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Descriptions for the Multisensory UNESCO project

***Haczów – Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Michael the Archangel***

Haczów is a village founded around the mid-14th century and the local parish comes from 1388. However, it is difficult to say how long it took to organize the parish and the type of church that might have been built in the village in the 1st half of the 15th century. The present church was erected at the end of the 1450s: dendrochronological examination on the wood used for its construction proved that the temple was built of fir wood from trees that had been cut down in 1458-59 and which were over 100 years old at the time. Wooden buildings were then erected from non-seasoned rough wood, so the church could have been built in 1459. Church ceilings were usually added at a later time, which was the case here as well, as a study of the ceiling boards showed that they had come from trees felled in 1472. On the other hand, samples from the walls of the added sacristy appeared to have dated from the 1860s.

The founder of the church in Haczów is still unknown, but Haczów itself was a royal village. Interestingly, the same carpentry workshop that erected the church in Haczów may have built a temple in nearby Iwonicz (1464). According to tradition, the church in Iwonicz was founded by King Casimir IV Jagiellon, so maybe both these churches were founded by the Polish king himself…?

We know that, in 1624, Haczów was destroyed by the Mongol (Tatars) invasion and old literature assumed that the present church in Haczów was built after the invasion and referred to it as a 17th-century monument. Meanwhile, the existing church was rebuilt in the 17th century, with a tower-bell, arcades, ridge turret, and new windows added. According to Piotr Łopatkiewicz, these changes were made a bit later than 1624. Right after the Tatars' invasion, in the face of the devastation, the parishioners did not have the means to reconstruct the church. But a few years later, in 1631, the king handed over the parish in Haczów to the Krosno mansionary canons who, in turn, had property that allowed them to carry out architectural work, so the reconstruction of the church in Haczów may have started after 1631. In the 18th century, new windows, the Our Lady of Sorrows Chapel, a small strongroom and a new matroneum were added to the church. In 1789, the walls of the church, which were then covered with dirty and darkened late-medieval polychrome, were whitewashed: the preserved parish chronicle, kept since 1781, contains a record under the date 1789 of whitewashing the walls and covering the old paintings from 1494. In the 2nd half of the 19th century, the church underwent some further renovation works and, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, there were further additions of new polychrome: the Assumption of Mary into Heaven on the ceiling of the chancel and the trompe l'oeil painted architectural divisions on the walls of the temple. *Zaskrzynienia* in the nave (or extended beams of the upper part of the chancel's side walls, looking like suspended chests) were supported by pillars which substituted the three-aisle layout.

The 1955 discovery of medieval murals by Jerzy and Stanisław Gadomski might have saved the church from destruction. It turned out then that, contrary to popular belief, the temple was not built in the 17th century, but had been founded two centuries earlier. At the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, the renovation of paintings was led by Wojciech Kurpik from the restoration workshop of the Museum of Folk Architecture in Sanok. This was followed by the discovery of 11 boards from the original church ceiling, containing the remains of figural ornaments. A comprehensive renovation of the paintings and subsequent discoveries took place in the early 1990s, but it was not until 2000 that 10 of the boards were exhibited on the ceiling, arranged according to the 1993 concept by Prof. Jerzy Gadomski. Today, the church in Haczów displays the exposed elements of most of the preserved 15th-century paintings, although parts of later polychrome showing the character of the decorations from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries also remain. The side altars from the 18th century and polychrome church benches (around 1700) returned to the interior as well.

In 2003, the church was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

*Fun fact – a surprising discovery of medieval murals*

Unfortunately, the 1st half of the 20th century saw numerous wooden monuments disappear from the Lesser Poland landscape, not even as a result of war damage or fires, but simply as a result of demolition, since old churches were replaced with new, brick ones. The wooden church in Haczów almost suffered the same fate. After the war, a new church was built and started holding services in 1948. The old church was abandoned and its floors were removed. In the mid-1950s, the windows were broken, and anyone was able to enter the church, which was closed only in theory, through a hole in the bell-tower. It was then that the discovery of the late-Gothic polychrome saved the church from destruction.

In the autumn of 1955, Jerzy Gadomski, a future professor of art history, and his cousin, Stanisław Gadomski, a graphic artist, both arrived in Haczów. Jerzy Gadomski was 21 and studied in the Faculty of Conservation and Restoration of Works of Art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków. The church in Haczów was in a run-down state at the time, basically doomed to devastation and possible demolition, and its altars had already been removed. It was in the empty spaces where the altarpieces used to be that the Gadomskis noticed pieces of paintings under the thick layer of dirt; they seemed to be part of a completely different ornament than the decorations on the other parts of the walls. Apparently, during the whitewashing of the church interior in the 18th century, the altarpieces were not moved away and, therefore, the walls behind were not painted over. It was the discovery of late medieval polychrome that would completely change the state of research carried out in the church in Haczów.

**Architecture:**

The church in Haczów is the oldest, largest and best preserved wooden Gothic church built using a log construction in Europe. It is also the only wooden monument in Poland with preserved figural paintings from the 15th century.

The church was built of fir wood, on a stone foundation. It 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. The nave is built on a square-like plan, the chancel is slightly narrower than the nave and closed on three sides from the east. The total length of the nave and chancel is over 25 metres. The interior is covered by ceilings, the nave’s ceiling has *zaskrzynienia*: a structure that looks like suspended chests consisting of extended beams of the upper part of the chancel's side walls, which forms a support for the timber roof truss that covers the whole church (including the nave and the chancel). The system combining the chest-like beam structure and the timber roof truss (in Polish: *system więźbowo-zaskrzyniowy*) was used only in Lesser Poland (the term is here understood as a historical region, which mostly coincides with the area of former Western Galicia, much larger than the present voivodeship) and was a major achievement of the local medieval carpentry workshops. In addition, the timber roof truss structure was secured by catches located under the eaves, which were visible from the outside.

In modern times, a bell-tower with a belfry (a room hung in the upper part), built using a set of posts which support the beams, was added to the western side of the church. The church has two entrances: the western one, which may have originally been two-winged, but was transformed after the tower was added, and the southern entrance with an original late-Gothic portal.

*Fun fact: carved hooks*

Under the eaves of the Haczów church’s chancel, we can see hooks (elements supporting the structure). Four of them, located on the southern wall, have unusual carved anthropomorphic shapes resembling geometrised masks. The meaning behind the masks is unknown, nor is it known why such ornaments were made on only four hooks. Was the carved decoration of the chancel of the Haczów church abandoned before it was finished for financial reasons, or was it a case of the craftsmen becoming bored? Or perhaps these strange masks, looking like pagan deities, were to refer to the cultic and symbolic meanings of the number four (corners of the world, elements, temperaments)? It is difficult to resolve this issue now, but it is certainly a very interesting decorative element that is unique in Central Europe.

**Murals:**

Haczów is currently home to the largest known set of wall paintings from the 15th century in Poland; it is the only set complete enough to allow us to imagine what the interiors of rural wooden churches looked like at the end of the Middle Ages. The murals represent the traditions of Gothic Kraków painting, but might have been made by artists from a workshop that operated in nearby Krosno. The total area of uncovered Gothic murals in Haczów is approx. 600 sq m. They tell a story from the beginning of the world and the original sin, through the history of redemption and the history of sainthood, to the announcement of the Last Judgement.

The 15th-century paintings were made on thin calcium and chalk ground, directly on a levelled wooden support. Figural depictions were arranged in two or three rows, and individual scenes were separated by painted frames. The trompe l'oeil depictions of architecture and painted fabrics were put in the plinth sections of the walls.

The northern wall of the chancel displays the Passion cycle; the uncovered plots include: Entry into Jerusalem, Last Supper, Washing of the Feet (?), Christ in Gethsemane, the Taking of Christ, Christ before Pilate, and the Carrying of the Cross. The eastern walls display the Crucifixion (destroyed by a window being moved), the Soldiers casting lots for Christ's garments, and the remains of the scenes of Mourning and the Entombment of Christ. Most of the paintings on the southern wall of the chancel have not been uncovered, but we can assume they showed scenes relating to the Resurrection of Jesus. The only scenes visible today are those of the Coronation of the Virgin and the Martyrdom of St. Stanislaus as well as small vertical strips which reveal fragments depicting Archangel Michael, the Annunciation, and the Ten Thousand Martyrs of Mount Ararat.

The eastern wall of the chancel also displays images of saints. The lower area shows depictions of two female saints which are not very clear, and it was also where the foundation inscription could be found which, unfortunately, is now mostly illegible. On the sides of the central window in the middle wall, there are images of two holy bishops: Stanislaus (with his attribute, i.e. the figure of Piotrowin who was said to be resurrected by the bishop) and St. Vedast (Vedastus, Vaast) with a wolf holding a goose in its mouth.

The southern *zaskrzynienie* of the nave displays an Old Testament cycle; from the Creation of the World, through the Creation of Adam and Eve, the Original Sin, Exile from Paradise to the Work of the First Parents. Unfortunately, the murals are now in quite bad condition. The western wall of the nave was also decorated with scenes from the Old Testament: the Binding of Isaac, the Killing of Abel, and the Drunkenness of Noah (?), which are all placed above the matroneum. Below the matroneum and above the western church entrance, there is a depiction of the Veil of Veronica (the face of Jesus reflected on a piece of cloth belonging to St. Veronica). Another such image can be found above the southern entrance. The Veil of Veronica on the western wall shows Jesus with his eyes closed, which is a result of errors in reconstructing the fragment of the mural.

Below the *zaskrzynienie*, the southern wall of the nave was decorated with depictions of the female saints, now only partially preserved: St. Margaret with her attribute in the form of a dragon and St. Helen holding a cross are both visible today.

The western wall of the nave under the matroneum used to be decorated with a depiction of martyrs and the remains of the depicted scenes can be interpreted as the martyrdom of Saints Sebastian and Erasmus. The northern wall of the nave might have displayed the martyrdom of Saints Lawrence and Andrew; however, it is the immense image of St. Christopher that is the most-visible mural on this wall. We can also find here the remains of a depiction of St. Sophia and her three daughters.

The eastern (rood screen) wall holds the remains of the Apotheosis of St. Mary Magdalene.

The remains of the boards of the original nave ceiling include the depictions of Salvator Mundi (Saviour of the World) and St. Michael the Archangel killing the dragon.

*Fun fact: Sophia and her three daughters*

Sophia is a legendary saint who is said to have been an early Christian martyr, the mother of three tortured daughters, called Faith, Hope, and Love. The story of the martyrs may be rooted in the allegorical concept of personifying the Three Theological Virtues as daughters of the Wisdom of God (*Sophia*). The cult of Sophia and her daughters might have developed at the turn of the 6th and 7th centuries. According to legend, persecutors of Christians decided to put Sophia through great suffering and told her to watch her daughters being killed one by one. The Middle Ages saw many different versions of the legend of St. Sophia. One of them tells the story of a miracle when angels with crowns (sign of the martyrdom of the mother and the girls) appeared by Sophia and her daughters, with Sophia being entitled to seven crowns. Legend says she was tormented seven times, revived after each round, and finally killed, having received Holy Communion. However, you can also find a different interpretation of the seven crowns in the paintings of St. Sophia and her daughters: one crown of martyrdom is for each of the four saints, and the additional three crowns above Sophia’s head represent the three times the mother had to suffer watching the deaths of her three children.

*Fun fact: St. Christopher the Giant*

St. Christopher is one of the most popular patrons, but he is a legendary saint: even his name is most likely to have been derived from legend. *Christoforos* means "Christ-bearer" and that is how St. Christopher was depicted: as a strong man carrying the Christ Child on his shoulders or on his back. Interestingly, legend says that the saint was supposed to be a giant (apparently he was about 7 metres tall). He was a very strong man and a great warrior who wanted to serve the most powerful master in the world. Once a hermit told him that Christ is the most powerful ruler, but if people want to serve him, they must devote themselves to helping others; then Christopher devoted himself to the work he was physically predisposed to, i.e. he settled near a dangerous river crossing and helped travellers to cross the river. Once, a little boy asked him to take him across the river; during the crossing, Christopher suddenly felt the child was as heavy as lead, so much so that Christopher could barely carry him. When he finally reached the other side, he said to the boy: “I do not think the whole world could have been as heavy on my shoulders as you were”. The boy replied: “You had on your shoulders not only the whole world but Him who made it”. Of course, it was Jesus himself, and this way the giant became *Christoforos*, or "the Christ-bearer". The gigantic depictions of St. Christopher used to be displayed in visible places, not only because the legendary Christopher was supposed to be a giant, but mainly because the images of St. Christopher were believed to have almost magical powers. According to medieval beliefs, they were to protect against sudden and unexpected death and everyone should, therefore, look at an image of St. Christopher to be safe.

*Fun fact: the remains of St. Mary Magdalene in Ecstasy*

Mary Magdalene is a unique saint: according to the Gospel, a woman closely associated with Jesus and the first person to see the resurrected Christ. The most popular collection of hagiographies in the Middle Ages (13th-century "Golden Legend") says that, after the Ascension of Jesus, Mary Magdalene decided to spend the rest of her life as a hermit. Living in isolation for 30 years, Magdalene would experience mystical ecstasy every day: seven times a day the angels would lift her up, and she would hear hymns of praise of the Heavenly Host, which served as a replacement for earthly food. It was during the time of her ecstasy, when she was being raised by angels, that Mary Magdalene was portrayed, especially in the late-medieval art of Central Europe.

The remaining fragments of the scene show us the angels, and the legs of Mary Magdalene, which are clearly covered with hair. Magdalene, raised by the angels, was actually depicted as being covered with hair almost all over her body, except her face, hands, and feet. The late-Gothic images of Mary Magdalene might have been influenced by a motif from the legend of another saint, Mary of Egypt, who was venerated mainly in the Eastern Church. Mary of Egypt was believed to be a sinner who retired to the desert to live the rest of her life as a hermit in penitence, where her clothes crumbled to dust over the years, with her long hair being the only thing covering her nakedness. It is possible, however, that there is something more behind the "hairy" Mary Magdalene that we can find in medieval art: Mary Magdalene was not a perfect figure, but a sinner-saint. Her sinfulness was associated with her sexuality, since, according to legend, she was a former prostitute, and the concept of unbridled lust and sexual desire in medieval art was often portrayed in the form of the so-called Wild Men, covered with hair all over their bodies. In this context, the figure of a hirsute Mary Magdalene can be interestingly seen as a dualistic sinner-saint: she is a Wild Woman, because in the past she devoted herself to carnal urges, but now, after conversion, she experiences mystical ecstasy.

*Fun fact: St. Vedast (Vedastus, Vaast)*

Bishop Vedast lived at the turn of the 5th and 6th centuries and was the first bishop of the French diocese of Arras. The fact his image can be found among the paintings in Haczów is really surprising, because he was not a popular saint in Poland and there are no other depictions of him in our art. However, it must be Vedast that is displayed in the church in Haczów, because he has a rather unique attribute in the form of a wolf holding a goose in its mouth. This attribute comes from a legend about a wolf snatching a goose that belonged to a poor family; St. Vedast took the bird from the wolf, brought it back to life and gave it back to the poor owners. The image of Vedast might have been related to the fact that Haczów had numerous residents with German roots, and the saint was venerated in German territories.

*Fun fact: The Martyrdom of St. Stanislaus*

The depiction of the Martyrdom of St. Stanislaus in Haczów is one of the oldest surviving examples of this scene in Polish art. According to legend, Stanislaus was killed while he was celebrating Mass in a church: we see how the king himself raises his sword and kills the bishop during the liturgy. According to the story, Bolesław II the Generous killed Stanislaus himself and then ordered his corpse to be dismembered.

Stanislaus, the Bishop of Kraków, lived in the 11th century and was killed in 1079 (in quite mysterious circumstances). The chronicles of the so-called Gallus Anonymus do not provide information concerning the reasons behind the story or its details; it only says that there was a serious conflict between the bishop and King Bolesław. Bishop Stanislaus was canonized in 1253. The following year saw the solemn proclamation of the saint and the translation of his relics. It was only then, connected with the efforts to canonize the bishop, that his legend was born (over 150 years after the death of the saint). Therefore, it is not historically credible: the story about the king killing the priest during the Mass was simply taken from the legend of St. Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Depictions of the legend of St. Stanislaus were popular in the late-Gothic art of Lesser Poland, although most examples date from the beginning of the 16th century. The scene in Haczów is, therefore, one of the oldest surviving examples of the depiction of Martyrdom of St. Stanislaus. The saint may have been put in an important place among the decorations of the Haczów church because of the founder of the paintings (as Piotr Łaptkiewicz suggests, it might have been nobleman Stanisław Jeżowski, the owner of Haczów village).

*Fun fact: Virgin Mary on the Moon*

The contemporary mural on the ceiling of the chancel in the Haczów church shows the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary; the chancel also houses a late-Gothic figure of the Virgin Mary and Baby Jesus. In both cases, we can see a crescent moon at Mary's feet. We call this type of image *Maria Immaculata,* which is a symbolic depiction of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the doctrine teaching that the mother of Christ was the only one to be conceived without original sin and her conception was thus immaculate.

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception became popular in the 13th and 14th centuries, but, initially, the idea of *Immaculatae Conceptionis* had more opponents than supporters. Eventually, the Council of Basel (1439) stated that belief in the immaculate conception of Mary is in accord with the Catholic faith, which was confirmed by Pope Sixtus IV in his constitutions (1476; 1480). However, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary was not dogmatically defined until 1854.

In art, the concept of *Immaculatae Conceptionis* was portrayed by showing Mary as a Woman of the Apocalypse: clothed in the Sun and with the Moon under her feet, the way John the Evangelist saw her in his vision. The woman described in the Apocalypse is defined as being chosen by God, the way Mary was supposed to have been chosen, and as the future mother of the Messiah, free from the burden of original sin at conception.

*Fun fact: Salvator Mundi*

The ceiling in the nave of the Haczów church was arranged at the beginning of the 21st century, using ten original medieval boards containing the remains of murals. The preserved elements include a figure of Christ shown as Salvator Mundi, or the Saviour of the World. This type of depiction is believed to have evolved in 15th-century Netherlands, as a result of combining the images of Christ in Majesty (*Maiestas Domini*) with depictions of the Holy Face of Jesus, as seen on the Veil of Veronica. The former type is similar to Salvator Mundi, the representation of Christ with one hand raised in blessing and the other hand holding a *globus cruciger*, while the latter type, which was thought to be a "real portrait" of the Saviour, is similar in its frontal view. Salvator Mundi has no crown on his head, is usually dressed modestly and often portrayed as barefoot. It is a unique mixture of God and man merged in one person: this type of depiction emphasizes the coexistence of both natures of Christ: divine and human; it also emphasizes the humility of the Saviour who, as a ruler of the universe, became a man. The inscription on the banderole ("O Rex Gloriae Veni Cum Pace [...]" - "Oh King of Glory, Come with Peace") suggests that the representation was to be viewed in an eschatological context (connected with the Last Judgement and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ).

*Fun fact: Consecration crosses*

The oldest elements of painting decorations in Haczów (3rd quarter of the 15th century?) consist of consecration crosses (Polish: *Zacheuszki*), i.e. signs in the form of Greek crosses on the interior walls showing the 12 spots where the bishop anointed the church with chrism during its consecration. The number ‘twelve’ referred to the number of Apostles. In front of each cross, there was a place for a candle which was lit on the anniversary of the consecration. The Polish name derives from the evangelical figure of Zacchaeus, a wealthy chief tax-collector, who hosted Jesus in his house in Jericho. As a result of this visit, Zacchaeus decided to give half his possessions to the poor, and to those he had ever wronged (returned fourfold).

*Fun fact: Miron Białoszewski’s poem*

In 1956, the State Publishing Institute PIW published a book of poetry by Miron Białoszewski titled "Obroty rzeczy" (Changing Things”), including poems written in the years 1952-1955, e.g. "Barbara of Haczów":

*— Barbara made of ash and silver...*

*— I am made of wood.*

*— Barbara from under the grey shingle...*

*— I am from under the blue.*

[…]

In the early 1950s, Białoszewski would enthuse over the art and culture of Subcarpathia, and his expeditions into these areas resulted in poems; particular verses of the piece "Barbara of Haczów" clearly show that the poet visited the church before the medieval murals were revealed from under the plaster ("*and your house / is silver and ash. / — It is lime plaster. / — Plaster? / — It is lime plaster.*"), when the temple was neglected ("*By the roadside, / no nails, / but instead: / firstly – spiderwebs, / secondly — layers of dust*") and it was thought to be a relic of the 17th century *("— You are talkative, / Baroque Barbara. / — Baroque? / — Yes*.").