

# Sarunas Milisauskas (1936 – 2024)

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## PREFACE

### **SARUNAS MILISAUSKAS** (1936–2024)

Professor Sarunas Milisauskas died April 1, 2024 in the Brothers of Mercy Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, Clarence (Buffalo USA). He was born in 1936 in Kaunas, Lithuania as the son of a business owner. He fled with his parents as a child ahead of advancing Russian troops at the end of World War II and lived in the American sector of occupied Germany before coming to Kenosha, Wisconsin USA. He met his wife, the former Vita Kriciunaite, who also came from Lithuania, in Chicago. They were married in 1961.

Sarunas Milisauskas served in the US Army before earning a bachelor's degree from the Ohio State University and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa (America's most prestigious academic honor society). He received his MA and PhD from the University of Michigan. He had begun archaeological research in 1965 at Neolithic and Bronze Age settlements in Central and Eastern Europe. After completing his doctorate in archaeology in 1970, he moved as an assistant professor to the State University of New York, University at Buffalo and stayed (as an associated professor and full professor) until his retirement in 2020. Sarunas Milisauskas served the University at Buffalo for over 50 years as Professor, Museum Director and Chair of the Department of Anthropology.

During his first year at University at Buffalo, Sarunas Milisauskas received a grant from the US government to study Stone Age inhabitants of Poland. This was the first grant ever received by the State University of New York, University at Buffalo in a foreign currency and it came from Polish payments for American wheat. Professor Milisauskas received also grants from the Smithsonian Institution's Foreign Currency Program Grants, the National Science Foundation, Fulbright Fellowship, the Wenner-Green Foundation and the American Council of Learned Societies for his studies of the chronology, environments, economies, and social organization of prehistoric communities. He published 14 books and more than 150 articles, book chapters, book reviews and commentaries. His



Fig. 1. PhD. Sarunas Milisauskas. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (Archiv. J. Kruk)

books, *European Prehistory* (Academic Press), and *European Prehistory. A Survey* (Springer) follows the course of human activity in Europe from the Palaeolithic Age to the Roman Empire. He was elected to membership in the Polish Academy of Arts and Science. At the time of his death, he was working on a book about the history of European Archaeology.

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As a PhD candidate at the University of Michigan in the fall of 1964, Sarunas Milisauskas initiated a project by applying for a Fulbright Exchange Program to Poland. His main area of interest was the Neolithic period of Central and Eastern Europe. At the time Americans has easier access to conducting archaeological work in Poland than in any other of the so-called Socialist countries.

A few months earlier in Spain, Professor James Bennett Griffin, Milisauskas' advisor at the University of Michigan, had met Konrad Jażdżewski, then professor at Łódź University and Director of the Archaeological Museum in Łódź, and discussed with him the possibility of Sarunas Milisauskas conducting research on Neolithic settlements in Poland. In the Fulbright application, Milisauskas identified Konrad Jażdżewski as the scholar with whom he would cooperate on the archaeological research in Poland. After receiving the Fulbright scholarship, Milisauskas arrived in Poland during the summer of 1965 to work with Konrad Jażdżewski. A housing shortage in Łódź made it impossible for the Milisauskas family to find housing, so Jażdżewski assigned them a room in the museum. At least

the living conditions gave Milisauskas close contact with the archaeological material in the museum.

Because Konrad Jażdżewski was not about to be granted permission to conduct the American-Polish archaeological research project, Waldemer Chmielewski suggested that Milisauskas contact Professor Witold Hensel about project. At the time, Witold Hensel was head not only the Institute of History of the Material Culture, Polish Academy of Sciences but also the Archaeology Department of Warsaw University and a leading medieval archaeologist in Poland. He knew how the administration worked and advised Milisauskas to be patient. And indeed, it took 18 months to secure permission for the project.

In the meantime, Professor James B. Griffin wrote to Milisauskas to suggest applying to the Smithsonian Institution for funding with him as the Principal American Investigator and Sarunas Milisauskas as Field Director. Professor J. B. Griffin continued in this role until 1970, when Milisauskas received his PhD and replaced him in this post.

In the spring of 1967, the long coveted permission to excavate was granted by the Polish authorities. The agreement for the cooperative archaeological work was signed on May 11, 1967 in Warszawa by James B. Griffin and Witold Hensel. Sarunas Milisauskas and Witold Hensel renewed the agreement twice during the 1970s. In 2016, and 2021 agreements were signed between the Institute for European and Mediterranean Archaeology at the University at Buffalo, the State University of New York, and the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology Polish Academy of Sciences to continue research on Bronocice region.

Much of the success in obtaining permission to conduct field research and obtain funds for this particular initiative is owned to Witold Hensel and the late James B. Griffin who supported and encouraged Milisauskas to specialize in European prehistory, and was also instrumental in obtaining the initial funds from the Smithsonian Institution.

Sarunas Milisauskas owed his utmost gratitude to Professor Witold Hensel for enabling him to conduct research in Poland. He was given total scientific freedom to conduct research and Hensel never interfered in the field work. He also protected the project from devious moves by other archaeologists who were either against the project or who wanted to establish control over it.

Then, in 1967, with the assistance of Witold Hensel, Sarunas Milisauskas transferred from Łódź to the Institute of History of the Material Culture, Polish Academy of Sciences, section in Kraków in order to be able conduct a field project in southeastern Poland. Milisauskas and his family rented a room in the Wola Justowska district of Kraków. Living there, he had the opportunity to observe how pre-World War II and even pre-World War I Polish high society lived.

As an American archaeologist in Poland, Milisauskas was confronted with several challenging situations. For example, in the autumn of 1965, another American archaeologist arrived for several days in Poland to discuss the possibilities of conducting joint archaeological field research. His visit had positive and negative effects on Milisauskas' plans for field work. On the positive side, his presence indicated that American archaeologists had



**Fig. 2.** Professor Sarunas Milisauskas.  
Department of Anthropology State University of New York, University at Buffalo (Archiv. J. Kruk)

an interest in working in Poland. On the negative side, this individual made some alarming statements while presenting himself as an expert on European prehistory, and suggested that Milisauskas join him instead in a field project. Sarunas rejected this proposition.

The archaeological project's objectives were to study the chronology, as well as the economic and social organization of the Neolithic and Bronze Age communities in south-eastern Poland. The majority of the project was funded by the Smithsonian Institution, *via* the Foreign Currency Program Grants. Source analyses were also funded by the grants from the National Science Foundation and the American Council of Learned Fellowships. Finally, the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology (former Institute of the History of the Material Culture), Polish Academy of Sciences supported surveys and publications.

The cooperative agreement stipulated that American funds for the fieldwork would be evenly divided between American and Polish archaeologists. The project consisted of two stages. First, an excavation of individual Neolithic and Bronze Age sites such as Olszanica, Iwanowice and Niedźwiedź by American and Polish archaeologists was conducted. Next, a regional archaeological project involving American and Polish archaeologists in the Bronocice region of southeastern Poland was completed.

Sarunas Milisauskas directed the excavations at Olszanica. The Polish archaeologists used their allocated funds for excavation of two sites, Jan Machnik directed the excavations at Iwanowice, and Barbara Burchard conducted the field work at Niedźwiedź. Since the Polish antiquities law prohibits the removal of artefacts from the country, the analysis of the material from Olszanica was carried out in Poland by Sarunas Milisauskas with the help of young Polish archaeologists and students.

The goals of the Olszanica excavations evolved over two or three years. Many ideas came from the vigorous American archaeology of the 1960s. Sarunas Milisauskas contemplated the possibility of such a study. The range and spatial patterning of human activities at Olszanica were studied by analyzing the intrasite (horizontal) distribution of artefacts and features in an area representing a relatively brief occupation. This type of archaeological investigation evaluates the proposition that different areas within the settlement were used for different purposes; hence, the spatial distribution of artefacts and features should reflect the *loci* of various activities.

In the Bronocice project, Sarunas Milisauskas conducted surveys and excavations of Neolithic sites in the region to investigate the prehistoric environment, chronology, economy, settlement system, and social organization. Furthermore, he wanted to contribute to the understanding of the social evolution of low-level hierarchical societies. This was the first systematic regional project conducted with such goals on Neolithic sites in Europe.

Professor Sarunas Milisauskas was interested in investigating the appearance of low-level hierarchical societies by using settlement data. The motivation for this research came from the work of archaeologists and cultural anthropologists at the University of Michigan. Richard Blanton, Kent Flannery, Gregory Johnson, Jeffrey Parsons, and Henry Wright were conducting research in Mesoamerica and Near East on the development of complex societies. Cultural anthropologists, such as Leslie White and Elman Service, had stimulated archaeologist's interest in the problems of social evolution. Professor Milisauskas considered the causes usually mentioned for the development of complex societies: population increase, warfare, ecological changes, trade, and internal conflict. Although a number of technological, economic, and social changes occurred during the Middle and Late Neolithic, the difficulty lies in trying to explain how these changes were associated with the development of a more complex society.

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The original field research goals were accomplished at Olszanica and in the Bronocice region. Several studies, such as the intrasite spatial analysis and the origin of the low-level hierarchical societies, reflected the specific interests of American archaeologist's within the European context.

Numerous young archaeologists, and archaeology students from the universities in Kraków and Warszawa, received field training at Polish-American excavations. Some of



Fig. 3. Professor Sarunas Milisauskas at the Bronocice stone monument erected to commemorate the excavations (photo. J. Kruk)

them, such as Jerzy Kopacz, Jacek Lech, Krzysztof Tunia and Jacek Rydzewski became distinguished archaeologists. The Polish-American archaeological project and work of Sarunas Milisauskas, quite obviously changed the local landscape and local human relations. More importantly, however, the excavations have given the local communities a new visibility. Archaeological reports have made the names Olszanica and Bronocice familiar to archaeologists specializing in European Neolithic studies. And the local people are continuing in their efforts to publicize the results of the excavations that have already changed their lives to some extent.

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Professor Sarunas Milisauskas was a distinguished scholar, a passionate teacher and mentor, a gifted administrator, and internationally renowned ambassador of American, and also Polish archaeology. But most importantly he was a wonderful friend and colleague, funny and authentic. He is deeply missed.

*Janusz Kruk*