



# The Beginnings of Ethnoarchaeology in Post-War Poland

**RESEARCH NOTE** 

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# **ABSTRACT**

The article presents the pioneering research conducted in Poland in the field of ethnoarchaeology just before and immediately after the Second World War. The use of this method was pioneered by W. Hołubowicz. The article shows how ethnoarchaeology spread to other research centres in later years. A novelty in the research was the search for solutions in ethnographic materials. It made it possible to study production techniques and ways of using products. Currently, it is used in studies about architecture, workshops, and various classes of monuments. Research on monuments allows us to determine the traces of production and use of items. The described method contributed significantly to the refinement of knowledge about the everyday life of ancient people.

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# THE IMPACT OF THE IRON CURTAIN ON THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY IN POLAND

This article traces the beginnings of ethnoarchaeology in post-war Poland. Pioneering works of this period are little known in the world, as the Iron Curtain forced this new science to develop independently in Poland. Stalin's death in 1953 brought no breakthrough. A slight easing of the regime came three years later, but it took several more decades to bring down communism. Then, the change of regime opened the country to contacts with the rest of the world. The skills of ethnographers began to be used in the work of archaeologists. They consisted in observing the work of rural craftsmen and looking for similar phenomena in archaeology. Research on the traces left on objects during production and use brought about traceology, also known as use-wear analysis, which consists of recognizing microscopic traces on objects. The results of such works allow archaeologists to determine how artifacts were made and used. This article is based primarily on post-war publications. Much later articles on the history of science were helpful too. However, the works of W. Hołubowicz are the most important here.

At the beginning of the 20th century, there was still a traditional folk culture in the Polish provinces. Villages still consisted of wooden houses and farm buildings, products sold in marketplaces were handmade by local craftsmen, and in many villages, there were still blacksmiths, inns, and various craft workshops, including potters. This slowly disappearing world of folk culture was studied by ethnographers, among them Kazimierz Moszyński.1 The research methods developed by ethnographers and their descriptions of villages proved to be of great use for later archaeological research. After the Second World War, with the beginning of the Cold War and the establishment of the Iron Curtain, research in Poland, as in any Eastern and Central European country, found itself isolated from world science. Contacts with the West were limited to visits of individual researchers, but there were no joint research projects. The situation in Poland changed only after 1956, making real cooperation with foreign research centres possible and excavations in the Mediterranean area accessible.<sup>2</sup> In a country rising from the rubble, researchers had restricted access to the latest achievements of their Western colleagues. Mainly leftist scholars were translated into Polish.<sup>3</sup> Childe was regarded as a substitute for Marx and foreign journals and books were virtually out of reach.<sup>4</sup> Over the years, only a few researchers received passports and were allowed to travel to foreign libraries or congresses. The scholars' isolation was clearly visible in the humanities, which had been used as a tool of communist ideology. As A. Abramowicz noted, 'the liberation from German occupation came from the East, together with political changes that were accepted only in narrow circles of the society. There was pervasive pressure in all areas, including science, and thus, archaeology.'5 Technical and medical sciences, which were associated with military potential, were in a slightly better situation. Until Stalin's death in 1953, and even for a while after, humanities in Poland and other countries 'behind the Iron Curtain' remained under strong pressure from the totalitarian system. Many scientific publications had to contain quotations from Stalin's works to be accepted for print.<sup>6</sup> It was not until 1956 that the dark age of Stalinism was condemned and officially considered a 'period of errors and distortions.' However, Soviet science remained the main point of reference almost until 1989, when the communists were removed from power. During the Stalinist period, scientific discussion served to demonstrate the ideological superiority of Soviet science. Sometimes it was not even about the Marxist methodology adopted today in many scientific centres, but about the rejection of Western science.7 'Western bourgeois science' ran counter to Soviet science.8 It

<sup>1</sup> Kazimierz Moszyński, *Kultura ludowa Słowian*, Vol. I. *Kultura materialna* (Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1929).

<sup>2</sup> Jacek Lech, "Between Captivity and Freedom: Polish Archaeology in the 20th Century," *Archeologia Polona* 35–36 (1997–1998): 84.

<sup>3</sup> V.G. Childe, Postęp a archeologia, transl. A. Ponikowski, Z. Sławska (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1954); Grahame Clark, Europa przedhistoryczna. Podstawy gospodarcze, transl. Józef Kostrzewski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1957).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Barford, "Marksizm w archeologii polskiej w latach 1945–1975," *Archeologia Polski* 40 (1995): 36; Cf. Lech, *Between Captivity and Freedom*, 83.

<sup>5</sup> Andrzej Abramowicz, *Historia archeologii polskiej. XIX i XX wiek* (Warszawa-Łódź: Oficyna Bibliofilów Spółka z o.o., 1991): 146.

<sup>6</sup> Barford, "Marksizm," 28.

<sup>7</sup> Lech, "Between," 83.

<sup>8</sup> Barford, "Marksizm," 24.

was believed that it was necessary to develop new methods of research. The means of pressure on Polish society was provided by thousands of Soviet soldiers stationed in the country. In such dramatic times, Polish scientists tried to conduct scientific research. Against the background of such a difficult situation, the achievements of Włodzimierz Hołubowicz and his successors deserve special attention.

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# BEGINNINGS OF ETHNOARCHAEOLOGY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

W. Hołubowicz (Figure 1), the son of an exiled Pole, was born in Jekarynodar (modern Krasnodar in Russia) in 1908 and died in Stockholm in 1962. Before the Second World War, he started studying prehistory, history and ethnography in Vilnius. He was particularly interested in the latter subject and specialized in it. This led him to use ethnographic methods to study archaeological sites. In 1937-1939, he observed the work of rural potters in the provinces of eastern Poland, in areas that were later incorporated into the Soviet Union and belong today to Lithuania and Belarus. Beginning in 1950, he was associated with the University of Wrocław.9 In 1952, he continued his research on pottery in Albania.<sup>10</sup> W. Hołubowicz observed the activity of rural craftsmen for many years, and later, he meticulously compared the traces left on products by their work with traces visible on archaeological artefacts. His studies were ethnoarchaeological by nature, but they also were laying the cornerstone of traceology. Thanks to such comparisons, he managed to reconstruct with certainty the whole succession of stages of the work of medieval craftsmen. He also made an important contribution to science with his social observations concerning the gender of potters, their social origins, their customs, the issue of the ownership of their workshops and the arbitration of disputes between craftsmen.<sup>11</sup> In this way, though deprived of access to the achievements and methodology of American or British science, W. Hołubowicz began innovative research in the field known today as ethnoarchaeology. He was an unquestionable pioneer of such research in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>12</sup> He even seems to have been ahead of prestigious researchers at Western universities. 13 Ethnoarchaeology should be understood as an anthropological science, on the border between archaeology and ethnography.<sup>14</sup> However, there are many ways to understand these sciences, their fields of study, their purpose, and their research methods.<sup>15</sup> The novelty of his method consisted in linking archaeology to experimentation (Figure 2).16 In addition to pottery, his research also focused on excavation methods.<sup>17</sup> In his fieldwork, including in Ostrówek in Opole, Hołubowicz was quided by theoretical reflections on the broadly understood research process.<sup>18</sup> He initiated the documentation of monuments with unprecedented accuracy. Both the depth at which they were found and the location within the excavation were registered. In this way, he achieved a three-dimensional documentation of the location of artefacts. During the excavations, he analysed publications in the fields of logic and research methods, which led to frequent discussions on the results and methods of research.<sup>19</sup> In his articles, there are no references to similar publications from the

<sup>9</sup> Aleksandra Burdukiewicz, Jan Michał Burdukiewicz, "Profesor Leon Kozłowski jako człowiek, uczony, polityk i jego wpływ na archeologię wrocławską," *Wychowanie w rodzinie* 5 (2012): 207–11.

<sup>10</sup> Włodzimierz Hołubowicz, "Garncarstwo wiejskie Albanii," Archeologia Śląska I (1957): 5–20.

<sup>11</sup> Włodzimierz Hołubowicz, *Garncarstwo wiejskie zachodnich terenów Białorusi* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1950): 12–5.

<sup>12</sup> Zbigniew Kobyliński, "Włodzimierz Hołubowicz: Pioneer of the Ethnoarchaeology of Pottery-Making," in *Contesting Ethnoarchaeologies: Traditions, Theories, Prospects*, eds. Arkadiusz Marciniak, Nurcan Yalman (New York: Springer, 2013): 83–94.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Zbigniew Kobyliński, "Badania etnoarcheologiczne a nomotetyzacja archeologii," *Archeologia Polski* 26, no. 1 (1981): 19.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Kobyliński, "Badania," 7.

<sup>15</sup> Zbigniew Kobyliński, "Etnoarcheologia", in *Przeszłość społeczna. Próba konceptualizacji*, eds. Stanisław Tabaczyński, Arkadiusz Marciniak, and Dorota Cyngot (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2012): 721–25.

<sup>16</sup> Kobyliński, "Badania etnoarcheologiczne," 31.

<sup>17</sup> Abramowicz, "Historia archeologii," 149.

<sup>18</sup> Bogusław Gediga, "Instytucje i badacze (1945–2012)," in Archeologia. Górny Śląsk, ed. Eugeniusz Tomczak (Katowice: Śląskie Centrum Dziedzictwa Kulturowego w Katowicach 2013): 391.

<sup>19</sup> Bogusław Gediga, "O moich mistrzach", in *Nasi mistrzowie*, ed. Małgorzata Rybicka, Magdalena Rzucek (Rzeszów: Uniwersytet Rzeszowski, 2016): 228.

Anglo-Saxon scientific community because they were inaccessible to him. He probably knew about the work of Jesse Walter Fewkes and his successors, but he did not cite them.<sup>20</sup> Citing works by 'imperialist scholars' from the 'enemy camp' was not possible at the time. Actually, the attitude was in line with Hołubowicz's left-wing views, who identified himself with Marxist science. In a country ruled by the communist party, the recognition of the authority of Soviet science and its research methodology made life easier.









Figure 2 Biskupin, Bydgoszcz Province. The second Archaeological Training Camp. Prof. W. Hołubowicz demonstrates the technique of making pottery by hand. (Photo: T. Biniewski, after D. Piotrowska (Printed by: Jacek Lech 1997–1998, p. 63, fig. 26).

It should be emphasized here that ethnoarchaeology came into use in Anglo-Saxon research many years after Hołubowicz's work.<sup>21</sup> His scientific achievements did not make their way into the international scientific community, as they were published in Polish in journals that were not part of the global scientific circulation and whose articles had no chance of being read by Western scientists.<sup>22</sup> Archaeological research in Poland at that time focused on material culture and carefully avoided spiritual culture.<sup>23</sup> During this period, significant changes in research methodology took place in European archaeology.<sup>24</sup> The discussion in Poland concerned the

<sup>20</sup> Jesse Walter Fewkes, *Tuasayan Migration Traditions* (Washington: Washington Government Printing Office, 1901).

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas David, Carol Kramer, Etnoarchaeology in Action (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 6–31.

Zbigniew Kobyliński, "Theory in Polish Archaeology 1960–1990: Searching for Paradigms," in *Archaeological Theory in Europe: The last three decades*, ed. Ian Hodder (London: Routledge Library Editions: Archaeology, 1991): 223–47.

<sup>23</sup> Barford, "Marksizm," 45.

<sup>24</sup> Kobyliński, "Theory," 230.

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methods and goals of research, a new look at the historical material.<sup>25</sup> One might think that studying the techniques of ceramic production, like W. Hołubowicz did, had no connection with any ideology. However, linking the study of prehistory to ethnographic research established, instead of archaeology, a school of 'material culture' that met the expectations of Marxist ideologists and was in line with Lenin's decree of 1919.<sup>26</sup> Apparently, research on folk culture could not interfere with State ideology. Therefore, his works were accepted by both the strongly ideologised circles ruling the universities and the completely neutral and objective researchers. Thanks to this research profile, his achievements still have a significant and inspiring scientific value today, although they date from the difficult post-war period.

An additional advantage of working in this field of archaeology was that it did not require expensive research equipment or unavailable foreign books. The researcher was aware that many of the artefacts discovered during excavations may have their equivalents in the presentday world studied by ethnographers. Following this idea, he could correctly identify the traces left on the vessels and was able to interpret their production methods.<sup>27</sup> He identified traces of turning, slipping and various modelling methods, as well as small tools used by the potter.<sup>28</sup> Later, the same research method was applied to other categories of archaeological artefacts. W. Hołubowicz's field observations are priceless today, because the world he could see in the Polish countryside at that time is now long gone. It is no longer possible to find rural potters, weavers, blacksmiths or coopers. Some people, of course, continue the traditions of old crafts, but they do not necessarily work with the same methods and tools as people did in the past. New tools and machines have appeared, and the old ones, less efficient or less convenient, have been forgotten. Instead of muscle-powered devices, water or windmills, electric tools with different technical parameters are used today. As a result, the craftsman's work efficiency is improved, but very different kinds of traces of their work are also visible on the product. Old ethnoarchaeological research is therefore of an invaluable cognitive value.

# THE INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE OF POST-WAR RESEARCH

Unfortunately, for political reasons, the pioneering works of W. Hołubowicz had no followers in the subsequent generations of researchers. Despite his real scientific achievements, W. Hołubowicz was perceived as a convinced Marxist.<sup>29</sup> According to persistent opinions, he dismissed his opponents using political methods, and was even suspected of having links with the secret police (UB), linked to the Russian NKVD.<sup>30</sup> Later generations of archaeologists also referred to the work of ethnographers, but not necessarily in the direction set by Hołubowicz. This can be seen in the work of Professor Józef Kaźmierczyk and his students in Wrocław and their colleagues from other research centres. While conducting excavations in medieval constructions in Wrocław, J. Kaźmierczyk often compared the traces left on artefacts with traces of the work of present-day carpenters.<sup>31</sup> In this way, he managed to establish the order of works of the medieval builders and their work methods. The next step was to apply comparisons to the known forms of buildings and try to determine their functions. Ethnographic observations applied to medieval Wrocław allowed archaeologists to identify meat preservation pits and domestic baths.<sup>32</sup> These were small annexes similar to vestibules with walls made of braided branches.<sup>33</sup> According to the discoverers, they were similar to rural bathrooms described in

- 26 Lech, "Between Captivity and Freedom," 79.
- 27 Włodzimierz Hołubowicz, *Garncarstwo wczesnośredniowieczne Słowian*, Wrocław: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1965, 35.
- 28 Hołubowicz, "Garncarstwo wiejskie Albanii," 15–31.
- 29 Lech, "Between Captivity and Freedom," 62.
- 30 Saraunas Milisauskas, "Observations Polish Archaeology 1945–1955," *Archeologia Polona* 35–36, no. 2 (1997–1998): 225.
- 31 Józef Kaźmierczyk, Ku początkom Wrocławia", Vol. 2. Warsztat budowlany i kultura mieszkalna Ostrowa Tumskiego od połowy XI do połowy XIII wieku (Wrocław–Warszawa: Uniwersytet Wrocławski. Centrum Badań Śląskoznawczych i Bohemistycznych, 1993): 137.
- 32 Kaźmierczyk, "Ku początkom," 86.
- 33 Aleksander Limisiewicz, "Łaźnie Wrocławia w XI wieku," Śląskie Sprawozdania Archeologiczne 61 (2019): 113–146.

Ludomir R. Lozny, "Polish Archaeology in Retrospective," in *Comparative Archaeologies: A Sociological View of the Science of the Past*, ed. Ludomir R. Lozny (New York–Dordrecht–Heidelberg–London: Springer Science+Business Media, 2011): 195–220.

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publications about old Slavic villages.<sup>34</sup> In this way, the researchers could identify the function of these parts of buildings.<sup>35</sup> It was a step forward in the development of research: functional analyses of buildings could be carried out starting from the identification of archaeological material. With such an approach to historical remains, archaeological research no longer dealt with objects or ruins alone, but with the people who once lived in a place. Archaeologists were now interested above all in the people who had lived in the house and used the objects whose traces could be investigated. This change in attitude towards the archaeological remains, now questioned from another point of view, meant that the archaeological site was no longer seen in terms of layers, walls and objects, but as a building with a specific function. This new look at the remnants of the constructions was applied to the later excavations in medieval Wrocław. From that time on, other elements of the old buildings, such as latrine pits, wooden waterworks, forges, merchants' houses and market stalls were identified.

Excavations from the Nowy Targ Square in Wrocław are an excellent example of such an approach to the artefacts discovered. It was a marketplace surrounded by merchants and craftsmen's houses, and there were trade stalls in the plaza.<sup>36</sup> Research on the marketplaces of other cities, such as in Kraków, Przedbórz, Kutno, Bytom and Kielce, obtained equally interesting results.<sup>37</sup> Work on ethnoarchaeological methods made it possible to identify flax production workshops. This method also helped to understand the weaving techniques used in the Bronze Age and to better understand weaving workshops of the Lusatian culture.<sup>38</sup> This method applies to both prehistoric cultures and modern times, such as in the cases of the sites of Daniszewo and Lutomiersk-Koziówki.39 It also turned out to be helpful in examining the construction of houses from different periods from the Zamiechów site.<sup>40</sup> The burned daub comparisons have proven to be helpful. Similar working methods were used to identify house types from the early medieval period. 41 The discussed method was used in the excavations in an early medieval village in Poboszów near Opole. 42 Referring to analogies known from ethnography gave excellent results. 43 The analysis of small objects of every day-use discovered in the layers of medieval Wrocław provided similarly interesting results. One of J. Kaźmierczyk's students, Krzysztof Jaworski, focused on the analysis of bone and horn products. In his works, the concern for establishing traces of various categories of production and decoration tools such as compasses, saws, files, drills or knifes is visible.<sup>44</sup> Another noteworthy continuator of similar

- 34 Cf. Moszyński, "Kultura ludowa," 20.
- 35 Limisiewicz, "Łaźnie Wrocławia," 114.
- 36 Jerzy Piekalski, *Rytm rozwoju miasta na kulturowym pograniczu. Studium strefy Nowy Targ we Wrocławiu*, Wratislavia Antiqua 23 (Wrocław: Instytut Archeologii, 2018).
- 37 Janusz Pietrzak, "Wyniki badań archeologicznych przeprowadzonych w sierpniu 2002 roku na rynku w Przedborzu, woj. łódzkie", Łódzkie Sprawozdania Archeologiczne VIII (2002–2003): 331–44; Aleksander Andrzejewski, Janusz Pietrzak, "Nowy Rynek w Kutnie w świetle badań archeologicznych przeprowadzonych w 2001 roku," Łódzkie Sprawozdania Archeologiczne 7 (2001): 423–41; Aldona Andrzejewska, "Badania archeologiczne rynku w Bytomiu w 1997 i 1998 roku," Łódzkie Sprawozdania Archeologiczne 7 (2001): 399–400; Waldemar Gliński, Nina Glińska, "Średniowieczne Kielce w świetle ostatnich badań archeologicznych," Światowit VIII (XLIX)/B (2009–2010): 133–140.
- 38 Justyna Żychlińska, "Kilka uwag o warsztatach tkackich ludności kultury łużyckiej, *Materiały Zachodniopomorskie. Nowa Seria XII* (2016): 132–40.
- 39 Daniel Żychliński, "Roszarnia lnu ze stanowiska 21 w Daniszewie, pow. Koło, woj. wielkopolskie jako przyczynek do poznania gospodarki ludności kultury przeworskiej z początków młodszego okresu przedrzymskiego," in Archeológia barbarov 2009. Hospodárstwo Germánov. Sídliskové a ekonomické štruktúry od neskorej doby látenskej po včasný stredovek, ed. Ján Belijak, Gertrúda Březimová, and Vladimir Varsik (Nitra: Archaeologica Slovaca Monographiae 10, Archeologický ústav SAV, 2010): 537–539; BłaŻej Muzolf et al., "Wczesnośredniowieczne płóciennictwo w świetle badań reliktów moczydła na stanowisku Lutomiersk-Koziówki," Prace i Materiały Muzeum Archeologicznego i Etnograficznego w Łodzi 46 (2013–2015): 187–190.
- 40 Agnieszka Půlpánová-Reszczyńska, "Interpretacja polepy odkrytej na osadzie wielokulturowej na przykładzie stanowiska nr 1 w Zamiechowie," *Materiały i Sprawozdania Rzeszowskiego Ośrodka Archeologicznego* 36 (2015): 181–90.
- 41 Sylwia Cygan, Wczesnośredniowieczne półziemianki kwadratowe na terenie Polski, Czech, Słowacji, wschodnich Niemiec i Dolnej Austrii (Rzeszów: Fundacja Rzeszowskiego Ośrodka Archeologicznego, 2006); Andrzej Rozwałka, Grzegorz Mączka, and Rafał Niedźwiadek, "Przedpaństwowy gród w Garbowie i jego zaplecze osadnicze. Zarys problematyki," Materiały i Sprawozdania Rzeszowskiego Ośrodka Archeologicznego 38 (2017): 217–30.
- 42 Eldegarda M. Foltyn, Eugeniusz Tomczak, "Osada wczesnośredniowieczna w Poboszowie, woj. opolskie," Światowit VI (XLVIII)/B (2006): 53–58.
- 43 Kobyliński, "Etnoarcheologia," 722–23.
- 44 Krzysztof Jaworski, Wyroby z kości i poroża w kulturze wczesnośredniowiecznego Ostrowa Tumskiego we Wrocławiu (Wrocław–Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen, 1991): 37.

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works is Paweł Rzeźnik. Based on the findings made many years earlier by W. Hołubowicz, this researcher analysed a huge collection of vessels from the excavations conducted in the Ostrów Tumski area of medieval Wrocław. He managed to identify traces of potter's wheel, 45 wheel plates, 46 and various techniques of vessel modelling and decorating. 47

W. Hołubowicz's research in the field of ethnoarchaeology was also applied in the Soviet Union, as evidenced, for example, by the works published by Aleksandr. A. Bobrinskij and Jadwiga V. Stankevič. These researchers could rely on publications from Poland, but usually not from Western Europe or the USA. Soviet scholars, like the Poles, could refer to the works of a colleague from a 'sister country,' and even sometimes have their papers printed in Polish journals. In practically every research centre in Poland, scientists using the above-described method can be found. Although it was developed many years ago, and despite the excellent research equipment and laboratories available today, ethnoarchaeology is still used. The only limitation nowadays is the disappearance of folk culture. Looking at the works of W. Hołubowicz, one can only regret that his scientific achievements have not been recognized by Western archaeologists for years, and that the years of division of Europe into hostile camps have caused such divisions between scholars. Researchers on both sides of the Iron Curtain did not exchange their research methods or results. Paradoxically, the Marxist methodology was only discovered in Western research centres after the fall of communism, when post-communist countries began to reject it.<sup>49</sup>

# **CURRENT SITUATION, FORECASTS**

Today, years after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the dismantling of the Soviet Union by M. Gorbachev, there is no trace of the old divisions in the research community. Discussions about research methods and their results no longer have any political or ideological context. After years, the results of the work of archaeologists from Central and Eastern Europe have proved to be comparable in many respects to the results of research carried out by their colleagues from distant academic institutions.<sup>50</sup> In their achievements, the activities of little-known researchers, including ethnoarchaeologists such as W. Hołubowicz and his students, were very significant. Finally, it is worth noting that many years later, despite the existence of sometimes very modern and sophisticated research equipment, the old method of ethnographic analogy is still used. We can even assume that the disappearing world of traditional folk culture whose image was captured by ethnographers may be a priceless resource for proper interpretation of many categories of archaeological objects in the future. The history of science on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain is still little known. This article shows that despite limitations, Polish researchers in the post-war years conducted research in the field of ethnoarchaeology. In conclusion, the beginnings of ethnoarchaeology presented here still deserve attention. Although W. Hołubowicz did not find direct followers, he deserves the status of a pioneer in this field.

# **COMPETING INTERESTS**

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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- 48 Milisauskas, "Observations," 233; Stankevič, "K voprosu," 421-41.
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