

**ANDRZEJ KUCZKOWSKI (Poland)**

SPACE, TIME AND FUNCTION.  
GÓRA CHEŁMSKA NEAR KOSZALIN  
IN THE MIDDLE AGES

**Introduction**

Without any doubt, the identification of sites of traditional religious worship solely on an archaeological basis is a controversial question. In the case of the West Slavonic peoples of the early Middle Ages we encounter few written accounts, and these only serve to support our speculations, rather than providing unambiguous answers. Instead, more questions and doubts arise (*Moszyński, 1998*).

In the Polish literature there is considerable arbitrariness in the use of terms usually employed by scholars of religion, so that intuitive connections are formed with the discovered archaeological evidence. And although intuition is a substantial factor for the humanities, free manipulation of terms taken from religious studies is not justified any more. This paper concentrates on several aspects of one case, which has been of exceptional importance to me – the mountain *Góra Chełmska* on the outskirts of the city of Koszalin. It is important to specify the exact focus of our interest. Customarily, two terms – seen as synonymous – are used: beliefs and religion. At first glance, such treatment of the two terms is fully justified. After a thorough consideration, however, doubts arise: to my mind, religion and beliefs should be defined separately. Religion, in my view, is the sum of all factors characteristic of the society or social group in question in the historical period under study that this society as a whole relates to an intangible view of the universe. Beliefs, on the other hand, are verbalized and individualized attitudes of the individual towards the sphere of the supernatural, characteristic of a society in a specified period of time.

A clear difference can be seen here: the aforementioned verbalization, i.e. accounts by the believers themselves. In the case of the tribal Slavonic societies we do not possess a single record written by a pagan author. This places

us in the position of external observers of Slavonic religion – several centuries after it ceased to exist as a functionally coherent belief system. Stemming from this fact are numerous difficulties encountered in describing and interpreting the facts under study.

Scholars of religion dealing with ancient religions have been fond of inventing typologies: let us consider the examples of belief systems described as ancestor cults, animistic or totemic cults, shamanism, etc. Qualifying a belief system as one of these often results in a very one-sided interpretation of facts recorded within the framework of that system. This is particularly the case with past societies – whose supernatural worlds are known through the perspective of residual, more or less objective written accounts or archaeological evidence. All this may create a one-sided view of ancient religions. It has been my opinion that within a traditional religious system, elements of manism, totemism or shamanism exist side by side with elements of a different nature. Their occurrence is not mutually exclusive and they all constitute complementary elements within one ideological complex.

**Góra Chełmska** is part of the Wzgórza Koszalińskie range of hills, which extend for 13.5 km east of the city of Koszalin. The hills were formed by glaciation in the early Cenozoic Era. This is the highest point along the whole south coast of the Baltic Sea. The Chełmski massif consists of three hills: Krzyżanki, Łeśnica and Krzywogóra (*Siedlak*, 1965) (Fig. 1). The authors of post-1945 broad-spectrum archaeological research have unanimously qualified this as a pre-Christian site of worship (*Janocha, Lachowicz*, 1991, 11ff). At this point a second important idea automatically arises. A common term for sites with features thought to be connected with the religious is 'place of worship'. This is connected with a specific perception of these sites: a secluded area where sacrifices were made and prayers said. It absolutely does not include all religious behaviour that could have taken place within that space. My interpretation will be a broader one: a place of worship is an area that is defined anthropogenically and geographically in the process of site or area symbolization, constituting a temporary or permanent place of religious practice by a given social group and representing an important cultural correlate (pattern).

The history of excavations at Góra Chełmska starts before 1629, when the book by Johannes Mkirälius *Sechs Bücher vom alten Pommerlande* was published. It mentions the finding of a brass horn, a sword and bones of a 'giant' on the massif. Broad-spectrum archaeological excavations were performed in 1905–1938



had a hermitage, which would usually be located in a forest, and in this case belonged to the Chełmska Chapel. The forests presumably also covered the northern approaches to the mountain. The discovery of an ancient burial mound site between the villages of Skwierzynka and Kędzierzyn in 1876 supports this claim. Had the site been located in a deforested area, it would have been destroyed within 25 to 40 years. It is also noteworthy that the village of Osieki, about 8 km north of Chełmska, has preserved a legend about a wild hunt, which took place in a forest (*Bojar-Fijałkowski, 1986*).

Some hydrographic information on the area should be provided. The massif of Góra Chełmska used to be surrounded by a dense ring of bogs extending to the coast of the Baltic Sea in the north. This constituted a 20-km-long and 5- to 7-km-wide barrier passable with difficulty, which in addition was dissected by the valleys of the river Unieść and Wkrzanka, each up to 4 km wide. In 1725 a treasure was found near the sources of the Unieść, consisting of 'medallions, old coins and silver' (*Wendland, 2006, Chapter I, §VI, Note 13*), which could cautiously be interpreted as an early medieval hoard, possibly containing coins, jewellery and scrap metal. The treasure itself was unfortunately dispersed and lost entirely soon after its discovery. Bearing in mind that at least some of the deposits of this kind were hidden along trade routes, it may be assumed that a considerable stretch of the Unieść was navigable.

Another very intriguing find may be proof that the river was used as a waterway: a little sculpted head of walrus tusk, probably a Scandinavian import dating from the 10th–13th century, found at the swampy mouth of the river, where it enters Lake Jamno (*Filipowiak, 1974, 251*). Adjoining Góra Chełmska on the western side was the valley of the River Dzierżęcinka, narrower than the two previously mentioned rivers, but possessing numerous tributaries (*Sprutta, 2001*). As late as the 18th century it was noted that the sources of these tributaries, springing from the Chełmska massif, never froze in winter, even in the bitterest frost (*Wendland, 2006, 447*).

Next we should discuss the role of the mountain in the cultural landscape. We do possess one basic source of information on the topic: the analysis of the settlement network recorded during archaeological excavations on the hills.

The distribution of settlement traces around Góra Chełmska dating from Phase IV of the Early Middle Ages (i.e. the end of the 10th to the mid-12th century), corresponding to the archaeologically proven period of navigation on the main run of the River Krzyżanka, reflects the profound changes happening at

that time in Pomeranian social structure: the fall of most of the small burgs that flourished in the so-called 'tribal period' and the transfer of their functions to a few larger decision-making centres (e.g. Kołobrzeg). These changes were bound to influence the character of traditional religious life. In the wake of the collapse of the old social structures this was becoming the main element legitimizing the *new world order*. An elaborate ritual system became an important force in the process of integrating a new society (Rosik, 2000).

The clear separation of Góra Chełmska from the settlement network of that time points to its special character. The nearest settlement is Site 19 in Dzierżęcín, 5 km in a straight line from the summit of Chełmska. The individual settlements of Early Medieval Phase IV were located only about 2–2.5 km apart. The rule of British archaeology referred to as the 'principle of least effort' states that the size of a territory utilized by a settlement should provide the best proportion of benefits stemming from its utilization and the costs thereof (e.g. the effort put into transportation of goods to the settlement). The size of a model area of utilisation from a settlement was estimated as 5 km, with the most intensive use of the area within a radius of 2 km from the settlement (Kobyliński, 1986, 8–9). It can be said of Góra Chełmska that arable land was no nearer than 3–5 km from the summit. Additionally, the undulating slopes of the hill and the strip of bog encircling the foot of Chełmska would have been further obstacles for communication and transport. If we accept the idea that there were permanent settlements of an unknown society at the summit of Krzyżanka in the early medieval period, it seems that the effort put into agricultural exploitation of the nearest arable land would have exceeded the benefits of using it.

Also, analysis of the plant remains from the excavations suggests that the Chełmska massif was used for purposes other than farming. As much as 92% of the identified seeds were pine and oak: pine constituted 51% and oak 41%. The remaining seeds came from another tree species (hornbeam) and two annual meadow plants (*Sinapsis arvensis* and wild buckwheat). No domesticated plants were identified (Janocha, 1974, 127).

All of this makes the space of the Chełmska massif, in my opinion, a special place for the neighbouring medieval societies, connected with the sphere of the religious and the magical. This is stressed in the definition of a place of worship as a defined area (defined anthropogenically or by the forces of nature). During the excavations no structures which could have constituted man-made

borders were found. It follows, therefore, that in this case, too, we are dealing with natural boundaries. How, then, were the boundaries of the sacred area on the massif of Góra Chełmska defined? An indirect answer comes from the geographical structure of the area itself.

In the Middle Ages the massif was surrounded by a thick ring of bog and forest (see above). Let us refer to sources that are reluctantly used by Polish archaeologists: legends. Scepticism towards these sources stems, it seems to me, predominantly from the single fact that archaeologists, as representatives of historical studies, tend to start their analysis of a problem with two questions: *When?* and *Who?* However, folk tradition is neither datable (except for the date of the oldest account we know of), nor do we know the author (only the anthropologist's informant). To me, oral tradition is not a historical document, though, but a reflection of the common social sensitivity to the surrounding world of nature and culture (*Kuczkowski, 2008; Kuczkowski, in print*).

The analysis of well-known folk-tales relating to the Chełmska massif has clearly shown that, apart from the stories concerning the sanctuary as a pilgrimage destination and the local highwaymen stories – which presumably date from the Christian period – the remaining tales are set exclusively *on the hillsides* and *at the foot of the mountain* (*Kuczkowski, 2009*). This does not seem to be coincidental. The stories, mostly connected with the imagery of demonology, constitute a document of common sensitivity. It seems that we are dealing with a reflection of ancient views concerning this space, preserved in the local verbal folklore. Demons, i.e. beings both from this world and from outside it, fully correspond to the nature of a border area – one that belongs to nobody, and at the same time brings together two neighbouring spheres (in this case that of the sacred and that of the profane) (*Buchowski, 1993, 88*). It is an area where it is possible to perform rituals of passage required before one enters the sphere of the sacred and after one leaves it.

### Time

Traces of human activity in the Middle Ages at the top of Chełmska, connected with the sphere of the sacred, date from between the mid-11th and the mid-13th century (the period of pagan religious practices) and from the mid-13th century to the 1520s (i.e. the period of the Christian sanctuary) (*Kuczkowski, 2005*).

Both periods can be divided into three phases of development.

Phase I, up to the mid-11th century. Due to the low chronological sensitivity of the archaeological evidence collected at the site (*Kuczowski, 2005*), this phase was identified on the basis of its character. I have presented above my arguments that Góra Chełmska had a special role in the medieval cultural landscape. The assumptions behind these arguments can be extended chronologically back in time to the period of arrival of the Slavonic communities in Pomerania.

Apart from their internal social differentiation, during the whole medieval period the Slavonic peoples represented the traditional model of an agrarian civilization. Thence the general conclusion that similar input from the outside world may have caused similar reactions in them, regardless of the time period. Continuing this trail of thought, it seems that the mountain in question may have played a significant role in the common religious and magical imagination before the second half of the 11th century, i.e. before the time when human activity at the top of the Chełmska is proven to have started according to the archaeological evidence.

The second phase, which includes most of the early medieval artefacts registered during the excavations (Fig. 2), may be considered as spanning the period from the mid-11th to the mid-13th century. Along with social change in the region of Pomerania around the turn of the 11th century, reflected by the rapid collapse of the network of small burghs and the rise of a few large administrative centres (*Olczak, 1991, 150 ff*), at least some elements of the local religious system must have changed. It is possible that, along with the centralization of administration, centralization or institutionalization of religious life also took place. Could some kind of wooden edifice of a religious nature have been constructed there at that time? It is possible that during the same period a significant person was buried there in a boat, and the burial perhaps covered with a mound. It is noteworthy that inhumation burial in mounds was practiced in Pomerania between the turn of the 11th and the early or mid-12th century (*Rębkowski, 2007, 108*) and perfectly matches the cycle of social change registered in the region at that time. It is possible that the grave was a continuation of a funeral tradition connected with the location. However, perhaps it was this specific memorial that constituted the character of the space where it was located. A find of a pot with dog remains, deposited in one of the hearths (recorded as Hearth 1), is probably connected with the funerary nature of the space. It can be interpreted as evidence of an act of sacrifice. In

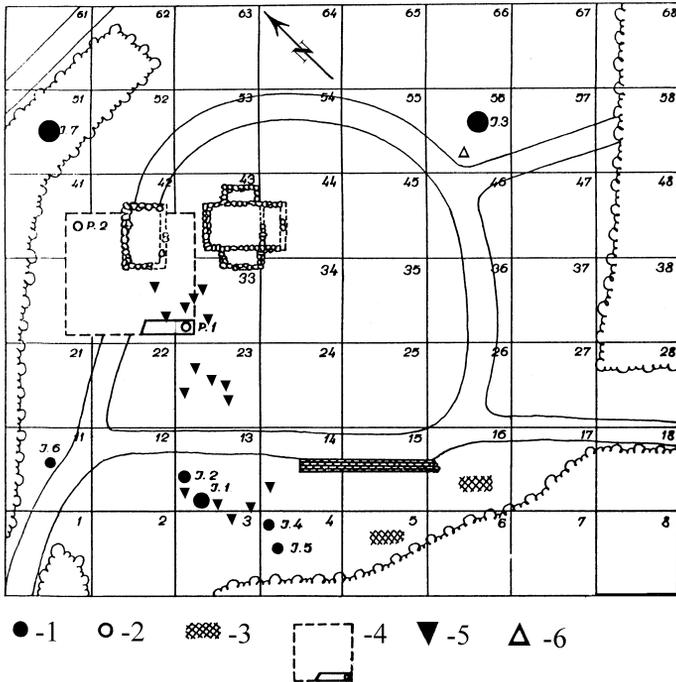


Fig. 2. Koszalin – Góra Chelmska (Stage 1). Early medieval structures (according to Janocha, 1974, 134, Fig. 7): 1 – hearth hollow; 2 – hearth; 3 – traces of burning; 4 – part of a house ('temple'), showing the hypothetical shape; 5 – burials, presumed early medieval; 6 – boat burial.

folk culture, dogs act as harbingers of death, which they announce by howling (Bonowska, 2003). We are most probably not dealing with a dog burial here, since they are an extreme rarity in this part of Europe (Gräslund, 2004, 169). It is certain, though, that the find is connected with the funeral context. In the face of this, the dog may be interpreted as the guardian of the world beyond the grave, or a symbolic manifestation of such a guardian, something that is well-proven for Scandinavian beliefs in the early Middle Ages, for example (Gräslund, 2004, 170). Dogs belong both to the world of nature and to that of culture, and may reflect both positive and negative characteristics, hence their

predisposition to act in the two antagonistic worlds – the earthly world and the afterlife.

Phase III (mid-13th century – 1520s), based on the collected evidence, marks the period of operation of the Christian sanctuary with a large burial ground next to the church. Christianity triggered very significant changes in man's relationship with nature, through the process of replacing sacred groves and springs with worship taking place inside buildings. By raising a House of God, a symbolic hierarchy was introduced into the neighbouring settlement network (*Bylina*, 2002, 26, 149). The church used to stand on the hill, although this location made it less accessible to the worshippers. However, by towering above the vicinity, it did sanctify what in Christian understanding was a greater and less tame space (*Bylina*, 2002, 151).

I am well aware that the above text is essentially a hypothesis that is very difficult to verify.

The site was also found to contain marks of religious and magical behaviour dating to the time after the Christianization of the area. It is usually considered that the contradictory magical and religious behavioural phenomena recorded in the course of anthropological and archaeological studies, or those phenomena which do not reflect the official teachings of the church, are relics of the pre-Christian religion. It seems that is a rather gross oversimplification. Magical thinking is not typical for non-monotheistic cultures, nor is it a degenerative form of traditional beliefs, a disease or 'primitive science'. It is an age-old structure, deeply rooted within the human being, persisting equally in past epochs and in our time (*Leeuw van der*, 1978, 580). It must be remembered, then, that the traces of magical actions taking place both before and after introduction of Christianity do not imply any continuity of this kind of practice.

It is probably to the sphere of the magical that we may attribute a find of nine coins in Area 9, dated to the late medieval period. The fact that only a boat burial has been found at the site suggests that the coins could not have belonged to the grave. The presence of numerous coins in close proximity to the boat burial, initially probably covered by a mound (*Zoll-Adamikowa*, 1988, 200, footnote 23), can be considered the result of an unknown magical activity. This formula is also found in the case of the *Kopiec Krakusa* (King Krak's Barrow) in Krakow, where numerous coins have been found on the surface of a hillock, dating mainly from the 16th–20th century (*Kotlarczyk*, 1979, 58), this

being the material evidence for the ritual of tossing them from the top, called *Rękawka* (*Jamka*, 1965, 223–224).

### Function

It can be concluded from the sources discussed above that in the early medieval period Góra Chełmska constituted a sacred area. I purposely abstain from employing the term 'place of worship', since there is no evidence of any worship of the supernatural, and no artefact that could be connected with the religious sphere has been found. It is commonly held by scholars that, should any object of this nature be found on a site, it qualifies as a sacred site (*Szafrański*, 1983). This is, however, a rather one-sided view. It is the context that provides an object with meaning, and not the other way round. Religious and magical actions were absolutely acceptable in profane places (e.g. agrarian rites performed on fields) and did not make the place in question any more sacred. In the case of the sacred, each *utilitarian* action detracted from the religious significance. In many cases such an action was irreversible. Not every space where material evidence of religious activity has been recorded was a place of worship in the common understanding. Therefore, the term 'place of worship' does not properly describe the character of the Slavonic culture of old. More justified is the use of the terms 'sacred space', 'sacred area', etc.

### Conclusion

It is not an object connected with the sacred, but above all the context (natural and cultural) in which it is found that proves the existence of a space of religious practice. An object deemed a regular, everyday item may once have been an element of sacred imagery. Features revealed by archaeological excavation may be approached in the same manner. Each of these studied separately can be regarded as, say, a storage pit, the remains of a house, etc. At the same time, when related to the general surroundings, a single find may turn out to be part of a greater whole with a clear meaning. Its sacredness is not limited to its form, but corresponds to the sum of all meanings included in it (i.e. its content).

## Bibliography

- Bojar-Fijałkowski, 1986. Bojar-Fijałkowski G. Nocna przygoda drwala Marcina. W *krainie Gryfitów. Podania, legendy i baśnie Pomorza Zachodniego*. Ed. Świrko S. Poznań, 1986. 522–525.
- Bonowska, 2003. Bonowska M. Znaki zwiastujące śmierć i jej zapowiedź na Pomorzu na przełomie XIX i XX wieku. *Problemy współczesnej tanatologii. Medycyna – antropologia kultury – humanistyka*. Ed. Kolbuszewski J. Vol. 7. Wrocław, 2003. 273–284.
- Buchowski, 1993. Buchowski M. *Magia i rytuał*. Warszawa, 1993.
- Bylina, 2002. Bylina S. *Chryścianizacja wsi polskiej u schyłku średniowiecza*, Warszawa, 2002.
- Filipowiak, 1974. Filipowiak W. Słowiańskie przystanie nad Jeziorem Bukowskim na Pomorzu. *Studia Archaeologica Pomeranica*. Ed. Lachowicz F. J. Koszalin, 1974. 241–253.
- Gräslund, 2004. Gräslund A.-S. Dogs in graves – a question of symbolism? *PECUS. Man and animal in antiquity. Proceedings of the conference at the Swedish Institute in Rome, September 9–12, 2002*. Ed. Frizell B. S. Rome, 2004. 167–176.
- Jamka, 1965. Jamka R. Wyniki badań wykopaliskowych na kopcu Krakusa w Krakowie. *Slavia Antiqua*. 12. 1965. 183–233.
- Janocha, 1974. Janocha H. Wyniki prac badawczych przeprowadzonych w latach 1961 i 1962 na Górze Chełmskiej (Krzyżance) koło Koszalina. Cz. 2. *Materiały Zachodniopomorskie*. 20. 1974. 31–68.
- Janocha, Lachowicz, 1991. Janocha H., Lachowicz F. J. *Góra Chełmska. Miejsce dawnych kultów i Sanktuarium Maryjne*. Koszalin, 1991.
- Kobyliński, 1986. Kobyliński Z. Koncepcja "terytorium eksploatowanego przez osadę" w archeologii brytyjskiej i jej implikacje badawcze. *Archeologia Polski*. 1986. 21:1. 7–30.
- Kuczkowski, 2004. Kuczkowski A. Stan i potrzeby badań nad Górą Chełmską (Krzyżanką) koło Koszalina. *Koszalińskie zeszyty Muzealne*. 24. 2004. 69–93.
- Kuczkowski, 2005. Kuczkowski A. Analiza wczesnośredniowiecznej ceramiki naczyniowej z Góry Chełmskiej (stan. 1) koło Koszalina. *Koszalińskie Zeszyty Muzealne*. 25. 2005. 21–45.
- Kuczkowski, 2008. Kuczkowski A. Magiczno – symboliczna organizacja przestrzeni masywu Góry Chełmskiej koło Koszalina w średniowieczu i czasach nowożytnych. *Czary i czarownictwo na Pomorzu. Materiały z konferencji naukowej, która odbywał się w dniach 17–18 maja 2007 r. w Marianowie*. Ed. A. Majewska. Stargard, 2008, 59–74.
- Kuczkowski, 2009. Kuczkowski A. Tradycja kontynuacji ośrodków kultu pogańskiego na Pomorzu. *Nasze Pomorze. Rocznik Muzeum Zachodnio – Kaszubskiego w Bytowie*. 11. 2009. 39–53.
- Kuczkowski, in print. Kuczkowski A. Podania ludowe o Górze Chełmskiej (Krzyżance) koło Koszalina. *Nasze Pomorze. Rocznik Muzeum Zachodnio – Kaszubskiego w Bytowie*.
- Kotlarczyk, 1979. Kotlarczyk J. Kopiec Krakusa – kopiec zagadek i rozczarowań. *Z Otcłani Wieków*. 45:1. 1979. 52–62.
- Leeuw van der, 1978. Leeuw van der G. *Fenomenologia religii*. Warszawa, 1978.
- Moszyński, 1998. Moszyński L. Dlaczego naukowe opisy prasłowiańskich wierzeń są tak różnorodne. *Studia Mythologica Slavica*. 1. 1998. 35–44.

Olczak, 1991. Olczak J. *Formy osadnictwa na Pojezierzu Zachodniopomorskim we wczesnym średniowieczu (Na podstawie źródeł archeologicznych)*. Toruń, 1991.

Rębkowski, 2007. Rębkowski M. *Chryścianizacja Pomorza Zachodniego. Studium archeologiczne*. Szczecin, 2007.

Rosik, 2000. Rosik S. Awans słońca w przedchrześcijańskiej mitologii Słowian na tle przemian społeczno – politycznych. *Człowiek, sacrum, środowisko. Miejsca kultu we wczesnym średniowieczu*. Ed. S. Możdziej. Spotkania Bytomskie. Vol. 4. Wrocław, 2000. 49–59.

Schulz, 1931. Schulz F. Die vor- und frühgeschichtliche Besiedlung des Kreises Köslin auf Grund der Ortsnamen. *Unsere Pommerland*. 16:11/12. 418–421.

Siedlak, 1965. Siedlak J. Uwagi o rzeźbie okolic Koszalina. *Rocznik Koszaliński*. 1. 1965. 112–126.

Sprutta, 2001. Sprutta J. Koszalińskie wody – wczoraj i dziś. *Koszalin, z dziejów miasta do 1266 roku*. Vol. 1. Ed. Buczak E. Koszalin, 2001. 189–206.

Szafrański, 1983. Szafrański W. Wznowienie wykopalisk na grodzisku żarnowieckim w Sobieńczycach pod Puckiem. *Pomorania Antiqua*. 11. 1983. 187–203.

Wendland, 2006. Wendland J. D. *Eine Sammlung unterschiedlicher die Historie der Stadt Cöslin betreffende Sachen von Johann David Wendland, czyli Zbiór rzeczy rozmaitych historii Miasta Koszalin dotyczących pióra Johanna Davida Wbedlanda*. Eds. Chojecka J., et al. Koszalin, 2006.

Zoll-Adamikowa, 1988. Zoll-Adamikowa H. Przyczyny i formy recepcji rytuału szkieletowego u Słowian nadbałtyckich we wczesnym średniowieczu. *Przegląd Archeologiczny*. 35. 1988. 183–229.