

**Mirosław P. Kruk**

University of Gdańsk, National Museum in Kraków

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8203-5922>

## Echoes of Iconoclasm in the Modern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

**Keywords:**

Erasmus Gliczner, Iconoclasm, counter-reformation, Fabian Birkowski, cult of images

**Abstract:**

On the wave of the so-called II iconoclasm, which encompassed northern Europe, similar movements, or rather local iconoclastic actions, were revealed in the Polish Republic in the modern period (16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century), wherever the voice of the dissenters was more intense, especially those representing more radical fractions of Protestant circles. Examples of iconoclastic acts from various regions of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth resemble occurrences known from the period of Byzantine iconoclasm although these parallels are more clearly visible in the literary aspect, as the political-religious freedom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth allowed for the publication of even openly anti-Catholic texts. Criticism of Polish Protestants towards Catholic religious practices was directed mainly against three manifestations of public religiosity, which they stigmatised in their polemics: Processions, the cult of selected Marian images, and the cult of relics and devotional practices related to the votive offerings. In this publication, certain problems are hinted at in relation to these manifestations of public devotion widespread in *Res Publica Poloniae*.



On the wave of the so-called II iconoclasm, which encompassed northern Europe, similar movements, or rather local iconoclastic actions, were revealed in the Polish Republic in the modern period (16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century), wherever the voice of the dissenters was more intense, especially those representing more radical fractions of Protestant circles.<sup>1</sup> Violent speeches against the excessive veneration that

---

<sup>1</sup> Most of the references in this article are repeated after the studies: Mirosław Piotr Kruk, “Refleksy pamięci o Bizancjum w homiletyce Fabiana Birkowskiego i Adama Makowskiego,”

surrounded images of saints, or against art in general in the interiors of churches, are generally known from Western Europe. Definitely less well known are such cases from the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian state. Below, selected examples of iconoclastic acts from various regions of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth will be cited, resembling occurrences known from the period of Byzantine iconoclasm. These parallels are more clearly visible in the literary aspect, as the political-religious freedom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth allowed for the publication of even openly anti-Catholic texts. While a number of studies have already been devoted to socio-religious tensions, this aspect remains insufficiently recognised from the point of view of artistic issues, such as the attitude to public devotion of Protestant representatives or the fate of specific works.<sup>2</sup> In this publication, certain problems will only be hinted at in relation to a few manifestations of public devotion widespread in *Res Publica Poloniae*.

---

in: *Amicissima. Studia Magdalanae Piwocka oblata*, eds. I.G. Korpala et al. (Kraków: Fundacja Nomina Rosae Ogród Kultury Dawnej, 2010), 269–276; Kruk, *Ikony-obrazy w świątyniach rzymsko-katolickich dawnej Rzeczypospolitej* (Kraków: Collegium Columbinum, 2011). Here I make no particular distinction between the different phases of Protestantism by focusing on the manifestations of aggression towards works of art.

<sup>2</sup> Selected literature on the subject: Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250–1550* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 1980); Janusz Tazbir, “Różnowiercy polscy wobec kultu maryjnego,” *Studia Claromontana* 5 (1984): 224–246; Sergiusz Michalski, *Protestanci a sztuka. Spór o obrazy w Europie nowożytnej* (Idee i sztuka. Studia z dziejów sztuki i doktryn artystycznych, ed. Jan Białostocki, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1989); ks. Jan Kracik, “Święte obrazy wśród grzesznych Sarmatów. Ze studiów nad recepcją kultowego dziedzictwa,” *Nasza Przyszłość* 76 (1991): 141–192; *The early Reformation in Europe*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1992); Katarzyna Cieślak, *Między Rzymem, Wittenbergą a Genewą. Sztuka Gdańska jako miast podzielonego wyznaniowo* (Wrocław: Fundacja na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej, 2000); Andrzej J. Frejlich, “Problem obrazu religijnego w protestancko-katolickiej dyskusji na wschodnich ziemiach Rzeczypospolitej w XVI–XVII wieku,” in: *Sztuka ziem wschodnich Rzeczypospolitej XVI–XVIII w.*, ed. Jerzy Lileyko (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 2000), 273–281; Jan Harasimowicz, “Sztuka jako wyznanie wiary chrześcijańskich wspólnot Rzeczypospolitej,” in: *Chrześcijaństwo w dialogu kultur na ziemiach Rzeczypospolitej* (Lublin, Wydawnictwo KUL, 2003), 472–503; ks. Jan Kracik, “Staropolskie polemiki wokół czci obrazów,” *Barok – Historia – Literatura – Sztuka* 11 (2004), 2: 9–22; Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Marcin Wisłocki, *Sztuka protestancka na Pomorzu 1535–1684* (Szczecin: Muzeum Narodowe w Szczecinie, 2005); ks. Jan Kracik, *Staropolskie spory o kult obrazów* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Petrus, 2012); Maciej Ptaszyński, “The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,” in: *A Companion to the Reformation in Central Europe*, eds. Howard Louthan, Graeme Murdock (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2015), 40–67; Eric Leland Saak, *Luther and the Reformation of the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Andrzej Woźniński, “Następstwa protestantyzmu we wczesnonowożytnej sztuce w Gdańsku i ich europejski kontekst,” *Karto-Teka Gdańska* 1 (2017): 41–53; *Maria zwischen den Konfessionen. Verehrt. Geliebt. Vergessen*, [catalogue of exhibition held in Wittenberg, 13 IV–18 X 2019], ed. Katja Schneider (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2019).

While the burghers of the cities of Pomerania recruited sympathisers of the teachings of Martin Luther (1483–1546)<sup>3</sup>, the Calvinist thesis was more attractive for the nobles and was much more confrontational especially with respect to the manifestations of the Catholic Marian cult. One can learn about contemporary views and concrete iconoclastic actions from polemical writings – on the one hand, representatives of Protestant currents, above all radical Calvinists, and on the other – of Jesuits and Dominicans standing at the vanguard of the counter-reformation movement. Characteristically, the representatives of the former, such as Erasmus Gliczner (1535–1603)<sup>4</sup> and Krzysztof Kraiński (1556–1618)<sup>5</sup> stigmatising manifestations of the Marian cult, perverted in their opinion, did not try to call for iconoclastic acts, while a representative of the contrary trend, Dominican and simultaneously Royal preacher Fabian Birkowski (ca. 1569–1636)<sup>6</sup> in search for examples of iconoclasm usually reached for the stories heard from Sweden or England.

At the same time, it is possible to point to the renewal of the arguments and counterarguments that were valid during the 1<sup>st</sup> iconoclasm, i.e., in the eighth to ninth century, including iconoclastic events commented on at the VII Ecumenical Council, that is, the Second Nicene Council. The preachers of the time were well aware of the legacy of the Greek Fathers, and so the Jesuit Father Adam Makowski (ca. 1575–1657), who was the spiritual patron of King Władysław IV's expedition to Smolensk in 1633–1634, in his funeral eulogy on the death of Fabian Birkowski recalled Epiphanius of Salamina, Bishop of Cyprus, Symeon Metaphrastes and Dionysius the Areopagite. In text of the sermon were Greek words interjected, testifying to a thorough education in reading the *Bible* in the language of the Eastern Church. It is significant that after Fabian Birkowski's death in 1636, his successor, Fr Jacek Mijakowski, recorded some twenty volumes of various writings by Greek

<sup>3</sup> "Directly after the publication of Martin Luther's theses in 1517, the first of Luther's publications appeared in the cities of Royal Prussia" – Tadeusz Glemma, *Stosunki kościelne w Toruniu w stuleciu XVI–XVII na tle dziejów kościelnych Prus Królewskich* (Toruń: Towarzystwo Naukowe w Toruniu, 1934), 31; Ptaszyński, *The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*, 42.

<sup>4</sup> Polish writer, religious reformer, theologian-polemist, educator, translator, leader of the Wielkopolska Lutherans. The author of the first pedagogical treatise on the upbringing of children in Poland – *Ksążki o wychowaniu dzieci barzo dobre, pożyteczne y potrzebne, s ktorzych rodzicy ku wychowaniuu dzieci swych, nauke... wyczerpnąć mogą. Teraz nowo uczynione y s pilnością wyrobione* (Kraków: drukowano przez Mattheusza Syebeneichera, 1558), in which, based on the *Bible* and ancient works, he criticised court and individual education, and recommended school one.

<sup>5</sup> Polish Calvinist preacher and superintendent of churches in Małopolska, preacher in Lublin, Opole Lubelskie and Łaszczów, theological writer. He supported religious tolerance with the Lutherans and Bohemian Brethren, and was hostile to the Jesuits and Arians.

<sup>6</sup> Polish writer and preacher. He made several speeches at burial ceremonies of outstanding personalities like King Sigismund III Vasa, his wife Konstancja, From 1611 until 1634 he served as a preacher on the court of King Władysław IV of Poland, and in 1622 as "Camp preacher" (*kaznodzieja obozowy*) during wars with Turkey, Muscovy and Walachia. See: Kruk, "Refleksy pamięci o Bizancjum," 269–276.

and Latin authors, which the deceased provided with commentaries in Latin and Polish.<sup>7</sup> Birkowski himself referred to the texts and teachings of Evagrius, Eusebius, St Basil the Great, and Sozomenos, modified by the teachings of medieval Western European theologians, which emphasised the utilitarian and didactic nature of church art. The author's views were thus part of the continuation of the teachings of the *Libri Carolini*, which were after all a reaction to the iconoclastic disputes in the Eastern Empire. Devotional images were used to express reverence towards God and the saints, and such was, for example, the copper image (i.e., probably a sculpture) of a woman kneeling at the Saviour's feet displayed outside the door of a house in Caesarea by a woman afflicted with hemorrhage, of which Birkowski knew from Eusebius' *History*.<sup>8</sup> In the writings of Protestant polemicists of the time, one can see the intensity with which views on art differed between Lutherans and Calvinists, to which Catholic theologians were not indifferent. One might even get the impression that in his polemics Birkowski directly referred to the teachings of one of the Protestant theologians more involved in this field, Erasmus Gliczner, who in his interesting treatise published in Königsberg in 1598 gave a long list of objections questioning the legitimacy of the creation and functioning of religious works. Birkowski had no choice but to appeal to the ancient tradition of the Church of both rites and to emphasise the utilitarian character of this art, which at times could not be denied miraculous powers.. At times, on the other hand, Birkowski seems to concede the polemicists' point, but to a limited extent, with regard to bad, i.e., immodest images.

It must be admitted that in the Polish lands iconoclastic acts also occurred, which proved that the oppression of opponents was in fact not limited only to polemics. It happened that the church occupied by the Protestants was shorn of furnishings, which were then destroyed. Jan Firlej (d. 1574), a courtier of King Sigismund II Augustus (b. 1520; king 1548–1572), occupying around 1563 the church in Kock (land of Lublin), ordered the burning of altars and paintings publicly on the market, while the image of the Mother of God in Wola Gułowska in Podlachia was extracted from the mud, thrown there by Calvinists after the conversion of the church in Łysobyki (now Jeziorzany; land of Lublin) to the Helvetic one.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Dorota Żralko, "Biografia Fabiana Birkowskiego w świetle kazania pogrzebowego Adama Makowskiego i badań archiwalnych," *Pamiętnik literacki* 96/2 (2005): 227. Fabian Birkowski was educated at the Lviv Cathedral School, where it was customary to teach the declamation of classical poets, and as a graduate of the Krakow Academy, he knew three languages belonging to the canon of a humanist's education: Latin, Greek and Hebrew – *ibidem*, 217–218.

<sup>8</sup> O. Fabian Birkowski, *Głos krwi b. Iozaphata Kvczewica, archiepiskopa połockiego, także b. Iana Sarkandra, męczennika morawskiego y obrazu bransbergskiego. Przy tym O śś. Obrazach, iáko maią być szánowane. Kazania Czwooro* (Kraków: W Drukarni Andrzeja Piotrkowczyka, 1629), 76.

<sup>9</sup> Frejlich, "Problem obrazu religijnego w protestancko-katolickiej dyskusji," 278. Jan Firlej may have had the opportunity to meet Martin Luther personally during his studies in Leipzig in 1537–1539. At that time, he briefly leaned towards Lutheranism and later became one of the best experts in Calvinist theology in Poland – Irena Rolska, *Firlejowie Leoparzi. Studia nad patronatem*

Thus, the basis of the described actions were the attitudes of some of the reformers and the impact of the Hussite movement, even though Hus himself spoke positively about religious images that were to be used for evangelisation, thereby resembling Luther's views. In turn, the radical Hussites attacked the cult of images in the *De imaginibus* by Nicholas from Dresden (d. 1417), the leader of the Prague school of the Black Rose:<sup>10</sup> The Polish Hussites were also involved in it, for example Piotr from Czchów took part in the attack on Nemecký Brod (Czech Havlíčkův Brod); the town was plundered, and the paintings were destroyed and burned.<sup>11</sup> The most famous was the Hussites' attack on the image of Our Lady of Częstochowa in 1430. The icon was – according to a legend – stabbed on the cheek with blood miraculously flowing out of the wound. The scar has been kept as a sinister and enduring memento and a warning against similar acts of iconoclastic vandalism.<sup>12</sup> The act of doing harm to the cheek belonged, as we know, to the *topoi* known in Byzantine tradition, and is known, e.g., in the case of the image of the Mother of God in the monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos.<sup>13</sup>

The attitude towards sacral works and their fate at the same time did not have to be as unambiguous as it might seem from the perspective of time. The adaptation of new, critical views looked interesting in Gdańsk, where Protestant teachings reached quite quickly and, in this rapidly radicalising environment, the furnishings of the important St Catherine's church were destroyed in 1523.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, in the heart of the city, i.e., in Artus Court, the fraternities consisted of the local elite – members of the aristocracy and wealthy bourgeoisie – tolerated

---

*i fundacjami artystycznymi w XVI–XVII wieku* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 2009), 46, 54.

<sup>10</sup> Nikolaus de Dresden, "De Imaginibus," ed. Jana Nechutová, *Sborník prací filozofické fakulty Brněnské Univerzity* 15 (1970): 211–240, 227; Paweł Kras, *Husyci w piętnastowiecznej Polsce* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1998), 186; Robert Maniura, *Pilgrimage to Images in the Fifteenth Century. The Origins of the Cult of Our Lady of Częstochowa* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), 79–85. Nicholas from Dresden was a lawyer, theologian, Hussite preacher, an advocate of radical social change, fighting against the Church and the nobility. Entangled in theological disputes between various Hussite factions, he left Bohemia. He was burned at the stake in Meissen.

<sup>11</sup> Kras, *Husyci w piętnastowiecznej Polsce*, 187. During the Hussite Wars in 1422 as a result of Battle of Deutschbrod, Brod was conquered by Jan Žižka and completely destroyed.

<sup>12</sup> *Najstarsze historie o częstochowskim obrazie Panny Maryi XV i XVI*, transl. and comments by Henryk and Monika Kowalewicz (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, 1989), 99; Anna Niedźwiedz, *Obraz i postać. Znaczenia wizerunku Matki Boskiej Częstochowskiej* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2005), 33.

<sup>13</sup> Anna Różycka-Bryzek, "Obraz Matki Boskiej Częstochowskiej. Pochodzenie i dzieje średniowieczne," *Folia Historiae Artium* 26 (1990): 12ff.

<sup>14</sup> Woziński, "Następstwa protestantyzmu we wczesnonowożytnej szuce w Gdańsku i ich europejski kontekst," 51. It happened just two years after wave of attacks on church property in Wittenberg after Luther's colleague Karlstadt had spoken out against the images – Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, 31.

large-format religious paintings hanging on the walls, supplemented by quotations from the Holy Scriptures, and there were even new commissions, e.g., of the image of Christ Saviour of the World (Latin: *Salvator Mundi*) in 1541, i.e., several years after the aforementioned tumult.<sup>15</sup> As pointed out by Katarzyna Cieślak, the official introduction of the Reformation to Gdańsk (1557) did not result in either a spontaneous or official action to remove the paintings; the positive appreciation of paintings in the Protestant-Augsburg Church had already become established. Lutheranism accepted church art, after all, with quite significant restrictions. Side altars and devotional paintings were abandoned, associated with the phenomena fought against by the Reformation: the theology of merit and the cult of saints.<sup>16</sup>

Andrew Pettegree noticed: “A Catholic visitor to a Protestant worship service in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Europe would immediately have been struck by stark contrasts to the familiar tradition of his own upbringing. The scale of the physical alterations would obviously vary, depending on whether he had stumbled upon a church cleansed of all images for Calvinist worship, or a Lutheran church, in which the internal fabric might be largely untouched.”<sup>17</sup>

The spread of Protestant ideas was undoubtedly fostered thanks to the stay of numerous Polish students in Wittenberg.<sup>18</sup> Conversions to the Protestant side intensified in the Przemyśl area towards the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and so, for example, Rev Stanisław Lutomirski (1520?–1575), a member of the Przemyśl chapter, became a supporter of the Protestant Reformation, revealing his views in 1554 after he had finished his studies in Krakow and Wittenberg.<sup>19</sup> In the documents of the Official Office of the Diocese of Przemyśl from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, it is recorded that

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, 53, il. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Cieślak, *Między Rzymem, Wittenbergą a Genewą. Sztuka Gdańska jako miast podzielonego wyznaniowo*, 3. In fact, art in Pomeranian churches began to revive and, after a break during the post-Reformation period, new foundations took place – Ptaszyński, *The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*, 6. During the parliamentary debate of 1555, Protestants had submitted their first common confession of faith to the king Sigismund August, in which they prohibited prayer to anyone except the One God and the depiction of His image, which was criticised by bishops Stanislas Hosius (Stanisław Hozjusz) and Marcin Kromer – *ibidem*, 53.

<sup>17</sup> Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*, 40.

<sup>18</sup> “Wittenberg became the most popular destination. 536 students from Poland and 453 from Royal Prussia matriculated at Wittenberg between 1511 and 1645. Though the Polish king officially prohibited students from studying at Wittenberg in 1535, they worked around these restrictions. Some ignored these orders while many matriculated at Leipzig in order to visit Wittenberg,” in: Dorota Zołądz-Strzelczyk, *Peregrinatio academica: studia młodzieży polskiej z Korony i Litwy na akademiach i uniwersytetach niemieckich w XVI i pierwszej połowie XVII wieku* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, 1996); Marian Pawlak, *Studia uniwersyteckie młodzieży z Prus Królewskich w XVI–XVIII w.* (Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu, 1988); Theodor Wotschke, “Polnische Studenten in Wittenberg,” *Jahrbücher für Kultur und Geschichte der Slawen* 2 (1926): 169–200; Ptaszyński, *The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*, 44.

<sup>19</sup> Tadeusz Śliwa, *Diecezja przemyska w połowie XVI wieku* (Przemyśl: Wydawnictwo Archidiecezji Przemyskiej, 2015), 271.



the local clergyman Fr Hieronim Piekarski (vicar and preacher in Radymno), whose origins were in the petty gentry of Podlachia, was publicly accused on 16 December 1546 by his colleague, altar servant Lawrence, that “publicly and privately,” contrary to the common belief of the church, he taught that there is no purgatory, that merits and intercession of saints do not help. He was soon forced to revoke his views before the tribunal and was to teach from then on, in accordance with the whole church and ancient custom, both about purgatory and the intercession of saints. After a few years, however, he married and “entered into heresy”.<sup>20</sup>

Criticism of Polish Protestants towards Catholic religious practices was directed mainly against three manifestations of public religiosity, which they stigmatised in their polemics. They were: Processions, veneration of selected Marian images, and the cult of relics and devotional practices related to the votive offerings.

## Processions

Processions were held on the occasion of liturgical feasts or to avert the scourges that haunted the cities, and the tradition of the first millennium was also revealed here, for example when the two largest plagues in Rome (in 590 and 1348) were to be stopped by the icon carried in the processions – the image of the Mother of God from S. Maria in Aracoeli.<sup>21</sup>

Belief in the magical power of Christian images was manifest in this regard as early as the fifth century – there is a well-known account of rubbing a piece of clothing over an image, such as Christ’s, to obtain the reverential power flowing from it. On Polish soil, accounts relating to the Jasna Gora image bear witness, including those of various denominations: one Calvinist described a procession during which its participants rubbed beads and scarves on the image carried by the monks and then on their faces.<sup>22</sup> Processions in the former Commonwealth were marked by what was most characteristic of Polish religiosity, namely its mass and its folk character.<sup>23</sup>

For the Protestants, the symptoms of this type of piety were naturally blameworthy. Calvin Krzysztof Kraiński, describing a procession in Krakow in 1600, reluctantly referred to the statue of the Virgin Mary carried before the monstrance which was “shaped [like] the veneration of the pagan goddess Venus, because it was dressed like a snowman in a very rich colorful coat with dissolved hair, wreath and

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, 269–270.

<sup>21</sup> Claudia Bolgia, “The Felici Icon Tabernacle (1372) at S. Maria in Aracoeli, Reconstructed: Lay Patronage, Sculpture and Marian Devotion in Trecento Rome,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 68 (2005): 29.

<sup>22</sup> Janusz Tazbir, “Różnowiercy polscy wobec kultu maryjnego,” *Studia Claromontana* 5 (1984): 227.

<sup>23</sup> Ks. Daniel Olszewski, “Pobożność pątnicza w polskiej kulturze religijnej przełomu XIX i XX wieku,” *Studia Claromontana* 7 (1987): 84.

crown'.<sup>24</sup> Significantly, for modern polemicists both Catholic and Protestant it was often important not to contrast idols with God but the relevant images to those which had mythological themes, so common at that time. It was written by Dominican Fabian Birkowski in Krakow in 1629, that these are images of fornication, which are the poison and temptation entering through the eyes into the soul.<sup>25</sup> Dr. Sebastian Petrycy was to encourage to replace on the walls the gods of Jupiter, Vulcan, the Vanir, etc., by religious paintings.<sup>26</sup>

The processions became a kind of manifestation of the Catholic faith, but also an opportunity to demonstrate the supernatural power of the venerated images, especially that of the Virgin Mary. As a result, legends proliferated about their miraculous rescue, or the punishment that befell dissenters who threatened them. The most well-known legend is from the time of the siege of Częstochowa, but also in the case of smaller towns, e.g., in Ruda Śląska in 1642, when Swedes threatened the monastery, the monks brought a supplication service to the Virgin Mary and then went out in procession with the painting, and when dense fog covered the church, the attackers mistook the directions and went off in another direction.<sup>27</sup>

## Cult of selected Marian images

However, what caught the attention of the polemicists were, as in the eighth century, the so-called miraculous images. These essentially included Marian depictions in their variety, and this devotion to Mary, manifested in festivals (e.g., *Assumption of Mary*), pilgrimages, hymns (e.g., *Salve Regina*) and the veneration of selected images, was criticised by Martin Luther at the dawn of his activity, who pointed out that it found no justification in the *Bible*.<sup>28</sup> In effect, the same actions as in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium were repeated, and the same arguments were put forward. The belief in the special protection of divine images had even older, ancient sources. Characteristic over the centuries, for example, was the belief in the physical protection of gate images. Crosses, sacred images, and often precious relics have been important objects to defend sacred spaces. Treated as objects having the power to drive away and destroy demons,

<sup>24</sup> Krzysztof Kraiński, *Postylla Kościoła powszechnego apostolskiego* (Łaszczów: Drukarnia kalwińska, 1611), 239; Kracik, "Święte obrazy wśród grzesznych Sarmatów," 188.

<sup>25</sup> Birkowski, *Głos krwie*, 75.

<sup>26</sup> Tadeusz Jaroszyński, *Zaranie malarstwa polskiego. Szkic do historii* (Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff, 1905), 7.

<sup>27</sup> Ks. Franciszek Wolnik, *Śłużba Boża w rudzkiej opactwie cystersów* (Opole: Redakcja Wydawnictw Wydziału Teologicznego Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2006), 123.

<sup>28</sup> Hartmut Kühne, *Maria im Luthertum des 16. Jahrhunderts – Kontinuitäten und Abbrüche, Traditionen und Umdeutungen*, w *Maria zwischen den Konfessionen. Verehrt. Geliebt. Vergessen*, [catalogue of exhibition held in Wittenberg, 13.04–18.09.2019], ed. Katja Schneider (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2019), 186.



they were placed in a gate chapel, that is, a holy space, the house of God. The image of Our Lady of Ostra Brama (Gate of Dawn) in Vilnius belonged to the most famous images guarding the city gate in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.<sup>29</sup> Placed in the new gate, earlier known as Ruska (Ruthenian) in 1498, she became the caretaker of the whole community in a metaphorical sense.

Protestants, and above all, Calvinists, claimed that the adoration of Marian images is idolatrous. Their criticism touched the most sensitive point of the Catholic faith, that is the cult of the Mother of God in the painting kept at Jasna Góra in Częstochowa. One can get the impression that the goal was chosen consciously – they tried to ridicule the cult of the most precious Catholic relic image and thus depreciate all other manifestations related to minor images. The way to do this was, for example, questioning the Maria's likeness in the picture to the historical figure, as well as the symptoms of idolatry, which was contrasted with pure faith, uncontaminated by idolatry worship. The image of Częstochowa in the opinion of reformer Krzysztof Kraiński (1556–1618) is ugly, black, scary, [too] elegant, great, has a Tatar-like face, a too-long and thick nose, and big eyes looking everywhere with interest.<sup>30</sup> He stated that it is enough to compare the description of Mary's appearance by "Nicephorus" with the image of Czestochowa in order to see that these are two different images, because according to Nicephorus' account, the Virgin Mary had fair hair, her face was white and elongated rather than broad, her eyes were merry, and she wore modest clothes. The image in Kraiński's opinion could not have been painted by Łukasz (Lucas), but by Rusin and was by no means a saint.

Catholics have come back with allegations against Calvinists, especially with frequent reference to the Cain parable, that they not only destroyed sacred art, but also replaced it by the allegedly evil and devilish, or introduced all that is lustful and inappropriate, that is, a variety of Venuses and Cupids hanged at homes replacing religious paintings. All attacks on sacral objects, especially those of the Holy Trinity and Christ crucified, in the Protestant countries or in places where iconoclastic acts occurred, were widely echoed. Such a set of examples was collected in his sermon by Fabian Birkowski, indicating that, for example, in London, the statue of St. Archangel Michael was crushed.<sup>31</sup> Birkowski argued, following John of Damascus, that images are useful and an aid on the road to salvation, polemicising, as it were, against the opinion of Erasmus Gliczner, who rejected this interpretation. The Protestant theologian referred to the tradition of the Church of the first centuries, which did not need images and, despite recognising the argument about the usefulness of religious images, rejected the possibility of accepting them in view of the threat

<sup>29</sup> Maria Kałamajska-Saeed, *Ostra Brama w Wilnie* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1990).

<sup>30</sup> Kraiński, *Postylla Kościoła powszechnego apostolskiego*, 715; Tazbir, "Różnowiercy polscy wobec kultu maryjnego," 228.

<sup>31</sup> Birkowski, *Głos krwi*, 55.

of the idolatry they could provoke. In his polemic he referred, among others, to Clement of Alexandria and Origen. And that is why, in his view, images could not be *instrumenta cultus*, books of the simple people, nor move people to good, because in essence all images are pagan. In doing so, it is hard to resist the impression that Gliczner went further in his criticism than Martin Luther, who regarded the Law of Moses as binding only on Jews and not on Pagans and Christians, noting that the *New Testament* did not address the issue of images, and that Christ accepted a coin with the image of the emperor.<sup>32</sup> It was important that word and image could complement each other, although the word was definitely more important, and images were allowed to be viewed rather than worshipped; it was possible to create sacral art, but its adoration was forbidden. Luther postulated to spare them for the sake of viewing, for the sake of witness, for the sake of memory and for the sake of the sign, because a pictorial way of thinking is inherent to man. He also agreed that irrational faith should be fought against, but he attributed to them the characteristics of *adiaphora* – a thing neutral, indifferent to salvation.<sup>33</sup> In his zeal to destroy images, Gliczner was, therefore, much closer to the Calvinists, who treated idolatry as the opposite of religion. Gliczner criticised the teaching of, for example, St Thomas Aquinas. In his view, praise of images instead of persons lead the faithful astray into idolatry.<sup>34</sup>

### The cult of relics and devotional practices related to the offering of votive deposits

As Fabian Birkowski testified, the actions against paintings also concerned relics which were burned, their ashes tossed to the wind and into rivers. The symptoms of popular piety were attacked, but what is interesting, attacks on the Orthodox Marian sanctuaries were avoided, which could have been dictated by the hope of convincing followers of the Eastern Church to unite in common action against the Counter-Reformation.

An individual form of image veneration, very well-developed in modern times, was the laying of votive offerings, generally of silver, whose bizarre forms often reproduced the shape of the healed members of the body. It was linked

<sup>32</sup> Cieślak, *Między Rzymem, Wittenbergą a Genewą*, 430.

<sup>33</sup> Michalski, *Protestanci a sztuka. Spór o obrazy w Europie nowożytnej*, 50–55; Cieślak, *Między Rzymem, Wittenbergą a Genewą*, 6–7.

<sup>34</sup> Erazm Gliczner, *Appellatia którą sie popiera y znowu wywodzi obrona dołożna Confederatiew krolestwa polskiego, z okazaniem pewnym, ze euangelicy Auspurskiej confessiey, tu w Polsce, w Litwie, w Prusiech y wszędzie w państwie korony Polskiej, w miastach koronnych, stołecznych, y innych: słuźnie, potrzebnie...* (Królewiec: u Jerzego Osterbergera, 1598), 48–51.

with pilgrimages, which were a central spiritual exercise of communities and individuals.<sup>35</sup> “Ordinary people were strongly attracted to ritualised pilgrimage piety with its cult of the saints, relics, special indulgences, and promise of miraculous cures.”<sup>36</sup> Votive offerings were an acknowledgement of the miraculous power of the image, so their number increased as the belief that events interpreted as supernatural took place because of it. The tradition of votive gifts dates back to the beginnings of Christianity, which inherited this custom from ancient times. For example, hundreds of votive offerings representing the most diverse body parts which presumably had been restored by the miraculous power of Artemis were found in the goddess’s sanctuary in Ephesus.<sup>37</sup> Widespread in the ancient world, the practice of donating votive offerings has survived to contemporary times. Hanging badges in the shape of miraculously healed hands or feet became a custom documenting the direct and tangible effects of divine grace. As John of Damascus wrote: “Accept, therefore, the teaching of the Scriptures and the fathers. If the Scripture says, ‘The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands’” (*Psalm* 135: 15), “it is not forbidden to bow before inanimate things, or the handiwork of men, but only before those images which are the devil’s work.”<sup>38</sup> Fabian Birkowski, as an argument for the veneration of images, repeated after Athanasius of Alexandria the legend of blood flowing from the image of Christ in Beirut, which healed all the sick witnesses to this miracle.<sup>39</sup>

Marcin Krowicki (ca. 1501–1573),<sup>40</sup> who wrote mockingly about the image of Jasna Góra, evaluated this belief and practice more seriously: “You are running from dozens of miles each year, in order to put in front of it heads, hands, legs, children who are silver and wax, and to wipe it with beads and handkerchiefs.”<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Bruce Gordon, *Switzerland, w The early Reformation in Europe*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1992), 74.

<sup>36</sup> Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250–1550*, 206. “Luther’s patron and protector, Frederick the Wise, maintained and displayed in Wittenberg as late as 1520 one of the largest relic collections ever assembled” – Julius Köstlin, *Friedrich der Weise und die Schlosskirche zu Wittenberg* (Wittenberg: Herrosé, 1892), 17; Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250–1550*, 91.

<sup>37</sup> Jacek Kościuk, *Wczesnośredniowieczna osada w Abû Minâ* (Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Wrocławskiej, 2009), 30.

<sup>38</sup> John of Damascus, *First Apology against those who attack the Divine Images* (26), transl. by David Anderson 1980, rev. by Miceal F. Vaughan 1996; [https://faculty.washington.edu/miceal/Courses/CompLit280/John\\_of\\_Damascus.html](https://faculty.washington.edu/miceal/Courses/CompLit280/John_of_Damascus.html).

<sup>39</sup> Birkowski, *Głos krwie*, 55. This legend, which originated in a speech given by Peter of Nicomedia at the Council of Nicea in 787, also had a wide resonance in the West, functioning in various variants, e.g., in the *Golden Legend* of James de Voragine (d. 1298) – see Piotr Grotowski, “Kształtowanie się toposu ikony ranionej a judaizm i islam, Portolana,” *Studia Mediterranea* 2 (2006): 131.

<sup>40</sup> Marcin Krowicki was a Polish Catholic priest who became a Calvinist in 1551 and a Unitarian in 1562. In 1561 he published *Obraz własny antykrystów* identifying the Catholic Church as the antichrist.

<sup>41</sup> Marcin Krowicki, *Obrona nauki prawdziwej y wiary starodawnej krześcijańskiej, którey uczyli Prorocy, Krystus Syn Boży, y Apostołowie iego święci: naprzeciwko nauce fałszywej y wierze*

Grzegorz z Żarnowca (Gregory of Żarnowiec, ca. 1528–1601)<sup>42</sup> again wrote about real faith as opposed to images, which are everywhere: “on the walls, on the streets, in front of which they kneels, falls, on knees walk around them, on which in pagan manner hands, legs, arms, heads, hair and rags they hang, confessing that they owe them healing”.<sup>43</sup>

\* \* \*

Disputes over images in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century were repeated during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with a recurrence of arguments from Protestants and counter-arguments on the part of Catholics. They were followed by well-known trophies, developed in other environments. The argument of Maciej Krowicki about the idolatrous cult of the paintings was opposed by counterarguments of Jakub Wujek who claimed that the paintings would be decoration for the Lord’s house.<sup>44</sup> Prejudices of Erasmus Gliczner find a reply in the writings of the Dominican friar Fabian Birkowski, who used the argument wielded by John of Damascus (ca. 675/676–749).<sup>45</sup> The fullest arsenal of the arguments in favor of the sacred paintings was presented by Piotr Hiacynt Pruszczyński in the introduction of his book (first published in 1662 with a second edition in 1740)<sup>46</sup> in which he stated that the sacral images are justified not only by the depiction of Christ on the veil (i.e., *Mandilion*). He recalled not only the depiction of the Mother of God left by Saint Lucas, but also the creation of a man in the image and likeness of God, and that in the Christian world it was Constantine the Great (ca. 272, emperor from CE 306 – 22 May 337) who from what we know according to his chronicler Eusebius (ca. 260/265–339)<sup>46</sup> started to decorate the temples with them.

---

*nowey, które uczą w kościołach swoich Papież Rzymski, a które odpowiedzią swoją broni Jędrzej Biskup Krakowski* (Pińczów: w drukarni Danielowej, 1560), 260; Tazbir, “Różnowiercy polscy wobec kultu maryjnego,” 227; Kracik, “Staropolskie polemiki wokół czci obrazów,” 14. Wax votive offerings were a kind of wax tribute paid mainly by peasants in rural parishes – Jacek Olędzki, “Wota woskowe ze wsi Brodowe Łąki i Krzynowłoga Wielka,” *Polska Sztuka Ludowa*, XIV (1960): 5–6; Jowita Jagła, *Wieczna prośba i dziękczynienie. O symbolicznych relacjach między sacrum i profanum w przedstawieniach wotywnych z obszaru Polski Centralnej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2009), 79–82. Metal votive offerings have been recorded since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and silver ones since the 17<sup>th</sup> century: Jagła, *Wieczna prośba i dziękczynienie. O symbolicznych relacjach między sacrum i profanum w przedstawieniach wotywnych z obszaru Polski Centralnej*, 82ff.

<sup>42</sup> Polish confessional polemist, postillographer, theologian and Calvinist preacher.

<sup>43</sup> Grzegorz z Żarnowca, *Postylle Krześcijańskie. Część Trzecia. W kthorey na cały Rok są wypisane Kazania o Świętych...* (Kraków: Drukarnia Macieja Wirzbięty, 1582), 588; Kracik, “Święte obrazy wśród grzesznych Sarmatów. Ze studiów nad recepcją kultowego dziedzictwa,” 162.

<sup>44</sup> Kracik, “Staropolskie polemiki wokół czci obrazów,” 16.

<sup>45</sup> See the four sermons collected in Birkowski, *Głos krwi, passim*; Kruk, *Ikony-obrazy w świątyniach rzymsko-katolickich, passim*.

<sup>46</sup> Piotr Hiacynt Pruszczyński, *Morze Łaski Bożej, które Pan Bóg w Koronie Polskiej po różnych miejscach, przy Obrazach Chrystusa Pána, y Matki jego Przenajświętszey ná Sercá ludzi pobożnych,*

In general, one has the impression that the old iconoclastic disputes of the Middle Byzantine period were transferred from the Mediterranean area to the area north of the Alps in modern times. Similar arguments and counter-arguments were repeated, including the Western revision of the Acts of the Council of Nicea (787) at the Council of Frankfurt (794), and if the Protestants stressed the abuses and degenerations in reference to the cult of images and statues, their defenders referred to the arguments of St. John of Damascus, pointing to the Incarnation, through which Christ made himself known and thus – as it were *ex silentio* – allowed the making of an image of his face.

---

*y w potrzebach ratunku ządajacych, z głębokości miłosierdzia swego, nieprzebránego, co dzień obficie Wylewa* (Kraków: w drukarni dziedziców Stanisława Lenczewskiego Bertutowicza, 1662), s.p.; *idem, Morze Łaski Bożey, które Pan Bóg w Koronie Polskiej po różnych miejscách, przy Obrazách Chrystusa Páná, y Matki iego Przenayswiétszey ná Sercá ludzi pobożnych, y w potrzebach ratunku ządajacych, z głębokości miłosierdzia swego, nieprzebránego, co dzień obficie Wylewa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (z *Addimantami*) (Kraków: W Drukarni Akademickiej, 1740).