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Archaeological heritage in rivers. Comments based on the results of underwater penetration in Gwda river, between Piła and Ujście

Abstract

Archaeological artifacts accidentally discovered by divers were donated to the collections of the Piła Regional Museum. As a result, a decision was made to start systematic underwater archaeological penetrations in the Gwda River. The systematic underwater research conducted by the Toruń centre and the penetrations carried out in the Gwda prove the wealth of the underwater archaeological heritage and its scientific importance. At the same time, they reveal its progressive degradation - by people and nature. For scientific and conservation reasons, there is an urgent need to take systemic measures to learn about and protect this heritage.

Keywords

Underwater archaeology, river archaeology, underwater archaeological penetrations, Gwda River, Piła

Summary

Among the least archaeologically explored parts of Poland are inland open waters, including rivers. This problem affects a large area of the country. In the lower parts of valleys, along water-filled channels, there are areas inaccessible to surface archaeological reconnaissance.

In the absence of due interest from conservation services, a limited programme of recording underwater archaeological sites was developed at the Institute of Archaeology at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. The research activity was primarily directed at identifying the relict space lying in the lakes.

Since 2017, underwater penetrations have been carried out by the Piła District Museum in Piła on sections of the River Gwda located between Piła and Ujście nad Notcią. Remains of wooden bridges have been located in both channels of the Gwda river flowing around the island. This crossing functioned at least from the location of the town in the mid-15th century until the end of the 18th century. In addition, an area rich in historical material with a chronology from the late Middle Ages to modern times was identified.

South of the Piła River, along a stretch of wild, highly meandering river, six archaeological sites with chronologies ranging from Mesolithic to modern times have been discovered so far. In addition, a fresh break in the bank of the riverbed with profiles of objects - a fragment of a cemetery of the Wielbark culture - has been observed. It can be assumed that all the artefacts recorded so far have entered the River Gwda as a result of the sites being washed away by the river. They are very well preserved, but at the same time destroyed by the forces of nature.

The recognition of the underwater archaeological heritage in Poland is not systematic. Prehistoric settlements were adjacent to and connected to water, so there is no shortage of sources related to the daily life, economic activities or rituals of communities whose chronology dates back to the Stone Age.

To date, the work of Toruń archaeologists has focused almost exclusively on identifying relict spaces in lakes. Nevertheless, watercourses cannot be overlooked in the study of underwater archaeological heritage. Objects found in rivers in contexts that exclude the existence of crossings most likely come

from archaeological sites destroyed by the current that washed them away. Equally important information can be obtained from penetrations carried out on regulated sections of rivers flowing through urban centres since the Middle Ages.

Large-scale underwater archaeological penetrations are necessary for conservation and scientific reasons. The destruction of archaeological artefacts resting in the waters is also at risk. In addition, the results of surveys that do not take into account the archaeological heritage found in the waters in addition to the artefacts on land can be seriously falsified.