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Research on Medieval Settlements in Poland: A Brief Overview of Methods, Theories and Research Challenges

Polonya'daki Ortaçağ Yerleşimleri Üzerine Araştırma: Yöntemlere, Teorilere ve Araştırma Zorluklarına Kısa Bir Bakış

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Özet

Bu makale, Polonya tarih yazımında belgelendiği şekliyle yerleşim çalışmaları alanındaki araştırma yöntemleri ve teorilerine kısa bir genel bakış sunmaktadır. Tartışmanın kökleri, araştırmacıların yerleşimlerin tarihini ve kronolojilerini ilk kez düşündükleri 19. yüzyıla kadar uzanan tarihsel gelişmelere dayanıyor. Sonraki yüzyılda yerleşim araştırmalarıyla ilgili yeni, ilgi çekici yöntem ve terminolojinin ortaya çıktığı görüldü. Şu anda, Polonya'daki Ortaçağ çalışmaları, yerleşim araştırmalarında sarsılmaz bir ilginin damgasını vurduğu sağlam bir gelişmeye tanık oldu. Bu metin aynı zamanda yerleşim araştırması yürütürken karşılaşılan belirli sorunları da vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yerleşme, Ortaçağ, Tarihi Coğrafya, Polonya, Ortaçağ Yerleşimini Araştırma Yöntemleri.

Abstract

This article provides a concise overview of research methods and theories within the field of settlement studies, as documented in Polish historiography. The discussion is rooted in historical developments, dating back to the 19th century, when researchers first contemplated the history of settlements and the establishment of their chronology. The following century saw the emergence of new, intriguing methods and terminology related to settlement studies. Presently, Polish medieval studies have witnessed a robust development of settlement studies, which are marked by unwavering interest. This text also highlights specific issues encountered in conducting settlement research.

Keywords: Settlement, Middle Ages, Historical Geography, Poland, Medieval Settlement Research Methods.

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Introduction

Undoubtedly, research in settlement stands as a cornerstone of Polish medieval studies and enjoys enduring popularity. To exemplify this, contemporary research teams have been established within the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IH PAN), tasked with contributing further entries to the Historical and Geographical Dictionary of the Polish Lands in the Middle Ages (“Słownik historyczno-geograficzny ziem polskich w średniowieczu”).¹ Settlement research also serves as an invaluable complement to various research areas, including prosopography, genealogy, and historical geography.² Its significance is strongly emphasized in Polish academic discourse.³ Today, it is inconceivable to prepare a trustworthy monograph on a noble family or a study on land ownership without a comprehensive understanding of the history of settlement in a given area.

The multitude and intricacy of issues addressed in this article necessitate us to focus on the most significant theories and research methods pertinent to the history of settlements. The author acknowledges that this discussion is by no means exhaustive, recognizing that a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter would require a dedicated, in-depth study, such as a monograph or extensive articles.

This text serves as an introduction to delve into issues concerning methods of researching the history of settlements. It appears that recent historiography lacks a comprehensive overview of this problem with respect to Polish lands in the Middle Ages and slightly later times. It is noteworthy, following Jacek Laberschek, that the numerous studies devoted to the settlement of Polish lands “are not uniform in nature; they differ in the way they approach the subject, the methodology of writing, and the construction”.⁴ The primary question raised here revolves around reflecting on the continued relevance of the methods reviewed below in an era of improved access to written sources and expanded general knowledge of settlements. Alternatively, does the passage of time and the rich source base present an excellent opportunity to formulate new research concepts and perspectives? Could this, in turn, lead to the development of a model monograph that addresses the history of settlement across all historical regions? The complementary contribution presented here aims to encourage other researchers of medieval settlement to engage in the discussion of potential new methods and solutions for reconstructing the most ancient settlement network. The text is primarily directed towards foreign researchers, intending to familiarize them with the tradition of Polish research on settlements and research theories.

The chronological scope of the considerations undertaken encompasses methods and concepts related to the medieval period (up to the late 15th century). However, it is essential to note that when discussing the method of settlement cross-sections, a reference is made to the 16th century, exemplifying an idea articulated by one of the researchers of the history of settlements, which is detailed later in the article. Territorially, the text covers the area of Poland in the Middle Ages, with a specific focus on its central lands. One notable omission is the territory of Ruthenia, which was incorporated into the Crown in the 14th century and Royal Prussia.⁵

1 <http://www.slownik.ihpan.edu.pl/> (access: 31/07/2023).

2 Historical geography, according to the contemporary definition, supplements our knowledge of the natural environment of the past, focusing on the forms and conditions of historical settlements. This topic, enthusiastically embraced by historians, has driven the evolution of modern research methodologies, including extensive research on settlements, Jan Tyszkiewicz, “Geografia historyczna. Zarys problematyki”, Nauki Pomocnicze Historii seria nowa, ed. A. Rachuba, S. Górzyński, Warsaw 2014, p. 10.

3 Włodzimierz Dworzaczek, *Genealogia*, Warsaw 1959, p. 53.

4 Jacek Laberschek, “Średniowieczne osadnictwo ziemi miechowskiej. Ujęcie syntetyczne”, *Małopolska. Regiony, regionalizmy, male ojczyzny*, V. 22, 2020, p. 9.

5 The settlement of Ruthenia is discussed in the following works: Adam Fastnacht, *Osadnictwo ziemi sanockiej w latach 1340-1650*, Wrocław 1962; Andrzej Janeczek, *Osadnictwo pogranicza polsko-ruskiego: województwo bełskie od schyłku XIV do początku XVII w.*, Wrocław 1991; idem, “Udział szlachty w kolonizacji Rusi Koronnej: migracje rodów i ich nowa własność (XIV-XV w.). Próba ujęcia syntetycznego”, [in:] *Rody na Śląsku, Rusi Czerwonej i w Małopolsce: średniowiecze i czasy nowożytne. Stan badań, metodologia, nowe ustalenia*, ed. W. Zawitkowska, A. Pobóg-Lenartowicz, Rzeszów 2010, pp. 59-91.

Aside from the introduction and conclusion, the text consists of two main parts. The first part briefly reviews selected methods and theories related to medieval and early modern settlement in the 19th and 20th centuries. The second part highlights some of the problems encountered in this type of research. It must be clearly emphasized that this text is not a comparative study of settlement research in Poland and the rest of Europe.

A brief review of selected research methods and theories related to settlements in Polish historiography (19th and 20th century)

Research traditions associated with the history of settlements in Poland have deep roots in Polish historiography and their origins can be traced back to the 19th century. These traditions owe much to renowned scholars such as Tadeusz Wojciechowski (1838-1919), Franciszek Piekosiński (1844-1906), Oswald Balzer (1858-1933), Karol Potkański (1861-1907), Stanisław Kozierowski (1874-1949), and Franciszek Bujak (1875-1953), among other influential researchers of the turn of the 20th century. During this era, these scholars grappled with defining the essence of settlement history, presenting their own unique concepts and proposals for reconstructing the earliest history of settlements in Polish territory. This period witnessed the formulation of various research postulates, one of which advocated the use of toponomastic data (content analysis of local names) as a means to determine the chronology of settlements.⁶ Scholars of this time also introduced a classification system, categorizing settlements into patronymic settlements (named after individuals, nicknames, or surnames, denoting descendants of the settlement's owner or founder), possessive settlements (indicative of the settlement's owner), and topographical settlements (associated with geographical features such as landforms and vegetation).⁷ Additionally, the integration of settlement research with economic and social aspects was encouraged.⁸ Over time, settlement research gradually shifted its focus towards changes in the landscape, drawing nearer to the field of historical geography in the 1930s. Some researchers, including F. Bujak, employed this approach to explore the expansion of cultivated land and the growth in the number of settlements. This emphasis underscored the enduring influence of economic history on the study of settlement processes. In a pivotal 1905 monograph, which remains an integral part of Polish medieval studies, Bujak delved into subjects such as settlement size, boundaries, population, and shifts in economic prosperity.⁹ The interwar period introduced a crucial trend that took into account the legal and systemic aspects of settlements, which was reflected in the considerations that regarded colonization under German law in Poland.¹⁰

Considering the diversity of research proposals, it is essential to recognize that successive researchers have approached settlement issues from various angles. As previously mentioned, some scholars focused on studying landscape changes, while others connected settlements to socioeconomic development. Additionally, toponomastics played a significant role in some investigations. Stanisław Franciszek Zajączkowski (1890-1977) underlined that this multitude of approaches stemmed primarily from the specificity of the research topics undertaken, the availability of source material, and the varying degrees of accomplishment in the investigations. Zajączkowski also noted that these projects often lacked comprehensive theoretical reflections on the history of settlements, as it is

6 Małgorzata Delimata-Proch, "Tadeusz Wojciechowski (1838-1919)", [in:] *Mediewiści*, ed. J. Strzelczyk, vol. 5, Poznań 2017, p. 216.

7 Oswald Balzer, "Rewizja teorii o pierwotnym osadnictwie w Polsce", *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, V. 12, 1898, pp. 23-25, 37-47; Witold Taszycki, "Słowiańskie nazwy miejscowe (Ustalenie podziału)", [in:] *Rozprawy i studia polonistyczne*, V. 1: *Onomastyka*, Wrocław 1958, pp. 228-268; Stanisław Rospond, *Klasyfikacja strukturalno-gramatyczna słowiańskich nazw geograficznych*, Wrocław 1957.

8 In 1920, the prevailing perspective held that Poland's economic history was largely synonymous with the history of settlements. This viewpoint gained even greater prominence in 1937 when settlement history was formally acknowledged as one of the subdivisions within the broader field of economic history.

9 Franciszek Bujak, *Studia nad osadnictwem Małopolski*, Kraków 1905 [reprint: Poznań 2001], pp. 108-191; Andrzej Janeczek, "Franciszek Bujak: historyk w nurcie życia", [in:] *ibidem*, pp. 215-216, 224-225

10 Colonization under German law commenced in Poland at the onset of the 13th century. It entailed a deliberate influx of people, primarily from Germany, who introduced a distinct settlement law that eventually evolved into a well-defined system known as German law. This process of colonization contributed to the expansion of the number of settlements and population density and was further associated with the introduction of more efficient farming systems.

obvious that the study of peripheral areas differs from that of central regions. Furthermore, variations in the source base can be attributed to different historical periods. The historian of the Middle Ages, for instance, has significantly less data at their disposal compared to researchers dealing with more recent eras. When written sources reach their limits, archaeology emerges as a valuable resource, although it may not be feasible to examine every locality in this manner. Nevertheless, the significance of archaeology cannot be overstated, particularly in the context of investigating the origins of the Polish state.¹¹ Zajączkowski raised another pertinent question, one that remains relevant today: does a historian specializing in settlement history need to primarily be an expert in historical geography or economic history, or perhaps both? Or maybe they should be even larger than that, considering that, as early as the 1950s, expectations were set for proficiency in understanding the land system and settlement sizes.¹² From a contemporary standpoint, the ideal situation for a modern settlement historian is to skilfully integrate research findings from various disciplines, including archaeology, ethnology, anthropology, geography, linguistics, among others. Embracing interdisciplinarity is crucial in this pursuit.

Theoretical reflections on settlement history have led to an attempt to answer the fundamental question of how settlement history should be comprehended. Due to variations in personal working style and research methods, the definitions put forth by historians, archaeologists, or geographers may differ. Karol Potkański (1861-1907), a pioneering figure in the study of ancient settlements, provided a thought-provoking definition in one of his posthumously published works from the 1920s. He posited that settlement history is essentially the history of the occupation, division, and utilisation of the territory where a particular community establishes, resides, and evolves.¹³ This definition underscores two fundamental factors: territory and people. The interaction of these elements shapes the history of settlements. It should also be emphasized that this interaction is a continuous process, lasting for centuries, until the moment when communities occupy a given area.¹⁴ Potkański placed significant emphasis on external factors, such as physiographic conditions and environmental characteristics, in influencing societal development, structural arrangements, economic relationships, and social systems.¹⁵ In the 1970s, this definition was identified as the most useful¹⁶, and it remains as such, in principle, until today. This is evident in the fact that J. Laberschek cited it in his recent work.¹⁷ S.F. Zajączkowski, in contrast, highlighted the essence of the settlement process in his considerations, defining it as the establishment of settlement points within a given territory. What does this term encompass? It encompasses not only the settlement itself, the habitation of people in the strictest sense, but also the surrounding area immediately adjacent to the village (such as part of the farmland).¹⁸ According to Zajączkowski, the essence of the settlement process involves continuous dynamics, development, and variability, while only settlement cross-sections, representing specific moments in history (chronological arrangements), can be statically captured. It is worth noting that Karol Buczek (1902-1983) criticised the definition of a settlement point, contending that it was challenging to precisely determine whether a settlement truly constituted a distinct unit and if the exact boundaries of the adjacent area could be established. He argued that the history of settlements should not solely involve identifying new settlement units but should also encompass the study of the

11 Andrzej Buko, *Świt państwa polskiego*, Warsaw 2021, pp. 329. For an interesting discussion of the interplay between archaeology and history, see *Archaeologia versus historiam – historia versus archaeologiam czyli jak wspólnie poznawać średniowiecze?*, ed. M. Brzostowicz, Poznań 2012, p. 238.

12 Stanisław Zajączkowski, “W sprawie przedmiotu i problematyki badań nad dziejami osadnictwa”, *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, V. 4, I. 2, 1956, p. 216-217.

13 Karol Potkański, “Wstęp”, [in:] *Pisma pośmiertne*, vol. 1, compiled by F. Bujak, afterword J.M. Piskorski, Poznań 2004, p. 78. see Idzi Panic, *Historia osadnictwa w księstwie opolskim we wczesnym średniowieczu*, Katowice 1992, pp. 15-27.

14 Ibidem.

15 Marek Cetwiński, “Karol Potkański (1861-1907)”, [in:] *Mediewiści*, p. 151; Andrzej Kobak, *Karol Potkański w życiu i nauce (1861-1907). Między tradycją a modernizacją*, Łódź 2021, p. 111.

16 Anna Borkiewicz-Celińska, *Osadnictwo ziemi ciechanowskiej w XV wieku (1370-1526)*, Wrocław 1970, p. 7.

17 Jacek Laberschek, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

18 Stanisław Zajączkowski, *W sprawie...*, p. 218; idem, “Z zagadnień teoretycznych historii osadnictwa”, *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, V. 8, I. 3, 1960, p. 362.

development of already known points. Indeed, settlement research should extend beyond the mere reconstruction of the settlement network.¹⁹

Zajączkowski introduced a novel and intriguing concept for periodising the history of settlements, distinguishing four distinct periods. The first period spanned from the mid-5th to the 12th centuries (1138), and the second extended until the mid-13th century (1250). The subsequent period encompassed the years from 1251 to 1384, while the final period was characterized by the emergence of court books²⁰, covering the first quarter of the 16th century (1511-1523)²¹. It is important to note that this proposed periodisation was specific to the central regions of medieval and early modern Poland. While it initially garnered approval from other historians, it found continued use primarily with Zajączkowski's son, Stanisław Marian Zajączkowski (1931-2014), also a recognised researcher of the history of settlements. Stanisław referred to this periodisation in both peripheral works and monographs, including his most significant publication from 1996, where he expanded upon the concept by adding an additional period covering the years 1523 to 1576.²² This method of chronological cross-sectioning considered all categories of ownership, including royal, ecclesiastical, and noble ownership. It analysed the relationship between settlement patterns and physiography, identified key settlement centres within the region of interest, and highlighted the role of German colonization in shaping settlement processes. The culmination of the extensive research conducted by these scholars resulted in the development of a valuable publication titled *Materiały do słownika geograficzno-historycznego dawnych ziem łęczyckiej i sieradzkiej do 1400r.*²³ This dictionary, compiled on a robust source base, holds significant scholarly value and serves as a fundamental resource for studying the history of settlements in the central Poland region during the Middle Ages. The importance of this publication was underscored with the following words: "(...) a fundamental compendium of knowledge about the earliest history of the localities in our region, without which any settlement research would be hard to imagine (...)."²⁴

The investigation of the origins of individual church foundations and their endowments is a crucial component in the study of medieval settlements. Church institutions were typically granted land or income, often derived from the land itself, such as tithes or tributes from the local population. For instance, the collegiate church in Łęczycza, consecrated in 1161, which S. Zajączkowski²⁵ wrote

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- 19 Karol Buczek, "Kilka uwag o zagadnieniach teoretycznych badań historycznych w ogóle, a historyczno-osadniczych w szczególności (w odpowiedzi prof. Stanisławowi Zajączkowskiemu)", *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, V. 10, I. 1-2, 1962, p. 17.
- 20 Court books began to be created towards the end of the 14th century, primarily serving notarial purposes for the nobility. However, they also included records of other social strata, such as townsmen and peasants. These documents constitute a valuable source extensively utilised in settlement research, as evidenced by the research conducted by the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IH PAN), as well as the new monograph dedicated to the settlement history of various regions within the Kingdom of Poland up to the early 16th century, Łukasz Ćwikła, *Settlement studies on Orlów County until the 16th century. Territorial and administrative past, settlement landscape and ownership relations*, Łódź 2023, pp. 135.
- 21 Stanisław Zajączkowski, "Uwagi nad osadnictwem dawnych ziem łęczyckiej i sieradzkiej (do przełomu XI i XII w.)", *Rocznik Łódzki*, V. 9 (12), 1964, pp. 167-169; idem, "Studia nad osadnictwem dawnych ziem łęczyckiej i sieradzkiej w XII-XIV w. Uwagi i spostrzeżenia", *Studia z Dziejów Osadnictwa*, V. 4, 1966, p. 5; Jan Szymczak, "Stanisław Franciszek Zajączkowski (1890-1977)", [in:] *Mediewiści*, p. 238.
- 22 Stanisław Marian Zajączkowski, *Studia z dziejów osadnictwa na obszarze Łodzi do końca XVI wieku*, Łódź 1976, p. 10; idem, "O przeszłości wsi starostwa łęczyckiego do trzeciej ćwierci XVI wieku (przyczynek do dziejów osadnictwa przedrozbiorowego województwa łęczyckiego)", *Rocznik Łódzki*, V. 35, 1986, p. 13; idem, "Z dziejów wsi starostwa inowłodzkiego do trzeciej ćwierci XVI w.", *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Historica*, V. 23, 1986, p. 145; idem, "Uwagi nad dziejami wsi kolegiaty łęczyckiej (do połowy lat siedemdziesiątych XVI w.)", *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Historica*, V. 36, 1989, p. 102; idem, *Powiat orłowski do lat siedemdziesiątych XVI wieku. Studia z dziejów osadnictwa, struktury własnościowej i stosunków kościelnych*, Łódź 1996, p. 8.
- 23 Stanisław Zajączkowski, Stanisław Marian Zajączkowski, *Materiały do słownika geograficzno-historycznego dawnych ziem łęczyckiej i sieradzkiej do 1400 r.*, parts 1-2, Łódź 1966-1970.
- 24 Jan Szymczak, "Życiorys naukowy profesora Stanisława Mariana Zajączkowskiego", *Przegląd Nauk Historycznych*, V. 11, I. 1, 2012, p. 219; idem, *Stanisław Marian Zajączkowski (1931-2014)*, [in:] *Mediewiści*, p. 242.
- 25 Stanisław Zajączkowski, "Początki kolegiaty łęczyckiej. Przyczynek do dziejów osadnictwa ziemi łęczyckiej", *Roczniki Historyczne*, V. 24, 1958, pp. 145-175.

about in the late 1950s, serves as an illustrative example. According to the historian's assessment, the initial endowment of this institution dates back to the same century as its foundation. Consequently, if a settlement was burdened with obligations to support this collegiate church, it provides a basis for tracing its origins to the 12th century. It is worth noting that this research proposal aims to identify villages originally obligated to make payments to such institutions.

Some research problems related to the study of the history of settlements

Medieval studies encounter a plethora of challenges, which undoubtedly merit in-depth discussion and analysis.²⁶ At this juncture, the focus is on the specific issues that should be addressed by some of the theories and research methods mentioned earlier. One of these issues is the so-called first-record case, signifying the date when a particular settlement first appears in historical sources. It is important to recognize that, in the vast majority of cases, the first mention in historical records does not necessarily equate to the actual origins of the settlement. As emphasized by S. Zajączkowski, the first date should only serve as a starting point for further research to establish the genuine origin of the settlement points, although it is evident that proposals regarding their earliest dating are often hypothetical in nature.²⁷

When addressing these issues, it is imperative to consider the complexities associated with colonization under German law, as mentioned previously. Tadeusz Nowak has pointed out that drawing conclusions about the origins of a village based on its presumed layout (a concept derived from the analysis of maps from a later period, such as the 18th and 19th centuries), before the stabilisation of settlement following the mentioned phenomenon, can lead to erroneous conclusions. In such cases, only archaeological research can yield more accurate results.²⁸

As mentioned above, the tithe dependence of some villages was used as a basis for presuming their origins. However, it is noteworthy that certain villages paid tithes to the Łęczyca provosts, and they were not established until the 14th or 15th centuries. Therefore, the information provided by Jan Łaski in the book of the endowments of the Archbishopric of Gniezno, written in 1511-1523, may occasionally lead to misleading conclusions.²⁹

As regards other challenges encountered in settlement research, it is noteworthy to address the difficulty of distinguishing individual settlements. An examination of the source material reveals that some localities in central Poland during the late Middle Ages shared similar or identical names, such as Będków and Bądków, both situated in the historical region of Łęczyca. Furthermore, the complication of this matter is exacerbated by the recording of local names in Latin. To correctly identify these names, consulting records that detail the demarcation of boundaries between settlements proves useful. By understanding the location and territorial-administrative relationships of neighbouring villages, it becomes possible to distinguish similarly named settlements and establish their geographical locations.

26 In the context of urban settlements in the medieval and early modern periods, several problems have been flagged by the author of the present article, Łukasz Ćwikła, "Małe miasta ziemi łęczyckiej w średniowieczu i wczesnej epoce nowożytnej – wybrane problemy badawcze", *Space - Society - Economy*, V. 34, 2023, in print.

27 Stanisław Zajączkowski, "Sprawa pierwszego zapisu (w świetle badań nad osadnictwem dawnych ziem łęczyckiej i sieradzkiej)", *Rocznik Łódzki*, V. 7 (10), 1963, p. 103.

28 Tadeusz Nowak, "Dzieje Pęcławic w ziemi łęczyckiej do początku XIX w.", [in:] *Via Archaeologica Lodziensis*, vol. 4, Łódź 2011, p. 343.

29 Łukasz Ćwikła, "Uwagi do dziejów osadnictwa na obszarze dawnego powiatu orłowskiego w średniowieczu", *Przegląd Nauk Historycznych*, V. 21, I. 1, 2022, p. 288.

Conclusion

The intriguing method of settlement cross-sectioning proposed by S.F. Zajączkowski, as described above, carries a certain risk associated with the imprecise determination of the number of settlements at a given point in history. It is crucial to consider that some settlements may have been transient and quickly disappeared. A potentially comprehensive reconstruction of the settlement landscape requires a combination of archaeological research and a meticulous exploration of medieval sources from various origins, including documents, land and municipal court records, church court records, and tax registers. From this perspective, it appears that Zajączkowski's proposed periodisation of the history of settlement has limited impact on the reconstruction of the settlement landscape, as it is fundamentally determined by the available source material.

In terms of contemporary monographs focusing on present-day territorial-administrative units, specifically municipalities, noteworthy works are being developed by a community of historians centred around Łódź. These monographs systematically present information about villages within a given territorial community, including details about property and church relations. Furthermore, they often incorporate archaeological chapters, unveiling that settlement development predates the establishment of the Polish state. Only through such a comprehensive approach can an attempt be made to capture settlement processes across centuries.³⁰ Monographs of this nature prove valuable for comparative studies of various regions in Poland and may be aptly confronted in the future with similar works on settlement that are being published in Europe.

The history of settlement research is firmly entrenched in Polish historiography and continues to attract the interest of successive generations of scholars. Nowadays, research in this field is thriving within the realm of Polish medieval studies. Scholarly works that reconstruct the settlement network and the histories of specific localities from the Middle Ages to the early 16th century are in progress. Local governments also show keen interest in their ancient histories, which encourages the publication of new monographs that substantially incorporate the history of settlements in their respective regions. The Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IH PAN) is actively producing new volumes of historical-geographical dictionaries, offering valuable sources for understanding the history of settlements across various regions of Poland during the Middle Ages. In this context, it is fitting to acknowledge distinguished medievalists such as: Waldemar Bukowski, Marek Florek, Zbyszko Górczak, Tomasz Jurek, Janusz Kurtyka (1960-2010), Jacek Laberschek (1950-2023), Zdzisław Noga, Jerzy Rajman. With regard to the lands of central Poland, settlement research was pioneered by S. and S.M. Zajączkowski, with their legacy carried forward by subsequent acclaimed researchers like Jan Szymczak and the aforementioned T. Nowak. It is also important to recognize the Institute of History at the University of Łódź as one of the leading schools of settlement research in the awareness of Polish medievalists. It boasts a long and rich tradition, standing as one of the finest in Poland.

³⁰ *Dzieje Witoni i Gminy Witonia (do 1939 roku)*, ed. J. Szymczak, Witonia-Łódź 2018, pp. 299. It is worth mentioning the latest monograph devoted to the Wartkowiec municipality, *Po obu stronach Neru. Gmina Wartkowiec poprzez dzieje*, ed. J. Kita, Łódź-Wartkowiec 2023, pp. 440.

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Netography

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Extended Abstract

Settlement research in Poland has a rich historical tradition, dating back to the 19th century. The latter half of the 19th century saw a growing interest in the study of local names (toponymy). The trend was pioneered by such scholars as Tadeusz Wojciechowski, Franciszek Piekosiński, Karol Potkański, Stanisław Kozierowski and Franciszek Bujak. During this period, medieval sources began to be appreciated not only for their utility in reconstructing political history but also for their greater potential in exploration. The mentioned researchers recognised the cognitive value inherent in the names of individual villages. Historians also delved into defining the concept of “settlement history”. The definition put forth by K. Potkański in this context remains pertinent today and is frequently cited by contemporary researchers. Historians concur that settlement should be construed as the deliberate occupation and development of a specific territory by people. This process can unfold in two distinct manners: firstly, spontaneously, and secondly, administratively. Regardless of the method employed, the core of settlement lies in the establishment and functioning of settlements. Intriguingly, this process also involves the disappearance of existing settlements and the emergence of new ones.

In the scientific discourse of the 1950s, Stanisław Zajączkowski introduced the concept of a “settlement point”, which encompassed not only a specific settlement but also the area adjacent to it. However, this proposal faced criticism from Karol Buczek, who noted ambiguities in its definition, particularly regarding the precise boundaries of the adjacent area.

The theoretical and methodological reflection also includes the concept of “settlement cross-sections”, aimed at illustrating the settlement network in specific time intervals. It is important to note that this concept primarily applied to the central lands of Poland during the Middle Ages and the early modern era. The proposed research method has been innovative and gained recognition from Zofia Podwińska, Ryszard Rosin, and Andrzej Wędzki. Its objective is to illustrate the development of settlements based on the specifics of the territory, as well as social and economic relations. The intention is to utilise individual settlement points appearing in the source material during specific periods to reconstruct the settlement landscape at the end of each proposed time period. The adoption of this research procedure assumes that by overlaying the cross-sections, settlements present in earlier periods essentially also existed later. However, it should be noted that this method carries some risk, as not every cross-section accurately reflects the actual number of settlements. Consequently, using this method might result in a small group of villages in certain periods, while in others (later periods), their numbers could increase dramatically, leading to significant quantitative disparities in different sections of the adopted chronology.

The text also addresses several research problems related to the history of settlements, such as the challenge of identifying the “first record” and determining the historical origins of settlements, the issue of tithe dependence, and the accurate identification of villages with similar or identical names. The complexity of these issues, largely determined by the available source base and the specifics of a given area, warrants separate discussion. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that settlement research is a meticulous and time-consuming endeavour that requires comprehensive familiarity with source material, incorporating the contributions of other sciences such as archaeology. These problems in settlement research deserve separate in-depth discussions.

At present, settlement research continues to enjoy unwavering interest, resulting in numerous monographs and peripheral works in the form of scholarly articles. These works cover historical territories, non-existent in the present (lands, provinces, districts, parishes). Another model for this type of publication includes a historical analysis of modern territorial-administrative units, such as districts and municipalities. There are also studies that strictly refer to geographical territories, such as valleys, highlands, river basins, etc.

An important undertaking in Polish science is the geographic-historical research conducted by the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IH PAN), producing extensive dictionary entries with rich information on villages, towns, etc. Settlement research is not only popular among

professional researchers but is also undertaken, with varying success, by regionalists, local historians, and all those interested in the region in which they live. Unfortunately, the basic shortcoming of research undertaken by a wide range of amateurs is methodology deficiencies, manifested, among other things, in incorrect analyses of source material or a lack of paleographic skills. The research discussed here also represents an expression of public demand for local history, which is, of course, something we should appreciate.

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