

# The Role of Urban Archaeology in a Multidisciplinary Approach to Urban Heritage

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**Abstract:** Mecklenburg's 13<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by a sudden rise of approximately 40 towns with the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Resulting from a combination of the conversion and conquest of the Slavic tribes in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, German speaking settlers were introduced to found villages and towns within Mecklenburg. While the development of these towns has been considered through historical and archaeological work done by other authors, the aim of this contribution is to examine an interdisciplinary approach connecting historical sources, urban morphology and urban archaeology. This approach aims to determine the major factors influencing the urban development of towns of Mecklenburg in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. For this contribution, the town of Friedland will be used as a case study. Friedland has a rich catalogue of archaeological findings while at the same time the urban history is well established. Meanwhile major details of the earliest phase of urban in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century settlement remain still unclear. Using the oldest cadastral maps, the town was divided into morphological regions that will be further studied through the archaeological and historical sources. The addition of these sources have allowed for a comprehensive understanding of Friedland's urban development from Slavic settlement to Medieval town. The analyses and results of this case study will help form the first of many towns to be studied under the banner of the Research on Urban Heritage of Medieval Mecklenburg (RUHMM). The overall goal of the PhD project this case study is part of is to demonstrate how an interdisciplinary approach can be used to place the development of towns like Friedland in the larger context of urbanization in the Baltic region. As these towns were under both internal and external influences, the matrix would be a perfect basis for the future development of the urban heritage within Mecklenburg and the surrounding areas.

**Keywords:** Archaeology, Urban Morphology, Medieval, Mecklenburg.

## 1. Urban Archaeology and the Development of Towns

This paper examines how the discipline of urban archaeology can be combined with that of urban morphology, in a new approach to study urban heritage and expand our knowledge on the development of towns.

Urban archaeology has long been used to study the development of towns (Fracchia, 2020). While the very definition of a 'town' has been disputed among archaeologists for decades, and while it is unlikely that a consensus will be reached, this paper will make use of the factors discussed by Peter Carelli (2001, 99-105). The factors discussed by Carelli range from town and market rights, heterogenous population, and a reliance on trade to support

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the town. While some of these factors like the market rights are not archaeologically visible, other factors like the town rights can be viewed as archaeologically visible from town seals, and population density can be discerned from the density of plots and foundations. While these factors are used by Carelli to discuss the identity of the populace, they are also used here to demonstrate when a settlement can be considered urban.

This paper will use the town of Friedland as a case study, focusing on its development between 1244 and 1600. Urban morphology is defined by Vitor Oliveira as “the science that studies the physical form of cities, as well as the main agents and processes shaping it over-time” (Oliveira, 2016b: 1). However, urban morphology has not yet been combined with archaeological methods and sources.

The paper will compare the methods used in urban archaeology to these two approaches, in order to enable the discussion of the individual merits of each discipline and how they may work together in a multidisciplinary approach. Part of the methodological presentation will include the author’s own proposal for an optimal approach and combination of these methods. This will lead to a short presentation of the known history of Friedland, and subsequently to an analysis of Friedland, using the archaeological evidence to expand upon what would otherwise be a ‘standard’ urban morphological study of Friedland. Finally, this paper aims to demonstrate how urban archaeology can challenge and support the discipline of urban morphology in answering questions about the development of towns.

## 2. Why Friedland?

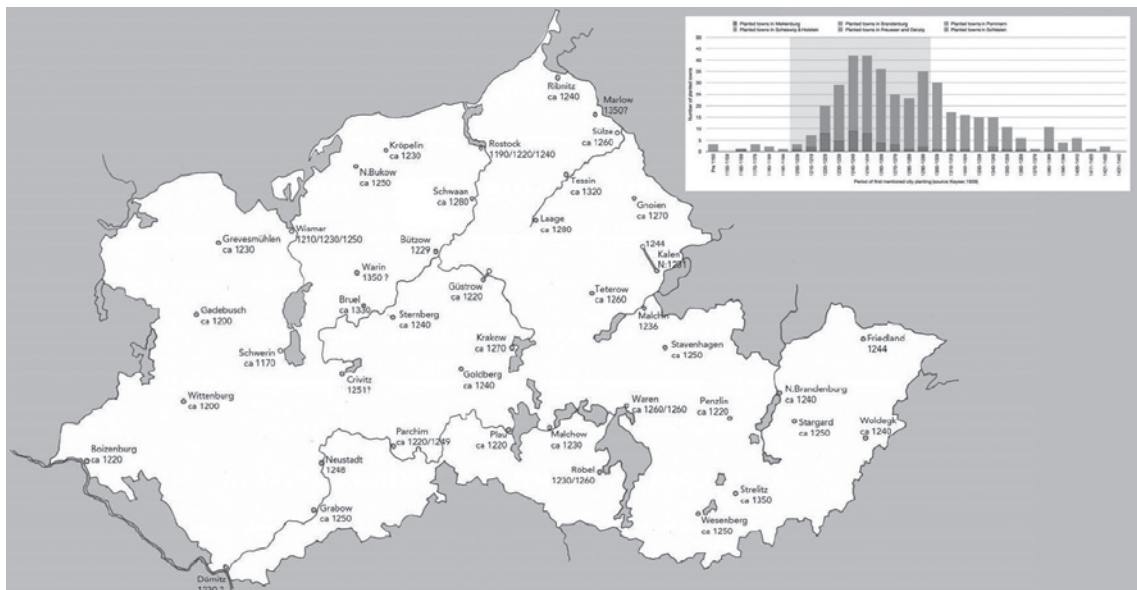
This paper will use the medieval town of Friedland as a case study, as part of a PhD project at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU). The focus is on the Urban Morphology of the towns in Mecklenburg (Germany), which were founded during the medieval period. Approximately 40 towns were established during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries (Figure 1) (Ebert, 2021) either by Slavic Lords recently converted to Christianity or by German lords, who brought German-speaking settlers to the area over a century. The founding of the towns took place following the conquest, conversion, and settlement of the original Slavic people of the area (V. Schmidt, 1995). Overall, Mecklenburg was a region under great transformation during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, which makes it a region of great interest for this paper.

Despite the abundance of towns founded in Mecklenburg during the medieval period, not all were found to be suitable for the study. Towns like Rostock, Wismar, and Stralsund are all Hanseatic Towns with widespread connections, and they were excluded in favour of other towns more representative of a medium-sized town under local lordship during the medieval period. As for the rest of the towns, one major challenge was finding towns that fit the paper’s criteria, namely that the town had to provide enough sources gained by excavation that were available from the Landesarchäologie Mecklenburg-Vorpommern from the medieval period to enable a discussion about its development over time. For the purposes of this PhD, the three towns chosen are Friedland, Güstrow and Parchim.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. *Urban Morphological Methodology*

The cornerstone of a morphological analysis lies in the town-plan analysis, the goal of which is “revealing structural and historically determined spatial qualities of cityscapes” (Conzen, 2018: 141). Cadastral maps represent a simple way to get an overview of these regions and



what the towns would have looked like. These maps allow for the study of towns over time, as cadastral maps show the layout of the town at the moment of the survey (Simms, 2015). Not only does this allow for tracing the evolution of plot sizes and housing developments in towns, it also enables the tracing of areas of use within towns, whether the area was considered commercial or private (Simms, 2015). From these maps, it is possible to perform a town-plan analysis. Part of the earliest form of town-plan analysis came from Conzen's work on Alnwick in the 1960's (Conzen, 1960). While Conzen and other urban morphologists have not been able to give "an explicit statement on the methodology of plan analysis" (Lilley, 2000: 9), it has been generally accepted that this method can be used to study the development of historic towns where the plots and block structures can be grouped into historical periods, i.e. medieval, renaissance, industrial periods (Lilley, 2000). Archaeologists have disputed the use of these maps as a form of continuity in medieval towns, with evidence of such continuity being sporadic even within the same towns (Lilley, 2000; Simms, 2015).

As mentioned in the previous sections, the analysis of Friedland will start with a morphological analysis. Since such an analysis has not been carried out in Friedland before, one will be attempted here using the sources available. The goal is to demonstrate how the addition of urban archaeology benefits an urban morphological study; the focus of this section will be on available archaeological data, with the urban morphological analysis working as the starting point.

### 3.2. *Archaeological Methodologies*

The author of this paper draws from his own experience on Nordic archaeology to assess the relevant archaeological methods and shortcomings. Nordic archaeology has been moving towards a more interconnected focus (i.e. between towns and between towns and regions), the goal of which is to seek out networks, e.g. commercial, transport and social networks, that are visible and/or can be assessed, both within and outside the town (Raja, 2020). Part of this work can be said to be an expansion on earlier archaeological work within towns, where the focus has been on the identification of social groups, mainly through the material culture that they leave behind (Jervis, 2014). In Denmark, the *Projekt Middelalderbyen* sought to analyze and discuss the emergence of several medieval towns combining historical, geological, archaeological, and geological analysis. The results of these analyses were presented in terms of periods of development for the towns that were in the project (Krongaard & Poulsen 2016: 28-31).

As opposed to some of the larger Nordic excavations, like the Bryggen excavations in Bergen, most of the towns in Mecklenburg have not received similar levels of continual excavations. From 1949 to 1990, Mecklenburg was part of the GDR, which resulted in sometimes underfunded and rushed excavations, and no archaeological excavations at all in most cases<sup>2</sup>. Outside of towns like Stralsund and Rostock, this has resulted in few larger publications of the town's archaeological development over time (Radohs, 2023).

### 3.3. *Methods of the Paper*

As the goal is to demonstrate the viability of a multidisciplinary approach, i.e. urban archaeology combined with an urban morphological study, the methodological approach consists of three aspects:

1. Contextualizing Friedland in terms of its placement and connections.
2. Division of the town into smaller regions similar to the morphological regions.
3. Interpretation of written sources and archaeological data.

Since Friedland has not been studied from an urban morphological perspective, it is appropriate to start with this type of analysis. In essence, the urban morphological perspective takes a much wider approach to studying the urban landscape than urban archaeology does.

The contextualization of the town is relevant in terms of why a town would be placed in a chosen location, including how this location connects it to other towns and regions. As Carelli states, one of the factors that can help characterize a town as urban is a dependency on external food production (Carelli, 2001). This dependency breeds a necessity for trade, highlighting the importance of a town's placement. Something that also needs to be considered, especially when discussing the shape of the town, is the geological makeup of the area. Soft soil is not an appropriate foundation for heavier buildings like fortification walls and multistoried houses. Looking at medieval towns in continental Europe, a soft soil foundation would place natural restrictions on the construction of medieval walls. Geological maps and height maps can therefore assist in explaining the placement of the town.

The second aspect of the analysis is the division of the town into smaller regions, similar to the morphological regions. A central part of an urban morphological study is to produce morphological regions based on the characteristics that can be observed throughout the

2. Personal comment from Dr. Michael Schirren.

town. However, this assumes a direct continuity of a town's major elements, such as the width of the plots, size of buildings, and the construction of these buildings from the Middle Ages until its mapping in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an assumption which may be problematic. For the analysis of Friedland in this paper, three numbering systems were employed: One for the blocks that include private buildings; one for the blocks containing public buildings, e.g. churches, hospitals and mills; and one for the street system, thereby treating this as its own independent system. The numbered blocks were based on the cadastral map from the 19<sup>th</sup> century provided by the Rostock Landrat. This division of private blocks, public blocks and streets facilitates the discussion of archaeological excavations within and among these blocks and streets.

While buildings are an important aspect of a morphological study, buildings that were constructed after the thirty years war, like the school close to the church, are not included in the analysis. The buildings in this case are loosely dated based on available data from the written sources, so while certain buildings are not mentioned until the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it has to be assumed that the building existed prior to this. One instance of this is the church of St. Mary that, while not mentioned before 1328 in the Mecklenburgische Urkundenbücher, must have been there beforehand<sup>3</sup>.

The final step of the analysis is the interpretation of archaeological and written sources. Unfortunately, very few excavations have been undertaken within the blocks themselves. However, the ones that are available can be georeferenced and placed on a map of Friedland to give an idea of settlement development, while archaeological finds and principles of stratigraphy can show connectivity between excavations. Looking at written sources, these are studied to gain an idea of the development of the town and, where applicable, gain an overview of named buildings, like churches and mills.

#### 4. History of Friedland

In 1994, historian Horst Wernicke published an article on Friedland, theorizing that Friedland's Slavic origin lay around St. Nicolai church (Wernicke, 1994). After the Slavic period, the area was settled by German-speaking settlers in 1244. The two founders were Johan and Otto, both Margraves of Brandenburg, with market rights being given in 1282 by Albrecht, Margrave of Brandenburg<sup>4</sup>. The town was founded to fortify the border between Brandenburgian Stargard and the Duchy of Pommern, and, as with the previous Slavic settlement, was placed on the plateau due to the access and sanitation options that the Datze River provided (Figure 2) (Wernicke, 1994).

During the foundation of Friedland in 1244, the sources available in the Mecklenburgische Urkundenbücher mention that Friedland was given an area of 200 Hufen, with 50 of these Hufen being given for pasture and the remaining 150 being given for farmland (Erstling, 1994). It is also mentioned that permission for the construction of a mill was given to Johann of Grevendorp, with a two year tax exemption (Erstling, 1994). Most notably in the founding document, the town of Friedland is given the town charter of Stendal placing them under Magdeburg town ordinances and privileges chartered to a town (F. Erstling, 1994). Following this initial founding and the gifting of market rights, Friedland had its customs returned along with those from the town of Neubrandenburg<sup>5</sup>. The document makes no

3. G.C.F. Lisch (1872), *Mecklenburgisches Urkundenbuch*, vol. 7 (1322-1328), Schwerin: Verein Für Mecklenburgische Geschichte und Alterthumskunde, 4906.

4. G.C.F. Lisch (1865), *Mecklenburgisches Urkundenbuch*, vol. 3 (1281-1296), Schwerin: Verein Für Mecklenburgische Geschichte und Alterthumskunde, 1617.

5. G.C.F. Lisch (1869), *Mecklenburgisches Urkundenbuch*, vol. 5 (1301-1312), Schwerin: Verein Für Mecklenburgische Geschichte und Alterthumskunde, 3025.





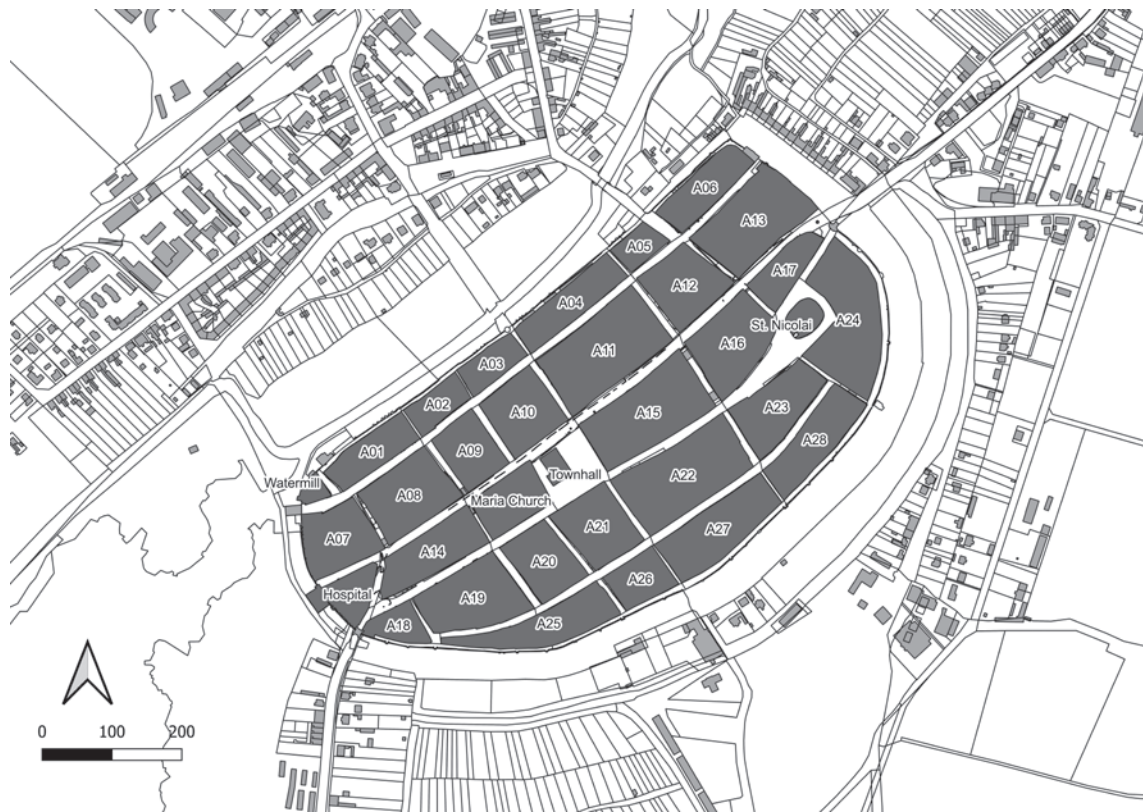


Figure 3. A map of the Friedland with the blocks base on the cadastral map from 1901, produced by Martin Ebert. St Mary church is located at the center of the town and St. Nicolai is located to the northeast.

## 5. Analysis of Friedland

As mentioned in the methodology, an urban morphological analysis seeks to understand the elements that make up a town (Oliveira, 2016a). Following this approach, the analysis of Friedland will seek to go from the wide view of the town to a narrower view. As opposed to other urban morphological studies, this one will, as stated before, largely ignore the buildings in the town unless the building can be said to have belonged to a medieval core, as is the case with the St. Mary Church and the St. Nicolai Church. To get the best possible results, the analysis will start with a wider topographic perspective and zoom in to the narrower perspective of the individual blocks.

Starting with the topographic analysis, elevation maps gathered from Mecklenburgs Geoportal show that the town of Friedland is placed on a plateau in the Datze Riverbed. Geologically speaking as the plateau is moraine in nature, “die insbesondere bei ihrer Betrachtung aus einer talhangnahen Position den Eindruck von inselartigen Hochflächenplateaus vermitteln können” (Erstling, 2001). The placement of Friedland on this plateau served multiple functions, with the Datze River providing a natural form of defense for the town, as well as necessary sanitation (Wernicke, 1994). Friedland is also a convenient meeting point between the towns of Treptow, Anklam, and Neubrandenburg. Friedland covers an area of 360.000 m<sup>2</sup>, making it the largest of the urban settlements founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

According to the standard process of urban growth, the town of Friedland tells a story of two phases of development. The area surrounding St. Nicolas church appears, on the cadastral maps, to have a non-geometric construction in opposition to the rest of the streets in Friedland that form a cartesian grid with SW/NE running streets. Typically, this type of opposition is viewed morphologically as the contrast between an area that grew unregulated and an area that was planned from the beginning. Other research, like the one carried out by Baeriswyl in his research on Züringer towns in Switzerland, would suggest that the area of St.

Nicolas church could have been the site of an earlier, larger construction (Baeriswyl, 2004). This area was pointed to by Horst Wernicke in 1994 as the origin of the town, being the possible area of the Slavic town (Wernicke, 1994). His theory suggested that from this area the rest of the town was constructed, forming the trellis road system that is seen today. However, from an archaeological point of view, the evidence for a Slavic settlement is focused around the St. Mary church and the areas to the north of here (V. Schmidt, 1994).

Moving on from the urban morphological perspective, the archaeological perspective paints a slightly different picture of Friedland's development. Archaeological excavations are limited in their scope to areas that are in need of reparation or to new constructions. One of the largest excavations undertaken in Friedland is the excavation of Riemannstrasse, which is also Friedland's arterial road. Results from this excavation included the foundation of a large building towards the Neubrandenburg gate, foundations of medieval, late medieval, and modern buildings, as well as remains of the wooden road that ran through medieval Friedland, dated to between 1234 and 1256 AD (Fenske, 2007a, 2007b).

For the areas of the town that were excavated, the orientation of the road has not changed much. However, one of the other excavations near the watermill revealed the site of a Slavic ringfort (B. Schmidt, 2010). This, along with excavated Slavic finds from around the market square, indicate that the Slavic presence was centered around the areas that would later become the watermill and St. Mary's church, following Friedland's founding (B. Schmidt, 2010). Sadly, despite the relatively high amount of excavations carried out in Friedland, little work has been done around the St. Nicolas church. Therefore, despite the evidence that points at the Slavic settlement being more centrally placed within the town, from an archaeological standpoint, there is not enough evidence to completely ignore the possibility of an earlier settlement being somewhere in the region of the St. Nicolas church. However, one excavation in Friedland, Fundplatz (Excavation Site, shortened to FPL) 57, makes reference to another excavation, FPL 158, and discusses the medieval layers in the northern area of the town, which is just below the subsoil. While the FPL 158 excavation cannot be located beyond a single mention in the Denkmal GIS system, it is the closest archaeological excavation that gives an idea of the medieval layers in the region of St. Nicolas. Future archaeological work would be helpful for a better identification of where the Slavic center of the town is found, as it is known from historical sources that there was a Slavic population already present at Friedland's founding, demonstrated by the founding document stating that the current Slavic population should be governed by a bailiff that was yet to be elected to the town<sup>7</sup>.

Previous urban morphological analysis of medieval English towns has also been able to reveal patterns in the plot widths of these towns (Lilley, Lloyd, Trick & Graham, 2005). Similar work has been completed for the towns of Malchin (Ebert, 2021). These results revealed groupings in the plot sizes, referred to in English literature as perches. Similar work was done for the town of Friedland, where the peaks in terms of plot widths lie between 27-30 Magdeburgian feet and in another case around 38-39 Magdeburgian feet (Table 1). This corresponds roughly to a width of between 7-10 meters for the lower grouping and 11-13 meters in the higher grouping. Based on foundations found during the Riemannstrasse excavations, the plots were measured to 9 meters. The excavations from FPL 150, one of the few undertaken within a block, give a width of approximately 12 meters. Thus, it is possible to discuss a form of consistency of plot sizes (Figure 4). Future excavations would help provide more datapoints for this type of research, while larger excavations could possibly help advance the discussion of the plot depths, which would provide further proof of consistencies within the plots systems of medieval towns, as well as their periods of development.

7. G.C.F. Lisch (1863), *Mecklenburgisches Urkundenbuch*, vol. 1 (786-1250), Schwerin: Verein Für Mecklenburgische Geschichte und Alterthumskunde, 559.



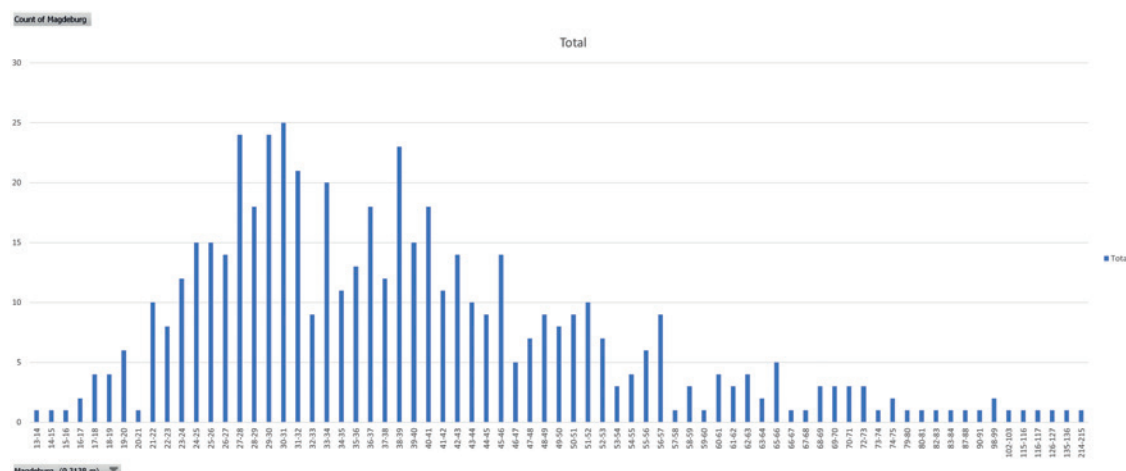


Table 1. Graph showing the count of plot sizes grouped into 2 feet sections. Note the groupings around the 27-30 Magdeburgian feet and 38-39 Magdeburgian feet.

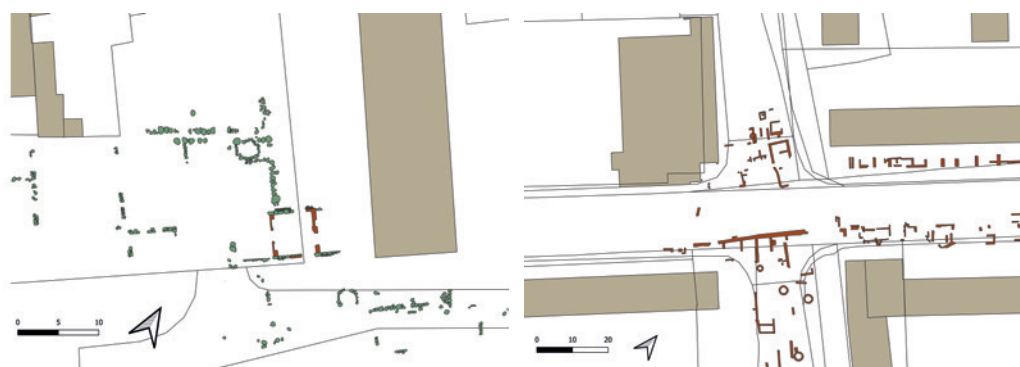


Figure 4. Two excavations, FPL 150 (left) and FPL 144 (right) both showing properties from the medieval period (marked in green) and late medieval (marked in orange).

## Conclusions

With all the data collected, the characteristics of Friedland's development become clearer. Friedland is a border town at the edge of the Stargard territory adjacent to Pomerania. Wernicke's article on Friedland proposes that a Slavic settlement was situated around the St. Nicolas church in Friedland. While the excavations that have been undertaken in Friedland to this point have revealed signs of a Slavic presence in Friedland, especially in the area close to the watermill, the only excavations that give an indication of a Slavic presence are those around the area of the town market. The strongest evidence apart from archaeological findings of a Slavic presence prior to the founding of Friedland is the mention of a Slavic population that was under the control of a special court and the bailiff. Ringforts like the one found in Friedland are not uncommon when compared to other towns within the Mecklenburg area, with the town wall of Parchim bisecting one such construction while Bützow, the seat of a Bishop, has two such ringforts constructed in the town's periphery.

Following the founding of Friedland in 1244 on the natural plateau in the Datze River, the natural defenses provided by the riverbed to the south, man made channel to the north, made to supply the mill, as well as the walls that were built to surround the city made the town a perfect border fortification. As the town developed, certain aspects of the town changed, most notably the width of the streets, as is the case with most medieval cities. One aspect that further excavations will uncover is the standard widths of the plots of the origi-

nal medieval and late medieval buildings, particularly the depth of the plots as the available data showed a strong continuity in terms of standardized plot sizes.

Future work with Friedland would benefit greatly from larger excavations with greater focus on activity within the blocks of the town. Sadly, despite the town's founding naming several important people involved with the founding of the town they do not reappear in the written sources following their original mention, making it impossible to know what influence they had on the formation of the town. In the span of the town's medieval development, there are also mentions of several brotherhoods, as well as various guilds that all could potentially have influenced Friedland's development. The ideal result would be something similar to that produced by Armand Baeriswyl in his study of the Zähringer towns of Switzerland and Southern Germany (Baeriswyl, 2004).

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