

Complessi scultorei medievali all'indomani della Seconda Guerra Mondiale tra distruzioni, dispersioni e restituzioni. L'impatto sulle metodologie e sugli strumenti di ricerca

Medieval sculpture in the aftermath of the World War II: destruction, dispersion and restitution. The impact on research methodologies and tools

PAOLA VITOLO, ANTONELLA DENTAMARO

Le distruzioni della Seconda Guerra Mondiale hanno rappresentato, in tempi relativamente recenti rispetto allo sviluppo della moderna storiografia artistica, uno spartiacque nel processo di indagine dei complessi scultorei medievali. All'indomani della fine del conflitto, la perdita dei materiali per un verso, gli interventi di restauro e ricostruzione per un altro hanno modificato in maniera spesso profonda e irrimediabile opere e micro-contesti architettonici e decorativi (cappelle, altari...), con un impatto significativo sull'approccio critico alla materia e, prima ancora, sul senso di identità legato ai luoghi nonché sulle categorie di rappresentazione degli spazi. Al tempo stesso, questi interventi hanno rappresentato in alcuni casi l'occasione per importanti scoperte sulle condizioni materiali delle opere, rivelando ad esempio segni di integrazioni operati nel corso dei secoli ai contesti originari, casi di reimpieghi, opere rimaste celate etc.

Quanto è andato irrimediabilmente perduto nel corso della Seconda Guerra Mondiale? Qual è stato l'impatto delle ricostruzioni sull'iconografia dei luoghi? Quanto sopravvive ancora, in stato frammentario, in musei e collezioni private? Quali contesti potrebbero essere materialmente ricomposti o ricostruiti attraverso le immagini storiche e il supporto delle ricostruzioni virtuali? In che misura, per altro verso, gli interventi post-bellici hanno rappresentato un'opportunità di ricerca scientifica?

La sessione mira ad indagare, attraverso la discussione di casi di studio, in che modo e in che misura la Seconda Guerra Mondiale abbia condizionato e posto nuove questioni metodologiche nel settore degli studi sulla scultura medievale.

La sessione si inserisce nelle attività del progetto MemId (Memoria e Identità. Memoria e identità. Riuso, rilavorazione e riallestimento della scultura medievale in Età moderna, tra ricerca storica e nuove tecnologie, FISIR 2019).

The destructions caused by of the World War II represented, relatively recently with respect to the development of modern artistic historiography, a watershed in the investigation of medieval sculptural complexes. In the aftermath of the end of the conflict, the loss of materials on the one hand, the restoration and reconstruction of works on the other, have often changed in a profound and irremediable way sculptural works and micro architectural contexts (chapels, altars ...), with a significant impact on the critical approach to this field of study and above all on the sense of identity linked to places, as well as on the categories of representation of spaces. At the same time, these interventions have in some cases represented the opportunity for important discoveries on the material conditions of the works, for example revealing signs of interventions made over the centuries to the original contexts, cases of reuse of materials/works, sculptures that have remained hidden after later interventions etc.

How much was irretrievably lost during the Second World War? What was the impact of the reconstructions on the iconography of the places? How many works still survives, although in a fragmented state, in museums and private collections? Which contexts could be materially

recomposed or reconstructed through historical images and the support of virtual reconstructions? To what extent, on the other hand, have post-war interventions represented an opportunity for scientific research?

The session aims to investigate, through the discussion of case studies, how and to what extent World War II conditioned and posed new methodological questions in the field of medieval sculpture studies.

The session is part of the activities of the MemId project (Memory and identity. Reuse, rework and repurposing of medieval sculpture in the Modern Age, between historical research and new technologies, FISR 2019).

PREPRINT

The Recovery of Artistic Remains from the Ruins of War: Investigating the Medieval Portals of San Tommaso in Ortona and San Giovanni Evangelista in Ravenna

CATHLEEN HOENIGER

Queen's University

Abstract

The medieval portals of two churches of early foundation on the Adriatic Coast of Italy are examined in relation to the destruction of World War Two, attempts to salvage the remains from the ruins, and post-war reconstruction. Focus is placed on the collection of artistic fragments from the wreckage to allow restoration to be later undertaken. Archival documents illuminate the obstacles faced by the Soprintendenze in managing the ruins and chart the assistance of the Allied MFAA officers.

Keywords

Medieval sculpture, war damage, wartime salvage.

Introduction

Among the most calamitous events for societies and their cultural heritage in Europe, the two world wars of the twentieth century caused profound damage to artistic monuments and provoked decades of restoration. This essay examines the medieval carved portals of two Italian churches amidst the destruction of World War Two. Only very limited anti-aerial protection had been established for Italy's numerous ecclesiastic properties because few were registered as national monuments and came under the responsibility of the federal ministry and the regional Soprintendenze. For the vast majority, their preservation during the war fell to clerical custodians, who were ill equipped [Regio Decreto, 27 maggio 1929, n. 848]. The immovable or difficult to dislodge ornamentation of early churches, including sculpture, frescoes, and stained-glass, became vulnerable to damage from aerial bombardment and artillery fire. Among the stages of art preservation during WWII, emphasis will be placed on the emergency rescue after damage had occurred, and specifically the excavation of broken fragments from the wreckage. The examples under scrutiny are the two medieval doorframes of San Tommaso in Ortona and the gothic gateway of San Giovanni Evangelista in Ravenna. Unlike some early churches that experienced severe damage, for example, Santa Chiara in Naples and the Eremitani in Padua, the monuments to be considered have garnered less scholarly attention. Nevertheless, these churches were of very early foundation, and their portals were art-historically significant.

1. The Origins of the Church of San Giovanni Evangelista and the 14th-Century Gateway

San Giovanni Evangelista had auspicious origins under the patronage of Galla Placidia, resident in Ravenna from 417 to 450, and the dedication of the church reflected her personal devotion to the apostle [Schoolman 2016, 105-107]. Planned as a basilica with a quadriporticus, and divided on the interior into three naves by double-storied arcades with early capitals, the church underwent changes after it was acquired by the Benedictines in the tenth century. The quadriporticus was torn down and replaced by a courtyard, and, in the first half of the fourteenth century, an architectural entrance into the precincts was fashioned from

a variety of marble stones, some reused from the early basilica. More than just an attractive gateway, two bas-reliefs illustrated events from the foundation of the basilica, signalling ties to the imperial family. The stories of the *Miracle of the Sandle* in the tympanum, and the *Dedication of the Church* in the gable, had been recorded in later medieval manuscripts, one commissioned for the monks at about the same time as the gateway [Novara 2012, 130-139]. In the miracle scene, the gift to Galla Placidia by St. John the Evangelist of a relic of his pontifical sandal for the basilica was conveyed. The gable relief depicted the subsequent dedication of the basilica to the Evangelist in the presence of Galla's son, Emperor Valentinian III (reigned 425-455).

2. Limited State Protection from War Damage for Ecclesiastical Properties

Before WWII, neither San Giovanni Evangelista in Ravenna nor San Tommaso in Ortona were on the State inventory of national monuments. However, after Prime Minister Mussolini took Italy into war, joining forces with Chancellor Hitler and Germany in June 1940, the Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale, Giuseppe Bottai, worried that Italy's Catholic cathedrals would not be safeguarded, introduced legislation to elevate 225 cathedrals to the national list [Regio Decreto, 21 novembre 1940, n. 1746]. Therefore, the cathedral of San Tommaso came under the protection of the Soprintendenza in L'Aquila.

3. The Cathedral of San Tommaso and Its Medieval Portals

Ortona's large cathedral, which dominated the northern section of the seaside town, had very early origins after Ortona became a diocesan seat in the fourth century, though much of the building reflected neo-classical renovations in the eighteenth century. Among the events that transformed the early church were: destruction by Norman invaders, collapse in the earthquake of 1125, expansion and rededication after the arrival of the sacred remains of St. Thomas in 1258, and severe damage in a fire set by Saracen invaders in 1566. From the fabric of the enlarged church, built in honour of St. Thomas after 1258, two portals survived. The portal in the west façade dated from the thirteenth century, and featured vegetal motifs on the pilasters and colonettes in the jambs, though the tympanum sculpture had long been missing. The slightly later, south portal, which was the public entrance to the church, was attributed in a lost inscription to Nicola Marcino di Ortona in 1311-1312 [Gavini 1927, 65-68]. In the manner typical of the Abruzzi, a rich variety of decorative motifs were employed, including geometric, vegetal, and floral forms on the colonettes in the jambs, and stacks of half-length figures in the voussoirs, some of rural laborers and others of angels holding candles. The tympanum held a sculpted group of the Madonna and Child with St. John the Baptist and another male saint, perhaps Thomas.

4. A Summary of the Events of WWII along the Adriatic Coast of Italy

Sadly both churches and their doorways experienced heavy damage in the fierce fighting between the occupying Germans and the Allies. Italy had entered WWII alongside Germany, but after Mussolini was deposed in July 1943, Italy signed an armistice with the Allies in September, and, in reaction, a large German army took over the peninsula. Hence, when the Allies arrived on the southern mainland, they were fighting against the Germans. Divisions of the British Eighth Army battled German forces up the Adriatic Coast, through Apulia, the Abruzzi, the Marche, and into Emilia-Romagna [Gioannini and Massobrio 2007, 409-410].



1: Gateway of San Giovanni Evangelista, Ravenna, first half of 14th century; condition in Dec. 1944 after war damage. (Photo: College Park, NARA, RG 239-PA, no copyright restrictions).

5. Partial Destruction of Ortona Cathedral in December 1943

In Ortona, German battalions engaged in intense conflict against Canadian divisions of the Eighth Army for weeks in December 1943 [Nicholson 1956, 304-339]. On 21 December, before they retreated, German army engineers detonated mines in the base of the Torre dell'Orologio, beside the west façade of the cathedral. Though the objective was to topple the tower into the piazza to the south so that piles of rubble would block the progress of the Allies, the tower fell northeast onto the body of the church, ruining the west end and causing one-third of the dome to collapse [Politi 1966, 149-150]. The medieval stone portals were broken into pieces and the west portal was buried under the rubble.

6. Heavy Damage to San Giovanni Evangelista in August and September 1944

Several months later, the German-occupied city of Ravenna, farther up the coast, came under attack from the Allies. Trainlines were targeted to disrupt the movement of the Germans, and San Giovanni Evangelista, located about 200 metres from the main trainline, was partly destroyed in the air-raids of late August and early September 1944. Accounts submitted by the Soprintendenza and ministry inspectors recorded the ruin of the front half and part of the apse of the church, and that the

top of the gateway had fallen and bomb splinters had damaged the lower arch¹. When members of the Allied Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Subcommittee (MFAA) visited Ravenna in December, Major Paul Gardner described how: «the fine Romanesque gate of the atrium had been hit and one of the superb lions from the top was standing on his head in a pile of rubbish»².

7. The Salvage of Ruined Monuments under the Allied Military Government

In signing the armistice in September 1943, Italy had agreed to the establishment of an Allied Military Government (AMG) to temporarily administer each *provincia* that was freed from German occupation until stability was achieved and the Italian government reassumed control [Inglis 2014, 49-51]. The MFAA Subcommittee constituted one wing of the AMG,

¹ Rome, ACS, MPI, Dir. Gen. AABBA, Div. II (1945-55), b. 16, Sopr. C. Capezzuoli, telegrams about air-raid damage, 21 and 25 agosto, 9 settembre 1944; Comm. L. Crema, *I Danni di Guerra ai monumenti del Comune di Ravenna*, 24 gennaio 1946. College Park, NARA, RG 331, 17th Monthly Report, AMG-134, 67-72, E. Lavagnino, G. De Angelis, and M. Cagianò De Azevedo, *Reports on a Visit of Inspection to Rimini and Ravenna, March 45*.

² Kansas City, MO. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Paul Gardner Papers, Maj. P. Gardner, Letter, 12 December 1944.

and was comprised of American and British classical archaeologists, art historians, architects, artists, and archivists. Beginning in October 1943, MFAA officers assisted the insolvent Soprintendenze by providing funding and supplies, and collaborated in the emergency rescue work [Hartt 1949, 3-8]³. Even though the salvage procedures were familiar to several Soprintendenti from World War One or other disasters, and instructions were circulated by the ministry, the toll taken by WWII was horrendous, and the already strained Soprintendenze were disabled by the collapse of the federal economy. Immediate responses to damage generally were only possible for registered monuments situated near by, since transportation was lacking [Lavagnino 1946, 85]. The protocol was that the Soprintendenza assessed the ruins, and then submitted a *preventivo di spese* or cost estimate for each stage of the work to the Ministero for approval and funding. However, under the AMG, the *preventivi* went to the MFAA Subcommittee, and emergency finances were released by the AMG to the Prefetti (premiers) and Sindaci (mayors) to be distributed to the Soprintendenze. If the Allies reached a war-torn area before the Soprintendente, the MFAA officers sometimes initiated the assessment and rescue. In the case of an early church, the process typically involved: securing the site to prevent additional damage and looting, removing artistic fragments from the ruins, and urgent repairs, such as patching a roof or stabilizing a wall [R. Soprintendenza L'Aquila 1945, 7]⁴. Among these, the collection of the fragments was critical because the original pieces were necessary for subsequent restoration work. At some sites, where the wreckage had not been disturbed, the application of systematic methods inspired by archaeology enabled good yields [Hoeniger 2020, 297-301; Hoeniger 2022, 198-199]. However, the responses to the ruins of the churches in Ortona and Ravenna were not timely.

8. Reasons for the Slow Rescue of Ortona Cathedral

Ortona Cathedral was half destroyed, but the location of the Soprintendenza at a distance in L'Aquila and the lack of vehicles hindered the arrival of Soprintendente Umberto Chierici [Coccoli 2017, 111-126].

A voluntary *ispettore onorario*, the lawyer Tommaso Grilli, had been appointed, but was absent when the Allies arrived [Grilli 1966, 27]⁵. The preliminary assessment and safeguarding fell to the MFAA officers, who reached Ortona six months before Chierici. In the earliest MFAA report on the cathedral of February 1944, Major J.B. Ward-Perkins alerted Headquarters and Soprintendente Chierici that municipal garbage crews had been removing stones from the ruins to clear the piazza. Ward-Perkins sought local help to preserve the artistic remains, but could only find the elderly Canone Penitensore Basti, who kept watch through April⁶. By May, the Soprintendenza had established a committee to protect Ortona's heritage, including the lawyer Grilli, and their duties encompassed the prevention of looting from the cathedral ruins [R. Soprintendenza L'Aquila 1945, 7]⁷. Major Norman Newton reported in early June that pieces retrieved from the south portal were being kept in the

³ College Park, NARA, RG 331, Brig.-Gen. E. E. Hume, *Work of Allied Military Government of Rome: Report of the First Forty-Eight Hours*, 7 June 1944, 4-6.

⁴ Rome, ACS, MPI, Dir. Gen. AABBA, Div. II (1945-55), b. 15, Ministro dei Lavori Pubblici, *Ricostruzioni degli Edifici e delle Zone Monumentali Distrutti o Danneggiati alla Guerra*, 4 ottobre 1944.

⁵ Rome, ACS, MPI, Dir. Gen. AABBA, Div. II (1940-45), b. 101.

⁶ College Park, NARA, RG 331, Fourth Monthly Report, J. B. Ward-Perkins, *Monuments and Fine Arts, Work in Forward Areas*, 17 February 1944, 1; Sixth and Seventh Monthly Reports, AMG-13, 76, N.T. Newton, *Inspection of Monuments, Ortona*, 23 April 1944.

⁷ College Park, NARA, RG 331, Tenth Monthly Report, AMG- 35, 46, F. H. J. Maxse, *Monuments in the Province of Chieti*, 19 August 1944.



2: Detail of Dome of San Tommaso, Ortona, condition in spring 1944 after severe war damage. (Photo: College Park, NARA, RG 239-PA, no copyright restrictions).

cathedral, and recommended a systematic clearance of the remains of the west portal, buried under the collapsed tower⁸. Chierici was finally able to assess the site on 8-9 August, in the company of the MFAA officer, Captain Fred Maxse. Taking charge, Chierici advised that a comprehensive procedure would be undertaken when specialists could be brought from L'Aquila⁹. In November, the Soprintendente submitted his first account of the clearance, in which he described a successful retrieval of fragments from the west portal, though the results proved less favourable for the south door¹⁰.

9. Partial Recovery and Restoration of the Medieval Portals of Ortona Cathedral

Because of the devastating condition of Ortona, and the long delay before a proper clearance was commenced, less than half of the original stones survived. Dagoberto Drisaldi completed the restoration of the south portal in 1947, as an inscription in the lintel

⁸ College Park, NARA, RG 331, Sixth and Seventh Monthly Reports, AMG-13, 77, N.T. Newton, *Inspection of Monuments, Ortona*, 2 June 1944.

⁹ College Park, NARA, RG 331, Tenth Monthly Report, AMG- 35, 55, F. H. J. Maxse, *Report of August 1944*, 24 August 1944; Eleventh Monthly Report, AMG-56, 62, Idem, *Monuments in the Provinces of Chieti and Pescara*, 25 September 1944.

¹⁰ College Park, NARA, RG 331, Twelfth Monthly Report, AMG-65, 64, Sopr. Chierici, L'Aquila, *Stato dei Lavori di Riparazione dei Monumenti Danneggiati della Guerra nel Giorno 10 Novembre 1944*.

CATHLEEN HOENIGERE

attests, but no attempt was made to replace the lost sculpture. Instead the salvaged original pieces were set into an unornamented facsimile of the architectural framework. Some of the sculpture had been lost before 1940, but further pieces became casualties of the war. The question remains whether the slow response of the Soprintendenza to the ruin of Ortona Cathedral was partly due to the lower stature of the monument, despite its historical importance as a pilgrimage shrine. Evidently, the protection had been delegated to a volunteer, who was neither fully trained in heritage work, nor required by ministry protocol to remain on site throughout the conflict.



3: *Detail of South Portal of San Tommaso, Ortona, attrib. Nicola Marcino di Ortona, 1311-12, after war damage and restoration of 1947 (Photo: author).*

10. The Low Priority of San Giovanni Evangelista in the Salvage of Ravenna's Monuments

Certainly in Ravenna, one reason why the gateway of San Giovanni Evangelista was only salvaged in part was that the Soprintendenza was focused on the rescue of more famous churches in the city, such as Sant'Apollinare Nuovo [Coccoli 2017, 262-270]. Overall, the impact of the war in the medium-sized city was less severe than in the devastated town of Ortona. Even though three night air-raids caused great damage, the municipal administration continued to function. However, the MFAA reports reveal that San Giovanni Evangelista was low on the list, and when attention was given, it was the late Trecento frescoes in a chapel that were of primary concern, not the gateway¹¹. In December 1944, Major Newton recorded that barbed wire had been erected for security until the Soprintendenza could manage the clearance, and emphasized the importance of saving the gateway¹². One factor in the delay was the mysterious absence of Soprintendente Corrado Capezzuoli from December 1944 to April 1945, which would later be investigated¹³. In place of Capezzuoli, the Prefetto established a voluntary committee¹⁴. Amidst these fraught circumstances, in February 1945, «truckloads» of rubble were mistakenly removed from the church ruins by army vehicles¹⁵. Though the plan for trained workers to collect the fragments was announced in March 1945, only in November was there news from the city engineer that the lower portion of the archway had been retrieved and the pieces numbered [Zampini 2017, 245]. The stones then remained in storage and in the church cloister for over a decade.

11. The Post-War Reconstruction of the Gateway of San Giovanni Evangelista

In 1957, after the church was rebuilt, Soprintendente Arrigo Buonomo proposed the reconstruction of the gateway to the Ministero, and brought to the fore the loss of close to seventy percent of the stones, as it was necessary to consider how to replace the originals¹⁶. After researching the nature of the original marbles, conservation and reconstruction were performed by the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence, and replicas for missing pieces were fashioned from similar stones. The gateway was rebuilt into the walled enclosure of San Giovanni Evangelista in 1958¹⁷.

¹¹ College Park, NARA, RG 331, Fourteenth Monthly Report, AMG-90, E. DeWald, *Report on Tour of Inspection in the Provinces of Tuscany and Emilia, December 4-16, 1944*, 8 January 1945, 71-3; N.T. Newton, *Supplementary Report on Forlì and Ravenna*, 10 January 1945, 111.

¹² College Park, NARA, RG 331, Fourteenth Monthly Report, AMG-90, 102, N.T. Newton, *Report on Ravenna Churches*, 18 December 1944.

¹³ College Park, NARA, RG 331, ACC 1000/145/470, C. R. Pinsent, *Sitrep*, 20 May, 2 June, and 28 June 1945.

¹⁴ Cambridge, MA, Harvard University, Norman T. Newton Archives, *Subcommission for Monuments Fine Arts and Archives*, FLR2, N.T. Newton, to Prov. Commissioner, Ravenna Province, *First Aid to Monuments*, 13 December 1944.

¹⁵ College Park, NARA, RG 331, Sixteenth Monthly Report, AMG-121, 77-78, N.T. Newton, *Supplementary Report, Monuments of Forlì, Ravenna, and Cocolia*, 3 March 1945.

¹⁶ Rome, ACS, MPI, Dir. Gen. AABBA, Ufficio Conservazione Monumenti (1952-59), b. 249, *Portale Gotico, Chiesa di S. Giovanni Evangelista, Ravenna*, Sopr. A. Buonomo, *Perizia di spesa, sistemazione e restauro portale gotico, S. Giovanni Evangelista, Ravenna*, 28 aprile 1958.

¹⁷ Rome, ACS, MPI, Dir. Gen. AABBA, Ufficio Conservazione Monumenti (1952-59), b. 249, A. Di Ceglie, *Perizia di Spesa, Portale, Ravenna*, 23 aprile 1958; Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Firenze, *Preventivo di massima per il restauro di un portale monumentale per la chiesa di S. Giovanni Evangelista*, n.d.; Sopr. A. Buonomo, *Perizia di spesa per i lavori di sistemazione e restauro del portale gotico, S. Giovanni Evangelista, Ravenna*, 14 luglio 1958.



4: Gateway of San Giovanni Evangelista, Ravenna, condition after war damage and reconstruction of 1958. (Photo: author).

Conclusion

These two examples highlight the critical importance of the careful clearance of the wreckage of heritage sites after disasters. Although the carved doorways were not in fine condition before WWII, the war damage, and the hiatus before heritage personnel gained control of the sites, resulted in the collection of only thirty to fifty percent of the stones. At both churches, extensive ruin rendered the salvage difficult, but several other circumstances, particularly the inability of the Soprintendenze to respond effectively, and the lower art-historical stature of the churches, led to only partial retrievals of the fragments. The repercussions of the tardy response were exposed during post-war restoration. Indeed, the resurrected gateways are hybrid, with decorative sculpture that is partly original and partly the result of compromises reached in the wake of the war. It is evidently important to understand the complete history of early monuments of this kind, which have endured profound transformations. The medieval portals of San Tommaso and San Giovanni Evangelista carry the evidence of calamitous damage and extensive restoration, but may also be decoded to expose the struggles of heritage professionals in the midst of the chaos of war.

Bibliography

- COCCOLI, C. (2017). *Monumenti violati. Danni bellici e riparazioni in Italia nel 1943-1945: il ruolo degli alleati*, Firenze, Nardini Editore.
- GAVINI, I.C. (1927). *Storia dell'architettura in Abruzzo*, 2 vols., Milano, Casa editrice d'arte Bestetti e Tumminelli.
- GIOANNINI, M., MASSOBRIO, G. (2007). *Bombardate l'Italia*, Milano, Rizzoli.
- GRILLI, T.R. (1966). *Relazione del Comune di Ortona (marzo, 1948)*, in *Ortona: Medaglia d'oro al valor civile, settembre 1943 - giugno 1944*, Roma, Tip. Editrice Romana, pp. 17-45.
- HARTT, F. (1949). *Florentine Art Under Fire*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- HOENIGER, C. (2020). *Rising from the Rubble of World War Two: The High Altarpiece of Impruneta*, in *New Horizons in Trecento Italian Art*, eds. B. Keene and K. Whittington, Turnhout, Brepols, pp. 293-305.
- HOENIGER, C. (2022). *Invention as a Necessity: The Salvage of Italian Frescoes during World War II*, in *Histories of Conservation and Art History in Modern Europe*, eds. S. Dupré and J. Boulboulé, Oxford, Routledge, pp. 195-210.
- INGLIS, M.J. (2014). *Civil Affairs and Military Government Operations in Post-Fascist Italy*, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, School of Advanced Military Studies.
- LAVAGNINO, E. (1946). *Migliaia d'opere d'arte rifugiate in Vaticano*, in «Strenna dei Romanisti», n. 7, pp. 82-88.
- NICHOLSON, Lt.-Col. G.W.L. (1956). *The Canadians in Italy 1943-1945*, vol. II, in *The Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War*, Ottawa, Edmond Cloutier.

- NOVARA, P. (2012). *Ravenna. La facies basso medievale della chiesa di San Giovanni Evangelista*, in «Medioevo Adriatico», n. 4, pp. 113-154.
- POLITI, A. (1966). *I giorni del martirio*, in *Ortona: Medaglia d'oro al valor civile, settembre 1943 - giugno 1944*, Roma, Tip. Editrice Romana, pp. 121-163.
- REGIA SOPRINTENDENZA AI MONUMENTI E ALLE GALLERIE, L'AQUILA. (1945). *I danni della Guerra al patrimonio artistico degli Abruzzi e del Molise*, intro. F.H. Maxse, U. Chierici, L'Aquila.
- Regio Decreto, 27 maggio 1929, n. 848. *Disposizioni sugli enti ecclesiastici e sulle amministrazioni civili dei patrimoni destinati a fini di culto*, in «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», 8 giugno 1929. (<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/>).
- Regio Decreto, 21 novembre 1940, n. 1746. *Dichiarazione di Monumento Nazionale di Chiese Cattedrali*, in «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», 3 gennaio 1941 (<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/>).
- SCHOOLMAN, E.M. (2016). *Rediscovering Sainthood in Italy: Hagiography and the Late Antique Past in Medieval Ravenna*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- ZAMPINI, A. (2017). *Monumenti in guerra. Tutela, restauro e ricostruzione in Romagna negli anni del Secondo Conflitto Mondiale*, Ph.D., University of Bologna.

Archival sources

- Cambridge, MA. Harvard University. Frances Loeb Library Special Collections. The Norman T. Newton Collection.
- College Park, MD. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Record Group (RG) 239-PA. Roberts Commission. Still Photo Collection.
- College Park, MD. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Record Group (RG) 331. Allied Control Commission (ACC).
- Kansas City, MO. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Paul Gardner Papers.
- Rome. Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS). Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione (MPI).

PREPRINT

Documentation and Discovery: Locating the Cappella della Pace Madonna and Child in a postwar exhibition in Naples

CLAIRE JENSEN

University of Toronto

Abstract

Above the door of an abandoned chapel in a hospital parking lot in Naples is a headless sculpture. Indiscernible now, the work's subject was documented as a Madonna and Child for a museum exhibition held after World War II. Combining in situ analysis with original archival research, this paper probes the generative potential of postwar exhibitions and catalogs in facilitating new interpretations of since neglected medieval art and architecture.

Keywords

Medieval sculpture, postwar exhibition, Naples.

Introduction

During World War II, hundreds of bombs were released in air-raids over Naples, devastating the city, its people, and severely damaging many buildings and artifacts [Gargiulo 2018]. Restoration efforts ever since have led to groundbreaking discoveries of medieval materials; the fourteenth-century structure of Santa Chiara, which was unearthed from under the rubble of its Baroque cladding postwar, is a notable example [Bruzelius 1995, 70-71]. Destruction and recovery is not the only dialectic we can use to study the effects of war on cultural heritage, however. Despite its location adjacent to a bombardment, this paper's case study was remarkably resilient and survived the war intact. Fragmented afterwards, the sculpture's identity as a Madonna and Child is paradoxically only preserved because of its proximity to war damage. Interrogating the relationship between postwar documentation and contemporary discovery, the paper first locates the work in museum exhibitions and then proposes a new interpretation of the Madonna and Child as a whole aimed at clarifying the convoluted history of its original context.

1. Documentation and Display

When accessing the current public Ospedale dell'Annunziata from the via Egiziaca a Forcella in Naples, one is immediately faced with a strikingly monumental grey stone portal (fig. 1)¹. Centered on a façade of white plaster, this doorway has on its left the red exterior wall of the nave of the Annunziata basilica and directly in front, parking spaces. Boldly classicizing in its design, the portal's frame is Doric and decorated with three bands of high-relief moldings that outline a tall, multi-part carved wooden door. In keeping with the rules of the classical order, the portal's upper portion consists of an architrave, frieze punctuated by faintly articulated triglyphs, and a cornice formed of two rows of dentils. At the very top of this ensemble is a semicircular tympanum that contains a small, broken sculpture. Visibly crumbling and partially concealed behind bursts of vegetation, the subject of this work is all but impossible to read *in situ*. In order to confirm its identity as a Madonna and Child, one must turn to the archives.

¹ <https://www.aslnapoli1centro.it/ospedale-annunziata>.

CLAIRE JENSEN



1: The Cappella della Pace in the parking lot of the Ospedale dell'Annunziata. Photo by author.

The most complete record of the sculpture exists thanks to a national exhibition of art from the Annunziata church and hospital organized by the Soprintendenza alle Gallerie della Campania in the early 1970s. Even though it occurred nearly three decades after Allied troops left Naples, the project was very much informed by the events of the second world war. Discussions for the show began in 1967 when Raffaello Causa, Superintendent from 1965 to 1984, met with the Giuseppe Mauri Mori, the Annunziata institutional archivist². From the outset, the Soprintendenza agreed to collaborate on three objectives: first, they would help stage the exhibition in a public venue; second, they would arrange the restoration of any Annunziata artworks damaged in the bombardment; and finally, Causa himself agreed to edit a scientific catalog that would provide the first critical assessment of institution's collection. The first of these promises was fulfilled when an exhibition opened at the Palazzo Reale in Naples on December 12, 1971. Titled *Opere d'arte della Real Casa Santa dell'Annunziata*, the show was on view until March 31, 1972 and presented a selection of paintings, sculpture, liturgical furnishings, and parchment documents from approximately six centuries of the institution's history³. As per the second of Causa's agreements, one of the focal points of the display was an eighteenth-century oil painting by Francesco De Mura, which had been severely burned by a bomb strike to the Annunziata cupola on August 4, 1943. This painting was restored to a remarkable seventy percent by the Soprintendenza and displayed with infographics detailing the conservation work for the duration of the show⁴.

² ASMuN, RCSA, *Opere d'Arte*, G. Mauri Mori al Soprintendente Generale della Real Casa Santa dell'Annunziata, 5 dicembre 1967.

³ ASMuN, RCSA, *Opere d'Arte*, Cronaca di Napoli, anno LXXXI, n. 10. 10 febbraio 1972, p. 7.

⁴ ASMuN, RCSA, *Opere d'Arte*, Protocollo n. 2551, G. Mauri Mori al Governo del Pio Luogo della Real Casa Santa dell'Annunziata, 18 febbraio 1970.

Although the Madonna and Child sculpture was not transported to the Palazzo Reale for the exhibition, it was fully documented for the catalog. Attributed to an «ignoto scultore del XV secolo», the work was listed in a subsection of sculpture as a «Madonna col Bambino, marmo e tufo (sull'arco del portale di accesso alla sala mortuaria già Cappella della Pace)»⁵. This typological categorization with details regarding the author, material, and location meets the standards of museum documentation established by Bruno Molajoli, Causa's predecessor and supervisor at the Soprintendenza during and in the immediate aftermath of the war. Molajoli's heroic preservation actions in this period were extraordinary and historically renowned. In the one hundred and five bombings that occurred in Naples from 1940 to 1943, he arranged the transport of nearly 60,000 artworks out and then back into the city, protecting them from unthinkable damage [Pampalone 2007, 400]. After the war, Molajoli reorganized the collections of many museums in Naples and published widely about the cultural value of exhibitions in preserving and promoting local memory [Barrella 2017, 378-382]. Despite leaving his post in Naples in 1960, the esteemed ex-Superintendent was present for the inauguration of the Annunziata exhibition. A clear indication of his previous supervisor's influence on the show, Causa recognized Molajoli in the event's opening speech and recounted their first visit to the Annunziata church while conducting research for a seminal display of the region's wooden sculpture [*Sculture lignee nella Campania* 1950]. Unprepared for what they would find at the Annunziata in the late 1940s, the Soprintendenza curatorial team of Causa, Molajoli, and Ferdinando Bologna were impressed by the range and quality of artworks at the institution. In fact, Causa reflected that the Annunziata heritage was «tutto nuovo, tutto da attribuire, tutto da rendere noto al mondo della cultura» [Giliberti 1971, 13-14]. The obvious next steps in preserving the art of the Annunziata was to hold a formal exhibition and produce a rigorously researched critical catalog. It may have taken a few decades to execute, but the early 1970s Annunziata exhibition project was certainly indebted to Molajoli's legacy of postwar museum work.

Unfortunately, the Annunziata exhibition catalog was never published. Extant archival sources and photos verify, however, that research was well-underway during the final stages of the show's preparation. For instance, a record from a meeting with Mauri Mori at the Annunziata in 1970 details that the catalog would include critical essays not only by Causa but also his Soprintendenza inspectors Nicola Spinosa and Francesco Abbate⁶. Later in 1970, Causa brought on another researcher, Anna Barricelli, tasked with compiling the official "schedatura" in preparation for meetings with three different publishers to select a final press for the volume in mid-January 1971⁷. It seems that the work was still on track in 1972, when some Annunziata artworks, including the Madonna and Child from the Cappella della Pace, were professionally photographed *in situ*. Although the ultimate cause for the abandonment of the project is as of now unclear, two articles by Barricelli survive as the only published evidence of the Soprintendenza's research on the Annunziata collection [Barricelli 1972; Barricelli 1973].

⁵ ASMuN, RCSA, *Opere d'Arte*, scheda con le sculture, dipinti, disegni, mobili e documenti per il catalogo scientifico a cura di R. Causa, G. Mauri Mori, A. Barricelli, F. Abbate e N. Spinosa, 3ff.

⁶ ASMuN, RCSA, *Opere d'Arte*, G. Mauri Mori al Governo del Pio Luogo della Real Casa Santa dell'Annunziata, 14 ottobre 1970.

⁷ ASMuN, RCSA, *Opere d'Arte*, G. Mauri Mori al Governo del Pio Luogo della Real Casa Santa dell'Annunziata, 10 dicembre 1970.

CLAIRE JENSEN



2: *The Madonna and Child in the tympanum of the Cappella della Pace. Photo from 4 February 1972. Image courtesy of the Fototeca del Polo Museale della Campania.*

Considering the current state of conservation, the 1972 image is an invaluable resource for understanding the Madonna and Child sculpture as a whole (fig. 2). The photo clearly shows the figural group centered in a shallow cavity in the semicircle of the tympanum. Despite damage to Jesus' arms and nose, both figures are highly legible. It is obvious, even in black and white, that the child's head stands out. While to scale with the other components of the group, this head appears smoother in texture, an indication that it is marble noted in the Soprintendenza catalog description. The Madonna's face, meanwhile, is more worn and clearly made of tuff, a soft volcanic sandstone prevalent in Campania. Tuff also seems to be the material used for the bodies of both figures, which are formally cohesive and wear long, draped robes belted at the waist with knotted cords. As Barricelli proposed in her 1973 article, this garb might have served as a subtle nod to their historical context above the door to a confraternity chapel [Barricelli 1973, 59].

Damaged in the Irpinia earthquake in 1980, the sculpture's heads have since been removed from the Cappella della Pace tympanum and are now on display at the Museo Diocesano in the Complesso Monumentale Donnaregina in Naples (figs. 3 and 4). The current museum signage continues to rely on the postwar cataloging efforts and repeats its formalistic description and broad fifteenth century date. The textural contrast in material is even more striking at close view, but the divergent styles in the Madonna and Child heads merit additional comment. Although the marble head of Jesus is refined and stoic with blank, heavy lidded eyes set deep in the face, rounded cheeks, and full lips (fig. 3), the tuff face of Mary is



3, 4: The fragmented heads of the Madonna (4, right) and Child (3, left) on view at Il Complesso Monumentale Donnaregina - Museo Diocesano in Naples. Photos by Nora Lambert.

much more lively. Her wide-set eyes are open to two distinct apertures and her small, slightly parted lips curve into a subtle smile (fig. 4). The detail in her long straight nose, thinly arched eyebrows, and strands of hair peeking out from her mantle are also surprisingly fine in their rendering. While the fifteenth-century date in the Soprintendenza description and Museo Diocesano labels attempts to reconcile the obvious material and stylistic differences in the two heads, the intricacy of the details provides rich ground for further study.

In the most recent critical interpretation of the two heads, Ida Maietta attributed the work to a Neapolitan sculptor of modest skill working in the middle of the fifteenth century [Leone de Castris 2008, 190] While her hypothesis that the tuff components of the Madonna and Child were carved by this unknown local master is convincing, her suggestion that the head of Jesus might have been recovered from the workshop of Pietro di Martino da Milano seems less plausible. Repeating a theory about the Aragonese patronage of the Cappella della Pace that will be negated in the second half of the paper, Maietta justified the inclusion of this marble fragment by citing its similarity to works by the Lombard sculptor on the grand entrance arch of Castel Nuovo also commissioned by Alfonso I. Aside from the unlikelihood of this authorship given the dubious nature of Alfonso's involvement, an earlier dating for Jesus' head may also prove compelling. In fact, the fragment's size and style closely resemble the features of caryatid figures carved for Neapolitan tombs in the later fourteenth century. With a vertical circumference of only twenty-eight centimeters, the marble head's round cheeks, heavy-lidded eyes, and full lips make it very similar to the reused sculptural figures that form marble base of the Del Balzo candelabra in San Domenico Maggiore (fig. 5).

CLAIRE JENSEN



5: The fourteenth-century base of the *Del Balzo Candelabra* at San Domenico Maggiore in Naples. Photo by author.

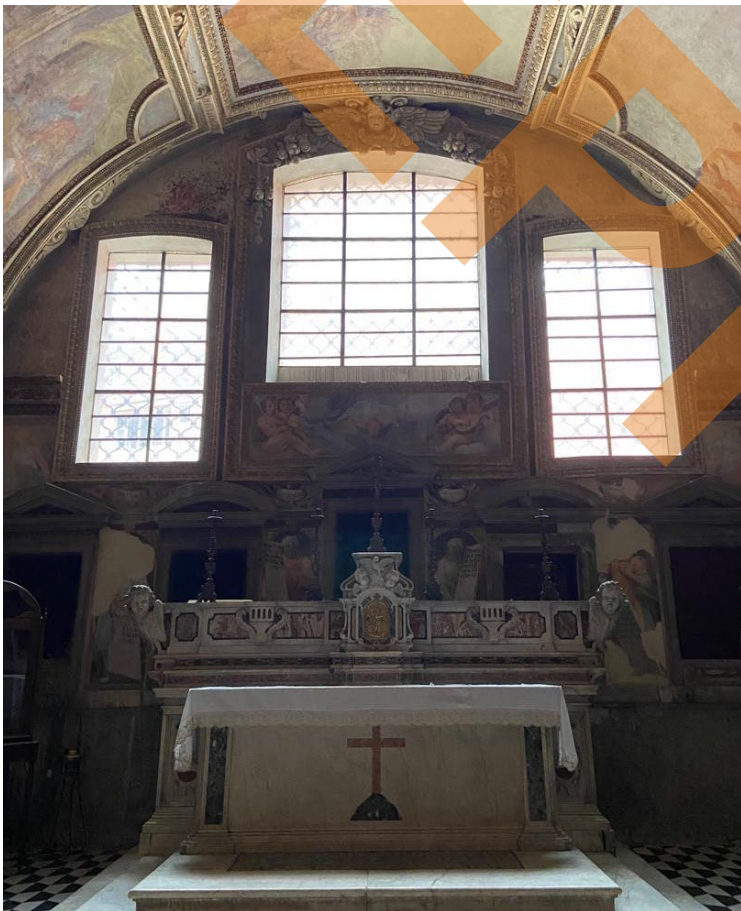
Fragmented from its original setting, this late medieval marble head assumed a sacred male identity for its integration in stone Madonna and Child tympanum sculpture and has gone unrecognized ever since.

2. Historical Context and Interpretation

Before exploring a potential meaning for the Madonna and Child sculpture *in situ*, it is helpful to outline the history of its larger context. As is indicated in its various catalog entries, the work's original setting was over the entrance to a building known as the Cappella della Pace, which is part of the present-day public Annunziata hospital. Converted into an operating room in 1872, the chapel was most recently used as a mortuary cell until the 1980 Irpinia earthquake rendered it largely inaccessible [Ferraro 2003, 231]⁸. While this modern chronology is relatively straightforward, the history of the building before it was a medical facility is convoluted and closely entangled with that of church and hospital of the Real Casa Santa dell'Annunziata [Maietta, Vanacore 1997, 82]. As the unfortunate victim of a pervasive tradition of misidentification compounded by substantial archival losses, the chapel's foundation date and original patronage are difficult to ascertain.

⁸ ASMuN, RCSA, *Opere d'Arte*, Protocollo n. 6862, 16 dicembre 1980.

Since the early seventeenth century, the Cappella della Pace has been conflated with another chapel by the same name founded in 1442 by Alfonso I of Aragon. Noted in documents for its location in the “Campovecchio”, this Santa Maria della Pace was established by the first Aragonese king as a votive offering of peace to his newly conquered kingdom. Although Francesco Senatore convincingly argued that Alfonso’s Campovecchio chapel was a discrete entity quite far from what is now the hospital parking lot, the Aragonese identification of the Annunziata structure persists [Senatore 2010, 350-356]. Indeed, the fiction of its royal patronage was promoted on-site by three shields that used to be displayed above the windows on the façade [Bernich 1906, 8]. The sculptural reliefs, which were also photographed by the Soprintendenza in 1972 and are currently in storage at the Museo Civico in Castel Nuovo, display the coat of arms of the Neapolitan House of Aragon, the “AGP” motto of the Annunziata, and a suggestive motif of two soldiers embracing over the letter “P” respectively [Leone de Castris 1990, 106]. While the presence of the shields has been used to corroborate Alfonso’s involvement, architectural analysis confirms that the construction of the upper level of the Cappella della Pace façade was a later intervention. The three windows surrounding the portal are those seen behind the altar in the current



6: The altar of the Cappella del Tesoro inside the basilica of the Real Casa Santa dell’Annunziata. Photo by author.

Annunziata treasury (fig. 6), which was built directly on top of the chapel starting in 1598 [Ferraro 2003, 229]. It is unclear when the shield decorations were added, but their placement must have occurred more than a century after control of the Aragonese Santa Maria della Pace passed to the Annunziata governors in 1469⁹.

Despite the historiographical conflation of the two chapels, the Madonna and Child portal may help clarify the Annunziata-adjacent structure’s elusive origins. A notarial record in the Annunziata archive states that a local confraternity called the Disciplina di Santa Maria della Pace commissioned a new doorway to their chapel in 1502¹⁰. This portal is almost certainly that which is visible today in the Annunziata hospital parking lot. Specifically constructed to accommodate future building projects at the neighboring holy hospital institution, the door moved the confraternal chapel exit to an empty lot contiguous with both the existing structure and the external wall of the

⁹ ASMuN, RCSA, *Pergamene*, n. 106. Napoli Ferdinandi I regis litterae patentis, 18 agosto 1469.

¹⁰ ASMuN, RCSA, *Notamenti A (1500-1556)*, ff. 6v-7r.

CLAIRE JENSEN

Annunziata basilica. Also matching the appearance of the current portal, the text records the project's building materials, stipulating that a total of twenty-two *palmi* – approximately five and three quarter meters – of grey *piperno* stone would be used to form the new doorway. Although the 1502 source does not provide any other details regarding its appearance, the use of a classically-influenced Doric style for the portal would align with the architectural preferences of elite Neapolitan patrons at the end of the fifteenth century [De Divitiis 2008, 506-507]. The notarial text similarly makes no mention of a Madonna and Child sculpture, but the inclusion of this sacred theme in the tympanum would make sense given the door's patronage. Not only does the Madonna and Child's overall style fit the 1502 date, the subject also evokes the local Disciplina's dedication to the Virgin Mary of peace. As the Neapolitan confraternity officially conceded control of their meeting place to their neighbors in 1546, the sculpture – if it was indeed commissioned in 1502 – might have been one of their final expressions of identity before their chapel was subsumed by Annunziata construction [D'Addosio 1883, 192].

Conclusions

While it is certainly feasible that any or all components of the Madonna and Child were later additions to the façade like the Aragonese shields, I will conclude by offering a tentative reading of the sculpture's composite nature as intentional on the part of the local confraternity. Paola Vitolo recently explored the reuse and restoration of fourteenth-century tomb sculpture in the early modern Naples and argued that fragments were re-employed to promote local genealogy and continuity with a prodigious past [Vitolo 2021, 9-10]. A similar interpretation may also apply to the Cappella della Pace Madonna and Child. In the 1972 Soprintendenza image, all elements of the sculpture are cohesive in scale making it appear as though it was created in a single commission. However, the contrast in materials, which is still notable in the Museo Diocesano display, indicates that the child's head was meant to stand out. Carefully outfitted with a late fourteenth-century marble fragment, the stone Madonna and Child was perhaps commissioned as a composite in order to evoke the legacy of the confraternity when their meeting place was under pressure in the early sixteenth century. Although any ideological theory about such a heavily renovated site must stay firmly in the realm of conjecture, the Madonna and Child might thus be read as a directed statement by the Disciplina regarding their long history of devotion at the chapel. As per the current condition of the work and scope of this paper, such a message – creatively constructed with a late medieval sculptural fragment – is now only legible thanks to postwar documentation and museum displays.

Bibliography

- BARRELLA, N. (2017). *Museografia postbellica nei musei d'ambientazione napoletani: alcune riflessioni a partire dai Saggi di Bruno Molajoli*, in «Annali di critica d'arte», n.s., n.1, pp. 373-387.
- BARRICELLI, A. (1972). *Il tesoro della Real Santa Casa dell'Annunziata in Napoli*, in «Kalós», n. 18, pp. 13-18.
- BARRICELLI, A. (1973). *Strada de' marmorari. L'Annunziata angioina e aragonese*, in «Critica d'arte», XX, pp. 13-28 e 57-76.
- BERNICH, E. (1906). *Statue e Frammenti Architettonici della Prima Epoca Aragonese*, in «Napoli Nobilissima», vol. XV, p. 8.
- BRUZELIUS, C. (1995). *Queen Sancia of Mallorca and the Convent Church of Sta. Chiara in Naples*, in «Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome», vol. XL, pp. 69-100.
- D'ADDOSIO, G. B. (1883). *Origine, vicende storiche e progressi della R.S. Casa dell'Annunziata di Napoli (Ospizio dei trovatelli)*, Napoli, Antonio Cons.

- DE DIVITIIS, B. (2008). *Building in the Local All'Antica Style: The Palace of Diomedede Carafa in Naples*, in «Art History», vol. XXXI, n. 4, pp. 505-522.
- FERRARO, I. (2003). *Napoli Atlante della Città Storica. Quartieri Bassi e il "Risanamento"*, vol. II, Napoli, Clean.
- GALANTE, G.A. (1985). *Guida sacra della città di Napoli*, a cura di N. Spinosa, Napoli, Società editrice napoletana.
- GARGIULO, M. (2018). *Uscire dalla catastrofe. La città di Napoli fra guerra aerea e occupazione alleata*, in «Diacronie. Studi di Storie Contemporanea», n. 33 (http://www.studistorici.com/2018/03/29/gargiulo_numero_33/).
- GILIBERTI, G. (1971). *Inaugurata a Napoli la Mostra delle Opere d'Arte della Real Casa Santa dell'Annunziata*, in «La Rota», anno IV, n. 6, pp. 3-17.
- LEONE DE CASTRIS, P. (1990). *Castel Nuovo Il Museo Civico*, Napoli, Elio de Rosa editore.
- LEONE DE CASTRIS, P. (2008). *Il Museo Diocesano di Napoli. Percorsi di Fede e Arte*, Napoli, Elio de Rosa editore.
- MAIETTA, I., VANACORE, A. (1997). *L'Annunziata. La Chiesa e la Santa Casa*, Napoli, Edizioni Eidos.
- PAMPLONE, A. (2007). *Bruno Molajoli*, in *Dizionario biografico dei soprintendenti storici dell'arte, 1904-1974*, a cura del Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Direzione generale per il patrimonio storico artistico e etnoantropologico; Centro studi per la storia del lavoro e delle comunità territoriali, Bologna, Bononia university press, pp. 398-409.
- Sculture lignee nella Campania (1950)*, catalogo della mostra a cura di F. Bologna, R. Causa, Napoli, Palazzo Reale.
- SENATORE, F. (2010). *La processione del 2 giugno nella Napoli aragonese e la cappella di S. Maria della Pace in Campovecchio*, in «Annali di Storia moderna e contemporanea», vol. XVI, pp. 343-361.
- VITTOLO, P. (2021). *Reimpiego e rilavorazione di due sculture del Medioevo napoletano tra Tino di Camaino e i fratelli Pacio e Giovanni Bertini*, in «Mélanges de l'École française de Rome - Moyen Âge», vol. CXXXIII, n. 1, pp. 105-120 (<http://journals.openedition.org/mefrm/8730>; <https://doi.org/10.4000/mefrm.8730>).

Archival sources

*All sources used are in Naples at the Archivio Storico Municipale, Section: Real Casa Santa dell'Annunziata. For clarity, I've listed all of them in chronological order. Those under the collation "Opere d'Arte" are unedited and, as of May 2022, un-catalogued.

ASMuN, RCSA, *Pergamene*, n. 106, Napoli Ferdinandi I regis litterae patentis, 18 agosto 1469.

ASMuN, RCSA, *Notamenti A (1500-1556)*, ff. 6v-7r.

ASMuN, RCSA, *Opere d'Arte*, G. Mauri Mori al Soprintendente Generale della Real Casa Santa dell'Annunziata, 5 dicembre 1967.

ASMuN, RCSA, *Opere d'Arte*, Protocollo n. 2551, G. Mauri Mori al Governo del Pio Luogo della Real Casa Santa dell'Annunziata, 18 febbraio 1970.

ASMuN, RCSA, *Opere d'Arte*, G. Mauri Mori al Governo del Pio Luogo della Real Casa Santa dell'Annunziata, 14 ottobre 1970.

ASMuN, RCSA, *Opere d'Arte*, G. Mauri Mori al Governo del Pio Luogo della Real Casa Santa dell'Annunziata, 10 dicembre 1970.

ASMuN, RCSA, *Opere d'Arte*, Cronaca di Napoli, anno LXXXI, n. 10. 10 febbraio 1972.

ASMuN, RCSA, *Opere d'Arte*, Protocollo n. 6862, 16 dicembre 1980.

ASMuN, RCSA, *Opere d'Arte*, scheda di scultura, dipinti, disegni, mobili e documenti per il catalogo scientifico a cura di R. Causa, G. Mauri Mori, A. Barricelli, F. Abbate e N. Spinosa, 3ff.

Sitography

<https://www.aslnapoli1centro.it/ospedale-annunziata> (March 2023)

PREPRINT

Medieval Sculpture from the Recovered Territories and the New Canon of Polish Medieval art after 1945

AGNIESZKA PATAŁA

University of Wrocław

Abstract

The text aims to outline the circumstances as well as the most important actors, strategies and methods used in constructing a new tailor-made history of medieval art within Poland's new borders, in which medieval sculpture from the so-called Recovered Territories played an important role. Particular importance will be given to the National Museum in Warsaw's three areas of activity in this regard, as a central institution that cooperated with the new Polish communist authorities.

Keywords

National Museum in Warsaw, Recovered Territories, Gothic sculpture.

Introduction

«art history is not an innocent study of beauty, as it is sometimes perceived. It has been political from the very beginning, serving ideological manipulations. As an autonomous academic discipline, it emerged from the 19th c. nationalisms. And it supported them, creating, for example, the concept of “national heritage”, as much a source of identity as of a conflict [...]. Are we ready to answer the question of what we understand by “Polish art”?»

Maria Poprzęcka [Plinta 2022]

Imposed in May 1945, the shift in national borders demarcating the area of present-day Poland has had several consequences, including the migration of people and things, the loss or permanent damage to many artworks, and the urgent need to reformulate the hitherto accepted narratives about Polish history and its cultural heritage. Among lands incorporated into Poland, called Recovered Territories, were Pomerania and Silesia, whose pre-war churches and museum collections abounded with medieval art objects, including outstanding high-class works of woodcarving and stone sculpture. As a result of the severe war damages in these areas, and in the face of the post-war chaos and other factors elucidated further in this text, many valuable artworks, including medieval sculpture, were transported upcountry to Warsaw and stored in the premises of the National Museum. Their further fate, sometimes very complicated, was determined, in many cases, by the representatives of Polish central authorities, including the very distinguished long-time (1935-1982) director of the National Museum in Warsaw, Stanislaw Lorentz. His decisions and actions, supported mainly by other Polish art historians, conservators and architects, greatly impacted the shape of the post-war history of Polish medieval art, including medieval sculpture.

The text aims to outline the circumstances and the most important actors and methods employed in 1945-1950 to construct a new tailor-made history of Polish medieval art, which reflected the new post-war outline of the Polish borders. What is more, due to its high artistic value and a large number of preserved objects, medieval sculpture from Recovered Territories turned out to play an essential role in this new narrative. Particular attention will be given to

Gothic sculpture from Silesia – their legal status, relocations, presence in the museums' first post-war permanent exhibitions, and their "national" status in the syntheses of Polish art history created in the new post-1945 geopolitical realities. Therefore, it will be presented how medieval sculpture was injected into new (geographical, artistic, ideological and national) contexts, promoting a new vision of Polish history. Such actions were also fostered by Polish legislation nationalizing the so-called "post-German" property, not only leaving the "post-German" artworks' pre-war biography unsaid but also facilitating the coming to prominence of their "availability to be claimed". [Zborowska 2021, 2] Moreover, the several roles played in the processes in question by the National Museum in Warsaw merit consideration. The museum was the primary place for the storing, evaluating, presenting and redistributing of evacuated and restituted "post-German" artworks, which quickly complemented the new canon of Polish medieval art. Sculpture from the Recovered Territories played a vital role in this new narrative.

1. "Substitutive" restitution and the status of the post-German medieval sculpture in post-war Poland

As early as the second half of 1944, Polish art historians had realized that the most valuable Polish art collections from Cracow, Warsaw and Lviv, among others, were transported by the Nazis not only deep into Germany and Austria but also closer to Lower Silesia and Pomerania, i.e., the area of the future Recovered Territories [Kudelski 2016, 74]. In early February 1945, in the shadow of the Yalta Conference, the Polish Supreme Directorate of Museums and Monuments Protection, led by Stanisław Lorentz, was established [Lorentz 1956, 52-57]. Among the many aims of this institution was the restitution of cultural property looted from occupied Poland. Silesia was selected as the first area for the recovery campaign, engaging museum professionals (including Lorentz), archivists, librarians and historians [Karecka 2002]. For their purposes, a manual was formulated that also included supplemental objectives for the expedition, such as: retrieving objects originating from other countries and nations, as well as from local Silesian museums and churches, and transporting them to the central repositories, especially the National Museum in Warsaw [Kudelski 2016, 78]. It was clear from the outset that the cultural property of German origin would be treated as a component of a "substitute" restitution for the lost Polish goods [Jarocki 1981, 335]. The second territory of the recovery campaign, led by Michał Walicki, a distinguished art historian and medievalist, was Pomerania [Jarocki 1981, 327]. On 9 April 1945, a separate list of objects to be secured in Danzig was created, including "Polish memorabilia" from Danzig churches and libraries, as well as furnishings from the Town Hall, Artus Court, Uphagen House, St. Mary's Church, especially pre-Reformation art [Rutowska 2000, 180]. It was, therefore, evident that Pomeranian medieval art was of particular interest to the Polish authorities.

Soviet troops and their Trophy Brigades heavily hampered the first operations of the recovery expeditions to Silesia and Pomerania. For this reason, the first transports of objects from Gdansk and Silesia did not arrive in the National Museum in Warsaw and the Wawel Castle in Cracow (by lorries and wagons) until June of 1945 [Kudelski 2016, 81]. The preserved photographic (fig. 1) and text documentation demonstrates that medieval Silesian sculpture was considered valuable and included in transports from the beginning. Moreover, it soon emerged that, particularly in Silesia, the actions would take much longer than anticipated. In the ruins of the Breslau (since 1945 Wrocław) Museum of Fine Arts, Józef Gębczak found documentation to identify more than 100 consecutive locations where not only Polish but



1: Gothic Silesian sculptures found in Prudnik, spring 1945 (LORENTZ 1957, p. 23).

mainly German collections had been deposited [Gębczak 2000]. To meet the needs of the restitution operation, held until ca 1950, and to offload central repositories in Warsaw, Cracow and Kozłówka, several local repositories were established in Silesia, as well as in Szczecin and Danzig [Rutowska 2000, 181]. Unfortunately, despite the efforts of many people, chaos, robbery, dispersal and destruction of the works could not be avoided, so the consequences of the war turmoil can still be observed today.

The restitution actions mentioned above took place in parallel with legislative activities undertaken in 1945 and 1946, sanctioning the seizure by the Polish State of the property previously owned by the Reich or the Free City of Danzig, German or Danzig legal persons and citizens [Sierzputowski 2020]. According to the two decrees, this particular type of property from the Recovered Territories, including objects classified until May 1945 as components of

German heritage, was referred to as “abandoned” (in 1945) and “post-German” (in 1946)¹. Both terms played an important role in redefining material objects located or found by the Polish newcomers at the Recovered Territories, as they symbolically denuded the things of their previous owners and effaced their previous historical, spatial and social context [Zborowska 2019, 25; Zborowska 2021, 7-9]. Nevertheless, despite the clear legal distinction, the terms “abandoned” and “post-German” were used interchangeably concerning the artworks from the Recovered Territories, notably avoiding the last. This inconsistency made it possible to conceal the troublesome “German” past of objects, such as a medieval sculpture from Silesia, integrated into the national museum collection and historic church interiors in the reality of post-war Poland [Patała 2021]. Such nobody’s neutral artworks, of reasonably good artistic quality, seem perfect material for constructing a new history of Polish medieval art.



2: Reception for Czech writers, 1947 (National Museum in Warsaw).

2. First exhibitions of medieval art in the National Museum in Warsaw

In June 1945, when the first crates arrived in the National Museum in Warsaw, the first post-war exhibition, “Warsaw Accuses”, documenting «crimes committed against Polish culture», was already underway in some renovated rooms [Przeździecka-Kujałowicz 2018]. Besides, on 7 May 1945, the museum was transformed into a central Polish museum institution, aiming to «research, exhibit and promote Polish and foreign artistic culture», whose collection was to be enlarged with post-German objects [Karecka 2002, 408]. This gave Stanisław Lorentz the legal

¹ Decree of 2 March 1945 on left and abandoned property, cfr.: *Dziennik Ustaw*, 9 poz. 45. March 2/1945; Decree of 8 March 1946 on left and post-German property, cfr.: *Dziennik Ustaw*, 13 poz. 87. March 8/1946.

justification to direct the best works from the Recovered Territories here. Further arguments were added soon, such as the availability of a professional conservation workshop (lacking in the Recovered Territories) and the need for access to all available objects enabling a rational distribution of the works to other institutions in Poland [Rutowska 2000, 183].

On 18 April 1946, a temporary "Exhibition of Gothic Art", presenting newly acquired artworks from the Recovered Territories, was inaugurated within the museum walls [Lorentz 1957, 72]. An excellent source of information on the selection of works is the photographs taken on the occasion of the Museum's hosting of Czech writers and members of the American Revindication Mission in May 1947². The pictures (fig. 2) feature a meal organized in the current Gallery of Medieval Art room. Sunlight streaming through large windows illuminates a large hall, filled with artworks and dozens of people sitting at the tables. The guests seem deep in conversations and oblivious to the artworks displayed against the walls, which are among the most important objects of gothic sculpture from Silesia and Pomerania. The statue of the Beautiful Madonna of Wrocław (before 1945 Breslau), one of the most essential works of Central European art, all the more valuable after the wartime loss of the Beautiful Madonna of Toruń (before 1945 Thorn), was placed under the window. The Crucifixion triptych from the BVM Church in Gdansk (1500), the magnificent Polyptych of the Annunciation with the Unicorn from St. Elisabeth's Church in Wrocław (1480s.), whose crowning did not fit into the hall, and the tabernacle altar from BVM Church in Gdańsk with a Marian statue (1430), are placed next to the white wall. Of all the objects displayed here, only the monumental sculpture of the Apostle Andrew, belonging to a group of apostles figures from the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Wrocław, was soon returned to the city of its origin. The photograph from the visit of the Italian professors features another statue from this series – St. Paul's, sideways to the paintings from Gdańsk and Wrocław (fig. 3). The lukewarm reaction of all guests, including the members of the American delegation (fig. 4) rather defeats the organizers' intentions.

On 8 December 1947, the National Museum in Warsaw opened the permanent exhibition of the Department of Medieval Art, still running within these premises today [Lorentz 1957, 72]. Its curator, the aforesaid Michal Walicki, showed visitors around with a "black coffee" served on the verso. A brochure with a woodcut image of the statue of the Beautiful Madonna of Wrocław on the cover accompanied the inauguration³. As its authors stated, «the exhibition provides an overview of Gothic art in Poland within the present-day borders and includes the most vibrant centres of art production» (14th - early 16th c.) These centres, inferred from the works presented, were primarily Pomerania and Silesia and to a certain extent Lesser Poland. In the already familiar four-column hall, mainly sculptures, altarpieces and panel paintings from Pomerania were displayed. In the next rooms, Silesian art was represented by numerous late Gothic retables, monumental figures of the Apostles, the Beautiful Madonna and works from the circle of so-called Madonnas on lions. The brochure's anonymous authors knew that medieval art was incomprehensible to modern people. Still it could also serve as an inspiration for contemporary artists, whereas its meditation was necessary to «develop a picture of Polish and European history». One can only guess what Stanislaw Lorentz was trying to tell in his conversation with Pablo Picasso in front of the Wrocław statue of St Barbara (1st quarter of the 15th c.) in 1948 (fig. 5). Picasso's focused expression indicates that the work probably prompted deeper reflection.

² Archive of the National Museum in Warsaw, Kat. A [Galeria Sztuki średniowiecznej. Uroczystość otwarcia Działu Sztuki Średniowiecznej 1947], sygn. 847b.

³ Archive of the National Museum in Warsaw, Kat. A [Galeria Sztuki średniowiecznej. Uroczystość otwarcia Działu Sztuki Średniowiecznej 1947], sygn. 847b, Sztuka gotycka w Muzeum Narodowym w Warszawie.



3: Reception for Italian professors, 1947 (National Museum in Warsaw).



4: Reception for the members of American Revindication Mission, 1947 (National Museum in Warsaw).



5: Pablo Picasso and Stanisław Lorentz with other participants of the World Congress of Intellectuals in Defense of Peace, 1948 (LORENTZ 1957, p. 29).

The Warsaw National Museum created a fine artistic representation of the newly annexed lands while providing a post-war vision of Polish medieval art – far more attractive than its pre-war form. From the early 20th c., when its collection of old art began to develop, few artworks from the former provinces of the Kingdom of Poland (initially excluding Pomerania and Silesia) were recognized as representative of medieval Polish art [Kochanowska 2017]. This same key, i.e., appealing to the former lands of the Kingdom of Poland, of which Silesia ceased to be a part in 1348, and the status of Gdansk Pomerania remained changeable, was also adopted in the narrative after 1945. Thus, the Gallery of Medieval Art was intended to represent Polish medieval art from all ever belonging to his country lands [Dobrzeńiecki 1960, 6], and the works on display form a panorama of its development [Kochanowska 2017, 15]. Simultaneously, while introducing different temporalities, these works bore witness to times gone by and became carriers of many potential histories. It seems, however, that their insertion into the national discourse may have been dictated by a desire to find justification for the new shape of the country after 1945 rather than to distort an already convoluted history.

3. Redistribution of restituted medieval artworks

The director and curators of the National Museum in Warsaw were deeply involved in establishing new museum institutions in the Recovered Territories, including the appointment of their directors [Jarocki 1981, 234] and the redistribution of works from revindication campaigns. For these measures, a framework was formulated in 1946 with the involvement of Stanisław Lorentz. It assumed a complete reorganization of the post-German museum network corresponding to “Polish cultural and museum concepts”, whose aim was the repolonisation of the Recovered Territories [Rutowska 2000, 193]. Moreover, in 1947 Lorentz reported that «not all historical objects of the Recovered Territories will be handed over to the newly established museums there». [Rutowska 2000, 194]. The idea was to block the transfer of works collected before 1939, which were supposed to demonstrate Germanic culture in Silesia or Pomerania. Such objects should have been transferred to central Poland, whereas the «important collections of Polish art» [Rutowska 2000, 195] were to be transferred to the Recovered Territories instead. Even though such ambitious plans could not be fulfilled, the undisputed

symbols of Silesian Gothic art, such as the statue of the Beautiful Madonna from Wrocław, the sculptural works attributed to Jakob Beinhart and several of altarpieces, including the Polyptych of the Annunciation with the Unicorn, never returned from Warsaw to the National Museum in Wrocław, established in 1947. Its rich and diverse collection of Silesian medieval sculpture and painting, consists of works mostly uncovered in Silesian caches after Lorentz's return to Warsaw. Transfers from the National Museum in Warsaw did, however, take place, e.g., in 1948, the monumental figures of the Apostles from the Church of St Mary Magdalene in Wrocław (figs. 1, 2, 3) returned to the place of their origin. Collaboration between these two museums has continued up to the present day but has never determined the shape of Wrocław's permanent exhibition.

Medieval sculptures from Silesia, especially the late Gothic carved and painted altarpieces, which had no defined ownership status as "abandoned" or "post-German" works, constituted significant elements of furnishings in many of the churches and cathedrals being rebuilt in post-war Poland. An altarpiece from the Silesian town of Góra (1513), attributed to the workshop of Jakob Beinhart, became in 1955 the main altar of the reconstructed Gothic cathedral in Poznań (Greater Poland) - one of the major churches in Polish history connected with the first Polish rulers from Piasts dynasty - Mieszko I and Bolesław I the Brave, the first King of Poland [Nowacki 1959, 225]. The retable has been there until now, seeming to blend harmoniously with the interior. A Silesian Late Gothic retable from Ścinawa (1514), also attributed to the workshop of Jakob Beinhart, appears to be equally well embedded in a historically and artistically alien sacred space. In 1947, it was obtained from the National Museum in Warsaw, from the collection of works revindicated from Silesia, and transferred to the renovated Cistercian Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Mogiła in Cracow [Marcinkowski 2006]. A number of officials, including Stanisław Lorentz, decided on transfer of this work was. He was the one who refused to hand over to Mogiła another Silesian altarpiece brought to Warsaw in 1945, i.e., the so-called Virgin of the Rosary Pentaptych currently adorning the main altar of the BVN Church on Sand Island in Wrocław. However, before the aforementioned polyptych returned to Wrocław in 1964, it had for several years adorned the chancel of the cathedral in Warsaw, reconstructed in the Gothic spirit [Patała 2021, 60-70] (fig. 6). In turn, the post-war history of the Polyptych of the Annunciation with the Unicorn illustrates the importance of selected Silesian altarpieces for the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw. On 17 March 1953, the National Museum of Warsaw received a request for «a triptych [sic] Madonna with Unicorn for the presbytery of the Gniezno Archcathedral»⁴. On 16 April of the same year, Stanisław Lorenz refused to hand the work over, arguing that the retable, of great artistic value, is an exhibit of the National Gallery of Polish Art, and its removal would «impoverish the exhibition to a great extent». These are just a few examples of post-war dislocations of Silesian carved late Gothic altarpieces. Their desirability in other parts of Poland was determined not only by their "abandonment" and no-one's-works status, which could be acquired relatively easily but also by their usually very good state of preservation and very high artistic value.

⁴ Archive of the National Museum in Warsaw, no. VIII-1159/53.



Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe

6: *Virgin of the Rosary Pentptych in the presbytery of the St. John's Archcathedral in Warsaw, ca. 1955 (Narodwe Archiwum Cyfrowe, Poland).*

Conclusions

The showpiece potential of St. Barbara's sculpture, which attracted Picasso's attention, and Silesian medieval art in general remains evident until now. Indeed, this work was featured on the cover of an album published in 2012 presenting "treasures" from the collection of medieval art of the National Museum in Warsaw [Kochanowska 2012]. In this book, among 120 medieval artworks of a different type, well over half are sculptures and altarpieces from the Recovered Territories, mostly Silesia and Pomerania. Moreover, medieval sculpture from these lands has

been and still is, an indispensable component of all major studies of the history of Polish art, to which only works from the Lesser Poland can compete [Kęłowski 1983; Kęłowski 1987; Skibiński, Zalewska-Lorkiewicz 2010]. This was certainly influenced by the medium of photography itself and albums published many years after the war. This medium was used to document not only the images of these artworks, but also their life and role in the post-war realities of a recovering museum sector.

The national narrative proposed in 1947 at the opening of the Gallery of Medieval Art of the National Museum in Warsaw, which had faded over the years, was finally broken with the opening of the new permanent exhibition in 2013. Its curators, Antoni Ziemia and Zofia Herman, resolved to focus on the function and agency of late medieval art and to present a history of regional art and trans-regional history as a counterbalance to the center-periphery model and the nationalist approaches [Ziemia, Herman 2013]. Nevertheless, the core of the presented collection has not changed. Hence the art of the former Recovered Territories still prevails – in terms of quantity and artistic quality – over works from other regions of present-day Poland. The canon of the country's most important works within its 1945 borders also remains unchanged, and its highlights can still be viewed primarily in Warsaw. Nevertheless, particular regions have regained their independence, providing an insight into the variety and complexity of traditions and factors influencing their artistic heritage.

In conclusion, the significant role of the National Museum in Warsaw and its staff in this process is worth emphasizing. First, the museum was the primary place for storage and evaluation of evacuated and restituted works. Second, the institution was involved in redistributing artworks to churches and museums across the country. Thirdly, the National Museum in Warsaw, with the opening of the Gallery of Medieval Art in 1947, became a place to present of the most valuable works of the newly defined Polish medieval art heritage (cultural property), of which sculpture from the Recovered Territories became a flagship. Its exhibit in museum spaces contributed to its presence in the catalogues, syntheses and in-depth studies devoted to the history of medieval art in Poland. The choices made in the first post-war years have influenced how medieval sculpture from the territory of present-day Poland is perceived, regardless of changing perspectives and methods*.

Bibliography

- BIAŁOSTOCKI, J. (1947). *Sztuka gotycka w Muzeum Narodowym w Warszawie*, Warszawa, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie.
- DOBRZENIECKI, T. (1960). *Galeria Sztuki Polskiej. Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie*, Warszawa, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie.
- GĘBCZAK, J. (2000). *Losy ruchomego mienia kulturalnego i artystycznego na Dolnym Śląsku w czasie drugiej wojny światowej*, Wrocław, Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu.
- GULDAN-KLAMECKA, B. (2003). *Wstęp*, in Bożena Guldán-Klamecka, Anna Ziomecka, *Sztuka na Śląsku XII-XVI w. Katalog zbiorów*, ed. Bożena Guldán-Klamecka, Wrocław, Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu.
- JAROCKI, R. (1981). *Rozmowy z Lorentzem*, Warszawa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- KARECKA, L. (2002). *Akcja rewindykacyjna w latach 1945-1950 : spór o terminologię czy o istotę rzeczy?*, in «Ochrona Zabytków», 55, nr 3/4, pp. 404-409.
- KĘBŁOWSKI, J. (1983). *Polska sztuka gotycka*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe.
- KĘBŁOWSKI, J. (1987). *Dzieje sztuki polskiej. Panorama zjawisk od zarania do współczesności*, Warszawa, Arkady.
- KOCHANOWSKA, M. (2012). *Mistyczne Średniowiecze*, Warszawa, Bosz.
- KUDELSKI, J. (2017). *Rewindykacja dóbr kultury na Dolnym Śląsku*, in «Kwartalnik Historyczny», 123, pp. 71-94.
- LORENTZ, S. (1956). *Muzea i zbiory w Polsce 1945-1955*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo "Polonia".

* This article presents selected outcomes of a research grant financed by the University of Wrocław (IDUB Programme, title: The afterlife of the Gothic altarpieces from the territory of today's Poland in the 19th and 20th c.).

- LORENTZ, S. (1957). *Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie w latach 1939-1954*, in «Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie», 2, pp. 7-98.
- MARCINKOWSKI, W. (2006). *Gotycka nastawa ołtarzowa u kresu rozwoju – Retabulum ze Ścinawy (1514) w kościele klasztornym w Mogile*, Kraków, Wydawnictwo i drukarnia “Secesja”.
- NOWACKI, J. (1959). *Dzieje archidiecezji poznańskiej*, vol. I, *Kościół katedralny w Poznaniu. Studium historyczne*, Poznań, Księgarnia św. Wojciecha.
- PATAŁA, A. (2021). *Left / Abandoned / Post-German: Late Gothic Silesian Retables and Their New Settings in the Monastery Church in Mogiła (Cracow), and the Cathedrals in Warsaw and Poznań in the 1940s and 1950s*, in «Ikonotheke», 31, pp. 49-81.
- PLINTA, K. (2022). *Płynąc za horyzontem. Rozmowa z Marią Poprzeczką*, in «Szum», 39: <https://magazynszum.pl/plynac-za-horyzontem-rozmowa-z-maria-poprzecka/>
- PRZEŹDZIECKA-KUJAŁOWICZ, A. (2018). “Warszawa oskarża” – pierwsza powojenna wystawa Muzeum Narodowego, in «Spotkania z zabytkami», 72, nr 11-12, pp. 22-29.
- RUTOWSKA, M. (2000). *Elementy polityki wobec niemieckiej spuścizny kulturowej na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych*, in *Wspólne dziedzictwo? Ze studiów nad stosunkiem do spuścizny kulturowej na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych*, ed. Z. Mazur, Poznań, Instytut Zachodni, pp. 167-200.
- SIERZPUTOWSKI, B. (2020). *Public international law in the context of post-German cultural property held withing Poland's borders. A complicated situation or simply a resolution?*, in «Leiden Journal of International Law», 30, nr 4, pp. 953-968.
- SKIBIŃSKI, S. ZALEWSKA-LORKIEWICZ, K. (2010). *Sztuka Polska. Gotyk*, Warszawa, Arkady.
- ZBOROWSKA, A. (2019). *Życie rzecz w powojennej Polsce*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- ZBOROWSKA, A. (2021). *'Abandoned' things: Looting German property in post-war Poland*, «History and Anthropology», 32, nr 5 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2021.1958805>).
- ZIEMBA, A., HERMAN, Z. (2013). *The New Gallery of Medieval Art of the National Museum in Warsaw*, in «Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie. Seria Nowa / Journal of the National Museum in Warsaw. New Series», 38 (2), pp. 24-29.
- DE FUSCO, R. (2010). *Storiografia e restauro sui generis di Roberto Pane*, in *Roberto Pane tra storia e restauro. Architettura, città, paesaggio*, a cura di S. Casiello, A. Pane, V. Russo, Venezia, Marsilio, pp. 28-30.
- ADAMO MUSCETTOLA, S. (1985). *Il ritratto di Augusto dalla Mostra d'Oltremare*, in *Napoli Antica*, Napoli, Macchiaroli editore, p. 347.

Archival sources

Warsaw. Archive of the National Museum. *Gallery of Medieval Art. Opening of the Medieval Art Department 1947* [*Galeria Sztuki Średniowiecznej. Uroczystość otwarcia Działu Sztuki Średniowiecznej 1947*], Kat. A, sygn. 847b.
Warsaw. Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe, nr. 351011251763.

PREPRINT

Medieval sculpture in the collection of the Archbishopric Museum in Wrocław after 1945 – difficult heritage?

ROMUALD KACZMAREK

University of Wrocław

Abstract

This article will concentrate on the fate of the collection of medieval sculpture in the Archbishopric Museum in Wrocław after WW2, with particular reference to the circumstances of its exhibiting and exploring (collections' dispersal, losses, disintegration of ensembles). However, specific problems were determined by the institution's affiliation with the Catholic Church. The religious nature of this collection and its "post-German" status may have added to the burden. The article will point out the factors that made the effects of WW2 paradoxically progressive over time.

Keywords

Wrocław (Breslau), Archbishopric Museum, national museum, religious art.

Introduction

The fate of Wrocław (before 1945: Breslau) seems emblematic of WWII's disaster and its effects on medieval artworks. By 1945, the scale of the city's medieval structure was comparable to that of Cracow; its churches and museum seemed jam-packed with late Medieval artworks. The destruction of Wrocław and the whole of Silesia in 1945 was compounded by the consequences of political treaties. This territory has changed its national and cultural affiliation – from German to Polish, from Western to Eastern European, oriented in the Soviet spirit. The post-war process of retrieval of artworks secured by the German authorities, run by the Polish and Soviet services, was conducted haphazardly and resulted in further losses. Moreover, the objects were taken deep into the territory of Poland, instead of being returned to their places of origin. Restitution of the pre-war conjuncture proved impossible. Erzbischöfliches Diözesanmuseum (hereafter EDM), renamed Archbishopric Museum (hereafter MAD) after 1945, constituted one of the Breslau museums, whose collections had been severely affected during WWII. It includes of more than 260 works of Medieval stone and wooden sculpture, dating from the 12th to the early 16th c. Late Medieval objects predominate, including 12 relatively completely preserved winged altarpieces. Following the National Museums in Wrocław and Warsaw, this is the most essential collection of Medieval art from the territory of Silesia.

1. Erzbischöfliches Diözesanmuseum before 1945

EDM was established in 1898 as an institution amassing art objects removed from churches in the diocese of Wrocław – covering ca. 20,000 km² before 1945, and after the war, the area increased to 24504 km²) [Jaworska 2013, 12]. Until 1945, medieval art formed a significant part of its collection (fig. 1), but the only publication documenting this fact was the 1932 guide to the permanent exhibition [Nowack 1932]. During WWI, the works were partially evacuated (only 4 crates) deep into the Reich (Hildesheim) and they returned without loss. WWII evacuation had a completely different scale and consequences. Securing the collection in

ROMUALD KACZMAREK



1: The main exhibition room in the *Erzbischöfliches Diözesanmuseum* in 1932. After Nowack 1932.

case of war was discussed already in November 1938. In the following months, a list of caches was compiled mainly in Silesian smaller towns, churches and monasteries. The first transports of crates began in mid-1942. By the beginning of July 1944, they had been distributed, with the approval and cooperation of the Silesian Provincial Conservator, in at least six locations. No less than 115 crates were prepared, but other packing methods were also used [Urban 1973, 140-143].

2. The first post-war year

Shortly after the end of WWII, the the Polish Catholic Church in Silesia sought to take over all the immovable and movable property formerly owned by the German Church. Several priests from the German cathedral chapter remained in Breslau for a shorter or longer period, as did the EDM director Dr. Kurt Engelbert [Urban 1973, 139]. They cooperated with representatives of the Polish Church, and their knowledge of all matters concerning the Church's material heritage was priceless. Following the relocation at the war's end, the artworks had to be tracked down, secured and transported back to Wrocław. The first year after the war, this was handled by the German director Engelbert, holding office until his departure for Germany on 23 October 1946. Before leaving, he had estimated that some 100 objects had not been returned to the Museum. This number decreased in the next few years, yet it is still not possible, even today, to precisely verify all the lost items listed in the pre-war inventory. However, not even a vehicle was available to the Church to carry out independent field searches. Which is why the art collections, dislocated in various places in Silesia, by no means only church property, were sought by specially appointed representatives of the Polish government and by random amateurs getting rich by robbery.

3. Finding and dispersing the museum's collection

The process of crates retrieval proved to be somewhat troublesome, as the Catholic Church representatives probably never reached "their" caches first. Instead, they received information when the crates were already on their way to a new location. Nor did the tracking of such crates marked as EMD property imply, that they would be returned to their owner, as the analysis of the protocols concerning the September 1945 transport from Duszniki Zdrój to Cracow clearly proves. Notification about the discovery of EDM items in the railway warehouse Duszniki must have somehow reached the new Polish Church authorities in Wrocław, for the apostolic administrator of Lower Silesia, appointed his representative (Fr Ludwik Mucha) on 19.9.45, thus one day after the find, and granted him the authority to participate in the evaluation of the objects. The role of the Church's plenipotentiary was limited to assessing whether the items found were "of liturgical use" i.e., whether the return to the Church would be justified by the need or necessity to integrate them into the ongoing liturgical and administrative functioning of the Church. On the other hand, objects belonging to the Church assessed as having museum value, were seized by state commissions and transported from the so-called Recovered Territories deep into the territory of pre-war Poland, mainly to Cracow and Warsaw. This was the case with more than 30 crates found in Duszniki Zdrój. From the incomplete documentation, it appears that among miscellaneous objects from the EMD, there were also wooden Gothic sculptures (10 are listed). A protocol drawn up on 20 September in Kłodzko (nearby Duszniki) stated that the objects were of "museum purpose", and therefore they were handed over to Jerzy Zanoziński (art historian, delegate of the Provincial Office from Cracow) «to be transported to Cracow's Wawel Castle at the disposal of the Directorate of the State Art Collections». Two days later, the crates reached Cracow, as evidenced by the protocol, written on 24 September, from their opening attended by the Director of Wawel Castle, Tadeusz Mańkowski, and the Deputy Director of the National Museum in Krakow, Adam Bochnak. On 26 September, Zanoziński was already back in Duszniki to take over the next consignment of "historical objects", containing Gothic sculptures, among them a 14th-century crucifix, transported to Cracow.

This case is probably one of many and illustrates the state of play less than six months after the end of the war, in an area still insecure in terms of security. The protocols available to art historians are imprecise as they fail to mention museum signatures and rarely the original provenance of the sculpture. While some of the sculptures can be identified in these lists, others need to be considered lost or can no longer be conclusively linked to specific objects. Moreover, a large group of works remained at Wawel Castle and had not been disclosed over the years, as a 1958 publication on Polish wartime losses still considered some of them to be lost. For example, three statues (Mary with Child, St Catherine and St Ursula) from Stare Miasto near Namysłów (Altstadt bei Namslau) were transferred from Wawel to the Jagiellonian University Museum as early as 1950 [Bularz-Różycka 2006, 24-27]. Or, in 1964, four works (one triptych and three statues) belonging to the EDM's collection and kept at Wawel Castle since 1945, were handed over as a long-term deposit to the Wrocław National Museum, which after ten years became its owner. So far as is known, MAD as the legal heir to the EMD has not been contacted in any of these cases. What is more, it remains uncertain whether all of the sculptures that ended up in the Wawel Museum in 1945 have survived. For instance, the statue of St Mary Magdalene from Centawa (c. 1500) is on display in the Wawel Royal Castle department in Pieskowa Skała.

Another group of sculptures from the EDM was included in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw (hereafter MNW). They remain there to this day, co-creating a significant

ROMUALD KACZMAREK



2, 3: The main exhibition room in the MAD in Wrocław in 2018. Fot. R. Kaczmarek.

collection of Silesian medieval art made up exclusively of works acquired in 1945 from Silesia, either from former museum collections or directly from churches, and transported to Warsaw without Cracow's intermediary. Among works from the former EMD collection, one can find a *crucifixus dolorosus* from the Corpus Christi church in Wrocław, a group of altar reliefs from the parish church in Ziębice and a group of Coronation of Mary from Karczyce – all created within the 2nd half of the 14th century. Two other works of Gothic sculpture from the EMD, taken over by the National Museum in 1945, are deposits at the National Museum in Poznań since 1947: the shrine of a retable from Marcinowice (1st quarter of the 15th century; Dep. 316) and a group of Lamentations of Christ from Żagań (ca. 1500; Dep. 315) [Woziński 1990a, 97, 103; Woziński 1990b, 9, 13] The origin of the so-called Pietà from Rucewo, obtained in 1945 from the war depot in Szczytna Śląska, is unknown. Probably it belonged to the EDM [Soćko 2016, 128-129].

In post-war Poland, a further dispersal of the MAD's collection, especially in medieval sculpture, was also caused by ideologically or patriotically motivated operations. In early 1956, the rector of the then-only Catholic university in Poland sent an appeal to the diocesan bishops, who were responsible for the church museums, to donate any artworks of their choice. It was motivated by a wish to recreate the collection established at the Catholic University of Lublin (hereafter KUL) before WWII, having been looted or destroyed in the first year of the war by the Gestapo. The only hierarch to respond to this appeal was the controversial deputy bishop in the Diocese of Wrocław, Kazimierz Lagosz, appointed by the state authorities and accepted by the Church under the duress of the political situation [Wójcik 1996; Staniszewski 2000; Jaworska 2011]. On his order, 14 sculptures, including three altarpieces, were transferred in 1956 from MAD to the museum collection of KUL in Lublin (eastern Poland) [Przylicki 2012]. Notably, the introduction to the 1973 MAD Catalogue does not mention this event. However, there is a fairly detailed account of dislocation of the museum pieces during the war, followed by their arduous recovery after 1945. One can assume that the act of disposing of the Wrocław museum artifacts by an



4: The staircase as the museums depot in MAD, 2018. Fot. R. Kaczmarek.

5: One of the museums depot in MAD, 2018. Fot. R. Kaczmarek.

Ordinary imposed by the communist authorities, had been seen as an event to be concealed rather than highlighted.

Most probably, some sculptures from the EDM came into private hands in the hectic of 1945 or a little later, stolen from transports or when the MAD was already in operation. The latter can be assumed for the St. Hedwig statue (late 14th c.), which, as evidenced by a photograph from the Herder Institute in Marburg, was in the EDM. In 2016, it was sold at the DESA Unicum auction in Warsaw. In all probability, this sculpture is identical to the one mentioned in the Catalogue of the MAD (503) [Urban 1973, 180]. Its disappearance could be linked to the relatively unrestrained movement of museum objects between buildings belonging to the Wrocław curia. The sold sculpture formed a pair with a statue of the St. Bishop with the following inventory number (504) and similar height [Urban 1973, 180], which also disappeared after being lent “outside”. In the 1971 manuscript inventory, there is a note that it was loaned to the Seminary in 1958. Specific to the administration of the MAD’s collection, it would also seem that the works would be loaned for decorating rooms and furnishing chapels and churches, particularly within Cathedral Island. This then fostered, given the lack of professional registration of the objects’ circulation and a lack of awareness of the artistic and historical value of the objects received, their disappearance [Urban 1973, 150].

4. The difficult heritage?

On an ideological and psychological level, integrating the newly annexed territories into pre-war Poland was also a problem. In the mentioned publication of Polish war losses in sculpture, 160 lost objects from Silesian churches and museum collections (the vast majority from its areas belonging to Germany until 1945) are reported under Polish losses. Not the last paradox resulting from the superimposition of official propaganda on historical reality, as more surprising is the specification of the mode in which these works were “lost”, namely, «taken away by the occupying forces before 1944». So the Germans, evacuating their collections, were – according to this twisted understanding – the “occupiers” in their territories or perhaps

ROMUALD KACZMAREK

the occupiers of “Piast Silesia”? Until long after the war, both the government and the Church used the argument of Lower Silesia having a Piast or Polish origin. In a letter to Władysław Gomułka, the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party, Bishop Kominek wrote about churches «dating back to the old Polish times» [Jaworska 2007, 199, 201]. At the same time, Kominek understood Silesian culture more broadly than Primate Wyszyński, who regarded it as Polish («the eternally Polish nature of the western lands»), while the bishop of Wrocław «recognized additional elements of Czech, Moravian, German and Lusatian culture in the spiritual culture of Silesia» [Olszar 2001, 59]. Meanwhile, a 1957 government circular referred to church property in the Recovered Territories as state “post-German property”.

However, the negative phenomena described so far were mainly due to the whole complex of post-war turbulences. The cultural policy of the new Polish state, under the dominant political influence of the Soviet Union, was closely linked to communist ideology. This resulted in poor relations between the state and the Catholic Church, forced to rely on self-financing. Given these realities, MAD’s situation was stable, albeit only to the extent that it could not be closed.

The museum did not have a dedicated budget for routine activities such as purchasing, conservation and artwork research. There were no positions for lay professional staff. The institution’s two directors managing it from 1956 to 2020 were history-trained priests. The research activity, however, must be judged as increasingly deviating from the average level and minimum standards. Admittedly, Director Wincenty Urban completed a new manuscript inventory of the entire collection around 1970/71, but it was essentially the result of a transcription into Polish of a German inventory. For publication, in three parts between 1973 and 1975, Urban arranged it chronologically and, within the epochs, introduced a hierarchical iconographic division, which in the “Gothic” section resulted in a sequence from representations of God the Father to saints [Urban 1973; Urban 1975]. On the one hand, this publication is very positive, as the State Museums did not make their collection inventories available. On the other hand, the level of this study was already very low, with many errors in the identification of iconography and chronology. Due to the lack of illustrations and access to non-exhibited works, identification could only succeed in the cases of artifacts published in pre-war studies.

The Museum’s exhibiting activities, particularly about old art, were essentially based on the permanent exhibition. Medieval artworks were mainly displayed in one large room of the former chapter library (fig. 2), as well as in the corridors and one smaller room. Director Urban recalled several entries from the Museum’s visitors’ book for 1965-1970, attesting to the positive response to the permanent exhibition [Urban 1973, 153]. Already in the late 20th c., the concept of this presentation aroused astonishment among professionals, feeling that one was dealing with the survival of an arrangement from the early days of this Museum. This was, however, not the case. It simply remained the largest exhibition space and the heart of the entire Museum. Moreover, when filling it with many sculptures and panel paintings, no principle (chronological or iconographic) was adopted other than a particular functional arrangement, mainly considering the scale of the objects. The sculptures hung on the walls, stood on the floor and sat in deep window niches (fig. 3). Hand-drawn captions in metal frames hanging on strings, sometimes hooked onto the sculptures themselves, were a flavor. The difference with the pre-war exhibition was the focus on medieval art. The 1932 photograph proves that the exhibition was arranged in a romantic spirit, with the picturesque atmosphere of a collector’s studio. Hard to believe that in addition to the 15 sculptures, there are 14 (!) Late Gothic altarpieces of various sizes, 15 panel paintings, complemented by 13



6: Horse from the St. George's Group during documentation as part of the 2020 cataloging project. Fot. R. Kaczmarek.

vitrines with 13th - 20th century crafts, a stone font and furniture. The post-war period saw a decrease in the number of carved altarpieces presented here (5) and an increase in the number of single Gothic statues to as many as 50. Many objects have also been replaced. A full-scale, life-size group of St George fighting on horseback (2nd third of the 15th century), which oddly enough had not been on display before the war, has become one of the main highlights of this room (fig. 2. in the rear plan).

An illustrated situation resulted probably from the peculiarities of the functioning of the MAD, like other church museums in Poland. It remains outside the structures of museology framed by law and the practice of conservation and preservation (figs. 4, 5). Its collection remains outside any system of surveillance, has the status of a private museum and is consequently cut off from public money to maintain and protect the works [Stec 2019, 129-131; Maniurka 2019, 126].

Conclusions

From the above outline, it is evident that WWII had a long-lasting impact on the situation of the Gothic sculptures belonging to the EDM collection and, after 1945, to the MAD. They have occurred on all fundamental levels – the quantitative state, the substantive recognition, and the state of collection preservation. The political and social effects caused by the war are primarily responsible for the condition of this art collection, which is so valuable for the region. This includes the functioning of church museum institutions outside the museum system and has led to the petrification of the negative phenomena and factors of the first post-war decades. Recent years have brought some hope of improving the status quo. The

ROMUALD KACZMAREK

Archdiocese of Wrocław secured significant funding in September 2017 for a comprehensive renovation of MAD. It also has created the opportunity to apply for funds for the thorough study of the collection. Inventory work covering the medieval art collection began at the end of 2020 (fig. 6) and should be completed in 2025 (Project nr 11H 18 0024 87 financed by the National Programme for the Development of Humanities).

“Post-German”, declaratively, “Piaśt” heritage became problematic since it needed to be maintained while its potential could not be exploited. What saved it was the sacral nature of the collection. But, even in the context of the document of the Holy See emphasizing the pastoral function of diocesan museums [Leszczyński 2003], is it the fuel to survive the 21st century?

Bibliography

BULARZ-RÓŻYCKA, L. (2006). *Rzeźba średniowieczna w zbiorach Collegium Maius. Muzeum Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Katalog*, vol. III, Kraków.

JAWORSKA, K. (2007). *Relacje między państwem a Kościołem katolickim na Ziemiach Zachodnich (1957–1960) w ocenie biskupa Bolesława Kominka i Władysława Gomułki*, in «Perspectiva. Legnickie Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne», 6, nr 1, pp. 193-216.

JAWORSKA, K. (2013). *Rola Kościoła katolickiego w integrowaniu społeczeństwa dolnośląskiego w latach 1945-1951*, in «Zeszyty Naukowe Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Naukowej im. Witelona w Legnicy», 9, pp. 7-20.

JAWORSKA, K. (2011). *Rządy wikariusza kapitulnego ks. Kazimierza Lagosza w ocenie biskupa Bolesława Kominka*, in «Perspectiva. Legnickie Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne», 10, nr 1, pp. 293-303.

LESZCZYŃSKI B. (2003). *Funkcja pastoralna muzeów kościelnych (Omówienie dokumentu Stolicy Apostolskiej)*, in «Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne», 79, pp. 147-150.

MANIURKA, P.P. (2019). *Prawna ochrona zabytków kościelnych. Problemy dóbr kultury w świetle norm kościelnych*, in *Muzea kościelne wobec nowych wyzwań*, red. S. Natanaela, W. Błażejczyk, Piotr Majewski, Warszawa, pp. 115-128.

NOWACK, A. (1932). *Führer durch das Erzbischöfliches Diözesanmuseum in Breslau*, Breslau, Otto Borgmeyer.

OLSZAR, H. (2001). *Stefan kardynał Wyszyński o współczesnych kardynałach ze Śląska rodem*, in *Śląsk w okresie posługi prymasa Stefana kardynała Wyszyńskiego. Materiały posesyjne*, red. J. Śliwiok, Z. Szandar, Katowice, Drukarnia Archidiecezjalna w Katowicach, pp. 47-60.

PRZYLICKI, K. (2012). *Kolekcja średniowiecznej rzeźby śląskiej w zbiorach artystycznych Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego Jana Pawła II*, in «Roczniki Sztuki Śląskiej» 21, pp. 9-28.

SOĆKO A. (2016). *Sztuka w służbie wiary*, in *Imagines Medii Aevi. Wystawa z okazji 1050. rocznicy chrztu Polski* (Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu), red. A. Soćko, Poznań, pp. 128-129.

STANISZEWSKI, B. (2000). *Książdz infułat Kazimierz Lagosz jako rządcza Archidiecezji Wrocławskiej 1951-1956*, Wrocław, Instytut Historyczny Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.

STEC, P. (2019). *Muzea kościelne z perspektywy prawa państwowego*, in *Muzea kościelne wobec nowych wyzwań*, red. s. N.W. Błażejczyk, P. Majewski, Warszawa, Narodowy Instytut Muzealnictwa i Ochrony Zbiorów, pp. 129-131.

URBAN, W. (1973). *Muzeum Archidiecezjalne we Wrocławiu oraz katalog jego zbiorów*, in «Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne», 27, pp. 133-206.

URBAN, W. (1974). *Muzeum Archidiecezjalne we Wrocławiu oraz katalog jego zbiorów*, in «Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne», 28, pp. 283-330.

URBAN, W. (1975). *Muzeum Archidiecezjalne we Wrocławiu oraz katalog jego zbiorów*, in «Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne», 30, pp. 195-221.

WÓJCIK, S. (1996). *Życie i działalność księdza infułata Kazimierza Lagosza (1888-1961)*, in *Kościół katolicki na Dolnym Śląsku w powojennym 50-leciu*, red. I. Dec, K. Matwijowski, Wrocław, Dolnośląskie Tow. Społeczno-Kulturalne, pp. 74-99.

WOZIŃSKI, A. (1990a). *Dzieła średniowiecznej plastyki śląskiej w Muzeum Narodowym w Poznaniu (Katalog)*, in *Sztuki plastyczne na średniowiecznym Śląsku. Studia i materiały II*, Wrocław-Poznań, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza, pp. 83-107.

WOZIŃSKI, A. (1990b). *Galeria sztuki średniowiecznej. Przewodnik* (Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu), Poznań.

Sitography

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_commissions/pcchc/documents/rc_com_pcchc_20051028_musei-ecclesiastici_it.html (March 2023)