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## *Some concerns about the Olbin's Portal from St. Mary Magdalene Church in Wrocław*

### *Introduction*

The history and original form of the portal, now embedded in the wall of the southern nave of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Wrocław, still remains an unexplained research problem. Initially, the artwork was located in the Benedictine abbey founded before 1139 in Ołbin, an area outside the foundation city. After the demolition of the monastery in 1546, the portal was moved to the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, which is located near the market square in Wrocław (Fig. 1A). Regardless of the motivation behind preserving the portal – by Wiesław Koziński perceived as “bourgeois stinginess” [1], and by Zygmunt Świechowski as “full of appreciation and admiration evaluation (of the portal)” [2] – there is no doubt that thanks to this decision of the 16<sup>th</sup> century patricians Wrocław preserved one of the most magnificent works of Romanesque architectural sculpture.

The research done into the portal so far has provided more questions than answers, and the conservation work to which the portal has been exposed since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has probably eliminated many opportunities for a better understanding of it. The presented work was the first stage in the architectural research on the portal and its aim was to determine the issues related to the portal's transformations occurring in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century and at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was also intended to draw attention to some inaccuracies that have been established or overlooked by researchers in the literature on the subject. The basis of the study was an inventory of the church and the portal made by the author in the years 2021–2022 by means of digital photogrammetry (il. 1B),

and an analysis of iconographic sources and the current state of research.

### *History of the portal*

At the beginning, the portal was probably part of the church of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Vincent in the Abbey on the Ołbin. The monastic foundation is now unquestionably dated to the years before 1139, as indicated by the granting of the church of St. Michael to the first abbot – Radulf – by Bishop Robert of Wrocław. There is no doubt about the person of the founder of the monastery, who was undoubtedly Piotr Włostowic [4]. Significant in the context of dating the portal itself is the year 1145, when the relics of St. Vincent, its later patron, obtained by Peter Włostowic a year earlier from Conrad III in Magdeburg, were introduced into the church [5]. A turning point in the history of the abbey is the last decade of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In 1193, in a bull issued by Pope Celestine III, the Benedictines of Ołbin were accused of mismanagement, which in effect led to their removal. In 1197, in their place, Bolesław I the Tall brought the Premonstratensians from the area of the Reich [6]. Some researchers (especially German ones) have taken this date as a terminus post quem of the creation of the portal, linking its rich decorations with the artistic culture of German monks [7]. The abbey in Ołbin functioned until 1529, when it was demolished by the decision of the city council, allegedly out of concern for safety in the face of the Turkish invasion. The reason was the potential threat posed by the spacious monastery buildings, which could be seized and used as an enemy base during a siege of the city. As is known, the Turks never reached Wrocław. It is worth noting, however, that the threat of invasion was probably only a pretext allowing the Protestant city council to curb the activities of the Catholic monastery [8]. The portal was dismantled

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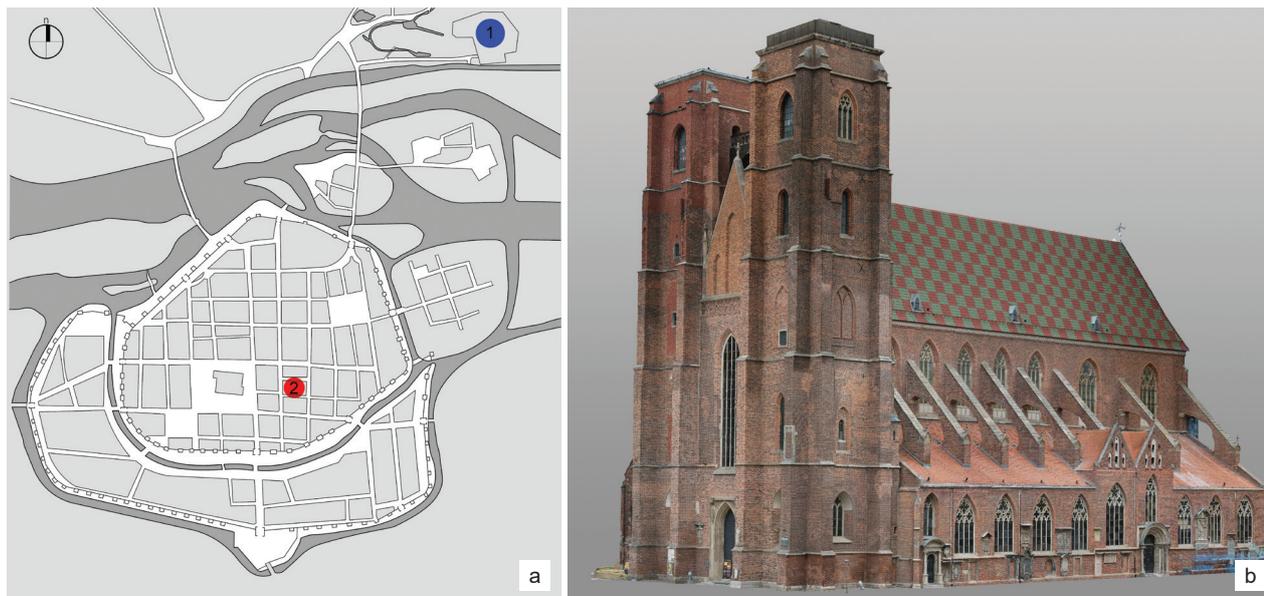


Fig. 1. Wrocław. Relocation of the portal from Ołbin.

A – schematic plan of Wrocław from the 14<sup>th</sup> century (redrawn after: [3, p. 28]), 1 – Benedictine abbey, 2 – St. Mary Magdalene church.  
B – view of St. Mary Magdalene church from south-western side, 3D model of the church made with the use of digital photogrammetry (elaborated by F. Hackemer)

#### II. 1. Wrocław. Translokacja portalu ołbińskiego.

A – schemat liniowy planu Wrocławia z XIV w. (przerys za: [3, s. 28]), 1 – opactwo benedyktynów, 2 – kościół św. Marii Magdaleny.  
B – widok kościoła św. Marii Magdaleny od strony południowo-zachodniej, model 3D kościoła wykonany metodą fotogrametrii cyfrowej (oprac. F. Hackemer)

during the demolition of the abbey. In 1546, it was embedded into the southern wall of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, which changed its overall composition and shape [9].

After these events there was a long period of stillness, but also a slow decay of the portal, caused mainly by the weather conditions. It was only in the years 1888–1890, in the face of the terrible state of preservation of the monument, that many treatments were conducted on it to improve its condition and slow down its deterioration. Further conservation efforts were carried out in 1912 and 1934 [8] with the aim of preventing further destruction and securing the damaged parts of the portal's stonework.

The portal did not suffer any damage during World War II, although the church was heavily damaged. Especially the western part of the church was destroyed, in particular the south tower. The portal was protected during the war by a shatterproof wall.

In the 1960s, attempts were made to clean the monument from the layers of substances used for conservation in 1912 and 1934 [10], [11]. There were even conceptual designs – by Halina Dziurla – of structures intended to cover the portal. Finally, in the years 1967–1968 works were performed to clean the monument from harmful layers and to significantly slow down its destruction. Since those works the portal has not changed much.

#### *State of research*

Hermann Luchs, in his 1855 work, dedicated a chapter to the abbey churches (only two – St. Michael and St.

Vincent). Importantly, this work also included a detailed description of the portal before the conservation treatments and a drawing inventory. Luchs was also the first researcher to link the tympanum built into the wall of the so-called Old House<sup>1</sup> with the portal [9]. At the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a chapter on the relics of the monastery (and very much on its iconography) was included in *Schlesiens Vorzeit in Bild und Schrift* by Conrad Buchwald, agreeing with Luchs on the tympanum and giving its exact dimensions, in line with those of the inner belt of the archivolt [12]. The researcher also provided an interpretation of the tympanum relief scenes. Two years later Max Semrau wrote about the portal, especially about the tympanum and its iconographic agenda, in fact strongly criticizing Buchwald [7]. A very brief description of the portal could be found in a work by Heinrich Götz and Alfred Hadelt published in 1926. However, what is important, this study contained an extremely valuable photograph of the monument before the conservation activities in 1888 [13]. A photograph taken shortly after the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century conservation work was included in a study by Cornelius Gurlitt [14]. In a work by Rudolf Stein, published a year earlier, there was a graphic work by Heinrich Mützel depicting the portal and probably dating from 1822–1828 [15].

After World War II research became more vigorous and the subject of the Abbey of Ołbin and the portal itself was dealt with by numerous researchers, creating an extensive

<sup>1</sup> It was previously located in the wall of All Saints Hospital.

body of studies, the vast majority of which were contradictory. It is worth mentioning here the works of Zygmunt Świechowski and Marian Morelowski containing contradictory concepts [2], [16]. The dispute of researchers concerning the stylistic genesis of the portal outlined two later dominating views on the issue and influenced the whole literature dedicated to it until today. Świechowski saw in the decoration of the portal mainly the influence of Italian sculpture, especially of the workshop of Benedetto Antelami – the author of the frieze of the cathedral in Parma. Morelowski, on the other hand, derived the origin of the portal's decoration from the region of the Meuse river. A brave reconstruction of the portal was included and extensively explained in Wiesław Koziński's work. The researcher's conception was based on the analogy to the portal from St. Jacob's Church in Regensburg<sup>2</sup>. He suggested that in 1546 the jambs were shortened in order to adjust the scale of the portal to new conditions. According to the researcher, the weld visible at about half the height of the eastern jamb is a trace of the segment removed. Moreover, based on the analysis of the stonework of the western jamb, the researcher concluded that the chisels used for its decoration were significantly harder than those used for the other decorations, therefore concluding that this one is a few centuries younger copy. The researcher found the reasons for such behavior of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century builders in the damage to the original western jamb, or in its being covered with decoration that made it impossible to segment and shorten without clear traces. It is worth noticing that the changes in height could have affected almost all elements of the portal's flanks, except for two external pairs of columns, which could be indicated by their visible segmentation. We are talking here about both, the jambs and the cancelled pilasters, as well as the corner responds of the faults. On the other hand, Koziński assessed the base of the eastern jamb covered with a flame pattern, together with the plinth, as original, but he sees them as the original capitals and impostes turned by 180 degrees. There is a striking difference in style between the bases of the jambs and their capitals. The capitals were made in forms contemporary with the 16<sup>th</sup> century restorers of the portal, clearly different from the Romanesque decoration of the bases. The question remains, of course, about the original purpose of the elements covered in flame relief and the reason for a possible change in their function [1].

A separate issue raised by researchers was the conservation of the portal. We are referring here to the works of Barbara Penkalowa, Teresa Ciach and, in particular, Wiesław Domasłowski, whose study was the basis for conservation works conducted under his supervision in 1965 [10], [11], [17].

In recent years Rafał Quirini-Popławski (recalling the dispute between Morelowski and Świechowski) and Małgorzata Chorowska have written about the portal decoration. Both works strongly criticize Świechowski's assumptions about the Lombard origins of the portal decoration and its connections with Antelami's workshop [18],

[19]. Also important for the topic is the extensive study by Aldona Fařara, which is a detailed record of the state of research on the portal [20].

Pre-war German researchers, when determining the date of origin of the portal, opted for the early years of the 13<sup>th</sup> century [7], assuming that the portal was created under the inspiration of German Premonstratensians. However, this opinion disappeared in the post-war literature. Świechowski dated the portal to the years after 1178, Morelowski indicated the time to the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century inclusive, attributing it to the Benedictines.

Świechowski's conception was based on the striking similarity between the representation of the scene of the deposition from the cross on the Olbin tympanum (separated from the rest of the portal since 1529) and the frieze of the cathedral in Parma by Antelami. This thesis is strongly related to Świechowski's general view of the stylistic genesis of the work in discussion, but was criticized first by Morelowski and then by Quirini-Popławski and Chorowska. The researchers pointed out that the influence of Antelami's work was evident between the late 12<sup>th</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but in Emilia, whose contacts with Silesia at that time were probably not strong, if they existed at all [18], while the similarity is due to the reliance on the same iconographic model. Chorowska cited many examples of earlier and later representations of the deposition revealing a very strong resemblance to the Olbin tympanum [19].

Morelowski based his attempt to estimate the date of the portal origin on an analysis of similar works of architectural sculpture from the area on the Meuse, where he saw its stylistic genesis (as suggested earlier by M. Gębarowicz [21]). On this basis, he determined the moment of its creation to be no later than the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century [16].

One of the latest chronological dating, and at the same time one of the earlier ones, can be found in Chorowska's work, which links the creation of the portal with the Włostowic family – the founders of the abbeys on Olbin and Piasek<sup>3</sup> Island, as well as many churches in the region. The portal would have constituted a setting for the introduction of the saint's relics to St Vincent's church, given to Peter Włostowic by Conrad III Hohenstauf in 1144<sup>4</sup>.

The tendency, visible in the discussion, to date the portal earlier and earlier, although based on relative methods, allows the assumption that the portal was created before the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. A completely separate issue, discussed later in this work, is the dating of individual elements of the stonework mentioned starting from the dismantling of the portal in 1529.

### *Iconography analysis*

The oldest known presentation of the portal is related to the panoramic plan of Wrocław made by Barthel Weiner in 1562 [22]. It shows the abbey, which did not exist at

<sup>2</sup> Which Buchwald [12] has previously written about.

<sup>3</sup> We are talking about the foundation tympanum of Maria Włostowicowa from the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Piasek.

<sup>4</sup> The relics were introduced into the church a year later.

the time of the plan's creation, together with the basilica church of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Vincent, dominating with its tower façade. Its western elevation also shows two portals depicted in speckled detail, the southern one being significantly larger than the northern one. The position of the portal within the church has not been established. Many researchers have argued that it framed the passage from the south wing of the cloister into the church [2]. However, it is possible that it was the western portal.

Interestingly, Weiner's plan either shows the original location of the portal or draws it twice – in its current and historical position. An opening was drawn in the wall of the Church of Mary Magdalene in the place of the present portal. The portal was depicted in a blurred way, only as a general outline of its shape, without details. The wall of the church, in which it was set, is plastered in this image. The church was at that time surrounded by a wall, whose gate led to today's St. Mary Magdalene Street, which was then a square.

The abbey, and with it perhaps the portal, is also shown in a drawing by Friedrich B. Werner from the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (after: [23]), which is one of a series of representations based no doubt on an earlier, unknown original. The Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Vincent is visible on the left and is the largest building on the abbey grounds. It is depicted as a basilica building with a single-towered west elevation with at least two portals (part of the façade is not visible). It is likely that the portal we know from the wall of St. Mary Magdalene church was originally one of these. Both have been depicted in a simplified

manner. It is not possible to discern the details or even the general form of the portals.

The abbey was also depicted in a drawing from 1752 (after: [23]), which bears a strong similarity to Werner's work, possibly inspired by it or sharing with it a common, unknown original. However, this representation is more accurate in certain aspects, which is worth noting. Two portals of the façade of the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Vincent are depicted. The southern portal is larger than the northern one. Both are schematically depicted as simple, semi-circularly crowned openings in the wall.

Very similar to the drawing from 1752 is the composition of the painting depicting the abbey, the original of which dates from the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (after: [23]), so also probably based on some earlier representation. Similarly to the drawings described above, the western portals of the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Vincent are depicted here in a simplified, even blotchy manner.

A drawing by Heinrich Mützel from 1823 (Fig. 2) [15] presents the portal frontally, with great precision. The author carefully portrayed the multitude of decorations, not missing any details. There are visible 16<sup>th</sup> century inner doorways topped with a triangular pediment with a shell theme and an opening leading to the interior of the church, preceded by a single step. The drawing does not show any damage to the decoration of the portal, except for the segmentation of the shafts of the inner columns. However, two carved lions resting at the bases of the outer columns are visible. The author put the date 1546 on the archivolt's external strip. The transom of the portal shows a grille with a centrally placed ring.

Luchs's drawings from 1855 are an inventory [9]. The author presented the portal with great care and attention to faithful representation of the details and the state of preservation of the object. The damage to the column bases and the outer strip of the archivolt (on which the date 1546 does not appear) is visible. The drawing also shows the sculpture of a lion – only one, located behind the outer base of the east side. Two steps of the stairs are visible.

Adalbert Woelfl's painting of 1867 [24] shows a view of the church from the south-east. In the foreground, the square in front of the church is visible, and to the left of the painting – no longer existing tenement buildings of the neighboring quarter. The surface of the square appears to be unpaved, and three small trees are depicted on its northern part, near the portal. The wall of the side nave of the church is plastered in the painting above the line of the stone plinth. The painting depicts the portal with quite a high degree of accuracy. Even the decoration of the columns and archivolts and the 16<sup>th</sup> century inner doorway are recognizable. The destruction of the column bases and the segmentation of the outer archivolt strip are also clearly visible.

The oldest known photograph of the portal shows its condition before conservation treatment in the years 1888–1890 (Fig. 3). The outer strip of the archivolt, at that time not yet protected by tinsmiths, is heavily damaged. The next, second belt bears traces of erosion, mainly in its western part, where the decoration is no longer readable.

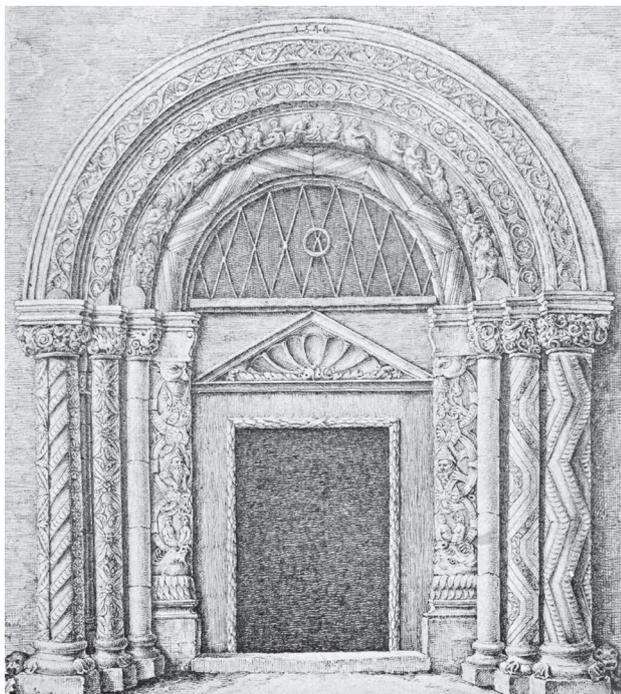


Fig. 2. Portal from Olbina in the southern wall of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Wrocław, as it appeared in 1823.

Drawing by Heinrich Mützel (source: [15])

Il. 2. Portal z Olbina w południowej ścianie kościoła Marii Magdaleny we Wrocławiu, stan z 1823 r.

Rycina Heinricha Mützela (źródło: [15])



Fig. 3. First known photograph of the Olbin portal, built into the wall of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Wrocław. Condition before restoration in the years 1888–1890 (source: [13, p. 109])

Il. 3. Pierwsza znana fotografia portalu ołbińskiego, wmurowanego w ścianę kościoła św. Marii Magdaleny we Wrocławiu. Stan sprzed konserwacji z lat 1888–1890 (źródło: [13, s. 109])

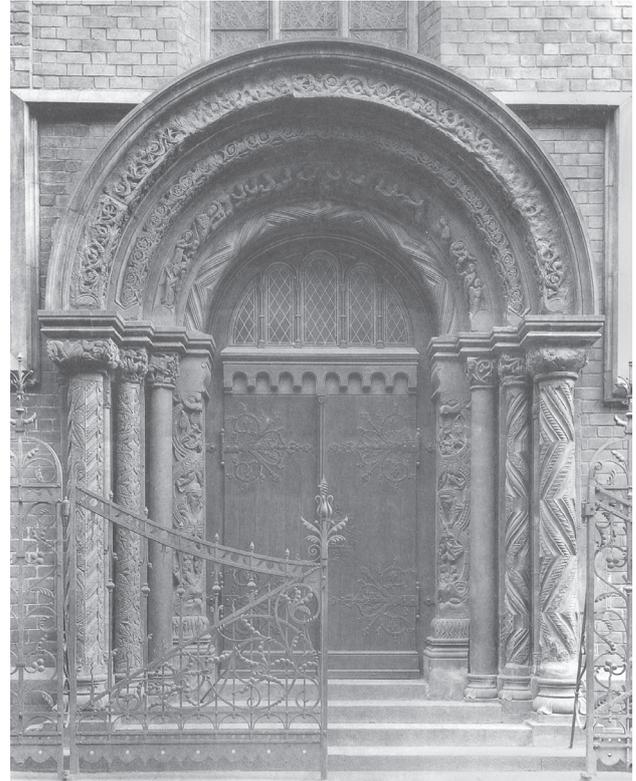


Fig. 4. A photograph of the Olbin portal, built into the wall of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Wrocław. State from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (source: [14, p. 33])

Il. 4. Fotografia portalu ołbińskiego, wmurowanego w ścianę kościoła św. Marii Magdaleny we Wrocławiu. Stan z początku XX w. (źródło: [14, s. 33])

The other elements of the archivolt seem to be much better preserved. In the zone of the capitals, the external pair of columns with broken and eroded capitals and imposts is striking. Its shafts bear traces of damage in the lower part. The photograph shows the shafts and capitals of the inner columns without any visible damage. The plinths and bases of the columns, especially the external ones, are the most eroded. The bases of the jambs, elevated above the ground level at the highest, are visible in good condition. The lion at the base of the west column is damaged in the photograph, practically unrecognizable. The stair steps (two) are heavily worn in the central part. The portal opening in the photograph is still built up with 16<sup>th</sup> century forms. In the photograph the wall of the church is partially plastered, largely eroded at the bottom. It is noticeable that all the major damage to the portal concerns its external elements, especially the upper and lower parts, which are most exposed to the weather.

Another photograph from around 1930 (Fig. 4) shows the portal shortly after the conservation treatments of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. What draws attention is the brighter color of the impost cornice and the bases of the columns and their significantly better condition. The shafts of the inner columns have not changed. The new outer strip of the archivolt and the entire lower part – the steps (four) and the plinths – are also clearly differentiated. The photograph shows cylindrical pads placed between the shafts and bas-

es of the two outer columns of the east side. The church wall is unplastered, with a new clinker brick face. Also clearly visible is the exposed stonework of the fault, to the right of the outer eastern column, after the removal of the plaster. Perhaps the most significant change visible in the photograph is the removal of the 16<sup>th</sup> century inner door and its replacement with a gateway with neo-Romanesque timberwork.

A detailed inventory of the portal's condition from the 1950s was published by Świechowski [23] and shows precisely the decoration of the stonework elements along with the damage. Thirty years later the author proposed a reconstruction assuming the connection of the tympanum with the portal, currently in the National Museum in Wrocław [2].

Comparing the described iconographic materials, one may conclude that Mützel's illustration, especially in the face of comparison with not much later drawings from Luchs's study and the first known photograph of the portal, seems to be a certain idealization. The discrepancy regarding the number of steps is noteworthy – in Mützel's case it is one, while in Woelfl's picture from 1867 it is two. The condition of the steps before the conservator's intervention in 1888 indicates their heavy wear, rather than being the result of only a few decades of use. The overall state of preservation of the portal, especially its lower parts (the bases), as well as the eastern part of the outer archi-

volt and the capitals of the column carrying it, is clearly worse in the photographs from before the conservation in 1888 than in Mützel's graphics. A detail of minor importance is a certain inconsistency in the scale of the transom grille. This set of inconsistencies between Mützel's depiction and the photographs and Woelfl's work allows us to assume that the illustrator in some way refined the image of the object. It is worth noting here the date of the transfer carved centrally in the outer strip of the archivolt: 1546. Mützel's graphic is perhaps the only iconographic source on which the inscription is visible. The drawing from Luchs' work, although also exceptionally precise, does not contain this detail. The text mentions another inscription from the archivolt: IORDANI<sup>5</sup> near the scene of Christ's Baptism, but there is no information about the centrally placed date. On the photographs from before the replacement of the whole archivolt the inscription also remains invisible. This may be due to the heavy erosion of the whole outer part of the archivolt, which is the section most exposed to the weather. The damage may have obliterated the inscription to such an extent that it was not visible in the photographs. However, we have no certainty that it actually existed. Also noteworthy is the inner pair of columns with smooth shafts. Mützel's drawing shows them clearly segmented, whereas all other 19<sup>th</sup> century depictions show them as monolithic. It is possible that they were replaced between 1823 and 1888, although it seems more likely that this is the result of a discrepancy between the artistic representation of the portal and its actual state. What is unquestionable is the presence of stone lions at the outer bases of the columns before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, confirmed by all the iconography of the period.

### *Iconographic agenda*

Equally mysterious as the history of the portal is its iconographic agenda, the leading motif of which was initially described by Świechowski as [...] *what Adam and Eve were guilty of when they reached for the forbidden fruit, the Saviour erased with His life and death on the cross* [25, p. 55]. The analysis of the decoration, however, may reveal even a wider scale in depicting the biblical scenes of the portal's creators. The description of the elements bearing the decoration (excluding geometrical and floral decoration) will be presented here in order from the lower to the upper parts of the portal.

The western jamb is a mirror reflection of the eastern one, which may indicate its later, 16<sup>th</sup> century metric, as claimed by Koziński [1]. Three medallions surrounded by a ribbon thread on both represent in turn (from the top): floral decoration, a bearded man with hands reaching down towards the lower medallion, and Adam and Eve. Above the head of the bearded man, on which rests the characteristic veil or mitre<sup>6</sup>, two birds of prey meet with their beaks. Similarly, above the heads of Adam and Eve,

two fish (?) are sculpted in a similar position. The man in the middle part was interpreted by Burgemeister and Grundmann, as well as Quirini-Popławski as God the Father [18], [26]. The recognition of the first parents in the two figures of the lower segment is clear. It would be difficult to assume that another pair of naked people could find their place here [2]. This set of representations (vegetation, fowl, fish, first parents and God the Father) may point to the biblical cycle of creation as the primary theme of the jamb decoration. On this assumption, the events of the third, fifth and sixth days of creation are visible on the eastern side. The western carving is probably a 16<sup>th</sup>-century replacement for a prototype destroyed or lost during the demolition of the abbey. As such, it was forged in the form of a mirror image of its eastern counterpart, known to those of that time. Originally the western carving may have been decorated with a decoration depicting the first days of creation, also included in medallions and completing the chronology of the whole representation.

Significant in the context of considering the decoration of the jambs is the seam dividing the eastern jamb into two parts, running at the height of the headdress of God the Father. Koziński drew attention to the "sculptural inconsistency" visible on both sides of the cut line, which may suggest that the carving was shortened in order to lower the portal and adapt it to the conditions of the new site [1]. The composed medallion actually varies in width on the two sides of the joint, which is visible to the naked eye in the alignment of the western part of the ribbon thread. On this basis it can be assumed that these are in fact fragments of two medallions, which would testify to the original segmentation of the decoration of the eastern (and probably also the western) jamb into four parts. Eight medallions would allow the representation of the six days of creation and the presence of God the Father in the decoration on both sides of the portal.

When analyzing the iconographic program of the jambs, it is worth noting the characteristic theme of the "mouths of hell" – two human masks, from whose mouths a ribbon thread flows, encircling the following segments of the decoration, placed above the base and below the capitols. An almost identical form can be seen in the right jamb of the portal in Kilpeck, dated between 1135 and 1140, as pointed out by Chorowska [18]. It is worth noting here that this motif occurs, although in a visually different form, in one of the capitals of the portal from Czerwińsk dated to around 1140 [18].

The area of the capitals is probably the most decorative part of the portal. The capitals of the outer columns were probably symmetrical, but this cannot be determined with certainty, as the eastern head was heavily damaged in its front and western part. For this reason only the western capital will be described here. On its western side there is a depiction of a four-legged creature devouring a leaf (?) [25], the mirror image of which is also on the front face of the capital, so that the two meet head-on at its corner. Further on, the eastern corner, which is the most exposed, depicts a scene of original sin – Adam and Eve facing each other but separated by a tree of the knowledge of good and evil entwined by a serpent. On the east wall of the

<sup>5</sup> In Luchs's work as "ICRUANI" [9].

<sup>6</sup> In the eastern jamb the figure is deprived of this headgear. This change, however, is due to a slit in the carving which runs through this place.

head a scene difficult to interpretation – two figures facing north. The first of these (left) is a winged angel, the second remains unrecognized, due to its incompleteness, resulting from 16<sup>th</sup> century trimming of the capitul at this point. However, it wears a long robe and a circular nimbus around its head (like the angel), which precludes interpreting it as either of the first parents. Between the figures two plant branches spreading out on either side are depicted. Both capitals of the outer columns have been stripped of some of their decoration as a result of being forged to accommodate the new location in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The capitals of the second and third columns of the western side bear exceptionally rich and plastic decoration with zoomorphic motives. In the central capital there are possibly silhouettes of eagles – the symbols of the Evangelist John and a lion – Mark. These representations are not fully preserved and are devoid of heads. The capitul of the inner column is decorated on the left with a well-preserved figure of an ox (Evangelist Luke) and on the right with a figure of a man in a mitre (Matthew?). It should be noted, however, that Świechowski interpreted these representations differently – as zoomorphic decoration devoid of the symbolism of the four Evangelists. In the figure of a man in a mitre he saw “a bishop of the sea” [25]. The level of complexity of the decoration and entanglement of these figures in plant threads undoubtedly causes problems with their correct identification and many ambiguities.

Significantly, the second and third (from the outside) capitals of the eastern side are decorated much poorer, both in terms of the momentum of the iconography and the artistic quality of the sculpture. The central head is covered only by simple and relatively low-density plant threads. The capitul of the inner column bears a similar decoration, enriched in the corner with a human face of simplified drawing. It is possible that during the 16<sup>th</sup> century reconstruction of the portal a mistake was made in the arrangement of the heads on the columns. It is possible that originally one pair of capitals was exchanged, so that in each of the sides there was one with the representation of the evangelists and one with plant decoration. It is also worth noting the much lower artistic level of the decoration of the heads on the eastern side. This may suggest that in the original layout of the portal they were not there at all. They may have appeared there only in 1546, during the reconstruction of the portal, replacing the lost or destroyed capitals with richer decoration, corresponding to the one we know from the western side.

The story of Christ's life is in fact, clearly and without any doubt as to the interpretation of the whole, recorded in the second centrifugal strip of the archivolt (chronologically from left to right: the Annunciation of Mary, Joseph and the Midwife of Bethlehem, the Birth, the Adoration of the Three Kings, Joseph's Dream, the Child's Bath, the Circumcision (?), the Presentation in the Temple, the Baptism in the Jordan). Two of these scenes are apocryphal: Joseph and the Midwife of Bethlehem (Pseudo-Matthew Gospel), which is usually interpreted as the Annunciation to the Shepherds [25], and the Baby Bath. The most interesting segment, however, is a piece about 40 cm long

between the Child's Bath and the Presentation in the Temple, bearing cut marks on both sides and depicting two figures facing each with their backs. The interpretation of this fragment as a scene of the Circumcision can be found in the literature, but it is quite probable that it is in fact the remains of two adjacent scenes originally located in this place, which would explain both the unusual positioning of the figures in relation to each other and the dilution of the decoration noticeable in the western part of the archivolt strip. Perhaps the archivolt was lowered during the works adapting the portal to its new location<sup>7</sup>.

The change in the archivolt's shape may have also necessitated the removal of the Romanesque tympanum (now in the National Museum in Wrocław), commonly associated with the portal today. Its decoration depicting the Deposition of the Cross on the obverse and the Dormition of Mary on the reverse would probably complete the entire iconographic agenda of the portal. Precise comparison of the arches of both elements and their dimensions should be the next step in research on the portal.

### *Attempt to date elements of the portal*

The starting point of the attempt presented by the author to date the elements of the portal was its inventory made in 2021–2022 by digital photogrammetry. This method has been described in many papers on the inventory of historical objects, including articles from 2018 presenting the process of creating photogrammetric models [27], [28].

For this purpose, 950 photographs were taken with a DJI Mavic Air 2 drone, the use of which allowed easy capture of the portal also from above. The set of photographs was then analyzed in the Reality Capture software of the Capturing Reality studio. Characteristic points and their repetition in subsequent photographs were determined (by the program's algorithm), after which the algorithm calculated the position of the drone's camera at the time each of the photographs was taken. On the basis of the information obtained in these two stages, the program created a dense cloud of points faithfully representing the geometry of the portal and transformed it into a mesh model. Generating a texture from the photographs used was the final step in creating the 3D model. The final model was composed of 32 million triangles, which speaks for its high accuracy – all details of the portal, including the texture of the stone, were documented. The processing of the model, which consisted of removing surrounding elements that were unnecessary in the context of this work, scaling and establishing views, was carried out in CloudCompare. The model was then used to generate a view of the portal, as well as a projection and cross-sections in orthogonal projection (Fig. 5), which served as the basis for the measurements and illustrations included in the study.

Koziński's thesis that the western jamb was chiseled in 1546, in order to fill the gap left by a lost or damaged orig-

<sup>7</sup> The author would like to thank Rev. Prof. Janusz Nowiński for his multiple consultations during the writing of this article.



Fig. 5. Photogrammetric inventory of the Ołbin portal from the southern wall of St. Mary Magdalene Church in Wrocław. Present state:

1 – cross-section A-A, western part, 2 – portal view from the south, orthogonal projection, 3 – cross-section B-B, eastern part (elaborated by F. Hackemer)

II. 5. Inwentaryzacja fotogrametryczna portalu ołbińskiego z południowej ściany kościoła pw. św. Marii Magdaleny we Wrocławiu. Stan obecny:

1 – przekrój A-A, ościeże zachodnie, 2 – widok portalu od południa, w rzucie ortogonalnym, 3 – przekrój B-B, ościeże wschodnie (oprac. F. Hackemer)

inal, seems plausible, although its confirmation would require physical and chemical testing of the stone. However, there is no doubt that the eastern carving bears a clear trace of segmentation in the form of a cut line visible in the central medallion. It is significant that the figure of the bearded man depicted here was, as a result of this cut, deprived of the headgear known to us from the western carving. So it is in fact almost certain that some changes to the height of the jambs were made when the portal was set into the wall of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene. Recognizing the scale of these changes is crucial to giving credibility to earlier considerations about the iconographic program of the jambs. To this end, suitable measurements were made based on a photogrammetric model of the portal. The height of the entire eastern jamb in its present form, counting from the junction with the flamed base at the bottom to the 16<sup>th</sup> century capital at the top, is approximately 212.5 cm (Fig. 6). The heights of the central medallions, which are the only ones presented fully and not fading into the maw of hell, are: 62.5 cm (eastern jamb) and 62.2 cm (western jamb). Assuming the original existence of four medallions on each side, the total height of the shaft can be set at about 276 cm, counting without bases and capitals. This dimension is subject to a margin of error of a few centimeters.

The bases of the jambs bear a flame decoration, the direction of which may indicate their secondary 180-degree turn, which Koziński pointed out, seeing in them the original capitals. The impost below them form a whole with the bases, chiseled from a single fragment of stone. Significantly, however, the whole also includes the 11.6 cm high cuboidal slab under the impost. The assumption that this flame-decorated base once constituted the capital of a jamb, therefore, also enforces the assumption that above the impost cornice there were cuboid abacuses in the portal, of which this slab is a relic. For such a form it is possible to find analogies such as the portals from the monastery

churches in Thalburgel and Paulinzella (both Benedictine)<sup>8</sup>. Koziński also suggested a correspondence between the dimensions of the base of the jambs and the zone of the capitals of the columns, which raises some doubts. The height of the capitals of the columns of the eastern side, together with the imposts, oscillates between 47 and 49 cm. The height of the flame base together with the impost is about 36 cm. Only after adding to this height the dimension of the slab – located today below, but once perhaps above the impost – can we obtain a result of about 47 cm. However, such a correspondence is difficult to accept, as the compared sets of elements are not compatible with each other. This raises the following question: if the flame-shaped base together with the impost and the slab once constituted the capitals of the jambs, why is the capital almost half as high as the others? This observation raises some doubts. However, it should be noted that the height of the set of the impost, flame base and hypothetical four-medallion jamb shaft is 312.7 cm, which is only less than 2 cm less than the height of the adjacent column including the capital and impost. This correspondence may suggest that the jambs originally had bases of similar height to those we know from 19<sup>th</sup>-century copies and set at the same level. The conformity of the heights of the imposts has been confirmed. Their heights are approximately 18–19 cm. The eastern base is on the side of the accompanying column clearly scuffed to fit the new location. The lack of traces of such actions in the western jamb may speak in favor of Koziński's thesis on the secondary nature of the western jamb. What is clear, however, is the 16<sup>th</sup> century origin of the capitals of both jambs, whose form is completely different from the other elements of the portal.

<sup>8</sup> The author would like to thank Roland Mruzek PhD for his consultation on portal transformations and style analogies.

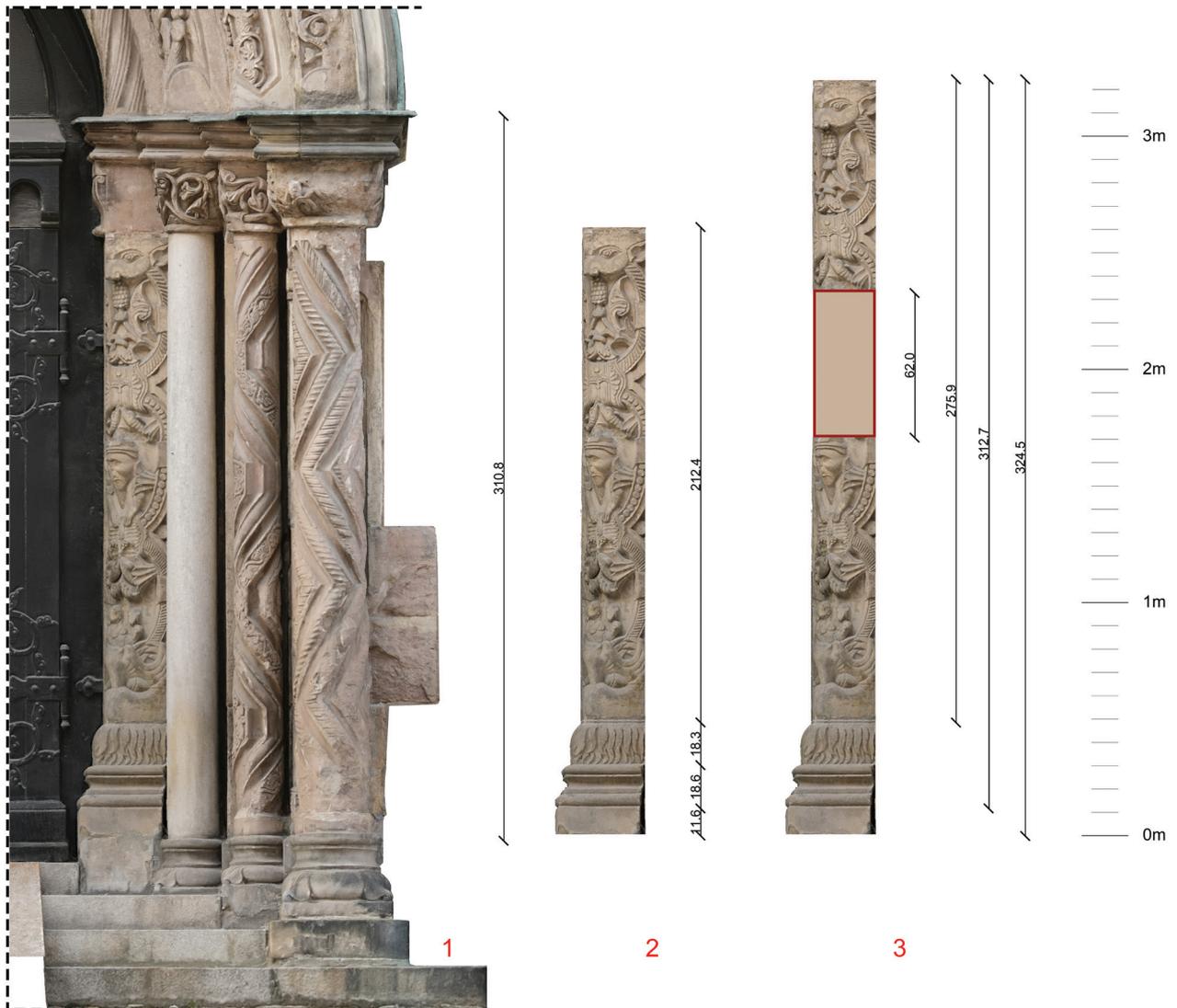


Fig. 6. Portal from the southern wall of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Wrocław, present state. Eastern jamb, comparison of the heights of individual elements: 1 – photogrammetric model of the portal, eastern side, 2 – eastern jamb without the 16<sup>th</sup> century capital, 3 – eastern jamb enlarged by the size of one medallion (red box indicates hypothetical location of the missing element) (elaborated by F. Hackemer)

Il. 6. Portal olbiński z południowej ściany kościoła pw. św. Marii Magdaleny we Wrocławiu, stan obecny. Węgar wschodni, porównanie wysokości poszczególnych elementów: 1 – model fotogrametryczny portalu, ościeże wschodnie, 2 – węgar wschodni bez XVI-wiecznego zwieńczenia, 3 – węgar wschodni powiększony o wymiar jednego medalionu (czerwoną ramką oznaczono hipotetyczną lokalizację brakującego elementu) (oprac. F. Hackemer)

The impost cornice crowning the zone of capitals in its present form obviously dates from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is clear from the analysis of the iconography. The question arises whether its predecessor visible on the oldest photograph of the portal (Fig. 3) was a 16<sup>th</sup> century addition. According to Koziński [1], the only preserved impost of the 12<sup>th</sup> century is the one located under the flame-decorated base of the eastern jamb. This thesis is very plausible, not only in light of the analysis of the destruction of both jamb bases presented above, but also thanks to the observation of the jambs. The corners between outer and second pair of columns of the portal are decorated with columns with capitals with rosettes. Behind the external columns can be seen cannelled pilasters set in the face of the wall. These two elements form

a whole – the column was chiseled in the corner of the pilaster. It is difficult to imagine that the creators of the portal in its original form deliberately made the decorative channeling of these fragments of stonework and then covered them up by attaching a column directly to the pilaster. It is therefore clear that the outer column must have been offset in some direction and the projection of the doorways different than today. As the impost cornice follows the positioning of the capitals of the columns, it is almost certain that it was carved in the 16<sup>th</sup> century for the reconstruction of the portal.

The dating of the outer archivolt strip, which in its present form dates from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (it was replaced due to extensive damage during conservation work around 1890), is undetermined. It is likely that in the form



Fig. 7. The Olbin portal from the southern wall of St. Mary Magdalene Church in Wrocław. A fragment of photogrammetric inventory. Detail of the lower parts of the external columns of the eastern side. Cylindrical pads between the shafts and bases of the columns are visible (elaborated by F. Hackemer)

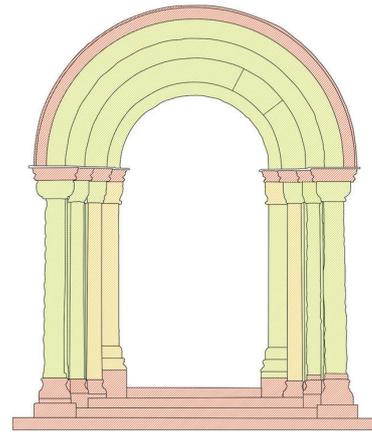
II. 7. Portal olbiński z południowej ściany kościoła pw. św. Marii Magdaleny we Wrocławiu. Fragment inwentaryzacji fotogrametrycznej.

Detal dolnych partii kolumn zewnętrznych ościeża wschodniego. Widoczne cylindryczne podkładki między trzonami i bazami kolumn (oprac. F. Hackemer)

known to us from the iconography and the existing copy it appeared only in the 16<sup>th</sup> century during the adaptation of the portal to a new function.

The origin of the cylindrical pads placed between the shafts and bases of the outer columns of the east side of a portal is interesting. They were undoubtedly placed here only at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the similarity of the sandstone from which they were made to that of the column shaft (undoubtedly the original) suggests that these pads may also date from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The complete dissimilarity of the stone used for the column bases and the impost cornice seems to confirm this. They may have been made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from any of the removed, eroded elements of 12<sup>th</sup> century stonework, e.g. from the bases of these columns (Fig. 7).

The rebuilding of the portal in 1546 was undoubtedly done in a way that lost its original form and prevented its full reconstruction. Many changes, such as alteration of the height of the door frames, change of the plan and positioning of columns, probable change of the arch of archivolt shape, removal of tympanum, replacement of imposts, introduction of new plinths and change of the



■ - 1      ■ - 2      ■ - 3

Fig. 8. Proposal for chronological dating of the elements of the Olbin portal from the southern wall of St. Mary Magdalene Church in Wrocław: 1 – 12<sup>th</sup> century, original elements, 2 – 1529–1546, 3 – 1888–1890 (elaborated by F. Hackemer)

II. 8. Propozycja datowania elementów portalu olbińskiego z południowej ściany kościoła pw. św. Marii Magdaleny we Wrocławiu: 1 – XII w., elementy pierwotne, 2 – 1529–1546, 3 – 1888–1890 (oprac. F. Hackemer)

height of the bases, replacement of the western jamb with a copy or change of the arrangement of capitals of the two inner pairs of columns make it difficult today to identify the 12<sup>th</sup> century shape of the portal.

The conservation work of 1888–1890 mainly involved the replacement of many damaged elements with copies, including the bases of three pairs of columns, their bases and stair steps, the outer archivolt and the impost cornice. Cylindrical stone pads, slightly but noticeably larger in diameter than the diameter of the shaft, were placed between the shaft and the bases of the two outer columns of the eastern side. This procedure is clear when comparing two photographs of the portal, before and after conservation (Figs. 3, 4). The remains of the lion sculptures were removed, however it was not decided to place the copies, perhaps due to too poor recognition of their original shape. The archivolt was covered with a strip of sheet metal to protect it from rainfall. A small respond in the fault between columns 1 and 2 (from the outside) in the western flank of the portal was filled in to hide its segmentation. A similar treatment was applied to other elements of the portal (the archivolt stripes, the connection of the column shafts with stone pads). Finally, a new purist Neo-Romanesque door woodwork was introduced in place of the 16<sup>th</sup> century addition.

After two such strong sets of transformations of the object, the following can be regarded as 12<sup>th</sup>-century elements: four centrifugal strips of archivolts, capitals of three pairs of external columns, shafts of two pairs of external columns, the eastern jamb with a flame-decorated base and impost and abacus(?) below it, stonework of the flanks – cannelled pilasters (with columns in corners). The ele-

ments from the 16<sup>th</sup> century are probably the western jamb, the capitals of both jambs, smooth shafts of internal columns. Other elements of the portal are probably results of the conservator's interference from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or their dating has not been established (Fig. 8).

### Summary

The analyses described above have made it possible to pose questions which will form the basis for further architectural research aimed at clarifying certain issues related to the origin and transformation of the Olbin portal.

The starting point for the analyses were the measurements and studies of the decoration of the eastern doorway, with particular emphasis on the jamb. They allowed supporting Koziński's thesis about the lowering of the portal during the rebuilding of 1546. As a result of these investigations and visual inspections it was also possible to find clues suggesting the original existence of abacuses above the impost cornice of the portal. Hypotheses concerning changes in the height of the archivolt need to be confirmed by further research, e.g. on a tympanum from the National Museum in Wrocław and two strips of the archivolt from Olbin from the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław. There is no doubt that the 19<sup>th</sup>-century detail

worth attention are two pads under the shafts of the columns of the eastern side, possibly chiseled from the relics of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century bases.

The recognition of secondary elements and the precise establishment of the history of transformations is a step towards the knowledge of the original form of the portal. Therefore, it seems also necessary to study the present condition of the portal, after a series of 20<sup>th</sup>-century restoration works, which seriously and unfortunately affected its condition. It is impossible to reconstruct the decoration from, for example, the cut capitals of the external columns, which makes it impossible to fully identify the iconographic agenda of the portal.

The analyses carried out confirmed the view that the Olbin portal is an outstanding work of architecture of the region and at the same time it is still not fully recognized. Many elements of this unique work and its history remain shrouded in mystery. The recognition of secondary elements and the precise establishment of the history of transformations is a step towards the knowledge of its original form. Therefore, it seems fully justified to continue the research on the portal planned by the author.

Translated by  
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### Abstract

#### *Some concerns about the Olbin's Portal from St. Mary Magdalene Church in Wrocław*

The article outlines the key research problems concerning the so-called Olbiński Portal from the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Wrocław, originally from the Abbey in Olbin. The portal is undoubtedly one of the most important works of Romanesque architectural sculpture in this part of Europe. Its original form, however, remains unknown – the present one is the result of the 16<sup>th</sup> century process of embedding the portal in a new place, after the suppression and demolition of the abbey. For inventory purposes, the author created a photogrammetric 3D model of the portal, which is also the basis for later considerations. The work contains the author's analysis of the iconography and the present state of the portal, together with conclusions concerning the dating of its individual elements. On this basis, an illustration of the overall stratification of the consecutive construction phases of the portal was created. An attempt is also made to better understand the iconographic program of the work and to draw attention to unnoticed problems of interpretation, resulting mainly from the damage of the portal suffered as a result of being adapted in order to be built into the wall of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in 1546. The work draws attention to a number of research problems which have not been solved so far.

**Key words:** Wrocław, Olbin, St. Mary Magdalene Church, portal, photogrammetry

### Streszczenie

#### *Kilka uwag na temat tzw. portalu olbińskiego z kościoła św. Marii Magdaleny we Wrocławiu*

Artykuł stanowi opis kluczowych problemów badawczych dotyczących tzw. portalu olbińskiego z kościoła pw. św. Marii Magdaleny we Wrocławiu, pierwotnie pochodzącego z opactwa na Olbinie. Portal jest bez wątpienia jednym z najważniejszych dzieł romańskiej rzeźby architektonicznej w tej części Europy. Jego pierwotna forma pozostaje jednak nieznaną – obecna stanowi wynik XVI-wiecznego zabiegu osadzenia portalu w nowym miejscu, po kasacie i zburzeniu opactwa. Do celów inwentaryzacyjnych autor stworzył fotogrametryczny model 3D portalu, stanowiący również podstawę późniejszych rozważań. Praca zawiera przeprowadzoną przez autora analizę ikonografii oraz obecnego stanu portalu, wraz z płynącymi z nich wnioskami dotyczącymi datowania jego poszczególnych elementów. Na tej podstawie powstała ilustracja całościowego rozwarstwienia kolejnych faz budowlanych portalu. Podjęta została również próba lepszego zrozumienia programu ikonograficznego dzieła oraz zwrócenia uwagi na niepomijalne problemy interpretacyjne, wynikające przede wszystkim ze zniszczeń, jakich portal doznał w wyniku dostosowywania go do wmurowania w ścianę kościoła Marii Magdaleny w 1546 r. Praca zwraca uwagę na wiele nierozwiązanych do tej pory problemów badawczych, takich jak identyfikacja postaci rzeźbionych w węgarach czy pierwotna forma kapiteli zewnętrznych kolumn, oraz na pewne przyjęte w dotychczasowej literaturze przedmiotu przeoczenia dotyczące głównie efektów XIX-wiecznych zabiegów konserwatorskich.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Wrocław, Olbin, kościół św. Marii Magdaleny, portal, fotogrametria