

# The altars of the Holy Trinity Church of the former Bernardine Convent in Kaunas from the 17th century until 1864: an Outline of the Research

## Ołtarze z dawnego kościoła Bernardynek Świętej Trójcy w Kownie XVII w. – 1864 r. Zarys problematyki

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The former ensemble of Bernardine Monastery in Kaunas (curr. Priest Seminary) and the church of the Holy Trinity has long been a significant part of the Kaunas Old Town quarter, formed between the Town Hall Square, the Kaunas Castle moat, Franciscan Observants Convent of St. George the Martyr and the former Royal Manor street

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(curr. A. Jakšto g.). Although the buildings of the ensemble are surrounded on three sides by a high brick fence, which is a reminder of a cloistered lifestyle of the Bernardine Sisters, the roofs, the tower and part of the façades of the Holy Trinity Church are perfectly visible from any side of the Town Hall Square and form an integral part of the Kaunas Old Town panorama (Fig. 1). From the Kaunas Castle, one can see the buildings of the former monastery, some of which underwent significant architectural changes since the seminary has been established there. In the context of sacral architecture, this ensemble is one of the most valuable in Lithuania, representing the style between late Gothic and Renaissance, and has often been the focus for researchers.

Brief references to the monastery in various sources reach us from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, mainly in review publications about the city of Kaunas or churches



1. Kaunas Church of the Holy Trinity (Seminary).

Phot. A. Baltėnas, 2020

in Lithuania. An increasing number of descriptions at various levels began to appear in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the most appreciated being those provided by Motiejus Valančius (Maciej Wołoncewski)<sup>1</sup>. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the historian and public figure Jurgis Oksas made a significant contribution to the research of the Monastery's history. A certain part of his works on the historical research has been published<sup>2</sup>, though a number of articles remained in the form of manuscripts. Perhaps the most valuable contribution is his thorough

analysis of the formation of the monastery territory, identifying the former possessions, their owners and streets. Oksas' work is still relevant for further research today. Formal architectural studies on the stylistic characteristics of the architectural ensemble were being carried out in the Soviet period, as well, in this context we should mention the research<sup>3</sup> carried out by Vytautas Levandauskas. After the Restoration of Independence, the material was supplemented with recent facts and insights, newly published handbooks, manuals, databases also provided important information, e.g. texts by Rūta Janonienė, Vaida

1 M. Valančius, *Namų užrašai*, ed. A. Prašmantaitė, Vilnius 2003, p. 661–667; idem, *Pastabos pačiam sau*, trans. J. Tumas [Vaižgantas], Vilnius 1996 (first ed. Kaunas 1929), p. 139–142.

2 J. Oksas, *Buvusio bernardinų vienuolyno ansamblio Kaune (dab. Tarpdiecizinė kunigų seminarija) istoriniai tyrimai*, "Kauno istorijos metraštis", vol. 1, 1998, p. 203–243.

3 V. Levandauskas, *Švenčiausiosios Trejybės bažnyčia ir bernardinų vienuolynas Rotušės a. 22, Trakų g. 1, 1a, 3, Papilio g. 5*, in: *Kauno architektūra*, ed. A. Jankevičienė, V. Levandauskas, A. Miškinis, J. Minkevičius, Vilnius 1991, p. 267–276; T. Adomonis, K. Čerbulėnas, *Lietuvos TSR dailės ir architektūros istorija*, vol. 1: *Nuo seniausių laikų iki 1775 metų*, Vilnius 1987, p. 130.





## 2. Interior of Kaunas Church of the Holy Trinity.

Phot. A. Baltėnas, 2020

Kamuntavičienė, Dalia Ramonienė and other authors<sup>4</sup>. No doubt, the Kaunas Bernardine Nunnery has been included in more important theoretical works by Polish scholars, the most important of which being *Bernardyni polscy* ('The Polish Bernardines') by Kamil Kantak and the book *Klasztory bernardyńskie w Polsce w jej granicach historycznych* ('The Bernardine Monasteries on the Borders of Historical Poland'), published in 1985 on the initiative of Hieronim Wyczawski including a short essay on the Kaunas Bernardine Nunnery by Wiesław Murawiec<sup>5</sup>. The texts mentioned above do not provide exhaustive studies, essential historical data repeat, but they complement each other from the point of view of different sources applied.

There is still no comprehensive study dedicated to this unique object and to the history of the monastery itself, various aspects need to be explored and developed. One of them concerns the furnishings and art of the interior, the reconstruction of which is important not only for identifying the former values but also for revealing the connection between the Bernardine Sisters' spirituality and art. A more detailed

analysis of the evolution of the old interior before the closure of the monastery has not yet been carried out. This can be explained primarily by the fact that the complete Bernardine archive did not survive and probably burnt down after the closure of the monastery in 1864<sup>6</sup>, individual documents or groups of documents in various Lithuanian and Polish archives were found. In the context of the above mentioned historiography, more abundant data on the interior were provided by Jurgis Oksas, who relied on the inventories and visitation documents of 1821–1864. The author had identified the altars of the church, although did not go into more detail<sup>7</sup>. The text by Polish author Wiesław Murawiec is significant in that it contains the only known more detailed description of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century altars mentioned in the 1453–1656 chronicle of the province of the Order of the Observant Friars of Lesser Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania<sup>8</sup>. There are only several, but important references to the church altars in the documents of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is to be regretted that very few artefacts testifying to the Bernardine Sisters have survived in the church, today its interior is dominated by modern solutions (Fig. 2). A few artefacts have found their way into the Kaunas Archdiocese Museum. The side altar of the Blessed Virgin Mary and two other altars together with several paintings were taken to the church of the Transfiguration of Christ in Alksninė (Olszyna), their structure and decor were analysed by Regimanta Stankevičienė<sup>9</sup>. Parts of one

4 R. Janonienė, *Kauno buvęs bernardinių vienuolynas ir Švč. Trejybės bažnyčia*, in: eadem, *Lietuvos vienuolynai. Vadovas*, Vilnius 1998, p. 88–92; V. Kamuntavičienė, *Fundatoriai Masalskiai ir Kauno bernardinės*, "Kauno istorijos metraštis", vol. 18, 2020, p. 7–22, <http://www.autc.lt/lt/architekturos-objektai/1101> [access 2.04.2023]; K. Misius, R. Šinkūnas, *Lietuvos katalikų bažnyčios (žinynas)*, Vilnius 1993, p. 160–161; D. Ramonienė, *Trys altoriai. Sakykla. Paveikslas „Švč. Trejybė“ su aptaisais. Paveikslas „Jėzaus Atsimainymas“*, in: *Lietuvos sakralinės dailės katalogas*, vol. 1: *Vilkaviškio vyskupija*, part 1: *Marijampolės dekanatas*, ed. G.M. Martinaitienė, Vilnius 1996, p. 42–54; I. Vaišvilaitė, *Moterys vienuolės XVII a. Lietuvoje*, in: *Istorinė tikrovė ir iliuzija: Lietuvos dvasinės kultūros šaltinių tyrimai*, ed. D. Klajumienė, Vilnius 2003, p. 69–76.

5 S.K. Kantak, *Bernardyni polscy*, vol. 1: *1453–1572*, vol. 2: *1573–1795–1932*, Lwów 1933; W. Murawiec, *Kowno*, in: *Klasztory bernardyńskie w Polsce w jej granicach historycznych*, ed. H.E. Wyczawski, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska 1985, p. 513–517.

6 V. Kamuntavičienė, op. cit., p. 2.

7 J. Oksas, op. cit., p. 220–221.

8 Archiwum Prowincji OO. Bernadynów (Archive of the Bernardine Province in Cracow, further as APB) B.25 (*Chronicle of the Province of the Order of the Observant Friars of Lesser Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1453–1656*), p. 299–300; W. Murawiec, op. cit., p. 514–515.

9 R. Stankevičienė, *Alksninės Kristaus Atsimainymo*

### 3. Portrait of the Voivode of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania Aleksander Massalski, late 18<sup>th</sup> – early 19<sup>th</sup> c. Kaunas Archdiocese Museum BMT 64. Phot. A. Kapčius, 2023

Baroque altar and a picture of the Holy Trinity of the high altar, as well as several sculptures, were transferred to the Daukšiai Church (Dauksze), rebuilt in 1958. The altarpieces of the Daukšiai Church were analysed by the art historian Dalia Ramonienė, who made an exhaustive description of the application of details in the artworks of Kaunas Church, and the artistic peculiarities of the Holy Trinity painting<sup>10</sup>. Another uniquely carved altar has been placed in Išlaužas (Išlauž) Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Help of Christians<sup>11</sup>.

Despite the poor survival of old documents and artefacts, the reconstruction of the church interior was possible due to the analysis of inventories and visitation acts, and the surviving altars of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the clues in documents from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to Jurgis Oksas, the church after the fire of 1668 was furnished with rich Baroque altars, which “had survived until recently”<sup>12</sup>. It is not entirely clear what exact period the historian was referring to, but, as it will be seen later, there is little doubt that the essential elements of the interior decoration and iconography could have survived from the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century until the closure of the monastery.

The aim of this article is to analyse, as far as the surviving few sources and valuables allow, the iconographic programme of the interior of the Kaunas Church of the Holy Trinity of the former Bernardine Convent until its closure in 1864, focusing on the clarification of the expression of

spirituality in ecclesiastical art. The following objectives were set: to perform the reconstruction of the former interior of the altar ensemble, to bring to light the most important characteristics of the Bernardine Sisters’ spirituality, and, by means of an icono-theological approach, to highlight logical links between art and Bernardine spirituality. The main sources used to reveal the theme were found in the 19<sup>th</sup> century visitations and inventories before the closure of the monastery in 1864<sup>13</sup>, documents from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and iconographic material. Various literature sources were of great aid for disclosing the contextual aspects, among them a monograph by Rima Valinčiūtė-Varnė and Laima Šinkūnaitė *The Kaunas Convent of Franciscan Observants of St. George the Martyr. Vision of the Past*<sup>14</sup>. Publications by Polish researchers about Bernardine Nunneries in Poland and Belarus were also of great importance while preparing the text.

The Bernardine Monastery was funded by the Marshal of Kaunas Province, Aleksander Massalski (Aleksandras Masalskis) (Fig. 3), and his wife Apolonia Jasińska-Massalska (Apolonija Jasinskaitė-Masalskienė) after their daughter Klara had taken her vows in the Nunnery. The Massalski family also financed the building of a brick church in 1624–1634. The first more detailed description of the interior of the church in

bažnyčios *Didysis altorius; Šoniniai Šv. Antano ir Šv. Juozapo altoriai; Paveikslas „Nekaltojo Prasiidėjimo Švč. Mergelės Marija“; Paveikslas „Paskutinė vakariėnė“*, in: *Lietuvos sakralinės dailės katalogas*, vol. 1, part 2, ed. T. Jurkuvienė, Vilnius 1997, p. 46–59.

10 D. Ramonienė, op. cit., p. 42–52.

11 My thanks for the information about the altar in Išlaužas Church go to Rima Valinčiūtė-Varnė.

12 J. Oksas, op. cit., p. 216.

13 Kauno arkivyskupijos kurijos archyvas (Archive of Kaunas Archdiocese Curia, further as KAKA) b. 142 (*Visitation of Kaunas Bernardine Nunnery*, 1804), p. 848–854; Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas (Lithuanian State Historical Archives, further as LVIA) f. 691, ap. 1, b. 3669 (*Visitation of Kaunas Bernardine Nunnery*, 1820), p. 324–358; KAKA b. 142 (*Visitation of Kaunas Bernardine Nunnery*, 1851), p. 845–847; LVIA f. 1671, ap. 4, b. 2 (*Inventory of Kaunas Bernardine Nunnery*, 1861), p. 21–26; LVIA f. 669, ap. 2, b. 356 (*Inventory of Kaunas Bernardine Nunnery*, 1864), p. 418–423, etc.

14 R. Valinčiūtė-Varnė, L. Šinkūnaitė, *Kauno Šv. Jurgio Kankinio pranciškonų observantų konventas. Praeities vizija*, Kaunas 2018.





ALEKSANDER MASALSKI  
Vojevoda Minski Kasztelan Smoleński  
Kłajki Fón dator P.P. Bernardynek Kłajki

the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, as mentioned above, comes from the *Chronicle of the Province of the Order of the Observant Friars of Lesser Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1453–1656*<sup>15</sup>. From this text we learn that the church, built by the funders, was decorated inside and outside with impressive works of art, and had five altars – the high altar with sculptures and four altars near the pillars. Of all the altars, only one was described in a specific detail – the picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary, famous for her graces, and votives next to it: “Ibidem[que] in uno Altari conspicitur Imago B[eatae] V[irginis] M[ariae] filiolum IESUM in sinistra manu gestantis statura[e] iusta[e] et pictura[e] elegantissima[e], qua[e] populi frequentia et devotione colitur, ut testantur plurima[e] ibi appensa[e] tabella[e] argentes”<sup>16</sup>. The relic of the True Cross was also held in high esteem in the church, as it is written, it was approximately one inch<sup>17</sup> in size and kept in a *pacifical* decorated with jewels. The relic was publicly displayed for veneration on the high altar twice a year, on the feast of the Discovery and Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

The church also had precious golden and silver liturgical vessels, including a golden chalice with a paten, decorated with precious stones and diamonds. These items were acquired for one thousand florins by Anna Maria Ancilla Rudomina-Dusiacka Pac (Ona Marcibela Rudomina-Dusiacka itė Pacas) and her husband, Stefan Pac (Steponas Pacas), the Vice-Chancellor of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL), on the

occasion of the vows taken by their daughter<sup>18</sup> Katarzyna (Kotryna, s. Maria Aniela)<sup>19</sup> at the monastery. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the church also had two Gothic monstrances with the inscribed date 1617. They are mentioned in the inventory of 1922. One of them, the larger, also had an inscription in Latin indicating that the monstrance was acquired by Kaunas Bernardine Sisters at their own expense<sup>20</sup>.

The same chronicle also mentions that on the right side of the church a flag of damask hung with a memorial inscription dedicated to the funder, asking the worshippers to pray for him when they entered the church:

“D. O. M.  
Eheu quam brevi memoria(m) clauduntur  
Longa vita(e) merita.  
Ill(ustri)ssimi Viri Senatoris amplissimi  
D(omin)i Alexandri  
Mossalski, Palatini Minscensis etc. etc.  
Nihil tamen eius Virtuti non praeivium  
Nihil Polona(e) Gloria(e) non qua(e)situm  
Literas, Bella, Amicitias, Iudicia Reipubli-  
ca(e) munera  
Vitam deniq(ue) totam, Sigismundi III et  
Vladislai IV.  
Serenissimorum Polonia(e) Regum officiis  
impensam  
Feliciter decurrit.  
Bonus (Ubi)que Patria(e) Civis.  
Vixit Annos 63, quos pietate Singulari, cultis  
Defensisq(ue) Religionibus, profusis in pau-  
peres  
Largitionibus, magis quam diebus implevit.  
Ereptus tandem ma(e)sta(e) familia(e) A(nno)  
D(omini) 1647 die 25  
Februarii, nihil de se pra(e)ter nomen, Cineres,  
et Uberes

15 APB B.25, p. 299; W. Murawiec, op. cit., p. 514.

16 „There is also an altar with a painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus in her left hand, and, next to the amazing painting, which is highly adored by worshippers, hangs a large number of silver votive offerings”. APB B.25, p. 299. My thanks for the translations from Latin here and further on go to Vaiva Vasiliauskaitė.

17 Inch – 2,54 cm.

18 APB B.25, p. 299; W. Murawiec, op. cit., p. 514–515.

19 V. Kamuntavičienė, *Fundatoriai...*, op. cit., p. 5; eadem, *Biograms of Kaunas Bernardine Sisters*, manuscript of Kamuntavičienė's personal archive, 2020, p. 4.

20 LVIA f. 1671, ap. 8, b. 272 (*Inventory of Kaunas Church of the Holy Trinity, 1922*), p. 5; J. Oksas, op. cit., p. 211.



Amicorum, egenorum(que) Lachriimas, reliquit, et desideria.

Bene precare hospes magne, Ill(ustri)ssimi Viri Anima(e)”<sup>21</sup>.

Following the Baroque tradition, the funders were appointed their place in the iconography of the church as well: the figures of Aleksander and Apolonia Massalski were painted in the triumphal arch of the presbytery, including the date of the construction of the church. There were also easel portraits of the two Massalski in the church<sup>22</sup>.

Taken together, these brief details manifest that the image of the Virgin Mary was highly venerated in the monastery church in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The fact that it had already earned fame indicates that the image and the veneration tradition had existed for a certain period of time, so it might have been painted at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, at the latest. The following text from Juozas Vaišnora's book *Marijos garbinimas Lietuvoje* ('The Adoration of Mary in Lithuania') provides additional insight to the image of the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century: the drawing (13 × 10 cm) by Ramoška published in 1677 suggests that there was in this church

21 "To the Most Majestic and Best Lord / A long, full of merits life of the noblest man, Senator, / The most honourable Sir Aleksander Massalski, Voivode of Minsk, etc. / Ends, however, so unexpectedly. / Nothing compares to his bravery. / He, eager for the glory of Poland, devoted to his service, throughout the life / Of Sigismund III and Vladislaus IV, the noblest kings of Poland. / His writings, wars, friendships, decisions, duties to the Republic / And, finally, his whole life end fruitfully. / A virtuous citizen of his Homeland forever / He lived sixty three years of exceptional mercy, / Upholding and preserving the Faith, generous donations to the poor / More abundantly than he filled with his days. / Finally, he was torn away from his grieving family in the year of the Lord 1647, / On the 25<sup>th</sup> day of February, leaving nothing behind but his name and ashes, / The tears and sorrows of his friends and the poor. / Honorable guest, pray for the Noble Man's soul." APB B.25, p. 300.  
22 LVIA, f. 1671, ap. 8, b. 272, p. 4.

a miracle-working picture of Virgin Mary. Mary is depicted *en face*, wearing a peculiarly shaped crown on her head, two angels hold it with one hand and have a branch with flowers in the other. There are flowers around the wreath, as well. Mary's hair is loose, covers her neck, which is adorned with pearls. Mary holds the royal sceptre in her right hand, and with the left one embraces the Child, who holds Mother's hand with his left hand and makes a blessing with two outstretched fingers of his right hand. There is a Polish inscription below the picture (in translation): "The image of the Virgin Mary, famous for special graces and gifts from God, in Kaunas at the Holy Trinity Church of St. Francis Sisters; for a deeper devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, printed in 1677"<sup>23</sup>.

The composition of the painting with a fitting on the altar in the left nave of the church nowadays corresponds to the description, the positions of Mary and the Child coincide, except for the absence of a wreath and angels holding it (Fig. 4). Votive offerings attest to the veneration of the image. However, it is hardly probable that the image of Our Lady with votive wreaths could have survived to the present day from the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, moreover, after the mid-century disasters. It is likely that in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the church already had a new picture, which was depicted in a graphic form as in the above-mentioned picture. The stylistics of the image and the fittings would bear witness to this. However, more detailed studies (chemical and physical) of the painting are still required to draw more precise conclusions, as there is evidence that the picture has been repainted. This might have resulted in losses of some of the above-mentioned details and the quaint

23 J. Vaišnora, *Marijos garbinimas Lietuvoje*, Roma 1958, p. 335.





4. The Blessed Virgin Mary – Consoler of the Afflicted, second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c., overpainted. Church of the Holy Trinity in Kaunas. Phot. A. Baltėnas, 2020

treatment of the background, uncharacteristic of the works of the period.

The wooden Relic of the True Cross and the tradition of its veneration in the Church of the Holy Trinity reveal one of the fundamental factors as regards the Bernardine Sisters' piety – the mindfulness to the Crucified and His passion. The main

aspects of the Bernardine Sisters' piety were taken over from the Friars Minor, who first of all called to concentrate one's gaze on the Crucified, encouraging to follow St. Francis' example, reflecting on Christ's passion<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> R. Janonienė, *Bernardinų...*, op. cit., p. 41.



5. Interior of Kaunas Holy Trinity Church, until 1932. Phot. J. Marčiukaitis, Maironis Museum of Lithuanian Literature GEK 136343

Today, the only known documents of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries that mention the altars provide but rather fragmentary data. More exhaustive information on the titles and a number of altars is presented in the letter of 19 October 1787 of the bishop of Vilnius Ignacy Jakub Massalski (Ignotas Jokūbas Masalskis), confirming the indulgence of Pope Pius VI, i.e. the document granting indulgences. According to this letter, indulgences were granted for a ten-year period, from 1787 to 1797. Among the mentioned altars were: the high altar of the Holy Trinity, the Crucifixion altar, altars of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Francis Seraph, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Joseph, and St. Clare<sup>25</sup>. Additional information about the altars of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries can be found in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century documents,

25 KAKA b. 79 (*Pope's Indulgences to the Convent of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis of Assisi, the Church of the Holy Trinity Church in Kaunas, 1637–1787*), p. 2.

which mention that the porticoes of six altars with relics were consecrated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century: the Great altar – on 7 January 1676, the altar of Our Lady of Sorrows – on 3 May 1663, the altar of Jesus Christ at the Pillar, the altar of the Crucified and the altar of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary – on 3 May 1670, and the altar of St. Anthony – on 7 June 1678<sup>26</sup>. The porticoes of some of the altars were consecrated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: the altarpiece dedicated to St. Joseph – on 13 July 1704, to St. Francis – on 3 July 1760, and to St. Elizabeth on 20 June 1767<sup>27</sup>.

26 LVIA f. 694, ap. 1, b. 3734 (*Visitation of Kaunas Bernardine Convent, 1828*), p. 463–464; Rossijskij gosudarstvennyj istoriceskij archiv (The Russian State Archive of History, further RGIA, the microfilm used is preserved at the Lithuanian Institute of History in the fund of Leonidas Žilevičius – F50-P15) f. 822, ap. 12, b. 2983 (*Visitation of Kaunas Bernardine Convent, 1830*), p. 157–158.

27 LVIA f. 694, ap. 1, b. 3734, p. 463–464; RGIA, f. 822, ap. 12, b. 2983, p. 157–158.



6. The Holy Trinity, early 18<sup>th</sup> c. – second quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. The Daukšiai Church. Phot. S. Poligienė, 2015, Archive of Cultural Heritage Centre

The descriptions are not detailed, but this information reveals that the altar ensemble highlighting the main features of the Bernardine Sisters' spirituality had already been formed by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and, as mentioned above, the baroque altars were most probably installed at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century – the first quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and survived almost unchanged until its closure. The altars were wooden, painted, and richly decorated with carvings (Fig. 5).

At that time, the high altar might have been adorned with the image of the Holy Trinity painted in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>28</sup>, still present in Daukšiai, and the image of St. Joseph which today can be seen on the altar in the right nave of Kaunas Church of the Holy Trinity. Both paintings, as well as the aforementioned image of the Virgin Mary, have preserved their authentic framing.

The titles of the altars and the images on them are related to the main devotional practices of the Kaunas Bernardine Sisters: the celebration of the Holy Trinity, the feasts of St. Joseph, St. Clare, St. Elizabeth, the Discovery and Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Every Sunday and on festive days, the Chaplet of the Holy Trinity (*Koronka do Najświętszej Trójcy*) was sung holding the Blessed Sacrament. The Brotherhoods of the Holy Trinity and St. Joseph were present in the church of Kaunas, which were obliged to sing on Sundays and festive days<sup>29</sup>. The Brotherhood of the Holy Trinity is supposed to have been active since the church was built, while St. Joseph's Brotherhood was established in 1703 at the St. Bernardine church. Pope Clement XI confirmed this brotherhood in a bull and granted it indulgences on 12 January 1703.

The bull bears the date of its approval on 26 September 1709 by Konstanty Kazimierz Brzostowski (Konstantinas Kazimieras Bžostovskis), bishop of Vilnius<sup>30</sup>. The cult of the Holy Trinity and St. Joseph, as well as the Franciscan saints, was, undoubtedly, prominent not only in the devoutness of Kaunas Bernardine Sisters but also of Bernardines in general, altars titled after them were installed in many churches of women's and men's monasteries. The Bernardine Sisters' spirituality was primarily based on the core aspects of the piety of the male Bernardine monasteries at which they were being established.

Obviously, a special emphasis in Kaunas was laid on the devotion to the Holy Trinity – not only the high altar but also the Bernardine Church bore this title. The composition of the altarpiece of the Holy Trinity is traditional, painted according to the recommendations of post-Tridentine treatises on Christian art of the period (Fig. 6). A detailed description of the proper representation of the Holy Trinity, which is consistent with Kaunas and many other Lithuanian depictions of this scene, is given by Francisco Pacheco (1564–1644), one of the interpreters of the Council of Trent's provisions on art, in his book *On the Art of Painting* (1649): "The Holy Trinity must be painted following the sacred scripture, with a focus on the Holy Father who is to be depicted as a handsome, majestic, not at all bald elderly man with a long white beard, as described in Daniel's vision (Dan 7:9), wearing a deep-coloured robe of brocade or other material, with a light blue tunic. On his right, as David says and as the Holy Church affirms in the Creed, there must be the image of our Lord Christ. He [should be

28 D. Ramonienė, op. cit., p. 47.

29 KAKA b. 142 (1804), p. 848, 851; KAKA b. 142 (1851), p. 845.

30 LVIA f. 1671, ap. 4, b. 2 (*The Bull of Clement XI*, 12.01.1703), p. 62; V. Kamuntavičienė, *Kauno Švč. Trejybės bernardinių bažnyčia ir vienuolynas*, p. 4, <http://www.autc.lt/lt/architekturos-objektai/1101> [access 2.04.2023].









7. Fragment of the painting "The Holy Trinity", early 18<sup>th</sup> c. – second quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. The Daukšiai Church. Phot. S. Poligienė, 2015, Archive of Cultural Heritage Centre

depicted] at 33 years of age, with a harmonious face and the most beautiful nakedness, with wounds on his hands, feet, and a flank, and wearing a scarlet robe. The Holy Spirit in the form of a dove shall be centered over them, the angels and seraphim should assist them with reverence and wonder"<sup>31</sup>.

31 S. Maslauskaitė, Švč. Trejybės vaizdavimas. *Potridentiniai traktatai apie krikščioniškąjį meną*, in: *Pamaldumas Išganytojui Lietuvos kultūroje*, ed. G. Surdokaitė-Vitienė, Vilnius 2008, p. 161–162; R. Valinčiūtė-Varnė, L. Šinkūnaitė, op. cit., p. 133.

The Kaunas picture, like other paintings of the Holy Trinity that spread in the GDL, was influenced by the composition of Rubens<sup>32</sup>. An exceptional detail in the image of Kaunas painting is that the globe, usually depicted at the feet of the Holy Trinity, here is held and blessed by Jesus Christ and God the Father (Fig. 7).

The nearby church of Kaunas St. George the Martyr Franciscan Observant Convent<sup>33</sup> also had an altar of the Holy Trinity with a picture of a similar triangular composition on it. Established a bit earlier than in Kaunas, the high altar of the church of St. Michael the Archangel of Vilnius Bernardine Sisters contained the iconography of the Holy Trinity, as well, though developed in a distinctive way, with the gaze being directed primarily at the Crucified. The figures of the Holy Trinity are situated at different levels of the altar retable – the image of the Crucified in a central part, the Throne of God's the Father Grace on the second level above, and at the very top – the Holy Spirit<sup>34</sup>. Images of the Holy Trinity were also frequent depictions in other Bernardine Convents in Lithuania – in Vilnius, Kretinga (Kretynga), Tytuvėnai (Cytowiany), Troškūnai (Traszkuny)<sup>35</sup>. Looking further afield at the Bernardine monasteries of the GDL, we come to know that the painting of the same title was on a high altar of the Slanimas Bernardine Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Słonim, Слонім), and the image of the Holy Trinity on the top<sup>36</sup>; the high altar of

32 D. Ramonienė, op. cit., p. 51.

33 R. Valinčiūtė-Varnė, L. Šinkūnaitė, op. cit., p. 152–153.

34 Exhaustive analysis of the altar's iconography: I. Šurkutė, *Vilniaus Šv. Arkangelo Mykolo bažnyčios didžiojo altoriaus ikonografija*, in: *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės moterų vienuolijos: istorija ir paveldas*, ed. A. Vasiliauskienė, Kaunas 2014, p. 211–226.

35 R. Valinčiūtė-Varnė, I. Šinkūnaitė, op. cit., p. 155–156.

36 M. Kałamajska-Saeed, *Kościół parafialny p.w. Niepokalanego Poczęcia Najśw. Marii Panny i klasztor*

the Brest-Litovsk Bernardine Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Brześć Litewski, Брэст) was adorned with a replica of Częstochowa Virgin Mary depicting the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, highly revered by worshippers, on the second level there was a picture of the Holy Trinity and one more on the second level of the altar of the Crucifixion Chapel<sup>37</sup>. It is interesting to note that in all of the above-mentioned sanctuaries, with the exception of Vilnius and Kaunas Bernardine Churches, the images of the Holy Trinity were mainly situated on second levels of the altars, therefore the observation that Trinitarian iconography was dominant, though not the most important theme among the Franciscan Observants can be approved<sup>38</sup>. Actually, the examples of Bernardine Churches in Kaunas and Vilnius testify to the Holy Trinity as the dominant aspect of devoutness in them. The popularity of the Holy Trinity in the Bernardine tradition is primarily related to the person of Jesus Christ, the post-Tridentine conception states that “God in the Old Testament is a manifestation of the Son, but not of the Eternal Father or the Holy Spirit”<sup>39</sup>. For an even more suggestive revelation of Christ and his torture, as mentioned above, the Kaunas Bernardine Church had an altar of the Crucified and, as it will be noticed further, an altar of Jesus at the Pillar – a venerated relic of the True Cross.



8. St. Joseph, second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c. – early 18<sup>th</sup> c., overpainted.  
Phot. A. Baltėnas, 2020

bernardynek, in: *Materiały do dziejów sztuki sakralnej na ziemiach wschodnich dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, part 2: *Kościół i klasztory rzymskokatolickie dawnego województwa nowogrodzkiego*, vol. 3: *Miasto Słonim*, ed. eadem, Kraków 2013, p. 96, 122.

37 M. Zgliński, *Zarys dziejów i urbanistyki Brześcia oraz rysy historyczne jego nieistniejących kościołów i klasztorów rzymskokatolickich*, in: *Materiały...*, op. cit., part 5: *Kościół i klasztory rzymskokatolickie dawnego województwa brzeskolitewskiego*, vol. 1, ed. idem, Kraków 2013, p. 58, 66-67.

38 R. Valinčiūtė-Varnė, I. Šinkūnaitė, op. cit., p. 156.

39 S. Maslauskaitė, op. cit., p. 160.

The image of St. Joseph is depicted according to one of the canonical iconographic schemes – a full-figured image, the arms embracing the Infant Jesus against a low-lying horizon landscape. In the 19<sup>th</sup>-century descriptions of visitations, a silver lily, the main attribute of the saint and a symbol of chastity, was also mentioned, which is absent both in today's



pictorial version and in a framing (Fig. 8). The painting, likewise the image of the Virgin Mary, has probably been repainted, but more research is to be made to confirm this. The veneration of St. Joseph in the monasteries of the GDL may have been influenced by the exceptional devotion of the Cracow Bernardines to this saint. The first Bernardine nuns came and settled in Lithuania just from Cracow. The church of the Cracow Monastery, which still functions today, is the Church of St. Joseph with an image on the high altar of this saint<sup>40</sup>. In Cracow, as well as throughout Poland and the GDL, St. Joseph was highly adored as the Lord's Nourisher and as a Fiancé of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The wars of the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, the war with Sweden, particularly encouraged the devotion to St. Joseph. The whole country, including Cracow, went through many hardships, disease and famine spread and decimated the city. The magistrate asked the Holy See to grant the city a special protection of St. Joseph. The Holy Father Clement XI responded positively to this request and on 23 March 1715 granted the city a special patronage of him. The religious life of the Bernardine Sisters was shaped by following the virtues of St. Joseph and relying entirely on his protection. Sister Teresa Zadzik, the founder of the monastery, recommended establishing the cult of St. Joseph in the monastery as early as 1649. St. Joseph was referred to as "the patron and protector of this place"<sup>41</sup>. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the fraternities of St. Joseph were extremely popular in Lithuania and Poland. The veneration of this saint can be explained by the fact that St. Joseph is not only the patron saint of

families and craftsmen but also the patron saint of a happy death or the dying. It is believed that his dying was blessed by the Virgin Mary and Jesus. At the time when Poland and Lithuania were racked by wars and plague epidemics, people lived under the constant threat of death and tried to get ready for it. They created St. Joseph brotherhoods of happy death, for example, in Lviv or Stary Miadzioł Carmelite monasteries (Miadziel, Мядзел). The brotherhood in Lviv was later renamed to the Brotherhood of the Dying, emphasizing its main purpose – the prayer for the dead<sup>42</sup>. Returning to the Bernardine Sisters, it should be noticed that images of St. Joseph were also present in the churches of the Bernardine monasteries of Slanimas and Brest.

Other altars of Kaunas Church of the Holy Trinity were dedicated to the Franciscan saints – St. Francis of Assisi, St. Anthony of Padua, and St. Clare of Assisi. St. Francis is described as a Seraph in the above-mentioned source. This indicates that the subject of the painting must have depicted the stigmatization of St. Francis. According to the narrative of Thomas of Celano, he saw a vision while praying on Mount Alverna in 1224 – a seraph-like creature with six wings, outstretched arms, and crossed legs. At the same time, wounds appeared on his body in the same places as those of the crucified Jesus Christ. St. Bonaventure later identified the creature with the Crucified, and this had an influence on the widespread depiction of the crucified Christ in the sky, with rays connecting his wounds to the wounds of the kneeling and praying man below, i.e. Francis<sup>43</sup>, and the original vision of Francis of Assisi is reminded by the fact that Christ

40 R.M. Gustaw, A.K. Sitnik, *Klasztor i kościół św. Józefa ss. Bernardynek w Krakowie. 1646–2009*, Kraków 2013, p. 163.

41 *Kult św. Józefa. Klasztor siostr bernardynek w Krakowie*, <https://bernardynki.com/kult-sw-jozefa/> [access 2.04.2023].

42 A. Vasiliauskiene, *Šiluvos bazilikos Šventosios Šeimos paveikslas*, "Meno istorija ir kritika", vol. 5, 2009, p. 69–70.

43 *Krikščioniškosios ikonografijos žodynas*, ed. D. Ramonienė, Vilnius 1997, p. 264–265.

was often depicted with seraph's wings.

St. Anthony of Padua was St. Francis' disciple and follower. He was known as an assiduous scholar of the Bible, a renowned pilgrim, a missionary, and one of the most popular saints not only in the context of the Bernardine monasteries but of the Church in general. St. Clare, the founder of the Clarissan Order, is naturally venerated in the Bernardine monasteries as a zealous follower and companion of St. Francis of Assisi, who adopted the ascetic Franciscan way of life. The saint was dressed in the habit by Francis of Assisi himself in a small church of St. Mary of the Angels (Portiuncula)<sup>44</sup>. Images of St. Clare, representing the female part of the Franciscans, can be found in every Bernardine church of the GDL, but it must be remembered that she was not the founder and a nun of the Sisters' monastery of the Third Regular Order of St. Francis but of the Clarissan Order.

The documents of the 19<sup>th</sup> century provide a more detailed description of the altar ensemble at Kaunas Church of the Holy Trinity. The visitations and inventories of 1804–1861 mention all the altars and the works, and describe the fittings in detail thus imparting additional data on the iconography of the altars. The sources illustrate that the high altar was decorated with wood carvings, painted, and adorned with a picture of **The Holy Trinity**. The altarpiece was supplemented with silver mouldings and gilded details, a silver cross, gilded rays of the Holy Spirit and Christ's nimbus, and a silver gilded Mitre of God the Father. The Mensa was wooden, and a carved wooden ciborium was white-lacquered ("biało lakierowane"). A little further on, behind the Mensa, there was a three-levelled stone retable and a wooden level next to the altar. On either side of the high altar, there were two altars: the first one –

of **St. Joseph** with an altarpiece dedicated to St. Joseph, the picture had silver fittings, a silver lily, and silver gilded crowns of St. Joseph and Infant Jesus, on top there was also an old painting of St. Rose [from Viterbo]. The second altar – of **St. Elizabeth** [of Hungary], with the image of St. Catherine on the second level. The third altar had a sculpture of **Jesus Christ at the pillar**, with an image of St. Clare (from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, St. Agnes, mentioned from 1851) on top. The fourth altar was dedicated to **St. Anthony**, with a painting on canvas with silver panels, silver bands, and a lily; the Infant Jesus' crown and the rays of the saint's nimbus were also silvered and gilded. The image of St. Barbara was placed on top. The fifth altar had the image of the **Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Sorrows**, painted on canvas and decorated with silver gilt trimmings, a gilded silver sceptre, and a crown. Above was a canvas painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Immaculate Conception. The sixth altar was decorated with the **Crucifix** bearing the initials I.N.R.I. in silver gilt lettering, the rays and crown were also silvered, and there were two silver gilt hearts and two small crowns. A wooden ciborium containing a relic of the True Cross (the relic mentioned above was in the church since the 17<sup>th</sup> century). There were three other altars near the pillars: the first one, the altar of the **Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary** (according to the visitations of 1804 and 1821), and from 1851 onwards **St. Clare**, on the second level – the image of St. Onuphrius. The second altar of **St. Francis** was topped with the image of St. John Nepomuk. And the third – the altar of **Our Lady of Sorrows** had a canvas painting with a silver crown and a sword.

All the altars were wooden, decorated with wood carvings, most of them had stone retables, and the mensas were wooden as well. The church also had a portable

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, p. 157.

carved altar, one side of which depicted the Holy Trinity and another – the Holy Family. In the choir at the back, above “the women’s place”, there was a sculpture of Jesus Christ, and the Stations of the Cross painted on the walls<sup>45</sup>.

The provisions described in the visitations and inventories of the first half and the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century should have reflected the situation that had gradually developed since the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In this period, the same altars, as listed in the afore-mentioned document of 1787, were preserved, with the exception of the St. Clare altar – in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was only the image of St. Clare on the second level of the altar of Jesus at the Pillar. The altar appeared again in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (mentioned since 1851), probably replacing the altar of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary, present in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The image of St. Clare on the second level of the altar of Jesus at the Pillar was replaced by the image of St. Agnes. According to Jurgis Oksas, the image of St. Clare may have been moved to the new altar<sup>46</sup>. The reasons for this change are not yet clear, but it is evident that the altar of St. Clare has become more harmoniously integrated into the overall iconography of the Bernardine shrine.

In the Church iconography, apart from the above-discussed focus on the Crucified, the Holy Trinity, the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, the main saints of the Order of Friars Minor of Francis of Assisi, Anthony of Padua and Clare of Assisi – Francis’ closest follower, another group of more characteristic saints, or rather female

saints, for the Bernardine Sisters became evident. First of all, mention should be laid on St. Elizabeth of Hungary, who was designated her own altar in the church. Although the sources refer to the altar as the one of St. Elizabeth, but delving deeper into the saint’s life and her importance to the Sisters of the Third Order of the Regula leaves little doubt that it was the altar dedicated to St. Elizabeth of Hungary. With her life she bore witness to the Gospel, fervently following the example of St. Francis. Despite her royal descent, like him, she was famous for having refused all kinds of wealth, for her charity and care for the sick, and for the hospital she founded in Marburg, where she was a nurse. Pope Gregory IX named Elizabeth of Hungary the second Clare and declared her a saint in 1235<sup>47</sup>. St. Elizabeth’s of Hungary relationship with St. Francis and St. Clare was particularly well developed in the iconography of St. Elizabeth Church in Marburg, built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. All three are sometimes figuratively referred to as the Franciscan tercet<sup>48</sup>. St. Elizabeth of Hungary is considered the heavenly patroness of the Sisters of the Third Regula of the Order of St. Francis of Assisi.

Single altars and images, despite the significance of a saint, were not as common in the Bernardine churches of the GDL as they were in the main Franciscan ones. A separate altar was arranged in the Church of Brest, the image of St. Elizabeth of Hungary located in the altar of the Crucifixion, together with a sculptural group on the second level was present in the Slanimas Bernardine Church. In Kaunas, the Church of St. George the Martyr had a sculpture of St. Elizabeth of Hungary on

45 KAKA b. 142 (1804), p. 848; LVIA f. 694, ap. 1, b. 3669 (1820), p. 324, 326; LVIA f. 694, ap. 1, b. 3734 (1828), p. 462–464; KAKA b. 142 (1851), p. 845; LVIA f. 1671, ap. 4, b. 2 (1861), p. 21–22; LVIA f. 669, ap. 2, b. 356 (1864), p. 418–419; J. Oksas, op. cit., p. 220–221.

46 J. Oksas, op. cit., p. 221.

47 R. Janonienė, *Bernardinų...*, op. cit., p. 329.

48 A.E. Kędracka, *Święta Elżbieta Węgierska z Turynгии 1207–2007. 800-lecie urodzin*, Łowicz 2006, p. 74–75.



the altar of St. Rose of Viterbo<sup>49</sup>, the Vilnius Bernardine Church – a painted image in the vault of the monastery corridor<sup>50</sup>. Even in St. Joseph Church of the Bernardine Monastery in Kraków, the image of St. Elizabeth is incorporated only on the second level of St. Anthony's altar<sup>51</sup>. But, for example, St. Elizabeth of Hungary was highly revered by the Łowicz Bernardine Sisters and on the occasion of the 800<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of the saint, the nuns, on their own initiative, published a book on the life of St. Elizabeth of Hungary<sup>52</sup>. Detailed research is necessary for a broader and more accurate generalization of the cult of St. Elizabeth of Hungary in the context of the Bernardine monasteries in the GDL.

We come across a similar situation as concerns the image of St. Rose on the second level of St. Joseph's altar – the sources do not specify which saint is depicted, but the context of the Franciscan and Bernardine devoutness indicates to St. Rose of Viterbo, a representative of the Third Regula of the Order of St. Francis, one of the most eminent Franciscan saints, although without having taken the monastic vows she was not admitted to the Clarisse Convent because she had no dowry. St. Rose died very young, at the age of seventeen, but her life was devoted to the service of God and full of miracles. The church of the Convent of St. George the Martyr had a separate altar of St. Rose of Viterbo<sup>53</sup>, this aspect had undoubtedly impacted the appearance of her image among the Bernardine Sisters.

The second level of St. Anthony Altar at Kaunas Church of the Holy Trinity had the image of St. Barbara, whose cult in

Lithuania was particularly prominent in the Bernardine monasteries. The altar of St. Barbara, as well as the fraternity that was one of the first to be established in Lithuania (1674), was also located in the nearby Church of St. George the Martyr, and in many other Franciscan observant churches in Vilnius, Kretinga, Tytuvėnai, Telšiai (Telsze), and Dotnuva (Datnów)<sup>54</sup>. St. Barbara, like St. Joseph, is known as a protector against sudden and unexpected death and an example of happy death.

Another saint of importance to Bernardine piety is St. Agnes of Assisi, whose image was incorporated on the second level of the altar of Jesus at the Pillar. Although she is not specifically interpreted in the sources, except for mentioning her name, her relation to the main Franciscan friars, as well as the presence of the statue of St. Agnes at the Church of St. George the Martyr in Kaunas, in the Gallery of Saints, leaves little doubt as to the identity of this saint. St. Agnes of Assisi was Catherine, Clare's sister, who followed the same path of poverty and penance, becoming the first follower of Clare. Like Clare, Francis of Assisi himself put her in the habit. The saint founded the convents of the Sisters of the Poor in Mantua, Venice, and Padua. She was buried together with her sister in the Basilica of St. Clare in Assisi<sup>55</sup>.

A photograph of the former interior taken in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and artefacts from the Daukšiai Church, as well as valuables belonging to the Kaunas Archdiocese Museum (Fig. 9) provide additional data on the iconography of the altars: on either side of the high altar there were two Franciscan sculptures, but only one, the sculpture of St. Francis, located on the right, has been identified and survived (Fig. 10). At least two statues of Bernardine

49 R. Valinčiūtė-Varnė, I. Šinkūnaitė, op. cit., p. 276.

50 R. Janonienė, *Bernardinų...*, op. cit., p. 329.

51 R.M. Gustaw, A.K. Sitnik, op. cit., p. 163.

52 A.E. Kędracka, *Łowickie bernardynki*, Łowicz 2005.

53 R. Valinčiūtė-Varnė, I. Šinkūnaitė, op. cit., 271-272.

54 Ibidem, p. 164-165.

55 Ibidem, p. 275.



9. Interior of Kaunas Church of the Holy Trinity.  
Phot. 1939–1940, after reconstruction, Archive  
of Cultural Heritage Centre



10. St. Francis of Assisi, 18<sup>th</sup> c.  
Kaunas Archdiocese Museum  
BMs 193. Phot. A. Baltėnas, 2020



11. Pope Alexander (?), first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c.  
Kaunas Archdiocese Museum  
BMs 24. Phot. R. Ropytė, 2018



12. St. Apollonia (?), first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c.  
Kaunas Archdiocese Museum BMs 23.  
Phot. R. Ropytė, 2018

women were also placed near the high altar, but there is no exact identification of them today. The wooden pulpit at the pilaster on the left, closer to the high altar, contained the statues of the Fathers of the Church, which are today in the Daukšiai Church – St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and St. Gregory<sup>56</sup>. The church also had two more primitive wooden sculptures, presumably of Pope Alexander and St. Apollonia

<sup>56</sup> D. Ramonienė, op. cit., p. 42–44.

(probably patron saints of the monastery founders) from the Kaunas Archdiocese Museum<sup>57</sup> (Figs. 11–12).

With reference to the data from the sources analysed in the article, it is possible to draw conclusions on the main iconographic peculiarities of the altarpieces of the Bernardine Church in Kaunas and their links with the Bernardine devotion. The

<sup>57</sup> The artefacts from the Church of the Holy Trinity, currently at Kaunas Archdiocese Museum, have been identified by Rima Valinčiūtė-Varnė.



earliest sources indicate that in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the shrine was a place for a distinguished veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The image of the Virgin Mary and the relic of the True Cross were held in high esteem by the worshippers, and the Feast of the Discovery and Exaltation of the Holy Cross was celebrated. These clues suggest that the devotion to the Crucified and to the Mother of God was dominant at that time. The cult of the Crucifix is associated with the general origin of Franciscan religious devotion, which encouraged believers to follow St. Francis' example by contemplating the suffering of Jesus Christ. It is not complicated to predict that the high altar was dedicated to the Holy Trinity according to the name of the church, therefore there must have been appropriate devotional practice already at that time. It is believed that the fraternity of the Holy Trinity has been active since the opening of the church.

The main aspects of altar iconography of the Kaunas Bernardine Church had formed after the disasters of the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, the last one being the fire of 1668. The dominant element of devotion was the Holy Trinity. The high altar of the same name was decorated with an image dating to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, in line with the post-Tridentine recommendations for artistic representation. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, an exceptional piety to St. Joseph gained prominence: in 1703, St. Joseph's brotherhood was established, with a dedication of a separate altar to this saint, and festive days of the Holy Trinity and St. Joseph were celebrated. It is believed that the devotion to the Holy Trinity was influenced by the Vilnius Bernardine Sisters whose altar was distinguished by its highly developed and majestic iconography, with a visual emphasis on the figure of the Crucified, while the cult of St. Joseph was probably influenced by Bernardine Sisters in Vilnius. The cult of St. Joseph might have been extolled by

a distinctive devotion of the Cracow Bernardine Sisters. The first Bernardine nuns came to Lithuania from Cracow, and the Lithuanian nuns must have kept in touch with them.

Devotion to the Virgin Mary and the Crucifix was further developed. Two altars were dedicated to the Mother of God (Mary, Consoler of the Afflicted and Our Lady of Sorrows), and altars to Jesus at the Pillar and the Crucifix. The latter was the place where the relic of the True Cross, mentioned since the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, was preserved and venerated. The Feast of the Discovery and Exaltation of the Holy Cross was celebrated.

The Bernardine nuns venerated the main Franciscan saints, close followers, and brothers of St. Francis – the church had altars dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi (with a stigmatization plot), St. Clare, and St. Anthony of Padua.

A closer study into the lives of lesser-known saints, who can be easily confused with other popular saints of the same name, revealed a rich gallery of Franciscan saints, especially female ones. The Bernardine nuns had a separate altar and a feast dedicated to St. Elizabeth of Hungary, patroness of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis, one of the most venerable followers of St. Francis' life. In other Bernardine monasteries in the GDL context, the Bernardine Sisters stand out for their attitude towards this saint. The Bernardines also distinguished St. Rose of Viterbo, St. Agnes of Assisi, and St. Barbara whose cult is linked to the general active devotion of the Lithuanian Bernardines to this saint.

It is evident that the iconography of the Bernardine Church was influenced by the Convent of St. George the Martyr, the church was naturally richer and its iconographic programme covered a broader spectrum. Interestingly, it also contained

images or sculptures of all the saints associated with the Franciscan Observants mentioned above, including those of women saints less known to other faith communities, while individual altars were dedicated to St. Rose of Viterbo and St. Barbara. Following the tradition of the Baroque

period, the funders were also incorporated in the iconography of the church space. The altar ensemble of the church and devotional practices, which were gradually evolving from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, remained little changed until the closure of the monastery in 1864.

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### STRESZCZENIE

Prezentowany artykuł poświęcony jest dawnej świątyni Bernardynek pw. Świętej Trójcy w Kownie, aż do jej zamknięcia w 1864 r. Powstał na podstawie zachowanych źródeł i analizy zabytkowej tkanki zespołu ołtarzowego kowieńskiego kościoła. Główny akcent położono na ikonografię i religijne treści, stawiając za cel rekonstrukcję wezwań zespołu ołtarzy w kontekście duchowości i życia bernardynek oraz nowożytnej sztuki kościelnej.

### SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

Kowno, kościół pw. Świętej Trójcy, bernardynki, bernardyni, franciszkanie, ołtarze, ikonografia

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### SUMMARY

The present article deals, as far as the surviving sources and valuables allow, with the analysis of the altar ensemble at the Kaunas Church of the Holy Trinity of the former Bernardine Nunnery until its closure in 1864, focusing on the expression of spirituality in ecclesiastical art. The following objectives were set: to perform the reconstruction of the former interior of the altar ensemble, to bring to light the most important peculiarities of the Bernardine Sisters' spirituality, and, through the icono-theological approach, to highlight logical links between art and Bernardine spirituality in the ecclesiastical art.

### KEYWORDS

Kaunas, the Church of the Holy Trinity, the Bernardine Nunnery, the Bernardines, the Franciscans, altars, iconography

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