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Castrum Sive Fortalicium in Woźniki in the Light of the Latest Field Survey

Castrum sive fortalicium w Woźnikach
w świetle najnowszej prospekcji terenowej

Abstract: Situated among marshy meadows, the cone-shaped gord in Woźniki has been an object of interest for researchers since the early twentieth century. However, probing excavations were only carried out by the staff of the Archaeology Department of the Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom in 1957. They confirmed the historic character of the site, but provided little information on the appearance of the buildings or stages of

their functioning. Unfortunately, in the twentieth century the gord was destroyed and its plateau is now heavily levelled. In 2023, it was decided to return to the research of the site, using non-invasive techniques. A thorough re-examination of the surface was also performed with a metal detector and spatial planigraphy. This yielded a number of new interesting results, providing a reason for further research of the site.

Keywords: Upper Silesia, Woźniki, cone-shaped gord, late Middle Ages

Site exploration history

The first discoveries at the gord in Woźniki (Lubliniec District, Silesia Province, site I, AZP 91-48/1) took place as early as the mid-nineteenth century, when it was decided to expand the cemetery operating at the wooden church of St. Valentine, St. Bartholomew and St. Stanislaus, located more than 1 km south of the town, in the so-called Staromieście. The selected area was about 1 m below and required levelling. It was decided that the soil needed for it would be taken from a nearby earthen mound in the meadow of the parish church (Musioł 1971: 10–11, 46, 67),

which the locals called Górka, Góreczka or Grobel (Jakimowicz, Żurowski 1939: 65). Handwritten notes left by Józef Lompa include an account of witnesses to those events:

Near St. Valentine's Church, there are square earthworks created by the Swedes who destroyed the castle standing there. When the cemetery next to St. Valentine's Church was being walled and levelled with earth and sand in recent times, three javelins and an axe used for fighting were found there. In another place, there was a chimney-shaped wall with clay vessels. People believe that these are pottery vessels, but some say that the alleged chimney may have been a sacrificial fire and the clay vessels were urns. If these are urns, they may still date back to pagan times. The axe is kept by the property owner, sexton Johann Michalski, who confirms this (Szczzech 2011: 145–146).

Information about this discovery was also found in the description of Silesia by Feliks Triest (1865: 455), while the artefacts discovered at that time, including 2 spearheads, 2 axe heads, and 2 horseshoes, were among the first archaeological artefacts in the collection of today's Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom, where they were deposited in 1912 and where they can be still found today (Pawliński 2011: 95). A recent analysis of these artefacts has shown that they are long-lived forms, generally dated to the late Middle Ages (Kawka 2015: 106–112).

The gord was explored at least twice more, in 1906 and 1912, which led to further discoveries, including 2 iron spurs and coins, which were to be deposited in the museum in Gliwice (Jakimowicz, Żurowski 1939: 27), but their fate is unknown. The inhabitants of Woźniki were already aware of the historic nature of the mound at that time, as a resolution of the parish council of 1906 recorded: *Formerly a manor house or fortified castle stood on this square* (Musiał 1971: 11). In 1922, an iron key, a shovel ferrule, and an iron bolt head were accidentally found, first handed over to Gliwice, and in 1929 transferred to the museum in Bytom (Kawka 2015: 93).

The site was also known to pre-war German and Polish researchers, who visited it many times and retrieved artefacts, mostly ceramics (a total of 139 fragments), from the surface. Surface surveys until the middle of the twentieth century were carried out by Max Helmich in 1911, photographer and amateur archaeologist Edgar Boidol in 1927 and 1931, Józef Kostrzewski in 1942, Franz Pfüthenreiter in 1942, and members of the Będzin branch of the Polish Archaeological Society in 1954 (Kawka 2015: 93–94; Nowakowski 2017: 466). In addition, in 1933 Roman Jakimowicz and Józef Żurowski took measurements and created an accurate contour plan of the site, as well as collected available historical data and toponomastic material related to the gord and its immediate surroundings (Jakimowicz, Żurowski 1939: 27–28).

The first and so far the only survey excavations were carried out by the staff of the Archaeology Department of the Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom on September 21, 1957. Two narrow trenches were then excavated on the plateau of the mound – trench one, 21.30 m long and 0.50 m wide, running along the NE–SW axis, and trench two, 10 m long and 0.50 m wide, perpendicular to it. Trench one encountered a narrow object 1.40 m deep, probably a stakehole, and disturbed layers of sandy sterile earth, probably associated with the removal of soil from the mound in earlier times. In trench two, in its south-eastern part, numerous limestone and sandstone fragments without a clear layout were found, along with traces of burning. In the central part of the mound, however, a section of a bottom part of a domed furnace was exposed in the form of a circular platform made of stones firmly bonded by fired clay. Some movable artefacts were also recovered: 46 vessel fragments, 2 iron nails, a belt buckle, a fragment of a crude scythe or sickle, and 1 animal bone. On the basis of these, the chronology of the site was estimated very broadly for the period from the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries to the fifteenth century (Szydłowski 1958: 20–21; Kawka 2015: 94–95).

Unfortunately, despite the confirmation of the historic character of the gord through research, the site continued to be damaged by agricultural activity. Although it was entered in the Register of Historic Monuments in 1977, the area of the gord was intensively used as an arable field until the conservator's intervention in 1988. Agricultural work has had a very negative impact on its present state of preservation. Nowadays, the site is excluded from agricultural use and remains a fallow meadow, and knowledge of its historic character is much more widespread thanks in part to information boards erected in recent years.

After the 1957 probing research, the gord was surface-surveyed by the employees of the Office of the Conservator of Archaeological Monuments in Katowice in 1965 (Nowakowski 2017: 466), and then in 1994 by a team led by Czesław Hadamik, Waldemar Gliński and Jacek Koj in connection with the planned construction of the A1 motorway, currently running west of the site (Gliński et al. 1997: 418). Ceramics dated to the early Middle Ages and the Middle Ages in general were then recovered at several points scattered around the gord and the wooden church. The investment provided the impetus for probing research in the vicinity of the gord. Research in 2000 under the direction of Elwira Holc at site 4, located above the wetland meadows to the north-west of the gord, revealed the existence of a cultural layer containing pottery from the early Middle Ages as well as lumps of pugging and slag (Holc 2012: 220). On the other hand, the results of probing research at site 16, which comprises a slight elevation of the terrain to the north-west of the gord, proved inconclusive, revealing two hollow objects sunk in sterile earth, of unfortunately undetermined chronology and function (Wojtal, Zdaniewicz 2005).

The discovery of early medieval materials and layers in the vicinity of the site seems significant in the context of a presumed pre-incorporation settlement, which was supposed to have existed in the area already since the end of the twelfth century (Panic 1992: 41, 43). What remains of it is the term *Staromieście* (Old Town) used to refer to the area near St. Valentine's Church in modern times and recorded for the first time in 1490 (Szczech 2016: 61). It is likely that a reference to the village of *Woźniki* (*villa Uoznici*) from 1206, found in a document of the exchange of villages between Kraków bishop Pełka (Fulco) and Gerard, abbot of the monastery of St. Vincent near Wrocław, should be linked to this settlement (Małczyński, Skowrońska 1959: 124; Szczech 2016: 11–17). Considering the name, it is believed that the village was inhabited by servants, engaged in the manufacture of wheels and whole carts for the duke (Borek 1988: 202), or coachmen (Jakimowicz, Żurowski 1939: 66). It seems that it no longer existed at the end of the fifteenth century, as only fields and meadows in the vicinity of St Valentine's Church are mentioned at that time (Musioł 1971: 11; Szczech 2016: 62–63).

Historical sources

The second oldest known historical mention of *Woźniki* dates back to 1310. Duke Bolesław I of Opole sold to the burghers of Wrocław the tolls collected from pedestrians passing through his towns (Nowakowa 1951: 56–57; Szczech 2016: 53). Researchers recognise that this document proves the existence of a town in the area of the today's market square, but the time of its incorporation is uncertain. Ludwik Musioł pointed to the person of Vladislaus I, Duke of Opole and Racibórz, as a possible founder of *Woźniki* and proposed a date around 1270. This would be proved by the location of the town forest on both sides of the border between the duchies of Opole and Bytom, created with the division of Prince Vladislaus's dominion between his sons in 1281 (Musioł 1971: 12–14). Jerzy Horwat, on the other hand, points to the years after 1281 as a probable time of incorporation (Horwat 2002: 300).

The gord itself is mentioned in written sources three times. In 1386, Vladislaus II of Opole donated to Marek, called *Jochs*¹, for his faithful service, the castle (*castrum sive fortalitium*) near *Woźniki*, along with the town's voytship, 1/3 of the fees

1 According to J. Sperka (2006: 283–284, 349), the knight Marek could come from Marków near Gniewkowo in Kuyavia, and his merit could have been his faithful support for Duke Vladislaus in the years 1383–1385, when the majority of the Kuyavian-Dobrzyń elite supported Siemowit of Płock in his efforts to take the Polish throne. This thesis would be confirmed by the presence of the Kuyavian voivode Włodek of Danaborze, loyal to the Duke of Opole, among the witnesses on the document granting the castle in *Woźniki*.

from bakers', tailors', shoemakers' and butchers' stands, $\frac{1}{3}$ of the income from fines, and the forests of Jaczów and Olszyna. In return, Marek had to serve in the Duke's army with one lance fournie (*cum una hasta seu lancea*) (CDS 1865: 15–16; Szczech 2016: 60). The form of the donation and the lack of information about its hereditary nature suggest that this was a lifelong castle fief (Nowakowski 2017: 226–227).

In 1412, the Duke of Opole Bernard approved the sale of the voytship of Woźniki along with the castle (*Walle oder Veste*), $\frac{1}{3}$ of the fees from bakers', tailors', shoemakers' and butchers' stands, $\frac{1}{3}$ of the income from fines, and the forests of Jaczów and Olszyna made by Albrecht Csluck to Schwech Zwessowsky for 240 *grzywnas*. This Schwech was henceforth to serve in the Duke's army with one lance fournie (*mit einer Gleffen*) (CDS 1865: 32; Szczech 2016: 60–61). The object of the sale was therefore identical to the grant of 1386.

Finally, in 1418, Duke Bernard again approved the sale of the castle (*walle oder festen*) and the voytship of Woźniki by Swench Wesschoffsky, already known from the 1412 document, to Wlczek Cobelczicz for 250 *grzywnas*. This time, however, the Duke stipulated that the agreement did not include the part of the forest where the burghers of Woźniki had wild beehives or the income from fines. Instead, he extended the grant to income from all tailors', butchers', salt and shoemakers' stands, and gave the forests of Jaczów and Olszyna as hereditary



Fig. 1. A photograph of the gord in Woźniki from the 1930s, the Archive of the Department of Archaeology of the Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom.

possession. In return, the new voyt had to stand for battle at the Duke's call to arms with one lance fournie (*Myt einer Gleffen*) (CDS 1865: 42–43; Szczech 2016: 61).

The owner of the castle in Woźniki may also have been Piotr from Lubsza, court scribe to Duke Bernard in the years 1430–1439, who died before March 7, 1440. Piotr was granted the town of Woźniki along with Ligota, which he annexed to his estate in Lubsza with the Duke's consent, as indicated by the 1454 charter for the town (Szczech 2016: 19–23; Woźny 2020: 213–214). By analogy with the documents of 1386, 1412, and 1418, we can presume that the castle was also part of the grant. Finally, in 1490, we learn that Stanisław Brzezina was *the Lord and heir of the voytship* in Woźniki (Szczech 2016: 61–62), and so the former castle fief had already passed into the hereditary private property of the nobility. Stanisław then granted a meadow and a field in Staromieście to the parish of St. Catherine in Woźniki, then in 1493 he sold 20 *grzywnas* of income from the voytship to Ssymon von Strzelicz and his wife Anna (CDS 1865: 137; Szczech 2016: 62). The next known hereditary voyt was Jan Gąbowski from Czanty, who also granted another lea and meadow in Staromieście to the Woźniki parish (Szczech 2016: 63). The castle no longer appears in documents from the end of the fifteenth century, while the reference point for the location of the agricultural land in Staromieście is the “chapel”. It can therefore be concluded that the castle was no longer in use at that time.

The Mound in the light of the latest surface and geophysical surveys

At present, the remains of the former manor are a flat mound founded on the plan of an elongated quadrilateral with rounded corners and dimensions at the base of 36 x 48 m, and on the plateau of 30 x 42 m, with an area of approximately 1100 m². The height of the mound varies from 1 to 1.5 m. It is surrounded by a moat, best preserved from the west and south, up to 8 m wide, and the remains of an outer embankment. It is located on the western edge of the marshy valley of the Łana stream (Nowakowski 2017: 465). The relics of a causeway visible to the south of the site, which the locals referred to as the Jewish Graves, and which are supposed to be the traces of the road leading to the stronghold from the east, are sometimes associated with the gord (Jakimowicz, Żurowski 1939: 26). However, modern maps clearly show a pond functioning at this location, whose dammed waters powered a mill in the hamlet Bór (today's Statek) first recorded in sources only in 1561 (Musioł, Rospond 1972: 119).

The destruction and levelling of the mound in the twentieth century make it difficult to reconstruct its original height today. The surface of the upper plateau is now flattened, with numerous irregularities representing both traces of



Fig. 2. The site area during research in the spring of 2023 (photograph by R. Zdaniewicz).

post-war archaeological research and probably also contemporary cuts (Fig. 2.7–8). During the surface prospecting in the topsoil layer, archaeological material was found in the form of fragments of ceramic vessels, lumps of fired clay, fragments of metal/smelting (?), charcoal, as well as individual metal artefacts (Fig. 3–5)². These artefacts probably constituted structural elements of the gord's courtyard buildings and prove its use in the Middle Ages.

Among the artefacts mentioned, metal objects deserve special attention. These are both items of clothing and accessories in the form of belt buckles. Both are made of iron wire, the former with a rectangular frame, the latter with a D-shaped frame (Fig. 3.3, 3.4). The design of these buckles is very simple, single-piece, and yet versatile. Similar specimens, both more geometrised and semicircular, were used from the early Middle Ages until the end of the period, as evidenced by finds from sites in Upper Silesia and western Lesser Poland. D-shaped single-piece buckles were discovered in particularly great numbers during research of the Ostrówek gord in Opole, in practically all phases of its use from the tenth to the beginning of the fourteenth century (Wachowski 1984: 19–21). Much rarer were specimens with

² The location of the places of discovery of individual artefacts within the site is illustrated in Figure 7. The numbers of the illustrations of the artefacts shown in Figures 3, 4 and 5 correspond to those in Figure 6.

a square or rectangular frame, which disappeared at Ostrówek around the middle of the twelfth century, replaced by two-piece specimens (Wachowski 1984: 23).

Quadrilateral buckles of similar size to the one in question have been discovered in accumulations associated with early medieval settlement as well as the functioning of the castle on Góra Zamkowa (Castle Hill) in Będzin (Rogaczewska 2021: 28, 35; cat. nos. 33, 66). A similar one was also found at the site of an early medieval production settlement associated with the smelting of lead in Bukowno near Olkusz, however, its chronology has not been precisely established (Rozmus 2019: 30, Fig. 11.2).

Returning to the D-shaped buckle artefact, a single-piece buckle of similar form was already discovered during the research of the Woźniki gord in 1957 (Kawka 2015: 108–109). However, its chronology was defined very generally to the fourteenth/fifteenth century. Analogies to these examples are the specimens discovered during the exploration of the oldest accumulations related to the use of the Market Square in Gliwice from the second half thirteenth century to the first half of the fourteenth century (Wachowski 2011: 58, Fig. 68 i–j). D-shaped buckles were also discovered within the gord that operated from the eleventh century to the beginning of the fourteenth century on Wzgórze św. Małgorzaty (St. Margaret's Hill) in Bytom (Szydłowski 1966: Photograph 11) and in accumulations related to the use of the Market Square in Bytom around the mid-fourteenth century³.

A separate group among the discovered artefacts are single military items. The first is a massive spearhead with an oval section and a rather long sleeve in relation to the leaf (Fig. 3.6). The leaf has a flattened, rhomboidal cross-section, offering fairly high potential for penetration and piercing, e.g. of armour. The considerable diameter of the sleeve indicates that the spearhead was mounted on a large diameter pole, so it probably was not a javelin head, but rather a head of a lance-type weapon. A lance head from the second half of the thirteenth century to the first half of the fourteenth century, of similar size and proportions, is known from the research of Bradlo Castle in northern Czechia (Hejna 1974: 394, Fig. 13:1). The second specimen is a not very characteristic bolthead with a sleeve (Fig. 3.5). It undoubtedly dates back to the Middle Ages, but artefacts of this type, due to their form, are not very useful when it comes to precise chronological determinations.

An interesting metal artefact is a key with an oval handle, forged from iron (Fig. 3.1). The stem has an oval cross-section and is hollow inside. The bit is approximately rectangular in shape, with a single indentation preserved. A similar specimen was discovered at the Woźniki gord during the 1957 research (Kawka 2015: 110).

³ The collection of the Department of Archaeology of the Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom, inv. no.: B/270m/6-7/98. Archaeological work at the Bytom Market Square in 1997–1998 was supervised by Dr A. Andrzejewska, IA UŁ.

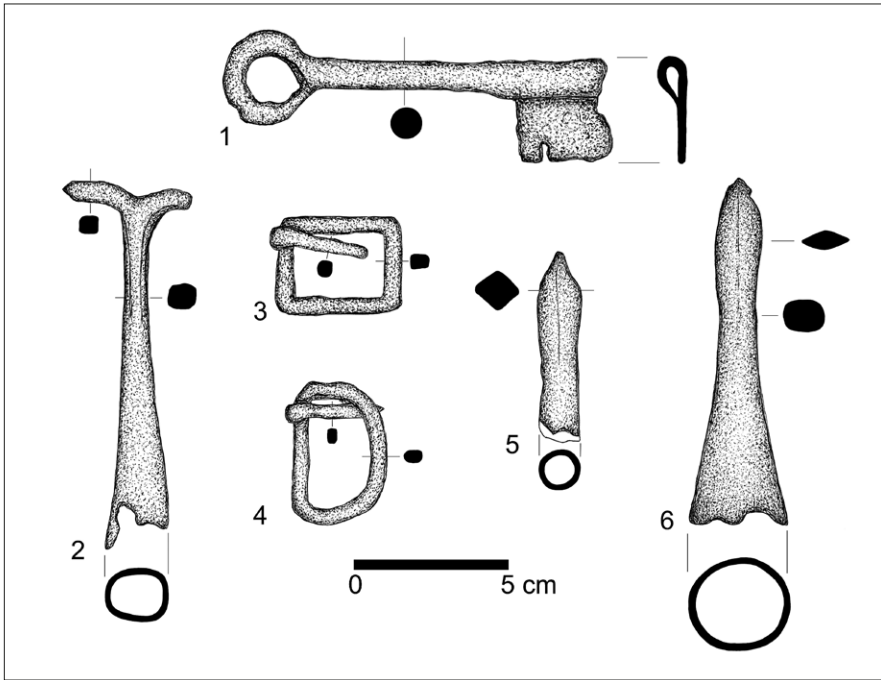


Fig. 3. Metal artefacts discovered during surface works in 2023 (drawing by R. Zdaniewicz).

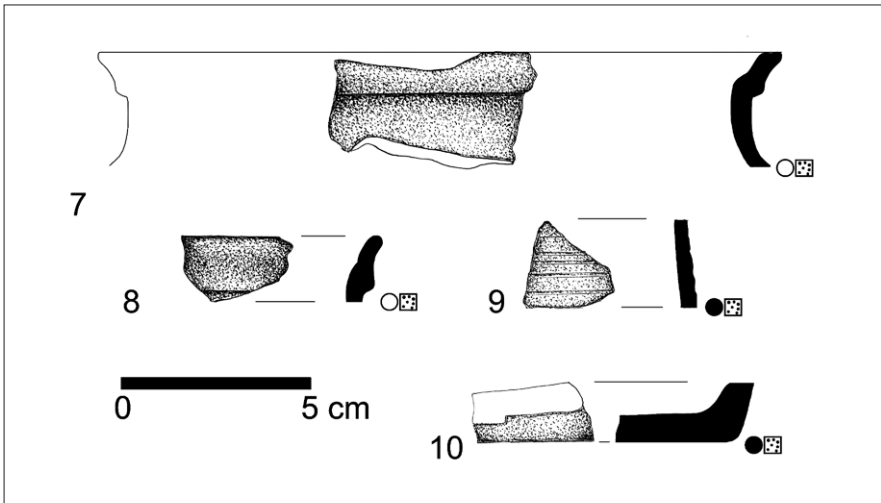


Fig. 4. Ceramic artefacts discovered during surface works in 2023 (drawing by R. Zdaniewicz).

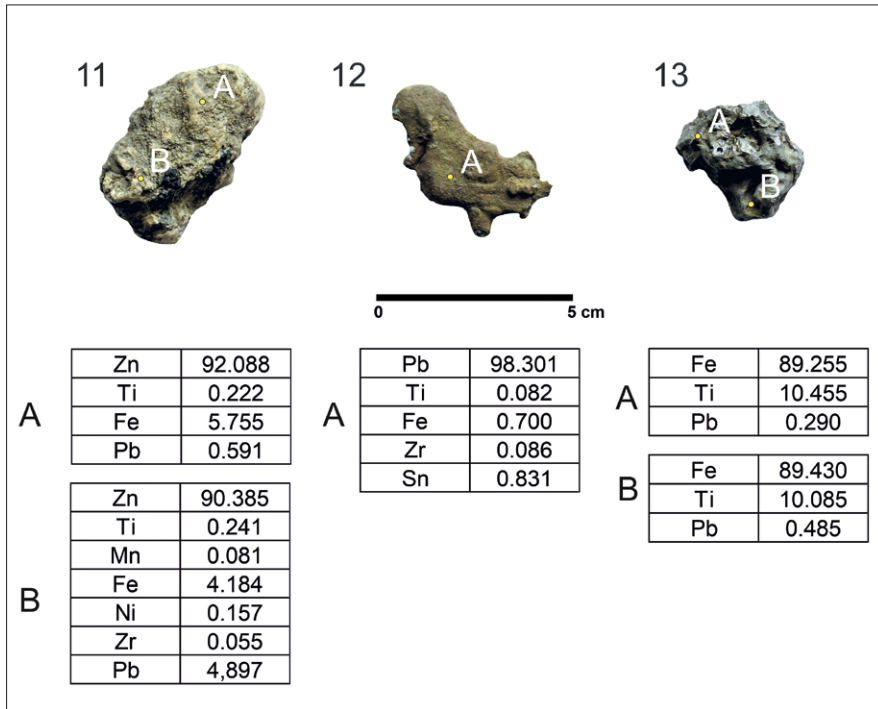


Fig. 5. Lumps of metal/smelted metal discovered during surface works in 2023, along with a general spectrometric analysis for the presence of metal compounds (photograph by R. Zdaniewicz).

The closest analogy here may be an artefact from Lower Silesia, from Drewniana Street in Wrocław, discovered in accumulations associated with the thirteenth century (Każmierczyk 1966: 172, Fig. 54:2).

The last metal artefact discovered during the surface prospecting at the gord in Woźniki is an iron object with a function that is difficult to establish due to its fragmentary state of preservation. The object has an oval-shaped haft ending with a forked mandrel (Fig. 3.2). It should most likely be interpreted as a relic of a fork-type farm tool (Krajc 2003: 113, Table 119). However, tools used for hunting had a similar form, but they are dated to modern times (Marek 2009: 103, Fig. 2a).

Apart from the artefacts isolated during the surface works, single fragments of ceramic vessels were discovered (Fig. 4). Unfortunately, it is a fragmented material, with few features allowing precise dating, but certainly of medieval origin. This is indicated by the technological features observed during the analysis of vessel fragments, such as the shape of the rims in the form of profiled plastic strips and reductive firing. In terms of workmanship, they are characteristic of the youngest stages of early medieval pottery and the older phases of typical late medieval pottery

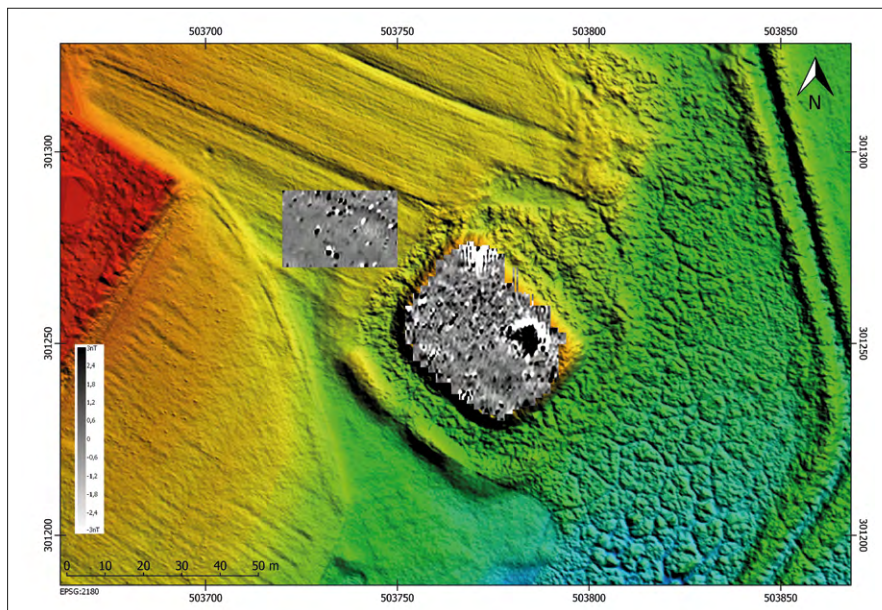


Fig. 6. LIDAR visualisation of the gord area, showing the 1957 probing pit and the location of the 2023 surface finds (prepared by M. Furmanek, R. Zdaniewicz).

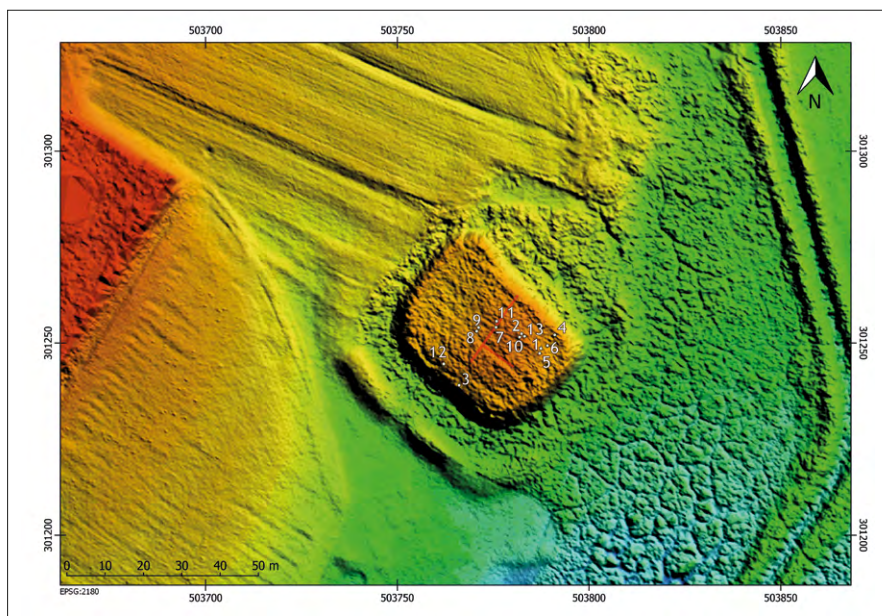


Fig. 7. LIDAR visualisation of the gord area, showing the result of geophysical surveys in 2023 (prepared by M. Furmanek).

(Fig. 4.7–8). In general, it can be assumed that the vessel fragments discovered during the surface survey are related to the use of the gord area from at least the thirteenth century, which was already indicated during the analysis of historical materials from the 1957 research (Kawka 2015: 98–101). However, based on the historical mentions cited, it should be assumed that the site was in use at least until the fifteenth century.

Also noteworthy are the surface finds of lumps of pugging and metal/smelting (Fig. 5)⁴. They are probably traces of the existence of buildings within the plateau, as well as of economic production connected with metal smelting, common in this region since the early Middle Ages (Molenda 1963: 63–64) – for example, the above-mentioned charter from 1386 was written down in the forge of Mały Janisz (CDS 1865: 15–16). This subject, insofar as it has only been hinted at here, requires further specialist sample research⁵.

The mound in Woźniki, as demonstrated, is now largely destroyed in the upper part. The degree and extent of this destruction has not been definitively established, which motivated geophysical prospecting to confirm the existence of possible surviving relics of buildings or traces of the use of the gord. Part of the non-invasive research also covered the area surrounding the mound from the north-west, in search of traces of a possible settlement from the side of the still existing church. The main objective was to capture traces of anthropogenic structures that were originally sunken into the surface or bore traces of burning or fire-related activity. The magnetometer survey revealed primarily a number of small-scale anomalies of difficult-to-interpret origin⁶. Of particular note was a much larger anomaly recorded in the eastern part of the mound. It was provisionally assumed that it might represent a trace of an archaeological site that had probably been consumed by fire. Confirmation of its function can only come from verification by excavation methods, but the size may indicate that it could be a relic of the past plateau development of the mound, e.g. the remains of a building with a basement.

4 The discovered lumps of metal/smelting (?) were subjected to preliminary metallographic analysis with a Bruker TRACER 5i XRF spectrometer. These tests should be considered preliminary and at this stage of the work were only carried out to determine the type of metal. Measurements were taken on the mechanically cleaned surface of the samples. They were made by mgr J. Soida in the Archaeology Department of the Silesian Museum in Katowice, whom the authors would like to thank for his help.

5 Samples of the pugging and other organic and inorganic substances collected during the 1957 research are currently stored in the collection of the Archaeology Department of the Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom. They constitute a good source for further multi-disciplinary analyses.

6 Geophysical research using a Bartington Grad 601-2 gradiometer was conducted by Dr M. Furmanek from IA UWŹ, for which the authors would like to thank him.

An archival photograph taken in the 1930s (Fig. 1) shows that, at that time, the eastern part of the mound still retained a distinct elevation of the plateau area. It may have been a trace of a collapsed residential and defensive structure, crucial to the functioning of the entire *fortaliticium*.

The existence of buildings in the eastern part of the culmination of the mound is also indirectly indicated by the location of the artefacts discovered during surface works as they are also concentrated in the eastern part of the plateau of the gord (Fig. 7). This does not seem to be an accident.

Conclusions

Archaeological research of the gord in Woźniki carried out in the twentieth century provided preliminary information on the dating of the site. However, it did not provide a solution regarding the layout of the buildings or the nature of the object. Unfortunately, the gord has been destroyed in recent years and is now heavily levelled. As has been demonstrated, however, perhaps not everything has been destroyed and the site can still have value for archaeological research. The non-invasive method allowed to make key observations that could provide the basis for further excavation of the site. The clearly visible moat and the embankment surrounding the gord are also of great research potential (Fig. 2). As shown by studies of other motte-and-bailey castles in Upper Silesia or the rest of present-day Poland, moats can serve as a treasure trove of knowledge about the lives of their inhabitants in the past (Marciniak-Kajzer 2011: 111–237; Nowakowski 2017: 133–178).

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Streszczenie

Położone wśród podmokłych łąk grodzisko stożkowe w Woźnikach było obiektem zainteresowań badaczy już od początków XX w. Jednak badania wykopaliskowe o charakterze sondażowym zostały przeprowadzone przez pracowników Działu Archeologii Muzeum Górnośląskiego w Bytomiu dopiero w 1957 r. Przyniosły one potwierdzenie zabytkowego charakteru obiektu, jednak niewiele informacji dotyczących wyglądu zabudowy czy etapów jego funkcjonowania. Niestety, w XX w. grodzisko było niszczone i obecnie jego plateau zostało silnie zniwelowane. W 2023 r. postanowiono powrócić do badań obiektu, wykorzystując techniki nieinwazyjne. Wykonano również ponowne, dokładne badania powierzchniowe z użyciem detektora metali i planigrafii przestrzennej. Przyniosły one wiele nowych, interesujących wyników, które stanowią asumpt do dalszych badań stanowiska.

Słowa kluczowe: Górny Śląsk, Woźniki, grodzisko stożkowe, późne średniowiecze

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