Between the Slavs, Balts and Germans: ethnic problems in the archaeology and history of Podlasie

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Podlasie (Podlasia, Podlachia) lies in the northeast corner of modern Poland along the present frontier with Byelorussia, and may be defined as the land between the Bug and Biebrza rivers, the upper part of the river Narew running through the middle (Fig. 1). Historical sources show that for many centuries this region has always been a border zone between a series of successive political organisations, constituting a “no-man’s land” between them, to be invaded and colonised by its neighbours. Upon the partition of Poland in 1795, Podlasie was absorbed into Prussia. In 1807–15 the Białystok area became part of the Russian empire, where most of it remained until the formation of independent Poland in 1918. The eastern frontier of Poland was redrawn at Yalta in 1945 along the “Curzon Line” (proposed at Versailles at the end of the First World War), placing Podlasie now just on the Polish side.

Ethnographic, sociologic and linguistic studies in the region show a very mixed ethnic and cultural situation, making it a fascinating area of study of the emergence and maintenance of cultural entities in the ethnic borderland. The confusing problems of ethnicity of the populations here however go back far beyond the period covered by written sources. This paper, having no ambition to present any comprehensive outline of the archaeology and history of Podlasie, attempts to highlight some of the ethnic problems of this region, drawing mainly on the results of the authors’ recent fieldwork. We feel that this study can also be a valuable contribution to the methodological problems of archaeological inference and to general theory of ethnicity, and in addition that prehistoric processes cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration also historical and ethnographic evidence.

Podlasie has, until recent years, been archaeologically a largely neglected area. Pre-War work e.g. by Zygmunt Szmit and Roman Jakimowicz uncovered a little archaeological evidence, supplemented by some early work after the War, working from Warsaw’s State Archaeological Museum. The formation of the archaeological department of the museum in Białystok in 1956, the mounting of

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the "Multidisciplinary Jatvingian Expedition" in 1959, and more recently (1985) of the Podlasie Archaeological Expedition (PAE) of the Polish Academy of Sciences Institute of the History of Material Culture, led to more suitable conditions for sustained fieldwork in the area.

The work of the PAE in the area around Bielsk Podlaski has included a comprehensive area survey centred on the multiphase settlement complex at Haćki, covering the valleys of the Orlanka, Biała and Łoknica rivers (which are southern tributaries of the upper Narew). The work has two aspects, the recording of new sites by recovery of surface material by systematic fieldwalking (so far an area of 337 km² has been covered), and the investigation of selected sites by sondages, geophysical surveys and excavations.

ENVIRONMENT

Geographically, the area termed here "Podlasie" comprises a macroregion (the North Podlasie Plain) about 16,000 km² in area. Geomorphologically, it lies on the border between Western and Eastern Europe, belonging to the province of the East Baltic Plain (East Russian Plain) which extends to the east (Kondracki 1980). This geographical affinity with Eastern Europe may to some extent explain its differentiation from much of Central Europe in the past, shown by the material presented below.

Podlasie has an underlying geology of Quaternary glacial and pro-glacial deposits, consisting mainly of sands, boulder-clays and clayey sands. The soils are of variable quality (like most of northern and eastern Poland), of medium or poor agricultural worth. Some parts of the area (especially valleys of the rivers Biebrza and Narew) are presently swampy, and form natural barriers (limiting communication and the development of settlement even today). Whether this state of affairs existed at all periods considered here is a topic for future investigation of the river valley sedimentation in relation to climatic and anthropomorphic changes.

The area has in recent history been very heavily forested (and some evidence suggests that it has been largely forested throughout most of the period considered here). There still remain large tracts of this forest (e.g. the Białowieża forest on the modern Polish-Byelorussian border). One model of the ancient settlement patterns suggested by the distribution of known sites is that settlement may have largely taken the form of dispersed settlement "cells" in cleared areas surrounded by virgin forest. Many settlements (of all periods) in this area cluster in the near vicinity of water, such as streams and rivers.

Today Podlasie (due to its geographical position) lies near the boundary between two climatic zones, and has a maximum growing period (average number of days annually having temperatures above +5°C) ranging from 200 – 205 days. This modern boundary seems to be a reflection of a phenomenon having some significance in determining the density of Early Medieval settlement in various areas of Poland (Barford in prep.), though in a period of altered climate the precise
number of days in the growing period will differ. It seems also that climatic fluctuation in potentially sensitive areas as here may have led to economic (which could lead to cultural) change.

EARLY PREHISTORY

Podlasie falls outside the known range of most Polish Neolithic cultures, but is on the northeastern edge of Funnel Beaker (TRB) and Globular Amphora Culture distributions (Fig. 1). In the Middle Neolithic in the forest zone of northeast Europe, a number of cultures arise, which are linked by their use of round-based pottery vessels decorated with bosses, stabbed dots and comb impressions. This “Comb- and Pit-marked” ceramic style is usually interpreted (e.g. Jażdżewski 1984: 196, 201), due to position and extent, as representing the distribution of groups speaking (Proto-) Ugro-Finnic languages, or at least a non-Indo-European language group.

The sites in Podlasie (as has only relatively recently been recognised; Kempisty 1973), belong to the southwestern zone of the Niemen cycle of these cultures. This formed about the middle of the fourth millenium BC in the watershed of the river Niemen (and the northern edge of the Pripyt watershed) by complex cultural processes acting on the native “Mesolithic” population under the influence of southern Neolithic cultures from the Dnieper-Donets region (Fig. 1). Recent fieldwork has identified a number of sites of this period in Podlasie, mainly on sand dunes by the side of rivers, as at Grądy Wniecko, Hryniewicze and Zajączki in the Narew valley, several sites in the Bug valley near Drohicyn, and Sośnia in the Biebrza valley (Kempisty and Więckowska 1983; Barford and Krasnodębski 1992). Despite this, not enough is yet known about these cultures in northeast Poland to allow detailed discussion here of the mechanisms of acculturation in the area, the ethnic issues, or the integrity of these Neolithic cultures across the area concerned. The “Comb- and Pit-marked” Cultures persisted in Podlasie until the middle of the 2nd millenium BC.

The nature of any settlement of the area by users of the so-called “Corded Ware Culture” (Jażdżewski 1984: 181-92) is unclear; single finds of “Battle-Axes” and cordiform flint arrowheads traditionally linked with this pan-European phenomenon have been found in the area, but recent Polish work has been inclined to split this “culture” into smaller regional groups and its status is presently uncertain (Kmieciński ed. 1989: 262-300). According to Machnik (1970: 419) Mazovia and Podlasie were (up to the II period of the Bronze Age) an area of the appearance and disappearance of various late “Corded Ware Culture” groups, which exhibited close affiliations with the local “Comb- and Pit-marked Pottery” Culture.

About 1500 BC the “Trzciniec Culture” (Dąbrowski 1972: 18) appears in central and eastern Poland. This “culture”, covers a huge area with some lateral variation. It, or rather the eastern variant form, merges to the east with the Sosnica “Culture” (or cycle) of the “Trzciniec-Komarov-Sosnica Group”
economic (and probably social) models, whether the same is true of Podlasie in the northern forest zone is unclear.

MIDDLE AND LATE BRONZE AGE

The Trzcinec Culture phase ended about 1300 BC; Gardawski (1959) identified a “Łódź phase” in central Poland, while in the west of Poland the “Pre-Lusatian” culture develops. Both appear to constitute a transitional phase between the “Trzcinec Culture” and the culture groups of the Middle to Late Bronze Age. These seem to form by a series of influences on the autochthonous cultures of the area, particularly due to cultural trends from the south and west. The series of phenomena occurring over most of Poland in this period is known to archaeologists as the “Lusatian Culture” (Jaźdżewski 1984: 252–62). This forms part of the “Urnfield” complex, dominated by flat cremation cemeteries in urns. The “Lusatian Culture” was at one time seen as a single complex covering a large area, but within this have been identified many sub-groups and several phases of development (Kostrzewski, Chmielewski and Jaźdżewski 1965: 144–219; Kmieciński ed. 1989: 607–48), Hensel considers (1988: 236–356) that these groups represent “tribes” of the “Lusatian Culture”. Modern syntheses are beginning to lay more emphasis on the identification of these groups and phases, and are beginning to demonstrate the differences within the “Lusatian” complex rather than confirming its unity. The East-Mazovian-Podlasie subgroup of the Eastern group of the “Lusatian Culture” is territorially the largest of the Lusatian groups, developing from the end of the III period of the Bronze Age (Kmieciński ed. 1989: 641–45) in Mazovia and the area along the left bank of the Bug south of Podlasie (Fig. 3) where it is represented by many cemeteries and several large open settlements (Węgrzynowicz 1969, 1973). In the initial phases (11th century BC), the compact zone of finds of Lusatian cultural material extends however no further than the Bug in the area of Podlasie, the river apparently forming a noticeable cultural frontier. In the 9th–6th centuries BC, “Lusatian Culture” sites occur beyond it, as far as the river Nurzec, and the area north of the latter river is seen as a very sparsely-inhabited zone of forest (Węgrzynowicz 1973). Some material of the period from the area north of the Bug has mixed characteristics. Material of apparent "Lusatian" affinities has been discovered with pottery of other types at several recently examined sites, though the PAE area survey has confirmed that any settlement in the area datable to this period was very dispersed. The pottery at Drohiczn-Kozarówka (Węgrzynowicz 1978a: 44–5 fig.5) is a very strange assemblage, sharing several features with the material recovered from the PAE’s sites, and also having several features more reminiscent of some Byelorussian pottery than Polish “Lusatian” material. The ethnicity of the users of the “Lusatian Culture” has for several generations been the subject of heated discussion (see Sklenar 1983). In the immediate post-War period in Poland, there was a fairly general opinion that the “Lusatian Culture” represented the Proto-Slavs; an opinion still held by some in a modified form
even today (Hensel 1988: 220–36). This is based mainly on a comparison of the distribution of the culture with reputed "very early" Slav hydronyms. The "Lusatian Culture" was seen as a homogeneous whole which could be traced in an unbroken thread throughout prehistory until it emerged in history as the first Polish state (Kostrzewski 1965). The bearers of this "culture" were identified by some with the Neuri, northern neighbours of the Scyths mentioned by Herodotus (Histories IV, 17), and these were identified as Slavs by analogy with the supposedly Slav (or Baltic) river names "Nur" and "Nurzec" in Podlasie. Others have identified them with the hypothetical ancestors of the Veneti (Veneti). Both hypotheses are without any real factual foundation. If the "Lusatian Culture" can now be split into regional groups of the "Urnfield Complex" (some of which have quite close relationships to other groups outside Poland), we should consider if the term "Lusatian" should not be abandoned as a cultural term and replaced by regional names. Certainly there are now no grounds for considering the total extent of the "Lusatian Culture" as the extent of the proto-Slavs.
EARLY IRON AGE

The cultural changes causing the end of the “Lusatian Culture” are poorly-understood, the arrival of iron in the area in the 7th century BC seems to have had little significance. Perhaps climatic change from the Sub-Boreal to the colder and wetter Sub-Atlantic (from about 700 BC) may have had important economic effects, affecting the rate of culture change. At the end of the 6th century BC the “Lusatian Culture” mutates into the Iron Age Pomeranian Culture. The link between these cultures is demonstrated primarily by the similar territory occupied by both (Fig. 4), and the sequence visible in certain of the characteristics of pottery style and metal objects. In the absence of closely datable material from the beginning of the Pomeranian Culture in Mazovia and Podlasie, it is impossible to follow here the details and chronology of the process of the disappearance of one culture and the appearance of the next, nor to determine the reasons for these changes. It seems certain however that this process took place over a long period of time. The nature of the subdivision of the Pomeranian Culture is debatable. Some previous investigators have treated it as two taxonomically separate groups, the “Cloche Grave Culture” (distinguished on the basis of a specific type of cremation grave) and the “Wejherowo-Krotoszyn Culture” (Chomentowska, 1970: 236; Bukowski 1967: 345ff; Węgrzynowicz 1979; Jaźdżewski 1984: 323–7; Hensel 1988: 366–80). More recent work suggests that it is more reasonable to see it as one group (Czopek 1985; Kmiećński ed. 1989: 571–82).

It is not clear whether or not the processes of the development of the Pomeranian Culture were accompanied by folk-movements. In older (mainly German) literature, one finds the view that the Pomeranian Culture is linked with the spread of Germanic cultures (e.g. La Baume 1934: 44). Present opinion in Poland tends towards the view that there was primarily a movement of ideas, and limited (and perhaps only local) movement of populations. The ethnic identity of the users of this culture is thus seen by various workers as either Slav or proto-Germanic (Hensel 1988: 366–80; Kmiećński ed. 1989: 572), the issue being complicated by uncertainty about the method of spread of the culture.

Podlasie has an interesting place in this phenomenon, consisting as it does of a strip through the edge of the spread of this culture. The most northeasterly site of this culture in Poland are sites in Podlasie such as the cemetery at Grądy Woniecko on the Narew and at Drohicyn, Krupice and Płosków on the Bug, and the settlement complex at Haćki. Further to the east (in modern Byelorussia) are other groups of sites belonging to this culture.

To the east in the forest zone (Fig. 4) we see in the Iron Age the development of the Milogrady Culture of the 7th–3rd cents BC. Further to the north are the Stroked (“Brushed”) Ware Cultures of the 7th cent. BC–4th cent. AD. These rather amorphous “cultures” extend over a long period of time (Melnikovskaya 1967; Mitrofanov 1978; Pobol 1983). Their ethnic affinities are almost certainly East Balt, since their extent corresponds with that of Baltic hydronyms (Okulicz 1986: fig. 4). One possible “Milogradz” site with a small pottery assemblage has been published from the modern border zone in the Białowieża forest.
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Fig. 4. Iron Age: (1) northern boundary of Pomeranian Culture, (2) approximate southern extent of West Balt Culture, (3) southwestern extent of Stroked Ware Culture, (4) northwestern extent of Milogrady Culture (compiled according to Knieciński ed. 1989: map 28; Czopek 1985: map 1; D. Jaskanis and Kaczyński 1978: map 1; Pobol 1983: map 1; Kryzhitskiy and Rusyayeva eds. 1986: map 3; Schadio 1983: fig. 62).

(Gór ska 1976), but its correct attribution is uncertain. Shadio (1985: fig. 62) fills the area between the accepted edge of the Milogrady Culture in its classic form (near Pińsk) and the Polish border with “Milogrady” sites, but the evidence for this is unclear.

Loose sherds of “Stroked Ware” have occasionally been found in Podlasie, but not found as part of assemblages, and thus it is difficult to be sure if they form part of “Stroked Ware” cultural assemblages in their classic form. One pot of similar characteristics (J. Jaskanis 1971) is known from Białystok and several possible sherds from Posejnele, Suwałki province (J. Jaskanis 1981: 51) have led some to propose the existence of a zone of sites of Stroked Ware in Poland; Pobol (1983: map 1–2) was inclined to see the culture extending up to Poland’s frontier with Byelorussia. Assignation of sites to this culture simply on the basis of the wiped surface finish of some sherds is however of debatable value. Similar wiped
sherds have come from investigations by the PAE, such as from buried soil layers under the Early Medieval stronghold at Zajączki, from Hački, and from fieldwalking in the region of the Orlanka river. This material is difficult at this stage to interpret.

Some time in the Iron Age the West Baltic culture also crystallised (Okulicz 1986) in the area northwest of Podlasie (Fig. 4) formerly occupied by two local groups of the “Lusatian Culture” in Warmia and Mazuria, perhaps under the influence of the above-mentioned forest cultures. The processes of formation of these ethnic and linguistic groups cannot be considered here, but are an interesting sidelight on the old question of the ethnic identity of the “Lusatian Culture” and the supposed Slav-Balt linguistic community (Hensen 1988: 220–36). As can be seen on the map (Fig. 4), in the Iron Age Podlasie forms an apparent “blank area” between regions which are occupied by known archaeological cultures. Recent excavations have shown that the area was not deserted wasteland however (Fig. 5). The assemblages of cultural material from many of the investigated settlements are, however, difficult to assign as a whole to any of the adjacent archaeological cultures, which would argue against extending the boundaries of these cultures into Podlasie on the evidence of the material available at present.

The multi-phase settlement complex at Hački seems to have produced especially important information for understanding the Early Iron Age in Podlasie. The site, excavated 1967–73 and 1986–91, consists of a steep-sided hill which in the Early Medieval period seems to have been a stronghold, this rises from the bottom of a broad valley on the floor and sides of which are a series of open settlements. On the south edge of the hilltop was found a series of stone layers linked by horizontal timbers, with several rows of postholes underneath. It seems that they formed some kind of enclosing wall or rampart round the hilltop. These layers have produced a series of ten radiocarbon dates centring around 420 and 280 BC (Kobyliński 1990). On the north side of the hilltop were over 2 m of occupation deposits, pits, postholes and hearths containing Early Iron Age pottery. On the valley floor around the hill, trenching revealed several large bowl-shaped pits and a ditch running round the foot of the hill of the same date.

The pottery from these deposits seems similar to that of the Pomeranian Culture, but also includes vessels recalling Lusatian forms, suggesting some form of continuity of settlement. The pottery assemblage clearly does not conform to the “standard” form of the Pomeranian culture as known from areas further to the west, and there seem however to be influences from Zarubintsy, and to some extent Stroked Ware, and West Baltic ceramics. Many decorated fired clay flat and globular spindlewhorls were found, these have parallels in Byelorussia (Pobol 1974: 199 fig. 68; Shadio 1985: 82–5 figs 57–60). Fragments of fired clay figurines found here resemble similar fragments from Milograd context (Melnikovskaya 1967: 125 fig. 56). An iron crook-headed pin also has analogies in Milograd contexts (ibid.: 87 fig. 37), and in the Pomeranian Culture cemetery at Drohiczyn (Węgrzynowicz 1978b: 50 fig. 2). The defended form of the site itself does not find parallels in Pomeranian Culture contexts, and maybe we
Fig. 5. Distribution of sites south of the Narew: (1) Iron Age, (2) Roman Period, (3) sites of Iron Age or Roman Period (letters mark selected investigated sites: H – Hańki, Z – Zajączki, Hr – Hryniewicze, B – Bański, P – Pilipki, L – Łady) (data from systematic fieldwalking programme (AZP) and PAE investigations).

should see here traces of Balt influence, as defended sites are an especially characteristic settlement form of these groups (Antoniewicz 1979). The 1990 – 1 excavations at Zajączki in the Narew valley (7 km to the north) produced a considerable amount of similar prehistoric pottery from a buried soil, but with no other accompanying artefacts. These (and several similar) Early Iron Age assemblages from Podlasie contain a mixture of cultural influences, and show strong affinities to cultures to the northwest and to the east as well to other material from Poland. These syncretic assemblages of cultural material seem to suggest cultures forming in a zone of influences from several directions.

LATE LA TÈNE PERIOD AND PERIOD OF ROMAN INFLUENCES

At the beginning of the 2nd century BC in Poland the Pomeranian culture begins to give way to the Przeworsk Culture. There exist many theories on the genesis of this new cultural unit, some investigators see a close relationship between the Przeworsk and Pomeranian cultures, for example in the similar general distribution of sites of both cultures. Lately however it has been demonstrated that there is a great difference in the microgeography of their settlement
(Dąbrowska 1988: 85—104), suggesting some form of break in continuity between populations using these cultures. This is visible in Podlasie, where there is a cluster of sites on the right bank of the Bug in an area apparently weakly settled in the previous period. A break is also suggested by the totally different ceramic styles (both in technology and vessel form) of these cultures. The appearance of mixed assemblages of material (Dąbrowska 1988: 99) might suggest rather the existence of enclaves of the population represented by the Pomeranian Culture rather than the creation by this population of the Przeworsk Culture.

The ethnicity of the Przeworsk Culture has been the topic of a long and lively discussion. While it was formerly thought by many Polish archaeologists (e.g. Kostrzewski 1965) that the Przeworsk Culture was proto-Slav, it now seems more likely that the opposite opinion is more likely (Todd 1975: 87—8), that the culture represents Germanic groups. Godłowski (1985: 140—3) suggests that it is in part the archaeological counterpart to the “Lugian tribal union” noted in this area by Tacitus (Germania 43), and appearing in the Migration Period as Vandals (Godłowski 1985: 147). The name of the Lugians has been seen by Łowmiański (1963: 191) as of Celtic origin, which has led to some debate about the ethnic composition of some of the groups making up the tribal union.

Podlasie was from the end of the 2nd century BC in the zone of the early stages of the Przeworsk Culture (Dąbrowska 1973: 171, 1988: 63ff., map 2). In the present state of knowledge however, it would appear that settlement at this period was not intense. Systematic fieldwalking in the Orłanka, Łoknica and Biała valleys has located a number of new sites which may be dated to the late La Tène period or the Roman Period. Some of these form very clear clusters (e.g. near Bańki, Filipki and Sobótki). On the basis of these recent investigations (Fig. 5), it seems clear that previous views about the character and intensity of settlement in Podlasie in this period will have to be altered.

To the east of this area, in the Pripet and Dnieper valleys in the forest and forest-steppe zones of Byelorussia and the Ukraine at this period the Zarubintsy Culture was developing (Kukharenko 1964). At present, its genesis is unknown. Some investigators believe that it was the result of the eastwards migration of people represented by the Pomeranian Culture, forming a new archaeological culture under various influences acting on the autochthonous population (Machinskiy 1966: 6ff.; for criticism of this theory see Bukowski 1967: 347).

The ethnicity of the users of this culture has also been the subject of discussion (Baran ed. 1986: 33—4). Some investigators have seen it as representing the Veneti of Tacitus (Germania 46) “...in the forested and hilly tract between the Peuci and Fenici...” (Godłowski 1985: 146), while others (Kozlowski ed. 1981: 229) have seen this group as representing the Bastarnae known from Greek and Roman sources. Others still have seen them as a non-Indoeuropean forest culture. Trubachev’s (1968) work on hydronyms however seems to show a correlation between the distribution of archaeological material and old Slav river names in the middle Dnieper and Polesie, which suggests the possibility that the Zarubintsy Culture represents the extent of the proto-Slavs or their ancestors. About the end of the 1st century AD, classic Zarubintsy assemblages start to
disappear and mutate into the Late (Post-) Zarubintsy (Kiev) Culture, which is still poorly-understood (Maksimov 1982).

Until now, Podlasie has formed a "blank-spot" on maps of the archaeological cultures of this period. Previous work placed the western boundary of the early phase of the Zarubintsy Culture on the upper course of the river Bug, and it seemed that sites of the late La Tène phase of the Przeworsk Culture did not cross north beyond the river Nurzec between the Bug and Narew (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Early Roman Period: (1) northern boundary of Przeworsk Culture, (2) approximate eastern boundary of early phase of Wielbark Culture, (3) West Bált Culture, (4) western extent of Stroked Ware Culture, (5) western extent of Zarubintsy Culture (compiled according to Godłowski 1985: map 4; Dąbrowska 1989; Wołągiewicz 1981: fig. 3; Okulicz 1933; Pobol 1983: map 2; Schadrio 1985: fig. 62).

Recent discoveries at Hački and Bańki have shown however that in the Late La Tène Period there was a group of sites in Podlasie with ceramics showing some features similar to those taken as typical of the Polesie group of the Zarubintsy Culture (such as crescent shaped applied strip "handles" and grooved
rims), but in these groups there are also traces of strong influence from the Przeworsk Culture, such as "Graphite Ware" dishes with strongly faceted rims, and roughening of the surface of vessels. One may see the Hački material as proof of a boundary to the Przeworsk culture itself on the line of the Nurzec, though only by accepting the possibility that certain of its ceramic attributes penetrated further east. Perhaps at Hački, Bańki and related sites, we are dealing with a group representing a zone of the mixing of Przeworsk and Zarubintsy influences. Some Pomeranian Culture ceramic traits are also detectable. Perhaps here it may be possible to define a local cultural unit similar to the Czerniczyn group (in the Lublin area) representing a mixture of Pomeranian, Przeworsk, Zarubintsy and perhaps Jastorf cultural attributes (Czopek 1985:385–88; Dąbrowska 1988:197–200; Gajewski and Gurba 1976). It should be noted that the published groups of Czerniczyn type (Liana and Piętka Dąbrowska 1962:168 pl.30; Czopek 1985:386 fig. 4) are very similar to the material discussed here.

The Przeworsk Culture in the Early Roman Period has a somewhat different distribution, as sites of this culture extend further to the east. On three investigated sites in Podlasie there were clear traces of activity related to this culture. These are the cemeteries at Łady, Hryniewicze Wielkie (Szmit 1922; Dąbrowska 1973:200), and Zawyki (D. Jaskanis 1961). The cemeteries at Łady and Zawyki contained no traces of "eastern" influences, but at Hryniewicze (2 km east of Hački), alongside objects characteristic of Przeworsk assemblages (such as "eye" fibulae and bucket-shaped pendants), there were also materials characteristic of the late phase of the Zarubintsy Culture such as specific fibula types, chains, and lunulate pendants (Maksimov 1982:7ff.; Kukharenko 1964:58). It seems therefore that we see here the same situation as at the site at Hački a hundred years earlier. Several sites producing Przeworsk Culture material of this period have been found in systematic fieldwalking in the Orlanka area, as have sites producing possible Zarubintsy Culture ceramics.

The cultural situation in central Podlasie in this period may be interpreted in four ways; It is possible that in the Late La Tene and Early Roman Periods, there was in this area a distinct culture which contained elements of the contemporaneous Przeworsk and Zarubintsy (and post-Zarubintsy) Cultures. Perhaps in this area there was Przeworsk Culture settlement, absorbing elements of the adjacent Zarubintsy Culture. Alternatively, it is possible that in this area there was Zarubintsy Culture settlement, which had absorbed elements of the adjacent Przeworsk Culture. Finally, perhaps the boundary zone between these two cultures ran through the area and the mixed character of the archaeological material is the result of strong intercultural contacts. Each of these hypotheses contains the argument of well-developed and intensive contacts between (and influences on) adjacent populations represented by the archaeological cultures. This possibility has until now been rejected by previous investigators (Dąbrowska 1973). The evidence suggests that there may be a zone (perhaps about 30 km wide) in this area within which one might expect further discoveries of a syncretic culture of Przeworsk-Zarubintsy type.
About 100 AD in West Pomerania certain changes were taking place which led to the formation of a new cultural entity known as the Wielbark Culture. From the mid 2nd century AD the area of occurrence of this phenomenon spread over eastern Poland and northwest Ukraine (Godłowski and Okulicz 1981; Wołagiewicz 1981: fig. 3). It seems almost certain that this is the archaeological reflection of events associated with the expansion of the Goths and Gepids as reported by Cassiodorus and Jordanes (Strzelecky 1984: 39ff.; Wołagiewicz 1981: 100-2). The area covered by this culture in the Early and Late Roman Period (Fig. 7) stretched from the Vistula delta through Mazovia and Podlasie as far as Volynia. In conjunction with the area occupied by the Chernyakhov Culture (which partly derived from the Wielbark Culture), the territory covered seems to be too large to have been settled by a single homogeneous ethnic group. It seems more likely to represent a loose community created by the
communication links of smaller groups in cultural contact (Wołągiewicz 1981:102). The Goths and Gepids were reputedly themselves from Scandinavia, though there is no proof of this in the Wielbark phenomenon. Their influence was apparently restricted to certain culture-forming (in archaeological terms) influences leading to the formation of similar cultural traits over a large territory. Possibly the distribution of this culture was effected by the migration of part of this population to the Black Sea steppes (Strzelczyk 1984).

There are several sites of this culture known from Podlasie, which is mainly represented here by cemeteries of burial mounds with a specific stone and earth construction (J. Jaskanis 1976). Most of these cemeteries are dated to the Late Roman Period, that is from about the middle of the 3rd century. With few exceptions from central Poland, the extent of these burial mounds is restricted to the area east of the middle Vistula, of which the greatest concentration is in the zone between the Naręw and Bug (J. Jaskanis 1976: fig. 1). The genesis of this type of burial is still poorly-understood; they derive either from Pomeranian mounds with stone kerbs (as at Odry, Węsiory and Grzybnica – Wołągiewicz 1977; Kmiecinski, Blomberg and Walenta 1966), or from Jastorf burials in western Pomerania, or perhaps they were an indigenous invention. It is possible that the compact concentration of these graves in Podlasie indicates the existence of a distinct ethnic group based on an autochthonous population assimilating elements of the Wielbark Culture. The continuation of Przeworsk Culture cemeteries in the area by users of the Wielbark Culture may reflect settlement, if not population, continuity (D. Jaskanis 1961:401–16; Wołągiewicz 1981: table 1). At the same time there is evidence of an overlap period in which both cultures occur alongside each other. This is shown by certain ceramic forms and metalwork types characteristic of the Przeworsk Culture found in early Wielbark Culture contexts. Thus the site at Hryniewicze produced a copper alloy bracelet with strongly-profiled ends, being a local product of Przeworsk Culture people under the influence of the Wielbark Culture fashion of wearing bracelets (Dąbrowska 1981:122). This suggests (at this site, and perhaps over a wider territory), the existence of a contact zone between populations archaeologically represented by three cultures (Przeworsk, Wielbark and Zarubintsy).

The end of the Wielbark Culture in this area seems to have come at the end of the 4th and beginning of the 5th centuries (J. Jaskanis 1976:219ff.). At the end of the Roman Period, there is widespread evidence of the desertion of many Wielbark and Przeworsk Culture settlements and cemeteries over most of eastern and central Poland (or more strictly, there is no evidence for a continuation of use), this includes Podlasie, but these processes do not affect the West Balt territories. One of the most likely explanations of the archaeological phenomenon seems to be the collapse of pre-existing social and economic systems under a variety of factors, which led to economic decline and the depopulation of large areas (Godłowski 1985:112–25, 153–7). It is tempting to correlate this with the appearance of the Germanic tribes on the frontiers of the Roman Empire at the same time.
A group of copper alloy objects from an inhumation at Dworaki-Pikuty near Łapy on the Narew (Okulicz 1970: fig. 9) have clear affinities in the phase E material from the West Baltic Culture (Okulicz 1973) and thus date to the period from the 5–6th centuries. The meaning of these items in Podlasie is unclear, and perhaps indicate some form of Baltic penetration of the area after the collapse of Wielbark settlement.

THE EARLY PHASES OF THE EARLY MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The period between the middle of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th century is for most of Poland a particularly mysterious phase. The archaeological sources available to us seem to suggest a break in the settlement record, or at least a marked weakening of its intensity. The cultural formation subsequent to the collapse of the Late Roman Wielbark and Przeworsk Cultures is the so-called “Prague Culture”, the oldest phases of which appear in Poland probably no earlier than the middle of the 6th century. The settlement hiatus, together with the complete contrast in the archaeologically visible elements of culture appearing at the beginning of the Early Medieval Period, may be interpreted either as a result of a fundamental socioeconomic changes, or as the result of an ethnic change (Kobyliński 1989). Recent investigations seem to demonstrate that the “Prague Culture” in Poland is a reflection of part of the the flow of Slavs (known to the Byzantine chronicle Jordanes as “Sclavenoi”) into Central Europe from the east and southeast; the earliest phase of this culture in Poland appears to occur mainly in the south of Poland, reflecting the gradual settlement of the area by users of this culture (Parczewski 1991).

A conclusive solution to the problems raised by this material is hampered by the fact that the earliest phase sites produce few finds apart from sherds of pottery, mainly plain baggy jars of simple form. The dating of this pottery is based on several predetermined concepts on the general direction of the development of Slav potting technology. If we accept for example the theory of the survival of the use of the potter’s wheel from the Roman Period, our views of the problems of the process of settlement and culture will be completely different than if we accept the view that the oldest groups of ceramics are those which contain only totally hand-made vessels.

In Podlasie the beginnings of the Early Medieval Period are extremely mysterious, there are only a few sites from the area which seem to date to this phase, most of them from the Bug valley near Drohiczyn. Groups of totally handmade pottery have come from the settlement at Drohiczn-Sowa (Musianowicz 1966) and the stronghold at Haćki. The pottery from Drohiczyn and the other nearby sites dating from the 6th to mid 8th century show affinities with East Slav material, this suggests (Miśkiewiczowa 1981: 84) a link between the Slav settlement in this area and the westwards migration of the Dulebi tribe from Volhynia and Polesie, where they are noted by the Russian Chronicles. Tyszkiwicz (1974: 84) has suggested that possibly this group of sites may be linked with the
tribe of "Busane" mentioned by the Bavarian Geographer, but Hermann (1988: 166) places this tribe on the southern Bug, and a location near Drohiczyn would hardly coincide with the 231 strongholds ("civitates") reportedly possessed by this group.

The site at Haćki is situated north of this cluster of sites, and recent excavations on the hilltop have produced a large assemblage of handmade ceramics, many ornaments of copper alloy, silver and gold, as well as metalworking debris. These finds (especially bracelets, buckles, and belt-ends, chains and pendants) show analogies from a wide territorial area. There are links with material from the south, from the Danubian area (including from early Avar cemeteries) and also from the forest zone cultures to the east (the Kolochin-Tushemla-Akatovo-Bantserovshchina culture circle) and from the north (West Balts). The pottery from Haćki cannot be regarded as a classic Prague Culture assemblage, though its character is undoubtedly Slav and from the very beginning of the Early Medieval period.

Generally, the Haćki site and rich assemblage of material can be closely compared with the material from Szeligi, Plock province (Szymański 1967), and also with the material from Zimno in Volhynia (Aulich 1972). This phenomenon is difficult to understand, especially since the systematic fieldwalking in the area demonstrates that the site at Haćki is an isolated settlement in the microregion, and the finds from the site itself have analogies from such a wide area.

Many explanations are possible, one of these is to suppose that the ethnogenesis of the Slavs for the whole area of Poland is not as simple as has usually been assumed (e.g. Parczewski 1991). One can understand the phenomenon represented by the site at Haćki as evidence that in Podlasie Slav culture did not develop as the result of the influences from the area of the Prague Culture to the south, but also from the area covered by the so-called Tushemla-Kolochin groups. This would therefore suggest the appearance in Poland of two different waves of westward advance of the Slavs (Godlowski 1983). The specific nature of the finds assemblage from Haćki and the wide range of its affinities can be explained as the expression of the formation of a specific syncretic culture, linking traits of the autochthonous population (who may at the end of the Roman Period have had a mixed Baltic-Slav-German ethnicity) with influences from the Slav populations moving from the east. The present evidence seems to suggest that the autochthonous population did not survive in Podlasie longer than the mid 5th century, and the existence here after this of a deserted wilderness. If we assume this to be true, one can treat the material from Haćki as a result of the meeting in Podlasie at the beginning of the Early Medieval period of two population groups, Slavs from the east or south, and Balts from the north. The isolation of the phenomenon of Haćki may show that the existence of such a syncretic culture was short-lived, and of limited territorial extent. Further investigations may however alter our picture of this problem, as well as the genesis of the Early Medieval culture of the whole zone lying beyond the extent of the Prague Culture.
LATER PHASES OF THE EARLY MEDIEVAL PERIOD

In about the mid 8th century in much of present Poland, the earlier undifferentiated Early Slav material develops into new cultural forms. The “post-Prague” material here has no agreed name, Leciejewicz (1989: fig. 4) refers to it as the “Russen-Chodlik” zone. It has no ethnic indicators as such at this period, though from the 10th century appear e.g. S-terminal headband ornaments (Musianowicz 1949: 132–40), considered characteristic of West Slav female dress styles. The Luka Rajkovetska Culture (8th–9th century) east of the Bug and south of the Pripet (Sedov 1982: 90–4; Baran ed. 1990: 260 fig. 52) is generally taken as representing the East Slavs, though it is not clear when they became differentiated linguistically from West Slavs (Hensel, this volume). Our conception of the distribution of this ceramic style (Fig. 8) is however conditioned by the modern political frontier; this culture is seen (e.g. Baran ed. 1990: fig. 52) as extending precisely up to, but not beyond the modern frontier (Bug valley), but then comparison of pottery from from both sides of the river suggests it does not differ very much. Pottery from Rochan, Siedlce province for example is closer to Luka Rajkovetska style than to the Chodlik material (Musianowicz 1960: 228 tab. VII: 10–6). It seems that in the past the Bug may not have formed as clear a frontier as some modern scholars imagine, and was surely as much a zone of communication as a frontier.

In the Early Medieval Period, the southern boundary of the “Baltic” ethnic group is difficult to define precisely. There is no evidence of Balts in the Narew area before the 13th century, and Balt hydronyms in the area probably are all late (Tyszkiewicz 1975: 117). The centre of the Jatvingian (Sudovian) tribal confederation seems likely to have been in present Suwałki province (Okulicz 1973) and probably did not extend south of the Biebrza. Attempts to locate their territory in Podlasie (e.g. Sedov 1982: map 38) are based on a mistake made by the 16th century Polish historian Długosz, who placed their centre at Drohiczyn. The principal form of Early Medieval cultural contact between Balts and Slavs seems to have been through conflict, the West Balts mounted a series of raids on their southern and eastern neighbours. These led to frontier defences and reprisal raids, and eventually in 1230 to prince Conrad of Mazovia’s decision to call in the Teutonic Knights to destroy them. It seems likely that the area between the Balts and Slavs was for a large part of the Early Medieval Period sparsely-inhabited forest. BALT groups may have settled south of this forest, but archaeological evidence of this is difficult to detect, since by this time the Balts were for some reason using ceramics and material objects largely identical to those of the Slavs to the south (Antoniiewicz and Okulicz 1958).

The sparsely-inhabited and marshy Priet valley seems to have formed an ethnic frontier between early (East) Slavs and East Balts. South of the river in this period, early (6th–8th cents) Slav strongholds are rare and are mainly found in the area of the Priet, on the borders of Slav lands with the Balts (Khotomel, Khilitchse, Babka). If we regard these sites as fortified strongholds, we may see this as signs of some form of ethnic stress or competition along the west side
of this frontier zone. The process of Slav settlement of the region north of the Pripet was largely complete before the late 10th century when these areas became tributary to the Kievan state. The details of the mechanism of the replacement of a “Baltic/forest zone” ethnos with a “Slav” one north of the Pripet are still unclear (Szymański 1973:43). Over a large part of the area the East Balt dialects disappeared, and only the Baltic hydronyms remain in the area (Toporov and Trubachev 1962). Podlasie was on the fringe of these processes, and forms a zone between the West Slavs, the Balts and the East Slavs north of the Pripet.

Fig. 8. Early Medieval Period (8th – 12/13th centuries): (1) extent of Łuka Rajkovetska ceramic style, (2) West Balt tribal groups, (3) generalised southern extent of East Balt groups (later, Lithuanians), (4) core area of the Duchy of Mazovia around Plock, (5) western extent of the Dregoviche, (6) northeastern extent of the Volhynians, (7) extent of stone-kerbed graves, (8) extent of concentrations of “East Slav” burial mounds, (9) extent of Upper Niemen complex of sites (compiled according to Baran ed. 1989:fig. 52; Okulicz 1973, 1978; Sedov 1982:map 15; Rauhut 1973; Zoll-Adamikova 1975, 1979; Zvergo 1989; Kolchin 1985:fig. 1, maps 17–9; Miśkiewiczowa 1982:map 8 and other sources, generalised by the authors).
The East Slav “tribes” should perhaps rather be regarded as tribal unions, as they contain several clear clusters of sites (Sedov 1982: maps 13, 15–6), separated by areas which in the present state of knowledge appear empty. Archaeologically, the territories of these tribal unions are mapped mainly on the evidence of specific types of funerary monument and details of female personal ornament. In some cases in the north the “Slav” assemblages contain female ornaments similar to Baltic or Finnish types (Sedov 1982: tab. 58, 60) which suggests that these groups formed on an autochthonous substrate.

East of Podlasie lived the Dregoviche (Fig. 8), who expanded north of the Priepet in the 9th and 10th centuries (Sedov 1982: 113–22). The Dregoviche buried their dead singly under burial mounds of several types; some of them have internal burnt wooden structures suggesting mortuary houses, and some have ritual fireplaces in the barrow. Inhumations also occur in 11th century burial mounds. The Dregoviche had a specific style of female personal ornaments, including two forms of headband temple-rings (with “raspberry”-shaped globular filigree ornaments and one and a half-turn wire rings; Sedov 1982: 97–plate). Their distribution forms clusters at the tribal boundaries, especially in the southeast (ibid.: maps 15–6). To the south of the Dregoviche were the extensive Priepet marshes, beyond which from the 8th century were the Volhynian tribe (Sedov 1982: map 10).

Podlasie has many Early Medieval burial mounds, unlike much of the rest of Poland (Zoll-Adamikowa 1975). They generally contain layers of stones and burnt material, among which may occur cremated bone and a few sherds, though few other finds. In most cases the burial was clearly placed on the outer surface of the mound. The rite seems to have begun in the 8th century and continued to the 10th or 11th, but ends by the 12th century. The pottery from these mounds (Zoll Adamikowa 1975: fig. 7–9) is not very informative, a vessel from Ceecele however (ibid.: fig. 7g) has similarities to ceramics of the Romny-Borshevo type of the upper Dnieper (Zoll Adamikowa 1975: 65–6).

Usually these burial mounds are seen as evidence of the settlement of the area by East Slavs (though not necessarily Dregoviche), but the situation is complicated by the use of the rite of mound burial by the Balts and also in some areas of West Slav territory (Zoll Adamikowa 1975, 1979). Similar burial mounds come from several clusters in the Niemen basin (Zverugo 1989: 30–37 figs 1, 11–2). The distribution of these small discrete groups of burial mounds (Fig. 8) shows that they occur in a zone between other larger “tribal” groups of settlement. Perhaps the inhabitants of these smaller “inter-tribal” zones used a particular burial rite (among other things) to express their ethnic identity.

In the 11th century, the ethnic separateness of the East Slavs in the Kievan state becomes more apparent through the archaeological material, and at this time a number of specifically “Russian” features appear in the East Slav material culture (some of them are the results of acculturisation of steppe culture elements). At about this period, Kievan Rus power apparently extended into the area of Podlasie, and the upper Narew and the upper Niemen valleys formed part of the western territories of Kievan Rus (Kolchin 1985: tab. 18–20). This led to
a number of changes in the area, not only of a politico-economic nature. Resettle-
ment (or migration) of the Dregoviche into newly-colonised regions and internal
wars in the 11th–12th centuries probably led to demographic thinning of the
population, and they disappear as an ethnonym from chronicles after 1149.

The semi-independend principedom of Mazovia, centred to the west on
the Vistula valley near Plock (Fig. 8), did not begin its political and economic
growth until the beginning of the 11th century. The eastern areas (including
Podlasie) were for a long time a backwoods in more sense than one; much
of the area was covered in dense ancient forest until the Later Middle Ages.
Mazovia had been annexed by the Piast dynasty from Great Poland between
the 960s and 980s. According to the document “Dagome Iudex” (Hensel
1967:90–1), the frontiers of Poland in the 990s extended in the northeast
to the “Pruze and Russe”. In Gallus Anonymous (I.7 and I.10) the frontier
between early 11th century Poland and Kievian Russia in the south was the
Bug. We have no idea where the northern part of the “frontier” actually ran,
if indeed there was such a thing, perhaps we should be thinking more of a very
diffuse “frontier zone”. There was probably little feeling of ethnic affinities
to the state in these frontier zones, simply a political obligation to the local
seat of power, whether it itself was subject to Polish or Russian dominance
was perhaps irrelevant to the tiller of the soil. This challenges our modern
concept of political and ethnic frontiers when applied to the past.

There seems to have been active Mazovian expansion into the area to the
northeast along the Narew, accompanied in 1009 by the mission of Bruno of
Querfurt (who was martyred while preaching in this frontier zone). While
some Polish historians tend to extend the pre-11th century Mazovians as far to
the northeast as the modern frontier (e.g. Tyszkiwicz 1975:110 – map),
evidence for an early West Slav (still less “Mazovian”) presence in this area is
debatable.

The area ruled by the independent Mazovian prince Maslaw (1034/7–1047)
was probably centred around Plock, and the eastern areas of modern Mazovia
and Podlasie possibly owed him only nominal allegiance, if at all. The area around
Drohiczn seems to have been lost to Kiev Rus about 1041–2, when Drohiczn
first appears in the Russian chronicles. Kazimierz I of Poland united with Jaroslav
of Kiev to crush the Mazovians, finally killing Maslaw in battle in 1047. As a result
of the aid given to the Polish king, Jaroslav of Kiev was allowed by the late 1090s
to join Podlasie to his state, which was at this period expanding north and west.
The area then seems to have been settled by East Slavs (though other East Slavs
were almost certainly there earlier), it would seem however improbable that any
other previously-existing population was expelled from the area.

In addition to annexing the middle Bug valley, as part of the same action,
the Kievian state seems to have deliberately settled the Niemen valley (formerly
occupied by East Balts) with Slavs. Probably the aim was to control trade routes
to the Baltic. North of the Narew in Podlasie in the region of modern Sokółka
is a small cluster of strongholds, which is part of a larger group of sites in the
most of these sites (including Volkovysk, Novogrodek, Indura and Iżjaslavl) are on the east of the modern frontier. East Slav settlement had begun in this area in about the 10th century (Tyszkiewicz 1975: 115; Zverugo 1989: 137; Kolchin 1985: tab. 17), but the rate of the changes taking place in the Niemen valley after the early 11th century can only be explained in terms of intensive Slav settlement, perhaps both spontaneous and state controlled, which brought about permanent cultural transformation here (Tyszkiewicz 1975: 121; Zverugo 1989: 62 ff.). The finds give some clues to the mixed ethnicity of the colonists; some items are of Dregoviche type, while some of the pottery has parallels in material from Volhynia. The cemeteries between Vilnius and Minsk are of varied rites, there is a cluster of burial mounds cemeteries in the Volkovysk – Novogrodek region which are like those in Podlasie.

In this and later periods, primarily in the 11th and 12th centuries, there is some evidence of Mazovian colonisation of Podlasie (Musianowicz 1960; Rauhut 1973; Miśkiewiczowa 1981) which allows us to consider the relationships between the Mazovians and the East Slav populations. The situation is complicated by the possibility of an earlier phase of “Mazovian” settlement of the area at the end of the previous century. Two types of field monument in particular are predominant in these discussions, the earthwork strongholds and the cemeteries.

Podlasie and adjacent Mazovia have relatively few strongholds compared with other areas of Poland (Antoniewicz and Wartolowska 1964; Miśkiewiczowa 1981), most of them are 11th century and later. A particularly noticeable group is the line of major strongholds along the Narew (Stara Łomża, Ostrołęka, Tykocin, Surażą) forming a line of defence for eastern Mazovia’s frontier along the Narew against raids from Baltic tribes further to the north. Most of the “great” strongholds in Podlasie are known from written sources as central places of the western frontier zone of the Russian state (Brest, Drohiczyn, Mielnik, Surażą, Bielsk, and Brańsk). Excavations at these sites (e.g. Drohiczyn and Bielsk) produce material evidence of an East Slav presence. The majority of the smaller strongholds in Podlasie mostly lying on probable trade routes (Indura, Zbucz, Hački, Zajączki etc.) are not mentioned in the historical sources, and seem to have had a largely administrative rather than military function. The 1990–1 excavations of the small stronghold and open settlements on the bottom of the Narew valley at Zajączki showed that it probably dates to the end of the 11th century, but that the pottery from it is of types which finds closer parallels in Mazovia than Russia. The evidence is best explained in terms of Mazovian settlement in the western fringes of Medieval Russia.

Two types of burial rite which occur together in the area are often treated as a clear ethnic indicator, the burial mounds rite discussed above and a series of inhumation cemeteries with stone kerbs round each grave. The poorly-furnished burial mounds, as we have seen, may represent the East Slavs. The 11th century mounds (Zoll Adamikowa 1979: 232–3) seem to be a continuation of the earlier rite, but by the 12th century the rite changes. Some late skeleton burial mounds contain grave goods like those of the contemporary inhumation cemeteries in the area, and some mounds have later adjacent or inserted furnished
skeleton burials. In addition there are also flat cremations in cemeteries and also alongside inhumations.

Where inhumation graves have been dug into burial mounds, does this continued use of the sites imply ethnic continuity, or rather continuity of function of the site in two different populations? In other words, does the insertion of new graves in old burial mounds represent desecration or continued sanctity of the old burial site? A possible parallel is the siting of a chapel on the site of the Kuraszewo cemetery (Zoll-Adamikowa 1975: 145–51). The value of the burial mounds as ethnic indicators and for mapping the distribution of ethnic groups is reduced by uncertainty whether the whole population was buried in them, or whether the rite was restricted to part of the socially differentiated community. Also it is not clear where the population was buried after the burial mound rite ends in the course of the 12th century, but before the beginning of churchyard burial in the area.

In 11th century Mazovia, the predominant burial rite is inhumation with grave goods (ornaments and objects worn on the body with the occasional pot) in graves with stone kerbs. Similar rites appear in Podlasie in graves dated mainly to the 12th century (Rauhut 1973). These are often thought to be a typically "Mazovian" feature, on the evidence of the main area of their occurrence, although similar ones occur outside the region, and their distribution within Mazovia is uneven. The cluster of these graves in Podlasie form a separate group, not only geographically (Fig. 8), but also structurally, as they often contain a nailed wooden structure inside (Musianowicz 1960: 192). This method of burial continues into the 13th century when they seem to be replaced by churchyard burial without personal ornaments.

In several Early Medieval cemeteries in Podlasie there are cremations among the inhumation graves, and they seem to be contemporary (Musianowicz 1960: 191). Most of these cemeteries with mixed rite occur on the north side of the Bug. It seems likely that this different rite signifies a different system of beliefs or a different ethnicity, and it is interesting to note that they can occur together in the same cemetery. As noted above, in Podlasie there are a few (12th century?) cemeteries of flat cremations. Their ethnic affinities are unclear, since the rite is unknown in Russian contexts at this time (Sedov 1982), perhaps Rauhut (1973: 363) is correct in seeing in some of the features of "Mazovian" burial rite some form of Baltic influence, if not the presence of Balts themselves (Zverugo 1989: 37–42).

The grave goods in the stone-kerbed inhumations of Podlasie often consist mainly of female ornaments and dress fittings. Small S-shaped and Dregovich type half-coiled temple-rings are found, sometimes in the same grave. There are also a number of "raspberry" form temple-rings. Sometimes there are bracelets made out of twisted wires with looped end, and bracelets made of flat decorated bronze sheet (as found in many East Slav and Dregovich graves). Other finds also have East Slav affinities, such as spindlewhoris made of Volhynian (Ovruch) pink shale, and glass bead necklaces with encolpion amulets. Male graves contain a number of artefact types (axes, knives, firesteels) also bronze rings worn on the
belt as in the case of the Dregoviche. Thus the stone-kerbed graves contain many objects thought to be of Dregoviche type, and Musianowicz considers that this means that the Mazovian colonists

"...borrowed generously from the Dregoviche and absorbed elements of their culture. Only in one respect did they remain conservative, that is in using their own traditional burial rite..." (1960: 198).

It is not clear however why the reverse cannot be the case, that is that the East Slav dress styles and not the burial rite are the ethnic indicator, in which case, perhaps both are equally meaningless.

Inhumation graves of this period in Podlasie only rarely occur north of the Narew. A few examples are known from 19th century records, but are not specifically mentioned as having stone surrounds. Stone-kerbed graves occur alongside burial mounds southwest of the Bug, but more frequently on the right bank, where the number falls off to the east (where there are more burial mounds). In some areas the inhumation cemeteries and burial mounds are very close together which, if they are contemporary, may suggest peaceful co-existence (Musianowicz 1960: 197).

The densest distribution of these inhumation cemeteries is in the Bug-Nurzec interfluve (around Drohiczyn), and a less dense cluster northwards to the Narew (Bielsk, Brańsk (?) and in the western part of Podlasie). It is not possible to draw a distinct "ethnic boundary" between the burial mounds and inhumation cemeteries which would divide separate communities (Musianowicz 1960: 197). The main problem is that the details of the chronology of these phenomena are unclear, and we may be observing several quite separate phases of settlement telescoped into one map. Wiśniewski (1977: 9) suggests that in this area there was a

"...transitional Polish-Russian group, but political changes and the use by the two groups of different versions of the Christian rite did not further the process of unification and ethnic assimilation..."

In the upper Niemen area are also several concentrations of inhumations with stone surrounds (Sedov 1982: 119–22 map 16; Zverugo 1989: 37–42 fig. 1) dating from the 12–14th centuries and later. It is not clear what is the relationship between these and the Mazovian and Podlasie groups of graves, Zverugo assigns the Niemen burials to the Balts. Possibly however we should see these burials as representing the same kind of population as appear in Podlasie (be they Mazovians, or of mixed ethnicity).

The area around Drohiczyn seems to have been especially well-inhabited in the Early Medieval Period (or rather this settlement pattern takes an especially archaeologically-visible form). The central place at Drohiczyn is known from written sources as a trade, royal, military and administrative centre. Excavations in 1953–7 produced evidence of craft and trade in the late 11th century, and material culture contained many Russian elements. There was also evidence of
contact with other ethnic groups, and a number of Baltic objects (Musianowicz 1969:135–215). One find was a knife handle with a Cyrillic inscription, many other imports were also notable. The evidence suggests either a strong Russian element among the inhabitants, or any Mazovian elements had absorbed East Slav material culture (Musianowicz 1969:224). There were elements of West Slav female attire (primarily temple rings with S-terminals) which are more likely to represent individuals expressing an ethnic identity, rather than objects casually brought to the site by trade, though the latter cannot be ruled-out. We have seen there is however the possibility that in Podlasie, other West Slav women may have acquired East Slav dress styles. The site is interpreted as (among other things) a trade “factory” of Kiev or Halicz on the border of Russian territory, which did not require too strong political control of the local inhabitants (Musianowicz 1969:228).

Podlasie was invaded by the Poles on several occasions in the 11th and 12th centuries. In 1193 king Kazimierz (II) the Just took Drohicyn and the surrounding territory. Drohicyn was finally lost to the Halicz prince Danilo Romanovich (1255). The area was also heavily raided throughout the 13th century by the West Baltic Latvings and from the middle of the century and in the next by the Lithuanians, who had organised themselves into a powerful state under Gedymin (1240–70).

LATE MEDIEVAL AND MODERN TIMES

From the 14th century onwards, ethnic differentiation in Podlasie starts to take on a new dimension. The written sources illustrate the processes operating, and the processes of settlement begin to acquire clearer characteristics of a political, administrative and religious nature.

By the 14th century, most of Podlasie (except the area around Drohicyn itself) had been devastated by long-term wars between Lithuania, Russia and the Teutonic Knights. Many villages and huge areas of land between the upper Narew, Biebrza and the southern tributaries of the Niemen became almost completely deserted and overgrown by forest (Wiśniewski 1977:10–1). Even after the end of the wars, Podlasie remained a border area affected in turn by different states, and the political situation determined the nature of colonisation; thus when the area came under Mazovian rule, land was given to Polish nobility, who brought in their tenant peasants, and the towns were colonised with western settlers. The occupation of the territory between the Narew and Bug by the Duchy of Lithuania about 1400 AD led to increased settlement of the area from the north and east. In the north of Podlasie the settlers were mainly Lithuanians and Byelorussians, but south of the Narew most of the settlers were from Volhynia.

Legal factors thus played a part in these processes, such as the feudal relationships between landowner and his tenant peasants, and the granting of town charters. An additional factor determining the direction of settlement was the
ecclesiastical organisation of the new territories. While the land between the Bug and Narew belonged to both the Latin and Uniate Orthodox Dioceses of Volhynia (Luck), the territory north of the Narew belonged to the Vilnius bishopric. The newer arrivals settled near existing populations speaking the same language with similar customs, thus strengthening and not reducing the differentiation across the region. Religious differences also led to differentiation, thus Roman Catholic Mazovians did not marry Orthodox believers, nor (in a later period), Uniate Volhynians or Lithuanians. In the 15th century the most easterly Catholic parish was at Drohiczyn, while the most westerly Orthodox village church was at Hodyszewo near Brańsk, thus the overlap between these two belief systems was a zone about 30 km across. Catholic and Orthodox churches occur however beyond this region in towns with mixed populations.

There were other traditional reasons for folk movements. Often peasants escaping from heavy taxation and dues in their home villages occupied so-called "wołniźny", that is areas of waste where the new arrival was free of all dues and rent for a predetermined period. Thus for example there was migration northwards from the well-inhabited areas near the Bug. These populations (often Ukrainians) did not however penetrate the densely inhabited "Mazovian" territories west of the line Drohiczyn-Brańsk-Suraż-Tykocin, nor did they penetrate far beyond the line east of the Orlanka, beyond which was the thick Bielsk forest (Wiśniewski 1977: 11-17). While individual families did penetrate these "Mazovian" areas, they were not enough to alter the general picture presented above. The eastern boundary of Mazovian settlement running through Podlasie (Fig. 9) formed in the 15th century, the irregularities in its line were due to the Russian elements in the population around the towns at Drohiczyn, Brańsk and Suraż.

From the 16th century, Lithuanian settlement clearly lessens, and the existing Lithuanian population in the area underwent acculturation.

It is also worth recalling the social differences accompanying the ethnic differentiation of the area. Most of the peasants came from the Russian ethnic groups, most of the inhabitants of the towns and hamlets on the estates of the Polish nobility were of Polish origin.

Jews moving from overpopulated towns in the Kingdom of Poland were a relatively new element in the local population. They settled mainly in the towns, such as Bielsk. The permanent rate of inflow led to the formation of an increasingly strong element in the local (especially urban) population, marked by their own distinctive styles of culture (most of the external manifestations of which developed in Europe only in the last few centuries).

The processes outlined above gave rise to a specifically mixed ethnic situation in Podlasie. The boundaries between these ethnic groups were not sharp, partly perhaps due to a lack of major physical boundaries between them. There thus have arisen several transitional zones in which are mixed influences of different cultures and ethnoses (Fig. 9).

The first, clearest and most important of these mixed zones was the north-south contact zone between the predominantly Mazovian and the Russian
populations. Here West Slav and East Slav influences became mixed, the religious differences between the populations affected the processes taking place in this area. Besides this were several mixed zones dividing the population of northern-Ukrainian origin from Lithuanian and Byelorussian populations. This latter zone extends east-west from the Białowieża forest, along the Narew–Supraśl watershed to the Knyszyn forest (Wiśniowski 1977: 69).

An effect of the various influences on Podlasie since the Medieval period was the creation of an area within which three languages (Polish, Ukrainian, and Byelorussian) were used in day-to-day contacts (and two others, Old Church Slavonic and Latin used in ritual; Yiddish and Hebrew were also used alongside the other languages by the Jews). The Ukrainian language predominated in the southeast, the Byelorussian north of the Narew and east of the river Brzozówka: and Polish in the west (Czapliński and Ładgórski eds. 1986: map 23). This led to the creation of zones with local mixed dialects (Glinka et al. ed. 1980).

The ethnic makeup of the area defined at the end of the Medieval Period has survived in an almost unaltered form until today. The settlement processes discussed above led in modern times (16th–19th centuries) to the development of zones of mixed settlement in which the deciding ethnic differentiator was
religion. Census results of the 19th century show that in 1887 the population consisted of 40.7% Byelorussians and Ukrainians and 45% Poles (in this latter group were included all Catholics, Orthodox worshippers using the Polish language, and Orthodox peasants living in western Podlasie, so the number of Poles is probably over-represented). Jews constituted then almost 14% of the population (Wiśniewski 1977: 67). The 1931 census showed that in Bielsk itself, there were 44% Jews, and in Bielsk district as a whole 39%. As a result of the genocidal programme of the Nazi occupier in the years 1941–4, virtually the whole Jewish population in the area was completely exterminated.

The differences in culture which are visible today (or at least until recently) and which are caused by this ethnic mixture may be compared with the archaeological situations discussed above. In small towns in the area (such as Bielsk, Tykocin, Orla) Catholic churches stand alongside Orthodox ones and synagogues, in the same places the cemeteries of these three belief systems may still be seen. Villages are often more internally-unified in terms of language or religious beliefs, though neighbouring villages may differ in these respects, but their distribution does not form frontiers, but rather zones in which there are Roman Catholic and Orthodox populations living peacefully alongside each other, though in separate villages. These communities use different languages, have separate churches, different cemeteries and have differing systems of keeping Holy Days from each other. The differences are also visible in the means of building and decorating the wooden houses. Objects of everyday use have undergone some forms of unification within larger areas however, and irrespective of the cultural differentiation within the area. This is caused by the habitation of a small region alongside and in daily contact with other ethnicities, and also the acquisition of certain objects from a common source (e.g. buying pots from the same potter in a market town).

In Podlasie therefore one can still see several cultural processes occurring together, (although these traits are rapidly disappearing due to the introduction of modern technology). Firstly, we may observe the presence of a different culture, a mixed culture specific only to this region. Thus over the whole area a specific type of threshing-flail (Gajek ed. 1964–1981: maps 71–4) is in use, also the area is characterised by the use of a special type of horse harness, known as a “duha” (with a wooden U-shaped hoop over the back of the horse between the poles of a waggon). These types of horse harness have however a wider extent in Russia to the east.

The region forms a clear boundary between West and East Slav types of material culture, the boundary between which runs through the area. As examples we may cite methods of making scythe handles (ibid.: map 28) of plough cultures (ibid.: map 140), yokes for harnessing oxen (ibid.: map 229), horse harness (ibid.: maps 233 and 235). Many other examples of this could be cited (such as for example the western extent of the use of wickerwork shoes, and of the baking of cheese (fruit, or poppy-seed) – filled noodles).

The settlement and ethnic processes in Podlasie were not single events taking place in one century. They seem to have had their beginnings at the beginning
of the Early Medieval Period, and the processes intensified in the early 16th century (though in the Bialowieża forest only in the 18th century) and are continuing today. The most obvious example of such ethnic “change” is the growing self-awareness of the Ukrainians in recent years in the area.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: SOME METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

In this paper we have been discussing the difficulties of assessing the ethnicity of past communities. For most of the evidence, we have had to rely on archaeology alone. Only in the consideration of the more recent past have written sources been available to bring light on these problems. The later periods considered here are thus a useful comparison to the periods from which we have only the archaeological evidence, and have much to tell us about certain aspects not directly detectable.

Even when we have some written evidence however, there are limitations in the choice of the very general ethnonyms available to the historian or archaeologist, thus some cultural traits are believed to represent proto-“Slavs”, while others are held to represent “Balts”. We know that (even if the hypothetical identifications are correct) within these broad groups there will have been a multitude of divisions and subdivisions which we are powerless to detect and name. The ethnic affinities of even such well-understood cultures as Przeworsk and Zarubintsy however have been debated to the degree that it was questioned whether they belonged to Slavs or Germans.

Even when more detailed written sources exist, it sometimes seems that they are more of a hindrance than a help, they seldom give all the information required, thus Tacitus (Germania 43) mentions five Germanic tribes apparently on Polish territory in the Lugian tribal union, but objectively locating them on a map of contemporary settlement of the area (e.g. Godłowski 1985 : map 4) is a hopeless task.

While the ethnic interpretation of an archaeological culture remains an academic hypothesis divorced from reality, it causes few problems; many modern cultures however have their roots in the past, which cannot be separated from the present. Thus the debate on the Germanic nature of the Przeworsk Culture was given a political dimension by the Third Reich, which led to a post-War backlash in Poland which retarded the study of this important factor in the early ethnic and demographic history of this part of Europe for three decades. In the same way, perhaps the relationships between Early Medieval cultures in Podlasie has been related to the post-War political situation, and the area was seen as “Mazovian” before it was settled by “Russians” who “lived peacefully” alongside the Mazovians.

Several general problems about archaeological cultures have emerged from this discussion. The problems in Podlasie are especially acute because the area has been so poorly explored, and some of the material recovered from recent excavations is particularly difficult to assign to known archaeological cultures,
but it seems that the comparative evidence is also poor. One is struck by the fact that a great number of Central European archaeological “cultures” are in fact still only known mainly on the basis of their pottery typology and decorative schemes, coupled with the burial rite. We have too little data for many of them on which to base sound conclusions even about geographical range and the nature of the boundaries between groups, still less their economy, dress styles, social organisation, belief systems, settlement structure, and other aspects of culture which (with other factors) produced the perceived ethnicity of a group. Another feature not understood at present is the variability of these phenomena across these cultural zones and with time.

We have seen that some widespread assemblages of superficially similar groups of archaeological attributes are now seen as splitting into a number of regional groups (which may themselves show some microregional and temporal variability), the prime example is the “Lusatian Culture”. The so-called “Corded Ware Culture” is another victim of such subdivision when all that is left from a recent rethinking (Kmieciński ed. 1989:262–300) is a general European stylistic “horizon” and several local cultural groups. It seems probable that several other large scale cultural phenomena are due for further subdivision into much smaller groups when better understood (e.g. the Trzciniec–Sosnica–Komarov group of “cultures”). The ethnographic evidence from Podlasie (Pokropek 1981; see Olsen and Kobyliński, this volume) is instructive. It strongly suggests that linking a few selected traits of finds from broadly contemporary sites over large territories to form such large “cultures” may have been a theoretical mistake made in the early decades of this century in the absence of more detailed information. It seems that the most we can do at the moment is to regard some of these extensive archaeological “cultures” as broad “ceramic style zones” (e.g. Milisauskas 1978:183), and to conclude that, while they often seem to correspond to other groups of cultural phenomena, the possible relationship between these style zones and ancient ethnic differentiation is a topic for deeper consideration and study.

We have several times in this paper posed the question of the nature of boundaries between cultures. This is also more difficult to examine than first appears, when one takes into account the evidence on which these boundaries are defined. The maps which accompany this article are to be treated as illustrations rather than as tools for scientific research. During their compilation, we were made aware of the very subjective nature of the divisions drawn on them. A comparison of a series of maps of selected cultures from adjacent territories soon revealed a high degree of disagreement between the various scholars working on related material, about where to draw (and how to depict) the “boundary” of a “culture”.

Scattered settlements in the forest in Podlasie should perhaps be mapped as discrete dots, rather than a shaded areas covering the mapped area evenly, often with a clear boundary shown as a sharp break in the cartographic symbol (or worse still a solid or dashed line). Unfortunately for various technical reasons, this ideal could not be fulfilled by the maps illustrating this article. The boundary
between clusters of known sites is really more diffuse, and it must also be remembered that we are seeing the picture in totality, with no time factor; most cultures lasted several dozen generations, and in this time there could well have been considerable fluctuation of the area settled. The sites in the frontier zone may not have been actually contemporary with each other, but separated by several decades, but we are unable to separate them chronologically.

If we take into account the archaeological observability of the sites, the situation becomes more complex. Some sites have been destroyed by natural and human activity (erosion, urbanisation); others are not now visible on the surface (e.g. pottery scatters overgrown by thick forest or pasture preventing fieldwalking). A proportion are visible as ploughsoil scatters, a few of which may be examined by controlled surface collection or excavations of varying scales. Often the only material from any one site is small in quantity and of uncertain coherence as a group (e.g. small sherds from a buried soil layer or single pit groups). Often only selected sherds and finds will give a clue to cultural affinities, but as in the case of the larger groups of Iron Age pottery from Hački and Zajączki, the actual significance of these selected traits taken in isolation is unclear. In another case, not all burial mounds surviving as earthworks into the 19th century are now visible, and of these only few are excavated, the assignation of the rest to period is seldom certain. It is thus quite clear that the margin for error in determining extent, stability and the nature of ethnic boundaries on the basis of such data is potentially great.

An additional difficulty arises when the set of characteristics which define a “culture” (or rather ceramic style zone) are not consistent across the whole zone of its occurrence. Thus we have seen recent trends towards an disintegration of some “cultures” into regional groups. In these cases, distinguishing between the division (or rather transitions) between these minor subdivisions to be expected within the style zone, and the edge of an archaeological culture is a subjective process, especially when one has to take into account the small number of sites which have been adequately sampled, the chronological dimension and the possibility of shifting boundaries. The situation is similar to the concept of a “fuzzy set” in mathematics; we seem in Podlasie to be dealing with certain “fuzzy cultures” which may on further work be redefined.

The presence of a modern state frontier adjacent to Podlasie has also hindered the fuller understanding of cultural transition across the area. This modern boundary cuts across an area of unknown cultural variability, and causes great problems in the study of this phenomenon, which cannot easily be overcome simply by a few brief visits by foreign specialists. A similar situation is met in distribution maps, thus for example no single detailed map has yet been published of the Polish and Byelorussian Early Medieval burial mounds or strongholds shown together.

In nearly all the above-cited periods, we find the same situation repeated: Podlasie forms a “blank area” on existing maps of the occurrence and extent of archaeological cultures, while field investigations in the area have shown that the area produces archaeological material of unclear cultural affinities or of mixed
character, *i.e.* containing elements of different cultural groups. This phenomenon is especially visible when considering the Early Iron Age material from the recent excavations. The Iron Age pottery sequence of the area is very poorly understood, and the recovery of material of this phase in part led to the reflections which gave rise to this paper. The Iron Age evidence may thus be discussed here as a concrete illustration of the problems raised above. Various eminent specialists examined the material, and gave many different and varied opinions about its date and affinities, confirming that these assemblages seemingly possess a mixture of a variety of traits apparently belonging to various cultures, but without belonging as a whole to any of them. There are three possible reasons for the occurrence of pottery assemblages like these (and by extension, similar material from all periods in Podlasie);

1) Perhaps these sites all contain a hopeless mess of mixed pottery assemblages comprising material of several occupation phases (by the same or different cultures); it is notable that many sites in the area seem to have had long lives, or multiphase habitation (the settlement stability which this suggests is also worth nothing in the present context). Since however the same characteristics seem to repeat themselves at several sites, it is less likely that these assemblages consist only of mixed material of this nature, and such an explanation does not account for the geographical extent of these features.

2) One can perhaps see this phenomenon as proof of the existence in these areas of formerly unrecognised local groups or archaeological cultures, differing from neighbouring groups or cultures (which may be better illustrated by further work). Thus it is possible that Podlasie in later prehistory constituted a distinct pottery style zone (separate from that further west in Poland or to the east in Byelorussia). This may not have been recognised by modern archaeologists working in their own communities either side of the modern frontier, who have been categorising their material according to characteristics established for better-understood (but now recognisably variable) cultural groups further towards the centre of modern states.

3) Perhaps these sites lie at the junction of several culture zones and thus in a zone of transition between them with an interesting ethnic and cultural mixture. Perhaps we should therefore reconsider our existing concepts about the existence of clear frontiers between populations having different material culture, and should perhaps think more in terms of mixed zones of settlement, certainly at the edges of zones of similar material culture, if not within these zones themselves. Perhaps we should consider the forms which such contact may have taken. In the case of pot decoration, apart from possibilities of ceramic trade, they may be nothing more meaningful than for example pots made by women taken by men of one tribe from another tribe, either as wives or captives. On the other hand, the mechanisms may be more complex and reflect our poor understanding of (or inability to describe) the cultural processes taking place.

In the case of the third option, we should consider whether the previously-known extent of existing archaeological cultures should be extended into Podlasie
to take account of the new material. The problem is not difficult when (as in the case of Hački) one culture seems well-represented and is not far from a known cluster of sites of that culture, but then is Hački a “classic” Pomeranian Culture site? On Fig. 4 we have drawn the northeast boundary of this culture according to the new evidence. The problem becomes more acute when dealing with a few sherds of “strokéd” pottery found at Hački or Zajączk; should the westernmost extent of the known boundary of the known boundary of the “Strokéd Ware Culture” (which Pobol 1983 shows very close to the Polish border) be extended to take account of this new pottery? When does a site which has produced a few sherds of pottery with a wiped surface finish become “a site of the Strokéd Ware Culture”, and what does this mean in cultural and ethnic terms? The choice between these options is not dependent only on the “objective” evidence of facts. To a greater extent it is conditioned by one’s conception of the significance of cultural phenomena, in particular of ethnicity and the formation of the ethno-cultural boundaries.

Archaeologists are accustomed to accept unquestioningly that the extent of an archaeological culture represents a tribal or ethnic territory, and are accustomed to treat an archaeological culture as a closed entity with clearly defined boundaries, representing a “zone of mutual fear” between groups hostile to one another. Thus archaeologists try to assign groups of material they recovered to well-known and well-described taxonomic units, usually disregarding the possibility of “mixed” or “fuzzy” groups.

The primary lesson which the archaeological examination of Podlasie teaches us is perhaps to re-examine our views on the character of the boundaries between ethnic and cultural groups in the past, as well as the relationship between material culture and feelings of ethnic differentiation. What kind of ethno-cultural phenomenon lies behind the archaeologically-observable “mixed” and “fuzzy” groups? Perhaps we are dealing with a reflection of settlement of the same restricted area (or even the same site) by groups of different ethnicity. Alternatively, perhaps the group inhabiting this area was ethnically homogeneous, and the syncretic nature of their cultural material is a result of lively contacts in the ethnic contact zone. Such a concept might however require the rejection of the view that the intensity of contacts within an ethnic group is greater than the intensity of contacts with other groups, and would require a critical review of the problems of the existence of divisions between ethnic groups in the past. Acceptance of such a concept would also require the re-examination of the view that it is precisely in the contact zone that we should observe an especial intensification of such features of material culture which might form ethnic idioms or correlates, according to which feelings of ethnic links should be aroused when in contact with outsiders (Olsen and Kobyliński, this volume).

At the same time, in the case of archaeological cultures, we generally see the opposite to the above model. Groups of artefacts in the “classic” form of a given culture often occur in the central area of its territorial extent, while towards the edges the cultures become more “fuzzy”. In this case therefore, perhaps the original manifestation of ethnicity was in spheres other than material culture. The
features which survive to be recognised by a modern archaeologist (*e.g.* pottery decorative styles) may have had no precise meaning to the "living" culture, to whom other features were ethnic indicators. Thus the pots bought in Bielsk market in post-Medievel Podlasie are not ethnic indicators, but the differences in religion and language are. The implications of such a model are far-reaching; it would require rejecting the hypothesis that it is possible to apply ethnic labels to past communities represented only by groups of posthers.

We can interpret the archaeological evidence two ways, we may either envisage the simultaneous co-existence directly alongside each other of human communities of differing ethnicity, or alternatively the settlement of groups of homogeneous ethnicity across the area, but open to acceptance of cultural innovation by contact with external groups. Whichever of the explanations of the genesis of the "mixed" or "fuzzy" groups of Podlasie might be accepted, our reflections on the phenomenon of ethnicity will be the same. The area has in the past (as indeed still at the present) been crossed by numerous cultural boundaries, both cultural and (presumably) linguistic. Despite this, it seems from the archaeological evidence that the clear expression and manifestation of ethnic affinity was not always a feature necessary to the organisation of inter-group contacts, since it seems that ethnic awareness did not constitute a barrier to these groups living alongside one another and borrowing from one another of material culture styles. We see this clearly for example in the grave furniture of Early Medieval Period inhumation graves, as well as the present situation.

It is not easy to see at present why this should be the case. Was the reason a low level of population in Podlasie, coupled with a sufficiently high level of productivity of the natural environment, which did not lead to the necessity of conflict and competition? Maybe the isolation of small groups in inaccessible forest-clearing settlements prevented the organisation of inter-group tribal bands and integration into larger scale political structures? We are not able at the present to answer these questions.

In any case, recent archaeological investigations in Podlasie have shown that one possible form of inter-group contact in Antiquity might have been the inter-mixing of cultural influences, and thus not only the formation of clear cultural boundaries representing "zones of mutual fear". It appears that this model of "fuzzy cultures" as a model of the cultural relationships in this zone of cultural contact should be more widely applied in the interpretation of archaeological materials from other areas of Europe as an alternative to the model of clear ethno-cultural frontiers.

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