

ALABASTER SCULPTURE *ST. HYACINTHUS'S MADONNA*. PROBLEMS OF ATTRIBUTION AND RESTORATION

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Abstract

This article presents an art analysis of the alabaster sculpture "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna", which is now stored in the Lviv Museum of History of Religion. The paper addresses the issues of composition, style and proportional alignment. Comparative, compositional and proportional analysis were used to fulfil the outlined tasks. A method of visual examination was used to describe a conservation state of the sculpture. A hypothesis that this artwork belongs to the Romanesque period was developed on the basis of the carried-out analysis. A restoration programme was worked out. In addition, the article describes the problems of alabaster sculpture conservation. Own graphic materials are given: reconstruction and cartogram of losses, construction of linear composition. Conclusions concerning the problems of attribution and restoration were made based on the carried-out study. Besides, the article recommends further technological examination of this cultural property.

Keywords: *St. Hyacinthus's Madonna; Alabaster; Sculpture; Attribution; Restoration problems.*

Introduction

"St. Hyacinthus's Madonna" is a unique property of the cultural heritage of Ukraine. There is a large gap in the science literature concerning the features of the formation of "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna", its composition, proportion, style. The origin of the sculpture is unknown. The conservation state is unexplored. In addition, there is no developed programme of restoration. For a long time the sculpture is in the museum holdings and is not exhibited. It needs restoration interference, discussion of conservation and reconstruction problems [1].

The aim is to uncover the artistic features of the alabaster sculpture "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna" and work out restoration recommendations.

"St. Hyacinthus's Madonna" is made of yellow-tinged alabaster with the gradation of light yellow to light brown. The figure's height with a pedestal is 43cm, the width – 13cm (Fig. 1). The sculpture is stored in the Lviv Museum of History of Religion holdings since Lviv Historical Museum gave it in 1974. Until 1911, Stefan Pielecki kept this sculpture. Jan Sobieski National Museum (inventory no. 4917) bought "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna" from S. Pielecki on January 30, 1911. On March 20, 1940, the sculpture was given to the Lviv Historical Museum (inventory book of holdings, 1974). All the inventory numbers are written on the front side of the pedestal. M. Khmiliovskiy [2] also noticed that "...since 1401 until 1901 Lviv alabaster figure of Mother of God was at the Corpus Christi Church the, Dominicans' Monastery in Lviv...", and "since 1911 and until now it is stored in the Lviv museums"[3].

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Fig. 1. “St. Hyacinthus’s Madonna”, front and back view

The inventory book of holdings of the Lviv Museum of History of Religion contains a short description of the sculpture: “Mother of God in a standing pose, her hair falls on the shoulders, long clothes in numerous folds, she holds Baby Jesus in her left hand, which holds a ball in his left hand [4]. On the right side of Mother of God there is a snake wrapped around the tree, whose head is pressed by the Virgin Mary’s foot; on the tree – Crucified Christ; the pedestal looks like a sarcophagus with a cut out relief of Saint George defeating the devil and a kneeling person”. It is necessary to add that Baby Jesus’s right hand rests on Mary’s heart [1]. A diamond-shaped ornament is on the preserved fragments of the crown. Crucified Christ on the tree is depicted in a crown of thorns. Figure of Jesus Christ has a generic anatomical structure. Tree branches are openwork [5]. Relief on the pedestal has a basic form: round face with a hint of eyes, nose and mouth. A second figure of the relief, which is also generic, has no details. Pedestal has an upper profile, and the lower part has a cut out furrow. In 1856, *F. Lobeski* [6] described this sculpture in details. He believed that the figure was white and eventually turned yellow. It is worth paying attention to how *F. Lobeski* [6] describes the style of the sculpture trying to establish its origin: “The style of the sculpture does not resemble classical art, to which from the closeness of the place from which this work comes, as well as time, one could somehow conclude; nor does it depict the type of art of the Greek church, but rather approaches the medieval German woodcarving works, or which we see in Krakow in the church of the Virgin Mary; the chisel confirms quite high proficiency of the sculptor, but here and there are certain mistakes and features that are early in the piece and represent the artist as a beginner, and undoubtedly show the antiquity of this artwork”. *F. Lobeski* [6] thinks about the origin of the sculpture, considering possible options and tends to think that it originates from the antiquity times.

The author of the sculpture remains a mystery [7]. *Tadeusz M. Trajdos* [8] is convinced that the sculpture was brought from Prussia: “I am convinced that in the last quarter of the 14th century two English alabaster sculptures, *Vir Dolorum* and *Madonna Jackowa* were brought from Prussia from the private foundation to the Dominican Church in Lviv”. Although Professor Antonievych believes that this is the artwork of a French artist, not German, and the date of creation refers to 1350 [3]. The Lviv alabaster sculpture until recently was considered a

replica of the XVIII century of the Krakow "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna". *Mykola Khmilovskiy* [2-4] unveiled sensational news that the original is the Lviv alabaster sculpture and it was made in the XIII century. Two figures of Mother of God (Lviv and Krakow ones) are very similar, with an identical iconography and composition. However, they were made by different masters and in different periods (Figs. 2, 3, 4 and 5).



Fig. 2. Lviv sculpture "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna" 1856, book of Dominican priest *Donat Piątkowski* [9]



Fig. 3. Lviv sculpture "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna", *History of Lviv*, Volume 1, 2006, page 296, page 310. The photo has no reference [4]

Bożena Opiłło-Nalepa carried out the study and restoration of the Krakow alabaster sculpture "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna". Based on the study, she proposed a hypothetical reconstruction of the sculpture's polychrome. She detected the traces of red, green and bronze paint. Bożena Opiłło studied the sculpture under the ultraviolet light, carried out petrographic analysis, and used a method of INAA to identify the sculpture's alabaster. The alabaster samples for the study were taken from quarries in Ukraine and Lesser Poland, among them: Kraków-Łagiewniki, Kraków-Ruczaj, Łopuszka Wielka near Przemyśl, Zhuravno, as well as from one alabaster epitaph in the Dominican Church in Lviv. As a result, it was established that the alabaster does not come from Ukrainian or Lesser Poland's (małopolskich) deposits. Furthermore, the additions made before the restoration are of the same alabaster as epitaph in the Dominican Church in Lviv. It is worth mentioning, that Ukrainian alabaster deposits are not only in Zhuravno. Besides, the colour and texture of the alabaster from Zhuravno visually differs from the alabaster sculpture. The origin of this sculpture remains unexplained and it requires further research involving a wider range of alabaster samples from different parts of Ukraine. There is not enough information in the publication regarding the restoration means, which Bożena Nalepa used during her work. She paid closer attention to the theoretical study. Nevertheless, we know the following: the sculpture was cleaned from contamination and polishing paste (although the cleaning method was not indicated). Bożena Nalepa did the additions of losses using a DURACRYL methacrylic resin. She used acrylic glue to bond

certain elements of the sculpture. The result of the work of Bożena Nalepa is a well-restored figure of the Krakow alabaster sculpture "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna".



Fig. 4. Krakow sculpture "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna" (1903), published in the 7th volume of "Sprawozdań" 1906 [3]



Fig. 5. Krakow sculpture "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna", photo by Edward Trzemeski, 1878 [8]

Materials and methods

Methods of visual examination, analysis of the previous studies and art analysis were used for the effectiveness of the scientific research.

Method of visual examination. This method involves studying the object without interfering in it. In order to obtain the maximum amount of useful, reliable and exhaustive information, the method of visual examination consists of specific tasks: to determine the conservation state of the sculpture, to describe the problems of restoration.

Art analysis includes the sculptural form analysis – determination of belonging to the style and author; study of the composition form and proportion analysis. Carrying out of art analysis is of great importance for the sculpture identification.

Analysis of the previous studies involves a detailed description of the current state of the problems; implementation of a wide-ranging information search on the basis of the literary sources, which are in Ukraine, abroad and on the Internet. This method aims at studying the object from different points of theory and practice, which involves the arrangement of literary sources.

Results and discussion

Analysis of the previous studies. *F. Łobeskiego* [6], *T.M. Trajdos* [10] and *M. Khmilovskyi* [2-4] wrote about the "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna". Their publications give a detailed description of the alabaster sculpture. The authors tried to establish its origin and

proposed different hypotheses. Piątkowski's book fully outlines the discussion about the "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna" [9]. The additional information can be found in *Gazeta Lwowska*, 1901, as well as in the inventory book No.1 of the Lviv Museum of History of Religion holding [1]. The modern studies of *M. Khmilovsky* [2-4] contributed the most into the scientific literature. He discovered that the original of the alabaster sculpture "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna" is stored in Lviv, but not in Krakow. In her publication, Bożena Nalepa [8] gave short historical data about the Lviv Madonna and visually compared it to the Krakow sculpture. The overview of literature proves that the attribution problem is relevant and requires a detailed study [12-20]. Restoration recommendations have not been discussed yet and have not been published in any scientific journals.

Sculptural form analysis of the "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna". The sculpture consists of two parts: sarcophagus-like pedestal (with a relief) and sculptural group: Mother of God, Baby Jesus and Jesus Christ. The sculpture was polished; the surface is smooth and translucent in the thinnest places. There is a certain hierarchy of figures depiction. Beginning from the relief, where people are depicted conventionally, have a primitive non-clear form. Higher - more details are revealed, the folds of the dress are done. The body of Jesus Christ acquires anatomical features, but conventionality is still prevalent. As the peak of perfection - delicately carved face of Mary (unfortunately, the head of Jesus is lost and it is not possible to compare the technique of fulfillment).

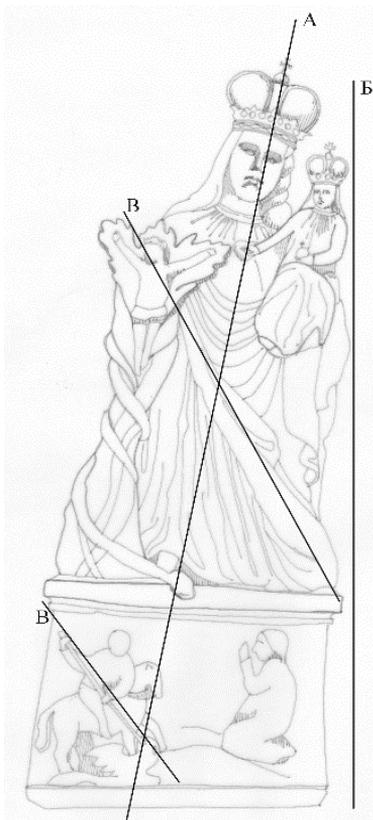


Fig. 6. Linear composition

Having analyzed the composition of the "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna" we can draw the following conclusion – the sculpture's composition has three key points. The first is Mary's heart and Baby Jesus hand on it. The second is the snake's head. The third is the dragon's head. If you line out these three points, you can see that the composition of the sculpture is

constructed in a certain pattern; it is thought-out and not accidental. This diagonal determines the direction of the head of Mary and the direction of the inclination of the crucifixion. Baby Jesus and a kneeling figure are arranged along the vertical axis (Fig. 10, line «B»). A snake wrapped around the tree, a spur in St. George's hands and a massive fold on the Mary's clothes form a composition diagonally to the left side. (Fig. 6, Line «A», «B», «B»). There is a central figure of the composition (Mother of God) and there is a main composition line.

Proportionally, the sculpture looks rather massive. The width of the pedestal fits into the height of the sculpture (together with pedestal) almost three times. A near tree with Crucified Christ on it merges with the Mary's clothing. Such merger visually extends the figure of Mother of God. In the ratio of the width of the entire sculptural group to its height, we have a proportion of 1×2 , that is, the width twice fits in the height of the sculpture (without a pedestal). It is also rather flat and does not have a distinct bulky form. The figure of Baby Jesus is outstretched. Hands are flat, with distinctly cut lines of fingers. The clothing is depicted without considering a plasticity of a body. Such proportion of persons and forms, apparently, does not intend to create a real image. The idea and symbolic character of the sculpture were of importance to the author. The described proportions and forms of "St. Hyacinthus's Madonna" are characteristic of Romanesque art. In addition to the general massiveness, the individual details are similar as well. For example, the shape of hands and head, a large number of folds of different thickness, the clothes that completely covers the body (Figs. 7, 8 and 9).



Fig. 7. The Flight into Egypt, 1120, Autun, France [12]



Fig. 8. Tympanum, collegiate church in Tuma, XII century [12]



Fig. 9. Cattedrale di San Rufino di Assisi [11]

The characteristic feature, which distinguishes “St. Hyacinthus’s Madonna” from the other sculptures of Mother of God, is a tree with a depiction of Crucified Christ on it and a sarcophagus-like pedestal with a relief. Apparently, the depiction of Saint George is the founder’s patron, the customer who prayed for the salvation of his soul. It is worth mentioning, that the iconography of the “St. Hyacinthus’s Madonna” is surprisingly rare. It is difficult to make a definite conclusion about the origin of this sculpture and it requires further study

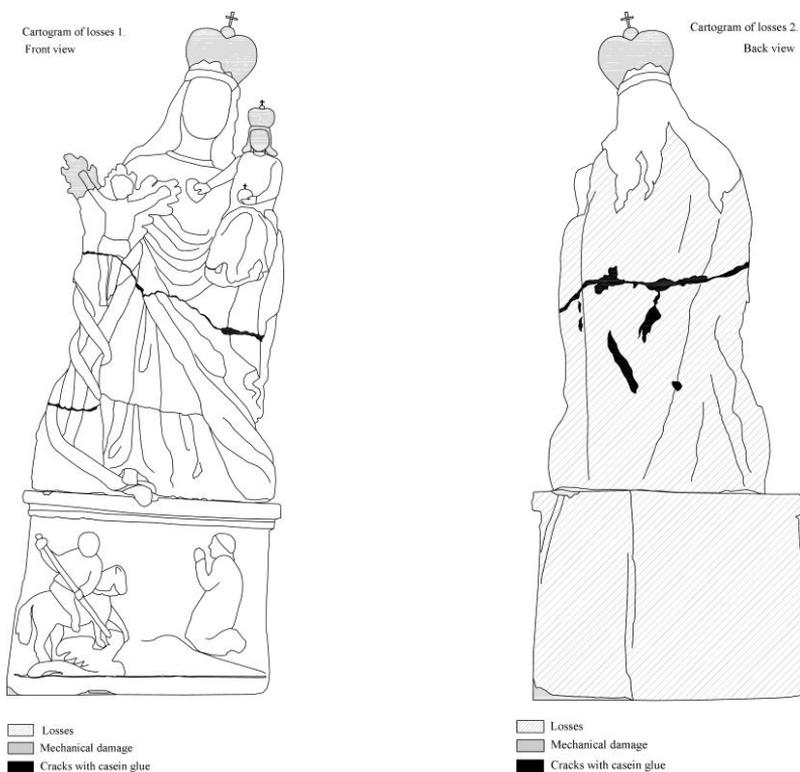


Fig. 10. Cartogram of losses: 1) front view; 2) back view

Conservation state of the alabaster sculpture “St. Hyacinthus’s Madonna”. At the beginning of the XIX century, the sculpture was broken into three parts during the procession. According to M. Khmilovskiy [2], it was then probably that at least 5 centimeters of the stone was trimmed from below for the reparation, or more from the back of the pedestal, because there the alabaster is rough and not polished. The cracks are filled with casein glue. In the places of large formation, the glue covered with cracks and turned yellow because of ageing. The head of Jesus and gold crowns were lost. Moreover, there is no Jesus Christ’s right hand, tree branches and cross on the ball in Baby Jesus’s hand. According to the facts cited in M. Khmilovskiy’s article [3], we know the preconditions of the caused damages: “...a few months before June 20, 1901 wrongdoers attacked the alabaster figure of Lviv Holy Mother. The gold crowns with diamonds, “praca złotnicza późniejszej epoki” (“Goldsmith’s work of a later period”), was stolen, and the head of Jesus was torn off, which “przepadła bez śladu” (“disappeared without a trace”). The gold crowns were the work of the goldsmith of a later period. (Gazeta Lwowska, December 21, 1901). Equally important is that originally the crowns had the shape of a crown, similar to those worn by the rulers of Europe in the X-XIII centuries

[3]. The surface of the sculpture is dirty; there are small scratches. There is a noticeable abrasion on the figures, indicating the stone deterioration. A small part of the snake's body under Mary's foot is cut off. There are numerous damages caused by stress on the figure's front side. Furthermore, there are roughly modeled thick clothing folds, which do not match the general style of the figure at all. A joint between the pedestal and the sculpture was filled with gypsum mortar. Apparently, traces of red paint on the dragon's tail were left after one of the inventory number had been written on it. Minor stone disintegration is also noticeable. Such disintegration occurs in the structure of the alabaster itself; the crystals lose their grip forming a tiny crack, which may result into foliation due to water or steam penetration, sudden temperature changes. The disintegration process is visible on the St. George's head. Five inventory numbers are on the backside of the pedestal.

Restoration problems and recommendations

1. *Cleaning*. Alabaster is a fine-grained sedimentary rock. This stone is not resistant to natural and anthropogenic factors. Water dissolves and washes out crystals of alabaster. Therefore, it is necessary to use weak solutions of alcohol, solvent 646, white spirit, etc., for cleaning, combining the process with mechanical means. It is necessary to clear the joints, cracks and the surface of the sculpture from the glue. I consider it necessary to move inventory numbers, that fill almost the entire plane of the back wall of the pedestal, into a less noticeable part of the sculpture, for example, on its basis.

2. *Strengthening*. The places of breakage and cracks need to be strengthened. Such places are fragile. Alabaster is not protected from external factors, which can lead to further deterioration of the stone structure and increase in size of the cracks. All cracks need to be injected with alcohol-based polymer.

3. *Reconstruction*. Regarding reconstruction, this issue is extremely important and may have a few standpoints. From one point of view, it would not be justified to restore the losses of sculpture. The caused stress damage is an integral part of the sculpture's history, which cannot be hidden. Broken Jesus's head, stolen crowns certify to the attack of the wrongdoers, the back of the figure is damaged as a result of the unsuccessful restoration. This cultural property has lost its original purpose, now it is just an exhibit with a centuries-long history. Thus, restoration of losses may be inappropriate. Instead, it is appropriate and necessary to perform a graphic reconstruction or make a 3D-model of the sculpture depicting it in the original form. In this way, people will be able to evaluate the damage and compare the current state to the original. From another point of view, restoration of losses has a right for realization. The sculpture is a sanctuary to all Christians and for many citizens of Lviv and its guests it can be unacceptable to see a beheaded Jesus or Mary without a crown. Restoration of losses is necessary on ethical and practical grounds. Restoration is not univocal. That is why the issue of restoration is a complex stage of decision-making that should be discussed at the meetings of the qualified restoration council.

4. *Polishing*. The final stage of restoration is to protect the restored sculpture from the effect of external natural factors. Polishing will help restore the glance and saturation of the stone colour. If preserved correctly, alabaster is long lasting and does not lose its features; therefore, it is necessary to create a safe outer space for the sculpture. Regular examination of the sculpture will ensure the proper detection of changes in conservation state and allow taking measures in time.

Conclusions

The art analysis defined that the “St. Hyacinthus’s Madonna” presumably belongs to the Romanesque type of sculptures. The current conservation state of this cultural property is unsatisfactory, due to scratches, cuts, detorted back of the figure, spots of glue, weathering, foliation, tiny cracks, lost Jesus’s head, gold crowns and right hand of Jesus Christ. The restoration problems concern the stone structure, alabaster solubility in water, degree of losses reconstruction. The proposed restoration recommendations include: 1) surface contamination removal, 2) strengthening, 3) reconstruction of losses, 4) polishing (the final stage).

The future studies of the sculpture must include technical examination (ultraviolet illumination, petrographic analysis, X-ray examination, etc.), comparative analysis of the composition, plastic art and iconography. In addition, further development and implementation of a comprehensive programme of restoration on the basis of the proposed recommendations and previous studies of sculpture is necessary.

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