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An Ideal Image of the Past. The Iconography of Saint John the Baptist in Early Modern Coats of Arms in Lesser Poland

ABSTRACT

The article refers to the iconography of Saint John the Baptist in early modern coats of arms in Lesser Poland. It provides some works of Polish researchers of auxiliary sciences of history and focuses on the civic iconography issue, especially the Saint John the Baptist image that occurred in many seals and coats of arms in early modern period. The author is deeply focused on *Prodromos*' life and presents spread of his cult all around the medieval Europe, including Lesser Poland. Then he explains some images of St. John the Baptist in heraldry of few towns, like for example Frysztak, Koprzywnica, Krościenko, Piwniczna, Dobczyce, Proszowice, Nowa Góra, Dukla or Skalmierz. Further those cities' coats of arms were created from depictions that occurred on seals. We can see here Saint John's symbol as well as his attribute, in a form of the Lamb of God or the decapitated head put in a bowl plate. It seems that the meaning of them is not so obvious as it looks like, so the author is trying to explain why *Prodromos* depictions appeared on seals and coats of arms and if they were always connected with Saint John.

KEYWORDS

Saint John the Baptist, past, image, seal, coat of arms, heraldry, civic iconography, Lesser Poland, early modern period

Introduction

Iconography of St. John the Baptist has been a subject of a wide interest, both of Polish¹ and foreign² researchers. Among those appeared also scholars in auxiliary sciences of history, because John was portrayed in numerous coats of arms of Polish towns.

First steps in researching the subject were done before the II World War by Marian Gumowski, who analysed the oldest relics of Silesian sigillography and numismatics, including of course those with depictions of St. John the Baptist, like seals of clergy or coins minted by dukes during the fragmentation of Kingdom of Poland.³ John's subject appeared also in two other publications of the quoted author, published in the sixties and dedicated to former seals and coats of numerous Polish towns like: Dobczyce, Proszowice, Skalmierz, Krościenko, Frysztak, Lidzbark Warmiński, Zakroczym, Sulęcín, Wrocław and Nysa.⁴ Still, Gumowski made a few mistakes in interpreting St. John's symbolism in context of civic heraldry. Unfortunately, similar mistakes were made later by other

¹ See B. Bartkowski, "Agnus Dei", [in:] *Encyklopedia katolicka*, t. 1, Lublin 1973, kol. 187; H. Wegner, "Baranek Boży. III. W ikonografii", [in:] *Encyklopedia katolicka*, t. 2, Lublin 1976, kol. 7–9; R. Knapiński, "Jan Chrzciciel. V. W ikonografii", [in:] *Encyklopedia katolicka*, t. 7, Lublin 1997, kol. 778–780; idem, *Titulus ecclesiae. Ikonografia wezwań współczesnych kościołów katedralnych w Polsce*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 352–363; S. Kobieliński, *Bestiarium chrześcijańskie*, Warszawa 2002, pp. 59–61; idem, *Niebiańska Jerozolima. Od sacrum miejsca do sacrum modelu*, Żabki 2004, pp. 43–56; P. Ratkowska, "The Romans of an Altarpiece with the Legend of St John the Baptist. An Unpublished Work of the Franco-Gothic Style in the National Museum in Warsaw", *Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie* 1970, 11, pp. 1–18; L. Rotter, "Zwierzęta jako atrybuty świętych", [in:] *Symbolika zwierząt: symbol – znak – przesłanie*, red. L. Rotter, J. Marecki, Kraków 2009, pp. 118–119.

² E. Kirschbaum, "Lamm, Lamm Gottes", [in:] *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, Bd. III, hrsg. E. Kirschbaum, Freiburg 1970, pp. 7–14; L. Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien*, t. 2, Paris 1956, pp. 432–463; V. Spring Reed, *Piety and Virtue. Image of Salome with the Head of John the Baptist in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, New Brunswick 2002; S. Yandim, "The Appearance of The Winged-Image of St John the Baptist in the Thirteenth-century Byzantine Painting", [in:] *On ikinci ve on üçüncü yüzyıllarda Bizans dünyasında değişim*, publ. A. Ödekan, E. Akyürek, N. Necipoglu, np 2010, pp. 626–663; Z. Všetecová, "Nástenné malby v kostele sv. Jana Kritele v Jindřichově Hradci do konce vlády Lucemburku", *Umení* 2009, 57, pp. 2–25; E. Weiss, "Johannes der Tauffer (Baptista), der Vorläufer (Prodromos)", [in:] *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, Bd. VII, Freiburg 1974, pp. 164–190.

³ M. Gumowski, "Pieczęcie Śląskie do końca XIV wieku", [in:] *Historia Śląska od najdawniejszych czasów do 1400 roku*, t. 3, red. W. Semkowicz, Kraków 1936, pp. 249–440; idem, "Moneta na Śląsku do końca XIV wieku", [in:] *Historia Śląska od najdawniejszych czasów do 1400 roku*, op. cit., pp. 553–737.

⁴ Idem, *Herby miast polskich*, Warszawa 1960; idem, *Najstarsze pieczęcie miast polskich XIII i XIV w.*, Toruń 1960.

researchers discussing the subject – Andrzej Plewako, Józef Wanag⁵ and Piotr Gołdyn.⁶ Fortunately, numerous rectifications and new adjudications in the subject of St. John's iconography on arms and seals in Poland were made in works of Henryk Seroka,⁷ Marek Adamczewski⁸ and Wojciech Strzyżewski.⁹ The subject, though, is still not researched thoroughly. Taking into account disagreements among authors, a re-examination of John's iconography in civic heraldry in Lesser Poland is necessary. Numerous attributes of the Saint, like his head placed on a plate or the Lamb of God, despite appearances, are not always tied to the cult of Predecessor of Christ and are difficult to interpret correctly.

Life and cult of Saint John the Baptist

John was a son of a priest Zechariah and Elizabeth, relative of St. Mary.¹⁰ While still being young, he went to the desert, where he led a modest life as a hermit. Evangelists underline that "[...] (he) wore clothes from camel's fur, fastened with a leather belt and ate locust and honey."¹¹ When John was around 28 years old, he begun his missionary work that attracted crowds of listeners.¹² Those that adopted his teachings were baptised in Jordan, as a sign of spiritual change.¹³ It was John that recognized the Messiah in Jesus, pointing at him with a gesture and uttering significant words:

"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (J 1, 29).

This is why, in Christian tradition, St. John the Baptist is perceived as a herald preceding the coming of Christ.¹⁴ For public condemnation of Herod's incest

⁵ A. Plewako, J. Wanag, *Herbarz miast polskich*, Warszawa 2004.

⁶ P. Gołdyn, *Symbolika religijna i kościelna w herbach miast polskich do końca XX wieku*, Warszawa 2008.

⁷ H. Seroka, *Herby miast małopolskich do końca XVIII w.*, Warszawa 2002.

⁸ M. Adamczewski, *Pieczęcie miast wielkopolskich do końca XVIII w.*, Warszawa 2000.

⁹ W. Strzyżewski, *Treści symboliczne herbów miejskich na Śląsku, Ziemi Lubuskiej i Pomorzu Zachodnim do końca XVIII w.*, Zielona Góra 1999, *passim*.

¹⁰ His name (*Johanan*, *Jehonan*), meaning „Jahwe showed mercy”, is tied with a miracle of birthing a child by Elizabeth, wife of Zechariah. According to the Bible, the couple was infertile. When they abandoned all hope of having an offspring, archangel Gabriel foretold Zechariah birth of a child – see: J. Szalga, „Jan Chrzciciel. I. Życie”, [in:] *Encyklopedia katolicka*, t. 7, op. cit., kol. 778.

¹¹ *Holy Bible*, King James Edition, Mk 1, 6; Mt 3, 4; 11, 18; Lu 1, 80; 7, 33.

¹² Łk 3, 1–3.

¹³ Mt 3, 1–13.

¹⁴ “[...] Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: Look, I am sending My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You. Truly I say to you, among those who are

with wife of his brother Philip, John was imprisoned in the fortress Machaerus.¹⁵ During the feast, the king was so delighted by Salome's dance that he agreed to grant her one wish. She demanded St. John's head and the tetrarch agreed without hesitation.¹⁶ Disciples of John received his body from one of Herod's officials and buried it in an unknown place, later said, according to tradition, to be in Sebaste, Samaria.

Saint John the Baptist has a prominent place in the pantheon of Christian saints, mainly because of theological reflection of numerous antique thinkers like Justin, Tertullian, Origenes, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Ambrose or St. John Chrysostom – the author of seven orations commemorating *Prodromos*.¹⁷ It is because of their works that the tradition and belief in exceptional role of St. John came to life. In the Middle Ages, patristic theology had its renaissance, which is also reflected in the cult of the saint.¹⁸ From 11th to 13th century a process of establishing a primacy of John among the saints took place. Fully fledged Middle Ages added to the tradition new, apocryphal themes and new interpretations of Church Fathers' works, placing *Prodromos* in trinity along with Christ and Virgin Mary.¹⁹

The cult of St. John the Baptist was widespread right from the beginning, in contrast to local cults of first martyrs. Undoubtedly, main influence on the cult had evangelic "canonisation" of John by Jesus and miraculous rediscovery of the Saint's head in Jerusalem in 337 AD that started the process of dedicating first temples and sanctuaries to him.²⁰ The oldest cult's centres of John were places in which he stayed and preached – Ain Karim, where according to tradition he was born, Ainon near river Jordan, where he was baptising, and Sebaste, where he was probably buried.²¹ In Roman Catholic Church, the main temple dedicated to John is the pontifical Lateran basilica, founded by Constantin the Great.²² *Prodromos* is a patron of numerous European cathedrals, to name a few; in Monza,

born of women, there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist" (MEV, Mt 11, 7–11). See: R. Knapiński, *Titulus ecclesiae...*, op. cit., p. 346; R. Mazurkiewicz, *Deesis. Idea wstawiennictwa Bogarodzicy i św. Jana Chrzciciela w kulturze średniowiecznej*, Kraków 2002, p. 22 ff.

¹⁵ Mt 4, 12; 14, 1–5.

¹⁶ Mt 14, 6–11; Mk 6, 16, 21–28; Łk 9, 9.

¹⁷ R. Mazurkiewicz, *Tradycja świętojańska w literaturze staropolskiej*, Kraków 1993, p. 9.

¹⁸ St. Peter Damian, author of sermons for the birthday of John, should be mentioned here, and mystical orations of St. Bernard of Clairvaux – ibidem, p. 11.

¹⁹ Reinterpretation of patristic writings was expressed in liturgy and iconography, where a *Deesis* typography was formed, portraying *Christ Pantokrator* with Mary and Saint John the Baptist – see: idem, *Deesis...*, op. cit., pp. 27–44.

²⁰ R. Knapiński, *Titulus ecclesiae...*, op. cit., p. 348.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Even though the main *patrocinium* is *Christus Salvator*, and St. John is officially "only" a copatron of the basilica – ibidem.

Turin, Amiens, Avignon, Dijon, Lyon, Strasbourg and Merseburg.²³ It should be also mentioned that most of the baptisteries are dedicated to him. The most important ones are on Lateran in Rome, and in Florence, Siena, Ravenna, Pisa and Aachen.²⁴

Genesis of St. John's cult in Poland should be traced back to christianization conducted between the Vistula and the Odra. First missionaries, mainly Benedictines, like Bishop Jordan, St. Bruno of Querfurt or St. Adalbert of Prague, played a crucial role in this process.²⁵ Their eremitic spirituality, undoubtedly modelled on the life of Saint John the Baptist, led them to dedicate to him the first convents in Międzyrzecze and Mogilno. It was not accidental, though, because the Predecessor of Christ was often chosen as a patron for missionary countries. Besides, his ascetic life was a great example for monks.

Another convent that helped to propagate the cult in Poland was the Order of Hospitallers whose main patron was St. John the Baptist. They were invited to Lesser Poland in 1154 by Duke Henry of Sandomierz who also gave them the village Zagość.²⁶

Contacts with Orthodox Byzantium also strengthened and helped in spreading the cult of John in medieval Lesser Poland; it was in Byzantium where the fundamentals of the movement were formed.²⁷ Influence of eastern culture was undoubtedly on the rise during the crusades in which also Polish knights and dukes took part.²⁸ Crusaders, who came to Constantinople that had over thirty buildings dedicated to John at that time, were able to claim relics tied to his cult.²⁹ It is also known that there were temples in Poland that hosted relics of Saint John the Baptist. In the middle of 12th century, Duchess Salome of Berg was said to possess a tooth of *Prodromos* that was later, in 1149, presented to Benedictine monastery in Zwiefalten.³⁰ Jan Długosz in his annuals (orig. *Roczniki*) mentioned on the other hand that the cathedral in Kraków had in its treasury "jaw of blessed John the Baptist", acquired by Zbigniew Oleśnicki and kept in a silver reliquary

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ R. Mazurkiewicz, *Deesis...*, op. cit., pp. 157–158.

²⁶ At the beginning of XIII century the monks already had a church and hospital in Zagość, dedicated to St. John the Baptist – see: M. Starnawska, *Między Jerozolimą a Łukowem. Zakony krzyżowe na ziemiach polskich w średniowieczu*, Warszawa 1999, p. 26.

²⁷ R. Mazurkiewicz, *Deesis...*, op. cit., p. 160.

²⁸ See: M. Gładysz, *Zapomniani krzyżowcy. Polska wobec idei ruchu krucjatowego w XII–XIII wieku*, Warszawa 2002 (English version: *Mikołaj Gładysz, The Forgotten Crusaders: Poland and the Crusader Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, eds. J. V. Sigurðsson, I. Øye, P. Gorecki, S. Murdoch, Cordelia Heß, Leiden and Boston 2012).

²⁹ R. Mazurkiewicz, *Deesis...*, op. cit., p. 160.

³⁰ See: S. Wieczorek, "Zwiefalten i Polska w pierwszej połowie XII wieku", *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 1996, 103, p. 32.

that looked like head on a plate³¹ (this statement is then confirmed in the inventory from 1563 that also mentions a cross-shaped reliquary with remnants of Saint John's clothing, made from camel's fur).³²

Significant number of churches under the patronage of St. John the Baptist in Lesser Poland is the best proof of his cult's popularity. The oldest ones are in: Zagość (1176 or younger), Skalbmierz (1217), Prandocin (1222), Siewierz (1232) and Kraków (before 1308).³³ Bolesław Kumor listed eleven churches within borders of Krakow diocese under the *patrocinium* of John by the end of 13th century.³⁴ Dariusz Szymański also mentions that by 1326 (the oldest reference to collection of Peter's pence in documents in Poland) in the area of Wiślica and Kielce provosts, Oświęcim and Krakow deaneries, Sącz and Lublin archdeaneries there were eleven churches dedicated to St. John the Baptist.³⁵ According to Kumor, only patronage of Mary was more popular (twenty-six patronages, including fourteen related to Assumption of Virgin Mary), as well as Saint Peter and Saint Adalbert (respectively fourteen and thirteen patronages).³⁶ Szymański found up to date of 1326 twenty-five churches under the *patrocinia* of Mary, among which nineteen were related to Assumption of Virgin Mary.³⁷ Moreover, according to the research conducted by the author, patronage of St. John the Baptist was as popular as St. Nicolas's, and only a little fewer churches had patronage of All Saints and St. Peter and Paul (nine churches in both cases).³⁸ In the middle of 14th century both in Poland and in Western Europe, popularity of St. John's *patrocinia* began to diminish (even though new sacral objects dedicated to Him were still raised).³⁹ Jan Długosz, in his *Book of benefices of Krakow diocese* (orig. *Księga uposażeń diecezji krakowskiej*) listed 28 temples under the patronage of St. John the Baptist that existed in the latter half of 15th century.⁴⁰ According to calculations of Bolesław Kumor, the Predecessor of Christ was the fifth among the most popular patrons. More popular were patronages of: Mary (seventy-eight), the Lord (forty), St. Nicolas (thirty-nine) and All Saints (thirty-seven).⁴¹ Calculations of Kumor are not convergent, though, with information given by

³¹ M. Starnawska, *Świątych życie po życiu. Relikwie w kulturze religijnej na ziemiach polskich w średniowieczu*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 98–99.

³² *Inwentarz katedry wawelskiej z roku 1563*, red. A. Bochnak, Kraków 1979 (Studia do dziejów Wawelu, 2), pp. 278, 283.

³³ R. Mazurkiewicz, *Deesis...*, op. cit., p. 163.

³⁴ B. S. Kumor, *Dzieje diecezji krakowskiej do roku 1795*, t. 4, Kraków 2001, p. 435.

³⁵ D. Szymański, "Wezwania kościołów parafialnych w diecezji krakowskiej do końca XVI w.", *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 1993, 41 (2), p. 133.

³⁶ B. S. Kumor, op. cit., p. 435.

³⁷ D. Szymański, op. cit., p. 133.

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ R. Mazurkiewicz, *Deesis...*, op. cit., p. 165.

⁴⁰ B. S. Kumor, op. cit., pp. 445, 506.

⁴¹ Ibidem, pp. 505–506.

Szymański that refers to mentioned above part of Krakow diocese (without new, founded in 14th and 15th century archdeaconries in: Radom, Sandomierz, Wojnice, Zawichost and provosts in: Pilice and Tarnobrzeg). Furthermore, Szymański noted that until 1470 only seventeen churches under the patronage of St. John the Baptist were functioning in the area mentioned above.⁴² *Patrocinium* of Mary (forty patronages) and St. Nicolas (twenty-one) were more numerous.⁴³ Results of analyses of latter sources for patronages of churches in Lesser Poland for the whole diocese were not that divergent. In *Book of incomes for Kraków diocese* (orig. *Księga dochodów diecezji krakowskiej*) from 1529, done on commission of the Bishop Piotr Tomicki, *patrocinium* of St. John the Baptist was still very popular, fifth in the popularity ranking, with thirty-eight churches under this patronage.⁴⁴ On the other hand, in the mentioned above acts from the Bishop's Jerzy Radziwiłł visitations, patronage of the Lord's Predecessor is placed beside fifty-four (Kumor) or fifty-two (Szymański) churches,⁴⁵ which leads to placing St. John the Baptist as the fourth *patrocinium* in terms of popularity, after patronages of Mary, St. Nicolas and St. Adalbert.⁴⁶

Images of St. John the Baptist in the heraldry of towns from Lesser Poland

Iconographic templates for civic seals were taken from ecclesiastical sigillography. Images of saint patrons of particular societies were placed on those seals, which was a symbolic act of spreading their protection over the whole town or city.⁴⁷ The oldest seal of vogt from New Sącz is a good example. The town was founded

⁴² D. Szymański, op. cit., pp. 133, 135.

⁴³ The reason may be the fact that Szymański in his publication focused mainly on patronages from the latter half of 16th century, and his main sources were acts from visitation protocols in 1597–1599, done from the initiative of the Bishop of Kraków, Jerzy Radziwiłł. Szymański was interested only in aforementioned dioceses in comparative context, while Bolesław Kumor focused on the whole area of Kraków diocese.

⁴⁴ B. S. Kumor, op. cit., p. 509.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 512; D. Szymański, op. cit., pp. 102–103.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, p. 103.

⁴⁷ See: T. Diedrich, "Zum Quellenwert und Bedeutungshalt mittelalterlicher Städt-siegel", *Archiv für Diplomatik. Schriftgeschichte, Siegel- und Wappenkunde* 1977, 23, pp. 269–285; R. Wolff, "Descriptio civitatis. Siegel-Bilder und Siegel-Beschreibungen italienischer Städte des Mittelalters", [in:] *Raprsentation der mittelalterlichen Stadt*, hrsg. von J. Oberste, Regensburg 2008, pp. 129–144; B. Bedos-Rezak, "Du modèle à l'image. Les signes de l'identité urbanie au Moyen Age", [in:] *Le verte, l'image et les representations de la société au Moyen Age*, publ. par M. Boone, E. Lecuppre-Desjardin, J.-P. Sosson, Paris 2000, pp. 189–203; eadem, "Images of Identity and the Identity of Images", [in:] *The Mind's Eye. Art and Theological Argument in the Medieval West*, eds. J. Hamburger, A.-M. Bouché, Princeton 2006, pp. 46–64.

by the Czech king, Wenceslaus II in 1292 and initially was called Kamienica.⁴⁸ Authority over the local government was in hands of a vogt, whose strong position was voiced through legend on the edge of the seal: *sigillum advocati atque civium de Kemniz*. In the field of the seal there was a figure identified with the patron of parish church, Saint Margaret. Of course, before fully fledged civic coats of arms emerged though, a "heraldisation" of functioning seal images had to take place.⁴⁹

In iconography of Polish civic heraldry there are some depictions of St. John the Baptist which could be taken from earlier, Roman and Gothic objects, that should especially be mentioned. From the 1160–1180 comes a sculpture of John, placed initially besides Wrocław cathedral (now the National Museum in Wrocław), dedicated to *Prodromos* (fig. 1). The saint holds in his left hand a tondo with depiction of *Agnus Dei*, who holds with his leg a flagstaff with a pennant, and points at Him with his right hand.⁵⁰ This motif appeared also in a sculpture from 14th century Lesser Poland. In 1337 the parish church in Radłów under the patronage of *Prodromos* and founded by the Bishop of Kraków Jan Grot was finished.⁵¹ In the tympanum of the church a sculpture of the Lord's Predecessor made from sandstone was placed, with Lamb of God in his left hand, pointing at Him with his right hand (fig. 2). At the left the founder is represented kneeling, dressed in pontifical robes, holding a model of the temple.⁵² Similarly, like with the sculpture of *Prodromos* from Wrocław cathedral, also in this case *Agnus Dei* appeals directly to Christological imagery.

Along with development of Gothic art, images of St. John the Baptist were of course changing. As an example a depiction on a stained glass window from the beginning of 13th century in the church of St. Kuniberth in Cologne may be presented, where the saint holds a book with the Lamb of God resting on it.⁵³ These images are connected with text of the *Apocalypse* by St. John the Evangelist, where Christ in the guise of Lamb is able to break seven seals guarding the book that contains future of the world.⁵⁴ The oldest depictions of this kind are in the cathedral in Kamień Pomorski. A stone figure from a former portal of St. John the Baptist is preserved there, dated at circa 1250.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ M. Gumowski, "Herb i pieczęć Nowego Sącza", *Rocznik Sąddecki* 1960, 4, pp. 71–89. See: I. Styczyńska, "Historia herbów miasta Nowego Sącza", *Almanach Sąddecki* 1999, 8 (3), pp. 3–7; eadem, "Historia herbów miasta Nowego Sącza", *Almanach Sąddecki* 1999, 8 (4), pp. 29–35.

⁴⁹ In Little Poland this process gained momentum in 16th century and was in motion through the whole modern era – see: H. Seroka, op. cit., pp. 58–62.

⁵⁰ R. Knapiński, *Titulus ecclesiae...*, op. cit., p. 355, fig. 478.

⁵¹ M. Walczak, *Rzeźba architektoniczna w Małopolsce za czasów Kazimierza Wielkiego*, Kraków 2006, p. 143.

⁵² Ibidem, pp. 147–148, fig. 103–104.

⁵³ R. Knapiński, "Jan Chrzciciel...", op. cit., col. 778.

⁵⁴ Ap 5, 5.

⁵⁵ Z. Świechowski, *Sztuka romańska w Polsce*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 65, 207, fig. 132.

The attribute of Lord's Predecessor – *Agnus Dei* – discussed here was used for the first time in civic sigillography of Lesser Poland in Frysztak, founded in 1366 as a result of ministrations of Cistercian abbot Konrad in Koprzywnica.⁵⁶ The oldest stamp of this seal comes from the turn of 14th and 15th century and consists of Lamb of God presented on the background of squared rosette, turned to left and holding with its leg a pennant on a flagstaff crested with a cross⁵⁷ (fig. 3). A similar image occurred on a 15th century seal of Koprzywnica vogt, founded in the years 1262–1268 by Duke Bolesław V the Chaste (orig. Bolesław Wstydlivy).⁵⁸ There is a Lamb of God in the seal area that looks at a pennant placed on a flagstaff.⁵⁹ *Agnus Dei* imagery is especially interesting here. Churches in before mentioned towns are under patronages of Mary and All Saints.⁶⁰ Since it seems that St. John the Baptist was not especially revered in the areas of Koprzywnica and Frysztak, the Lamb of God on the seals may be rather interpreted as a chrystological symbol.⁶¹ This thesis is further strengthened by the fact that in the monastery church in Koprzywnica there are two keystones with *Agnus Dei* motif.⁶²

⁵⁶ See: K. Głowacki, *Heraldyka historycznych miast regionu sandomiersko-kieleckiego XIII–XX w.*, Kielce 2001, p. 86; F. Kiryk, *Urbanizacja Małopolski. Województwo sandomierskie XIII–XVI wiek*, Kielce 1994, p. 58.

⁵⁷ Paper seal, round, 45 mm in diameter, with legend: *sigillum civitatis [fr]euenstat* – National Museum in Kraków, Biblioteka Czartoryskich, Collection of Wiktor Wittyg (further: MNK, BCzart, ZW), VIII-a-Rkps-552/58, stamp on document dated: 25 VI 1563; H. Seroka, op. cit., p. 233, footnote 24.

⁵⁸ K. Głowacki, op. cit., p. 49.

⁵⁹ Paper seal, round, 24 mm in diameter, with legend: *s[igillum] advocati et civitatis coprzywnice[nsis]* – MNK, BCzart, ZW, MNK VIII-a-Rkps-562/6, loose stamp, 1578; H. Seroka, op. cit., p. 252, footnote 118.

⁶⁰ J. Dobosz, L. Wetesko, "Koprzywnica", [in:] *Monasticon Cisterciense Poloniae. Dzieje i kultura męskich klasztorów cysterskich na ziemiach polskich i dawnej Rzeczypospolitej od średniowiecza do czasów współczesnych*, red. A. Wyrwa, J. Strzelczyk, K. Kaczmarek, t. 1, Poznań 1999, p. 157; F. Kiryk, *Urbanizacja Małopolski...*, op. cit., p. 59; B. S. Kumor, op. cit., p. 460; D. Szymański, op. cit., p. 145.

⁶¹ Taking into account that patronages were usually permanent and changed rarely, it is possible to assume that determined earlier *patrocinia* of churches and altars survived in nearly unchanged form. Bishop's visitation protocols from 17th and 18th century did not mention patronage of the Lord's Predecessor for objects in both churches in Koprzywnica and in parish church in Frysztak – see: Metropolitan Archive in Kraków (orig. Archiwum Kurii Metropolitalnej w Krakowie) (further: AKKM), *Acta Visitationis* (further: A.V.), 6, p. 45; A.V. 46, pp. 276–277, 305.

⁶² First keystone was placed in the side aisle, the second one in the cross section between main aisle and transept. The one closer to chancel has an interesting composition that complements *Manus Dei* and majuscule inscription: AGNVS DEI. Similar keystone from Lesser Poland is located in parish church of Cistercian monastery in Mogiła with added motif of a chalice holding blood that seeps from the lamb's side – see: M. Walczak, op. cit., p. 62, 339.



Fig. 1. St. John the Baptist stone figure, copy, 1160–1180,
photo before 1945, org. in National Museum in Wrocław

Source: *Album Romański: Wrocław – katedra św. Jana Chrzciciela*,
[online] <http://albumromanski.pl/album/wroclaw-katedra-sw-jana-chrzciciela>



Fig. 2. Tympanum of Radłów parish church, 1337

Source: *Nieoficjalny Portal Miasta Brzeska i Okolic*,
[online] [http://www.brzesko.ws/_brzesko/documents/zabytki/
powiat_1951/zp_f35_s12_radlow.jpg](http://www.brzesko.ws/_brzesko/documents/zabytki/powiat_1951/zp_f35_s12_radlow.jpg)

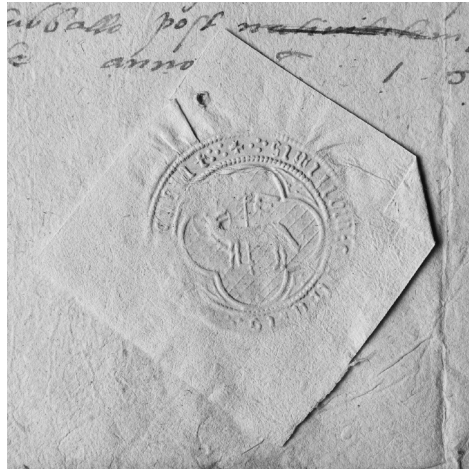


Fig. 3. Fryszak city seal, 14th/15th cen.,
stamp dated at 1563, National Museum in Cracow
Source: Biblioteka Czartoryskich, Collection of Wiktor Wittyg,
VIII-a-Rkps-552/58

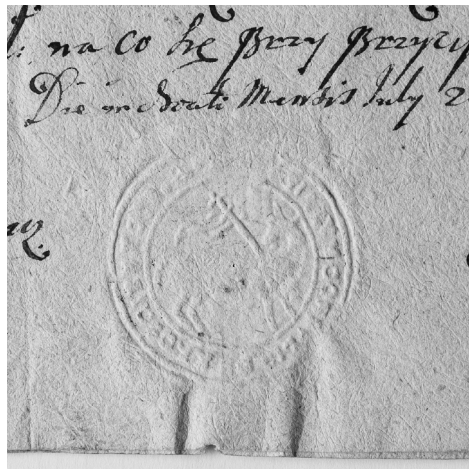


Fig. 4. Krościenko city council seal, 16th-17th cen.,
stamp dated at 1754, National Museum in Cracow
Source: Biblioteka Czartoryskich, Collection of Wiktor Wittyg, BCzart,
ZW, MNK VIII-a-Rkps-556/3



Fig. 5. Piwniczna city jury seal, 16th cen.,
stamp dated at 1565, National Museum in Cracow
Source: Biblioteka Czartoryskich, ZW, MNK VIII-a-Rkps-561/39



Fig. 6. Bowl with carved head of St. John the Baptist,
2nd half of 13th cen., Diocese Museum in Tarnów
Source: *Parafia pw. NMP Częstochowskiej w Bogumiłowicach*,
[online] <http://www.bogumilowice.diecezja.tarnow.pl/www2/grafiki/logo3.jpg>



Fig. 7. Dobczyce city seal, 14th/15th cen.,
stamp dated at 1739, National Archive in Cracow
Source: NAC, Varia civitates et villae, 121/258 Dobczyce

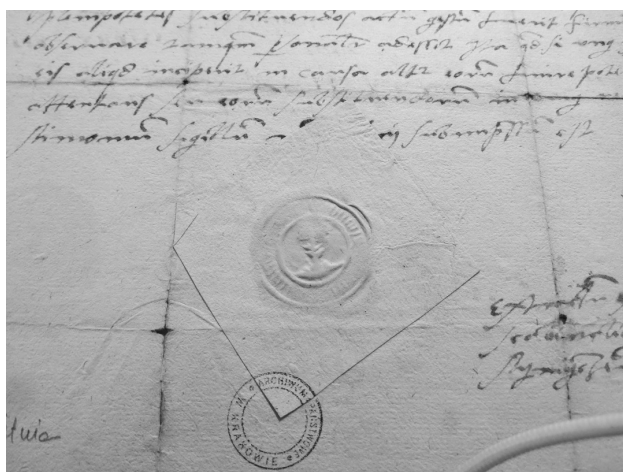


Fig. 8. Proszowice city seal, 16th cen.,
stamp dated at 1546, National Archive in Cracow
Source: NAC, Varia civitates et villae, 121/281 Proszowice

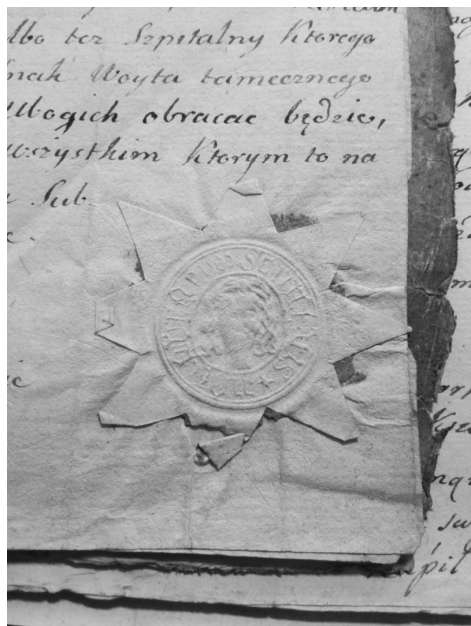


Fig. 9. Nowa Góra city seal, 15th cen.(?),
stamp dated at 1621, National Archive in Cracow
Source: NAC, *Varia civitates et villae*, 121/274 Nowa Góra



Fig. 10. Skalbierz city seal, 15th/16th cen.
Source: H. Seroka, *Herby miast małopolskich do końca XVIII w.*,
Warszawa 2002, p. 232, fig. 122

Attribute of St. John the Baptist was also used on the oldest preserved (probably from 15th century) seal of Krościenko beside Dunajec, founded by Casimir III the Great in 1348.⁶³ This motif is also present on a younger seal of town council, dated at 16th–17th century by Henryk Seroka⁶⁴ (fig. 4). Image of *Agnus Dei* is also visible on the seal of Piwniczna, founded like Krościenko in 1348. On the first known *sigillum*, coming from 16th century, the Lamb of God stands on three hills and holds a flagstaff with a cross and pennant⁶⁵ (fig. 5). On the younger seal, created in 1607, the same motif is depicted within coat of arms, adorned with volutes and scroll.⁶⁶

Many researchers connect the Lamb of God from seal from Krościenko and Piwniczna with St. John the Baptist, arguing that he appeared on the seals as an attribute of local parish churches.⁶⁷ As a matter of fact, there are a few examples of seals that present another attribute of Lord's Predecessor in Lesser Poland, a head placed on a bowl that indeed is a reference to the patron of local parish church. However, in this case there is a problem, because churches in Krościenko and Piwniczna are dedicated to All Saints and Birth of Blessed Virgin Mary respectively.⁶⁸ I have not observed any special indications of Lord's Predecessor's cult in these towns.⁶⁹ It may be said then, like in the previous example, that *Agnus Dei* is once more a chrystological symbol. It is possible that the cult of *Corpus Christi* that had been vigorously developing in Lesser Poland and had supporter in king

⁶³ Paper seal, round, 27 mm in diameter, with greatly worn legend, written in gothic miniscule – MNK, BCzart, ZW, MNK VIII-a-Rkps-556/37, loose stamp, 1586; H. Seroka, op. cit., p. 96, footnote 26.

⁶⁴ Dry stamp, round, 33 mm in diameter and legend: *SIGILLVM CONSVLVM OP[PIDI] CROSCIENKO S[ACRAE] R[EGIAE] M[AIESTATIS]* – MNK, BCzart, ZW, MNK VIII-a-Rkps-556/37, stamp on document dated: 2 V 1754; H. Seroka, op. cit., p. 96, footnote 27. Undoubtedly there was an earlier seal of Piwniczna, because from the moment of foundation, the town has been developing without problems and had a basic town council – see: W. Drelicharz, Z. Piech, "Herb Piwnicznej", *Rocznik Sądecki* 2010, 38, p. 293.

⁶⁵ It may be a juror's seal because M. Gumowski transcribed legend as: *S[IGILLVM] S[CABINORUM] C[IVITATIS] PIW[NICZNA] S[ZYIA]* – see: M. Gumowski, *Appendix*, [in:] H. Stamirski, *Zarys rozwoju miasta Piwnicznej (lata 1348–1807)*, Nowy Sącz 2008; MNK, BCzart, ZW, MNK VIII-a-Rkps-561/39, loose stamp from 1565; H. Seroka, op. cit., p. 95, footnote 20.

⁶⁶ Seal from 1607, 30 mm in diameter and legend: *VRBEM OPIDI PIVNICZNA S[ZYI] A* – see: W. Drelicharz, Z. Piech, "Herb Piwnicznej", op. cit., pp. 294–295; H. Seroka, op. cit., p. 96, footnote 21.

⁶⁷ See: P. Gołdyn, op. cit., p. 94; M. Gumowski, *Appendix*, op. cit., pp. 108–109; idem, *Herby miast polskich*, op. cit., pp. 38, 269; *Polskie herby miejskie*, red. T. Szczechura, Warszawa 1963, tabl. 12; A. Plewako, J. Wanag, op. cit., p. 165.

⁶⁸ B. S. Kumor, op. cit., pp. 471, 489; D. Szymański, op. cit., pp. 146, 150.

⁶⁹ W. Drelicharz, Z. Piech, "Herb Piwnicznej", pp. 300–302. Information about parish in Krościenko see: B. Krzan, *Klejnot zagubiony w górach. 700-lecie Krościenka nad Dunajcem*, Krościenko nad Dunajcem 1988, pp. 66–70.

Casimir III the Great himself, influenced imagery on this seal. It was from his initiative and order that the construction of church under the patronage of *Corpus Christi* was started, after the most divine sacrament had been found in a nearby swamp, at least according to a legend.⁷⁰ Moreover, in a collegiate in Wiślica and in basilica in Sandomierz there are keystones with imagery of the Lamb of God.⁷¹

A second, vastly popular attribute of *Prodromos* was a decapitated head, placed on a plate or in a bowl. Ornamented bowls were placed on altars as objects of cult for pilgrims. In Poland these objects are found in the Diocesan Museum in Tarnów (bowl from Łąck, second half of 13th century) (fig. 6)⁷² and in Benedictine monastery in Kraków (second half of 15th century).⁷³ Imagery of a decapitated head of Saint John the Baptist on a plate was also used in heraldry of local governments in Lesser Poland.⁷⁴ For Dobczyce, founded once more in 1362 with a *ius municipale magdeburgense* there are two medieval city seals preserved. The first one is larger and was done at the turn of 14th and 15th century. It depicts the head of St. John the Baptist, with beard and moustache, placed on a plate with a prominent edge⁷⁵ (fig. 7). The latter one has a similar imagery but measures only 20 mm in diameter and has a legend: + s(igillvm) * de * Dobschycz : ez, written with Gothic minuscule.⁷⁶ The motif with head on a plate is repeated also in modern seals of town councils,⁷⁷ vogts-jurors⁷⁸ and

⁷⁰ K. Łatak, *Kanonicy regularni laterańscy na Kazimierzu w Krakowie do końca XVI wieku*, Ełk 1999, pp. 93–96.

⁷¹ M. Walczak, op. cit., pp. 298, 365.

⁷² R. Knapieński, *Titulus ecclesiae...*, op. cit., p. 358.

⁷³ *Wawel 1000–2000. Wystawa jubileuszowa*, t. 2: *Skarby archidiecezji krakowskiej. Katalog*, red. J. A. Nowobilski, Kraków 2000, p. 116.

⁷⁴ Apart from analysis of chosen civic seals from Little Poland, as an example for different area may serve coat of arms from Wrocław, conferred by the Emperor Ferdinand I Habsburg in 1530. The main area of athecoat of arms with five fields is a bowl with head of St. John the Baptist, patron of the town and Wrocław diocese. In the other fields there is a rampant Czech lion, eagle of Piasts from Śląsk, W monogram and bust of St. John the Evangelist – see: W. Strzyżewski, op. cit., p. 102.

⁷⁵ Wax seal(?), round, 45 mm in diameter, with legend in Gothic majuscule: SIGILVM * CIVITATIS * DOBSCHICZENS +, pressed on a document from 1586 – see: M. Gumowski, *Najstarsze pieczęcie...*, op. cit., p. 63, no. 74; W. Wittyg, *Pieczęcie miast dawnej Polski*, Kraków–Warszawa 1905, p. 52, no. 2. Paper seal, round, 45 mm in diameter, with legend: S(IGILLVM) CIVIVM CIVITATIS DOBSCHICZENSIS, pressed on documents from 21 October and 14 December 1739 – National Archive in Kraków (further: ANK), *Varia civitates et villae*, 121/258 Dobczyce.

⁷⁶ Round seal, 20 mm in diameter, with legend: + s(igillvm) * de * Dobschycz : ez, pressed by the document from 1581 – W. Wittyg, op. cit., p. 52, no. 1.

⁷⁷ Paper seal(?), 30 mm in diameter and legend: SIGILLVM CONSVULARE CIVI(TATIS) DO(BCZICENSIS), pressed beside 16th century documents – H. Seroka, op. cit., p. 97, footnote 29.

⁷⁸ Paper seal, 30 mm in diameter, unreadable legend, pressed by document from 12 September 1749 – see: ANK, *Varia civitates et villae*, 121/258 Dobczyce.

parishes⁷⁹ from Dobczyce. A consistent use of one sign from the very beginning of town is closely tied with a patron of local parish church – St. John the Baptist.⁸⁰ Lack of truly heraldic seal in resources is thought-provoking, though. It turns out that Dobczyce until the end of 18th century was not granted a coat of arms privilege, therefore seal imagery had not been adorned with badges or ornaments.⁸¹

On the other hand, the decapitated head of *Prodromos* from coat of arms of Proszowice gained heraldic features. King's town founded by Casimir III the Great in 1358, already at the end of 14th century became a local judicative place of *comitia minora* (orig. sejmik ziemski) for Kraków voivodeship.⁸² City seal from 16th century consists of traditional depiction of the Lord's Predecessor⁸³ (fig. 8), undoubtedly connected with *patrocinium* of parish church.⁸⁴ In the succeeding century emblem was placed in cartouche crested with peacock feathers.⁸⁵

Determining origins of inspiration for seal badges in arms of Nowa Góra and Dukla remains problematic, though. Nowa Góra, from the bestowal of Władysław Jagiełło, was given to Jan of Tęczyn, coat Topór, in the years 1398–1402.⁸⁶ Soon after, a foundation of town must have happened, because the oldest preserved seals bear Gothic features⁸⁷ (fig. 9). Even though the local church was under *patrocinium* of the Holy Spirit, and there were no signs of particular cult of

⁷⁹ W. Drelicharz, Z. Piech, *Dawne i nowe herby Małopolski*, Kraków 2004, p. 223.

⁸⁰ *Katalog zabytków sztuki w Polsce*, red. J. Szablowski, t. 1: *Województwo krakowskie*, Warszawa 1953, p. 262. In the chancel, on the altar there was a retabulum from the beginning of 16th century, founded by Lanckoroński family. In the middle quarter there was a Lord's Predecessor with Lamb of God on his palm, along with Mother of God and St. John the Evangelist. Outer pair of wings depicts scenes of St. John's decapitation and Herod's feast – see: J. Gądomski, *Gotyckie malarstwo tablicowe Małopolski 1500–1540*, Warszawa 1995, pp. 74–75.

⁸¹ Documents of this kind were a rarity in Poland. If a coat of arms of the town had not been developed to the end of 18th century, then one was officially created on the basis of the oldest seal imagery available for the town – W. Drelicharz, Z. Piech, *Dawne i nowe herby...*, op. cit., p. 222.

⁸² F. Kiryk, "Wstęp", [in:] *Proszowice. Zarys dziejów do 1939 roku*, red. F. Kiryk, Kraków 2000, p. 5.

⁸³ Paper seal, 27 mm in diameter, legend written in gothic majuscule: SIGIL(L)VM CIVITATIS PROSOVICENSIS, pressed by the document from 1 april 1546 – ANK, *Varia civitates et villae*, 121/281 Proszowice.

⁸⁴ *Katalog zabytków...*, op. cit., p. 244.

⁸⁵ Paper seal, 40 mm in diameter, with legend: SIGIL(L)VM CIVITATIS PROSOVICENS(IS), pressed by the documents from 1660, 1683 i 1712 – ANK, *Varia civitates et villae*, 121/281.

⁸⁶ F. Sikora, "Góra Nowa", [in:] *Słownik historyczno-geograficzny województwa krakowskiego w średniowieczu*, t. 1, red. J. Wiśniewski, Wrocław 1980, p. 828.

⁸⁷ Wax seal(?), 30 mm in diameter, decapitated head on the seal and visible fragment of a legend written in minuscule: s(igillum) civitatis [...] – H. Seroka, op. cit., p. 176, footnote 33, loose stamp from 1531, documents from: 1566, 1777 and 1789; document from 1621 – ANK, *Varia civitates et villae*, 121/274 Nowa Góra.

St. John the Baptist,⁸⁸ Henryk Seroka tied seal emblem of the decapitated Lord's Predecessor's head with a private devoutness of Jan of Tenczyn, castellan of Kraków. However, it's still difficult to confirm this thesis, because Janusz Kurtyka in his monograph dedicated to Topór family does not mention anything related to spirituality of one of the most famous figures from the line.⁸⁹ On the other hand, Dukla city coat of arms with Trąby badge of Jordan's family is tied with profile of the saint patron of John Jordan of Zakliczym, owner of the town from 1540.⁹⁰ On the town council seal, known from a preserved example by the document from 1564, in a diagonally squared field there is a Late-Gothic shield with Trąba emblem, from behind which appears a bust of St. John the Baptist in a mantle, with halo around the head, and small Lamb beside.⁹¹ Equally interesting is iconographic type of Lord's Predecessor from juror's seal of Dukla from 1570. Apart from shield with badge of Trąba family, *Prodromos* stands with a cross and an arrow, attributes ascribed to him, yet rarely depicted.⁹²

The last area of my interest is depiction of St. John the Baptist in coat of arms of ecclesiastical towns from Lesser Poland. In spite of appearances, it is a group of only a few seals, among which only those from two centres using seals with depictions related to the Lord's Predecessor require attention. The first one is Skalbierz, founded in 1342 with *ius sredense* by Casimir III the Great.⁹³ This town used seal where in Gothic rosette field lies the head of St. John the Baptist, placed over crossed keys⁹⁴ (fig. 10). Imagery of crossed keys is tied with patronage of local collegiate church, constructed at the turn of 12th and 13th century.⁹⁵ The second town is Puchaczów, founded by Benedictine monastery from Sieciechów, probably in 1527, during the reign of abbot Maciej.⁹⁶ The oldest known seal from Puchaczów is dated at 1570, and refer to coat of arms of Sieciechów. It depicts

⁸⁸ *Katalog zabytków...*, op. cit., p. 118.

⁸⁹ See: J. Kurtyna, *Tęczyńscy. Studium z dziejów polskiej elity możnowładczej w średniowieczu*, Kraków 1997.

⁹⁰ F. Sikora, "Dukla", [in:] *Słownik historyczno-geograficzny województwa krakowskiego w średniowieczu*, op. cit., p. 627; H. Seroka, op. cit., p. 204.

⁹¹ Paper seal, 50 mm in diameter, with legend: SIGILLVM CONSVLVM CIVITATIS DVCLA, two loose stamps dated at 1553, by the document from 1564 – ibidem, p. 204, footnote 235.

⁹² Paper seal, 45 mm in diameter, with legend: SIGILLUM SCABONORUM CIVITATIS DUCALA 1570 – ibidem, p. 204, footnote 236; R. Knapiński, *Titulus ecclesiae...*, op. cit., p. 357.

⁹³ A. Bienias, S. M. Przybyszewski, *Skalbierz: 1342–1999*, Kielce 1999, pp. 11–17.

⁹⁴ Seal from the turn of 15th and 16th around 35 mm in diameter, with legend: SIGILLVM CIVITATIS SCHKALBIMIRIENS(IS); 16th century seal, 25 mm in diameter, with legend: SIGILLVM CIVI(TATIS) SCHKALBIMIRIENS(IS); 18th century seal, 35 mm in diameter, with legend: SIGILLVM CIVITATIS SCHKALBIMIRIENS[IS]; 17th century seal, 25 mm in diameter, with legend: SIGILLVM CIVI(TATIS) SCHKALBIMIRIEN(SIS) and badge in cartouche – ANK, *Variaecivitates et villae*, 121/285 Skalbierz; H. Seroka, op. cit., p. 232, footnote 20.

⁹⁵ B. S. Kumor, op. cit., p. 476.

⁹⁶ H. Seroka, op. cit., p. 232.

St. John the Baptist bearing a cross and surrounded by stars.⁹⁷ Parish church in Puchaczów, completed immediately after foundation of town was under the patronage of the Ascension of Blessed Virgin Mary and the parish church in Sieciechów has *patrocinium* of St. Laurence.⁹⁸ It is intriguing then that *Prodromos* was chosen for a patron of new town.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is necessary to state that iconography of St. John the Baptist in the light of heraldry of local governments in Lesser Poland is quite plentiful. It is undoubtedly caused by a vast popularity of the Lord's Predecessor's cult in the areas of Kraków, Sandomierz and Lublin. The first saint of Catholic Church, "canonized" in the gospels by Jesus Christ, quickly rose to prominence and frontal place at the Christian pantheon. Along with numerous christening missions in Poland and spreading of Catholic faith, new temples dedicated to *Prodromos* arose. They were adorned with depictions of St. John the Baptist, consistent with iconographic types developed in the Western Europe. They included inseparable and the most popular symbols and attributes of the Saint – the Lamb of God and a decapitated head placed in a bowl. Those depictions were placed in emblems of civic coats of arms that were developed in the Middle Ages that local governments used to gain care and favour of the saint patron of the settlement. It is not different in case of the Lord's Predecessor, whose attributes adorn medieval and modern coat of arms of a few towns in Lesser Poland. However, connecting St. John's symbolic from seals with a local cult is not always accurate. Unfortunately, many previous researchers considered *a priori* that the only possible interpretation of these arms is symbolic of St. John. Meanwhile, one can perceive only decapitated head, placed on a plate as a symbol of *Prodromos* and search for relation with local churches. On the other hand, in case of lack of clues leading to cult of Lord's Predecessor, imagery of *Agnus Dei* should be perceived as a chryso-logical symbol popular in the whole Christian world.

⁹⁷ Paper seal(?), 25 mm in diameter, with legend: S(IGILLVM) IOANN(IS) 1527; paper seal, 35 mm in diameter, with legend: S(IGILLVM) IOANNES BAPTISTA PATRONUS PU-CHACOWIENSIS 1675, St. John the Baptist with lamb at his feet in the seal field – ibidem, p. 232, footnotes 22, 23.

⁹⁸ B. S. Kumor, op. cit., pp. 476, 497.

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