

# THE FORGOTTEN TOWN, VILLAGE AND MANOR HOUSE OF ZWANOWO

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## Abstract

In January 2014 on the land of a hamlet named Dzwonowo (in the parish of Niedźwiedziny, Wągrowiecki district, Wielkopolska voivodeship), the plan of a lost medieval chartered town was located. The discovery was made thanks to distinctive features of vegetation visible on the orthophotomap published on the site [www.geoportral.gov.pl](http://www.geoportral.gov.pl). In addition to the plan of urban development, other structures were also observed that were interpreted as a village settlement in an oval layout and the relics of the owner's residence.

The city was founded on a site with good natural defences, on the north-eastern slope of the valley of the river Dzwonówka. During the initial field walking, a cemetery of unknown chronology was located on a hill to the east of the market square, perhaps associated with the medieval urban centre. Unfortunately, as yet the location of the Dzwonowo church has not been determined.

Beyond the northern block of the chartered town, some outlines of cultural objects were observed, fairly evenly spread around the circumference of an elongated oval covering an area of approximately 66 x 37 m. The anomalies described should be interpreted as relics of the oval-shaped village settlement probably founded as early as the thirteenth century.

About 300 m southwest of the city, on a small elevation located in the marshy Dzwonówka valley a rectangular structure is visible, which may be connected with the medieval (?) and modern mansion of the owners of Dzwonowo.

**Keywords:** Medieval archaeology, Great Poland, orthophotomaps, Medieval town

## Resumen

En enero de 2014, en los terrenos de la aldea de Dzwonowo (pueblo de Niedźwiedziny, comarca de Wągrowiec, región de Wielkopolskie) se localizó el trazado de una ciudad medieval desaparecida. El descubrimiento fue posible gracias a las marcas de cosecha visibles en una ortofotografía publicada en la página web [www.geoportral.gov.pl](http://www.geoportral.gov.pl). Además del trazado de las construcciones urbanas se observaron, también, otras estructuras, interpretadas como el asentamiento de un pueblo de traza ovalada y los vestigios de la residencia de los propietarios.

La ciudad fue fundada en un lugar que presentaba unas condiciones defensivas naturales, en la ladera noreste del valle del río Dzwonówka. Durante la prospección inicial del terreno, en una colina situada hacia el este desde la plaza del pueblo se localizó un campo funerario de esqueletos, de cronología indeterminada, posiblemente relacionado con el centro urbano medieval. Por desgracia, hasta la fecha de hoy sigue desconocida la ubicación de la iglesia de Dzwonowo.

Detrás del bloque norte de los edificios de la ciudad se observaron contornos de construcciones culturales colocadas de forma bastante regular en el perímetro de un óvalo alargado de dimensiones de 66 x 37 m. Dichas anomalías deben interpretarse como vestigios de un pueblo de traza ovalada, fundado probablemente todavía en el s. XIII.

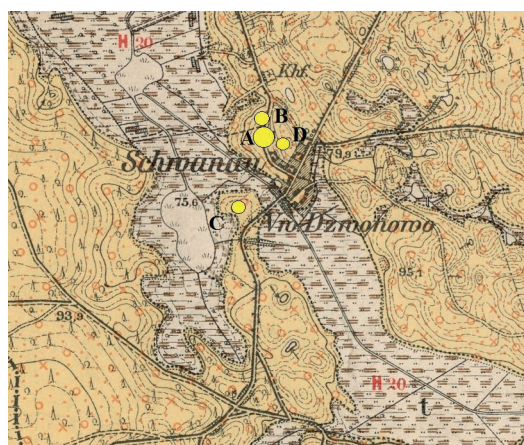
A unos 300 m desde la ciudad hacia el sudoeste, en una pequeña colina que se levanta en el valle fangoso del Dzwonówka, se percibe una estructura rectangular que podría relacionarse con la casona medieval (?) y moderna de los propietarios de Dzwonowo.

**Palabras clave:** archeologia medieval, Wielkopolskie, ortofotografía, ciudad medieval

## INTRODUCTION

In January 2014, a thorough examination of an orthophotomap available at [www.geoportal.pl](http://www.geoportal.pl) led to identification of a plan of a medieval chartered town within Dzwonowo, a hamlet near Niedźwiedziny (community Skoki, county Wągrowiec, Wielkopolska province). This was the third such discovery in Poland over last three years<sup>1</sup>. However, the clearly visible crop marks also revealed other structures – a former oval village, as well as an old-Polish manor house, and probably even an older knightly residence.

Dzwonowo, the hamlet near Niedźwiedziny, is located within Pojezierze Gnieźnieńskie, a part of Pojezierze Wielkopolsko-Kujawskie (Kondracki 2009: 137, 143-145). The examined area is located in Puszcza Zielonka, within the valley of the Dzwonówka river (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The vicinity of Dzwonowo on an agronomical map from 1900 (after: [www.mapy.amzp.pl](http://www.mapy.amzp.pl)). Estimated location of a medieval town – A, oval village – B, medieval (?) and modern manor house – C, cemetery – D (by M. Krzepkowski).

The village once lay on the western borders of the county of Gniezno, within the Archdiocese of Gniezno. This was probably where one of the routes connecting Poznań with Pomorze Gdańskie ran, through Łekno, Kcynia and Nakło (Przybył 2005: 116, 118, 126, fig. 1). A parallel route from Gniezno to Szamotuły and Sieraków was also described from nearby villages: Dąbrówka Kościelna and Głębocek (Brust 2005: 446).

Archaeological recognition of Puszcza Zielonka, due to its thick forest cover, remains insufficient. Some research has been carried out there as a part of the Record of Archaeological Sites in Poland project, but only in restricted areas, usually around villages located in the forest. One of these available areas were fields in close vicinity of Dzwonowo (Niedźwiedziny). During the prospection of the area in October 1985, four archaeological sites were recognised: early, late and post-medieval ones (Figure 3). Besides these, no other archaeological discoveries have been made in the vicinity of Niedźwiedziny.

## PRELIMINARY INTERPRETATION OF THE ORTHOPHOTOMAP

The analysed thophotomap was based on digital aerial photographs taken on July 8th 2010<sup>2</sup>. Exceptionally favourable conditions in the fields sown with grain made crop marks clearly visible (Figure 2). The most readable was a system of rectangular structures, fairly evenly distributed around an empty area, almost square in shape. This system has been interpreted as a medieval urban layout. There was a clear oval concentration of anomalies observed, north of the city, most likely mapping the layout of the oval village. About 300 m south-eastwards of the town, on an elevation in the bottom of the valley of the Dzwonówka river, relics of a possible medieval knightly residence (?) and an old-Polish manor house appeared.

<sup>1</sup> Earlier, the first locations of Szamotuły and Nieszawa were determined.

<sup>2</sup> Record N-33-131-A-b-3-3; 0.25 pixels per metre.



**Figure 2.** Niedzwiedziny (Hamlet Dzwonowo), county Wągrowiec. Crop marks on the orthophotomap based on digital air photographs taken on 8 July 2010 (after: [www.geoportal.gov.pl](http://www.geoportal.gov.pl)).

During the preliminary field prospection in February 2014 in the area of expected cultural structures and features, concentrations of daub, pottery and charcoal were noticed. Observation conditions allowed to recognise a cemetery, probably related to the town, formerly existing there<sup>3</sup>. During the field inspection it was also noticed that the area of site 5, with relics of expected medieval (?) and post-medieval manor house, was fenced and supposed to be a construction area.

## MEDIEVAL URBAN LAYOUT

North-east of the housing developments in Dzwonowo, on the slopes of the valley of the Dzwonówka river a regular array of crop marks was observed, which has been identified as the remains of a medieval chartered town (Figures 2, 3). It seems that the place had been selected deliberately with regard to its natural defensive character. From the west, the town was protected by the marshy bottom of the valley, cutting into the slope from the south and north, and from the east by a ridge of natural elevations.

Housing developments only slightly extended beyond the market, including routes beginning at the square. The outlines of residential buildings were clearly visible on the eastern, western and northern sides of the northwest-southeast oriented square. The south-eastern frontage as well as the middle of the market, are now covered with bushy vegetation and trees that used to define the borders of nineteenth-century farms. An additional obstacle reducing the visibility of the structures appeared to be field roads running through the former town<sup>4</sup>.

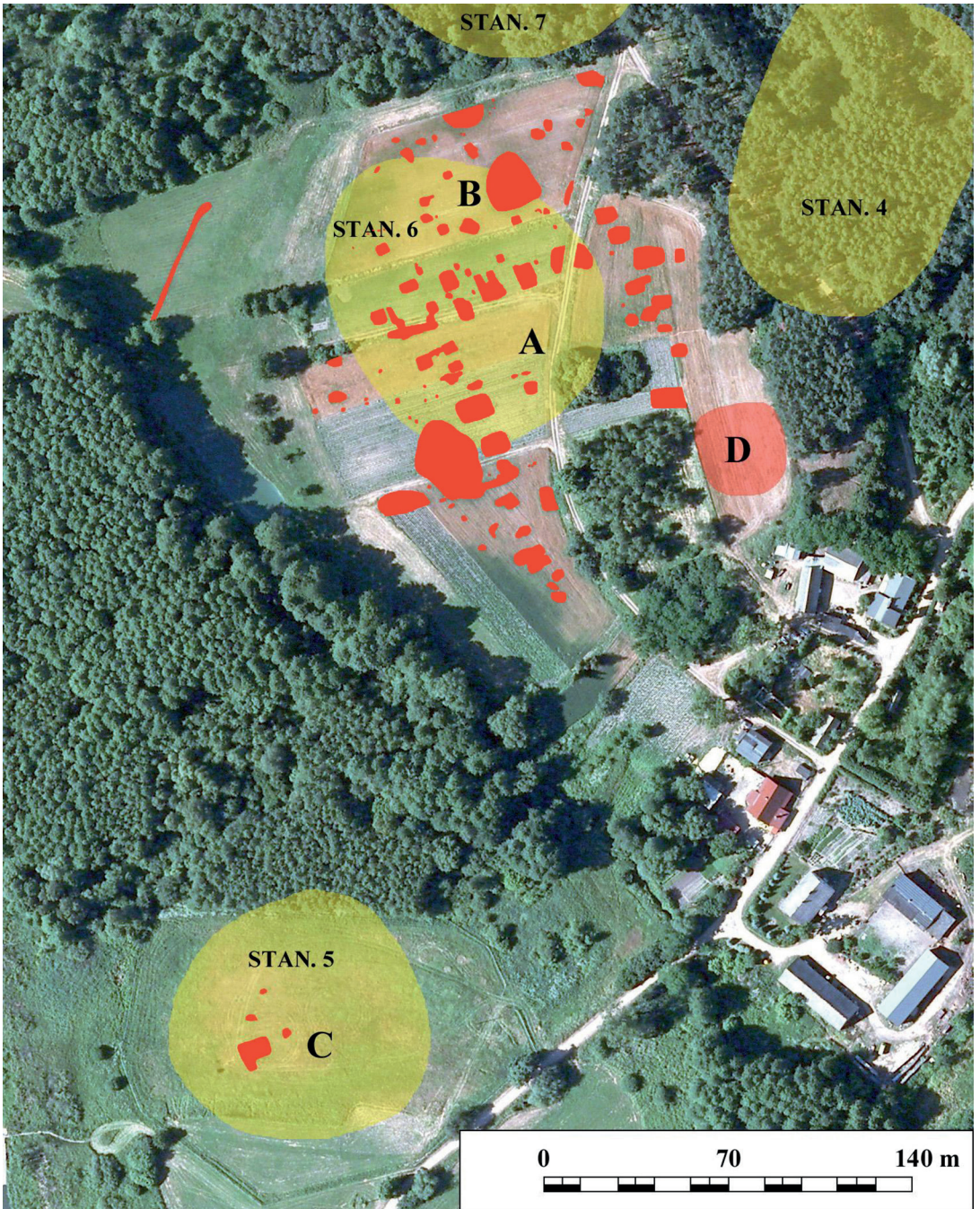
The fairly evenly distributed rectangular structures have been identified as traces of housing developments – most probably wooden, facing fronts of town plots. Some of the identified buildings were characterised by a considerable size, reaching up to 10 m in length, with a width of up to 9 m. In some cases an interesting observation was made of elongated extensions added at the rear parts of residential buildings. Similarly as in the case of Szamotuły, it would be difficult to reconstruct the type of organisation of the rear area of town plots based on the observations from the air.

Within the town there were 5 streets recorded, stretching at right angles from the market, two of them starting from the corners of the north-western frontage of the town square, the other two from the south-western frontage. In the south-western frontage there was only one route recorded, starting in its southern corner. Due to the worse observation conditions it appeared impossible to designate routes in the north-eastern part of the market and in the second corner of the north-western frontage. The most important artery of the town should be considered the one starting in the south-eastern corner of the market square, in a suitable (the narrowest) place crossing the valley of the Dzwonówka river (next to the manor house belonging to the owners of the village) and leading to Poznań. Most probably it had its continuation in the road starting in the north-eastern corner of the town square and running along the Dzwonówka river northwards. Interestingly, the route survived the fall of the town in Dzwonowo, which is proved by the map by D. Gilly from the early nineteenth century (Figure 4) and it has been used as a ground road until now.

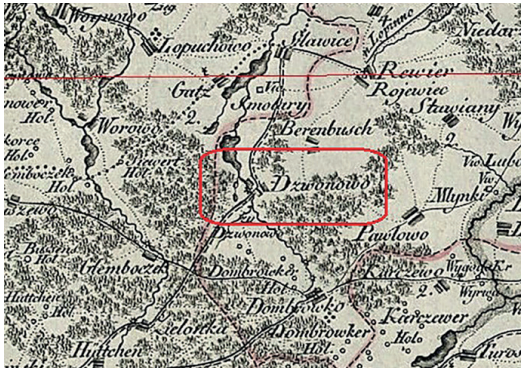
An integral part of the medieval town was a church, usually located not far from the square market, most often behind the area directly adjacent to it. Zwanowo town also had one, first mentioned

<sup>3</sup> The cemetery was located on the basis of anthropological data recorded on the surface. According to local people, the cemetery was connected with epidemics of cholera.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noticing that contemporary ground roads run parallel with the roads of medieval chartered town, e.g. the road crossing the square market in Dzwonowo (which most probably reflects main communication tract of the town) and the road running along the northern frontage towards the river crossing (?) through the valley of the Dzwonówka river.



**Figure 3.** Niedzwiedziny (Hamlet Dzwonowo), com. Skoki. Archaeological sites marked on the relics of settlement recorded on the orthophotomap. A – chartered town, B – oval village, C – medieval (?) and modern manor house, D – cemetery (by M. Krzepkowski on the basis of the orthophotomap from [www.geoportal.gov.pl](http://www.geoportal.gov.pl)).



**Figure 4.** Location of Dzwonowo village on the map by D. Gille from 1802-1803 (after: [www.sggee.org](http://www.sggee.org)).

in 1348 and demolished in the late eighteenth century. Unfortunately, it appeared impossible to locate the church, although it might have been built not far from the cemetery.

According to the data analysed above, Dzwonowo represents an example of a medieval urban area of the smallest demographic and economic potential, the forms of settlement sometimes known as “dwarf” or “lower value” towns (Jastrebeckaja 1995: 35). Such organisms often differed from villages developing in vicinity only in terms of their legal status and layout of housing developments. The economy of their inhabitants was usually based on agriculture (Górczak 2002: 14-15).

## OVAL VILLAGE

In addition to the northern part of the housing developments of the chartered town there were also recorded outlines of structures (some of them almost square in shape) spreading fairly evenly around an elongated oval of about 66x37 m in size (Figures 2-4). In the central part of the southwest-northeast oriented oval structure there was observed an interesting quite regular shaded area of 3-4 ares.

The arrangement, as described above, shows similar characteristics of the layout of an oval village. The central part in such a type of housing development was a square (called *półwieś* or *nawieś*), often with a pond, sometimes a church or a tavern (Burszta 1959: 38; Wędzki 1998: 75). Most researchers would see the diffusion of such a village layout as a result of towns being founded under the German law – they were particularly popular in areas under strong German influence (Piskorski 2005: 210). According to Piskorski, who discussed the problems of the rural colonisation of Western Pomerania, oval villages, in the analysed area, were the most favourable type of rural settlements chartered under German law, especially in the first half and at the beginning of the second half of the thirteenth century (Piskorski 2005: 210).

## Medieval knightly residence (?) and old-Polish manor house

In the close vicinity of the village and then the chartered town there must have existed a knightly residence for the owner of the lands, built — like other such structures — in a place with natural defensive features. This was possibly the small circular elevation of circular exposure, located in a marshy bottom of the valley of the Dzwonówka river, at the end of a strongly elongated, irregular tip (Figure 1). The defensive character of the place, located less than 300 meters from the chartered town, was even strengthened by a small reservoir of water west of the elevation. This was an area where, during fieldwalking in 1985, a late medieval and modern settlement was discovered, recorded as site 5.

In the south-western part of the elevation, an outline of a regular rectangle (about 11x9 m in size) was observed, oriented southwest-northeast (Figures 2, 3). The analysed structure, significantly large, may represent the surviving relics of such a residence. At the same elevation, to the north and northeast of the described structure there were observed several significantly smaller marks, oval (?) in shape. As already mentioned, in the whole area there were recorded numerous late medieval and post-medieval potsherds and fragments of stove tiles (vessel-like and plate ones). The large number of stove

tiles on the surface of the elevation may prove the hypothesis of a post-medieval residence functioning in the area. However, the state of the art cannot determine whether the manor house of the owners of Dzwonowo replaced the former (medieval) knightly residence or was erected in a new location, and therefore the relics of the medieval manor house should be searched for in another place<sup>5</sup>.

## AN OUTLINE HISTORY OF MEDIEVAL DZWONOWO

The name Dzwonowo was first mentioned in documents dating from the early fourteenth century. They were associated with the contemporary owner of the village, Dobrogost of the Nałęcz family, the voivod of Poznan (Pakulski 1982: 39). At the present stage of research, it seems impossible to determine whether it was Dobrogost of Dzwonowo who started the estate, or an earlier owner of the village, who has not been mentioned in written sources.

According to the date of a document mentioning the widow and Dobrogost's son Dzierżykraj aka Świdwa, Dobrogost must have died before 16 April 1321 (Zakrzewski 1878: no. 1023). The same document provides evidence that at the time of his death, Dobrogost together with his son Abraham had been excommunicated for iniquities against the bishop of Poznan (Pakulski 1982: 44). The widow, donating the village to the bishopric asked to revoke anathema of her late husband and son and to reconsecrate their burial place. Unfortunately, the location of the grave itself was not described and it may only be assumed that in this case it might have been the church in Dzwonowo first mentioned on 25 May 1348 (Zakrzewski 1878: no. 1269). Except for the note concerning the owner of the area – Dzierżykraj (son of Dobrogost), an important piece of information was that at the time Dzwonowo was a town, and its inhabitants were named citizens. Thus, the charter must have been given to the town before 1348 and its most probable initiator would probably be the voivod Dobrogost.

According to his high official position and contacts he had with powerful elites, the owner of Dzwonowo must have been in a good financial shape. The material goods he owned together with favourable political circumstances gave him an opportunity to invest in his own property, while his high position among the knighthood in Wielkopolska obliged him to manifest his personal prestige and confirm his social status. One of his acts might have been the location of a private town (Wroniszewski 2001: 17-38).

As mentioned above, when Dobrogost died, the estate in Dzwonowo was inherited by his son Dzierżykraj Świdwa, and then by descendants of the latter (Pakulski 1982: 44). Dzwonowo had remained a town up to the first decades of the fifteenth century, while at the beginning of the sixteen century it was nothing more than a village with five houses.

## CONCLUSIONS

The real value of the discovery presented in the paper should be emphasised in the summary. Firstly, it appeared to be the first in Poland settlement relics related to a chartered town, an oval village and a residence identified at the same time on the basis of the observation of crop marks seen from the air. The three perfectly illustrate not only the way private properties were used in medieval Wielkopolska, undergoing chronological and spatial settlement transformations, but also investment efforts aiming at increasing the income of a liege lord to emphasise his social status. The town developments identified in Dzwonowo provided researchers with new data concerning the layouts of medieval towns and their

<sup>5</sup> A similar situation is known also from Kościelna Wieś in Kujawy (Kajzer 1994: 107-158).

early developmental stage, right after being founded with a charter. On the other hand, a complete novum appeared to be the identification of an undisturbed layout of a medieval oval village based on the analysis of air photographs. The chartered town in Dzwonowo (poorly described in written sources, thus also often omitted in historical papers) valuably enriches studies of the sixteenth-century urbanisation of Wielkopolska and the network of trade and communication routes. The discovery of civitas Zwanow and the supposed knightly residence may lead to further consideration on the political situation in the 1320s, i.e. on the disputed military operation of the Brandenburgian army in Wielkopolska.

For further study of the historical settlement in Dzwonowo, interdisciplinary research should be carried out, including the implementation of the most recent documentation techniques as well as non-invasive survey methods.

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