

Stanislaw Mossakowski. *King Sigismund Chapel at Cracow Cathedral (1515–1533)*.

Cracow: IRSA, 2012. 374 pp. €120. ISBN: 978–83–89831–14–9.

Jan Białostocki (*The Art of the Renaissance in Eastern Europe*) once stated that only rare cases exist in the history of art that have done so much to change the stylistic character of a whole artistic landscape as the burial chapel erected and decorated for King Sigismund of Poland-Lithuania from 1517. For over two centuries chapels throughout this vast commonwealth imitated its form of cube surmounted by a drum and elliptical dome; the effigy of the sleeping monarch supported on an elbow inspired sepulchral sculpture; and its synthesis of the orders and ornamental forms derived from broad knowledge of the antique provided models for numerous designs. Consequently the Sigismund Chapel has garnered a large bibliography, mainly in Polish and most of it recorded in the book under review.

Stanisław Mossakowski's fine monograph now provides the most comprehensive treatment of this important monument. Good color photographs, some additional black-and-white illustrations, and diagrams enhance the presentation of a serviceable translation of a 2007 publication (some renditions of Latin are not so felicitous). The fruit of three decades of research, it supplies all the primary sources for the chapel, and offers insights into many issues concerning its interpretation and place in the history of Poland and the European Renaissance. Mossakowski demonstrates that the chapel is more than just an extension of Italianate forms beyond the Alps. He shows how it achieves an original synthesis of antique forms worthy of consideration alongside better known works in Italy with which it is in fact contemporaneous.

Mossakowski judiciously evaluates archival and stylistic information, adducing many new observations and connections. He argues that the Florentine Bartolomeo Berrecci, who proudly signs himself as *opifex* in the cupola, was mainly the designer and overseer of the project. He situates the origins of Berrecci's architectural ideas and familiarity with classical art in the immediate ambit of Giuliano da Sangallo. He relates the sculpture of the chapel and its ancient sources to the works of Andrea Sansovino and Benedetto da Rovezzano, with which he was personally familiar and from which several of his collaborators, whose individual participation he attributes, may have come. He suggests that Berrecci may have come into contact with Michelangelo in 1505–06, when he could have become familiar with the earliest designs for the tomb of Julius II. He also hypothesizes that Berrecci knew Rome at first hand ca. 1515, and therefore may have seen some of the inventions by Raphael that he later used. He summarizes the Sigismund Chapel's religious and political program of glorification of the monarch, and concludes that the learned king, perhaps with humanist advice, invented its ideological content and was a keen judge of its execution by Berrecci.

Mossakowski effectively terminates his book in 1533. While he notes later repairs and problems of condition, he disparages the alterations and additions introduced in the sixteenth century by Queen Anna, the last of the Jagellonian

dynasty to which Sigismund belonged. He limits discussion to a brief account of Marian iconography of the important silvered brass altarpiece by Peter Flötner, Pankraz Labenwolf, and Melchior Baier with paintings by Georg Pencz that was in mind before his terminal date and that culminates the chapel. He does not mention the Sigismund reliquary by Baier and Flötner, the set of brass candle holders by Hans Vischer, and silver ones by Baier — all objects commissioned for the chapel from Nuremberg.

This reviewer would concur that choices of genre, mode, or material might have determined the commissioning of works by Germans. However, patronage of metal sculpture, for example, cannot be so easily explained, because Berrecci also designed a bronze relief for the chapel. Sigismund ordered not only several different types of object for the chapel, but also engaged Germanic artists in Nuremberg and residents in Cracow in other major projects. These include his own portrait, the relief for Fryderyk Jagellon's tomb, and painted and carved decoration in the Wawel Palace. Other Jagellonians and many members of the Polish *szlachta* (gentry) also patronized Germanic artists. In this light, I cannot agree that in contrast to imports from Nuremberg, "works of Italian Renaissance art in Poland became a weapon in the hands of the . . . gentry . . . that dealt a blow to the essentially burgher art of the Late Middle Ages" (286). The Renaissance in Poland, the chapel included, still seems to me to represent a multiethnic, multicultural phenomenon.

Mossakowski has written a book worthy of its subject. A distinguished scholar and generous spirit who, beyond his own publications, has done much for art history in Poland and its international relations, he would surely agree that more may nevertheless be said about the chapel's contents and Sigismund's patronage.

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