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# THE EARTH SPEAKS

Photography by Jakub Ostałowski

Every day they stroke the sand to hear the stories of the Chodelka River Valley. And the stories are plentiful.



THE CHODLIK ARCHEOLOGICAL MISSION



Photo 1:  
The work of an archaeologist demands patience. Sifting through a grave using just spatulas and brushes can take weeks.

Photos 2, 3, 4:  
Burnt skeletal remains and fragments of pottery are the most common findings unearthed from kurgans. Each one is carefully measured and documented.



**Dr. Łukasz Miechowicz** – Head of the Mission  
(PAS Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology)

*The team working in the Chodelka River Valley is made up of students and changes every year. The following students took part in this season's digs:*

**Jakub Stępnik ■ Agnieszka Chlebicka**

– Institute of Archeology, University of Warsaw

**Alicja Rajmer ■ Łukasz Krasula ■ Kamil Rogoś**

– Institute of Archeology, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań





Photo 5:

The remains of the funeral pyres were usually placed at the top of the kurgans. Amongst them, archaeologists have discovered more graves, in which skeletal remains were placed in small pits, or directly on the surface of the earth.

The Chodelka River Valley “is an exceptional site for scholars of Poland’s early middle ages, in particular the tribal period (7th-10th centuries)”, wrote Łukasz Miechowicz in *Academia* in 2014, summing up the crowdfunding campaign in which the public had contributed over 11,000 zlotys for archeological digs. “In this beautiful valley, running for around 15 km up to the river’s outlet into the Vistula, the remains of four major settlements can be found alongside numerous smaller ones, kurgan burial grounds, and linear earthworks. This gives us the rare opportunity to study entire settlement complexes and the interconnections between their elements, such as any strongholds, outlying villages, burial grounds, and fortifications. We may even be able to reconstruct the road network and delimit the far reaches or boundaries of the settlements. For archeologists, these are very favorable conditions to work in.”

Łukasz Miechowicz’s team has been working in Chodlik since 2010. They continue the research undertaken by Fr. Antoni Chotyński in the early twentieth century, and that of Prof. Aleksander Gardawski, who headed the expedition of Warsaw’s National Archaeological Museum in 1952, and in the years 1959–1974 worked on behalf of the Department of Archaeology at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin.

In the first season of digs, archaeologists discovered one of the most interesting early-medieval Slavic burial grounds. Alongside the interred remains of men they found horse bones and elements of horse harnesses, which testifies to the wealth of the inhabitants, making the discovery unique on a European scale. While the work on the kurgans continues, the team is also excavating settlements in Chodlik and in nearby Kłodnica. They are also carrying out the project “Archeology of the Forest,” which consists of recognizing, reporting, documenting and researching the cultural heritage hidden in forests. This research is supported by the State Forest Enterprise.

The Chodlik Virtual Museum is a new feature – a website where you can take a virtual walk through this unique area and follow the work of the archaeologists in real time.

More information on [www.chodlik.edu.pl](http://www.chodlik.edu.pl)



THE CHODLIK ARCHEOLOGICAL MISSION



Photo 6:  
Documentation is the basis of archaeological research. These days the traditional drawing techniques have been replaced by photogrammetry and 3D models of the excavation.

Photo 7:  
After a hard day of excavating work, it's time for some well-earned R&R and long discussions by the fire.



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Photo 8:  
If you want to see for yourself what a medieval settlement looked like, take a trip to Żmijowiska.

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Photo 9, 10:  
Relics discovered during excavations are documented, preserved and reconstructed. Some are sent for special laboratory analysis.



Photo 11:  
These days, using drones and laser scanning techniques to help document archeological sites and search for new ones has become standard archeological practice.