

THE CATHOLICS, THE PROTESTANTS, THE MENNONITES: THE POPULATION OF PIEŃ AND ITS SURROUNDINGS IN THE MODERN ERA THROUGH THE LENS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

The state of the research on the Protestant funeral rite in Poland is far from satisfying. In his recent discussion on the topic, Krzysztof Wachowski (Wachowski, 2015a) points out that most of the existing literature concerns Silesia (Bunzel, 1981; Harasimowicz, 1986, 1990, 1993) and Hanseatic cities (Kizik, 1998, 2001). Wachowski emphasizes that recent archaeological studies of Protestant necropolises have tended to be connected with investments. On the whole, their findings have been published rarely and only exceptionally as monographs.¹ Some studies have focused on selected categories of objects, especially clothing and jewelry, but without taking into account the context of the graves. On this basis, it is difficult to produce a comprehensive account of the Protestant funeral rite. In general, while our current knowledge of modern Protestant burials in Poland is incomplete, it is even more inadequate as regards the rural areas, where the problems in distinguishing Catholic graves from the graves of the dissenters sometimes go hand in hand with difficulties in identifying even the character of the entire cemetery.

The remains of a modern necropolis were discovered at the cemetery in Pień, in the western part of the Chelmno Land (Fig. 1). While the graves unearthed there are difficult to attribute to any particular religious group, it can be assumed that Protestants were buried there. This is suggested by the fact that devotional items characteristic of Catholic burials are strikingly lacking whereas the few items with which the dead are equipped can be either linked to the Protestant population or found in the graves of various religious groups.

Abridged to meet the editorial demands, this article attempts to determine the character of the Pień cemetery, using the sources available to the author, above all the archaeological ones, and to assess the relevance of the discovery to the developing research on the Protestant funeral rite.

The Evangelical population probably appeared in and around Pień already in the 16th century. After the Teutonic period, Pień was in the possession of the Elżanowski family (Porębska, 1971, 96). In 1613, the abbess Magdalena Mortęska bought Pień for the Benedictine convent in

¹ The monograph on the Salwator Cemetery in Wrocław, edited by K. Wachowski (2015), is a notable exception.

Chelmno (Raszeja, 2002, 102). However, in the same year, the Pień estate was leased by the Von Lewinski family, perhaps Protestants themselves. The Von Lewinski family farmed in this area probably until 1882. After the Swedish wars, Pień declined into a small grange, which passed under the Prussian administration after the first partition of Poland in 1772 (*Ibid.*, 104). In the 19th century, the Słończ-Pień grange was one of the four settlements forming the village of Słończ. In 1885, the farm had nine houses and 39 residents, while Słończ boasted the population of 189 people, therein 117 Catholics and 72 Protestants (Słownik, 1880, 820). In 1882, the former Benedictine grange was bought by German Hermann Boldt, who probably came from “the Dutch-settled areas” (Raszeja, 2002, 107).

Dutch settlers, including Mennonites, might also have been buried at the cemetery. The establishment of Dutch villages in the Chelmno Province dates back to the end of the 16th century (Cackowski, 1985, 77-78), and most researchers believe that initially the Ołęders were predominantly Mennonite (Kizik, 1994, 23; Szalygin, 2004, 16). In 1667, the Ołęders, probably Mennonites, lived in nearby Słończ (Słownik, 1880, 820). Until the end of the 18th century, the Mennonites did not have their own communal denominational cemeteries, and their burials were held in designated parts of cemeteries of other denominations, above all Evangelicals, or in purchased quarters between the graves of the “foreign dead” (Kizik, 1994, 150; Józefczyk, 1998, 64). It is thus difficult, if not impossible, to identify the places where the dead of the Mennonite community were buried in the late 18th century. Some researchers refer to all the Protestant cemeteries in villages founded or settled under the Ołęders law as Ołęders, without distinguishing a separate category of Mennonite sites (Wiśniewski, 2016, 89). Mennonite cemeteries became Evangelical over time, mainly due to the conversion of subsequent generations to Lutheranism, especially in the area of what was later to be the Prussian partition.

The archaeological rescue research of the cemetery in Pień was carried out in 2005-2009.² The area of about six hundred square meters was examined, exploring graves and cultural layers exposed to destruction or robbery. The necropolis was used in the early Middle Ages and in the modern period. Fifty-seven modern graves were unearthed at three levels, including three double graves,³ with the oldest burials probably dating back to the 17th century.⁴ In all likelihood, the cemetery stopped being used at the turn of the 18th century.

² The project was funded by the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Provincial Heritage Conservator, the Dąbrowa Chelmińska Commune and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (priority 4 “The protection of archaeological monuments”).

³ In one grave (5/6) a woman and a child were buried, in another (41) — two children of the same age (possibly siblings), and in the third (59) — a man with a child (Drozd, Janowski, Poliński, 2009, 366).

The bones in the modern graves have been preserved in good condition, but many burials have been damaged, when digging sand and gravel. People who died in their childhood account for the majority of the group whose age has been ascertained (about 43% of the sample). About 19% of the individuals died as adolescents (*juvenis*) and early adults (*adultus*); about 9% died in later adulthood (*maturus*) and about 4% in old age (*senilis*) (Drozd, Janowski, Poliński, 2009, 368).⁵

The pits of the modern graves were usually rectangular with rounded corners, with varying dimensions adapted to the body size of the deceased. The dead lay flat on their backs, with the heads usually toward the west (47 people, 87%). Deviations from the skeleton orientation with the skull facing west were found only in the graves of children or juveniles. Upper and lower limbs were usually straight; in nine cases (17%), the deceased were buried with both upper limbs bent, while in four burials (7%) one of the upper limbs was straight and the other bent. The limb arrangement pattern was not found to be related to the sex or the age of the deceased (Drozd, Janowski, Poliński, 2009, 366). In one case, an extremely interesting arrangement was registered. In one of the double graves (grave 59), a child was laid on the legs of a man, with the child's arms spread sideways (perpendicular to the long axis of the body). The child was placed on his back, his head towards the west, occiput down, face up and its left side leaning on a rather large stone. A slightly smaller stone was placed directly over his head, followed by three other stones between the male's thighs; there were also stones under the child's knees and pubic symphysis. A rectangular dark spot under the skeleton at the height of the shoulder implies that the child was probably put on a pillow (Drozd, Janowski, Poliński, 2010). Nothing analogous to grave 59 has been found so far at the modern cemeteries studied in Poland.

The dead were most likely placed directly in the burial pits; only in grave 3 traces of a coffin were preserved. In 10 graves (three burials of women and juveniles, two burials of men, and one burial of children), rectangular blackenings were found under the skulls, stretching under

⁴ The chronology was determined on the basis of coin issuance and ¹⁴C dating. The coins are only dated by the *terminus post quem* — a half-penny of Jan Olbracht (1492-1498) from grave 3 and one and a half pennies of Zygmunt III (1626) from grave 5; four other coins were found in the soil: two Lithuanian “boratynkas” (one from 1660), a “szeląg” of the Prussian king Fryderyk I (1772) and a Prussian penny (1852) (Drozd, Janowski, Poliński, 2009, 367, 370). In addition, uncalibrated, similar markings of the age of the bones in graves 59 and 45 (345 ± 44 BP and 352 ± 44 BP, respectively) allow dating the north-western edge of the cemetery, with high probability, between the second half of the 16th and the first half of the 17th century (Drozd, Janowski, Poliński, 2011, 519).

⁵ The age of the deceased was determined by Dr. A. Drozd-Lipińska from the Department of Anthropology, Nicolaus Copernicus University.

the skeletons almost to the point of the shoulder blades (Drozd, Janowski, Poliński, 2009, 366).⁶ These dark spots can be traces of the pillows that had been laid under the heads of the dead. Placing pillows in the graves was probably related to the widespread comparison of death to sleep, and of dying to falling into eternal sleep. According to Martin Luther, cemeteries were to become *koemiterium*, i.e. “bedrooms” or “resting places,” rather than “houses of mourning and lamentation” (Luther, 1932, 288).

Stones of varying sizes were found in the fill of several burial pits, and in at least three cases their layout was intentional. In grave 6, four large stones were unearthed around the woman’s skull (*maturus*; some traces of degenerative changes and deformations around the elbow joints), forming a “collar” around the cervical vertebrae. One stone was placed between her femurs, in the pubic symphysis, and another one lay on her left pelvis, just over her left hand (Drozd, Janowski, Poliński, 2009, 367). In grave 45, a large stone rested on the left hand of a woman (*senilis*; traces of venereal syphilis and degenerative changes in the spine, vital teeth cavities and tooth decay),⁷ while smaller ones had been arranged (?) along her left side (*Ibid.*, 369). It is believed that the deceased were covered with stones to prevent them from returning to the world of the living. Given their visible physical defects and unusual appearance, the women buried in these graves could have been viewed as witches, ghosts, or vampires (Stanaszek, 2007). The third burial with a lineup of stones which defies any unambiguous interpretation is grave 59, described above. It is the burial of a young man (*adultus*) and a young child (aged 2-4). The age difference hints at the father-child relationship rather than at siblings although the latter option cannot be excluded without relevant DNA testing. The mutual arrangement of the bodies — one on top of the other — also indicates a close relationship. One suggestion has been that as the child’s skeleton resembles a baby sleeping on his back (on the pillow) with his arms extended towards his parent, the burial could have been arranged by the mother/widow (Drozd, Janowski, Poliński, 2010, 97-104). Whether this interpretation is right or wrong, it should be noted that graves in which a child rests on the body of an adult are extremely rare (Fig. 2). Burials of a man with a child/children are rare as well.⁸

⁶ A child in grave 59 was also placed on the pillow (Drozd, Janowski, Poliński, 2010, 103).

⁷ Bone lesions indicating syphilis were recognized by Dr. hab. T. Kozłowski of the Department of Anthropology, Nicolaus Copernicus University.

⁸ At the Salwator Cemetery in Wrocław, three such graves have been identified, but the gravediggers could have added the child’s body secretly, when interring an adult (Wojcieszak, 2015, 24). A burial of a young man (aged 20-24) with two children has also been discovered there. One child’s skeleton was in the arms of the man, right to his body, while the other rested between his thighbones (*Ibid.*, 26). Similar graves have also been found at another cemetery in

At the cemetery in Pień, objects other than body and coffin remnants were found only in six modern graves, probably from the two oldest levels. They were exclusively the graves of children (*infans I*; 3, 5 and 22) and juveniles (1-2).⁹ The children's graves contained a silver coin and an iron padlock (grave 3),¹⁰ another silver coin, pieces of a silk fabric with gold thread, and a brass pin stuck on the occiput (grave 5), and a fragment of an iron key (grave 22). Items in the graves of juveniles included two bronze hook-and-eye clasps and a bronze fitting (grave 1), another bronze hook-and-eye clasp (grave 2), and a silver coin (grave 30).

The fabric discovered in grave 5 is a piece of 17th-century lace, made of silk threads with gold braid, which is most likely an ornament of a linen mob cap (Grupa, 2017; Fig. 3).¹¹ Items of clothing, such as pins and hook-and-eye clasps, similar to those collected during the research in Pień,¹² also tend to be found at other modern cemeteries, both Catholic and Protestant.¹³ Pins are a relatively underexamined category of items (Sawicki, 2015, 72; cf. Talaga, 2012). Their finds which date to the period we study may be related to the way of preparing the bodies for burial (so-called burial clothing, made with the use of pins; Sawicki, 2012, 102).¹⁴ The hook-and-eye clasps could have been used to fasten the swaddling or the shroud, or were sewn onto the so-called grave robe (finds on or near the cervical vertebrae; Sawicki, 2015, 69).

The key found in one of the children's graves at the cemetery in Pień is an intriguing finding. Though it eludes any unambiguous interpretation, we should be reminded that a large collection of keys (132 specimens) was compiled during the study of the Protestant cemetery of Salwator

Wrocław, at the church of Corpus Christi. One held a man (*maturus*) with an infant on his left leg, and the other, a mature man with a child, perhaps embracing the adult's right leg (Wojcieszak, 2012, 87).

⁹ In addition, the age of the deceased buried in grave 30 was determined for *infans II/juvenis*.

¹⁰ Six iron nails are remains of a coffin.

¹¹ Pieces of the silk mob cap have been discovered in the grave of an infant at the Salwator Cemetery in Wrocław (Jędrysek, 2015).

¹² The Mennonite identification mark was a simple and modest outfit. They used only ribbons, while all other clothing ornaments, including buttons and outer pockets, were considered a luxury that bespoke an attachment to material goods. Women wore dark, hooked-up dresses (<http://plajny.pl/mennonici>, 16 March 2018).

¹³ Bronze pins were found during the research of Wrocław's cemeteries, both Catholic at the Church of Peter and Paul (two bronze specimens dated to the 15th-16th century [Sawicki, 2012, 102], and the 15th-17th century [Sawicki, 2012, 102]) and Protestant at the Salwator Church (31 bronze and brass specimens [Sawicki, 2015, 72, 93-94]). Hook-and-eye clasps (7 items, mainly of bronze/brass) were discovered only at the latter necropolis (Sawicki, 2015, 69). Bronze-wire hook-and-eye clasps were also preserved at another Wrocław necropolis, namely — at the hospital cemetery next to the Corpus Christi Church. The clasps were found in eight burials (Wojcieszak, 2012, 98).

¹⁴ Mentions of special funeral pins began to appear in in English written sources in the 17th century (Talaga, 2012, 17). As yet, no specimens that could be regarded as mournful have been found anywhere (*Ibid.*).

in Wrocław. Emphatically, those keys were associated almost exclusively with the graves of women, most of whom died in *adultus* age. In a few cases, the keys were separate specimens, but more often than not they were found in bunches of two up to as many as 10 keys.¹⁵ Probably all the items were feather keys. The prevalent idea is that such objects were considered symbols of a good housewife (Wachowski, 2015b, 235).¹⁶

Even more doubts are connected to the triangular padlock from grave 3 (Fig. 4). This item, dated to the turn of the 16th century or to the 17th century, is one of the few padlocks placed in burials in Poland other than at Jewish cemeteries (Drozd, Janowski, 2007, 358). The Jews used their own necropolises, intended only for the believers of their faith. Generally, Jewish graves are characterized by an almost complete lack of any objects, but occasionally they contain buckles, as well as coins and padlocks (Fijałkowski, 2003, 363-366).

The “obol-for-the-dead” custom forms a highly interesting part of the modern funeral ritual.¹⁷ The custom has been known and practiced across huge geographical, cultural and chronological expanses. Ethnographic research suggests that it is extremely common. Many attempts have been made to interpret the custom, in which the motives for equipping the dead with coins vary widely, from ensuring that they have the fee for crossing the gates of heaven — so-called *tributum Petri* (Dzieduszyccy, 2002, 281-287) — to paying them an equivalent for the part of the property due to them (Miechowicz, 2007, 91). Coins could also be meant as a bribe for the deceased not to return to the world of the living (Suchodolski, 1998, 496), including as a ghost (Miechowicz, 2007, 89-90). However, the problem has not been clearly settled yet.

Burials with coins in the mouths of the deceased make up the largest group of finds (Dzik, 2007, 82; Siwiak, 2017, 172-173). Michał Dzik has suggested that putting coins in the mouths of the deceased was most prevalent among the Catholics (Dzik, 2017, 85).¹⁸ However, archaeological data show that late-medieval and modern graves with the so-called obol for the dead have been found in Poland not only at Catholic cemeteries but also at Evangelical, Orthodox and Jewish ones (Siwiak, 2017, 173-174). In the case of Pień, the most convincing interpretation is that the coin inserted into the oral cavity served as an anti-vampiric agent; in two graves (5 and 30) the coin was found in the mouth (mandible; Figs. 5-6), and in another one (grave 3) under the

¹⁵ While individual knives and keys are known to have been placed in modern graves, Poland, Bohemia and Germany did not practice putting complete sets of everyday objects into graves (Wojcieszak, 2015, 30).

¹⁶ This group of artifacts also includes belts, often entirely metal, and long knives for cutting bread (Wachowski, 2015b, 235).

¹⁷ This issue has been discussed by M. Dzik and Ł. Miechowicz, and recently by W. Siwiak (see below).

¹⁸ However, about 40% of the cemeteries he took into account did not have an established religious affiliation or were defined as Catholic/Protestant.

mandible, in the right collarbone area.¹⁹ But what it could actually be that made the community afraid of the deceased children (*infans I*; graves 3 and 5) and the individual who died at about 15 years old (*infans II/juvenis*; grave 30) is rather unclear. The anthropological examination has not indicated any diseases that could have affected the perception of these people or caused a fear of them. Still, they may have suffered from stigmatizing diseases that left no marks on the bones, such as epilepsy.

Based on the existing studies, the idea that Catholic funeral rituals were relatively modest while some practices are to be found only at Protestant cemeteries may be attributable to the current state of scholarship. Attempts have been made to distinguish elements characteristic of the sepulchral cultures of the two religions (Wachowski, 2015b, 230-231; Wojcieszak, 2015, 37). Rosary beads, medallions, and crosses have been considered distinctive of Catholic graves,²⁰ while keys, belts, and other items have been regarded as specific to Protestant burials; however, in the latter case, some objects are symbolic. Coins, wreaths, and pins are known to appear in the graves of both religions (Pankiewicz, Marcinkiewicz, 2012, 22).

In conclusion, the modern cemetery in Pień cannot be unambiguously assigned to any particular religious group. Undoubtedly, however, some features of the funeral rite, especially the lack of any devotional articles, indicate that Protestants (Evangelicals), including perhaps Mennonites, were buried there. The alleged Mennonite burials at the Pień cemetery require further, detailed research, first and foremost the examination of written sources. Regardless of these key issues, the findings of the research on the burial ground in Pień are an important contribution to our knowledge of modern funeral rites in the rural areas of Poland, and can usefully further the development of what is referred to as the archaeology of Protestantism, one of the new trends in Polish historical archaeology.

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¹⁹ According to Ł. Miechowicz, a considerable proportion of coins found next to the jaw can be linked to anti-vampire practices (Miechowicz, 2007, 90). It is also possible that coins were moved during the post-deployment processes or during the exploration of the grave.

²⁰ Other devotional items in this group are portable/traveler altars, scapulars, breastplates (ring collars) and reliquaries (Wachowski, 2015b, 231; cf. Kolyszko, 2013).

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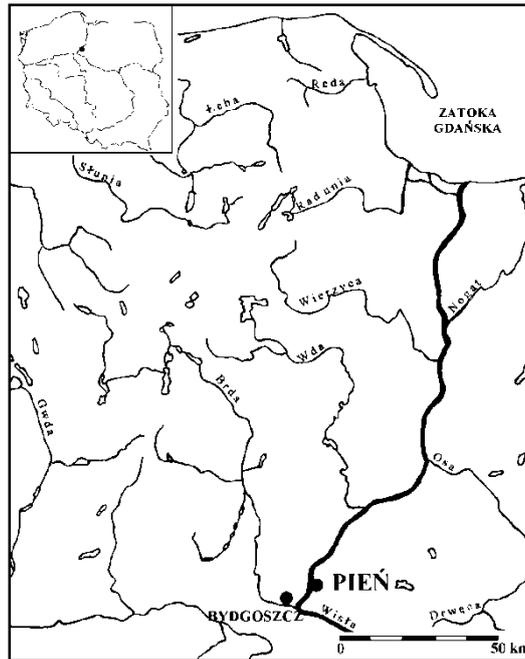


Fig. 1. Pień, Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship, site 9 (cemetery). The location of the site (Poliński, 2013, 10).



Fig. 2. Pień, Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship, site 9 (cemetery). Grave 59 (in Drozd, Janowski, Poliński, 2010, 99).



Fig. 3. Pień, Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship, site 9 (cemetery). A piece of a silk fabric from grave 5.



Fig. 4. Pień, Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship, site 9 (cemetery). A padlock from grave 3 (Poliński, in print).



Fig. 5. Pień, Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship, site 9 (cemetery). Coins: a — a half-penny of Jan Olbracht (from grave 3), b — one and a half pennies of Zygmunt III (from grave 5) (in Musiałowski, Poliński, Drozd, Janowski, 2006, 98).



Fig. 6. Pień, Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship, site 9 (cemetery). Coin in situ in grave 30 (Poliński, in print).