1. Monumental mounds, admired throughout the ages

A peculiarity of the lands in southeastern Poland are the monumental mounds, sometimes called ‘Krakuszowiec type barrows’.\(^1\) They differ from other ones especially in their dimensions: the diameter sometimes more than 50 m and preserved height up to 10 m. They all can be seen from a distance and are characteristic landmarks. The mounds are all located in Little Poland near the old centers of pre-state and early Piast power: in Przemyśl, Sandomierz and Cracow; in the last mentioned case there are multiple mounds, and this distinguishes Cracow from the other sites. The mound which gave the group its name is located in Krakuszowice near Bochnia (an oak is said to have grown on its top). It was excavated in the 19th century so only its remains have been preserved till today. No similar structures have been found in the other regions of Poland.

The Little Polish mounds have fascinated both the researchers and local historians since the Middle Ages. Various, sometimes completely imaginary, functions and circumstances of origins were invented for them. In local legends and written sources the Sandomierz mound was linked with the Tatars’ invasion, whereas in the case of Cracow the tales associate the appearance of the mounds with the dynastic legends connected with the origins of the center; for the Przemyśl mound (which has two names), there are two stories of its origin. As a result of this early interest, attempts at exploring the mounds were first made many years ago. The most famous were the excavations of the Krak Mound carried out in the period between the two World Wars by the Polish Academy of Learning in Cracow. In the other cases the excavations were carried out in the 19th century (in Przemyśl) and after the Second World War (Przemyśl, Sandomierz). Their results shed new light on the questions of the building and functions of the mounds in

\(^1\) The term ‘Krakuszowiec-type mounds’ was coined by A. Żaki (1974, 120). A shortened version of this chapter has been published separately (cf. Buko 2004).
comparison to the similar structures known from other parts of Europe. However, the main question asked by the archaeologists and historians still remains: who built them, when and what for? And although each of the structures provides some premises for creating hypotheses in this respect, attempts at finding convincing answers have not brought any definitive solutions. This view is clearly illustrated by the results of the excavations of the Przemyśl, Sandomierz, and Cracow mounds.

2. Przemysław’s (Tatars’) Mound in Przemyśl

The mound is located on Zniesienie Hill (356 m above sea level). Its present relative height is 10 m and its oval bottom part measures 100 × 60 m. The mound has the plan of an acute triangle with its base oriented towards the west (from that point of view it resembles ‘Salve Regina’ Mound in Sandomierz; see below). The form, size and location of the elevation make it one of the most characteristic topographic points in the town (Fig. 62). In the 16th century a chapel dedicated to St. Leonard was built, thanks to which the structure can be seen at many iconographic representations.

The monument in Przemyśl is connected with several legends, and for this reason the mound has a double name. The first tradition relates that it commemorates Przemysław, the legendary founder of the town in the early pre-state period (perhaps the 7th century?) after whose death this monumental mound was built. According to the other group of local traditions (not confirmed by any historical records), the mound is the burial of Mirza a leader of the Tatars who led an attack on the region in 1614. Others believed this was not a barrow but a beacon hill which, together with other structures of this kind made up a signaling network. Scholarly interest in the structure began in the early 19th century; in 1869 excavations of the mound were conducted by Teofil Żebrowski, commissioned by the Cracow Society of Learning. The results, however, were not very fruitful, at the summit remains of a modern cemetery were discovered as well as coins dating to the times of King Jan Kazimierz (the 17th century). One of the reasons of the failure were the difficulties in getting through a layer made up of rock at a depth of about 2.6 m; this detail is worth remembering in the context of the later history of the excavations at that site. In the period between the World Wars, small scale excavations were conducted two local archaeologists, Antoni Kunysz and Andrzej Koperski. The