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New Finds Offering Insights into the Knight's Manor in Chechło, Upper Silesia

Nowe materiały do poznania siedziby rycerskiej
w Chechle na Górnym Śląsku

Abstract: The archaeological research conducted in 1970 confirmed that there are remains of a late medieval motte-and-bailey castle in Chechło. At that time, the structure was almost completely destroyed by farmstead construction, with only one small section of an earth wall preserved. During the conservator's intervention in 1998, hundreds of unprocessed artefacts were discovered in the collection of the Provincial Office of Monument Preservation in Katowice, again drawing attention to this interesting site. Due to the expansion of the farmstead, the cultural stratification of the motte-and-bailey castle was damaged. Today, degradation and destruction by the contemporary infrastructure make it impossible to conduct

further verification research, which would allow to better explore the remains of the site. Based on written sources and analysis of the finds, we can draw some new conclusions concerning its operation. There is no doubt that the manor already existed in the fourteenth century and that it was also used in the following centuries. It is difficult to say anything about the appearance of the manor at the time. It was most probably surrounded by an earth wall, small remains of which have been preserved until today. The discovered ceramic shards and fragments of stove tiles indicate that the residence was still used in the modern era, meaning the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, by representatives of the local gentry.

Keywords: Upper Silesia, Chechło, motte-and-bailey castle, Late Middle Ages, modern era

Introduction

Archaeological research into medieval residential and defensive structures in Upper Silesia has traditions dating back to the interwar period (Nowakowski 2017: 55–60; Zdaniewicz 2021: 369–394). It is worth mentioning that this was the time when many sites of this type were first discovered, usually manifesting themselves in the form of characteristic mounds of different diameters. Initially, in the 1930s, no strictly excavation work was carried out in these areas. The research was usually limited to a brief note with a description of the site, containing its approximate

dimensions, location characteristics, and other distinctive features. In some cases, more detailed surface reconnaissance was carried out to inventory and document the discovered items in the form of fragments of dishes and other artefacts, constituting remains of the structure and utility buildings. In many cases, the items were damaged by, for example, ploughing, when new buildings or the accompanying infrastructure were erected, during tree planting, and as a result of all kinds of terrain levelling. When the soil was moved, artefacts from the destroyed cultural stratification were brought to the surface, and when they were discovered there during the archaeological reconnaissance, they constituted the first tangible evidence of the historic character of the place. Prewar researchers, during the already mentioned field survey and in their description of sites, frequently used methods employed by cultural anthropologists and ethnologists. Commonly used tools were interviews conducted with the local population. As it turned out, mentions of forgotten knight's manors remained mostly in unwritten, oral accounts handed down from generation to generation. Moreover, the local tradition associated these places with extraordinary, or even fairy-tale-like, stories preserved in the local awareness at least for decades. Knowledge of the knight's manor in Chechło (German: Chwchlau kr. Gleiwitz), despite the tens of years that passed since its disappearance, was also preserved and was of interest to local inhabitants and people connected with the village¹. The oldest signs of this interest in the motte-and-bailey castle in Chechło date back to the nineteenth century.

About the research history

In December 1867, a school inspector from Chechło (*Schulinspektor*) Mr Kosellek wrote in a letter to the Museum of Silesian Antiquities in Wrocław (*Museum Schlesischer Altertümer*): [...] *Hier im Dorfe (Chechlau) ist ein grosser Ringwall, Ruinen eines alten heidnischen Schlosses. Sehr viele Knochen Und Eisenstücke wurden darin gefunden* [...]². As the teacher's correspondence indicates, Chechło had a large ring wall surrounding an old pagan castle. In 1878, Mr Kosellek wrote in the chronicle of the local school that he had conducted the first amateur research on the earth

1 Today, knowledge of the site among the local population is very poor. Only three elderly people have heard about the "castle in the village". Local legends focus on the inn that allegedly sank into the ground because "people had a good time there too often", and on a "white lady" haunting the local palace. I would like to thank Dr Klaudia Janicka, history teacher in the primary school in Chechło, for collecting information from pupils and their families about the local knowledge of the knight's manor in the village.

2 The Archive of the Department of Archaeology of the Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom, file: Chechło (Chechlau): Kreis Gliwitz, Fundplatz no. 4.

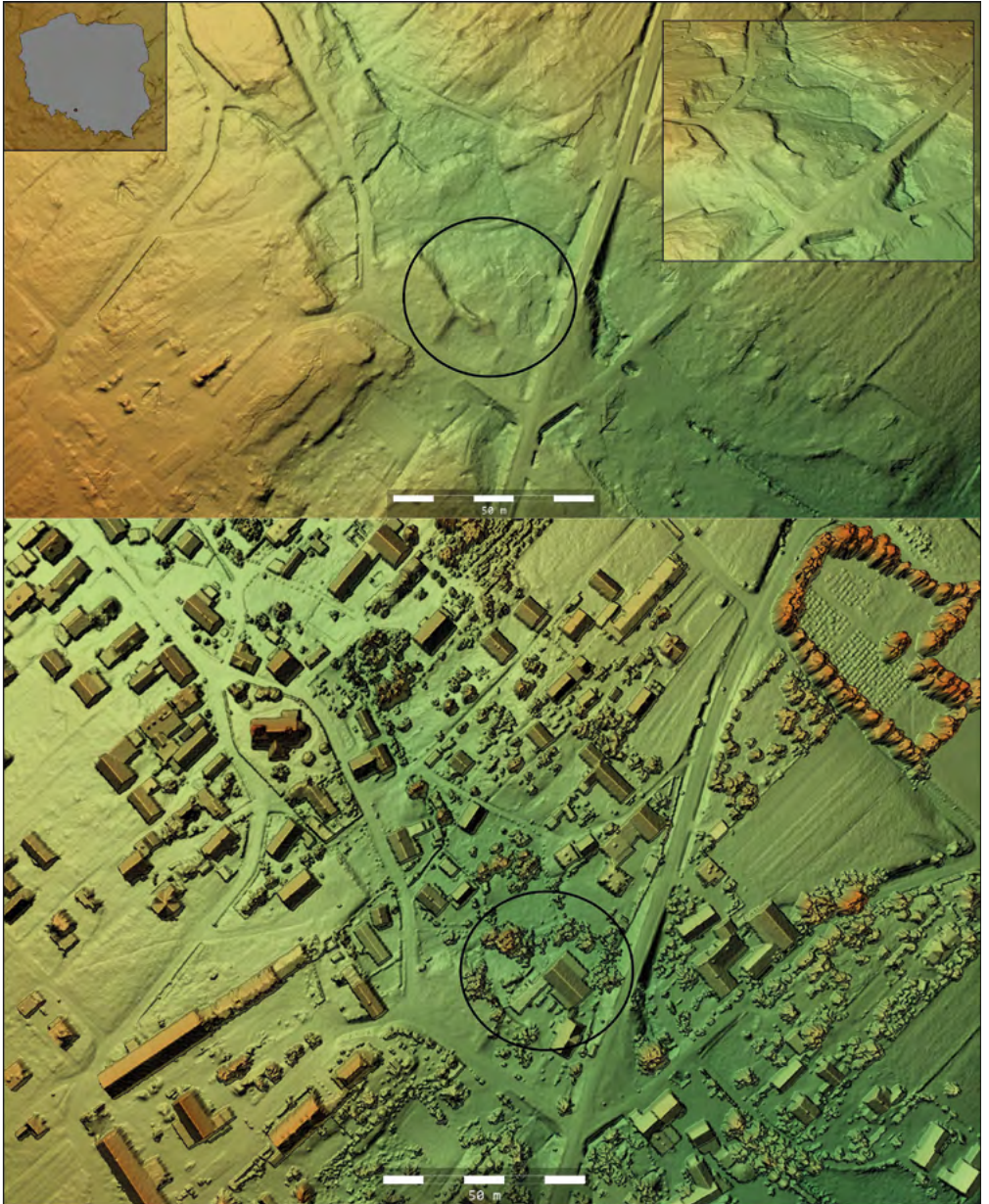


Fig. 1. Field models of the site based on a LiDAR map, prepared by R. Zdaniewicz with Planlauf (source: <http://www.geoportal.gov.pl> [20 1 2022]).



Fig. 2. The site area during research in 1970 (photograph from the Archive of the Department of Archaeology of the Museum in Gliwice).

wall described, during which he had found bricks and numerous dishes. As he noted, owners of the land had levelled the mound in the past by at least two metres, uncovering numerous bones. A note of September 7, 1925, indicates that at the time the earth wall was already mostly destroyed, with only a small section preserved, while during a trip some artefacts were found, which were then donated to the Museum in Bytom³. Archival materials confirm that before the Second World War at least one more research trip to Chechło was organised. A note of September 15, 1931, informs that teachers from Gliwice A. Skalnik and P. Scheitza along with the director of the Bytom Museum Dr F. Heinevetten collected medieval broken pieces from the area of the local “castle wall” (German quotation: *vor dem Burgwall*).

The first post-war archaeological research conducted in 1970 confirmed that there were remains of the so-called motte-and-bailey castle from the Late Middle Ages in Chechło (Bagniewski, Tomczak 1972: 202–203). At that time, the site was almost completely destroyed by farmstead construction, with only one small section of an earth wall preserved (Fig. 1–2). A test pit dug in the area yielded further finds in the form of fragments of dish ceramics, bones, and fragments of stove tiles.

³ These artefacts can still be found in the Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom, ref. no. B:270:25.

According to the researchers' estimates, the site could have been approx. 45–50 m in diameter and operated in the fourteenth century. The site has not been examined since 1970, probably also due to the extent of destruction.

The historical background

Before the new historical finds mentioned in the title are presented, it is worth examining written sources concerning the village of Chechło and its medieval owners. The oldest mention of the settlement comes from the *Liber foundationis episcopatus Vratislaviensis* (*The book of benefice of the diocese of Wrocław*) from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, where it is called *Chechel* ([...] *Chechel maldrate, due mesure tritici, quattuor siliginis et avene* [...])⁴. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, the village was most probably owned by Wilczek (*Lupus von Chechel*), who in 1320 moved in the circles of Władysław, Duke of Bytom and Koźle (Weltzel 1866: 61; Horwat 1990: 94)⁵. Documents from the end of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries indicate that Chechło belonged to the *Stręła* family. In 1393, its first representative, meaning *Stephan Stręła von Chechel*, appears in the sources (Pilnáček 1991: 1201). Most probably, he witnessed the document of Bernard, Duke of Strzelce, issued on December 5, 1409 (Horwat 2002: 442). Another owner of Chechło from the *Stręła* family was *Mikulass Sselerzowsky von Czechel* (Mikołaj Strzelowski of Chechło), also known as a witness to documents from the end of the fifteenth century, i.e. from 1477, 1491, and 1496 (*Codex Diplomaticus Silesiae* 1865: 100, 131, 141)⁶. According to *The Geographical Dictionary of the Kingdom of Poland and Other Slavic Countries*, in 1512, the then lord of Chechło Melchior Szyberowski built a new church in place of the old one that had been destroyed (*Słownik geograficzny...* 1880: 551; *Die Schrotholzliche...* 1932). This indicates that at the time the estate belonged to the Szyberowski family, and not the Strzelowski family. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the owner of a part of Chechło was Opole Burgrave Jan von Oderwolff, and in 1689, most probably his son Kasper Fryderyk, followed by Henryk Waclaw until 1706 (Sękowski 2008: 18–19). Another owner of the village was Jan von Oderdorff, who died in 1720, and then the estate was in all likelihood taken over by the Paczyński family from Tenczyn (*von Tenczin*), as on Wrede's

4 According to the record, the village was to provide two measures of wheat and four measures of rye and oat as part of their tithe, cf. *Liber Foundationis...* 1889: 95.

5 It is worth mentioning that according to J. Horwat, this knight also appeared in older documents, when he moved in the circles of Duke Bolko I of Opole.

6 In documents of 1491 and 1496, however, there is no mention of anyone from Chechło.

where the remains of the archaeological site are located, the cultural stratification was damaged. During a site visit, it was impossible to create any archaeological documentation; only mixed historical materials were collected from the destroyed settlement levels of the site, in the form of fragments of dish ceramics, stove tiles, lumps of pugging as well as some metal and stone items. Even though the material obtained has no clear archaeological context, it is still a valuable source for research into the chronology of the site⁹.

The largest group of artefacts obtained during the visit in 1998 were fragments of ceramic dishes. In chronological terms, however, this collection is not homogeneous. A majority of them were fragments of dishes with characteristics of late medieval pottery, manufactured on a wheel using a slide technique, of clay with sand or a mixture of sand and grains of rock, with gently rounded edges. The dishes were mostly fired in an oxidizing atmosphere, which made their walls cream-coloured, brick-red, or grey. Most fragments of the dishes created using the late medieval technique came from pots and jugs (Fig. 4a–b), usually with thickened edges. There were also fragments of small bowls (Fig. 4d) and larger wide-mouthed bowls (Fig. 4c). Basically, the fragments described above were the remains of so-called kitchen dishes, used for preparing, storing, and most probably also serving meals¹⁰. Some of them were fragments of dishes with definitely better technical specifications, fired in a reducing atmosphere, which made their walls black or dark grey. Most fragments of the reducing dishes also came from pots and jugs (Fig. 4e–f), usually with thickened and gently profiled edges. There were also fragments of jugs (Fig. 4h–i) and thin-walled cups, fired very well, which made their walls very hard, nearly as stoneware. Many of the dishes had polished surfaces, which gave them a characteristic metallic gleam. Moreover, they were extremely richly ornamented with compositions of encircling grooves, wavy grooves, and imprints made with a tracing wheel or a stamp (Fig. 4k–l). The dishes should be perhaps considered local copies of stoneware dishes, such as the richly ornamented cups and jugs manufactured in Lusatia, the so-called Falke-Group pottery, which can be linked to tableware (Stephan 2004: 293–329; Mackiewicz 2008: 161–169; Szajt 2015: 47–54).

As this paper was being written, a formal process of handing the artefacts over to the Department of Archaeology of the Museum in Gliwice was underway.

- 9 As the site is located on a private plot of land and partially developed, fenced, and used as a garden, performance of any research work would be difficult.
- 10 Dish ceramics manufactured with a similar technology were discovered during research into the remains of other Upper Silesian manors on mounds dated to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in such places as Pniów, Gliwice Czechowice, and Ruda Śląska – Kochłowiec, cf. Zdaniewicz 2020a: 14–18; Zdaniewicz 2020b: 108–113; Goiński et al. 2020: 55–59. They were also found during research into late medieval urban centres of Silesia, such as Wrocław (cf. Buśko et al. 1992: 136–138; Rzeźnik 1998: 221–223; Niegoda 1999: 159–161).

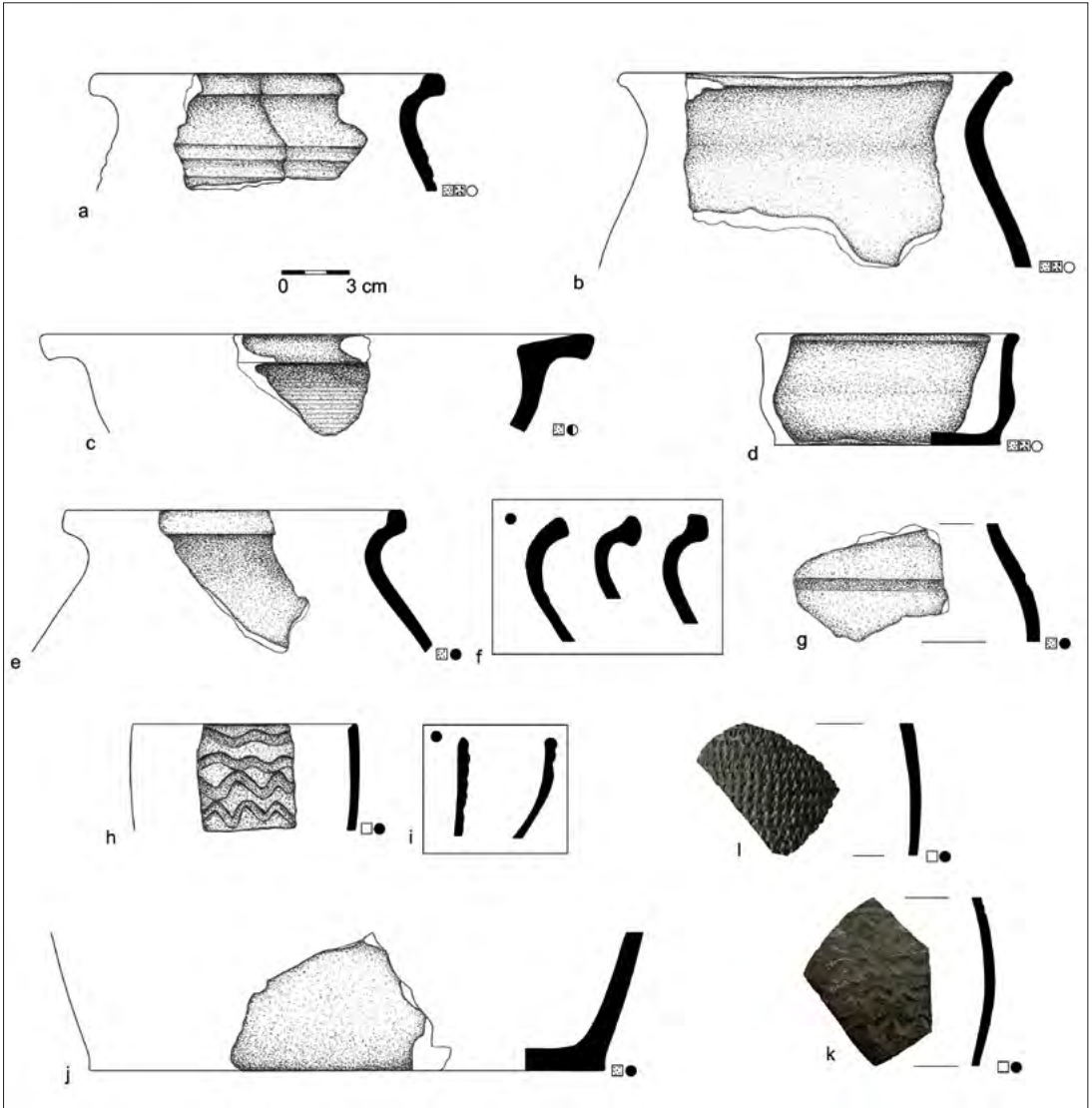


Fig. 4. Fragments of late medieval dishes collected during the conservator's intervention in 1998 (R. Zdaniewicz).

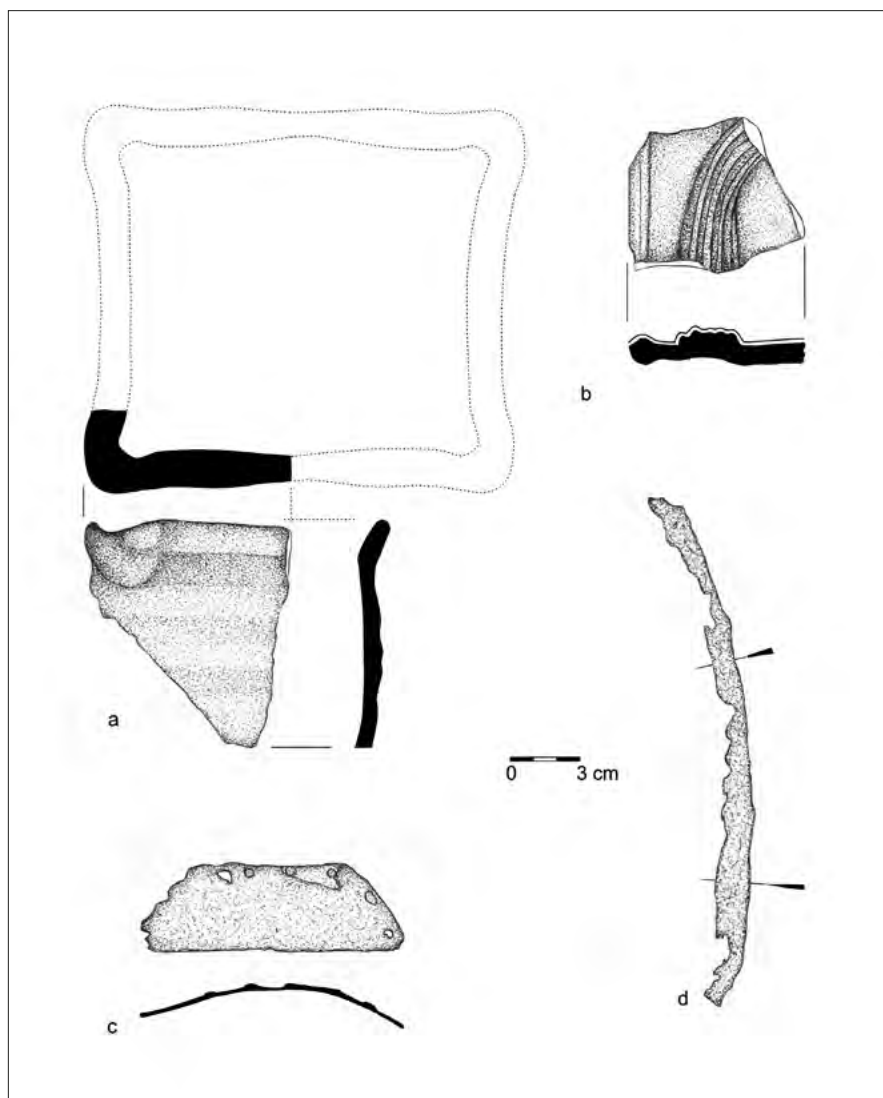


Fig. 5. Fragments of late medieval tiles and metal items collected during the conservator's intervention in 1998 (R. Zdaniewicz).

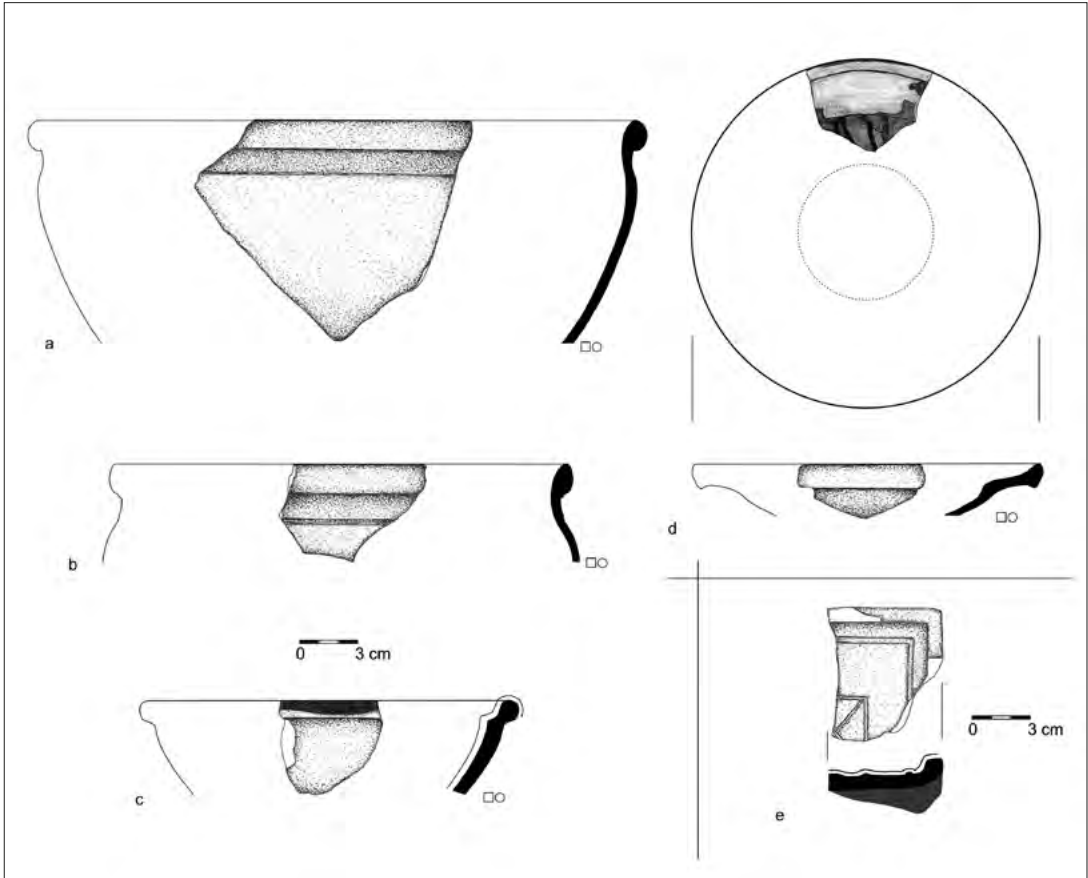


Fig. 6. Fragments of modern-era dishes and tiles collected during the conservator's intervention in 1998 (R. Zdaniewicz).

Due to lack of an archaeological context, the discussed fragments of dishes can only be generally linked to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries¹¹. Also some fragments of stove and pot tiles can be dated to that period, which might indicate that the late medieval manor in Chechło had its own heating device(s) (Fig. 5a–b). One of the isolated fragments of stove tiles has a front covered with dark green glaze, decorated with convex fluting, which in stylistic terms refers to the Late Gothic style (Fig. 5b) (Dąbrowska 1987: 124–125). A different fragment

¹¹ Dishes similar in technological and functional terms were discovered in the accumulations connected with the operation of the knight's manor in Ciochowice near Toszek, carbon-14-dated to the end of the fourteenth century or the first half of the fifteenth century, cf. Zdaniewicz 2019.

used to be a corner of a pot or bowl tile, with an opening that was originally four-sided (Fig. 5a). Tiles of this type have many counterparts among finds dated to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, they were also discovered in collections from the sixteenth century (Dymek 1995: 41–42, 246, Table IX). Apart from the tile finds, the fact that there was a stove in the manor may be also indicated by large clumps of pugging collected during the visit in 1998. However, it should be emphasised that these could be fragments of construction pugging from the manor building itself. It is worth mentioning that medieval dish ceramics and stove tiles were also discovered during the verification research in 1970 (Bagniewski, Tomczak 1972: 203).

From the historical point of view, the most interesting artefact is an iron plate (lame), which was most probably an element of a coat of plates (Fig. 5c). It protected the torso as a textile or leather coat, with rows of vertical or horizontal, smaller or larger, iron lames or plates riveted to it from the inside (Nowakowski 1994: 235–236). The plate discovered in Chechło is now trapezoidal and arched, but due to damage caused by corrosion, it is difficult to say what the original shape of the artefact was¹². The maximum width of the artefact is approx. 11.4 cm and its maximum height is approx. 3.8 cm. It was made of metal sheet, approx. 0.3–0.4 cm thick. Along one of the longer side edges of the plate, there are rivet head marks left by rivets that were originally used to attach the plate to the textile base. Lames of different sizes, usually rectangular but also with slanting edges, were found among historical materials during research into castle complexes, such as the Lower Silesian Szczerba castle in Gniewoszków, the Czchów castle in Lesser Poland (Szpunar, Glinianowicz 2006: 151, Table 7; 152, Table 8; Marek 2008: 89, Fig. 3.3–3.4; 102, Fig. 17; 103, Fig. 18), and the remains of smaller knight's residences, such as Siedlątków and Borówka near Łódź, and Plemięta in the former Chełmno Land (Kamińska 1968: 16–88; Kosiorek 2002: 230; Boguwolski et al. 2005: 30). Plates similar in form to the artefact from Chechło were discovered during research in Nowe Miasto nad Wartą (Grygiel 1996: 85–91). Fragments of coats of plates were also excavated during research in other Upper Silesian late medieval motte-and-bailey castles, i.e. in Tarnowice Stare¹³. The size and the form of the artefact in Chechło may indicate that it was originally a part of the coat protecting the knight's sides. For practical reasons, this part was usually made of smaller plates that made it easier to fit the armour, thus making it more comfortable to wear.

12 It seems that one of the side edges, slanting at an angle of approx. 45°, preserved its original shape, while the other, unfortunately, seems to be damaged.

13 The lame discovered in the motte-and-bailey castle in Stare Tarnowice was approx. 27 cm long and approx. 8.5 cm wide, so it seems it was an element of the front part of a coat of plates, cf. Kawka 2015: 113, Fig. 15.1.

Relatively cheap production, and so a low price, made coats of plates a popular type of protective armour among Polish – so probably also Silesian – knights in the Middle Ages (Nowakowski 2006: 125). They were most popular in the second half of the fourteenth century, but poorer knights in all likelihood still used them in the fifteenth century, even though they were already outdated considering the growing popularity of plate armour (Nowakowski 2006: 125). It is difficult to conclusively date the lame discovered in Chechło, which – similarly to other artefacts – was found in a secondary deposit. Generally, it should be dated to the fourteenth or fifteenth century.

The other metal artefact is a partially preserved iron sickle (Fig. 5d). Due to its state of preservation, however, it is difficult to conclusively determine its original dimensions. The single-edged blade was forged using iron tape, approx. 1.5–1.7 cm wide and up to 0.3 cm thick. In the lower part, there is a clear narrowing and the blade becomes a plate, approx. 1.1–1.2 cm wide, which originally served as a mandrel to attach the handle. Objects of this type offer poor chronological characteristics, but they are numerous among historical artefacts excavated during research into late medieval and early modern rural residential and defensive complexes in Silesia (Kawka 2015: 109, Fig. 13; Nowakowski 2017: 523, Table 39)¹⁴. Farming was the source of income of their owners, which is why finds of agricultural tools are by no means unusual. The discovery of the remains of the sickle in question among dishes connected with the life of the manor on a mound in Chechło is thus unsurprising.

Among the artefacts found in 1998, there were also a few dozen fragments of pottery, with modern-era characteristics. These dishes were thrown on a wheel of clay with a non-granular admixture, and then fired in high temperature in an oxidizing atmosphere. The dishes included fragments of large pots or jugs (Fig. 6b), wide-mouthed bowls (Fig. 6a), small bowls (Fig. 6c), trivets, and plates (Fig. 6d). Only in a few cases were the dishes decorated with bands of single or double encircling grooves, usually at the bottom of the neck (Fig. 6b). In terms of surface finishing, some fragments bore traces of polishing and glazing with a dark brown coating (Fig. 6c). The internal surface of the plates showed traces of engobe, painting, and glazing (Fig. 6d). The modern-era pottery with similar technological characteristics was created in workshops of specialist guild craftsmen located in the towns of Silesia. The forms of dishes, including the shape of their edges, refer to those known from the area of Gliwice and Wrocław, usually dated to the sixteenth or seventeenth century (Szwed 2004: 335–343; Zdaniewicz 2011: 106–110;

14 Sickles analogous to the artefact from Chechło were also discovered among the materials from research into a motte-and-bailey castle existing before the masonry castle in Chudów. These artefacts have not been published.

Pankiewicz, Rodak 2016: 331–356). Fragments of similar dishes were also discovered during research into Upper Silesian manors on mounds in such places as Rudno and Kozłów, dated to the sixteenth or seventeenth century (Michnik, Zdaniewicz 2012: 160–162; Zdaniewicz 2014: 364–370). Fragments of stove tiles from the collection of artefacts obtained in 1998 should probably be placed within a similar chronological framework. Their fronts were glazed with a light green coating, while their surface was decorated with geometrical motifs characteristic of the Renaissance (Fig. 6e) (Dymek 1995: 134). A very similar technology and ornamentation were found on some stove tiles from the castle in Opole, dated to the end of the sixteenth century, and some tiles discovered during research at the castle in Chudów, dated to a similar period (Dymek 1995: 269, Table XXXII; Dąbrowska et al. 2005: Fig. 11–12).

Conclusions

The state of the site leaves much to be desired, with degradation and damage by contemporary structures making it impossible to conduct additional verification research. However, the written sources quoted above and analysis of the finds allow to draw some cautious conclusions concerning its operation. There is no doubt that the manor was already built in the Middle Ages, most probably in the fourteenth century, and that it was also used in the following century. It is difficult to say anything about the appearance of the manor at the time. It was most probably surrounded by an earth wall, small remains of which have been preserved until today (Fig. 1–2). The discovered ceramic shards and fragments of stove tiles indicate that the residence was still used in the modern era, meaning the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Even though they prove the progressing destruction of the site and their cognitive value is not full as they were not excavated during rescue research typically conducted for sites of this type, it seems that the finds made in 1998 can now constitute one of the last sources of information about the history of the place. It would be worth making the collections of unprocessed artefacts deposited in museum warehouses and Offices of Monument Preservation once again available to science. They are not always extremely precious cognitive sources, but perhaps they should be sometimes viewed in the context of the lyrics of Marek Grechuta's song "Ocalić od zapomnienia" ("To Save From Oblivion"). Publication of materials, even if so modest as in the case of the artefacts from Chechło discussed in this paper, definitely broadens the knowledge of poorly recognised Upper Silesian knight's manors.

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Streszczenie

Badania archeologiczne przeprowadzone w 1970 r. potwierdziły, że w Chechle zachowały się relikty późnośredniowiecznego grodziska stożkowatego. W tym czasie obiekt był już niemal całkowicie zniszczony przez budowę gospodarstwa, a zachował się jedynie niewielki odcinek wału. Swoiste odkrycie w zbiorach WKZ w Katowicach kilkuset dotychczas nieopracowanych zabytków, które pozyskano w trakcie interwencji konserwatorskiej w 1998 r., pozwoliło na ponowne zwrócenie uwagi na to interesujące stanowisko. W związku z rozbudową tutejszego gospodarstwa ponownie naruszono nawarstwienia kulturowe gródka. Obecnie degradacja i zniszczenie przez współczesną zabudowę uniemożliwia przeprowadzenie dodatkowych badań weryfikacyjnych, które pozwoliłyby na lepsze rozpoznanie reliktyw tego obiektu. Źródła pisane oraz analiza zabytków pozwalają na wysunięcie pewnych nowych wniosków dotyczących

jego funkcjonowania. Z pewnością dwór istniał już w XIV w., a używany był jeszcze w kolejnych stuleciach. Trudno powiedzieć coś o wyglądzie siedliska w tym czasie. Zapewne otoczone było wałem, którego pozostałości w nikielnej formie dotrwały do dnia dzisiejszego. Odkrycie ułamków naczyń i kafla piecowych wskazuje, iż jeszcze w okresie nowożytnym, tj. w XVI i XVII w., siedziba nadal funkcjonowała i była używana przez przedstawicieli lokalnej szlachty.

Słowa kluczowe: Górny Śląsk, Chechło, grodzisko stożkowe, późne średniowiecze, nowożytność

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