

**STAROSIEDLE - AN EARLY IRON AGE
STRONGHOLD IN WESTERN POLAND. 80
YEARS AFTER**

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The “Baalshebbel” stronghold near Starosiedle is a small and low sandy hill surrounded with wet meadows in the valley of the small river Lubsza in western Poland’s historical Lebus Land region. It lies close to the German border in a fertile basin, historically called the “Stary Kraj”, now administered by the commune of Gubin, Lubuskie Province. Interestingly, while it may not be a very spectacular archaeological element in the landscape today (Figure 1), the site has played a pivotal role in the history of the Central European settlement archaeology for the last 80 years.



Figure 1. Aerial view of the stronghold at Starosiedle. Photo: Dariusz Wach.

The site, located in the village then called *Starzeddel* (in Sorbic language - *Stare Siedlo*), which then laid in the eastern part of Prussian Upper Lusatia, was identified as a “Lusatian” (*i.e.*, Late Bronze – Early Iron Age) stronghold by Gubin’s pioneer antiquarian Hugo Jentsch (Jentsch 1882). Between 1920-1923 excavations on the “Baalshebbel” were undertaken by Carl Schuchhardt (1859-1943), a famous German archaeologist who was one of the most influential figures in European archaeology during the late 19th and early

20th centuries (Schuchhardt 1944, Müller 2004). Despite his humble origins and his training as a classical philologist he impressed the august circles of German Classical Archaeology in the 1870’s as an able field man and organizer during excavations in Pergamon in 1886-1887. Prussia’s cultural mandarins, ever on the look out for able young technocrats, made him director of the Kestner Museum in Hanover in 1888 and on the weight of a spate of excavations in northern Germany, the director of the prehistoric department of Berlin’s Ethnographic Museum in Berlin in 1908. As a strict opponent of Gustaf Kossinna’s narrow “Folkish” orientation, this gregarious and charismatic man promoted a Pan-European outlook and knew and befriended almost all of the prominent archaeologists of his day. He also sponsored a brace of young hopefuls including Germany’s Gerhard Bersu and Herbert Jankuhn, Poland’s Józef Kostrzewski and even Catalonia’s Pedro Bosch-Gimpera (Bosch-Gimpera 1980) who worked for him as a student in Berlin. Among other achievements he initiated and co-edited the important archaeological journal “Prähistorische Zeitschrift” (1909), was co-founder of the Römisch Germanische Kommission, intended as a central body to coordinate archaeological research in the whole Germany (1902), was one of the pioneers of the aerial archaeology, and wrote a series of popular books exposing a wide audience to Central European archaeology (Schuchhardt 1919), but also to Schliemann’s excavations at Troy (Schuchhardt 1891). He carried large number of excavations both in the Mediterranean and in the Barbaricum. A major contribution to European Prehistory was his initiation of the first archaeological stronghold research project, which began as an attempt to verify Roman and Carolingian military conquests in North West Germany. After his move to Berlin, he concentrated on research on Germanic and Slavic strongholds in Brandenburg, Mecklenburg and Pommerania, including sites in areas which became a part of the western Poland after the Second World War (Nebelsick 2008).

The sites he excavated included the impressive Early Medieval stronghold at Feldberg and the famous fortified Slavic temple on Cape Arkona located on the northernmost point of the high cliff on the Rügen Island on the Baltic Sea shore. The

reason he chose to excavate the rather humble stronghold at Starosiedle was due to the fact that he thought it had been occupied for a brief period and, if excavated, would reveal a complete and unambiguous internal arrangement of an Early Iron Age stronghold. Besides this, he enjoyed digging there as he had befriended the freshly widowed Princess Margarete zu Schönaich-Carolath and stayed with her, first at her enormous Renaissance palace at neighbouring Amtitz (nowadays Gębice), and later in her widows seat in the charming 18th century manor house at Starosiedle itself (both of which were sadly demolished during the post war socialist era). Anyway, after three short excavation campaigns (1920, 1921 and 1923), carried out with the help of "lazy local labourers" (as he described them) and Gubin school kids, Carl Schuchhardt published a rather schematic excavation report (Schuchhardt 1926), in which he presented what he claimed was the full spatial layout of an early Germanic defended settlement. The plan he presented (Figure 2) shows a rampart surrounding the whole stronghold, with a cobbled street running along its back. He believed that the interior was occupied by eight large rectangular post built wooden houses, of "Greek megaron type", dispersed in a radial fashion around an empty square with their backs abutting a cobbled street. Schuchhardt dated all these elements to the Early Iron Age, namely to the Billendorf (today Białowice in Poland) Phase. In the north-eastern part of the stronghold he located what he thought was a single Early Medieval Slavic farmstead, consisting of a sunken structure, irregular in plan and what he thought might be a stable and barn, which had disturbed earlier Iron Age outbuildings.

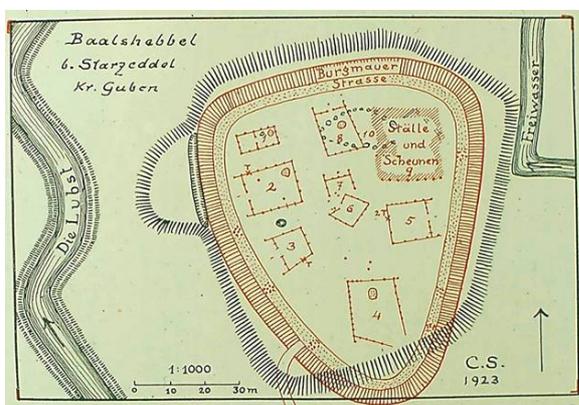


Figure 2. Starosiedle: plan of the site published by Carl Schuchhardt in 1926.

On the basis of this plan Schuchhardt speculated about a wide range of topics including the egalitarian structure of Early Germanic society, relations between Central Europe and Greece and the Germanic origin of Slavic ring shaped villages (Schuchhardt 1931). This plan, prepared and published by such an eminent and reputable scholar, has generally been accepted without reservations in the international archaeological milieu and was referred to in many later publications (e.g., Piggot 1965), as the best example of a fully recognized spatial structure of an Early Iron Age fortified settlement in the North European Plane.

In the year 2000 an international research project devoted to Early Iron Age strongholds in the territory of eastern Germany and western Poland, between the Vistula and Elbe rivers, was initiated, as the focus of a cooperation between the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw and the Office for Archaeology of Saxony in Dresden (Kobyliński 2002, Ender *et al.* 2004). The first site chosen for excavation was the Early Iron Age stronghold, the "Swamp Fort" at Biehla, near Kamenz in Upper Lausatia, one of the very few Early Iron Age waterlogged prehistoric strongholds in Germany with good wood preservation. Since it was seriously threatened with degradation by drainage, excavation was needed in order on the one hand to determine what the state of organic preservation was and on the other to suggest adequate strategies for the site's long term maintenance. The publication of this excavation, which produced the first dendrochronological sequence for an Early Iron Age stronghold in Germany is planned for the year 2009. It was during the excavation at Biehla that the director - Prof. Zbigniew Kobyliński and his German partners: Dr. Judith Oexle and Dr. Harald Meller decided that to live up to the bi-national aims of the project, a comparable and contemporary site on the Polish side of the border should also be investigated. During a reconnaissance visit to western Poland in August 2000, a series of sites were visited including the stronghold at Starosiedle. Here it was immediately apparent, that despite the fact that the site was and is protected by law as a registered historical monument, a large part of the stronghold was being destroyed by clandestine sand exploitation, triggered by the building boom

which has accompanied the dynamic economic development of this once neglected border region in the last decade. Alarming, sherds of prehistoric pottery were found lying in the sand pits and on the edges of these diggings dark occupation layers and prehistoric features were clearly visible. This was particularly surprising as it called Carl Schuchhardt's claim to have completely excavated the site in the 1920s into serious question, and stimulated us to re-excavate what was clearly a massively threatened site. After consultation with the regional agency for monument protection, a joint Polish-German excavation was carried out on the "Baalshebbel" in the years 2001-2004, under the leadership of Zbigniew Kobylński and Louis Daniel Nebelsick. The initial purpose of this excavation was to rescue information which had survived the process of destruction caused by the illegal sand-pitting. Thus in the first season we concentrated excavation in the southern part of the site, which was most heavily destroyed. Due to this circumstance, most of the prehistoric and Early Medieval features which were investigated, were found in a damaged condition. Yet despite these severe limitations it was possible to document enough surviving features to make it obvious that Carl Schuchhardt's claims to have made a total excavation of the site were spurious. Furthermore we were able to distinguish clear traces of his trenches (Figure 3), which turned out to be narrow ditches, usually less than 1 m wide, dug across the site. This stood in stark contrast to the impression created by his comprehensive plan, which suggested that he had done a large scale excavation. Moreover, even within the narrow ditches, Schuchhardt had not excavated the features he had uncovered, and satisfied himself with recording their position in the general plan. Therefore it turned out that actually the site was not destroyed by Schuchhardt at all. Furthermore it meant that – if only the threat of further illegal sand exploitation could be eliminated – the site is largely intact and could be subject to a programme of a long-term preventive conservation *in situ*. Unfortunately however, even the attempts to involve conservation service, local authorities, school teachers and the local priest in the process of protection of the site, were not successful and in the subsequent seasons the destruction process continued, forcing the international archaeological team to extend the excavation in order to outrun the destruction process.



Figure 3. Starosiedle: the site during re-excavation: Carl Schuchhardt's trenches visible as narrow ditches. Photo: Dariusz Wach.

In total, the area of over 1100 m² of the site has been excavated, and 388 prehistoric and Early Medieval layers and features has been discovered, recorded and excavated. Besides a few small finds of stone and metal over 36 000 prehistoric and Early Medieval pottery sherds were found. Pottery found during the excavation at Starosiedle became the subject of the joint Spanish-Polish international research project on archaeometric laboratory analyses of prehistoric pottery in years 2007-2008 led by Prof. Zbigniew Kobylński from the Polish side and by Dr. Manuel García-Heras of the Institute of History of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) from the Spanish side. The results of this cooperation will soon be published (García-Heras *et al.*, 2008).

The results of the re-excavation of the Starosiedle site certainly call the conclusions Carl Schuchhardt made 80 years ago into serious question. While he correctly discerned the two occupation periods: Iron Age and Medieval, he mistakenly assigned pottery he

found at Starosiedle (which actually come from the latest part of the Hallstatt Period and Early La Tène Period) to the preceding Early Iron Age Billendorf / Białowice Phase. This was probably done for tactical reasons as he was interested in combining his results from the stronghold at Wicina (which does indeed date to the Billendorf / Białowice Phase) and the Römerschanze near Potsdam (which is in fact Late Bronze Age) as a coherent whole, seeing all three sites as characteristic strongholds of the Germanic Semnone tribe. While Schuchhardt, a graduated philologist and trained classical archaeologist, was generally at loose ends when it came to classifying prehistoric pottery, he was in fact quite an authority on Medieval wares and thus was able to competently assign the Medieval "Slavic" pottery he recovered from Starosiedle to the 10th century. It is sad to say that while his dating may be seen in retrospect as minor gaffe, his interpretation of the construction were, however, appallingly wrong headed. The band of dark soil and cobbling which surrounds the site, interpreted by him as a "street", is in fact a defensive structure, perhaps a wall or compact rampart, supported by vertical posts.

Schuchhardt was equally wrong in his identification of the post-holes and of course structures he recreated from them. This grave mistake in interpretation has to do with a fundamental problem Schuchhardt had in interpreting prehistoric features. After clearing ruins in western Anatolia in the late 1870s his introduction to excavation in Central Europe was under the tutelage of the pioneering provincial Roman archaeologist Georg Loeschke, the "inventor" of the post hole, in the Roman forts near Haltern in Westphalia. There Schuchhardt learned to identify post holes with the massive pits the legionnaires used as foundations for their impressive gate constructions. When digging in the Lusatian "Römerschanze" near Potsdam just after arriving in Berlin (Schuchhardt 1909), he imagined that the typical Late Bronze Age storage pits he was finding were just such post holes (the few stone packed post holes he actually found were described as hearths). Ironically, Schuchhardt's intensive popularisation of the faulty interpretation of this dig introduced the concept of the post hole to Central European prehistoric archaeology inspiring the following generation of archaeologists to find real post-holes. The

Römerschanze dig frustrated him, however, as the dense concentrations of pits on the site which he (wrongly) attributed to multiphase building activities prevented him from seeing a coherent plan of the domestic architecture in what he thought was an early Germanic stronghold. Schuchhardt did some test excavations in the Lusatian strongholds at Kamieniec on the Odra River and at Wicina on the Lower Silesian border but it was at Starosiedle that he thought he had found a single phase stronghold which was adequate to his needs. He proceeded to excavate the site during the politically and economically unstable early 1920s. As he was short of time and money, he decided against a large scale excavation and was content to "follow the walls" of the structures he thought he was uncovering and not to empty the pits he found as he was sure they were just "post-holes" with no cultural contents. Thus, not surprisingly, most of the features which he defined as "post-holes" at Starosiedle are in fact storage pits, since the shape in section of these pits in most cases is trapezoid, and in many cases either complete pots, or large parts of pots were found on their bottoms (Figure 4). As result, the reconstruction of the spatial layout of the settlement, proposed by Schuchhardt, is completely unreliable, both due to his partial and indeed arbitrary method of excavation and to his confused identification of original function of the discovered features.



Figure 4. Starosiedle: one of the pits wrongly interpreted by Carl Schuchhardt as post-holes. Photo: Dariusz Wach.

What is therefore the correct interpretation of the site, revealed by its re-excavation? The most important conclusion is that there is no evidence of any permanent dwellings within this site, neither in the prehistoric nor in the Early Medieval phase. Large number of the storage pits, most probably serving to store grain, suggests that we have in this case to

do with a kind of a storage area located outside of a village in the surroundings, which was protected both by the natural environment and by artificial earthen and wooden constructions. Indeed similar storage sites have been turning up in large scale rescue excavations neighbouring eastern Brandenburg. The village itself should be rather located on the other side of the river and perhaps connected with the "granary" by a wooden bridge or track. In the Early Medieval period the site may have had a similar function, however with a far more limited number of storage pits. Schuchhardt's interpretation of his Medieval structures as a "stable and barn" must be considered pure fantasy.

The most characteristic feature of the assemblage of prehistoric pottery vessels from Starosiedle is the abundance of large storage vessels with simple egg-shapes and coarse surface, with the only ornament being applied cordons, as well as notched rims. The second type of pottery, which is numerous at Starosiedle, are bowls of various sizes, all of them with smooth surface, black or brown in colour. Another specific numerous vessel type consists of handled dippers with smoothed black surface and festoon ornament, typical for the Göritz / Górzycza Group (Figure 5).

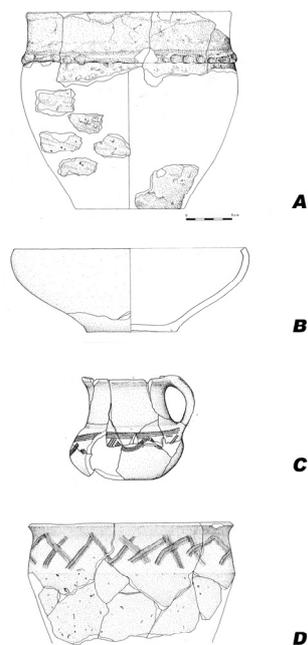


Fig. 5. Examples of Early Iron Age and Early Medieval pottery vessels from Starosiedle. A. Early Iron Age large storage vessel. B. Early Iron Age bowl with smooth surface. C. Early Iron Age handled dipper with smoothed surface. D. Early Medieval vessel of the Menkendorf type.

Early Medieval pottery found at Starosiedle mostly belong to the so-called Menkendorf type, turned on a slow potter's wheel, characterized by a biconical shape and simple ornament made with a comb (mostly crossing lines). These pots are smoothed only in their upper part and left with a rough surface at the bottom. This kind of pottery is typical for the north-western Slavic tribes (Kobylińska 2004).

Besides pottery vessels among prehistoric finds from Starosiedle a number of clay spindle-whorls, stone whetstones, iron knives, stone querns were found as well as only one small blue glass bead with white ornament.

Urszula Kobylińska, who analyzes the assemblage of pottery from Starosiedle, corrected assignment of the pottery from the site to the transitional Göritz / Górzycza Phase, which lies between the cultural habitus of the Lusatian (Lausitz) cultural tradition current in the territory of western Poland and eastern Germany since the Bronze Age and the new cultural constellations in the La Tène Period. This new chronology paves the way for a very interesting interpretation of the cultural and historic implications of this site. Individual cremation graves from the Late Bronze Age on the "Baalshebbel" suggest that the site was formerly used as a cemetery. Its new use as a storage facility happens after a period of Scythian raids, whose most spectacular witness is the famous Scythian Gold hoard found at the close of the 19th century a few kilometres west of Starosiedle near Witaszkowo (Vettersfelde). This site was also re-excavated by Schuchhardt, as well as our team (Nebelsick 2003, Nebelsick and Kobyliński 2006) and could be shown to be a deposition in a local ritual context. The finds of Scythian arrow heads in the burnt ramparts of the nearby Early Iron Age strongholds of the Billendorf / Białowice Phase at Polanowice and Wicina show that these raids had a decisive, indeed disastrous, affect on the region. Białowice style pottery disappears from settlements and cemeteries in the Stary Kraj region and is replaced by Göritz / Górzycza wares, characteristic for the lower and middle Odra River basin, suggesting either a new cultural orientation to the north by the inhabitants of the region or northern immigration in lieu of these dramatic incursions. The establishment of a new defended storage facility on the Baalshebbel

can be seen in the context of this dynamic cultural reorientation. We have certainly come a long way from Schuchhardt's wholly fictitious vision of an Iron Age stronghold occupied by a rustic egalitarian Germanic clan.

The General lesson from the re-excavation of the Starosiedle site is that unfortunately it is unwise to rely on conclusions based on excavations from the pioneering period of prehistoric research. There is a growing body of evidence showing that poor methods of excavating and recording of archaeological sites, as well as their reporting within the context of highly speculative interpretations in the pre-war period resulted in publications that are anything but reliable. In many cases, however, wide ranging interpretations accepted today are based on just such reports leading to the fabrication of wholly fictitious visions of the past. It is therefore fully reasonable, and indeed advisable, to re-excavate such crucial sites which were investigated in the pioneer period of archaeology.

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[Back to index](#)

CONSERVATION SCIENCES AND CONSERVATION-RESTORATION AREA IN PORTUGAL: A NEW DEPARTMENT

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Introduction

The Conservation and Restoration (CR) area is strategically important for Portugal, a country with centuries of history and where different cultures left their legacy, namely Christian, Islamic and Jewish. Conservation and Restoration of cultural heritage as it is presently accepted is a rather modern subject, and its theory and praxis are the result of the philosophical thinking and the work of Cesare Brandi, Paul Phillipot and others, in the 20th century. They constructed a philosophical body and consequent methodological approach that can be shortly summarized by the following words: "Only the material form of the work of art is restored". Bearing this in mind, the importance of research and development (R&D) for the practice of modern conservation and restoration is obvious.

Science and technology are important to understand the complex evolution which the work of art has endured with time, to propose the most adequate methods and materials to