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CASTRUM LUBENOV.

CALAMITY OF THE TOWER CASTLE IN LUBRZA

Abstract: Due to illegal construction works in 2016, the late medieval motte-and-bailey castle in Lubrza was significantly damaged. The immediately undertaken rescue excavations paradoxically led to better understanding of the complex based on the obtained archaeological evidence as well as written sources, architectural studies, and remote sensing data. Detailed analysis of the artefacts has made it possible to establish the basic occupations of the inhabitants of the tower, their standard of living, everyday life, wealth, diet, and social status. The archaeological research also allowed us to establish accurate chronology of the complex, which should be placed in the 14th century.

Keywords: late medieval, motte-and-bailey castle, everyday life, social status


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The tower castle in Lubrza, referred to as *Castrum Lubenov* in written sources, was until recently one of the few well-preserved medieval motte-type structures located in the Lubuskie Voivodeship (Fig. 1). The site is located approximately 10 km north-east of Świebodzin, in the valley of Lake Goszcza, on a promontory at the north-eastern edge of the village on the Niesulice Channel (Fig. 2). The site consists of a conical earthen mound with the relics of a stone residential tower-house preserved in the centre of the motte, founded on a square plan with a side length of about 10 m. Surface surveyed in 1988 and in 1989,¹ little was known about the chronology of the site, as it had never been extensively excavated or analysed. References to the existence of a tower on the mound in Lubrza appear as early as the 19th century,² and its existence was again noted at the beginning of the

20th century (Fig. 3).³ One can also find brief mentions of the tower castle in papers published after the Second World War (Fig. 4).⁴ Based on the written sources from the Middle Ages, the stronghold in Lubrza functioned between the 13th and 15th centuries.⁵

Unfortunately, however, a catastrophe occurred in 2016: due to illegal construction activities, most of the mound and other adjacent landscape remnants were levelled and the original terrain form was lost. The material from the motte was used to level the surrounding area. Although a part of the stone tower's ground floor has survived *in situ* (Fig. 5), the historic substance of this important site was irretrievably destroyed. Recent analysis of the legal situation of the late medieval stronghold in Lubrza before its destruction in 2016 provides clear evidence that the current owner of the property had full knowledge of its status as a protected cultural heritage site and carried out

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¹ Lewczuk 1993, 477; Michalak 2022a.

² Müller 1837, 215.

³ Kowalenko 1938, 248; Keyser 1939, 579; Dobrindt 1941, 190, Table 69:2.

⁴ Wiliński 1949, 342; Szczaniecki 1950, 73-74; Hensel 1959, 236.

⁵ Kurnatowska and Łosińska 1996, 171; Nowakowski 2008, 157-158, 365, 500; Nowakowski 2017, 352-353.

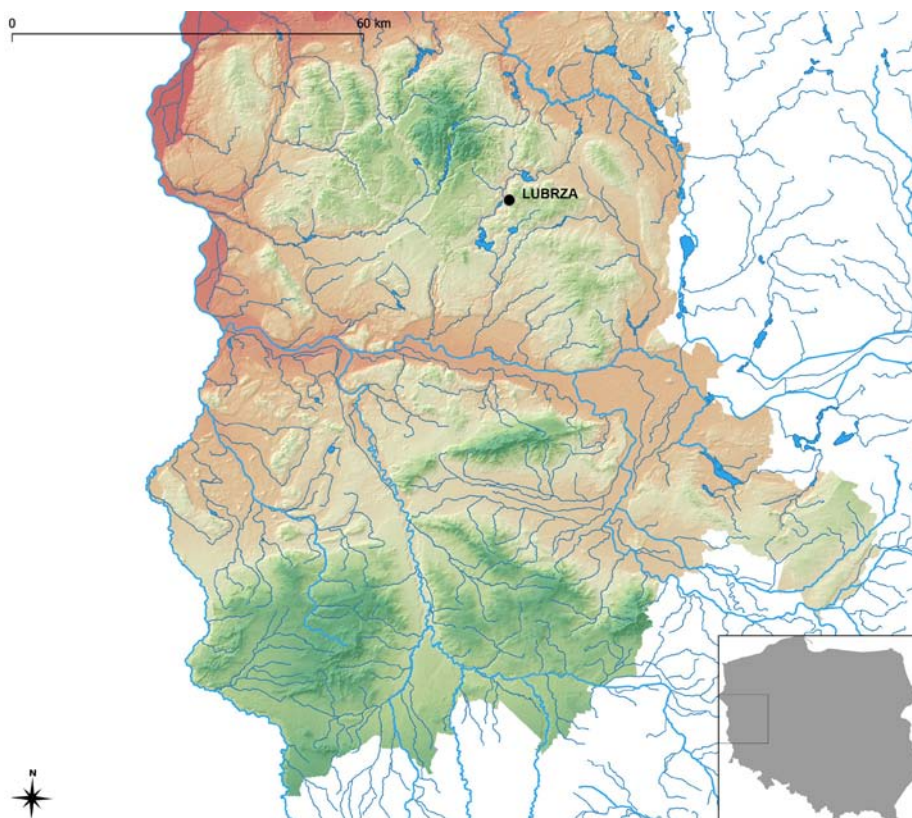


Fig. 1. Location of Lubrza on the topographic map of the Lubuskie Voivodeship. Graphic design: B. Gruszka.



Fig. 2. View of the relics of the site in Lubrza from the south-west, 2022. Photo: H. Augustyniak.

the construction works leading to the destruction of the historic substance in disregard of heritage conservation rules.⁶ However, the owner of the land was acquitted at the first trial, which clearly shows the powerlessness of Polish Heritage Protection system.⁷

⁶ Kosowicz 2022.

⁷ See Sabaciński 2010.

Legal action taken by the Heritage Protection Officer for the Lubuskie Voivodeship (*Lubuski Wojewódzki Konserwator Zabytków*) led to rescue excavations of the site, aimed at searching the scattered masses of earth for remains of structures and artefacts, recording and preserving the remains of the fortified settlement. The research on behalf of the Lubusz Division of the Scientific Association of Polish Archaeologists

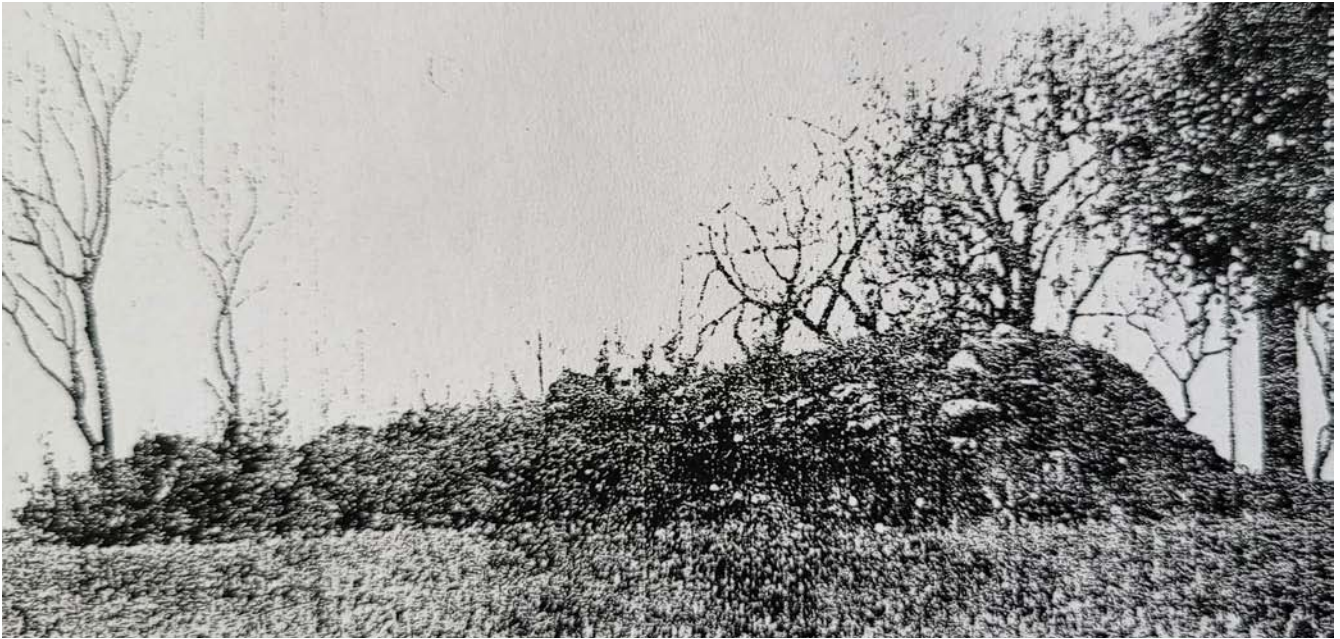


Fig. 3. Relics of the stone tower in Lubrza, 1941. Source: Dobrindt 1941.



Fig. 4. North-west view of the site before destruction. Photo: R. Jurga.

was led by Sławomir Kałagate, with the cooperation of the Author. Archaeological investigations resulted in the recovery of metal artefacts (280 special finds and about one thousand metal mass finds consisting mainly of nails and nail fragments), ceramic fragments (1382 fragments), and 236 bone fragments, probably deposited within the mound, but also within the moat and the bailey of the complex.⁸ The finds are housed in the collection of the Archaeological Museum of the Central Odra River Region.

The scale of the destruction, but also the value of the acquired artefacts, lay at the heart of the project *Castrum Lubenov. The Tragic History of the Medieval Tower in Lubrza*, whose main goal became a multidisciplinary study of the excavated items aimed at determining the significance, function, and chronology of the objects, as well as showing the daily life

of inhabitants of the stronghold and the economic basis of their functioning. The objective was not only to describe the artefacts and determine their function and chronology, but also to investigate the relationship between the items and their owners.⁹ To achieve this goal, it was necessary to reconstruct the context of the finds from which the artefacts were torn by the illegal construction works. As some researchers believe, an artefact stripped of its context becomes unreadable.¹⁰ Setting the excavated items in context became possible by analysing the archaeological data in relation to three types of sources: historical (as a castle belonging to a specific owner, located in the medieval borderland of Silesia, Greater Poland, and Brandenburg), architectural (reality limited and determined by the space of a specific small defensive establishment), and geographical (the environmental conditions of the tower's

⁸ Kałagate and Michalak 2022.

⁹ Gosden and Marshal 1999.

¹⁰ Hodder and Hutson 2003, 141.



Fig. 5. North and central part of the site after the destruction of the mound. West view. Photo: S. Kalagate.

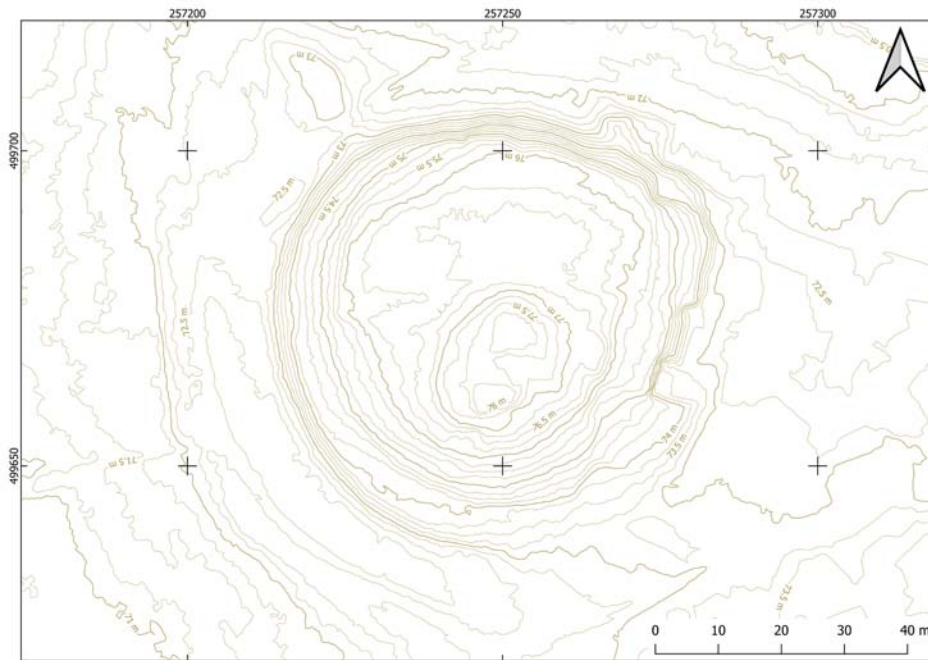


Fig. 6. Contour map generated from the numerical terrain model from aerial laser scanning, contour cut 1 m. Graphic design: G. Kiarszys.

location). This allowed the reconstruction of a specific microhistory for the analysed items.

The first essential step was to reconstruct the landscape. Recent research has shown a tendency towards a correlation between the social rank of a castle's builders and its visibility in the landscape.¹¹ When the founders of the tower in Lubrza chose the location for their

castle, they selected the most favourable natural conditions. However, they also aimed to symbolically distance themselves from the peasantry.¹² Analysis of remote sensing and cartographic data gathered before the destruction of the site in Lubrza allowed us to reconstruct its original appearance.¹³ It had the form of an earth mound with the shape of a truncated cone, about

¹¹ E.g., Atzbach et al. 2017, 210-211.

¹² Faucherre et al. 2015.

¹³ Kiarszys 2022.



Fig. 7. Derivatives of numerical terrain models from airborne laser scanning showing the Lubrza stronghold before destruction: composition of shading analysis and numerical terrain model. Graphic design: G. Kiarszys.



Fig. 8. Relics of the stone tower after the demolition of the site. East view taken in 2022. Photo: H. Augustyniak.

3-5 meters high, with a diameter at the base of approximately 30-60 meters, and at the top of approximately 10-20 meters (Fig. 6). The building was surrounded by a moat, which was probably formed during the excavation of the earth used to build the motte. The whole complex could have been surrounded by a defensive wall. At the top of the motte was a residential stone tower, hypothetically surrounded by a palisade. There was most likely also a suburbium, a kind of settlement situated near the castle (Fig. 7).

The stone tower was built on a roughly rectangular plan with walls 10.7-11.0×13.1-13.7 m long, with the longer sides facing south and north (Figs. 8 and 9). The perimeter walls of the tower were built from erratic stones laid in layers 0.7 to 0.8 m high, with gaps filled with smaller stones (Fig. 10). The width of the perimeter walls found in the surveys was 2.2 m to the east, 2.3 m to the south and 3.2 m to the west, which indicates that the ground floor room may have measured approximately 6.0×7.0 metres and may have been vaulted. The



Fig. 9. 3-D scan of the tower. Graphic design: P. Domagalski.



Fig. 10. Scan of the eastern wall of the tower. Graphic design: P. Domagalski.

location of the tower in relation to the entrance to the site suggests that a staircase in the thickness of the wall was more likely to have been located on the west side. The technology of construction and the building material indicate that the construction of the building can generally be dated to the first half of the 14th century.¹⁴

Additional information on the appearance of tower castle in Lubrza and its functioning as a noble family's seat was provided by the analysis of remains of the building's fixtures and fittings.¹⁵ There were 495 items in total, among which the following groups of relics were documented: nails, keys and padlock elements, hinges and other parts used to close doors, fittings, and

bars (Fig. 11:11). The large number of exposed nails may indicate a wooden shingle roof covering. This collection enriches our knowledge of equipment and old construction techniques used in this type of facility. The presence of so many lock-related items in the Lubrza material indicates the wealth of the tower's owners and the need to protect valuable items from thieves.¹⁶

Analysis of the written records¹⁷ pertaining to Lubrza indicate that this borderland village was originally the property of the Greater Poland castellan Bodzęta from the Jeleńczyk family, who later sold it to the Cistercian abbey in Gościkowo-Paradyż. Over time Lubrza was absorbed by the nearby town and later functioned

¹⁴ Legendziewicz 2022.

¹⁵ Krauskopf 2005, 59-61.

¹⁶ Augustyniak 2022.

¹⁷ Karczewska 2022.

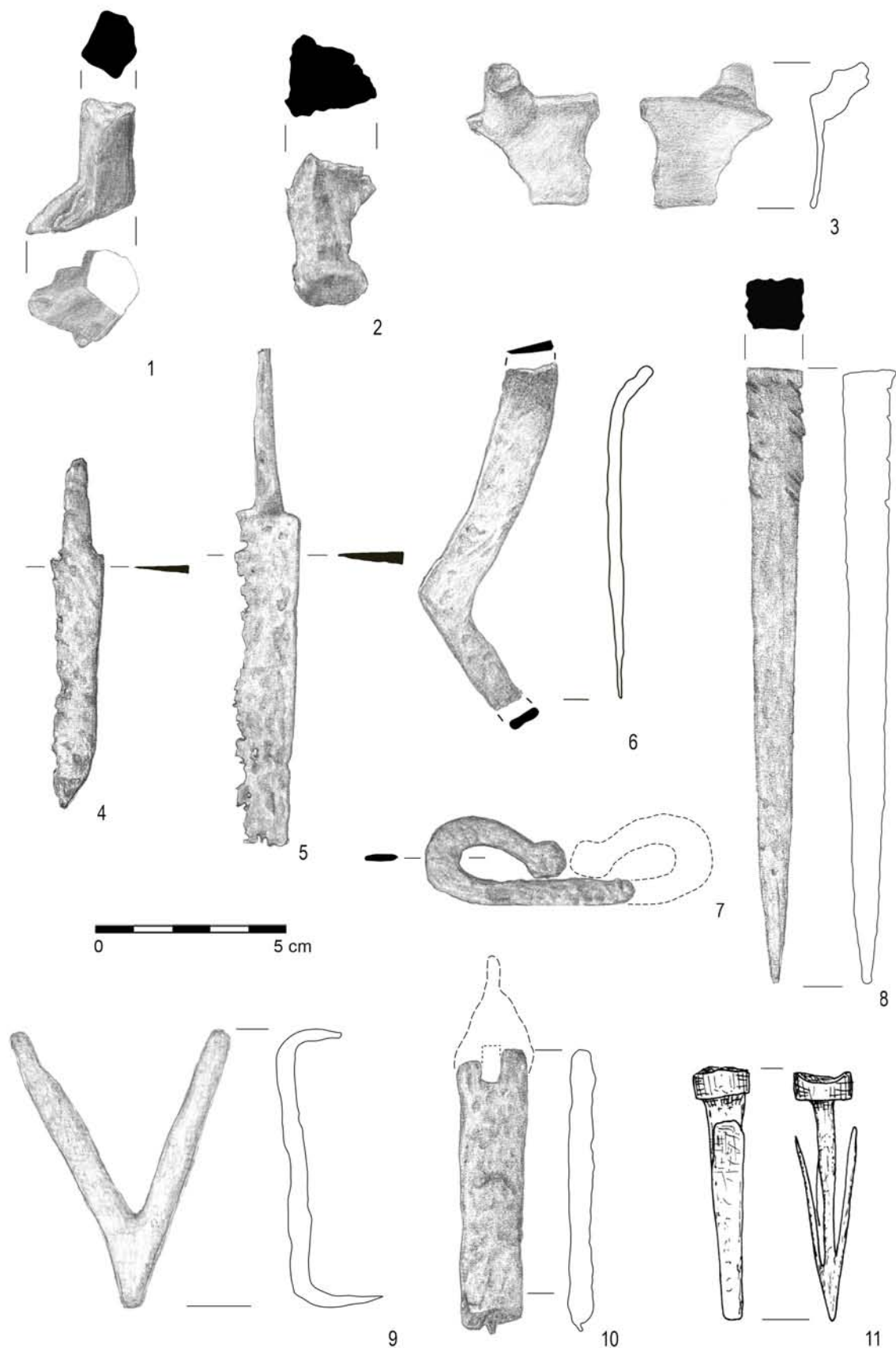


Fig. 11. Artefacts connected with daily life, excavated in 2016: 1-3 – fragments of cauldrons; 4-5 – knives; 6 – sickle; 7 – fire steel; 8 – harrow fragment; 9 – crampon; 10 – nail-drawing iron; 11 – element of padlock. Drawn: A. Sabak-Stachowiak and H. Augustyniak.



Fig. 12. Pottery. Selection of pot rims. Graphic design: S. Kałagate.

under the name of Lubieniów, which was the property of the Dryja family and their primary residence. Lubieniów had already gained town status in 1276, whereas Lubrza tower castle was mentioned as a knight's dwelling for the first time in 1304. Both properties were located administratively in the Duchy of Głogów and in 1312 was most likely one of its centres. In 1319, it belonged again to the dukes of Głogów and later in 1330 to dukes of Żagań. Though this may indicate that Lubrza was a ducal castle held as a fief by a knight, we still do not have convincing and unequivocal evidence. When Lubieniów along with the tower castle became the property of the Gościkowo-Paradyż Cistercians, they settled the local ownership disputes in 1322. Ultimately, as the property of the monastery the Lubieniów-Lubrza tower castle lost its original function as a stronghold and was gradually brought to ruin.

In light of the analysis of written sources, the owners of the tower castle should be considered to be from the family of the nearest circle of ducal court. People of such a high social status very often demonstrated their social position, prestige or their identity through dress accessories. Unfortunately, among the artefacts from Lubrza associated with this category only belt elements were preserved (Fig. 13:1-8). These include buckles of a single D-shaped frame, quadrilateral forms of varied design, as well as oval and profiled ones. A less numerous group consists of belt fittings made of copper alloys, including variously shaped belt appliques (rectangular, heart-shaped, hexagonal, and hat-shaped) and one tongue-shaped end fitting.¹⁸ XRF analysis of the heart-shaped belt mount revealed that it was made of red brass.¹⁹

Objects related to everyday life and work that have been excavated in Lubrza offer a glimpse at the typical activities of residents of the medieval tower castle.²⁰ Recovered items include those related to kitchen activities (pieces of tripod cooking pots), personal equipment of everyday use (knives, crampons, fire striker), carpentry tools (drill, hammer), agricultural tools (sickles, harrow teeth), and probably furrier tools (awl) (Fig. 11:1-10). The whetstone discovered at the site could have been used for the care and maintenance of tools with cutting edges.²¹ These materials have direct analogies in the 14th-century artefacts excavated in the castle in Międzyrzecz²² and Tarnów Jezierny.²³

Recent research indicates that there was a tendency to build fortified dwellings away from agricultural sites.²⁴ Clear traces of agricultural activity in Lubrza, evidenced not only by excavated tools²⁵ but also by the numerous animal bones from consumption, are legible in the archaeological material. There is no doubt that the castle dwellers liked to eat meat. Unearthed animal bones came mainly from domestic mammals, such as cattle, pigs, and small ruminants; the bones of horse and a dog were also noted. Birds were represented by chicken bones only; wild mammals by roe deer, deer, and wild boar. The inhabitants of the tower castle consumed all parts of the carcass. However, it can be assumed that in the case of beef, brawn was rarely eaten, while pork head cheese was appreciated. The consumed portions of beef, judging from the length of the ribs, averaged about 12.1 cm. The meat delivered to the tower castle came mainly from mature, older animals. The cattle belonged to the short-horned small breed commonly kept in the Middle Ages. The pig, in terms of body size, did not differ from other medieval populations. Bones from individuals with a height of about 83 cm at the withers could come from either large pigs or short boars.²⁶

The preparation of food, cooking, consumption, and the associated social and behavioural aspects of eating, drinking, and feasting comprised one of the most important spheres of daily and social life for the inhabitants of the tower castle.²⁷ Among identified kitchenware were fragments of bronze tripod grapens²⁸ and fragments of earthenware pots, referred to as 'grey' or 'steel-grey vessels'. Fired in a reduction atmosphere, they are the most dominant group of vessels unearthed in Lubrza, representing over 97% of the total collection. Less numerous are vessels made of kaolinite or ferruginous clays with a calcium carbonate component and fired in a strongly oxidizing atmosphere to a light yellow, yellow, or cream colour; similarly, much less frequent are products called proto-stoneware (German *Faststeinzeug*). Nine categories of vessels were identified in this collection: pots, jugs, bowls, small bowls, lids, goblets, and miniature dishes (Fig. 12).

These artefacts shed more light on the question of chronology of the tower castle. The discussed ceramic material should be dated quite broadly from the turn of the 13th/14th centuries through the entire

¹⁸ Janowski and Michalak 2022, Fig. 1-3.

¹⁹ Hošek 2022.

²⁰ Unger 2002, 19; Svensson 2008, 347; Krauskopf 2020, 230-233.

²¹ Michalak 2022b, Fig. 1-7.

²² Banach 2016.

²³ Nowakowski 2017, Pl. 30-39.

²⁴ Rundkvist 2019, 21.

²⁵ Michalak 2022b, Fig. 4.

²⁶ Makowiecki and Makowiecka 2022.

²⁷ Rundkvist 2016, 27.

²⁸ Michalak 2022b, Fig. 1:11.

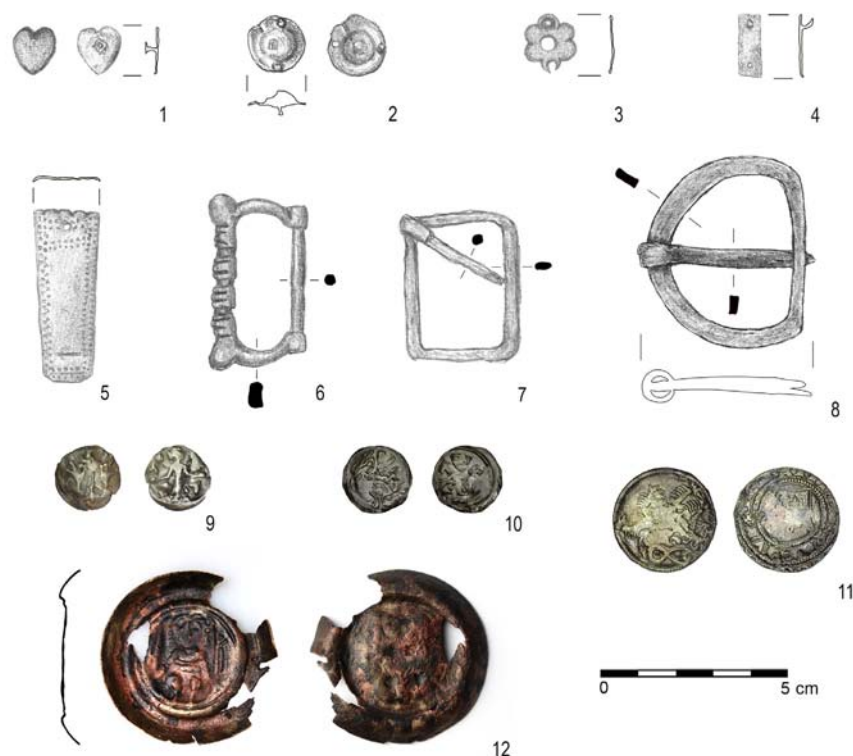


Fig. 13. Status markers: 1-8 – dress accessories; 9-11 – coins, and 12 – bracteate box. Drawn: A. Sabak-Stachowiak, photo: M. Kaczmarek.

14th century; however, most of the pottery fragments represented here were made during the first half of the 14th century.²⁹

This chronology is confirmed by the numismatic material. It implies profound influence of the Brandenburg coinage from the Ascanian dynasty on the northern parts of Silesia. To the same category of issues belong the Anhalt and Saxon-Wittenberg denars, including a forged denar from the Margraves of Brandenburg, most likely minted in the County/Duchy of Anhalt or the Duchy of Saxony-Wittenberg (Fig. 13:9-10). The lack of any Silesian coins is intriguing; however, a regularly cut Prague groschen was found (Fig. 13:11). The absence of domestic coins seems to be rather accidental, but all finds in Lubrza are probably chance losses. The noticeably large amount of Brandenburg coinage results from the Lubrza tower castle location near the border. Substantial minting activity in the Ascanian period and the short-term affiliation of Lubrza with the Margraviate of Brandenburg in the first quarter of the 14th century also played a considerable role. Since in the contemporary territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, no large bracteates were

minted, finding a fragment of a copper bracteate box intended for storing small amounts of this kind of money is quite sensational (Fig. 13:12). The box lid from Lubrza, probably made in the second half of the 13th century, is most likely of Meissen origin.³⁰

During the excavations in Lubrza, a relatively large number of military paraphernalia was found. Included are both elements of arms and armour: namely, one plate from a coat of plates, three copper alloy mail rings, an awl-pike head, a spear- or javelin head, five axe head fragments, two caltrops, three copper alloy ferrules of a dagger sheath, 113 bolt- and arrowheads (Fig. 14). As for equestrian equipment, the following were found: four stirrups, 8 spur fragments and 8 spur fittings, 6 buckles from a horse harness, 9 elements of bits, and 15 horseshoe fragments (Fig. 15). The elements of knightly equipment represent important aspects of medieval culture, while testifying to the lifestyle of the owners of the site, their personality and implied symbolism, as well as the level of local blacksmithing.³¹

The plate from a coat of plates and the awl-pike head from Lubrza were examined metallographically.

²⁹ Kałagate 2022.

³⁰ Szczurek and Michalak 2022; see Wachowski and Wróbel 2002.

³¹ Michalak 2019, 217-223.

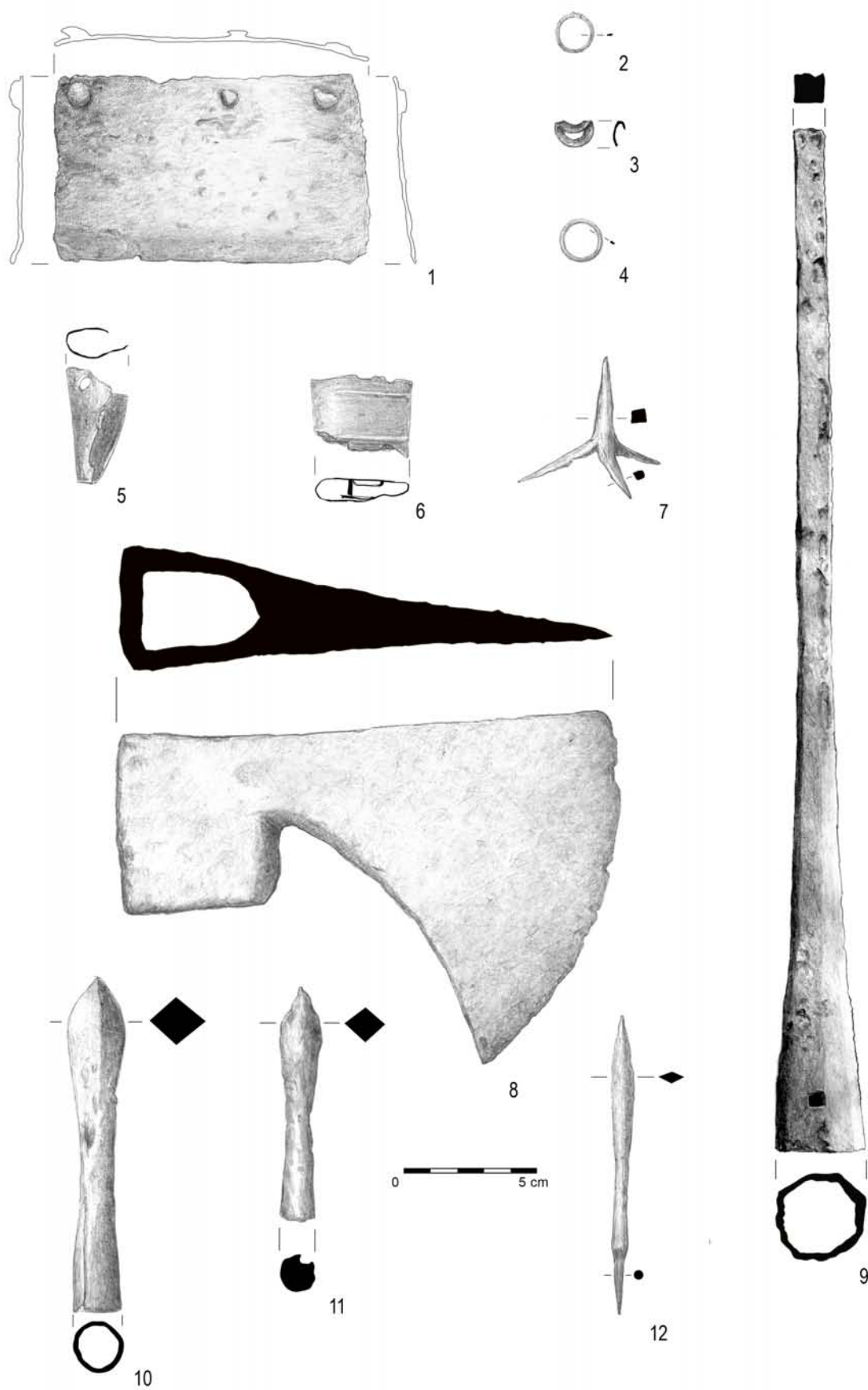


Fig. 14. Arms and armour: 1 – plate from coat of plates; 2-4 – copper alloy mail rings; 5-6 – dagger sheath copper alloy ferrules; 7 – caltrop; 8 – axe head; 9 – wall crossbow bolt head; 10 – bolt head; 11 – arrowhead. Drawn: A. Sabak-Stachowiak.

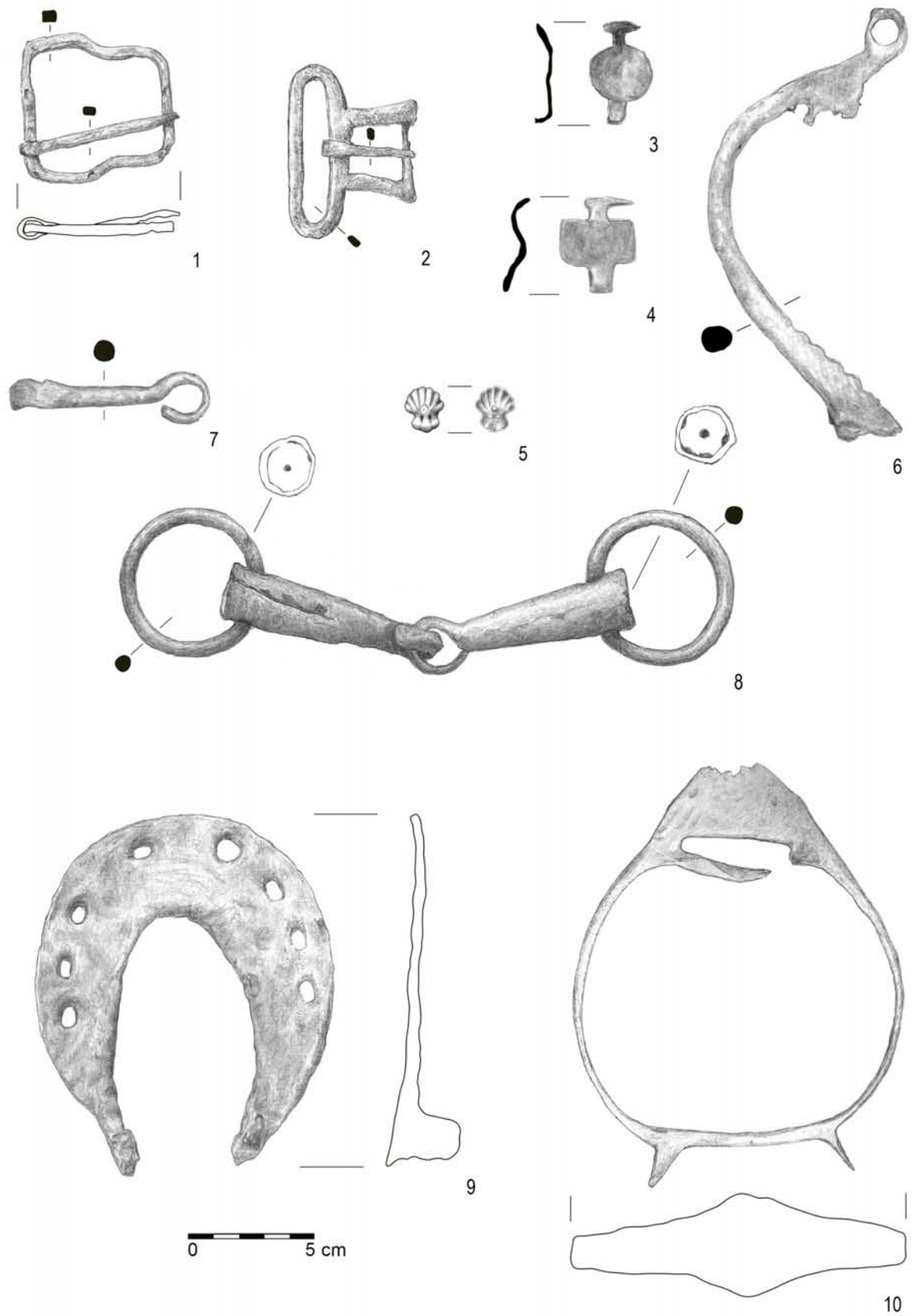


Fig. 15. Equestrian equipment: 1-2 – harness buckles; 3-5 – hook attachments for spur leathers; 6 – spur; 7-8 – snaffle bits; 9 – horseshoe; 10 – stirrup. Drawn: A. Sabak-Stachowiak.

Analysis revealed that the plate was made of phosphoric iron. It can be considered a combination of steel and phosphoric iron, but it is difficult to make any comparison, as this category of weapons has not yet been much studied.³²

The analysed collection of military items from Lubrza is extremely interesting evidence of the armament resources of a small stronghold between the second half of the 13th and 14th century. It was probably maintained for the needs of the owner and his small entourage. These include items that could be made locally (maybe even on site), but also objects of a higher value, probably belonging to an affluent inhabitant of the tower castle, perhaps even its owner or lord. This illustrates a knightly culture of the highest ranks, typical of the elites of the world at that time.³³ It is possible that the impact marks found on some of the bolt heads record a siege of the tower castle not recorded in writing, or bear witness to an exercise by a local armed crew; however, due to the lack of material context for these objects, it is difficult to determine their real purpose.³⁴

The number of discovered military artefacts seems to be significant, although it is uncertain whether all the artefacts obtained during the research come from the tower mound itself. Many of the discovered bolt heads showed traces of characteristic damage resulting from hitting a hard target, which may be a sign indicating their origin from the tower mound. In several sockets it was possible to identify relics of wooden shafts, which were examined for the type of wood used to produce them. 3 shafts were made of conifer wood while 4 others were made of deciduous, ring-porous wood. Damaged bolt heads and caltrops seem to indicate a siege or sieges of *Castrum Lubenov* which could have taken place in the Middle Ages. However, historical records remain silent in *expressis verbis* about such an event in Lubrza.³⁵

In the Late Middle Ages, the area where *Castrum Lubenov* is situated was the arena of struggle between the Silesian Duchies, the Kingdom of Poland, and the Margraviate of Brandenburg. After the death of Przemysł II in 1296, Greater Poland became the area of struggle between Duke Henry III of Głogów and Ladislaus the Short (Władysław I Łokietek), pretenders to the Polish throne. After a short fight, both dukes concluded a treaty in Krzywín, which established that Greater Poland was divided along the Warta and Obra, and the south-western part of the Duchy of Poznań directly adjacent to the Duchy of Głogów and bordering Brandenburg in the north was separated for Duke Henry. This division meant that Lubrza was located in the territory under the rule of the duke of Głogów. However, Henry III of Głogów struggled to defend his rule against Brandenburg, which attacked the border areas.³⁶ Military operations focused on the borderland could have affected Lubrza and *Castrum Lubenov*.

The late medieval castles of the borderland between Silesia, Brandenburg, and Greater Poland still conceal many questions, especially when it comes to private seats. Hopefully the interdisciplinary study of the complex at Lubrza will contribute to a better understanding of how this type of castle functioned and will show many aspects of the daily life of their inhabitants.

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³² Hošek 2022.

³³ Paravicini 1999.

³⁴ Michalak 2022c.

³⁵ Michalak 2022d.

³⁶ Jurek 1993, 31-35.

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