PART ONE

MEDIEVAL TOWNS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE
The emergence of the medieval town in Poland has generated much debate in historiography. The pre-war German school has emphasized the concept that, before Germans arrived into Poland as part of a vast colonization to the East (*Drang nach Osten*), there were no towns, and they were created by the outlanders. German Historians would ground their theories in a definition of the town as a self-reliant settlement with a foundation charter.\(^1\) After the war, with Poland again finding its place on the European map as an independent state, a new trend in historiography saw the first towns as non-autonomous trade centers, predating the arrival of Germans.\(^2\)

After World War II, archaeological excavations indicated pre-urban settlements at Gniezno, Szczecin, Wolin, Gdańsk, Poznań, Wrocław, Opole, Kraków, Sandomierz, Płock and several other sites, existing ever since the 8th–9th centuries, before the medieval Polish state. The Geographer from Bavaria mentioned no fewer than 50 tribes in the latter half of the 9th century, occupying the area that Poland spans today, east of the Oder. In early times, the above-mentioned settlements were seats for chieftains, and would stand near fords and crossroads. Their fortifications were palisades, earth ramparts, and only rarely stone walls. In the plains of north and central Poland, settlements emerged on flatlands, whereas in the hills to the south, they

---


\(^2\) Benedykt Zientara, “Socio-Economic and Spatial Transformation of Polish Towns During the Period of Location,” *APH*, vol. XXXIV (1976), pp. 57–60. One of the first studies to challenge the former theories of German historiography in Kazimiersz Tymienicki (1919). Tymienicki texts were re-published in *Pisma wybrane* (Warsaw, 1956).