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THE NECRIOPOLIS IN THE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN WROCŁAW

SUMMARY

The evolution of the burial rite in the medieval and early modern city may be traced basing on archaeological material from the period 12th – first half of 16th century with some assistance from inconography and the written sources. Although there is sound evidence on that there was settlement in Ostrów Tumski (Cathedral Island) in the period 940–960 (Rzeźnik 2000, p. 141) the burial site of its dwellers has not been identified so far. Funerary finds associated with the early urban centre were recovered in Ostrów Tumski (infant burials in the crypt of the Romanesque cathedral, a small fragment of a destroyed churchyard by the eastern apse of that building – fig. 10–15), the district of Ołbin (the churchyard of St Vincent Church) and Piasek Island (a burial under the church of Our Lady), and in the town districts on the left bank Odra River (a burial ground discovered south of the settlement, cemetery next to St Adalbert Church, burials under the churches of Mary Magdalene and St Elisabeth; fig. 3). There is source evidence to confirm that Palatine Peter Wlast and his wife, Mary, were buried inside St Vincent Church in the district of Ołbin (fig. 31).

Cemeteries that can be linked reliably to churches include graveyards next to the Cathedral, the monastery church of St Vincent in Ołbin, and St Adalbert – the first parish church on the left bank Odra River. The existence of a Christian temple, possibly wooden, associated with the burials unearthed beneath the churches of St Mary Magdalene and St Elisabeth is only conjectural, and the relationship of graves discovered in Wita Stwosza Street with one of these churches –highly doubtful. Presumably, the latter cemetery was the oldest on the left bank Odra River in Wrocław. With the growth of the urban commune during the early 13th century new parish churches were established – St Mary Magdalene, which took over the parish rights of St Adalbert, and St Elisabeth. A parish churchyard was established next to them. Relatively early – even before mid-14th century – some townspeople enjoyed the privilege of burial in the choir of the parish church of St Elisabeth (fig. 27, 30). New monastery churches were also established, erected on the ducal estates bordering the Odra R. (the Franciscan church of St James, the Order of Saint Clare church, and St Matthew church of the Convent of the Knights of the Cross with the Red Star). St Adalbert church also became a monastery church after it was offered in 1226 to the Dominicans. The townspeople could choose to be buried in graveyards of all these churches. Shepherds of the Wrocław diocese were buried in the choir of St John the Baptist Cathedral (fig. 2). Several necropolis were set up for the Silesian branch of the House of Piast dukes (St James, the collegiate church of the Holy Cross, St Hedwig church). Hospitals were established (the Holy Ghost, St Elisabeth, St Lazarus) and had their graveyards. Possibly, still during the 13th century, a Jewish cemetery was set up in *platea gallica*, the later Oława suburb.

As parishes developed and the number of the clergy grew, the burial rite became increasingly uniform, adjusted to the dogma of the Christian eschatology. The dead were buried in a supine position, with the head at the western end of the grave (but always with some departures from this rule, observed in most of the investigated cemeteries). There was also some evolution in the placement of the hands. At first, the usual position was with straight arms placed to either side of the body. In 13th and 14th

century burials the dominant position was with the forearms resting on the pelvis and near to the waist, or alternately, placed on the chest. Coffined burial became common (in rectangular or trapeze-shaped coffins), although burial without a coffin continued to be frequent. The body was naked or wrapped in winding sheet (fig. 76). Masonry in the grave pits is limited mostly to churches (graves of bishops in the Cathedra, the tombs in the Lady Church on Piasek (Sand) Island, St James, and St Elisabeth; fig. 28-29, 33), but we also know of an exception – a brick tomb and brick settings discovered in the cemetery in the district of Ołbin.

There was also observable change in the furnishing of the graves. The Slavs had practiced making grave offerings to their dead of ornaments, weapons, tools and – presumably – food, the latter suggested by the presence of pottery vessels in graves. This tradition may be seen to liner in burials discovered under Wita Stwosza Street and in churchyard of St Adalbert and St Vincent in Ołbin. From these cemeteries we have finds of typical Slav ornaments, mostly temple rings, and also, of implements (knives and whetstones), and a clay vessel (fig. 4.2–3, 91–97). The selection of the grave goods discovered in burials inside the churches of St Elisabeth and St James, and in the cemetery next to the Franciscan church is limited to dress accessories – iron buckles, hook-and-eye fasteners, and a finger-ring, although there was also a unique find of a bone whistle, noted in an infant burial. This would be the reflection of the gradual discontinuation of Slav funerary practices, now viewed as an expression of paganism. The custom of offering grave goods became limited to the deposition – in the graves of kings, princes and bishops – of their power insignia (for the former – the crown, sceptre and sword, for the latter – the crosier and ring, possibly, also sets of chalices and patens; fig. 5–8).

A characteristic feature of the urban cemeteries which operated in a crowded environment was the vertical arrangement of graves, enforced by the shortage of the burial space. Also observed is the destruction of older burials by younger ones. Bones unearthed during digging would be reburied in smaller or larger pits.

Existence side by side of space used by the living and the dead led to the graveyards being used as public ground of many uses.

During the 14th century gravestones become widespread although they continue to be a rather expensive item (nevertheless, the first tombs covered with a full-size stone slab dating from the 12th and 13th century, commemorate dead rulers and saints; fig. 17–20). Also introduced at this time were small architectural constructions borrowed from Western Europe – lanterns of the dead and charnel-houses (fig. 103–104).

At the beginning of the 14th century the town council of Wrocław came forward with the initiative of building a new poorhouse for "strangers and the indigent", the first charity institution created at the initiative of the lay people (a fragment of the cemetery attached to the poorhouse was investigated in 2006 – fig. 70–75, 83–90, 98–100). During the same period the problem of the shrinking burial space in the intramural city led the two largest Wrocław parishes to start their affiliated cemeteries in the area between the first and the second ring of town walls, next to the churches of St Christopher (formerly, Mary of Egypt) and St Barbara. They became the site of burial mostly of the poorer townspeople. Another widespread development was that the better off townspeople started buying a site for their burial inside the church. This was a reflection of the ambitions of the urban elite to be remembered after death, to stand out from the anonymous crowd. This purpose was served also by epitaphs, the first noted during the 15th century, which offered information about the dead individual, his or her virtues and merits. Members of guilds, fraternities and burgher families also founded chapels around the main body of churches which, next to being a manifestation of private or corporate piety, could be turned into a separate private mausoleum. At the other end of the scale, the town had the cemetery for felons, outside the city walls, in *Schweidnitzer Anger* (the Świdnica Green), by the chapel of St Gertude and *Rabenstein*, the place of execution (fig. 110).

At the beginning of the Reformation the same graveyards continued in use but the attitude to the funeral itself had changed. The Protestants negated the existence of the purgatory and rejected the value of the mass and praying for the dead. This led during early stages of Reformation to the decline of solemn funerals and neglect of cemeteries (Harasimowicz 1992). Burials would be performed at night, in silence. With time, the reformers themselves became aware of the need to restore the dignity to the places of eternal rest. In 1528 a new funerary ritual was developed in the city, similar in its ceremonial to the Catholic and, two decades later, funerals were practiced again complete with a solemn procession, the pealing of bells and singing of funeral songs. In 1541 a new graveyard was set up in the Świdnica Green by the parish of St Mary Magdalene, the first

cemetery to be set up at the initiative of the Protestant town council. Almost three decades later a church was founded in the same cemetery, dedicated to the Saviour (Guszpit et al. 2010). The dead continued to be buried inside the town churches. The most significant change in the funerary rite in the city, in Silesia, and in the Kingdom of Prussia at large, was brought by an edict issued by Frederick II in 1775 which forbade burial in churches and graveyards next to them. This law was consistent with the tendency, then sweeping across Europe of the Enlightened Age, to close down cemeteries in the inner city prompted by the growing concern about hygiene and ideological considerations (Morawski 1991, p. 99, cf. also: Burak, Okólska 2007, p. 16–17, 308). In 1777 the first municipal cemetery was established in the area outside the second Mikołajska Gate (*Nikolai Tor*). Several centuries of history of the city's churchyards came to an end.