From the Author

The first time I went to the Ukraine was in 2001 at the invitation of Alexander Kolesnik, the Ukrainian specialist dealing with the Stone Age. We had met in Cracow a year before. I held my first practice at two Palaeolithic sites. Alexander participated in an international grant in Cracow and was the head of our shift. Very quickly we became friends because, as the only person among the students, I understood the Russian language and I could get in touch with the expedition using this language. During these practices we spoke mostly about the specificity of research on Palaeolithic sites, while after hours, together with my future husband, we organised for Alexander and other members of the group of foreigners field trips around the Cracow as well as their free time. In return, I was invited to Donetsk. Eleven years ago the Ukraine was one of the countries that was not taken into account when planning sightseeing trips, and even more individually organised practices, due to concerns about the internal situation and social conditions prevailing there. It was a country that had gained its independence ten years earlier (in 1991) and the social and political changes had just begun. We knew that the economic situation was severe. However, I went there, guided by my curiosity and a desire to see this part of Europe. I was not disappointed; despite the apparent difference in the standard of living, many deficiencies arising from the slow pace of the economic reconstruction, poor infrastructure, lack of opportunities to contact with the country and the culture shock I experienced during first days in the steppe, I was charmed by people, nature and above all the opulence of archaeological sites. This was the first time I had contact with monumental anthropomorphic sculptures. I saw the collection of stelae in the Donetsk Regional Museum – the organiser of the expedition I participated in. I saw Neolithic stelae and Polovtsian statues in the “Khomutovsky Steppe” Nature Reserve. During the two-day train journey back to Poland, I was constantly thinking about things I had learnt and experienced in that exotic part of Europe. Visions of my research future crystallised at that moment. I had already known what I wanted to deal with. I also knew that the only direction in the world for my plans would be South-Eastern Europe.
During following practices and then research studies, I participated in excavations in various regions of the Donetsk District – from the forest steppe to the seaside steppe areas. We conducted work on single- and multicultural sites. I took part in the exploration of the Middle Palaeolithic workshop and a ramparts construction of a 10th-century stronghold. I became acquainted with the research methodology of the Russian school. In the following years, however, as a doctoral student and with a small financial contribution of the Institute of Archaeology of the Jagiellonian University, I conducted research on Mayaky (Sloviansk Raion, Donetsk District) and Druzhnoye (Volnovakha Raion, Donetsk District) with the support of colleagues from the Regional Museum in Donetsk.

In 2006, two years before the expedition referred to in this book, I saw the collection of anthropomorphic stelae in the Veliko-Anadol Forest Museum for the first time. We were hosted by the museum during the field prospection and museum query that I executed in conjunction with my doctoral dissertation, in the southern part of the Donetsk District. After photographic and descriptive documentation of stelae, I decided to organise the expedition, which, in addition to students of archaeology, would be attended by students of art preservation. I knew that in the Ukraine no one had ever conducted professional conservatory works on these objects. I already knew Michał Burzak, a young graduate of the Cracow Academy of Arts. We had met on the occasion of his diploma, which was the full technical and plastic conservation of a Polovtsian anthropomorphic stela located in the collection of the Archaeological Museum in Cracow. Thanks to a proposal of the Director of the Institute of Archaeology at that time, prof. dr hab. Jan Chochorowski, I started a scientific undertaking with Michał, which resulted in a publication including a study on nomadic monumental sculpture from the perspective of archaeologists and conservators. Efforts to gain financial resources for the logistical organisation of the expedition started. The Ukrainian party proposed to pay for accommodation and transport of people and equipment from Donetsk to Veliko-Anadol. Also a new truck was bought that, during a month of our stay, was supposed to serve us at excavations. At the site we were supposed to be assisted by researchers of the Forest Museum, a colleague from Donetsk who was a trainee conservator and our friends, archaeologists. The Director of the Institute of Archaeology and the Dean of Faculty of History of the Jagiellonian University approved the financial support for research, but by then we already knew that these funds would be sufficient only for half of the planned activities. Students of the Institute of Archaeology of the Jagiellonian University acquired reimbursements for travel expenses from the Jan Kochanowski Fund at the Jagiellonian University. Our resources were also funded by the Fund of Students and Alumni of the Jagiellonian University “Bratniak”. Funds for chemicals necessary for the conservation of relics, transport of equipment and the last group of students on their way back to Kiev, as well as for expenses partially covering the stay of 16 people in the Ukraine were
assigned by my husband. The expedition was attended also by students of the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Rzeszów and a student from the Charles University in Prague, who individually covered their travel expenses. Our project was supported by prof. dr hab. Ireneusz Płuska, Head of the Department of Conservation and Restoration of Sculpture of the Cracow Academy of Arts, approving practices of four fifth-year students, who wanted to participate in this research expedition. In early July the entire team was in place. The aim of the expedition was to conduct archaeological research on the Polovtsian temple, and conservatory work on three selected stone statues. After investigating the archaeological site and the space where the stelae were exhibited, and after a stormy debate, we decided instead to take action to rescue as many stone stelae as possible. The expedition’s young people were impressed by the figural sculptures, each older than 800 years. After a deliberation, we decided that instead of the three planned statues, students guided by Michał would conduct the technical conservation of as many stelae as they managed to preserve during the stay (2 weeks) and with such amount of special chemicals the team had. We cancelled research of the selected archaeological complex. Thanks to the kindness of colleagues from the Donetsk Regional Museum, we commenced exploration at a site of a different character, associated with the originally established character of practices in both cultural and chronological terms. The decision to shift the research arose primarily from the need of saving the greatest possible amount of money necessary to preserve as many statues as we could. We took this decision also due to procedural issues related to obtaining the permission of the district administration to commence archaeological research at the kurgan. This example illustrates independent difficulties, unforeseen by the Ukrainian organisers of the expedition. A quick solution required a logistic adaptation to new conditions and flexibility in the actions of both teams. Finally, 14 exemplars of stelae were preserved and we conducted research on the winter encampment near which a kurgan cemetery with Polovtsian burials was located in the 1980s.

The conservatory works conducted on anthropomorphic stelae in the 2008 research season by the international team of archaeologists and conservators are among the first such actions in Eastern Europe. The purpose of the project was to continue rescuing stone statues from devastation and destruction, and to prove that with the small, yet significant, logistical support of the local museum, modest financial contributions from scientific institutions, private resources, and thanks to the group of engaged scientists and friends, it is possible to make great steps towards saving these treasures of the Black Sea Steppes during a single research season.

After we returned from the expedition we knew that information about conservatory and rescue measures taken in relation to anthropomorphic stelae should be made available to the wider public as soon as possible.
Results of works, in the form of illustrations, I posted on my web site. Unfortunately, for the next several years I was unable to interest any non-profit institution or Polish and Ukrainian foundations in at least partial support of the publication concerning our work, not to mention the continuation and development of the project dedicated to the rescue of stone stelae. Also my own University was not interested in this, because my actions were contradictory to the vision of development of the Department of Mediaeval Age. The opportunity to publish the results of the international cooperation of our archaeological expedition was given only in 2012 by the Versita Publishing which, looking for a niche topic, proposed that I write the following monograph. For this, on behalf of all those people involved in the project, we would like to thank the entire Editorial Team.