

INTRODUCTION

The Scientific Forum of 2012 “Historical Strata of Central European Towns”, organised by AGH University of Science and Technology, became a convenient platform for presenting the results of studying written source materials, cartography, artefacts of material culture, architectural (re)constructions of buildings and the location laws of setting out urban settlements, or, finally, historical changes in the environment conditions. All the contributions were aiming at finding the origin and the genesis of changes.

With wide-angle perspective or with the help of microscopes, the attempts were made to build a grid of meanings and contexts, connections of culture, trade or raw materials; of the things that – at the first glance – seem to be separate and without their counterparts. In the syntheses we searched for logic and consequence resulting from geo-environmental conditioning. In the analyses, in turn, it was possible to point to the factors which were proof from the sociological perspective, which enabled the individual development, rising of settlements, towns, countries and unions.

In this issue of the technical sciences quarterly, we invite you for a next journey in the field of interdisciplinary questions concerning historical strata. Using imagination we will search for the genesis of the modern look of the Lower Silesia towns, or the difficult stages of obtaining and technique development of working the local raw materials, to use them in the oldest constructions of Krakow, which have testified to the toil of their creators up to this day. Based on the example of a Krakow’s museum building we will follow, sometimes still visible in the architectural detail, the changes in spacial development resulting from the physiography or ownership, and so, political conditions. The shift from a macroscopic perspective to the layers of somewhat different nature, recorded in the structure and phase changes, requires peering into the depths. In this way we can, in the consequence of some phenomena visible only under the microscopes, look for the factors detrimental for the materials used on one hand, but on the other – discover the secrets of manufacturing techniques. Researching the beginnings of settlement we come close to the areas connected with the inevitable ending of a society, befriending death in the form of everyday cherished objects found in the burial grounds, apart from enriching our knowledge concerning rituals, it gives us information about the origin of these objects, their value, and – at the same time – about social hierarchy. Through the kind of death we see the way the people lived, but also, sometimes, we glimpse sophisticated forms of barbaric deeds. Chemical analyses of the substrata of the burial sites, similarly to the groundwater pollution of the historical stratification grounds, paint the picture of the town’s functioning, especially with regard of waste water management and its impact on the environment, both then and today.

The publication we present shows a great potential of interdisciplinary approach to historical layers research; and in the juxtaposition of the articles it can be seen, that on one hand the research object can be the natural environment, and on the other – culture; they both intertwine and determine each other; they bring about development – or fall.

We do invite the reader to look for their own research topics hidden in both the material and non-material layers of the issues discussed here.

On behalf of the Organizers,
the Coordinator of the Scientific Forum “Historical Layers”
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