Places of the Dead and the Living:
A Study of Cemetery Religious Symbolism
as Funerary Expressions of Religiosity

TOMÁŠ BUBÍK, JAKUB HAVLÍČEK, MARKÉTA MUCZKOVÁ, LENKA JEDLIČKOVÁ, OLGA ČEJKOVÁ, JAROSLAV HURTÍK, KLÁRA KUBÁLKOVÁ

Tomáš Bubík, Jakub Havlíček, Markéta Muczková, Lenka Jedličková, Olga Čejková, Jaroslav Hurtík, Klára Kubálková, Department of Sociology, Andragogy and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, Palacký University Olomouc, tř. Svobody 686/26, 779 00 Olomouc, Czechia; e-mails: tomas.bubik@upol.cz, havlicek@rect.muni.cz, marketa.muczkova01@upol.cz, lenka.jedlickova04@upol.cz, olga.cejkova01@upol.cz, jaroslav.hurtik01@upol.cz, klara.kubalkova01@upol.cz

This study examines attitudes towards the afterlife and the death of close relatives of the deceased. The research focuses on cemeteries and tombstones, understood as places that can provide information about the bereaved's funerary expressions of religiosity. We have focused through the perspective of the academic study of religion (Religious Studies) on two Central European regions, specifically along the borders of the Czech Republic, with different levels of declared religiosity. These regions were influenced by different national (Czech, German, and Polish) and religious groups (especially Catholic and Protestant). In total, we have documented almost 10,000 gravestones and developed a quantitative method for the data processing. Our study confirmed the correlation between funeral expressions and declared religiosity as revealed in the Censuses. The research also proved that it is possible to track changes in such expressions over time, as well as differences among national attitudes. Moreover, our results suggest the suitability of the research method for studying relatively small localities rather than large areas with huge populations.

Key words: death, cemeteries, religiosity, bereaved, tombstones, iconography, site research

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Introduction

This survey focused on the behavior of those close to the deceased that can be associated with the modification of tombs, gravestones and other features of gravesites. We did not devote attention to "mortuary rituals" (Metcalf, Huntington, [1979], 1991; Mitima-Verloop, Mooren, Boelen, 2021); that is, rites and practices concerning death and the treatment of dead bodies. The focus instead was on religious tomb iconography. The reasons that lead us to this approach stem from the belief that tombstones and other grave markers are places to which survivors devote special attention, and therefore they can be considered as important indicators of their beliefs. At the heart of our approach is Daniel Gade's assertion that "markers erected in cemeteries reflect both individual and group differences either in religious beliefs or in fidelity to an institution" (Gade, 2015: 643).

In the early 1970s, Richard Francaviglia was one of the first to point out how the cemetery space can be understood as a cultural representation of common patterns and values. According to this cultural historian, cemeteries are highly organized cultural landscapes as well as miniaturizations and idealizations of larger settlement patterns. The focus of Francaviglia's research is primarily on the spatial and architectural perspective of the cemetery, which is a "real-world microcosm" and serves "functional and emotional purposes" (1971: 503–506). Cemetery artifacts comprise aspects of the local cultural memory through which a great deal of important information about the attitudes of individuals and communities can be determined. The cemetery is thus a kind of museum of memory, the contents of which are literally carved in stone. Many grave markers also contain religious content in the form of inscriptions and symbols which represent a kind of last public communication that creates a link between the deceased and the bereaved. Harold Mytum, a contemporary archaeologist specializing in this issue, has applied the term "material culture of death" (2004: 1) in this context. According to him, death and funeral rites are significant events which also have legal, social and cultural consequences in addition to religious ones (2004).

For researchers studying religiosity, this information found in cemeteries can become an important treasure trove of knowledge that complements data from various forms of research, both quantitative and qualitative surveys. Following the example of cultural geographer Wilbur Zelinsky, the content of tombstones and other grave markers is called "funeral religiosity" (2007: 459). In this appellation, he refers to the behavior of survivors which manifests itself in religious depictions on the grave markers of their loved ones and in the arrangement of graves. Therefore, according to him, funeral religiosity represents essentially personalized behavior of fundamental importance in terms of religious communication as well as possible ways to record and evaluate such a potentially intangible quality. Our research, however, will focus more on cemetery religious symbolism, which, in our opinion, mainly expresses the attitudes of the bereaved towards the afterlife and religious issues. Unlike Zelinsky, we understand the religious symbolism of graves more as an

indicator of what he calls funerary religiosity. Therefore, we have chosen to use the term "funerary expressions of religiosity" in our research, as it better characterizes the phenomenon under study.

One of the first researchers to discuss the growing popularity of personalized grave markers in terms of the text and imagery from the lives of the deceased was Albert Hamscher, who began this line of research in the 1970s by attempting tried to place this information in the context of current religious beliefs and attitudes to death and dying (2006). A few years later, Frederick Gorman and Michael DiBlasi conducted research in the states of South Carolina and Georgia, focusing on the so-called "funeral ideology", which they understand as a set of ideas about death conditioned by religious, social, and economic factors. The patterning of the iconography of tombstones and other markers came to be considered as a material correlate of funeral ideology (Gorman, DiBlasi, 1981). Gorman and DiBlasi as well as Edwin Dethlefsen and Kenneth Jensen (1977) devoted attention to so-called burial markers, which may provide a source of data reflecting past attitudes toward death, family, and society. Similarly, the researchers postulate that "cemeteries provide a kind of ethnohistoric laboratory situations for studying the temporal and spatial dimensions of motif patterning" (Gorman, DiBlasi, 1981: 79). Thus, for reasons such as the association of cemeteries with trauma of man's death and end of life, the artifacts in these places reflect the religious beliefs and attitudes of the actors involved in their creation (Gade, 2015).

Along with all of these trends, the approach of ethnographer Wilbur Zelinsky has become indispensable in the type of research that our team has been undertaking. He conducted extensive research on cemetery grave markers in the United States, Canada and England, first publishing results in 2007. He explains how the decoding and analysis of these targets of investigation represents a more sensitive research method for measuring religiosity (2007) than does simply gathering statistics, a method in which religious affiliation is often the primary (even the only) criterion. The use of standard questionnaire surveys has also come under criticism, as established or expected social conventions may affect the answers of the respondents to the questions. In contrast, Zelinsky calls his own research method the "Gravestone Index" (2007: 441). Tombstones and other markers as artifacts thus express very intimate feelings, messages, themes and personal values which are manifested especially in liminal life situations (2007).

Thus, in this study, our main aim is to discuss "how religious dimensions influence the form and organization of spaces for the dead" (Gade, 2015: 623; Salner, 2003; Jágerová, 2009: 454–460), i.e. how religiosity intervenes in spaces that are now considered secular. In other words, this study does not pay attention to the life experiences of survivors after the loss of a loved one and the possibilities for improving their lives (MacArthur, Kirby, Mowll, 2022), but focuses on the study of their personal attitudes towards death.

Locations and Research Goals

Much current work on cemetery research has focused mainly on themes such as the study of the denominational affiliation of the deceased, the localization of grave markers in different geographical areas, diversity in iconography, how grave markers have changed over time, etc. The research has generally been localized in that it focuses on the study of cemetery religiosity within regions or even specific municipalities. We believe that the cemetery space in general, in our case in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia as the three historical provinces that make up the Czech Republic, is undergoing permanent transformation which is linked to important political, ideological and historical changes. We therefore share the view that the dynamics of the development of modern cities also create long-term pressures on the cemetery space by which this originally "sacred ground" has ceased to be untouchable (Gade, 2015: 636).

Our research focused on cemeteries in two cities in the Czech Republic, namely in Třinec and Litvínov. Třinec is located in the northeastern part of the country, with Litvínov in the northwest. These cities and their cemeteries were selected on the basis of a contrast in the long-term level of religiosity, with the first of these municipalities showing one of the highest levels of declared believers in the Czech Republic, and the second, on the contrary, one of the lowest. Another selection criterion was the high level of industrialization and modernization of both regions. Cemeteries in both cities are therefore set in the midst of urban agglomerations to which a large number of people have moved for reasons of employment during the last hundred years or so. There are also coal mines near both localities, which led to industrial development in both regions: in Třinec iron and steel production, in Litvínov the chemical industry. In terms of ethnicity, Třinec has been significant influenced by Polish immigration; the city lies near the present-day border with Poland. Until 1945 the German-speaking population had a significant influence in Litvínov, which is situated along the Czech-German border.

Our goal was to focus not only on cemeteries of a comparable nature, but especially on those administered by the state. State-owned city cemeteries allow for a freer arrangement of gravesites than is the case with church-operated cemeteries. In addition, religious practices in church cemeteries significantly influence the customary behavior in their arrangement. Therefore, we assume that city (state-administered) cemeteries are more individualized, and survivors can express their attitudes and beliefs more freely in the design and arrangement of markers, i.e. the worldview of those planning the resting places of the departed can be more easily identified. Based on this presupposition, we intentionally chose not to focus on cemeteries that are administered by the church organizations and communities.

Based on long-term surveys of religiosity in the Czech Republic, we assumed that Třinec would show a significantly higher level of funerary expressions of religiosity than would Litvínov, since Třinec is part of the significantly more religious region of Třinec and Těšín. However, we did not assume a causal link between the degree of declared religiosity (religious affiliation) taken from the Czech censuses and the

degree of funerary expressions of religiosity in both localities, although we assume a certain degree of correlation.

In setting research questions, we realized that if our findings on the degree of religiosity were to be relevant, they must take the issues under consideration into account comprehensively. Therefore, we tried to address the following problems: 1) *the level of* funerary expressions of religiosity *in selected localities*; 2) *how such expressions changed over time in given localities*. In general, we have tried to ascertain the extent to which the study of funerary expressions of religiosity can become an important tool for understanding these issues, thus in doing so we have sought to complement quantitative research strategies in the research.

With regard to methodology, the first step consisted of an initial study of the particular localities and local cemeteries, including the historical, cultural and religious background connected with each of them. The next step was extensive field research undertaken in the specific cemeteries, through which data were obtained. A total of 9,624 tombs and other grave markers were examined in both locations. Data were collected by photographing individual gravestones and their features, as well as taking working notes on all cemetery sections.

This was followed by systematic data processing. For this purpose, we used Microsoft Excel, which is suitable for quantitative calculations. We also used numerical coding to determine the number of quantitative occurrences of religious and nonreligious symbols on all gravestones, as seen in Tables 1, 2, 4 and 6. If a gravestone contained an inscription, we followed the same procedure. For coding a quantitative coding matrix was created (included in the appendices). The coding sheets, which are four in total because four students coded the data, are also included in the appendices of this study. The data were processed by two PhD students and two MA students in the study of religion program as directed by the principal researcher. The coding took approximately two months, after which the data were controlled and completed by the principal investigator and another project researcher. The obtained quantitative data were subsequently processed in a descriptive analytical manner and then interpreted.

We also assumed that the changes in Czech society throughout the 20th century would also be reflected in the cultural memory of the localities, and therefore the nature of the cemetery space and the arrangement of markers would be affected accordingly. These societal changes can generally be categorized with reference to ideological and political milestones of modern Czech history.

We therefore divided the research sample into four time periods that correspond to these milestones: 1) pre-1918, when Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia were part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy; 2) post-1918, a period related to the establishment of an independent Czechoslovakia and the democratization of society after the disintegration of Austria-Hungary; 3) post-1948, when the communist regime came to power and the ideologization of society was mandated by the state; 4) post-1989, an era related to the fall of communism, democratization and the gradual differentiation and individualization of society. Our aim was to study the changes in funerary

expressions of religiosity over time, that is, what gravestone markers can tell us in a time perspective about attitudes toward death, the nation, and especially religion (cf. e.g. Bubík, 2020). The same procedures of coding, sorting and evaluation of the obtained data were used for the research site of the Litvínov cemetery as in the case of the Třinec burial grounds.

The research group consisted of two academic staff, three doctoral students and two master's students. It was also one of our important goals to involve students in research activities, to develop their skills of working within a scientific research team in collecting and subsequently classifying a large amount of data, and then to evaluate and interpret the information.

The Municipal Cemetery in Třinec and Research Procedure

The demographic and industrial development of Třinec region was determined by its strategic location and the large occurrence of coal deposits in the vicinity, which had a major impact on the establishment of what eventually became the Třinec Iron and Steel Works and the accompanying construction of railways throughout the region. Heavy industry has dominated economic activity in this area for more than 150 years, with the iron mill first put into operation in 1839, after which the modernization of the former agricultural and pastoral areas gained momentum. Originally the inhabitants of Třinec and its surroundings were largely of Silesian, German and Polish heritage, with Jewish and Czech residents also represented to a lesser extent. Today more than four-fifths of the population declare Czech nationality and less than a fifth declare Polish nationality. Slovaks, Vietnamese, Roma, as well other nationalities also now reside in the city. Within the town of Třinec itself, the largest religious groups are represented by the Roman Catholic parish of the Church of St. Albert, and the parish congregation of the Silesian Church of the Evangelical Augsburg Confession.

A total of ten cemeteries fall under the central administration of the town of Třinec, including the cemeteries of adjacent municipalities. Our focus was the Folwark complex, the first cemetery of which is called Old Folwark, founded in 1890 and located a few hundred meters from the Catholic Church of St. Albert. Two other cemeteries, New Folwark I and New Folwark II, are located in the immediate vicinity and were created to increase the capacity of the complex in the 1980s and 1990s. Burials at New Folwark I began in the spring of 1994, and at New Folwark II in 2004. The cemetery administration of the town of Třinec reports a total of 7,877 gravesites in these three cemeteries. At the time we completed the field research in July 2021, the number of tombstones and other grave markers on these sites totaled 5,474, of which we found 5,227 markers which contained evaluable data. The difference between the total number of gravesites and the number of grave markers can be explained by the definition of the term grave site, which may indicate a grave with remains, an unmarked grave, or even a location for the future burial of remains.

The data we worked with consists of grave marker symbolism and inscriptions. Within the framework of the study of religious iconography we have defined a religious grave marker as an artifact that meets at least one of the following conditions: 1) it bears a religious symbol or symbols, 2) it contains an inscription with religious content, or 3) it contains a religious symbol and/or a religious inscription. As a key data point, we determined the absolute number of religious tombstones in percentage terms in relation to the number of all cemeteries documented. We simultaneously took into account these numbers in terms of individual periods in order to monitor the changes in funerary expressions of religiosity over time.

In order to determine whether the tombstone contains a religious symbol, image or some other devotional object, we first compiled a list of iconological representations, which we then marked with codes from 1 to 15. We defined fifteen categories, namely a common Latin or Greek cross, the face of Christ/crucifix, the Virgin Mary, an angel, a dove, a chalice, a book, a palm or olive branch, a plant of some kind, a landscape scene, a vocational symbol, two doves together, a flaming torch, an "other" or miscellaneous category, and, finally, a supplementary symbol not attached to the tombstone. Thus the first 14 categories above represent symbols that are an integral part of the tombstone or marker itself.

As we tried to address the question of how the religiosity of the given localities changed over time, we chose the *date of death of the (first) person* named on the grave marker as a criterion for the inclusion of the marker in the timeline. Nevertheless, we consider this date to be only approximate, as tombstones and other markers are usually crafted at some period after the death itself. We also remained aware that the markers are constantly being continuously reconstructed, modified or even completely replaced with a new marker. Thus, we consider this criterion as merely indicative, with its informative value only an approximation.

The frequency of markers in the cemetery in Třinec suggests that the disruption of the older gravesites, including tombstones and other artifacts, undoubtedly had a direct effect on the amount of symbols in the individual periods. The number of markers from before 1917 as well as before 1947 had been disturbed in some way or reconstructed. If the sites do not represent family tombs or graves of noteworthy deceased ancestors, the family memorial to the departed is generally preserved until the third to fourth generation even under the most favorable circumstances. Another important factor to consider, however, is demographic growth. For example, in 1910 only 3,849 inhabitants were residing in Třinec; in 1930 the number was 6,128; in 1950 15,619; and in 1991 45,210 (Czech Statistical Office 1869–2011). The most recent figure available is 35,224 inhabitants. It should also be noted that in addition to demographic changes, the population of Třinec was also affected by the change in its cadastral area which occurred in the 1980s. However, the same factors affect the data on research of religiosity (and others) in the censuses too.

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Although we took into account the various possible research pitfalls concerning the relevant issues, including a number of secondary factors that could have potentially affected the research sample, the current state of the cemetery – what it looks like today – was crucial for us. With regard to the research questions concerning the level of funerary religiosity and how it changed over time in the localities, it was most important to determine how many grave markers have a religious character. For this reason, neither the absolute numbers of individual symbols nor the inscriptions were relevant to us, merely the fact that the tombstone contained at least one religious item.

We considered the numbers of grave markers from the period before 1918 as irrelevant from a research point of view, as there were only 30 of these (although 63.3% were religious in nature). In the case of markers from the period 1918 to 1947, a total of 405 artifacts, 56.0% had a religious character. During the communist regime from 1948 to 1989, 38.1% of the total number of 2,787 artifacts had a religious character. And in the last period under study, after 1989, 37.6% of a total number of 2,005 markers have a religious character. Despite the relatively high level of funerary expressions of religiosity that remains in the present era, a steady decline is also evident, which corresponds to declared religiosity in the 1991, 2001, 2011 and partly in 2021[1] Czech censuses. We were surprised, however, by the fact that the rate of funerary expressions of religiosity basically correlates with the data on the rate of religiosity declared in the 2011 Census, which was 39.1%. Unfortunately, the data during the communist era cannot be correlated with any data from the Czech census of the period, as in 1954 the Communist government of Czechoslovakia passed a resolution abolishing the register of religions, which meant that the issue was dropped from the survey. The first census after the Velvet Revolution and the change to representative democracy took place in 1991.

Table 1
Number of evaluable markers with religious content in each individual period

Code	Symbol	I till 1917	II 1918–1947	III 1948–1989	IV 1990 +
1	cross (in combination with other religious symbols)	16	184	930	697
2	face of Christ/crucifix (without code 1)	1	31	43	26
4	chalice (without code 1 and 2)	0	3	40	4
10	Virgin Mary (without codes 1, 2, 4)	0	0	0	2
13	angel (without codes 1, 2, 4, 10)	1	0	5	4
	Total	18	218	1018	733
Total number of markers with a religious inscription without codes 1, 2, 4, 10, 13		1	9	45	21
Religious markers in individual periods		19	227	1063	754

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1   At the time the study was written and completed, the 2021 Census results on religiosity were known only for regions, not cities and towns. In the Moravian-Silesian Region, which includes the city of Třinec, the proportion of those who consider themselves religious reached a total of 39.5%. However, the question on religious affiliation is optional, so the figure on the level of religiosity is only relative.

The most commonly used religious symbol in this cemetery is a simple cross. The infrequent occurrence of crucifixes in comparison with the basic cross is likely due to the fact that the crucifix is disproportionately more demanding in terms of craftsmanship and thus more expensive. It is also surprising that although the Folwark central cemetery is located near the Catholic Church of St. Albert, there are very few depictions of the Virgin Mary in and around the church building, also probably due to the relatively high cost of production of such detailed artifacts. On the other hand, for example, images, statues and bas-reliefs of various plant species can be found quite often, which together with those of branches form the largest number of representations, even more often than those of a simple cross.

Along with these findings, it is remarkable that due to high industrialization over the years vocational symbols can be found only to a minimal extent. Similarly, depictions of the landscape rarely appear, although Třinec is bordered on all sides by beautiful mountains. There are also a quite a lesser number of Protestant symbols on the grave markers that would be expected given the importance of Protestantism in the region. The samples found are typically symbols of the Reformation such as the Chalice and the Bible (in our case, the book). This certainly does not correspond to the membership of Protestant churches, not only in the past but also in the present. The reason for this lack of Protestant symbolism probably lies in the fact that local Protestants are usually buried in the Lutheran cemetery established in 1850 in the formerly independent village of Lyžbice, which has been a part of the town of Třinec only since 1946.

Table 2

Absolute number of symbols

Code	Symbol	I till 1917	II 1918–1947	III 1948–1989	IV 1990 +
1	cross	16	184	930	697
2	face of Christ/crucifix	1	31	43	26
3	dove	0	1	0	7
4	chalice	0	3	40	4
5	branch	7	47	707	266
6	plant	7	50	365	666
7	landscape scene	0	2	58	13
8	vocational symbol	0	1	5	3
9	two doves	0	0	4	5
10	Virgin Mary	0	0	0	2
11	book	0	5	20	9
12	flaming torch	0	0	5	2
13	angel	1	0	5	4
14	miscellaneous	1	29	62	56
15	additionally attached symbolic object	0	33	385	390

It is interesting that there are basically no communist symbols from the communist era in this cemetery, for example in the form of a star, sickle, hammer, etc. It can be assumed that despite the appeal of communist ideology, the iconography

of grave markers served to call back to centuries-old cultural and religious customs regardless of the pressure of the political system. Manifestations of funerary expressions of religiosity at this time can also be seen as an expression of tacit anti-communist protest. Non-religious manifestations in the field of funeral practice in this highly religious region, as elsewhere in the Czech lands, were more often demonstrated through cremation. However, the urn grove in the cemetery in Třinec is only a small part of the complex in comparison with the rest of the facility.

Among the quite remarkable manifestations of funerary expressions of religiosity are also the objects which the survivors have placed spontaneously on and around the grave markers, artifacts for which we have created the designation "additionally attached symbolic object" (code 15). Figurines of angels or small crucifixes can be found most often. However, we have also included non-religious objects in this category, such as roses (sometimes can have religious symbolism), candles, etc. This form of religious behavior is an important manifestation of contemporary funerary expressions of religiosity, (re)confirming to the visitor/survivor the intimacy of the tomb space. This gesture has the advantage that it does not fundamentally change the nature of the tombstone; the object is generally relatively inexpensive and is both easy to situate in the area as well as remove. It should also be noted that these types of ancillary items are most often placed on the graves of the deceased during the All Soul's Day, which takes place on November 2. Nevertheless, in our research we did not categorize these artifacts as manifestations of funerary expressions of religiosity, since we judged that it is not possible to assess whether the deceased's family or friends can be associated with these objects, and they cannot be reliably placed within a specific time period.

Religious tomb inscriptions can be considered an extremely important manifestation of funerary expressions of religiosity. We have defined these inscriptions as texts containing traditional religious terms such as "the Lord", "God" as well as other words directly referring to God and religion, including the "Virgin Mary", "faith", "angel", etc. along with biblical quotations or other statements commonly considered religious, such as the excerpt from the Gospel of John 14:25, "Peace be with you", the phrase from Psalms 4:9 "Rest in peace", etc. From the point of view of the funerary expressions of religiosity we are considering, these words and texts are important for several reasons. First of all, in our estimation these inscriptions are a richer source of information than religious symbols. The inscriptions make it possible to formulate a more concrete description of the nature of the funerary expressions of religiosity of the bereaved. As a rule, these words and texts represent an economically more expensive behavior, and as such generally fewer inscriptions can be found in cemeteries than is the case with religious symbols. Moreover, when religious inscriptions are used in combination with a religious symbol, a compounded degree of funerary expressions of religiosity is represented. Since the inscriptions are written in a specific language, they can also help us answer the question of how local funerary religiosity corresponds to ethnic identity.

In our study of the cemetery in Třinec, using all of the above criteria we devoted great attention to whether a relatively high level of funerary expressions of religiosity

can be more associated with Czech or with Polish ethnicity. An important key for us was the number of religious inscriptions in each period and especially in what language they were written. We assume that the percentage of Polish inscriptions would decrease in individual periods, as the number of Poles living in this region and specifically in the town of Třinec has also been in decline for many years. Another detail from our findings that we must add is that a number of inscriptions have been written in other languages, for example Latin and German, although this was found far less frequently. A relatively higher number have been written in Greek, which is historically significant, as the grave markers of the deceased Greeks come from the period following World War II when several thousand left-wing Greeks immigrated to communist Czechoslovakia. Many of these Greeks settled in northern Moravia due to job opportunities in heavy industry (Martínek, 2003). Most of these markers can be found in an urn grove.

Table 3a

Number of markers with evaluable data

Metric	I till 1917	II 1918–1947	III 1948–1989	IV 1990 +
Markers with any inscription	11	156	1164	936
Total number of markers	30	405	2787	2005

Table 3b

Number of Polish and Czech religious markers

Metric	I till 1917	II 1918–1947	III 1948–1989	IV 1990 +
Religious markers with Polish inscription	5	50	163	57
Religious markers with Czech inscription	4	18	130	92

Our findings also show that of the total number of evaluable markers in the individual periods, 36% to 46% of them bear an inscription. In the first three periods for which we collected data, inscriptions in Polish predominate, as can be seen in Table 3b above. However, in the last monitored period beginning in the year 1990, inscriptions in the Czech language have already come to predominate in a ratio of 92 in Czech to 57 in Polish. This number of 92 seems low given the total number of religious grave markers, of which there are 754 (see Table 1). Thus, secular inscriptions can clearly be seen to predominate. Even these small numbers, however, indicate a certain significant change, which shows twofold: 1) above all, the decline of the Polish population in this region; 2) that the level of religiosity of the Czech and Polish populations in this region is gradually becoming similar.

The Municipal Cemetery in Litvínov

Litvínov is a border town located in the northwestern part of the Czech Republic in the district of Most in the administrative region of Ústí nad Labem. It is situated at the foot of the Ore Mountains near the border with the Federal Republic of Germany. The town of Litvínov is the seat of the administrative district, which includes ten other municipalities in addition to the town itself. As of December 31, 2020, approximately 37,000 people resided in this administrative district (Czech Statistical Office, 2001-2022).

In the 2011 census took place, approximately 25,000 inhabitants were living in the town of Litvínov alone, of whom less than 2,200 declared themselves religious believers, i.e. about 8.8%. Among cities in the Czech Republic with more than 5,000 inhabitants, this is the fourth lowest declared rate of religiosity, representing one of the lowest levels of religiosity in the Czech Republic in terms of statistical data (2011). The most significant in terms of the number in the area is represented by membership in the Roman Catholic Church. No more than a few dozen citizens of Litvínov identified themselves with other churches.

An essential feature of the area was the presence of the German ethnic group, with population settlements forming since the High Middle Ages. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, German was the first language of about three-quarters of the region's population. Although the number of Czechs who migrated to the Litvínov region for employment gradually began to rise (Gawrecká, 2014), the German ethnic group significantly prevailed. In 1930, less than 10,000 people lived in Litvínov, with the Germans comprising over two thirds of the population and Czechoslovaks making up the remainder. The German ethnic group prevailed in the city until the end of World War II, after which through a series of laws and decrees almost all the German population was deported in the years 1945–1947. The post-war population decline was gradually offset by the resettlement of immigrants from the Czech interior as well as from Slovakia (Glassheim, 2005).

Situated on the eastern edge of the town, the present-day Litvínov municipal cemetery contains a burial ground with an area of approximately 42,000 m^2. The exact number of burial places in the facility today could not be ascertained, although in 2018 an approximate number was determined of 5,000 urn and gravesites, about another 1,000 places in urn columbaria as well as two burial grounds and one scattering meadow. Based on our research in the locality, this estimate can also be assumed to correspond to the situation in June 2021.

The origin of the current town cemetery is closely connected with the industrial and construction development of Litvínov in the second half of the 20th century. With the gradual growth of Litvínov, the cemeteries of the municipalities that were affiliated to the Litvínov agglomeration were closed. A need thus emerged to centralize burial facilities in the newly formed municipal areas. The cemetery complex was erected in several stages, with construction completed in the year 1968. In connection with the establishment of the current municipal cemetery, the local

burial grounds of the Litvínov agglomeration were closed and the remains of those buried there moved to the present-day facilities. Unidentified remains (often Germans) were placed in mass gravesites.

Religious Iconography in the Litvínov Cemetery

A total of 4,146 graves were photographically documented at the research site. Not all graves were marked by a tombstone or other artifact, and some markers could not be classified according to the described criteria for a specific time period, for example because the inscriptions were illegible or completely missing. Some of the markers bear more than one symbol and/or include an epitaph in the form of the inscription alone or in combination with a symbol or symbols.

It is necessary at the outset to emphasize that the number of markers classifiable to individual historical periods in the Litvínov locality is clearly influenced by the fact that the current facility was established only in the 1950s and 1960s. There are therefore very few markers from the pre-war periods, with only three for period I (till 1917). For period II (1918–1947), 86 markers were found, of which 22% contained religious text or symbology. Due to the limited number of markers from these two periods, it is not possible to draw a relevant conclusion regarding funerary expressions of religiosity in the locality. For period III (1948–1989), 1,585 grave markers were found, of which 13.1% were religious, while of the 1,608 markers identified for period IV (since 1990), 16.9% were religious. These data show a relatively low level of funerary expressions of religiosity in the locality in the period after 1948, as markers without religious symbols or inscriptions significantly predominate over those with religious information. It can be said that in both of these periods the rate of funerary expressions of religiosity in the locality as reflected in the grave markers is low. Let us recall that in the census of 2011[2] the number of respondents reporting some form of religiosity in Litvínov reached about 8.8%, and even in the more recent censuses after 1989 a very low level of religiosity was found in the region.

In the first step of the data collection, the religious markers were identified according to the same criteria as in the Třinec locality. A total of 490 graves with markers bearing at least one religious symbol (i.e. whether or not an epitaph of religious or non-religious content was also featured) were identified in the Litvínov locality. The distribution of markers according to the type of religious symbol as well as the time period is shown in the Table 4.

Table 4

Number of evaluable markers of a religious character

Code	Symbol	I till 1917	II 1918–1947	III 1948–1989	IV 1990 +
1	cross (in combination with other religious symbols)	1	13	178	225
2	face of Christ/crucifix (without code 1)	0	0	0	4
4	chalice (without code 1 and 2)	0	0	9	3
10	Virgin Mary (without codes 1, 2, 4)	0	0	0	2
13	angel (without codes 1, 2, 4, 10)	0	0	7	38
	Total number of markers with a religious symbol in each individual period	1	13	198	278
	Total number of markers with a religious symbol in all periods	490			

Furthermore, the markers which did not bear a religious symbol but featured an epitaph of a religious character were designated as religious. The epitaph might be combined with a non-religious symbol. The religious nature of the epitaph was determined according to the same key as in the Třinec locality. Based on these criteria, a total of 22 markers were identified, the religious character of which was determined solely by the presence of an epitaph. The number of these markers by period is provided in the Table 5:

Table 5

Number of markers of a religious character bearing at least one religious symbol or only an inscription of a religious character

	I till 1917	II 1918–1947	III 1948–1989	IV 1990 +
Religious epitaph without symbol	0	6	10	4
Total	22			

Due to the former strong presence of the German ethnic group in the locality, it might be expected that many epitaphs in the German language would be found. However, the number recorded – only 15 – was small, with the vast majority of inscriptions on the Litvínov markers in Czech. For periods I and IV no German inscriptions were found at all; 5 inscriptions were identified for period II, 10 for period III. Of these 15 markers with German texts, 5 are secular in nature, and 10 can be identified as religious. This very low number of epitaphs in the German language is most likely related to the historical circumstances of the post-war expulsion of those with German heritage from the area as well as the relocation of the Litvínov burial ground in the 1950s and 1960s. The low number of markers with a German inscription in the locality does not allow us to draw a relevant conclusion about funerary expressions of religiosity in relation to the German population. The historical circumstances of the post-war period has created a situation in which almost all traces of the German ethnic group have been removed from the Litvínov cemetery.

A visitor to the Litvínov cemetery complex may notice the overall visual style of the facility in the religious symbolism of the grave markers as well as the epitaphs on the tombstones and other artifacts. A number of other special objects also form aspects of the grave inventory, many of these of a religious nature such as crosses and statues of Christ, angels, the Virgin Mary, etc. which have been added to the graves. In addition, a number of motifs which are evidently non-religious in nature can be identified such as depictions of branches or shoots of ferns, flowers, silhouettes of landscapes or less common symbols likely associated with the profession of the deceased, for example mining hammers or other tools, etc. This symbology forms an overall visual and even tactile impression which we attempted to capture through our gathering and analysis of the quantitative data.

These symbol or symbols, again either alone or in conjunction with an epitaph, are featured on markers at 2,299 gravesites. Recall that we counted only those symbols that formed a solid, stable part of the marker, typically a solid part of the tombstone or memorial plaque itself. In a total number of 4,146 photographically documented gravesites in all the time periods there were a total of 578 symbols, i.e. fixed parts of the marker which we identified as religious. Some markers bear two or more religious or non-religious symbols, while some are combined with epitaphs, which again could contain religious or non-religious information.

The Table 6 shows the number of symbols that appear on the markers included in each period, with, again, some artifacts bearing two or more symbols.

Table 6

Absolute number of symbols on markers classifiable into individual periods in Litvínov

Code	Symbol	I till 1917	II 1918–1947	III 1948–1989	IV 1990 +
1	cross	1	13	186	202
2	face of Christ/crucifix	0	0	6	6
3	dove	0	1	1	7
4	chalice	0	0	8	2
5	branch	0	17	513	296
6	plant	0	9	185	364
7	landscape scene	0	4	199	159
8	vocational symbol	0	0	10	2
9	two doves	0	0	11	2
10	Virgin Mary	0	0	0	2
11	book	0	0	3	2
12	flaming torch	0	0	1	2
13	angel	0	0	6	49
14	other symbol	0	4	13	39

The most common religious symbol found on the markers is represented by the simple cross, the occurrence of which we recorded in 488 cases, keeping in mind that one grave site may feature several crosses. The symbol of a religious nature which we found in the second highest amount is that of the angel, which was featured in dozens

of single cases or multiple cases. As can be seen in the Table 6 above, it is clear that in the period after 1990 the popularity of the symbol of the angelic figure has been growing. While for the periods before 1989 the angel was found only in 6 cases, in the most recent period it was featured 49 times. The statuette of an angel is also a very common artifact placed on the grave only secondarily, with various statuettes of angels forming a relatively frequent feature of grave site decoration.

Depictions of a non-religious nature clearly predominate on the tombstones, with the vast majority represented by plant motifs. A simple branch is most often depicted, in 978 cases usually featuring a simple, slightly stylized shoot of a fern. The second most common motif, with 642 cases, is again a plant or flower. The representation can usually be identified as a rose (sometimes can have religious symbolism), although in certain other cases plants, such as willow, meadow bells or tulips are featured. The third most common motif, one which we identified as secular, is the silhouette of the landscape, with 344 occurrences. A rural landscape with a village is featured relatively frequently, and we found the same pictorial scheme repeated in several individual cases. In the foreground of the landscape there is usually a meadow, in the middle the village itself, and mountain peaks or hills and the setting sun in the background. Often a feature of such a landscape is also a depiction of a church with a cross at the top of the steeple. We decided to classify this motif as non-religious. In our opinion, this representation is an expression of an idealized image of the Czech rural landscape in the style of romanticized illustrations, thus this feature cannot be considered a separate religious symbol, unlike the cross, which clearly denotes Christianity. Less common depictions of a non-religious nature (12 cases) include those we have identified as vocational symbols associated with the profession of deceased.

The quantification of the symbolism associated with the design of the grave markers, i.e. with funerary expressions of religiosity in the Litvínov locality, shows that non-religious symbolism predominates. On the contrary, relatively few religiously classifiable symbols can be found, a finding which indicates a low level of funerary expressions of religiosity in the locality. These results correspond to data on the relatively low level of religion in Litvínov as indicated by respondents in census statistics.

Comparison of Results in Localities

At both the Třinec and the Litvínov cemetery facilities, the theoretical concept of funerary expressions of religiosity and the associated methodological tools for investigations were demonstrated to be well-suited for describing and analyzing religion in connection with this type of environment. The municipalities of Třinec and Litvínov are similar in many respects in terms of the overall socio-cultural context, in particular the fact that they are both border industrial urban centers of a comparable size. Nevertheless, both cities differ significantly in the degree of

religiosity as identified in national censuses after 1989. In this respect, Litvínov is a city with one of the lowest levels of religiosity in the Czech Republic, while Třinec ranks among the highest. The ethno-national composition of the population of the cities also shows differences. Although Czechs make up the majority of the population in both localities, a significant Polish minority resides in Třinec.

The historical circumstances that affected the creation and existence of cemeteries in the two localities also differ. In Třinec, the town burial ground Starý Folwark has been in continuous use since the middle of the 19ᵗʰ century, while the Litvínov cemetery in use today was not established until the 1950s and 1960s. It is obvious that events and conditions in the post-war period of the Litvínov municipal cemetery influenced the form of funerary expressions of religiosity in Litvínov; grave markers from pre-war historical periods are almost non-existent in this facility. The Třinec facilities are larger and better preserved than is the case with the cemetery in Litvínov. In keeping with these circumstances, a significantly larger number of graves with evaluable data was documented in Třinec than in Litvínov. The data regarding the religious grave markers in both research sites indicate a significant difference in funerary expressions of religiosity. In Třinec, we found a total of 2,063 religious tombstones, which represents almost 39.5% of the total number of graves with evaluable data, while 512 religious tombstones were found in Litvínov, representing only 15.6% of such graves. This discrepancy provides further evidence that the level of funerary expressions of religiosity in the Třinec locality is significantly higher than in Litvínov.

As for the issue of ethnic identity as ascertainable from the grave markers in Třinec and Litvínov, the differences in both localities in terms of the overall cultural and historical context is also shown. Regarding the post-war history of Litvínov, after the German population was expelled after 1945 the local cemeteries were closed. As the remains were relocated to the site of the current municipal cemetery beginning in the 1950s, today it is not possible to document a great deal funerary expressions of religiosity in connection with the German ethnic group at the new location. On the contrary, in the Třinec locality for the individual periods under examination it is possible to identify hundreds of religious tombstones with an inscription in Polish. Traces of the Polish ethnic group in the funerary expressions of religiosity of the Třinec cemetery therefore remain quite clear.

In both localities, symbolic motifs were identified that are quite similar in terms of both religious and non-religious symbols. The most common non-religious motif is that of a plant motif – either a branch or the entire plant itself. Regarding the religious symbols, the most common is a simple cross. An interesting difference between the two localities is the higher incidence of the figural symbol of an angel in the Litvínov cemetery in the period after 1990. In terms of graves with religious symbols, an angel without other religious symbols in this period in Litvínov was found in 38 cases out of a total of 278 religious markers. On the other hand, in the Třinec facilities, this motif was found in religious markers in the period after 1990 in only four cases out of a total of the 733 artifacts for which the religious character was

determined by the occurrence of a religious symbol. Although this was not our primary goal, in both localities we also reported the incidence of secondary artifacts on or near the photographed graves which did not form a common part of the grave inventory (candles, wreaths and flowers, etc.), or were not firmly attached to the grave.

Conclusion: Possibilities and Limitations

In this text we have tried to show why and how to investigate what we called "funerary expressions of religiosity". We have presented a quantitative research method for which officially declared religious affiliation is not a key indicator. The subject of this research is cemetery grave markers, specifically the symbols and inscriptions that are associated with them.

We believe that findings about the nature of funerary expressions of religiosity can contribute to knowledge in the following ways. One advantage is that the subject of collection and subsequent analysis is not the self-references of the respondents, but cemetery architecture, i.e. durable artifacts that remain (at least for a time) part of the cultural memory of a particular place. The data than can be collected in these spaces are significantly connected to the given locality; they are literally carved in stone. This research is based on the assumption that not only declared believers, but also people whose lives have not been directly connected in any way with particular church may sometimes manifest religiously significant behavior.

In our experience, funerary expressions of religiosity can only appear in the confrontation with death, i.e. in the awareness of and reaction to the loss of someone close which is subsequently reflected in the form of the tombstone or other grave marker. Another postulation we can make is that the more secular the place of the deceased's remains (e.g. a cemetery under the administration of a city, town or village), the more freely the funerary expressions of religiosity of the surviving person or persons can manifest itself.

Given that our research has confirmed (unlike Zelinski's finding) a certain correlation between funerary expressions of religiosity and the religiosity declared in the censuses taken in the localities over the years, knowledge of this kind may also prove important, for example, to verify or supplement data obtained from sociological or psychological research. This is especially true for those countries in which the methodology for filling in the state census forms does not require the completion of items on the respondent's religion and religious affiliation.

We have also confirmed that this research does not necessarily present a suitable tool for the study of historical religiosity, but for contemporary religious beliefs and practices. In our case, we possessed enough information to work with concerning the time period after 1950, i.e. 60 to 70 years ago, but older data were not sufficient for an adequate evaluation of previous periods.

During the research, we found that this type of research is particularly suitable for the study of relatively smaller localities, not necessarily huge metropolitan areas

and wide zones with a large population. One practical concern is that on such an extensive scale, such research would be difficult to organize and carry out in terms of the extreme demands on personnel and other research resources. The collection of a large amount of data can be considered relatively easy, but their subsequent processing is very time consuming. We therefore consider it vital that the team of researchers corresponds to the planned scope of the researched locality and is thus able to process the data to produce meaningful results.

In searching for evidence concerning the values or worldview of a given population, the cemetery can be considered an essential research site, one which contains a great deal of information unavailable in other locations. We hope that the quantitative research method used to study the religious and non-religious content of specific communities can serve as a guide for other researchers, for example, to complement the results of other types of research with new findings. Equally, this method can be useful for researching religious (denominational) diversity in particular localities, which is often characterized by the use of specific religious symbols.

In addition to obtaining knowledge about the degree of contemporary religiosity in the particular locality, research such as the study described in this text is able to provide useful information not only about the religiosity of a place, but also about the degree of its secularization as well as the secularity of specific ethnic groups. Our research has allowed us to trace not only changes in the demographic composition of the population, but also to monitor changes in religiosity/secularity over time. The findings that such research is able to yield could be particularly valuable in the study of material culture.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

TOMÁŠ BUBÍK (ORCID: 0000-0002-0914-9229) – is Religious Studies scholar and an Associate Professor of Faculty of Arts at Palacký University Olomouc (Czechia). He is the head of the experimental Cognitive Laboratory (CO-LAB), which deals with cognitive research on religion. His interest includes the history, theory and methodology of religious studies, study of modern forms of atheism and non-religion, study of religion in museum and cemetery, and laboratory research on contemporary religiosity from a cognitive perspective. In the last few years, he has led several grant projects resulting in books such as *Academic Study of Religions in a Cognitive, Anthropological and Sociological Perspective*, (Bubík, T., Havlíček, J., Eds., UP Olomouc 2021), *Freethought and Atheism in Central and Eastern Europe: The Development of Secularity and Non-Religion* (Bubík, T., Remmel, A., Václavík, D., Eds., Routledge 2020) and *Studying Religions with the Iron Curtain Closed and Open. The Academic Study of Religion in Eastern Europe* (Bubík, T., Hoffmann, H., Eds., Brill 2015).

JAKUB HAVLÍČEK (ORCID: 0000-0002-7330-4406) – graduated in the Study of Religions, History and French Language from Masaryk University (Brno, Czechia). He got his PhD in Religious Studies from Masaryk University in 2009 (dissertation entitled "Gods' Ways. Interpreting Religions and Nationalism in Modern Japan" published in Czech, Masaryk University Press, 2011). He has completed internships, exchanges and lectureships at Kansai Gaidai University Osaka, University of Vienna, University of Hawai'i, London School of Economics, Harvard University, University of California Berkeley, Sapienza University of Rome, etc. He has worked as an assistant professor at Palacký University Olomouc, where he taught mainly courses focused on the anthropology of religion, visual anthropology and religion in Japan. He is the author of a number of publications on religion in modern societies, with a focus on religion and education and religion in Czech society. In 2021 he published a monograph *Imagining Religion in the Czech Republic: Anthropological Perspectives* (Münster, Zürich: LIT Verlag). He is currently working as a teaching innovation specialist at Masaryk University.

MARKÉTA MUCZKOVÁ (ORCID: 0009-0003-5585-9023) – holds a bachelor's degree in Theology and Religious Studies, later earning a master's degree in Religious Studies and General Linguistics. Currently pursuing a PhD in Religious Studies, her focus lies primarily in exploring superstitions and magic from a cognitive perspective. Her intellectual curiosity extends to the human brain in general, delving into its diverse distortions and biases, which she prefers to examine through instruments and verifiable empirical data. As a contributor to the Cognitive Laboratory (CO-LAB) research team, she dedicates her efforts to understanding the nuances of cognition. Her work strives to offer a perspective within the realm of religion, cognitive processes, and its numerous biases.

LENKA JEDLIČKOVÁ (ORCID: 0000-0002-4795-3875) – studied philosophy, bohemistics and journalism at the Faculty of Arts of Palacký University in Olomouc. During her studies, she focused mainly on phenomenology, both the work of Edmund Husserl and his followers – Martin Heidegger, Jan Patočka, Eugen Fink and others. In

2004, she defended her master's thesis entitled The Concept of Death and Anxiety in the Work of Martin Heidegger and Søren Kierkegaard, and she continued this theme in her doctoral studies, which she completed in 2020 with the defense of her dissertation entitled "The Concept of Death in the Work of Eugen Fink and Jan Patočka". In the same year she started her PhD in Religious Studies program at the Department of Sociology, Andragogy and Cultural Anthropology. Her research work is based on previous studies and research and is focused on the investigation of spirituality in management professions.

OLGA ČEJKOVÁ (ORCID: 0000-0003-3887-9690) – is a graduate of Department for the Study of Religions, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University Brno (Czechia). Currently, her studies continue in doctoral Religious Studies programme at Faculty of Arts of Palacký University Olomouc. Her research is focused on anthropology of religion, qualitative fieldwork research and theory of ritual. Her research topics of last years are: anthropology of food, religiosity and modern hunting rituals, particularly in Czech hunting and game keeping tradition originally called "myslivost".

JAROSLAV HURTÍK (ORCID: 0009-0002-1894-1063) – completed his Master's degree in History and Social Sciences at the University of Ostrava and also graduated in Religious Studies in Pardubice. He is currently studying a PhD Religious Studies program at Palacký University Olomouc.

KLÁRA KUBÁLKOVÁ (ORCID: 0009-0005-7970-424X) – completed her Master's degree in Cultural Anthropology and Religious Studies at the Faculty of Arts of Palacký University in Olomouc in 2023. Her bachelor thesis, defended in 2020, dealt with the topic of gravestone symbolism of selected Prague headstones from the 20th century. She is currently working towards a PhD in Religious Studies at Palacký University in Olomouc. Her areas of interest include alternative spirituality and new religious movements.