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## PRAKTYKI AUTOETNOGRAFICZNE

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# Mother Earth. A Prototype of Modern Pomeranian Art?<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

Between 1920 and 1921, expressionist Ernst Barlach, who had settled in Mecklenburg, designed a grave monument for Ernst Biesel, a timber merchant. The sculpture, entitled *Mother Earth*, stood in the Main Cemetery in Stettin, newly designed by Georg Hannig. The theme referred to the chthonic deity spread in primitive, ancient cultures and folk rituals, known among the Celts by the Phrygian name *Kybele* and among the Germans as *Nerthus*. The modern German state and nation-building mythology referred to these two ethnic groups. Mother Earth was the subject of a treatise by Albert Dietrich in 1905. Barlach modelled his work on vernacular post-classical sculptures, but his most important source of inspiration was the reception of the Kuma statues, the so-called stone women (11<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century), which he had viewed on the Ukrainian steppe in 1906. The crude, blocky sculptures, attributed to Celts, Scythians, Huns, Goths or Mongols, for Barlach were the ‘milestone of the initial limit of time’ (*Markstein der unteren Grenze einer Zeit*), the ‘stone miscarriage’ (*steinerne Mißgeburt*) and the ‘crystallisation of earthiness’ (*Christallisierung des Irdischen*). This eastern ‘primitive’ inspiration proved to be a ground-breaking experience for the ‘North-German artist,’

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<sup>1</sup> This article is an English version of a text that appears simultaneously in Polish as an introductory chapter to the author’s monograph *Macierz. Szczecińskie muzea i sztuka dla Nowego Pomorzana 1910–1945* [The Motherland. Szczecin Museums and Art for a New Pomeranian, 1910–1945] (Szczecin: Muzeum Narodowe w Szczecinie, 2023).

referring to the Migration Period and the formation of post-antique Europe. While at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century France (additionally burdened with the criticised slogan *l'art pour l'art*) was regarded as the main heir to classical antiquity, Germany was to restore barbarian mysticism (inherited from the Celts) and a sense of practicality (typical of the Germans) to art, which were rooted in a particular love of nature. Barlach's *Mother Earth* became a prototypical work for interwar Pomeranian art, representing the supposedly coarse temperament of farmers and fishermen.

#### Keywords

Ernst Barlach (1870–1938), Szczecin (Stettin), (Western) Pomerania, sculpture, literature, archaeology, psychoanalysis, Expressionism

In 1922, the influential publisher and art dealer Paul Cassirer published the latest drama of his friend Ernst Barlach, *Der Findling* [The Foundling].<sup>2</sup> Featuring woodcut illustrations made by the author himself, the text spread a vision of post-war misery, human humiliation, acts of murder, even cannibalism, and, as some interpreted it<sup>3</sup>, the fear of communism spreading across Europe. The titular foundling, left on the road by a pair of refugees, was depicted by Barlach on the book's cover (Fig. 1): an infant rests on the lap of a woman who, grief-stricken, sits on a small hill. Her long gown, completely covering her body, and the veil falling down the sides of her shoulders, form a compact outline in the shape of an egg, an archaic “navel of the world”<sup>4</sup> or a stone. Located below the figure, the title, calligraphed in stylized Gothic Schwabacher, thus retains its double meaning: *Findling* means both abandoned child and erratic boulder in German. A similar ambiguous term appeared in a song hummed by one of the characters near the end of the play:

[.....]  
 Wozu die Qual, wozu das Leid,  
 Wozu die klägliche Gebärde,  
 Überall ist Muttererde.  
 Sie nährt dich wie sie soll und kann,  
 Umfängt mit Liebesarmen den toten,

<sup>2</sup> Ernst Barlach, *Der Findling* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1922). The collector's edition (80 copies) includes hand-printed artworks from 1921.

<sup>3</sup> Willi Flemming, *Ernst Barlach – Wesen und Werk* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1958), 212–218.

<sup>4</sup> See Matthias Schirren, “Grab, Altar und Nabel. Der delphische Omphalos”, in: *Kristallisationen, Splitterungen. Bruno Tauts Glashaus*, Konz. Angelika Thiekötter, Hrsg. Oliver Bätz (Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag, 1993), 129–131.

Mühselig müd gewordenen Mann --  
 Überall ist Mutterboden...  
 [...]

The term humus (German *Mutterboden*), understood as the top organic layer of soil, was formed from an amalgamation of words that can also be translated as terrain, soil, mother area, mother earth, matrix.

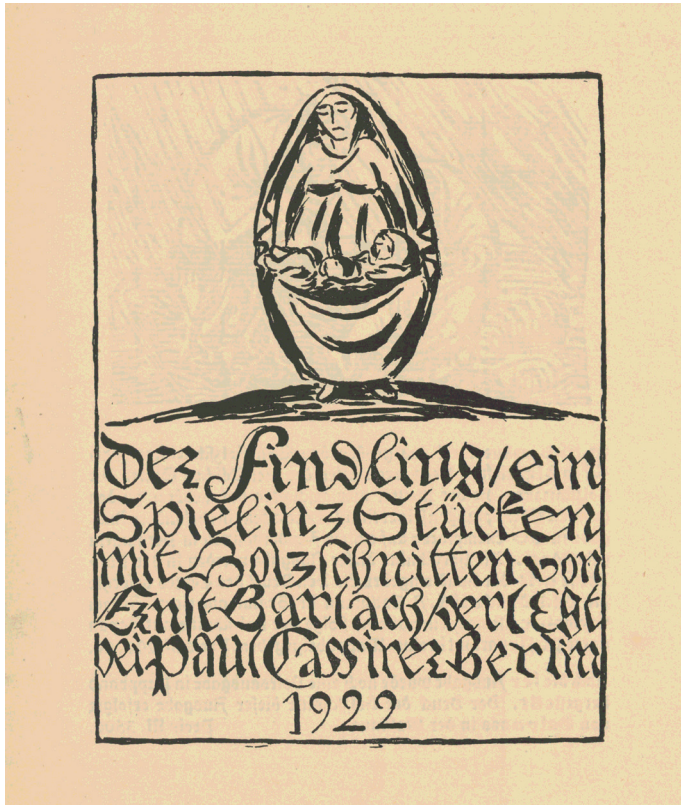


Fig. 1. Ernst Barlach, *Der Findling*, Berlin 1922. Ernst Barlach Stiftung Güstrow

<sup>5</sup> What is all this agony for, What is all this suffering for, | And all this pathetic gesture, | Mother Earth is everywhere. | She feeds you as she should and can, | Takes into loving arms the dead, | Afflicted poor creature -- Humus is all around. Barlach, *Der Findling*, 73–74. See the psychoanalysis-inspired analysis of the artist's writing: Wolfgang Beutin, *Barlach oder der Zugang zum Unbewussten. Eine kritische Studie* (Würzburg: Königshausen u. Neumann, 1994), 122, 168.

At the time of writing *Der Findling*, the expressionism playwright, graphic artist, but above all sculptor experienced with volunteer work in a children's shelter, born in 1870 in Holstein but settled in Mecklenburg (Fig. 2) – was struggling with the trauma of his mother's suicide. At the same time, he was working on a statue for a family tomb for the Szczecin timber merchant Richard Biesel. Dr. Biesel, as a member of the Norddeutsche Sezession association, was acquainted with the directors of the three institutions: the City Museum in Szczecin (*Stadtmuseum Stettin*, *Städtisches Museum Stettin*, *Museum der Stadt Stettin*), classical archaeologist and advocate of expressionism Walter Riezler, the Main Cemetery (*Hauptfriedhof*, today's Central Cemetery), designer of gardens Georg Hannig, and soon the local School of Arts and Crafts (*Handwerker- und Kunstgewerbeschule*), architect Gregor Rosenbauer, and was clearly fascinated by avant-garde trends.<sup>6</sup> Barlach, on the other hand, already represented in the museum's collection by two volumes and eight loose xylographic prints just purchased from Cassirer,<sup>7</sup> had been known to the Pomeranian capital for a decade in the context of sepulchral projects. During an exhibition of cemetery art, organized in 1911 by the local branch of the Dürer Association (*Dürerbund*), the Dürer Society (*Dürer-Gesellschaft*), on the grounds of the park between the Royal Gate and the museum building (*Grabower Anlagen*, today Stefan Żeromski Park), he presented one of the concepts for modest monuments that had preoccupied his thoughts a few years ago. This group of works, created between 1905 and 1906, included wall-mounted columbaria in the type of colorful archaic Middle Eastern architecture, discovered in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by German archaeologists, and slabs of earth tombs. It was the latter type – an Art Nouveau stele resembling a young, crosier-coiled fern leaf, asparagus shoot or phallus – that Barlach most likely sent to Szczecin as part of his Pomeranian debut.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Dariusz Kacprzak, "Szczecińskie *memento mori* Ernsta Barlacha – Matka Ziemia / Das Stettiner *memento mori* Ernst Barlachs – Mutter Erde", in: *Ernst Barlach. Obrazy śmierci w twórczości niemieckiego ekspresjonisty / Ernst Barlach. Bilder vom Tode im Werk eines deutschen Expressionisten*, red. Szymon Piotr Kubiak, Volker Probst, tłum. Barbara Ostrowska (Szczecin: Muzeum Narodowe w Szczecinie, 2011), 10; Szymon Piotr Kubiak, "Gmach – monument – wnętrze. Gregor Rosenbauer i szczecińska Szkoła Bauhausu", *Sztuka i Dokumentacja* 23 (2020): 109.

<sup>7</sup> Dariusz Kacprzak, "Moderna – sztuka zwyrodniała ze zbiorów Muzeum Miejskiego w Szczecinie w świetle źródeł archiwalnych [katalog] / Klassische Moderne – Entartete Kunst aus dem Bestand des Stettiner Stadtmuseums im Licht der archivischen Quellen [Katalog]", w: *Szczecińskie awangardy / Stettiner Avant-garden*, red. Szymon Piotr Kubiak, tłum. Tomasz Kowalewski (Szczecin: Muzeum Narodowe w Szczecinie, 2017), 183–198. Barlach was also a regular member of the avant-garde Norddeutsche Sezession from the moment it emerged from the stylistically and worldview diversified Pomeranian Artists Association (1921).

<sup>8</sup> Identification based on the historical catalog listing and the only pair in this group of works – a conceptual and measured drawing – testifying to the realization of the project: Volker Probst, "Memento mori. Sztuka sepulkralna w twórczości Ernsta Barlacha / Memento mori. Grabmalkunst im Werk Ernst Barlachs", in: *Ernst Barlach. Obrazy śmierci*, 26–27 and 130 [catalog].



Fig. 2. Ernst Barlach as a volunteer at a childcare center in Güstrow, 1915. Photograph by Albert Hannig (?), Ernst Barlach Haus – Stiftung Hermann F. Reemtsma, Hamburg

A decade later, Mecklenburger offered to Biesel, as in the case of *Der Findling*, a figure of a seated woman obscured almost entirely by a large shawl. “One can guess” – wrote Volker Probst – “the outstretched, accepting arms underneath it, which give the region of the womb the shape of a gently depressed basin.”<sup>9</sup> The stocky sculpture, modeled with sharp facet cuts, received the author’s title *Mother Earth* (Fig. 3). The artist commissioned Hamburg stonemason Friedrich Bursch to carve it. For the figure, he chose shelly limestone from the “Franconian primordial ocean” (*Fränkisches Urmeer*), for the low pedestal – unpolished granite blocks, while the entire composition was placed on a slightly bulging, greened mound (Fig. 4). The post-war design, which was larger but formally much more austere than the previous one, thus corresponded to the guidelines for shaping the individual plots of the early modern Main Cemetery (today’s Central Cemetery). This park-like, and in some parts even pseudo-wild, as if backwoods-like surroundings were to be filled with tombstones made of German stone, being an expression of concern for the native landscape.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, 31.



Fig. 3. Ernst Barlach, Mother Earth, sketch drawing, 1920. Ernst Barlach Museum, Güstrow

According to Hannig, the building of the Szczecin museum, for example, served as an example of the patriotic use of natural and durable materials.<sup>10</sup> Barlach's concept, however, was also influenced by a new – individual, though spreading – perception of space, where simplified human statues mimicked geological formations, and the texts of the dramas were given a specific topographical structure, highlighting boundary places of symbolic significance.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The director of the Central Cemetery referred to the tenets of the *Heimatschutzbewegung* and argued the appropriateness of using German stones with the example of the museum building being completed on Hakenterrasse: Georg Hannig, "Grabmalkunst", in: idem, *Friedhofkunst, Gartenkunst, Feuerbestattung. 7 Aufsätze* (Stettin: s.n., [1912]), 23–33. The facades of the City Museum were faced with Lusatian granite and sandstone from the Table Mountains: Bogdana Kozińska, "Szczecińskie muzeum wczoraj / Das Stettiner Museum gestern", in: *100 lat muzeum w Szczecinie / 100 Jahre Museum in Stettin*, red. Szymon Piotr Kubiak, Dariusz Kacprzak (Szczecin: Muzeum Narodowe w Szczecinie, 2013), 24.

<sup>11</sup> Barlach's statement regarding the 1925 wooden sculpture *the Dreamer* [*Der Träumer*], which was described by the artist as "waves of the Mecklenburg landscape," has survived. See Friedrich Schult, *Barlach im Gespräch*, Hrsg. Elmar Jansen (Leipzig: Insel, 1987), 20, after: Karoline Lemke, "«...ein wenig bekommt man die Idee der Bewegung im reinen Raum, der schrankenlos ist und Grenzen nur solche hat, die man selbst anerkennt oder setzt». Raumerfahrung und Raumdarstellung in Ernst Barlachs Drama *Der arme Vetter*", in: *Barlach Revisited. Eine kritische Bestandsaufnahme*, Hrsg. Paul Onasch, Karoline Lemke, Holger Helbig (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2021), 89. See more in Lemke's works on the "topography of drama" with reference to Juri M. Lotman's structuralist-semiotic model.

Soon after the installation of the work at the circular square, in the midst of a quasi-forest grove, two models of *Mother Earth* were presented at the exhibition of Norddeutsche Sezession at the City Museum in Szczecin.<sup>12</sup> The exhibition context was significant: the adjacent room held a set of urns from prehistoric corpse burials discovered in the southwest corner of the Main Cemetery in 1907.<sup>13</sup> There, the Biesel family quarters and the archaeological site were separated by a distance of a few minutes' walk, a short distance from the side cemetery gate on Berliner Straße (now Mieszka I Street).



Fig. 4. Ernst Barlach, *Mother Earth*, 1921. MNS Photo Archive

<sup>12</sup> 2. *Ausstellung der Norddeutschen Secession* (Stettin: Museum der Stadt Stettin, 1922), 14; Kacprzak, „Szczecińskie”, 11; idem, „Moderna”, 198–199.

<sup>13</sup> See A[dolf] Stubenrauch, „Das Urnengräberfeld auf dem Hauptfriedhof zu Stettin”, *Monatsblätter der Gesellschaft für Pommersche Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 7/8 (1914): 97–115.

The drapery arranged in rhythmic folds, characteristic of the aforementioned Barlach artworks from the early 1920s, allowed the anatomy to be abstracted and the volume to be monumentalized, giving the figure the appearance of a compact, static block. The fabric motif undoubtedly referred to ancient representations of women, including images of the primordial chthonic deity – the personified Earth with many names. By the Greeks she was worshipped as the mother of the gods Gaia, the Roman Tellus was entrusted with the care of crops and pregnant women, eventually Terra Mater became identified with the Phrygian Cybele. The cult of the latter reached into the territories of Gaul and Germania, where images of ideal beauty were subjected to vulgarization or vernacularization through a formal reduction of the ancient model.<sup>14</sup> The Celtic people, particularly sensitive to the element of mysticism, paid homage to the dual nature of Cybele in secret ceremonies. They referred not only to the act of birth but also to the phenomenon of dying in the cyclical order of nature.<sup>15</sup> The earliest anthropomorphic representations of the Celts were associated with sacred stones, menhirs “of human likeness, which represent half-dressed women,” wrote French archaeologist Solomon Reinach.<sup>16</sup> These throning goddesses, clad in lavishly creased hipbands, appeared singly or in triple representations. Iconographically, they were close to fluvial deities: rivers, after all, gushing from the earth, required intercession at their sources and mouths, and because of the boundary nature of the watercourses, their matrons watched over the security of territories.<sup>17</sup>

“Natural,” that is, the then original people of the Germans (*Naturvolk*), who settled, like the Celts, in the area of the *barbaricum* and took over many aspects of culture from the latter, were described in an ethnographic genealogy by Publius Cornelius Tacitus:

[...] the Reudigni, the Aviones, the Anglii, the Varini, the Eudoses, the Suardones, and Nuthones who are fenced in by rivers or forests. None of these tribes have any noteworthy feature, except their common worship of Ertha, or mother-Earth.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Elmar Schwertheim, *Die Denkmäler orientalischer Gottheiten im römischen Deutschland mit Ausnahme der ägyptischen Gottheiten* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 290–305.

<sup>15</sup> Jerzy Gąsowski, *Mitologia Celtów* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1979), 113.

<sup>16</sup> Salomon Reinach, *Pochodzenie religji. Historia powszechna religji*, transl. unknown (Toledo, Ohio: Paryski Publishing CO., 1924), 141. The book, published in 1907 in French, appeared in German translation four years later.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, 147; see Bożena Gierek, *Celtowie* (Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 1998), 50–55.

<sup>18</sup> Cornelius Tacitus, *The Agricola and Germany of Tacitus, And the Dialogue on Oratory*, ed. and trans. by Alfred John Church, William Jackson Brodrigg (London: Macmillan, 1877), 116.



Long before Barlach, it would have been difficult to point to another classical text that was equally popular among Germans. The widespread reception of Tacitus's *Germania* (in actuality *De origine et situ Germanorum liber*) was, in fact, of exceptional importance for the formation of their modern mythology. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Karl Dietrich Hüllmann, a professor at Frankfurt's Viadrina and Königsberg's Albertina, even identified the Germans with the Celts. In a painting by Romanticist Gerhard von Kügelgen (1815), *Germania*, having collected the ashes of heroic children, took the form of Cybele, and the trail of synthesis of national and regeneration symbolism was taken up by scholars and artists in the revived Reich in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> The concepts described influenced, among other things, the linking of barbarian spirituality with the parochial but positively charged temperament of the religious, working peasant during the growing season and the active hunter in winter, who draw strength from nature to fight the Roman decadence of the metropolis – synonymous with transgression and evil.<sup>20</sup> Also attractive was the Roman metaphor equating the Germans with “big children,” destined to “manifest inclinations that will only be fully revealed in later stages of life.”<sup>21</sup>

The planting of oaks, hornbeams and beeches imitating the wilderness of the riverside province was *nomen omen* of a natural setting for Biesel, a professional directly involved in forest management. Not surprisingly, he referred the commission to Barlach, who was interested in vernacular cultural themes, and in whom the Viking berserk was awakened by his admiration for Wilhelm Worringer's book *Formprobleme der Gotik* (1911).<sup>22</sup> As he himself recalled, thanks to this reading, among other things, the artist assimilated the concept of “northerliness” or “barbarism” and identified himself and his art with the Nordic temperament. According to a group of scholars, the aforementioned vulgarization of ancient representational schemes was also once a manifestation of the vitality that purified degenerate Hellenistic and Roman art.<sup>23</sup> Worringer noted the occurrence of a new,

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Martin May, *Antheil der Keltgermanen an der europäischen Bildung im Altertum* (Frankfurt/Main: Gebr. Fey, 1895). On the subject of the lost Kügelgen painting: Tadeusz J. Żuchowski, *Patriotyczne mity i toposy. Malarstwo niemieckie 1800–1848* (Poznań: PTPN, 1991), 43.

<sup>20</sup> Herfried Münkler, *Mity Niemców*, transl. Andrzej Kopacki (Warszawa: Sic!, 2013), 123–139. More extensively on the subject of forest in the context of ethnogenesis: Johannes Zechner, “Deutscher Wald”, in: *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften. Akteure, Netzwerke, Forschungsprogramme*, Bd. 2, Hrsg. Michael Fahlbusch, Ingo Haar, Alexander Pinwinkler (Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 1007–1015.

<sup>21</sup> Adam Kożuchowski, *Powinowactwa mimo woli. Święte Cesarstwo Rzymskie Narodu Niemieckiego i Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów w niemieckiej i polskiej historiografii XIX wieku* (Warszawa: IH PAN, 2016), 47.

<sup>22</sup> James van Dyke, “Ernst Barlach and the Conservative Revolution”, *German Studies Review* 36/2 (2013): 288.

<sup>23</sup> With regard to the work and views of the seemingly apolitical Barlach, the specific position of Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, representative of the “conservative revolution” and author of the term “Third Reich,”

supposedly German style in areas where Germans mixed with other ethnic groups, but it was in the appearance of invaders that he saw the *conditio sine qua non* of the medieval flowering of art. “They brought into a self-confident people the seed of sensual uncertainty and spiritual discord from which the transcendental pathos of the Gothic grows [emporschießt] so powerfully,” claimed the art historian, whose “the real aim [...] was to discover the latent Gothic from the proper Gothic”.<sup>24</sup> Barlach was to be, in his eyes and in the eyes of critics, the heir to both.<sup>25</sup>

Some researchers, moreover, studied not only the texts of the great historiographers – representatives of Mediterranean high culture, but also post-classical testimonies, vernacular precisely, and contemporary folk ones. Reinach recalled “that with the Germans the newborn child was laid on the bare ground, and that the father lifted it up, as if it were at that moment coming out of the earth, the common mother of mortals”<sup>26</sup> Albrecht Dietrich, in his treatise on the chthonic goddess, published in 1905, relied on Roman writings and the observations of ethnographers made in all, he claimed, corners of the world. Dietrich, combining his Latin training with his zeal for folklore and religious studies, became a well-liked popularizer of the fields represented, and his book on Mother Earth brought him the greatest fame. The researcher noted not only the custom, widespread in various cultures, of laying a newborn baby on the soil, but also, in the event of its imminent death, of burying the body without a coffin in the ground, even where burning the corpse was practiced. The belief that the same child would be conceived secondarily from another mother dictated burials not in cemeteries, but in roads. Women passing through them could thus become pregnant and give new life.<sup>27</sup> The bodies of the dying were also placed on the ground, while the possessed were placed in open graves, which had to be plowed, sprinkled with grain and harrow, and the demon would leave the sick person.

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is discussed in: Volker Weiß, *Moderne Antimoderne. Arthur Moeller van den Bruck und der Wandel des Konservatismus* (Paderborn–München–Wien: De Gruyter, 2012); Dyke, “Ernst Barlach”.

<sup>24</sup> Wilhelm Worringer, *Formprobleme der Gotik* (München: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1912), 126.

<sup>25</sup> The issue of the Northern European cultural region – as a source of Barlach’s inspiration and a model for interpreting his work – is the focus of the exhibition catalog: *Ernst Barlach. Artist of the North*, compilation Jürgen Doppelstein, Volker Probst, Heike Stockhaus, transl. Zbigniew Massowa, Andrzej Sojka (Hamburg–Güstrow: ARS Baltica, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> Reinach, *Pochodzenie*, 160–161.

<sup>27</sup> Albrecht Dietrich, *Mutter Erde, ein Versuch über Volksreligion* (Leipzig–Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1905), 1–2. More extensively on the relationship of agrarian peoples to the cult of the earth as prewomb: Klaus E. Müller, “Grundzüge der agrarischen Lebens- und Weltanschauung”, *Paideuma. Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde* 19/20 (1973/1974): 84.

It is difficult to give any other explanation to these customs – Dietrich wrote – than that the return to the womb of our common mother was symbolically expressed in this way; being buried in the earth and sown, one accessed the resurrection, i.e., the calling to a new life.

Connected to all this, the scholar added, was the image of a phallus that grows out of the ground.<sup>28</sup> By this he probably meant the “sacred white stones” in the shape of a male penis, just described by Norwegian researchers.<sup>29</sup>

Barlach undoubtedly exhibited anthropological and cultural passions, and – especially in his youth – a clear fascination with archetypal erotic symbolism. The imaginary northern direction, used in the geographical interpretation of the works of his mature and late phase, was furthermore combined in his case – and not without reason – with ethnographic-archaeological Eastern inspiration. And in this case, too, the element of movement, displacement, repeating the trajectory and vector of the migration of peoples at the end of antiquity reflected in a peculiar way the state-forming interests or ideologies of contemporaries. The monumental and at the same time synthetic formal language of the sculptor was to evolve in contact with the Ruthenian (“South Russian”) landscape and the local – folk and early historic – artifacts. It was in 1906, a few months after the publication of Dietrich’s book, that the diametric and permanent transformation of the representative of decorative “French” *Jugendstil* into an original Expressionist took place. Barlach, in a moment of deeply creative and identity crisis, went via Warsaw to Kharkov, where his brother Hans had settled. His most important experience, recorded in his diary-sketchbooks, press coverage, memoirs, and numerous drawings by the artist (Fig. 5), was an expedition to the Donetsk steppe and the discovery of Polovtsian (Kuman) statues of seated figures from the 11<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Slavic population called them stone babas (Russian *kamiennyje baby*; Ukrainian *kamjani baby*), while in Turkic languages the term *balbal* functioned, i.e. an idol, “a pillar of victory over a slain enemy,” according to Zygmunt Gloger.<sup>30</sup> From the Persian *pahlavan* was to be derived the Kyrgyz *palvan* and Turkish *balaban*, which Barlach Russified in his own way, inventing the term *Balabanoff* (*Balobanof*, *Balabanov*). These pillar-gods turned out to be

<sup>28</sup> Dietrich, *Mutter Erde*, 29.

<sup>29</sup> See Th[eodor] Petersen, “Zwei neugefundene Kultobjekte aus der älteren Eisenzeit”, in: *Festschrift Eugen Mogk zum 70. Geburtstag* (Halle–Saale: Niemeyer, 1924), 484–499. The first description of the finds was published by Petersen in 1905.

<sup>30</sup> Aleksander Brückner, *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1989), 12–13; cf. Helga Thieme, “*Balabanow nennt man diese Bilder*. Die kumanischen Steinfiguren der südrussischen Steppe in Ernst Barlachs Darstellung”, in: “*außen wie innen*”. *Rußland im Werk Ernst Barlachs*, Hrsg. Inge Tessenow, Helga Thieme (Güstrow: Ernst Barlach Stiftung, 2007), 65–82.

for the German, enchanted by the rawness and “authenticity” of the East, a “milestone of the lower limit of time” (*Markstein der unteren Grenze einer Zeit*), “stone miscarriage” (*stein-erne Mißgeburt*)<sup>31</sup>, “crystallization of earthliness” (*Christallisierung des Irdischen*).<sup>32</sup> The figure of crystal and crystallization, extremely key for German Expressionists and activists of regeneration movements, was rooted in the Romantic idea of sacralizing nature and the work of human hands as a representation of concentrated natural forces. After Friedrich W.J. von Schelling, the transparent solid with regular walls became a blueprint for the future world and at the same time a symbol of the absolute truth of art, a “metaphorical tectonization and deconstruction of the classical ideal” anchored more in “active principle than in beautiful form.” In this way, “*Natura naturans* [nature giving birth] became the matrix of the artistic process,” – Regine Prange argued.<sup>33</sup>



Fig. 5. Ernst Barlach, Steppe landscape with the “Balabanov”, 1906. Ernst Barlach Stiftung Güstrow

<sup>31</sup> Ernst Barlach, “Eine Steppenfahrt”, *Kunst und Künstler* 1 (1912/1913): 9 [reprint: “*außen wie innen*”, 121–132].

<sup>32</sup> Idem, “Reise ins Herz des südlichen Rußland” [journal, 1906], in: “*außen wie innen*”, 113.

<sup>33</sup> See Regine Prange, “Schellings Kristall. Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte einer Identitätsmetapher in Kunst und Kunsttheorie, mit Lacan betrachtet (Teil 1)”, *Imago. Interdisziplinäres Jahrbuch für Psychoanalyse und Ästhetik* 2 (2013): 75; *Kristallisationen*, passim.

In fact, statues “growing” out of the ground with simplified physiognomic and anatomical features, sagging breasts and hands clasped on the lap were erected by nomadic peoples along roads and on barrows. They were known to the West as early as the Middle Ages and Renaissance thanks to the records of the monks Wilhelm von Rubruk and Matthias de Miechow, and aroused increased interest in 1851, when 428 “babas” were discovered in the Yekaterinoslav Governorate (now around the Dnipro). Swedish, Finnish, French, and especially Polish and German scholars were drawn to “Southern Russia”, putting forward various theories about the provenance of the puzzling sculptures. For the Poles, the Polovt-sian stones were an example of a foreign legacy adapted by the Slavs. Sandstone and limestone “babas” in the steppe *in situ* and transferred to the Odesa museum of antiquities and the Kyiv botanical garden were viewed by literary critic Antoni Jaxa-Marcinkowski in the 1850s. He discussed them in the pages of the Warsaw press with Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, a popular historical writer and later author of *Sztuka u Słowian*.<sup>34</sup> Ukrainian statues were supposed to be of equal gender “not merely because a baba cannot be a man, but that all male idols do not have the character and style of babas,” Jaxa-Marcinkowski wrote naively. He also claimed that the Polish word „mogiła” [*grave*] (Sansk. *mahila*) means woman, and that “earth as well as woman expresses the passive element”.<sup>35</sup> Kraszewski, meanwhile, concluded:

As the Babas themselves are not all the work of one epoch or one nation, so the thought attached to them must have changed, revolving around one myth common to almost all the nations on earth: nature, the feeder, the earth [...]<sup>36</sup>

He also had no doubt that the original authors of the statues were Scythians, but the forefathers of the Polish nation reworked them “into Slavic Baba”.<sup>37</sup>

Extensively on the subject of “babas”, also with reference to pre-Christian monuments from the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was written in the *Encyklopedia*

<sup>34</sup> Antoni Nowosielski [in actuality Antoni Jaxa-Marcinkowski], “O posągach pogańskich, zwanych pospolicie babami” [part 1], *Dziennik Warszawski*, 17.02.1854, 4; Antoni Nowosielski, *Stepy, morze i góry. Szkice i wspomnienia z podróży*, vol. 1 (Wilno: Teofil Glücksberg, 1854), 74–76.

<sup>35</sup> Antoni Nowosielski, “O posągach pogańskich, zwanych pospolicie babami” [part 2], *Dziennik Warszawski*, 19.02.1854, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, *Sztuka u Słowian szczególnie w Polsce i Litwie przedchrześcijańskiej* (Wilno: A.H. Kirkor, 1860), 225.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, 226.

do krajoznawstwa Galicyi, noting among the “unshaped statues” both female and male versions – stone *chelovik*, *baba moujik*.<sup>38</sup> Eastern Borderland sculptures were combined with other examples of primitive representations – “coarse statues” from East Prussia, the famous Sviatovid from Zbruch, or the multi-headed idols revered by the Sorbs and Polabians.<sup>39</sup> They were known to be described in medieval chronicles, mentioning the Mecklenburg and Fore Pomerania shrines, where great images of Svantevit, Triglav and Rugievit stood. The doyen of Polish prehistory, Professor Włodzimierz Demetrykiewicz, excluded their Scythian genealogy<sup>40</sup>, but this one appealed to many native writers, Michał Grabowski or Romuald Podbereski, and was common among Ukrainians and Russians (Oleksandr Tereshchenko, Ivan Zabelin, Dmytro Yavornitsky). Engravings and photographs of the “babas” were published in the press and in albums of the countryside, but the reception in the visual arts devoid of a documentary function was assured to the artifacts only by the modernist breakthrough. Admittedly, the six-volume work by Nikodim Pavlovich Kondakov and Ivan Ivanovich Tolstoy *Ruskiya drewnosti v pamiatnikakh iskusstva* (1889–1891), which mentioned the Polovtsian monuments in the context of the Scythians, quickly lived to see a French edition by Reinach,<sup>41</sup> but initially interested mainly specialists. The impetus of the Western avant-garde of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century made the books a reference work for a large group of contemporary artists from the tsarist empire, mastered by a truly archaic or even primitive (in the then sense of Black African or Polynesian cultures) fashion: Scythism (Russian *skifstvo*).

The original Polovtsian stones were imported to the art colonies – sub-Moscow Abramtsevo and Chernyanka in the Kherson region. The crude form of the “babas,” associated with the cult of ancestors sometimes buried in a characteristic sitting position, inspired from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the pictorial experiments of Nicholas Roerich – a painter and stage designer of the Russian Ballets associated with Symbolism, who independently dug up barrows and listened to the “music of the steppe” with Igor Stravinsky and Sergei Prokofiev.

<sup>38</sup> *Encyklopedia do krajoznawstwa Galicyi*, vol. 2, zebr. i wyd. Antoni Schneider (Lwów: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1874) 13–15.

<sup>39</sup> On the iconographic associations of the Zbruch Svyatovid and fanciful reconstructions of Pomeranian statues: Szymon Piotr Kubiak, *Archeomoderna. Polska sztuka nowoczesna i mity państwowotwórcze / Archeomoderna. Polnische moderne Kunst und staatsbildende Mythen* (Szczecin: Muzeum Narodowe w Szczecinie, 2021), 16–17, 37, 77.

<sup>40</sup> Włodzimierz [Władimir] Demetrykiewicz, *Figury kamienne t. zw. „bab” w Azji i Europie i stosunek ich do mitologii słowiańskiej / Altertümliche steinerne Statuen, sog. „baby” [Steinmütterchen, Becherstatuen] und ihr Verhältnis zur slavischen Mythologie*, offprint from *Sprawozdanie Akademii Umiejętności w Krakowie: Wydział Filologiczny* 7–8 (1910), passim.

<sup>41</sup> N[ikodim] Kondakof, I[van] Tolstoï, S[alomon] Reinach, *Antiquités de la Russie méridionale* (Paris: Leroux, 1891), 239, 501. The translation included the first two volumes of the Russian edition.

Significantly in our context, Roerich was also preoccupied with Western Slavs: the diptych *Pomeranians (Morning and Evening)*, presented in Paris, turned out to be, according to critics of the time, even a landmark in the St. Petersburgers' works<sup>42</sup>. Belonging to the same milieu, Alexander Benois found himself „in some kind of collapse into the mother damp earth.”<sup>43</sup> In the slightly younger Natalia Goncharova, who viewed “babas” in person only a year after Barlach, the statues appeared in numerous cubized landscapes and still lifes. However, Goncharova's letter to the editor of *Russkoye Slovo* in 1912, as well as the painter's statements around her individual exhibition a year later, proved a strong need for emancipation from the civilizational center: artists from the eastern borderlands of Europe saw in the Scythians native Blacks, that is, “others,” and in their stone idols (as well as wooden dolls and woodcut *liubok* sold at fairs) – their own prefiguration of Cubism.<sup>44</sup> These associations were firmly rooted in the Western understanding of the separateness of the “immovable” and “immutable” Orient, “its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability,”<sup>45</sup> as the classic of postcolonial studies Edward W. Said described. The young artist's vision seemed to overcome these schemes:

The Russian avant-garde's xenophobic campaign helped elaborate a strategy whereby the East as Other was not only rehabilitated but also promoted as the “grand narrative” out of which European Modernism had grown. The East, in this view, already contained the West. The “feminine” also had to demonstrate its universality and self-sufficiency.

<sup>42</sup> Nikolai Gumilev, “Vystavka novogo ruskogo iskusstva v Parizhe”, *Libra* 11 (1907): 87–88; Sergey Makovsky, “N.K. Roerich”, *Zolotoe runo* 4 (1907): 3–7. The painting *Pomeranians. Morning* is in the Gorlovka Art Museum in Ukraine; the painting *Pomeranians. Evening* appeared in 2000 at a Sotheby's auction in London. See John McCannon, “In search of primeval Russia. Stylistic evolution in the landscapes of Nicholas Roerich, 1897–1914”, *Ecumene* 7/3 (2000): 271–297.

<sup>43</sup> Alexandre Benois, “Povorot k' lubku”, *Retch*, 18.03.1909, 31, as cited in: Michael Kunichika, “Primitivism and Scythianism in Russian Futurism”, *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies* 6 (2016): 302. More recently on the relationship between the Russian/Soviet avant-garde and local or eastern archaeological/ethnographic fascinations: John E. Bowlt, Nicoletta Misler, Yevgenia Petrova, ed., *The Russian Avant-garde, Siberia and the East* (Milano: Skira, 2014); Michael Kunichika, “Our Native Antiquity”. *Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Culture of Russian Modernism* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2015).

<sup>44</sup> Valentine Marcadé, *Le renouveau de l'art pictural russe, 1863–1914* (Lausanne: Éditions L'Age d'Homme, 1971), 205–206; Marina Vanci Perachim, “Ancêtres nécessaires et «douaniers» sans frontières. Internationalisation du modèle primitif”, in: *Un art sans frontières*, dir. Gérard Monnier, José Vovelle (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 1995), 47–63. Text of the letter available in English translation: *Letter to the editor of Russkoe Slovo*, access 18.06.2022, <https://nataliagontcharova.com/life/russkoe-slovo-letter/>.

<sup>45</sup> Edward W. Said, “From *Orientalism*”, in: *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory. A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams, Laura Chrisman (London–New York: Routledge, 2013), 144.

[...] Like the painted dolls, the “stone maidens” [...] are not representations specifically of women, but anthropomorphic representations in general. Thus Goncharova’s picture of the world was distinctly matriarchal [...] <sup>46</sup> – Ekaterina Dyogot wrote.

Finally, among German scholars at the forefront of theories on the biological determinants of the formation of nations, there was a debate over the ethnicity of the alleged makers of the steppe statues. Choosing to be Mongolian or Gothic-Hunnic, or possibly Celtic, professionals and popularizers of science *de facto* aligned the appearance of the statues with basic Eurasian craniological types – Aryan long- and non-Aryan short-skulled.<sup>47</sup> Although opponents argued that “in the barrows of Eastern Europe, only the long-skulled (dolichocephalic) type prevailed in the past, while today the short-skulled type prevails among the population”<sup>48</sup>, and “the Aryan varnish is only a nostrified import, a looted foreignness,”<sup>49</sup> physical anthropology stirred the imagination and suggested geopolitical conclusions. Indeed, the physiognomic interpretation of the Polovtsian monuments resonated with the paternal reminiscences discovered in the Near (and “nearer”) East by German travelers of the Wilhelmine era, seeing in this border area a strange (*un-heimlich*) mixture of the familiar and the foreign, but ultimately gaining – like Karl Bernhard Stark – “a feeling of being at home” (*Gefühl heimischen Daseins*). The traditional agricultural area on the edges of Europe fulfilled, according to the most widespread narrative, all the conditions to be identified with the original German “homeland,” or *Heimat*.<sup>50</sup>

One of the most active in the field of eastern research was Rudolf Virchow – a liberal naturalist and physician native of the Farther Pomeranian Schivelbein (now Świdwin), a respected pathologist, but also an archaeologist, folklorist and founder of the first museum of native folklore. Virchow, who visited Romanov Russia many times and served as a celebrity in his

<sup>46</sup> Ekaterina Dyogot, “Creative women, creative men, and paradigms of creativity: Why have there been great women artists?”, in: *Amazons of the Avant-Garde. Exter, Goncharova, Popova, Rozanova, Stepanova, Udaltsova*, ed. John E. Bowlit, Matthew Drutt (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2000), 115.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, *Materialien zur Vorgeschichte des Menschen im östlichen Europa*, Bd. 2, Bearb. u. Hrsg. Albin Kohn, C[hristian] Mehliis (Jena: H. Costenoble, 1879), 186–206. On the ideological entanglement of anthropometric research around the First World War: Maciej Górny, *Wielka Wojna profesorów. Nauki o człowieku (1912–1923)* (Warszawa: IH PAN, 2014); see also: Uwe Hoßfeld, Michal V. Šimůnek, “Rassenbiologie”, in: *Handbuch*, Bd. 2, 1114–1126.

<sup>48</sup> Mateusz Mieses, *W kwestyi nienawiści rasowej* (Lwów: H. Altenberg, Warszawa: E. Wende, Kraków: Drukarnia Narodowa, 1912), 6.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> See Maria Theresia Starzmann, “Der ‘Orient’ als Grenzraum: Die koloniale Dimension wissenschaftlicher Narrative zum Nahen Osten”, *Forum Kritische Archäologie* 7 (2018): 1–17, quote from p. 6.



province until the decline of the German period,<sup>51</sup> brought four specimens of steppe monuments to the Berlin Ethnographic Museum in 1885.<sup>52</sup> A year earlier, he had invoked “babushkas” (*sic!*) in the voice of discussion at a Breslau (Wrocław) anthropological conference.<sup>53</sup> And opening that meeting with a lecture on “East German prehistoric antiquities,” he emphasized:

We are performing here on the frontier of our homeland, in a land that was relatively late reclaimed from the Slavs, but, I may say, with the friendliest feeling toward our Slavic neighbors. [...] It is precisely on such a land as this that the danger of a reverse situation arises, which we do not quite know how to prevent in political life and in the heat of the struggle for existence. Meanwhile, I think I am allowed to declare in the face of these witnesses to Slavism that the German science of anthropology has taken its path completely independently, and that no one, including among our neighbors, can complain that we have unduly harmed them in unilateral Germanic pursuits. We are ready for discussion at any time, and even points that we thought had been settled we are willing to put to the test again.<sup>54</sup>

Such a conciliatory or even empathizing or praising attitude toward the Slavic inhabitants of Eastern Europe also characterized Barlach, although it is difficult to deny that the artist was capable of rejecting common cultural clichés. His travel accounts are marked by a conviction about the primitivism of the Russian- or Ukrainian-speaking population that sets them apart from other ethnic groups on the continent. However, the image of mental dullness, allegedly drawn on the stone physiognomies of the idols, as if in accordance with the second

<sup>51</sup> The Virchow Family Foundation was active in Świdwin, and the long-time president of the German Anthropological Society was dedicated to memoir texts, and his works related to the region were published. See *Zur Erinnerung an Rudolf Virchow. Drei historische Arbeiten Virchows zur Geschichte seiner Vaterstadt Schivelbein* (Berlin: A. Asher, 1903); Rudolf Beneke, “Rudolf Virchow”, in: *Pommersche Lebensbilder*, Bd. 2 (Stettin: Leon Sauniers Buchhandlung, 1936), 198–236. Virchow’s correspondence was presented at an exhibition of the Pommersches Landesmuseum in Szczecin in 1939, while local painter Baron Alfred von Ketelhodt produced a portrait of the scholar for the gallery of famous Pomeranians in the new provincial administration building (*Landeshaus*), according to a cropped original by Hans Schadow (Rudolf Virchow Hospital, Berlin): Alice Bethe-Kränzner, “Zur Ausstellung «Das geistige Pommern»”, *Nachrichtenblatt des Stettiner Verkehrsvereins* 10 (1939): 2–8; Karla König, “Eine Bildnisgalerie berühmter Pommer”, *Das Bollwerk* 7 (1941): 122–125.

<sup>52</sup> Thieme, “*Balabanow*”, 71. The sculptures, however, were not made available to the general public.

<sup>53</sup> [Rudolf] Virchow, “Nachbildungen antiker Goldsachen durch Herrn Telge-Berlin”, *Correspondenz-Blatt der deutschen Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* 9 (1884): 90–91.

<sup>54</sup> Idem, “Ueber ostdeutsche prähistorische Altertümer”, *Correspondenz-Blatt der deutschen Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* 9 (1884): 66.

meaning of their term – fool, idiot, illiterate, turned out again to be a widely sought-after regenerative source for contemporary art.<sup>55</sup> The aspiration to regain the infantile purity or naivety discovered in the Russian/Ukrainian people was a figure prevailing for a century: it reproduced – again – the Romantic concept of the renewal of Europe through Asia, an idea put forward by Friedrich Schlegel or Novalis.<sup>56</sup> In Barlach's case, it resulted in the Slavophilia shown in many places, which in Virchow's time was at best met with indulgence, but in the face of the First World War and in the post-war years condemned the German apologist to seclusion, and during the Third Reich – crushing criticism with drastic consequences.

Mecklenburger's stylistic change between the creation of the two Szczecin works of 1905 and 1920/1921 was noted by many reviewers interested in ethnography and prehistory. Willy Pastor, who was hostile to foreign elements in German culture, contrasting elsewhere between "Romanesque beauty" and "Germanic truth" and deriving the "native" form of the blackletter writings from northern runes,<sup>57</sup> addressed Barlach's contemporaries presented to the public during the artist's first solo exhibition at Cassirer's (1917). According to Pastor, these "low folk types of the Slavic race" were captured by the sculptor "in their heavy, even brutal, down-to-earth character."<sup>58</sup> Even earlier, the conservative critic Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, who kept up a lively correspondence with the artist, regarded Russia of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as "the only country in Europe where the degenerate forms of our culture have never reached."<sup>59</sup> Thanks to the Eastern experience, as noted by Moeller van den Bruck, Barlach was able to abandon his ossified academicism (*Verbildung*) and revitalize his work. The year 1917 and the following year, bringing the end of the war and the Treaty of Versailles, which was unfavorable to Germany, put geopolitical and

<sup>55</sup> On the reception of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (1869) in the context of Barlach's play and the Western career of the Russian Ballet community: Szymon Piotr Kubiak, "Wacława Niżyńskiego święto lub ofiara wiosny. Teatr i sztuki piękne u progu Wielkiej Wojny – wprowadzenie / Vaclav Nijinskys Frühlingsfeier oder Frühlingsopfer. Das Theater und die bildenden Künste am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges – eine Einführung", in: *1913. Święto wiosny / 1913. Frühlingsweihe*, red. Szymon Piotr Kubiak, Dariusz Kacprzak (Szczecin: Muzeum Narodowe w Szczecinie, 2013), 12–29.

<sup>56</sup> Said, *From*, 152–155. Romantic conceptions developed in Germany into regular studies of Eastern Europe, conducted since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and formulated in the 1920s as "eastern studies." Markus Krzoska, "Ostforschung", in: *Handbuch*, Bd. 2, 1090–1102.

<sup>57</sup> See Ulrich Hunger, "Runenkunde", in: *ibidem*, 1127–1139.

<sup>58</sup> Willy Pastor, [?], *Tägliche Rundschau*, 17.11.1917, quote after: *Ernst Barlach. Die Briefe. Kritische Ausgabe in vier Bänden*, Bd. 2, Hrsg. Holger Helbig, Karoline Lemke, Paul Onasch, Henri Seel (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019), 549; cf. *idem*, *Die Erde in der Zeit des Menschen. Versuch einer naturwissenschaftlichen Kulturgeschichte* (Jena-Leipzig: Eugen Diederichs, 1904), 125–127.

<sup>59</sup> Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, "Barlach", *Der Tag*, 13.09.1912, after: Weiß, *Moderne*, 286; see Anja Lobenstein-Reichmann, "Arthur Moeller van den Bruck", in: *Handbuch*, Bd. 1, 88–91.

geopoetic issues in a harsh light: the pamphlet of French art historian Émile Mâle, denying originality to works of German medieval art, was met with a fierce rejoinder and eventually with an obsession with nativeness by scholars such as Paul Clemen, Kurt Gerstenberg and Wilhelm Pinder.<sup>60</sup>

Cemetery *Mother Earth*, however, had its numerous – not so much ideological as formal – predecessors in pencil sketches from 1906, as well as ceramic, wooden and metal figures with generic Ukrainian themes created in later years.<sup>61</sup> One of the intimate porcelain “types” from this series was acquired by Biesel for his private Szczecin collection.<sup>62</sup> The Slavic theme was still present at the time of the work on the tombstone: writing to his other brother Karl about the commission from Biesel, Barlach critically clarified his attitude toward Russia – the imagined one and the contemporary one. Although he found there

amazing unity of exterior and interior of that symbolic aspect [...] it seems that the Slav is shouting, expressing what others hide, that’s why at first contact Slavism seemed closer to me. I hardly think about Slavic culture [however], I don’t think about culture at all – the artist added, also keeping in mind the political situation at the time.<sup>63</sup>

Paraphrasing the didactic juxtaposition of contrasting backgrounds of Adolf Helbok – the Austrian father of racial theory, creator of the Volkist concept of “blood ties” governing history – it can be said that Barlach transferred the artistic preform of the steppe (defining contemporary Russians and Ukrainians, but already tamed by Germans) to the forest (“fused” with the ethnogenesis of the latter). Paradoxically, in this way he approached Germanic depth and mysticism, rejecting the French elegance of forms.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Émile Mâle, *Studien über die deutsche Kunst*, Hrsg. Otto Grautoff (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1917); see Adam S. Labuda, “Polska historia sztuki i «Ziemie Odzyskane»”, in: idem, *Z dziejów historii sztuki. Polska, Niemcy, Europa* (Poznań: Nauka i Innowacje, 2016), 79; Robert Born, Beate Störckuhl, “Apologeten der Vernichtung oder Kunstschtützer? Kunsthistoriker der Mittelmächte im Ersten Weltkrieg”, in: *Apologeten der Vernichtung oder Kunstschtützer? Kunsthistoriker der Mittelmächte im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Hrsg. Robert Born, Beate Störckuhl (Köln–Weimar–Wien: Böhlau, 2017), 16.

<sup>61</sup> See drawings: *Sitting Woman* (1906), *Worried Woman* (1906), *Leaning Sitting Woman* (1906/1907); sculptures: *Russian Beggarwoman with Bowl* (1906), *Beggar Woman with a Child* (1907), *Sitting Old Woman* (1907), publ. in: “*außen wie innen*”, 236, 246, 271, 276–277, 278–279.

<sup>62</sup> C[hristina] T[homson], H[anna] S[trzoda], “Ernst Barlach (1870–1938), Liegender russischer Bauer, 1908”, in: *Die Galerie des 20. Jahrhunderts in West-Berlin. Ein Provenienzforschungsprojekt*, access 5.05.2022, <https://www.galerie20.smb.museum/werke/967837.html>.

<sup>63</sup> [Letter 572 to Karl Barlach, 6.10.1920], in: *Ernst Barlach. Die Briefe*, Bd. 2, 129.

<sup>64</sup> Adolf Helbok, “Der Bildungswert der Heimatkunde (I)”, *Heimat. Voralberger Monatshefte* 2 (1927), 2: 33–37. Here Helbok literally contrasted the French love of form and the German inclination to “move the heart,”

It is precisely the search for pre-civilization forms, the belief in the possibility of recovering a childlike sensibility, a non-culture, or naturalness and maternity, a predilection for vanitas and vegetative themes intertwined with the image of the mother and the archetype of the womb of the Earth, and finally, the mental and physical need to return to their – mother and Earth – interior, however, that allows us to view Barlach's multifaceted oeuvre through the prism of a different theory developed in the same region: of classical psychoanalysis. Although the artist had admitted only to reading a "small article" devoted to the thought of Sigmund Freud, the works, but also letters to loved ones, testify to the reception of the Viennese doctor's basic theses by the Mecklenburg artist. Barlach used the terms consciousness and unconsciousness in relation to his artistic work and used metaphors corresponding to the popular tropes of psychoanalysis: the soul as a cellar where thoughts grow in the darkness, or dreams as slimy worms. As Wolfgang Beutin has argued, there is a projection mechanism and a castration complex in Mecklenburger's dramas.<sup>65</sup> And if one accepts the analogy, rooted in the works of Freud, who eagerly made use of collections of "antiquities," between the activities of the archaeologist and the psychoanalyst, then revealing levels of mind and soil sediments inaccessible to the general public, extracting facts or objects frozen in time, directly juxtaposing the distant past with the present, simultaneously living in two eras, turns out to be particularly intriguing in Barlach's case.

One of the first texts devoted to the relationship between archaeology and psychoanalysis after the death of its creator was published by Suzanne Cassirer-Bernfeld – the daughter of a marcher and friend of the sculptor. The researcher mentioned the idea of the prehistory of civilization as the childhood of man – proposed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau but used by German Romantic poets and philosophers. Freud developed this concept, calling early childhood the prehistory of the human individual.<sup>66</sup> The Viennese borrowed the names of ancient Greek heroes for medical work, and – as Cassirer-Bernfeld stressed – became excited about the achievements of German archaeologists in the Near East. Freud's evocation of an event from his own boyhood was said to compare to the discovery of Troy considered a myth before Heinrich Schliemann's excavations.<sup>67</sup> In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), on the other hand, he looked at the Eternal City in such an impossible topographical perspective, in which absolutely all monuments of past times coexist on the principle of a transparent palimpsest:

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as well as the Russian steppe and the German forest as different in character factors shaping "native countries" (*Heimaten*). See Martina Pesditschek, "Adolf Helbok", in: *Handbuch*, Bd. 1, 285–287.

<sup>65</sup> Beutin, *Barlach*, 118–128.

<sup>66</sup> Suzanne Cassirer-Bernfeld, "Freud and Archaeology", *American Imago* 8/2 (1951), 8: 107.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, 112.

[...] let us, by a flight of imagination, suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past – an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one. [...] And the observer would perhaps only have to change the direction of his glance or his position in order to call up the one view or the other. [...]

If we want to represent historical sequence in spatial terms, we can only do it by juxtaposition in space: the same space cannot have two different contents. Our attempt seems to be an idle game. It has only one justification. It shows us how far we are from mastering the characteristics of mental life by representing them in pictorial terms.<sup>68</sup>

Such an attempt was made by museum institutions, as well as artists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the latter not necessarily for self-therapeutic reasons. However, the symbol of the Freudian death drive in the grave-womb devised by Barlach – however Gothic, Scythian, folk-Slavic or contemporary expressionist – plays a much more important role in this view in uncovering local geopolitical, geo-artistic or geopoetic meanings than in describing the mental condition of the sculptor, printmaker and playwright. The symbol, even if intended by the creator to be personal or universal, underwent regionalization, indigenization or “heimatization” of territorial ideological disputes, in the era of the new conquistadors, otherwise so fascinating to Freud.<sup>69</sup> *Mother Earth* became, in the view of the contemporaries, an organic part of “the growing forest, windswept Pomerania,”<sup>70</sup> and, without shouting Slavic at all, fulfilled the demands of the “homeland protection movement” (*Heimatschutzbewegung*). The Szczecin poet Karla König even granted the work the function of a regional allegory:

Szczecin park cemetery, famous for its beauty, hides a monument by North German sculptor Barlach of particularly moving power. Mother Earth, in a serene caring pose, full of grave, wise kindness, throbs with suppressed silence like a field waiting for future growth. The symbol of Pomerania – her maternally nurturing furrow slice that houses life and death, growth and maturity. With all his soul a Pomeranian loves his Mother

<sup>68</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, Vol. 21 (1927–1931): *The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works*, ed. James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, Alan Tyson, transl. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1961), 70–71; Cassirer-Bernfeld, “Freud”, 119–120.

<sup>69</sup> For Freud, one of the most passionate (also because of the name) figures was Sigismund of Luxembourg – the Roman emperor of the German nation, conqueror of Bohemia and protector of the Jews. Cassirer-Bernfeld, “Freud”, 125.

<sup>70</sup> *Stettiner Hauptfriedhof* (Stettin: Stettiner Verkehrsverein, 1928), 4–5.

Earth, who is not, after all, everywhere serious and silent, but often a gentle and blooming young mother [...].<sup>71</sup>

It is no coincidence that this almost apologetic text, decorated with a drawing by the young, born in Szczecin artist Lotte Usadel, was printed on the sighted pages – in tandem with a description of the new maternity clinic (1929–1931, designed by Paul Viering): timelessness was juxtaposed with the present day and a vision of the future. Looking at the cemetery in the perspective of the region’s humanistic geography as an establishment that overrules spatial-temporal laws from outside the area separated from the city, we find precisely in it an important factor in the formation of local identity. The cemetery is both a heterotopia, a space outside of time, and a heterochrony, a layering of different historical perspectives, a transparent Freudian palimpsest.<sup>72</sup>

In archaeological, anthropological, art-historical, musicological, but also thanatological and psychoanalytical contexts, Riezler – perhaps the most versatile intellectual of Szczecin in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – was fluent. A specialist in ancient Greek vessels relevant to the cult of the dead, an admirer of the Russian avant-garde, using spatial categories in theoretical texts on painting and music,<sup>73</sup> he occupied a voice in heated discussions on the formation of contemporary native culture. Riezler’s programmatic text delivered at a Werkbund meeting in 1921 – that is, at the time of the creation of the Barlach cemetery

<sup>71</sup> *Das schöne Pommern*, Hrsg. Karla König (Stettin: Graphische Kunstanstalt M. Bauchwitz, 1933), 52.

<sup>72</sup> See Katarzyna Szalewska, “Figura cmentarza i czytanie historii regionu. Trzy modele lektury”, in: *Geografia wyobrażona regionu. Literackie figury przestrzeni*, red. Daniel Kalinowski, Małgorzata Mikołajczak, Adela Kuik-Kalinowska (Kraków: Universitas, 2014), 328–341.

<sup>73</sup> Walter Riezler’s doctoral dissertation in 1901, *Der Parthenon und die Vasenmalerei* (München: Universität, 1902), which he followed up with a book on the Attic white-ground lekythos: *Weissgrundige Attische Lekythen nach Adolf Furtwänglers Auswahl* (München: F. Bruckmann, 1914). The spatial categories with their characteristic nomenclature (*Umlinie*, *Ursatz*, etc.) were taken over by Riezler from the Galician-Viennese musicologist, Heinrich Schenker: Walter Riezler, *Das neue Raumgefühl in bildender Kunst und Musik. Sonderdruck aus „Vierter Kongreß für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft“*, Hrsg. Hermann Noack (Stuttgart, 1931), 179–206; Walter Riezler, “Die «Umlinie»”, *Die Musik* 22 (1930), 7: 502–510. As part of Riezler’s accession policy, works by avant-garde artists from the former Russian Empire, including paintings, drawings and prints by Alexander Archipenko, Alexej von Jawlensky, Ida Kerkovius, Moissej Kogan, El Lissitzky, Alexander Pavlovich Mogilevsky and Abraham Palukst, were added to the Szczecin museum’s collection. Kacprzak, “Moderna”, 180–346. In the same year that Barlach’s model of *Mother Earth* was shown at the 2nd Exhibition of Norddeutsche Sezession, 59 works by Jawlensky were also displayed in the City Museum building. Riezler wrote: “[...] in the initially astonishing supernaturally large heads of this era sparkles a strong life, full of mystery, which belongs to the richness of Russian mysticism. [...] Only a Russian could attempt such a departure from all the «forms» of this world and paint spiritual experiences directly.” W[alter] R[iezler], “Zur Einführung”, in: *Alexey von Jawlensky, Franz Radziwill, Graphik von Sella Hasse, Ingwer Paulsen* (Stettin: Museum der Stadt Stettin, 1922), 3–5.

monument – included the concept of the unconscious (*unbewußt*) beauty of the German provincial landscape, in which human creations literally “sit”. The director of the City Museum in Szczecin, although he considered himself a cosmopolitan, stressed the importance of the ethnic aspect in future art – after the end of World War I, he no longer doubted that German culture had more vitality than French, and he saw nothing wrong with filling old forms with a new spirit.<sup>74</sup> “The degeneration [...] was the fault not of the forms, but of the people who misapplied them,” Riezler added in 1926,<sup>75</sup> while another half decade later he argued for the emergence of a new “organic” sense of space in sculpture precisely on the example of Barlach’s work:

[...] and here, too, it can be said [...] that these figures live their own lives, as if unconcerned with the viewer, in a stupefied attachment to nature, which also gives the faces a peculiar, completely new expression<sup>76</sup> – Riezler stated, probably having the Biesel family tomb before his eyes.

In the 1930s, special attention was paid to old rural gravestones from the Pomeranian area, made of unpolished, sparingly worked glacial erratics or local wood species.<sup>77</sup> The accumulation of antique stele forged in erratic boulders from the Demmin area, as well as old carpentry from Treptow an der Rega (Trzebiatów), Orth (Górki), Gützelfitz (Gośćlawice), Karolinenhorst (Reptowo), Wangerin (Węgorzyno), Jamund (Jamno), Deutsch Krone (Wałcz) and Dramburg (Drawsko) districts, was initiated by Hannig, an active *Heimatschutzbewegung* activist and the first director of the Main Cemetery, in its birch and juniper grove.<sup>78</sup> Over time, the originals, which were disintegrating due to corrosion, were replaced by faithful copies,<sup>79</sup> representing a position in conservation and museology close to ethnographers and archaeologists, but already condemned by modern art historians. Routes for tourists mapped out at the necropolis led through both the open-air museum and the square next

<sup>74</sup> Walter Riezler, [...] (1921), typescript from the author; s legacy, Hasso Bräuer Archive (Hamburg), deposit at the National Museum in Szczecin.

<sup>75</sup> Walter Riezler, “Die Baukunst am Scheidewege. Ein Versuch”, in: *Kairos zur Geisteslage und Geisteswendung*, Hrsg. Paul Tillich (Darmstadt: Otto Reichl, 1926), 261.

<sup>76</sup> Idem, “Das neue”, 203.

<sup>77</sup> Walter Borchers, “Ländliche Grabmäler aus Pommern”, *Das Bollwerk* 11 (1936): 374–377.

<sup>78</sup> Georg Hannig, *Der Stettiner Hauptfriedhof. Führer durch die Anlage mit zahlreichen Abbildungen, einem farbigen Plan, Richtlinien für die Ausgestaltung der Grabplätze und einem Auszug aus der Friedhofsordnung. Gedanken über Friedhofskunst* (Stettin–Grünhof: Stettiner Verkehrsverein, [1918]), 20.

<sup>79</sup> “Der Stettiner Hauptfriedhof im Jahre 1928/29”, *Stettiner Abendpost*, 13.09.1929, unnumbered pages.

to *Mother Earth* at the Biesel family quarters. The curators of the Provincial Museum of Pomeranian Antiquities, archaeologists and ethnographers, taking over from the director of the City Museum in this decade as the main animators of artistic life in Szczecin and the province as a whole, were referring to examples of good regional sepulchral craftsmanship, displayed in an urban park setting and contrasting with the mass trashiness of modern stonework available behind the cemetery fence.<sup>80</sup> Its cultural boundaries, sometimes in defiance of current administrative divisions, were defined by agricultural tradition, family and management ties of centuries-old landed estates.



Fig. 6. Kurt Schwerdtfeger, Plowman, 1929. Photograph by Fritz Zöppig. MNS Photo Archive

When Dr. Ulrich Randolf – since 1922 the procurator of the Brandenburg knightly estate of Hohenfelde near Vierraden, and since 1932 the owner of the Seltz estate in the Farther Pomerania region of Treptow in the Mecklenburg Lake District – commissioned a tombstone from Szczecin’s most respected sculptor Kurt Schwerdtfeger, this professor of the School of

<sup>80</sup> Fritz Herbert, “Friedhofkultur in Pommern”, *Pommersche Heimatpflege* 1 (1930): 10–16; “Der Stettiner Hauptfriedhof”, *Nachrichtenblatt des Stettiner Verkehrsvereins* 16 (1935): 1–8.



Crafts and Arts forged an evocative image in a rectangular slab (Fig. 6).<sup>81</sup> The entire rough surface of the gravel-heavy cement stele is filled with a holistic, though softly rendered figure of a plowman in high relief. Clad in a working helmet, loose jacket, wide pants and wooden sabots (Low German *Klümper*), he leans slightly in a distant stride. Large hands push a plow, from under whose blade a crystal-cut furrow slice is deposited. Balancing the composition, two small clouds, convex as a farmer's body, are more like boulders in their haptics. What Barlach called, in reference to the Polovtsian artifacts, "stone miscarriage" and "crystallization of earthiness," was commonly felt in the context of natural creations in Rügen, Pyritz (Pyrzyce) Land, the Bütow (Bytów) Lake District or at the Blumenthal's estate – Deutsch Pudigger (Podgórki) near Schlawe (Sławno), Schwerdtfeger's place of origin.

The dynamics of the 1930s, however, were as follows. In 1930, the phenomenon of "birthing" stones by the soil, which had been observed for centuries by villagers in their daily work, was covered by systematic archaeological documentation on the initiative of Ernst Sprockhoff, curator of the Romano-Germanic Central Museum in Mainz. The data was collected by the Provincial Museum of Pomeranian Antiquities in Szczecin.<sup>82</sup> In 1932, local "rural and forest farmers, technicians, teachers, nature lovers and lovers of their native country" received a popular scientific handbook guide to the geological treasures of the region.<sup>83</sup> In the year of the Nazi takeover, the Werkbund periodical "Die Form", edited until recently by Riezler, made a flimsy attempt to defend the Mecklenburger's works, protesting that they were called "documents of laponoid subhumanity" (*Dokumente ostischen Untermenschentums*).<sup>84</sup> Four years later, 98 items were deleted from the inventory of the City Museum in Szczecin: sculptures, drawings and prints attributed to Barlach.<sup>85</sup> However, the stone *Mother Earth*,

<sup>81</sup> Fritz Zöppig, "Hauptfriedhof Stettin", *Nachrichtenblatt des Stettiner Verkehrsvereins* 13 (1929): 2; *Landwirtschaftliches Adreßbuch der Provinz Pommern* (Leipzig: Niekammer's Adreßbüchern G.m.b.H., 1939), 19.

<sup>82</sup> Krzysztof Kowalski, "Muzealne opowieści o megalitach / Museum stories on megaliths", in: *Megality Pomorza Zachodniego. Na tropie budowniczych tajemniczych grobowców z epoki kamienia / Megaliths of Western Pomerania. On the track of the builders of the mysterious Stone Age tombs*, ed. Agnieszka Matuszewska, Marcin Szydłowski (Szczecin: Zapol, [2013]), 11–14, 45–48.

<sup>83</sup> Kurd von Bülow, *Grundzüge der Geologie und Bodenkunde Pommerns. Eine Kurzgefasste Einführung für Land- und Forstwirte, Techniker, Lehrer, Natur- und Heimatfreude* (Berlin: E. Schweizerbart'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1932).

<sup>84</sup> This was a reprint of an article by conservative critic Brunon E. Werner from *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*: "Kunst im Dritten Reich", *Die Form* 4 (1933): 103. The Volkist neologism *ostisch* (usually translated as "laponoid" or "East Baltic-laponoid") referred to one of the five races inhabiting the territory of modern Germany. It was characterized by a short stature, a short skull, a broad face with an unmarked chin, a blunt flat nose, brown eyes, stiff brown or black hair and a yellowish brownish complexion. See Cornelia Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 455–456.

<sup>85</sup> Kacprzak, "Moderna", 183–200.

holistic in form like an erratic boulder, survived in the heterotopic space of the necropolis. After World War II, rather overlooked by Polish settlers, it remained in the Main (Central) Cemetery until 1967 to support a selective return to modernist tradition in the German Democratic Republic as a gift from a brotherly nation.<sup>86</sup>

*Translated by Oskar Reschke*

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<sup>86</sup> Idem, "Szczezińskie", 11. The sculpture became the property of a newly established museum in Mecklenburg's Güstrow, Barlach's longtime home.

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## Matka Ziemia. Prototyp nowoczesnej sztuki pomorskiej?

### Streszczenie

Osiadły w Meklemburgii ekspresjonista Ernst Barlach zaprojektował w latach 1920–1921 pomnik nagrobny dla kupca drzewnego Ernsta Biesla. Rzeźba zatytułowana *Matka Ziemia* stała się nowym Cmentarzem Głównym w Szczecinie, którego projektantem był Georg Hannig. Temat nawiązywał do rozprzestrzenionego w kulturach pierwotnych, starożytnych oraz obrzędowości ludowej bóstwa chtonicznego, u Celtów znanego pod frygijskim imieniem Kybele, u Germanów zaś Nerthus. Do tych dwóch grup etnicznych odwoływała się nowoczesna mitologia państwa i narodotwórcza Niemców. W 1905 roku Albert Dietrich poświęcił Matce Ziemi swą rozprawę. Barlach wzorował się na wernakularnych rzeźbach postklasycznych, ale najważniejszym źródłem natchnienia była dla niego recepcja posągów kumańskich, tzw. bab kamiennych (XI–XIII wiek), które oglądał na ukraińskim stepie w 1906 roku. Surowe, blokowe rzeźby przypisywane Celtom, Scytom, Hunom, Gotom lub Mongołom były dla Barlacha „kamieniem milowym dolnej granicy czasu” (*Markstein der unteren Grenze einer Zeit*), „kamiennym poronieniem” (*steinerne Mißgeburt*) i „kryształizacją ziemskość” (*Christallisierung des Irdischen*). Ta wschodnia „prymitywna” inspiracja okazała się przełomowym doświadczeniem dla „północnoniemieckiego artysty”, nawiązującego



do epoki wędrówek ludów i kształtowania się poantycznej Europy. O ile za bezpośrednią spadkobierczynią klasycznego antyku na początku XX wieku uważano przede wszystkim Francję (obarczoną dodatkowo krytykowanym hasłem *l'art pour l'art*), o tyle Niemcy miały przywrócić sztuce barbarzyńską mistykę (odziedziczoną po Celtach) i zmysł praktyczności (typowy dla Germanów) zakorzenione w szczególnym umiłowaniu przyrody. *Matka Ziemia* Barlacha stała się dziełem prototypowym dla międzywojennej sztuki pomorskiej, reprezentującej rzekomo szorstki temperament rolników i rybaków.

#### Słowa kluczowe

Ernst Barlach (1870–1938), Szczecin (Stettin), Pomorze (Zachodnie), rzeźba, literatura, archeologia, psychoanaliza, ekspresjonizm

#### PROSIMY O CYTOWANIE ARTYKUŁU JAKO:

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