intimate relation between the evolution of architectural drawing and Platonic ideals, based as it is entirely on written texts, or accepting his theory that such drawing was created specifically in relation to the design of the non-extant fifth-century BCE theater at Athens, as a visualization of the cosmic order of the pòlis. Ultimately, only new physical evidence, whether of actual scale drawings or analyses of surviving buildings, can effectively support—or refute—these more speculative claims.

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Stanisław Mossakowski
King Sigismund Chapel at Cracow Cathedral (1515–1533)
Cracow: IRSA, 2012, 376 pp., 277 b/w and 89 color illus. €120, ISBN 978838983114

The importance of Cracow as a center of Renaissance humanism during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries has long been recognized by Anglophone historians and linguists interested in the early modern achievements of scholars at the Jagiellonian University and their contacts with Italian counterparts. Among the more familiar figures are the humanist Filippo Buonaccorsi, called Callimachus (1437–1496), who served as tutor to the sons of King Casimir IV Jagiellon (r. 1447–92), and Nicolaus Copericus, who studied ancient Greek, mathematics, and astronomy at the Jagiellonian. In spite of Cracow’s renown as a humanist center, there is a paucity of modern European, and particularly Italian, art and architecture. The centrally planned, elliptically domed monumennt, located on the south side of the Wawel cathedral nave, decorated and vaulted all’antica, emerges as the product of a close collaboration between the monarch and his chosen architect and also serves as a complex model for studying the transmission and dissemination of architectural form and the language of ornament.

Mossakowski portrays King Sigismund I (r. 1506–48) as an erudite, pious ruler with a humanist background whose collaboration with the Florentine architect Bartolomeo Berrecci (ca. 1480–1537) serves as the clearest expression of the taste at that time for both Italian architecture in Poland and royal magnificencia. Sigismund embraced Italian architectural styles early; during his journey to Hungary in 1501 he met and hired the Italian mason and sculptor Francesco Fiorentino, who would work on the west wing of the royal residence at Wawel until his death in 1516 (28). In search of a suitable artist for his mausoleum project, Sigismund entrusted Jan Laski, the archbishop of Gniezno and primate of Poland, to find the right person for the job. Citing earlier research, Mossakowski explains that Laski, probably during his stay in Rome from March 1513 to 1515, came into contact with Berrecci and convinced him to accept the royal commission (31). Countering earlier claims that the presence of Berrecci’s signature in the lantern—“Bartholo Florentino officina”—(through the agency of the maestro Bartolomeo Fiorentino)—eclipses the importance of the chapel’s monarchical patron, Mossakowski suggests that the inscription represents a “typological parallel between Moses’ Ark and Solomon’s temple,” stating that “in both cases, God not only inspired the creators—Moses and Solomon—but also directly or indirectly indicated suitable artists and craftsmen to implement their plans” (258). After introducing the design, construction, and decoration of the chapel in the first chapter, Mossakowski analyzes the sculptural decoration and program according to recurring motifs, authorship, and purported influences. Chapter 2 treats the orders and the portal, establishing the chapel’s architectural patterns; Mossakowski then aims to establish the chapel’s Roman pedigree through comparisons of its figural motifs to those of, among others, the Ara Pacis Augustae, the antique triumphal arch, and Roman tomb sculpture, in chapters 3 through 5. In outlining the comparisons, he offers possible Italian sources for the chapel’s visual language; chief among them are Giuliano da Sangallo, the drawings in the Codex escurialensis (chapter 3), and the works of Andrea Sansovino, Benedetto da Roverzano (chapter 4), and Raphael (chapter 5). Berrecci also seems to have been familiar with the decorations of the tomb of Julius II and the motifs in the Chigi chapel (204–5) and may have come into contact with Michelangelo himself in Carrara in 1505 or 1506 (207).

Mossakowski’s extensive comparates in chapters 3 through 6 and the care with which he assembles them to substantiate his hypotheses are impressive; the illustrations represent a rich repository of examples compiled over the course of thirty years. When considered together as a group, they also speak to the complexity of the processes of artistic transmission. One might even suggest that they contradict a notion of the transmission of architectural forms and motifs that stems from the standardization of architectural ornament via the strict copying of drawings and engravings. Mossakowski’s analysis may lead one to consider that in the chapel the variations on ornamental themes—foliate, zoomorphic, or anthropomorphic ornaments for capitals, pediments, and pilasters, for example—are too numerous to be explained by an exact imitation of prototypes. Rather, the number and variety of forms that appear at the Sigismund chapel in relation to their purported sources recall the ideas set forth recently in the JSAH by Michael J. Waters.
Waters advances the argument that “mutability” resulted from the circulation and copying of architectural prints that “promoted variety over order, license rather than decorum, and were a starting point for invention.”

As Mossakowski shows, the Sigismund chapel not only represented a version of a typology developing concomitantly in Italy but also provided a model for imitation throughout the borderland of Christendom. Its ornament and sculptural program also constitute a veritable laboratory of forms based in part on identifiable sources. One of its many lessons is that invention can intervene, generating variety and novelty.

After an extensive interpretation of the chapel’s iconography and ideological message in chapters 6 through 9, Mossakowski provides five appendixes that include the account records for the commission and full transcriptions of the Latin inscriptions on the monument’s interior and exterior. Throughout, Mossakowski restricts his analysis to the original portions of the chapel; the decision to forgo discussion of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century restorations is deliberate, though he incorporates observations that are the result of conservation work carried out on the chapel from 2002 to 2004. Extensive color photographs, color-coded diagrams distinguishing original from restored components, and a legend Mossakowski developed to accompany the textual analysis enhance the clarity of the arguments.

Although King Sigismund Chapel is accessible to any reader interested in early modern architecture, the nonspecialist in East-Central European architecture may wish for an introductory account of the region’s political landscape and artistic geography. It is important that Poland-Lithuania’s population was neither ethnically nor religiously homogeneous, even though the state itself was officially Catholic. Mossakowski gestures toward this heterogeneity in his analysis of the Latin inscriptions located on the entrance and altar walls of the chapel, which must be understood in the context of the multinational, multiconfessional state that faced the challenge of the Reformation and, at times, of the Ottoman presence. He also states that the chapel was not the product of mere fashion or the influence of the king’s second wife, Queen Bona Sforza, whom the king married in 1518. Instead, the claims of both the Lithuanian-born king and of Poland-Lithuania itself to Roman origins are key to the chapel’s meaning. The Cracow canon Jan Długosz advanced this ethnogenic myth in the late fifteenth century, in his *Annales seu cronici incliti regni Poloniae* (274). Mossakowski asks, “Should it be surprising that in search of the most suitable forms and ideological references for his mausoleum, the king, descended from a Lithuanian dynasty, decided to draw on the stock of forms and on the associated symbolic content of ancient Roman art and its Italian transmutations?” Ultimately he sees the Wawel structure “as an example of a specific romanitas lituana” (274).

The reader is left with a clear understanding that Italianate arts and architecture, frequently created by Italians invited to the court, emerged under Jagiellonian patronage during Poland-Lithuania’s “golden age,” when the state constituted a formidable rival to the Habsburg court. Less conspicuous in the study are the effects of pressure and influence from both the East (the Ottoman Porte) and the West—they proved to be an inherent feature of political and cultural life in this borderland—on the nature of Poland-Lithuania’s architecture and artistic culture. The Polish-Lithuanian state’s decentralization and the porosity of its borders enabled not only neighborly mercantile and diplomatic exchange, but also insurGENCY movements and military conflict, particularly across the Cossack and Tatar vassalages. Poland-Lithuania, as a Roman Catholic *antemurale christianitatis*—that is, a country on the frontiers between Christian Europe and the Ottoman Empire, marked by its location between East and West—was governed by a monarch who embraced humanist intellectual developments consciously and deliberately. This freely chosen cultural affinity shaped the Sigismund chapel’s overarching architectural expression of Romanitas far beyond the boundaries of the Eternal City.

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Note