

HOW THEY SEE US FROM AFAR. ABOUT:  
*MEDIAEVAL ART, ARCHITECTURE AND ARCHAEOLOGY IN CRACOW AND LESSER POLAND*<sup>1</sup>

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In the first days of July 2011, members of the British Archaeological Association and invited guests met at an international conference in the lecture hall of the Jagiellonian Library to explore the mediaeval art, architecture and archaeology of the city of Cracow and Lesser Poland.

The British Archaeological Association is a prestigious institution whose beginnings date back to 1843, the early Victorian era. The word “archaeological” contained in its name should therefore be understood in its traditional, broad sense, whose Polish equivalent used to be the word “starożytnicze”<sup>2</sup>. The Association’s focus is not archaeological study alone, but rather interdisciplinary research ranging from the history of architecture and art to heritage preservation. Its founders, Charles Roach Smith, Thomas Wright and Thomas Joseph Pettigrew – “gentlemen and scientists”, as they were referred to by their contemporaries<sup>3</sup> – were former members of the Society of Antiquaries of London, but decided at some point this “older body was too aristocratic, too London-focused and lacked the campaigning vigour required”<sup>4</sup>. The very name of the new association they went on to establish was to suggest upcoming revolutionary changes and a new organisational model, aimed at documenting, preserving and publishing new archaeological findings in Britain. One of the principal commitments of the new organisation was to hold annual meetings to

enable renowned experts and local scholars to share their opinions and insights.

Today, the BAA is focused on investigating mediaeval architecture and art, with particular emphasis on major cathedrals, abbeys and monasteries. In line with its original statutes, it also keeps organising annual congresses, which for many years now have been held outside the United Kingdom. One of such congresses took place in Cracow, Poland, between 3 and 7 July 2011. The thematic arrangement of the meeting and the list of speakers were prepared on behalf of Poland as the Convenor by a renowned art historian and author of numerous publications, Dr. Agnieszka Rożnowska-Sadrei, with assistance from Honorary Conference Organisers: literature and art historian Dr. Abigail Wheatley, Kate Davey, historian and expert in gothic architecture, and Prof. Tomasz Węclawowicz, member of the BAA.

The opening ceremony was held at the *Collegium Maius* building of the Jagiellonian University, after which the conference moved to the Jagiellonian Library. A multinational group of speakers from the UK, Poland, Austria, France, Germany and the US presented a wide array of topics, from the Italian influences on Polish Romanesque architecture to the impact of astronomical treatises on patronage. Also addressed were the artistic achievements of mediaeval contemplative and mendicant orders.

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<sup>1</sup> *Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology in Cracow and Lesser Poland*, (eds A. Rożnowska-Sadrei, T. Węclawowicz), BAA and Maney Publishing, Leeds 2014 [The British Archaeological Association Conference Transaction XXXVII].

<sup>2</sup> Cf.: *Starożytnicze wiadomości o Krakowie: zbiór pism z pamiętników tyczących się opisowej i dziejowej przeszłości, oraz zwyczajów téj dawnéj stolicy kraju, z dodatkiem różnych szczegółów Polaków zajmć mogących, zebrał z rękopiśmiennych źródeł Ambroży Grabowski*, Cracow, published by Józef Czech, 1852.

<sup>3</sup> Virginia Hoselitz, *Imagining Roman Britain: Victorian Responses to a Roman Past*, Woodbridge, Suffolk – Rochester NY 2007, chapter 3 *Gentlemen and Scientists*, p. 55 et seq.

<sup>4</sup> The Society of Antiquaries of London was created in 1707. Cf.: *History of the BAA by Dr Alexandrina Buchanan*, [in:] <http://the-baa.org/about/history-of-the-baa/> [viewed: 25 Apr 2015]. Presently, the Royal Patron of the Society is His Royal Highness Prince Richard Duke of Gloucester, and Royal Fellows include Queen Elisabeth II, Prince Charles and Queen of Denmark Margrethe II.

Proceedings from the conference were published in late 2014 as a collection of 14 papers under the title *Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology in Cracow and Lesser Poland*. Among the contributors are such eminent humanists as Prof. Eric Campbell Fernie, former director of the London Courtauld Institute of Art and former President of the Society of Antiquaries of London; Prof. Michael Czajkowski of the Open University, Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society; Dr. Zoë Opačić, senior lecturer at Birkbeck's Department of History of Art of the University of London (formerly Birkbeck College of Art and Visual Media); Dr. Alexandra Gajewski, member of the Society of Antiquaries of London, for many years Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor), and more recently also at Centro de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales in Madrid, and many others.

The papers are arranged by style and chronology and preceded by a short introduction by the editors, describing briefly the general range of subjects and the course of the conference. Polish readers will no doubt be interested to read foreign authors' contributions on Polish heritage, since they offer a valuable "outsider's point of view", revising the status of Polish research and expanding the comparative context. Even more importantly, they also address the significance of Polish heritage in relation to the rest of Central Europe from a standpoint which can considerably differ from our local, short-distance perspective.

Eric Fernie, a celebrated medievalist and prolific author on the subject of Romanesque architecture<sup>5</sup>, focuses his attention on the St. Andrew Church in Cracow<sup>6</sup>, with particular consideration given to its centralised longitudinal plan as compared to other similar church plans in Poland and abroad. The discussion is illustrated with a number of plans, photographs and a computer reconstruction of the church with the surrounding architecture as it might have looked in mid-13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 1).

In the paper by Alexandra Gajewski, the author discusses Cistercian churches of Lesser Poland, paying particular attention to their identity seen against

the backdrop of the architectural culture of Western Europe, analysing the filiations involved, reception of models, and expanding considerably on the research of Polish scholars.<sup>8</sup> The article by Professor Michael Czajkowski is a study of the relics of one of the oldest mechanical clocks in Europe, dating back to late 13<sup>th</sup> century, recently discovered in the Cistercian monastery in Mogiła. The author made an attempt at visual reconstruction of the unique mechanism and stages of its evolution<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 2).

The chapter by Dr. Zoë Opačić addresses the issues of sacred architecture and liturgy in Cracow and Prague in the years 1335–1455<sup>10</sup>. The author has spent a number of years studying the artistic culture and patronage of the court of Charles IV in Prague, which she interestingly compares to the royal patronage of Casimir the Great and his successors in Cracow, emphasising the king's contribution to the expansion of the city and the establishment of the Academia. She also examines the role of Cardinal Zbigniew Oleśnicki's in the emergence of Cracow's sophisticated court etiquette. A broad and innovative appraisal of Zbigniew Oleśnicki's *Pontificale Cracoviense* is contained in the paper by Dr. Constanza Cipollaro (Universität Wien, Institut für Kunstgeschichte).<sup>11</sup> The scholar discusses the pontifical as a testimony of both Oleśnicki's bibliophilic passion and political ambition. Cipollaro also points to some theological and iconographic peculiarities that can be found in the manuscript, which seem to provide evidence for a more accurate estimate of its time of creation.

The unique late gothic pillory from Wrocław's main square put in a broad European context<sup>12</sup> is the subject of the contribution by Prof. Achim Timmerman, art historian from the University of Michigan, Department of the History of Art: Ann Arbor. In his turn, Dr. Gavin Simpson, geographer and ecologist from the University College of London (Department of Geography, Environmental Change Research Centre), writes about the economic history and historical landscape of the region, addressing the interesting is-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. recently published extensive monograph: E Fernie, *Romanesque Architecture*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2014, p. 295, fig. 388.

<sup>6</sup> *The Church of St Andrew, Cracow*.

<sup>7</sup> By the Cracow-based studio Mm Interactive.

<sup>8</sup> *Identity on the Edge: The Architecture of the Cistercian Abbeys in Lesser Poland*.

<sup>9</sup> *The Clock Dial at Mogiła Abbey and Possible Associated Clock Mechanisms*.

<sup>10</sup> *Architecture and Ceremony in Cracow and Prague, 1335–1455*.

<sup>11</sup> *A New Appraisal of Zbigniew Oleśnicki's "Pontificale Cracoviense"*.

<sup>12</sup> *"Wer nicht recht tut den fureich vor rect": Wrocław's Late Gothic Pillory in Context*.

sue of timber trade in Lesser Poland and on the coast of the Baltic Sea and investigating the Polish-English connections in this branch of trade.<sup>13</sup>

The book also includes contributions from Polish art historians. Dr. Rafał Quirini-Popławski (History of Art Institute, Jagiellonian University), an expert on Romanesque sculpture,<sup>14</sup> examines the sculpted decoration of the St. Gereon church in Wawel. Expanding on the comparative context provided in the available literature, he brings to the attention of the reader the evident Italian influences visible in the architectural solutions used in this important edifice, which in all probability used to be a co-cathedral basilica at the time of Casimir I the Restorer.<sup>15</sup> The newly discovered remains of the foundations of Casimir the Great's royal chapel at the Holy Trinity Dominican church in Cracow are described and interpreted in the article by Dr. Marcin Szyma (History of Art Institute, Jagiellonian University).<sup>16</sup>

Adding to Dr. Alexandra Gajewski's insights on the legacy of the Cistercian order are texts by Polish researchers of the subject. Prof. Tomasz Węclawowicz (Faculty of Architecture and Fine Arts, Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University) reports on the most recent findings from the restoration works at the Cistercian monastery in Mogiła. The reconstructed church, featuring a transept tower and a so-called paradise narthex (Fig. 3) compels us to revisit our perceptions of the Cistercian architecture in Lesser Poland.<sup>17</sup> Another contributor, Dr. Beata Kwiatkowska-Kopka (The Royal Castle of Wawel), presents her own archaeological findings from other Cistercian complexes of the region: Jędrzejów, Szczyrzyc and Koprzywnica (Fig. 4), bringing new insights into their chronology and the construction process of individual monastic buildings.<sup>18</sup>

The relations between liturgy and astrology are explored by Dr. Dariusz Tabor of the Institute of His-

tory of Art and Culture, Pontifical University of John Paul II, on the example of the Orantes on the floor of the Romanesque crypt in the Collegiate Church in Wislica<sup>19</sup>. Dr. Marek Walczak (History of Art Institute, Jagiellonian University) reinterprets the figures on the Sides of the Tomb-Chest of King Casimir the Great in the Wawel Cathedral, and basing his research on extensive comparative material, manages to link the ideological message of the tombstone with the so-called *corpus rei publicae*, a popular political concept of the period.<sup>20</sup> The ever-inspiring art of Veit Stoss prompted Dr. Wojciech Walanus (History of Art Institute, Jagiellonian University) to investigate its influences on late Gothic sculpture in Cracow and Lesser Poland in the decades following master Stoss's leaving Cracow for Nuremberg.<sup>21</sup>

The book is without a doubt an important tribute to Cracow's role as a prominent artistic centre in the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and constitutes a major step towards furthering mediaeval research in Poland. The variety of topics raised by the contributors, including not only issues of style, iconography, ceremony and patronage, but also of politics, economy, law, philosophy and theology, as well as horology, trade and shipbuilding, makes this publication a considerable interdisciplinary achievement of European scholarship regarding mediaeval Cracow and the region, which are still rather underrepresented in the Western literature. The collection is a valuable step towards filling that void, and the initiative of the British Archaeological Association will surely be followed by other similar ventures into the fascinating world of Polish mediaeval art.

Translated by Z. Owczarek

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<sup>13</sup> *Seeing the Wood for the Trees: Poland and Baltic Timber Trade c. 1250–1650*.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. R. Quirini-Popławski, *Rzeźba przedromańska i romańska w Polsce*, Cracow 2006.

<sup>15</sup> *The Oldest Fragments of Sculptural Decoration from Wawel Hill*. O tzw. podwójnej katedrze na Wawelu, see: T. Węclawowicz, *Królewski kościół katedralny na Wawelu. W rocznicę konsekracji 1364–2014*, Kraków 2014, s. 27–46.

<sup>16</sup> *The Chapel of Casimir the Great at the Dominican Church of the Holy Trinity, Cracow*.

<sup>17</sup> *The Cistercian Abbey at Mogiła: The Latest Research and New Questions*.

<sup>18</sup> *Archaeological Excavations at the Cistercian Monasteries of Jędrzejów, Szczyrzyc and Koprzywnica*.

<sup>19</sup> *Liturgy and Astrology: The „Orantes“ on the Crypt Floor in the Collegiate Church at Wislica*.

<sup>20</sup> *The Figures on the Sides of the Tomb-Chest of King Casimir the Great: A Reassessment of the Iconography of the Polish Kingdom Reborn*.

<sup>21</sup> *Veit Stoss and Late Gothic Sculpture in Lesser Poland: Selected Issues*.