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Thanatourism at Grodno Castle in Zagórze Śląskie

What is thanatourism?

The German concentration camp in Auschwitz, mass graves in Katyn Forest, Thailand after tsunami, war zones (e.g., in Palestine) or ground zeroes (e.g., Ground Zero in New York) – all of these places are tourist destinations. While they are associated with death and suffering, they also serve to commemorate and document catastrophic events. Travelling to such places is called thanatourism. The need to isolate this concept as a subcategory of broadly defined tourism arose at the end of the 20th century, when a growing interest in this type of travel was first observed, even though the phenomenon is thought to date back to Christian pilgrimages and gladiator games in the Roman Empire [1], [2].

But what drives people to travel to death sites? Firstly, it is worth pointing out that not all of these sites are perceived as connected to death by the visiting tourist, as the character of death spaces varies¹. It is believed that “dark” sites are

non-commercial places with underdeveloped infrastructure, where tragedy has struck fairly recently. These are far more controversial than “light” sites, which are either not directly associated with tragic events or which merely stage them, present material evidence, or commemorate them in the form of monuments, crypts, and cemeteries [5].

According to Sławoj Tanaś [2], the motivations of “thanatourists” may be divided into two groups. The first group, described as *sacrum*, consists of motivations stemming from religion, empathy, identity, and remembrance. These motivations are characteristic of an aware tourist who wishes to pay their respects to the victims and is oriented towards solemnity and contemplation. The second group, described as *profanum*, consists of motivations involving a thirst for knowledge, curiosity, entertainment, and emotion. This group of motivations drives an unaware tourist, for whom the death space is exciting, pop-cultural, and informative. These people often take plenty of photographs with artefacts, sometimes causing damage, and even commit theft. Scientific research also indicates that a great role in shaping people’s motivations to make these types of trips is played by today’s media, whose portrayal of death (through reports, films or games) invokes the feeling of death’s universality, although the viewer does not consider it as involving them directly. At the same time, it is a sign of the times that “ugly” death stays out of our sight – in hospitals and care homes – and our society is oriented towards a happy, perfect life instead. This arouses the desire to encounter death in a direct, but safe way [2], [6].

A great role in thanatourism is also played by the sites themselves, as they draw tourists through their advertising. But why are these places even available to tourists? This question is answered by Tanaś [2], who mentions three main reasons. The sites may simply care for remembrance, they may aim to spread information about human death in an attempt to avoid future catastrophes and atrocities, but they may also treat thanatourism as a way to benefit

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¹ We currently distinguish 5 categories of thanatourism destinations [3], [4]:

- visitation to sites of public death or sites serving as testimonies to public death – such as gladiator games, crucifixions, executions, sites of natural disasters or terrorist attacks,
- visitation to places where mass or individual death has been recorded or discovered – such as former concentration camps (Auschwitz, Gross-Rosen), sites of air accidents or incidents,
- visitation to sites and monuments commemorating the dead – such as burial sites of famous people,
- visitation to sites not directly associated with an event, but only displaying material evidence of death or staging the event – such as museums exhibiting murder weapons, instruments of torture, blood-stained clothing, wax figures, or embalmed bodies,
- visitation to sites of death staging or simulation – such as combat and battle re-enactments, religious depictions of the Passion of Christ.



Fig. 1. Grodno Castle in Zagórze Śląskie (photo by M. Świtulski)

Il. 1. Zamek Grodno w Zagórze Śląskim (fot. M. Świtulski)

financially. Włodzimierz Kurek (as cited in [7]), on the other hand, points out that leisure tourism revolving around luxury hotels is currently being pushed aside by a type of tourism that encourages deepening of knowledge, emotional development, physical activities and excitement.

Grodno Castle in the context of thanatourism

Grodno Castle is located in the village of Zagórze Śląskie (Lower Silesia Voivodeship, Walim district), in a nature reserve called Góra Choina, 450 m above sea level. The first written records of the castle date back to 1315. According to a 19th century tradition, it had been erected much earlier, in the 11th or 12th century (Fig. 1). The castle boasts many assets. The basic one is that it is one of the best-preserved objects of its kind in Poland. Well-preserved relics of mediaeval and renaissance architecture are an asset in itself. Tourists can also admire a picturesque view from the castle tower over Bystrzyckie Lake, as well as Wałbrzyskie and Sowie (Owl) Mountains [8].

Apart from the above-mentioned assets, Grodno Castle also offers a tour of its chambers, whose nature has much to do with death space, which is an intrinsic part of thanatourism. Tourists are encouraged by the opportunity to visit an underground torture chamber featuring replicas of old instruments of torture. The neighbouring room holds a crypt of the von Zedlitz family – the castle's last owners from before the World War II. Moreover, visitors are drawn in by legends that accompany the castle's history, one of which tells a story of young Princess Margaret, who falls in love with a young man. Their love is opposed by the girl's father, who chooses a different candidate for his daughter – a wealthy, older man, who owns a neighbouring castle. Refusing to marry her father's pick, Margaret pushes the old man off a steep boulder. The whole thing is witnessed by the father, who then sentences the princess to death by starvation. The credibility of this legend is supposed to be strengthened by a skeleton displayed in the starvation dungeon (Figs. 2, 3). According to Marek Dudziak [8], the skeleton has been displayed in the castle

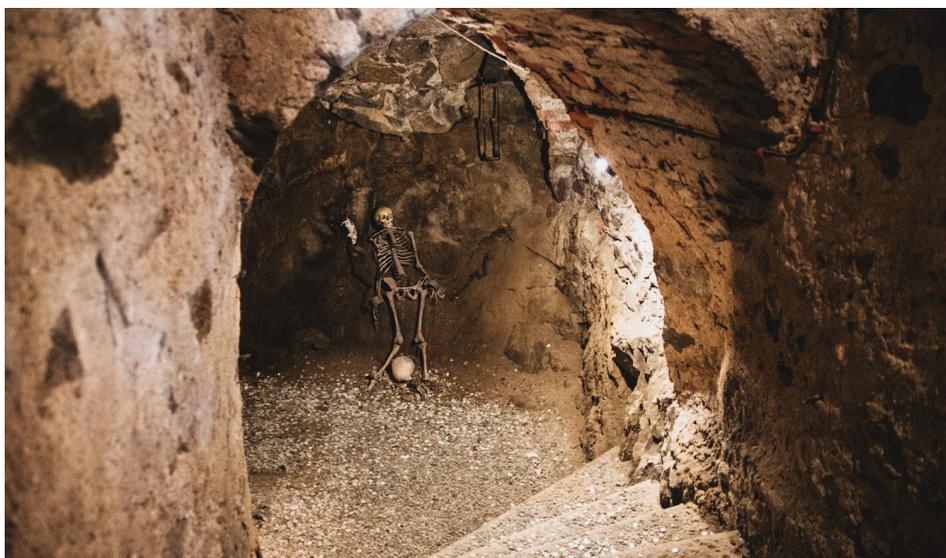
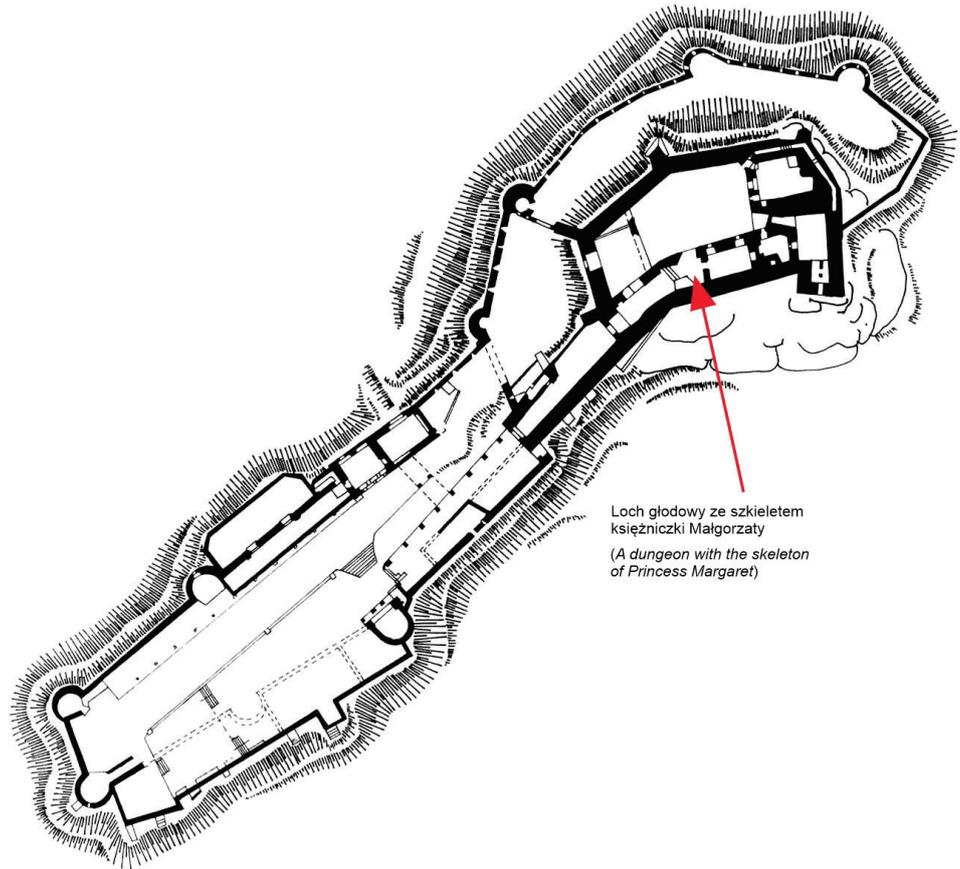


Fig. 2. Starvation dungeon with the skeleton of Princess Margaret, (photo by P. Franieczek, 2018, <https://www.zycie.me/>)

Il. 2. Loch głodowy ze szkieletem księżniczki Małgorzaty, (fot. P. Franieczek, 2018 <https://www.zycie.me/>)

Fig. 3. Plan of Grodno Castle with the location of the starvation dungeon (www.medievalheritage.eu.pl, compiled by A. Chlebicz)

Il. 3. Plan zamku Grodno z lokalizacją lochu głodowego (wg www.medievalheritage.eu.pl, oprac. A. Chlebicz)



since 1905, and the legend was invented to make the site more attractive.

Anthropological study of human bone remains

One of the aims of this study was to determine the origin of the remains found in the castle. We started with two hypotheses. According to the first one, the remains could have belonged to a member of the von Zedlitz family, as was suggested by empty coffins in the crypt next to the torture chamber. The premise of the second hypothesis was that the bone material was made up of earlier exhibits.

The anthropological analysis was performed on a bone material discovered in the southern part of the starvation dungeon². The material involved a skull, two right femurs, two left hip bones, a left humerus, a left talus bone, a left tibia and a rib fragment. The features of the rib led us to the conclusion that it belonged to an animal, and the rest of the remains were human material. It was established that the bone material belonged to at least 2 individuals. In order to determine the sex, we conducted morphological analysis of the skull and hip bones. We took appropriate measurements³ and calculated relevant anthropometric

indicators. Based on this method, we established that the bones belonged to individuals of both sexes. We also analysed the age of the individuals at the time of death. This allowed us to indicate that the material came from people of different ages belonging to *juvenis* and *adultus* cohorts⁴. We also analysed lesions and pathology. During the analysis, we observed remnants of wires and holes left by wires on some of the bones, which could mean that the bones used to be a part of a display skeleton.

The data collected as a result of the anthropological analysis allowed us to reach a firm conclusion that the human bones from the starvation dungeon belonged to at least 3 individuals:

- a young woman (19–22 years),
- an adult man (over 35 years),
- a mature woman (44–55 years).

The obtained information, in conjunction with the fact that the crypt of the last owners contained the remains of two men – Ferdynand Maksymilian von Zedlitz and his son Franz Robert – may suggest that the adult man could have been one of the aforementioned gentlemen, however the evidence is not sufficient to make a firm conclusion in this regard. Undoubtedly, some of the analysed bones used to constitute a display skeleton, as evidenced by the remnants of wires and the holes left by them. It is unlikely,

² The anthropological examination was not carried out on the human skeleton displayed in the starvation dungeon as the remnants of princess Margaret. This skeleton was brought to the castle in the 1970s from the collection of the Anthropology Department of the University of Wrocław.

³ The bones were measured in line with Martin's method (after: [9]).

⁴ Age estimation categories used [9]: *Infans I* (early childhood to 6–7 years), *Infans II* (late childhood to 12–14 years), *Juvenis* (adolescence to 18–22 years), *Adultus* (adults to 30–35 years), *Maturus* (matures to 50–55 years), *Senilis* (elderly ca. 60 years).

however, that these remains constituted elements of a single exhibit, as it would have been anatomically incorrect (apart from different ages at death, the skeleton would have been composed of two left hip bones or two right femurs), making it difficult or impossible to assemble it. In conclusion, it is assumed that the human bones found in the starvation dungeon most likely belonged to the last owners of the castle as well as to an exhibit older than the one displayed currently.

Attractiveness of the castle's offer in the eyes of the tourists

The second aim of the study of thanatourism within the context of Grodno Castle was to determine the characteristics and motivations of its visitors. To this end, we prepared a survey, which was disseminated between 10th and 24th November 2018 electronically (as a Google form shared mainly with people interested in Lower Silesia) and on 10th and 11th November 2018 directly among tourists visiting Grodno Castle. The obtained material comprised 108 physical copies and 228 digital copies of the survey – 336 copies in total. Of those, 21 were discarded (mainly from the physical version) due to a considerable number of questions being unanswered, which means that the total of 315 copies were submitted for final analysis. The survey contained 22 questions, both single and multiple choice, which provided the following information after analysis. Hence, Grodno Castle is mostly visited by:

- women (60.0%),
- aged 35–44 (34.3%),
- with higher education (56.2%),
- living within 100 km of the castle (62.5%).

The visitors most often learnt about the castle from friends and family (39.1% of the respondents), from travel guides (23.4%) and on the Internet (21.6%). Information channels such as television, the press, radio, or other sources constituted a minority (15.9% altogether). Few people were visiting the castle by chance (6.3%). Usually the visit was the main goal (43.8%) or a part of a trip (49.8%). The respondents were most often travelling with family/loved ones (59.8%) or with friends (24.0%), less often with an organised group (11.1%) or alone (5.0%).

The respondents' motivations for visiting Grodno Castle were divided into two categories in line with the available literature [10] – push factors (pertaining to the tourists themselves, i.e., what had “pushed” them to make certain decisions, Fig. 4) and pull factors (the assets of the site itself that had encouraged the tourists to visit, Fig. 5). The respondents could choose more than one of the available options. One of the purposes of the questions about motivations was to determine whether the thanatourist offer of Grodno Castle constituted the main factor that pulled the tourists in, or not.

The analysis of the answers allowed us to conclude that thanatourist attractions, such as the torture chamber or the dungeon with the princess's skeleton are not the main interest of visitors to Grodno Castle. It turns out that the strongest push factor among the visitors was their interest in the past (26.2%), curiosity (23.0%) and a thirst for knowledge (12.8%). As for the pull factors, the respondents mostly chose the opportunity to tour the castle (32.2%), the opportunity to see a well-preserved castle “live” (22.0%) and the lookout tower (19.3%).

To complement the study of thanatourism, the tourists were asked about the feelings they experienced while tour-

Co skłoniło cię do odwiedzenia zamku Grodno? (What prompted you to visit Grodno Castle?)

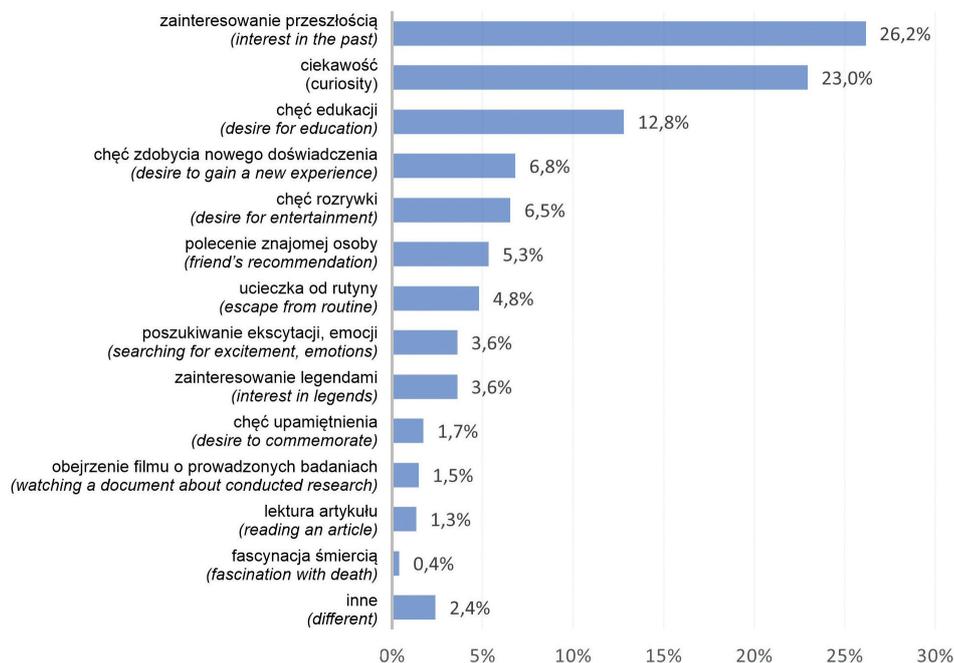


Fig. 4. Motivations of visitors to Grodno Castle in Zagórze Śląskie – push factors (elaborated by A. Chlebicz)

Il. 4. Charakterystyka motywacji odwiedzających zamek Grodno w Zagórze Śląskim – czynniki *push* (oprac. A. Chlebicz)

Co przyciągnęło cię na zamek Grodno? (What attracted you to Grodno Castle?)



Fig. 5. Motivations of visitors to Grodno Castle in Zagórze Śląskie – pull factors (elaborated by A. Chlebicz)

II. 5. Charakterystyka motywacji odwiedzających zamek Grodno w Zagórze Śląskim – czynniki pull (oprac. A. Chlebicz)

ing the whole castle. Most of the respondents pointed to curiosity (69.1%) and enjoyment (52.8%). While touring just the thanatourist assets (torture chamber, starvation dungeon), the majority of the respondents chose curiosity (57.0%), compassion/empathy (45.4%) and sadness (28.7%).

In summary, according to the respondents the most attractive asset of Grodno Castle was its lookout tower (37.3%). The starvation dungeon obtained 11.2% of the votes, and the torture chamber – 7.8%. As much as 47.3% of the respondents claimed that they did not associate the site with death and suffering, while 29.8% stated to the contrary (the rest had no opinion). These findings corroborate the aforementioned data obtained in the course of the study.

Conclusions

To sum up the above, one may ask, what direction should Grodno Castle take when developing its offer. The findings of the study presented herein clearly show that of all the attractions listed by the castle, those associated with death space were not the most popular among the respondents. Nevertheless, they still constitute a distinguishing feature of the castle. The obtained results suggest that Grodno Castle should develop its offer addressed to families with children/friends who wish to enjoy their free time. This is because tourists do not perceive the castle as a death space. The most popular features are the castle walls themselves as well as the lookout tower. Therefore,

it seems reasonable to invest in essential renovation of these places without overwhelming the castle with modern infrastructure, as many of the visitors are interested in the past and are appreciative of the fact that they can view a well-preserved castle to “travel back in time”, as it were.

Towards the end of the survey, the respondents were encouraged to voice their opinions on the castle’s operation. The comments were both positive and negative. Most of the time, the respondents praised the knowledge of the guides and the quality of their work, but they also pointed out that the exhibition and cleanliness could be improved. The survey findings allow us to conclude that the replica of the torture chamber and the invented legend about the princess are hardly attractive to a contemporary tourist.

As for the human remains in the starvation dungeon, although it was not unambiguously established whom they belonged to, the anthropological analysis does provide us with some valuable suggestions pertaining to further study – for example genetic testing to establish whether the material contains the remains of the castle’s pre-war owners. These tests may have a practical aspect, as their findings may be used to promote the castle. In general, it would also be relevant to include the continued study of the castle in the management strategy for the cultural heritage (the castle) and the strategy for tourist development in Walim district.

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Abstract

Thanatourism at Grodno Castle in Zagórze Śląskie

Thanatourism is a concept involving travel to sites associated with death and suffering. It is not a cult of death, but merely a form of tourism aimed at discovering places of human tragedy. Grodno Castle is a popular destination of thanatourists, as it features specific forms of attractions, namely a starvation dungeon with a displayed skeleton, a torture chamber, and burial crypts of the previous owners. The article discusses the phenomenon of the growing attractiveness of thanatourist places. Secondly, it presents the results of a study of human bone remains found in the starvation dungeon of Grodno Castle. The assumption was that the bone material could belong to the heroine of the legend of Princess Margaret (i.e. it could have been artificially assembled for the purposes of the exhibition) or it could come from the tombs of the last owners of the castle. An anthropological analysis was carried out, involving determination of the sex, age and other parameters, and appropriate measurements were taken. The analysis of the material showed that the remains belonged to at least three individuals of different ages, and both sexes (young woman, 19–22 years old; adult male, over 35 years old; mature woman, 45–55 years old). Most likely, some of the examined bones used to make up a displayed skeleton in the past. The article also presents findings of a survey conducted among tourists at Grodno Castle, concerning their characteristics, as well as their motivations for visiting. According to our findings, Grodno Castle is mostly visited by women aged 35–44 with higher education, who live within 100 km from the castle. The main motivations for their visit are their interests in the past and the opportunity to tour the castle. The most frequent feelings expressed by the tourists during their visit were curiosity and enjoyment. Thanatological elements did not attract much attention. The lookout tower turned out to be the best tourist attraction. The exhibitions of human remains, coffins and the torture chamber mostly aroused curiosity, compassion and sadness among the visitors.

Key words: death tourism, dark tourism, tourists' motivations, human remains, anthropological analysis

Streszczenie

Tanatourystyka na zamku Grodno w Zagórze Śląskim

Tanatourystyka to termin oznaczający podróżowanie do miejsc związanych ze śmiercią i cierpieniem. Nie jest ona kultem śmierci, a jedynie formą turystyki, która ma na celu poznanie miejsc tragedii ludzkiej. W obszar zainteresowania tanatourystyki wpisuje się zamek Grodno ze względu na to, że posiada on specyficzne formy atrakcji: loch głodowy ze szkieletem „księżniczki Małgorzaty”, salę tortur oraz krypty grobowe poprzednich właścicieli. W artykule omówiono zjawisko rosnącej atrakcyjności miejsc tanatourystycznych. W dalszej kolejności przedstawiono wyniki badań ludzkich szczątków kostnych z lochu głodowego. Przyjęto założenie, że materiał kostny mógł być elementem starszych szkieletów, które dawniej ekspozycjonowano jako szczątki „księżniczki Małgorzaty”. Omawiane szczątki ludzkie mogły również pochodzić z tzw. krypty grobowej ostatnich właścicieli zamku. Przeprowadzono analizę antropologiczną, podczas której dokonano oceny m.in. płci i wieku oraz wykonano stosowne pomiary. Analiza materiału osteologicznego pozwoliła wskazać, że odnalezione szczątki należały do co najmniej trzech osobników w różnym wieku, obu płci (młoda kobieta, 19–22 lata; dorosły mężczyzna, ponad 35 lat; dojrzała kobieta, 45–55 lat). Najpewniej niektóre z badanych kości rzeczywiście stanowiły w przeszłości szkielet ekspozycyjny. W artykule podano też ustalenia dotyczące charakterystyki osób odwiedzających zamek Grodno, a także motywacji ich przyjazdu, wynikające z ankiety przeprowadzonej wśród turystów. Wyniki badań ankietowych wskazały, że zamek Grodno najczęściej odwiedzały osoby: płci żeńskiej; mające 35–44 lat; z wykształceniem wyższym; mieszkające w Polsce w promieniu 100 km od zamku. Głównymi motywacjami przyjazdu okazały się zainteresowanie przeszłością i możliwość zwiedzenia zamku. Podczas zwiedzania turystom najczęściej towarzyszyły zaciekawienie oraz przyjemność. Elementy o charakterze tanatologicznym nie cieszyły się większym zainteresowaniem. Największą atrakcją turystyczną okazała się wieża zamkowa i panorama gór widoczna z jej szczytu. Ekspozycje szczątków ludzkich, trumien i izba tortur najczęściej wywoływały wśród odwiedzających zaciekawienie, współczucie i smutek.

Słowa kluczowe: turystyka śmierci, ciemna turystyka, motywacje turystów, szczątki ludzkie, analiza antropologiczna