

## BURIAL RITE AT A CHURCHYARD CEMETERY FROM THE 11<sup>TH</sup>-15<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES IN KRÁSNO IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY CEMETERIES IN SLOVAKIA

The churchyard cemetery in Krásno (district of Partizánske) belongs to the sites that can widen the knowledge and deepen the information on medieval society, its development and life, to a remarkable extent.

As far as its geography concerns, the site is situated on the headland of Chríb, which is the most northern promontory of the Trbeč hills. I would like to stop at the name of the place the site is situated - Chríb. We meet the name Chríb more quite frequently in cadastrals of villages in the middle river Nitra basin. The village Sádok, which is 4.6 km far from Krásno, can serve as an example. Here, on a hilltop called Chríb, a rebuilt small Romanesque church and a medieval cemetery with gravestones are placed. The situation is analogical to that in Krásno.<sup>1</sup>

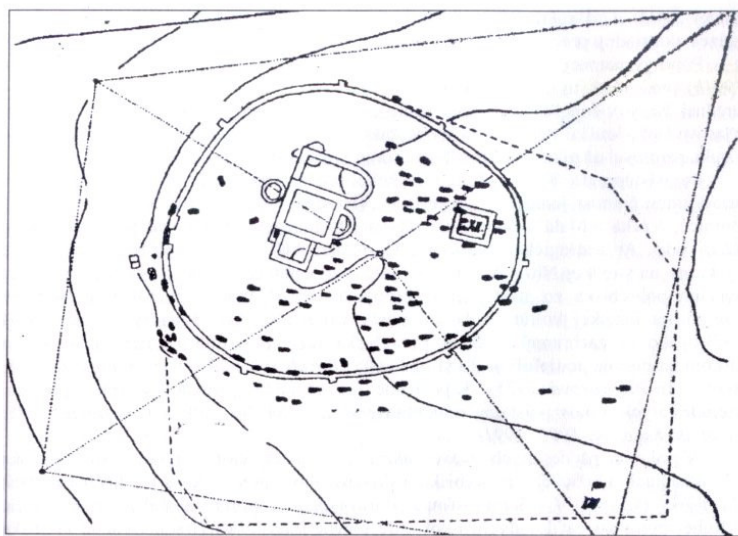


Fig. 1. Plan of the sacral building and cemetery in Krásno.<sup>2</sup>

Archaeological excavations at the cemetery were realised in 1952-1954 under the leading of Oldrich Krupica.

Issuing from the number of revealed graves (1609), the cemetery in Krásno can be considered a necropolis of a central European importance. From the total number 114 graves were under gravestones and probably 365 were modern burials. The centre, however, lies in medieval burials, the oldest phase of which is proved by anonymous coins from the terminal 11<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. This is documented by finds of 26 coins dated to the mentioned period. Majority of medieval burials arranged in rows is situated in the space in front the church fence. Within the fence the graves with gravestones and modern ones are concentrated, arrangement of which let the deceased facing the church altar.

According to graves, which were destructed during the church fence building, it is presupposed to be constructed somewhere at the turn of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The greatest part of the cemetery in Krásno belonged to the medieval phase of burying (the 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries). From the total number of 1,609 burials 342 were infant, 133 female, and 62 male ones; in 1,072 the sex have not been determined. The above-mentioned results are given in the table.

<sup>1</sup> Oldrich Krupica, *Stredoveké Krásno*, in *Západné Slovensko*, 5, Bratislava, 1978, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, *Pohrebište z XII.-XIV. stor. v Krásne na Slovensku*, in *Archeologické rozhledy*, 5, 1953, p. 196.

Representation	Sex				
	Infants	Women	Men	Unidentified sex	Total
Quantitative	342	133	62	1,072	1,609
Percent	21%	8%	4%	67%	100%

Fig. 2. Categorization and representation in percents of buried individuals according to the sex.

Absence of total anthropological elaboration in many studied problems (e.g. those of burial rite or analyses of material culture) was caused by remarkable unclearness in formulating of demographic conclusions. The grave furnishing was found in 376 graves, including those under gravestones. The burial rite used was inhumation. The dead were revealed lying on their backs, with straightened arms and legs. Deviations occur at the cemetery, too, mostly concerning upper limbs, where a variant with one arm situated on a pelvis and the other along a body is the most frequent (103 burials). A deviation concerning lower limbs was the O-position of legs that was found in 6 cases.

At the cemetery dominated basic orientation W-E (984 graves), unusual orientations were SW-NE (60 graves), NW-SE (42 graves) and their various declinations.

Types of grave pits cannot be specified in more details; another situation concerns their arrangement, according to which the grave pits can be divided considering the material used – stone (8 graves) or wood (26 graves), e.g. by putting limestone rocks around a corpus (2 burials) or by lining a grave pit except of its bottom with sandstone plates (graves no. 1606, 1607, 1608 – a triple burial). Eleven graves were dug into bedrock.

Timbering of graves had several variants, in which the way of burying, when a skeleton was rounded with timber wood along its longer sides, was prevailing (10 burials).

At the cemetery in Krásno super-positions of grave pit are relatively frequent. We excavated also a triple super-position here. In all cases the super-position caused by different time horizon is probable.

Burial rite at necropolises from the 11<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries is interesting by surface identification of graves with gravestones mostly of rough shapes. First sites with occurrence of gravestones included burial grounds in Bratislava-Devín, Martin, Nitra-Dražovce; later excavated were cemeteries in Kostolany pod Trábečom, Ducové, Levice-Baratka, etc.<sup>3</sup>

In Krásno 114 gravestones were found, 65 of them in primary and 49 in secondary position. Raw material for their production has its origin in Krásno and in villages in its vicinity, 1-8 km far from the cemetery. This fact can be explained by two ways: a stone for a grave plate could come from a village, where a deceased individual had lived, because at the burial ground deads from three villages – Krásno, Nedanovce and Turčianky – were buried. The other possible variant is a quality of a raw material.

Graves belonging to the medieval cemetery are concentrated on area behind the church fence. Majority of burials under gravestones was found within the space inside the fence; they were mostly respected by younger graves, also in spite of intensive burying till the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Gravestones in secondary positions as well as following destructions of graves under them were found in connection with younger constructions and modern burials at the cemetery.

Different situation was revealed at a burial ground in Svinica, where destruction of majority of graves under gravestones was caused by intensive burying on a small area of 600 m<sup>2</sup> (Krásno has 2200 m<sup>2</sup>).<sup>4</sup>

According to results of recent research is presupposed that this burial rite of burying under gravestones was spread on a relatively extended territory from eastern Germany up to western Ukraine and it had a practical importance. It enabled permanent, solid and clear identification of graves, it prevent wild animals from rooting up of graves and so from destructing them first of all on places, where deep pits could not be dug because of a rocky underlier.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Milan Hanuliak, *Hroby pod náhrobnými kameňmi v 11.-14. storočí*, in *Slovenská Archeológia*, 27, 1979, p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> Dušan Čaplovič, Milan Hanuliak, *Hroby pod náhrobnými kameňmi vo Svinici*, in *Historica Carpatica*, 10, 1979, p. 194.

<sup>5</sup> Alojz Habovštiak, *Stredoveká dedina na Slovensku*, Bratislava, 1985, p. 210.

Existing results of the research and ethnographic material as well link the gravestones with efforts to mark a burial on earth surface, “to placate the dead and prevent him from returning back among living people”.

I would like to underline also other specificities of burial rite at the necropolis in Krásno, among them special grave pits, such as double burials (6 cases), triple burials (1 case) and infant burials in vessels (8 cases). In all the mentioned burials kinship ties can be presupposed among the individuals.

I would like to stop at the infant burials in vessels (8 burials), which are dated to the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> up to a half of the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries according to a coin found in a vessel including an infant corpus. All these burials were situated near outer margin of the fence, therefore burying of unchristened children is presupposed. Occurrence of coins in these burials helps us to date roughly the fence construction or ending of medieval burying at the cemetery. Presence of a coin in six burials from eight is an interesting moment. This custom was of symbolic mean probably. The Polish research worker Zawadska-Antosik in connection with finds of such graves in Poland has come to the conclusion that depositing of the vessel with its bottom up indicates a mother's fear of the child's possible return back, reproaching her that he/she had died unchristened.<sup>6</sup> At the cemetery in Krásno the vessels were always deposited on their side with its neck oriented to the altar. In this situation the explanation could be the same, mainly regarding the orientation to the altar. Maybe this was also a reason why a coin had been put into a burial vessel. The problem of infant burials in vessels concerns a modern phase of burying at the site. Similar infant burial in a vessel was found at the cemetery in Bohatá, where the grave had been situated out of the necropolis.<sup>7</sup>

I would like to stress also reasons leading to formation of churchyard cemeteries as well as the problem of relation of row burial grounds and churchyard cemeteries in the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries, which are usually considered to follow one after the other.<sup>8</sup> In a law article of the king Stephan I.'s code from the period between 1030 and 1038 there is a reference to a compulsory establishing of a net of churches, minimum one for ten settlement sites.<sup>9</sup> This is a common conception of Christianisation that developed evenly in all regions of the Carpathian basin. In compliance with the problem of row burial grounds and churchyard cemeteries the importance lies on attention paid to corresponding and different elements in burial rite and material culture, to different rate and intensity of Christianisation in particular regions. We are speaking about medieval cemeteries in which horizons of burying can be observed from the time before a half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century already. In one part it is continuation in burying near an original Great-Moravian church (Bratislava castle), close to sacral constructions connected with Great-Moravian traditions (Devín castle) or cemeteries near Late-Romanesque churches, where burying before the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Kostoľany pod Trábečom, Dražovce) or at the turn of the 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> centuries (Krásno) was proved.<sup>10</sup>

Significance of the analysed cemetery has been confirmed also by finds of 163 coins, whose long development of using has included several functions. One of the most important was that of coin being a mean for dating. This category of material culture revealed at the burial ground allow us to fill a lot of gaps and complete insufficient information concerning the time period of the 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries in a relatively great extent.

At the cemetery in Krásno coins in closed burial units played a relevant part in dating of finds. At the same time it can be considered a reflection of social position of the dead and an evidence of remarkable changes in the sphere of burial rite.

Coins in the graves occurred in the function of obolus of the deads – i.e. it is a burial custom of giving a coin to the deceased person, tradition of which reaches down to ancient peoples. With arrival of Christianity pagan rituals of presenting the dead with gifts (food, tools, and weapons) withdrew. Instead of it a coin was given to the dead that could help him to obtain necessary things in after-life. P. Radoměský, cited after Z. Váža, saw the real sense of this rite in a fear of the dead, who

<sup>6</sup> Beata Zawadska Antosik, *Pochówki dzieci w naczyniach glinianych*, in *Wiadomości Archeologiczne*, 38, 1973, p. 369-370.

<sup>7</sup> Alojz Habovštiak, *Príspevok k poznaniu našej nížinnej dediny v 11-13. storočí*, in *Slovenská Archeológia*, 9, 1961, p. 472.

<sup>8</sup> Bohuslav Chropovský, *Slovensko na úsvite dejín*, Bratislava, 1970, p. 181.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander T. Ruttikay, *Mittelalterlichen Friedhof in Ducové, Flur Kostolec, Bez. Trnava: Beitrag zum Studium der Beziehungen zwischen den sog. Reihengräberfeldern und Kirchenfriedhöfen*, in *Ethnische und kulturelle Verhältnisse an der mittleren Donau vom 6. bis 11. Jahrhundert*, Bratislava, 1996, p. 391.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 393.

had to be placated with a symbolic gift, preventing him from taking his possessions with him to the other world.<sup>11</sup> This has been, however, a speculation still, as no written reports or other ethnographic evidence is known.

The ritual of giving a coin to the dead appeared on our territory for the first time together with Christianity in the Great-Moravian period in the 9<sup>th</sup> century at the background of significant political movements in contemporary Central Europe. With the arrival of Hungarians it withdrew and its greatest bloom is observed in the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. After this period of expansion the rite is diminishing gradually, rarely it appears up to the Late Middle Ages<sup>12</sup>, what is evidenced in Krásno, or till modern age – Ducové.<sup>13</sup>

The next question concerning the problem is number of coins in a grave. In several cases two or three coins were found in a burial. A double obolus was revealed in four graves at the cemetery in Krásno.

A triple obolus appeared in e.g. Nitra-Na vřšku.<sup>14</sup> Almost in all cases of double or triple oboluses the coins of the same ruler or from the very near period are used. This is the reason we can support the theory about dating ability of coins in a grave, because it would be paradox, if on one side a belief in obolus as a mean for obtaining necessary things on the other world exists and on the other an invalid coin had been given to the dead.<sup>15</sup>

During this burial rite lasting a position of the given coin was changed and it took various forms: coins were put into the mouth of the deceased, in the right or left hand, on pelvis or other parts of the dead person's body. Here we can take into consideration also possible movement of a coin during burying a corpus to a grave as well as a change of its position during the body's decay. I have divided positions of coins in graves into three main groups with several variants: 1. on a trunk (variants chest, pelvis, and abdomen); 2. upper limb (variants right hand, left hand); 3. skull (variants mouth, near skull, chin). Another positions of coins (e.g. between heels) form the fourth group. In burials of grown-ups a coin in a right hand is prevailing (27%), which occurred mostly in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, together with a position on pelvis (25%), frequency of which is increasing mainly in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Analysis of coins occurrence at the burial ground in Nitra-Šindolka was very suggestive. At this necropolis a coin position on a chest or trunk is remarkably dominating (75%) that was a very frequent way of putting the obolus to graves in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup>

Total number of coins revealed at the cemetery in Krásno was 163 pieces of Austrian, Hungarian and Bohemian provenience. The oldest are anonymous coins from the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> to the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, which were found in 26 graves and which are dating the beginning of burying at the necropolis in Krásno. According to coins appearance and situating of graves, end of the medieval phase of burying at the cemetery can be dated to the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Younger graves were from medieval ones separated with a stone wall. A course of burying or formation of basic dividing of the cemetery into particular phases in dependence on time determination will be possible after decoding the plan of the churchyard cemetery. I have not succeeded in clearing up the system of graves entering into the plan yet.

The excavations in the medieval cemetery in Krásno have brought a rich collection of finds, which are in many cases relevant for typology. In 48 graves the artefacts were dated with coins. As we have mentioned above, coins are very important help in sketching out a development of usage of artefacts in the given period and in a certain sense they help to reconstruct the society life.

In my contribution I have tried to outline the burial rite development at the churchyard cemetery in Krásno and I did not devote my attention to analysis of the material culture that is completing the whole picture of the necropolis. Analysis of the burial rite and archaeological remains is not definitive. The churchyard cemetery in Krásno with its valuable material potential offers a lot of

<sup>11</sup> Zdenek Váňa, *Radomský, Obol mřtvych u Slovanu v Āechách a na Morave*, Recenzia, in *Památky Archeologické*, 1956, p. 225.

<sup>12</sup> Eva Kolníková, *Obolus mřtvych na vĀasnostredovekých hroboch na Slovensku*, in *Slovenská Archeológia*, 15, 1967, p. 225.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander T. Ruttkay, *Novoveká fáza cintorína na "Kostolci" pri Ducovom. (Problematika minci toliarového obdobia v hroboch)*, in *Slovenská numizmatika*, 12, 1992, p. 99.

<sup>14</sup> E. Kolníková, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 222.

<sup>16</sup> Gabriel Fusek, *Gräber mit Arpadenmünzen aus dem Gräberfeld von Šindolka in Nitra*, in *Slovenská Archeológia*, 46, 1998, p. 112.

possibilities and information as well, which can contribute to knowing of the medieval society life in a relevant extent.

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