

The church of St Roch stands to the south of the former city gate, the Brzeska Gate, outside the boundaries of the historical town and beside the historical main road from Oława (Ohlau) to Grodków (Grottkau) and Brzeg (Brieg). This inconspicuous single-space building, constructed on the ground plan of an elongated rectangle, closed with a trilateral chancel on the eastern side and with a porch on the western side, having three window axes on the longer elevations, is most likely the only material legacy of the long-standing residence of Crown Prince James Sobieski and his wife Hedwig Elisabeth of Pfalz-Neuburg, dating from the period of the so-called Oława Pledge in 1691–1734, to have survived in the town.¹

It is therefore all the more surprising that the historiography of the church to date is so meagre. It consists of only a few laconic and often contradictory references in texts by pre-war German-language authors, subsequently copied and ‘creatively’ reprocessed in post-war Polish-language literature. No hitherto unknown source material was referred to, and the new conclusions concerned only attempts to establish the founder and author of the painting of the *Annunciation*, the most important historical piece decorating the interior of St Roch’s.²

THE ORIGINS OF THE CHURCH OF ST ROCH IN OŁAWA (OHLAU)

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1 The marriage contract was signed on 16 November 1690, and the nuptials of James Louis with Hedwig Elisabeth took place on 25 March 1691. Extensively on this subject: A. Skrzypietz, *Królewscy synowie – Jakub, Aleksander i Konstanty Sobiescy* (Katowice, 2011), pp. 179–189. It took a few years for the couple to settle permanently in Oława, against whose value dowry sums had been secured; on 9 August 1697 the townspeople greeted the ceremonial entry of Hedwig Elisabeth Sobieska with a gun salute; State Archive in Wrocław, Documents of the Oława Township (Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu, Akta Miasta Oławy hereinafter: APWr, AMO), sign. 469, Der Stadt Ohlau Geldraytung 1697–1698: ‘Anno 1697 dem 9 August vor 25 Pfund Pulver zum Salve geben bey dem Einzüge der allhiero residirenden Princessin’.

2 The painting is now attributed to Johannes Claessens; see A. Mula, ‘Johann Claessens z Antwerp. Nadworny malarz biskupa Franciszka Ludwika von Neuburg’, *Dziela i Interpretacje*, vol. 7 (Wrocław, 2002), pp. 44–45. The pre-war attributions pointed to Petr Brandl or Michael Willmann, see *Bericht des Provinzial-Konservators der Kunstdenkmäler der Provinz Schlesien über die Tätigkeit vom 1. Januar 1905 bis 31. Dezember 1906 erstattet an die Provinzial-Kommission zur Erhaltung und Erforschung der Denkmäler Schlesiens* (Breslau, 1907), p. 31. Wanda Roszkowska suggested that the painting was founded by a castle clerk, the forester (forestry manager) Johann Philip Zobel, to commemorate the liberation of James Sobieski in 1706; see W. Roszkowska, *Oława królewiczów Sobieskich* (Wrocław, 1968), pp. 82–83; eadem, *Oława królewiczów Sobieskich. Wydanie przejrane i zaktualizowane* (Wrocław, 1984), p. 72. However, there are sources which confirm that the *Annunciation* was created earlier than it is presently assumed and it was originally located in the Oława parish church of St. Blaise as the central element of an altar funded for 1500 florins by Gabriel Wyhowski, marshal of Crown Prince Sobieski’s court. The framework of this article does not allow for further development of this topic and a separate publication on this subject is planned as a development of the findings presented in a series of articles in the series ‘Oława nieoczywista’, *Gazeta Powiatowa – Wiadomości Oławskie*, no. 29, 21 July 2022; no. 30, 28 July 2022; no. 51, 21 Dec. 2023.

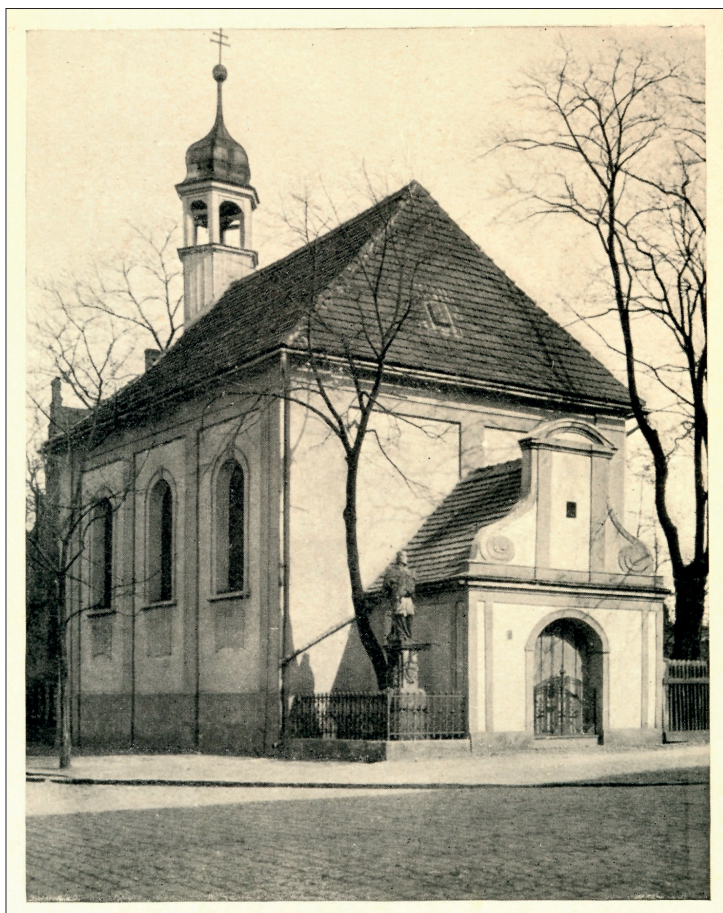


Fig. 1

The church of St. Roch,
exterior, 1930

The time when the church was built, as well as the Sobieski family's role in the whole process, remain disputed. Hedwig Elisabeth Sobieska was presented as the patroness of the church in 1706,³ and over time the idea

3 This piece of information is given for the first time (with no construction date) by J. G. Knie, *Alphabetisch-Statistisch-Topographische Uebersicht aller Dörfer, Flecken, Städte und andern Orteder Königl. Preuss. Provinz Schlesien* (Breslau, 1830), p. 987 ('kath. Begrabnitz k. St. Rochus, vor dem Brieger Thore, erbaut von der Gemahlin des poln. Prinzen Jacob Sobieski, der Pfandherr von Ohlau 1691 bis 1734 hier residierte. Patronat Königl. (Archipresb. St. Mauritz.)'), the date '1706' was added in the next edition, in 1845: idem, *Alphabetisch-statistisch-topographische Uebersicht der Dörfer, Flecken, Städte und andern Orte der Königl. Preuss. Provinz Schlesien: nebst beigefügter Nachweisung von der Eintheilung des Landes nach den Bezirken der drei königlichen Regierungen, den darin enthaltenen Fürstenthümern und Kreisen, mit Angabe des Flächeninhaltes, der mittlern Erhebung über die Meeresfläche, der Bewohner, Gebäude, des Viehstandes usw. – 2. verm. u. verb. Aufl.* (Breslau, 1845), p. 890. Other relevant publications from this period concerning the history of Olawa do not mention the church, e.g. J.G. Mohaupt, Winter, *Geschichtliche und statistische Nachrichten von der Stadt Ohlau, wie solche an der evang. Pfarrkirche in den Thurmknopf gelegt worden sind. 1. Ohlau's Denkwürdigkeiten bis 1804, 2. Fortges. kirchl. u. städtische Chronik vom Jahre 1805 bis 1836* (Brieg, 1837) or only mention its existence, omitting Hedwig Elisabeth's participation in the process of its construction ('Die kleine katholische Rochuskirche, vor dem Brieger

that she initiated the reconstruction/renovation of the church,⁴ allegedly built on this site at the beginning of the seventeenth century, became widespread in post-war Polish literature. In addition, Hedwig Elisabeth was considered to have founded the painting of the *Annunciation*⁵ and the authorship of the thanksgiving inscription after her husband's liberation from captivity in Saxony⁶ was attributed to her; this was supposed to indicate the votive character of the whole construction enterprise.⁷

Do we, then, have source documents that indicate a direct link between the Sobieski family and the church of St Roch? The answer must be in the affirmative, and the source material points to facts that force us to reassess the building and its furnishings as much as the period to which they should be dated.

I

The now widely accepted dating of construction of the 'original' church of St Roch to the years 1602–1604 seems problematic for several reasons.

Thore'), e.g. F. A. Zimmermann, *Beyträge zur Beschreibung von Schlesien*, vol. 1 (Brieg, 1783), p. 29; A. Boysen, 'Fragmente der Geschichte Ohlaus', *Ohlauer Kreis – Blatt*, no. 1–26, 1828–1830. The year 1706 in the context of the construction of the church of St Roch was indicated mainly by German-language publications: J. Jungnitz, 'St. Zoc-rard und das Hospital in Ohlau', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte (und Alterthum) Schlesiens*, vol. 50, 1916, p. 66; E. Bittner, 'Die Ohlauer Rochuskapelle 275 Jahre alt', *Heimatblatt für die Kreise Strehlen, Ohlau*, no. 1, 1982, p. 10; H. Günther, *Kreis und Stadt Ohlau in Schlesien 1521–1740* (Iserlohn, 1988), pp. 214–216, as well as, among others, J. Mandziuk, *Katalog ruchomych zabytków sztuki sakralnej w Archidiecezji Wrocławskiej*, vol. 1 (Wrocław, 1982), p. 62.

- 4 In the year 1706 according to, among others, *Katalog zabytków sztuki w Polsce. Powiat olawski*, ed. E. Kołaczkiwicz (Warszawa, 2013), pp. 148–149; in the year 1707 according to, among others, *Olawa. Zarys monografii miasta*, ed. K. Matwijowski (Wrocław–Olawa, 2004), p. 217; *Śląsk*, vol. 12, *Olawa*, ed. M. Chorowska et al., *Atlas Historyczny Miast Polskich*, vol. 4 (Wrocław, 2015), p. 17.
- 5 *Olawa. Studium historyczno-urbanistyczne*, vol. 2, ed. M. Frankowska et al., typescript, Archiwum Narodowego Instytutu Dziedzictwa Oddział Terenowy we Wrocławiu (Wrocław, 1987), p. 21. Karty ewidencji zabytków ruchomych kościoła św. Rocha z 1961 roku oraz 2000 roku no. DLN 000 000 031 861, Archives of the Provincial Office for Heritage and Monument Protection in Wrocław (Archiwum Wojewódzkiego Urzędu Ochrony Zabytków we Wrocławiu, hereinafter: WUOZ Wrocław); Karta Ewidencyjna Zabytków Architektury i Urbanistyki – *Katolicki kościół cmentarny, obecnie Rzymsko-katolicki kościół pomocniczy pw. św. Rocha*, 2001, eds of the textual section A. Dobrzyński, P. Oszczanowski.
- 6 In 1704, while travelling from Wrocław to Olawa, the prince was abducted and imprisoned by Augustus II the Strong, his rival for the crown of the Commonwealth. Held in Pleissenburg and then in the fortress at Koenigstein on the Elbe, the prince was freed thanks to King Charles XII of Sweden, who had invaded Saxony. The clashes did not last long, and James's freedom was brought by one of the provisions of the Swedish-Saxon truce, concluded at Altranstädt in the early spring of 1706. For more, see Skrzypietz, *Królewscy synowie*, pp. 405–442.
- 7 Such an interpretation appears relatively late, only in the twentieth century. In the context of the painting of the *Annunciation*, it was indirectly suggested for the first time by E. Wissmach, *Die Stadt Ohlau und ihre Umgebung* (Ohlau, 1929), p. 18.

This dating is based on an anonymous ecclesiastical document cited by the local teacher Andreas Boysen in the nineteenth century.⁸ The passage he quotes reports that ‘on 12 June 1603 a new church was erected on the burial site in front of the gate. It was completed in 1604’.⁹ However, he does not specify to which city gate he is referring (and there were two, Brzeska and Wrocławska), nor does he mention the patron saint of the church. Boysen was evidently aware of the ambiguous nature of his source and, in quoting it, merely assumed¹⁰ that the anonymous mention might have referred to the church of St Roch, which was in existence in his lifetime. This conjecture was made popular by a guidebook published a century later¹¹ and was repeated by post-war authors,¹² which led them to a seemingly logical conclusion that the chapel under the patronage of St Roch must have been founded by the Catholic community of Olawa.¹³

However, in the light of our knowledge of the course of the Reformation and the religious relations in the Duchy of Brzeg, such a conclusion must be considered completely ahistorical.¹⁴ On 10 September 1534, the then ruler of the duchy and a supporter of Protestantism, Prince Fred-

8 Boysen primarily used a manuscript by Friedrich Wilhelm von Scheel from around 1750 (the so-called von Scheel Chronicle). The quotation in question does not come from this chronicle, but it is worth noting that W. von Scheel, too, assumed that the church of St Roch existed before 1707. In a passage concerning the return of the Olawa churches to the evangelical Protestants after the Convention of Altranstädt in 1707, he writes that the castle chapel and the church of St Roch had been left in the possession of the Catholics: ‘Das in der Briegischen Vorstadt gelegen kleine Catholische Kirchlein ad St. Rochum, und die Schloss Capelle ad Sanct. Barbaram, welche sehr alt, und in jeder Zeit tempore dubium, die Sacra modo Evangelico, administriert, worden für die Hand aber den Catholischen’; APWr, AMO, sign. 42, Chronik 1627–1750, pp. 119–120.

9 ‘Anno 1603, den 12ten tag Juny ist die Neu Kirch auf dem Begräbnis vor dem Thor gehoben und gesetzt worden. Anno 1604 vollbracht’; A. Boysen, ‘Fragmente der Geschichte Ohlaus’, *Quellen und Darstellungen zur Geschichte des Kreises und der Stadt Ohlau*, vol. 1, 1995, p. 78. This is a facsimile reprint of a series of articles by Boysen, from the journal *Ohlauer Kreis – Blatt*, which he had edited from 1828.

10 Ibid.: ‘Auf sie ist vermutlich zu beziehen, was sich in den Kirchennachrichten findet, und woraushervorgeht, dass sie seit 1603 existirt’.

11 Wissmach, *Die Stadt Ohlau*, p. 18.

12 Roszkowska, *Olawa królewiczów Sobieskich. Wydanie przejrane*, p. 72; *Olawa. Zarys monografii*, p. 217.

13 E.g. Karta Ewidencyjna Zabytków Architektury i Urbanistyki – *Katolicki kościół cmentarny, obecnie Rzymsko-katolicki kościół pomocniczy pw. św. Rocha*, 2001; *Katalog zabytków sztuki*, p. 149.

14 The hypothesis on the Counter-Reformation genesis of the establishment of the church of St Roch in the early years of the seventeenth century is fully developed by M. Frankowska: ‘The need to build a new parish church was prompted by the removal of the church of St Blaise from the Catholics’ possession in 1534. The people’s mass conversion to Protestantism meant that the Catholic community was not numerous, so the small church of St Roch initially met the needs of the worshippers completely’; *Olawa. Studium historyczno-urbanistyczne*, s. 21.

erick II of Legnica (Liegnitz), convened the Catholic clergy from the Brzeg, Niemcza (Nimptsch), Strzelin (Strehlen) and Oława districts at the castle in Strzelin. The priests were given eight days to consider the 'proposal' presented to them, namely, to introduce the Protestant rite in the parishes in accordance with the Augsburg Confession of 1530.¹⁵ If they refused and decided to remain Catholic, they were threatened with the loss of their positions and expulsion from the duchy. The then parish priest in Oława, Georg Bernhardi, converted to Lutheranism and remained a clergyman in the town's church of St Blaise where, from then on, Lutheran pastors were ordained.¹⁶ No sources confirm that following the events of 1534 Catholic rites were still being practised in the town (who, where and with whose permission could Catholic masses be celebrated?). At the dawn of the seventeenth century, Oława, in keeping with the rule of *Cuius regio, eius religio*, was an entirely Protestant city.

The question of the authenticity of Boysen's account is therefore a legitimate one,¹⁷ especially as contemporary sources provide another clue. The *urbarium* of Oława¹⁸ dating from 1604, drawn up after the death of Duke Joachim Frederick of Legnica and Brzeg, grandson of Frederick II of Legnica, lists three Protestant churches in the town, namely, the castle church, the parish church and the Polish church; the church of St Roch is not mentioned. The so-called Polish church of evangelical Protestants had probably not yet been completed at the time the *urbarium* was being compiled,¹⁹ so it cannot be ruled out that the note quoted by Boysen referred to its construction²⁰ or combined information about

15 S. J. Ehrhardt, *Presbyterologie des Evangelischen Schlesiens* (Liegnitz, 1782), vol. 2, pp. 9–10, 196; K. Matwijowski, 'Z dziejów protestantyzmu w Oławie', in: *Studia z dziejów Olawy*, ed. idem, Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis, no. 829 (Wrocław, 1985), pp. 41–44.

16 H. Quester, 'Predigergeschichte des Kirchenkreises Ohlau in Schlesien', *Jahrbuch für Schlesische Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 76–77, 1997–1998, pp. 369–384.

17 Perhaps the only author in the town's historiography to date who was surprised by the foundation of a new church under the patronage of St Roch in a town dominated by Protestants was Heinz Günther. Accepting the timeframe of the church's foundation as proposed by Boysen/Wissmach, he therefore concluded that it had been built by Protestants: 'nach zweijähriger Bauzeit wird in Ohlau die Rochuskapelle fertiggestellt. [...] Obwohl die Stadt ganz evangelisch ist, wird der Name des Heiligen gewählt, weil er als Beschützer vor der Pest gilt'; Günther, *Kreis und Stadt Ohlau*, p. 70.

18 Archdiocesan Archive in Wrocław (Archiwum Archidiecezjalne we Wrocławiu, hereinafter: AAWr), sign. VIc 4, Consignation aller und jeder Privilegien, so die Stadt Olaw sambt ihren bayden Dörfen Baumgarten und Zedlitz hat und selbige in der fürstlichen Briegischen Cantzeley zu finden.

19 Ibid., 'In dieser Stadt ist ein schöne Wohl und vast neuer baute Kirch, mit aller not-hurft, in welcher man die Deutsche Prediegetes halten thuets und baldt hinter der selbes die Stadtmauer erreichende, Eine andere Kirch zu welcher die Polnisch Prediegeten verrrichtets zur werden Pfleges, Sowohl dabey eine doch vom Holtz erbaute Schuele'.

20 This working hypothesis requires further archive research; the date of the construction of the Polish church in Oława has so far not been established. It seems likely that in

two different buildings. This would not be the first such mistake; in the second half of the nineteenth century an attempt was made to move the origins of the church and its patron saint as far back as the time of Duke Ludwig I of Brzeg, citing a document from 1385.²¹ This error is still widely repeated today, even though in the early twentieth century Father Joseph Jungnitz, a German historian of the church in Silesia, attempted to correct it by pointing out that the cult of St Roch was not widespread in fourteenth-century Silesia and that the document in fact referred to a different building: the St Swierad Hospital at the Wrocław Gate, which had ceased to exist in the period of the Hussite Wars.²²

The supposition concerning the later, Baroque restructuring is equally problematic.²³ This would mean that the 'original' church of St. Roch was spared the consequences of the Thirty Years' War, which in Oława had been catastrophic,²⁴ or that it was rebuilt after that war. However, the existence or rebuilding of the church after the war is not confirmed by the unique, little-known view of Oława by Johann Rudolf Storn.²⁵ It

the early period, i.e. until the end of the seventeenth century, the first Polish ministers active in Oława: Simon Francisci (1534?–1580), Thomas Czirbock (1581–1590) and Johannes Francisci (1590–1612) still operated at the German-speaking parish church.

- 21 R. Rößler, 'Urkunden Herzogs Ludwig I. von Brieg', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte (und Alterthum) Schlesiens*, vol. 11, 1872, p. 438.
- 22 Rösler mentions a document in which Duke Ludwig I approved the granting of rent to *altaria* prebendaries of a chapel described as 'Begräbnisskirche (infirmorum zu St. Rochus) vor Ohlau'. Such an explicit and early description of the church's invocation provokes the legitimate question of whether this is a literal quotation from the original document, or perhaps a later interpolation into a copy of it (and if so, then from what period) or simply an unfortunate translation and interpretation by the author of the collation. In Jungnitz's view, it is this third eventuality that has occurred: Rösler had no knowledge of the former 'altar of the sick' ('altaris infirmorum') at the Hospital of St Zorard, and therefore placed the altar in the familiar church of St Roch, and the note on the back of the document simply attributed it to the hospital: 'Rösler in seinem Brieger Urkundenregesten, der von dem alten St. Zeohardushspitale nichts wusste und nur das noch vorhandenen Begräbniskirchlein zu St. Rochus kannte, verlegt in dieses den »Krankenaltar«. Die Verehrung des hl. Rochus was indes im 14. Jahrhundert in Deutschland noch nicht verbreitet, und St. Rochus bei Ohlau wurde erst viel später gebaut. Ein vermerk auf der Rückseite der Urkunde weist diese einfach dem Hospital zu'; Jungnitz, 'St. Zoerard und das Hospital in Ohlau', pp. 62, 66.
- 23 See note 4.
- 24 This was also highlighted by Jungnitz: 'Nach dem 30jährigen Kriege, in welchem Ohlau 1634 eingeäschert wurde, war ausserhalb der Mauern zunächst weder Kirche noch Kapelle'; Jungnitz, 'St. Zoerard und das Hospital in Ohlau', p. 64. The scale of the destruction is illustrated by a commemorative account placed in a time capsule on the tower of the parish church, which was fully rebuilt only as late as 1691. As a result of the warfare, all the houses in the town suffered, 'except for four small ones in the castle', as well as all the churches, the parsonage, the school, the town hall with its tower, the malt-house and the distillery; APWr, AMO, sign. 39, Urbarium 1691, fols 53–61.
- 25 The engraving is to be found in the so-called Meyerberg Album. The album contains drawings by the Austrian-Swedish painter J.R. Storn which provide illustrative material for the journey of an imperial envoy travelling from Vienna to Moscow via, among

shows the condition of the town in the first years of the reign of Duke Christian. Oława is seen from the south-east, from the road leading to Grodków and Nysa (Neisse), opposite the Brzeska Gate, i.e. exactly a spot where today's church of St Roch is located. The panorama shows no buildings before the town walls (in the so-called Grodków suburb); silhouettes of public and residential buildings only partially raised from the war damage emerge from behind the walls. The towers of the parish church and town hall, as well as the Polish church, are still waiting to be rebuilt. Furthermore, the church of St Roch was unknown to Friedrich Lucae (German: Friedrich Lichtstern),²⁶ who described Oława in the last years of the Piast rule and at the beginning of its history within the Empire.²⁷ The correspondence of the Vicariate of the Wrocław Bishopric for the year 1707 explicitly states that the castle chapel was the only church available to the town's Catholics at that time.²⁸ All of this calls into question accounts of the origins of the church of St Roch as dating back to the early seventeenth century, and clearly indicates that the building we know today was a new construction.

An analysis of accounts concerning an alleged thanksgiving inscription after Prince James's liberation from captivity in Saxony in 1706 reveals similar problems, namely, an absence of new source materials which results in the recycling and transforming of previous conclusions. The content of the inscription has never been quoted, and the abbreviated information of its existence is recorded for the first time in the already mentioned 1929 guidebook to Oława.²⁹ The inscription was said to have

others, Silesia, in 1661, in: W. Tomkiewicz, 'Weduty polskie z Albumu J. R. Storna', *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, vol. 3, 1962, p. 271. Until now, the engraving has never been considered in any text on the subject of Oława.

- 26 F. Lucae, *Schlesische Fürsten-Krone Oder Eigentliche, warhafftige Beschreibung Ober- und Nieder-Schlesiens* [...]. Also auch insonderheit Von Den Fürstenthümern Lignitz, Brieg und Wohlau (Frankfurt am Main, 1685); idem, *Schlesiens curieuse Denkwürdigkeiten: oder vollkommene Chronica von Ober und Niederschlesien* (Frankfurt am Main, 1689).
- 27 This problem was already noted, with some surprise, by Wanda Roszkowska. And although the church of St Roch 'is not mentioned in descriptions provided by Lucae with his customary conscientiousness', Roszkowska supported the prevalent version on the origins of the church's construction in 1602–1604 and categorically stated: 'It is not true that the church was built by Hedwiga (as the historian Knie writes)'; Roszkowska, *Oława królewiczów Sobieskich. Wydanie przejrane*, p. 72.
- 28 'nach abgenommenen so vielen herrlichen Kirchen [...] in bedeitete Stadt, und dareinen nur noch allein befindliche Schloss Capellen', AAW, sign. XI. Akta Parafii i miejscowości – Ohlau, Zustand der Katholiker nach der Altranstädter Konvention 1707–1708, letter dated 23 Dec. 1707.
- 29 Wissmach, *Die Stadt Ohlau*, p. 18. According to Wissmach, the inscription was located over the painting in the altar: 'Zum dank für seine Errettung stiftete seine Gemahlin Hedwig Elisabeth von Pfalz-Neuburg eine Umschrift um das Altarbild'.

Fig. 2

J. R. Storn, *A View of Olawa from the Grodków Suburb*, 1661



dated from 1707³⁰ or 1706³¹ and to have been located ‘in the frame of the painting’;³² the painting itself was said to have been ‘the main element of the carved-wood altar’ in the church until they year 1945.³³

The information about the alleged demolition of the altar at the very end or soon after the end of the Second World War is probably contradicted by the only surviving pre-war photograph of the interior of the chapel, taken at the request of the conservator of monuments for the province of Lower Silesia.³⁴ The arrangement of the elements on the presbytery wall is identical to the present one; only the figures of the saints in the side niches have changed places.³⁵ Apart from the painting in the central niche, there is no additional woodcarving or other altar decoration. The only element that is no longer extant is the quotation ‘Venite adoremus’ (‘Come, let us adore Him’), taken from the refrain of the popular church hymn *Adeste Fideles*, which used to be located above the painting and the inner cornice. It remains an open question whether it was this

30 *Katalog zabytków sztuki*, p. 149.

31 E.g. Roszkowska, *Olawa królewiczów Sobieskich*. Wydanie przejrane, p. 72.

32 Karty ewidencji zabytków ruchomych kościoła św. Rocha z 1961 r. oraz 2000 r., no. DLN 000 000 031 861, WUOZ Wrocław. *Olawa. Zarys monografii*, s. 217.

33 Roszkowska, *Olawa królewiczów Sobieskich*. Wydanie przejrane, p. 72.

34 Currently in the Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences, photographic collection, inv. no. IS PAN R0000017250, author: Marianne Kirchner, ca. 1936/1937. For more on the pre-war endeavour to inventory historical monuments in the Olawa district, see G. Grajewski, *Między sztuką a polityką. Ochrona zabytków na Dolnym Śląsku w czasach III Rzeszy*, doctoral dissertation written at the Faculty of Architecture, Wrocław University of Science and Technology, under the supervision of Prof. Janusz L. Dobesz PhD (habil.) (Wrocław, 2014), p. 119.

35 Karty ewidencji zabytków ruchomych kościoła św. Rocha z 1961 r. oraz 2000 r. no. DLN 000 000 031 863, DLN 000 000 031 864, WUOZ Wrocław



Fig. 3

The church of St. Roch,
interior, ca. 1936/1937, photo
by Marianne Kirchner

inscription that Erich Wissmach had in mind,³⁶ and if so, whether the narrative of the votive foundation of the church/the image was based on this verse.

II

The fact of James Louis Sobieski's release from captivity in Saxony in 1706 has so far played a prominent role in the narrative on the erection of the church of St Roch. It must be stressed, however, that the prince did not regain full freedom until late 1706 and returned to Oława in mid-1707.³⁷ If indeed these events significantly influenced the decision

36 His 1929 guide is earlier than M. Kirchner's photograph of the church interior by only a few years.

37 The prince's release was to be conditional on his pledge to renounce his claim to the throne of the Commonwealth and the signing of this pledge was delayed; more on the subject in A. Skrzypietz, *Królewscy synowie*, p. 442.

to build a new church, the most favourable conditions for the Sobieski family to manifest their presence in the religious life of Oława's Catholic community were yet to come. By the end of 1707, the town's small Catholic community had two churches, the parish church of St. Blaise and the Sobieski's private chapel in the castle, at their disposal, and the construction of another church would have had no practical or financial justification at that time.³⁸

The situation was about to change radically, however, and events were unfolding at a local level whose dramatic nature and consequences were far more important to the Silesian residents of the town and surrounding area than the issue of the prince's release from captivity and his ambitions and political plans concerning the distant Commonwealth. What influenced these events were the complicated religious conditions in the region at the turn of the seventeenth century.³⁹

With the death of the last Silesian Piast, Duke George William, in 1675 the duchies of Legnica, Brzeg and Wołów (Wohlau) came under direct imperial rule. The Duchy of Brzeg, together with Oława, which under the rule of the last Piast dukes had been almost entirely Protestant, began to feel the changes resulting from the consistent and sometimes violent re-Catholicisation that the Habsburg emperors had already practised in Silesia for half a century. In Oława itself, these changes were somewhat delayed by the fact that Dowager Duchess Louise resided there (until 1680), but even there by 1699 all the Lutheran churches, schools and offices had been closed or removed from their possession.⁴⁰

In 1707, King Charles XII of Sweden, in response to numerous complaints from Silesian Protestants, forced Emperor Joseph I of Habsburg, threatening him with an occupation of Silesia, to abandon his persecution of Protestants, thus restoring their freedom of religion, parish structure,

38 The Sobieski family was struggling financially and had long been preparing to leave Oława for Graz, whereas the Catholic community was a religious minority in the town and would not be able to maintain another church. The unfavourable financial situation of the Holy Trinity parish in Oława is reported in the records of the episcopal visitation of 1706. Translation from Latin: 'the income of the church is very small, due to the lack of branch churches, which are under the authority of the Lutherans, so that the parson is hardly able to live without going into debt; besides, 3 villages are exempt from Mass fees'; AAWr, sign. IIb 151 1706 Visitatio archidiaconalis de clementissimo Serenissimi et Reverendissimi Principis ac Domini Domini Francisci Ludovici [...] in Ducatibus: Vratislaviensi, Brigensi et respective Münsterbergensi instituta et peracta, and in a German translation: K. Engelbert, 'Kirchliche Visitationsberichte aus dem jahre 1706', *Unser Schlesien*, supplement to *Ohlauer Kreis – u. Stadtblatt*, no. 22, 1930.

39 D. von Velsen, 'Die Gegenreformation in den Fürstentümern Liegnitz-Brieg-Wohlau: Ihre Vorgeschichte und ihre Staatsrechtlichen Grundlagen', *Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte*, vol. 15 (Leipzig, 1931), pp. 24–131.

40 J. Soffner, 'Die Kirchen – Reduktionen in den Fürstentümern Liegnitz – Brieg – Wohlau nach dem Tode des Herzogs George Wilhelm', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte (und Alterthum) Schlesiens*, vol. 20, 1986, pp. 138–139.

schooling and other social activities. From a Catholic, and therefore denominationally opposite, perspective, the Swedish king's wartime involvement had a dual, even paradoxical character for the small town of Oława.⁴¹ The Peace of Altranstädt, concluded on 24 September 1706, restored freedom to Sobieski, the Catholic resident of the castle and the Oława estate;⁴² but the so-called Convention of Altranstädt, signed less than a year later, was a blow to the entire Catholic community, as it obliged the emperor to return to Silesian Protestants a hundred and twenty-one churches seized in the course of re-Catholicisation.⁴³ In Oława, those included the large parish church, taken over by the Catholics after the death of its minister Rev. Adam Friedrich Springer on 7 December 1699, and the so-called Polish church of evangelical Protestants, closed and unused since its takeover in 1695.⁴⁴ The last Catholic mass in the parish church was held on 4 December 1707, and three days later, on exactly the seventh anniversary of the Catholic takeover, an Imperial-Swedish commission handed over the keys to the church to the Lutherans.⁴⁵ After 7 December 1707, Catholics in Oława were again left with only a small private chapel at the Sobieski court.

The local deputy rector (*commendarius*) Franz Dismas Tichy became intensely involved in the defence of the town's Catholic community.⁴⁶

41 The best illustration of this is the anecdote related to the portrait of Charles XII, which was hanging in the prince's chambers next to images of saints. When a priest rather sourly pointed out that it was not right to hang a portrait of a heretic among the images of saints to whom prayers were offered, James replied that he would not remove the portrait because it was that heretic who had helped to free him. In any case, Catholics in Oława, regardless of their knowledge of the meanders of high politics, expected the prince to extend to them a protection similar to that enjoyed by Lutherans under the reign of the last Piast dukes.

42 P. Feit, 'Jacob Ludwig Sobieski, Prinz von Polen, Pfandherr von Ohlau', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte (und Alterthum) Schlesiens*, vol. 26 (Breslau, 1892), p. 17.

43 N. Conrads, *Die Durchführung der Altranstädter Konvention in Schlesien 1707–1709* (Köln, 1971).

44 After the death of Rev. Johann Christian Opolius and the Ohlau city hall officials' failed attempt to ordain Georg Friedrich Thilo in his stead. See H. Quester, 'Zur Geschichte der protestantischen Kirchen in Ohlau/Schlesien', in: *Erinnertes Erbe. Beiträge zur schlesischen Kirchengeschichte. Festschrift für Christian – Erdmann Schott* (Herrnhut, 2002), pp. 77–78.

45 G. Schulz, *Festschrift zur Erinnerung an die Rückgabe unserer Pfarrkirche am 7. Dezember 1707* (Iserlohn, 1962).

46 The chronology of events reconstructed below is based mainly on Father Tichy's correspondence from the chronicle of the parish of St Maurice in the Oława suburb of Wrocław, AAWr, sign. Va 3, *Annales seu acta parochiae divi Mauricii in suburbio Wratislaviae post portam Ohlaviensem*, fols 42–99. Father Tichy included copies of the letters in his memoirs of the period when he was serving in Oława and Niemcza, at the time when the churches were being returned to the Lutherans (the memoirs were written after he had left Oława, around the middle of 1710). On 23 April 1710, Father Tichy was appointed parson of the parish of St Maurice. He most likely took his correspondence with him to Wrocław, which would explain the fact that copies of writings

Two weeks after the move to the castle chapel, he wrote a letter to the Vicariate of the Wrocław Bishopric, warning, emphatically and in an imploring tone, against ‘the greatest threat of the complete annihilation of Catholicism so laboriously and, by the grace of God, splendidly sown [in Oława]’.⁴⁷ Father Tichy reported how on the preceding Sunday, i.e. 18 December 1707, a crowd of Catholic worshippers from the town of Oława numbering 1,300 persons, and including the residents of the surrounding villages reaching no less than 3,000 persons,⁴⁸ could not fit into the small chapel of the Sobieski castle. Most of the worshippers stood in the open air outside the church, i.e. in the castle courtyard, in the rear (northern) wing of which the chapel was located. From outside Oława, it was mainly Catholics from the areas of Minkowice (German:

relating to the years 1707–1710 in his Oława period are found in the chronicle of the parish of St Maurice’s and not in the Oława chronicle. Written in Latin, the memoirs were translated into German and appeared in print in three parts under the title ‘Kurzer Bericht von der gewaltsamen Abnahme vieler katholischen Kirchen in Schlesien, absonderlich derer zu Ohlau und Nimptsch durch den König von Schweden Carl XII., and Uebergabe derselben an die Protestanten im Jahre 1701 bis 1708’, *Schlesisches Kirchenblatt* no. 13, 1862, pp. 145–149; no. 14, 1862, pp. 157–161; no. 15, 1862, pp. 169–174. Passages from the memoirs were also quoted in the pre-war local press (*Unser Schlesien*, a supplement to *Ohlauer Kreis i u. Stadtblatt*) and church press (*Katholisches Kirchen-Blatt Pfarrei Ohlau – Zur Ohlauer Kirchengeschichte*). Copies of Father Tichy’s letters have not been of interest to researchers so far, even though they complement the above-mentioned memoirs and provide a unique insight into the religious situation in Oława in the years 1707–1710.

- 47 The re-Catholicisation of Oława progressed with a delay of several years, probably the slowest of all the towns in the Duchy of Legnica and Brześć. The duchess died on 25 April 1680, and Catholic masses did not begin to be celebrated in the Oława castle chapel until the end of 1685 (while in the castle chapels in Brzeg and Legnica, as early as 1677), at the point when the imperial authorities managed to fill the chamber offices with the first Catholic appointees after the death of their Lutheran predecessors, who had been appointed still in Piast times. Johann Simon Weissberger, the new tax collector and caretaker of the newly opened castle chapel in the Catholic rite, was named ‘the first Catholic in this heretical town’. It was also at this time that the first visiting Catholic burghers appeared in Oława. The goldsmith Johann Chmurowski and the chimney sweep Johann Wolckmann, who were admitted to the town charter in 1684, were appointed the first sacristans of the castle chapel. A noticeable increase in the number of Catholics occurred only after the Sobieski courts installed themselves in the town in 1697.
- 48 These figures should be approached with caution; they were most probably inflated in order to enhance the rhetorical effect. Official church data from the 1706 visitation of the bishopric of Wrocław, i.e. soon before the handing over of the churches to the Lutherans, list 2200 inhabitants in the town of Oława together with the Sobieski court, of whom 600 were Catholics; in Lipki, 51 inhabitants out of the total of 647 were Catholics; in the parish of Minkowice and its subsidiary church in Bystrzyca Oławska, 1200 inhabitants, of whom 50 were Catholics, and in Brzezimierz, 1400 inhabitants, of whom 400 were Catholics; cited after: AAWr, sign. I Ib 151 1706. Only documentation of the episcopal visitation in 1724 records 1271 Catholics as present in Oława and the neighbouring villages: Bergel, Baumgarten, Jatzdorff, Gisdorff, Ottag, Deutsch – Steine, Polnisch – Steine, Sacrau; see J. Pater, ‘Schematismen des Fürstenbistums Breslau 1724 und 1738’, *Forschungen und Quellen zur Kirchen- und Kulturgeschichte Ostdeutschlands*, vol. 26 (Köln 1994), p. 77.

Minken), Bystrzyca Oławska (Peisterwitz), Brzezimierz (Wüstebriese), Piskorzów (Peiskerau), Lipki (Linden) and Gać (Heidau) that came for Mass in the castle chapel; two priests were unable to provide sacramental services for all.⁴⁹

On the very same day, 23 December 1707, in a letter drafted by the clerk Georg Frantz Klugheimer, vicars general of the bishopric Leopold Graf von Franckenberg and Anton Lothar Graf von Hatzfeldt-Gleichen conveyed Father Tichy's remarks to Franz Ludwig von Pfalz-Neuburg, bishop and *starost*-general of Silesia. They asked him to submit to the emperor a comprehensive account of the plight in which the Catholics, not only of the Oława district but of the entire duchy, found themselves when the provisions of the Convention of Altranstädt came into force, and to designate additional funds for the upkeep of priests deprived of parishes and income, and still alive only from a 'Christian sense of duty'.⁵⁰

In February 1708 came the emperor's reply and a declaration that Catholics in the duchy 'will not be abandoned', backed up by a promise to build new churches where needed. The decision was communicated to Father Tichy by Leopold von Frankenberg in a letter of 16 February 1708, asking him to specify in which towns of the Ohlau Weichbild (i.e. the Oława town and district) new churches should be established; the distances between them; the estimated number of worshippers for each of the new parishes; whether one administrator for the entire Oława district would be sufficient; how many ministers and additional members of church staff should be procured; what remuneration should be provided for them; and finally, where education for children and young people should be organised.⁵¹

In response to the imperial decree and the questions asked in the questionnaire, Father Tichy estimated the number of churches the Oława district needed to be at least four. Above all, there was no church in Oława itself, where, as Father Tichy brought to recollection, up to 3,000 people attended the crowded castle chapel every Sunday, and the ministry required two or three priests, a rector, a cantor, an organist, a bell-ringer, 'and none of them will serve for less than 100 thalers' annual salary, with the parson of a small (rural) parish should receive 300 thalers a year, but the Oława administrator, due to the higher rank of the parish, would

49 AAWr, sign. XI, Akta Parafii i miejscowości – Ohlau [Documents of the Parish and locality – Ohlau]; Zustand der Katholiken nach der Altranstädter Konvention 1707–1708, document no. 1: 23 Dec. 1707 [original]; copy in: AAWr, sign. Va 3, Annales seu acta parochiae divi Mauritii, fol. 71.

50 AAWr, sign. XI, Akta Parafii i miejscowości – Ohlau; Zustand, documents no. 2 and 3: 23 Dec. 1707 [a draft and the original].

51 AAWr, sign. Va 3, Annales seu acta parochiae divi Mauritii, fols 93–95.

expect 'something above that'.⁵² For the location of the new church and parsonage in Oława, Father Tichy proposed the so-called Castle Square (Schlossplatz), a vacant strip of land within the city walls between the castle moat and buildings in the middle of the market, the Wrocław Gate on one side, and the wall behind which shooting competitions were held on the other. Another church was needed in the village of Minkowice (Minken), which belonged to the estate of the church administration office (*camera*) in Oława. Due to its location, this parish served, until 1707, Catholics from the northern areas of the Ohlau Weichbild and the Bierutów-Oleśnica (Bernstadt-Oels) border, gathering up to 600 worshippers at mass. The third church was to be built in the entirely Catholic village of Bolechów (Bulchau) – it belonged to the parish of Osiek (Hennersdorf), but the church there was inaccessible to the villagers when the water level in the Oława River rose. The last church, according to Father Tichy, should be built in the village of Gać (Heidau), whose owner was Johann Adrian von Plencken, a Catholic and chancellor of the Wrocław Superior Office.

The solutions proposed and implemented at the beginning of 1708 were ad hoc and concerned only the allocation of modest resources for priests and chaplains. In the following months, Tichy relentlessly appealed to the Episcopal Office, reporting the 'deplorable state' of Catholics in the duchy and requesting an increase in his own remuneration and those of other church employees: the chaplain, the bell-ringer, the Catholic teacher; in the absence of funds, he asked to be transferred. During this period there was also a dispute with the Lutheran community in Oława over the release of the parsonage at the parish church, then still occupied by Father Tichy, for the new Lutheran pastor. In addition, the Lutherans demanded the return of the chalices (or at least the equivalent of their value), which the Catholic community had taken over with the church as early as 1699 and had not returned at the end of 1707. In return, Father Tichy billed the Lutherans for the repairs and renovations, funded by Catholic alms, carried out over the previous seven years in the church which had just been transferred to them, hoping that the amounts of the mutual claims would cancel each other. He made settling the outstanding tithes a condition of his leaving the parsonage. The dispute lasted until the end of April 1708.

The matter of erecting a new church returned in the middle of 1708 due to completely new circumstances. A plague had been spreading in areas around the Baltic Sea and in Central and Eastern Europe for several years chiefly due to the ongoing Great Northern War (1700–1721), and finally it reached Silesia, arriving there from the lands of the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania. The first cases were recorded in Upper

⁵² Ibid., fols 96–99.

Silesia, in Miasteczko Śląskie, followed by Lower Silesia near Milicz, Syców and Oleśnica; twenty-five villages were infected there in the following year. In Opole Silesia, in turn, between February and December 1708, the plague decimated Olesno.⁵³

The first traces of action undertaken in Oława in connection with the pandemic are recorded in city documents at the end of April 1708.⁵⁴ At that time, the city ordered a hundred sheets of health certificates, known as the Pest Pässe, from the Brzeg bookbinder Gottfried Gründer. Permanent passport control posts at the entrances to the city were established in late September 1708. Two additional guards were employed for this purpose, one each at the Brzeska Gate and Wrocławska Gate.⁵⁵ Inspections in Oława continued until the end of 1711, and the issuing of passports for a few years longer.

The breakthrough event took place in the summer of 1708. James Sobieski complained about the 'great and unbearable stench' of farm workers from the surrounding villages gathering for mass on hot days, and announced that he could no longer make his castle chapel available to Oława's Catholic community for fear of 'a plague pandemic raging in the neighbourhood' and the threat of infecting his princely residence.⁵⁶ The prince's seemingly petty decision had its reason. A large proportion of the worshippers (according to Father Tichy's account) came to Sunday mass from villages on the right bank of the Oława River, which until then had been served by the Minkowice parish, liquidated in 1707, and which in turn included the worshippers from the infected areas even further to the north – Oleśnica, Bierutów and Namysłów, so the pandemic risk was real.

Apart from his concern for the well-being of his court, the prince's decision to refuse access to his private chapel can also be read as a disagreement with the authorities' tardiness regarding the still overcrowded castle chapel (or, in effect, a *sui generis* blackmail). By delaying the decision to build the church, the superior authorities virtually shifted the burden to Sobieski. It is also not impossible that this was part of a wider conflict between the prince and the imperial administration and a kind of retaliation for the restrictions he and his courtiers faced on their numerous travels. On 19 to 21 September 1708, the *starost* of Wrocław, Graf Otto Wenzel von Nostitz, stayed in Oława on a diplomatic mission caused by the prince's complaint to the imperial court about certain

53 C. I. Lorinser, 'Die letzte Pest in Schlesien 1708–1713', in: *Die Pest des Orients. Wie sie entsteht und verhütet wird* (Berlin, 1837), p. 437.

54 28 April 1708; APWr, AMO, sign. 479.

55 Ibid., 22 Sept. 1708; first invoices made to Joachim Friedrich Zetsche and Hans Christoph Günthern.

56 AAWr, sign. Va 3, Annales seu acta parochiae divi Mauritii, fols 74–76.

difficulties his men were encountering in Wrocław when entering and leaving the city 'due to an epidemic raging in Poland'.⁵⁷ Another case of this type was a complaint, this time by the magistrate of Oława against the courtiers of James and Alexander Sobieski, who repeatedly entered Silesia, and then Oława itself, without undergoing the prescribed quarantine and illegally crossed the city walls through the castle's back gate, thus bypassing passport control at the entrances to the city.⁵⁸ The emperor threatened to quarantine the entire Oława castle if such cases were to be repeated in the future.

Meanwhile, in response to Sobieski's ban on masses in his chapel, the undaunted Father Tichy decided to seek help from Joseph I of Habsburg himself.⁵⁹ Once again, he asked for a new church to be provided for Catholics or for the parish church to be returned to them, arguing that the evangelical Protestants in Oława did not need *two* churches for the freedom of religion guaranteed by the Convention of Altranstädt to be maintained.⁶⁰ Changing the status of the church of St Blaise was out of the question; this would have been a clear breach of the terms of peace and the emperor would certainly not have taken such a risk. It was therefore recommended that mass be celebrated in the town hall until a suitable site for a new church could be found and prepared. This was a solution that had already been introduced at the beginning of 1708 in other towns in the Duchy⁶¹ governed by Catholic town councils installed

57 K. Gebauer, 'Schlesischer Adel im Spätbarock. Nach Tagebüchern des Grafen Otto Wenzel von Nostitz, Landeshauptmanns von Breslau', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte (und Alterthum) Schlesiens*, 1934, vol. 68, pp. 140–141.

58 K. Piwarski, *Królewicz Jakub Sobieski w Oławie* (Kraków, 1939), pp. 54–55. The correspondence concerning this particular case dates from November/December 1709, but the context shows that it was not an isolated incident. In any case, James vigorously denied the magistrate's allegations.

59 Neither the exact time of the refusal to use the chapel nor the date of Father Tichy's appeal to the emperor are known. Considering the content of Sobieski's complaint and adding up the time it took to deliver letters between Oława, Wrocław and Vienna, as well as the formalities involved, it can be assumed that it was late July or early August (the harvest period). The reply from Vienna dated 21 August 1708 to the Superior Office in Wrocław was forwarded to Tichy on behalf of the emperor by the chancellor and councillor Johann Adrian von Plenken on 30 August 1708; Tichy received the letter on 7 September 1708; AAWr, sign. Va 3, *Annales seu acta parochiae divi Mauritii*, fols 74–76.

60 I.e. the parish church and the Polish church; according to Father Tichy, the latter, since its reopening by the evangelical Protestants in late 1707, had in any case been used only rarely: 'dann eine schon wüst stehet, und sich derselben selten bedienen', AAWr, sign. Va 3, *Annales seu acta parochiae divi Mauritii*, fol. 76.

61 In Niemcza (Nimptsch) and Byczyna (Pitschen), where, unlike in Oława, there was no longer any Catholic church after 1707. In Brzeg, Catholics had at their disposal not only the castle chapel of St Hedwig, but also the church of St Leopold at the Capuchin monastery, built in 1700. After 1681, there was also a Jesuit mission. More on the topic in: A. Peszko, *Wieże wiary. Rzecz o stosunkach wyznaniowych Brzegu od II połowy XVIII do końca XIX wieku* (Brzeg, 2008), pp. 21–31.

during the gradual re-Catholicisation of the region.⁶² The emperor's decision was intended to express his understanding of Sobieski's position and the 'disputes conducted because of the inconveniences that had taken place', and the solution was to guarantee 'respect appropriate to his status'.

Father Tichy was apparently of a different opinion, which he expressed in a reply full of regret and undisguised disappointment. In his view, the temporary relocation to the Oława town hall did not solve the existing problems, as he estimated that it would accommodate a maximum of 300 worshippers; to make matters worse, there would be no singing or the use of bells there. He predicted 'the total ruin of Catholicism in the Oława district' in the event that the parish church could not be recovered or a new one acquired in its place, and once again appealed to the Vicariate of the Bishopric of Wrocław to listen to his cause: '[...] showing sorrow for the imminent death of souls, I am begging to receive what I asked for'.⁶³

III

It is not known how Father Tichy's most important postulate was addressed (if it was addressed at all), but the Oława church in the location he indicated was never built.⁶⁴ The priest's letters circulated for nearly half a year between Oława, the Superior Office and the Vicariate of the Bishopric in Wrocław. Both of these offices were then in the hands of one person: Franz Ludwig von Pfalz-Neuburg, in private, the brother of Hedwig Elisabeth Sobieska. In the end, it was the princess who took the initiative and effected the erection of the new church, but in the absence of additional sources of information, it is difficult to determine what motivations influenced her decision; whether it was just a private act of thanksgiving (as recorded in the church's historiography to date), or perhaps a reaction to the dynamic religious situation in the town, further reinforced by the threat of a pandemic.⁶⁵ The two motivations

62 In Oława, it took 12 years, from 1688 to 1700, to replace the fully Protestant town council with a Catholic one.

63 AAWr, sign. Va 3, Annales seu acta parochiae divi Mauritii, fol. 81

64 The other proposals were taken into account by the imperial authorities a little later, when setting the amounts of remuneration for priests and church workers as part of the so-called Josephine curatorship (*kuracja józefińska*) in 1710. The Oława administrator received 500 thalers, all other priests of the newly established parishes, 300 thalers each. A few years later, two other churches proposed by Father Tichy were established in the Oława district: in Psary (1712), neighbouring the village of Gać, and in Minkowice (1716); see J. Soffner, *Die Altranstädtsche Convention (1707) und die Kaiser Josephinische Pfarrfundation für Schlesien (1710)* (Breslau, 1898).

65 The interrelation of all these factors was first noted by Father Josef Wahlich, the last pre-war parish priest of Oława. In a short memorial entry he wrote: 'An jene bewegte Zeit erinnert die Rochuskapelle vor dem ehemaligen Brieger Tor und die Johann Nepomuk Figur an ihrem Eingang [...]. An die Stelle der so schnell wieder aufgehobenen

are not contradictory and may have been mutually reinforcing. There is less doubt about the dating: the stubbornness of the local priest, the limited space of the Sobieski castle chapel, the inability of Catholics from Olawa and nearby villages to fully participate in masses – all these circumstances and events culminate around the middle of 1708, pointing to it as the most likely moment when the construction of the new church, known to this day as St Roch's, began. The project was carried out in a tense period of mutual disputes, in straitened circumstances and in an accelerated manner; perhaps this is why so few documents on its progress have survived. One of the earliest relevant documents is a note in the chronicle of the Holy Trinity parish in Olawa,⁶⁶ not mentioned in the literature to date, which resembles a foundation inscription or a design (?) for a cartouche that has been lost:

Anno Domini 17 06 / Aedificata est Ecclesia ante / Portam Brigen-
sem / Dicata, / in / Honorem SSSmie Trinitatis / Beatissima Virginis
Mariae. /ac /Venerationem S'cti Rocha & / Sancti / Sebastiani. Om-
nium que / Sanctorum / Sumptibus Regiae Celsitudinis / Ducissae
Casimirae Dominae / Conjugis Ducis Jacobi / Sobiesky.⁶⁷

This entry is surprising for several reasons. It appears that originally St Roch was neither the sole patron saint (perhaps the intended patron) of the church nor the main one. The date '1706' is notable for the way it is written: only the first two digits '17' are original, the last two '06' were added at a later date, in a different hand. Most surprising is the ambiguous figure of the foundress, which is a combination of two persons and titles: Queen Maria Casimire Sobieska and her daughter-in-law, Princess Hedwig Elisabeth. Was this a deliberate move (and thus a hitherto completely unknown 'Olawa trace' of James's mother, Queen Marysieńka), or perhaps an anticipation of the future royal title for Hedwig

Ohlauer Pfarrei trat 1710 eine sogenannte Josefinische Kuratie, wie sie Josef I. mehrfach für schlesische Orte stiftete [...]. Der Gottesdienst wurde wieder in die Schlosskapelle verlegt, die zur Zeit des Prinzen Jakob ein sehr festlicher Raum war. Sie konnte den wachsenden Zustrom kaum fassen, und der Prinz hatte nicht wenig Angst, dass ihm das Volk vom andern Oderufer in heißer Sommerzeit einmal die Pest ins Schloss einschleppen könnte'; J. Wählich, *Die katholische Stadtpfarrkirche*, in: *Ohlauer Heimatbuch*, ed. K. Buschbeck (Goslar, 1950), p. 34.

66 Acta Sacelli Arcis Olaviensis – Kronika Parafii pw. Świętej Trójcy w Oławie [Chronicle of the Holy Trinity Parish in Olawa], fol. 76. The entry is preceded by a letter from 1696 and followed by a note from 1710. I would like to thank Ms Nina Kordys, Director of the District and City Public Library in Olawa, for making the scan of the chronicle available to me, and Dr Tomasz Galwiazek, who initiated the scan. The current location of the chronicle is unknown.

67 Translation from Latin: 'In the year of our Lord 17 06, a church was built in front of the Brzeska Gate, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the cult of Saint Roch, Saint Sebastian and all the Saints. At the expense of Her Royal Highness Princess Casimire wife of Prince James Sobieski'.

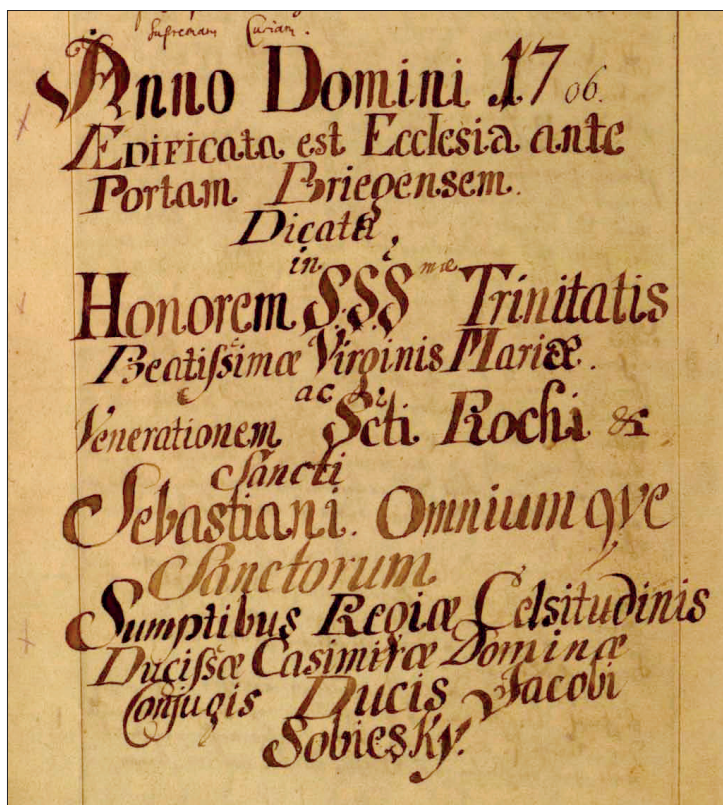


Fig. 4

Foundation inscription, before 1710, Chronicle of the Holy Trinity Parish in Oława

Elisabeth (which, as we know, did not materialise), or simply a mistake by the author of the inscription in writing down the name of the crown prince's wife?

The view that this is simply a case of confusion as to the names of James Sobieski's mother and wife is supported by another little known document, this time concerning the episcopal visitation of Oława in 1719.⁶⁸ A short note contained therein mentions Hedwig Elisabeth Sobieska, directly and with correct titles, as the sole founder of the chapel of St Roch.⁶⁹ It also states the then full name of the church, which, however, was rather quickly reduced or forgotten.

An echo of the chronicle entry (or knowledge of the cartouche bearing a similar inscription) is still discernible as late as in the nineteenth century: the German historian Johann G. Knie reproduces the same

⁶⁸ AAWr, sign. IIb 39, Visitatio ecclesiarum in Briga, Olavia, Lossen, Klein-Öls, Jauer, Bruswitz, Marienau, Ossig, Kaulwitz. 1719–1720 [Olavia die 17 Juny 1719 visitatori fol. 9–13f].

⁶⁹ Translation from Latin: 'He [the parish priest] has no church attached [under his care], but there is a chapel outside the town in honour of saints Roch, Sebastian, Charles, Francis Xavier, Ignatius and Anthony the Great, built at the expense and thanks to the efforts of the most reverend Duchess and Princess Elisabeth. In this chapel, services are celebrated twice a year, on the feast days of Saints Roch and Sebastian, with a sermon and vespers'.

characteristic error in the name of James Sobieski's wife.⁷⁰ An anonymous chronicler of Olawa makes the same error, additionally supplementing his entry with the date '1706'.⁷¹ The pedestal of a statue of St John of Nepomuk in front of the church bears a chronostich indicating the date '1706'. This may be the origin of the narrative linking James's release from captivity in Saxony with the year when the church was constructed, but, as shown above, this construction date seems far too early.

The first bill in the town's brickworks for 20,000 bricks 'for the new chapel being built by the princess royal' only dates from late July/early August 1708⁷² and constitutes further direct confirmation that Hedwig Elisabeth was in charge of the project. The bell in the ridge turret, which was cast in Brzeg, dates from the same year,⁷³ and the entire construction works continued at least until the end of 1709, as evidenced by further invoices for bricks (a total of 30,000 pieces) and roof tiles.⁷⁴ In January 1710, the Brzeg administrative district office looked into a request from the Catholic community to enlarge the cemetery adjacent to the church.⁷⁵ The last minor finishing touches were probably completed in late July and early August 1712, and a wooden cross was erected by the chapel in December.⁷⁶ The earliest surviving images of the chapel, by Friedrich Bernhard Werner, erroneously suggest that all the building was in brickwork.⁷⁷ In fact, it was constructed in a timber frame technology (either

70 J. G. Knie, *Alphabetisch-statistisch-topograph. Übersicht der Dörfer, Flecken, ... der königl. Preußischen*, p. 890: 'erbaut von Kasimira, der Gemahlin des poln. Prinzen Jacob Sobieski'.

71 APWr, AMO, sign. 45, Chronik der Stadt Ohlau 1860–1869, fol. 12, 84: 'die katholische begräbniss Kirche St. Rochus in der Grottkau – Brieger Vorstad; erbaut 1706 von Kasimira der Gemahlin des Polnischen Prinzen Jacob Sobiesky, der als Pfandes Herr von Ohlau, 1691–1734 hirer residirte. Patron fiscus'.

72 APWr, AMO, sign. 480, Der Stadt Ohlau Geldraytung 1708–1709, fol. 38: 'Anno 1708 M. Jul. und August 20000 [Ziegeln] zu der neu erbauten Capella vor Ihro Hoheit die Konigl. Princessin allhier'.

73 Karty ewidencji zabytków ruchomych kościoła św. Rocha z 1961 r. oraz 2000 r. no. DLN 000 000 031 878, WUOZ Wrocław.

74 APWr, AMO, sign. 480, Der Stadt Ohlau Geldraytung 1708–1709, fol. 39f: 'Anno 1709 M. Jan. und Febr. 600 [Ziegeln] zu der neuen Capella', fol. 41f: '1500 [Flachwerk] M. Sept und October 1708 zu der neuerbauten Capella'; APWr, AMO, sign. 481, Der Stadt Ohlau Geldraytung 1709–1710, fol. 39f: 'Anno 1709 M. Sept. und Octobris. 9200 [Ziegeln] Zur neuen Capella vorm Brigist. Thor'.

75 APWr, AMO, sign. 481, Der Stadt Ohlau Geldraytung 1709–1710, 'Anno 1710 den 10 Jan vor eine Konigl. Regierungs Resolution wegen zu erweiternden Catholischen Kirchhofes'.

76 APWr, AMO, sign. 484, Der Stadt Ohlau Geldraytung 1712–1713, fol. 41v: 'Anno 1712 M. Jul. und August 200 [Ziegeln] Zur Capelle vom Briegl. Thore', 'Anno 1712 Mens. Nov. und Dec. 2 St. Eichen aus dem Ottager Vinckel, so zum Crucifix vonn Briegl. Thore bey die Capelle kommen'.

77 F. B. Werner, *Cathol. Begräbnus Kirchel. Topographia oder Prodomus Delineati Principatus Lignicensis, Bregensis et Wolaviensis una cum Principatu Trachenbergensi das ist Presentatio*



Fig. 5

F. B. Werner, *The Church of St. Roch (Cathol. Begräbnus Kirchel)*, 1740–1759

wattle-and-daub, i.e. filled with clay, or half-timbered with brick infill) and plastered on the outside, which gave it the appearance of solidity and masked the low-cost nature of the project.

The argument that the chapel was built in response to a combination of religious issues with problems caused by the pandemic is also provided by a analysis of the building's functional and spatial features. Situated outside the town boundary, it provided an opportunity for the inhabitants of villages on the north side of the Oder to attend mass without having to pass through the town's gates, where passport control was exercised. In order to enter the castle grounds while going to the Sobieski chapel, it was necessary to cross the entire town in the northerly direction, starting from the Brzeska Gate located in the south. It was therefore logical and justifiable to locate the church, whose role was to relieve pressure on the castle chapel, in the vicinity of that gate. In addition, the church was similar in size to the castle chapel; it appears to have been much too large for a cemetery chapel and too large in relation to the area of the cemetery in which it was built. Admittedly, in the first known images of the church, dating from the mid-eighteenth century, by F. B. Werner,⁷⁸

und Beschreibung derer Städte, Flecken, Clöster, Schlösser, Ritter Sitz und adlichen Häusern, Gärten, Kirchen, Dorfschaften der Fürstenthümer Lignitz, Brig und Wolau mit dem district des Fürstenthums Trachenberg durch viel Jährige muhsame Reisen zusam getragen von F.B. Werner; coloured drawing in pen, size: 90 × 70 mm, dates cited in the volume: 1740–1759, Wrocław University Library, Manuscript Section, inv. no. Ms 2o 17m, II, s. 403/Prawa.

⁷⁸ F. B. Werner, *Plan der Stadt Ohlau*, after 1740, copperplate, 17.9 × 29.2 cm, eastern orientation, plan in perspective, Wrocław University Library, Cartographic Collections, *Atlas Machnizkich*, vol. V.

it is indeed titled 'Cathol. Begräbnus Kirchel.', but a careful scrutiny of these engravings leads to the conclusion that, in the initial period, the church may not have been conceived solely as a cemetery chapel. If the entrance was located, as in the prints by F. B. Werner, on the north wall of the porch (thus on the side of the road by the moat and not on the main axis of the building), the funeral procession would have had to make logistically rather complicated manoeuvres in a limited space, eventually exiting the chapel onto the road rather than the cemetery area located on the opposite side of the building.

When the church of St Roch was built, the earlier custom of burying eminent burghers, their relatives and members of the Sobieski court in the castle chapel came to an end.⁷⁹ Its patron saint, protector of the plague victims, stands as a clear testimony of the era, a *sui generis* post-pandemic memento. Unfortunately, no detailed information is available on how the church served the Oława community in this initial challenging period and whether it actually fulfilled its role. Was it spacious enough to relieve the burden on the castle chapel and fully replace it? Certainly not, as evidenced by a bequest in James Sobieski's will dated 12 February 1710.⁸⁰ The prince willed 20,000 florins for the construction of a completely new church of the Immaculate Conception, but this was not carried out and the next version of his will does not contain the bequest.⁸¹ In the second half of 1710, Father Tichy's successor, Father Karol Rzeczkowski, took over the office of the Oława superintendent, by then back to being based at the castle chapel, and the aforementioned episcopal visitation of 1719 suggests that a mere few years after its construction the church was already in no more than sporadic use. Quite soon, that is by the second half of the 1720s, the castle chapel needed to be renovated and extended.⁸² The endeavour was crowned by the construction of

79 The last three persons to be buried in the castle chapel were Franz Andreas, son of the Catholic mayor of Oława Wilhelm Daniel Ehinger, on 29 Jan. 1708; daughter of the court tailor Jacob Klepel, on 29 May 1708; Johan George Joseph, son of Georg von Lauers, accountant of the Ohlau Weichbild land treasury, on 3 July 1708; based on the parochial registers of the Holy Trinity parish in Oława, AAWr, Katholische Kirche Ohlau – Tote, 1685–1743.

80 Ossoliński National Institute, Manuscript Section, sign. 3802/II, Materiały i notatki Stanisława Przyłęckiego dotyczące Jakuba Sobieskiego kasztelana krakowskiego i rodziny Sobieskich [Materials and notes by Stanisław Przyłęcki concerning James Sobieski, Castellan of Cracow, and the Sobieski family], Polish, Latin, nineteenth century, inv. no. K. 42. Mf BN. ('Testament królewicza Jakuba, syna Jana III w Oławie 1710 r. 12 lutego własnoręczny z podpisem i pieczęcią' [Last will of Crown Prince James, son of John III, in Oława, 1710, 12 Feb., in his own hand with signature and seal], fol. 32); Roszkowska, *Oława królewiczów Sobieskich. Wydanie przejrane*, p. 72.

81 Ibid., Oława, 17 Dec. 1717, fols 35–39.

82 APWr, AMO, sign. 2857, Acta des Magistrats zu Ohlau betreffend Acta Camera von der Restauration der Ohlauschen kathol. Schlosscapelle, 1727.

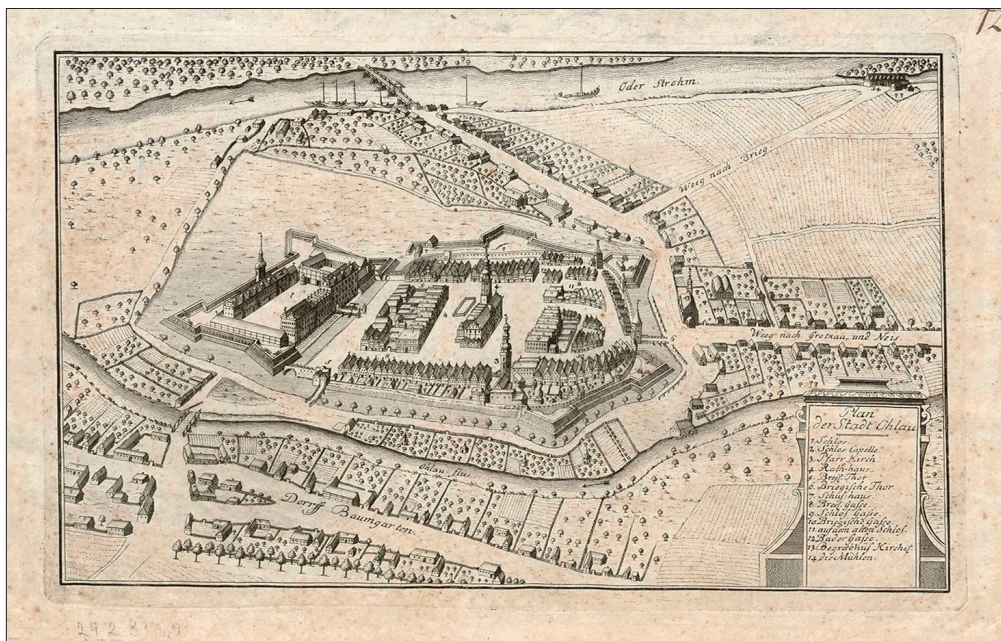


Fig. 6

F. B. Werner, *Plan der Stadt Ohlau*, a perspectival plan of Oława, ca. 1740/1750. The church of St Roch is under no. 13

a completely new church on the site of the former castle buildings, but this happened only a century later.⁸³

IV

Events, hitherto entirely unknown to scholarship, which unfolded the second half of the eighteenth century, when church of St Roch had already been in a disastrous state of repair for a long time, serve as a postscript to the above considerations. In 1783, less than seventy-five years after its construction, services in it were discontinued. Three years later, in August 1786, the town council closed the building, which was in danger of collapse, and, fearing for the safety of the residents, issued an admonition to the then superintendent of Oława, Franz Balthasar, requesting that the church be either repaired or completely demolished.⁸⁴ The use of coniferous timber in the structure and its tight sealing under the plaster caused the beams to rot rapidly and

83 APWr, AMO, sign. 2552, Kostenanschlag über die Erbauung einer katholischen Kirche zu Ohlau 1750–1800; APWr, AMO, sign. 2858, Acta des Magistrats zu Ohlau betreffend katholischen Kirchen und Schulsachen in Ohlau, Bau und Reparaturen der Gebäude 1801; APWr, AMO, sign. 2481, Akta betreffend dem Bau einer katholischen Kirche vol. III 1818; APWr, AMO, sign. 2477, Akten betreffend die Züchtigkeit der Mauern den mittleren und hinteren Teiles des Schlosses behufs der Einrichtung einer Kirche 1830–1831; APWr, AMO, sign. 2478, Akten betreffend die käuflicher Überlassung des mittlern und alten Schloss Gebäudes an das behufs Einrichtung eines katholischen Kirche 1830–1847.

84 Born in Piskorzewo (Peiskerau) near Oława, from 1764 the superintendent of Oława, he died of lung disease on 23 March 1799 at the age of 66 and was buried by the church of St Roch; *Katholisches Kirchen-Blatt Pfarrei Ohlau*, no. 2, vol. 11 (Ohlau, 1937), p. 6.

resulted in the building losing its stability. The decision to demolish it loomed on the horizon. Father Balthasar mounted determined resistance to this plan, however, and thanks to his persistence and initiative, it proved possible to procure the necessary funds, as well as to involve the residents of the town and surrounding villages in helping to preserve the church.

The construction project as proposed by the priest's neighbour Dionysius Riedelbach, a local mason and a Protestant, involved the demolition of external walls and their replacement with ones made of brick. Roof decking needed replacing as well. The technical condition of the roof trusses, ceiling and gallery was assessed as acceptable and it was decided to preserve them. The cost of the work was estimated at 888 thalers and 27 Silesian groschen. The cost estimate was presented to the ecclesiastical and secular authorities: the General Vicariate of the Wrocław Bishopric and the Royal Chamber Office, in January 1787. The effort to rescue the church began on 28 January. The carpenter Johann Koschara and his three apprentices, Quaderle, Steinhof and Schumann, built a scaffolding to support the trusses, and on 11 April 1787 masonry work began under the direction of Dionysius Riedelbach. In three days, the old elevations were dismantled down to the foundations, which fortunately proved to be deep enough and only needed widening. A detailed account of the works conducted, written down by Father Franz Balthasar,⁸⁵ contributes some details also to our meagre knowledge of the original church erected by Hedwig Elisabeth Sobieska. For instance, Father Balthasar's account indicates the existence of a burial crypt, which was demolished in the course of the 1787 renovation works, yielding an additional 30,000 bricks.

A summary of the costs incurred, compiled on 12 August 1788, shows that the costs of restructuring the building were successfully reduced to 740 thalers and materials used included, among others, a total of 70,000 bricks, 100 barrels of lime, more than 50 carts of sand and 210 threescore of roof tiles.⁸⁶ The joiner Johann Jacob Wagner repaired three old window frames and made three new ones, as well as twelve new benches. The accounts also suggest that the arrangement of the presbytery, with the central painting of the *Annunciation* in a panel on the back wall and two statues of saints in side niches, was already in place at that time. Their precise positioning on the wall was probably

85 Acta Sacelli Arcis Olaviensis – Kronika Parafii pw. Trójcy św. w Oławie [Chronicle of the Holy Trinity Parish in Olawa], fols 117–124 (entry titled 'Pro Perpetua Rei Memoria – Kirchel St. Rochus BMP'), and a record in APWr, AMO, sign. 45, Chronik der Stadt Ohlau 1860–1869, fol. 84.

86 AAWr, sign. XI, Akta Parafii i miejscowości – Ohlau [Documents of the parish and locality – Ohlau]; II Rechnung über Die erforderlich gewesene Kosten, zum bau der Kirche St: Rochus, vor dem Brieger Thore zu Ohlau in anno 1787.

established with the help of two carpenter's templates, one large (for the painting) and one small (for the symmetrical niches for the statues), which were also commissioned from Wagner the joiner. A traffic difficulty caused by the original design was removed by locating the main entrance in the axis of the restructured porch, in the place of the earlier *oculus*, and the lesenes and plaster window surrounds were made; they are still extant on the elevations of the church today. The works were completed in December 1787 and on 20 January 1788 the church was reopened and consecrated with the consent of Anton Ferdinand von Rothkirch, suffragan bishop of Wrocław and administrator of the Prussian part of the diocese of Wrocław. The church was renovated thanks to local craftsmen and the commitment of the burghers and the inhabitants of the surrounding villages. The chronostich with the words: 'Posteris pro notitia sub Curato Balthasar ita sum restaurata, prout non fui adificata' was placed inside the church in honour of the initiator of the whole undertaking.

No trace remains of this inscription today, and the fact that this renovation took place is known to us only thanks to a commemorative entry in the Oława parish chronicle and the invoices which have survived to our times. It is to be hoped that there also exist some as yet undiscovered documents concerning the endeavour of Princess Hedwig Elisabeth Sobieska, and that one day they will make it possible to reconstruct the origins of the church of St Roch in Oława with more precision.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- p. 456 The church of St. Roch, exterior, 1930, Ohlau, Kreis Ohlau (Oława), State Archive in Wrocław, Iconographic Collection, sign. 41582/1868/0/134/415, www.szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl/en/jednostka/-/jednostka/30195705
- p. 462 J. R. Storn, *A View of Oława from the Grodków Suburb*, 1661, in: Władysław Tomkiewicz, 'Weduty polskie z Albumu J. R. Storna', *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, vol. 3, 1962, p. 271
- p. 463 The church of St. Roch, interior, ca. 1936/1937, photo by Marianne Kirchner, photographic archive at the Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences, inv. no. IS PAN R0000017250
- p. 473 Foundation inscription, before 1710, Chronicle of the Holy Trinity Parish in Oława
- p. 475 F. B. Werner, *The Church of St. Roch (Cathol. Begräbnus Kirchel)*, 1740–1759, in: F.B. Werner, *Cathol. Begräbnus Kirchel. Topographia oder Prodomus Delineati Principatus Lignicensis, Bregensis et Wolauiensis una cum Principatu Trachenbergensi das ist Presentatio und Beschreibung derer Städte, Flecken, Clöster, Schlösser, Ritter Sitz und adlichen Häusern, Gärten, Kirchen, Dorfschaften der Fürstenthümer Lignitz, Brig und Wolau mit dem district des Fürstenthums Trachenberg durch viel Järinge muhsame Reisen zusam getragen von F.B. Wernher*, pen and ink drawing, coloured, size: 90 × 70 mm, dated quoted in the volume: 1740–1759, Wrocław University Library, Manuscript Division, inv. no. Ms 2o 17m, II, p. 403r
- p. 477 F. B. Werner, *Plan der Stadt Ohlau*, a perspectival plan of Oława, ca. 1740/1750, copperplate, 17.9 × 29.2 cm. Eastern orientation, perspectival plan, *Atlas Machnizkich*, vol. V, Wrocław University Library, Cartographic Collections Division www.bibliotekacyfrowa.pl/dlibra/publication/28389/edition/37065

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