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SOUTH GERMAN INSPIRATIONS IN THE ARMOUR OF LATE MEDIEVAL COMBATANTS

FROM THE SILESIA-LUSATIAN-BRANDENBURG-POLISH BORDERLAND.

ICONOGRAPHIC EXAMPLES

Abstract: There are visible tendencies in the late medieval iconography from the Silesian-Lusatian-Brandenburg-Polish borderland, indicating strong South German inspiration in depicted armour. The presence of this kind of protection on works of art from this region can most likely be connected with political, family and artistic reasons.

Keywords: armour, Late Middle Ages, Silesia, Brandenburg, Greater Poland, Lusatia, borderland, South Germany, coat of plates, Kastenbrust, Gothic armour

Situated on today's Polish-German border, the area of the Lubuskie Voivodeship was in the Late Middle Ages the arena of struggle between Silesian duchies, the Kingdom of Poland, Brandenburg and the Kingdom of Bohemia (Fig. 1). A borderland nature of this territory resulted in an inflow of weaponry from different cultural zones into this region. One can find there military artefacts of Eastern origin (e.g. arrowheads from Krosno Odrzańskie, Zielona Góra and Międzyrzecz from the second half of the 13th-14th century), which might have arrived there with Lithuanian troops used by Kings of Poland, for instance Władislaus the Ell-high. Also 13th-15th centuries Bohemian weaponry (e.g. an awlpike from Żary from the second half of the 13th century, a spearhead with a variable section of the socket from Międzyrzecz dated to the end of the 15th century and a falchion from Lubniewice from the second half of the 15th century), which most likely came to this region with Bohemian mercenaries who supported Silesian dukes, just to mention John the Mad¹. Also elements of late medieval Hungarian armament (e.g. a 15th century throwing axe from the collection of the Lubuskie Military Museum in Drzonów), reached this region with Hungarian troops used in many events by Silesian allies of Matthias

Corvinus King of Hungary and Bohemia². A discovery of two 14th century dagger quillons of South German origin in the northern part of the Lubuskie Voivodeship can most likely be connected with the Brandenburg military campaigns in which they used mercenaries from Bavaria and Swabia³.

Beside these artefacts, there are also visible tendencies in the late medieval iconography from this region, indicating strong South German inspiration in depicted armour⁴. The main goal of this paper is to discuss them on the basis of three examples from the 14th-15th centuries and to possibly explain reasons behind these inspirations. I will focus here on the most characteristic feature of an armour, that is, breastplates.

The first example is the effigy of Henry IV the Faithful (†1342), which is now exhibited in the Augustinian Church in Żagań in the border of Silesia and Lusatia⁵. This grave monument is strongly damaged, which renders its analysis difficult (Fig. 2:1). However it seems that the duke wears a sleeveless surcoat, deeply cut under the armpit and a coat of plates underneath. In former studies the presence of a large breastplate which protected the duke's chest was

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¹ Techmańska 2001, 52.

² Michalak 2016.

³ Michalak, forthcoming.

⁴ Michalak 2016.

⁵ Michalak 2016.



Fig. 1. Political situation in the Polish-Brandenburg-Silesian-Lusatian borderland in the 14th-15th century. Locations of mentioned works of art were marked with dots (1 – Siedlnica; 2 – Sulechów; 3 – Żagań). Drawing A. Michalak.

only suggested⁶, on the basis of two rhomboid mamelieres, to which arming chains for sword and shield were attached. The mystery of the duke's armour can be finally solved thanks to the slit in the surcoat under the armpit (Fig. 2:2). Two rows of horizontal lames densely riveted to the leather or fabric covering are visible in it. The rivets with quadrilateral heads appear only on the upper edge of the lames.

There is no doubt that the layout of the hooped lames from the duke's armour corresponds to the coats of plates discovered in the fill of the lower part of the keep of the Swiss castle of Gesslerburg in Küsnach, destroyed in 1351 during the war between Austria and the Old Confederacy⁷, the fortress of Schönenwerd, ruined in 1344⁸ and in mass graves of combatants fallen during the battle of Visby,

Gotland (1361), discovered in Korsbetningen⁹. Many depictions of these plastrons are known from iconography from 1330-1370¹⁰. These torso protections significantly differ from the cuirass of the Duke of Żagań in lacking a solid breastplate which is evident in Henry's armour. Therefore, the following cuirasses, known from several South German effigies which were made (probably in the same workshop) in 1340-1360, should be considered as the closest analogies to his coat of plates: Otto von Orlamünde's (†1340) from the monastic church in Himmelkron, Rezzo von Bechlingen's (†1320) from St John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bächlingen, Rudolf von Hürnheim's († c. 1280) from the convent church in Zimmern, and Wilhelm von Bopfingen's (†1359) from the Evangelical parish Church in Bopfingen (Fig. 3)¹¹. The rivets are placed in the upper part of the plates, however with regard to the chest protection – only on the bottom one. Based on clear and sharp borders of various lames visible in these tomb slabs, which can hardly be considered as folds of the covering, Bengt Thordeman¹² raised a question whether the armour plates are riveted on the outside of the leather coat. There are however few pieces of evidence (some of them the Swedish scholar already rightly pointed out) to recognise them as coats of plates. It is clearly noticeable that two contours are visible in armholes. The rivets follow the inner one, while the outer one, which extends beyond the former, seems to be a leather underlay or covering. Also the bottom part of the plastron is finished off with decorative large scallops, made of leather, which must have been visible at least on the bottom edge of the last lame above. However on Bächlingen's and Hürnheim's tomb slabs rivets appear on this small piece, which may be considered as a proof for Thordeman's assumption. Additionally, rivet heads are clearly visible on the whole surface of the torso protection, and they would be rather turned inwards if the iron plates were on the outside. Other arguments are provided by a figure of Goliath from the choir stalls at Scharnebeck from about 1370¹³. Arming chains attached to

⁹ Thordeman 1939, 345-354.

¹⁰ We need to list here an illumination from the Romance of Alexander (1338-1344), the figure of warrior in the Levitic pew in Verden Cathedral, about 1360-1370, a monument of Sir Miles Stapleton (†1364), formerly in Ingham Church, a painting in Skibby Church in Sjælland from the mid-14th century, figures of Gideon on the choir stalls in the cathedrals in Lund and in Scharnebeck from the 1370s (Thordeman 1939, 306, Figs. 263, 312-313, 316-317), a tomb slab of Thomas Cheyne (†1368) at Drayton Beauchamp (Mann 1935, 77, note 5), the *Battle with the Canaanites* scene from Guyart de Moulins' *La Bible historique complétée* from the Bodleian Library collection (BL Royal 17 E VII fol. 111), made probably in Paris in 1357 (Backhouse 1997, No. 105), and a depiction of St George from the frescoes in Kirkerup Church, dated to 1300-1375 (available on-line at <http://www.kalkmalerier.dk>).

¹¹ Geßler 1925, Fig. 1-2; Kelly 1933, 106; Thordeman 1939, Fig. 324-329.

¹² Thordeman 1939, 307-308.

¹³ Habicht 1915, Pl. XI:24; Thordeman 1939, Fig. 329.

⁶ Wawrzonowska 1976, 105-106.

⁷ According to H. Schneider (1953, 6) these cuirasses can be dated to ca. 1320-1325.

⁸ Geßler 1925, 211-215.



Fig. 2. Effigy of Henry IV the Faithfull (†1342). Augustinian church in Żagań. 1 – After Wawrzonowska 1976; 2 – Photo A. Michalak.

a single piece breastplate go there through the slit in leather covering. Other, previously not mentioned, pieces of evidence for this kind of armour prove the existence of leather covering. In these sources torso protections are composed of horizontal lames in the lower part, however the borders of various plates are not so distinct. The existence of a solid breastplate protecting the wearer's chest is only indicated by arming chains. First of all we should pay our attention to the effigy of Friedrich von Truhendingen (1350/1360) from St Kilian's Catholic Parish Church in Scheßlitz, Bavaria¹⁴. Others are known from the statue of St Wenceslaus from the Church of Our Lady in Nuremberg, Bavaria, dated to c. 1360¹⁵. His mameliere is crown-shaped, like that on Bechlingen's effigy and rivets with trefoil heads are placed on the bottom parts of the hooped lames. One of the Sleeping Guards from the Freiburg Minster in Freiburg im Breisgau in Baden-Württemberg, dated to c. 1350¹⁶, also wears this kind of body defence¹⁷. Armour of this type can also be recognised on the Centurion's figure from the main portal of the Minorite Church in Vienna, Austria, dated to c. 1360¹⁸. On these two above mentioned depictions rivets are placed in the middle of the lames.

¹⁴ The image of this effigy is available on-line at <http://www.bildindex.de> (Neg. Nr. 403268).

¹⁵ Leyh 1992, 34, 46.

¹⁶ Thordeman 1939, Fig. 315; Gombert 1983, 38-39.

¹⁷ Bengt Thordeman (1939, 306) listed this depiction as an example of plastrons composed of horizontal lames, without a solid breastplate. In my opinion this assumption is contradicted by the presence of arming chains there.

¹⁸ Parucki 1995, 179, 227.

In my opinion, the discussed analogies confirm South German origin of Duke Henry's armour¹⁹. Considering possible causes of this we should also take into account artistic reasons, for example, that the sculptor who made the effigy came from South Germany. With regard to effigies, one should remember that the memory of the deceased may have been created by mourners. This sometimes resulted in attempts at increasing the prestige of the buried knight with luxury armament (which he actually never possessed) on his tomb slab to make him look more marvellous. On the other hand, we should also bear in mind that in many cases depicted armament is based on the equipment that actually belonged to the buried knight²⁰. It seems also significant that many knights in the court of the Duke of Żagań (who was the son of a princess of Braunschweig) came from Meissen, Saxony and Upper Lusatia²¹.

The next example of South German inspirations in the armour of men-at-arms from the borderland of Silesia, Lusatia, Brandenburg and Poland which I would like to discuss here comes from the effigy of Jan Kotwicz from Gołanice (†1448) (Fig. 4:1)²². His sandstone grave statue is now displayed in the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St John the Apostle in Siedlnica, which is located in the south-western corner of Greater Poland (Wielkopolska)²³. The armour from this effigy is composed

¹⁹ Michalak 2016.

²⁰ Capwell 2015, 52.

²¹ Jurek 1996, 86-87, 210-211, 262-263.

²² Michalak 2016.

²³ Górski 2008, 65-67.

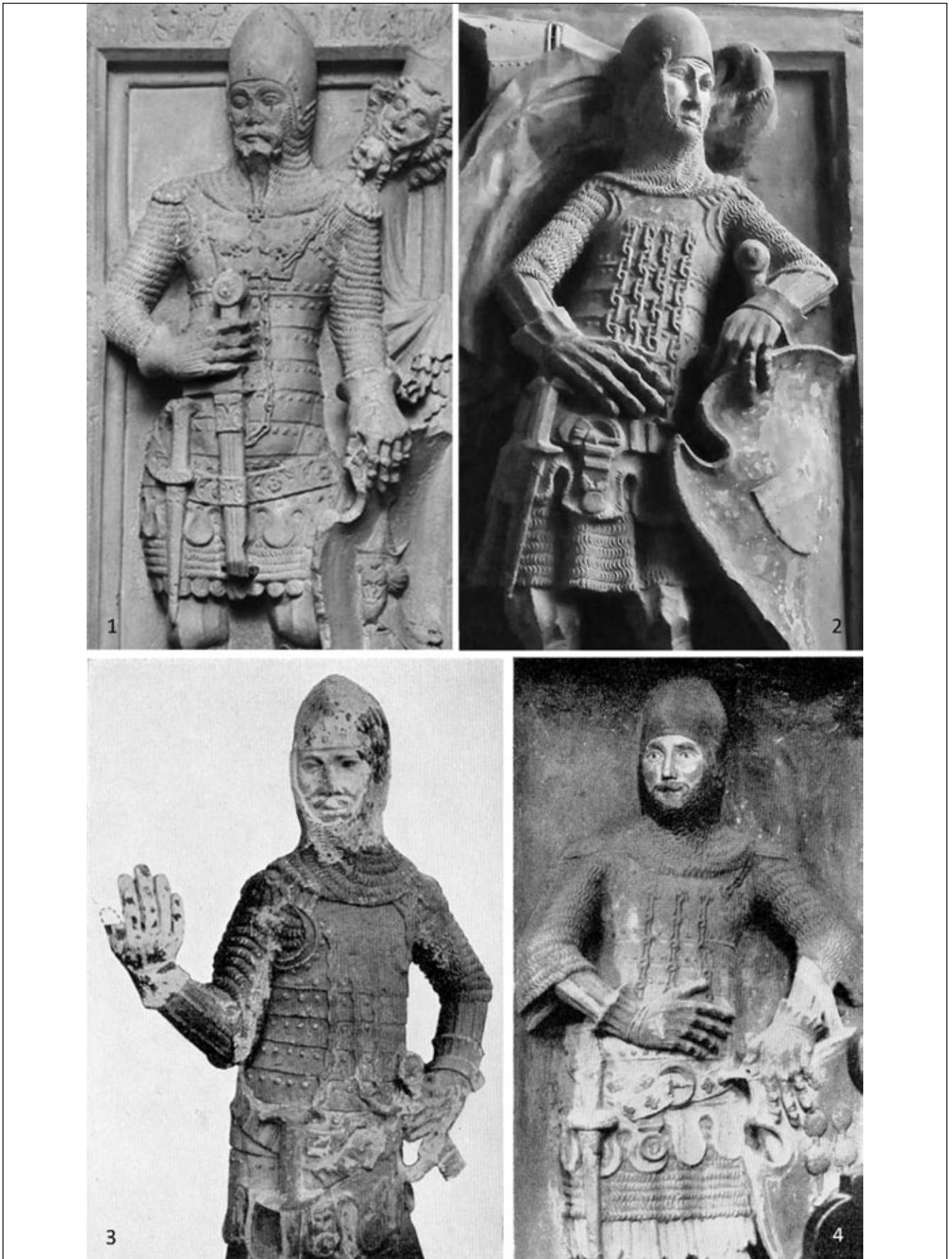


Fig. 3. 1 – Rezzo von Bächlingen (†1320) from St John Evangelic-Lutheran church in Bächlingen. After Baum 1921; 2 – Wilhelm von Bopfingen (†1359) from the Evangelic Parish church in Bopfingen. After Gradmann 1907; 3 – Rudolf von Hürnheim († c. 1280) from the convent church in Zimmern. After Thordeman 1939; 4 – Otto von Orlamünde (†1340) from the monastic church in Himmelkron. After Thordeman 1939.



Fig. 4. Effigy of Jan Kotwicz from Gołanice (†1448). Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and John the Apostle in Siedlnica. Photo A. Michalak.

of a breastplate with a deeply scooped neckline and armholes, perfectly matched to the lower part of the bevor of the great bascinet and three-part vambraces. In the lower part it has three skirt lames. The surface of the upper part of the breastplate is covered with narrow vertical grooves. Its bottom part is unfortunately covered by a shield (Fig. 4:2). However it seems that this groove decoration may indicate that on this effigy Jan Kotwicz wears a late *Kastenbrust* (box-shaped) breastplate.

Grooves in breast- and backplates were supposed to mimic the folds that appear in fashion of German civilian costume of this period²⁴. In the *Kastenbrust*, in a less dense layout, they occur already c. 1340²⁵. The type with shallow fluting visible on Kotwicz's tomb slab seems rather rare. There is only one iconographical piece of evidence and two original artefacts. Thanks to a perfect illustration of this kind of body defence from the statue of Frederick III as Archduke made by Jakob Kaschauer in 1453 from the Wapenwand of St George's Cathedral in Wiener Neustadt, we can recognise the form of the lower part of the breastplate (Fig. 5:1)²⁶. It is of slightly rounded shape with a strong medial ridge and a single waist articulation²⁷. It is ornamented

with densely set narrow flutes going from the centre of the bottom part to the armholes and neck. Another analogy can be found in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum in New York (inv. 29.150.79), discovered in 1840 during the renovation works in Chalcis Castle in Greece (Fig. 5:2)²⁸. The capture of this Venetian fortress by the Ottomans in 1470 is a *terminus ante quem* for this find²⁹. It was most likely made by South German or Austrian armourers in the 1450s or 1460s³⁰. The fault of this piece is now missing. A hole that appear just above the medial ridge may indicate the place of fastening for the bevor or great bascinet. Another recently published breastplate of this form with analogous decoration is in the Frýdlant Castle collection (Fig. 5:3)³¹. It can be dated to the 1450s. In the 19th century, a 16th century fault was attached to it. In all three examples grooves appear on the placard, originating from the central point in the middle of the waist to spread up across the placard surface. In Frederick's monument and the breastplate from Chalcis an initial beam of flutes is narrower than in the artefact from Frýdlant Castle³².

²⁸ Grancsay 1955, 7.

²⁹ Pyhrr 1989, 85; Goll 2016, 101.

³⁰ Robinson 1957, 139; Goll et al. 2008, 36, Fig. 2.

³¹ Pertl 2009, 459-460, Fig. 7-8.

³² The same dense fluting is also visible on the left pauldron (Tower Armouries, No III-1305) which is very similar to the one from Kotwicz's effigy.

²⁴ Kelly 1930.

²⁵ Mann 1935, 79.

²⁶ Robinson 1957, Pl. XXXV; Blair 1958, 93, Fig. 34; Rosenauer (ed.) 2003, 316.

²⁷ Robinson 1957, 139; Blair 1958, 93.



Fig. 5. 1 – Statue of Frederick III as Archduke, made by Jakob Kaschauer in 1453, from the Wapenwand of St George’s Cathedral in Wiener Neustadt. After Rosenauer 2003; 2 – breastplate discovered in Chalcis, c. 1450. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum in New York (inv. 29.150.79). After Robinson 1957; 3 – breastplate from the Frydlant Castle collection, c. 1450 (with a 16th century fault). After Pertl 2009.

The presence of this kind of protection in Jan Kotwicz’s effigy can most likely be connected with his family roots. Ancestors of the ruler of Wschowa came probably from Meissen or Thuringia³³. It could have also been

connected with his high financial status. He held an office of the Starost (elder) of Wschowa³⁴ and thus he could afford to order and import this high class armour from South Germany.

³³ Kozierowski 1929, 53-54; Jurek 1993, 15.

³⁴ Górski 2008, 65-67.



Fig. 6. Master of the Altars from Gościszowice. Poliptych from Sulechów, now in St Lawrence's Church in Babimost, 1499.
Photo A. Michalak.

The last example, dated to the end of the 15th – beginning of the 16th century, comes from the altars made by the so-called Master of the Altars from Gościszowice near Żagań³⁵. His works are spread in various churches located in the borderland of Silesia, Greater Poland and Lusatia³⁶. We will focus here only on the poliptych from Sulechów, which is now on display in St Lawrence's Church in Babimost³⁷. The armour depicted there is composed of many articulated elements. The broad upper torso tapers sharply down to a narrow waist, from which faulds of four lames extend. Both the breast- and backplate were probably composed of two or more pieces. Like in most German body

defences of this period, the depicted armour includes some fluting and edge decoration. Heraldic lilies are located on the helmet, breastplate, pauldrons, and poleyns. Flutes are placed close together in groups, spreading slightly but for the most part running close to each other. Tassets which were largely abandoned in the Gothic style by 1480, are visible in the depictions from the mentioned altars, as in other South German variants. They are of trapezoid form, with a surface decorated with 5-6 flutes and densely engraved (Fig. 6).

These characteristic features are visible amongst many iconographic sources from the last two decades of the 15th century created in Bavaria, Swabia and Tirol. First of all we should notice similarities with the monument of Ludwig IV of Bavaria from the collection of the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum in Munich (inv. R 2481), made

³⁵ Michalak 2016.

³⁶ Walicki 1932; Świechowski 1949; Marxen-Wolska 1976.

³⁷ Wiliński 1948.



Fig. 7. 1 – *Saint George with sword*. Wooden statue from the collection of the Staatliches Museum in Berlin. Tirol, c. 1490. After Rüttinger 2010; 2 – Alexander the Great, a woodcut from the Nuremberg Chronicle (*Schedelsche Weltchronik*), fol. LXXV v., c. 1493. After Himmel 2000.

c. 1490³⁸. Many parallels can be also observed on the effigy of Conrad von Ehenhaim from the Chapel of the Order of the Swan in St Gumbertus Church in Ansbach, dated to c. 1490 (Mann 1935, 92, 103) and that of Eberhard von Grumbnach (†1487) from the parish church in Rimparr, Württemberg³⁹. The afore-mentioned characteristic elements of armour are visible on the sculpture of Saint George with sword from the Staatliches Museum in Berlin (inv. 8179). It was made in Tirol c. 1490 (Fig. 7:1)⁴⁰. We should also mention here a lime wood figure of Saint George and the Dragon, from the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Gift of George Blumenthal, 1941 (inv. 41.100.213). This work of art was made in Swabia and is dated to the last third of the 15th century⁴¹. Close parallels can be found on the portrait of Alexander the Great in a woodcut from the Nuremberg Chronicle (*Schedelsche Weltchronik*), LXXV v., dated to 1493 (Fig. 7:2)⁴².

When trying to clarify the presence of armour with clear South German influences on the altars made in the northern part of Silesia, one needs to remember that most scholars, like James Gow Mann or Tobias Capwell, included Silesia and Poland in the area influenced by the German military style⁴³.

We should also take into account some external artistic inspirations that the Master of Gościszowice followed during his work⁴⁴. Some art historians noticed clear influences of Hans Pleydenwurf and Michael Wolgemut from Nuremberg⁴⁵. A few of them even believed that the Master of Gościszowice visited Nuremberg at the end of the 15th century⁴⁶.

* * *

In light of this study it can be assumed that with the regard to armour the borderland of Silesia, Brandenburg, Greater Poland and Lusatia in the Late Middle Ages did not differ from other countries of Latin Europe. There is no doubt that the afore-mentioned body defences from the area in question present forms of armour which are typical for southern regions of the Empire. This fully justifies the assumption that this borderland was one of the regions influenced by 14th-15th centuries German military style. It is also reflected by other inspirations from Bavaria and Swabia, visible in the Silesian sepulchral art.⁴⁷ It is important to bear in mind that South German influences reached even further to the East. There are some good pieces of evidence with regard to armour from the area of today's Slovakia, confirming inspirations from this region⁴⁸.

³⁸ I am grateful to my colleague Dr Petr Žakovský from Brno for providing good quality photos of this source.

³⁹ Czechowicz 2003, Fig. 165.

⁴⁰ Rüttinger 2010, Fig. 6.2.

⁴¹ Rubinstein-Bloch 1926, Pl. XXI.

⁴² Himmel 2000.

⁴³ Mann 1935, 69.

⁴⁴ Marxen-Wolska 1976, 173-175.

⁴⁵ Braune and Wiese 1929, 66-67; Walicki 1932, 88-94; see also von Pfeil 1996.

⁴⁶ Świechowski 1949, 245-248.

⁴⁷ We can for instance mention here the armour depicted on the tomb slab of Louis II of Legnica and Brzeg (Wawrzonowska 1976, cat. 23; Czechowicz 2003, 128-130), which shows considerable similarities to the effigies of Peter von Stettenberg (†1428), from the Bronnbach monastery, made c. 1440 (Mann 1935, Fig. 1), Conrad von Weinsberg (†1446) from St Joseph's Parish Church in Schöntal (Baum 1921, 124) and two unidentified effigies from Schloss Kreuzenstein in Austria and Bielefeld, Westphalia, dated to c. 1440-1445 (Kelly 1930), or works of Hans Multscher from Ulm (1400-1467) (Mann 1935, 79). We should however note parallels with the breastplate of Dobiesław Oleśnicki Voivode of Sandomierz, depicted on the foundation plate from Sienna, dated to after 1438 (Kajzer 1976, 72, Fig. 14).

⁴⁸ Méry and Jankovics 2013a, 27; Méry and Jankovics 2013b, 67.

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Streszczenie

Południowoniemieckie inspiracje w uzbrojeniu ochronnym późnośredniowiecznych kombatantów pogranicza Śląska, Wielkopolski, Brandenburgii i Łużyc. Przykłady ikonograficzne

Wśród późnośredniowiecznych zabytków związanych z uzbrojeniem ludności pogranicza Śląska, Wielkopolski, Brandenburgii i Łużyc można zarejestrować również okazy, które swoje bezpośrednie analogie znajdują na odległych terenach bałtyjskich i Wschodzie Europy. Występują także zabytki, których pierwowzorów należy poszukiwać na obszarze Czech, Węgier i Niemiec. Pojawienie się ich na omawianym pograniczu wynikało najprawdopodobniej z fizycznej obecności oddziałów zaciężnych posługujących się tą bronią. W źródłach ikonograficznych pochodzących z tego terenu można zaobserwować w wyobrażanej broni ochronnej również silne nawiązania południowoniemieckie. Występują one na rzeźbie nagrobnej ówczesnych elit z XIV (nagrobek Henryka IV Wiernego z kościoła Augustianów w Żaganiu) oraz z połowy XV w. (pomnik sepulkralny Jana Kotwicza z kościoła w Siedlnicy). Silne związki z południowymi regionami Rzeszy wykazują również osłony kombatantów wyobrażonych na kwaterach pochodzących z Warsztatu Mistrza Ołtarzy z Gościszowic, datowanych na koniec XV-1. ćwierć XVI w. Obecność tych elementów na dziełach sztuki z omawianego pogranicza może być zarówno wynikiem kontaktów politycznych, rodzinnych, jak i inspiracji artystycznych.

