

CEMETERY OF OUR SAVIOUR THE FIRST PROTESTANT BURIAL SITE IN WROCLAW

SUMMARY

Studies of the oldest protestant cemetery of Our Saviour that operated from 1542 to the end of the 18th century in Wrocław, supplemented by written sources as well as information from other Silesian cemeteries, made it possible to outline the problems of protestant burial rites in Silesia. In 2006-2007, more than 1000 skeletal tombs were discovered in the above mentioned necropolis. We were able to indicate certain regularities in mutual relations between Catholics and Protestants, which allowed to distinguish models reflecting the relationships between burial places of Catholics and Protestants: single burials of *heretics* in Catholic cemeteries; numerous burials of Protestants in the cemeteries at churches taken over from Catholics; burials in cemeteries belonging to Protestants from the beginning. Meanwhile, the representatives of Protestant elites continued to bury their dead in crypts together with Catholic members of the family. In the absence of sources we do not know, however, what was the situation in Silesian villages. So far as the symbolism of items discovered in the graves is concerned, several interesting patterns have been found. Generally, in graves of burghers and people with high social status objects of symbolism related to love and fidelity as well as birth and death can be distinguished. In turn, in graves of poorer people, coming from suburban areas, as is the case with the cemetery of Our Saviour, objects of simple symbolism related to the position at home (good housewife) prevail. Additionally, qualitative differences can be noted: the first group is dominated by items made of precious metals while the other by iron and bronze. In the case of objects found in graves, because of the lack of sources, again we do not have references to burials

in villages. The example of the Catholic church in Mušov in Moravia (see Unger 2014), a small local center of pilgrimage, shows that we deal with specific votive offerings there. They are made of iron and besides clumsily done small representations of saved limbs we also have votive offerings in the form of iron horseshoes. It seems that a kind of analogy to the furnishings of protestant graves of rural population should be taken into account here.

Relatively abundant archival sources concerning the cemetery and church of Our Saviour encourage their comparison with the effects of excavations. Many archival pieces of information have been confirmed, e.g. common burials of victims and killers, graves of decapitated convicts, collective graves of plague victims or secondary collective burials due to the lack of space in the cemetery. Because the area of the necropolis were repeatedly increased, we are not able to verify information about alienated individuals being buried at the wall or even outside the cemetery. Items found in graves prove that the vast majority of population buried in the cemetery of Our Saviour were rather poor. Unfortunately, on the basis of equipment it was not possible to explicitly distinguish burials higher-ranking people, e.g. vogts (hereditary), but burials of males in this necropolis tend to be devoid of any furnishings. It is difficult to interpret belts and related fittings found in female graves. If one were to make the attempt to differentiate their quality, several groups could be distinguished. The first one is formed by bronze buckle clasps with slots or hook-and-mesh structure. The same fastening mechanisms in the second group are supplemented by additional bars and sometimes also by elements for suspending objects such as keys,

a knife and a purse. The third group is bronze belts composed of bar-like links. The last, fourth group, includes iron belts made in complex techniques that mimic e.g. silver objects, known mainly from the first half of 17th century and produced among others also by Wrocław goldsmiths (see. *Ornamenta...* 2000, cat. No. 193 and 197). It seems that the fourth group of belts may be connected with the highest rank of people buried in the cemetery of Our Saviour, e.g. wives of hereditary vogts. The problem, however, lies not only in the structure of assets but also in their symbolism. It seems beyond doubt, which is confirmed by the rich iconography, that a belt with suspended objects such as e.g. keys and a long knife are symbols of a good housewife. But is a sole belt a reduced symbol of a housewife or does it symbolize

something else? Sometimes it is suggested that it is a bridal belt (Harder 2010, p. 9). I would not reject such a hypothesis, which generally does not contradict the symbolism of a good housewife.

At the margin of the main topic of our discussion there was architecture. In addition to the (3D) reconstruction of the church of Our Saviour, a new method for testing bricks have been developed which allows to determine the workshop, which combined with the period of its operation known from written sources makes it possible to clarify the chronology of bricks. It was also the first time the study of mortars was employed, using not only the material from the church of Our Saviour but also a broader comparative material from various buildings in Wrocław.

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