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Saving the Elbląg of the past from oblivion

Abstract. The article presents issues related to the Old Town, the Teutonic castle complex, and Granary Island in the context of the city's history and the entire process of rebuilding the historical centre after it was utterly destroyed in 1945. The construction works were preceded by broad-scale archaeological and architectural studies with extensive interdisciplinary collaboration. For the first time in Poland, the research work entailed a full application of *urban archaeology* – the toughest sub-discipline of archaeology. The obtained results provided a massive amount of previously unknown information regarding the city's layout, wooden and masonry buildings, defensive reinforcements, technical infrastructure, the range of the local and long-distance trade, craft, and the socio-topography of the city of Elbing (Elbląg). The collection of nearly one million archaeological artefacts provides a comprehensive insight into the material and artistic culture of Elbing's residents. To some extent, the castle complex and Granary Island became better known, too.

Keywords: Elbląg, Elbing, Old Town, Teutonic castle, Granary Island, archaeological studies, reconstruction of the Old Town.

Introduction

Many years of scientific research into the past of the Old Town of Elbląg (formerly Elbing – Translator's note) have led researchers to make certain attempts at synthesising the findings. In this process, one of the most significant roles in reconstructing the several-hundred-years-old history of the city has been played (and should continue to be played) by archaeology, particularly given the scarcity of the historical sources concerning the oldest period that the settlement was operating in, which is the 13th–14th century (i.a., Nawrolski 1987; Nawrolska 2014).

The fascinating history of the Old Town "ended, in a sense" with its destruction in February 1945; by 1961, the remaining walls of burned-down tenement houses – except for a few buildings – were demolished (Fig. 1). The historical layout of the town disappeared, its 24-hectares-large space reclaimed by omnipresent vegetation (Fig. 2), whereas numerous post-war reconstruction plans for the Old Town were supposed not to bear any reference to the old spatial layout. Fortunately,

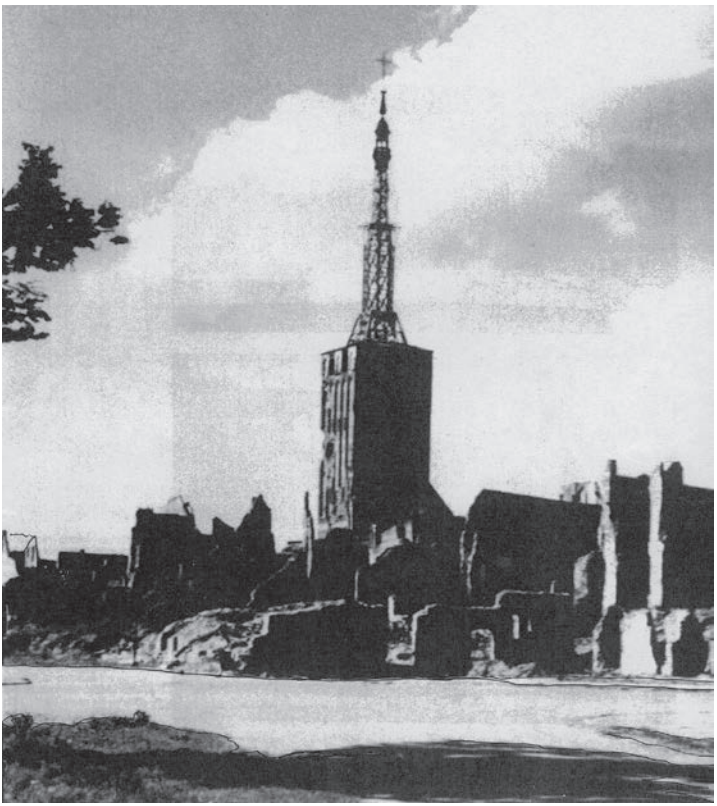


Fig. 1.
Elbląg. Old Town. St. Nicholas' Church. Condition before 1950 (after Dokumnetacja 1974–1975)



Fig. 2. Elbląg. Old Town. Centre of the Old Town in the early 1980s (photo by G. Nawrolska)

insufficient funding for such projects prevented the raising of "modern blocks of flats and skyscrapers" in the historical space of the city. A breakthrough came in 1979 with a decision to rebuild the Old Town taken by Maria Lubocka-Hoffmann, Voivodeship Heritage Protection Officer in Elbląg, which was ground-breaking for its future. All the design work and, consecutively, the construction works were contingent on a compulsory archaeological survey, the results of which proved to revolutionise the knowledge about the past of the centre and the restoration efforts (Fig. 3) (i.a., Lubocka-Hoffmann 1997).

In the history books

The history of the Old Town and the castle complex begins in the spring of 1237 with the arrival of the Teutonic Knights and the first settlers from Westphalia, Saxony, Bremen, Lübeck, and Dortmund, among others. Founded in the raw root – *in crude radice* – in an area of 15 ha, the town was expanded to cover 24 ha in the beginning of the 14th century (i.a., Czaja, Nawrolski 1993). Situated between Danzig and Königsberg – immediately on the river, Elbing had a convenient waterway connection with the Gdańsk Bay and further with the Baltic Sea and the North Sea.

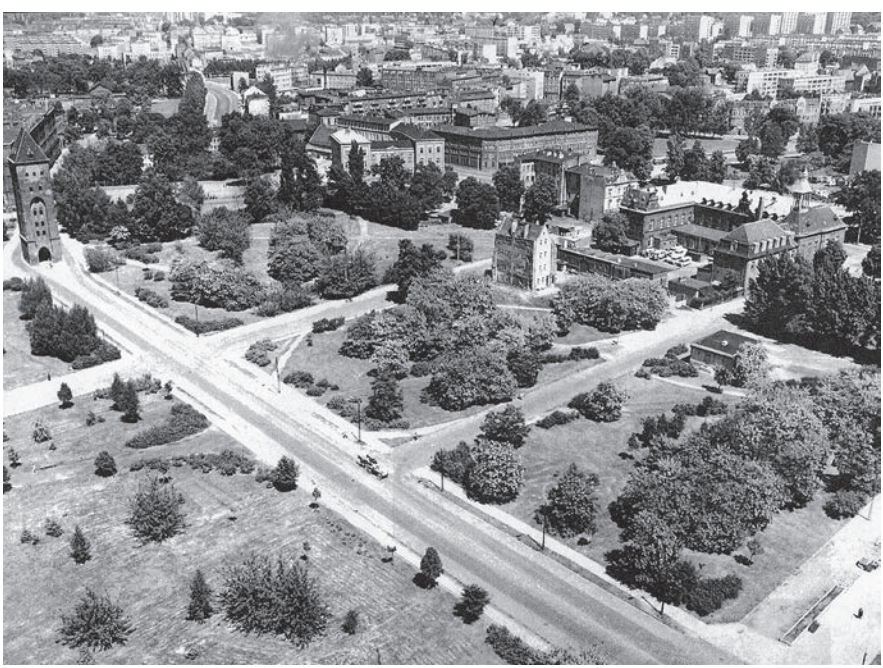


Fig. 3. Elbląg. Old Town. Northeastern part of the town, 1980 (photo by A. Kołecki)

The building of the castle and the new centre was progressing at a fast pace. In 1238, a charter was granted to the Dominican monastery, while several years later, Elbing townsmen were permitted to build a hospital with the Chapel of the Holy Spirit (1242). Municipal rights including a large patrimony of 1147 *łany* were granted on the 10th of April, 1246 (CDW 1861; Carsten 1938, pp. 73 *ff.*; Długokęcki 1992). From the second half of the 13th century, the rapidly developing Elbing was already actively involved in trade with cities of Northern and Western Europe, with the official access to the Hansa granted in 1356 (among others, Nawrolski 1992; Nawrolska 2008). Elbing and many other cities joining the Prussian Confederation in 1454 resulted in a refusal to obey the Order, the war that ended after 13 years concluded with a peace treaty in Thorn, 1466, and the incorporation of Danzig, Elbing, Thorn, and part of Prussia into the Kingdom of Poland under the name of Royal Prussia (Fig. 4).

From the Peace of Thorn (1466) to the first partition of Poland (1772), Elbing was experiencing a favourable and relatively stable development – economic growth, rebuilding, social transformations – despite plenty of hardships. The establishment of the English Eastern Campaign in the city (1583) improved its economic situation with a significant advancement of many crafts, whereas increased affluence of its residents improved the pace of construction endeavours. From the end of the 16th century to the mid-17th century, the city was enclosed by Dutch-style bastion fortifications, a result of firearms introduced in warfare (Fig. 5) (Rendschmidt 1933, p. 38; Dybaś 1994; Nawrolska 2010, p. 570 *ff.*). The wars taking place in the first half of the 18th century, occupation by various armies, and imposed reparations brought the city to ruins, making Elbing a provincial town. It was not until the incorporation to Prussia (1772) that its situation shifted. Following the demolition of the fortifications, further development of the city ensued, with manufacturing plants established and de-sanding of the Vistula Split waterway made port operations more dynamic and significantly improved the development of trade. From the mid-19th century, Elbing was an active participant in the industrial revolution. Under the Treaty of Versailles (1919), it fell within the borders of the German Reich, thus becoming an important centre of the East Prussia (*Ostpreussen*) province (Sobczak 1963, p. 226 *ff.*). In the course of the previous war, the city suffered no damage and it was only the two-weeks-long "conquest" by the Soviet Army that turned it into rubble. Following the "beautify the Old Town" campaign and the export of bricks to Gdańsk and Warsaw, the area of the former chartered municipality was covered with lawns, with cornerstones of streets and pathways trodden by residents.

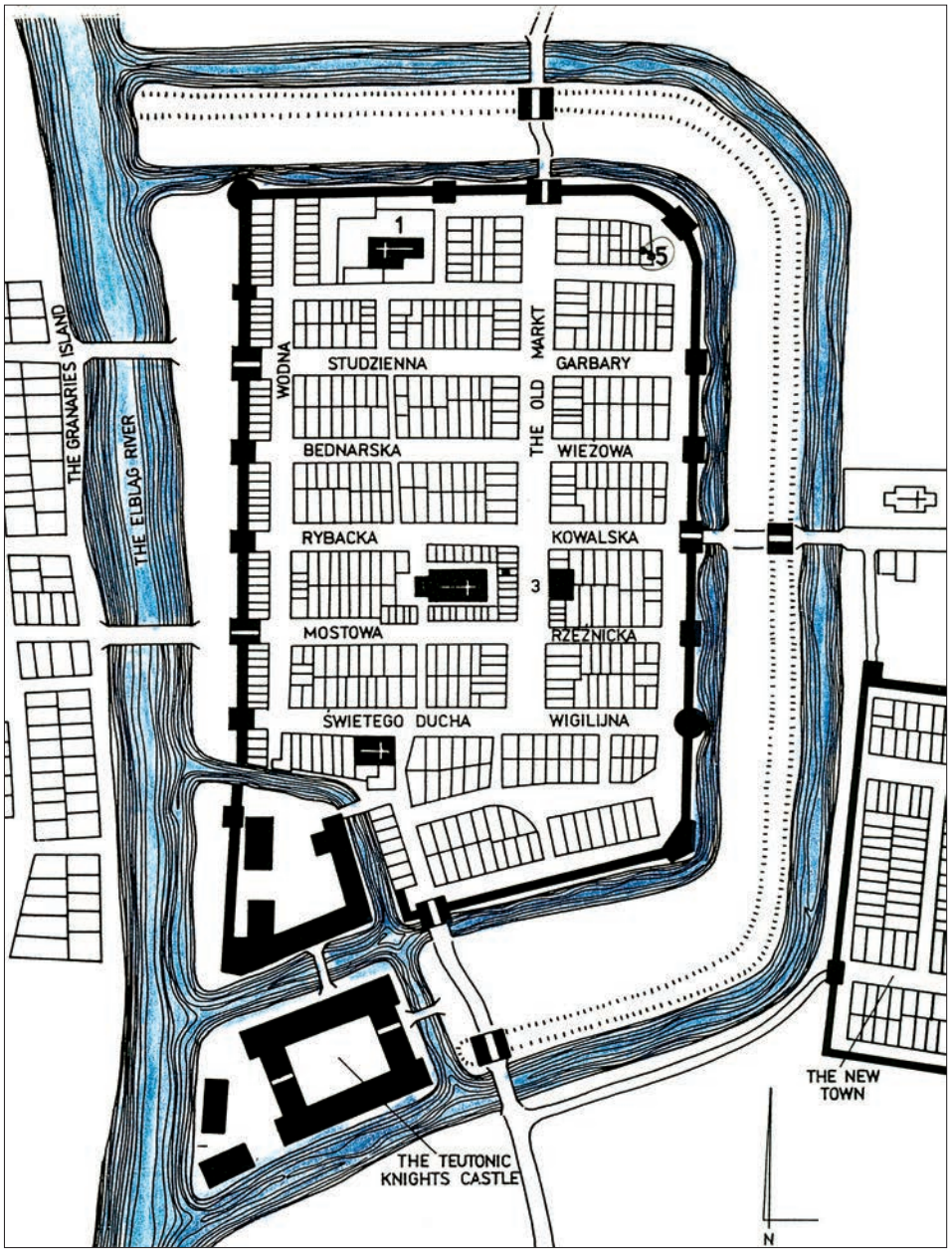


Fig. 4. Elbląg. Old Town. Town plan in the 15th century: 1 – Dominican monastery complex, 2 – church of St. Nicholas, 3 – Town Hall complex, 4 – hospital complex with the Chapel of the Holy Spirit (drawing by B. Kiliński)



Fig. 5. Plan of Elbląg from 1642 (after *Atlas historyczny* 1993)

Archaeology of the Old Town

A new chapter in the investigation on the history of the Old Town began in the year 1980[1]. The planned rebuilding of the historical centre was conditioned on archaeological-architectural studies. As a result of this choice of this conduct, M. Lubocka-Hoffmann, Provincial Conservator of Monuments in Elbląg introduced the method of retroversion, based on recognizing the layout of the medieval town as one of the key values of the old town area: street network, building lines, plot sizes, and plans of tenement houses (Lubocka-Hoffmann 1997, p. 115).

In the research works launched in the Old Town, the method of *urban archaeology* was used for the first time in Poland. It is the most difficult subdiscipline of archaeology – back then, already noticed by Professor Tadeusz Poklewski-Koziełł (Protokół 1984), and later by Professor Marian Rębkowski (Rębkowski 2001)[2].

[1] By the year 1980, the state of the archaeological research of the Old Town and the castle complex had been addressed repeatedly (e.g., Nawrolska 2014; 2025).

[2] The immensely high value of the methodical research by our colleague Tadeusz Nawrolski within the boundaries of the Old Town in Elbląg. Concerning the method, it is an undertaking that seeks to create a model for surveying vast urban spaces. Archaeology has currently produced model solutions for conducting research in vast urban spaces on the example of Elbląg (Protokół 1984).

The executed archaeological-architectural studies were based on two science programmes – for the Old Town and the Teutonic castle complex, respectively – developed by Tadeusz Nawrolski and approved by the Advisory Board (Nawrolski 1981a; 1981b), whose underlying principles entailed broad-scale multidisciplinary collaboration with researchers of many different specialties. By 2001, the excavation survey were conducted by the Urban Archaeology Practice PP Conservation Laboratory, Office in Gdańsk, and later by the Museum in Elbląg, and since 2008, the archaeological research has been carried out by private businesses, too (lacking the multidisciplinary collaboration); though sadly, some of them were conducted often in line with the principle, "cheaper and faster", which in this regard stands at odds with the 1968 UNESCO recommendations, specifically, the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, as well as the ICOMOS International Charter for the Conservation and Management of Archaeological Heritage, which mandated methodical surveying of every site endangered by damage (*Vademekum* 1996; Kobyliński 1998, p. 22).

Below, several selected examples – both good and bad – present the outcomes of the research, naturally, but a fragment of archaeologists' work within the boundaries of the Old Town (Figs. 6–9).

The Elbing settlement complex

The Elbing settlement complex comprised three parts, namely, the Teutonic castle with three castle boroughs, the Old Town, and the New Town founded next to it in the year 1347, as well as Granary Island, and three suburbs surrounding the entire complex. The multidisciplinary archaeological-architectural research conducted so far covering an area of several tens of thousands square meters yielded excellent results, radically changing our knowledge of the Elbląg of the past, at the same time providing data for designers that allow for the planned rebuilding of the historical centre to take place (Fig. 10).

In my view, a breakthrough in the archaeological research of cities of the former Hanseatic region located in Poland did not occur until 1980, when systematic excavations related to reconstructing the Elbląg of the past were commenced. Back then, it turned out that it is possible for one team to execute many years of broad-scale field surveys preceding construction works. It is also important that a difference in the results of the excavations could be easily noticed compared to those under the so-called archaeological supervision, most often a mere recording of damage that "quite often sanctioned irrecoverable damage to the historical substance", as recently accurately remarked Władysław Łosiński (Rębkowski 2001).



Fig. 6. Elbląg. Archaeological works in the northeast part of the Old Town. Excavation of 600 m^2 between the northern defensive wall and Garbary Street, 1987 (photo by J. Strobin)



Fig. 7. Elbląg. Old Town. Kowalska Street 6. Excavation works, 1994 (photo by G. Nawrolska)



Fig. 8. Elbląg. Old Town. View from the tower of St. Nicholas' church, 2019. Urban block: Bednarska – Ścieżka Kościelna – Stary Rynek Streets (Focus Hotel Premium Elbląg). Archaeological excavations carried out by the Archaeological and Historical Museum in Elbląg in the courtyard (photo by G. Nawrolska)



Fig. 9. Elbląg. Old Town. Northwestern corner of the Old Town (former Tortuga). Archaeological research (work at this level completed), 2023 (photo by G. Nawrolska)

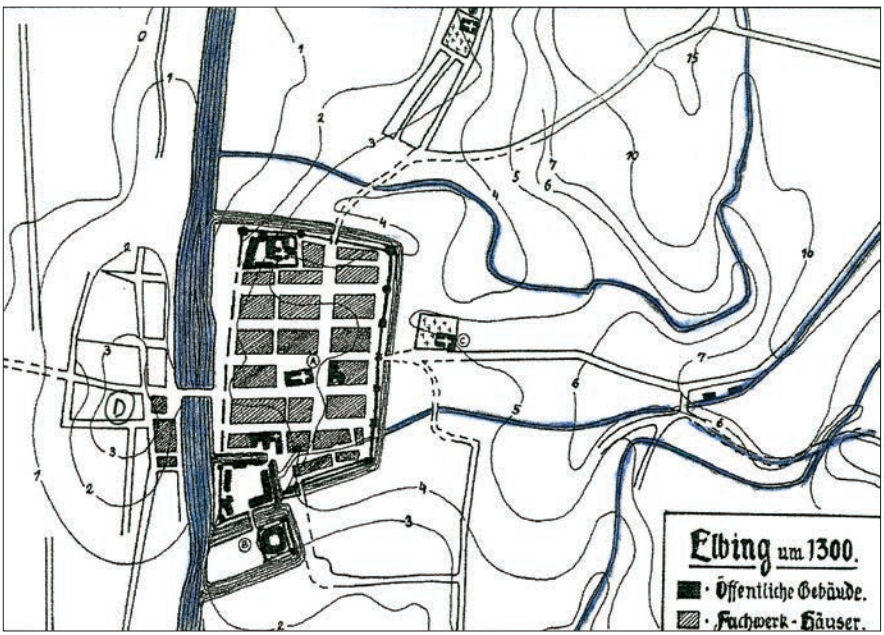


Fig. 10. Plan of Elbląg in the 15th century: Old Town, New Town, Granary Island, castle area, suburbs; river Elbląg – dark blue; Dzikuska, Kumiela Canal, Kumiela – light blue (*after* Hauke, Stobbe 1964; drawing by J. Szalaty)

The Teutonic castle

Until 1309, the castle complex situated on the southwestern side of the Old Town was the main seat of the authorities of the State of the Teutonic Order in Prussia and simultaneously the headquarters of the Grand Hospitalier. After the castle was handed over to the Elbing townsmen in 1454, it was systematically dismantled and in the 17th century, it disappeared from the public space, with the sole iconographic source that was left being an engraving depicting "unidentified ruins" (Fuchs 1818/1852, p. 53 *ff.*). The place of the castle was taken by bastion fortifications, followed by burgher houses.

Owing to the research conducted by German scientists in the interwar period of the past century and the archaeological studies of Polish scientists in the 1970–1980s and in the 2020s, it was possible to locate fragments of the southern and northern wing of the stronghold, the palace of the Elbing master, a fragment of the northern defensive wall and a moat, and likely the first wooden keep (?) (i.a., Nawrolski 1986; Fonferek *et al.* 2015). The Elbing castle was an immense keep measuring 62.5 m along the north-south axis. However, we do not know the full size of this

feature, the layout, utility buildings within the outer baileys. The previous small scope of research works assures our belief that it is necessary to conduct large-area multidisciplinary research in its area (Fig. 11).

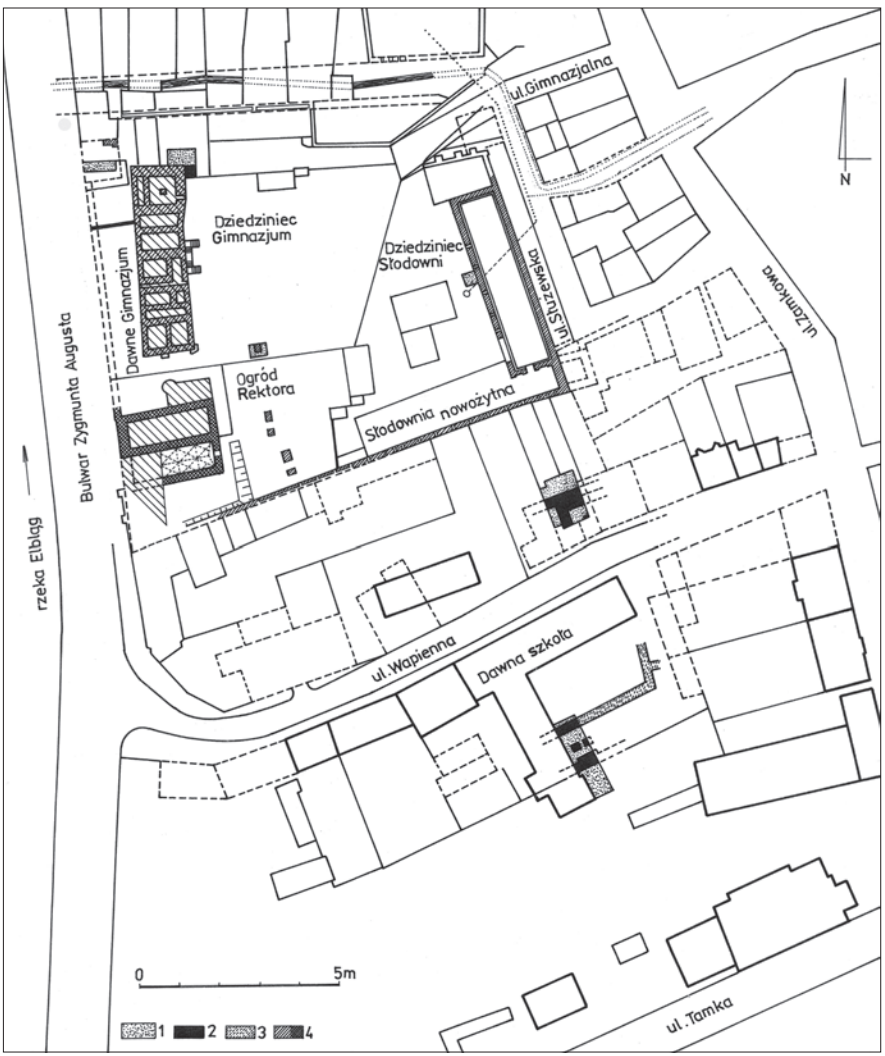


Fig. 11. Elbląg. Plan of the castle grounds with the layout of plots and buildings before 1945: 1 – archaeological excavations carried out in 1945–1982 (excluding research by Gdańsk University of Technology), 2 – medieval walls uncovered in excavations, 3 – probable course of walls exposed in 1936–1939, 4 – preserved portions of medieval walls (drawing by B. Kiliński; developed by T. Nawrolski)

The City Hall complex in the Old Town

A city hall – the most important secular building in town – is a place where activities related with economy, finance, and judiciary are pursued. The medieval city hall of the Old Town burned down in 1777, burgher houses raised in its place. The only one iconographic source that has been preserved shows three buildings of the townhouse complex dated to the 16th century, while mentions in written accounts were informing solely of some stages of the complex construction works. It was not until the large-scale excavation survey was undertaken in an area of 1,440 square metres that the complete layout of the entire city hall complex was revealed and the chronological range for its individual segments were determined (Nawrolski 1994).

The oldest form of the city hall was a stone tower measuring 13.0 by 14.8 m, later adjoined by a cloth hall that together with the tower was 36 m long (Fig. 12). It served for trading (cloth stalls), whereas its cellars housed a tavern with beer and wine, as tangibly evidenced by large quantities of broken medieval stoneware jugs from workshops in Siegburg and Waldenburg (Fig. 13). The next stage in the complex development was a massive feature covering 250 square metres, whose cellar walls were 4.5 m tall, and whose purpose was difficult to determine (wine cellars?) (Fig. 14). A municipal notary house and flesh shambles were also built. The final stage of the city hall complex extension was a building featuring a Mannerist façade visible on a 16th-century engraving. The entire complex was complemented by an enclosed yard – with a gigantic latrine – and two whipping posts.

The city hall with the Parish Church of Saint Nicolas right in front of it and other public buildings used to determine the central zone of the city centre (Nawrolski 1992b).

The Elbing fortifications

The trapezoidal plan of the Old Town was neighbouring the river of Elbląg with its longer side. It was a regular grid of streets divided into rectangular blocks of buildings and a distinct central zone. Initially, the newly founded centre was enclosed by earth ramparts and a wet moat, which has been confirmed by archaeological studies (Nawrolscy 1985, p. 387 *ff.*). In the beginning of the 14th century, construction of the first ring of stone-and-brick defensive walls commenced, featuring a system of fortified towers, gates, and watchtowers, while at the turn of the 15th century, the second ring was raised, as confirmed by excavation studies, likewise (Fig. 15). From the 16th century, the development of new warfare technologies – particularly the use of large cannons and firearms – triggered changes in the fortification art. In the first half of the 17th century, the Old Town and the New Town, as well as Granary Island were enclosed by Dutch-style bastioned fortifications (Fig. 16) (i.a., Behring 1921–1922; Drabiński 1963, p. 153; Bukal 2012).

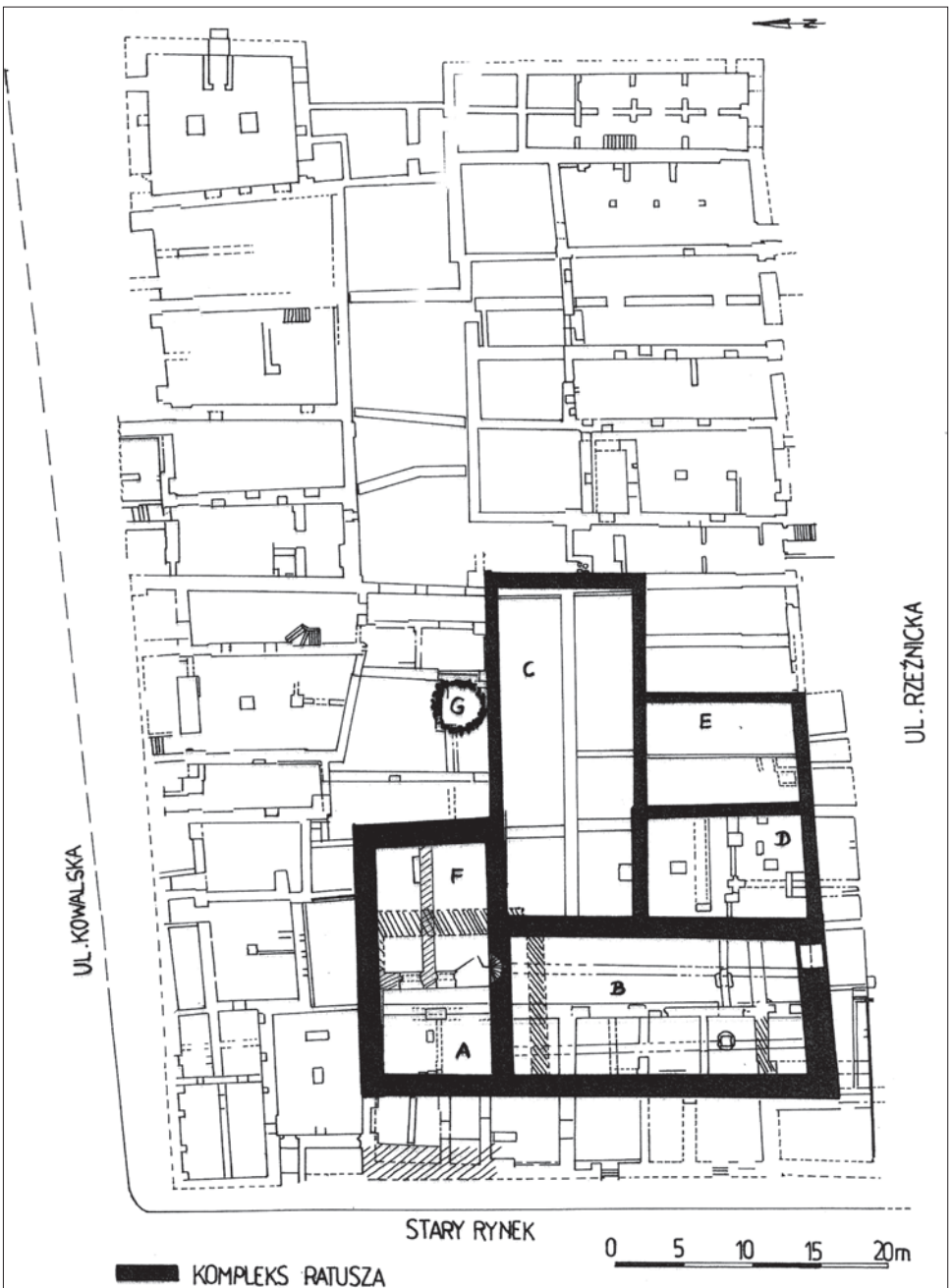


Fig. 12. Elbląg. Old Town. Main phases of development of the town hall complex: A – stone tower, B – cloth hall, C – unidentified building, D – scribe's house, E – butcher's stalls, F – "new town hall", G – town hall latrine (after Nawrolski 1994)



Fig. 13. Elbląg. Old Town. Stoneware jugs from workshops in Siegburg and Waldenburg (fragments of such forms were found on the brick floors of the cloth hall) (photo by G. Nawrolska)



Fig. 14. Elbląg. Old Town. Town hall complex: fragment – Building C of unidentified function. Cellar of the building – condition after archaeological excavations, 1993 (photo by G. Nawrolska)

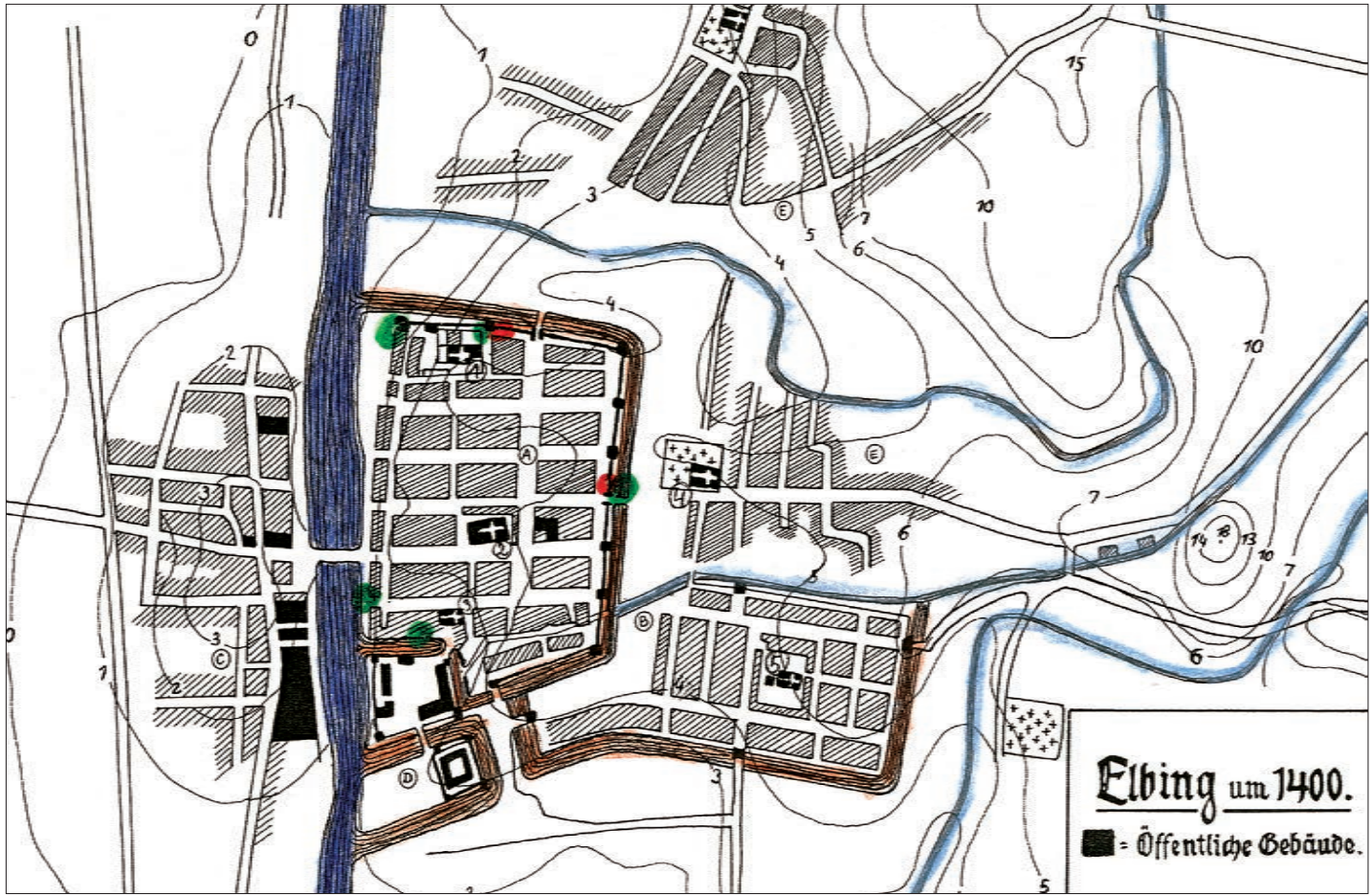


Fig. 15. Plan of Elbląg ca. 1400: A – Old Town, B – New Town, C – Granary Island, D – Teutonic castle, 1 – Dominican monastery, 2 – Church of St Nicholas, 3 – hospital with the Chapel of the Holy Spirit, 4 – Church of St James. Red – earth rampart with moat, green – medieval walls (after Hauke, Stobbe 1964; drawing by B. Kiliński)



Fig. 16. Plan of Elbląg after Merian, 1734: A – Old Town, B – New Town, C – areas outside the castle, D – Granary Island, 1 – Kowalska Gate Bastion (after Dokumentacja 1974–1975)

In the course of the renovation of a road that runs across the city centre, remains of a massive *piatta-forma* bastion were unearthed. An area of ca. 500 square metres yielded relics in the form of a fragment of an orillon with artillery terraces with loopholes. The uncovered features involved a casemate of the bastion's right side covering 196 square metres with 3.5-metres-tall walls. In the revealed foundations of the Third Blacksmith Gate (Brama Kowalska), a fragment of the city's main pipeline was found, supplying water to the city centre from the Elbląg Uplands (Fig. 17) (i.a., Nawrolska 2016).



Fig. 17. Elbląg. Eastern section of the water conduit, located within the former moat, 2013 (photo by J. Gawryołek)

21 and 23 Garbary Street

Conducted in a methodological manner particularly in the years 1980–2010, the archaeological studies yielded excellent results, with comprehensive excavation studies conducted within the entire area of parcels at 21 and 23 Garbary Street serving as one of many examples. Owing to an interdisciplinary collaboration involved in the research, it was possible to recreate levels of former wooden buildings from the 13th to the 15th century, specific phases related to the building of tenement houses and outbuildings, the order in which the yards of these parcels were developed, and to analyse a vast number of items related to daily life of their residents (Nawrolscy 1986).

Four levels of the wooden buildings have been distinguished, and some irregularities in how the urban space was planned have been recorded. In the preserved cellar walls of the tenement houses, subsequent building construction phases were marked (Fig. 18). Invaluable sources acquired in the course of the works include magnificent objects used by Elbing residents from the 13th to the 19th century; made in local workshops, and also imported in very high quantities, such as pottery, glassware, metalware, objects made of hide, wood, often representing the highest level of craftsmanship (Figs. 19–21).

Granary Island

An inseparable element of the Elbing complex, Granary Island was situated on the opposite side of the Elbląg River. Confined by earth reinforcements, its space held a regular grid of streets. In the 17th century, it was enriched with bastion fortifications.

The planning of the space of Granary Island began at the end of the 13th century; it housed within its boundaries, among others, gardens, granaries, timber storage yards, carpenter's shops, coach-houses, craftsmen's workshops, and also port facilities (Fig. 22) (CDW 1860–1872, p. 287).

An inescapable element of the urban life was fire, a frequent incident, one of which consumed nearly all the buildings of the Island in 1396. Following swift reconstruction, business and storing of commodities continued to be pursued on the island. After the fortifications were dismantled at the turn of the 19th century, the area started taking on an industrial and partly residential character. Once seized by the Red Army in 1945, the city saw all the developments of the Granary Island destroyed, the latter remaining an empty space with a few production halls until the end of the 20th century.

Presently non-developed and thus a perfect investment area, Granary Island is a *terra incognita* to archaeologists. Therefore, by necessity and obligatorily, the re-development of the island had to be preceded by archaeological surveys.

At 55 Warszawska Street, in a place where the building of PORTO VISTA building complex is planned, covering an area of several thousands of square metres, the first stage of research work involved non-invasive geophysical tests (Welc, Brzostowska 2020). This was followed by excavation works that were completed in only 19 days (in December) in an area of 1340 square metres. In the heritage protection application, the researchers wrote, "It is recommended that excavation studies are conducted consecutively with the I stage of construction works. Spoil should be removed from the site on an ongoing basis outside the investment area, due to which a single large excavation trench could be made and would provide archaeologists with a better outlook on the situation occurring below the modern-day destruction on the one hand, while on the other hand, it would have a positive

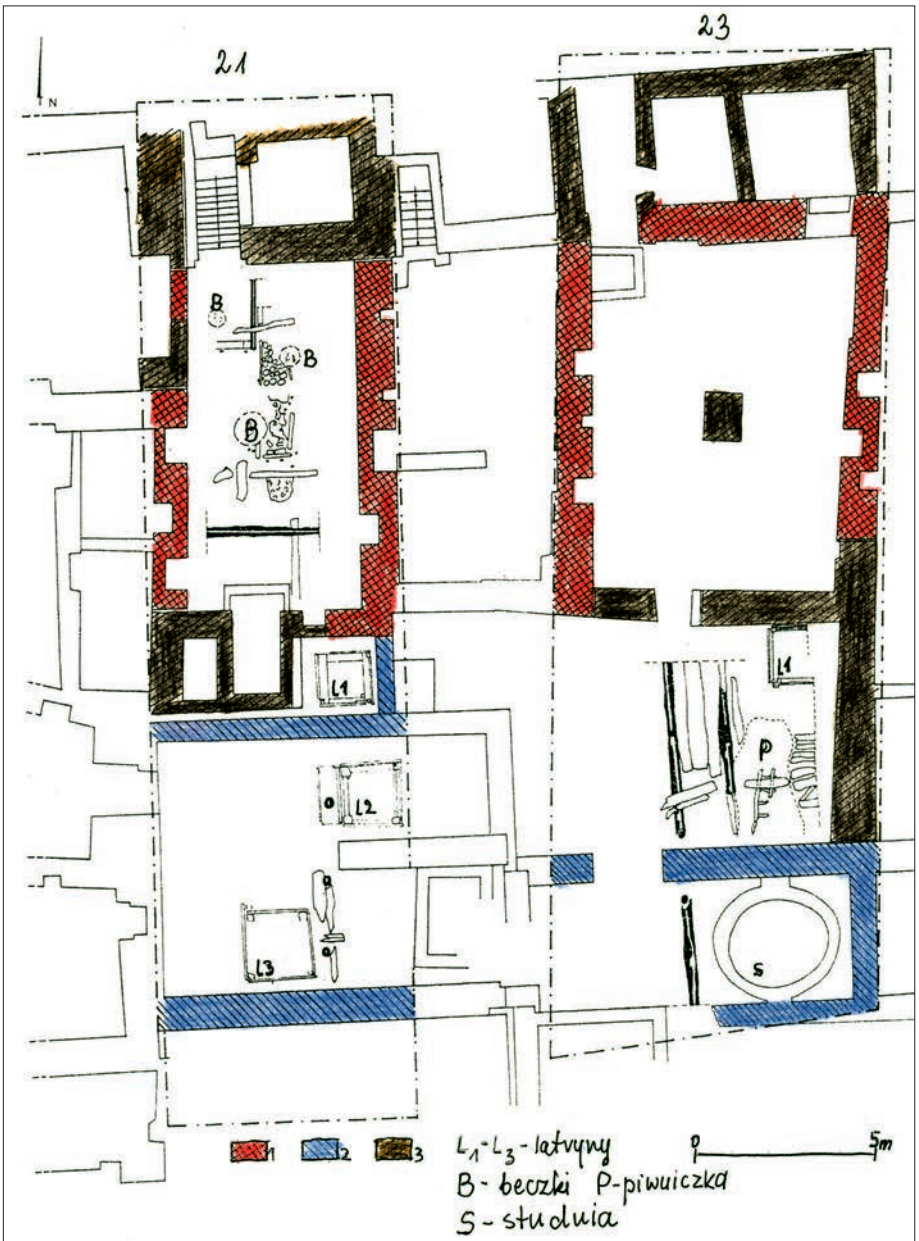


Fig. 18. Elbląg. Old Town. 21 and 23 Garbary Street. Stratigraphy of cellar walls, timber outbuilding, and domestic installations: 1 – walls from the first half of the 14th century, 2 – walls from the second half of the 15th century, 3 – walls from the 15th–17th centuries, L1–L3 – latrines, S – well (latrine), B – barrels, P – small cellar (after Nawrolscy 1986; drawing by I. Szalaty-Marszewska)



Fig. 19. Elbląg. Old Town. Garbary Street 23. Settling pit. Spectacles from the early 17th century (photo by A. Kołecki)



Fig. 20. Elbląg. Old Town. Garbary Street 21. Maiolica plate from the Netherlands, 17th century; glass goblets (so-called Römer) and other items (photo by G. Nawrolska)

impact on the investment process" (Borzych *et al.* 2020, p. 8). Meanwhile, the conduct they recommended stands at odds with the binding method for carrying out archaeological research in old-town complexes, and probably not solely in such complexes. There's one rule – it is only after the excavation works are completed that the area is made available to the investor, which takes place after the commissioning by a heritage protection officer who approves the archaeological studies as completed (Nawrolski 1985).

The next big investment area was a fragment of a district limited by Warszawska Street – Kupiecka Street – Szańcowa Street – Orla Street. The archaeological works

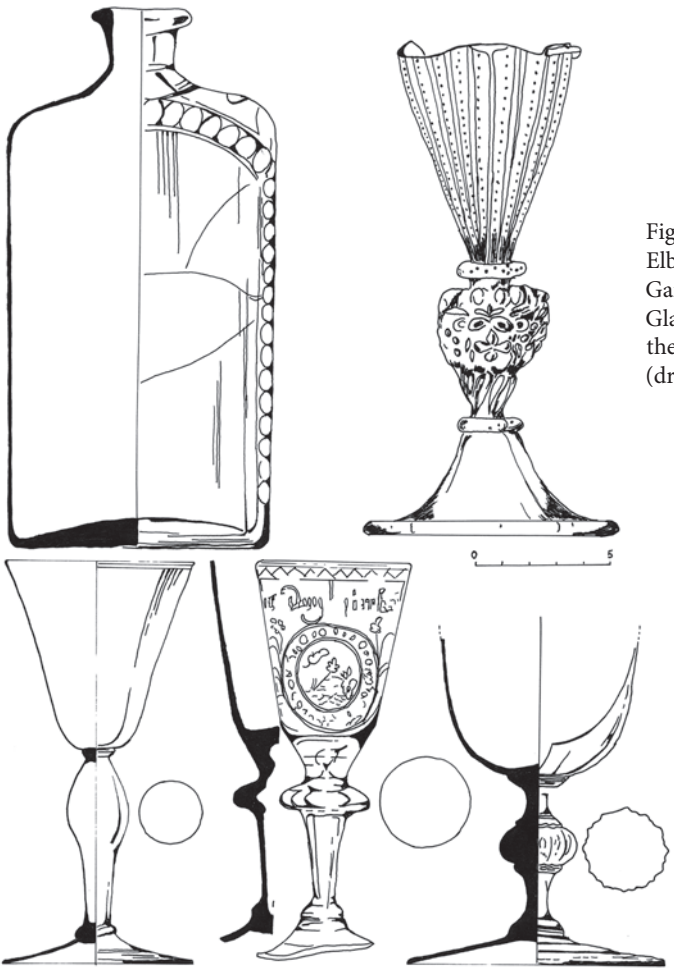


Fig. 21.
Elbląg. Old Town.
Garbary Street 21.
Glassware from
the 17th–18th centuries
(drawing by B. Kiliński)

performed in a methodological manner by company DANTISUM[3] covered an area of 5,200 square metres down to the undisturbed soil. As a result of the survey, elements of former developments of various chronology were unearthed, among others, foundations of fifty-four granaries and three tenement houses/outbuildings, twenty-four wells and three levels of pavement of constructed streets, uncovered in a substantial area (Fig. 23) (Krzywdziński 2024, p. 5). During the excavations numerous historical materials were found.

[3] DANTISUM Pracownia Badań Archeologicznych Robert Krzywdziński. I would like to thank my colleague Robert for allowing the access to the material from the archaeological survey conducted on Granary Island prior to publishing it.

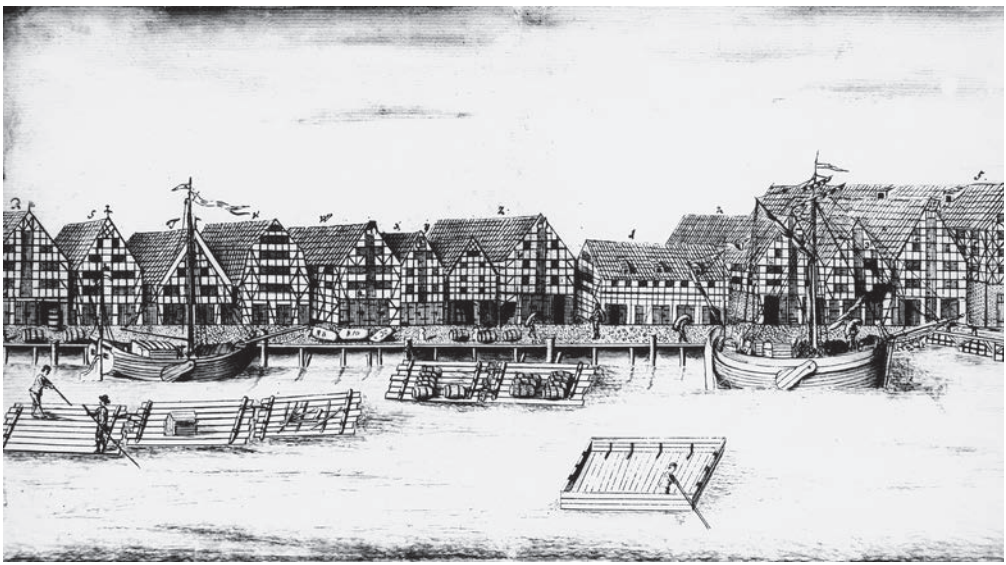


Fig. 22. Elbląg. Granary Island between the High and Low Bridges. View from the Old Town, 18th century (after Dokumentacja 1974–1975; reproduction A. Wołosewicz)



Fig. 23. Elbląg. Granary Island. Foundations of granaries (Phase I). Western part of the trench, 2024 (photo and developed by R. Krzywdziński, DANTISCUM. Archaeological Research Laboratory)

Results of multidisciplinary research

The issues covered by the research programmes were a *novum* of sort in studies investigating urban centres, which is undeniably owing to T. Nawrolski. He led the research in the years 1980–1994, and after his premature death, the archaeological studies were continued by Grażyna Nawrolska until 2010, whereas in the years 2011–2023, the excavation studies in the Old Town were carried out under the leadership of Mirosław Marcinkowski with the mandate of the Museum of Archaeology and History in Elbląg.

The issues addressed in both programmes were classified into several basic groups – nine point each. The non-specific approach to the subject of the medieval and the modern-era city in these programmes signalled only some general problems and matters; the reality in the research proved to be more complex.

1. City layout. The making of the city layout and the original urban layout. Determining principles for measuring the centre, specifying occupation zones, main passageways.
2. Defensive reinforcements. The forms and chronology of original city embankments. Their development, medieval and modern-era reinforcements. Building materials and techniques for masonry fortifications.
3. History of city developments. Determining the layout and sizes of the oldest urban parcels of land, their growth in space and time. Progress of the city's wood and masonry buildings. Building techniques.
4. The city's technical infrastructure. Determining the course of the water and sanitation system in the city. Locating water mains, wells, and latrines. Construction forms of structures.
5. Material, artistic, and spiritual culture. Matters related to Elbing crafts, stockbreeding, consumption. Sacral and municipal buildings, among others, the town hall complex, the Dominican monastery, the Parish Church of Saint Nicolas, and the cemetery. The issues of artistic and daily culture of the city residents in a broad sense.
6. Local, regional, and long-distance trade. Matters related to the operation of the port. Determining the assortment of products that are imported and exported – commercial contacts with the Hansa, the English East India Company and the local market.
7. Socio-topography of the city. Matters related to the residents' social and ethnic structure, craft and trade groups associated with a specific area of the city – association with street names.
8. The Teutonic castle. Precise spatial location of the entire castle complex and its individual elements. Determining the chronology of the complex. Specifying the role of the castle in the formation and development of the city.

9. Forms of suburban settlements. Determining the function and chronology of suburban areas. Their role in the operation of the urban economy and the development of the entire complex.

1. City plan

The area of the Old Town is similar to a trapeze covering 15 ha, which was expanded to 24 ha in the beginning of the 14th century. The main thoroughfare was Stary Rynek Street measuring 19–25 m in width, linking a comb-like arrangement of six streets perpendicular to itself and the river; simultaneously, it served as a market square. Additionally, communicating was facilitated by means of the Church Path that was linking the Dominican monastery with the Parish Church of Saint Nicolas and the hospital with the Holy Spirit Chapel (Fig. 24). The city developments were

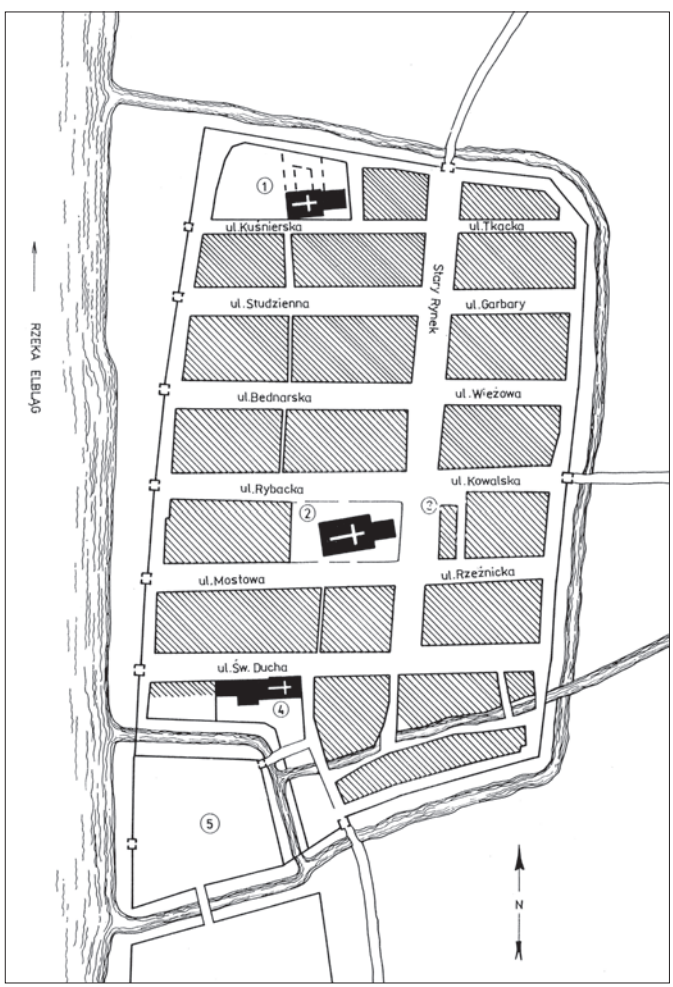


Fig. 24. Elbląg. Old Town. City plan in the 15th century: 1 – Dominican monastery complex, 2 – St Nicholas Church, 3 – town hall complex, 4 – hospital with the Chapel of the Holy Spirit, 5 – The Teutonic Castle (after Hauke, Stobbe 1964; drawing by B. Kiliński)

arranged into rectangular blocks of buildings separated by streets (Nawrolska 2014, p. 78). The city centre features operating public buildings. The limits of the complex determined in the 1246 incorporation charter were confirmed by archaeological studies (i.a., Nawrolscy 1985, p. 390; Nawrolska 2005). Theories about the urban space being measured twice were not confirmed. We can only be talking about small adjustments that occurred in the central part of the city in the area of Garbary Street.

From the mid-13th century, a high-intensity process of developing the city space began, and lasted for about a hundred years. Based on the stratigraphic analysis and dendro-chronological studies, we can determine settlement zones and city development areas. Delineating streets, residential and utility buildings within the urban parcels, as well as actions related to raising the administrative, commercial and cultural centre ended the first phase of shaping the space of the city (e.g., Nawrolski 1994, p. 9 *ff.*).

2. Defensive reinforcements

Owing to the excavation works, it was possible to learn about former relics of defensive reinforcements since all left of the medieval system was the Marketplace Gate (Brama Targowa). On the eastern side of the city, a 7-metres-long section of a 13th-century earthen rampart and a wet moat were found along with a fragment of the oldest inner Blacksmith Gate and a section of a stone-and-brick defensive wall that sits on a previously formed earthen rampart (Nawrolscy 1985, p. 387 *ff.*). Therefore, the eastern boundary of the city has been confirmed and, likewise, the northern border has been confirmed in the form of severely damaged earthen reinforcements on Wałowa Street. The north-western corner of the city was determined by uncovered crown of foundations of defensive walls (?) (Marcinkowski, Stasiełowicz 2023).

In the city centre, perfectly preserved remains of modern-era *piatta forma* bastion fortifications were unearthed in an area of 500 square metres – from the first line of modern reinforcements dated to the beginning of the 17th century (Toeppen 1887; Behring 1922).

In the course of the future research work on Granary Island, particular focus should be put on the likelihood of discovering elements of its defensive system.

3. Burghers' houses

When the research began in 1980, one of the key tasks was to identify and recreate the former grid of streets and the size of full-value medieval urban parcels of the *Erbe* type, which was intended to serve as the grounds for rebuilding the Old Town in line with its historical delimitation subdivision (Fig. 25).

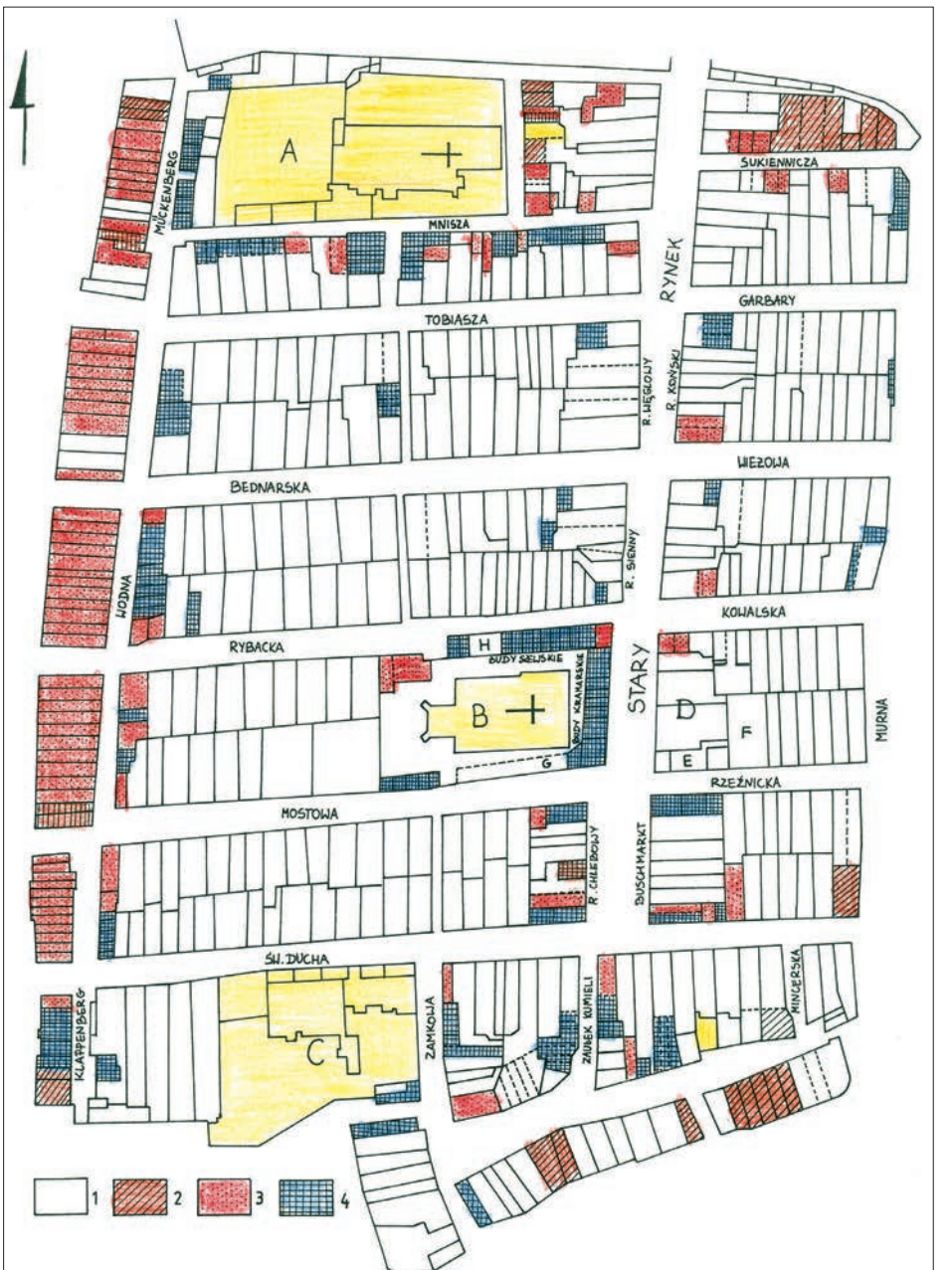


Fig. 25. Plan of the Old Town from the mid-14th century: 1 – full-value plot, Erbe 2 – farm plot, Wurth, 3 – Bude-type plot (1/3, 1/4, 1/6 Erbe), A – Dominican complex, B – Church of St Nicholas, C – hospital complex of the Holy Spirit, D – town hall complex, E – scribe's house, F – butcher stalls, G – bread stalls, H – parish school (drawing by K. Raguze)

A matter of exceptional importance was to determine the size of the 13th-century parcels of land, though unfortunately, reconstruction proved to be possible in two cases only (Nawrolska 2012, p. 99). However, given the outcomes of our efforts, it became possible to recreate the subdivision of Elbing made of bricks from the 14th century – that is, the first tenement houses – to the destruction of the city's buildings in 1945. In the determined pattern, the land parcels in Elbing were from one to two and a half *pręty* wide – that is, from 4.70 m to 11.75 m – and from three to five *pręty* deep – that is, from 16.5 to 23.5 m (Nawrolski 1992b, p. 374). The front part of the parcel was occupied by a residential building, often serving also as a warehouse, whereas the other course accommodated outbuildings, utility buildings, wells, and latrines.

Much understanding has been gained regarding forms of wooden buildings; when it comes to those from the 13th–14th century, we can differentiate several construction types[4]. These are wattle structures, pile, log wall, and – primarily framed dwelling structures – often dual band – built as early as from the mid-13th century (Nawrolska 2001, p. 473 *ff.*; 2002 p. 290 *ff.*). The areas of these houses varied, ranging from 12 square metres to 45 square metres (Figs. 26, 27).

In Elbląg, relics of four masonry annexes were found, preserved as cellars situated in the central parts of the parcels that served as outbuildings after the tenement houses were raised.

Excellent results were yielded by the architectural research of the cellars of the Elbing tenement houses, with the obtained findings serving as the foundation for designing and rebuilding the Old Town.

The Elbing tenement house covered the entire width of the parcel and, in general, two-thirds of its length. Initially, it was two-storey, and at the turn of the 15th century, subsequent ones were added (Fig. 28) (i.a., Kąsinowski 1997, p. 52 *ff.*).

Owing to the archaeological-architectural studies, the processes pertaining to the development of wood and masonry buildings were developed, allowing us to rebuild the tenement houses in the Old Town in line with the retroversion principles[5].

4. Technical infrastructure of the city

The matters related to the technical infrastructure of the Old Town pertain predominantly to the principles according to which the water and sewage system operated, which is an important element of the urban organism. Ensuring that drinking

[4] In the Old Town, relics of several hundreds of wooden houses were unearthed, whose individual elements are dated by means of the dendrochronological method to the period from mid-13th century to the 15th century. At times, these are the year of the time when the tree used for building these features had been cut.

[5] Unfortunately, after the year 2011, architectural studies were conducted in few cellars of tenement houses and outbuildings.



Fig. 26. Elbląg. Old Town. Św. Ducha Street 23. Fragment of a log-frame building dated to the 1270s. (photo by G. Nawrolska)



Fig. 27. Elbląg. Old Town. Św. Ducha Street. Front of a timber-frame building from the 14th century (photo by A. Kołecki)



Fig. 28. Elbląg. Old Town. A, B – cleared interiors of townhouses, 1990 (photo by G. Nawrolska)

water is supplied and that waste is removed were one of the most important issues in the life of the Elbing residents (Nawrolska 2022, p. 25 *ff.*).

Water was sourced from the river, two large city wells: the Central Well and the Main Well, and also private wells situated in the yards of the land parcels. Made with wood, stones, and bricks, they served their role for a relatively brief period of time, since the immediate vicinity of latrines contaminated the water sourced from the former. The unearthed sections of wooden water troughs and water distribution networks are not impressive. This is due to the fact that barely any surveys have been conducted in the streets where these networks were primarily laid (Fig. 29).

In Elbing, sewage was accumulating at an alarming rate, while removing it outside the city boundaries was highly challenging for the authorities. Of the sanitary facilities, the pest-preserved are the wooden and masonry latrines found on each lot (Fig. 30). By the year 2011, over 250 latrines had been examined; since

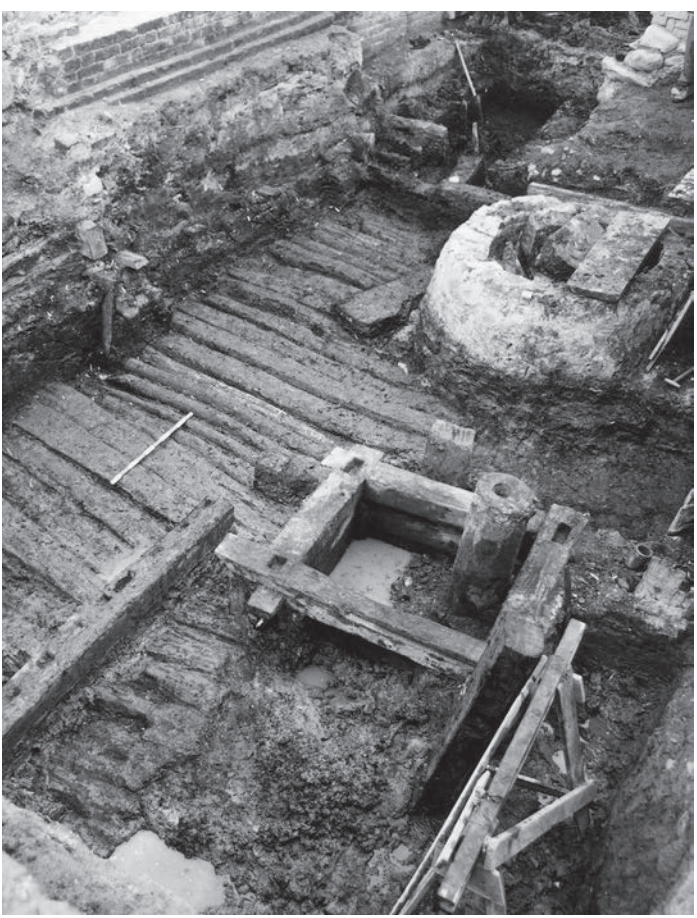


Fig. 29.
Elbląg. Old Town. Stary Rynek Street. Masonry and wood-lined well (photo by A. Kołecki)



Fig. 30. Elbląg. Old Town. Stone-brick and wood-lined latrines in the courtyards of plots (two originally served as wells) (photo by G. Nawrolska)

they served also as waste pits, they were holding hundreds of thousands of various objects. Cleanliness was preserved also by means of street gutters, while outside the city, there were designated areas for storing litter.

Owing to the archaeological research it was possible to gain a relatively good understanding of how the water and sewage networks operated.

5. Material, artistic, and spiritual culture

The research postulate regarding various areas of material culture covered a wide range of topics. Many of them have been successfully explained, however, a number of issues should be analysed with, among others, art historians.

Certain subjects pertaining to the central zone of the Old Town have been already made known. The construction and expansion of the city hall complex and utility buildings; works within the boundaries of the cemetery by Saint Nicolaus Church provided information regarding the burial rite. Still, the knowledge of the Dominican monastery and the parish church in the city remains insufficient.

Craft was the foundation of Elbing's economic growth and its broad-scale trade from as early as the mid-13th century. Accounts concerning contemporaneous guilds and pursued vocations are provided in written sources and a vast collection of items acquired in the course of the archaeological research. With the numbers of artefacts this high, it is relatively rare to encounter traces of craftsmen's workshops.

The relics found so far include those of a kiln for firing pottery dated to the late 13th century (Marcinkowski 2003), antler workshops, shoemaker stalls, button-maker stalls, and a workshop where metal elements of furnishings were fixed (Marek 2014). These businesses have left thousands of different products.

Elbing saw an early development of a wide range of crafts related to broadly understood woodworking. Thousands of discovered wooden items involve homestead utensils, various implements related to, among others, homestead utensils, various tools related to, among others, construction, farming equipment, toys (i.a., Nawrolska 2014).

Numerous individuals of trades related to ironworking – such as blacksmiths, cutlers, locksmiths, etc., left hundreds of products highly essential in daily life.

Stockbreeding, fishery, and farming were an essential element of the city's economy. These activities have left numerous tools and tens of thousands of osteological remains (Fig. 31).



Fig. 31.
Sturgeon at 1:1 scale (with original plates) – reconstruction by B. Kiliński (in the photo), consultation Prof. D. Makowiecki (photo by G. Nawrolska)

The collection of several hundred thousand items of above-average value gathered in the course of the archaeological survey made by various craftsmen, has been and will be a valuable foundation for further works.

6. Local, regional, and long-range trade

The importance of Elbing was enhanced by its role of a port city well communicated with bodies of water, while its situation at the junction of trade routes enabled vast trade with the entire Northern Europe (i.a., Nawrolska 1999). As a member of the Hanseatic League and the key port of the Order, Elbing had numerous privileges.

As early as from the mid-13th century, the biggest part of Elbing's imports was pottery, manufactured, among others, in Danish, Dutch, and Rhine workshops (Fig. 32). Exclusive kitchen utensils, such as mortars, whetstones, spit supports. Imported goods involved broadcloth, silk, glassware, spices. Elbing's merchants exported primarily wood and derived products (ash, tar), grain, amber, and beer.

The Elbing trade regressed to some extent in the 15th century; however, as early as from the subsequent century, the city was experiencing economic boom. One of the reasons was the founding of the Eastland Company in 1583 and the significant rise in trade, particularly with the Netherlands. Elbląg saw an influx of large amounts of various objects belonging to the so-called culture of dressing, table dressing, and dining. Glassware, pottery, pipes, metal objects, and a number



Fig. 32. Elbląg. Old Town. Stoneware jugs from Siegburg and Waldenburg (photo by G. Nawrolska)

of other items found in very large quantities and made in European workshops are evidence of the willingness and/or need to emphasise one's affluence or to stand out among the Elbing society (Figs. 33–35).

The import of goods to Elbing was taking place primarily via maritime shipping, though it was connected also by land routes to cities of the Republic of Poland, where copper, lead, and wine was imported from.

Commercial activity was set out to happen in the town square – the entire Stary Rynek Street ("Old Town Square" in Polish – Translator's note) housed cloth halls, shops, flesh shambles, stalls, whereas directly by the river there was a fish market. Trade was pursued also on the porch terraces or directly in houses, while wholesale was taking place in the port and on Granary Island. Political shifts and military operations hindered trade flow. Nonetheless, tens of thousands of objects remained, evidencing the significant position that Elbing held in the broadly understood trade (i.a., Groth 2006; 2007).

7. Socio-topography of the city

Matters from the domain of socio-topography – a field of science investigating the relations that occur between social structures of residents and the spatial layout of a city or a town, particularly regarding the network of streets – have been taken



Fig. 33. Elbląg. Old Town. Tableware and everyday objects from the 17th–18th centuries (photo by A. Kołecki)



Fig. 34. Elbląg. Old Town. Tableware of Elbląg residents, 17th century (photo by A. Kołecki)

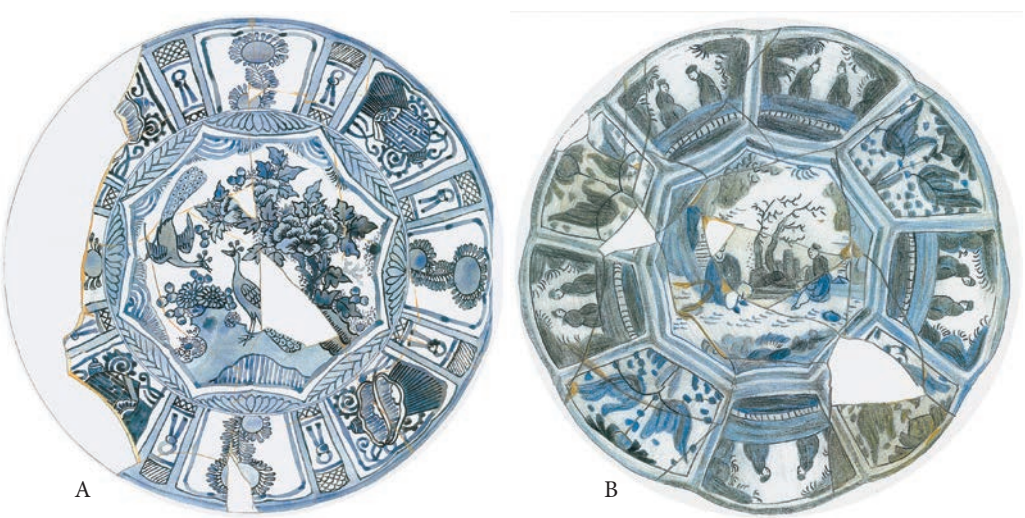


Fig. 35. Elbląg. Old Town. Dutch faience, plate and bowl from the 17th century (drawing by K. Raguze)

into account in the research programme, likewise. The source for studies that seek to explain these issues combined with the archaeological material is, among others, cartographic books (Czaja 1992).

A group of prominent historians developed "Kartoteka działek" (Kartoteka 1985), where based on all the available historical sources, names of proprietors and users of every plot of land in the Old Town were recorded.

Based on an analysis of a number of criteria used by Elbing's residents to choose a place to live and operate their commercial business in, zones that determined the attractiveness and, simultaneously, the social prestige of a given urban space – a street – were identified. The measure of this assessment was, among others, the situation of a given plot and the type of the building, convenient communication and the vicinity of public premises, easy access to water, traffic in the city, and, what is highly important, financial capabilities. In many cases, these conditions were reflected in the nomenclature of the streets they inhabited. Nonetheless, there were exceptions to this, such as brewers, who occupied plots on nearly all the streets, yet there was no Browarna Street or Piwna Street in medieval Elbing, for that matter.

8. Teutonic castle

The Elbing castle complex – a conventual castle and three outer baileys – has been evoking much interest among researchers since as early as mid-19th century (i.a. Schmid 1915; 1920; Hauke, Stobbe 1964; *Zur Wirtschaftsentwicklung* 1989; Herrmann 2007). Despite the conducted research works, both archaeological and geo-radar surveys over the last and present century, our knowledge about one of the key military features of the Teutonic Order is modest, unfortunately. We do not know the full scale of the castle and the layout of the elements of the entire complex. Matters related to the daily life of its residents and users remain unknown to us. We do know, though, that the castle used to fulfil political, administrative, economic, and representative roles, demonstrating the power of the Teutonic knights that we can also become familiar with by means of everyday objects.

Certainly, carrying out comprehensive large-scale multidisciplinary research within the castle complex boundaries will provide a deeper understanding of its history, among others, the magnificent architecture, and shed light on the castle life in the "olden days".

9. Forms of suburban settlement

Suburbs are areas located outside the city walls though governed by municipal authorities. Their premises housed hospitals, shelters, facilities for craft and industrial purposes, mills, workshops. At the same time, they were serving residential purposes. Following the construction of modern-era bastion fortifications in the 17th century, some of them became part of the urban organism. Once Elbing's

defensive enhancements had been completely dismantled (18th–19th century), the suburbs were connected to the Old and the New Town.

- The port-area (western) suburb – was covering a small area between the river and the city walls, whereas the activities pursued there was related to the operation of the port and marine trade.
- Eastern suburb – used to lie beyond the Blacksmith Gate and make advantage of the waters running down from the Elbląg Uplands; mills including oil mills were built, and fish ponds were established there. It also housed Saint Elisabeth Hospital and Saint Jacob Church. After these buildings and bastion fortifications had been dismantled in the late 18th century, the site became the city centre.
- Northern suburb – with a shipyard founded in its premises on the northern side of the Marketplace Gate and accompanying facilities such as, among others, cordmaker stalls, a fulling mill, cloth halls. Further away, the Church of the Corpus Cristi was raised; even further, ten brickyards were situated. From the mid-19th century, numerous industrial plants were operating in that area.

Final remarks

In the attempt to assess the archaeological research of many years in the Old Town, one should consider the scope and method of works, the impact that their results have on processed related to designing new buildings and using the last chance for learning about the inaccessible past of the historical centre.

The destruction of the Old Town in 1945 and the dismantling of the standing tenement house walls by 1961 transformed that space into a great green square. In 1980, Voivodeship Heritage Protection Officer in Elbląg M. Lubocka-Hoffmann decided to have the Old Town rebuilt in accordance with the proposed conceptual design referred to as retroversion. The planned reconstruction was intended to be based on modern-day architecture, albeit drawing from the atmosphere of the town of the past by preserving its medieval layout with the width of streets and tenement houses. Future design work and then construction work was supposed to precede comprehensive, multidisciplinary archaeological-architectural studies.

The excavation studies in the Old Town and partly on Granary Island were executed under programmes authored by T. Nawrolski (Fig. 36). The *archaeology of cities* method applied during the research has been considered for some time one of the most difficult disciplines of archaeology (Fig. 37). Using it gives immense cognitive opportunities and a way to recover tangible sources in the most complete way. Processing materials and interpreting them correctly requires broad-scale multidisciplinary cooperation with experts in various fields that was highly consistently implemented until 2013, and then sporadically (Krzywdziński 2024).



Fig. 36.
Elbląg. Old Town. Bednarska Street. Tadeusz Nawrolski at the excavations, 1992 (photo by G. Nawrolska)



Fig. 37.
Elbląg. Archaeological works in the northeast part of the Old Town, 1987 (photo by A. Kołecki)

The significance of the Elbląg research is evidenced by hundreds of various types of publications appearing in Poland and abroad – Austria, Germany, Belgium, Latvia, Greece. The performed excavation studies played an important role in popularising the knowledge of the Elbląg of the past, passed in the local press, the national press, and the European press. In numerous expeditions, magnificent, admirable objects were shown. Both the laboratory and the excavation site were frequented by a large number of researchers of various specialties (Fig. 38).

For the first thirty years (1980–2010), the excavation works were conducted in line with the research methodology. When private-owned development companies entered the Old Town area (after 2012), the cost and the duration of *surveys* became the most important criterion for hiring archaeologists whereas substantive aspects ceased to play their role and in practice, started to take on the form of the so-called *archaeological inspection*. The results of "research" work oftentimes carried out with an excavator and a shovel, and over a short course of time, are not that hard to imagine.

The rebuilding of the Old Town required sacrifice, effort, and commitment from the residents of Elbląg, the heritage protection office and municipal authorities,

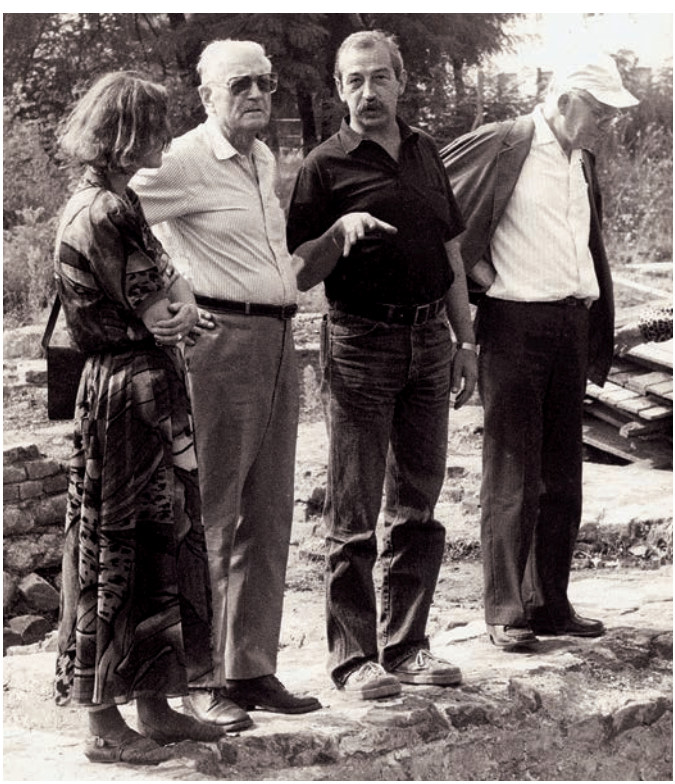


Fig. 38.
Elbląg. Old Town. Rybacka Street. Maria Lubocka-Hoffmann, Prof. Aleksander Gieysztor, Tadeusz Nawrolski, Prof. Lech Leciejewicz at an archaeological site, 1990 (photographer unknown)



Fig. 39. Elbląg. Old Town. Sukiennicza Street. Visitors,. including Prof. Aleksander Gieysztor touring the excavation site, 1987 (photo by G. Nawrolska)

construction workers, and experts in many fields of science. Looking at the *new Old Town* brought back to life, we cannot forget the inhabitants of Elbing who have been shaping their contemporaneous reality there for several centuries – living, working, entertaining themselves (Fig. 39). Today, we seek to get this past realm back and recreate it through the unearthed objects and relics of buildings of the past. For this reason, it is worth stressing again the importance of conducting archaeological works that serve us as the basis for "acquiring" and "retrieving" various sources in a methodical manner.

By means of archaeology, we revive the memory of their distant predecessors to the modern-day Elbląg residents.

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