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A Preliminary Report on a Search for Artefacts and Verification Excavations Conducted within the Limits of the Old Village of Trójca in 2020 and 2021

Abstract

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In 2020–2021, within the limits of Trójca – a medieval village located near a ford on the Vistula River that is today part of Zawichost – artefacts were sought with the use of metal detectors. Next, a survey excavation was conducted, resulting in the discovery of e.g. two silver hoards from the 11th and 12th c., single coins from the 11th–12th c. (over 140 specimens) and from later times, merchant's weights, adornments, minor devotional articles and military accessories (especially from the 11th–13th c.) and many other artefacts. Their discovery makes us suspect that Trójca was one of the most important supralocal trade centres of Lesser Poland in the early Middle Ages. The conducted excavations and research are only the first stage for future archaeological prospections to be conducted in Trójca and will be continued in the years to come.

Keywords: Zawichost, Trójca, early medieval period, Zawichost ford, searching for artefacts

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Introduction

Trójca is a former separate village which today is part of Zawichost (Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship). It is located west of the town proper, on the edge of the fluvial terrace of the Vistula River, in the place where the Czyżówka River runs into the valley of the Vistula (Fig. 1). The name of the locality comes from the fact that the local parish church – the history of which goes back at least to the middle of the 12th century – was dedicated to the Holy Trinity (Chyła 2019, 23; 2021). In the times of Jan Długosz – and often in later periods – Trójca was considered to be part of the old outskirts of Zawichost (Wiśniewski 1907, 503). Nevertheless, starting from the 17th c., Trójca was always treated as a separate village. In the 19th c. and in the first half of the 20th c., it belonged to the municipality of Czyżów Szlachecki (Chlebowski 1892). It was only incorporated into Zawichost as late as 1954.

Zawichost and Trójca are located in an exceptional place, at the junction of six physical-geographical regions: Sandomierz Upland, Iłża Piedmont, Biłgoraj Plain (which is part of the Sandomierz Basin), Lublin Upland (specifically the Urzędów Heights), Vistula Lowland and Małopolska Gap of the Vistula River (Fig. 2; cf. Maruszczak 2018; Nogaj-Chachaj 2018; Wyczółkowski 2018, to learn more about the topography of Zawichost). This region had one of the most convenient fords used in medieval times (and probably even earlier) due to the fact that directly north of Zawichost starts the Małopolska Gap of the Vistula, where the river valley becomes considerably narrower and, as a consequence, more profound, its current becomes more rapid, and the topography of both banks of the river (where the majority of the borders between the mesoregions are arranged longitudinally) also changes. Two trans-European trade routes crossed near the ford: one leading from the east (Ru-

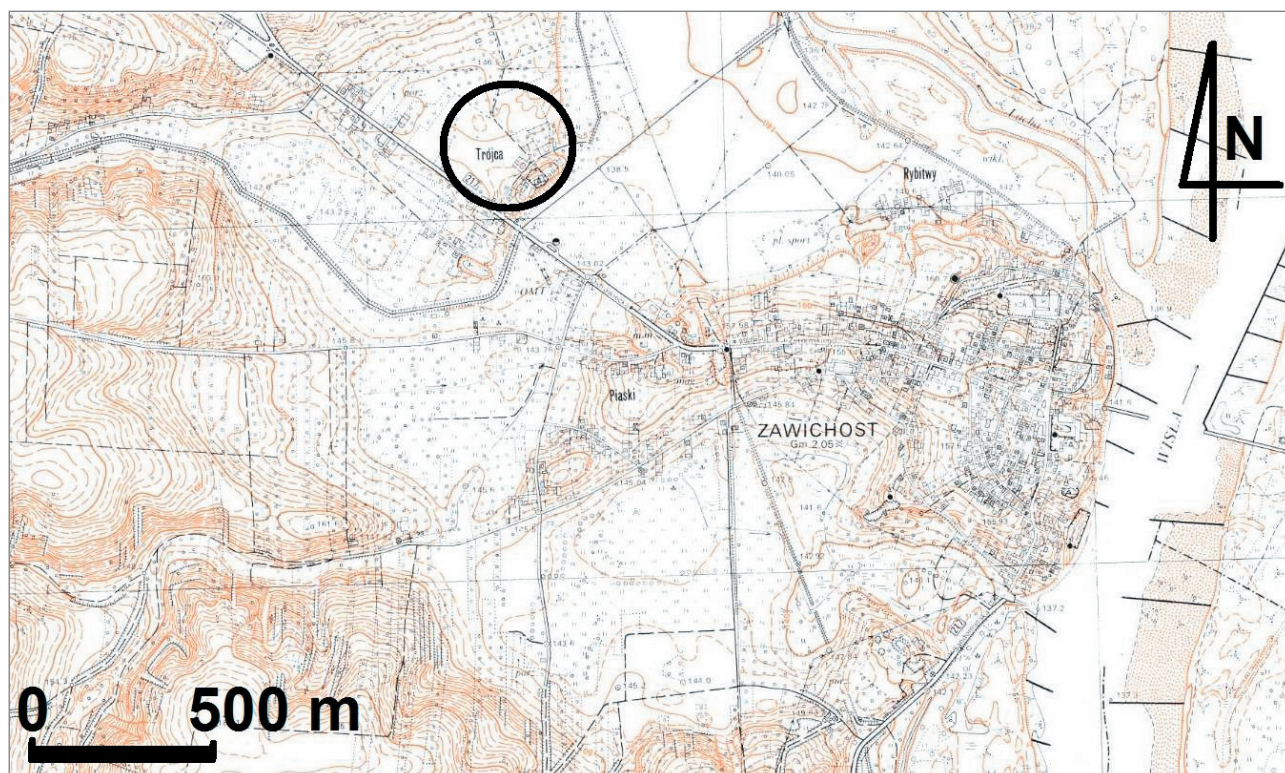


Fig. 1. Trójca and Zawichost, Sandomierz dist., on the modern topographic map.
The area researched is marked with the circle (prepared by M. Florek).



Fig. 2. Location of Trójca and Zawichost, Sandomierz dist. (marked with the circle) against the division of Poland into physico-geographical units according to J. Kondracki (2002) (prepared by M. Florek).

thenia) through the territories of Poland to Western Europe, and the other going along the Vistula, connecting the Baltic shore – through the Carpathian mountain passes – with the Hungarian Basin and Adriatic Sea. The location of the ford which existed in medieval times should probably be placed north of the so-called Town Island on which Zawichost is located, although it is vital to remember that its position might have altered with consecutive changes of the riverbed (cf. Wąsowicz 1967; Hoczyk-Siwkova 1996).

The ford and the communication routes crossing nearby meant that the region of Trójca and Zawichost played the role of a trade centre – where supralocal exchange was practiced – and at the same time served the function of a military post exercising control over the ford (Chyła 2010, 35). Zawichost itself, being an important centre of the state government (castellany) and ecclesiastical administration (collegiate, archdeaconry) appeared in written sources as late as in the 12th c. (cf. Kiryk 1990, 37–40; Lalik 1999, 40–41; Chyła 2010, 40–41). This fact is the reason why it was suggested that the earlier centre – the “original” Zawichost – was located in Trójca. It is believed that in the 11th and 12th c. the Zawichost stronghold, built after the liquidation of a tribal centre located in nearby Podgórze, stood here and accompanied a market settlement (Gąssowski 1969, 378–380; Widawski and Wyczółkowski 2005; Florek 2010).

The above-presented assumptions were based on the following circumstantial evidence: the previously mentioned location of Trójca near the ford on the Vistula, the crossing of the supralocal communication routes in its vicinity, the construction of a church within the limits of the locality in the middle of the 12th c. at the latest (it was later transmitted to the archdeacon of Zawichost, which indicates that the locality was a considerable population centre), the local tradition according to which the church stood in the place of an earlier castle-stronghold, and the discovery of an 11th c. silver hoard in the village as early as in the 1930s. The hoard consisted of at least 900 coins, mainly Saxon and Polish cross denarii and single German and Hungarian denarii. It is worth mentioning that 878 whole specimens and several dozen fragments were deposited in two clay vessels buried next to one another after 1063, most probably in the 1080s (Różańska 1960; Widawski and Wyczółkowski 2005, 164–165).

The site of the original church in Trójca, supposedly already existing in the 12th c., remains unknown (Kiryk 1990, 37–40; Lalik 1999, 40–41; Chyła 2010,

40–41; 2019, 17–20). In the walls of the present temple, whose form is the effect of remodelling its architecture in the 18th c., large parts of an older stone church are preserved, which must have been constructed no earlier than in the 13th c. (Polanowski 2005, 160). Previous archaeological research – which admittedly encompassed a small area within the church and in its nearest vicinity – did not provide us with information on the potential earlier phase of the building, nor did it allow us to confirm or negate the local tradition according to which the present structure was built within the limits of an earlier stronghold (Misiewicz 1992; 1993; Bajka 2019; Niedźwiadek 2020). It is possible that the original church was wooden – although located where the present temple is standing – thus there are no material remains of this building. On the other hand, the fact that we have no remains that could be interpreted as the remnants of stronghold fortifications may be the result of the fact that only a small area was researched or maybe it was caused by the type of methods employed.

In the context of the supposed Trójca stronghold from the 11th–12th c., it should be mentioned that the church in Lublin that was transferred to the archdeacon of Lublin approximately at the same time as the establishment of the archdeaconry in Zawichost was also dedicated to the Holy Trinity (Myśliński 1966, 163). This temple, whose dedication was assumed by the still standing gothic castle chapel from the 14th c., was located in the centre of the castellan's castle, which was later transformed into a royal castle (Florek 2015, 25–26; 2019, 262–268).

No relevant information about Trójca and the role it played in the early Middle Ages was provided by surface surveys – including the research conducted within the framework of the Polish Archaeological Record (Polish AZP) in 1987. During the latter, only a small group of early medieval pottery was discovered: 24 fragments, mainly in fields located west of the church. At that time, it was dated from the second half of the 9th to the first half of the 10th c. (Bargieł *et al.* 1987). A new analysis of this material indicated that the pottery is not earlier than the second half of the 10th c., whereas most of the vessel fragments discovered during the survey come from the 11th and 12th c. Also, two attempts to search for artefacts with metal detectors – in 1993 by Borys Paszkiewicz and in 2003 by Maciej Widawski – did not considerably contribute to our knowledge of the history of Trójca (except for determining the approximate place where the above-mentioned silver hoard had been discovered in the

interwar period and discovering another three Saxon cross denarii (Paszkievicz 1993; Widawski 2003).

There were also several serendipitous discoveries of artefacts from different times made independently of the archaeological research conducted in Trójca. Besides the above-mentioned hoard of 11th century coins, e.g., several Roman denarii were found here before 1956 (Kunisz 1958, 209–211), and in recent years a silver pendant in the shape of a miniature stylised axe from the Roman period, two coins (one Polish and one Saxon cross-denarius), fragments of unspecified silver adornments and a spindle whorl made of Volhynian slate were discovered (Florek 2009).

In 2020, the research group Nadwiślańska Grupa Poszukiwawcza Stowarzyszenia Mieszkańców Gminy Annopol “Szansa” – led by Wojciech Rudziewski-Rudziewicz – in cooperation with the “Wspólne Dziedzictwo” Association from Opatów commenced a systematic search for archaeological artefacts in Trójca. It was conducted based on a permit issued by the Provincial Office of Monument Preservation in Kielce. The substantive supervision of the research was exercised by Dominik K. Płaza from the Regional Museum in Sandomierz and Marek Florek from the Institute of Archaeology at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. Initially, its main purpose was to locate – based on potential discoveries of military accessories – the site of a battle fought on 19 June 1205 between the Ruthenian army and Polish knights, which resulted in the death of Roman II Mstislavich (to learn more about the battle, see: Ślupecki 1999; 2018; Kollinger 2018). With time and new discoveries, the goal of the research was expanded to include, e.g., establishing the extent of the early medieval settlement in Trójca and determining the location of the market place within this settlement.

The results of the search and excavations – commenced in its wake and (for the time being) covering a small area – allow us to treat Trójca as one of the most important archaeological sites associated with the early medieval period in Poland. In their light, 11th c. Trójca appears to be not only a trade settlement of a supralocal character, but also an international trade emporium intermediating in the exchange of goods between the north and south, east, and west. It is difficult – at least at the present stage of the research – to compare it with centres located by the Baltic shore such as Wolin – Jomsborg or Janów Pomorski, identified with Truso, which was described in King Alfred’s Chorography (cf. Jagodziński 2010; 2013; Filipowiak and Stanisławski 2014; Stanisławski 2013) or even with Cracow, whose importance in international

trade was indicated in Ibrahim Ibn Yaqub’s narration (Kowalski 1946, 48). Undoubtedly, however, Trójca can be considered one of the most important trade centres located by a ford on the Vistula, perhaps even the second most important after Cracow. This is why – although the survey and excavations are to be continued and the artefacts discovered during the survey and first excavations are still being analysed – it was decided to present a broader overview of the conducted works.

Results of the search for artefacts conducted in Trójca in 2020–2021

The research mainly encompassed the ID No. 946 plot of land, having the area of 3.66 ha and located west of the Holy Trinity Church, and some adjacent plots (Fig. 3).

The research was conducted with metal detectors. Only artefacts found on the surface or in the arable layer, occurring at the depth of up to 25–30 cm, were collected. Each discovered item was separately packed, labelled with a unique number, together with the number of the land plot in which it was found, the depth at which it was discovered and GPS coordinates. Photographic documentation was prepared during the research, also with the use of a drone. The discovered artefacts were successively sent to the Sandomierz Delegation of the Provincial Office of Monument Preservation, and next, if necessary, subjected to conservation.

During the research, conducted from September 2020 to the end of 2021, several hundred archaeological artefacts were found – items from different time periods ranging from the Neolithic to the modern period, but mainly from the early Middle Ages, especially from between the end of the 10th to the end of the 11th c. Among them especially noteworthy are:

- a polished tetrahedral axe made of Świeciechów flint, dated to the Late Neolithic;
- fibulae and a bronze belt buckle from the Roman and Migration periods, including a fragment of a digitated fibula (Fig. 4) and two Roman denarii from the times of the Roman Empire;
- a hoard of nearly 1900 silver coins, mainly denarii of Boleslaus IV the Curly (*Kędzierzawy*) and Ladislaus II the Exile (*Wygnaniec*) as well as single denarii of Boleslaus II the Bold (*Śmiały*) and Boleslaus III Wrymouth (*Krzywousty*), and cross denarii, deposited in a clay vessel and buried in ca. 1165 (Fig. 5);
- over 140 single coins, mainly Polish and Saxon cross denarii from the 11th c., as well as single Hun-



Fig. 3. Trójca, Sandomierz dist. Area researched in the years 2020 and 2021 – view towards the east (photo by T. Mazur).

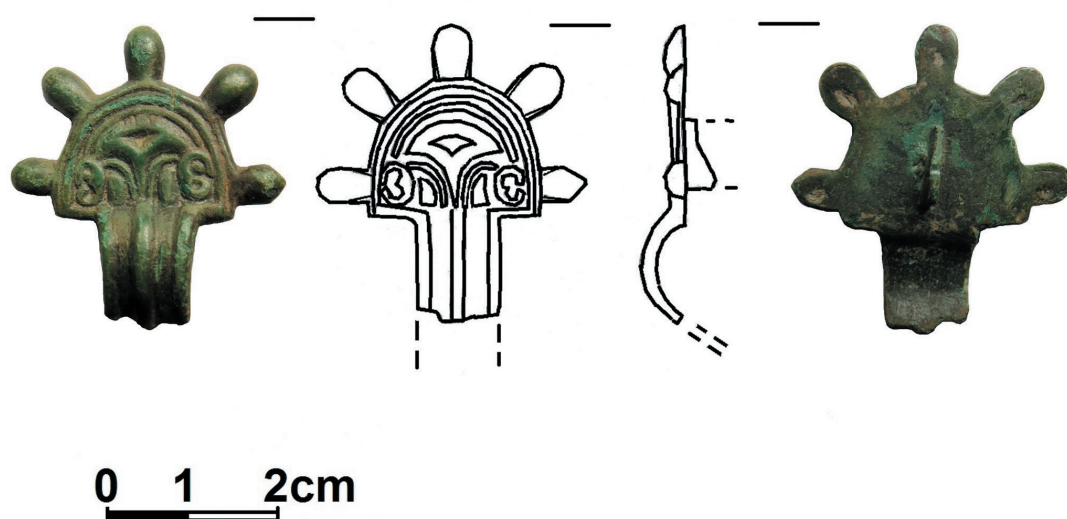


Fig. 4. Trójca, Sandomierz dist. Finger-shaped fibula from the 5th–6th centuries (photo by M. Florek).



Fig. 5. Trójca, Sandomierz dist. Hoard of coins from the 12th century (photo by M. Florek).

garian, Bohemian, German and English coins from the same time and later coins from the 12th and 13th c. (Fig. 6);

- coins from the late Middle Ages and modern period, including denarii of Ladislaus I the Short (*Łokietek*), Ladislaus II Jagiello (*Jagiello*) and Ladislaus III of Varna (*Warneńczyk*);
- over 40 iron weights coated with bronze from the end of the 10th c. – beginning of the 11th c., having different sizes, both barrel-shaped and in the form of polyhedrons (Fig. 7);
- several dozen iron and lead weights probably from the 12th and 13th c.;
- adornments and garment elements made of copper alloys, silver or lead: openwork beads having different shapes, crescent-shaped pendants (*lunulae*) (Fig. 8), fragment of an earring, temple rings, fittings of strap ends, belt buckles, bell pendants, frag-

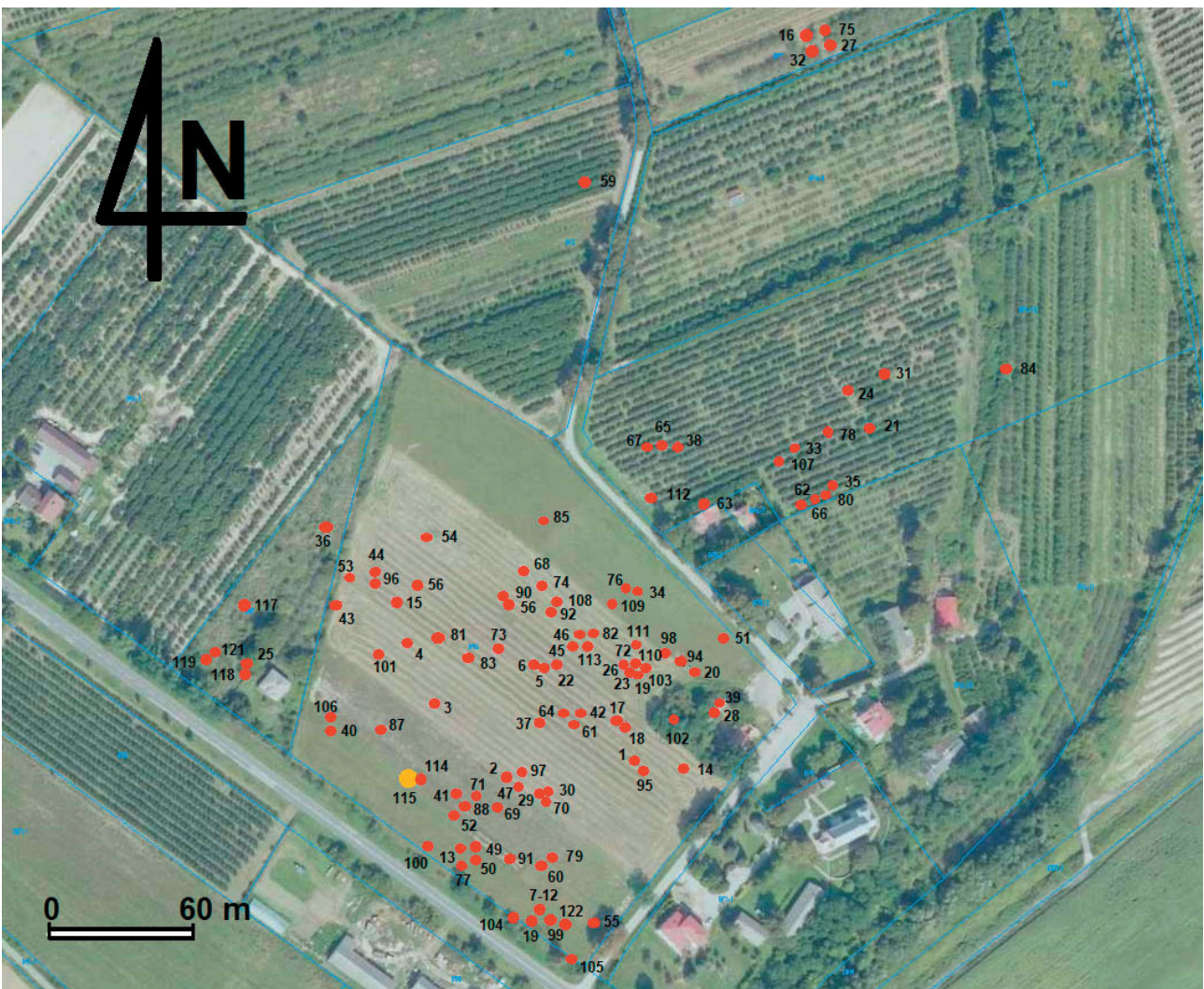


Fig. 6. Trójca, Sandomierz dist. Planigraphy of the discovered coins from the 10th, 11th and 12th centuries. The site where the 12th century hoard was discovered is marked with a yellow circle (prepared by M. Florek).



Fig. 7. Trójca, Sandomierz dist. Iron weights coated with bronze from the 11th century (photo by M. Florek).



Fig. 8. Trójca, Sandomierz dist. Lead crescent-shaped pendants (lunulae) and beads (photo by M. Florek).

ment of a horseshoe-shaped fibula, etc. dated from the end of the 10th to the end of the 13th c.;

- early medieval, medieval and modern devotional articles, especially crosses made of copper alloys or lead, including specimens ornamented with enamel, fragment of bronze encolpions;
- military accessories and elements of weaponry used by mounted warriors (different types of iron arrow-

heads, sword pommels, a handle of a knobbed shaft-hole axe, spur elements, stirrups) from the 11th–14th c.;

- a fragment of a Ruthenian lead seal from the turn of the 11th and 12th c., probably belonging to Sviatopolk II (Michael) Iziaslavich;

- Polish princely lead seal (*bull*a), probably of Boleslaus III Wrymouth (*Krzywousty*) or Boleslaus IV the Curly (*Kędzierzawy*) (Fig. 9);

Additionally, the research resulted in finding clusters of iron slag and waste left after smelting lead, which are probably the remains of metallurgical production from the Roman period or early Middle Ages.

All of the discovered artefacts, after being analysed, will be transferred to the Castle Museum in Sandomierz.



Fig. 9. Trójca, Sandomierz dist.
Lead prince's seal (bulla), probably
of Bolesław III Wrymouth (photo by M. Florek).

Results of archaeological excavations conducted in October 2021

In October 2021, due to the above-described discoveries, the Institute of Archaeology at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, in cooperation with the archaeological company Trzy Epoki – Monika Bajka conducted survey excavations in Trójca. Their task was to determine the context of the 12th c. hoard and verify the places where the coins from the 11th c. were discovered in order to check if new treasures could be found at those sites. To that end, three test trenches were dug. Their joint area was ca. 50 sq. metres (Fig. 10).

In trench 1, located where the hoard of 12th c. coins had been found in the spring of 2021, a large feature (feature 1) was discovered. It was oval, with a flat bottom and the depth of ca. 90 cm. There was pottery in its fill, including fragments of sharply profiled vessels (Fig. 11) – characteristic of the so-called Wielkopolski trend of Sandomierz pottery (cf. Buko 1981) – numerous animal bones, daub lumps of different sizes and slab blocks, charred flints, a spindle whorl made of Volhynian slate, a fragment of a decorated folding comb made of bone (Fig. 12), small flint products and fragments of Funnel Beaker culture vessels. Apart from the Neolithic artefacts, which were not the original components of the fill, all the materials discovered inside should be dated to the 11th c., probably to its first half. The feature was only partially excavated, thus its function (a half-dugout?, a large

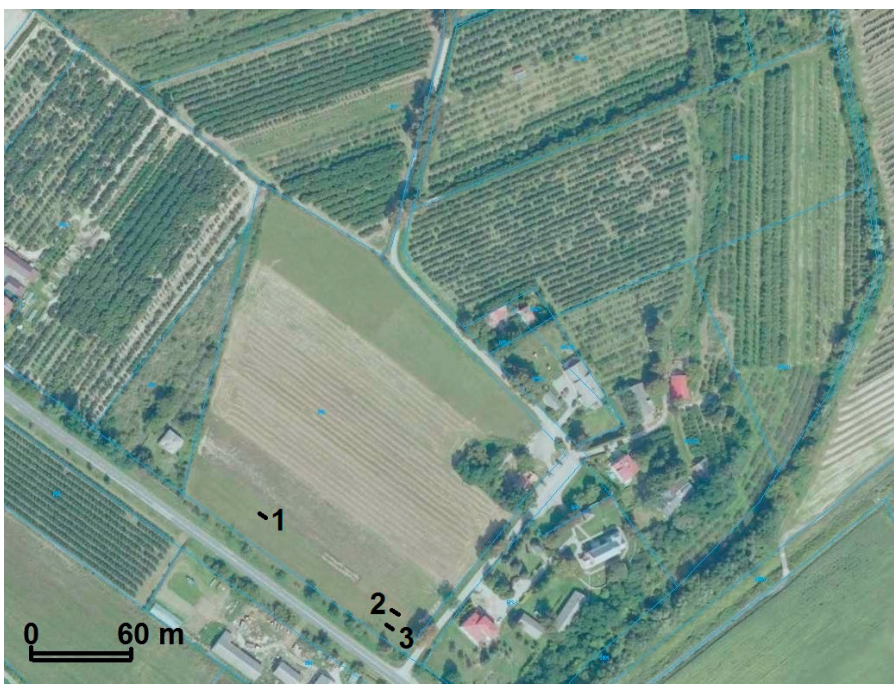


Fig. 10. Trójca, Sandomierz dist.
Location of archaeological
excavations (prepared by M. Florek).

waste pit?) is difficult to determine. The before-mentioned vessel containing the collection of 12th c. coins was dug into the top layer of the fill.

In trench 2, there was a thick cultural layer of a considerable depth (60 cm). It contained prehistoric materials (vessel fragments and flint products, e.g. of the Mierzanowice culture), artefacts dated to the early Middle Ages (mainly pottery from the 12th and 13th c. and single coins from the 11th c.), late Middle Ages and modern period (vessel fragments, fragments of unspecified metal items) as well as animal bones from an undetermined time. What is more, in the northern profile of the trench, there was a fragment of a small pit, the fill of which contained fragments of a vessel from the end of the 10th or beginning of the 11th c.

In trench 3, just as in trench 2, a thick (up to 70 cm) cultural layer was unearthed. It contained prehistoric materials (e.g., pottery sherds linked with the Trzciniec, Lusatian and possibly Pomeranian cultures as well as small flint products), early medieval pottery (mainly

from the 12th and 13th c.), pottery from the late Middle Ages and modern period and fragments of unspecified items made of copper alloys, lead, and iron. What is more, it contained 26 silver coins and their fragments (dated from the end of the 10th to the beginning of the 11th c.: denarii of Otto II, Otto III, Otto and Adelaide and Henry IV the Saint, Saxon cross denarii, English coins of Aethelred I, an Arabic dirham and fragments of silver adornments decorated with granulation (Fig. 13). Some of the fragments were stuck together with whole coins, which means that they had been probably kept together in some sort of a container made of organic material (pouch?) rather than in a ceramic vessel. Together with the coins discovered earlier on the surface and in the arable layer – they should be considered the remains of another hoard, dug approximately in the middle of the 11th c. It might have been damaged/scattered as a result of the building and use of a farm construction – dismantled in the beginning of the 21st c. – in the direct vicinity of trench 3.

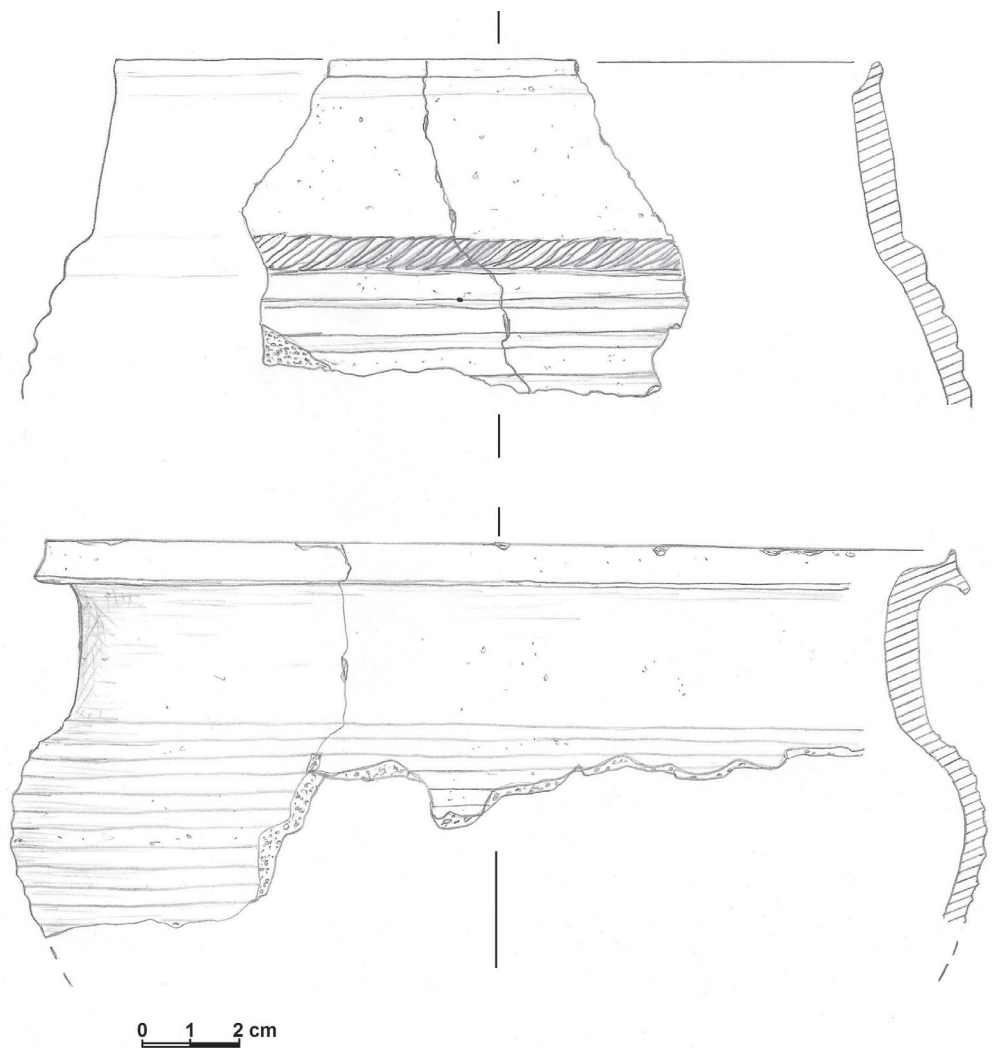


Fig. 11. Trójca, Sandomierz dist. Fragments of vessels from feature no. 1 (drawn by M. Florek).



0 1 2 cm

Fig. 12. Trójca, Sandomierz dist. Bone comb from feature no. 1 (photo by M. Florek).



Fig. 13. Trójca, Sandomierz dist. Hoard of coins from the 11th century from the excavation no. 3 (photo by M. Florek).

Conclusion

The artefacts discovered during the search conducted in 2020–2021, as well as those found as a result of the survey research carried out in October 2021, are being analysed and prepared for publication. To date, it has been possible to analyse military accessories (Florek 2022) and single coins not included in hoards (Nakielski 2022). Introducing all the artefacts in archaeological publications is hindered by the necessity to preserve them and subject them to specialist analyses, which takes time and – especially – money, not to mention the need to involve specialists from different fields.

Nevertheless, the results of the previous research and excavations allow us to formulate several conclusions and hypotheses.

Firstly, it was established that there had been previously unknown intense settlement in Trójca in the Middle Neolithic (the Funnel Beaker culture), Bronze Age (the Mierzanowice and Trzciniec cultures) and at the beginning of the Iron Age (the Lusatian culture and probably the Pomeranian culture).

Secondly, the research confirmed the existence of the local settlement in the Roman and Migration periods, although its character remains unclear. The discovered lumps of iron slag – indicating that there were specialist workshops at the site where iron was produced and processed – can be dated to the Roman period or early medieval times. So far, no pottery from the Roman period has been found. On the other hand, the works resulted in the discoveries of such artefacts as Roman denarii, garment elements (fibulae) and items that can be considered as imported (the silver pendant in the shape of a stylised axe, the digitated fibula). This indicates that the ford at the Vistula existed in that period, but without an adjacent settlement.

Thirdly, it was stated that among the early medieval artefacts – discovered during the recent research as well as in earlier times – there are no items from before the second half – end of the 10th c. (with the exception of single coins) – including pottery. This fact allows us to suspect that the early medieval settlement in Trójca was established no earlier than after the middle of the 10th c., most probably at the end of the century, after the annexation of this territory by the Piast state. Since its beginning – at least from the 11th c. – it was a market settlement of supralocal importance due to its location by the ford, at the crossroads of trans-European communication routes. Iron weights coated in bronze are the principal evidence of the role played by Trójca in the supralocal trade. Such items were used mainly across the regions of the

Baltic Sea and North Sea by Scandinavian tradesmen or those trading with Scandinavia and thus using the local system for weights and measures. In Polish territories, such weights are mainly known from Greater Poland – which was the central part of the Piast state – and Pomerania, a region with such trade emporia as Wolin and Truso, which were controlled to a great extent by the Vikings. Until recently, only single specimens of such weights were known from other parts of Poland (Florek 2018). Those discovered in Trójca are the most numerous known from the region of Lesser Poland. Coins from the 11th–12th c. – mainly single specimens – found across the whole area of the locality (probably lost by their owners) indicate that in the Trójca settlement there was a market place of a supralocal importance. They are the greatest set of such artefacts from Poland. At the same time, the discovered lumps of iron slag and waste products left after lead smelting indicate that the settlement in Trójca was not only the market place, but also a venue where specialist workshops operated.

Fourthly, the considerable share of products from Eastern Europe – especially from early medieval Ruthenia and dated to the 11th–12th c. – among the artefacts discovered in Trójca is noteworthy. Among them, there are adornments and garment elements, spindle whorls made of Volhynian slate, devotional articles (the crosses, the encolpion fragment), the lead princely seal and certain military accessories (mainly tanged arrowheads). Some of the latter might be possibly linked with the Battle of Zawichost that took place on 19 June 1205.

Fifthly, the results of the previous research and surveys indicate that the trade settlement in Trójca maintained its importance in the 12th c. Still, international contacts, probably not only of commercial character, were limited almost entirely to Ruthenia, whose frontier extended not more than 50 km from the ford on the Vistula. The significance of Trójca in the 12th c. is attested not only by the recently discovered hoard of Piast coins and the foundation of the church dedicated to the Holy Trinity, but also by the lead princely seal (*bull*a), probably of Boleslaus III Wrymouth. It is the sixth known specimen of such a seal, but previously these artefacts were discovered only in the main power centres or in their vicinities (cf. Suchodolski 2009, 207–231). Taking into consideration the preliminary dating of the *bull*a, we can attempt to link it with some unspecified grants to the church dedicated to the Holy Trinity – which was a princely foundation – or to the Zawichost Archdeaconry that was being formed at that time. It was only at the end of the Middle Ages,

with events such as the founding of the town of Zawichost by Boleslaus V the Chaste (*Wstydlivy*) in the middle of the 13th c. (cf. Chyła 2010, 127–130) and the establishment of a market place there, consecutive Mongol and Mongol-Ruthenian raids, and especially the shifts in the bed of the Vistula River (which caused the change of the location of the ford) that led to the marginalisation of Trójca. The same change of the riverbed also caused the depopulation and subsequent destruction of the stronghold in Zawichost, which was later replaced by a castle founded by Casimir III the Great (*Wielki*) and situated in a different location, in the valley of the Vistula by the new ford.

The survey in Trójca conducted in 2020–2021 by the research group Nadwiślańska Grupa Poszukiwawcza Stowarzyszenia “Szansa” and people cooperating with it is a good example of what can be achieved from the cooperation between detectorists, archaeologists and monument preservation officers. Without them, our knowledge of Trójca would not exceed what is known from the surface survey conducted within the framework of Polish Archaeological Record at the end of the 1980s. The search and excavations commenced in 2021 will be continued in close cooperation with archaeologists from different institutions and specialists in various fields, including historians and numismatists, with kind support from the authorities of Zawichost.

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