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# Where do the Forest Germans Live? Determining the Boundaries of a Forgotten Settlement Region in Southern Poland

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## Abstract

As Poland began to expand towards the east in the 1340s, a large-scale settlement initiative commenced on the former Polish-Ruthenian borderland in the Carpathians. This initiative, along with integration of German and Polish colonists, resulted over time in the emergence of a Polish cultural group known as Forest Germans (in Polish *Gluchoniemcy*). In 1871–1989 Polish-German conflict led to the relevant ethnonym and choronym being removed from both Polish academic and popular discourse. As a result, no systematic geographical research into the location and borders of their settlement region was carried out. All we have are its dispersed, imprecise geographical descriptions from the period between the second half of the 17th century and the first half of the 20th century. Despite the erasure of this term from discourses and obstruction of the process of self-determination by the local population as Forest Germans at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries primarily for political reasons, the existence of a community which can potentially be identified today as Forest Germans at the former Polish-Ruthenian border is a fact. This article outlines the problems, challenges as well as the very process of delimiting Forest Germany, along with a general outline of its boundaries.

**Keywords:** Central Europe; Eastern Europe; Assimilation; Ethnicity; Minorities

## Introduction

*Homo sapiens* as *homo geographicus* (an entity active in the geographical environment, in space) is a blend of *homo categoricus* (an entity that categorises, divides) and *homo nominans* (an entity that assigns names) (Solarz 2018, 54). On one hand, it is natural for it to create divisions (segregate other people, things, phenomena, space, etc.); and on the other hand, to label the discerned fragments of reality. A world divided and named is a world that is familiar, tamed and friendly.

The purpose of this article is to define the borders of the settlement region of Forest Germans. Designating these borders is a difficult task due to historical (tenuous source base), geographical (the lack of previous research of this type as well as of explicit and unique delimiting criteria), social (the lack of past and present subjective sense of identity in an objectively existing cultural group) and political reasons (the burden of difficult Polish-German relations during the period from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). At the same time, however, the presented geographical problem concerns a densely populated region that has retained settlement continuity since the Middle Ages. Resolving it is crucial in the context of research into its past and present, and potentially also for the identity of

the people who live there, especially since they can be hypothetically identified with Forest Germans. It is important in the context of possible (self-)discovery of their historical and simultaneously (paradoxically) new identity as Forest Germans, which was obscured and misrepresented for political and ideological reasons approximately 100 years ago [with new ethnographic groups being invented in their place during the interwar period (Solarz and Raczyńska-Kruk 2023, 114)]. Defining the settlement region of Forest Germans is one of the first steps towards learning about them. On one hand, the presented analysis is a detailed case study of the forgotten community of Forest Germans; on the other hand, it illustrates broader phenomena that affect multiple cultural groups of the borderlands, which have complex identities, in a situation of a conflict between their communities of origin (in this case – Poles and Germans).

The process of final demarcation of the settlement region of Forest Germans will be subject to numerous criteria, including those pertaining to various relics of their material and non-material culture. However, the key issue in the Polish historical, cultural and geographical context is the non-specificity of potential markers that would allow for the area inhabited by them to be designated. The ubiquity of anthroponyms and toponyms of German origin in Poland, the geographical distribution of chain villages, so-called linear forest villages (in German *Waldhufendorf*), the long-term influence of the German language on the Polish language, etc. mean that it is likely impossible to distinguish the settlement region of Forest Germans from the remaining territory of Poland based solely on these criteria. The specificity of 1,000-year-old Polish-German relations (from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century), reflected in thorough intermingling of Polish and German elements throughout the territory of Poland over those 10 centuries, means that the first step must consist in verification of the possible location and borders of the settlement region of Forest Germans through reference to narrative historical sources that mention them in geographical context. Only then will it make sense to use other criteria in the Polish-German historical, geographical and cultural context. The focus of this article is therefore the first step in the process of defining the settlement region of Forest Germans, which is affected by quantitative and qualitative imperfections of the sources as well as subjectivity of the researchers tackling this academic challenge.

### Theoretical and practical lessons from the Forest German study

The Forest Germans make for an intriguing study for several reasons. For one, they can provide new knowledge about a community that had never been the subject of scholarly research until the eve of the 2020s. This alone is an exciting prospect for the researcher, although the situation is more complex in practice. Even though scholars were interested in the people who lived in the Forest German settlement area, they did not perceive them as Forest Germans and did not study them in the context of the genesis and history of this settlement. As a result, they often, sometimes wilfully, disregarded or ignored certain historical facts and processes, and even fabricated social facts (as mentioned above, e.g. Polish ethnographers ‘invented’ new ethnographic groups and identities (Pogórzanie and Rzeszowiacy) to replace them in 1918–1939) (Solarz and Raczyńska-Kruk 2023, 114). The researcher of Forest Germans thus becomes something of an archaeologist who has to unearth the distorted social reality buried beneath several layers of narrative. At this point, Forest Germans immediately invite deeper reflection on scientific cognition from two perspectives. On the one hand, they encourage reflection on its limitations and challenges. On the other, they serve as a warning to every researcher, as their case clearly illustrates the pitfalls of not keeping current policies and ideological considerations out of science.

Geographic considerations, i.e. identifying the region of interest and demarcating its boundaries, has to be the starting point for Forest German research. This determines or locates historical sources, interviews, or surveys to be investigated or performed respectively. Faced with a millennium of relations between neighbouring Poles and Germans, along with the complete colonisation of the Forest Germans, delimitating Forest Germany should assist in filtering out those traces

exclusively associated with the Forest Germans from the many traces of German culture in the culture of Poland and the Polish Carpathians. The 700-year history of the Forest Germans and their complete polonisation bears out Michel Houellebecq's claim that the map is more interesting than the territory (Houellebecq 2010). This is especially so as Forest Germany has yet to be delimited. This is a major hurdle in any study of this cultural and territorial community.

Forest German research comes under research on one of the most important historical processes that took place in the borderland of Latin Western and Orthodox Eastern Europe, viz. the eastern colonisation of the 13th and 14th centuries. In 1934, the French historian Marc Bloch wrote 'The German expansion is not only a major event of European history in its own right. It places one of the most exciting experiences that researchers of human societies can dream of right before our eyes: the contact and reciprocal reactions between two types of civilisation' (Higounet 2003, 19). The eastern colonisation consisted of German colonisation and the imposition of German law. These two strands proceeded in parallel and overlapped in certain places (Higounet 2003; Piskorski 2001). One of the last and easternmost phases of this process was the colonisation of Forest Germany. This mediaeval eastern colonisation was pivotal to shaping the cultural landscape, as well as the national and international relations, of this part of Europe. It built an ethnic and political map of the region that prevailed until 1945, and a model of the landscape that is still current (Piskorski 2001; Piskorski 2005; Piskorski 2006; Zaborski 1926). One of the results of this was that the mediaeval (12th–14th century) ethnic boundary between Poles and Ruthenians, and by extension Western civilisation, probably moved 20–40 km eastward in the Polish Carpathian Foothills and the Jasło and Krosno Basins to the 17th century (Parczewski 1991, 66). For this reason, Forest German research also comes under research on Central Europe as a distinct geographical unit (Škrabec 2013) and on the east-west divide in Europe (Davies 1998; Solarz 2022; Wolff 2020). The eastern border of Forest Germany is one of their possible eastern borders.

Forest German research lays bare the limitations of traditional methods of scientific cognition, especially when it comes to historical, linguistic, and landscape analysis. The key three research issues concerning the ethnogenesis of the Forest Germans are: (i) their source area(s) and the stages of their migration to Forest Germany; (ii) their original ethnic composition and their subsequent intermingling and assimilation with the Polish population; and (iii) their relations with other ethnic groups in the Carpathians. In his analysis of Romania, Lucian Boia noted that a populace is not something given once and for all, but a fluid synthesis that is in any event cultural and not biological (Boia 2016, 53). The Forest Germans are obviously a fluid cultural synthesis, but as well biological. First, due to the paucity of sources, traditional research methodologies listed above cannot answer the three questions posed above. This has prompted the use of new research techniques, especially genetics. Geographical research has become all the more important given that delimiting Forest Germany has to be the first step in any genetic study, as it helps determine where the descendants of the original colonists, i.e. the study's potential participants, are most likely to be found.

As indicated above, Forest Germans are also a fluid cultural synthesis. 'The problems of colonisation, assimilation, and acculturation can only be identical from a current perspective. They should be separated, as the bare colonization of a territory usually lasted only a few decades, whereas assimilation and acculturation spanned several centuries and many generations, and the result only depended on an influx of colonists to a relatively minor extent. It more often depended on the territory's subsequent political and cultural history.' (Piskorski 2006, 216). Forest Germany was colonised for no more than half a century and the process ceased around the turn of the 15th century. The western part was polonised in the 16th century, and the rest of it at the latest by the turn of the 19th century. Basing on Barbara Loyer's observations on minorities (in fact a minority is any cultural and territorial group that maintains a distinctiveness from the society within which it operates), it should be noted that a separate cultural-territorial group is a community that: (i) by itself, objectively stands out from the rest of the population; (ii) considers itself distinct from the rest of society; and (iii) is perceived as such by the majority (Loyer 2011, 19). These three distinctiveness 'indicators' form a matrix of types of cultural-territorial groups, from actual outright minorities to

exogenously invented minorities, with numerous intermediate types. Indicators (i) and (ii) do not apply to the Forest Germans. Centuries of assimilation and adaptation have blurred or diluted all conspicuous markers of distinctiveness (the clearest traces are preserved in toponymy and anthroponymy). The evolution of a Forest German identity was blocked from the top prior to 1950 and there is currently no such regional identity. In this respect, the situation only changed when the communist system collapsed in 1989, and freedom of scientific research was restored, censorship was lifted, and there was a warming of relations with Germany (i). During the 1990s, there was an increase in interest in microhistory, including genealogy (ii), and the 21st century has seen the rise of the Internet and social media (iii). The third indicator of distinctiveness (external perception), however, definitely applied to the Forest Germans until the mid-20th century which is at least indicated by the ethnonym and choronym created to name them and their territory. The specifics of the third indicator, however, consist in its effective removal from academic and popular discourse. This is because Polish historiography, geography and ethnography in the 19th and 20th centuries came to be contingent on the political and national needs of a nation without a state (1795–1918), immersed in conflict with Prussia (no later than 1772) and Germany (since 1870), and then a state threatened by German revisionism (1918–1970/1990) (Kroh and Dobroch 2024, 57; Górny 2024, 255; Romer 1939, 5–7). Nevertheless, Louis Wirth noted that the minority is not a statistical concept, but is characterized by a common experience of discrimination and stigmatisation, e.g. on account of their actual or purported background (Ndiaye 2011, 16). Objectively, this has also been the experience of Forest Germans and also indicates their certain distinctiveness as a cultural-territorial group in Polish society.

The partial maps and the summary map, which are the central and final result of the research presented in this article, have a specific character. As there are no old or historical maps depicting Forest Germany, there are no delineated borderlines that the geographer can critically analyse and superimpose on the contemporary map of the relevant part of Poland. Whatever map is used, it cannot be the result of field research, because Forest Germany has never been a distinct settlement unit with boundaries marked on the ground. As there is no Forest German identity, the area cannot be plotted on the basis of the mental maps of community members: If they do not define themselves as Forest Germans, then *ipso facto* they do not define their area. The only source for locating Forest Germany and reconstructing its boundaries are historical narratives. These in this case, however, are devoid of geographical precision. They have to be ‘translated’ into the language of geography that is a map. This involves a multi-stage spatial interpretation and concretisation of the geographical descriptions they contain. As a map is not only a collection of information but also the result of an interpretation of the world (Soini 2001), the partial maps and the final map presented in this study thus become imaginary maps of a sort. This is because they not only allow for the presentation of Forest Germany as a fragment of the real world, which objectively exists, but also reflect its image in the imaginations of those who compiled documents about this region – in the imagination of the creator of a narrative historical source, the geographer who interpreted it spatially, and the cartographer who plotted them on the basis of the geographer’s instructions.

### Forest Germans - complex and changing identities

The Polish term *Gluchoniemcy* is perfectly ambiguous as this single word simultaneously points to the genesis of this community (colonists clearing out the forest on the borders of the Latin world to make room for new villages) and to its characteristics (distinctness from the Polish and German populations, which gave rise to problems in communication). In other languages, such as German and English, the Polish term *Gluchoniemcy* (probably coined before the German one) and its double meaning must be conveyed using different words – *Waldddeutsche*/Forest Germans and *Taub-deutsche*/Deaf Germans, respectively (Solarz and Raczyńska-Kruk 2023, 122–123). While this term already emerged as an ethnonym in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Solarz and Raczyńska-Kruk 2023, 115–116), the first person to have used it in a form that suggested a choronym might have been

Wincenty Pol in 1869 (Pol 1869, 32). However, both uses were eliminated from academic and popular discourse by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century during the escalating Polish-German conflict. There is only one known map on which their settlement region is marked; it contains errors and is highly schematic (Niemcówna 1923, n.p.). As a result, approximately seven centuries after the settlement initiative which led to the emergence of Forest Germans, we do not know where exactly they lived (and perhaps still live).

The establishment of the Forest German community is connected with political and settlement processes which began in the 1340s on what was at the time the south-east border of Poland. After Red Ruthenia was incorporated into the Kingdom of Poland, a large-scale colonisation initiative commenced in the former borderland region – in the river basin of Wisłoka and farther east in the river basin of Wisłok. It also relied, to an extent which is nowadays unknown, on settlers from the German cultural circle, likely including both ethnic Germans and partly Germanised Western Slavs from Slavic Germany. Over the following centuries, the first settlers representing (to varying degrees) the German and West Slavic (including Polish) cultural and ethnic circles were polonised as a whole as a result of intermixing with subsequent waves of settlers (typically of Polish origin), thus creating the Polish cultural group of Forest Germans. With respect to the present day, we are certainly not looking for a German population in this area since it is certain that no relic German community with medieval roots currently exists in the river basins of Wisłoka and Wisłok.

### Delimitation of the Forest Germans settlement region according to sources: the challenge of source ambiguity and subjectivity of interpretation

In the light of the complex historical, cultural and geographical context of Central Europe, including long-term Polish-German proximity, delimiting the settlement region of Forest Germans requires its outline to be defined based on analysis of sources.

The research procedure aimed at demarcation of the settlement region of Forest Germans consisted of several stages and ultimately produced maps depicting the issue under consideration. The first step involved a query aimed at finding as many mentions placing Forest Germans in geographical context as possible. Only texts directly containing the relevant ethnonym or choronym associated with a specific territory were selected for further analysis. The source materials used for framework definition of the borders of the settlement region of Forest Germans (handwritten documents, study manuscripts, printed monographs, press, maps) are dispersed, uncatalogued and unrefined. Without advanced digitisation allowing for automatic searches of archival and library resources, any research work is bound to be uncertain, incomplete and temporary. The search for geographical mentions of Forest Germans is reminiscent of looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack (especially with several countries and languages being involved; the relevant archival materials are or can be stored in Poland, Ukraine, Germany, Austria, Hungary and Slovakia). This is why digitisation of some of the printed monographs and press materials in a way which enabled automatic search by keywords undoubtedly made this work quicker and easier. It also likely revealed some geographical descriptions which could have been overlooked in a traditional query (Table 1). Table 1 contains information about the author and date of creation of the source, description or geographic context of a mention of Forest Germans and reference to the figure with geographical interpretation of the text.

The second research step consisted in geographical analysis and interpretation of the text descriptions extracted from sources and the aforementioned map from 1923 and, as a result, in drawing up appropriate maps (Fig. 1-23.). Descriptions which placed the specified ethnonym or choronym in geographical context but were too general and imprecisely formulated to serve as the basis for defining the borders of the settlement region of Forest Germans were rejected.

The third step involved imposing the partial maps obtained as a result of the aforementioned procedure on top of each other and covering the analysed area with the same colour of varying intensity, depending on the number of instances in the sources and the coverage of individual

**Table 1.** Settlement region of Forest Germans according to various sources, 1650–1950

source	date of creation of the source or publication	settlement region of Forest Germans according to the source	figure containing the cartographic interpretation
<i>Liber status ecclesiae parochialis in villa Krzemienica</i>	1690	the vicinity of Krosno and Łańcut	1
Benedykt Chmielowski	1756	historical Foothills, especially the vicinity of Rzeszów and Łańcut	2
Ignacy Krasicki	probably 1767–1801	Markowa, Albigowa and Białoboki (in annotation by Ignacy Krasicki added ‘etc.’)	3
Franciszek Siarczyński	1827	Krzemienica, Markowa, the vicinity of Korczyn, Biecz	4
Wacław Maciejowski	1835, 1859	the northern border: threshold of the Carpathians; southern border: the northern border of Ruthenian settlements; western border: Grybów Ridge (probably the ridge between Chełm and Małana Mountain, separating the settlements of Forest Germans from the Biała (Dunajec tributary) valley; due to the short length of this section, the water divide between Biała and Wisłoka (and Ropa), from the border of the Lemko Region to the threshold of the Carpathians, can be considered the western border; eastern border: the eastern range of the Wisłok valley	5
Wincenty Pol	1869	Wisłoka and middle Wisłok river basins; to the west from the eastern edge of the Jasło and Krosno Basins, i.e. the vicinity of Kombornia, Haczów, Trześniów, to the Grybów Ridge in the west: Gorlice, Szymbark, Ropa, north towards the Pilzno land in the Sandomierskie Province (1772); southern border: probably the northern border of the Ruthenian settlements	6
Zygmunt Gloger	1869	the Jasło Poviats excluding that part of the poviat inhabited by the Ruthenian population	7
Lucjan Tatomir	1876	the region including the Wisłoka and middle Wisłok river basins, delimited by the Pilzno-Łańcut line from the north and the northern border of Ruthenian settlements from the south	8
Wojciech Michna	1879	the region including the Wisłoka and middle Wisłok river basins, delimited by the Pilzno-Łańcut line from the north and the northern border of Ruthenian settlements from the south	8
<i>Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich</i> [Geographical Dictionary of the Kingdom of Poland and Other Slavic Countries]	1880–1892	to the west from the eastern edge of the Jasło and Krosno Basins to Gorlice, Szymbark and Pilzno; to the north from the northern border of Ruthenian settlements; the southern part of the Pilzno and Rzeszów Poviats, to the south from the Archduke Charles Louis railway line (the present-day Tarnów-Rzeszów main railway line)	9

Continued



Table 1 *Continued*

source	date of creation of the source or publication	settlement region of Forest Germans according to the source	figure containing the cartographic interpretation
Józef Szujski	1882, 1896	probably to the south of the Pilzno-Łańcut line to the northern border of the Ruthenian settlements	10
Biblioteka Warszawska [Warsaw Library]	1882	the northern slopes of the Carpathians, to the south of the line between Pilzno and Łańcut, probably to the north of the northern border of the Ruthenian settlements	11
Czas [Time] (Jerzy Mycielski)	1882	to the south from Pilzno in the Wiśłoka river basin and from Łańcut in the Wistok river basin, to the south of the line between Pilzno and Łańcut, probably to the north of the northern border of the Ruthenian settlements	12
Czas [Time]	1884	the area delineated by the line from Tarnów to Jasło and Krosno — and from Jasło to Fryszak and Rzeszów	13
Kraj [Country]	1884	the area delineated by the line from Tarnów to Jasło and Krosno — and from Jasło to Fryszak and Rzeszów	13
Gazeta Narodowa [National Newspaper]	1884	the territorial belt to the north of the contemporary ethnographic Polish-Ruthenian border, especially the Jasło Powiat excluding that part of the powiat inhabited by the Ruthenian population	14
Prawda [Truth]	1884	the area delineated by the line from Tarnów to Krosno and Rzeszów	15
Prawda [Truth]	1885	the southern part of the Pilzno and Tarnów Poviats	16
Ignacy Karpiński	1887	in the Foothills, i.e. the region starting near Kraków on the right bank of the Vistula, covering a part of the former Krakowskie Province and the western part of the former Przemyśl land, probably to the north of the northern border of the Ruthenian settlements	17
Stanisław Majerski	approx. 1903	the vicinity of Rzeszów excluding the Sandomierz Forest	18
Ludwik Dębicki	1903	between Tarnów, Jasło and Krosno	19
Stanisław Majerski	1912	the vicinity of Rzeszów excluding the Sandomierz Forest	18
Jan Karłowicz	1906	to the west from the eastern edge of the Jasło and Krosno Basins to Gorlice, Szymbark and Pilzno, probably to the north of the northern border of the Ruthenian settlements	20
Stanisław Majerski	1921	the vicinity of Rzeszów excluding the Sandomierz Forest	18

*Continued*

Table 1 Continued

source	date of creation of the source or publication	settlement region of Forest Germans according to the source	figure containing the cartographic interpretation
Stanisława Niemcówna	1923	Jasło and Krosno Basins and the Gorlice Basin, probably to the north of the northern border of the Ruthenian settlements (text description in her book); a part of the Carpathian Foothills: to the west — slightly beyond the Wisłoka basin, and to the east — to the halfway point between the Wisłok and the San, to the south — to the Jasło and Krosno Basins and the Gorlice Basin, far to the south from Tarnów and Rzeszów (map in her book)	21
Adam Fischer	1926	to the west from the eastern edge of the Jasło and Krosno Basins to Gorlice, Szymbark and Pilzno, probably to the north of the northern border of Ruthenian settlements	20
Aleksander Świętochowski	1928, 1939	the Carpathian Foothills in the east of the contemporary Lesser Poland Voivodeship, probably to the north of the northern border of the Ruthenian settlements	22
Jan Stanisław Bystroń	1935	to the west from the eastern edge of the Jasło and Krosno Basins to Gorlice, Szymbark and Pilzno, probably to the north of the northern border of the Ruthenian settlements; and probably the vicinity of Łańcut and Rzeszów	23

Source: Biblioteka Warszawska. *Pismo poświęcone naukom, sztukom i przemysłowi*, 2 (1882), 304; Henryk Borcza, 'Parafia Markowa w okresie staropolskim', in *Markowa - sześć wieków tradycji. Z dziejów społeczeństwa i kultury*, ed. by Wojciech Blajer and Jacek Tejchma (Markowa: Urząd Gminy Markowa, 2005), pp. 72–189; Jan S. Bystroń, *Megalomania narodowa* (Warszawa: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze „Rój”, 1935), p. 102; Benedykt Chmielowski, *Nowe Ateny*, volume 4 - extended edition (Lwów, 1756), p. 341; Jerzy Mycielski, 'Nowa książka o Galicyi', *Czas* 35 (1882), No. 3 (January 4<sup>th</sup>), 1; 'Przegląd polityczny', *Czas* 37 (1884), No. 23 (27<sup>th</sup>), pp. 1–2; Adam Fischer, *Lud Polski. Podręcznik etnografii Polski* (Lwów-Warszawa-Kraków: Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, 1926), p. 16; 'Emigracja chłopstwa', *Gazeta Narodowa* 23 (1884), No. 37 (February 14<sup>th</sup>), p. 2; Zygmunt Gloger, *Obchody weselne*, volume 1 (Kraków: published by the author, 1869), p. 111; Jan Karłowicz, *Lud. Rys ludoznawstwa polskiego* (Lwów: Macierz Polska, 1906), p. 185; Ignacy Karpiński, *Krótki rys ustroju dawnej Polski i poglądy na przeszłość* (Warszawa: Drukarnia „Kupiecka”, 1887), p. 160; Liber status ecclesiae parochialis in villa Krzemienica, 1617–1713, Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Przemyślu (Archdiocesan Archives in Przemyśl) [hereafter AAPr], Mss. 1038; Wacław A. Maciejowski, *Historia prawodawstw słowiańskich*, volume 3 (Warszawa: Drukarnia Komissji Rządowej Sprawiedliwości Królestwa Polskiego, 1859), pp. 356–357; Stanisław Majerski, *Geografia Polski dla niższych klas szkół średnich* (Lwów: Polskie Towarzystwo Pedagogiczne, Drukarnia Udziałowa, 1921), p. 60; Stanisław Majerski, *Opis ziemi*, volume 2, (Berlin-Wiedeń: Franciszek Bonda, J. Philipp's printing house, 1903), p. 271; Stanisław Majerski, *Geografia handlowa* (Lwów: Pillar and Neumann, 1912), p. 95; Ludwik Dębicki, *Z dawnych wspomnień* (Kraków: Spółka Wydawnicza Polska, 1903), p. XXX; Wojciech Michna, *Geografia dla szkół ludowych* (Kraków: "Czas", 1879), p. 20; Stanisława Niemcówna, *Wincenty Pol jako geograf* (Kraków: Księgarnia Geograficzna "Orbis", 1923), p. 61; Kasper Niesiecki, 1842 (1889), *Herbarz Polski Kaspra Niesieckiego S.J. powiększony dodatkami z późniejszych autorów, rękopisów, dowodów urzędowych i wydany przez Jana Nep. Bobrowicza*, volume 9, (Lipsk: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1842; reprint Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1989), p. 11; Wincenty Pol, *Historyczny obszar Polski* (Kraków: Drukarnia C.K. Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1869), p. 32; Wincenty Pol, 'Rzecz o dialektach mowy polskiej' in *Rocznik cesarsko-królewskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego Krakowskiego*, 17 (1869), p. 87; Franciszek Siarczyński, *Słownik historyczno-statystyczno-geograficzny królestwa Galicji. T. 1. Wiadomości ogólne*, rkp. [Ossolineum] (1827), pp. 140, 154, 158–161; Franciszek Siarczyński, 'Rozprawa o starodawnych osadnikach niemieckich na Podgórzu i Rusi Czerwonej', in: *Pamiętnik Narodowy* (Lwów: Kuhn and Milikowski, 1827), pp. 129–147; *Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich*, volumes 2, 8, 10 (Warszawa: „Wiek”, 1880–1892), pp. 612 (volume 2), 151 (volume 8), 155 (volume 10); Józef Szujski, *Die Polen und Ruthenen in Galizien*, (Wiedeń: Verlag von Karl Brochasta, 1882), pp. 17–18; Józef Szujski, *Polacy i Rusini w Galicyi*, (Kraków: Druk W. L. Anczyca i Spółki, 1896), pp. 17–18; Aleksander Świętochowski, *Historia chłopów polskich*, (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Polskie, 1939), p. 557; Aleksander Świętochowski, *Historia chłopów polskich w zarysie*, volume 2 (Lwów-Poznań: Wydawnictwo Polskie, 1928), p. 498; Lucjan Tatomir, *Podręcznik geografii Galicji*, second edition (Lwów: Seyfarth and Czajkowski, 1876), p. 59; 'Dowcipny manewr', *Prawda* 4 (1884), No. 6, pp. 62–63; Jerzy Mycielski, 'Nowa książka o Galicyi', *Czas* 35 (1882), No. 3, p. 1; 'Petersburg, 31 marca', *Kraj* 3 (1884), No. 14, p. 4; 'Przestroga', *Prawda* 5 (1885), No. 48, p. 569.



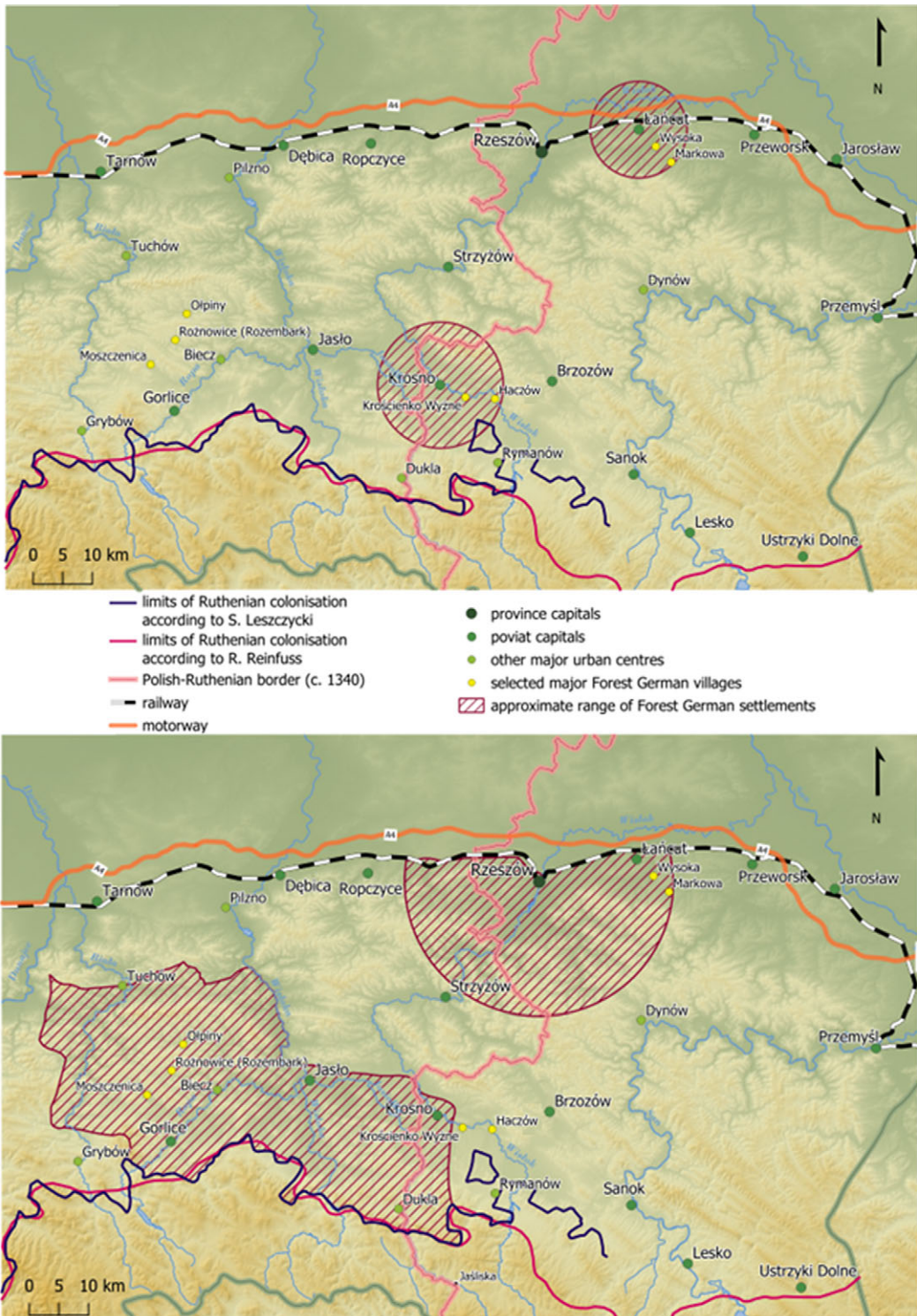


Figure 1–23. Settlement region of Forest Germans according to various sources, 1650–1950.

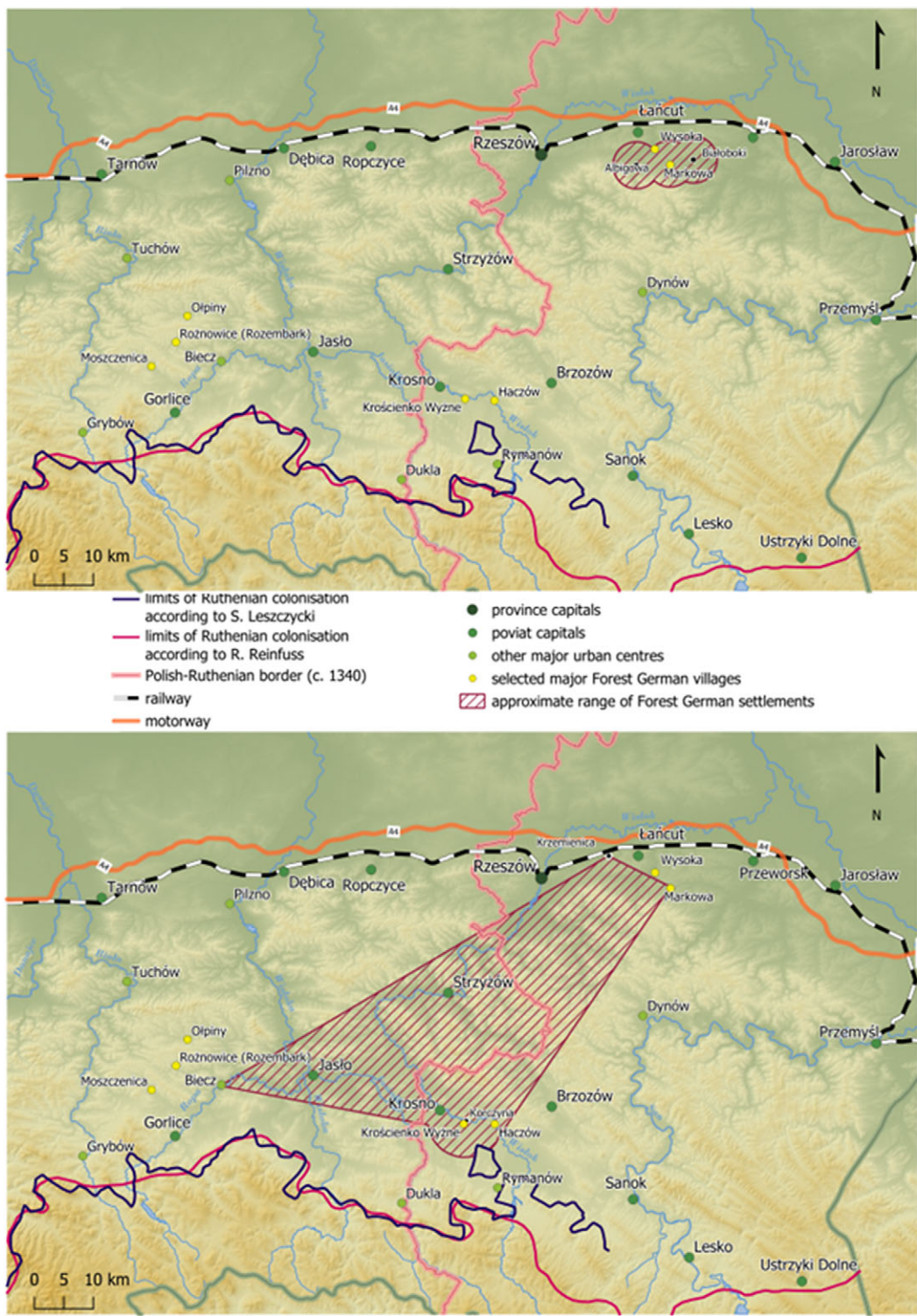


Figure 1–23. Continued



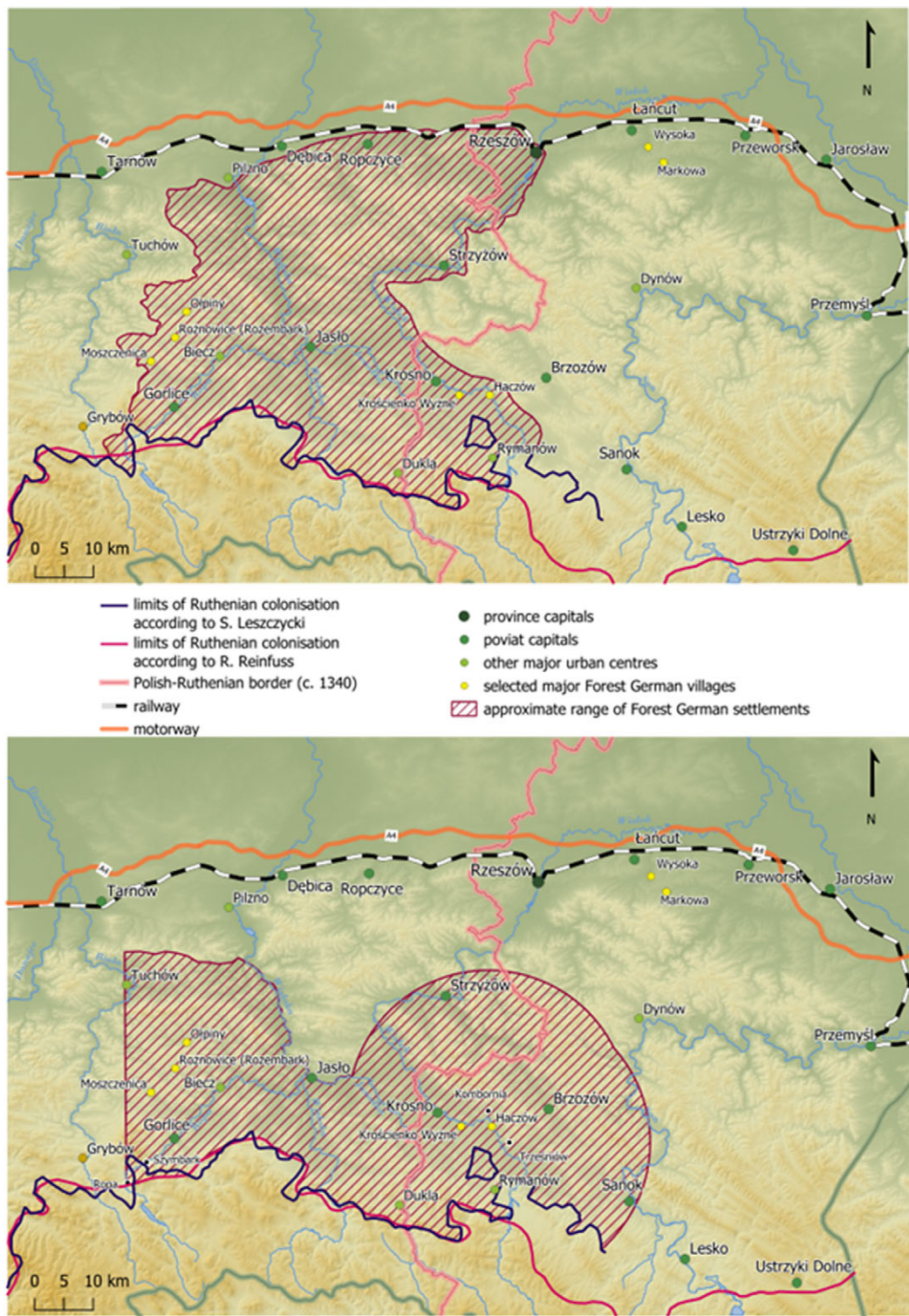


Figure 1–23. Continued



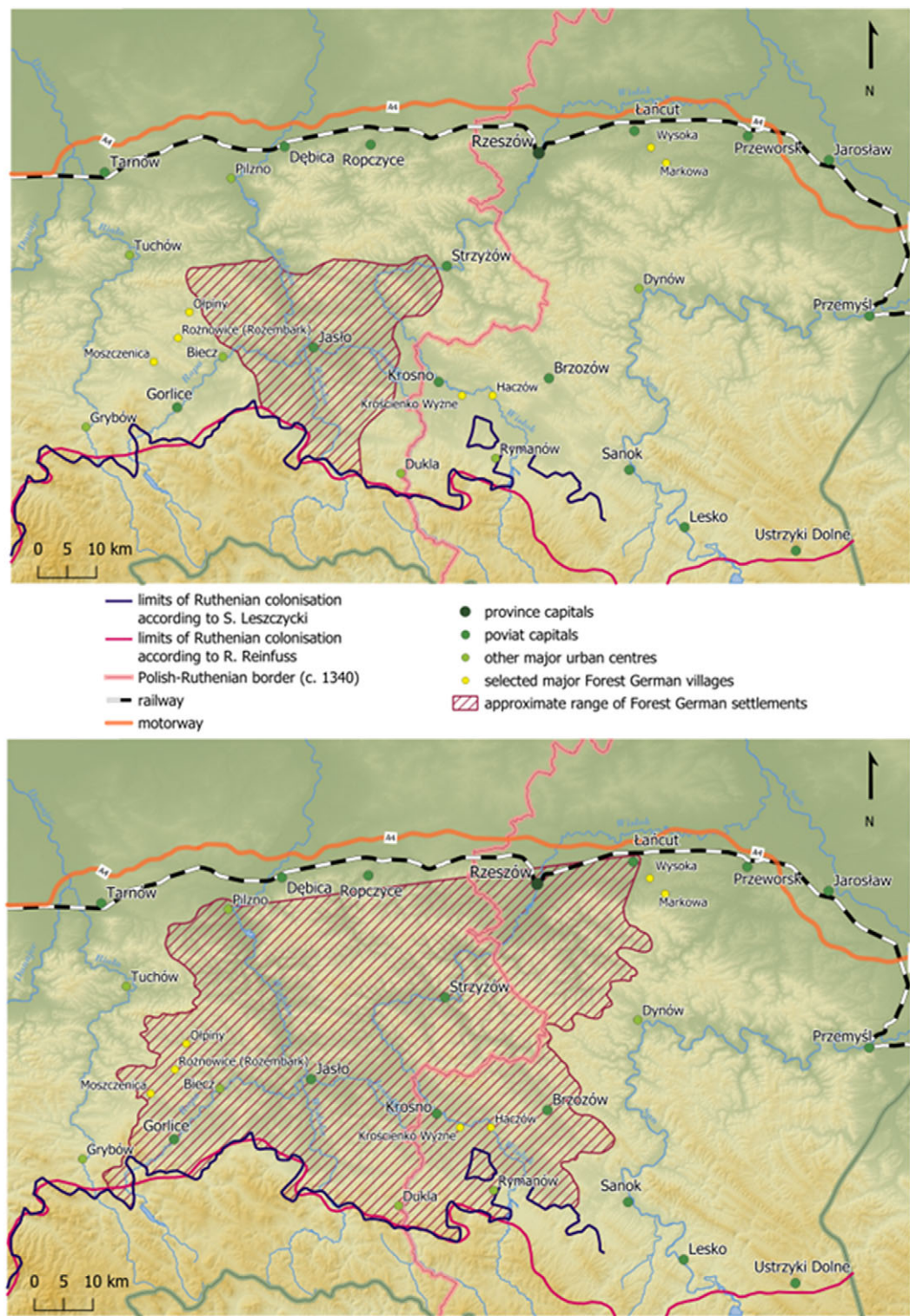


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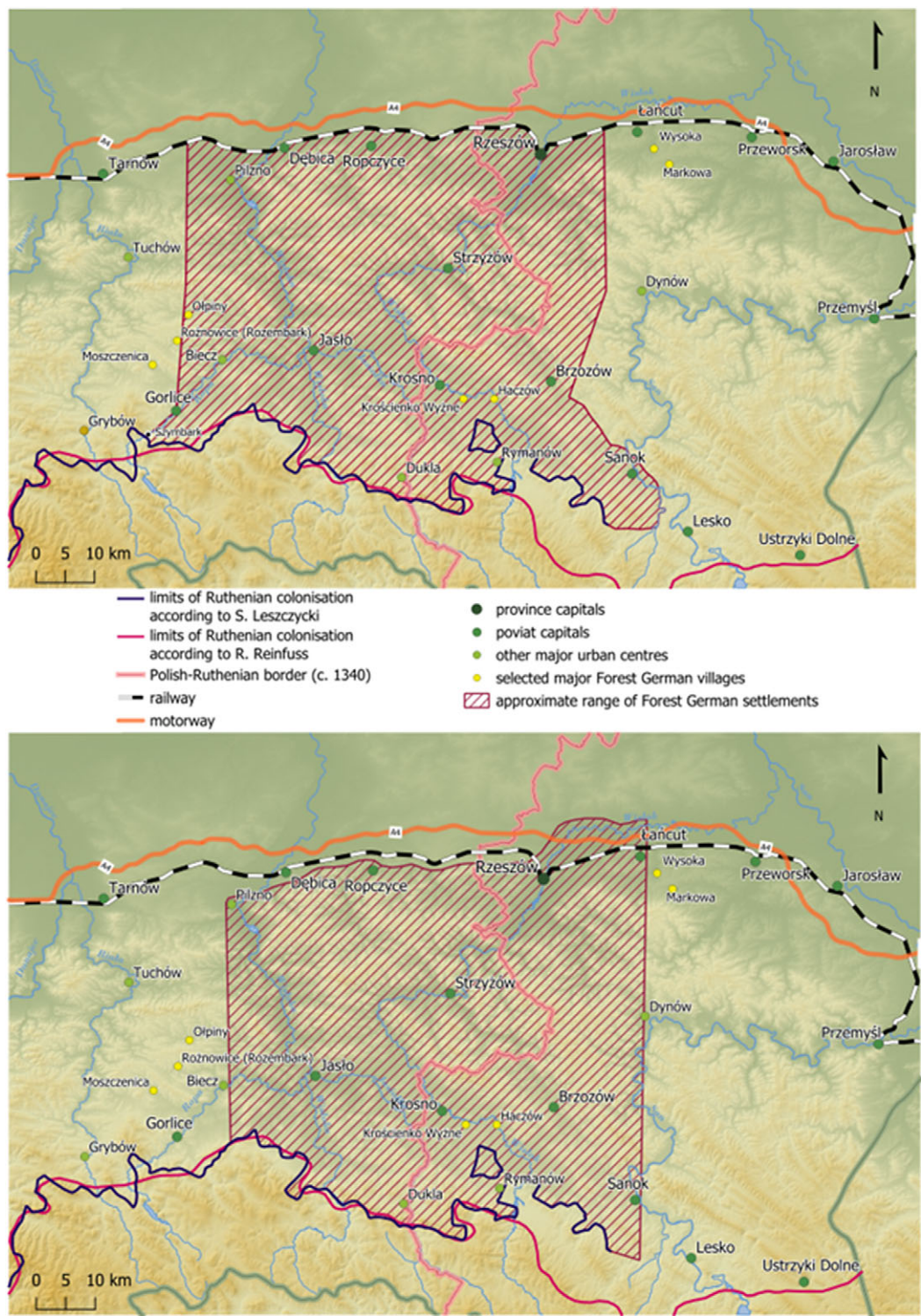


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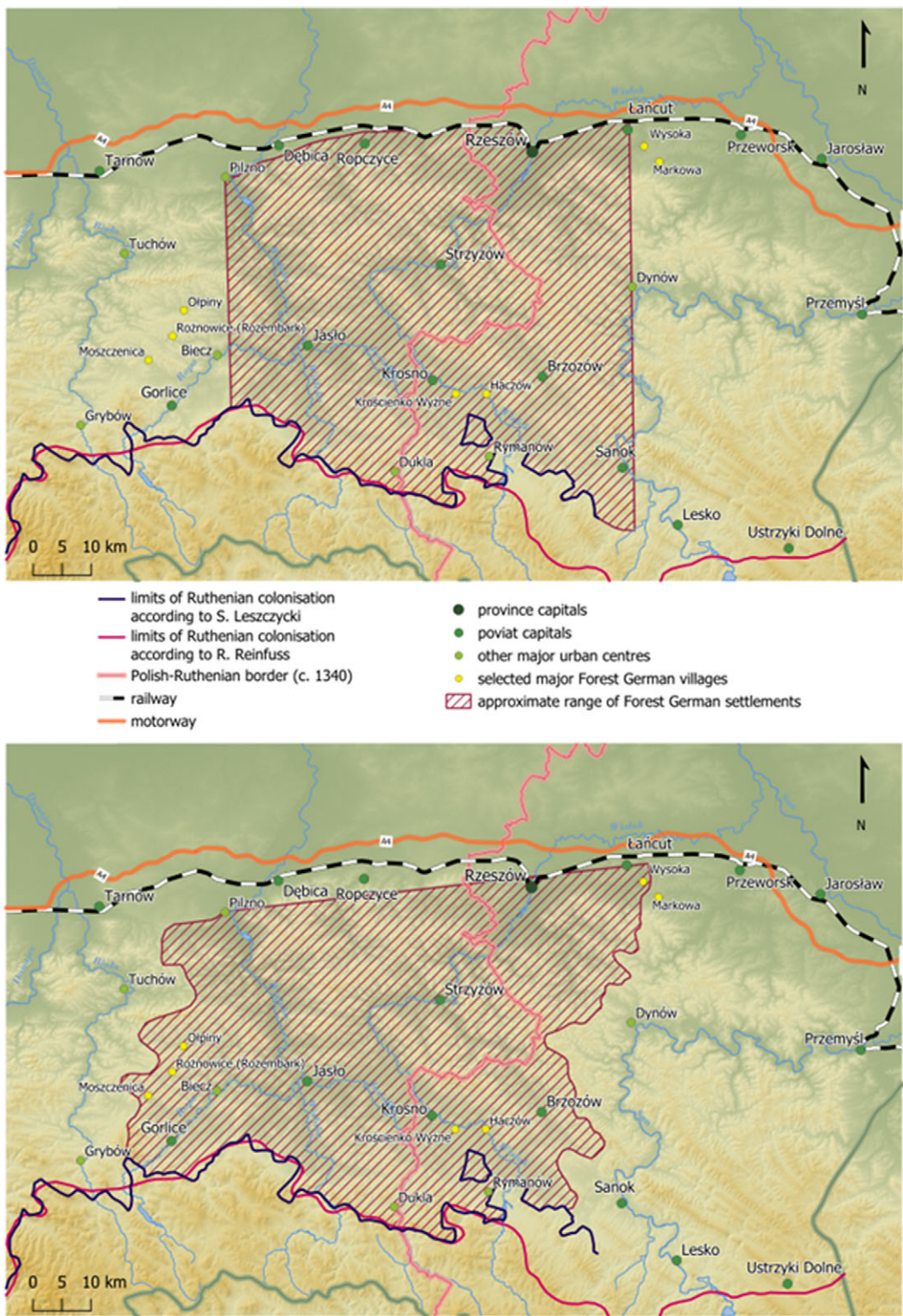


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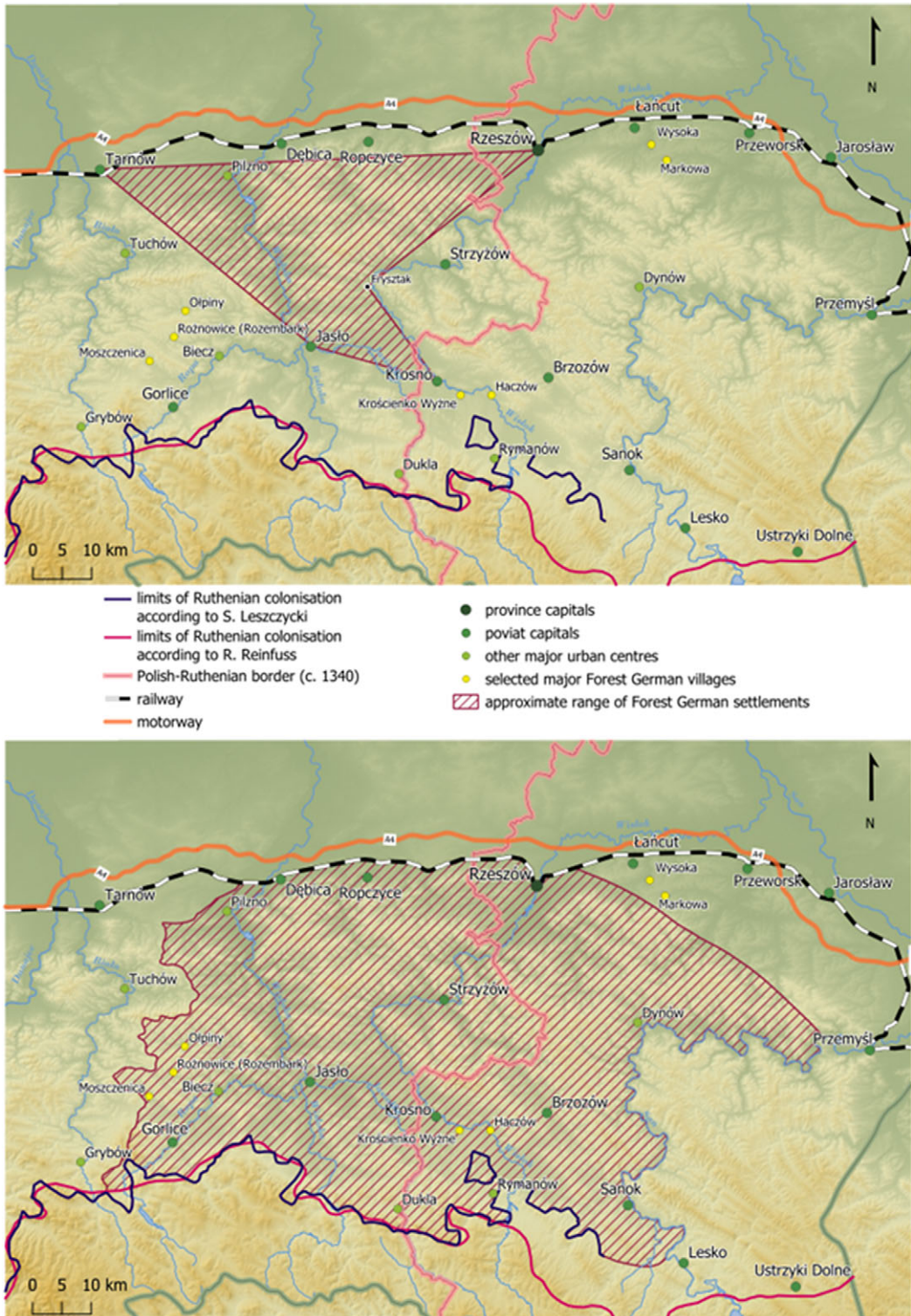


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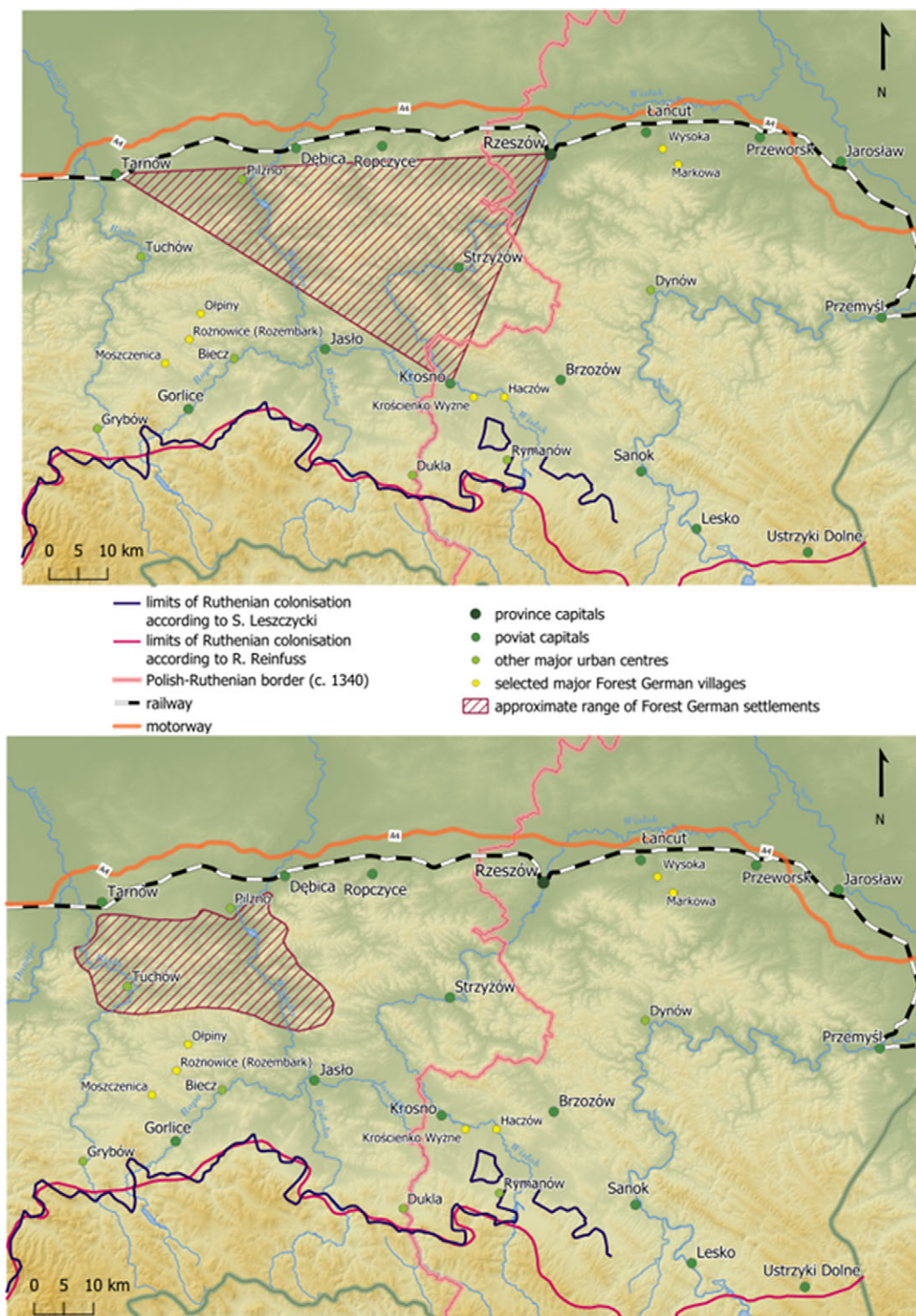


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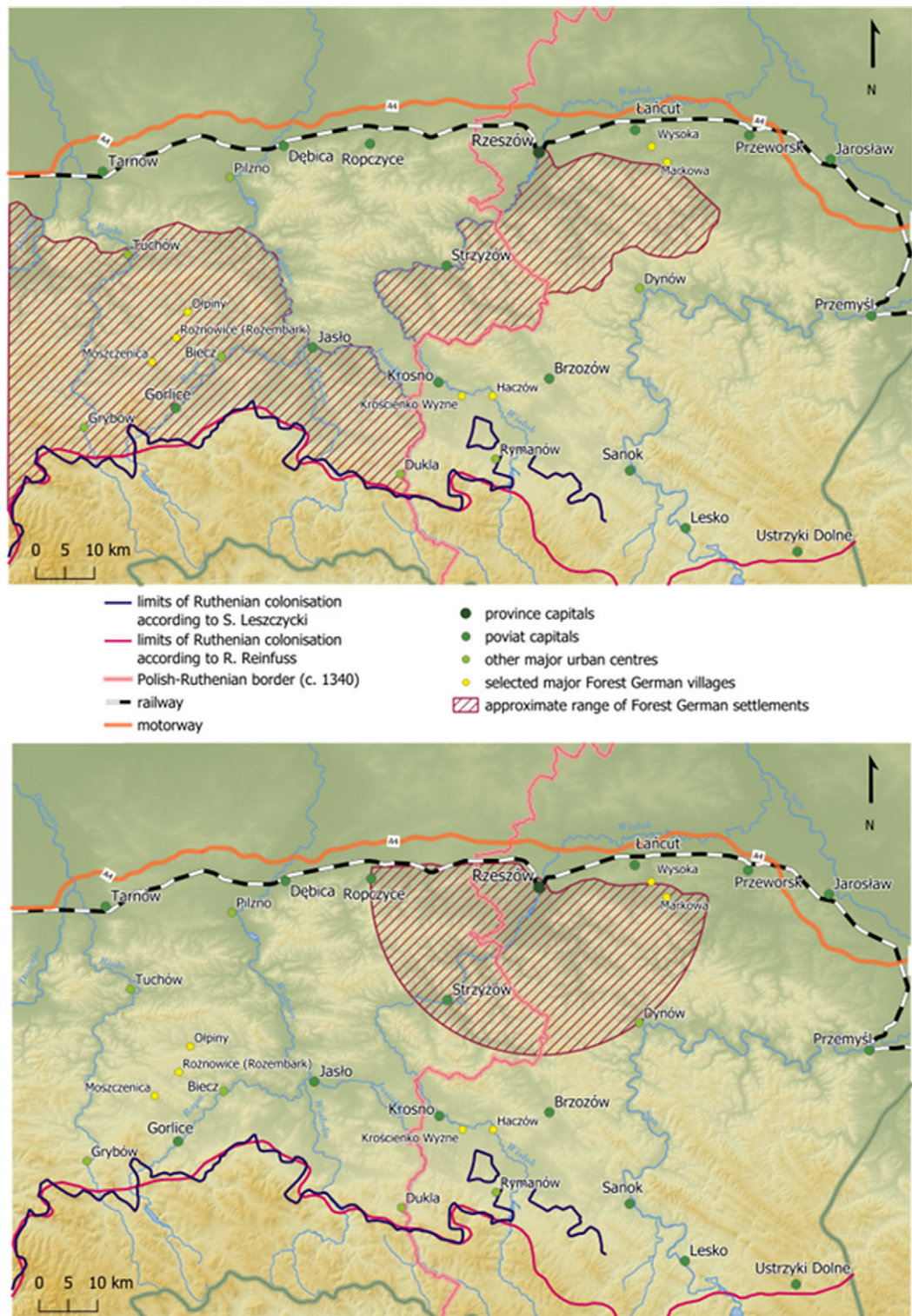


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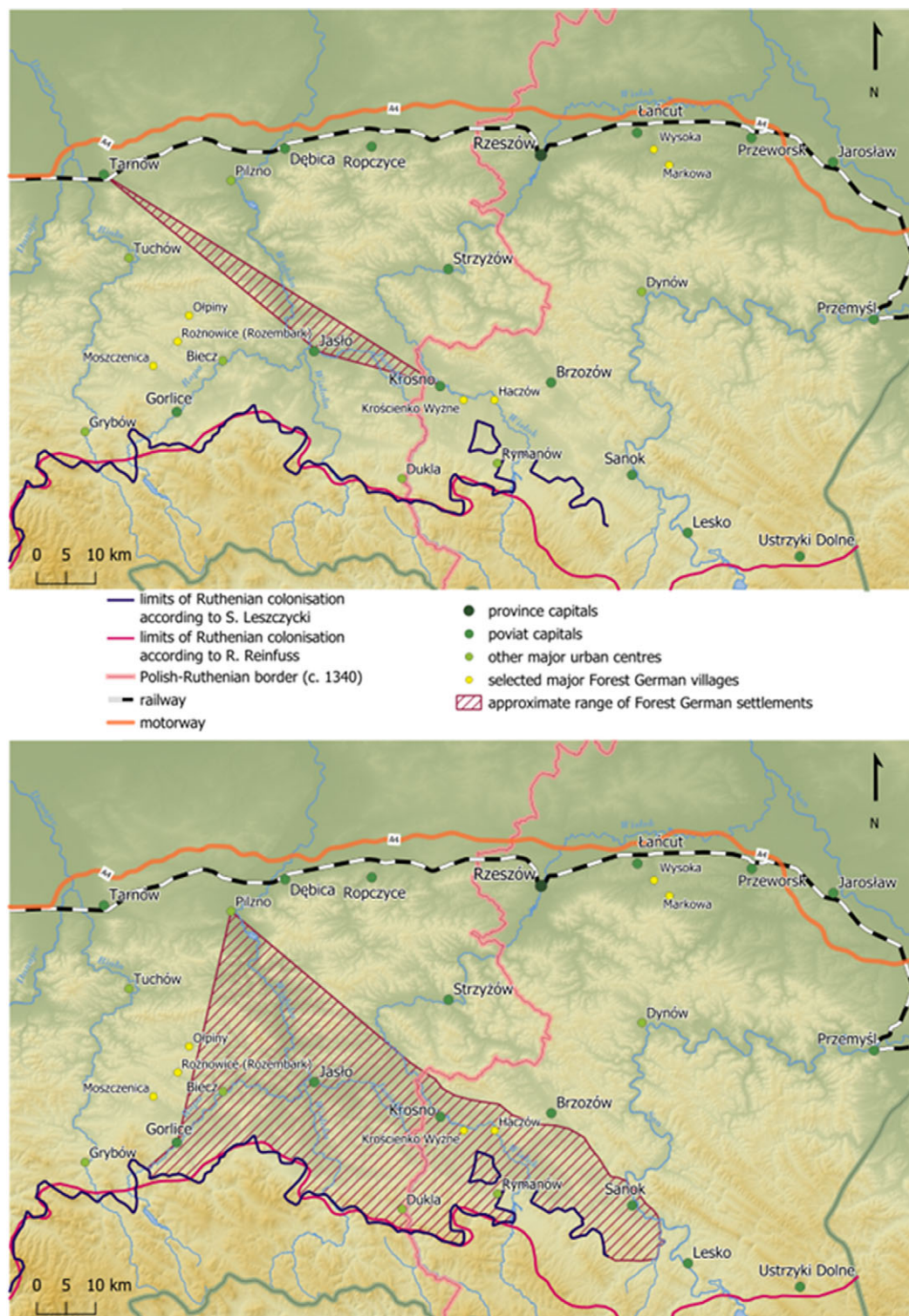


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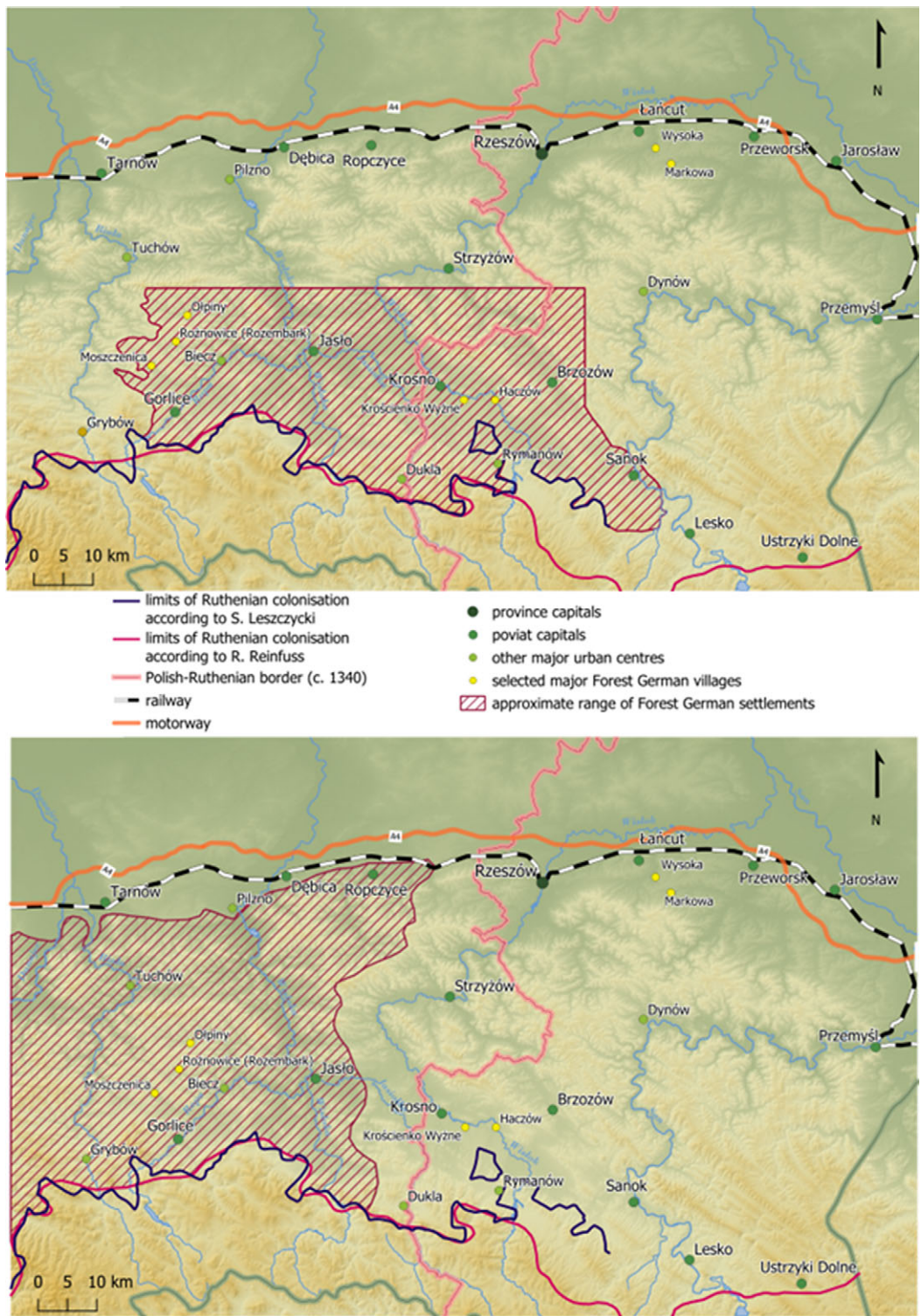


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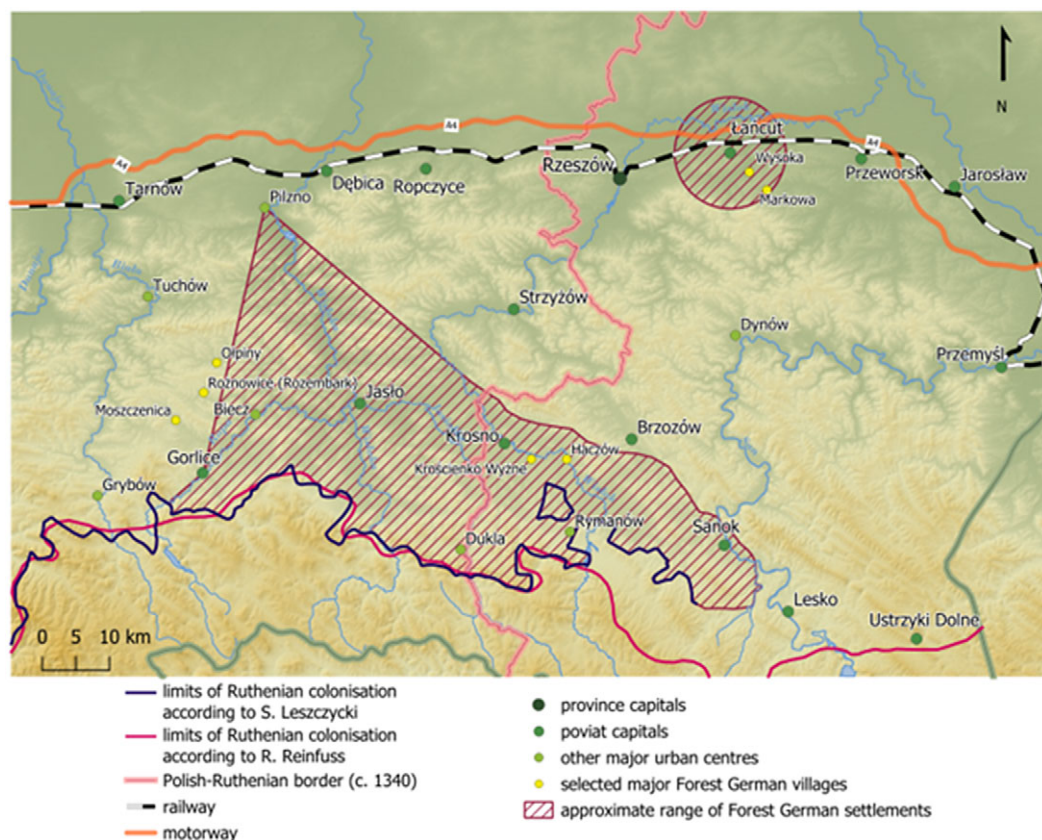


Figure 1–23. Continued

regionalisations from the partial maps (no colour means no mentions, while the most intense colour means the highest number of mentions) (Fig. 24).

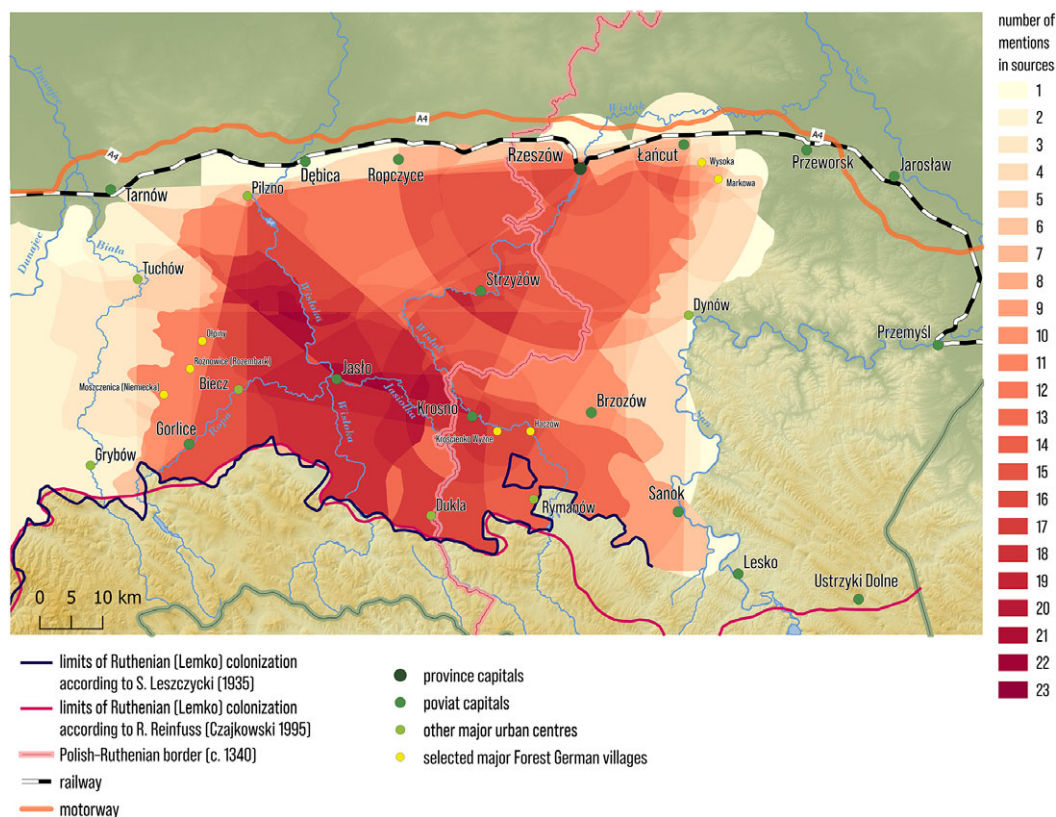
During the fourth step, locations indicated merely once or twice were rejected as accidental or without sufficient basis in sources (Fig. 25).

The fifth and final step consisted in drawing up a map with the border of the settlement region of Forest Germans, determined along the outline of the area defined as stated above and serving as the starting point for applying other non-specific markers to refine the borders of their settlements (Fig. 26.).

Each stage of research designed in this manner was accompanied by a lot of randomness or subjectivity. In view of the vast quantity of sources that should be objectively analysed, certainly not all possible geographic descriptions of the Forest German country were successfully captured. Another research challenge was the geographical and cartographic interpretation of those relatively few sources found (with their interdependence posing an additional challenge). Several detailed research challenges can be pointed out here:

- 1) In the delimitation process, only those sources which contained the term “Forest Germans” in geographical context were used; however, relatively few such descriptions were found during the more than two-year query. Although there are references to German settlements in general in the relevant geographical context, e.g. by Marcin Kromer (Kromer 1857, 361; Kromer 1984, 54–55), a 16<sup>th</sup> century Polish geographer and historian, they do not reference

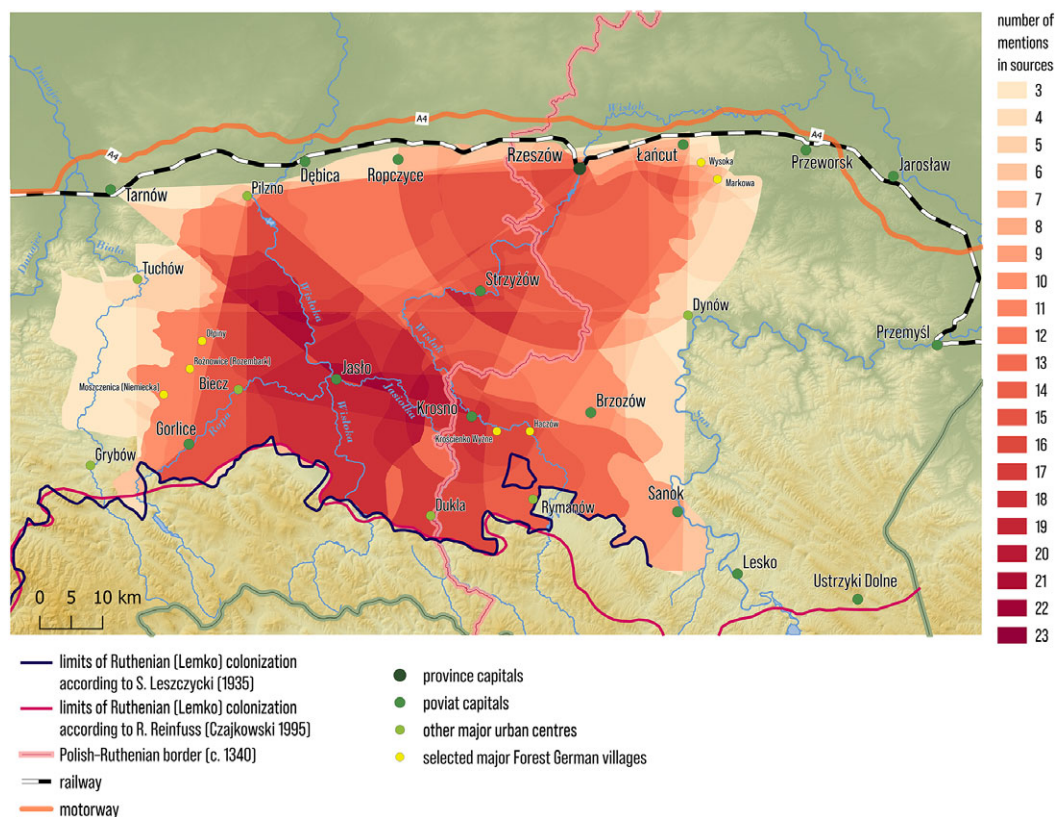




**Figure 24.** Borders and area of Forest Germany – areas included in the territory of Forest Germany according to the number of mentions in historical sources (1650–1950)

the analysed ethnonym or choronym, which gives rise to doubt as to the nature of the described community – whether they pertain to Germans or Forest Germans, which is important since these two communities are not identical. In the process of delimiting the borders of the settlement region of Forest Germans based on sources, it is therefore preferable to choose a more conservative approach and only take into account those sources which directly refer to the analysed term in connection with a certain territory. However, this approach creates the risk that the recreated borders will be narrower than they were in reality.

- 2) Another issue is the credibility and hierarchy of the sources, as well as the basis of the geographical descriptions contained in them. The geographical references typically do not seem to be based on field research. Practical knowledge of the area described is also dubious. The same source can also be inconsistent and contain gaps, even a highly ambitious one like *Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich* [Geographical Dictionary of the Kingdom of Poland and Other Slavic Countries] (Słownik... 1880-1892). The geographical context of use of the term “Forest Germans” has appeared in sources with varying credibility and prominence, including proto-academic and popular science studies, historical-geographical and geographical dictionaries, church documents, opinion pieces or press, which makes comparison and compilation of information even more difficult, especially since higher credibility and prominence of a source does not always go hand in hand with the precision of the geographical description.
- 3) Geographical interpretation of the available source descriptions has proven to be quite difficult. The geographical descriptions found are unsystematic, imprecise, exemplifying,



**Figure 25.** Borders and area of Forest Germany – areas included in the territory of Forest Germany according to the number of mentions in historical sources (1650–1950), no less than 3 mentions in historical sources

partial, frequently unclear and interdependent. They also contradict each other. Meanwhile, each source obviously required subjective, unambiguous and arbitrary interpretation in the process of its translation onto a map.

- 4) Another issue is the “chronological interpretation” of the geographical descriptions extracted from the sources. The range of settlements of Forest Germans certainly changed throughout centuries, so combining geographical hints from approximately 300 years (from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century) to draw up a single, aggregate map creates a somewhat ahistorical spatial reality. However, in view of the sparsity of sources, abandoning this approach puts the very determination of the region’s borders into question. The settlements from which the Forest German community emerged date back to the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, but the first use of the ethnonym was only recorded in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, similarly to its first placement in geographical context (Solarz and Raczyńska-Kruk 2023, 114–116). On the other hand, the choronym was only used for the first time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This gives rise to another element of uncertainty – the borders of the region inhabited by Forest Germans from the 14<sup>th</sup> century until the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century cannot be determined. Yet another area of uncertainty is due to the fact that the original geographical references (17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century) are geographically narrower than later ones (19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century). This gives rise to the hypothesis – which is impossible to confirm at the current stage of research (perhaps at all due to the exceptionally sparse sources, of three geographical descriptions prior to 1800) – that the relatively small original settlement area of Forest Germans in the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century (“true” Forest Germans?; “lesser Forest Germany”) was somewhat artificially expanded to

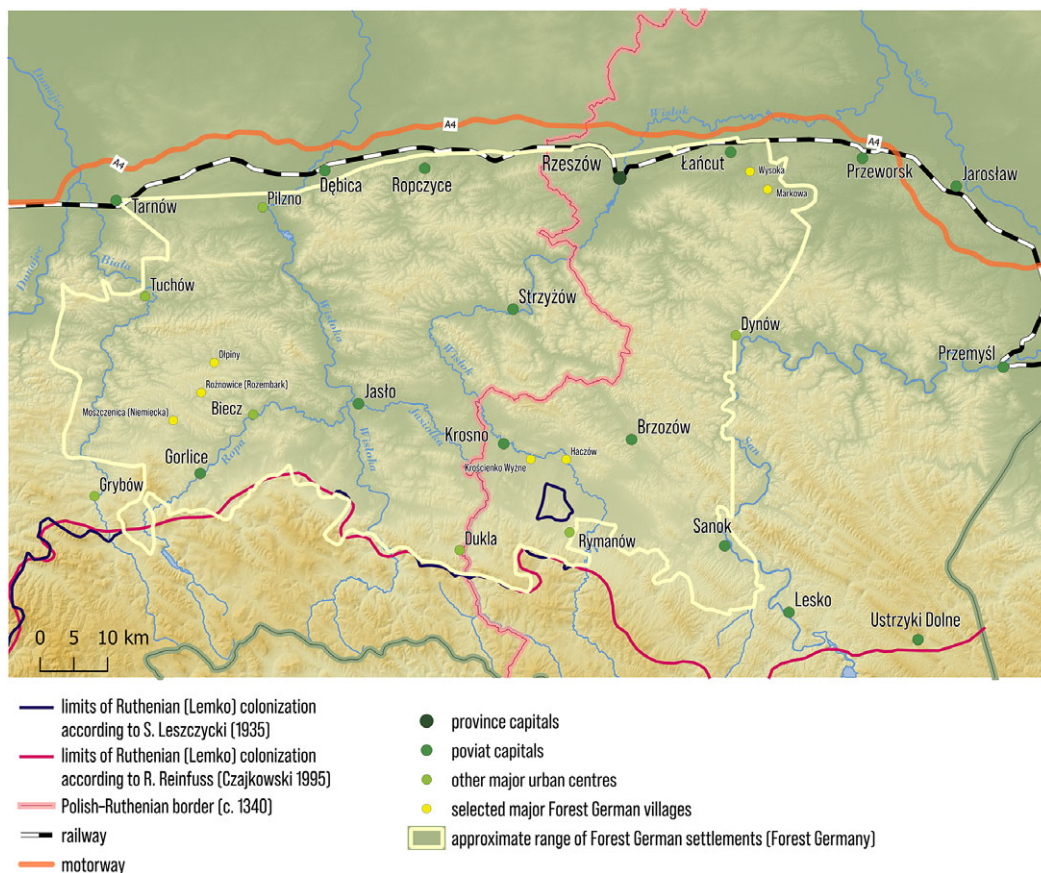


Figure 26. Approximate borders and area of Forest Germany

cover a larger territory in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (“greater Forest Germany”). Perhaps it was then that the ethnonym and choronym was expanded beyond the borders of the original “lesser Forest Germany” to cover new territories, which were nevertheless subject to processes analogous to those within the former territory in the past. However, this hypothesis might be completely false in connection with the insufficient number of sources that would allow for sensible reasoning or at least for its verification. The quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the corpus of currently known geographical names from the settlement region of Forest Germans also prevents recreation of its spatial evolution on their basis. Finally, the lack of common awareness of Forest Germans creates tension between subjective and objective existence of their settlement region.

### The issue of delimiting the southern and eastern border of the settlement region of Forest Germans

While western, northern and partly eastern borders of the settlement region of Forest Germans can be considered somewhat by definition unclear and fluid (given the unclear criteria – in the Polish historical, cultural and geographical context – of division of Poles into Forest Germans and non-Forest Germans, as well as given the fact that they are supposed to distinguish this Polish cultural group from other Poles), at first glance, the southern and partly eastern border of their settlement region seems clear, determined by the (seemingly) distinct ethnic and religious border separating



Poles from the Ruthenian population (including the Lemkos in the south) in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, this border is also imprecise and uncertain in different respects:

1. Due to the problem with definition of Forest Germans, as well as the lack of common Forest German identity: now and in the past, the Polish-Ruthenian border between the Biała and San rivers cannot be arbitrarily considered identical with the Forest German-Ruthenian border. This is highly probable, but not absolutely certain.
2. Precise delimitations of the northern border of Ruthenian settlements come from a period when Forest Germans were just being removed or had already been eliminated from academic and popular discourse. Therefore, the maps depict the border between Polish and Ruthenian populations, alternatively the Lemkos and related peoples as well as new Polish ethnographic groups created during the interwar period (Solarz and Raczynska-Kruk 2023, 114).
3. There are several demarcations of Lemko settlements drawn up on maps, which – despite being generally consistent – differ when it comes to details. In 1935, Stanisław Leszczycki noted, in reference to the borders of the Lemko Region, that its western part (situated to the west of the water divide of Jasiołka and Wisłok) is characterised by a sharp, linear Polish-Lemko border, whereas the eastern part exhibits high intermixing of the populations, resulting in the Polish-Lemko border to the east of the aforementioned water divide being blurry and difficult to define (Leszczycki 1935, 64-66). This situation is additionally complicated by the fact that Polish settlements to the south of the designated Polish-Lemko border and, respectively, Ruthenian settlements to the north of that border were also island-like (cf. the Ruthenian community of Zamieszańcy).
4. The border of Wallachian and Ruthenian settlements varied over time. These settlements emerged in a settlement vacuum on the border between Poland and Hungary at the time and gradually expanded to reach their final limits from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Initially, they tended to cover uninhabited areas, but with time, they also entered areas which had already undergone Polish-German colonisation (Krasnowolski 2010, 78-79, 90-92).
5. The existing Polish-Lemko delimitations pertain to a social reality that has not existed since the turn of the 1940s and 1950s. After 1947, the previous Polish-Ruthenian border in the Polish Carpathians became a relic as a consequence of mass compulsory resettlements to the USSR (1940–1941, 1944–1946) and Operation Vistula (resettlement within the borders of communist Poland in 1947) as well as migration of the Polish population (Barwiński 2011, 140-142), including possibly Forest Germans, to depopulated territories. In view of the foregoing, after 1947, the border of the settlement area of Forest Germans might have moved to the south and east, beyond the former Polish-Ruthenian settlement border. However – even if all inhabitants of the Polish Carpathians to the north of the former Polish-Ruthenian border between the Biała and San rivers were hypothetically recognised as Forest Germans – given the intermixing of the populations in a settlement vacuum and the lack of adequate research and data, it would still be difficult to determine the contemporary southern and eastern range of Forest German settlements.

## Conclusions

Defining the borders of the settlement region of Forest Germans, including its delimitation based on sources that place the relevant ethnonym and choronym in geographical context, is difficult for the multiple reasons stated above and at the same time it may be of great importance in the context of complicated Polish-German relations. The picture obtained as a result of the source analysis presented here is merely preliminary. It requires further definition based on other indicators (toponyms, anthroponyms, traces of spatial layout of villages established in the Middle Ages under German law, location of settlement vacuums on the eve of colonisation under German law, other

preserved traces of material and non-material culture, genetic test results). At the same time, it is fluid, subjective, hypothetical and ultimately ahistorical, existing outside the past and present. Paradoxically, it might only be adequate in relation to the future, when it will probably materialise in the form described in this article for the very first time (this is the first attempt at precise determination of its borders in geographical literature). Therefore, when tackling this crucial task – pertaining to a densely populated region that has retained settlement continuity since the Middle Ages – the criteria, sources and their interpretations should be chosen diligently, critically, carefully and prudently. Last but not least, another source of uncertainty is the tension (which is difficult to resolve in the above research) between the reconstructed world of Forest Germans that realistically existed in the past and its image created here based on subjectively interpreted sparse and unclear geographical descriptions. Hence, the picture obtained here serves as the starting point for further research, aimed at its verification, further definition and disambiguation.

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