MALGORZATA GRUPA

LITURGICAL VESTMENTS FROM EXCAVATIONS
IN CHURCHES IN WARSAW AND KOŃSKOWOLA

In 1996-2000 Maria Dąbrowska supervised archaeological works in St. Catherine church in Służewiec in Warsaw. Foundations originating from different church phases as well as earthen graves and a big quantity of single bones were located under the floor.

During the works in the nave under northern heating canal a collection of yellow-tea color textiles was excavated. At present it is impossible to define what the colors of particular fabrics were, because plant dye decomposed completely (Fig. 1).

The base of a chasuble, so called „mask” was trick silk upholstery fabric while outer layer was made of satin. All elements were joined by the means of tack stitch, therefore we can state for sure, that they belonged to elements of a grave gown. Analysis of all fragments indicated, that it is a front of fiddleback chasuble of Roman type with cross orphreys separated from the vestment base with silk band. The chasuble edges were rimmed with narrow fringed band.

Outer layer was made of silk satin in weave 7:1 (Fig. 2), density per 1 cm: 140 threads of warp, 40 threads of weft. Silk thread was not twisted.

The chasuble mask was manufactured of thick silk double-weft textile with geometrical-plant pattern (Fig. 3). The base in weave 4:1, density per 1 cm: 72 threads of warp, 15 threads of weft.

Outer layer was separated from the vestment mask with silk weaved band of geometrical-rhomb pattern (Fig. 4, 5). The band edges with picots. The chasuble rims were also lined with silk haberdashery of 2,2 cm wide, with fringes from outside (Fig. 6, 7). The masks had 28 cm of width, outer part – 27 cm. It was sewn on to the mask unsymmetrically, on one side 7,7 cm wide, on the other – 5,2 cm. The mask was sewn from many textile pieces.

During cleaning works in 2010 in so called central crypt in Końskowola parish church one of the coffins revealed liturgical vestment. Complete decomposition of bone material made it impossible to obtain any information on the buried person. However, preservation state of silk textiles enabled establishing some facts concerning gowns, the dead had been dressed in. The excavated chasuble can be classified as a fiddleback one with a pillar (back and front) made of damask with floral pattern (Fig. 8, 9). Textile density: 100 threads of warp with delicate twist S, 70 not twisted threads of weft per 1 cm. The edge of width 0,8 cm (0,15 cm – 4 thick threads of warp in weave 1:1, 0,65 mm in weave 3:1). Weave of the base 2:1, and in ornament – satin weave with predominance of 4:1. Neck hole finished with the same fabric.

The mask was made of textile which geometrical-plant ornament composes stripes, and was obtained by introducing additional warp in other colors. Despite pigment loss in the textile, warps creating the ornament differ in shade from the base color (Fig. 10, 11). General base weave 2:1, density: 66 threads of warp, 33 threads of weft per 1 cm, non twisted thread. The edge of 2 mm wide, 8 threads of warp, thicker than the basic one in weave. The ornament is shaped by additional warp in satin weave, most frequently 4:1.

Orphreys were separated from mask with 1,7 cm wide lace made of silk thread with metal wrap. Originally the wrap had been yellow (golden), but destructive processes deprived it of its color and at present we find only greenish spots on silk thread, which are the remains of copper oxides being components of the used metal alloy (Fig. 12). All chasuble edges and seams joining orphreys and mask and also neck hole were lined with haberdashery. The vestment sizes: front length – 82 cm, back – 125 cm, front mask width – 23,5 cm, back – 21 cm, orphreys width – 20,5 cm, width of aperture for the neck – 8 cm. The chasuble was lined inside with textile of plant fibres (flax fabric most presumably) with weave 1:1. Maniple and stole were also made of the same silk as the mask. They also had probably the same kind of lining as the basic liturgical vestment. Stole and maniple were decorated with cross signs made of silk haberdashery with edges wavy
rimmed by different sizes of picots (Fig. 13). Its background (weft) was weaved with a thread of metal wrap, presumably gold (at present gray, what indicates substantial silver admixture). In case of Końskowola chasuble it is difficult to define if it had been specially prepared for the grave or had liturgical purpose. Comparing to other gowns the vestment's silk is
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very well preserved. The seams have not remained, therefore it is difficult to state if it was tack stitch or back stitch.

The chasuble excavated in St. Catherine church in Służewiec is a typical grave gown and it consists of only front part sewn for the needs of a funeral. The masks were sewn together of many fragments originating probably of a garment worn earlier. The outer layer is deprived of any embroidery. The mask ornament has no connections with Church symbols and any parallels to liturgical dresses. The Końskowola chasuble does not posses any church symbols, either. Church or liturgical textiles are the ones used as material for liturgical dresses. In accordance with Church rules they should be silk. Vestments found in Warsaw, Końskowola, Lubiń or Lublin were made of silk.


6 A. Drążkowska, M. Grupa, Dokumentacja konserwatorska prac przeprowadzonych na odzieży grobowej biskupa Michała
bushy flowers, shrubs, arabesques, acanthus leaves and other floral – geometrical compositions and architectonic elements. The chasuble of Bishop Jan Trach Gniński buried in 1636 in Lubiń did not bear any embroidery trace on the outer layer. It was manufactured of beautiful patterned velvet, where the ornaments were obtained by pulling over the textile surface loops of warp hair and cutting a part of them (Fig. 14). The whole garment was made of many velvet fragments, tacked and tucks on rims were only pressed. There were no lining traces. It was regarded as grave gown specially made for the funeral. But for the other grave equipment, particularly five-finger liturgical gloves made of plain silk without any patterns and only with slanted lengthened wristbands and the cipher IHS embroidered on the upper part, it would have been difficult to state in the initial stage of the works, that it had been a burial of ecclesiastic. The velvet used for making the chasuble, stole and maniple did not have any features of liturgical textile. During Baroque this type of material was used in upholstering or for garment sewing. Priests Bock and later Żarnowiecki indicated that frequently the same textiles and patterns were met in the evenings at concerts and balls and in the morning they were seen at the altars.

Despite great luxury in every day life liturgical grave gowns were rather modest, although it is difficult to confirm in case of excavated silks. In case of liturgical vestments excavated in Poland no embroideries were registered. Very often the garments’ backs were sewn of many small pieces (chasuble from Lubiń). Those gowns did not have any lining, with the exception of Końskowola case (we can suppose that at least for short it had been used during the priest’s life). Until now only in one instance liturgical grave gown has possessed solely the upper part – the vestment from Warsaw.

Comparing all chasubles known to me from archaeological studies we can observe that they were fiddleback types. The back was always longer that the front. The masks were made of different fabrics than the upper part and neck holes. They differed with pattern and color. Despite the fact that all textiles had colors close to brownish-yellow, differences were to be noticed. Outer layers were brighter, masks darker. Main additional ornaments consisted of haberdashery and laces lining the gowns’ edges or partings between outer layer, mask and neck holes. The same band served for rimming the maniple and the stole.

In case of burials of bishops Jan Trach Gniński and Michael de la Mars there were no problems with textile dating because we knew their dates of death. However, in instances from Warsaw and Końskowola we do not have such information. Silk from Warsaw was thick with rich ornamentation (Fig. 3), while the textile from Końskowola was very thin and delicate. It was stripe repeating pattern (Fig. 10). In spite

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Fig. 11. Measures of thread thickness of weft and warp from the mask – Końskowola.

Fig. 12. Chasuble lace – Końskowola.

Next information indicating the textile as a piece of liturgical vestment could be the chasuble color, which should be in white, red, green, violet, pink or black. However, plant pigment decay during depositing, deprived us also of that detail. What is more, during modern times, this detail was not strictly obeyed to. Therefore Longin Żarnowiecki reminded us about symbolism of those six colors and their meaning in religious cult. During Middle Ages silks available on the market were used for the purpose, but their additional ornamentation, e.g. scenes from the Bible, image of Saint or symbolic decorations showed directly the gown character. During the Renaissance we observe common depletion of Church embroidery or its complete disappearance. Even the most expensive gowns, without any symbolical Church ornaments were deprived of liturgical dresses’ features, but on the other hand they had very rich pattern program

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*de la Mars*, manuscript in Institute of Archaeology of Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, 2002.

7 L. Żarnowiecki, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

8 *Ibidem*, p. 127.

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of those differences the textiles originate from more or less the same period, i.e. the turn of 17th/18th c or 1st half of 18th c.

Textile fragments found in earthen graves and crypts indicate great degree of destruction. They underwent various factors causing damages during wearing those garments, when living people had been using them as well as damages made during textile deposing in graves and crypts. General fibres’ weakening takes place during textile using and influence of so called aging changes. They include, among others: rubbings, bulging. The others are destructions caused by mechanical factors – cuts, piercing, tearing, cracks, folds, completed by accumulation of impurities, UV ray activity. Next destruction takes place after deposing to the grave. Textiles are characterized by numerous spots and deposits on the surface being a result of microbiological attack – bacteria, fungi and impurities made by wax fat replacement of the dead body. Next damages are caused by worms and tachnid flies preying. They are insects preying in coffin wood, directly on textiles or decomposed bodies. Aging processes taking place under the ground cause textile stiffening and dye decomposition. Conservation laboratory obtains textiles with strong impurities, the most often over-dried. Their fibres are fragile and with a little degree of flexibility. First stage of conservation work is to make drawing, photo and descriptive documentation. Textiles are cleaned mechanically and chemically and next fibres undergo flexibility process. The following treatment consists of: ripping off all elements and clearing seams. Conservation Laboratory of the Archaeological Institute in Toruń applies for those treatments – PEG 300, paraloid B-72 in toluene and methanol. After completing impregnation technological textile analyses are executed. Doubling is also made if possible. Synthetic glue Akrylkleber 360, which as a means of cementing archaeological textile with the new doubling one turns out to be a safe preparate, is applied. The final stage of conservation treatment is to sew together particular elements for complete reconstruction of particular garments.

Fig. 14. Scheme of thread report on satin from burial of Jan Trach Gniński – Lubiń.

Fig. 13. Cross sewn on the maniple – Końskowola.
Badania w kościołach na terenie Polski dostarczają coraz więcej informacji na temat obrządku pogrzebowego ludzi świeckich i duchownych a także wyposażenia grobowego. Archeologiczne tekstylii z Końskowoli i Warszawy są fragmentami ornatów pochodzących z XVII i XVIII wieku. Są to relikty ornatów skrzypcowych używanych w liturgii katolickiej od średniowiecza do czasów obecnych. Ich datowanie jest możliwe tylko na podstawie analizy tkanin znajdowanych w grobach i czasami dodatkowego wyposażenia grobowego.


Tkanina jedwabna z Warszawy była gruba, o rozbudowanym ornamentowym, natomiast tkanina z Końskowoli była bardzo cienka i delikatna, o wzorze pasowym, powtarzającym się cyklicznie. Pomimo tych różnic, tkaniny pochodzą mniej więcej z tego samego okresu, tzn. z przelomu XVII/XVIII wieku lub z 1. polowy XVIII wieku.

Fragmenty tkanin znajdowane w grobach ziemnych i kryptach wykazują duży stopień destrukcji. Miały na to wpływ różne czynniki, które powstały w trakcie noszenia szat a także zniszczenia powstałe w czasie zalegania tkanin w grobach lub kryptach. Podczas użytkowania tkanin następuje ogólne osłabienie włókien przez działanie tzw. zmian starzeniowych. Są to między innymi: przetarcia, wypchnięcia. Zniszczenia powodowane są także przez procesy starzeniowe, które są związane z postępującym starzeniem starań o dokumentację DRAWIC, o który mówimy dalej. Do tego dochodzi akumulacja zanieczyszczeń, działających na tkaniny a także zniszczenia powstałe w wyniku zakłócenia i naloty na powierzchni, powstałe w wyniku trumien, bezpośrednio na tkaninach czy ciele zmarłego. Zachodzące procesy starzeniowe podziwiają do uszytych form tkaniny czy rozkładarka barwnika.

Tkaniny poddano licznom zbiorników konserwatorskich. W pierwszej kolejności wstępnie ustalano lokalizację, następnie badano na kąpielach ze środkami powierzchniowymi, podnosząc się do ze wstępnej i impregnowania. Koncowym etapem prac konserwatorskich była rekonstrukcja reliktych ornatów.