

GUTTERS, LATRINES AND CLOSETS. SANITATION PROBLEMS IN CENTRAL-EUROPEAN TOWNS IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN TIMES (the 15th – second half of the 19th centuries)

On 26–27 November 2004 in Gdańsk a scientific session was held, organized by the History of Towns Commission of the Committee of Historical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Institute of History of Gdańsk University and The "Uphagen's House" Society in Gdańsk. The conference concerned the problems signalled in the title above.

The debate opened with Jerzy Piekalski's (Wrocław) paper, discussing the state of pollution of medieval and early modern towns of Central Europe. He described, among other things, the town-creative human activity and drew attention to the importance of the level of ground-waters for the removal of sewage. While analysing the results of archeological research he also characterized the role of 12th–14th-century pavements, public drains and latrines for the hygiene of the urban centres of that era.

Piotr Jan czewski (Wrocław) chose a more narrow scope for the subject of his paper; taking the town of Wrocław as an example he showed the state and functioning of some sanitary facilities of a medieval urban centre. He also showed the criteria on the basis of which archeologists can distinguish the remains of the wells from those of cesspools of that era and described 12 types of the construction of latrines in Wrocław between the 13th and the 18th centuries. Archeological material was also used by the next lecturer, Robert Krzywdziński (Gdańsk), who discussed the gutters and latrines of late-medieval and early modern Gdańsk. He took into account about 60 latrines and four gutters situated in the Old and Main Town; the author isolated as many as 10 types of latrines, characterizing among other things their construction (mainly poles with cross-beams) and various types of board-joining. The next lecture, presenting the results of the latest archeological research on 15th–18th-century latrines, was delivered by Zbigniew Polak (Warsaw). He analysed numerous cesspools discovered in 2002–2003 in Powroźnicza (Ropemaker) street in Gdańsk, and compared their construction to thousands of cesspools earlier found in Długi Targ (Long Market) street in that city. He observed that the latrines of that era were generally two metres deep, placed at the back of the building-plots, and constructed according to a similar pattern with the use of poles.

Afternoon debates on the first day of the conference started with Urszula Sowina's (Warsaw) paper entitled *Water Pollution in Medieval and Early Modern Towns*. The author presented actions taken by town authorities and the owners of towns aimed at protecting waters from pollution. This consisted of testing the purity of waters and issuing regulations forbidding their contamination, as well as sanitation operations taken directly by the municipalities. Sowina also drew attention to the fact that the floods at that time were real ecological disasters which not only caused destruction but also the outbreaks of epidemics and infectious diseases.

Zofia Maciakowska (Gdańsk), on the basis of several 14th–15th century town books presented her hypothesis concerning the sources of water supply in medieval Gdańsk. In her opinion, these were: the Siedlce stream, running at that time across the later New Town, the Radunia channel and the Motława river. A wider subject was chosen by Roman Czaja (Toruń), who discussed the state of hygiene of the Old Town of Elbląg in the 14th–15th centuries. The author found that the authorities of Elbląg developed intensive activity by demanding the streets

to be paved, forbidding the pollution of the town with dung and carcasses, and trying to restrict urban swine-raising. R. Czaja noted, however, a lack of regulations concerning the disposal of sewage from private latrines; but he drew attention to the attempts to clean up the Market Square as well as the vicinity of the Town Gates and of the Embankments. Those issues were also discussed in the next paper, by Leszek Kotlewski and Lidia Grzeszkiewicz-Kotłowska (Toruń) entitled: *The Disposal of Sewage in Late-medieval Toruń*. It analysed among other things the cleaning of the ditches running down the middle of the streets and round the Town Hall, the regular cleaning of the cesspools, as well as the systematic sprinkling of the town routes with wooden chips or remnants of leather.

The second day of the conference started with three papers devoted to the role of the hangmen and dog-catchers in the cleaning of Old-Polish towns. Andrzej Karpiński (Warsaw) discussed various tasks set to the hangmen, such as removing stray animals and carcasses from the streets and the faecales from the private latrines, cleaning prisons, the areas of the gallows and places of executions, burying the corpses of the executed people, of the suicides as well as of persons charged with social infamy. These occupations, especially in the 18th century, yielded profits that surpassed the payment the hangmen and their helpers received for torturing and executing criminals. Similar conclusions were reached by Dariusz Kaczor (Gdańsk) and Jacek Wijaczka (Toruń) who analysed the contracts signed by the authorities of Gdańsk, Elbląg and Königsberg with the local hangmen in the 16th-18th centuries.

The interests of Bogusław Dybaś (Toruń) paper focussed on the detailed regulation of 1595, concerning the cleaning of Toruń. The co-author of this document, the Mayor of Toruń Heinrich Stroband, in 28 points discussed the principles of the disposal of rubbish and sewage, formulated the prohibitions against street-soiling by the owners of urban private property as well as retributions for keeping swine and pigeons in the town. This regulation agreed with Stroband's idea of creating legal foundations of the functioning of a *sui generis* ideal city. Urban statutes and regulations of the 16th-18th centuries served also as the basis for Józef Arno Włodarski's (Gdańsk) paper concerning the hygiene of the towns in Warmia. He presented the problem of urban hygiene in normal times and those of epidemics. During the plagues the town authorities not only tried to remove excessive rubbish and carcasses from the streets but also to rid the city of vagrants and beggars, considered to be the carriers of disease.

Radosław Kubicki's (Kielce) report concerned the general sanitary state of the towns in the Świętokrzyskie region in the 16th-18th centuries, while Ewa Baryłowska-Szymańska's (Gdańsk) paper discussed the standard of private hygiene maintained in the houses of 18th century inhabitants of Gdańsk. On the basis of probate inventories the author discussed the location and character of the closets and bathrooms of those times as well as the common utensils, that is: chamber pots, basins, dressing-tables, soap-holders, spittoons etc. A separate fragment of her work dealt with insecticides and the means of air-purification.

Iwona Janicka (Gdańsk) discussed the sanitary facilities used by the inhabitants of Vilna in the 19th century. She drew attention to the fact that despite the functioning of the urban sewage and water-supply systems, public baths and latrines, the general standard of public and private hygiene in the town was still unsatisfactory. Dagmara Fleming-Cejrowska (Bydgoszcz) reached similar conclusions in her analysis of the medical opinions about "the public conveniences and toilets" in Warsaw in the second half of the 19th century. Most of Warsaw sanitary arrangements were not only outdated, but also terribly dirty and stinking.

The papers delivered at the session and other materials of the conference will soon appear in print.

Andrzej Karpiński, Urszula Sowina