



Bezląwki – ocalić od zniszczenia. Wyniki prac interdyscyplinarnych prowadzonych w latach 2008–2011, red. Arkadiusz Koperkiewicz (Gdańskie Studia Archeologiczne. Seria Monografie, Nr 3), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Gdańsk 2013, 323 pp. + CD-ROM, ISBN: 978-83-7865-176-5.

In recent years, academic studies concerning the fortifications built by the Teutonic Order have intensified. This trend is observable in the context of the Latin Levant and the Baltic region as well as Transylvania. The majority of studies, however, still focus on the late medieval strongholds in Prussia as it is this region which is ascribed the greatest political, military and historical importance in modern historiography. Notable examples of such works include publications by Christoffer Herrmann, Sławomir Józwiak and Janusz Trupinda, Tomasz Torbus, Maria Splawska-Korczak as well as volumes edited by Marcin Wiewóra. With the exception of the works by Herrmann, however, these studies focus primarily on larger fortifications which had important political, administrative and residential roles – that is the conventual castles and the residences of Prussia's bishops. In this context the study presented here is very different, focusing on a less important stronghold which belongs to the category of so-called 'forest houses' (Ger. *Wildhäuser*): the castle in Bezląwki (Ger. Bälsack).

The volume presents the results of archaeological investigations carried out in Bezląwki in 2008–2012 by teams led by Arkadiusz Koperkiewicz (see pp. 8–9 and 10–11) in three areas covering the castle itself, the rural cemetery and the nearby early medieval stronghold. It is divided into three sections; the first (and largest), consists of articles discussing the three areas studied (pp. 14–257) while the second provides data and summaries of specialist analyses (pp. 260–320). The third part is a CD that includes a visualisation by Adam and Helena Michel of the principal stages of the castle's construction and the transformation of its surrounding terrain from the later medieval period to modern times. The CD also includes an animation prepared by Andrzej Dumalski and Karolina Hebudzka on the basis of measurements obtained by 3D laser scans as well as an extensive, digital collection of photographs edited by Arkadiusz Koperkiewicz and Waław Kulczykowski that document the progress of the research. Although the publication is written in Polish, each article includes a summary in English.

The first part consists of 11 articles by 17 authors. The opening chapter is the study by Seweryn Szczepański entitled 'Bezląwki and its surroundings in the settlement context of tribal Bartia and the Kętrzyn procurator's district in the Middle

Ages'. It gives a detailed discussion of issues related to the settlement pattern of the Old Prussian region of Bartia, where Bezlawki is located, and the functioning of two of Bartia's sub-regions (referred to as 'Lesser' and 'Greater'), including discussion of the recently confirmed peripheral location of cult sites situated far from the population centres of the Western Balts. The second part of his study focuses on settlement of the area around Bezlawki in the second half of the 14th century, which included the foundation of the village of that name. The village was organised according to the Kulm Law and its rents and functioning are discussed by the author on the basis of both published and archival sources. In the final section of the article, Szczepański discusses the period 1402–1404, when the castle in Bezlawki was given by the Teutonic Order to serve as a residence for its important ally, the Lithuanian prince Bolesław Śvitrigaila, who hoped to become grand duke of Lithuania with the Order's support. The later history of Bezlawki from the 16th century onwards is described in more general terms. Thus, the circumstances of the conversion of the castle into a church remain unclear, and it is not certain whether the new church served the Protestant community from the start or whether the transformation occurred when the village was still Catholic. Such analysis would form an important contribution to the historical study of the settlement area and would serve as an important chronological reference for archaeologists. Szczepański's study also does not take into account two important historical sources: the privilege dating from 20 February 1452¹ and the letter of the voigt of Rastenburg (Pol. Kętrzyn) of 3 July 1515.² Considerable information about the village and its inhabitants in 1452 can also be found in the records of the Teutonic Order's administrator in Seehesten (Pol. Szestno) (Ordensfoliant 186) though these too are not included in the analysis. Minor errors include referring to the peace in Raciążek of 22 May 1404 as a truce and giving an inaccurate date for this event (p. 28), ascribing an incorrect administrative function to Johann von Posilge (p. 27) and using the outdated edition of his chronicle from 1823 even though there is a better edition in the third volume of the *Scriptores rerum Prussicarum* from 1866. Despite these weaknesses, however, Szczepański's article provides a valuable historical introduction to the discussion regarding the settlement pattern in Bezlawki, particularly in the late 14th and the first half of the 15th centuries.

In a short analysis, 'Geology and geomorphology of the Bezlawki castle hill and its surroundings', Ewa Smolska and Piotr Szwarczewski discuss in general terms the geography and geomorphology of the terrain surrounding the castle

¹ GStA PK, XX. HA, OF 97, fol. 233r–233v.

² GStA PK, XX. HA, OBA 20527.

hill, distinguishing three distinct phases in the transformation of the natural environment in its proximity in the post-glacial period. The natural environment of the area around the castle in the later medieval period still remains to be defined, which has significant implications for later discussions of the defensive properties of the site which are given in other articles in the volume.

The results of the five seasons of archaeological investigations in the castle hill area are discussed by Arkadiusz Koperkiewicz in 'Bezlawki castle in the light of archaeological excavations' (pp. 44–76). This study questions the established, 19th-century reconstruction of the castle by Conrad Steinbrecht; most importantly, it shows that the main gate providing access to the fortified courtyard was located close to the Teutonic Order's house, that is in the northern section of the north-western wall of the castle, not opposite the house (in the south-eastern wall) as was previously assumed. Furthermore, below the 19th-century porch attached to the eastern wall of the church (previously the castle), archaeologists have discovered foundations of an earlier structure dating at least from the 15th century. The Teutonic Order's house protruded slightly beyond the line of the wall of the castle in a manner similar to the castle in Taplacken (Rus. Taplaki). The main building lacked any form of a tower (the current church tower dates from the 18th century). The investigations in the courtyard indicate that the castle wall was built immediately on the terrain's surface, without the laying of deep foundations. Excavation trenches in the area of the early modern cemetery located in the former courtyard of the castle indicated that the castle hill was not occupied prior to the second half of the 14th century, although the author argues that archaeological studies of the former castle courtyard should continue.

Movable artefacts are discussed in the article entitled 'The analysis of the artefacts found during excavations conducted in the Bezlawki castle' (pp. 77–108), co-authored by four scholars from the Institute of Archaeology in the University of Gdańsk: Arkadiusz Koperkiewicz, Dominika Leśniewska, Wacław Kulczykowski and Krzysztof Wroński. The collection shows a degree of diversity that is typical of later medieval sites. In the courtyard area (currently used as a cemetery) archaeologists found elements of attire and various objects of everyday use, for example decorative textiles (bobbin lace), brooches, buttons, anchor plates, nails and iron book fittings, dating from the late medieval and early modern periods up to the 19th century. There were only few artefacts related to military activities, namely seven crossbow bolt heads, which should not be surprising given how long the former courtyard was used as a cemetery. The recovered ceramics were numerous and diverse in terms of their morphology and the temperature of firing (oxidising and reductive). The identified elements include fragments of pottery, cups, covers and pitchers as well as building materials such as roof, floor and stove tiles.

The castle's architecture is discussed in two articles. In 'Architecture of the Beżławki castle' (pp. 109–118), Wojciech Wólkowski focuses on the architectural form of the building in the 14th century. On the basis of dendrochronological dating, the year 1377 has been suggested as the *terminus a quo* for the construction of the walls of the main Teutonic Order's house. The second stage of construction involved building a wall enclosing the courtyard of the castle. This wall had five towers that were left open on their interior's side, and a fortified gateway attached to the north-eastern side of the Teutonic Order's house. The final element, most probably constructed before the end of the 14th century, was a brick staircase attached to the south-eastern side of the Teutonic Order's house. The author argues that the interior of the house was divided into three spaces in a manner similar to other non-conventual castles of the Teutonic Order in Prussia (for example in Soldau (Pol. Działdowo), Hohenstein (Pol. Olsztynek) and Taplacken). Architectural study of the standing walls of the Teutonic Order's house clearly indicates that the building was divided into five floors and an attic. Wólkowski describes the castle in Beżławki as an example of a fortified stronghold built in the frontier regions of Prussia (other examples include Lyck (Pol. Elk), Lamgarben (Pol. Garbno), Gerdauen (Rus. Schelesnodoroschny), Leunenburg (Pol. Sątoczno), Taplacken, Wargen (Rus. Kotelnikovo) and Waldau (Rus. Nizov'e)). He also argues that on this type of frontier, the Teutonic Order's fortifications followed a similar model that included a medium-sized, main house and relatively large courtyard surrounded by a wall, or a palisade, which sometimes had a gate tower. The study also suggests that the large size of the courtyard in Beżławki (42.3 x 51.8 m.) indicates that this area may have been used as camp site for Teutonic Order's forces, which is not a new theory. Accordingly, the fortified courtyard could have been used as a protected space where crusader forces could gather before embarking on an expedition against Lithuania. In this context, the author considers whether there were any timber structures in the courtyard and compares Beżławki with the results of the archaeological studies in the courtyard of the Teutonic Order's castle in Sątoczno. It is worth noting, therefore, that the presence of timber structures in the courtyard would decrease the area that could be used as a fortified military camp. The presence of timber structures in the courtyard in Beżławki is indicated by the fact that the garrison had to have at least few horses which could not have been kept unprotected, outside of the fortified area. The only possible alternative would be that stables were located in the outer bailey, but, so far, there has been no attempt to verify whether the castle in Beżławki had an outer bailey. This would not have been very unusual, however, as Wólkowski notices that some Teutonic Order's castles located in the peripheral regions of Prussia (such as Wargen, Germau (Rus. Russkoe) and Rudau (Rus. Melnikovo)) had both fortified

courtyards and outer baileys. Finally, the author emphasises the need to undertake archaeological investigations inside the current church, which is certainly a valuable suggestion for future research.

This study is complemented by the article by Wojciech Brillowski entitled 'Functional analysis of the Beżławki castle's defensive architecture' (pp. 119–136). The analysis sensibly questions the methodological approach prevalent in many studies of medieval fortifications which focuses on finding similarities between various castles and seeks to classify them into groups of sites allegedly constructed according to the same model. The author emphasises the presence of distinct architectural features and solutions that are found only in the castle in Beżławki, conclusions which are in accord with the previous study. Brillowski uses measurements of the church (the former castle), obtained with the help of laser scanning. He notes that the upper parts and battlements of the curtain wall enclosing the courtyard may have been made of brick whilst the larger, lower section, 1.5 m. wide, was made of cobblestones. The study points to the possibility that the curtain wall may have been constructed many years after the main Teutonic Order's house, perhaps in the early 15th century. At the same time, however, the author emphasises that the wall formed an integral part of the architectural plan of the castle, also suggesting that the towers of the castle (whose internal side was left open), were defensive elements that provided platforms for using heavy missile weapons. Brillowski also postulates that the room of the castle's administrator was located on the highest floor, located immediately below the attic. The two lower levels were used for storage. The ground floor may have served as utility area although its height exceeded that of any other floor in the building. In the middle of the ground level's height there was a wooden gallery that provided access to 13 arrow loops pierced through all four sides of the building. Other floors also had arrow loops so that overall every potential direction from which the house could be attacked was protected by approximately 25 arrow loops. The author argues that the castle in Beżławki guarded the route between Rastenburg and Rößel (Pol. Reszel) and that the road connecting these towns passed directly within the firing range of the castle. This theory, however, is difficult to verify as it remains unclear where exactly the late medieval road was located. Brillowski sensibly notes, however, that the castle's second function was to protect the local villagers. Overall, the courtyard of the castle comprised over 1000 square metres and could provide temporary shelter for a several hundred people. Another interesting observation is that the castle also served as a viewing platform which provided a convenient view of the nearby area to a radius of some 10 km. From the uppermost windows of the Teutonic Order's house one could see the town of Rastenburg (9.5 km away) with the imposing, fortified church of St. George. The author is also right to point

out that the construction of the castle in Bezlawki had an important symbolic meaning because it manifested the authority of the Teutonic Order in the region. Finally, the study provides a valuable insight into the process of colonisation in the area in its observation that the building of the castle was not one of the driving forces of colonisation. The local village, with its own parish church, two taverns and a mill, did not develop in order to support the new Teutonic Order's fortification. On the contrary, the new castle was built on the outskirts of a populated rural area that was being organised under the Kulm Law.

The following two articles provide analysis and discussion of the archaeological works carried out in 2010–2011 in the area of a medieval burial ground within the broad area of the village of Bezlawki (marked as site XV). In the first study, entitled 'Medieval burial ground in Bezlawki (site XV). Excavations conducted in 2010–2011' (pp. 137–159), Arkadiusz Koperkiewicz describes the course and results of the fieldwork. He notes that the oldest, late medieval burials in the cemetery were not been disturbed in the later periods because the burial ground was abandoned in the 16th century when the main building of the Teutonic Order's castle was converted into a church and the castle's courtyard was adapted to serve as a new cemetery. Overall, during two seasons of fieldwork 80 burials were excavated, some of which contained remains of more than one individual. Most of the burials did not yield grave goods though in over a dozen cases archaeologists have recovered metal crosses, small knives, buckles and brooches (including numerous examples with the head of the pin shaped in the form of a poppy). These findings seem to suggest that in the 14th century, the inhabitants of the village held syncretistic beliefs, although Koperkiewicz notes that burials with grave goods were among the oldest in the group. He also offers a very likely interpretation that the cemetery was used by both incoming settlers and by local Balts. It is worth noting that the oldest burials identified in the cemetery date from the mid-14th century, which indicates that the sources mentioning the organisation of a village in Bezlawki under the Kulm Law in the early 1370s should not be treated as evidence that a new village was founded, but rather, would seem to refer to a re-organisation of an earlier settlement whose inhabitants formed a part of the newly organised community. Some of the burials also included pieces of pottery deliberately deposited in the ground as well as numerous coins, particularly, old coins which were no longer circulating at the time of the burial. All of the burials, including those with grave goods, were arranged according to Christian tradition which is indicated, among other things, by their alignment. Unfortunately the location of the medieval church in Bezlawki has not been identified although geophysical surveys conducted in the area to the north of the excavated burials have detected

anomalies which may indicate that a building might have been located there. The existence of this structure, however, needs to be verified archaeologically.

The second article on the cemetery is 'Anthropological analysis of human skeletal remains from the cemetery in Beżławki, district of Reszel, site XV' (2010–2011 seasons), (160–182), co-authored by Beata Iwanek, Sylwia Łukasik and Janusz Piontek. Overall, the sample was dominated by children and young people up to 15 years old (24 individuals out of 40 in total). The average height of males was 171 cm, of females 159.5 cm. In the analysis of the remains of adults, the study identified biological indicators, such as traces of fatigue, which must have been caused by hard work and physical exertion. The authors emphasise the poor dental health of the analysed individuals, which can be considered as a reflection of the poor standard of their living conditions.

A study of 189 coins from the castle area and 43 from the cemetery is provided in an article by Borys Paszkiewicz, 'La monnoye des Prussenayres – coins from Beżławki' (pp. 183–219). The oldest coins in the group, Prussian pfennigs, date from the second decade of the 14th century although the author emphasises that they were probably deposited as grave goods many years after they entered circulation. Indeed, such coins could have remained in use until the last years of the 14th century. According to Paszkiewicz, this interpretation is supported by the absence of coins that could be dated to the second quarter of the 14th century. The chronological sequence is thus incomplete as the next group of coins recovered during excavations date from the 1360s and 1370s. Furthermore, these later coins show little signs of use and thus can be regarded as providing *terminus a quo* for the burials in the cemetery. The most numerous coins, however, were those dating from the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries, with far fewer examples from the first half of the 15th century. Coins found in the castle courtyard are more difficult to date with precision as they were recovered from layers of disturbed soil and were not related to burials. The late medieval examples date mainly from the second half of the 15th century, though some may have been deposited as early as the 1440s. Most of the collection, however, consists of post-medieval coins, predominantly from Prussia as well as Poland and Lithuania. Their dates range from the 16th to 18th centuries, but there are also some early modern ones from the 19th century. All of the post-medieval coins were either offerings deliberately deposited with the buried remains or were simply lost. In the final part of the article, Paszkiewicz emphasises that the earliest use of coinage in medieval Beżławki is attested by the two pfennigs that were discovered in 2000 in the area of the local hill fort, referred to as site I. One might surmise that the Teutonic Order's coins were in use there in the 1360s. The article concludes with a catalogue of all coins found.

The article entitled 'Laser scanning as a tool for 3D recording of historic objects in Bezląwki' (pp. 220–234), by Karollina Hejbudzka, Andrzej Dumalski and Paweł Łata, discusses the methodology and results of the 3D laser scanning of the main house of the castle in Bezląwki that was conducted in 2011. The scanning provided not only precise (to a few millimetres), measurements of the structure but also documented the building through 3D reconstructions of interior and exterior.

The final analysis in the first section focuses on the hillfort (marked as site I) which was the third area in Bezląwki to be excavated. The study by Tomasz Nowakiewicz, 'The Hillfort at Bezląwki (Prussia) as an element of medieval settlement in Teutonic Order State' (pp. 235–249) provides an updated and verified version of earlier research based on preliminary excavations carried out in the summer of 2000. Though limited in scale, the investigation indicated, somewhat surprisingly, that the site was not inhabited in the early medieval period and was only occupied in the Teutonic Order's period. Most of the artefacts recovered from the site date from the 13th–14th centuries. The list of finds includes two bracteates from 1360s, a crossbow bolt head, a glass bead and a rosette brooch imported from Lithuania. One cannot agree with Nowakiewicz, however, that the latter two finds form sufficient evidence to conclude that the hillfort was used by the Lithuanian court of Prince Bolesław Śvitrigaila during his stay in Bezląwki in 1402–1404. The argument that the Lithuanian prince had to use the hillfort because the Teutonic Order's castle was too small to cater for Śvitrigaila's needs is doubtful at best. In this context, one has to also consider the fact that the hillfort was separated from the castle by the densely organised area of the village. Thus, in this reviewer's opinion, Nowakiewicz's argument that there was a functional link between the castle and the hillfort is not supported by sufficient evidence. Another theory supported by Nowakiewicz is that the hillfort was initially occupied by an individual named *Bayse*, who was supposedly a Balt, one of the 'free' Prussians known as *witings*, stationed in the hillfort by the Teutonic Order as part of the wider process through which it tried to secure its volatile frontier with Lithuania. This type of service, however, is not attested in more detailed studies concerning the position and roles ascribed to *witings* by the Teutonic Order. In any case, it is more likely that *Bayse* may have been an *ex-witing* who received a donation of land as a reward for his long and loyal service in one of the main conventual castles of the Order located far from the frontiers of Prussia. Still, it remains unclear what the circumstances that allowed for a construction of such a large hillfort (its size reached one hectare and may have been additionally augmented by an outer area of 3 hectares) were. It is unlikely that an average 'free' Prussian would be able to carry out such a challenging project. Finally, Nowakiewicz argues that the building of the earthen

and timber defenses of the hill fort started around 1360. According to him, this is indicated by two bracteates from that period discovered in the layer of soil which, as we are told, was formed when part of the earthen defences on the northern side of the site were levelled. Overall, therefore, one has to point out that at the current, initial, stage of research the interpretations offered in the analysis remain speculative at best. The collection of articles ends with a brief summary by Arkadiusz Koperkiewicz (pp. 250–257).

The second part of the volume includes seven annexes describing specialist analysis and conservation activities conducted during the research. Koperkiewicz focuses on the conservation of metal objects recovered between 2008 and 2011 (pp. 260–270), while the following five texts deal with specialist analyses including: radiocarbon dating (p. 271), dendrochronological dating (pp. 272–274), geophysical analysis and thermal imaging of the church and former castle (pp. 274–278), geophysical survey of the former castle courtyard and the area of the cemetery (pp. 279–282) and geodetic surveys of sites II and XV (pp. 283–285). The last annex discusses the methodology used for the visual reconstruction and 3D animation showing the different phases of the construction of the castle and its post-medieval transformation into a church (pp. 286–290). The volume ends with a Polish translation of the text by Otton Zander which focuses on late medieval Beżławki (pp. 291–294). The original, hand written manuscript of this text, written in 1955, was purchased by Koperkiewicz on an internet auction. The translation is accompanied by a facsimile copy of the purchased manuscript (pp. 296–320).

Overall, the book reviewed here should be seen as a valuable publication. It presents a comprehensive and professionally prepared collection of studies summarising the results of five seasons of archaeological works using up-to-date methodology and techniques of collecting and recording data. Some of its minor weaknesses include repetition of arguments included in articles discussing similar themes as well as occasional inconsistencies in presented interpretations. For example, some articles state that there are no sources confirming that the castle was converted to a church in 1513 (pp. 30, 110, 133, 251–262) while elsewhere 1513 is presented as a secure date of the conversion (p. 191). Also, in one part of the text it is argued that the curtain wall surrounding the courtyard of the castle was an integral part of the original plan of the castle constructed in the late 1370s (p. 123) while elsewhere it is suggested that the wall may have been added when the castle was selected as a residence for Bolesław Śvitrigaila (p. 252). There is also some inconsistency as to which floor of the Teutonic Order's house served as the most prominent part of the castle; suggestions made include the first floor (p. 112) or the highest floor located immediately below the attic (p. 128). Finally, the ground

level of the castle is sometimes described as consisting of two floors (pp. 111–112) while elsewhere it is treated as a single floor divided into two by an internal gallery (p. 127–128). Such inconsistencies, however, should not be surprising in a volume bringing together studies by numerous authors and at least one of them, related to the location of the principal floor of the castle, is addressed by Koperkiewicz (p. 252). One notable omission is the absence of a general plan of medieval Beżławki showing all of the areas examined. Ideally, such a plan could have been based on a topographical map of the area or geodetic surveys. It is hoped that archaeological studies in Beżławki will continue for five more seasons or longer in future. A number of questions regarding this interesting location remain unclear and some of the theories proposed seem unsatisfactory. However, Koperkiewicz's team has demonstrated that archaeological studies of Beżławki can contribute significantly to modern understanding of the processes of colonisation and settlement of the frontier regions between Late Medieval Prussia and Lithuania. The site awaits further investigations.

Krzysztof Kwiatkowski (Toruń)

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