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The Stronghold on St. Peter's Hill in Radom (Poland). Archaeology, Biography of the Place, and Practices of Memory

ABSTRACT

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The stronghold called St. Peter's hill in Radom is located in the centre of the city, in an area severely degraded by the side effects of 19th- and 20th-century industrialisation. The archaeological excavations and paleoecological research carried out in 2009–2013 created a background for studying its complex past and designing the future. The biography of St. Peter's hill encompasses the early medieval power centre, late medieval urbanisation, nineteenth-century industrialisation, subsequent degradation of material and human resources, and present revitalisation projects. This place is far more than an archaeological site or even a part of archaeological heritage. It is a unique cultural landscape, which emerged as a result of long-lasting mutual relations between man and nature. Its materiality constitutes an inalienable cultural capital, indispensable for the reconstruction of local identities and communities of memory.

Keywords: Radom, stronghold, archaeology, memory, revitalisation

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Introduction

The stronghold, which has been known as “St. Peter's hill” since the 16th c., is situated on the right side of the wide and shallow valley of the Mleczna river. Its outline approaches a regular circle with a diameter of ca 150 metres. Ramparts, partially destroyed by levelling, partially by a line of military trenches from World War II, raise over 4 metres above the surrounding meadows, encompassing an area of about 1.5 hectares. The interior of the stronghold, with a slight elevation in the centre, bears traces of sand harvesting, carried out in the first half of the 20th century. East of the stronghold, the half-rural, half-industrial city district called “Old Radom” extends, with the medieval church of

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St. Wenceslas located in the centre. Wet meadows and swamps that surround the stronghold form the north, west, and south cover the remains of early medieval open settlements (Fig. 1).

The stronghold in Radom was investigated already in the 1960s. Regrettably, the results have not been published yet (Fuglewicz 2013, 11–30, with further literature). The site's entry in the National Heritage list, accomplished in 1972, appears to be the most permanent legacy of the excavations. Concurrently with the excavations, a project of an archaeological open-air museum was created, revisited by the city authorities after 40 years, owing to the fact that the stronghold had become a part of a multi-hectare wasteland as a result of long-term negligence and degradation of the urban tissue. A new research project, carried out in 2009–2013, was to precede the revitalisation project of this highly deteriorated area. Its main goal was the acquisition of archaeological data, which was indispensable for designing a strategy for the conservation and exhibition of the early medieval settlement complex (Trzeciecki 2013a; 2018a, 10–15).



Fig. 1. Aerial view of the Mleczna river valley in Radom: 1 – stronghold, 10th–14th c.; 2 – open settlements, 10th–12th c.; 3 – settlement with St. Wenceslas' church, 13th–14th c.; 4 – industrial buildings, 19th c. (Photo by D. Krasnodębski, edited by M. Trzeciecki)

This opportunity to conduct extensive research, not restricted by the time limits imposed by an investment project, put the research participants under the obligation to develop an appropriate research strategy. A close collaboration between archaeologists, palaeogeographers, palaeobiologists and historians, implemented already at the stage of fieldwork, became the focal point of the entire project. At the start, it was driven by the essentially positivistic conviction that the larger scope of the data we obtained, the more complete and accurate the reconstruction of the past would be. However, the confrontation of the methodologies and research approaches of all the disciplines involved revised the majority of the original assumptions. Already the first results of archaeological and paleoenvironmental investigations enabled us to look at the material heritage of St. Peter's hill as an interminable stream of interactions between man and nature in which our excavations are but one of the episodes. Furthermore, activities aimed at opening communication channels between the researchers and the local community, at the start driven by the notion of "heritage popularisation", led to an encounter of "our" and "local" memory discourses, indicating the need to ask questions such as: what constitutes the heritage of the past, does it belong to the domain of history or memory, and who is the depositary (Auch *et al.* 2012, 9–15; Trzeciecki 2018b)?

The following text poses questions of this nature. The notion of the "biography of a place", embracing the entirety of the phenomena that shaped the contemporary landscape of the Mleczna river valley, serves here as a "conceptual roadmap". Among the advantages of such an approach, of key importance is the switch from the perception of an archaeological site as a complete and infrangible deposit of the past into a more dynamic vision of the site as a permanent process of becoming, driven both by long-term natural phenomena and more or less incidental human activities. Archaeological excavations, the everyday lives of the local inhabitants, and revitalisation projects are, from this vantage point, but part of the process.

The biography of St. Peter's hill invites researchers of the past to look into the future, which in the times of dynamic changes in the post-modern world is as much of a challenge as it is a necessity. Biographical approach shows that objects such as the Radom stronghold cannot be regarded as a closed chapter of history. Their materiality still impacts our here-and-now. It constitutes a particular reference to the

past, inscribed both in the landforms and their natural and cultural content, that “endows the present time with multidimensionality” (Augé 2010, 46). The biography of a place recognises the investigated object as an assemblage consisting of landforms, ecosystem, material relics of past human activities, and contemporary entanglements in social politics, economies, or memory practices, both on the local and global level. Hence, archaeology, regarded so far as focused on the past, turns into a discipline open to the future, involved in the study, care, and management of the material remains of the past along with their local depositaries, forasmuch as their identification with the place builds its real social value (Solli *et al.* 2011, 52–54; Olivier 2013; Edgeworth *et al.* 2014, 99–102; Stobiecka 2018, 137–139, with further literature).

The biographical approach to the archaeological site is present in the agenda of landscape archaeology, particularly in the theoretical orientations driven by the work of Tim Ingold (1993), regarding landscape as a process of permanent mutual interactions between its human and non-human “dwellers” (cf.: Holtorf and Williams 2006; Branton 2009; Edgeworth 2016; Hicks 2016; Rajala and Mills 2017, with further literature). The biographic narrative based on archaeological and paleoenvironmental data collated with documents, oral history and collective memories of contemporary inhabitants of the place in question, corresponds with an anthropological approach to the temporality of the landscape, as posed by T. Ingold (1993, 171–171; 2005). It also adheres to the notion of “thick description” that focuses on human entanglements in the specified locality and time, and puts emphasis on the fieldwork experience (Geertz 2005, 19ff). It should not be ignored that Geertz’s methodological approach corresponds in a way with archaeology’s routine field documentation practices.

With its tendency to obliterate the boundaries between what is “historical” and “contemporary”, the biography of a place adheres to reflection on the materiality of the past and its agency in the contemporary world, as well as to discourses on individual and collective memories embodied in monuments, artefacts and heritage sites. The issue of the place of memory studies in the contemporary humanities is a topic for a separate text. The growing interest in the material “carriers of memory”, referring us to the notion of *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1984; 2009), is, however, worth emphasising. Putting aside the complex issue of the definition, it should be stressed here that *lieux de mémoire* studies

focus on the mechanisms of cultural memory formation, changes to which collective ideas about the past are subject, and on the place that the memory occupies in identity discourses. The strategies of recognising and inventing both places of memory and commemorative practices settled around them are a separate issue (Szpociński 2008; 2014; Kończal 2012; Zalewska 2014, with further literature).

According to Pierre Nora (2009, 8), the fundamental difference between memory and history is that memory is a dialogue, binding experience of the past with “eternal here-and-now”, while history (in terms of scientific discourse) is but a representation of the past, an incomplete reconstruction of what no longer exists. Hence, archaeology, with its routine practices requiring permanent (at least in the course of fieldwork) contact with material remains of the past; with its particular sensibility to traces, remains, and waste; with its procedures of classification, is definitely akin to memory, though seduced by the positivistic paradigm of “objective knowledge”, tends – often disadvantaging itself – to become history (Zalewska 2012; Olivier 2013, 122–124). Archaeology, considered as a memory practice opens itself up to a dialogue with individual and collective local memories.

The reassessment of the place which the past occupies in our present stands among the key issues of the discourse on the human condition in the postmodern world. The growing distrust of the fragmented and flexible reality stimulates an increasing need to establish direct relations with the past, endowed with the value of authenticity and firmness. It is explicitly associated with the phenomena described as the democratisation and privatisation of the past, promoting direct and sensual contact with times past, without the mediation of academic or heritage institutions (Krajewski 2003, 206–209; Szpociński 2007, 28–34; Pawleta 2016, 51–59). Thus, references to the past, particularly to the more or less mythologised time of the origins, assume the form of a signpost in the quarry of local identifications.

Justifications of the reconstructed identities, self-consciousnesses fostered by referencing the mythological “long ago”, (micro)histories written for the sake of local requirements – all of them strive for a specific “certificate of authenticity” (Csáky 2002, 34–38; Szpociński 2009, 230–232). The demand can be met by rediscovering or inventing material signs of memory, such as heritage sites inscribed in the local landscape. It must be, however, stressed that the recognition of local

memory sites described above is a “bottom-up” process, at odds with the persuasive, focused on national identity and mainly “top-down” constructed *lieux de mémoires*, dominating both national and Pan-European memory discourses (Pfister and Prager 2011). Such a phenomenon conjoins with both fatigue of “monumental memory” that dominates national grand narratives and striving to replace it with local memory, embodied in tangible objects, monumentalised for the needs of the local here-and-now (Szpociński 2004, 164–167; Nora 2010, 137–138; Pawleta 2016, 73–74).

What does all this have to do with a biographical approach to the archaeological site? Facing the erosion of large state-funded research programmes aimed at creating great, overwhelming syntheses, archaeologists, partially perforce, turn to local studies, carried out with the support of local communities. Hence, researchers engage themselves or are engaged in the discourses of local identities, policies, and economies held by various stakeholders, oftentimes competing or conflicting with each other. Archaeology is thus acknowledged as a discipline equipped with expert competencies to grant the aforementioned “certificate of authenticity” to material relics of the past, indispensable both in the domain of identity, image-building and commercial activities (Byszewska 2011; Pawleta 2016, 119–132, 138–148, with further literature). It imposes on researchers the obligation to develop strategies that equally consider our scientific interests, the needs and capabilities of local communities, and, above all, the future of the sites we investigate. Given that, the biography of the Radom stronghold appears to be a valuable case study.

St. Peter’s hill – towards a biography of the place

Excavation works on St. Peter’s hill and in its vicinity, carried out in 1959–1971 and in 2009–2013, encompassing the area of approximately 25.000 square meters, revealed a stratigraphic sequence documenting occupational changes from the Early Iron Age to the present time. The excavations yielded tens of thousands of finds, including numerous sets of pottery, animal and human bones, weapons, tools, items of personal use, and coins (Fuglewicz 2013; Trzeciecki 2015; 2018, 10–15; with further literature). In the course of paleoenvironmental investigations, approximately 500 drills were made, in order to collect a series of samples

for sedimentological and geochemical analyses. The results make it possible to reconstruct changes in the geomorphology and hydrology of the valley over the last 10,000 years, particularly changes of the river course (Szwarczewski *et al.* 2010; Szwarczewski 2013; Kupryjanowicz *et al.* 2013). Palinological and palaeobotanical studies document changes in vegetation (Skrzyński 2013). Still ongoing archaeozoological analyses inform us about animal husbandry (Gręzak 2018). The anthropological research project, focused on the changes of the biological condition of the population inhabiting the vicinity of the stronghold between the 11th and the 19th century, based on collections of human remains from the excavated burial grounds, is also worth mentioning (Tomczyk 2018).

The contemporary landscape of the stronghold's vicinity is far distant from the one formed here long before the first settlers appeared. On the eve of the Early Middle Ages, the Mleczna river valley was deeper and much more developed, with terraces above the floodplain. The river was navigable and freely meandering along the valley (Szwarczewski 2013, 140–141). Despite incidental traces of prehistoric settlement, the beginning of the permanent occupation of the Mleczna river valley was at the end of the 9th century. The area was not densely populated – research results point to isolated spots on fluvial terraces (Fig. 2: 1). The erection of the stronghold, at the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries, indicates the first significant turning point for the natural and cultural landscape of the valley (Trzeciński 2015, 184–185; 2018a, 15–16).

The stronghold occupied a small, sandy embankment on the fluvial terrace (Fig. 2: 2). The rampart surrounding the stronghold included wooden boxes filled with sand and stones, bolstered with an embankment made of layers of beams sandwiched with earth. Its western part was protected by the river, the other ones – by a moat. Sand harvesting, indispensable for fortification works, totally altered the original topography of the inner part of the stronghold. In the proximity of the fortification line, the ground level was lowered significantly, in some cases even below the foundations of the rampart. In the central part, the top of the hill remained untouched, slightly exceeding the reconstructed height of the rampart. Traces of buildings inside the fortification are scarce, at least in the initial phase, when the stronghold appears to have been settled by a relatively small group, utilising the space in a somewhat disorganised manner. The erection of the stronghold was accompanied by the emergence of an open settlement located 0.5 km

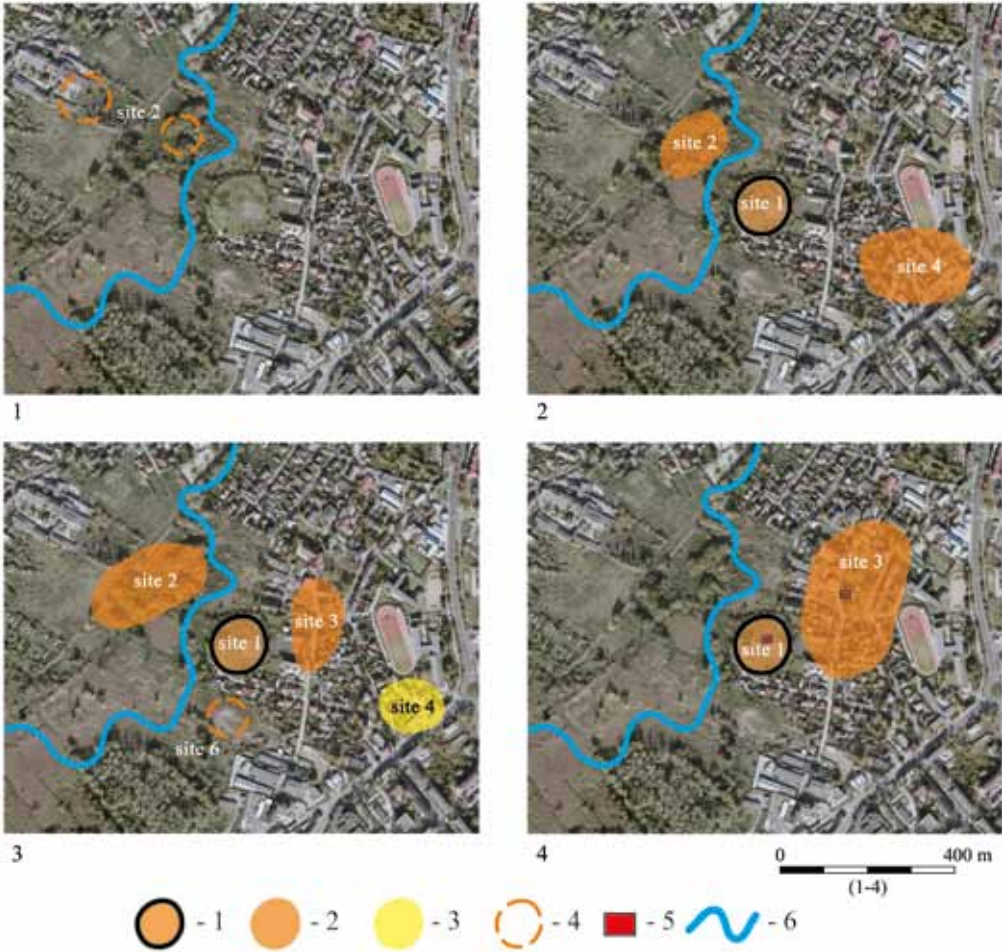


Fig. 2. Changes of settlement network in the Mleczna river valley: 10th c. (1), 11th c. (2), 12th c. (3), 13th c. (4). Legend: 1 – stronghold; 2, 4 – open settlements; 3 – burial ground; 5 – church; 6 – reconstruction of the river bed course (Graphic design by M. Trzeciecki)

eastwards, built-up with orderly lines of standardised buildings – square sunken houses with ovens in one of the corners (Auch *et al.*, in print). Both the chronology, the layout of the stronghold, and the details of the rampart construction point to the first rulers of the early Piast state as the founders of the settlement complex (Trzeciecki 2015, 192).

In the second half of the 11th century, the settlement east of the stronghold was abandoned, though in an organised way, and the place was turned into a cemetery (Kurasiński and Skóra 2016). The

settlement concentrated and flourished in the floodplain of the Mleczna river valley (Fig. 2: 3). Due to subsequent changes in the water regime in the valley, relics of wooden dwelling structures of the settlement, tools and personal items made of wood or leather, and primarily plant remains survived until today in excellent condition. In the course of the 12th century another open settlement arose outside the valley, in the immediate vicinity of the stronghold (Fuglewicz 2013, 70–98; Trzeciecki 2015, 189–191).

A look at the stronghold and its hinterland from a slightly wider perspective, possible thanks to palynology and paleobotanical research, indicates a small impact of anthropo-pressure in the entire region between the 11th and 13th centuries. The vegetation kept its natural character to a large extent; pine and mixed pine forests dominated the landscape. Significant deforestation took place only in the Mleczna valley, in the proximity of the settlement complex, where meadow and crop plants prevailed since the mid-11th century (Kupryjanowicz *et al.* 2013, 129–130; Skrzyński 2013).

Another essential change took place at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries (Fig. 2: 4). It included the total rebuilding of the stronghold rampart and an increased density of the buildings inside. The most significant investment, however, was the construction of St. Peter's church in the middle of the stronghold. Its remnants were destroyed by further levelling and sand mining carried out from the 19th c. onwards. The only evidence of the church are single skeletal burials dated to the 13th century and construction elements of limestone, found in the secondary layers. The dedication of the church survived and gave the popular name to the hill, which is still in use today (Trzeciecki 2018a, 22–24). Along with the rearrangement of the stronghold, the open settlement on the bottom of the river valley was relocated east, to the higher ground, apparently in order to avoid the rapidly growing instability of the river, as indicated by paleoenvironmental studies (Szwarczewski 2013, 141). The new multifunctional centre with its own parish church dedicated to St. Wenceslas was also better suited to the profound economic and social changes related to the ongoing process of urbanisation (Gawlas 2005; Piekalski 2007, with further literature). Consequently, at the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries, the new settlement was granted a town charter (Kalinowski 1979, 45–51; Kupisz 2009, 9).

Numerous finds dated to the early 14th century demonstrate the transformation of the early medieval stronghold into a royal castle. A deposit of silver deniers of Władysław the Short, the majority of which are extremely rare or previously unknown to numismatics, should be mentioned here first. The other finds, including fragments of a plate armour and chain mail, daggers, battle axes, a battle knife, numerous arrowheads, and spurs, imported pottery (stoneware and glazed redware), along with new forms of buildings (large houses with cellars built using frame construction) and changes in food consumption (a rapid increase of wild mammals – from 6% in the 12th c. up to 20%) indicate significant changes in the lifestyle of the stronghold's inhabitants (Bogucki and Trzeciecki 2018). Regrettably, this process was interrupted in the middle of the 14th century.

Between 1350 and 1360, king Kazimierz the Great founded a new town, which was granted Magdeburg rights, about 1 km east of the stronghold (Fig. 3). The town, called “New Radom” (*Nova Radom, Nova Civitas*), was laid out in the Western European manner – with a chessboard network of streets, a rectangular market square, a new parish church, and masonry defensive walls with a new castle, as well (Szczygieł 2001, 24–28). The former town, chartered at the eve of the 14th century, was divested of its privileges and turned into a village called “Old Radom” (*Antiqua Radom*). The stronghold, since it was no longer needed, was burned down. In the second half of the 15th century, when Radom for a short time was one of the kings' favourite residences and place of parliament sessions, almost the entire hill was densely built up. The remains of residential buildings, barns, and baking ovens, probably belonging to the castle grange, testify to a “golden age” in the history of Radom (Trzeciecki 2018c, 68–73).

In the 16th century, when royal visits came to an end, the hill was abandoned – this time for good. Between 1529 and 1779, St. Peter's hill and the surrounding meadows were subject to long-standing judicial proceedings over property rights between the Benedictines of Sieciechów and the Old Radom parish. Yet the wooden chapel erected by the monks, probably a descendant of the 13th-century church, along with the name of the hill recorded in the documents (*mons St. Petri, mons quondam arcis, mons domus regalis*) stored the memory of its former function (Gacki 1855, 248–253). The uninhabited hill remained unaffected by the intense economic activity that took place in the river valley



Fig. 3. The city of Radom on the map of Meyer von Hendsfeldt (1804): 1 – stronghold with St. Peter's church; 2 – Old Radom; 3 – New Radom (Source: <http://mapire.eu>, edited by M. Trzeciecki)

during the entire 16th century. A deforested section of the valley was a reservoir of forage, mainly for cattle but also sheep, whose breeding was of considerable importance for drapery manufacture. The second important element was the construction of water-powered grain mills (Sowina 2011, 193–194). In the following centuries activity in the Mleczna valley gradually ceased. Due to the total felling of forests, the riverbed became shallow and the river started to spill over the valley, which quickly turned into a swamp (Szwarczewski 2013, 141–142).

At the end of the 18th century the hill became Radom's first municipal cemetery. This was related to the legal closure of all parish cemeteries functioning in the most densely populated parts of the town, mainly for reasons of hygiene. The new cemetery was situated outside the town (in the legal sense), but relatively close to Radom's two main parish churches. The form of the hill symbolically separated it from the surrounding space, and the chapel situated there relieved the aversion

against burials outside the town, previously designated for those who suffered “impure” or “dishonest” death. Given the number of burials discovered during excavations, the surface of the stronghold, and records in the books of the dead from Radom parishes, we can estimate the number of people buried here at around 2,300. By 1812 the hill was completely filled, with no possibility of extending the cemetery to the surrounding wet meadows (Kupisz 2016, 54–55; Trzeciecki 2018a, 24–34). In the same year a new municipal cemetery was opened, which is still in use today. The relocation of the cemetery involved a complete demolition of the wooden chapel (Kupisz 2016, 55).

The beginning of the 19th century started the next chapter of the biography, a chapter on the gradual degradation of the former central place. The industrial revolution, which started in Radom in the 1820s, transformed the landscape of St. Peter’s hill on an enormous scale. Palynological investigations document the rapid deforestation of the whole region. The increased amount of charcoal in the sediments demonstrates the extensive use of fire. Pollen data also document an increase of crops and pastures (Kupryjanowicz *et al.* 2013, 130–131). From the mid-19th century onwards, natural hydrological and geomorphological processes in the Mleczna valley were completely inhibited by human economic activity. The entire area received tremendous amounts of industrial waste, often toxic, derived mostly from numerous tanneries located on both sides of the river (Witkowski 1970, 24–36; 1985, 119–121). Paleogeographic research revealed the ecological costs of such practices. Storage of tanner waste, as well as brick rubble and waste from construction sites of the emerging factories, led to the elevation of the valley bottom by up to 2 meters. Deposits of tanner waste, covering also the relics of the early medieval open settlements, are highly toxic – samples contain a concentration of heavy metals elements, mainly chromium and arsenic, significantly exceeding the current norms (Szwarczewski 2013, 143).

In the interwar period, the process of deterioration continued. The river was engineered and started to serve as a sewer channel for the city. The marshy meadows surrounding St. Peter’s hill were drained, in part with the use of sand and earth acquired from the stronghold. Consequently, the swampy area was altered to a place suitable for development. The land was divided into small plots, sold by the city council to residents of neighbouring villages, who migrated to Radom

in large numbers in search of work. It was at that time that a half-rural type of housing became characteristic of the vicinity of the stronghold (Witkowski 1985, 139–140; Szwarczewski *et al.* 2010, 164–167).

Little is known about St. Peter's hill during World War II. In April 1941 the stronghold and its vicinity became a part of the closed Jewish district of Radom. The accounts of what was happening there until the ghetto liquidation in August 1942 are very scanty – there were almost no survivors. Due to resettlement and post-war exchange of the population, only a few pre-war residents of Old Radom, displaced after the creation of the ghetto, returned to their homes (Piątkowski 2006, 177n). After the war ended, the hill acted as a public sand mine for construction works. Already in the 1950s, the first appeals to cease the destruction of the stronghold, as well as the first attempts at its legal protection, appeared (Kalinowski 1953; Sznuro 1966, 21). Such activities involved an invitation for the Institute of History of the Material Culture, Polish Academy of Sciences to excavate the stronghold. In this way, Radom entered the Millennium scientific programme (Fuglewicz 2013, 17–18; Trzeciecki 2017, 232–234).

The excavations carried out in the 1960s were of profound importance, not only due to the scope of the information they yielded but also and primarily for the future of the stronghold and the river valley. Both the stronghold and all of the archaeological sites in its vicinity found themselves in the National Inventory of Historical Monuments. Moreover, the entire area was to become an archaeological open-air museum, based on the model of Biskupin – with reconstructions of early medieval buildings, wooden relics exhibited *in situ*, and a museum pavilion in the former church of St. Wenceslas. The local spatial development plan included the demolition of most of the buildings (some of them historical) surrounding the stronghold, partly to “clear the area of the early medieval Slavonic proto-town”, partly to introduce large-scale administrative and service buildings for museum employees and visitors (Kalinowski 1971; Kalinowski and Kierzkowska-Kalinowska 1972; Cieślak-Kopyt 2010, 180–184). Before the execution phase started, the entire project was abandoned, partly as a side effect of the workers' revolt in Radom in 1976, partly due to a growing crisis of the socialist state economy. However, the open-air museum project, though not even begun, brought about unexpectedly significant changes in the landscape.



Fig. 4. Marshlands in the vicinity of the stronghold in 2012 (Photo by M. Trzeciecki)

Both the oppressive regulations of the heritage board and the spatial development plans completely stopped any investment activity in Old Radom, particularly the conservation of the drainage system. Already at the end of the 1970s, the Mleczna river valley changed back into a swamp, systematically fed not only by river outflows but also by municipal sewage (Fig. 4). What area remained accessible became a place of illegal storing of rubbish from around the city (Szwarczewski 2013, 143). A lack of decisions concerning the future of this place and a lack of perspectives contributed to the social marginalisation of Old Radom and its inhabitants. Consequently, St. Peter's hill quickly gained the reputation of one of the most dangerous places in Radom (Trzeciecki 2018b, 136–137). Among the side effects of administrative decisions, a spontaneous and uncontrolled re-naturalisation of the valley is of particular importance. Within a dozen or so years after human activity was halted, plants of the forest habitat came back, and the area became a shelter for many species of wildlife. Moreover, some elements of the newly created ecosystem are now under strict protection as rare or endangered species (Kocik *et al.* 2012).



Fig. 5. “Signs of memory” at the foot of stronghold ramparts, 2013 (Photo by M. Trzeciecki)

Restoring the memory of St. Peter's hill as a historical place began in the early 21st century. Local activists attempted to regain the historical “cradle” of Radom – seemingly lost forever. It is worth taking a closer look at these activities, which are a record of bottom-up, spontaneous creation of the “place of memory”. They started from a systematic cleaning of the area, as well as a struggle with the illegal dumping of garbage. Then, a somewhat “postmodern” conglomerate of memorials emerged – three wooden piles exemplifying the fence of the stronghold, a stone with the image of Mieszko I, and a cross in the middle of the stronghold, along with an information board conveying a mythologised version of the stronghold's history (Fig. 5). Such activities were accompanied by attempts to arrange social events, such as archaeological picnics, together with the Museum of Radom and local re-enactment groups (Morgan 2013, 284–288; Trzeciecki 2018b, 137–138).

These modest activities yielded unexpected results in 2007, when the municipal government tried to sell the area north of the stronghold to a real estate developer. The investment was halted, and

the local community forced the local authorities to sign a declaration of a revitalisation project for St. Peter's hill. The first design submitted by the municipality directly echoed the 1970s open-air museum project. It included levelling the surface of the stronghold in order to obtain space for "cyclical mass events", the erection of a lookout tower in the middle of the stronghold, along with an "educational pavilion", replicas of randomly selected archaeological objects, a partial reconstruction of the ramparts and moat. Approximately 40 hectares of the river valley were to be converted into a leisure park, including, in accordance with the spirit of the times, a skate park, a "valley of dinosaurs", a cable car along the Mleczna river and the like (Cieślak-Kopyt 2010, 193–200; Bugaj 2012; Trzeciecki 2018b, 138–139).

It was the intention of the municipality for the "new" St. Peter's hill to become a "multifunctional place of memory" – providing relaxation, "learning through entertainment", and participation in mass events with an elegant, though not necessarily reliable, reconstruction of the stronghold in the background, aimed both at fostering the common identity of Radom inhabitants, and at building the image of city authorities as depositors and heirs of its medieval origins. The project, however, did not include two important factors – values of the contemporary ecosystem of the Mleczna river valley, subject to independent regulations outside the legal competences of the municipality, and the local inhabitants' emotional relationships with the place, their real needs and concerns about its future condition. Meanwhile, the people connected with St. Peter's hill, either by the proximity of residence or due to their interest in Radom's cultural heritage, had a definitely negative response to the aforementioned "attractions", including the reconstructions of archaeological objects. They emphasised the necessity to take care of the stronghold, put its surroundings in order, make it accessible both to local inhabitants and tourists, as well as preserve the natural values of the valley, along with making indispensable investments in the urban infrastructure in order to improve the living conditions. The notion of heritage of the past was evoked as an argument against the planned interventions into the stronghold's form, although the main emphasis was placed on the former cemetery, still present in the collective memory of the city inhabitants. Although the stronghold itself was recognised as a valuable testimony of the past, its entire form, buildings or finds evoked but

little interest, at least at the beginning of the excavation campaign (Trzeciecki 2018b, 137).

The research project revealed the multiplicity and complexity of mutual relations between the past and the present day of St. Peter's hill. It also became an excuse to give the voice to the most interested, oftentimes overlooked both by the municipality and heritage institutions. A permanent and direct relationships with Radom's inhabitants proved to be indispensable to understand the value of the stronghold for the emerging local communities of memory (Morgan 2013; Trzeciecki 2013b; 2018b, 139–141). Eventually, the city council adopted a resolution establishing the “Old Radom Cultural Park” as a legal form of protection and management of the cultural landscape in the Mleczna river valley. Both the early medieval settlement complex, the relics of the 19th-century factories, the wooden houses in Old Radom, and the environmental resources are regarded as integral parts of cultural and natural heritage, deserving preservation for future generations. Regrettably, as a result of changes in the municipality after the self-government elections in 2014, the revitalisation plans were put aside. Today St. Peter's hill and its surroundings remain abandoned, the place is once again disappearing from the collective consciousness of the city inhabitants, and wild nature is gradually returning there.

Final remarks

By way of conclusion, it is worth listing the most important issues resulting from the biographical approach to the Radom stronghold:

1. The stronghold is a relic of an early medieval power centre. Although this was but one among the episodes in the biography of the place, the construction and function of the stronghold generated a particular landform that structures the physical and mental space even today.
2. The destruction of the stronghold in the mid-14th century did not end its biography. On the contrary, the majority of radical changes of its form or function correspond with the profound social and political changes in the town history. We can point here to the convergence of the stronghold's abandonment with the modernisation of the urban network undertaken by king Kazimierz the Great; the establishment of the cemetery with the attempts to modernise the declining 18th-century Polish towns; the progressive environmental deterioration

with successive waves of industrialisation in the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Contemporary research and discussions on the revitalisation of St. Peter's hill are also in line with top-down implemented modernisation, related to Poland's accession to the European Union, as well as with bottom-up attempts to reconstruct local identities, devastated by decades of communism and the first years of political transformation.

3. The subsequent stages of the biography of the place are shaped by human and environmental agencies, working coequally. Of particular importance here are the data assessing the scale of anthropo-pressure, both in the local and regional context. Prior to the 18th century, human impact on the environment was negligible on the macro scale, despite profound changes taking place in the Mleczna valley. Environmental changes propelled by the industrial revolution were comprehensive and highly destructive. Their record in the geomorphology of the valley argues for the acknowledgment of the Anthropocene as a separate era in the geological history of the Earth. Furthermore, the heritage of the industrial era has become an inherent, irremovable and deserving protection part of the cultural landscape of the valley.
4. Knowledge about ecological transformations in the area in question appears indispensable to studying the long-term effects of human impact on the environment, as well as to designing responsible strategies of cultural and natural heritage management.
5. Reflections on the recent episodes of St. Peter's hill biography, namely the unintentionally destructive effects of the entry on the Historical Monuments list, the following projects of open-air museums or archaeological parks, and competition between the municipality and local activists, striving to take over the cultural capital and symbolic meaning of the re-discovered *lieux de mémoire*, argue for caution in designing new revitalisation strategies, and for giving preference to those which do not seek to dichotomise "natural" and "cultural" heritage, or those which are more attuned to work with, rather than against, local communities.

The early medieval stronghold on St. Peter's hill in Radom viewed through the lens of the biographical approach appears to be far more than an archaeological site or even an element of archaeological heritage. Its materiality, inextricably bound with the natural environment and human activities, constitutes an inalienable cultural capital, indispensable

for the reconstruction of local identities and communities of memory. Recognition of its multifaceted biography becomes not only a cognitive task, but also an antidote to the increasing inability to experience space symbolically, so distinctive for the fragmented post-modern reality. Therefore, the postulate to complete the agenda of early medieval stronghold studies with reflections on the biography and memory of the place, encouraging us to pose questions to the past on behalf of our present, should not be ignored.

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