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Italian Inspiration for the Painting Decorations  
by Maciej Jan Meyer from the First Half  
of the Eighteenth Century in Szembek Chapel  
at the Cathedral in Frombork

## ABSTRACT

The Bishop of Warmia, Krzysztof Andrzej Jan Szembek from Słupów (1680–1740), erected a domed reliquary chapel devoted to the Most Holy Savior and St. Theodore the Martyr (Saint Theodore of Amasea) at the cathedral in Frombork, also known as Szembek Chapel. The entire interior of the chapel is covered with frescoes dating from around 1735 by Maciej Jan Meyer (Matthias Johann Meyer) from Lidzbark Warmiński. Educated in Italy, the artist made polychrome decorations in the style of illusionistic architectural painting known as quadrature. In the lower part of the chapel stand busts of saints and the entire figure of St. Theodore of Amasea; in the cupola of the dome is the adoration of the Holy Trinity and the Holy Cross by the Mother of God and the Saints. Using the comparative method, I discuss the decoration of the chapel in the context of quadrature painting, which was developing in Italy and then in Central Europe, especially at the end of the 17th and the first half of the 18th centuries. Influential artists who played an important role for Polish *quadratura* techniques were Andrea Pozzo (1642–1709) and painters who came from Italy or studied painting there, such as Maciej Jan Meyer. I also show the prototype for the decoration of the chapel's dome, namely, the frescoes from 1664–1665 by Pietro Berrettini da Cortona in the dome of Santa Maria in Valicella in Rome, as well as for medallions with busts of saints modeled on the structure of the main altar from 1699–1700 in the Church of the Holy Cross in Warsaw, funded by Meyer's first patron, Bishop Teodor Potocki, primate of Poland.

KEYWORDS: chapel, fresco, wall painting, Italian influence, Meyer

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## STRESZCZENIE

Włoskie inspiracje malarskiej dekoracji Macieja Jana Meyera z pierwszej połowy XVIII wieku w kaplicy Szembekowskiej przy katedrze we Fromborku

Biskup warmiński Krzysztof Andrzej Jan Szembek ze Słupowa (1680–1740) przy archikatedrze we Fromborku ufundował kopułową kaplicę relikwiarzową pw. Najświętszego Salwatora i św. Teodora Męczennika (Teodora z Amazji), zwaną także Szembekowską. Całość wnętrza kaplicy pokrywają freski wykonane około 1735 roku przez Macieja Jana Meyera (Matthiasa Johanna Meyera) z Lidzbarka Warmińskiego. Wykształcony w Italii artysta wykonał polichromię w typie malarstwa iluzjonistyczno-architektonicznego określanego jako kwadratura. W dolnej części kaplicy przedstawiono popiersia świętych oraz w całej postaci św. Teodora z Amazji, a w czaszy kopuły adorację Trójcy Świętej oraz Krzyża Świętego przez Matkę Boską i świętych. Poprzez metodę porównawczą omówiono dekorację kaplicy w kontekście zagadnień malarstwa kwadraturowego rozwijającego się we Włoszech, a następnie w Europie Środkowej, zwłaszcza pod koniec XVII i w I połowie XVIII wieku. Ważną rolę w tym zakresie odegrał Andrea Pozzo (1642–1709) oraz artyści, którzy z Italii pochodzili bądź też tam studiowali malarstwo, jak Maciej Jan Meyer. Wskazano pierwowzór dla dekoracji kopuły kaplicy, którym są freski z lat 1664–1665 Pietra Berrettinico da Cortony w kopule Santa Maria in Valicella w Rzymie, a także dla medalionów z popiersiami świętych wzorowanych na strukturze ołtarza głównego z lat 1699–1700 w kościele Krzyża Świętego w Warszawie, ufundowanego przez pierwszego mecenasa Meyera biskupa Teodora Potockiego, prymasa Polski.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: kaplica, freski, dekoracje ścienne, wpływy włoskie, Meyer

The Chapel of the Most Holy Savior in Frombork, commonly known as Szembek Chapel, has not yet received the focused attention it deserves in a separate study. Both earlier German researchers (Boetticher, 1894, pp. 84–85, 99–100; Dittrich, 1916, pp. 14–17) and Polish ones, especially in the post-war period, mention the chapel only in the context of the cathedral or the activity of its founder in Warmia (Arszyński & Kutzner, 1980, pp. 85–88; Szorc, 1991, p. 82; Achremczyk, 1987, p. 18, 2008, p. 331; Żochowski, 1993, pp. 70–72; Starek & Kotłowski, 2017, p. 359). The reliquaries located there were only of partial interest to art historians (Samulowska, 1968, pp. 54–58, Figs. 10–13; Mączyński, 2003, pp. 583–584; Semkow, 2006, pp. 1–36; Semkow, 2012a, pp. 47–53; Okulicz, 2006, pp. 15–16, 346–351). This is also true for the polychrome painting in the chapel, which Andrzej Stoga discussed in very general terms (Stoga, 1981,

pp. 258–261, 1993, p. 519). The scholar recognized the innovative composition of the figures in the dome, referring the whole decoration to the Italian art characteristic of the “style that was popular around 1650.” Hence, it is worth taking a closer look at Meyer’s polychrome artwork, which was deeply rooted in the Italian painting tradition.

The polychrome made by the fresco artist from Lidzbark covered the interior of the chapel built in 1732–1735 at the Gothic corpus of the Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Andrew the Apostle in Frombork (Fig. 1). The man responsible for the oratory and the frescoes was Bishop Krzysztof Andrzej Jan Szembek from Słupów (1680–1740), who served in Warmia from 1723 to 1740 (Żochowski, 1993; Szorc, 1991, p. 82; Kopiczko, 1996, pp. 244–245; Akhremczyk, 2008, pp. 323–334). The Chapel of the Most Holy Savior and St. Theodore the Martyr (Saint Theodore of Amasea), also known as Szembek Chapel, was intended as a reliquary from the very beginning. The Archives of the Archdiocese of Warmia in Olsztyn hold several important historical documents related to the chapel and its furnishings and materials.<sup>1</sup> A lot of valuable information also came from the thorough conservation of the entire monument, including the polychrome, which was carried out in the 2010s, by the conservation company of Dr. hab. Edgar Pill and Aleksandra Pill, MA from Toruń (Pill & Pill, 2014; Maćko, 2014; Szumińska, 2015).

Szembek Chapel was erected in the seventh bay of the southern aisle of the cathedral, which was built in 1388. On behalf of Szembek, the cornerstone for the chapel was laid on August 15, 1732 by auxiliary bishop Michał Remigiusz Łaszewski (1730–1746). Bishop Krzysztof Andrzej Jan Szembek consecrated the chapel in 1735 (AAWO, AB, A 31, sheet 81), even though

1 The documents of particular importance include the foundation decree for the chapel, *Erectio Beneficium Szembekiani in Capella S(ancti)s(i)mi Salvatoris*, issued in Lidzbark Warmiński on December 29, 1736; the first inventory of its contents without the date of creation, defined as *Connotatio. Argentariae, Reliquiarum, Ornamentum totiusque Suppellectilis Capellae S (ancti)s(i)mi Salvatoris D (omin) ni Nostris*; and a second document, from 1785, preceded by the status of the oratory and a description of its furnishings—*Status et Rescriptio Capellae Sanctissimi Salvatoris a Perillustri Reverendissimo Domino Joanne Cichowski Canonico Warmiensi Anno 1785 facta*. These three documents are bound together and labelled as *Capella Szembekiana Ecclesiae Cathedralis Warmiensis. Archiv(um) Capitulare Frauenburg. R. C11a*, and all bear the reference number AAWO, AK, RC 11a. The chapel was also mentioned by Bishop Szembek himself in his report on the Warmia diocese sent to Rome on September 12, 1735, preserved in *Acta Cancellariae Illustrissimi Christophori Joannis Szembek Episcopi Warmiensis 1735–1740* (AAWO, AB, A 31, sheets 78–90). Some important information is also included in the extensive testimony of Szembek from January 25, 1740: *Testamentum Codicilli et Rationes Executoriales b.m. C(e)l(enti)ssimi R(everendissimi)mi D(omi)ni Christophori Szembek Principis Ep(isco)pi Warmiensis* (AAWO, AK I T 16, sheets 19–64v; AAWO, AB, A 46, sheets 55–57), published, in the main part, by Hipler (1886, pp. 121–122).

the finishing work continued for three years after his death, until 1743. In the decree of December 29, 1736, the founder took care of the appropriate funds for the maintenance of the chapel and the liturgy celebrated there (AAWO, AK, RC 11a (1), a loose sheet without numbering, and sheets 1-2v; AAWO, AK, RC 11a (3), sheet. 1v-2; Dittrich, 1916, p. 51). In accordance with his wish, outlined in his will of January 25, 1740, the founder—who died on March 16, 1740—was buried in the crypt of the chapel on June 1, 1740 (AAWO, AB, A 46, sheets 55-55v; Hipler, 1886, p. 121) (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Frombork, Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Andrew with the Chapel of the Most Holy Savior (the Szembek Chapel), 1732–1743. Photo by Szymon Tracz, 2011.

The chapel was erected on a floor plan with a different appearance of the outer and inner sides. Outside, it is projected onto a plan similar to a square ( $9 \times 10$  m) with concave corners, while inside the ground floor area is marked by a circle inscribed in a square with four rectangular recesses in the middle of the sides (an altar is situated in the southern recess, an entrance in the northern recess, and benches in the east and west recesses), which in effect is shaped similar to two Greek crosses inscribed inside each other.

The entrance to the chapel is located in the northern arcade. From the inside of the cathedral nave, it is formed by a deep, high arcade framed by

an illusionistically painted portal made in 1742 by the painter Rogawski.<sup>2</sup> The entrance to the oratory is finished with a decorative double-leaf trellis, richly forged in spatial plant motifs. In the semicircular transom, there is an openwork cartouche with the coat of arms of Bishop Szembek. The grating was made around 1742 by a blacksmith from Reszel, Jan Schwartz (1691–1760), and in 1742 it was painted and gilded by Rogawski (Dittrich, 1916, p. 15, footnote 1; Celińska, 1969, pp. 331–346, illustration 2, Fig. 5; Arsyński & Kutzner, 1980, p. 86; Maćko, 2014).



Figure 2. Frombork, Chapel of the Most Holy Savior (the Szembek Chapel). View of the interior with the altarpiece. Photo by Szymon Tracz, 2018.

At the focal point of the chapel is a polychromed and silvered reliquary wall altar with a painting of the Victorious Christ with a cross surrounded by saints, which was placed in the southern arcade in 1734. On his mensa, there is a wooden coffin in the shape of a sarcophagus with visors and silver appliqué with relics of Saint Theodore of Amasea (Dittrich, 1916, p. 15; Arsyński & Kutzner, 1980, p. 86; Mączyński, 2003, pp. 583–584;

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2 Rogawski (Rogalski) is an unknown painter and gilder who was active in Warmia in the second half of the 18th century, which is mentioned in the archival sources when works in the cathedral in Frombork and at the chapel of St. Bruno, canon Eulenburg in Frombork were being commissioned for Bishop Szembek (Dittrich, 1916, p. 15, footnote 1; Starek & Kotłowski, 2017, p. 362, note 415).

Semkow, 2012a, pp. 48–50; Pill & Pill, 2014, illustrations 46–49). Relics of St. Theodore are accompanied by numerous relics of various saints and by wax Agnus Dei sacramentals. They were placed in black glass reliquaries of various shapes decorated with silver, embossed appliqué as well as in glazed openings in the picture frame and the altar. The silver fittings and decorations of the retable and reliquaries were created around 1730–1743 in the workshops of goldsmith Jan Krzysztof Geese († 1761) in Olsztyn and Samuel Grewe, who was active in Królewiec from 1712 to 1750 (Dittrich, 1916, pp. 15, 57–58; Samulowska, 1968, pp. 54–58, illustrations 10–13; Mączyński, 2003, p. 584; Semkow, 2006, pp. 7–16; Semkow, 2012a, pp. 50–52; Okulicz 2006, pp. 15–16, 346–351) (Fig. 2).

Inside the chapel, special attention should be drawn to the magnificent polychrome painting, executed in the fresco technique around 1735 by Maciej Jan Meyer from Lidzbark Warmiński. The frescoes were painted in light, pastel colors with the dominant, wide range of shades of brown, ocher, whitewashed blues, reds, and olive green. Several components can be distinguished in the decoration system. The arcades, pilasters, friezes, wall panels, and window recesses articulating the interior of the chapel were covered with decorations in the form of marbling and regency ornamentation. Then, between four pairs of pilasters in each row, four busts of saints were piled up vertically in illusionistically painted frames. The medallions were hung on a painted grey-white ribbon tied with a bow at the top. Above each medallion there was a band with a red Latin inscription identifying the saint. The saints were shown in frontal, profile, and three-quarter views.<sup>3</sup> Above the entrance to the oratory, Meyer embedded the monumental *Vision of St. Theodore of Amasea*, surrounded by an illusionistically painted, profiled frame. The martyr was portrayed as an *all'antica* Roman soldier, in a late Renaissance burgonet helmet with a plume, cuirass, and a purple cloak flowing from his shoulders. The saint is kneeling on a smashed pagan deity. He is accompanied by an angel who is placing a palm branch in his hands, entwined with a band with

3 The chapel on the southeastern side represents St. Macarius (S[anctus] Macarius), St. Martin, the Pope (S[anctus] Martinus, Pontifex), St. Wenceslaus (S[anctus] Venceslaus, M[artyr?]), and St. Ivo Advocatus (S[anctus] Ivo, Advocatus). Then, the southwest side shows the semblances of St. Blasius (S[anctus] Blasius), St. Henry II, Emperor (S[anctus] Henericus C[aesar] R[omanorum]), St. Maurice (S[anctus] Mauritius M[artyr] c[um] 10000), and St. Hieronymus Emiliani of Venice (S[anctus] Emilianus, Veneciae). In turn, on the northwest side, we see St. Hilary (S[anctus] Hilarius), St. Louis the King (S[anctus] Ludovicus, R[ex] Gal[licae]), St. John of Nepomuk (S[anctus] Ioan[nes], Nepomucen[us]), and St. Isidor (S[anctus] Isidorus). Finally, on the northwest side the artist painted St. John the Almoner (S[anctus] Ioannes), St. Charles Borromeo (S[anctus] Carolus Boromeus), St. Alban of Mainz (S[anctus] Albanus, Sacerdos), and St. Lazarus (S[anctus] Lazarus) (see Starek & Kotłowski, 2017, pp. 365–370).

the Latin inscription “Justus ut palma florebit. Ps[almus] 91, Ver[sus] 13” (Starek & Kotłowski, 2017, p. 371). Above the martyr among the clouds, in the luminous rim, we can see the Tetragrammaton with the Hebrew name of God (Yahweh, יהוה). The whole picture is completed by the painter’s signature, which is visible on the left side of the saint: “MATTHIAS I (OHANNES) MAYER/ PICTOR CIVISQU (UE) / HELISBERGAE” (Starek & Kotłowski, 2017, p. 372) (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Frombork, Chapel of the Most Holy Savior (the Szembek Chapel). North wall with entrance and representation of *St. Theodore of Amasea*, painter Maciej Jan Meyer, ca. 1735. Photo by Szymon Tracz, 2019.

In turn, in the arches of the arcades that provide the structure for the interior of the chapel, the decorations were executed in the *en grisaille* style. On a marbled background, the artist depicted putti in pairs with attributes that personify the eight blessings.<sup>4</sup> Meyer drew on the Gospel of St. Matthew (Mt 5:3–12). It is possible to correctly identify the subsequent personifications after we compare them to similar representations of the eight blessings by Maciej Jan Meyer in the interior of the dome of the Holy Trinity Chapel, located in the northwest corner of the cloisters in the church in Święta Lipka. Those frescoes were created between October 1733 and

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4 In the literature, personifications in the arches are wrongly interpreted as virtues: see Arszczyński & Kutzner (1980, p. 86).

October 1734 (Paszenda, 2008, pp. 114, 117). Contrary to the Frombork representations, in the Święta Lipka sanctuary, each of the blessings is embodied by a female figure, defined by a larger set of attributes, only some of which were repeated in Szembek Chapel. In addition, bands with the text of each of the eight blessings appear in the painting.

Finally, the last element of the Frombork artwork are frescoes covering the dome's vault and roof lantern. Here, the artist from Lidzbark depicted the adoration of the Holy Trinity and the Holy Cross by the inhabitants of heaven, led by the Assumed Mother of God. The composition was based on the principle of three: expertly interconnected circles of figures gathered in groups are visible among swirling, fleecy clouds. The first ring is made up of figures standing directly behind an illusionistically painted balustrade. They are men and women of different ages known from the pages of the Old Testament, portrayed in half-figures. The second ring is comprised of figures accompanying the Holy Trinity. It shows the apostles, holy martyrs, and followers, who can be identified by their attributes. The saints are surmounted by winged angels. The third ring consists of dancing angels holding a flower and rose garland, surrounding the lantern opening, against a background of clouds. The roof lantern is filled with a representation of a golden crown (Fig. 4).

The bottom of the entire composition of the dome's vault is finished by an illusionistically painted baluster railing with a profiled banister, articulated with four low posts decorated with a stylized volute motif. The tangibility of the balustrade, which is an extension of the actual architectural divisions in the lower part of the chapel, is accentuated by a convex stucco half-shaft running around the lower edge of the vault. It is also a marbled pedestal for painted angular balusters placed on square plinths (Fig. 4).

In front of the balustrade, the artist painted an illusionistically framed greenish-mirror globe entwined by a serpent, suspended in space. The globe rests on a profiled, stucco half-shaft, which constitutes the previously mentioned lower edge of the dome. The head of the serpent, with an apple in its mouth, is being crushed by a huge cross carried by angels. Also against the background of the balustrade, slightly to the left of the Earth's globe, the Mother of God can be seen, supported by an angel and ascending to heaven with her arms spread, in white and pale blue robes blowing in the wind. Her head is surrounded by a wreath of twelve stars. The Madonna in the pose of adoration is facing the Holy Trinity, shown centrally above the globe, sitting on the clouds (Fig. 4).

The interior of the arcade opening onto the nave of the cathedral, where the entrance to the chapel is located, was also decorated with frescoes. The arcade is finished by the aforementioned lattice, while in its roof there is a triangle with the Eye of Divine Providence in a luminous





Figure 4. Frombork, Chapel of the Most Holy Savior (the Szembek Chapel). Dome decoration—*Adoration of the Holy Trinity*, painter Maciej Jan Meyer, ca. 1735, photo by the author, 2019.

perimeter, against the background of clouds, surrounded by winged heads of angels. On the sides of the arcade interior, the fresco shows angels holding a crown, a palm of martyrdom, and a lily. In turn, in the field above the entrance to the oratory there is an angel holding an open book and a pen, which reads “Nomi/na con/scrip/ta / sunt / in libro / vita(e)” (Arszyński & Kutzner, 1980, p. 86, illustrations 276, 278–281; Semkow, 2006, pp. 17–22; Starek & Kotłowski, 2017, p. 363).

The creator of the Frombork frescoes is Maciej Jan Meyer (Matthias Johann Meyer). Not much biographical information has survived about him. He most likely studied painting in his hometown of Lidzbark, where he was born. In Kraszewo, near Lidzbark, he was the artist behind the presbytery of the local parish church of St. Elżbieta Węgierska, the first known painting decorations. Meyer was sent to study painting in Italy, after he was noticed by the local parish priest, Fr. Maciej Berendt and recommended to the Bishop of Warmia, the later primate of Poland, Teodor Andrzej Potocki († 1738). There, he possessed the ability to paint in the fresco technique. It is not known where Meyer studied, nor with whom he practiced. It was most likely one of the northern Italian workshops. Everything indicates that after his return from Italy, the talented frescoist finished the polychrome painting in Kraszewo. There are several elements in the way the decorations are built which are similar to those that the

painter later used in Świąta Lipka. It must have happened before 1722, because at that time the artist had already started working in the northern sacristy in the Świąta Lipka sanctuary. The work in the church must have been completed before 1727, as it is not mentioned in the sanctuary's accounting book, which began in the middle of that year. In the same year, the painter decorated the chapel of St. Bruno at the church in Wozławki, commissioned to him by the Warmian canon Gotfryd Henryk von Eulenburg of Galiny († 1734). However, a year later, in 1728, he created frescoes for his patron—Teodor Andrzej Potocki, who from 1722 was the archbishop of Gniezno and the primate of Poland—in the chapel that he funded at the cathedral in Gniezno. In 1733, the fresco artist was seen again in Świąta Lipka, where he began painting the cloisters and four chapels surrounding the sanctuary. This work was discontinued around 1735, because the artist was summoned to Frombork by bishop Krzysztof Andrzej Jan Szembek, who ordered him to decorate the chapel of the Most Holy Savior (Szembek) that he had funded. After that, the painter returned to his work on frescoes in the cloisters of the Świąta Lipka sanctuary. There, as a result of a fall from scaffolding, he died in July or August 1737. In recognition of his work, he was buried with three brushes in his hand in a crypt under the church in Świąta Lipka (Achremczyk, 1987, p. 24; Arsyński, 1993, pp. 236–238; Achremczyk, 2004, p. 459; Paszenda, 2008, p. 112–114). In Warmia, Jan Lossau from Braniewo followed in the footsteps of Meyer, who in 1748–1749 made the polychrome of the pilgrimage church in Chwałęcín based on a quadrature, and in 1750 the one in Osetnik (Arsyński & Kutzner, 1980, pp. 36–37, 85–86, 164–165); Stoga, 1981, pp. 249–264; Witwińska, 1981, pp. 198).<sup>5</sup>

Italy was the cradle of architectural and illusionistic painting (see Bauer & von der Mülbe, 2000; Farneti & Bertocci, 2002; Verdon, 2008, pp. 71–87; Čičo, 2011). It was from the Italian tradition that Polish painting drew its inspiration from the first half of the 16th century. However, by giving it an innovative form in the first half of the 18th century, thanks to artists who came from Italy—or who were educated there, as in the case of Meyer—illusionist painting, also known as quadrature, gained an unprecedented quality and momentum, which also remained visible in the following decades of that century (see Stoga, 1980, pp. 365–376; Witwińska, 1981, pp. 180–202; Michalczyk, 2016, pp. 165–200). Its development was greatly influenced by unsurpassed works and theoretical considerations on the illusionist painting contained in the treatise *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* (Roma 1693—volume I, 1700—volume II) by the Italian Jesuit

5 The polychrome painting on the wooden ceiling was lost along with the church, which was destroyed during World War II in 1945.

Fr. Andrea Pozzo (1642–1709). It was he and his coworkers who did the decorations in Italy and Austria which excited the admiration of the public (Kowalczyk, 1975, pp. 335–350; Folga-Januszewska, 1981, pp. 203–212; Möseneder, 1999b, pp. 303–318; Bianchi et al., 2009; Bösel & Salviucci Insolera, 2009, pp. 175–200, 2010). Artists creating works in the same spirit as Pozzo, who arrived in Poland from Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, also played a major role in promoting this type of decoration (Hubala, 1964, pp. 208–220; Kowalczyk, 1975, p. 336; Koziel, 2017, pp. 56–73).

Vaulted panoramas were especially appreciated. The first one in Europe was executed between 1667 and 1673 by Francesco Cozza on the vault of the Palazzo Pamphili library in Rome. However, their popularity among Italian wall decorations only became noticeable in the 1720s. The most prominent representatives of this style were artists associated with Venice and Southern Germany, such as Tiepolo, Cosmas Damian Asam, Jacopo Amigoni, and others (Karpowicz, 1981, p. 98; Witwińska, 1981, p. 188; Bauer & von der Mülbe, 2000, pp. 32–59). The fresco from Lidzbark decorating the cupola vaulting in the Frombork chapel borrows from the principles of the panorama. It is organically linked to the tradition of Italian monumental painting. Meyer adeptly reworked the techniques and patterns known from Italy, as well as those he saw thanks to Italian artists working in Poland and with whom he became acquainted during his artistic journey, and created a set of monumental and innovative works that had not been seen in our country before. This is visible in both the oratory of Bishop Szembek and in earlier works in Świąta Lipka and Wozławki, or in Gniezno.

The very decoration of the dome of the Frombork chapel fits in with similar trends initiated in the north of Italy, for example by Correggio in *Ascension of Christ* from 1520–1523 in the dome of the Benedictine Church of San Giovanni Evangelista in Parma and *Assumption of Mary*, painted later—between 1524 and 1530—in the dome of the Parma cathedral. In both works, the artist shows the represented figures surrounded by billows of clouds. In the Benedictine church, these are seated apostles, captured in foreshortening along the lower edge of the dome and looking at the centrally portrayed Christ hovering above their heads at the zenith of the cupola. To compare, in the dome of the Parma cathedral, the composition was further expanded by introducing whirling bands of clouds “ascending” upwards, among which heavenly figures were arranged. It is also worth noting that in the octagonal tambour of the Parma dome, an illusionistically painted windowsill was introduced, interrupted by oculars illuminating the interior. Correggio, in order to increase the impression of spaciousness, presented the apostles and accompanying figures sitting on the sill or standing behind it (Verdon, 2006, pp. 296–297, Fig. 317).

Decades later, Giovanni Lanfranco followed the path of Correggio. Between 1622 and 1625, he made impressive frescoes in the interior of the dome of the Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle in Rome, and later in 1631 in the dome of the Tesoro di san Gennaro chapel at the Cathedral of Naples. In the former church, he painted the *Assumption of Mary*; in the latter, Christ triumphant among the saints. In both works, the artist placed prominently foreshortened groups of celestial beings sitting on the clouds, which form concentric rings “rising” upwards. In the Roman duomo, they are rising towards the lantern, while in Naples they stretch towards the figure of God the Father depicted at the zenith. Additionally, in the Roman cupola, we can see figures peeking out from behind the lower edge of the dome and putti playing around the lumen of the lantern (Verdon, 2008, p. 72, Fig. 77).<sup>6</sup> An important work of this kind was the adoration of the Holy Trinity by Pietra Berrettini da Cortona in the dome of Santa Maria in Valicella in Rome from 1664–1665, which was popularized by Francesco Faraone Aquila in 1696 in a copperplate engraving from 1696 (Verdon, 2008, pp. 72–75; Michalczyk, 2016, pp. 185, 630, Fig. 253b). Cortona depicted angels and saints seated on concentric clouds adoring the Holy Trinity, and a cross held up by a group of angels. Around the light of the lantern there are playful putti carrying a leafy garland decorated with flowing ribbons (Fig. 5). In a similar style, Luca Giordano made a polychrome painting in 1683 of the Glory of St. Andrew the Apostle in the dome of the Corsini chapel at the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence (Verdon, 2008, p. 85, Fig. 90). These visual molds were broken by Giovanni Cola and Filippo Gherardi in the cupola of the dome of the Church of San Nicolo da Tolentino in Rome in 1670 (Cerrato, 1959, p. 162; Stoga, 1981, p. 261). The frescoes showing the apotheosis of St. Nicholas of Tolentino presented the saints in loose groups sitting on clouds, which clearly blurred the existing spherical division without a definitive climax of the entire composition. Only the little angels playing around the opening, holding a rich floral and leaf wreath, link the whole with the earlier works.

In the following years, similar decorations created in Italy were a point of reference for the painting groups emerging north of the Alps. From among the early dome polychromes, it is worth recalling South German frescoes: the one by Carpofo Tencalla in the Cathedral of St. Stephen in Passau from 1679–1685, depicting the adoration of God the Father by angels; Giovanni Battista Carlone's paintings on the sail vaults of successive spans of the nave, complementing the stucco (Möseneder, 1999a, pp. 54–55); *The Triumph of*

6 Perhaps the triumphant Christ depicted here was the model for the image of the Savior that Meyer portrayed in the dome of St. Bruno in Wozławki.

*the Saved* by Georg Asam from 1690 in the Benedictine abbey church in Tegernese; *Coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* by Cosmas Damian Asam from 1721 in the Benedictine abbey church in Weltenburg; and *Lamentation for Christ* by Venetian frescoist Jacop Amigoni from 1726 in the chapel at the Benedictine abbey church in Ottobeuren (Bauer & von der Mülbe, 2000, pp. 72, 73, 97, 98, 106, 107).

Another example is the domed works from Austrian territories, such as the frescoes inspired by the adoration of the Holy Trinity by Pietro Berrettini da Cortona from 1664–1665 from Santa Maria in Valicella in Rome with the scene of the coronation of Mary in the Dreifaltigkeitskirche dome in Salzburg by Johann Michael Rottmayer from 1697 (Möseneder, 1999b, pp. 312, 340–341, Fig. 114). More examples include the paintings of the Venetian Antonio Pellegrini in the Salesianerinnenkirche in Vienna from 1727, and the work of Matthias von Görz from 1718 in the Augustinian abbey church in Pöllau, or the monumental apotheosis of St. Charles Borromeo from 1725–1730 by the above-mentioned Johann Michael Rottmayer in the Viennese Karlskirche, who clearly followed the path initiated in 1670 by Giovanni Cola and Filippo Gherardi in San Nicolo da Tolentino in Rome (Cerrato, 1959, p. 162; Stoga, 1981, p. 261; Möseneder, 1999a, p. 59, Fig. 53; Möseneder, 1999b, p. 312, Fig. 312, pp. 343–344, Fig. p. 116).

The interiors of the domes in Bohemia and Silesia were decorated with frescoes in the same spirit. One example would be the scene of the Assumption of Mary by Cosmas Damian Asam in the monastery church in Kladruby from 1726–1727, and the frescoes with the apotheosis of St. Nicholas in the dome of St. Nicholas church in Lesser Town in Prague, created by Franz Xaver Karl Palko between 1752 and 1753 (Hubala, 1964, pp. 215, 324, Fig. 120). As for Silesian artwork, we should first mention the Wrocław dome decorations in the cathedral chapels—the St. Elizabeth Chapel and the Electoral Chapel (Corpus Christi). Pioneering frescoes from 1680–1682 by Giacomo Scianzi picturing the legend of St. Elizabeth and her heavenly glory in the dome in the chapel dedicated to her are done in the tradition of post-Berninian monumental illusionist painting, and draw inspiration from the above-mentioned Roman frescoes by Cortona in the dome of the Church of Santa Maria in Valicella (1655–1656; Fig. 5) and by Lanfranco in the Church of Sant’Andrea della Valle (1625–1628) (Koziol, 2018, pp. 60, 196, 668–670). The frescoes in the cupola of the Electoral Chapel with the scene of the fall of the rebel angels were executed in a similar vein, done between 1721 and 1723 by Carlo Innozenzo Carlone, influenced by the works of the Venetian painters Sebastian Ricci, Giovanni Battista Gaulli—also known as Baciccia—and Michael Wilmann (Koziol, 2018, p. 336–338, fig. 431).

The beginnings of the illusionistic, multi-figure decorations of dome structures in Poland date back to the end of the 16th century. One of the first projects of this type include the uncovered fragments of frescoes that complement the architectural divisions of the interior of the Branicki Chapel at the church in Niepołomice. The chapel itself was completed in 1596. Perhaps an architectural painting was created around that time, from which the remains of a figural polychrome have survived in the dome (Łoziński, 1973, pp. 138–139, Fig. 100). However, illusionist paintings inside the domes appeared on a large scale only at the turn of the 17th century, to dominate the entire 18th century, quickly replacing the existing stucco and stucco-painting decoration systems.

Among many such works, it is worth mentioning the earliest ones here, which will later become an inspiration and a benchmark for the next ones. This was the case with the Church of St. Anthony of Padua in Czerniaków in Warsaw, erected by the Grand Marshal of the Crown, Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski († 1702). The temple was built by Tylman van Gameren († 1706) with the interior decoration completed between 1686 and 1693. Four artists worked on the frescoes painted in the *fresco buono* technique, while the paintings in the dome showing the heavenly glory of St. Anthony of Padua, surrounded by the heavenly beings sitting on the clouds and with his miracles represented in the lower part, were done along with a collaborator from the Swiss–Italian border, Francesco Antonio Giorgioli († 1725). The fresco artist, who was well-acquainted with illusionist painting, had “a clear predilection for massive, almost sculpted physical figures, especially male, with developed musculature”; he must have seen the figures depicted by Michelangelo on the vault of the Sistine Chapel, and his love of ancient tradition is visible, for example, in the way women are painted (Witwińska, 1996, p. 139).

The paintings from the royal foundation, attributed to Michelangelo Palloni from 1692 and created around the same time as the frescoes in Czerniaków are known only from description. They once adorned the dome of the Church of the Sacraments in the New Town in Warsaw (the paintings were done between 1897 and 1917, and finally destroyed in 1944). The smooth octagonal vault shows “the Glory of the Most High, many angels and saints in heavenly glory against the backdrop of light clouds” (Walicka, 1988, p. 76). The fresco consisted of “figural circles in the clouds painted in such a way that the dome seems deepened and leads the eye upwards” (Górska, 2017, pp. 31–32). One cannot ignore the later (done after 1709) decoration of the central dome and the cupola in the side chapel in the post-reform church of St. Peter of Alcantara and St. Antoni of Padua in Węgrów. The former shows the apotheosis of St. Francis of Assisi and the triumphant Church, while the other pictures

the apotheosis of St. Anthony of Padua (Górska, 2017, p. 35, Figs. 204–210, 213–214).

An important role was also played by a homogeneous complex of monumental late-baroque wall polychromes decorating the interior (including the central dome and the domes of side chapels) in the academic collegiate church of St. Anna in Krakow. Painting decorations from the years 1695–1703 were made by two brothers, Karol and Innocenty Monti, and Karol Dankwart, who completed Baltazar Fontana’s sculptural and stucco decorations. In this piece, the vault of the central dome particularly stands out, in which in 1703 Charles Dankwart portrayed heaven with the Holy Trinity and the Mother of God with St. John the Baptist, prophets, apostles, martyrs, doctors of the Church, believers, and virgins participating in the adoration of the Mystical Lamb (Bochnak & Samek, 1971, pp. 79–84; Kurzej, 2018, pp. 159–160, Fig. 256).<sup>7</sup>

In this rich context, the painted decoration of Szembek Chapel appears to be an important link in transposing Italian patterns and combining them with the native tradition, which had already taken root. In the Oratorio in Frombork, Meyer followed the guidelines of Andrea Pozzo, for whom the relationship between real and fictive architecture was an important element in building the decorations. Thus, the quadrature was to extend or complete the real structure. Thanks to this, the interior opened its lumen towards the heavenly sphere and the faithful standing on the floor of the church or chapel could join in watching the glory of heaven.

In Frombork, the transition between what is real and what is fictive occurs by means of a balustrade painted in the illusionist style running along the lower edge of the dome’s vault. Importantly, the balustrade is perpendicular to the chapel floor. In addition, this effect is strengthened by the use of a stucco half-shaft forming the lower edge of the dome, which—decorated with marbling—constitutes the plinth of the trompe-l’œil balustrade. In this way, the realistic articulation of the lower part of the chapel, augmented by ornaments and marbling, vividly painted portraits of saints in illusionistic frames, and *en grisaille* representations of the blessings in the buttresses, is continued in the upper tier thanks to the faux balustrade crowning the real entablature. Above the balustrade there is a lumen of the heavenly sphere, where the inhabitants of the sky, illuminated by the natural light from the dome’s roof lantern, live among the clouds (Fig. 4). It is significant that in this work Meyer does not try to blur the boundaries of real and faux architecture and invade the interior using

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7 The polychrome and the decoration of the collegiate church of St. Anna in Krakow, together with its ideological content, is discussed in detail and with reference to the previous literature by Kurzej (2018, pp. 113–169).

stucco or carved heavenly figures, as he did in Świąta Lipka. This technique was used by Pozzo, for example, in the Church of San Ignazio in Rome. This can also be seen in the Polish works of Palloni and Dankwart. Meyer himself referred to the works of Dankwart, a fact which is reflected in the painting technique and the characteristic features of the characters represented (Stoga, 1981, p. 261). The only painting effect that is intended to create the impression of spatiality in the dome's vault is "extending" the earthly globe in front of the illusionist balustrade, on which the angels lean the cross and groups with the Madonna ascending to heaven (Fig. 4).

Andrzej Stoga noticed that it was in the vault of the Frombork dome, and a few years earlier in the dome of St. Bruno Chapel in Wozławki—done by Meyer, for the first time in Poland—that the characters were gathered in loose groups of several people. In this way, the fresco from Lidzbark modified the practice of the 17th century, which was used in the above-mentioned work by Giovanni Lanfranc from 1622–1625 in the Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle in Rome, in which consecutive circles tightly filled with figures and separated by clouds decreased as they rose upwards, following the style of Giovanni Cola and Filippo Gherardi's frescoes in the dome of San Nicolo da Tolentino in Rome from 1670 (Cerrato, 1959, p. 162; Stoga, 1981, p. 261). Contrary to the church in Wozławki, where there are fewer figures in the dome, in Frombork, the rings crowded with figures were skillfully connected with each other. Thanks to this, we get the impression that the mutual interpenetration of the rotating, almost spiraling circles rising up towards the lantern are emitting natural light. This was made possible thanks to the use of "connectors." These were whole figures located in various places, for example, the Assumed Madonna, the Queen of Sheba, saints, a group of angels holding the cross, angelic figures, and more emphatic clouds. Thanks to this effect, the composition is very coherent and homogeneous, as well as very dynamic. Meyer achieved this by means of foreshortening and by differentiating the size of individual people seen in whole or only partially among the billowing clouds. They are characterized by gestures full of theatrical pathos and expression as well as flowing clothes. Polychrome composed in a *horror vacui* style retains the sense of lightness and ephemerality (Fig. 4).

The basic difficulty faced by every frescoist, including Meyer, was how to properly select the visual pattern, which then had to be adjusted to the large surfaces to be filled. In the case of vault paintings, it was essential to show the figures from the right angle and in a foreshortened view. For this reason, painters often sought patterns which interpreted such paintings. Zbigniew Michalczyk, who examined this issue, noted that





Figure 5. Rome, Church of Santa Maria in Valicella. Dome decoration—*Adoration of the Holy Trinity and the Holy Cross Tree*, painter Pietro Berrettini da Cortona, 1664–1665.

when compared with the gigantic productions of modern times, the engravings showing the polychrome of vaults and domes were definitely not as numerous as copies of easel paintings or works of original visual arts. Making such “reproductions” was a difficult undertaking, and the main center where works of this type were created was Rome. (Michalczyk, 2016, p. 185)

When even a skilled painter used copperplates to reproduce monumental paintings, he usually had to adapt them and fit them into his artistic work.

The prototype for the composition in the dome of Szembek Chapel is probably the painting which illustrates the adoration of the Holy Trinity and adorns the dome of Santa Maria in Valicella in Rome. It was made in 1664–1665 by Pietro Berrettini da Cortona (Fig. 5). In 1696, Cortona’s work was popularized by Francesco Faraone Aquila († 1740) thanks to the published copperplate engraving (Michalczyk, 2016, pp. 185, 630,

Fig. 253b). Perhaps Meyer saw it firsthand during his stay in Italy, or was in possession of the above-mentioned copperplate. The engraving differs slightly from the original. In the lower part of the dome decoration, Aquila added a layer suggesting the existence of a tambour with oculars articulated with pilasters supporting the entablature, which is not present in the original. In the Roman work of Cortona, as in the work of Meyer, we can clearly distinguish a group of the Holy Trinity, a separate group of angels holding a wooden cross further to the left, saints sitting on concentrically depicted clouds in larger groups, and putti carrying a massive flower-leaf garland around the lantern opening. The roof of the lantern is filled with a brightened dove of the Holy Spirit. Meyer introduced modifications in the Frombork dome as compared with the original. The tambour visible on the copperplate was replaced with a balustrade, the angels carrying the cross were placed out in front of the balustrade, and the cross itself was supported by the globe added by the artist. The saints were loosely placed in more distinct groups. The dove of the Holy Spirit was moved from the lantern roof into the close vicinity of the figure of God the Father and Christ, and its place was taken by the crown of glory of all the saved. Cortona's massive garland around the lumen of the lantern was reformatted into a light flower and rose wreath carried by angels (Figs. 4–5).

It seems that Maciej Meyer borrowed the *en grisaille* allegories of eight blessings in the arches of the chapel's arcades from the works of Andrea Pozzo. Pozzo placed similar allegorical figures in a prominent frieze above the entablature in the apse with the scene of *St. Ignatius Pleading for the Sick* from 1684–1688 in Sant'Ignazio in Rome (Salviucci Insolera, 2010, p. 86, Fig. pp. 88–89). Most likely, Pozzo's work was inspired by an illusionistic balustrade, which was a link between the real architecture and the world of illusion in the dome of the Frombork. In 1676–1677, Andrea Pozzo created a similar balustrade with angular balusters in the apse of the Church of San Francesco Saverio in Mondova, depicting the baptism of Queen Neachile administered by St. Francis Xavier in Moluccas, which was repeated by an anonymous collaborator of the master in a painting with the same representation in the collection of Castello del Buonconsiglio in Vescovado di Biella (Dardanello, 2009, pp. 54–59, Figs. 29, 37; pp. 198–200, illustration 37; Pfeiffer, 2009, p. 77, Fig. pp. 38–39).

Pozzo and his collaborator Antonio Colli also used the balustrade motif on the walls of the refectory of the Trinità dei Monti Monastery in Rome in 1694 by placing the participants of the wedding at Cana in Galilee behind it. A similar balustrade was painted by the Jesuit fresco artists in the refectory of the Roman convent of Sant'Orsola (Bigari, 2009, pp. 127–132, Fig. 96; Salviucci Insolera, 2010, pp. 82–83, Fig. pp. 83–85). The balustrades painted by Pozzo bring to mind the monumental canvases by Paolo

Veronese illustrating the wedding at Cana in Galilee from 1562–1563 (Paris, the Louvre), or the feast at Levi's house from 1573 (Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia) (Verdon, 2006, pp. 351–352).

Meyer could also have come across the motif of the balustrade from behind which the figures lean out in Silesia, an example of which is the decoration with *Adoration of the Holy Name of Jesus* by Johann Michael Rottmayer von Rosenbrunn from 1703–1706 in the University Church of the Holy Name of Jesus in Wrocław. This motif is later referred to by Ignaz Depée in frescoes in the former Dominican church of St. Waclaw in Opawa (Kozioł, 2017, pp. 60–61, Fig. pp. 52, 55).

We can also notice that the form of the balustrade in the dome of Szembek Chapel could have been inspired by the marble balustrade surrounding the first morning mass altar in the Frombork cathedral. On the order of Bishop Teodor Andrzej Potocki and the Warmian Chapter, it was made out of black Dębica marble in 1725 according to the design of the Krakow artist Kacper Bażanka, as part of a free-standing canopy altar (Dittrich, 1916, pp. 19–21; Rynkiewicz-Domino, 1999, pp. 57–60, Fig. 5).

It seems that the choice of Pietro Berrettini da Cortona's work in the dome of Santa Maria in Valicella in Rome as a point of reference for the Frombork Roman oratory was not accidental (Fig. 5). It was certainly influenced by the popularity of this artwork, as indicated by Francesca Faralone Aquila, but perhaps even more by its ideological content. At the request of Bishop Szembek, the chapel was built in honor of the Savior, the relics of the Holy Cross, St. Theodore, and All Saints. Cortona's decoration and Aquila's copperplate that came after it clearly emphasize the Holy Trinity and the cross, next to which the angels are holding the tools of the Lord's Passion. In the background, angels and saints are visible. This composition and arrangement fits very well with the commissioners' expectations.

Another element of indirect Italian origin is the busts of saints between the pairs of pilasters articulating the lower tier of the episcopal oratory. This method of arranging the images of saints dates back to the Middle Ages, when the images of the twelve apostles, Fathers of the Church, or saints were placed on the pillars of churches (Bandmann, 1951, pp. 80–81; Kobielski, 2002, pp. 87–89). In reference to this tradition, Gianlorenzo Bernini and his collaborators introduced a set of bas-relief marble busts of martyred popes in oval frames supported by putti, completed in 1649, into the interior of the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome, on the shafts of monumental pilasters in the interiors of the inter-nave arcades and on the pilasters in the aisles (Ferrari & Papaldo, 1999, p. 542). Vertically piled oval, stucco, and gilded frames with painted figural representations are set against the background of pilasters providing the structure of the nave of the Cistercian church in Austrian Schlierbach. They were made in 1679–1680 by

Pietro Francesco, Carlo Antonio, and Giovanni Battista Carlone. Additionally, the pilasters were decorated with full-figure sculptures of saints on consoles (Lorenz, 1999, pp. 244–246, Fig. p. 245).

Most likely, however, the arrangement of the busts of saints between the pilasters in Szembek Chapel was inspired by the main altar in the Church of the Holy Cross in Warsaw from 1699–1700. As already mentioned, the retable was funded by the then bishop of Chełmno (from 1699) Teodor Andrzej Potocki, supporting Meyer's painting education; in 1712 Meyer was transferred to the Warmian bishopric during the construction of the Świętokrzyskie retable.<sup>8</sup> The goldsmithing works financed by Potocki continued from May 1717 to June 1718 (Wardzyńska, 2010, pp. 164–166) (Fig. 6).

Created by Johannes Söffrens and Matys Hankis, the Świętokrzyska altarpiece represents a monumental, entirely gilded, three-axis architectural retable, which was destroyed during World War II and has been reconstructed. The columned edicula with the painting of the Crucifixion, originally the work of Jerzy Eleuter Siemiginowski, stands in the foreground of the altar wall. The altar structure behind it was divided into three axes by means of Corinthian pilasters. They rest on a high pedestal that extends the entire width of the reredos and support the grooved entablature that runs along its entire width. In this way, the retable brings to mind an ancient triumphal arch. The top of the altar takes the form of a square pilaster edicula composed on a square outline, containing an oval picture frame and topped with a cornice and a triangular tympanum. Against the background of the crowning picture stands a cross presented by a fully carved group of angels, which fills an interrupted pediment resting on an entablature supported by the above-mentioned Corinthian columns of the central edicula. In the side axes of the altarpiece between the pilasters, three oval, glazed openings were axially piled up, originally containing the relics of saints: the martyr St. Vincent, St. Maurus, St. Helena, St. Philomena, and St. Constance.<sup>9</sup> Above the bas-relief laurel frames of the glazed opening, at the top, there are partially framed flower and plant branches tied on the axis with bows (Wardzyńska, 2010, pp. 161–166, Figs. 2, 3, 8, and 17) (Fig. 6).

8 In November 1723, Teodor Andrzej Potocki became the Archbishop of Gniezno and the primate of Poland (Archemczyk, 2008, pp. 309–322).

9 After the reconstruction of the altarpiece from the war damage, the glazed openings were filled with paintings with busts of saints from the Congregation of the Missionary Fathers of St. Vincent à Paulo painted between 1968 and 1970 by Stanisław Korcz-Komorowski in cooperation with Maria Słoniowska-Ciechomska.



Figure 6. Warsaw, Holy Cross Basilica in Warsaw. Main altar (present condition), wood-carvers Johannes Söffrens and Matys Hankis, 1699–1700. Photo by Szymon Tracz, 2020.

Katarzyna Wardzyńska noticed that the stacked oval medallions located in the axes of the Świętokrzyska altarpiece were eagerly used by Tylman of Gameren. His designs referred to the visual designs of Claude Perrault and Jean II Lepautre, who used abundant decorations *à la romaine* and *à l'italienne* in their artwork. As examples, the researcher cites the design of the calendar-almanac with St. Francis Xavier of Jean II Lepautre, where oval medallions were hung vertically on the pilasters flanking the central space in the form of a wreath framed by laurel branches and garlands, and his design of the triumphal gate *all'antica* from 1659, decorated on the sides with four vertically piled portrait medallions hung on a ribbon between the columns (Wardzyńska, 2010, p. 172, Fig. pp. 18–19).

The monumental polychrome by Maciej Jan Meyer in Szembek Chapel in Frombork is a unique work in Poland. There is no doubt that the Italian experience of the artist from Lidzbark translated very well into his

frescoes. They also contain elements of trends which were popular in the north of the Alps that arose from or referred to the Italian artistic heritage, and were already living their own lives. First of all, in the Szembek oratory, Meyer included the most important achievements of the Italian artistic tradition of illusionist and architectural painting, commonly referred to as quadrature. At the same time, using his talent and careful observation of the world around him through the original transposition of patterns that he witnessed during his artistic journey, he created a work of art that still arouses admiration and recognition today.

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