

NEW SHAPE OF AN OLD TOWN URBAN SPACE AND FABRIC OF LATE MEDIEVAL WOLIN (POMERANIA)

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ABSTRACT

The town of Wolin, situated on the southern coast of the Baltic Sea, was chartered under so-called German law in the 1260s. Its foundation took place directly on the site of an older settlement complex of early urban characteristics. Based on scarce written sources as well as archaeological documentation from excavations carried out in the 20th century, this article examines the spatial transformations associated with the foundation of the new town and discusses its topography and fabric.



Figure 1. Location of Wolin at the mouth of the Oder River. By P. Romanowicz, after Wolin 2019.

Introduction

During the 12th and 13th centuries Central Europe witnessed a major turning point in the process of urbanisation. This transformation consisted in the emergence and spread of a new type of town, resulting in the establishment of a network of settlements commonly referred to as chartered towns. A key concept for understanding this phenomenon is the Latin term *locatio*, used in contemporary documents to describe the foundation of such towns. In the period in question, the term functioned as a colonisation-related notion with two distinct meanings. The first referred to the granting of a legal framework known as “German Law”, which defined the principles governing the functioning of a settlement. The second meaning concerned the shaping of a settlement’s spatial layout, an act realised either through the foundation of a new urban centre or through the reorganisation of an existing one (e.g., Zientara 1976, 78–79; Schich 1996, 7 ff.).

The development of medieval chartered towns also encompassed the territories along the southern coast of the Baltic Sea. It began with the founding of the new town of Lübeck in 1158 and reached as far east as Tallinn (Reval). Over the past several decades, archaeology has come to play an increasingly significant role in studying the past of these towns (Lübecker Kolloquium 1997–2024). The development of urban archaeology, initially linked to the post-war reconstructions of towns destroyed during World War II, gave impetus to archaeological excavations and research, especially on the origins of urban centres located in the region under the so-called German law in the 12th–14th centuries.

In Pomerania, where the process of locating new towns began in the 1230s, some of the best archaeologically documented

centres include, e.g., Greifswald, Kołobrzeg or Stargard/Ina. The town of Wolin (Fig. 1), chartered in the 1260s, however, is not among them, despite the fact that the beginning of archaeological excavations there dates back to the pre-war period, during which remains of the late medieval settlement were also identified. These received the least attention so far and have not been systematically analysed, whereas research interest concerning Wolin was focused mostly on the Viking Age. The reason for this was that, according to archaeological evidence, the town's peak prosperity occurred between the 9th and 11th centuries, when Wolin was one of the most significant emporia in the Baltic. From the other side, there has been preserved a very limited number of written records from the late medieval period. The foundation charter itself has not survived, while there are very few other documents concerning the town's history in the 13th and 14th centuries. The municipal book has survived only in fragments, with the earliest entries dating from the second half of the 14th century.

Research question

Almost nothing has survived of the urban fabric of Wolin developed there from the 13th century onwards, since the Old Town was completely destroyed during World War II (Fig. 2). From the medieval buildings, only two churches survived the war, one of which was dismantled in the post-war period. However, the significance of the results of the old archaeological excavations provides a basis for confronting the sparse written evidence and for reconsidering the problem of chartering Wolin under German law. Given the nature of the available data, the focus of this study will be on the spatial transformations of the settlement associated with the town's location and the emergence of Wolin's new urban structure in the 13th and the 14th centuries.



Figure 2. The Old Town of Wolin after World War II. View from the north with remains of the church of St George. Archive of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences.

The position of the medieval town in relation to earlier settlements

Wolin is situated in the south-eastern part of the island of the same name, on the left bank of the strait known as the Dziwna. It is one of three long and narrow straits, along with the Peene and the Świna, which surround the islands of Usedom and Wolin (Fig. 1). Together they connect the Szczecin Lagoon with the Baltic Sea and form the main components of the Oder River estuary. According to current archaeological research, the extensive settlement complex that existed in Wolin in the Viking Age and early Middle Ages stretched for several kilometres along the left bank of the Dziwna (Filipowiak 2004; Fig. 3). Its main sections were located on a long esker, forming a distinctive moraine island. Late medieval Wolin was established in the central part of this area (the Old Town), on an elongated moraine islet measuring roughly 200 × 400 m, located directly above the valley of the Dziwna (Fig. 4).

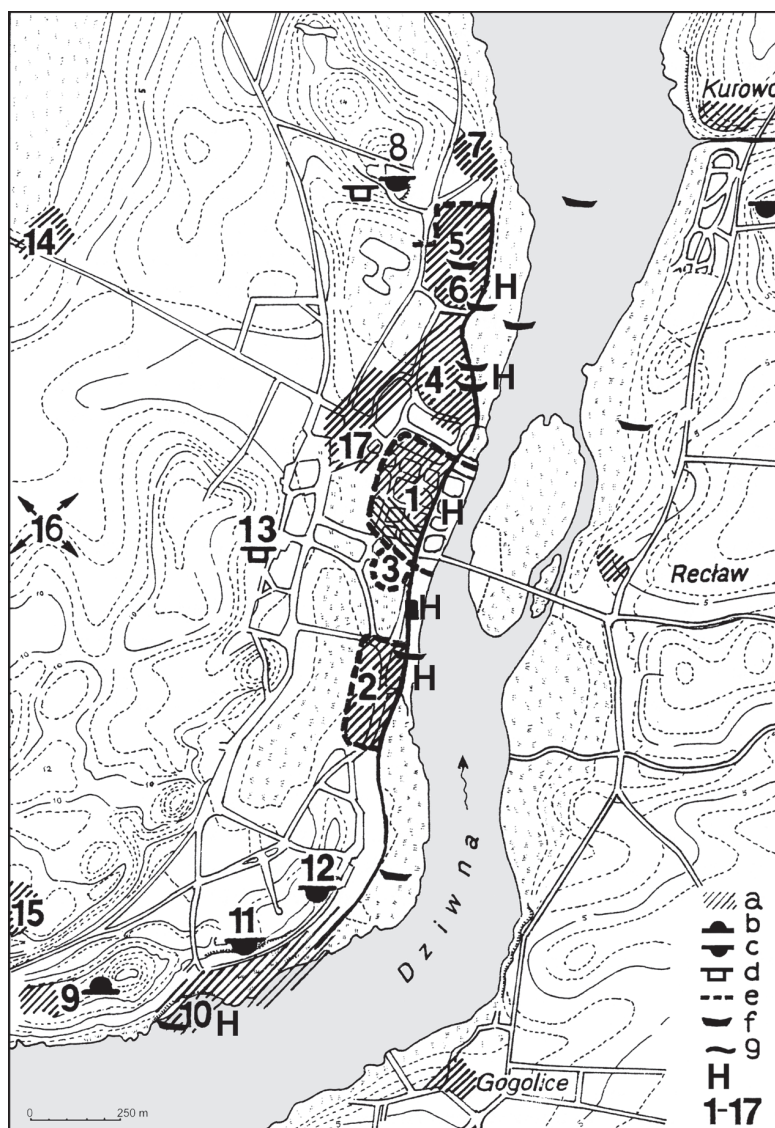


Figure 3. Location of early medieval archaeological sites of Wolin. The Old Town is indicated by the number 1. After W. Filipowiak.

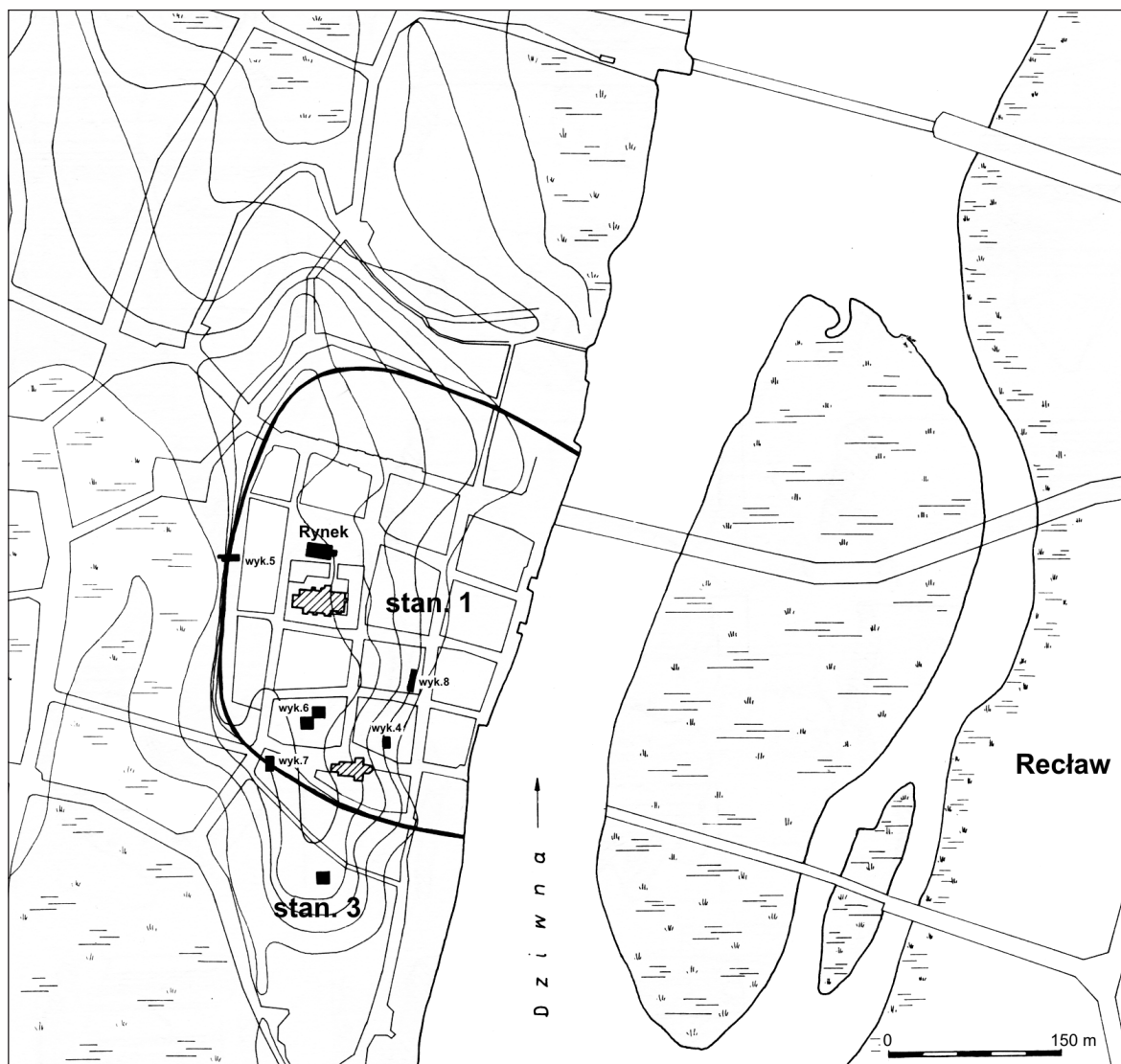
1–17 – archaeological sites;
a – estimated extent of dense settlement;
b – burial mound cemetery;
c – flat cremation cemetery;
d – flat inhumation cemetery;
e – probable extent of fortifications;
f – finds of wrecks of boats;
g – the original course of the Dziwna valley;
H – harbour

Its elevation at its highest point exceeded sea level by only a few metres.

The first systematic excavations within the Old Town were conducted by German archaeologists between 1934 and 1941, who explored a large area located in the Wolin market-place (Kunkel, Wilde 1941; Biermann 2020). During more than thirty years of Polish excavations, carried out from 1953 until the mid-1980s, eight trenches of varying size were investigated in the Old Town (Stanisławski 2013; Wolin 2019) (Fig. 5). These studies revealed substantial stratified cultural deposits, in places exceeding eight metres in thickness. The accumulation of these layers occurred between approximately 800 AD and the 14th century. Within them, several distinct settlement phases can be identified, each reflecting broader transformations occurring along the southern Baltic coast during this long period. The earliest was an open settlement (first half of the 9th century), followed by an emporium (second half of the 9th century to late 11th century), then



Figure 4. Airborne Laser Scanning (ALS) visualisation of the Old Town of Wolin. By G. Kiarszys, after Wolin 2019.



a stronghold and *suburbium* (late 11th century to late 13th century), and finally the chartered medieval town (from the late 13th century onwards) (Rębkowski 2019).

The youngest settlement phase is of particular interest here. However, to evaluate properly the process of locating the new town, it is first necessary to reconstruct the character, extent, and importance of the settlement during the period immediately preceding the chartering.

Pre-chartered Wolin (12th to late 13th century)

In the scholarly literature it is often claimed that the decisive event leading to the decline of the Viking Age emporium of Wolin was the raid conducted by Magnus the Good in 1043 and the destruction inflicted at that time (Morawiec 2009, 349–390). This opinion, however, is contradicted both by the results of archaeological research and by written evidence from the 12th century. In the 1120s, Wolin was still described

Figure 5. The Old Town of Wolin. The continuous line marks the course of the city walls at the end of the Middle Ages, and black rectangles the sites of archaeological excavations. By A. Janowski, after Wolin 2019

as a great and mighty city (*civitas magna et fortis*) and as one of the two most noble cities (*nobilissimis civitatibus*) of Pomerania, alongside Szczecin (Herbord 1974, II, 24; Ebo 1969, III, 1). It is assumed that within the settlement of the Old Town a smaller space was enclosed at that time by earth ramparts, forming a fortified stronghold. The first mention of the Wolin *castrum* appears just in the 1120s, while the last reference dates to 1284, thus in the post-charter phase of Wolin's development (Ebo 1969, II, 7; PUB I 1970, No. 111). The remains of ramparts were recorded on the western as well as on the north-eastern edge of the moraine elevation of the Old Town. Throughout the 12th century, these fortifications were twice destroyed by fire and rebuilt, and at some stage the slopes of the rampart were reinforced with stone facing (Cnotliwy 2014, 224–235; Rębkowski 2019, 146).

The remaining part of the Old Town's moraine island should, for this period, be described in functional and spatial terms as the *suburbium*. It was covered by loosely scattered buildings interspersed with open spaces. From the late 11th century, houses were constructed almost exclusively in the log-building technique, while wattle-and-daub structures became increasingly rare. The spatial layout of the settlement was probably orientated along communication routes leading toward the Dziwna Strait (Polak, Rębkowski 2019, 129–130). It is most likely that the tavern and market attested in papal bulls of 1140 and 1188 were located right in this area, together with the church dedicated to Sts Adalbert and George, erected in 1124, which had served as a cathedral since 1140 for nearly forty years. The extent of the settlement beyond the island at this time remains uncertain. However, the foundation of the church of St Michael outside the town gates in 1124 suggests that there may have been an extra-mural settlement in that area. Before the middle of the 12th century, Wolin had also become one of the administrative centres of the Duchy of Pomerania, serving as the seat of a castellany (Bollnow 1964; Guzikowski 2012).

The above data indicates that in the 12th century Wolin may be characterised as a typical early urban, multi-component settlement complex, comparable to those that developed in Pomerania under the so-called ducal law (*ius ducale*). Such centres generally consisted of a stronghold, a *suburbium*, and, in some cases, additional open settlements. The fortified stronghold housed the seat of the duke's representative, while the *suburbium* typically concentrated craft and trade activity and usually contained the principal church of the settlement (Leciejewicz 1983; Rębkowski 2001, 22–33).

It is generally assumed that Wolin's significance declined in the final quarter of the 12th century as a result of destruction caused by Danish raids. From 1170 onwards, the town became one of the principal targets of repeated attacks of the Danish fleet (Eggert 1927; Bollnow 1964, 46 ff.). Archaeological evidence of this devastation may be reflected in traces of rampart reconstruction, as well as in subtle shifts in the orientation of buildings within the fortified area. This destruction is often regarded as the reason for the temporary relocation of the Pomeranian bishopric to Usedom and its eventual transfer to nearby Kamień in 1176 or shortly thereafter. However, it is difficult to speak of Wolin's complete collapse at that time, as written sources indicate that in the 1220s the settlement still functioned as the seat of a ducal official (castellan).

Chartering the town

In the mid-1230s, Duke Barnim I of Pomerania initiated a programme of urban transformation in his domain. The greatest intensity of town chartering in the country occurred during the first four decades following this date, when the rulers established just over twenty towns. Initially, the restructuring focused primarily on the largest ducal cities, meaning that by the end of the 13th century, the number of settlements transferred under German law was only slightly higher than the number of early urban stronghold complexes present in the 12th century (Lucht 1965; Kuhn 1974; Piskorski 1987). Wolin was among the cities included in this group. The exact date of the charter privilege remains unknown. Nevertheless, some evidence allows for an approximate chronological framework for this event. A document issued by Barnim I in 1277 – granting exemption from fees to merchants arriving at the *oppidum* of Wolin by water – mentions an *advocatus* and *subadvocatus* of the town, which implies that the charter had already been granted by that time (PUB II 1881–1885, No. 1058). The most likely initiator of the charter was Barnim himself. This version is supported by a document issued a year later by his son, Bogusław IV. In it, the new ruler confirms the *ius civile* granted to Wolin by his father, along with rights to use fields, meadows, pastures, forests, and waters (PUB II 1881–1885, No. 1130). However, in a later (1286) confirmation of the town privilege, both Barnim and his ducal brother, Wartislaw III, are jointly named as initiators of the chartering process. Since Wartislaw III died in May 1264, this date should be considered the *terminus ante quem* for the town's chartering.

Archaeological excavations conducted so far offer little additional insight into the dating of the charter. However, an interesting detail emerges from two dendrodates derived from the remains of timber-framed buildings, associated with the latest phase of medieval settlement—undoubtedly already during the post-charter period. The samples taken from beams provided dates of “after 1253” and “after 1257”. They align quite well with the picture that emerges from the written records. However, establishing the precise chronological relationship between the legal chartering of the town and its spatial organisation is not yet possible.

Spatial layout and topography

As was the case with many other chartered towns, one of the initial stages of establishing the new town in Wolin involved delineating the urban space from its surrounding area. The primary goal of this process was not so much the creation of defensive fortifications for the newly established urban organism but rather the demarcation of its boundaries, thereby distinguishing the area under municipal jurisdiction. In this part of Europe, this was typically done by digging a ditch and, if necessary, raising an earth wall. These were relatively simple structures, often topped with some form of palisade, which was most commonly referred to as *plancae* in written sources (Holsten 1931, 82–84).

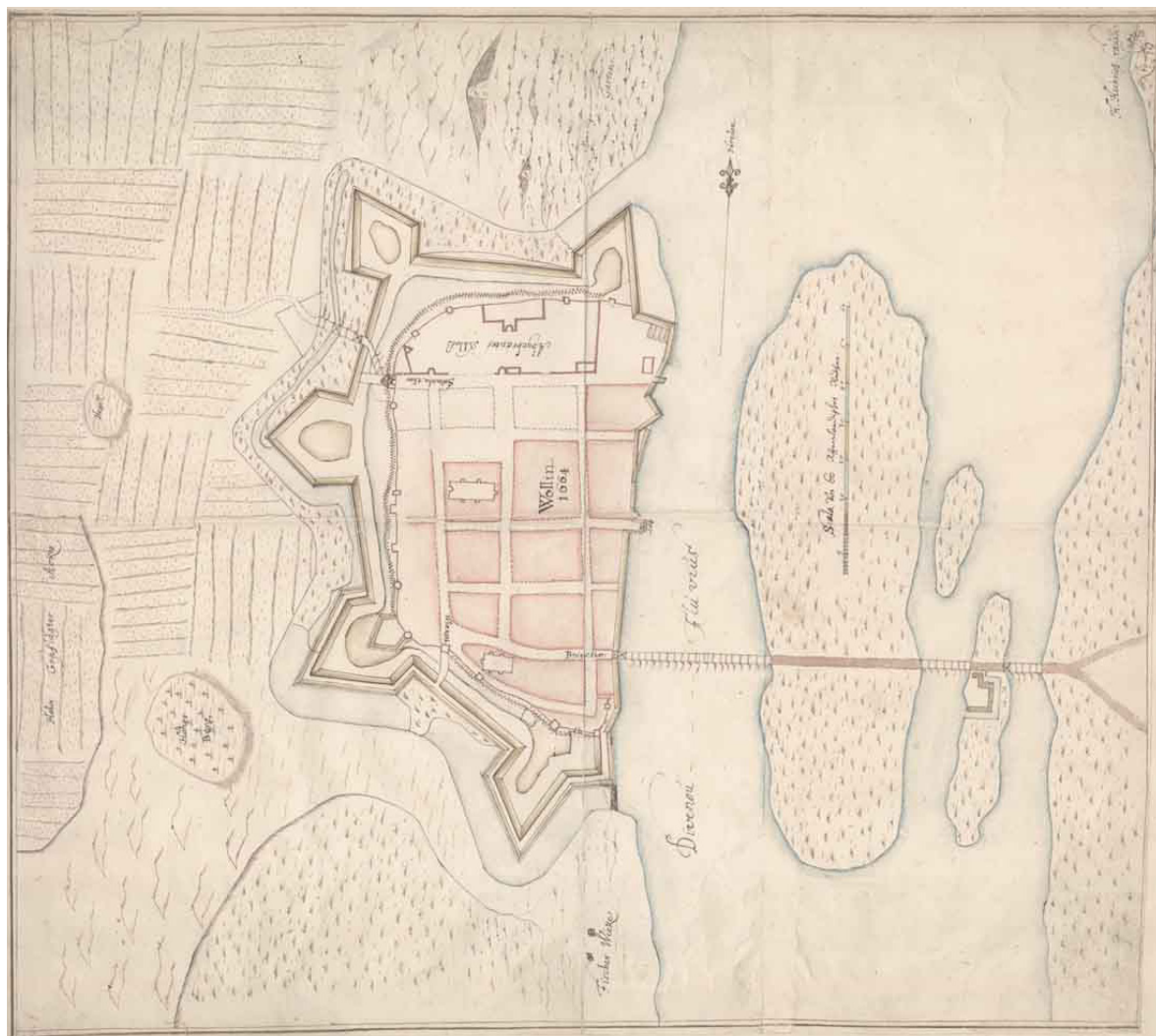
A reference to such a form of boundary delimitation also appears in relation to Wolin, though it is only mentioned in the 14th century. It can be assumed that the palisade was located on top of the wall, alongside a moat (PUB IV 1903, No. 2314). This form of fortification seems to be confirmed by archaeological observations. According to them, in the second half of the 13th century, a new wall appeared in place of the old rampart of the early medieval stronghold. Traces of wood discovered within the structure were interpreted as remnants of a fence or palisade mounted on top of it. This reconstruction closely resembles what has been revealed by archaeological research in recent decades regarding the original fortifications of other chartered towns in Pomerania (Rębkowski 2011, 153–159). This form of fortification in Wolin likely survived until the construction of stone town walls in the 14th or the 15th century.

The current extent of archaeological excavations in Wolin does not allow the determination of the exact size of the area enclosed by the town walls. However, it is likely accurate to suggest that the original space of the chartered town and the line of the rampart were very similar to the area later enclosed

by the stone town walls, which can be reconstructed using the oldest maps of Wolin, dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries (Fig. 6). Nonetheless, it is possible that some differences existed during the first few decades after the town's chartering, particularly regarding the area of the old stronghold. It can be assumed that the stronghold was not immediately levelled after the charter was granted nor incorporated into the urban space, as references to it still appear in sources from 1284. This likely changed before 1306, when the Cistercian nuns – initially located outside the town – received from the town council an unoccupied plot *infra muros*, situated in the northeastern part of the town, along the Dziwna and adjacent to or partially occupying the former stronghold area (PUB IV 1903, No. 2314). In another section of this area, a ducal stone residence was built at an unknown time. From that time onwards, this site is documented as being in close proximity to both the ducal *domus* and the monastery's buildings. However, traces of the early medieval fortifications might still have been visible in the landscape of the late medieval town, as suggested by a

Figure 6. Wolin on the Swedish military map from 1664.

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1560 inspection, which noted that the ducal buildings in the town were still surrounded by a rampart and a moat (Bülou 1885, 155–157; Lemcke 1900, 416–418; Bollnow 1964, 67 ff.; Kalita-Skwirzyńska 2010, 140–142; Balcerzak et al. 2011).

Taking as a starting point the reconstructed shape of the town at the turn of the 13th and the 14th centuries, the area of Wolin can be estimated at approximately 8–9 hectares. Compared to other chartered towns in Pomerania, this would have made it a relatively small urban centre. On three sides the town was surrounded by walls and a moat, while the fourth side was likely open toward the shoreline of the Dziwna strait.

Archaeological observations indicate that the organisation of the urban space *infra muros* was preceded by land leveling. The remnants of older early medieval buildings were covered with mixed sandy-clay soil layers. It can be assumed that only after this process was the urban space divided into building blocks, marking a completely new stage in the construction and organisation of the settlement along the Dziwna Strait. Little can be said about the exact size of the building blocks and market square in Wolin immediately after the town's charter, as well as about an assessment of the original size of urban plots. The urban space was organised by five or six streets running perpendicular to the waterbank and three parallel thoroughfares. The layout was crowned by a road running along walls, although it remains unclear whether it extended along the entire length of the fortifications.

The regular subdivision of the urban space into rectangular blocks did not extend to two specific locations. In both cases, these areas were remnants of early medieval settlements that were eventually enclosed within the town rampart. In the southern part of the town, this included the structure of the church of St George, while in the northern part, it encompassed the surviving remains of the stronghold which later became the site of the Cistercian nunnery and, possibly at a later stage, a ducal residence nearby (Fig. 6). Roughly half-way between the old stronghold and the church of St George, between two streets running parallel to the strait, a market square was established. Adjacent to it was a parish block with the newly founded church of St Nicholas, which became the main temple of Wolin (Holtz 1940, 92–93; Lemcke 1900, 409ff.; Kalita 1973, 445–477). It was likely constructed shortly after the town's charter was granted. Over time, a town hall appeared in the market square, with late medieval remnants made of brick, reportedly discovered during the excavations in the late 1930s (Biermann 2020, 59–60).

In connection with the foundation of the Cistercian nunnery in 1288, we learn of the existence of three churches in Wolin, over which the nuns received patronage (PUB III 1888–1891, No. 1453). In addition to St Nicholas, there were two older, already-mentioned churches whose origins date back to the early 12th century: St Michael, located *extra civitatem*, a short distance west of the town's rampart, and St George, incorporated into the southern outskirts of the newly established urban structure. A document issued nearly twenty years later indicates that a cemetery was located next to the church of St George (PUB IV 1903, No. 2314). There is little doubt that another burial ground would have been designated near St Nicholas.

Urban Development

As already mentioned above, the phase of stratigraphy registered in the excavated trenches that can be associated with the town's chartering stands out clearly. This is marked not only by the aforementioned land levelling but also by a slight reorientation of the newly constructed buildings and the introduction of entirely new construction techniques. A particularly characteristic and likely fundamental element of the post-charter development of Wolin was the emergence of timber-frame houses, varying in size according to the specific needs of their residents and limited by the size of urban plots (Fig. 7). This phenomenon was typical of all chartered towns in Pomerania, where timber-frame structures began to appear shortly after the towns' locations and by the 1270s had become the standard building practice (Rębkowski 2001, 127 ff.). Remnants of such buildings, differing in size and construction details, at the Old Town in Wolin can be dated to the late 13th century or possibly the early 14th century.

One of the best documented examples is the remains of a timber-frame building with a cellar (Polak, Rębkowski 2019, 120–121). It was placed in a pit approximately 1.30 metres deep from the contemporary ground level. The beams of the lower frame were set on stone foundations. Rectangular slots were located in the corners of the frame to secure vertical posts. Along the outer upper edges of the beams ran rectangular notches, which likely housed vertical planks that formed the wall panels. The wall length measured only 3.57 metres, and the entire structure could have had two above-ground storeys, resembling a tower-like construction. Similar structures are known from other Baltic port cities, such as, for example, Lübeck, nearby Kołobrzeg, and Riga (e.g.,



Figure 7. Beam of a timber-frame house under stone foundations of the brick-made Kemenate. Foto A. Kaube. Archive of the the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology Polish Academy of Sciences

Legant-Karau 1994, Abb. 13; Polak 2000, 163–164; Caune 2001, 560–562).

It is highly probable that fragments of a similar timber-framed, cellar-equipped building were discovered on the western edge of the Old Town. It represents the second stage of post-charter development in that place. A large timber-framed house – possibly exceeding 5.8 metres in wall length, with wattle-and-daub or palisade wall infill – was eventually replaced by a more classical structure featuring vertical posts embedded in the corners of the lower frame. The walls of the sunken portion of the structure were filled with horizontally laid planks, likely pressed against the posts by the weight of the surrounding soil in the excavation pit (Cnotliwy 2008/2009, 239–255, 262–263).

The remains of yet another timber-framed building, with walls longer than 5 metres, were also recorded in the same trench. The lower frame of this structure was set on rows of posts driven into the ground with rectangular cross-sections, forming a foundation of sorts. Other fragmentary discoveries suggest that these larger timber-framed buildings had internal divisions, and at least some of them featured wooden plank floors.

A very characteristic feature of port cities located along the southern Baltic coast was the rapid emergence of stone architecture. In wealthy centres such as Lübeck, the first secular masonry buildings were constructed as early as the first half of the 13th century. From the end of the century and

into the early 14th century, examples of brick houses became known in other major Baltic port towns, where it became the standard form of construction by the 14th century (Lübecker Kolloquium 2001; Piekalski 2004, 87 ff.). An analysis of documentation from the old excavations indicates that this phenomenon also appeared in Wolin (Fig. 8). What is surprising is the confirmation of early stone architecture in a relatively small town of the region, which, according to the prevailing view in historiography, played a minor role in the post-charter period. While precise dating of these findings is difficult, their stratigraphic position and formal characteristics – such as the shapes of the buildings and the dimensions of the bricks used in their construction – suggest that they were built in the 14th century, with the oldest possibly dating back to around 1300. Another surprising feature of these discoveries is the variety of late medieval masonry buildings in Wolin. Excavations revealed not only remains of the characteristic hall house (German: Dielenhaus) typical for Baltic towns of the time but also remains of two structures which most probably were tower-like buildings (German: Kemenate).

The latter refers to a multi-storey masonry tower-like structure built on a plan resembling a square, trapezoid, or rectangle with sides of slightly differing lengths. Located in the rear sections of plots, usually just behind the wooden front building, these structures sometimes featured – especially those not built on a square plan – a masonry “neck” leading directly from the wooden front building to the cellar. The sides of the *Kemenate* typically ranged from 5 to 10 metres in length, with wall thicknesses reaching up to one metre. Originally, these buildings served as warehouses, primarily functioning as fire-proof storage spaces for merchants. Over time, they were also used as residential towers. Similar structures were built in the rear sections of plots in large Baltic cities during the 13th and 14th centuries, as evidenced by archaeology in Lübeck, Greifswald, Elbląg, and Riga (Fehring 1986, 52–53; Broscheit 1994; Piekalski 2004, 116 ff.; Nawroński 1990; Caune 2001; Enzenberger 2000).

The remains of both masonry tower houses discovered in Wolin were located in the rear sections of adjacent urban plots (Figs. 6 and 8). From the first structure, only the stone foundation measuring approximately 5.0 × 3.8 metres and a paved floor marking the ground level have been preserved. The walls were likely constructed of brick, as indicated by fragments found inside the building. The second building was better preserved, although only a portion was uncovered. It was most likely built on a nearly square plan with sides up to 6 metres long. Brick walls set on a stone foundation were

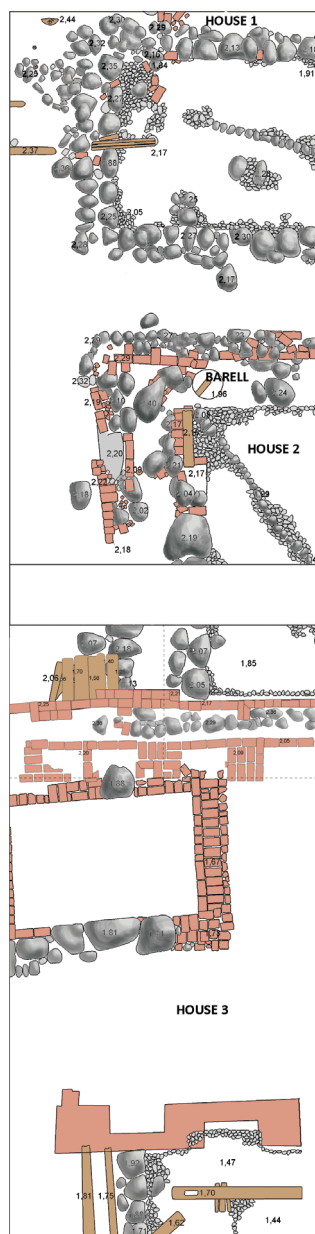


Figure 8. Remains of medieval masonry buildings documented during excavations in the 1970s. After Wolin 2019

constructed using lime mortar. The walls' thickness suggests that only the lower storey was built of masonry, while the upper ones were constructed with a timber frame. The sunken ground floor, paved with stones, was accessed by an external wooden staircase located along the southern wall (Polak, Rębkowski 2019, 121–122).

On the neighbouring plot, the rear part of a well-preserved hall house was registered. These houses were oriented with their gables facing the street, and their longer side walls were shared between two adjacent plot owners; the walls featured characteristic niches. The widths of the hall houses matched the widths of the plots on which they were built, usually several metres. Their lengths, however, were much longer, meaning that a single house could occupy most of the plot's area. Each building had access from the street, and an additional passage was placed in the rear wall leading to the back of the plot. These buildings were two or even three storeys high and initially lacked basements. The earliest hall houses appeared in Lübeck shortly after the mid-13th century and, not much later, began to be built in other large Baltic port towns during the same century. By the 14th century, they had become the standard architectural form in most Baltic Hansa towns, from Lübeck in the west to Tartu (Dorpat) and Tallinn (Reval) in the east (Erdmann 1983, 24 ff.; Fehring 1986, 56 ff.; Lübecker Kolloquium 2001; Piekalski 2004, 121 ff.; Polak 2005). The building discovered in Wolin was over 6.60 metres wide and, according to estimates, more than 10 metres long. On the east side, the house likely extended to the street frontage. The brick walls, 0.70 and 0.75 metres thick, were set on a stone foundation. The northern wall was an external wall, with its inner face divided by niches measuring 80 cm in width, spaced 60 cm apart, and 55 cm deep. The southern wall was a shared wall with an analogous neighbouring house built on the adjacent plot, as evidenced by alternating niches (95 cm wide and 45 cm deep) placed on both sides. Initially, the building was enclosed at the rear by a timber-framed wall (Fig. 9).

Conclusion

Based on the data presented above, it can be observed that the available sources for research on the chartering of Wolin are quite limited. On the one hand, there are only a few documents produced by the ducal chancery, with the actual charter privilege itself missing. On the other hand, there is a very modest set of archaeological data, a consequence of the relatively small scale of excavations conducted in the 20th century in the Old Town of Wolin. Despite these limitations,

it has been possible to reconstruct the process of chartering, at least concerning some of the spatial transformations associated with it.

Wolin was chartered within the first decades of the urban reform of the Pomeranian Duchy, consistently implemented from the mid-1230s onwards. During this period, the ducal strongholds serving as the main administrative centres of the state were primarily transferred to German law, along with adjacent suburbia. Consequently, new towns – laid out according to different principles – were located at short distances from these earlier settlement complexes, adopting the names and some of the functions of the older centres. This space separation allowed for the free measurement and layout of the new towns, free from existing older structures. In this respect, the case of Wolin is unique, as the new town was laid out directly on the site of the older polycentric settlement complex, initially encompassing the *suburbium* and very soon also the stronghold, naturally retaining its name. This represents complete continuity of both the space and the nomenclature. This model of urban transformation was not particularly common in Pomerania; apart from Wolin itself, a similar pattern has been best described for Szczecin and Kamień. Using Szczecin as a starting point, I was once inclined to attribute such solutions to the presence of a pre-charter German community adjacent to the *suburbium* (Rębkowski 2008). In the case of Wolin, however, there is no evidence to support such an interpretation. Therefore, it seems more plausible that topographical factors should be here considered the main reason—there were few better alternatives in the area for establishing a new town than the moraine island with direct access to the shoreline.

This decision meant levelling older structures while preserving the existing church of St George, located on the southern edge of the new town. In the central part of the new settlement, Wolin's main church was built under the patronage of St Nicholas. This dedication became widespread in Pomerania during the period of town chartering and was the second most common after the Virgin Mary's *patrocinium* of parish churches. In this relatively small town, whose population could be estimated at a few hundred people, two churches functioning *infra muros* was an unusual occurrence. Additionally, by the early 14th century, the town's religious topography was complemented by the Cistercian nunnery.

Another particularly interesting remark concerns the town development. The shift in building character and the appearance and spread of various timber-framed houses represent a

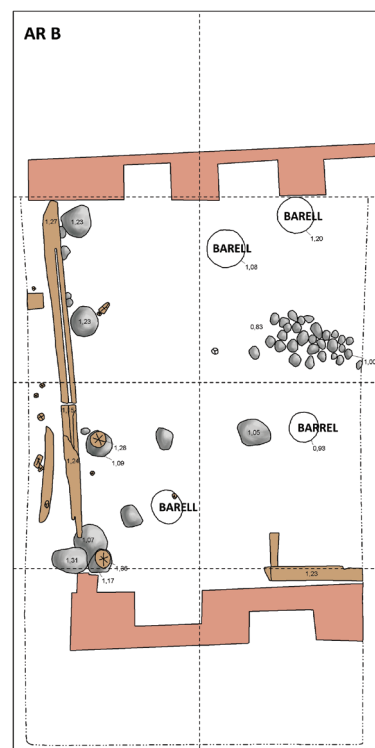


Figure 8. Rear part of the medieval hall house documented during excavations in the 1970s. After Wolin 2019

typical and characteristic element of the cultural transformations taking place during the chartering of towns across Pomerania. However, the situation differs regarding stone architecture. It had previously been confirmed primarily in large port towns with significant economic potential. The presence of such structures in Wolin as early as the first half of the 14th century prompts a reassessment of the town's economic significance during this period. Traditionally, it has been assumed that Wolin's role at that time was minor, primarily due to the growing dominance of Szczecin, which was the largest port on the lower Oder. Another key problem faced by Wolin was the gradual silting of the Dziwna Strait from at least the 12th century onwards, which increasingly obstructed waterway communication and access to the Baltic Sea – an issue that likely became particularly severe after the widespread adoption of cogs. The privilege from 1277 exempting merchants arriving by water from paying fees can be interpreted as an attempt to maintain or revive Wolin's long-distance trade connections. Ultimately, however, the town did not develop into a major maritime trade centre in the late Middle Ages, although its membership in the Hanseatic League is attested in the second half of the 14th century (Kratz 1865, 552).

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