

Supraśl Iconostasis. Problem of the Attribution

Joanna Tomalska, Podlaskie Museum in Białystok

Iconostasis belongs to one of the most important ornamental elements in Eastern Orthodox churches. According to Eusebius of Caesarea: *Constantine the Great surrounded the altar with boards so that only few could enter [...] The altar, as the Holiest Place, is available only to priests. [...] Similarly, in the Holy Sepulchre temple, there were copper bars that no one could get behind, even if such a need arose.*¹

The development of the altar partition forms has not yet been well recognized. The majority of the early altar partitions, which are preserved until this day in their initial structure or are reconstructed on the basis of sources and research, repeated the structure which the Greeks named “kosmitis” or “templon”, comprised of an architrave resting on four columns, three intercolumns and two low stone slabs symmetrically placed on both sides of the central door.²

It is unknown what the original iconostasis of the Saint Mary of the Annunciation church in Supraśl looked like, unknown are also its whereabouts after the construction of a new altar partition.³

The history of the monasterial founding in Supraśl, once one of the most prominent and wealthiest monasteries on the border of the Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, in many aspects remains in the sphere of hypotheses until this day; the time of the monastery and church foundation has not been finally established, it is unknown what

¹ *Nowe tablice czyli o cerkwi, liturgii, nabożeństwach i utensyliach cerkiewnych, Objasnienia Beniamina, arcybiskupa Niżnego Nowogrodu i Arzamasu*, Kraków 2007, p. 33.

² И. А. Шалина, ‘Вход „Святыя Святых” и византийская алтарная преграда’, in: *Иконостас, Происхождение – Развитие – Символика*, ed. А. М. Лидов, Москва 2000, p. 52.

³ This problem was presented by the author in the article ‘Ikony cerkwi Zwiastowania w Supraślu w świetle archiwalnych opisów w XVI–XVII w.’, *Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne*, 39 (2013), pp. 99–117.



Fig. 1. View of the monastery in Supraśl, from *Историческое обозрение района большого маневра в 1897 г. под Белостоком*, Санкт Петербург 1897, p. 62

happened to the 16th c. iconostasis and who was the author of the altar partition placed in the Annunciation church before the mid 17th century.⁴

As shown by the sources analysis of the furnishings of the Supraśl Catholicon before the creation of frescos there was an iconostasis comprised of five Sovereign icons: Ho-degetria, Pantokrator, Christ Emmanuel, Annunciation, icons depicting scenes from the life of Saint Mary, and the tiers of Deisis and Prophets.⁵ Sergiusz Kimbar changed the iconostasis structure by commissioning to paint the icons up to the Feasts tier, because the icon painter employed in the monastery gilded the partition comprised of four tiers: Sovereign icons, Deisis, the Feasts and the Apostles: *иконнику, што Деисус церковный золотом покладал и пророки и праздники и кивот и двери царски и икону жития Богородици.*⁶

⁴ Monastery monographer, archimandrite Mikołaj Dałmatow, admitted that with the existing source data it is not possible to establish the time of the church construction; Архимандрит Николай (Далматов), *Супрасльский Благовещенский монастырь, историко-статистическое описание*, Санктпетербург 1892, p. 37. More on this subject see J. Tomalska, 'Uwagi o wyposażeniu cerkwi w Supraślu w XVI i XV w.', *Studia Podlaskie*, 20 (2012), pp. 231–258; Eadem, 'Wyposażenie cerkwi Zwiastowania w Supraślu - stan badań i potrzeby badawcze', *Acta Collegii Suprasliense* [in print].

⁵ 'Опись вещам Супрасльскаго монастыря составленная настоятелем его архимандритомъ Сергеемъ Кимбаремъ', in: *Археографический сборник документов относящихся к истории Северо-Западной Руси*, vol. 9, Вильна 1870, p. 49.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

The first iconostasis with a simple structure must have been created soon after the church construction, and in the times of archimandrite Kimbar and his large scale works it was extended by a tier of the Feasts icons and gilded.

While visiting Supraśl in 1635, the archbishop Józef Welamin Rutski⁷, recommended that apart from the revenue and expense ledger, a third one should be written down, comprising all church possessions, apparatuses, equipment, clothing and other objects, to facilitate the inspector's work. Such visits were to be performed every four years, or, if possible, even more frequently.⁸ Perhaps these recommendations were connected with large-scale renovations and changes in the furnishings of the church in Supraśl.⁹ Without a doubt, the most important realization of that time (before mid 17th c.) was the construction of a new altar partition with a rich icon programme and an opulence of ornaments. The works of Nikodem Szybiński were highly praised by Mikołaj Dałmatow, who included the iconostasis in the most valuable treasures of the Supraśl church: *Самым ценным памятником ревности, заботливости архимандриты Никодима о благоустроении Супрасльской обители служит устроенный им иконостас Благовещенской церкви, который сохранился в том самом виде и доньне. Действительно приснопамятный архимандрит Никодим на устройство иконостаса не пожалел средств.*¹⁰

Michał Janocha thinks that the 17th c. iconostases were not only altar partitions but also the apogee of Eastern Church sacral art, a particular expression of cultural and artistic



Fig. 2. Saint Mary of the Annunciation church in Supraśl, picture from 1864, University Library, Vilnius

⁷ Józef Jan Welamin Rutski (1574–1637), born in Ruta near Nowogródek in Korsak family, changed his surname to one originating from his birth place; from 1603 studied in Greek College in Rome, in 1607 received holy orders; in 1613, after Hipacy Pociej's death, became Kiev archbishop, the last one residing in Kiev; *Podręczna encyklopedia kościelna*, vol. 41/42, Poznań 1914, pp. 195–198; *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, vol. 33, Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków 1991, pp. 256–260.

⁸ *Археографический сборник документов ...*, p. 152.

⁹ The archbishop recommended not to destroy “the old building style” while raising the monastery gate, therein.

¹⁰ Архимандрит Николай (Далматов), *op. cit.*, p. 140.

synthesis that led to the melting of Byzantine and Roman influences, the Middle and Modern Age, and the familiar with the strange into a homogenous body.¹¹

According to Maria Barbara Topolska, the altar partitions of that time are an expression of the borderland culture. Artists, either local or coming from the Crown, created highly ornamented baroque partitions such as the ones in Supraśl, the church of Holy Trinity in Vitebsk and Saint Nicholas in Mohylev.¹²

The iconostasis in the Annunciation church in Supraśl was created on request of the archimandrite Nikodem Szybiński, who received his title on 8th July 1636 and died on 13th March 1643¹³. After the abbot's death, among his other merits was also this one: *He built Deisus [iconostasis] at high cost, embellished with wood-carving or old-fashioned but excellent work, and lavishly gilded. In this Deisus, he created extraordinary paintings at a great cost – next to the image of the Holy Father are the twelve apostles, and on their right the image of Moses with the Izraelites, presenting to them a snake hung on the Cross Tree, on the left Jacob the patriarch with a figure of a ladder touching the Heaven and angels stepping from it to the Earth and from the Earth to Heaven [the author discusses the outermost icons of this tier of the iconostasis]. On the second, lower lever, next to Salvator and the Holy Spirit – twelve apostles, on their right side three kings worshipping the newborn Lord the Saviour and the Holy Virgin in the Bethlehem stable, and on the left – the image of circumcision of the Lord the Saviour. On the last, third [the lowest] level doors made with exquisite wood-carving work, ad sanctuarium, and gilded richly; over these double doors, called Holy in the Slavic language, a little statue of angel holding a bezel in his hand, written in Slavic “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty”. On the right side of Salvator an image well painted on a copper sheet, and next to it the second image of annunciation of Blessed Virgin, most artistically painted, on a similar copper sheet, right after them the side door to the sacristy; on them a beautiful painting of the Archangel Michael with Lucifer at his feet. On the left of the door ad sanctuarium – a painting on a similar sheet of the Blessed Mother holding the Infant Saviour in Her arms, of the same author, miraculously beautiful, and right next to it the painting of Saint John the Evangelist in revelation, painted on the same sheet by the same author's hand, later the side door to the offertorium in accordance with the East Orthodox Church rite, on which the painting of Melchisedec priest in archpriest judaistic clothing, presenting a bloodless sacrifice of bread and wine. On top of the Deisus Saint Veronica is presented in the hands*

¹¹ M. Janocha, 'Barokowy ikonostas. Kryzys kanonu i okcydentalizacja sztuki cerkiewnej w XVII w. cz. II', *Bunt młodych duchem*, 3 (2006), pp. 29–31.

¹² M. B. Topolska, 'Znaczenie polskiego wschodniego pogranicza kulturowego dla poszerzania zasięgu zachodniej cywilizacji w XVI–XIX w.', *Rocznik Lubuski*, 35 (2009), p. 42; M. Janocha, 'Ikonostasy w cerkwiach Rzeczypospolitej XVII–XVIII w.', *Przegląd Wschodni*, 8 (2003), no. 4, pp. 897–921.

¹³ *Археографический сборник документов ...*, p. 159, 175, 178; Архимандрит Николай (Далматов), *op. cit.*, p. 140.

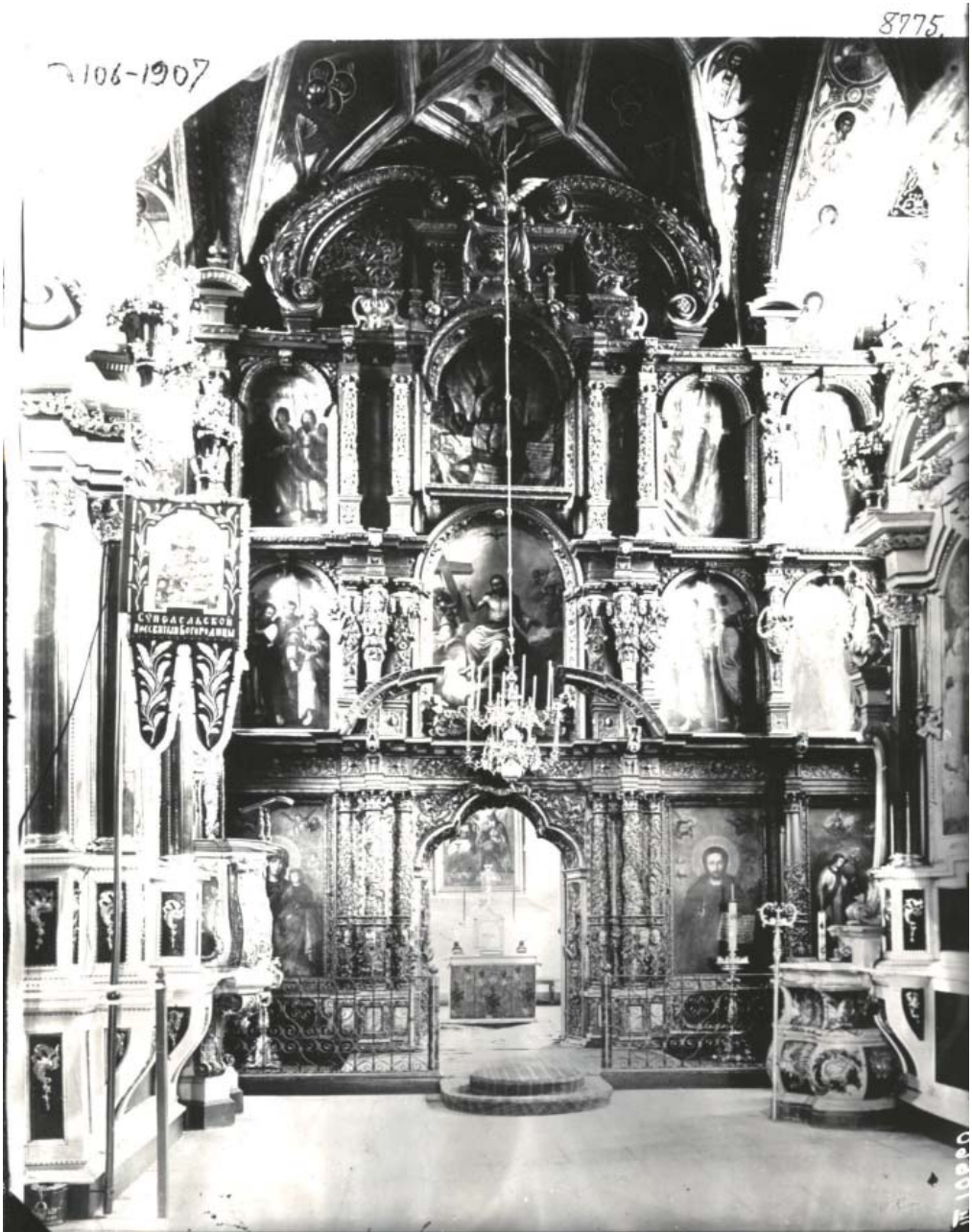


Fig. 3. Iconostasis from the Annunciation church in Supraśl, picture from 1907

of a carved angel¹⁴. It is written further that the iconostasis was decorated with columns “made with excellent wood-carving work”¹⁵, which divided individual paintings.

The change in furnishings of the Supraśl church resounded widely. Included as a saint, Peter Mohyla¹⁶ - Kiev Orthodox metropolit, in 1644 commented on the replacement of the paintings in Supraśl church, stating: *Ask in this monastery where the old paintings, all gilded in silver plates, have gone, and you will see that it all went to private hands, and instead of silver, they put Italian canvas in the church: they trade well with the Lord. Giving a painted canvas for the silver, golden ones.*¹⁷

As a response to these allegations, a polemic text by father Jan Dubowicz, archimandrite of the Holy Trinity Church in Dermań was written.¹⁸ In “Protestacja” (Protestation) enunciated in 1645, he wrote of the destruction of many wealthy churches in Śląsk, Germany and Czech during the wars: *... have Kossacks been lenient with Moscow, on conquering any town or monastery, have they not looted paintings, pearls and gemstones or have they not slashed and broken crosses and silver or golden paintings, or have they not taken precious parchments from the churches? Or when the Turk got Constantinople, has he not plundered the Saint Sophie church ...?*¹⁹ The author of these words reacted equally impulsively to the accusations of Peter Mohyla: *a defamation he brought on the Supraśl monastery that the old silver and golden paintings were looted and taken for private needs, and in their place Italian canvas were put in the church. Thus for this calumny I have to react and sine ceremonia say that impudenter mentiles, that you lie shamelessly, which I am not the only one to tell but anyone who visits this sacred place. You should know, slanderer, that in the whole country of ours you cannot find as valuable and ornamental paintings as in the Supraśl church, not on canvas, as you claim, but painted on copper. How dared you defame the elders of that place, just as the Nowogród church, where the painting may not be as monasterial, nec in tanta magnetitude, but still beautiful and golden. What if, after the church burned down, the paintings were made on canvas and paper, no wonder, but now, for some time, more ornaments are brought to the church.*²⁰

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 173–175.

¹⁵ J. Maroszek, ‘Ikonostas supraski z 1643 r.’, *Białostoczczyzna*, 3 (1996), pp. 4–5.

¹⁶ *Енциклопедія українознавства*, ed. В. Кубійович, vol. 5, Львів 1993, p. 1632.

¹⁷ P. Mohyla, *Lithos Abo kamień z procy prawdy Cerkwie Świętej Prawosławney Ruskiej Na skruszenie...*, Roku 1644 w Kijowie’, reprinted in: *Архив юго-западной России издаваемый Коммиссиею для разбора древних актов*, part 1, vol. 9, Киев 1893, pp. 365–366.

¹⁸ Dermań – a village in the old Dubiensk district near Ostroh, with an Orthodox monastery, later Uniate and Orthodox again; *Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich*, vol. 2, Warszawa 1881, p. 8.

¹⁹ *Киевский Митрополит Петр Могила и его сподвижники, Опыт церковно – исторического исследования*, ed. С. Голубев, vol. 2, Киев 1898, p. 342. From this words it can be inferred that the reason for the refurbishing of the Supraśl church interior were the damages during the wars of those times.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 346–347.

What arises from the pamphlet of Piotr Mohyla is that already in 1644 there were no icons painted on wooden boards and covered with silver golden layers in the altar partition of the Supraśl church. However, from response to the pamphlet, it follows that in 1645 there existed icons painted on copper intended for the new iconostasis.

The inventory made in 1668 does not include iconostasis description²¹, and the visitation of 1731 has not been preserved till the present day.²²

A comprehensive description of the partition (the last one that thorough²³) can be found in the inventory made by Lew Jaworowski in 1829.²⁴ The iconostasis was described as a piece: *of beautiful, wood-carving work, ornamented with capitals, cornices, pilasters, angels, vases and numerous stylish stuccos, all lavishly gilded*.²⁵ A valuable addition to the information are the dimensions in cubits and inches of the icons placed on it. According to this information, the icons painted on copper of the Sovereign tier measured 184.8 x 96 cm, and the central image of the second tier presenting Resurrected Christ in the clouds – 4 cubits 7 inches high and 3 cubits 5 inches wide, i.e. 247.2 x 168.4 cm. These were also the exact measures of the painting of Christ the Great High Priest in the centre of the highest tier. All the other paintings in the second and third tier of the iconostasis measured 172.8 x 86.4 cm. These measurements allow us to estimate the approximate size of the altar partition.²⁶

When were the construction works of the new altar partition finished? Can we assume that they were finished at the time when Petr Mohyla described them? Or maybe the Kiev archbishop estimated the temple's furnishings during furnishing replacement? One way or another, the author was surely aware of the new icons ordered for the new altar partition, which he proved in the cited excerpt. Why then the date "1664" appeared in the monograph by Nicolai Dalmatov, and was repeated later by other authors?²⁷

Presumably, one should agree with the opinion of Józef Maroszek, who claims that the dating of the Supraśl wood-carving masterpiece should be narrowed to years 1640–1643: from 1643 comes the information about the gilding works on the iconostasis *by painter Modzelewski*²⁸; thus, it would be hard to assume that an unfinished partition

²¹ 'Inwentarz cerkwie monastyrza supraslkiego za iasnie wielmożnego i-mci księdza Gabryela Kolen-
dy ... pisany roku 1668', in: *Археографический сборник документов ...*, pp. 229–243.

²² Архимандрит Николай (Далматов), *op. cit.*, p. 233.

²³ Archimandrite Nikolai Dalmatov wrote that the iconostasis, built in the first half of the 17th c., remained in the same condition, therefore, the author did not see it fit to include its description; *Ibidem*, p. 471.

²⁴ Опись Супрасльскаго монастыря составленная 1829 г. за настоятельства Преосвященного Льва Яворовскаго, in: Archdiocesan Archive in Białystok (Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Białymstoku), [no number]

²⁵ Опись Супрасльскаго монастыря ..., column 5.

²⁶ Опись Супрасльскаго монастыря ..., column 5–6.

²⁷ W. Kochanowski, 'Pobazyliński zespół architektoniczny w Supraślu pow. Białystok', *Rocznik Białostocki*, 4 (1963), pp. 376–377.

²⁸ J. Maroszek, *Ikonostas supraslki ...*, p. 8.

could be gilded. It has to be reminded that Nikolai Dalmatov, when writing about the icon of the St. John the Evangelist from the new iconostasis, situated the time of its creation to the years 1636–1643, i.e. the time of archimandrite Nikodem Szybiński²⁹; in a different part, he enclosed information that the iconostasis was created in the first half of the century.³⁰ Therefore, the date “1664” must be a misprint and the iconostasis must have been built around 1643.

One of the most important problems with the Supraśl iconostasis is the place of its creation. In nearly all publications concerning the monastery there occurs the information of its origin in Gdańsk. However, there is no evidence to support this thesis. This attribution has derived solely on the basis of the excerpt from *Kronika Ławry Supraslskiej*, the author of which was supposed to be Supraśl vice-vicar Mikołaj Ratkiewicz, who wrote down the history of the monastery before 1747.³¹ Many years after placing the new iconostasis, the chronicler wrote that abbot Nikodem Szybiński, who ordered the work, established business connections with Gdańsk.³² The excerpt concerning the attribution of the new iconostasis can be found right after its description: *Through old monks I managed to hear that this whole structure was ordered by the mentioned abbot to be made in Gdańsk and brought by ships to Tykocin, from where it was transported by land.*³³

Therefore, the authorship of the iconostasis was attributed to Gdańsk workshops on very unsound basis: oral tradition and suppositions related to Nikodem Szybiński entering business contacts with Gdańsk. How accurately did the events that had happened over half a century before inscribe in the monks’ memories and how precise is the cited record? Can the analysis of the ornaments visible on the archival photographs confirm this attribution?

Three-tier, five-axis iconostasis was raised on a pedestal with a grand crowning and an isolated central axis. The first tier was visibly higher from the rest, the rest had similar height. Horizontal divisions were created by the pedestal ornamented with panels and offset cornices. The most developed cornice, dividing the Sovereign icons from the Apostles tier, were composed of three horizontal bands (*fasciae*), and a frieze with a relief floral vine. The remaining cornices of the iconostasis were much more modest. The cornice above the Apostles tier was broken by deep, semicircularly closed icon frames. A magnifi-

²⁹ Архимандрит Николай (Далматов), *op. cit.*, p. 46.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 471.

³¹ The handwritten version of *Kronika Ławry Supraskiej* is available in the collection of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences’ Library in Vilnius, inv. no. 134. B2. Cf. J. Maroszek, *Pogranicze Litwy i Korony ...*, p. 115. Mikołaj Ratkiewicz died at a very old age on 16th November 1779. Cf. Архимандрит Николай (Далматов), *op. cit.*, p. 364.

³² The apologist of Nikodem Szybiński’s doings wrote: „I cannot find any notes concerning any ships with grain going from Supraśl to Gdańsk; however, always or very often transport was sent to Vilnius with grain, and after selling it, necessities were bought that were needed by the monastery, which can be noticed in the archive documents. When Nikodem Szybiński became archimandrite, he contrived a port for Supraśl in Tykocin, at this time Supraśl successfully started to navigate to Gdańsk with grain”. *Археологический сборник документов ...*, pp. 172–173.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 175.



Fig. 4. Virgin Mary icon from the Annunciation church in Supraśl, picture from 1864, University Library, Vilnius

cent broken semicircular pediment was placed over the openwork Holy Doors. In addition, the vertical divisions of the alter partition, depending on the place, comprised columns, spiral columns and herm pilasters. The Holy Doors were flanked with triple columns in a ledge configuration, while the central ones were in a spiral configuration. The shafts of all of them were separated with double rings at $\frac{1}{3}$ of the height, below were the winged heads of puttos, higher was a relief floral vine in a spiral layout.

Lavishly ornamented and diversified herm pilasters dividing the paintings in the second tier were placed on pedestals decorated with stately oval cabochons in rectangular panels. In the central part, on both sides of the painting of Christ in the clouds, triple pilasters with half figures of angels surrounded by an unclear floral ornament were found. Further on the left herm pilasters with half figures of women holding escutcheons with both hands can be seen: on the left, with three horizontal bars and letters NS (Nikodem Szybiński), on the right, with Kościesza coat of arms of the Chodkiewicz clan. The cornice separating the Apostles tier from the Prophets tier was broken in the centre by deep, semi-circularly closed frames of the paintings.

Yet another form of horizontal divisions can be found in the third tier; the paintings here were separated by diverse forms: in the central part with openwork columns (if it can be stated from the archival photo) placed on pedestals ornamented with relief four-leaf rosettes. Similarly to the lowest row, the shafts of the columns were divided with a semi-plastic ring at a third of the height, under which puttos' heads were placed surrounded by floral ornaments, and entwined with floral ornaments on the upper part. Further on the left and right were herm pilasters with half figures of angels whose curly heads formed pilasters' capitals. Above the heads emerged volutes of composite capitals.

The Holy Doors were placed in a deep embrasure, richly ornamented with semi-plastic winged puttos' heads, half figures of worshipping angels, lion heads on scrolling cartouches³⁴; bunches of grapes, floral twigs, and on the bottom decorated with fruit and flowers. The most sophisticated elements of the whole structure were the openwork double doors³⁵. Among their decorations of multiple symbolic meanings there were grapevine and grape bunches, astragals, winged angels heads, eagle figures. All the elements created a symmetrical openwork net filling both wings of the doors with dense layout.

The crowning of the structure was created by a half figure of an angel holding Veronica's veil. The sculpture, placed on a rectangular pedestal crowned with a grand cornice, was framed with volutes with acanthus leaves motif.

³⁴ Cf. M. Deri, *Das Rollwerk in der deutschen Ornamentik des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1906, passim.

³⁵ The most details of the Holy Doors of the Supraśl iconostasis are depicted on a documentary drawing "Supraśl, Kościół pobazyleński, Wrota ikonostasu" signed in the right bottom corner „Wykonali: Maria i Jan Zachwatowicze R. 1939”, kept in the collection of the Architecture Department of the Warsaw University of Technology.



Fig 5. Christ Pantocrator from the Annunciation church in Supraśl, picture from 1864, University Library, Vilnius

Thus, in the detail work of Supraśl iconostasis numerous ornaments were used, such as astragal, acanthus leaves, flowers, fruit, ferrule ornament, spiral columns and herms. Part of them (acanthus, astragal) belong to the classical art arsenal, whereas others (ferrule ornament, scrollworks, Schweifwerk) appeared in certain style phases of the European art.

Some of the ornaments (e.g. auricular ornament, scrollworks), as researchers claim, reached Poland through Gdańsk, from where they spontaneously penetrated to the whole Republic, also to Uniate and Orthodox art³⁶.

Herm pilasters with half figures of bearded men with muscular arms clasped on their chests were used on the frame of the graphic work by Hans Holbein the Younger (1497 or 1498–1543) depicting a full body image of Erasmus of Rotterdam³⁷. A similar detail appeared in the projects of Hans Vredeman de Vries³⁸.

Spiral columns, already existing in the Roman Saint Peter's basilica in the times of Constantine the Great, gained great popularity after raising in that temple the Confession by Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598–1680). Nevertheless, the motif appeared in the late renaissance architectural treatises of, among others, Lucas Kilian³⁹. The same motif was used in the altar of the Lviv Boim Chapel, consecrated in 1615⁴⁰.

Similar realizations also appeared in Catholic and Orthodox churches of the Vitebsk area, Mohylev, Brest and in Moscow. One of the earliest works of that kind is a pair of altars in the Orthodox Holy Transfiguration church in Porpliszcz (Порплішча)⁴¹ near Vitebsk. Massive columns, gilded and decorated with bas-relief, flanking the painting in the main part of the altar, are divided into two unequal parts. In the lower part there are relief acanthus leaves with semi-plastic spiral ribs. The upper part of the shafts, separated by a double profiled ring, is entwined by grapevine with putto figures and bunches of grapes.

³⁶ T. Chrzanowski, 'Uniwersum maski- destrukcja symbolu', *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, 17 (1988), p. 182; T. Chrzanowski, M. Kornecki, *Sztuka Ziemi Krakowskiej*, Kraków 1982, p. 412.

³⁷ J. S. Byrne, *Renaissance Ornament And Drawing*, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, [exhibition catalogue], New York 1981, p. 78.

³⁸ H. Vredeman de Vries, *Caryatidum sive Athlantidum multiformium ad quemlibet Architecturae ordinem accommodatum*, Cent. I, Anvers 1597, passim; E. Forssman, *Säule und Ornament, Studien zum Problem des Manierismus in den nordischen Säulenbüchern und Vorlageblättern des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, Uppsala 1956, fig. 25.

³⁹ *Newes Gradesca Bűchlein durch Lucas Kilian Burger in Augsburg ...*, 1607.

⁴⁰ M. Gębarowicz, *Studia nad dziejami kultury artystycznej późnego renesansu w Polsce*, (= Towarzystwo Naukowe w Toruniu, Prace Wydziału Filologiczno-Filozoficznego, vol. 13, no. 2), Toruń 1962, p. 12.

⁴¹ The original Uniate temple was built of wood in 1627 from funds of Anna and Franciszek Zebrzydowski; this was the place of the worshipped figure of Christ; renovated in 1794, in 1836 was transformed to Orthodox church; Porpliszcz in: *Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich*, vol. 8, Warszawa 1887, p. 827; J. Fibek, *Wskrzeszenia na pograniczu dwóch światów, Dzieje Kościoła rzymsko-katolickiego w dorzeczu Berezyny i Wilii w granicach dekanatu dokszyckiego w diecezji witebskiej na Białorusi 1395–2009*, Nowe Miasto nad Pilicą 2011, p. 240, 250; *Сакральны жытавіц Беларусі XV–XVIII ст.*, Мінск 2007, fig. 27, 28.

A similar detail can be found in the columns of the first row of the central altar and two side ones in the Holy Transfiguration church in Nowa Mysz in the Brest district⁴². The differences come down to a different treatment of the lower part of the columns, decorated with putto heads and floral twig.

The latter than the given examples, extraordinarily embellished with a bas-relief ornament, iconostasis of the Orthodox church of Saint Nicholas in Mohylev, is dated to 1669–1672⁴³. Relief decorations cover in dense layout the pedestals, pilasters and cornices of the three-tier iconostasis, openwork Holy Doors and the crowning⁴⁴.

In the second half of the 17th c. in Russia, in many cities in the West and North and in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, appeared a new type of altar partition – “Flemish” iconostasis, named due to the used ornaments called *флемский*⁴⁵ in Russian. Such altar partitions were created by masters from Vilnius, Polock, Vitebsk, Smolensk and other cities, which remained within the borders of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth for decades. In 1650–1660 carpenters, wood-carvers, turners and other craftsmen helping with creation of iconostases were repeatedly called from Moscow to Belarus⁴⁶. Some of the arrived workers were commissioned by patriarch Nikon, others worked in the Kremlin Armoury. The newcomers’ duty was also to educate local apprentices.

The most characteristic detail of Supraśl iconostasis, and wider – iconostases called “Flemish”, was the ornament. Russian researchers found the source of that kind of decorations in German Baroque adopted through Poland⁴⁷.

In the 17th c. the elements of Netherlandian sculptures gained advantage over Italian; the process was particularly visible in Pomorze district and Gdańsk, from where the Netherlandian influences spread to the whole Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: brother Paweł of Bydgoszcz worked for the Lviv Bernardine church⁴⁸. Did the Netherland ornaments really appear on the Supraśl iconostasis?

⁴² The original temple was founded in 1641 by Lithuanian sub-cancellarius Kazimierz Leon Sapieha, in 1824–1825 new church was built, rich furnishings were taken from the Benedictine church in Nieśwież in 1905; B. Gryko, ‘Fundacje sakralne Kazimierza Leona Sapiehy, Kontynuacja budowy prestiżu Lwa Sapiehy’, in: *Nad społeczeństwem staropolskim, Kultura – instytucje – gospodarka w XVI–XVIII w.*, ed. K. Łopatecki, W. Walczak, Białystok 2007, p. 411; *Сакральны жываніс Беларусі ...*, fig. 30.

⁴³ *Sztuka ziem wschodnich Rzeczypospolitej XVI – XVIII w.*, ed. J. Lilejko, Lublin 2000, p. 201; A. Mironowicz, ‘Monastery diecezji białoruskiej’, *Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne*, vol. 29 (2008), p. 12.

⁴⁴ *Сакральны жываніс Беларусі ...*, fig. 70.

⁴⁵ И. Бусева-Давыдова, ‘Русский иконостас XVII в., Генезис типа и итоги эволюции’, in: *Иконостас ...*, p. 626.

⁴⁶ In 1660, from Vitebsk to the Kremlin Armoury came turners Dawid Pawłow and Jakub Pogorzelski. Cf. A. B. Абецедарский, *Русско – белорусские связи в XVII в., Сборник материалов*, Минск 1961, p. 428.

⁴⁷ И. Бусева-Давыдова, *op. cit.*, p. 627. Author emphasizes the lesser significance of Ukrainian artists, in 1655 two turners from Kiev-Pechersk lavra came to Moscow: elder Sewerian Zinkiejew and his assistant Prokop Ostapow; as the author claims, renaissance traditions endured for a long time in the Ukrainian art.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 628. Brother Paweł, bernardine, carpenter (and turner?), was the author of works of great artistic value, worked, among others, on the decoration of the monastery church in Leżajsk (main altar,

The analysis of the ornament visible on archive photographs brings very interesting conclusions. The detail used for decoration of the altar partition is a compilation of classical ornament, including, among others, acanthus leaves, volute, astragal and bull's eyes, with that of late Renaissance: *Schweifwerk* and auricular, popular particularly in the Baroque period⁴⁹. *Schweifwerk* is a type of ornamental motif comprised of forms in the shape of elongated letters C and S with widened endings, filled with a row of pearls put next to each other, used in the transitional phase between Mannerism and the early Baroque, around 1570–1620⁵⁰. This type of decoration was used for congesting forms or joining different types of ornaments. *Schweifwerk* was no longer used⁵¹ in Gdańsk workshops around 1640, when the Supraśl altar partition was created⁵². The use of this motif was possible in more provincial centres, such as Vilnius.

The auricular ornament, in which biological forms with emphasized row of knobs were used, appeared at the end of the 16th c. and gained popularity especially in the 17th c. wood-carving and goldsmithery⁵³.

Thus, could the iconostasis have been created in Vilnius? Confirmation of this thesis requires further research, however, the fact supporting this thesis is calling Wincenty, one of the painters working on the icons, малярем велнским, which means he must have come from Vilnius. Since, at least one of the painters originated from this city (with which Supraśl monks stayed in everyday vivid contacts, for which evidence can be found in numerous sources), was the equally large as valuable partition ordered in the far away Gdańsk, where luxurious and very expensive works were created? Could it be created in Vilnius?

In Vilnius in the 17th and 18th c., as stated by Marian Morelowski, on the basis of archival excerpts concerning Vilnius art kept in the central Jesuit Archive in Valkenborch in Holland, worked – apart from the Italians – a small group of talented Nehterlandian and French artists⁵⁴. Their influence on the development of Vilnius art of that time remains unknown.

stalls), and in the Lviv Bernardine church. Cf. *Słownik artystów polskich i w Polsce działających (zmarłych przed 1966 r.)*, ed. K. Mikocka-Rachubowa, M. Biernacka, vol. 6, Warszawa 1998, p. 456.

⁴⁹ The motif appeared in the project of Geerts and Collaert in 1580, Theodor Bry in 1589, Mignot in 1593, Bruyn in 1594, Brickenhultz in 1600, Christoph Jamnitzer in 1610, and also in later years, e.g. in the projects of Janssen (1631), Lucas Kilian (1632). Cf. *Katalog der Ornamentisch-Sammlung der Kunstgewerbe-Museums zu Berlin*, Leipzig 1894, no. 389, 581, 412, 428, 585, 437, 448.

⁵⁰ *Lexikon der Kunst*, ed. H. Olbrich, G. Strauss, vol. 6, Leipzig 2004, 559–560.

⁵¹ Cf. R. Berliner. *Ornamentale Vorlage Blätter*, Leipzig 1924; G. Irmscher, *Kleine Kunstgeschichte des europäischen Ornaments seit der frühen Neuzeit (1400–1900)*, Darmstadt 1984.

⁵² The discussed ornament was at that time in the form of a dry auricle changing into acanthus. I'm very grateful to prof. Jacek Tylicki for valuable comments.

⁵³ *Słownik terminologiczny sztuk pięknych*, ed. S. Kozakiewicz, Warszawa 1976, p. 85.

⁵⁴ M. Morelowski, *Znaczenie baroku wileńskiego XVIII stulecia, Studia nad dawną sztuką wileńską*, Wilno 1940, p. 6.



Fig. 6. Saint Mary of the Annunciation church in Supraśl today

Furthermore, it needs to be emphasized that the forms of the Supraśl work conformed to a whole group of 17th c. iconostases, known for the use of ornamental forms as “Flemish”⁵⁵.

Also in the view of Irina Busiewa-Dawydowa, although the author repeated the message of its alleged origin in Gdańsk⁵⁶, Supraśl iconostasis did not resemble the “Flemish” type. As the researcher notices, the motif of cherub heads was used in herm pilasters, similarly to architecture of Kazimierz, Lublin and other Polish cities, as well as double columns entwined with floral ornament⁵⁷. The author regards other details, such as columns entwined with grapevine and grape leaves, as the favourite motif of Belarus-Russian wood carvers.

⁵⁵ О. В. Бабак, ‘Символика резьбы в царских вратах русского севера’, in: *Молода мистецка наука України, VIII електронна наукова конференція*, Харків 2005, p. 5.

⁵⁶ И. Бусева-Давыдова, *op. cit.*, p. 628.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 644. The author noticed connections with motifs taken from Flemish art, which can be found in many churches: the main altar in the parish church in Szydłowiec, St. Nicholas in Gdańsk, the town church in Małogoszcz, Opalenica, Sieraków and Przedborze; therein.

Andrzej Modzelewski and the aforementioned painter Wincenty, named in the source materials „малярем велнским”⁵⁸, assuredly worked on the construction of Supraśl iconostasis. Andrzej Modzelewski was not a Gdańsk painter, his name does not appear in the archive materials⁵⁹. It is mentioned in the receipt issued by Krzysztof Chodkiewicz in 1650: “Note taking gold from painter Modzelewski from the treasury. Now 12 June I, the deputy, from this treasury have taken painting gold Fangolt 15 books Cwingolt 1 book which I am going to spend according to painting need”⁶⁰. Thus, in 1650, Andrzej Modzelewski was hired to do goldsmithing work, he could have gilded the already placed iconostasis or the icon frames.

If Wincenty had come from Vilnius, it does not seem probable that the wood-carving work had been done in Gdańsk.

The non-existing Supraśl iconostasis, following the comment of the monastery chronicler, Mikołaj Ratkiewicz, regarded as a work of Gdańsk masters for more than 200 years, assuredly was created in a city situated much closer. The most probable seems to be Vilnius, from where the painter Wincenty was to come. It was there where in a Jesuit circle worked Bartłomiej Pens (who, escaping from Elbląg, was supposed to land in Vilnius), the alleged author of the Hodegetria and Christ Pantocrator⁶¹ and perhaps also other icons in the great church. Without a doubt, the answer to the question of the authorship of the Supraśl iconostasis belongs to one of the most prominent research problems in regard to the history of culture of this part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Its solution would allow for a better evaluation of the artistic value of the work of arts once kept in the Supraśl church.

⁵⁸ Архимандрит Николай (Далматов), *op. cit.*, p. 142. According to N. Wysocka, the painter was one of the 19 artists working on the Ruthenian grounds of the Crown in the first half of the 17th c.; Н. Высоцкая, ‘Роль белоруской иконописи в развитии христианского искусства’, in: *Гісторыя, культуралогія, мастацтвазнаўства, Матэрыялы III Міжнароднага кангрэса Беларускай „Беларуская культура ў дыялогу цывілізацый”*, Мінск 2001, p. 286.

⁵⁹ Cf. J. Pałubicki, *Malarze gdańscy, Środowisko artystyczne w gdańskich materiałach archiwalnych. Słownik malarzy, szklarzy i rysowników*, vol. 1-2, Gdańsk 2009. It needs to be emphasised that there were almost no Polish speaking craftsmen in the Baltic metropoly: the guilds employed almost exclusively Germans and Lutherans. I’m very grateful to prof. Jacek Tylicki for drawing my attention to it.

⁶⁰ *Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie, Archiwum Młynowskie Chodkiewiczów*, F. 630, Registr. Kochaniewiczza, k. 204; Архимандрит Николай (Далматов), *op. cit.*, p. 142; W. Kochanowski, *op. cit.*, p. 377.

⁶¹ Cf. J. Tomalska, ‘Uwagi na temat wyposażenia cerkwi Zwiastowania w Supraślu w XVI i XVII wieku’, *Studia Podlaskie*, 20 (2012), pp. 27–55.