

## Motte-and-Bailey Castles and Problems With Dating Their Origins in Poland<sup>1</sup>

Anna Marciniak-Kajzer

### *Hrady typu motte a problémy s datováním jejich počátků v Polsku*

**Abstrakt:** Článek se zabývá datováním objektů typu motte, které byly na základě dosavadních archeologických výzkumů považovány za nejstarší v Polsku. Na základě nově provedených testů radiokarbonové metody datování byla potvrzena datace do 13. století pouze u dvou objektů z devíti zkoumaných.

Motte structures pose interpretive problems for researchers in various European countries. Generally, it is believed that they were created by Vikings. However, this is the only matter that all scholars agree on. Some researchers think that the people inhabiting the northern coasts of today's France and Spain began to erect settlements on mounds in order to repulse the Viking invasion, while others believe that it was the Vikings who popularised such structures throughout Europe. The latter view is frequently questioned on account of the fact that they appeared in Scandinavia in a relatively late period, i. e. in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. So far, it has been commonly accepted that motte-and-bailey castles first appeared in France, where they are dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. However, this view is also not without controversy. Attention should be given to the fact that in France, buildings appearing on mounds in most cases constituted the second phase of structures existing there earlier. Moreover, the dating of archaeological sites based on the analysis of pottery is frequently not imprecise. A good example of this is the Doue-la-Fontaine site, which dates back to the Carolingian Age; however, the artificial mound only appeared there in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Boüard 1974, 11).

An interesting view was put forward by B. K. Davison, who thought that before the British Isles were conquered by the Normans in 1066, there were no typical motte-and-bailey castles in northern France. He concluded that these structures were created as an adjustment to the difficult conditions directly after the conquest of the British Isles in order to guarantee the safety of the invaders as soon as possible (Davison 1967, 205, 207; 1969, 37–47). Thus, they can be called 'colonising castles'. This author also drew attention to another significant issue. The conquest was successful mostly because the Normans used well-armed cavalry against the Anglo-Saxon infantry. This is why it was so important to protect horses and create a safe place for them, where they could be kept before other battles. Thus, it was suggested that a fortified courtyard was built first, and only then an artificial mound and a defensive settlement were erected.

Similar conclusions were reached by J. R. Kenyon (Kenyon 1990, 7–8), who identified another problem. What were the structures with artificial mounds that lacked bailey courtyards? He suggests two answers: they were either ‘observation posts’ or unfinished structures (Kenyon 1990, 4). I propose that there is one more possibility, i.e. that there has been a lack of research hitherto or that current knowledge on the topic is insufficient.

From the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and regardless of the side of the English Channel they were on, these early defensive structures spread from regions considered to be the cradle of motte-and-bailey castles nearly throughout Europe, with the exception of its eastern and western peripheries. They reached Poland from the west through the territories of today’s Czech Republic and Germany.

Despite nearly half a century of research into motte-and-bailey castles in Poland, many questions remain unanswered. The latest and excellent work concerning this issue (Nowakowski) also contains many questions and research premises. Therefore, it would be useful to sum up the things we still do not know about these structures. We have no certainty concerning their origin. B.K. Davison’s thesis about their being a Norman colonisation ‘invention’ is still under discussion and there are no early mottes in northern France with certain dating. We also know little about the earliest castles of this type on the territory of Poland. There is still no absolute dating that could determine more precisely how early they appeared in our country.

Having received a research grant from the National Science Centre [OPUS 2013/09/B/HS3/03572] Dating the First Private Fortifications in Medieval Poland, I attempted to verify the dating of several sites considered to be the oldest, i.e. dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It should be emphasised that such a chronology was determined by researchers based on pottery and other artefacts excavated.

The structures selected for research were typical – conical mounds surrounded by moats. Thanks to the information gathered as part of a literature survey, we selected sites where it would be possible to find wood or other organic materials, which we tried to infer based on reports from previous studies.

The final list of sites was as follows: three sites located in the Mazovia Province: Kielbów Stary, Stara Błotnica District, Orszymowo, Mała Wieś District, and Wilkanowo (formerly Nakwasin), also located in the Mała Wieś District. Two sites are located in the Łódź Province: Witów, Burzenin District, and Małków, Warta District. The work was also carried out in Sędziszów (today located in the village of Piła) in the Świętokrzyskie Province; in Piekary, Dobra District, Greater Poland Province; and in Szczekociny, Silesia Province. An extensive report on excavations at these sites has already been published (Marciniak-Kajzer 2018).

We started our research by collecting a full bibliography and all archival documentation of earlier archaeological work that was available. Unfortunately, there are no full studies for all the sites selected. The following stage involved drawing up site and height guidelines. New geodetic surveys showed changes in the state of preservation of the structures in question. Unfortunately, most of them show traces of gradual disintegration.

A series of boreholes were drilled with geodetic drills at each of the sites. The drilling results helped us select places for excavations, which were conducted in 2014 and 2015.

The results of this repeated research provoke several reflections. Most of all, it was observed that despite the fact that the sites had been protected, they were slowly disintegrating. In the case of Kielbów and Sędziszów, the problem was digging of illegal waste dumps. In Szczekociny, the sites were surrounded by fish ponds, which destroyed a part of the moat, just like in Wilkanów, where the creation of a storage reservoir damaged the original hydrological system. Here one can



**Fig. 1.** Map of sites mentioned in the text. – **Abb 1.** Die Karte der im Beitrag erwähnten Lokalitäten.

suggest that the extent of archaeological sites that are officially registered should be determined more broadly. In the case of gords with a distinct land form, the boundaries usually do not go far beyond the moat or an embankment. Thus, we do not protect the potential supply bases, the remains of which are invisible on the surface and can only be found in the course of field work, for which there are usually no resources.

The second reflection concerns research documentation, which is of crucial significance for repeat excavations. I do not wish to review previous researchers; however, lack of professionalism in the drawing up of plans and, in particular, their low level of accuracy can result in a waste of time and resources. This is exactly what happened in the case of the gord in Kielbów Stary, where the first excavation was made in the same place as the old one, which was probably carried out in 1965 and was incorrectly marked on the contour plan. On the next site, we undertook research that was sparked by mentions of a large amount of charcoal there. Unfortunately, it turned out that these were trace amounts deposited in layers directly under the topsoil, which could not be used for dating analysis.

Two of the studied sites are located not far from one another: Orszymowo is just under 3 km away from Wilkanowo. Both sites were studied at the end of the 1960s by W. Szymański. The available documentation of this research is very good. Considering the far poorer technical possibilities of the time, its precision is amazing. Our observations fully confirmed the data from the report on the previous research.

In Orszymowo, just like our predecessor (Szymański 1966; 1968), we discovered the relics of a wooden cottage with its wall beams completely burnt down but its floor preserved. We took samples of them for  $^{14}\text{C}$  analysis. In nearby Wilkanowo, however, the discoveries were nowhere near as spectacular (Szymański 1968). Under the topsoil, there was a heap of large lumps of burnt pugging. Its colour ranged from bright red and brick-red to cherry, which suggests that the temperature of the fire that baked the clay was very high. This was further indicated by the lack of charcoal from the wall structures, which most probably burnt down completely. Also the few fragments of ceramics that were found bore traces of strong repeat firing. However, the observations that were made suggested that the burnt wood had initially been placed on stones located underneath it. Small traces of charcoal were collected from this level for carbon dating.

The analysis of samples from Orszymowo confirmed the dating of the building to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, as proposed by W. Szymański (1966; 1968). On the other hand, the dates determined for Wilkanowo are difficult to interpret. Based on standard calibration, the first dating wholly indicated modern times. The second sample could be dated to the 15<sup>th</sup> century (with a probability of 91 %). However, this dating is controversial, as Wilkanowo and Orszymowo are sites that are only a few kilometres apart. The ceramic materials excavated seemed very similar, which was why the sites were also dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> century after the first research (Szymański 1968). Further research is necessary to solve this problem.

Another site we studied was the mound in Małków. The data gathered during the exploration of the excavation confirmed the 1937 observations of G. Leńczyk, who discovered relics of a wooden structure destroyed in a fire; however, we did not manage to find the traces of 'a fence on the embankment' suggested in the publication (Leńczyk 1937). The  $^{14}\text{C}$  analysis results confirmed the proposed dating to the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Subsequently, we explored the mound in Witów, where Janina Kamińska conducted excavations in 1964. At the time, it was established that there had been a cellar-less wooden structure on the mound that had been burnt, leaving remains of charcoal and pugging. Unfortunately, in this case the data provided in the publication was not fully confirmed by our observations. Moreover, the field documentation we were able to obtain was not complete, as plans were missing. We only had access to a field book. We noted some differences between the records in the field book and the figures in the publication. This must have been a mistake, perhaps made by the author of the figures. In the published version, there are some categorical statements about a layer of charcoal a few centimetres thick and a 'hard, fired cover of brown clay' (Kamińska, Golczyńska 1970, 162), whereas the field book indicates that the stratigraphy observed was 'fainter' and the traces were

not so obvious. Our observations were closer to the notes from the field book. However, it cannot be ruled out that the authors found a completely different stratigraphic layout in their excavation. Unfortunately, we were unable to collect any samples for tests.

In Kiełbów Stary, research was conducted twice. In 1965, excavations were carried out by Zygmunt Włodzimierz Pyzik; verification work was subsequently headed by Grzegorz Kotkowski in 1978/1979. The plan from 1965 comes from a publication by Pyzik (Pyzik 1970), but it was drawn using a local coordinate system and the lack of any reference points made it impossible to use it to fully coordinate it with the plan we made. In the excavation, we found relics of the burnt wooden walls of a house and a fragment of the floor lying on rather loosely spread stones. We did not confirm the observation of Z. W. Pyzik, who concluded that it was a two-stage structure. We excluded the existence of a house of considerable dimensions (6x11.5 m) there. As our observations suggested, there were probably at least two (or even more) houses there standing around a central courtyard, which is not very frequent in the case of motte-and-bailey castles. We took samples of charcoal for tests and dated them to the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Another site where we conducted verification research was the settlement in Piekary. The excavations in 1978/1979 were conducted there by employees of the Museum in Konin. Unfortunately, documentation of this research was only partially preserved. We drew information from the MA thesis of Jerzy Rybacki (Rybacki 1984), who used field documentation. The contour plan indicated that three large excavations covered virtually the whole plateau of the mound, because it was noted that wooden elements had been preserved in the moat at the base of the cone. This was where we carried out our excavations and collected samples of wood from the stilts at the base of the mound. The results obtained allowed us to date the operation of the settlement to the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The research in Sędziszów was the most disappointing. According to the report on the excavations carried out there by Z.W. Pyzik in 1980, 'deposits of charcoal and pugging' (Pyzik 1989) were found in the layers on the mound culmination. Unfortunately, despite a dense grid of drills and excavations, we failed to find any historical materials or organic remains that could be used for dating.

The last of the sites we studied was a small motte in Szczekociny. There is no documentation of the excavations carried out by Z. W. Pyzik in 1969 except for a brief note in *Informator Archeologiczny* (Pyzik 1969). The site area has been considerably damaged by numerous excavations. Some of them are probably traces of the four excavations from 1969. In our excavation, we discovered cultural layers that may indicate two stages of occupancy of the area, with the first one ending in a fire. However, as the pottery shards form a rather homogeneous collection, it can be inferred that there was no large gap between the two periods of occupancy of the site.

The excavations in Witów and Sędziszów revealed no materials that could be used for dating analysis.

## Conclusions

We managed to collect samples for dating analysis at six out of the eight sites where excavations were carried out. For these sites, a series of dating analyses were performed, with four results for Kiełbów Stary and Małków, six for Piekary, five for Szczekociny, as many as nine dates for Orszymowo, and only two for Wilkanowo.

Dating results that confirmed the existence in the 13<sup>th</sup> century were only obtained in the case of two sites: Małków and Orszymowo. Two other sites – Szczekociny and Kiełbów Stary – can be dated to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, while materials from Piekary can be dated to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In the case of Wilkanowo, based on standard calibration the dating fully indicated modern times. However, one of the samples could be dated to the 15<sup>th</sup> century (with a probability of 91 %).

According to the original programme of the grant, thermoluminescence dating was to be a significant method for determining absolute dates. Regrettably, during the initial stage of the grant implementation, the researcher running the laboratory offering TL testing for archaeological purposes died. Thus, the samples were sent to a different laboratory. Unfortunately, the accuracy of the results is unacceptable from an archaeological perspective.

On account of these aforementioned problems with thermoluminescence dating, we obtained funds from the University of Łódź and opened a Thermoluminescence Dating Laboratory at the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Łódź.

Based on the information above, some conclusions can be drawn. Research practice has shown that only digging test pits in order to take samples is not always effective. Much depends on documentation from previous research. We faced several problems. Firstly, the site and height guidelines of the sites that were prepared a few decades ago usually used a local coordinate system, which means that they did not refer to geodetic coordinates. As there were frequently no distinct permanent elements that could be preserved until today, their coordination with new plans was not always possible. This made it difficult to choose the excavation location so that it did not overlap with the previous excavations and so that the place selected based on previous research offered an opportunity to discover cultural layers that might include organic remains necessary for analysis. In such a situation, obtaining good results for 6 out of 8 sites explored should be considered a success. However, true progress in this respect can only be ensured by new dating methods such as thermoluminescence. Ceramic artefacts needed for such analysis are present virtually at every site and are much easier to find.

It can be said that the attempt to verify the dating of the earliest defensive settlements was partially successful. Only two of the sites analysed can be considered to be structures from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, which confirms that such early dating can be correct and that lords in the territory of Poland built motte-and-bailey castles as early as in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The other conclusion from the research conducted is rather pessimistic: the dating of most sites ('conical' hillforts) should be verified. Thus, one should be very careful when using this dating data in settlement studies. We know perfectly well that traditional methods for dating archaeological artefacts are not precise enough for contemporary science. Greater emphasis should be placed on collecting samples for dating and on ensuring appropriate funding for laboratory tests. Everyone would probably agree that this is particularly important with regard to the Late Middle Ages. Written records do not contain data we could use to recreate the process of the construction of the earliest knights' courts, and this is of crucial significance for the reconstruction of the settlement network and the method of managing large landed estates in the Middle Ages. In this case, archaeology is a science that can offer new and decisive data.

## References

<sup>1)</sup> Paper prepared under a project funded by the National Science Centre (OPUS 2013/09/B/HS3/03572).

## Bibliography

- Boüard, M. 1973–1974: De l'aula au donjon, les fouilles de la motte de la Chapelle à Doué-la Fontaine (X<sup>e</sup> – XI<sup>e</sup> siècle). *Archéologie Médiévale* 3–4, 5–110.
- Davison, B. K. 1967: The origins of the castle in England. *Archaeological Journal* 124, 202–211.
- Davison, B. K. 1969: Early earthenwork castles: a new model. *Château Gaillard* 3, 37–47.
- Kamińska, J. – Golczyńska, A. 1970: Kopiec w Witowie. In: J. Kamińska (ed.), *Rozwój osadnictwa w rejonie Burzenina nad Wartą VI–XIV w. Włocławek*, Wrocław, 162–165.
- Kenyon, J. R. 1990: *Medieval fortifications*. Leicester.
- Leńczyk, G. 1937: Kopce historyczne w powiecie sieradzkim. *Sprawozdania Polskiej Akademii Umiejętności* 42/8, 229–231.
- Marciniak-Kajzer, A. 2018: Czy rzeczywiście najstarsze – weryfikacyjne badania grodzisk stożkowatych, *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Archaeologica* 33, 93–111.
- Nowakowski, D. 2017: Śląskie obiekty typu motte. *Studium archeologiczno-historyczne*. Wrocław.
- Pyzik, Z. W. 1969: Szczekociny, pow. Włoszczowa. *Informator Archeologiczny. Badania*, 396.
- Pyzik, Z. W. 1970: Grodzisko stożkowane w Kiełbowie Starym, pow. Białobrzegi. *Rocznik Muzeum Świętokrzyskiego* 6, 461–485.
- Rybacki, J. 1984: *Grodziska stożkowane w Woli Piekarskiej i Piekarach nad środkową Wartą*. Poznań (master thesis).
- Szymański, W. 1966: Sprawozdanie z badań sondażowych grodzisk w miejscowościach: Biała, Orszymowo, Parzeń, Wilkanowo i Wyszogród (d. Drwały), pow. Płock w 1966 roku. *Sprawozdania Archeologiczne* 20, 231–235.
- Szymański, W. 1968: Przyczynek do badań nad problematyką grodzisk stożkowatych (Orszymowo i Wilkanowo w pow. płockim). *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej* 16/1, 55–72.

## **Anna Marciniak-Kajzer: Die Motte-Burgen und die Probleme mit der Datierung ihrer Anfänge in Polen**

Der Zweck der Untersuchung (9 Lokalitäten) bestand darin, die korrekte Datierung der Motte-Objekte zu überprüfen, die nach früheren Ausgrabungen als die ältesten in Polen angesehen wurden (sie wurden in das 13. Jahrhundert datiert). Die Proben, die an 6 Objekten erhalten wurden, wurden dem 14C-Test unterzogen. Die Daten, die ihre Funktionsweise im 13. Jahrhundert bestätigten, wurden nur bei zwei Standorten erhalten (Małków, Orszyowo). Weitere zwei Objekte (Szczekociny, Kiełbów Stary) können wir in das 14. Jahrhundert und die Lokalitäten Piekary und Wilkanowo in das 15. Jahrhundert datieren.

Der Überprüfungsversuch war also teilweise erfolgreich. Nur bei zwei Lokalitäten wurde bestätigt, dass die frühe Datierung (13. Jahrhundert) korrekt sein kann. Es wurde jedoch bewiesen, dass die Chronologie solcher Stätten, die auf der Grundlage der traditionellen Datierung archäologischer Artefakte ermittelt wurde, nicht genug präzise ist, um in der modernen Wissenschaft verwendet zu werden. Es sollte mehr Gewicht auf die Probenahme zur Datierung und die Bereitstellung angemessener Mittel für Labortests gelegt werden.