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Relieving a besieged city in Medieval Poland

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RELIEVING A BESIEGED CITY IN MEDIEVAL POLAND

The historical-military literature stresses the fact that besides comprehensively preparing a stronghold for a fight, protecting it against the entrance of an enemy, repulsing assaults and dealing with emergencies the crew were obliged to be in contact with their own army outside the fortress¹. The aim of the present article is to establish the extent to which the defence of a stronghold could be successful if the fortress was not relieved from the outside and to find out how effective relieving troops were. The phenomenon will be discussed to the second quarter of the fourteenth century, that is to say, to the time when Casimir the Great came to the throne and the stronghold period in Poland ended.

A city was relieved when the crew of a besieged defensive stronghold was assisted from the outside. Thus any operations consisting in reinforcing the crew before a town was ringed by troops are not the subject of the present analysis. Consequently, the first documented instance of such a relieving operation cannot be taken into consideration. In 1017 the Emperor Henry II arrived at Niemcza. He wanted to lay siege to the stronghold in order to cut the crew off and prevent any reinforcements from entering the town. His plan, however, was never fully executed. According to Thietmar, the numerous relieving troops (*presidium magnum*) forced their way through all the guards, who were fast asleep, under cover of darkness². That operation made it possible for the crew to defend the stronghold and forced the Emperor to raise the siege. The incident is not a classic example of a relieving operation because as the chronicler said, Niemcza had never been fully encircled.

The situation at Nakło, besieged by Bolesław III the Wry-Mouthed in 1109, was different. Outnumbered by the Polish forces, the defenders offered to call a truce and surrender the stronghold after it had ended. At the same time the crew sent messengers to bring in reinforcements from Pomerania. The relieving troops arrived secretly, unnoticed by the guards and the security troops stationed some distance from the stronghold. Their arrival took the Poles

by surprise. Part of the army had left their positions to look for food. The rest, however, managed to form themselves into two troops commanded by Bolesław the Wry-Mouthed and Palatine Skarbimir, who launched an unexpected assault and defeated the Pomeranian forces. After the defeat of the relieving troops the crew of Nakło surrendered the stronghold³.

The events of the spring of 1146, when Prince Władysław II the Exile laid siege to Poznań, which belonged to his younger brother Mieszko III the Old⁴, provide the researcher with some interesting material. A cordon of guards encircled the stronghold and the settlement, situated on an island on the Warta River, in order to prevent the crew from leaving the fortress or making contact with potential relieving troops. The besiegers controlled the routes to Gdańsk and Gniezno as well as the road running south alongside the Warta River and were able to stop any troops heading for the city⁵.

Having encircled the stronghold, Władysław's forces spread out and a regular siege began. The aim of the blockade was to force the defenders, whose provisions and weapons were running short, to capitulate. In order to arouse a feeling of pessimism among the besieged soldiers the attackers would feast and enjoy themselves every day. However, the majority of the magnates, headed by palatine Wszebor, backed the prince's younger brothers and reinforced the relieving troops commanded by Bolesław the Curly, the eldest of the brothers. The troops who arrived to assist the besieged crew took double action. They made contact with the defenders and formed detailed plans. As The Archbishop of Gniezno, Jakub, and the priests of Poznań supported the juniors, one can assume that the crew

¹ B. Miśkiewicz, *Rozwój stałych punktów oporu w Polsce do połowy XV wieku (The Development of Fixed Points of Resistance in Poland to the Mid-Fifteenth Century)*, Poznań 1964, p. 295.

² *Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi Chronicon*, ed. Z. Jędrlicki, Poznań 1953, pp. 554-555; cg.: A. F. Grabski, *Polska sztuka wojenna w okresie wczesnofeudalnym (The Polish War Art in the Early Feudal Period)*, Warszawa 1959, pp. 145-146; B. Miśkiewicz, *Rozwój...*, p. 254.

³ *Galli Anonymi Cronicae et gesta ducum sive principum Polonorum*, ed. K. Maleczyński, „Monumenta Poloniae Historica”, Series nova, vol. II, Kraków 1952, pp. 126-129; A. F. Grabski, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-173; B. Miśkiewicz, *Rozwój...*, pp. 255-257.

⁴ *Magistri Vincentii dicti Kadlubek Chronica Polonorum*, ed. M. Plezia, „Monumenta Poloniae Historica”, Nova series, vol. XI, Kraków 1994, pp. 121-122; *Chronica Poloniae Maioris*, ed. B. Kürbis, *ibidem*, vol. VIII, Warszawa 1970, pp. 50-52.

⁵ S. Smolka, *Mieszko Stary i jego wiek (Mieszko the Old and his Age)*, Warszawa 1881 [1959], pp. 238-240; B. Miśkiewicz, *Walki wewnętrzne w Polsce w latach 1142-1146 (Internal Struggles in Poland in the Years 1142-1146)* [in:] *iusdem, Szkice z dziejów wojskowości (Sketches of the History of the Military Science)*, Warszawa-Poznań 1991, pp. 244-248.

kept in touch with events outside the city through the so-called chapter dyke connecting the main settlement of Poznań with the left-bank settlement near St. Gotard's Church. At the same time they started to destroy the guards and secretly came closer to the stronghold. At midday when, as usual, a feast was given in Władysław's camp, the defenders raised a red shield on a tower situated behind St. Nicholas' Church three times, which was a signal for the relieving troops to attack. That the defenders used the earthworks of the borough of Zagórze to signal to the relieving troops suggests that the latter were hidden nearby, for example on the bank of the Cybina River, from which place the signals were clearly visible.

The attack occurred from two sides because the defenders also opened the gates and carried out a frontal assault on the enemy, who surprised, did not avoid panic in their ranks. Besides, the water from the dam on the Warta River was discharged and it flooded the tents which stood close to the riverbed. Władysław's army was dispersed and he himself fled the battlefield.

Bolesław IV the Curly and Mieszko III the Old's victory was a result of the relieving troops' effective assistance outside the stronghold and their close cooperation with the defenders. The besiegers' behaviour, namely their lack of discipline and self-consciousness, being a result of their military advantage, played a major role too⁶.

The three incidents mentioned above illustrate three different forms of military assistance: reinforcing the crew, defeating the relieving army and the crew's cooperation with the relieving troops.

It should be stressed that instances of military assistance given to besieged soldiers are frequently mentioned in written sources, particularly in the case of strongholds which were strategically important.

One of them was Lubusz, which was to ensure the safety of three Polish provinces-duchies: Silesia, Great Poland and Western Pomerania. At the beginning of the thirteenth century the stronghold belonged to Władysław the Spindle-Legged, the prince of Great Poland. The margraves of Lusatia and Brandenburg were interested in seizing the fortress. Fights for the district of Lubusz started when the margrave of Lower Lusatia, Conrad II, set off from his Kopanik for Lubusz in March 1209⁷. The crew of the stronghold resisted the attackers and waited for Prince Władysław to organize defence. The prince prepared a strong detachment, declared war and as was the knights' custom, informed him of the date of his arrival. He did not, however, keep his word. Despite doubts voiced by one of his knights, the day before, in the evening, the prince crossed

the Oder River and attempted to come up to the stronghold and launch an unexpected assault on the attackers. A witch, who walked in front of the army, cast spells and foretold victory, was said to have encouraged him to do so. His detachment was, however, discovered by the watchful guards while they were crossing the muddy valley of the Oder River. As a result it was the margrave who took the attacking enemy by surprise. Pierced with a spear, the witch died at the very beginning of the battle and the Polish force suffered heavy losses. The knight who had objected to the plan was killed too. As a result of the battle the Great Polish detachment was forced to withdraw and many soldiers died in the marshes of the Oder River during the night retreat. The defeat of the carelessly organized relieving expedition brought about the capitulation of Lubusz and the execution of its crew (the margrave took revenge for their previous attacks on his lands)⁸.

Another German expedition to Lubusz, led by Ludwig, the landgrave of Turingen, took place in 1225. In July he took command of the knight levy of Turingen and the neighbouring lands and set off for the Oder River⁹. The reconnoitering detachment, 300 strong, did take the inhabitants of Lubusz by surprise but managed to seize and destroy only the borough as the crew succeeded in closing the gates of the fortress. The reconnoitering detachment was left with no choice but to put up their encampment and lay siege to the stronghold. Ludwig and the rest of the army, who according to the chronicler, covered the ground around the fortress completely, like locusts, arrived on 1st August. The defence of the stronghold, manned by a small crew unprepared to fight with an enemy, consisted mainly in negotiations. Prince Władysław the Spindle-Legged learnt about the assault but he was very busy fighting with his nephew. Consequently, he only sent envoys headed by Wincenty of Niłek, the Archbishop of Gniezno, in order to make the landgrave withdraw from Lubusz. No reinforcements arrived and the defenders had to surrender the stronghold when the truce was over. They were only allowed to leave the fortress unharmed¹⁰.

In 1239 the Germans attempted to seize Lubusz again¹¹. Wilbrand of Käfernburg, the Archbishop of Magdeburg's army attacked the stronghold's fortifications for a few weeks. The natural defences as well as the fortification system facilitated the defence of the stronghold.

⁸ K. Olejnik, *Obrona polskiej granicy zachodniej. Okres rozbicia dzielnicowego i monarchii stanowej (1138-1385)* (*The Defence of the Polish Western Border. The Period of Territorial Division and the State Monarchy (1138-1385)*), Poznań 1970, pp. 116-117.

⁹ *Annales Reinhardtsbrunnenses*, [in:] „Thüringische Geschichtsquellen”, vol. I, ed. F. Wegele, Jena 1854, pp. 178-182.

¹⁰ B. Miśkiewicz, *Rozwój...*, pp. 259-261; B. Ziენტara, *Henryk Brodaty i jego czasy (Henry the Bearded and his Times)*, Second Edition, Warszawa 1997, pp. 256-257.

¹¹ *Annales Poloniae Maioris*, ed. B. Kürbis, „Monumenta Poloniae Historica”, Series nova, vol. VI, Warszawa 1962, p. 4; *Chronica Poloniae Maioris*, p. 86.

⁶ J. Szymczak, *Sposoby zdobywania i obrony grodów w Polsce w okresie rozbicia dzielnicowego (The Ways of Seizing and Defending Strongholds in Poland in Time of Territorial Division)*, „Studia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości”, vol. XXII, 1979, pp. 13-15.

⁷ *Chronicon Montis Sereni*, „Monumenta Germaniae Historica”, SS, vol. XXIII, p. 176.

The unexpected attack launched by the reinforcements brought by the Silesian prince Henry II the Pious forced the enemy to retreat. The defeat also resulted from the attackers' lack of discipline (they even quarreled among themselves)¹².

The example of Lubusz is meaningful. All three attempts to seize Lubusz made over a period of thirty years failed. The clumsy relieving operation of 1209 brought about the crew's tragedy. Lack of military assistance resulted in surrendering the fortress in 1225. Finally, lack of discipline among the besiegers brought about the defenders and the relieving troops' victory in 1239.

The stronghold of Santok was an important post on the north-western border of the Polish state. It controlled the water and land routes in the vicinity of the Noteć River's confluence with the Warta River and the point where the borders of three provinces, namely Silesia, Great Poland and Szczecin Pomerania, met. Barnim I, the prince of Szczecin, attacked the stronghold in 1244. When his attempts to capture the fortress failed, the duke employed a well-known method of blocking the stronghold off with the so-called counter-stronghold manned by his own crew. The aim of this operation was to cut off the old fortress and the Pomeranian soldiers paid by the Silesian prince Bolesław stationed in it. Przemysł I, the prince of Great Poland, who did not underestimate the importance of Santok to the defence of his duchy, relieved the besieged troops. He not only made the attackers retreat but took possession of the fortress¹³.

Prince Barnim attacked Santok, whose crew, according to sources, was small and did not have enough provisions, again in July 1247. Both the Silesian prince Bolesław and Przemysł I, the Duke of Great Poland, dispatched relieving troops to the stronghold. Their armies outnumbered the forces of Prince Barnim, who did not risk a defeat. He decided to break camp and withdraw. Simultaneously, the Silesian duke realized that the burning Santok issue becomes more and more time-consuming and handed the stronghold over to Przemysł I, the Duke of Great Poland, who rebuilt and fortified it without delay¹⁴.

Nakło-on-Noteć was a strategically important stronghold on the border between Great Poland and Gdańsk Pomerania. In 1242 Przemysł I, the prince of Great Poland, joined the Teutonic-Mazovian coalition against the Gdańsk prince Świętopełk. The allied forces arrived at the stronghold at the beginning of January 1243. Siege engines and other devices indispensable during a siege were built. The operation took the Pomeranian crew by surprise. The defenders surrendered the stronghold because they could not count on Prince Świętopełk's forces, who were fighting on another front line, namely at Sartowice¹⁵.

The Pomeranians craftily seized the stronghold at Nakło at the end of September 1255. Przemysł I, the prince of Great Poland, quickly launched a counterattack and his brother, Prince Bolesław the Pious; Casimir, the prince of Kujavia; Bolesław the Shy, the prince of Kraków; as well as Siemowit I, the prince of Mazovia, sent reinforcements to assist him militarily¹⁶. The army gathered at Nakło was about 4000 strong. Despite the fact that he had such a strong army at his disposal (it may only be noted that the Polish kingdom was in a state of disintegration at that time), Prince Przemysł did not launch an assault on the stronghold's fortifications but employed the well-tryed method of besieging a fortress by erecting the so-called counter-stronghold. This tactic made it possible for Przemysł to send most of his soldiers home. The crew of the watchtower was to prevent transportation of supplies and military equipment to the old stronghold as well as to prevent the defenders from launching any defensive attacks. The tasks imposed on both the crews made them stay alert. As a result, there were many skirmishes in the open area between the two fortresses.

Nakło served as a place from which Przemysł could launch his assaults on Gdańsk Pomerania and Raciąż, which he destroyed. Świętopełk, the prince of Gdańsk, his brother Racibor and the former's sons, Mściwoj and Warcisław, shipped food and equipment to the stronghold occupied by their crew in the spring of 1256 during the Great Fast. The incident should be considered a relieving operation. The Pomeranians laid siege to the watchtower-counter-stronghold erected by the enemy and attempted to break through its fortifications while the men armed with catapults and projectile weapons hurled missiles at the defenders. However, the attackers suffered heavy losses, which made Świętopełk raise the siege and retreat from Nakło.

Prince Świętopełk made another attempt to seize the stronghold in May 1256. He managed to lead out part of the crew by means of a ruse. Then he ambushed, encircled and eventually defeated the soldiers. Despite the victory, he failed to seize the fortress, without which he could not take full advantage of his stronghold at Nakło. Faced with the failure of their attempts, the two sides decided to make peace and the peace agreement was signed at Kcynia on July 24th 1256. Prince Świętopełk gave the stronghold up and received 500 marcas as compensation for the supplies he had gathered there¹⁷. Although the events described above do not fall into the category of classic relieving operations, they cannot be overlooked while discussing the means of fights for besieged posts of resistance. Undoubtedly, relieving operations are closely connected with the use of

¹² K. Olejnik, *op. cit.*, p. 122; B. Zientara, *op. cit.*, pp. 371-372.

¹³ *Annales Poloniae Maioris*, p. 7; *Chronica Poloniae Maioris*, p. 90.

¹⁴ *Annales Poloniae Maioris*, p. 9; *Chronica Poloniae Maioris*, p. 92.

¹⁵ *Annales Poloniae Maioris*, p. 6; *Chronica Poloniae Maioris*, pp. 88-89; *Petri de Dusburg Chronicon terrae Prussiae*,

ed. M. Toeppen, „Scriptores rerum Prussicarum”, vol. I, Leipzig 1861, p. 72; see: B. Włodarski, *Rywalizacja o ziemie pruskie w połowie XIII wieku (Rivalry for the Prussian Lands in the Mid-Thirteenth Century)*, Toruń 1958, pp. 21-23.

¹⁶ *Annales Poloniae Maioris*, pp. 35-37; *Chronica Poloniae Maioris*, pp. 103-104.

¹⁷ *Annales Poloniae Maioris*, pp. 39-40; *Chronica Poloniae Maioris*, pp. 104-105.

the so-called counter-stronghold as a form of siege but at the same time any military assistance given the crew of the main stronghold from the outside and directed against the crew of the counter-stronghold can be considered a relieving operation. Thus we can discuss instances of double sieges, that is to say, the siege of the stronghold and the siege of the counter-stronghold.

Lack of proper security and discipline among the besiegers has already been mentioned in the present paper. Both the factors influenced battles fought at besieged strongholds. Master Wincenty, called Kadłubek, mentioned such a situation in his work. The crew of Brześć-on-the-Bug repulsed the attacks by the Polish forces commanded by Prince Casimir the Just and Palatine Mikołaj in 1182¹⁸. Unprepared for long fighting, the Polish troops rebelled and the riots ended only when the soldiers saw Russian troops arriving to relieve the stronghold's crew. The relieving forces approached the encampment unnoticed as there were no security guards, no security rules were obeyed and the troops were in chaos. Prince Casimir had difficulty in summoning his knights to fight with the Russian soldiers because only part of his men were in place. Most of the soldiers were busy sacking the vicinity of the town or had simply wandered from the encampment. Luckily, the Poles succeeded in repulsing the attack and the defeat of the relieving troops brought about the defeat of the stronghold¹⁹.

The above situation resembles the events which occurred at Poznań in 1146. The outcomes of the sieges, however, were different, because it was the defenders and the relieving troops who won the battle at Poznań.

Written sources provide information about the security measures that were taken by the attackers in case the defenders or some relieving troops launched an assault on them. The Russian troops that arrived in Gostynin in 1283 placed guards in case Bolesław II's Mazovian forces attacked them²⁰. Similarly, Lew Daniłowicz, the prince of Halicz, managed to avoid being attacked by the knights of Kraków in 1289. Together with the Mazovian forces of Bolesław II of Płock and Conrad II of Czersk, he stopped fighting for Wawel Castle the moment he learnt about the arrival of relieving troops, which he faced without delay. Although the relieving troops did not engage in battle but they made it easier for the defenders to carry out their task²¹. Thanks to this manoeuvre the defenders of Wawel Castle were able to rebuild their positions, mend their weapons, regroup their forces, and even have a rest. The operation is an interesting instance of a tactical move intended to relieve a besieged crew.

¹⁸ *Magistri Vincentii dicti Kadlubek Chronica Polonorum*, pp. 156-158.

¹⁹ W. C a b a n, *Polityka północno-wschodnia Kazimierza Sprawiedliwego w latach 1177-1192 (Casimir the Just's North-Eastern Policy in the Years 1177-1192)*, „Rocznik Białostocki”, vol. XII, 1973, pp. 202-203.

²⁰ *Ipatevskaja letopis*, [in:] *Polnoe sobranie russkich letopisej*, vol. II, Moscow 1962, p. 886.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 936.

The necessity to organize relieving operations in order to militarily assist besieged strongholds was perceived throughout the fourteenth century. When in 1305 the Lithuanians attacked Great Poland and most probably laid siege to Stawiszyn, the Bohemian king Wenceslaw III approached the Teutonic knights to dispatch reinforcements and assist the starost (governor) who was organizing a relieving operation²². After Wenceslaw III's death, in August 1306, Prince Władysław the Short (Łokietek) attacked Kraków, which had not been captured yet. The besieged Bohemian crew and the men of Jan Muskata, the bishop of Kraków, surrendered. The decision was taken because the defenders were cut off and no provisions could be brought to the stronghold. Besides, the crew did not count on any assistance from outside the fortress. This situation was a result of the resolution taken on 1st September 1306 by the knights of Kraków, Great Poland and Sieradz, who decided to back Prince Władysław the Short as their king elect and the charter of 2nd September issued by him granting privileges to Jan Muskata and the bishopric of Kraków, thanks to which the king strengthened his rule over the district²³.

At the beginning of August 1308 the margraves Otto IV nicknamed „Otto with an arrow” and Waldemar attacked Gdańsk, Pomerania. This was a large-scale expedition as besides their vassals and the knights of the district of Sławno and Słupsk there were Fryderyk, the bishop of Lubusz, and Henryk, the bishop of Kamień, with their armies. The margraves entered the city of Gdańsk, whose people opened the gates, at the end of August or at the beginning of September 1308 at the latest. After the inhabitants of Gdańsk had sworn allegiance to the margraves, part of the Brandenburg forces, led by Waldemar, left for Brandenburg, because the margrave was engaged in a struggle for succession to the throne after Albrecht Habsburg's death.

When the city was seized, the crew of the stronghold found themselves in a very unpleasant situation, especially because the people of Gdańsk had backed the besiegers. The stronghold of Gdańsk was situated on a hill near the Siedlce Stream's confluence with the Motława River. It was surrounded by a deep moat and a solid earth and timber rampart, as well as marshes, which were very difficult to cross. There was only one gate between the stronghold and the city. The above-described location made it impossible

²² *Codex diplomaticus Maioris Poloniae*, vol. I, ed. I. Zakrzewski, Poznań 1877, no. 894; see: J. B i e n i a k, *Wielkopolska, Kujawy, ziemie łęczycka i sieradzka wobec problemu zjednoczenia państwowego w latach 1300-1306 (Great Poland, Kujavia, the Districts of Łęczyca and Sieradz in the Face of the Problem of State Unification in the Years 1300-1306)*, Toruń 1969, pp. 148-149; G. B ł a s z c z y k, *Dzieje stosunków polsko-litewskich od czasów najdawniejszych do współczesności (A History of Polish-Lithuanian Relations from Ancient to Modern Times)*, vol. I: *Trudne początki (The Difficult Beginnings)*, Poznań 1998, p. 58.

²³ J. B a s z k i e w i c z, *Polska czasów Łokietka (Poland in the Time of Władysław I the Short)*, Warszawa 1968, pp. 90-91.

for the Brandenburg troops to encircle the fortress on all sides but it also made it very difficult for the crew to transport provisions from Żuławy, where there were many enemy troops, who also destroyed the Cistercian estates in Oliwa near Gdańsk. The Pomeranian judge Bogusza commanded the Gdańsk crew, who did not surrender to Władysław the Short and started desperate fight with the enemy. As a result of a long siege the attackers were running short of food. Moreover, the prince of Gniewkowo Kazimierz, who was in Tczew, refused to help them. The defenders of the stronghold found themselves in a very difficult situation and Bogusza had to approach Władysław the Short, who was staying in the district of Sandomierz at that time, to relieve the fortress. Władysław the Short allowed them to summon Teutonic forces.

The Teutonic army arrived at Gdańsk at the beginning of October 1308. Günter von Schwarzburg, the Commander of Chełmno, commanded the 200 Teutonic knights and 200 Prussian warriors who crossed the Motława River and entered Bogusza's stronghold²⁴. This incident can be considered a relieving operation intended to assist a besieged stronghold. Their arrival reinforced the crew and played an important role in the Brandenburg troops' withdrawal from Pomerania. After their retreat the Teutonic troops took possession of half of the stronghold of Gdańsk and fortified themselves. After the arrival of Country Master Heinrich von Plotzke, they forced the Polish crew to leave the fortress and at the beginning of November made first assaults on the city, where at least part of the stronghold crew had hidden. One of the best-defended places was the Dominicans' monastery. On 13th November 1308 the city was seized by the Teutonic troops, who slaughtered their opponents. Many knights and townspeople were killed. Part of the city must have burnt up and the buildings that survived the fire had to be demolished. Eventually, the inhabitants had to leave the city themselves. Thus despite the fact that they had been asked to fulfill a different task, the Teutonic knights accomplished their own goal.

As soon as they had captured the city, the Teutonic army set about conquering the whole Pomerania. First they attacked Tczew, whose crew was commanded by Kazimierz, the prince of Gniewkowo. Although the stronghold had a very advantageous location and masonry fortifications, the prince did not make any preparations for a fight, but entered into fruitless talks with Heinrich von Plotzke in the latter's encampment²⁵. He returned to the town to find the first Teutonic troops entering it. The prince panicked. In spite of the fact that Świętosław, the Palatine of Tczew had

set off to fetch reinforcements, Kazimierz surrendered the stronghold maybe on 13th November and in return the attackers let the crew leave the fortress²⁶. As a result, the troops of Sieradz commanded by Andrzej, who later became the castellan of Rozprza, failed to arrive in Tczew on time²⁷. After seizing Tczew the Teutonic forces encircled the stronghold at Nowe. Thanks to the campaign of 1308, the Teutonic knights took control of northern Gdańsk Pomerania.

The Teutonic knights began to conquer the rest of Pomerania in July 1309. They wanted to seize Świecie. The stronghold was situated in the fork of the Vistula and Wda rivers. It was well protected because it was surrounded by water on three sides. Besides earth and timber fortifications encircled it. The fortress was well prepared and equipped with both weapons and food. The crew consisted mainly of enlisted knights from Pomerania and Kujavia as well as some knights from the district of Łęczyca. They were commanded by Bogumił of Kościelec, the starost of Świecie and repulsed the attacks by the more numerous Teutonic troops commanded by Country Master Heinrich von Plotzke. The Teutonic troops had at their disposal various siege equipment, including four projectile-throwing engines. They also hanged local peasants on gallows put up outside the stronghold and threatened to hang the crew in case they refused to surrender the stronghold. The defenders did not give up and successfully repulsed the attacker's raids using hand crossbows and arbalests placed on the earthworks. Prince Przemysł's attempts at negotiations failed. Eventually, the Teutonic attackers paid Andrzej Czadrowicz, bearing the Gryf arms, to betray his fellow warriors. He agreed to cut the strings of the arbalests positioned on the ramparts at night and escaped to the Teutonic encampment. The attacking troops placed their siege towers at the foot of the fortifications and launched an assault on the earthworks of the stronghold. The defenders were not on full alert, which weakened their military potential²⁸. The crew, however, managed to repulse the attack. They defended themselves for a few days, waiting for the arrival of any reinforcements dispatched by Władysław the Short.

All attempts to relieve the besieged crew failed. Władysław the Short approached Bolesław II of Płock to send reinforcements and the Mazovian army arrived in the vicinity of Świecie, where they fought battles with the Teutonic knights. A detachment of soldiers from Great Poland gathered by Piotr Drogosławicz also fought with Teutonic forces. Michał, who later became the judge of Sandomierz,

²⁴ K. J a s i ń s k i, *Zajęcie Pomorza Gdańskiego przez Krzyżaków w latach 1308-1309 (The Seizure of Gdańsk Pomerania by the Teutonic Knights in the Years 1308-1309)*, „Zapiski Historyczne”, vol. XXXI, 1966, fasc. 3, p. 22.

²⁵ T. N o w a k, *Walki z agresją Zakonu krzyżackiego w okresie jednoczenia państwa polskiego (Struggles with the Aggression of the Teutonic Order in the Period of the Unification of the Polish State)*, Warszawa 1952, p. 62; K. J a s i ń s k i, *Zajęcie Pomorza Gdańskiego...*, pp. 33-34.

²⁶ B. Ś l i w i ń s k i, *Działalność wojewody tczewskiego Świętosława z Wąsoszy z rodu Pałuków jesienią 1308 (The Activities of Świętosław of Wąsosz Coming from the Pałuki Family, the Palatine of Tczew, in the Autumn of 1308)*, [in:] *Książęta, urzędnicy, złoczyńcy (Princes, Officials, Criminals)*, ed. B. Śliwiński, „Gdańskie studia z dziejów średniowiecza”, no. 6, Gdańsk 1999, pp. 273-274.

²⁷ J. B i e n i a k, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

²⁸ T. N o w a k, *Walki z agresją...*, pp. 62-64; B. M i ś k i e w i c z, *Rozwój...*, pp. 268-269.

brought troops from Little Poland. The Teutonic forces, however, outnumbered the reinforcements and no troops reached the besieged stronghold at Świecie, as a result of which the defenders surrendered the fortress after a two-month siege at the end of September 1309. They were allowed to leave the stronghold and the Teutonic knights took possession of the whole duchy of Świecie.

At the beginning of 1314 Władysław the Short captured part of the district of Kalisz and Gniezno, including Słupca, Dobrzyca near Jarocin, Kłecko and probably Gniezno. He did not, however, seize the whole of Great Poland and returned to Kujavia to bring reinforcements. The princes of Głogów sent a strong detachment of Silesian and German knights commanded by Janusz of Biberstein to Great Poland in order to regain the lost lands. They arrived at Kłecko and laid siege to the stronghold. The fact that they stopped the enemy forces at Kłecko permitted the Great Polish commanders to gather a strong army commanded by Dobrogost of Szamotuły, the castellan of Gniezno, who headed for the besieged stronghold. The forces of Great Poland won a bloody battle at Kłecko. They seized the enemy's encampment and the spoils. The victory played an important role in Władysław the Short's campaign, who captured the districts of Kalisz and Gniezno, Kalisz, Pyzdry and finally Poznań as well²⁹.

The agreement signed by Władysław the Short with Lithuanian Prince Gediminas in 1325 and the knights of Kraków and Sandomierz's attack on Płock brought about the formation of a Mazovian-Teutonic alliance in Brodnica at the beginning of 1326. In July 1327 Władysław the Short invaded Waclaw's duchy of Płock. The Polish army crossed the Vistula River near Dobrzyń and attacked Płock, which they seized and burnt up. The stronghold of Gostynin was encircled after another crossing of the Vistula River and simultaneously in the duchy of Siemowit II Lithuanian forces destroyed six villages belonging to the duke in the district of Wizna. Fulfilling the conditions of the Treaty of Brodnica, Otto von Luterberg, the provincial commander of Chełmno, arrived to assist the princes of Mazovia. He attacked the besiegers of Gostynin and forced them to retreat. The Mazovian-Teutonic army headed for Kujavia, where they seized and burnt up the stronghold at Kowal. The Polish forces, led by the king, followed the

main army. They did not manage to prevent the enemy from achieving his goals but finally defeated his troops near Włocławek³⁰.

Władysław the Short's active foreign policy made the Bohemian king John of Luxembourg, who conspired to seize the Polish throne as the successor of the Czech Premyslids, strengthen his alliance with the Teutonic Order. In 1327 John of Luxembourg laid siege to Kraków but he was forced to retreat by Hungarian forces, who were allies of Poland³¹.

Władysław the Short's subsequent steps brought about the formation of an alliance against Poland between the Bohemian king and the Teutonic Order in 1329, which resulted in a Czech-Teutonic expedition to the district of Dobrzyń. The king made Paweł Ogon, the starost of Dobrzyń and castellan of Łęczyca, responsible for the defence of Dobrzyń. King Władysław I himself, who took command of the main forces, stayed on the left bank of the Vistula River and prevented the enemy from crossing the river and attacking Kujavia. Only part of his forces, commanded by Władysław the Humpbacked, the prince of Łęczyca, and Wojciech of Kościelec, the Palatine of Brześć Kujawski, operated in the district of Dobrzyń, fought some skirmishes, as well as reconnoitered and observed the enemy positions. Such activities did not prevent the Czech-Teutonic army from seizing Dobrzyń almost in front of Władysław the Short's and his forces', stationing on the other bank of the Vistula River, eyes at the beginning of the spring of 1329³².

In March, after capturing the district of Dobrzyń, John of Luxembourg and the Teutonic army attacked the lands of Waclaw of Płock and laid siege to his capital. Siege towers were used during the operation. Simultaneously, Teutonic ships headed for Płock, but Władysław the Short's army and the knights of Płock repulsed the attack. Płock defended itself for a couple of days and even the town survived. However, because of the fact that the enemy forces outnumbered the defenders, that an important borough of the city was completely destroyed and that the city was not given any assistance by his brothers and Władysław the Short himself, Waclaw swore allegiance to John of Luxembourg on 29th March 1329.

The Teutonic knights³³ launched another assault on Kujavia in April 1332, when the Teutonic army arrived at Brześć Kujawski. Czech troops and knights from Western Europe reinforced the Teutonic forces. Otto von Luterberg, the country commander of Chełmno, accompanied by

²⁹ K. P o t k a ń s k i, *Zajęcie Wielkopolski 1313 i 1314* (*The Seizure of Great Poland 1313 and 1314*) [in:] eiusdem, *Lechici, Polanie, Polska. Wybór pism* (*The Lechici, the Polanians, Poland. Selected Works*), Warszawa 1965, pp. 506-528; J. P a k u l s k i, *Siły polityczno-społeczne w Wielkopolsce w pierwszej połowie XIV wieku* (*Political and Social Forces in Great Poland in the First Half of the Fourteenth Century*), Toruń 1979, pp. 37-44; T. N o w a k, *Znaczenie budowli obronnych w Wielkopolsce, Kujawach, ziemi dobrzyńskiej, łęczyckiej i sieradzkiej w działaniach wojennych w XIV w. (1313-1385)* (*The Importance of Defensive Structures in Great Poland, Kujavia, the Districts of Dobrzyń, Łęczyca and Sieradz to Fourteenth Century Warfare (1313-1385)*), „Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis. Folia Historica” no. 36, 1989, pp. 34-35.

³⁰ A. S w i e ż a w s k i, *Rawskie księstwo Piastów Mazowieckich 1313-1462. Dzieje polityczne* (*The Mazovian Piasts' Duchy of Rawa. The Political History.*), Łódź 1975, p. 23; T. N o w a k, *Znaczenie budowli...*, pp. 39-40.

³¹ J. B a s z k i e w i c z, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

³² S. Z a j ą c z k o w s k i, *Polska a Zakon krzyżacki w ostatnich latach Władysława Łokietka* (*Poland and the Teutonic Order in the Last Years of Władysław I the Short*), Lviv 1929, pp. 132-133; T. N o w a k, *Znaczenie budowli...*, p. 41.

³³ For information on Polish-Teutonic wars see: *Lites ac res gestae inter Polonos Ordinemque Cruciferorum*, Second Edition [I. Zakrzewski], vol. I, Poznań 1890.

Grand Marshal Dietrich von Altenburg, commanded the reinforcements. The attackers encircled Brześć with a ditch and an earthwork. The stronghold was so cut off from the rest of the world that it could not be given any military assistance. Wojciech of Kościelec, the palatine of Brzeg, commanded the defenders. On hearing the news of the Teutonic siege Wincenty of Wieleń, the general starost of Great Poland, mobilized the knights of Great Poland and dispatched a detachment consisting of 60 lance units to the besieged fortress. However, the detachment was not strong enough to break through the enemy lines. An attack on the town was launched on Good Friday on 17th April. The attacking troops used battering rams, stone-throwing engines, pots with tar and burning resinous chips in order to set fire to the town. The projectiles from the stone-throwing engines destroyed the Dominicans' church and monastery. The town wall was breached on the third day and the Teutonic troops entered the city. They seized Brześć Kujawski on 20th April. Many of the inhabitants were slaughtered³⁴.

After seizing Brześć the Teutonic army set off for Kruszwica. Its castellan, Przewdzew of Ostrów, was scared of the numerous Teutonic army and surrendered the stronghold without fighting. The Teutonic army succeeded in seizing a number of other strongholds, the crews of which surrendered their post without fighting. Jan of Płonków, the starost and palatine of Inowrocław defended Inowrocław, but the fortress was seized on April 26th. Prince Kazimierz agreed to have his capital stronghold at Gniewkowo destroyed. Respecting the agreement of 1330 with Bishop Maciej, Teutonic forces did not destroy Włocławek. Wincenty of Wieleń, who had brought relieving troops from Great Poland, was defeated and died in battle in June 1332. In mid-July Teutonic troops defeated the last point of resistance at Pakość and their campaign in Kujavia ended. The Teutonic Order took possession of the land³⁵.

Mentions of the necessity to relieve the crews of besieged strongholds can also be found in the documents of military alliances. The Teutonic Order signed an agreement with Conrad of Mazovia and his sons on 20th September 1242. The document discusses, among other things, the plan of action and lists the means intended to win a victory in the fights with Świętopełk of Gdańsk and Pomerania. At this stage of the preparations the sides, particularly Kazimierz of Kujavia, who was responsible for the main fights, were aware of the challenging tasks awaiting them in the near future. The Teutonic Order was obliged to help him to build strongholds against Świętopełk and to assist him to defend strongholds, for example, the stronghold at Bydgoszcz. Because of the fact that they could reach Bydgoszcz easily, they were responsible for supplying it with food and equipment and for dispatching relieving troops if necessary³⁶. In 1312 Henryk of Głogów's sons, who had received western Great

Poland after its division into parts, were obliged to send 100 men a to assist their brothers to regain Nakło and Konin³⁷.

Relieving troops helped the besieged crew to defeat the attackers at Poznań in 1146, prevented the besiegers from seizing Lubusz in 1239, Santok in 1247, Kraków in 1289, Kłęcko in 1310, and finally Gostynin and Kraków in 1327. The failure of the relieving operation resulted in the surrender of the strongholds of Nakło in 1109, Lubusz in 1209, and Brześć Kujawski in 1332. Lack of military assistance from the outside forced the defenders of Lubusz (1225), Kalisz (1229), Nakło (1243), Sandomierz (1260), Santok (1266), Gostynin (1283), Sieradz (1292), Kraków (1306), Tczew (1308), Świecie (1309), Dobrzyń and Płock (1329) to surrender. The above list proves that relieving operations were indispensable in the Middle Ages because of the contemporary system of fighting, which consisted in battles for fixed points of resistance. A situation where all strongholds were constantly ready for battle and kept their crews mobilized was out of the question. But, on the other hand, the fact that strongholds were not satisfactorily supplied with food and military equipment is frequently mentioned by written sources. Thus the main task of a stronghold's crew was to defend the fortress and wait for relieving troops to arrive. Lack of military assistance meant a longer siege. If no reinforcements arrived, the defenders' attempts to win the fight were bound to end in failure.

Translated by Zuzanna Poklewska-Parra

³⁴ S. Zajączkowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 268-271.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 272-274.

³⁶ *Codex diplomaticus et commemorationum Masoviae generalis*, ed. J. K. Kochanowski, vol. I, Warszawa 1919, no. 430:

„Et si obsessum fuerit castrum, quod Budegosta vulgariter nuncupatur seu quodlibet aliud, quod eorum fuerit obtentum auxilio, tenebuntur pro suis viribus liberare, si vero defectum eadem castra habuerint expensarum, eis securos aditus, prout poterunt, procurabunt”.

³⁷ *Codex diplomaticus Maioris Poloniae*, vol. II, Poznań 1878, no. 952.