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TWO PYRAMIDS IN THE 17TH CENTURY IN POLAND: KRYNICA AND BERESTECZKO

Not many funerary buildings shaped to resemble pyramids are known from Polish territories. Undoubtedly they are rare objects and a choice of that particular shape usually had a proper explanation. As an ancient symbol of eternity and immortality a pyramid was therefore especially suitable for sepulchral purposes\(^1\). An especially important, yet poorly known period is the time preceding the French expedition to Egypt (1798 – 1801) when information coming from the Nile were rare. Usually the Roman pyramid of Cestius was taken as example at that time (Fig. 1)\(^2\), known from quite common journeys to Italy.

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\(^1\) The pyramid motif (also the obelisk and mastaba motifs) was more common in the European sepulchral art, mainly in the 19th century. For a fascination with Egyptian past see e.g. J.S. Curl, *The Egyptian Revival. Ancient Egypt as the Inspiration for Design Motifs in the West*, London – New York 2005. See also C. Tietze, *Die Pyramide. Geschichte – Entdeckung – Faszination*, Weimar – Berlin 1999. The effort of researching this phenomenon on Polish ground was undertaken by L. Zinkow, *Imhotep i pawie pióra. Z dziejów inspiracji egipskich w architekturze polskiej* (in preparation).

\(^2\) It was a tomb of Caius Cestius Epulo, praetor and tribune of the people (CIL VI 1374), built in Rome near Porta Ostiensis between 18 and 12 B.C. It was shaped as a steep pyramid raised on a travertine base measuring 29.5 x 29.5 m.; the construction of the pyramid itself was from brick covered with marble slabs. Inside a burial chamber was situated, measuring 4.10 x 5.95 m. and covered with paintings. The pyramid measured 36.4 m in height. In the 3rd century it was incorporated into the Aurelian Walls. The choice of this tomb shape may probably be connected with a journey to Egypt that Cestius once undertook. There was also another, larger pyramid in Rome. It was built on the banks of the Tiber near Castel d’Angelo and was known as Meta Romuli (destroyed in the 16th century), while the pyramid of Cestius was known as Meta Remi.
The proportions of that pyramid, different from Egyptian pyramids from the Old Kingdom, played an important part in egyptianizing buildings of the modern times.

Among the forgotten and rare works of the 17th century architecture that were shaped as a pyramid there is a building situated in the South-Eastern Poland, in the Lublin Voivodeship. This enigmatic construction topped with a sharply shaped pyramid (Figs. 2, 3) was raised on a hill in a thick coppice within the boundaries of the Krynica village in the Krasnystaw district. The so-called Grobisko (thus called in the neighbourhood) is a sepulchral object that undoubtedly is connected with the past of this land, linked to the Polish Brethren, followers of Faustus Socinus, commonly known as Arians, who operated here on the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. Unfortunately until now not much attention has been paid to this building in our publications.

The most probable hypothesis links this uncommon building with the activities of Paul Orzechowski (ca. 1550-1612), subcamerarius Chelmensis. According to this assumption it would be his burial chapel, therefore an object probably built after his death, that is in 1612 or slightly later (surely in the first half of the 17th century). His tomb was once situated in a crypt beneath the chapel floor and a small cemetery of the Polish Brethren, where the brothers

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3 The pyramid is situated roughly half way between Krasnystaw and Rejowiec Fabryczny, to the south of national route no. 812, not far to the north from the village of Krupe. The hill measures 286 meters AMSL and is called „The Arian Mountain” by the locals.


5 As noted by C. Hoffman in 1826, „They say that years ago some curious or destructive person, when they removed the floor (that hence is gone), they saw a large brick dungeon with
and co-believers of *subcamerarius Chelmensis* found their resting place, was probably located near the building.  

Upon a massive cube measuring approximately 8-9 meters in height, built of stone supplemented with brick, plastered, crowned with a brick cornice covered with a fairly narrow shingle roof, a steep brick pyramid measuring approximately 20 meters was raised (probably once it was also plastered). It is topped with a massive stone pyramidion. Together the entire building measures about 30 meters. The wall angle and proportions of the pyramid surely do not point to it’s ancient Egyptian connections, but to inspirations drawn from the Roman pyramid of Cestius.

Not a single trace has survived from the decoration of the pyramid; the inside is ruined and almost entirely stripped of plaster. The chapel is covered with a brick barrel-groin vault supported by corner pilasters. The entrance to the chapel (situated on the southern side) determines its frontal wall, is crowned with a semicircle final while a small round window is situated below (analogous windows are also situated on the other walls of the chapel).

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only one coffin” (see footnote 4).

Surely it would make a point to run some thorough research there, probably even archaeological excavations. During the reformation catholics did not allow to bury dissidents on their graveyards and therefore they were forced to seek different places or even different burrial forms. Earth burrial mounds were often situated near dissident estates in Lesser Poland, for instance in Łuczanowice, Grodkowice-Brzezie, Czarnocin. See G. Gill, *Kopce w krajobrazie kulturowym Polski*, Kraków 2002, p. 109-112.
Paul Orzechowski used the Rogala coat of arms and was an important character among the Polish Brethren. He was known as an enlightened, committed citizen (between 1565 and 1570 he studied in Leipzig, probably law) that did not avoid political activity (among others as a deputy of the Chełm land). He was raised in a non-catholic environment, first as a follower of Calvinism, after 1570 he joined the Polish Brethren. As a publicist venturing into theological grounds he also called for an understanding between the dissident and catholic nobility. From the beginning of his political career he was connected with the John Zamoyski (1542 – 1605) circle; among others he was one of the envoys sent to France in 1573 to accompany the newly chosen king, Henri de Valois, in his journey to Poland. In 1575 Orzechowski voted for Stefan Batory to be chosen king of Poland and during the election in 1587 he demanded that Sigismundus, the prince of Sweden (later Sigismundus III Vasa) was elected and later greeted him in Gdańsk with the entire delegation. In his political views Orzechowski was always against choosing a Habsburg for the Polish throne.

Paul Orzechowski has also earned the name of a caretaker of the religious life of the Polish Brethren. He funded a chapel in his estate in Krupe and later also in Suraż, furthermore he took care of the chapel in Piaski, which was

7 Stanisław Tworek paid a lot of attention to him. See among others the following publications: Działalność polityczna i reformacyjna Pawła Orzechowskiego, Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce, vol. 4, 1959, p. 89 – 112; Działalność gospodarcza Pawła Orzechowskiego, Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska, Sectio F, 12, 1960, sp. 103 – 128; and Orzechowski Paweł, [in:] Polski Słownik Biograficzny 24, 1979, p. 283 – 284.
founded by his brother Stanisław.

The fruitful economic activity of Paul Orzechowski is especially noteworthy. His well administered estate in Krupe brought significant income, he was also a leaseholder of the Russian duty chamber and one of his activities was lending money with interest as well as leasing other estates and farms. Orzechowski was the owner of three cities (Bełżyce, Piaski, Rejowiec), 23 villages, two tenement houses in Lublin and other estates and income sources. Paul Orzechowski died in Krupe on the 21st of March, 1612.

As mentioned before, Paul Orzechowski resided in the village of Krupe, where an impressive castle complex was raised due to his initiative, probably on the spot where an old residence of the Krupski family was situated. The Renaissance-Manneristic complex dating to the end of the 16th century was rebuilt and reached its final shape in 1604 – 1608 (ruined from the second half of the 17th century). The funerary pyramid from Krynica was significantly damaged during World War II. Due to that fact the entire object was thoroughly renovated in 1956 – 1957 (the roof of the chapel was rebuilt at that time), at the same time securing all the openings leading to the inside. Since then however the situation has changed for worse. The metal door leading to the once unaccessibile chapel now stand open, the floor is entirely smashed. Damage to the outer side of the walls is also significant.

The Arian tomb in Krynica is an object that should probably be put at the front of the list of „Polish pyramids” since it is probably the oldest (1612) and the most monumental of such buildings (it is the highest of Polish pyramids). A shape and proportions very similar to the above described building are also characteristic for a tomb pyramid (Fig. 4) connected with the castellan of Trakai, prince Alexander Proński; it was also built in the beginning of the 17th century, however in a significant distance from Krynica. It is situated in

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8 See also Katalog zabytków sztuki w Polsce, vol. VIII, fasc. 8, Warszawa 1964, p. 32-35.
9 For information regarding those works see H. Gawarecki, Prace konserwatorskie. Województwo lubelskie (1953-1957), Ochrona Zabytków, vol. 11, 1958, no. 1-2, p. 126 (and figs. on p. 124). At that time the pyramidion was moved to the Museum in Krasnystaw and a copy was instead placed on the top of the building.
10 Damage and decrements to the shingle roof of the chapel (just below the pyramid itself) is especially dangerous for the entire structure of the tomb, allowing water to leak inside the entire building. The lightning conductor is also broken.
the suburbs of Beresteczko, upon upper Styr (Volhynia), at that time on the eastern border of the Commonwealth of Poland (now Ukraine). A victorious battle was fought at Beresteczko on the 28-30th of June 1651 against Cossack–Tatar forces led by Bohdan Chmielnicki. The Proński monument situated in that area was therefore often mistaken for an object commemorating that important battle. A historic plate fixed on the building is decisive in this case, informing in Polish and Ukrainian: „Alexander son of Frederick Prince Proński, the Castellan of Trakai, died in 1631 at the end of March”.

The funerary building of Alexander Proński is almost identical to the pyramid of Krynica (see Figs. 2 and 3). A steeply shaped pyramid is raised on a cubical base, however it lacks a pyramidion (the entire structure is very poorly preserved). It is a brick structure with an entrance opening in one of the walls, however without any windows. When comparing both buildings (Krynica and Beresteczko) a fairly obvious conclusion is that they may have been works of the same originator and architect. Despite a considerable distance between both monuments...

[12] At that time a mound situated 4 km to the west of the pyramid was considered his resting place. It is however a tomb of Maria Prońska, Alexander’s sister that died in her youth (hence the name of the mound: „Marukha”). The battle with Chmielnicki’s troops took place on the right bank of Styr while the tomb of Proński and his sister’s mound were raised on the left bank.
[14] In an anonymous publication mentioning the pyramid of Beresteczko („Tygodnik Illustrowany” No. 13, 1897, p. 257) the following information was given: base height 11 cubits (5,95 m), height of the pyramid 25 cubits (14,87 m), height of the entire structure was therefore 36 cubits, that is 21,42 m.
this idea seems quite probable when taking historical considerations into account. A number of facts speak for it, among them a unity of time and dissident environment and - undoubtedly – direct contact and personal relations between the two founders. To prove this it is essential to describe the most important elements of the life and activity of Alexander Proński since the information regarding Paul Orzechowski has already been provided above.

Alexander Proński was born around the year 1550 as the son of prince Frederick Proński, the voivode of Kiev. He spent a couple of years of his youth in France on the court of Charles IX. He early became a follower of Calvinism, already in 1573 as a representative of dissidents who furthermore was familiar with relations on the French court he took part in a ceremonial legation.

They were equal in age, both outstanding representatives of dissident environments of the old Commonwealth of Poland, taking active part in the political life of the country. It is however obvious, as may be seen from the stories of their lives, that they differed in characters – Orzechowski was a prudent, complaisant person, a pacifist by nature. Proński on the other hand was a violent, fierce man that took part in many wars, quarrels and heated disputes.


He was later converted into Arianism and was known as a protector of the Polish Brethren, which he brought to his town. See: Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich, vol. I, 1880, p. 139-140.
travelling to France for Henri de Valois who was appointed king of Poland. Undoubtedly Proński met Orzechowski at that time, he was after all an envoy of the same legation and he also represented the dissident circles. Similarly to Orzechowski, Proński also supported the choice of Stefan Batory for the king of Poland. In the following years he took active part in the war campaigns of that ruler. In 1580 he was appointed starost of Luck. During the next interregnum, contrary to Orzechowski, Proński became an active supporter of the Habsburg party that tried to bring archduke Maximilian to Polish throne. After his party was defeated at the battle of Byczyna (24.01.1588) Proński was held prisoner in Krasnystaw, that is in vicinity of Orzechowski’s estate. Taking into consideration his relations with chancellor John Zamoyski he could have helped Proński during his long stay and facilitated his release. In 1591 Proński was appointed castellan of Trakai.

The date of Alexander Proński’s death is uncertain, and such is the date his funerary monument was erected. It may be assumed that this fact took place by the end of 1595\(^1\). This date does not correspond with the text on the plate that was once fixed on the pyramid wall, where the moment of his death is described as „the last days of March, 1631”\(^2\). This discrepancy is currently hard to evaluate\(^3\).

Other buildings shaped as pyramids known from the territories of Poland are significantly younger\(^4\). Among noteworthy buildings is the object from Karczew near Warsaw (built probably in 1794 to commemorate the soldiers fallen in the battle fought by units led by Jakub Jasiński against the Russian

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\(1\) As R. Żelewski informs us, it supposedly happened before the 12\(^{th}\) of February 1596 (Polski Słownik Biograficzny 28, 1984 – 1985, p. 508).

\(2\) See above, footnote 13. He would have been at least 80 years old at that time.

\(3\) Alexander Proński had two sons who studied in Basel and travelled around Europe (France, Italy, Spain and the Balearic Islands). Julius Elias died in 1613 and Alexander Octavianus in 1638. They were the last descedants of the Proński family line in the Commonwealth (see: Polski Słownik Bibliograficzny 28, p. 509). A large amount of information on the history of the Proński family (and an engraved portrait of Alexander Octavianus) may be found in the work Michalonis Lituani De Moribus Tartarorum, Lituanorum et Moschorum fragmina X [...] Basel 1615, published from a manuscript by J.J. Grosser (a rare copy, among others in the Herzog August Bibliothek collection in Wolfenbüttel, catalogue number 241 Q).

\(4\) A pyramid-shaped project of the Warsaw Brothers Hospitallers church by Tylman of Gammen dating approximately to 1669 is also worth mentioning although it was never realized (see: S. Mossakowski, Mauzoleum Morsztynów..., p. 189 – 201.)
troops of Suvorov); the monument commemorating Franciszek Łakiński (a Napoleonic officer that died in 1845) in Łaziska near Wągrowiec, the tomb of the Worcell family in Stepań in Volhynia (beginning of the 19th century); the tomb of Władysław Trojanowski in Aleksandrów Kujawski (around 1880), the tomb of the Skrzyński family in Zagórzany (1905); the tomb of General Adam Dembicki in Sanok (1933) and the funerary pyramid of the Kulczycki family in Międzybrodzie near Sanok (1936). It is also worth to remember the pyramid-shaped tombs raised by German families von Eben und Brunnen around the year 1780 in Rożnow (Silesia) and von Fahrenheit in Żabin (East Prussia).

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