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## Women's shoes from the crypt of the church of the Name of the Holy Virgin Mary in Szczuczyn, Podlaskie Voivodship

### Abstract

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During the inventory-arranging works inside the western and eastern crypts under the presbytery conducted in the church of The Name of the Holy Virgin Mary in Szczuczyn, two examples of women's eighteenth-century shoes were found. The first specimen represents a slip-on, leather shoe decorated with silk ribbons. The second one belongs to the class of footwear with a textile upper fastened with a buckle. Excellent conditions prevailing in the crypts ensured that the artefacts have been preserved in very good condition. This permitted detailed research on the raw materials used in constructing the footwear to be conducted. Textiles, leather and wood were subjected to microscopic analysis.

**Key words:** crypts, footwear, 18<sup>th</sup> century, silk, leather, shoemaking, Poland

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### Introduction

During the inventory-arranging works inside the western and eastern crypts under the presbytery (Fig. 1) conducted in the church of The Name of the Holy Virgin Mary in Szczuczyn two examples of women's eighteenth-century shoes were found. They represent two different types. The first one was made entirely of leather, and only the additional, decorative elements, were made of textiles. The second is characterized by an upper made of high quality silk. Both are extremely valuable cognitive examples since artefacts made of organic materials typically quickly decompose. This is related to the soil pH and the putrefaction processes occurring in it (Drażkowska and Grupa 1998, 121–122). An important factor is also the quality of the raw materials used to make the deposited artefacts. Textiles made of cellulosic fibres react differently to those made from animal-based fibres. In the case of leather, the tanner's technique, species differentiation of leather and the area of the animal's body from which it was obtained are of primary importance. No less important is the history of its use, i.e. what damage and deforma-

tions occurred and, finally, what processes took place in its structure during bedding in the layer (silt, mulch) or in the crypt (Grupa 2011). However, the exceptional, permanent conditions prevailing in the crypts in Szczuczyn – low temperature and constant access of fresh air (Dudziński *et al.* 2013, 15–16, Grupa 2012, 109; Kozłowski and Krajewska 2013, 86) meant that the artefacts preserved the majority of their components and have not fundamentally changed colour. If the artefacts are in the soil or silt, the products of iron ions and tannins absorbed by the leather make it become black and less elastic (Grupa 2011, 31).

In the Polish literature on the subject, there have been a small number of publications on eighteenth-century footwear. Among them, these include analysis of shoes excavated in Warsaw (Blusiewicz 2009, 62–72; Blusiewicz 2013), the footwear from the General Carleton shipwreck (Jakimowicz and Rodzik 2008), the shoes from crypts in Szczuczyn (Dudziński *et al.* 2015, 65) and Piaseczno (Kulesz 2018), as well as the general characteristics developed on the basis of both excavated and museum objects (Drażkowska 2011, 235–275). Therefore, it was decided to make a detailed descrip-

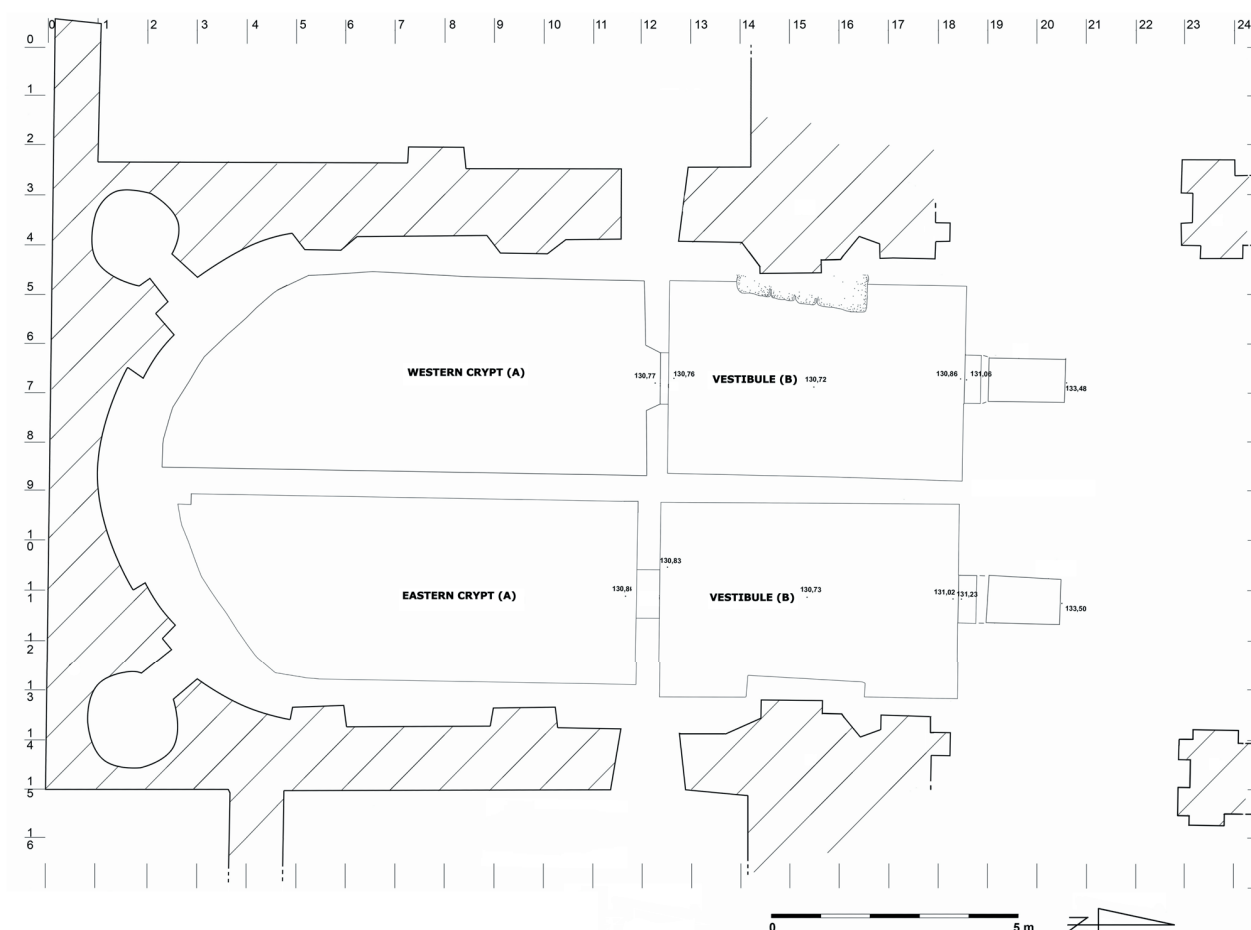


Fig. 1. The architectural plan of the crypts.

tion and carry out a series of material analyses. This permitted the identification of the raw materials and shoemaking techniques used.

## Materials

### The Leather Footwear

Footwear made of leather was found in the eastern crypt. One of the shoes lay on the floor (Fig. 2) and only the one worn on the right foot was found. Unfortunately, it cannot be attributed to a specific burial. However, due to its sole length (20 cm) and shape, it can be clearly stated that it is an example of women's footwear.

The bottom part of the shoe is partially preserved (Fig. 3. 1), with the insole and top lift of the heel missing. The shoe is heightened with a leather covered, three-and-a-half-centimetre heel. The top surface of the heel is concave. This shape ensured the comfortable positioning of the heel part of the foot. A strongly profiled sole lies underneath the wooden heel. The sole

was sewn with a heel cover and vamp. Additionally, wooden pegs fastened it to the heel. The heel was secured with a top lift. Holes in the bottom part of the heel are evidence that it was attached by means of two wooden pegs.

The upper of the footwear is made of soft, well-tanned leather. It consists of the vamp and two quarters. It is additionally reinforced with a low heel stiffener. The top edge of the upper was covered with a textile piping. The bridge part of the vamp was decorated with a small pleats made of silk ribbon (Fig. 4). The decoration was fastened in two rows, arranged one above the other.

The microscopic analyses were carried out on the individual components of the footwear. It was established that the heel was made of birch – a soft wood which was easy to process. The leather used in footwear is categorized into two classes. The first one is soft, vegetable-tanned leather, 1 mm thick. It was made of calf skin (Fig. 5). It was used to make the upper elements and heel cover. The second one is harder, also vegetable-tanned, 1.5 mm thick. It was used to make

the sole. The grain of the sole has been heavily worn during use, meaning that further analysis is impossible. However, it can be assumed that cowhide was used for this purpose. This kind of leather is characterized by adequate strength and was most often used for sole-making (Kowalska and Radek 2015, 234).

The ribbon used to make the piping has a width of about 1 cm. It is bicolour, white and dark beige. It was folded in half and the white part was attached to the inner edge of the footwear, while the dark part was visible from the outside. It is made in a linen weave 1/1, with an unresolved edge. The weave is very loose and the warp is made of white and dark silk. The warp on the bright side is in the S-spun and on the dark side on the Z-spun. The weft is non-spun.

The ribbon attached to the instep is made of a linen weave 1/1, with a width of 1.6 cm. There are 50 (2 ×) warp threads per 1 cm (each thread consists of two strongly S-spun bands) and 16 non-spun weft threads. Such a number of thin threads of a warp into a thick threads of a weft gives the impression of a warp rip weave.

The twine connecting the individual leather elements is made of vegetable fibres (flax or hemp). Unfortunately, its condition does not allow to deter-

mine the spin type or amount of bands that make up a single thread.

The leather shoe was undoubtedly used during the deceased's life. A strongly worn sole and signs of wear on the upper (lateral parts of the vamp) testify to the results of intensive use. The thickness and delicacy of the leathers used may have significantly reduced the strength of shoes and led to their faster wearing. At the same time, the presence of the heel stiffener shows that the craftsman wanted to maximize the lifetime of the object.

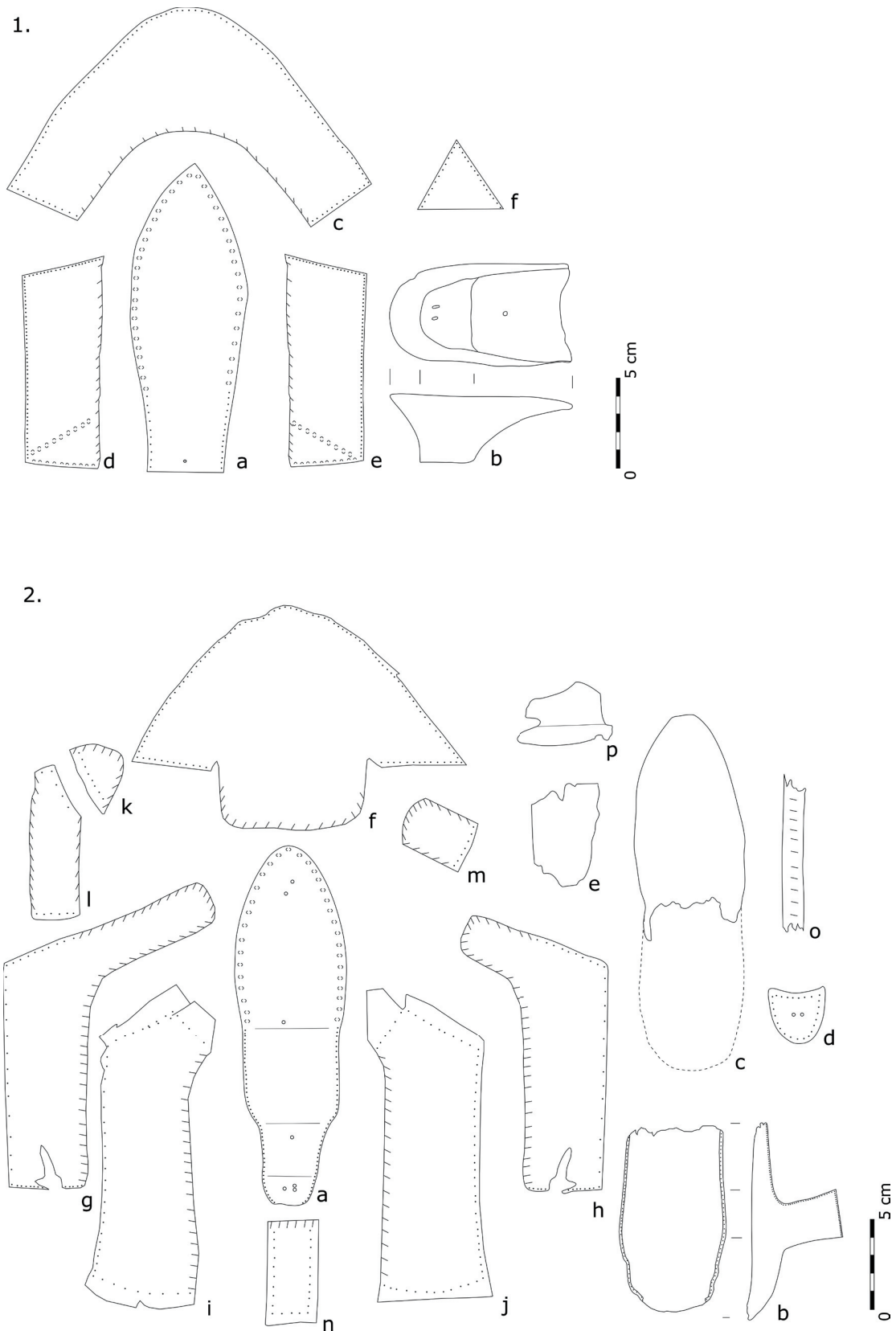
### The Footwear with a Textile Upper

The second analysed artefact was discovered in the western crypt and associated with the burial no. 8. The sole length (21,5 cm) and shape shows that it is a female shoe (Fig. 6).

The bottom of the footwear is constructed of two layers: a sole and insole (Fig. 3. 2). The sole grain was turned inward, with the bottom heightened with a wooden, five-centimetre heel, covered with a light cream leather. As in case of the leather shoe, the heel is concave. From the bottom, the heel is covered by a dark brown, contrasting sole. The top lift is an ad-



Fig. 2. The leather shoe *in situ*.



**Fig. 3.** 1. Leather shoe parts: a. sole, b. heel, c. vamp, d., e. quarters, f. heel stiffener; 2. Textile shoe parts: a. sole, b. heel, c. insole, d. top lift, e. wooden sole reinforcement, f. vamp, g., h. leather quarters reinforcement, i., j. quarters, k., l., m. parts of the latches, n. back stitch cover, o. silk piping, p. satin lining



Fig. 4. The decoration of the leather shoe.

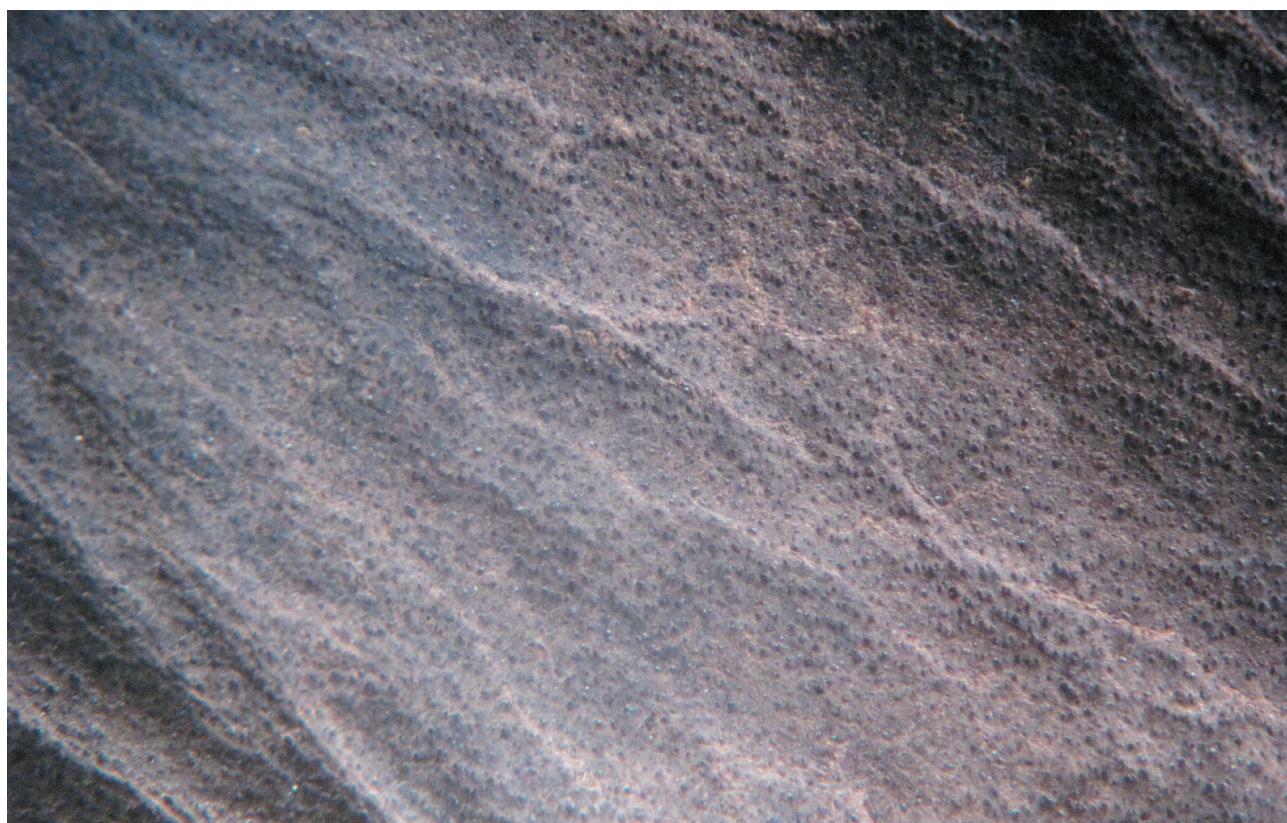


Fig. 5. The microscopic view of the vamp's grain.



Fig. 6. The shoe with a textile upper before conservation.

ditional means of reinforcement. It was fastened with a stitch hidden in an oblique cut made underneath the sole (protecting the twine against moisture) and two wooden pegs (Fig. 7). The heel was fastened with a stitch connecting the heel and the insole. In order to stiffen the tread and waist between the sole and the insole, a wooden stave was placed there and fastened with twine. The sole has an almond, strongly upcurved toe. A small piece of greenish fabric was found between the heel cover and the wooden core (Fig. 8). It can be presumed that this is the remnant of the footwear lining.

The upper of the footwear was made of silk fabric with a fine geometric pattern. The edges were sewn with silk ribbon. Unfortunately, as a result of its deposition in the crypt, the colours have changed the shades slightly. The upper of the shoe consists of quite a large number of components: a vamp with a low, square tongue; two quarters; three small elements – parts of latches; piping and reinforcement of the back stitch. All the above-mentioned elements, except the trimming, were made of one type of red, silk fabric, with a geometric pattern (isosceles triangles). The silk is currently claret-coloured and the triangles are pink. The ribbon used to pimp the upper edge of the footwear was

bicolour. The weft was in the natural colour of the silk, and the warp was made up of red threads. Currently, the colours have changed to beige-gold and dark red. The economy of the craftsman is worth noting. The latches were cut from small fragments, probably made of larger cut-offs that remained after other work. The upper stiffness was given by the bottom layer made of soft, light leather. The shape of the leather elements corresponds to those of the quarters. The edges of both quarters and the reinforcement were sewn at the top with an overhand stitch.

Originally, the footwear was fastened with a buckle. However, it was deposited in the grave in a budget version, fastened with a pin made of copper or its alloy. This is indicated by the greenish colour of the corrosion products deposit on its surface (Grupa 2013, Grupa and Łukaszewicz 2019 – in this volume).

As in the case of the leather footwear, in order to determine the raw materials used more precisely, microscopic analyses were carried out. The heel was made of limewood/linden, another softwood. This kind of wood allows a strongly profiled shape to be given to the heel. Due to the poor condition of the wooden reinforcement of the sole, it was impossible to obtain a preparation



Fig. 7. The top lift fitting.

from it and the use of a more invasive preparation method would probably lead to the destruction of this element of the artefact. However, it can be identified as a soft, flexible broad-leaved tree – e.g. hazel, birch, willow or limewood/linden. The size of wooden pegs was also a preventing factor, so they were not analysed.

The leather used in the shoe is of two types. The first type is calf leather – soft and thin, alum tanned (Fig. 9), it was both aesthetic and functional. Its thickness was only 1 mm and the use of such delicate leather was to stabilize the quarters but also enhance user comfort. On the other hand, the light leather covering of a heel provided an interesting visual effect by contrasting it with the dark sole. The second type of leather is harder, made from cowhide (Fig. 10) and tanned with vegetable tannins. It was used to make the sole and the top lift of the heel and has a thickness of only 1.5 mm.

The last raw material group are textiles. Three types of fabrics and two types of threads were tested. The first thread was used to connect the elements of the upper. This was a red silk thread, made of two strands. Each of the strands was in the gentle S-spun and consisted of six filaments. The second thread is a twine, made of vegetable fibre (hemp or flax), two-

strand (Fig. 10). Each of the strand was in the S-spun, and then both were spun again in the same way. The twine was used to make joints between the leather elements of the bottom.

The fabric used to make the parts of the upper has a harmonious geometric ornament, emphasized by the colour of the threads used. The background was dark, cherry-red, and the ornamentation (isosceles triangles) was light red. The fabric background is the linen weave, 1/1. The centimetre of fabric consisted of 50 threads of non-spun warp and 40 threads of non-spun weft. A geometric pattern was made by introducing additional warp threads. The pattern was created by means of the differentiation of the interlacing. The smallest loose interlace included two weft threads and the longest, seven (Fig. 11).

The upper piping is made of silk ribbon, with a total width 1.15 cm. It is divided into parts – the central zone and the separated side edges. The edge is made up of five warp threads in a weave 2/1. A warp consists of two strands, each in a delicate S-spun. The main zone is in a linen weave 1/1. For each centimetre there are 20 non-spun, red warps and 32 wefts in a delicate S-spun. Each weft consists of four strands (Fig. 12).



Fig. 8. The lining fragment.

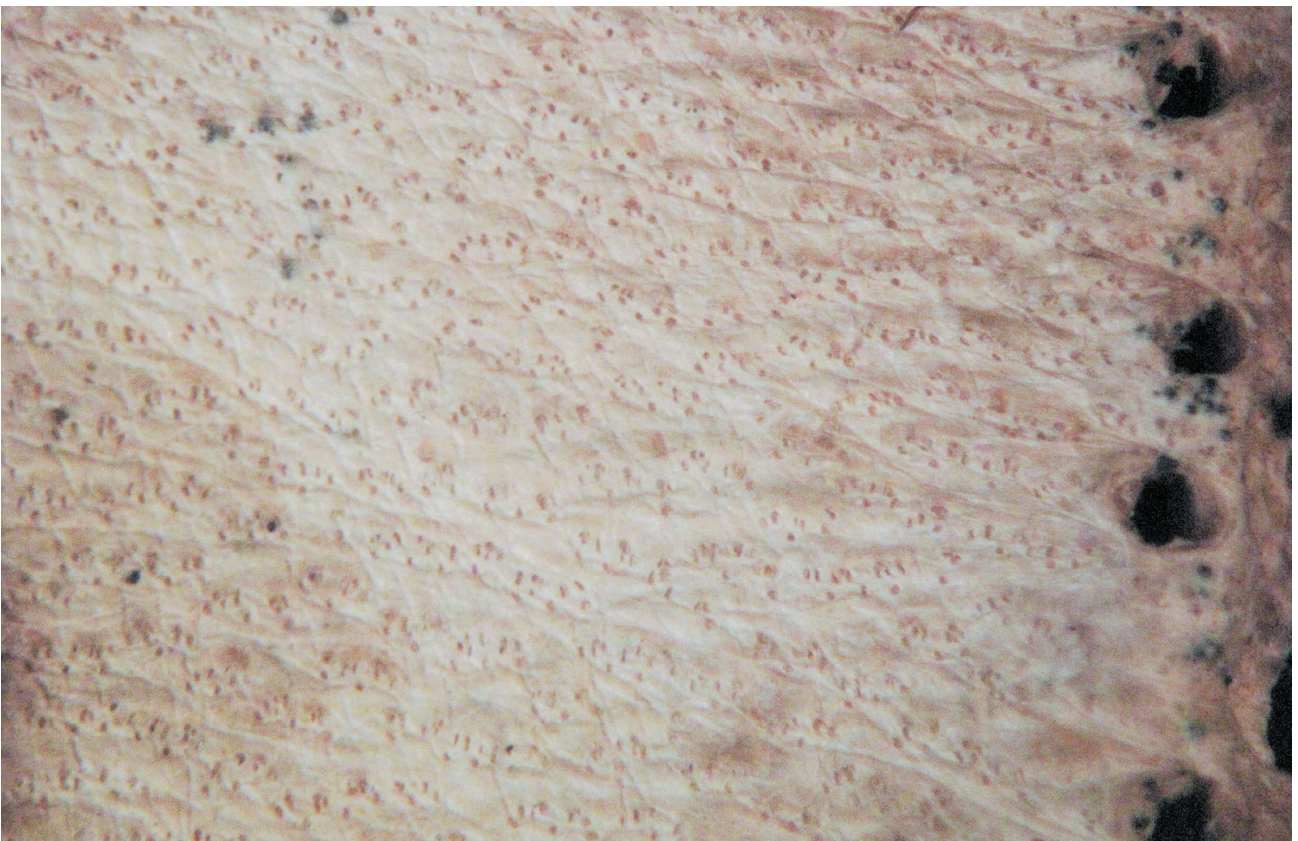


Fig. 9. The alum tanned leather.





Fig. 10. The sole leather and the twine of the textile shoe.

The last analysed type of fabric is the lining. It was made in satin weave, 5/1. For each centimetre there are 96 warps in S-spun and 32 non-spun wefts.

The textile footwear was certainly not just made for the funeral ceremony. The extremely precise nature of the seams and a textile insert on the heel covering the seam, prove that it was worn during the deceased's lifetime.

#### Style and dating of the Szczuczyn Shoes

The leather shoes can be described as low, and according to Goubitz's typology – based on the fastening methods – it should be included as type 90 – slipped footwear (Goubitz *et al.* 2011, 219–227). The footwear with a textile upper is also a low variety, reaching up to the ankle. In Goubitz's typology it represents type 135 – footwear fastened with a buckle on latches (Goubitz *et al.* 2011, 289–295).

The footwear described above was made as an accessory to outfits made in the western European

style (Fig. 13). Unfortunately, the garments worn with the leather shoes were probably destroyed. However, linking the textile footwear to a specific burial allowed us to analyse the dress of the deceased young woman to whom it belonged (burial No. 8 – western crypt). The dress and accessories distinguished in the entire set of grave dresses in Szczuczyn. The gown was made in the style à la *française* with a stomacher, an open robe and a petticoat. The outer dress and petticoat were made of the same fabric. Each of the pleats made along the vertical edges of the outer dress was adorned with two types of bobbin lace of different widths. On her legs, the woman had white, silk stockings that contrasted with the red shoes, although the viewers of the *Pompa Funerbris* would not have seen them since noblewomen of the day did not reveal even their ankles (Grupa 2012, 238). Dresses of this type were worn from the first half of the eighteenth century (Boucher 2004, 264–266; Możdżyńska-Nawotka 2002, 156–157). The crypts in Szczuczyn began to function in 1711, one year after the death of the church's founder Stanisław Antoni

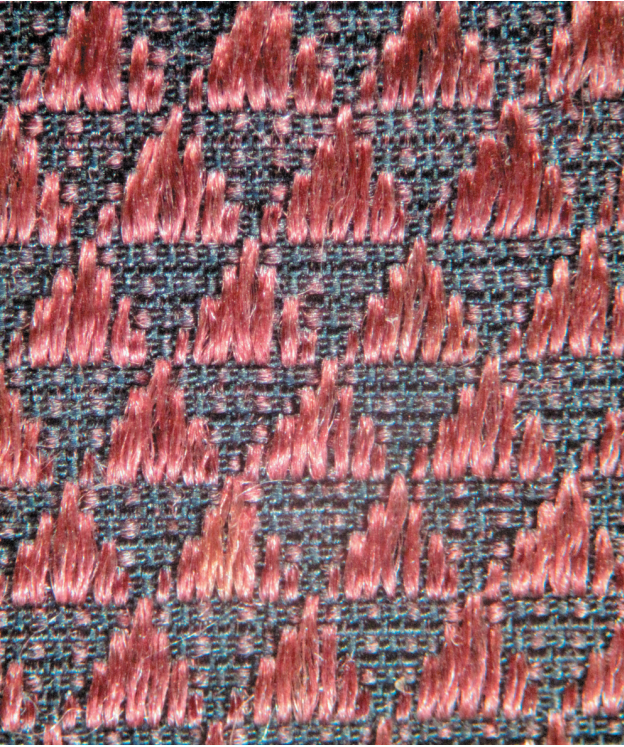


Fig. 11. The fabric with a geometric pattern.

Szczuka (Dudziński *et al.* 2013, 10, 12, 14–15). The dead woman could not have been laid to rest there any earlier. In Toruń, in the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, women buried in the Czapski crypt had grave dresses in the same type. The Czapski crypt was built after 1724, when the church returned to Catholic control (Grupa 2005, 24). Therefore, it should be assumed that dresses from Toruń and Szczuczyn were made in the eighteenth century.

Shoes connected with the *Szczuczyn robe à la française* had soles with almond, upcurved noses. This feature allows to narrow down the dating of the object. This shape of nose was the most popular in the first half of the eighteenth century (Swann 1982, 29). However, the use of a geometric fabric to make shoes in this style is surprising. At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, baroque, richly embroidered or woven fabrics were still fashionable. According to June Swann, monochromatic fabrics with geometrical patterns became popular in the 70s and 80s (Swann 1982, 29). Museum objects, e.g. no. T.436-1913 from V&A Museum or no. SM43 in Bayerischen Nationalmuseum München (Durian-Ress 1991, 81), show that the first

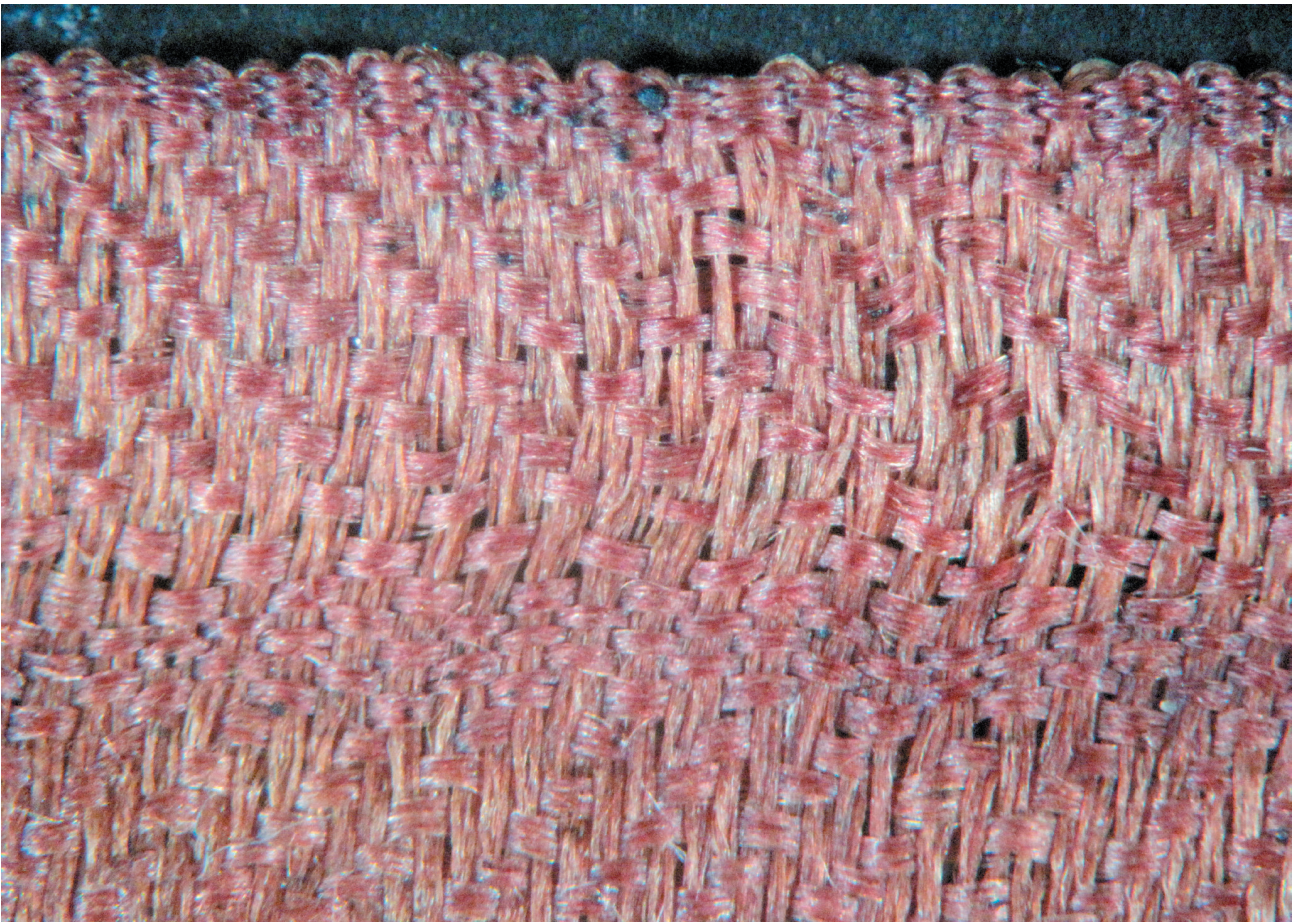


Fig. 12. The silk ribbon.



Fig. 13. Francois Boucher. Portrait of Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour. Alte Pinakothek, Munich. 1756. Public domain.

examples made from more subtle fabrics can be dated to the 1750s – 1760s. Therefore, if we consider all the elements: the use of a geometric fabric, a fairly low heel and an upcurved nose, we know that the entire toilette of the deceased was created about the middle of the century.

The shape of the leather footwear and the height of its heel indicate that it was made in the second half of the eighteenth century. Leather shoes of the type described above became popular in the 1780s (Turnau 1967, 278). The textile elements used in this footwear – ribbons, give no hints as to the dating. They were produced in the same way in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Grupa and Grupa 2013, 44–51, Grupa *et al.* 2015, 49–52).

The style of the footwear confirms the trend observed so far. Polish noblewomen, unlike their fathers, husbands and sons, preferred fashion patterns from Western Europe (Fig. 14). Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, especially since the reign of the queens, Marie Louise Gonzaga (known in Poland as Ludwika Maria Gonzaga de Neveres) (1646–1667) and Marie Casimire Louise de La Grange d'Arquien (1674–1696), women diligently tried to follow the latest trends (Janisz 2016, 52, 55). In



**Fig. 14.** Louis de Silvestre. Portrait of Katarzyna Barbara Branicka from the Radziwiłł family. Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, Wilanów. c. 1730. Public domain.

one nobleman's house we have two coexisting worlds. Eastern (Polish, Sarmatian) chosen by men and western preferred by women (Grupa 2005, 98, 108). Research in Szczuczyn confirms these conclusions, with Polish style garments definitely prevailing in men's clothing and western dresses predominating in women's (Grupa 2012, 110–112, Grupa *et al.* 2013, 99–104).

### Character of the Szczuczyn footwear

A number of solutions used in both pairs of footwear find analogies in examples known both from the lands of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and elsewhere in Europe. Shoemakers had to know the techniques and trends used in the shoemaking of the day and among them we can mention:

The leather reinforcement of textile quarters. An, analogous solution was used in textile footwear stored in the National Museum in Warsaw, probably belonging to Teresa Kunegunda Sobieska (Drażkowska 2011, 249), or in footwear no. 2009.300.4744a, stored at the Metropolitan Museum of Arts in Boston.

Wooden reinforcement between the sole and the insole in textile footwear. Although it was not possible to determine the wood from which it was made, it can be suspected that, like the artefacts discovered in Jabłonowski Square in Warsaw, it was made of the tree's secondary phloem (Blusiewicz 2013, 208). The flexibility and quite high durability of phloem perfectly suits the needs of this type of reinforcement.

The light, alum-tanned leather (Turnau 1983, 49–52) contrasted with the dark, vegetable-tanned one gives a remarkable visual effect. Craftsmen in the eighteenth century clearly appreciated this technique. It is quite commonly found in former footwear, e.g. footwear from the Bayerischen Nationalmuseum München catalogued under number I 7-260 (Durian-Ress 1991, 76) or footwear with inventory no. 270 & A-1890 and No. T.64 & A-1935 from the Victoria & Albert Museum in London.

Heel stiffener used in leather footwear. Many modern shoes have various types of reinforcements, the purpose of which was to extend the life of the footwear. Although in modern times mainly toe and sides reinforcements have been used, the heel stiffeners were also applied by European shoemakers. Their presence is recorded even in the second half of the eighteenth century, e.g. in men's leather footwear from Groningen (Goubitz *et al.* 2011, 293; Fig. 10), or women's footwear stored at the MET Museum in Boston (no. C.I.50.8.22a, b).

Unfortunately, the character of the buckle worn with textile footwear cannot be described. The absence

of this item in the burial is not surprising, especially since the buckles used in that period could be freely removed and replaced. This feature allowed the appearance of the footwear to be modified. A buckle dedicated to such a rich shoe could have been valuable, perhaps even incusted or jewel-encrusted (Drażkowska 2011, 280–281). Therefore, this kind of accessory was a significant asset that could be passed down or sold to cover funeral expenses.

Analogously constructed footwear is stored in many world museums. Among them: Victoria and Albert Museum in London, e.g. no. T.436-1913; 230 & A-1908; T.444A-1913 or 270 & A-1890 (<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/> – accessed on 20.06.2019), Kyoto Costume Institute no. AC4790 84-5-3AB ([https://www.kci.or.jp/en/archives/digital\\_archives/1700s\\_1750s/KCI\\_004](https://www.kci.or.jp/en/archives/digital_archives/1700s_1750s/KCI_004) – access: 20/06/2019), Metropolitan Museum of Art in Boston, e.g. no. 2001.345a, b; 2009.300.1482; 2009.300.4740a, b; 2009.300.4743a, b. (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/> – access: 20/06/2019), or Bayerischen Nationalmuseum München (Durian-Ress 1991, 74–82).

## Conclusions

The footwear discovered in Szczuczyn confirms the thesis that western style fashions spread throughout the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Textile shoes represent a particularly popular type in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The leather shoes from the second half of the century have a lower heel, and no longer feature an upcurving nose, which is typical of the fashion of that time (Turnau 1967, 279). The delicate character of the textile footwear and the exposed to the damage sole indicate that it was worn indoors. In the course of possible external use, it was probably covered with protective footwear. On the other hand, the leather shoes definitely played the role of everyday shoes worn outside (Pratt and Woolley 2008, 35). In both examples, the shoemaker's precision is noteworthy, with the shoes being perfectly stitched and cut. Their luxurious character is not only an effect of the wonderful craft, but also of the high-quality raw materials – silks and delicate leathers. The deceased women had high social status and were wealthy enough to be laid to rest in the crypt. The shoes which they wore were a confirmation of their position in society. The excellent conditions prevailing in Szczuczyn's crypts afforded the opportunity to carry out detailed analyses. This allowed us to take a closer look at the technology and raw materials used to make eighteenth-century women's shoes.

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