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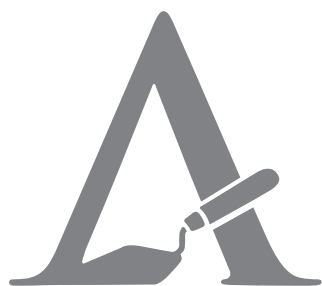
ARCHAEOLOGICA RESSOVIENSIA

VOLUME **18** RZESZÓW 2023



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The “Cow-mouth” Footwear from Coffin no. 7 in the Presbytery of the St Nicholas Church in Gniew (Poland)

Abstract

Kozłowski T., Nowosad W., Nalaskowski F., Grupa D. 2023. The “Cow-mouth” Footwear from Coffin no. 7 in the Presbytery of the St Nicholas Church in Gniew (Poland). *Analecta Archaeologica Ressoiviensia* 18, 183–203

This article presents a comprehensive analysis of a pair of shoes excavated during archaeological research in the chancel of the St. Nicholas Church in Gniew, found on the feet of a man over 60. It is the first pair of Renaissance “cow-mouth” type shoes excavated from a grave. The results of the study of both archaeological material (footwear, velvet headgear covered with embroidery using threads in a metal braid) and iconography – portrait depictions, group scenes, and archival sources – confirmed the high social status of the deceased.

Keywords: Renaissance, footwear, markers, social differentiation, Gniew, Poland

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Introduction

The Church of St Nicholas in Gniew is a Gothic, three-nave hall church, the main body having been built in the 2nd half of the 14th century in a town which, during the reign of the Teutonic Order, was the seat of a commandery residing in a nearby castle. After the Thirteen Years' War (1454–1466), the whole area came under Polish rule, and the former commandery became the seat of a non-city starosty governed by an official nominated by the king – the starost. From that time until the First Partition of Poland in 1772, Gniew was regarded as a royal town, and successive starosts had an overwhelming influence on its development (Strzelecka 1982, 54–55; Mross 1997, 53; Grupa *et al.* 2015, 11).

The research at St. Nicholas Church in Gniew was conducted by a team led by Małgorzata Grupa from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń between 2009 and 2016. The stone floor (cracked in many places, with large cavities in the outer layer) was systematically removed. The layered graves were inventoried, as well as the crypts found – the northern, southern and south-western part of the chancel (Majorek and Grupa 2014; Grupa *et al.* 2015; Nowak *et al.* 2015, 425–438; Grupa 2016, 183; 2023a, 234–248; Grupa and Nowak 2017; Grupa and Warecka 2018, 31–40; Grupa and Łukaszewicz 2019, 137–152; Kozłowski and Grupa 2019, 33–49; Jarzęcki and Grupa 2020, 245–262).

Trench 1/13 was opened in the northeastern part of the chancel, next to the Gothic altar. Its dimensions

were 300 × 460 cm and were adapted accordingly to the previously conducted research. In this section, 14 burials in wooden coffins were discovered. Subsequently, an extension was made in the central part of the chancel just in front of the contemporary altar table and marked as trench 1a/13 (Fig. 1), measuring 170 × 300 cm. Nine coffins were discovered in this space. The burial furnishings from the chancel were varied and rich. Here, leather prayer book covers were discovered in addition to fragments of silk fabrics, shoe elements, flowers and graves wreaths. Burials preserve only artificial variants (Wojciechowska 2014; Grupa *et al.* 2015, 117–122; Grupa 2023b, 232–252).

After examining the individual burials in trench 1a/13, it was found that they were intact and undisturbed by the subsequent actions of the gravediggers. The layering of the discovered coffins consisted of the addition of new coffins. This was done by digging into an earlier burial and placing a new coffin with the body of the deceased on top. Natural taphonomic processes led to the decomposition of the coffin boards, so coffin 4, placed on top of coffin 7, collapsed into the lower coffin (Fig. 2). This was a situation repeated quite often under the floor of the Gniew church, and it was not always possible to separate the furnishings of the two coffins. In this case, however, it was easier. Coffin 4 contained the remains of a child (deceased in age category *infans I*), while coffin 7 contained the bones of an adult male (age category *senilis*). In addition, the lower boards from the lid of the child's coffin were preserved well enough to remove the child's burial from the contents of the older man's burial. Therefore, there was no problem in separating his grave furnishings, which consisted of fragments of silk fabric decorated with inlaid embroidery using silk thread wrapped with metal tape (Fig. 3) and dismembered elements of leather shoes with a very characteristic cut (Fig. 4), not found in graves investigated so far by the archaeology team from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.

Characteristics of the footwear of the deceased from coffin No. 7

In the uncovered pair of footwear, the right and left foot coverings could be seen with relatively wide, flat toes; a unique discovery in grave research. The preservation of the shoes can generally be described as average. The leather is non-uniform, i.e. brown, dark brown and brown. On the preserved soles and fragments of the vamp and uppers, there is surface discolouration, loss of grain, tiny missing pieces of leather, perfora-

tions, cracks and heavy rubbing, and compression of the leather and deformations (creases). Undoubtedly, the greater part of this damage is due to taphonomic processes – damage due to insect activity is visible in some parts – although some marks and damage can undoubtedly be linked to quite intensive human use of this footwear. There can therefore be no doubt that the deceased was buried in the shoes worn when he was alive. Despite the destruction of some parts of the shoes, it was possible to reconstruct their appearance, the way they were fastened, and their construction.

The inner side of the footwear was constructed “in the turnover” manner, which was still used in shoemaking in the 2nd half of the 15th century. The stud marks in the metatarsal, heel, and forefoot area show that the sewing process was no different to that of the Middle Ages. The soles were punched with a distinction between the right and left foot. The outer soles were made of cowhide (Fig. 5). The length of the soles (a layer of subcutaneous tissue that has not been entirely removed from the leather that is the inner part of the shoe sole – Fig. 6) is 262 mm and corresponds to a contemporary size 40–41 EU (6.5–7 UK). In contemporary terms, the shoes' owner, for a man, did not have an exceptionally large foot. The widths of the toe forefoot, metatarsal and heel are: 85, 92, 45 and 53 mm, respectively. The metatarsal is softly trimmed on both sides, and the heel is rounded. The bottom construction is reinforced with a multi-part rand sewn between the shoe's sole and top. The most abrasion-prone area of the sole – the heel – has been reinforced by sewing a heel reinforcement.

The upper of the footwear was cut in a single-cut system, although it should be noted that the construction inserts are extensive in size. The right and left copies were not cut from the same template. They differ in the size of the inserts used in one and the other. On the left, one of the vertical seams connecting the parts of the vamp and the upper falls in the middle of the heel. On the right, it is moved towards the foot's inner (medial) side, and the other two diagonal seams are made in the same place – on the inner side of the forefoot. The shoe's upper was reinforced at the heel by sewing a triangular heel counter 65 mm high and 143 mm wide, and at the upper edge by sewing a 10 mm wide leather top band folded in half. The front of the footwear was built-up, which is not the most common solution in this category of footwear. An approximately eight-centimetre-long slit was situated on the instep, allowing the foot to be inserted freely. Four round holes were made on its sides for tying the shoe with a thong. Single traces of stitching in the forefoot

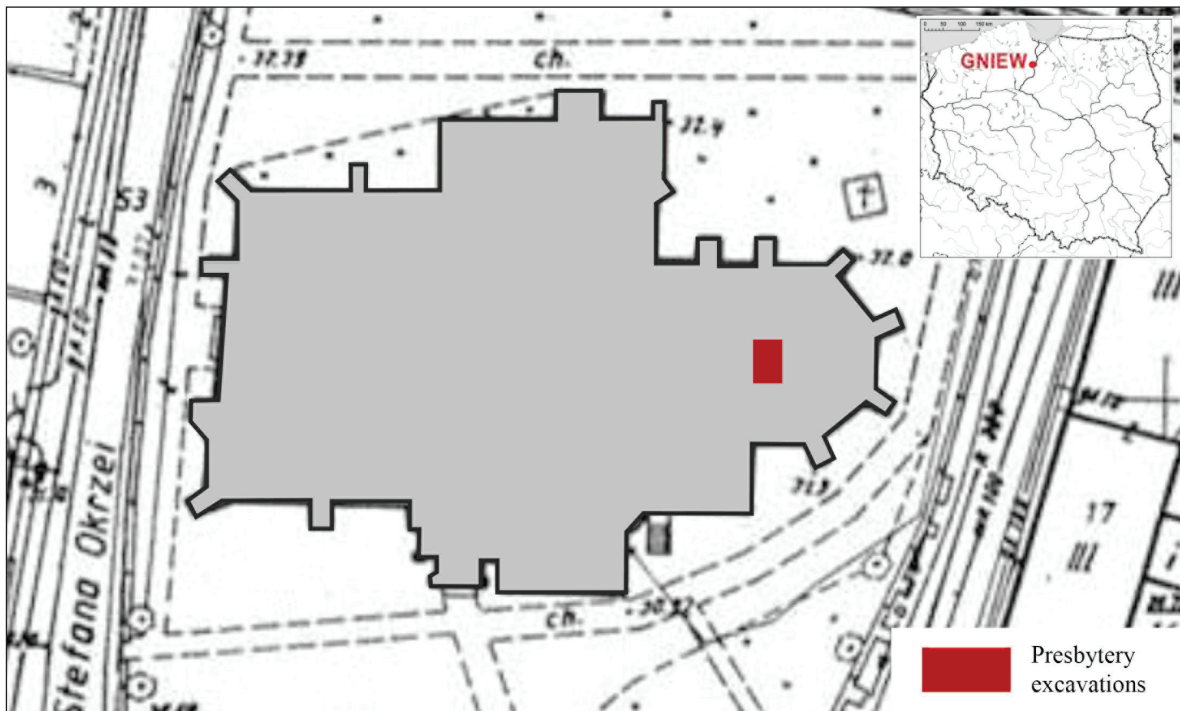


Fig. 1. Gnień, St Nicolas church. The trench location inside the church.
Gnień's location on a map of Poland (digitalization by D. Grupa).



Fig. 2. Gnień, St Nicolas church. Situation in trench 1a/2013 after exposing the outlines of coffins 4 and 7
(photo by M. Nowak).



Fig. 3. Fragment of silk fabric decorated in the inlaid embroidery technique (photo by D. Grupa).

area, located on the flesh side, may indicate that the toe was reinforced with some form of lining. However, the poor state of object preservation does not allow us to unequivocally confirm this observation. The pair of shoes discovered in Gniew reached just above the ankle (the height of the upper at the heel: 90 mm).

All of the described features raised doubts about whether the two shoes could be attributed to a single pair. It was decided to take a closer look at the utilitarian damage because these traces are linked to the form and function of the footwear analysed, the quality of

the material from which the shoes were made and the intensity and duration of their use, as well as the structure and biomechanics of the foot that the footwear analysed protected. Consequently, these traits can provide us with a great deal of valuable information, not only about the form and construction of historical footwear but can also be an indirect source of knowledge about their owner (Grupa and Kozłowski 2023, in print; Kozłowski *et al.* 2023, in print).

From the point of view of footprint analyses, it is the soles that seem to be of most interest. On the soles

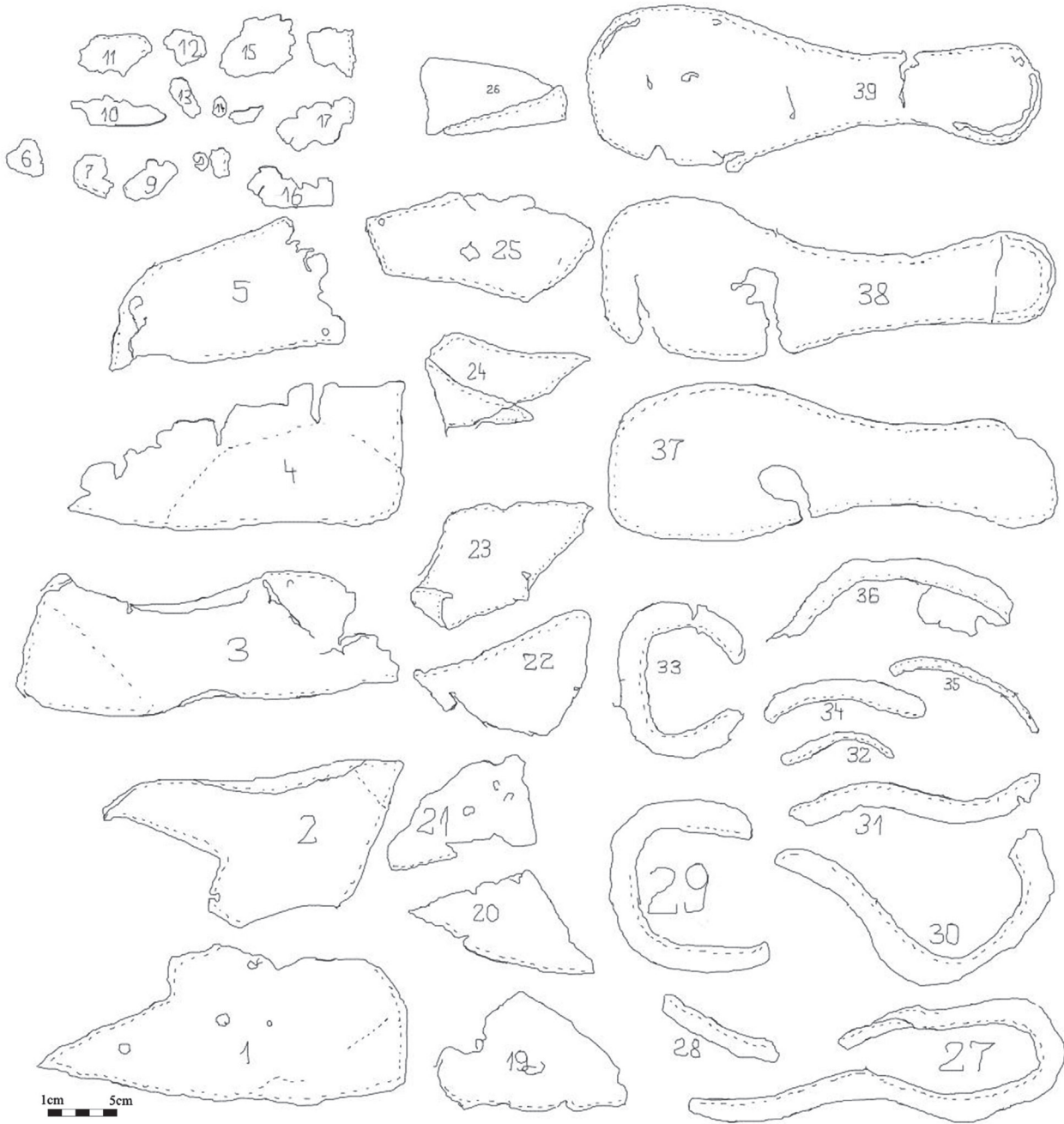


Fig. 4. Elements of footwear found from coffin 7 (drawn by F. Nalaskowski).

of the shoes, traces of contact with the foot and the ground are visible. Certain areas of the sole are also subject to the most significant forces: pressure – compression, tension, friction, bending, and straightening. The chemical environment (e.g. the effect of perspiration) may also be mentioned. In the case of the footwear analysed, both soles are preserved (Fig. 7). They have an asymmetrical shape in the sagittal plane. They also appear to be mirror images of each other. Together with the asymmetry, this indicates that the soles were parts of a left (Fig. 7: A) and a right shoe

(Fig. 7: B). Although the soles are relatively similar in shape, length, and width, it is possible to observe differences between them (Fig 7: C). We considered these dissimilarities to be significant and this has already been mentioned earlier.

The main difference concerns the outline (shape) of the soles, above all in their front part and in the course of the carving line on the foot's medial (inside) side. The right sole is, in the area of the so-called shoe nose (its front edge), more rounded than the one on the opposite side, which seems to be "angular". The



Fig. 5. Area of bare skin on the outer sole (photo by D. Grupa).



Fig. 6. Layer of subcutaneous tissues not removed during tanning – inner sole (photo by D. Grupa)

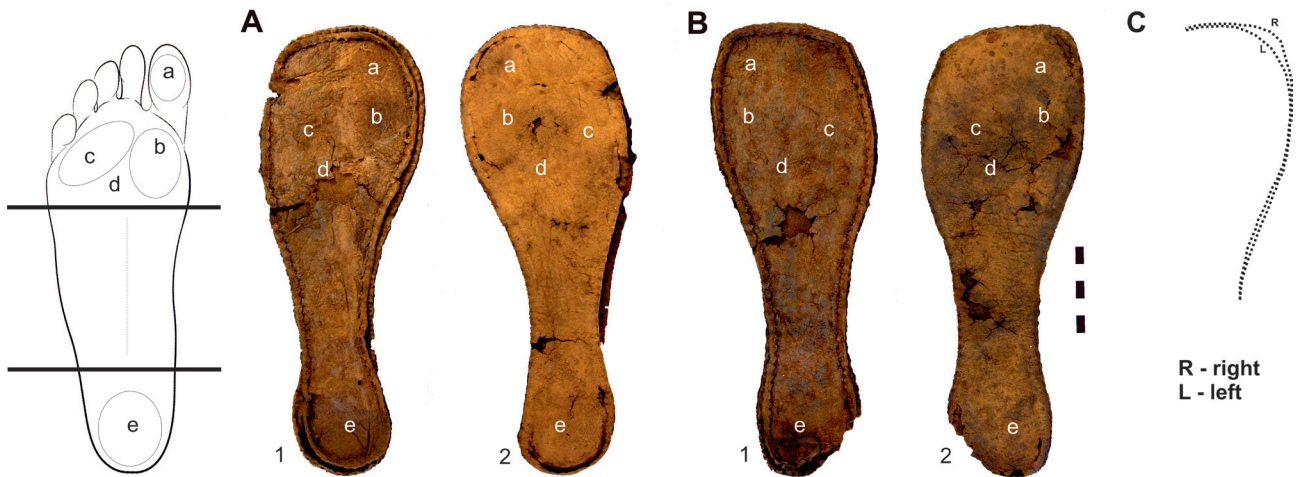


Fig. 7. Human foot from the sole side and its regions.

a – surface of the first toe pad, b – surface of the thenar, c – plantar region of toes II–V, d – beginning of the longitudinal arch of the foot, e – area of the heel surface; A – left sole, B – right sole (1 – “obverse” sole, 2 – “reverse” sole), C – course of the longitudinal arch of the foot between its approximate borders (photo by T. Kozłowski).

left sole is a slightly deeper cut on the medial side. Two hypotheses can be made here regarding this state of affairs. The first would relate to the inaccuracy of the cobbler who constructed these shoes. He may have been using a pattern for the left and right sides, which did not maintain the proper symmetry. On the other hand, it also cannot be ruled out that the deceased had shoes on his feet that were not from the same pair. This may be suggested by the different course of stitches on the uppers of the shoes (Fig. 8). In one case, it is a single seam that runs at the back of the heel (in the sagittal plane of the limb) in the other it is laterally located and has an oblique course (Fig. 9). Given that the shoes analysed were generally quite worn, it does not seem entirely improbable that two shoes (here less worn) from two pairs of similar footwear were completed for the coffin. It can also be assumed that custom-made shoes did not have to be symmetrical at all, they could have a slightly different cut for the left and right foot. These are nuances that are rather impossible to grasp in shredded leather materials.

Both soles are damaged by use in a fairly similar manner and to a relatively similar degree (Fig. 7), although, on the grain surface, slightly more damage characterises the left sole. Both on the side adjacent to the foot (flesh surface) and in contact with the ground (“reverse side of the sole”), the marks left by the different areas of the shoe owner’s foot are evident: the first (“great”) toe, the ball of the first toe (head of the Ist metatarsal bone), the balls region of the head of the II–V metatarsal bones and the heel (Grdzeliżce 2017, 3). These marks take the form of discoloura-

tion, abrasion of the skin surface, and compression. On the reverse side, additionally, there are convexities and cracks. Damage to the soles occurring just below the head of the metatarsal bones is the most visible, mainly in the area of contact with the ball of the first toe (head of the Ist metatarsal bone). The same is true in the heel area, and these are the areas where the human foot exerts the most pressure. Below the area of the heads of the metatarsal bones, at the beginning of the foot’s longitudinal arch, the flesh surface is severely cracked and characterised by cavities. This section of the sole is particularly exposed to bending and straightening as well as friction during gait and the foot’s detachment from the ground (propulsion), which, over time, must lead to fatigue of the material and its mechanical destruction. The degree of expression of the marks indicates that the shoes were undoubtedly used intensively. As a result of this damage, the soles, and therefore more broadly the shoes, lost some of their protective qualities, which may also have been reflected in the comfort of the shoes.

The soles are least damaged in the area corresponding to the longitudinal arch of the foot up to the limit of the arch in the posterior section (just near the surface of the heel). This corresponds to the natural anatomy of the human foot. It can also be inferred from this that the wearer of the shoes most likely did not suffer from flat feet; on the contrary, the longitudinal arch of the foot was high. At the border of the longitudinal arch and the heel zone, cracks and breaks in the skin are again visible, in this case mainly on the grain surface of the sole. It can be suspected that



Fig. 8. Joining of heel counter elements – left shoe (photo by D. Grupa).



Fig. 9. Joining the side elements of the insole – right shoe (photo by D. Grupa).



Fig. 10. A fragment of the left shoe on the medial side of the foot with a characteristic deformation (fold) of the skin suggesting varus ankle joint positioning (photo by T. Kozłowski).

these are due to solid ground contact and bending and straightening, although somewhat less amplitude than the location of parts of the foot: the toes and next area (area of the heads of the metatarsal bones) – the beginning of the longitudinal arch of the foot.

On the left rear part of the upper on the medial side of the foot (tibial side), there are characteristic traces of stretching of the skin and its considerable creasing by the pressure of the heel area against the skin (Fig. 10). A characteristic large fold has even formed here. This is also indicative of relatively prolonged and/or intensive footwear wear. In addition, it may indicate that the deceased's right foot may have tended to be slightly different at the ankle joint, which should be considered a kind of postural defect.

The characteristic wide, slightly square front of the sole indicates that this shoe belongs to the group of so-called Tudor footwear, type 125, according to Goubitz (Goubitz *et al.* 2001, 275–280), and thus is recognisable due to the strongly widened front part. The specimen discovered in Gniew is classified as the “cow-mouth” (German: *Kuhmaulschuh*) subtype.

Cow-mouth footwear in Europe as seen in archaeological and iconographic sources

Archaeological research carried out in the urban areas of Europe confirms the finding of footwear of this type in layers dating to the 16th century. They not only occur in its western part but also in its eastern part. They are known from Britain (Pratt and Woolley 2008, 14–15), Belgium and the Netherlands (Goubitz *et al.* 2001, 276–78), Germany (Durian-Ress 1991, 25–27), and Finland (Harjula 2008, 67–74, 112). The most numerous collection from a single site and with the same date of deposit, this time underwater, is footwear from the English flagship *Mary Rose*, which sank on 19 July 1545. Among the footwear, specimens known as the “cow-mouth” type were also found. After conservation, along with other artefacts (some 20 000 pieces), they were displayed for the first time at the Portsmouth Maritime Museum (<https://pl.pinterest.com/pin/742390319813821929/>, access: 13.08.2023).

Renaissance footwear, including cow-mouth shoes, are discovered sporadically in Poland. Such finds have so far been reported in Warsaw (Blusiewicz 2009, 134–147) and Gdańsk (Ceynowa 2009, 389–399). They have also been found in Vilnius (Puškorius 2012, 162–168), which at the time belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (a state consisting of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania). Few museum specimens have also survived, such as the corona-

tion shoes of Sigismund Augustus in the Wawel collection (Ceynowa 2009, 389; Drążkowska 2011, 169).

Leather archaeological artefacts are rarely preserved, so the search for patterns and references associated with this type of footwear has been extended to analyses of selected iconographic sources. For example, Renaissance tiles, on which numerous representations of figures in scenes with mythological, allegorical and everyday life motifs and portraits are present, sometimes with the possibility of identifying specific individuals. It is tiles from this period that also form, in today's terms, the “journals” of the fashion of the time. Their quality and detail vary greatly, but scholars familiar with costume issues can quickly characterise the clothing and footwear found as images on their surface. Of course, it is impossible to present all of the tiles found during the archaeological investigations in this article, and it would go far beyond the scope of this work. Therefore, only single sites from selected European countries with depictions of “cow-mouth” shoes will be mentioned. We consider the tiles particularly important because they are made of an environmentally resistant ceramic material, which means they have a good chance of being preserved in the cultural layers discovered by archaeologists.

Undoubtedly, tile relics have a very different informational potential, as they are mostly preserved fragmentarily. An excellent example is a tile found in Kołobrzeg, associated with the figure of the Saxon Elector John Frederick I, who lived in 1503–1554. Analysis of a fragment of a standing figure, attire, and armament elements allowed us to compare these elements with a portrait engraving of the Saxon Prince by Lucas Cranach the Younger (Majewski 2015, 207–208). In both the engraving and the fragment of the tile (with the right foot visible), the footwear of the type described in this article is perfectly visible. It also shows that footwear of this type was also worn by people at the top of the social hierarchy of the time, from at least the 1st half of the 16th century. However, such personal identifications are rare. For the most part, however, the figures in the tiles are anonymous, and the scene carries the main cognitive load set in a specific context and time. These include the very popular early 16th century battle between David and Goliath symbolising the struggle between good and evil. These scenes can be seen on tiles from Stargard, Poznan, Frankfurt or Lubeck (Majewski 2015, 134). They were not associated with a specific figure of a local ruler but had religious connotations. The struggle between good and evil was a recurring theme in Christian themes of the medieval and Re-

naissance periods (Grupa 2005, 32), and the scene described was a relatively simple message about the struggle between God and Satan. Specific scenes can also be found in various editions of the Bible – Anton Koberger, Nuremberg 1518; Hans Lufft, Wittenberg 1550 – and the illustrations contained therein may have served as the prototype for graphic underpinnings for compositions on tile face plates (Majewski 2015, 134, 137).

It was crucial to find form and shape for our fashion research, including precise footwear as an essential part of it and the new elements introduced into it. Identifying figures or specific scenes with their description in various publications sets the “cow-mouth” in a specific social time and space. For example, on the tiles in the series with Salome, the images of soldiers, overwhelmingly landsknechts, are clad in “cow-mouth” type shoes. These depictions are similar elsewhere – e.g. Dobra, Grajswald, Stargard, Stralsund, Wolgast, Salzburg. They show landsknechts in various situations: Salome with an image of a man playing a flute, a drummer, a musician or men and women on a journey (Wegner 2012, 231–232; Majewski 2015, 146, 212; Ansorge 2018, 416; Schäfer 2021, 147). It should also be noted that the landsknechts were not elite. The juxtaposition of the “cow-mouth” shoes worn by rulers and ordinary soldiers and mercenaries

may indicate to us that the patterns of this fashion were relatively widespread in the society of the time. This could even be described as a kind of egalitarianism in this fashion.

Moving beyond Poland’s southern border, Renaissance tiles generally do not differ in iconography from what we find elsewhere. There are still tiles with religious themes, such as the Pharisee and the tax collector or the two tiles with the prodigal son’s return motif found in Prague (Žegklitz 2014, 525, 526). These are also scenes as if taken from real life. In a collection of tiles from an exhibition at the Budapest Museum, there is a tile with a scene from a potter’s workshop (Kiss *et al.* (eds.) 2018, 61–62). Two craftsmen are seated at the potter’s wheels, and the men standing at the sides are presumably buyers, as suggested by the gestures of the men striking a bargain (the catalogue note informs us that the tile comes from Salzburg and is dated 1561). The men are all dressed in classical Renaissance kit of Western European provenance – wams (doublet), pluders – hose (Fig. 11: A, B), and “cow-mouth” type shoes on their feet. Some confusion in the chronology of this footwear is introduced by a tile from the collection of the Bratislava City Museum (Kiss *et al.* (eds.) 2018, 166, 174). It dates to the late 15th/16th century. However, the king’s attire: a long robe and a knee-length tunic may point to the 15th cen-



Fig. 11. A contemporary copy of the vamps and pluders (photo by D. Grupa).

tury, which means that could be one of the earliest depictions of the “cow-mouth” shoes. This dating would also indicate the creation of a fashion for this type of footwear instead by the royal and magnate courts and the subsequent penetration of these patterns into the lower social strata (Turnau 1986, 76–77; Grupa 2005, 74; 2023a, 230–233). This would only explain the later “extravagance” in the attire of the landsknecht, who perhaps wanted to raise their prestige in the eyes of society in this relatively cheap way only by using the form of leather footwear.

The discovery of an almost complete pair of footwear of the type in question undoubtedly makes it possible to supplement the history of footwear in the Polish lands, mainly when a comparative approach is applied here. The closest analogy to the footwear discovered in Gniew is found in the Netherlands. This is a specimen from Breda, which differs only in the formation of the distal part of the sole (toe), which was further widened, giving the impression of a form similar to horned shoes (Goubitz *et al.* 2001, 277).

The fashion for wearing this type of footwear was said to have developed in the German-Austrian borderlands and become widespread thanks to the landsknechts – the German heavy infantry. The landsknechts lived off their pay, looted the enemy’s property, and were not held in high esteem. They often spent the money they earned on extravagant costumes, which included shallow footwear with a wide front (Ceynowa 2009, 392; Kozina 2017, 199). In our opinion, this is not necessarily the correct hypothesis, as at least a random analysis of the iconography from manuscripts from the late 15th and 1st half of the 16th century indicates that this type of footwear was also worn by people not associated with military service. Miniatures from around 1490 show footwear similar to the “cow-mouth” type. Young men walking with women on a boulevard have footwear with a free heel with a vamp that widens considerably in the toe section. In a scene illustrating a pair of peasants warming their feet in front of a fireplace, we see a man standing next to them wearing an exclusive coral knee-length shoe and black shoes of this type (Véniel 2008, 99, 165).

However, it seems that the design of this footwear may have originated at some court. Its cut differed from *poulaine* footwear, characterised by an unusually long pointed toe. This may have been linked to a change in the design of the viscera in parade armour, which is apparent in the iconography and on tombstones (Kozakiewicz 1978, 43, fig. 28; Kozina 2017, 119–120), as well as in the literature of the time. In the *Liber geneleos illustris familiae Schiddloviciae* kept

in the Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Kórnik [Polish: Biblioteka Kórnicka Polska Akademia Nauk] (ref. MK 3641-3651), illustrated most probably by the Polish painter Stanisław Samostrzelnik (before 1532), the family of the chancellor Krzysztof Szydłowiecki in the male line are knights depicted in armour with metal visors of the “cow-mouth” type (Żołnierz 1960, 152–153; Kozina 2017, 133–134). It seems logical that the underside of the leather footwear must have been of a similar shape to the steel lining. This is primarily evident on tombstones dating from the 15th to the 1st half of the 17th century throughout Europe (Kozakiewicz 1978, 14–50; Grupa 2022, 31–32). Here, the knights are depicted primarily in armour, which offers excellent interpretative possibilities for weapon scholars but is also sometimes useful if only in analysing the form of footwear. The most significant examples are armour viscera with a widened front on the tomb slabs.

One of the earliest examples of this is the figure of Emeram Salomon (starosta of Drohobych), who died in 1504, depicted on a bronze plate from the Church of the Virgin Mary in Kraków (Żołnierz 1960, 128–129). The viscera of the armour already have widened fronts. Even more legible are the viscera from the armour of Andrzej Szamotulski, who died in 1511. The tombstone was made as early as 1505 (Żołnierz 1960, 134–135), possibly on his order. Later tombstones did not deviate much from the pattern of the knight in armour. Near Gniew in Pieniążkowo, there is a tombstone of Jerzy Oleski, who died in 1569, and his wife Zofia, who died in 1593 (Nowosad 2014, 83–85). The armour’s viscera are shaped like “cow-mouth” boots (Fig. 12). This type of representation is also known as the Commonwealth style. A gravestone from the Holy Trinity Church in Radzyń Podlaski (northern chapel), attributed to the Mniszech family, made of red marble, depicts a man in armour with the viscera described above (Fig. 13).

An exciting juxtaposition is the groups of knights participating in the *Battle of Orsha* in 1514 (the Polish army triumphed over the Muscovites). The number and variety of armour and clothing is probably one of the best studies of that period due to the painter’s detailed recreation of clothing elements. Furthermore, in addition to the knights appearing in Polish costumes, we find knights in full armour with very different viscera (Żołnierz 1960, 142–151, 196–197; Grupa 2022, 34). However, here, too, we find boots of the “cow-mouth” type. We see knights who, after crossing the river, began to pour water out of their boots by adopting convenient positions. For example, one of them,



Fig. 12. A tombstone of Jerzy Oleski, the church in Pieniążkowo near Gnień (photo by W. Nowosad).

lying on his stomach, tried to remove the water from his boots by bending his lower limbs at the knees. The distinctive sole of the cowhide he was wearing is visible. On the other hand, in other parts of this image, the shoes are also visible from above, and in this way, the typical front width for the type of footwear described can be seen.

Another source introducing new designs was sacred art, showing the rich and poor images. Probably the quickest and most durable way to convey innovations of this type was in frescoes and altar settings commissioned for churches, as they could be seen and admired by the crowds of the faithful coming to services. The closest example of footwear with a “cow-mouth” is

that of the men depicted in a wall painting from 1500 (St. George’s Chapel in St. Mary’s Church in Gdansk), which shows a panorama of the city with dense buildings (townhouses, towers, gates, drawbridge over the moat). Four armed men (a horseman and three pedestrians) are depicted on the edges on the city’s right side. The men have footwear on their feet, one in a cow-mouth type and two in so-called horned shoes (Fig. 14). This is probably one of the earliest depictions of the new type of Renaissance footwear in Royal Prussia. The second chapel of the Holy Cross contains an Antwerp altarpiece from around 1520.

The Resurrection scene is painted of soldiers wearing “cow-mouth” type footwear, which differs in overall appearance only in detail, while the fronts of the shoes in both pairs are clearly widened. This altar was already a time when the footwear described was well established in the production of European shoemakers. How much earlier this model came into use is difficult to say unequivocally. As noted earlier, it probably happened in the last decades of the 15th century, evidenced by the earlier altar settings.

In a triptych commissioned in 1498 by the Paumgartner family for St Catherine’s Church in Nuremberg, Dürer painted St Eustatius wearing “cow-mouth” type footwear. This setting was made after 1500. The painter was already entering the period of mature painting, where the whole is rigorously subordinated to the lines of perspective (Zuffi 2017, 46–47). Another saint in the shoes described is on an altarpiece originally intended for the family chapel of the condottiere Tuzio Costanzo, originally located in the church of San Liberali in Castelfranco Veneto, by Giorgione (now in the Prado Museum in Madrid; Buricchi 2011, 117, 120–121). In the central part sits the Virgin Mary with the child Jesus, and to her right stands a slightly stooped St Liberalis wearing black shoes with much-widened fronts for the toes with a tied seam, almost perfectly in line with the Gnień copy. The altarpiece was created between 1504 and 1505.

The analysis of the whole figure portraits of the powerful and mighty is also noteworthy. Unfortunately, it provides limited information, as only men’s footwear can be discussed in this case. Women belonging to the elite walked in dresses not only covering their ankles (most common and plebeian women, if possible, walked barefoot, as can sometimes be seen in illustrations of women doing various types of physical work) but also covering their feet (Pérez Sánchez 1999, 74–75; Boucher 2012, 254; Grupa 2012, 79; Nowosad and Grupa 2020, 236; Nowosad *et al.* 2021a, 71). Perhaps the clearest example of this is the *Portrait*



Fig. 13. Statue of Mikołaj Mniszech in armour, tombstone in the parish church of the Holy Trinity in Radzyń Podlaski (photo by W. Nowosad).



Fig. 14. Epitaph of Jan and Zofia Konopacka Oleski in the parish church in Pieniążkowo near Nowe over the Wisłą (photo by W. Nowosad).

of the Duke of Saxony (Henry the Pious) and his wife Catherine of Mecklenburg (Gemäldgalerie Museum Dresden), by Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1514 (Fig. 15). It is an original representation of the princely couple, both a portrait and a heraldic image. The period costumes are in the heraldic colours of gold, blue, and red (Zuffi 2006, 110; Kozina 2017, 199). The prince's shallow, black shoes with a wide front are clearly distinguished from the red, smooth-fitting calf-length stockings (presumably silk). In this case, one can only guess that the Duchess may have worn shoes of a similar cut. The scenes when the women are seated are no different. The voluminous bottom of the dress, which often ranged from 3 to 6 m in circumference (these

data are derived from reconstructions of grave dresses from studies conducted in Poland), always covered the feet (Grupa 2012, 65, 95, 98, 156–157; Nowosad *et al.* 2021a, 71).

The same is true of the woodcuts by the German painter Hans Burgkmaier the Elder (1473–1531) and many other artists of the period. Different social groups (royal courts, patricians, craftsmen, commoners) are depicted in genre scenes (battles, at royal courts, in the park, in the craftsmen workshops), revealing the clothing of adults and children. The rich usually have “cow-mouth” shoes, with rounded toes or a free heel. The poor, on the other hand, have either footwear still made in medieval design or simply bare feet – *Die*



Fig. 15. Double portrait of Duke Heinrich the Fromme and Mistress Duchess Katharina of Mecklenburg – 1514, Cranach Lucas senior (source: Zuffi 2006, 110).

Spiele der Weisskunig, woodcut printed c. 1520–1530 (<https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo/weisskunig.html?sortBy=relevant>), *Minting coins*, c. 1515 (<https://www.posterazzi.com/minting-coins-c1515-nthe-minting-of-coins-woodcut-german-by-hans-burg-kmair-c1515-poster-print-by-granger-collection-item-vargrc0091729/>, access: 23.07.2022), *The Brown and White Party asking mercy from the Old White King From Weisskunig*, *Battle of Hullein 1514*, *The Swiss Embassy against the Blue King* and many others.

The iconography contained in the so-called Trachtenbuchs or otherwise Frauentrachtenbuchs also complements the consideration of “cow-mouth” shoes. These were usually generic scenes from real life together with short descriptions. Most importantly, they also provided information about lower social groups. The prototypes of these albums were created by Albrecht Dürer, Hans Holbein, Ures Graf, among others (Tyllicki 2005, 50–51; Grupa 2012, 245). In later periods, it was a very popular form of recording events in the city or countryside and, on occasion, an overview of the clothing worn in each century. In the Trachtenbuch of Matius Schwarz of Augsburg, created between 1520 and 1560, it is possible to trace the different modes of dress of virtually all social groups (Rublack *et al.* (eds.) 2015). This is also true for footwear, where “cow mouth” is extremely popular. This type of footwear was worn with a shoulder-widening coat (Elector of the Rhenish Palatinate Otto Henry Wittelsbach, Henry VIII – Kozina 2017, 77) and a doublet with pants (Duke Henry the Pious – Fig. 15).

Associating this type of footwear primarily with the landsknechts is, therefore, misleading when looking for the origins of this design in the history of footwear. It is likely that the landsknechts, like most lower social groups, adopted the design introduced at some Burgundian or Spanish court, as these were the places where new fashion trends were created. In addition, soldiers from various European countries wearing a doublet and pants did the same. This is indicated by examples of Polish knighthood, or the painting *The Argonauts' Expedition* located in the National Gallery, London, circa 1510, by Giovanni Luteri, working under the pseudonym Doso Dossi (Fregolent 2006, 128–129). They provide evidence that shoes of this type became popular in Western Europe but never predominated amongst the clothing of simple people and the military. This is also illustrated by the copperplates by Hans Sebald Beham in the National Museum in Gdansk (Zabuska 2009, 62). They give an overview of the clothing of various figures, including soldiers, wearing footwear with both high uppers with

rounded toes and shoes with a widened front of the “cow-mouth” type.

It is also important to note the presence of Hanseatic merchants in many port cities, and beyond, who skilfully instilled innovations in the countries they visited. Their presence, fashionable, elegant clothing must have aroused the curiosity and interest of the inhabitants of the European cities they visited. Their mobility and liveliness may have contributed significantly to the spread of this type of footwear. The movement of diplomats with entire courts across Europe, pilgrimages to the Holy Land, or journeys abroad by young men from wealthy families must not be forgotten in these considerations either (Loret 1929, 131–172; Pawlak 1988, 19, 45; Gutaker 1993, 49–77, 110; Nowosad 2014, 308–313). Due to this mobility, travelers often brought novelties from the world of fashion to their homelands or perhaps gifts even in the form of shoes with new designs or prints or richly illustrated printed books, e.g. a Bible from 1518 with a graphic depicting the battle between David and Goliath published by Anton Koberger in Nuremberg, which features this type of footwear (Majewski 2015, 137).

An attempt to personalise the man from burial 7 in Gniew

Exploring modern archaeological sites opens up broader possibilities for interpretation, this time using preserved historical sources. However, in the Polish reality, the state of preservation of archival sources is unsatisfactory. The complicated history of the country, numerous conflicts, changes in nationality, and finally, simple random events mean that these sources are usually missing in many cases. It is no different with the sources from Gniew. Town records have survived to the present day in a residual state, while parish records from the turn of the Middle Ages and modern times are practically non-existent. Research can therefore be carried out on the basis of indirect sources, with a particular focus on material written down in the royal chancelleries, e.g. with the Crown Metrics (*Metrical Regni Poloniae*) at the forefront.

St Nicholas Church was the only church in the town in modern times (until the beginning of the 19th century). The church and its immediate surroundings were also the central burial place for all the town's inhabitants and the inhabitants of the nearby castle. The most prominent place to lay the deceased was in the chancel with a location in front of the altar. As the town was the seat of the starosta – the representative

of the royal authority – it should hardly come as a surprise that the starosta, his family, and – less likely – his closest associates are the ones who were buried in this prominent place.

The preserved footwear, the subject of this article, is at the same time a chronological clue, locating in time the funeral ceremonies and the laying in the grave of the shoes' owner. Moreover, these must have occurred in the late 15th to the 2nd half of the 16th century. The sex of the deceased and his age at death, as determined by anthropologists from the skeleton, point to a man whose death occurred at an advanced age (category *senilis*: >60 years). This information narrowed the search field quite significantly. From this period, we know all the starosts of Gniew. They were, therefore, Sebastian Mgowski (Legendorff), holding the starosty from about 1493 to 1503; Michał Żelisławski, starost in 1504–1517, later chamberlain of Malbork and Chełmno; Jerzy Bażyński, starost in 1517–1546, at the same time starosta of Malbork; and his son Jan, starost in 1546–1548, at the same time castellan of Gdańsk. The next starosta of Gniew – the Malbork voivode Achacy Czema rested in the chapel of this temple built for him – (Czaplewski 1921, 80–82). Sebastian Mgowski and Jan Bażyński probably died before their fortieth year. Michał Żelisławski, having left Gniew in 1517, died in 1547 having had no connection with Gniew for thirty years, so there was no reason to bury his body in the local church. Of this list, only the starosta of Malbork, Jerzy Bażyński, who, according to his biographer, was born in 1469, remains likely (Czaplewski 1935); he was, therefore, about 77 years old at the time of his death. Nothing is known about his childhood. He was the son of Jan, castellan of Elbląg, and grandson of Ścibor, governor of Royal Prussia, the most important provincial official. The family stood at the head of the wealthiest families in the area. Its representatives belonged to the close circle of those who initiated the creation of the Prussian Union and led to the declaration of obedience to the Teutonic Order and the outbreak of the Thirteen Years' War. If we accept Jerzy's date of birth as accurate, his father died when he was 11. It is unlikely that the minor son was left in the care of his mother. It is more likely that he was given to one of his relatives for upbringing, such as his uncle Mikołaj, the starosta of Malbork, or to the royal court or one of the magnates in the Crown at that time. It is unknown whether his guardians sponsored him to travel abroad or study. We find no trace of him in the university records that have survived.

In the sources, Jerzy appears in 1492 already as starosta of Tolkmicko and remained so until 1504. In that year, he holds the starosties of Dzierzgoń, Straszewo and Sztum, and a little later, for a while, those of Międzyłęcz and Nowe. At the beginning of 1512, he received the starosties of Skarszewy and Sobowidz from the king, and from 1517 he was also starost of Gniew, holding all of the above until his death. His only son John inherited these estates (Czaplewski 1921, 81, 135, 173, 184, 193, 201). These three locations: Skarszewy, Sobowidz, and Gniew, and several of his extensive estates, could have been potential burial sites. He was associated with all of them in some way. It is known that there were at least a few tombstones of Bażyńskis in the Skarszewy church. Dachnowski mentions this in his heraldry without mentioning their names (Dachnowski 1995, 4). He built a castle from scratch in Sobowidz, which was the reason for his conflict with the Gdanskers (Czaplewski 1921, 173). However, it was probably Gniew that was his primary residence. Most of Jerzy Bażyński's surviving letters to Gdańsk were issued in Gniew (APGd 300, D/54, sig. 525, 527, 529, 543, 544, 548, 573, 576, 579, 580, 584, 586). He carried out a major renovation of the castle, leaving an appropriate inscription to his memory which was still visible in the 17th century. There was also a tombstone of a relative in the local church, probably erroneously identified with his wife, also buried in front of the great altar (Dachnowski 1995, 6). It was in Gniew that Bażyński received the Prussian Prince Albrecht Hohenzollern for informal talks in 1534 (Małek 1976, 86).

There Bażyński was mobile in his adult life. From 1512 until his death, he held the office of Voivode of Malbork (Mikulski (ed.) 1990, no. 624), which gave him the right to sit in the Senate of the Republic. For this reason, he participated in the Sejm and may have stayed at the royal court on other occasions. For example, he was in Krakow at the royal court in May 1518. In 1525 he was one of the signatories of the peace treaty signed in Krakow, ending the war with the Teutonic Order and the document granting Ducal Prussia to Albrecht as a fief (CIP 1910, 164, 177). Immediately afterwards he travelled as an envoy to Königsberg to the local Diet for further negotiations (*Acten* 1886, 771, 772). Immediately afterwards he went to the Diet of Königsberg for further negotiations (*Acten* 1886, 771, 772). On behalf of the king, he was one of the commissioners overseeing the transfer of the Duchy of Prussia as a fief to Albrecht Hohenzollern in 1526 (MRPS 1910, nos. 2951, 4975). In each of these cases, Bażyński had the opportunity to familiarise himself with the latest trends, also in fashion,

prevailing at the courts of Kraków and Königsberg. In addition, through his marriage to Dorota Kunheim, sister of Prince Albrecht's friend Jerzy Kunheim, he could be relatively close to the Königsberg court. He could even be a part of its political circle (Małek 1976, 66). In this case, the financial capacity to fulfil even the most sophisticated orders is obvious. It seems justified to say that Bażyński could afford almost anything. His political and social position, his direct authority over Gniew, and his influence on the staff of the presbytery of the local church naturally predisposed him to be buried in such a prominent place as the presbytery. The question remains, however, was this his will?

If this was not Bażyński, then who might it have been? The list is relatively short. It could have been any of his relatives who died when Gniew was in the hands of the Bażyński family. For example, it could have been his brother Franciszek, who was still alive in 1545. One of the town's councillors or mayors could have obtained the starost's permission for burial there. However, none are known by name due to the lack of relevant sources.

Summing up our discussion, it should still be mentioned that the method of making the footwear (discovered in the burial from the Gniew church) sheds new light on the problem of "cow-mouth" shoes and perhaps the history of footwear in general. Earlier studies assume these shoes were imported into the Commonwealth (Ceynowa 2009, 390). However, after the analyses of "pile taxes", this appears to be an erroneous assumption, as no shoes were recorded in the imported goods (Zins 1967; Groth 1990). Rather, we believe the local craftsmen must have started to imitate imported fashions, most likely from journeyman wanderings. Another possibility is that youths or members of the messenger class individually brought shoes from their peregrinations and gave them to local shoemakers to create copies based on their designs. Local craftsmen may have initially used outdated techniques (cutting with a distinction between right and left soles, single-cutting, sewing "on the tip-pet") to produce new designs, but according to skills acquired in the past and using old technologies. In light of the iconographic sources and the repetitive nature of the depictions of this type of footwear in the early 16th century, it should be assumed that the fairly widespread adoption of the designs (in the larger cities) must have occurred by the end of the 15th century at the latest. Over time, they simply became one of the available types made perhaps only to order for court and military use. It is generally assumed that this footwear was in use between 1500 and 1550,

with the peak of its popularity beginning in the second decade of the 16th century (Goubitz *et al.* 2001, 275). However, from a review of various sources, both written and iconographic, we believe that the time of use was much longer, and one should assume roughly the years 1475 to the end of the 16th century unless the images on the tombstones are just a memory of a passing era and not reality.

Conclusions

The numerous iconographic examples of the described pair of "cow-mouth" shoes and grave clothes sewn from silk red velvet fabric covered with inlaid embroidery using gold thread, and the location of the grave in the chancel suggests that the deceased man (abstracting from his presumed identity) belonged to the secular social elite of the time.

Considering the furnishings from Tomb 7, it is clear that footwear could be freely copied by any social group with the right piece of leather. Luxury headgear, on the other hand, was already beyond the reach of most of society. This type of headgear is known from the grave furnishings of princes and kings.

The analysed footwear of the "cow-mouth" type, discovered in the burial of a man in the presbytery of the church of St Nicholas in Gniew, is an example of a fashion prevalent in Europe during the Renaissance. Thus, it should be considered that some centres located on Polish soil were also under its influence.

The shoes we analysed bear visible signs of intensive use and they can even be described as worn. As a result of significant damage in the form of abrasions, creases, folds, cracks and fractures in the leather, mainly present on the soles, but not only, they have certainly lost some of their protective and aesthetic qualities. They may not even be very comfortable to wear anymore. They were, therefore, not shoes sewn for the coffin and may have been everyday footwear belonging to the deceased. Despite his high social status, the deceased was given shoes for his last journey, which may have been considered useless.

Some of the features of the traces of shoe use that we have noted may indicate the existence of a certain defect of the right foot (valgus, hollow foot) in its owner. Thus, the analysis of the grave furnishings (here, shoes) may even provide us with unique information about the physical characteristics of the buried person, assuming, of course, that the garments belonged to the deceased during his lifetime. Alternatively, perhaps they were his favourite footwear, and he wanted to be buried wearing them.

Specific differences in the cut of the soles and the sewing of the vamps, which we considered significant, found between the left and right shoes may suggest that the footwear buried with the deceased may have come from two different pairs. It seems unlikely that such separations (defects) could have been accepted by their owner, who ordered or bought the shoes. It seems more likely that, for example, from two pairs of relatively heavily used shoes, copies in slightly better condition were selected. This confirms the existence of a kind of “economy of death” (Kozłowski and Grupa 2019, 69), the manifestations of which are often observed during archaeological investigations of modern sites, especially church crypts. In clerics burials we often find an evidence for that such as a kontush sashes cut lengthwise in half, the lack of a back in the silk żupan of the deceased, decorative buttons cut off from clothing, a mended grave robe bearing traces of intensive use, or an old and tattered chasuble (Grupa 1998, 277–279; 2005, 57–58, 96; 2019, 181–184; 2022, 118–119, 162–164, 173–178, 189–190; Grupa *et al.* 2015, 109–112; Dudziński *et al.* 2017, 49–72, 90–96; Nowosad and Grupa 2020, 252). This testifies to remarkable economic rationality and frugality even in representatives of the highest rungs of the social ladder.

Finally, we would like to refer to the commonly used nomenclature, including in the scientific literature. Are the shoes referred to as “cow-mouth” really, in their form, like cow-mouths? We have also used this term systematically in our article for formal reasons, however, without conviction. Guided by our intuition, associations and analogies, as well as our experience gained in researching the past of past elites, in our opinion, however, the “cow-mouth” is more reminiscent of a “lion’s paw”, albeit with the claws hidden. We find such elements in heraldry (lions and griffins), funerary culture (coffins and sarcophagi on so-called “lion’s feet”), and even allegorical art. “Lion’s paw”, in which the foot of a monarch or a brave (brave as a lion!) battle-hardened knight is clad – there are also the viscera of armour in this shape (Fig. 12, 13), more fitting than the typical “cow-mouth”. One can go even further. Pludry, stocking and boot in this form, as a whole, can even be associated with the hind limb of just this great cat. In our view, this is not just a matter of semantics but of symbolism, mentality and mindset of Europe’s ancient elites. This issue still requires much more comparative research, but it is certainly worth looking into.

The presentation of examples (e.g. iconography from a variety of objects and sources, from tiles,

prints and canvases of well-known master painters) in fairly widely available artefacts is intended to make researchers aware of the directions of exploration not only in footwear but also in many other aspects of everyday and religious life in Europe. Aiming only at a search focused on one aspect can undoubtedly lead one astray and prone to interpretation errors. A complete analysis of all available sources and confronting them with the way of approaching life (dependencies and differences between social groups), religion and generally accepted symbolism (e.g. flowers, pearls, the hourglass, the scythe, the skull) only gives the possibility to describe them correctly and to set them in a specific epoch – among the material and spiritual culture and even the mentality of the people of the time. It should also be emphasised that one cannot abstract from written sources when analysing modern material. This is because they can shed new light and even be a signpost leading to discovering the truth about the past. In some cases, they can allow for the personalisation of a narrative by linking it to circles of people or even specific characters (Grupa 1998, 287; 2005, 54–56, 103–106; 2023, 72–77; 91–97; Grupa *et al.* 2014, 23, 60–64, 113–114; Dudziński *et al.* 2015, 16–17, 48–59, 62–66; 2017, 23–48; Grupa 2015, 194–198; 2016, 175–179; 2018, 218–222; Majewski 2015, 135, 181–203; Dudziński 2016, 184–193; Nowosad *et al.* 2021a, 50–81, 81–91; 2021b, 131; Jarosz and Grupa 2022, 82–87). However, “history is the sum of human biographies”, as the British philosopher and Victorian-era historian Thomas Carlyle wrote (Jankowski 1995, 7).

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