

Agata Felczyńska

Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw

**Bronze casting in Cracow in the so called silver and golden age (1501 -1655).
Technology, production and artistic issues**

During my art history studies I got interest in bells to which I dedicated my master thesis titled: *The new age bells in Cracow. Their functions, decorations and provenance*. Whilst browsing archives, enclosing uncatalogued objects and reading related publications I noticed bronze was quite a popular material in 16th and 17th century but it was and is rarely find noteworthy. From among metals it is silver and gold that get most attention. It applies not only to Poland. I decided to give this topic my further attention and to start doctoral studies dedicated to bronze and bronze cast. So my future dissertation carries a first, working title: *Bronze casting in Cracow in the so called silver and golden age (1501 - 1655). Technology, production and artistic issues*. I want to focus on the time of greatest production that gained new forms since the beginning of the influence of Italian renaissance (however it is important to remember that Cracow was always under great influence of German art and production) until the time of Swedish Deluge, when destruction and impoverishment stopped artistic production for certain time.

At the beginning I want to concentrate on the symbolic meaning of bronze: where was it used in the past and what was it used for? Did the material itself give the object additional meaning- in other words was it chosen intentionally? Than I would like to proceed to technical issues. I want to trace where Cracow's artists took inspiration and knowledge from: was the casting technique written down or was it transferred verbally, could one producer manage both the technical and artistic aspect of bronze casting (or were they collaborating with artists like woodcarvers or sculptors who prepared models for them)?

The core of my interest will be to gather most possible examples (a catalogue) of bronze art objects produced in Cracow or imported in that time and to evaluate their quantitative and qualitative level as well as artistic expression (I still ponder what reference material should I select) and to identify the spectators and founders. This will hopefully help me

follow tracks of artistic transfer and inspirations-among those that lead to Nuremberg and Lithuania.

Since the very beginning I struggle with a difficulty to properly estimate quantitative level of production decreased e.g. by 17th and 20th century wars. The damages are noticeable both in archive material and in the amount of art objects. My concern is how to keep the outcomes nevertheless representative. 2nd is how to focus on local production despite such wide range of connections.

When talking about sources I start with library and museum collections research, than there are a few archives that should support me with useful information, important for my topic are also comparative studies concerning objects and artists working in the same material or those working in different European regions. Especially regions linked with Cracow with trade routes. That is, among many other reasons why I find it very important to merge researchers from different countries. Processes and changes observed in a certain time in one country were and are influenced by the wide range of impulses both domestic and from abroad. History has it that regions and persons had impact on each other and it is impossible to research any, even very narrow field without broad historic background. Sooner or later it occurs that no artist works isolated and no production is local. But someone's knowledge of local realities may never be overrated by researchers from abroad because their access to some data may be more difficult.

It is important for me to exchange ideas and listen to researchers from other central Eastern and East Central European countries, as no research can be limited now a days. That concerns also my topic.

So let's help each other by sharing our knowledge!