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Paolo Pagani's St. Sebastian in Cracow¹

Abstract

The picture of Saint Sebastian has been ordered to the Cracow University church by professor Sebastian Piskorski, who was in charge of the construction, decoration, and furnishing of the building. The canvas had been placed in the chapel, which was made available to the public yet in 1696, while the rest of the church remained a fenced construction site for seven more years. This small interior must have made a great impression on viewers, encouraging them to financially support the works. A contemporary writer stated that the chapel began decorative works of the church in forms that had not been seen before. Its main part, the exquisite painting by Paolo Pagani, sensually showing the saint's naked body, could evoke the viewer's admiration, but also an impression of uniqueness and peculiarity. Thus, the term queer can be applied to this work, at least in its original sense, meaning something strange, odd or eccentric. Pagani's painting is a good starting point for questions about the hidden meanings that were associated with the male act in the early modern environment of the clergymen and university. Repressed or subconscious erotic associations could have been connected there with religious mysticism – as indicated by Piskorski's particularly personal attitude to the sculpture of the crucified Christ. Similar links are also present in the patronage of Jacek Łopacki, who in the middle of the 18th century refurbished St. Mary's church.

Keywords: Paolo Pagani, Saint Sebastian, Sebastian Piskorski, Saint Anne's Church in Cracow

The image of St. Sebastian (fig. 1) in a chapel altar of St. Anne's collegiate church in the city of Cracow is widely known as one of the most artistically outstanding paintings bought for a church in early modern Poland. It did not however receive attention adequate to its outstanding artistic value. Its author and founder are known from the volume by Andrzej Buchowski issued on the occasion of the

¹ This paper was created within the project *STUDEC - Stucco Decoration Across Europe*, ID 2022-1-CZ01-KA220-HED-000085652.



Fig. 1. P. Pagani, St. Sebastian, oil on canvas, Cracow, St. Anne's Church, photo M. Kurzej

church's consecration.² From that time, the painting was mentioned in several publications about the church.³ It is formal uniqueness has firstly been stressed by Zofia Maślińska-Nowakowa, who dedicated her work to the iconography of the church's interior,⁴ and later by Mariusz Karpowicz, who focused on at-tempts to attribute to Pagani other works in Cracow.⁵ The painting was also

2 A. Buchowski, *Gloria Domini super Templum S. Suum ad Solennes Encaeniorum primitias Ecclesiae Collegiatae Crac. S. Annae Ope Divinae Providentiae recenter a fundamentis erectae relucens*, Cracoviae, 1703, p. F4v, Gr. Polish summary of this book, titled *Abrys terazniejszego Kościoła Kolegiaty S. Anny...* has been included to newer edition of popular guidebook to the Cracow churches: P. H. Pruszczyk, *Kleynoty Stołecznego Miasta Krakowa albo Kościoły y co w nich iest widzenia godnego y znacznego*, Kraków, 1745, pp. 184–224.

3 M. Tylkowski, *Krótki opis kościoła akademickiego kolegiaty świętej Anny*, Kraków, 1863, p. 32; J. Bukowski, *Kościół akademicki św. Anny. Monografia historyczna*, Kraków, 1900, p. 38.

4 Z. Maślińska-Nowakowa, "Literackie źródła dekoracji kościoła św. Anny w Krakowie", *Rocznik Krakowski* 1972, 42, p. 59.

5 M. Karpowicz, "Paolo Pagani in Moravia e Polonia", *Arte Lombarda* 1991, 28–29, p. 111, 112; M. Karpowicz, "Paolo Pagani w Krakowie", *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* 1992, p. 54, 67, 70; M. Karpowicz, *Artisti Valsoldesi in Polonia nel '600 e '700*, Menaggio, 1996, s. 118; F. Bianchi, "Paolo Pagani: nota biografica" in: *Paolo Pagani 1655–1716*, Milano, 1998, s. 213; A. Morandotti, *Paolo Pagani e i Pagani di Castello Valsolda*, Lugano, 2000, pp. 177–179. Karpowicz's attributions to Pagani have been rejected by P. Pencakowski, "Dekoracja sklepienia zakrystii kościoła Mariackiego w Krakowie", *Prace Instytutu Historycznego Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego* 1998, 1, p. 111.

mentioned in monographs about its author,⁶ but it has never been subject to a detailed analysis.

The painting was commissioned by rev. Sebastian Piskorski, a professor of laws and rector of the University, who supervised the construction and furnishing works in The Church of St. Anne's – an important collegiate church under the Academy's management. This work turned out to be the most important artistic venture ever undertaken by the Cracow University. Despite not being a professional artist, Piskorski was considered an art expert, famous for designing programs of complex artworks. At an early stage of his career, he had shown artistic skills as a panegyric poet, inventor of coats of arms for his fellow graduates, and director of plays in the school theater. During the trip to Italy in 1671–1672 Piskorski had an opportunity to get to know the art and cultural habits of Rome. Before St. Anne's construction was started, he had gained fame by creating the pilgrimage site in Grodzisko (1677–1691) dedicated to the blessed Salomea. The site is remarkable because of its extremely complex symbolic construction developed in a series of chapels and statues as well as finest quality etchings in a biography of Salomea published together with a guide-book to the site.⁷

Piskorski was put in charge of the church construction as *director fabricae* (construction manager) at its early stage in 1692 and managed it quite independently until accomplishing it in 1703. He was responsible for purchasing materials and hiring contractors from simple masons and carpenters to famous foreign stuccoists and painters, but also collecting money from donors. To encourage them, he decided to decorate one of the chapels (fig. 2) with his own funds and show it to the public in 1696 as the first part of the new church, while the rest of the building was still a fenced construction site.⁸ According to a contemporary relation, the small interior made a great impression on viewers:

“The first chapel, by the entrance to the church, was furnished by *director fabricae* himself, to honor his patron St. Sebastian, and covered with round vaulting, modelled on the church of St. Justine in Padua.⁹ In this chapel, the excellent stuccoist Baldassare Fontana made an admirable altar in the shape of a wreath of clouds, decorated with cherubs and a divine glory outstretched towards a window. On both sides of this wreath, he set up figures of angels, who admire and mourn the torment of the martyr. They are holding the elegant picture of St. Sebastian, painted by

wie – refleks rzymskich malowideł Pietro da Cortona”, *Folia Historiae Artium* 1994, 30, p. 100, cf. A. Morandotti, op. cit., p. 179; M. Kurzej, “Budowa i dekoracja kościoła św. Anny w świetle źródeł archiwalnych” in: *Fides ars scientia. Prace z historii i historii sztuki poświęcone pamięci ks. Augustyna Medniśa*, eds. A. Betlej, J. Skrabski, Tarnów, 2008, p. 281, 284, 285.

6 Morandotti, *Paolo Pagani...*, pp. 177–179; Bianchi, op. cit., p. 213.

7 On Piskorski see: M. Kurzej, *Depingere fas est. Sebastian Piskorski jako konceptor i prowizor*, Kraków, 2018.

8 Kurzej, *Depingere...*, p. 52.

9 The church of St. Justine (St. Giustina) in Padua belonged to Benedictine Abbey which had a close relationship with the local university, so it was well known to Polish scholars frequently visiting this city.



Fig. 2. Cracow, St. Sebastian chapel in St. Anne's church, internal view without recent additions, photo M. Kurzej

the Milanese Paolo Pagani. Above the picture, the stuccoist placed celestial angels holding up palm leaves, which are a sign of martyrdom. The base of the altar was made narrow, not to impede a place for walking through, and its antependium was decorated with a mosaic of artificial marble included in white marble. On one of the chapel's side walls, the artist shown a beautiful stucco work on the history of St. Alexius of Rome, and of St. Roch's on the other side. The cornice was adorned with a sculpted and gilded image of a Cherub with beautiful spreading palm leaf, and in the arcades and arches collected insignia of the Saint Martyr was shown, together

with some motives from his *vita*, painted by Mr. Carl Danckwart.¹⁰ This chapel had started the process of decorating the future church in a manner, that had not been seen before”.¹¹

This description puts forward stucco decorations, but obviously, it is the painting that first attracts the viewer's attention. This is also the key element of this previously unseen manner, not only because of its central position as the altar painting or its unparalleled artistic quality, but also because of the exceptionally evocative posture of the reclining naked body, unconventionally stretched on the diagonal of the canvas. The painting has also some unusual iconographic elements. Above the body, a group of puttos is floating in dramatic poses. They are holding a red drape, a rope, a palm leaf, and the saint's right hand which points to a flower growing at the left edge of the painting. This detail can evoke some associations with mythological tales about Narcissus and Hyacinth – young heroes who – in their agony – were changed into flowers. Saint's body is pierced with three arrows, one of which is stuck into his left arm, pointing towards his thighs.

Considering its uniqueness Pagani's painting can be described as queer, at least in the original meaning of this adjective: *strange, odd, peculiar* or *eccentric*. It seems so, especially when we take into consideration the main principles of post-tridentine catholic church art. One of them was to avoid showing anything that could be interpreted inconsistently with the official theological teaching or could evoke ungodly thoughts. As stated in the widely known *Instructions on church buildings and their furnishings* issued in 1577 for the Archdiocese of Milan, widely known and partially adapted for implementation in several dioceses of Poland in the 17th century,¹² [...] nothing false ought to be introduced in the painting or carving of holy image, neither anything that is uncertain, apocryphal, and superstitious; nothing [of that sort], only that which is in agreement with custom. Similarly, whatever is profane, base or obscene, dishonest or provocative, whatever is merely curious and does not incite to piety, or that which can offend the minds and eyes of the faithful [all this] should be avoided.”¹³

The author of the painting, Paolo Pagani, a painter from Valsolda by the Lake Lugano, gained popularity at the imperial court of Leopold I Habsburg as the most skillful in showing nudity. As the author of several exquisite mythological scenes, demonstrating the highest proficiency in showing anatomy, he could be considered a worthy successor of Bartholomeus Spranger and Peter Paul Rubens. From Vienna, he moved to Kremsier (Czech: Kroměříž), where he worked mostly for Karl of

10 Carl Tanquart (Dankwart), an outstanding painter from Nisse (Nysa) in Silesia, was the main author of the fresco decorations of the church (Kurzej, *Depingere...*, pp. 61–62, 279).

11 Buchowski, op. cit., p. F4r–Gv.

12 See P. Krasny, M. Kurzej, *Mediolańskie instrukcje o budynkach i sprzętach kościelnych wydane na polecenie Karola Boromeusza i ich recepcja w Kościele katolickim*, Kraków, 2021, pp. 187–194.

13 E. C. Voelker, *Charles Borromeo's "Instruções Fabricae et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae", 1577. A Translation with Commentary and Analysis*, Ann Arbor, 1981, p. 228. For more on the complex authorship of the text see W. de Boer, *The conquest of the Soul. Confession, Discipline, and Public Order in Counter-Reformation Milan*, Leiden–Boston–Köln, 2001, pp. 88–91.

Liechtenstein-Castelcorno – the bishop of *Olmütz* (Olomouc), who also employed Baldassare Fontana. In 1695 the painter was also employed (with some unknown commission) by the queen of Poland, Marie Casimire Sobieska, so Piskorski might have contacted him with the help of the stuccoist or via his contacts at the royal court. It is unclear, whether Pagani was in Cracow, or if the painting was ordered by letter and then sent from the artist's workshop, but the second possibility seems to be more likely.¹⁴ No matter how Piskorski got in touch with him, it must be emphasized that the scholar found the best artist for the intended iconography. The price paid for the painting is unknown; Piskorski preserved a detailed accounting book of church construction, but, as a private donor of the chapel, decided not to reveal the value of his own contribution. It had only been noted, that „the picture, painted by Mr. Pagani, the most brilliant painter of the king of Spain, has been estimated by art experts at 100 Hungarian goldens [tallars] and other costs can be estimated by a comparison with other chapels”¹⁵. Such a comparison shows that the painting was considered much more precious than any other of similar size, purchased for other lateral chapels. Innocenzo Monti got 60 tal. for *St. Peter* and 50 *St. Joseph*, while Tanquart was paid only 40 tal. for his *Baptism of Christ*.¹⁶ Pagani's masterpiece, placed on the chapel's altar, is the central but not only unusual element of its hagiographical program. Three pairs of small half-figures had been painted *al fresco* by Carl Tanquart under arcades leading to the chapel. In the description quoted above, they were mentioned as some motives from *St. Sebastian's vita*, so they must represent saints mentioned in his legend.¹⁷ Most likely they are brothers Marcus and Macellinus (fig. 3) established in faith by Sebastian, an official, Nicostratus, and his wife Zoe converted by Sebastian to Christianity, and a widow Irene, with her maid Lucina, who helped the wounded martyr. One of Fontana's stucco reliefs on the side walls represents *St. Roch* – the frequent saint companion of Sebastian and very popular intercessor in pestilences (fig. 4). The saint was shown in a fairly conventional way, with a dog bringing him bread. His prayers for the sick are heard, so the angel is sheathing his sword. The only peculiarities are representing this angel of the plague as a baby putto and a small relief-in-relief at the right edge of the main composition. It shows a group of sick people beaten by a snake – an allegory of plague victims by reference to the Old Testament story of the Bronze Serpent. A rare companion to Sebastian is saint Alexius, shown on the opposite wall (fig. 5). Uncommon is also presenting his dead body naked, with only thighs covered with a piece of fabric. The scene depicts the moment of discovering his body by pope Innocent I under the stairs of a former family house. On the right, we see a woman, probably Alexius' wife, whom he abandoned to become a hermit

14 On Pagani see: C. Geddo, *Registro documentario in: Paolo Pagani 1655–1716*, ed. F. Bianchi, Milano, 1998, pp. 193–212; Morandotti, op. cit.; Kurzej, *Depingere...*, p. 277.

15 Archive of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, shelf mark: Rkps 318: *Rationes Perceptorum et Expensorum pro Fabrica Ecclesiae S. Annae Crac.*, p. 353.

16 *Rationes...*, op. cit., p. 249, 256, 259.

17 About problems with identification of those saints see Kurzej, *Depingere...*, p. 155.



Fig. 3. C. Tanquart, St. Marcus or St. Marcelinus, fresco, Cracow, St. Anne's Church, photo M. Kurzej



Fig. 4. B. Fontana, St. Roch, stucco, Cracow, St. Anne's Church, photo M. Kurzej



Fig. 5. B. Fontana, St. Alexius, stucco, Cracow, St. Anne's Church, photo M. Kurzej

and a small relief of St. John the Baptist who was an example of an ascetic for Alexius.¹⁸

The accounting book also demonstrates that Piskorski's effort to encourage donors with his own example proved itself very effective. After the presentation of the chapel, donations started to flow in a wide stream and middle-level clergy connected with the university made the greatest financial contribution to further works.¹⁹ Considering this success as well as the iconographic peculiarities described above, it is worth considering whether the decoration of St. Sebastian's chapel could have been perceived by the academic community in a non-religious context. In particular – whether Pagani's painting could be originally perceived as sensual and – if so – could its sensuality constitutes an intended cultural code.

Those questions must obviously remain open, because of insufficiency of sources, which could put some even remote light on the social habits and sexuality of early modern academics. There are few source references to professors entering into informal heterosexual relationships.²⁰ It seems obvious, however, that due to the

18 As a sign of belief about some mystical relationship between St. Alexius and John the Baptist may also be the date "a 17. Lulio 1700" written on a stucco panel in the passage between the chapels of the Baptist and John Cantius. It may refer to the completion of some stage of works in that part of the church, but it is coincidence with the liturgical commemoration of Alexius can also have symbolic meaning. About the "calendar" symbolism of the church interior see Kurzej, *Depingere...*, pp. 114–169.

19 See *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.

20 See W. Urban, "Akademia Krakowska w dobie reformacji i wczesnej kontrreformacji (1549–1632)", in: *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w latach 1364–1764*, vol. 1. ed. K. Lepszy, Kraków, 1964, p. 274.

morality and legal restrictions of the time, homosexual relationships were rarely mentioned in sources, and even less frequently in historical studies. Piotr Oczko, postulating the need for further research on queer culture in the early modern culture in Poland, rightly noticed that the scant references to homosexual relations in contemporary sources do not reflect the frequency of their occurrence. He also emphasized that for the research on culture more important are not the sexual acts themselves, which may have been recorded in judicial sources, but psycho-emotional relationships, which remain virtually elusive, which means that searching for small and blurred traces of the sensitivity of Old Polish homosexuals resembles more archeology than history.²¹ The latter observation seems to be particularly important for these considerations. Moreover, as stated by David M. Halperin, even those pieces of evidence of erotic preferences that can be found, are mostly referring only to a particular discourse and set of practices constituting one aspect of what counts as gay sexuality nowadays. Therefore, they show hierarchical acts rather than emotional relations, while the latter seem to be at least of equal importance for explaining cultural phenomena.²²

With these reservations in mind, however, several observations can be made. Firstly, it is obvious that the great majority of professors were catholic priests. The only exceptions were the professors of medicine, who remained laymen and lived with their families outside colleges, but almost all professors of philosophy, laws and theology used to join the clergy.²³ Hence, one can state, that academics belonged to the most influential social group of the society, that does not admit to heteronormative sexual behaviors, at least on the declarative level. One must also remember that the academy was deeply rooted in classical culture, so at least some of its members must have been aware of ancient sexual habits and the widespread of homosexuality among Greeks.

One can presume that, at the time, joining the clergy was for a gay person the best chance of self-realization, and so – a popular career path, like in the following centuries, especially for people from smaller towns. In the literature on homosexuality, it's also usually emphasized that homosexual behaviors often occur in all kinds of single-sex closed communities.²⁴ Homoerotic desires, at least among students, were noticed by Stanisław of Skarbimierz, the first rector of the university after its restoration in 1400. He found such inclinations common among boys but explained them as the results of youthful stupidity and did not foresee any particular penance for homosexual acts.²⁵

Little is known about informal relations between academics and scholars. It was, however, observed, that many academic customs empowered the emergence of

21 P. Oczko, "Dlaczego nie chcę pisać o staropolskich samcołożnikach? Przyczynek do »archeologii« gay studies w Polsce", *Teksty Drugie*, 2008, 5, p. 42.

22 D. M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, Chicago–London, 2002, pp. 117–121.

23 Urban, op. cit., p. 255, 259, 264, 265.

24 Halperin, op. cit., s. 114; K. Skwierczyński, *Mury Sodomy. Piotra Damianiego „Księga Gomory” i walka z sodomią wśród kleru*, Kraków, 2011, p. 156.

25 Skwierczyński, op. cit., p. 59.

close relationships. Selected boys used to live in professors' apartments as their servants.²⁶ Influential professors used to favor some students, usually of the same origin. The academic career was obviously easier for boys involved in such relationships, especially for those who had some family connections with elders. They followed in the footsteps of their protectors, both in academic specialization and social habits, so it led to the developing of long-lasting influential groups of scholars, especially those coming from smaller towns of Lesser Poland as Pilzno and Kurzelów.²⁷ Such relationships might have been inspired to some extent by customs known from papal courts and higher Roman clergy.²⁸

Piskorski's career was also a good example of this pattern. He was born in a small town of Skawina near Cracow, and during his studies became a protégé of his un-cle – influential professor and many times rector Wojciech Łańcucki, to whom he dedicated one of his earliest panegyric poems.²⁹ Piskorski most likely showed an early interest in and comprehensive abilities towards art. A chance to develop them was his work in a Nowodworski secondary school belonging to the university. There he became involved in the activities of the school theater, where, due to the lack of girls, female roles were played by boys.³⁰ He performed with students a monumental play on the occasion of the coronation of Michał Wiśniowiecki. It was an allegorical history of Poland, pictured with live images and ballet.³¹ Piskorski worked also as a home teacher, taking care of, among others, the sons of Franciszek Szembek (later the castellan of Cracow), and also of King Jan III Sobieski. He was especially close with his son, Prince James,³² who was later accused of homosexuality.³³

The model of male friendship for the academic community could be found in the hagiography of its saint patron John Cantius. According to the common tradition, he lived in close friendship with other saintly clerics – Regular Canon of the

26 S. A. Sroka, "Życie codzienne w murach kolegium", in: S. A. Sroka, et al., *Collegium Iuridicum*, Kraków, 2015, p. 53.

27 See Urban, op. cit., p. 274.

28 For more on nepotism on papal court see for example W. Reinhard, *Papstfinanz und Nepotismus unter Paul V. (1605–1621): Studien und Quellen zur Struktur und zu quantitativen Aspekten des päpstlichen Herrschaftssystems*, Stuttgart, 1974; B. Emrich, *Bürokratie und Nepotismus unter Paul V. (1605–1621): Studien zur frühneuzeitlichen Mikropolitik in Rom*, Stuttgart, 2001; M. Pattenden, *Pius IV and the Fall of the Carafa: Nepotism and Papal Authority in Counter-Reformation Rome*, Oxford, 2013.

29 S. Piskorski, *Auspicium in colenni [...] D.M. Alberti Łancucki [...] in generalem Almae niversitatis Cracoviensis rectorem renuntiatione a gratulantibus Parnasi Academici Musis eiusdem universitat celebrerrimae feliciter praedictum et ex solistismis pieridum turpidis observatum*, Cracoviae, 1661.

30 See K. Targosz, "Teatr Szkół Nowodworskich w Krakowie w XVII wieku", *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, 1976, 25, vol. 1–2, pp. 24–25.

31 The play is known from the printed program booklet *Eleutheria Polonis semper celebrata in ludis saecularibus anni 1669* [no date].

32 An expression of this bond is the speech in honor of prince James, which Piskorski delivered on the occasion of taking up a place in the Juridical College. See S. Piskorski, *Oratio as serenissimum Poloniarum Principem Iacobum*, Cracoviae, 1683.

33 See Oczko, op. cit., p. 34.

Lateran Stanislaus Kazimierczyk, Regular Canon of Penitence Michael Giedroyć, Bernardine Simon of Lipnica and mansionary chaplain of St. Mary's Church Sventoslaus the Silent.³⁴ As John Boswell showed, friendship between saints could be seen as a metaphor for same-sex relationships with which mystical connotations were often associated.³⁵

Under those circumstances, it seems likely that Pagani's masterpiece evoked in erudite scholars some associations referring to rather earthly matters, despite divine ones. It seems even more probable, if we take into consideration the way of reading a complex artwork at the time. According to both theory and its implementation (clearly visible in the decorative programme of St Anne's church), such artwork should have several layers of meaning, respectively addressed to several groups of recipients, distinguished by their level of education, and possibilities of perception. Thus, a work of art should be – up to some point – comprehensible for everyone but also have some exclusive meaning, reserved for a selected one.³⁶ Moreover, the common reception of rhetorical theory in art popularized the opinion that an excellent artwork should also have hidden clues, readable only to selected viewers, who, by finding them, could get an impression that their mind is somehow connected to the author's. This feature was perceived as an exemplification of the sublime concept, postulated by Jakob Massens and Emmanuele Tesauro.³⁷

A verbatim hidden clue, revealed however to literates, was hidden by Piskorski in a second nude image, which is an even more important part of the St. Anne's church's interior. It is the wooden crucifix placed on the top of the chancel arch (fig. 6). The sculpture, made by local craftsman Kazimierz Kaliski, has very broad symbolic connotations. Recently Paweł Pencakowski has strongly opted for the interpretation of the crucifix as a triumphant sign of the Parousia, negating its meaning as a sign of passion.³⁸ This interpretation, however well-founded and established in earlier scientific literature,³⁹ corresponds poorly with the dollorical description of the sculpture left by Buchowski,⁴⁰ and with Piskorski's sermon for the church

34 R. M. Zawadzki, "Mistrz Jan z Kęt i 'szczęśliwy wiek Krakowia'", in: *Felix saeculum Cracoviae – krakowscy święci XV wieku. Materiały sesji naukowej, Kraków, 24 kwietnia 1997*, ed. K. Panuś, K. R. Prokop, Kraków 1998, pp. 53–70.

35 J. Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*, New York, 1995, s. 244–245, 306.

36 P. P. Fehl, "Hermeticism and Art: Emblem and Allegory in the Work of Bernini", *Artibus et Historiae*, 1986, 7, no 14, p. 153.

37 Kurzej, *Depingere...*, pp. 192–193.

38 P. Pencakowski, "Znak Paruzji w tęczach kościołów na terenie dawnej diecezji krakowskiej w końcu XVII i w XVIII wieku", in: *Sztuka w kręgu krakowskich franciszkanów i klarysek*, ed. M. Szyma M. Walczak, Kraków, 2020, s. 359–372.

39 S. Kobieliński, "Idea niebiańskiej Jeruzolimy w dekoracji monumentalnej kościoła św. Anny w Krakowie", *Rocznik Krakowski*, 1987, 53, p. 52; P. Pencakowski, "Znak Syna Człowieczego w tęczu kolegiaty św. Anny w Krakowie", *Wiadomości konserwatorskie województwa krakowskiego*, 4, 1996, pp. 57–60.

40 Buchowski, op. cit., p. Hv, H2r.



Fig. 6. Cracow, St. Anne's church, Crucifix on the chancel arch, photo M. Kurzej

consecration, where the crucifix above all was compared to the Tree of Life in paradise.⁴¹ Moreover, the interpretation of angels' figures holding the crucifix as demonstrating grief with their gestures does not match with another sermon quoted by Pencakowski.⁴² Obviously, the crucifix, as the most widespread sign of Christianity, has numerous meanings, among which, besides apocalyptic ones, those related to wisdom as well as passion and martyrdom, are of great importance.⁴³

The last one was probably particularly important for Piskorski, who – according to the contemporary relation – left a note inside a sculpture, putting it into the wound in Christ's chest. This letter contained information about his function as the manager and supervisor of *fabrica ecclesiae*, and his collaboration with Baldassare Fontana,

41 See S. Piskorski, *Kazania na dni Pańskie...*, Kraków, 1706, p. 1045. It seems likely that Pencakowski didn't understand the quoted fragment of the sermon, where the crucifix was mentioned as "a salutary sign displayed to the eyes of the coming – the crucified Savior, on the first rainbow arch: as he will also come to judge the living and the dead at the end of the world". The last supplementary sentence refers here not to the representation of the Crucifixion, but rather to the rainbow, which is a frequent element of the iconography of the Last Judgment.

42 The sermon of Paweł Ruszel is referring to a homily of St. John Chrysostom, according to which before the Last Judgement "angels and archangels shall carry the sign of Son of man, so they will carry the cross on their arms, as soldiers used to carry their banners" (P. Ruszel, *Skarb nigdy nieprzebrany Kościoła Świętego Katolickiego Krzyż Pański...*, vol. 2, Lublin, 1655, p. 163). So, it is a triumphal march and, contrary to Pencakowski's claim, text does not implicate, that the heavenly spirits would be "full of sorrow and regret".

43 Kurzej, *Depingere...*, pp. 132–136.

being a kind of extensive author's signature. It starts with a periphrasis of a quote from the gospel of Mathew (6,21) "ubi est thesaurus tuus, ibi sit et cor **meum**" – so it says, "Where your treasure is, there will **my** heart also be" instead of "...where **your** heart will also be". The change of the pronoun directs this sentence towards Christ, referring not to humans, but to the godly treasure at which Piskorski wanted to place his own heart. An explanation of this concept can be found in one of the visions of St. Bridget of Sweden, experienced at the relics of St. Thomas in Ortona, where Christ revealed to her that the relics of his friends are a treasure for him and explained that the sentence from the gospel refers to his gladness from the reverence shown to the relics of saints and visiting their graves.⁴⁴ Apart from deep theological meaning, this unusual signature points towards a connection between the figure of the crucified Jesus and the image of the martyr's body. Simultaneously it emphasizes the timeless durability of not only the spiritual but also the corporeal existence of man.

An unusual example of a nude sculpture of congruent mystical and sensual meaning is a figure of sorrowful Christ with movable hands preserved in the Cracow monastery of Poor Clares. During the worship of Holy Thursday, the sculpture used to be placed on the refectory table with a chalice and host into its hands. The sculpture has also a characteristic opening in the chest, which was most likely used to pour a fluid imitating blood dripping from the wound. Damage found below this opening during conservation work may have been caused by frequent touching or kissing.⁴⁵ It can be assumed, that the figure and its usage were well known to Piskorski, because he was in close relation with poor clares, acting as their longtime confessor.⁴⁶

The mystical connection between saint's relics and the venerated crucifix is a common feature of Cracow sanctuaries. As observed by Grażyna Jurkowlaniec, it is known from hagiographical legends of queen Hedvig d'Anjou, Michael Giedroyc and Sventoslaus the Silent.⁴⁷ The latter was a particular worshiper of Slacker's Crucifix in St. Mary's Church (fig. 7). This outstanding work of Veit Stoss was believed to have spoken to Sventoslaus, and later, in the 17th century, to have a conversation with Barbara Lang – a local mystic related to the Jesuits. Since that time there is known a legend about a painter, who touched the sculpture when carrying out restoration works, and felt like he was touching a living body.⁴⁸ This remark shows that the extremely expressive sculpture influenced the viewers of that time with its realism, evoking the impression of sensual corporeality.

44 Ibid., p. 134.

45 Z. Gyalóky, "Średniowieczne figury Marii z Dzieciątkiem i Chrystusa w krakowskim klasztorze Klarysek", in: *Sztuka w kręgu krakowskich franciszkanów i klarysek*, ed. M. Szyma, M. Walczak, Kraków, 2020, pp. 187–188.

46 Kurzej, *Depingere...*, p. 70.

47 G. Jurkowlaniec, "Kult obrazów a kult świętych w nowożytnym Krakowie", *Barok*, 11, 2004, 2, p. 69–87.

48 G. Jurkowlaniec, "The Slacker Crucifix in St. Mary's Church in Cracow: Cult and Craft" in: *Wokół Wita Stwosza. Materiały z międzynarodowej konferencji naukowej w Muzeum Narodowym w Krakowie*, eds. D. Horzela, A. Organisty, Kraków, 2006, pp. 348–357.



Fig. 7. V. Stoss, The Slacker crucifix, limestone, Cracow, St. Mary's church, photo M. Kurzej

The interior of St. Mary's Church was thoroughly rearranged in the years 1733–1755. The initiator and most likely the main inventor of these changes was rev. Jacek Augustyn Łopacki – an outstanding physician, son of a university professor and multiple mayor, coming from a family closely related to the academy. In his school years, he played in Nowodworski theatre,⁴⁹ and before leaving to study medicine in Padua, he obtained a doctorate in philosophy in Cracow. Works carried out in St. Mary's under his supervision allow to acknowledge him as the second (after Piskorski) outstanding patron priest in early modern Cracow.⁵⁰ The leading

⁴⁹ Targosz, op. cit., p. 25.

⁵⁰ On Łopacki see Z. Gajda, *Jacek Augustyn Łopacki. Studium z dziejów kultury medycznej w Krakowie w XVIII w.*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków, 1969; J. Kuś, “Działalność kulturalno-artystyczna ks. Jacka Augustyna Łopackiego (1690–1761)”, *Nasza Przeszość*, 40, 1973, pp. 196–246. About his works ins St. Mary's see: J. Skrabski, “Modernizacja i renowacja kościoła Mariackiego w czasach archiprezbitera Jacka Łopackiego. Między Kacprem Bażanką a Franciszkiem Placidim”, *Rocznik Krakowski*, 74, 2008, pp. 87–113; M. Kurzej, “Uwagi o aranżacji kościoła Mariackiego w czasach

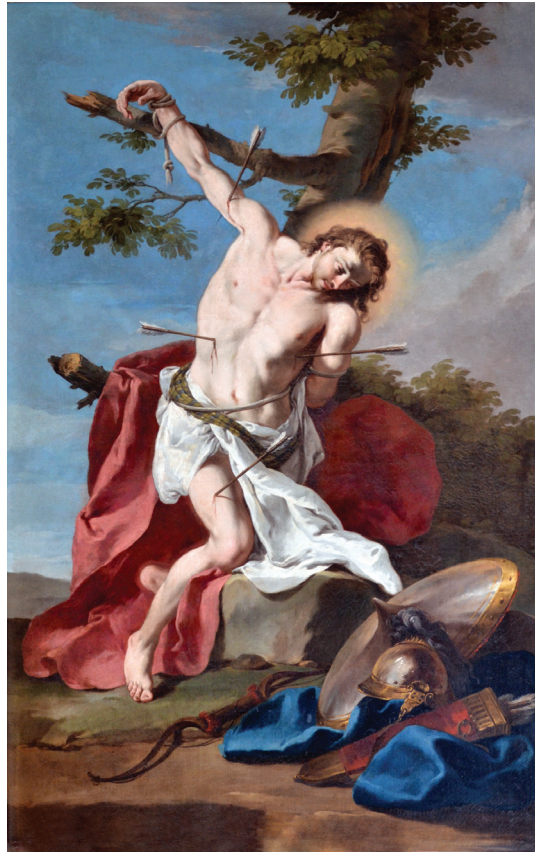


Fig. 8. P. Pagani, St. Sebastian, oil on canvas, Cracow, St. Mary's church, photo M. Kurzej

motive of those works was putting forward Christological themes and Łopacki himself was known as another particular worshiper of Sacker's Crucifix, and ordered to be buried next to this sculpture. Among the many new elements of the church interior introduced by him, five altar paintings by Giovanni Battista Pittoni are of primary artistic importance. This set is the most exquisite and probably also the most expensive purchase of paintings to a Polish church. Two of them – i.e., Annunciation and Adoration of Magi, belong to the Christological thread, while the other three, depicting saints, are related to it indirectly. St. Philip Neri is shown during his vision of the Holy Virgin presenting Christ, and Mary Magdalene adores the Passion of Christ depicted in the crucifix she is holding. The last painting depicts St. Sebastian as a follower of Christ in his martyrdom (fig. 8).⁵¹ Saint's naked body,

ks. Jacka Łopackiego”, in: “Jako serce pośrodku ciała...”. Kultura artystyczna kościoła Mariackiego w Krakowie, eds. M. Walczak, A. Wolska, Kraków, 2021, pp. 161–169.

51 Kurzej, “Uwagi...”, p. 164.

shown in a twisted pose resembles the Bandini Pietà by Michelangelo. Sebastian, tied to a tree, looks at the parts of his armaments abandoned on the ground, perhaps seeing the reflection of heaven in the shield.

Obviously, Pittoni's picture differs from Pagani's not only in composition, but also in iconography, which stresses the saint's loneliness in his suffering. Therefore, both works share the same common subject – Sebastian after his first, unsuccessful martyrdom, before he was found and cured by Irene. An unknown image with such iconography inspired pope Urban VIII to write this suggestive poem:

“Depicted knight of Christ is pierced by arrows,
 Having the face of neither alive nor dead.
 You are scared that may fall dead which you have for alive
 And your pious thoughts are moved by cruel wounds.
 But calmly, though so wounded, he looks at the stars,
 As long as his lips open gently as in prayer.
 Not given to the artist to paint the voice? However
 This one he painted, for you, to believe what words is he saying:
 O Jesus, release me from the bonds, My anxious mind
 Desires to see you, like a tired deer is thirsty for water.⁵²”

This poem, although rather graphomaniac, presents a meaningful interpretation, which can be applied to both paintings. It emphasizes the tension between life and death, as well as between what is painted and what is unseeable. Both paintings show also the connection between the spiritual and the carnal, and pointing to a particular relationship between the subject and their founders. For Piskorski St. Sebastian was a name patron, while for Łopacki – a special intercessor for his patients. This, however, fits the concept of symbolic perception and finding hidden meanings in all possible aspects of reality, in the belief that they were placed there by omnipotent divine providence.⁵³

The question of whether two outstanding images of St. Sebastian in Cracow could have been seen in an erotic way must obviously remain without a direct answer. Besides, it should be asked in a much more nuanced way, taking various groups of people and different levels of their perception into account. One can only guess that members of the academic community had some sensual associations with the image of St. Sebastian, but his tangible context is linked primarily to spirituality.

One must also remember that using artworks as a key to research on the sexuality of people from a centuries-long distance involves the risk of ahistorical and unjustified interpretations. That issue has been well expressed by Bradley Cavallo, who warned that “historians must guard themselves against subjecting the subjects of their research to the ephemeral nature of their own socio-linguistics environments. Only by doing that can we hope to attain a basis from which to understand

52 M. Barberini, *Poemata*, Parisiis, 1642, p. 155.

53 Kurzej, *Depingere...*, p. 250.



Fig. 9. Cracow, St. Sebastian altar in St. Anne's church, current state, photo M. Kurzej

the past as unreflective of ourselves, and therefore come closer to unearthing the coherency of past sexual significations”.⁵⁴

Considering such risk of overinterpretation, Christopher Reed came to the conclusion that instead of hoping to psychoanalyse early modern artists (and so, by extension, their patrons) it may be more useful to attempt to understand how images that look homoerotic to modern eyes commanded respect in a culture that officially condemned homosexuality.⁵⁵ Going back to Pagani's painting, we can observe a strange reverse situation, in which the image might have lost its respect in less distant times. It can be assumed that it was so in the middle of the 20th cen-

54 B. J. Cavallo, "Albrecht Dürer's The Mens' Bathhouse of 1496–1497: Problems of Sexual Signification", *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 16, 2016, no 4, p. 22.

55 C. Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas*, Oxford, 2011, p. 50.

ture, when the lower part of the painting was covered with another picture,⁵⁶ distracting the attention of the viewer. It is a contemporary work without significant artistic value, showing St. Anthony of Padua (fig. 9). His very popular cult as the intercessor in very difficult things, long ago overshadowed devotion to Sebastian, so introducing his image into the church is understandable. But its large size and placement, being an aggressive interference with the structure of the historic altar, are pointing towards the conclusion that the main reason for placing it on the altar was to distract attention from the old painting, which at the time had been found inappropriate. Paradoxically, this situation allows us to consider some clerics from the past century as more strait-laced than those from the time of the church construction, which might be correct, at least given their views on sacred art. It is also quite emblematic of recent Catholic Church art and its attitude towards its own heritage: the mediocre work-covered masterpiece, the ordinary replaced uniqueness and the banal was placed in front of the outstanding.

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⁵⁶ Exact date of placing the new picture on the altar is hard to determine. A photo of the altar without it was published in 1957 (J. Gomoliszewski, *Kościół św. Anny w Krakowie. Dokumentacja geodezyjno-inwentaryzacyjna*, Warszawa, 1957, p. 197, fig. 447), but the date of the photo is unknown.

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