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## Archeology in the investigation of the history of human activity in the region of Spitsbergen

**ABSTRACT:** The author makes a review of conceptions explaining the beginnings of human penetration into the region of Spitsbergen and points to attempts of employing archeological data in this task. In his analysis of the development, the tendencies and the state of the excavatory exploration of Spitsbergen the author tries to define the cognitive capabilities of archeology in the investigation of the history of human activity in the area. The appraisal of achievements in the field prompts the author to propose new priorities in the research problems hitherto undertaken by archeologists. Greater emphasis should be put on the examination of the structure and the dynamics of the analysed processes, rather than on the purely historical (event-centered) aspects.

**Key words:** Arctic, Spitsbergen, archeology.

### Introduction

In the abstract of Anatol Heintz's article on Russian opinion about the discovery of Spitsbergen (1966) there was the following sentence: "The question of when the Russians first came to Svalbard may perhaps only be solved by careful archeological investigations."<sup>1</sup>

This research postulate addressed to archeology expressed the expectations that the scholarly circles vested in the cognitive capabilities of this branch of knowledge. Its role was seen not so much in widening the historical perspective beyond the reach of historical (written) sources, as in supplying material arguments of unquestionable veracity. Heintz's statement was a manifestation of trust in the efficacy of argumentation based on a "materialized fragment of historical reality". It also symbolized a certain kind of scholarly attitude, which focused on the event (*i.e.* historical episode) as an indicator of human activity evidencing the nature of the historical process.

The question "who and when" discovered Spitsbergen electrified many

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<sup>1</sup> In the Russian version of the abstract the statement is as follows: "The problem of who and when discovered Spitsbergen can be most probably solved only through intensive archeological exploration of Spitsbergen." (Heintz 1966).

scholars and liberated energy for finding new ways to overcome the limitations stemming from the scarcity of sources. Heintz's opinion was shared by many other scholars who, just like Belov (1977), saw the insufficiency of historical data throwing light on the early phases of human activity in the distant Arctic regions and turned to archeology in their research undertakings (*see* Belov, Ovsjannikov and Starkov 1980, 1981). Hopes (*e.g.* Saskolskij 1958) were raised high especially by the findings of the first real, planned, methodical excavations conducted in Spitsbergen in 1955 by the Scandinavian expedition headed by H. Christansson and P. Simonsen (Christansson 1956, Simonsen 1957, Christansson and Simonsen 1957, 1968, 1970).

Such an approach, crediting archeology, its sources and its methods, with high capabilities in tracing the event or the historical episode, still determines many archeological projects undertaken in Spitsbergen (Starkov 1990a). It is therefore proper to present here briefly those historical episodes which are considered to have come first in the process of "discovering" and "mastering" Spitsbergen, and which are still subjects of a heated discussion. It is in search for arguments in the discussion that archeological sources are frequently evoked.

## Contemporary opinions on the "discovery" of Spitsbergen

Even though the geographical location of Spitsbergen is comparable with the situation of northern tips of Greenland, the climate of the region is much milder than in other parts of the Arctic. Its favourable weather conditions are a result of the Golfstrom, which flows round the western shore of the largest island (West Spitsbergen) of the archipelago and tempers the harshness of the polar climate. This is clearly illustrated by the outline of the ice pack border on the west side of Spitsbergen, which in summer forms a deep bay cutting far into the north, beyond 81 degrees latitude. Navigation conditions are also better here due to the mild climate, which makes Spitsbergen much more easily accessible than other Arctic lands.

However, in spite of the favourable climatic conditions, Spitsbergen falls beyond the reach of permanent human settlement. The region has never experienced lasting forms of settlement, which would be capable of creative growth on the basis of its own demographic potential. Man appeared here only to exploit local resources of the natural environment and then withdrew to his permanent habitation.

Spitsbergen's distance from larger, permanently inhabited lands is certainly an important factor which shaped the specific (in comparison with other Arctic regions — *e.g.* Greenland) nature of its settlement processes.<sup>2</sup> The beginnings of

<sup>2</sup> About 350 miles from Nordkap, but about 800 miles from the inhabited areas of the White Sea basin.

human penetration in the area depended primarily on the level and advancement of navigation, especially in regard to sailing in the open sea. Limitations in transport and communication were also a serious barrier hindering the process of infiltration and the spreading of permanent settlement.

With the development of navigation technology (esp. 16th c.) due to the favourable sailing conditions existing there during the Polar summer (esp. on the west coasts) Spitsbergen became easily accessible. Most scholars place the "discovery" and the beginnings of "mastering" the archipelago in that century of rapid advancement in sailing and navigation.

### The West European scenario

Historical sources seem to define the moment of man's appearance in the area fairly unequivocally (Arlov 1988). According to them, Spitsbergen was discovered in 1596 by three Dutch sailors: Barents, van Heemskerck and de Rijp (Hacquebord 1981b). Only Willem Barents became popular through literary tradition, which commemorated his heroic attempt to find a northern passage to China and India. The voyage ended in a catastrophe near Novaya Zemlya, where the discoverer was forced to spend the winter and where he died.

Barents's expedition was only an initial step, a fairly accidental prologue to a process which began some dozen years later. H. Hudson's (1607) and J. Pool's (1610) news of mass occurrence of whales in waters surrounding the west coasts of Spitsbergen (Conway 1906) opened a stormy period in the history of the exploitation of the fisheries. From 1611, for dozens of years to come, whaling ships and whole fleets of West European companies would be the main signs of human activity in the area. The process continued until a total annihilation of whales in the coastal waters of Spitsbergen.

### The Pomor scenario

From time to time, however, in various scholarly circles there appear more or less emotional argumentations placing man's first appearance on Spitsbergen before Barents's expedition. A heated discussion has recently developed around a theory strongly promoted by Soviet scholars (see e.g.: Stavnicer 1948; Belov 1956; Obručev 1964). They claim that Spitsbergen was penetrated by Russian walrus hunters from the White Sea region (so called Pomors) already in the 15–16th centuries, or even as early as the 13th century, that is much before Barents. This hypothesis is based on several historical references which suggest that already then Pomors knew some land in the North, which was within the range of their small ships called *koča* or *kočmara (lodia)* (Litwin 1985). Considering the land to be a part of Greenland they called it **Grumant**, **Grunant** or **Gruiland**. According to Soviet scholars, Pomor expeditions in search of new

hunting-grounds developed into regular hunting undertakings (so called **promysl**) in the second half of the 16th century (Starkov 1990 b), that is before the coastal waters of Spitsbergen became one huge whaling region. The urge to find material proofs of this hypothesis led to an intensive Soviet archeological exploration of Spitsbergen, focused on the supposed “pre-Barentsian” Russian hunting (**promysl**) (Starkov, Korjakin and Zav’jalov 1983).

### The Norman scenario

Another, even more intriguing hypothesis is based on historical sources which suggest that Spitsbergen was discovered by the Normans (Keilhau 1831; Storm 1888, 1890). One of the propagators of the hypothesis was Nansen (1911). References to the Norman discoverers come from **The Icelandic Annals**, **Landnamabok** (*i.e.* **Book of Settlement**), **The Saga of Samson the Beautiful**, and other sources. They speak of a land called **Svalbard** (cold shore), which is known to the Normans and lies to the north of Iceland, between Greenland and Russia. Under the year 1194 in **The Icelandic Annals** there is the following entry: “Svalbardi fundinn” or “Svalbards fundr”, *i.e.* “Svalbard found”. When in 1925 the Treaty of Paris made the Spitsbergen archipelago a part of the Kingdom of Norway, the province received the name **Svalbard**, as if to emphasise the rights of the inheritors of the Norman legend to the lands.

However, the problem of the location of the Norman Svalbard is controversial, as is the question of the application of this geographical name (Krawczyk 1987). Some scholars identify it with the east coasts of Greenland (Korjakin 1990). So far no early medieval material traces of Norman origin have been found on Spitsbergen. It is possible, however, that the coastal area in which the sailors may have landed in the 12th–13th century (*i.e.* in the Viking period of the Little Climatic Optimum — Kelly, Karas and Williams 1984) came later (in the Little Ice Age), as a result of isoglaciestatic changes, under the destructive influence of the sea.

### The Mesolithic scenario

The most original conception places the appearance of man on Spitsbergen already in the arctic and subarctic stone age (the mesolithic period), more precisely in times going back to the third millennium B.C. This claim is based on the reputed finds of flint and stone products (Hansen 1967), typical of the culture of arctic reindeer hunters. Supporters of the hypothesis come mostly from circles of natural scientists (*esp.* geologists, *e.g.*: Lierl 1970; Solov’eva 1976), but its most ardent propagators are two Scandinavian archeologists: P. Simonsen from Norway and H. Christiansson from Sweden (1970). These two led the first archeological expedition which excavated the Russekeila site (ruins of a Russian

hunting station) on the south side of the entrance into Isfjord (West Spitsbergen) in 1955 and 1960. They consider it quite probable that the mesolithic hunters from the Pechora river-basin or the northern section of the Ural followed the reindeer along the ridge of the ice pack through Novaya Zemlya and Franz Josef Land all the way to Spitsbergen (Christiansson and Simonsen 1970). The route should not be looked at only as a theoretical construct for in 1912 a reindeer branded by a north Siberian breeder was shot in Spitsbergen (Guttormsen 1985). However, the authenticity of the products and implements found in Russekeila (also by other amateur expeditions) is questionable (e.g.: Starkov and Ovsjanikov 1980). Most scholars consider them to be natural fragments of crystalline rock (quartzite, etc.), which were formed through intensive cryogenic processes and have nothing to do with intentional treatment.

## The state of archeological exploration of Spitsbergen

The short review presented above shows that the attempts to employ archeology in search for irrefutable arguments supporting the hypothesis of man's earlier (*i.e.* Viking or mesolythic) penetration of Spitsbergen have not been successful. As a natural result of this failure, the interest of archeologists shifted to other periods in the history of human activity in the area. After all, questions about the more modern history of Spitsbergen were asked next to the attractive "who was first" even by the earliest archeological expeditions coming to the archipelago. In the introduction to his short sketch of the excavatory works undertaken in 1955 by the Swedish expedition, Christiansson (1961) writes, "The archeological-ethnographical expeditions to Vestspitsbergen in the summers 1955 and 1960 were undertaken in order to investigate the possibility of settlements having existed in Spitsbergen before 1596, when the islands were "officially" discovered by the Dutch explorer Barents"..., and shortly afterwards adds, "and to search for traces of the many whaling and hunting stations that existed from the 17th to the 19th century." <sup>3</sup> This statement reveals a wide investigative perspective, which proposes a broad view of the problems connected with long-lasting human activity involving the exploitation of the natural environment of Spitsbergen. At present archeologists working on Spitsbergen tend to focus on two principal problems:

- West European whaling in the coastal waters of Spitsbergen in the 17th century (especially in the first half of the 17th c.)
- Russian hunting activity (so called **promysl**), whose apex falls on the second half of the 18th century.

To understand the present state of and the tendencies in the archeological

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<sup>3</sup> A similar statement can be found at the beginning of a report on the exploration published by the same author in 1956 (Christiansson 1956).

exploration of Spitsbergen one must briefly review the history of these undertakings.

### Scandinavian expeditions

Scandinavians were the pioneers in planned, methodical excavatory works on Spitsbergen. After the 1955 expedition of Norwegian, Swedish, Danish and Finnish archeologists led by H. Christiansson and P. Simonsen in 1958 a Norwegian-Finnish expedition, headed by H. Tegengren (1962), undertook the examination of the Midterhuken site in Bellsund (ruins of a whaling station). Two years later Tegengren organised another group which excavated the ruins of a large Russian station in Trygghamna, on the northern side of the entrance into Isfjord (Tegengren 1962, Storå 1989). In 1960 H. Christiansson returned (as the head of a Swedish expedition) to continue the exploration of the Russekeila site (Christiansson and Simonsen 1968).

After the 1960 expeditions the archeologists' interest in Spitsbergen dwindles. As if disappointed by the lack of any sensational finds proving man's penetration of the area to have begun before the historically verified discovery of the land by Barents, they limit themselves to publishing reports from their excavations. Apart from A. Dalland's amateur excavation of the ruins of a Russian hunting station on Kapp Lee (Edgeøya) and S. Malaug's partial uncovering of the remnants of the Scheibukta whaling station (Smeerenburgfjorden) in 1968, no serious field work was practically undertaken for many years (Guttormsen 1985). Only in the 1970's there was again a rapid growth of interest in the archeological exploration of Spitsbergen. From then on excavatory works have been conducted as part of long-term research projects.

### Soviet expeditions

Soviet archeologists from the Institute of Archeology of the Soviet Academy of Sciences have proved to be most active in the field. Since 1978, led by V.F. Starkov, they have undertaken numerous excavatory works in many regions of the archipelago (Ovsjannikov and Starkov 1982). Their only focus of interest are the remnants of the Russian stations of walrus hunters (the Pomors). The Soviet project aims primarily at finding argumentation for an early (pre-Barentsian) dating of the objects.

So far the Soviet expedition has examined (partially or thoroughly) 25 historical complexes, most of them from the 18th century, and some (5 sites) from the 17th century. Following the dendrochronological method of dating the Russians claim a group of seven objects to go back to the 16th century, that is the times before Barents (Starkov 1986, 1990b; Chernykh 1987, 1990). As the dendrochronological analysis was, it seems, applied mostly to samples of drift-wood (which was largely the building material used by the Russian hunters

in the construction of their huts) some specialists question the reliability of the conclusions (Albrethsen and Arlov 1988). This method of dating defines in this case the moment the tree fell, and not necessarily the time the hut was built. Between the two dates time must be allowed for the sea currents to carry the tree to the shores of Spitsbergen. There are more doubts about and objections to the dating methodology applied by the Soviet archeologists to the Pomor finds from Spitsbergen. The discussion raised by the Soviet claims is therefore very heated, and the Soviet archeologists find their greatest opponents in the Scandinavian scholars (*see*: Arlov 1987; Albrethsen and Arlov 1988).

## Dutch expeditions

The second nation to undertake large-scale archeological exploration of Spitsbergen were the Dutch. In 1979 L. Hacquebord and his colleagues from the Arktisch Centrum of the Rijkuniversiteit in Groningen initiated an extensive, long-term (3 years) excavatory project in Smeerenburg on Amsterdamøya (Hacquebord 1981a). Smeerenburg was the legendary Dutch whaling station founded by the Amsterdam whalers near an excellent anchorage between Amsterdamøya and Danskøya and the West coast of Spitsbergen. The anchorage was spotted by Captain Willem van Muyden in 1614 and was given the name of Mauritiusbaai (= Smeerenburgfjorden) (Hacquebord 1981b). In 1619 the whalers built here the first whale fat melting furnace, which was the beginning of the rapid development of this unusual seasonal "town" in the far North, in summer inhabited by one or even two hundred whalers (Hacquebord 1985). The station functioned until 1660 and was a source of large profits to merchants from Amsterdam and other Dutch towns. They belonged to the Noordsche Compagnie, which sends its ships yearly to the Spitsbergen fisheries.

The Dutch archeologists were primarily interested in the remnants of the dwellint objects of Smeerenburg. They managed to reconstruct the plan of the settlement (Hacquebord 1988), to describe the stratigraphy of the objects, and to gather a rich collection of finds representing the successive stages of the station's history (Hacquebord 1984a). The exemplary excavations and the excellent publications that followed the field work are one of the greatest achievements of Spitsbergen archeology.

Especially interesting is Hacquebord's (1984b) hypothesis concerning the causes of the total disappearance of Greenland whales (*Balaena mysticetus*) from the coastal waters of Spitsbergen. Their disappearance, he proposes, was not only a result of their physical annihilation in the period of intensive West European whaling in the area especially in the 14th century,<sup>4</sup> but also

<sup>4</sup> The number of whales killed every year in the first half of the 17th century is estimated at about 300–400; about 150 out of the total number were, most probably, killed by the Dutch (Hacquebord 1984a; van Bree, Hacquebord 1988).

a consequence of general ecological processes connected with climatic changes. The processes in question are those that took place at the threshold of the maximum of the Little Ice Age (17th century — Kelly, Karas and Williams 1984; Olszewski 1987) and led to the shift of the Golfstrom border towards the south and the disappearance of concentrations of zooplankton around Spitsbergen. In summer months zooplankton was the major food source for the Greenland whale.<sup>5</sup>

### Polish expeditions

In 1982 the exploration of Spitsbergen was undertaken by Polish archeologists from the Institute of Archeology of the Jagellonian University (Chochorowski and Parczewski 1985). The works concentrated in the region of Hornsund, which had been for years the traditional destination of many Polish scientific expeditions. At the beginning it was a small-scale undertaking conducted as a part of the interdisciplinary expedition of the Jagellonian University. The expedition was working towards the preparation of a comprehensive monograph of southern Spitsbergen: Sørkappland and the area of Hornsund. The monography was to comprise an analysis of all the elements of the natural environment, including the problem of anthropogenic deformations of the environment considered from the historical perspective. This last task required the registration of all traces of human activity in the area by way of a planned inventory procedure. Excavatory works had to be undertaken in order to determine the chronology and the ethnic provenance of objects recognized as archeological deposition complexes. Within the range of interest of Polish archeologists came both the remnants of Russian (Pomor) hunting stations in the area (Palffyodden, Bjørnbeinflyene, Schønningholmane) and the relicts of the West European whaling station from the first half of the 17th century located on the south side of Hornsund, in the Gåshamna region (*e.g.* the Schønningholmane-Höferpynten complex) (Chochorowski 1989a; 1989b and Chochorowski *et al.* 1989).

### Norwegian expeditions and undertakings sponsored by Norwegian scientific centres

In the mid 1980's Spitsbergen became the destination of many Norwegian archeological expeditions, affiliated with the Tramsø University and Tramsø Museum and with the **Kulturvernet for Svalbard og Jan Mayen**, an institution that functions as conservator of historical objects in the region. They are

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<sup>5</sup> The population is estimated (jointly for Spitsbergen and the Jan Mayen Island at 16.500 to 22.000 whales (van Bree, Hacquebord 1988).



a continuation of the pioneering traditions of the Scandinavian expeditions of thirty years earlier. In 1984 a Danish-Norwegian expedition led by S.E. Albrethsen comes to Danskøya to excavate several dozen graves from the whaling period. In the same year R. Jørgensen and his Norwegian colleagues examine the relicts of a Russian hut in Gipsvika (Isfjorden). In 1985 D. Naevestad, working on behalf of **Kulturvernet**, excavates several graves of the Likneset (east side of Smeerenburgfjorden) graveyard, constantly destroyed by abrasive processes. S.E. Albrethsen from the National Museum of Copenhagen is especially active in the 1980's. Interested mainly in the problems of 17th century Danish and Norwegian whaling expeditions, he conducts numerous excavatory works in the region of Danskøya (Albrethsen 1985-86, 1988). Sponsored by **Kulturvernet**, Albrethsen undertakes a number of inventory projects in various parts of the archipelago (1987), and takes up excavatory works in Hornsund (Höferpynten), correlated with the Polish exploration of the Schönningholmane site (Albrethsen 1989). H. Guttormsen, B.H. Helberg, L. Vig-Jansen, G. Rossnes are other archeologists involved in the inventory and conservatory projects of the **Kulturvernet for Svalbard og Jan Mayen** undertaken in Spitsbergen in the 1980's.

The intensification of conservatory measures in the area is connected with the threat that the natural destructive processes and the growing number of tourists pose to the archeological sites. Excavations that focus on the saving and preservation of objects have been recently conducted by R. Jørgensen on behalf of **Kulturvernet** on sites which are either more endangered than others or more valuable than others (e.g.: Scheibukta, Likneset, Kobbefjorden, Rekvika, etc.).

In 1987 the **Norges Almenvitenskapelige Forskningsråd** (Norwegian Scientific Council) provided funds for a research project called "Russiske fangststasjoner på Svalbard" (Russian hunting stations on Svalbard), coordinated by the Tramsø University and realised by M.E. Jasinski from Tramsø. The author of the present work has also been invited to participate in the project. The project aims at an analysis of key problems connected with the activity of Russian hunters from the White Sea area in the region of Spitsbergen. The analysis uses earlier materials gathered by Scandinavian expeditions, data collected by Polish archeologists in Hornsund, as well as on results of recent exploration of the author (Chochorowski and Jasiński 1990; 1991b). The analysis would not be competent without drawing on the extensive material base compiled by Soviet archeologists.

Norwegian archeologists from the University of Tramsø are still very active in the field. They are the organizers of numerous conferences devoted to arctic archeology. Theirs was the initiative to create the "International Working Group for Arctic Archeology" (Tramsø conference, March 1989 — see: Jørgensen, Bertelsen 1989). The association institutionalizes the scholarly and scientific activity of researchers interested in the archeology of Spitsbergen. It organizes a debating forum for them and promotes their achievements. It also strives to

attain the uniformity of exploration methods used by different expeditions in their excavations on Spitsbergen<sup>6</sup>.

## The present aims and the range of archeological excavations on Spitsbergen

As it should be clear from our review the excavatory exploration of Spitsbergen concentrates today on two cultural and chronological groups of historical complexes:

- relicts of West European whaling stations
- remnants of Russian (Pomor) hunting stations.

The former group comprises the following archeological objects: ruins of whale fat melting furnaces, dwelling huts, traces of tent capms, and graveyards (some of them even as large as 200 graves). Especially interesting among the whaling objects are the observations points, called "look-outs", located usually in the vicinity of the station in places with good view.

The archeological artefacts collected on these sites are mostly tools used by whalers to flay the whales, cut the fat, etc. (*e.g.* choppers, knives, grapnels), hunting weapons and accessories (harpoons, pikes, axes, numerous lead bullets, flints, etc.), fragments of clothes and personal belongings, ceramics, glass containers, some coins, and many fragments of kaolin pipes (Fig. 1). Thanks to their chronological classification based on statistical methods, the pipes are perfect date-markers (Hacquebord 1984a; Chochorowski 1989a).

Traces left by Russian hunters are mainly remnants of timber huts, graves, monumental votive crosses, relicts of landing places and hunting devices (*e.g.* fox traps). The sites rendered a rich hunting inventory of weapons and other accessories: harpoons (called **noski**), spearheads (called **spitsa**), grapnels, fishing hooks, wooden parts of traps, elements of fire-arms, etc. Other objects found in the course of excavation are tools (axes, spades, saws, drills, etc.), craftsman's accessories (shoemaker's lasts, awls, etc.), personal equipment of the hunters (knives, whetstones carried on belts, tinder-boxes, flints, lead bullets), kitchen utensils, ceramics, wooden containers (barrels, buckets, etc.), cult objects (Orthodox pendant crosses, icon fragments), and finally objects connected with relaxation and entertainment (fragments of chess-boards, chessmen, fragments of musical instruments, etc.) (*see*: Chochorowski 1989a; Starkov 1990a) (Fig. 2).

The sites are sometimes subjected to thorough excavatory examination aiming at a complex analysis of a given object or of the whole region. Some excavations serve only sounding purposes while some others are purely

<sup>6</sup> The founding declaration of the "International Working Group for Arctic Archeology" was signed by S.E. Albrethsen (Denmark), R. Bertelsen, M.E. Jasinski, R. Jørgensen, P. Simonsen (Norway), J. Chochorowski (Poland), L. Hacquebord (Holland), V.F. Starkov, V.I. Zav'jalov (USSR) and N. Stora (Finland).

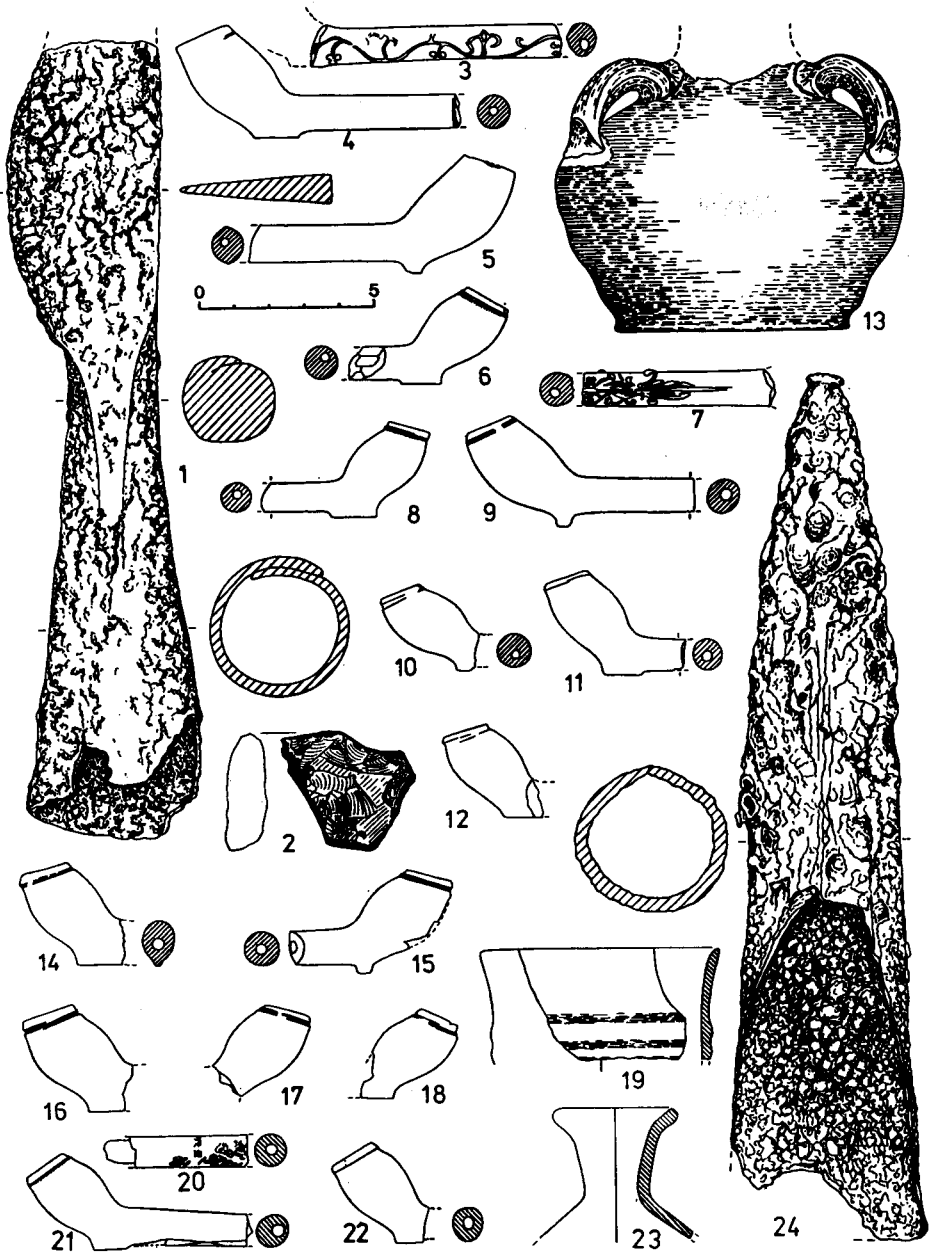


Fig. 1. Inventory of whaling objects from Hornsund area. 1 — chopper. 2 — flint. 3-12, 14-18, 20-22 — kaolin pipes. 13, 19 — fragments of ceramics. 23 — fragments of glass bottle. 24 — pikes

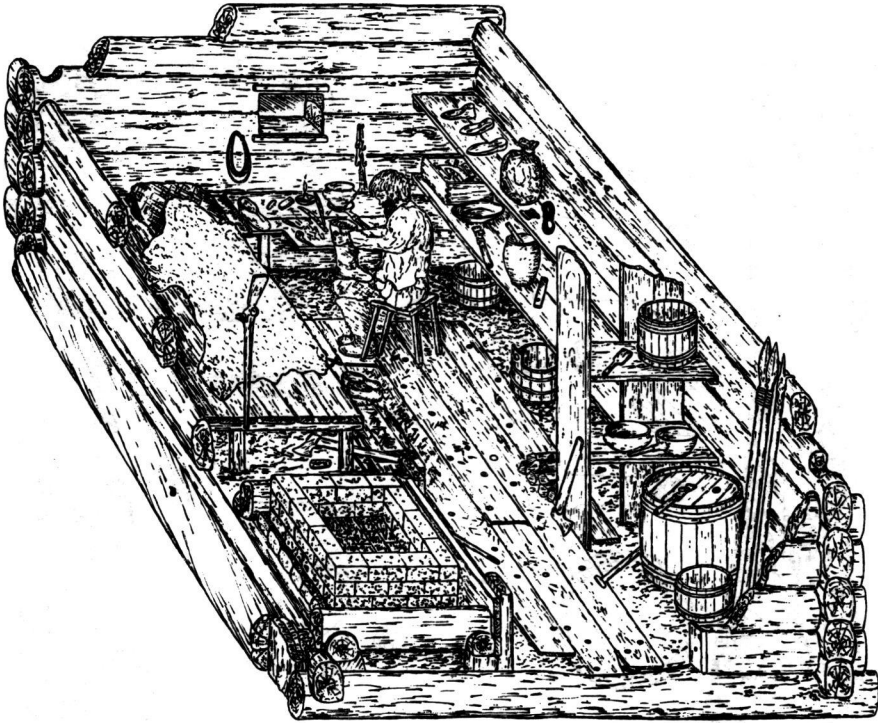


Fig. 2. Reconstruction of the Pomors hunting hut inside (Bjørnbeinflyene site). Drawing by author

conservatory. The scale and range of excavations recently undertaken in Spitsbergen is now a subject of animated discussion (*see*: Bertelsen, Simonsen 1988). The number of archeological objects on Spitsbergen is, naturally, limited. Therefore, a balance must be kept between those that can be excavated for scholarly purposes and those that should be left intact — either for their unique nature, or because future methods of exploration, better and more accurate than those used at present, may tell us more of the preserved objects. The problem does not, of course concern sites threatened with destruction, which need to be examined for conservatory reasons.

### The role and the cognitive capabilities of archeology in the research of the history of human activity in the region of Spitsbergen

A question must be asked here about the role of archeology in this comprehensive research and about its usefulness from the viewpoint of scientific methodology and field work methods. More than anywhere else we encounter here a situation in which the investigative capabilities of various disciplines,

especially history, archeology and ethnography, join hands to answer questions about the past. The position of archeology in the process of reconstructing the phenomena in question follows from the specificity of the sources used. Its position is then defined by its ability to analyse the stratification structures of archeological deposition complexes and thus to reconstruct fragments of the social and cultural reality represented by these complexes (Urbańczyk 1986, 1987). The definition quite unequivocally determines the scope of investigative procedures identified with archeological methods of exploration. It also interprets the investigative capabilities of the discipline, perceived especially in the context of the frequently expressed hopes for arguments that would outweigh the importance of historical sources, and in the context of the hierarchy of aims established in keeping with these expectations.

It must be emphasised here that the nature of archeological sources allows a more reliable reconstruction of recurring human behaviours (social and cultural) — in terms of technology, economy, settlement, etc. — than of events or episodes, understood as single manifestations of activity. It is clear then that in our case the hierarchy of aims set up by researchers attracted by the historical trend should be reversed. The specific nature of the historical processes a scientist encounters in his study of Spitsbergen requires, first and foremost, the exposure of their mechanisms, such as:

- the geography of hunting expeditions and the problem of transportation
- the structure and the organization of the whaling and hunting stations
- the structure of the hunting and the processing undertakings along with their parameters (*e.g.* scale and efficiency)
- the structure of daily life
- characteristic traits of the whaling and the hunting subcultures, etc.

It is the structure and the dynamics of the analysed process that should be examined. Its purely historical (episodic) aspect recedes, as it were, into the background in this context. By no means are we proposing here the “ahistorical” approach, propagated by the so called “new archeologists” (Pałubicka and Tabaczyński 1986). The dynamic and structural perspective simply seems more effective. It allows to trace those specific features of the historical process (socio-cultural system) which may have appeared in a situation in which human behaviour was so much determined by environment. The event, or episodic, aspect is, of course, also indispensable. It serves as the necessary background to the analysed processes and endows them with a chronological dimension. But the episodic aspect cannot be the only approach determining the scope of investigative aims that archeology is capable of pursuing. Often the episodic aspects of the historical processes under consideration require additional use of historical sources, which make it possible to see both the incidental manifestations of human activity in Spitsbergen and their “external”, continental conditioning.

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## Streszczenie

W dotychczasowych badaniach nad początkami penetracji ludzkiej w strefie Spitsbergenu, ukształtowało się kilka zasadniczych koncepcji. Są to:

— koncepcja „zachodnioeuropejska”, zgodnie z którą punktem wyjściowym tego procesu było, historycznie w pełni udokumentowane, odkrycie Spitsbergenu przez Barentsa, a w jego następstwie — wielka fala wielorybnictwa zachodnioeuropejskiego,

— koncepcja „pomorska”, wg której Spitsbergen znany był Pomorcom (rosyjskiej ludności z rejonu Morza Białego), co najmniej od XV wieku, a w wieku XVI (przed Barentsem), został na stałe włączony w obręb pomorskich terenów łowieckich,

— koncepcja „normańska”, w świetle której odkrycie Spitsbergenu („Svalbardu”), należy łączyć z XII-XIII-wiecznymi wyprawami Normanów,

— koncepcja „mezolityczna”, łącząca początki penetracji ludzkiej w strefie Spitsbergenu z łowcami reniferów, reprezentującymi ugrupowania kulturowo-osadnicze, typowe dla arktycznej i subarktycznej (dorzecze Peczory, płn. Ural) epoki kamienia, z 3 tysiąclecia p.n.e.

O ile pierwsza z tych koncepcji bazuje wyłącznie na źródłach historycznych, to w wypadku pozostałych, próbuje się w różnych zakresie, z gorszym i lepszym skutkiem wykorzystywać dane archeologiczne. Jak dotąd, wyniki intensywnych (zwłaszcza w ostatnich kilkunastu latach), badań archeologicznych, nie spełniły oczekiwań niektórych badaczy, na uzyskanie niepodważalnego i nie wywołującego żadnych obiekcji, „materialnego” dowodu (w randze niemal „źródła historycznego”), potwierdzającego obecność grup ludzkich na Spitsbergenie, przed historycznym odkryciem Barentsa. Dostarczyły one natomiast informacji, które pozwalają zgłębić wiele istotnych aspektów, dwóch zasadniczych procesów w dziejach eksploatacji środowiska naturalnego Spitsbergenu, tj.:

— wielorybnictwa zachodnioeuropejskiego na wodach przybrzeżnych Spitsbergenu w 1. połowie XVII wieku,

— rosyjskiej działalności łowieckiej (tzw. „promysła”), której szczytowy rozwój przypada na 2. połowę wieku XVIII.

Wydaje się, iż możliwości poznawcze archeologii — wynikające ze specyfiki źródeł właściwych dla tej dyscypliny — predystynują ją właśnie do objęcia badaniami głównie struktury i dynamiki procesów, a nie wyłącznie ich aspektów zdarzeniowych (epizodów historycznych).