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The Art of the Renaissance
in Eastern Europe

Hungary · Bohemia · Poland

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Phaidon

as an artificial, artful style exemplified, more or less closely in such works? Are not the fantastic *Kunstschranke* (Fig. 323), the incredible ivory structures of interpenetrating cubes, polyhedrons and spheres, the intricate metalwork (Fig. 322), artefacts which have no other purpose than to show the skill of the artists?⁵⁷

One may then propose to distinguish two types of international Mannerism: one of them was mainly Italian, or of Italian origin; it was practised by artists following the ideal of *maniera*, and it found expression mainly in painting and sculpture and in the form of the human nude. The second one was northern, although its roots are also to be found in Italian architecture and ornamental models. It appeared mainly in the decorative arts, since even architecture was conceived mostly in terms of decoration. Both of them were highly artificial, refined and sophisticated, and in spite of considerable differences in formal aspects, it is perhaps reasonable to call them by the same name.

As in a piece of polyphonic music, we may observe that the new stylistic trends in the sixteenth century in eastern Europe enter the scene one after the other and do not disappear. Rather, each of them, having created one or two important buildings or works of sculpture, leaves behind a host of imitations: to use George Kubler's terminology, they create prime objects which provoke replications.⁵⁸ They appeared one after the other and continued simultaneously: the early Albertian or Urbino manner as transformed in the Buda workshops, the specific High Renaissance of Berrecci, the north Italian Classicism of Padovano and Stella, the severe Mannerist Classicism of Wohlmüt, the lively Florentine Mannerism of Gucci, and the northern Mannerism coming to the east in various forms – from Augsburg in its more southern version as well as from the Netherlands in its more northern one. Against that background of imported forms was created a local, vernacular style, of great originality and independent beauty, striving after picturesque, dynamic, colourful expression, which – in Bohemia and Poland – produced its most interesting results both in towns and for noble patrons.

Such genuine local idioms of the period could hardly be formulated in Hungary, which was locked at that time in a highly dangerous struggle for life against the Turks, who occupied large parts of the country. Only a few monuments like the Sárospatak castle survive. All energies were directed to coping with problems of defence; architects and patrons concentrated on fortifications and fortresses.^{58a} The traditional type of castle with four towers at the corners but with modern Italian bastions became popular in Hungary and Slovakia. Except for some sgraffito decorations they were mostly functional, and different from the style developed in Bohemia, Moravia and Poland. In these countries – in spite of differences in detail – perhaps the last common artistic expression of the area to which this book is devoted was formulated. Finally, therefore, let us turn our attention to that specific trend.

'Vernacular' style as opposed to Mannerism

The variety of forms and artistic sources is great indeed, but the qualities of typical products of the vernacular trend may be considered the opposites of those typical of Italian Mannerism.⁵⁹ The vernacular works of art are naïve and direct in contrast to the refinement and sophistication of Mannerism; they are straightforward and sometimes even awkward as opposed to the virtuosity and 'terribilitá' of Mannerism; they are free and spontaneous, narrative and coarse as against Mannerist self-control and complexity; they

are popular or connected with the middle class rather than courtly, as is most Mannerist art.

The vernacular trend shows a lack of interest in space composition, an enthusiasm for ornament, a lack of functional thinking, a disruption of links between form and content and a neglect of Classical norms and rules. It seems that we can observe in that art what A. Goldschmidt once called 'disintegration of form'.⁶⁰ He said that such a process occurs when forms created to express a certain content are taken over in a milieu where acquaintance with the original content has been lost and the actual meaning and function of form are no longer understood. Thus the phenomenon of the provincial transformation of art forms may sometimes result in structures superficially similar to highly sophisticated compositions. It would not be right, however, to define the vernacular trend in negative terms alone, since the buildings and works of art produced by it have a picturesque or fantastic character of their own, which makes them the best representatives of the *genius loci* of eastern Europe.

In Bohemia that trend, called by historians the 'Czech Renaissance',⁶¹ is especially apparent in a group of castles which includes the no longer existing castle of the Lords of Rožmberk on the Hradshin,⁶² and the Lobkovic-Švarcenberk castle, also on the Hradshin, and the castles in Litomyšl and Horšovský Týn. Typical is the use of large and complicated gables with strong, mostly horizontal divisions made by protruding cornices. The gables are – in contradistinction even to works of northern Mannerism – often used in an asymmetrical grouping. This obviously reflects the irregular growth of these castles, most of which were built around a medieval nucleus.⁶³

One can easily guess the underlying Gothic design in Horšovský Týn (Fig. 324). The chiaroscuro effect of the gables goes together with the painterly sgraffito decoration – most of it damaged and restored – to create an illusion of diamond rustication. The Litomyšl portal (Fig. 325), mentioned before, is a striking example of the transition between actual and illusionistic rustication: the portal itself has a thick stone frame of diamond-shaped blocks with cut tops, while the wall around it repeats the same motif in the illusionistic sgraffito technique.

In this castle at Litomyšl, built between 1568 and 1573 by Giovanni Battista and Ulrico Aostalli (Avostalis), the combination of sgraffito rustication and picturesque gables was perfected.⁶⁴ Inside it has a typical three-storey arcaded courtyard, like those in Moravian castles (Fig. 297). Its front wing is partly a curtain wall with arcaded walks, which are cut through the façade at the upper floor and transformed into a panoramic loggia, a main accent of the façade (Figs. 326, 327). But Avostalis did not care about strict symmetry, and the outside of the building has elements of that irregularity typical of the vernacular trend. The splendid rotunda built by Giovanni Maria Faconi and Antonio Cometta in the garden of the castle at Jindřichův Hradec in the last decade of the century (1591–3; Fig. 329), although mostly conceived in the Italian Mannerist idiom, gains a picturesque note thanks to its use of gables. Its interior has a splendid grotesque decoration, a reflection of the type of ornamentation common in Italian villas of the time (Fig. 328).⁶⁵

In Bohemia sgraffito decoration and gables were the main characteristics of the vernacular trend. The Polish vernacular shows a greater diversity of means and its sources are more varied. In the last decades of the sixteenth and in the seventeenth century there coexisted in Poland several stylistic trends, inspired by the local Italian Renaissance tradition (central

chapels), by Mannerist Italian models (Gucci, impact of Serlian prints), and by the decorative patterns of northern Mannerism (gables decorated with strapwork). Against the background of these trends and using various quite old traditional elements, the vernacular trend formulated popular solutions, which brought the modern artistic language even to small provincial centres.⁶⁶

In Bohemia ecclesiastical architecture played only a marginal role in the development, although there was a late revival of Gothic in that field.⁶⁷ In Poland, however, under the fresh impact of the Counter Reformation, but before the Early Baroque Italian models became widely popular, a simple type of church was created, usually with one nave and Gothic proportions but with a distinctive type of decoration in the gable crowning the façade and on the vault (Fig. 330).⁶⁸

This type of vault decoration, although it has some parallels in Germany and the Netherlands, nowhere took forms like those popular in Poland. It is a kind of net of thick bands, reminiscent both of Late Gothic net rib-vaulting and of Renaissance coffers or medallions, but differing from both. The ornamental patterns are designed on the vaulting in forms made of stucco and painted. Often a white or yellow design is seen against a blue, green or grey background. This design includes abstract motifs such as rosettes as well as symbolic ones such as angels, stars, the initials of Jesus or coats of arms. The patterns introduced on the vaults of the first Renaissance churches built by Italians in Masovia, like those at Pułusk (Fig. 331) or Brok, may have had some significance for the development of this kind of decoration.⁶⁹ Its first preserved example is the vault of the Lublin St Bernard Friars church, rebuilt in 1603–7 (Fig. 332).⁷⁰ The Lublin workshops seem to have been a centre of this kind of decoration, and the vogue soon reached western Poland, where Kalisz (Fig. 333) became another centre, and examples may be found all over the country. This vogue continued far into the seventeenth century, one of its exponents being the workshop of Jan Wolff, which was active in Zamość and its surroundings, and whose work in the church at Uchanie (about 1625; Fig. 334)⁷¹ is a good example.

Another trend of the vernacular derived from Gucci. The excellent architect of Książ Castle and sculptor of the Batory tomb introduced some motifs for which hardly any models can be found in Italy. In the Batory tomb (Fig. 203), as well as in that of the Kryski family at Drobin (Fig. 169), there are picturesque cartouches, round knobs filling the fields of lesenes or pilasters, and arches whose borders are cut and bent like paper or leather.⁷² Gucci introduced colourful marbles as decorative motifs in sandstone structures and he used feather-like, unusual elements at the ends of the arcades. These appear in the stalls of the Lady Chapel in the Wawel cathedral (Fig. 335), where the Batory tomb is placed. These motifs were eagerly taken up and used by the Gucci workshop, for instance in the tomb of the Branicki family at Niepolomice, which is a kind of mixture of motifs from the Batory tomb and from the stalls of his chapel (Fig. 340).⁷³

The castle at Baranów in southern Poland (Fig. 336), one of the best examples of the Polish picturesque vernacular style, unites the Renaissance tradition of an arcaded courtyard with elements of Mannerist composition and Gucci's decorative motifs.⁷⁴ The rectangular plan with four cylindrical towers at the corners is traditional, recalling Bohemian designs like Kostelec nad Černými Lesy.⁷⁵ A typically Mannerist main portal leads upstairs to the courtyard, which is situated at a higher level than the entrance. Inside, as is often the case in Bohemia, the wing opposite the front has no arcaded loggias; the startled visitor

has to turn round to find that it is the rear of the front wing which has the character of an interior façade, with rather bizarre arcaded stairs leading up to the first floor loggias (Fig. 337). The exterior façade is decorated with a parapet, whose cresting is shaped as a series of small gables, not unlike the big ones which appear at the sides of the façade and belong to the roofs of the transversal wings, a feature recalling Litomyšl.

A somewhat similar idea underlies the composition of the castle of Krasiczyn (1598 to 1633) in the south-eastern corner of present-day Poland (Fig. 338). It has a large courtyard, four cylindrical towers at the corners and a square gate-tower in the centre of the western curtain wall.⁷⁶ Also the southern wall is a curtain. Towers as well as walls are adorned with decorative parapets and crestings, and that of the southern wall with its unique pattern of large circular forms between turrets is perhaps the most ingenious of all Polish crestings (Fig. 339).⁷⁷ Krasiczyn with its picturesque towers, with a ruined sgraffito decoration, with the symbolism of its towers (they were named after God, the Pope, the King and the Nobleman), is a showpiece of Polish vernacular with all its haphazard growth and fanciful lack of unified design.

The decoration of Krasiczyn is almost completely gone, only a shadow of the sgraffito remains. At Baranów there are some well-preserved sculptural details, like the masks on the postaments of the courtyard columns, and the imaginative portal frames, which are typical of the ornamental repertoire of the Pińczów workshops (Fig. 341). Gucci's motifs here become animated, they have an unexpected vitality, with the feathered cartouches transformed into dragon heads. This development, perhaps not without some oriental influences, leads to the more and more complicated solutions seen in several tombs made by this workshop, such as those of Zofia and Mikołaj Mniszech at Radzyń (Fig. 342) or of Arnulf and Stanisław Uchański at Uchanie (Fig. 343).⁷⁸ Nowhere does the zoomorphic trend of the vernacular reach such buoyant density and fantastic dynamism as in the sepulchral chapel of Mikołaj and Elżbieta Firlej at Bejsce,⁷⁹ where the sober simplicity of the exterior contrasts with the almost Asiatic exuberance of the interior (Fig. 346). The chapel entrance has unexpected geometrical decorations recalling the early medieval transennas (Fig. 344); inside, however, everything is full of ornament and movement (Fig. 345). The tomb, the altar, the baptismal font: motifs coming from Gucci are combined with those from Dutch pattern books, but the dragons, snakes and bird claws or wings are so unusual that no direct source for them can be pointed out.

The Polish vernacular style is represented in all the functional types to which our preceding chapters have been devoted: it left its imprint on castles and on chapels, on tombs, and also on town architecture. And in this last field it had perhaps its longest life. A unique example is the town hall in the northern Polish town of Chelmo (1567–70), where 'the illogical play of Classical architectural elements reaches the limits of the possible. The cube of the town hall is transformed into a kind of toy-like dream structure, recalling the fantastic and crazy *Kunstschranke* of the German Mannerism' (Figs. 347, 348).⁸⁰

At a time when one of the first imitations of the Gesù church north of the Alps was already nearing completion in Cracow, when Early Baroque was being introduced at the Wawel castle, and when Prague was radiant in a short-lived splendour, due to the international group of Mannerist artists brought together by the strange patron Rudolph II,⁸¹ excellent, but completely foreign to the long local tradition – at this late stage the Polish vernacular was being more and more transformed by the provincial workshops, until it

almost reached the level of folk-art, and produced works amazing for their unusual combination of imagination and primitivism.

By 1615 several new private houses had been built in Kazimierz Dolny, the rich harbour town on the Vistula.⁸² Some of them still remain. The two most important ones are those built on the market square for the Przybyla brothers (Fig. 349). The ground floor is an arcaded sidewalk, the second floor has irregularly-placed windows, and above the cornice oversized parapets with immense crestings are the most important elements of the composition. Christian symbols, images of saints, inscriptions of a humanist character and mythological and legendary elements are crowded on these façades, together with Italian candelabra and grotesque ornamentation, and with Netherlandish strap- and fret-work (Fig. 351). A striving for concrete forms dominates this decoration: it is plastic, convex, tactile, not painterly but picturesque. As if made of pastry by a naïve hand, these reliefs do not show any intermediary planes, nor any subtlety of stratification in depth. But they had to be tactile. No abstract sign was allowed: to show that St Christopher is walking through water the artists represented crabs and fishes, and inserted them in the cloud-like shape which covers the saint's feet (Fig. 350).⁸³

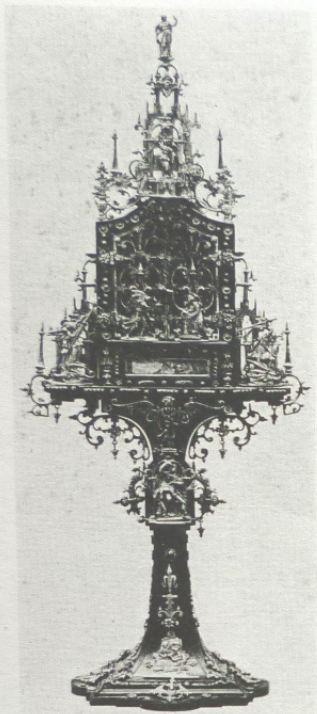
It seems that only then the new visual world of the Renaissance had been fully accepted by even the most simple-minded artisans. Its sense and meaning was almost lost in this long process of adaptation. But it ceased to be limited to the élite and became completely popularized. By that time, however, eastern Europe was no longer the unity it could be considered to have been about 1500. Hungary had ceased long ago to play an active role. Bohemia was soon to enter a gloomy period after the tragic battle at the White Mountain in 1620. The only link which by 1600 still united the Polish and Czech artistic cultures was this distinctive picturesque interpretation of Renaissance and Mannerism. In this vernacular art, with its dynamism and buoyant strength, the germ of a new artistic attitude was already alive; and the patterns of the Baroque were just coming from the south.

The art of the Renaissance in eastern Europe had run its full course.

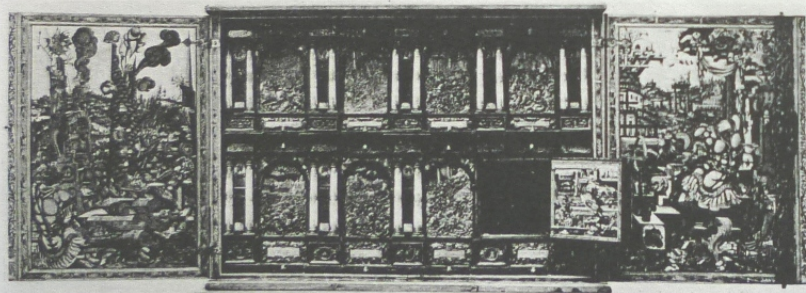
Notes

Chapter One

- 1 A. Hahr, 1913; A. Hahr, 1915; A. Hahr, 1940. A. Angyal, 1961, summarizes the general cultural history of eastern Europe in the whole period of the Renaissance and the Baroque in fifty pages. There exists also a recent account of the 'art treasures' in eastern Europe: A. Rhodes, 1972.
- 2 O. Benesch, 1945, republ. 1965.
- 3 I. Golenishtchev Kutusov, 1958; hereafter I refer to the Polish edition of 1970.
- 4 L. Beltrami, 1925; E. Lo Gatto, 1934; V. N. Lasarev, 1959. Generally: M. Gukovskij, 1967.
- 5 Traditionally the authorship of the 'Faceted Palace' used to be attributed to Solari and Marco Ruffo. Lasarev (1959, p. 427) has proved the apocryphal character of 'Ruffo'. This name is thought to have resulted from the corruption of 'Rosso' and this was the name of an Italian diplomat in Russia and not of an artist. The builder who started the palace was Marco Frasin.
- 6 S. Bettini, 1944; G. Fiocco, 1956; and S. Bettini, 1964. Lasarev, 1959, p. 439 is sceptical about this identification.
- 7 N. Ernst, 1928; Lasarev, 1959.
- 8 S. Shervinskij, 1917; A. Vlassiuk, 1952; Lasarev, 1959.
- 9 C. Budinis, 1936, p. 35f.
- 10 For Branda Castiglione see R. Mols, 1949; for Scolari: J. Balogh, 1923-6; F. Banfi, 1940, p. 828; for a general account: J. Balogh, *Wealthy Patrons*, 1966; J. Balogh, 1970.
- 11 C. Budinis, 1936, p. 35f.
- 12 On humanism in Hungary the basic work is by T. Kardos, 1955; a general account in Golenishtchev Kutusov, 1970, p. 167-224. Recently: J. Bérenger, 1973.
- 13 Golenishtchev Kutusov, 1970, p. 172.
- 14 On Vitéz the basic monograph is by V. Fraknói, 1879; Golenishtchev Kutusov, 1970, pp. 174-7.
- 15 The best account of these relations is in Golenishtchev Kutusov, 1970. See also V. Novak, 1953 and V. Filipović, 1958; recently: R. Feuer-Tóth, 1972 and A. Horvat, 1972.
- 16 Golenishtchev Kutusov, 1970, p. 168; A. Gabriel, 1969.
- 17 Golenishtchev Kutusov, 1970, p. 177. See also several papers grouped in the section called 'Academia Istropolitana a školstvo na Slovensku' (Academia Istr. and the Schools in Slovakia) in: L. Holotik and A. Vantuch, ed., 1967, pp. 5-127 and A. Gabriel, 1969.
- 18 J. Dąbrowski, 1954; E. Kovács, 1960; J. Dąbrowski, 1963.
- 19 T. Kardos, 1955, pp. 123-49; Golenishtchev Kutusov, 1970, pp. 178-89.
- 20 The basic work concerning the artistic culture of Matthias Corvinus's time is the excellent, rich collection of source material published by J. Balogh, 1966. As the third volume with the actual text of Balogh's study has not been published as yet, one also has to rely for historical and artistic problems of Corvinus's times on older works of varying value: C. Csányi, 1922; A. Berzeviczy, 1928; A. Solmi, 1928; E. Schaffran, 1932-3; E. Schaffran, 1933; G. Delogu, 1936; H. Horváth, 1940; I. Lukinich, ed., 1940; T. Kardos, 1940-1; T. Gerevich, 1942; E. Schaffran, 1953; L. Elekes, 1956; G. Entz, 1963; and of course on all the studies by J. Balogh. A summary of the third volume of her study (scheduled for publication soon at Graz) appeared recently: J. Balogh, 1972.
- 21 A. de Hevesy, 1911; A. de Hevesy, 1923; G. Fraknói and others, 1927; G. Szabó, 1960; K. Csapodi-Gárdonyi, 1962; I. Berkovits, 1964; J. Balogh, 1966, pp. 312-19; I. Berkovits, 1970; Cs. Csapodi and K. Csapodi-Gárdonyi, 1970; Cs. Csapodi, 1971; Cs. Csapodi, 1973.
- 22 A. de Bonfini, ed. 1936. Excerpts relating to Corvinus's buildings are given in Balogh, 1966.
- 23 L. B. Alberti, *De re aedificatoria*, Modena, Bibl. estense, Cod. lat. 419 (Royal workshop at Buda, 1485-90); J. Balogh, 1966, p. 482, Fig. 5. - The same work executed in the workshop of Attavante, 1485-90, Olomouc, Domská a Kapitální Knihovna; J. Balogh, 1966, p. 483, Fig. 4. - Filarete (Antonio Averlino), *De architectura libri xxv*, Venice, Bibl. Marciana, Cod. lat. 2796 (Royal workshop at Buda, 1489); J. Balogh, 1966, p. 521, Fig. 6 (our Fig. 4).
- 24 Quoted in J. Balogh, 1966, p. 495.



322 Matthias Wallbaum (silverwork) and Anton Mozart (miniatures): Shrine, 1598, Augsburg. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art



323 German intarsia work, the so-called 'Wrangelschrank', late sixteenth century, Münster, Landesmuseum



324 Castle, after 1547, at Horňovský Týn



325 Giovanni Battista and Ulrico Aostalli (Avostalis): Main portal and illusionistic rustication, 1568-73, in Litomyšl Castle



326 Giovanni Battista and Ulrico Aostalli (Avostalis): Loggia of the façade wing, 1568-73, of Litomyšl Castle



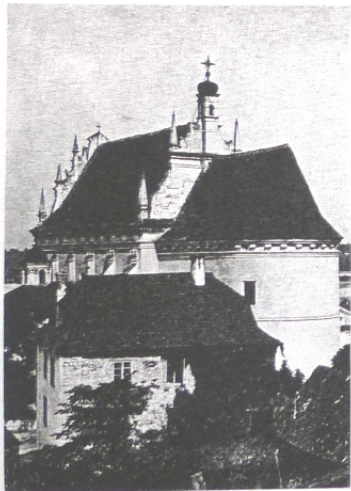
327 Giovanni Battista and Ulrico Aostalli (Avostalis): Castle, 1568-73, at Litomyšl



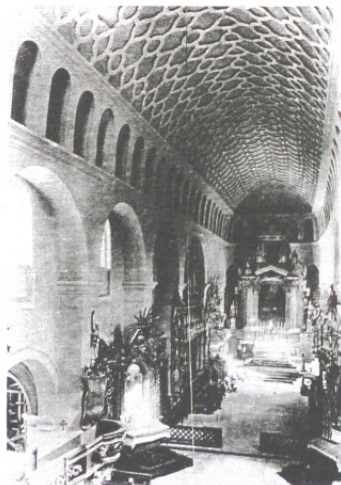
328 G. P. Martinola and G. Bendel: Decoration of the rotunda of the castle, 1594-7, at Jindřichův Hradec



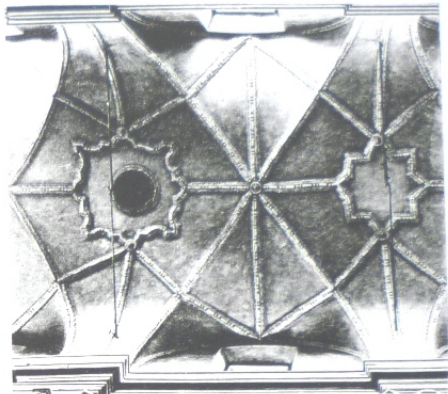
329 Giovanni Maria Falconi and Antonio Cometta: Rotunda at the castle, 1591-3. View from outside. Jindřichův Hradec



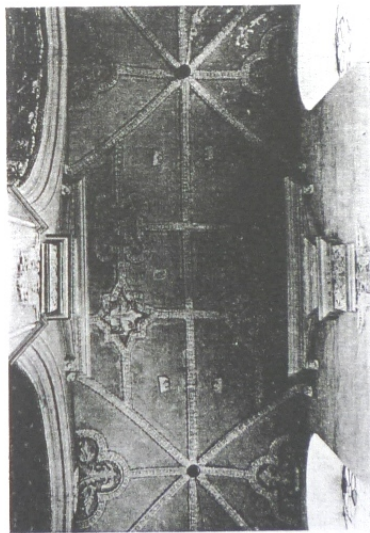
330 Jacopo Balin: Parish church, 1586-9 and 1610-13. Kazimierz Dolny



331 Giambattista of Venice: Collegiate Church, 1560. Pultusk



332 Vault decoration, painted stucco, 1603-7. Lublin, St. Bernard Friars Church



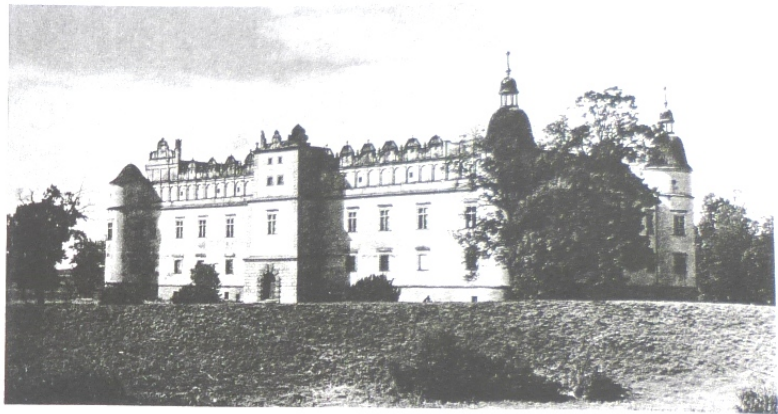
333 Albin Fontana: Vault decoration, painted stucco, 1599-1632. Kalisz, Franciscan Friars Church



334 Jan Jaroszewicz and Jan Wolff: Vault decoration, painted stucco, about 1625. Uchanie, Parish Church



335 Santi Gucci: Stalls in the Lady Chapel, 1594-5. Cracow, Wawel Cathedral



336 Castle (last remodelling, of the parts shown here 1591-1606) at Baranów



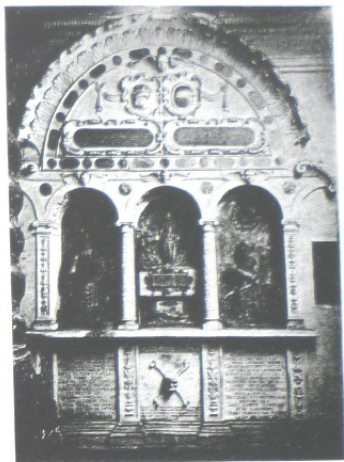
337 Courtyard of the castle, 1591-1606, at Baranów



338 Castle, last remodelling 1598-1633, at Krasiczyn



339 Parapet of the south wing of the castle at Krasiczyn (extensively restored early twentieth century)



340 Workshop of Santi Gucci: Tomb of the Branicki family, 1596. Niepolomice near Cracow, Parish Church



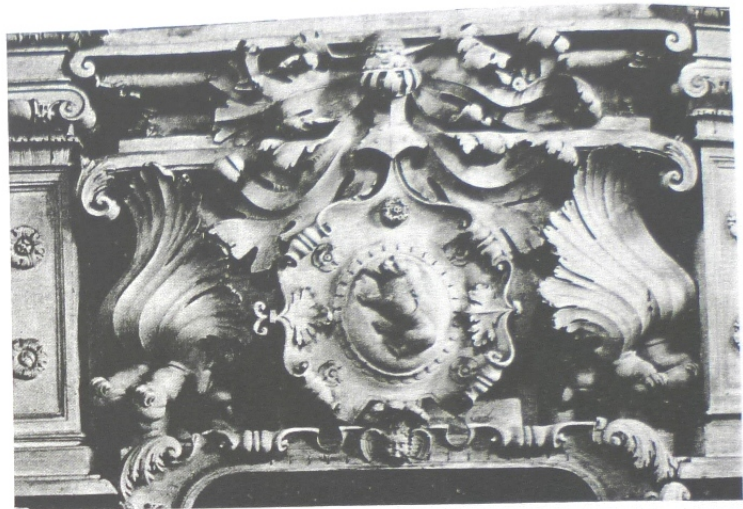
341 Portal with dragon heads, arcade of the castle at Baranów



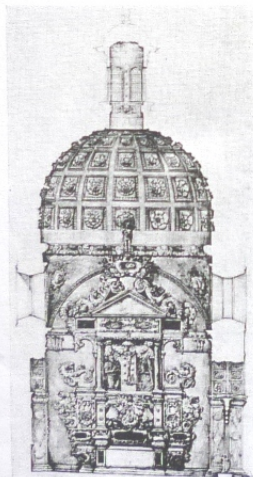
342 Tomb of Zofia and Mikołaj Mniszech Radzyń. After a nineteenth-century drawing. Warsaw, University Library



343 Tomb of Arnulf and Stanisław Uchański, about 1600. Uchanie, Parish Church



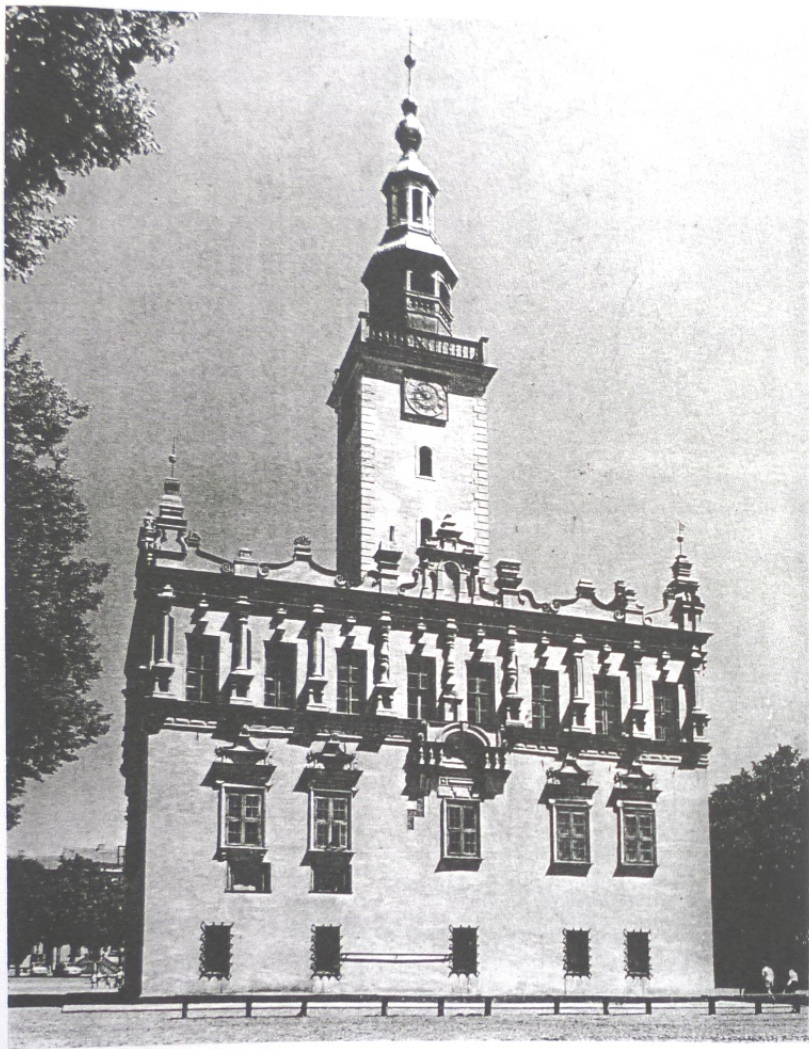
346 Workshop of Samuel Świątkowicz: Chapel of the Firlej family, 1593-1601. Detail of the decoration. Bejsce



344-345 Workshop of Samuel Świątkowicz: Chapel of the Firlej family, 1593-1601. Doorway between the nave and the chapel, and modern drawing of the interior with the tomb of the Firlej family. Bejsce



347 Chelmino town hall parapet, 1567-70.



348 Chelmo town hall, 1567-70



349 Houses of the Przybyla (St. Nicholas and St. Christopher Houses, 1615) Kazimierz Dolny



350 St Christopher relief. Kazimierz Dolny, Przybyla House