

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.