



## Jan Machnik (1930–2023). A scholar at a crossroads

In the rays of the autumn sun on October 14, 2023, in the parish of St. Nicholas in Lubla near Jasło, we said goodbye to Professor Jan Machnik.

Someone might ask why this place was chosen for his eternal rest, since the Professor was born in Łuka, near Stanisławów (today Ivano-Frankiivsk, Ukraine) on September 20, 1930, and spent most of his life in Krakow. Anyone who knows at least a little about the Professor's biography and his scientific fascinations will quickly find the answer – this is a place at the creative crossroads of a Scientist with great intuition and energy, which he generously shared with others.

In his first piece of research, he focused on the early Middle Ages, and there was no indication that he would one day become one of the greatest specialists in the field of European colonisation from over 4,000 years ago. Yet later doctoral and habilitation theses dealt with the end of the Neolithic and the beginning of the Bronze Age.

After graduating from high school in Krosno on the Wisłok River in 1950, Jan Machnik began first-cycle studies at the Jagiellonian University, majoring in the history of material culture, specialising in archeology, led by prof. Rudolf Jamka. He continued his studies as a second-cycle student at the University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań, which he completed in 1955 with the defense of his master's thesis – Results of Research on the Early Medieval Settlement in Igołomia near Kraków in 1953–54 – written under the supervision of prof. Witold Hensel.

The following years were a time of changing interests and preparing a doctoral dissertation under the supervision of prof. Stefan Nosek – Basics of the Division and Chronology of the Corded Ware Culture in Małopolska





**FIG. 1.** Jan Machnik during his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration. Grand Hall of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (Photo: Bogdan Zimowski; Collection of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in Kraków)



**FIG. 2.** Jan Machnik during the awarding of the Saint Gorazd badge (2013). Collegium Maius auditorium (Photo: Bogdan Zimowski; Collection of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in Kraków)

– defended in 1963. This profound change in interests soon brought results in the form of new initiatives in field research in Małopolska. The first was the implementation of my own idea of surface exploration of large parts of the San, Tanew and Lubaczówka basins. The second, in the years 1967–1974, involved the young docent in the archeology of the Lesser Poland loess uplands. As a research supervisor, he directed extensive excavations in the villages of Lesser Poland, in Iwanowice, Niedźwiedź, Olszanica and Bronocice, which were very important for the archeology of the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age and were carried out jointly by Institute of the History of Material Culture of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Universities of Michigan and Buffalo.

In addition to these significant achievements, Jan Machnik's soul was filled with creative anxiety and sentiment towards the first field experiences in the late 1950s, during the pioneering actions of the Carpathian Archaeological Expedition, led by Prof. Andrzej Żaki. The spirit of the then journeys through the Carpathian Foothills and the Beskids, overcoming organisational obstacles and facing something unknown, shaped the young Master of Archeology, who went step by step with his peers, who, years later, would set the tone in those areas of archeology in which, like Jan Machnik, they would become professors: we refer to Kazimierz Godłowski, Helena Zoll-Adamikowa, and Zenon Woźniak.

Jan Machnik's experience gained at that time, exactly half a century ago, would begin a separate trend of the Professor's activity, resulting in the inclusion of these areas in Neolithic archaeology. In 1960, his large study on the Corded Ware culture in the Polish Carpathians was published in *Acta Archaeologica Carpathica*. Although the Professor did not return to this subject matter for the next twenty years, the publication was a harbinger of further discoveries that the Foothills and Beskids were populated with groups of pastoral people dating back almost 5,000 years.

It is therefore not surprising that there came a moment in the Professor's scientific life when he stood at a creative and sentimental crossroads. He would again be fascinated by the Carpathians, known from his childhood and school years. The turning point in this change of interests was a unique excavation campaign, undertaken in 1984 by the Professor and his team in the town of Bierówka on the Warzyce Hills range. The embankment examined at that time turned out to be a tomb from over 4,000 years ago and not, as was assumed, a border mound built in modern times by the owners of landed estates. The discovery, made at great scientific risk, initiated an increasing process of examining many similar objects on both the Polish and Slovak sides of the Carpathians.

His closest disciples, who travelled many kilometers for this moment and came at the Master's call, heard the memorable *Alea iacta est*, spoken in the spring of 1992, on the hill of the Slovak Ondava Upland. This is how the Polish-Slovak program – The First Farmers and Shepherds in the Foreland of the Lower Beskidy Mountains – began, which colored and scientifically enriched ideas about the role of mountain areas for prehistoric man.

Another turn in the Professor's scientific interests took him to Grzęda Sokalska and Roztocze, as well as to the upper Dniester. He gathered around him specialists from other fields, paleobotanists and geomorphologists. The focus was still, as in Slovakia, the burial mounds, but this research also contributed greatly to the problems of other periods of prehistory.

All these campaigns had some common non-scientific feature. Jan Machnik always had devoted collaborators around him: Polish, Slovak, Ukrainian; he created an atmosphere of adventure, and when scientific seriousness was needed, he would be the irreplaceable organiser of every field campaign, able to talk to representatives of the local community: the County Executive, the village head, the parish priest and the farmer.

Even though he was not an easy debater, he quickly gained respect and showed it himself. First, endowed with great scientific intuition, he was able to direct research towards quick, clear findings and, ultimately, serious discoveries. Those who were lucky enough to write their master's and doctoral theses under his supervision will certainly agree with this.

Professor Jan Machnik will remain at the crossroads. The cemetery in Lubla near Jasło is a resting place not chosen by accident. From here, you can almost see the characteristically broken ridge of Cergowa Mount in the Lower Beskids, which he was constantly looking towards. You can see Jasło-Sanok Depression and the Gogołów Range, which he walked on during his surface inspection, which he learned before his high school leaving exam, and which is only a few kilometers to the tomb of the Corded Ware Culture barrow grave in Bierówka. Lubla. This lies somewhere between his native Łuka near Stanisławów and Kraków, where he spent most of his life.

Professor Jan Machnik remains in our memory full of gratitude and fascination with his great personality and achievements, as well as his endless energy. Many of us owe him important parts of our lives.

Thank you, Professor!

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