

The function of biblical passages used as graves inscriptions found in the Zelów's necropolis

Keywords: biblical text, grave inscription, final formulas, the Zelów's necropolis

Abstract

Graves inscriptions, which are subject of analysis in the present paper, are a basic element of the sepulchral space of the Evangelical Reformed Parish burial ground in Zelów that brings together the descendants of Czech religious emigrants. It is assumed that the tombstone inscription is a linguistic and iconic message with a defined, conventionalized structure, containing both obligatory and optional verbal elements. This analysis will cover non-obligatory verbal elements represented by final formulas in the form of quotations from the *Bible*, mainly from *the Old Testament* (passim *the Book of Psalms*), less frequently from *the New Testament* (passim *the Gospels*). Biblical passages testify to the relationship of the deceased and the tombstone's founder to God; moreover, they express the desire to commune with God and hope for the reward that is the eternal life.

The burial ground in Zelów is a cemetery of the Evangelical Reformed Parish, gathering descendants of Czech religious emigrants. In 1803, primarily the second and third wave of religious emigrants from the Czech Republic came to Zelów. They were descendants of the Czech Brethren who left Calvinism and formed the so-called reformed church (Marešová 2001). In Zelów, back then the landed estate purchased from Józef Świdziński (under a purchase contract), „they were to be settled as free settlers with the freedom of religion, the right not to intercept the dissenters among themselves, and also with the possibility to enforce the prohibition of setting figures and crosses within their possessions“ (Jadwiszczak 2008: 18). This record was extremely important for the Czech colonists due to the preservation of their religious identity.

The Evangelical Reformed Cemetery has over 150 years of tradition. It was opened in 1854 after the cholera epidemic that hit this area in 1852 (at an earlier time, the deceased were buried in the churchyard). It is a religious necropolis; therefore, the basic provision in its rule book concerns the priority of the burial for people of the Evangelical Reformed religion. However, particular cases are also mentioned, in which the right to burial (in a way of exception) is granted to people of another religion as well, e.g. a spouse, a meritorious person¹.

Grave inscriptions, that are discussed in the present article, are one of the sepulchral space elements. The tombstone consists a special example of cultural text, a testimony to the epoch both due to the specific architectural composition and the type and content of the inscription. An overview of tombstones is done from many aspects. They can be studied „not only as linguistic messages, literary facts, manifestations of folk art or sociological facts, reflecting social relations. From the cultural stand point of view, inscriptions are a testimony to a certain way of looking at the world, capturing reality, attestation of beliefs or religious ideas of the deceased and those who inscribe their memory on tombstones” (Dudek-Szumigaj 2011, p. 68; after: Kupiszewski 1996, p. 27).

The grave inscription (in Latin: *inscriptio* means ‘inscription’) is considered here as a text written on a tombstone, a linguistic-iconic message with a specific, conventionalized structure². It consists of verbal and iconic elements, some of which are obligatory, other optional:

a) obligatory verbal elements are: personal data – full name, date of birth and death or only death;

¹ Compare: *Regulamin cmentarza ewangelicko-reformowanego* [A rule book / Regulations of the Evangelical Reformed Cemetery] on the website: <http://www.zelandia.pl/cmentarz/regulamin.html>.

² The definition, characteristics and classification of grave inscriptions are discussed in detail in Kazimierz Długosz's monograph *Inskrypcje nagrobne w ujęciu językoznawczym* [Tombstone inscriptions in the linguistic approach], Gorzów Wielkopolski 2010.

- b) optional verbal elements:
 - ba) initial formulas (simple: *late* ‘holy memory’ and extended, e.g. *Zde odpočívá v Pánu*);
 - bb) additional information about the deceased (e.g. surname, number of years spent, type of death);
 - bc) final formulas (quotes from the Bible, other texts expressing the memory of the deceased);
- c) optional iconic elements (symbols, likeness pertaining to the deceased) (cf. Balowska 2014 and Photo 1).



Photo 1. Optional iconic elements

The central element, analyzed here, are the final formulas containing quotes from *the Bible*. Exceptionally, in one case, the quote from the Bible appeared in the initial formula (cf. Photo 2). Quotations are in Czech and Polish, one in Latin. References to *the Bible* on Czech tombstones refer primarily to *the Bible of Kralice*, while on Polish tombstones to *the Gdańsk Bible*, *the Warsaw Bible*. According to Krzysztof Biliński, some of the Polish inscriptions are only „inade-



Photo 2. The quote from the Bible appeared in the initial formula

quate translations taken from *the Bible of Kralice*” (Biliński 1998: 136). It should be mentioned that there are many errors on Czech tombstones, especially graphic ones. Most often they refer to the lack of diacritical signs over Czech vowels with reference to long vowels (see graphs é, í, á, ý, ů) or erroneously marked lengths over vowels. There are problems with hooks over consonants [č], [], [š], [ř] and even an exchange of consonant graphs ř and , for instance: instead *v Pánu odpočívá*, there is *v Panu odpočiva*; instead *v tebe Hospodine doufám*, there’s *v tebe Hospodine doufam*; instead *alm 31*, there’s *zalm 31*; instead *v Bohu jest spasení mé*, there’s *v Bohú jest spasení mé*; or instead of an abbreviation *zemř* (pertaining to a verb: *zemřel/zemřela*), there’s *zem* .

This may be due to several factors. First of all, due to the lack of knowledge of the Czech language among stonecutters (who make inscriptions), which seems to be the most common cause and it corre-

sponds with the general tendency of graphic errors on tombstones. However, in the case of the present material, we should also pay attention to the fact that among the founders of tombstones could also be people who barely know the Czech language. It is necessary to take historical conditions into account: the descendants of the Czech Brethren came to Żelów from Silesia as the second and third wave of emigration. Some of them had already polonised names; hence, there are examples of names and surnames on the graves with varying degrees of adaptation, e.g. Karel Jersak, Karol Pospiszył, Anna Vesolovska (Balowska 2016)³. In Żelów, however, they succumbed to gradual polonization in connection with the functioning of the Polish state at various stages of its development, beginning from the Duchy of Warsaw to post-war Poland (cf. Jadwiszczak 2008, Marešová 2001, Štěříková 2000, Wróblewski 1998). They are currently either extensively assimilated in language or bilingual.

The fragments of *the Bible* quoted in inscriptions come from both *the Old* and *the New Testament*. In many instances, the location of the quotation is often provided. We have registered a number of biblical texts repeated in both the Czech and Polish language on tombstones; hence, below there are two language versions cited. The most frequently quoted biblical texts are excerpts from *the Book of Psalms* (the location is given according to the Polish way of writing biblical sigles adopted in the ecumenical translation of *the Holy Scriptures* (2001)⁴:

³ Also compare information on the impact of the activity of Father Jan Theodor Mozes, a parish priest in Żelów in the years 1830-1870, who used only the Polish language during sermons and – what is more important – prepared parish documentation (record books) (vide: Štěříková 2000, Balowska 2016).

⁴ New translation of *the New Testament and Psalms. Ecumenical translation for the third millennium*, cf.: <http://bibliepolskie.pl/przeklady.php?tid=11>. The difference between the writing of sigils in *the Warsaw Bible* pertains to the use of a dot after the abbreviation and the introduction of certain (changed) abbreviations, e.g. Fil. – the epistle to the Philippians (Flp – in a new translation).

The Old Testament – the Book of Psalms:

Hospodin jest můj pastýř (Psa 23, 1)

V tebe Hospodine doufám (Psa 31, 2)

Žadostivje očekávali sme na hospodina i naklonil se ke mne i vyslyšel me volání (Psa 40, 2)

Jen v Bohu se ztiší duše má, od něho vzejde mi spása (Psa 62, 2)

V Bohu jest spasení mé a sláva má (Psa 62, 8)

Já pak Hospodine k tobě volám a každého jitra předchází tě modlitba má (Psa 88, 14)

Když volají k Hospodinu v ssoužení svém, z úzkostí jejich je vysvobozuje (Psa 107, 28)

Drahá jest před očima Hospodynýma smrt svatých Jeho (Psa 116, 15)

Člověk marnosti podobný jest, dnové jeho jako stín pomíjející (Psa 144, 4)

Pan jest Pasterzem moim (Psa 23, 1)

Do Ciebie wznoszę duszę moją Panie (Psa 25, 1)

W ręce twoje polecam ducha mego (Psa 31, 6)

Niech będzie miłosierdzie Twoje, Panie, nad nami, jakośmy nadzieję w Tobie mieli (Psa 33, 22)

Powierz Panu drogę swoją, zaufaj Mu, a On wszystko dobrze uczyni (Psa 37, 5)

W Bogu zbawienie moje i chwała moja, skała mocy mojej, ucieczka moja jest w Bogu (Psa 62, 8)

Wysłuchaj głosu mego według łaski Twej Panie (Psa 63, 7)

Naucz nas Panie liczyć dni nasze, abyśmy posiedli mądre serce (Psa 90, 12)

Dni moje są jako cień nachylony, a jam jako trawa uwiędł; ale Ty, Panie, trwasz na wieki (Psa 102, 12)

Dni człowieka są jak trawa, jako kwiat polny – tak przekwita, lecz łaska Pana trwa wiecznie (Psa 103, 15)

W pośród wielu chwalić go będą (Psa 109, 29)

Miłuję Pana, iż wysłuchał głos mój i prośby moje (Psa 116, 1)

Zbawienia Twego pragnę Panie (Psa 119, 174)

Among many quotations in the Bible, we find a shortened and full version of the particular verse:

Blahoslavení, kteříž přebývají v domě tvém (Psa 84,5)

Blahoslavení, kteříž přebývají v domě tvém, tebe na věky chváliti budou (Psa 84,5)

Pan światłością moją i zbawieniem moim (Psa 27, 1)

Pan światłością moją i zbawieniem moim, kogóż bać się będę (Psa 27, 1).

Sometimes an interference can be seen (most likely a tombstone's founder) in a grammatical form that allows to adapt a biblical passage to a deceased person: *Wołałam do Pana w utrapieniu moim, a wysłuchał mnie* (Psa 120, 1), instead: *Wołałem do Pana w utrapieniu moim, a wysłuchał mnie* (*Do Pana wołałem w swej niedoli i wysłuchał mnie; the Warsaw Bible*).

Some biblical verses appear several times, which allows to ascertain that they are highly appreciated. These are mainly fragments of psalms regarding God as a caring guardian, as well as the human's death and God's eternity, e.g.:

Hospodin jest můj pastýř (Psa 23, 1)

V Bohu jest spasení mé a sláva má (Psa 62, 8)

Pan jest Pasterzem moim (Psa 23, 1)

Pan światłością moją i zbawieniem moim (Psa 27, 1)

Dni człowieka są jak trawa, jako kwiat polny – tak przekwita, lecz łaska Pana trwa wiecznie (Psa 103, 15)

In the case of other *Old Testament* texts, we can actually talk about few or individual examples that appear on tombstones, e.g.:

The Book of Genesis:

Nie bój się [...] Jam tarczą twoją. Zapłata twoja będzie sowita (1 Moj 15, 1; Genesis 15, 1)

The Book of Proverbs:

Żena statečná jest koruna muže svého (Prz 12, 4)

The Book of Job:

Člověk narozený z ženy jest kratkého věku, a plný lopotování. Jako květ vychází i podřát bývá, a utíká jako stín, a netrvá (Hio 14, 1–2)

Bóg dał, Bóg wziął (Hio 1, 21)

Człowiek narodzony z niewiasty krótki ma byt i bolesny. Jak kwiat wyrasta i więdnie. Jak cień chwilowy przemija (Hio 14, 1–2)

The Book of Ecclesiastes:

Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas (Koh 1, 2)

The Book of Zechariah:

Miłujcie prawdę i pokój (Zac 8, 19)

Among *the New Testament* texts, *the Gospels* are the most represented, but it is *the Gospel of Saint Matthew* and *the Gospel of Saint John*.

The New Testament – The Gospel of Saint Matthew:

Blahoslavení čistého srdce, nebo oni Boha viděti budou (Mat 5, 8)

Blahoslavení pokojní, neboť oni synové boží slouti budou (Mat 5, 9)

Radujte se a veselte, nebo odplata vaše hojná jest v nebesích (Mat 5, 12),

Co jest platno člověku, by všecken svět získal, své pak duši uškodil? (Mat 16, 26)

Nechte dítek jíti ke mně, nebraňte jim (Mat 19, 14)

Błogosławieni czystego serca, albowiem oni Boga oglądają (Mat 5, 8)

Bądź woła Twoja (Mat 6, 10)

A kto wytrwa do końca, ten będzie zbawiony (Mat 24, 13)

Jam z wami jest po wszystkie dni (Mat 28, 20)

In one case, a change of the grammatical form is encountered (from the plural to the singular), which individualizes the inscription, with reference to one deceased person buried in a given grave: *Pan jest z tobą po wszystkie dni až do skończenia świata* (Mat 28, 20) instead: *A oto Ja jestem z wami przez wszystkie dni, až do skończenia świata* (*The Warsaw Bible*).

The New Testament – The Gospel of Saint John:

Kdož věří v Syna, má život věčný; ale kdožť jest nevěřící synu, neužítť života, ale hněv boží zůstává na něm (Jan 3, 36)

Kdož věří ve mne, má život věčný (Jan 6, 47)

Pokoj vám (Jan 20, 19)

Moreover, an example of using a short version and a full biblical quote was observed:

Kto wierzy we mnie, choćby umarł, żyć będzie (Jan 11, 25)

Jam jest zmartwychwstanie i żywot. Kto wierzy we mnie, choćby też umarł, żyć będzie (Jan 11, 25)

Some verses from *the Gospels* appear several times. They mainly concern the hope with regard to the eternal life, the awareness of being loved by God – a good Father, as well as the conviction about the superiority of spiritual goods over material things, e.g.:

Nechte dítek jíti ke mně, nebraňte jim (Mat 19, 14)
 Co jest platno člověku, by všecken svět získal, své pak duši uškodil? (Mat 16, 26)
 Kto wierzy we mnie, choćby umarł, żyć będzie (Jan 11, 25))
 Jam z wami jest po wszystkie dni (Mat 28, 20)

A less numerous group of quotations from *the New Testament* are represented by fragments of Saint Paul's epistles:

Epistle to the Romans:

Albowiem z niego przez niego i ku niemu jest wszystko. Bogu niech będzie chwała na wieki. Amen (Rzym 11, 36)

Bo jeśli żyjemy, dla Pana żyjemy; jeśli umieramy, dla Pana umieramy; przeto czy żyjemy, czy umieramy, Pańscy jesteśmy (Rzym 14, 8)

Epistle to the Corinthians:

Bůh jak i Pana vzkřísil i nas také vzkřísí mocí svou (1 Kor 6, 14)

Epistle to the Philippians:

Naše obcování jest v nebesích (Flp 3, 20)

Nasza ojczyzna jest w niebiosach (Flp 3, 20)

Epistle to the Colossians:

Kristus život náš (Kol 3, 3)

An interesting solution to the verse *Albowiem z niego przez niego i ku niemu jest wszystko. Bogu niech będzie chwała na wieki. Amen* (Rzym 11, 36) appears on the family grave, where one passage composed of two sentences and the word *Amen* ending the quote, was divided into two gravestones (Photo 3a and Photo 3b).

In the material, there are also fragments from the book closing *the New Testament*, i.e. *the Book of Revelation*:

Blahoslavení, kteří jsou k večeri svatby Beránkově povolání (Apok 19, 9)

Bądź wierny aż do śmierci, a dam ci koronę żywota (Apok 2, 10)

Błogosławieni, którzy w Panu umierają (Apok 14, 13)

From *the Book of Revelation*, there is a verse in its full and an abridged form:

Blahoslavení jsou mrtví, kteří v Pánu umírají (Apok 14, 13)

Blahoslavení, kteří v Pánu umírají. Duch zajisté dí jim, aby odpočinuli od prací svých (Apok 14, 13)



Photo 3a. One passage composed of two sentences



Photo 3b. One passage composed of two sentences

Frequent recourse to *the Bible* on grave inscriptions found in the Zelów's necropolis is a natural tendency consistent with the character of this place – a denominational cemetery, which is the manifestation of religious views, attitudes towards God, professed values and binding moral norms. Not only is *The Bible* an extremely important text with reference to the culture, but also a sacred book. It presents the history of each person's salvation in both individual and community dimension, in the historical context of the Israeli people. Therefore, it is the basic source of morality (also Christian). One can say that it is found both in its starting point as well as its approach. Among the members of the Evangelical community there is a common habit of accepting the right quotation from *the Bible* as the motto of life, which people follow in their lives. Thus, the biblical passages quoted above, that appear on the epitaphs of the Zelów's necropolis are a testimony to a special relationship to God, which the deceased had during his/her lifetime; though, they express his/her faith and trust in God. On the other hand, they also carry information about the tombstone's founder. The fact that discussed epitaphs do not contain in their structure expressions of sadness and pain, disagreement or lamentation (related to the departure of a loved one), it may help to assume that the founder is characterized by a similar approach to God and the truths of faith.

Among the discussed biblical quotes, the majority refers to the hope that the believer possessed during the lifetime, that after an ethical, pious, earthly correspondence with the Holy Scriptures, s/he will receive the prize, which is the eternal life. This is illustrated in the fragments of *the New and Old Testament*, e.g.:

Blahoslavení, kteříž přebývají v domě tvém, tebe na věky chváliti budou (Psa 84,5)

Radujte se a veselte, nebo odpłata vaše hojná jest v nebesích (Mat 5, 12)

Kdož věří ve mne, má život věčný (Jan 6, 47)

Bůh jak i Pana vzkřísil i nas také vzkřísí mocí svou (1 Kor 6, 14)

Naše obcování jest v nebesích (Flp 3, 20)

Blahoslavení, kteří jsou k večerí svatby Beránkově povolání (Apok 19, 9)

Nie bój się [...] Jam tarczą twoją. Zapłata twoja będzie sowita (1 Moj 15, 1; Genesis 15, 1)

W ręce twoje polecam ducha mego (Psa 31, 6)

Niech będzie miłosierdzie Twoje, Panie, nad nami, jakośmy nadzieję w Tobie mieli (Psa 33, 22)

A kto wytrwa do końca, ten będzie zbawiony (Mat 24, 13)

Jam jest zmartwychwstanie i żywot. Kto wierzy we mnie, choćby też umarł, żyć będzie (Jan 11,25)

Nasza ojczyzna jest w niebiosach (Flp 3, 20)

Bądź wierny aż do śmierci, a dam ci koronę żywota (Apok 2, 10)

Błogosławieni, którzy w Panu umierają (Apok 14, 13)

The submission to the will of God is not a resignation and/or reconciliation due to the lack of another possibility; nonetheless, it is a trustful acceptance of it, as a trust in God's love, despite the fact of passing away and the inevitability of leaving the earthly world, e.g.:

Jen v Bohu se ztiší duše má, od něho vzejde mi spása (Psa 62, 2)

V Bohu jest spasení mé a sláva má (Psa 62, 8)

Hospodin jest můj pastýř (Psa 23)

V tebe Hospodine doufám (Psa 31, 2)

W Bogu zbawienie moje i chwała moja, skała mocy mojej, ucieczka moja jest w Bogu (Psa 62, 8)

Pan światłością moją i zbawieniem moim, kogóż bać się będę (Psa 27, 1)

Dni moje są jako cień nachylony, a jam jako trawa uwiadł; ale Ty, Panie, trwasz na wieki (Psa 102, 12)

Dni człowieka są jak trawa, jako kwiat polny – tak przekwita, lecz łaska Pana trwa wiecznie (Psa 103, 15)

Jam z wami jest po wszystkie dni (Mat 28, 20)

This is also evidenced by passages from *the Book of Job*, which do not directly compare the deceased approach to his/her life struggles and humility that the biblical Job demonstrated in his suffering, e.g.:

Bóg dał, Bóg wziął (Hio 1, 21)

Člověk narozený z ženy jest kratkého věku, a plný lopotování. Jako květ vychází i podřát bývá, a utíká jako stín, a netrvá (Hio 14, 1–2)

Człowiek narodzony z niewiasty krótki ma byt i bolesny. Jak kwiat wyrasta i wędnie. Jak cień chwilowy przemija (Hio 14, 1–2)

A number of biblical passages written on epitaphs characterize the deceased as a person of blameless opinion, as a moral and spiritual hu-

man being, straightforward and honest, who can not be accused of anything and who is characterized by an awareness of the superiority of spiritual goods over material ones, e.g.:

Žena statečná jest koruna muže svého (Prz 12, 4)
Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas (Koh 1, 2)
Blahoslavení čistého srdce, nebo oni Boha viděti budou (Mat 5, 8)
Blahoslavení pokojní, neboť oni synové boží slouti budou (Mat 5, 9)
Co jest platno člověku, by všecken svět získal, své pak duši uškodil? (Mat 16, 26)
Nechte dítek jíti ke mně, nebraňte jim (Mat 19, 14)
Nauč nas Páně liczyć dni nasze, abyśmy posiedli mądre serce (Psa 90, 12)
Błogosławieni czystego serca, albowiem oni Boga oglądają (Mat 5, 8)

By means of biblical texts, the deceased is also portrayed as a person of fervent prayer that God listened to, e.g.:

Žadostivje očekavali sme na hospodina i naklonil se ke mne i vyslišel me volání (Psa 40, 2)
Když volají k Hospodinu v ssoužení svém, z úzkostí jejich je vysvobozuje (Psa 107, 28)
Wołałam do Pana w utrapieniu moim, a wysłuchał mnie (Psa 120, 1)
Wysłuchaj głosu mego według łaski Twej Panie (Psa 63,7)
Miłuj Pana, iż wysłuchał głos mój i prośby moje (Psa 116, 1)

In conclusion, it can be said that the discussed biblical texts that are written on the epitaphs (in a literal or slightly changed way) reflect the religious worldview of the Evangelicals in Żelów, their values and a way of looking at the world rooted in *the Holy Scriptures*, based on the complete trust that God, as a good Father, looks after them during their earthly life and provides a reward in the eternity. The analyzed biblical passages complete the sphere of the *sacrum*, which is the sepulchral space under discussion, shaping the specific cultural character of the Żelów's necropolis, its *genius loci*.

Translation by Monika Porwoł

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