

# The origins of the medieval Polish towns

Sławomir Moździoch<sup>a</sup>

The questions of when, how and why Polish medieval towns developed were the most disputed ones in Polish medieval history and archaeology in the second half of the twentieth century. The interpretations of archaeological sources pointed to strongholds as early Polish towns. Their authors put particular stress on the permanent presence of craftsmen and merchants. In the current author's opinion the theory of "stronghold—town" called into being by Polish archaeologists influenced data interpretations and in many cases data were formed by the theory. Today, from the archaeological point of view one should understand by an "early Polish town" a complex consisting of a stronghold (as *acropolis*, military—administrative—ideological centre) and surrounded by open settlements (places for production and distribution of goods and information). This model of a "town" in the Piast state remains invariable from the middle of 11th century to the first half of 13th century. Current interpretations of archaeological data do not support "evolutionary origins of Polish towns" but suggest a continuation of economic and political functions of the "early—town settlement complexes" by the charter towns which replaced them.

KEY-WORDS: Medieval archaeology, Poland, stronghold, town

The questions of when, how and why Polish medieval towns developed were the most disputed in Polish medieval history and archaeology after World War II (Tymieniecki 1919:319—45, 1956:229ff.; Hensel 1963; Zientara 1976; Lalik 1976; Sporn 1978; Łowmiański 1985:649—731; Leciejewicz 1989:264—80). Long ago, in 1919, Kazimierz Tymieniecki suggested that the beginnings of Polish towns were not connected with the introduction of German law in the 13—14th centuries, but went much further back (Tymieniecki 1919, 1956:205—28). The concept of Tymieniecki was an answer to the one-sided views of German historians connecting the genesis of towns in Central Europe with the introduction of German law (Sporn 1978). This problem is difficult to solve because there is a lack of an exact definition of a medieval town.

In the second half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, the opinion that the possession of separate laws (town charter) could be

<sup>a</sup> Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii, Polska Akademia Nauk, Wrocław, Poland

recognized as a criterion for urbanisation, dominated. This meant the 1st half of the 13th century, at the earliest. This opinion dominated the works of Polish historians until the beginning of the World War II and thus has affected the common image of Poland during the 11th and 12th centuries. In “*Encyklopedia Staropolska*” Aleksander Brückner wrote (p. 886): “Towns and townsmen did not exist in ancient Poland. There were strongholds with craftsmen, and servants and peasants settled beside. Fairs were held in that temporarily animated province”. Parallel to the above—mentioned legal definition of the town, functioned an other one, that stressed the economic function of towns. For instance Sombart (1907:4) defined the town as

*“eine größere Ansiedlung von Menschen, die für ihren Unterhalt auf die Erzeugnisse fremder landwirtschaftlicher Arbeit angewiesen ist”.*

This definition started concepts that distinguished towns according to the way and degree to which their inhabitants were engaged in economic activities.

Archaeologists joined this discussion already before World War II. Józef Kostrzewski in 1939 suggested that many of the Polish strongholds (*grody*) were also settlements of craftsmen hence the two attributes: a dense built—up area and the occupation of inhabitants, allowed the definition of these settlements as early towns (Kostrzewski 1938/1939:122—47). What was the basis for such opinions? Excavations carried out in the 1930s by German and Polish archaeologists at Opole, Gniezno, Poznań, Wolin and Strzegom revealed new archaeological sources in unparalleled number. Kostrzewski’s concept was based on the evolutionary model proposed by Tymieniecki. That model, however, in its primary form assumed that Polish towns developed from the open settlements (*podgrodzie*) **situated beside** strongholds (*grody*), and not **in** the strongholds (Tymieniecki 1921:3—31).

All the hypotheses concerning the origins of Polish towns are listed and discussed in the recent work of Henryk Łowmiański (1985:649—731). Overlooking the second range criteria (topographical, demographical and terminological) it becomes clear that discussion on the concept of “early medieval Polish towns” has been concentrated on four types of definitions: legal, economic, administrative and multi—factor (consisting of several criteria).

After the World War II the most popular was the “economic” definition of a town. It was the result of both the rapid development of medieval archaeology and the new Marxist methodological approach, defining a town as the result of social division of labour. In connection with the approaching millennium of the Polish State excavations started in all of the most important medieval political and economical centres (Fig. 1). The systematic research that has been carried out in the major Piast strongholds gave new and important archaeological material for the

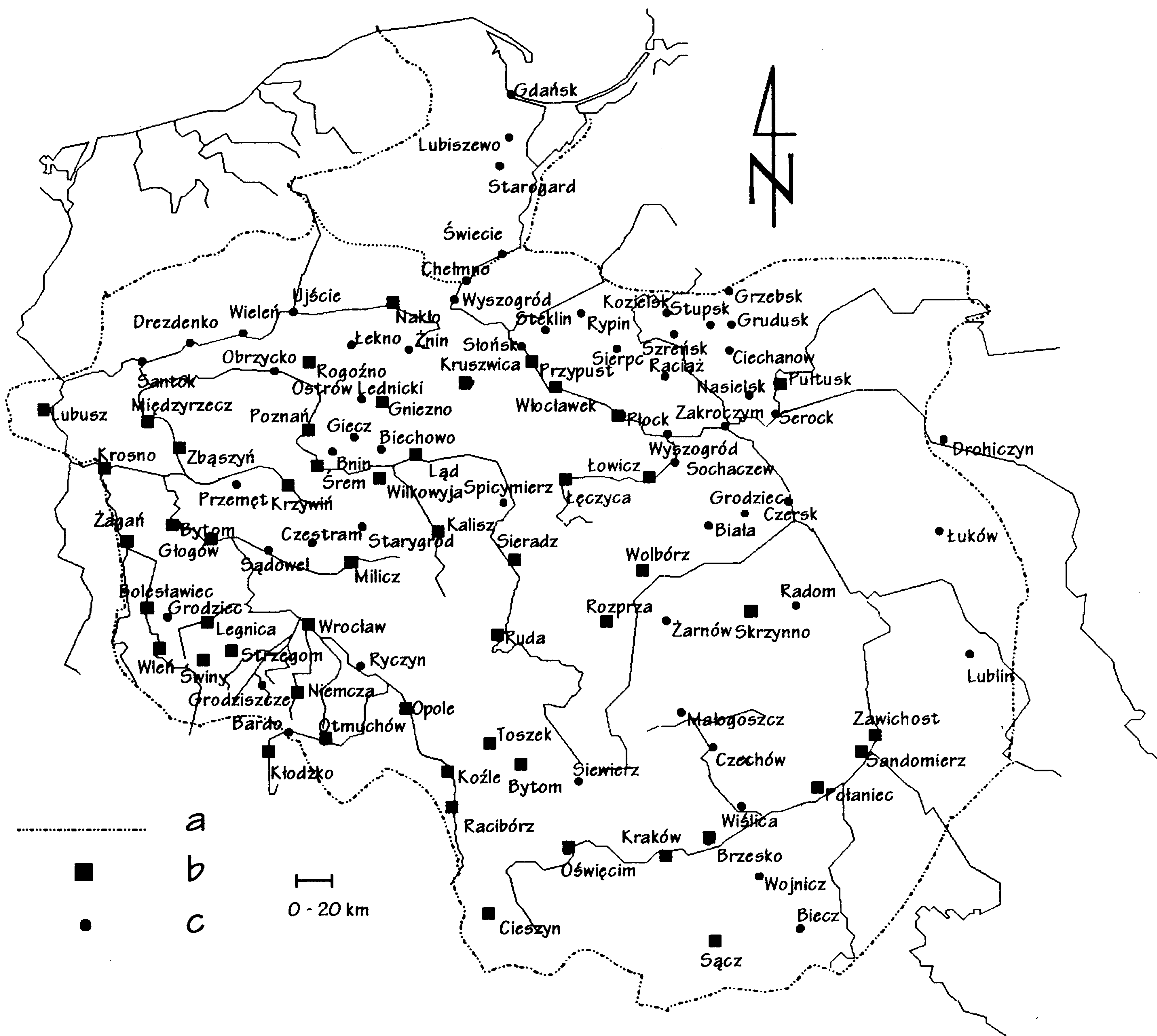


Fig. 1. Castellan strongholds in Poland in 11–12th centuries: a — Polish state borders in 11–12th century, b — castellan strongholds with later (before 1310) located towns, c — other castellan strongholds.

understanding of the process of urbanisation in Central Europe. Both conceptions: Tymieniecki's (1919) and Kostrzewski's (1938/1939) became "after World War II a sign-post for archeological investigations that were to prove the productive function of early towns" (Łowmiański 1985:661). The first interpretations of the archaeological sources pointed to strongholds as early Polish towns, laying particular stress on the permanent presence of craftsmen and merchants. In 1955, in the course of the conference held in Warsaw, Konrad Jażdżewski (1957) proposed the main elements of "stronghold—town" theory. Now and then the term "stronghold—town" (*gród—miasto*) still appears in archaeological works.

In the initial phase of the research on the origins of towns in Poland the interpretations of excavation results were simple. Włodzimierz Hołubowicz qualified the finds from Opole as domestic products. In his opinion (1956:53–4, 110)

the craftsmen worked outside of the stronghold. Similarly, Jażdżewski (1957:319–47) thought that finds from the Gdańsk stronghold had the character of domestical production too. The regular professional production, in his opinion, did not start before the second half of the 12th century. Later, however, archaeologists and historians began to speak about towns of craftsmen and merchants. Under this influence Hołubowicz wrote in 1960 that it was difficult to explain the occurrence of many spurs in layers of the Opole stronghold — “the town where lived mainly various craftsmen...” (Hołubowicz 1960:61). Stronghold—town as the model of the early town (“Polish town”) occurred very often in discussions during the First International Congress of Slavic Archaeology in Warsaw in 1965. During the sixties the influence of the “stronghold—town” paradigm on the interpretation of the archaeological data became much stronger. The archaeologists in their reports from excavations of multi—layer sites emphasized dense and regular building structure, a great number of inhabitants, the presence of craftsmen and merchants, as well as the presence of a market place, *etc.* (Cofta 1961:59–61; Rajewski 1968:35; Zbierski 1968:162; Wędzki 1968:490; Gediga 1970). In this way archaeologists moved the “place of birth” of the early Polish towns from open settlements (suburbia = *podgrodzia*) into the strongholds.

Called into being by archaeologists, the theory of the “stronghold—town” met with opposition from some historians (Buczek 1964:89–90; Łowmiański 1985:68off.). Łowmiański (1985:671) accepting the presence of towns in Poland before the 12th century defined them as “consumer towns”, where professional craftsmen or merchants did not live. The presence of these two groups in Polish strongholds seldom left evidence in the written sources. He suggested (1985:677) “to think over whether the archaeological interpretation is well—founded while bearing in mind the vague evidence of archaeological material”.

What can one say today about the origins of early Polish towns looking from the archaeological point of view? The quality of the archaeological data we find and use depends very much on the theory we use. I will now sketch briefly how the theory of the “stronghold—town” has influenced data interpretations and how far in this case data has been formed by the theory. The discussion below concerns Polish strongholds of the 10–12/13th centuries excluding the province of Pomerania. Most of the comments mentioned below are based on the archaeological research of strongholds in Silesia, one of the best investigated provinces of the Piast state. I will concentrate on the Opole stronghold (Upper Silesia), because it has the largest investigated area (2700 sq. m), and it was commonly taken to be an example of the “stronghold—town”.

Ziółkowska (1968:136) has shown that terminological chaos makes it difficult to discuss the genesis and functions of early Polish towns. Already during the First International Congress of Slavic Archaeology the need to standardize the ter-

minology and to build a new, more versatile definition, binding the early towns with later located towns was clear. Ziólkowska, based on the sociological definitions of a “town” which put particular stress on its political, administrative and military functions, has formulated a multifactorial definition (1968:136–43). She accepted that the early medieval town, just as any town, fulfilled many functions. It fulfilled undoubtedly: political—administrative functions manifested in the concentrated presence of political—administrative—military officials, as well as military functions, the function of a production and distribution centre, and an ideological function (centre of cult, presence of priests). Until now, however, the terminological problems remain unsolved.

One could propose as a crude basis for this discussion a definition of a town considering the functions it fulfilled. Relations between various central functions varied in the cases of particular early medieval towns. The most important of these functions (based on the definition mentioned above) would be:

1. political—administrative functions (presence of political—administrative officials)
2. military functions (presence of ordinary knights and of a stronghold—“*acropolis*” of the town),
3. ideological functions (presence of priests, cult centre, church),
4. production centre functions (presence of craftsmen and workshops),
5. distribution and redistribution centre functions (presence of market—place and merchants),
6. cultural and information centre functions (*e.g.*, transmission of innovations).

Presence of the cult centre (3) and the market place (5) were conducive to the integration of people living in a stronghold—district and accelerated the diffusion of innovations.

These functions were characteristic for both the early towns and for the located towns. They do not mean however the identity of these two forms of urban life. As in the case of early towns (urban settlement complexes) the rise of strongholds was a kind of “first motion engine”, in the case of located towns it was a document of the location. But similarly as we can not identify early towns with strongholds, we can not identify located towns with a document of location.

If we consider the above—mentioned composed definition of a town it would be inconsequent to regard Polish Piast strongholds as towns, neither the large ones as Wrocław, Gniezno or Niemcza, nor the famous as Głogów, or the archaeologically well examined Opole. If we agree that these strongholds fulfilled the administrative, military and partly ideological functions it would be difficult to say the same about the productive and distributive functions.

The great number of concentrated inhabitants, mentioned by Jażdżewski (1957:324) and by other scholars, was an important element of this theory. In general, based on the results of excavations one can say that Polish strongholds of the 10th—12th centuries were densely built—up. Hołubowicz (1962:553) supposed

that Opole consisted of 100–160 buildings. Multiplying the number of buildings by 5 persons, the number of inhabitants was estimated to *ca.* 800 persons (Każmierczyk 1971:64) or 1000 persons (Hensel 1967:120). A similar number was also estimated for the inhabitants of strongholds Niemcza and Legnica and some other ones. In all cases the density of population amounted to *ca.* 1000 persons per 1 ha. This would be enormous because in medieval German towns this density was estimated to be 100–140 persons per 1 ha, and in medieval Spanish towns 200 persons per 1 ha (Kuhn 1966:335). Even though we accept these method of calculation (5 persons per 1 building – see Hensel 1967:108, fn 194) we must remember that not all buildings were houses, which is detectable from written and archaeological sources (Slama 1986:22–8). In Silesian strongholds there were, for instance, stables (Wrocław, Głogów), granaries (Wrocław, Legnica, Niemcza), and warehouses (Strzegom).

In order to interpret the function of individual buildings we can try to use the finds and other such archaeological data. But how representative are the finds which are found in, or just outside, the buildings? It may be difficult, but we should try to interpret the functions of buildings. For demographic questions this interpretation should be very important.

What is the data that may help to discern the houses from farm buildings? Based on the excavations in stronghold Strzegom (Silesia) we can assume that non-habitation buildings were smaller than houses. We observe in Opole the presence of two groups of buildings: those with an area of 16.5–25 m<sup>2</sup> and with an area of 9–16.5 m<sup>2</sup>. There are many facts that show the difference between these two groups (Moździoch 1991b). For example, we can observe the tendency of the occurrence of mud floors in relatively smaller buildings. The average area of a house with a plank floor was about 16.9 m<sup>2</sup>, when the area of a house with a mud floor was about 16.1 m<sup>2</sup>. Among bigger houses we can find also two-room buildings. Their area varies around 19.5 m<sup>2</sup>. The next feature that might distinguish habitation buildings is that of woodworking. The average area of buildings constructed of logs with no bark is *ca.* 17.4 m<sup>2</sup>, while the average area of buildings made of trunks with bark was *ca.* 15.8 m<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 2). The poor quality of non-habitation buildings was also observable in the Wrocław stronghold (Czerska and Kaźmierczyk 1988:57–8).

The function of a building can also be suggested by the number and type of finds. The number of finds (*e.g.*, ceramics) per 1 m<sup>2</sup> of house area was the greater the smaller the house (Fig. 3). This tendency in particular houses has remained constant in all layers. The examples of “big” houses with little “rubbish” are the buildings numbered 9, 14, 58, 75–76–77, and of “small” houses with much “rubbish” are the buildings numbered 10, 18, 19, 61, 69. In the light of this data it is quite sure that there were farm buildings in the Opole stronghold, but their

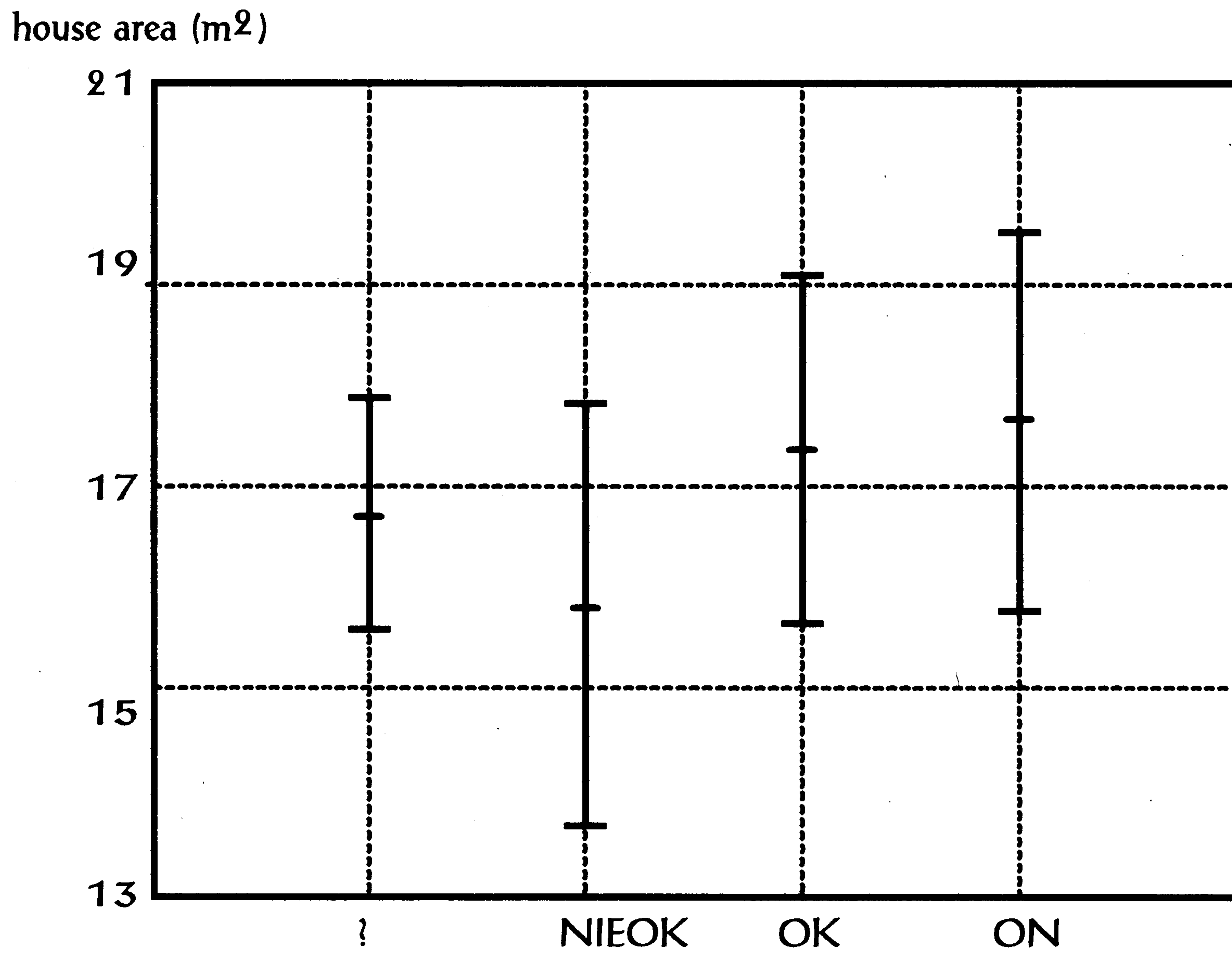


Fig. 2. Average areal of buildings in Opole and variety of construction materials: OK – barked logs; NIEOK – logs with bark; ON – partly barked logs; ? – no data. Average house areal is given with 95 percent confidence interval.

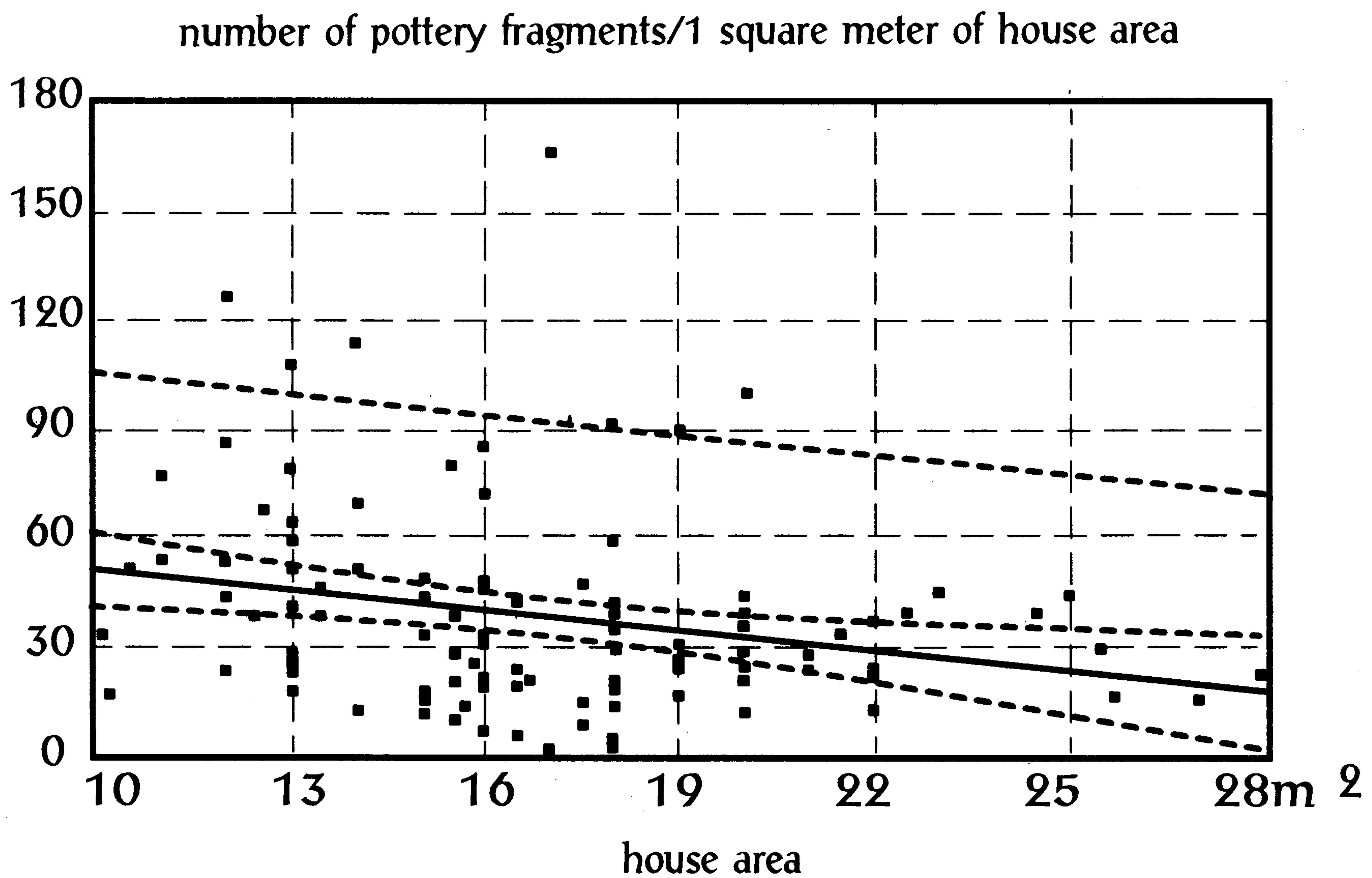


Fig. 3. Number of pottery fragments shown against the areal of the houses in Opole.

precise recognition still needs more detailed analysis. The lack of evidence for intensive production could also be interpreted as an indication of farm houses. In many cases great amount of matted straw, horse hair, feather and muck confirms this hypothesis. The analysis of data from 11th century layers from the Wrocław stronghold brought the same results. Both in Opole and in Wrocław the groups of buildings, consisting of house and farm buildings were observed (Hołubowicz 1956:107; Kaźmierczyk, Kramarek and Lasota 1978:124ff.; Buśko, Czerska and Kaźmierczyk 1985). Similar crofts (groups of buildings) were explored before World War II at the Strzegom stronghold (Bersu 1930:28–33).

Therefore, today one cannot speak about a great number of stronghold inhabitants in 11–12th centuries because the ratio of farm buildings to houses (for instance in Opole stronghold) was 2:1. Hence, using Hołubowicz's algorithm we may come to *ca.* 200–250 stronghold inhabitants. Similar to this was also the situation in contemporary Moravian strongholds. For Olomouc, 60 warriors were qualified in written sources as a very strong crew (*Kronikarze czescy*, 207). This stronghold (1.5 ha area) was bigger than many contemporary Polish ones (mostly 0.5–1.5 ha). In my opinion it shows that we must also be careful when discerning many social and professional categories of stronghold inhabitants (merchants, craftsmen, priests, *etc.*). Such interpretations result from the assumption that a town was the effect of intensified labour division. I do not want here to demonstrate any thesis. I want only to show that we, as archaeologists, have many possibilities to test our concepts against material data.

The important part of the “stronghold–town” theory was the premise that many craftsmen's workshops functioned at strongholds (Hensel 1963:104ff., 1967:98ff.). Was the size and quality of the production at strongholds really of a “craftsman” character? Final proof for this can only be given by the remains of workshops, and they are very difficult to detect by archaeological methods (Kuza 1984:3–4; Donat 1985:331). In Polish 11–12th century strongholds there are less positive examples of craft production than one may expect when reading popular synthetic works on Poland in the Middle Ages. Until now the results of excavations of multi–layer sites have shown that within the layers the objects were transported over large areas. It is very difficult to say how representative the objects which were destroyed at the site are of fragments found during excavations. How representative are the destroyed objects of the productive activity of the inhabitants?

Basic to our discussion is the division between domestic production and craft production, the question that has yet to attract great interest. Archaeologically detectable traces of production could be the result of activity of the itinerant craftsmen, of permanent workshop or of domestic production. Axel Christoffersen, based on the material from the excavations in Lund, has shown (1980:150–65)

that short-lived activity of itinerant craftsmen can leave many material traces that could be interpreted as traces of permanent craft production. Because we must be careful with the functional analysis of a small area it would be better to analyse all the excavated layers instead. In this way I hope to gain new information about the production intensity and to compare it with other areas. For example, the ratio of shoe-leather off-cuts to the quantity of pottery in some layers gives us a coefficient of production intensity. Pottery, always occurring in great quantities in these places where man lived and worked, reflects the intensity of use of a given niveau much better than the thickness or size of the layer. Therefore, I introduce this coefficient (*i.e.*, the number of finds linked with some kind of production divided by the number of sherds found in the same layer) only to compare the scale of production at the stronghold (Fig. 4d — trench I — II) and at the surrounding settlements (Fig. 4d — trenches II, V, VI). Values from various trenches are represented by a number of finds (traces of production) *versus* 1000 sherds from the same layer. The values received for all layers have shown that finds linked with various production activities (*e.g.*, the shoemaking — Fig. 5, or glass working — Fig. 6) were plentiful particularly in open settlements (Wrocław—Stare Miasto — trenches II, V, VI). The frequency of finds linked with spinning or weaving was equal both in the stronghold and in open settlements. This was domestic activity (Fig. 7). There are very remarkable quantitative and qualitative differences in production in the stronghold and in the open settlements. The results of archaeological investigation of other sites do not support the hypothesis that Polish medieval strongholds were inhabited by numerous craftsmen. For, the rare traces of production could also be linked with the activity of servants, itinerant craftsmen or the domestic production of warriors living in the strongholds. Knights, living in strongholds, were linked much more with distribution than with production (Fig. 8).

The consequence of the “stronghold—town” theory reception was the multiplication of the crafts present at the strongholds (*e.g.*, Hensel 1963:103, 1967:98). In effect, at the Opole stronghold in 11th century several dozen crafts were suggested, *e.g.*, carpet-weaving, locksmithing, needle-making, boat-building, *etc.* (Kostrzewski 1961:183). As in other cases the reason for misunderstanding remains the same — terminological inaccuracy. Authors used the term “craft” as synonymous with the “handicraft” and “domestic production” strengthening the “urban” character of archaeological evidence. In many cases some finds or a single find were the foundation for too far-reaching interpretations. For instance, one fragment of crucible with traces of glass (from the rampart) was taken as the evidence of developed glass-working at the Niemcza stronghold. The “facultative” terminology one can find in many works. Kostrzewski offers a good example when writing (1961:183): “not all crafts discussed here were carried on as a profession but were

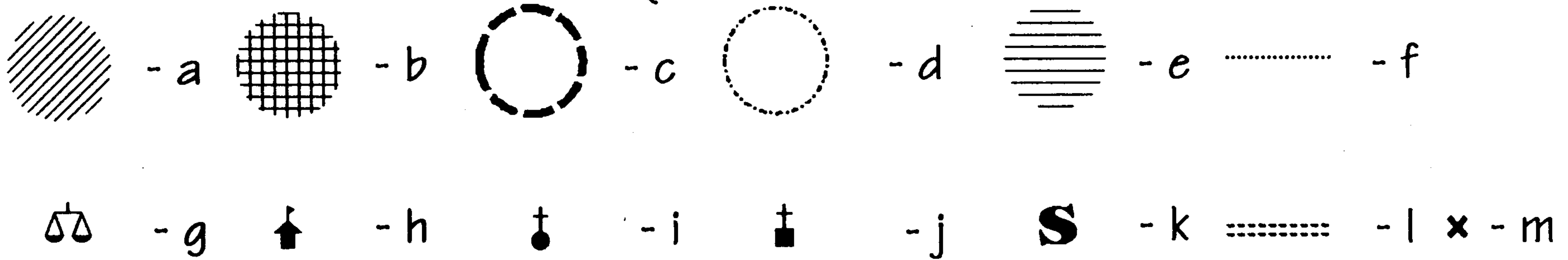
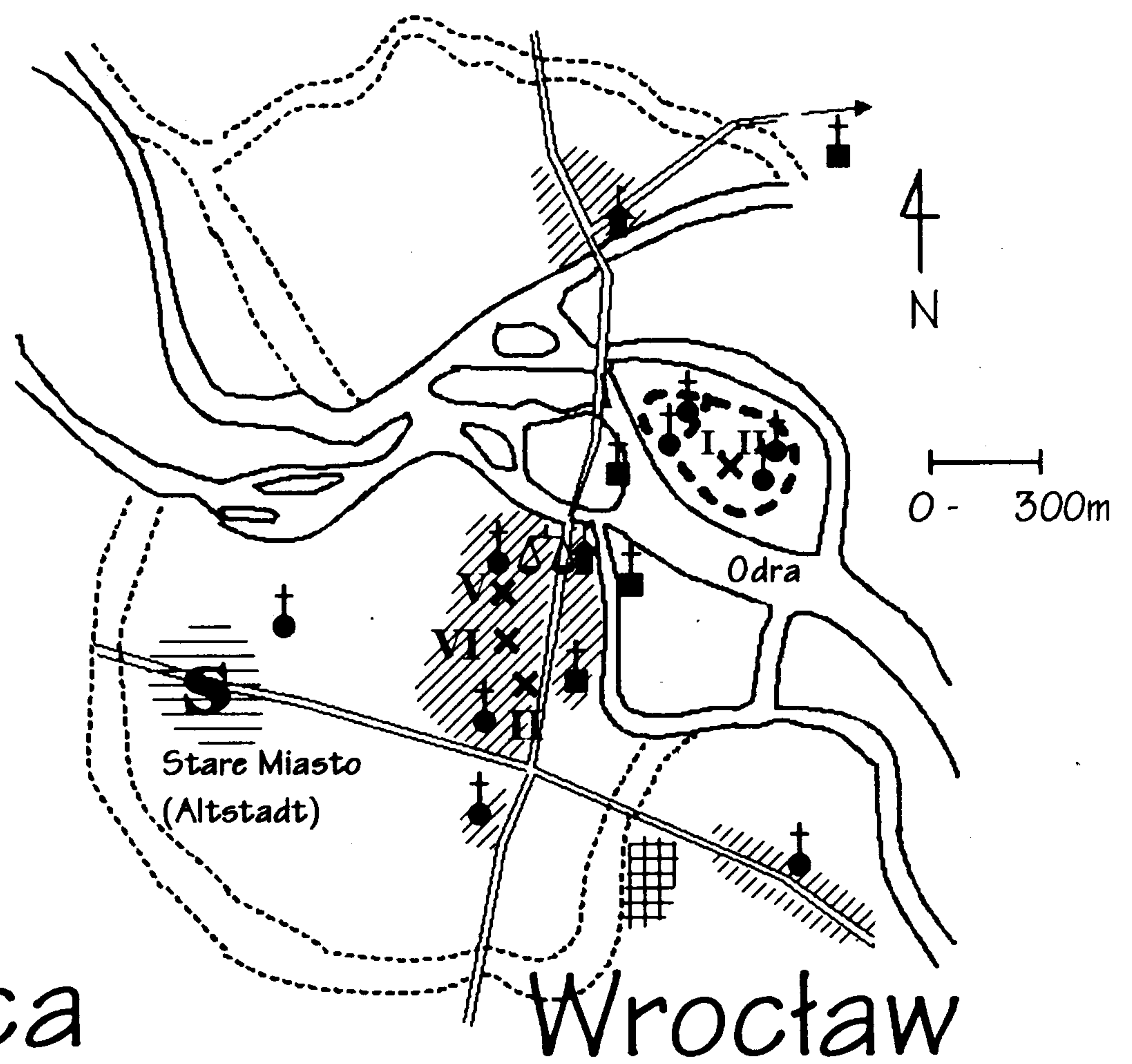
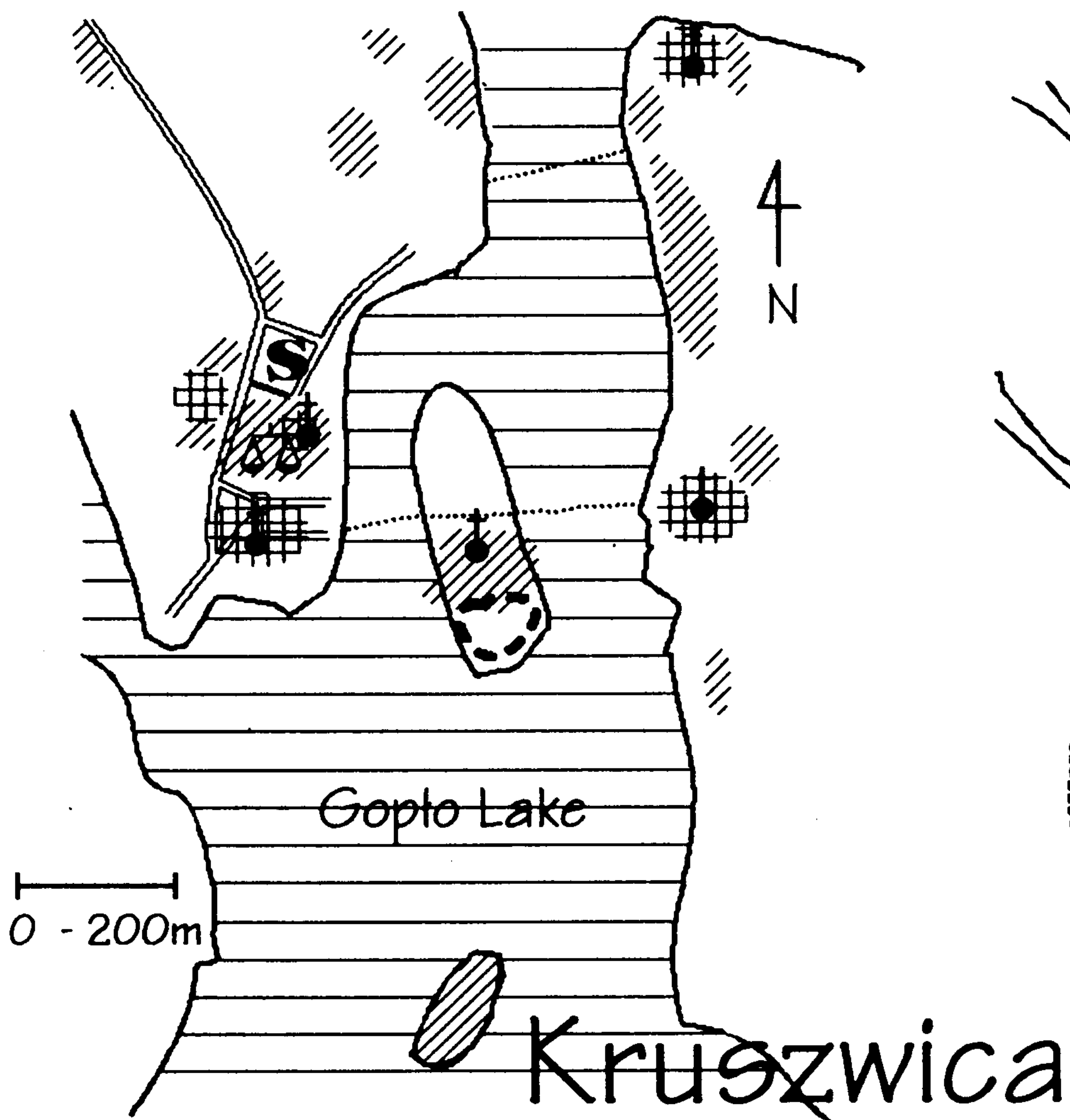
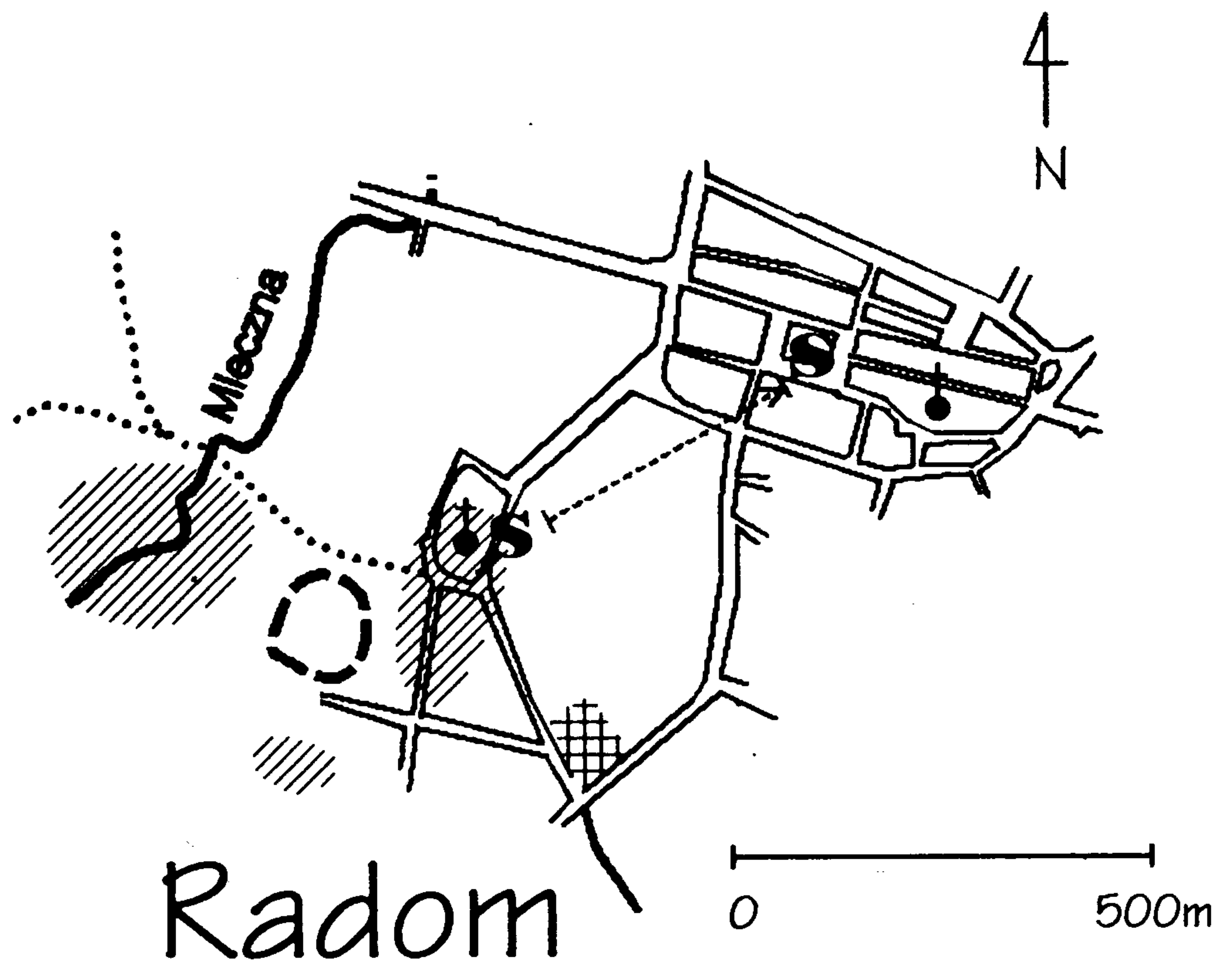
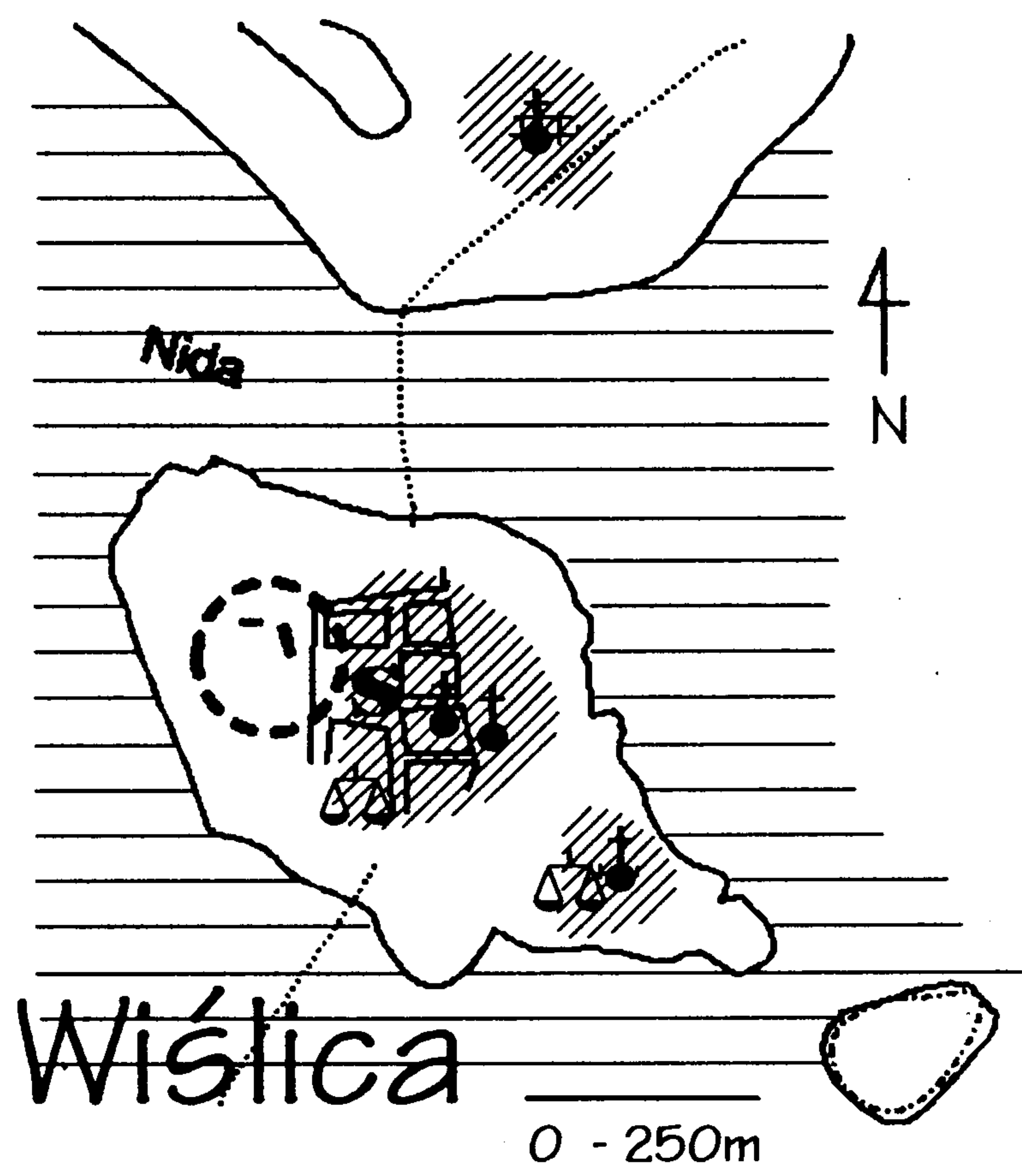


Fig. 4. Examples of early urban complexes in 11-12th century Poland: a - open settlements, b - cemeteries, c - strongholds (*grody*) - 11-12th c., d - tribal stronghold - 9-10th c., e - so-called Old Town in Wrocław, f - roads, g - markets, h - custom points, i - church, j - cloister, k - located town, l - old river channels, m - archaeological trenches mentioned in text.

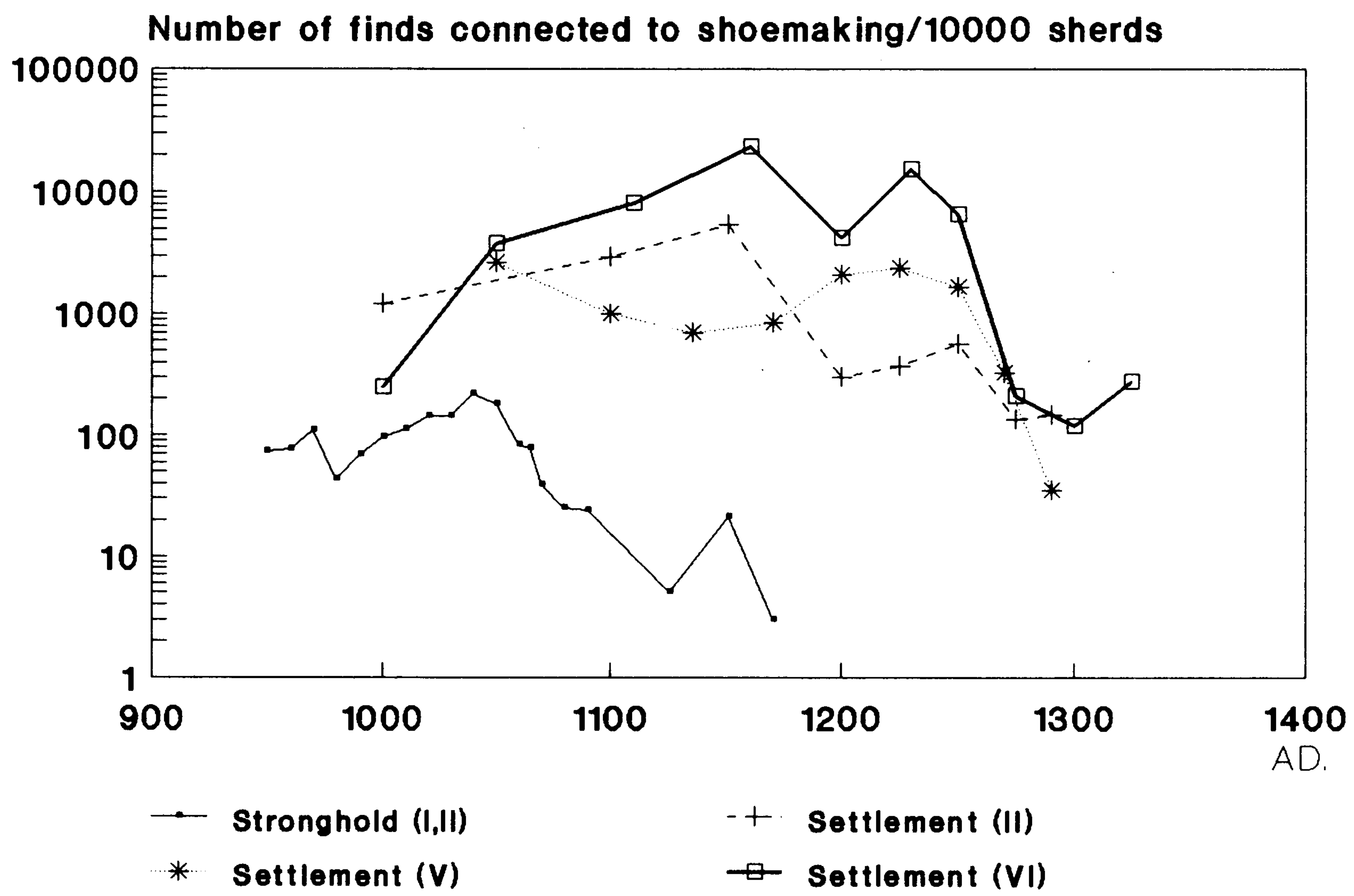


Fig. 5. The trends of shoemaking activity in Wrocław. Data points mark culture layers.

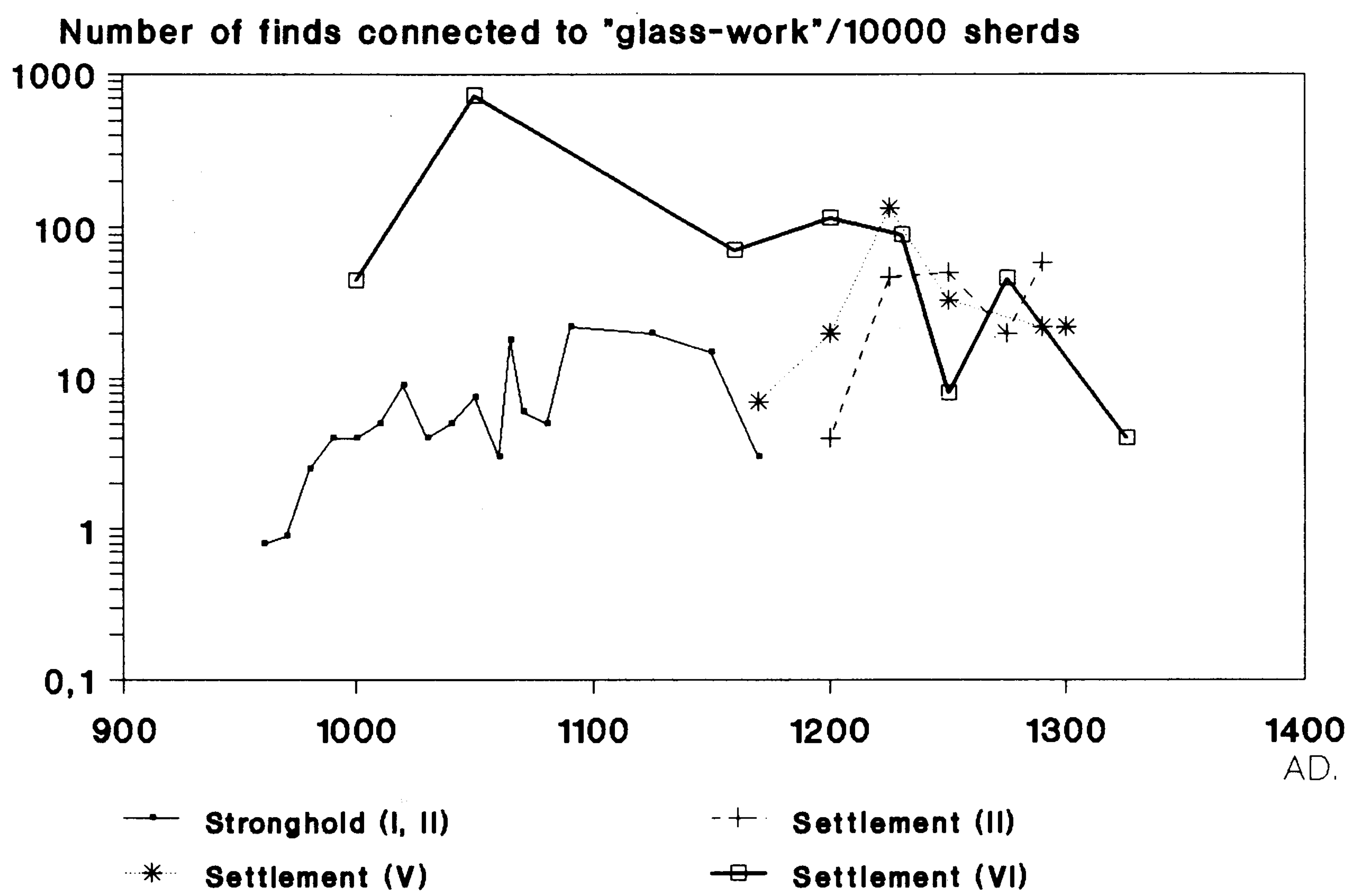


Fig. 6. The trends of glass-working activity in Wrocław. Data points mark culture layers.

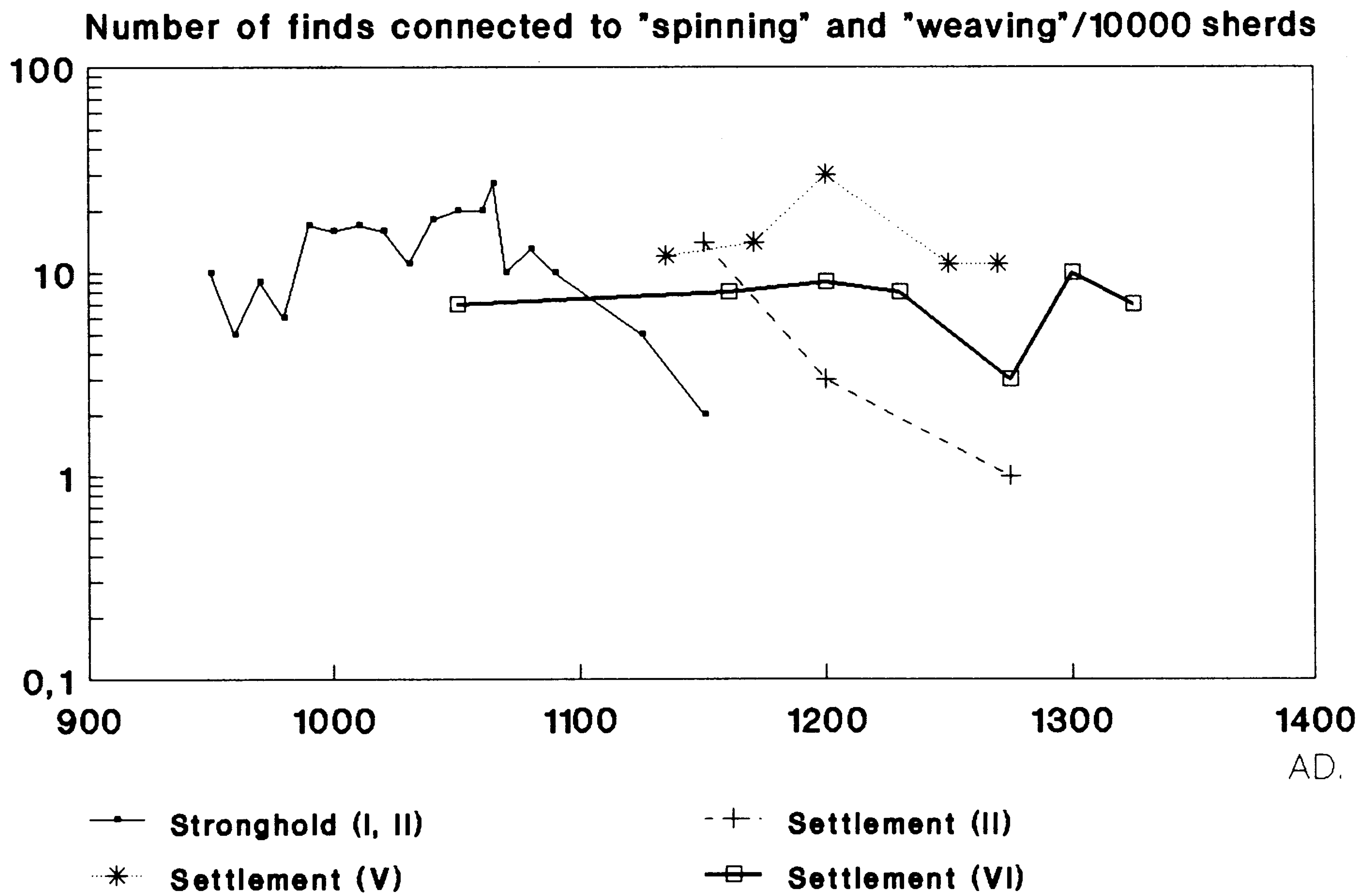


Fig. 7. The trends of spinning and weaving activities in Wrocław. Data points mark culture layers.

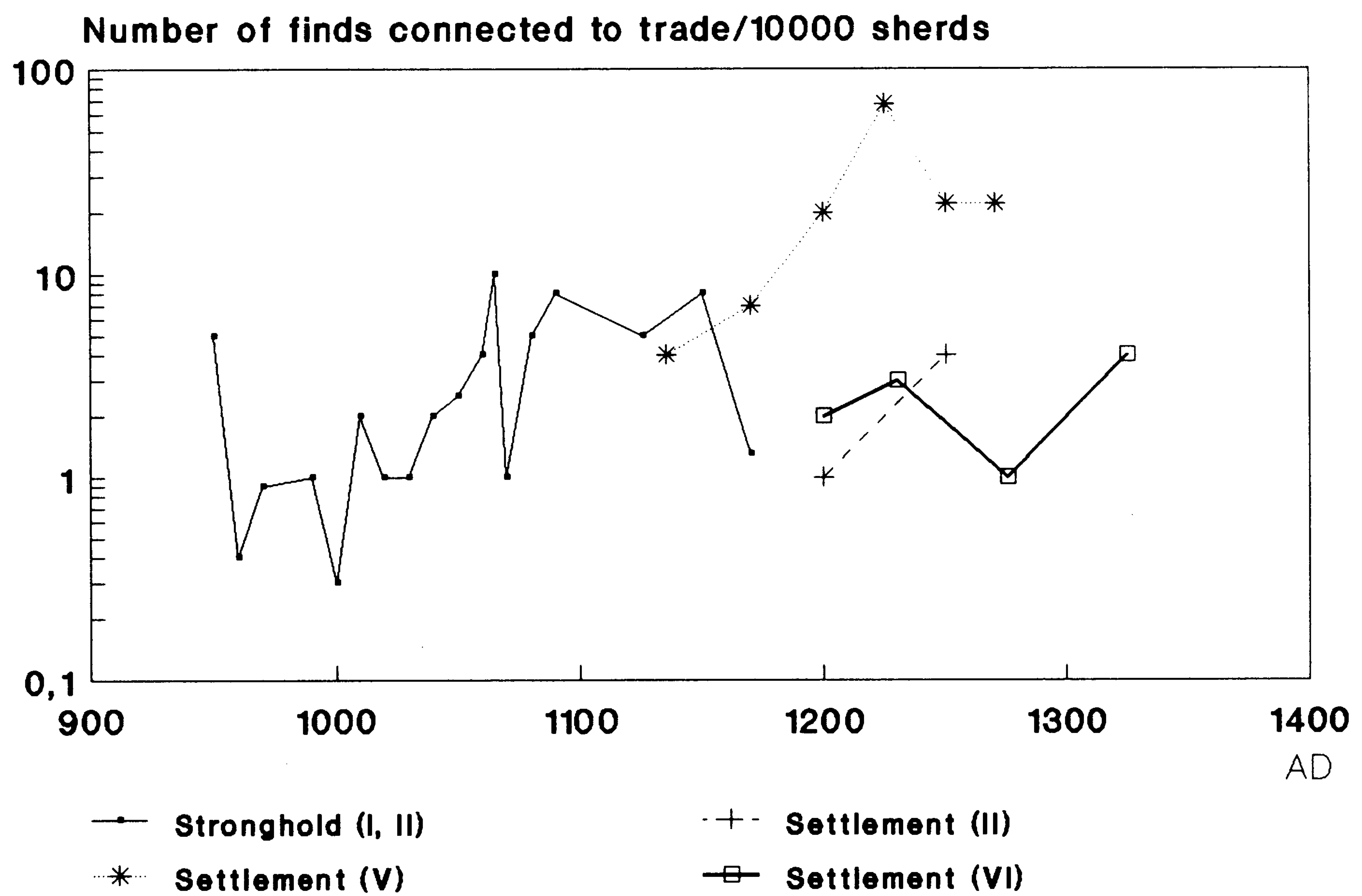


Fig. 8. The trends of trading activities in Wrocław. Data points mark culture layers.

partly a side—activity of the villagers”. Could craft be a side activity? As long as we cannot archaeologically differentiate these two types of production, we can not speak about developed craft production in early Polish strongholds but only about domestic production.

The next consequence of terminological inaccuracy was a more and more frequent interchangeable use of terms “*gród*” (stronghold) and “*miasto*” (town), seizing the ambiguity of term “*civitas*” used in medieval written sources.

The result of the assumption that a stronghold community was very much stratified was the multisectional reconstructions of Polish strongholds. In separate sections would live merchants, craftsmen, priests, feudals, plebs, *etc.* These superficial generalizations drawn on the basis of finds from the initial phase of excavations are not always as firmly supported as one could wish. The next reason for this type of reconstructions was the assumption (based on Marxists methodology) that the Polish town was an effect of fully developed feudal relations. Archaeologists were (and still are) looking for the divisions inside the stronghold, and especially for the “seat of the lord”. Today many strongholds seem to have no sections (Kruszwica, Poznań?, Legnica, Głogów, Wrocław?, Opole). These divisions could have existed (Moździoch 1992) but not necessarily in the form of fortifications, because the social stratification was not so clear at that time.

In the light of these observations it is necessary to verify some models of the Polish “stronghold—towns”. Who did live in Polish strongholds in the 11—12th centuries? The written sources do not mention craftsmen but knights seated in strongholds are sometimes mentioned. This evidence was reviewed by Łowmiański (1967:447—64, 1985:607—27, 683—92). Both in the Gallus Chronicle and in the Thietmar’s we can find information of this kind (*Gall*, III:7; *Thietmar*, I:16, III:6, III:24, IV:22, V:10). They also both mentioned the families and belongings of stronghold knights (*Gall*, III:8; *Thietmar*, VI:59).

One may conclude, then, that no craftsmen nor merchants but ordinary knights inhabited the strongholds. In Bohemian written sources the stronghold inhabitants are named as *presidium*, *milites*, *vigiles* and *custodes murorum* (Slama 1986:30). Servants, farmers or craftsmen are mentioned only occasional, and in these cases it is very difficult to conclude whether they inhabited strongholds or settlements around (Slama 1986:31). Stronghold knights were known both in Poland and in Bohemia and Hungary (Slama 1986:83ff.; Gyorffy 1976:332ff.; Łowmiański 1967:447—64, 1985:607—27, 683—92; Modzelewski 1975).

The presence of knights at strongholds is confirmed also by the great frequency of weapons and horse harness finds. It was particularly noticeable in the case of the Opole stronghold of which 55% was investigated. There the finds of weapons were plentiful. Wachowski (1984:81) who analysed these finds, suggested that ordinary knights, engaged in domestic production in their free time, lived

there. Archaeological traces of such activities are different from the traces of craft production. The traces of craft production are so rare that we cannot attribute to them “urban” character. In many cases the overinterpretation of archaeological data was supported by statements of other scholars without verifying them. In this way the “stronghold—town” theory, as many other archaeological theories, became “self—verifying”.

The traces of workshops are first of all to be found out of stronghold fortifications, in open settlements. Archaeological investigations concentrated on strongholds only in a very small degree concerned their hinterland. The results we obtained hitherto show that many traces of craftsmen production like smithing, shoemaking and glass—working were found outside the strongholds of Wrocław (Kaźmierczyk 1966, 1970), Sądowel (Lodowski 1972), Opole (Kaźmierczyk 1959), and Głogów (Lasota 1972:73—85). There were only a few more or less detailed regional investigations of the surrounding settlements. As we shall see below the regional approach is fundamental for the understanding of this type of production and exchange. Parallel to the stronghold net, the system of servant settlements was created in their districts, in some cases at quite a long distance (Modzelewski 1975; Moździoch 1990). There were produced many goods delivered to the strongholds. In the Wrocław stronghold contamination of cereals with characteristic sorts of weeds proved their provenience from various fields (Kosina 1977:257—67). It could confirm the hypothesis about the collection of cereals at strongholds. They originated from tributes payed by local people.

One may conclude then, that the stronghold in the 11—12th century was only a part of the early Polish town. To specify the term “town” one should show the functions that the given centre fulfilled. The more functions the local centre fulfils the more one could qualify it as a town. I think that one should understand by the term “town” or “early town complex” a complex of settlements consisting of a stronghold (as *acropolis*, military—administrative—ideological centre) and surrounding open settlements (places for production and distribution of goods and information). This model of a town remains invariable from the middle of the 11th century to the first half of the 13th century. Then, together with the breakdown of the system of ducal law it was necessary to change the form of the local centre to one not so as expensive but more efficient.

The process of the downfall of the Ducal Law system began in the first half of the 12th century when the administrative bureaucracy, and later (in the second half of the 12th and in the first half of 13th century) the ordinary knights, received land from the rulers (*Księga henrykowska*, 60). While many of the landowners in the 12th century are mentioned in documents together with the name of the stronghold (Leciejewicz 1968:176, note 51), in the first half of the 13th century more and more they are named together with the name of their estate (property). In the second

half of the 13th century, within written sources, appeared the term "*terrigenae*" replacing the term "*milites*" (Łowmiański 1985:624–5; SUB, III, no. 382, p. 256, 1261 year).

Together with the downfall of stronghold organisation the strongholds lost their significance, which indicated that their existence was linked much more with the administrative—fiscal function than with the function of production and the distribution centre. Lack of evidence for the craft activities of stronghold inhabitants could indicate that distribution was more important for their existence (Moździoch 1991a). The significant role of distribution was certified by the aim of rulers to control all aspects of exchange. In many places, under the control of rulers, proceeded such exchange, both on a local and on an interregional scale. Market—places existing by all castellans strongholds were the places of many transactions but also the places of information exchange.

After World War II within Polish archaeology and history the role of labour division in the process of state and town formation was stressed. The problem of the spatial organisation of economy was very rarely the object of discussion. I agree with John F. Cherry (1978:423) that:

“If centralization and structured hierarchy are, however, quintessential features of complex organizations such as the state [*town — note by SM*], then archaeologist must expect, almost as an article of faith, that these features should be reflected in a spatial component: an on—the—ground pattern can be correlated with the state’s ability to function as a powerful exploitative and coordinating institution”.

If we define the town as a specific form of space formation that fulfilled many functions in the economical organisation of the early medieval state, the discussion about the meanings of terms “town”, “Polish town”, “German town”, “early town”, “located town”, “stronghold—town” becomes meaningless. At the centre of our interest come the central places as basis for state existence.

Based on the spatial distribution of archaeological finds it is possible to reconstruct the areas of settlement concentration in 10th—13th century Poland. The next step to the reconstruction of the spatial structure of the socio—economical base for the net of located towns was the distinction of places where the central places of the 11—12th centuries could function. The changes in economy were reflected especially in the spatial organisation of distribution. It was mentioned above that distribution was at that time more important for the formation of social relations than production. After Silesia was incorporated into the Piast state the change in distribution organisation was based on the control of the exchange in market—places by the strongholds. At the centre of newly formed stronghold districts, market—places were founded and in the district peripheries came the existence of small exchange — market places or public houses (*tabernae*). Distribution was clearly only one of the central functions and hence the choice of place was very important. These places are very difficult to identify but we can try to reconstruct at least fragments of this network.

The following assumptions could help us in this reconstruction:

- a) nearly all old centres are known by such archaeological finds as silver hoards, means of exchange, coins, scales, weights, *etc.*;
- b) one could find the old central places near the junctions of major communication routes, in the vicinity of bridges and fords, where the control of exchange was easy to fulfil;
- c) one could identify these old centres thanks to old local names linked with market—place tradition (in Poland such names as *Piątek* [Friday], *Sobota* [Saturday], *Środa* [Wednesday]);
- d) the churches were founded (mentioned) before 1250. The church at that time was a very effective place for people to meet in order to exchange goods and ideas (Moździoch 1991c:174, note 44);
- e) market—places existed in the 11th century probably by every castellan stronghold;
- f) a distance of less than 6—8 km between two low—level central places was very rare in this time (Hodder and Orton 1976:57ff.; Moździoch 1991c:174, note 43);
- g) the old central places existed first of all inside major settlement concentrations.

The analysis of this information shows us a partly reconstructed network of distribution centres in the 11—12th centuries (Fig. 9a). It was a system where higher—level centres were strongholds with surrounding settlements and low—level centres (for example the markets [*fora campestris*] or public houses [*tabernae*]). This system of local centres is like the hierarchical spatial ordering of centres based on the “administrative” principle (Smith 1975:98ff., 119ff.; Losch 1961). The administrative principle divides territories so that all lower—level centres were submitted to one higher—level centre only (Fig. 10a). Each high—order centre controls its dependent centres and hinterland exclusively.

Here economic position rested on the position in the exchange economy: by controlling the places, timing and means of exchange the dominant group and their retainers would control the economy more safely than by controlling production resources. This system always suggests “imposition of the economic system by rulers — perhaps the imposed arrangement of ‘administered’ trade, tribute collection...” (Smith 1975:99ff.). The position in the economy was determined by the position in the polity. This system of “administered” distribution and redistribution is very effective for a military dominant group. But it is costly to administer because of its inherent economic inefficiency.

Modern net of major centres in Poland developed on the basis of the system, which was built by the first Polish rulers in the 11—12th centuries. In the 12th century began the first attempts by the political administrators (Silesian princes) to allow a free market. It would result in a “transport” system of local centres (in Poland in the 13th century), *i.e.*, located towns (Fig. 9b). This system evolved from

the “administrative system”. It maximised the position of centres on a limited number of roads by locating lower-level centres between two higher-level ones (Fig. 10b). Transport was an important element of economic control. Position in the stratification system would be strongly affected simply by residence inside or outside urban centres, for control of the exchange economy would be exercised from urban centres. Both moments: the rise of the stronghold organisation, *i.e.*, the administrative system (the middle of the 11th century) and the birth of the system of the Polish towns, *i.e.*, transport system (beginning of the 13th century) are observable in archaeological sources.

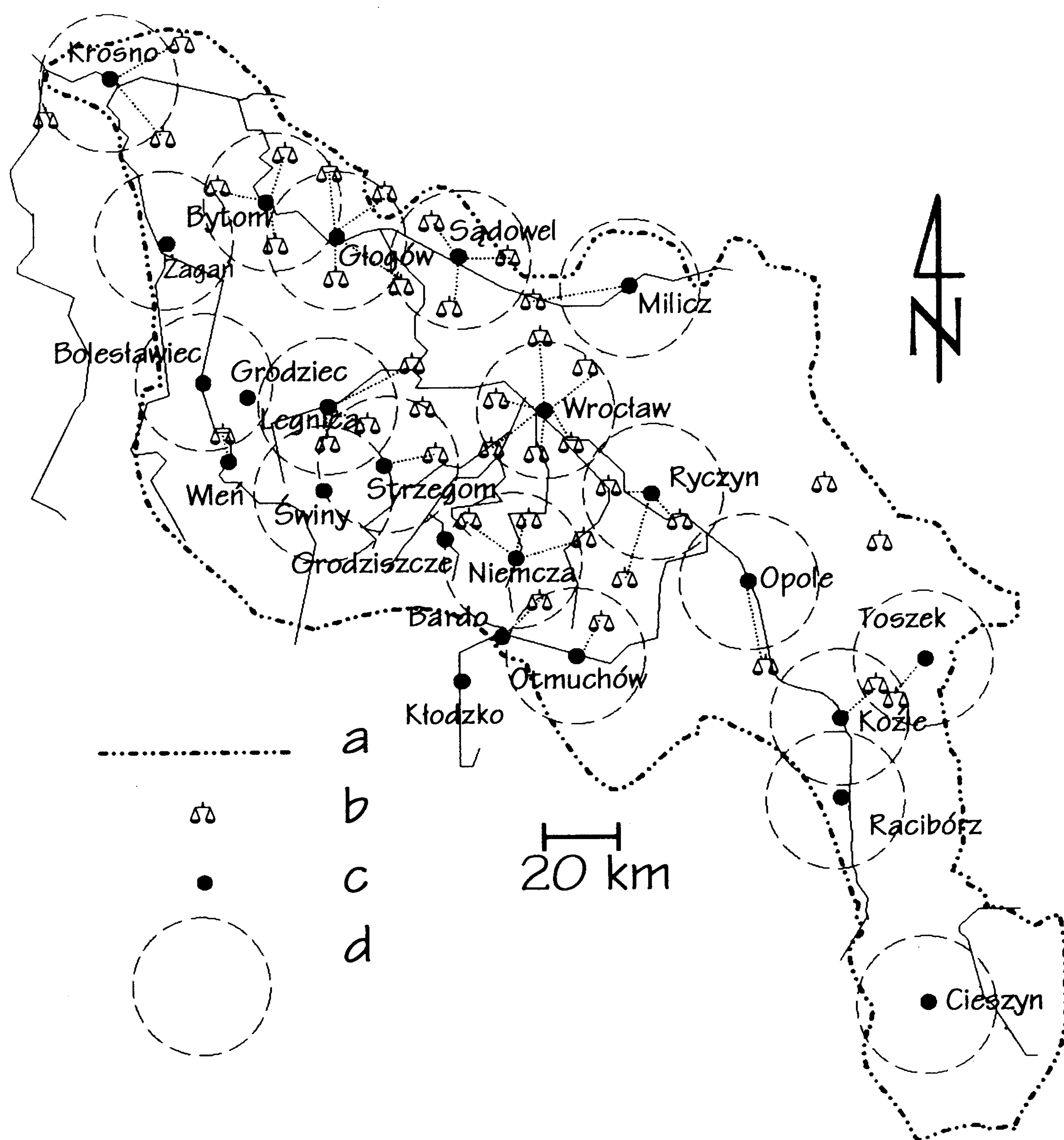


Fig. 9a. Silesia in 11–12th c. — network of central places: a — province borders, b — secondary centres, c — castellan strongholds (primary centres), d — hypothetical range of stronghold economic area.

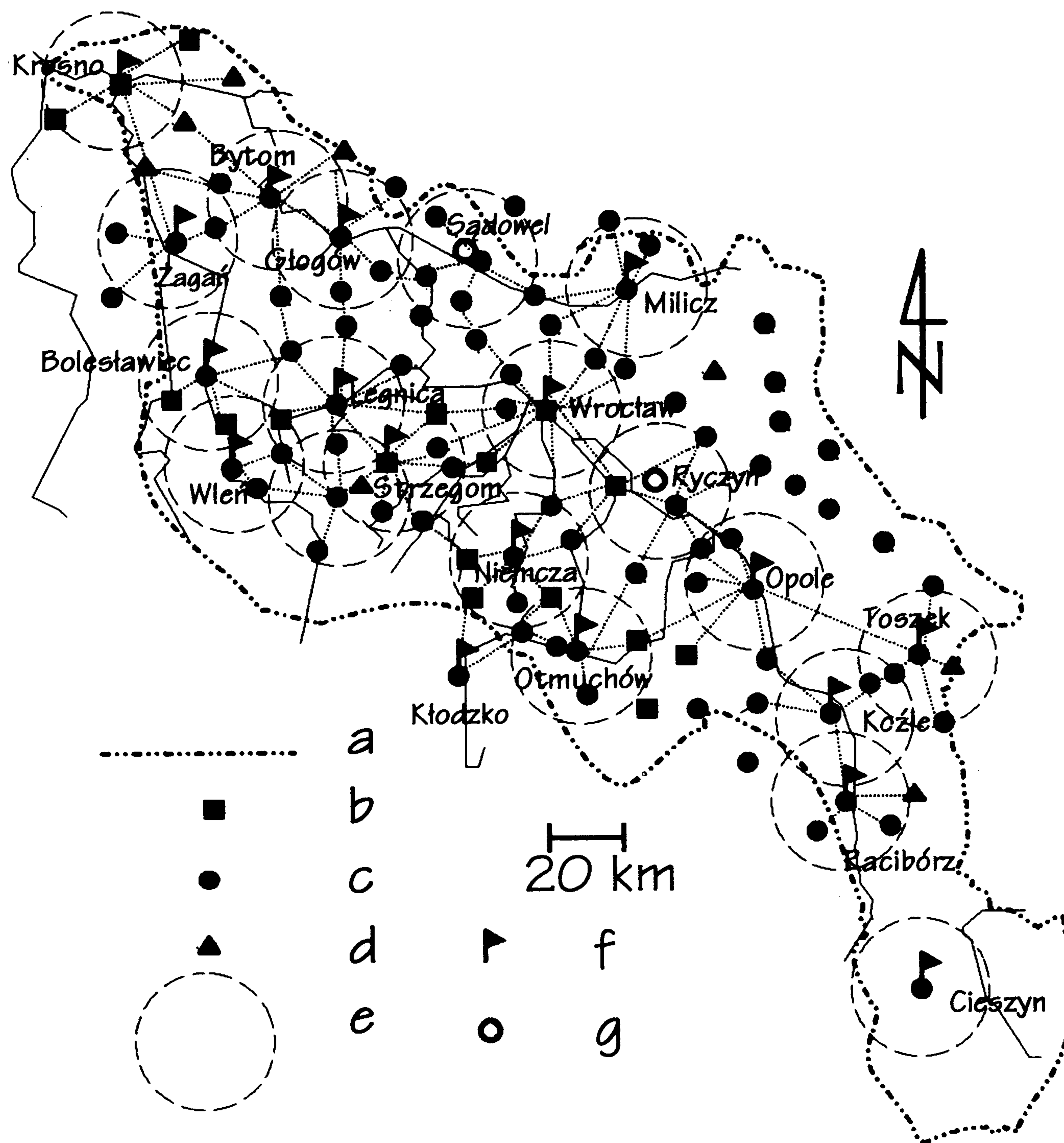


Fig. 9b. Silesia in the 13th c. — network of central places: a — province borders, b — towns located before 1250, c — towns located between 1250 and 1290, d — towns located between 1290 and 1310, e — hypothetical range of the economic area of the higher — level central place, f — towns located near old castellan strongholds, g — deserted castellan strongholds.

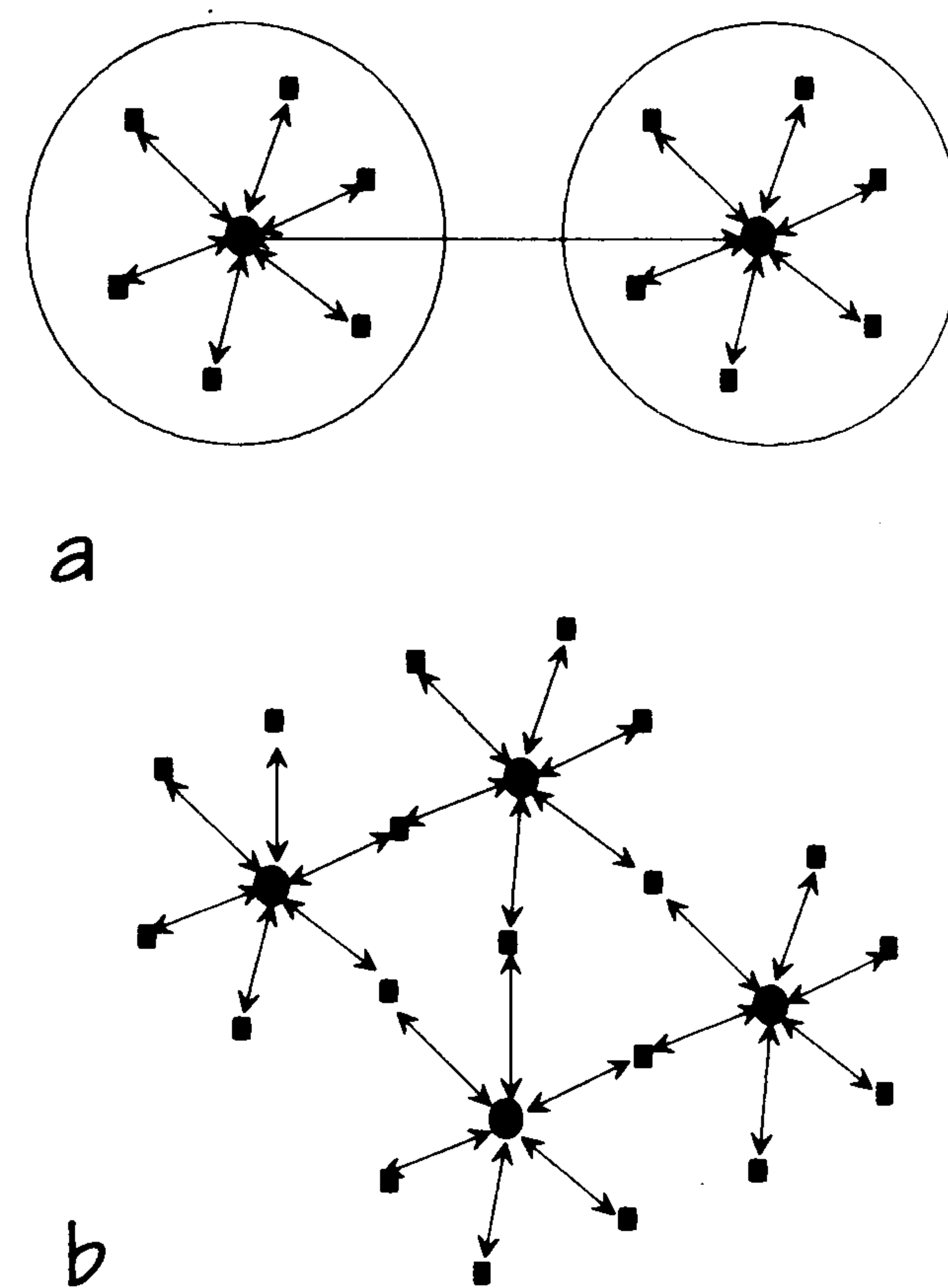


Fig. 10. Spatial ordering of centres based on “administrative” (a) and on “transport” (b) principle. Black circles are high — level centres, squares — low — level centres.

In the Wrocław stronghold in the middle of the 11 century the building structure became more regular (Moździoch 1990: 52–4, fig. 3–5; Kaźmierczyk and Limisiewicz 1990:272). Much the same was the situation in Opole after the second quarter of the 11th century (layer EI – Bukowska–Gedigowa and Gediga 1986:21). In strongholds in Little Poland (Kraków–Okół, Sandomierz) this process is visible from the middle of 11th century and in Great Poland (Poznań) in the 2nd half of the 11th century. Both the chronology and the distribution of hoards shows the rapid growth of local exchange in the 2nd half of the 11th century parallel with the consolidation of stronghold organisation (Moździoch 1991c). An interesting archaeological example of innovative distribution is the distribution of English

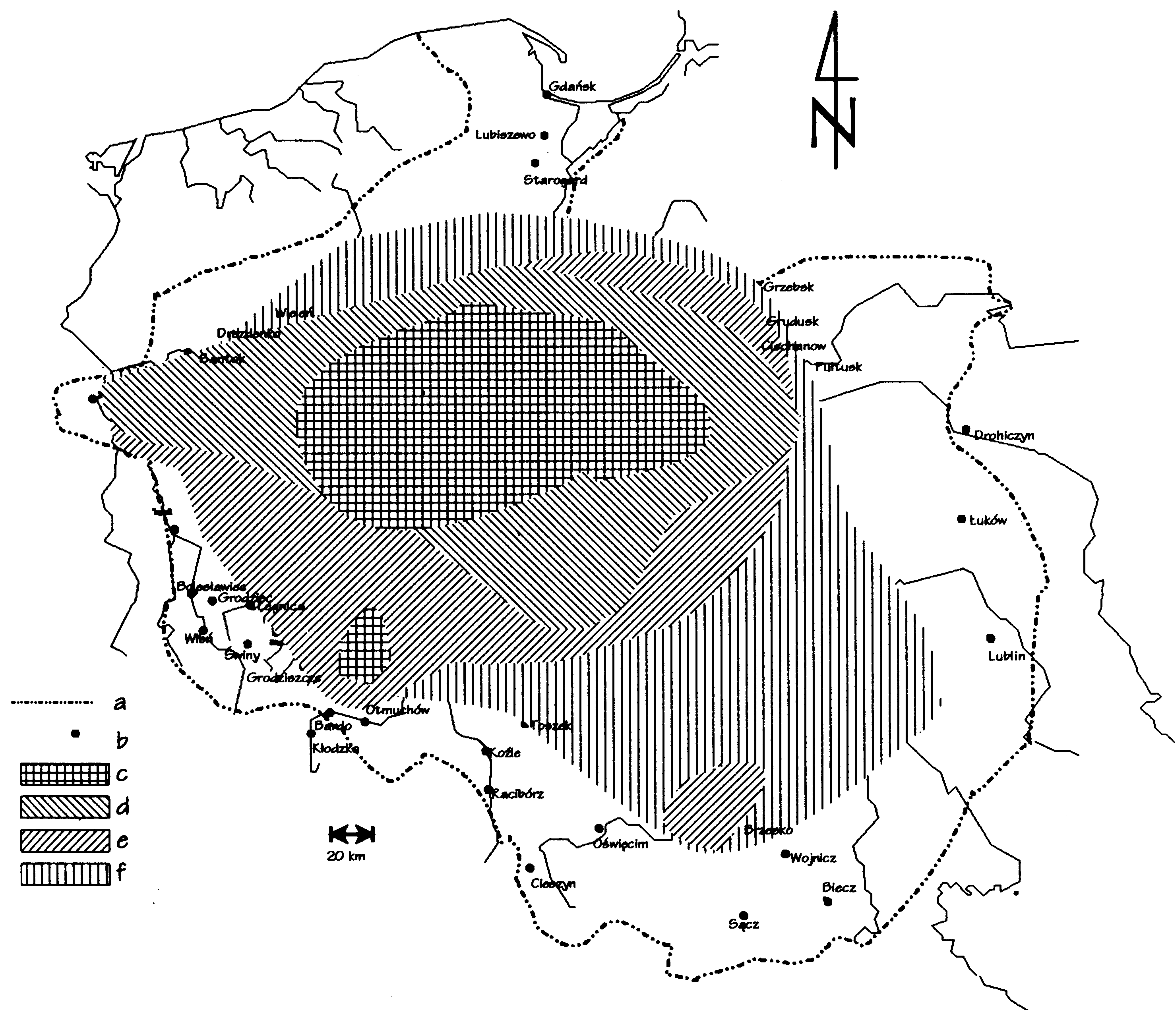


Fig. 11. Finds of hoards with coins of Ethelred (978 – 1016) and Kanut (1016 – 1035) in Poland (Baltic region excluded): a – state territory, b – castellan stronghold, c – hoards hidden between 990 and 1010 AD, d – hoards hidden between 1010 and 1030 AD, e – hoards hidden between 1030 and 1050 AD, f – hoards hidden after 1050 AD.

coins of Ethelred (978–1016) and Kanut (1016–1035). They appeared first in and by major centres and then by smaller centres. The distribution of hoards shows how slowly these coins were accepted (Fig. 11). It required 50 years in order for them to come from Wielkopolska (Great Poland) to Małopolska (Little Poland). In the next century this time span became shorter. It was connected with the faster and faster circulation of coins.

Distribution maps of silver hoards from the 10th century show concentrations by the centres of the biggest Silesian tribes (*Ślężanie*, *Dziadoszanie*). Then, in the first half of the 11th century almost all hoards came out along the crucial roads. In the second half of the 11th century there was a marked coincidence between the distribution of hoards and the high- and low-level centres (strongholds and market-places).

The second important moment in the economic development of the Polish state is dated to the first half of the 13th century. The bureaucracy, increasing in number, could not be supported. Hence, there developed other sources of income than simple redistribution. The economic role of landownership was growing. The stronghold as a form of space organisation also changed parallel to the changes in economy. The same concentration process that was characteristic of changes in the spatial organisation of the economy in Poland in the 8–13th centuries can also be observed in the reduction of the stronghold area (from several hectares in 8th–10th centuries, to 0.5–1 ha in 10–12th centuries, and 0.05–0.5 ha in 13–14th centuries). In the new economical system the territorial stronghold organisation in its previous form was useless. The most evident archaeological signs of the collapse of this organisation were: destruction of strongholds, devastation of fortifications, thinning of build-up inside strongholds.

New centres (located towns) acted as the gaps in barriers (cultural, geographical, economical). They enabled the diffusion of innovations. With the first located towns to Poland came new settlers who proposed new solutions for the organisation of the economy, technology and building. This is seen, for instance, in coincidence within the growth-rate of the number of located towns (Fig. 12a) and the proportion of “gray” ceramics found among the pottery in towns in different provinces of the Polish state (Fig. 12b). The trend of town formation in Silesia with its great dynamics looks like that of the participation of “urban” ceramics found among the pottery from Wrocław–Stare Miasto. Similar are also the trends for Little Poland (Kraków–Okół) and Great Poland (Poznań–Szewska 6). It is very interesting that this new technology of pottery was accepted in small centres much more slowly (*e.g.*, Międzyrzecz in Great Poland). Then, after the breaking of the “innovations barrier”, amounts of “gray” ceramics rose there as rapidly as in major centres (Poznań) in the same province.

number of located towns

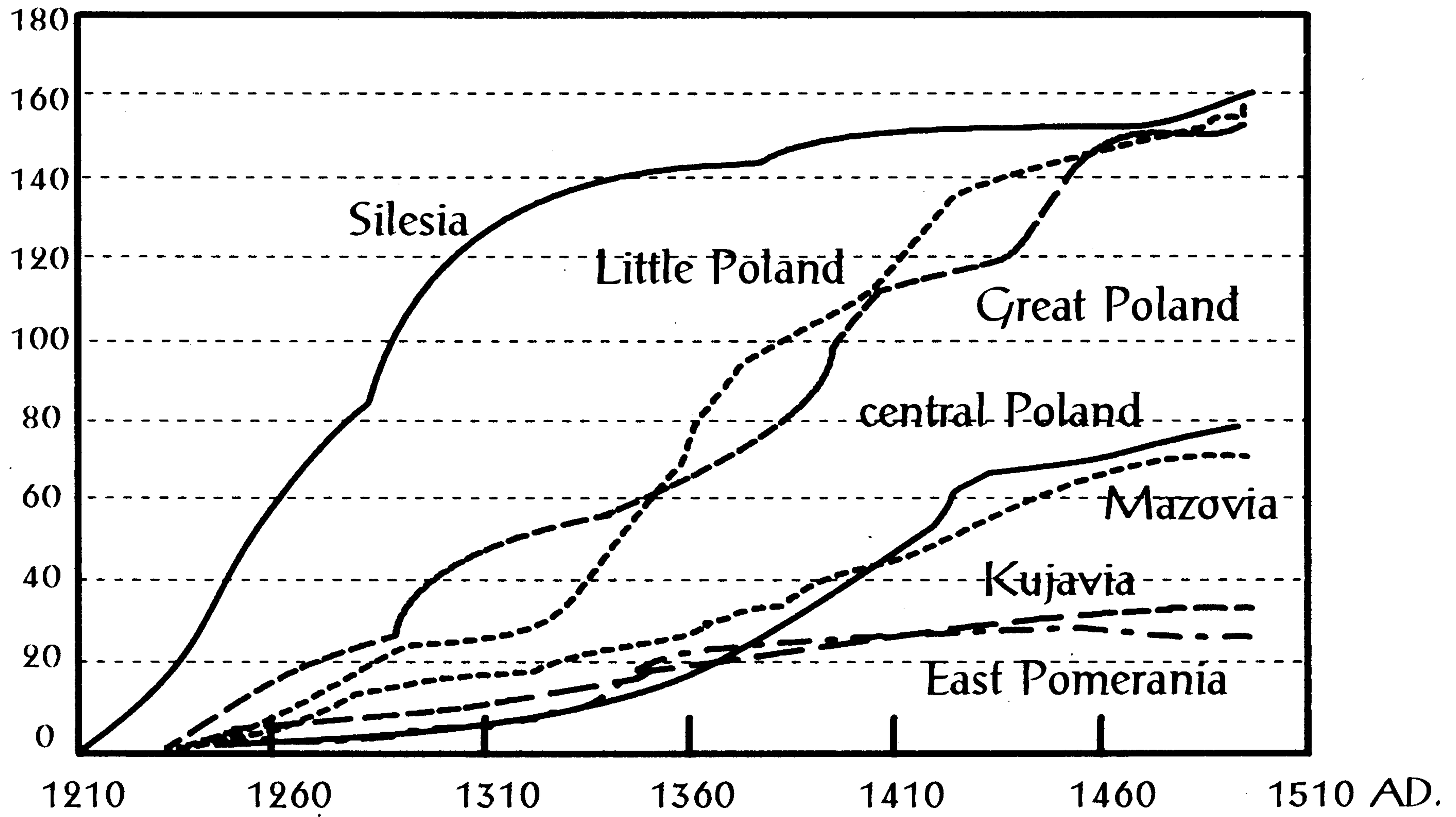


Fig. 12a. Number of towns located in various provinces of Poland during the 13–15th c. (smoothed trend lines).

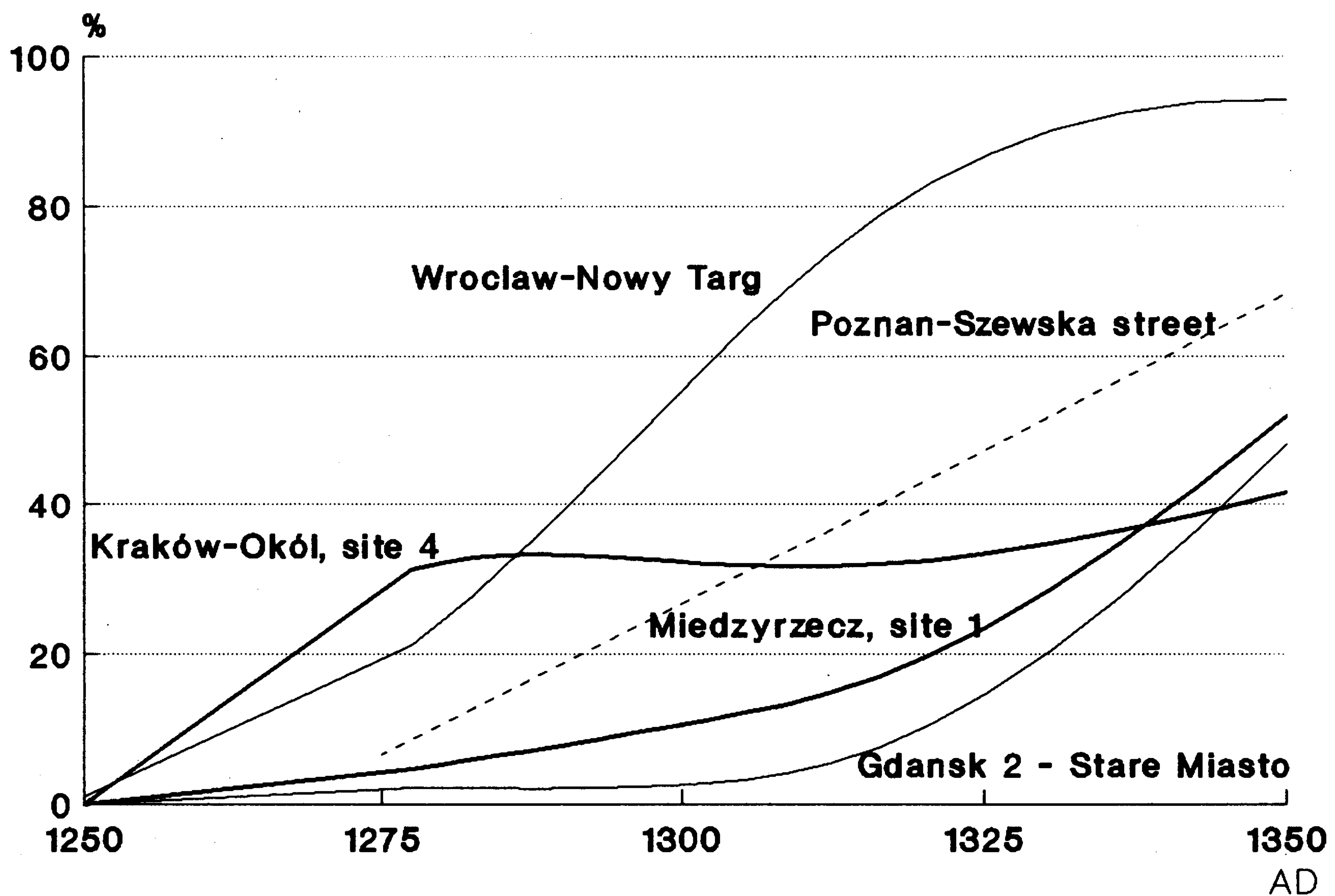


Fig. 12b. Percentage trends of "urban" pottery (dark – grey and brick – red) in collections from various towns, *i.e.*, the dynamics of new technology acceptance: a – Gdańsk 2 – Stare Miasto, b – Międzyrzecz, site 1, c – Wrocław–Nowy Targ, d – Poznań – Szewska Street 6, e – Kraków–Okól, site 4 (smoothed trend lines). After Kaźmierczyk 1970, Kurnatowska 1973, Kruppé 1981.

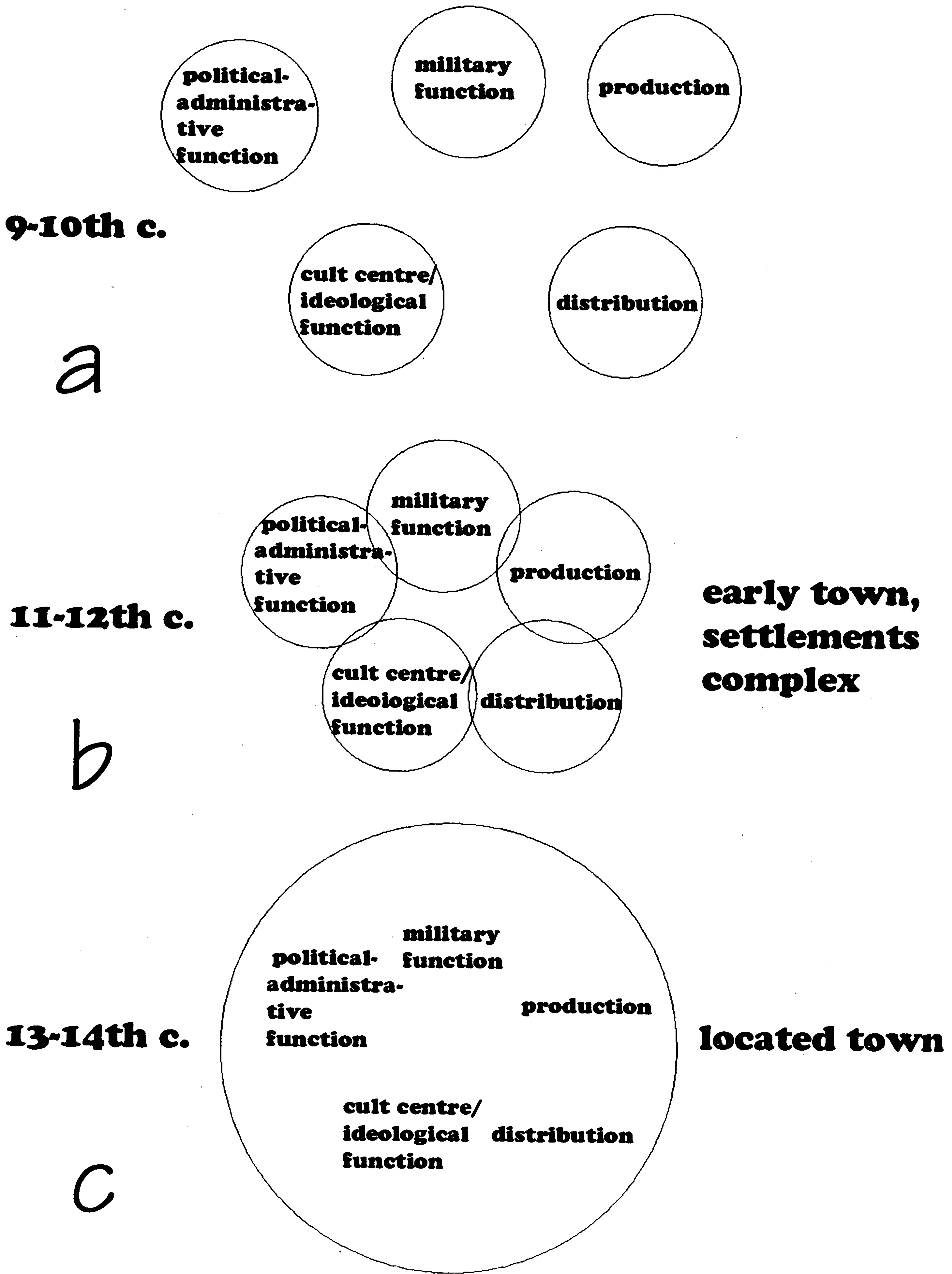


Fig. 13. Development of central places in Silesia.

Local centres were functioning in the 13th century in all Polish provinces under various law orders. But, if they were located towns, settlement complexes with Ducal Law (Polish law) or rural market—places, their origins were conditioned by historical (old power centres), geographical and economic (location) factors.

In the 9th—10th centuries all the central functions were fulfilled in different places (Fig. 13a). Later, all central functions were located in complexes consisting of settlements, strongholds, *etc.* situated at a short distance from one another (Fig. 13b). The result of this process was the town (located town) which fulfilled all functions within the small area in the form of a closed unit (Fig. 13c). In the course of time this area was surrounded with some kind of retrenchment.

The located towns in the 13th century began to fill the blanks in the peripheries of the stronghold districts. They supported the need for low—level range centres. However many of them were founded near old market—places, strongholds and “settlement complexes”. In this way the network of central places created in Poland by Piasts in the 10th—11th century became the basis for the towns with “German” law. In the 10th century the change in the spatial organisation of economy was based on the destruction of the old tribal centres, what is confirmed in Silesia by burned strongholds. In 13th century the new centres were founded near the old centres and market—places (Fig. 4). The new centres overtook the functions of the old centres and introduced new principles.

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Gall — *Galli Anonymi Cronica et gesta ducum sive principum Polonorum*, K. Maleczyński (ed.), MPH n.s., vol. II, Kraków 1952.

Thietmar — *Kronika Thietmara*, M. Z. Jedlicki (ed.), Poznań 1953.

*Kronikarze czescy — Kronikarze czescy. Kanonik Wyszebradzki. Mnich Szawski*, Warszawa 1978.

*Księga henrykowska* — R. Grodecki (transl.), Poznań 1949.

SUB — *Schlesisches Urkundenbuch*, vol. III, W. Irgang (ed.), Wien 1984.

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