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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL VIEW OF CHRISTIANIZATION ON TWO SIDES OF THE BALTIC SEA

The written evidence gives us a view of the conversion of the peri-Baltic area through the eyes of the successful Christianizers because, unfortunately, no other contemporary “eyes” are available. Sources from the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century paint a process that was quick, historically necessary, and politically effective. Those especially active in spreading the Faith are naturally the focus of attention, hence the accounts we are dealing with refer for the most part to political elites and ruling dynasties in particular. Therefore, the historiography of Christianization is not much different from political history.

Medieval Christian ‘historians’ dichotomized the past into two distinctive epochs separated by decisive events which introduced divine order into ungodly chaos. This uniform vision makes us also think in terms of sharp contrasts between “what was Christian” and “what was not-Christian”, thus confronting the two “worlds” in order to achieve better focus and typological clarity. It is easier after all to think in terms of contradictions instead of struggling with various forms of gradual transition.

Ecclesiastic tradition viewed the Christianization of areas bordering on the northern and northeastern fringes of the heart of post-Roman Europe as a rather rapid process initiated by zealous missionaries and effectively executed by devout monarchs. Their decision to convert meant official inclusion of whole peoples (*gentes*) into the Church and, consequently, the end of paganism. Therefore, some countries have a precise date of their “baptism” (e.g. Poland in 966 and Rus’ in 988), while others have to choose some decisive event to separate the two epochs. There were also “appointed” missionary kings who led the breakthrough (e.g. Harald Bluetooth in Denmark or Mieszko I in Poland). This artificial chronology, imposed by the contents of the written records, strongly constrains the interpretative perspective of both archaeologists and historians.

Another problem with discussing the medieval religious confrontation draws from the lack of a clear explication of any of the old systems of beliefs, for which there are no direct records. This further reinforces a simplified vision of

Christianization that is based on strict categorization: Christian/non-Christian, before/after. Both, historians and archaeologists have problems with distancing themselves from this deeply-rooted scholarly tradition. This is evident in interpretations of the potentially very informative material evidence, which offers insight into the situation at the grass-roots level where real, not stated, processes took place. Archaeological finds provide grounds for comparative interregional studies that may be set in a relatively precise chronological and geographical framework. Easy generalizations can thus be avoided and the socio-historic context sketched in with more prudence.

In addition, burial customs offer insight into the otherwise hardly accessible sphere of eschatology, i.e., beliefs referring to the ultimate fate of the world and humanity, interpretations of paths leading to the “world of the dead”, concepts of post-mortal judgment and eventual reward or punishment. Practically all the known religions include such elements which find indirect expression in reactions to death. Death rituals, treatment of corpses and burial practices are all indicators of this intimate sphere of beliefs that is crucial for placing an individual within a social context of collective reaction to death.

Obviously, in any given case the form of the “last service” for the dead is a reflection of the collective eschatological vision of the living and not the dead. This deciding role of the body of people charged with completing a burial makes death rituals and burial practice important aspects of the social practice. These rituals and their symbolism are crucial for sustaining collective identity and thus, promoting social order by recalling practical aspects of the dominating ideology. Thus, medieval rituals applied in the face of death and treatment of the corpse were not only forms of human action, but took on an important religious dimension. This premise, which does not follow Cathrine Bell’s (1997, p. 52) suggestion to study ritual behavior and religion separately, is crucial to archaeological research (cf. Lars Fogelin’s discussion, 2007).

Christian eschatological anticipation of the resurrection of the body as a whole, of Final Judgment for all and the expected coming of the eternal Kingdom of God determines the attitude toward death. It definitely influenced treatment of the corpse which had to be well prepared for these future “events”. Strictly uniform eschatology had to be met with strict death rituals and did not leave much freedom in the choice of burial practices. This orthodoxy was controlled institutionally by the Church and supported by the executive power of Christian monarchs. Therefore, Christianization should be observable in the archaeological record in the forms of treatment received by corpses.

For archaeologists dealing with the Middle Ages this is a fundamental expectation. Yet its clearness demands that clear typological and chronological distinctions be established in order to separate neatly the two different eschatological realities. This helps to build a clear-cut periodization, but may result in simplified interpretations. A good example of such an attitude is offered by a recent statement that “burial according to non-Christian practices virtually disappeared in Viken around 950, whereas in some parts of the Opplands it continued right up to the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century” (D. Skre 2007a, p. 387). The obvious conclusion is that

the diminishing number of “pagan” graves about AD 950 “was most likely due to a general conversion in the region” (D. Skre 2007b, p. 469).

Such straightforward conclusions derive from the conviction that discerning between “pagan” and “Christian” burial does not pose much of a problem and that a clear threshold of change exists. In addition, it is typically assumed that the pagan period was characterized by a transregional eschatological uniformity like the Christian one. This helps to build a clear-cut opposition. Therefore, “the idea of a more or less homogenous, or in any case primary, common *Viking Age culture* in Scandinavia” (F. Svanberg 2003a, p. 93) is prevalent in the topic literature. It is openly claimed that Viking Age Scandinavia was characterized by “common features in culture and religion shared by people” (D. Skre 2007b, p. 462).

This reproach is not aimed at Scandinavian archaeology because similar reasoning is typical of the Polish scholarly tradition as well. South of the Baltic we have also created two “epochs” in opposition to each other, taking for granted the written evidence and looking for sharp distinctions in the archaeological data. It has gone as far as a general acceptance for the idea that Mieszko’s I baptism in 966 is the factual date for the emergence of the Polish state, this despite Widukind’s and Ibrahim ibn Yaqub’s references some years earlier to Mieszko as an unquestionable “king of the north”.

The long story of building a shared Christian identity on the southern fringes of the Baltic Sea may be instructive for studies of parallel processes taking place in Scandinavia. Scholarly experience with confronting the written and archaeological evidence — mutually supplementary but often apparently contradictory — is of particular importance.

The protagonists on the political stage of the time — the dukes and their collaborators — viewed Christianization as a personally advantageous decision and were therefore rather easily converted, willing to cooperate closely with missionaries and invest in the establishment of an ecclesiastical network. The promotion of a new uniform ideology that would help to integrate larger areas was seen in terms of a strategy to support their political dominance over culturally differentiated populations.

The process must always be studied in the specific political and geopolitical context that largely determined the effectiveness and speed of the conversion. Mieszko’s I (?–992) decision to marry Dobrava in 965 firmly placed him on the geopolitical stage next to his Bohemian father-in-law. His membership in the “club” of acknowledged Central-European rulers was sealed a year later with his baptism and that of his closest associates. One reason for this move was the desire to reinforce his power in ideological terms by offering his people, still fragmented by adherence to separate local traditions, a new common identity. Christianity further legitimized his paramount position among his military supporters based so far mainly on collective acceptance. The process of constructing a new collective identity based on identification with a centralized Christian state was accelerated by frequent military conflicts which demanded action under one leadership.

In Early Medieval states, at least until the twelfth century, almost all ecclesiastical institutions were subordinated to the ruling dynasties. Cathedrals, churches,

chapels and monasteries were founded by the dukes/kings and members of their families who regarded these investments as their property. Bishoprics, monastic congregations and chapters were an important part of state administration which made extensive use of the transcontinental communication network established by Church institutions. Therefore, the clergy financed by the dukes was dependent more on the secular lords than on the bishops. Even tithes (originally paid in grain) were collected initially by the princes' officials and eventually returned to the Church. The clergy was subject to ducal control in the judiciary, administrative and financial fields. Rulers expected Christian conduct and punished trespassers (Thietmar VIII, 2; Kosmas II.IV and III.I). In large states, like Hungary and Poland, internal policy depended much and large on the cooperation of provincial bishops. In fact, they represented the interests of the central administration which put them often at odds with the local elites. The external contacts of the national Churches were subordinated to the control of the monarchs who dominated all geopolitical relations. The monarchs were also responsible for the internal and possibly external missionary work.

The establishment of the Polish Archdiocese in Gniezno in 1000 did not change the internal situation of the Polish Church, despite the fact that Boleslav Chrobry (992–1025) was considered a fully independent monarch and was granted the right to consecrate bishops. Pope Silvester's II decision to appoint St Voitech-Adalbert's follower Brun of Querfurt as missionary *archiepiscopus gentium* shortly before his departure to Poland in late 1002 indicates an open conflict of some kind, also intimated by Gallus Anonymous who claimed that archbishop Radim-Gaudentius laid an anathema on Poland (Gallus Anonymous I, 19). Added to the prolonged open conflict with the Empire, this must have slowed down the still needed missionary activity. Even so, Chrobry managed to establish in 1003 a short-lived missionary monastery in western Poland, to send a mission to Sweden in 1008 (Brun of Querfurt, 105) and another one to the Yatvingians in 1009 (Wibert; and accounts in: Petrus Damian, chap. 27; Thietmar VI.94–5), but all these actions did not bring any permanent success. He managed to stabilize and endow ecclesiastic institutions in the main centres of his state but Christianization did not penetrate the masses of inhabitants living in the agricultural enclaves of the largely forested countryside.

His son and heir to the throne Mieszko II (1025–1034), praised by the German princess Mathilde for his vigorous involvement in spreading the faith, had to face external intervention and internal opposition. His plans and many investments were halted radically already in the 1030s, when the still fragile ecclesiastical structure suffered from a deep crisis in the monarchy. Mieszko's death in 1034 ushered in a period of political chaos during which the state disintegrated and pagan reaction resulted in the destruction of much of the church network. The pagan uprising that followed is confirmed by all three important Slavic chronicles, those of Gallus Anonymous, Kosmas of Prague and Nestor. It was apparently a widespread popular reaction to the Piasts' centralistic policy and the financial burden of continuous wars. The end effect was a temporary subdivision of Poland into domains ruled by local "princes". Gallus Anonymous' vivid description of servants killing their lords and wild animals living in the archiepiscopal cathedral in Gniezno is

augmented by excellent archaeological data from Wrocław where a pagan temple was built in the winter of 1032/1033 atop the destroyed rampart of the royal stronghold (S. Moździoch 2000, p. 176–187).

The crisis in Poland struck the institutionalized Latin Church which had all its connections in the West and its symbolic centre in Rome. The Gniezno archbishopric ceased to function in 1034 (*Kraków calendar*, 918) and there is no more mention of bishops being active in Kraków. Some of the clergy may have found refuge in Mazovia, where a self-declared prince Mieclaw/Maslaw organized a safe enclave.

Neither should we forget the pressure exercised on the eastern peripheries of the Piast state by the Orthodox Church, especially in the the southeastern frontier zone, that is, the fringes of Małopolska (Little Poland), conquered already in 981 by Great Duke Vladimir. Eastern Christianity was attractive because of its use of the vernacular in the liturgy which had been slavified by St St Cyril and Methodius in the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century. Reconquest by Bolesław Chrobry in 1018 probably did not weaken the Orthodox influence in an area that lay the farthest away from his state centre located in Wielkopolska (Greater Poland), especially as it was soon subordinated again to the Rus' state.

The phenomenon of eastern religious infiltration has to be studied on the grounds of archaeological data alone as there are no written sources. In fact, the zone of influence of Eastern Christianity is well indicated by finds of specific pendant crosses with characteristically rounded extremities. The *encolpion* type of cross comprising two folding halves, used by followers of the Orthodox Church, was widespread along the eastern frontier during the eleventh through thirteenth centuries and it may be used to map the zone of indirect influence by the alternative version of Christianity. The crosses were imported mostly from the east, although some of them were also made in southeastern Poland (M. Wołoszyn 2000, p. 243). The same can be said about characteristic small silver crosses made in pseudo-filigree technique, circular pendants with built-in crosses, crosses decorated with enamel and small rectangular icons made of soft stone, all distinctively concentrated along the eastern border of contemporary Poland (see map in Fig. 7 in M. Wołoszyn 2000).

It is also known that the Eastern Church tolerated the old tradition of burying dead bodies under mounds. It was probably a conscious strategy to ease the confrontation of two different eschatologies by accepting some elements of the old burial rituals. This tolerance for syncretic burial behaviour lasted until the beginning of the thirteenth century. Thanks to this the area dominated by the Orthodox Church may be identified archaeologically from the eleventh century onwards. Mapping the extent of the Christian burial mounds reveals once again the zone along the Bug river which was under more or less direct Rus' control until the second half of the fourteenth century. The absence of a Latin Church network in this area and the evident eastern religious orientation are reasons why the troubles of the 1030s that shook the Polish Church appear to have had no visible impact there.

The problems which medievalists face when studying Christianization of the area located between the Baltic and the mountain belt in the south may serve as a good comparative perspective for their overseas neighbors. Not so long ago it seemed

quite obvious that there was a common pan-Slavic mythology (e.g. A. Gieysztor 1982; L. Słupecki 1994, p. 9) but nobody attempted to explain how this alleged uniformity was achieved and kept. However, despite the striking similarity of the everyday material culture over vast areas of Central Europe, one cannot presume any religious uniformity even among the northwest Slavs who observed various burial practices (cf. H. Zoll-Adamikowa 2000a, p. 104). For, just like in the case of southern Scandinavia, “it is hard to see how a number of different [burial custom] traditions may all simply be reflections of one and the same coherent mythology or religion” (F. Svanberg 2003a, p. 142).

Collective cultural practices, such as death rituals and burial customs integrate members of particular communities and, at the same time, differentiate the populations. They are not simple reflections of eschatological ideas but, also, factors that actively create and reinforce communities. Just as among the northern Slavs, so in Viking Period Scandinavia, “there were clearly many different collectives of people with more or less strong sense of collective identity... [and] clearly not a single homogenous ‘Viking Age culture’” (F. Svanberg 2003a, p. 199) as proved for Sweden. Similarly, research in the area of contemporary Norway indicates that “there were probably major differences in culture and belief” (S.W. Nordeide 2006, p. 222), because the late Iron Age burial customs there were very heterogeneous (S.W. Nordeide 2007, p. 3f). We must accept, therefore, that “there were profound chronological, regional, and social differences in pre-Christian religious practice in Scandinavia” (A. Andrén, K. Jennbert, C. Raudvere 2006, p. 14).

Therefore, the popular terms “pagan” or “pre-Christian” lose their general chrono-geographical meaning for the two sides of the Baltic. The archaeological data triggered awareness of the excessively generalizing nature of the historical evidence, “as well as of differences between the classificatory framework of the written sources and the actual reality ‘on the ground’” (F. Svanberg 2003a, p. 126f). Archaeological evidence of territorial variability of grave types, indicating a differentiation of burial customs that points to different death rituals, may be interpreted in terms of the religious differentiation which, in turn, undermines the concept of a common pan-Scandinavian or pan-Slavic religious symbolism and eschatological beliefs.

Thus, generalizations like “Slavic heathendom” or “Norse paganism” are not obvious any longer and need a chronological and geographical specification every time. This is nothing new for archaeologists studying precisely localized communities and observing the differentiation of burial customs. The concept finds support among the radical historians who have suggested that the authors of source texts who spoke of a pan-Scandinavian religion in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries were “...quite innocently playing with forms and contents inherited from a previous, but religiously speaking long dead era” (R. Simek 2006, p. 380).

When discussing the issue of “uniformity vs. differentiation”, one should keep in mind the ambivalence of Nordic archaeological evidence: as Svanberg explains, “burials of the social elite followed traditions that were primarily supra-regional, while the burial customs of the vast majority of people were primarily connected to ritual traditions more or less limited to relatively small geographical areas and human groups” (F. Svanberg 2003a, p. 142). Obviously, the rich burials of social

elites have always led the way in terms of attracting researchers' attention and therefore dominating the literature, whether professional or popular in character. Extraordinary in nature, these discoveries "created" a popular vision of the Viking Age, obscuring the actual differentiation of the Scandinavian masses.

While the top echelons of society manifested their membership in a supra-regional elite through elitist behavior, the common people belonged to different cultural/symbolic communities by relating themselves differently to existing collective perceptions of a way of life and eschatological concepts. And there were no obstacles for such differentiation and no mechanisms promoting homogeneity because there was no political power which could and would enforce ideological and symbolical uniformity.

This changed with the introduction of Christianity but the ecclesiastic tradition to put a sign of equality between the act of a ruler's conversion and inclusion of a whole "nation" into the universal Church is misleading. The studies of Christianization focused obviously on similarities of regional development that were to follow a continental trend, long considered to be smooth, linear, obviously progressive and advantageous for political organizations as well as social structures.

A recent tendency is to explore the dialectic aspects of "acceptance versus resistance" attitudes and to expose the confrontation and the continuity of the coexistence of the "old" and "new" religion-driven socio-political systems. The research perspective has been broadened to include studies of longer periods "before" and "after" the official conversions, and the search for elements that might shed light on reality as observed on the regional, local and even individual level. This has resulted in a picture that is far from uniform and the conclusion that "there was not a single Christianization process but in fact many different Christianizations" (F. Svanberg 2003b, p. 147) which geographically conformed to the identified regions of specific ritual systems.

The tendency toward generalization was undercut by putting into doubt pan-regional similarities as being no more than a superficial manifestation of continental political circumstances and the interregional identity of royal dynasties who turned even more "cosmopolitan" after the establishment of the Christian monarchy network in the late 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> century. One observes the royal courts promoting a continental model of rulership with standard elements like anointment, coinage, royal titles, iconography, foundation of churches and monasteries, introduction of "national" state names, etc. Conformity with this pan-continental symbolism was essential in order to be acknowledged as a player on the geopolitical stage.

At the same time, members of ruling dynasties needed to belong to their "own/national" traditions that ensured cultural coherence of their territorial domains. At this level the early Christian monarchs tried to impose a common ideology in order to raise social consciousness above individual and local "ethnic" beliefs. This included enforcing a practical observance of Christianity's eschatological expectations as a manifestation of supra-local identities. The effectiveness of this strategy may be estimated archaeologically by the growing level of uniform burial practices.

There is, unfortunately, a sad lack of reliable sources reporting on the chronology and spread of possible "pre-baptismal" penetration of Christianity in the Polish

lands. The only and unsuccessful attempt to push back this date refers to a laconic account in St Methodius' hagiography. According to the author, some "mighty prince in *Vislech*" harassed the Christian Moravians but was finally captured and obligatorily baptized by St Methodius between 874 and 880 (MPH I, p. 107). This single sentence had such an impact on the imagination of Polish historians that they eventually introduced a "state" of the *Vislane* that allegedly competed with Sven-topolk's Great Moravia and started the state-formation process in southern Poland. Archaeologists endeavored to find proof for this concept by interpreting the locality of Wiślica where a little church and supposed baptismal font were excavated and eagerly dated to the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century (W. Antoniewicz 1968, p. 106 and 114) as the *Vislane*'s "capital", but this idea was easily disproved. In the 1990s, archaeologists again attempted to revive the concept of early Christianization by overinterpreting some mysterious clay tablets found in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century layers of a settlement in Podeblocie in eastern-central Poland. The "letters" incised on these tablets were deciphered as an acronym of *I[esos] X[Chrestos] N[ika]* (A. Buko 2005, p. 159; A. Łukaszewicz 2008).

The absence of solid written evidence leaves us with the one(?) option of tracing changing eschatological imperatives in the material evidence of death rituals and burial practices. However, analyses of the available data show that the transformation of burial practices was a slow and difficult process. It was not chronologically linear and geographically continuous. Moreover, the reasons for the observed changes are far from being clear even in the well studied areas of contemporary Poland, similarly as in Bohemia (cf. I. Stefan 2007).

Logical loops when written accounts are confirmed by archaeological finds that are dated by referring to these texts are common in the historiography, Polish medieval studies offering a good example. The way out of this circular argumentation is through complex multi-disciplinary studies that must include precise accelerator (AMS) dating of every burial. Only a skilful combination of text and material evidence studies, supported by linguistics, theology, numismatics, history of art and historical anthropology may ensure any real progress in our understanding of the fascinating process of Christianization in Northern Europe. This will be a departure from the simplistic "text-driven" archaeology that concentrates on "confirmation" of the written sources and from the "item-fascinated" history that uses archaeological data as simple illustration of ready-made concepts. They are both parasitic substitutes of the postulated multi-disciplinarity.

Despite the optimistic declarations by Christian chroniclers, it is difficult to estimate how long it took for the new Christian identity, vigorously promoted by the Piasts after 966, to be fully accepted by the inhabitants of lands within the territory of modern Poland. The process was not made easier by the fact that until the 11<sup>th</sup> century the clergy all came from Bohemia, Germany and Italy. At the beginning of the eleventh century, according to Thietmar (*Chronicon*, VIII, 2), Boleslav Chrobry still used harsh methods to enforce observance of fasts and to uproot adultery. Because there are no cemeteries or even single graves in Poland that would indicate acceptance of Christian eschatology before the very late tenth century, some archaeologists suggest that there was opposition among the common people in



accepting the new identities imposed by the political elites (e.g. H. Zoll-Adamikowa 1998) and the pagan traditions may have still been observed even at the very centre of the Christian state (e.g. the large cemetery in Dziekanowice).

Thus, even in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, despite the already long presence of the Church and its strong promotion by the monarchy, it would be risky to say that the country had been successfully Christianized. The new faith, its rituals and eschatological expectations, diffused at a very slow rate among the rural inhabitants of the formally converted state. Continued cremation of dead bodies, so typical of the Early Medieval Slavs, may serve as a good indicator of surviving pagan death rituals. Consequently, the disappearance of cremation graves and grave-mounds from central Poland may indicate a growing acceptance for the “official” Christian eschatology, but the already-mentioned general central-European trend towards inhumation could have also played a “promotional” role. An increasingly east-west orientation of the bodies is observed along with a reduction in the quantity of grave goods. Next came the location of cemeteries near churches and a sequence of changes in the arrangement of the arms (from straight at the sides, through crossed on the pelvis to crossed on the chest).

Pagan hierophanies (elements of environment believed to represent the sacred) connected to characteristic landscape formations must have posed a serious challenge to the expanding Church because they were important parts of local collective identity. In Christianity even the most extraordinary elements of the landscape cannot be holy by themselves. A sacral dimension is imposed by specialists performing consecration rituals, which clearly separate the chosen space from the profane surrounding (cf. J. Jensenius 2001, p. 26). Therefore, some elements of pagan landscapes were Christianized in order to retain control over their symbolic power. In most cases condemnation and placing a cross was sufficient, but occasionally more substantial intervention was needed. Monasteries built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century on the venerated mountains of Łysiec (in central Poland) and Ślęża (in Silesia) are meaningful proof of this strategy.

The difficulty with achieving real conversion is well illustrated by the archaeological evidence of individual burial practices and collective decisions expressed in the localisation and organization of cemeteries. The late Helena Zoll-Adamikowa listed subsequent variations of the penetration of Christianity into Poland: 1. nominal Christianization of new areas but without the conversion of inhabitants; 2. individual conversion by single persons; 3. temporary Christianization followed by a halting of regular evangelization due to negligence on the part of the clergy or to massive resistance; 4. durable formal Christianization; 5. ‘real’ Christianization followed with all the rules of the new faith being commonly accepted.

In this model one should also distinguish between two different types of relevant ecclesiastical activity: missionary and established, the latter being supported by administrative and coercive measures. There is no common chronology for the whole country and every area must be studied separately in its specific historical context (H. Zoll-Adamikowa 1998; 2000a, Fig. on p. 104).

Boleslaw Chrobry must have been aware of the lack of respect for the basic Christian rules and disapproved this, because we have evidence of his radical zeal.

In Thietmar's Chronicle (VIII, 2) he is said to act cruelly against the sinners. Such radical casual measures directed at members of the upper classes were hardly helpful in changing the generally poor understanding of the new religion among the rural masses. Thus, there was an obvious need for extensive internal missionary work, which the underdeveloped Church could not provide.

Effective organization was not the only problem of peripheral Churches at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Despite their firm institutional establishment they still had to carry on tedious missionary work among the masses of inhabitants who sometimes lived in hard-to-reach places or on the distant peripheries. Local communities still referred to collective identities that had their roots in a pagan past. The need for a political solidarity with the Christian state could have been understood by the elites, but not by individual peasants for whom blood ties were of primary importance.

Nominal or temporary formal Christianization as well as missionary activity may be demonstrated by the parallel occurrence of cremation and inhumation [e.g. in Cedynia (H. Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982), Tańsk-Przedbory (L. Rauhut, L. Długopolska 1973) or Wolin site 8 (J. Wojtasik 1968)], grave-mounds and flat graves, as well as an east-west orientation of the skeletons. Formal Christianization by the state-supported Church resulted in the introduction of the so-called 'village or row cemeteries' that consist of inhumation burials alone. They may still show some pagan elements, e.g. grave-mounds, non east-west orientation and rich grave goods. Elevated sites were preferred for these cemeteries but not in the same places as the earlier pagan *necropolia* (H. Zoll-Adamikowa 2000b, p. 217). Cemeteries were privileged stages for performing collective rituals crucial to the communal identity. Therefore, they were often located in distinct and well visible localities that facilitated communication. Any structures visible on the surface served as points of reference for long-term memory.

Only after 150 to 200 years did the concentration of all burials (without grave goods) around churches demonstrate that the Church had finally gained full control over the death rituals and burial practices of the local populations. Obviously, the stages of this process were never very distinct and did not occur simultaneously everywhere. The process was faster around the ecclesiastic-political centres and slower in marginal areas. In general, 'real Christianization' in Poland did not begin until some time before the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century when a network of parish churches and monasteries was developed (H. Zoll-Adamikowa 1998, p. 233; also discussion in P. Urbańczyk, S. Rosik 2008, p. 391).

The Christianization of hard-to-reach areas and peripheries must have obviously proceeded at a much slower pace. In such areas syncretism and pagan elements seem to have survived for quite a long time going into the Christian era. Various orientations of the skeletons; partially burned skeletons; bi-ritual cemeteries with both cremation and inhumation burials, or even bi-ritual graves; special objects put into the graves (for example amulets made of animal teeth, rattles of various shapes, animal bones representing the best cuts of meat, eggs, intact pots, bells, coins, crescent pendants); and mutilation of the dead bodies (so-called anti-vampire practices). In the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>-century cemeteries in northeastern Poland, necklaces made of crosses combined with pagan amulets were still in use

(D. Krasnodębski 1998, p. 96, Figs 134 and 135) and the openly pagan cremation ritual survived locally until the 13<sup>th</sup> century!

Religious aspects of collective identities have always been important elements of collective and individual self-definition. Therefore, an inter-religious dialogue may be assumed to have played an important role in the processes that shaped the ethnic structure of the continent. Thus, the function of Christianization in inter-ethnic relations deserves closer study. Studies on Christianization must include research on tension typical of situations of radical ethnic/cultural/linguistic differentiation. The struggle took place at the level of not only ideological dialogue/conflict, but also the material expression of different world views. All this resulted in a long and difficult Christianization process and a vigorous resistance on the part of the indigenous population. This is archaeologically witnessed in syncretic practices and pagan burials which were still being observed on the peripheries in the High Middle Ages.

Keywords: Christianization, Slavs, Poland, Scandinavia, funerary rites

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PRZEMYSŁAW URBAŃCZYK

## ARCHEOLOGIA O CHRYSYANIZACJI PO OBU STRONACH BAŁTYKU

### S t r e s z c z e n i e

Źródła pisane oferują jednostronną wizję procesu chrystianizacji obszarów okołobałtyckich skomponowaną przez przedstawicieli ekspandującego Kościoła. Stworzyli oni kanon interpretacyjny, w którym przeszłość podzielono na dwie wyraźne epoki przedzielone wydarzeniami, które uporządkowały bezbożny chaos. Ta tradycja wskazuje przełomowe daty (np. w Polsce i na Rusi) i/lub władców misjonarzy, którzy doprowadzili do konwersji swoich poddanych (np. w Danii

i w Norwegii). Taka perspektywa silnie wpływała na interpretację świadectw archeologicznych, dopasowywaną często do wymowy informacji historycznych.

Tymczasem źródła archeologiczne umożliwiają śledzenie rzeczywistych procesów transformacji religijnej i pozwalają na badania porównawcze odkryć dobrze ulokowanych w czasie i w przestrzeni. Szczególnie zachowane ślady obrządków pogrzebowych pozwalają „wejrzeć” w inaczej niedostępną sferę eschatologii. Rytuály pogrzebowe informują bowiem o kolektywnej reakcji na śmierć i towarzyszących jej zabiegach.

Jeżeli eschatologia chrześcijańska, antycypując „ciała zmartwychwstanie”, narzucała sposób traktowania ciał zmarłych, to oczekiwano szybkiego odbicia tej zmiany w materiale archeologicznym. Siła interpretacji historycznej skutkowała po obu stronach Bałtyku uproszczoną wizją radykalnego przełomu w sposobie traktowania zmarłych. Tymczasem niezależna, choć nie abstrahująca od kontekstu historycznego, analiza danych archeologicznych wskazuje na długi i geograficznie zróżnicowany proces chrystianizacji obrządku pogrzebowego.

Przedchrześcijańskie kolektywne praktyki kulturowe, takie jak rytuały okołosmiertne i zwyczaję pogrzebowe integrowały wewnątrznie członków danej społeczności, równocześnie odróżniając od siebie sąsiadujące populacje. Znaczne zróżnicowanie obrządków pogrzebowych w Skandynawii i mniejsze wśród Słowian pozwala zakwestionować tradycyjny obraz religijnej jednolitości mieszkańców wielkich obszarów Europy. Trzeba przy tym rozróżnić zachowania elit społecznych, odwołujących się do ponadregionalnych wzorców kulturowych, od zachowania mas mieszkańców zdeterminowanego lokalnymi tradycjami.

Dzisiaj odchodzi się już od wizji jednorodnego procesu chrystianizacji, kładąc nacisk na jego geograficzne zróżnicowanie, co każe mówić wręcz o „chrystianizacjach”, których przebieg zależał nie tylko od misyjnej determinacji monarchów, ale też od lokalnej specyfiki tradycji kulturowych. Dane archeologiczne potwierdzają, że chrystianizacja obrządku pogrzebowego była procesem długim, trudnym, nieciągłym i przestrzennie zróżnicowanym. Potrzeba jednak precyzyjnych danych o chronologii i geografii tych przemian, które pozwolą odkryć dialektykę akceptacji nowej ideologii, ale i oporu przed nią. Dzisiejsza wiedza pozwala stwierdzić, że — poza pojedynczymi przypadkami — nawet w centralnej Polsce brak jest pewnie chrześcijańskich grobów bezsprzecznie datowanych na koniec X w. Formalną konwersję centrum politycznego od faktycznej zmiany religii mas mieszkańców mogły dzielić nawet dwa stulecia.

Słowa kluczowe: chrystianizacja, Słowianie, Polska, Skandynawia, obrządek pogrzebowy

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