

## Editorial

This volume is the fourth one in the new series of “*Archaeologia Polona*” offering monographical collections of articles. After discussions on “Ethnicity” (vol. 29), “Pottery” (vol. 30) and “Archaeometry” (vol. 31) the current volume comes with the panoramic view of the early towns formation processes within the wide zone of great European plains.

This zone of temperate climate stretches from Ireland in the West to Russia in the East. With exception of England most of this area was behind the direct influence of the Roman Empire and native urban processes started there during the last quarter of the first millennium AD. Of course, despite these very general topographical, climatical and historical similarities, specific regions within this zone had their specific histories determined by local factors. Therefore, the origins of towns had, also, their local characteristics.

However, these processes of urbanization were subject to many generalizations aimed at presenting both the uniform history of European non-Roman towns, and regional characteristics. This discussion was dominated by historians who, despite different interpretations, generally accepted evolutionary scenario stressing basic continuity of the process in question.

Finding no serious counterpart, such idea deeply rooted in the positivistic paradigm led to the stagnation that have been observed for some years. One of the reasons is the very limited number of written sources. Here archaeology comes with an offer of vast amount of new data resulting from extensive urban excavations. Archaeological information often sheds new light on the stage where the problem of the origins of towns has been discussed.

I think that a chance for explaining the difficult problem of urbanization lays in combining various types of data. Last years many archaeologists aimed at performing such complex analyses. This volume presents only some examples of this wave of new interpretations. However, it shows that in many countries disagreement with old concepts arose. Particular histories presented here are different but there are clear common traits which I leave for the reader to find out.

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Polish archaeology has long tradition of organizing complex interdisciplinary research teams studying early towns. Shortly after the World War II enormous

campaign of excavating the towns destroyed during the war started here. Extensive trenches, cooperation of archaeologists, historians and ethnographers, interpretations aimed at explaining in terms of social structure of urban settlements are all important elements of this tradition. These experiences were used later in organizing and developing urban archaeology in many other countries.

Today there is no one definite centre that could be accepted as an unquestioned leader. One may point to some more and less advanced regions but generally modern urban archaeology observes similar trends of development. The most obvious differences are due to the economic situation of various countries but theoretical positions seem to be similar within the younger generation of those studying the origins of towns.

*Przemysław Urbańczyk*

This volume has been prepared for two years and many scholars were asked for cooperation. Unfortunately, but at the same time typically, many of them were too busy to contribute in such short term.

One of these obvious contributors who responded positively was Erik Schia — head of the excavation group in Oslo (*Riksantikvarens utgravningskontor for Oslo*), Norway. PU met him for the last time in July 1993 in Oslo when they agreeded the outline of his contribution. Three months later he suddenly died.

Our friendship with Erik was long. First time PU met him in September 1974 in Oslo, and ZK in 1984. Later we excavated with him several times in Norway and we met at various conferences throughout Europe. He also visited several times Poland. He was always in very optimistic mood, full of energy and of new ideas. His plans for the future were enormous. His sudden death was a shock.

We found it obvious to dedicate this volume to our friend Erik Schia and all of the contributors accepted this idea. It is just a symbolic reflection of our sorrow and a tribute to his achievements.

*Przemysław Urbańczyk and Zbigniew Kobyliński*