

Sacrum in the Service of the Community

The Chapel of Cracow City Council in the Comparative Perspective of Late Medieval Europe

Monika Saczyńska-Vercamer

The town hall was modelled on the castles of rulers. It imitated not only their internal features, but also certain elements of their interior order and character. The chapel belonged to such elements. The locating of a sacral space within the seat of power legitimized this power. It also raised its prestige as both coming from God and being sanctified by God. With the example of Cracow town hall, we can observe that the councillors used the privilege of a portable altar (obtained at the end of the 14th century) in order to create their chapel. They used the same strategy of ‘building’ a chapel within their seat of governance as had the knights of Lesser Poland at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries for a similar purpose. The portable altar as a fixed altar was an additional element distinguishing the receivers of this spiritual favour. The liturgy performed on it – similar to the liturgy in private chapels, which included the chapel in the town hall – was not to replace the Sunday mass of obligation, but was used for pious practices.

Analog zu den Herrschaftssitzen weltlicher Herrscher imitierte das Rathaus bestimmte Elemente ihres Innenraums und dessen Charakter. Dazu gehörte auch die Kapelle. Die Einführung des sakralen Raums in den Sitz der stadtbürgerlichen Herrschaft legitimierte deren Macht. Sie verstärkte das Ansehen eines Herrschers als von Gott gegeben und geheiligt. Am Beispiel des Krakauer Rathauses kann gezeigt werden, dass die Ratsherren ein am Ende des 14. Jahrhunderts erteiltes Privileg eines tragbaren Altars nutzten, um eine Kapelle zu installieren. Sie bedienten sich dabei ähnlicher Strategien des „Bauens“, die auch die Ritter von Klempolen an der Wende des 14. zum 15. Jahrhundert nutzten. Der Übergang des Tragaltars zu einem festen Altar war ein zusätzliches Element, das die Bedeutung seiner Empfänger hervorhob. Die in der Ratskapelle vor dem Tragaltar vollzogene Liturgie diente – ähnlich wie die Liturgie in den Privatkapellen, zu denen auch die Kapelle im Rathaus gehörte – nicht den christlichen Pflichten, sondern den religiösen Praktiken.

1. Introduction

The town hall, as a symbol of the city authorities and the city’s identity and independence, imitated the seats of rulers and knights in its form and architectural organisation; it was “a castle of the townspeople”.¹ This imitation was cre-

¹ The term burgher’s castle (*Bürgerschloss*) was used to describe the town hall by Reinle 1976, p. 67. See also Czerner 2002, p. 60, Komorowski 2008, p. 175. Research on town halls has



memo

Recommended Citation:
Saczyńska, Monika: Sacrum in the Service of the Community. The Chapel of Cracow City Council in the Comparative Perspective of Late Medieval Europe, in: MEMO 9 (2022), Material Culture in Central European Towns, pp. 74–87, Pdf-Format, doi: 10.25536/20220905.

Featured Image

Boniface IX, pope, allows the councillors of Cracow to use the portable altar Rome, 17 November 1396 (detail) (National Archive in Cracow, Collection of parchment documents, sign 29/657/107).

ated through a replication of patterns taken over from other social groups who were higher in hierarchical standing, but was above all a sign of the municipality's independence. The castle embodied the strength and independence of the political and legal power of its owner, and was also the centre of this power. The castle of the townspeople had the same functions.² Not only the external form but also elements of the interior referred to the representative seats of the mighty. One of them was the chapel located in the town hall, similar to castle chapels. The *sacrum* was incorporated into the area of the seat of power not only as a space for prayer and liturgy, but also, and perhaps above all, as a sign of divine support for the power located therein. The *sacrum* served to legitimise the authorities; without divine support, the legitimacy of secular power could be questioned.³ The chapel sacralised the activities taking place in the town hall, above all the legal acts, i.e., the exercise of power.⁴ It was also the place for the collective city council to gather for devotional practices. There is another important element connected with this space, namely the climate of urban religiosity (*religion civique*). What should be mentioned among the features characteristic of this type of devotion are: its attitude towards time and the characteristic urban lifestyle, the multiplicity of patronage cults (those of the diocese, city, guild, parish, brotherhood, individual cults), a commercial attitude toward God ('buying' grace and salvation, examples of which are phenomena such as endowments for funeral masses, legacies for pious works, multiplication of prayers) and – of particular importance – the strong presence of corporate forms of piety, which was directly shaped by the nature of the community's urban social ties and relationships between people.⁵ Corporate piety was manifested primarily in the activities of fraternities and the community devotional practices of various groups operating in the town. One such group was indeed the town council.⁶

2. The private chapel of the city council

The importance of such chapels in town halls is evidenced by the efforts made by councillors to create them. In this article, I am interested in the private chapel of the city council – specifically Cracow's city council – located in the town hall. Through this example, I wish to show the mechanism of creating a sacral space in the area of the seat of power in a city. The starting point and the basis for my further deliberations will be the specific situation in Cracow and related circumstances.

a long tradition. At this point, I will only draw the reader's attention to a few more recent works which also deal with issues relevant to this article, and in which the reader will find references to older literature. There is a great deal of interest in research on individual objects, their form and transformation, and on town halls from individual European regions. Of the more recent works, the work of an art historian should be mentioned: Albrecht 2004. Apart from valuable architectural, archaeological, and art history research, the problems of the functions (and their transformations) performed by town halls are also reflected upon there. Other recent works are also worth mentioning: Heckert 1993, pp. 139–164; Zlat 1997, pp. 13–36; Scheutz 2012, pp. 19–66; Albrecht 2012, pp. 67–90; Opll 2014, pp. 37–51; Jiřová 2014, pp. 109–118; Šedivý 2019, pp. 161–198.

2 Albrecht 2004, pp. 13–24.

3 Heckert 1993, p. 139.

4 Zlat 1997, p. 27.

5 See Manikowska 2002, p. 13.

6 Heckert 1993, pp. 139–164; Czaja 1997, pp. 106–119.

We read in a document issued by Cardinal Demetrius on 29 August 1383:

*Ideo nos horum consideracione vobis [sc. consulibus Cracouiensis] humiliter a nobis supplicantibus auctoritate nostre legationis, - - , duximus concedendum, ut dum et quando vos - - in dicto vestro pretorio aut alio loco pro vestro consilio apto, tempore celebrationis missarum preuenti fueritis et prepediti, missam in eodem vestro pretorio vel vestri consilij loco, tuto videlicet et mundo ac ad id apto, in altare viatico, quotiens necesse fuerit, mediante dicta nostra auctoritate audire possitis atque valeatis.*⁷

[Therefore, after consideration, we decided in our authority to give you (that is to say the councillors of Cracow), who humbly asked us, a concession that, in your aforementioned town hall or other place suitable for your council, you may and are able, by the same authority of ours, to listen to the Mass, when and whenever [there is] a proper time for celebrating the Mass, in that town hall of yours or other place of the council, that is apt and suitable for it, before the portable altar.]

Cardinal Demetrius granted the town councillors of Cracow the right to listen to holy mass at the town hall (*in – – pretorio*) or at any other place suitable for their meetings (*alio loco pro vestro consilio apto*). The mass was to be celebrated on a portable altar at a permissible time of day. This document proclaims the privilege of a portable altar, which is one of the spiritual favours granted by the pope or by those who had received such authority from him, for instance, legates. It is not, therefore, an exceptional and unknown grace at that time. But the way in which it was granted, and given the recipient, and especially the circumstances of its bestowal, this document becomes very interesting.

The privilege of a portable altar was one of three favours associated with the sacrament of the Eucharist. The two others were: the privilege of listening to the mass in an area that was under interdict; and listening to the mass *ante lucem* (at dawn). The provision in the document for the Cracow councillors specifying the time for celebrating a liturgy at a portable altar clearly indicates that the right to celebrate the mass outside the permitted time, that is from morning until noon, was not being bestowed. The group of spiritual favours also included privileges related to the sacrament of Penance: the licence for choosing a confessor and absolution *in articulo mortis*.

Initially, favours in spiritual matters were granted to monarchs and members of their families. The oldest known privilege is the one granted on 9 March 1224 to King Louis VIII of France, allowing him to listen to mass in a place under interdict.⁸ The earliest such privilege known from Polish lands is the same right to listen to mass in a place under interdict granted on 1 February 1296 by Boniface VIII to the Prince of Wrocław (Breslau) and Brest, Henry V the Bellied (*Brzuchaty*).⁹ We then see an absolution *in articulo mortis* granted to Prince Ladislaus, called the Elbow-High, and his wife Hedwig, on 11 September 1319, as well as to the Bishop of Włocławek, Gerward of Ostrów.¹⁰ In the 14th and 15th centuries favours in spiritual matters were broadened to

7 Piekosiński (ed.) 1879, no. 59.

8 Barbiche (ed.) 1975, no. 256.

9 BP, vol. 1, no. 927.

10 BP, vol. 1, no. 1119, 1120, 1125. It is interesting that these favours were granted to Bishop Gerward during his legation in Rome, the main purpose of which was to obtain papal consent for crowning Prince Ladislaus as King of Poland. On the legation and its circumstances, see,

a wider public; those granted these privileges were now Church dignitaries, representatives of the secular elite, knights, and also townsmen. The range of this phenomenon in Polish lands in the late Middle Ages is illustrated by the following tables.

	Privileges related to the sacrament of Penance		Privileges related to the sacrament of the Eucharist			TOTAL
	Absolution <i>in art. mortis</i>	Confessor	Portable altar	Mass	<i>Ante lucem</i>	
Nobility	54	2	21	8	6	91 (44.6 %)
Clergy	48	3	5	3	2	61 (30 %)
Townspeople	44	-	-	-	-	44 (22 %)
Unidentified	7	-	1	-	-	8
TOTAL	153 (75 %)	5	27 (13.2 %)	11	8	204 (100 %)

Table 1a Grants of papal privileges for individual Polish recipients in the 14th century, according to social group.

	Privileges related to the sacrament of Penance		Privileges related to the sacrament of the Eucharist			TOTAL
	Absolution <i>in art. mortis</i>	Confessor (lett. <i>confessionalis</i>)	Portable altar	Mass	<i>Ante lucem</i>	
Nobility	74	62	101	40	12	290 (42 %)
Clergy	66	111	55	21	7	260 (38 %)
Townspeople	40	27	6	15	-	88 (13 %)
Unidentified	21	20	3	3	-	47 (7 %)*
TOTAL	201 (29.3 %)	220 (32.1 %)	166 (24.2 %)	79 (11.5 %)	19 (2.9 %)	685 (100 %)

Table 1b Grants of papal privileges for individual Polish recipients in the 15th century, according to social group.

I have included in these tables data from the Gniezno metropolis, but excluded the diocese of Wrocław (Breslau). I refer to the Silesian data in this text only comparatively and only with reference to the 14th century.¹¹ Also, the chronological range is narrowed. While the material I have collected covers the whole of the 14th century, for the 15th century I have only partial data. To some extent the caesura is the chronological range of the *Bullarium Poloniae*, the last volume of which includes the revelations from the Vatican archives about Polonia up until the end of the pontificate of Paul II, i.e., up to 1471.¹² However, I have supplemented this material with data collected in the archives of the Apostolic Penitentiary,¹³ which granted numerous privileges in matters of spiritual favours, especially the privileges of the confession letter, but also

among others: Abraham 1900, pp. 1–34; Liedtke 1971, pp. 91–107; Bieniak 1973, pp. 469–483; Maciejewski 1996, pp. 128–132.

11 Silesia was not part of the renewed Kingdom of Poland in 1320. In the 14th century the process of its further dependence on Czech rulers continued. The last independent prince of the Piast dynasty in Silesia was Bolko II the Small (d. 1368), Prince of Świdnica (Schweidnitz) and Jawor (Jauer). Thus, in spite of the fact that the diocese of Wrocław belonged to the province of Gniezno, as early as the 14th century (and even more so in the 15th century) Silesia, as it was outside the borders of the Polish Kingdom, should be treated independently.

12 BP, vols 1–7.

13 On the basis RPG vols. 1–8 and my own research in Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Penitenzieria Ap., Reg. Matrim. et Div., vols. 1–26, 28–50.

quite a number of privileges relating to portable altars. In spite of these shortcomings, I include here statistical summaries because, in my opinion, they display general tendencies.

3. The privilege of a portable altar

Most commonly obtained by recipients from the Polish Church province were spiritual favours associated with the sacrament of Penance, i.e. the absolution *in articulo mortis* and the choice of a confessor, or various types of confession letters (15th century). This is particularly evident in the comparison made for the 15th century. Among the privileges associated with the sacrament of the Eucharist, the most popular was the permission to have a portable altar. In the 14th and 15th centuries I have recorded almost 200 privileges of this type granted to recipients from the Gniezno metropolis.

The first known privilege of a portable altar for a recipient from the Gniezno province is a spiritual favour dated 13 June 1349 for the Prince of Głogów (Glogau), Henry the Iron (*Żelazny*).¹⁴ In Silesia in the 14th century the majority of recipients of this privilege were the Piast princes.¹⁵ The first known recipient of the favour of a portable altar from the Kingdom of Poland was a trusted collaborator and diplomat of Casimir the Great, the Castellan of Cracow, Jan Jura. During his diplomatic mission in Avignon in 1360, he was granted the right to use the portable altar, as well as two other privileges: the absolution *in articulo mortis* and the privilege of listening to the mass *ante lucem*.¹⁶ The first known privilege of a portable altar for a Polish ruler comes only at the beginning of the 15th century and it was a spiritual favour for Ladislaus Jagiełło and his future wife Anna of Cillia, granted by Boniface IX on 21 April 1401.¹⁷ Earlier, Jagiełło's cousin, the Duke of Lithuania Vytautas (4 August 1394) received such a privilege,¹⁸ as well as Jagiełło's brother-in-law, the Prince of Masovia Siemowit IV and his wife Aleksandra (19 September 1394).¹⁹

14 This privilege was granted, along with three others: the privilege of absolution *in articulo mortis*; the privilege of listening to mass at a place under an interdict; and listening to mass *ante lucem*: see BP, vol. 2, nos 427–430.

15 All 15 spiritual favours for the portable altar known from the 14th century, granted to people from the diocese of Wrocław, were received by lay representatives of the highest local elite; 12 spiritual favours were granted to the Piast princes. Apart from the mentioned favour granted to Henry the Iron (*Żelazny*), the other favours were later and almost all of them come from the 1360s and 1370s: BP, vol. 2, no. 1228, 25 Sept. 1363; no. 1309, 7 May 1364; no. 1434, 6 June 1365; no. 1436, 6 June 1365; no. 1557, 22 Sept. 1367; no. 1568, 24 Nov. 1367; no. 1590, 12 April 1368; no. 1612, 13 Nov. 1368; no. 1680, 5 Jan. 1371; no. 1934, 3 July 1372; BP, vol. 3, no. 588, 4 April 1399. The recipient of one favour was Princess Hedwig, the wife of Prince Rupert of Legnica (Legnitz), widow of Casimir the Great (BP, vol. 2, no. 2399, 5 June 1377), and two favours were given to representatives of the nobles (BP, vol. 2, no. 1312, 8 May 1364; no. 1775, 12 May 1371).

16 BP, vol. 2, nos. 1011–1013. The aim of Jan Jura's legation was to obtain a dispensation for the marriage of the grandson of Casimir the Great, Kažko, to the daughter of the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Olgiard. For the career of Jan Jura and his diplomatic missions, see Szczur 1986, pp. 73–83.

17 BP, vol. 3, no. 754. This privilege also included permission to listen to the mass in a place under an interdict and to listen to the mass "after midnight and before dawn". At the same time, Boniface IX's dispensation for Ladislaus Jagiełło and Anna of Cillia comes from the same date (Anna was related at a third degree to Jagiełło's first wife Hedwig d'Anjou). Privileges were obtained on this occasion (*ibidem*, no. 753).

18 BP, vol. 3, no. 377.

19 BP, vol. no. 399. Both princes were also granted the privilege of absolution *in articulo mortis* and the privilege of listening to the mass *ante lucem* (BP vol. 3, no. 399).

The above lists show us that in the 14th century the privilege of the portable altar was relatively rarely granted to recipients in the Polish Church province (13% of the recipients of all papal privileges), and its recipients were mostly representatives of knightly status. In the following century we have already recorded multiple spiritual favours of this type (166, which constituted almost one-quarter of all known papal privileges for recipients from the Gniezno metropolis). The recipients of portable altar privileges were still mainly knights (102 privileges, i.e., over 60% of all graces of the portable altar from the 15th century); the second largest group were clergy (over 30% of the recipients of such privileges). The townspeople were recipients of a portable altar only in individual cases.

A portable altar privilege was used to create the holy space needed for divine services in situations where the recipient did not have access to a church, i.e., a permanent place of worship. The consecrated object – the portable altar – allowed one to ‘build’ a portable chapel in a place where it was set up; for example, such altars were very often used to celebrate mass during a journey. Along the way, the sacred space was set up at random places and in varying conditions; the only important thing was that it needed to be possible to set up a liturgical tent, i.e., a portable chapel.²⁰ The portable altar was also used to create sacral space within secular buildings, for example in a castle.

The privilege of the portable altar was well known among the elite of late medieval Poland, although it was very rarely granted to townspeople; so, the privilege in 1396 from Cardinal Demetrius granting the councillors from Cracow this type of spiritual favour should be considered exceptional. It is also exceptional in that this privilege does not use the fixed formula for the spiritual favour of the portable altar, which had been in force in the Papal Office since the time of John XXII, and was observed throughout the late Middle Ages.²¹ This gives us a better idea as to the city councillors’ motivation in requesting this privilege.

The privilege contains a complaint from the councillors who, due to their duties for the city and the practices of the court, could not, they say, go to the parish church for mass. For this reason, they asked for the spiritual favour of listening to the mass celebrated on the portable altar in the town hall. What has changed here is that this is a situation in which a portable altar is being used as a substitute for a permanent altar. We can guess that the desire to

20 It was precisely because of the bad weather (strong winds) and the resulting difficulties in setting up the liturgical tent that the mass was not held the day before the Battle of Grunwald (Tanneberg) at a stopover in Dąbrowno; however, on the day of the battle it was in fact possible. See Długossius 1997, libb. X–XI, pp. 86–87.

21 Tangl 1894, pp. 307–311. The forms of spiritual favours for individual recipients date back to the Avignon era and were introduced under the pontificate of John XXII (1316–1334). These forms belonged to a whole group of new formulas which differed from those used previously. The forms introduced by the Avignon popes – new formulas were also added by Clement VI (1342–1352) and Innocent VI (1352–1362) – were ready-made models according to which documents could be drawn up. They concerned a number of different matters, including a large group of spiritual favours (e.g. the grace of the portable altar, the privilege of absolution *in articulo mortis* and others) and dispensations (see Tangl 1894, p. XLIX). *Litterae gratiosae*, to which the group of papal documents included the privilege we are interested in, were not to be changed. This means that the format used at the office was to be repeated exactly in each individual case. Only variable elements were to be introduced (the name of the pope, the name of the recipient, the date, and relevant grammatical changes). However, in practice it was different, and a detailed analysis allows one to find numerous exceptions, with privileges written in a formula other than the prescribed one: Tangl 1892, p. 39; Tangl 1894, p. L).

listen to mass at the town hall was combined with the designation of a permanent place for the chapel. I also suppose that the reason given in the privilege for seeking a portable altar is merely an excuse to justify the councillors' request, whereas the real reasons were different and were not formulated explicitly. However, let us start by considering the argument raised by the councillors, namely the difficulty they allege they were encountering in fulfilling their Christian duties.

A difficulty in attending church services as a reason for asking for the privilege of a portable altar was a common rationale. Among much later documents – from the second half of the 15th century, which are collected at the Apostolic Penitentiary – we find numerous examples of portable altar pieces. We find requests from a community living far away from a parish church and having problems with travelling to participate in a mass. One example from the Gniezno metropolitan area is the privilege that George Bock from the Diocese of Włocławek applied for in 1486. He asked the Holy See (the Apostolic Penitentiary) for permission for a portable altar not only for himself but also for other people from the village of Gisków, and he describes the circumstances of sending his petition to the Penitentiary. George, a noble, had built *suis propriis expensis* a chapel in Gisków *pro sua devotione et diversorum hominum omnis utriusque sexus habitatorum dicte ville*. These people were not able to attend their parish church especially during winter *propter pulvias, nives et alia viarum discrimina*. For these reasons George asked the Holy See whether any clergyman in good standing could say a mass using a portable altar in the chapel in Gisków. He and the community of the village were granted the privilege.²² This was not an isolated case. Communities asked for the privilege of a portable altar *propter longam distantiam et tempestates ac viarum pericula*.²³ It was also pointed out that some people could not reach the church because *sine sacramentis obierunt*.²⁴ The communities that submitted the petitions pointed out that they already had a special place for the celebration of the liturgy (a church, chapel, altar), but it had not yet been consecrated, and that was why they asked for the privilege of a portable altar in order to be able to attend masses without having to wait for the consecration of an already built sacred place.²⁵

These petitions show us the actions of the groups who were forced to look for an *ad hoc* solution. The portable altar, used as a permanent altar, would allow the whole community access to the sacrament of the Eucharist. In such cases, the community desired, through the privilege of the portable altar, to be able to fulfil its Christian duties. It was not, therefore, about some special form of devotion, about deepening religious life, but rather about meeting the basic religious needs of the group and fulfilling the obligations imposed by Church law. The Cracow councillors had no problems getting to their parish church. Let us note another group seeking privileges of a portable altar. Fraternities also applied for this spiritual favour, and a certain scheme is repeated: a fraternity wanted to use its chapel or altar, which was not consecrated, and therefore asked for the privilege of a portable altar, and this object would be used in place of a permanent altar.

22 RPG vol. 7, no. 1665, 9 April 1486.

23 For example: RPG, vol. 5, no. 1481, 29 Jan. 1468.

24 RPG, vol. 3, no. 306, 28 Feb. 1456.

25 For example: RPG, vol. 5, no. 1810, 25 Aug. 1470; no. 1904, 25 March 1471.

We have many such examples of applications sent to the Apostolic Penitentiary from the diocese of Liège. On the 20 February 1468, the Saint George and Saint Sebastian Fraternity obtained a portable altar privilege because their chapel was not consecrated.²⁶ And we have other examples when a given fraternity asked and received permission to use a portable altar because their altar had been built but had not yet been consecrated. There were also privileges given for fraternities of the parish church in Weert: on 29 January 1468, the Corpus Christi Fraternity received a privilege for using a portable altar *quod altaris [in honorem Corporis Christi construxerunt] nondum consecratum existit*.²⁷ The next year the Saint Jacob Fraternity and Saints Peter and Paul Fraternity received the same privilege and for the same reason.²⁸ We also know of many other permissions for using a portable altar that were granted to fraternities in the diocese of Liège.²⁹

Apparently, we are dealing with a situation similar to that described in the petitions sent by groups in villages which were far away from a parish church. The community wants to use an unconsecrated altar or chapel for divine services; the portable altar will replace the permanent altar and thus create an area suitable for contact with the sacred. However, there is a very important difference. Brotherhoods that ask for the right to use a portable altar were not deprived of access to the sacraments. Therefore, a portable altar was not serving to meet basic Christian needs. The fraternities were asking for the privilege of performing their own devotional practices. The members of the fraternities wanted to participate in the rituals to which the group was obligated, and which additionally served to build up the community and identity of the group.

Examples of the privileges for using a portable altar granted to brotherhoods follow closely the privilege accorded to Cracow's councillors in 1396. In spite of the remoteness in time, we are dealing with a similar situation in both cases. The Cracow councillors, like the members of the fraternities in the examples mentioned above, were not deprived of access to the sacraments and could fulfil their Christian duties in the parish church without any obstacles. Admittedly, the councillors stressed that their duties towards the city (they write about judging – *iuramentum* – among other things) made contact with this *sacramentum* difficult. It is, however, difficult, given Cracow's situation, to recognise this *sacramentum* as a Christian duty. This should be viewed rather as the collective devotional practices of the town council itself.

The privilege of Cardinal Demetrius is part of a longer process in which the Cracow city council made efforts to obtain a private chapel. The council's ordinance from 1375 stated that a city priest should celebrate mass in the town hall.³⁰ It was approved by the Bishop of Cracow, Florian of Mokrsko (1367–1380), but a comment "*non*" was written in a contemporary hand in a cartulary of the council's ordinances. Therefore, it was not possible to organize such a service at the town hall at that time.³¹ The privilege of Cardinal Demetrius would be another attempt (29 August 1383) to create the town council

26 RPG, vol. 5, no. 1479, 20 Feb. 1468.

27 RPG, vol. 5, no. 1482, 29 Jan. 1468.

28 RPG, vol. 5, no. 1635, 12 Feb. 1469; RPG, vol. 5, no. 1636, 5 Feb. 1469.

29 RPG, vol. 4, no. 1076, 13 Nov. 1459; RPG, vol. 4, no. 1085, 17 Nov. 1459; RPG, vol. 5, no. 1697, 4 Sept. 1469.

30 Estreicher 1936, vol. 2, no. 5, 16 March 1375, pp. 23–24.

31 Wyrozumńska 1995, p. 42. Wyrozumńska believes that this shows that the chapel at the town hall was not functioning at the time, a view with which I can concur.

chapel, this time in a very honourable form, through the city council obtaining a prestigious privilege. Further facts indeed confirm that this time the effort was successful.

The expense for the painting of an altar was recorded in the city financial accounts under that year.³² It must relate to the town hall because the expenses for the parish church were registered separately. Therefore, it gives evidence that an altar for a chapel in the town hall had been obtained. It is worth considering whether the expense was for the making of a portable altar or for an altarpiece, with the latter being more probable. An altarpiece was not an obligatory element for the celebration of liturgy, but it could indicate the construction of a fixed chapel or a refurbishment of an existing one.

Four years later, on 17 November 1396, Cracow's councillors received another privilege of a portable altar from Pope Boniface IX (see Fig. 1).³³ This time the document follows the standard form, which is the one used in the Apostolic Chancery. Therefore, it posed no restrictions on the use of the portable altar to only be in the town hall and its chapel. However, this privilege cannot be dissociated with the functioning of the chapel in the town hall. The privilege of Boniface IX should be regarded as a greater distinction for the Cracow councillors, greater than the privilege of Cardinal Demetrius. Perhaps the town councillors themselves thought that the privilege granted directly by the pope was more prestigious. There may also be some doubts as to whether the cardinal's privilege was "sufficiently important and legitimate".³⁴

One entry from the inventory of the treasury of St. Mary's Church from 1424 confirms the existence of the chapel in the town hall (and probably its functioning). It was recorded that beside the portable altar located in the treasury, there was another one *in pretorio apud dominos consules Cracouienses*.³⁵ It is impossible to know if that was the altar made in connection with Cardinal Demetrius' privilege. However, what we are sure of is that the note mentions a portable altar, which formed a chapel for councillors at the town hall.

The use of the portable altar to create a town hall chapel should not come as a surprise. We also know of other examples in other towns where the town council acted exactly as we assume they did in Cracow. In 1345, the Bishop of Wrocław, Przecław of Pogorzela, allowed a chapel with a portable altar to function in the town hall in Wrocław, and in 1358 he confirmed that the town

32 Piekosiński/Szujski (ed.) 1878, vol. 2, p. 301.

33 Piekosiński (ed.) 1879, vol. 1, no. 85, 17 November 1396.

34 We have much later and indirect information suggesting that the actions of papal legates sometimes met with doubts from the public. A clergyman from the Diocese of Włocławek, Albert Fischer, submitted a petition to the Penitentiary for a dispensation *de defectu corporis*. In his request, he explains that he had already applied for such a dispensation and obtained it from the papal legate. He later served as a priest for many years, but doubts have arisen as to whether the legate had the right to grant him a dispensation, and therefore whether it was valid, and thus whether he himself was committing a crime while serving at the altar. He therefore asked the Penitentiary to grant him the dispensation again, which he received (RPG, vol. 8, no. 2968, 6 May 1500). We can only regret the fact that the petition did not contain a more precise record of what caused Albert's doubts, and on what point he questioned the legate's rights and the validity of the dispensation he had been issued. However, this example may also suggest that there were unreasonable doubts. It is not so much the legate who may not have had the power to grant a dispensation, but a dispensation granted by him correctly may have seemed 'worse' than the one obtained directly from the papal office: the Apostolic Penitentiary.

35 Piekosiński (ed.) 1891, p. 67.



Fig. 1 Bonifacy IX, pope, allows the councillors of Cracow to use the portable altar Rome, 17 November 1396 (National Archive in Cracow, Collection of parchment documents, sign 29/657/107).

council of Wrocław had the right to build a chapel in the town hall.³⁶ We can assume that this was similar to what occurred in Cracow with the initial chapel functioning only in the form of a portable altar.

The fact that the Cracow bourgeoisie – or more precisely the Cracow councillors – obtained the privilege of a portable altar, introduced them into an exclusive group of people who could use this object. Let us recall that in the Gniezno metropolis the main recipients of the privileges of a portable altar were knights. In the 14th century they accounted for 77% (21 privileges from among 27 graces of this type) of recipients, in the 15th century it was 61% (102 privileges from among 166 graces of this type) of recipients of portable altar privileges. It was also one of the privileges that kings and princes received, as I have pointed out. The townspeople were recipients of this spiritual favour only very occasionally. We are therefore dealing with a privilege linked to the elite. In our interesting case, the privilege of having a portable altar was granted not only to townspeople, but to a strictly defined group of people: members of the town council. It was not so much the group of people belonging to significant and privileged families in Cracow that was distinguished, but rather the Cracow town council. Those who belonged to the group of councillors could benefit from the privilege. Thanks to the privilege of Cardinal Demetrius, the councillors were given the possibility of performing a separate and exclusive liturgy intended for them and taking place in the building they occupied.

The liturgy celebrated on a portable altar distinguished the group and gave them a sacred status of a community bound together by prayer. As a group they could worship 'at home', and in a sense on their own terms. Another benefit of the privilege granted to Cracow's councillors was the possibility of creating a private chapel, at the town hall. The chapel introduced a sacred element into the seat of the city authorities. The *iuramentum* performed by the councillors did not make it very difficult to reach the *sacramentum*, but the council needed this *sacramentum* to gain in importance and power. Placing a

³⁶ Korn (ed.) 1870, p. 163, no. 182, 31 March 1345; Czerner 2002, p. 51. The chapel, whose origins perhaps also date back to 1345, was also in Świdnica. To this day you can still admire this hall, although in the form it received at the end of the 17th or the beginning of the 18th century: Czerner 2002, pp. 51–52. We also know about the chapel at the town hall in Brzeg (Brieg), although its first appearance in the sources is rather late: from 1493: Czerner 2002, p. 51; Grünhagen (ed.) 1870, no. 1118, 25 October 1493.

chapel in the town hall sacralised the city authorities, but also indirectly sacralised the whole city community.

I have already given examples of the use of a portable altar by communities – inhabitants of one village, brotherhoods – as a substitute for a permanent altar to create a permanent religious space. A similar activity was the ‘creation’ of a portable chapel within the seat of power by using the altar. This is not only exemplified by the work of the Wrocław councillors, which I mentioned above; we can also find more examples of such actions from other areas.

Philip Mattox draws our attention to this kind of activity in the *Casa vecchia Medici*. An inventory from 1418 does not mention the chapel, but a privilege of a portable altar for Cosmos and his wife, granted by Martin V, comes from 1422. Mattox suggests that the chapel was created in the main hall on the *piano nobile* by inserting the necessary objects for the liturgy.³⁷ Jan Długosz, while describing the murder of Sigmund, Duke of Lithuania and son of Kęstutis, stated that the Grand Duke of Lithuania was staying at Trakai (Troki) Castle on Palm Sunday (20 March) 1440, where he listened to mass in his chamber. The prince was virtually alone, as his courtiers (*curiales*) listened to the service in the parish church at the time. The assailants took advantage of this circumstance.³⁸ In this story, it is important not only to testify to the celebration of the liturgy in a secular environment, but also to the fact that Sigmund, son of Kęstutis, used a portable altar to create a sacred place for himself and, in a way, in opposition to other believers who participated in the Eucharistic sacrifice in the parish church during this festive time.

During my research on knightly and magnate chapels, I observed a certain correlation of source material from the Lesser Poland region at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries. Namely, the moment of construction or significant reconstruction of a knight’s seat coincides with the owner obtaining the privilege of a portable altar. It clearly suggests that the privilege of a portable altar was an element of a planned strategy when creating a knight’s seat.³⁹ The seat, which was not only appropriate for the social position of the owner, but also raised his prestige, since owning a chapel even gave him a divine sanction. Examples cited from different areas and at different times indicate that certain patterns of using the portable altar were repeated and persisted for a long time.

In particular these near contemporary examples of activities related to knightly residences in the Lesser Poland region led me to guess that it was likely that a similar mechanism of action was used by Cracow’s councillors. Their receiving of the privilege of a portable altar could have been dictated from the start by the intention to create a town council chapel in the town hall. Thus, the portable altar was, from the beginning, intended as a substitute for a permanent altar. The choice of such a method for doing this could have been less expensive, easier and quicker, despite the costs and efforts that had to be made to obtain the privilege and to have the altar made, and the necessity of having the altar consecrated by the bishop.

37 Mattox 2006, p. 661.

38 Długossius 2001, libb. XI–XII, p. 216. I have analysed this case more thoroughly elsewhere: see Saczyńska 2010, pp. 111–127.

39 Saczyńska 2016, pp. 307–324, esp. 316–321.

4. Conclusion

Cracow's councillors built a chapel in the town hall. The group received an additional, sacred, distinguishing feature to their identity. The liturgy being celebrated for the councillors in the town hall confirms the unity and identity of this group, an identity founded on an altar stone, as we may say poetically. The stone is a symbol of the centre of the world, *axis mundi*, on which the whole world is based. The rite of consecration of an altar (portable and fixed) includes references to the symbolism of the stone on which Jacob offered his sacrifice to God, and on which he had previously slept and had the vision of a ladder with angels ascending and descending. There are also references to Golgotha and the Cross of Christ in this rite, two powerful symbols marking the place where earth and heaven meet.⁴⁰ Thus, an object of such great symbolic significance – the 'gateway to heaven' – was now placed in the town hall and at the disposal of the councillors who had obtained power over the sacred site. In the end, the portable altar had been incorporated into the image of power. This powerful symbol of the connection between the earth and heaven, the temporal and the eternal, the place where the sacrifice of Christ was celebrated, was now 'locked' in the town hall, which was the seat of the town authorities. The *sacrum* sanctifies the profane, but at the same time the *sacrum* is subordinated to the profane. It was also a breakthrough in the Church's monopoly of creating places of contact with the *sacrum*. The chapel of Cracow council, like other private chapels, is an element of a wider phenomenon growing in the late Middle Ages, which can be identified as a step towards the secularisation of devotion.⁴¹

40 Saczyńska 2009, pp. 433–451.

41 Philip Mattox, who has analysed sacred spaces in Florentine palaces in the 15th century, also points to such conclusions; see Mattox 2006, pp. 672–673.

5. Bibliography

- Abraham, Władysław: Stanowisko kurii papieskiej wobec koronacji Łokietka [The standpoint of the papal curia towards Łokietek's coronation]. In: Księga pamiątkowa Uniwersytetu Lwowskiego ku uczczeniu pięćsetnej rocznicy fundacji Jagiellońskiej Uniwersytetu Krakowskiego [A memorial book of the University of Lviv to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Jagiellonian foundation of the University of Krakow]. Lwów/Lviv 1900, pp. 1–34.
- Albrecht, Stephan: Mittelalterliche Rathäuser in Deutschland: Architektur und Funktion. Darmstadt 2004.
- Albrecht, Stephan: Architektur und Öffentlichkeit im Rathausbau. In: Pils, Susanne Claudine/ Scheutz, Martin/Sonnlechner, Christoph P./ Spevak, Stefan (ed.): Rathäuser als multifunktionale Räume der Repräsentation, der Parteilungen und des Geheimnisses. Innsbruck 2012, pp. 67–90.
- Barbiche, Bernard (ed.): Les actes pontificaux originaux des Archives Nationales de Paris, vol. 1: 1198–1261. Città del Vaticano 1975.
- Bieniak, Janusz: Wiec ogólnopolski w Żarnowie 3–7 czerwca 1319 r. a geneza koronacji Władysława Łokietka [The nationwide rally in Żarnów 3–7 June 1319 and the background to the coronation of Władysław the Elbow-High]. In: Przegląd Historyczny [Historical Review] 1973 (64), pp. 469–483.

- BP = Sułkowska-Kuraś, Ileana/Kuraś, Stanisław (ed.): *Bullarium Poloniae*, vols. 1–7. Rome/Lublin 1982–2006.
- Czaja, Roman: *Korporative Formen der Religiosität des Patriziats in den preußischen Großstädten*. In: *Questiones medii aevi novae* 1997 (2), pp. 106–119.
- Czerner, Rafał: *Zabudowa rynków. Średniowieczne bloki śródrynkowe wybranych dużych miast Śląska* [Market buildings. Medieval market square blocks of selected large cities in Silesia]. Wrocław 2002.
- Długossius, Joannis: *Annales seu Cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae* [Annals or Chronicles of the Famous Kingdom of Poland], libb. X–XI: 1406–1412. Varsaviae 1997.
- Długossius, Joannis: *Annales seu Cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae* [Annals or Chronicles of the Famous Kingdom of Poland], libb. XI–XII: 1431–1444. Varsaviae 2001.
- Estreicher, Stanisław: *Najstarszy zbiór przywilejów i wilkierzy miasta Krakowa* [The oldest collection of privileges and ordinances of the city of Cracow]. Kraków 1936.
- Grünhagen, Colmar (ed.): *Urkunden der Stadt Brieg. Urkundliche und chronikalische Nachrichten über die Stadt Brieg, die dortigen Klöster, die Stadt- und Stiftsgüter bis zum Jahre 1550* (Codex diplomaticus Silesiae, vol. 9). Breslau 1870.
- Heckert, Uwe: *Die Ratskapelle als Zentrum bürgerlicher Herrschaft und Frömmigkeit. Struktur, Ikonographie und Funktion*. In: *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte* 1993 (129), pp. 139–164.
- Jišová, Kateřina: *Praskie ratusze – symboliczne czy rzeczywiste centra władzy?* [Prague's town halls – symbolic or real centres of power?] In: *Rocznik Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych* [Yearbook of Social and Economic History] 2014 (74), pp. 109–118.
- Komorowski, Waldemar: *Najstarszy ratusz – symbol miejskiej autonomii* [The oldest town hall – a symbol of municipal autonomy]. In: Grzybowski, Andrzej/Żygulski, Zdzisław/Grzybowska, Teresa (ed.): *Urbs celebrima. Księga pamiątkowa 750-lecia lokacji Krakowa* [Urbs celebrima. A commemorative book of the 750th anniversary of the founding of Cracow]. Kraków 2008, pp. 173–201.
- Korn, Georg (ed.): *Breslauer Urkundenbuch*. Breslau 1870.
- Liedtke, Antoni: *Stanowisko papieża Jana XXII wobec koronacji Władysława Łokietka*. [Pope John XXII's attitude towards Władysław the Elbow-High's coronation] In: *Nasza Przyszłość* 1971 (36), pp. 91–107.
- Maciejewski, Jacek: *Działalność kościelna Gerwarda z Ostrowa, biskupa włocławskiego w latach 1300–1323* [The ecclesiastical activity of Gerward of Ostrow, Bishop of Włocławek in 1300–1323]. Bydgoszcz 1996.
- Manikowska, Halina: *Religijność miejska* [Urban religiosity]. In: Manikowska, Halina/Zaremska, Hanna (ed.): *Ecclesia et civitas. Kościół i życie religijne w mieście średniowiecznym* [Ecclesia et civitas. Church and religious life in the medieval city]. Warszawa 2002, pp. 11–34.
- Mattox, Phillip: *Domestic Sacral Space in the Florentine Renaissance Palace*. In: *Renaissance Studies* 2006 (20), pp. 658–673.
- Opll, Ferdinand: *Ratusz jako przestrzenne i prawne centrum rozwoju miasta. Rozważania i odniesienia do badań w Niemczech i Austrii od 1990 roku* [The town hall as a spatial and legal centre of urban development. Reflections and references to research in Germany and Austria since 1990]. In: *Rocznik Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych* [Yearbook of Social and Economic History] 2014 (74), pp. 37–51.
- Piekosiński, Franciszek (ed.): *Kodeks dyplomatyczny miasta Krakowa 1257–1506* [Diplomatic Codex of the City of Cracow 1257–1506], vol. 1. Kraków 1879.
- Piekosiński, Franciszek (ed.): *Najdawniejsze inwentarze skarbca kościoła N.P. Maryi w Krakowie z XV wieku* [The oldest inventory of the treasury of St. Mary's Church in Cracow from the 15th century]. In: *Sprawozdania Komisji do Badań Historii Sztuki w Polsce* [Reports of the committee on Art History Research in Poland] 1891 (4/2), pp. 64–71.
- Piekosiński, Franciszek/Szujski, Józef (ed.): *Najstarsze księgi i rachunki miasta Krakowa* [The oldest books and accounts of the city of Cracow], vol. 2. Kraków 1878.

- Reinle, Adolf: Zeichensprache der Architektur. Symbol, Darstellung und Brauch in der Baukunst des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit. Zurich/Munich 1976.
- RPG = Schmugge, Ludwig et al. (ed.): Repertorium Poenitentiarie Germanicum, vols. 1–8: Eugen IV–Alexander VI. Tübingen et al. 1996–2012.
- Saczyńska, Monika: O kaplicach rycerskich i możnawładczych późnośredniowiecznej Polski uwagi kilka [A few remarks on knightly and magnate chapels in late medieval Poland]. In: Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej 2016 (64), pp. 307–324.
- Saczyńska, Monika: Prywatna przestrzeń sakralna w domu – przykłady wykorzystania ołtarzy przenośnych w późnośredniowiecznej Polsce [Private sacral space at home – examples of the use of portable altars in late medieval Poland]. In: Pauk, Marcin Rafał/Saczyńska, Monika (ed.): Dom, majątek, klient, sługa – manifestacja pozycji elit w przestrzeni materialnej i społecznej Europy (XIII–XIX wiek) [Home, property, client, servant – a manifestation of the position of the elite in the material and social space of Europe (13th–19th century)]. Warszawa 2010, pp. 111–127.
- Saczyńska, Monika: Poświęcenie ołtarza przenośnego w piętnastowiecznych pontyfikatach krakowskich. Treść i symbolika rytuału [The consecration of the portable altar in 15th-century Cracow pontificates. The content and symbolism of the ritual]. In: Nodl, Martin/František, Šmahel/Kowalewski, Krzysztof (ed.): Rituály, ceremonie a festivity v střední Evropě 14. a 15. Století [Rituals, ceremonies and feasts in medieval Europe of the 14th and 15th century]. Praha 2009, pp. 433–451.
- Scheutz, Martin: Die Multifunktionalität der Rathäuser in langer Perspektive – Versuch eines Überblicks. In: Pils, Susanne Claudine/Scheutz, Martin/Sonnlechner, Christoph P./Spevak, Stefan (ed.): Rathäuser als multifunktionale Räume der Repräsentation, der Parteilungen und des Geheimnisses. Innsbruck 2012, pp. 19–66.
- Šedivý, Juraj: Mittelalterliche Rathäuser im mittleren Donaugebiet. Von Räumen der örtlichen Eliten zu Symbolen der städtischen Massen. In: Czaja, Roman/Scheutz, Martin/Opll, Ferdinand/Noga, Zdzisław (ed.): Political Functions of Urban Spaces and Town Types through the Ages: Making Use of the Historic Towns Atlases in Europe/Politische Funktionen städtischer Räume und Städtetypen im zeitlichen Wandel: Nutzung der historischen Städteatlanten in Europa. Vienna 2019, pp. 161–198.
- Szczur, Stanisław: Dyplomaci Kazimierza Wielkiego w Awinionie [Casimir the Great's diplomats in Avignon]. In: Nasza Przyszłość 1986 (66), pp. 43–106.
- Tangl, Michael: Die Päpstlichen Kanzleiordnungen von 1200–1500. Innsbruck 1894.
- Tangl, Michael: Das Taxwesen der päpstlichen Kanzlei vom 13. bis zur Mitte des 15. Jahrhunderts. In: Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 1892 (13), pp. 1–106.
- Wyrozumska, Bożena: Kancelaria miasta Krakowa w średniowieczu [The chancellery of the City of Cracow in the Middle Ages]. Kraków 1995.
- Zlat, Mieczysław: Ratusz – zamek mieszczan: symbolika typu architektonicznego i jego form [The town hall - the burgher's castle: symbolism of the architectural type and its forms]. In: Latour, Stanisław (ed.): Ratusz w miastach północnej Europy [The town hall in northern European cities]. Gdańsk 1997, pp. 13–36.

Article published in

MEMO 9 (2022): Material Culture in Central European Towns. doi: [10.25536/2523-2932092022](https://doi.org/10.25536/2523-2932092022)

Title

Sacrum in the Service of the Community. The Chapel of Cracow City Council in the Comparative Perspective of Late Medieval Europe

Author

Monika Saczyńska-Vercamer

Contact

msaczynska@wp.pl

Web site

<http://iaepan.edu.pl/departments/employees-6/dr-monika-saczynska/>

Institution

Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology PAS, Warsaw

ORCID

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1316-6846>

DOI of Article

<https://dx.doi.org/10.25536/20220905>

Initial publication

November 2022

Last check of all references

21.11.2022

Licence

If not stated otherwise CC BY-SA 4.0

Media licences

All media rights belong to the authors unless stated otherwise.

Recommended Citation

Saczyńska, Monika: Sacrum in the Service of the Community. The Chapel of Cracow City Council in the Comparative Perspective of Late Medieval Europe, in: MEMO 9 (2022), Material Culture in Central European Towns, pp. 74–87, Pdf-Format, doi: [10.25536/20220905](https://doi.org/10.25536/20220905).

Inhalt

MEMO 9 (2022): Material Culture in Central European Towns

Materiality of neighbourly relations in medieval central European towns. A step towards understanding neighbourhood formation
Paweł Cembrzyński, Urszula Sowina 1–22

The Social Role of Saints' Processions in 15th Century Cracow
Piotr Kołpak 23–38

Building identity. Town halls of small Polish towns as a symbol and a sign of urban character and identity (14th–16th century)
Maciej T. Radomski 39–57

Expressing urban identities through medieval secular badges
Jakub Sawicki 58–73

Sacrum in the Service of the Community. The Chapel of Cracow City Council in the Comparative Perspective of Late Medieval Europe
Monika Saczyńska-Vercamer 74–87