Albin Jura (1873–1958):
Social Activist, Teacher and Stone Age Researcher

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Abstract: In 1960, the Archaeological Museum of Cracow bought a collection of 54,000 flint artefacts recovered by Albin Jura during his excavations at fifteen Stone Age locations near Cracow or in Pod Kopą Magury Cave in the Western Tatra mountains between 1934–1955 (Appendix 1). Albin Jura was an amateur archaeologist who strove to document his research thoroughly and publish its results (Appendix 2). Apart from archaeology, he was deeply involved in political activities.

Keywords: history of archaeology, the amateur archaeologist, excavations, flint artefacts, collection in the Archaeological Museum of Cracow

Archaeologists who explore Stone Age sites near Cracow, those who carry out preliminary archival research or visit the storage rooms of the Archaeological Museum in Cracow, often come across collections and documentation related to Albin Jura (Kowalski and Kozłowski 1958: 339; Lech 1974: 17, 1981: 65), a researcher from Lesser Poland, who, though now somewhat forgotten, rendered truly great service to archaeology in the region.

Albin Jura, born in Wieprz in the Wadowice district in 1883 (Wosiński 1969: 66; Fig. 1), graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy of the Jagiellonian University and soon became involved in socio-political activity. In 1910, he published a book on the prehistory of Poland, followed a year later by a paper that popularised the history of the Polish land, both texts issued under the imprint of the Przyjaciel Ludu, an illustrated weekly and socio-political organ of the Polish Peasant Party. After linking up with the Alliance of Democrats in 1918, Jura co-operated with that party in editing their Dziennik Polski daily and Tygodnik Polski weekly during the Second World War. In the post-war period, he was a deputy-chairman of the Regional Committee, a member of the Supreme Council and a member of the Central Committee of that political organisation.1 Between 1919–1928 he also belonged to the Polish Peasant Party ‘Piast’ and from 1935 he was a deputy-chairman of the Agricultural Society in Lesser Poland. He believed that every professional activity should be based on appropriate education. Accordingly, at a session of the Legislative Sejm in 1947, when he acted as a member of the State National Council and a secretary of the Agricultural Commission, he put forward a motion to form 3000 agricultural schools in Polish communes (Wosiński 1965: 365).

1 I owe thanks to Mr Przemek Smoluch from the Alliance of Democrats for his help concerning the terminology.

Fig. 1. Albin Jura during the excavation at Dąbrowa Szlachecka, Cracow dist. in 1939. Information overleaf: ‘in front of Socha’s house’. Photo from the Archive of the Department of the Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic, the Archaeological Museum of Cracow.
Albin Jura’s concern for the education of young people was related to his work. After his graduation, he found employment as a secondary-school teacher; for example, from 1922–1924 he taught maths at the St. Hyacinth’s State School in Cracow (Bednarski 1923: 4, 1924: 6). In that capacity, he sought to arouse young people’s interest in prehistory. In 1936, he appealed to the Education Office to familiarize secondary-school students with a thirty-minute silent film about the excavation in Biskupin, Żnin district.¹ In 1955, he wrote: ‘(...) in June 1936, as soon as the cave became accessible, I took my pupils on a trip to the Tatra Mountains. After spending a night at the Hala Gąsienicowa, I set out with a group of stronger boys to Magura Cave. (...) in July of that year, I went on an excursion with (...) two pupils’ (Jura 1955: 97). He organised a similar archaeological trip to Ojców, Cracow district, in October 1935.³ Between 1941–1945, Jura and Rudolf Jamka (1906–1972), doctor of prehistory at the Jagiellonian University, gave classes in prehistory and geology to students of prehistory, history and art history at the Clandestine Jagiellonian University, as official university education and research were forbidden by the German occupation authorities in Poland during the war. Jura lectured on the Palaeolithic, while Jamka specialised in the ‘later periods’ (Gedl 1969: 249; Jamka 1964: 214, 1967: 296).

Simultaneously, Albin Jura carried out his own field work. The list of archaeological sites he explored is quite impressive, considering the times he lived in. He was active mostly in the 1930s. In 1934, he started excavating at Jerzmanowice, Cracow district, and he established a small excavation unit in the Prądnik valley near Ojców within the Cracow-Częstochowa Jurassic Upland, close to the house of Janina Uracz (Fig. 2 and 3), married later to professor Stefan Krukowski (1890–1982), a famous Palaeolithic archaeologist (Kozłowski 2007: 119). The excavation near Ojców was only an episode, however, possibly because the area was then explored by other researchers (Lech 2001: 138).

The discovery of prehistoric artefacts in Sowiniec in the Zwierzyniec district of Cracow was described by Jura in a letter, dated 10 October 1935, to dr Tadeusz Reyman (1889–1955) from the Archaeological Museum of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences. According to the letter, Jura, expecting to find flint artefacts in Sowiniec, had often supervised the area when it was dug over during the construction of the Piłsudski Mound, a monument commemorating Polish independence regained in 1918 (the mound, built in Cracow between 1934–1937, was named after Józef Piłsudski, the first Marshal of Poland and Chief of State, after his death in 1935). In 1935, when the artefacts were discovered, Jura called for protection of that area and the setting up of an ‘archaeological post’ there; he also offered to carry out the excavation himself. In the letter to Reyman, he suggested that the discovery be reported to professor Józef Żurowski (1892–1936), the prehistoric monument conservator in western Lesser Poland and Silesia.5 Jura notified the Committee for the Construction of the Piłsudski Mound about his finds and was given technological assistance; he co-operated with Stanisław Kożmiński, an engineer and a captain of sappers, who was in charge of the construction work (Fig. 4–6). From autumn 1935 to 1938, Jura identified two concentrations of flint artefacts in that area: Sowiniec I and Sowiniec II.

¹ The Archive of the Archaeological Museum of Cracow, SP 30/53, no. 162/36, p. 5.
² The Archive of the Archaeological Museum of Cracow, SP 30/53, p. 5.
³ The Archive of the Archaeological Museum of Cracow, SP 17/2, p. 2.
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Jura was personally most engaged in the exploration of Zwierzyniec, a district of Cracow. The excavation was carried out on a truly large scale, its profile sections going up several dozen metres, although – as Jura’s field notebook indicates – the project involved only a small group of people working from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. (Fig. 8–10). The excavation lasted ten years (1934–1944), providing A report on his exploration, with drawings of the finds, was published in 1939 (Jura 1939).

While exploring the Bębło Zachruście site, Cracow district, in 1935–1936, Jura took an interest in the diversification of its flint material and attempted to classify the finds chronologically according to the differences in their colour (Fig. 7). He applied the same classification to flint finds from sand dunes in Dąbrowa Szlachecka, Cracow district, which he explored at intervals from 1937 to 1942. In 1939, he discovered a camp with numerous flint artefacts in Kukułówka, a hamlet near Dąbrowa Szlachecka (Kozłowski 1960: 23).

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Albin Jura strove not only to recover flint artefacts, but also to broaden his knowledge of Stone Age settlement. For that purpose, he went on study trips to Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and other countries in 1936 and 1937. As the president of the Prehistoric Society in Cracow, he had received a letter of recommendation from professor Włodzimierz Demetrykiewicz (1859–1937), the director of the Archaeological Museum of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, who backed his study of the Palaeolithic during those trips. He also sought to obtain a government subvention for his study tour, which was supported by Tadeusz Sulimirski (1898–1983), professor at the Department of Prehistory at the Jagiellonian University. The special reason for the tour was the discovery of processed animal bones in Pod Kopą Magury Cave in the Western Tatra mountains.

Fig. 10. Albin Jura during the excavation at Zwierzyniec (Cracow) in 1940. Information overleaf: ‘Zwierzyniec – heaps of solifluction mud, segment L, 9 October 1940, photo by M. Sobieski’. Photo from the Archive of the Department of the Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic, the Archaeological Museum of Cracow.

more than 15,000 finds. Jura took detailed notes, made copious drawings of the site and the artefacts, and had numerous photographs taken. The documentation proved useful when he presented his collections, a task he treated very seriously. The finds from Cracow-Krowodrza were described in his unpublished work *Kultura mustierska na Krowodrzy, zabytki krzemienne i kościane w żwirach dyluwialnych rzeki Roboty na przedmieściach Krakowa. Z dodatkami Z. Bakowskiego, M. Klimaszewskiego i M. Książkiewicza* [The Mousterian culture in Krowodrza: flint and bone artefacts in diluvial gravels of the Robotna River in Krowodrza on the outskirts of Cracow; with additions by Z. Bąkowski, M. Klimaszewski and M. Książkiewicz]. He spent two years on his collection from Wołowice, Cracow district: ‘(...) I gained so much time due to the war, because I was free from all gainful employment’. During the Second World War, he wrote monographs on Zwierzyniec, Wołowice and Sowiniec (Jura 1945a, 1945b, 1951, 1953); he also prepared two works which were not published and have not survived: *O metodzie w badaniach paleolitycznych* [On the research method in Palaeolithic excavations] and *Od zarania dziejów do Piasta* [From the dawn of time to Piast], a text on ‘the Palaeolithic in the world and in Poland, (...) the Neolithic and the Metal Ages’, commissioned by professor Władysław Szafer (1886–1970), a botanist.

Fig. 8. The excavation at Zwierzyniec (Cracow) in 1937. Information overleaf: ‘Zwierzyniec, 17/9, removal of the 2nd metre, 09.1937, photo by O. Tomasz’. Photo from the Archive of the Department of the Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic, the Archaeological Museum of Cracow.
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The first excavation season at the cave in 1936 had brought to light so many interesting finds that, thanks to professor Sulimirski’s favourable opinion, the exploration was financed by the Józef Piłsudski National Culture Fund the following year. The Fund, operative in 1928–1939, supported Polish researchers and artists with grants and benefits coming both from state funds and from donations of private individuals. Apart from Albin Jura, the exploration team at the cave included prof. Tadeusz Sulimirski, dr Rudolf Jamka, Adolf Nasz (1916–1973), later professor of ethnology in Wrocław, MA Jan Bartys (1909–1940), and students.

During his trips in 1937, Jura discussed the animal bones from Pod Kopą Magury Cave with several eminent researchers: palaeontologist dr Alois Stehlik (1877–1945) from the museum in Brno; archaeologist dr Franz Mühlhofer (1881–1955) from the Vienna Museum of Natural History; dr Emil Bächler (1868–1950), the curator of the Museum of Natural History in St. Gallen. At the end of his life, Jura published an extensive paper (Jura 1955) presenting his conclusions about the excavation at Pod Kopą Magury Cave as compared to other finds from Poland and viewed against a broader European background. One of the points he dwelt on was the ‘developing technique of bone artefacts in Central Europe’ (Jura 1955: 119). He emphasised that his conclusions were well founded, but he also quoted critical opinions of the researchers whom he had shown the assemblage recovered from the cave.

Although Albin Jura was an amateur archaeologist, he was meticulous in his work, and the conclusions he drew concerning the chronology and technology of the analysed artefacts were cited in the literature up until the 1960s (Kozłowski 1960: 55, 58, 62).

Some artefacts from Albin Jura’s collection were given to the Archaeological Museum of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences already before the war (Jura 1955: 103); other items were handed over as a deposit to the Museum in 1959 and then purchased in 1960. Before the purchase, professor Stefan Nosek (1909–1966), the director of the Museum, consulted about the collection with several archaeologists, including dr Waldemar Chmielewski (1929–2004), the head of the Department of the Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic at the Institute of History of Material Culture in Lodz, who excavated Nietoperzowa Cave in Jerzmanowice, Cracow district, at that time (Schild 2004: 218), and with dr Andrzej Żaki (1923–2017), later professor of archaeology. The Archaeological Museum finally bought the rest of the collection back from Zofia Jura, Albin Jura’s widow, in 1960. The acquisition consisted of over 54,000 artefacts recovered from fifteen locations, together with their documentation and photographs of the sites, of the excavation units with their profile sections and of the excavating teams. The collection, complemented – according to the custom – with artefacts brought from the study trips abroad, is now kept at the Department of the Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic in the Archaeological Museum of Cracow.

Translated by Anna Skucińska

Appendix 1

An alphabetical list of the locations excavated by Albin Jura, with dates of the excavations:

- Czernichów, Czernichów commune, Cracow district, excavation in 1940.

Appendix 2

Albin Jura’s bibliography

• 1955. Grota Magury w Tatrach (1460 m), najwyżej w Polsce położona siedziba człowieka epoki lodowej. Światowit 21: 81–124.


References


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