

| The Baldachin Altarpiece of the Wrocław Goldsmiths

In the years 1472–73, in the goldsmiths' guild's chapel¹ built in the second half of the 14th century at the St Mary Magdalene parochial church in Wrocław, a new two-tiered altarpiece was installed over the altar that included figures and elements from an earlier retablo (**fig. 1**). A significant part of the work was transferred to the National Museum in Warsaw after the Second World War, where some of the parts were stored until 2000.²

The altarpiece is an example of a two-tiered variant of the baldachin altarpiece.³ Each tier contains three figures typifying two phases of the Gothic style (ca. 1400 and 1473). The figure of Christ of Pity (ca. 1392) is considered to be the oldest one. Along with the flanking figures portraying Saint Peter and Saint Paul (ca. 1405), it was probably derived from the earlier altarpiece

¹ The history of the goldsmiths' guild and their chapel, see Erwin Hintze, *Die Breslauer Goldschmiede. Eine archivalische Studie* (Breslau, 1906), pp. 11–12; Ludwig Burgemeister, Günther Grundmann, *Die Kunstdenkmäler der Provinz Niederschlesien*, vol. 1: *Die Stadt Breslau*, part 2: *Die Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Breslau* (Breslau, 1933), p. 4 (plan of the church), 18–19; Małgorzata Niemczyk, "Kaplice mieszczańskie na Śląsku w okresie późnego gotyku," *Roczniki Sztuki Śląskiej*, 13 (1983), p. 9.

² The dating of the new altarpiece is given in the inscription on the external side of the wings of the lower tier: (after Hermann Luchs): *Anno domini MCCCCLXXXIII hoc opus ornatum est per providos viros aurifabros et per Nicolaum Schreyer socium illius artificis et eodem anno fuerunt seniores Johannes Bischorff et Jacobus Konczel quorum omnium deus sit merces eorum* (only one part on the altarpiece's wing has survived until today). It informs us that the altarpiece was funded by master goldsmiths, with a contribution of apprentice Nicolaus Schreyer, in the period when Johannes Bischorff and Jacobus Konczel were the elders of the guild, that is, between Easter of 1472 and Easter of 1473; in the early 17th century, the altarpiece was thoroughly renovated, the Gothic predella was replaced by a Late Renaissance one, and the 15th-century busts were moved to the upper part. In 1890, the altarpiece was transferred to the Schlesisches Museum für Kunstgewerbe und Altertümer in Wrocław (Breslau) and subjected to conservation. The 17th-century predella was replaced by a pseudo-Gothic one. In 1942, the work was disassembled and hidden. During the Second World War, construction elements of the altarpiece, the crowning and the external part of the left wing of the lower tier were lost. Preserved parts, transferred after 1945 among other places to the National Museum in Warsaw, are presently at the National Museum in Wrocław (inv. no.: XI 282; dep. 1997/00, 1. 2; inv. no. XI 217 a–c, 393 a–e, 157, 114, 113 a–d.). See Bożena Guldán-Klamecka, Anna Ziomecka, *Sztuka na Śląsku XII–XVI w.* (Wrocław, 2003), pp. 281, 291–94; Hermann Luchs, "Bildenden Künstler in Schlesien nach Namen und Monogrammen," *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte und Alterthum Schlesiens*, vol. 5, 1 (1863), p. 8; Hintze, op. cit., p. 13; Tadeusz Dobrzeńcki, *Malarstwo tablicowe. Katalog zbiorów* (Warsaw, 1972), pp. 224–26.

³ On the topic of the baldachin altarpieces, see Anna Żakiewicz, "Gotyckie retabula baldachimowe," *Ikonotheka*, 3 (1991), p. 49 (with basic bibliography); Kees van der Ploeg, "How liturgical is a medieval altarpiece?," in *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento*, Victor Schmidt, ed. (New York–New Haven and London, 2002), p. 107. Studies in the History of Art, 61; see Annegret Laabs, "Das Retabel als 'Schaufenster' zum gottlichen Heil. Ein Beitrag zur Stellung des Flügelretabels im sakralen Zeremoniell des Kirchenjahres," *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, 24 (1997), pp. 71–86; Klaus Krüger, "Aller zierde wunder trügen die altaere. Zur Genese und Strukturentwicklung des Flügelaltarschreins im 14. Jahrhundert," in *Entstehung und Frühgeschichte des Flügelaltarschreins*, Hartmut Krohm, ed. (Wiesbaden, 2001), pp. 69–85.

linked to the foundation of Hensil of Kłodzko.⁴ In 1473, the structure of the new altarpiece was ready (it is possible that the old retable was only added to the second tier), as were its painted wings, figures of Saint Eligius and two angels placed in the upper level and sculptural busts of the saints in the predella: Andrew, Jadwiga (Hedwig), Elizabeth and Wenceslas.⁵ Both tiers of the altarpiece could be closed by a pair of wings, which folded at the corners of the square bases and baldachins so that, when closed, they formed a cuboid. When open, the wings created a kind of screen and the total width of the altarpiece more than doubled. The lower, flat-roofed baldachin with vaulted underside served as the base of the corpus of the upper one. The upper baldachin consisted of a high, two-part composition woven of intertwining arches, pinnacles and floral motifs.

The Goldsmiths' Altarpiece versus Other Baldachin Altarpieces. What Was the Purpose of Its Constructional and Formal Distinctness?

The goldsmiths' altarpiece is quite properly categorized as a baldachin altarpiece on account of its construction.⁶

The first question to be discussed is the two-tiered construction, absent in other baldachin altarpieces, and the resulting presence of two baldachins and two pair of wings. This uncommon solution must have been connected with specific functions of the work, among which the major one was providing an appropriate frame for the sculpture of Christ of Pity.

The other issue and arising question to be asked is: Why wasn't the most popular type of triptych in Silesia – the cupboard-like triptych shrine – chosen instead of a much less often employed altarpiece type? Only a couple of baldachin altarpieces in Silesia have been preserved,⁷ while altar shrines can be counted in hundreds.

⁴ C. 1398, Hensil from Kłodzko and his wife funded the altar for the Goldsmiths' Chapel. See Hintze, op. cit., pp. 11–12.

⁵ Height of figures: Christ: 165 cm; St Peter: 138 cm; St Paul: 140 cm; St Eligius: 170 cm; angel to the right: 98 cm; angel to the left: 100 cm; busts: c. 50 cm; the altarpiece was made of pine (construction elements, wings) and the figures of limewood. The figure of Christ was carved in organogenic limestone. Wings painted on both sides; obverses: chalk-glue ground on canvas, tempera, gold leaf, inscriptions and pattern on frames incised in the ground; reverses painted in tempera directly on wood; central panel: 198 × 78.5 cm, side wings: 201 × 56 cm.

⁶ Preserved parts of the six earliest baldachin altarpieces are dated to the mid-13th century, the youngest ones – to the early 16th century. See the baldachin altarpiece with the figure of Madonna from St Andrew church in Weissenburg (ca. 1470), Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Monachium, inv. no. MA 1961.1–9; baldachin altarpiece with the figure of Madonna (ca. 1500) from an unidentified church in Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, inv. no. Pl.o.157; baldachin altarpiece of the Virgin Mary (1473–78) in the chapel of the Sacerdotal Fraternity at St Mary's Church in Gdańsk. See Adam S. Labuda, *Retabulum baldachimowe Panny Marii*, in *Malarstwo gotyckie w Polsce*, Adam S. Labuda, Krystyna Secomska, eds, vol. 2 (Warsaw, 2004), p. 167; Żakiewicz, op. cit., pp. 49–50; Peter Tängeberg, *Mittelalterliche Holzsulpturen und Altarschreine in Schweden. Studien zu Form, Material und Technik* (Stockholm, 1986), p. 130; Joseph Braun, *Der christliche Altar in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung: Die Ausstattung des Altars, Antependien, Velen, Leuchterbank, Stufen, Ciborium und Baldachin, Retabel, Reliquien – und Sakramentsaltar*, vol. 2 (München, 1924), pp. 318–410; Van der Ploeg, op. cit., pp. 103–21; Wojciech Marcinkowski, *Gotycka nastawa ołtarzowa u kresu rozwoju – Retabulum ze Ścinawy (1514) w kościele klasztornym w Mogile* (Kraków, 2006), p. 50.

⁷ Baldachin altarpieces were present in Silesia from the early 14th century to the late 15th century. Nuremberg altarpieces could have inspired the baldachin altarpieces from Wrocław. See Zofia Białłowicz-Krygierowa, *Studia nad snycerstwem XIV wieku w Polsce. Część I. Początki Śląskiej Tradycji Ołtarza Szafowego* (Warsaw–Poznań, 1981), p. 97; Grzegorz Świąliński, *Wrocław w przestrzeni gospodarczej Europy (XIII–XV wiek). Centrum czy peryferie?* (Wrocław, 2009), p. 413.

The Two-Tiered Structure

The goldsmith's altarpiece has two tiers – it consists of two corpuses put one over another, which results in a significant height of the work.⁸ Such an arrangement was conceived in order to place a three-figure sculptural group in each tier and give them one common frame. The distinctive division into two structures was not blurred. The three-figure arrangement of sculptural groups distinguishes the Wrocław altarpiece from other baldachin altarpieces, while it also connects it with altarpieces of yet another type.⁹ The two-tiered structure enabled the presentation of more statues in one altarpiece than it would have if it only had one level.

The following retables have been cited as a structural analogy to the Wrocław altarpiece: the 13th-century two-wing ivory baldachin altarpiece from Charles Stein collection,¹⁰ the 14th-century altarpiece in the Brandenburg cathedral called the *Bohemian Altarpiece* which could be identified as a baldachin altarpiece, with two tiers closed with separate pairs of wings (**fig. 2**),¹¹ and the *Tiefenbronn Altarpiece* by Hans Schüchlin of 1469 (here, however, the two-tiered structure is not so articulate due to the fact that the lower composition – the Pietà, and the upper one – the Descent from the Cross are linked with a wooden cross which passes through both spheres).¹²

The existence of analogies to the Wrocław altarpiece does not provide answers to the question where the original idea came from. Possibly, the model for monumental pieces could have been small-size, two-tiered ivory altarpieces, like the one from the Stein collection.¹³ A definite link to the Wrocław altarpiece of such a scarce number of works crafted in geographically distant places would be hard to prove. One could assume that the upper tier was added in 1473 to a one-tiered altarpiece with the figure of Christ. Before the refurbishing, it would have looked very similar to the altarpiece with Pietà from the St Elizabeth church in Wrocław (**fig. 3**). The foundation inscription: *hoc opus ornatum est*, suggesting an embellishment or renovation of the work,¹⁴ and not its construction or completion, would substantiate this theory.

Yet another curiosity in the goldsmiths' altarpiece are its two baldachins. The lower one does not vary in shape from baldachins in altarpieces from northern and central Europe, including Prussia and Silesia. It had to be modest and not unduly high in order not to cover the sculptures of the upper tier. By contrast, the elaborate and flamboyant form of the upper

⁸ Anna Żakiewicz stated that there could have been not enough space at the eastern wall of the chapel for a wide cupboard-like altar shrine and this is why the vertical solution was applied. This opinion does not seem convincing, however, since the eastern wall of the chapel is 5.2 m wide and the altarpiece with wings open is 4.5 m wide. There was enough space for a horizontally extended altar shrine. See Żakiewicz, op. cit., p. 64; Burgemeister, Grundmann, op. cit., pp. 4, 31.

⁹ Anna Ziomecka, "Śląskie retabula szafowe w drugiej połowie XV w. i na początku XVI w.," *Roczniki Sztuki Śląskiej* 10 (1976), p. 30.

¹⁰ *Catalogue des objets d'art, de haute curiosité et d'ameublement, composant l'importante collection de M. Ch. Stein...* [Vente à Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, les 10, 11, 12, 13 et 14 mai 1886. Commissaire-priseur: Me Paul Chevallier] (Paris, 1886), p. 9.

¹¹ Żakiewicz, op. cit., p. 52.

¹² Ziomecka, op. cit., p. 44.

¹³ An altarpiece with a predella and central part confined within separate pairs of wings can be found in Rostock – the Altarpiece of the Holy Cross, see Kathrin Wagner, *Rostocker Retabelkunst im 15. Jahrhundert* (Kiel, 2011), pp. 45–69.

¹⁴ See n. 3.

baldachin attracts attention. It was formed in this way to crown the piece with an element that could balance the lower, extensive part. Interestingly, its form could have also related to the ornate goldsmith objects crafted by the owners of the chapel: monstrances and various other liturgical items.

The open wings in baldachin altarpieces used to provide a multi-coloured complement to sculptures – which could also be observed from the side. When closed, wings formed a cuboid box around figures (**fig. 4**). In the case of the goldsmiths' altarpiece, the fact that figures were installed in corpuses of both tiers was exceptional. It is also important that there was a possibility of opening only one tier. Only the lower or only the upper sculptural group could be displayed, or both of them at a time, which multiplied options of displaying depictions during the liturgical year.¹⁵ No extant archival documents are known which would inform the ways of opening and closing the wings of the goldsmiths' altarpiece.

The Two-Tiered Structure and the Display of Old Figures

The figures of Christ of Pity and Saint Peter and Saint Paul were more than 70 years older than the new structure. It was not uncommon to have older figures installed inside newer baldachin altarpieces. In Wrocław, an example of this procedure can be provided by the aforementioned altarpiece from the St Elizabeth Church containing a much earlier stone Pietà sculpture.¹⁶ However, the fact that as many as three earlier sculptures made of various materials were installed in a younger baldachin altarpiece may well be unique.

The structure was intended to present two separate spaces to the two sculptural groups. Painted curtains separated the sacred sphere from the profane one. The baldachin altarpiece provided an appropriate frame for a three-dimensional, stone-carved old depiction of Christ, permitting it to be observed from three sides when the wings were open. The figure's plastic qualities and its dolourism would be difficult to exhibit in an altar shrine and even that would nevertheless require a very deep niche. The figure of Christ was at the same time the central point of the entire composition of the altarpiece and its principal ideological feature.

Iconography of the Altarpiece

The main feature of the goldsmiths' altarpiece was the stone figure of Christ of Pity. The idea of placing a depiction of the Man of Sorrows¹⁷ in the central section of the altarpiece probably emerged in the early 14th century in Italy. The greatest number of altarpieces whose main theme is this representation was preserved in Germany and Central Europe. The few baldachin altarpieces among these examples are mostly late works, from the late 15th and early 16th century (**fig. 5**).¹⁸

¹⁵ Marcinkowski, op. cit., p. 117.

¹⁶ A lost sculpture. About the altarpiece, see Dobrzeńiecki, *Malarstwo tablicowe...*, op. cit., pp. 226–28.

¹⁷ I alternatively use the terms: Christ of Pity, Man of Sorrows, and Vir Dolorum using them as synonyms.

¹⁸ Apart from the goldsmiths' altarpiece, there are few similarly constructed works. The lack of comparison material dictates the search for analogies among altar shrines. The altarpiece in Pulkau contains a three-figure group in the central part (Man of Sorrows flanked by Saint Bartholomew and Saint Sebastian). The compositional scheme of this part of the shrine is fundamentally similar to the solution in the goldsmiths' altarpiece's lower tier. A good comparison is provided by the altarpiece from Vika – see Tängeberg, op. cit., p. 130; Mitchell B. Merback,

Figures of the Virgin and Child or the Virgin alone (**fig. 6**)¹⁹ were mostly placed in the baldachin altarpieces, with saints occasionally depicted. Placing two saints next to each other or one assisted by angels under the baldachin was an exceptional solution. The Annunciation,²⁰ Crowning of Mary, Pietà or Saint Anne with the Virgin and Child²¹ were also rare. The depiction of Vir Dolorum in the centre of an altarpiece was meant to confirm the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist while assisting angels with the Instruments of Passion pointed at the successive stages of His Passion.

Flanking Christ in the goldsmiths' altarpiece are Saint Peter and Saint Paul²² – and this combination is very rare (**fig. 7**). Here Christ is presented as the Lawgiver, handing power to the apostles in the dissemination and preaching of the Word of God, administering the sacraments, governing the Church; in other words, we are contemplating a synthetic picture of the apostolic succession. The depiction of the Man of Sorrows was occasionally complemented with other persons, like the Virgin Mary, angels, Fathers of the Church or Saint John the Evangelist. They introduced new motifs to the Eucharist-focused and soteriological message.²³

On the wings of the goldsmiths' altarpiece, just behind Saint Peter and Saint Paul, full figures of Saint Bartholomew and Saint Lawrence, imitators of Christ in His Passion, were painted.²⁴ I should like to add that so far scholars discussing this altarpiece failed to notice that the two inscriptions encircling the figures of Saint Lawrence (*laurentium bonum opus operatus est qui per lignum illuminavit*) and Virgin with Child (*mater domini speciosa...*) are excerpts from the responsory and antiphon: *Levita Laurentius bonum opus operatus est, qui per signum crucis caecos illuminavit* and *O florens rosa mater domini speciosa o virgo mitis o fecundissima vitis clarior aurora pro nobis iugiter ora*.²⁵

The other figures on the obverses of the wings of the lower tier are Saint John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary with Child. The former held a lamb on his left arm – the Lamb of God, the symbol of the Eucharistic Sacrifice bringing Salvation. The Lamb was depicted alongside

"Fount of Mercy, City of Blood: Cultic Anti-Judaism and the Pulka Passion Altarpiece," *Art Bulletin*, vol. 87, no. 4 (2004), pp. 598–642; James H. Stubblebine, "Segna di Buonaventura and the Image of the Man of Sorrows," *Gesta*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1969), pp. 3–13.

¹⁹ Mary was enthroned mainly in early objects (13th–14th century), in the 15th century figures of erect Mary prevailed.

²⁰ E.g., the baldachin altarpiece from Cologne including the Annunciation scene, called "der kleine Dom" (1345–59), see Cornelia Ringer, "Der 'Kleine Dom'. Ein kölnischer Schnitzaltar um 1360," in *Entstehung...*, op. cit., pp. 205–14.

²¹ Żakiewicz, op. cit., p. 57.

²² Interestingly, they were not mentioned in any documents concerning the altar, see E. Hintze, op. cit., pp. 11–14.

²³ Grażyna Jurkowlaniec, *Chrystus Umęczony. Ikonografia w Polsce od XIII do XVI w.* (Warsaw, 2001), p. 165.

²⁴ An analogical situation could be observed in the altarpiece in Pulkau (Bartholomew and Sebastian) and in the central altarpiece at the Wawel Cathedral in Krakow (Adalbert and Stanislaus), see Merback, op. cit., pp. 598–642; Jerzy Gądomski, "Jeszcze o konstrukcji i treści późnogotyckiego retabulum ołtarza głównego w katedrze na Wawelu," *Ikonotheka*, 19 (2006), pp. 161–66.

²⁵ The responsory for Saint Lawrence was better known in Wrocław than the Marian antiphon. They can be found in the antiphonary from Wrocław of 1387 used in St Mary Magdalene church (*pars aestivalis* preserved in the University Library in Wrocław, inv. no. M 1244). It can be also found in the antiphonary from the Wrocław parish church of St Elizabeth (14th c.; BUWr R503). The antiphon *O florens rosa* appears more rarely than *Levita Laurentius* where it was placed under the feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary. I would like to thank Professor Paweł Gancarczyk for drawing my attention to the antiphonaries from Wrocław.

in a different manner – in the figure of Christ of Pity. Saint John the Baptist is the patron saint of Wrocław and therefore his presence in the altarpiece is natural and fully justified.²⁶

The combination of depictions of Christ of Pity and Child Jesus held by Mary could be interpreted as the beginning and conclusion of Jesus's mission on Earth – even if such a pairing happened only sporadically.²⁷ Moreover, in the case of the Wrocław altarpiece, one cannot really speak of a direct confrontation, since Mary and Child are depicted in the external wing, and not in the central part, directly beside the Man of Sorrows. She does not even turn to Him and acts as an independent depiction, which could as well function on its own. In the late 15th century, we observe the tendency of abandoning fixed iconographic programmes in altarpieces. In the altarpiece from Urdiala, for instance, Mary and Child accompanies Saint Olaf,²⁸ and in the aforementioned Pietà altarpiece from the St Elizabeth church, the Throne of Grace was painted on the uttermost left wing of the retable, and not in its central part.²⁹ The altarpiece from Wrocław followed the same tendency.

The upper tier of the altarpiece contains figures of Saint Eligius³⁰ and two angels, behind whom yet other angels were painted in the gesture of holding a draped curtain providing the background for the figures. The curtain is a widespread motif in Silesian altarpieces used to express the glorification of given figures.³¹ On the obverses of the wings of the altarpiece's upper tier, the Four Virgins are represented, whose depictions are often found in cupboard-like altar shrines in Silesia,³² yet much more rarely in baldachin altarpieces. Their representations reference *imitatio Christi* (through martyrdom), which links them to the figures of saints from the lower part, including Saint Eligius, the patron saint of goldsmiths. This unlikely configuration becomes comprehensible when it is understood that as a goldsmith, Eligius crafted engagement and wedding rings, symbols of the sacrament of marriage. The implied virginity of the groom and bride and the ideal of spiritual and corporeal chastity is the connecting element of the figures.³³

An essential complement of the altarpiece's programme were representations on the reverses of the wings: the Annunciation in the lower part and the Man of Sorrows (repeated, independently from the "old" sculptural figure) and Mary of Sorrows in the upper part. The painted Annunciation in this particular location is characteristic for Netherlandish and northern-German altarpieces.³⁴ Representations of Christ of Pity and Mary of Sorrows on

²⁶ A similar treatment of Saint John the Baptist can be found, e.g., in the initial from the Wrocław Antiphonary of 1387 (M. 1244, fol. 68r, initial) – see Alicja Karłowska-Kamzowa, *Malarstwo śląskie. 1250–1450* (Wrocław–Warsaw–Kraków–Gdańsk, 1979), fig. 32; Białowicz-Krygierowa, op. cit., p. 61.

²⁷ For instance, the Pahl altarpiece of 1396 (Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich, nr inw. MA2377.), see G. Jurkowlanec, *Chrystus Umęczony...*, op. cit., p. 126.

²⁸ A. Żakiewicz, op. cit., p. 67.

²⁹ B. Guldán-Klamecka, A. Ziomecka, op. cit., pp. 303–08.

³⁰ J. Braun, *Der christliche...*, op. cit., pp. 204–06.

³¹ Jacek Witkowski, *Gotycki ołtarz główny kościoła świętych Piotra i Pawła w Legnicy* (Legnica, 1997), p. 18.

³² *Malarstwo gotyckie w Polsce...*, op. cit., p. 163.

³³ Joseph Braun, "Eligius," in *Tracht und Attribute der Heiligen in der Deutschen Kunst* (Stuttgart, 1943), pp. 203–04; Louis Réau, "Eloi de Noyon," in *Iconographie de l'art chrétien* (Paris, 1955), p. 425. See Peter Christus's painting *Goldsmith in His Workshop* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 1975.1.110), commissioned by the goldsmiths' guild in Bruges. It featured an engaged couple choosing their wedding rings. The convex mirror alludes to the chastity of Mary and the young couple.

³⁴ Ziomecka, op. cit., p. 26.

the reverses of wings are often found. They were frequently presented together, for instance in the altarpieces in Brzeźce (4th quarter of the 15th century), in Czarnowąsy (the early 16th century)³⁵ and in the goldsmiths' altarpiece. In the general sense, the Annunciation scene alludes to the Incarnation which enabled the Sacrifice of Christ, depicted in the figure of the Man of Sorrows. The linking of depictions of Christ of Pity and Mary of Sorrows and angels holding the Instruments of Passion are Eucharistic and eschatological motifs intertwined. In such configurations, Mary plays the role of an intercessor, a *Co-Redemptrix*,³⁶ the one who contributed to the Salvation offered by Christ.³⁷

The permanently displayed element of the altarpiece was the predella, containing four reliquary busts of saints associated with Silesia and neighbouring lands: Jadwiga (Hedwig), Wenceslas, Elizabeth and Andrew who, as well as Mary Magdalene, was the patron saint of the city parish church. Finishing off the altarpiece with busts of the mentioned saints was validated by their historical relations with Silesia and their local cult.

The Goldsmiths' Altarpiece as a Frame for the "Old" Sculptures

The key feature of the altarpiece was the figure of the Man of Sorrows placed in the lower corpus, around whom the programme and the form of the entire work were themed. The extraordinary frame emphasized the special status of the sculpture resulting from its four qualities: its Eucharistic message, material, artistic quality and age. The exceptional status of the figure of Christ was strictly related or could be related to the accompanying cult, yet it is hard to discuss any definite external forms of veneration. We are not aware of the reactions of the community or the aura surrounding the figure³⁸. The lack of written sources is an obstacle, yet we are somehow recompensed by the altarpiece itself and the inserted figure – since, as Hans Belting wrote, the placement of an image in itself suggests its veneration.³⁹

The altarpiece with the exhibited figure of the Man of Sorrows functioned first of all as the background for Holy Mass celebrated on the altar table. In the 15th century the acknowledgment of the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine started again to be called into question.⁴⁰ The confirmation of the Presence of Christ in the sacrament of the altar was often looked for in His images put in altarpieces. The function of providing a "visual proof" was performed by the figure in the goldsmiths' altarpiece. During the elevation of the Blessed Sacrament, the worshippers could see the sculptural depiction behind the Host and the Chalice.⁴¹ With its naturalism,

³⁵ The altarpiece from Czarnowąsy was destroyed in a fire in 2005. See Jurkowlaniec, *Chrystus Umęczony...*, op. cit., p. 129.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 86–87.

³⁷ Some theologians of the 14th century, like the Marian theologian Engelbert of Admont, called Mary the indispensable participant in the Passion of Christ, "*individua socia passionis*," see Tadeusz Dobrzeński, "Gotycki obraz z Olbierzowic. Zagadnienia ikonografii i stylu," *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, 31 (1969), pp. 41–60.

³⁸ See Hans Belting, *Obraz i kult*, Tadeusz Zatorski, tr. (Gdańsk, 2010), p. 22.

³⁹ Belting, op. cit., p. 19.

⁴⁰ Johannes Betz, "Eucharistie," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 3 (Freiburg, 1959), pp. 1142–59.

⁴¹ See Michał Janocha, "Ewolucja liturgii mszalnej w XIV i XV w. w Polsce w świetle świadectw ikonograficznych," in *Sztuka około 1400. Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki*, vol. 2 (Poznań, 1995, Warsaw, 1996), pp. 297–315; on malpractices related with the visual adoration of the host in the moment of Elevation, see Caroline

its purpose was to substantiate the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist.

The sculpture was made of limestone, as stone, as opposed to wood in medieval perception, was a durable, passive and unchanging material, which earned it a connotation of timelessness.⁴² Wood, on the other hand, was thought to be alive and dynamic – many legends recounted cult figures made of wood changing into stone as a punishment when they had disappointed the hopes of their worshippers.⁴³ In the Bible, Christ was often referred to as “the rock” (Latin *petra*) or “the stone” (Latin *lapis*). Yet their understanding is different, metaphorical. Christ is the living stone, giving salvation to those who believe in Him. The synthesis of these comparisons was given by Saint Peter (1 Pet 2:4) who writes about Jesus as the stone rejected by the builders but chosen by God. The living stone becomes the cornerstone, the *lapis angularis* for the building of the living Church.⁴⁴

The relief in the portal of St Emmeram church in Regensburg depicting the Saviour was stone-carved. The *Maiestas Domini* is encircled by a particularizing inscription: *CUM PETRA SIT DICTUS STABILI P[ro] NUMINE | XPC ILLIVS | IN SAXO SATIS APTE CONSTAT IMAGO*⁴⁵ (“Since Christ is called the rock as the unchanging deity, his depiction is highly appropriately made in stone”). Christ is described by the inscription not as *lapis*, but as *petra*, the rock. Saint Paul explains the comparison citing, among other motifs, the Israelites whose thirst was quenched by water springing from the rock after Moses struck it with his cane: “For they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10:4). The rock, according to the Gospel of St Matthew (Mt 7:24–27) is a durable foundation upon which one should build one’s house. The relief may make an allusion to the *stabilitas* of the Church which will not be shaken as it is built upon many metaphorical rocks – Christ and apostles, among whom Peter is the most important one (Mt 16:18).⁴⁶

The stone figure of Christ from Wrocław could be interpreted along these lines.⁴⁷ It would be additionally suggested by the accompanying figures of Saint Peter and Saint Paul: wooden,

Walker Bynum, “The Blood of Christ in the later Middle Ages,” *Church History*, vol. 71, no. 4 (2002), p. 689; Peter Browe, *Die Eucharistie im Mittelalter: Liturgiehistorische Forschungen in kulturwissenschaftlicher Absicht*, Hubertus Lutterbach and Thomas Flammer, eds, vols 1, 6 (Berlin, 2011), p. 501. Vergessene Theologen [online], [retrieved: 7 July 2015], at: <<http://www.lit-verlag.de/isbn/3-8258-6233-6>>.

⁴² The stone was not necessarily perceived as dead or inanimate. It was considered by ancient Greeks and Romans a living matter. Cicero wrote, be it as a joke, that when Mucius Scaevola spoke, he made stones cry. See Joseph Conrad Plumpe, “VIVUM SAXUM, VIVI LAPIDES: The Concept of ‘Living Stone’ in Classical and Christian Antiquity,” *Traditio*, 1 (1943), pp. 6–7.

⁴³ Michael Pastoureau, *Średniowieczna gra symboli*, Hanna Igalson-Tygielska, tr. (Warsaw, 2006), pp. 92–93.

⁴⁴ “Ad quem accedentes, lapidem vivum, ab hominibus quidem reprobatur, coram Deo autem electum, pretiosum, 5 et ipsi tamquam lapides vivi aedificamini domus spiritalis” – see *Nova Vulgata Bibliorum Sacrorum Editio. Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II ratione habita iussu Pauli pp. VI recognita auctoritate Ioannis Pauli pp. II promulgata. Editio typica altera* [online], [retrieved: 14 July 2014], at: <http://www.vatican.va/archive/bible/nova_vulgata/documents/nova-vulgata_nt_epist-i-petri_lt.html>.

⁴⁵ Thomas Raff, *Die Sprache der Materialien: Anleitung zu einer Ikonologie der Werkstoffe* (Münster, 2008), p. 58.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59

⁴⁷ Mt 7:24: “Omnis ergo, qui audit verba mea haec et facit ea, assimilabitur viro sapienti, qui aedificavit domum suam supra petram. 25: Et descendit pluvia, et venerunt flumina, et flaverunt venti et irruerunt in domum illam, et non cecidit; fundata enim erat supra petram. 26: Et omnis, qui audit verba mea haec et non facit ea, similis erit viro stulto, qui aedificavit domum suam supra arenam.”; 1 Cor 10:2: “et omnes in Moyse baptizati sunt in nube et in mari 3 et omnes eandem escam spiritalem manducaverunt 4: et omnes eundem potum spiritalem biberunt; bibebant autem de spiritali, consequente eos, petra; petra autem erat Christus.” See *Nova Vulgata...*, op. cit. [online], [retrieved: 14 July 2014], at: <http://www.vatican.va/archive/bible/nova_vulgata/documents/nova-vulgata_nt_epist-i-corinthios_lt.html>.

yet totally polychromed – the basic material masked. At least some of the worshippers could symbolically understand the three figures as the triad of rocks upon which the building of the Church is raised. Apostles would be the pillars supporting the building of Ecclesia, guaranteeing, together with Christ, its *stabilitas*.

The limestone figure of the Man of Sorrows is polychromed. However, a vast part of the cloak was not covered by paint. Under the colour treatment (*Fassung*), the limestone lost its natural “stoniness.”⁴⁸ The monochromatic appearance of the material usually serves to enhance stereometry, materialness and volume of a figure. Polychromy brings out details of form or significant elements like attributes. In the case of the Wrocław figure of Christ in Pity, polychromy added some realism. Differences in materials between the stone figure of Christ and the totally polychromed wooden figures of apostles could not pass unnoticed. Paradoxically, the partial coverage of the stone exposed it. This treatment can be understood, on the one hand, as an intention to underline the uniqueness of the used material (pointing at its symbolical meaning), and on the other hand, as a way of harmonizing the figure of Christ with the remaining sections of the altarpiece in terms of colour.

Polychrome decoration endowed the figures of Christ and apostles with specific aesthetic qualities. The loincloth and the lining of the cloak of Christ were painted blue and the cloak was trimmed gold. The crown of thorns was painted green and the bare parts of the body were rendered in ochre tones and blushes in red tones. The hair and beard are brown and brown eyes have a black frame. The robes of the apostles are gold and blue, their hair and beards – black and brown and their faces were painted in pink and red tones. Owing to the polychrome decoration, the figures gained a more lively and realistic character – yet also more decorative.

The figure of Christ, sculpted with outstanding mastery, displayed traits of the so-called international Gothic style of about 1400 (“the Beautiful style”): the voluminously and softly draped folds of the cloak, the curve of the posture, subtle gestures of the right hand holding the cloak’s wing and the left hand pointing at the wound on the side. The loincloth is arranged in multiple, tiny, horizontal folds. The voluminous drapery contrasted with the bare torso, legs and face of Christ. His Body was rendered realistically, especially the face with half-open mouth. The accompanying figures of Peter and Paul were crafted not less meticulously, yet more conventionally. In their faces, there is no such power of expression and realism that emanates from the figure of the Man of Sorrows. The sculptor stressed the decorativeness of garments arranging into cascades of folds and creases that completely cover the bodies concealing their anatomy. The statues are one head lower than the figure of Christ, yet together they form a well-harmonized group.

The manner of aesthetic reception, reactions to beauty and artistry of the figures must, unfortunately, remain in the sphere of our speculations. Displaying traits of “the Beautiful style,” in the 15th century they could have been perceived as much as beautiful as archaic.⁴⁹ Contemporary viewers must have been aware of formal differences separating sculptures of around 1400 and those made in the second half of the 15th century. It is proven by the way these objects were handled: they were installed in new altarpieces and new figures were given historicizing forms. Sculptures which were contemporary to the viewers (from the 2nd half of the 15th c.) were criticized

⁴⁸ Barbara Lejman, “‘Sztuka, która zakrywa sztukę’ – kilka uwag na temat zasłaniania materiału sztafirunkiem,” in *Materiał rzeźby. Między techniką a semantyką*, Aleksandra Lipińska, ed. (Wrocław, 2009), p. 57.

⁴⁹ Bernhard Decker, “Reform within the cult image: the German winged altarpiece before the Reformation,” in *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, Peter Humfrey, Martin Kemp, eds (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 95–97.

multiple times for being naturalistic and excessively “mundane,” which was a disgrace towards the depicted saints.⁵⁰ However, the criticism was usually directed towards specific details (for instance, the women’s robes appearing too secular) and not towards overly realistic or insufficiently idealized faces. It cannot be stated with certainty that the aesthetic qualities of a statue determined its preservation and placement in a new altarpiece, since they often passed unnoticed. On the other hand, it would be hard to imagine that a new, richly decorated and expensive altarpiece would have been added a work perceived as ugly or unappealing to the chapel’s owners. The only exception to this would be a depiction worth preserving because of another asset – its age, which used to be as important a criterion as beauty.

As a rule, older works were looked at with more trust and respect than new ones.⁵¹ This principle was also valid with respect to paintings and sculptures, which is confirmed by the conflict between Canons of the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris and the Benedictine monks from Saint-Denis in 1440 regarding the authenticity of the skull of Saint Dionysius. In order to prove their respective claims, both parties of the conflict referred to old images of the patron saint of France.⁵² The older the picture, the truer and more faithful portrayal of a saint it was.⁵³

The manner in which the figures of Christ of Pity and apostles were handled should be compared to the analogical ways of treating works which were older or at least considered as such. An early and uncommon example was the story of the figure of Virgin and Child in the church of a Cistercian convent in Doberan. Installed in an altarpiece of about 1300, it was used as a ciborium.⁵⁴ The situation changed when half a century later the altarpiece was heightened through adding a lower row of panels being 62 cm high. The figure could not be used in its previous function in the same place, since the celebrant priest would not have been able to reach the vessel placed between Mary and Child. This is the reason why in the first quarter of the 15th century, the figure was installed in a suspended tabernacle surrounded by candles. Then, another 50 years later, in 1461, the figure was endowed with an indulgence, which leads to the belief that its primary function was changed or enriched with a new aspect: a sculpture used to store the Host became an object of veneration. In this case, the exceptional status of the figure was determined not as much as by its age as it was by the presence of the Host.⁵⁵

Statues displaying traits of “the Beautiful style,” carved in stone, were rather often placed, usually years after being made, inside wooden altarpieces. The phenomenon increased in the second half of the 15th century. Examples are numerous and worth citing. In the St Elizabeth

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

⁵¹ Contrary to the claim by James Samuel Preus that medieval theology contained ideas generating innovation, the stance of those scholars who underlined the mistrustful attitude of medieval people towards modernization and novelty seems wiser. Innovation was an unknown, potentially dangerous phenomenon severing links with the past and tradition. See Grzegorz Myśliwski, *Człowiek średniowiecza wobec czasu i przestrzeni (Mazowsze od XII do poł. XVI wieku)* (Warsaw, 1999), p. 395.

⁵² Hans Belting, *Obraz i kult. Historia obrazu przed epoką sztuki*, Tadeusz Zatorski, tr. (Gdańsk, 2010), p. 49.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 488; also document forgeries should be mostly explained by the intention to add the patina of age to a new legal status. See Myśliwski, *Człowiek średniowiecza...*, op. cit., p. 395; see also Donata Lutteroth, “Versuch einer Rekonstruktion der Predella des Mindener Hochaltaretabels,” in *Die Goldene Tafel aus dem Mindener Dom*, Hartmut Krohm, Robert Suckale, eds (Berlin, 1992), pp. 29–40.

⁵⁴ It was a common practice in the Cistercian Order, see Laabs, op. cit, p. 80.

⁵⁵ Grażyna Jurkowlaniec, “Dawność wizerunków jako kryterium ich oceny w późnym średniowieczu” in *Mowa i moc obrazów. Prace dedykowane Profesor Marii Poprzęckiej* (Warsaw, 2005), p. 57.

church in Wrocław, Pietà from the late 14th century was placed in the Corpus Christi altarpiece of 1470–1480⁵⁶. About 1518, the Altarpiece of the Crowning of Mary was accomplished for the St Elizabeth church in Marburg, while the limestone Pietà, dated to 1385, was set in the altarpiece's predella, forming an almost separate corpus. In St Mary's Church in Gdańsk, the Beautiful Madonna of 1425 was placed in the early 16th century in a wooden altarpiece with the scenes of the Passion in medallions⁵⁷ (fig. 8). Another example could be a Bohemian figure from the castle in Malbork (Marienburg), known only from bills issued by the maker of its frame.⁵⁸

These instances reveal the ways in which older works of art were handled in the Middle Ages as well as their adaptations and related changes of functions. They provide a background for the specificity of the history of the figure of Vir Dolorum and figures of apostles in the altarpiece of the goldsmiths' chapel. There is no other example of a sculptural group made of various materials installed in a younger baldachin altarpiece.

What was the reason behind the decision to build a new altarpiece and place the three older sculptures in it? Did the stylistical qualities of the figures described above and their recognition by the goldsmiths of Wrocław have any impact on considering the figures as old? It appears likely, but also the age of the figures could play a role, certified by human memory and a foundation inscription unknown to us. Paradoxically, the lack of knowledge of the exact age of the figures could support the belief that they were older than they really were. A figure portraying a saint appeared to gain further sanctity with age and consequently was considered more precious than newly executed figures. This conviction must have been widespread in the late Middle Ages if it was energetically and sharply criticized by theologians, for instance by Johann von Wünschelburg. This author, in one part of his treatise *De superstitionibus* (1444/1445) described a strange cult that arose around an old wooden cross, to which people pilgrimaged. The cult itself would not be noteworthy of blame if not for the fact that the cross was only venerated because of its age.⁵⁹

The setting of old figures in the new goldsmiths' altarpiece was just one aspect of the retrospective activity (meaning, the conscious revisiting of the past) that can be noticed in this work. It is traceable in the specific course of action which Belting called the quotation of the (historical) form.⁶⁰ It consisted in transferring a work whose forms were rooted in tradition ("the Beautiful style") to a new altarpiece. There may have been several reasons behind such a move, like wanting to spare the community a shock when confronted with stylistic innovations or to satisfy their conservative aesthetic preferences. The age of forms is characteristic not only of the figures of

⁵⁶ See Guldán-Klamecka, Ziomecka, op. cit., p. 307.

⁵⁷ Willy Drost, *Die Marienkirche in Danzig und ihre Kunstschatze* (Stuttgart, 1963), p. 90; see the Saint Elizabeth altarpiece from St Mary's Church in Gdańsk (stone sculptures c. 1390, wooden framework from the early 15th century), at present in the National Museum in Gdańsk – see Monika Jakubek-Raczkowska, *Plastyka średniowieczna od XIII do XVI wieku. Katalog wystawy stałej*, Muzeum Narodowe w Gdańsku (Gdańsk, 2007), pp. 68–71.

⁵⁸ A note mentioning a bill for the execution of its wooden frame has been preserved. *Das Marienburger Tresslerbuch der Jahre 1399–1409*, Erich Joachim ed. (Königsberg i. Pr., 1896), p. 62, verses 37–39, p. 63, verses 8–9, p. 64, verses 31–33; p. 82, verses 37–39 (1400) "item vor das holzgemechte zum bilde von Praga 5 scot dem tischer und eyn pulbt eyn wenig zu bessern, und ½ m. vor das nuwe pulbt," p. 62.

⁵⁹ Krzysztóf Bracha, "De ymaginibus sanctorum, quibus utitur ecclesia, et cruce" w traktacie *De superstitionibus* (1444/1445) Jana z Wünschelburga," in *Peregrinationes. Pielgrzymki w kulturze dawnej Europy*, Halina Manikowska, Hanna Zaremska, eds (Warsaw, 1995), p. 68. *Colloquia Mediaevalia Varsoviensia*, vol. 2.

⁶⁰ See Belting, op. cit., p. 496.

about 1400, yet also of the figures of Saint Eligius and angels displaying hardly legible features of the “jagged style”, that were several decades younger but only slightly stylistically different (fig. 9).

The Wrocław altarpiece can be therefore reckoned a distinctive and definite example of retrospective tendencies in medieval art⁶¹. There were other factors behind such decisions as the aforementioned examples show. Archaic forms of old works displayed useful and favourable qualities (pleasing appearance, miraculousness, and lack of controversial innovation). However, one can hardly determine when such a course of action was undertaken consciously and when it was nothing more than copying well-worn solutions or, finally, when the bottom line was only an economic calculation.

The Figure of Saint Eligius

When the new altarpiece was being constructed, the Wrocław goldsmiths’ guild made a wish to have in their chapel a depiction of the patron saint of their own craft. Saint Eligius must have been the patron saint of the altar in the goldsmiths’ chapel as early as 1446. He shared the *patrocinium* with Our Lady and Saint Bartholomew, Saint Margaret and Saint Dorothy.⁶² His depiction is likely to have already been in the old altarpiece. With time passing, patron saints of the altar multiplied. For instance, in 1468, two sainted virgins were added: Barbara and Catherine. At the same time, the document in which the two patron saints were mentioned, fails to cite Margaret and Dorothy, listed in former foundation inscriptions. Perhaps they were omitted in order to shorten the elaborate *patrocinium*. All that seems to indicate that when the new altarpiece was built in 1473, a decision was made to incorporate in its iconographical programme all its patron saints.

The figure of Saint Eligius was an unmistakable sign of the corporation that funded the altarpiece and owned the chapel. It was a regular practice of marking one’s possession. In altarpieces, these were mostly single depictions of patron saints of a confraternity, accompanying depictions of other themes which covered much vaster spaces of the altarpiece. Another variant of this practice was depicting multiple scenes from the life of the patron saint of a guild or fraternity, or a representation of a theological idea or sacrament to which the community related (e.g., the Eucharist).⁶³

⁶¹ Retrospective tendencies in Gothic art were noticed in regions neighbouring Silesia, eg. in Małopolska (Little Poland), see Wilfried Franzen, “Krakauer Retabelkunst um 1460–1470 im Kontext höfischer Repräsentation. Zur Ausstattung der westlichen Kapellenanlage der Krakauer Kathedrale,” in *Wokół Wita Stwosza. Materiały z międzynarodowej konferencji naukowej w Muzeum Narodowym w Krakowie, 19–22 maja 2005*, Dobrosława Horzela, Adam Organisty, eds (Krakow, 2006), pp. 89–97. *Studia i Materiały Naukowe Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie*; see Dobrosława Horzela, *Późnogotycka rzeźba drewniana w Małopolsce około 1440–1477*, Marek Walczak, ed., vol. 1 (Krakow, 2012), pp. 210–22. *Studia z Historii Sztuki Średniowiecznej Instytutu Historii Sztuki Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*.

⁶² Hintze, op. cit., p. 185.

⁶³ E.g., the Saint Reinhold pentaptych from St Reinhold confraternity’s chapel in St Mary’s Church in Gdańsk by Joos van Cleve and Jan de Molder. On the reverse of one of the wings, the figure of Saint Reinhold was shown as the patron saint of the confraternity. Beside him, on the other wing, Saint John the Baptist was depicted (patron saint of the chapel). Open wings displayed scenes from the Life of Christ and Mary – and not of the confraternity’s patron saint. Presently, the work is in the National Museum in Warsaw, inv. no. M.Ob.2190. Painters’ guilds most often placed the scene with Saint Luke painting Madonna and Child in the central part of their altarpieces. A similar work was commissioned in 1480 for an altar in the chapel of the Saint Luke Guild in the church in Wesel. At present, it is in the Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kunstgeschichte in Münster, inv. no. 62 Wkv, see *Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie. Arcydzieła Malarstwa*, Dorota Folga-Januszewska, ed. (Warsaw, 2004), p. 209. See also *Early Netherlandish Paintings. Rediscovery, Reception and Research*, Bernhard Ridderbos, Anne van Buren, Henk van Veen, eds. (Amsterdam, 2005), pp. 362–66.

The solution employed in the Wrocław goldsmiths' chapel, that is, a single depiction of their patron saint in the altarpiece, was the most common treatment, similar to the one employed in the Saint Reinhold altarpiece in Gdańsk (the wings did not feature scenes from the life of the patron saint in order to leave more space for other saints and the Life of Jesus). The figure of the goldsmiths' patron saint was lower in the rank than the figure of Vir Dolorum from the lower part. Saint Eligius portrayed in the altarpiece played the role of the guild's protector who guaranteed of the prosperity of the members in their earthly pursuits and helped them to reach Salvation. His veneration did not spread beyond the circle of the guild's community, yet his depiction was a necessary complement of the altarpiece, defining the identity of the commissioners and owners.

Summary

The Wrocław goldsmiths' altarpiece occupies an exceptional position in the group of baldachin altarpieces. It has a unique form: we know of no other baldachin altarpiece having two tiers, displaying such significant dimensions and elaborate forms of baldachins. Unique are three old sculptures made of varied materials gathered in the corpus of the new altarpiece. The main function of the altarpiece was to provide an adequate frame to the sculptures of Christ of Pity, Saint Peter and Saint Paul and Saint Eligius both when the wings were closed and open. The *dignitas* of the portrayals was emphasized by the presence of baldachins as well as by the system of opening of the winged two-tiered structure.

The altarpiece is dominated by the figure of Christ. The wings either tightly confined and screened it against the human eye or – when open – revealed a multi-coloured background filled with figures of the saintly acolytes. The altarpiece was distinguished for its two tiers, upper and lower; all panels of the wings presented a single erect figure. The scale of figures and their groups was alike in the entire structure. However, a dimensional hierarchy can be observed (from the two-dimensional paintings on the outside to the three-dimensional sculpture inside) as well as the principle of gradation from natural colours to the golden background (the figures on the reverses were shown against colourful brocade curtains, and on the obverses, visible after the wings were opened – against the shimmering golden background). The shine of the opened altarpiece was even more reinforced by gildings of the cloaks of sculpted figures crowded in the internal part of both levels of the altarpiece and by the gilded tracery of the baldachins. The wings of the two storeys could be folded and opened separately – one after another. Consequently, on display were either the figure of Saint Eligius from the upper part or the group of Vir Dolorum with figures of Saint Peter and Saint Paul from the lower part – both surrounded by figures of angels and saints. The opening of the upper level when the lower one was closed was proper for workdays as it showed the saints and angels around the figure of the guild's patron saint. The Christological-Eucharistic idea was only unveiled after the wings of the lower part were opened.

This special exhibition and veneration of the figure of Christ of Pity in the lower tier of the altarpiece resulted from three factors: its beauty radiating from archaic forms, its age and the Eucharistic contents. The figure of Christ visualized the truth about the Transsubstantiation taking place during Holy Mass celebrated on the altar. Its Eucharistic message was associated with eschatological ideas, which was of significance in a corporation's chapel and place of burial.

The Man of Sorrows created a coherent iconographic whole together with the depictions of the lower part, and the symbolism of the materials contributed to the integrity. Saint Peter and Saint Paul introduced additional contents to the figure of the Saviour. He was more than the

conqueror of death and Redeemer, present in the sacrament of the altar, but also the Lawgiver establishing the apostolic succession in the Church built upon the rock – Christ, strengthened by the power of faith of the apostles. The three-person group regulated the remaining depictions – the upper three-figure sculptural group with Saint Eligius and the painted portrayals of saints on the wings. Figures of martyrs present in the altarpiece carried the message of the imitation of Christ in Christian life. Saint John the Baptist who points at the Lamb recalls the Sacrifice of Christ, and Mary with Child – the Incarnation. The upper tier contained an autonomous group of representations. Saint Eligius was most of all the patron saint of the guild, and together with the surrounding sainted virgins, he highlighted the significance of chastity in sacraments to which goldsmiths provided liturgical objects (chalices, patenas, wedding rings, etc.). Depictions on the reverses of the wings – the Annunciation, Mary of Sorrows and Christ of Pity – prepared a fortunate summary of the leading motifs appearing in the programme of the altarpiece: the Incarnation, Redemption and Intercession. The reliquary busts, portraying locally venerated saints, were linked to other portrayed saints through the idea of *imitatio Christi*. The sacred relics helped to invoke the presence of the imitators of the Lord.

The form of the altarpiece and the inherent message of the work make a fascinating example of combining diverse structural and ideological solutions in one work. We are presented with an adaptation of a traditional structure of the baldachin altarpiece, not employed anywhere else on such a monumental scale, transformed into a two-tiered form. The choice of such a structure was prompted, among other factors, by the intention to exhibit both sculptural groups. In the Wrocław altarpiece, we observe on the one hand a tendency to remain with long-established solutions, and on the other hand an ability to adapt them to current needs. As well as an affinity with old sculptures which were most probably transferred from the previous altarpiece (or the old one may have been added an upper tier) and with old forms showing in the structure of the altarpiece, new tendencies are visible, like the application of the “jagged style” in the treatment of the cloaks of the virgin saints. Multiple contradictory tendencies are intertwined in this altarpiece, creating a coherent and fortunately assembled whole.

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