

# The Location of Medieval Kołobrzeg and the Finds of Pottery as Evidence of Social Changes

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During the past decade Polish archaeologists have become much more interested in the towns of the late Middle Ages. Particularly interesting results have arisen from excavations in the coastal towns of Medieval Hanseatic origin.

Kołobrzeg is one of these towns; it lies on the coast, on the right bank of the estuary of the River Parsęta (fig. 1). This town was ranked as one of the most important centres on the southern coast of the Baltic Sea in the Middle Ages. Throughout the Mid-



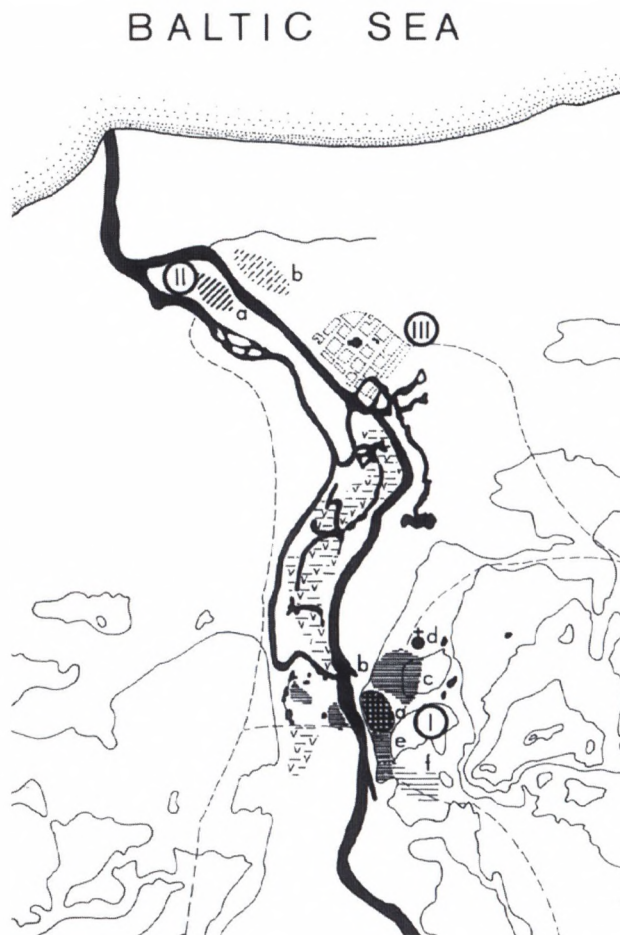
*Fig. 1. Location map of Kołobrzeg.*

dle Ages Kołobrzeg had continuous settlement of urban type. This is very significant for research into the town as it provides an opportunity to explore various aspects of the urbanization process which took place in this region over a long period of time.

Excavations in early medieval Kołobrzeg, conducted under the supervision of Lech Leciejewicz in the 1950s, showed that a stronghold surrounded by an earth and timber rampart was built there in the middle of the 9th century. It stood on a sandy hillock on the right bank of the River Parsęta, 4km south of where the river flowed into the sea. Its origin may be connected both with its favourable location and with saltworking, the exploitation of which may date back as far as the 7th century. In the course of time, two suburbs developed around the stronghold, and a market and harbour came into existence. By the first half of the 10th century Kołobrzeg had become a craftsmen's and merchant's centre, these growing up around the duke's residence, and it had all the attributes of an early urban centre. Its significance in that period sprang from the fact that, after its temporary inclusion in the Polish State, one of the earliest Polish dioceses was founded there in AD 1000.

Despite certain changes, this early urban centre continued in existence for the next two and a half centuries, its development being based on salt production, trade and manufacture.

In the first half of the 13th century, on the threshold of future changes, the settlement consisted of an extensive manufacturing, commercial and administrative complex: the stronghold with its suburbs, the harbour, the market, the tavern, churches and the Salt Island (the centre of salt production) (fig. 2).



*Fig. 2. Location of medieval settlements in the Kołobrzeg region. I: early medieval stronghold and suburbs. II: Salt-producing areas. III: Medieval town. After Lech Leciejewicz.*

In the 1230s comprehensive economic and social changes began to occur in Pomerania; these were mainly expressed in the foundation of towns fol-

lowing the German law. Kołobrzeg was gradually assimilated into these changes. In 1255, Prince Warciśław III and Herman von Gleichen bishop of Kamień, the owners of the Kołobrzeg »castellum«, founded new Kołobrzeg according to the law of Lübeck (*ius lubicense*) on a low hillock on the right bank of the River Parsęta halfway between the stronghold and the coast.

This location brought about a number of changes which had considerable consequences for the further development of the town of Kołobrzeg. Of prime importance was the administrative change from the Prince's law (the framework for the functioning of the early medieval centre) to the new model of the Lübeck law.

There was also a significant change in the spatial settlement-structure of Kołobrzeg. It acquired a new site between the coast and the stronghold, and to some extent cut the old centre off from the coast; the centre of settlement thus moved *c.* 2km north.

The history of the old Slav centre is very characteristic for that period. The Pomeranian princes Barnim I and Warciśław III drew up some documents there from 1227 to 1253 but there is evidence that the old stronghold had fallen into decay by 1276 when gardens and a convent of Benedictine nuns were established. In the course of only 20 years the siting of the new town had caused the ruin and depopulation of the old centre, after that described in documents as »antiqua civitas«.

Considering the location in a wider geographical perspective, it is very obvious that the new town referred to the early medieval centre in terms of its situation. Such references seem to be typical of many newly-founded Pomeranian towns which either absorbed the earlier Slav centre or were situated close

by. That is why in most cases it is difficult to speak of *in crudo radice* sites where a new centre directly took over a number of functions, particularly the economic functions which were previously performed by the early medieval centres. In the case of Kołobrzeg, salt production continued to be one of the bases for the economic development of both its centres; it

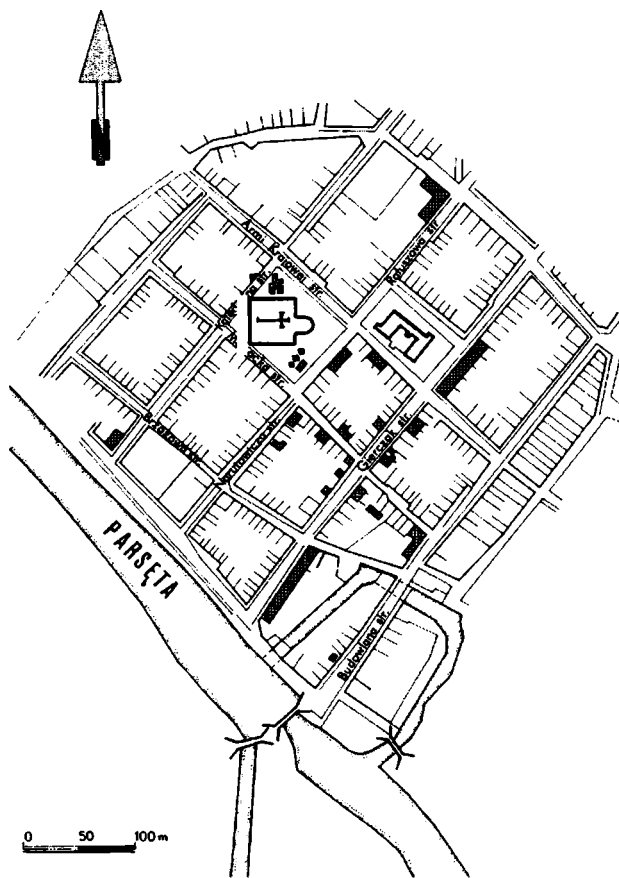


Fig. 3. Plan of the medieval town with the areas excavated (1986-1991).

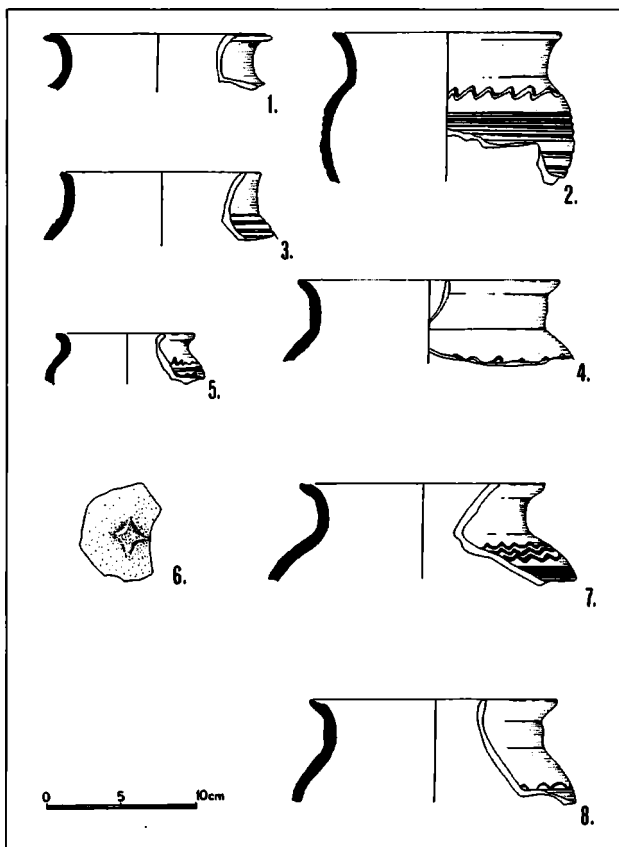


Fig. 4. Pottery from 12 Ratuszowa Street. Third quarter of the 13th century. Slav pottery: 1-8.

continued irrespective of the changes in social structure and town planning. The town was also sited there because of its communications. The coast provided direct connection with other countries, especially those around the Baltic Sea, and the Parsęta provided communications with the interior.

Revolutionary changes took place in the fields of

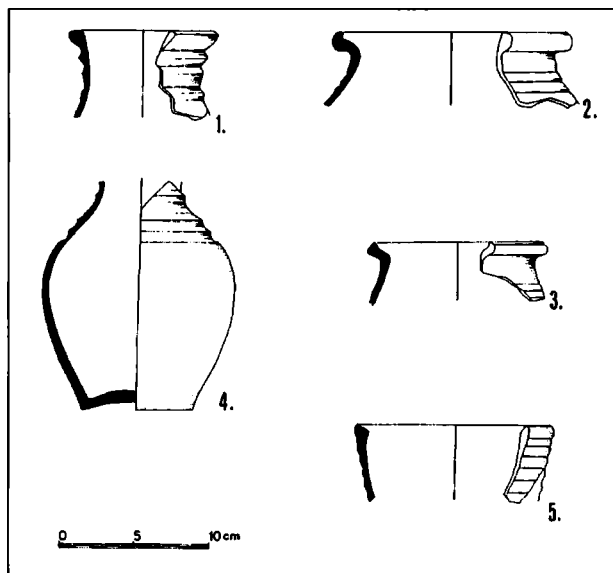


Fig. 5. Pottery from 12 Ratuszowa Street. Third quarter of the 13th century. Greyware: 1-4; red-glazed earthenware: 5.

urban organization and planning. New Kołobrzeg copied the models of town planning devised in Western Europe and which were typical of developed towns in the late Middle Ages (fig. 3).

Social transformations were also very important elements in the changes which were taking place. The siting of Pomeranian towns was connected with the influx of new settlers, mainly from German territories. Thus, transformations must be regarded as the results of both economic and ethnic changes.

Study of the medieval history of Kołobrzeg from written sources is beset with difficulties as the written sources are so few. There is also only limited evidence from cartographic and iconographic sources. The earliest preserved views of the town come from

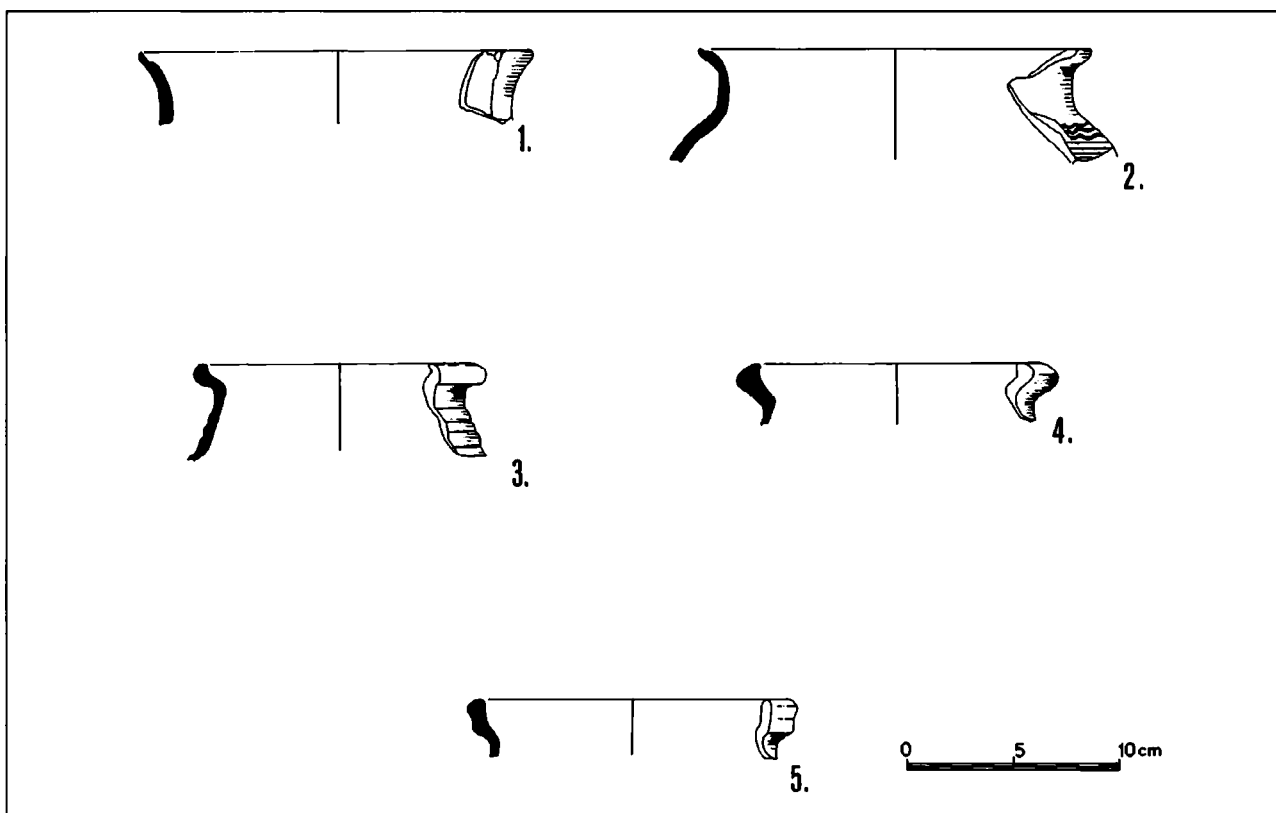


Fig. 6. Pottery from 44 Gierczak Street. Third quarter of the 13th century. Slav pottery: 1-2; greyware: 3-5.

the beginning of the 17th centuries. Because of this, the archaeological rescue excavations carried out since 1986 are essential to our knowledge. The excavations began as a result of the reconstruction of the centre of Kołobrzeg which was almost totally destroyed in 1945.

Although the excavations so far undertaken have not as yet comprised all parts of the town, their extent and results make it possible for various interpre-

tations to be presented. The quality of the excavated finds, the well-preserved stratigraphy from the 13th and 14th centuries and the annually increasing series of dendrochronological dates make this possible.

One of the purposes of this paper is to use the excavated pottery to study the social changes which took place in Kołobrzeg at the time of its foundation.

The pottery groups from the earliest layers of the

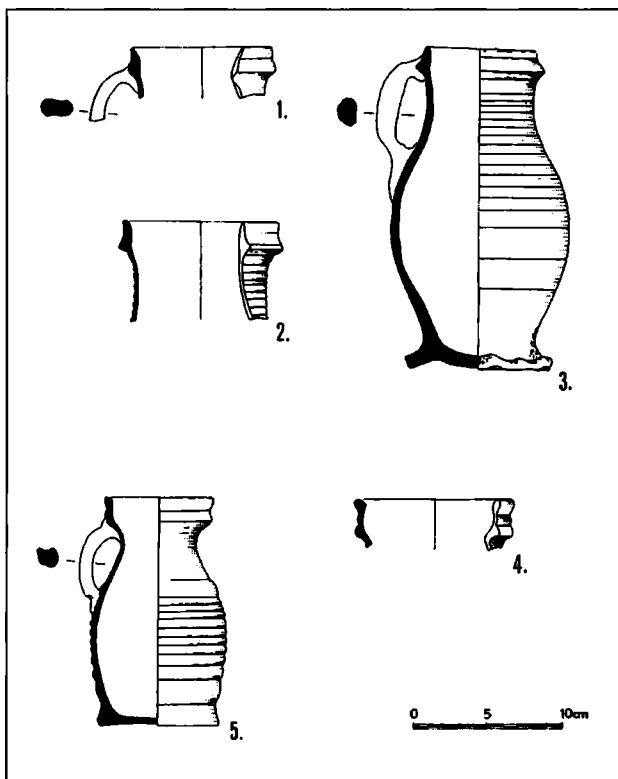


Fig. 7. Pottery from 44 Gierczak Street. Third quarter of the 13th century. Greyware: 4-5; early stoneware: 1-3.

stronghold, 12th and beginning of the 13th century, are characterized by their homogeneity. Traditional Slav pottery is predominant, represented almost entirely by pots made using the same technology. Imported pottery occurs very rarely: for instance a very small vessel of probable Andenne origin found in a 12th-century layer of the stronghold.

The pottery from the newly sited town and dated to the third quarter of the 13th century is quite dif-

ferent. Its characteristic feature is its obvious differentiation. Four categories of pottery occur in almost each group: traditional Slav pottery, greyware, early stoneware; imported glazed wares. Figures 4-9 show selected pottery from the oldest layers in the property located at 12 Ratuszowa Street (medieval *platea Slavorum*), 44 E. Gierczak Street (medieval *platea piscatorum*), and at Property 2 by the market place. The conspicuous differentiation no doubt illustrates the violent changes which took place in Kołobrzeg about the middle of the 13th century.

The intrinsic make-up of these pottery groups in the period between the foundation of the town and c. 1275 is also interesting. The most numerous category of pottery in all of the properties is greyware, from 30 to 60 per cent (fig. 11).

Greyware can be expected to have arrived in Pomerania by at least the first half of the 13th century, and it was common in many Pomeranian settlements by the middle of the century. The local production of greyware also began at that period; this was associated with the influx of German settlers and potters to Pomerania. In this context we should consider the occurrence of greyware from the beginning of the establishment of Kołobrzeg on its new site. It was, no doubt, the result of the influx of a considerable group of German settlers, thus of ethnic transformation. The beginning of the local production of greyware constituted a significant breakthrough in the development of Pomeranian pottery, not only because of the introduction of new techniques of manufacture and firing but also because of the appearance of new and previously unknown pot-shapes. The predominant form of greyware in the pottery groups from Kołobrzeg in the second half of the 13th century is a round-bottomed vessel (*Kügel-*

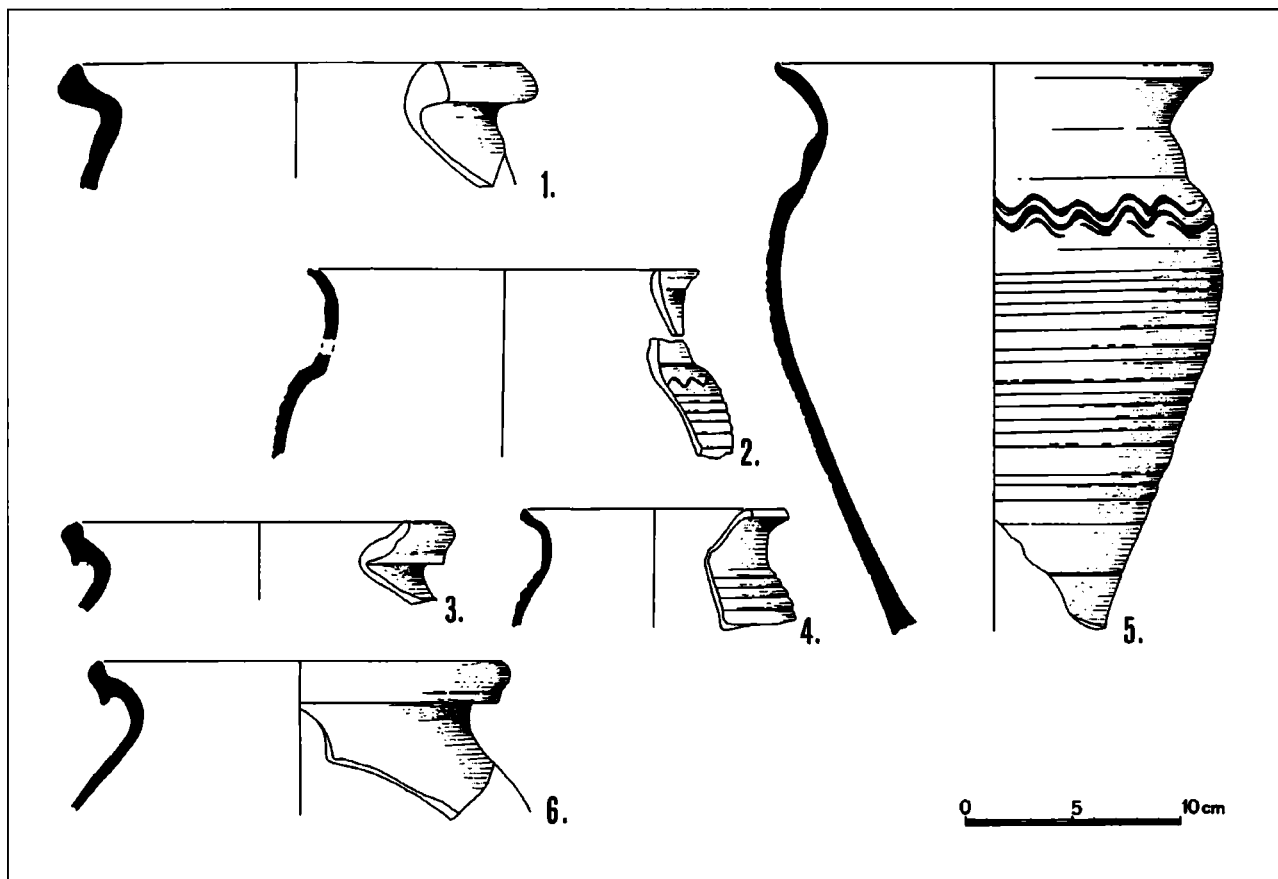


Fig. 8. Pottery from Property Number 2 from near the Market Place. Third quarter of the 13th century. Slav pottery: 2, 4-5; greyware: 1, 3, 6.

*opf* and *Dreiknuppentopf*) and also flat bottomed jugs and pitchers. It is worth noting that Kołobrzeg is one of the most easterly centres in which *Kügeltopf* have been ascertained. This may result from the fact that the German population came from other regions to settle in West and East Pomerania.

The traditional Slav pottery found in the earliest

layers of the town is of particular significance in the examination of social changes. It is interesting not so much for its occurrence but for its proportion. In the pottery from several properties presented here the traditional Slav pottery ranges from almost nothing to 40 per cent (fig. 10); in some plots it reaches 50 per cent. A few per cent may be regarded as

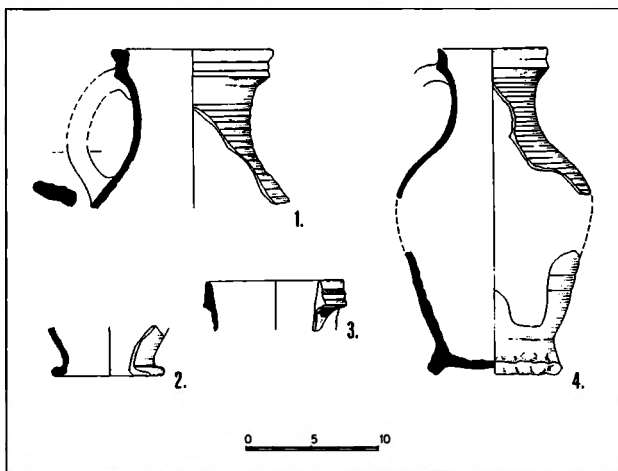


Fig. 9. Pottery from Property Number 2 from near the Market Place. Third quarter of the 13th century. Early stoneware: 1, 3-4; red-glazed earthenware: 2.

a sign of local exchange between the town and Slav settlements but this interpretation cannot be applied to the presence of tens of per cent of the traditional pottery. It is difficult to believe that the simple Slav pottery was technologically and aesthetically better suited to German taste than were West-European wares, so the presence of such a high proportion of ceramics made in the traditional Slav manner must indicate the attachment of the indigenous population to their native products. The explanation must be that there was an influx of Slavs into the newly founded town, quite probably those same people who, over a few years, abandoned the early stronghold and its suburbs. The pottery, then, indicates migration into the town from the old centre or the neighbouring villages.

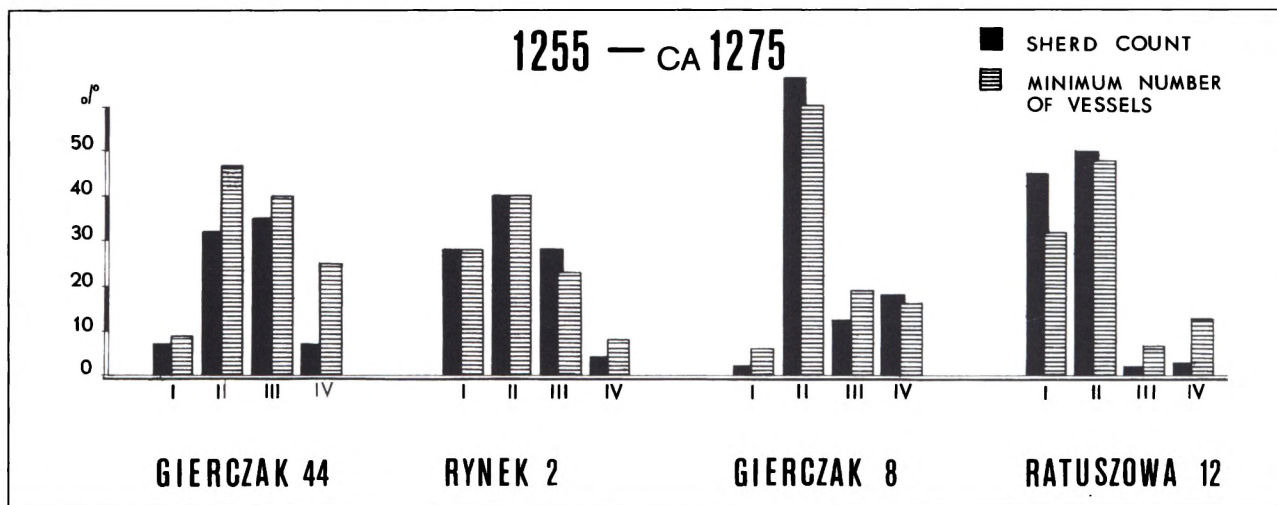


Fig. 10. Percentage of pottery from selected properties. Third quarter of the 13th century. I: Slav pottery; II: greyware; III: early stoneware; IV: imported glazed pottery.



## SLAV POTTERY 1255-CA 1350

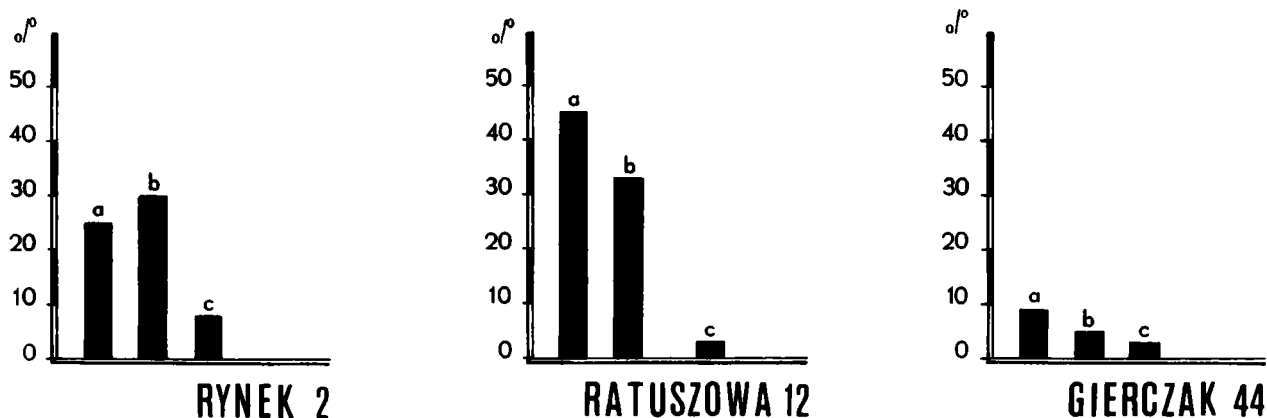


Fig. 11. Proportions of traditional Slav pottery from selected properties.

a: third quarter of the 13th century

b: last quarter of the 13th century

c: first half of the 14th century

The distribution of native Slav pottery is uneven throughout the town as a whole. One of the highest concentrations has been found in the north of the town, present Ratuszowa Street. This seems not to have been accidental as the street was mentioned in the Town Book for 1337 and 1343 as *platea Slavorum*.

Two types dominate in the traditional Slav pottery excavated in Kołobrzeg. There are pots of the G-group with so called S-shaped profile, equivalent to the Vipperow type of E. Schuldt's typology; they are also found elsewhere in Western Pomerania. There are also pots of the J-group, bulbous pots with distinct necks, equivalent to the Mecklenburg-Teterow group. Both groups were among the most common in Western Pomerania in the late phases of the early medieval period. They were also found in early me-

dieval Kołobrzeg. Their upper chronological limit is sometimes said to be the first half of the 13th century, but this is not corroborated at Kołobrzeg where they are also found in the 14th century. In stratigraphical contexts from the first quarter of the 14th century in several excavated properties in Kołobrzeg this pottery is scarce or not present; in other places it still forms a considerable percentage. This is confirmed by Diagram 11, showing the proportions of Slav pottery in the 13th and 14th centuries. Several years of research in different parts of the town have shown that the Slav pottery disappeared completely only about the middle of the 14th century, coinciding with other signs of change in economy and town planning.

This type of pottery may have disappeared for two

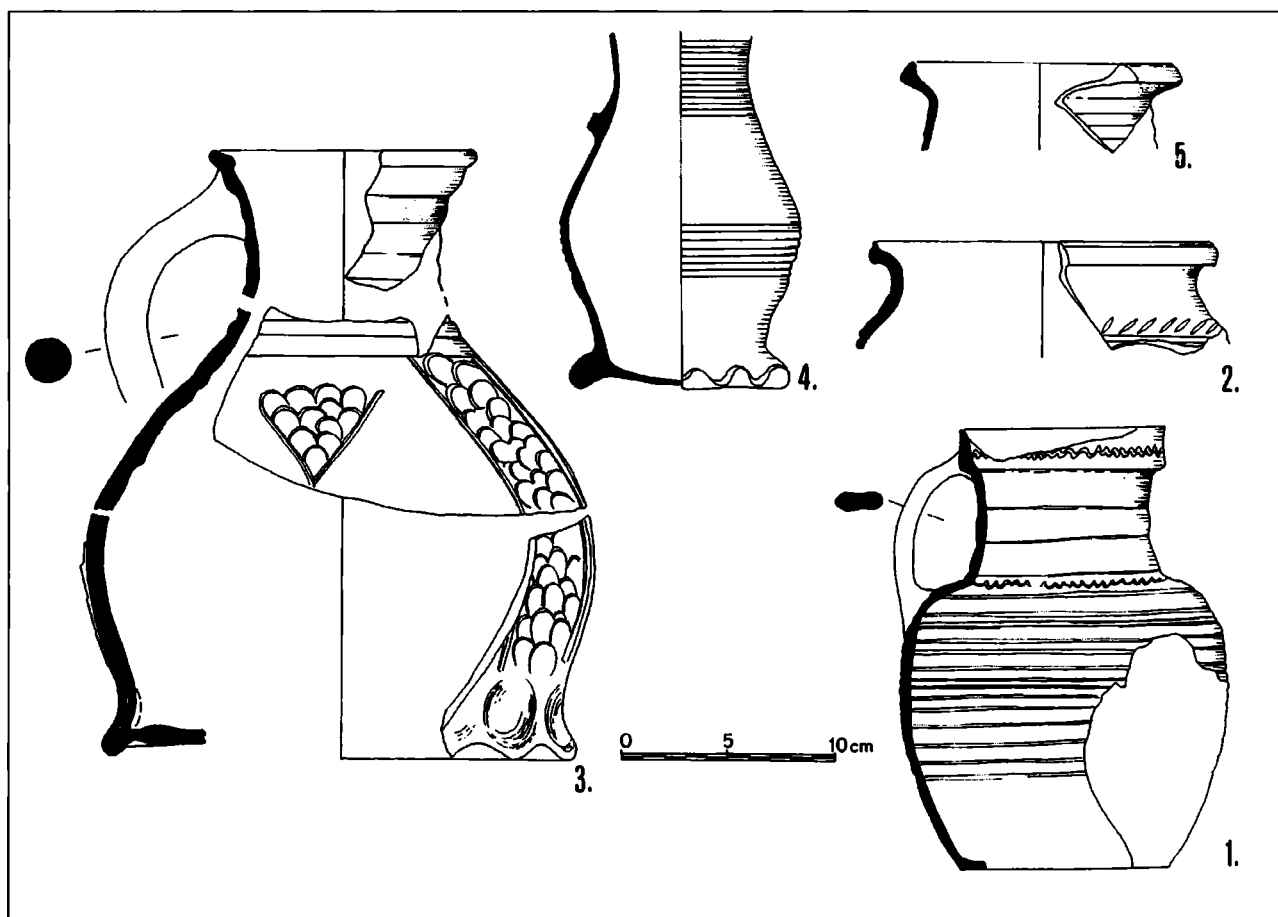


Fig. 12. Some 14th-century vessels.

reasons: the Slav population may have been expelled from the town, or it adopted new cultural patterns. The first reason is quite possible in the light of the statute of 1539 which forbade the purchase of goods from Slav speaking people, but it is probably more complicated. The greyware which appeared in Po-

merania in the 13th century constituted a turning point in the development of local pottery production by introducing a technology which produced vessels of higher standard and greater typological differentiation. Greyware differed from the functionally homogeneous Slav pottery (basically cooking

pots) by comprising a wide range of functional types for use both in the kitchen and on the table. The qualitative and functional superiority of greyware seems to have been the reason for the gradual disappearance of traditional pottery.

Some pottery found in 14th-century layers in the town is significant in this context. Either these vessels accord with traditional ones in fabric, ornamentation or shape, but have been fired by the reduction process; or they have been produced in a totally traditional manner but in greyware or stoneware forms. A vessel discovered in a 14th-century layer in Katedralna Street is interesting here; its technique of manufacture and decoration is typical of traditional pottery but its shape is an almost faithful imitation of an early stoneware jug (fig. 12:1).

The examples mentioned above seem to illustrate the process whereby Slav potters adopted innovations and adjusted to new standards and demands. We may suppose that changes in the Slav population of the town evolved along the same lines. The abandonment of tradition and the use of new and better products are illustrations of this, as manifested in the disappearance of Slav pottery. In broader social terms, new cultural standards were adopted and the indigenous population was assimilated with the Germans who settled within the boundaries of the town.

Imports are a separate issue in the question of 13th- and 14th-century pottery. They reached Pomerania on only a small scale before the new towns were founded: a few sherds of Pingsdorf and Andenewares are known from only a few sites.

This situation changed radically in the middle of the 13th century although it may have started a quarter of a century earlier. Kołobrzeg illustrates this. The siting of the new town provided a crucial

turning point in the influx of pottery imports: mainly early stoneware and glazed earthenware. In the second half of the 13th century the two groups make up from 4-5 per cent to more than 30 per cent of all the pottery (fig. 10). Early stoneware imported from the Rhineland and Lower Saxony (*olive* and *rotengobierter Faststeinzeug*) increased in quantity. Lead-glazed pottery was of lesser importance even though it makes up a considerable proportion; most of it was of red-fired jugs and pitchers, probably from workshops in southern Scandinavia. Products from the Netherlands appear in smaller numbers and are of the so-called »Flemish highly-decorated pottery«. Possible English products have been excavated occasionally.

In many properties the proportion of imported pottery increased still more after c. 1295-1300 when the »classical« products of the Siegburg workshops arrived in great quantities.

The occurrence of imported pottery on such a scale encourages other more specific aspects of research. For example, it suggests that in comparison with the older centre there were strong social and cultural changes. Its appearance is probably explained by the demand for good of better quality, of a higher aesthetic standard, and greater functional differentiation. It also illustrates the town's rapid inclusion into the Hanseatic system of long-distance trade.

The above comments form a preliminary survey of one of the aspects of the social changes which took place in the Kołobrzeg region in the 13th and 14th centuries. Obviously, some of the processes in different parts of the town took place over different lengths of time. Assessment of the speed of the changes will necessitate research into the north of Koł-

brzeg in particular: in the medieval *platea montis* area where the monasteries and richest families are recorded in the 13th and 14th centuries. Here we touch upon another problem: that of social differentiation within the town and how it may be studied using excavated pottery. It will be extremely difficult or impossible to do this for the period before the new town was founded as the pottery of Early Medieval Kołobrzeg is so homogeneous. The pottery from late medieval Kołobrzeg presents quite a different problem; the results obtained so far indicate that the various properties were contemporaneously different. It is very probable that the evidence reflects the social changes which were taking place in the town and the differentiation in wealth. This question touches upon the issue of the social topography of Medieval Kołobrzeg, but that is beyond the bounds of this paper.

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