

The town of Koźle

At the beginning of 13th century, the Polish regional dukes, following the example of western rulers, began to grant town privileges. The first location privilege that we know of is the town privileges granted to Złotoryja in 1211 by Henry the Bearded, Duke of Silesia. We do not have confirmed information regarding the town privileges for Koźle. Some researchers claim that Koźle was settled in 1222, meaning that it would be one of the first Polish settlements possessing town privileges. According to others, this event took place at the time of the creation of the Duchy of Bytom and Koźle, so in 1281, whereas a German researcher of the history of Koźle, Jerzy Greger, indicates the year 1289 as the date when Koźle was granted town privileges. Such a multitude of rationales is not astonishing, as the town privileges could not only be granted but also revoked. Moreover, many cities received town privileges several times in accordance with different models (Magdeburg, Środa Wielkopolska, Nuremberg, and Flemish models, etc.).

The town privileges specified the way of organization of the urban organism, the possibilities of generating income, the rights and duties of the inhabitants, tax amount, and the period of time exemption usually associated with the location. What also related to the town privileges was the establishment of the municipal self-government, as it defined how the councilors were chosen, as well as the rights and duties of the commune head (*wójt*) governing the town.

If a town or village was settled in a place that had not been inhabited before, it was referred to as a "location on a raw root," that is, a place of a freshly cut forest. Nevertheless, such a location certainly did not concern Koźle, as a gord of the same name, which probably evolved from a fisherman settlement, had already existed there, although it must have not necessarily been located in the exact place designated at the time when the town privileges were granted.

On one hand, town privileges granted complete freedom to town inhabitants, but on the other hand, they strictly defined the way of the town's economic life, e.g., the form of paying taxes or obligations to the duke, regulated the organization of trade and craft that the inhabitants lived off of, or specified how many so-called *łans* of land situated outside of the town's walls an inhabitant purchasing the plot would receive and what he could use this land for. The town privileges also defined how many craftsmen could settle in the town and regulated the functioning of craft self-governments - the so-called guilds.

Koźle had a very good localization at the intersection of the main trade routes, which enabled the inhabitants to grow rich on trade and to send the goods down the Odra river. The Middle Ages were the time during which Koźle was just as great as other European towns.