

The medieval settlement complex in Góra, parish Pobiedziska, Poznan voivodeship

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Excavations on the site 1 in Góra near Poznan, carried through 10 digging seasons, provided interesting data concerning settlement changes which took place in this area in the Middle Ages. The site lays on a small (around 1,8 ha) sandy hill, well protected from environmental conditions. From the south the site directly adjoins the bank of Góra Lake, from the east and north it is surrounded by an arm of the Cybina river, and from the west - marshy ground. The area of the hill was (and till today is) accessible practically from the west side only, after crossing the marshy inlet (Fig. 1).

Convenient conditions were conducive to early colonisation, which has developed here at least since the Mesolithic. However, this area was particularly most intensively settled in the early Middle Ages (Kócka-Krenz, Sikorski 1992; 1995; Kócka-Krenz 1995).

The Medieval settlement complex in Góra is composed of several elements, namely:

- constructions enabling passing « dry-shod » to the hill area,
- an open settlement of a rural type,
- a fortified settlement on the top of the hill,
- a wooden tower house.

One can assume that this area was also penetrated in the later periods, though in a different way, indicated by the presence of modern pottery in the humus layer.

I – THE CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE WATER-CROSSING.

Remains of the wooden constructions were found on the narrowing of the natural terrain filled by water, 30-35 m to the west from the foot of the hill. These constructions, which nowadays lie in the peat at a depth of 3-3,5 m, were put across the marshy ground. They correspond to several stages of crossing building which, depending on the water level, has changed its

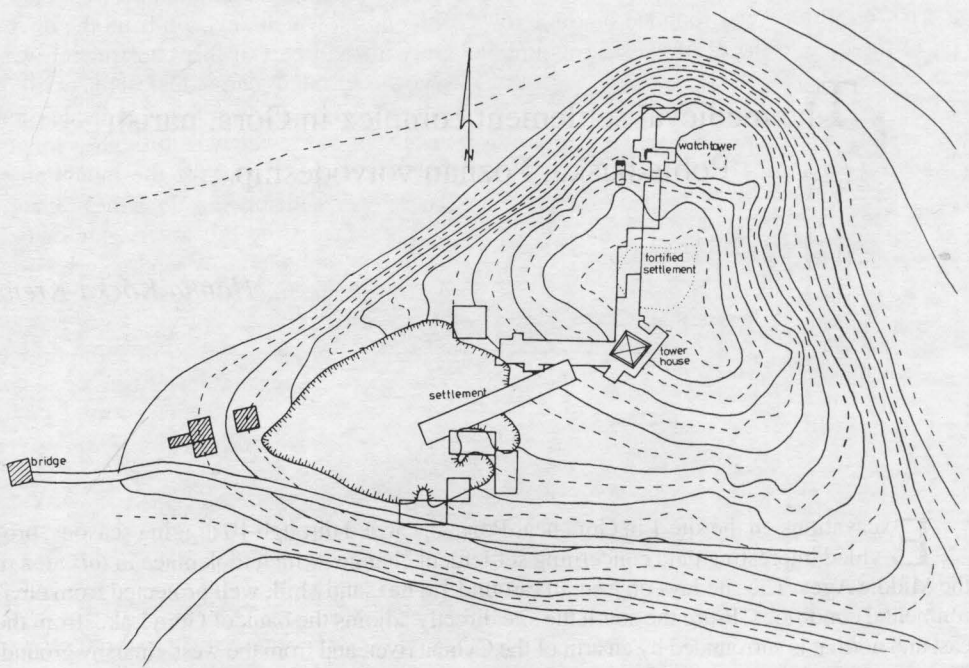


Figure 1: Plan of the site

character (Fig. 2). Initially the turf inlet was strewn with a few layers of loosely composed sticks, strengthened with the stakes set into the bottom. The lack of material hinders the definition of the chronology of this structure. A raising water level caused the inhabitants of the settlement to construct a slightly more solid dike on the marshy stratum, which was built of short, thin wooden stems laid along the edges of the dike and completed with the sticks layer, mostly of birch origin. Pottery material in this construction layer allows us to date the dike to 950 - 1050 A.D. It was probably erected by the population living in the early medieval settlement.

Along with the settlements' developments the dike, intensively used, needed more stable construction. It was rebuilt, and the edges were strengthened by beating the short (0,7-0,8 m) oak posts into the turf, which were stabilized with large field stones. The lathing was put on these posts, which formed the surface of the dike at a breadth of 2,2-2,5 m. The bank of the hill on the settlement side was strengthened with paving-stones. On the basis of the archaeological materials and dendrological analysis, one can assume that in this form the dike functioned in a period between 1050-1200 A.D., and then was partly destroyed and pulled down towards the lake. It was carelessly repaired temporarily by a layer of tiny chopped pieces of wood (c. 1200 A.D.). One can link this dike with the open settlement as well as with the occupation of the fortified settlement on this site.

The ever increasing water level caused the next rebuilding of the crossing, this time foot-bridge made of oak boards, and dated to 1250-1350 A.D. Its direction underwent change. The foot-bridge was founded on three rows of the posts, which deviated from the direction of the dike to the north-west in its middle. Only a small part of this construction was recognised, but its chronological relationship with the wooden tower house indicates that access to the tower was through a longer but more secure way for the inhabitants. The way presumably run along the northern, abrupt edge of the hill to the gate of this defensive foundation. When the tower was destroyed, the foot-bridge also fell down.

In the place of former dike the bridge was subsequently built. It was constructed in winter-time, which is indicated by the find of a so called ice-drill. For this purpose the natural marshy zone was deepened by excavating part of the turf strata. A stable construction was based on posts of 1,7-1,8 m in two rows and were regularly set at every 3,5 m. The distance between the rows was 1,7-1,8 m. Vertical posts, on which the boards of the surface were laid, were strengthened with two abutment posts. This bridge probably functioned until the 15th century, and was then taken to pieces. Only a few bearing posts and small elements were preserved, such as wedges, cuttings off beams and wood cuttings. The negatives of some bearing posts were noticed, but not the boards from the bridge surface, which show intentional demolition of this structure. In its place a modern dike made from sand and clay layers was built up. Until today, this dike has constituted the only way to the hill (Kócka-Krenz, Sikorski 1995).

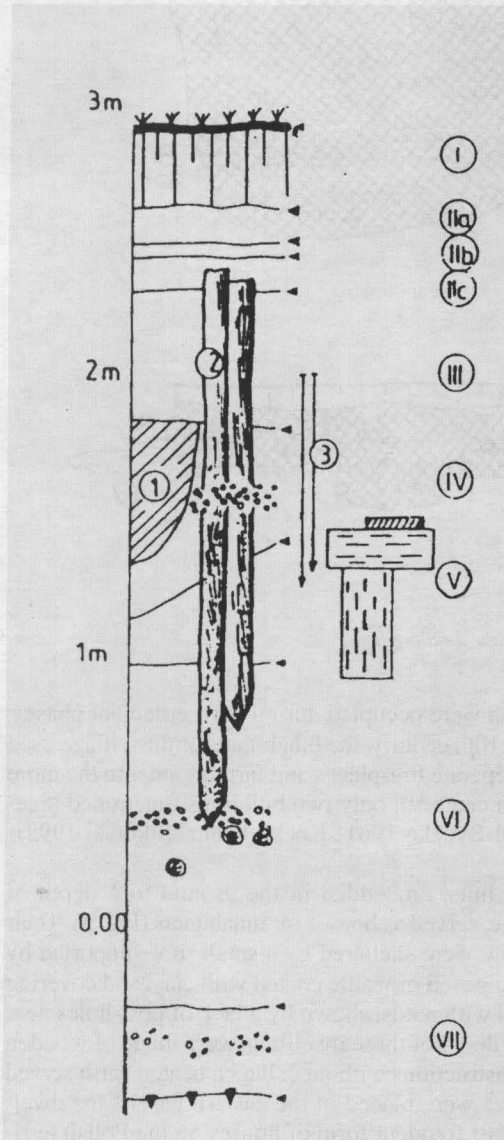


Figure 2: Schematic section of the water-crossing constructions

II - OPEN SETTLEMENT

The early medieval settlement was founded on the western slope of the hill, which gently slopes down towards the marshy inlet. Unfortunately, the settlement was partly destroyed by casual exploitation of the sand. Excavations in the preserved settlement area have brought about the discovery

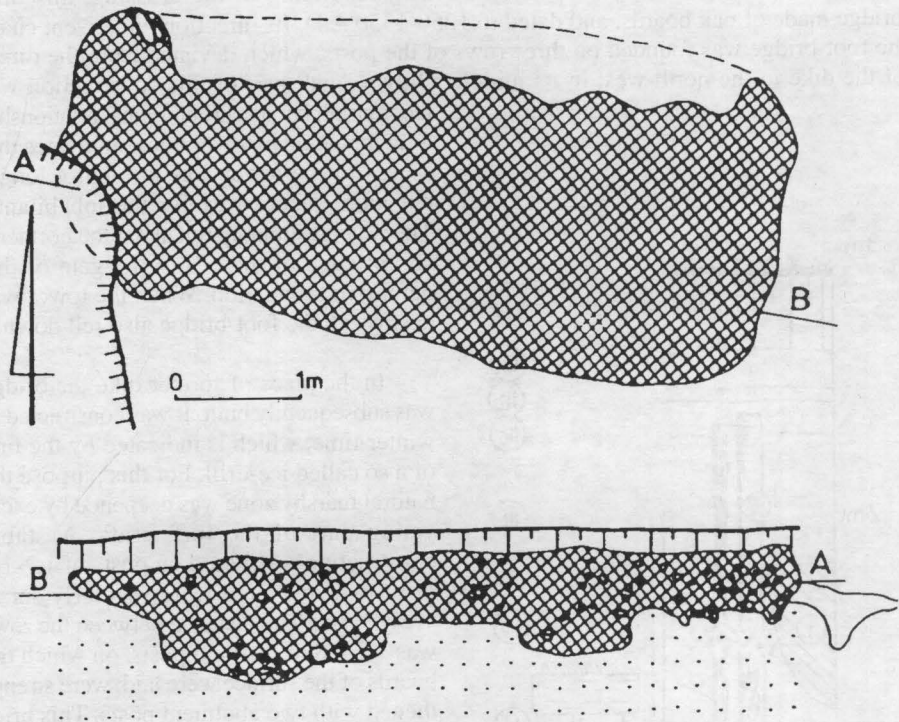


Figure 3: Plan of the dwelling-house

of dwelling houses and farming objects, which were occupied during two settlement phases. In the older phase, dated to the 7th - middle of 10th century, the inhabitants of this village used at least seven dwelling houses together with separate fire-places and farming pits. In the more recent phase (middle of 10th - middle of 11th century), only two buildings functioned together with farming objects (Jasnosz 1960; Kihl-Byczko 1961; Kócka-Krenz, Sikorski 1992).

During all this time rectangular sunken huts, embedded in the ground to a depth of 0,5-0,8 m and situated parallel to the lake's edge, served as houses for inhabitants (Fig. 3). Their entrances were placed in the southern wall and were sheltered by a small roof supported by two posts. The walls of the buildings were composed of wattle coated with clay, and covering these walls, was a pent-roof probably covered with reeds, shown by a lack of post-holes near the shorter walls of the dwelling-houses. The floors of these dwellings were made of wooden planks, covering one or two cellars. In the constructions without cellars a beaten earth served as a floor. Fire-places made from small stones were placed in the eastern part of the dwelling-houses. Dwellings of this type are the most frequent form of houses on the Polish territory in the early Middle Ages (from 6th till 13th century - Jankowska 1971). Except for fire-places inside the dwellings, the inhabitants of the settlement used separate fire-places, for farming purposes during fine weather, and several pits for which it is difficult to attribute a func-

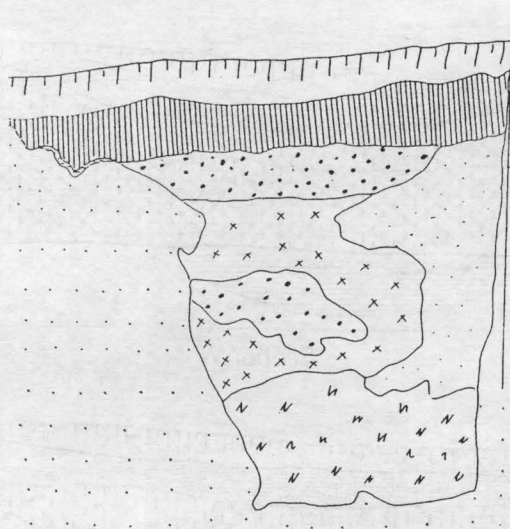


Figure 4: Section of the waste pit

tion have been found. Only one of them, with a sack-form section, and 1,8 m in depth, can be interpreted as a waste pit (Fig. 4). It included pottery fragments, animal bones and humus layers, deposited in three utilizable levels.

The settlement in Góra constituted, regarding the arrangement of the buildings, a type of scattered settlement, with houses situated in varying distances from one another. The farming pits and hearths outside were adjoining. The only longer constant rule was to orientate houses in the east-west direction, with the entrance from the longer southern side, facing the lake. In its earliest phase, the settlement composed an independent unit, making use of the convenient natural conditions. Sufficiently fertile sandy - clay soil was conducive to cereal growing. We are indirectly informed about this by the presence of sherds of roasting pots used for drying and cleaning grain. The inhabitants of this village bred animals - cattle (43,29 %), pigs (33,37 %) and sheep/goats (23,33 %). This meat diet was supplemented by hunting to a large degree (43,98 % of bone remains belonged to the wild animals, mainly roe-deers and deers, which was an untypical phenomenon for the early medieval economy, determining the specificity of this settlement. Fishing also took place in the nearest lake. Household activities included pottery making, wool spinning (the presence of spindle whorls), antler and bone working, and iron object production (presence of iron slag, knives and flints). It was therefore a small, self-dependent community. In the earliest phase, during which the small fortified settlement was built on the top of the hill, two houses sufficed to satisfy the basic needs of a farm.

III – THE FORTIFIED SETTLEMENT

The existence of the small fortified settlement on this site is shown indirectly by the configuration of the top of the hill. In the northern part, a small dale is visible, after which the terrain slightly rises and then comes abruptly down to the river. The dale is probably a part of the

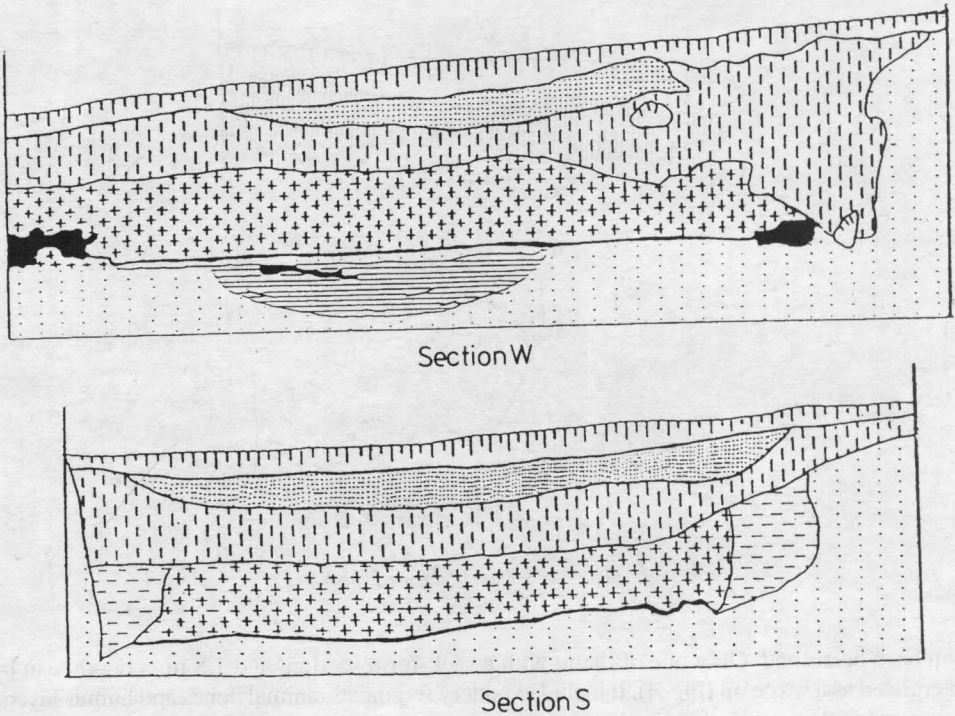


Figure 5: Sections of the tower house

stronghold's maiden. The rest of it was filled in when the area was prepared for the erection of the tower house. On the hill slope under the humus layer a great number of stones can be seen. These stones could originally have strengthened the sandy slope, used as the bottom part of the rampart. The core of the rampart was built of sand, covered with a clay layer. Excavations in this part of the settlement are in progress, and in the future digging season, they should lead to full recognition of the constructions. The southern, western and eastern parts of the rampart, which were put on the more gentle slopes of the hill, could have been erected in a different way. The excavations in the western part of defences brought to light four deep earthworks which were joined in their upper parts, but were separated below, flatly closed, bearing traces of decomposed wood. Its preserved depth was 2,2 m, and width -2,2 m at the bottom. There are also probably the remains of rampart constructions built of separated boxes, filled up with sand. Material in these earthworks included potsherds dated from the mid 10th - mid 11th century, and we situate the use of the fortified settlement to the same period. It was not only used by the inhabitants of the small neighbouring village, but also by the people living close by.

IV – THE TOWER HOUSE

The tower house was founded on the south-western part of the fortified settlement, the rampart of which was partly used for this purpose. Other parts of the rampart were levelled to a plateau for a new foundation. This method was put into practice at other, similar defences, in other parts of the Polish territory (Kola 1991, 81 - 97). On such a prepared bank, a pit was dug, measuring 7 x 7,5 m and about 2 m deep (Fig. 5). On its bottom were laid foundation beams, marking a quadrangle, 6,5 x 7 m in size. Side walls planks were placed on these beams in the bottom part of the tower, as well as the floor planks. Particular elements were joined with iron nails, tree-nails and iron fixtures. Space between the earthworks foundations and the tower walls was filled with beaten earth, stabilizing the building. The lower storey was raised as a timber construction (Fig. 6, 7). A door in its southern wall, lead to a corridored entrance, 2 m long and 1,5 m wide. The upper storey was built with a wooden frame filled with clay plaster.

Major structural elements were

joined by the carpenters' method; strengthened with iron fixtures. This is indicated by the presence of a thick burnt clay layer containing of burnt wood, in the tower rubble. Two fragments of plaster decorated with imprints were found in the rubble, these were probably part of the decoration covering the external face of the walls (Fig. 8). Such decoration has been found in the remains of a tower in Jarocin (Grygiel 1994, 13 - 14). This storey was closed with a shingle roof, separate shingles being nailed to the rafter framing (394 specimens of nails were found in the rubble; Kaminska 1968, 31; Wilke 1985, 59). Unfortunately, we do not dispose of any data concerning the appearance of the door and window openings. The only door remains are hinge fixtures, a staple, a padlock and a pair of keys, made of iron. As far as windows are concerned, we may suppose on the basis of analogies, that they were small, longitudinal openings covered with animal bladders or laths (Barnycz-Gupieniec 1974, 64; Wilke 1985, 58). An open

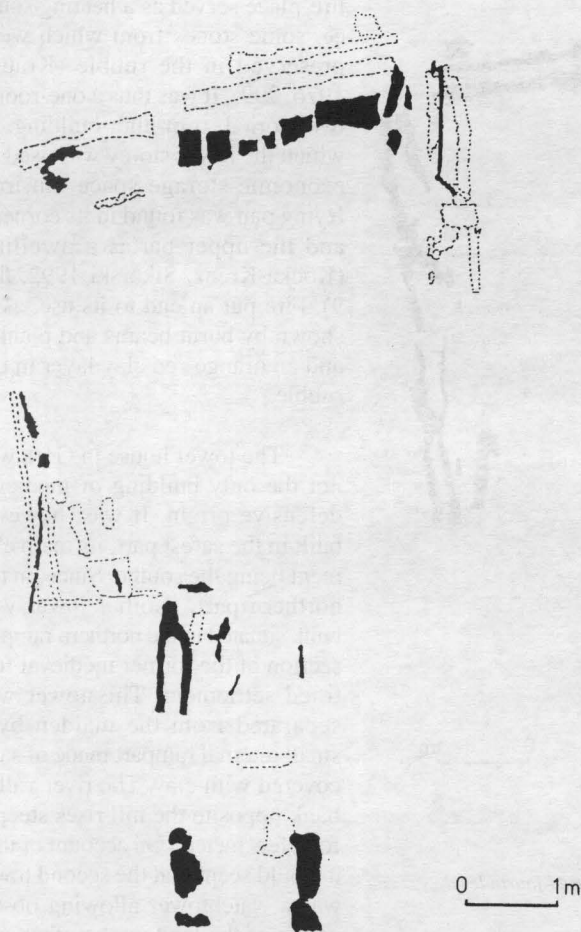


Figure 6: Plan of the tower house - second level

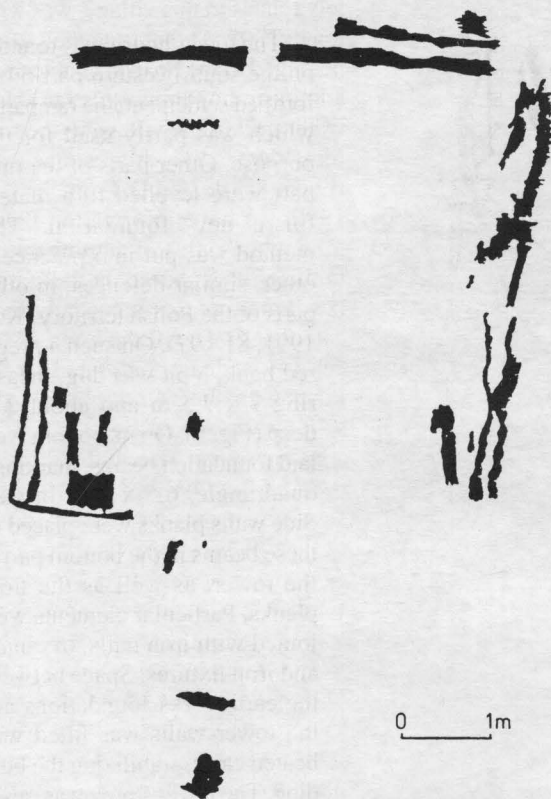


Figure 7: Plan of the tower house - fourth level

of the valley. The only remains of this construction is a clay threshing-floor, 3,8 x 1,8 m in size, orientated east-west. Its north-western corner, placed near the rampart slope, was strengthened by a foundation of small stones in clay. The post-holes in the threshing-floor have not been found, one can hence suppose that the watchtower was built within the framework, or that the vertical constructions were put on the sillbeams. The tower could be open at the ground level and have a timber watching platform or wall-walk. Close to this tower a gate probably lead to the interior. In the preserved part of the watchtower, bearing the marks of fire also, were found only scarce pottery fragments. Analysis of potsherds and iron objects associated with this layer leads to the conclusion that the watchtower was defended in the middle of 13th century. The buildings were burnt, ending a long-lasting period of permanent settlement here in the Middle Ages. The hill was still visited, as is indicated by both the chronology of the water-crossing and the presence of late medieval and modern potsherds in the humus.

The remaining question is, who was the owner of the tower house? We have to look for an answer in the written sources concerning the Góra village (Kócka-Krenz 1995). The first

fire-place served as a heating source, some stones from which were preserved in the rubble (Krause 1976, 299). It was thus a one-room, two-storied, 6 m high building, in which the lower storey was used as economic-storage space (an iron frying pan was found in its corner), and the upper part as a dwelling (Kócka-Krenz, Sikorski 1992, fig. 9). Fire put an end to its use, as is shown by burnt beams and planks, and an orange-red clay layer in the rubble.

The tower house in Góra was not the only building of medieval defensive origin. It was, however built in the safest part, its main element being the south. Since, in the northern part, another tower was built, situated in the northern rampart section of the former medieval fortified settlement. This tower was separated from the main by a small internal rampart made of sand covered with clay. The river valley bank opposite the hill rises steeply for a few meters. On account of this, it would seem that the second tower was a watchtower allowing observation of the land on the other side

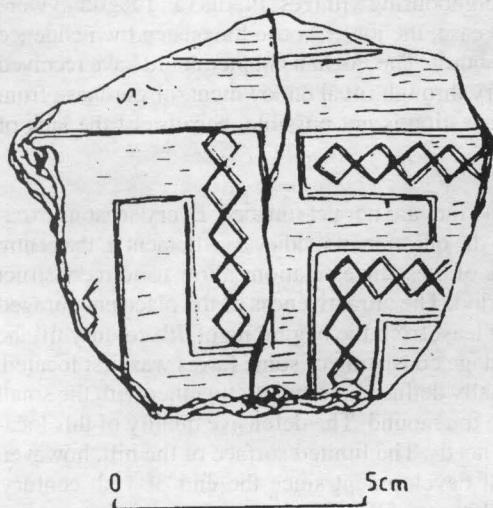


Figure 8: Fragment of the decorated clay plaster

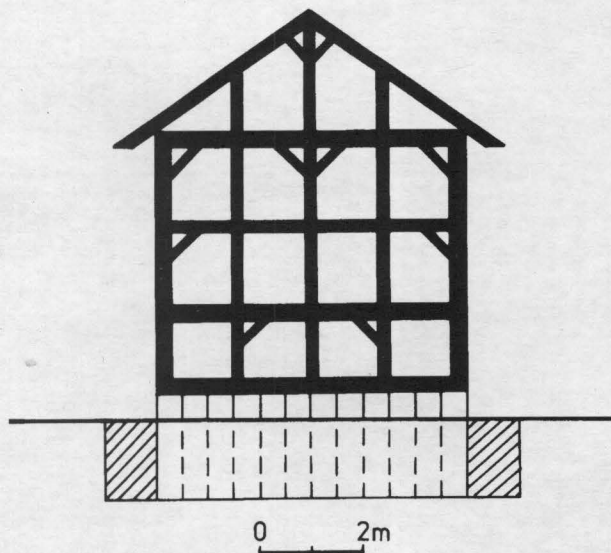
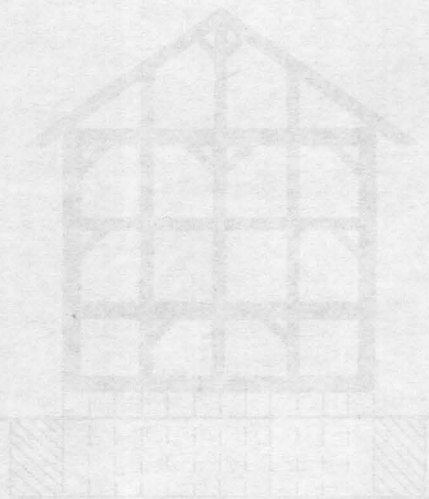


Figure 9: A reconstruction of the tower house

piece of information, which definitely relates to this village, was written in 1302. At that time the village belonged to the Poznan chapter, and administrating Prepositus Jan sold a water mill in the village to the miller Pieta and his successors (Lucinski 1987, 611). From the year 1370, we have information determining the rights of administrators in this village, based on the statute law. Later records univocally indicate that Góra, till the end of 16th century at least, belonged to the Poznan chapter. On its behalf, the village was ruled by succeeding administrators. They did not reside here personally, though they possessed a manor (*curia*). Inspections of the village inform us about a the devastation of manor buildings, that remained without permanent protection. No sources mention « *the-
fortalitium* », on the grounds of the Góra village. One therefore comes to the conclusion that the tower house was burnt before the beginning of 14th century. One can also suppose that before this time peasant's buildings were situated on the southern bank of the lake, where day the present village is situated. To whom then belonged the hill area before it was taken in possession by the Poznan chapter? It seems that there are two possibilities. First, we can suppose that the village grounds were a royal property, because the nearby town of Pobiedziska was situated in the middle of royal properties in this part of Great Poland (*Słownik 1887*). In this case, the tower house in Góra could be the residence of the administrator of this land, on behalf of a sovereign. The village grounds could equally be a private noble-

man's property. It is more probable that the neighbouring villages, Pradno and Jagodno were in private hands (Lucinski 1987, 611). In this case, the tower house have been the residence of an owner of the village, until the tower was burnt. The Poznan chapter could have received this village towards the end of the 13th century through royal endowment, or purchase from the former owner. A definite answer to this question is not possible, because of the lack of sources.

Investigations of the settlement complex in Góra are not yet finished. Every seasons excavation adds new, sometimes astonishing data to the question of medieval settlement in the centre of Great Poland. However, the results of some of these investigations allow us to reconstruct the processes which took place during this period. The attractiveness of the place encouraged its permanent occupation during 700 years, at least from the beginning of 7th century till the end of the 13th century. In the same area, a village consisting of some farms was first located, then came the fortified settlement of a territorially defined community together with the small village, and lastly came the compound seat on the mound. The defensive quality of this location was conducive to the earlier settlement's needs. The limited surface of the hill, however, has been an obstacle for dynamic settlement development since the end of 13th century, connected with new legislation. Thus the inhabitants of the village transferred their seats to a more suitable area. Exploration of the village structures in a new place remains a future research objective.



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