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## The So-called Copernicus' Chapel: a Jubilee Creation in the Gothic St John's Cathedral in Toruń<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The article is devoted to the history of transformation and re-arrangement of the first from the West chapel on the South side of the Gothic parish church of the Old Town in Toruń, at present the Toruń Cathedral of St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist. The former merchants' chapel dedicated to St Nicholas over its history had changed its furnishing and *patrocinium* twice (St Michael the Archangel/ The Guardian Angels), which had been dictated by religious needs. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it had also assumed the function of baptismal chapel and in 1973 – the Copernicus Jubilee Year – gained an entirely new arrangement to suit the *memoria* of the astronomer, who was born in this town. From then on it is universally referred to "The Copernicus Chapel". The Authors analyse the historic grounds for that commemoration (the Copernicus memorabilia collected in that interior), the principles of its new arrangement with the use of Medieval elements of the church furnishing, the elements of historic and emotional narrative as well as the contemporary implications of that creation.

**Keywords:** Nicolaus Copernicus, Toruń, St John's Church, "Copernicus chapel", medievalism

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Over four hundred years of the history of transformations and changes of the medieval spatial layout of the church of St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist in Toruń begun in the time when the temple had been taken over by the Jesuits in early 17<sup>th</sup> century (the sources remain silent about earlier activity in this regard). From that time until the inter-war period any rearrangement of the interior and any translocation of the Medieval furnishing were dictated mainly by liturgical function, religious cult and devotion practiced by the Jesuits, fraternities etc. Research and restoration works in the chancel, that resulted in revealing the mural painting on its North wall (1908),<sup>2</sup> as well as scholarly analyses that allowed to associate and then rejoin the Beautiful Madonna with the Moses console (1921),<sup>3</sup> had opened a new chapter in the church's history: the execution of restoration works and creative rearrangements. Putting aside few changes related to transformations in the cult,<sup>4</sup> other modern alterations of the interior have been justified basically by factors other than liturgical. Their most significant outcome has been the post-war refurbishing of the chancel (bearing a strong mark of re-gothisation) and rearranging the former merchants' chapel devoted to St Nicholas and the to St Michael the Archangel and the Guardian Angels, located in the second span from the West on the South side. The first has been brought by necessity: after World War II the Early Modern retablo of the main altar, under restoration from 1938 onwards has been finally dismantled following a war-time damage. As a consequence, the East wall has been revealed, with its tracery window and the images of the two patron Saints of the church, discovered already before the war.<sup>5</sup> The space required furnishing:<sup>6</sup> the interior has been cleared of whitewash, the newly discovered mural paintings – both on the east wall and on the vaulting have been restored and partly reconstructed (1947) and the window has been glazed with stained glass “in Medieval fashion” by Edward

2 The file containing archival material and photographic documentation of discovering and revealing the mural as well as the first research and restoration works: AADDT, Toruń – the cathedral, sign. 649, Aufnahmen des Wandbildes im Presbyterium der Pfarrkirche in Thorn – 1908–1911.

3 Following a hypothesis voiced by Bernhard Schmid (B. Schmid, “Die gotischen Bildwerke des St. Johanniskirche”, *Mitteilungen des Copernicus-Vereins für Wissenschaft und Kunst zu Thorn*, 1911, 19, pp. 9–12), the Moses console and the Beautiful Madonna have been put together in result of a decision taken by Jan Lankau, the then district conservation officer, see J. Lankau, *Monografia i przewodnik ilustrowany po Toruniu: z planem miasta*, Toruń, 1924, p. 59; ever since the two sculptures have been regarded as an integral group from late 14<sup>th</sup> century.

4 Among those belong: removing the communion rail and introducing new elements of furnishing to the chancel (1969) following the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council (see J. Kwiatkowski, “Przekształcenia wnętrza kościoła farnego p.w. św. Jana Chrzciciela i św. Jana Ewangelisty w Toruniu od końca XVIII do XX wieku,” in: *Dzieje i skarby kościoła Świętojańskiego w Toruniu. Materiały z konferencji przygotowanej przez Toruński Oddział Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki przy współpr. Instytutu Zabytkoznawstwa i Konserwatorstwa Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika 22–23 III 2002*, eds. K. Kluczwajd, M. Woźniak, Toruń, 2003, pp. 308–309); relocating the pulpit, moved to the chancel (1999, the result of a new function of the church as a cathedral); erecting St John Paul II Retable by the first from the West pier of the nave on the North (2014).

5 They have been cleaned in 1947 under guidance of L. Torwirt.

6 Kwiatkowski, op. cit., pp. 306–308.

Kwiatkowski. The new retable for the main altar has been composed of two Gothic elements of furnishing – the former rood-beam Crucifix (mid-14th century) and St Wolfgang retable of a former side altar (1506) set on a modern predella designed by Stefan Narębski. The circumstances of that refurbishing deserve a separate analysis, that would exceed the limits of this study, focused on the second case: the chapel of Guardian Angels. Already before the war it used to be sometimes called the Copernicus Chapel<sup>7</sup> (because of the Copernicus mementos collected there). This name has established for good since the time of the celebration of Copernicus jubilee in 1973,<sup>8</sup> when the new arrangement has made it “a memorial to Nicolaus Copernicus in 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth”.<sup>9</sup>

There is no doubt, that Nicolaus Copernicus, who had spent his childhood years in the house at No 36 Old Town Market,<sup>10</sup> used to be the member of St John's parish. Most probably he was baptised there and – according to a common belief – frequented local parish school.<sup>11</sup> It was St John's church where in 1589, that is almost fifty years after the astronomer's death, his memorial was hung to commemorate his brief connection (broken with Copernicus' departure to study in Cracow in 1491) with the parish (in 18<sup>th</sup> century it was even believed, that Copernicus was buried in St John's church – in 1766 Wraxandall wrote: “his remains are buried under a flat slab in one of the aisles of the oldest church”).<sup>12</sup> Historically grounded belief, that this very church must have been frequented by the astronomer in his childhood,

7 Lankau, op. cit., p. 67: Copernicus Chapel.

8 The same in more recent literature on the church see for instance: M. Woźniak, “Przestrzeń liturgiczna kościoła pw. Jana Chrzciciela i św. Jana Ewangelisty w Toruniu”, in: *Argumenta, articuli, quaestiones. Studia z historii sztuki średniowiecznej. Księga jubileuszowa dedykowana Marianowi Kutnerowi*, eds. A. Błażejewska, E. Pilecka, Toruń 1999, p. 402: “tzw. Kaplica Kopernika”; J. Domaśłowski, “Wyposażenie wnętrza”, in: *Bazylika katedralna św. Janów w Toruniu*, ed. M. Biskup (TNT “Prace popularno-naukowe” 68, “Zabytki Polski Północnej” 12), Toruń, 2003, p. 114: “kaplica Kopernika (chrzcielna – Zaśnięcia NMP)”, p. 214: “kaplica Kopernikańska”; Kwiatkowski, op. cit., p. 300: “Kaplica Kopernikowska”; A. Błażejewska, E. Pilecka, “Sztuka średniowieczna”, in: A. Błażejewska et al., *Dzieje sztuki Torunia*, Toruń, 2009, p. 111: “Kaplica Kopernika”, etc.

9 M. Dorawa, “Kościół św. Jana w Toruniu w czasach Kopernika. Próba rekonstrukcji wyposażenia”, *Studia Warmińskie*, 1972, 9, p. 429.

10 Rich town house at No 36 Old Town Market was owned by the Copernicus family partly since 1468 and wholly since 1480. K. Górski, *Mikołaj Kopernik. Środowisko społeczne i samotność*, Toruń, 1973, pp. 48–49 indicated that house as the most probable place of birth and a certain place of residence of the future astronomer during his childhood, which has been accepted in recent literature (e.g. K. Mikulski, *Mikołaj Kopernik. Życie i działalność*, Toruń, 2009, p. 25). The house was pulled down in 1906 to build Leiser's department store. However Jasiński, having analysed the sources claims, that the place of Copernicus birth and residence is uncertain, since uncertain is where the family seat in the period 1468 to 1480 was (see T. Jasiński, “Dom rodzinny Mikołaja Kopernika. Przyczynek do studiów nad socjotopografią późnośredniowiecznego miasta”, *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 1985, 92, no 4, pp. 861–884).

11 R. Heuer, *Thorn zur Zeit des Copernicus*, Thorn, 1923, p. 15; Górski, op. cit., p. 52; Mikulski, op. cit., pp. 25–26.

12 Quotation after Górski, op. cit., p. 41.

accompanied his commemoration especially during jubilees. It also influenced the perspective of evaluation of Medieval heritage preserved in the church. It is also worth mentioning that both the astronomer's jubilees and commemoration from 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards had a peculiar character, marked with national tensions,<sup>13</sup> generated in Toruń by the town's complex history and changing geopolitical situation<sup>14</sup> (with its social and denominational implications).

It was St John's church, where Polish jubilee of the quatercentenary of Copernicus' birth was celebrated. The anniversary had a two-way celebration: separate by the German community (under the aegis of the Copernicus-Verein) and separate – on the initiative of Father Ignacy Polkowski – by the Polish intellectual elite.<sup>15</sup> The highlight of the Polish-language celebrations was a religious service with elaborate, long sermons in the patriotic spirit, aiming to manifest Polish identity of the astronomer.<sup>16</sup> On the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Copernicus' birth (1923) – celebrated in a town only recently Polish again – Reinhold Heuer summoned the christening of Nicholas at the bronze baptismal font and listed religious practices he took part in together with his father. Among the existing historic artefacts he pointed to those, that were already present in the church in those times and that could have been seen by Copernicus (like the Beautiful Madonna on the Moses console or the mural painting with Crucifixion in the chancel).<sup>17</sup> The magnificence of Gothic art – dating to the times of the Teutonic Order – was in Heuer's perspective one of the reasons for pride for the "Thorner Deutschen" celebrating Copernicus memory. The role of St John's church had been finally emphasised during the jubilee of 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the astronomer's birth, celebrated in the times of flourishing socialist-patriotic

13 From a certain distance the general issue of controversies about Copernicus' nationality is characterised by O. Gingerich, "The Copernican Quinquecentennial and Its Predecessors: Historical Insights and National Agendas", *Osiris*, 1999, 14: Commemorative Practices in Science: Historical Perspectives on the Politics of Collective Memory, pp. 39–42 (on the 1873 jubilee), pp. 42–44 (on the 1923 jubilee), pp. 44–50 (on the 1943 jubilee).

14 In the Middle Ages Toruń had a status of one of the main cities of the state of the Teutonic Order in Prussia (with prevailing German population), after 1454 it was incorporated to Kingdom of Poland (the Royal Prussia), from 1793 – in the Kingdom of Prussia, from 1807 – in the Duchy of Warsaw (Polish formation), in the years 1815–1920 – again under the Prussian rule, and in 1920 – in the II Republic of Poland.

15 On this issue alone: U. Wencel-Kalembkova, "Polskie obchody czterechsetnej rocznicy urodzin Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu", *Acta Universitatis Nicola Copernici. Historia*, 1973, 9 (58), pp. 213–226. On the issue of nationalists' overtone of the dispute on Copernicus see also: E. Grotek, "Miejsca pamięci a toruńska tożsamość zbiorowa w XIX wieku. Przypadek Kopernika", in: *Pamięć w ujęciu lingwistycznym. Zagadnienia teoretyczne i metodyczne*, ed. W. Czachur, Warszawa, 2018, pp. 159–187.

16 Wencel-Kalembkova, op. cit., p. 219; see also the report on the celebration: I. Polkowski, *Czterowiekowy jubileusz urodzin Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu*, Gniezno, 1873. Organising the service in St John's was made possible thanks to great commitment ("the most honest eagerness, the highest favour, help, work and efforts" – quoted after Polkowski, op. cit., p. 6) of the then Parish Priest, Father Emil Szmeja.

17 Heuer, op. cit., p. 14.

propaganda of the PRL (Polish People's Republic). As Marian Dorawa wrote then: "among the monuments of Gothic architecture related to that great Toruń citizen, particularly in the times of his childhood and youth, of particular character is St John's church".<sup>18</sup>

It is that particular perspective – of commemorating Copernicus and celebrating his anniversaries – that gave to works of Gothic art that were made in his times and were "seed by his eyes" a new, emotional dimension – of the witnesses to the period of his life spent in Toruń; the town's heritage was perceived as a setting for and introduction to his biography. This idea had in a way contributed to "discovering" in 1973 still little studied art of the Chełmno Land of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 15<sup>th</sup> century: this task was to be faced by a temporary exhibition staged in 1973 *The Artistic Culture of Chełmno Land in Copernicus' Times*, that was an impulse to undertake thorough studies in that field by Janina Kruszelnicka, a pioneer of research on Late Gothic sculpture of Toruń and the region.<sup>19</sup> In the concept for the exhibition one reads, that the choice of „the time frame was dictated by the dates of the astronomer's life, however the dates opening and closing the period match the periodisation of political and artistic phenomena in the Chełmno Land".<sup>20</sup> The jubilee of 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary had also brought a desideratum to make an inventory of historic monuments in Toruń.<sup>21</sup> It was also this very idea – a particular example of contemporary reception of the Middle Ages – that gave an incentive to a new creation in the chapel being the focal point of this study prompted by the upcoming next jubilee – 550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the astronomers birth – in 2023.

## The history of St Nicholas chapel

In the Middle Ages St Nicholas chapel had been coupled with *memoria* of the most significant group of Toruń burghers – merchants gathered in St George Fraternity.<sup>22</sup> The oldest records on the chapel date to 1426 however it is mentioned in the

18 Dorawa, "Kościół św. Jana", p. 407.

19 The exhibition was staged in the exhibition space in the cellars of the Old Town Hall. It was the first exhibition devoted to Gothic art (1450–1550) in Chełmno Land in the history of museology, and in the same time the first attempt of a comprehensive scientific approach to the issue of sculpture and painting of the region. See: J. Kruszelnicka, *Rzeźba i malarstwo*, in *Kultura artystyczna ziemi chełmińskiej w czasach Kopernika. Katalog*, Toruń, 1973, pp. 24–46. The dynamics of evolution of Toruń sculptors' milieu, with the leading "St Wolfgang's workshop" drafted here (ibid., p. 28–44) has been adopted in later studies on Late Gothic art of the region and still awaits the necessary revision.

20 Ibid., p. 24.

21 The leading member of Toruń conservators' milieu, prof. Jerzy Remer, had then postulated to prepare that volume by 1971 at the latest, see J. Remer, "Muzeum Epoki Kopernika (koncepcja i realizacja)", *Rocznik Muzeum w Toruniu*, 1968, 3, p. 25; nota bene, *The Catalogue of Monuments of Art in Poland* for Toruń has not been published yet.

22 P. Oliński, *Fundacje mieszczańskie w miastach pruskich w okresie średniowiecza i na progu czasów nowożytnych (Chełmno, Toruń, Elbląg, Gdańsk, Królewiec, Braniewo)*, Toruń, 2008, p. 201.

sources in following years several times more as “the merchants’ chapel” (*capella “mercatorum”, “kauffmanne” “kouflute”*).<sup>23</sup> St Nicholas *patrocinium* is verified in the list of benefices from 1541<sup>24</sup> and in the list of silverware from 1596.<sup>25</sup> There is however no information on the décor and furnishing of the chapel in Copernicus times. The only Medieval artefacts preserved there are: the brick-build *stipes* of the altar with *armarium* closed with oak doors with wrought-iron fittings by the East wall and three sets of oak stalls along the South and the West walls, decorated with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic masks, dated in the literature to the period 1400<sup>26</sup>–1500<sup>27</sup> (Fig. 1). The stalls had been made to fit this very interior. Possibly, among the Medieval furnishing belonged some of the artefacts listed in the inventory of 1596.<sup>28</sup> The look and the fate of the original St Nicholas retable are not known. Jan Ludwik Strzesz, an auditor acting on behalf of bishop Andrzej Olszewski noted an old – possibly Medieval – retable in the chapel, with carved images of saints (with no identification).<sup>29</sup> This mention is sometimes being associated with a possible translocation of the retable of the Fourteen Holy Helpers into that spot, hovered such interpretation remains hypothetical;<sup>30</sup> perhaps canon Strzesz had still

23 Ibid., p. 201; here also more on foundations till mid-16<sup>th</sup> century; on the incomes from the chapel in Middle Ages: *ibid.*, pp. 356–357.

24 AADDT, Toruń – the cathedral, sign. 51, *Regestrum Omnium Beneficiorum sive Ministeriorum Totius Civitatis Thorn pro Fraternitate Sacerdotum Anno 1541 conscriptum* (further on referred to as *Regestrum 1541*), bp; see the commentary: K. Górski, “Spis beneficjów kościelnych Torunia z 1541 r.: nowe źródło do dziejów miasta (komunikat)”, *Zapiski Historyczne*, 38, 1973, z. 3, pp. 83–87 and edition: K. Górski and M. Gołębiowski, “Wykaz prebend kościelnych Torunia z 1541 roku”, *Zapiski Historyczne*, 42, 1977, z. 4, pp. 149–175.

25 AADDT, Toruń – the cathedral, sign. 27, *Inventarium vasorum argenteorum aliusque suppellectis sacrae Templi Parochialis Tituli S. Joannis in antiqua civitate Thorun siti conscriptum in Praesentia Reverendorum Andreae Markowski Parochi moderni (...) manse Julio 1596* (further on referred to as *Invetarium 1596*), bp.

26 Domasłowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 158–159; Błażejewska, Pilecka, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

27 Vide M. Beek-Goehlich, *Die mittelalterlichen Kirchgestühle in Westpreußen und Danzig* (Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler des Deutschen Ostens Reihe B, 4), Stuttgart, 1961, pp. 99–100.

28 AADDT, Toruń – the cathedral, sign. 27, *Inventarium 1596*, bp., m. in.: “missale vetus [...] manus scriptum”, “capsula antiqua”, “candelabra orychalcina vermiculata duos, sed destructa”.

29 *Visitationes episcopatus Culmensis Andrea Olszowski Episcopo A. 1667–72 factae*, part 2 (Fontes TNT 7), Toruń, 1903, p. 200: “Capella posterior. Ubi altare vetustum minusculis sanctorum simulacris sculpturisq[ue] refertum, prout illius aevi statuendi aras ferebat usus. Post suppressas fulndationes contubernium piscatorum sibi vendicat locum facili ne gotiosus maneat.”

30 This hypothesis, with a question mark, presented Woźniak, *Przestrzeń liturgiczna*, p. 402: “would that have been the retable of The Fourteen Holy Helpers?”; M. Woźniak, “Ołtarze w przestrzeni liturgicznej kościoła Świątogańskiego w Toruniu”, in: *Dzieje i skarby kościoła Świątogańskiego w Toruniu. Materiały z konferencji przygotowanej przez Toruński Oddział Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki przy współpr. Instytutu Zabytkoznawstwa i Konserwatorstwa Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika 22–23 III 2002*, eds. K. Kluczwajd, M. Woźniak, Toruń 2002, p. 284: “one has to notice the reoccurance of the Fourteen Holy Helpers in the merchants’ chapel before 1671”. *Patrocinium* of the retable of The Fourteen (in the sources described also as The Fifteen) Holy Helpers during the 17<sup>th</sup> century was transformed into *patrocinium* of St Rosalia; a respective retable was however not founded earlier than 18<sup>th</sup> century, see in detail: A. Grabowska-Lysenko, “Do rozmnożenia

described an original retable in the merchants' chapel. In the Middle Ages no artefacts or sources related to the chapel referred directly to the Copernicus family; the only thing linking this interior to the astronomer is the conviction voiced by Reinhold Heuer<sup>31</sup> that that was the chapel – as being under patronage of Toruń merchants – frequented by young Nicolaus, the one in which he attended services for the dead and kneeled in prayer.



**Fig. 1.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral, the so-called Copernicus Chapel. Gothic stalls by the South wall, photo: J. Raczkowski

In the Early Modern period St Nicholas chapel had changed its patrons twice: in 17<sup>th</sup> century it belonged to the guild of fishermen (Latin *capella piscatorum*, *Seniores Piscatorum*) and in early 18<sup>th</sup> century the patronage was taken over by the guild of haberdashers, as indicated by Bishop Potocki episcopal visitations.<sup>32</sup> After 1701, the

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chwalej Pańskiej y czczci SS. Iego. O niektórych relikwiarzach z toruńskiego kościoła św. Jana Chrzciciela i św. Jana Ewangelisty, związanych z nimi ołtarzami i ich znaczeniu dla dziedzictwa regionu – na marginesie niedawnego odkrycia zbioru relikwii w toruńskiej katedrze”, in: *Dziedzictwo Torunia i ziemi chełmińskiej – odkrycia i reinterpretacje*, (“Studia i materiały z dziedzictwa kulturowego Torunia i regionu” 4), ed. M. Jakubek-Raczkowska, Toruń, 2021, pp. 160–171, 175–182. Archival sources do not supply reliable information on the time of removal of the older retable of the Holy Helpers; the sources also say nothing about it being transferred to the merchants' chapel.

<sup>31</sup> Heuer, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> ADP, Culmensia, C 33, *Visitatio generalis Ecclesiarum Diocesis Culmensis ex mandato revmi Domini D. Theodori Potocki Episcopi Culmensis et Pomesaniae feliciter moderni, per me infrascriptum commissarium anno 1700–1706 peracta*; here the information on the changed guild's patronage: “Altare in capella tertia quam olim vendicabant (!)ibi Seniores Piscatorum vulgo Galmirte Contubernium istud dictorum, Galmierano penitus evanuit nunc vero ad postulata Contubernis Szmuklerzów ab annis aliquot introducti ut in ea suas absolvent devotiones est concessa.”

efforts of suffragan bishop Seweryn Szczuka led to changes in its furnishing that entailed also the change of *patrocinium*: the bishop had founded a retable dedicated to St Michael the Archangel (Fig. 2–3), adorn with coat of arms incorporating bishop's crest Grabie;<sup>33</sup> from the first quarter of 18<sup>th</sup> century for the next hundred of years the chapel had that dedication.<sup>34</sup> In late 19<sup>th</sup> century the *patrocinium* had changed once more – during restoration of the retable in 1883 the painting of St Michael was replaced by the present image of the Guardian Angel<sup>35</sup> painted in the Nazarene style by Julian Wałdowski.<sup>36</sup> It happened on the initiative of the Parish Priest Emil Szmeja (who had also commissioned a monumental painting of St Cecilia for the main altar from the same artist).<sup>37</sup> From then on the chapel had been called “the chapel of Guardian Angels” and this was its last dedication related with devotion. Father Emil Szmeja founded also new stained glass windows for the chapel (commissioned in Frankfurt am Main),<sup>38</sup> that were damaged during World War II. A very important addition to the chapel's function (also in the context of commemorating Nicolaus Copernicus) was introduction of a Medieval bronze baptismal font<sup>39</sup> with an 18<sup>th</sup> century carved wooden cover (Fig. 4) in 1880; hence the older customary name of

33 At present it is placed on the former location of St Wolfgang's retable; the original patron's image is not preserved. On the foundation: B. Łyczak, “Uwagi na temat nastaw ołtarzowych ufundowanych w XVIII wieku do kościoła pw. św. Jana Chrzcziciela i Jana Ewangelisty w Toruniu”, *Zapiski Historyczne*, 2015, 80/2, pp. 80–81. On the retable see also W. Kofel, “Problematyka konstrukcyjna zabytkowych retabulów toruńskich z XVII i XVIII wieku na przykładzie ołtarzy Zaśnięcia Najświętszej Marii Panny i Anioła Stróża z kościoła pw. św. Jana Chrzcziciela i św. Jana Ewangelisty w Toruniu”, in: *Stare i nowe dziedzictwo Torunia, Bydgoszczy i regionu II*, eds. J. Raczkowski, M. Jakubek-Raczkowska (Studia i materiały z dziedzictwa kulturowego Torunia i regionu 3), Toruń, 2020, pp. 187–203, in particular pp. 196–197.

34 Toruń – the cathedral, sign. 42, *Visitatio Decanalis Ecclesiae parochialis S. Joannis Thoruniensis* 1731, p. 3, no 6: “Altare (...) sub titulo Sancti Michaelis Archangeli”; AADDT, Toruń – the cathedral, sign. 45, *Wizytacja ganaralna bp. Zafuskiego, c. 1734*: “Altare dictum Ołtarz Szmuklerski tituli S. Michaelis Archangeli Parochiale”; AADDT, Toruń – the cathedral, sign. 44, *Liber visitationum Generalium ecclesiae Archypresbyterialis S. Joannis*, 1798 (without page): “Altare S. Michaelis Archang”; AADDT, Toruń – the cathedral, sign. 44, *Liber visitationum Generalium ecclesiae Archypresbyterialis S. Joannis*, 1814 (further on referred to as: *Liber visitationum* 1814), p. 4: “Tertia Capella decorata est altari dat venum in honorem S. Michaeli Archan.”; AADDT, Toruń – the cathedral, sign. 44, *Inwentarz rzeczy w kościele św. Jana teraz rzetelnie znajdujących się*, 1819 (further on referred to as: *Inwentarz rzeczy* 1819), no 48/55: “Ołtarz Archanioła Michała z drewnianemi kratami i ławkami”.

35 As a result of renovation of the retable commissioned by the Parish Priest, Emil Szmeja

36 See: S. Majoch, “Nazarenizm w toruńskim kościele Świętojańskim. Julian Wałdowski (1854–1912) i jego zapomniane prace”, in: *Kościół Świętojański w Toruniu – nowe rozpoznanie*, ed. K. Kluczwajd, Toruń, 2015, pp. 213–237.

37 Ibid., p. 227.

38 Lankau, op. cit., p. 68.

39 On this artefact and the history of translocations see in detail: M. Jakubek-Raczkowska, “XIII-wieczna chrzcielnica z Kaplicy Kopernika”, in: *Dzieje i skarby kościoła Świętojańskiego w Toruniu. Materiały z konferencji przygotowanej przez Toruński Oddział Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki przy współpr. Instytutu Zabytkoznawstwa i Konserwatorstwa Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika 22–23 III 2002*, eds. K. Kluczwajd, M. Woźniak, Toruń, 2003, pp. 237–255.





**Fig. 2.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral, the so-called Copernicus Chapel. View on St Michael the Archangel retable (18<sup>th</sup> century) with an image of the Guardian Angel (19<sup>th</sup> century), condition in 1940, photo: K. Grimm, from the collection of the District Museum in Toruń, ref. No. A. 1555 (detail)



**Fig. 3.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral, St Michael the Archangel retable (18<sup>th</sup> century) with an image of the Guardian Angel (19<sup>th</sup> century) located at the first from the West pier of the nave on the South side, present condition, photo: J. Raczkowski

the site, *Taufkapelle*<sup>40</sup> – the baptismal chapel.<sup>41</sup> During the translocation the font was fitted with a massive round foot made of ceramic stuff and cement mortar.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the chapel or in its direct surrounding were located several objects that today are regarded as the most important Copernicus memorabilia in Toruń: the Nicolaus Copernicus Memorial, the memorial for his uncle, Lucas

40 J. Heise, *Die Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler des Kreises Thorn*, ("Die Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler der Provinz Westpreußen" 6/7), Danzig, 1889, p. 262.

41 Domasłowski, "Wyposażenie...", p. 114. Earlier the font was placed at the first from the East pier of the nave on the South side, in front of the altar of St Anne, see: *Visitationes ecclesiarum dioecesis culmensis et pomesaniae Andrea Leszczyński Episcopo A. 1647 curavit Adalbertus Pobłocki*, Toruń, 1900, p. 13; here it was still mentioned in 1872: W. Kolberg, *Napis na starej chrzcielnicy w kościele św. Jana w Toruniu, dokładnie przerysowany*, Warszawa 1872.



**Fig. 4.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral, the so-called Copernicus Chapel. Bronze baptismal font (late 13<sup>th</sup> century) with carved, wooden cover (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century), photo: J. Raczkowski

Watzenrode and a marble bust of the astronomer from the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 5–6). It is not known exactly when they were placed in their present spots within the chapel, on the West side of the arcade; the archival records in this respect are not clear. The most important Copernican artefact is undoubtedly the memorial, painted on wooden board, commemorating Nicolaus Copernicus as a physician and founded in 1580s by Melchior Pirnesius (Fig. 7).<sup>42</sup> It seems likely, that from the beginning it was located close to the chapel, but rather not inside it. Jan Ludwik Strzesz mentioned this work to be placed on the south side of the church, by the column, close to the entrance.<sup>43</sup> Similar location is described in early 18<sup>th</sup> century by Johann Baumgarten (south of the church portal; it was to be visible by the last column on the left

42 On this issue in detail see: J. Flik, J. Kruszelnicka, *Epitafium Mikołaja Kopernika w bazylice katedralnej św. Janów w Toruniu*, Toruń, 1996; Domaśłowski, op. cit., pp. 165–170.

43 *Visitationes episcopatus Culmensis...*, pp. 209–210: “E regione ingressus intra ecclesiam ab austro ad columnae superficiem appensa est lignea tabula, veram effigiem subtilis quondam mathematici Nicolai Copernici, canonici Varmiensis, praebens, anno 1543 picta”.



**Fig. 5a.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral, the so-called Copernicus Chapel, general view of the West side with Copernicus memorabilia, condition in March 1971, photo: B. Horbaczewski (after: Dorawa, M., *Dokumentacja historyczno-konserwatorska projektu wyposażenia Kaplicy Kopernikańskiej /Aniołów Stróżów*, Toruń, 1971, fig. 2)



**Fig. 5b.** Copernicus memorabilia – present condition, photo: J. Raczkowski

side of those leaving the church).<sup>44</sup> The inventory from 1814 conforms to the Strzesz description – it says about a column by the entrance on the South side of the church, adding however “In opposita huic Capelle” – opposite the chapel;<sup>45</sup> a note in the inventory from 1819 is not clear, it places the memorial “above the

<sup>44</sup> In Baumgarten's Memoranda a description of the Copernicus memorial has a separate position, see: *Miscellanea źródłowe do historii kultury i sztuki Torunia*, eds. B. Dybaś, M. Farbiszewski, (“Źródła i materiały do dziejów sztuki polskiej”, ed. M. Arsyński, t. 27), Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź, 1989, pp. 119–120, on the location: “australem versus portam templi parochialis Johannitici, magnitudini gloriae suae mirum quantum inferius. Visitur ad ipsum ultimae columnae e templo egrediendo ad sinistram affixum” (ibid., p. 119).

<sup>45</sup> AADDT, Toruń – the cathedral, sign. 44, Liber visitationum 1814, p. 5: “In opposita huic Capelle columna in regione ingressus in Ecclesiam ab Austro appensa est lignea tabula veram Effigiem Subtilier qum dam Mathematici Nicolai Copernici Canonici Varmiensis exhibatur”.



**Fig. 6.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral, the so-called Copernicus Chapel. Nicolaus Copernicus Memorial (ca. 1570–1580) with elements added in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, photo: J. Raczkowski

retable” [of St Michael the Archangel].<sup>46</sup> The inventory from 1842 again gives the location by the pier “opposite the chapel”.<sup>47</sup> “Nach der südlichen Thire der Kirche” – behind the South portal (not indicating that in the chapel) had seen the memorial Julius Emil Wernicke before 1846.<sup>48</sup> The memorial’s photograph can be found in an occasional Copernican album published in 1873, with a note informing that the work is located “by the pier”.<sup>49</sup> All the texts are ambiguous, however none of them

46 AADDT, Toruń – the cathedral, sign. 44, Inwentarz rzeczy 1819, “Prosto nad ołtarzem jest obraz Kanonika i Matematyka Kopernika, króla Polskiego Jana Alberta i pod temż marmurowy obraz na postumencie” [Straight above the altar there is a painting of the Canon and Mathematician Copernicus and the Polish king John Albert, and below it a marble image on a plinth].

47 AADDT, Toruń – the cathedral, sign. 37, Inventarien Nachweisung der Hl. Johannis Kirche in Thorn aufgenommen am 26, 27, 28 und 30 Septbr 1842 veridirt den 19 und 20 Septbr 1845 (further on: Inventarien Nachweisung), no. 56: “An dem dieser Capelle gerade überstehenden Pfeiler in der Gegend des Eingangs in die Kirche, von Süden, ist eine Holzernerne Tafel, auf welcher das Bildniß des ehemaligen ermländischen Dom Hernn Nicolaus Copernicus”.

48 J. E. Wernicke, *Wegweiser durch Thorn und seine Umgebungen*, Thorn, 1846, pp. 33–34.

49 *Album Mikołaja Kopernika. Album wydany staraniem Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk w Poznaniu w czterechsetną rocznicę urodzin Mikołaja Kopernika*, Gniezno–Warszawa, 1873, Tabl. X, p. V–VI, the commentary of the priest, Ignacy Polkowski: “Znajduje się on [portret] w kościele Ś. Jana w Toruniu na ostatnim filarze w bocznej nawie. Szczupłość miejsca nie pozwala wprost



**Fig. 7.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral, South aisle, view to the West, photo: J. Raczkowski

mentions the artefact being inside the chapel. It seems, that in that time the memorial was positioned by the first from the West pier on the South side (under the tower), which is suggested by the phrase "opposite the chapel", or on the other side, next to the chapel's arcade (as suggested by Baumgarten's text saying that while exiting the church one could see it on the left). The memorial has been restored for the first time on the Jesuits' initiative (it was also when an image of King Jan Olbracht was added and the attributes transformed from medical to astronomical ones<sup>50</sup>). The subsequent restorations were performed in 1733 – on the initiative of

ustawić aparatu, zdjęty więc jest z boku i dlatego wygląda krzywo nieco, ale inaczej nie udało się zrobić" ["It [the portrait] is located in the church of St. John in Toruń on the last pillar in the side aisle. Due to space constraints the camera can't be placed directly, so it's taken from the side, which makes it look a bit crooked, but I couldn't do it any other way"].

50 Flik, Kruszelnicka, op. cit., pp. 127–129.



Jakub Kazimierz Rubinkowski (with a text commemorating the founder added to the earlier epigram) and again in 1870, shortly before the jubilee of 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the astronomer's birth.<sup>51</sup> In 1873 the memorial was still hanging on the pier.<sup>52</sup> Assuming that earlier it was located opposite the chapel, than it had possibly been transferred due to building the entry way to the new organ erected between the piers under the tower (1878).<sup>53</sup>

Early in 19<sup>th</sup> century another image of Copernicus found its way to St John's church: a marble bust carved by the Lesser Poland guild sculptor, Wojciech Rojowski. The bust was granted to the town in 1766 by Duke Józef Aleksander Jabłonowski as a "leaven" for a memorial. The parish church was not an intended place for the sculpture<sup>54</sup> (Fig. 8). Perhaps its transfer to and exhibition in the church was stimulated by Father Stanisław Staszic, an eminent activist of the Enlightenment and a representative of the then most revered Polish scientific institution – The Society of Friends of Learning in Warsaw, who used to visit Toruń on behalf of the Society in the time, when the town was a seat of the Council of State of the Duchy of Warsaw (1809).<sup>55</sup> The bust had been placed in the church before 1812, when it was seen there by Polish writer and historian Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz.<sup>56</sup> In later sources 1814,<sup>57</sup> 1819<sup>58</sup>

51 Ibid., p. 54 and 127.

52 *Album*, p. VI.

53 On building the new organ and transformation of the music gallery see: M. Dorawa, "Organy bazyliki katedralnej p.w. św. Jana Chrzciciela i św. Jana Ewangelisty w Toruniu na tle dziejów budownictwa organowego w Polsce", in: *Dzieje i skarby kościoła Świętojańskiego w Toruniu. Materiały z konferencji przygotowanej przez Toruński Oddział Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki przy współpr. Instytutu Zabytkoznawstwa i Konserwatorstwa Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika 22–23 III 2002*, eds. K. Kluczajd, M. Woźniak, Toruń, 2003, p. 352.

54 Complicated history of the bust, for a long time kept in the Town Hall's cellars, presents H. Załęska, "Popiersie toruńskie Mikołaja Kopernika", *Rocznik Muzeum w Toruniu*, 3, 1968, pp. 71–103. It is known that the bust – of mediocre artistic quality – had got a cold reception in Toruń. In 1783 it was publicly announced that the monument is of such poor quality, unskilfully executed, that the town council did not consider it appropriate to exhibit it in public (however the decisive factor was rather the political one – the inscription on the bust emphasised Polish origin of the astronomer: "Terrigenae Borusso Polono").

55 Ibid., p. 87. On the last sitting of the council, on 11 May 1809 it was decided to erect a Copernicus monument in Toruń, which however had never happened, since on Staszic proposal voiced in 1815 it was finally decided to erect the monument in Warsaw (in 1820 Bertel Thorvaldsen was commissioned to design it and Staszic himself had bequeathed a considerable sum for its building in his last will), p. 85.

56 J. U. Niemcewicz, *Juljana Ursyna Niemcewicza, podróże historyczne po ziemiach polskich: od 1811 do 1828 roku*, Paryż–Petersburg, 1858, p. 105: "Książę Jabłonowski, wojewoda nowogrodzki, posąg Kopernika z białego marmuru uciosać kazał, i temuż piękny położył nagrobek. Ledwie mógł docisnąć się do pomnika tego, tak kościół zawalony był beczkami sucharów i mąki" [Prince Jabłonowski, Voivode of Novgorod, had the statue of Copernicus cut out of white marble and placed a beautiful tombstone for him. I could barely reach that memorial, the church being crammed with barrels of biscuits and flour].

57 AADDT Toruń – the cathedral, sign. 44, Liber visitationum 1814, p. 5, "Statua marmurea eiusdem Copernici eleganter sculpta".

58 AADDT, Toruń – the cathedral, sign. 44, Inwentarz rzeczy 1819, bp.



**Fig. 8.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral, the so-called Copernicus Chapel. Nicolaus Copernicus bust, W. Rojowski, 1766, photo: J. Raczkowski

and 1842<sup>59</sup> it is mentioned as placed below the Copernicus memorial (probably on the south side). Emil Wernicke (1846) described it as located by one of the church piers (no precise indication) and with no relation to the memorial.<sup>60</sup> Heise (1889) mentioned the bust already in its present location, in the baptismal chapel, below the astronomer's memorial.<sup>61</sup> The two images of Copernicus are complemented with a memorial of two bishops of Warmia: Jan Abezier and Lukas Watzenrode (Nicolaus Copernicus uncle), founded in 1724 by Jakub Kazimierz Rubinkowski.<sup>62</sup>

## Refurbishing the chapel for the 1973 jubilee of 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nicolaus Copernicus birth

Rooted in the tradition presence of Copernicus memorabilia in the chapel of St Michael/Guardian Angels was a direct cause of its next, already non-liturgical arrange-

59 AADDT Toruń – the cathedral, sign. 37, Inventarien Nachweisung: "Unter derselben ist eine geschmackvoll in Marmor aufgestellt".

60 Wernicke, op. cit., p. 35.

61 Heise, op. cit., pp. 262–263.

62 Domasłowski, op. cit., p. 214.

ment, on the occasion of the next great jubilee: the International Copernican Year 1973, announced by UNESCO<sup>63</sup> (Polish People's Republic declared in the same time "The Year of Polish Science").<sup>64</sup> Thanks to the support of the then state authorities,<sup>65</sup> Toruń had been preparing for those celebrations with a great flourish for over five years,<sup>66</sup> both by undertaking scientific research, inventories and publications<sup>67</sup> and by building investments that involved among others the University Campus<sup>68</sup> and the Copernican Library.<sup>69</sup> In the framework of preparing the Copernican Year belonged also an extensive restoration campaign in the historic centre of Toruń (which involved 106 Medieval burghers' houses)<sup>70</sup> and yielded numerous discoveries in the field of mural paintings in dwelling interiors.<sup>71</sup> The campaign aimed at restoring the

63 <https://en.unesco.org/courier/april-1973> [accessed 16 December 2021]. About the global celebrations see: Gingerich, op. cit., pp. 37–60. Official international celebrations (including the congress Colloquia Copernicana in Warsaw, Toruń and Cracow and a plenary session under the auspices of the UNESCO "Humanity and Cosmos" in Toruń) had been organised jointly by the UNESCO, the International Astronomical Union, the Polish Academy of Sciences, and the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, among others (see *ibid.*, Appendix, pp. 55–57); the Copernicus Jubilee Year had been celebrated locally in many countries all over the world, most exuberantly – in Poland.

64 S. Kalemka, *Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w 1973 roku: rozbudowa i przygotowania do obchodów kopernikowskich*, Toruń, 1973, p. 4.

65 The financial outlays had been specified by the government of Polish People's Republic in special resolutions.

66 For a cross-cutting report on the jubilee in Toruń see: W. Polak, "Obchody pięćsetlecia urodzin Mikołaja Kopernika w 1973 roku w Toruniu", *Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie*, 2013, 3, pp. 573–584. See also an official programme of celebrations organised by the Nicolaus Copernicus University: S. Kalemka, A. Czacharowski, *Informator o obchodach 500-lecia urodzin Mikołaja Kopernika w 1973 roku*, Toruń, 1973; compare: *Zaproszenie na uroczystości kopernikowskie* at the NCU, access: <https://kpbu.umk.pl/dlibra/publication/33010/edition/41837/content> [accessed 16 December 2021].

67 On the most significant scientific activities (conferences) and publications (including the edition of Copernicus' *Opera Omnia*) see Kalemka, Czacharowski, op. cit., pp. 6–7; Kalemka, op. cit., pp. 5–6; on publications and lectures organised by the Scientific Society in Toruń see: "Sprawozdanie z czynności Towarzystwa Naukowego za rok 1973", *Sprawozdania Towarzystwa Naukowego w Toruniu*, 1973, 27, pp. 24–27 (Komisja Kopernikańska), pp. 29–30 (Komisja Redakcyjna – Biblioteczka Kopernikańska), pp. 38–39 (Akcja popularyzacji wiedzy). About publications and travelling exhibitions organised by the District Museum in Toruń see: *Program Muzeum Okręgowego w Toruniu w zakresie przygotowania do obchodu 500. rocznicy urodzin Mikołaja Kopernika*, Toruń, 1972, p. 4.

68 Kalemka, Czacharowski, op. cit., p. 3; cf. M. Pszczołkowski, "Z dziejów budowy toruńskiego kampusu uniwersyteckiego 1967–1973", *Zapiski Historyczne*, 2010, 75/2, pp. 151–170.

69 Polak, op. cit., pp. 573–574.

70 The campaign was managed by a specially set up Office for the Renovation of the Old Town Complex. Kampanią kierowało specjalnie powołane. See: Kalemka, Czacharowski, op. cit., p. 3; Polak, op. cit., p. 574.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 574; see also M. Jakubek-Raczkowska, J. Raczkowski, T. Kowalski, *Średniowieczne malowidła ściennie w kamienicach mieszczańskich Starego i Nowego Miasta Torunia / Medieval Wall Paintings in Burghers' Houses of the Old and New Town of Toruń*, Toruń, 2017, pp. 30–32.



quarters "in direct vicinity of the Great Astronomer's family home<sup>72</sup> to their former glory, within the boundaries of the historic centre of the Old Town of Toruń, that "during his childhood was [...] the most beautiful".<sup>73</sup> There were also attempts to create the Museum of Copernicus' Times, that was to be housed in the Old Town Hall and the complex of "The Copernicus' House".<sup>74</sup>

Extensive restoration activities within the boundaries of Toruń historic town centre included also St John's church; the parish itself applied for financial support of the refurbishing works – already in 1965 a letter concerning refurbishing the Copernicus' Chapel wrote to the Town Heritage Office the then Provost of St John's basilica, in 1968 a similar application was addressed to the Ministry of Culture and Art by the Chełmno Bishop's Curia in Pelplin.<sup>75</sup> Certain pragmatism of those activities, that had a better chance of realisation in the conditions of the Copernicus' Jubilee Year, can be illustrated by a passage from a letter addressed to the Primate's Secretariat:<sup>76</sup> „refurbishing [the chapel] after the war damage with the effective State aid is now the most urgent matter in view of the forthcoming Copernicus celebrations. It is small wonder, that the works undertaken in that space were justified by that very argument: to properly present the space that was the most strongly related to the astronomer.<sup>77</sup> In documents the parish argued, that the works in question concerned the chapel „where that brilliant Pole was baptised” (sic!). As Marian Dorawa, responsible for the design of new arrangement of that space commissioned by the Regional Heritage Office in Bydgoszcz in 1971 wrote – it was to gain “a suitable character, focused on the times and memory of Nicolaus Copernicus”<sup>78</sup> (Fig. 9).

72 Kalemka and Czacharowski, op. cit., p. 3; The authors argued: “While refurbishing the flats in the spirit of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century requirements, those houses regain the beauty once obliterated by time”, ibid.

73 B. Rymaszewski, “Dzielnica Staromiejska Torunia – środowisko rodzinne Mikołaja Kopernika”, *Rocznik Muzeum w Toruniu*, 1968, 3, p. 104.

74 Remer, op. cit., pp. 23–37; Program Muzeum, p. 3. The first such activities were undertaken already during the earlier jubilee in 1953, when one of the houses had been restored for a seat of the Copernicus' Museum (see: B. Popławski, “Obchody rocznic historycznych: Rok Kopernika i Rok Odrodzenia 1953”, *Przegląd Historyczny*, 2010, 101/3, p. 405). The museum have never came into being in the shape suggested in the 1960s, it has been replaced by the present Copernicus' House, branch of the District Museum in Toruń set up in 1973 in houses located at No. 15 Copernicus' Street (restored in that time and handed over to the museum) and at No. 17 Copernicus' Street; the then exhibition had functioned for over half a century. Since 2028 the branch gained new arrangement after a thorough renovation and transformation of the interiors within the operational programme “Toruń Historic Town Centre – Stage II”.

75 The information is contained in a letter dated on 7 July 1969 written by the parish Provost, Father Wincenty Kolczyk to the Primate's Secretariat addressed to His Excellency Bishop Dąbrowski in Warsaw no. 22/69 (access: Archiwum Wydziału Konserwatorskiego Kurii Diecezjalnej Toruńskiej).

76 Ibid.

77 Dorawa, “Kościół”, p. 428.

78 M. Dorawa, *Dokumentacja historyczno-konserwatorska projektu wyposażenia Kaplicy Kopernikańskiej /Aniołów Stróżów*, [typescript] Toruń 1971 (access: Archiwum NiD, Toruń, sign. 398, dok. hist.), p. 31.



**Fig. 9.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral, the so-called Copernicus Chapel. View on the East wall with the Dormition Retable (bas-relief with The Virgin's Last Prayer, ca. 1500, retable 1620–1630), photo: J. Raczkowski

The chapel was being refurbished from 1971 on. The works were preceded by investigation of plasters covering the outer walls; the preserved Copernicus memorabilia were restored,<sup>79</sup> new paving was laid, the stained glass window damaged in 1945 was replaced with a new one: an abstract, geometrical glazing designed in 1973 by Władysław Koziół (realisation: 1975)<sup>80</sup> (Fig. 10). The works had consumed so much funds, that already in 1971 the Regional Heritage Office advised to take a brake in spending money.<sup>81</sup> The range of actions was however not restricted to refurbishment and restoration; except for the Copernicus memorabilia, the stalls

79 A letter by the parish Provost, Father Wincenty Kolczyk dated on July 7<sup>th</sup> 1971 to the Bishops' Curia in Pelplin; no. 81/71 (access: Archiwum Wydziału Konserwatorskiego Kurii Diecezjalnej Toruńskiej).

80 See the design: <https://ksiaznica.torun.pl/muzeumcyfrowekoziol/monografia/> [accessed 16 December 2021].

81 A handwritten note ("Ps.") by the parish Provost Father Wincenty Kolczyk (access: Archiwum Wydziału Konserwatorskiego Kurii Diecezjalnej Toruńskiej).



**Fig. 10.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral, the so-called Copernicus Chapel. Stained glass windows by W. Kozioł (1975), photo: J. Raczkowski

and the baptismal font the chapel's furnishing has been composed anew. The idea behind those changes is known thanks to an unpublished preliminary report developed by Dorawa in 1971,<sup>82</sup> the main purpose of which was to gather all the movable historic artefacts "scattered over the aisles and side chapels dating from Gothic and Renaissance times or related to Nicolaus Copernicus and as such qualifying to be placed in the "Copernicus' chapel".<sup>83</sup> The planned actions were of entirely non-liturgical character (not related to the needs of religious cult) and decidedly non-historical one.<sup>84</sup> They were intended was to decorate the place, that had already earlier housed the images of Copernicus, with historic artefact that had never been there, but whose age had predestined them to evoke "the Copernicus' times". The list of items and rationale for the choice are contained in the quoted proposal by Marian Dorawa; the plan of refurbishment and arrangement of the interior had been approved by a board comprising representatives of the diocesan curia, the parish and local authorities, including the regional and local heritage officers.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Dorawa, *Dokumentacja...*, passim.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>84</sup> This was emphasised by Michał Woźniak, who wrote about transformation that was not justified by liturgical or cult needs: "in early 1970s a heritage and commemorative creation appeared here, one to honour Nicolaus Copernicus", see: Woźniak, "Ołtarze w przestrzeni...", p. 291.

<sup>85</sup> See the preserved minutes of the seating of the "Joint Committee", 28 Aug. 1971 concerning the restoration of the Copernicus' Chapel (access: Archiwum Wydziału Konserwatorskiego Kurii Diecezjalnej Toruńskiej).

And so, the former retable of St Michael the Archangel with a 19<sup>th</sup>-century painting of the Guardian Angel was removed from the chapel and transferred to the first from the West pier on the South side (Fig. 3) – that is to the historic location of the Medieval altar dedicated to St Wolfgang (whose retable – as it was mentioned above – has been moved to the main altar after World War II). Then, the Medieval altar in the chapel has been combined with a Late-Mannerist retable from the Jesuits' period (Fig. 11), with the central wood-work bas-relief with The Virgin's Last Prayer ca. 1500 – the latter was to suggest "the Copernicus' times" (Fig. 12). That retable had been originally located at the first from the West pier on the North side,<sup>86</sup> and in 1973 stood at the East wall of the North aisle;<sup>87</sup> for that transfer it had been restored.<sup>88</sup> On a new console on the wall (the previous, Gothic-revival one has been discarded) went a wooden sculpture of the Flogged Christ of the late 15<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>89</sup> subjected to a limited conservation treatment<sup>90</sup> (its present look, with an astonishing blue perizoma, is a result of a recent restoration carried out in 2017)<sup>91</sup> (Fig. 13).

86 Since 1671 reported in this location had been the altar of Dormitionis Mariae, described by Canon Strzesz as follows: "Ad altare Dormitionis Mariae, veteri sculptum arte, nec usquequaqnam vulgari, optima consertum mensa" (*Visitationes episcopatus Culmensis*, p. 209). It is not certain, whether that bas-relief had been associated with this location from the very beginning, originally most probably a centre piece of a Late-Gothic winged retable. In the literature that image is mostly assumed to be associated with the first retable of an altar dedicated to Beatae Mariae Virginis founded in 1500 r. (Oliński, op. cit., p. 203) by the Chełmno canon and parish priest in the years 1497–1510, Jan Schmolle (Smolle).

87 Marian Dorawa had suggested, that its transferring would "lighten the composition of the wall, overcrowded with the three retables" (Dorawa, *Dokumentacja...*, p. 30).

88 The treatment involved removing the oil overpaintings, reintegrating the gildings (with bronze and Dutch metal leaf) and silvered areas. In the scene of Dormition the missing fragments of tracery were reconstructed as well as the Virgin's headscarf, the paint layer in flesh areas was reintegrated and varnishes (the works were executed by Krystyna Dąbrowska, PPKZ Toruń); another restoration took place in 2017 r.: J. Ziemlewicz *Dokumentacja prac konserwatorskich i restauratorskich przy elementach wyposażenia wnętrza kapicy tzw. kopernikowskiej w toruńskiej katedrze p.w. św. Jana Chrzciciela i św. Jana Ewangelisty*, [typescript] Toruń, 2017 (access: Archiwum Miejskiego Konserwatora Zabytków w Toruniu, sign. 7911), pp. 5, 6, 8–9, 15–17, 18, 19–21, 22–23, 24–25.

89 Its original location is unknown. In the literature it is sometimes being wrongly associated with the Holy Family retable in the raftsmen chapel, together with a wing with partly preserved Annunciation (*Ars Sacra. Dawna sztuka diecezji toruńskiej, katalog wystawy Muzeum Okręgowego w Toruniu 5 XI–31 XII 1993*, Toruń, 1993, no. 25, p. 46 [J. Kruszelnicka], with the Corpus Christi retable (Błażejewska, Pilecka, op. cit., p. 169) or with the Crown of Thorns retable (Woźniak, "Ołtarze w przestrzeni...", p. 287). The ideas behind that artwork indicate associations with a retable devoted to Christ /the Passion, thus the latter suggestion seems more probable. For the state of research and stylistic issues see: M. Kurkowski, "Rzeźba Chrystusa z tzw. kaplicy kopernikańskiej w kościele Świętojańskim w Toruniu", *Rocznik Toruński*, 47, no. 220, pp. 259–293.

90 In the restoration atelier of the District Museum in Toruń in 1972 (infilling the gaps, impregnation of the base, after: Kruszelnicka, *Rzeźba i malarstwo*, p. 36–37, 38, kat. 18, pp. 90–92).

91 During the restoration the historic infills made with plaster of Paris were removed, the wood has been impregnated, the overpaintings removed, new infills have been applied, some restora-



**Fig. 11.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral, the so-called Copernicus Chapel. View on the East wall with the Dormition Retable (bas-relief with The Virgin's Last Prayer, ca. 1500, retable 1620–1630). Photo: J. Raczkowski



**Fig. 12.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral, the so-called Copernicus Chapel. Bas-relief with The Virgin's Last Prayer, ca. 1500, photo: J. Raczkowski

In late 19<sup>th</sup> century the sculpture used to be kept in the vestry, and after the war in the chapel of the Sacred Heart. In 1971 it was – justly, as it seems – decided that it was not well visible in that spot;<sup>92</sup> on that occasion it had been restored for the first time.<sup>93</sup> Of the historic furnishing of the chapel – of course beside the Copernicus memorabilia themselves<sup>94</sup> – were left *in situ* the Gothic stalls custom-made for their location, that had also been restored in that time,<sup>95</sup> which involved however remov-

tion of missing details and the reintegration of paint layers with watercolours, Ziemlewicz, op. cit., pp. 6–7, 12, 17, 21, 22, 26, 47;

<sup>92</sup> Dorawa, *Dokumentacja...*, p. 30.

<sup>93</sup> J. Kruszelnicka, "Rzeźba i malarstwo", pp. 36–37, 38, 90–92, no 18; the works executed in the restoration atelier of the District Museum in Toruń.

<sup>94</sup> The Copernicus' memorial was restored, see: H. Drążkowski, L. Bliskowski, *Dokumentacja konserwatorska, Toruń, Epitańium M. Kopernika, PP. Konserwacji Zabytków, Oddział w Toruniu*, [typescript] Toruń, 1972 (access: Archiwum NiD, Toruń).

<sup>95</sup> The stalls were preserved in a dicmal condition, the structure being weakened and the wood infested with woodworm, see: Z. Balewski, *Stalle gotyckie z Kaplicy Kopernikowskiej Kościoła p.w.*

ing the historic addition, that is the Gothic-revival backs.<sup>96</sup> Also a 19<sup>th</sup>-century low iron-work banister had been preserved. In the centre of the chapel the baptismal font was displayed – as the oldest piece of the church furnishing, being associated with Nicolaus Copernicus – to create a particular space of commemoration.



**Fig. 13.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral, the so-called Copernicus Chapel. The Flogged Christ, late 15<sup>th</sup> cent. on a modern console by the South wall, photo: J. Raczkowski

Summing up, the direct consequence of the preformed actions was depriving the chapel of its historic furnishing and fitting it with artworks, that had not been intended for it. According to the argumentation supplied by the project's author, the basic criteria for choosing particular items was their age and the fact, that they were not in their original setting anyway and already "not in harmony with their surrounding".<sup>97</sup> In itself, relocating the Gothic artworks from their already non-historic locations and arranging them in new location within the church would perhaps not have been controversial, if it had not involved reaping the former Baroque

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św. Jana w Toruniu. Dokumentacja konserwatorska, *PP Konserwacji Zabytków, Oddział w Toruniu*, [typescript] Toruń, 1973 (access: Archiwum NiD, Toruń, sign. 181).

<sup>96</sup> These have been counted among the elements, that were considered as "dating to later times or of mediocre artistic value", and as such not conforming with "the gravity of the chapel's décor", Dorawa, *Dokumentacja...*, p. 29.

<sup>97</sup> Dorawa, *Dokumentacja...*, p. 28.



retable out of its historic context (see Fig. 2). Also removing the historic, Gothic-revival backs of the stalls – of undisputable historic value (see Fig. 5) – has stripped the walls of the interior, giving a very purist impression. The interior – deprived of the custom made Baroque retable with exuberant acanthus ornamentation and distinguished crowning and stripped of the wall panelling, with its modern flooring – has the air of artificial void, especially in comparison with other side chapels of the cathedral. The effect is even enhanced by the impact of modern, abstract stained glass window, acting as a serious discord in this interior.<sup>98</sup> It is also worth mentioning, that relocations within the chapel itself resulted in a number of other alterations of the church interior – they forced new location of St Michael the Archangel retable, left an empty place where the Dormition retable used to be. Moreover, from the imminent surrounding of the chapel a Lourdes Grotto was removed (see Fig. 3)<sup>99</sup> – perhaps lacking in artistic value, but witnessing a certain phase of modern piety.

Instead, the chapel has been bestowed with a new, emphatic Copernican narrative: the information that the future astronomer had been baptised at the bronze font is probably true (Fig. 14), but indirectly it suggests – entirely wrongly – that the interior had served as a baptismal chapel already in the Middle Ages (and that it was here, where Copernicus had actually been baptised). Since that time that interior and the font – admittedly an artefact of great importance for the studies



**Fig. 14.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral. Plaque by the baptismal font (1973), photo: J. Raczkowski

<sup>98</sup> Prof. Wiesław Smużny, Toruń artist, characterised this creation as follows: “with their abstract and non-semantic structure as well as the colouring of commiserating with Siberia survivors [the stained-glass windows] are highly intriguing. They make one to ponder – not as much over the fate of art, as over the fate of sacral window-glazing in the context of explorations of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century art and its attitude towards the past”, see: W. Smużny, “Gotyk na dotyk i witraż... dla oczu i duszy”, in *Witraż w Toruniu – dawny i dzisiejszy / Glasmalerei in Thorn – gestern und heute*, ed. K. Rochecki, Toruń, 2005, p. 25.

<sup>99</sup> M. Dorawa had argued, that it was worthless and proposed introducing in its place the Renaissance memorial of Krzysztof Florian (ibid., p. 31); neither that artwork nor the memorial of Anna Pirnesius (pendant to the Copernicus memorial) are not in the then suggested locations.

on Medieval crafts in Chełmno Land, but of mediocre artistic quality – became the obligatory stopping point for every group of tourists visiting the church.

## Epilogue

The climax of not so long history of “the Copernicus’ Chapel” was a visit of pope John Paul II to Toruń, during his VII Apostolic Journey to Homeland, on June 7<sup>th</sup> 1999. His stay in the town the Pope began with the words: “Greetings to Toruń, which is close to my heart and to the beautiful Pomerania on the Vistula River. I am happy to be able to come to your town, made famous by Nicolaus Copernicus”. Within the tight schedule of the visit (the important part of which made the celebrations organised at the Nicolaus Copernicus University, sic) took place a spontaneous gesture – the pope made a short visit to the cathedral and right in front of the Copernicus’ Chapel intoned the hymn *Salve Regina*.<sup>100</sup> The moment of his reflection by the baptismal font has been recorded not only by photographs, but first of all by a painting by Ewa Mika, depicting that prayer (Fig. 15). The painting has been introduced in 2014 to the most recent liturgical foundation in the cathedral church, that is the retable holding John Paul’s II relics (Fig. 16), designed by Andrzej Ryczek and located at the first from the West pier on the North side (the original location of the aforementioned Dormition retable, since 1973 in the Copernicus’ Chapel). The association seems to be of particular significance for establishing local cult of Copernicus: here (the future saint) John Paul II prays before the chapel dedicated to (no saint indeed) Nicolaus Copernicus. That association has been further strengthened by another action: the throne and prie-dieu, used by the pope during the pilgrims’ mass celebrated on the airfield in Toruń, make the latest addition to the furnishing of the Copernicus’ Chapel (Fig. 17).

## Conclusion

The case of the Copernicus’ Chapel in St John’s church proves the longevity of local traditions that – however not documented – define still today the sense of identity, historical importance, even fame, nourished in Toruń at least since 18<sup>th</sup> century and

100 <https://www.niedziela.pl/artukul/53045/Pielgrzymka-do-Torunia> [accessed 13 December 2021]. The significance of that event for Toruń is mentioned often, see for example *Toruń – miasto papieskie*, homepage of *Polska Organizacja Turystyczna*, <https://www.polska.travel/pl/poznaj-atrakcje-i-zabytki/szlaki-i-miejsca-papieskie/torun-miasto-papieskie> [accessed 13 December 2021]: “Poza programem [wizyty], co było częstą praktyką papieża w czasie pielgrzymek do Ojczyzny, wstąpił on na krótko do gotyckiego kościoła św. św. Janów, gdzie obejrzał Kaplicę Kopernikowską z chrzcielnicą, przy której ochrzczony został przyszły polski astronom” [Apart from the visit program, which was a frequent practice of the Pope during his pilgrimages to his homeland, he briefly entered the Gothic church of St John’s, where he saw the Copernicus Chapel with the baptismal font at which the future Polish astronomer was baptized].





**Fig. 15.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral. Painting from St John Paul II Retable, E. Mika (2014), photo: J. Raczkowski



**Fig. 16.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral, the so-called Copernicus Chapel. St John Paul II Retable by the first from the West pier of the nave on the North, the structure designed by A. Ryczka (2014, with sculptures from the former Jesuits' main altar retable, 1638), photo: J. Raczkowski



**Fig. 17.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral, the so-called Copernicus Chapel. John Paul's II throne and prie-dieu designed by A. Ryczka used during the papal Holy Mass in Toruń in 1999, photo: J. Raczkowski



**Fig. 18.** Toruń, St John's Cathedral, the so-called Copernicus Chapel. Present condition with Nicolaus Copernicus and Pope John Paul II commemorative elements, photo: J. Raczkowski

focused on the Astronomer. This sense has been shaped in changing historical and geopolitical circumstances, the milestones being jubilee celebrations that provided (regardless of the times) opportunities for patriotic demonstrations. The actions undertaken in the chapel during the years 1971–1973 on the wave of the Copernicus Jubilee Year – most of all the relocation of Late-Gothic elements of furnishing that assumed the role of “memorabilia” losing their historical contexts in the process – have significant consequences for the impact and perception of the interior of the present cathedral. The memory of a merchants' chapel as the most prominent space in the Medieval parish church of the Old Town of Toruń, strongly associated with the most eminent group of the patritiate, has been obliterated. The original patrocinium – St Nicholas – has perversely interweaved with the modern customary name “The [Nicolaus] Copernicus' Chapel”. In that respect particular, quasi-religious connotations have such events as placing there the sarcophagus with the astronomer's earthly remains on 537th Copernican anniversary, before their reburial in Frombork Cathedral in 2010).<sup>101</sup> The Baroque retable has been removed – the one carrying the memory of later religious history of the place, in which significant roles had played clergymen distinguished for St John's church – bishop

101 W. Rozyński, “Z historii parafii katedralnej św. Jana Chrzciciela i św. Jana Ewangelisty (1992 –2013)”, in *Opus temporis. Toruńskiej katedry historia najnowsza. Prace konserwatorskie i restauratorskie w latach 2000–2013*, eds. K. Kluczwajd, M. Rumiński, Toruń, 2013, p. 34, fig. 5.

Seweryn Szczuka and parish priest Emil Szmeja. Today the *memoria* of the eminent citizen of Toruń has been coupled with commemoration of John Paul II (mostly due to the Copernican narration given to his visit to Toruń) and the chapel in its present form assumes a novel symbolic meaning – of a place of remembrance of “great countrymen” (Fig. 18).

Transl. by Joanna M. Arszczyńska

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