

Summary

JACEK WITKOWSKI/ Hercules and monsters. On recently discovered example of the hero's medieval iconography

The article deals with a set of Gothic stove tiles recently discovered during archeological research in the remains of Gromnik castle in Strzelin in Lower Silesia. Stylistic aspects and archeological context of the discovery allow us to date the stove in 1440s, when the castle was owned by the knight Opitz von Czirn, closely related to the court of the duke Louis II of Legnica-and-Brzeg. The tiles most certainly originated in the cultural circle of the duke's court and in the area of his rule, most probably in Brzeg or Legnica, perhaps in Wrocław. They bear no traces of analogies with the known works of 15th-century Silesian tile craft. The figurative decoration of the stove is unprecedented as it depicts a struggle between good and evil with the aim of images deriving from both Christian and ancient tradition. Among the latter as particularly outstanding comes an image of Hercules struggling the Nemean Lion or Lernaean Hydra with his club (state of the tiles' preservation allows no closer specification). The image has also no similarity as its antique character of iconography as well as its composition and form are concerned, hence it should be regarded as one of the oldest, or to be more precise, the unique ancient-like image of Hercules from the period of Gothic, not only in Silesia but also in all regions of Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, the article discusses in details the iconography of Hercules in our part of Europe in Romanesque, Gothic and the earliest Renaissance times along with ways of reception of ancient Greek and Roman forms in this area. By doing this the importance of the discovery of Hercules' image from Gromnik is being stressed.