

Particular Ways of Planting in Cemeteries of Šiauliai City (Lithuania)

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Abstract: The issue of cemetery planting is not yet sufficiently studied in Lithuania. Cemetery is one of the sites where people could give way to their subjective comprehension of beauty. Analysis of the cemetery planting revealed certain noticeable features that could be ascribed to the forms of folk art. These are various objects with implied specific content or ornamented compositions. The aim of the research was to ascertain and distinguish graves characterised by specific planting features associated with plants, their layouts on graves. Analysis of the research results shows that two options form the peculiarities of grave planting: depiction of specific objects and ornamentation. We think that majority of the ornaments are made with the single purpose of decoration, and do not associate with symbolic meanings. During this research the graves decorated with planted symbolic objects and ornaments were distinguished. This phenomenon becomes more and more popular in cemeteries of Šiauliai city in Lithuania.

Key words: Types, ornamental patterns, cemetery planting, Šiauliai.

1. Introduction

A cemetery as an eternal resting place of the dead is a rare object of research in Lithuania. The British, for example have a periodical publication “Mortality”, devoted to this subject. Many cemeteries located near major towns lack burial space, therefore it is likely that cremation and burial in urns will become more popular in the future, and will reduce the area needed for this purpose and prevent from turning of suburbs into entire cemeteries [1]. This, in turn, will bring changes in burial site designing traditions, and contemporary cemeteries with characteristic features will become history.

The issue of cemetery planting is not yet sufficiently studied in Lithuania. As lifestyle of the whole country changes, so do the cultural features and traditions of cemetery planting. New ways of decorating graveyards using plants appear, the choice of plants rapidly increases the social attitude towards the decoration and

maintenance of such public spots changes, besides the life of plants is very much time-dependent. Cemetery planting has become a very dynamic phenomenon which is characterised by national peculiarities as well as significantly expanding cosmopolite features. Characteristic and valuable present-day realities soon will probably irreversibly change and pass into the category of historical heritage. It is essential, therefore, to analyze and record the existing peculiarities of cemetery planting in Lithuania which reflect cultural level and traditions of modern society and are important for future generations. By presenting this sphere of planting tradition to other nations we can demonstrate how different, unique and special we are.

Cemetery is one of the sites where people could give way to their subjective comprehension of beauty. Plants also serve this purpose. Burial site surface planted with various plants makes up one of the parts of architectonics of the recorded object (burial site). Analysis of the cemetery planting revealed certain noticeable features that could be ascribed to the forms of folk art. These are various objects with implied specific

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content or ornamented compositions. An ornament as an element of décor is used in its various structural places: gravestone engravings, fences, layout of path tiles, candlesticks, lamps, vase décor, forged metal insertions integrated in the monument, layout of plants [2].

The ornament is formed by one or several rhythmically repeating elements which are located at the surface of an object regarding the entirety. Often the ornament holds not just decorative meaning, but serves as a representation of the surrounding world. In days of old the ornament, which originated from specific realistic stylized images, was used to communicate certain information by means of signs. The ornament could also have the already forgotten symbolic meaning.

By the methods of observation and analysis the graves with specific planting design, particular planting structure, peculiarities of plant arrangement or their composition were distinguished. The results obtained in both cemeteries and considering the periods of their formation were compared.

In 2007 such research results were:

- Plant range, popularity, colours, number of species and plant arrangement differ and largely depend on the grave formation period.
- The most popular genera were found to be: *Tagetes*, *Hosta*, *Petunia*, *Thuja*, *Begonia*, *Buxus*, *Sempervivum*, *Impatiens*, etc.
- The top tens of the most popular plants are different in the burial sites differing in the age; however, some plants are used irrespectively on the period of their formation.
- The diversity of plants planted in burial sites includes 64 major genera. The greatest plant diversity was identified in the moderately old burial sites.
- In terms of plant range, most of the plants are perennial.
- In the new burial sites the most popular are annual plants, and in old ones perennial plants. The latter are 2.5 times more frequent.
- The dominating colour of plant flowers in July is

yellow.

- In the burial sites of various ages the plants of variegated flowers dominate equally. Single-colour burial sites are rare.
- The number of plant species per burial site varies from one to five. The most frequent is the use of two to three species.
- Characteristic plant arrangement is in the corners of a burial site and symmetric.
- Analysis of grave planting revealed several features specific to a large part of burial grounds and pointed out the newly emerging characteristics [3]:
- Burial ground planting is most often unrelated to the material, shape, and colour of the monument, i.e., they are not matched. This suggests that landscape designers are not involved in the burial grounds' planting process.
- Specific shapes - hearts, crosses, suns formed from plants are increasingly used. There may be two crosses on one burial ground intended for each of the buried persons. These specific shapes are most often planted with *Saxifraga* L., *Leontopodium* R. Br. ex Cass., *Sempervivum* L., *Sagina* L., *Lobelia erinus* L..
- Conifers are often planted beyond the borders of a burial ground and form a green background for the monument. The popularity of individual ornamentally trimmed conifers is increasing.
- Plants that used to be considered as indoor pot plants (*Pelargonium* L'Hér., *Coleus* Lour., *Zantedeschia* Spreng., *Kalanchoe* Adans., *Sedum* L.) are increasingly used for grave planting. This was not characteristic of the period 15-20 years ago.
- In terms of colours, on the background of black earth or black monument, the plants that are difficult to discern are those with red or dark leaves: *Impatiens hawkeri* Bull, *Heuchera micrantha* Lindley, *Lobelia erinus*, *Ajuga* L., *Perilla frutescens* L. Britton and others. Consequently, a better result is achieved when plants with light leaves are planted alongside the other light-leafed plants that make a contrast to dark-leafed plants, for example: *Senecio bicolor* (Willd.) Tod., *Antennaria*

Gaertn., *Leontopodium*, *Saxifraga*, *Sedum* and others.

- Mottled-leafed plants (*Euonimus fortunei*: Emerald'n Gold, Aureomarginata, Argenteovariegata, *Ajuga*, *Juniperus sabina* Variegata and others), look nice on a burial ground only when they grow alone or at a certain distance from other plants, since leaf or needle glimmer creates the sense of disorder or excessive playfulness.

- A new trend in burial ground decoration is emerging. It is stone background made by placing stones under a plant. The trend has been directly transferred from garden design field.

- A characteristic grave decoration shape is rhomb. It is used not only for planting but also for laying tiles. There may be from one to four of such rhombi on a burial ground. It is likely that this shape comes from the primitive Lithuanian ornament.

- New varieties of short-growing conifers and drooping saplings imported from west Europe have been started to be used. Currently the number of such plants is not high since specialists find it difficult to choose them for a burial ground so that they do not obscure monument inscription and do not spread too much.

- Ornaments covered by plants have emerged in grave planting. This phenomenon is becoming increasingly popular. The ornaments represent flower, leaf or geometric motif. The most common short-growing plants used for this purpose are: *Armeria* Willd., *Hutchinsia* R. Br. *Iberis* L., *Leontopodium*, *Sagina subulata* (Sw.) C. Presl, *Sempervivum*, *Sedum*, *Festuca pallens* Host ir *Festuca scoparia* Hook. f.

In 2008, researches in Ref. [4] got these results:

Despite the extremely great diversity of burial grounds' planting, there were distinguished four types of planting and twenty four standard planting layouts. Practically any of the burial grounds falls within one of these schemes. The most popular planting types were found to be longitudinal and central. Characteristic as well as newly emerged burial ground planting features were distinguished and only after a longer period it will

be possible to state whether they will become well-established or will be abandoned.

The study suggests that the use of various burial ground covers is becoming increasingly popular. They tend to substitute plants because they require less management. Covers of non-plant origin are more characteristic of the new burial grounds. In summary, we can maintain that covers of non-plant origin are a rare phenomenon compared with plant covers.

The mean of burial grounds with differently planted surfaces (larger part, moderately planted, little planted) makes up from 29% to 39%, which does not differ significantly and still does not clearly express any valid trend.

Burial ground planting is most often unrelated to the material, shape, and colour of the monument. This indicates that burial planting is guided by individual amateurish understanding.

The researches about ratio of ornaments which regard to the layout of the structural parts and frequency of ornaments in burial sites in different periods of formation were described in author's article *Plant ornaments in Šiauliai cemetery* [4].

The aim of 2010 research was to ascertain and distinguish graves characterised by specific planting features associated with plants, their layouts on graves.

Tasks of the research were:

(a) to determine and formulate criteria for planting of ornamented graves;

(b) to identify plants and determine the frequency of their application on ornamented graves;

(c) to distinguish specific objects depicted in planting layouts;

(d) to determine the frequency of symbolic plants application in planting of particular graves;

(e) to explore symbolic meanings of plant ornamentation.

Object of the research was plants on graves.

Analysis of various literature references allowed distinguishing most frequently used ornamental patterns: cross, sun, moon, triangle, rhombus,

mountains, fish, heart, tree. Majority of the authors [5-9] similarly interpret symbolic meaning of these patterns:

A cross—magical and religious symbol. It appeared in primitive society as a symbol of fire. It also symbolizes four elements, four parts of the world. In pre-Christian times it was used by Celts and pagans. In Christianity it is a symbol of Jesus Christ crucifixion and resurrection.

The sun—primary meaning—sky fire, flash, in primitive society the sun was worshiped as deity, producer of life. The sun symbolizes fire, perfection, eternity. Ornaments of grass-snake and snake are closely connected with the cult of the sun.

The moon—flash of the night, dissipating darkness. The symbol is worshiped since the Stone Age. The moon is associated with the world of the dead in Lithuanian patriarchy period; it is considered the patron of the dead.

A triangle—one of the most sophisticated symbols. It symbolizes tree dimensions if the universe (God's world, natural world, human world). Long ago the triangle symbolized father, mother and child. It is the symbol of birth, life and death.

A rhombus—this is the symbol of activity, with many meanings: fire, earth, sun, day, wreath, knot, and ring.

Mountains—cosmic center. They separate the main spheres, i.e., sky and earth; they also symbolize ascension and descending. In folklore it is a symbol of a cemetery.

A fish—associated with water, element of life. It is the symbol of fertility and death. Fish is one of the oldest secret symbols of Jesus Christ.

A heart—symbol of love, joy, sorrow, and mercy.

A tree—the cult of a tree exists worldwide during all times. It symbolizes pillar of the world. A tree shows the connection between underground space and cosmos, link between the sky, earth and underground, bond between the live and the dead as well as between the past, presence and future.

All these symbols could be found in grave planting layouts. Since burial sites' planting is done by people

who are not professional artists, ornamental planting can be considered as another folk art expression form.

2. Materials and Methods

Presently there are two functioning cemeteries in Šiauliai city (Lithuania): K. Donelaitis and Ginkūnai. K. Donelaitis cemetery was established in 1960 and now comprises about 5,000 graves. The allotted territory is almost completely used (9.74 ha). Ginkūnaicemetery is being used since 1972 and it is also almost full (34.36 ha). The research was performed in summer of 2007, 2009, and 2010. 2,000 graves in K. Donelaitis cemetery and 20,000 graves in Ginkūnai cemetery were analyzed (in total 22,000 graves).

Research methods were: analysis, plant identification, description of plant arrangement, photography, colleague discussions.

3. Results and Discussion

Analysis of the research results shows that two options form the peculiarities of grave planting: depiction of specific objects and ornamentation. Wider explanations should be given regarding these two groups. Real things and visual symbols are ascribed to specific objects. Visualization employing plants make them already stylized because exclusive shapes and textures form due to the structure of plant material. In cemeteries of Šiauliai city the following planting layouts were distinguished: crosses, suns, moons, hearts, trees, mountains, fish and geometric forms (most frequently rhombi and triangles). According to display of symbolic objects, the graves could be divided into three groups:

- (1) the entire object is depicted;
- (2) part of the object is depicted (a half or quarter of a sun, half-moon, etc.);
- (3) several symbolic objects are depicted.

During this research the graves planted with symbolic objects and ornaments were distinguished. This phenomenon becomes more and more frequent.

Cross shaped plantings are usually planted single or two on one grave (Fig. 1). They all are asymmetrically composed. Shape of a cross is frequently planted using the same plant species, but sometimes it is contoured using other plants or non-plant materials. The choice of the layout is most probably determined by the meaning and significance of the symbol.

Display of the sun is one of the most frequently used. The whole sun, half of it or just a quarter could be depicted (Figs. 2 and 3). Usually the whole sun and its rays are planted using the same plants. The symbol of light kind of divides the two worlds, somewhat cheering up the appearance of a grave.

The heart shaped planting is infrequent. It could be a large (cover up to half of a grave) or a small one. In all cases only contour depicts the heart (Fig. 4). The heart symbol expresses sorrow, affection, love, faithfulness.

The tree shaped layout is probably the most problematic considering its appearance because it is



Fig. 1 Cross shaped plantings.



Fig. 2 Sun shaped plantings.



Fig. 3 Half sun shaped.



Fig. 4 Heart shaped layout.



Fig. 5 Tree image.

mostly formed of branch system and, therefore, much detached from the realistic image of a tree (Fig. 5). Such view evokes associations related with life; the broken branch is associated with the end of life.

Image of a moon is also rather rare in grave planting. It is usually linked with covering of the remaining grave surface, so it is not very spectacular and rather difficult to distinguish (Fig. 6). The moon is the symbol of night,



Fig. 6 Half-moon image.



Fig. 8 Fish images.



Fig. 7 Images of mountains and crosses.



Fig. 9 Image rhombus.

darkness. Solitary image of a sickle strongly associates with the Muslim symbol that is why the moon is depicted as half of a circle.

Image of mountains is displayed rather realistically. They are rather hills than real mountains (Fig. 7), symbolizing the life journey, ascensions and falls. Even, rounded tops of these hills are neatly waving in undersize plants.

The image of a fish was a real surprise for the researchers. The layout is formed of fish images as if swimming in one direction or in opposite directions (Fig. 8). The layout is formed as “yin” and “yang” images from oriental culture. Regular layout shapes, playful color patterns.

The most popular is depiction of geometric forms: rhombus (Fig. 9) and triangle (Fig. 10). We think that these two shapes were used for grave planting since very old times. Rhombi are either only contoured or fully planted inside, usually by plants of different



Fig. 10 Triangle plantings on graves.

genera. The rhombi are formed of plants or other materials. The rhombi are attractive due to their order, simple shape. The size of these rhombi varies from 30 cm to the size covering the whole grave. Right-angled and isosceles triangle shapes are used in cemetery planting. Their shapes are easily formed on graves; the number of triangles varies from one to three per grave.

Ornamental planting of graves is a rare phenomenon. It could be stated that the appearance of this phenomenon is not really recorded. Ornamented graves make only 0.18 % [3] of the graves in Šiauliai city. The recorded ornaments were grouped into:

- (1) Geometric: straight lines, curved lines, geometric forms;
- (2) Floral: flowers, branches, seeds;
- (3) Combined.

Geometric ornaments containing straight lines are characterised by different numbers and directions of the lines (Figs. 11-12).

Most frequent pattern is the repetitive diagonal lines or lines perpendicular to the grave contour. Rhythmically occurring lines formed of different plants, e.g., *Saxifraga*, *Petunia* and *Saxifraga* or *Armeriamaritima*, *Saxifraga* and *Armeriamaritima*. Probably, particularly complex are line ornaments



Fig. 11 Perpendicular lines.



Fig. 12 Repetition of diagonal lines.

formed of fluent junctions (Fig. 13). These are much more difficult to compose and plant because much precision is needed. We could not tell if the owners designed them themselves or copied from somewhere. Usually such patterns cover most surface of the grave, but elements located only at the corners of graves also occur. Ornaments of curved lines are almost always planted employing *Sempervivum*. Ornaments of geometric forms are most frequently formed of rectangles and rhombi of various sizes (Fig. 14). Geometric forms could be entirely filled with plants or have just a planted contour.

Floral ornaments are formed of the repetitive elements of depicted plants: flowers (Fig. 15), branches (Fig. 16), seeds (Fig. 17). Flowers are usually presented with stalks. Different plants are used for depicting of flower and leaves, e.g., *Petunia* (flower) and *Saginasubulata* (stalk with leaves) or *Pelargonium* × *hortorum* (flower) and *Festucaglauca* with *Saxifraga*



Fig. 13 Ornament of fluent junctions.



Fig. 14 Ornament formed of rectangles.

(stalk with leaves). Branches are usually depicted in checkerboard pattern. Their patterns are planted using *Armeriamaritima* or *Sempervivum* plants. Just a single example of seed presentation was recorded.

Maybe people do not notice their beautiful shapes and meanings in grave planting. Combined ornaments



Fig. 15 Flower ornament.



Fig. 16 Branch image.

are not typical either (Fig. 18). Usually straight and curved lines interchange.

We think that majority of the ornaments are made with the single purpose of decoration, and do not associate with symbolic meanings. Registry of all plants



Fig. 17 Seed image.



Fig. 18 Combined ornament.

Table 1 Plants used for formation of specific object or ornament layouts

No.	Perennial plants	Number of graves	No.	Annual plants	Number of graves
1.	<i>Saginasubulata</i> (Sw.) C. Presl.	22	1.	<i>Begonia semperflorens</i> L.	12
2.	<i>Sempervivum</i> L.	18	2.	<i>Impatiens walleriana</i> L.	10
3.	<i>Sedum acre</i> L.	10	3.	<i>Begonia tuberhybrida</i> L.	9
4.	<i>Armeriamaritima</i> Willd.	6	4.	<i>Tagetespatula</i> L.	9
5.	<i>Antennariadioica</i> (L.) Gaertn.	6	5.	<i>Petunia</i> Juss.	8
6.	<i>Saxifraga</i> L.	4	6.	<i>Senecio cineraria</i> L.	5
7.	<i>Festucaglauca</i> L.	4	7.	<i>Pelargonium × hortorum</i> L.	3
8.	<i>Aubrieta</i> Adans.	2	8.	<i>Dianthus</i> L.	2
9.	<i>Thymus</i> L.	2	9.	<i>Lobelia erinus</i> L.	1
10.	<i>Leontopodiumalpinum</i> Cass.	1	10.	<i>Viola</i> L.	1
11.	<i>Campanula carpatica</i> Jacq.	1	11.	<i>Gazaniarigens</i> Gaertn.	1
12.	<i>Primula</i> L.	1			

used for various layouts of cemetery planting (Table 1) revealed that both annual and perennial plants are used. They all are characterised by small height (2-15 cm), moderate spread, a rather well defined shape of a plant.

These characteristics make possible to form rather complicated and small shapes where the plant color is of no particular importance. The ratio between the diversity of perennial and annual plants is very similar, i.e. 12:11. The most popular perennials are *Sagina*, *Sempervivum*, *Sedum* plants; most popular annuals are *Begonia*, *Impatiens Walleriana*. Symbolic objects could be depicted in three ways: (1) entire object; (2) part of an object (half or quarter of the sun, half-moon, etc.); and (3) several repetitive objects.

During this research the graves decorated with planted symbolic objects and ornaments were distinguished. This phenomenon becomes more and more popular in cemeteries of Šiauliai city.

4. Conclusions

Application of plants for depiction of specific objects and ornaments adds to the particularity of cemetery planting.

As cemetery planting is usually performed not by professional landscape designers but by amateurs, the plants are probably randomly chosen.

Geometric ornaments are characterised by three structural elements: straight lines, curved lines and geometric forms. Floral ornaments are characterised by presentation of plant structural parts: flowers, branches and seeds.

Presentation of specific objects by plants is frequently depicted by their contours rather than patterns entirely filled with plants.

Nearly equal numbers of annual and perennial plant genera are used for grave planting (in total 23 genera).

Most popular plants in ornamental planting are *Saginasubulata*, *Sempervivum*, *Begonia semperflorens*, *Sedum acre*, *Impatiens walleriana*, *Begonia tuberhybrida*, *Tagetespatula*, *Petunia*.

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