GENIUS LOCI LASZLOVSZKY 60

edited by
Dóra Mérai
and
Ágnes Drosztmér, Kyra Lyublyanovics,
Judith Rasson, Zsuzsanna Papp Reed,
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A Penitent Judas Iscariot: An Exemplum of Christian Morals on the Eve of Hussitism?

KATEŘINA HORNÍČKOVÁ*

The most powerful family in southern Bohemia, the Rosenbergs, founded the Augustinian canonry in Třeboň in 1367. Following the purchase of the second half of the town in 1366 from the Landštejns, distant relatives descended from the Witigonen, the Rosenberg brothers became the sole lords of Třeboň. In 1367 they confirmed this by founding the canonry, attached to the pre-existing parish church of the Virgin Mary and St. Eligius in the northern part of the seigneurial town of Třeboň.¹ This was meant to be the most important contemporary foundation in the region and in a wider political and religious context, and as such it was even recorded in the imperial chronicle of Beneš Weitmile.

The same year they brought over three canons from the Roudnice canonry, the first house of this order in Bohemia and the center of the Augustinian reform movement. The choice of religious community was certainly not accidental; Roudnice was the episcopal foundation of the last Prague bishop, Jan of Dražice, so the canons held close ties to the Prague archbishops and became the focal point of a new ecclesiastical movement that fostered religious education and spirituality as well as new forms of piety, especially through art. The Roudnice canonry was a flourishing spiritual and artistic center; its original decoration, which survives only in fragments, clearly indicates the novelty of concepts backed by a highly sophisticated theological inspiration and interpretation of themes.2 In many ways, the canons were the spiritual elite in Bohemia at the time.3

As one of the key late medieval foundations in the region, with close ties to the Prague and

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Roudnice religious centers, the Třeboň canonry was richly decorated with wall and panel paintings, sculptures and liturgical objects. As perennial singing was part of the duties of the canonry, a gallery was built in the western part of the church for the singers at an early stage of the building process. Its practical liturgical function is reflected in a large dial painted on the western wall; it marked the hours for the perpetual Prayer of the Church, confirming its use primarily by the canons and the *schola* singers. The gallery also housed an altar dedicated to Mary Magdalene and St. Augustine.⁴

Looking up from the nave, eight (originally fourteen) figures can be seen to look down from the parapet of the singers' gallery, which is all that remains of the church's decorative program (Fig. 1). They once represented the Twelve Apostles around the central figure of Christ as *Salvator Mundi*; now six figures can be seen in front and two are preserved on the side walls: St. Paul on the northern wall, Judas Iscariot on the southern wall. The figures, painted by a highly skilled painter, are under a relief arcade and have generally been dated to around or after 1400 due to their similarities to the so-called "Beautiful Style," a



▶ Fig. 1. Singers' gallery in the Church of the Virgin Mary and St. Eligius, Třeboň (Photo: Kateřina Horníčková).

Bohemian variant of the Gothic International Style.⁵ The figures' moving postures, flamboyant draperies, and expressive gestures represent the final phase of the Beautiful Style,⁶ which justifies suggesting a slightly later date, closer to 1420,⁷ probably either not long before 1420/21, when the convent fled from the Hussites, or after the monks' returned from exile in the mid-1420s. I argue that the context of the early phase of the Hussite wars and young Ulrich of Rosenberg changing sides from the established Church to the would-be reformers under the influence of Čeněk of Vartemberg add an additional level of meaning to the figures, expressed in the inscriptions over their heads.

The apostles represented a model for an ideal Christian community; they were witnesses to the original Christian doctrine through whose writings, missions, and teaching the Christian community came into being. These notions are supported by sentences from the Credo, the lay confession prayer, written beside each figure on the singers' gallery. From the point of view of the faithful praying downstairs, they also represented a higher hierarchical level of spiritual initiation – that of priest and monk. The garments are richly draped, dramatic, and elegant in an effort to emulate what had once been the courtly style. Decorative draperies can be interpreted as an indicator of the refined style of the courtly environment or a conscious imitation of it. Lively gesturing figures with their attributes stand for the ideal Christian community surrounding Christ.

The core group is flanked by Judas and St. Paul, the apostle (doctor) of the Gentiles, who, according to the Bible, were not part of the original community of the Apostels. Here, however, they clearly form a group with them and were commissioned as such. Unlike the core group, these figures' inscriptions speak to God and the viewers. The figure on the left, painted on the southern wall facing the cemetery and the town, is the hanged Judas Iscariot. His unusual inclusion among the Apostles may have been inspired by the concept of an all-encompassing earthly community, including its offenders.8 His position at the left end of the row of apostles on the southern wall of the church is suggestive: he is located in the "earthly" space of the nave, close to the cem-



▶ Fig. 2. Judas among the apostles on the southern wall of the Church of the Virgin Mary and St. Eligius, Třeboň (photo: Kateřina Horníčková).

etery. He was facing the parish gathering, and stood between them and death. Judas's unusual iconography is supported by the inscription above him *Peccavi, tradens sanguinem iustum* (Fig. 2), pointing to his betrayal and role in Christ's death. In spite of his almost penitent attitude and position among the Apostles— which is, to my knowledge, unique⁹— he stands as a warning to those who lose their chance for Salvation by committing a mortal sin. Painted on the southern wall, he not only faced the parish gathering, but also stood physically between them and death: the cemetery behind this wall.

This rare monumental depiction of Judas has an early precedent in Bohemian painting. The initial M found on fol. 94v of the manuscript *Mater verborum* (*Glosa Salomonis*) from around 1240 shows the body of Judas hanging from a tree with a similar inscription *Peccavi trade/s.s.* (*Peccavi tradens sanguinum sanctum*) in an unusually expressive manner. Here Judas is depicted motionless, with closed eyes, showing no sign of life. His dead decaying body is green (Fig. 3); the scene is



▶ Fig. 3. Mater verborum (Glosa Salomonis), Prague, Library of the National Museum, KNM X A 11, fol. 94v. Source: Pavel Brodský, Katalog iluminovaných rukopisů Knihovny Národního muzea v Praze (Prague: KLP, 2000), 86, cat. no. 72.

a horrifyingly realistic condemnation of his betrayal and an anti-exemplum meant to deter.

Judas's counterpart in the Třeboň singers' gallery is the figure of St. Paul, facing the community from the northern wall, adjacent to the ambit and the monastic community spaces. A large, richly draped figure with two inscriptions (unusual in the context of other depictions) that identify him as the apostle of the Gentiles, as a teacher obediently undertaking his task given by God — Paul Doctor gentium, inspired by Habakuk's Specialis magister gentium — asking God, Domine quid me vis facere? ("Lord, what do you want me to do?" Acts 9:6; Fig. 4). This biblical quotation resonates with the call of the monastic community of the canons regular, whose multifaceted tasks included continuous prayers, services for laity, religious education, and charity. Paul is pondering his tasks and the future path of his apostolic service, the text stressing his right choice vis-à-vis the History of Salvation and Christ's Final Coming. As the counterpart to Judas, he represents here the right path for a pious man, and



► Fig. 4. St. Paul on the singers' gallery, Church of the Virgin Mary and St. Eligius, Třeboň (photo: Kateřina Horníčková)

a model apostolic teacher for the community of cannons regular.

This context of the Třeboň Judas, and its contrast with the earlier manuscript representation, show a marked shift in meaning. His inclusion in the group of apostles, which normally stands for the unspoiled early Church, is highly unusual. Giving Judas a choice and representing him as an active figure making (wrong) choices is wholly new to me. In Třeboň, moreover, he is represented as a counterpart of St. Paul, who, called to duty, chose the right path of teaching the Gentiles. The images show them as antithetic moral models. St. Paul on the right side — the evangelical side, close to the door leading to the convent ambit — represents the right choice of faith and Judas on the left, close to the door through which laypeople entered the church, stands for the wrong choice of betrayal. Warning of sin and eternal damnation, Judas stands against the path of St. Paul, the path which the religious community of canons are committed to pursue. This interpretation also resonates with the early times of religious conflict in Bohemia that led to the Hussite wars, which were explicitly focused on the moral choice of priests and laypeople regarding obedience to the Church authority, betrayal, and the right path to Salvation.

Notes

- Foundation charter on May 12, 1367, foundation stone laid on May 25, 1367, followed by further donations, Pavel Vlček, Petr Sommer and Dušan Foltýn, Encyklopedie českých klášterů (Prague: Libri, 1998), 674; Pavel Zahradník, "Třeboň, klášter augustiniánů kanovníků, SHP - 1. sv. (archivní rešerše)" [Třeboň, cloister of the Augustinian canons], in Bývalý klášter augustiniánů kanovníků v Třeboni: Standardní stavebně historický průzkum. Textová část – archivní rešerše; Národní památkový ústav, ústřední pracoviště [henceforth SHP], ed. Petr Macek et al. (Prague: Národní památkový ústav, 2009), 6; Josef Salaba, K dějinám někdejšího augustiniánského kláštera v Třeboni [On the history of the former Augustinian canonry in Třeboň], separate offprint kept in the Státní vědecká knihovna (State Research Library) (České Budějovice, n.d.), 274; Josef Vačkář, Dějiny někdejší slavné Řeholní kanonie svatého Augustina v Třeboni a některé památnosti tohoto starobylého města. Dle hodnověrných pramenů sestavil Josef Vačkář [History of the former glorious canonry of St. Augustin in Třeboň and selected monuments of this historical town] (Prague: Tiskem Hynka Fuchse, 1867), 10-11.
- Jan Royt, "Bischoff Johann von Draschitz als Kunstmäzen," in Böhmen und das deutsche Reich. Ideen und Kunsttransfer im Vergleich (13-16. Jahrhundert), ed. Eva Schlotheuber and Hubertus Seibert (Munich: Collegium Carolinum, 2009), 265–282; Jan Royt, Mistr Třeboňského oltáře [Master of Třeboň Altarpiece] (Prague: Karolinum, 2015), 83, 95.
- Lucie Doležalová, Michal Dragoun and Adéla Ebersonová, eds. *Ubi est finis huius libri deus scit: Středověká knihovna augustiniánských kanovníků v Roudnici nad Labem* [The medieval library of the Augustinian canons in Roudnice nad Labem] (Prague: Scriptorium, 2015); Jaroslav Kadlec, "Raudnitz Roudnice," in *Die Stifte der Augustiner Chorherren in Böhmen, Mahren und Ungarn Die Stifte der Augustiner-Chorherren in Böhmen, Mähren und Ungarn*, ed. Floridus Röhrig (Klosterneuburg and Vienna: Mayer & Comp., 1994), 180.
- The location of the altar devoted to a penitent saint favoured by reformed monastic communities (St. Mary

- Magdalene) and to St. Augustine, the titular founding saint of the Augustinians, suggest that the gallery was used by the convent for the daily prayers. When opened in 1730, consecration titulus and relics were found. Jaroslav Kadlec, Klášter augustiniánů kanovníků v Třeboni [Cloister of Augustinian canons in Třeboň] (Prague: Karolinum, 2004), 69. The list of relics as reported by a later, eighteenth-century chronicle of the canonry: Anno Domini MCCCLXXVIII consecratum est hoc altare a venerabili patre fratre Wenceslao Nicopolensi episcopo et hae reliquiae videlicet S. M. Magdalenae et aliarum sanctum virginum et viduarum continentur inclusae, titulus vero S. M. Magdalenae et S. Augustino annotatur. František Mareš and Jan Sedláček, Soupis památek historických a uměleckých X: Politický okres třeboňský [Monuments of Třeboň District] (Prague: Nákladem Archeologické komise, 1900), 74. The year 1378 may have been a mistake in transcription, 1388 is more plausible, as Wenceslas became bishop of Nicopolis only in 1385-1389 (Royt, Mistr Třeboňského oltáře, 93, quoting Eva Kolářová).
- Stejskal, Karel, "Nástěnné malířství 2. poloviny 14. a počátku 15. století" [Mural painting from the mid-fourteenth to the beginning of fifteenth century], *Dějiny* českého výtvarného umění, vol. 1:1 (Prague: Academia, 1984), 350.
- ⁶ Stejskal, "Nástěnné malířství," 350.
- Other authors date it to after 1400, or around 1410, eg. Zuzana Všetečková, "Bemerkungen zu den Wandmalereien in Südböhmen," Umění 41 (1993): 183-184. František Mareš dates them to 1411, the time of reconstruction works, but gives St. Barnabas instead of St. Paul. Around 1410-1417, a large figure of St. Christopher was painted on the northern wall of the nave, and the decoration probably continued on the choir, although it is likely by a different hand. The paintings were overpainted in 1902-1903 by the Viennese painter and restorer Theodor Melichar (Melicher), which makes the judgement about style rather difficult.
- The IMAREAL database contains no example of the hanged Judas iconography in the context of the Apostle group. Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, www.imareal.sbg.ac.at, last accessed October 19 2018. The Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie does not contain examples of Judas' inclusion among the Apostles after his sin, and vice versa, in his death he is always depicted alone. LCI, 444–448.
- ⁹ Cf. Ingrid Westerhoff, "Der moralisierte Judas. Mittelalterliche Legende, Typologie, Allegorie im Bild", Aachener Kunstblätter 61 (1995–1997), 85–156, esp. 136–7. Judas legend was known and depicted in the region in manuscript narrative cycles, ibid. 88–9.
- Prague, Library of the National Museum, KNM X A 11. Pavel Brodský, Katalog iluminovaných rukopisů Knihovny Národního muzea v Praze [Catalogue of illuminated manuscripts in the Library of the National Museum in Prague] (Prague: KLP, 2000), 86, cat. no. 72. The origin of the manuscript is unknown, it is generally associated with a Bohemian Benedictine monastery.