Similarities and Differences in the History, Techniques and Technologies Used in two Gothic Panel Paintings From the Historic Region of Lesser Poland

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1. Introduction

To begin with we would like to say a few words about the circle of painters who were prominent in historic region of Lesser Poland (Picture 1) in the late Middle Ages. Their heritage is a great number of panel paintings. They were focused around Cracows workshop which started in the beginning of the XV century. However, it's not so obvious that there were other workshops in the region of Lesser Poland, it's known though that not all artists belonged to workshops. Some monasteries had their own artists who fulfilled the needs of their own order. It was common for these artists to have more than one specialization, e.g. a panel painter would know how to create wall paintings or illuminate books¹.

Panel paintings in this region have had some specific characteristics not found anywhere else, e.g. the technology of crafting. The wooden support have been made exclusively from lime. The joints, and sometimes even the whole wooden supports, were covered by the strips of canvas to minimize cracking of ground layer. The ground was laid in a number of layers. It was made out of animal glue mixed with chalk, and sometimes even pigments in order to change a color. Before starting painting the design has been traced to the ground layer and then brought out by black paint or engraving. The most common paint was bound with egg tempera but

¹ GADOMSKI, Jerzy, Gotyckie malarstwo tablicowe Małopolski 1460-1500, Warszawa 1988, p. 89-98.
the resin binder could also have been used e.g. to make glazings on metal foils\(^2\). This presentation is concerned with two works of art from this particular circle of paintings (picture 2, 3).

Despite the fact that these paintings are much different, e.g. in terms of technic, there are also similarities characteristic of this particular group of panel paintings from the historic region of Lesser Poland.

2. History

The first similarity is that they have a parallel history. Their both have been altered on various occasions e.g. altering dimensions, reparations and overpaintings.

![Picture 3. Painting from Koziegłówki, after removing the overpaintings, and its reverse (Photos: Filip Pelon, November 2014)](image)

The first of them is thought to have been done before 1491 and it shows the type of Woman the Apocalypse. It's history is well documented in the archives that survived from that times. From this we come to learn about a Bernardian\(^3\) monk who died between 1487-1491 and was called Francis from Hungary. He is the one who's known to have painted the panel in the main altar of the Bernardins church in Krakow. In the beginning it was combined with two other paintings like the Triptych from Dobczyce (Picture 4). On one side there was st. Francis and on the other there was st. Bernardin from Siena, so it was type of Sacra Conversacione. It was before the first half of XVII century when the church of st. Bernardin bought a new main altar. The old one was sent to the newly funded Bernardins monastery in Alwernia. At this time two paintings were separated from the Triptych and put in the separate wings of the altar. Some time after that the main painting was reduced from the top and bottom. After that the background was reduced too, leaving only The Madonna

\(^3\) Bernardins is the name of Observant branch of the Franciscans in Poland.
and The Child. It was widened by adding two boards, where new ground layer was applied and then gild with silver\(^4\).

![Picture 4. Main panel of Triptych from Dobczyce, 1490, National Museum in Cracow (Photo from GADOMSKI, Jerzy, Gotyckie malarstwo tablicowe Małopolski 1460-1500, Warszawa 1988)](image)

The second one is believed to have been made at the beginning of the XVI century, and it shows the combination of two iconographical types. Cracow Hodegetry and Sacra Conversacione with st. Wojciech and st. Nicholas. So it reminds us of the original state of The Woman of the Apocalypse painting from Alwernia. It was painted in the main altar of the romanesque church of st. Wojciech and st. Nicholas in Koziegłówki. It is possible that this type was fund there to protect against the outbreak of epidemics. The type of Hodegetry with the line of "Regina Caeli" antiphon was believed to prevent such disasters\(^5\). In the beginning of the XX century the new church was built and the old one pulled down. The painting was

\(^4\) Archive of Bernardins Province in Cracow, materials with signatures: II-1, II-2, I-b-20, w-20.

\(^5\) Prolegomena do badań nad obrazami Hodogetriotypu krakowskiego, editor GADOMSKI, Jerzy, Kraków 2014, s. 32.
reduced on both sides. The damage that you can see now, the missing part of the saints, was done accidently. They were covered by overpaintings when they were cut. The changes from that time were also combined with the addition of metal dress with coral stone decoration and scapular. It is because the painting was combined with the scapular cult\textsuperscript{6}.

The history of the two paintings shows how works of art were treated differently and in a specific way after the time of the Middle Ages. Those types of objects were respected because of their age and the cult they were part of. This often lead to reparations, overpaintings, and new arrangements to make them attractive for people in their present time.

It's worth mentioning that although the paintings were in the main cult for a while they were replaced by other pieces of art which were more popular at the time. Because of that they lost their status\textsuperscript{7}.


\textsuperscript{7} STĘPIEŃ, Waclaw, Stare Koziegłowy...; Archive of Bernardins Province in Krakow, materials with signatures: II-1, II-2.
3. Wooden support

Analyzing technics of crafting the paintings it's hard to miss the fact that their wooden supports had got a lot in common. Panels were made out of poor quality lime. They have lots of structural defects like knots and irregular graining. Originally both wooden supports had a dovetailed crossbeam inserted into a mortise located circa in the middle of the height of the support. Saw and half round scrub plane marks can be seen along and across the graining (Picture 4). The edges of panel parts were previously roughened in a characteristic way before glue application to make the bonding stronger (Picture 5). Furthermore there is a characteristic mark engraved with calipers on the reverse of the supports, the only difference is its size. Our conjecture is that this mark is a sign of the carpenters' workshop. The topic is not examined properly, however, in the experts opinion there are no other examples known so far of this kind of signs in that period and in this region. In both wooden supports the joints and knots were covered with stripes of canvas, and many layers of chalk-glue ground have been applied.
Picture 6. Roughened edges of panel parts, on the left Alwernia (Photo: Paweł Gąsior, March 2015), and on the right Koziegłowki (Photo: Filip Pelon, March 2015)

Picture 7. Marks engraved with calipers on the reverse of the wooden supports, on the left Alwernia (Photo: Paweł Gąsior, March 2015), and on the right Koziegłowki (Photo: Filip Pelon, March 2015)
4. Drawing

There are serious differences between the drawing layers. When it comes to the Alwernia painting the drawing is very subtle and it can’t be seen through the painting layer. Some elements of the composition are marked by engraving, also the gilded parts. The part of The Madonnas dress is more complicated for the engraved ornament does not fit with the painted ornament. The situation becomes clear when we examine it closely. Little red dots can be seen on the edges of the ornament which is the sign of using the template pouncing technic. The most probable explanation is that at first artist engraved the ornament but then covered it with too thick paint layer and made it unreadable. That forced him to use another technic.

In case of Kozieglowki painting, the drawing has been made with black ink. It’s drawn with a pretty thick line and can be seen through the painting layer (Picture 8). The gilded parts are marked with engraving. It’s worth mentioning that the template or a group of templates used to trace the contour of The Madonna could have been used in several Cracow Hodegetry type paintings in Lesser Poland region, and even wider.

*Picture 8. The drawing visible through the painting layer on Koziegłóki painting (Photo: Filip Pelon, March 2015)*

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8 Prolegomena..., s. 56.
5. Paint layer

There are some obvious similarities in the paint layer. Two works of art were painted with egg tempera, the pigments are typical of the gothic palette, popular in Lesser Poland including; lead white, lead-tin yellow, azurite, cinnabar, or organic red, and without ultramarine. Also the paintings gild layer on the edge of The Madonnas coat was covered with a mastics resin layer to facilitate painting ornaments on gold.

Nonetheless, there are some main differences, one of them is the way of overlaying the paint. In case of Koziegłowski Hodegetry the painting layer is thin and transparent, when the Alwernia Woman of The Apocalypse painting layer is very thick.

It’s worth mentioning that the difference in overlaying the paint could have been caused by the fact that the Woman of the Apocalypse was painted by a monastery artist who was believed to have come to Lesser Poland from Hungary, whereas Hodegetry was painted by a workshop artist. Using a template can verify this hypothesis. It is also possible that Koziegłowski painting could have been made by several workshop artists, which suggests that the individual parts have been made in a variety of artistic skill levels. The Madonnas complexion has been painted at much higher level than the rest of the painting. It is also possible that the other technic which may have been in use was glazing. The engraving level is also very high which can lead to the conclusion that it could have been made by other craftsman.

![Picture 9. Complexions of both Madonnas, on the left Alwernia (Photo: Bartosz Zarębski, March 2015), and on the right Koziegłowski (Photo: Filip Pelon, March 2015)](image)

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^9 Archive of Bernardins Province in Cracow, materials with signatures: I-b-20, w-20; JAN FROM KOMOROWO, Kronika Zakonu Braci Mniejszych, translation ŻUCHOWSKI, Kazimierz, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska 2014, s. 269.
6. Conclusion

To conclude we would like you to note that the scientists should pay more attention to the wooden support layer in the conservation of Lesser Poland’s panel paintings. The wider look at this topic in Lesser Poland and other not so popular European art circles can lead to gaining very interesting knowledge about craftwork in the Middle Ages.
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