

## SUMMARY

### THE EARLY-MODERN PERIOD IN RELATION TO THE MIDDLE AGES RELICS OF THE PAST, MIRACULOUS IMAGES, WORKS OF ART

While medieval traditions in early modern architecture have been thoroughly scrutinized in scholarly literature, the reception of medieval church furnishings between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century has hitherto received far less attention. The present book elucidates the varying attitudes towards the Middle Ages during the Early Modern period, as epitomized by approaches to medieval images, figures and altarpieces in the confessionally inhomogeneous, and thus particularly interesting, region of Central Europe (the Holy Roman Empire, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Switzerland) from the Reformation until the secularization.

In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the very presence of images in churches became an issue not only between the adherents of the Reformation and the followers of the Catholic Church, but also among the reformers themselves. The history of the Church, *nolens volens* shared by all Christians, was reconsidered in writings presenting particular denominations as legitimate heirs of original Christianity. Such was the agenda of the Lutheran *Magdeburg Centuries* by Matthias Flacius and his collaborators, as well as of Catholic *Annates Ecclesiastici* by Caesar Baronius, who regarded "ancient" (i.e. early Christian or medieval) images as "living witnesses" of Christianity and as historical sources. Images, therefore, were an object in the debate on whether they can be tolerated and venerated in churches, but also became an instrument in the controversy over the Church's past. By the late-16<sup>th</sup> century, all denominations shaped their doctrinal positions towards images: Calvinists insisted on their removal from churches, Catholics formulated apologias for the sacred image, whereas Lutherans regarded images as *adiaphora*. Theory, however, often differed from practice.

Part I (*Reception*) presents various practices: the Calvinists removed (while not necessarily destroying) figures, images and altarpieces from ex-Catholic churches, whereas both Lutherans and Catholics were initially rather reluctant to introduce radical changes of church furnishings, preferring usually to preserve old images, restoring them, reusing or adapting into new ensembles. The Lutherans often reconsidered the original iconography of medieval pieces which they intended to display in new settings and, instead of removing Marian scenes, tended to neutralize them by incorporating them into Christological iconographic programmes, thus presenting Mary simply as the Mother of Christ (e.g. altarpieces in Brzesko and Klępsk; Figs 51, 52, 53, II). The Roman Catholics, on the contrary, laid emphasis on Virgin's role as "Queen of Heaven" and proved the legitimacy of their Church in the given country or region (e.g. altar-pieces in Kobylin and Koźmin; Figs 35,1). When the religious situation in Europe had settled after the Thirty Years War, the Lutherans continued to display medieval images and figures in Baroque altarpieces (Nördlingen; Fig.

III). Occasionally, new settings seem to allude to contemporary pietistic devotion (Pruszcz Gdański/Praust; Fig. 57), while in some cases altarpieces carved in the 17<sup>th</sup> century for the displaying of medieval triptychs were further developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Lutherans (Königsberg; Fig. 62) and Catholics (Kościan; Fig. 63) alike. By this time, however, the Catholics displayed whole medieval altarpieces in new framings infrequently, distinguishing more often single images in elaborated architectural-cum-sculptural settings.

Part II (*Creativeness*) focuses on single cult images included within monumental Baroque altarpieces. Despite difficulties in defining the notion of the "cult image", there is no doubt that a large number of individual images displayed in new settings were especially venerated by the faithful. This was the case already in the late Middle Ages (Orsanmichele in Florence, Dädesjö, Figs 64, 65), but the phenomenon of displaying old worshipped images in new altarpieces flourished in Rome during the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (Santa Maria in Aracoeli, Santa Maria in Vallicella, Santa Maria Maggiore, Figs 66, 69, 70), while becoming widespread in Central Europe from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, to coincide with artistic changes usually labelled by scholars with the name of Gian Lorenzo Bernini. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, many medieval images and figures were displayed in Baroque altarpieces patterned after famous Roman works, but also rooted in local artistic traditions. Eminent examples can be found in Catholic churches (Franciscan church in Salzburg, Thalkirchen, "Old St. Peter's" in Munich; Figs V-VII), but also, perhaps more surprisingly, in Lutheran ones (Cranach's altar-piece in Schneeberg; Fig. 90).

Occasionally, not only a Baroque altarpiece, but also a whole Baroque church was built or remodelled to house a medieval venerated image. As a rule it was incorporated into a complex iconographic program unifying architecture and its decoration (St. Mary's church in Kłodzko/Glatz; Figs 91-93, VIII). An example which has received special attention in the present book is the Cistercian church in Krzeszów/Griissau (Silesia) where three venerated images were displayed in the main altar and in the altars of the transept: the Virgin of Grace (regarded as the "founding relic" of the monastery), a late medieval crucifix brought from Wierzbno/Würben (believed to have been "wounded" by a Dissenter) and a figure of Emmanuel from Kłodzko/Glatz (described as despoiled by a Heretic). Emmanuel is also the key figure of the iconographic programme of the church decoration (both exterior and interior), based on the prophecy of Isaiah (Is 9: 6) and combining the history of Salvation with the local history of Silesia, the history of Cistercian order and that of the monastery in Krzeszów/Griissau (Figs 94-96, 98, 99, 104-109, IX).

Part III (*Opinions*) examines how medieval images and medieval art were perceived and evaluated by early-modern authors, depending on their milieu, interests and aims. Some Marian images, these being regarded as miraculous and "ancient", were officially crowned by the chapter of St. Peter's in Rome. A number of medieval Marian images were worshipped in national and local shrines where they legitimized the Roman Catholic denomination in the given country (Częstochowa in Poland, Altötting in Bavaria, Mariazell in Austria, Brno in Moravia, Stara Boleslav in Bohemia). Thus, religious factors were combined with historical ones. Nevertheless, the issue of aesthetic value of medieval art proves more

complex. Until the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, Italian historiographers and theoreticians of art depreciated "Greek" (i.e. medieval) paintings, whereas church writers regarded "ancient" images as a recommended model of simplicity and a source of renewal in religious art after its Mannerist degeneration. As late as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a positive interest in medieval paintings arose among collectors and amateurs, whereas pastoral visitors of churches still usually regarded old images as ugly and worn-out, and only rarely appreciated their historical or aesthetic value.

In *Conclusion*, general questions have been collected and approached. Firstly, were medieval images perceived as stylistically different from their early modern artistic context? Secondly, did they preserve their integrity, or were they reduced to merely part of a new artistic whole? Thirdly, according to a variety of circumstances, how were the images appropriated and reinterpreted? Naturally, the answers to all these questions cannot be unequivocal. Some medieval images and church furnishings were supposed to merge aesthetically with their early modern settings and thus tended to lose their integrity, whereas others were essentially distinguished from their artistic context and perceived as an integral whole, to which the early modern setting was subordinated (even if an inconspicuous image was seemingly overwhelmed by its monumental architectural framing).

Thus, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, medieval images and figures were venerated as monuments of the Christian heritage, as well as (especially in Roman Catholic regions) worshipped as cult images. In the late-18<sup>th</sup> century, without neglecting their historical and religious value of medieval paintings and sculptures, some writers discovered their artistic value, which heralded the birth of a new scholarly discipline: art history.