

The Gothic Cathedral in Cracow and the European Architecture around 1300

Description for the general public

The main objective of the present project is a new, broad analysis of the gothic architecture of the Cracow Cathedral (1320–1364), which aims to highlight its European significance for the history of medieval art. The Cathedral on the Wawel Hill in Cracow is one of the most important church buildings from the 1st half of the 14th century in this part of Europe. The promising results of preliminary research proved that if we consider the artistic quality and innovative inventiveness of the Cracow cathedral's architecture, it can be placed next to the most important royal and bishop churches of the 14th century. Still, its general importance is underestimated, also because of the way too much regional perspective in the research on the Cathedral up to now. That explains why this building has not been included in the general discussion on the European art of the 14th century, and why its affiliation with the most creative branch of the sacred architecture of around 1300 has not been emphasised.

Thanks to the research planned in the present project, the Cracow Cathedral, examined and described since the end of the 19th century, will be shown eventually not as a provincial, but as transregionally important piece of architecture. A work creatively derived from the architectural experiences of the most important artistic centres in Europe, summing up that experiences, and opening new evolutionary paths of the church architecture in this part of the continent. will be shown eventually not as a provincial, but as transregionally important piece of architecture. A work creatively derived from the architectural experiences of the most important artistic centres in Europe, summing up that experiences, and opening new evolutionary paths of the church architecture in this part of the continent. The project will be based on the notion that this building is a symptomatic example of the most avant-garde architectural movement of its times, which is simply called "the architecture of around 1300". The detailed observations on the forms of the church will be exploited in the attempt to sketch the Pan-European network of different factors – art-historical, religious, political and social, by which the Cathedral was shaped.

So far the Cracow building has not been presented in such a broad context, and because of that its importance in the historiography up to now remains rather local and marginal, even in spite of quite numerous publications. In turn, this situation does not match the art-historical importance of the church, which should be redefined and presented anew, equally in Poland, as well as in the prestigious periodicals of international importance. These are the most important objectives of the present project.

In the implementation of the grant the interdisciplinary approach will be crucial. Without it, achieving results exceeding the present state of knowledge would not be possible. Therefore, the research team will be formed by medievalists of art historical, archaeological and technical education, all experienced also in the purely historical analysis of written sources. It is justified by the subject of the present project. The Cracow Cathedral demands complex and multi-layered analyses. The research will encompass the recognition of the forms of the building, tracking the artistic origins of the specific architectural solutions and establishing the Cathedral's place in the history of gothic art in the local, national and, above all, European perspective. Defining the historical and functional context of the Cathedral, as well as interpretation of its hidden symbolic and political meanings, will form the final stage of research. As a departure from the traditional methods of art history one can describe the employment of specially prepared 3D drawing documentation of the building in its meticulous analyses.