

Foreword

In 2014 the Pažaislis monastery is celebrating the 350th anniversary of its founding. On 3 November 1664 the endowment granted to the Pažaislis Camaldolese monastery by the Chancellor of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Krzysztof Zygmunt Pac, laid the foundations for its construction. Certainly, no less important was the endower's further activity, supervision of the construction and decoration works, and implementation of artistic ideas in Pažaislis. Even though the construction lasted for a very long time, its cornerstone was laid on the day of the monastery's endowment.

Nobody can say when precisely Pac decided to endow the Camaldolese order. He himself mentioned in the endowment letter that he had learned about the Camaldolese monks in his youth, in his study years, while visiting the grave of his relative, Bishop of Samogitia Mikołaj Pac (died in 1624), in a Camaldolese monastery near Padua. A couple of decades later, in 1660, information about Pac's plans to found the first Camaldolese monastery in Lithuania appeared in different sources. At that time the country was ravaged by war, part of its territory including Vilnius was occupied, and the future of the state seemed rather vague. This could prove that these plans were well considered and had been matured for a long time. The entire subsequent history of the church and monastery construction shows that Pac devoted much attention to these works, which were carried out according to a deliberate plan. The church and monastery construction started in 1667, and the decoration of the church began in 1673. The church interior was decorated with stucco mouldings, mural paintings, and black and red marble, while individual details, borders and the entire church façade were finished with sandstone. After the endower's death on 10 January 1684 the decoration works slowed down. The church was consecrated in 1712, and it was not until the 1730s that all 13 cabins, which were necessary for monastic life, were built in the hermitage. The belfry of the hermitage was built in the second half of the 18th century. While Camaldolese monks ran the monastery, Pažaislis underwent few changes, and they were very slow. Even the management of the buildings, let alone their decoration, was poor and insufficient. Thus, when the tsarist authorities took away the Pažaislis monastery from the Camaldolese and gave it over to Eastern Orthodox monks in 1831, the latter above all had to think about repair and renovation rather than restructuring. The Eastern Orthodox monks removed the former altars and abundant paintings, reconstructed some spaces of the monastery and pulled down the larger part of the hermitage cabins, but did not carry out fundamental reconstructions. Moreover, they appreciated the artefacts entrusted to their care and sought to preserve them – the holey roof was fixed and stucco mouldings damaged by water were repaired. Upon the outbreak of World War I, the Eastern Orthodox monks retreated to Russia and took along the artefacts donated by the endower Pac – a painting, bells, liturgical implements and even part of the archive, which were held at the monastery since a long time ago. The German soldiers who used the monastery premises during the war did not behave

any better – having torn off the tin sheets from the church roof for their needs, they left the art treasures of Pažaislis exposed to the rain. It was not until 1920, when the monastery was transferred to the nuns of the Congregation of St. Casimir, that part of the plundered artworks was regained, and the roof and part of the premises were repaired.

However, it is not because of its changeable history that the Pažaislis monastery attracts and enchants visitors. The church dome rising among the forests in the loop of the Nemunas River has been drawing curious travellers for a long time. Having arrived to the monastery, they would find reclusive monks who lived according to the Rule of Saint Benedict and the Camaldolese constitutions. It was not their unusual lifestyle, but the buildings in which they lived, prayed and worked that were the most striking. Distinguished by their Italian architecture, symmetrically arranged monastery buildings were decorated with portals and window borders, arcades and polished stairs of various forms. Already the main gate covered with imported sandstone and decorated with niches, pilasters, sculptures and an elegant cartouche was meant to create an impression of having arrived at a very special place. Having passed a long alley, a visitor would find a nice one-storey building with a representative hall whose interior was decorated with stucco mouldings and mural paintings, and which served to accommodate the travellers. Following the teaching of Saint Romuald, Camaldolese monks offered lodging and food to the travellers. In fact, it was perhaps their only social interaction, as they performed all their activities in the monastery (except farming, which they practiced in their estates). The daily rhythm of the monastery was strictly divided by the hours of common prayer held in the church. The monks would gather for the first prayer already before dawn. In between the prayers they rested, slept, performed various physical chores, ate (usually once a day) and had some spare time, which they usually devoted to pious reading or tending to little gardens growing at their cabins. How surprised the travellers must have been upon seeing the church in which eremitic monks prayed every day! The church of central plan, reminiscent of a large chapel, was trimmed with luxurious imported materials – sandstone and red and black marble. Pac would bring marble from the quarries near Cracow; upon his request new quarries were opened there after the start of the construction in Pažaislis. From these quarries marble was transported to Kaunas on the Vistula River, the Baltic Sea and up the Nemunas River covering more than a thousand kilometres, for approximately 20 years. The view of all this marble might not have impressed Belgian, French or Italian visitors who had a great many marble quarries in their countries, but in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania it was extremely unusual and luxurious. Transportation of marble for the decoration of a single architectural object on a similar scale was unprecedented in the country neither before nor afterwards. Marble was not the only decorative material – it constituted the general background of the décor. The church and some monastery rooms were decorated with stucco mouldings (Giovanni Maria Merli; late 1673 – early 1677) and mural paintings (Michelangelo Palloni; circa 1680–1684). The work of both artists was impeccable and of a high artistic level, and the iconographic plots were well considered and brilliantly

depicted. Various religious themes were represented in the church chapels, vestibule, presbytery, choir, sacristy and the chapter hall, even in the corridors, and different saints related with the Camaldolese order and the endower's family were extolled. In Italy similar and even larger magnificently decorated churches can be found practically only in large cities, as if competing among themselves for the attention of believers or words of praise. In the meantime, in Pažaislis an ensemble of the highest artistic level was built farther from residential areas, in the woods, and its inhabitants – silent ascetic monks – did not try to convert indifferent passers-by by preaching or discussions, but incessantly prayed for the salvation of the world. If the Pažaislis monastery surprises a contemporary visitor who is used to spectacular views, one can hardly imagine how it must have astounded the travellers two or three hundred years ago.

The appearance of the present publication is above all occasional. The main objective is to summarise what has been done in the research of Pažaislis until today. However, the contents of the articles in the book do not quite fulfil this objective. According to the original idea, the articles had to be prepared by researchers who had contributed to the Pažaislis research to some extent, and some publications had to introduce new research. The latter aspect has come out more successful. Due to various reasons the long-standing researchers of Pažaislis Mariusz Karpowicz and Laima Šinkūnaitė did not submit articles; the little known period of Eastern Orthodox monks in Pažaislis and, e.g., the rich collection of liturgical artefacts amassed in different periods remained without attention. However, the book is valuable in another respect – almost all articles introduce new research and completely new scientific material, insights and interpretations. The information contained here will not only allow the reader to better understand the history of Pažaislis, but also expand the range of information and show the fields that have been left without research attention. The value and significance of this collection of articles will undoubtedly be revealed in the future, while continuing the research published today.

The articles address a large range of problems and offer the answers to different questions, while analysing the artistic features of Pažaislis and discussing different monastic orders. The historian Rafał Witkowski explores the context of founding the Camaldolese order and its spread in Europe, as well as the establishment of the Pažaislis monastery. The author includes a wide bibliography of research into the Camaldolese order and different monasteries. The historian of architecture Karol Guttmejer tries to tackle the secret of the hexagonal plan of the Pažaislis church. This type of plan occurs rather seldom in the history of architecture and is quite challenging for the builders, but at the same time allows putting into life original ideas. The researcher draws attention to an apparently insignificant detail that has not been noticed – the cornice around the tambour of the cupola and its particularly large extensions in six corners. As the décor of the Pažaislis church is highly deliberate and each detail often has a concrete explanation, it could hardly have appeared by accident. The author advances a well-grounded hypothesis based on other abundant examples that these spots had to serve as a support for paired

sculptures of the holy apostles (12 in total). Unfortunately, this magnificent idea unprecedented in this country was not put into life, possibly because the endower died when the decoration works were in full swing. The researcher of architecture and sculpture Giorgio Mollisi talks about the sculptor Giovanni Maria Merli (better known as Merlo in Italy), who decorated the entire church of Pažaislis and some rooms of the monastery in three and a half years. However, little is known about his origin and works in Italy. As we learn from the article, he worked in Italy (mainly in Vicenza and Trento) before and after coming to Lithuania, was well acclaimed and ran a busy workshop together with his two brothers. Interestingly enough, in Italy he did not specialise in stucco works, but also built altar retables decorated with marble and stone sculptures, tabernacles and individual sculptures. However, after Pažaislis more elements of stucco mouldings appeared in his work. The art scholar Aušra Vasiliauskienė discusses Merli's works created in Pažaislis and describes the newness of the sculptor's oeuvre in the local context. The artistic style of the stucco moulder and the origin of his ornamental motifs is discussed in great detail. Both articles allow us to look at Merli's excellent work in Pažaislis from a totally new angle. The researcher of the painter Michelangelo Palloni, Giovanni Guidetti, in his interesting article compares the plots depicted by this Italian painter in Pažaislis with similar plots of other artists created in Italy in earlier periods, and indicates the Italian painters of the first half and middle of the 17th century, whose work made the greatest impact on the artist who worked eight years in Pažaislis. The article will definitely be useful to those interested in the artistic prototypes of Pažaislis. Guidetti also prepared a publication of a highly valuable source held in the Monte Corona monastery – a history of founding the Pažaislis monastery written by one of the first inspectors of the Pažaislis monastery and vicar general of the Polish-Lithuanian Camaldolese province, Giovanni degli Avogadri (circa 1685–1687). In his manuscript the inspector presents valuable information about the monastery's situation at the time of his visit to Pažaislis in 1680, explains how the site for the new endowment was chosen, describes the endowment itself and the endower's personal qualities. In his lengthy article the art historian Michał Wardzyński recounts the history of ordering marble and sandstone for Pažaislis, the production of details from these materials and their transportation, discusses different quarries and the masters who worked there. The article reveals the extraordinary character of the Pažaislis décor and the difficulties that were encountered before the decoration materials reached Pažaislis and were assembled. The subject of Anna Sylwia Czyż's article is the silver urn containing the heart of the endower Krzysztof Zygmunt Pac's wife, Clara Isabella. Once held in Pažaislis together with the urn containing the endower's heart, this urn disappeared in the 19th century and quite recently was found in the former church of the Camaldolese monastery in Bielany of Warsaw, which is today called the Seminary Church. There it was held for long years next to the urn containing the heart of King Michał Korybut. The article introduces this rare and little known type of artworks. Mindaugas Paknys analyses various aspects of the Camaldolese novitiate in Pažaislis in the first half of the 18th century – who the novices were and where they came from, how

long the process of training lasted and how it was conducted, – referring to the unique copy of the meeting records of the Pažaislis Camaldolese Chapter, which is today held in Tbilisi. The book historian Arvydas Pacevičius discusses the library of the Camaldolese monastery in Pažaislis and the history of its formation and dispersion. The author reveals which books were considered valuable by the Eastern Orthodox monks who took over the monastery in 1831, where they intended to send the larger part of the books, and which books were returned to Catholics. Sister Lidija Edita Šicaitė presents a concise history of the sisters of the Congregation of St. Casimir who settled in Pažaislis in 1920, their aims and mission today.

Today Pažaislis continues to live its life. Once it was a quiet burial place of its endowers, guarded by reticent Camaldolese monks and impressive by the scale of the endower's plans and rich artistic execution. Later Pažaislis fascinated the Romanticists and inspired some of their poetic works. There was a time when the monastery was plundered and looked pitiful. Today it is teeming with life and a large variety of activities – praying, sessions of spiritual exercises, a musical festival; visitors are offered both food and accommodation. In spring people gather for voluntary cleaning work, and in autumn apples from the monastery gardens reach the farthest corners of Lithuania, as if passing on a message that Pažaislis is prospering. It is a banal truth that as long as there is something to keep Pažaislis alive, Pažaislis will be alive. It would be nice if Pažaislis continued to unite people instead of separating them. What does the 350th anniversary have to do with it? It is just another stage that remains in the past as we move forward. Like the entire history of Pažaislis.

Mindaugas Paknys