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## *'Bethlehem, the City of David'. On the Interior Decoration of the so-called Abbot's Pavilion at Betlejem near Krzeszów\**

Anyone who enters the pavilion located in the middle of a small pond at Betlejem (Bethlehem) situated near the Lower Silesian village of Krzeszów (Ger.: Grüssau) is astounded and filled with admiration at the same time, since the modest wooden construction raised amidst the wooded stillness contains within some of the most exceptional works of Central European Baroque (ill. 1). Twenty-four paintings have been placed on the walls above the windows, on the inside surface of the roof, and the lantern walls, all of them being dedicated to an exceptional Old Testament theme of water and the person of King David (ill. 2). And although, thanks to the preserved inscriptions under each scene, art historians are familiar with their contents, they have remained unable to answer the vital question why such a rare topic is presented inside a modest wooden building located in a secluded and virtually uninhabited place outside Krzeszów.<sup>1</sup>

The Biblical association of this forest clearing, located on the slope of the 'Angel's Mount' (*Anielska Góra; Engelnhöhe*) about two kilometres west of Krzeszów Abbey, began in 1674, when Abbot Bernard Rosa decided to erect here a chapel of the Nativity Grotto.<sup>2</sup> Previously, this charming wooded retreat, with a little pond deriving its waters from a sulphur spring of healing properties, had been used by the Krzeszów Cistercians as a summer resting place. Abbot Rosa, who celebrated a holy mass and prayed by the relics of the Bethlehem stable in the Roman church of Santa Maria Maggiore on 12th May 1661, in his chapel directly followed the copy of the Bethlehem Nativity Grotto founded in the Prague Augustinian monastery by emperor Charles IV. The Krzeszów chapel imitating the

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<sup>1</sup> On the pavilion on the water in Betlejem see: F. SCHILLER, *Grüssau und seine nächsten Umgebungen*, Hirschberg 1826, p. 16; J. HEYNE, *Geschichtliche Notizen über die aufgeloste ehemalige fürstliche Cistercienser-Abtei*, Liegnitz 1835, p. 9; W. PATSCHOVSKY, *Erklärung der Gemälde in Wasserpavillon zu Bethlehem bei Grüssau im Kreise Landeshut i. Schl. nebst geschichtlichen Mittheilungen*, Liebau i. Schl. 1888; N. VON LUTTEROTTI, *Kloster Grüssau in den Zeitaltern des Barock, Rokoko und Klassizismus*, [in:] *Heimatbuch des Kreises Landeshut in Schlesien*, vol. 2, Landeshut 1929, p. 405; H. DZIURLA, *Krzeszów*, Wrocław 1974, p. 85; B. KUDERA, *Krzeszów*, Piechowice 1995, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> See N. VON LUTTEROTTI, *Vom unbekanntem Grüssau*, Wolfenbüttel 1962, pp. 37-45.



1. Betlejem, pavilion on the water, general view  
 1. Betlejem, pawilon na wodzie – widok ogólny

Prague prototype was most probably designed by the architect, Martin Schuppert, who worked for the Abbey, and he it was who also directly supervised the building works. The swiftly erected church comprising an aisleless nave with apse and lateral niche was completed with stucco decorations executed in 1675 by the Bavarian Matthias Mayer, as well as the moveable furnishings, most of which have not been preserved. It was composed of not only two altars erected in 1675, dedicated to the Magi and the Holy Family, with paintings by a local artist, Martin Leistritz, but also an unknown picture by Michael Willmann executed two years later, as well as a Nativity Scene displayed in the chapel's niche at Christmas 1677 with figural representations sculpted by a local artist, Georg Schrötter.

The newly erected chapel, in compliance with the intention of its founder, became a centre of the Nativity cult. Every year, a midnight mass celebrated here on Christmas Eve was preceded by a solemn, torchlit procession from a nearby monastery of the Krzeszów Cistercians. In order to cater for pilgrims flocking to Betlejem, Abbot Rosa published a special prayer book, first printed in the Kłodzko publishing house of Andreas Pega in 1678.<sup>3</sup> The wary abbot also took provisions for the sanctuary's safekeeping by having raised a wooden hut to house a guardian, but which, starting from 1681, was inhabited for eighty years by hermits.<sup>4</sup> In 1927, the Betlejem chapel took on an additional function as the damaged fifth chapel of the Way of the Cross (the Garden of Gethsemane) which had been located nearby.

<sup>3</sup> B. ROSA, *Liebliche Rosa von Jericho / Oder Kurtzer Bericht / Wie das lieblichste Röselein von Jericho / das zarte JESUS Kindlein / Welches Von der gebendeyten Jungfrauen MARIA im Stall zu Bethlehem gebohren/mit Andacht könne verehret und angebethet werden*, Glatz (Andreas Pega) 1678.

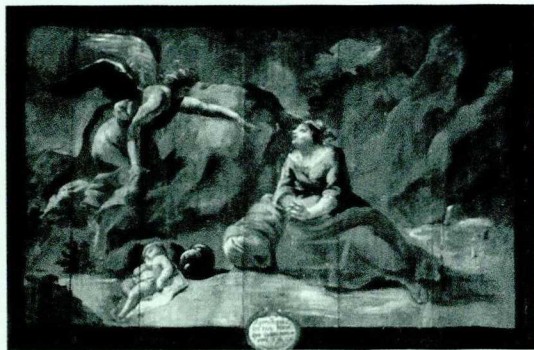
<sup>4</sup> The first hermit to live in Bethlehem was a Franciscan monk, Elias Anton Leonhard, whose position was taken over after his death in 1720 by a Lithuania nobleman and friar, Tomasz Matulewicz who died in 1723.



2. Betlejem, pavilion on the water, view of the interior  
 2. Betlejem, pawilon na wodzie – widok wnętrza

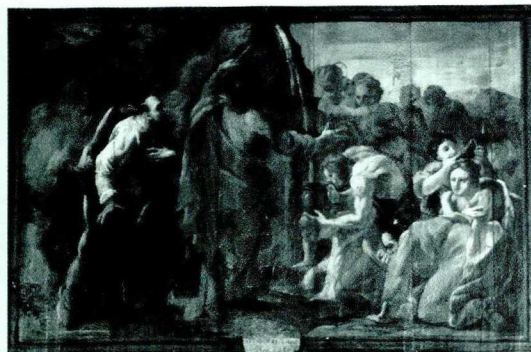
The so-called abbot pavilion was built several dozen metres from the Betlejem chapel on posts originally sunk into the pond's bed and currently standing on a concrete platform. The wooden building raised on a regular octagonal plan surrounded by a gallery was covered with a steep pavilion roof surmounted by a high lantern. The pavilion's single space interior is unlikely to have ever had any permanent furnishing, its sole decoration consisting of the paintings which cover almost the whole of the inside and have survived to the present day.

Placed against polychromes imitating architecture, twenty-four paintings form three horizontal rows. The lowest of them in the form of a horizontal rectangle, painted in distemper directly on the planks of side walls above the windows, features a cycle of eight Biblical scenes with the common subject of water. Beginning at the entrance and moving clockwise, the following themes may be identified in succession: God the Father in the



3. *G. W. J. Neunhertz, Hagar and Ishmael in the Wilderness, Betlejem, pavilion on the water*

3. *G. W. J. Neunhertz, Hagar i Ismael na pustyni, Betlejem, pawilon na wodzie*



4. *G. W. J. Neunhertz, Moses Causing Water to Spring from a Rock by striking it with his staff, Betlejem, pavilion on the water*

4. *G. W. J. Neunhertz, Mojżesz wydobywający wodę ze skały uderzeniem laski, Betlejem, pawilon na wodzie*

form of an angel pointing the way for Hagar's thirsty female servant and her son Ishmael to a spring of water (ill. 3); Rebecca, offering a pitcher of water to the servant of Abraham, who is searching for a wife for Isaac; Moses, leading the people of Israel across the wilderness, causes water to spring from a rock with his rod (ill. 4); Gideon, selecting three hundred men above the water to fight the Midianites; Samson, very thirsty after slaying the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass, calling on the Lord for water (ill. 5); Jacob putting both stripped and unstripped rods in the runnel to water his lambs; Benaiah, slaying a lion in a pit when snow had fallen, and the final last representation, showing Elisha purifying water at a well in Jericho.

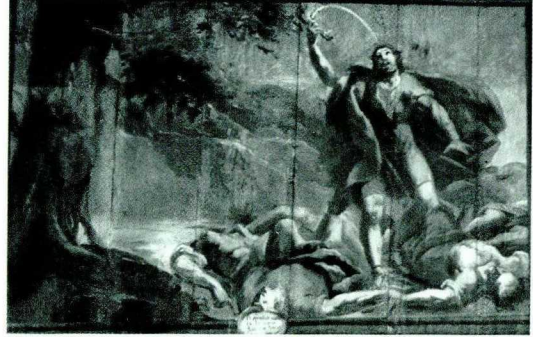
Above, great canvases suspended from the ceiling and, touching one another with their edges, each in the shape of an upright trapezium, feature eight of the narrative scenes described in Chapter 11 of the I Chronicles associated with the life of King David<sup>5</sup>: mighty men come to Hebron to make David king of all Israel (ill. 6), then David is anointed king over all Israel, David and the Israelites conquer Jerusalem (ill. 7), David builds the conquered city, Jashobeam, David's warrior, slaying at once three hundred men with his spear, Eleazar, another warrior of David's, who caused the Philistines to flee from the field of barley at Pasdammim, then David's three warriors: Jashobeam, Eleazar, and Shammoth break through the camp of the Philistines to bring David water from the well by the gate of Bethlehem (ill. 8), with the final representation depicting the King of the Israelites pouring out water as a sacrifice to the Lord. The whole cycle is crowned with eight smaller paintings on the side walls of the lanterns portraying oval busts of the bravest mighty men of David: Joab, Jashobeam, Eleazar, Abishai, Benaiah (ill. 9), Elhana, Asahel (ill. 10) and Shammoth.

The unusual subject of the paintings is matched by their high artistic quality, and although serious damage was inflicted to the works by humidity, necessitating conservation at two separate times,<sup>6</sup> affecting their painted surfaces, they are still wonderful works of art which enchant with their compositional maturity and consistency in developing the narration. The rectangular series of paintings at the lower level, which were composed to

<sup>5</sup> The sequence of the two first and two last scenes in this row was altered during the last conservation of the paintings.

5. G. W. J. Neunhertz, Thirsty Samson after the Battle with the Philistines, *Betlejem, pawilon on the water*

5. G. W. J. Neunhertz, Spragniony Samson po walce z Filistynami, *Betlejem, pawilon na wodzie*



be viewed from close at hand, consist in general of scenes with a curtained background, comprising a number of figures and a single foreground of action constructed in line with the picture's surface, as a result of which, in accordance with the representations' theme, the act of an individual has been exhibited with effect. The much larger trapezoid paintings of the middle level were visibly given a more complex compositional space that frequently consists of 'introductory' figures placed in the foreground, truncated at the edges and showing a rich multifigural middle ground, forming the scene's essential theme built up with an architectural or natural landscape background, additionally emphasising the 'historical' rather than personal dimension of the Biblical history relating the victories of King David and his warriors. The narration of the representation is built up in the first place from suitably chosen poses and gestures of individual participants, lending the Old Testament representations a wide emotional spectrum that ranges from surprise at the sight of a miracle through the joy of quenching thirst to the despair of the defeated in battle.

Although in the so-far existing literature on the subject the creation of the pavilion and its painterly decoration was never associated with the idea of imitating Jesus' birthplace at Bethlehem, the pavilion's architectural form, and above all the contents of its painted decoration, permit the assumption that it was conceived precisely as an ideological completion of the Nativity Grotto founded by Abbot Rosa. As much as the Baroque elongated chapel was founded to symbolize the birthplace of Jesus, which, according to numerous Apocrypha was in a grotto or a little stable not far from the town of Bethlehem, the central pavilion building, featuring a soaring roof raised on the water and also decorated with paintings iconographically associated with King David, represented a kind of symbol of the city itself, thereby becoming a typological completion of the Bethlehem chapel placed nearby.

<sup>6</sup> The first conservation of the pavilion on the water at Betlejem took place in 1926-28. The paintings, badly damaged by water leaking through the roof of the lanterns, were conserved by a Wrocław painter, Walter Schölei: see *Provinzial-Konservator der Kunstdenkmäler Niederschlesiens zu Breslau 1896-1944*, file reg. Nos. 455-64 State Archives, Breslau-Wrocław, and a brief note on the conservation of paintings in: 'Schlesische Volkszeitung' from April 23, 1928. During the post-war period, the Betlejem paintings fell into a state of decay once again in the 1960s and 1970s when the pavilion was abandoned for a long time. The second complex renovation effort was carried out by E. Kosakowski in 1982-91; see: W. KAPALCZYŃSKI, *Prace remontowo-konserwatorskie w okresie powojennym. Stan obecny zabytków zespołu w Krzeszowie*, [in:] *Krzeszów uświęcony łaską*, ed. H. Dziurla, K. Bobowski, Wrocław 1997 ('Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis', 1782), pp. 371-2, ill. 185-8.



6. G.W. J. Neunhertz, David Chosen to be King of Israel, *Betlejem, pavilion on the water*

6. G. W. J. Neunhertz, Wybór Dawida na króla Izraela, *Betlejem, pawilon na wodzie*

According to both the New and Old Testaments, as well as in the Apocrypha, Bethlehem was referred to a number of times as the city of David. Already in I Samuel the prophet Samuel was sent to Bethlehem to anoint David, son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, king of Israel and was instructed to do this in secret (I Sam 16, 1-13); Bethlehem is defined as the city of David in Luke (Lk 2, 4) and two Apocrypha: the Georgian Gospel<sup>7</sup> and the Gospel according to the Pseudo Matthew.<sup>8</sup> This association was certainly known to the Krzeszów Cistercians, since already in the first sentence of Abbot Rosa's prayer book *Liebliche Rose von Jericho...* the following can be read: '*Die Heilige Stadt Bethlehem / woraus der Könnig David gebohren / war vorzeiten eine schöne Stadt...*'<sup>9</sup>

Jesus' birthplace was so closely associated with the figure of King David that some mediaeval authors placed the Nativity in David's ruined house or palace in Bethlehem. In *History of the Magi* by John of Hildesheim, Jesus was born in a cellar of King David's ruined house at Bethlehem: '*Et est sciendum, quod Bethlehem [...] dicitur ciuitas Dauid ex eo quod in ea fuit natus, et in loco in quo quondam fuit domus Ysay, patris Dauid, et in quo Dauid fuit natus et per Samuelem in regem victus, in eodem loco etiam Christus fuit natus*'.<sup>10</sup> Jesus' birth among ruins can also be found in the description by Hugo of St. Victor who wrote the following: '*in ruinis parietum, quia Christus nasci voluit...*'<sup>11</sup> Naturally, David's home was not only perceived as a building in a material sense, but also symbolically as the 'house of David' that would yield Jesus, as prophecies had it. Of particular importance in this respect was the prophecy in the Book of Amos which spoke of restoring 'David's fallen house' and of rebuilding it (Amos 9, 11), as well as of a celebrated prophecy from the Book of Micah quoted in the Gospel of Matthew which

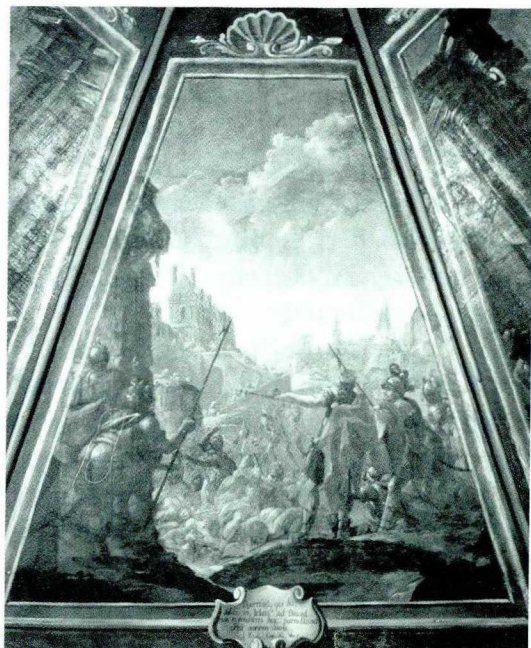
<sup>7</sup> *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu*, ed. Rev. M. Starowieyski, vol. 1: *Ewangelie Apokryficzne*, Lublin 1986, p. 159.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>9</sup> ROSA, *Liebliche Rosa von Jericho...*, p. 5.

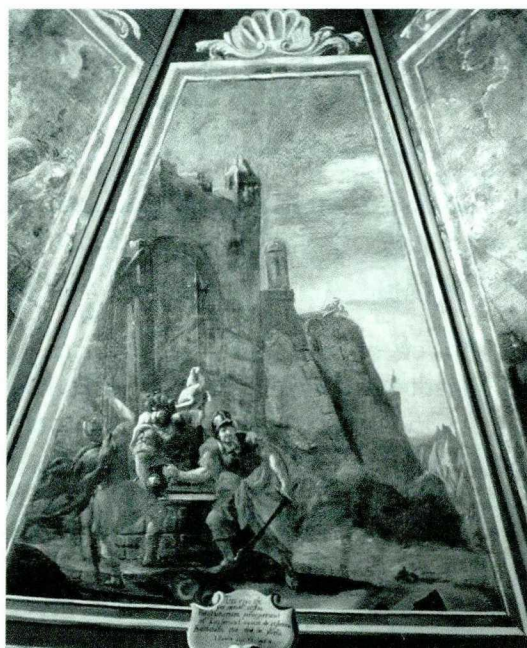
<sup>10</sup> Quoted after: Z. KĘPIŃSKI, *Wit Stwosch w starciu ideologii religijnych Odrodzenia. Oltarz Salwatora*, Wrocław etc. 1969, p. 48.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.



7. G. W. J. Neunhertz, David Conquering the City of Jerusalem, *Betlejem, pavilion on the water*

7. G. W. J. Neunhertz, Dawid zdobywa miasto Jeruzalem, *Betlejem, pawilon na wodzie*



8. G. W. J. Neunhertz, Jashobeam, Eleazar and Shammot Forcing their Way through to the Well by the Bethlehem Gate, *Betlejem, pavilion on the water*

8. G. W. J. Neunhertz, Jaszobeam, Eleazar i Szammot przebijają się do cysterny z wodą u bramy Betlejem, *Betlejem, pawilon na wodzie*

proclaimed the glory of Bethlehem, from where 'Out of you shall come forth a governor for Israel, one whose roots are far back in the past' (Mic 5, 2). The identity of the birthplace is connected here with the family genealogy of Jesus: both Matthew (1, 1-17) and Luke (2, 4) declare unequivocally that Joseph, and therefore Jesus also, were descendants of David, as is best illustrated in the nave vaulting's painterly decoration of the brotherhood church of St. Joseph at Krzeszów, showing in as many as five representations several dozen ancestors of St. Joseph.

This association of Jesus' birthplace with the city of King David, frequently emphasized by the Gospel and Apocrypha, was also reflected in numerous works of fine art. From early Carolingian times, West European artists depicted the Nativity scene against the background of the architecture of Bethlehem.<sup>12</sup> A more or less complex architectural landscape of Bethlehem is to be seen in the Nativity scenes of later painterly representations, both created in the Middle Ages and in the panel painting of the Pisa School from around 1400, based on a text describing the vision of St. Brigitte the Swede,<sup>13</sup> and early-modern works, such as, for example, the Baroque easel painting by Ciro Ferri.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> G. SCHILLER, *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst*, vol. 1, Gütersloh 1969, pp. 78-9, ills. 163-5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83, 89, ills. 174, 196.

<sup>14</sup> *Pietro da Cortona 1597-1669*, ed. A. Lo Bianco, Milan 1997, pp. 416-17, cat. no. 84.

From the late Middle Ages a type of scene also enjoying considerable popularity was that of the Nativity depicting Jesus, Mary and Joseph, as well as occasionally shepherds paying tribute to the Christ Child, amidst the ruins of a building identified as David's palace.<sup>15</sup> Such was the presentation of the Nativity by Hugo van der Goes in the middle panel of the Portinari's altar from 1473-5 and by Veit Stosch in the central panel of Salvatore's sculpted altar from 1520-23. A similar way of presenting the Nativity was also frequently used in the works of modern artists, as in the altar painting *Adoration of the Shepherds* by Michael Willmann from the old monastery church at Lubiąż (Ger.: Leubus),<sup>16</sup> or the canvas by Johann Michael Rottmayr depicting the same subject.<sup>17</sup>

The very choice of a central octagonal layout for the wooden pavilion, surrounded by a colonnaded gallery and covered with a steep pavilion roof and high lantern, lent the building an Oriental, or more justly 'Old Testament' quality; yet, the placing inside it of eight large paintings as dominant elements of the overall interior decoration, portraying David and his warriors, correlated the pavilion unambiguously with the person of the King of Israel. The elaborate narration of the scenes based on Chapter 11 of I Chronicles did not merely indicate the presence of King David, but also displayed a definite vision of his reign. The Betlejem paintings show David as a ruler, and triumphant commander, enjoying royal dignity as anointed by the Lord, conqueror of the Jebusites and Philistines, conqueror of Jerusalem and builder of a new town. Such an image of a triumphant ruler of Israel in the context of Bethlehem was intended in all certainty to fulfill the role of the Old Testament's prefiguration in the figure of the new-born Messiah and His ultimate victory over sin. The same typology, however, may be interpreted as a vision of the future triumphs of the Church as established by Christ. If seen in this context, it becomes clear why David is shown in the scenes at Betlejem as a commander surrounded by invincible warriors ruthlessly routing the enemies of Israel and helping David expand the conquered city. The most courageous of David's warriors, presented in the Betlejem pavilion as bust effigies occupying the third and highest level of paintings, acquire here almost the status of the Old Testament counterparts of the later holy defenders of faith; the temporal assistants of Christ.

The cycle of paintings dedicated to King David and found in the pavilion finds its culmination in two scenes which are directly connected with Bethlehem and its water (ill. 8). *'One day a longing came over David, and he exclaimed, "If only I could have a drink of water from the well by the gate of Bethlehem!" At this the three made their way through the Philistine lines and drew water from the well by the gate of Bethlehem and brought it to David. But David refused to drink of it; he poured it out to the Lord and said, "God forbid that I should do such a thing! Can I drink the blood of these men? They have brought it at the risk of their lives". So he would not drink it.'* (1 Chron. 11, 17-19). This is the only time that the Bible speaks of the well which was supposed to be placed at the city's gate, yet in later times it was considered to be one of the dominant elements shaping the appearance of Bethlehem in the times of Christ, as is testified by a description included in the most popular modern compendium on the Holy Land written by Christian Kruick of

<sup>15</sup> See KEPIŃSKI, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>16</sup> Currently at the National Museum, Wrocław – H. LOSSOW, *Michael Willmann (1630-1706) – Meister der Barockmalerei*, Würzburg 1994, cat. no. A. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Crocker Art Gallery, Sacramento – E. HUBALA, *Johann Michael Rottmayr*, Vienna 1981, cat. no. G. 122.



van Adrichem, known as Adrichomius.<sup>18</sup> Not only were the cisterns at Bethlehem schematically marked by the city walls on a large map of the Holy Land next to the sign of Bethlehem, but also described in a written commentary included with the places marked on the map by means of the words quoted from the Old Testament. And although Cistercian monasteries were strongly associated with water, both by their location beyond city walls next to running water, and great involvement in the business of breeding fish, the main reason for placing the wooden pavilion in the middle of the pond amidst woods near Krzeszów was, as it seems, the desire to imitate the topography of the Bethlehem prototype. The octagonal building with its soaring roof, symbolising the city or palace of King David, was integrally connected with the natural spring of water and its healing properties, which in this context perfectly imitated the water source at Bethlehem.

The significance of water at the Betlejem of Krzeszów was not only limited to evoking the likeness to the Biblical prototype. The completion of the pictorial history of King David and his mighty men's triumph with the cycle of eight Old Testament representations focussed exclusively on water bestow them with the significance of yet another Old Testament prefiguration of a new-born Child. The Gospel of John speaks twice of Christ as the spring of living water. When meeting the woman of Samaria at the well of Sychar, Christ said: *'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I shall give him will never suffer thirst any more. The water that I shall give him will be an inner spring always welling up for eternal life'* (Jn 4, 14). When preaching in the Temple, He said once again: *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me; whoever believes in me, let him drink" As Scripture says, "Streams of living water shall flow out from within him"* (Jn 7, 37). The Old Testament water shown in the eight paintings quenched thirst only temporarily, and such was the water from the Betlejem spring that filled the pond on which the wooden pavilion was raised. The spring of



9. G. W. J. Neunertz,  
Benaiahm, *Betlejem*,  
*pavilion on the water*  
9. G. W. J. Neunertz,  
Benajasz, *Betlejem*,  
*pawilon na wodzie*



10. G. W. J. Neunertz,  
Ashael, *Betlejem*,  
*pavilion on the water*  
10. G. W. J. Neunertz,  
Asael, *Betlejem*,  
*pawilon na wodzie*

<sup>18</sup> C.H. ADRICHOMIO, *Theatrum Terrae Sanctae et Biblicarum Historiarum cum tabulis geographicis aere expressis*, Coloniae (Officina Birckmannica) 1628, p. 43-4. The Ossolineum Library is in possession of two copies of this work which undoubtedly come from the old library of the Cistercian monastery in Krzeszów (pressmark XVII 20 720, XVII 20549).

real living water giving eternal life was a new-born Messiah whose presence was testified by a nearby chapel of Nativity.

The sphere of symbolic meanings and references of 'David's Bethlehem' is not merely connected with the birthplace of Christ and the person of the future Saviour, it is also associated with the concept of Immanuel, exceptionally popular among the Krzeszów Cistercians.<sup>19</sup> Its source found in the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa 7, 14 and 9, 5-6) does not only speak of the name ('*A young woman is with child and she will bear a son, and will call him Immanuel*'), but also of the qualities of Messiah ('*For a boy has been born for us, a son given to us to bear the symbol of dominion on his shoulder, and he shall be called in purpose wonderful, in battle God-like. Father for all time, Prince of peace*'). Yet, already in the ensuing sentence David is named as his royal predecessor: 'Great shall the dominion be, and boundless the peace bestowed on David's throne and on his kingdom to establish it and sustain it with justice and with righteousness from now and for ever more'. It is known that the excerpt concerning the features of Immanuel in the prophecy of Isaiah was used as the leitmotif of the interior decoration of a new abbey church in Krzeszów erected in 1728-35, where the church façade featured a sculpture personification of the names of Messiah, the vaulting of six spans in the nave was covered with fresco representations of particular qualities of Messiah, and the inspiration in the prophecy of Isaiah could also be found in the church bell called by the name of Immanuel, as well as on the Abbot's chalice. It may thus be assumed that David shown in the Betlejem pavilion in the cycle of paintings, presenting him as king and victorious commander, conquering new lands and building his own state, could have consciously referred to the subsequent sentence of the prophecy of Isaiah speaking of David's kingdom, which would also include the Messiah. The likelihood is all the greater, since this very part of the prophecy was also used by the Krzeszów Cistercians as the source of artistic works, whether it be in the Krzeszów figure of Immanuel from the beginning of the 17th century, holding a globe crowned with a cross in the left hand, the latter being the symbol of royal power, or in the Nativity altar to the Incarnated Word from 1735, decorated, among others by a sculpture of genius in a princely coronet, and featuring a sceptre and royal globe in hands.<sup>20</sup>

The unique character of the painterly decoration in the Betlejem pavilion on the water and the richness of its contents begs an answer to the question who the author of this unusual undertaking could have been. And although analysts of the history of the Betlejem complex thus far have indicated in unison Abbot Rosa as the founder of the pavilion and the paintings that decorated it, this does not seem to be a very likely interpretation. The abbot's preserved account book of relating to the Krzeszów Abbey during his abbotship does not contain even a single entry referring either to building or to decorating the pavilion.<sup>21</sup> This is all the more striking since every expense connected with the accomplishment of all the Abbot's initiatives, this including the erection and furnishing of the Nativity chapel, was scrupulously recorded. Neither does Abbot Rosa mention the wooden pavilion in his diary, although the Krzeszów Betlejem was a particularly favourite place which the Abbot had expressly desired to visit shortly before his death.<sup>22</sup> David's triumphs

<sup>19</sup> On the subject see: S. KOBIELUŚ, *Wątek Emmanuela w dekoracji monumentalnej kościoła opackiego w Krzeszowie*, 'Rocznik Historii Sztuki', 16 (1986), p. 159-212.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162, footnote 23, p. 180.

<sup>21</sup> State Archives in Breslau-Wrocław, files: Cistercian Monastery, Krzeszów, accounting books of the abbey, vol. I; 1675-1687 (No. 101), vol. 2: 1688-95 (No. 102).

<sup>22</sup> LUTTEROTTI, *Vom unbekanntem...*, p. 40-41.



11. G. W. J. Neuhertz, *Dome decoration, Gostyń, abbey church*  
 11. G. W. J. Neuhertz, *dekoracja kopuły, Gostyń, kościół*  
*Filipinów*

or the Old Testament water are not mentioned in Rosa's prayer book published for the pilgrims to the Nativity chapel, either in its first edition in 1678 or later ones.

However, the above-mentioned connection of the painterly decoration of the pavilion on the water with the motif of Immanuel present in the monumental decoration of a new abbey church seems to suggest that both programmes were founded simultaneously. The parallels between them are not limited to the symbolic meanings resulting from a visualisation of Isaiah's prophecy, but also result from the role that the Old Testament prefiguration played in each programme. In the abbey church every scene connected with six different names of Immanuel and placed on the nave vaulting was completed with two scenes described in the Old Testament, whereas the decoration of the Betlejem pavilion is, on the whole, an implementation of a multi-motif concept of the Old Testament prefiguration of Christ. The fact that the monumental decoration of the abbey church lacks narrative scenes connected with the history of King David – this being the most popular Old Testament prefiguration of the Messiah – seems to be compensated by the elaborate David cycle in the Betlejem pavilion on the water. The profound and complex references to the Old Testament went beyond the decoration programme of both buildings. It was in the time of the

abbotship of Innocent Fritsch that the official historiography of the Krzeszów Cistercians compared them to the Israelites of the Old Testament. The Krzeszów Mausoleum of the Piasts features a symbolical motif of forty pillars, referring to the forty Krzeszów abbots, embodying here forty generations of Israel, from Abraham to the Redemption, with the forty-first being Abbot Innocent Fritsch, who renewed the New Covenant.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, in the chronicle of the Krzeszów monastery *Grissovium in Diocesi Wratislaviensis...* from 1738 the Krzeszów monks are defined as 'true Israelites', and the Abbots Dominik Geyer and Innocent Fritsch were compared to David and Solomon respectively, as testified by the fresco portraits of the Krzeszów abbots placed in the vestibule of the abbey church.<sup>24</sup> Could it thus be assumed that it was Abbot Fritsch, a fervent worshipper of the Krzeszów Immanuel and most likely also the author of the abbey church decoration, who founded the Betlejem pavilion and the interior decoration of the abbey church?

This hypothesis is supported by the coincidence with the pavilion's creation together with its interior decoration. The paintings were certainly not executed by Michael Willmann, as Wilhelm Patschovsky maintained,<sup>25</sup> and the hypothesis that they were authored by 'Willmann's disciples' or 'painters from Willmann's school'<sup>26</sup> brought forth by later scholars is too vague. A tremendous skill to compose multi-figured complex scenes with the use of a *da sotto in su* perspective, a perfectly constructed narration in particular paintings, as well as a visible simultaneous creation of the painterly presentation with a broad stroke of brush and by means of large patches of colour, without taking care of drawing and detail – all being still evident, despite the damage to the paintings – testify to the artistic potential of the Betlejem cycle's author, as well his wide experience with monumental painting. Among Willmann's disciples and co-workers it was only his stepson, Johann Christoph Lischka, as well as grandson and the last artistic heir, Georg Wilhelm Neunhertz, who could boast of such high skills. The final argument to proving Neunhertz was the author of the Betlejem paintings can be found when the analysed works are compared with those he undoubtedly authored.

If it were not for the late date of the execution of the work (1748), the eight-panel decoration of the dome vaulting in the monastery church of the Philippian monks at Gostyń depicting scenes from the life of St. Filippo de Neri (ill. 11)<sup>27</sup> could have been regarded as the direct model for the compositional arrangement of the cycle of paintings on the inner surface of the Betlejem pavilion's roof. The oil-on-canvas Betlejem copy of the dome decoration of this type does not only repeat the eight-partite scheme of the fresco cycle, but also imitates the ornamental stucco decoration of the frames of the fresco panels, whereas the Gostyń narrative representations of the shape of delicately rounded trapeziums are in some cases almost compositional clones of the trapezoidal representations of the Betlejem cycle. What is more, equally akin compositionally are multi-figured representations of the format similar to trapezium from the eight-panel fresco decoration

<sup>23</sup> See R. HOŁOWNIA, *Krzeszowskie Mauzoleum Piastów Świdnicko-Jaworskich w aspekcie sukcesji książęcej*, [in:] *Krzeszów uświęcony łaską*, ed. by H. Dziurła, K. Bobowski, Krzeszów 1997, pp. 278-9.

<sup>24</sup> *Grissovium in Dioecesi Vratislaviensi Filia Henrichovii*, 1738, State Archives, Breslau-Wrocław, V 25 – see: KOBIELUS, op. cit., p. 160, 173-4, ill. 7.

<sup>25</sup> PATSCHOVSKY, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> LUTTEROTTI, *Kloster Grüssau...*, p. 405; KUDERA, op. cit. p. 123.

<sup>27</sup> See: A. DOBRZYCKA, *Jerzy Wilhelm Neunhertz, malarz śląski*, Poznań 1958, p. 55-8, ill. 43-7.



12. G. W. J. Neunhertz, Nativity, Krzeszów, abbey church  
 12. G. W. J. Neunhertz, Boże Narodzenie, Krzeszów,  
 kościół opacki

inside the dome of the Cistercian monastery at Łąd, situated on the river Warta near Konin, which was carried out by Georg Neunhertz in 1731-2.<sup>28</sup>

The elaborate fresco decoration of the abbey church at Krzeszów devised by Neunhertz in 1733-5 is, in turn, the example of a manner almost identical to that of all the Betlejem paintings manner, in which narrative presentations were combined with quotes from the Bible together with source references placed in cartouches (ill. 12). The similarity is so great that they even employ the same letter type and shape of the cartouche inscription. This kind of procedure in providing paintings with the source inscription can be found in Neunhertz's other works, such as the aforementioned dome of the Cistercian church at Łąd or the polychrome decoration on two domes crowning the library of the Augustinian monastery at Żagań (Ger.: Sagan) executed in 1735-6.

As much as the fresco decoration has been enumerated as to permit a comparison with the Betlejem paintings only in the generalised compositional features, the large-scale painting of *The Last Supper* from the High Altar of the parish church of St Andrew the Apostle from Środa Śląska (Ger.: Neumarkt; 1716), and an easel painting of two decades later titled *The Crucifixion* from the parish Church of Our Lady and St Nicholas in Bolesławiec (Ger.: Bunzlau)<sup>29</sup> (ill. 13), represent two of the few known oil paintings by Neunhertz, thereby permitting Morelli-like analysis of analogies in the detail. Despite considerable changes in the painted layer of the Betlejem interiors, a number of similarities with the compared paintings can be observed, not only in the painter's approach to the representations, based on the broad, slightly superficial stroke of brush and leaving of details unfinished, but also in the types of men's faces which, in many cases, are almost identical.

<sup>28</sup> See: DOBRZYCKA, op. cit. p. 33-37, ill. 1-5; J. DOMASŁOWSKI, *Kościół i klasztor w Łądzie*, Warsaw-Poznań 1981, p. 85-90, ill. 33.

<sup>29</sup> See T. KOZACZEWSKI, *Środa Śląska*, Wrocław-Warsaw-Cracow 1965, p. 88-89; J. BACHMIŃSKI, *Bolesławiec*, Wrocław etc. 1970, p. 50, ill. 15.



13. G. W. J. Neunhertz, Christ on the Cross, Bolesławiec, parish church  
 13. G. W. J. Neunhertz, Chrystus Ukrzyżowany, Bolesławiec, kościół parafialny

Having assumed that Neunhertz may be the author of the painting decoration of the Betlejem pavilion on the water, the time framework of the paintings' execution may be hypothetically determined, since it is known that Neunhertz was brought to Krzeszów by Abbot Innocenty Fritsch as early as 1730, soon after the fresco decoration of the newly erected church of the Benedictine Nuns at Lubomierz (Ger.: Liebenthal) had been completed.<sup>30</sup> Prolonged architectural works on the new abbey church at Krzeszów forced the artist to wait before he could begin work on the fresco decoration for quite a long time. Although Abbot Fritsch 'rented' the painter to the Cistercians of Łąd in Great Poland, where he executed the dome decoration of the monastery church, this commission kept him occupied for a relatively short period of time, from autumn 1731 to July 14 the following year. Neunhertz began the decoration of the Krzeszów church vaulting as late as in 1733, to complete his work two years later. The subsequent year of his activity was filled with other commissions: decoration of the library dome in the Augustinian monastery at Żagań, decoration of the window framing at the Holy Cross Chapel, the painting of *The Crucified* at the parish church in Bolesławiec, and the dome decoration of the Piast Mausoleum at Krzeszów. Having executed the above, Neunhertz left for Prague, to return to Krzeszów only in 1738 in order to execute the fresco decoration of the Holy Sepulchre.

<sup>30</sup> See: DOBRZYCKA, op. cit., p. 14.

It may thus be assumed that the painterly decoration of the Betlejem pavilion was executed during the Krzeszów artistic idleness of Neunhertz enforced by the prolonged building works of the abbey church. This may have taken place either in the first half of 1731, or before the painter left for Łąd, which is the more likely, interpretation, already after he had returned to Krzeszów from Great Poland, but still before the beginning of the paintings in the new church, and that would be in the second half of 1732. A modest architectural form of the wooden pavilion on the water erected most likely with a limited organizational and financial input permits the assumption that the rich paintings filling its interior from the very beginning were supposed to be the central element of this monument and the jobless painter its main creator. Neunhertz may have even influenced the choice of the pavilion's architectural scheme, which could explain the striking likeness between the arrangement of the Betlejem decoration and arrangement of frescoes in the monumental dome of the Cistercian church at Łąd. Around that time, the ideological programme of the future fresco decoration of the new church was already known. Therefore the contents of the programme at Betlejem may have been an ideological completion of the main monastery church's decoration.

'David's building', as it tends to be defined, at Betlejem near Krzeszów is an exceptional work, most likely unequalled in Central European art of the time. Both the richness of symbolic meanings evoked by the painterly representations and the artistic mastery of its creator are astounding. What demands consideration is how a monument of such remarkable quality could have remained for over a century outside the scope of interest of art historians.

*Text originally and mainly translated by Magda Iwińska*

## *„Betlejem, miasto Dawida” czyli słowo o malarstwie i wystroju tzw. pawilonu opata w Betlejem koło Krzeszowa*

Drewniany pawilon, stojący na środku niewielkiego stawu w miejscowości Betlejem koło Krzeszowa, kryje w swoim wnętrzu jedno z najbardziej niezwykłych dzieł malarstwa środkowoeuropejskiego baroku. Na ścianach ponad oknami, na wewnętrznej powierzchni dachu i ścianek latarni umieszczone zostały bowiem aż 24 malowane przedstawienia poświęcone w całości unikatowej starotestamentowej tematyce dotyczącej wody oraz osoby króla Dawida. Jaka była przyczyna zobrazowania tej tak rzadkiej tematyki we wnętrzu skromnej drewnianej budowli znajdującej się na leśnym odludziu pod Krzeszowem?

W 1674 r., kiedy to opat Bernard Rosa zdecydował się wybudować w tym miejscu kaplicę Groty Narodzenia Pańskiego. Jednonawową budowlę z apsydą i boczną niszą zaprojektował architekt M. Schuppert, który jako wzór przyjął kopię betlejemskiej Groty Narodzenia Pańskiego znajdującą się niegdyś przy klasztorze Augustianów w Pradze.

Wnętrze krzeszowskiej kaplicy dopełniły sztukatorskie dekoracje (M. Mayer, 1675) oraz w większości dzisiaj zaginione ruchome wyposażenie: ołtarze Trzech Króli i Świętej Rodziny z obrazami M. Leistritza (1675), nieznanymi obrazami M. Willmanna (1677) oraz stajenka z rzeźbionymi figurami (G. Schrötter, 1677). Nowowzniesiona kaplica stała się ośrodkiem kultu bożonarodzeniowej stajenki: w Wigilię Bożego Narodzenia w kaplicy odprawiana była uroczysta pasterka a dla pielgrzymów przygotowano modlitewnik *Liebliche Rosa von Jericho...* (Glatz 1678).

Tzw. pawilon opata został wzniesiony w odległości zaledwie kilkudziesięciu metrów od kaplicy betlejemskiej. Założony na planie regularnego ośmioboku, otoczony gankiem drewniany budynek został nakryty spadzistym dachem namiotowym zwieńczonym wysoką latarnią. Umieszczone we wnętrzu 24 obrazy układają się w trzy horyzontalne rzędy przedstawień. W najniższym rzędzie znajduje się cykl 8 biblijnych scen namalowanych temperą na deskach

bocznych ścian powyżej okien. Łączy tematyka wody: Hagar i Ismael na pustyni, Rebeka i Elizer, Mojżesz wydobywający wodę ze skały uderzeniem laski, Gedeon wybierający wojowników, Spragniony Samson, Jakub pojący swoje owce, Benajasz zabijający lwa i Elizeusz sprawiający cud oczyszczenia wody. Powyżej, na podwieszonych pod dachem wielkich płótnach o formacie trapezu rozgrywa się osiem scen z 11 rozdz. *Pierwszej Księgi Kronik*, które związane są z życiem króla Dawida: Obwołanie Dawida królem, Namaszczenie Dawida na króla, Dawid zdobywa Jeruzalem, Dawid rozbudowuje zdobyte miasto, Jaszobeam zabija włócznią 300 wrogów, Eleazar gromi Filistynów w Pas-Dammim, Jaszobeam, Eleazar i Szammot przebijają się do Betlejem i przynoszą Dawidowi wodę i Dawid wylewający przyniesioną mu wodę jako ofiarę dla Pana. Całość cyklu wieńczy 8 namalowanych na bocznych ściankach latarni owalnych popiersi wojowników Dawida: Jaba, Jaszobeam, Eleazara, Abiszaja, Benajasz, Elchanana, Asaela i Szammota. Niezwykłość tematyki łączy się z wysokimi artystycznymi walorami obrazów. Choć poważne zniszczenia narażonych na działanie wilgoci malowideł, usuwane podczas co najmniej dwóch gruntownych konserwacji (1926-28; 1982-91), odbiły się w sposób widoczny na malarzkiej warstwie przedstawień, to jednak dzieła te wciąż zachwycają swą kompozycyjną dojrzałością i konsekwentnie budowaną narracją.

Mimo że w dotychczasowej literaturze powstanie pawilonu i jego dekoracji malarzkiej nigdy nie było łączone z ideą naśladowania miejsca narodzenia Jezusa w Betlejem, to jednak architektoniczny kształt pawilonu a przede wszystkim treść dekorujących go malarzskich przedstawień pozwalają sądzić, iż został on wzniesiony właśnie jako ideowe dopełnienie ufundowanej przez opata Rosę kaplicy Groty Narodzenia Pańskiego. O ile barokowa podłużna kaplica powstała po to, by symbolizować miejsce narodzin Jezusa, to centralny budynek pawilonu o strzelistym dachu, wzniesiony na wodzie i dodatkowo opatrzony malowidłami o programie związanym z osobą króla Dawida, stanowił rodzaj architektonicznego znaku samego miasta i przez to stawał się typologicznym starotestamentowym dopełnieniem stojącej w pobliżu betlejemskiej kaplicy. W Starym i Nowym Testamencie oraz ewangeliach apokryficznych Betlejem kilkakrotnie nazywane jest miastem króla Dawida (I Sm, 16, 1-13; Łk, 2, 4; Ew. Gruzińska; Ew. Pseudo-Mateusza). Tego związku świadomi byli także krzeszowscy Cystersi, czego świadectwem jest tekst modlitewnika *Liebliche Rosa von Jericho...* Łączenie miejsca narodzin Jezusa z osobą króla Dawida było na tyle silne, iż niektórzy średnio-wieczni autorzy, jak Jan z Hildesheimu i Hugo od św. Wiktora, nawet umiejscowiali narodziny Dzieciątka

w zrujnowanym domu, bądź też pałacu Dawidowym w Betlejem. Pod postacią domu Dawida rozumiano nie tylko budowlę w sensie materialnym, ale symboliczny „dom Dawidowy”, z którego, jak głosiły starotestamentowe proroctwa (Am, 9, 11; Mi, 5, 1), miał wyjść Jezus. Związek miejsca narodzin Jezusa z miastem króla Dawida znalazł także odzwierciedlenie w licznych dziełach sztuk plastycznych. Poczynając już od czasów karolińskich zachodnioeuropejscy artyści często przedstawiali scenę Narodzin na tle miejskiej architektury Betlejem, a od czasów późnego średniowiecza dużą popularnością cieszył się także typ sceny Narodzenia, w którym Jezus, Maria, Józef i niekiedy także adorujący Dzieciątka pasterze, ukazywani byli w ruinach budowli identyfikowanej jako pałac Dawida.

O ile architektura centralnego budynku pawilonu imitowała wygląd „starotestamentowej” budowli, o tyle już umieszczenie w jego wnętrzu cyklu obrazów poświęconych Dawidowi jednoznacznie wiązało pawilon z osobą króla Izraela ukazanego tutaj w roli starotestamentowej prefiguracji osoby nowo narodzonego Mesjasza. Co więcej, zamykające cykl dwie sceny mówią wprost o Betlejem i znajdującej się pod murami cysternie z wodą, co - zgodnie z zasadą naśladowania betlejemskiej topografii - było główną przyczyną usytuowania drewnianego pawilonu na środku stawu, doskonale imitującego betlejemską cysternę. Natomiast cykl 8 starotestamentowych przedstawień, które dotyczyły wyłącznie wody, nadawał jej rangę kolejnej starotestamentowej prefiguracji osoby nowo narodzonego Dzieciątka jako źródła wody żywej (J, 4, 14; 7, 37).

Sfera symbolicznych znaczeń i odniesień „Dawidowego Betlejem” łączy się także z niezwykle popularną wśród krzeszowskich Cystersów ideą Emmanuela. Jej źródło - proroctwo Izajasza (Iz, 7, 14 oraz 9, 5-6), mówi bowiem nie tylko o imieniu oraz przymiotach Mesjasza, lecz także już w kolejnym zdaniu wymienia jako jego królewskiego poprzednika osobę Dawida. Tak jak dotyczący przymiotów Emmanuela fragment proroctwa Izajasza został wykorzystany jako idea przewodnia programu wystroju wybudowanego w latach 1728-1735 nowego kościoła opackiego w Krzeszowie, tak też pojawienie się w betlejemskim pawilonie cyklu malowideł ukazujących Dawida mogło być rezultatem świadomego nawiązania do kolejnego zdania Izajaszowej przepowiedni, mówiącego o Dawidowym królestwie, które obejmie Mesjasz.

Choć dotychczas sądzono, że fundatorem pawilonu na wodzie był opata Bernard Rosa, to jednak w zachowanych krzeszowskich archiwaliach i betlejemskim modlitewniku nie znajdujemy potwierdzenia tego opinii. Wydaje się, iż fundatorem betlejemskiego założenia był inny krzeszowski opat - Innocenty



Fritsch, znany jako gorliwy czciciel krzeszowskiego Emmanuela. Wskazuje na to głęboki związek malarzkiej dekoracji pawilonu na wodzie z wątkiem Emmanuela obecnym w monumentalnym wystroju nowego opackiego kościoła, a także podobieństwo roli, jaką w obu programach pełnią starotestamentowe prefiguracje. To właśnie za rządów opata Fritscha jednym z rysów oficjalnej historiografii opactwa stało się przyrównywanie krzeszowskich Cystersów do starotestamentowych Izraelitów.

Za takim czasem powstania pawilonu na wodzie oraz jego malarzkiej dekoracji przemawiają także stylistyczne i kompozycyjne cechy betlejemskich malowideł, wskazujące na pracującego przez długie lata dla krzeszowskiego opactwa Georga Wilhema Neunhertza jako twórcę całego cyklu. O słuszności tej atrybucji przekonuje porównanie betlejemskich malowideł z wybranymi własnoręcznymi dziełami artysty: ośmiopolowymi freskowymi dekoracjami kopuł w kościołach klasztornych Cystersów w Łądzie

i Filipinów w Gostyniu, freskową dekoracją sklepień opackiego kościoła w Krzeszowie oraz obrazami olejnymi *Ostatnia Wieczerza* z ołtarza głównego kościoła parafialnego pw. św. Andrzeja w Środzie Śląskiej i *Chrystus Ukrzyżowany* z kościoła parafialnego pw. NMP i św. Mikołaja w Bolesławcu. Malarzka dekoracja betlejemskiego pawilonu powstała zapewne podczas okresu artystycznej bezczynności Neunhertza, wymuszonej przez przeciągające się prace budowlane nad opackim kościołem. Miało to miejsce najprawdopodobniej już po powrocie artysty z Łądu do Krzeszowa, ale jeszcze przed rozpoczęciem prac malarzskich w nowym kościele, czyli w drugiej połowie 1732 roku. Skromny architektoniczny kształt drewnianego pawilonu na wodzie, wzniesionego zapewne przy minimalnych nakładach organizacyjno-finansowych, pozwala sądzić, iż to wypełniające jego wnętrze bogate malowidła od początku miały być głównym elementem tej inicjatywy, a bezrobotny malarz głównym jej realizatorem.