

RENAISSANCE ARCHITECTURE IN CRACOW — GENERAL FEATURES AND REGIONAL PECULIARITIES*

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Summary

Polish Renaissance — especially that in Cracow — is an outstanding phenomenon in Renaissance in Central Europe. It has been introduced by immigrating Italian architects who, however, soon naturalized, and integrated Polish architectural traditions — especially Gothic ones — to Italian Renaissance, creating thereby a typical Polish Renaissance style. Also political events were favourable to the golden age of Polish architecture. Several excellent constructions have arisen at that time, and so have architectural elements e.g. multiple galleries or roof parapets, regional features becoming widely extended.

Political, social and economic links between countries belonging to different artistic and cultural circles have always been a platform for penetration of mutual influences affecting arts in general and architecture in particular. The search for common features and for ways of interpenetration of artistic form and content is a fascinating topic both for art historians and for historians of architecture. The external influences and foreign imports in Middle Ages have an extensive Polish and European bibliography [1]. Similarly has it the Renaissance, whose art is a permanent subject of investigations giving ever new important results concerning both mutual influences between countries and regional differences [2].

In this context let us mention the role of Budapest as a centre stimulating research on arts in particular of Renaissance, in Central Europe. One should recall such activities as the Congress of Historians in 1953, the International Conference in 1956 devoted to the Twilight of Middle Ages and the beginning of modern times in Central Europe, or the XXII-nd International Congress of the History of Art in 1969, devoted, among others, to the problems of art in Central Europe.

Also in Poland, a number of symposia were concerned with investigations of arts in Central Europe, particularly Renaissance. Some of them, such as

* Contribution at the International Conference of Educational and Research Teams in History, Theory of Architecture and in Monuments Preservation, Budapest, December 4 to 7, 1984.

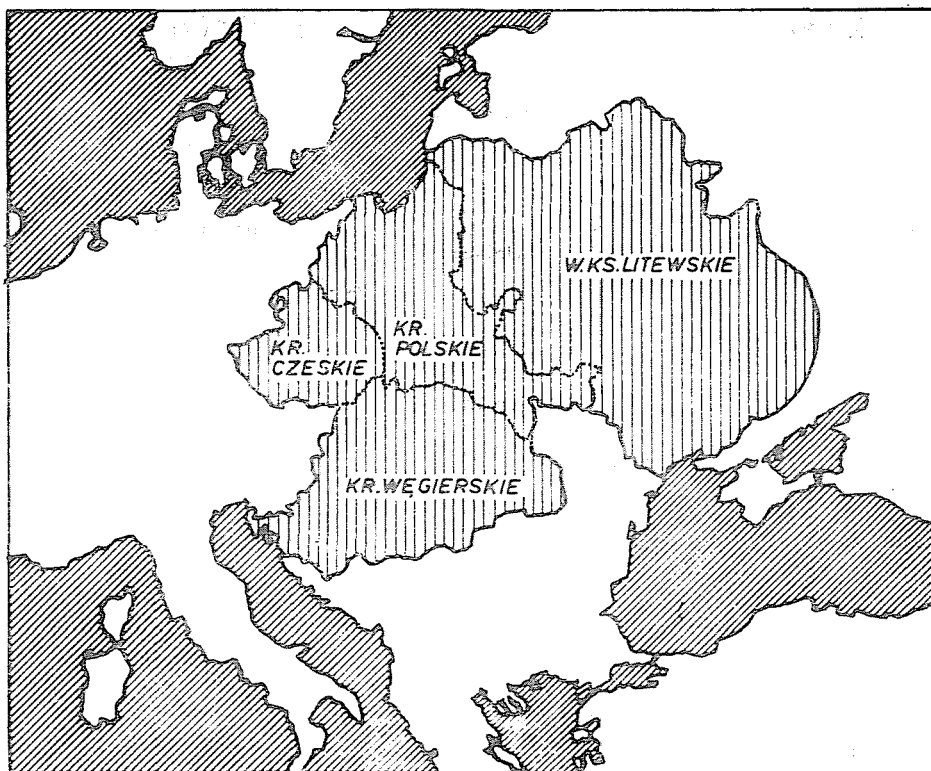


Fig. 1. Map of "Imperium Jagellonicum"

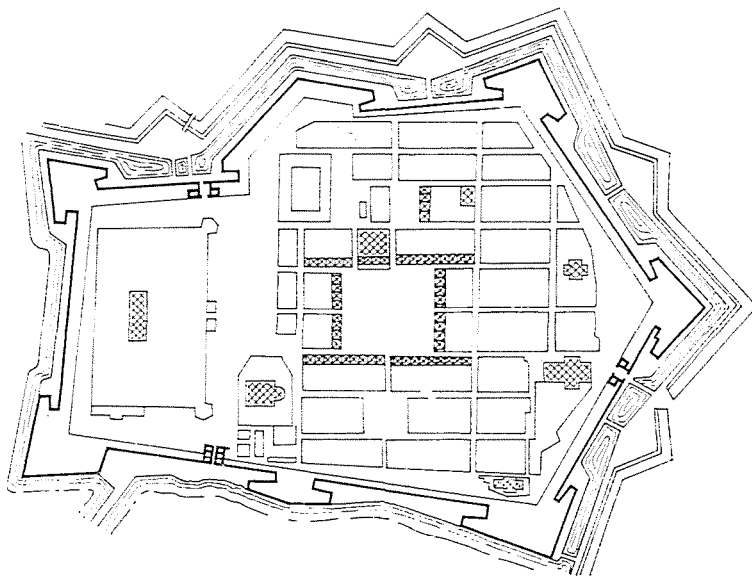


Fig. 2. Plan of the "Ideal city" of Zamość No. 1 — palace of Zamojski family

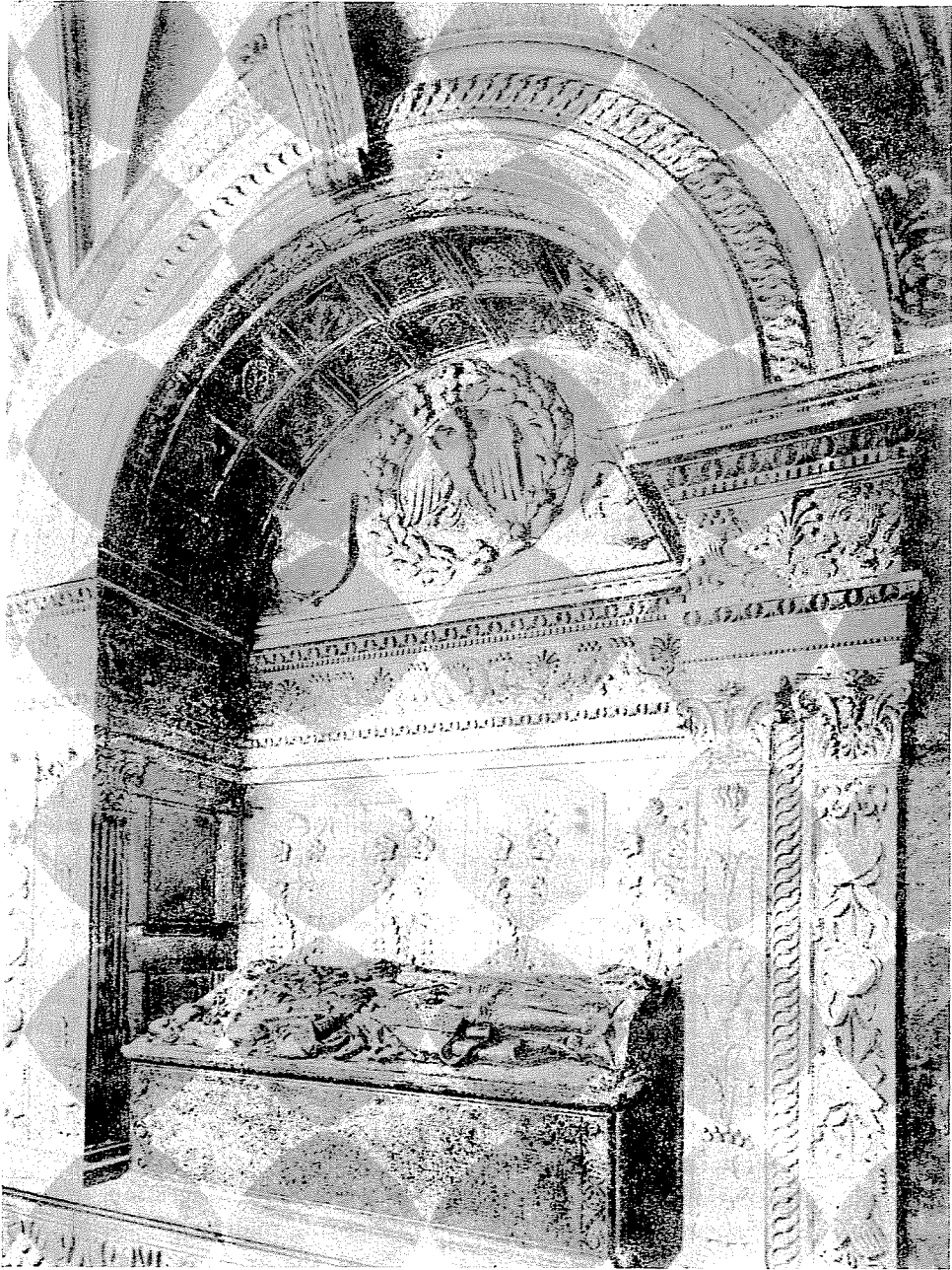


Fig. 3. Tomb of King Jan Olbracht in the Royal Cathedral on Wawel Hill in Cracow

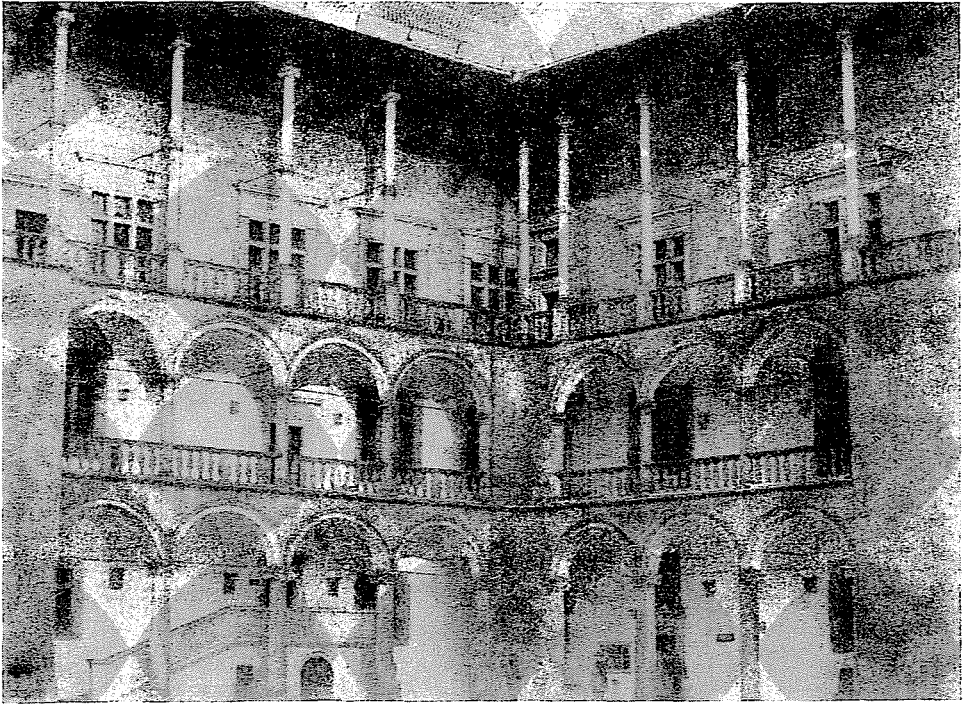


Fig. 4. Courtyard of the Wawel Royal Castle in Cracow

the Symposium on Renaissance in Poland organized by the Polish Academy of Sciences in 1972 and that organized by the Society of Art Historians in 1973 have to be mentioned here.

At a difference from Lajos Vayer's somewhat questionable suggestion to consider the territory of Central Europe sited between the Rhine in the West and the Vistula in the East [3], Polish researchers are inclined to agree with Tatarkiewicz's idea that criteria, comprising political, economic, social, cultural and artistic links, cannot be tested over such a vast territory [4]. The theory of "integration of art and politics", gaining ground recently, can best be documented just by finding the origins of Central European distinctness of Renaissance arts and also confirms definition of a more limited territory. The political situation of Poland emerging from feudal disintegration, unified as the result of the efforts of last Piasts and fighting under the first king of a new dynasty — Władysław Jagiełło — against the growing inrush of the Teutonic Knights power, is here of crucial importance. It seems plausible to look for the origin of the integration of peoples inhabiting the territory of Central Europe in the common struggle on the Grunwald fields and in the common contribution to the Grunwald Victory.

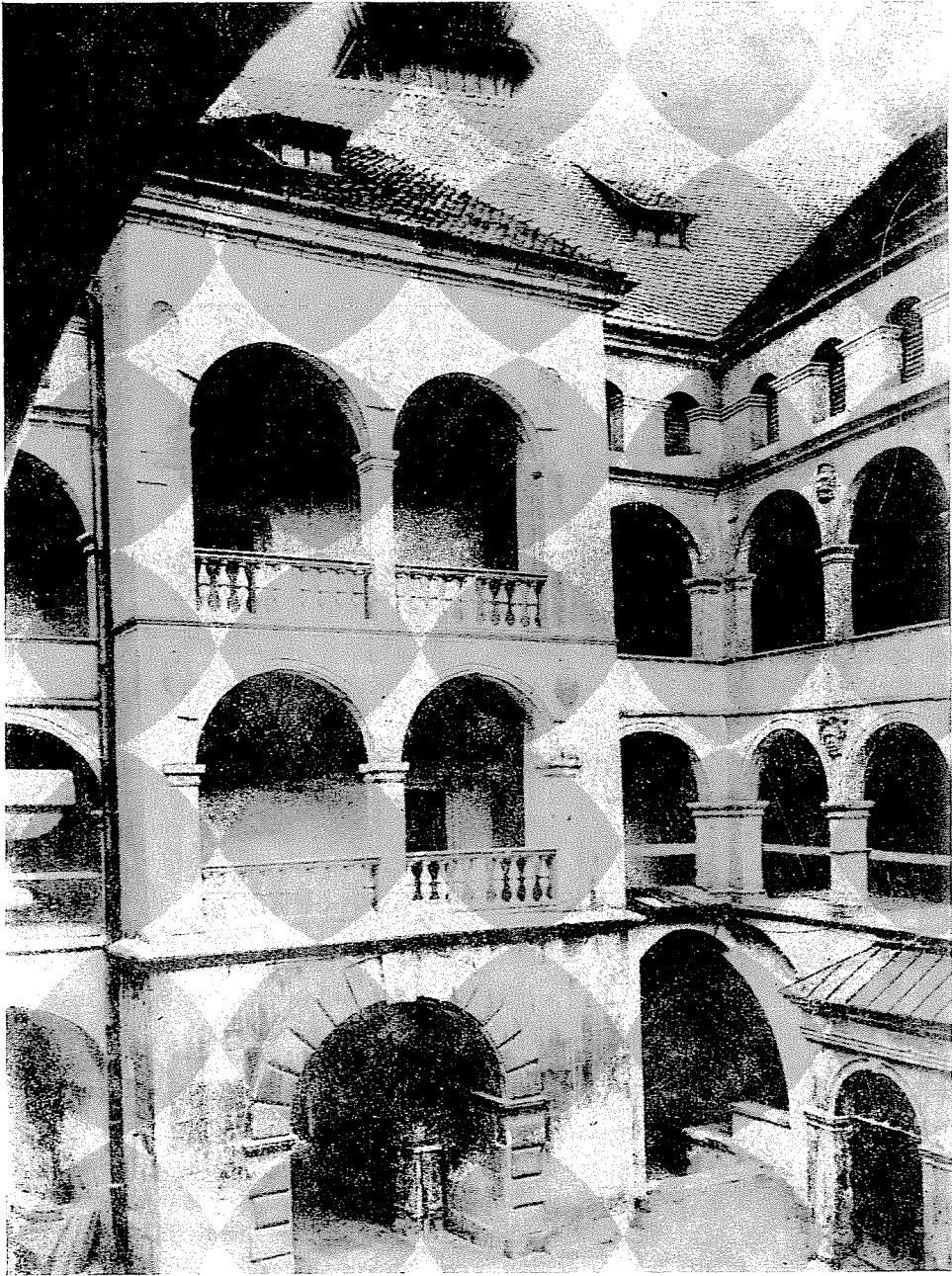


Fig. 5. Courtyard of the Castle in Pieskowa Skala

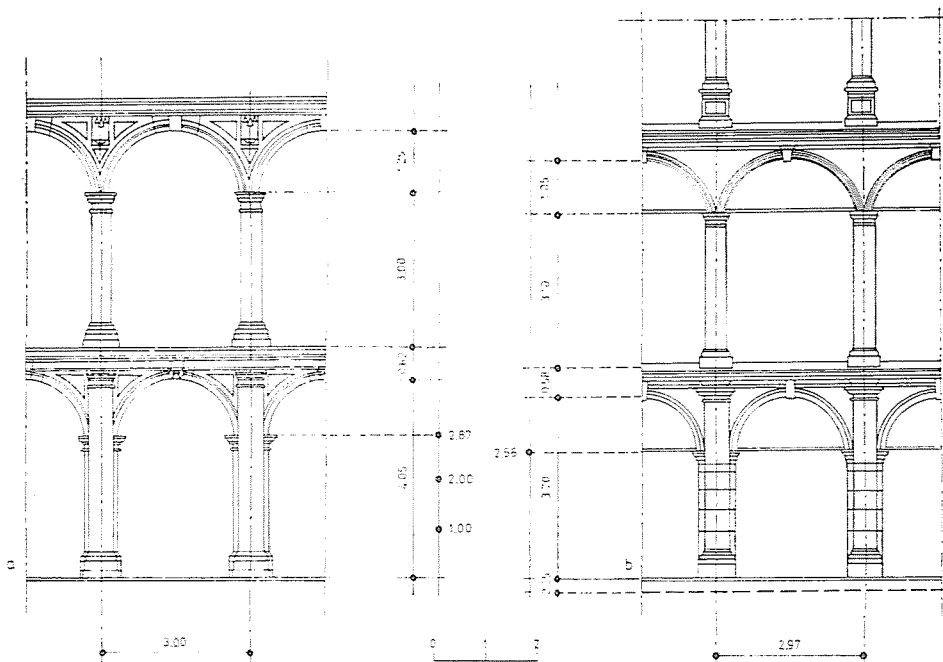


Fig. 6. Scheme of the galleries of the Castle in Wisnicz and of the Palace of Justus Decjus near Cracow. Drawing by A. Kadłuczka

Although not all possible strategic and political advantages arose from the victory of Grunwald, this victorious battle strengthened the rule of the Jagiello king and gave rise to the economic and political power both of the kingdom and of the dynasty. It also intensified the sense of unity of the nations inhabiting this territory, and revealed the importance of common actions.

It is also not without significance that at that time two universities were active in Central Europe: that of Prague, founded in 1348, and that of Cracow, founded in 1364, whose alumni professed similar ideas and outlooks on life. Hence, confinement of the term Central Europe to the territory of the contemporary "Imperium Jagiellonicum" seems to be more convincing for our subject. After the death of King Matthias Corvinus in 1490, Władysław the Second, son of Kazimierz Jagiellończyk, king of Bohemia from 1471, was elected also king of Hungary. In this way a vast area of Europe from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic Sea and from the boundaries of Silesia and Łużyce down to Transylvania and Ukraina went under the rule of the Jagiellons. It has to be emphasized after Białostocki that it is art in this area of Europe "with which Polish art at that time has to be compared, because its links with this area were natural and operating already in the times of the late Gothic" [5].

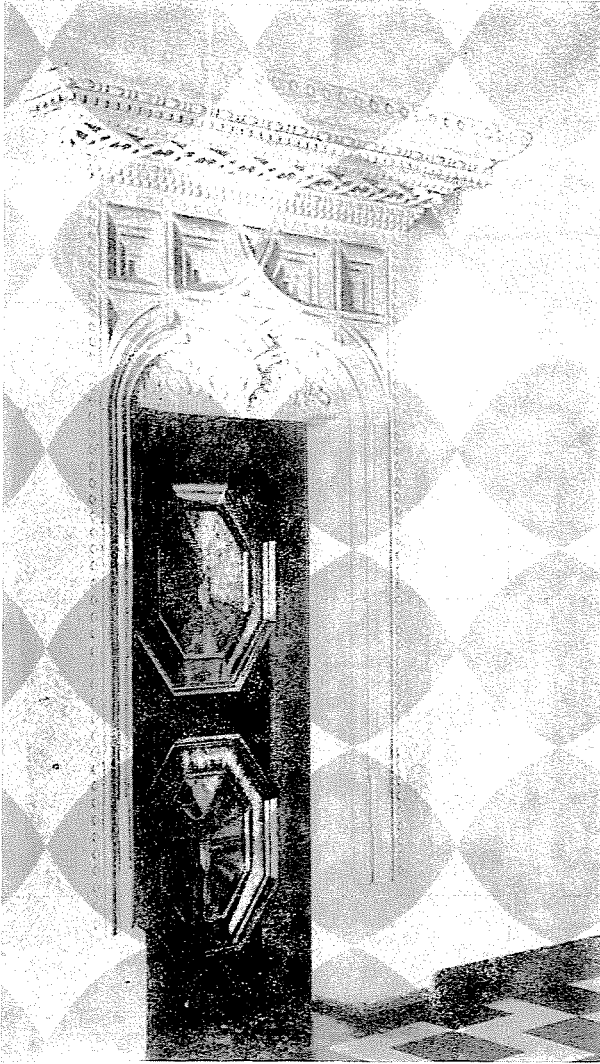


Fig. 7. Wawel portal

This was briefly the political, social and economic situation of the Res Publica Poloniae in the second half of the 15th, and in the first half of 16th centuries. It enabled commerce and manufacture to develop and towns to grow rapidly. It also increased the importance of burghers. Religious tolerance, intellectual development and formation of new ideology and philosophy helped to accept new trends of humanism.

In architecture and town planning, attention has to be paid to the partic-

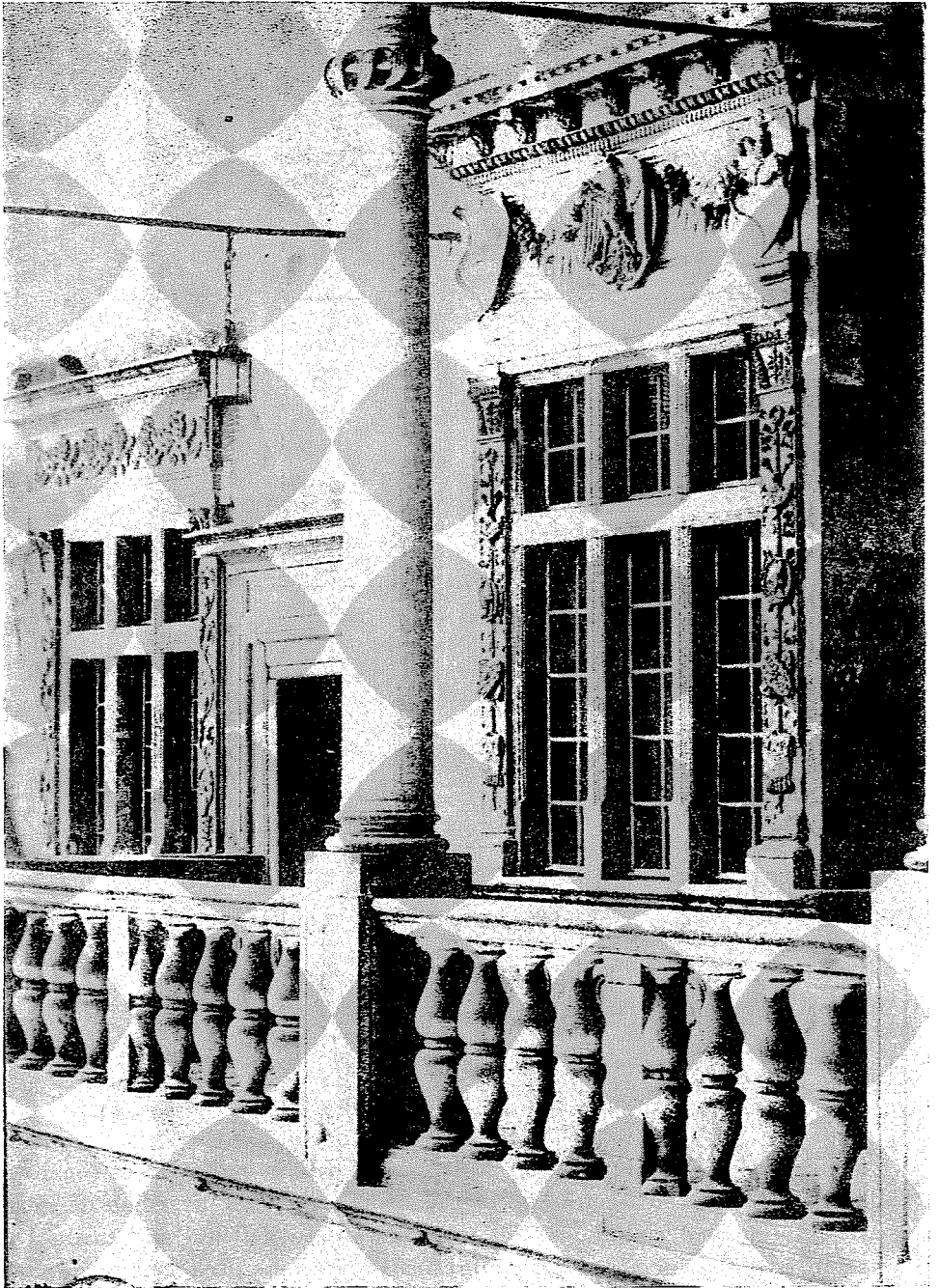


Fig. 8. Windows in the Wawel Royal Castle by F. Fiorentino, about 1502—1507

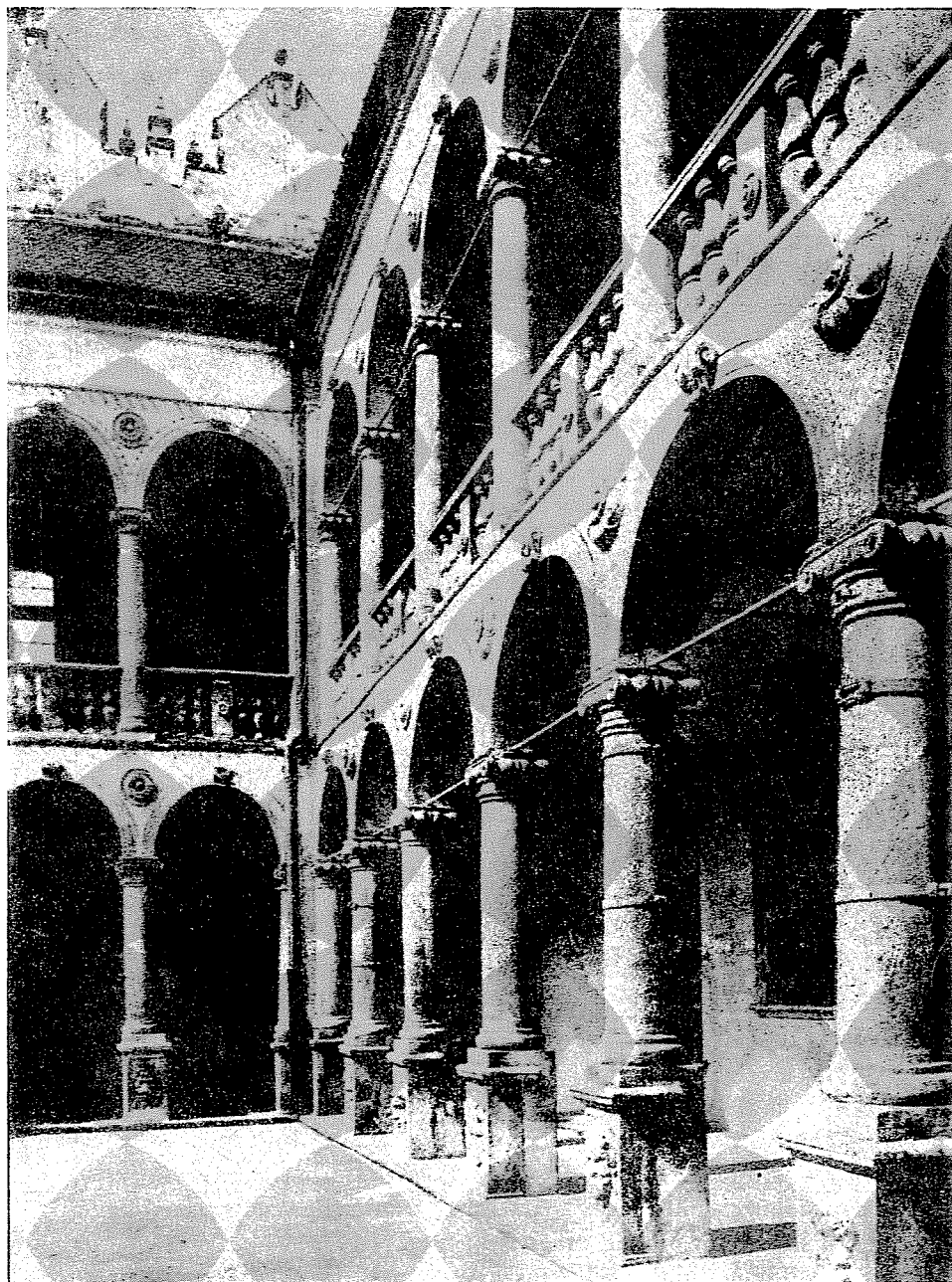


Fig. 9. Courtyard of the Castle in Baranów

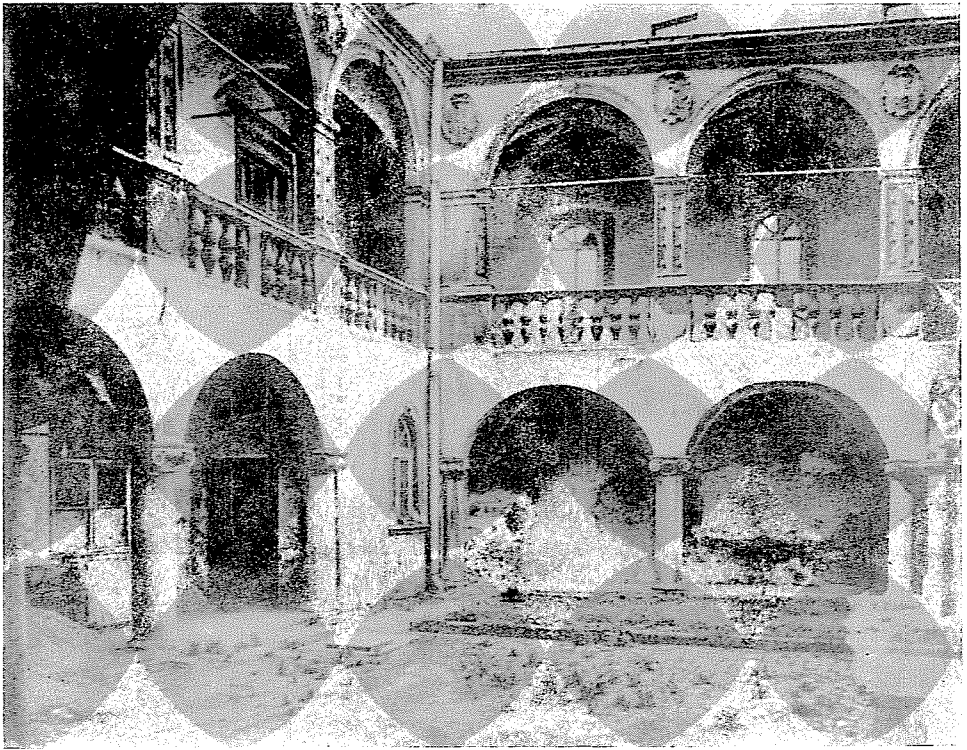


Fig. 10. Courtyard of the house at Kanonicza 21 in Cracow

ular program of structures and forms of function and space, preferred in Renaissance:

- town planning, namely the development of commerce and manufacture forwarded urbanization, resulting in the growth of both population and number. In 1585 there were more than 1000 towns in Poland, of them eight had over 10 000 inhabitants [6]. Cracow had a population of more than 20 000. The process of town formation and town development was favourable to new constructions partly conform to canons of the art of warfare;
- royal residences, magnates' palaces and suburban villas, mainly on the order of king, church and magnates;
- sacred buildings, above all, funerary chapels according to the pattern of the Sigismundus Chapel, and sepulchral vaults for both great gentry and rich burghers' families;
- and finally, public buildings, construction of which was stimulated by the development of economic life.

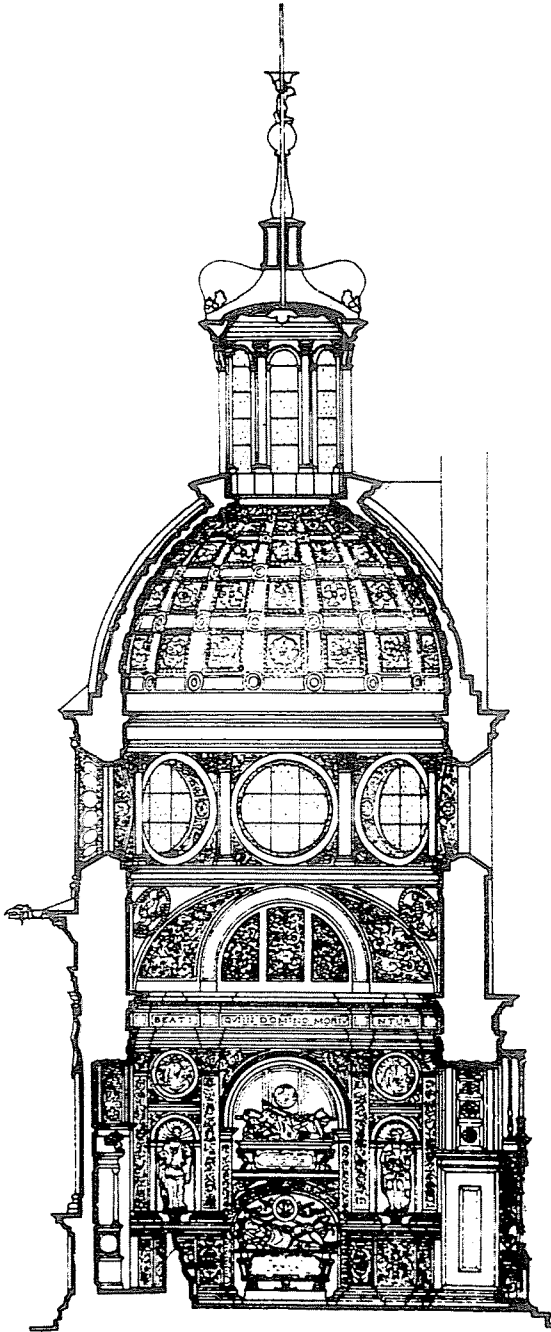


Fig. 11. Sigismundus Chapel by B. Berecci, 1515—1533, cross section

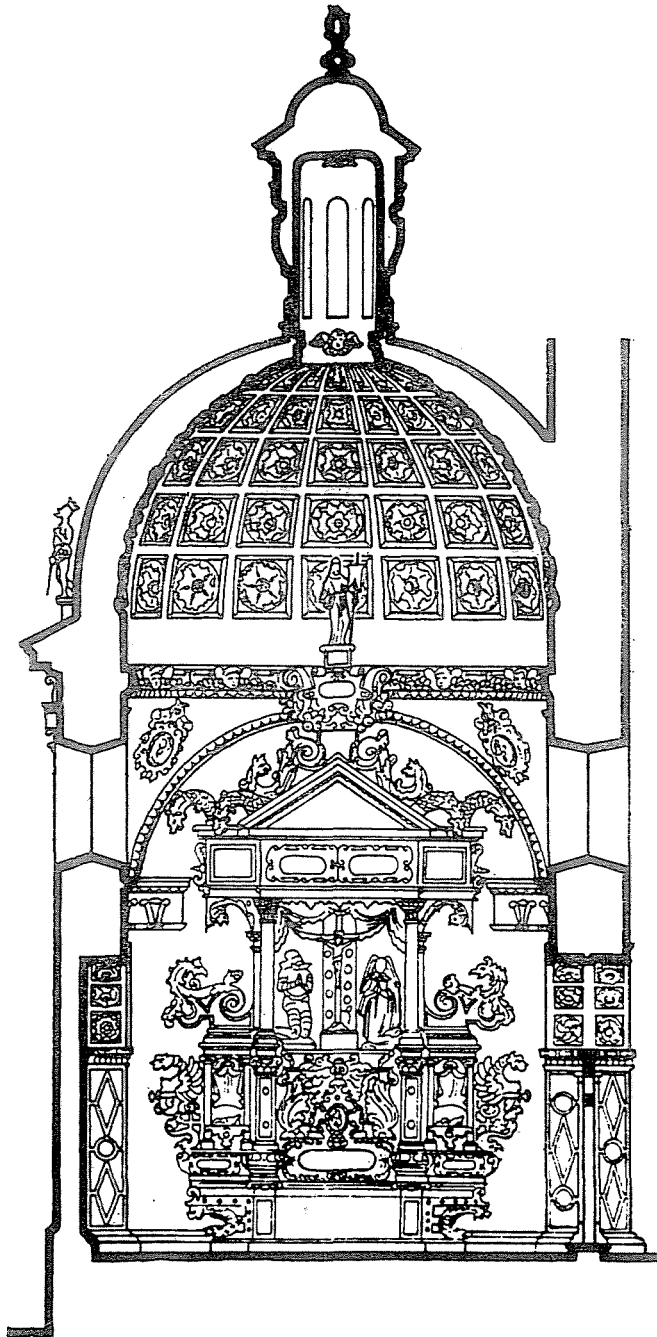


Fig. 12. Firllej family Chapel in Bejsce, by T. Nikel, 1594—1600, cross section

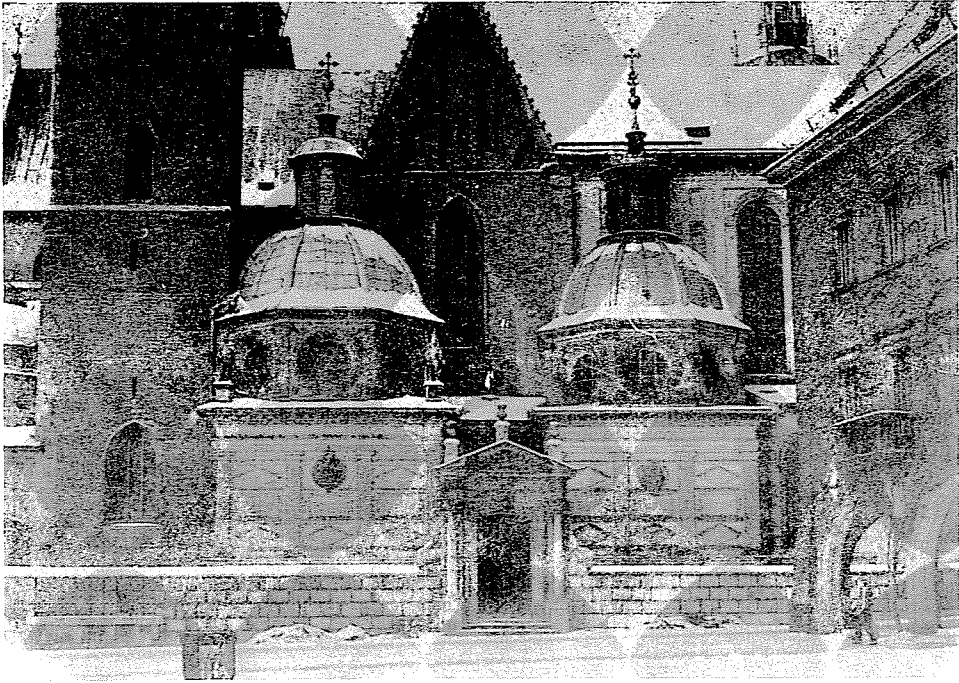


Fig. 13. Sigismundus and Waza Chapels of the Royal Cathedral on Wawel Hill!

The Cracow Renaissance, widely followed in Poland at that time, had arrived from Italy through Hungary. However, the influence of Hungarian Renaissance on the Polish art is to be considered rather an inspiration than a drive to copy or even to interpret patterns. Zygmunt Jagiellończyk spent several years in his youth at the court of his brother Władysław, king of Hungary at that time, where he met Renaissance art of the Matthias Corvinus period. This art modelled his aesthetic views.

The projects of Renaissance architecture in Cracow were executed by Italian artists, who in the first period worked under royal patronage. The ideas brought by them from Italy got easily adopted by local patterns just as they themselves got assimilated; they became members of local societies, held a variety of posts and offices. They came to Poland as young people; having been suppressed in native Italy by the fame of great masters, here in Poland they found good conditions for freely developing their creative talents. Here they founded families and here, in their second motherland, they stayed until death.

For instance, Francesco Fiorentino came to Poland in 1501 and lived until his death in Cracow. Bartolomeo Berecci came in 1516 at the age of 36, twice married Polish women, was alderman of the city of Kazimierz and died

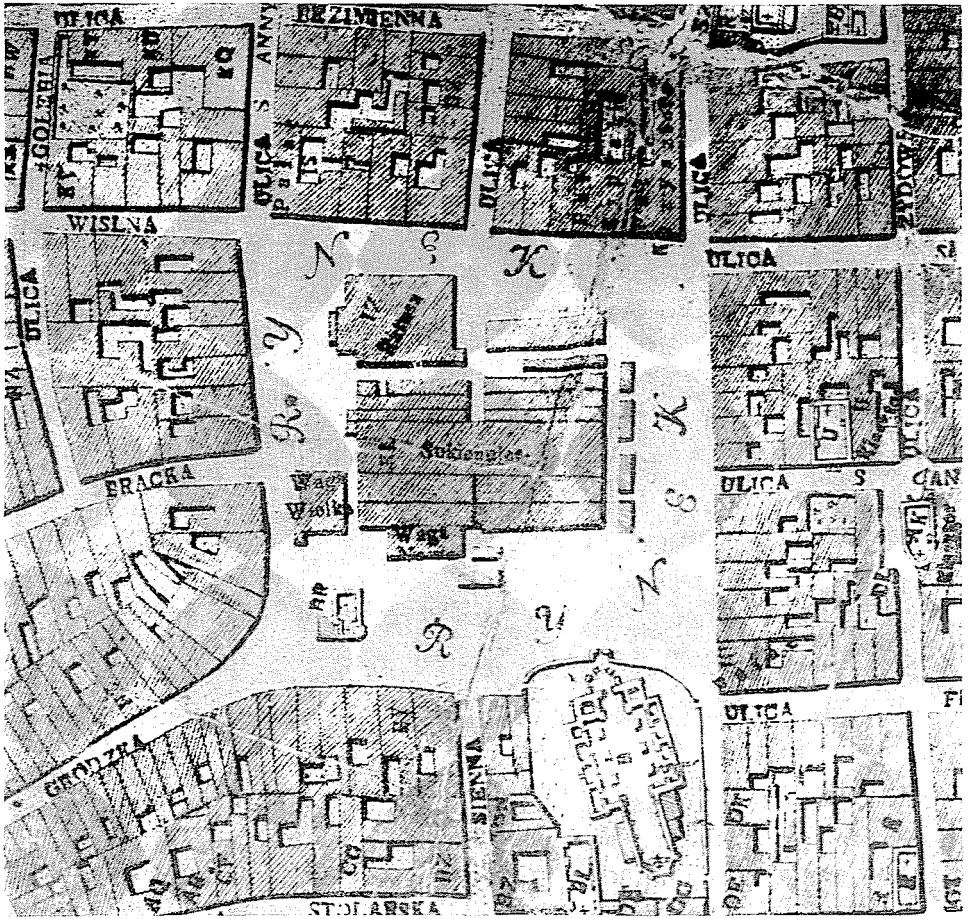


Fig. 14. Plan of the Market Place in Cracow, drawn in 1791

in Cracow in 1537. Bernardo Morando, planner author of the "ideal city" of Zamość, came to Poland in 1570 at the age of less than 30, held in 1591 the post of mayor of Zamość where he lived and worked until his death in 1600.

The Cracow Renaissance encountered various artistic forms, qualities, functions and artistic themes, but only those fitting the local culture were adopted and then developed, generating new, original concepts.

A considerable number of Renaissance structures were erected either exactly in the place of structures existing there earlier, or were their remodelations. This naturally made the centuries old elements to be continued. This phenomenon reveals how deeply ingrained the tradition was, and the great importance attached to the demonstration of the family continuity. The Wawel Castle as well as the castles in Sucha, Niepołomice and Pieskowa Skala

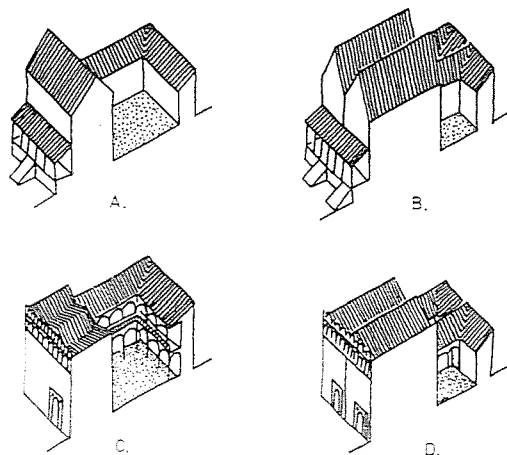


Fig. 15. Scheme of the formation of sunken roof and parapet wall. A and B — Gothic, C and D — Renaissance, after W. Grabski

confirm this phenomenon. Even Zamość, the “ideal city”, confirms it, as — according to the latest results of investigation — its central element, palace of the Zamojski family is an example of the incorporation of relics of the mediaeval family seat of Zamojski’s into the concept of Renaissance residence. The preserved disposition of the relics determined the main composition axis of the city.

Let us now analyse selected examples.

The turning point in the history of architecture by the end of the 15th, and at the beginning of the 16th centuries coincided with the great fire of the Gothic Wawel castle in 1499. The reconstruction of the castle by King Zygmunt I was carried out by Francesco Fiorentino, Italian artist. His first Renaissance work in Poland has been Jan Olbracht’s sepulchral vault commissioned by the king and his mother Elisabeth of Austria. This form of tomb soon found its fullest development in the sepulchral vault of Kings Zygmunt I and Sigismundus Augustus in the Sigismundus Chapel, and soon became a prototype widely followed in Poland.

The Gothic castle situated on the eastern promontory of the hill consisted of one-track buildings dating from different centuries. This castle surrounded a trapezoidal inner courtyard. The reconstruction, initiated in 1502 by Fiorentino and continued by Bartolomeo Berecci, included the best preserved fragments of the old northern, eastern and western wings into a compact body, surrounding the courtyard.

Although the courtyard surrounded with galleries is typical of Renaissance architecture, that of the Wawel is still very original. The Świętokrzyski Annals wrote in 1517: “. . .restauring the castle of Cracow Zygmunt



Fig. 16. Cloth Hall in Market Place in Cracow, before the 19th-century restoration, general view

decorated it in an unprecedented manner with columns, paintings, golden flowers and azure . . ." This seems to emphasize Fiorentino's role in creating the general conception of the castle, followed by Berecci. Some researchers point out the form of galleries as elements uniting various parts of the palace, stressing the secondary importance of the main body of the structure, only background to the new forms. This unique role of galleries to "integrate" incoherent parts constructed step-wise and maintained in respect to the ancestors' efforts, is to be regarded as original. This particular concept was repeated in the mentioned constructions: the castle at Pieskowa Skała, Wiśnicz, Sucha or even in the 17th-century Justus Decius palace at Wola Justowska near Cracow, in which a "lace" of galleries covering the preexistent body stretched between two corner wings. Secondary importance of the main body screened by galleries was also manifest in that here mostly the old elements were used and adapted. As an example, certain structures are peculiar to Cracow Renaissance architecture, e.g. portals and windows with typical lintels combining old Gothic forms with new Renaissance designs. These portals are unique enough to be named Wawel-type portals.



Fig. 17. Cloth Hall, after the restoration by T. Pryliński, detail of parapet

These impressive representative galleries also eased to match contemporary fashion, as according to Mikołaj Rej of Nagłowice: "...lord's residence... was to be pretty... and neatly put". So galleries decorated suburban royal residences (Łobzów, Niepołomce), ducal residences (Brzeg, exhibiting strong influence of the Wawel castle), magnate's palaces (Baranów, Krasieczyn) as well as town houses and palaces (in Cracow; 21 Kanonicza street, Krzysztoforzy, Palace of Wodzicki).

The problem of the Sigismundus Chapel is somewhat different. Art historians qualify it as a mausoleum whose architecture and sculptural decorations "are pure Italian, of Florentine origin" [7]. Lech Kalinowski even pointed to its prototype, a central construction depicted by Leonardo da Vinci [8]. What is unusual is that in spite of its undoubtedly almost pure Italian form, it



Fig. 18. Town Hall in Tarnów



Fig. 19. Zamość, Armenian block, Madonna House

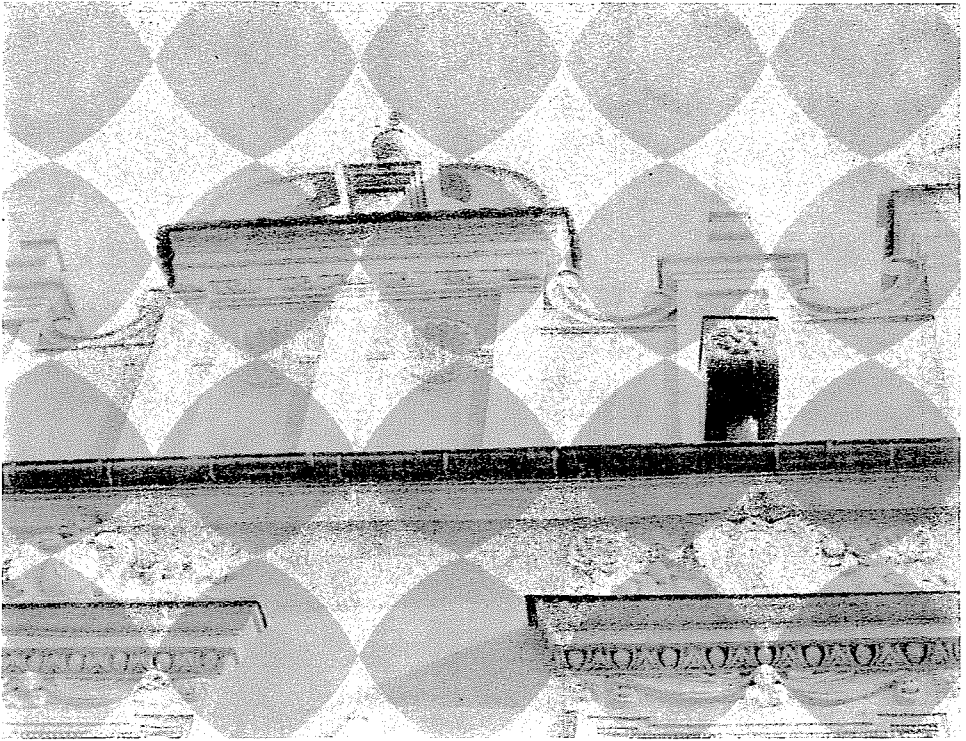


Fig. 20. Zamość, Armenian block, Madonna House, detail of parapet

conveys a certain message, namely the unusual respect of the monarch and the artist to monuments of the past. Although located in the Royal Cathedral — place of the king's coronation — that already was a national sanctuary, and although it is mausoleum of the mighty monarch, formally it does not dominate the place.

The Sigismundus Chapel became a prototype for the long series of similar funerary chapels in Poland, determinant to an extent that the Chapel of the Wazas accomplished in the 17th century, typically Baroque in its interior, externally copied the shape of the Berecci chapel instead of the fashionable Baroque style. This way a tribute paid both to the perfection of Berecci's masterpiece and to the architectural achievements of "the golden age" of Poland — symbol of might of the Jagiellon Kingdom.

An original Polish contribution to Renaissance forms is topping of building façades by a decorated parapet screening a sinked roof. By the turn of the 15th century, Cracow was a big capital, a flourishing city with a central market place, one of the largest in Europe. Gothic houses surrounding the square bore the elements of vertical symmetry. The new Renaissance style brought new canons of harmony and beauty marked, among others, by pref-

erence to horizontal elements. In this context a steep Gothic roof covered by an adorned gable was an unwanted element. A wide-range reconstruction of medieval Cracow, considered to be expression of welfare of the city, was initiated in order to meet combined aesthetic and functional demands. The reconstruction involved to replace pitch roofs, dangerous by easing fire spreading, by four-pitch roofs concealed on the street front by decorative parapets. Numerous town houses and palaces (to quote only the Boner house and the Wielopolski palace) in Cracow and in Poland received this form of roof. This roof model was also widely used in public buildings such as the Cloth Hall or the Town Hall in Cracow as well as in castles and palaces (Baranów, Krasiczyn).

One must emphasize the generalization of this model of so-called Polish parapet in the neighbouring countries. The parapet as an architectural element seems to owe its wide reception in the Renaissance to being applied on fortifications already in Middle Ages, whose roofs covered with inflammable materials required sheltering. The parapet lends picturesqueness and attractiveness to the façade; enriched with regional, native forms it became a popular architectural element first adopted in Mannerism and then developed in Baroque, as seen in Kazimierz, Zamość.

As it results from the examples of Polish Renaissance architecture discussed above (especially those of Cracow) the ways of contribution of native features to the Renaissance of Central Europe may be classified in terms of interaction (after Tatarkiewicz [9]) as:

1. form and content of particularly great value achieving the stand and of perfection, such as the Sigismundus Chapel, one of the most precious works of Renaissance architecture "North of the Alps";
2. form and content adopted from a prototype, assimilating traditional elements and spread to become specific design, like courtyards with galleries;
3. form and content are original, distinct and appear nowhere but where created, like the Wawel portals;
4. form and content penetrate other territories where they become widely accepted patterns, like the Polish parapets.

Morelowski, Polish art historian compared the Polish art to a bouquet, for which flowers are picked on the flower-beds of the whole Europe. He said: I think that this bouquet shows its specific character because of native wild flowers and even simple herbs collected in the Polish fields, plaited into the bouquet. On such a background they colour the foreign imports.

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