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Jesuits of the East? Artistic network of the Basilian order in eighteenth-century Poland-Lithuania

The Uniate Church (nowadays known as Greek-Catholic) was established in 1596, when a part of the Orthodox hierarchy in Poland-Lithuania accepted Catholic dogmas and papal supremacy. Basilians were the only Uniate order, in the 18th century forming one of the biggest monastic communities in Poland-Lithuania with a network of about 150 monasteries and over one thousand monks. Basilians took care of the most important sanctuaries, provided pastoral and educational care, developed modern printing houses and from within them the Uniate bishops were recruited. The order was involved in building of masterpieces of late Baroque architecture, e.g. in Lwów, Połock, Poczajów and Berezwech.

Most scholars assume that the Basilian order was organized on the basis of the Jesuit model. Jesuits developed an efficient worldwide organisation with a centralised structure and an extensive repertoire of persuasive methods, including scientific and artistic activities. In Poland-Lithuania the Basilian monastic network was indeed developed similarly to the Jesuit one and similarly diverse was the order's activity. On the other hand, many differences existed. Basilians worked in the more limited area, their internal organisation was more complicated and, what is most significant, the historical traditions and social background of the orders were different.

The central goal of the project is to reassemble the artistic network of the Basilian order using GIS (Geographic Information System) and SNA (Social Network Analysis) methods in order to uncover the social mechanisms functioning within and around the order. Artistic network in this case means the links between humans, ideas, things and places. The project will study to what extent did Basilian artistic network resemble the Jesuit organization. How did the monastic network function in the Uniate order, joining the traditions of Eastern and Western Churches? Did "Basilian" art and artists exist? Were Basilian superiors and artists realizing universalized artistic vision? Or – on the contrary – did regional differences prevail? How significant was the impact of patrons? What did it mean "Basilian" with regard to art?

The project uses typical for a historian critical analysis of written sources and formal analysis of the Basilian complexes that is the basis of art history research. The third method, combining the previous ones, will be the spatial and network analysis using geographic information system (GIS, SNA). In the spatial database the organizational, economic, patron and personal relations between the monasteries will be complemented by the artistic problems of their architecture and furnishings, such as building location and layout, its relation to Eastern and Western traditions or specific formal solutions applied. This will uncover the mechanisms functioning in the Basilian monastic network, i.e. examine to what extent did it resemble the model known from Jesuits' studies. The project will provide better understanding of the early modern monastic and artistic networks, as well as the position and characteristics of the Uniate Church in Poland-Lithuania. The results of the research will be presented to international conferences and in the renowned scientific journals. From the perspective of further research it is important that the project will introduce the elements of digital humanities in Polish historiography of culture and art.