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Chapter 1. Circumstances of the discovery and the search for the deposition context of the ornamented antler artefact

Abstract: The stray find of an ornamented antler object recovered at Powalice in 2003 in an arable field improved with lake chalk quarried at the “Rusinowo” quarry (Świdwin commune, Świdwin County, West Pomeranian Voivodeship) was presented to the National Museum in Szczecin in 2004. An action taken by researchers to confirm the original place of deposition of this find recovered from a secondary deposit and to reconstruct its environmental and cultural context. The antler artefact from Rusinowo is the first piece of portable art referred to the symbolic culture of forager communities in Pomerania to have its context of deposition studied in so much detail. Parallel to these activities the find was also subjected to physical chemistry, earth science, technological and experimental archaeology analyses designed to recover a possibly complete body of data about its history prior to its discovery. Thanks to its stable preservation status, lack of alteration during the modern age and the decision taken by the Museum to delay conservation treatment, at the time of laboratory studies the antler still retained a residue of chalk on its surface. The field prospection, interviews and the review of the archival documentation from the chalk quarry brought in no definitive conclusions but taken together with the results of geological sampling and palynology studies this input corroborated and complemented the data from the analysis of the artefact, shedding new light on the symbolic culture of Late Palaeolithic and early Mesolithic communities of Central Europe
Keywords: stray find, finders, provenance, context of deposition, specialist analyses

Like many portable art artefacts representing the symbolic culture of prehistoric communities, the antler artefact from Rusinowo was a stray find. It owes its survival and addition to the museum collection, as well as its availability for scientific research, to some members of the public who not only proved their powers of observation but also took interest in its unusual form, ornament and raw material, and took pains to learn more about its nature of an archaeological object and ancient history.

The antler artefact was brought for the first time to the National Museum in Szczecin and shown to archaeologists in April 2004. Paweł Kula had volunteered to help its finder, and the interest members of the village community to establish dating and the value of this perplexing object. It remained in the Museum for a few hours, enough to be documented in a drawing (Fig. 1) and photographed by Paweł Kula, then a student of the Academy of Fine

Arts (today the University of Arts in Poznań) (Fig. 2). Paweł Kula also reported on the circumstances of the discovery of the artefact. More information was given at a later date by Gerard Kula, a resident of Szczecin who had spent some time at Powalice and brought the artefact to back the National Museum in Szczecin in July 2004 presenting it to its collections on the behalf of the object’s finder.

The artefact had been discovered in 2003 by Piotr Paczkowski, a resident of Powalice, in a pile of chalk when it was being cleaned after a season’s storage preparatory to liming the recently harvested field found between the villages of Międzyrzecze and Powalice (Fig. 3). The find remained for a few months in the home of its finder, who showed it to his neighbours as a curiosity recovered near to their village. They were intrigued by the unusual shape and ornament of the object. In the spring of 2004, Gerard Kula came to Powalice and, considered

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Fig. 1. Rusinowo. The ornmented elk antler find documented in drawing at the time of Paweł Kula's first visit to the National Museum in Szczecin in April 2004. (Drawing A. Ryś)



Fig. 2. Rusinowo. The ornmented elk antler find photographed by Paweł Kula in April 2004 during his visit to the National Museum in Szczecin



Fig. 3. A reconnaissance of the site of the discovery of the artefact found resting on a secondary deposit in the vicinity of the village of Powallice in 2011. From the right: Gerard Kula, Paweł Kula, Tomasz Płonka. (Photo K. Kowalski)

something of an authority in the village, was approached by P. Paczkowski and asked to help to unravel the mystery of this extraordinary find. Suspecting that this could be a unique and valuable archaeological object Gerard Kula soon got in touch with his son, and through him, with the National Museum in Szczecin. He also took some pains to find out more about the circumstances of its discovery. He established that the natural calcium-rich soil conditioner was brought to the area a few years earlier and stored in a prism in the field, from a deposit of calcareous lake sediments quarried in the valley of the Mołstowa river – the right-bank tributary of the Rega – near to the village of Rusinowo. He confirmed moreover that the chalk quarry was no longer in operation and it had been flooded and turned into an artificial lake. According to the most recent administrative divisions, the conjectured site of the discovery of the object – the “Rusinowo” chalk mine – lies within the village of Berkanowo. However, we have kept the name “Rusinowo” because the site of the discovery is only approximate (and the boundary between the villages Berkanowo and Rusinowo runs to the south of the present-day mine) and the artefact itself has entered the literature as a find from Rusinowo.

Thus, at the outset of the study of the antler find added by the National Museum in Szczecin to its collections it was known that it had been discovered in 2003 on a secondary deposit, in a fully modern context. Nothing was done subsequently to alter the antler artefact in any way, neither had it been cleaned with any energy – as confirmed by the residue of chalk in the grooves of the ornament and in the cavities of the antler spongiosa, its species identified provisionally by Jerzy Stępień, the specialist in zoology, from the photograph as elk. The preservation status of the object was evaluated by Senior Conservator Anna Borowiec from the Department of Conservation of the Museum in Szczecin as sufficiently good and stable, which made it possible to delay conservation treatment until the time of completion of specialist analyses. These considerations, coupled with the relatively brief time interval between the discovery of the artefact, taken out of its original chalk deposit, and the time it passed into the hands of archaeologists, all made it possible to carry out the specialist analyses and comparative studies. The multidisciplinary research was coordinated by the staff of the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Wrocław and of the Department of Archaeology of the National Museum in Szczecin. Its aim was



Fig. 4. The first prospection of the chalk quarry in 2005. (Photo K. Kowalski)

confirming the provenance of the artefact and investigating the geology and natural environment of the site of its original deposition, and if possible, identifying its archaeological context, and moreover to submit the artefact itself to physical chemistry, earth science, technological and experimental archaeology analyses to obtain as much information as possible about its history up to the time of its discovery (from the sourcing of the antler, its circulation as a cultural object, through to its exposure postdepositional processes), and to some extent, also to confirm its authenticity. The latter, while not actually suspect, given the circumstances of the artefact's discovery had to be verified, both as to its dating, raw material and marks of working.

Steps taken to obtain additional data about the site of the discovery started with a reconnaissance made in 2005 in the vicinity of the chalk deposit at Rusinowo and continued over the years that followed (Fig. 4). The chalk quarry was no longer in operation, and according to the feedback from its owner, it was no longer possible to identify the exact, original location of the artefact within the part of the deposit exploited in 1998–2004. This was largely prevented by the exploitation method that had been used and the required treatment of the quarried material

by dumping it to dry prior to its delivery to buyers (cf. Nowak, Szynekiewicz 2003, 9). Some relevant information was found in a report from a specialist study made of the geotechnical phenomena and processes observed within the working of the quarry at Rusinowo (Nowak 2002, 21–44) made May 2002 by the Poltegor Opencast Mining Institute based in Wrocław. Still visible at the time of this study were fresh traces of exploitation of the deposit. Over a few years prior to the making of the geotechnical analyses there had been a change in the shoreline of the working on its north and east side, and its area had expanded south- and south-eastward. According to the measurements made of the bottom of the working, its depth measured from the water surface was less than 3.5 m, and a part of the chalk deposit remained in situ, which is characteristic for this type of quarry (Nowak, Szynekiewicz 2003, 9). What is important to note is that the thickness of lake sediments in the deposit was not uniform. Consequently, it cannot be established whether the find had been resting within the upper, the middle or the bottom level of the layer. Prospections, interviews and a review of the documentation brought no insight useful for a closer identification of the archaeological context. During the field prospection



Fig. 5. A site with a flint inventory located in the spring of 2016 near the defunct chalk quarry at Rusinowo. (Photo T. Płonka)

of 2007, a passer-by encountered near to the defunct quarry reported the find at the same location of the remains of a skeleton of an animal from the deer family. This information was not confirmed during later interviews. However, it is corroborated by archival evidence (Department of Archaeology of the National Museum in Szczecin – file No. 3581) – a report on fossil red deer antler (*Geweih von einen Urhirsch*) discovered near present-day Rusinowo in June 1936. An archaeological surface survey made by Tomasz Płonka near the Mołstowa river between the Rusinowo and Berkanowo in the spring of 2016 identified several previously unknown archaeological sites with flint inventories suggesting the existence in this area of Late Palaeolithic and Mesolithic camps (Fig. 5).

Some modest input potentially useful for specifying the original place of deposition of the artefact comes from specialist analyses of this object, and from the geological fieldwork carried out near to the site of its discovery. The first pilot geological borehole was obtained in October 2009 near to the NE edge of the quarry (Fig. 6) recovering a rather slender stratigraphic sequence of gyttja sampled near to the edge of the deposit. The gyttja rested under a layer of peat (180 cm), overlying a layer of sand (370 cm). Eleven

samples were taken of the peat and the gyttja for palynological studies. The main geological study made in 2014 included a borehole made in the central part of the deposit approximately a kilometre to the south of the quarry. The results of this project are reported on in a separate chapter of the present monograph.

The geological study carried out as a follow up to the random archaeological discovery in order to recover the stratigraphical context and the chronology of a Stone Age object made of organic raw material was not the first of its kind in Pomerania. It has a precedent in a 1930s project of Tadeusz Dobrzyński (1937) to assist in the dating of a unique group of bone and antler finds recovered some years earlier during the exploitation of a chalk deposit in a tract of moorland found within the Reda-Łeba ice-marginal valley near the village of Orle (Wejherowo commune, Wejherowo County, Pomeranian Voivodeship). Other than this project meant to confirm the context of deposition of the artefacts from Orle, the vast majority of Late Palaeolithic and Mesolithic antler and bone objects from Pomeranian finds largely lacks this sort of data and on occasion, even the circumstances of their discovery are little known (cf. Galiński 1992, 127–134, 221–229; Kobusiewicz 1999, 47–48, 113–114; Ilkiewicz 2011, 15–17, 21–31).



Fig. 6. Rusinowo. Preparing to take the first borehole (2009) to the east of the chalk quarry at Rusinowo. From the right: Bernard Cedro and Krzysztof Kowalski. (Photo T. Płonka)

This situation is mostly due to the very poor archaeological recognition of areas filled in with organic formations and of the littoral zone (Galiński 1992, 127–128; Wąs 2012, 35–38). This may be confirmed by studies made at Dąbki (Darłowo commune, Sławno County, West Pomeranian Voivodeship), a site rich in bone and antler finds (Ilkiewicz 1997; Kabaciński *et al.* 2007). On the other hand, until recently we had little data on the archaeological and the environmental context of most of the mobiliary finds recovered in Pomerania and attributed to the symbolic culture of late Pleistocene and early Holocene communities, some of which artefacts of key importance for the study of symbolic culture of the Mesolithic foragers; of these more notable are stray finds dredged up from the Odra River near Szczecin during the

1930s: eg, at Grabowo (Kunkel 1936; Czarnecki 1983, 81–82; Galiński 1992, 228) and Podjuchy (Kunkel 1935; Galiński, Dziewanowski, Kowalski 2012, 90–91). Only the most recent archaeological discoveries made in 2014 by Tadeusz Galiński at Bolków site no. 1, investigated over several seasons, brought in a larger body of data on the context associated with the symbolic culture of the Mesolithic communities (Galiński 2014). In this situation, the review of the existing documentation and the reconstruction of the history of the site of the discovery of the antler find at Rusinowo was a given special priority. The data obtained cast new light on the symbolic culture of Late Palaeolithic and early Mesolithic communities living in Central Europe.