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Descriptions for the Multisensory UNESCO project

***Binarowa – Church of St. Michael the Archangel***

The royal village of Binarowa, founded by Casimir III the Great in 1348, was given its parish church at the beginning of the 15th century, a wooden building which was damaged at the end of the 15th century (probably burnt in 1493). The present church is a log building (i.e. a structure built with horizontal logs interlocked at the corners by notching and such buildings were erected without the use of nails) and was constructed at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries. It consists of a rectangular nave and a narrower chancel closed on three sides, the whole interior is covered by ceilings, and the nave’s ceiling contains *zaskrzynienie* (a structure that looks like suspended chests consisting of extended beams of the upper part of the chancel's side walls). The tower, erected on the western side in 1596, using a set of posts which support the beams, is the oldest preserved extension of this type of wooden church in Poland (most towers of this type were erected in the 17th century). In 1601, the building was decorated with murals on the outside, which were later covered by boarding. The years 1641-1650 saw the addition of the Guardian Angels' chapel and the matroneum, enlarged windows and a mural decoration. The restoration works carried out in the church from the end of the 19th century finished in 1908 with a decision to cover the temple with metal sheeting and yellow-painted boarding, which distorted and disfigured the external appearance of the building. In order to support the weight of the metal sheets, arcades on columns were built inside the church. At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the metal sheeting was removed and the tower roof reconstructed, with shingles making a return onto the roof. In 2003, Piotr and Tadeusz Łopatkiewicz found a sketchbook by Józef Mehoffer (1889) in the collections of the Jagiellonian University Museum. It contained a drawing of the church in Binarowa, thanks to which we know that the reconstruction of the western part of the church was carried out in a remarkably accurate way. In the same year, the church was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

*Fun fact – inscriptions inside the church*

How do we know when the church in Binarowa and its interior was reconstructed or changed? Some of the dates are simply known from inscriptions that can be found in the building itself. The date ‘1596’ was placed on the south-western tower column, several dozen centimetres above floor level, and is the year when the tower was built. The south-eastern corner of the outer wall of the nave holds an inscription reading *Painted in 1601*; it is not unlikely that, at the same time, the southern wall was connected with a morgue, referred to as "new" in the sources from 1602. At the time, morgues in church cemeteries were buildings used to store bones dug from the ground while preparing new graves, however, after the liquidation of cemeteries in the 19th century, some of those buildings were dismantled. On one of the beams in the upper part of the tower, we can see the engraved date *1646* and the name *Mathias*, who may have been the carpenter that built the tower’s finial.

The letters in the late Gothic decoration of the ceiling that are possible to decode are M, K and B, which may be the initials of the artist, who in some publications was referred to as the Monographist MKB. The ceiling was decorated with patterned paintings (i.e. created using templates) in the early 16th century.

The post supporting the matroneum carries the inscription: ‘RESTAURATUM A.D. 1.6.4.1.’, and the letters: ‘I. K. P. B.’, which may indicate that the main part of the 17th-century church works was carried out on the initiative of the Binarowa parish priest, Jan Kaniowski (Latin: *Ioannes Kaniowski Plebanus Binaroviensis*). Under the beam that crowns the matroneum, there is an inscription: ‘COLORIBUS EXORNATUM FOELICITIER: ANNO DOMINI. 1643. MAY. 23.’ In the chancel, there is the date 1650. The sacristy bears the date ‘1670’ and the inscription ‘IGNI M PH B P B.’, which may refer to another local parish priest, Ignacy Markowicz, Bachelor of Philosophy (Latin: *Ignatius Markowic Philosophiae Baccalaureus Plebanus Binaroviensis*).

**Murals in the Binarowa church**

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) was when the Catholic Church decided to implement a whole series of changes to help in the fight against the Reformation; such changes were intended to create a new image of the Church: one that would attract the faithful and allow at least some of those who had converted to Protestantism to be regained. In a somehow "competitive" manner, the Roman Catholic Church decided to focus on the promotion of disputable matters (the Cult of the Eucharist, the cult of saints and especially the veneration of Mary; the importance of the sacraments with emphasis on the Sacrament of Penance and the Eucharist) and to attract the faithful with delightful, theatrical ornaments that they might have been missing in the typically modest Protestant temples. A decision was taken to create the image of the Church Triumphant, with more and more themes of vanitas present in sacred art, which would remind the faithful of the inevitable death and the approaching Judgement. The mural decorations of the church in Binarowa contain a lot of particularly rare scenes depicting complex theological content, which is proof that the manifesto of those murals was carefully thought out and planned in terms of the Counter-Reformation message. This could have been connected with the fact that nearby Biecz was dominated by radical followers of Calvinism, called the Polish Brethren (or Arians). Particular depictions were patterned on drawings that were a popular source of inspiration for modern-time artists across Europe.

The chancel of the church in Binarowa houses the Lord's Passion cycle and, interestingly, Christ's perpetrators are representatives of Polish society at the time (judging by their costumes, hairstyles or facial hair).

The upper part of the eastern wall of the nave holds a depiction of Christ in the Mystical Winepress. On the southern wall, there is an allegorical scene of the crossroads of human life. At the crossroads, people can choose a steep path leading to Heaven (in the company of the Guardian) or let themselves be seduced by the Temptation that leads to perdition. The said Temptation (*Seductio*) is a well-built winged woman, dressed in a beautifully decorated gown which partly reveals her bare leg (probably as a form of seduction). The lower part of the southern wall of the nave shows the scenes of the Martyrdom of St. John the Baptist, and the Stoning of St. Paul. The latter is extremely rarely depicted in art, illustrating an incident described in the Acts of the Apostles: people tried to stone the Apostle Paul during one of his missionary journeys, but he survived somehow and did not suffer a martyr's death at the time. In the upper part, above the side entrance, between the windows of the southern wall, we can find the Art of Dying scene where a dying man is supported by the Virgin Mary depicted in the centre of the composition; Archangel Michael is arriving in aid of the soul, the Guardian Angel and St. John the Baptist are showing the dying man the Heavenly Host and angelic choirs; we can guess that the soul of the dying man will not fall into the hands of the devil who is luring him at his bedside. The scene draws our attention to banderoles, or speech scrolls (with inscriptions in Latin). This type of dialogue, reminiscent of today's comic books, already appeared in medieval art. On the northern wall, opposite the Art of Dying scene, there is a representation of the Last Judgement.

The Personification of Death is also shown in the south-western corner of the nave, under the matroneum. It is a crowned skeleton with a scythe, painted right in front of the eyes of people who might have sat here on church benches. Another scene about death is depicted on the western wall of the nave: it is a representation of Sudden Death, where a wealthy man counting his money is suddenly attacked by a skeleton armed with an arrow. The arrow had already been an attribute of sudden death in medieval times, especially in connection with the plague: death from unexpected arrows coming from unknown directions was compared to sudden deaths that were connected with the bubonic plague.

One of the most interesting depictions is represented by the cycle of seven illustrations of the Petitions of the Lord's Prayer, with the angels carrying the subsequent verses of the Lord's Prayer to heaven. These verses have been linked to the Seven Sacraments depicted in the background, behind the figures of angels. The angels themselves are also represented by the Seven Virtues (three theological virtues: Faith, Hope and Love, and four cardinal virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance). Another unique series has the form of twelve scenes illustrating the verses of the Apostles' Creed ("I believe in God the Father...") that can be found on the side walls of *zaskrzynienie* in the nave. They are as follows: Creation of Adam and Eve ("Creator of Heaven and Earth..."), Transfiguration of Jesus ("I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son"), Nativity of Jesus ("...born of the Virgin Mary"), Entombment of Christ ("He was crucified, died, and was buried..."), Harrowing of Hell ("He descended to the dead."), Christ and God the Father ("...seated at the right hand of the Father."), Valley of Josaphat ("He will come again to judge the living and the dead."), Descent of the Holy Spirit ("I believe in the Holy Spirit... "), the Catholic Church ("...the holy Catholic Church... "), Confession ("...the forgiveness of sins... "), Resurrection ("...the resurrection of the body..."), and finally, New Jerusalem ("…and the life everlasting").

The next surprising cycle comes in the form of decoration of a matroneum sill; it shows eight depictions from the cycle of *Remedia redemptoris nostri*, i.e. the representation of the means of redemption from the seven deadly sins: seven angels are bearing the instruments of the Passion, trampling the devil's mouths that are personifications of the seven sins.

One of the most interesting compositions from the church decorations in Binarowa was put on the western wall; unfortunately, it is hardly visible from the nave floor, partially covered by the organ case. The depiction, divided into three parts, shows Churches Triumphant, Penitent, and Militant. The most visible fragment shows the Chariot of God's Wisdom, consisting of seven columns with medallions whose decorations illustrate the Seven Sacraments.

*Fun fact – Mystical Winepress*

The painting showing Christ in the Winepress is of medieval origin and is a Eucharistic image. Christ is standing in a winepress, where He himself becomes the grapes pressed by the cross and by God the Father, or by angels at His command – such a version can be found among Gothic paintings in the cloisters of the Church of St. Francis in Kraków.

The late medieval iconography made a return in the era of Counter-Reformation, when the Eucharistic content in sacred art became popular in Roman-Catholic art. This type of depiction would usually be decorated with the inscription *torcular calcavi solus* ("I have trodden the winepress alone"), which is a passage from the biblical Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 63: 3). Meanwhile, the Binarowa version of the Mystical Winepress is more modest in its composition (it shows Christ alone in the winepress, pressed by a cross and a screw), but richer in inscriptions; the press includes several more verses from Isaiah (Isaiah 53: 4, 5, 6, 10a, and 63: 2), as well as a verse from the Book of Revelation: *Indutus est pallio tincto sanguine* ("He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood", Revelation 19:13).

*Fun fact – Miron Białoszewski’s poem*

One of the most famous poems of Miron Białoszewski from the volume "Obroty Rzeczy" (“Changing Things”) (published in 1956) includes “Stara pieśń na Binnarową” ("The Old Song for Binnarowa"). The poet expressed his admiration for the old art preserved in the village church by using archaic language tricks, which can be seen in the title itself stylised as Kochanowski's epigrams, such as “Na lipę” ("On Linden") and the double "n" in the name of the village, which was probably supposed to give it a more "old Polish" character. The poem itself repeatedly paraphrases fragments of the medieval song "Bogurodzica" (“Mother Of God”), such as "The Virgin Mother of God, the golden Gothic Mary", "with your Son, the Lord, all of Jerusalem..." and finally: "Adam – you divine servant, Eve – of the same lineage, [...] Kyrie eleison!"). The following strophes of the poem repeat the references to dust, ash and cobwebs, with this poetic image perhaps being a result of Białoszewski’s visit to Binarowa before the renovation of the church, which took place in 1953-1956.

*Fun fact – Death in the culture of the 17th century*

Even though a lot of people associate the motives of *Danse Macabre* with the culture of the late Middle Ages, it should be mentioned that the subject of the fragility of human life and the inevitability of death would often appear in Early-Modern literature and art, especially in the era of Counter-Reformation.

In 1621, a Polish translation of the work of the Jesuit Robert Bellarmine, entitled "The Art of Dying Well", was published in Krakow and the author of the scene at the church in Binarowa could have known this publication. Binarowa’s representations of death as a skeleton with a scythe and Sudden Death with an arrow have their own literary patterns or references, since the motif of death and the transience of life was quite present in Polish Baroque literature. We can find numerous examples in the 2nd half of the 17th century; such as Jakub Teodor Trembecki's poem (1643-1719 / 20) “Zegar bojaźni bożej” ("Clock of God's Fear"), with a verse: "The clock is ticking, / your time is running out / Feel for yourself, the death bow hits you in the heart", or "The clock is ticking, death is cutting down the tree of life / Woe betide you if virtue does not redeem you." Although Trembecki was a Protestant, he converted to Catholicism; in 1675, he wrote down over 1,000 Polish and Latin poems and wrote “Wirydarz poetycki”, the most important historical anthology of 17th-century poetry. It included works such as “Śmierć nikim nie brakuje” ("Death misses nobody") ("Death is common to everyone / It does not respect freedom, titles or dignity. / The poor will not find a shelter, / The rich will not pay, the soldier will not defend himself" and "Death touches both the sumptuous palace / And the rickety hut.").

In the early 1670s, Klemens Bolesławiusz (c. 1625-1689) published his poem "Przeraźliwe echo trąby ostatecznej" ("A Dreadful Echo of the Ultimate Trumpet") containing a poetic image of death with a scythe without regard to social position and the possessions of its victims ("Once born into this world, / we race one another / to death, until the end of our short lives. [...] We become one with the soil / and like flowers, we are cut by the scythe of death / not losing its grip on anyone. / It is allowed in a sumptuous palace, / and a poor rickety hut: / it will find you everywhere."). Such images were, of course, present in earlier poetry as well; artists creating images emphasizing the transience of life in the first half of the 17th century may have been inspired by the poetry of Hieronim Morsztyn (1581-1625). For example, the poem "Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas" ("Oh, nothing lasts in this treacherous world, / All things that exist die, death is the end to everything, / Time is fickle, / which adds to a great worry. / Night and day follow each other quickly and then death comes"). A description of the "image of death" in one of the poems by Mikołaj Sęp Szarzyński (1550-1581) is an even earlier example: "All things that were once born, / All things that walk on the ground, / swim in the sea / or fly in the sky; / Just like a reaper / cutting weeds / It touches everyone / and offers no explanation / for the terrible deeds."

*Fun fact – remains of the Altar of Four Holy Virgins*

The structure of the altarpiece called the Altar of Four Holy Virgins was formed in the 14th century; in the 3rd quarter of that century such altarpieces were very popular in Silesia and, by the end of the century, they became popular in other areas as well. This type of altar would have a representation of the Virgin Mary in the middle, with four smaller figures of holy virgins on the sides. They were usually early Christian martyrs: in most cases St. Catherine of Alexandria, St. Barbara, St. Margaret and St. Dorothy. All of the women were depicted as young girls with their hair loose (a symbol of maidenhood) and wearing crowns (in the case of Mary, the crown referred to her royal dignity, and in the case of the other saints, they were crowns of martyrdom). The bas-reliefs of this type from the Binarowa altar (from the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries) can now be found in one of the local side altars.

*Fun fact: discoveries made during renovation*

In June 2010, the structure of the Binarowa church suffered some serious damage as a result of flooding. In order to stabilize it, it was necessary to tear off the flooring and remove nearly one metre of soil, which revealed 15th-century burials and 14th-century ceramic pottery (therefore, dating back earlier than the current church). In addition, the renovation works revealed a few 7th-century coins and a box under the altar, (it contained human remains as well as a broken glass and a chicken bone, which were possibly the remains of works carried out in the church in the 19th century).