



# The lamented *Coronation of Virgin Mary* by Włodzimierz Tetmajer in the Cathedral Church in Sosnowiec

PAWEŁ PENCAKOWSKI · Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Krakowie · <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5311-6099> · [ppencakowski@asp.krakow.pl](mailto:ppencakowski@asp.krakow.pl)

Wersja polska – s. 81

The Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Sosnowiec was built in the years 1893–1899 with the money collected by its parish priest Dominik Roch Milbert (1854–1916). The funds consisted mainly of gifts and contributions from parish residents, industrialists, and employees of the Sosnowiec mines, steelworks, as well as machinery, chemical and metallurgical plants that the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie (mining district) was famous for at the end of the nineteenth century (see: **Fig. 1**). The author of the design for the church building was the Warsaw-based architect of historicism and eclecticism style, Karol Kozłowski (1847–1902).<sup>1</sup> The style of the Sosnowiec church refers to Romanesque and early French Gothic forms, and it was built of brick with elements of stone. Father Milbert's fundraising activities also made it possible to complete the interior furnishings of the temple, build a parish house, and establish a cemetery. In 1897, the first five stained glass windows were installed in the interior of the church,<sup>2</sup> followed by a historicizing painted decoration of the vaults in the chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary<sup>3</sup>; the floors were laid, and the altars were installed *in situ* – in 1903 the main one, and then the side altars, by a graduate of the Kraków School of Fine Arts, sculptor Paweł Turbas (1851–1921).<sup>4</sup> These were financed, among others, from the donations by foremen

1 A.K. Olszewski, *Karol Kozłowski*, [in:] *Polski słownik biograficzny*, vol. XV/1, 1968–1969, <<https://teatrnn.pl/leksykon/artykuly/karol-kozlowski-18471902/>> (as of 12 January 2024).

2 Most of the stained glass windows, however, date from the 1930s. Their author was Jan Bukowski.

3 *St. Joseph with the Child* from the Józef and Anna Wilmowski foundation, *Archangel Michael* and two ornamental stained glass windows in the skylights above the entrance to the side porches and in the rosette of the façade.

4 His work belongs to mature historicism. The retable of the main altar superficially imitates the Mannerist altarpiece of the main altar in the Corpus Christi Church in Kraków. The side altars refer to the retables of the late Baroque period. More about those in: J. Wiśniewski, *Diecezja Częstochowska. Opis historyczny kościołów i zabytków w dekanatach będzińskim, dąbrowskim, sączowskim, zawierckim, i żarneckim oraz parafji Olsztyn*, Marjówka 1936, pp. 381–388; C. Ryszka, *Matka kościołów Diecezji Sosnowieckiej. Bazylika katedralna Wniebowzięcia Najświętszej Marii Panny w Sosnowcu*, Sosnowiec 2000, p. 55.



1. Wnętrze bazyliki katedralnej Wniebowzięcia NMP w Sosnowcu. Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

to 5 September 1905, the Russo-Japanese War continued, and in the meantime, on 22 January 1905, a bloody revolution began, which lasted almost two and a half years. Strikes and demonstrations in Sosnowiec broke out at the end of January, and on 9 February the Russian army massacred workers at the local Katarzyna steelworks (where 38 people died, and many were injured). In November, power briefly passed into the hands of the Citizens' Committee, soon followed by the pacification, deportations to Siberia, and persecution. All this was accompanied by increased activity of the tsarist army, secret police, and administrative bodies. It was in such circumstances that the decoration of the church in Sosnowiec was created. Two decades later, the painter Kasper Źelechowski (1863–1942), a close friend of the artists and a witness to their activities in Sosnowiec, who at that time was creating

and workers of the Milowice rolling mill and by the Sosnowiec housemaids. Other church equipment was ordered, various artifacts were imported, for example a copy of the Roman figure of St. Peter by di Cambio. However, these works were suspended with the prospect of creating a uniform interior decoration, at the initiative of the aforementioned priest Milbert, who had an interest in contemporary art and maintained contacts with the Kraków circle of Young Poland artists.

The painting decoration by Włodzimirz Tetmajer and Henryk Uziębło, which crowned the whole undertaking, was created in the years 1904–1906. It was a turbulent time throughout the entire Romanov Empire, as well as in the lands of the Russian partition. From 8 February 1904

a polychrome in the church in Niwka (today a district of Sosnowiec), told the story of the creation.<sup>5</sup> Żelechowski wrote that: “The constant harassment from the authorities because of the bold composition, enveloped in the most ardent patriotic spirit in the profoundest sense, threatened at any moment to interrupt the entire work, and to repress it. Undeterred by adversities, [they] completed their work.”<sup>6</sup> It is no wonder that the ideological program of the painted decoration of the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Sosnowiec seemed suspicious to the Tsarist censorship, as did the artists – foreigners.<sup>7</sup> What was acceptable in the early twentieth century for the local government authorities in Galicia, which enjoyed significant autonomy, triggered negative reactions in the Russian Empire. Having said that, in the peak periods of social and national tensions, as a rule invaders would focus on matters that were of primary importance to them, and admittedly the decoration of churches was not one of those matters. After the revolution was suppressed and the society was pacified, the empire, weakened by their defeat in the war and by the aforementioned rebellion, relaxed the pressure; and a “thaw” came, which manifested itself in politics and culture. Initiatives that had been started beforehand and those already completed, such as painted decorations or published books, were usually left alone.<sup>8</sup> Both painters, parish priest Milbert and the church construction committee took advantage of the time that was favorable to them.

The end of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century were a period in which great Polish painters boldly installed new painted decorations in the historical interiors of centuries-old religious buildings, as well as in contemporary buildings representing historical forms. The decoration of St. Mary’s Church, still belonging to historicism, by Jan Matejko, was of groundbreaking significance; and Matejko was followed by his students representing the art of *Młoda Polska* (the Young Poland), including Tetmajer and Uziembło, who were invited to decorate the parish church in Sosnowiec. We do not possess complete information about the development of the concept and the progress of the work, the contribution of both artists and priest Milbert to the preparation of the program of the ideological decoration, or the division of labor in its implementation. However, certain indications suggest that Tetmajer and Uziembło were thinking not solely about monumental paintings themselves, but also about stylish retables, belonging to the triumphant new art that rejected historicism. It seems that they were interested in a uniform style arrangement of the large-scale interior.<sup>9</sup> The Museum of the City of

5 Piotr Niziński and Stefan Matejko also worked there, as did the sculptor Paweł Turbas, who made the altars.

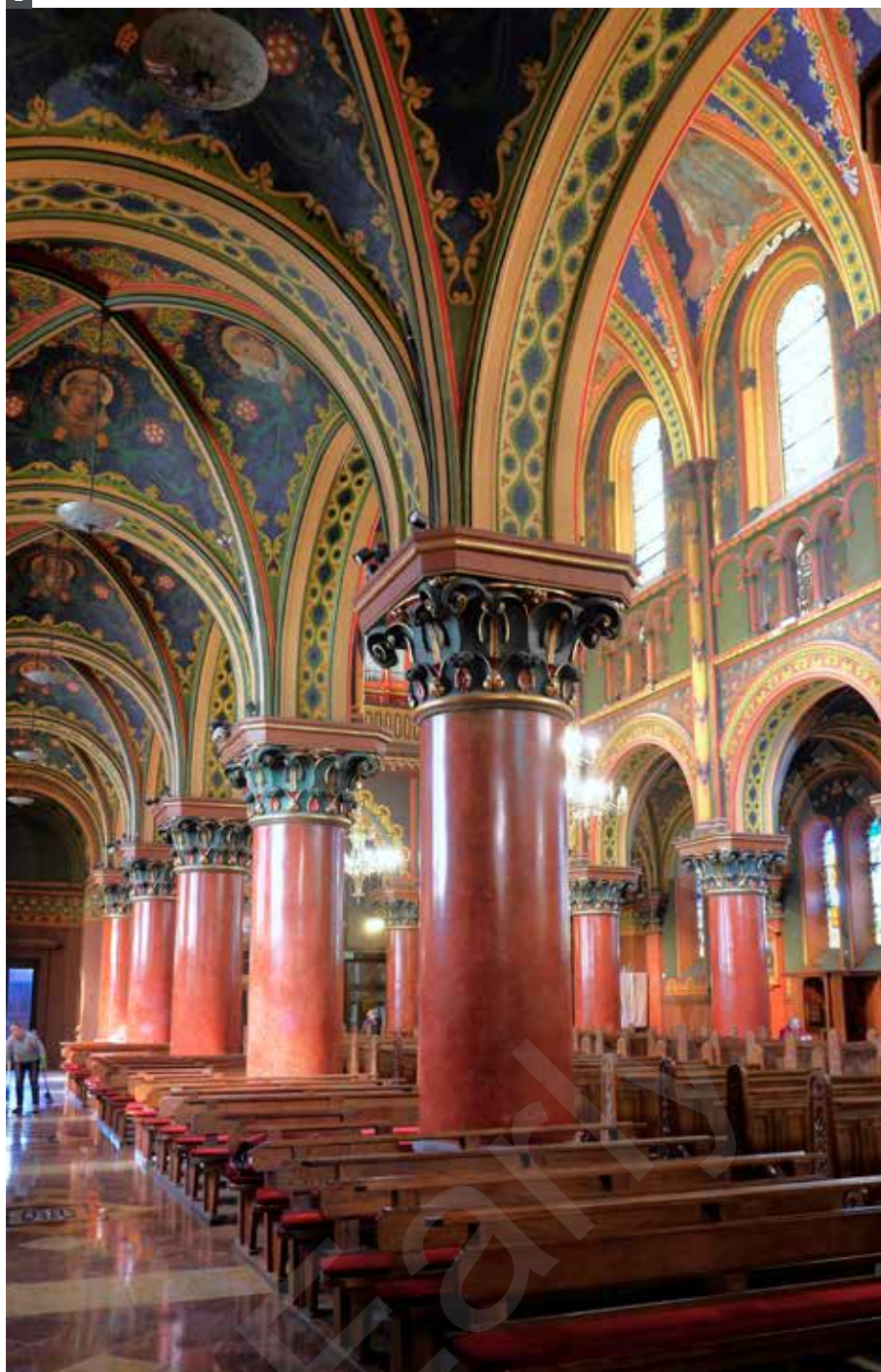
6 Report by the painter Kasper Żelechowski referring to the participation of Henryk Uziembło in the implementation of painting works in the parish church in Sosnowiec, dated February 7, 1925, notarial copy dated May 5, 1930, in the Archives of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, file 101 (Henryk Uziembło). Żelechowski also drew attention to the financial problems related to the implementation of the paintings in difficult times.

7 Tetmajer was an active politician in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

8 Corruption, which was common in the Romanovs’ empire, also played a role – and this was another way to paralyze or delay harassment.

9 We have no information whether they also planned stained glass windows. As we do know, the first ones were installed before Tetmajer and Uziembło were hired, but all the others were created in the early 1930s, according to the designs of Jan Bukowski (1873–1943), a painter, typographer, and interior designer, who was friends with Tetmajer. Perhaps their implementation was the fulfillment of a comprehensive concept from years earlier.





2. Wnętrze kościoła.  
Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

Kraków has preserved conceptual sketches, drawn in pencil, of three retables made by Tetmajer.<sup>10</sup> These combine the type of modern architectural altar (late baroque) with the modernist shaping of its form. The altars were designed to be fanciful and “disheveled”, and probably also very colourful. The drawings were made at a time when the main altar was already standing in the Sosnowiec church, and the side altars were in the works, funded by the local community, designed and implemented by Turbas in his Olkusz studio. Ultimately, the decision was made not to replace them, if only out of respect for the founders of the freshly fitted altars.

The Kraków artists divided their works according to their talents, preferences, and professional training (see: **Fig. 2**). Tetmajer was responsible for the iconographic programme, the ideological message of the whole, and the figurative parts of the decorations, as evidenced by the forms and iconography of his paintings, as well as the preserved cartoons and witness accounts. Uziembło – a comprehensively educated painter and interior decorator – designed the architectural paintings and ornaments.<sup>11</sup> These two component parts of the paintings differ noticeably from the point

of view of stylistic genesis, but they make up a harmonious whole. As Źelechowski wrote: “both [...] completed their work not only in perfect harmony and agreement, but remained the best colleagues and friends until the end of the late Włodzimierz Tetmajer’s

10 Muzeum Miasta Krakowa (Museum of the City of Kraków), reference number MHK-3146/VIII/2.

11 Henryk Uziembło had studied painting at the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts and the Académie Julian in Paris (1903–1904), as well as at the Kraków Industrial School, the Vienna Kunstgewerbeschule des Osterreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie (1897–1902), and was also educated in the field of interior design in London (1904–1905). The designs for the architectural paintings and ornamental motifs were exhibited by Uziembło in the Kraków Palace of the Society of Friends of Fine Arts in 1909. See the report on the artistic activity and exhibitions of works by Henryk Uziembło, issued by the Society of Fine Arts in Kraków on 10 February 1925. Typescript in the Archives of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, file 101 (Henryk Uziembło).



life.”<sup>12</sup> Technical analysis of the figurative, ornamental, and architectural paintings indicates that they were all created simultaneously.<sup>13</sup> Some full-sized cartoons have also been preserved in the collections of the Włodzimierz Tetmajer family and the Museum of the City of Kraków. Traces of stencils and lines intended to orient the cartoons remain *in situ*. The full-sized cartoons testify to the painter’s mastery of the large-format drawing technique and his workshop skills. The oil technique was used in the implementation, although – as



technological and conservation studies have shown – the layers in the presbytery are thicker than those in the other parts of the church.<sup>14</sup> Gilding with powdered gold and silvering was used, and subsequently glazed. Up close, one can see bold brushstrokes, characterized by the painter’s certainty of hand and revealing his temperament. Despite the generally smooth painting, impasto effects appear here and there, and in sections treated sketchily, the white underlay, used as a background or to represent the illuminated part of the presented object, shows through.

The paintings cover the entire interior of the church. On the vault, in its cross, a scene is presented, referred to as the *Coronation of Mary* (see: **Fig. 3**). If features is a huge radiant glory, against its background the kneeling Mother of God, and above them God the Father and Christ, and the dove of the Holy Spirit still further above. The third person of the Holy Trinity has the appearance of a heraldic White Eagle against a red background, in a golden quatrefoil ring, whose upper

**3.** Koronacja Marii w krzyżu kościoła. Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

12 Report by the painter Kasper Żelechowski referring to the participation of Henryk Uziembło in the implementation of painting works in the parish church in Sosnowiec, dated February 7, 1925, notarial copy dated February 27, 1925, in the Archives of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, file 101 (Henryk Uziembło).

13 Ornamental parts, painted with the use of stencils, overlap (over) the architectural paintings, while in other places it is the other way around.

14 Perhaps they economised on expensive paints. I owe information on the painting techniques and technologies of the Sosnowiec decoration to the monument conservator, Agata Malik-Ptaszyńska, PhD. Chemical tests were conducted by Maria Rogóż, PhD.



4. Chrystus ukazuje cierpienie Matki. Fot. Paweł Pencakowski



5. Głowa anioła w scenie koronacji. Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

part resembles a crown. In the lower part of the glory there are seven angelic figures. There are three more of those behind Virgin Mary; they hold the insignia of royal power. In the further plane, saints with haloes and figures without haloes are visible. On some haloes there are the names of Polish saints inscribed in Latin: *SALOMEA BE(ata)* and *S. HEDWIG(is)*, *JOH(annes) DVCLE(nsis)*, and by the head of the monarch, within the crown, there are the letters *DV(x)*.<sup>15</sup> Also visible are the head of a woman in black, and another one, in profile. In the corners of the span, the evangelists are shown with their symbols, which is in line with the age-old tradition of installing their images in the central points of sacred buildings.

The coronation of Mary is a heavenly ceremony performed by the Holy Trinity, concluding the history of Her earthly life and beginning Her reign in heaven and the whole world.<sup>16</sup> The story of the passage of the Mother of God from earth to heaven, extensively elaborated by Christian literature, takes into account a whole series of successive episodes.<sup>17</sup> In the program of the wall paintings of the Sosnowiec church and the large painting in the main altar, which was created in 1905, the two most important of those episodes were taken

into account: the Assumption, and the Coronation. However, in the church crossing, it is not the coronation itself that is shown, but the moment when the procession of angels bearing the crown and the royal mantle and groups of saints, who have been approaching Mary and the Holy Trinity, stopped, and are standing still. It is patently clear that the figures participating in the event do not express satisfaction or joy.<sup>18</sup> Mary, who bears the appearance of a Polish peasant woman, is immersed in helpless grief: this is evidenced by her pose, her bowed head, her face swollen from crying and her eyes filled with tears, looking towards the main altar. Christ further emphasizes this with his eloquent gesture: he turns away, as if he did not have the strength to look again at his Mother's sorrow(see: **Fig. 4**). The face of God the Father looks gloomy, the angel on the right, dressed in an orange tunic, is distraught (see: **Fig. 5**), the angels with a crown and an ermine cloak are sad, as is another angel – in a black robe – at Christ's feet. The shock and agitation mark the faces of the Evangelists. When analyzing the cartoon that Tetmajer made for the figure of Saint Matthew, we can conclude that in the painting he changed the angle of view,

15 This may be an image of Duke Henry the Pious or perhaps Prince Kazimierz – Grand Duke of Lithuania.

16 J. Fournée, *Himmelfahrt Mariens*, [in:] *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, E. Kirschbaum (Hrsg.), Bd. 2, Freiburg im Breisgau 1970, col. 277.

17 Ibidem. For centuries, they were the subject of theological and then artistic interpretations.

18 Which was not noted by those who wrote about these paintings: Daniela Sawicka-Oleksy, *Polichromia Włodzimierza Tetmajera i Henryka Uziembły w kościele Wniebowzięcia Najświętszej Marii Panny w Sosnowcu*, [in:] *Z dziejów sztuki Górnego Śląska i Zagłębia Dąbrowskiego*, E. Chojecka (ed.), Katowice 1982 (Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Śląskiego w Katowicach, np. 494), pp. 161–167; J. Nowobilski, *Sakralne malarstwo ściennie Włodzimierza Tetmajera*, Kraków 1994, pp. 41–58; idem, *Włodzimierz Tetmajer (1861–1923)*, Kraków 1998, passim; C. Ryszka, *Matka kościołów Diecezji Sosnowieckiej* (no page numbering).





thanks to which he showed a larger part of the face than originally planned, thereby emphasizing the anguish visible on the face of the Evangelist (see: **Fig. 6 and 7**).<sup>19</sup> The images of God the Father, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the despairing angel have their models in the figures of Tetmajer's recently completed polychrome painting on the wall of the Holy Trinity Chapel in the Kraków Cathedral (from 1902–1904); several years later, they were reflected in the Chapel of Our Lady of Consolation at the Church of Saint Nicholas in Kalisz (1909–1912).<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the mournful mood emanating from their faces and gestures in the Kraków and the Kalisz compositions comes from the fact that the figures are looking at the personification of the dead Poland, brought before the throne of the Mother of God, while in the Wawel Cathedral this is accompanied by the words from the Gospel *NON MORTUA SED DORMIT* ("she is not dead, but sleeps"),<sup>21</sup> and the call to *SURGE!* ("Arise!"). The presentation of a dead body to figures of a "higher order" – rulers and judges – refers to the age-old procedural act of presenting the body of a murdered person to the tribunal, as well as to the iconography of begging them for mercy or justice. However, the vault of the cross span of the church in Sosnowiec depicts saddened or agitated divine, angelic, and human figures who have gathered to take part in the coronation of Mary, a triumphant, dignified ceremony that although serious in its expression, is also joyful. What is more, their sorrow is shared by other figures depicted on the vaults and walls (see: **Fig. 8**). The Archangels Michael and Gabriel are sad<sup>22</sup> (see: **Fig. 9**), so are Saints Peter (see: **Fig. 10**) and Paul on the presbytery vault. In the



6. Św. Matusz Ewangelista, karton Tetmajera w zbiorach Muzeum Krakowa; nr inw. MHK-3146/VIII/2

7. Św. Matusz Ewangelista w kościele w Sosnowcu. Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

8. Archanioły i księżka Kościoła na sklepieniu prezbiterium. Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

19 The drawing is in profile, whereas in the painting you can see part of the face and notice its unambiguous expression.

20 In 1913, the tsarist censorship ordered some of the figures in Tetmajer's Kalisz composition to be painted over (they were uncovered again in the 1930s). See: J. Nowobilski, *Malarstwo ścienne*, p. 76; J. Dużyk, "Sława, panie Włodzimierzu". *Opowieść o Włodzimierzu Tetmajerze*, 2nd edition, Kraków 1998, p. 222.

21 Christ addressed them to the dead daughter of Jairus, whom he resurrected. Mk 5, 22–24, 35–43.

22 Their names appear on the cartoons in the collections of the Krakow City Museum.





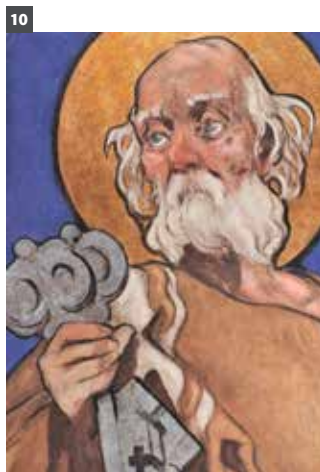
9. Archanioł Michał.  
Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

10. Św. Piotr.  
Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

11. Św. Cyryl.  
Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

12. Papież Sylwester.  
Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

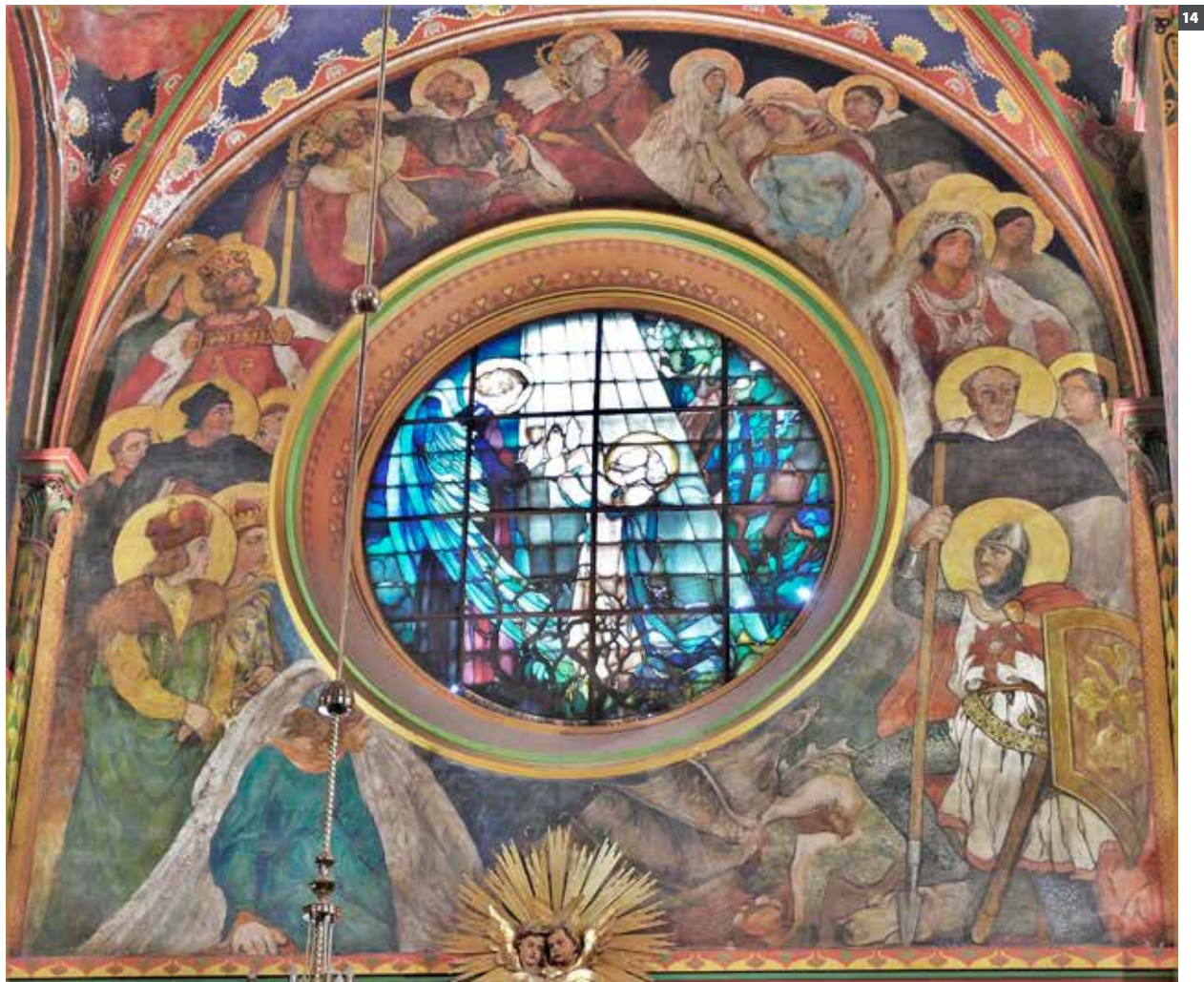
13. Papież Pius V.  
Fot. Paweł Pencakowski



main aisle and the arms of the transept we see the troubled apostles of the Slavs: Cyril (see: **Fig. 11**) and Methodius; then, gloomy kings: Stephen of Hungary and Saint Louis, the sentimental Roman knight Florian, the popes: tearful Sylvester (see: **Fig. 12**) and the pontificating Pius v (see: **Fig. 13**). On the vaults of the transept arms, we can see more apostles – on the northern side, Saints Thomas, Andrew, Thaddeus and James the Elder; on the southern side, Bartholomew, Simon, James the Younger and Matthias. The same feelings dominate among the figures represented on the shield walls of the transept (see: **Fig. 14**). Sorrow, anger and quandary are revealed in the images of Saints Adalbert standing next to the boat with the written text of the first verse of the *Bogurodzica* [Mother of God] in his hands, and his brother Radzim-Gaudenty – the first archbishop of Gniezno; the Kraków martyr Stanislaus of Szczepanów (see: **Fig. 15**) and the knight Piotrowin, whom he resurrected and summoned to the royal court; the Dominican Jacek Odrowąż; the saintly Franciscans and the blessed Polish Poor Clares of the thirteenth century (see: **Fig. 16**), Saint Jadwiga of Poland; Stanislaus Kostka. A worried Saint George stands over the slain dragon (see: **Fig. 17**), and we can also see a number of other figures, both clergy and lay people. Among them, a woman in Kraków costume draws attention, wearing a bonnet on her head, and with the Piast Eagle in the Crown embroidered on a red bodice (see: **Fig. 18**). This is a portrait of Anna neé Mikołajczyk, the wife of Włodzimierz Tetmajer, who in this instance – in accordance with the painter’s understanding of her person – is a personification of the “entire homeland.”<sup>23</sup>

23 “Ty, jak anioł zawsze przy mym boku / drużko Ty wierna, ucieczko w potrzebie. / W Tobie wieś polską, polskie pola żyzne / i w Tobie całą ja widzę Ojczyznę...” [You, like an angel always by my side / my faithful friend, my refuge in need. / I see in you the Polish village, the fertile Polish fields / in you, I see the entire Homeland...], W. Tetmajer, *Do mojej żony* [To my Wife], [in:] *Marsz Skrzyneckiego*, Kraków 1915, p. 13.





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14. Malowidła w prawym ramieniu transeptu. Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

15. Św. Stanisław ze Szczepanowa. Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

16. Święta niewiasta (bł. Jolenta?). Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

17. Św. Jerzy. Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

18. Personifikacja Ojczyzny – portret Anny z Mikołajczyków Tetmajerowej. Fot. Paweł Pencakowski







The large-scale paintings on the walls show: the baptism of Poland (see: **Fig. 21**), the baptism of Lithuania, the Lwów vows of king Jan Kazimierz (see: **Fig. 22**), according to which the Mother of God became the Queen of Poland (and the Grand Duchess of Lithuania), the homage paid to Virgin Mary and Christ Child, or perhaps to the Holy Family, by the Three Kings of Poland – Kazimierz Wielki, Stefan Batory, and Jan III Sobieski (see: **Fig. 23**).<sup>25</sup> Also featured are the Holy Family

**21.** Chrzest Polski.  
Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

**22.** Śluby lwowskie Jana Kazimierza – fragment.  
Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

**23.** Pokłon Trzech Królów Polski.  
Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

<sup>25</sup> They can be treated as Tetmajer's *sui generis* response to Matejko's two historical cycles and the collection of drawings called "Poczet Królów i Książąt Polskich" ["Gallery of Polish Kings and Princes"]. The fragmentary nature of this response does not change the fact that the Master's student presented his own version of historical events and the people taking part in them, Young Poland-style (and folk-based in the sense of costumes, among other things).





24. Wniebowzięcie Marii w otłarzu głównym. Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

with Saints Elizabeth and John the Baptist, a nocturne with the Holy Family at the feet of the Great Sphinx, the Crucifixion of Christ, His Resurrection, the finding of the Holy Cross by Saint Helena and the miracle of the resurrection of the latter deceased saint that was associated with it. Generally speaking, scenes from the history of Salvation and the Holy Cross are interwoven with events from the history of Poland. Then, there are King David and Saint Cecilia at the entrance to the music stand, and the meeting of Blessed Kinga and Bolesław Wstydlivy with miners, which is a reference to organists and parish choirs as well as employees of the mining district of Zagłębie.

In these paintings, in a way characteristic of Tetmajer's art, folk types of Kraków and Podhale, as well as regional and historical costumes and accessories were shown (in the "Tetmajer editorial"). Tetmajer presented the viewers of the early twentieth century with an eternal people, the "royal Piast tribe", unchanged in appearance, costumes, and gestures until that time. In the representations of the Holy Family at the feet of the Great Sphinx, the Crucifixion, the Finding of the Holy Cross, and in the figures of some of the apostles, one can see oriental features of costume. The huge sphinx, raising its eyes to the sky, at whose feet Mary with the Child and Saint Joseph are crouching represents the riddle of existence, the power of wisdom and strength, according to Father Wiśniewski.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps it may also symbolize the eternal longing of humanity for God, whereas the night scene seems to refer to people persecuted and fleeing from their own country to a foreign land, alone and vulnerable in the face of the forces of the ancient and modern world. The painting *Odnalezienie Krzyża Świętego* [*The Finding*

*of the Holy Cross*] shows a dead woman on a bier. According to an ancient legend, written by Saint Ambrose, the cross of Christ found by Saint Helena on Golgotha was recognized when the deceased saint came back to life after touching it. Here we have a metaphor for the situation of Poland at the beginning of the twentieth century, a prophecy of its future history, and a manifestation of the belief spread by mystics and poets that the resurrection of Poland would occur through the Cross.

In the ideological program of the painted decoration of the church in Sosnowiec, the ceremony of the coronation of Mary, presented on the vault of the cross span and linked in terms of content to the painting in the main altar, is of key importance. The impossibility of performing this act in heaven and the invalidity of the monarchic title, granted two and a half centuries earlier in Lviv by King Jan Kazimierz, evokes reactions of grief in its witnesses in the heavens, and its participants on earth alike. Tetmajer also presented, in a subtle and veiled way (probably due to

26 J. Wiśniewski, *Diecezja Częstochowska*, p. 385; M. Marek, *O wystawie i twórczości Włodzimierza Tetmajera*, [in:] M. Marek, P. Hapanowicz, *Włodzimierz Tetmajer. Siła barw i temperamentu*, catalogue of an exhibition at the National Museum in Kraków, Kraków 2023, p. 52.



the Tsarist censorship), the reason why the coronation is unfulfilled and lamented. This is indicated in the altar painting *Wniebowzięcie Marii* [Assumption of Virgin Mary] (see: **Fig. 24**). In the lower section of the painting in question, we see an open grave, covered by the black and navy blue wings of an angel standing with his back to the viewer, and lit from the front. A lily – a symbol of innocence and purity – is growing by the grave. Next to the mournful “Angel of Death”,<sup>27</sup> looking into the abyss of the grave, we can see the heads and wings of several others, and we can also see light shining from below. In the centre of the painting, Mary is shown floating in the sky in a white dress with a purple and blue veil (see: **Fig. 25**). Anna née Mikołajczyk also posed for this figure, and the angels surrounding her have the features of the Tetmajer children.<sup>28</sup> The tearful kneeling angel on the left hand-side of the Mother of God is clearly highlighted, shown in profile, and standing out against the dark background (see: **Fig. 26**).

The angel, with the appearance of a Polish village child, looks down and sheds tears. Tetmajer drew just such a young lady, in a similar take, as a study for an altar painting, and one of his daughters posed for him.<sup>29</sup> The angels’ attention is focused on the open tomb as the latter is not empty.<sup>30</sup> What are the crying “Polish angel” and the “Angel of Death” looking at, then? What is hidden behind the



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27 We can recall that in 1906 Włodzimierz Tetmajer’s half-brother, the poet Kazimierz, published a contemporary novel entitled *Anioł Śmierci* [The Angel of Death]. In it, the angel is an ominous statue of white marble, with the face of one of the heroines.

28 In the years 1904–1905, Tetmajer drew several sketchy portraits of his children in various views and a study of large wings in pencil on paper. They were created as studies for the painting in question. [in:] M. Marek, P. Hapanowicz, *Włodzimierz Tetmajer*, p. 239, catalogue numbers 240 and 329, p. 313.

29 Reproduction, among others, in: M. Marek, P. Hapanowicz, *Włodzimierz Tetmajer*, catalogue number 307, p. 305. The entry states that this is a study for a project of polychrome painting in the Holy Trinity Chapel of the Wawel Cathedral.

30 In early modern representations of the Assumption of Mary – for example, by Veronese, Rubens, seventeenth-century Spanish painters, Tiepolo, etc. – some apostles look into the tomb, noting that it is empty. In Sosnowiec, there are no apostles, while the angels look into the tomb with regret – precisely because it is not empty.



26

**25.** Maria w scenie Wniebowzięcia.  
Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

**26.** Płaczący anioł w scenie Wniebowzięcia Marii.  
Fot. Paweł Pencakowski

black angel's wings, and who remains in the tomb that the Virgin Mary has just left? There lies the unfortunate Fatherland, which is yet to be resurrected from the dead.<sup>31</sup> The Mother of God and Poland lay in one shared grave, and the latter still remains therein. This is why Mary cannot don the crown of the Queen of Poland or cover herself with the royal mantle, and the participants of the ceremony which did not take place are sad, desperate, and agitated. They belong to the coronation procession and experience the injustice that befalls the Mother of Christ and Poland – the mother of her people. The weeping Virgin Mary also gazes down on the Homeland from the vault in the cross span, turning her head towards it (see: **Fig. 3** and **19**). The tomb is open, so the figure of the dead Poland can be viewed from above by angels and saints, but the Three Divine Persons look in another direction: this is a sign that the longed-for time of Poland's Resurrection has not yet come... However, it is the Holy Trinity that is the addressee of the plea presented by the participants of the mournful ceremony in the heavens, and the Poles of old and present join in that plea. Theirs and their Homeland's eternal connection with Christianity, the honour paid to the Mother of God and the title of Queen of Poland granted to her in times of historical trial are depicted on the walls, and thus presented at the feet of the divine throne. In view of the faithfulness, merits, and long-lasting historical wrongs, the Mother of God, the Church Triumphant in heaven, the Church Fighting on earth, the unfortunate Poland lying in the grave, and the Poles gathering in the Sosnowiec temple all await God's judgment, His mercy, and the word *Surge!* The painters expressed this in the text associated with the "charitable" composition and jointly signed by both artists, in which we read:

*KOŚCIÓŁ TEN (...) W R. P. 1904-05-  
1906 MALOWANIEM OZDOBIONY ZOSTAŁ  
KU BOŻEJ CHWALE I TEJ RZECZYPOSPOLITEJ  
NIESZCZĘŚLIWEJ WSPOMOŻENIU DLA DŹWI-  
GNIĘCIA SERC WSZYSTKICH POLAKÓW. OZDO-  
BIONA ŚWIĄTYNIA NIECHAJ BĘDZIE PRZYBYT-  
KIEM WIARY W SPRAWIEDLIWOŚĆ BOŻĄ.*

*[THIS CHURCH (...) IN THE YEAR OF THE LORD 1904-05-  
1906 WAS DECORATED WITH PAINTING  
FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF GOD AND THIS UNHAPPY  
REPUBLIC, TO HELP SOOTHE THE HEARTS OF ALL POLES.  
MAY THUS DECORATED TEMPLE BE THE TABERNACLE  
OF FAITH IN GOD'S JUSTICE.]*

*Włodzimierz Przerwa Tetmajer Henryk Uziembło*

31 We may recall that the Bronowice farmer, artist and politician – Włodzimierz Tetmajer – admonished his loved ones to “love the deceased Fatherland and worship it like you love and worship God! And believe that a new star will shine for us! And through the countryside to independent Poland!” [“kochać zmarłą Ojczyznę, i czcić Ją, jak Boga! A wierzyć, że się nowa nam gwiazda zaświeci! I przez wieś do Polski niepodległej droga!”] These are stanzas from the poem *Na dom bronowski* [*The Bronowice Home*], published in the volume *Marsz Skrzyneckiego* [*Skrzynecki's March*], p. 7. The painter's poetic achievements are discussed by Leokadia Pośpiechowa, *Twórczość literacka Włodzimierza Tetmajera*, Wrocław 1974.



## Abstract

### ***The lamented Coronation of Virgin Mary by Włodzimierz Tetmajer in the Cathedral Church in Sosnowiec***

The text presents significant and previously overlooked aspects of the iconographic program of the Young Poland-era mural decoration by Kraków painters Włodzimierz Tetmajer and Henryk Uziembło in the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Sosnowiec. The murals were created in the main city of the Silesian-Dąbrowa Basin during the turbulent years of 1904-1906. An analysis of the program's elements indicates that the depiction of the Coronation of Mary at the center of the church deviates from traditional and unequivocal representations. The interpretation of the iconography reveals that, according to Tetmajer – the author of the concept – it is a coronation that cannot be carried out, unfulfilled and irrelevant concerning the dignity of the Virgin Mary as the Queen of Poland. This is because Poland, the deceased Motherland of its people, lies in the grave, where the Virgin Mary also rested before the Assumption. This is confirmed by the analysis of the iconography and the message of the painting “The Assumption of Mary” in the main altar. It subtly but unmistakably suggests that the grave is not empty. This state of affairs evokes despair, sorrow, and agitation among the participants of the halted, impossible-to-conduct coronation ceremony in heaven, as well as among some of the angels accompanying the ascending Virgin Mary. At the foot of the divine throne, all of them await justice and mercy. Their arguments, and the basis of their pleas, are the eternal faithfulness of Poland and the Polish people to Christianity, the Church, and the Virgin Mary, depicted in historical scenes on the church walls, such as the Baptism of Poland, the Baptism of Lithuania, the Lwów Oaths of King John II Casimir, and the Homage of the Polish Kings to the Virgin Mary with the Child.

#### KEYWORDS:

Church of the Assumption of Mary in Sosnowiec, polychrome by Włodzimierz Tetmajer, unfulfilled coronation of Mary

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Early View