



# The Mystery of Light

Medieval Art in Pomerania

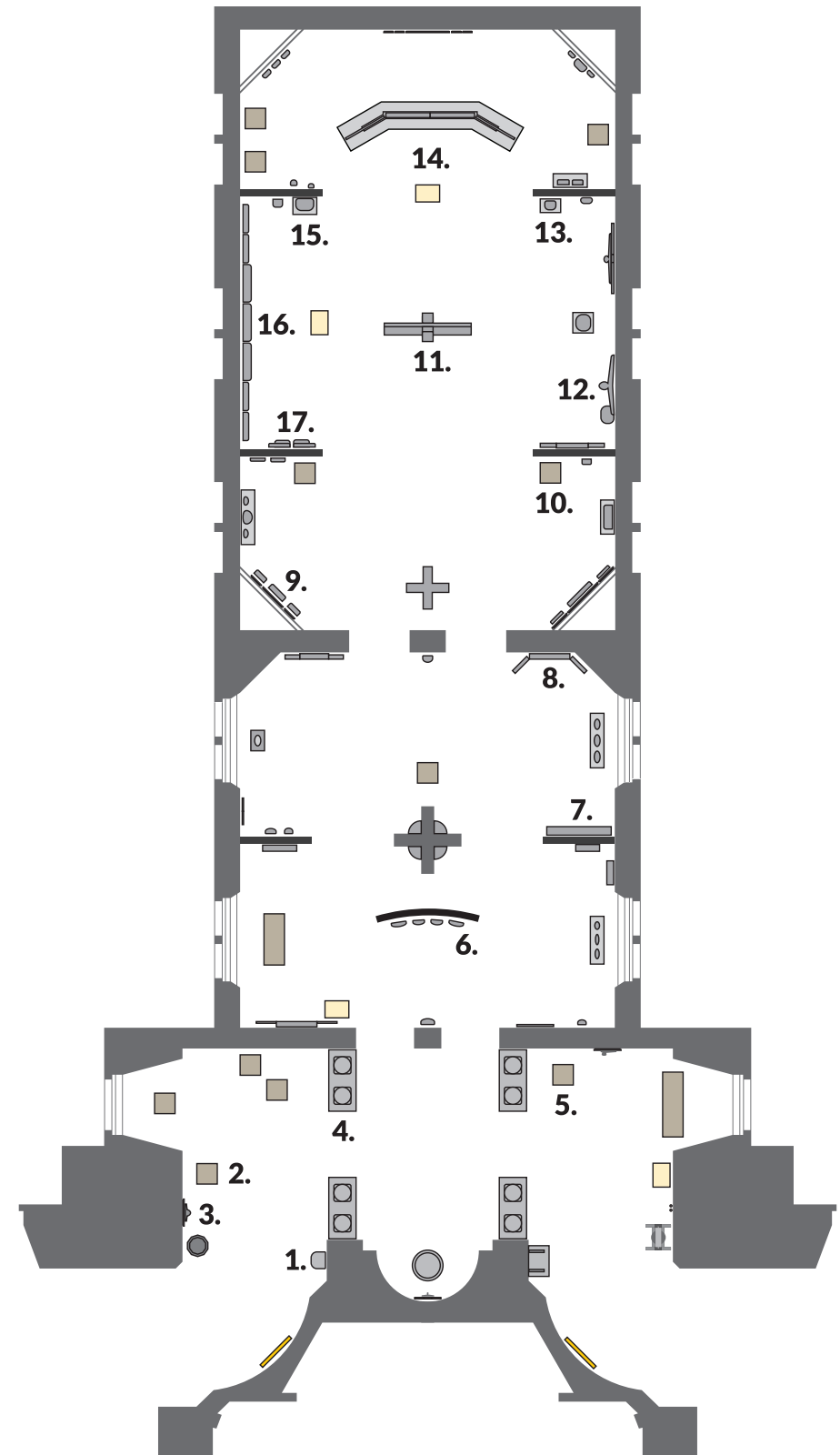


The National Museum in Szczecin

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MIS  
TE  
RIUM  
SWA  
THA

A classical painting of a woman, likely a saint or noblewoman, wearing a richly patterned gold and brown dress. She is shown from the chest up, looking slightly to the right. The painting is partially obscured by large, bold, black, sans-serif text that is layered over it. The text consists of the words 'MIS', 'TE', 'RIUM', 'SWA', and 'THA' stacked vertically, with some letters overlapping the woman's face and clothing.





Kinga Krasnodębska

# The Mystery of Light

Medieval Art in Pomerania

Exhibition guide



The National Museum in Szczecin  
2022



## The Mystery of Light. Medieval art in Pomerania

*The Mystery of Light* is a new permanent exhibition of the National Museum in Szczecin, showcasing medieval art created by artists over the course of four centuries of the history of Pomerania – a region, which became part of the social and political structures of Christian Europe. The long-running process of Christianisation of this land was successfully completed thanks to two missions carried out in 1124 and 1128 by Bishop Otto of Bamberg, dubbed the Apostle of Pomerania, whose monumental statue from the former collegiate church at the residence of the dukes of Pomerania in Szczecin greets the exhibition visitors. The relics and artefacts presented at the exhibition come from the Polish and German part of the historic Pomerania – the region, which stretches on both sides of the Oder River, ruled by the dukes of the House of Griffin – Polish, Danish and German fiefs. This era came to an end with the second religious transformation of Pomerania – the official adoption of the Reformation in 1534.

The construction of churches and monasteries in Christianised areas ensured that the religion would survive, enabled the social and economic development of the region, and meant particularly high outlays on the works of art. The presented works, which are spread across three separate exhibition spaces, came mainly from Pomeranian churches. Back in their day, they were linked to religious worship, reflecting and justifying the ideas originating in Christian thought at the time, as well as satisfying the socio-religious needs of the faithful and the sponsors, which kept changing over the centuries. One of the particular features characteristic of art in West Pomerania, especially in the late Middle Ages, was the significance of towns and townfolk, who were sponsors of the works of art – the same phenomenon could be seen in Silesia and in Gdańsk Pomerania.

Join us on a journey into a mysterious era, somewhat dark, yet illuminated by a metaphysical glow full of interesting beliefs, outstanding figures, fantastic imagery, miraculous objects, solemn ceremonies and religious rituals – the world of medieval Christianity.

The Gotland columns with bas-relief images of monks and the famous devil, which came from the Cistercian monastery in Kołbacz – the most important monastery in Pomerania, highlight the first space of the exhibition, symbolically recalling the layout of a three-nave church interior. Between them, in the apse, the visitors can see one of the oldest Pomeranian crucifixes – the crucifix from Marianowo, which is presented at the exhibition courtesy of the National Museum in Poznań. On the sides of the colon-

nade, objects typical of medieval temples are displayed. A bronze Romanesque crucifix from Pyrzyce from the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century – the oldest displayed artefact linked to the Magdeburg workshop – was once placed on the altar and used during the liturgy. The decorative censers saturated the sacred space with the smell of incense. Stone baptismal fonts with the depictions of dragons – like the artefact from Lubiana from ca. 1300 – were used to celebrate the first of the sacraments of the Christian faith. The oldest, 13<sup>th</sup>-century figures of Mary Enthroned with the Child in Pomerania from Gardno allowed the faithful to meditate about the dogma of the Incarnation. Bells hung on tall towers, which dominated medieval landscape, helped measure the passage of time with their loud sounds and called the believers to pray. The bronze lion's head-shaped door knocker, as well as fragments of carved stalls illustrate the wealth and importance of Kołobrzeg in the 14<sup>th</sup> century – at the time, one of the main cities in Pomerania, part of the Hanseatic League, a powerful union of northern European cities. Its importance was equal to that of Szczecin – home to a large port and the seat of ducal power. Luxury jewellery from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, found by archaeologists in 1999 in a cauldron hidden in a merchant's house in Szczecin's Old Town was an exceptional hoard, which showcased the wealth of decorations and ornaments worn by the residents of the Hanseatic cities.

The everyday life full of dangers, wars and unknown diseases, and the fear of eternal damnation was a reason enough for many average Europeans to pray. And so, they eagerly prayed to the saints, who were not only role models but also intermediaries, who would take their prayers to God. The colonnade that opens the exhibition leads to the gallery of depictions of saints in the second hall. Found in a cosy interior, which is supposed to bring to mind a temple chapel, they reflect a form of religiosity characteristic of the Middle Ages, which was focused on extraordinary events and objects – miracles and relics. Some of the most important and popular saints for the Church and the region can be recognised thanks to their attributes. A refined lady in an elegant dress – Saint Dorothy – holds a basket of flowers. Saint George – a knight in medieval armour – defeats the dragon, symbol of evil, with a sword. Saint James the Great, who – according to the Christian tradition – was buried in the Spanish cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, still visited by crowds of pilgrims today, wears a hat decorated with a scallop shell, commonly known as the scallop shell of Saint James, which grew to become an international symbol used by Christian pilgrims. The gallery shows the ways of shaping these images, typical and characteristic of the nascent Gothic art – from the beautiful style, as seen in the figures of saints from Glewitz from around 1430, to the figures made in the spirit of late-medieval realism by a local workshop of the Master of Chociwel Passion, who was active from around 1500.

The peaceful interior of the saints' gallery opens into the monumental space of the third hall. The discreetly shining facet of the ceiling, in a colour



referring to the custom of painting the vaults of medieval churches in colours symbolising the idea of Heaven, provides a symbolic setting for a group of the most important images and objects. They are connected with the figures of Christ and Mary, as well as the key elements of the doctrine of the medieval Church. The centre of this lofty hall is dominated by an impressive in size, yet subtle Kamień Crucifix – the most valuable work of art in the collection of medieval art of the Szczecin museum, which dates back to ca. 1300. In accordance with the symbolism of the cross, it marks the *axis mundi* – the axis of the world connecting heaven and earth, while its wide arms remind of the universal and common character of salvation, which took place on the cross – the core tenet of Christianity. A colourful and gilded series of paintings of Marian and Christological themes painted on the altar wings of the monumental polyptych from the church of St John in Stargard from ca. 1450 serves as an outstanding background for this crucifix. The events of the Passion, experienced during the Paschal mysteries, which were particularly popular in the late Middle Ages, were masterfully depicted in the carved quatrefoils of the Ueckermunde Altar, filled with expressive gestures and faces. The seven-metre long Passion Altar was sponsored in ca. 1510 by Duke Bogusław X, probably in memory of his journey to Jerusalem.

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I would like to express my enormous gratitude for the opportunity to co-create the exhibition, showcasing these valuable works of art, as well as for the support and cooperation of many people involved in its design and preparation. This joint work is dedicated to Zofia Krzymuska-Fafius, a curator and researcher of medieval Pomeranian art, whom I hold very close, and who encouraged me to go on this journey.















# 1. Figure of Saint Otto of Bamberg

influenced by Rhineland art, ca. 1360–1370

sandstone, 225 × 44 × 42 cm

from the collegiate church at the ducal residence in Szczecin

inv. no.: MNS/Szt/137

Saint Otto from Swabia, who used to serve as a chaplain in the court of the Duke of Poland, Władysław I Herman, and who would later become the chancellor of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, the bishop of Bamberg and the Apostle of Pomerania. Invited by Bolesław III Wrymouth, he set out twice with a mission to Christianise West Pomerania in 1124 and 1128. With the cooperation of the local dukes, he managed to baptise numerous inhabitants of the region, as well as to build and furnish numerous churches. As a result, he managed to bring the long and turbulent process of Christianisation of West Pomerania, one of the last non-Christian areas on the map of Europe at that time, to a successful end. Saint Otto is the patron saint of the Szczecin-Kamień, Berlin, Bamberg archdioceses, as well as of Pomerania and the city of Pyrzyce.

The creation of the monumental sculpture of Saint Otto is associated with the foundation of Barnim III, Duke of Pomerania, as well as the medieval development of the castle hill in Szczecin. The griffin motif on the clasp of the bishop's cope and the coat of arms on the console supporting the figure confirm who funded the piece. The sculpture could have originally served as part of the furnishing of the church of Saint Otto, which was built in 1346 and demolished in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the expansion of the ducal residence. Until 1934 the sculpture was built into the so-called bell tower of the current castle, from the side of the mint courtyard. In that year, due to the negative impact of climatic conditions, it was replaced with a copy, and the original was placed on display at the Pomeranian Museum in Szczecin.

The symbolism of the sculpture is connected with the commemoration of the Christianisation of Pomerania. The seated couple depicted on the console, above the coat of arms with a griffin, are probably Warcisław I and his

wife Heila of Saxony – the ducal couple, who actively supported Bishop Otto during his mission and became renowned for their involvement in the organisation of the Church in Pomerania.



Leviathan mask on the bottom of the console





IN HOC SITO



## 2. Small bronze Romanesque crucifix

Magdeburg workshop, ca. 1150–1175

bronze cast, 12 × 7 × 1.7 cm

found in the Old Town in Pyrzyce

inv. no.: MNS/Szt/228

The representation of the Crucified as a living Christ, with open eyes, without visible signs of the Passion, often with a royal crown on the head, is a depiction characteristic of Romanesque art. It highlights the aspect of Christ's victory over death and sin, as well as the triumph of Christianity over other contemporaneous religious beliefs, which were considered to be paganism by the Church. Later – in Gothic art – this depiction fell out of favour, replaced by the image of Christ dead or dying on the cross, with a crown of thorns on the head.

The figure of Christ was originally attached to a crucifix, which is evidenced by the holes in the preserved hand and the eyelet under the feet. It represents a type of small crucifix popular in the Romanesque period, which came to be in the late 11th century, emerging alongside the development of the liturgical practices of the Church. It was the key element of the basic furnishings of temples – it would be placed on the altar and used in liturgical rites. Romanesque altar crucifixes, installed on a flagpole, were also used as crosses carried during religious processions. Many of them also served as reliquaries. The figure found in Pyrzyce, where Bishop Otto baptised Pomeranians on a mass scale for the first time and founded the first church during his mission, is the oldest artefact displayed at the exhibition.





### 3. Lion's head-shaped door knocker

Hans Apengeter's workshop, ca. or before 1344

bronze cast, 50 × 48 × 15.5 cm

from the collegiate church in Kołobrzeg

inv. no.: MNS/Szt/159

The elaborate and decorative door knockers, which were characteristic of medieval culture, were often installed on the doors of churches. Unlike standard handles, which were purely utilitarian, they had a decorative and symbolic function. Their shape usually referred to a lion's head, usually holding a hoop in its open jaws. The lion's head, according to Christian symbolism, may refer to evil, Satan, who was subdued at the threshold of the church - the House of God. In this context, it may also symbolise Christ the Redeemer, who is the allegorical gateway to the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kołobrzeg door knocker stands out from other medieval door knockers, thanks to its unusually decorative, openwork frame formed around the lion's head. The medallions made of grapevine feature symbolic depictions, which refer to the Salvation. The images of Christ shown on the cross in the lower medallion and triumphant on the throne as Pantocrator – the Lord of the World – at the top of the door knocker are accompanied by depictions of Old Testament prophets foretelling the coming of Christ and symbols of the Evangelists, authors of the history of salvation included in the New Testament. The Kołobrzeg door knocker is similar – in particular when it comes to its composition – to the analogous door knocker from Szczecin, sponsored by Duke Barnim III, as well as one in the town hall in Lübeck. These exceptional works are associated with Hans Apengeter, a master, who created his works in numerous cities on the Baltic Sea in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.



Eagle – the symbol  
of St John the Evangelist







## 4. Devil capital

Gotland workshop, ca. 1330–1340  
Gotland limestone, 37 × 52 × 52 cm  
from the Cistercian monastery in Kolbacz  
inv. no.: MNS/Szt/143

The devil capital, which owes its name to the image of the devil characteristic of the Gothic art of the Middle Ages, belongs to a group of column elements, known mainly for capitals adorned with bas-reliefs from the former Cistercian monastery buildings in Kolbacz. The capitals, which feature a shape typical of Romanesque art, are made of limestone from a quarry in Gotland. The style, based on forms from the intersection of Romanesque and Gothic art, as well as the characteristic motifs also link these pieces to the Nordic island and stone-making workshops, which were active there in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century

The round-relief decoration of the devil capital presents a genre scene with educational and satirical elements, referring to the life of monks. The main theme of the play is the celebration of the Eucharist and the adoration of the host. At the altar, on which the communion chalice is placed, we can see the figures of monks celebrating and participating in the daily Cistercian liturgy of the Eucharist. On the opposite side of the capitol, we can see a devil and a rebellious monk. The latter tries to escape punishment for his transgressions, with a look on terror on his face. He fails, as the muscular devil with a large head, donkey ears, and a mocking grin on his face, grabs him by the hood and pulls him closer.

This depiction, which may seem a bit grotesque to the contemporary viewer, used to have a moralising effect on the monks and their imagination. It serves as a warning and a call for humility, obedience and prayer, which are the only way to be saved from eternal damnation. The sacrament of the Eucharist, in this context, is the most effective way to fight the devil's powers.



Capital with oak branches



## 5. Madonna with the Child

Gotland workshop, ca. 1325–1350  
oak wood, polychrome remains, 61 × 25 × 14 cm  
from the church of St Peter in Benz (Usedom)  
inv. no.: MNS/Szt/178

The statue of the Madonna of Benz captivates the viewer with its subtle, youthful image. The crowned Mary Enthroned was depicted as the Queen of Heaven. The hieratic, solemn and severe expression of the Enthroned Madonnas, characteristic of earlier Romanesque depictions, had to give way to the image of a caring Mother, which emerged in the Gothic period. The way she nods her head and the tender way in which she embraces her Son create an image of a humble and modest mother, making her a model of motherhood. At the same time, the concerned expression on her face with eyes gazing into the distance and the somewhat reserved gesture of giving an apple seen in the centre of the composition prove that she is aware of the future sacrifice of her Son. The courageous, upright posture of the young Jesus and the gesture of accepting the apple from his mother show readiness and consent to the Work of Salvation. The apple, which was depicted in the Old Testament as the fruit of sin, symbolises the redemption of the original sin through Christ's death on the cross. In this context, Mary becomes the new Eve, taking part in the history of Salvation as the Mother of God.



The sculpture is an example of the depiction of Mary Enthroned with the Child standing or sitting on her knee, very popular in the Middle Ages. Statues of this kind were used for furnishing churches and were used for worship during services in honour of Mary or during individual prayer. The sculpture represents early Gothic Gotland style, which emerged from the Cologne court style around 1330.





## 6. Figure of Saint Dorothy

Szczecin workshop, ca. 1520–1530

linden wood, polychrome, gilding, 120 × 43 × 13 cm

from the Church of St Gertrude, formerly probably from the Church of St Mary in Szczecin

inv. no.: MNS/Szt/173

Saint Dorothy – the patron saint of gardeners, young ladies and brides – lived in Caesarea in Cappadocia, according to the legends. She was the daughter of a Roman senator and was famous for her exceptional beauty, as well as for her piety. During the persecution of Christians under Emperor Diocletian (284–305), she was subjected to numerous tortures which she endured, remaining faithful to her religion to the end. By sentence of the governor of the province, Sapricius – whom she had previously refused to marry – she was sentenced to death by beheading. According to tradition, as Dorothy was being led to the place of execution, the persecutor of the Christians, Theophilus, shouted at her in the crowd of onlookers. The man was mocking the paradise promised to Christians after death, where Dorothy was heading with a smile on her face. When a miracle happened and a boy appeared next to the woman with a basket of roses and fruit from the heavenly garden, the astonished Theophilus believed, converted and died alongside Dorothy.

A carved image of Saint Dorothy adorned the wing of the altar, the fragments of which have been preserved in modern times in the St Gertrude hospital church in Szczecin. Some assume that the altarpiece originally came from the Gothic Church of St Mary in Szczecin – an enormous hall-type building, which was richly furnished with art sponsored by dukes and wealthy burghers, which was the cultural and educational centre of the city. What remains of the altar are three statues of virgin saints, dressed in gold gowns and in fine poses, as well as the statue of St Maurice in late-medieval gold plate armour. The elongated, slender figure of Saint Dorothy – typical of the Mannerist trend, glittering with the gold of a costly gown, with her fair face and large, smooth forehead, as well as delicate smile of fine carmine lips, with charming dimples on her cheeks was the ideal of feminine beauty at the time. The corset, which highlighted her slender waist, decorative trimming on the edges of the robes with appliquéés, fashionable cuts and folds on her sleeves, as well as an embroidered shrug covering her neckline, typical of the Renaissance fashion of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, and an uncovered hairdo of black curls, typical of an unmarried maiden at that time, mean that the figure of the saint depicts a noble lady, a wealthy inhabitant of the Hanseatic city.





## 7. Predella with depictions of the Fourteen Holy Helpers

workshop of the Master of Chociwel Passion, ca. 1500–1520  
linden wood, tempera, 44 × 189 × 25 cm  
from the altar of St Anne from the collegiate church in Kołobrzeg  
inv. no.: MNS/Szt/100

The cult of saints was a religious phenomenon characteristic of culture of the Middle Ages – an epoch filled with dangers, wars, unknown diseases and plagues, as well as the fear of eternal damnation. According to common beliefs, the protagonists of the interesting legends, for their steadfast faith in Christ and their exceptional attitude as an exemplary model of piety, were given the status of residents of heaven acting as intermediaries in prayers to God. People commonly believed in their supernatural power, which ensured that the prayers and requests would be granted.

The figures painted on the predella – the chest base – of the altar of St Anne from Kołobrzeg, gathered in a row on Mary's sides and bearing their attributes, constitute a group of saints distinguished for their miraculous actions in areas important to the inhabitants of Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. A respectable group of beautiful and brave virgins, knights and bishops, mostly legendary inhabitants of the Roman Empire in the early Christian period, who suffered martyrdom in times of the persecutions of Christians, are commonly referred to as the Fourteen Holy Helpers. According to legend, the place where they first manifested themselves as a group was the Cistercian monastery of Landheim in upper Franconia, a popular pilgrimage destination since the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. The broad spectrum of help these saints could provide, from relief from headaches (St Dionysius, a bishop with a sword) and sore throat (St Blaise, the bishop with the long candle), protecting from sudden death (St Christopher, carrying a child on his shoulder), taking care of the knights (St George, piercing a dragon with a sword), epileptics (St Vitus, the young man with a rooster), or those that relieved labour pains (St Margaret, with a dragon at her feet) influenced the popularisation of this cult, and gave a rise to this popular depiction, often included on late medieval altars.







## 8. Triptych of James the Greater

workshop of the Master of Chociwel Passion, ca. 1500–1520  
linden wood, polychrome, gilding, 127.5 × 185 cm (when opened)  
from the collegiate church in Kołobrzeg  
inv. no.: MNS/Szt/126

A triptych is a form of an altarpiece, characteristic of the art of the Middle Ages – a decorative setting for the liturgy celebrated at the altar. The most important part, both ideologically and structurally, was the central section which featured the main representations linked to the patron of the altar. It would also feature attachment points for movable wings, which would enable double-sided depictions to be included on them. On weekdays the wings were closed, with the back sides facing the believers – showing painted depictions, which supplemented the main ideological content. The ceremonial opening of the wings is a ceremony that took place only during the celebration of the liturgy on holidays. Only then would the on-lookers see the rich colours and artistic shapes dipped in gold, which symbolised the divine.

The altar of Saint James the Greater from the collegiate church in Kołobrzeg is a piece made in the late Gothic woodcarver's workshop of the Master of Chociwel Passion, which was active between 1500–1520, and which was vastly important for the region of Pomerania and Neumark. The workshop specialised primarily in creating small triptychs with a characteristic model and patterns. The popularisation of the cult of saints led to an increased demand for such pieces of art. Altars were often commissioned to commemorate a successful pilgrimage and to thank God.

In the central part of the altarpiece from Kołobrzeg, we can see three statues – Saint James the Greater (wearing a hat adorned with a scallop shell – the symbol of pilgrims) and Saints Peter and Paul. On the back sides of the wings, we can see depictions of scenes from the life of Saint James. The preserved polychromy of the altar shows the intense colours and pure gold, which was typical for the art of the Middle Ages.













## 9. Bas-relief with the depiction of the Family of Mary

Stralsund master, ca. 1505–1515

oak wood, polychrome remains, gilded, 97 × 57 × 16 cm

from the altar of the Family of Mary from the Church of St Michael in Krummin

inv. no.: MNS/Szt/167

The depiction of the Family of Mary, also referred to as the Great Family of Mary, is a motif associated with the development of the cult of Mary, which gained popularity in the late medieval art, in particular in the region that would later become northern Germany. The carved or painted images constitute family portraits, depicting all members of the three generations of Mary's family. These representations are based on the texts of non-canonical gospels – the apocrypha – and medieval legends, which popularised the stories about Mary's parentage, popular among the folk. The motif became popular in Christian art in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, as evidenced by numerous preserved altars featuring this theme. Due to the fact that this image was not grounded in the Gospel, it was excluded from the official iconography of the Church at the Council of Trent, which took place in 1545–1563.

The partially preserved central bas-relief of the altar dedicated to the Family of Mary from the church in Krummin on the Usedom Island depicts a typical variant of the image. The main figure, highlighted in the composition by the increased proportions of the image, is St Anne, mother of Mary and grandmother of Jesus. To her right, we can see the second of the central figures – Mary, the daughter from her first marriage to Joachim, the mother of Jesus. To the sides, we can see Anne's daughters from her second and third marriages, after the deaths of subsequent husbands: Mary of Clopas and Mary Salome, sisters of Mary and aunts of Jesus, mentioned in the Gospel texts as women watching at the cross. The fragment with the image of Mary Salome was damaged. Above the women, we can see depictions of their husbands. Among the images preserved in relief are, from left: Joachim, Cleophas, and Alphaeus. On the knees and at the feet of the sitting women, we can see their children playing, including the naked Jesus, who is in the central spot, balancing on the knees of his mother and grandmother and the later apostles and companions of Jesus.

Medieval depictions of the Family of Mary are generic and educational in nature. Elements of clothing that are compatible with the fashion of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and children's toys (such as a horse on a stick in the hands of St Jacob the Lesser) and the happy atmosphere among the family, whose members love and care for each other, make this image of the protagonists of the story of Salvation a model of social behaviour for a bourgeois families in the late Middle Age.







## 10. The Beautiful Madonna

Württemberg workshop (?), ca. 1440  
alabaster, polychrome, gilding, 60 × 26 × 15 cm  
from the Cistercian church in Bukowo Morskie  
inv. no.: MNS/Szt/74

Alabaster is a mineral characterised by outstanding qualities as a sculptural material and great aesthetic characteristics, as it has a certain transparency and softness. Thanks to its whiteness and softness, it was sometimes compared to a woman's body. The ease of sculpting and the possibility of obtaining a variety of sculptural effects all contributed to its immense popularity. What is more, it also works as a great imitation of ivory and marble, which made it sought after in medieval and modern times. The popularity of objects made of alabaster started at the French-Burgundy court in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and spread to the Netherlands and Germany.

The alabaster statue of the Beautiful Madonna with the Child was made in a South German workshop around 1440. This workshop, which may have been in Württemberg, specialised in the production of statues of this kind, as evidenced by analogous examples preserved in museum collections.

The sculpture from the Szczecin collection was imported at an unknown time by the Cistercians from Bukowo Morskie. The cult of Mary is particularly close to Cistercian spirituality. The exceptional importance of the statue as an object of worship in the Bukowo monastery is evidenced by the fact that almost 100 years after its creation, it was placed on the main altar in a new setting. The late Gothic polyptych altar made of oak wood was sponsored by the last abbot – Henricus Krese just before the dissolution of the monastery in 1535. The beautiful Madonna, placed on a pedestal, took the central place among the carved depictions of saints. She then received a new Gothic crown, which gave her the rank of *Regina Coeli* – the Queen of Heaven. The dedication of the main altar to Mary, the most important patroness of the Order, is typical of the Cistercians.





## 11. Kamień Crucifix

workshop influenced by Strasbourg sculpture, ca. 1300  
oak wood, polychrome remains, 473 × 255 cm  
from the cathedral in Kamień Pomorski  
inv. no.: MNS/Szt/45-46

A crucifix is a Latin cross with the figure of Christ Crucified attached to it. In medieval churches, monumental crucifixes were placed high on the lectorium or on the rood beam between the chancel, where the altar was set up, and the nave part intended for the laity. They dominated the space of churches, constantly urging the believers to get immersed in the liturgy.

Medieval art saw the development of two key types of crucifixes – the so-called heroic crucifix from the Romanesque period with the representation of the living Christ, without signs of the Passion and with a royal crown on the head, as well as the Gothic one, with a naturalistic image of the tormented Saviour with a crown of thorns. The Kamień piece, characterised by its extremely subtle and harmonious expression, falls somewhere in between these two variants. Christ with closed eyes, whose idealized body of slightly elongated proportions slumps and settles into a soft sigmoid shape, is shown at the moment of death; however, there are no signs of the Passion and no crown of thorns on his head. The suffering only becomes apparent due to the eyebrows, which show a painful grimace, but this does not disturb the mood of lyricism and beauty in the spirit of the scholastic philosophy of the 13th century.

The crucifix from the cathedral in Kamień Pomorski is the most impressive and the most valuable piece of this kind in Pomerania. It represents the Gothic trends, which developed in the great cathedrals of the 13th century. Together with wandering workshops, these trends reached the main centres of European art from all across the Western Europe. The soft and precise shape carved out of the hard oak wood confirm the sculptor's extraordinary skills, equal to those of the masters of sculpture working on

the furnishings of the Strasbourg Cathedral, as well as the refined taste of the sponsor, who must have been aware of the trends popular on European courts at the time.







## 12. Chociwel Passion

workshop of the Master of Chociwel Passion, ca. 1500  
linden wood, 203 × 175 × 37 cm (Christ), 175 × 48 × 35 cm (Impenitent Thief)  
from the Church of St Mary in Chociwel  
inv. no.: MNS/Szt/66, 67

The Crucifixion Group from Chociwel, usually referred to as the Chociwel Passion, is one of the most important artefacts of the Middle Ages found in West Pomerania. It is a key work of the Pomeranian workshop of an unknown sculptor, commonly dubbed the Master of Chociwel Passion, after his most important piece. The numerous works from this workshop, which survived to this day, are characterised by the natural depictions of figures, precisely rendered anatomical details, as well as building emotions and dynamics through gestures and facial expressions.

The Chociwel Passion originally comprised a group of five figures, with enlarged dimensions. The central figure of the Crucified Christ was accompanied by the figures of Our Lady of Sorrows – *Mater Dolorosa*, John the Evangelist and two thieves crucified on Jesus' sides. Only the statue of Christ and the Impenitent Thief survived to this day. These depictions, which gained enormous popularity in the art of the late Middle Ages, were based on the descriptions of the end of Christ's Passion, contained both in the canonical Gospel, as well as in the apocrypha. According to a tradition based on the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, the impenitent thief, who maligned Jesus and mocked Him to the end was called Gestas. Artists usually depicted him to the right side of Jesus' cross. In the work from Chociwel, Gestas' athletic body shows that the Master was well-aware of the approach to the depictions of the nude body popularised by the Italian Renaissance. The thief's boisterous attitude is expressed by the dynamic position of his legs, as if he was trying to free himself from the restraining rope, as well as his tilted head. Also worthy of note are the elements of the face surrounded by curly short hair, eyebrows drawn in decorative semi-circles, the precise shape of the ear and the teeth visible behind his parted lips, as well as the realistic cuts on his body.

The Crucifixion Groups, usually placed in the space of a church or in chapels referred to as *Calvaries* were a characteristic fixture of late medieval religiosity. The naturalistic carved figures allowed the contemporaneous viewers to see the events of Golgotha, enhancing the experience of Christ's martyrdom on the cross and suffering during personal reflections, as well as the celebration of the Paschal services.





## 13. Our Lady of Sorrows

West Pomeranian workshop, ca. 1400–1425  
linden wood, polychrome remains, 110 × 33 × 25 cm  
from the Church of St Mary in Trzebiatów  
inv. no.: MNS/Szt/176

The religious art of the Middle Ages abounds in works featuring stories from the life of Mary, sourced from descriptions in the Bible and their literary interpretations, as well as theological reflections on the role of Mary in the Work of Salvation. The strong need for an image that visualised and justified beliefs, which was particularly apparent in the late Middle Ages, stemmed from a piety based on imitation of Christ (*imitatio Christi*), compassionate suffering (*compassio*), and spiritual empathy (*conformitas*). The image made the sacred real, allowing one to experience the deepest emotions, and the importance of this fact in the spiritual life of the late Middle Ages could rise to the level of an element of faith.

The representations commonly known as *Mater Dolorosa* focus attention on Mary's painful suffering as a mother and her part in the story of Redemption. The sorrowful look on the face of the slender and graceful figure of Trzebiatów can evoke admiration and deep emotions even in contemporary viewers. The full and free-standing sculpture probably constituted a part of the so-called Crucifixion Group, which was customarily placed high in the church, on the rood beam, separating the chancel and the nave. The image of *Mater Dolorosa* standing under the cross hearkens back to the events of Golgotha – a Mother in pain caused by the Passion and death of her Son. She stands beneath the cross on which her Son suffered a martyr's death. Reflecting on Mary's experiences was supposed to foster repentance for the sins and urge the faithful to seek reconciliation with God.





## 14. Stargard Polyptych

workshop of the Stargard Polyptych Master, ca. 1450  
oak wood, tempera, polychrome, gilding, 230 × 520 cm (when opened)  
from the Church of St John the Baptist in Stargard  
inv. no.: MNS/Szt/120–123, 196–213

The Stargard polyptych, which is also commonly referred to as the St John polyptych, is a monumental altarpiece from the Church of St John the Baptist in Stargard that constitutes one of the most precious Gothic artefacts in West Pomerania, in particular in the category of board painting. The elaborate form of an altar with two pairs of moving wings, which is sometimes called a pentaptych due of the number of its elements, is characteristic of medieval altars in churches in large cities, city cathedrals and monasteries.

The richly gilded, fragmentarily preserved interior of the Stargard altar, presented during the most official ceremonies in the liturgical calendar, was devoted to the representation of the Coronation of Mary, dominating the composition, surrounded by rows of saints. Mary, who sits on the throne next to Jesus, impresses the viewers with her subtle, girlish image, the gentle gesture of her slender hands in prayer, and the radiance of her gilded, softly draped mantle. After closing the first pair of wings, during the Sunday Eucharist, the faithful saw a series of 24 paintings presenting a narrative of the lives of Mary and Christ, featuring a palette of intense colours, as well as gilding and silvering. On weekdays, when the outer wings of the altar remained closed, the liturgy took place against the background of an impressive painting in a variety of browns and reds, depicting the baptism of Christ in the River Jordan. The presentation of the figure of St John the Baptist (the patron saint of the church) and Christ facing each other, accompanied by angels, was set in a landscape scene against the background of a starry red sky. The way the robes of St John were depicted

by the painter, as well as the details of the surrounding landscape prove that the author of this extraordinary painting was familiar with the innovative trends emerging in the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch art.















## 15. Pieta

Szczecin workshop, ca. 1520  
oak wood, polychrome remains, 132 × 52 × 35 cm  
from the Church of St Mary in Dąbie  
inv. no.: MNS/Szt/222

The depiction of Mary holding the dead body of Christ – commonly referred to as Pieta – remained one of the most popular devotional motifs in medieval art. The name of the sculptural depiction is derived from the Latin word *pietas*, which meant a virtue of love according to one's vocation and referred to humble piety and loving obedience to the will of God. The sources of this depiction, which emerged at the end of the 13th century, were medieval theological and literary texts on the Passion, which highlighted the suffering of Mary, who was left alone to mourn the death of her Son on the cross. Pietàs as figures depicting the close relationship between the Mother and Son evoked emotions and religious feelings. The form of representation referring to another arrangement, equally popular in the Middle Ages – Mary with the Child – fostered contemplation of the tenets of faith. The ideological connection between these representations referring to the beginning and the end of the presence of the Son of God on Earth was expressed in the sculpture from Dąbie by showing Mary in her youthful age and by diminishing the proportions of Christ's body. The type of representation was intended to make the faithful aware of Mary's participation in the Work of Salvation and her consent for her Son's sacrifice on the cross, as his martyrdom enabled him to redeem the world.

The sculpture features some clearly apparent analogies to the work of the Master of Osnabrück, especially with the Pieta sculptures from Münster and

Cologne attributed to his workshop.

The characteristic depiction of Mary with a full face, as well as the way her mantle is shaped, along with the stone slope covered with turf – evoking associations with Golgotha – suggest a link between the late medieval workshop in Szczecin and its surroundings with the north-western region of Germany – Westphalia.





## 16. Bas-relief with a Crucifixion scene

West Pomeranian workshop, ca. 1510–1520

oak wood, polychrome remains, gilding, 132 × 107.5 × 26 cm

central quatrefoil of the Passion Altar from the Church of St Mary in Ueckermünde

inv. no.: MNS/Szt/227

The bas-relief scene depicting the Crucifixion is the centrepiece of a late Gothic Passion Altar from the Church of St Mary in Ueckermünde. The nearly seven-metre long reredos, which probably used to be a triptych, which enjoyed particular popularity in the Middle Ages, has survived to this day in the form of eleven panels showing individual scenes connected with the passion and death of Christ.

According to the tradition, the altar was funded by Duke Bogusław X, one of the most important rulers in the history of Pomerania. The ducal sponsorship seems highly probable, and not only because of the grandeur and the high grade of the piece. In addition to that, Ueckermünde was home to a ducal residence, where he often stayed. He could have funded the Passion Altar as a token of gratitude and commemoration after his two-year long journey to Jerusalem, described in chronicles.

The style of the altar refers to the North German works, while the composition of individual representations is more akin to the popular models from the Netherlands, widely used in the art of the late Middle Ages and transformed by the German masters, including Martin Schongauer. Some other Dutch trends, such as realism and genre scenes, can also be seen by looking closely at individual fragments. Particularly noteworthy are the individual depictions of the characters, the attires, which feature a medieval plate armour, padded doublets and a variety of headwear, as well as the backgrounds with architectural motifs that made the events described in the Bible seem more current.







## 17. Bas-relief with a Lamentation of Christ scene

Szczecin workshop, ca. 1510–1520

oak wood, polychrome, gilding, 113 × 63.5 × 10.5 cm

fragment of the Passion Altar from the Church of St Mary in Dąbie

inv. no.: MNS/Szt/170

Mourning over the body of Christ taken down from the cross in the art of the mid- to late Middle Ages is a motif that was supposed to promote contemplation. The purpose of these representations is to appeal to the emotions, to evoke sympathy and empathy for the pain of loved ones grieving over the dead body of Christ, who had to suffer and who sacrificed himself.

The bas-relief with the scene of the Mourning is one of the four preserved fragments of the Passion Altar from the Church of St Nicholas in Dąbie – at that time an independent city, now a district of Szczecin. It shows a variant of representation most widespread in the late Middle Ages, developed in Dutch art and connected with the development of the cult of the Eucharist. The body of Christ was taken down from the cross and laid on a shroud on the ground. He is surrounded by his mourning mother, St John the Evangelist, his mother's sisters, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus. The body of Jesus is the compositional and ideological centre of the representation. Placed on the shroud, it reminds the viewer of the Eucharistic dimension of his sacrifice. The literal Body of Christ – *Corpus Christi* – turns into the host, symbolising the mystery of the Eucharist, the transubstantiation of bread into flesh taking place on an altar covered with a linen tablecloth. The way in which the Mourning scene is presented confirms the presence of Christ in the sacrament. The figure of Mary kneeling over her son and tenderly grasping the hand of Jesus recalls another motif of the representation related to the idea of *compassio* – Mary's participation in Christ's suffering and in the Work of Salvation. Other figures, whose poses and facial expression show sadness and concern constitute typical examples of representations of piety in the late Middle Ages.



The composition of the relief confirms that the author was aware of the Passion graphics, which gained immense popularity at the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The fact that it was based on the woodcut by the outstanding German engraver Hans Schäufelein, whose series of Passion images was shown in 1507 in Nuremberg, is clearly visible in this piece.

The apostles, predella of the altar from Dąbie







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Marshal  
of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship  
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of the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern  
Manuela Schwesig



The exhibition was created as part of the “Common Heritage, Common Future. Central Pomeranian Museums Presenting the History and Culture of Pomerania” project co-financed by the European Union from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) as part of the Interreg V-A – Germany/Mecklenburg-Vorpommern-Brandenburg-Poland cooperation programme, as well as from the funds of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship.



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Photographs:  
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Grzegorz Solecki, Arkadiusz Piętak: pp. 14–15, 18–19, 26–29, 33

DTP and printing:  
Soft Vision

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ISBN 978-83-63365-93-6

Szczecin 2022







