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ON THE ISSUE OF DATING CHRISTIAN BURIALS

(Review) Andrii Fylypchuk, *Arkheolohiia khrystyianskykh nekropoliv litopysnoho Plisneska* [Archaeology of Christian necropolises of the chronicle's Plisnesk]. Lviv 2020: Rastr-7, 136 pp.

In the study of the beginnings of Rus', the funeral rites of the princely era are inextricably linked with the process of Christianization of the region. It is the nature of burials to function as a kind of marker in space and time, reflecting the degree of penetration of the new creed into the society of the period. At the same time, in some regions, the introduction of Christianity as a state ideology had certain features due to a number of factors, among which socio-political changes (reforms in the system of territorial division, state administration and taxation) are basic ones. Reforms aimed at "conquest or conversion of souls" were implemented more slowly, on the way to which obstacles had to be overcome in the form of age-old traditions and social mentalities with their own forms of mythological perception.

At the dawn of the formation of proto-state Slavic groups, the Ukrainian Prykarpattia was the last region to lose its territorial and political independence. As a result of Prince Volodymyr's campaign against the Croats in 992/993, these territories became part of Rus', forming extensive lands of the grand-ducal domain. This event began an era of changes that lasted more than a century. In the context of the genesis of the new religious culture, processes that reflected the "restructuring" of spirituality and social consciousness are ex-

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tremely interesting. Due to the lack of written sources, archaeological material, especially the results of excavations of Christian necropolises, become the basis that allows highlighting the problems of the genesis of Christianity in the Prykarpattia region. Of particular importance are the sites, where the continuous development of the settlement for several centuries can be traced. Such sites include the Plisnesk hillfort*, where researchers have noted construction horizons dating back to the seventh to thirteenth centuries.

Territories of the Ukrainian Prykarpattia, which were newly incorporated into Rus' at the end of the 10th century, were undeveloped land far from Kyiv. There is no doubt that in the process of appropriation of these territories it was the military garrisons that took the first steps. However, at a certain stage of the process, clergymen would have joined them. Their missionary activity included the introduction, dissemination and rooting of the state religious doctrine.

Plisnesk, which was located on the border with Volhynia, and where the military garrison was deployed (which is confirmed archaeologically), was in the micro-regional epicentre of social and cultural transformations. Therefore, features (barrow cemeteries, dug-out and surface residential, household and manufacturing buildings, flat cemeteries), which have survived to the present day, reflect the complex intertwining of these historical and cultural processes. Of course, we are unlikely to know how and when the missionary work of the first Christian preachers took place. However, the results of archaeological research allow us to record reliably the time when, and form in which, this activity brought in Plisnesk its tangible and stable consequences, which was decisive for the whole region. One such factor, which testified to the dominant role of Christianity in the spiritual culture of the local population, is the widespread introduction of the funeral rite, carried out in accordance with the canonical principles of the Orthodox Church.

Despite the importance of Christian burials in the highlighting of a number of socio-cultural aspects in the past, this category of archaeological sites is still poorly reflected in the scientific literature of the region. The difficulty lies not only in identifying the graves (usually in flat cemeteries without any surface markers) but due to current trends in scientific research of the existing materials. At the same time, the vast majority of these cemeteries are identical in composition of the bodies, without burial equipment, which, at first glance, looks like they contain a minimum of historical information. Yet, it is precisely in the mass character, the unification of the ritual, and the total area of the necropolises that their information content lays, which is the task of an inquisitive researcher to see. Plisnesk is just such a site, where the archaeological excavation of burials has been carried out for many decades, but the time to draw general conclusions about them has now come.

* Plisnesk [Пліснеськ], a large fortified Rus' settlement on the banks of the Buh River near modern Pidhirtsi, Brody raion, Lviv oblast, mentioned in medieval chronicles as an important center of the Principality of Galicia-Volhynia, abandoned in the 13th century and excavated in 1880-1883, and on a number of occasions since 1940 [Ed.].

In the context of the general vision of the problem, the latest monograph *Archaeology of Christian necropolises of the Chronicle's Plisnesk* by Andrii Fylypchuk attracts attention. In the light of the current dearth of analytical knowledge, the monograph's title raises hopes that we will finally get the long-awaited reconstruction of the religious life of the Plisnesk of the Annals. The epigraph of the work *In cultum domini dei nostri exodi x*** best characterizes the victory of the Christian funeral ritual, as a result of the activities of the local clergy to the glory of the Lord. Will this study fulfil the expectations of the scientific community?

The monograph is not large – 136 pp. Its content consists of an introductory foreword, three chapters, conclusions, an appendix, a list of sources and literature and an afterword. The text part of the main content (97 pp.) contains 17 photos and 44 figures.

In the introduction, the author presents a brief description of the Plisnesk Archaeological Complex, the periodisation of which is presented in accordance with the results of many years of research, carried out by Mykhailo Fylypchuk. The stages of development of Plisnesk during the seventh to thirteenth centuries is illustrated by a plan. While this is already known from a number of articles written by M. Fylypchuk, it is also relevant in this case, as it introduces the reader uninitiated in the problems of site to the essence of its complex spatial organization and the dating of its constituent areas. Noting the mentions of Plisnesk in the written sources and the events connected with them, the author singles out certain periods in the socio-political development and development of the structure of the site's plan, emphasizing the importance of places where presumably churches and cemeteries are located. Andrii Fylypchuk paid special attention to the circumstances of the discovery and study of these necropolises, emphasizing the accidental discovery of most burials, their perfunctory and partial, partly unprofessional, study. In this regard, it should be noted that from the point of view of the modern researcher this is true. But to assess the achievements, mostly of amateurs, and only rarely scholars of the nineteenth century should be through the prism of the development of the science of that time rather than our own. Both then and now, we are permanently losing valuable sites. The point is to note those positive efforts of enthusiasts, due to which the archaeological remains were recorded (at the level of the methodology of the time), and the material was stored in museum collections. In the introduction, A. Fylypchuk defines the issues that the present volume is intended to address, the introduction into scientific circulation and the implementation of a generalized analysis of all currently known ground inhumation burials.

Chapter 1 “Necropolis of the Chronicle's City” is generally devoted to the history and results of research of the burials within single urban areas, which are reflected in three sections: “1.1 Cemetery on the Dytynets (Zamchysko place)”, “1.2 Burial in Tserkvyska place”, “1.3 Cemeteries on the posad (Vysoke Horodysko)”.

** The quote comes from the inscription on the portico to the rotunda of the nearby church of Exaltation of the Holy Cross and St. Joseph (1752-1766) by the Koniecpolski Palace in Pidhirtsi (Podhorce) [Ed.].

The archaeological excavations at the *Dytynets* (Citadel) were the largest, as they were carried out by almost all famous Lviv archaeologists who studied the Medieval Period: Yaroslav Pasternak (1940), Ivan Starchuk (1948), Volodymyr Honcharov and Mykhailo Kuchera (1953), Roman Bahriy (1970-1971, 1988), Mykola Peleshchyshyn and Roman Chaika (1980), Mykhailo Fylypchuk (1993, 2001, 2003). Already from this list, it is clear that these researchers belonged to different generations of scientists, and used different methods of excavation and documentation of objects. And here we should pay tribute to both Mykhailo and Andrii Fylypchuk, who, realizing the difficulties of drawing up consolidated plans, tried to analyse the location of the excavations as carefully as possible and plot them on the plan of the area as close as possible. Thus, the plan of excavations in the central part of the hillfort (fig. 3) is in fact the basis that serves as a source for conclusions about the social topography, periodisation of features and the time of their functioning. Describing the layout of burials within each of the excavations, A. Fylypchuk, if necessary, refers to excerpts from site diaries and reports, as in part these are the only clarifications of the circumstances of the discovery of burials, not reflected in the plans. However, the low quality of illustrations must be noted.

Describing the burials, A. Fylypchuk provides information on the total area of the site excavated by each researcher, the number of opened graves and their topography, shape and parameters of grave pits, the peculiarity of the position of the skeletons and the availability of accompanying grave goods. At the same time, the researcher focuses on the stratigraphy of features – the superposition of grave pits on the older structures, which is crucial for the periodisation and dating of both the burials themselves and the stages of functioning of the *dytynets*. At the same time, the opinions of researchers who conducted their excavations regarding the types of burials, sex and age of the dead, time of the funeral are noted. It is important to emphasize here that most of the burials on the *dytynets* represented flat, extended inhumations lying on their back, head to the west, with a Christian position of hands (on the chest or abdomen in various combinations). Five burials under stone slabs and one in a stone sarcophagus have been distinguished from the total number. All this information is presented as comprehensively as possible.

In our opinion, the excavations in the Tserkvyska place, located on the western side of the *dytynets* and outside its fortifications, were extremely important. R. Bahriy was attracted to this area by clusters of boulders, on which the researcher noted traces of working. This material gave him the hope of finding the remains of a monumental structure. However, all researchers (R. Bahriy, M. Fylypchuk and N. Shui) failed to capture any regular outline of any building structure. Instead, A. Fylypchuk rightly connects this accumulation of stones with natural quarries, raw materials from which were extracted for centuries and also in the eighteenth century for the nearby Pidhirtsi monastery. It should be noted that near the scatter of stones a cultural layer with traces of residential activities was recorded. In an area of 160 m² there were two clay kilns, around which a considerable number of fragments of pottery were collected, which R. Bahriy dated to the tenth to eleventh centu-

ries. Interestingly, in the southern part of the excavation, at a distance of 4 m from the kilns, there was a burial covered with stones and with a stone tile-pillow under the head of deceased. A bronze lyre-shaped buckle (at the feet) and a pot with small embers inside (near the head) represent grave goods. R. Bahriy dated the burial to the tenth to eleventh centuries. However, the proportions of the pot and the shape of its rim, presented by A. Fylypchuk in Fig. 39 indicate a later date, at least twelfth century. Besides the pottery, four ceramic glazed tiles were also found within the excavation area. These two categories of archaeological material (burials and ceramic tiles) indicate, as A. Fylypchuk finally points out, that there was a cemetery on this western terrace, apparently planned near a sacred building. It is important in this point to establish the time of burial, because it is possible that this will provide an answer to the question where people who lived in the *dytynets* in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries were buried.

Another large area on the hillfort is the '*posad*' in the Vysoke Horodysko place. Active excavations were also carried out here in 1940 (J. Pasternak), 1949 (I. Starchuk, V. Honcharov, O. Ratych and T. Plakisy), and again in 2013 (M. Fylypchuk). Describing the results of these studies on the basis of reports, A. Fylypchuk, unfortunately, did not indicate on general plan the location of both these and the latest excavations from 2015-2016.

Chapter 1 concludes with brief research results, placed after each section. This chapter is important because both the history of research and the characteristics of the burials presented here serve as a source for investigating the questions of the chronology of the necropolises and the development of the funeral rites, presented in the next two sections "The problem of the cemeteries' chronology" and "Pre-Christian and Christian Plisnesk's burials: evolution or revolution of the funeral rite?"

In considering the chronology, it seems obvious that any consideration of these problems should start with a presentation of the features of the stratigraphy of the features (superposition of burials on the residential buildings) and a presentation of the evidence for the dating of both the cultural layer and the buildings themselves, and thus the burials presented in chapter 1. Yet, A. Fylypchuk refers only to the chronology of the features discussed as deduced by the original authors of the excavations. Most researchers attributed the burials considered here to the post-Mongol period. Instead, M. Fylypchuk identified three phases of the functioning of the necropolises within the period from the middle of the twelfth to the beginning of the thirteenth centuries. The author of the monograph considered here generally agrees with this opinion. We would like to make a few comments about this.

The situation concerning the burials in the Plisnesk hillfort is both difficult and typical for this category of sites. First of all, it is necessary to take into account the degree of destruction of the surface within the structural areas of the ancient defensive site. All researchers noted three levels of depth to which the burial pits were dug even within the area of single excavation: 0.30-0.40 m, 0.50-0.60 m, 0.7-0.8 m. In some places, they could lie even shallower – just below the turf, or a little deeper – up to 1.0-1.10 m. It was also briefly

noted that the cause of the shallow grave pits was ploughing. It is therefore extremely necessary to present the characteristics of the surface in the area where the burials were studied, noting any modern earthmoving and the degree of destruction of the cultural layer. This, to certain extent, would allow reconstruction of the original level of the ancient surface. The comparative analysis of the depth of those burial pits that intersect each other is essential for the periodisation of burials (and especially its verification). Unfortunately, in most records, these data are missing and the reader is forced to rely solely on the already generalized account of the author of the monograph. As for the depth of inhumation, it would be worth taking into consideration the fact that the later burial pits were dug much deeper than the previous ones. Therefore, the difference in the depth of burial pits, as a separate feature, is not a sufficient basis for the periodisation of burials. A notable example of an unreasonable interpretation of a burial concerns Grave No. 8a (a cluster of bones of an entire skeleton), the grave pit of which was covered by Grave No. 8 (examined at the level of the legs) (p. 54, fig. 31; 34) and which, incidentally, was dug deeper than the other one. Following M. Fylypchuk, the author defines Grave No.8a as “reburial or multiple burial [...] that continued the burial pit of Grave No. 8”. But the figure clearly shows that the bottom of the burial pit of Grave No. 8a (0.50 m) is cut by Grave No. 8 (0.55 m). It is clear that as a result of digging a pit under the latter came across an ancient burial, the remains of which were carefully collected in one place (in this case at the feet of a new burial). This practice, recorded in other towns of the princely age, speaks in favour of the presence of canonical precepts in the funeral ritual, which eventually took place in the subsequent period. Although it is worth noting that the custom of multiple burial in the grave of the ancestor after exhumation and washing the bones of the last one with holy water is also known in the Balkans. In some places, it has survived even in the twentieth century and was considered one of the types of “reburial”. The existence of such a custom in Rus’ is not reflected in any sources, after all, as in ethnographic evidences.

The larger problem, in our opinion, lies in the circumstances of the overlapping of structures by graves. Most researchers thought that the burials lay on top of features that they dated quite widely to the tenth to eleventh centuries, and were dug into the cultural layer of the twelfth to thirteenth centuries. M. Fylypchuk attributed only one building (building 1/1993) to the end of the thirteenth century, and dated the three burials that cut it to the post-Mongol period. All this indicates the need for a thorough analysis of artefacts from these structures, primarily the ceramics. As the above example of dating a pot of charcoal shows, the situation with the dating of ceramic material from this site is ambiguous. A well-developed periodisation and chronology of pottery from the site would be an indispensable basis for dating the necropolises.

Analysing the excavations from different years, A. Fylypchuk provides all possible information about these studies, which indicates a balanced approach to the chosen topic of an experienced researcher. He also carefully marks the excavation area by year. And hence there was only one step to present to the reader the total excavated area, and therefore the

area occupied by the burials (a total of about 170 graves) and to calculate the percentage of the necropolis compared to the area of the *dytynets* or *posad*. This means that the fact that the necropolis in particular on the *dytynets* (as the most researched part of the city) occupied most of its area would be more clearly reflected. And this raises doubts about the simultaneous existence of the cemetery and household and manufacturing buildings there. The conclusion of A. Fylypchuk that “the cemetery functioned for a long chronological period, [...] grew strongly and constantly reduced the space for household and manufacturing building” (p. 60) obviously does not stand up to criticism. But we must pay tribute to the researcher, he reserves the right to make mistakes and future studies will allow him to clarify questionable points.

A few words are necessary about a special category of artefacts from these investigations, ceramic glazed tiles. They were recorded in all areas of the site where excavations were carried out. In combination with the burials, as A. Fylypchuk rightly points out, they are an indirect proof of the existence of a sacred building. Various researchers of Rus’ antiquities once wrote about this, in particular M. Hrushevsky, L. Chachkovsky and J. Pasternak. It is only necessary to pay attention to the fact that in Plisnesk both single tiles (whole and in fragments) and their clusters appeared in the studied areas, but certainly in a redeposited state. This indicates the destruction of the sacral buildings. The presence of tiles in the filling of grave pits, or even near them, indicates rather the planning of burials on the place of destroyed churches.

In his account, A. Fylypchuk draws attention to the lack of grave goods in burials, as well as to the presence of certain items, in his opinion, typical for the Old Rus’ (namely pre-Mongol) period – especially glass bracelets and gold-woven items of clothing. Here we must note that the existence of these and other artefacts that appear in the burials of Plisnesk is limited to the end of the thirteenth century. This *a priori* pushes the upper chronological boundary of the necropolis to the end of the thirteenth century. At the same time, A. Fylypchuk cites examples of burials under stone slabs and in the stone sarcophagus as an argument that they “could not have been carried out in post-Mongol times”. Why not? Because the researcher thinks that from the second half of the thirteenth century on the hillfort was a hamlet, and if we consider that these burials had taken place at this time, the rural form of settlement “did not correspond to the social status of the dead”. At the same time, the author does not give a generalized description of the burials under stone slabs interred on the site of the settlement (the total number of which is at least 10), simultaneously making assumptions about their elite nature. And here we could argue, make different assumptions, but the further we go, the more obvious is the problem of the need for a comprehensive analysis of ceramic material as a basis for dating features. As for the above-mentioned “elite” burials, their small number (only 10 burials under slabs and one in a sarcophagus) speaks in favour of the fact that they are not a natural manifestation of a functioning social elite, but rather an exception, its remains. Here it is worth drawing attention to the fragmentary nature of both the slabs and the sarcophagus which seem to

support this. The fact that most burials are single ones (very few that overlapeach other), there is a clear layout, as well as a small number of grave goods allow us to speak of a fairly short time of functioning of the necropolis, which was probably limited to the thirteenth century. During the first half a century after the Mongol invasion, the remains of the surviving population whose houses were in a different place, and not in on the site of former fires and massacres laid their dead to rest on the ashes of sacral complexes. The buildings of subsequent centuries already reflected other historical realities.

In general, in our opinion, the work would be enriched by statistics presented in tables, for example, on the characteristics of the position of hands of the deceased, the presence of grave goods or so-called “stone pillow”. Diagrams would facilitate the perception of content with rich factual material. In addition, the lack of anthropological analysis is highly noticeable in the characterization of burials. The known difficulties in achieving this in expeditions of the twentieth century can still be understood. But the absence of an anthropologist in the 2015-2016 expeditions is unjustified. As a result, the book does not contain much significant information from anthropological studies.

The last section, “Plisnesk’s Pre-Christian and Christian burials: evolution or revolution of the funeral rite?” is devoted to the comparative analysis of the sepulchral tradition of the Slavic and Rus’ periods. A. Fylypchuk rightly notes the lack of an evolutionary link in the rituals that were observed during these very different historical stages. He interprets the appearance and dominance of flat inhumation burials in the context of the introduction of Christianity in the Ukrainian Prykarpattian region as a new (for these areas) state ideology. The term “revolution” in relation to the canonical church precepts in the observance of the new funeral ritual, proposed by the author, is quite applicable.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that A. Fylypchuk’s monograph *Archaeology of Christian necropolises of the Chronicle’s Plisnesk* is one of the few studies devoted to the analysis of Christian necropolises in Galician Rus’. The value of the work (despite the critical remarks here) is primarily in the source base, which represents a consolidated analysis of the results of excavations carried out by several generations of archaeologists. The author took into account and emphasized the conclusions of all the researchers who studied the Plisnesk burial complexes and expressed their own views, opinions and assumptions. The appearance of this book, dedicated to only one site, once again proves the relevance of such research. It focuses on that huge layer of knowledge associated with Christian culture that is still a poorly studied sphere of the activity of the Church and spirituality of the princely ages of the history of the region.