

Binarowa – the “Sudden Death” painting

The mural is painted on the western wall of the church, opposite the chancel and to the right of the door. 3 metres high and 2 metres wide, it dates back to the 1640s and represents three figures in a chamber: two men and death. The main theme of the mural is the moment when a rich man counting money is suddenly attacked by death.

In the right-hand side of the composition, a middle-aged man sits at the longer edge of the rectangular table. It is shown in half-profile. His head is covered by a brown fur-trimmed hat. The bearded face beams with serenity. The large eyes look above into the distance. The man is clad in a loose dark-brown coat. Bending his left hand at the elbow, he holds scales with several coins on them. He keeps his right hand at head height. The table is long and wide and has richly sculpted legs. There are 9 piles of coins on it. There are two books to the left of them, one upon the other. The one underneath has a grey cover, the one above – a red one. Further away on the table, there are stuffed purses. These are small bags tied up in their upper parts. They were once used for carrying coins. There is another man on the other side of the table, opposite the man with the scales. He occupies the central position in the mural. He sits with his side towards the table and faces the viewer. His head is turned left. He wears a red hat trimmed with brown fur, his bearded face pensive. His big eyes look left. A magnificent long red coat flows down the man's shoulders. The collar and the lining of the coat are made of white ermine fur with black spots. Underneath the coat is a blue kaftan and narrow trousers, as well as red shoes with a high bootleg, which are almost knee-high. The man bends his arms at the elbows and stretches one hand above the books. He points his right hand towards his breast. The third character is death, shown as a skeleton. It is behind the back of the man in the red coat. Its pupils look intimidatingly to the left. The skull of death virtually clings to the man's temple. Death holds the man's right hand with its right bony hand. It keeps its left hand at the height of the man's head. It holds a long arrow, with an arrowhead pointing right at the man's heart. Death raises its left foot and puts it against the books on the table. Its right foot is on the floor, right next to the man. A red cloak flows down the man's back. In the background, the wall of the chamber has two windows with round panes. There is also a clock on the wall. It is to the right of the windows, in the top right corner of the mural.

The round clock face does not have any hands of a clock. Near the table, in the bottom right corner, is an open empty casket. On the bottom of the mural, there are two rectangles with Latin inscriptions.

The arrow that death drives into the chest of the rich man was an attribute of sudden death. It used to be a frequent way to illustrate a death as a result of a plague. This provided the affected individuals no chance to admit their sins and become at peace with God, and so this kind of death was dreaded the most. The theme of the fragility of human life and the inevitability of death was abundantly represented in sacred literature and art. This is especially the case with the time of the Counter-Reformation, when the Catholic Church fought against Protestantism.