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(review) M. Grupa, T. Kozłowski, R. Jankauskas, D. Grupa, M. Krajewska,
S. Krakowska, M. Majorek, J. Mosiejczyk, M. Nowak, S. Nowak,
M. Przymorska-Sztuczka and A. Wojciechowska, *Tajemnice krypty w kaplicy
św. Anny. Secrets of the crypt in St. Ann chapel.*
Gniew (2015): Stowarzyszenie Centrum Aktywnych, pages 189

This publication on archaeological research in St. Ann chapel of St. Nicolas church in Gniew was edited in 2015. It was a result of explorations started in 2009 and continued for some seasons.

Four years have passed since then, and the publication has unfortunately not yet been reviewed. However, it will not be a typical review of an archaeologist, written for archaeologists, because its author is a historian, a researcher of archive records and sources, one who has participated for some years in archaeological projects as a consultant and a research team member, preparing historical base of the studied objects.

The publication consists of 13 parts, the first of which – *Słowo wstępne (Preface)* – is not in fact an integral part but more of a formal expression of praise of the town mayor by the researchers. The work starts with the chapter *Krypta południowa w kaplicy św. Anny (Southern crypt in St. Ann chapel)*, which has two functions: a short introduction to the history of the St. Nicholas church in Gniew, and the general purpose – presenting information of the object situating, subsequent stages of its exploration and its contents. In this place – as a historian – I must refer to the first part of the chapter. I am fully aware that the town's history does not enjoy a very rich literature, including very poor written material on the history of the church itself. The latest studies were available for the publication's authors, but they turned out to be insufficient and influenced by information concerning the object's chronology, or rather its absence in fact. Thanks to the knowledge and experience of the researchers, the majority of the statements referring to the dating of the objects discussed in the text seems to be compatible with the Gniew temple's history.

I would now like to present some general remarks. Archaeologists conducting works and studies in modern

times objects (as well as mediaeval and contemporary ones), cannot work without a historian's support, as it is obvious that one should use already existing historical written material – general and monographs of particular objects, comparing the knowledge collected therein. In many cases, it is insufficient for obtaining answers to questions which arise during archaeological field works. Therefore, it seems that historians of the epoch, being able to read the written sources, should be invited to work with research teams since they are especially helpful in deciphering and interpreting unstudied and unpublished material. Their work can be strictly directed and synchronized with archaeological works, and this cooperation would contribute to the more complete elaboration of the studied subjects. This is by no means an exaggerated requirement. Archaeologists have been cooperating with anthropologists and biologists for years. Working with historical objects whose presence is depicted in written sources, collaboration with historians is necessary because they can read sources, deliver new information and supply its proper interpretation.

The second part of chapter *Krypta południowa...* is a reliable report of the exploration works with detailed information on the crypt excavation, opening, construction and its contents, which is a real introduction to further activity.

The chapter *Dobra śmierć i uroczysty pochówek – pompa funebris na przestrzeni wieków (Good death and ceremonial burial – pompa funebris in the space of the centuries)* is an attempt to collect all of the information accessible in literature concerning burial ceremonies, starting with antiquity until modern times and, I must admit, it is a successful attempt. This part is not directly connected with works in St. Ann chapel crypt, but

taking into account the publication's studied problem, it is fully justified, as it takes a reader across European funeral culture world, demonstrating the context for the objects described later.

The following chapter: *Trumny z krypty pod kaplicą św. Anny* (*Coffins from the crypt under St. Ann chapel*) directly introduces us to the world of the artefacts excavated during the archaeological exploration of the Gniew temple, where the evident lack of the participation of a historian is clear. The crypt housed six coffins which were dated on the base of external features from the turn of 18th century. One of them (coffin no 5) had a painted date 17th November 1801. Unfortunately, even the most precise examination, directly in situ or later in laboratories, cannot tell us anything more than the results of external analyses: shape, size, material, inscriptions, if any, or workshop characteristics, if there are any decorations. These are, of course significant details, and they are placed in the coffin descriptions. Thanks to them we can deduce if the buried person was an adult or a child, or what the material status of that person was, but they are still assumptions which can lead to wrong conclusions. In this study, the researchers did not go too far, limiting themselves only to the strict characteristics of the artefacts. By doing so they made room for other specialists who will be able to create a broader, more attractive and inspiring narration using this data and information taken from the records. The date 17th Nov. 1801 from one of the coffins is quoted here not accidentally. The Diocesan Archives in Pelplin preserves parish registers of Gniew church, including the death records from 1776, where we can see that on 17 Nov. 1801, the death from consumption was registered of 40 year old Zuzanna Wolff from Pastwa, a since abandoned hamlet between Gniew and Tymawa, and a notice that she was buried one week later on 23rd Nov. With some luck, we would be able to establish the names of the other individuals buried in the rest of coffins, but if not, this single case generates next very important question. How was it possible that a peasant woman from a nearby village was buried in the crypt which originally was reserved for eminent personalities from the local castle (from the mediaeval period it was a seat of Teutonic comtur's office, later a starost's seat), some brotherhoods (brotherhood of St. Ann existed in Gniew from 1685) or representatives of the local patriarchy? What kind of social changes took place between the 18th and 19th century to make this fact possible? These questions remain unanswered and await further studies.

The next chapter, *Prace konserwatorskie* (*Conservation Works*), refers to the subsequent stages of work taken to protect and preserve the excavated artefacts. As

the authors remark, only silk textiles and metal objects have been preserved. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of the examples of conservation treatments discussed were based on silk fabrics. This is a very detailed description, starting with a brief history of silk and its production, cleaning excavated objects, disinfection, consolidation, cataloguing, and finally reconstruction of selected garment items and relics. This chapter is a very important work part demonstrating archaeological workshop, unknown for exhibition visitors – time-consuming, monotonous process, much different from spectacular works in archaeological sites. However, I am not certain whether it is placed in the right book section, perhaps at the end of the publication, after reviewing all of the artefacts groups would have been better.

The next chapter: *Wyroby tekstylne, Wianki grobowe i sztuczne kwiaty, Szkaplerze, Obuwie* (*Textile products. Grave wreaths and artificial flowers, Scapulars, Footwear*) describes groups mentioned above. This is the biggest part of the publication – a total of 100 pages of a volume nearly 200 pages long. It is difficult to question or evaluate its contents, because it is very detailed, delivering specialist information on archaeology, materials science, production technology. It shows clearly that the authors know their field perfectly, skillfully moving around various disciplines. Technical data is wisely backed up by passages concerning the history of clothes or haberdashery production. This is not general knowledge, but well recognized in circles of researchers studying contemporary fashion, and the publications available are a sufficient basis for researchers working on the problem (provided – they find them). In this case, we can observe the authors' perfect knowledge of the subject literature, including the historical.

One piece of information is missing in this part – whether the discussed artefacts come from coffins or the area under them, from a concentration of bones and textile relics pressed into the floor. This information might appear elsewhere in the text, among other data, but it should be pointed out here. While coffins placed in the crypt were dated from between 18th–19th century, human relics situated underneath must have been at least a little older. Here again, we observe an absence of historical studies which could possibly answer these questions, trying to find out if the crypt had earlier been an ossuary and, if so, when it was created and which part of the church the relics could have come from. If the assumption was false, how long was the break in using the crypt that led to destruction of the coffins originally placed there, that relics situated there earlier could have been the ground for putting next coffins preserved till the time of opening the room by archaeologists. Solving these

problems, in turn, could have led to the more precise dating of excavated relics.

The last 'essential' chapter is titled: *Badania antropologiczne (Anthropological studies)* and it is a result of the cooperation of archaeologists and anthropologists, financed within the frames of scientific project of MNiSW (Ministry of Higher Education). Bones excavated from coffins, scattered around the crypt and the ones placed in the crypt floor composition pressed by later burials were examined, giving evidence of at least six persons, matching the six coffins placed there. Two men and four women were recognized. Examining the ground bones, about one hundred individuals were distinguished. Preliminary tests showed that the bones in coffins were mixed – e.g. the remains of three persons were placed together in coffin no 1. Anthropologists statements concerning misplacing human remains within different coffins is stressed and consolidated by the case given in the beginning of the review, in reference to the only dated coffin no 5, with the body of 40-year old Zofia Wolff. The problem is that this very coffin contained the bones of a young woman, aged 20–30. It is evidence that body misplacing might concern all coffins, and the problem is when it happened, in the 19th century, or later during the events of WWII, or even after the war, when the crypt could have been robbed. Historical studies may help in solving that secret.

The same chapter contains very detailed bone analysis, trying to find pathological deformations caused by diseases or traumas. What is surprising is the fact that none of these bones had traces of the tuber-

culosis that Wolff died from, and particular attention is devoted to syphilis, recognized on only one of the deposited persons.

The publication ends with a *Podsumowanie (Summary)* and is completed with a *Spis rycin, Bibliografia (List of figures, Bibliography)* and short notes about the authors. Here, two remarks should be made about these parts. The illustration list contains 121 objects: both photos and drawings. It is a huge swathe of material, illustrating all chapters of the work and making the text more understandable and visually attractive. This provides the possibility of a wider context of reception, being clearly intended for non-professionals, local history lovers and amateurs. The publication has therefore a character which is not strictly scientific, but it is also popular-science literature, one which is usually neglected by professionals, without any harm to its scientific values. I tried to show this above, I hope. The opinion is supported by the extensive bibliography placed at the end, consisting of over 200 sources, unpublished papers and pieces from the subject literature.

Summing up, the publication *Tajemnice krypty w kaplicy św. Anny/Secrets of the crypt in St. Ann chapel*, despite not being completed with historical layer, is a book worthy of recommendation. I believe that it is a complete work and there is no reason to prepare another volume on the subject. However, I hope that the results of archaeological research conducted simultaneously in other locations of the church will be published soon, perhaps with the participation of a historian this time.

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