

## ART IN POLAND IN COPERNICUS'S TIME

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The last quarter of the fifteenth century was the times of the most multifarious periods in the history of Polish art. It was the splendid period, for then the Late Gothic art reached its peak and, the first Renaissance works appeared; both of these stylistic trends produced works of such artistic value that they even influenced the art of neighbouring countries. This period was the most multifarious in that the Middle Ages were giving way to Modern Times, arising on the soil of a multinational country with various cultural traditions. The Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, one of the largest and most populated countries in Europe, was inhabited by Poles, Lithuanians, Ruthenians and Byzantinians as well as by other immigrant groups: Germans, Armenians and Jews, each of which possessed and tried to uphold different artistic traditions. Therefore, when Late Gothic and Renaissance art appeared in central Poland, which for five centuries belonged to the Latin culture of the West, Byzantine, Russian and even Persian-Armenian art were still developing on the Eastern border of the country. Finally, the Jewish population cultivated its own artistic tradition.

The full influence of Late Gothic art in Poland was closely related to the economic prosperity and cultural flowering of towns in those times, among which the following were the greatest: the capital of the Kingdom — Cracow, the capital of Great Poland — Poznań and the wealthy towns of Royal Prussia with the Vistula-part of Toruń and the sea-part of Gdańsk. During the second half of the fifteenth century, two of these towns became outstanding centres of art on a European scale — Cracow and Gdańsk.

The most influential personality in Cracow, who greatly influenced the Late Gothic art of that town, was Włodek Strogan. He came, a brilliant architect, painter and engineer from Nuremberg. He arrived in the Polish capital in 1472 and worked there for twenty years. In Cracow, he created his main work, a monumental poliptych ordered by a wealthy conscript patrician for his



The last quarter of the fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth, the times of Nicholas Copernicus, belong to the most splendid as well as the most multiform periods in the history of Polish art culture. It was the splendid period, for then the Late Gothic art reached its peak and the first Renaissance works appeared; both of these stylistic trends produced works of such artistic value that they even influenced the art of neighbouring countries. This period was the most multiform in that the Middle Ages were giving way to Modern Times, stirring on the soil of a multinational country with various cultural traditions. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, one of the largest and most populated countries in Europe, was inhabited by Poles, Lithuanians, Ruthenians and Byelorussians as well as by other immigrant groups: Germans, Armenians and Jews, each of which possessed and tried to uphold different artistic traditions. Therefore, when Late Gothic flourished and Renaissance art appeared in central Poland, which for five centuries belonged to the Latin culture of the West, Byzantine-Russian and even Byzantine-Armenian art were still developing on the Eastern border of the country. Finally, the Jewish population cultivated its own artistic tradition.

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The most illustrious personality in Cracow, who greatly influenced the Late Gothic art of that town, was Wit Stwosz (Veit Stoss), a brilliant sculptor, painter and engraver from Nuremberg. He arrived in the Polish capital in 1477, and worked there for twenty years. In Cracow, he created his main work, a monumental polptych ordered by a wealthy municipal patriciate for St.

Mary's Church (1477–1489), as well as many other sculptures in wood and marble. Among these a series of tombstones is especially worth mentioning, the most splendid being the canopied tomb of King Casimir Jagiellon (Kazimierz Jagiellończyk) in the Wawel Cathedral, made in 1492. All of Stwosz's engravings also date from this Polish period and are the earliest specimens of Cracow graphic art. In the Polish capital, his own individual style crystallized, both expressive and decorative, linking a naturalism of detail with the intricacy of abundant drapery and robes with deep cut and "broken" folds that conceal the structure of the body. In the royal tomb canopy already referred to, with its intersected, twisted and broken mouldings, multions and ribs, Stwosz likewise introduced an expressive Late Gothic style into the domain of architectural decoration in Little Poland. His Cracow work was a turning and culminating point in the history of Polish Late Gothic art. Its influence on sculpture, painting, graphic art and even on handicrafts, such as embroidery and goldsmithery, was apparent throughout the greater part of the country as well as over the border, in Silesia, in Spisz (Hungary) and in Transylvania. One must add that in Cracow, during the Late Gothic, goldsmithery was one of the more advanced arts, as is most clearly shown by the work of Marcin Marciniak, a royal goldsmith from the turn of the fifteenth century. His marvellous reliquary of St. Stanislas in the Wawel Cathedral (1504), with its rich architectural ornamentation and figural scenes, in some parts also betrays the influence of Stwosz style. Cracow-made fine chalices and monstrances of very delicate and fragile shape were sold everywhere in Poland and even made their way to Lithuania.

The second outstanding art center was Gdańsk, the capital of Royal Prussia which was reverted to the crown lands in 1466 in consequence of the Thirteen Years' War with the Teutonic Order. This Baltic sea-port, main trade agent of Polish agricultural products, maintained far-reaching commercial and artistic contacts even with the Spanish and Portuguese coasts and especially with the Netherlands. During the second half of the fifteenth century a prominent creative center, mainly in the domain of architecture, Gdańsk had inherited the brick building traditions of the Teutonic lands and developed them into its own Late Gothic style, which was to spread far to the East and South of Poland. The distinct character of this style is best perceived in newly erected or enlarged churches, where the hall church type attained its perfection. Great halls with light, spacious and secular-looking interiors were covered

by decorated, lierne-stellar or "crystal" vaults resting on tall thin piers. These vaultings, which originated from the simple stellar vaults in Teutonic buildings, were characteristic of Gdańsk architects. The best example of this kind of hall church is the magnificent interior of St. Mary's Church in Gdańsk (rebuilt between 1484 - 1502), one of the largest sacral interiors in Europe. The famous Artushof in Gdańsk, a monumental meeting hall for various municipal guilds, built 1476 - 1481, was also covered by a decorated stellar vault on four free-standing pillars. The Gdańsk architectural achievements were adopted by builders in other Prussian towns, namely in Toruń and Elbląg, and the highly developed style of Gdańsk Late Gothic decoration, which exploited the plastic qualities of brick, was employed in the sixteenth century even in Catholic and Orthodox churches in Lithuania.

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, some artistic phenomena appear that seemingly herald changes which the coming century was to introduce in the forms of the Italian Renaissance. I have in mind above all the classicizing tendencies in architecture and the attempts at imitating Romanesque art, as also a gradually increasing realism in painting and sculpture.

In the sacral architecture of Little Poland at the end of the fifteenth century one can observe a revival of the "soft" forms of the International Gothic; buildings become shorter and horizontal articulation is accentuated. In the domain of secular architecture, which in Little Poland acquires a great importance at that time, in magnate residencies as well as in clergy dwellings founded by the brilliant historian Jan Długosz, there appear a tendency to group blocks into regular coherent units, to plan interiors with particular order and to apply axiality and symmetry in external elevations. The Collegium Maius, the main building of Cracow University would be the best example of this kind of planning. Composed of a few houses, it was finally rebuilt in 1492—1497 into a four-sided building with a single storey gallery in the style of Italian university quadrangles. Around the same time, Gothic pointed arches are replaced by semicircular ones and rectangular forms appear in architectural decoration, while in certain buildings in Gdańsk and in some works of goldsmithery in Great Poland, ties with Romanesque art may be discerned.

At about the same time, both in sculpture and in painting, a tendency towards realism and even towards naturalism was gradually developing. I have already mentioned the expressionistic naturalism of the work of Stwosz and his circle. The growing realistic understanding of the world, of man and

of nature, which characterized the development of the panel painting of Little Poland, is best illustrated by the comparison of such outstanding works as the Holy Trinity triptych in Wawel Cathedral (Master of Choirs, ca. 1467), the polyptych from St. Catherine's church, Cracow (Nicholas Haberschrack, 1468), the weeping Holy Mother triptych in Wawel Cathedral (probably Stanisław Durink, ca. 1475), the Assumption in the church at Warta (probably Franciszek of Sieradz, ca. 1480), or the Olkusz polyptych (painter Hanusz, ca. 1485). This tendency towards realism was of course common to the whole of North European art, following the influence of Netherlandish realistic painting originated by Van Eyck. The influence of Netherlandish art reached central Poland belatedly and rather by indirect than direct ways, but nevertheless is clearly visible in most of the works mentioned above. One can also perceive it in Cracow book painting, flourishing during the turn of the century, of which the best example is the admirable illuminated manuscript of Cracow statutes and guild privileges called the *Baltazar Behem Codex* (1505). To the author of the numerous miniatures in this manuscript, splendidly illustrating the life and work of Cracow citizens, even the early works of Hieronimus Bosch were probably known. Prussia, and especially Gdańsk and Toruń, were most directly inspired by Netherlandish art. Gdańsk imported Flemish works in great quantities and from there they spread to other Pomeranian towns. In Gdańsk, Memling's famous Last Judgment triptych was preserved; it was stolen by Gdańsk corsairs in 1473 and offered to St. Mary's Church. The amount of Netherlandish works of art was so great and their influence so strong that it is sometimes difficult to decide with complete certainty whether a given Pomerian work dating from this period is a local or an imported product, as in the case of the Jerusalem Altarpiece from St. Mary's Church in Gdańsk (ca. 1480).

The third but not artistic factor that led the way to the changes which the imported Italian Renaissance forms were to bring about in Polish art was the fifteenth century Humanism. In order to realize the strength and long influence of this intellectual movement, it will suffice to mention the proto-humanism of diplomats and dignitaries grouped around Cardinal Zbigniew Oleśnicki (died 1455) — a correspondent of Eneas Sylvius Piccolomini, the humanism of the circle of Grzegorz of Sanok, the many years of the activity of Filippo Callimachus Buonaccorsi (Kallimach) in Poland, and finally the humanistic "Sodalitas Vistulana" in Cracow, founded by Conrad Celtis,

which enrolled its members from among university and townspeople alike. Humanism brought the world of Ancient culture closer and helped to develop an understanding of the forms originated in Ancient art. Thanks to Humanism, a knowledge of Ancient mythology spread, to which the then flourishing astronomy and astrology in Cracow University likewise made their contribution, and it helped to an allegorical understanding of the pagan themes of literature and art. If not for its fifteenth century Humanism, Poland would never have been able to accept so early the mature forms of Italian Renaissance art.

It needs no proof to show what role in spreading Humanism, with its ciceronian *laudatio studiorum litterarum*, was played by the book, by Cracow's bookselling contacts with the whole of Europe and by the establishment of the first printing houses in the Polish capital during the last quarter of the fifteenth century. The book in itself and book-printing were the main tools in transforming culture, including aesthetic culture. Magnates as well as University men and municipal patriciates set up many private humanistic libraries, for bibliophilism was rapidly increasing. The first Polish super Ex Libris date from the fifteenth century; they not only indicate the proprietor but also decorate books, often richly bound. The oldest Polish Ex Libris, made at the beginning of the following century, surprisingly enough of high artistic value, appear earlier than in countries such as France, Bohemia, Italy and England. Humanism in intensifying an interest in books begot a predilection for exquisite typographic forms in printing, for sumptuous decoration on printed works as well as manuscripts, and was at the base of the flourishing Cracow book illumination towards the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries.

Humanism, an intellectual movement that grew out of literary culture, anteceded the Renaissance in the domain of art. That is why Renaissance forms appeared first in epigraphy. The humanistic script, the reborn *litterae antiquae*, is found in Poland for the first time in some of Stwosz's Late Gothic works and not accidentally in the tombs of two humanists: bishop Piotr of Bnin (Włocławek Cathedral, 1494) and Filippo Callimachus Buonaccorsi (Dominican church in Cracow, before 1500).

Italian Renaissance art appeared in Poland at the beginning of the sixteenth century — that is, earlier than in most of the countries of Western and Middle Europe, with the exception of the Hungary of King Matthias Corvinus. It was probably from Hungary that Francesco da Firenze, an Italian

sculptor and architect, arrived in 1502 on the invitation of Prince Sigismund — later King Sigismund the Old (Zygmunt Stary). In 1502—1505 he constructed an architectural framework for the gothic sarcophagus of King John Albert (Jan Olbracht) (died 1501) in Wawel Cathedral, a work which introduced Italian Renaissance art into Poland. With this work, which belongs to the Florentine wall tomb type, appeared, for the first time in this country, not only such basic elements of Renaissance architecture as pilasters with round arch and full entablature but also a rich collection of Quattrocento decorative motifs.

In the same year, 1502, Francesco da Firenze began to rebuild the West wing of the royal Wawel castle, called the House of Queen Elisabeth, where Renaissance architectural decoration was added to the late medieval structure. The reconstruction and enlarging of the Wawel castle in the Italian style reached its full activity when King Sigismund the Old began his reign in 1506, and even more so when he married Bona Sforza of Milan in 1518. The North wing was rebuilt in 1507—1516. After the death of master Francesco, in 1516, another architect, Benedict of Sandomierz, erected an Eastern palace on the site of the demolished Gothic building (1521—1530). Finally an Italian sculptor and architect Bartolommeo Berrecci from Pontassieve, who was employed to build a royal burial chapel, enclosed the court with a simple blind wall on the South side and added the greater part of the column galleries around it (1527—1535). These galleries, with arcades in the two lower storeys and unorthodox superimposed columns supporting a salient roof in the third storey, unified this heterogeneous and in many aspects still medieval building.

It was not by accident that Italian Renaissance art was introduced into Poland by the royal patron. Sigismund the Old, thoroughly educated among others probably by famous Callimachus, naturally wanted to have a residence which would comply with his humanistic ideals, and to this end the decoration themes of palace interiors, with appropriate mottos over the doors and windows, were taken from Ancient and Renaissance ethical writings. But new Renaissance forms in the royal residence of the capital were also meant to externalize in a special way the new splendours of the Jagiellon dynasty. The Jagiellons were achieving political hegemony in Central Europe around that time and threatened even the Hapsburgs; the brother of Sigismund the Old, Władysław King of Bohemia, ascended the throne



in Hungary in 1490, while after Emperor Maximilian's death, in 1519, the Polish King aspired even to the crown of the Holy Roman Empire.

Other Renaissance royal foundations were also destined to proclaim the glory of the dynasty; and this was the main aim of the new Jagiellonian mausoleum, the Sigismund burial chapel in the Wawel Cathedral, the project of which Berrecci presented to the King in 1517. The corner stone of this building was laid in 1519 and, significantly enough, in the same year Berrecci's collaborators began to construct a new Renaissance canopy over the Gothic tomb of King Władysław Jagiełło (died 1434), the first Polish King of the Lithuanian dynasty. In the decoration of the canopy, Polish and Lithuanian coats of arms are represented together with medallions illustrating Cesaer's triumph.

The Sigismund Chapel was centrally planned, a square building covered with a dome, and this according to humanistic art theory reflected the uniformity, perfection and harmony of the macrocosm, — i.e., the universe and God — as well as of the microcosm — man. The whole building and especially the interior were sumptuously decorated with sculptures; the work was terminated in 1533. The authorship of individual parts of this decoration has not as yet been convincingly resolved, since in addition to the principal master, Berrecci, there were other Italian sculptors among his collaborators: Giovanni Cini da Siena, Filippo da Fiesole, Michele da Castiglione, Bernardo Zanobi de Gianotis da Roma and Giovanni Maria Mosca da Padova (called Il Padovano). The sculptural decoration was part of a complicated religious and dynastic programme, the main ideas of which — terrestrial and posthumous glory and immortality — were expressed in a way formerly unknown in Poland. Christian themes were markedly restricted. Also new in this country was a system of interior pilaster divisions, in which an ancient triumphal arch motif is repeated four times. It successively accentuates an altarpiece, a King's tomb, a throne and the entrance; in this way, the most worthy places of the interior of the building were highlighted and the notion of triumph over death symbolized. The figure of King Sigismund on his tombstone was likewise innovatory. He is represented armed and crowned, recumbent like the statues on Andrea Sansovino's Roman tombs; neither dead nor living, he seems to have laid down to rest and in a moment will rise to continue the tribulations of reigning.

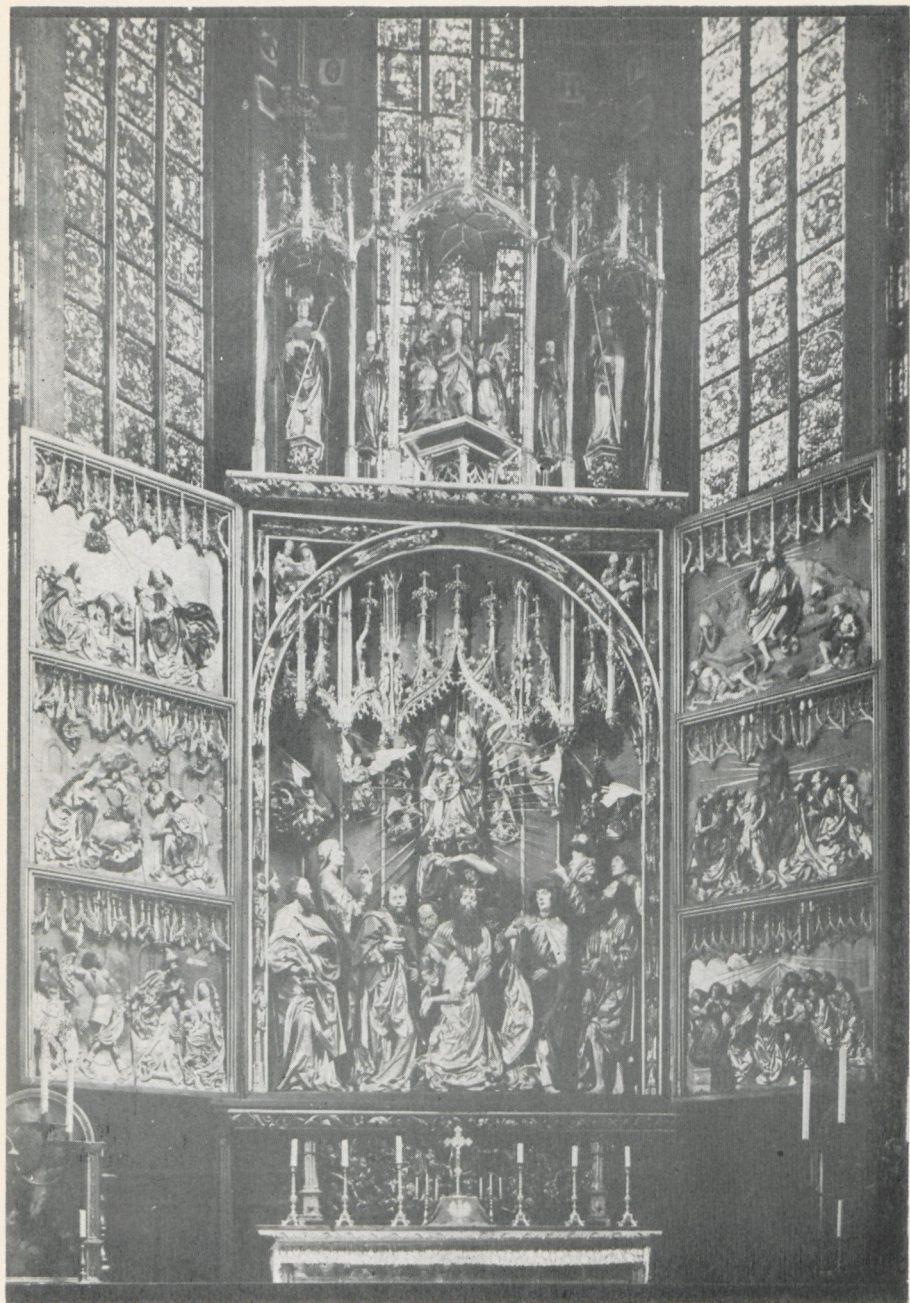
The main ideas expressed in the sculptures of the lower zone of the Chapel were developed in rich grotesque and ornamental bas-relief, which fully co-

vered the walls as well as parts of the architectural divisions, and which seemingly lacked the slightest deeper meaning. The laurel wreaths and trophies were connected with the heroic theme. The angels' heads, represented in the decoration of the lantern, remind us that we are dealing here with a Christian heaven, even though rosettes in the coffers of the dome replace stars *more antico*. Finally, the predominant concepts of immortality and everlasting happiness in the programme of the Chapel are, if we ignore a few Christian symbols of Paradise and of Redemption inserted in the grotesques, most forcibly expressed in the set of themes and forms taken from pagan Antiquity. We are dealing here with the great wealth of Ancient eschatology, discovered and studied by the Italian Renaissance in the decoration of antique sarcophagi. The dolphins represented on the framework of the windows of the drum are but symbols of Resurrection and of Salvation, since they transport dead souls to the beyond similarly to the Nereids so frequently appearing in the grotesque of the Chapel. In turn, the whole world of fantastic marine life, passionately fighting, or playing with beautiful nymphs brought to mind Ancient ideas of happiness beyond death (one of the Triton and Nereid couples derived from the same group in Raphael's Galatea in the Villa Farnesina). Even the beautiful Venus Anadyomene — with two Cupids (perhaps an allusion to Ficino's human and celestial love) — holding in her two hands an acanthus branch, would not have been represented so boldly above a Christian altarpiece if she had not been accepted as a symbol of divine beauty, of birth and rebirth, of generation and regeneration, of exculpation and salvation. This rich repertoire of pagan themes and its sepulchral symbolism, new in Poland, was a phenomenon not to be found on this scale even in Italian Renaissance art. And even though pagan motifs hidden among a luxuriant jungle of ornamentation, were subordinate to the general ideas of Christian eschatology, the latter was unable to quench the vital, buoyant and joyful atmosphere of the grotesque decoration of the Chapel. This unusual programme could not have been produced by Berrecci alone in spite of the fact that, called *philosophiae amator* by his contemporaries, he was fully aware of the exceptional value of his work as created *ad instar dei* and signed his name among angels's heads in the lantern of the dome. If the King and his humanistic circle, led by Andrzej Krzycki, did not prescribe all the details to the artist, they at least gave their consent to such a realization of them.

☞ The first Renaissance Wawel altarpieces also originated among the royal



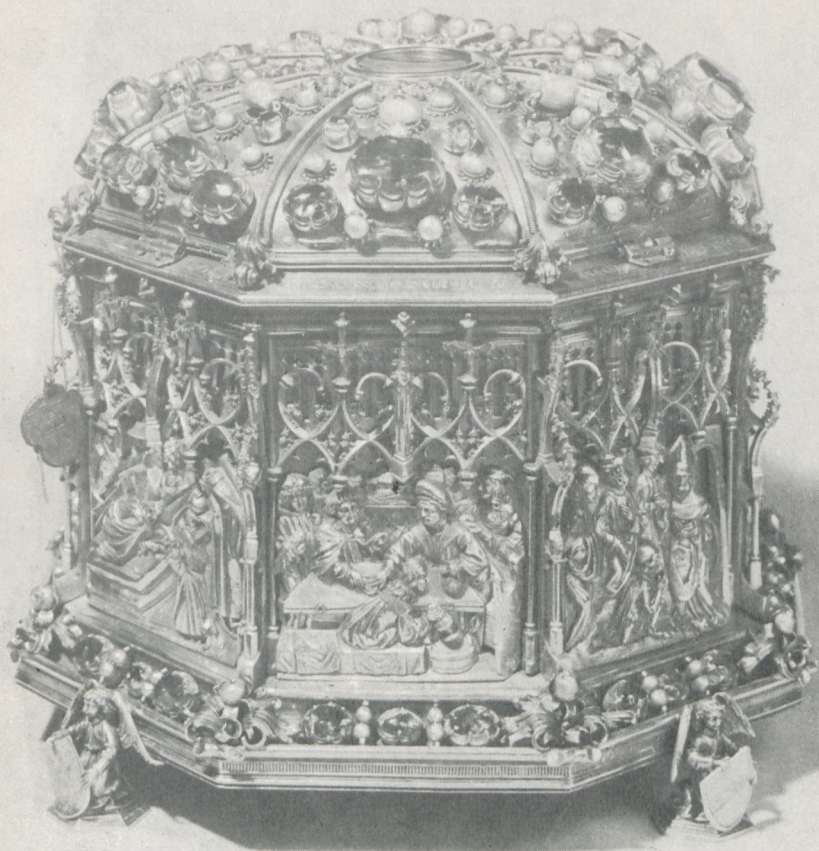
24. St. Mary's Church at Gdańsk, 1495—1502.



25. Wit Stwosz,  
The high altar in St. Mary's Church in Cracow, 1477–1489.

26. Tomb of King Casimir Jagiellon, 1492–1494.





27. Marcin Marciniak, St. Stanislaus's Reliquary, 1504.

patronage and were made by sculptors from Berrecci's workshop (a small stone altarpiece in 1519 and large wooden one from around 1545–1548). They introduced a new architectural type of altar retable into Poland, which replaced the old Gothic triptychs and polyptychs during the sixteenth century.

The influence of new royal foundations on Wawel hill and the Italian Renaissance forms they represented was enormous. The Italian artists and their Polish assistants employed by the King soon began to work likewise for other patrons, magnates or members of the urban patriciate.

The new type of centrally planned sepulchral mausoleum and a new type of tombstone were singularly attractive; they corresponded to the humanistic anthropocentrism with its aspiration to terrestrial and posthumous glory. About the same time as Sigismund's Chapel, between 1518–1523, a new different centrally planned sepulchral chapel was built, namely primate Jan Łaski's (John a Lasco) mausoleum in Gniezno. Constructed on a circular plan with three apses added and covered by a cupola, it resembled Bramante's famous Tempietto. Then from 1530 to 1535, Berrecci erected another sepulchral chapel at the Wawel Cathedral for Bishop Piotr Tomicki, which was a simplified duplicate, for it lacked a drum, of the architectural schema of the Royal Chapel. Both of Berrecci's Wawel works became prototypes of a considerable number of Renaissance and Baroque chapels, which were built in Poland up to the middle of the seventeenth century.

The influence of the King's tombstone on the Wawel and especially the dead monarch's animated recumbent pose lasted almost as long. This Sansovino pose, rarely to be found in other countries, was repeated in hundreds of sepulchral figures all over Poland and became almost obligatory in Polish sepulchral sculpture until the beginning of the seventeenth century.

The Italian sculptors working on the Wawel introduced a few basic types of the Renaissance tomb co. an architectural framework that were later often reproduced and travestied. Apart from the arched niche type represented by the tombs of King John Albert and King Sigismund, the Renaissance framework of Bishop Jan Konarski's Late Gothic slab in the Wawel Cathedral, made by an anonymous Italian ca. 1521, which is in the form of a socle on which rests a slab enclosed in volutes and crowned with a tablet, introduced another kind of tomb imitated by many Italian and Polish sculptors such as Giovanni Maria Padovano and Jan Michałowicz of Urzędów. With some of Padovano's works — the two Wawel tombs of Bishops Piotr Tomicki (1532–1535) and

Piotr Gamrat (1545–1547) – the Roman type of tomb in a rectangular framework found its way into Polish sepulchral art. Barbara Tarnowska's tomb in Tarnów (after 1521), regarded as the work of Padovano, also belongs to this type; it includes the most beautiful feminine statue produced by Renaissance sculpture in Poland. Finally, among the works of Italian artists during the first half of the sixteenth century there appeared a special kind of tombstone representing a sleeping naked child.

In 1531, Bernardo Zanobi de Gianotis, Giovanni Cini and Filippo da Fiesole formed an architect-sculptor workshop, which, after Berrecci's death in 1537, contributed a great deal to the propagation of Italian Renaissance forms in Poland and in Lithuania. They worked jointly, from 1532 to 1534, on a commission for the humanist bishop Andrzej Krzycki – the rebuilding of the Romanesque cathedral in Płock – and from 1534 onwards on the restoration of Wilno Cathedral. With the exception of the sepulchral chapels referred to above one might regard these two reconstructed churches as unique Renaissance sacral architectural works in Poland, since the impending Reformation was soon to put a stop to this kind of building movement.

The Gianotis and Cinis workshop produced a large number of tombs whose main characteristic was, by contrast with those of Berrecci and Padovano, a static frontal view of the figure of the deceased. These works were either carved in stone (marble) or cast in bronze. We might mention some of them: the tomb of the last Mazovia princes, Stanisław and Janusz, in Warsaw (1526–1528), that of Stanisław and Zofia Lasocki in Brzeziny (ca. 1535), of Anna Szydłowiecka in Opatów (after 1532), of the Lithuanian Chancellor Wojciech Gasztold (died 1539) in Wilno, and above all a tombstone of great artistic value, that of the Crown Chancellor Krzysztof Szydłowiecki in Opatów (1532–1541) which includes a beautiful bronze bas-relief illustrating the arrival of the news of the chancellor's death and the stricken relations, friends and courtiers. This representation, inspired by Ancient Greek tragedy, is remarkable for the diverse poses and gestures of the figures and the realistically portrayed Polish costumes and Slavonic features.

Renaissance forms reached Poland not only by way of Italian architects and sculptors, but also by the intermediary of German, and especially Franco-German art. Cracow's traditional trade and artistic contacts with Nuremberg played a great role here. Many bronze tomb slabs were imported from Vischers workshop in Nuremberg – as, for instance, the Late Gothic ones in the Wawel



Cathedral: that of Piotr Kmita (died 1505), where the Knight's pose resembles that of St. Eustache in Dürers Paumgartner Altarpiece, and of Crown Prince Cardinal Fryderyk (1510). Later works of the Vischers workshop, such as the bronze grating and candlesticks in the Sigismund Chapel (1532 and 1534) and the tomb slabs of Seweryn Boner and Zofia Bethman in St. Mary's Church (1538) belong entirely to Renaissance art, similarly to the beautiful silver polyptych, of the Nuremberg goldsmith Melchior Baiers in the Sigismund Chapel, inspired by the works of Peter Flötner and Dürer's woodcuts.

Renaissance painting in Poland, on the other hand, was under the influence of German and Netherlandish rather than Italian art. The main factor here was the immigration of artists, especially German. From 1507 - 1523, a German painter, Michael Lantz of Kitzingen (died 1523), was active in Cracow and as the King's court artist he worked on the decoration of the Wawel Castle. His surviving paintings of religious content, now in Cracow, Poznań and Warsaw, show that he was acquainted with the art of Dürer, Cranach the Elder and with the engravings of Israhel van Meckenen. In the years 1511 and 1514-1515 Hans Suess von Kulmbach of Nuremberg (died 1522) worked in Cracow; a pupil of Jacopo dei Barbari and a close collaborator of Dürer, he left here numerous works, including three altarpieces. Two of these, one with scenes from the life of St. Catherine of Alexandria, the other with the story of St. John the Evangelist, clearly show influence of the Danube school, in particular of Altdorfer whom Kulmbach must have met in Regensburg on his way from Nuremberg to Cracow. Apart from Polish painters, such as Antoni of Wrocław or Dionizy Stuba, another German artist after Lantz was employed for the decoration of the Wawel Castle rooms: Hans Dürer, brother of the great Albrecht. The frieze in one of the rooms, an illustration of the text of the Greek moralists Cebes, is considered to be his work. Finally at the opposite end of Poland, in Gdańsk, other German artists were at work: Michael of Augsburg, the author of the St. Mary's high altar paintings (1511 - 1517), influenced by Dürer, the painter George, from Cranach's circle, working around 1530, and Martin Schoninck, whose style resembled Altdorfer's.

In expanding Renaissance forms, a role equal to that of the immigrant foreign artists was played by extensive imports of German and Netherlandish works. Dürer's young pupil, George Pencz (died 1550), painted the reverse side of the silver polyptych already referred to for the Sigismund Chapel; this is a work which illustrates the influence of contemporary Italian art.

Portraits painted by Cranach and his school also made their way into Poland. In Gdańsk and Pomerania there were a few works by Hans Holbein, who in 1532 made a famous portrait of a Gdańsk merchant, George Giese (now in Berlin). One of Holbein's paintings, the portrait of Erasmus of Rotterdam, was in the possession of a Varmia bishop, the humanist and poet Jan Dantyszek (Joannes Dantiscus). Equally numerous, in Pomerania and Great Poland in particular, were works imported via Gdańsk from the Netherlands. From Gdańsk carved and painted altarpieces, mass exports from the workshops of Brussels and Antwerp spread far and wide. The most valuable of them is the famous polyptych of St. Reinhold in St. Mary's Church, Gdańsk, partly executed before 1516 by Joos van Cleve. The Szydłowiecki brothers, Jakub and Krzysztof, imported from Flanders images of the Virgin Mary. It was an amusing fact that the local donor from Jasieniec ordered his own portrait to be painted with the Ogończyk coat of arms on to an Antwerpian Mannerist painting with the Adoration of the Magi. As concerning Netherlandish works of art imported into Poland, mention must be made of the tapestries ordered by the Kings Sigismund the Old and Sigismund Augustus (Zygmunt August), first (1526 and 1533) in Antwerp and Brussels and later (from 1548 onwards) in the Brussels workshops of Willem Pannemacher, Pieter van Aelst and Jan van Tiegen. From there originates the famous collection — over three hundred items — of Sigismund Augustus; it was and still is the main decoration of the interiors of the Wawel Castle.

In spite of the fact that so many foreign artists were active in Poland, and of the existence here of such a great number of Renaissance works of art, Polish art as a whole slowly changed its stylistical aspect. Even in such leading arts as sculpture and architecture, not to mention painting and goldsmithery, more conservative in Poland, Gothic forms were for long to keep their hold. The primary reason for this was the medieval structure of artists guilds, which were reluctant to assimilate innovations and preferred to imitate old models, together with the traditional taste of many provincial patrons. In wooden building, which from the point of view of quantity predominated in Poland up to the end of the nineteenth century, Gothic traditions persisted uninterrupted until the seventeenth century. In the brick architecture of the sixteenth century, Late Gothic forms long kept their vitality, maintained in particular by the Bernardine Order. What is more, about this time Late Gothic art moved from Central and Northern Poland far to the East, and the frontier

of Gothic architecture in Europe stretched to Podolia and the distant lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In sculpture, cultivated by guild workshops — as, for example, in the Cracow workshop of Stanisław Stwosz — the Late Gothic forms of post Wit Stwosz style were employed till far into the sixteenth century.

The persistence of medieval traditions is more clearly apparent in panel painting than in architecture or sculpture. Old subject-matter and medieval iconography minimally transformed, as well as gold backgrounds retained their vitality for a long time. There was also an evident reluctance in solving space and landscape problems in a new fashion. The greatness of the achievements of Polish fifteenth century altarpiece painting also contributed to this conservatism. It caused an extension of the influence of Late Gothic and led the waning Middle Ages in Poland to produce works of exceptional value. Here we have in mind first of all the Cracow polyptych of St. John the Almoner (ca. 1504) and the triptych from Bodzentyn, the work of Marcin Czarny (1508). They bring to an end the development of the painting of the fifteenth century guild workshops and at the same time lay the foundations of a new epoch. A kind of Polish counterpart of Italian Quattrocento works is the polyptych of St. John, executed for the Cracow church of St. Catherine, representing figures with distinct facial expressions, dressed in robes whose “broken” folds underwent a softening, and which are contained in more correctly planned interiors. On the other hand, in the Bodzentyn church triptych, of rich, subtle and lustrous colouring, the leading Cracow guild painter has paraphrased the brilliant composition of the Wit Stwosz Altarpiece in St. Mary’s Church, Cracow, representing the Sleeping and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, while the effigy of the donor, bishop Konarski, placed at the bottom of the panel, is an outstanding portrait study, the first of its kind in Poland. Both these leading works gave rein to many imitations which spread far in time and space.

However, Polish art and architecture could not remain insensible to Renaissance art imported from abroad, whose patrons were the royal court and the intellectually and culturally leading circles of nobles and municipal patricians, the more so since many Poles collaborated with foreign artists and new works were bound to influence a change in the taste of wider circles of society. The confrontation of traditional and new forms proved to be fruitful in many works of exceptional originality possessing an artistic value of their own.

The best example here is the Wawel Royal Castle with its unusually superimposed columns of the third storey, the kind of jugs placed on top of them beneath the roof, and with its richly multiform stone carving of the interior portals dating from 1521 – 1529, the years of the activity of Benedict of Sandomierz. These original mixed Gothic and Renaissance forms appeared not only in architectural decoration but also in tomb sculpture, as in the famous tombstone of Barbara Tarnowska (ca. 1520), and in wood-carved altarpieces, – the triptych of St. Stanislaus in Pławno church (ca. 1520) and the Wieniawa triptych (1544). The infusion of Renaissance forms into the work of native artists was also facilitated by graphic art. The influence of German graphic art was apparent in Poland already at the end of the fifteenth century, but it was strongest in the first half of the sixteenth century and then it was based on the works of other artists – Dürer, Kulmbach, Schüeflein, Cranach and Altdorfer. These German woodcuts and engravings were imitated and transformed, depending on the needs, alike in panel painting and miniatures and in wood-carving or even architectural decoration.

Local production acquired traits of these foreign artists' works which were especially valued and in great demand. It is a well-known fact that Kulmbach's altarpieces greatly influenced Cracow painting. Similarly, the anonymous painters of the beautiful Madonna in Corpus Christi Church, Cracow (first half of the sixteenth century) and of the famous epitaph of Dr. Jan of Oświęcim known as Sacranus (died 1527) in the Cracow Missionary Order Church were deeply attracted by Cranach's art. Madonnas painted in the Netherlands by such artists as Ysenbrandt or Lambert Lombard, highly valued by Polish recipients, were often copied and reproduced; there is even an almost faultless Polish duplicate of the Pietà of Quinten Massys in the Wawel Cathedral.

The formation of Polish Renaissance painting under the strong influence of German and Netherlandish art did not solely depend on copying ready-made models or on confounding these with Late Gothic traditions. Owing to the vital role of foreign art and the application of traditional values, especially Late Gothic realism, a national product possessing Renaissance qualities was developed. We have in mind here above all the work of the Master of the *Behem Codex*, already referred to and that of the most eminent of Polish painters of the sixteenth century, Stanisław of Mogiła, known as Samostrzelnik (ca. 1485–1541). The principal author of the illuminations in the magnificent

prayer-books destined for the use of the royal pair, Sigismund the Old and Bona Sforza, and that of the highest State dignitaries, which now adorn libraries in Poland, London, Oxford, Milan and Munich, was a many-faceted artist. He frescoed his native church and convent in Mogiła near Cracow and painted the famous portrait of Bishop Tomicki in the Cracow Franciscan Convent monastery. Samostrzelnik's art underwent a visible evolution. In so much as his early work was inspired by Dürer's woodcuts and Cranach's paintings from the Viennese period, his later work, as a result of his journey to Austria in the company of Chancellor Szydłowiecki (1515 and 1523), is decidedly inspired by the Danube school, by Altdorfer in particular and his anticlastic and pantheistic attitude towards nature. The work of the Master Stanisław was characterized by a splendid variety of decorative motifs where Late Gothic ornaments stood beside diverse Italian Renaissance and naturalistic Netherlandish forms, the latter resembling those used by the Master of Mary of Burgundy. Samostrzelnik's art found wide echos in contemporary Cracow painting.

During the first half of the sixteenth century, great changes heralding Modern Times took place also in the domain of Polish architecture. Newly built or reconstructed castles began to acquire a monumental appearance. The plans were becoming more rectangular, while even those built on hills began to be more regular. These tendencies reached their peak in the composition of the King Sigismund Augustus castle in Niepołomice (from 1550). Although as early as in the Late Gothic, residencies appeared in Poland which were no longer strongholds, it was now that a new type of habitation was introduced from Italy — namely, suburban villas, such as that built around 1530 for the royal secretary Jodok Ludwik Decius in Wola near Cracow or the villa in Prądnik of the bishop humanist, Samuel Maciejowski, which was immortalized by Łukasz Górnicki in his famous adaptation of Baldassare Castiglione's *Il cortegiano*.

One of the most important novelties in Polish sculpture and painting at the beginning of the sixteenth century was the appearance of the portrait. Although the portraiture trend originated in fifteenth century art, it was only, now, under the influence of humanistic anthropocentrism, that the portrait developed into an individual, self-dependent artistic genre. Painted portraits of that period were characterized by a realism of detail and a decorative, precise and minute manner of treating forms. We might mention here the

numerous portraits of Sigismund I, of the Mazovia princes (ca. 1520), of Cracow bishops, especially that of Tomicki painted by Samostrzelnik (ca. 1534), and also the portraits of Przybyła townspeople (ca. 1534), as well as the beautiful portrait of Benedykt of Koźmin (died 1559), a humanist, professor and benefactor of Cracow University.

In religious painting, a tendency to "modernise" the figures represented, to realistic typographic localisation and actualisation was developed. Authentic Polish towns appeared in the background of paintings, and figures of saints were often modelled on contemporary Kings or magnates. Likewise innovative was the development of profane painting on a great scale. Profane were the themes of the brilliant miniatures of the *Behem Codex* (1505) while secular, allegorical and historical scenes decorated the Wawel Royal Castle. Finally, an interest in national history arose, which was stimulated by an inflorescence of Poland's historiography, to name only the writings of Miechowita, Decius and Copernicus's friend, Wapowski. We might mention here paintings of the victory of Wiśniowiec (1512) and of the battle of Orsza (1514), which decorated the Franciscan convent in Cracow, as well as that representing the siege of Malbork (1410) painted in 1536 by a Gdańsk artist, Martin Schoninck.

Many themes of profane painting were borrowed from Ancient history and mythology. We know that in the Wawel Castle in 1542 hung tapestries depicting the Judgment of Paris and Thisbe's story, and a painting of "the woman taken in adultery". The royal bathroom was decorated with pictures representing the Three Graces, painted by Dionizy Stuba in 1544, and pictures of similar subject-matter, works of a painter George (1531–1534), were in the Gdańsk Artushof.

The growing number of foreign artists employed by the Royal court caused a new important law concerning artistic production to be introduced, namely exemption for foreign artists from membership of municipal guilds as long as they were working only for their patrons. In this way a circle of court artists was formed and the first step taken towards the modern conception of artistic activity. Under the influence of these foreign artists, who like Berrecci were fully aware of the importance of their work, a self-consciousness was awakened among local artists, till then anonymous; they began more often to sign their own works.

The circle of Polish art patrons at that time was very large and included, apart from the King's court and the secular and ecclesiastical magnates, the



28. Wit Stwosz and Vischer's workshop,  
Tomb of Filippo Buonaccorsi, after 1496.

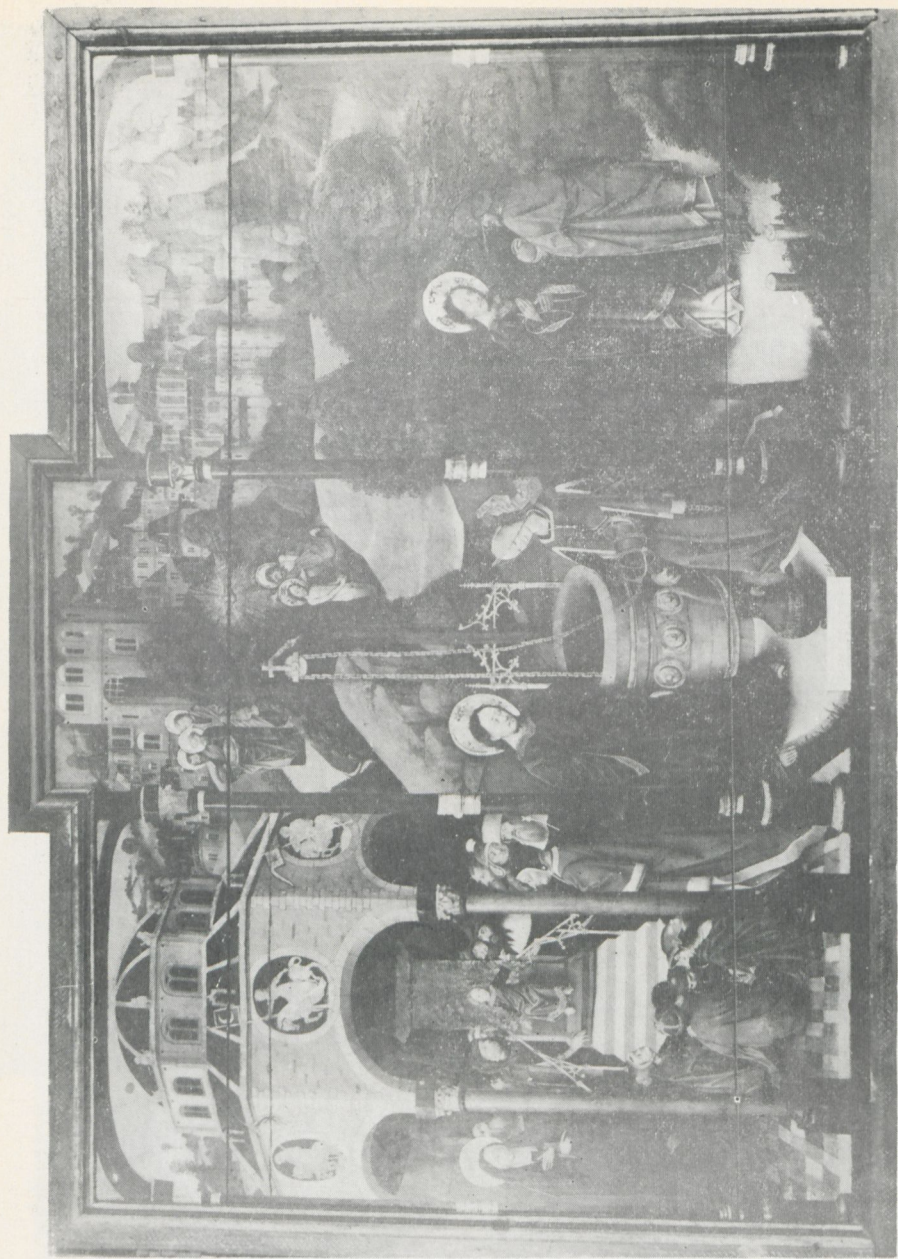


29. Franciszek of Sieradz (?),  
The triptych of Warta (fragment), c. 1480.

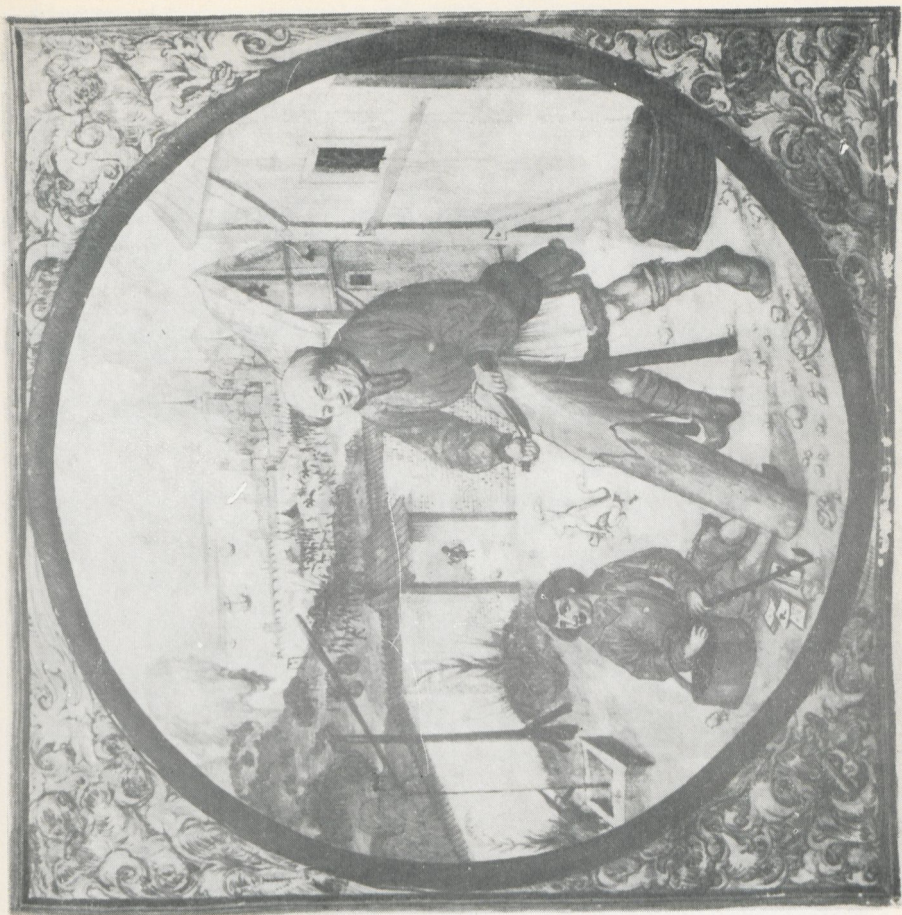
30. The polyptych of Olkusz (fragment), c. 1480.







31. Central part of the Jerusalem altar piece from Church at Gdańsk, c. 1500.



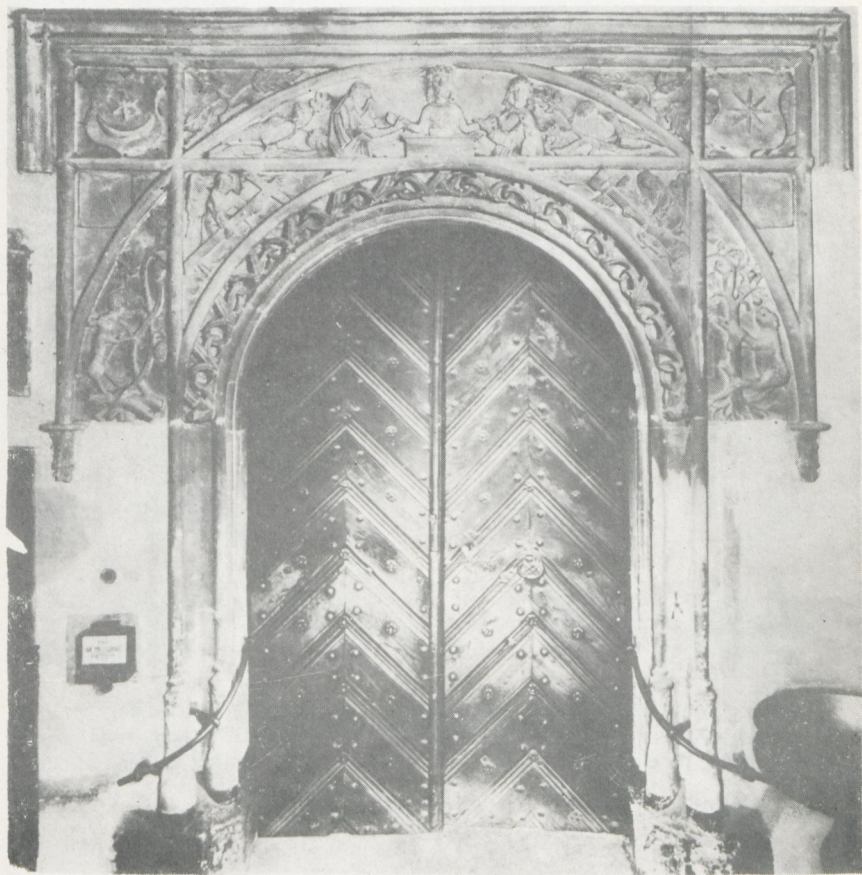
32. Miniature  
from *Behem's Codex*, 1505.



BARBARA DE GONNORUM LITURGO ZAVINSE  
NIGRIMILES IN OBITU CHRISTI ANNO MCCCLXXII  
IN THARMEN CASTELI ANNO GRACIE MCCCLXXII  
PASTOR ANIMARUM SANCTI MICHAELIS  
BAPTISTE ANNO MCCCLXXII

33. Tomb of Barbara Tarnowska at Tarnów, c. 1520.

34. Portal of the Cathedral at Tarnów.  
Early 16th century.



INSIGNE REVERENDISS. IN CHRISTO PA  
TRIS. ET DOMINI DOMINI MATHIE  
DREVICII EPISCOPI WLADISLA  
VIENSIS.



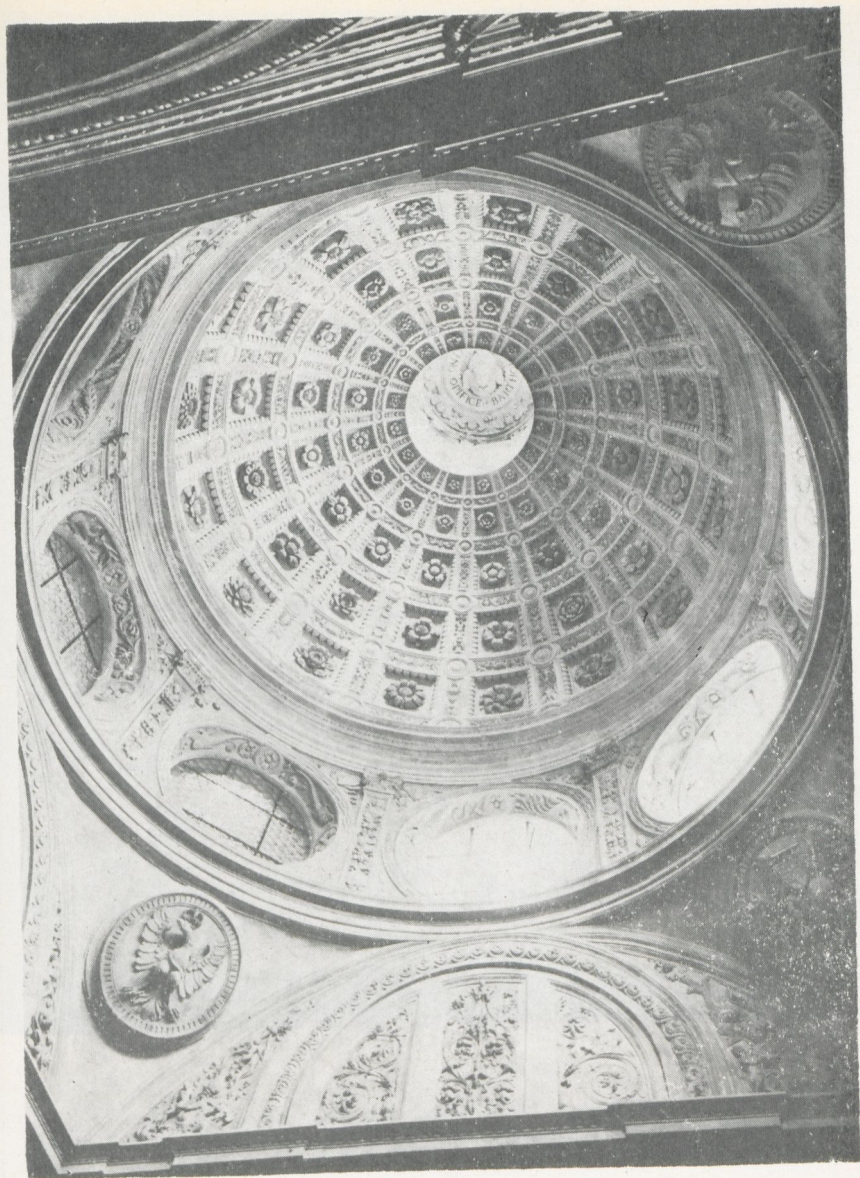


36. Wawel Castle in Cracow, 1507—1536.

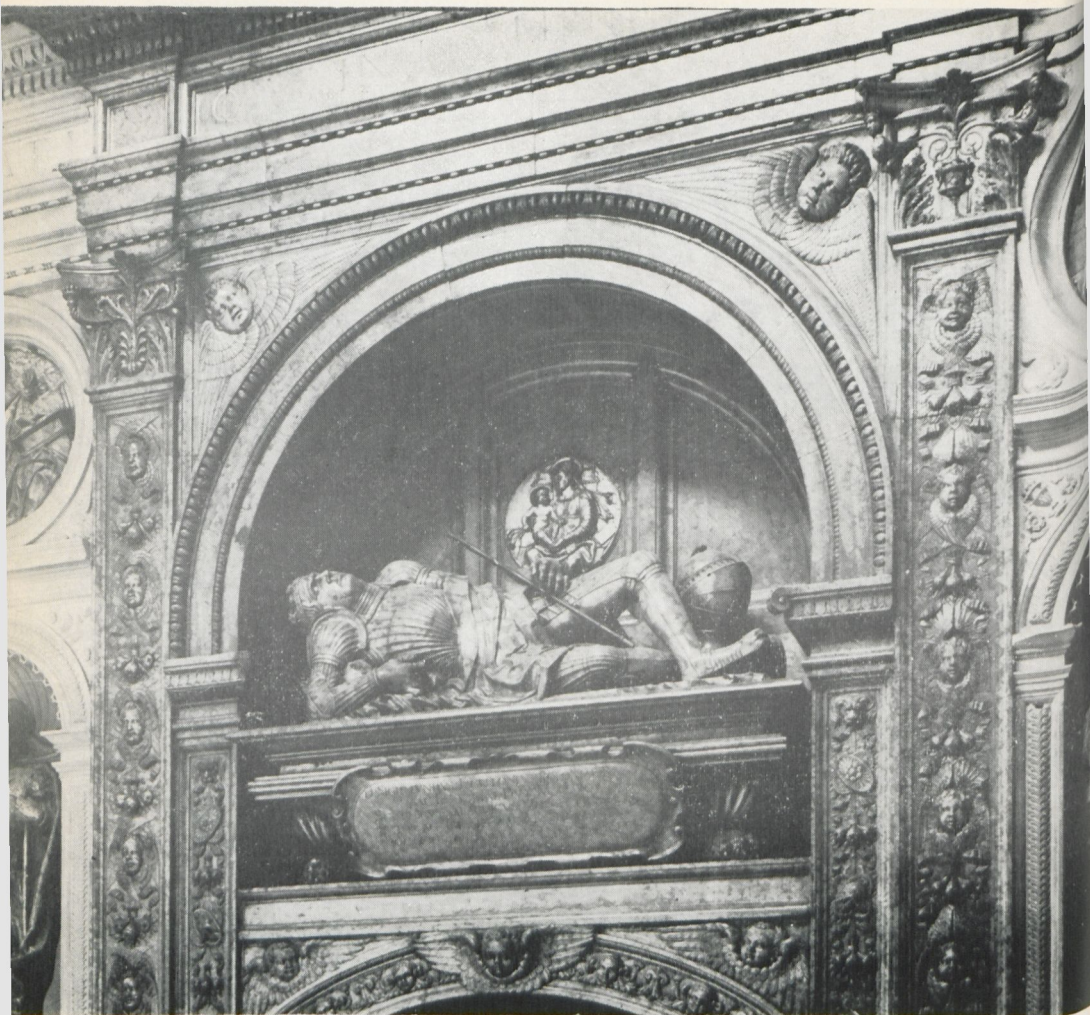


37. The tomb of King John Albert, 1502.

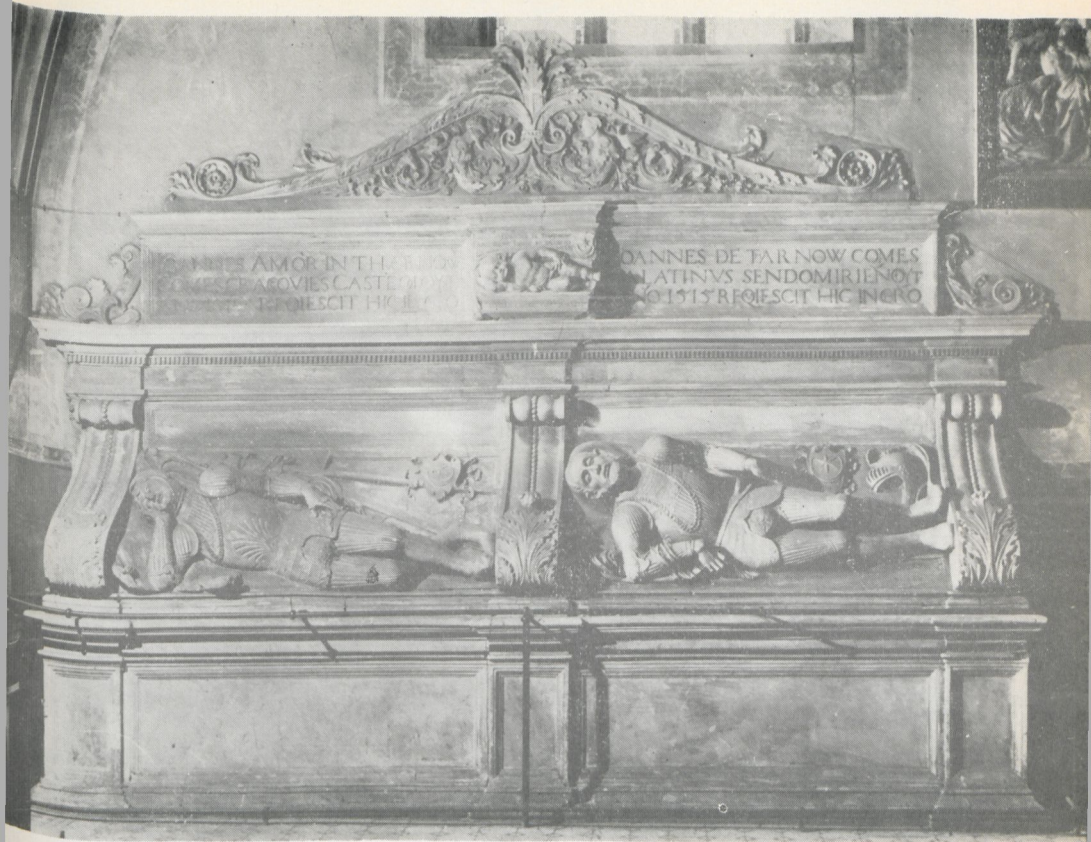




38. The Sigmund Chapel in the Wawel Cathedral, 1517–1533.

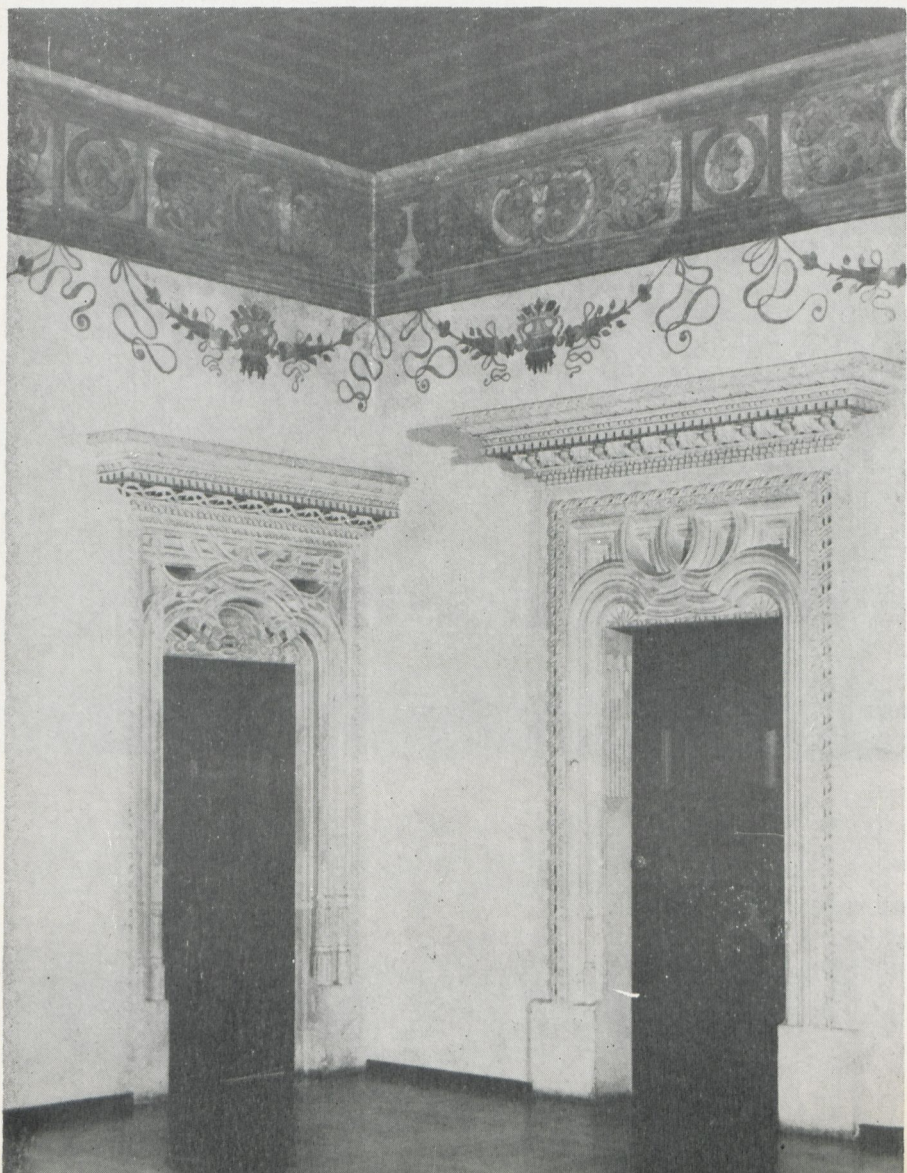


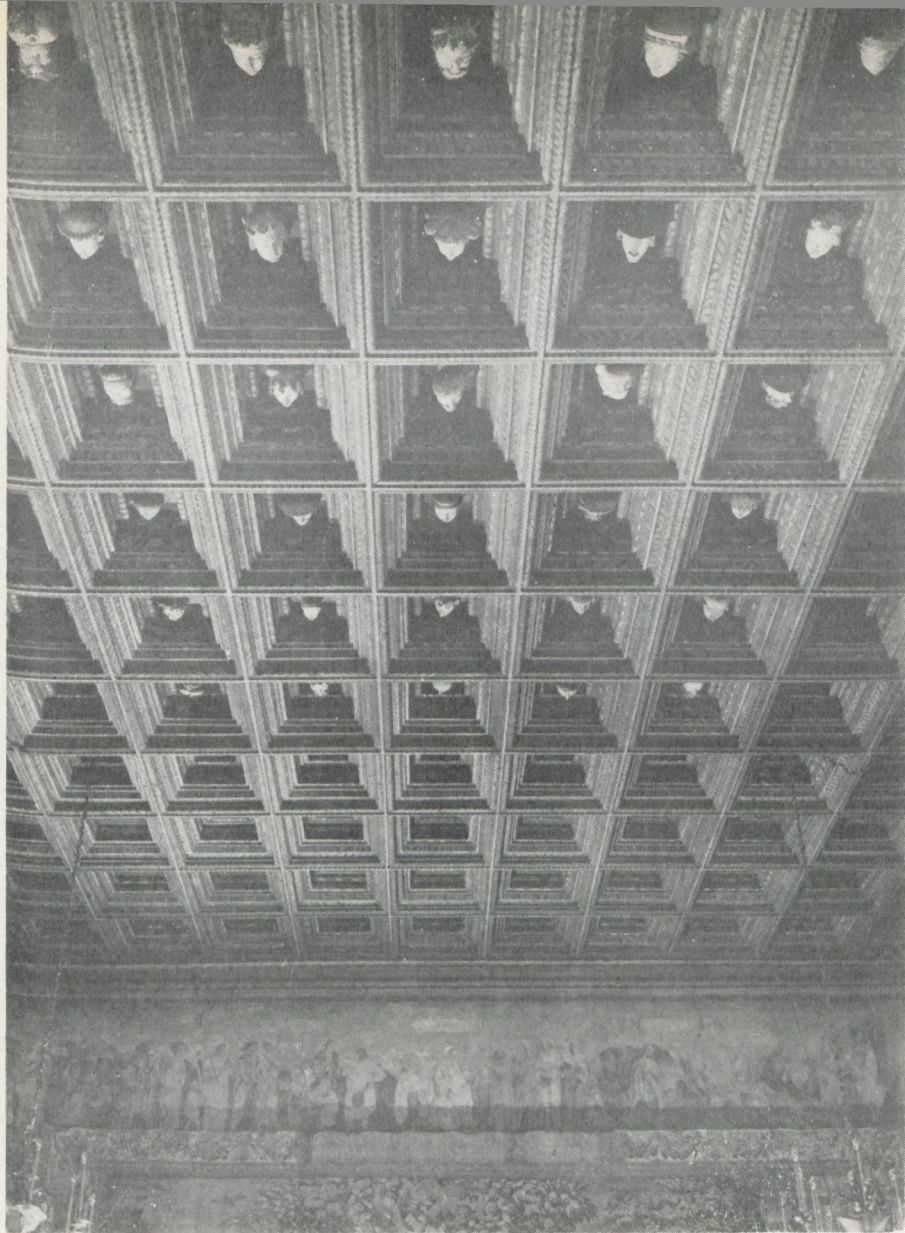
39. Tomb of King Sigismund the Old  
in the Sigismund Chapel, 1529–1532.



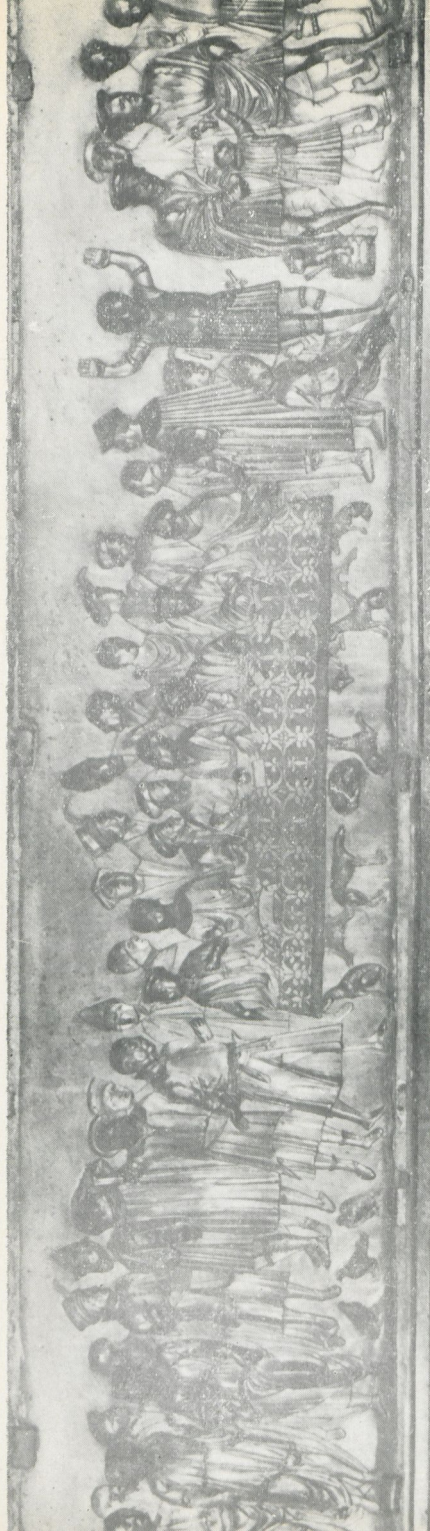
40. Tomb of Jan Amor,  
Jan and Jan Aleksander Tarnowski at Tarnów,  
after 1536.

41. Portals of King Sigismund the Old's bedroom  
in the Wawel Castle, 1524—1529.

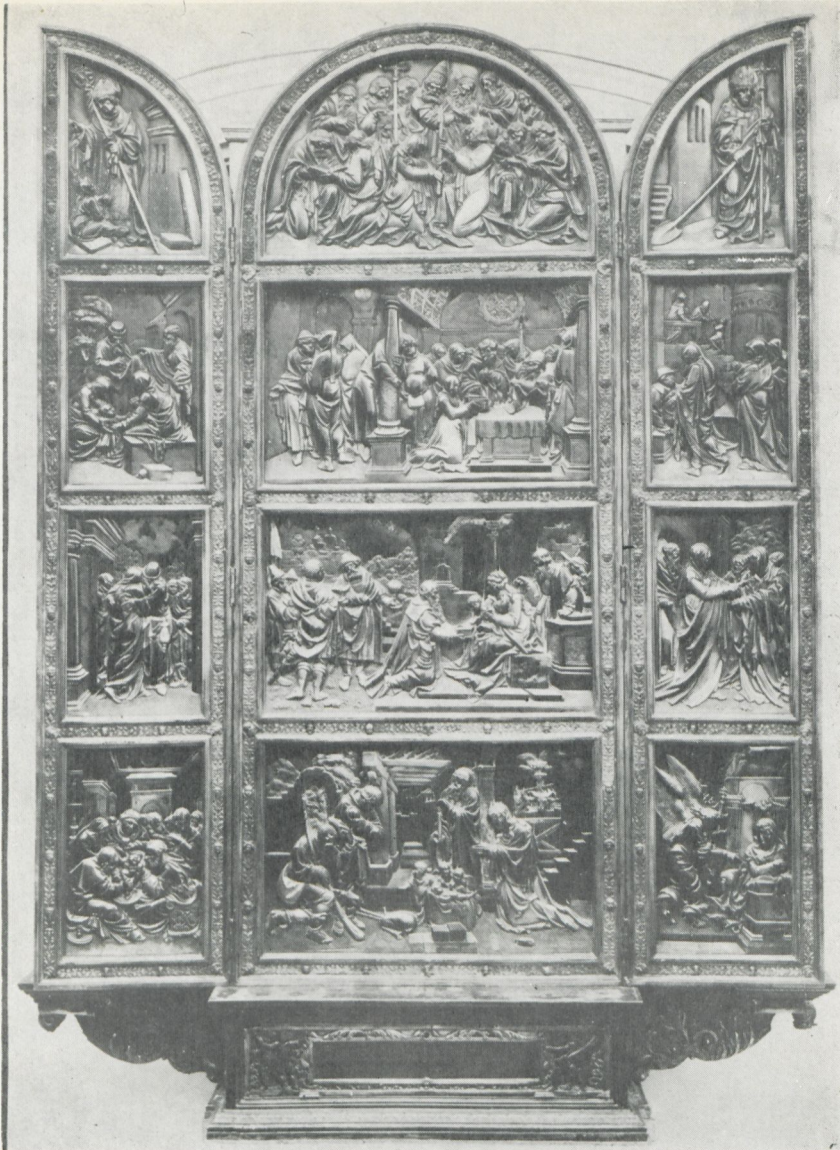




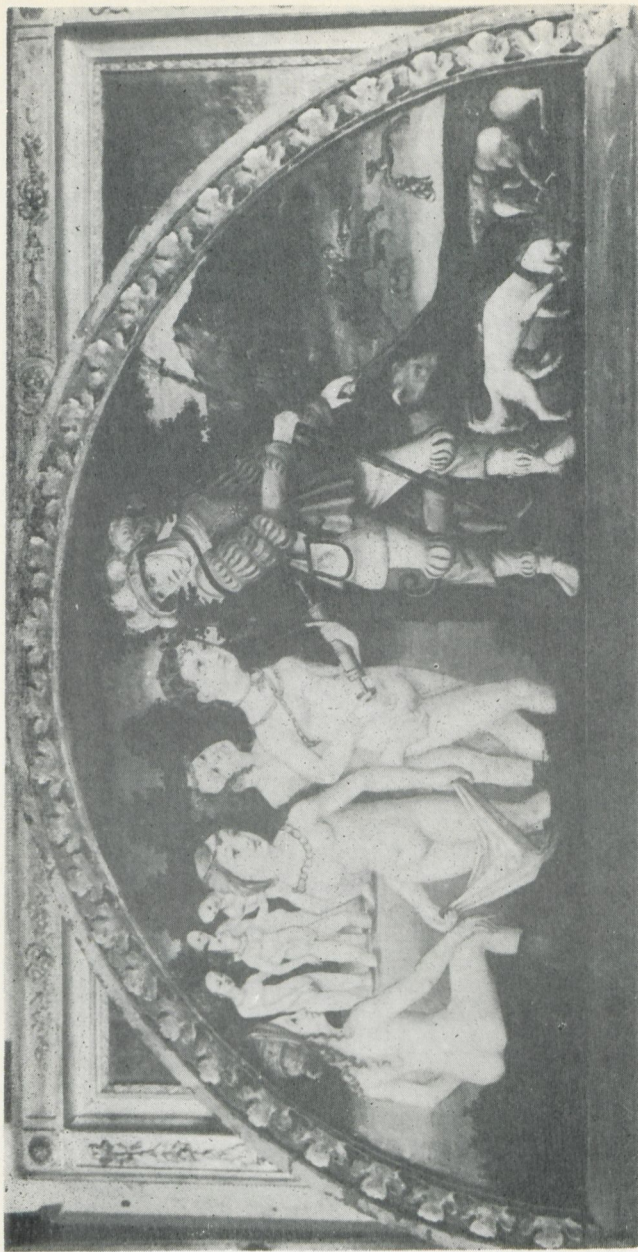
42. Ceiling and frieze in the Deputies' Hall  
in the Wawel Castle, 1531—1535.



43. Bas-relief of the tomb  
of Krzysztof Szydłowiecki at Opatów, 1530 — 1541.



44. Altar in the Sigismund Chapel  
in the Wawel Cathedral, 1531 – 1538.



45. The painter George,  
*Meeting of Diana and Actaeon*  
from the Artus House at Gdańsk, 1531 – 1534.

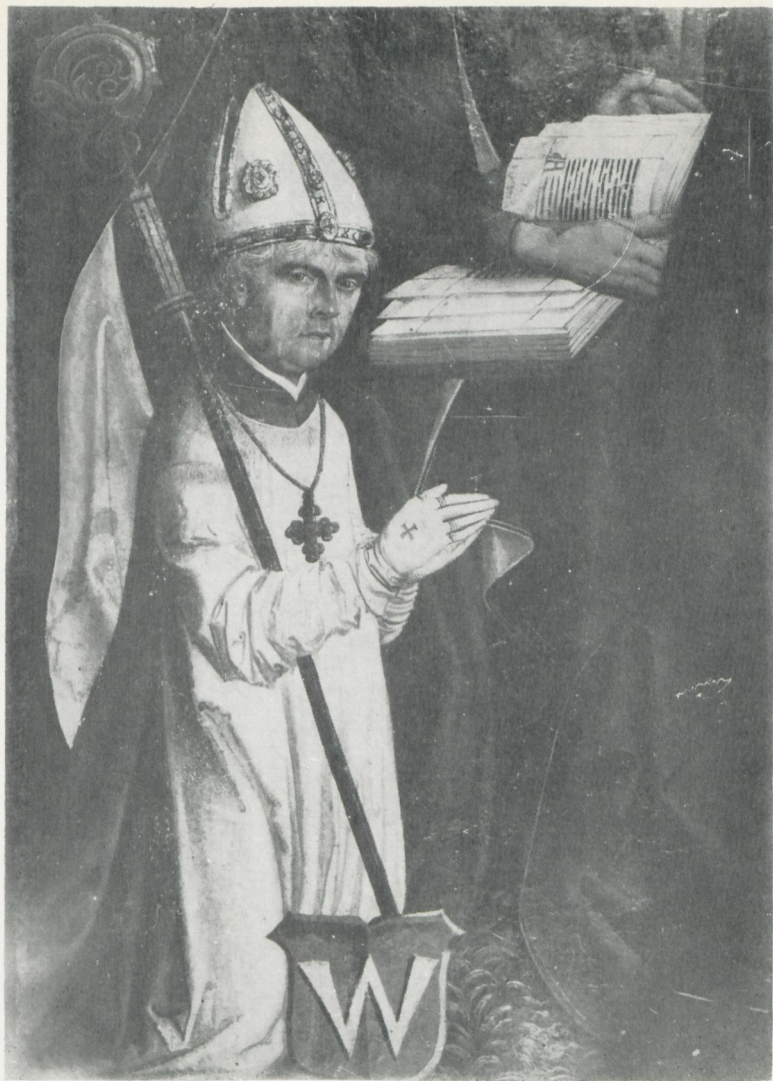




46. Arras of the set *The Paradise Story* in the Wawel Castle, before 1553.



47. Michael Lantz of Kitzingen,  
Central part of the triptych  
from the Wawel Cathedral, 1521.



48. Marcin Czarny,  
Fragment of the triptych at Bodzentyn  
with portrait of bishop Konarski, 1508.





50. Benedykt of Koźmin, ca. 1559.

49. Stanisław Samostrzelnik, miniature in Jan Długosz's Catalogue of Gniezno archbishops, before 1535.



51. Fragment of the picture *The Battle at Orsza*, after 1514.

wealthy gentry, the patriciate and the town intelligentsia. Their artistic needs were intensive and authentic. The best proof of that is the importation of so many artists and works into Poland from the main European art centres. The ordering of a first class work of art from the workshop of a famous artist by a person living in the artist's native country could not always be considered proof of a real artistic need but the importation of artists, inevitably of second rank, and of works of art, necessarily of lower value, to a distant and not easily accessible country certainly was.

The first half of the sixteenth century was, as we have already said, in the domain of art, a period in which the Late Gothic and the Renaissance, the Medieval and the Modern alternated and coexisted. The most outstanding art patrons of the period, Sigismund the Old, the Boners, Konarski, Tomicki, Łaski, Krzycki, and Szydłowiecki, significantly enough were linked with the achievements of old as well as new art. Their attachment to the old values was almost as strong as their interest in the new; and this in no way betrays a lack of artistic culture, for it was thanks to their orders that brilliant works of both stylistic trends were produced by Italian, German and Polish artists. It is therefore not surprising that the men who were saturated with the ideas of Italian humanism, with all its syncretism, and who were deeply influenced by Erasmus, appreciated the values of an art which had inherited a many centuries-old Christian tradition and were at the same time fascinated by the new art which exploited the forms and themes of pagan Antiquity and which heralded Modern Times. Perhaps it was not simply by accident that in Poland during this period there emerged a scholar who — inspired by the rooted late medieval realism and likewise well instructed in humanistic culture — was interested by various domains of theoretical and practical science and created a work which opened a new era of human thought — Nicholas Copernicus.

*Translated by Izabella Carrol*