

| Two Trinity Panels from St Mary's Church in Gdańsk

The Trinity panel which until 1945 was placed on the altar attached to the *Georgenpfeiler* (St George's pillar), the south-western pillar in the northern transept of St Mary's Church in Gdańsk, is an impressive work (**fig. 1**). Measuring 168.5 × 162 cm including its frame,¹ it shows the mighty standing figure of God the Father who presents the Broken Body of His Son, depicted approximately at the same scale as the Father – this type of image is known as *Gnadenstuhl* (Throne of Mercy) or *Pitié-de-Nostre-Seigneur*. Christ seems lifeless, with his arms hanging down strengthless, and lines of drying blood are running down from the wounds of the Crucifixion. His feet are resting on a globe filled with a charming little landscape which sports hills, castles and cities, woods and a river with tiny boats under a starry sky. God the Father is dressed entirely in dark blue and wears a heavy golden crown resembling an emperor's crown on his grey-haired head, while the dove of the Holy Ghost is strangely perched on Christ's ear. Behind the Trinity, four small angels spread out a cloth of honour, a sumptuous brocade resembling Italian silk fabrics of the time around 1400. God and the lower angels are firmly standing on a lush meadow, and on the black background rows of golden stars are shimmering.

At the end of the Second World War, when the Red Army was approaching Gdańsk (Danzig) in early 1945, the panel was evacuated by the Church authorities under unknown circumstances and ultimately brought to Berlin. There it was hung in the domicile of the Protestant Consistory until 1972 when its precarious state of conservation prompted its placement in the climate-controlled storage of the Gemäldegalerie of the Staatliche Museen in West Berlin; this transfer was arranged by the Evangelische Kirche der Union (EKU), the legal successor of the Protestant Church in Prussia which had owned St Mary's Church in Gdańsk until 1945.² However, for the broader public as well as for the scholarly community the fate of the panel remained unknown, and it was only in 1999 that it was published as a depository at the Gallery in Berlin Dahlem.³ After undergoing a restoration accomplished in 2002,⁴ it has been perma-

¹ Painted surface 157 × 151 cm. Gemäldegalerie Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kat.-Nr. Dep. 25 FV EKV.

² The Consistory was in Jebenstrasse 1, Berlin West, near Zoo Station; it was brought to Dahlem on 14 February 1972.

³ Irene Geismeyer, *Dokumentation des Fremdbesitzes. Verzeichnis der in der Galerie eingelagerten Bilder unbekannter Herkunft*, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Berlin, 1999), pp. 92 ff., Dep. 25 FV EKV. Adam S. Labuda, "Die Trinität schlummert im Depot. Altarbild aus der Danziger Marienkirche in der Berliner Gemäldegalerie entdeckt," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 138 (16.4.2000), p. 43; Ulrich Clewing, "Tauben im Niemandsland. Ein Danziger Altarbild erfreut die Forschung und regt zu unnötigen Fragen über Beutekunst an," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 171 (26.7.2000), Berliner Seiten, p. 1.

⁴ Carried out by Helen Smith in the workshop of the Gemäldegalerie, report and documentation by Smith, 3 May 2002, in the gallery files.

nently on view, first in the study gallery of the new Gemäldegalerie, located at the *Kulturforum* in Berlin-Tiergarten, then in the Bode-Museum from 2006 to 2009, and from 2009 on again in the Gemäldegalerie, now in the major gallery where it is still on display along with other large-format masterworks of the early 15th century.

In the Church at Gdańsk, the panel is first recorded in 1843 when it was placed on the altar at the St George's Pillar (**fig. 2**)⁵ on top of a predella which also has left the devastated city in 1945 and today adorns the main altar of St John's Church in Berlin-Moabit (**fig. 3**), likewise as a loan of the EKV. Yet was that location in St Mary's the original one for the *Trinity*? And was the work commissioned by the prestigious brotherhood of St George (*Georgsbruderschaft*), who owned the altar at the pillar, or did it at least pass into their possession already in late medieval times? Likewise important seems the question of whether the work is a product of a local workshop or whether it was imported from the west, more precisely from the Netherlands – or might its painter have been a master from the Low Countries who had moved to the Hanseatic city? None of these questions has been convincingly settled so far, and especially the last one was answered in quite different ways in scholarship.⁶ For instance, on a study day on the occasion of the Master of Flémalle-Rogier van der Weyden-exhibition at the Gemäldegalerie (2009), which included the Gdańsk *Trinity* as a comparison piece, there was astonishingly little agreement among a group of international scholars as to the origin of the panel. At that time, I had labelled the work as southern Netherlandish, and while a few colleagues agreed, others suggested Westphalia or Austria or, as the obvious possibility, Northern Germany or Gdańsk itself as the region or place of origin. However, these latter suggestions were only based on the provenance of the work, not on any stylistic or technical comparisons. In earlier times, the painting had already been attributed to a Bohemian painter,⁷ and, even with a certain success, to a follower of the so-called Master Francke of Hamburg.⁸ On the

⁵ Theodor Hirsch, *Die Oberpfarrkirche von Danzig in ihren Denkmälern und in ihren Beziehungen zum kirchlichen Leben Danzigs überhaupt dargestellt*, vol. 1 (Gdańsk, 1843), p. 430.

⁶ Most important: Gregor Brutzer, *Mittelalterliche Malerei im Ordenslande Preußen. 1. Westpreußen* (Gdańsk, 1936), pp. 69–73, cat. no. 13; Georg Troescher, "Die 'Pitié-de-Nostre-Seigneur' oder Notgottes," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch*, no. 9 (1936), pp. 148–68, esp. pp. 154 ff.; Alfred Stange, *Deutsche Malerei der Gotik*, vol. 3: *Norddeutschland in der Zeit von 1400 bis 1450* (Berlin, 1938), pp. 234 ff.; Willi Drost, *Danziger Malerei vom Mittelalter bis zum Ende des Barock. Ein Beitrag zur Begründung der Strukturforschung in der Kunstgeschichte* (Berlin–Leipzig, 1938), pp. 36–42; Willi Drost, *Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Danzig*, vol. 4: *Die Marienkirche und ihre Kunstschatze* (Stuttgart, 1964), pp. 133 ff.; Adam S. Labuda, "Dwa obrazy Trójcy Świętej z kościoła Mariackiego w Gdańsku. Stan i perspektywy badań," in *Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, Sprawozdania*, no. 95 (Poznań, 1978), pp. 78–81, 154–157 (English resumé: "Two Trinity Panels in St. Mary Church at Gdansk. The Present State of Investigation and Future Perspectives"); id., "Die 'Pitié-de-Nostre-Seigneur' der St.-Georgsbruderschaft in der Danziger Marienkirche. Untersuchungen zu den Quellen des Bildtypus und der Herkunft des Malers," in *Künstlerische Wechselwirkungen in Mitteleuropa*, Jiří Fajt, Markus Hörsch, eds (Ostfildern, 2005), pp. 161–81; Antje-Fee Köllermann, "Netherlandish Painting before the Master of Flémalle and Rogier van der Weyden," in *The Master of Flémalle and Rogier van der Weyden*, Stephan Kemperdick, Jochen Sander, eds, exh. cat., Städel Museum, Frankfurt; Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, 2008–9 (Stuttgart, 2008), pp. 39–51, esp. pp. 47 ff.; Antoni Ziemia, *Sztuka Burgundii i Niderlandów 1380–1500*, vol. 2: *Niderlandzkie malarstwo tablicowe 1430–1500* (Warsaw, 2011), pp. 149–53; Adam S. Labuda, "O retabulum Trójcy Świętej bractwa św. Jerzego w kościele Mariackim w Gdańsku," *Porta Aurea. Rocznik Instytutu Historii Sztuki Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego*, no. 11 (2012), pp. 20–66.

⁷ Grete Dixel, *Ostdeutsche Tafelmalerei in der letzten Hälfte des 14. und dem ersten Drittel des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Gdańsk, 1912), p. 12.

⁸ Hermann Ehrenberg, *Deutsche Malerei und Plastik von 1350 bis 1450. Neue Beiträge zu ihrer Kenntnis aus den ehemaligen deutschen Ordensgebieten* (Bonn–Leipzig, 1920), pp. 84–86; Stange, *Deutsche Malerei der Gotik...*, op. cit., pp. 234–36; Thomas Puttfarken et al., *Meister Francke und die Kunst um 1400*, exh. cat. Hamburger Kunsthalle, 1969 (Hamburg, 1969), p. 65, cat. no. 22.

whole however, research on the *Trinity* has been limited, especially after the war, when it was inaccessible for more than 55 years.

In this essay, I would like to approach the work from a different angle, one that was hitherto more or less neglected, namely the reconstruction of its original structure. At first glance, the work seems to be complete, the more so as its tooled and gilded frame obviously dates from the 15th century. However, even though the frame is old, it is not the original one: the painted surface preserves barbs all around, but they do not correspond to the inner edge of the present frame.⁹ Thus it seems that the frame of the painting was exchanged not very long after its creation. Accordingly, the lack of traces of hinges on the present frame does not prove that the panel never had wings. Indeed, there is every reason to believe the contrary. The crucial evidence comes from the comparison with another, very similar version of the Trinity of virtually identical size which likewise comes from St Mary's Church in Gdańsk (fig. 4). It was once the altarpiece in the Chapel of the Trinity owned by the shoemaker's guild, and was transferred to the National Museum in Warsaw after 1945.¹⁰ Both paintings of the Trinity are so close to each other in terms of composition and motifs that one of them must be a copy of the other. In the 19th and early 20th century, the present-day Warsaw panel was mostly seen as the model for the one from the St George's pillar,¹¹ while in more recent times scholars almost unanimously assume the opposite. The *Trinity* of the shoemakers was equipped with wings, painted in the same style as the central panel (fig. 5). Each showed a large standing angel holding the *Arma Christi*, the instruments of the passion, on its inner side; unfortunately, both wings were lost at the end of the war and are only documented in photos of rather poor quality from the early 20th century. The *Arma Christi* are a perfect complement for the Trinity, especially as Christ is lacking the crown of thorns here – a remarkable fact that apparently went unnoticed so far. Nevertheless, the thorny crown is essential to the Broken Body, the figure of Christ in a *Pitié-de-Nostre-Seigneur*, and we can see it in virtually every image of this type. In the shoemaker's triptych, the crown was depicted on the right wing, placed on top of the Cross that was held, together with other *Arma*, by one of the large Angels. Yet the crown of thorns is also absent from the head of Christ in the Berlin *Trinity*,¹² and from this fact we can safely conclude that this work must likewise have had wings showing it among the other *Arma Christi*. In all probability, these long-lost wings looked much like those of the shoemaker's triptych.

In contrast, the preserved predellas of both Trinity panels did not belong to the works that stood upon them before 1945. The one with Christ and the Apostles formerly supporting the shoemakers' triptych (today placed in a chapel in the choir of St Mary's) is stylistically different, and clearly inferior, and probably somewhat younger than the triptych. That the predella which is today in Berlin-Moabit differs stylistically from the *Trinity* once on top of it was already remarked in 1843 by Theodor Hirsch (1806–81) who assumed that this predella was the only remnant of the original altarpiece of the altar at the St George's pillar, while the

⁹ Report and documentation by Helen Smith, 3 May 2002, in the gallery files, p. 3. I heartily thank Helen Smith, Berlin, for further information.

¹⁰ Drost, *Danziger Malerei...*, op. cit., pp. 41 ff.; Labuda, "Die 'Pitié-de-Nostre-Seigneur'...", op. cit., pp. 163, 165; Ziemia, *Sztuka Burgundii...*, op. cit., pp. 150 ff.; *National Museum in Warsaw. The Gallery of Medieval Art* (Warsaw, 2017), pp. 263–65, cat. no. IV.15 [Małgorzata Kochanowska].

¹¹ Hirsch, p. 430; Brutzer, op. cit., p. 73.

¹² Both in the underdrawing and the painted surface.

panel today in Berlin was, in his eyes, of a later date.¹³ The differences are clear and they apply to the proportions and types of the figures, to colour scheme and painting style in general. Further, the iconography of this predella would be a strange repetition of the main panel as it also depicts the Trinity – albeit of a different type, traditionally found in Germanic countries, with a small figure of Christ on the Cross. This Throne of Mercy is flanked by St George and another knightly saint, usually identified as St Olaf; yet as he has no king's crown, but a silver cross in red as his coat of arms, he more likely represents St Victor.¹⁴ Furthermore, this predella forms a kind of stable chest that is 30 cm deep, and this might suggest that it was originally made to support an altarpiece with a carved shrine instead of just a flat painting – in fact, in Gdańsk and in St Mary's church, retables with carved figures in a central shrine, rather than completely painted ones, were the rule.

There is also a painting on the reverse of the Berlin Trinity panel that shows two standing knights: King Arthur and a Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, set against a red background with floral ornaments (**fig. 6**). Numerous losses and, most of all, a reddish overpainting nearly obliterate the two figures; this red paint was applied in a rather unprofessional and uneven way, leaving uncovered both the centre of the panel and a horizontal strip where a stabilizing cross-beam had been attached until mid-20th century. Obviously, somebody tried to make the two figures disappear while the panel was fixed to one side of the octagonal St George's pillar (**fig. 7**) and only the lateral portions of its rear side could be reached with a brush – indeed, the overpainting must have been applied exactly in this location for the central section of the panel that is not covered with red corresponds roughly with the width of one side of the pillar. With such a placement of the panel, the uniform paint coating on its back certainly made sense as the figures would have been hidden in large portions by the pillar anyway.

In Adam Labuda's opinion, the paintings on the back of the panel and on the predella were added by the same workshop; he understands both as later additions to the iconography of the main image, executed on the order of the knightly Brotherhood of St George.¹⁵ The workshop responsible would have been different from the one that had created the *Trinity* itself. However, the figures on the said predella and on the back of the panel diverge decidedly in their proportions – the heads are much larger with respect to the delicate bodies of the knights on the predella (**fig. 3**) – and, as far as a judgement is possible, in facial types.

In IRR, the overpainted figure of King Arthur (**fig. 8**) is better recognizable than to the naked eye, and what we find is the same style as in the *Trinity* painting, albeit executed in a much simpler fashion; this latter phenomenon can regularly be found on painted back sides of altarpieces and is due to the subordinate status of those paintings. In a sense, the two knightly figures on the back are rather drawings than paintings, with black lines defining not only outlines but also individual folds and other details. Nevertheless, there are the same long, elegant lines, sometimes ending in a small hook, indicating folds in the underdrawing of the obverse and in the paint layer of the reverse. When we compare the heads of God the Father from the Trinity and of King Arthur (**fig. 9**), we find the same proportions and similar features, the same formulas for eyes and for the strains of the beard; indeed, the undulating

¹³ Hirsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 430 ff.

¹⁴ These are the usual arms of the saintly knight Victor, shown, e.g., in Hermen Rode's Tallinn Altarpiece of 1481 or in the wing with the Christian Knights of the Van Eyck-brother's Ghent Altarpiece of 1432.

¹⁵ Labuda, "Die 'Pitié-de-Nostre-Seigneur'...", *op. cit.*, p. 180, n. 62; Labuda, "O retabulum 'Trójcy Świętej'...", *op. cit.*, pp. 37–41. I heartily thank Adela Kutschke, Frankfurt am Main, for her help with Labuda's Polish text.

lines in the underdrawing of God's beard and in Arthur's are almost identical. Further, the curls on Arthur's head match those in the underdrawing of the angel at the lower left of the Trinity painting (fig. 18) perfectly. The IRR of Arthur's face also reveals its high quality which is not inferior to the picture on the other side of the panel. The features are assuredly drawn, and volume and perspective of the head in three-quarter profile are well rendered. A final proof of the identity of hands – or at least workshops – is given by the large crowns of God and Arthur (fig. 9): Individual forms differ but slightly, and the way they are drawn in black lines is virtually identical; suffice it to compare the lines that run from the contour of the outermost edges of the crowns to the bulging centres of the leaves as well as the thinner, s-shaped lines to their sides. No doubt, the figures on the rear side of the panel were painted at the same time as the Trinity.

Thus we can reconstruct a triptych with the *Trinity* as its centre panel and, in all probability, angels with the *Arma Christi* on the inside of the wings. The back side of the *Trinity* was painted from the start with the two knights, while we do not have any information about the outsides of the lost wings. When open, this triptych would have measured c. 3.3 m in width.

As Labuda has remarked, the painted figures on the back of the panel rule out the possibility that the *Trinity* was originally destined for the altar at the St George's pillar. Instead, he suggests the chapel of the St George brotherhood, immediately west of said pillar,¹⁶ as its first destination, a chapel that seems to have been in use by 1403.¹⁷ From there it would have been transferred, according to Labuda, to the altar at the pillar around 1454 or shortly afterwards, that is at a time when the figure of the Teutonic knight on the back was no longer desirable for political reasons. However, it seems rather difficult to accommodate the reconstructed triptych in a free-standing position somewhere in the walled-in portion of that chapel. The altar of the brotherhood's chapel obviously was the one at the pillar – in the correct placement to the east – and there is no good reason to assume that their altar had first been placed somewhere else, at least after the pillar was erected which must have been the case by c. 1430,¹⁸ i.e., around the time when the *Trinity* was painted. Instead, the predella with the Throne of Mercy and Sts George and Victor (?) in all probability belonged to the former altarpiece of the brotherhood. It shows the corporation's patron saint, St George, on the prominent dexter side of God, and on the sinister side a second saintly knight, and its width exactly matched that of the mensa of the altar at the pillar (fig. 7).¹⁹ Given its style, this predella must also have been painted roughly around 1430, i.e. around the time the altar at the pillar would have been ready for use. These observations suggest that in the second quarter of the 15th century, the brotherhood placed its altar at the pillar and adorned it with a retable, but that work was not identical with the Trinity panel now in Berlin. As indeed, Hirsch already assumed more than 170 years ago, the predella today in Moabit is in all likelihood the only surviving fragment of the original altarpiece of the St George brotherhood in St Mary's.

These considerations are further corroborated by historical evidence. In 1473, Hans Memling's splendid triptych of the *Last Judgement*, captured a few years earlier by the Gdańsk captain Paul Benecke from an Italian galley, was placed on the altar at St George's pillar by two

¹⁶ Labuda, "O retabulum 'Trójcy Świętej'...", op. cit., pp. 47 ff.

¹⁷ Drost, *Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Danzig*..., op. cit., p. 51.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The predella is 2.08 m wide at the bottom and 0.72 m high; as photos taken from behind the pillar show, this predella was flush with the mensa.

members of the St George confraternity, obviously as a replacement of the former retable.²⁰ It has been suggested that the admired Netherlandish work was hung above the Trinity panel,²¹ but that is in no way confirmed by written and visual sources. Around 1550, Georg Melmann wrote that the Last Judgement is placed on the altar of St George,²² and this description can hardly refer to a triptych set high up on a pillar above another altarpiece. It is true that Hirsch in 1843 suspected that the Netherlandish work had been placed above an altarpiece already there – not the Trinity panel! – but he could never have seen such an arrangement for he was just one year old when the *Memling* was brought to Paris. More decisive, however, is a painting of c. 1635 by Bartholomäus Milwitz (**fig. 10**) that gives a view past the pillar with Memling's work towards the east:²³ the Netherlandish triptych obviously rests on the well-known predella – which appears too low in the painting – with the brass chandeliers that were preserved until 1945 attached to its edges. Above the *Memling*, there is a smaller dark painting, but this cannot be the Trinity panel as neither its size or proportions nor its representation correspond (as far as can be recognized, there are seated figures); maybe it was one of the many epitaphs from the 16th century in the church. Memling's triptych must have remained where it was placed in 1473 for a very long time. In 1781 the painter Daniel Chodowiecki remarked that its details are not easy to see for the work is hanging high at the pillar, nearly six feet (c. 1.8 m) above ground.²⁴ If we add the height of the altar with a step, c. 1–1.1 m, to the 0.7 m of the predella, we reach indeed a height of c. 1.8 m for the lower edge of Memling's triptych. No doubt, the latter was placed right on top of the St George-predella, and this would have been its location from 1473 on. In 1807, the *Memling* was looted on the order of Vivant Denon and brought to Paris, only to return to St Mary's church in 1816. Back in Gdańsk, however, it was not placed in its old location but in the chapel of St Dorothy, and from 1861 on in the chapel of St Barbara.²⁵

Pre-war photos of the church's interior show the well-known arrangement with the present-day Berlin *Trinity* set on the predella at the St George's pillar (figs 2, 11), a placement that is, we remember, documented for the first time in 1843. These photos also show an interesting detail which has not received any attention so far. Simulated pannellings with curtains and above them scenes from the Old Testament in ornamental frames were painted on all eight sides of the pillars of the northern transept. Surprisingly, these decorations also continued behind the Trinity panel. In the photos (**fig. 11**), one of the ornamental frames sticks out above the panel's upper edge. Today all of these paintings on the pillars have disappeared under an overall whitewash. Their medium height must have been around 3 m above ground, and it is

²⁰ Jan Białostocki, *Les Musées de Pologne (Gdańsk, Krakow, Warszawa)* (Brussels, 1966), pp. 55–122, no. 120. *Les Primitifs flamands*, I. 9.

²¹ Assumed by Drost, *Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Danzig*..., op. cit., p. 134; Labuda, "O retabulum 'Trójcy Świętej'...", op. cit., pp. 46–48; with caution considered by Gerhard Weilandt, "Transferkultur – Danzig im Spätmittelalter", in Wolfgang Augustyn, Ulrich Söding, eds, *Original – Kopie – Zitat. Kunstwerke des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit: Wege der Aneignung – Formen der Überlieferung* (Passau, 2010), pp. 73–100, esp. pp. 82 ff.

²² "die Tafel die auf S. Georgens-Altar stehet [...]" – cited after Białostocki, op. cit., pp. 106 ff.

²³ Today in the St George Chapel in St Mary's Church Gdańsk, it was only purchased in 2008 and published in 2009. See Magdalena Marcinkowska, "Obraz w Obrazie, czyli tajemnicze dzieło z Memlingiem w tle," *Cenne Bezcenne Utraczone*, no. 4(61) (2009). (for the image see <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Milwitz_St._Mary%27s_Church_in_Gda%C5%84sk.jpg>, [retrieved: 20 April 2018]). I heartily thank Olga Broniewska, Gdańsk, for pointing out this work to me.

²⁴ Białostocki, op. cit., p. 114.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

difficult to judge them stylistically; the frames appear to be late rococo, the pictures look classicistic. In any case it is obvious that the scenes on the St George's pillar could not have been painted when an object of a certain height was standing on the altar, and thus they could only have been made while neither the *Memling* nor the *Trinity* was placed there. That leaves only the time span between 1807, when the former was taken away, and 1843, when the latter was in place at the pillar. Even if their frames looked somewhat old-fashioned for the time, the murals were no doubt painted in the early 19th century, perhaps shortly after the *Memling* was removed. If these conclusions are correct, the *Trinity* panel could not have been placed on the altar when or immediately after Memling's triptych was taken from the church in 1807. Thus it can be excluded that the *Trinity* had simply been left on the altar in 1473 and was hidden all the time behind Memling's panel.²⁶ Apart from that, it would hardly have corresponded to late-medieval practise to hide a well-painted altarpiece behind another one instead of re-using it somewhere else. To sum up the evidence: it seems unlikely that the panel today in Berlin had anything to do with the altar of the brotherhood of St George in St Mary's in medieval times.

There are very few indications of the provenance of the former triptych around the *Trinity*. Surely unusual are the figures on its back side, both with respect to their placement and their iconography. King Arthur clearly refers to the *Artushof*, an institution in Gdańsk and in other Prussian cities where the social elite would meet and feast and where also a number of brotherhoods felt at home, among them in the first place the confraternity of St George.²⁷ Highly unusual also, is the depiction of a Grand Master of the Teutonic Order; it decidedly suggests a member of that order or a positive follower of it as the commissioner of the work, and that person or corporation must also have been linked to the *Artushof*. During the first half of the 15th century, the role of the Teutonic Order in the city of Gdańsk was unstable and changed considerably; the order had followers among the ruling class as well as opponents. Finally in 1454 the conflict escalated and the order was driven out of the town; their castle and the surrounding quarter, the *Neustadt*, were completely destroyed. It certainly is conceivable that the *Trinity*-altarpiece was originally destined for a location there, be it a chapel in the castle or a church of the *Neustadt*. It might have been taken as booty and brought to another location like a convent, a church or even the *Artushof*. It must have been on this occasion that the work lost its wings and was provided with a new frame, although the reasons for this remain obscure. Maybe the original frame and wings were broken when the panel was pulled out of its original location – but this has to remain pure speculation. However, one thing is clear: the figure of the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order would no longer have been acceptable in the city after 1454. Its face seems to be more damaged than that of King Arthur and might have been deliberately mutilated around the time, while the partial red overpainting, as we have seen, was probably only applied in the 19th century. Obviously there was no need to cover or destroy the painting on the back completely, and therefore it seems likely that the panel was installed in a place where the back side was no longer visible. Yet wherever the panel might have been placed for nearly four centuries, it was probably not very long before 1843 that it ended up on the altar at the St George's pillar in St Mary's church.

The most debated question around the *Trinity*, however, remains unanswered by the above considerations – the question of its place of origin. However, a small step to approach the

²⁶ A possibility that Weilandt mentions (Weilandt, op. cit., p. 83).

²⁷ Theodor Hirsch, "Über den Ursprung der preußischen Artushöfe," *Zeitschrift für Preußische Geschichte und Landeskunde*, no. 1 (1864), pp. 3–32.

problem has already been made: as we have seen, the figures on the back of the panel are not later additions to an already existing work that would have been imported from somewhere else. Instead, the fact that they were painted in the same workshop as the Trinity itself might speak in favour of a local origin of the work. On the other hand, the image of the *Pitié-de-Nostre-Seigneur* is no doubt intimately connected to Netherlandish and so-called Franco-Flemish art. This type with the Broken Body, where Christ is depicted at the same scale as the Father, can be found in the West from around 1400 on, and it differs fundamentally from the type common in Central Europe which is represented by the Gdańsk predella from the St George's pillar. Troescher and Labuda have made comparisons with a number of Western examples, beginning with the *Grande Pietà Ronde* in the Louvre, attributed to Jean Malouel and dated before 1404.²⁸ There, the pose of the dead body comes close to the Gdańsk Trinity. Further, Labuda's comparison of the angels in another work from the same circle, the *Virgin with the Butterflies* in Berlin, probably painted by Malouel or his successor Henri Bellechose around 1415,²⁹ and the *Trinity* is convincing: while their execution differs markedly, the type and features of the faces are indeed related. However, at the same time the *Trinity* painting appears less soft in the individual shapes; the figures are heavier, drapery folds more voluminous and more angular. Basically, the work from Gdańsk looks more modern in comparison to Malouel, but more old-fashioned when compared to paintings from the Master of Flémalle and Rogier van der Weyden-group, besides Jan van Eyck, the most advanced school of painting in Europe north of the Alps in the second quarter of the 15th century. In the Flémalle *Trinity* of c. 1430 in Frankfurt,³⁰ a sculptural group simulated in grisaille painting, the Father is likewise shown standing; the head of the dead son hangs down in a fashion similar to that in the painting from St Mary's, and in both pictures the muscles of neck and the collarbone are articulated. However, the Netherlandish painting appears more convincing, more anatomical – even if it is in fact not correct in this respect. Yet the crucial difference to the Frankfurt painting and works from the Rogier van der Weyden-Master of Flémalle-group in general lies in the absence of a realistic rendering of the effects of light and in the lack of a differentiation of materials and surfaces in the Gdańsk work. Surely it still belongs to a slightly older tradition, and even if it cannot be excluded that inspirations from the most advanced workshops of the time, like the Flémalle-van der Weyden one, played a role here, the responsible painter was not a proponent of the avant-garde of the day. This is not surprising, however, as only very few painters in Europe and the Netherlands themselves started to learn the lessons from the ground-breaking artists in the course of the 1430s. As an artist working in the 1420s or 1430s, the master of the *Trinity* still presents himself as a very competent and comparatively up-to-date painter. That his work is not on the same level as the outstanding masterpieces of the day should not prevent us from

²⁸ Troescher, "Die 'Pitié-de-Nostre-Seigneur'...", op. cit., p. 155; Labuda, "O retabulum 'Trójcy Świętej'...", op. cit., pp. 26–33; Labuda, "Die 'Pitié-de-Nostre-Seigneur'...", op. cit., pp. 166–70. On the *Malouel* see last Pieter Roelofs et al., *Johan Maelwael. Nijmegen – Paris – Dijon. Art around 1400*, exh. cat., Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2017 (Amsterdam, 2017), pp. 112–15, cat. no. 17 [Dominique Thiébaud].

²⁹ See *The Road to Van Eyck*, Stephan Kemperdick, Friso Lammertse, eds, exh. cat., Museum Boijmans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 2012–2013 (Rotterdam, 2012), pp. 128 ff., cat. no. 6 [Katrin Dyballa].

³⁰ Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main; see *The Master of Flémalle and Rogier van der Weyden*, Stephan Kemperdick, Jochen Sander, eds, exh. cat., Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main; Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, 2008–9 (Berlin–Stuttgart, 2008), pp. 206–14, cat. no. 6 (Jochen Sander). For the comparisons see Troescher, "Die 'Pitié-de-Nostre-Seigneur'...", op. cit.; Labuda, "Die 'Pitié-de-Nostre-Seigneur'...", op. cit., pp. 166–74; Ziembka, *Sztuka Burgundii...*, op. cit., pp. 152 ff.; Labuda, "O retabulum...", op. cit., pp. 24–28.

acknowledging the high artistic qualities of the panel and the strong impact it still makes if one is standing in front of it today in the Gemäldegalerie.

Such a position in the history of European painting is imaginable in the Netherlands as well as in other countries. A number of authors, among them myself,³¹ have assumed that the painter was indeed active in the Low Countries, maybe in Bruges, and accordingly that his panel was imported to the Baltic coast. I have to admit, however, that this possibility now seems unlikely to me. Despite the similarities of motifs and facial types just mentioned, the work as a whole does decidedly not resemble any Netherlandish or Franco-Flemish work known from the time, be it a highly refined one like the paintings of the Malouel-group or a coarser one like for example the *Calvary of the Tanners* in Bruges from around 1415–20 or,³² for instance, a work that might be from approximately the same time and that likewise was not touched by the most advanced movements of the day, the *Last Judgement* from Diest of c. 1420–40.³³

On the other hand, the fleshy, pink-grey face of God the Father (fig. 9) looks much heavier than the Western examples. In fact, all the faces on the panel bear a certain reminiscence of Bohemian painting. Art created in Prague had been the ultimate source of inspiration for painting in Prussia from the second half of the 14th century on, and this influence can still be detected in Gdańsk paintings from the beginning of the 15th century like, for instance, the *Altarpiece of the Virgin* from the Sts Cosmas and Damian-Chapel of St Mary's Church of c. 1420–30.³⁴ Surely, there is no direct relation between this earlier work and the *Trinity*. Yet the golden crowns that some of the holy figures wear are basically rendered in a similar way as the one of God the Father in Berlin. Their large surfaces are made of burnished gold leaf, onto which the details are added by thick black lines and some additional pouncing. In the panels of the *St Hedwig-Altarpiece* of c. 1430, also in St Mary's church,³⁵ crowns are rendered in a similar way, and here, too, the ornamental leaves resemble the corresponding details of the crown of the Trinity, even if the drawing in the Hedwig-panels is less elegant and lacking the foreshortening of the lateral leaves of the crown on the Berlin panel.

However, another work comes much closer in style to the *Trinity*, the wings of the so-called *St Dorothy-Altarpiece* which originally belonged to the All Saints-chapel of St Mary's church and is placed today in the St George-chapel (figs 13–16).³⁶ The similarities between the *Trinity* and these painted wings have already been remarked by Willi Drost in 1938,³⁷ but his observation seems not to have been taken up in recent times. Indeed, the head of the angel in the upper left corner of the Trinity panel (fig. 12) strongly resembles the St Agatha in the

³¹ Köllermann, "Netherlandish Painting...", op. cit., pp. 47 ff.; Stephan Kemperdick, Friso Lammertse, "Siting, Dating and Connections," in *The Road to Van Eyck*, op. cit., pp. 112 ff.; Ziembra, *Sztuka Burgundii...*, op. cit., pp. 150–53.

³² St Salvator Cathedral, Bruges, see Dominique Deneffe, Famke Peters, Wim Fremhout, *Pre-Eyckian Panel Painting in the Low Countries* (Brussels, 2009), vol. 1, pp. 124–55, cat. no. 2.

³³ Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels; see Anne Dubois et al., *Anonymous Masters. Catalogue of Early Netherlandish Painting: Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium* (Brussels, 2009), pp. 56–107, cat. no. 2. The Flemish Primitives, V.

³⁴ Today the National Museum in Warsaw. Drost, *Danziger Malerei...*, op. cit., pp. 26–31, figs 5–7; *National Museum in Warsaw. The Gallery of Medieval Art*, pp. 118–20, cat. no. 1.15 (Warsaw, 2017) [Justyna Aniołek].

³⁵ Drost, *Danziger Malerei...*, op. cit., fig. 15.

³⁶ The inner side is adorned with imported English alabaster reliefs, but its shrine and the double set of painted wings (each 81 × 46 cm) as well as the predella are no doubt of local origin. Drost, *Danziger Malerei...*, op. cit., pp. 49–51; id., *Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Danzig...*, op. cit., pp. 132 ff.

³⁷ Id., *Danziger Malerei...*, op. cit., pp. 49–51; likewise Stange, *Deutsche Malerei der Gotik...*, op. cit., p. 235.

scene of her martyrdom on one of the wings (**fig. 13**). The overall shape, albeit more plump and round in the angel, the very large ears of similar shape, the double chin and the sad expression around the mouth. Both – as well as the other figures here and there – have thick brown hair with the remarkable detail of individual hairs freed from the compact tuft of hair. Fingernails are always whitish, and thumbs are sometimes rendered in a peculiar way, with the last two phalanxes forming a right angle and connected in a not very organic way to the hand (**fig. 14**) (in the *Trinity* in Christ's right hand and the hands of the lower angels). Similarities can likewise be found in the arrangement of the draperies: the meandering folds on the sleeve of the alb of a standing deacon on one of the *St Dorothy-Altarpiece* wings (**fig. 15**) are almost identical to those on the sleeve of the angel in white at the lower right corner of the *Trinity* panel. In the same two figures, the folds touching the ground correspond in a more than general way in both paintings, especially where a loop encircles a foot. It also should not go unmentioned that the colour scheme in both works is comparable, and this applies especially to white garments which are invariably shaded in grey and appear as if made of a thick fabric. A figure like the standing St Catherine (**fig. 16**), from the scene of the destruction of pagan idols, would in no way look strange if she were placed on an adjacent panel next to the *Trinity*.

Certainly, there are also clear differences, for example in that the figures on the wings of the *St Dorothy-Altarpiece* appear a bit less sturdy than the ones of the *Trinity*, their faces less plump and full. Generally, the latter looks slightly earlier in style, not just because of the round, more “bohemian” faces, but also with respect to a detail like the garment wrapped around body and legs of the angel in the upper right corner of the *Trinity* – a motif still reminiscent of the late 14th century. Nevertheless, the similarities between the two works seem much stronger than to any other painting that is preserved. Thus there must have been a direct connection between the painters or workshops responsible.

A no less strong connection can be observed between the wings of the *St Dorothy Altarpiece* and the *Trinity Triptych* (**fig. 4**) from the altar in the shoemaker's chapel.³⁸ Again, the faces – and their expressions – are revealing, for example if we compare those of the angel in the lower left corner of the Warsaw panel and of St Catherine in the scene of her beheading from the other altarpiece (**fig. 17**). Also, the somewhat flat hands of the latter correspond to the right hand of the angel in the upper left corner of the *Trinity*. Again, Drost has already remarked the affinity between the two works and suggested that they were created by two different painters in one and the same workshop.³⁹ However, a differentiation of hands seems problematic – given that the Warsaw *Trinity* is the repetition of an older panel and in a rather poor state of preservation. In all probability, the said *Trinity* and the wings of the *St Dorothy Altarpiece* were made in the same shop, but it is unclear – and maybe not of crucial importance – whether one or two or more painters were involved.

These considerations bring us to the last important question around the two Gdańsk panels of the *Trinity*, that of the relationship between the two versions. The *Trinity* in Berlin betrays stylistic ties to the panels of the *St Dorothy Altarpiece*, and the latter is artistically close to the Warsaw *Trinity*. As a logical consequence, there must be a connection between the two *Trinities* which is not limited to motifs. As already mentioned, the Warsaw panel is widely accepted as a copy of the other one. Its quality is constantly judged lower than that of the Berlin work,

³⁸ Drost, *Danziger Malerei...*, op. cit., pp. 50 ff.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 42, 50.

and at the same time the spatial arrangement of the Warsaw painting is seen as slightly more modern.⁴⁰ This last observation is correct in my eyes, as both the overall arrangement – with a figure of God the Father whose head is smaller and does not reach up as high as in the other panel – and details like the space created between, e.g., the body of the angel in the upper right and the cloth of honour in front of him, and the structure of this cloth and its folds in general. Old-fashioned drapery motifs like the garment of the hovering angel in pink on the panel from the St George's Pillar have disappeared. Even the crown of God looks more “realistic” and better integrated into the pictorial space than the large gilded shape on the Berlin panel. Thus the today Warsaw painting clearly must be younger than the other one by a certain span of time. That the work today in Berlin was the model for the other is further corroborated by the underdrawing of both panels. While that of the Berlin panel (**fig. 18**) shows numerous details in the faces and extensive hatchings, the underdrawing in Warsaw is mostly limited to contour lines (**fig. 19**); it seems as if the artist was able to work from a precise, finished model. This becomes especially apparent in the body of Christ where just a few thin lines indicate the contour, some ribs and folds while there are dense hatchings and some re-worked, tentative contour lines in the Berlin version. In contrast, Christ's loin cloth is not underdrawn in Berlin, but indicated in the Warsaw version with a few simple lines. These lines do not really correspond to the arrangement of the painted loin cloth in the other painting, yet they seem to require the latter as a model; an arched line on the Warsaw Christ's left hip, which was not executed in paint, seems to echo a drapery fold in the Berlin panel. Finally, on the Warsaw panel Christ's belly button was underdrawn in a position corresponding to its location in the Berlin painting, and shifted downwards in the execution. Thus the underdrawings of the two *Trinities* confirm the already assumed relationship: the Warsaw version follows the model of the one today in Berlin.

Beyond that, the underdrawings also seem to suggest that there is an artistic relationship between the two *Trinity* panels. Despite the comparatively simple appearance of the Warsaw underdrawing, its general character does not seem to be essentially different. In both, most lines are drawn with a not very fine brush; contours and folds are indicated by long, elegantly curving lines, often ending in hooks (**fig. 20 a–b**). Some short lines ending in hooks on one or both ends to indicate the dimple of a fold are also present in both. In some places on the Berlin panel there are loosely spaced hatchings as in the Warsaw work, and curls and strands of hair are drawn in a very similar fashion here and there; the wavy lines in God's beard are especially close in both (**fig. 21 a–b**). The same applies to the face of the Father, where two thin parallel lines indicate the bridge of the nose, and some bolder strokes the wrinkles at the root of the nose.

Accordingly, in my opinion it is likely that the painters responsible for the *Trinity* from the St George's Pillar, the wings of the *St Dorothy Altarpiece*, and the shoemaker's *Trinity* all belonged to one workshop tradition. The painting today in Berlin is clearly the oldest among them and might have been made approximately between the mid-1420s and the mid-1430s; this suggestion is based on stylistic comparisons with works like the paintings of the so-called Master Francke in Hamburg which can securely be dated between c. 1425 and 1435.⁴¹ The *St Dorothy Altarpiece* would have been made somewhat later, maybe around 1440. We notice that it still lacks any attempt to render the effects of real light on surfaces and, even more important,

⁴⁰ Drost, *Danziger Malerei...*, op. cit., pp. 41 ff.; Labuda, “Die ‘Pitié-de-Nostre-Seigneur’...,” op. cit., p. 165.

⁴¹ See *Meister Francke revisited. Auf den Spuren eines Hamburger Malers*, Ulrike Nürnberger, Elina Räsänen, Uwe Albrecht, eds (Petersberg, 2017).

of cast shadows, features that started to spread from the 1430s on in Central Europe and that were commonplace by c. 1450. The triptych of the shoemaker's *Trinity* could be the youngest work of the group, albeit it likewise does not show those effects just mentioned. With all due caution I would like to suggest that the Berlin panel is, in terms of style, closer to the *St Dorothy Altarpiece* wings than to the Warsaw *Trinity*.

To conclude: the former triptych of the shoemakers is no doubt a repetition of the better-known *Trinity* from the St George's Pillar, which likewise must have been the centre of a triptych originally. The esteem that the composition of the *Pitié-de-Nostre-Seigneur*, newly introduced from Western sources by the work today in Berlin, enjoyed in Gdańsk is further underlined by the fact that it was repeated at the end of the 15th century in a painting of the *Nave of the Church* which was made for the new *Artushof*-building of 1476–81.⁴² No doubt, the shoemaker's guild explicitly wanted a replica of the obviously admired older work which they had had copied even in its measurements. Yet this decision does not mean that the copied work was an imported one by a foreign master. Rather, the shoemaker's guild commissioned the same workshop or its successor which had already created the first version. No doubt a certain time had elapsed by then, and thus the replica was slightly modernised. It was also varied in some smaller details, for example when the two lower angels exchanged their place. The landscape in the orb at Christ's feet was reduced to a single building, but this alteration must not necessarily be understood as a sign of lower quality; to paint three little houses instead of one could hardly have been a complicated task. Rather it would have been meant as an improvement that makes the image more legible and reduces the distraction by small details. This second version may be separated by 10 or even 20 years from the original, and in that span of time, the style of the workshop might have evolved, or the members of the shop might have changed. Nevertheless, the hallmarks of this atelier were still recognizable in the younger work. The Berlin *Trinity* is thus not a work imported from the Netherlands or somewhere else in the West but the product of a Gdańsk workshop. Its master certainly brought new inspirations to the Baltic coast which ultimately derived from Netherlandish art. There are several possibilities for this transfer of motifs – and maybe also of modes of representation – imaginable: drawings or other, now lost models could have been imported from the West, or the painter could have travelled there, or the painter himself was an immigrant from the Netherlands.⁴³ Following this last assumption, Albert Châtelet has suggested to identify him with a certain Jean de la Matte/Jan van der Matten from Bruges who is indeed documented to have worked in Prussia between 1397 and 1406.⁴⁴ However, the time of his activity does in no way fit with the approximate date of the *Trinity* panel, and furthermore Van der Matten is always referred to as a sculptor. Of course, other artists from the West might have been in Gdańsk in the second quarter of the 15th century. However, the more traditional aspects of the *Trinity*, like the motif of the heavy golden crown or the “Bohemian” reminiscences, argue against an itinerant artist from the Netherlands. Furthermore, the painting from the St George's Pillar can even be brought into the context of a local style in Gdańsk. When we look

⁴² Drost, *Danziger Malerei...*, op. cit., pp. 62–63, pl. 26. The work was lost during the Second World War.

⁴³ This last possibility was assumed, e.g., by Drost, *Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Danzig...*, op. cit., pp. 133 ff.

⁴⁴ Albert Châtelet, “Van Eyck et la diffusion de l'art flamand,” *Dossier de l'art*, no. 119 (2005), pp. 4–23, here pp. 9–11; Ingrid Geelen, “Sculpture in Flanders between 1369 and 1440,” unpublished PhD thesis, Ghent University 2017, pp. 65–68; p. 72–78 (without attribution to Van der Matten). Châtelet's hypothesis was already doubted for the same reasons as mentioned here by Ziembka (*Sztuka Burgundii...*, op. cit., pp. 150 ff).

at the roughly contemporary *Diptych of the Winterfeld Family*,⁴⁵ which was made around 1430 for a chapel in St Mary's church, the general impression is that of a certain proximity. In detail, there are similarities in the angels' heads, likewise equipped with big, light-brown hairstyles, for example if we compare the angel in green in the lower left of the *Trinity* with the lower angel on the right of the *Winterfeld Ascension of St Mary Magdalene*, or the upper right angel in the former panel with the one on the right of Magdalene's head in the latter. Also a certain taste for white as colour for garments, which shows in the angel, bottom right, as well as on the inside of the cloth of honour in the Berlin *Trinity* (but not repeated in the Warsaw version) is obvious in the *Winterfeld Diptych*. Seen side by side, these two works, albeit certainly made by different masters, do not appear strange to each other. Thus the *Trinity* from the St George's Pillar and the following works, the wings of the *St Dorothy Altarpiece* and the second *Trinity*, seem to belong to a distinguishable local school of painting – a school which on the one hand developed from earlier painting in Prussia and, on the other hand, received new inspirations from art in the European West.

Where the groundbreaking earlier *Trinity*, then in the form of a triptych, was installed originally, remains obscure. It definitely is remarkable that the shoemakers had it almost literally copied, but we do not know if they might have intended a pendant piece in the same church, St Mary's, or if they were only referring to a highly esteemed work in another place in the city. They had the work copied when it was still a triptych, but some decades later, when the central panel had already lost its wings, the *Trinity* itself seems to have assumed a kind of "official" status that caused it to be cited in the *Nave of the Church* in the *Artushof*. However, the figure of the Teutonic knight on the back of the *Trinity* panel was certainly no longer visible at that time.

⁴⁵ Today in the collections of the National Museum in Warsaw; Drost, *Danziger Malerei...*, op. cit., pp. 47 ff.; *The Gallery of Medieval Art. Guidebook*, The National Museum in Warsaw (Warsaw, 2017), pp. 121–26, cat. no. 1.16 [Małgorzata Kochanowska].