

The plans of medieval Polish towns

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Abstract. *The origins of Polish towns can be traced to the beginning of the Polish state. Most of them were founded before town charters existed, in the period between the end of the tenth century and the beginning of the thirteenth century. Most of the towns developed where there already existed a gród (the fortified seat of a local sovereign), craftsmen, and an incipient market. The first charters were granted at the beginning of the thirteenth century. By the end of the fifteenth century as many as 800 towns were chartered. In most cases, towns incorporated in their plans elements from the irregular layouts of existing settlements. Few towns were founded on previously undeveloped sites. Nevertheless, there still exist fine examples of perfectly formed regular Gothic towns.*

Key Words: town plans, charters, medieval period, Poland

Like towns all over the world, those in Poland have been affected by a great variety of internal and external factors, as well as the period of their foundation and the duration of their existence. Among the factors affecting the spatial form of towns are the local environment, the inheritance from older settlement forms, the principal functions that the town has performed, the urban concepts and aesthetic preferences at the time of the foundation of towns, and the catastrophes (such as wars, fires and floods) that may have erased legacies of the past. Many of these factors relate to the cultural norms, both native and from neighbouring countries, prevalent at key stages in the past development of a town, as well as the geopolitical circumstances of the country's regions at different times.

In European terms, Poland is a relatively large country, and its different environments

have created a varied basis for the location and layout of towns. The different regions of Poland (Figure 1) have had different types of economy and levels of development and have been open to contacts with the outer world to varying degrees.

Generally speaking, Poland's receptiveness to outside influences has been considerable, particularly in the sphere of culture, including architecture. Thus, in the landscape of Polish towns in different regions of the country, one can recognize different foreign elements of architecture and town planning: German, Byzantine, Hungarian, Italian, Dutch, Russian and others. Historically, the territory of Poland has had changing political borders and often particular parts of the country remained for centuries within separate political units, often hostile to one another. Consequently, towns in particular regions of Poland took shape

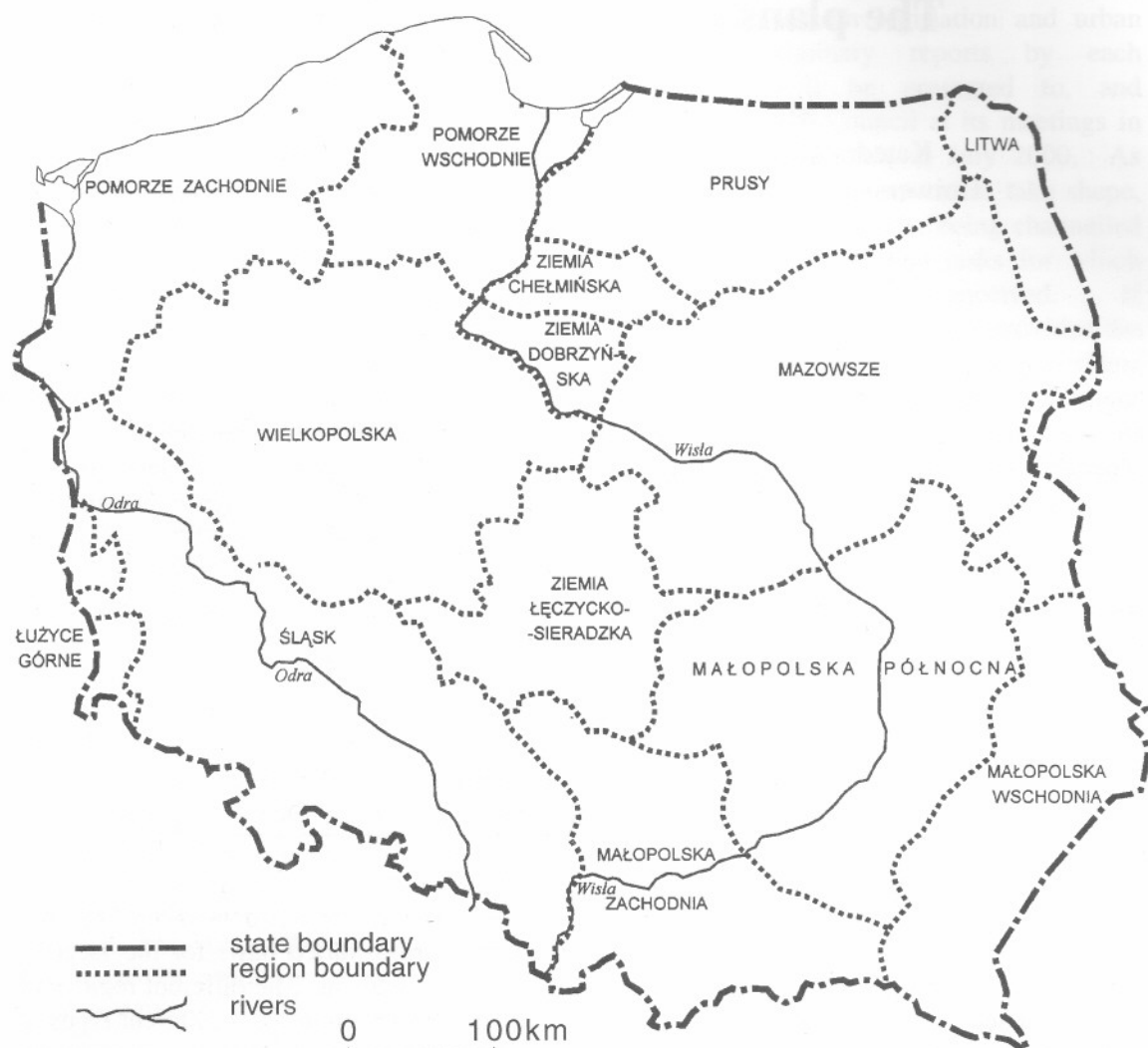


Figure 1. Division of Poland into historical regions.

more or less independently of one another, according to different aesthetic patterns, in relation to separate economic and geopolitical systems. The latter resulted in the rise in the present territory of Poland of an unusually large number of towns that played a military role and contributed to the outbreak of very frequent armed conflicts, which to a large extent destroyed or deformed the original spatial forms of many towns.

For these reasons, the rise of towns within Poland was not a single or a homogeneous process. On the contrary, towns varied from

region to region in their genesis, the time when chartered privileges were granted, the forms of layout, the character of buildings, the receptivity to external, aesthetic patterns and the intensity of urban processes. In terms of physical form there are four basic, regional varieties of medieval towns in Poland: Silesian, Pomeranian, Prussian and Wielkopolan.

Silesia is characterized by the largest variety of genetic types and urban physical forms. Being situated near the borders with Bohemia and Germany, it was influenced by

the cultures of these two countries as well as that of Poland. In the early Middle Ages Silesia was the richest Polish province, so the first pre-chartered towns began to appear here. According to the different roles that they played – military, commercial, handicraft or mining – the towns adopted different spatial forms. Owing to its borderland location, Silesia was the first region to be affected by the diffusion of West European innovations, including the idea of Gothic chartered towns. The first chartered towns occurred there as early as the beginning of the thirteenth century (Złotoryja received its charter in 1211), based on Magdeburg law, and adopted different forms – sometimes geometrical, sometimes comparatively irregular. These differences reflected the adaptation of layouts to physiographical conditions, as well as the degree to which older pre-urban, morphological elements were adapted to the new chartered plan. Generally speaking, the degree of adaptation was quite high. Created in Silesia, in Środa Śląska, the model chartered town was later to become an organizational-legal model for many Polish towns, based on what became known as the Środa Śląska law.

Pomerania, which was only temporarily (in the eleventh and twelfth centuries) part of the Polish state, later functioned as an independent duchy. It was increasingly subjected to German influence and formed its own morphological type of medieval town. Here, the chartered town also adapted many irregular pre-chartered forms, among which the oval layouts of the old market settlements are numerous. Absorption of pre-chartered relicts by medieval towns tended to reduce the regularity of their plans. In some cases pre-chartered relicts affected the layouts to such an extent that even German researchers perceived them as having continuity with Slavonic settlements (Bobiński, 1975). A characteristic feature of the layouts of Pomeranian towns is the presence of medieval fortification walls resembling a circle or an oval. In the towns of Western Pomerania there are few segments of walls in

the form of straight lines, which was normal in towns founded *in cruda radice* (on previously undeveloped sites). Chartered towns were founded in Pomerania according to the Lübeck pattern which was a checkerboard-type plan with an oblong market-place, of a type found in Brandenburg, partly occupied by the church and the stalls surrounding it, and partly by a town hall which appeared a little later. That pattern was only occasionally transferred to Polish lands neighbouring Pomerania (for example to Wielkopolska (Münch, 1946).

Prussia (the former German Eastern Prussia and the present Warmia and Mazury) was in the early Middle Ages populated by small, pagan Prussian tribes related to Lithuanians. These tribes had existed within tribal structures and had never formed mature state organisms. Until recently it had been supposed that, owing to poor economic development, their settlement forms were unsophisticated. However, this view is now being questioned. In 1226, to defend his lands from Prussian invasion, the Polish duke Conrad II of Mazovia, brought to his borders a German order of monks, the Knights of Mary the Virgin of German House in Jerusalem, commonly known as the Teutonic Knights. In a short period of time not only did they defeat the Prussians but they also conquered all their lands and founded their own state on that territory – entirely independent of Poland and soon hostile to it. On the conquered territories the Teutonic Knights formed a completely new dense network of towns, the majority of them reinforced by castles. Owing to the insignificant role of pre-chartered settlements, those towns were in fact founded *in cruda radice* according to the model of the Gothic chartered town transferred direct from the West. Thus, Prussian towns, like practically no other towns in Europe, are characterized by an almost perfect checkerboard-type plan. The first town to be created according to such a plan was Kulm (now named Chełmno, founded in 1233). The legal and spatial models adopted there were later to be transferred, in the form of the so-called

Chełmno law, to the remaining chartered towns in Prussia and were also used in many chartered towns in the borderland Polish provinces (for example in Gdańsk Pomerania, Kujawy and Mazovia).

Wielkopolska was the nucleus of the Polish state by the end of the tenth century. The towns founded here, such as Gniezno, Poznań and Kruszwica, are the oldest pre-chartered towns on Polish territory. Resulting from *gród* (round-fort) systems or market settlements, they tended to lack a specific plan type. The idea of a chartered town, transferred here in the middle of the thirteenth century, partly based on the Środa Śląska model and partly on Magdeburg law, thus had to be adapted to the existing pre-chartered forms. As a consequence, in chartered plans of towns in Wielkopolska one can perceive numerous relicts of older forms. However, the charter was often connected with the transfer of an old centre – usually situated in the strategically important but unhealthy marshlands at the bottom of valleys – to a more suitable place. The older of such towns took a regular form characteristic of new towns located *in cruda radice*.

The dominant role of Wielkopolska within the borders of the Polish state caused both pre-chartered and chartered towns in the other Polish provinces (such as Małopolska, Kujawy and Mazovia) to develop according to a similar model.

Indigenous pre-chartered plans

In the tenth and eleventh centuries, at the beginning of the Polish state, *gróds* and their surrounding territories were of particular significance for the settlement pattern, especially in the upper ranks of the settlement hierarchy. Over almost the entire country there were fortified *gróds* of varying sizes. Larger *gróds* played the role of local administrative centres. The attached settlements of traders and craftsmen provided services for the surrounding territory. A number of *gród* territories, that had

developed from tribal areas, composed the provinces of the state. The centres of the provinces were the main *gróds* in the state and they simultaneously formed the most important centres of handicrafts and trade (Figure 2). There was a clear relationship between the strongholds and the process by which the land was colonized. Not every *gród* gave rise to a town. The chances of a fully-fledged town developing were greatest where a trading settlement developed adjacent to a *gród* complex. The *gród*, being the centre of political or religious authority or both, tended to become a focus of social and cultural life. The craftsmen in the settlement attached to the *gród* supplied the needs of the *gród* as well as those of surrounding settlements. The combination of crafts and trade created an early basis for the transformation of settlements into multi-functional towns.

Fairs were first mentioned at the end of the eleventh century. They were formed both within *gród* complexes and outside them. At the end of the twelfth century there were



Figure 2. Plan of Gniezno – the first capital of Poland – in the eleventh century (after Hensel, 1960, p. 151).

about 250 market settlements on the territory of Poland. Even today in the landscapes of many towns there exist outlines of former market-places of various geometrical shapes, mostly roughly oval or rectangular, but some of them triangular, trapezoid or rhomboid. Notable examples of preserved early medieval markets are those at Sobótka in Silesia and Grabów Łęczycki in Wielkopolska (Figures 3 and 4).

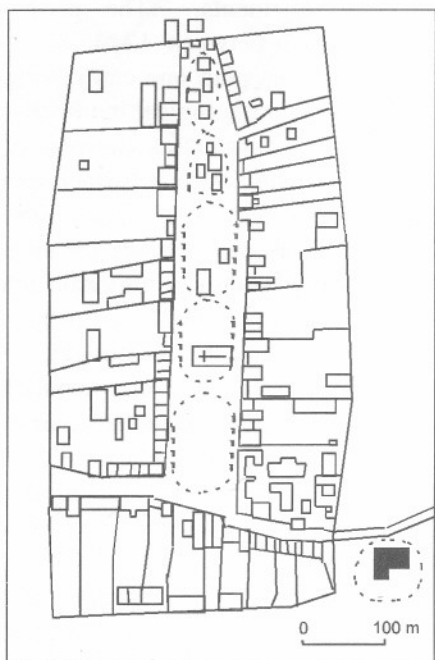


Figure 3. Plan of Sobótka in Silesia in the twelfth century (after Pudełko, 1967).

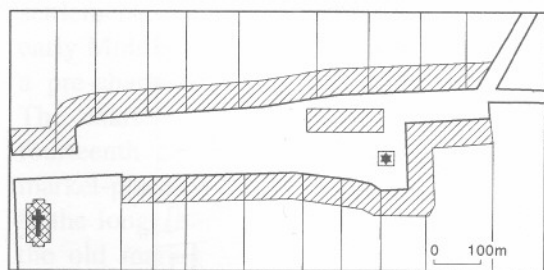


Figure 4. Street plan of Grabów Łęczycki in Wielkopolska in 1893 (original in Main Archive of Old Acts (hereafter AGAD), cartographic collection, 491-81).

Sobótka, at the foot of the Ślęza Mountain, was mentioned as a trading settlement in

1193. It was granted a charter in 1399. Its preserved twelfth-century plan is the oldest in the Polish lands. Its main element is an elongated, irregular market-place, which in its shape resembles an English medieval high street (Pudełko, 1967) (Figure 3). The early medieval settlement of Grabów Łęczycki was transformed into a town in 1372. Owing to the fact that it did not continue to develop in later years the town has an unusual plan, based on a site (later transformed into a market-place) shaped like an elongated triangle (Kulesza, 1994) (Figure 4).

Both of these towns have retained to the present key features of the plans they had before they received their charters, including the market (which is generally the earliest evidence of urban functions in Poland), roads, the site of the church, fragments of the plot pattern, and bridging points.

Adaptations of pre-chartered plans

Within the Polish lands there are some towns that consist of an admixture of pre-chartered settlement forms and urban forms created following the granting of a charter. Most of them are to be found in Silesia, the richest province in Poland in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The new city laws had been introduced there as early as the beginning of the thirteenth century and granted to over 130 centres according to the German pattern, later called German law. Most of the market settlements in Silesia were given charters. The market-place was the element of the pre-chartered layout that was most commonly preserved. Środa Śląska and Złotoryja in Silesia, two of the oldest chartered towns in Poland, are examples of towns that incorporated forms from the pre-chartered period.

Already in the twelfth century Środa Śląska was mentioned as a trading settlement. It later gave rise to a town, which received a charter in 1214. The main part of the pre-urban complex is still preserved. The oval market-place with the church situated at its exit was characteristic of the layout of

market settlements in early-medieval times. Towards the east and west the site becomes narrower and forms a through street with gates at both ends. The northern and southern edges of the site are slightly curved and contain several, adjacent, wedge-shaped plots. That not all plots were regular suggests that relicts of an earlier settlement might have survived. The town covered about 20ha (Pudełko, 1964, p. 124). Almost entirely preserved, the line of fortification walls surrounds the town, creating a rectangle of about 475m by 425m (Figure 5). This is a fine example of an almost entirely preserved layout of an old native market settlement incorporated within a chartered town.

Złotoryja, chartered in 1211, was the first town on Polish lands to be created according to the German pattern. It was a gold-mining settlement. Like Środa Śląska, the spatial layout of Złotoryja has an elongated form of early market-place. However, unlike in Środa Śląska, the shape of the site was to a

large degree the consequence of a charter regulation that had existed there. Thus, the site has the form of an elongated rectangle, slightly wider towards the church, which is situated at its southern end. As a consequence, the layout is less subjected to the discipline of the geometric, chartered scheme (Pudełko, 1964; 1967) (Figure 6).

Chojna, situated in Western Pomerania, is another example of a town which in its irregular layout maintained relicts of pre-chartered arrangements. The town was granted a charter between 1244 and 1257. When analysing its plan one can distinguish two particular morphological units that are different in their form from the rest of the town's layout. The first is a former spindle-shaped market-place. At the time of foundation of a chartered town according to the Brandenburg pattern, a trapezoid market and a church plot were laid out in this area (Münch, 1946, p. 176; Wittlinger, 1932; Zbierski, 1964). The other is a former *gród* site adjacent to the market and surrounded by

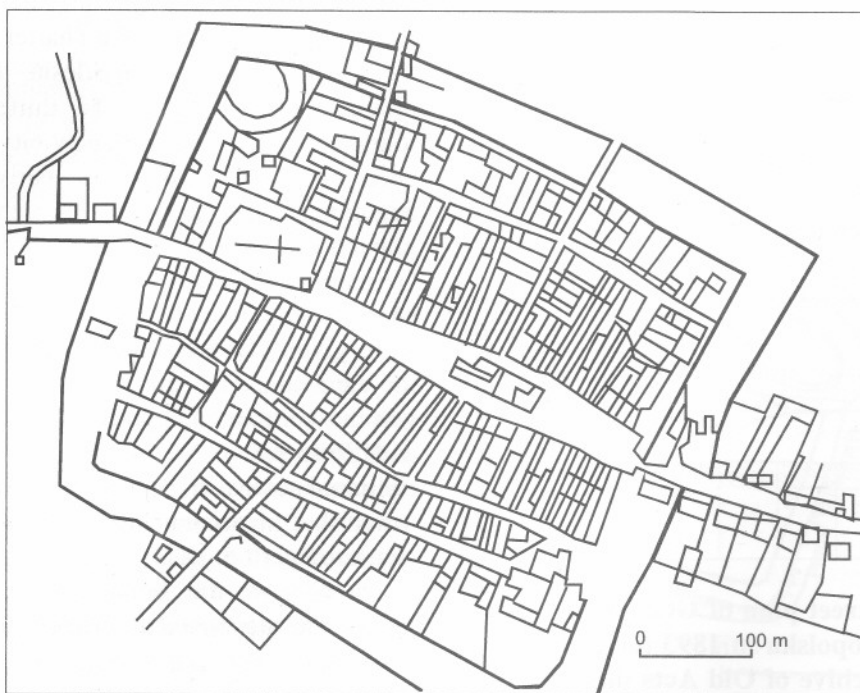


Figure 5. Plan of Środa Śląska in Silesia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (after Bobiński, 1975, p. 149).

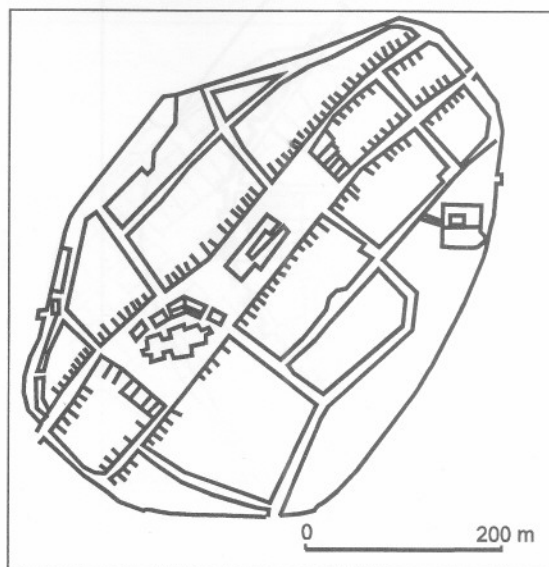


Figure 6. Plan of Złotoryja in Silesia in the thirteenth century (after Münch, 1960, p. 350).

a characteristic oval of peripheral streets. Since there are no remnants of any adjoining settlement of craftsmen, one can assume that Chojna developed from the former complex of a *gród*-market settlement (Bobiński, 1975) (Figure 7).

The layout of Inowłódz, in eastern Wielkopolska, is one of the finest relics of medieval town planning in Poland (Figure 8). At the foot of a hill, near a trade route, surrounded by the meadows in the meanders of the Pilica river, there appeared a market settlement in the eleventh century. In the early Middle Ages there was a *gród* here and a pre-chartered town developed next to it. The chartered town that developed in the fourteenth century had a long, rectangular market-place on a north-south axis – parallel to the longer edges of the island – replacing the old market site. Its vast size – about 250m north-south by 50m west-east (Zarębska, 1984, pp. 51, 70) – was striking in relation to the small area of the chartered town (about 6 ha). The urban layout assumed the shape of a rectangle which was a characteristic of urban planning during the reign of King Kazimierz Wielki.

As these examples indicate, in many cases

chartered towns incorporated pre-chartered forms which to a great degree influenced their planning and spatial layout. This influence is clearly visible in the shape of market-places, and some streets and city walls follow – to a greater or lesser degree – the embankments and palisades of the fortification schemes of pre-chartered towns, as in Chojna and Inowłódz.

New simple chartered plans

On the territory of present-day Poland about 500 towns were granted charters based on German law. The associated layouts can be divided into simple, complex and multicomponent ones. Simple forms are those where the whole town was composed of a single morphological unit – just the market place with fronting plots. In the case of complex forms there is a hierarchical relation between two basic elements – for example an ‘old’ and a ‘new’ town. In the case of multicomponent forms there are several quarters with different functions and layouts (Dziewoński, 1962).

The spatial planning of the Polish chartered town required first of all establishing the location of the market. Then the plots for the first settlers were delineated. The remaining area was meant for public buildings (such as a church or a castle), or provided a reserve of land. Examples of simple layouts are to be found in Paczków, Strzelce Krajeńskie, Łęczyca and Chełmno.

Paczków, situated in Silesia, was founded in 1254 as a border stronghold. Its almost entirely preserved urban fortifications earned it the name of the Polish Carcassonne. The fortification walls, made of local crushed stone, are about 9m high and are strengthened with 19 towers. They form an oval about 1200m long. In the fourteenth century they were additionally fortified by another, outer circle of walls with four gates and towers. The layout was planned very regularly with a large rectangular market-place and ten converging streets. The whole forms a regular, classical checker-board (Figure 9).



Figure 7. Plan of Chojna in 1724 (after Münch, 1946, p. 175).

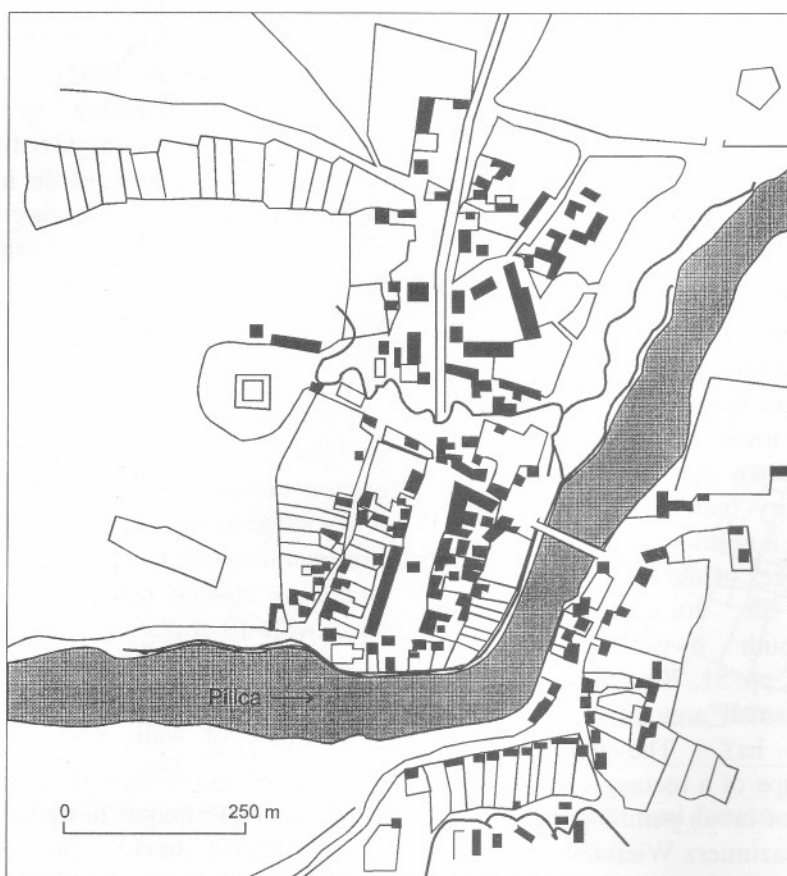


Figure 8. Plan of Inowłódz in 1827/8 (AGAD, Commission Governing Internal Affairs, vol. 870).

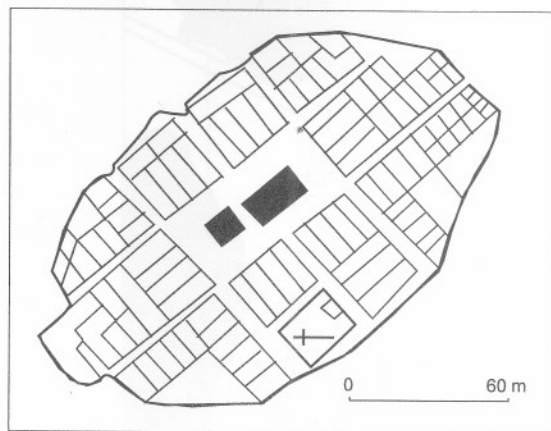


Figure 9. Plan of Paczków in the fourteenth century (after Pudełko, 1967, Fig. 14)

Strzelce Krajeńskie is situated on the border of Western Pomerania and Kujawy. Like Paczków, it possesses an oval layout, quite rare in the Polish lands. The town was granted civic rights between 1272 and 1286. In Strzelce, where the general outline of city walls is roughly elliptical, the internal layout resembles a checker-board with a long market-place of Brandenburg pattern (Münch, 1946, p. 176; Wittlinger, 1932) (Figure 10). The most striking element of the layout in Strzelce is a circle of land, about 40-50m wide, running inside the walls and divided into plots surrounding the inner chequered layout. It must have replaced earlier town fortifications – embankments, palisade and moat – which originally had a smaller circumference. Later, when the town continued to develop and new plots were needed within which to build, the fortifications were pulled down and replaced by new walls of a larger circumference, built on their outer side (Siedler, 1914).

The town of Łęczyca was founded in the thirteenth century on an undeveloped site, at some distance from the original settlement of that name – the *gród* and the market settle-

ment – built on inaccessible marshlands. The town had an unusually geometrical layout, comprising regularly placed blocks of the same size as the market-place. It was planned in the form of a cross. The four arms of the cross, adjacent to the market-place, were divided into residential plots, whereas the castle, the parish church and cloister were placed in corners. The area occupied by the town, resembling a square with rounded corners, was divided quite regularly into nine squares of initially equal size. The site of chartered Łęczyca, forming almost a square, distinguishes the town from later foundations which, for practical reasons, were oval-shaped. By rounding the corners of the square the circumference of walls was diminished and their construction was made less costly (Figure 11).

Chełmno, situated in former Prussia, and founded in 1233 as the Teutonic town of Kulm, was created on a previously undeveloped site. The town's interior was planned in an unusually geometrical way in the form of a regular checker-board. However, the circumference of the town walls has numerous curves and folds, being the result of the efforts to adapt to the uneven slope (Figure 12).

New complex chartered plans

Toruń, situated in the south of Eastern Pomerania, had been founded in the ninth century as a *gród*, with a neighbouring market settlement. The chartered town was erected on the right bank of the Vistula in 1233. In its full form it comprised three parts: the Old Town, the New Town and the Teutonic castle between them. The first stage of its development took place in the 1330s, when a spacious market-place and a network of streets and plots were laid out within the Old Town. In the middle of the

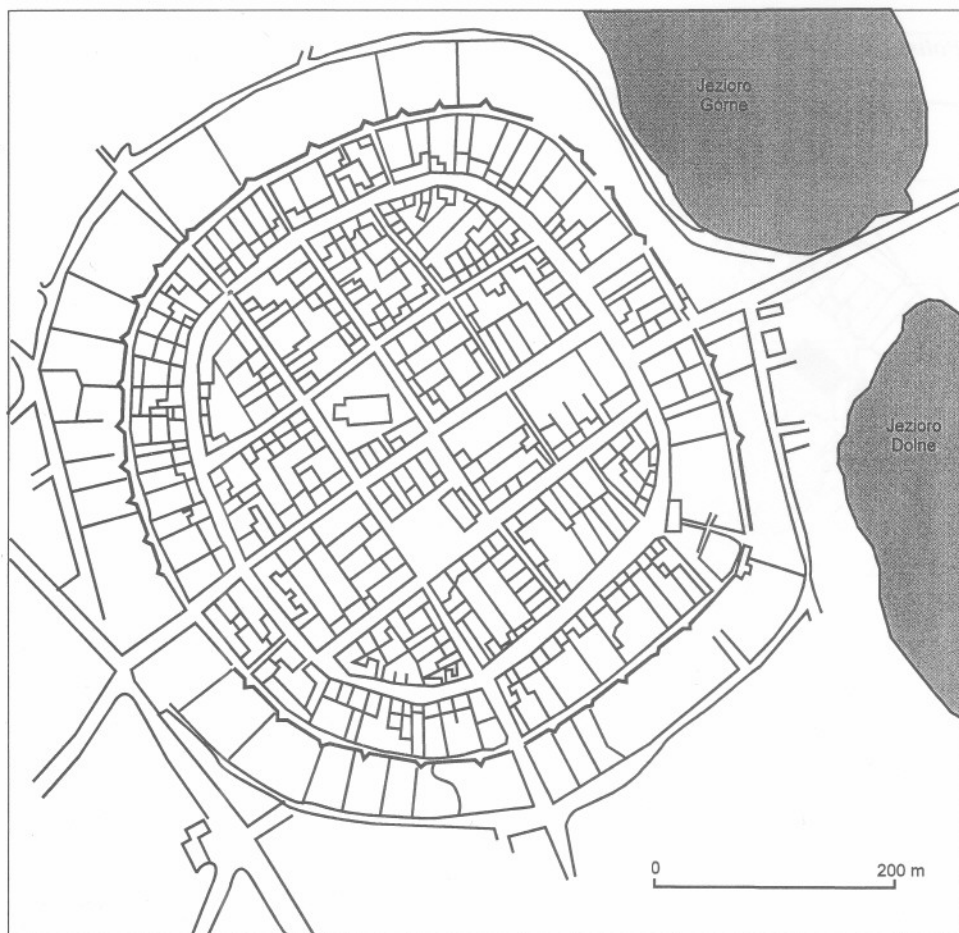


Figure 10. Plan of Strzelce Krajeńskie in 1945 (after Bobiński, 1975, p. 52).

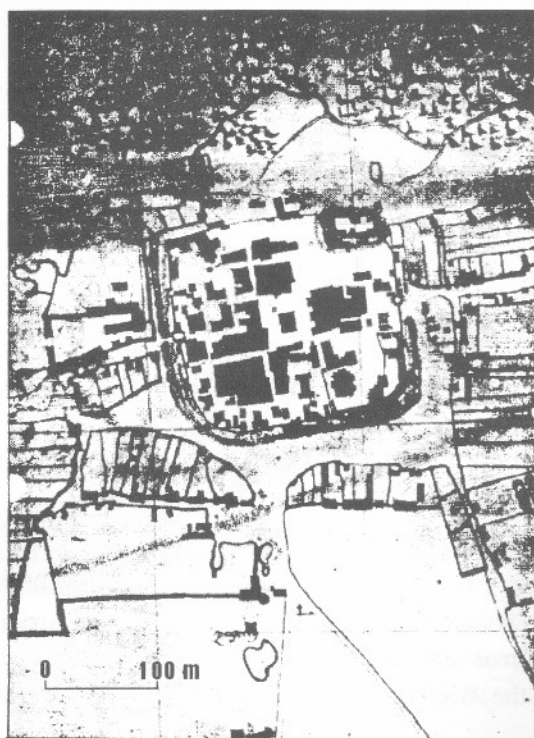


Figure 11. Plan of the Old Town of Łęczyca at the end of the eighteenth century (AGAD, cartographic collection, 554-31).

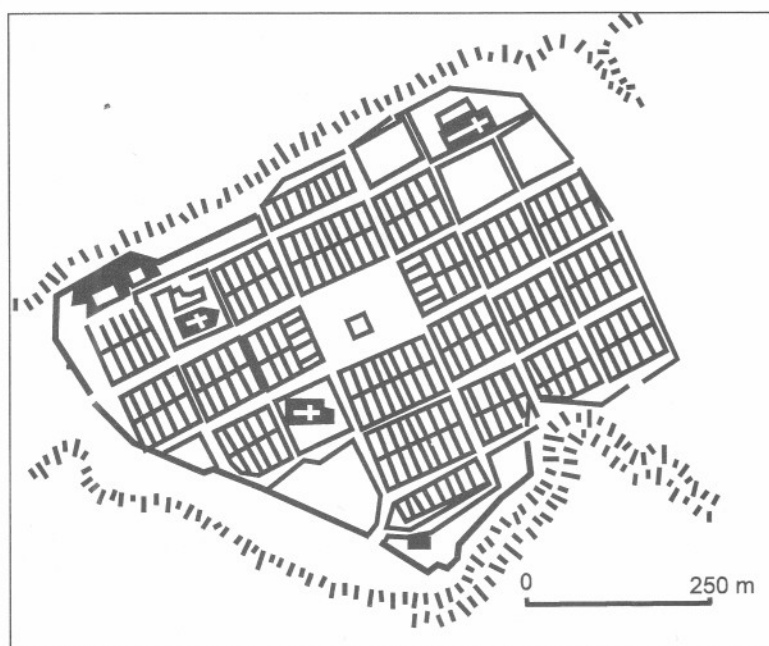


Figure 12. Plan of Chełmno in the thirteenth century (after Bobiński, 1975).

thirteenth century that space turned out to be too small, so the city walls were extended towards the north, thus doubling Toruń's size. The town's population grew rapidly and land outside the town's fortifications was occupied. In a short time a new settlement arose outside the city walls and in 1264 it was granted civic rights. It was called New Town to distinguish it from the Old Town. The layouts of the two towns were similar. As early as the thirteenth century each town had an independent double circle of fortification walls with a moat separating them (Figure 13). Outside the walls of the Old and New Towns there were major extensions (Bobiński, 1951).

The development of Poznań, the capital of Wielkopolska, is characterized by a combination of different urban elements, which in consequence led to a complex layout (Figure 14). One of the islands on which the town is situated, Ostrów Tumski – which includes within it a *gród*, palace and church (A) – is the original part of Poznań. The cathedral borough, containing a monumental Romanesque church (B), was

situated next to it. East of Ostrów Tumski, Poznań's market-place was created in the shape of an oval (Münch, 1946, p. 79). Poznań developed along a north-south axis in the eleventh century. In the middle of the twelfth century two settlements appeared along that route – the older one containing St. Wojciech's church (C) and the younger one containing St. Martin's church (D). The latter one subsequently influenced the layout of the chartered town. The charter was granted between 1244 and 1252. The area of the chartered town covered 21ha. It had a typical medieval layout comprising a rectangular network of streets with a spacious market-place in the centre. The market-place was a square with sides of about 141m. Twelve streets branched from the market-place, three from each frontage. These streets formed regular squares of eight blocks around the market-place. There are exit streets in the middle of the market's frontage, a rare occurrence in Poland.

Port towns had slightly different spatial forms. In conformity with their function, the place of the greatest economic and social

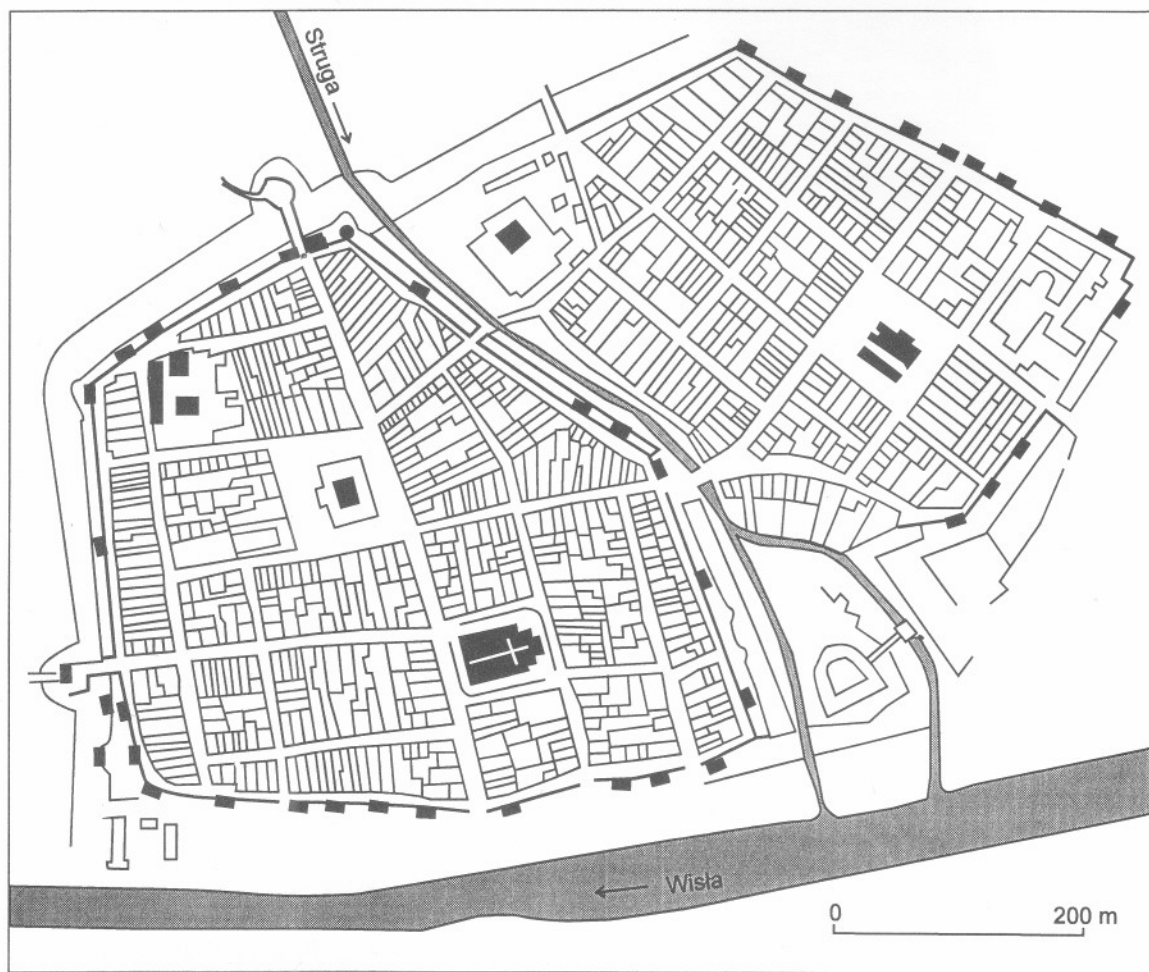


Figure 13. Toruń: the medieval town according to a plan of 1816
(after Bobiński, 1975, p. 69).

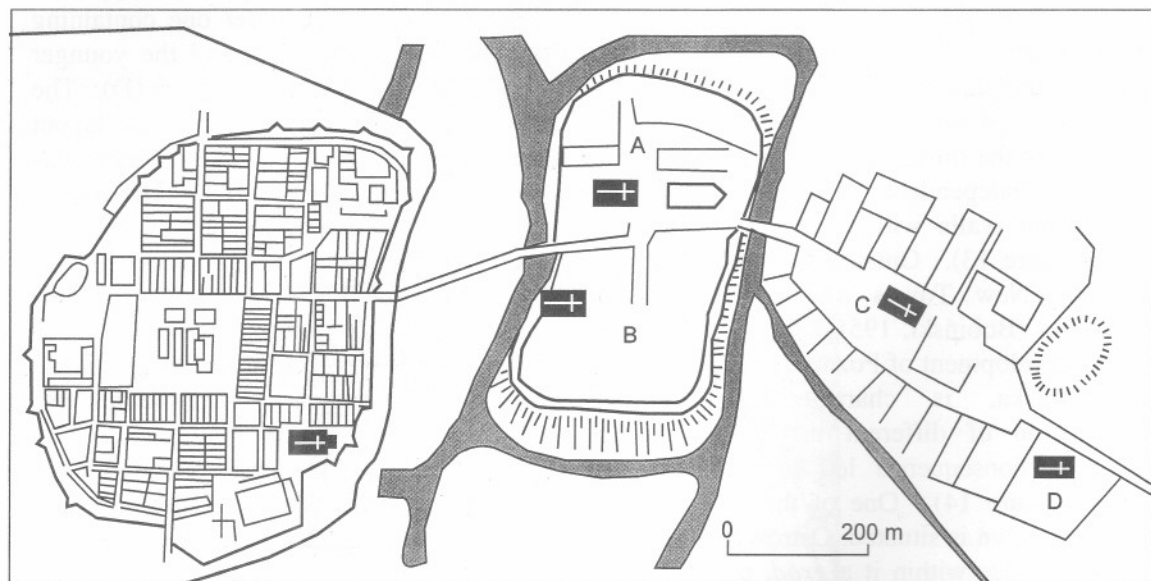


Figure 14. Poznań (after Münch, 1946, p. 79), based on plans of 1734 and 1772/3
(after Zieliński, 1956, p. 58).

activity was not the centrally situated market-place but the wharf or the river bank where trade was concentrated. Owing to that fact, harbour towns had a grid-type layout of streets, aligned with the shore. One of the streets was sometimes subsequently widened to play the role of a central square. Interesting examples can be found at Elbląg and Gdańsk. As these towns were rich and densely populated, their layouts were complex, and in the case of Gdańsk even multicomponent.

The layout of Elbląg, founded in 1237, is an example of a regular arrangement uninhibited by physiographical conditions, or inherited older forms, where a parallel series of streets and the lines of building development were determined with almost

mathematical accuracy. In the fourteenth century this simple layout was supplemented by the foundation of the New Town with the arrangement as regular as that of the Old Town (Figure 15).

The capital of Eastern Pomerania, Gdańsk was founded in about the tenth century on a small island in the estuary of the Vistula. A small *gród* and associated settlement, 2ha in extent, developed here. On the other side of the river, connected by a bridge, there was a market-place. The town's further development took place towards the south. South of an oval market-place, connected with the *gród*, there developed another market-place, on which was sited St. Nicolas's church – the oldest church in Gdańsk. A third market-place appeared near to the ford. It was

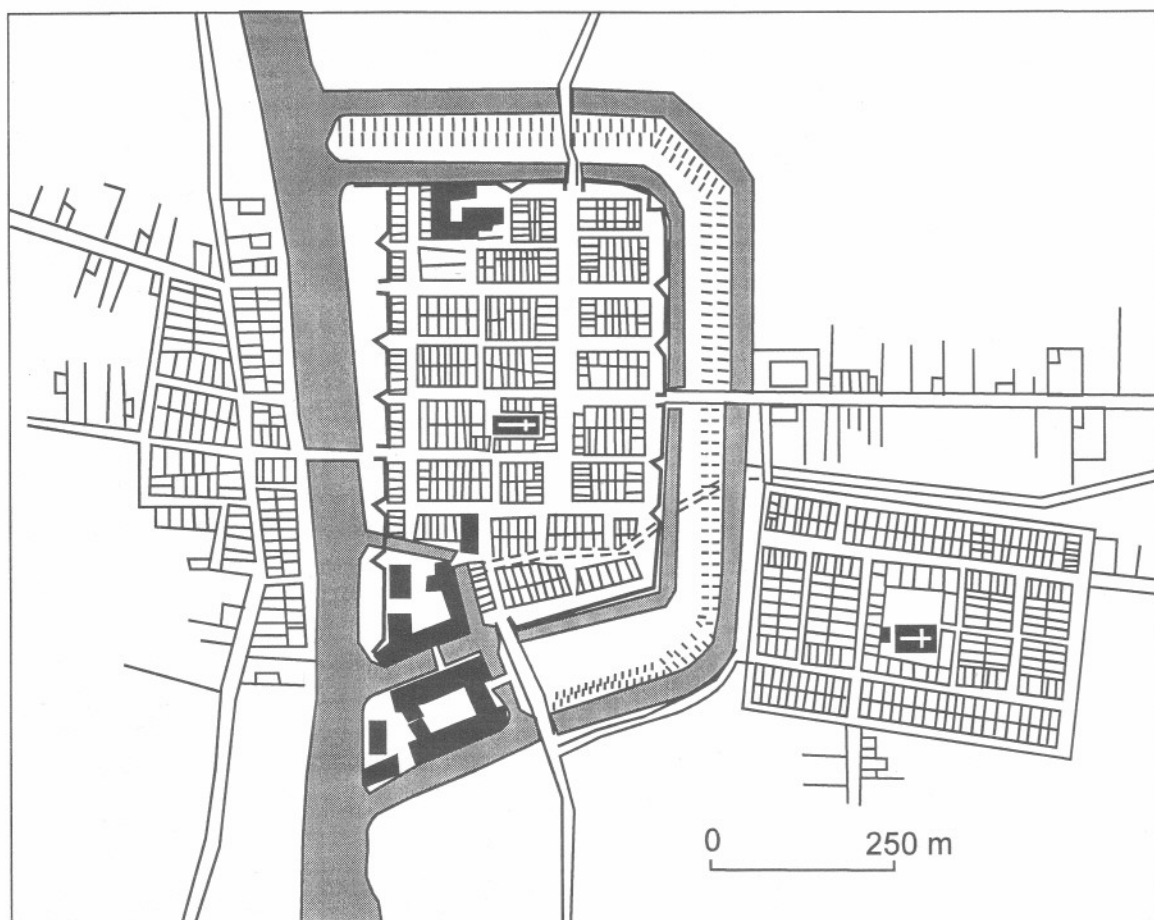


Figure 15. Plan of Elbląg in the fourteenth century (after Rendschmidt, 1945).

connected with the customs house and later with the developing wharf (Figure 16). Settlement started as early as the eleventh century in the vicinity of the present Długi Targ Street. Investigations indicate the existence of a settlement on the territory of the later Main Town, which in all probability had been granted the Lübeck law in 1263. In 1308 the Teutonic Knights conquered Gdańsk. In 1312 they granted a charter to the original island settlement and – in 1343 – to the Main Town. The layout of the latter is characteristic of port towns with a system of streets perpendicular to the wharf. That layout might have been in part an adaptation of an earlier layout. The Main Town covered an area of about 35 ha. The characteristic feature of the layout was the lack of a central, rectangular market-place and the distinctness of the streets leading eastwards to the wharf. One of them, called Długi Targ, widened approaching the port and played the role of a market-place. The streets on a north-south axis were of secondary significance. The Main Town was connected with the Old Town, lying west of it, by a single street. The first suburbs appeared in the fifteenth century and complemented the multicomponent layout of medieval Gdańsk (Figure 16).

In contrast to rich west European towns, in which handicrafts and trade gave employment to many inhabitants, the much poorer Polish towns, particularly the small ones, were to a large degree dependent on agriculture. The surrounding tracts of land are one of the most characteristic and distinctive features of medieval chartered towns in Poland (Figure 17). Whereas the built-up areas of the towns ranged in size from 8.5 to 54 ha, the surrounding tracts, even in small towns, were of at least 340 ha and sometimes over 1700 ha.

Urban tracts consisted of fields, meadows, forests and pastures. The most characteristic feature was the layout of the arable land according to the three-field system. All the arable land was divided into three fields, the number of arable plots in each of which corresponded to the number of families at the



Figure 16. Gdańsk in the Middle Ages
(after Bobiński, 1975, p. 19).

time of foundation of the town. In certain years the first field was meant for spring crops, the second for winter crops and the third lay fallow. Rotation of crops took place every year. Additions to the main fields – long, winding strips, running in different directions – created a very complex urban-agricultural layout, very characteristic of Polish towns in feudal times. As the development of towns continued in later times, these narrow plots, which were not practicable for building purposes, posed problems for rational urban development.

Conclusion

There is a common belief that Polish towns were created in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by German settlers. However, the

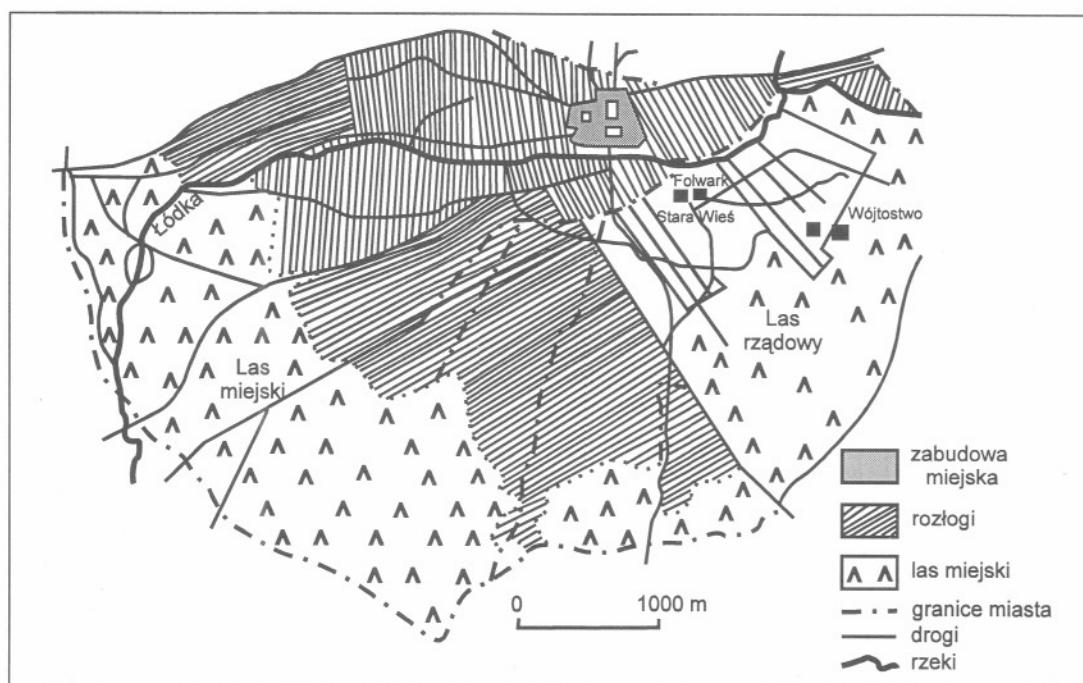


Figure 17. The medieval agrarian patterns of rural Łódź (after Koter, 1970, p. 32).

majority of Polish towns began earlier and evolved over many centuries. The original pre-chartered Polish town was a multifunctional settlement complex, consisting of the fortified seat of the local ruler, one or more artisan areas, and a trading area with a market-place. Many of these settlements were already quite large towns in the early Middle Ages and were therefore described in Latin documents as *civitas*.

Mongolian invasions of the country in 1241, 1259-60 and 1287-8 resulted in an enormous destruction and depopulation of most towns. Consequently there was a need to bring in new settlers, and they usually came from densely populated and undevastated German countries. Along with that immigration to Poland from the West followed the idea of a planned chartered town. As it had mostly originated from German countries, the new concept of legal-spatial organization of towns led to charters based on German law, in contrast to earlier foundations chartered according to Polish law. The charter based on German law was not synonymous with German colonization,

although in many cases, particularly in Silesia and Pomerania, the number of German settlers was significant.

The introduction of a charter based on German law consisted, first of all, in the acceptance of new organizational-legal patterns. To begin with, urban forms resulting from that law mostly consisted of fortifications surrounding existing layouts, which were only slightly modified. In the course of time, particularly in larger towns, the inherited, native, morphological elements were complemented by new ones of greater regularity. This particularly applied to the area surrounding the market-place.

Entirely new foundations, created on previously undeveloped sites, were less common in Poland than is usually supposed. For example, in Central Poland by the end of the sixteenth century out of 200 towns only a few had been founded *de novo*. Yet they were probably more numerous than in German lands. It is a paradox that the theoretical, geometrical concept of the Gothic chartered town, born in western Europe, achieved its purest form in Polish lands.

When the concept was being born in western Europe, towns there had already been physically shaped, and little in their layout could be changed. In the Polish lands there were more opportunities, for example to introduce fortifications. These gave towns a geometrical outer form. Later, checker-board plans were added. Finally, in a few striking cases – similar to the theoretical model – towns were transferred from an old site to a new one better suited to their development.

Naturally, the ideal model that spread from western Europe was adapted to local conditions and underwent regional mutations. In consequence, within the Polish lands there are at least four regional types of chartered towns, namely in Silesia, Pomerania, Prussia and Wielkopolska, which in different ways were adapted in other provinces of the country.

Variety in the economic development of Polish towns, associated with their weak non-agricultural functions and, simultaneously, important urban agriculture, has found its reflection in specific morphological forms. Rural forms, much more extensive than urban land development, are the most characteristic feature of Polish settlements in the feudal period. These rural forms have been the subject of considerable morphogenetic study. Such study has practical significance, since the relics of these rural features have an enduring influence on the inner structures of present-day Polish towns.

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