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Catholic ecclesiastical patronage of art in Warmia (Ermland) in the early modern period (17th – 18th century).

The subject of my thesis pertains to Warmia (Ermland) – a semi-autonomous ecclesiastical territorial entity within the historical province of Royal Prussia, until 1772 forming part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The principal objects of my research are works of art funded by the Catholic clergy in the 17th century. The research method is based on archival work in order to gain insight into the widest possible range of artistic commissions. It shall be accompanied by historical, formal and stylistic analysis of the preserved objects, as well as of those known only from illustrations or written descriptions, whenever possible. This strategy, implemented systematically, should to some extent recreate the corpus of artworks once extant in the discussed area, and provide information on their artistic origin, and ideas behind their commissioning. As a part of the wider picture, the thesis intends to draw conclusions on the quantity and quality of artworks present in the land and, thus, present Warmia on comparative ground as a centre of art and art patronage in the early modern period. It is well known that modern period art patronage constituted on one hand an important part of representation, and therefore power exercise; on the other, it often reflected the personal taste of the patron. These circumstances are especially meaningful in case of ecclesiastical patronage within the Warmia diocese, where due to specific political regulations, the bishop – in cooperation with the chapter of canons – exercised also lay power. Furthermore – a singular case among dioceses of the Commonwealth – Warmia bishops were directly subordinate to the Pope. This factor, determining frequent visits in Rome, influenced Warmia's rulers intellectually and aesthetically.

The character of art patronage in the land at the time in question was mainly driven by the need to refurbish the diocese after several calamitous wars with Sweden. It favoured

reconstruction of the temples and their interior furnishings: for instance, erection of new altars and acquisition of religious paintings, sculptures and liturgical objects. The two main centres of this activity were Frombork (Frauenburg – the seat of the chapter) and Lidzbark (Heilsberg – the main seat of the bishop), with their respective, imposing churches. On the other hand, the rebuilding of numerous residences of the bishop brought along artistic commissions of a more personal kind. The third factor decisive for practising patronage consisted of recommendations of the Council of Trent, which, most typically, promulgated the cult of Virgin

Mary among the believers. The numerous art commissions – apart from some cases of direct imports from major art centres, including Italy - naturally looked to relatively close large urban centres of Royal and Ducal Prussia, like Gdańsk (Danzig), Toruń (Thorn), Elbląg (Elbing) or Königsberg, for providing their executors. It were the artworks acquired during numerous foreign journeys of Warmia's church elite, however, that – more than being a token of its high social affiliations – speak most distinctly about aesthetical sensibility, as well as broad intellectual and cultural education of these patrons. The literature on the subject so far consists mainly of minor contributions of purely historical character; no attempt at producing a synthesis from art historical point of view has been made. The aforementioned considerations were mostly written by German scholars at the turn of the 19th century; however, studies concerning early modern period are not frequent, nor detailed. Therefore, the dissertation in progress may in time hopefully prove to be regarded as a long overdue and requisite study of cultural relations in the broad sense in an important province of the Commonwealth and the wider region at a time of fruitful artistic activity.