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THE ORIGINS AND HISTORY OF THE SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT  
OF RABKA-ZDRÓJ DURING THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD  
– INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

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GENEZA POWSTANIA I HISTORIA ROZWOJU PRZESTRZENNEGO  
RABKI-ZDROJU W OKRESIE ŚREDNIOWIECZA  
– WSTĘP DO BADAŃ

**Abstract**

This article concerns the origins and the history of spatial development of Rabka-Zdrój during the medieval period. It discusses the literature of the subject as well as research methods thanks to which it was possible to prepare prolegomena to the research on the history of Rabka within the given period. During the medieval period, Rabka was a small village owned by the Cistercian monastery in Szczyrzyc. The impulse for the development of settlement in this area must have been provided by salt deposits, known since the 12th century, which were primarily used by the monastery. Only with time they started to be explored by subsequent owners of the village. The spatial layout of Rabka developed basing on the local and long-distance routes existing in the Middle Ages, which ran through the village. The article addresses the issue of the development of the village, which suddenly transformed in the 19th century, becoming one of the most important Polish health resorts.

**Keywords:** Rabka, Middle Ages, history, spatial layout

**Streszczenie**

Niniejszy artykuł dotyczy genezy powstania oraz historii rozwoju przestrzennego Rabki-Zdrój w okresie średniowiecza. Omówiono w nim literaturę przedmiotu, a także metody badań, dzięki którym udało się opracować prolegomenę do badań nad dziejami Rabki w założonym okresie. Rabka w średniowieczu była niewielką wsią należącą do klasztoru cystersów w Szczyrzycu. Impulsem do rozwoju osadnictwa na tym terenie były zapewne znane od wieku XIII złoża soli, z których pierwotnie korzystał klasztor. Dopiero z czasem były one eksplorowane przez kolejnych właścicieli wsi. Układ przestrzenny Rabki rozwinął się na podstawie istniejących w średniowieczu traktów ponadlokalnych oraz lokalnych wiodących przez wieś. Przedmiotowy artykuł przybliża zagadnienie rozwoju miejscowości, która w wieku XIX uległa naglej metamorfozie, stając się jednym z najważniejszych polskich uzdrowisk

**Słowa kluczowe:** Rabka, średniowiecze, historia, układ przestrzenny

## 1. Introduction

Rabka-Zdrój is one of the best known Polish health resorts. It is located on the river Raba, between the Gorce and Beskid Wyspowy mountain ranges. As a village, it was established during the Middle Ages, but before, the area had been known as a salt exploitation site.

This article addresses the issue of the history of the village and its spatial development during the medieval period.

Despite its eventful history and interesting origins, Rabka does not have its monograph yet. The only scientific writings concerning the history of Rabka itself are: unpublished *Study conservation materials for the complex of the health resort and the former village* by Z. Beiersdorf and B. Krasnowolski from 1977 [1], and the article by the same authors entitled *Spatial development and architecture of Rabka* [2]. The remaining literature of the subject concerns the history of settlement in the Podhale region, the Cistercian monastery in Szczyrzyc to which Rabka belonged during the medieval period, and salt exploitation in lesser Poland during the Middle Ages. One should mention here the works by: A. Keckowa entitled *Mining work in Rabka in the 2nd half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century* [9, p. 7–34]; K. Potkański, whose findings on the subject of settlement development in Podhale were published in *Posthumous writings* [15]; J. Grzesiowski and J. Piotrowicz entitled *Salt in Lesser Poland in monastic endowments* [5]; A. Jodłowski entitled *The issue of salt exploitation in the Krakow area during the antiquity and the early medieval period* [8, p. 155] and S. Zakrzewski *The oldest history of the Cistercian monastery in Szczyrzyc* [19, p. 1–75].

The article in question was based on the following research methods: internal desk research, comparative analyses of archive cartography, and field research. Internal desk research involved primarily preliminary research of archives and literature, which was carried out in appropriate archives and libraries. The National Archives were analysed paying special attention to both historic manuscripts and printed documents (Section I – Old Polish municipal and land records, family archives and collections) as well as town plans (Section V – cartographic materials and specification sheets). Preliminary research was also carried out in the Austrian Military Archive (Kriegsarchiv) in Vienna, the Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw, the Branch Archive of the National Heritage Institute in Krakow; in the Archive of the Lesser Poland Voivodeship Monument Protection Office in Nowy Targ; the Jagiellonian Library and the Władysław Orkan Museum in Rabka-Zdrój. Obtained archive materials, in the form of manuscripts were translated from Latin into Polish, which allowed for putting forward new hypotheses related to particular stages of the village development and its characteristics; while archive cartography was compared and analysed paying special attention to determining the spatial form of medieval Rabka. Besides the internal desk research and comparative research, detailed field research was also carried out involving the analysis of the current functional-spatial structure of the health resort with special attention to its historical shape.

## 2. Rabka during the Middle Ages

It is difficult to determine the prehistory of the area where the village of Rabka developed because of a lack of archaeological research data. The archaeological photograph of Poland has not yet been prepared for the area of Rabka, and scientific studies concerning the prehistory of the Podhale and Orava regions do not contain information about the described area. One can only surmise that the land, like the entire Podhale region, was settled relatively late, which resulted from its lack of fertile soil and unfavourable climate. Some researchers believe that the first unorganised migration of settlers into the above-mentioned area took place in the 13<sup>th</sup> century [16].

The first source information related to later Rabka date back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In 1234, Duke Henryk Brodaty (Henry the Bearded) in the document granting ... *Theodore, the Voivode of Krakow, the right to settle Germans in some forests located by the rivers Dunajec, Rogoźnik and other* mentioned the name *fluvium Slona* which can be identified with the name of the stream *Slona* or *Słonka* in Rabka [5, p. 96; 11].

Another vital document, considering the origins of Rabka, dates back to the year 1254. In the document, entitled *Clemens et Marcus filii condam Marci palatini Cracoviensis, omnes donationes a partuosuo comite Theodoro coenobio Cisterciensium Ciriciensium factas, assentiente Boleslao duce Cracoviae et Sandomiriae, renovant*, Duke Bolesław Wstydlivy (Boleslaw the Chaste) confirmed the endowments for the Cistercian monastery in *Szczyrzyc* [11], mentioning e.g. lands in the vicinity of the river *Ponecza* that can be interpreted as the Poniczanka River, and the name *sal de Rapschycza* which must have referred to the already known salt deposits in Rabka. From the above document, one can conclude that the area of the later village must have belonged to the Cistercian monastery in *Szczyrzyc* during the early medieval period.

More information essential for these considerations is included in the work *Liber Beneficiorum dioecesis cracoviensis...* from the years 1470–1480, written by Jan Długosz, in which in the section entitled: *Cziczczense. Quintum monasterium Ordinis Cisterciensis in dioecesi episcopatus Cracoviensis consistons* the chronicler wrote about the estates belonging to the Cistercian monastery in *Szczyrzyc* [4, p. 436]. He mentioned several places, including those located in the Podhale region: Nowy Targ, Szaflary, Waczmuth, Klikuszowa, Poręba, Niedźwiedź, Podobin, Olszówka, Mszana, Kasina, Ogonówka, Dębno, Ostrowsko, Ostrowiec, Wilcze Pole, Ludźmierz, Krauszów, Rogoźnik and Rabka where the monastery obtained salt [19, p. 50]. It is worth noticing that in the text by Jan Długosz there appeared the name *Sal in Rabka* which the chronicler did not label as a *villa* (village) – as he did other places e.g. Ludźmierz. Therefore, it is rather difficult to decide when the first settlement began to crystallise here. However, one can assume that the deposits of salt and brine [8, p. 155], known since the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, must have been a key factor contributing to the fact that the first settlers began to arrive here.

Considering the issues related to the settlement development in Rabka, one can surmise that the village grew slowly, just like others belonging to the Cistercians. It was connected with the fact that the area had previously been completely uninhabited, most probably owing to difficult climate and poor-quality soil [13, p. 176–177].

The Cistercian Order from *Szczyrzyc* conducted their urbanisation activities in the Podhale region until 1382 when King Louis I of Hungary divested the monastery of its estates



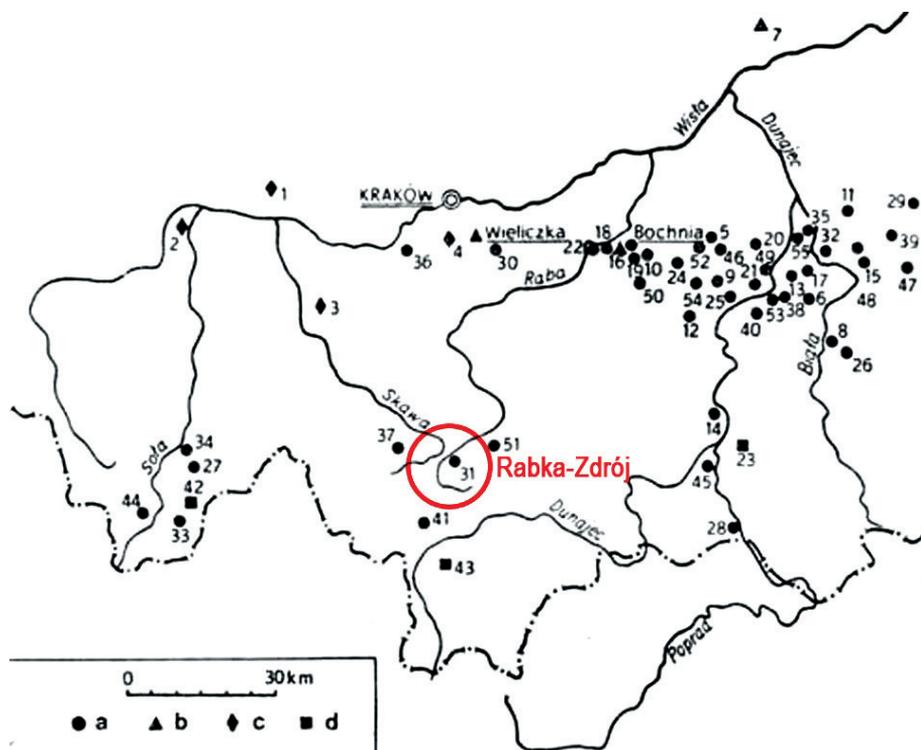


Fig. 1. Map of salt springs in western Lesser Poland during the early Middle Ages with marked springs in Rabka (Source: [8, fig. 1, p. 140])

located in the Podhale region. The simplest explanation of the fact is that, in those times, kings (particularly King Kazimierz Wielki – the Great) frequently divested the church of its lands and included them in the royal demesne [1]. In this case, however, S. Zakrzewski, who carried out research in the Szczyrzyc archives, believes that the actual reason why King Louis I the Hungarian divested the monastery of its lands was their mismanagement. According to Zakrzewski, the King’s decision was strongly influenced by one case when the abbot of Szczyrzyc let the castle in Szaflary to a Jew who counterfeited coins there [19, p. 51]. In the following years, in answer to the abbot’s appeals, the King returned two villages: Ludźmierz and Krauszów, to the monastery. He did not return the other, as he died in 1382 [19, p. 51].

During the reign of Władysław Jagiełło, Rabka was handed over to Zygmunt, the Vogt from Dębowy Dział (Dębowiec), the testimony of which is a note in the court records of the former Krakow Lands, where it was written that, in the year 1403, he sold the villages of Rabka and Kasinka to Jan Ligęza: “Zygmunt, the current vogt from Dębowiec, his two villages called Rabka and Kasina which he possessed in accordance to what is written in the document of King Kazimierz, he sold and handed over for 1000 ‘grzywnas’ of Prague grosz, to Jan Ligęza, Voivode of Łęczycza, with all the rights and property rights and appurtenances, pledging in accordance to the legal formula that he reserved nothing for himself forever” [18]. In the books, there is a reference to the “document of King Kazimierz” that might have been a document of the first foundation of Rabka, and which has not been found until the present day.

Thus, since the year 1403, Rabka was the property of Jan Ligęza of the Półkozic coat of arms, who might have died in 1419. He was the Voivode and starost of Łęczycza. In archive documents, he was also called Jan from Niewiarow; Jan from Niegowic; Jan from Przeclaw and Jan from Bobrek. The lands belonging to Jan Ligęza were scattered. Besides Rabka he owned e.g.: the already mentioned Kasina, Jurków, Niewiarów and Niegowic, Sławkowice, Kamyk, Witowice, a part of Zręczycze, Brzeźnicę, a part of Brniki and Świdówka, the estate in Gorzkow, Bobrek, a part of Libiąż, Chrzanów, Czernichów, Prokocim, Przeclaw and endowment on the Vogt property in Dębowiec near Jasło, which he must have purchased from Zygmunt to follow Rabka and Kasina [14, p. 316–317].

Another mention of Rabka dates back to the year 1440. It is known that, at the time, the village belonged to the descendants of Jan Ligęza, who went by the name of Niewiarowski [7, p. 61 (561)]. In the court records of the former Krakow Lands there appeared Jan from Niewiarow who „Appearing in court [...] he stated and committed himself to [...] consenting to court introduction to possession of Rabka property and, like he committed himself in writing, to pledge 58 ‘grzywnas’. That interest on the capital he vowed to pay to the noble Anna, the wife of Mirosz from Zagajow, and he should give her that court introduction to possession of Rabka property...” [6, p. 463].

Yet another, probably the most important medieval document concerning Rabka, is the one dated to August 16, 1446. It refers to the renewal of the privilege for the foundation of the Rabka village for Andrzej and Piotr, sons of Jakusz, a free peasant from Olszówka, made by Mikołaj, the squire from Niewiarow. In the privilege, one can read e.g. a suggestion that in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century the area of Rabka was abandoned, which was to be altered by the village foundation – “to people abandoned places with numerous settlers”. It means that, previously, a settlement must have existed here, which became depopulated for unknown reasons. Here, one should recall the above-mentioned “*lost*” document of the first foundation of Rabka from 1364, in which King Kazimierz Wielki allowed Mikołaj from Uście to found, according to the Magdeburg law, villages located between the rivers: Raba, Słonka, Łętownia and Kasina [17, p. 344]. It is worth noticing that, in 1360, probably the same Mikołaj founded the village of Lubień near Myślenice [10, p. 30], which suggests that the area was within the reaches of the urbanisation programme carried out by the King. It also has to be emphasised that the vicinity of Rabka as the land rich in salt deposits, which was known since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, might have been of special economic significance for the King. During his reign, the Royal Treasury acquired as much as 36% of its income from the salt mines [5, p. 73]; therefore, the desire to urbanise the surroundings of Rabka seems rather obvious.

The new foundation charter of Rabka was granted to brothers Andrzej and Piotr, from Olszówka. The Olszówka in question must have been the one currently located in the Limanowa County, the Mszana Dolna district, established in the year 1388 by King Władysław Jagiełło. In reference to the foundation act of Rabka, one has to emphasise that, according to the described document, the village of *Raba* was to have been laid out within precisely outlined limits: “...from the upper river Raba flowing below to the river called Biały Potok, and from that river i.e. the stream running below to the river called Kamienny Potok and from



there moving forward to the river known as Potok, and then going down from that river to the river or stream called Gliniasty from the upper Gliniasty (stream) to the summit of (Mount) Skomielna and from Mount Skomielna to Mount Lubański and from Mount Lubański to half-way up Mount Lubań and from half-way up the mentioned mountain to the stream called Miedziany from Miedziany Potok Mountain to the Skalisty stream and from that same stream climbing up to the Słony Potok stream and from it going up to the river called Poniczna and from the same river to the main river Raba...". It is also known that Rabka was founded according to the Magdeburg rights. Within it, ten Franconian lans were measured out, from which one lan "...in a better place and land..." was to be given to the church "... in the hope of our salvation and to develop for the church the community of the said village..."; three lans were to be bequeathed to the aldermen of Rabka, while the next one was intended for a *skotnica* i.e. the place where cattle was driven or pasture. It should also be mentioned that, at that time, 1 Franconian lan equalled around 25 ha [18, p. 59–63]. According to the discussed privilege, locators were also "entitled to build one mill with one wheel, as it had been for a long time or where it would seem better and more beneficial". The quoted fragment again suggests that the settlement used to exist once before ("as it had been for a long time"). From Mikołaj, the squire of Niewiarow, locators received an additional privilege to set up a mill with two waterwheels: "If there were not enough water, let them build two mills, but each of those with one wheel". He also allowed them to dig two ponds in Rabka and to build two inns. The act in question also ensured income for the brothers Andrzej and Piotr in the form of „every sixth denarius from rent, every third denarius from court fines [...] from stalls of craftsmen and cobblers and bread and meat stalls". Other bequeaths for locators referred to the right of "hunting, catching all game, fowl and fish in the rivers within [...] the village". The brothers, who were to serve as aldermen, were also entitled to judge and condemn persons to blame according to the German law. Moreover, the discussed document repealed "all Polish laws and customs" which might be contrary to the German law. In order to accelerate the urbanisation of Rabka and to encourage newcomers to settle in the newly founded village, Mikołaj, the squire from Niewiarow, exempted them from all taxes, duties and obligations to him for the period of 25 years. After 25 years, the aldermen of Rabka and their successors were obliged to pay two 'grzywnas' in Polish coinage for military expeditions. Inhabitants were to pay "from each lan every year on St. Martin's day [...] eight 'skojec' in the same coin" and "a tithe to the one who is entitled to it by the law, [...] custom and norm observed for years in Nowy Targ".

Summing up the foundation charter, it can be surmised that, like it was suggested above, it was the second foundation after the unsuccessful one from the times of Kazimierz Wielki.

About 40 years later, Rabka was already in the hands of the Jordan family from Zakliczyn, of the Trąby coat of arms. According to the sources, it took place around the year 1484, which means that it occurred during the lifetime of Jan who died in 1507, as well as of his brother Mikołaj who died in the year 1521. Literature of the subject differs as to which of the Jordans actually purchased Rabka because of the lack of virtually any source documents concerning the transaction.

Describing the history of the place, one cannot ignore the issue of the parish existing there. It was established in Rabka as late as the year 1557, thanks to the foundation of Spytek Jordan

who had the first church dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene erected here. Previously Rabka belonged to the parish in Mszana Dolna, and later in Łętownia [12, p. 23]. The relatively late creation of the parish in Rabka confirms the thesis that the village grew very slowly, and the inflow of a larger number of settlers took place only in the 16<sup>th</sup> and the following centuries [13].

The moment when Rabka was taken over by the Jordan family, symbolically ends the medieval history of the village. Moving on to summarising and outlining initial findings related to the spatial development of the village of Rabka, one has to say that salt deposits were the main factor influencing settlement development in this area. Yet, despite that factor, the settlement process was rather slow, and the first attempt at founding the village, carried out by King Kazimierz Wielki, did not succeed. The failure might have resulted e.g. from the fact that the mountainous land with infertile soil was not sufficiently attractive for settlers.

In the foundation charter from August 16, 1446, just like in the majority of foundation documents, there is no information about the shape of the established village.

A hypothesis could be put forward that, originally, the village of Rabka developed along two routes. One of them was long-distance and led from Mszana Dolna to Nowy Targ via Rabka. The other was a local road and led to the site where salt was obtained, which must have been in Słone (the east part of the present-day spa).

It is difficult to state when precisely the road to Chabówka and Skawa emerged from the route leading from Mszana Dolna to Nowy Targ. It might already have occurred during the medieval period, since Skawa, like Rabka, used to belong to the Mszana parish then. The fork of the road mentioned here was located in the southern section of the village, close to the ford on the river Raba. On this site, the market square evolved in the shape of a fork, even today known in Rabka as the “main square”. Such a spatial layout of Rabka from the 18<sup>th</sup> century was marked on the Mieg’s Map. The Mieg’s Map i.e. the topographic map of the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria from the years 1779–1783 (*Originalaufnahme des Königreiches Galizien und Lodomerien*) is a large-scale (scale 1:28 800) map of the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria drawn by the Austrian Staff of the General Quatermaster under the supervision of officer Friedrich von Mieg [3, p. 91–112]. The map of Galicia was sketched at the last possible moment before the approaching radical economic and social changes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Because of its precision and the time when it was created, it is a valuable source depicting the landscape of the still Old-Poland period.

An analysis of the history of the Rabka village offers a basis for a hypothesis that its spatial shape did not change much between the medieval period and the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Rabka became a spa. Thus, it can be assumed that the image of Rabka from Mieg’s map does not differ radically from the one of the village during the high Middle Ages, naturally with the exception of two objects marked on the map: the parish church of St. Mary Magdalene and the manor, which did not yet exist in the medieval period.

This article ought to be concluded by a statement that the health resort in Rabka, which was established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, crystallised on the site of a small medieval village that basically did not evolve into a larger spatial layout until the spa, which required laying out a new urban structure, was founded. The structure was realised to the east of the village of Rabka, in the vicinity of brine springs.



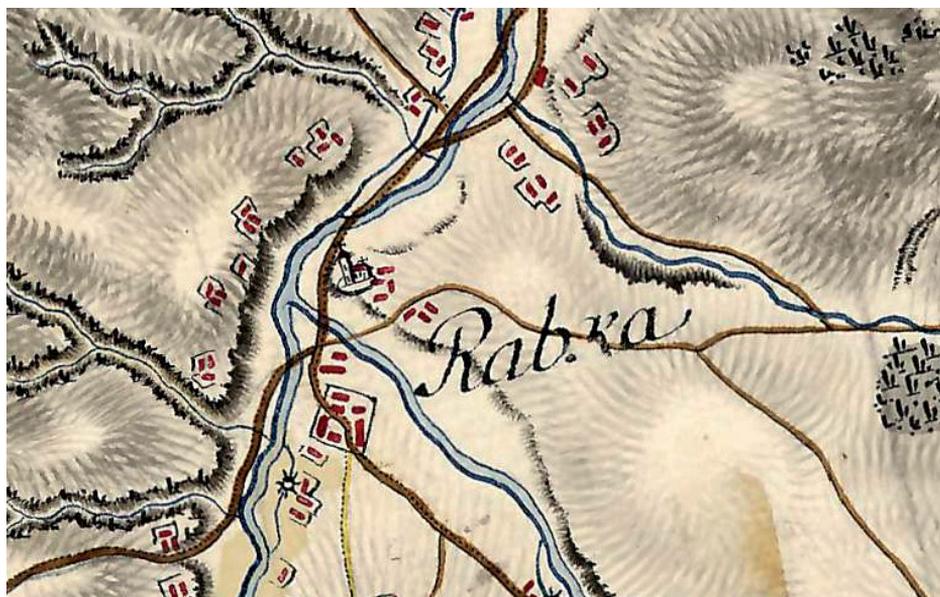


Fig. 2. Fragment of Mieg's map from the years 1763–1787 representing Rabka  
(Source: Copy of the map [in:] Archive of KHAUiSzP WA PK. Original [in:] Kriegsarchiv, s.v.)

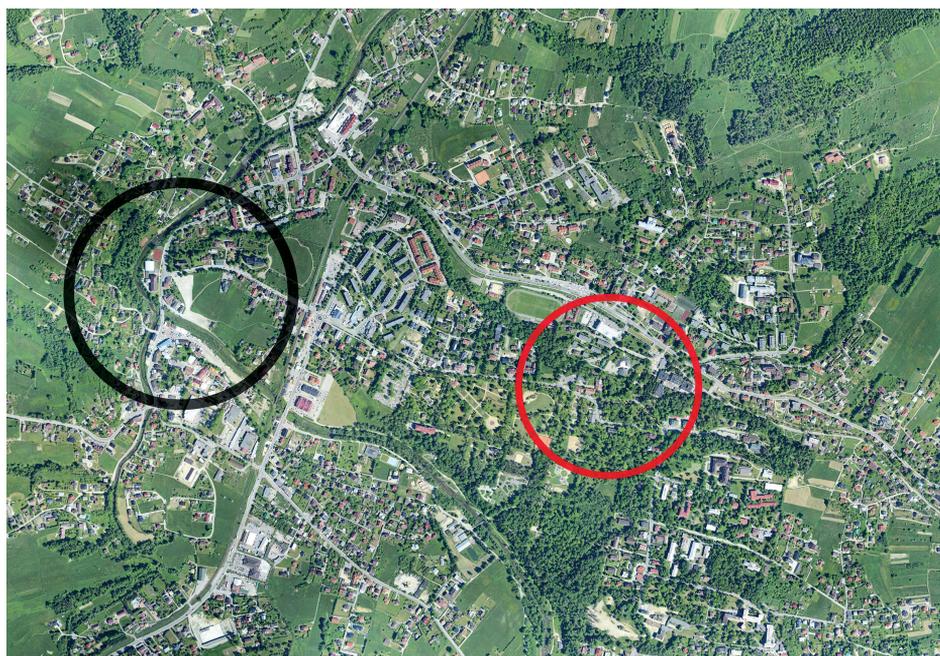


Fig. 3. Rabka on an aerial photo. Black colour marks the area where the village of Rabka developed in the Middle Ages. Red colour marks the area where the health resort was founded in the 19th century (Photo by W. Gorgolewski 2017)

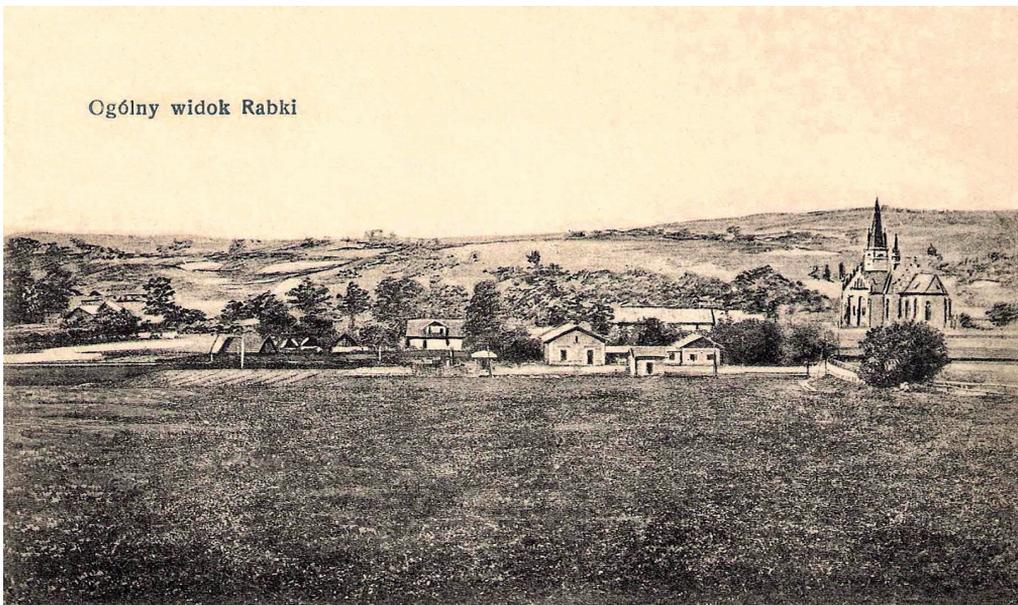


Fig. 4. Rabka at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, view from the east.  
The historic postcard (Source: Author's archive)



Fig. 5. Rabka at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, view from the west.  
The historic postcard (Source: Author's archive)

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