

The medieval town is not only its defensive architecture, but primarily an urban community. The concentration of significant number of people in a relatively small area, surrounded by narrow streets, gates closed every night and town walls required the development of some proper provisions of law, regulating the rules of cohabitation in a town. The basic collection of urban laws that regulated everyday duties of townspeople, but also the judicial, organizational and moral issues was urban "wilkierz". In the territory of my interest - Prussia - already in the 13th c. charter towns under the German law were founded. One of the oldest towns was Toruń (1233). The town is extraordinary for any researcher of the social and cultural history in the Middle Ages, because the oldest known Prussian urban "wilkierze", dating back to 1300, are still preserved. The development of ordinances regulating urban life of Toruń may be followed gradually since the beginning of the 14th to the half of the 16th c. The state of preservation of source material makes this town special in comparison to other great Prussian cities (Gdansk, Elblag, Kaliningrad, Braniewo, Chelmno) and very attractive to start the research on the development of social reality of Prussian towns.

In the 13th c. the urban legal regulations in "wilkierze" were created by town councilors in consultation with the so-called assembly of citizens. They were often developed and modified on an ongoing basis when it was necessary. At that time a town council stood for the executive of will of the whole community of residents. It can be stated that the regulations were grassroots initiatives. But as early as in the 14th c. we observe the tendency to limit the influence of assembly on decisions of town council. Town councilors began to be the main decision-making body in a town. We can observe the formation of set of rules that aimed at increasing social control in town, as well as oligarchization of town council and the attempt of this council to impose a specific vision of social order. The examination of the legal changes and the regulations of law is beyond my interest; my aim is to analyse the content of these records. The organization of town life was based on a certain vision of how a town (in this case Toruń) should function. I will be interested in the legislative intent that legislators wanted to achieve - the particular vision of a town and social order in it. On the other hand, we have at our disposal certain sources that resulted from social dissatisfaction of various professional groups in a town (guilds, brotherhoods, etc.), such as brotherhood statutes, which can illustrate the expectations of "the second side" concerning the social order and the role of a town council in a community. What should also be taken into account is the influence of state ordinances constituted by the territorial ruler (up to 1454 the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, since 1466 King of Poland) concerning towns. I am going to investigate, on the one hand, the dynamic image of society as it was seen by legislators through the prism of urban legal records (of Toruń), and on the other hand, the image townspeople wanted to create that is reflected in state records. Another question we can pose is how much the legal records concerned egalitarian order, i.e. the one that aims at equation of social order (neighbourhood, street and brotherhood communities), and how much hierarchical order. In literature there prevails the view that the medieval urban society was egalitarian. However, recent studies show that the situation was dependent on the region and particular town.

A number of statutory regulation of towns, such as Toruń, pertained to the issues connected with the safety of residents - fire prevention regulations, ordinances on the maintenance of cleanliness or the night silence. They concerned the family life sphere, i.a. holidays, law of succession or issues related to minors. I will be interested in the reasons why these records were constituted and what role they played in shaping and organizing the urban life. So far the area of Prussia in the Middle Ages has not been investigated in this respect. The end result of the project will be the monograph including the source - the records of Toruń's "wilkierz" that has not been published whatsoever.