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Art of Female Monasteries in Poland (c. 1150 – c. 1500). Women's Spirituality in the Context of Monastic Architecture and Visual Arts.

Female piety and spirituality that developed during Middle Ages within a peculiar atmosphere of the enclosed religious orders has recently become one of the most intensively developing area of History and Art History Studies. This subject is very popular in American and Western European Universities (research of Carolne Walker Bynum, Jeffrey F. Hamburger, Bernard McGinn, Michael Camille, Jo Ann Kay McNamara, Carola Jäggi, Caroline Bruzelius, Charlotte Klack-Eitzen, Wiebke Ortlepp, Tanja Weißgraf and many others). However, in Poland the complex and detailed study of art and architecture created for female orders, that would concentrate not only on the visual aspect and style of the artistic objects but also on their function and religious meaning, is lacking. I would like to explore this vast and interesting area of study that has been neglected in Polish Art History.

My aim is to analyse historic and artistic context that influenced foundation and development of female monasteries. This is the reason why I would like to begin my research by the oldest monuments from the Romanesque era – the Premonstratensians monastery in Zwierzyniec (Cracow) and Strzelno, founded in 12th century. In my opinion the in-depth study of the first period of female cloisters formation is crucial in the process of understanding the subsequent convents and the phenomenon of spirituality within the female monastic environment. There are about sixteen monuments from the territory of medieval Poland that will be included in my dissertation: the Premonstratensians monasteries in Zwierzyniec (Cracow), Strzelno, Imbramowice and Busko; the Cisterian convents in Trzebnica, Ołobok and Owińska; the Benedictine cloisters in Staniątki; the Poor Clares monasteries in Stary Sącz, Cracow, Breslau, Gniezno, Bydgoszcz; the Dominicans monastery in Racibórz and two Bridgettine convents in Danzig and Lublin.

Great number of these monuments was destroyed, transformed or re-build during early modern period, many underwent the secularization while the artistic objects that belong to them were lost, transferred to other monasteries or churches, dispersed to museums, galleries and private collections, etc. Despite these historical factors that make the research difficult and complicated, one of the most important aims of my dissertation is to reconstruct the original religious and spiritual context that was created for nuns within the frames of *cura monialium* by means of monastic architecture (the problem of enclosure) and devotional art (altars, paintings, sculptures, artisanal handicraft, illuminated liturgical books, embroidery, seals, etc.).

I will try to analyse religious art within a specific atmosphere of the enclosed female orders. J. F. Hamburger showed that the architectural shape of the convents was defined by the requirement of the separation of nuns from their male supervisors and confessors that took care of their spiritual formation, however his methodology still has no application in Polish science. My scientific interest concentrates mainly on the function of religious object that had an enormous meaning and influence over medieval women's devotional practices that often

led to the mystical experience. According to C. Walcer Bynum and J. F. Hamburger the specific characteristics of female devotion and nun's spirituality are 'emotionality', 'affectiveness', 'corporeality' and mystical visions, which were very common within the cloisters. However, these scientists (as well as others historians who write about female spirituality) hardly define the meaning of these terms. In my opinion it is very important to specify the definition of the so called 'female spirituality' with which I will try to deal within the scope of my doctoral dissertation.