

A full-page background image showing a diver in a black and yellow wetsuit with blue fins swimming in clear blue water above a vibrant coral reef. The diver is positioned in the upper half of the frame, while the reef occupies the lower half.

Archaeology: Just Add Water

Underwater Research at the University of Warsaw

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Underwater Archaeology at the University of Warsaw

Bartosz Kontny¹

Although plenty of majors are represented in the Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw – one of the largest institutions of this kind in the world – for a long time underwater archaeology had troubles settling there for good. Nonetheless, the cooperation between the archaeologists and scuba-divers started relatively soon, along with the dawn of this field of research in Poland. Since the very beginning, involved in the activities in the sphere of underwater archaeology was the group connected with the Warsaw Diving Club², affiliated by the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society³ (hereinafter: WKP PTTK). One of the pioneers of diving in Poland and the member of WKP PTTK, Mieczysław Kwapisiewicz (1922–1992), being a scientist himself (postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Metallurgy, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Warsaw University of Technology⁴ – cf. *Politechnika Warszawska. Skład osobowy rok akademicki 1961–1962* 1962: 155), has co-operated with archaeologists; although he was not institutionally connected with archaeology.⁵ His archaeology-based activities in WKP PTTK, and then, starting from 1958, in the Warsaw Underwater Club⁶ (founded by him⁷ and affiliated by the State Defence League⁸; hereinafter: WKP LOK), were of a secondary character. Although multiple surveys were undertaken in those days, in co-operation with the Institute for History of Material

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² Ed. note: *Warszawski Klub Pletwonurków*.

³ Ed. note: *Polskie Towarzystwo Turystyczno-Krajoznawcze*.

⁴ Ed. note: *Katedra Metaloznawstwa, Wydział Mechaniczny Technologiczny Politechniki Warszawskiej*.

⁵ It has to be noted, though, that Kwapisiewicz's Ph.D. dissertation, titled *The Iron Metallurgy of the Early Mediaeval Period in Greater Poland* („*Hutnictwo żelaza okresu wczesnośredniowiecznego Wielkopolski*”, Warsaw 1966), which was supervised by Prof. Ph.-Eng. Kornel Wesołowski, had partly an archaeological character. After all, it is stored in the library in the Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw (catalogue no. 419/D). Connection between the Warsaw University of Technology (*Politechnika Warszawska* [PW]) and the University of Warsaw (*Uniwersytet Warszawski* [UW]) in the field of archaeology was possible due to the presence of the Team for Studies on Polish Middle Ages (*Zespół Badań nad Polskim Średniowieczem*) UW and PW, established in 1958 by an archaeologist – Prof. Włodzimierz Antoniewicz. The team, associated e.g. with the then Chair of Ancient and Early Mediaeval Archaeology UW (*Katedra Archeologii Pierwotnej i Wczesnośredniowiecznej UW*; since 1965 – Chair of Prehistoric and Early Mediaeval Archaeology/*Katedra Archeologii Pradziejowej i Wczesnośredniowiecznej UW*), was especially active in the 1960s, which has manifested itself in the annual report conferences and own publications – cf. Sochacki 1993a: 185; 1993b: 205–206; Kolendo 2000: 108.

⁶ Ed. note: *Warszawski Klub Podwodny „Krab”*.

⁷ WKP LOK was established as a result of the interpersonal disagreements inside WKP PTTK. Due to that Kwapisiewicz left WKP PTTK and has created a new unit, colloquially called ‘Kwap-Club’ („*Kwap-Klub*”). For the invaluable consultations in a matter of Mieczysław Kwapisiewicz and his activities as well as WKP PTTK and WKP LOK the author of the hereby paper is very grateful to Karina Kowalska (Museum of Diving, Warsaw) and Grzegorz Kowalski (WKP PTTK).

⁸ Ed. note: *Liga Obrony Kraju*.

Culture, Polish Academy of Sciences⁹ (currently: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences¹⁰) as well as the National Museum of Archaeology¹¹ in Warsaw, the professional level was not achieved. Mieczysław Kwapisiewicz has mentioned that during the surveys in 1957 and 1958 in the waters of Lake Biskupińskie (fig. 1), Lake Sobiejuchy and Lake Święte as well as Lake Gopło in the area of the Mouse Tower (both Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship¹²), the coastline of the Wolin island and streams of the Parsęta River in the neighbourhood of the Kołobrzeg-Budzistowo stronghold (both West Pomeranian Voivodeship)¹³ the scuba-divers were only an auxiliary team, having facilitated “*rummaging for artefacts in the basin floor*”¹⁴ (Kowalska 2011: 14).¹⁵ None the less, plenty of features were successfully located, such as the alleged bridge relics in Lake Gopło and the Parsęta, hearths and bones from Lake Sobiejuchy (Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship), as well as wooden structures (i.e. remains of the wall eroded by waves) and pottery vessel from Lake Biskupińskie (Rajewski 1959: 47). Along with the team of scuba-divers from WKP LOK, Mieczysław Kwapisiewicz was in charge of the underwater team, also during the studies on the Early Iron Age lake dwelling in Rybno, Lake Piłakno (fig. 2, 3; Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship; Bukowski, Dąbrowski and Odoj 1962: 72), but in this case the archaeologists have already elaborated some methods of research (Odoj 1962: 714–716). Other expeditions, in which Kwapisiewicz and Zinserling with WKP PTTK divers were involved, were connected to the wreckages of the planes from the Second World War: JU87 Stuka in Lake Pluszne and Ił2 in Lake Łańskie in 1958 (both Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship; cf. Szydłowski 2014¹⁶; Laskowski 2015), therefore – in those times – findings of a rather historical character.¹⁷

⁹ Ed. note: *Institut Historii Kultury Materialnej Polskiej Akademii Nauk*.

¹⁰ Ed. note: *Institut Archeologii i Etnologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk*.

¹¹ Ed. note: *Państwowe Muzeum Archeologiczne*.

¹² Ed. note: all locations given according to the current administrative division of Poland.

¹³ Survey was carried out during the period from the 9th to 12th of August 1958. Apart from Kwapisiewicz also further WKP PTTK divers took part in the expedition, i.e. J. Rutkowski and A. Sobociński. Pillars and posts found by divers were attributed to the alleged bridge construction and fishing harbour only hypothetically (Leciejewicz, Łosiński 1960: 50).

¹⁴ Originally: „*wygrzebywanie przedmiotów z dna*”.

¹⁵ One cannot omit the important position of Andrzej Zinserling during these enterprises. He was one of the founders of WKP PTTK and a long-standing chair/vice-leader of the Underwater Tourism Commission in the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (nowadays: the Underwater Activity Commission).

¹⁶ Unfortunately, the paper is tainted with the factual flaws.

¹⁷ It is worth mentioning that Mieczysław Kwapisiewicz (alias „Stadnicki”) was also active in the underground during the German occupation; he served in the Polish Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) in Grodzisk Mazowiecki and the Kampinos Forest (*Puszcza Kampinoska*) (cf. <https://www.1944.pl/powstancze-biogramy/mieczyslaw-kwapisiewicz,26157.html>, access 02.01.2018).

Pioneer attempts (unfortunately unsuccessful) to create a unit concentrating on underwater archaeology in Warsaw, at the University, were adopted thanks to Zdzisław Skrok – first a student, later an absolvent, and, for a short time, employee at the then Chair of Archaeology, University of Warsaw¹⁸. A group of scuba-diving students (not only of archaeology), forming since the end of the 1960s, was shortly federated in the ‘Wreck’ (Polish: “Wrak”) – Academic Club for Underwater Tourism¹⁹ (Skrok 1991: 291).²⁰ At the turn of the 1960s and 1970s the members of the club have been conducting underwater surveys in co-operation with the archaeologists from the University of Warsaw. The reconnaissance has covered the bed of the Bug River in Ołtarze-Gołacze, in proximity of the Neolithic settlement relics (Masovian Voivodeship), the area of Cape Kula on Masurian Lakes Jagodne and Boczne (there is e.g. the mediaeval burgh and the necropolis of the Roman Period in Bogaczewo located nearby, on the shore; Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship) and Lake Żarnowieckie (Pomeranian Voivodeship). The expedition was set even to investigate the mammoth’s remains in the clay-pit pond near Pułtusk (Masovian Voivodeship). The results were not stunning, thus in 1975 the club limited its activities to scuba training, although the entry about the ties with archaeology was still left in the statute (Heinrichs 2014: 53–54). Zdzisław Skrok has not abandon archaeology entirely (fig. 4) – he has actively participated in excavations in the Baltic Sea (for the 1975 expedition on the legendary for Polish underwater archaeological site – the mediaeval W-5, the so-called Copper Wreck – he has engaged the members of ‘Wreck’ club; cf. Ossowski 2014: 102); although that he has already done outside the structures of the University. Skrok is the author of the oldest and up till now the only synthesis devoted to underwater archaeology in the popular version, published by *Wydawnictwo Morskie*²¹ (Skrok 1982²²). The confirmation of the enthusiasm for diving, still smouldering among the ‘Wreck’ youth, is the first M.A. thesis devoted to underwater archaeology (mainly to the issue of methods of research) written by Tomasz Wilde (1979), afterwards a well-known traveller.

¹⁸ Ed. note: *Katedra Archeologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego*.

¹⁹ Ed. note: *Akademicki Klub Turystyki Podwodnej „Wrak”*.

²⁰ In those times the scuba-training was very demanding, both in the matter of acquiring skills as well as the knowledge. The structures of underwater activity clubs enabled the access to diving, very limited for the average Polish citizen from the communist times: the relation of the regular salaries to the prices of equipment were so disadvantageous (e.g. the price of the western-European wetsuit equalled the yearly wages) that only by the means of the clubs it was possible to use the shared diving equipment, and even then the insufficiencies in this matter were severe.

²¹ The ‘Maritime Editors’.

²² Updated and somehow fuller version was published later in the pocket-sized series of *Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe* (the ‘Artistic and Film Editors’; Skrok 1991).

In the form depicted above the club endured until the 1990s. The changes in the pattern of scuba-diving in Poland (demise of the amateur diving clubs) have led to the gradual disappearance of the 'Wreck', even though the first possibilities for scientific expeditions, still much limited, have occurred. Due to them, at the turn of the 1980s and the 1990s, the students of archaeology and 'Wreck' members, Piotr Sadurski and Rafał Werbanowski, have participated in the underwater excavation in the Netherlands, on the *Aanloop Molengat* site (the wreck of the Dutch vessel dated to the 17th century, with the truly intriguing cargo)²³ as well as the 16th-century wreck of *Scheurrack*²⁴. 'Wreck', indeed, has sunk, but fortunately it was not the fate of the archaeology at the University of Warsaw.

The beginning of the 1990s was a period when the Institute of Archaeology has truly flourished: after the murky times, a freedom of science has finally prevailed at the University. The programme of education in the field of archaeology could be modified without the serious limitations of the ministry or the frames resulting from introducing the Bologna Process, inflicted in time. In these circumstances the second attempt to introduce the underwater archaeology to the educational programme of the University of Warsaw took place. Due to the involvement of a group of students (e.g. Paulina Kubacka, Wojciech Kowalczyk, Kazimierz Kotlewski, Robert Matłacki and the author of the hereby paper) as well as the goodwill of the director of the Institute of Archaeology (Prof. Tomasz Mikocki) and the Central Maritime Museum in Gdańsk²⁵ management (director – Prof. Andrzej Zbierski – and vice-director – Ph.D. Jerzy Litwin) systematic classes for students have started, being held in both Gdańsk and Warsaw. The students have also participated in the research projects led by the Gdańsk Museum – in the mediaeval harbour in the Puck Bay (*Zatoka Pucka*) as well as the W-27 wreck-site. In the same time a student research circle for underwater archaeology was created, which has brought together the constantly increasing group of diving students of archaeology. There were more and more affiliates, as the popularity of diving as a kind of recreation has been increasing constantly. The members of the student research group have conducted the surveys mostly in co-operation with the Galindian expedition of the Institute of Archaeology, in Lake Sałęt Wielki, in the proximity of Mrągowo (Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship; Kontny 1994; 1995). The most promising results were acquired after the reconnaissance in the area of the Bird Island (*Ptasia Wyspa*), thanks to which multiple fragments of animal and human bones,

²³ Cf. Maarleveld and Overmeer 2012.

²⁴ Cf. e.g. Maarleveld 1990.

²⁵ Ed. note: *Centralne Muzeum Morskie*.

as well as pottery sherds dated back to the Early Iron Age have been acquired, connected with – still poorly recognized in that time – traces of settlement on the island (artefacts were present in the colluvium strata). The results of this research were then used in scientific papers (such as Fedorczyk, Nowakowski, and Szymański 1998: 375). Unfortunately, this episode also did not end with the constant presence of education and research in underwater archaeology in Warsaw, even though the results were much more promising than for the first time. Apart from the forenamed, the M.A. dissertation of Paulina Kubacka should be also mentioned; it regarded the issue of the boats from the banks of Lake Łebsko (Pomeranian Voivodeship) and was later published (Kubacka 2000).

However, the seed has been sown: next students of archaeology, active in the student associations (e.g. Student Scientific Association for Modern Methods of Archaeological Survey and Documentation “Wod.O.Lot”²⁶) have supported the land expeditions with underwater survey, not only in Poland: *cf.* the activities in the Bay of Kotor in Montenegro (Kajak 2014: 77–108); they have also participated in the archaeological festivals in Biskupin (fig. 5; Kontny and Nowakowska 2013). The former ‘underwater students’ have developed their scientific interests, also at the University. At the end of the 1990s another series of classes dedicated to underwater archaeology (lectured by Prof. Iwona Modrzewska-Pianetti and Bartosz Kontny, M.A.) were concluded with visits to multiple museums managed by the Central (currently: National) Maritime Museum (fig. 6).

But the breakthrough was still to come. Year 2010 brought a success in that matter; the first – supported by the first edition of the European Social Fund – at first the courses, which have later evolved into the post-diploma studies in the field of underwater archaeology. The credits for that should be given to Prof. Radosław Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, managing the courses, and Magdalena Nowakowska, M.A. but also WKP PTTK should be mentioned for the diving support as well as the Museum of Diving. The successive editions of the course are considerably popular among the amateur divers, which not only promotes archaeology, but also contributes to the awareness of the underwater cultural heritage. The development has soon led to establishing underwater archaeology as a field of studies taught in the Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw by its research staff as well as the Visiting Professors. It was facilitated by establishing the Department for Underwater Archaeology (head of which is, from the beginning, Prof. Iwona Modrzewska-Pianetti; although the researchers from other

²⁶ Ed. note: *Studenckie Koło Naukowe (SKN) Nowoczesnych Metod Prospekcji i Dokumentacji Archeologicznej “Wod.O.Lot”*.

departments are also involved into the underwater research and didactic activities. The core are lectures and practical classes for the second year of B.A. students, but also pro-seminars and seminars (during which multiple B.A. and M.A. dissertations have been written) as well as the additional classes, devoted to shipbuilding, methods of research etc. The didactic offer includes the classes in English for the foreigners studying archaeology in Warsaw, too. The practical classes in the matter of survey, documentation and exploration methods are also being held for the students of archaeology, joined with the fieldwork practice²⁷; it has been held e.g. at the settlement complex from the early Iron Age, Roman Age and the Middle Ages in Szurpiły (the Suwałki Region; Kontny 2010) or on Lake Legińskie at the Mrągowskie Lakeland (both sites in Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship); fieldwork practise was organised also in Turkey, Croatia, and Ukraine. The co-operation in the field of underwater research was established with the archaeologists from Kuwait, Georgia, Norway and Denmark – the researchers from these countries have presented their discoveries in the Institute of Archaeology; in 2011 the Institute was also visited by the father of the world's underwater archaeology – George Bass, invited by Karina Kowalska, M.A. (the Museum of Diving). There was an excellent co-operation developed with the Ukrainian archaeologists at Crimea. Surveys of the southern coast of the peninsula, led for many seasons by Magdalena Nowakowska, revealed subsequent anchorages, or even potential wreckages (Nowakowska 2011). Unfortunately, after the annexation of Crimea the research was ceased – the actual exploration was not even launched... Thus, the co-operation (not yet on the full scale) with the Ukrainian archaeologists continues in the area of the Tendra Peninsula and Berezan Island (Black Sea). The survey is led by Vyacheslav Gerasimov and the student training is supervised by Artur Brzóska.

Yet, the Crimean breakdown did not stop the research initiatives. The activities of the Student Association for Underwater Archaeology²⁸ should be emphasised here. Due to the involvement of the students²⁹, with the supervision of the scholars from the Institute of Archaeology (Artur Brzóska and the author of the hereby paper), some

²⁷ At this convenience the students can gain their diver-archaeologist certification CMAS PA1 and PA2. The works over the novelisation of the programme for training were coordinated by the author of the hereby article, as a member of the Subcommittee for Research of the Commission of Underwater Activities CMAS (*Confédération Mondiale des Activités Subaquatiques*).

²⁸ Ed. note: *Koło Naukowe Archeologii Podwodnej (KNAP)*.

²⁹ It is necessary to emphasise the significance of the first chairperson of KNAP – Zuzanna Jędrzejczak, M.A. – who has piloted several successful research projects.

important research projects were done.³⁰ The most important ones have taken place in Lake Hańcza and Łańskie (dugouts; Kontny *et al.* 2014), Lake Wigry (Słupiańska Bay discoveries; Kontny *et al.* 2016), Lake Łęczek (dugout; Brzóska *et al.* 2016), Lake Orzysz and Wylewy (lake settlements; Kontny *et al.* 2018), Tworki Skrodzkie (the reconnaissance of the littoral zone near the land site), Lake Niegocin (so-called ‘barge’; Kontny *et al.* forthcoming), the Muchawka River (the area of the 19th-century battlefield; Mileszczyk and Maciejewski 2017), the Biebrza River (pales), Bogaczewo (lake settlement), and Lake Niedzięgiel (logboat).³¹

However, the most important scientific achievement up till now is the study on the lake site in Lubanowo (West Pomeranian Voivodeship; Kontny *et al.* 2016; Nowakiewicz 2016). It is the only known deposit of weapons, elements of the horse tack and tools of the European protohistory, researched with the methods specific for underwater archaeology. The research will probably last for much longer...

It is especially important to highlight the successful search for the spoils of the Deluge³², sunken during their transportation via the Vistula. Finding them was the *idée fixe* of Prof. Tomasz Mikocki, the long-term director of the Institute. After his death it was implemented by Hubert Kowalski (e.g. Kowalski 2015; 2016).³³ During the aforementioned works other archaeological features have also been discovered: e.g. the unknown wreck, documented lately in co-operation with the Institute of Archaeology – as a part of a larger research project – by Piotr Sadurski, voluntary in the Department for Underwater Archaeology; the acquired radiocarbon dates indicate that the vessel might have been built even in the early 16th century! The Mediterranean branch of the Department’s research is perfectly represented by the activities of the team working on trade contacts of ancient Spain, by the means of the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education grant HARMONIA 7 (Prof. Iwona Modrzewska-Pianetti and Aleksandra Chołuj, M.A.).

The Institute receives also the reports of accidental underwater discoveries, which are then documented and preserved by the researchers, such as the Jabłonna wreck, probably the relic of the 18th-century flat-bottomed river vessel, so-called ‘berlinka’ or ‘odrzak’, registered

³⁰ Some student projects were devoted to improving skills during the foreign underwater expeditions, e.g. in Turkey, within the co-operation in the UNESCO UniTwin Network for Underwater Archaeology (Galecki and Kuśnierek 2016).

³¹ Ed. note: most projects took place in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship; Tworki Skrodzkie and the Biebrza River are in the Podlaskie Voivodeship; Lake Niedzięgiel is located in the Greater Poland Voivodeship and the Muchawka River in the Masovian Voivodeship.

³² Ed. note: a series of mid-17th-century Swedish campaigns in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

³³ More particular information about majority of aforementioned sites is included in the hereby volume.

by M.A. Zbigniew Stasiak (Mileszczyk 2010). Moreover, the researchers of the Institute have participated in projects organized by the National Maritime Museum in Gdańsk. The 'Windborne' (*Wiatrem Gnane*) expedition might be mentioned in this place, led by Iwona Pomian, M.A. (head of the Underwater Archaeology Department³⁴ in NMM), which actual result was the documentation of more than 40 Swedish cannons dated to the end of the 18th century, being a cargo of a wreck lying on the depth of more than 40 m (Kontny and Pomian 2011). The underwater archaeologists from the University of Warsaw were also invited to participate in the significant project in the so-called 'Bay of Wrecks' (*Zatoka Wraków*), supervised by Prof. Waldemar Ossowski (the documented wrecks were dated to e.g. Middle Ages) and – also led by Prof. Ossowski – research on the notorious Copper Wreck (Ossowski 2014: 111–115). Among the most exotic places studied by University's underwater archaeologists are e.g. Kuwaiti Failaka Island's coastal zone fish-traps (Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology UW³⁵ – cf. e.g. Nowakowska 2013) and the Andean lakes survey in search for sanctuaries (The Centre for Precolumbian Studies UW³⁶), with the participation of Magdalena Nowakowska. Additionally, from the very beginning, the very close, even familiar relations connect the Institute with the Museum of Diving³⁷ in Warsaw, managed by the curator Karina Kowalska and WKP PTTK (fig. 7). Recently the close co-operation has also been established with the *Centro de Arqueología Subacuática* in Cádiz, Spain, effecting in a training of the student of Prof. Modrzewska-Pianetti, Joanna Staniszevska, M.A.

Since 2014 the Institute of Archaeology is a full member of UNESCO UniTwin Network for Underwater Archaeology, which federates the universities from the whole Europe. The fundamental purpose of the Network is the exchange of information and experience in scope of didactics and education in the field of protection of underwater cultural heritage. Magdalena Nowakowska, M.A., along with Karolina Trusz, M.A. being an official co-ordinator in this body, lately has also been appointed the member of the International Scientific Committee CMAS.

Therefore, the second decade of the 21st century might be regarded as very successful for the academic underwater archaeology in Warsaw. As a mean of recognition one might consider the organization of the 7th International Wreck Festival (the 11th of February 2017) at the University of Warsaw. A kind of confirmation for the development of the discipline

³⁴ Ed. note: *Dział Badań Podwodnych*.

³⁵ Ed. note: *Centrum Archeologii Śródziemnomorskiej UW*.

³⁶ Ed. note: *Ośrodek Badań Prekolumbijskich UW*.

³⁷ Ed. note: *Muzeum Nurkowania*.

are also the international seminars dedicated to underwater archaeology and the hereby issue, prepared by young researchers; several Ph.D. theses are also *in spe*. It is hoped that in the next 10 years the analogical review of achievements of the University of Warsaw's underwater archaeologists (fig. 8) would yield even more impressive!

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Fig. 1 –WKP PTTK scuba-divers in Biskupin
(photo: T. Biniewski, courtesy of K. Kowalska, Museum of Diving)



Fig. 2 – Underwater excavations in Rybno, Piłakno Lake published in the magazine “Poznaj Świat”, 12.08.1961 (courtesy of K. Kowalska, Museum of Diving)



Fig. 3 – Mieczysław Kwapisiewicz in Rybno, Piłakno Lake (published in the magazine “Poznaj Świat”, 12.08.1961, courtesy of K. Kowalska, Museum of Diving)



Fig. 4 – Zdzisław Skrok during the research at Gdańska Bay (after: Skrok 1991)



Fig. 5 – Group of diving archaeologists – Archaeological Festival in Biskupin, 1995
(from the archive of B. Kontny)



Fig. 6 – Student trip to Gdańsk, 1998 (from the archive of B. Kontny)



Fig. 7 – Karina Kowalska (Museum of Diving) and Laura White (Institute of Nautical Archaeology, Texas University), Warsaw 2012 (photo: G. Kowalski)



Fig. 8 – Underwater archaeologists from the Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw – professional diver III class certification training, 2011 (photo: W. Mattya)