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THE BURIAL RITE OF THE ROMAN PERIOD IN MASOVIA

Summary

The purpose of this work is to enlarge our knowledge of the burial rite in Masovia, on the basis of archaeological sources. The burial rite in the meaning used in this work represents the attitude of the living to the world of the dead, and manifests itself as a complex of principles, ruling in the defined social groups as regards the way of treating the dead man's body and his property, as well as complex of beliefs in the "beyond the grave" life reflecting in various ritual activities.

The author accepts the division of the Roman period into two phases: the older and the younger ones, each lasting about 200 years.

The examined territory, called briefly Masovia, covers the area of the Masovian-Podlachian Lowland (47 districts of the Warsaw Voivodship, of the southern part of the Olsztyn Voivodship, of the south-eastern part of the Bydgoszcz Voivodship, of the eastern of the Łódź Voivodship, of the north-eastern part of the Kielce Voivodship, of the southern part of the Lublin and of the western part of the Białystok Voivodships).

The chief archaeological sources for the learning about and the reconstruction of the burial rite are graves containing burials, particularly cemeteries which were in use for a long time and thus many graves were grouped there.

The concept "grave" denotes a uniform structure, both subterranean and on earth, in which one or more burials were deposited. „Burial" denotes the contents of the grave: remnants of the dead man, (cremated remnants or his skeleton), remains of the funeral pyre and the grave-furniture. This classification provides convenient possibilities for research on the connections between the contents of graves (burials) and their shapes.

Graves with following features were distinguished: I a) marked on the ground surface, b) not marked; II a) isolated, b) grouped in cemeteries; III a) made of earth, b) made of earth and stones; IV a) single, b) consisting of many burials.

Burials were divided into following types: 1 — A) cremation burials, B) inhumations; 2 — considering a number of individuals in one burial — A) individual, B) collective; 3 — A) male, B) female, C) children's burials.

Some features of graves and burials could be more precisely defined: for example: the graves marked on the surface of the ground show certain varieties: 1) with mounds, 2) with stones set along their sides, 3) with stone pavements, 4) marked with single stones, 5) others. Some features of burials can also be further classified. The cremation burials can be divided into 1) urn-containing burials and 2) pit-burials. Each of these varieties can occur 1) with remains of the funeral pyre 2) without it.

Each of the above mentioned features is characteristic of the grave from one point of view. For the whole characteristics of the grave it is necessary to define it

on the basis of a complex of features. Each grave bears one of two features excluding one another and mentioned in the paragraphs I—IV; this also refers to the burials. Theoretically speaking, it is possible to distinguish 16 types of graves and 30 types of burials. The number of combinations between various types of graves and various types of burials is of course incomparably larger. But, in fact, many theoretical combinations do not occur at all. Some of them are so insignificant that they cannot serve as a basis for statistical analysis.

The analysis of the interdependence between the types of graves and the types of burials has been made by Czekanowski's method of the smallest differences. Only those graves and burials which could be defined as undoubtedly early or late Roman ones served as a basis for that analysis. The graves which were incomplete and those single, very richly furnished situated in the cemeteries that were excavated incompletely, have not been taken into account.

The general state of our knowledge of the cemeteries and graves in Masovia has been discussed in chapter I. The list of these archaeological sites with respective literature, given in that chapter, comprises about 200 items. These sites are distributed irregularly in Masovia. A considerable part of that territory has not been excavated and the archaeological materials from that part are the result of surface investigations and of accidental findings. The best examined cemeteries are situated at Korzeń, Gostynin district, Brulino-Kostki, Ostrów Mazowiecka district, Hryniewicze Wielkie, Bielsk Podlaski district, and Drohiczyn, Siemiatycze district. Much information was provided by salvage excavations of cemeteries at Osieck, Otwock district, Nęcieplin, Garwolin district, Tuchlin, Wyszków district, Kłoczewo, Ryki district, at Grodzisk Mazowiecki and in Warsaw-Kawęczyn.

The chief features of the cemeteries of the Roman period in Masovia have been discussed in chapter II. It has been ascertained that the cemeteries were situated mostly on tops of small elevations, near various kinds of water reservoirs. Judging from these common features of most cemeteries, we may assume that the places for the establishment of these cemeteries were purposely chosen. It gives evidence of the existence in that area of well-established and rather common elements of tradition and worship in the Roman period. The cemeteries were being used by small groups of people, (on an average by about 25 persons); the length of period, in which such cemeteries were in use, varied. Most cemeteries were not used any more in the middle of the 3rd century. Approximately at the same time, and a little later, new cemeteries, which were in use in the 4th century, arose.

As a result of an analysis showing how the cemeteries were situated, it has been ascertained that there did exist various regions with groups of cemeteries dating from the same time. As settlements of that period were insufficiently excavated, it is difficult to define whether such grouping reflects: 1) the situation of the settlements and the principles of territorial organisation, or 2) whether it reflects the division of various social units according to their religion. The other hypothesis finds its confirmation in the existence of "unisexual" cemeteries, where only people of one sex were buried (female cemeteries at Brulino-Koski, Warsaw-Kawęczyn, Kłoczew), and in the difference between the types of burials in neighbouring cemeteries of the same date.

Complexes of graves and burials showing family or clan characters, and some groups, resulting from ever increasing social and economic differentiation of various units of territorial-and-family organisation sometimes occur within various cemeteries. Some groupings of graves may be also regarded as traces of separate parts of the cemetery for burying persons of the same sex.

A precise analysis of the graves of the Roman period has been discussed in chapter III. As a result, it has been ascertained that both in the older and younger phases, most graves were grouped forming cemeteries. It has been noticed, however, that the number of separate graves, outside cemeteries, was larger in the younger phase. The separate graves of that phase were barrows of considerable size (at Pielgrzymowo, Goździk, Bogucin and at Dworaki-Pikoty). Sometimes they were richly furnished. They may be regarded as an evidence of the advancing processes of the social-economic differentiation and of the formation of a separate class of tribal or clan chieftains. Most single graves of the older phase do not bear such features; they are probably traces of war expeditions and wanderings of results of the discrimination of certain members of the group.

A group of graves marked on the surface of the ground with a stone fence, usually round-shaped, also occurred in the older phase (see the list of cemeteries with such graves on pp. 110—111). Moreover, we also discover graves, marked on the surface of the ground with stone pavements, in cemeteries with graves mostly unmarked. These graves mostly contained many burials, contrary to those with a stone fence, which usually contained one burial each. Generally speaking, the graves made of stone and earth were relatively more numerous in the older phase, (26 per cent of the total number of graves), than in the younger one (13,4 per cent). This fact was connected with the discontinuation of the cemeteries with rings of stones in the later period. However, other stone arrangements of the grave construction developed in that period: the number of barrows made of stone and earth and that of graves with pavements laid over the grave-pit increased. The latter graves, similarly to those of the older phase, mostly contained many burials (at Korzeń, Pałuki, and at Drozdowo). A characteristic complex of cemeteries, consisting of barrows of the so-called Rostolty type, which appeared at the end of the older phase, can be distinguished to the north-east of the examined area. They belonged probably to the eastern Slavonic area, this being attested by their many connections with the Zarubińce culture.

In chapter IV the burials of the Roman period were discussed. The cremation burials preponderated in both phases; in the older phase they represented 98,8 per cent of the total number of burials, in the younger one — 88,9 per cent. The number of inhumations increased accordingly from 1,2 per cent to 11,1 per cent.

Changes can also be noticed in the structures of the cremation burials themselves: there were 64,8 per cent of pit-burials in the older phase and only 57,7 per cent in the younger phase. There appears a tendency to the equation of the number of both types. While considering the burials divided into three basic classes: 1) inhumations, 2) cremation-pit burials, 3) cremation-urn containing burials, it becomes evident that only the number of the cremation-pit burials decreased in the younger period, while the number of the cremation-urn containing ones and that of inhumations increased.

	Inhumations	Pit burials	Urn containing burials
Older phase	1,2 per cent	64,9 per cent	33,7 per cent
Younger phase	11,1 per cent	51,4 per cent	37,5 per cent

The decrease of number of the cremation-pit burials had a greater effect on the increase of the number of the inhumations than on that of the cremation-urn containing burials. This situation seems to be the result of the process of ousting the

pit type by the inhumation burials. Among the cremation graves those without remains of the funeral pyre became more numerous. It concerns both the pit type and the urn containing one.

The inhumation burials of the older phase do not show any uniform ethnical character. It seems that only the Szczytno burial can be regarded as a Gothic one. The remaining burials reflect either various kinds of magic practices or different rites of the local population. In the younger phase, however, with the increase of the number of inhumation burials their cultural and ethnical picture became clearer. In all probability, the burials of that type were those of the Gepidian (Gothic) people, changing place on their way towards their future settlements on the Black Sea shores. No weapons were found in those burials which are exclusively or mostly female in their character. Weapons were found, however, in many cremation graves, (10,3 per cent — in the older phase, 13,6 per cent in the younger phase). In the older phase the number of the burials with weapons in the urn containing type was almost the same as that in the pit type (11,5 per cent and 10,0 per cent), but in the younger phase considerable differences can be noticed. Weapons were found only in 7,5 per cent of the pit burials and in 26,9 per cent of the urn containing ones.

The territorial distribution of the cemeteries with burials of various structures has been shown on maps I—IV.

The results of a statistical analysis of the interdependance between the type of the grave and that of the burial are shown on tables I—III and V—VII. It results from the diagrams of successive differences (tables III—VII), that in the older phase the type of the construction of the grave was of greater importance for differentiation, while in the younger phase the type of the burial had a greater differentiating significance. The reason for that was the changed function of the stone-and-earth construction which occurred in the course of time.

The chief features of the burial rite in Masovia in the Roman period were determined in chapter V, on the basis of the results of the above mentioned analyses of archaeological sources. The characteristic feature of this rite consists in the fact of the existence of cemeteries as permanent and separate places where the remains of the dead were deposited. They can be regarded as a proof of the existence of a notion of the world of the dead in the consciousness of people of that time, who wanted to give to that world as many features of real life as possible. The ideas about that "world of the dead" were strongly connected with the idea of the soul as a non-material part of the human being. The formation of this idea is attested by such distinct signs of animism as the rite of cremating the dead and their property.

Many cemeteries of the Roman period bear features of clan organisation. Not always, however, the ideas of people of those times, concerning the organisation of the world of the dead, reflected features of the clan system. It can be illustrated, for example, by the existence of cemeteries with burials of individuals of one sex only, which can serve as a proof of the existence of a different, non-clan, basis, on which the world of the dead was "arranged". Another not less significant fact is the indubitable contemporaneousness of two neighbouring cemeteries with different kinds of burials. These facts can serve as a basis for a working hypothesis that some vague ideological premises, probably resulting from some disintegration of worship, may have also been a principle according to which the world of the dead was "arranged". As no traces of permanent arrangements for cremating were found, it is believed that the cremation was taking place each time at another place.

Traces of cremation of a few (2—3) individuals on one cremation pyre are not numerous but very distinct. The remains of those individuals were poured into one common urn or grave pit. The furniture of such a common burial, however, was of individual character, thus giving evidence of one of the persons buried together having been regarded as a "chief dead man", whose sui generis equipment were the remaining persons.

Besides the bodies, various objects were also cremated and their remains, together with those of the skeleton, were deposited in the grave. The objects which had not been completely damaged on the funeral pyre, particularly larger metal objects, were usually specially broken. It concerned chiefly weapons and thus we may suppose that the purpose of that practice might have been a kind of "disarmament" of the dead man.

His remains were deposited in the grave in an urn or directly into the grave-pit. It seems that not all urns were made especially for their ritual purpose; in some cases, however, they undoubtedly were. The same concerns some types of associated vessels, as for example, those with a hollowed foot (grave 22 with 6 such pots at Korzeń).

The small number of inhumation burials in the early phase considerably increased in the late Roman period. Most of them should be considered as traces of the penetration of foreign ethnical elements into the local community. In some cases, however, the furniture of those graves has a local character (of the Przeworsk culture), and then they may be regarded as burials of persons of high social standing.

The construction of the grave was usually simple. A fairly large pit made in earth was mostly its chief and usually only element. Graves of a more complicated construction, with the use of stones, occurred not so often. The stones were probably used to separate the dead man from the living and to make it impossible for him to leave the grave; that must have been the chief reason for that. In some cases there were perhaps other reasons too: the desire to mark the burial or to emphasize the eminent social position of the dead man. The stone fences, the so-called stone rings, bear, however, strong magic features. They occur in, sometimes vast, cemeteries consisting of graves made in the same way and containing similar burials of men and women.

An analysis of the furniture of the burials in graves of stone-and-earth construction and its comparison with that of the burials in those of a simple earth construction shows great differences. In the older phase the graves made of earth were more richly furnished, whereas in the late period the graves of stones and earth were richer. It should be interpreted as a proof that in the older phase the stone-and-earth construction had a magic ritual character, whereas in the late period its purpose was chiefly to distinguish the dead man.

In the Roman period the burial rite in Masovia did not differ, as a rule, from that existing in that period on the whole territory of the Przeworsk culture and on vast areas of Central Europe. It arose as a result of a long-lasting evolution of animistic ideas and served first of all to protect the world of the living from the world of the dead. Many of its features are a consequence of defined social and economic relations and of the beliefs of different ethnical groups.