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HOSPITAL AND OLD AGE IN LATE-MEDIEVAL WROCLAW

European societies are ageing. Consequences of this fact can be seen almost in every field, from religious life to economy. Historiography has also taken up the problem of elderly people¹. However, although demographic changes coincide with the new interests of researchers, they don't seem to be interrelated. We rather have to deal here with the continuation of earlier studies in social history; suffice it to mention both the achievements of the "Annales" school and of gender studies, recently followed so intensively.

Research into the old age goes in two directions. The first one embraces investigations into the demographic structure — concerning such issues as the average life expectancy or the percentage of old people per total population — as well as the legal and economic situation of this group. Another current consists of reflections upon the mentality of early times: the way of perceiving elderly people and patterns suggested to them. The comprehensive works by Georges Minois and Peter Borscheid present an attempt at combining both these directions and analysing their interconnections. Polish studies of this issue as regards the Middle Ages are not very advanced². The obstacle is above all the

¹ P. Borscheid, *Geschichte des Alters. 16.–18. Jahrhundert*, Münster 1987 (*Studien zur Geschichte des Alltags*, Bd. 7), p. 7; G. Minois, *The History of Old Age: From Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Cambridge 1989, p. 5; M. Kopczyński, *Old Age Gives No Joy? Old People in the Kujawy Countryside at the End of the 18th Century*, "Acta Poloniae Historica", vol. LXXVIII, 1998, pp. 81–102.

² Few studies have been devoted to this problem in the modern era: apart from M. Kopczyński's above-mentioned article we can cite A. Wyczański's study *Opieka nad ludźmi starymi na wsi polskiej w XVI w. (The Care of Old People in the 16th c. Polish Countryside)*, in: *Biedni i bogaci. Studia z dziejów społeczeństwa i kultury ofiarowane Bronisławowi Geremekowi w 60 rocznicę urodzin*, Warszawa 1992, pp. 65–69; Grzegorz Myśliwski, *Starość i długowieczność w Polsce do połowy XVI w. na tle porównawczym (Long Life in Poland till the Half of the 16th Century against Comparative Background)*, "Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej", vol. XLI, 2001, pp. 169–198.

lack of relevant sources. Those that exist do not allow us to discover the age structure even of small communities taken as a sample. Polish research has not brought out as yet a representative anthology of texts concerning the issue of old age; nor have the extant iconographic materials been analysed so far. Thus an indirect way may prove useful, i.e. an analysis of the institution called into being for the care of old people. This exactly was the function of some hospitals.

Hospital archives are profusely exploited by researchers into the old age in the cities of modern France, the Netherlands and Northern Italy. Margaret Pelling and Richard Smith justly contend that only a small proportion of elderly people found shelter in charitable establishments and that the results of research into hospitals provide us with an incomplete and distorted picture³. Indeed, the analysis of the function of poor-houses cannot produce a satisfactory reconstruction of demographic relations. But it can help to reconstruct the patterns shared by the founders, charges and benefactors of these establishments. If an institution was created by a given community on its own initiative, was later supported by it and was to serve exclusively or primarily its elderly members — then we can treat such an enterprise as the realisation of a certain ideal. Old people found there conditions best suited to their and their surroundings' needs.

The care for people advanced in years was not the original task of hospitals⁴. Their statutes and foundation documents mention various categories of the poor, but few old people happen to occur in them. The Warsaw Holy Spirit Hospital *extra muros*, designed for *pauperibus quos varilis naturae erumpit et aetatis seni defectibus*, was an exception, and yet even here old age is

³ M. Pelling, R. M. Smith, *Introduction*, in: *Life, Death and Elderly. Historical Perspectives*, ed. M. Pelling, R. M. Smith, London-New York 1991, p. 17.

⁴ On the institution of hospital: S. Reicke, *Das deutsche Spital und sein Recht im Mittelalter*, Bd. 1–2, Stuttgart 1932 ("Kirchenrechtliche Abhandlungen", H. 111/112, 113/114; Neudr. Amsterdam 1961); J. Imbert, *Les hôpitaux dans le droit canonique*, Paris 1947; *Histoire des hôpitaux en France*, ed. J. Imbert, Toulouse 1982; B. Roučka, *Špitály, jejich majetek, správa a postavení v danovém systému českého feudalismu*, "Právněhistorické studie" 12, 1966, pp. 41–90; K. Dola, *Opieka społeczna Kościoła (Social Welfare in the Church)*, in: *Historia Kościoła w Polsce*, ed. B. Kumor, vol. 1, part 1, Poznań 1974, pp. 442–446; K. Dola, *Szpitalie średniowieczne Śląska (Silesian Medieval Hospitals)*, part. 1: *Rozwój historyczny (Historical Development)*, "Rocznik Teologiczny Śląska Opolskiego" 1, 1968, pp. 239–291, part 2: *Funkcjonowanie (The Function)*, *ibid.* 2, 1970 (pub.: 1971), pp. 117–208.

mentioned only as one of the causes of poverty⁵. Thus theoretically, even if an old person found shelter within the walls of a poor-house, this was not because of his or her old age, but of a lack of the means of survival. Only one category of inmates may be supposed to consist mainly of old people. These were prebendaries (*prebendart*, *Pfründner*), i.e. those who for a definite payment had bought lifelong maintenance for themselves in a poor-house.

The sale of prebends was a certain paradox in the history of medieval charitable institutions. In order to gain the status of a poor person and receive alms one had to show one was rich (fees were very high) and pay for the admission. This situation, however, did not arouse any resentment or even astonishment of the contemporary people. In Gdańsk only the reservation of one of such houses exclusively for wealthy people aroused protests — and even this reaction was isolated and ineffective⁶. It cannot be ruled out, either, that the resistance was aroused not by the demand for payment, but its exorbitant amount. Prebends had been bought in hospitals since their beginning; this was a universal phenomenon in the whole of Central Europe⁷.

Its origin goes back to the early Middle Ages and is connected with monasteries and convents⁸. For an adequate payment, usually in the form of a landed property, one could obtain the right to live and have meals within convent walls, and to participate in the convent's religious practices, as well as to have prayers said for one's sake by monks (or nuns). We encounter lay people of such status in various religious orders both in the Middle Ages and in Modern Times. However, they were only a supplementary group and did not set the tone of monastic life. The situation was similar in many poor-houses.

Theoretically a prebendary did not need to be advanced in years. However, some circumstances allow us to see this group, at least in medieval Wrocław the prebendaries' group was predominantly composed of old, or allegedly old people. *Legavit hospitali IIII marcas annul census* wrote about one of them the

⁵ Duke Janusz the Elder's privilege of 1425, in: A. Wejnert, *Starożytność warszawska (Warsaw Antiquities)*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1848, p. 122, cit. from: A. Karpínski, *Pauperes. O mieszkańcach Warszawy XVI i XVII wieku (Pauperes. On the Inhabitants of Warsaw in the 16th and 17th cc.)*, Warszawa 1983, p. 250.

⁶ M. Mollat, *Les pauvres au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1978, p. 327.

⁷ S. Reicke, *op. cit.*, Bd. 1, p. 190 foll.; P. Borscheid, *op. cit.*, pp. 86–90.

⁸ S. Reicke, *op. cit.*, Bd. 1, p. 185, 190 foll.; G. Minois, *op. cit.*, p. 151 foll.

provost of the Holy Spirit Hospital, *et nutrit eum usque ad mortem et obiit in hospitali anno presentis scilicet 1435*⁹. The author of this note, Johannes Bindoff, became manager of this institution only seven years before, thus his charge stayed there probably even shorter. Anna Klose Tascherynne's mother, for whom the prebend was bought in the Corpus Christi Hospital after 1434, was probably no longer alive in 1441. We can suppose that in 1434 she was, just as her daughter, a widow¹⁰. Also Anna Rothe, who bought a place in this poor-house in 1522, appears as a *vidua*¹¹. We know of the admission to this hospital of two other women from the testaments of their sons¹². Neither of these informative documents allows us to determine precisely the age of those inmates, the mentioned persons, however, were probably not young. Attention should be drawn to the fact that maintenance was always bought for life. This is said *expressis verbis* in the extant contracts of sale-purchase of a place in the poor-house. The term for which the contract had a binding force was usually defined as *ad tempora vite* or *quamdiu vivet*¹³. The owners of hereditary prebends could hand them over to new charges after the death of the previous ones¹⁴. Johannes Cruczbecker erected at his own cost a cottage for himself and his wife on hospital premises. After his death his widow took over the right to live there, and only when she died, the house could be taken over by the management¹⁵.

⁹ State Archives in Wrocław (henceforward: SAW), The Records of the Town of Wrocław, G (hencefor. G) 1, 14, f. 221; Documents of the Town of Wrocław (hencefor. DTW) 27 VII 1431, N^o 1928 (the author of the catalogue misread the date: it should be 1437); The Records of the Town of Wrocław, Q (hencefor. Q) 28, f. 183 (*pro 300 florenis ungercalibus et 4 marcis census emptas pro 40 marcas super sculteto in Lewthenaw et omnibus attinentis ets*); f. 108.

¹⁰ Such conclusions are suggested by the analysis of two versions of Anna's testament (G 1, 14, f. 75; G 5, 33, f. 81–83), discussed further on.

¹¹ DTW, 11 VII 1522, N^o 9369.

¹² Agnes, the mother of friar Johannes, an Augustinian eremite from St. Dorothy's monastery, G 4, p. 270; and Katherine, the mother of an altarist from the Town Hall chapel, DTW, N^o 603.

¹³ G 4, p. 116, 1361; f. 135, 1369; SAW, Klose's Repertorium (hencefor. Klose) 24, f. 102, 1372; f. 145, 1380: *zu iren leptagen*: G 1, 13, f. 276, 1434; Q 154, 1, f. 14^b, 1452.

¹⁴ [...] *hñs decessis*, G 4, p. 270, 1365; the analogous German formulations are not so clear: *bet Abgang eines*, CDS Bd., 29: *Regesten zur Schlesiŝchen Geschichte* (hencefor.: SR), hrsg. C. Wutke, Breslau 1922, N^o 5945, 1337; *als manche persone abgeet*, statute of 1371, *Breslauer Urkundenbuch*, hrsg. G. Korn, Breslau 1870, (hencefor. BU), N^o 267, p. 224; G 4, p. 295.

It seems obvious that in every case the purchase of a place in the poor-house meant at least partly a breach with this world and preparation for a better life in the other. Hospital statutes from the territories of the German Empire, analysed by Siegfried Reicke, regulated the principles of accepting new persons and the fate of their property after their death; if the problem of leaving the hospital before one's death arose at all, this was almost always a penal relegation from it. Voluntary resignation from a place was a rare exception¹⁶. Thus we can assume that a prebendary once admitted to the poor-house spent the rest of his life there. Usually at this moment of his life his children were already grown up and independent, and his spouse was dead. Regardless of whether on crossing the threshold of the institution its future inmate was 40 or 80, at this moment he finished his professional life and was supposed to stay in the hospital till the end of his days.

The modern psychosocial concept of old age emphasizes not so much the concrete age, as inability to work, surrendering oneself to somebody else's care, the loss of an earlier social status, a posture of resignation and withdrawal from the rest of society, in accordance with predominant social patterns; all these changes were irreversible¹⁷. A prebendary entering the hospital fulfilled all these criteria.

As an example of the institution designed for people advanced in years we can take the Wrocław Corpus Christi Hospital, later known as the Holy Trinity Hospital. It was founded about 1318 by the city council and 20 years later entrusted to the Knights Hospitalers. Before 1354 the councillors again took over its management *in temporalibus*, leaving to the monks only their pastoral tasks. Then they set about the deep reform of their foundation. They redeveloped its possessions. Henceforward it consisted of a complex of villages and a high rent secured on the revenues of the town treasury. At least since the Hussite wars, i.e. since the 1430s a significant role was also played by rents from real estates in Wrocław and from the Hospital's farms. The

¹⁵ [...] *czu irre beyde lebetage [...] dy wyle se lebit [...] wenne der egenente hanke Cruczbecker von gote vorkentnisse abgett*, Klose 24, f. 141, 1379.

¹⁶ S. Reicke, *op. cit.*, Bd. 1, p. 204 foll., 229 foll.

¹⁷ I. Staręga-Piąsek, A. Lisowski, J. Suchecka, *Starość psychospołeczna i potrzeby opieki medycznej ludzi starych (Psycho-social Old Age and the Need for the Medical Care of Old People)*, Warszawa 1985, p. 27, 43.

reform in the third quarter of the 14th c. also brought about changes in the Hospital's organization. The post of the house-master was established, and that of provisors who represented the Hospital outside its walls and acted on behalf of the city authorities. The city council statute of 1371 forbade admitting to the poor-house more than 50 charges. Prebendaries started to prevail among them¹⁸. We rank in this group both those who owed a place in the Hospital to their relatives and those who bought prebends themselves. The latter group was growing and in time, probably since the turn of the 14th c., it clearly dominated. The situation that developed in the 14th c. endured, and at the beginning of the 16th c. the institution continued to serve the same category of charges.

Other Wrocław hospitals also happened to accept prebendaries. Especially numerous are mentions of such persons staying in the care of the Order of the Cross with a Star¹⁹. In 1336 a certain Bosucha gave his mill to the convent in return for which he would get board in the monastery just as other monks. In 1349 two Wrocław patrician women bought the right to place in the Hospital two chosen poor females²⁰. Prebendaries are mentioned in six entries from 1324–1360 in the obituary of this congregation; four of them, however, may refer to the branches of the Wrocław institution scattered over Silesia and Kujawy²¹. A large number of records from the relatively short period (1324–1360) contrasts with the almost complete silence in the sources from the next century. Only in 1457 do we learn of *Jungfrawen Salomeen im Spittal zu sand Mathis wonende*, and in 1490 Balthasar Szyrecki got the right to lifelong support from the convent²².

¹⁸ M. Słoń, *Die Spitäler Breslaus im Mittelalter*, Warszawa 2001.

¹⁹ The basic literature concerning this institution is provided by M. Starnawska, *Nekrolog krzyżowców z czerwoną gwiazdą: źródło do poznania środowiska zakonu i jego kontaktów (The Obituary of the Order of the Cross with a Red Star: the Source of Knowledge of the Order's Milieu and its Contacts)*, in: *Klasztor w społeczeństwie średniowiecznym i nowożytnym*, ed. M. Derwich and A. Pobóg-Lenartowicz, Opole-Wrocław 1996 [pub. 1997], p. 212; cf. loc. cit., *Między Jerozolimą a Łukowem. Zakony krzyżowe na ziemiach polskich w średniowieczu (Between Jerusalem and Łuków. Orders of the Cross in the Polish Lands in the Middle Ages)*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 118–127; M. Słoń, *op. cit.*.

²⁰ [...] *dicto Bosuche dare prebendam scilicet in cibo et potu, quibus alii fratres sunt ejusdem hospitalis conventi*, SAW, Rep. 66, 114, 1336; DTW, 7 VII 1349, N° 277.

²¹ The Wrocław University Library, MS IV Q. 198^a, records from 12 I, 6 III, 8 III, 5 V, 19 VI, 4 VIII; M. Słoń, *op. cit.*; on this source see: M. Starnawska, *Nekrolog, passim*.

²² SAW, Rep. 66, 592^b, 1457; 694, 1490.

In the 14th c., apart from the above-mentioned, there was another hospital in Wrocław — the Holy Spirit Hospital²³. It was run by canons regular. Here again mentions of likely prebendaries appear and disappear in a similar period, i.e. in 1345–1373; after 1355 we encounter here only earlier known persons²⁴. Thus we can suppose that the sale of prebends started in all the three institutions approximately at the same time. It had the largest extent in the Corpus Christi Hospital. After the municipal authorities took over this poor-house again in 1354 they redeveloped it and orientated towards one type of activity: the paid care of elderly people. As a result the foundation practically monopolized this type of service and the two remaining convents gave it up altogether.

Henceforward the purchase of an annuity in other hospitals was quite exceptional and probably took place only when a person was especially attached to a given institution. Balthasar Szyrecki, who decided to spend his last years in the care of the monks of the Cross with a Star, lived earlier on one of their farms. Johannes Gunzelinus was a *scultetus* at Lucienia, a village neighbouring with the estates of the Holy Spirit Convent; thus it is not accidental that he decided to purchase lifelong maintenance in it.

General hospitals established in the 15th c. and not connected with monasteries, almost completely closed their doors on prebendaries. The only exception known to us was the case of Anna Klose Tascherynne, which illustrates well the situation. Anna was the widow of one of the first provisors of the Holy Sepulchre Hospital established about 1411. In 1434 she wrote the first version of her testament. She ordered in it to give all her income to two charitable institutions: the Holy Sepulchre Hospital and the St. Lazarus' Leprosarium. Her possessions included two houses in the town — in one of them she wanted her mother

²³ On this institution: M. Słóń, *Średniowieczne rachunki szpitali wrocławskich (Medieval Accounts of Wrocław Hospitals)*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny" 105, 1998, fasc. 2, p. 18, note 7 (older literature); idem, *Ludzie z rachunków klasztornych. Przykład szpitala Św. Ducha we Wrocławiu (People from Monastic Accounts. The Example of the Holy Spirit Hospital in Wrocław)*, in: *Klasztor w społeczeństwie*, pp. 445–452; idem, *Szpitala*, chap. III; L. Krzywák, *Benedykt z Poznania. Śląski miłośnik historii z początku XVI wieku (Benedict of Poznań. A Silesian History-lover at the Beginning of the 16th c.)*, "Roczniki Historyczne" 57, 1991, pp. 77–86.

²⁴ *Nicolaus de Sancto Spiritu*, G 1, 1, f. 49; G 1, 2: f. 126, 1361; f. 222, 1364; G 1, 3: f. 99, 1371; f. 247, 1373; *Margareta von heiligen Geiste*, G 1, 1, f. 9–10, 1345; G 1, 2, f. 91; *Johannes Polonus*, DTW 1 VII 1355, without number.

to live. If the managers of this institution wanted to sell the house, they had to buy for her mother a place in the Corpus Christi Hospital and to ensure she had a personal servant. Seven years later Anna changed her last will. She bequeathed all her property to the poor-house once managed by her husband. Here she reserved a room for herself and her servant. This time she did not mention her mother; probably the latter died in the meantime²⁵. Evidently, the best place to secure quiet old age for one's parents was the Corpus Christi Hospital, even if one was very attached to another poor-house. Thus among the charitable institutions in Wrocław the council's foundation gained a certain monopoly of taking care of the elderly burghers. It was something more than just one of many places where one could spend the last years of one's life: we can see it as the symbol of the municipal community's concern for its old members.

We should emphasize that our deliberations concern only the urban society. In medieval Central Europe hospitals worked only in towns and it was the town which to a large extent influenced the shape of charitable institutions. In the case of the Corpus Christi Hospital we can speak outright of the council's special policy in face of the problem of old age. It was the city councillors who founded this institution, they designed it for a definite group of people, determined the relationships dominating in it and continually supervised the indoor life in this poor-house.

What did moving into the hospital mean for a Wrocław burgher? This was above all an irreversible change in his existence. He moved for the last time in his life. The reception of a new inmate was probably accompanied by an appropriate ceremony. In the Corpus Christi Hospital, according to its rule issued in 1416, he had to take an oath²⁶. First, the newcomer obliged himself to observe the rules of the hospital, its statute in the first place. This meant he had to accept his new situation. Henceforward he was to be one of the hospital's community and for this reason had to restrain his freedom e.g. the choice of the time to

²⁵ G 1, 13, f. 276, 1434.

²⁶ *Auch wer in dass hospital czihen wil von wes wegin das sie der sal sweren aha her indas hospital czuhet, das her des hauwes ahus)satzunge vnd gesetcze welle halden, vnd das her alle sein gut vnd habe farnde vnd ynfarnde das her hot ader ymer gewynnet die welle her in dem hospitale ist, dem hospitale nicht empfinden solle geistlich noch wertlich noch in keiner weise, DTW, 11 VII 1416, N^o 1383 (hencefor.: Statute 1416).*

have meals²⁷. Peter Borscheid rightly emphasizes the fact that the lack of personal freedom was the highest price a prebendary paid for all the benefits he derived from living in a hospital²⁸. The other part of the oath concerned his property. The inmate of the poor-house was not allowed from then on to dispose of any possessions, movable or immovable that he owned or would acquire in the future, either before a lay or ecclesiastical court. The hospital's right to inherit from the deceased inmate, the so-called *Anfallsrecht*, was in force in many hospitals²⁹ in the territory of the German Empire. Regardless of how we interpret the law-giver's intentions and actual consequences of this norm, it signified the end of the inmate's economic activity. In the case of craftsmen this was obvious: moving into the hospital ruled out not only further independent work, but even the supervision of one's workshop. But a merchant might think of continuing his activities. In the commercial sphere the advanced age not only was not an obstacle, but was even a serious advantage³⁰. However, *Anfallsrecht* categorically ruled out continuing any commercial activity. Indirectly, it seems, such a regulation signified a radical breach with one's previous life.

A person who decided to move into the poor-house knew that on crossing its threshold he or she wouldn't be able to hand over his or her property to anybody — either any other church institution, of his or her children. The eve of moving into the hospital was the last moment to prepare one's testament. One can imagine that the burghers did not miss this opportunity. We can suppose that usually they did not only write their last wills, but actually transferred their property. This would explain the fact that some inmates reserved for themselves some small income³¹; they wouldn't need to do it if they still continued to

²⁷ [...] *sal eyn tzlich mensche der | jhten molczeit obundes und morgens warten und wer der nicht warte deme sal der schaffer nictes gebin*, Statute 1416.

²⁸ P. Borscheid, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

²⁹ S. Reicke, *op. cit.*, Bd. 2, pp. 212–224.

³⁰ P. Borscheid, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

³¹ This was usually a definite sum which was a part of income from immovables or institutions (Lat. *census*, Germ. *Zins* or *Rente*). That type of transaction was very popular in late-medieval Central-European towns. See: B. Lesiński, *Kupno renty w średniowiecznej Polsce (The Purchase of Rent in Medieval Poland)*, Poznań 1966; the German studies, mainly by Rolf Sprandel and his disciples, are briefly presented by R. Czaja in his *Rynek kupna renty w Elblągu w pierwszej połowie XIV w. (The Rent Market in Elbląg in the First Half of the 14th c.)*,

receive income from their immovables. The majority of rent incomes that were recorded in the Corpus Christi Hospital accounts in the years 1485–1487 are known to us from the legacies recorded in assessors' books³². If the poor-house had actually taken over the whole property of all its inmates, its endowments would have grown enormously. This certainly was not the case. Prebendaries entered the hospital as relatively poor people and the resources of this institution were replenished only by the payments made by them on entering the house.

Thus *Anfallsrecht* signified in practice the necessity for the future inmates to part with their terrestrial property, to dissolve their most important ties connecting them to earlier life. Thus entering the hospital was a practically irreversible move. Were such consequences of statute regulations intended by their authors, or were they perhaps only their side-effect? Two circumstances speak for the first eventuality. Firstly, the rule issued by the council was written by the provisors of this institution, who knew well the relationships prevailing there; there is no ground suspecting them of naiveté. Next, the second decade of the 15th c. was a period of the greatest prosperity both in the economy of the whole region, and the Hospital itself. There is no reason why we should see the actions taken then as a feverish attempt to improve the financial standing of this institution. If we look on this issue in a broader context, the meaning of this principle seems obvious. It was applied in many hospitals in various parts of the German Empire, thus the hospitals' managers certainly followed the patterns of the poor-houses where *Anfallsrecht* already was in force. The urban élites wanted those people who had decided to spend the "autumn of their lives" under the protection of a charitable institution to resign their property earlier and to leave the freedom of action to their successors. The transition from an active professional life to the old age was to occur once and for all, as a radical cut. A man should work as long as he has the stamina; when this is lacking, one day he must leave for good. Together with the resignation from the past one should accept

"Zapiski Historyczne" vol. 52, 1987, fasc. 3, p. 7 foll. The charges purchased such a census secured on the hospital's income. Klose 24, f.102, 103, 145: the payment of such sums: Q 150, f. 76, 142.

³² Account book: Q 150; for the list of rent legacies for the benefit of the hospital see: M. Słoń, *Szpitalce*, annex; *ibid.* (chap. II. 2 and V. 4) an analysis of differences between these sources.

the future — the rules of communal life. The consent for this transition was to be given with due ceremony, in the presence of witnesses, since this was a public event concerning not only the interested parties.

The purchase of the prebend had one more important aspect. This transaction was meant to be not only a sale of a service; the payment given to the hospital was also a kind of alms. The prebendary who paid for his maintenance himself was also a benefactor of this institution.

On entering its walls he himself became a poor charge. Almost in all the sources the inmates of hospitals figure as *pauperes* or *armen leute*³³. However, they did not come from the town trash: the admission cost several dozen marks, more than the price of some houses in town³⁴. Within the walls of this institution there was no misery, either. In the second half of the 15th c. there was about 6 marks of annual income per inmate³⁵. This sum did not allow for any luxury, to be sure, and the rule of 1416 forbade, among other things, scorning the hospital food³⁶. But the latter was not so bad. Beer was made in the town brewery, all guild standards being observed. Bread was bought from the Wrocław bakers³⁷. For comparison: the Holy Spirit Hospital took its beer from a brewery on its farm, produced by the local unskilled workers who also baked the bread³⁸. In the Corpus Christi

³³ An exception from this rule is the above mentioned statute of 1416; even in its summary, included in the inventory of the hospital archives from 1503, the term *Armen* is consistently applied.

³⁴ In the second half of the 14th c. the prices ranged from 25 to 50 marks; no 15th c. transaction of this sort is known to us; we know of one from the beginning of the 16th c.: 70 guldens, i.e. about 50 marks, SR 5945, *Henricus Pauper. Rechnungen der Stadt Breslau von 1299–1358 nebst zwel Ratnarten von 1386 und 1387...*, ed. C. Grünhagen, CDS Bd. 3, Breslau 1860, p. 96; BU, № 252, p. 215; Klose 24, f. 9, 57, 76, 78, 102–104, 107, 131, 141, 145, 149; G 4, p. 116, 173, 270; G 1, 3, f. 6^b; DTW, 18 IV 1376, № 603; 7 V 1372, № 543; 11 VII 1522, № 9369; on the structure of wealth of Wrocław inhabitants see M. Goliński, *Socjotopografia późnośredniowiecznego Wrocławia (przestrzeń — podatnicy — rzemiosło) (The Sociotopography of Late-medieval Wrocław: Space — Tax-payers — Crafts, Wrocław 1997 (Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis № 2010, Historia 134), pp. 289–362; we will discuss this question later on.*

³⁵ In 1486 the cash income of this institution amounted to 300 marks, while the value of its farm-products can be estimated at 65 marks.

³⁶ [...] *sal eyne iczliche persone die in das hospital czlhen wil vor gut nemen und willtlichen erphoen was en der schaffer gibt noch des hawses vo/rm)ogen an spese adlr an Trinke und des nicht vormehen welle wedir mit worten noch werken wedir indem hawse, noch uswenig des huses noch Inketnerweise, Statute 1416.*

³⁷ Q 150, f. 32, 37–49, 81–83, 137, 139, 144–145, 197, 262–263.

poor-house for the elderly burghers such food went only to the servants' table, whose needs, at any rate, were satisfied by a separate kitchen (*hinderkoche*). Provisions for both groups were also bought separately, i.e. differently than in the Holy Spirit Hospital³⁹. The inmates frequently ate rolls, geese, pigeons, honey, and often drank the famous beer of the town of Świdnica⁴⁰.

We draw our information about food from accounts coming from a very short, about two-year period (September 1485 – June 1487). The financial situation of the Hospital was then as good as throughout the previous 100 years as well as the next 50 years, thus we can accept that decent board and relative well-being prevailed there throughout its whole history. The Hospital however, did not buy, clothing or shoes for its charges. Probably they came here provided both with a stock of their own things and with some cash. There were inmates who received small sums each year — about 1–2 marks, which could be assigned for their needs⁴¹.

At least a part of the inmates were given separate rooms. Towards the end of the Middle Ages probably all of them lived if not one per room, then two per room at the most⁴². However, we cannot say the same thing of the 14th c. When in 1379 one of the prebendaries (at the same time house-master) wanted to live together with his wife independently, he erected for this purpose a brick house in the hospital courtyard⁴³. Places bought at that time in the poor-house were called *lecti locum*, which also indicates a large common room⁴⁴. It is possible that it was divided with partitions into small cubicles, each with one bad designed

³⁸ Q 20, 1, *passim*; M. Słoń, *Szpital*, chap. III. 2.

³⁹ Q 150, f. 92, 128.

⁴⁰ Q 150, *Exposita uff dy schaferey*, f. 37–49, *passim*.

⁴¹ Klose 24, f. 102, 103, 145; Q 150, f. 76, 142.

⁴² Q 154, 1, f. 14^b; 2, f. 36, 1452; DTW, 11 VII 1522, N^o 9369; the fact that there were separate rooms is indicated by analogous situations in other towns of the German Empire (P. Borscheid, *op. cit.*, p. 90; U. Craemer, *Das Hospital als Bautyp des Mittelalters*, Köln 1963, pp. 87–89), and especially Nuremberg (*ibid.*, dr. 49) and by the 19th c. plan of our hospital, J. Rozpędowski, *Rozwój przestrzenny joantckiego kościoła p.w. Bożego Ciała we Wrocławiu (The Spatial Development of the Corpus Christi Hospital of St. John Order in Wrocław)*, Prace Naukowe Instytutu Historii Architektury Sztuki i Techniki Politechniki Wrocławskiej, N^o 22, Studia i Materiały, N^o 11, 1989, p. 166.

⁴³ Klose 24, f. 141.

⁴⁴ Klose 24, f. 78, 1368; f. 104, 1373; *Bettestat*, G 1, 3, f. 6^b; G 4, f. 256, 1369; Klose 24, f. 133, 1378.

for 1–3 persons. Such realities are known from many West-European hospitals⁴⁵.

The common room and food which was more modest than this known to us from later accounts could for many inmates signify a considerable lowering of the standard of life, in comparison to what they got used to outside the hospital walls. However, they certainly did not suffer penury. Their humble condition boiled down to having to content themselves with the modest meals offered by the hospital. The rule of 1416, forbidding any complaints about food, is very eloquent⁴⁶. The persons staying in the hospital had to adopt the posture of humble charges, living on the generosity of a charitable institution. The situation of dependence on the authorities of this house and the acceptance of this situation changed prebendaries into poor people — of course in the spiritual sense. If we are right in the above presented hypothesis that they had earlier handed over all their property to the institution, their spiritual poverty found its reflection in their real situation. While living in a warm and comfortable room, wearing their own, decent clothes, consuming tasty and abundant food, they still deserved to be called *pauperes*, both in the face of God and in the face of people. This gave them the right to obtain alms, i.e. live at the cost of the hospital, and this should alleviate their suffering in Purgatory.

The inmates probably were not obliged to any work for the sake of the hospital. We know only of two men who having acquired the status of prebendaries still exhibited considerable activity. The first was Johannes Cruczbecker, who on purchasing a place in the Hospital in 1369 reserved for himself the post of house-master. Indeed he took this post in the same year. Together with Johannes Dompnig he also performed the function of provisor. He resigned from his function as manager in 1379, however, he still appeared twice, in 1387 and 1389 as the Hospital's external representative⁴⁷. Another active man was Matthias Speicher, known to us from the account book. He permanently performed the function of sexton, for which he

⁴⁵ See note 42.

⁴⁶ See note 36.

⁴⁷ G 1, 3, f. 6^b, 72^b, 91^b, 96, 165, 173^b, 191^b, 203, 243^b, 253, 269^b, 271^b, 276^b; G 1, 4, f. 136, 141^b, 147 (1369–77); Klose 24, f. 103, 131–133, (1373–78); f. 141, 1379; G 1, 6, f. 11, 1387; DTW, 20 II 1389, N^o 794.

received some remuneration. He was one of those superiors of the hospital community who extended control over the house-master and the finances of the poor-house; it is possible that he initiated this control. Also in subsequent years, when he was no longer a member of *Obirleute*, he helped the manager: he delivered money to the steward on the farm, made purchases for the Hospital, witnessed setting accounts with the inferior personnel⁴⁸. The activity of those two men was closely connected with the internal functions of the Hospital and was of an extraordinary nature. No inmate except for Johannes Cruzbecker was, as far as we know, a house-master or a provisor. On the other hand during the making of the account-book no inmate exhibited such commitment as Matthias Speicher. The inmates were not expected to work. Their only obligation was to pray.

It goes without saying that the old persons were obliged in the first place to prepare for death and the Last Judgement by amassing treasures in Heaven. This was the purpose of their stay in the Hospital. Bartholomew Stein wrote at the beginning of the 16th c. that the people living in this Hospital *non tam inopes, quam qui deo servire volunt*⁴⁹. One had to pay several dozen marks for a place: for the same amount anybody could buy a life annuity and live on it till one's death, to say nothing of the fact that one did not need to get rid of one's whole property⁵⁰. Motivations for the decision to buy a place in a poor-house were of a religious nature. Here the inmates found the best conditions for serving God. The inmates were above all to pray. This was the first of the Hospital's rules; even the oath is mentioned in the second place⁵¹. In 1366, probably in the main hall of the Hospital, an altar of the Holy Trinity was erected and at the end of the century the hall was changed into a chapel; a hundred years after the altar, a small sanctuary under the same invocation was built (1466)⁵².

⁴⁸ Q 150, f. 59, 81, 101, 109, 130-132, 160, 205, 210, 218, 220, 224, 249, 255; 1486-1488.

⁴⁹ *Descriptio tocius Silesie et civitatis regie Vratislaviensis per Bartholomeum Stein*, hrsg. H. Markgraf, Breslau 1902 (SRS, Bd. 17), p. 60.

⁵⁰ P. Borscheid, *op. cit.*, p. 103; *ibid.* literature on *Leibrentenvertrag*.

⁵¹ *Czum trsten Weme das got gefuget das en die Ratmane ader a] erber lewte die do betstete haben gestift ader zu leyen haben in dame hospital das die allen gote dancken vnd got vordy beten von den is bekomen ist das en got gnedig seye vnd sollen das thun mit so fleyse das sie selbir icht von gote swer gerichtte durffen leyden*, Statute 1416.

The pastoral duties were performed by the hospitalers of St. John from the Corpus Christi Monastery on the opposite side of the street⁵³. Several Masses each week were also said here by the altarists. The chapel had four altar ministeria (foundations of 1366, 1375, 1430 (?) and 1442), two of which were certainly active until the end of the Middle Ages⁵⁴. Thus the inmates had easy access to liturgy. Nothing, however, is known of the obligatory participation in services; neither the statute, nor any document confirming the grants to the Hospital makes any mention of it. The rules of 1416 remind only the inmates that they have to pray, as eagerly as if their own salvation were at stake, for those who made their stay in the Hospital possible⁵⁵ — the councillors or other persons who financed a given place in the Hospital or made it accessible. The members of the council appear here both as founders of the whole establishment and as distributors of the majority of prebends⁵⁶. At the beginning of the 15th c. most inmates probably bought annuities in the hospitals on their own. The more they should be reminded that they owed the benefit of residency not only to themselves but also to the founders and benefactors of the house. The old people who decided to spend the autumn of their lives here, were obliged also to take care of the salvation of others, above all to beg for the prosperity and Lord's mercy on the town authorities. In this way they would serve the whole community with their prayers. It's worthwhile quoting

⁵² 1366: the altar in *hospitalis Corporis domini*, H. Luchs, *Der Johanniter-Convant und das heil. Leichnamshospital in Breslau*, "Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte und Alterthum Schlesiens" (hencefor.: ZVGS) 4, 1862, p. 359; 1395–1406: the chapel *prope ecclesiam corporis XPI, zuneste dem spittal*, DTW, 12 VIII 1480, N^o 5561 (inserted document of 1395); 10 VIII 1403, N^o 1941; G 1, 10, f. 106^b, 1406; cf. also G 1, 13, f. 184^b, 1430; the construction of the sanctuary in 1466: Q 154, 1, f. 19, 20; Klose 99, f. 40^b–41^b; we know this building from 19th c. drawings and a plan, J. Rozpedowski, *op. cit.*, p. 166; M. von Grossmann's engraving, 1820–1825, and H. Müntzel's drawing, 1828, O. Czerner, *Wroclaw na dawnej rycinie (Wroclaw in Old Drawings)*, Wroclaw 1989, Nos. 34 and 176.

⁵³ Klose 99, f. 40^b: the vidimus of the 1466 document, prepared in 1481.

⁵⁴ H. Luchs, *op. cit.*, p. 359; Klose 24, f. 102, 1372; DTW, 18 II 1377, N^o 618; 10 VIII 1403, N^o 1041; 18 VII 1414, N^o 1322; G 1, 13, 184^b; G 1, 17, f. 353; DTW, 17 VIII 1430, N^o 1889; 7 XI 1442, N^o 2836; 21 I 1443, N^o 2850; 28 VI 1486, N^o 5953; 30 III, N^o 5941; 3 IV 1510, N^o 8673; Klose 99, f. 41^b, 1515; B. Stein, *Descriptio*, p. 72.

⁵⁵ See note 52.

⁵⁶ The private purchasers of prebends frequently later handed over the obtained rights to the council, *Henricus Pauper*, p. 96, 1339; Klose 24, f. 57, 1363; f. 78, 1368; f. 104, 1373; f. 131–132, 1377; f. 134, 1378.

here a little episode. In 1368 Nicholas Polonus and his wife Agnes presented to the town *pro communi bono et republica ob dei intuitum specialem respectum* their butcher's stall, and the income from it was to be assigned for the upkeep of bridges and roads. Eight years later the same Agnes, after her husband's death, bought for 100 marks two prebends in the Hospital, probably for herself and her servant⁵⁷. Here we see the combination of connections with the hospital and an unusual concern for the town. The latter appears not only as an economic and legal community, it has also a spiritual dimension. The old people had their own role to play in it. Their task was close to that performed by monks and nuns; however, in contrast to them old people had to support themselves and they devoted to prayer that part of their lives only when they could not work any longer.

The hospital resembled a convent not only as a house of prayer. Its inmates were a strongly integrated group. They were called brethren and sisters, while the whole community was called a congregation. Both these terms, i.e. *Brüder und Schwester* as well as *Sammlunge* were used interchangeably⁵⁸. The inmates had a common statute, accomodation, meals, prayers. The rules called for a collective participation in meals. Those who did not observe it, were not to get any food at all⁵⁹. There were penalties for acting to the detriment of another inmate⁶⁰. On the one hand these regulations testified to conflicts within the group. On the other, however, they revealed the concern of authorities for maintaining the atmosphere of harmony within the community, or at least for maintaining its appearances. The order to inform against other charges contained in the same document testifies to the authorities' strong intention to maintain order and discipline⁶¹. This gave everybody the chance for a peaceful and pious life. It was up to the interested party to take advantage of this opportunity.

⁵⁷ Klose 24, f. 78, 131–132.

⁵⁸ E.g. Q 150, f. 136, *passim*.

⁵⁹ See note 36.

⁶⁰ [...] *sal nymand den andern lestern ader scheuden noch obilhandeln wedir mit worten noch mit werken heimelich noch offirbar*, Statute 1416.

⁶¹ *Auch eyn tzllich mensche das des hawses schade dirfure heimelich noch offirbar das sal deme schaffer offinbaren und melden bey senne eyde vnd bey seyner trewe, die her gote schuldig ist*, Statute 1416.

The authors of the statute were eager to maintain by the hospital's external appearances. All inmates were to conduct an exemplary life, so that the establishment gained a good reputation and constituted an elevating model for others. For transgressing this rule — and only this — an immediate eviction was envisaged, without any possibility of return⁶². The councillors and provisors set out their intentions quite clearly. They were really not interested in their charges' internal posture or the fate of their souls. An old person was obliged above all to give a good example. Here we find a repercussion of the well-known scene from the *Book of The Maccabees* (where an old man, for the sake of the young, prefers to perish rather than to pretend he is sinning) as well as of the medieval moralistic literature⁶³.

The councillors tried to ensure the community living in their foundation not only internal harmony, peace and good reputation. They also took care of this appropriate size and social composition. There were various reasons underlying the statute of 1371, which forbade the acceptance of more than 50 inmates. An excessive number of inmates could hinder the maintenance of the standard of life in the hospital and contribute to the slackening of the ties between the charges and facilitate the influx of undesirable persons. The city council statute gives no justification for this decision. We learn from the rules of 1416 that the decision was taken *der sammenunge zu gute vnd zu frommen*, for the good and benefit (piety?) of the community. In 1461 the councillors included in their letter to the Pope a short characteristic of the poor-houses in Wrocław. The Corpus Christi Hospital was established *pro depauperatis et honestis civibus et matronis*⁶⁴. This statement referred not to the foundation itself, but to the reform carried out in the third quarter of the 14th c.; it was then that prebendaries started to prevail. The institution

⁶² *Auch sal eyn tczlich mensehe Indem hospitale beide bey awswennig vnd Innewennung dem hospitale erberlich | Jognitlich leben also, das dem hospitale eyn lobelich vnd gut wort entstehe, das ander lewte diste grossere libe vnd gnade dorczn gewynnen und wen der schaffter anders erfunde den sal her l(asse)n awsczthen, und, vnd em der pfrunde nymme geben*, Statute 1416; on prohibition of complaints see note 36.

⁶³ 2 Mch 6, 27 foll.; K. Romaniuk, *Lata podeszcie i starosc wedlug Biblii (Advanced and Old Age According to the Bible)*, Warszawa 1993, p. 51; G. Minois, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

⁶⁴ *Politische Correspondenz Breslau im Zeitalter Georgs von Podiebrad*, hrsg. H. Markgraf, Breslau 1873 (SRS Bd. 8), N^o 60, p. 60.

founded by the council was designed for a distinctive social group — relatively wealthy burghers of the town of Wrocław. Due to the conditions created here, well-suited to the needs of the old burghers, there was never a shortage of candidates. On the other hand the high price and limited number of places deterred members of lower social strata.

As a result the hospital was meant to be open to people of relatively similar background and status. We can only partly assess whether this was the case. We know the names of over thirty inmates. Only a few of them could indicate they were related to the urban élite of power⁶⁵. None of the inmates, nor anyone of their close family had earlier sat on the council or on the bench. The representatives of town élites did not think it proper to enter a poor-house or to place their relatives there: simply speaking this was not a suitable place or company for them, although there was little probability there of rubbing shoulders with the real poor. The latter circumstance finds its confirmation not only in the examined sources concerning the sale of places. In 1486 the representatives of the community of inmates took control of the hospital's finances, and subordinated the house-master to themselves. This achievement, although short-lived, testifies to their rather strong position. The inmates belonged to the middle class.

The community's composition and the way its authorities were appointed are also important issues. These authorities were called *Obtrleute*. There were four to eight people in this group, an equal number of men and women. They always appeared *in gremio*, had the same prerogatives and were changed every year⁶⁶. One can hardly find a better testimony to the egalitarianism reigning here. The rule of 1416 forbade the inmates to look down on others (*obilhandeln*). Thus the idea of the equality of all inmates was present — and broken — as early as the beginning of the 15th c. We can draw similar conclusions from the analysis

⁶⁵ Michał Czadilmait (*BU*, № 251, p. 225, 1369) Margaret de Paczkow (Klose 24, f. 145, 1380), Nicholas de Lemberg (*ibid.*, f. 149, 1381), the daughter of Margaret Foytynne (G 1, 15, f. 386, 1451), Anna Rothe (DTW 17 XI 1517, № 9091); in the latter case her relationship to the councillor seems certain (G. Pfeiffer, *Das Breslauer Patriziat im Mittelalter*, Breslau 1929, p. 343); cf. *Breslauer Stadtbuch enthaltend die Ratslinie von 1287 ab und Urkunden zur Verfassungsgeschichte der Stadt*, hrsg. H. Markgraf, O. Frenzel, Breslau 1882 (CDS Bd. 11), index; the names of other charges see M. Słoń, *Szpitalce*, chap. V. 2.

⁶⁶ Q 150, f. 58, 71–105, 109, 125–127, 224–225, 249; more extensively M. Słoń, *Szpitalce*, chap. V. 3.

of contracts that the hospital's authorities signed with the purchasers of prebends. The latter were guaranteed the same maintenance as other inmates. We come across similar formulations in the records from the middle of the 14th c. and the beginning of the 16th c.: *sicut alii prebendarii, wie andere arme leute*⁶⁷.. In the document from 1522 the formula was developed: the accepted person was to get what others did and be satisfied with it (*vorgut nehmen* — an identical phrase, in the same context, appears in the statute of 1416). Moreover, the female inmate obliged herself *sich eyner anderen schwester gleichmassig halden* — to behave as any other sister⁶⁸. All the inhabitants of the poor-house were to be equal in all respects.

The necessity to enter some community was a natural consequence of an old person's retirement from his or her previous life. After breaking ties with their families and guilds they had to find their place in a new group. It provided support and at the same time subjected one to social pressure, as well as enforced the observance of obligatory norms. In order to fulfil these functions properly, the community could not be anonymous, hence its limited numeric strength. An old burgher at the end of his life was to associate with his equals. The hospital was a place where the need for effectiveness — economic, organizational or whatever other — did not enforce introducing any hierarchy that would make its activity more orderly and efficient. A community of really equal people could be realized here. The idea of poverty understood as surrendering oneself to somebody else's protection, dependence on and subordination to, found its fulfilment here⁶⁹. The motive of equality in the face of death, strongly rooted in the mentality of that era, must also have played here an important role.

The model of the ideal "autumn of life", reconstructed here, was shared by a considerable part of the urban community. This is testified by the unusual generosity of the burghers towards this

⁶⁷ Klose 24, f. 75, 1368; f. 103, 1372, s. 104, 1373; f. 133, 1378; f. 141, 1379; DTW 16 XI 1517, N^o 9091.

⁶⁸ [...] *enthaldunge essen trinken so vil man eyner anderen schwester pflieget taglich zw geben, das sie dann also vorgut nehmen sal und sich eyner anderen schwester gleichmassig halden*, DTW 11 VII 1522, N^o 9369.

⁶⁹ K. Bosl, "Potens" e "pauper". *Studi di storia dei concetti, a proposito della differenziazione sociale nel primo Medio Evo e del "pauperismo" dell'alto Medio Evo*, in: *La concezione della povertà*, a cura di O. Capitani, Bologna 1974, pp. 95–151. (German original published in 1963).

institution: the contributions to the hospital were not only the biggest but also the most numerous⁷⁰. The group of benefactors includes some names of members of the town élites, but they are not frequent. Both among the benefactors and the inmates prevail the persons whose names and surnames are not known from other sources. The object of donation was usually the rent from some real estate in Wrocław, which lets us surmise that the donors were mainly representatives of the middle class. Estates charged with rent for the sake of the hospital were dispersed all over Wrocław⁷¹. Thus this institution served the whole town; it was not supported by any single neighbourhood or professional group, as it happened in the case of other poor-houses. Because of the special profile of its charitable activity it could count on the generosity of very different urban groups.

This analysis of the hospital's work served us above all to reconstruct the patterns offered by the urban culture. However, the poor-house was not only a work of imagination: to some extent it also satisfied real social needs. It is thus worthwhile asking what part of the urban community could take advantage of the opportunity to settle there.

Relatively precise data concerning the number of the town-dwellers and the structure of wealth of the medieval Wrocław population are available only for the beginning of the 15th c. The 1403–1404 tax register of houses and workshops takes into account about 3,100 tax-payers⁷². The register embraces only the lower class of tax-payers, i.e. those whose property was worth from 20 to about 300 marks. They were almost exclusively men, hence the representatives of both sexes could double that number. We can confine our deliberations to this group, since the town élites, as we have seen, did not take the opportunity to settle in hospitals. On the other hand the price of the prebend, amounting to about 50 marks, barred this way not only to the poor, but

⁷⁰ In the years 1350–1520 the Corpus Christi Hospital received at least 168 rent legacies totalling over 500 marks; for comparison: the Holy Sepulchre Hospital received 132 legacies (323 marks), the Holy Spirit Hospital 112 (226 marks), others much less, e.g. St. Matthias's Hospital received 40 (126 marks), M. Słoń, *Szpitalce*, annex 7.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*; a good picture of the topography of hospital rents is also found in the inventory of this institution's archives from 1503, Q 154, 1, pp. 9–16.

⁷² SAW, The Records of the Town of Wrocław, K (hencefor. K) 8, *passim*; M. Gollńska, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

also to the considerable part of craftsmen. It is true that their large majority (over 90%) could obtain such a sum only if they sold all their possessions, yet few (less than 6%) had at their disposal a property worth between 150 and 200 marks⁷³. Thus only a narrow group of the richest could pay for a place in the hospital and at the same time endow at least one successor. Moreover, it is worth remembering that the potential purchasers of prebends were people advanced in years, making up probably not more than one fourth of the adult inhabitants of the town⁷⁴. It is hard to estimate how many families had no children, however, they were the exceptions. Thus an average craftsman could not count on spending his last years in the poor-house; his place was with his family. The hospital was the right solution to the problem of age only in some special cases.

This was the step taken above all by single persons, more often women than men. A typical charge was an old widow. Poorer women usually went to the Beguine convents. At the beginning of the 15th c. there were over 20 such poor-houses in Wrocław, providing over 100 places altogether⁷⁵. Richer townswomen could choose an institution with a higher standard of life and prestige, such as the Corpus Christi Hospital. 50 prebends offered by this establishment, was not a small number. It is probable that it suited the specific needs of the town community. Otherwise one could expect a considerable rise in the price of a place in a hospital or controversy over the choice of inmates — which was not the case.

The majority of burghers probably spent the last years of their lives in their family homes. Several solutions were possible. A craftsman could keep control of his workshop till the end of his days. He could hand it over to his successors, reserving for himself the right to a life-long maintenance. He could also guarantee it for himself legally, by purchasing a rent. The town books record the sale of a rent which was to be paid to the purchaser till the end of his life.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 301, 333.

⁷⁴ The age structure of the Wrocław population can be analysed only hypothetically, on the basis of analogies with chosen West-European towns. G. Minois, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

⁷⁵ A. Schulz, *Topographie Breslaus in 14. und 15. Jahrhundert*, ZVGS 10, 1871, pp. 285–287; M. Goliński, *op. cit.*, p. 136; on the Beguines see P. Borscheid, *op. cit.*, p. 102; J. Wyrozumski, *Beginki i begardzi w Polsce (The Beguines and the Beghards in Poland)*, *Zeszyty Naukowe UJ. Historia*, 1971, p. 35.

Peter Borscheid states that in Germany town authorities frequently placed in the poor-houses these town servants who had finished their service⁷⁶. Among the inmates of the Corpus Christi Hospital in Wrocław we find only one altarist from the Town-Hall chapel and the mother of another clergymen who performed the same function. The maid servant of the institution's provisor also found her place here. However, we do not know whether at least one of these persons obtained lifelong maintenance free, because of his or her connections with the town's or Hospital's authorities. There is no trace of any payment on that score either in the town accounts (1385, 1387, 1445, 1468, 1469), preserved in fragments, or in the Hospital accounts (1485–1487)⁷⁷. Thus it seems rather improbable that a person working for the Town-Hall was as a principle ensured the protection of a charitable institution for old age. It cannot be ruled out, however, that such a solution was applied in exceptional cases.

The élites of late-medieval Wrocław contrived to create an institution to protect the old people. This institution was seen by the burghers and newcomers to the town as a proof that the authorities were able to find not only the right, but simply a perfect solution to the problem of old age. The fact that this was a really functioning institution, not a mere image or word, determined the strenght of such a demonstration. This was, of course, a very special section of reality, far removed from the everyday life of the majority of the urban community. The old inhabitants of Wrocław usually had no possibility to retire definitively and ceremoniously from their previous activities, to play the role of a poor person and at the same time to live in relative comfort, to devote themselves solely to prayer, to have their place within the community of equals and to give good example. But they too, could boast of the fact that in their town, the good town of Wrocław, one could spend the autumn of one's life in a "perfect" way.

(Translated by Agnieszka Kreczmar)

⁷⁶ P. Borscheid, *op. cit.*, p. 86, however, the author does not provide any documentation; in Italy a similar practice was ascertained in Florence, cf. H. Manikowska, *Nadzór i represja. Władza i społeczeństwo w późnośrednio-wiecznej Florencji (Superviston and Repression. The Power and Society in Late-medieval Florence)*, Warszawa 1993, pp. 84–85.

⁷⁷ G 5. 1, p. 67; *Henricus Pauper*, pp. 141–146; K 31, 32, 33; Q 150.