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The castle in Kruszwica. A historical and archaeological overview*

Abstract. This article presents written sources that make it possible to reconstruct the history and appearance of the castle in Kruszwica, built in the mid-14th century on the initiative of King Casimir the Great. These are primarily the lustrations of the royal estates and Erik Jönsson Dahlbergh's engraving included in Samuel Pufendorf's work *De rebus a Carolo Gustavo Sueciae Rege gestis*. However, basic information about the Crusaders' defensive foundation is provided by archaeological research, which verifies and supplements previous historical knowledge. Thus, the results of several archaeological explorations are described, which made it possible to secure the remains of the fortress, reconstruct its layout and form, as well as its later fate in the 19th–21st centuries.

Keywords: Kruszwica, castle, sources, archaeology.

Kruszwica was an important administrative and ecclesiastical centre for the state of the first Piasts. The proximity of the hostile State of the Teutonic Order in Prussia led to a modern brick castle being built in Kruszwica in the mid-14th century on the initiative of the Polish king, Casimir the Great. Its military significance decreased in the latter 15th century when the power of the Teutonic Order was broken. From then on, the castle in Kruszwica was principally the seat of the *starost*, who performed administrative and judicial functions on behalf of the king. In the 16th century, the stronghold experienced two fires, but it was finally ultimately destroyed by the Swedes in 1657. Only the tower known as the Mysia (Mouse Tower) and fragments of defensive walls remain. This article presents written sources that can be used to recreate the history and appearance of the entire defense complex. These are primarily property survey reports ('lustrations') of royal estates and a sketch by Erik Jönsson Dahlbergh in Samuel Pufendorf's *De rebus a Carolo Gustavo Sueciae Rege*

* We dedicate this work to the memory of Professor Wojciech Dzieduszycki (1946–2020), the distinguished scholar of the history of Kruszwica.

gestis. However, the mainstay of information about the defensive site in Kruszwica is provided by archaeological research, which verifies and adds to existing historical knowledge. Thus, we describe the results of multiple archaeological investigations that have helped preserve the remains of the fortress and to reconstruct its layout and form.

In the past, as today, Kruszwica was dominated by the Mouse Tower that towers over the surface of Gopło Lake, and it has, to date, more stimulated the imagination of historians and archaeologists than it has inspired them to carry out in-depth historical research. Unfortunately, the Kruszwica castle that it is part of is usually associated in the Polish mindset not with the rather powerful defensive structure, but with the legend of Prince Popiel and the mice.

The former castle motte, with its well-preserved octagonal tower and fragments of the perimeter walls of the former castle of King Casimir III, is situated in the eastern part of the town at the base of the Rzępowski Peninsula. The circumstances of the castle's creation and how it functioned have not yet been studied or presented in detail. In the past, especially in the early Middle Ages, Kruszwica was an important administrative centre of the state of the first Piasts, and, as the first residence of the Kuyavian bishops and later of a collegiate chapter, it also played a special role in creating church structures in this area (Karczewski 2012, pp. 45–69).

Despite arousing widespread curiosity for the myth of the beginnings of Polish statehood that were related to it, throughout the 19th century, and even in the early 20th century, Kruszwica failed to garner more thorough historical and archaeological study. Initially, such study was limited to accidental finds, and later – as the town became more industrialised – to rescue research (Kaczmarek 2018, pp. 61–81). Not much changed in the interwar period. However, in 1934, when sinkholes began to appear near the tower, rescue work was carried out under the supervision of Antoni Bechczyc-Rudnicki from Warsaw. The cause transpired to be the collapse of the earth-covered castle cellars due to the medieval bricks eroding. This research uncovered many interesting cultural objects: ceramics, fragments of two iron keys, a knife with a handle, and a spur¹. Only in the early 1950s did systematic research begin on the early medieval stronghold of Kruszwica that is now referred to as the *przygródek*. It resulted in several synthetic publications². Until then, those curious about the past of Kruszwica and the local castle had to satisfy themselves with the extensive entry in the 'Geographical Dictionary of the Kingdom of Poland' (*Słownik geograficzny* 1883, pp. 737–740) and a monograph by Edmund Callier (1985). Later, reference was always made to an overview of the town's history published over half a century ago that has now become very outdated

¹ Documentation of this research is available in the Archives of the Archaeological Museum in Poznań.

² In addition to a number of detailed published reports, it is worth mentioning here: Hensel 1960; Hensel, Broniewska 1961; Cofta-Broniewska *et al.* 1964, pp. 528–532; Dzieduszycki 1996, pp. 377–380.

(Kruszwica 1965)³. Other than making a few mentions, these works usually remain silent about the history of the Kruszwica castle, giving the subject scant attention. So, too, the description of the castle by Jerzy Frycz in the aforementioned monograph on Kruszwica is very incomplete, as are the other articles therein (Frycz 1965, pp. 338–340). Little information about the castle on Lake Gopło is also contained in lexicons of defensive structures in Poland (Guerquin 1974; Kajzer 2001, pp. 253–255). Archaeological research on the castle motte in 1973–1982 under the supervision of Wojciech Dzieduszycki represented a unique kind of breakthrough. It involved two excavations adjacent to a southern section of the defensive wall within the castle. In the south-western corner of the defensive structure, part of a single-bay, basemented and probably single-storey residential building was uncovered. The brick structure was set on stone foundations and dated from the mid-14th century, although there were also traces of two considerable 16th-century reconstructions (Dzieduszycki 1975, pp. 289–290; Pawlak 1993, pp. 215–232)⁴. This knowledge was used to produce, among other things, a historical and architectural sketch of the stronghold of Kruszwica against the broad background of the whole of Greater Poland that had been provided by Janusz Pietrzak (2003, pp. 80–81; see also Pietrzak 2002, pp. 146–167). After a longer break (i.e. only in 2007–2008), W. Dzieduszycki was able to continue archaeological works at this site. They have already produced their initial results, because recently, although only in popular-scientific version, a work has been published illustrating this latest archaeological research on the castle motte and a concept of its architectural structures (Dzieduszycki *et al.* 2014).

The castle motte became the main settlement point in Kruszwica in the early Middle Ages. It is here that in the latter 10th century the first defensive and craftworking settlement was built (Dzieduszycki 1975, pp. 3–21; 2008, pp. 397–429; Dzieduszycka, Dzieduszycki 1993, pp. 159–172). The advantageous peninsular location, surrounded on three sides by the waters of Lake Gopło and difficult to access from the north though a occasionally flooded passage of wetland, predisposed the site to building a defensive castle. The flourishing of the Kruszwica centre was interrupted by the bloody Battle of Gopło of 1096 between the warriors of Duke Władysław Herman and Zbigniew, who rebelled against his father, on whose side there stood ‘seven troops of Kruszwiczans’ (Anonim 1952, pp. 71–72)⁵. Another great defeat was visited upon the fortress in Kruszwica in 1271, when it was burned down by order of the Duke of Greater Poland, Bolesław the Pious (*Rocznik kapituły*

³ For a detailed review of research on the past of Kruszwica – see Karczewski 2015, pp. 9–26.

⁴ There is also a series of annual reports by W. Dzieduszycki reporting the research results from Kruszwica site 2 (The castle motte), published in ‘Informator Archeologiczny’ in the years 1974–1983. For a summary of the state of research – see Kurzawa 2007, pp. 113–123.

⁵ See also Bieniak 1963, pp. 32–33, which illustrates the importance of this district in Polish–Pomeranian relations at the end of the 11th century.

poznńskiej 1962, pp. 49). Soon thereafter, however, it must have been rebuilt by Ladislaus the Elbow-High [Łokietek] because, in the spring of 1332, a *castrum* in Kruszwica was handed over to the Teutonic Knights without a fight by the castellan (of the Leszczyc family) of Przeźdrzewo (*Lites* 1890, p. 355)⁶. These events brought in the Teutonic Knights occupation of Inowrocław and the castellany of Kruszwica, since this was part of Brześć Kujawski in the years 1332–1337. Meanwhile, the rest of eastern Kuyavia remained under the authority of the Teutonic Order from 1332 to 1343 (Bieniak 1974, pp. 69–97).

These events, among others, probably inspired Casimir the Great to strengthen the defensive and administrative potential of the Kingdom with a system of modern, brick fortifications. According to a fragment of the *Chronicle of Kraków Cathedral* included in the *Chronicle of Jan of Czarnków*, the king in Kuyavia reinforced the uneasy border with the Teutonic Order with a line of new castles in Kruszwica, Złotoria, Przedcz and Bydgoszcz (*Jan z Czarnkowa* 1872, pp. 625–626)⁷. Following this source, Jan Długosz repeatedly mentioned these strongholds in his *Annals* (*Długosz Jan* 1978, p. 349; see also Nowakowski 2016, p. 286). Thus, the *terminus post-quem* for the beginning of construction on the Kruszwica castle is the Teutonic Knights' handing back of Kuyavia under the Treaty of Kalisz in 1343. So, when might it have been substantially completed in terms of being able to fulfil its defensive functions? We believe that the castle already existed in 1365. A document issued in Kruszwica by King Casimir the Great is dated to November 13 of that year whose attestations mention: Przedbór, the *starosta* of Brześć Kujawski; Dobiesław, the castellan of Kruszwica; and, most importantly, Jan, the burgrave of the Kruszwica castle (CDP 1852, no. 522). The castle was erected at a time when the Kruszwica castellany was held by the aforementioned Dobiesław of Kościoła (Kościelna Wieś) of the Ogończyk heraldic clan – a longstanding, trusted official of King Casimir who bore this title in the years 1351–1385 (*Urzednicy* 2014, p. 116, no. 364).

The last Piast to sit on the throne of Poland bequeathed to his maternal grandson, the Duke of Słupsk, Casimir (Kažek), the principalities of Dobrzyń, Kuyavia, Sieradz and Łęczyca along with the castles of Kruszwica, Bydgoszcz, Złotów and Wałcz (*Jan z Czarnkowa* 1872, p. 640). However, this will was revoked at the instigation of the Angevins. Back in ad 1377, Elizabeth of Poland, who was regent to the Kingdom of Poland on behalf of King Louis the Hungarian, had pledged a number of Kuyavian fortresses (including Kruszwica) to Piotr Małocha the *starost* of Brześć Kujawski, for two thousand grzywnas a year (*Jan of Czarnkowa* 1872, p. 677; Bieniak, Syska 1974, pp. 451–453). At that time, in 1380, another burgrave of the Kruszwica castle

⁶ During the great Teutonic Knights invasion of July 1331, the town of Kruszwica managed to escape destruction (*Lites* 1890, pp. 299–300).

⁷ For the basic literature on the defensive projects of Casimir the Great – see Pietrzak 2002, pp. 146–147, especially footnote 4.

appears in the sources – the otherwise unknown Jaśko de Naczenszlaszki (APB, Strzelno Kl., Ref. A 35). After the death of King Louis Angevin in 1383, Brześć Kujawski was taken over, along with Kruszwica, by pretender to the Polish throne Siemowit IV, Duke of Masovia, in whose hands they remained until 1398 (Bieniak 1973, pp. 71–87; Supruniuk 1998, pp. 33–42; 2001, pp. 39–64). During Lent in 1383, the castellan of Kruszwica, Dobiesław of Koscielna Wieś, concluded an agreement with Piotr Małocha, the *starost* of the Brześć Kujawski district, under which he handed over the Kruszwica castle to Wojciech and Jakusz Kulig of Przywieczerzyn of the Nałęcz heraldic clan. These two, in turn, in early June 1383 were involved in transferring the Kruszwica stronghold to Siemowit IV (*Jan z Czarnkowa* 1872, p. 739). At that point, the castle in Kruszwica became an initial posting for knights in the service of Siemowit who plundered the Kuyavia-Greater Poland borderlands (*Jan z Czarnkowa* 1872, pp. 741–742).

Another mention comes from the time of the Polish-Lithuanian Teutonic War (1409–1411), and can be directly related to the Kruszwica castle itself. It was then that, on the orders of King Władysław II Jagiełło, the burgrave of Bydgoszcz, Bernard, was thrown into the tower in Kruszwica for having surrendered the Bydgoszcz castle to the Teutonic Knights in ad 1409 (*Rocznik świętokrzyski* 1996, p. 83; *Długosz Jan* 1997, pp. 32–33; Nowakowski 2016, p. 287, footnote 44).

Rulers' itineraries are a valuable source of information not only about their travel routes, but also about the importance of castles. The frequency of a monarch's stays in a place was determined, *inter alia*, by the political or military significance of the location (Kajzer 1999, pp. 94–98). On this basis, Kruszwica can be ascribed a greater importance only during the times of Casimir the Great, who stayed there at least six times – in 1349, 1358, 1359, 1365, 1368 (Gąsiorowski 1998, pp. 186, 191–192, 197–198, 201). During the reign of Władysław II Jagiełło, the importance of Kruszwica castle waned, as evidenced by the monarch's mere two stays in this city (in 1428 and 1430, each time while travelling from Kuyavia to Greater Poland (Gąsiorowski 2015, pp. 111, 116). The king visited Brześć Kujawski, Inowrocław and Radziejów far more frequently. To complete the picture, it is worth mentioning that his son, Casimir IV Jagiellon, stayed in Kruszwica only once, in 1460 (Rutkowska 2014, p. 178).

In the 16th century, the Kruszwica castle was burned down twice. The first time was in 1519, and the second during the castellany of Wojciech Niemojewski, of the Szeliga heraldic clan, in around 1588 (*Lustracja* 1994, p. 247⁸). After the latter event, the stronghold was rebuilt around 1591, as inferred from a date engraved on the wall of the basement of the southern building (Dzieduszycki 1975, p. 290; Pawlak 1993, p. 217)⁹. The buildings of the castle are most accurately presented only in

⁸ 'This whole storey was burned in the times of Niemoiowski.' This contradicts information Wojciech Niemojewski was never appointed to the castellany of Kruszwica (*Urzędnicy* 2000, p. 134, no. 1082).

⁹ Therefore, this date should not be associated with the castle fire, but with its subsequent reconstruction.

an inspection report ('lustration') inventorying royal property in 1616 (*Lustracja* 1994, pp. 247–248)¹⁰. Earlier, the property of the Kruszwica *starostwo* had not been surveyed, because it had been pledged to the Oporowski family in the 'old sums', drawn back in the 15th century (*Lustracja* 1961, p. LIII). This description mentions a 'tenement house', near to which stood a 'new building' and an 'old building', next to which there were a bathhouse and a tower. The survey report describes in detail the number and internal appearance of individual rooms, their condition and fittings. However, in terms of capturing the external appearance of the entire fortress, it is of little use. The oldest preserved view of the Kruszwica castle, which is included in the work of S. Pufendorf (1632–1694) on about deeds by Charles X Gustav (Fig. 1) (Pufendorf 1696), tells us much more about the layout of the castle. It was drawn from memory by E. J. Dahlbergh, the then-chief quartermaster of the Swedish troops, and the engraving was made in 1694 by the Dutch engraver Willem Swidde (1660–1697), who was active in Sweden. It is worth remembering that the cited sketch is a mirror image created by transferring the original drawing onto a printing plate. Despite this, it is an excellent iconographic source, showing not only the only view of the castle that still existed at that time, but also its horizontal plan, preserved in the lower right corner of the card (Fig. 2).

The castle comprised at least three buildings adjacent to the defensive walls. The four-room 'tenement house' mentioned in the report was probably erected as a residential building in the 14th century. At the time of the survey (i.e. in 1616), one of its floors was still dilapidated. Under that tenement house there was a 'great store with seven chambers' (*Lustracja* 1994, p. 247). In the light of this property survey,



Fig. 1. View and layout of the castle in Kruszwica in 1655. Mirror image of Willem Swidde's engraving according to E. J. Dahlbergh's drawing (after Pufendorf 1696; development by Maciej Maciejewski)

¹⁰ The first description of the castle on the basis of this survey was given by Rodgero Prümers (1892, pp. 349–352).

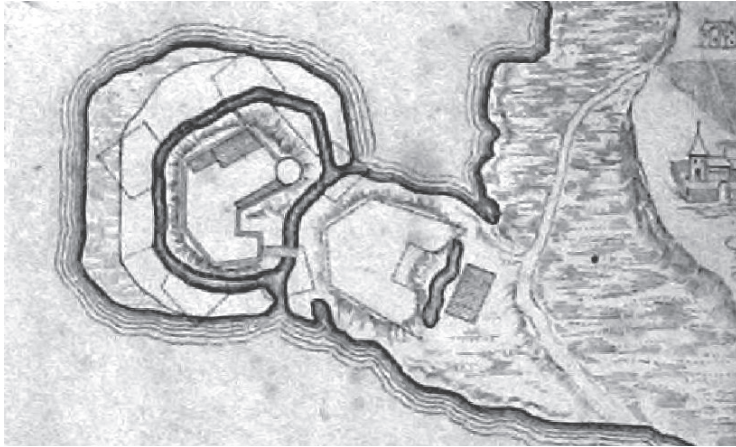


Fig. 2. Plan of the Kruszwica castle in 1655. Fragment of an engraving by Willem Swidde according to a drawing by E. J. Dahlbergh (after Pufendorf 1696; development by M. Maciejewski)

we can conclude that only the ‘tenement house’ had a basement. This is confirmed by the archaeological research conducted in the years 1973–1982¹¹. These studies confirm that the buildings whose remains were the investigated cellars were adjacent to the perimeter walls of the castle¹². The ‘second old building’ had a similar purpose and was small according to the survey (having only two rooms) and quite badly damaged (‘the roof had fallen in’) (*Lustracja* 1994, p. 248). On the other hand, the ‘new building’ had probably been erected shortly before the survey and was, judging from the description, quite a substantial, three-storey building that constituted an extension of the gothic wing. A small bathhouse must have stood near it. The entrance gate to the castle was on the north-eastern side¹³. Very clearly visible are the castle structures, with at least three buildings and a turret located on the opposite side of the castle tower (Dzieduszycki *et al.* 2014, pp. 94–95). In addition to the walls, there was also a palisade below, surrounding the castle, as can still be seen in the drawing of E. J. Dahlberg. The castle presented in the figure was compact, and quite impressively built up. The shape of the defensive walls was irregular, as some researchers had suggested (Kajzer 1993, pp. 131–134). This is confirmed by the map of the castle motte with the outline of the defensive walls that was drawn

¹¹ The archaeological documentation of these studies is kept by the Provincial Office for the Protection of Monuments in Toruń, Delegation in Bydgoszcz, ref. no. K/2, K/30, K/33, K/34 (Ruins of the castle in Kruszwica – ul. Zamkowa, Bydgoszcz voivodeship. Technical documentation).

¹² See footnote 11 – Provincial Office for the Protection of Monuments in Toruń, Delegation in Bydgoszcz, K/34, p. 3 (Ruins of the castle in Kruszwica – ul. Zamkowa, Bydgoszcz voivodeship. Technical documentation).

¹³ This has been confirmed by recent archaeological works (Dzieduszycki *et al.* 2014, pp. 94–95).

During the Swedish Deluge, the Swedes took the castle on August 23, 1655¹⁵, marking the beginning of a spate of looting and destruction in Kruszwica and surrounding areas. As their troops withdrew, the invaders set fire to the fortress and blew it up on June 18, 1657 (Nagielski *et al.* 2015, pp. 131–133). The destruction of the castle in 1657 ends its military history. It, like many medieval castles, did not survive the Swedish invasion. The post-invasion survey of the Kruszwica starostwo in 1659 contains the passage: ‘The *penitus* castle was ruined by the enemy and burned down as an *acta publica*, only one book was left *a[nno]* 1585’ (*Lustracja* 1996, p. 275). The destruction by the Swedes of the court books must have been particularly severely felt, and traces of their bindings were found in the ruins of the castle during the most recent archaeological research.

Nevertheless, contrary to appearances, the fortress had not been destroyed utterly. It turns out that the total destruction of the castle is to be laid at the door not only of the Swedes. Even in 1843, Count Edward Raczyński wrote: ‘[...] the castle of the Polish dukes in Kruszwica, although it had no roof fifty years ago, its walls still stood intact [...] The castle was demolished by greedy local tenants seeking damnable profits by stripping materials’ (Raczyński 1843, pp. 414–415). So, the greatest damage came at the hands of Prussians at the end of the 18th century. The demolition of the walls of the castle in Kruszwica began as early as 1787, with the materials going to the construction of public buildings in Inowrocław and the court of the German owner of Kruszwica. However, thanks to the efforts of Jan Mittelstaedt of Kołuda and his intervention with the then King of Prussia, Frederick William IV (1840–1861), the demolition of the tower and walls was halted and the monument was ordered to be cared for (Sperczyński 1923, p. 32). At that time, the tower was also repaired, having been in danger of collapsing due to its foundations having been undermined by those stripping it (Raczyński 1843, p. 415).

In the 19th century, according to available reports and iconographic materials, on the castle motte, apart from the tower and adjacent fragments of defensive walls, only piles of rubble remained (Raczyński 1843, p. 415; Callier 1895, p. 58). The damage to the castle was so severe at that time that the tower, standing alone, was thought to be a lighthouse facilitating navigation on Lake Gopło (Baliński, Lipiński 1843, p. 340; Wuttke 1864, p. 350; *Słownik geograficzny* 1883, p. 740)¹⁶. Fortunately, the documentation of the Prussian district authorities has been preserved and includes technical drawings, correspondence, press clippings, requests for financial support for the renovation of the Mouse Tower and, most interestingly, an 1894 map of the castle motte with the outline of the walls. The castle motte had already

¹⁵ The date August 12, 1655 appears in the literature as well, most probably deriving from the date shown in the engraving in S. Pufendorf’s work. However, it is given according to the Julian calendar, which was used in Sweden until 1700.

¹⁶ E. Raczyński (1843, pp. 420–421) and E. Callier (1895, p. 58) took issue with this idea.

been levelled in 1867, and this map records the state of preservation of the walls and the state of knowledge about their course after that moment. Part of the defensive walls protruding above the ground was marked in green. The official appeal for sponsors of the Mouse Tower renovation even suggested that it could have been part of a fortress erected by the Teutonic Order¹⁷. Several decades later, Władysław Sperczyński assumed that ‘the Mouse Tower was named by the Teutonic Knights for its resemblance to the Mouse Tower on the island of Bingen on the river Rhine’ (Sperczyński 1923, p. 32).

As already mentioned, in 1867 the castle motte was levelled and the area was prepared for gardens that were to be laid out at the foot of the Mouse Tower¹⁸. Further works were carried out in the years 1892–1896 to prepare the tower entrance and carry out conservation works (Fig. 4)¹⁹. The head of the construction committee for the tower entrance was the Hassenpflug *landrat*, who even appealed in Polish and German to the inhabitants of Kuyavia for generous donations for this purpose.

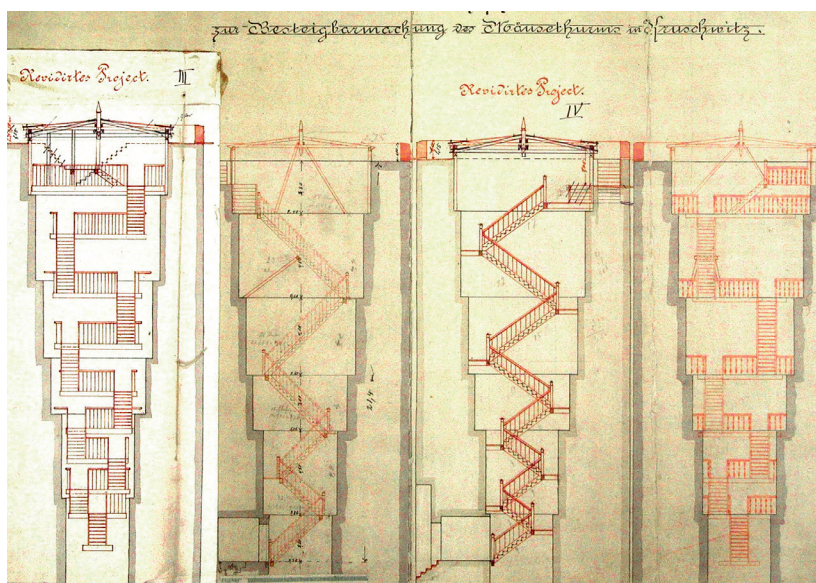


Fig. 4. Kruszwica. Cross-section of the Mysia Wieża (Mous Tower) according to the project of reconstruction of its interior, including installation of stairs and roof (State Archive in Bydgoszcz Inowrocław Branch, Landratúra in Strzelno 1816–1919/1923, reference no. 120) (photo by M. Maciejewski)

¹⁷ APB, Inowrocław Branch, Landratúra Strzelno 1816–1919 (1923), ref. 120 (no pagination).

¹⁸ These plans are kept at APB, Inowrocław Branch, Landratúra Strzelno 1816–1919 (1923), ref. no. 120 (no pagination).

¹⁹ Full documentation of these works is kept at the APB Inowrocław Branch, Landratúra Strzelno 1816–1919 (1923), ref. no. 120.

[illegible]

²⁰ For documentation of these works – see footnote 19; see also Sperczyński 1923, p. 31.

Mouse Tower have been renovated, some of the castle cellars have been uncovered and adapted for exhibition purposes, parts of the walls have been built upwards, the lower parts of the gate have been rebuilt and the drawbridge has been reconstructed (Maciejewski 2014, p. 78–81; Małachowicz 2014, p. 114; 2019, pp. 112–129; Pawlak 2021, pp. 375–397).

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