

# Between Idea and Reality. In Search of Archaeological Traces of the Identification of Members of the Knightly Class Based on the Example of Discoveries from the Motte Tower Castle in Widów, Upper Silesia, Poland

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**BETWEEN IDEA AND REALITY. IN SEARCH OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRACES OF THE IDENTIFICATION OF MEMBERS OF THE KNIGHTLY CLASS BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF DISCOVERIES FROM THE MOTTE TOWER CASTLE IN WIDÓW, UPPER SILESIA, POLAND****Abstract**

The considerations based on the artefacts discovered during the excavations of the motte tower in Widów are an interesting source for research on the chivalric culture of the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to connect the discovered sword fragment – regarded as a symbol of knighthood – with a specific representative of the Widowski family. Leaving aside any purely theoretical deliberations on the circumstances in which this artefact was buried among the remains of the building with other objects used in the manor house, it must be admitted that this discovery can hardly be considered accidental and completely unrelated to the occupants of the said residence. It is certainly very likely that the analysed artefact is material evidence of the cohabitation of the manor's inhabitants with a sword, an attribute of the knightly class and a symbol of their membership in the group of local *milites*. Finds of stove tiles with various images associated with chivalric culture are testimony to the fact that the local manor belonged to people whose material status, but also spiritual needs and worldview went beyond the everyday mundane life of the local country estate owners. The traces of material culture uncovered through archaeological research are carriers of ideas that complete the picture of a past reality.


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**INTRODUCTION**

There is no doubt that the sword was an object of extraordinary importance for the knightly culture of the Middle Ages, for it was not only a type of weapon used by representatives of this social class during armed conflicts of various importance but, in addition to its utilitarian significance, an item with a strong symbolic meaning. The sword was used in the knighting ceremony, where bestowing accolades initiated one's accession to knighthood.<sup>1</sup> In Polish culture, the sword was also used

to determine patrilineality – agnatic lineage (analogously to the spear in the phrase 'spear side') and to swear an oath in important and honourable matters. Culturally and socially, the knight was linked to the sword, it was his attribute and external symbol defining his status.<sup>2</sup> This relationship was described in an interesting and accurate way by Maria Ossowska who stated that '(...) Just as a knight has a special relationship with his horse, so a special relationship connects a knight with his armour and especially with his sword. It resembles the relationship of a modern man to his car or yacht.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Piwowarczyk 2000, 59; Ławrynowicz 2005, 60-61.

<sup>2</sup> Barber 2000, 26.

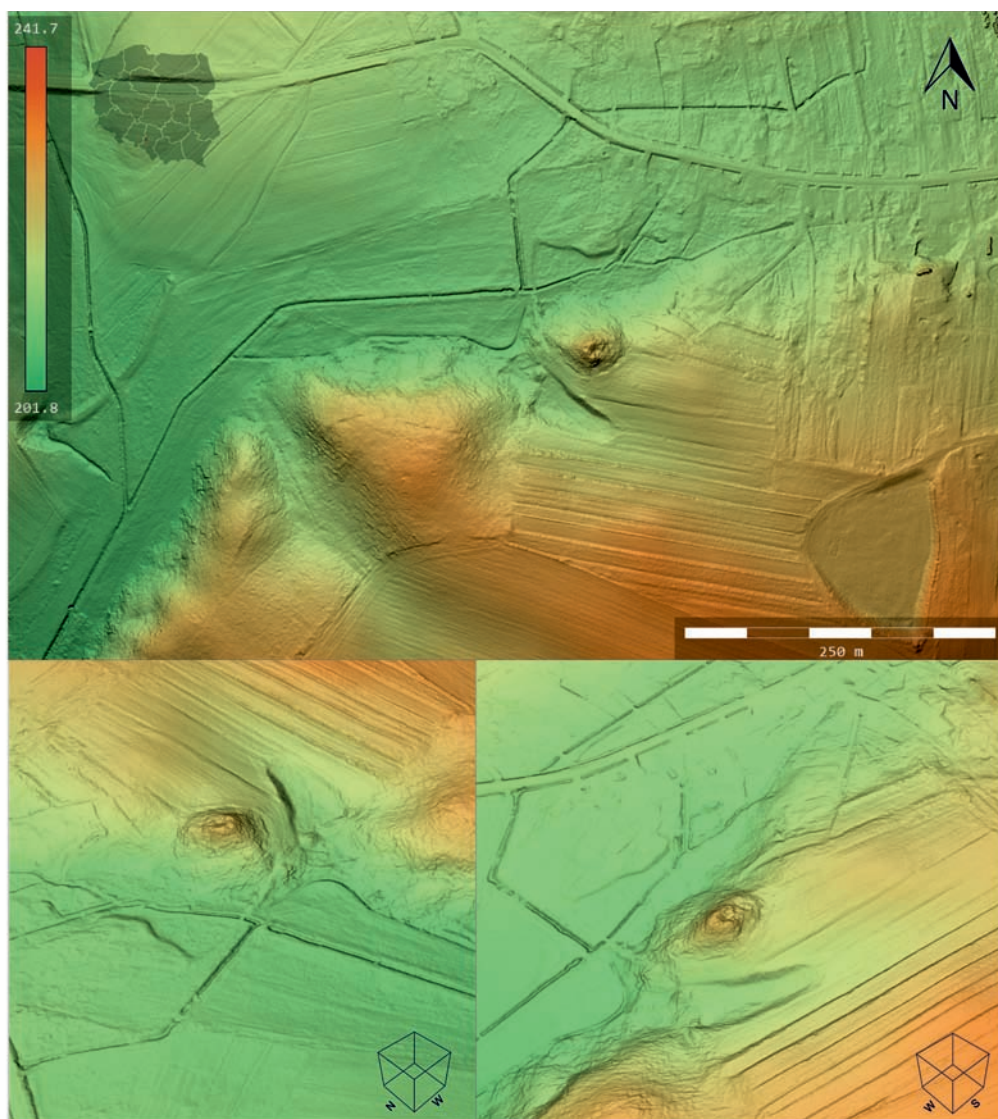
<sup>3</sup> Ossowska 1973, 460.

**KEYWORDS**

- late Middle Ages
- Upper Silesia
- Widów castle
- sword
- knighthood
- chivalric culture



**Fig. 1.** LIDAR model of the motte in Widów, Model LIDAR. Graphic design: R. Zdaniewicz



We should also note here that the depiction of the warrior-knight – usually in armour on horseback, with a sword or lance in his hand – is a kind of simplification of his image but in the minds of generations of Europeans references to this motif or its particular elements are commonplace and not only they are widespread in contemporary pop culture but can be found even in works produced at universities.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, we can ask ourselves if historical archaeology provides information on knightly culture? Do discoveries made during the excavations of medieval manor sites (motte tower castles) provide material evidence of this peculiar, centuries-old cohabitation of knight and sword? Was knighthood determined only by the sword? The discoveries made in Widów provide an interesting stimulus to write a few words on this subject.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Bielecki 2021.

#### **A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE RELICS OF THE MANOR HOUSE IN WIDÓW**

In 2023, exploratory archaeological investigations were carried out at the site of a motte tower castle in the village of Widów in Upper Silesia. The natural elevation that in the past was adapted for the construction of a motte-type residential and defensive feature is very clearly visible in the landscape, which is also well represented by Lidar visualisations (Fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> At the top, the hill is now damaged by sand mining, probably carried out in the 1930s – there is a large-scale excavation located in the central part of the hill and thus the main part of the historical site is now destroyed. During the archaeological investigations, trenches were

<sup>5</sup> The hill, roughly oval in plan, has a diameter of approximately 36 m N-S and approximately 47 m W-E at its base. On the summit (plateau), the dimensions of the elevation are slightly different – approximately 13 on the N-S line and approximately 20 on the W-E line. Currently, the hill is raised about 12-14 m above the valley level at the base (this is relative due to the unevenness found at the culmination of the hill and the differences in level on different sides of its base).



**Fig. 2.** Relics of the late-medieval items from the excavations in Widów. 1. iron sword pommel; 2. silver coin; 3. cooper alloy application. Photo: R. Zdaniewicz.

opened both on the small surviving section of the plateau and at the foot of the hill to the east.

The archaeological excavations that took place at the discussed site have provided information on the different stages of its use in the past. For the subject matter of this paper, the key phase is the time horizon falling between around the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

In this phase of settlement, the plateau of the mound was occupied by a structure of undetermined size, probably having a residential function. At some point (probably during the mining of sand by the local population in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), its relics were levelled and pushed to the western slope of the elevation.

In the trenches opened in this part of the site, archaeologists found plenty of historical material, including fragments of vessels and other artefacts, as well as structural elements in the form of iron nails, door fittings, and a hinge<sup>7</sup>. The fact that a residential building once stood here is evidenced by the decorated stove tiles from the destroyed stove that heated the interior of the former structure. The chronological markers of this phase also include

<sup>6</sup> In addition to this phase, archaeologists also discovered layers indicating that the plateau was also occupied in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (radiocarbon date of a rye grain from the occupation layer and fragments of pottery vessels) and in the modern period, around the 18<sup>th</sup> century (fragments of pottery, tiles, coin).

<sup>7</sup> The discussed set of objects was discovered during the exploration of layer no. 4 in trenches no. 1 and 2.

a silver coin from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 2:2)<sup>8</sup> and perhaps a star-shaped, copper-alloy belt appliqué, similar in form to specimens known, *inter alia*, from medieval assemblages discovered in Wrocław (Fig. 2:3)<sup>9</sup>. Chronological data for this phase of the site's occupation was also provided by the burnt relics of beams discovered in the fill of the excavation trench opened on the preserved small part of the plateau. These attest to the existence here of a structure made of fir wood (common firs felled after 1503 or 1507),<sup>10</sup> which burned down as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The reason for its destruction is not known but there are no traces indicating that it was caused by an attack.<sup>11</sup>

#### IRON SWORD POMMEL – A REMNANT OF THE WEAPONRY OF LOCAL KNIGHTS?

In the demolition layer of the above-mentioned 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century manor archaeologists found also an interesting relic of medieval weaponry. It was

<sup>8</sup> The Duchy of Głogów, John II the Mad (1476-1488), a heller from 1483-1488, Kozuchów mint, analysed by Dr. P. Milejski of the Institute of Archaeology, University of Wrocław.

<sup>9</sup> Sawicki 2022, 193, cat. nos. 376 -377.

<sup>10</sup> Radiocarbon14 dating and dendrochronological dating of organic material from stratigraphic layer 17 were carried out by Professor M. Krąpiec at the Absolute Dating Laboratory of the AGH University of Science and Technology in Kraków.

<sup>11</sup> During the excavations archaeologists did not encounter any weaponry relics, e.g., in the form of crossbow bolts arrowheads, which could indicate a potential attack on the homestead. The site's location at the top of the mound meant that the buildings were particularly exposed to possible lightning.

an iron sword pommel with a fragment of a hilt tang (Fig. 2:1). The pommel has an oval, slightly asymmetrical shape in lateral view, which in cross-section resembles a rectangle. Its lateral side is approximately 1.5 cm wide and the front dimensions are approximately 4.3×4.6 cm. The present weight of the pommel, including the preserved fragment of the hilt tang, is 206 g. Its edges are rounded, which may also be partly due to corrosion. In the upper part, there is a faint trace of flattening the end of the tang, while in the lower part of the pommel, there is a preserved small fragment of the hilt tang made of an iron rod with a rectangular cross-section measuring approximately 0.3×1.2 cm. The surface is flat, slightly concave in the central part, and takes the form of a round concave disc. As a result of corrosion, it is now difficult to determine whether the central part of the disc was originally decorated. It is possible that the traces of small dents, placed around the edges of one of the side surfaces of the pommel, may be regarded as relics of the ornament. It may have originally taken the form of a series of oval punched indentations symmetrically surrounding the central, slightly concave part of the pommel's surface. The nature of these indentations was probably merely decorative, as the marks placed on the pommels were unlikely to act as maker's marks.<sup>12</sup> Typologically, it is closest to disk-shaped pommels with flat surfaces in the type G according to E. Oakeshott, which in some specimens used after 1400 AD had a concave central part.<sup>13</sup> In M. Głosek's publication on swords from Central Europe, pommels of this type were similarly classified as G-type.<sup>14</sup> Disk-shaped pommels usually accompanied different varieties of swords in types XV and XVI dating to the late Middle Ages.<sup>15</sup> Examples from Bohemia show that they were sometimes also fitted on older 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century swords of type XI,<sup>16</sup> but also on younger swords of type XVIIIb dated to the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, it is a form of pommel with quite a wide chronological spectrum.

While this artefact can hardly be considered unique *per se*, the discovery of sword relics during archaeological investigations carried out at the site of a medieval motte tower castle in Poland certainly is not common. Probably the best known finds of this type are the swords discovered during

the investigations of the knightly seat in Plemięta in Chełmno Land<sup>18</sup> and from Nowe Miasto nad Wartą.<sup>19</sup> Sword fragments are also known from investigations of motte towers in Chłapowo and Bnin in Greater Poland<sup>20</sup>, and have also been discovered at similar sites in Pszczew, Sława or Trzciel in the Lubusz Land.<sup>21</sup> Also known from this part of Poland is a sword pommel from a brick-built knightly tower castle in Witków.<sup>22</sup> A fairly well-preserved specimen of a sword was found in the course of excavations of the relics of a wooden knightly tower in Spytkowice in Lesser Poland,<sup>23</sup> while a fragment of a pommel was found within a motte-type structure in Tarnow Jezierny in Lower Silesia.<sup>24</sup> Another artefact of this type was also supposedly discovered during investigations of a *fortalicium* occupied by knights in Pławniowice in Upper Silesia.<sup>25</sup> These objects were used by representatives of the knightly social class, so we can assume that they were elements of offensive weaponry that belonged to them. The fact that they were used by this social group is also confirmed by written records and numerous gravestones with images of knights, including those from the territory of Poland.<sup>26</sup> Although in Upper Silesia the oldest surviving stone slabs depicting knights with swords date only from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, sometimes they still have features of Gothic art, often combined with the new Renaissance style,<sup>27</sup> which is probably indicative of the earlier, established tradition. These include, among others, the grave slab of the nobleman Jan Kobyłka, who died in 1544 (Fig. 3) that is mounted into the porch of the church in Krasne Pole near Opole, or a specimen from the church in Włodzienin depicting Waclaw Bytowski who died in 1575 (currently stored in the Museum in Brzeg).

Consequently, the sword whose part was found in Widów may have belonged to members of the knightly class.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, there are very few known sources that record information about the potential owners of the Widów estate from the Middle Ages – the oldest documents come from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century,

<sup>12</sup> Głosek 1973, 128.

<sup>13</sup> Oakeshott 1963, 95.

<sup>14</sup> Głosek 1984, 26.

<sup>15</sup> Głosek 1984, 28-29.

<sup>16</sup> Hošek et al. 2019, 261-262.

<sup>17</sup> Hošek et al. 2019, 283, 313.

<sup>18</sup> Głosek 1985, 99-100.

<sup>19</sup> Grygiel and Jurek 1996, 165.

<sup>20</sup> Nowakowski 2006, 64-65.

<sup>21</sup> Michalak 2019, 230-231.

<sup>22</sup> Michalak 2007, 219-220.

<sup>23</sup> Nadolski and Wawrzonowska 1982, 19-34.

<sup>24</sup> Nowakowski 2017, 541.

<sup>25</sup> Wojciechowska 1969, 286; Zdaniewicz 2020, 297-298.

<sup>26</sup> Nowakowski 2006, 53-68.

<sup>27</sup> Chrzanowski 1971, 70-71.

<sup>28</sup> The sword was an attribute of knighthood, but it should be noted that by the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, swords were also worn by burghers, e.g., the patricians of Legnica, Jawor, Głogów, and Wrocław, cf. Goliński 1990, 23, 37-38.

a knight called Jan Widowski (*Jan Wydowski*) appears in the Opole and Racibórz records.<sup>29</sup> He was supposed to have been the owner of the village as early as 1518, but no original documents have survived to prove this – we only have secondary information provided by 19<sup>th</sup>-century German historians.<sup>30</sup> He certainly testified on a document issued in 1538.<sup>31</sup> In the same year, Marek Widowski (*Marek Widawsky*) signed one of the documents.<sup>32</sup> Widów probably remained in the hands of representatives of the Widowski family until 1592, when it passed into the hands of the Larysz family, with *Sebastian Laris* listed as the village's owner in a document from 1592.<sup>33</sup>

The artefacts obtained during the excavations and the results of dendrochronological dating indicate that the manor house in Widów functioned in the last decades of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. For this reason, its owners and occupants could probably have been the above-mentioned Jan and Marek Widowski. It is difficult to determine the nature of their kinship or how they came into possession of the Widów estate. Perhaps they purchased the village or received a grant of land from one of the dukes ruling the Duchy of Toszek.

The location of the manor of Widów in the Toszek Land perhaps linked its owners to the heirs of the former Duchy of Bytom, namely the court of the Dukes of Cieszyn. Indeed, from 1357, the Duchy of Toszek was the domain of the Duke of Cieszyn Przemysław I Noszak, and from 1404 of his son Bolesław I of Cieszyn.<sup>34</sup> In 1414, Toszek, like Gliwice, became the domain of Casimir I of Oświęcim. In 1445, after Casimir's death, Toszek Land was granted to his second son, Przemysław, known as Przemysław of Toszek.<sup>35</sup> In 1484, when Przemysław died without heirs, according to the rules of succession, the lord of Toszek became John IV, Duke of Oświęcim and Gliwice. In 1496, his widow sold the Duchy of Toszek to the Dukes



**Fig. 3.** Stone tombstone of Jan Kobyłka from Krasne Pole. Source: Archive of the Monument's Conservator in Opole.

of Opole.<sup>36</sup> Thus, this part of the lands of the former Duchy of Bytom came under the rule of the Duke of Opole John II the Good.<sup>37</sup> After John II the Good's heirless death in 1532, the territory formerly united by the Duke passed to Georg Hohenzollern, Margrave of Ansbach, thus ending the centuries-long rule of the Upper Silesian Piasts over the discussed area.<sup>38</sup>

As evidenced by numerous written records, the policy of the court of Duke John II was greatly influenced by his entourage, which included officials in the court chancellery as well as representatives of the knightly class that by force of arms implemented the policy pursued by the Duke.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, neither Jan nor Marek Widowski are listed as court officials, witnesses or in any other capacity on any of the surviving documents issued by John II the Good.

Although it seems that they did not operate in the immediate echelons of the Duke's court, this does not mean that they were not among the so-called *slovutni*, or 'faithful liegemen' (*wierni*

<sup>29</sup> The land registers of the Duchy of Opole and Racibórz (*Fürstenthum Oppeln-Ratibor*) date from the years 1532-1543 and 1557-1604. They contain information on, among other things, the sale of estates, last wills and testaments, and other legal acts. They were translated and published on the pages of successive issues of the journal "Oberschlesische Heimat" by Johannes Chrzęszcz in 1914-1916, cf. State Archive in Opole, reference No. 45/3371/1-2, on-line access: [www.szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl/en/zespol/-/zespol/47874](http://www.szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl/en/zespol/-/zespol/47874)), information on Jan Widowski in the above-mentioned records. Information after: Pilnáček 1991, 1329.

<sup>30</sup> Kloss et al. 1943, 245.

<sup>31</sup> Chrzęszcz 1915, 79; Pilnáček 1991, 1329.

<sup>32</sup> Chrzęszcz 1914, 182; Pilnáček 1991, 1329

<sup>33</sup> Kloss et al. 1943, 245.

<sup>34</sup> Panic 2015, 21, 147-148.

<sup>35</sup> Panic 1988, 58-59.

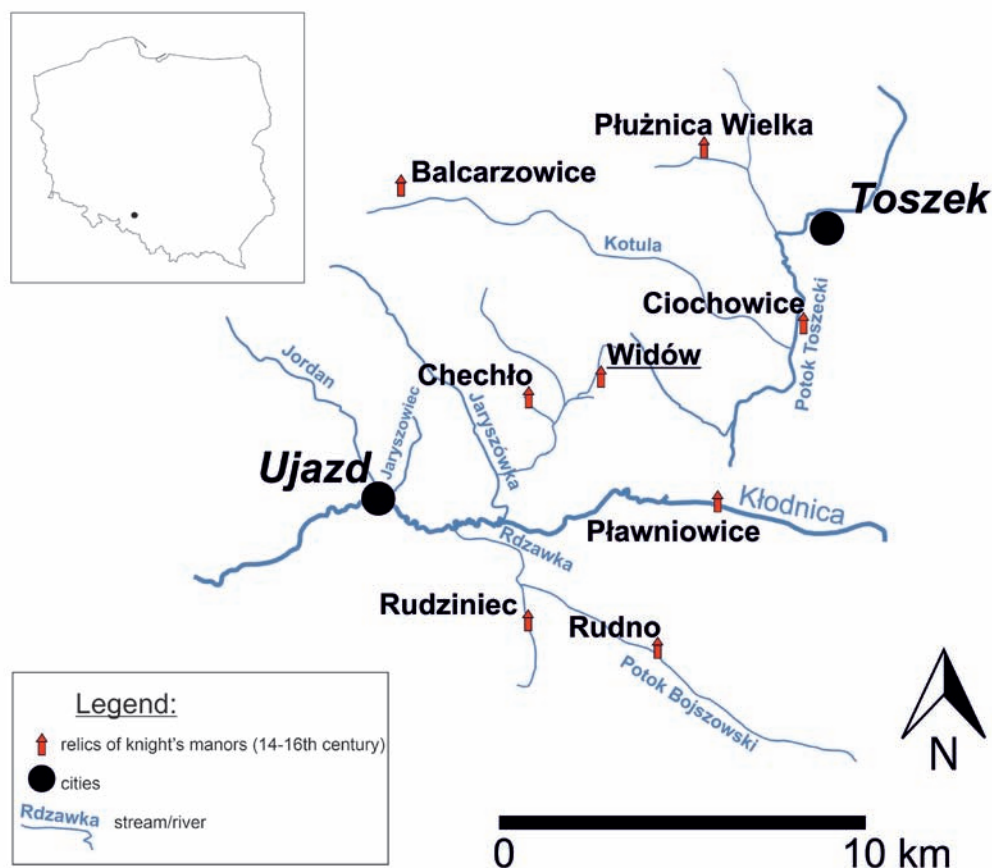
<sup>36</sup> Jasiński 2007, 649.

<sup>37</sup> Łojek 2021, 96-110.

<sup>38</sup> Kamiński 2009, 64-65.

<sup>39</sup> Łojek 2021, 342-387.

**Fig. 4.** Relics of the motte tower near the city of Toszek in 14-15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Graphic design: R. Zdaniewicz.



*naszych miłych*), who in large numbers appeared at the Duke's court during his several decade-long reign.<sup>40</sup> What is important, presumed owners of estates in the neighbourhood of Widów in which archaeologists also discovered remains of medieval knightly seats, sometimes operated close to Jan II the Good's court (Fig. 4)<sup>41</sup>. On a document issued jointly by the Dukes of Opole, brothers John and Nicholas, in March 1477, as a witness appears *Mikulass Sselerzowsky von Czechel*, owner of the manor and estate in the nearby Chechło.<sup>42</sup> Krzysztof Tiachowicz (*Kristoff z Tiachowicz*), a possible owner of the village and manor in Ciochowice (located around 8,5 km from Widów) from the 1480s until 1499 was a scribe and then chancellor of the Duchy of Opole and Racibórz.<sup>43</sup> He later appears as a witness on a diploma issued jointly by Dukes John and Nicholas in June 1502,<sup>44</sup> and then on a document issued by John II the Good himself in June 1503 (*Kristoff Tiachowsky*).<sup>45</sup> It seems that the members of the Widowski family, unlike

their neighbours, did not make political careers at the ducal court of the Piasts of Opole. At the same time, it is not known from whom Jan and Marek Widowski may have received the grant of land in Widów. They probably belonged to the knightly class but their genealogy is very enigmatic. It is also not known whether they could have been knighted, although from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards there is much less information about the ceremonial bestowing of accolades in Silesia, like in the case of Western Europe and the Kingdom of Poland.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, generally speaking, the boundary between the knights with and without accolades has become severely blurred.

In summary, the discovery of a sword pommel at Widów may indicate that the owners of the local manor belonged to the knightly social class.<sup>47</sup> However, it is worth noting that while the relic of weaponry in question may have been in the possession of the lords of the manor. At the same time, there are other finds that may indicate to us whether the owners of the Widów manor belonged to the knightly class.

<sup>40</sup> Sękowski 2011, 54-56.

<sup>41</sup> Zdaniewicz 2021, 369-394.

<sup>42</sup> Document dated 2 March 1477, after: CDS 1865, 100; cf. Zdaniewicz 2022, 289-290.

<sup>43</sup> Łojek 2021, 362-363.

<sup>44</sup> Document dated 10 June 1502, after: CDS 1865, 150.

<sup>45</sup> Document dated 25 June 1503, after: CDS 1865, 152.

<sup>46</sup> Piwowarczyk 2000, 65; Woźny 2020, 412.

<sup>47</sup> The location where the sword fragment was found itself indicates belonging to the knightly social class. Manor houses themselves were a sign of privileged status (social affiliation) of their owners, cf. Kajzer 1993, 107-108.

**'BEAUTY THAT HEATED THE KNIGHTS' MANORS**<sup>48</sup>

As already mentioned, archaeologists discovered a large number of various everyday objects and structural elements of buildings during their investigations of the destruction layers associated with the manor house in Widów. One of the largest groups of artefacts were the remains of stove panel tiles, which in the past were elements of a heating device in the manor house. Although many of these artefacts were very fragmented, they constitute an extremely interesting source for the study of the material culture of the inhabitants of the manor house in Widów because of the images that appear on the faces of the discovered tiles. Perhaps we should start the discussion on this issue with one piece of information, namely that in archive records dating from the 1930s, there is a reference to the discovery of fragments of vessels, tiles, and other objects during the construction of a road in the eastern part of the village. This information was also reported in the local Upper Silesian press and magazines from 1932-1935.<sup>49</sup> The discovered material also included a largely preserved tile with a representation of a knight, which is now in the collection of the Archaeology Department of the Gliwice Museum (Fig. 5). In all probability, it came from the site of the fortified settlement and ended up on the building site of the new road together with the sand brought from there for the road construction.

The discussed tile depicts a knight riding on horseback, wearing armour and presumably a helmet, with a sword concealed in a scabbard suspended from his belt. The whole figure is presented rather schematically, in a fairly primitive depiction of a scene of movement. Depicted on the tile is also a prominent symbol in the form of an inverted heart falling to the side of the rider. Despite these artistic shortcomings, the tile certainly very aptly alludes to one of the important elements of chivalric culture, for the scene depicted here refers to one of the models of love that were particularly common in the literature of the late medieval and modern periods, the symbols of which were primarily Jesus Christ and literary heroes: Tristan and Don Juan.<sup>50</sup> In the case of the discussed tile, the figure of the knight perhaps refers to that of Tristan known from the medieval myth of tragic lovers and



**Fig. 5.** Stove tiles with the rider found in Widów. Source: Archive of the Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom.

metaphorically depicts his tragic and unfulfilled love.<sup>51</sup> The adulterous and passionate affection between Tristan and Isolde was contradictory to the teachings of the church and for this reason the legend of their affair only became more widespread in literature and art of the Renaissance era in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>52</sup> In addition to the content of the image, it is also worth noting that at the side of the armed man portrayed on the tile there is a sword – an indispensable attribute of the knight's status.

Further fragments of stove tiles with decorated panels have already been discovered during excavations of the relics of the motte tower castle in Widów carried out in 2023. One of the motifs that are relevant to the discussion presented in this paper is the figure of St George (Fig. 6:1). In a fragmentarily preserved scene depicted on one of the tiles, St George is shown in armour, on horseback, with a spear in his hand with which he pierces a chimæra (dragon?) during a battle. Our attention is drawn to the details of the clothing and offensive and protective weapons, e.g. the gambeson, the faulds, and the hilt and pommel of the sword hanging from

<sup>48</sup> The above-mentioned title is a paraphrase of the name of a catalogue of tiles published in connection with the exhibition 'Krása, která hřeje. Gotické a renesanční kachle Moravy a Slezska', which in 2008-2010 was displayed at the Slovak Museum in Uherské Hradiště, the Slezské Zemské Museum in Opava, and the Museum of the City of Brno, cf. Menoušková and Měřínský 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Scheitza 1932; Skalník 1933; Scheitza 1935, 53.

<sup>50</sup> Starczewska 1975, 19-39.

<sup>51</sup> Bédier 2009.

<sup>52</sup> Flori 2003, 219-220.



**Fig. 6.** Parts of stove tiles from the motte in Widów.  
Photo: R. Zdaniewicz.



the armed man's belt. However, in addition to the matter of the depicted elements of costume and armour, which directly correspond to the fashion of armed men of late medieval times, the important issue at hand is the scene itself. St George is traditionally regarded in the Western world as the patron saint of knights.<sup>53</sup> The scene of the battle with the dragon, in which he slays the beast – an allegory of Satan – symbolises the Christian struggle between good and evil. Fighting against the enemies of the faith and fighting for its ideals, as well as courage, are among the most important virtues of chivalry.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that the motif of St George's battle may have adorned the tiles of a stove in a knights' manor.

This motif was, in fact, quite popular in Silesia and the entire Central Europe, especially in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>55</sup> In Upper Silesia, tiles depicting the scene of St George fighting with a dragon have been discovered during excavations of a motte tower in Chudów.<sup>56</sup> They also had many other elements traditionally associated with late medieval chivalric culture, i.e. scenes related to hunting or playing chess. Taking part in hunts was an important element of life both at courts and in knights' estates.<sup>57</sup> From the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, *inter alia*, representatives of the knightly class were often granted immunities, including those directly associated with hunting.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Ławrynowicz 2005, 37-38.

<sup>54</sup> Ossowska 1973, 73-77.

<sup>55</sup> Dymek 1995, 32; Menoušková and Měřínský 2008, 28.

<sup>56</sup> Dąbrowska et al. 2005, 9, Fig. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Piwowarczyk 2000, 148.

<sup>58</sup> Samsonowicz 1991, 175, 311; Tyszkiewicz 2009, 39-41.

Hunting rights were usually linked to land law, and thus by proving one's right to hunt one could demonstrate his noble lineage,<sup>59</sup> although there were some species, so-called 'big game,' that only rulers could hunt. However, it is difficult to establish to what extent the grant of hunting rights increased the consumption of wild animals. In the late medieval manors in the Toszek Land, the diet was still based on cereal products and those sourced from livestock, and game was only an addition to the regular menu.<sup>60</sup> Yet, we must remember that for the knightly class, hunting also had an important non-consumptive function. It provided an opportunity to demonstrate courage, strength, and resourcefulness – qualities desirable for any knight. It is probably for this reason that the panels of the tiles discovered in Widów featured both depictions of wild animals and presumably also hunting scenes (Fig. 6:2). One of them would be the tile depicting a horse rider with a bow in his hand. The hunter is presented in a very schematic manner, with no attention to detail. On the panel of another tile from Widów there is a stag depicted in motion (Fig. 6:3). Apart from the fact that the stag was considered a valuable royal hunting game, as it was also the emblematic king of the forest and a symbol of masculinity. For this reason, the stag or sometimes just the antlers were used in the heraldry of certain knightly families known from Upper Silesia.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, the stag is also inscribed in the Christian tradition, and in hunting scenes it was supposed to symbolise the clergy's pursuit of a lost soul.<sup>62</sup> This animal fitted perfectly into the mental and spiritual sphere of medieval chivalric culture.

Also, the depictions of fairytale characters, i.e., a griffin or a water spirit called Melusine, which

also appear on the panels of the stove tiles from Widów are associated with the chivalric culture of the Middle Ages (Fig. 6:4-5). Analogies to tiles with depictions of legendary beasts are plentiful, particularly among the finds from Bohemia.<sup>63</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The considerations based on the artefacts discovered during the excavations of the motte tower in Widów are an interesting source for research on the chivalric culture of the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to connect the discovered sword fragment – regarded as a symbol of knight-hood – with a specific representative of the Widowski family. Leaving aside any purely theoretical deliberations on the circumstances in which this artefact was buried among the remains of the building with other objects used in the manor house, it must be admitted that this discovery can hardly be considered accidental and completely unrelated to the occupants of the said residence. It is certainly very likely that the analysed artefact is material evidence of the cohabitation of the manor's inhabitants with a sword, an attribute of the knightly class and a symbol of their membership in the group of local 'milites.' Finds of stove tiles with various images associated with chivalric culture are testimony to the fact that the local manor belonged to people whose material status, but also spiritual needs and worldview went beyond the everyday mundane life of the local country estate owners. The traces of material culture uncovered through archaeological research are carriers of ideas that complete the picture of a past reality.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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<sup>59</sup> Samsonowicz 1991, 311.

<sup>60</sup> The results of the zooarchaeological analyses of the bone materials obtained during the excavations of the relics of late medieval motte towers from the Toszek Land show that the proportion of wild animal bones does not exceed 5%.

<sup>61</sup> Pilnaček 1991, 59, 134-135, 181-182, 196, 224.

<sup>62</sup> Dymek 1995, 32.

<sup>63</sup> Menoušková and Měřínský, 45-49.

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