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## THE SACRED IN THE LANDSCAPE OF THE CITY

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### SACRUM W KRAJOBRAZIE MIASTA

#### Abstract

In current times of progressing desacralisation, a retrospective view of the transformations that take place in building this phenomenon from the landscape perspective of the city appears essential. The work's main objective is the identification of the ongoing process on two scales: the micro and macro-scale and over time. The initial outline of the subject is meant to present the phenomenon within the structures of the city, the manner of its shaping and influence on the surroundings, orientation within space and strength of impact.

**Keywords:** sacrum, landscape of the city, landscape sacrum, identity of the place

#### Streszczenie

W obecnych czasach narastającej desakralizacji istotna wydaje się retrospekcja przemian zachodzących przy budowaniu tego zjawiska w ujęciu krajobrazowym miasta. Głównym celem będzie identyfikacja zachodzącego procesu w różnych skalach i w czasie. Wstępne zarysowanie problematyki ma na celu ukazanie zjawiska w strukturach miasta, sposobu jego kształtowania i wpływ na otoczenie, orientację w przestrzeni i siłę oddziaływania.

**Słowa kluczowe:** sacrum, krajobraz miasta, sacrum krajobrazu, tożsamość miejsca

## 1. Introduction – definitions of terms, the goal, state and scope of research

The introductory problem to the subject of the sacred (*sacrum*) in composed space that was taken up in the article covers a scope associated with this broadly understood phenomenon within the city. The outlook presented herein will focus on describing universal symbols associated with the establishment of settlements and cities, as well the consecration of their space based on the sacred. It will be an introduction to broader research leading to investigating these problems using semantic analysis and the assessment of current reception [10].

Often-used definitions of the terms *sacrum* and the city have been recalled here. The outlook upon them has depended on various conditions, both cultural, religious and social ones. The sacred is man's answer to his spiritual needs, it can be featured in complexes, but it can also be present in individual elements, as characteristic landscape and compositional forms belonging to *the field of garden design*. This phenomenon, built upon faith and memory of historical events, is often highlighted in the form of cultural sites [5, 6, 18].

The sacred is a multi-threaded symbolism, reading semantics and articulations, dependant on the time in which it is created. Associated with *such sciences as anthropology*, ethnography, sociology, psychology, religion and oriental studies. The manner of shaping the sacred is dependent on political, economic and social conditions [8, 12].

In order to attempt to define the city, we should use at least a number of terms. It is a *polis*, as a social city spanning between prehistory and the present; it is a system composed of two organically connected subsystems that cooperate based on the feedback loop principle and that are simultaneously autonomous – the urban and social one [21]. From an anthropological perspective, studies concerning the city involve identity as well as social and cultural systems. The city is also described as a dynamic entity, or as “a set of mental maps” by Lynch.

Studies on the perception of the sacred from a landscape perspective have been performed by numerous scholars. This problem group was investigated in terms of its philosophical aspects and those associated with religious (M. Eliade) and sociological studies (P. Kubicki.). K. Lynch and Ch. Delfante defined the basic principles of searching for the form of the city and relationships that take place within urban space. Beata Malinowska-Petelenz's publication, in turn, depicts the latest works of religious architecture from the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries [16].

Norberg-Schulz wrote of semantics in architecture, discussing, among other things, the manner in which the *Christian church has been forming city skylines* since the beginning of the Middle Ages. This structure was becoming a new form and a sense of existence for many people [5].

2017 saw the organisation of the VI international edition of the XXIV scientific conference held as a part of the cycle on garden design and historical dendrology, on the subject “*Sacrum w przestrzeni komponowanej*” (The sacred in composed space in English) at the Cracow University of Technology<sup>1</sup>. Multi-national teams presented problems that were various images

<sup>1</sup> Conference organiser: Division of Garden Design and Green Areas, Institute of Landscape Architecture of the T. Kościuszko Cracow University of Technology and the Section of Garden Design and Architecture of the Commission of Urban Planning and Architecture of the Krakow Branch of the Polish Academy of Science, Władysław Szafer Institute of Botany, Polish Academy of Sciences in Krakow.

of this broad research field, showing just how important this subject is in current conditions and how it is viewed from the point of view of different cultures.

The main goal of this article is to present changes that take place in reading the semantics of the sacred in the structures of the city on the example of Krakow (alleys, mounds, temples, monasteries, chapels, calvaries, stones, hills, small chapels, crosses, memorial sites, sites of tragedies, ritual sites) (Fig.1).



Fig. 1. Calvary near the church of the Reformed Franciscans, Reformacka Street, Krakow

The article is an introduction to research, whose continuation is the specific case of discussing the relationships and significance of monastic complexes of the Reformed Franciscans that were built in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries within the structures of cities [10].

Taking up this subject was a result of the increasingly strong pressure of desacralisation of elements that are important to the composition of a city, changes in function and role that were defined in space where holy places still remain, becoming traces of history.

## 2. The consecration of the city

Prior to discussing problems associated with the consecration of the place linked with founding cities, elements that occurred in consecrated places often as forms of animate and inanimate nature of outstanding characteristics of the sacred that were used by various cultures in different time periods should be mentioned. These include stone, hills – mountains, a vertical element that takes on the form of a pillar, the tree and the garden as a substitute for nature [5].

Stone took on various meanings depending on a given culture, it was filled with the souls of ancestors, it was a sacrificial stone for the Aztecs, it highlighted Christian, but also Muslim holy places, like Hajjar – the black stone located in Mecca in Saudi Arabia [2, 5].

The stone vertical pillar-like form was thought of as an element that upheld the world, or as a point that marked a border. Known in various different cultural circles, in the case of the Vikings it featured in the form of runic stones. Similar use of these stones was made by the Celts, Germanic tribes, Romans and the pagan tribes of the Rus'. They marked the borders of

areas, they were used for burial – the bodies of the dead were placed on pillars, becoming an analogy for later column chapels [3, 5].

Natural hills were used for communication with the heavens, as an *universalis columna*, highlighting the symbolism of the centre. In various cultures these are special, elevated places to this day, such as Mount Garzim in Palestine, described in the Old Testament as the first site of the promised land given by God, with ruins of cities. Elevations – mounds could be places of burial and could also take on a symbolic significance – devoted to the memory of specific people, constituting observation points and dominants within city panoramas [4, 5, 10, 17].

Another symbol of the sacred is the repeatedly used tree motif – the tree of life, constituting the site of a holy space. In various cultures and times it conveyed multi-threaded symbolism: of nature's fertility, of immortality, the tree of Paradise. It is a topical archetype today and remains in use. The significance of this symbol depended on the tree species that it represented – an apple tree in European culture, while a fig and quince tree – in areas of Asia.

The garden as nature's sacrum became an exceptional, magical reference to the image of the world, combining such compositional elements within it like borders and gates.

It conceptually referred to the garden of Paradise, from the cloister garth gardens to English parks (*beautiful, picturesque, sublime*) in which tombs, temples and places of deep thought and contemplation were found [20].

Greenery accompanied residential complexes, castles, villas as well as monastic complexes, which started to appear in cities in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Cloister garths and orchards accompanying monasteries were based on the symbolism of the forms that were located there, as well as on vegetation. They were and are to this day places that are enclosed, fenced off from the world outside, recreating the landscape of the world on the microscale. Monasteries became *civitas dei* (*The City of God*), separated from the *profanum* of the world around them [2, 4, 5, 6].

### 3. Elements of the sacred in the landscape of the city

We can commonly find numerous elements of the sacred such as alleys, mounds and temples in the city, which are simultaneously places of ritual and remembrance.

We can also mention here various forms of monuments such as crosses, mausoleums, as well as examples of special areas. A holy river can be one such example, serving as a place of burial and purification – in India it is the Ganges.

In cities we can find both temples: the aforementioned monasteries and calvaries. Cemeteries that take on various forms depending on culture, religion and place. Established as communal, they took on the forms of park-like necropolises in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Problems associated with the influence of the sacred on a location are an essential aspect. Techniques of consecrating a site have been used since the beginning of cultures. They led to the orientating and construing of a holy area by recreating divine creation. The oldest uncovered map of the world is *imago mundi* from the sixth century, which has been presented here. Many cultures repeated the concept of the fourfold division. In ancient Rome, apart

from the site appointed by an augur, the settlement was surrounded with *mundus* – a circular ditch [3, 7]. The division of a square-shaped space into four elements was an archaic concept, repeated by successive cultures when building the foundations of human settlements.

In the structures of the city, the temple appeared as a dominant, becoming a universal *sacrum*, answering the needs of man in terms of searching for and experiencing archetypes, affecting the structure of space through emerging religious and symbolic axes based on the main axes of the mythical Jerusalem [7].

Some of the symbols that have been referred to here have survived, becoming universal. This outlook was the result of man's need to experience archetypes. And thus, when establishing cities and settlements, the process of consecration was based on repeating the model world, whose centre was the temple. Replicas of the cosmic mountain were built in various cultures, as were sanctuaries connecting the earth with the heavens. In Hebrew traditions, Jerusalem was built on the rock of *tehom* (the waters of chaos) – said rock being the “Stone of the Earth's Foundation” [5, 6].

Across the centuries, temples have always been ascribed to divine creation, their models, from Babylonian complexes whose appearance was revealed to king Gudea in a dream, through the Greek Acropolis, to the Roman forums or the model image of the monastery in Cluny, were a spiritual entity, indestructible and heavenly. It was a model in its geometric layout for subsequent temple complexes [17, 20].

The original founding of a city was based on cosmogony – on an image of the world produced by a given religion or philosophical system. This provided protection from impure forces. At its base was Plato's idea of the city-state, transformed into the Medieval axis mundi – a cosmic axis which was the implementation of the idea of Thomas Aquinas [18].

#### 4. The case of Krakow

The case of Krakow can be an exemplification of these tendencies, analysed from the point of view of the transformations of a phenomenon of the significance of the sacred and various forms of content, read differently depending on specific time periods.

The discussion should be started from referring to the site associated with the seat of rulers – Wawel. It is a rocky hill that has fulfilled a special function since the beginnings of the settlement, attaining the well-established position of a national pantheon with a royal necropolis – the chapel of Zygmunt. Jacek Purchla stressed that after Mongol raids in the thirteenth century “the city was reborn anew, stronger, enriched by *ethnos* on the scale of an idea, a process” [19]. When analysing the structure of the sphere of the sacred in the city, an important role is ascribed to St. Stanislaus (canonised in Assisi in 1253) and another saint associated with the city, as the cult of saints has contributed to the building of this city as a place of pilgrimage for centuries. Of course this would not be possible without Krakow having an appropriate social, economic and political position within Europe.

Mounds, built over various periods, conveying different meanings and semantic values, were specific marks inscribed into the panorama of the city. The place of the legendary Krakus' Mound is associated with the tribal period, perhaps with Celtic roots. The mounds of



Kościuszko (1820) and Piłsudski (1935) were places built in order to highlight national identity and the fight for independence. These visual dominants have inscribed themselves into the city's panorama for good, becoming a sort of national sacrum within the landscape (Fig. 2).

Churches and monasteries build a specific atmosphere of the place, marking places of particular significance to history and religion. The number of monastic complexes in 1655 was 19, being limited after the transformations that decluttered the structure in the nineteenth century [11]. At the same time, Krakow's surface area was considerably expanded, incorporating existing temples and initiating the construction of new ones. They are structures that build the identity of the place to this day, being important both to the local community and tourists visiting the city. The sphere of the sacred is not confined to the area of historical Krakow. The Ark of the Lord in Nowa Huta and the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy in Łagiewniki have created new important points on the map of the contemporary city. Krakow's cemeteries include around 18 complexes belonging to a group of Catholic necropolises, with some playing the role of parish cemeteries [25]. Apart from this, we can also find a number of denominational and military cemeteries (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2. A showcase of selected elements of the sacred in Krakow on the axis of time: a view of the Wanda, Kościuszko and Krakus mounds, the Rakowice cemetery – a historical park-type necropolis established in 1803, a chapel near Mazowiecka Street (nineteenth century), monument to Kukliński near the Main Train Station (2018)

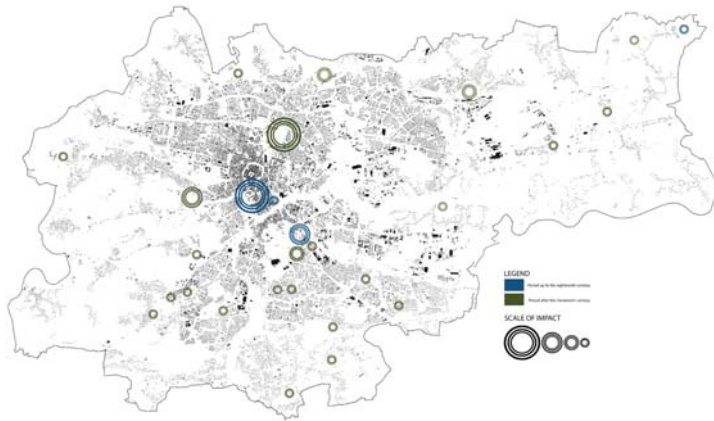


Fig. 3. Scale of impact of denominational and military cemeteries

Inscribed into the urban layout of the city are the many processions that are being organised to this day – including the one in May in commemoration of St. Stanislaus, the Corpus Christi procession and that of the Magi – permanently incorporated into the atmosphere and tradition of the place. They are a manifestation of the formation of the sacrum of the contemporary city.

## 5. Conclusion

It appears that in the culture of European cities, the sacred, by co-creating structures, has survived to this day, undergoing transformation. The impact of recent years has brought evident, increasing transformations of these spaces, building a new sanctity, while at the same time stripping Catholic temples of their original functions. It must be stated that a slow desacralisation of urban space has been taking place since the period of the industrial revolution, although a renewal of the sacred can take place at any time in accordance with the concept of hierophany – bringing a return to the exceptional sense of a given place [5, 6, 24]. However, identity and tradition still manifest themselves, being highlighted in various ways, referring to canons of the past and finding their place in the contemporary city in the form of spaces devoted to memory, rituals and traditions.

When analysing the original significance of the sacred of the landscapes of cities, it was determined to be based on a repetition of paradigmatic, model behaviours (the recreation of primal actions). It repeated the heavenly archetype, leading to the emergence of spatial structures and buildings associated with the symbolism of an “extraterrestrial centre”. It is still based on a repetition of lay rituals and gestures that have accompanied man since prehistory. In the ancient period it was the main factor affecting shape and location as an element that shaped settlements and cities – and within them, a safe world – in various cultures and religions, constituting a primal layer. At present, it highlights the identity and memory of a place.

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