



Animal husbandry on the Polish territory in the Early Middle Ages



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ABSTRACT

Over the last fifty years, archaeozoology has become an important branch of archaeology in Poland. This interest led to an increasing of number of animal bone analyses, among them those made for early medieval assemblages. Rich data resulted in estimation of these materials from a new statistical perspective. This analysis includes animal bone remains from 248 assemblages from different parts of the Polish territory dated from the early 5th century to 1st quarter of the 13th century. It was possible to establish three husbandry models with the domination of the cattle or the pig bones in assemblages and a similar share of those species' remains, which depended on the regional distribution of settlements. An important part of the research was to describe the morphotypes of breeding animals using point-score scales. The research showed that three factors were of great importance in the context of husbandry on the early medieval Polish territory: the type of settlement, geographic distribution of species, and chronology, though they did not affect animal economy to the same degree.

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1. Introduction

For almost half a century, scholars have been trying to explain the reason for regional differences in animal husbandry on the early medieval Polish territory, but the insufficient number of analyses made the conclusions almost guesswork. Our knowledge must be reconsidered in the light of new analyses, which are almost five times more numerous nowadays, and could be the basis for statistical research. The aim of this paper is to show new possibilities for the study of animal remains from various archaeological sites located on the present-day Polish territory, including hillforts and other types of settlements which played different parts, both in social interactions and administration of the country by local and the Piast officials. The Piasts, as a tribal elite which probably formed in the early 9th century, became the first Polish royal dynasty with the first king, Bolesław I Chrobry, who was crowned in AD 1025.

In Polish archaeology, the Early Middle Ages include almost eight centuries from the late 5th to the early 13th century. Some authors (e.g. Buko, 2005) divide this long period into two parts (from 5th to 9th century and from 9th to the early 13th century), but for the purposes of this work a third period was defined to include the time when the Piast state was forming. It is particularly interesting to investigate the scale of changes in animal economy during that relatively short time. That is why the material was arranged according to the regions (Fig. 1) and the three periods:

- 5th–8th century – tribal period (Period I)
- 9th–the beginning of 11th century – forming of the Piast state (Period II)
- 2nd quarter of 11th–1st quarter of 13th century – the Piast period (Period III).

In the second half of the 7th century, cultural differences between the south-eastern part and north-western part of the Polish territory were visible in pottery, house construction, and burial rituals (Parczewski, 2000; Dulinicz, 2001). In the first of these regions, the Praga culture was developing, while the territory between the Oder and the Elbe river basins was inhabited by people from the Sukow and Tornow-Klenica cultures. These two traditions must have survived until the end of the Early Medieval Period, which is also visible in animal bone materials.

The 10th century was a very special time when remodeling of tribal lands by the Piasts started. The incorporation of the new territories into the Piast state was not a peaceful process, which is indicated by layers of burned material found by archaeologists in e.g. Silesian hillforts (Możdżioch, 1998) that were never rebuilt. In the central territory of Poland, a network of large and fortified hillforts was constructed, i.e. Włocławek, Płock, Tum, Kalisz. During the reign of Mieszko I there was a strong and consistent central part with dependent peripheral regions (Kurnatowska, 1998: 9; Możdżioch, 2000). Centres of the state administration were also located close to the borders. Dendrochronological dates indicate that erection of large central hillforts started at the beginning of the 940s: Bnin (938–940 A.D.), Łąd (940–941 A.D.), Giecz (941 A.D.), and Gniezno (940–941

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Fig. 1. Map showing historical regions in the early medieval Polish territory.

A.D.) (Krapiec, 1998). According to Kurnatowska, such a serious construction project indicates the establishment of the first Piast rule.

2. Material and methods

The research is based on archaeozoological analyses which investigated animal bones from 248 assemblages (Table 1) from

different parts of the present-day Polish territory. Some of those analyses were published before the Second World War, others after 1945, mostly in the 1970s and 1980s. That makes it slightly difficult to compare the results, especially because the methods of analysis changed during that period. Additionally, three bone assemblages were analyzed by the author of this work (Bocheń; Ruska Wieś, site 13; Szestno, site 3).

Table 1
Animal bone assemblages from early medieval sites from the Polish territory.

Site	Region	Type of settlement	Chronology	Number of remains	Percentage of unidentified remains	References
Barkowo	Krajna Upland	Hillfort	8th–10th century		No data	Sobociński 1980a; Waluszewska-Bubień 1977c
Bielsk Podlaski, Zamkowa Str.	Podlachia	Outer settlement adjacent to the hillfort	10th–13th century	3909	7.5	Waszczuk 1999
Bnin, site 1 (phase I)	Great Poland	Hillfort	11th century	160	15.0	Sobociński 1976a; Waluszewska-Bubień 1975a
Bnin, site 1 (phase II)	Great Poland	Hillfort	12th–13th century	1437	23.5	Sobociński 1976a; Waluszewska-Bubień 1975a
Bnin, site 2b (phase I)	Great Poland	Outer settlement adjacent to the hillfort	1st half of 10th century		No data	Sobociński 1976a; Waluszewska-Bubień 1979
Bnin, site 2b (phase II)	Great Poland	Inner settlement adjacent to the hillfort	2nd half of 10th–1st half of 11th century		No data	Sobociński 1976a; Waluszewska-Bubień 1979
Bnin, site 2b (phase III)	Great Poland	Inner settlement adjacent to the hillfort	Late 12th–mid-13th century		No data	Sobociński 1976a; Waluszewska-Bubień 1979
Bobrowo, site 1	Chełmno & Dobrzyń Region	Hillfort	9th–1st half of 11th century	545	23.9	Makowiecki 1990b
Bocheń	Mazovia	Settlement	8th–9th century	5425	24.9	Iwaszczuk 2003
Bonikowo, site 1	Great Poland	Hillfort	2nd half of 9th–1st half of 10th century	11,546	36.1	Sobociński 1963

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