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Reconstruction of a Wreath and a Flower Bunch Excavated in the Northern Crypt of St Nicolas Church in Gniew

Rekonstrukcja wianka i bukietu z krypty północnej z kościoła św. Mikołaja w Gniewie

Abstract: In the last five decades, during archaeological investigations in churches and church cemeteries both in Poland and Western Europe, relics of many wreaths made of artificial and natural flowers have been discovered. Some of them have been described in considerable detail and drawing reconstructions have been made. In many cases, the garlands were made of similar details, but the arrangement in individual compositions varied. On the basis of these discoveries, it was decided in the laboratory of the Institute of Archaeology in Toruń to make a copy of one wreath and bouquet found on the mortal remains of a child (coffin 4) in the northern crypt of St. Nicholas Church in Gniew dated to the second half of the 17th century (up to 1680). The analysis of elements was the basis for the individual flowers. And the final composition is the vision of one of the authors of the article, Barbara Gałka, who made copies of both the bouquet and the wreath. The raw materials for making the copies had been collected for a long time, as the Polish trade offer did not quite allow them to be gathered in advance. This article attempts to provide a description of the flowers used in 17th-century objects and the creative process in making the copies. The end result of these activities is shown in Figures 11, 12 and 13.

Keywords: artificial flowers, flower wreath, 16th–18th century, reconstruction, krypta, Gniew, Poland

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Introduction

Child burials of modern times used excessive quantities of both artificial and natural flowers, what is depicted in numerous sumptuary regulations of Europe[1] (Grupa 2005: 91; Miazga et al. 2018: 76). Legislators usually did not describe constructions and types, flower species and wreaths, but they rather concentrated on materials which were too expensive and increased costs. We can meet these examples in the epoch iconography, but it presents only modest small girls wreaths. Archaeology completes this picture and thanks to finds from various churches, basing on relics we are able to reconstruct their forms and have the idea of what regulations they really speak about (Kériné Buzás 1992: 258; Petrycka 2003; Drążkowska 2006; 2007; Lippok 2007; 2009; 2011: 114, 116–117; 2015; Lippok, Müller-Pfeifruck 2009: 272, 274, 280, 283–291; Guszpit et al. 2010: 632; Cicha 2011: 189–195; Grupa et al. 2015: 117–120; Grupa, Nowak 2017: 162, 164).

Families of the deceased frequently did not obey them and bans and punishments referred to the sumptuous coffin and dead bodies decorations were often repeated. Despite all administrative limitations, the tradition was established as an element of the funeral culture of the 16th–19th century in Europe[2] (Krüntz 1773–1858). The occurrence of richly decorated artificial wreaths can be associated with shaping new trends in funeral fashion to manifest, among the others, family wealth.

Demonstrated reconstructions of a wreath and a bunch of flowers basing on artificial flowers relics excavated in the northern crypt – coffin 4 are only subjective visions of a luxurious bunch and a grave wreath. Every element could have been placed in another way and completed by natural plants and flowers to make it more beautiful. Mourning parents could have demonstrated their grief after the child loss regardless sumptuary regulations, placing huge quantities of flowers in the coffin of their child. They did not count the costs of preparing grave decorations.

1 Apart from flowers wreaths – both grave and wedding ones were completed with various decorations, organic and nonorganic: silk bands, pearls, gems (or glass imitating gems), golden or silver plates increasing values of these small works of art. Saxon ordinance from 1546 allowed townswomen to wear wreaths with silk bands, but without golden and silver plates (Kizik 2001: 79). In addition to flowers, both wedding and grave garlands were decorated with all sorts of organic and inorganic ornaments: silk ribbons, pearls, precious stones (or glass imitating them), gold and silver plates, which increased the value of these small works of art. The Saxon Ordinance of 1546 allowed townswomen to wear garlands with silk haberdashery, but without gold and silver plates (Kizik 2001: 79).

2 Johann Georg Krüntz in 242 volume of the encyclopedia placed a note concerning common tradition of putting to coffins grave crowns when virgins or bachelors were being buried. He writes about placing them in their hands or on coffin tops. That was the case with the describes items.

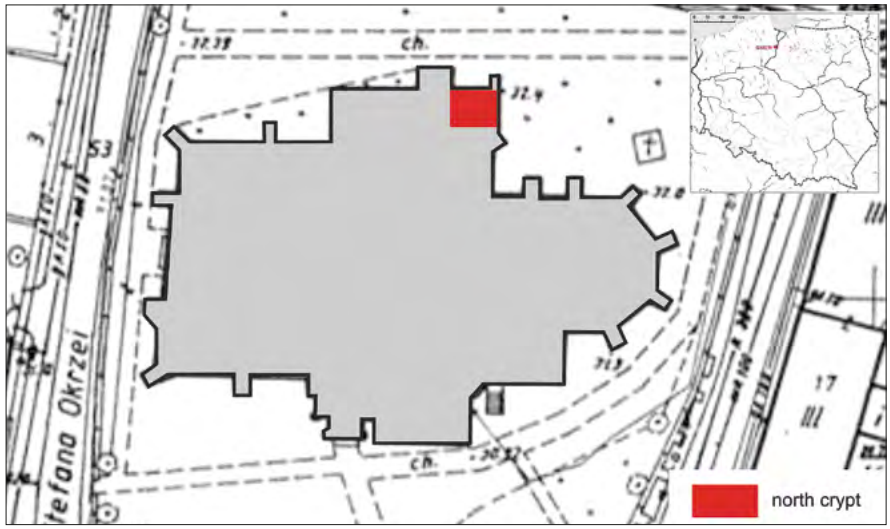

Fig. 1. Gniew, St Nicolas church. The crypt location inside the church. Gniew location on the map of Poland (dig. T. Dudziński).

Could it have been a burial of a child from the king's starost family, or somebody related to it? Dating around 1670–1680 indicates the presence of the Sobieskis in the town.

Relics of wreaths found in modern times grave goods have already had their own history. Manufacturing techniques and kinds of materials used for their production have also been described rather precisely by home and foreign archaeologists (Schier 1957; Petrycka 2003: 17–18; Garland 2011: 587; Lippok 2007; 2009; 2011; Grupa et al. 2015: 117–120; Grupa, Nowak 2017: 160–169; Rahde, Schindler 2018: 327, 329). In many cases these objects are similar, and the difference is only observed in particular details composition, what results from the spatial imagination of a manufacturer or requirements of a person ordering the decoration. However, money may have been the most important factor while producing particular items, hence a great variety in grave equipping of infants, young women, and youths. These ornaments symbolized virginity, and purity (Petrycka 2003: 19; Grupa 2005: 31–32; Drążkowska 2006: 212; Grupa, Nowak 2017: 160). 18th century even brought several handbooks describing artificial flowers production: *Dictionnaire portatif des Arts et Métiers* (Macquer 1767), Encyclopaedia of Diderot and D'Alembert (1756), which contained instructions based on the experience of several producers generations. We can also observe flowers on the dresses of portrayed ladies of that period (Boucher 2012: 266). Artificial flowers put to graves are the best documented when analyzing archaeological excavations. Basing on that knowledge we have decided to present these details manufacturing process and

the final result of a wreath and a flower bunch composition, inspired by their relics excavated in a child burial (coffin 4) located in the northern crypt of St. Nicolas church in Gniew (Fig. 1).

A child burial description – coffin 4

In the course of the research conducted in the church of St. Nicolas in Gniew (2009–2016) over 300 burials of adults and children were excavated (Grupa et al. 2015: 35–158; 2016: 385–395; Grupa 2015: 193–199). Analyses of wreaths and artificial

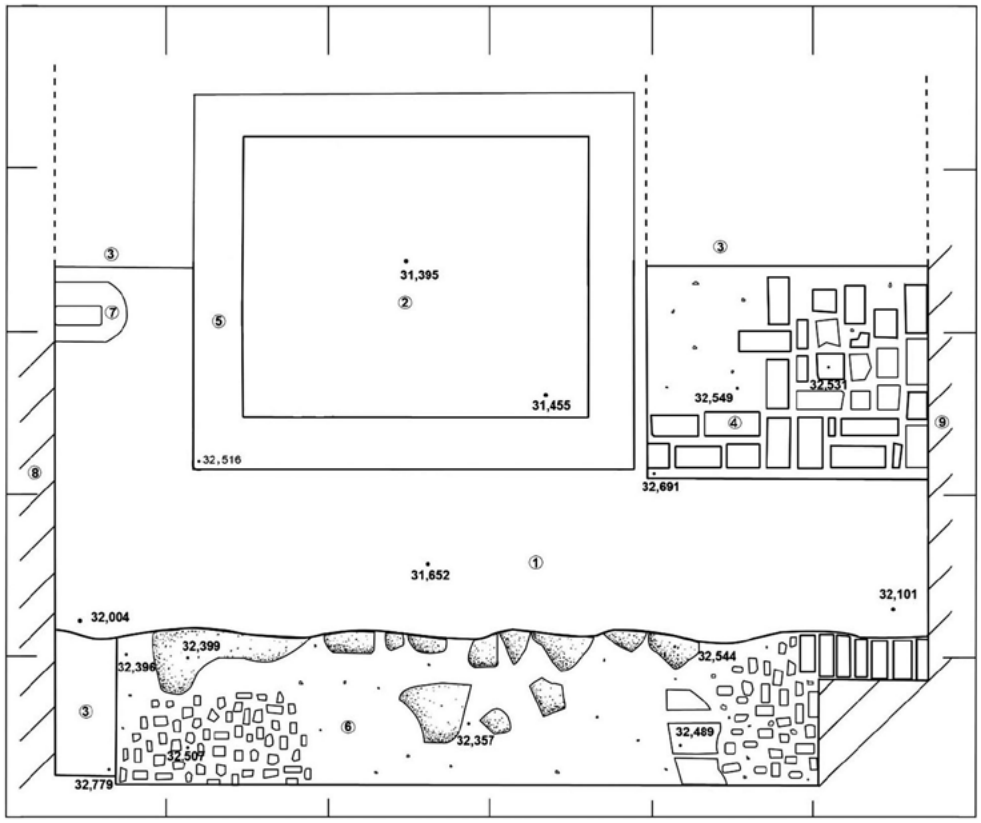

Fig. 2. Gniew, St Nicolas church, northern chapel. Projection of a trench bottom on the level (AMSL) in the northern chapel after excavating architecture relics. Captions: 1. bright brown humus with sand, 2. mixed brownish humus with sand, crypt filling, 3. floor of the northern chapel, 4. brick floor, 5. crypt walls – brick spotted with mortar, 6. stone-brick foundation spotted with mortar, 7. crypt ventilation hole, 8. cross-section of the chapel western wall, 9. cross-section of the chapel eastern wall (drawn by A. Kochmann, dig. M. Słomczewska).

Fig. 3. Gniew, St Nicolas church, northern chapel. White lily flower (photograph by A. Wojciechowska).

Fig. 4. Gniew, St Nicolas church, northern chapel. Open flower cup with a metal rod (photograph by A. Wojciechowska).

flowers found in children's graves were systematically made from the very beginning (Grupa 2015: 193–199; Grupa et al. 2015: 117–122; Grupa, Nowak 2017: 159–172). In 2011, exploring the chapel of St. Catherine, the northern crypt (Fig. 2), functioning in the 17th century was excavated, containing seven pressed coffins[3]. Two of them included relics of dead children (Grupa, Łukaszewicz 2019: 137–138). In coffin 4, placed under the coffin of an adult person with the date of 1680, there was a poorly preserved skeleton of a child (infans I, 0,5–1 year of age), situated on East-West axis, with its head towards the West (Wojciechowska 2012: 15). Wreath relics were found among bones and a mattress filling the skull area, and fragments of flowers coming from a bunch tied together with a band were placed on ulna and radius bones (Fig. 3). Various size artificial flowers reminding carnations were placed in two lines along the whole length of a silk grave gown (without back part) (Fig. 4) (Grupa, Nowak 2017: 166). Basing on analyses of the complete grave equipment several flower species were distinguished: carnations, parrot tulips, lilies or/and wild roses, cornflowers, forget-me-nots, and elements reminding flowers of chicory and corn conckle. Species adjustment was made on the grounds of flowers growing in that area and analyses of similar finds from other archaeological sites coming from the 16th–18th centuries (Drążkowska 2007: 491–493; Grupa 2015: 48–51; Grupa et al. 2015: 117–120; Grupa, Nowak 2017: 160–167). Taking into account a number of excavated flowers and their composition on a dead child body one has an impression that it was all in flowers leaving only a seen face.

Analysis of wreath and bunch relics

Gniew wreath and bunch artificial flowers' stems were made of metal wire containing copper, what is evidenced by the green corrosion color covering them with time (Grupa 2013: 133–137). That alloy was perfect to imitate gold and it was flexible enough to form various shapes (Grupa et al. 2015: 118–120). Metal products imitating gold are called in the 18th century and present literature 'false haberdashery' (Grupa 2014: 18, 21–22). These thin wires which were often basic frames for other constructions were wound up with not twisted silk yarn and glued together using fish, eggs, or starch gluing components.

Flower petals and buds were made of silk in plain weave 1/1 (weft and warp threads were Z twisted) and silk yarn glued together (Fig. 4, 5). Discoloring seen under the microscope suggest that they had been dyed, although at present most of them are yellow-brown, as the vegetal dyes have decomposed (Grupa 2007: 211–212; Grupa, Nowak 2017: 167–168).

3 The crypt vault might have collapsed under the weight of a baroque altar being erected above.

Fig. 5. Gniew, St Nicolas church, northern chapel. Cup of a flower similar to a forget-me-not (photograph by D. Grupa).

Fig. 6. Gniew, St Nicolas church, northern chapel. Closed flower cup with a long stem (photograph by A. Wojciechowska).

Most of the found flowers had their calyxes closed, what is concluded from the lack of flower stamens. Only a few of them reported metal stamens presence, hence – a calyx may have been open (Fig. 4) as much as it was necessary for the composition. Basing on that conclusion we were trying to recreate the composition of a bunch or a wreath/diadem, which main elements were carnations, as the most frequent finds amongst the relics. At present 16 closed carnations with short stems – from 0,5 – to 3 cm long have been identified, and 3 open carnations with stems of about 6 cm. Flowers reminding violets or forget-me-nots (Fig. 5),

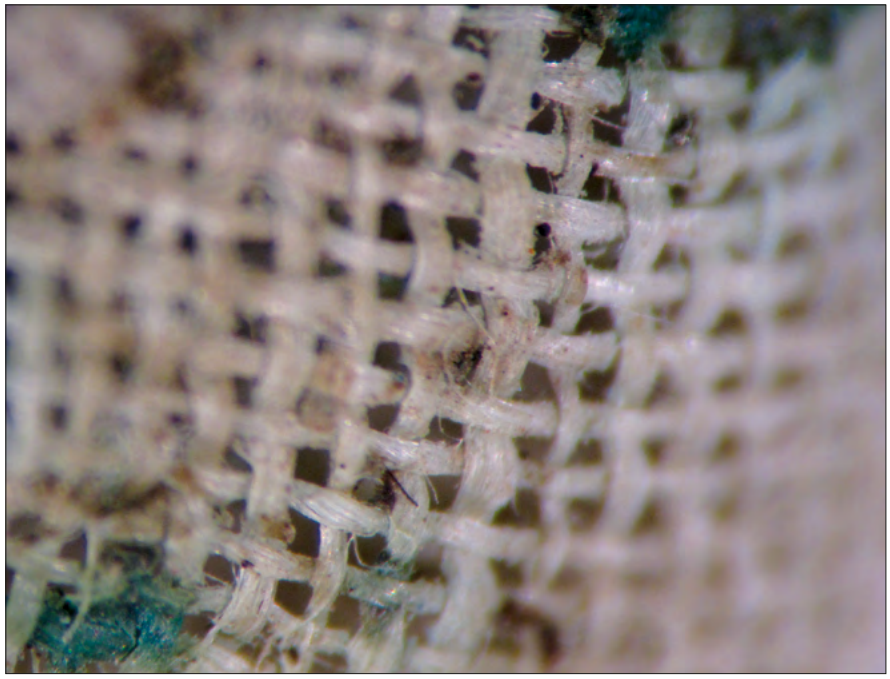

Fig. 7. Gniew, St Nicolas church, northern chapel. A 1/1 plain weave of a flower petal identified as a forget-me-not (photograph by D. Grupa).

smaller and more delicate than carnations, with calyx height of 10–15 mm (Fig. 6) were made of silk textile in plain weave 1/1 (Fig. 7). Calyxes were set on metal stems about 40 mm long. The composition also contained 6 long branches with small leaves or flower buds, 7 metal flower constructions (frames), probably of another species, and over 20 single-flower stamens.

Only lily petals (Fig. 3) have partially kept their original textile white color, the others were green-blue coming from copper alloy corrosion products. The remained, as it was mentioned above, were generally yellow-brownish, although microscope tests revealed at times red glow indicating the original color. The original lily calyx consisted of four petals bent slightly outside with their surface made of pieces of white silk in plain weave 1/1, and the outside surface covered with silk yarn in natural color, glued to it. The construction was supported by brass wires running diagonally, with a diameter of 0,09–0,12 mm. The calyx base was equipped with leaves made of glued silk yarn, originally darker than petal yarn, which circled the stem tight, formed by thin wires of petals ending pieces.

Stems of the wreath and bunch flowers were of various thickness to imitate real flowers (some were single wires wound up with silk thread). Due to long deposition in unfavorable conditions thread, likewise, the flowers are in tea color.

Reconstruction process

It took almost three years to find proper materials for the reconstruction, as similar products' offer at present is very limited, not to mention adequate silk textile of resemble parameters.

The first step in the wreath reconstruction was to make a sketch based on accessible relics of archeological material and the reconstructor's invention.

The next challenge was to find a suitable metal wire, flexible enough to obtain a desirable flower or a leaf shape. Galvanized wire with a diameter of 0,2 mm and brass wire 0,1 mm thick were used for reconstruction.

To make a lily shape one had to prepare spiral wire, winding it on another brass wire piece 1 mm thick. Artificial flowers from Gniew crypt may have been craftsmen handmade products[4], therefore making their reconstruction we used the simplest methods accessible then (pliers). That was a time-consuming process as the distance between wound elements had to be regular. When it was ready, it was cut and modeled to obtain petals and combined together to resemble a lily calyx (Fig. 3).

Another flower did not require such precision as the lily. To make 'arched' petals with spindle-shaped forms a fine piece of wire had to be cut and form parallel eyes. Contrary to making a lily, this flower called iris was not made of many small elements, but of one piece of wire folded and next bent outside. To make the construction compact it was squeezed in a vice. All elements were prepared that way and next a calyx was fixed to a stem. Other stalks consisted of some – 3–4 wires tied together not only using yellow-brown thread, but also another wire.

Lily petals were made of paper in our reconstruction, cut respectively to the desired shape.

Using paper for manufacturing artificial flowers was very popular and the material structure replaced perfectly the original one, which has remained in fragments in both Gniew objects.

Petals of other flowers were made of silk, and cutting the textile with small scissors. In the case of carnations original flowers from the crypt were made of rectangular textile pieces with fringed edges imitating real petals and while reconstructing we used the same method and the textile was fixed to stems with thread (Fig. 9, 10). Carnation petals found in Gniew burial were very flattened as a result of deformation caused by the upper adult person's coffin collapse. Our examples are more voluminous and give the impression that perforations on the edges are not clearly visible.

4 Production of artificial flowers was reported both in monasteries (especially sisterhoods) and specialized workshops around Europe.

Fig. 8. Copy of a lily flower (photograph by T. Kozłowski).

Fig. 9. Copy of an iris flower (photograph by T. Kozłowski).

Fig. 10. Copy of carnation flower (photograph by T. Kozłowski).

Fig. 11. Reconstructive vision of sepulchral bouquet from coffin No. 4, northern crypt B (photograph by T. Kozłowski).

Fig. 12. The presumed appearance of garland inspired by relics discovered in coffin 4, northern crypt (photograph by T. Kozłowski).

Making these fringed edges seemed in the beginning a very easy task, but despite many attempts, we were not able to imitate exactly the original treatment. To make the reconstruction we used small ordinary scissors cutting every single serration, and that method was selected supposing that flowers had been made in that historical period the same way not having any precise instruments (a craftsman making artificial haberdashery from Gniew had not used any matrix because his edges had also irregular fringes).

Glue was used to fasten all elements and stiffen the stems. Taking into account the dating of our finds we can assume that they used one of the natural glues commonly known in Poland as 'pastes', made of e.g. egg whites, rye flour, or starch (Grupa 2015: 48; Grupa, Nowak 2017: 161). In Great Britain they also used from the 18th century onwards glues made of the fish bladder, and animal remains, like cartilage, skin, bones, and soft tissue, but they were rather used in leathermaking and carpentry.

Final result – the flower bunch

Putting all ready flowers together also seemed easy as wire stems were rather flexible. The bunch of flowers relics from Gniew also contained a small metal cross with a hole in the middle which could have served as the bunch base/stand. Our construction was based on fixing together all stems and stabilized with a similar cross. To hide that operation the flowers were tied with a silk band. As the whole burial had been crashed, we can only suppose that the artificial flowers bunch could have consisted only of lilies, or could have been a more complex composition. The authors' vision is depicted on illustration 11.

Wreath reconstruction

A similar problem appeared in the case of the wreath reconstruction. It might have been made of two kinds of artificial flowers (Fig. 12, 13), or some smaller calyxes and natural dry flowers were also added. There may be many variations of the wreath composition as a big number of artificial flowers were excavated in the coffin interior. The reconstructors selected the simpliest one.

Reflections resulting from a wreath and a flower bunch reconstruction works

Basing on the treatment, we worked out some hypotheses on the original process of false haberdashery production. Despite similar materials used – metal wires and silk – some problems appeared, because of which the reconstruction did not fully depicts the original wreath from over three centuries ago. First – making a general

Fig. 13. Visualisation of the placement of the garland on the child's head (on the child's skull) (photograph by T. Kozłowski).

idea and reconstructing flowers basing on highly fragmented archaeological material required enormous creative work. We will probably never learn how exactly the objects' constructions looked like and we must treat the reconstructions as one of the archaeologists' visions. The next problem was the metal alloy for wires. Without laboratory tests, we are not able to confirm the exact composition of the brass wire which was originally used for the wreath. We had to implement modern production brass wire, which unfortunately was less flexible in reenacting complicated shapes of, e.g. lily petals. Therefore we finally used galvanized wire which proved its plasticity. It can be assumed that the original alloy had a different percentage of copper contents than today. Future tests can confirm our hypothesis.

Despite having the same type of silk textile to make flower petals, imitating the original ones turned out to be difficult. Historical craftsmen may have had special tools for manufacturing false haberdashery. The one[5] who produced the set from

5 In this case it can be assumed that particular semi-products were made by different craftsmen. Information on the subject can be found in court records where hatters sue haberdashers in reference to their privileges of decorating particular headdresses (Bogucka 1956: 108; Grupa 2012: 172). In 18th century the work was taken up by modistes creating huge constructions on women's heads. Basing on source analyses it is difficult to establish what professional group prepared grave wreaths – they could have been haberdashers, hatters or gold wire producers (the last group belonged in Gdańsk to the richest citizens; in 18th century urban authorities passed special sumptuary regulations for them) (Grupa 2005: 72; Miazga et al. 2018: 68–76).

Gniew must have been an experienced master of his trade and the objects are the results of handwork for sure.

Literature concerning false haberdashery production reports the problem of bleeding fingers while making metal shapes of wire and it must have been a common phenomenon as there were attempts to prevent mechanical traumas and wounds covering wires with a liquid called *balai* (Schier 1957: 45, 91). During our reconstruction, we did not use anything like that and it must be admitted that the work with metal wires finished with numerous injuries. No wonder that craftsmen invented various preventive measures commonly used although rarely mentioned in the literature (fingers might have been wound up with bandages, although these precise movements had to be made with bare hands). Artificial flowers were presumably the final product of quite a complicated manufacturing process and technological line involving persons producing wire, shaping spirals, and forming particular flower shapes. Some other craftsmen may have formed final products depending on the orders. It can be supposed that most of those small works of art serving as grave decorations may have been produced earlier and not specially just before a funeral. We see it in wreaths and bunches from Gniew. Similar products were used but their compositions differed with the number of flowers, their species, and additions of leaves, branches, or glass beads imitating pearls. We can only imagine other forms made of natural flowers which relics were found in many archaeological sites (Drążkowska 2006; Grupa et al. 2014).

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Streszczenie

Wianki grobowe w literaturze archeologicznej mają już swoją historię. Ich elementy zostały dość dokładnie opisane i rozrysowane. Wykorzystywano zarówno kwiaty naturalne, jak i sztuczne. W badaniach znajdowane są najczęściej kwiaty sztuczne wykonane z przędzy lub tkaniny jedwabnej, papieru i metalowych drucików pierwotnie imitujących złote. Ich kształt, wielkość oraz liczba wkładanych do trumny zależała od indywidualnych upodobań i kwoty przeznaczonej na wykonanie tych ozdób. Dlatego, pomimo dużych podobieństw, każda kompozycja była nieco odmienna.

W 2013 r. w krypcie północnej kościoła pw. św. Mikołaja w Gniewie odnaleziono szczątki dziecka znajdujące się w trumnie sprzed 1680 r. Pomimo że w tym kościele odnaleziono wiele przykładów różnych wianków, ten pochówek był wyjątkowy. Właściwie całe ciało dziecka (poza twarzą) pokrywały elementy sztucznych kwiatów i gałązek wykonanych z drutu i cienkiej blaszki. Takiej obfitości tych elementów jak dotąd nigdzie nie zarejestrowano. Dlatego w pracowni Konserwacji Instytutu Archeologii w Toruniu zdecydowano się na odtworzenie przynajmniej kilku detali z tego pochówku. Starano się wyodrębnić ze zmiażdżonego materiału poszczególne gatunki kwiatów. Były to kielichy goździków, lilii, tulipanów papuzich, dzikiej róży, chabrów i niezapominajek osadzonych na łodyżkach wykonach z drutu. Na podstawie dokumentacji polowej odtworzono ich układ na jedwabnej sukience grobowej (bez pleców).

Od dłuższego czasu w pracowni gromadzono różne tkaniny jedwabne, które można było wykorzystać jako podstawę do odtworzenia sztucznych kielichów kwiatów. Zadania tego podjęła się studentka Barbara Gałka, kalecząc sobie w czasie pracy dłonie, tak jak rzemieślnicy z wcześniejszych wieków. Wcześniej wykonała ona rysunki poszczególnych elementów. Efektem analizy wszystkich elementów, a następnie pracy manualnej są przedstawione na rycinach 11, 12 i 13 wianek i bukiet.

Słowa kluczowe: sztuczne kwiaty, wianek grobowy, XVI–XVIII wiek, rekonstrukcja, krypta, Gniew, Polska

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