

Review for *Post-medieval Archaeology* by Harold Mytum

An Historia Kościoła śOswalda w Płonkowie – Tom I / History of St Oswald church in Płonkowo. By Malgorzata Grupa et al. 191 pages, illustrated. Płonkowo: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Aktywnych Gniew, 2015. ISBN 978-83-941851-0-7. (hbk; also available as a free pdf download – locate by searching by ISBN).

Archaeolog Tajemnice krypty w kaplicy św. Anny / Secrets of the crypt in St. Ann chapel. By Malgorzata Grupa et al. 189 pages, illustrated. Gniew: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Aktywnych Gniew, 2015. ISBN 978-83-932682-0-7. (hbk; also available as a free pdf download – locate by searching by ISBN).

Some of the most exciting new discoveries and ongoing scientific analyses in post-medieval mortuary archaeology were reported at the Society's 50th anniversary congress in Sheffield in April, so it is appropriate that two books linked to some of those papers should be reviewed here, so that their publication can be more widely known.

The two volumes, richly illustrated with colour photographs and drawings, tell of the excavation of two church interiors at St Oswald's in Płonkowo and St Ann's, Gniew, both in north-central Poland. The texts are in parallel English and Polish, clearly written, and with a logical structure throughout. The work was necessary in advance of major conservation architecture projects, but allowed the high quality recovery of extensive burial data, including some interments where coffins, clothing, and mummified human remains were not only encountered but thoroughly excavated, recorded and are now being analysed. The preliminary results are set out in clear chapters and subsections.

St Oswald's was set in the small village of Płonkowo, but the timber structure with limited use of brick was burnt down during the German invasion in 1939. The open ground was left until the 1970s when a small church was constructed to one side of the original site. Excavations within the church and in the graveyard revealed numerous interments, most in earth-cut graves, some with substantial stone lining. In addition, three internal crypts were examined. The soil conditions allowed the preservation of textile fragments in a number of graves, and not just the crypts, and the discussion of these finds comprises perhaps the single most important finds category, though they do not have a separate chapter in the book, probably because conservation and analysis is still under way. The useful summary chapters that are included consider the numerous coin finds, the floor tiles, ironwork, and glass and ceramics including fragments of 18th-century stove tiles. A third of the book is devoted to a detailed anthropological analysis of the human remains, with 180 sufficiently well preserved to enable ageing. There is some valuable comparison of the Płonkowo population with other Polish excavated assemblages. We await the full excavation report, but having this well-illustrated book with an English text makes the major results easily accessible to a wide audience.

St Ann's Chapel stands south of the southern aisle of St Nicholas' church in the small town of Gniew, and beneath it lies a brick barrel-vaulted crypt, with access via steps on the north side normally hidden under the chapel floor. The crypt measures 3.5 by

3.3m and contained six well-preserved wooden coffins. Though of elaborate construction and in one case with six turned wooden feet, only one was painted (brown) and none had other decoration, coffin furniture or textile covering. Only one coffin yielded any text, revealing a date death of 17th November 1801, so all the individuals are unknown. There were at least three individuals in one coffin and another was empty, so in total remains from three men and four women were in the coffins, but as all had been opened the original pattern of interment is unclear. Under the coffins was a deposit of rubble and human remains of at least 100 individuals, of which over 20% were children. Whether these remains represent earlier burials in the crypt or had been moved from elsewhere is unclear.

From the coffins and the deposit beneath came numerous textile finds, including some complete garments, many of which were specially made simple grave gowns in a range of fabrics, with a few decorated with silk ribbons or pineapple or lace motifs. Many items would have been worn in everyday life, however, including a nearly complete żupan, and some other fragments – iconic because they form part of the Polish national costume. Over 20 items of headgear were recovered, including three styles of bonnet, with two examples heavily embroidered with vegetation designs in silk. Religious items were also recovered including three chasubles and three stoles, though these were all probably made for use in burial. Of particular note is the recovery of 15 scapulars – to be worn over the chest and back. Many examples were well enough preserved to reveal MARIA or IHS monograms, with one having an applied silk image of the Virgin Mary, all emphasising the Polish Roman Catholic tradition. Other notable finds were fragments of wreaths made from textiles, some supported on wire structures which were also used in creating artificial flowers. Although many of the finds cannot be closely associated with particular burials, and much of the material has suffered from disturbance, the assemblage seems to be largely from the 18th century, though some could be from the 17th century. The well-preserved assemblage reveals how this royal town was intimately connected to global trade represented by Chinese silks, and to European fashions in some of the items of clothing.

The excavations reported here sit beside volumes that, in a British post-medieval context, would include Warwick Rodwell's extensive work at Barton on Humber and Jez Reeve and Max Adams' innovative investigation of the Spitalfields crypt. The quality of preservation, with an exemplary investment in conservation and scientific analyses – which are still ongoing – has and will continue to provide many insights into mortuary practice. I trust that these volumes will be tracked down and read by all those whose interests lie in post-medieval church archaeology, and particularly mortuary archaeology and textiles, and we await further studies that the well-preserved remains will yet yield, and the definitive excavation monographs that will in time emerge. It is very helpful that both these books can be downloaded at no cost from the web and so can be made widely accessible, and congratulations should go to the team of Polish researchers that carried out this internationally significant work and have produced these excellent publications. As we in Britain prepare for some form of post-Brexit existence, it is worth noting that both the projects, and these publications, have relied heavily on European Union-funded schemes for Rural Development.

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