

Summary

The Myths and Legends of Pažaislis: 18th and 19th Century Accounts about the Monastery

The Pažaislis monastery is quite outstanding in the context of Lithuania's sacral art heritage. The monastery was endowed for Camaldolese monks by the Chancellor of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania Krzysztof Zygmunt Pac in 1664. Church construction began in 1667 with his funds. The endower and patron of the construction himself was in charge of hiring architects, sculptors and painters, and took care of their arrival from Italy; construction and decoration projects were coordinated with him as well. While implementing his plan, the Pažaislis church was decorated with marble brought from quarries in the vicinity of Krakow for approximately twenty years. The church was consecrated with the title of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1712.

Camaldolese monks stayed in Pažaislis for more than a century and a half. In 1831 they were dispossessed of the monastery by tsarist authorities claiming that the monks had been involved in the uprising against the authorities. Russian Orthodox monks resided in Pažaislis for more than eight decades from 1832 until World War I. They adapted the church and the monastery premises for their needs, but did not make larger reconstructions. After World War I the Pažaislis monastery was transferred to the nuns of St. Casimir's Congregation, who arrived in Lithuania from Chicago; currently they also reside in the monastery (since 1992). In the Soviet period the greatest loss for the Pažaislis landscape was caused by the Kaunas hydroelectric power station, which was put into operation in 1959. To supply water for the station, the Nemunas River was dammed to create the Kaunas Reservoir, which fundamentally changed the Pažaislis landscape and flooded the lands, cemetery, and the remains of the wooden church, which formerly belonged to Pažaislis. Majestically sitting on a hill in a curve of the calmly flowing river, the monastery was once the dominant object and the gem of the entire surroundings. Today the view is completely different.

The present book contains the published accounts about Pažaislis from the 18th and 19th centuries. Some of these accounts are historical notes, mentions, and references to Pažaislis in biographical or historical books. Others are accounts left by various travellers, which allow us to experience how Pažaislis was seen in earlier times. The earliest known published account about Pažaislis before the end of the 19th century was written by the French traveller Aubry de la Motraye and published in the first half of the 18th century. The end of the 19th century does not signify a convenient division into centuries, but has been chosen because the nature of accounts about Pažaislis began to change at that time. Several wider articles that appeared in the second half of the 19th century were followed by a booklet on Pažaislis by M. Pashkevich (Пашкевичъ) in the early 20th century. Since that time accounts about Pažaislis more frequently gave way to its treatment as an object of scholarly research. Therefore in the present book we decided to limit ourselves with the first accounts until the end of the early period, before scholars actively began to explore the history of the monastery.

The presented accounts about Pažaislis are very different. Only the published texts are presented here. Not all of their authors had visited Pažaislis in person. The accounts can be grouped according to their contents and the nature of description. For example, from the scholarly viewpoint the publication by Konstantyn Tyszkiewicz can be distinguished – though quite small, it was obviously published with scholarly aims: the author reviewed a concrete historical source (the visitation of the Pažaislis monastery in 1824) and the information that it contained. Speaking about the historical aspect, similar texts by Ludwik Zarewicz, who wrote some essays on the history of Camaldolese monasteries, and P. M. Silin (Силин), who presented the first synthesis of the history of Pažaislis, should be mentioned. From the viewpoint of the history of art, the texts by Sebastiano Ciampi, Franciszek Maksymilian Sobieszcański, and an anonymous author from Warsaw (1860) should be distinguished. The first author published the sources of the accounts related with concrete art works and the history of art, including some accounts about Pažaislis (today we would call them rumours). The second author wrote a synthesis of the art history of Poland and Lithuania, one of the first of its kind; very importantly, it included an account about Pažaislis. From that time no self-respecting art historian could pretend that he or she had never heard the name of this remote monastery in the vicinity of Kaunas. Finally, the third author who anonymously published his impressions in Warsaw could be called the first researcher of the frescoes of Pažaislis. Some titles of the frescoes had been mentioned in the accounts before, but this author discussed them purposefully, in a separate group, and quite precisely, while taking into account the general context of knowledge about Pažaislis in the second half of

the 19th century. In the meantime, Bishop Maciej Wołonczewski wrote about Pažaislis not only from the viewpoint of church history, but also as a linguist – he tried to give a short description of the features of the monastic order, which was once present in Lithuania, and even to explain the etymology of the place name Pažaislis.

Above all, it can be noted that almost everyone who ever visited Pažaislis called it one of the most beautiful or even the most beautiful monastery in Poland and Lithuania. Even the Frenchman de la Motraye, who had travelled extensively in all Europe (and beyond), placed Pažaislis on a par with the most magnificent monasteries that he had ever seen. This professional traveller said that the Pažaislis church would not be disgraced even if it stood next to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. However, the visitors quite often provided erroneous information about Pažaislis. In the second half of the 19th century the visitors of Pažaislis almost unanimously asserted that the history of the Camaldolese order was represented on the cupola (in fact, it is the scene of the Coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary). The source of quite many mistakes was Michał Baliński, whose account about Pažaislis in the publication *Starożytna Polska* was probably the best known among other 19th century accounts. He called not only the premises for guests, but also the churchyard *foresterium*, and referred to the *eremitorium*, the most remote and closed part of the Camaldolese monastery containing monks' cabins, as *erem* (a synonym for a monastery). Baliński was the first to spread erroneous information about the endowers' crypt under the church vestibule, asserting that the endowers, their three children, and several servants were buried there. In fact, the Pac family had an only son who died on the eight day after he was born, but later the remains of their more distant relatives were indeed buried in the crypt. When the entrance to the crypt was bricked up in 1860, stories began to spread about marble urns containing the brains and hearts of the members of the Pac family, though in fact the urns were made of glass and gilded tin. Another piece of erroneous information mentioned in the accounts was related with Italian marble. Marble extracted near Krakow (in Dębnik and Paczółtowice quarries) in Poland was mainly used in the construction of Pažaislis, which was correctly indicated already in the first half of the 18th century by de la Motraye. However, 19th-century visitors, above all Baliński, began to make references to Italian marble used in Pažaislis. The amount of construction and endowment costs varies in different accounts from two to eight million golden coins or even eight barrels of gold. In fact, the actual construction costs are not known.

Legends related with Pažaislis are also quite abundant. One of them went that Charles XII of Sweden visited Pažaislis and left a shoe mark in the foresterium. A romantic legend was told about the devils, which tried to play havoc with the construction, until the endower Pac assembled them in one spot and destroyed them. Several legends were prompted by the

austere way of life of the Camaldolese monks, who fasted a great deal (not only abstained from meat, but also survived only on bread and water), woke up at night to pray, lived in solitary cells and in humble conditions. Travellers mentioned a legend that the monks never talked with each other except for saluting one another by the words “memento mori” to remind them of impending death, and then going their own ways. Several authors mentioned that Camaldolese monks used to breed turtles, and some of them even indicated that it was done in the churchyard wells. A legend of the monastery’s founding became widespread in the second half of the 19th century. The underlying motif for founding such a huge and luxurious monastery supposedly was the endower’s sin, which he wished to atone for. However, the so-called legend of endowment had different variants – according to some sources, Pac abused a girl, while cothers asserted that it was his sister or daughter, that it happened either in a forest or manor, etc. It shows that unlike other popular legends of Pažaislis, this one was “unpolished” by traditions and oral stories, and was most probably concocted with the aim to depreciate the endower’s merits.

All the published accounts about Pažaislis from the 18th and 19th centuries are supplied with a short description of the publication and its author, pointing out the valuable and new features of the account and its differences from other accounts. Further a translation of the account and its original text are presented. The chronology of accounts is compiled according to the date when the monastery was visited, and if it is not known – the date when the account was published. It allows us to follow more easily (particularly with regard to the 19th century) how the monastery gradually changed, and what new historical facts were presented.

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