culture are located in the area of the so-called Old Mazovia to the northeastern boundaries of the Ciechanów Upland, as well as in the area of the middle Narew valley. The area north and east of the Orzyc bend, in the middle of the Subboreal phase, is still the domain of the para-Neolithic cultures. The natural environment of the primeval forest, especially the poor soils and the compact forest cover, did not favor the land-based economy of the garden system and breeding of the cattle, pigs and goats and sheep³¹.

²⁷ At the same time, from the south the Plain area enter the first farmers representing the production economy. (W. Borkowski, B. Matraszek, S. Sałaciński, *Mazowsze w epoce kamienia*, [In:] *Starożytne Mazowsze*. Pułtusk 2006, pp. 15-17).

²⁸ E. Kawalkowa, *Specyfika fizjografii w okolicach Ostrołęki...*, pp. 17–29. These features, among others, include: strong admixture of sand, as well as the presence of grasses, crushed granite and broken shells. The most famous sites with Mesolithic tools and ceramics are Ostrołęka-Czeczotka, Ostrołęka Wojciechowice, Kurpiewskie-Miezejewo, Gmina Lelis. Features of the Niemen culture are visible in the material from sites in Otok, Gmina Ostrołęka, Pianki, Gmina Zbójna and Witowy Most, Gmina Baranowo In the north of Puszcza Kurpiowska, we meet sites of the Narva culture, and in the immediate vicinity the complexes of the Niemen culture, among others: Młynarze, Gmina Różan, Woźna Wieś, Gmina Rajgród, Budki, Gmina Chorzele, Sielc Nowy, Gmina Krasnosielec, Sypniewo, Gmina loco and Szła, Gmina Przasnysz. (W. Borkowski, Z. Miecznikowski, *Początki osadnictwa na terenie pogranicznym północnego Mazowsza...*, p. 20; E. Kawalkowa *Pradzieje Równiny Kurpiowskiej...*, p. 92).

²⁹ M. Ralska-Jasiewiczowa, op. cit., pp. 118–119.

³⁰ It is one of the most important indigenous agricultural formations of the European Lowlands, created in the middle of the 5th millennium BC, covering the area from the North German Lowlands to the upper Bug.

³¹ The funeral rite of the Funnel Beaker culture was of the megalithic type. The dead were buried in stone-earthen graves in shape of trapezes or elongated triangles, the burial chambers of which were laid out of stone plates. Pottery vessels, flint knives, axes and shaft-hole axes were placed into the graves as burial goods. Archaeological finds of this

The late Neolithic phase, defined in the Middle European Plain by the emergence of the Globular Amphora culture tribes, coincides with the period of dry climate fluctuations, which led to deepening of deforestation and displacement to the north of compacted forest complexes in favor of steppe and forest steppe. Such transformations favored the pastoral and pastoral-hunting economy, represented by the groups using characteristic spherical vessels³². This shepherds reached the area of the Ciechanów Upland and Międzyrzecze Łomżyńskie at the end of the 4th millennium BC. They grazed cattle and half-wild pigs. They used river valleys to grow cereals, while not despising hunting and fishing. This made the Late Neolithic population of the Globular Amphora culture to be more willing to enter the Mazurian Plain, although this was probably not a long-term presence. But there is no evidence of Globular Amphora culture settlements in the Kurpie Plain³³.

In the Neolithic period, the representatives of the Funnel Beaker and Globular Amphora cultures ventured into the river valleys of Puszcza Kurpiowska, perhaps in search of amber or for hunting purposes³⁴. Single finds of the Neolithic flint axes and shaft-hole axes, without the context of ceramics, in surface survey, strongly exclude more permanent settlement, even in the more fertile river valleys.

The last phase of the influx of Neolithic people from the south is called from the way of decorating pottery vessels – the Corded Ware culture³⁵. Very little is known about the economy of these tribes. Besides of some evidences of plant cultivation on a few of the sites, most of the remnants shows a pastoral-nomadic lifestyle. Traces of these peoples are found both in the area of the Mława Hills and

culture come, among others, from: Rostków, Gmina Czernice Borowe, Rycice, Gmina Chorzele and Romanowo, Gmina Maków Mazowiecki (W. Borkowski, Z. Miecznikowski, *Początki osadnictwa na terenie pogranicznym północnego Mazowsza...*, p. 21).

³² The characteristic funeral rite of this culture belongs also to the megalithic type. The dead were buried with burial goods in stone boxes dug into the ground. Beside the characteristic pottery vessels, flint tools and axes with carefully polished blades were placed into graves.

³³ Archaeological sites of the Globular Amphora culture have been discovered, among others, in Rembielin, Gmina Chorzele, Sielc Nowy, gm. Krasnosielc, Gąsewo Nowe and Szczeglin, Gmina Sypniewo, Makowica, Gmina Maków Mazowiecki, Ulatowo-Zalesie, Gmina Krzynowłoga Mała, Grudusk, Gmina loco and Budy Rządowe, Gmina Jednorzec (Ibidem, pp. 21–22).

³⁴ Single items of the Funnel Beaker and Globular Amphora cultures originate from Czarnia, Gmina loco, Łyse, Gmina loco, Lipnik, Gmina Łyse, Nasiadek, Gmina Lelis, Ostrołęka, Jazgarka, Gmina Kadzidło, Orzoł, Gmina Baranowo and Bandysie, Gmina Myszyniec (E. Kawałkowska, *Pradzieje Równiny Kurpiowskiej...*, p. 99; W. Borkowski, Z. Miecznikowski, *Początki osadnictwa na terenie pogranicznym północnego Mazowsza...*, pp. 21–22; W. Borkowski, *Najstarsze zabytki archeologiczne gminy Kadzidło...*, p. 18).

³⁵ In the middle of the third millennium BC in the area of the European Plain appeared tribes using ceramics decorated with rope imprints. The dead were first buried beneath the barrows and then in flat cemeteries, equipped with pottery vessels, flint axes, knives and arrowheads, and stone axes.

Ciechanów Upland as well as the Mazurian Plain³⁶. The episodic expeditions of the End Neolithic representatives of the Corded Ware culture reached the area of Puszcza Kurpiowska, which is confirmed by the finds of the battle axes of this culture³⁷. In the literature has been hypothesised the woodland cattle and pig breeding, in the glades in river valleys, realised by the representatives of the Corded Ware culture³⁸. However, pollen diagrams from pseudo-meanders in Leśna Góra-Łęg Starościński and Kurpiewskie-Miezejewo, Gmina Lelis do not show the presence of plants related to the breeding³⁹.

The younger Subboreal phase was marked by the cooling and drying of the climate. Within the mixed forests the share of hornbeam and alder was clearly reduced. Less rainfall was favorable for drying of sandy soils and increasing the share of pine and oak forests in the composition of the forest, as well as the decrease of the groundwater level, leading to the drying and overgrowing of the oxbow lakes and lakes⁴⁰. At that time, the first groups of the Trzciniec culture⁴¹, representing already the Bronze Age, came to the area of the Kurpie Plain. Along with them appear in the northern Mazovia, the first not numerous bronze products: bracelets, armlets, pendants. The most important change concerns the burial ritual. At first the skeletal funeral rite was dominating, but gradually disseminated the cremation custom, which for several millennia, has spread throughout most of Europe.

This was not a period favorable to the expansion of agriculture and the Early Bronze Age groups, which penetrated the Kurpie Plain, could not rely on the agricultural model of the economy⁴². Probably the people, who settled on the edge

³⁶ Presence of the products of the Corded Ware culture was found at the sites in: Rostków and Obrębiec, Gmina Czernice Borowe, Kęsocha, Gmina Dzierzgowo, Krasnosielc Nowy, gm. Krasnosielc, Małowidz and Lipa, Gmina Jednorożec (W. Borkowski, Z. Miecznikowski, *Początki osadnictwa na terenie pogranicznym północnego Mazowsza...*, p. 22).

³⁷ The ceramic remains of this culture were found in the villages of Zabrodzie and Przyszań Gmina Olszewo Borki. Fragment of a flint dagger of this culture comes from the locality Kurpiewskie-Miezejewo, Gmina Lelis, and two stone axes from Ostrołęka (E. Kawalkowa, *Specyfika fizjografii w okolicach Ostrołęki...*, p. 21; Eadem, *Pradzieje Równiny Kurpiowskiej...*, p. 10, 101).

³⁸ E. Kempisty, *Neolityczne kultury strefy leśnej w północnej Polsce...*, p. 175.

³⁹ K. Wasylikowa, *Antropogeniczne zmiany roślinności w holocenie*, [In:] *Człowiek i środowisko w pradziejach*. Eds. J.K. Kozłowski, S.K. Kozłowski. Warszawa 1983, p. 57.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

⁴¹ In Mazovia, the first half of the 2nd millennium BC is considered to be the beginning of Early Bronze settlement. Its full development coincides with the period from 1500 to 1300 BC (J. Dąbrowski, *Epoka brązu w północno-wschodniej Polsce*. Białystok 1997, p. 88).

⁴² On the basis of surface survey and a few archaeological excavations, it seems that they preferred the same settlement conditions as their Mesolithic and para-Neolithic predecessors.

and within the forest were hunting, gathering and fishing⁴³. From the earlier Mesolithic and para-Neolithic formation they distinguished themselves with a cremation ritual and occasional use of bronze tools. In the ceramics of the Trzciniec culture groups can be found a reference to the ornament and technology of the earlier period⁴⁴. Cremation is an obvious cultural determinant of the Bronze Age and was a permanent feature of the Trzciniec culture that it remained even after the change of the way of farming⁴⁵. The settlements of the Trzciniec culture, dating to this period, were limited essentially to the dunes in the Narew valley, near the estuaries of Omulew, Rozoga and Szkwa rivers⁴⁶. Sporadic trips of small groups up river valleys can't be excluded⁴⁷. The gradual disappearance of the Trzciniec culture in this area was a consequence of cultural and social transformations, which resulted in its transition into a local group of the Lusatian culture⁴⁸.

Lusatian culture developing at the turn of the 13th into the 12th century BC, was part of a large complex of the Urnfield cultures. From the very beginning, the

⁴³ It was different in the area of the Ciechanów Upland and the Mława Hills, where there was more fertile soils and agriculture could develop. The sites of Trzciniec culture were found, among others, in: Ulatowo-Dąbrówka and Skierkowizna, Gmina Krzynowłoga Mała, Wola Błędowska, Gmina Baranowo and Romanowo Gmina Maków Mazowiecki (W. Borkowski, Z. Miecznikowski, *Początki osadnictwa na terenie pogranicznym północnego Mazowsza...*, pp. 22–23).

⁴⁴ There is lack of analyses of flint assemblages for this region, nevertheless, a strong influence of Neolithic cultures of the forest zone is visible (E. Kawałkova, *Specyfika fizjografii w okolicach Ostrołęki...*, p. 23). Used are tools made by splitting and polishing technique (endscrapers, knives, sickles, pestles, arrowheads, shaft-hole axes, axes, blades) as well as made from organic materials ones (pendants of shells, pins and awls of bone) and of bronze: spiral bracelets, armlets and rings with disks and small axes and spearheads. Occasional small silver and gold items appear. Pottery with granite admixture, surface smoothing of the vessels and ornamentation show relations to earlier cultures from this region. The most numerous are hand-made, tulip-shaped vessels with a cymoid profile, thickened and faceted lips (J. Dąbrowski, *Kultura trzciniecka na Mazowszu i Podlasiu*, [In:] *Problemy przeszłości Mazowsza i Podlasia*, Vol. III. Ed. M. Dulicz. Warszawa 2005, pp. 61–66).

⁴⁵ It is interesting to observe traces of ocher in one of cremation graves at a Trzciniec site in Kurpiewskie-Mięzejewo, Gmina Lelis (E. Kawałkova, *Specyfika fizjografii w okolicach Ostrołęki...*, pp. 23–24). Sprinkling of grave with ocher was a common practice during the Mesolithic and occurred in the Neolithic cultures of the forest zone as a Mesolithic heritage.

⁴⁶ Studies of settlement concentration in this region indicate the presence of large permanent settlements surrounded by a number of small, short-lived camps. The best recognised site of this culture is located in Kurpiewskie-Mięzejewo, Gmina Lelis (E. Kawałkova, *Pradzieje Równiny Kurpiowskiej...*, pp. 111–113).

⁴⁷ In the area of Gmina Łyse, traces of the Trzciniec culture were discovered, among others, in the villages of: Dudy Puszczańskie, Serafin, Dęby, Łyse (W. Borkowski, *Najstarsze osadnictwo gminy Łyse* [in print]).

⁴⁸ J. Dąbrowski, *Kultura trzciniecka i lużycka na Mazowszu*, [In:] *Starożytne Mazowsze*. Ed. M. Zieleniewska-Kasprzycka. Pułtusk 2006, pp. 25–27.

population of the Lusatian culture, due to extent of their inhabited territory, did not form a single society. The basis of the phenomenon lies in the diversity of the cultural background. In the northeastern Mazovia, a part of the Lusatian complex were constituting the Trzciniec population groups⁴⁹.

In the Late Bronze Age (9th–8th century BC), both in the area of the Mazurian Plain, north of Puszcza Kurpiowska, and south of it, in the Ciechanów Upland, a significant increase in the number of sites is observed⁵⁰. This might be connected with the population growth but is limited in the south to the Orzyc river valley. The area of Puszcza Kurpiowska was long beyond the reach of the Lusatian settlement, which does not exclude sporadic penetration along the river valleys⁵¹. Despite the aforementioned diversity, the basic cultural features in the entire area of the Lusatian culture occurrence were very similar. The most important are: the burial ritual and the presence of flat cemeteries with burials in cinerary urns. The remains of the deceased, after burning the bodies at the stake, were buried in clay pots covered with lids. As equipment were added also smaller vessels, probably filled with food or other gifts⁵².

Agriculture and animal husbandry was the mainstay of the economy of the Lusatian culture population, while in the area of the Kurpie Plain, mainly in the river valleys, and in the smaller islands of the better soils, the agriculture of the garden type⁵³. Vessels used in the household were generally less careful made than the grave pottery. From bronze made were mainly axes, sickles, knives, awls, hooks, needles and chisels. As weapon were used bows and arrows with bronze, bone and flint arrowheads and spears. There were inhabited open settlements⁵⁴, and in the south, in the later period also the hillforts.

⁴⁹ M. Mogielnicka-Urban, *Kultura łużycka na Mazowszu i Podlasiu*, [In:] *Problemy przeszłości Mazowsza*, Vol. III. Ed. M. Dulinicz. Warszawa 2005, pp. 67–91

⁵⁰ G. Orlińska, *Cmentarzysko kultury łużyckiej w Cichowie*, *Archeologia Żywa* (Warszawa) 2005, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 8–10

⁵¹ The colonization of dense forest complexes had mostly an insular character and was limited to enclaves with more fertile soils. In the area of Warmia and Mazuria, the population of Lusatian culture arrived only in the 9th century BC, wandering, among others, the valley of Orzyc, Omulew, Szkwa and Pisa rivers. These settlers set out from the area of Międzyrzecze Łomżyńskie (M. Hoffmann, *Osadnictwo Równiny Mazurskiej w I tysiącleciu p.n.e. i jego relacje z osadnictwem Równiny Kurpiowskiej*, [In:] *Kurpiowszczyzna. Identyczność – odmienność*. Ed. W. Chmielewski. Ostrołęka 2000, pp. 32–33).

⁵² Wheat, barley, millet and rye were grown, as well as flax, hemp and poppy. Known were turnips, peas, broad beans and lentils. To work in agriculture were used tools of flint, bronze and iron, wooden plows, stone querns and pestles. Cattle, pigs, goats and sheep were bred. It was hunted for deer, bison, wild boar and roe deer.

⁵³ We find traces of Lusatian culture, among others, in the area of today's Łyse commune in the villages of Dęby, Zalas, Piątkowizna, Łyse, Tyczek Kolonia and Serafin (W. Borkowski, *Najstarsze osadnictwo gminy Łyse...*).

⁵⁴ Open settlements are both, large villages with a few hundred years of residence with houses of post construction and short-lived seasonal camps with shallow pithouses with

In the period from the 6th to the 2nd century BC, from north the region of Puszcza Kurpiowska was penetrated by population groups of the West Baltic Barrow culture⁵⁵. They were the ancestors of the Baltic people, inhabiting, among others, the Mazurian Plain in historical times. Their presence, on the basis of very fragmentary pieces of ceramics was recorded in the middle courses of Omulew, Szkwa and Orzyc rivers⁵⁶. An exception is a permanent settlement in the area of Chorzele (Rembielin – “Łysa Góra”), lying at the point of the Orzyc valley crossing, as part of a trade route from the south through the Mława Hills towards the Sambian Peninsula⁵⁷.

From the middle of the 5th century BC, there begins to form another cultural unit, identified with the Germanic tribe of Vandals – the Przeworsk culture⁵⁸. In the period between the second and the first century BC, it reaches the area of northern Mazovia without entering with its compact settlement into the area of Puszcza Kurpiowska. The interfluvium of Orzyc and Omulew rivers to the left bank of Rozoga river in the period of Roman influences (1st century BC – 4th century BC) is a strip of deserted area between the compact reach of the Przeworsk culture from the south, the Bogaczewska culture from the north, and the eastern group of the Przeworsk culture in the east. The northernmost sites of the Przeworsk culture are located in the area of Gmina Kadzidło in the localities of Todzia and Dylewo, dating back to the 2nd–3rd centuries AD⁵⁹. In the area of northern Narew tributaries, only a few sites from the above mentioned period were discovered as result of the surface survey, being grouped in the area of Ostrołęka and the lower Pisa river and Skroda river. They are probably the result of single migrations of

walls made of wattle and plastered with clay (T. Węgrzynowicz, *Kultura lużycka na Mazowszu wschodnim i Podlasiu*, Materiały Starożytne i Wczesnośredniowieczne (Warszawa) 1973, Vol. II, pp. 37–38).

⁵⁵ Ł. Okulicz, *Kultura kurhanów zachodniobałtyjskich we wczesnej epoce żelaza*. Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1970.

⁵⁶ W. Borkowski, Z. Miecznikowski, *Początki osadnictwa na terenie pogranicznym północnego Mazowsza...*, pp. 27–30.

⁵⁷ This trail crosses the area of Puszcza Kurpiowska. Its presence is confirmed by the Celtic imports at the mentioned site (Ł. Okulicz, *Sprawozdanie z badań cmentarzyska z wczesnej epoki żelaza w Rembielinie, powiat przasnyski*. Rocznik Olsztyński 1975, Vol. 11, pp. 205–209). The amber was not only of Baltic origin but also was mined in Puszcza Kurpiowska. Its end users were the Celtic trading posts in Silesia.

⁵⁸ T. Dąbrowska, *Mazowsze w młodszym okresie przedrzymskim*, [In:] *Starożytne Mazowsze*. Ed. M. Zieleniewska-Kasprzycka. Pułtusk 2006, pp. 39–55.

⁵⁹ J. Andrzejowski, *Cmentarzysko kultury przeworskiej w Todzi, gmina Kadzidło, województwo ostrołęckie, stanowisko 2*. Wiadomości Archeologiczne (Warszawa) 1993–1994, Vol. LIII, Issue 2, pp. 101–126.

small human groups into the primeval forest from the area of the evident settlement's concentration between rivers Orz and Narew⁶⁰.

The economy of the population of the Przeworsk culture was based on agriculture and cattle breeding. Cultivated were: rye, oats, barley and millet, and wheat and legumes on fertile soils, as well as cannabis and flax. Very important for economic development in the period of Roman influences was the metallurgy. The presence of rich bog iron ores in the valleys of the Kurpie Plain might have been a motive force for expeditions undertaken by both, the population of the Przeworsk culture from the south and the south-east as well as the representatives of the culture of Western Baltic Barrows and the Bogaczewska culture from the north.

A separate episode in the history of the region was migration of the Germanic (Gothic) tribes, representing the Wielbark culture, which probably took place through the river valleys of Puszcza Kurpiowska to the area of Międzyrzecz Łomżyński in the 2nd–4th century AD⁶¹.

The sites related to the early presence of the Slav population in the Puszcza Kurpiowska area are relatively few. Their precise dating based on archaeological material is not possible. Excavations of selected sites would be required. On the basis of the sources from the nearest neighborhood, it should be noted that into the region of Puszcza Kurpiowska, the Slav population may have been sporadically penetrating since the 11th century AD⁶². The visible development of the settlement on the left bank of the Narew river occurred only in the 11th and 12th centuries, when there were already existing castles in Łomża, Wizna and Ostrołęka⁶³. However, this period belongs already to the historical stage in the development of settlement in the area of the Zagajnica (Kurpiowska) Puszcza.

Looking at the entire prehistoric period of inhabiting the human community in Puszcza Kurpiowska, I come to the conclusion that the model of economy developed by the hunters and gatherers of the end of the Middle Stone Age, however shockingly it sounds, with minor modifications survived until almost contemporary times. The forest life described in the ethnographic works of the

⁶⁰ In the described area archaeological objects from the period of Roman influence were found in several localities of the Łyse municipality: Serafin, Łyse, Zalas, Piątkowizna (W. Borkowski, *Najstarsze osadnictwo gminy Łyse...*).

⁶¹ It is witnessed by the presence of a barrow cemetery in Uśnik, Gmina Śniadowo.

⁶² From the early Middle Ages, in the area of Międzyrzecz Łomżyński there is known a settlement concentration along the right bank of Orz: settlement in Goworówek, Gmina Goworowo, the existing since the 8th century settlement in Wojsze, Gmina Czerwin, dating back to the VI–VII century, and settlements in environs of the hillfort in Chmielew-Świerże. Another concentration existed in the area of lower Róż a tributary of the Narew with a settlement called Czartoria (M. Dulnicz, *Najważniejsze problemy archeologii wczesnego średniowiecznego Mazowsza*, [In:] *Starożytne Mazowsze*. Ed. M. Zieleniewska-Kasprzycka. Pułtusk 2006, pp. 75–102).

⁶³ E. Kowalczyk, *Granice Mazowsza w średniowieczu. Ocena stanu badań*, [In:] *Problemy przeszłości Mazowsza i Podlasia*, Vol. III. Ed. M. Dulnicz. Warszawa 2005, pp. 167–172.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries⁶⁴, of course with some modifications, could serve as canvas for the reconstruction of post-Mesolithic communities in the Kurpiowska Plain. Along the river valleys into this area undertook expeditions representatives of succeeding archaeological cultures from the south and north, trying to implement economic models characteristic of neighboring, or migrating in search of more suitable ecumenes, or possibly entering the forest for commercial purposes. They were going through or stayed. However, there was no full acculturation of the inhabitants of the forest backwoods. This may be one of the elements of the sense of separateness and pride of Kurpie people of their own past – today's inhabitants of the Forest⁶⁵.

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⁶⁴ E.g. I. Baranowski, *Łukasz Kościeszka-Zaluski i jego „Najstarszy opis Puszczy Kurpiowskiej”*. Ziemia 1911, Vol. II, No. 16; A. Chętnik, *Życie puszczańskie Kurpiów*. Warszawa 1971.

⁶⁵ The separateness of the area of Kurpiowska Plain has been lasting very long. In archaeological terms almost to the present day. Only administrative actions, deforestation, firing of river valleys (actions of Mazovian Duchy of the one, and the Teutonic Order on the other side) limited the range of Puszcza Kurpiowska and introduced a new type of economy (E. Kowalczyk-Heyman, *Dzieje granicy mazowiecko-krzyżackiej między Piszą a źródłami Biebrzy*. Warszawa 2013, pp. 39–51).

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SUMMARY

The Kurpie Plain has its own specific physiographic characteristics. From the Paleolithic to the early Middle Ages, it was a convenient route to move groups of people, both in the north-south and east-west direction. Due to the very unattractive soil conditions, the forest was treated as a temporary or seasonal exploitation area. The territory of the Kurpie Plain, originally formed as a result of the Riss Glaciation (Warta Stadial) and transformed during the Baltic glaciation through the formation of a large sandur area with elements of earlier moraine. The oldest sites in Puszcza Kurpiowska can be certainly attributed only to the second half of Dryas III and the beginning of the pre-Boreal period (11th/10th millennium BC). Looking at the entire prehistoric period of inhabiting the human community in Puszcza Kurpiowska, I come to the conclusion that the model of economy developed by the hunters and gatherers of the end of the Middle Stone Age, however shockingly it sounds, with minor modifications survived until almost contemporary times.

STRESZCZENIE

W obrębie Mazowsza północno-wschodniego występuje szereg mniejszych regionów geograficznych, wśród których Równina Kurpiowska posiada swoją istotną specyfikę. Od paleolitu aż po czasy wczesnego średniowiecza stanowiła dogodny szlak przemieszczania się grup ludności. Większość wędrowców nie pozostawała na tym obszarze dłużej. Z uwagi na bardzo nieatrakcyjne warunki glebowe puszcza traktowana była jako obszar eksploatacji czasowej lub sezonowej. Dolinami rzek na obszar ten zapuszczali się przedstawiciele kolejnych kultur archeologicznych z południa i północy, w poszukiwaniu dogodniejszych ekumen, ewentualnie zapuszczając się na teren puszczy w celach handlowych. Jedynie w epoce kamienia na obszarze Równiny Kurpiowskiej permanentnie gospodarowały grupy ludzkie zajmujące się łowiectwem, zbieractwem i rybołówstwem. W okresach związanych z gospodarką wytwórczą: rolnictwem i hodowlą teren ten był rejonem ścierania wpływów kulturowych, idących z różnych kierunków. To spowodowało, że na obszarze pierwotnej Puszczy Kurpiowskiej rytm rozwojowy nie odpowiadał przemianom na ziemiach sąsiednich. Model gospodarki wypracowany przez łowców, zbieraczy schyłku środkowej epoki kamienia, z niewielkimi modyfikacjami przetrwał do czasów niemal nam współczesnych. Dopiero działania administracyjne, odlesienia, wypalanie dolin rzecznych ograniczały stopniowo zasięg Puszczy Kurpiowskiej i wprowadzały nowy typ gospodarowania. Nie dochodziło jednak do pełnej akulturacji mieszkańców mateczników puszczańskich. Może to być jednym z elementów poczucia odrębności i dumy z własnej przeszłości dzisiejszych mieszkańców puszczy – Kurpiów.

Key words: Kurpie Forest, prehistory, archaeological cultures, archaeological sites, findings

Słowa kluczowe: Puszcza Kurpiowska, prahistoria, kultury archeologiczne, stanowiska archeologiczne, znaleziska