

Emptied places

A case study of three churches in Wrocław (of St. James, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of St. Elizabeth)

Romuald Kaczmarek

University of Wrocław

In memory of Professor Robert Suckale (1943–2020)

An empty space or plane can be a result of an intentional action of the creator. The question posed by a work of art that contains an intentional emptiness, an artistic creation that acts by contrast between filled and empty, is a question of the meaning of such a concept. The reflection on what was intended to be expressed or indicated by omission, abandonment, or apparent unfinishment. In the course of their research on works of medieval art, the art historian encounters disproportionately more often an unintentional emptiness, or in any case one that has not emerged in the controlled art making process or as a result of actions that are not chronologically distant from execution of an artwork. An unintentional emptiness is, therefore, one whose occurrence was not programmed, not predicted, and which was created in a way that was somehow secondary and contrary to original intentions. Let us also add that the researcher of medieval and early modern art comes across such a category of emptiness above all. It is so common that we treat it almost as natural.

Among the cases that could be classified as non-intentional emptiness, two basic types can be distinguished. The first is when, contrary to the original concept of the work of art or to the intention of the creator or founder, it remains unfinished. When its predicted element, whose desired presence in some whole is clear from the function of its other parts or from its composition, has never appeared. These unfilled places were part of a broader architectural, decorative and – potentially – substantive program of buildings, but for various reasons – let's mention, for example, an unexpected break in the work, which was never undertaken again – they remained empty. A classic example of a work of art where such a lack can be felt is a Gothic portal, in whose jambs and archivolts corbels and canopies are elaborated, but the spaces between them are not and have never been filled. To the second type I would include single empty niches, recesses or corbels, often installed in walls or on piers after the completion of the main church construction. The primary reason for their creation was most probably the commission for a statue they were supposed to receive. The decision to introduce such an element (a niche or a corbel) had to result from a decision already made or an act of foundation of the sculpture for which a certain place was assigned. If it is empty, we can assume that the artwork once exposed in such a frame was removed.



1. The niche for the statue on the southern side of the chancel arch. The former Franciscan Church of St. James in Wrocław (currently the Greek Catholic Church of St. James and St. Vincent), state around 1997. Photo: R. Kaczmarek

We focus here on examples that are architectural or closely related to architecture, as such ones will be discussed later in the text. But the removal and disappearance of medieval artworks is a common phenomenon. Its effect is that we are dealing with only a fraction of the output of craftsmen and artists of that time. Jan Białostocki gave an evaluation of medieval German painting, according to which we currently have only 2% of the preserved works¹. An empty space is therefore a research challenge. On the one hand, we must keep in mind that we build our opinions on a fractionally preserved material. On the other hand, when we are confronted with an intentionally shaped space or frame that was supposed to receive something and is now empty, it forces us to ask questions about an object, a work of art that originally filled the place created for it, and about the intentions associated with it. If we manage to recreate the original whole, we also have a chance to take a fuller look at the way of functioning of the space in which it was placed. And also at the work of art, its recipient and possible relations between them. And it happens that attempts to reconstruct a disassembled whole stimulate imagination, but they can also lead astray. However, being aware of these hazards, I would like to propose an escapade to the areas of hypothetical solutions of historical puzzles.

In Wrocław's (Breslau's) churches we find a number of examples of such architectural frames or corbels, which, deprived of the sculptural work for which they were conceived, do not attract special attention today. They have lost their function and most often remain useless or at most gain new functionality. If they do not have an inscription or at least a coat of arms identifying a family or a person, it is difficult to write about their story anything more than a few words of conjecture about their function and chronology. It is not my goal to present here a catalogue of such objects in Wrocław, but only to draw attention to a few examples. My intention would therefore be to point out the research potential of these empty places, which are moreover – undoubtedly also because of this emptiness – overlooked in artistic historiography.

The Franciscan Church of St. James (currently the Greek Catholic Cathedral of St. James and St. Vincent)

On the sides of the chancel arch and the entrance to the presbytery, in the engaged piers adjacent to the eastern walls of the side aisles, there were niches recessed in the brick face, framed by a stone frame. The frame of the niche on the southern side is unfortunately completely destroyed and the niche itself was only walled up anew during the post-war reconstruction of the church, without reconstruction of the frame. Luckily, the frame on the northern side was preserved with only slight losses [Fig. 1]. The exact fit with a thread of the pier and the lack of damage to the face indicates that these niches were made together with the wall, i.e. in one of the construction stages of the church, which passed several of them². The scale, the depth of the niche and the small polygonal protrusion in front of the niche indicate that it (and originally both of them) was planned to house a full-scale statue³.

¹ J. Białostocki, *Sztuka XV wieku od Parlerów do Dürera*, Warszawa 2010, p. 57.

² See *Die Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Breslau*, Ed. L. Burgemeister, G. Grundmann, Vol. 1.3, Breslau 1934, pp. 3, 8. From the chronology of construction given here results that the niches were created in the last third of the 14th century. J. Adamski (*Gotycka architektura sakralna na Śląsku w latach 1200–1420. Główne kierunki rozwoju*, Kraków 2017, pp. 625–630) sees a close affinity between the nave of the Wrocław church and the parish church in Brzeg (Brieg), confirmed by the work of master Gunther from Wrocław (died after 1378); and he determined the completion of the rebuilding of the older hall church into a pseudo-basilica for the time before 1390.

³ The lower edge of the frame is at the height of 181 cm from the current floor; frame dimensions: height approx. 322, width max. 97; niche dimensions of the frame: depth 30, and together with the protrusion 41 cm, width 49, height to tracery 200 cm.



2. A. Woelfl, *View of the interior of the church of St. James (later St. Vincent) in Wrocław*, fragment with the niche and the statue, 1869, National Museum in Wrocław. Photo: R. Kaczmarek

Such their function is confirmed by the view of the church interior painted by Adelbert Woelfl in 1869⁴. This Wrocław painter was famous for views of the city and its buildings painted with the utmost precision and accuracy. In the case of this painting, this is also confirmed by the correct depiction of the architectural forms of the baroque retables together with the compositions of the paintings filling them and – more importantly – also by the characteristics of the forms of the pier of the chancel arch together with the basic features of the Gothic frame of the northern niche preserved until today. In it, we can see a colourful polychromed statue in Woelfl's painting [Fig. 2]. Its scale in the original must have been considerable, because it should be nearly 2 m high. In the whole Woelfl's painting it is only a few centimetres. Therefore, one must be cautious when speculating about the forms of the sculpture.

⁴ See P. Łukaszewicz, *Malarstwo niemieckie od klasycyzmu do symbolizmu. Katalog zbiorów. Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu*, Wrocław 2012, No. 296, pp. 240–241, ref. VIII–645.

In any case, it does not seem that among the preserved Gothic sculptures from Wrocław, a similar statue could be found. However, it can be assumed with a high probability that at the time of creation of the painting it was still an original Gothic sculpture. The statue in it is shown in long robes, the underdress is red and the coat is blue. She probably has a veil on her head. Therefore, these are the colours and type of clothing most often used in the case of Marian figures. However, the Infant Jesus is not seen there, and the sculpture is definitely set with the right side to the viewer, so it faces to the right, towards the south. If it was a Marian figure, it was not in the type of Madonna and Child, but of Mary in the scene of the Annunciation⁵. The turn of the statue captured by the painter had to be composed in accordance with its pendant placed in the southern niche, on the other side of the chancel arch, which would have to be Archangel Gabriel heralding.

Such an arrangement of the Annunciation group, separated by an inter-naval arcade or a chancel arch, has precedents and analogies. The Annunciation in the upper part of the wall of the chancel arch in the Arena Chapel of the Scrovegni family in Padua is a well-known example. Giotto depicted this scene, emphasizing also the pictorial space, building its narrative and illusory character, according to the concept of the whole painting interior design. Sculptural variants of this scene were limited to imagining single figures, leaving the rest to the viewer's imagination. This is the case, for example, with the pair of stone sculptures of the Annunciation in the Basilica of St. Cunibert in Cologne (1439) set opposite each other on a pair of western piers of the crossing, behind which there is a shallow apse space⁶.

In Regensburg Cathedral, the figures of the Annunciation were created around 1285–1290 and are associated with the so-called Master of Erminold. Currently, they are located on the opposite piers of the nave, in the arcade opening to the crossing, on the corbels and under canopies [Fig. 3]. Originally, however, they were also placed opposite each other, on the walls of the cathedral's choir, enclosed in painted niches, near the main altar⁷. Mary makes a gesture towards Gabriel with her right arm raised, showing her hand, which means consent and humble acceptance of the news. The context of the altar, where the Eucharist is celebrated and where the Incarnation occurs repeatedly, is of great importance for the composition of such a group. Between its figures, the moment of the Mystery is revealed anew in the moment of *elevatio*. The performative aspect of such a composition of the group of the Archangel Gabriel and Mary and the gestures stopped in motion resound just then⁸. We would have a similar situation at the Franciscans' in Wrocław. At present there are no traces of the rood screen at the entrance to the choir, but it separated it from the nave until the first quarter of the 17th century⁹. It certainly had to be preceded by an altar for the laity, thus placed between the two niches. Perhaps even the architecture of the rood screen was somehow connected with them in a motive and composition. The gesture of the Marian figure captured in the painting of Woelfl – the right arm bent in the elbow and raised – is a clue to the similarly performative sense of the composition as in Padua or Regensburg¹⁰.

⁵ It is less likely that this is Archangel Gabriel, which would not change the sense of the presented interpretation of the whole anyway. It should be remembered that the colour scheme of the sculpture could be at most repeated after the Middle Ages.

⁶ See **G. Regenber**, *Die Verkündigungsgruppe in St. Kunibert zu Köln*, "Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch" Vol. 61 (2000), pp. 41–42, 48–50.

⁷ See **A. Hubel**, *Der Erminoldmeister und die deutsche Skulptur des 13. Jahrhunderts*, "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Bistums Regensburg" Vol. 8 (1974), pp. 160–182, 240.

⁸ It was seen a little differently by **A. Hubel** (*ibidem*) who wrote about the viewer standing between the sculptures, being a mediator (*Mittler*) between them, when they, facing slightly towards the altar, directed his attention to it.

⁹ See *Die Kunstdenkmäler...*, Vol. 1.3, p. 3.

¹⁰ It seems unlikely to see in this case the arrangement of the Crucifixion assistants – Mary and St. John the Evangelist – as these usually formed a compact composition of closely located figures, both on the chancel beam and in connection with the rood screen itself, as shown by the 13th-century examples from Wechselburg and Naumburg.



3. Group of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Regensburg Cathedral, circa 1285–1290. Photo: R. Kaczmarek

The Canons Regular of St. Augustine's Church of St. Mary on the Sand

In the northern aisle, on the first free-standing pier to the east, there is a wall-painting [Fig. 4] discovered in the post-war period (shortly before 1967)¹¹. It reaches a height of over 4 m. Unfortunately, it is not known how low it reached down. It stretches for about 214 cm, i.e. for almost the entire width of the horizontally elongated pier, including its moulded faults on the sides of the central lesene. In such a fault on the eastern side there is a Late Gothic stone corbel in the field of the wall-painting¹². In its plan it is close to a rectangle with cut corners, with a horizontally moulded plate of the impost, which is additionally enriched with multiple concave cuts passing vertically also to the lower part below the impost¹³. This part is covered with a sculptural decoration depicting strongly stylized leaves and several large grapevine clusters [Fig. 5].

The type of moulding and decoration of the corbel is most similar to the forms found in Wrocław within the works associated with the production of Hans Berthold and Peter Franczke's workshop from the 1460s and 1470s¹⁴. However, it cannot be ruled out that the corbel was created on the occasion of Jodok Tauchen's works in the church on the Sand between 1463–1466, proven by sources¹⁵. Whereas in the upper part of the painting on the pier there is a date 1477. Thus, the corbel and the painting are an added decoration, more than a century younger than the pier itself¹⁶. It can be assumed that the corbel, the existence of which has already been taken into account by the painting decoration, was created shortly before the painting was made, and that in whose program and composition both the corbel and the statue standing on it or the one that was intended to be placed there were taken into account.

They formed a group which – even if it was created in two chronologically not distant stages, and the second of which (the wall-painting) could be inspired by and determined by the existence of the corbel – was intended to function as a whole. Can we, in its present state, attempt to approximate the sense and manner of its functioning? In the absence of other indications and sources we should limit ourselves to the analysis of the wall-painting and its spatial context. The painting layer is preserved only fragmentary [Fig. 6]. However, it can be seen that the composition has been divided into two zones. In its lower part, ending more or less at the height of the corbel impost there is a fabric hung by means of a rope or rings on a bar. Below the angels (minimum pair of them at the edges; only one is preserved completely, below the corbel, and the other, on the right side, more or less in the middle) hold the second fabric in front of

¹¹ A. Ziomecka (*Rzeźba i malarstwo*, [in:] *Sztuka Wrocławia*, Ed. T. Broniewski, M. Zlat, Wrocław 1967, p. 157) stated that only "the landscape background with a view of a pond and swans flowing on it and the date 1477" is preserved. See also A. Karłowska-Kamzowa, *Malarstwo ścienne na Śląsku*, [in:] *Gotyckie malarstwo ścienne w Polsce*, Ed. eadem, Poznań 1984, p. 97 and Table on p. 221 (with erroneous dating to 1447 and with mentioning only the angelic half-figure under the corbel and the saints); J. Domaśłowski, *Znaczenie klasztorów kanoników regularnych we Wrocławiu, w Żaganiu i Kłodzku dla rozwoju średniowiecznej sztuki śląskiej*, [in:] *Sztuki plastyczne na średniowiecznym Śląsku. Studia i materiały*, Wrocław-Poznań 1988, p. 51; A. Jankowski, *Malarstwo ścienne na Śląsku u progu Reformacji*, Bydgoszcz 2005, p. 198 (with a mistaken recognition of only one saint as Bartholomew or Barbara).

¹² See *Die Kunstdenkmäler...*, Vol. 1.1, Breslau 1930, p. 232, here, it was described only as "Gothic", a wooden, polychromed sculpture of an unspecified bishop (80 cm high), dated to the early 18th century, stood on it. The painting was then covered with a layer of plaster.

¹³ Corbel dimensions (H/W/D): 31 × 33 × 31,5 cm. The upper edge of the impost plate reaches 234 cm above the current floor.

¹⁴ In the formation of leaves and clusters, e.g. capitals of columns supporting the vault of the western portico of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (1465–1468).

¹⁵ See *Die Kunstdenkmäler...*, Vol. 1.1, p. 213. However, among Tauchen's preserved works there are no such similar forms.

¹⁶ On the chronology of the construction recently: J. Adamski, *op. cit.*, pp. 434–438.



4. The painting on the north-eastern pier in the former Canons Regular of St. Augustine's Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the Sand in Wrocław, 1477. Photo: R. Kaczmarek



5. The corbel on the north-eastern pier in the former Canons Regular of St. Augustine's Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the Sand in Wrocław, 1477. Photo: R. Kaczmarek

them, with its upper edge rolled up¹⁷. Unfortunately, the central part of this composition is destroyed, so it is not known if and what was depicted in the middle, against the background of the curtain hanging from the bar. Above it and at the same time in the background behind it, in the upper zone, there is a wide landscape closed on the sides as if by the edges of a curtain or a frame decorated with regularly wavy lines of quasi-floral decoration. On it, in the background, one can see a winding river, which spills widely in the middle part, and further in the depths three high hills with gentle contours. Against this background, one can clearly see the naked branches here and there of tall growing trees. On the river, to the left and right, there are small moving vessels of the Hanseatic cog type, and a flock of three swans sway in the middle of the floodplain.

The middle part of the foreground is occupied by a pair of large figures with heads in halos. The figure on the left side is dressed in long robe, in his left hand he is holding a branch of a palm tree (?), in his right hand he has his sword raised with its tip up, and his head is most probably covered by a papal tiara, whose top with a crowning cross sticks out above the contour of the halo. Despite the lack of dress details, we can therefore assume that this is the Pope St. Fabian¹⁸. He was venerated together with St. Sebastian

¹⁷ The question must remain unanswered whether the painting-architectural composition was originally symmetrical, i.e. with the second corbel on the right. This is very likely. I would like to thank Agata Kaczmarek for drawing my attention to this aspect.

¹⁸ See L. Schütz, *Fabian Papst* [entry], [in:] *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, Vol. 6, Rom 1974, pp. 215-216.



6. The upper zone of the painting featuring St. Fabian and St. Sebastian in the former Canons Regular of St. Augustine's Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the Sand in Wrocław, 1477. Photo: R. Kaczmarek

due to the same day, 20 January, of their feast day. Both saints were often depicted together¹⁹. Sebastian, besides his most frequent depiction as naked and pierced by arrows, was also often shown in a secular dress. And if we identify him well, it is this version that we deal with here. He wears high-legged crakows, and is dressed in a coat reaching to the half of his calves, whereas his headgear can be regarded as some kind of a hat. Between his feet, the end of the arch, with which he used to be depicted, is most likely resting on the ground. He seems to be holding a bunch of three arrows in his left hand²⁰.

With this pair of saints, the character of the landscape harmonizes well with the strange, naked, i.e. leafless trees, which must have been a clear reference to the season in which their feast day was celebrated. Following the indications of the liturgical calendar, and looking for a possible candidate to place in the mentioned company on an empty corbel next to St. Fabian, our attention is drawn to the Late Gothic figure of St. John the Almsgiver, which was located in the church on the Sand²¹. His feast was celebrated in the Church on 23 January, that is within the octave of the feast of St. Fabian and St. Sebastian.

¹⁹ In Silesia, e.g. in the panels of the altar retables from Legnica (Liegnitz) (1466), Wrocław (1497) and Rudno (Rudnau) (fourth quarter of the 15th century) – see J. Witkowski, *Gotycki ołtarz główny kościoła Świętych Piotra i Pawła w Legnicy*, Legnica 1997, pp. 33, 55–56, fig. XVIII; also in St. James church in Pieszyce (Peterswaldau, ca. 1515) – cf. A. Jankowski, *op. cit.*, p. 190, Fig. 90 (herein St. Fabian identified erroneously with St. Gregory).

²⁰ P. Assion, *Sebastian St.* [entry], [in:] *Lexikon...*, Vol. 8 (1976), cols. 318–324.

²¹ *Schlesische Malerei und Plastik des Mittelalters. Kritischer Katalog der Ausstellung in Breslau 1926*, Ed. H. Braune, E. Wiese, Leipzig 1929, p. 61, Tabl. 128 (herein the identification with St. Hieronymus). In this regard, it is important to consider P. Knötel (*Kirchliche Bilderkunde Schlesiens*, Glatz 1929, cols. 93), who saw this statue in the church on the Sand still with the Baroque inscription “*vera effigies S. Joannis Eleemosynarii*”. He did not, however, specify its location in the northern aisle, as the catalogue of monuments claims, citing him (*Die Kunstdenkmäler...*, Vol. 1, p. 232).



7. The painting composition in the former Canons Regular of St. Augustine's Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the Sand in Wrocław with a statue of St. John the Almsgiver on the corbel. Photo & photomontage: R. Kaczmarek. Photo of the statue: M. Kujda

The dimensions of this statue might allow for its good exposition on the corbel and fitting into the composition of the wall-painting [Fig. 7]²². In the literature on the subject it was dated about 1500 or the beginning of the 16th century. The style of the draperies, not far from the stage represented in the Silesian woodcarving by the woodcarvers working on the Annunciation with the Unicorn Polyptych from St. Elizabeth's Church (ca. 1480), would however allow for a much earlier chronology²³. Unfortunately, there are no evidences that would speak of any particular cult of St. John the Almsgiver among the religious orders of the Augustinian rule, as suggested by Paul Knötel, based on the example of the Augustinian retable of St. John the Almsgiver (1504) from Cracow²⁴. This saint was not included in the liturgy of the hours in the Diocese of Wrocław in the 15th century²⁵. But his feast day was mentioned in the indulgence document dated 1500 issued for the Chapel of St. James at the parish church in Kłodzko (Glatz), located in the Archdiocese of Prague²⁶. Maybe it was the influence of the Augustinians, whose important monastery, which maintained close contacts with the Wrocław one, was located in that city.

Should we therefore trust the secondary inscription identifying the sculpture as the Almsgiver? The rather moderate and late development of the cult of this saint in Central Europe is explained by the fact that the King of Hungary, Matthias Corvinus, received his relics from Constantinople in 1489 (?)²⁷. Considering the relationship of Corvinus and Hungary with Silesia, it is possible to assume a fairly fast transmission of information and an attempt to establish a cult of this saint in Silesia. But if one wanted to associate the creation of the Wrocław representation in connection with the wall-painting from 1477, the sources of his veneration would have to be sought in Venice, where his relics were in possession from the middle of the 13th century²⁸. So, did the sculpture of the Almsgiver from the beginning stand on the corbel next to the figures of St. Fabian and St. Sebastian, or did it appear there later, by way of recomposition or complementation of the existing program? In an attempt to answer this question, in the future, one should take into account both a more thorough formal and comparative analysis of the sculpture itself, as well as the

²² The sculpture is preserved in the Archdiocese Museum in Wrocław. In the catalogue *Schlesische Malerei und Plastik...* (p. 61), it is given its height of 127 cm; after the restoration completed in 2020, its current dimensions are: height 120 cm, base (width/depth) 34.5 × 22; the difference may result not only from measurement inaccuracies, but also from the reconstruction of missing parts (hat, base). The ref. 3302 accompanying the sculpture is uncertain, because in the catalogue of the Museum under this reference there is the entry "Saint (?). Gothic sculpture, polychrome, size 195 cm" (W. Urban, *Muzeum Archidiecezjalne we Wrocławiu oraz katalog jego zbiorów*, "Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne" Vol. 27 (1973), p. 181.

²³ See *Schlesische Malerei und Plastik...*, p. 61; here dating to the beginning of the 16th century and locating in the circle the retable from Góra (Guhrau). It should be noted that the sculptural decoration of this retable is a work of several woodcarvers, and it is possible that a woodcarver who worked on the sculptures of the lower right wing quarter used an older style than the one represented in other sculptures. However, the sculpture discussed here is still closer in style to the forms found for example in the group of the Coronation of Mary or some half-figures in the *predella* of the Annunciation with the Unicorn Polyptych.

²⁴ P. Knötel, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

²⁵ See F. Wolnik, *Liturgia godzin w diecezji wrocławskiej w XV wieku*, Opole 1994.

²⁶ See *Urkunden und Regesten zur Geschichte der Grafschaft Glatz von 1401 bis 1500*, Ed. F. Volkmer, W. Hohaus, Habelschwerdt 1888, p. 517. Moreover, St. John Almsgiving, St. Fabian and St. Sebastian, as well as Hieronim were depicted in the painterly decoration of this chapel from the early 16th century.

²⁷ K. Secomska (*Oftarz św. Jana Jałmużnika*, "Studia Renesansowe" Vol. 4 [1964], p. 265) carefully indicates this date and Sultan Bayezid as a benefactor, referring to a short note by M. Sokołowski.

²⁸ See *Vollständiges Heiligen-Lexikon*, Ed. J. Ch. Stadler, Vol. 3, Augsburg 1869, pp. 211-213; L. Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien*, Vol. 3.2, Paris 1959, p. 724; G. Kaster, *Johannes der Almosengeber* [entry], [in:] *Lexikon...*, Vol. 7 (1974), cols. 82-83.



8. The corbel with the Aislinger family's house mark in the Church of St. Elizabeth in Wrocław, end of 15th century. Photo: R. Kaczmarek



9. The mensa of St. Hedwig's altar and the corbel with the Aislinger family's house mark in the southern aisle in the Church of St. Elizabeth in Wrocław. Photo: R. Kaczmarek

intriguing possibility of noticing in the unusual landscape and the motifs of a river and ships a connection with the legend of St. John the Almsgiver. The charity of the saint was compared by one of the authors of his *vita* to the Nile as a life-giving river, and in addition, in his generosity, he helped three times a merchant transporting grain by providing him with a ship, which he also took care of during the journey²⁹.

Assuming the above hypothetical reconstruction, one should also ask the question about the function of such a painterly and sculptural arrangement in the eastern part of the northern aisle. The saints were gathered here, whose feast days were at the same time. This may indicate, on the one hand, a close connection with their liturgical commemoration, but on the other hand, they were all special patrons, eagerly invoked in the late Middle Ages. So, apart from that mensa, which was most probably added to this pier in the light of the arcade on the western side, did the second one, added on the aisle side, functioned in the Middle Ages? The lower zone of the painting composition could correspond with it, creating a direct and solemn background for liturgical acts. At present, we are not able to point out examples of such "transverse" alignment of the mensa in the aisle in relation to the church axis. Perhaps, therefore, the whole composition was supposed to imitate a retable and create an additional micro space for individual or more formalized (e.g. within a fraternity) acts of devotion by the laity. The monastery Church of St. Mary had parish rights in the late Middle Ages and was open to private, bourgeois foundations³⁰.

²⁹ See *Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies of St. Daniel the Stylite, St. Theodore of Sykeon and St. John the Almsgiver*, Transl. E. Dawes, introd., notes N. H. Baynes, London 1948, <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/john-almsgiver.asp> (access date: 9.08.2020).

³⁰ See *Descriptio tocius Silesie et civitatis regie Vratislaviensis per M. Bartholomeum Stenus*, [in:] *Scriptores rerum silesiacarum*, Ed. H. Markgraf, Vol. 17, Breslau 1902, pp. 50-51.

The Church of St. Elizabeth

Inside this building, four emptied corbels³¹ have preserved, as well as a niche discovered in 2015, and still not fully examined³². Their context must have been significant for the liturgical and paraliturgical activities, and the relationship with the altars cannot be excluded³³. However, it seems that, by chance, all these elements are concentrated in and around the eastern section of the southern aisle. The small, polygonal, profiled corbel [Fig. 8] is located on the first free-standing pier in this aisle from the east, where the mensa of St. Hedwig's altar was once built in the light of the arcade [Fig. 9]. Around 1480, a retable stood on it with carved images of St. Hedwig, St. Sebald, and St. Leonard³⁴, founded and marked with coats of arms by the Hübner and Hornung families, both of Nuremberg origin³⁵. The corbel, which on weekdays, with closed wings of the retable, had to be visible just behind it, is adorned with an asymmetrical shield with a house mark identified as the mark of the merchant family Aislinger (Eszlinger). Its members, once associated with the Nuremberg trade company Stromaier-Ortlob-Aislinger, represented the Scheurl family in Wrocław³⁶. The approximate time of the corbel's creation can be determined on the basis of the asymmetrical form of the shield for the last third of the 15th century, when the first members of this family appeared in Wrocław. The location of two works of art funded by the representatives of the great Nuremberg trade in Wrocław next to each other was probably not accidental and created a kind of Nuremberg enclave in the space of the parish church. It is not known what could have been placed on this corbel, but its scale allows us to assume that unless it was a permanently placed sculpture, this place could have been used for occasional setting of a small work, e.g. a figurative reliquary.

In the Heugel family's chapel (second from the east) in the corners of the eastern wall there is a pair of rectangular corbels [Fig. 10–11], formed analogically and with identical dimensions of impost plates³⁷. These are probably the largest corbels of this type in Silesia that I know of. Their decoration is based on three-dimensional moulding of the bottom part, running in steps along the gradually diminishing contours of the rectangle. Such great corbels, which on the basis of their formal features can be dated around 1400³⁸, had to be designed for extraordinary sculptural works. And not only in scale. It seems that none of the currently known, those preserved and those existing only in photographs, Silesian sculptures can be matched

³¹ I do not include the corbel with the Krapp family's shield with house mark from around 1500, built into the eastern wall of the Dumlose family's chapel, because it was most likely to have been originally a corbel for the Krapps' epitaphs, as shown by its form similar to such corbels, which have preserved their original function. See *Die Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Breslau...*, Vol. 1.2, Breslau 1933, p. 97.

³² On the pier dividing the second and the third chapel from the east in the southern row. It appeared after the epitaph of Lorentz Heugel (d. 1583) and his wife Anna (d. 1612) placed here secondarily in the first half of the 19th century, was removed for conservation – see **H. Luchs**, *Die Denkmäler der St. Elisabeth-Kirche zu Breslau*, Breslau 1860, p. 48. The recess of the sharp-edged niche in the profiled sandstone frame (the second half of the 14th century?) is currently made shallow by bricklaying from two thirds of the 18th century, as indicated by date inscriptions engraved in the plaster.

³³ **P. Łobodzińska** (*Przestrzeń liturgiczna kościoła św. Elżbiety we Wrocławiu w późnym średniowieczu*, [in:] *Fara w mieście od średniowiecza do współczesności. Społeczność – duchowość – architektura – wystrój. Studia z historii sztuki*, Ed. **R. Eysymontt**, **D. Galewski**, Wrocław 2019) does not pay attention to the architectural details listed here.

³⁴ **J. C. H. Schmeidler**, *Die evangelische Haupt- und Pfarrkirche zu St. Elisabeth*, Breslau 1857, p. 86; **P. Łobodzińska**, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

³⁵ See **A. Patała**, *Pod znakiem świętego Sebald. Rola Norymbergi w kształtowaniu późnogotyckiego malarstwa tablicowego na Śląsku*, Wrocław 2018, pp. 58–59.

³⁶ See **H. Luchs**, *op. cit.*, p. 42; *Die Kunstdenkmäler...*, Vol. 1.2, p. 97 (without the identification of the house mark, dated to 15th century, dimensions 25 × 25 cm); **W. von Stromer**, *Nürnberg-Breslauer Wirtschaftsbeziehungen im Spätmittelalter*, "Jahrbuch für Fränkische Landesforschung" Vol. 34/35 (1975), p. 1098; **O. Pusch**, *Die Breslauer Rats- und Stadtgeschlechter in der Zeit von 1241 bis 1741*, Vol. 1, Dortmund 1986, p. 397.

³⁷ Not yet mentioned in the literature. Dimensions of the corbels (H/W/D): (left) 22 × 60.5 × 48 cm; (right) 21.5 × 59 × 48 cm.

³⁸ The moulding of the corbels shares a formal similarity with the polygonal, without sculptural decoration, vault corbels in this chapel – see *Die Kunstdenkmäler...*, Vol. 1.2, p. 90, with dating to about 1400, which seems more appropriate than the broad dating to the first half of the 15th century by **M. Niemczyk** (*Kaplice mieszczańskie na Śląsku w okresie późnego gotyku*, "Roczniki Sztuki Śląskiej" Vol. 13 [1983], p. 59). The chapel as a property of the Heugel family appeared only in the second half of the 16th century.



Chiloptero Craffoni
homo qui supra lxxvii annis
in hac Reipub. vixit & Anno
Bidermanni parentis carissimae
Hic ubi moratus est obiit postquam
Cognovit quatuordecim & Anno
de quatuordecim mensibus & diebus
LXXIIII annos & dies & dies
Veneranda Dispositio & conditio
Et hanc sui vitam carissimam
Johann Craffoni art. med. D. F. P.
Anno Christi MDLVII

Deus qui in omnibus
omnino obsequio laetantur in carissimae

Deus qui in omnibus
omnino obsequio laetantur in carissimae

Deus qui in omnibus
omnino obsequio laetantur in carissimae

10. The eastern wall with a pair of corbels in the Heugel family's chapel in the Church of St. Elizabeth in Wrocław, end of 14th century / ca. 1400. Photo: R. Kaczmarek

to this pair of corbels. Undoubtedly, the statues placed on them had to create a pair that had a deeper symbolic meaning. Such would include primarily representations of Mary and Christ in various possible iconographic versions (such as the well-known stone sculptures of the Madonna and the Christ as a Man of Sorrow from St. Dorothy's Church in Wrocław, currently the National Museum in Warsaw)³⁹. The mensa of the altar, which most probably stood by the eastern wall of the chapel and was flanked by both corbels with sculptures, has not been preserved, but the trace of its presence is the low located armarium niche on the southern side⁴⁰.



11. The corbel on the eastern wall of the Heugel family's chapel in the Church of St. Elizabeth in Wrocław, end of 14th century / ca. 1400. Photo: R. Kaczmarek

The fourth of the group of mysterious corbels is located in a polygonal apse closing the southern aisle, but not on its front wall above the preserved medieval altar mensa, but on the diagonal wall to the left of the altar [Figs. 12–13]. I would like to pay more attention to it here. This corbel rectangular in plan has smaller dimensions than the pair in the Heugel Chapel described above, but the analogous form of the whole and the moulding convince us that all three corbels must not only be linked by a very similar time of creation, but also by the designer/creator. The type of moulding, its three-dimensionality and rhythmic arrangement are analogous to such well-dated architectural details as the semi octagonal corbel of the southern arcade on the eastern wall of the nave of St. John's the Evangelist Church in Paczków (Patschkau) (before 1389)⁴¹ [Fig. 14] and the similar corbel of the chapel oriel in Chojnik (Kynast) Castle (foundation of the chapel altar 1393; construction or transformation of the oriel until about 1430)⁴² [Fig. 15]. The corbel in the southern apse of St. Elizabeth's Church is distinguished by the placing of the coat of arms on the lower profiles. The symmetrical shape of a shield with side edges falling parallelly in a straight line appeared in Silesia in the last 20 years of the 14th century⁴³. It can be considered quite characteristic for the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries also in the Silesian sigillography⁴⁴. The shield on the corbel, arranged at a very

³⁹ *Die Kunstdenkmäler...* (Vol. 1.2, p. 98) mentions in the chapel, a secondary here, sculpture of Christ from the Gethsemane group (ca. 1430–1450), currently deposited in the National Museum in Wrocław (No. 1389/90).

⁴⁰ The patrocinium of the chapel's altar is unknown – see P. Łobodzińska, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

⁴¹ See J. Adamski, *op. cit.*, pp. 585–586.

⁴² See M. Chorowska [et al.], *Zamki i dwory obronne w Sudetach*, Vol. 2: *Księstwo Jaworskie*, Wrocław 2009, pp. 43, 45–46. It is difficult to agree with the formal analysis presented here, the proposed dating of the existing fragments of the chapel at the end of the 15th century and their interpretation as “a manifestation of a retrospective attitude”. The meaning of Schaffs' coat of arms of type B, which is first confirmed in 1431, on the Gotsche III's seal, indicates the upper chronological limit – see M. L. Wójcik, *Pieczenie rycerstwa śląskiego w dobie przedhusyckiej*, Kraków–Wrocław 2018, pp. 730–731.

⁴³ See R. Kaczmarek, *Rzeźba architektoniczna XIV wieku we Wrocławiu*, Wrocław 1999, p. 217.

⁴⁴ See M. L. Wójcik, *op. cit.*, *passim*.



12. The interior of the apse of the southern aisle with an altar mensa and a corbel in the Church of St. Elizabeth in Wrocław, state in May 2015. Photo: R. Kaczmarek

acute angle was best seen from close up, from the perspective of a person standing by the altar mensa in the apse. On it, a relief coat of arm is carved in the form of a goat's head (with a beard and slightly bent horns facing back) with the neck turned to the right (heraldically).

A stone Mannerist epitaph dedicated in memory of Hieronymus III von Uthmann und Rathen (d. 1580) and his wife (d. 1583)⁴⁵ is placed on the corbel. Their coats of arms and those of their ancestors are completely different from those of the corbel. It does not seem possible that the epitaph was placed there immediately after it had been created, as Hermann Luchs already pointed out. However, based on the description of the church monuments from 1649, he believed that as early as that year the epitaph occupied this corbel⁴⁶. The question we ask ourselves concerns the founder of the corbel, that is, the owner of the coat of arms with a goat's head. It was Luchs' merit to point out, though with a question mark, to the Auer family⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ H. Luchs (*op. cit.*, p. 34) is also the only one who mentions the Gothic corbel under the epitaph. See also *Die Kunstdenkmäler...*, Vol. 1.2, pp. 117–118; P. Oszczanowski, *Bazylika św. Elżbiety*, Wrocław 2003, p. 28.

⁴⁶ See *Życie, śmierć i zbawienie. Inskrypcje kościoła św. Elżbiety we Wrocławiu w świetle rękopisu z 1649 roku*, Ed. J. Gołaszewski, A. Górski, Wrocław 2016, p. 159.

⁴⁷ See H. Luchs, *op. cit.*, p. 34: "ein Wappenschild mit einem Bockskopfe (das Auer'sche Wappen?)".



13. The corbel in the southern apse by the presbytery in the Church of St. Elizabeth in Wrocław, ca. 1385–1400. Photo: R. Kaczmarek



14. The corbel of the inter-naval arcade in the St. John the Evangelist Church in Paczków, before 1389. Photo: R. Kaczmarek



15. The corbel of the oriel of the chapel of Chojnik castle, about 1393 – about 1430. Photo: R. Kaczmarek

After 160 years, we are not able to extend or make this proposal more likely⁴⁸. The Auer family's coat of arms was first recorded in rolls of arms created in the last quarter of the 16th century – by Crispin (d. 1576) and Johann (d. 1586) Scharffenberger⁴⁹, and by Johann Siebmacher (d. 1611) [Fig. 16–17]⁵⁰. However, there is a problem that a family with such a surname appears in Wrocław sources only several dozen years after the time for which we date this corbel here. Moreover, as recent studies show, we should distinguish two unrelated families using this surname. The first one, which can be found first in Nysa (Neisse) and Brzeg (Brieg) at the end of the 14th century, and only from 1456, confirmed in Wrocław in the person of a merchant Kunz (Konrad), and the second, with Nuremberg roots, whose representative, Kilian Auer, settled in Wrocław in 1498⁵¹. It is with the latter that Oskar Pusch associates the coat of arms with the emblem of the goat's head, which, in my opinion, cannot be so sure, because neither Scharffenbergers' roll of arms nor the first editions of Siebmacher's roll of arms, presenting this symbol in the group of Silesian coats of arms, does not distinguish between these Auers from the others. So whose coat of arms was the one on the empty corbel from the end of the 14th century?

I would propose the following solution. The Auer family (one or the other, but I would argue rather for a local Silesian family in this hypothesis) as new to the city and seeking to strengthen their position there, took advantage of the phonetic convergence of their surname with another, earlier family, known in Wrocław, whose splendour ends however in the early 15th century, and

⁴⁸ I would like to thank Prof. Mateusz Goliński and Dr. Marek L. Wójcik for their kind consultations on issues concerning Wrocław families, forms of spelling and transformation of proper nouns and heraldry.

⁴⁹ See *Schlesisches Wappenbuch von Crispin und Johann Scharffenberger*, bearb. H. von Mosch, Neustadt an der Aisch 1984, p. 67, Plate 285 (herein the coat of arms of the Auer family is reproduced from a copy held in the University Library in Göttingen).

⁵⁰ See *New Wappenbuch [...] durch Johann Sibmachers von Nürnberg, Norimbergae 1605*, Tab. 57.

⁵¹ See O. Pusch, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 59–61.



16. The Auer family's coat of arms acc. to Scharffenberger's roll of arms (ca. 1570–1586). Photo from: *Schlesisches Wappenbuch von Crispin und Johann Scharffenberg*, bearb. H. von Mosch, Neustadt an der Aisch 1984, Plate 285



17. The Auer family's coat of arms acc. to Johann Siebmacher's roll of arms (1605). Photo from: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Siebmachers_Wappenbuch?uselang=pl#/media/File:Siebmacher057.jpg (access date: 16.09.2020)

the last representative known from sources is mentioned in the same year in which Kunz Auer is recorded in Wrocław for the first time. If we assume such a deliberate behaviour, it was connected with the adoption of the coat of arms of the family to which it was decided to assign themselves. A similar character of the annexation was in the early 17th century the deed of Christoph von Poley, who sealed and legitimized his advancement in the city structures of Wrocław with a new setting of 200 years older epitaph of Barbara Polani, which he recognized rather unfoundedly as a protoplast of his family⁵². An analogous situation took place in Gdańsk in 1640 in the case of Demoet von der Beke's epitaph dated circa 1425–1430⁵³.

In the case of the Auer family, such a manipulation could have been directed at the family of Auras (von Auras), which in its beginnings was connected with Uraz (Auras), a settlement near Wrocław, a former seat of the castellany, and later a town belonging to Wrocław. In the Wrocław sources, the Auras were pronounced as Awras, Owras, Owros or Wras. With the abbreviations that were customarily used, this could theoretically have resulted in even the Awer (Auer), which facilitated the transition from a toponymic "surname" to a new one. Phonetically, both forms could have been similar. The coat of arms of Lords Auras is not known. The assumption of this complicated hypothesis is that the coat of arms, which the Auer family later held, originally belonged to Lords Awras. The corbel with the coat of arms in the

⁵² See *ibidem*, Vol. 3, Dortmund 1988, p. 247; N. Conrads, *Der Aufstieg der Familie Troilo. Zum kulturellen Profil des katholischen Adels in Schlesien zwischen Späthumanismus und Gegenreformation*, [in:] *Zeitenwenden. Herrschaft, Selbstbehauptung und Integration zwischen Reformation und Liberalismus. Festgabe für Arno Herzig zum 65. Geburtstag*, Ed. J. Deventer, S. Rau, A. Conrad, Berlin 2006, p. 287.

⁵³ See K. Cieślak, *Kościół – cmentarzem. Sztuka nagrobna w Gdańsku (XV–XVIII w.)*, Gdańsk 1992, pp. 15, 136.

southern apse of St. Elizabeth's Church could then be considered a collective foundation of those or at least one of them. Let us therefore take a look at this family to assess the possibility of such a foundation, especially in this honorary place of the parish church.

They appeared in Wrocław before the middle of the 14th century and in the following two generations, from 1344 to 1387 their representatives were members of the city council. In particular, Hanco (Hensel, Hans) Owas was active in this regard, having been a member first of the Aldermen's bench (Schöffenbank) since 1344, and then of the Council (Rat) since 1349, reaching the position of President of the Council in 1363. This function, since it was the time when the Council served as a *Hauptmannschaft* in the Duchy of Wrocław, involved the office of the *Hauptmann* of the Duchy. Hanco, like his father before, was also the hereditary *Vogt* of Uraz. His son Nikolaus, mentioned in 1377–1389, was a councillor in 1387, and in the following two years first the "*Königlicher Mann*" and then a member of the Land Bench. Hanco's grandson, Willusch (mentioned in 1387–1393) hold several different offices in the town, among others, he supervised construction issues twice (1391 in the furriers' quarter and 1393 in the Great Quarter). His another grandson, Nikolaus (d. 1412), who inherited his father's name, was mentioned from 1400 onwards as "*Königlicher Mann*"⁵⁴.

This information alone shows that this family was situated in the highest circles of municipal authority, as well as with established contacts with the authority of Bohemian kings in the Duchy of Wrocław. The relationship of these people with the parish Church of St. Elizabeth certainly existed. The document from 6 October 1387 proves it clearly, saying that burghers of Wrocław, brothers Otto, Peter and Hanco called Awras, together with Otto from Kanth (Kały Wrocławskie) founded an annual rent of 10 marks in honour of St. Lawrence, Hedwig and Elizabeth and other saints, which Bishop Wenceslaus added to the fund of the main altar in the parish church⁵⁵. Therefore, if one assumes that it is the coat of arms of the Awras family that adorns the intriguing corbel, it should theoretically be connected with the second or third generation of this family in Wrocław, that is, with the sons or grandsons of Hanco Awras and his wife Hildegarda von der Neisse. These would be Nikolaus the Elder and his son Nikolaus the Younger, Hannus (or Hanco the Younger) and Willusch the Younger, that is to say, the period from the 1380s to about 1400. However, in 1387, apparently Hanco the Elder was still alive, because it is with him and his brother Peter and the third, overlooked by genealogists, brother Otto, that information about the aforementioned financial foundation for the church should be associated. Since Hanco the Elder could have been born around 1320, he was, like his brothers, at the time of this foundation act at a very advanced age.

Let us return to the corbel itself at the end. New information appeared after dismantling the epitaph in 2015 for its renovation, after which it returned to the same place. On the wall covered for almost 400 years, fragments of a painting decoration on thin plaster appeared [Fig. 18]. It depicted, in a vertical arrangement, a pair of leafy threads or branches with stems curling at the top. The leaves had fleshy, strongly stylized forms, on the basis of which one could propose dating to the last third of the 15th century. The branches were spaced out, creating a free space for the figure, which most likely stood between them. Since the proposed time of creating the corbel and the time of making the painting decoration above is separated by several dozen years, we have to assume that the painting setting of the sculpture was created as part of the modernization or renovation. Is it possible that it was made already on the initiative of the Auer family? Presenting the saints against a more or less stylized, floral background was a common procedure in medieval art, used in all techniques, not only painting. Hence, it does not give any indication as to the type of statue that could stand on the corbel.

⁵⁴ R. Stein, *Der Rat und die Ratsgeschlechter des alten Breslau*, Würzburg 1963, p. 110; O. Pusch, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 63.

⁵⁵ See J. C. H. Schmeidler, *op. cit.*, p. 75; *Katalog dokumentów przechowywanych w Archiwach Państwowych Dolnego Śląska*, Vol. 6: 1380–1391, Ed. M. Chmielewska, Wrocław 1995, p. 89, No. 442.



18. The painting decoration above the corbel in the southern apse by the presbytery in the Church of St. Elizabeth in Wrocław, 3rd third of 15th century, state in August 2015. Photo: R. Kaczmarek

19. The interior of the southern apse by the presbytery in the Church of St. Elizabeth in Wrocław with the altar mensa and the corbel with the figure of the Beautiful Madonna. Photo & photomontage: R. Kaczmarek

Construction and installation of such a corbel into the wall is only one aspect of the foundation's undertaking. The first one was to obtain, or maybe pay for, permission to occupy a place in one of the more prestigious spaces of the Wrocław parish church. The eastern closure of the southern aisle functioned as a separate chapel. The altar was consecrated in 1369, and among its patrons was St. Sigismund, whose cult was recently promoted by Charles IV Luxembourg. After 1355, perhaps at the initiative of the City Council, a heraldic program reflecting the political status of Silesia and Wrocław in the Bohemian Crown was placed on the keystones⁵⁶. The character of this space, determined by the aforementioned acts, had to remain valid at least until the end of Luxembourg's reign over Wrocław, and even in the Later Middle Ages it was a distinctive place and was described (1452) as "*Haupt- oder Haube-Kapelle*"⁵⁷. These circum-

⁵⁶ See R. Kaczmarek, *Gotycka rzeźba architektoniczna prezbiterium kościoła św. Elżbiety we Wrocławiu*, [in:] *Z dziejów wielkomięskiej fary. Wrocławski kościół św. Elżbiety w świetle historii i zabytków sztuki*, Ed. M. Zlat, Wrocław 1996, pp. 57-62, 70-72; R. Kaczmarek, *Znaki czeskiego panowania w średniowiecznym Wrocławiu*, [in:] *Wrocław w Czechach, Czesi we Wrocławiu. Literatura - język - kultura*, Ed. Z. Tarajło-Lipowska, J. Malicki, Wrocław 2003, pp. 211-212.

⁵⁷ J. C. H. Schmeidler, *op. cit.*, p. 82.



stances show the significance of the southern apse's space in the hierarchy of the interior of the parish church, and what follows, also undoubtedly high expectations of the City Council and the Wrocław patricians, represented by the churchwardens (*vitrici*), regarding the consent given to place a permanent individual sign of the foundation there. The sculptural work, which was to stand on a corbel bearing the family coat of arms, had to correspond to the considerable financial and aesthetic ambitions of the Wrocław patricians at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries.

Let us imagine what kind of statue it could have stood on the corbel located on the side of the altar⁵⁸ and what kind of representation could the viewer – a participant in the liturgy for a small group of persons, or a patrician or a Wrocław burgher coming here with the intention of a short individual prayer – have had contact with in this place? Let us assume, which already causes a significant increase in the hypotheticality of our deductions, that this sculptural work has been preserved to our times. It would have to meet at least four requirements: first, it should preferably have a confirmed origin from St. Elizabeth's Church; second, it should preferably have a time of its creation corresponding to that of the corbel; third, its dimensions should fit the corbel; fourth, and finally, its composition should not be in conflict with its specific location. As we have also pointed out, one should expect an extraordinary work here.

Does the Beautiful Madonna from Wrocław, a sculpture made in Bohemian marly limestone, currently in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw [Fig. 19], meet these conditions? Undoubtedly, it meets the highest standards of aesthetic sophistication. There is, unfortunately, no confirmed origin from the St. Elizabeth's parish, although it is still associated with this church⁵⁹. Its dating, usually oscillating around 1400, is shifted in the latest literature to the last decade, or even to the turn of the penultimate and last decade of the 14th century. Would it fit neatly on the corbel and integrate well into the space described? The rectangular top plate of the corbel is 25 mm deep and 50.5 cm wide. Madonna stands on a slightly elongated, low octagonal base with diagonally chamfered lower and upper edges. Its maximum dimensions are 27.5 deep and 43.5 wide⁶⁰. With this width, there would be narrow, 3.5 cm free surfaces on both sides of the base. In the case of depth, however, some measurement inaccuracy must be taken into account. The wall above the corbel is now covered with new plaster, which has reduced the depth dimension of the corbel plate. It seems that with a layer of old plaster, it can even be the missing 2 cm to the brick face. The Beautiful Madonna from Wrocław could therefore stand on this corbel, although it would not fit exactly with it, both in terms of the shape of the base and its width. Rectangular in plan corbels with such impost plates were not a common choice. The same is true of the bases of Gothic figures, which were usually polygonal and, as it is sometimes believed, their three frontal sides provide, in a way, three basic viewing perspectives. Usually, the plan and dimension of the corbel were attempted to match the base of the statue intended for it. This was possible when such a statue was created in the same workshop or when it was made a little earlier and its measurement could be taken. However, could it not happen that the corbel was commissioned for a sculpture that was to be created yet, and what's more, that such a figure could be made in a workshop located in a completely different city?

⁵⁸ It is necessary to correct the information given by **P. Łobodzińska** (*op. cit.*, pp. 124–126, 130), that in the Middle Ages, there was yet another altar, which she locates (Fig. 2, No. 28, III) diagonally to the preserved brick mensa, on one side or the other. This resulted from a misunderstanding of the information of **J. C. H. Schmeidler** (*op. cit.*, p. 113), who wrote about the altar of St. Gotard and St. Barbara located not in this apse (the choir), but on the choir above the chapel on the northern side of the church.

⁵⁹ See *Die Kunstdenkmäler...*, Vol. 1.2, p. 104, where it was pointed to a similar, as on *Pietà* from this church, painted ornament of the coat *bordure*. **K. H. Clasen** (*Der Meister der Schönen Madonnen. Herkunft, Entfaltung und Umkreis*, Berlin – New York 1974, pp. 3–4, 11–12, 47–50), reports on the state of research and, as far as provenance is concerned, notes that the figure must come from one of the churches in Wrocław. Recently doubting the origins from the St. Elizabeth's parish church, but without new arguments: **M. Kochanowska-Reiche**, *Beautiful Madonna of Wrocław – the Question of Provenance and Original State*, "Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie" Vol. 41 (2000), p. 47 (therein gathered more important literature on this sculpture).

⁶⁰ Both measurements, of the corbel and the sculpture base, by myself. The prominent Beautiful Madonnas – from Krumlov (Vienna), Toruń and Šternberk – have similarly chamfered bases. In the case of the Madonna of Wrocław, its measurement is additionally hindered by a metal enclosure protecting the lower part of the base.



20. The Beautiful Madonna on the corbel in the southern apse by the presbytery in the Church of St. Elizabeth in Wrocław.
Photo & photomontage: R. Kaczmarek

Recently, it was assumed that the Wrocław Beautiful Madonna was from a workshop located in Prague, and an important factor taken into account for this was the material of the sculpture⁶¹. A corbel with a rectangular impost plate ensured that even with a slight discrepancy in dimensions, this discrepancy would not be gross (in extreme cases it happened that a sculpture was trimmed from behind when it did not fit well in a niche or on a corbel), as would be the case if polygonal and elongated forms would not fit. How would the Beautiful Madonna present itself in this place? Maria holds the Infant on her left hand, while he, tilted back, slightly leans his head down and diagonally, directs his gaze forward [Fig. 20]. The viewer standing on the left of the altar mensa, somewhere around the eastern corner of the 16th century tomb of Heinrich Rybisch added on the northern side of the apse, could, in this rather cramped space, cross the eye with the Infant. Mary looks in the opposite direction and also downwards, above all at Jesus, but the twist of her head seems to suggest that she would easily include a celebrating priest in her gaze. This priest, standing on some wooden platform attached to the mensa (its current height is 139 cm), would have his head approximately at the height of her feet. Choosing the place for the location of the figure of the Wrocław Beautiful Madonna in this existing space, it was difficult to choose the height and location of the corbel more aptly (assuming that the figure was not placed on or above the altar mensa)⁶².

The hypothesis of the connection of the Beautiful Madonna with the corbel in St. Elizabeth's parish church and its foundation by members of the Awras family may be supported by another fact. The wife of Hanco Awras was a certain Hildegard (Hildegunde) von der Neisse. This was the name of a significant family of Wrocław patricians, of whom Otto von der Neisse (d. 1388) is known for his foundation of the family chapel on the northern side of the St. Elizabeth's parish church. There, according to the document approving the foundation, issued in 1384 by Bishop Wenceslaus, was a magnificent sculpture of the *Pietà*. It is sometimes identified with the "Beautiful" *Pietà* of limestone⁶³, lost in 1945, a work formally close to the Beautiful Madonna from Wrocław. Hildegard, wife of Hanco Awras, was Otto's aunt, sister of his father⁶⁴.

So the inspiration for commissioning the Madonna could come from the family circle or even both works were ordered together? As Michael Viktor Schwarz wrote about the circles from which the commission for this type of work could come:

Ich würde Auftraggeber und Publikum der Schönen Madonnen nicht auf den obersten sozialen Rängen suchen, unter den Spitzen von Hofadel und Hofklerus, sondern, ob Laien oder Priester, lieber etwas darunter [I would not seek commissioners and recipients of the Beautiful Madonnas in the highest social circles, on the courtly tops of the nobility and clergy, but rather, whether among laymen or priests, a little below]⁶⁵.

And:

⁶¹ See M. Kochanowska-Reiche, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.

⁶² For the corbel as a place to place devotional figures, see Z. Kruszelnicki, "Piękne Madonny" - problem otwarty, "Teka Komisji Historii Sztuki" Vol. 8 (1992); W. Marcinkowski, *Przedstawienia dewocyjne jako kategoria sztuki gotyckiej*, Kraków 1994, pp. 73-78.

⁶³ See E. Wiese, *Schlesische Plastik vom Beginn des XIV. bis zur Mitte des XV. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig 1923, pp. 39-40; *Die Kunstdenkmäler...*, Vol. 1.2, pp. 93, 104; W. Paatz, *Prolegomena zu einer Geschichte der deutschen spätgotischen Skulptur im 15. Jahrhundert*, Heidelberg 1956, pp. 28-29; recently: R. Kaczmarek, *Art in Silesian Duchies and in the Lands of Bohemia in the Period of the Luxembourg Patronage. Between complicated Neighbourhood Relations and complete Acknowledgement?*, [in:] *Silesia - a Pearl in the Bohemian Crown. History - Culture - Art*, Ed. M. Kapustka [et al.], Praha 2007, p. 142.

⁶⁴ See O. Pusch, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 62; *ibidem*, Vol. 3, pp. 143-146.

⁶⁵ M. V. Schwarz, *Die Schöne Madonna als komplexe Bildform*, "Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte" Vol. 46/47 (1993/1994), pp. 676.

der typische Auftraggeber einer Schönen Madonna sei etwas, aber nicht unbedingt weit unterhalb der Führungselite zu suchen [...]. Es würde auch passen, daß der Stifter Kontakte zum Hof besaß, seine Schöne Madonna aber nicht für den Hofbereich, sondern für eine davon abgelegene Kirche bestimmt war [the typical commissioner of the Beautiful Madonna should be sought just below the power elite [...]. It would also be good if the founder had contacts with the court, but dedicated his Beautiful Madonna not to the court environment, but to some unrelated church]⁶⁶.

Undoubtedly, the circle of Wrocław patricians, oriented towards the “cosmopolitan aesthetic and cult taste of the court circle”⁶⁷ can be reasonably regarded as the environment from which the initiative to commission the Wrocław Beautiful Madonna came.

Many of the prominent Beautiful Style sculptures from Central Europe did not remain in their original locations, and there is no information about them either. This encourages researchers to formulate hypotheses on this subject. For example, there is a theory that the Beautiful Madonna from Toruń (Thorn) belongs to the structure of a wooden retable⁶⁸. Opinions on the originality of such a solution are divided⁶⁹. In the context of the above proposed reconstruction of the location of the Wrocław Beautiful Madonna, the experiment conducted with the Beautiful Madonna from the Moravian town of Šternberk was interesting. In 1999 an attempt was made to place a plaster cast of the original on a corbel, under a canopy on the side wall of the bishop’s castle chapel in Šternberk. The conclusions drawn from this experiment indicate that the corbel and the canopy were introduced secondary and, more specifically, the earlier ones were replaced in order to place the figure of the Madonna between them. However, the Madonna could only be placed there after removing her high crown and trimming the back of the sculpture, otherwise it would not fit into the niche under the canopy. These measures, however, were considered to have been taken earlier and without any relation to the hypothetical transfer of the figure to the chapel. Interestingly, here as well, the polygonal plan of the impost plate of the corbel is not fully compatible with the base of the Marian statue – the corbel is rectangle in plan closed from the front triangularly, and the base of the sculpture is an octagon elongated transversely, so although the widths are compatible, there was free space left from the front.

All actions on the figure and its setting would have to take place in a very short time. The Madonna is dated to the 1390s. The new architectural setting would have to be made in the time of Bishop Albrecht II of Šternberk (1380–1397)⁷⁰. The puzzle, then, is why it was so quickly decided upon a drastic intervention into the form of sculpture and who was its founder? Probably this was not the only thing that Pierre-Yves Le Pogam, the author of the review of the Italian version of the exhibition catalogue, had in mind, when referring to the hypothesis of placing the Madonna on a console in the castle chapel, he wrote: “this

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 677.

⁶⁷ *Idem*, *Die Schöne Madonna als komplexe Bildform: Prolegomena*, [in:] *Künstlerischer Austausch. Akten des XXVIII. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte*, Ed. T. W. Gaethgens, Berlin 1993, Vol. 2, p. 95.

⁶⁸ See J. Kruszelnicka, *Dawny ołtarz Pięknnej Madonny Toruńskiej*, “Teka Komisji Historii Sztuki” Vol. 4 (1968), pp. 5–85.

⁶⁹ Formerly critically about this concept: W. Paatz, *op. cit.*, p. 31. Likewise, recently, with the recap of previous discussions, M. Jakubek-Raczkowska, *Uwagi o znaczeniu tzw. Pięknych Madonn w sztuce i religijności państwa zakonnego w Prusach*, “Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Zabytkoznawstwo i Konserwatorstwo” Vol. 40 (2011), pp. 52–53, 55 (note 59). In general, accepting: G. Schmidt, *Paralipomena zu der Ausstellung “Die Parler und der Schöne Stil”*, [in:] *idem*, *Gotische Bildwerke und ihre Meister*, Wien 1992, pp. 296–300.

⁷⁰ See I. Hlobil, *Následovník Mistra Toruňské Madony, Šternberská Madona* (entry 167), [in:] *Od gotiky k renesanci. Výtvarná kultura Moravy a Slezska 1400–1550*, Vol. 3: *Olomoucko*, Ed. I. Hlobil, M. Perůtka, Olomouc 1999, pp. 267–272; I. Hlobil, *The Follower of the Master of the Toruń Madonna, The Šternberk Madonna*, [in:] *The Last Flowers of the Middle Ages. From the Gothic to the Renaissance in Moravia and Silesia*, Ed. *idem*, Olomouc 2000, pp. 79–83.

idea is generally attractive, but would cause a number of difficult problems to be solved”⁷¹. But after all, Schwarz has already stated in relation to the Beautiful Madonnas (although trying to face the issue of their “complex pictorial form”) that “every statement about these sculptures, which goes beyond a pure inventory, is inevitably hypothetical” and “hypotheses intertwine with hypotheses”⁷².

Searching for the original context of works that have lost it, or reconstructing the original functions of places that have lost their essential component, is burdened – in the absence of written and iconographic sources – with a significant degree of hypotheticality in the process of reaching the truth, as well as in the conclusions being made. It seems that sometimes, when there is no other way, such a risky attempt can be justified. At least to introduce the places emptied of works of medieval art – as in several Wrocław examples presented here – to a broad-based discussion⁷³.

Słowa kluczowe

Wrocław, gotyckie nisze, gotyckie konsole, figura kultowa, Piękna Madonna, percepcja sztuki w średniowieczu

Keywords

Wrocław, Gothic niches and corbels, cult figure, Beautiful Madonna, perception of art in the Middle Ages

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⁷¹ **P.-Y. Le Pogam**, review of: *Ultimi fiori del Medioevo. Dal Gotico al Rinascimento in Moravia e nella Slesia*, Ed. I. Hlobil, “Umění” Vol. 48 (2000), p. 472. **J. Fajt** and **R. Suckale** (*Die Sternberger Schöne Madonna* [Cat. No. 197], [in:] *Karl IV. Kaiser von Gottes Gnaden. Kunst und Repräsentation des Hauses Luxemburg 1310–1437*, Ed. J. Fajt, München–Berlin 2006, p. 549, note 2) point out that the placement on the corbel in the chapel does not take into account the basic composition of the statue and that it does not fit the corbel.

⁷² **M. V. Schwarz**, *Die Schöne Madonna als komplexe...*, pp. 89–90.

⁷³ I would like to thank my wife Barbara Kaczmarek for her assistance in preparing the photomontages.

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Dr. habil. Romuald Kaczmarek, UWr Prof., romuald.kaczmarek@uwr.edu.pl, ORCID 0000-0003-0230-9696

Specialist in the history of medieval art. The author's research interests also include Silesian art from the 16th to early 19th century. He published, among others *Rzeźba architektoniczna XIV wieku we Wrocławiu* (Architectural Sculpture of the 14th century in Wrocław) (1999), *Italianizmy. Studia nad recepcją gotyckiej sztuki włoskiej w rzeźbie środkowo-wschodniej Europy* (Italianisms. Studies on the Reception of Gothic Italian Art in Central and Eastern European Sculpture) (2008).

Summary

ROMUALD KACZMAREK (University of Wrocław) / Emptied places. A case study of three churches in Wrocław (of St. James, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of St. Elizabeth)

Research on medieval art confronts generally with a low percentage of works preserved. A specific aspect of this problem are places that became empty, being a clear trace of the sculptural works created by individual foundations and/or having special functions in the liturgical space of churches. The article is aimed at analysing a few selected examples of such unintentional emptinesses in Wrocław, i.e. those that occurred after the Middle Ages, between the 16th and 20th centuries. In this case, these are micro-architectural forms – corbels and niches – in three churches. The first example is the preserved one of the original pair of elaborately designed, large scale niches on the sides of the chancel arch in the former Franciscan Church of St. James. Thanks to the reconstructed architectural context that was provided by a rood screen and to the analysis of the iconographic source from the mid-19th century, a hypothesis was put forward about the purpose of these niches for monumental figures of an Annunciation group.

The second example from the Church of St. Mary on the Sand is a Late Gothic corbel mounted into an older pier and integrated with the partially preserved wall-painting decoration from 1477. A new interpretation of the iconography of the painting was proposed, as well as identification of a figure that could stand on the corbel according to its meaning. The painterly and sculptural whole with the representations of St. Fabian, St. Sebastian and a statue of St. John the Almsgiver (?) also poses a question about the original way of its functioning.

A series of three different problems is posed by the corbels empty today, varied and preserved in and around the southern aisle of St. Elizabeth's Church. The most important issue here is the corbel marked with a mysterious coat of arms, placed on the wall on the side of the Gothic altar mensa in the apse closing the aisle. First the identification of the coat of arms, which might have belonged to one of the most important Wrocław families of the second half of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century, von Awras, was conducted. The social position, contacts in the power structure and family connections of the Awras, as well as the rank of the place chosen for the corbel (foundation) convince us that this place had to be dedicated to an extraordinary elite work of art being also a cult figure. The measurements made and a Late Gothic painterly plant decoration preserved in the background of the corbel made it possible to put a hypothesis that the sculpture was the Beautiful Madonna from Wrocław, now in the National Museum in Warsaw.