Archaeologia Historica Polona
vol. 32, 2024–2025, pp. 137–161, ISSN 1425–3534, DOI: 10.12775/AHP.2024-2025.005

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The rural cultural landscape of Silesia as a result of settlement transformation in the 12th–14th centuries

Abstract. This paper analyses the rural cultural landscape of Silesia as a result of dynamic settlement changes that occurred between the 12th and 14th centuries. It argues that large-scale processes in long-inhabited areas led to a profound spatial reorganisation of rural settlements, whereas the development of the human ecumene in previously uninhabited areas gave rise to distinct landscape forms. These changes had a decisive and lasting impact on Silesia's cultural landscape. The analysis of these settlement processes was based primarily on archaeological, written and cartographic sources. Archaeological evidence sheds light on the transformation of settlement structures at the turn of the late Middle Ages. Written sources provide data on the size of villages, legal changes and land ownership structures. Retrospective analysis of early modern maps enables the reconstruction of historical spatial layouts and landscape features at the level of individual villages and micro-regions. The article also draws attention to contemporary threats that are contributing to the disappearance of traditional spatial patterns, and emphasising the urgent need to document and protect rural structures shaped by history as an important element of the region's cultural heritage.

Keywords: cultural landscape, medieval village, medieval settlement, Silesia.

Introduction

For several decades the cultural landscape has been the subject of scholarly inquiry across various historical science disciplines. The growing popularity of this concept is linked to a broader academic interest in human-environment relations, which has long been explored within the framework of human ecology. A central premise of this concept is that a comprehensive understanding of humanity cannot be achieved without examining its environmental context (Schutkowski 2006). Human-environment interactions have also attracted the attention of archaeologists, who have readily employed the term cultural landscape in their studies of settlements (*Mensch und Umwelt* 1992; *Tradition* 2014).

The growing academic interest in historical processes is closely current global environmental changes. Research on cultural landscapes can therefore be seen as an attempt to understand the present by studying processes that unfolded in the past. A compelling historical parallel to current developments is provided by the second major civilisational transformation of medieval East-Central Europe, associated with the settlement transformation from the 2nd half of the 12th century to the mid-14th century. During this period, areas east of the Elbe saw the emergence of previously unseen elements in the settlement network, such as towns and villages founded under German law. The causes of this phenomenon were complex. The reception of new cultural patterns was facilitated by the migration of settlers from the West, in the case of the Polish lands primarily from German territories, who introduced settlement models developed in their regions of origin (*Die deutsche Ostsiedlung* 1975; Piskorski 1990; *Kultura średniowiecznego Śląska* 1996).

A cultural landscape is an area that has been transformed by humans to meet their basic needs, such as providing the family with the best possible housing and economic conditions. Within the framework of historical archaeology, the study of the cultural landscape was primarily undertaken by settlement researchers. They focused chiefly on analysing settlement distribution and typology, as well as settlement networks and their relationships with the natural environment. The latter was regarded as a determining factor in the location and form of settlements (Jankuhn 1983; Kajzer 1996, pp. 156–205).

The medieval cultural landscape should be understood not only as a collection of archaeological features, but also as the result of changes that occurred within a given area due to a variety of socio-cultural processes. In the case of Silesia, the structural changes to settlement patterns that occurred during the "long 13th century", including those arising from interactions between the established populations and new settlers, were particularly significant. This period witnessed also the expansion of the settlement ecumene through the development of areas that had previously been sparsely populated or entirely uninhabited.

There is an urgent need for research into the cultural landscape of Silesian villages, as these areas are undergoing intensive and often irreversible spatial, social and functional changes. Large-scale industrialisation has caused substantial damage in many areas. The territorial expansion of major cities (e.g., Wrocław), which has absorbed villages located in their immediate vicinity, has resulted in the loss of their distinct landscape character and cultural identity. Another significant threat comes from the expansion of national infrastructure, such as motorways and express roads, which cut through historic settlement areas and create landscape barriers.

State of research

Scholarly interest in Silesian villages emerged in the second half of the 19th century, closely tied to the rise of German regional historical studies, which anticipated later geographical and settlement research. A seminal contribution to this tradition is the work of August Meitzen, who examined sources for rural settlement studies and analysed patterns of landholding, historical land division, measurement practices, and land use (Meitzen 1863).

Particular attention should be paid to the subsequent articles and synthesised studies prepared by members of the Silesian Geographical Society (*Schlesische Gesellschaft für Erdkunde*). These publications, based on extensive source material, contain numerous findings, many of which remain valid to this day (Schlenger 1930; Bernard 1931; Czajka 1938; Granicky 1939). The 1930s also marked a turning point in the development of late medieval archaeology. However, rural settlements were investigated only sporadically, whereas their associated knightly residences were studied far more frequently (Fokt 2012, pp. 71–76; Nowakowski 2017, pp. 55–60). From the perspective of cultural landscape research, the work undertaken during this period on the card index of Silesian folk and local names (German: *Flurnamen*) was also very important. These sources were primarily published in the *Schlesischer Flurnamen-Sammler* edited by Ernst Maetsche and Artur Zobel. Unfortunately, the materials they collected were lost during the Second World War, though later, A. Zobel attempted to reconstruct them (Herder Institute in Marburg, ref. DSHI 100 Zobel 1–106). Unfortunately, the German scholarship of the 1930s, strongly influenced by the National Socialist ideology, attributed the origins of the 13th-century cultural transformations in Silesia only to the arrival of settlers from German territories. This view was maintained by some German scholars (including Walter Kuhn) even after 1945 (Cetwiński 2008, pp. 53–121).

Likewise, the post-war period proved unfavourable for the research on Silesian villages. Scholars working on the so-called "recovered territories" that were incorporated into Poland were guided by different objectives. Archaeology was also expected to serve as a "weapon in the service of national self-assertion", primarily aimed at delineating an early medieval Polish community that the post-war society could identify with (Wójcik-Kühnel *et al.* 2013, p. 304). Consequently, in anticipation of the millennium celebrations of the Polish state, archaeological fieldwork focused on surveying early medieval Piast strongholds (Kajzer 1996, p. 14).

From the perspective of the research on medieval Silesian villages, the initiation of onomastic studies proved particularly significant. The work of a research team led by Stanisław Rospond yielded numerous thematic articles (Borek 1965; Nieckula 1965; Rospond 1965; Stojanowska 1973), as well as *Słownik etymologiczny nazw geograficznych Śląska (The Etymological Dictionary of Silesian Geographical Names).* Within the field of settlement geography, studies on the typology of villages

in Opole Silesia were undertaken during this period. Although this research focused on the 19th-century settlements, the author also drew attention to a number of issues related to medieval settlement patterns when discussing their origins (Szulc 1968). Similarly, another monograph on the typology of forest villages (German: *Waldhufendorf*) extensively used examples from Silesia (Krüger 1967).

From the late 1970s and early 1980s onward, Silesia was subjected to extensive field surveys conducted as part of the Archaeological Survey of Poland (*Archeologiczne Zdjęcie Polski*). For studies of medieval settlement, the cognitive value of these results is limited, primarily due to the imprecise chronology of the recorded sites, which often precludes analysis of the dynamics of settlement processes (Kajzer 1996, pp. 157–158; Moździoch 2006, pp. 192–200; Fokt 2012, p. 80).

The political transformation of 1989 did not encourage research into rural settlements in Poland. From the 1990s onwards, the *renovatio terrae* focused primarily on reconstructing cities that had been neglected for decades and modernising the country's underdeveloped infrastructure. Nevertheless, sufficient source material became available for the 1990s to be considered a breakthrough period for the archaeology of rural settlements (Fokt 2012, pp. 80–84). Most of the fieldwork conducted during this period was archaeological supervision, which had a limited research value. Subsequent studies of medieval Silesian villages did not constitute large-scale investigations carried out as part of comprehensive research projects. Consequently, the synthetic studies produced during this period on late medieval rural settlements in Lower Silesia are particularly noteworthy (Fokt 2012). An example of the interdisciplinary approach advocated in scholarship is the study of settlement patterns in the upper and middle Oława river basin (Adamska 2019). A significant recent initiative is the comprehensive publication of source materials on the history of Silesian villages in the *Dictionary of Silesian Villages in the Middle Ages (Słownik wsi śląskich w średniowieczu)*. This work is carried out in an integrated manner by a team of scholars representing various disciplines. The volumes, which are being published systematically for individual historical Silesian counties, each include introductory chapters that characterise the medieval settlement processes occurring in the respective areas.

Sources and methods in the study of the rural cultural landscape

The sources and methods employed in the study of medieval Silesian villages have been covered in previous literature (*Słownik wsi I* 2014, pp. 8–18; Latocha, Nowakowski 2018; Adamska 2019, pp. 29–50). Here, only the most relevant aspects to research on the cultural landscape will be highlighted. Studies of late medieval settlements emphasise the importance of utilising all available sources, including archaeological, written, cartographic, iconographic and onomastic

sources, as well as contemporary settlement maps. Each of these sources has its own strengths and limitations, and it is only by combining their use that the most probable course of settlement transformations in the area under investigation can be reconstructed.

Archaeological materials are particularly important for studying the earliest settlements from 12th and 13th centuries. During this period, older structures, such as strongholds, market settlements, and villages, were gradually replaced or supplemented by new settlements, including towns, castles, and villages. Archaeological data is also valuable for later periods, especially in regions where written sources have been lost for various reasons. Most villages and their associated lands have only been identified only through surface surveys conducted as part of the Archaeological Survey of Poland. However, from the perspective of medieval settlement research, the usefulness of the data obtained in this way is limited (compare above). Most Late Medieval artefacts (mostly ceramic fragments) have been found close to dwellings and garden plots, as well as in fields situated farther from the village centre that had been fertilised with manure. Good results are often achieved simply by charting medieval sites within the borders of villages (Fig. 1).

In archaeology, fieldwork is often guided by information found in written sources. The primary aim of research inspired by such records is to identify structures and settlements, and locate them in the landscape. A prime example of this approach is research into lost villages. In studies of settlement processes, written sources play a pivotal role in addressing key issues such as chronology, identifying settlement organisers, analysing land ownership and its structure, and investigating the economic foundations of villages.

Cartographic and iconographic sources are of great importance for researching medieval settlements, including, but not limited to, analysing village forms and their economies. At the same time, they are the main source of information on the geographical aspects of medieval settlements. The classical approach to historical geography involves reconstructing the former natural landscape, anthropogenic landscape changes, and the interactions between the environment and humans, taking into account historical and political circumstances. Such reconstructions are possible with the use of retrogressive methods, which are based on the assumption that it is possible to draw conclusions about reality in its earlier form on the basis of sources from a later period. The limitation for using these retrogressive methods for the analysis of medieval and Early Modern settlement processes were the changes in spatial structure of settlements implemented on a grand scale from the beginning of the 19th century. Pre-industrial maps are of key importance for the analysis of the geographical aspects of medieval villages using the retrogressive method. The cartographic sources used in geographical analyses in the context of Silesian settlement are the Prussian military topographical maps of Ludwig Wilhelm Regler from 1764–1770 and the so-called *Urmesstischblätter* from the first

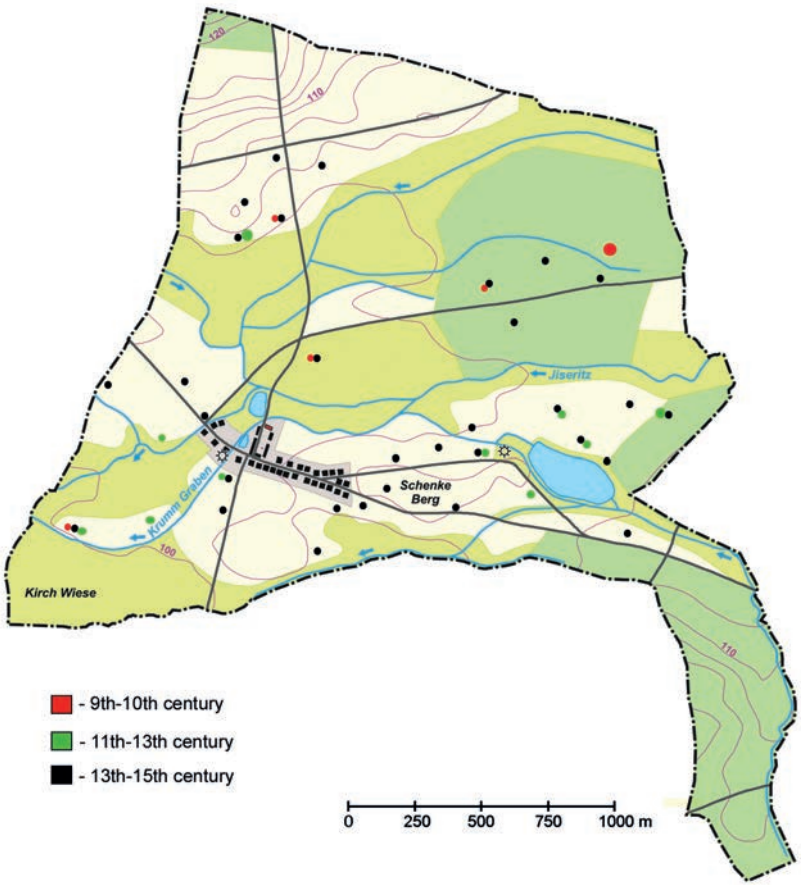


Fig. 1. Bożeń, Wołów county. Reconstructed outline of the village with the location of medieval sites (developed by M. Siehankiewicz and D. Nowakowski)

half of the 19th century. These maps provide data in vertical projection concerning village forms, their topographical location, roads, water bodies (watercourses and reservoirs), and land cover, distinguishing meadows, thickets, riparian forests, and farmland. Symbols were used to mark objects such as churches, residences, and other buildings, which allow differentiation between manorial estates and village areas, as well as watermills and windmills. A separate component of the map content is toponymy, including the names of villages, other settlements, dwellings, *demesne farms*, mills, certain elevations, and, sporadically, other landscape elements designated by folk or local names.

With the use of retrogressive methods, maps drawn by means of compiling source materials – archaeological, historical and cartographic – prove to be

extremely useful in historical settlement research, and in turn become a source of information on their own merit. It allows for drawing reconstructive outlines for singular locations and microregions, representing their topography, settlement structures, route network, and land use. These plans are an attempt at recreating the earliest possible layout of the village and its surroundings. The outlines, prepared as specific thematic layers, provide new opportunities for the analysis of links between settlements and the natural landscape of a given area (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Wołów county. Reconstruction plan of villages with their land boundaries against the background of the natural environment (developed by M. Siehankiewicz)

Settlement transformation in the 12th–14th centuries

As mentioned in the introduction, the cultural landscape of Silesia underwent fundamental changes in the second half of the 12th–14th centuries due to the emergence of new cultural patterns associated with the development of German settlements and law in the region. Particular interest is raised by the issue of mutual relations and interactions between the local Polish population and the newly arrived settlers. However, much less is known about the course of structural changes in rural settlements. In this article, we seek to characterise these processes using selected examples of villages and micro-regions.

In Silesia, areas with well-developed, old settlements from the later phases of the early Middle Ages are primarily associated with districts of the strongholds located on the Oder River. During this period, settlements mainly expanded onto the fertile soils of the Wrocław Plain (south of Wrocław) and in the areas between Wrocław, Legnica, and Mount Ślęża. Additionally, the areas around Głogów and the hills to the east of the Oder, near Trzebnica (Fig. 3), were used intensively (Bernard 1931, pp. 41–42; Czajka 1938, pp. 92–93, Plate 8/10; Hilczerówna, Urbańska-Łosińska 1970, p. 93; Moździoch 1990, pp. 21–45).

The changes in settlement structures in these areas could occur in two ways. The first was the adaptation of old settlements to new legal and economic conditions.



Fig. 3. A fragment of old settlement area near Trzebnica according to the Ch.F. Wrede map (after Wrede, sign. 15060)

These superficial transformations resulted in the creation of small street villages, square villages and multi-road villages (Fig. 4). These settlements were characterised by a small area of agricultural land and irregular boundaries. Most of them also had Polish names (*Słownik wsi I* 2014, p. 31; Latocha, Nowakowski 2018, p. 65). There are numerous examples of such villages on the left bank of the Oder River, in the areas of the aforementioned old settlement centres. A fragmentarily preserved rent register of the Duchy of Głogów from 1315 lists villages in the districts of Głogów, Polkowice, and Bytom, which were transferred to German law. Many of these villages had very small areas of arable land (*Glog. Zins*. 1940). Similar data is contained in the mid-14th century register of villages and farms of the Duchy of Wrocław (RWN). Among the numerous settlements mentioned in both sources, many have areas ranging from just a few to several dozen field units (*Hufen* in



Fig. 4. Examples of small villages in the vicinity of Wrocław according to the L.W. Regler map (after Regler, sign. 15140)

German). One example of this type of small settlement is Górzec near Strzelin, where archaeological research has demonstrated continuous occupation since the early Middle Ages (Fokt 2012, pp. 249, 321–322).

The second variant of settlement network transformation in areas with old settlements involved significant structural changes. In this case, as a result of settlement concentration, older settlements were liquidated and replaced by large colonial villages with characteristic settlement plan: square villages (German: *Angerdorf*), linear villages (German: *Strassendorf*) (Fig. 5: d), and mixed linear-square villages (German: *Stressenangerdorf*) (Fig. 5: c). Agricultural land was also reorganised



Fig. 5. Examples of large so-called colonial villages according to the L.W. Regler map (after Regler, sign. 15140)

and expanded, cultivated within the framework of the *three-field system*. In the Głogów area, examples include large villages with triangular squares, which are typical of the region (Fig. 5: a). In other areas, villages with spindle-shaped (Fig. 5: b) or rectangular squares predominated (Fig. 5: d) (Schlenger 1930, pp. 79, 196; Czajka 1938, pp. 147–148). Archaeological sources provide reliable data on changes to settlement patterns over time. As well as the aforementioned concentration of settlements, new villages were established in higher-lying areas offering better living conditions. Farmsteads (German: *Gehoft*) were located in close proximity to gardens and farmland. Examples of this phenomenon can be found in Polkowice county: Bucze, Krzydłowice, Rzeczyca, Szymocin (*Słownik wsi III* 2024, pp. 59–60, 98–101, 130–132, 141–143), and in the Wołów county: Bożeń (Fig. 1), Gliniany (Fig. 6), Krzelów, Krzydlina Mała, Wyszęcice (Fig. 7) (*Słownik wsi II* 2023, pp. 59–60, 70–77, 93–99, 175–177). Similar transformations were also observed in the vicinity of other Lower Silesian villages (Fokt 2012, p. 248).

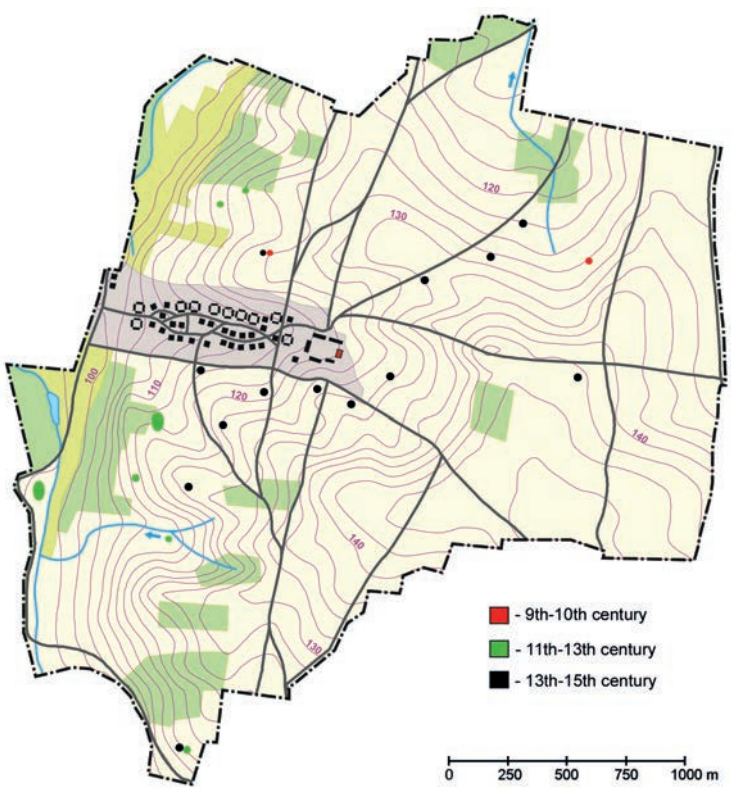


Fig. 6. Gliniany, Wołów county. Reconstructed outline of the village with the location of medieval sites (developed by M. Siehankiewicz and D. Nowakowski)

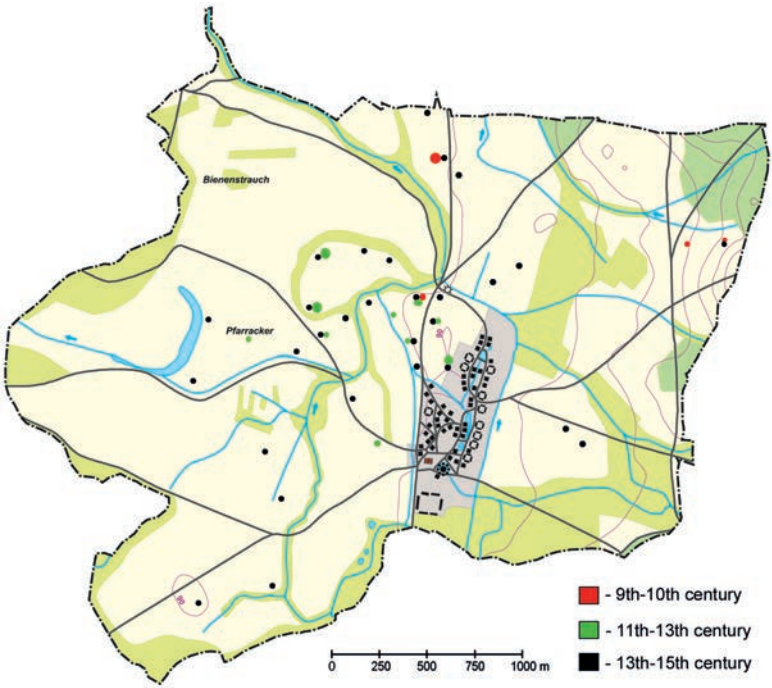


Fig. 7. Wyszęcice, Wołów county. Reconstructed outline of the village with the location of medieval sites (developed by M. Siehankiewicz and D. Nowakowski)

Due to the poor state of archaeological research, it is unclear whether new villages were built on the sites of older settlements or on previously uninhabited areas. It is likely that both approaches were employed. In Stary Lubin, for example, a new village was founded on the site of an earlier settlement located at the foot of a 12th–13th century stronghold. The village's name *Altstadt* (Old Town) reflects the central functions of the former settlement. During the Early Modern period, the settlement underwent further structural changes (Fokt 2012, pp. 253, 346–348; *Słownik wsi I* 2014, pp. 170–174). Near the town of Lubin is also located the village of Krzeczyn Wielkie, where traces of settlements from later phases of the Early Middle Ages have been discovered in the northern part (*Słownik wsi I* 2014, pp. 114–117).

Written sources provide numerous examples of villages being transferred to German law while retaining the name of the old settlement. There are also examples of villages founded on the sites of several older settlements with known names, as well as cases where villages functioned in parallel for a period until one was absorbed by the other. Research on medieval settlements in the Oława river basin has provided interesting data on this subject, including the establishment of the village of Kolnica shortly before 1242 on the sites of three settlements: *Goszykowice*,

Cucharowitz and *Pozocowiz*. A somewhat different example is Ciepłowody, which was transferred to German law by its owner, the knight Albert, who lived there. Prior to this, he purchased the settlements of Kubice and Cienkowice from Duke Bolesław the Bald, incorporated them into Ciepłowody and only established the village under German law once these territories had been consolidated (Adamska 2019, p. 369). The process of adapting areas that were partially settled as well as previously forested is well illustrated by the example of the village of Siedlce, located near Lubin. In 1257, Duke Konrad of Głogów granted the village of *Sedlez* to the *scultetus* Bertold for establishment under German law. The bushy areas were divided into Franconian *field* units and granted a five-year tax exemption, while the oak-covered forest lands were divided into Flemish units and granted a ten-year exemption (Meitzen 1863, pp. 80–82, 319; *Słownik wsi I* 2014, pp. 161–165).

These structural transformations in settlement patterns are also reflected in toponymic sources. Evidence of older villages being transferred to German law can be seen in their double names, which appear in written sources under both their Polish and German forms. Examples can be found in the Głogów register of *Liber fundationis episcopatus Vratislaviensis*, dating to around 1305, such as Stypułów (*Styplow* vel *Hertwigsdorf*), Przylep (*Prsilep* vel *Sarathindorf*), Osiecznica (*Osseczznicza* vel *Gunterberg*), Połupin (*Polupin* vel *Rudolfsdorf*), and Racula (*Razula* vel *Lewenwalt*) (*Codex diplomarticus* 1889, E, 8, 26, 33, 52, 117). Double names occur quite frequently throughout Silesia in both older and later written sources. So-called mixed names are also indicative of interactions between the local population and newly arrived settlers. Names such as *Isynmost* (*Eisemost*/Żelazny Most), *Lessotindorf* (*Lessendorf*/Lasocin), and *Radwansdorf* (*Ransdorf*/Radwanice) are believed to indicate the local population's participation in establishing new planned villages. However, the literature raises questions about whether these names accurately reflect the situation or are merely the result of German-language chancery practices. This issue is particularly pertinent for villages with names ending in *-dorf* (Borek 1965, p. 73; Gringmuth-Dallmer 2002; Cetwiński 2008, pp. 100–103).

From a cultural landscape studies perspective, so-called double settlements, featuring prefixes such as *Deutsch – Polnisch/Wendisch*, *Alt – Neu*, or *Gross – Klein* (Fig. 8), are particularly valuable for analysing structural transformations in rural settlement. Hundreds of such examples can be found across Silesia. Unfortunately, little is known about the mechanisms behind the formation of these names, except that they occur in areas with older Polish settlement. It is generally believed that they may reflect the character of early medieval settlement, where under a single name several small isolated farm (*sors*) could function across a relatively extensive area. During structural transformations, these were replaced by a larger, planned German village and a smaller settlement, sometimes perhaps even functioning under the old princely law. However, it should be emphasised that the prefixes attached to village names cannot be taken as definitive evidence of the chronology



Fig. 8. Examples of so-called double villages according to the Urmeßtischblätter maps (after Urmestischblätter, sign. 729)

of these settlements. Instructive examples can be found in small settlements with the prefix *Klein*, which developed adjacent to demesne farms that were established at a later date (Czajka 1938, pp. 64–65, 79–80; Gringmuth-Dallmer 1990; Adamska 2019, pp. 332–338).

The phenomena described above only occurred to a small extent in areas with poorly developed early medieval settlements, while they did not occur at all in newly colonised forest areas. The idea of settling border forests emerged earlier than the concept of reorganising areas with dense old settlements according to new organisational models. The reasons for this phenomenon were due to external and internal circumstances. Henry the Bearded (1202–1238) was aware of settlement initiatives in neighbouring lands, particularly in the west, carried out by the margraves of Brandenburg. The planned settlement along the western border (the Bóbr River) therefore had a pre-emptive character, representing a form of race for land. Internal reasons derived from the state organisation system functioning within the framework of the so-called princely law system (*ius ducale*), which was

based on various forms of services and tributes from the population. Transferring old settlements en masse to the new law, which abolished old customs and obligations and guaranteed periodic complete exemption from rents for the inhabitants of colonised villages in the early stages, would have destabilised the country's economic foundations. Consequently, during the early phases of the settlement campaign, villages under German law, which offered more favourable conditions for peasants, were established at a distance from settlements inhabited by the local population (Zientara 1997, pp. 192–206).

In areas subject to intensive deforestation from the early 13th century onwards, the dominant form of settlement was the forest types of villages (German: *Waldhufendorf*), with rows of buildings arranged in two parallel lines along the communication route. Such settlements were often established alongside small streams, and the surrounding meadows were used as common land for activities such as cattle grazing. Mills and ponds were also sometimes built there. As successive sections of the forest were cleared, these villages could reach considerable lengths and sometimes formed separate rural municipalities existing under the same name, differentiated by prefixes such as *Ober-*, *Mittel-*, and *Nieder-* (Fig. 9). In other cases, they merged with neighbouring villages to form linear chains extending for several kilometres. The establishment of this type of settlement was highly planned. Large tracts of forest, often measuring 200–500 field units (German: *Hufen*), were designated for clearance, on which a set number of villages with similar layouts and uniform size of rural land were to be established. The standard village size in Silesia was considered to be 50 field units, although there were, of course, exceptions to this rule (Bernard 1931, pp. 18–29, 51–76; Krüger 1967, pp. 123–170; Zientara 1997, pp. 192–199). Examples of villages measuring 40 field units can be found, among others, in the domain Piasts of Głogów, such as Krzelów and the aforementioned Siedlce, as well as in other settlements founded by Henry III of Głogów at the end of the thirteenth century in the vicinity of Uraz (Krüger 1967, pp. 135–140; *Słownik wsi II* 2023, pp. 28, 93). An interesting example of a forest village established on previously settled land is Nowy Kościół, near Złotoryja. Archaeological research has revealed that the late medieval church and cemetery were founded on the site of an earlier 12th–13th century necropolis (Fokt 2012, p. 249).

In the case of the discussed forest villages, toponymy also provides valuable insights. The vast majority of settlements have German names, in many cases clearly indicating that they were established in forested areas. Often, these are settlements whose original names contain elements such as *-walde*, *-waldau*, *-hain*. Numerous examples of such names can be found in written sources from the 13th and 14th centuries, including the aforementioned *Liber fundationis episcopatus Vratislaviensis*: Broniszów (*Brunczlinwaldt*), Bukowiec (*Buchwalth*), Bukowina Bobrzańska (*Buchwald*), Krzyżowa (*Lichtinwaldt*), Lubachów (*Breytenhayn*), Mirocin (*Herczogwald*),



Fig. 9. Examples of forest villages located between Szprotawa and Kożuchów according to the Ch. F. Wrede map (after Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, sign. N 15060)

Okmiany (*Keyserswalde*), Skibice (*Petirswald*) (*Codex diplomaticus* 1889, B 489; D 216, 249, 311; E, 66, 86, 118, 148; Bernard 1931, pp. 40–41).

After discussing the main issues related to the location of villages in the two settlement zones described above, some attention must be paid to the organisation of space within the settlements themselves and their immediate surroundings. This is a highly complex issue, which could be the subject of a separate study. Here, we will therefore limit ourselves to briefly characterising the most important components of late medieval Lower Silesian villages, such as the church, the manor, and the landlord's residence.

The most important public utility building in the village was the church. As the centre of the parish's religious life, it was typically accompanied by a parish cemetery. In large, planned villages, the church was constructed either in the square or in a row of rural buildings, depending on their layout. Sometimes locations outside the settlement were chosen, as was often the case with newer churches built near existing villages with an established ownership structure (Schlenger 1930, pp. 71, 110; Kozaczewski 1995, p. 7). Whenever possible, churches were built in prominent locations on hills overlooking the surrounding area. Sometimes, as in Stary Lubin, the hills were artificially raised; here, the church was built on the site of an early medieval stronghold, whose central area was levelled. In contrast, in Żelazny Most, the *plateau* of a natural hill was widened (Fokt 1912, p. 263).

The practice of building churches on elevated or prominent sites was particularly common in villages located in areas with an old settlement tradition, where parishes often covered several villages, or even a dozen or more. Churches on hillsides served as landmarks for travellers, and the bells in their towers could be heard by the inhabitants of the surrounding parish villages. Examples of such arrangements in the northern part of Lower Silesia include the churches in Grodowiec (Fig. 10), Kurów Wielki, Przychowa, and Solniki (Michael 1926, pp. 74–77; *Słownik wsi III* 2024, p. 31).

The organisation of parishes in large colonisation villages was different. The obligation to construct churches in newly established settlements was regulated in documents issued by the Silesian dukes. A notable example is the 1261 Act of Henry III of Wrocław, which demonstrates the planned nature of settlement activity encompassing towns, land, and villages (German: *Stadt-Land-Siedlung*). When establishing the town of Wołczyn, the duke required each village within his district that comprised at least 50 field units to build its own parish church. Numerous exceptions to this rule were also in place, as evidenced by villages with churches established in settlements of significantly smaller size. Furthermore, construction of a church was not always initiated immediately, even when 1–2 field units of agricultural land (German: *Pfarrwidmut*) were allocated at the time of village foundation to provide economic support for the parish priest and the parish itself. Therefore, there was no formal legal link between the establishment of a village and the construction of a parish church, although this often occurred in practice (Schlenger 1930, pp. 126–127, 192–193; Silnicki 1939, p. 334; Adamska 2019, pp. 181–182).

Another issue concerns temples built on private initiative, primarily by the Silesian nobility. Apart from religious considerations, the construction of these structures was also determined by other factors, including numerous privileges granted to the founder as a result of the right of patronage. In these cases, there is a clear tendency to locate the church in close proximity to the residence, whereas when rights to an existing church were acquired, the residence was often constructed in its immediate vicinity (Adamska 2005, pp. 117–138; Nowakowski 2025).

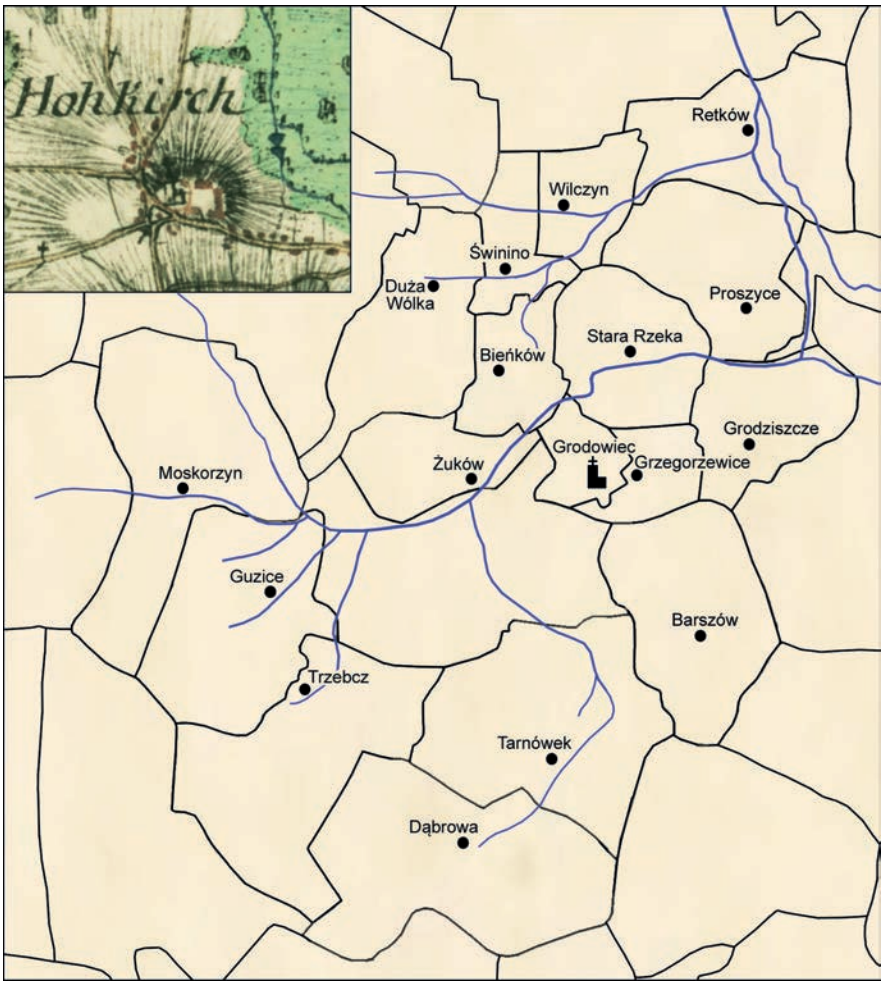


Fig. 10. Grodowiec village, Polkowice county, according to the L.W. Regler map (after Regler, sign. 15140), and villages of its the parish (developed by D. Nowakowski)

Another element that clearly stood out in the landscape of medieval villages was the manorial farm, which were autonomous settlement units, independent of the surrounding village community. While archaeological sources provide some information about their appearance, aerial photographs and LiDAR scanning have proven invaluable in the case of lost sites. The structures revealed by these modern research tools typically exhibit regular layouts and large dimensions, and often contain small defensive motte-type structures (Nowakowski 2017, p. 77; 2023, p. 113). It is highly probable that medieval manorial farms reflected patterns of building organisation known from modern cartographic and iconographic

sources. They are characterised by quadrangular arrangements surrounding a large central courtyard (Fig. 11). The presence of a manorial farm within a village was evident through the scale of its buildings, its network of communication links, and its economic organisation. These manorial estates, which usually encompassed 4–5 field units (*Hufen*), clearly differed from peasant landholdings. These were typically morphologically distinct units, frequently located on the periphery of the compact village settlement or in a manner that emphasised their dominant position. In such cases, the fortified residences of the estate owners would often accompany the manorial farm. Written sources also reflect the close relationship between the farm and the residence, almost invariably mentioning them together (Nowakowski 2017, pp. 79–81; 2021, pp. 192–202, 211–213).

The dominant position of the manorial farm is particularly evident in areas with a well-developed early medieval settlement. During the settlement transformation of the 13th–14th centuries, many former settlements were converted into small manorial villages. Several Lower Silesian villages have partially archaeologically documented examples of such arrangements (Fokt 2012, pp. 249–250). A particularly high number of small manorial villages are known from the vicinity of Wrocław, where their development was facilitated by the proximity of a large city providing a market for agricultural and livestock products. Church institutions (such a bishoprics, monasteries and knightly orders), as well as local knights and Wrocław burghers (mainly patricians), were interested in organising such estates (Hoffmann 1989, pp. 93–114, 159–195; Nowakowski 2023, pp. 49–87, 94–110). At

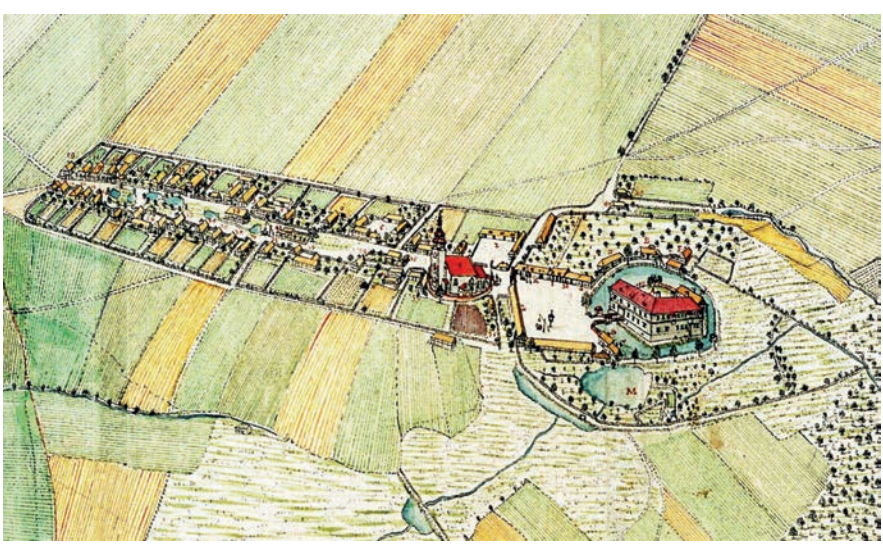


Fig. 11. Gałów village, Środa Śląska county, view of the village according to an engraving by F.B. Wrener (after Werner, sign. R. 551)

least two factors contributed to the conversion of small early medieval settlements into manorial farms. Firstly, the structural transformation of a former settlement was not a large-scale undertaking and was therefore relatively inexpensive. Secondly, most farms operated under the old Polish (ducal) law, and their inhabitants were obliged to provide various services to the landowner, for whom the benefits of this were obvious (Schlenger 1930, pp. 147–148, note 63; Adamska 2019, pp. 370–372).

The situation with manorial farms was slightly different in large forest villages (German: *Waldhufendorf*), where there were usually more of these estates (even 3–4). Many of them were mentioned in written sources as farms (German: *Vorwerk*) or estates (*Gut*), with their names reflecting their location within the village (*Nieder-, Mittel-, Ober-Vorwerk/Gut*) (*Słownik wsi I* 2014, p. 36). There are also numerous examples whose names were derived from the institutions to which they belonged or from the surnames of their owners. Such cases are attested, for instance, in the villages of Chotków, Dzietrzychowice, and Jelenin near Żagań (Steller 1940, pp. 91–92, 103–104).

As previously mentioned, farms were very often associated with another important element of the rural landscape, namely, the manor houses of the landowners. Literature emphasises that these residences, which dominated the village landscape visually, had both a symbolic and a utilitarian function, serving as a kind of an ideographic sign that highlighted the owner's belonging to the social elite of the period (Kajzer 1993, p. 107). In the vicinity of Wrocław, analogous symbolic significance was attributed to brick residential towers and large manor houses purchased or built by Wrocław patricians (Zlat 1990, pp. 79–82, 98–99; Nowakowski 2023, p. 100). Initially, the location of a landowner's house was chosen for its defensive qualities (wetlands, hills, river bends, etc.). Therefore, sites that were difficult to access and situated at a distance from villages were often selected. From the 14th century onwards, however, many residences were raised within villages, in proximity to manorial farm buildings which served as their utility base. The farm often served a defensive role due to its location and compact structures separating the manor house from the village (Nowakowski 2023, p. 101).

Conclusion

In my attempt to describe the medieval rural cultural landscape of Silesia, I sought to highlight a number of processes that influenced its development and transformation based on the available source materials and literature. The observed changes in rural settlements resulted from the cultural transformation that occurred between the 12th and 14th centuries, leading to profound changes in the spatial structure of individual settlements and entire regions. Given the threats mentioned in the

introduction to the destruction of the cultural landscape of Silesian villages, this issue requires urgent interdisciplinary research. This work should be carried out in consultation with institutions dedicated to protecting cultural heritage and local government organisations. This is essential for developing sustainable models of spatial development in rural areas. Without an in-depth diagnosis and documentation of existing landscape resources, the process of degradation will continue unchecked, leading to irreversible changes to the character of the Silesian countryside. The recent efforts relating to the monument protection law as of equal importance, including the redefinition of the concept of an archaeological site. Under this definition, areas where traces of human activity may have survived, representing potential objects of archaeological research, should be recognised and protected, and not only sites where archaeological artefacts have been discovered. This approach is particularly significant for protecting the cultural landscapes of villages whose various elements, preserved in situ, have not yet been subjected to an archaeological study, yet their medieval chronology can be inferred from the aforementioned sources. In this formulation, the definition of an archaeological site has a preventive function, safeguarding all the potential elements of the cultural landscape of Silesian villages essentially shaped by the settlement processes of the 12th–14th centuries.

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