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Late Romanesque baptismal font from St. Nicholas Church in Grudziądz – import from Gotland

Introduction

From the middle of the 9th century, when at Roman Synod Pope Leon IV obliged parish priests to place a baptismal font in churches they administered [1, p. 109], this equipment has become a symbol of the parish church and one of the conditions necessary for its consecration. Having a baptismal font was not only a right but also a privilege of the parish church while monastery churches and chapels of religious confraternities did not have this right¹.

Baptismal fonts of the parish church in Grudziądz

In St. Nicholas Parish Church in Grudziądz, whose beginnings date back to the turn of the 14th century [2, p. 92 – here earlier source literature], [3, pp. 25–27], three medieval stone baptismal fonts have been preserved. Today, they constitute the original testimonies of its centuries-old history. At present, two of them serve as holy water fonts at the entrances to the church (Fig. 1, II and III). The third one – the most outstanding artistically – which is placed near the presbytery in the south-eastern end of the nave (Fig. 1, I) still performs the function of the baptismal source of Grudziądz Parish Church and this article is devoted to it. It is aimed at a monographic study of the baptismal font as regards its history, form, iconography, artistic provenance, as well as ideological contents and imagery of representations which decorate it. As part of

this study, it will be defined as a baptismal font inspired by a bestiary.

The first testimony of the presence, form, and function of the three above-mentioned baptismal fonts in the interior of St. Nicholas Parish Church is a description of monuments of the Grudziądz Poviát, which was developed by Johannes Heise and published in 1894. The description of the parish church mentioned the old granite octagonal baptismal font decorated with ancient figures of dragons and simple ornamentation embedded on a folded foot (Fig. 2, I) as well as two granite baptismal fonts, i.e. a hexagonal one with a canopy tightened with belts of boards (Fig. 2, II)² and the second one – nine-field with a smooth surface (Fig. 2, III)³ [4, pp. 498, 499]. The oldest photo-

² At present, the baptismal font/holy water font is situated in the church porch at the southern side entrance; it was carved in the coarse-grained pink and black granite. J. Kuczyńska included it in a numerous group of granite baptismal fonts in Eastern Pomerania (36 objects). They had bowls decorated with boards, the wider of which surrounded the bowl at its upper edge. Six narrower boards spread to its base. The bowls were embedded on granite feet in the shape of a cylindrical stepped cone. The construction of these works, which were transported by waterways, the author hypothetically connects with the workshop opened in Malbork in the 1st half of the 14th century [5, pp. 29, 30]. Today, the baptismal font in Grudziądz Parish Church is embedded on a modern cement foot.

³ At present, the baptismal font/holy water font is situated in the south-western part of the porch; it is not – as Heise claimed – made of coarse-grained gravel conglomerate with iron binder. The surface of the bowl is divided into nine smooth fields separated by the edge lines. Probably after 1945 the bowl was re-embedded on an iron cylinder (now heavily corroded) which was covered with cement and along with it rests on a cylindrical foot narrower than its granite circumference and with one stepped set-off on the upper edge. Thanks to this treatment, the form of the composition resembles the shape of a chalice. The coarse-grained structure and the granite colour of the cylindrical foot are identical to the material of which the above-mentioned baptismal font/holy water font were made. It is situated in the southern church porch, which makes it possible to assume that originally they both might have formed the whole.

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¹ In the sources and former liturgical terminology, a baptismal font was defined as *baptisterium*, *fons*, *alveum*, *balneum*, *concha*, *labrum*, *lavacrum*, *lavorium*, *piscina*, *tinctorium*, *dolium baptisandi*.

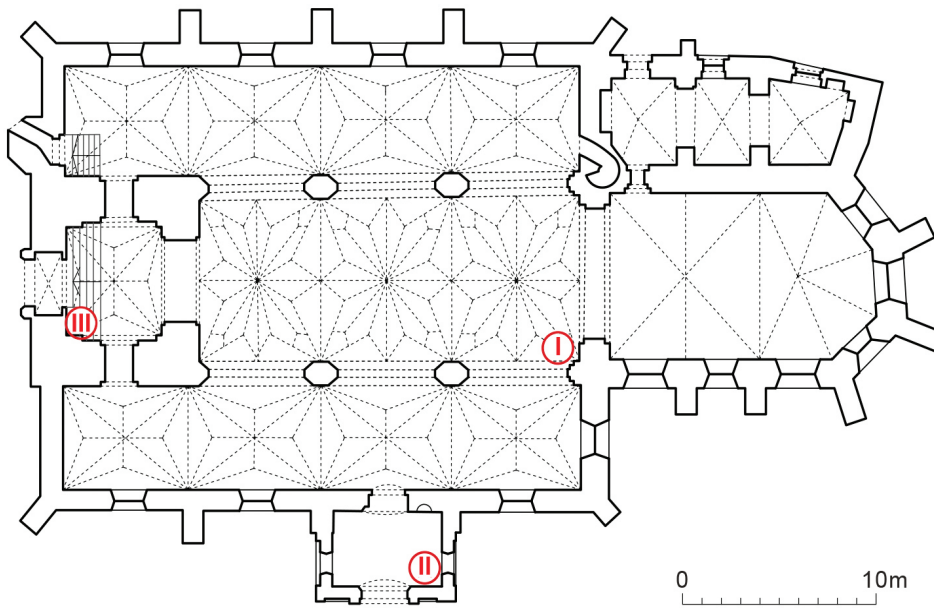


Fig. 1. Ground plan of the parish church of St. Nicholas in Grudziądz with the marked locations of three preserved baptismal fonts (elaborated by F. Hackemer)

Il. 1. Rzut przyziemia kościoła farnego św. Mikołaja w Grudziądzu z zaznaczonymi miejscami lokalizacji trzech zachowanych chrzcielnic (oprac. F. Hackemer)

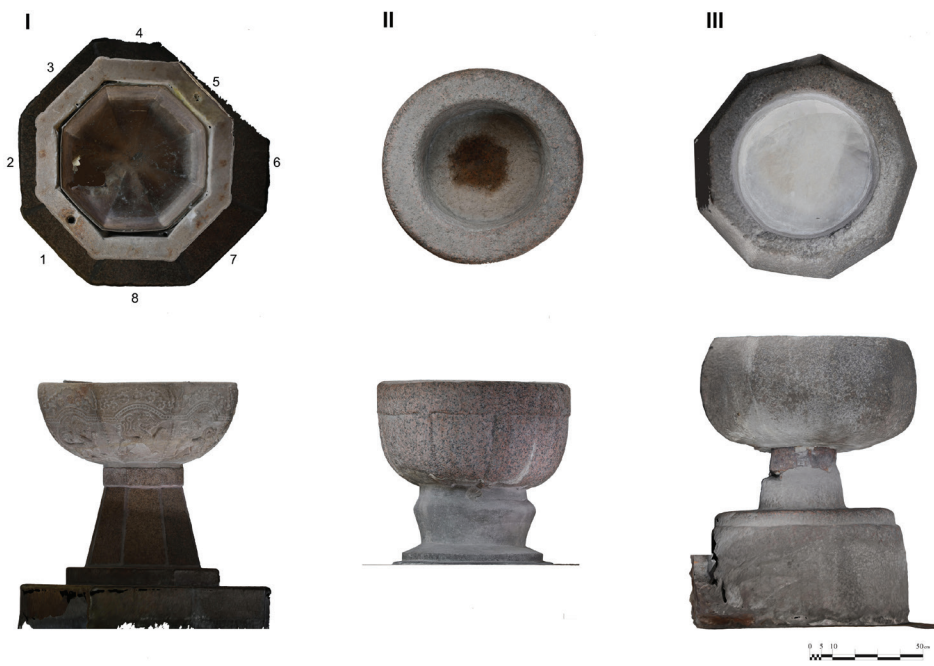


Fig. 2. Composition of three baptismal fonts from the parish church in Grudziądz, from above and from the side (photo and elaborated by F. Hackemer)

Il. 2. Zestawienie trzech chrzcielnic z kościoła farnego w Grudziądzu w ujęciu z góry i z boku (fot. i oprac. F. Hackemer)

graph of the baptismal font with animal/beast figures was also reproduced in this study (Fig. 3).

Today, the turbulent history of St. Nicholas Parish Church in Grudziądz gives no explanation as regards the origin of three stone baptismal fonts in the parish church. They present very different forms – from a very simple one devoid of any decoration (baptismal font III) to the one inspired by a bestiary with rich iconography and ornaments (baptismal font I). We cannot rule out the circumstances – known from other churches – in which formally and ornamentally poorer equipment was replaced by works of a more decorative form. In this case, the earlier baptismal font, which gave way to the new one, usually became a holy water font at the entrance to the church [6, pp. 1317, 1318]. This process – in the case of the rich city

of Grudziądz – might have been inspired by the aspirations for the representativeness and splendour of its inhabitants. The city parish church and its equipment performed a significant role here.

Baptismal font inspired by a bestiary

The main subject of this study is the preserved bowl of the stone baptismal font in Grudziądz Parish Church (Fig. 2, I) with a rich relief zoomorphic and ornamental decoration. The zoomorphic decoration is modelled on medieval bestiaries. As mentioned above, its bowl has been preserved from the original composition of the baptismal font. The reproduced photography in 1894 (Fig. 3) documents the embedding of the bowl on the base with



Fig. 3. Baptismal font from the parish church in Grudziądz, photograph reproduced in 1894 (source: [4, Table 3])

Il. 3. Chrzcielnica z kościoła farnego w Grudziądzu, fotografia reprodukowana w 1894 r. (źródło: [4, tab. 3])



Fig. 4. The baptismal font from the parish church in Grudziądz mounted on a modern granite base (photo by J. Nowiński)

Il. 4. Czasza chrzcielniczy z kościoła farnego w Grudziądzu osadzona na współczesnej granitowej podstawie (fot. J. Nowiński)

wavy forms which indicate their modern provenance. At present, the bowl is embedded on a modern polygonal base which is composed of granite slabs and segments; the wholeness is formed by a chalice layout with a bowl, shaft and foot (Fig. 4).

In his study, Johannes Heise described the baptismal font inspired by a bestiary as old and did not suggest the time of its construction [4, p. 498]. In 1939, Karl Heinz Clasen claimed that the baptismal font from Grudziądz was an import from Gotland or was made in the place where it stands by a Gotland stonemason and might have been built in the 3rd quarter of the 14th century by presenting a medieval sculpture from the State of the Teutonic Order [7, pp. 267–270]. In the study on medieval stone baptismal fonts in Poland, Jadwiga Kuczyńska accepted the dating of Clasen for the baptismal font in Grudziądz. However, she did not exclude its creation in around the mid-14th century. She also agreed that the baptismal font was completed in the church and ruled out its import from Gotland [5, p. 27]. Following Clasen, Jerzy Z. Łoziński presented Gotland's origin of the baptismal font and its creation in the 3rd quarter of the 14th century in the catalogue study of Pomeranian monuments [8, p. 407].

The octagonal bowl with a diameter of 87 cm and a height of 35 cm has a flattened form. Each of the eight fields, similar to the spherical triangle, is filled with analogously composed decoration realized in a shallow relief. In spite of difficulties resulting from the processing of hard material, the sculptor tried to carefully develop the shapes of each of the figural and ornamental elements, additionally enriching the bodies of animal beasts with a rich



Fig. 5. One of the beasts decorating the baptismal bowl (photo by J. Nowiński)

Il. 5. Jedna z bestii dekorujących czaszę chrzcielniczy (fot. J. Nowiński)

drawing of linear grooves which gave them decorativeness and elegance values (Fig. 5). The artist when sculpting the figures of beasts, emphasized their large heads with open mouths embedded on slender necks, paws with claws and tails which he deprived of a zoomorphic character giving them floral forms that resembled fancifully entwined tendrils; tails differ in the shape and expression of plant forms



Fig. 6. Combination of representations of the beast on the baptismal bowl (photo and elaborated by F. Hackemer)

Il. 6. Zestawienie przedstawień bestii na czaszy chrzcielniczy (fot. i oprac. F. Hackemer)

(Fig. 6). Clear ornamentation styling of the beast figures makes it difficult to determine their biological species. Linear grooves on their bodies and necks suggest shortness of the coat, which along with the predatory character of paws and mouths allows us to suppose that the beasts on the bowl can be images of a leopard, tiger, or puma, or – which seems to be the most convincing – they are only a presentation of predatory animals. The beasts in seven fields are shown by the right profile. A highly raised front paw and the arrange-



Fig. 7. The first and central field of the bowl composition, from which the procession of walking beasts begins and towards which it heads (photo by E. Łużyńska)

Il. 7. Pierwsze i centralne pole kompozycji czaszy, od którego rozpoczyna się i ku któremu zmierza orszak kroczących bestii (fot. E. Łużyńska)

ment of rear paws indicate their movement in one direction, i.e. towards the field from which the procession of animal beasts begins and ends. Thus, it is the first and central place of the composition (Fig. 7). It is filled with the image of a lion with a raised front paw shown by the left profile, i.e. heraldically turned to the right; a large head and neck are covered with a mane with twisted locks at the ends. The lion's tail is finished with a decorative tassel of a lilac form.

The figures of animals – beasts are enclosed by an ornamental frame with a quasi-architectonic form which creates a separate zone in the composition of the work in relation to the group of animals – beasts (Fig. 5, 7). The edges of each of the eight fields of the bowl are decorated with a board with a row of square pyramidal knobs in the base, which are cut to resemble routs. On the boards, like on thin supports, there is a frieze which goes through all the fields of the bowl and which also decorates the row of routs. Above the heads of beasts, the frieze rises with a section arch, which creates a form resembling an arcade along with vertical boards. Above the curvature of the frieze, five eight-field small rosettes are carved in each of the fields. On the extension of vertical boards, upper edges of each of the fields of the bowl are decorated with a human head with long wavy hair, embedded in a column whose cylindrical base rests on the corner section of the frieze (the faces of heads are today strongly blurred)⁴. Long, characteristically sculpted and symmetrical-

⁴ Destruction of anatomical details of faces might have resulted from rubbing them with a wooden (?) edge of the already non-existing

ly arranged hair of the figures go down along the columns to go into the form of an ornament forming a wave arch above small rosettes and a frieze at the height of their bases (Fig. 7).

The inside of the bowl is hollowed out and duplicates its octagonal shape. The interior for baptismal water is filled with copper (?) limewashed massive bowl which is adapted to the shape and size of the hollow (Fig. 2, I). In accordance with the liturgical regulations in force since the 13th century [1, pp. 121–123], the baptismal font bowl had a lid with a lock which was not preserved. On the upper edge of the bowl there are visible holes which once anchored its closure.

The oldest testimonies of the presence of a baptismal font in the interior of Grudziądz parish church include information in the protocols of episcopal visitation in the 17th century. In 1647, Grudziądz parish church was visited by Bishop of Chełmno Andrzej Leszczyński. In the post-visitation report it was written that the church had a stone baptismal font with a vessel [inside] cast in bronze [9, p. 41]⁵. Another record is in the report of the visitation of St. Nicholas Parish Church, which was conducted by canon Jan Ludwik Strzesz on Bishop Chełmiński Andrzej Olszowski's recommendation in 1667. Describing the interior and equipment of the parish church, the canon wrote that opposite Three Kings' Altar which was situated a little further from the southern entrance [to the church] at the pillar of the nave, in the back part of the church there was a baptismal font which – as they report – from Protestant times⁶ was secured with an enclosure made of wooden bars and locked with a padlock. Inside the baptismal font there was a copper vessel (*vas cupreum fusile*) [and the water in it] transparent and clean⁷. There was no piscina at the baptismal font⁸. The described location of the baptismal font in the western part of the church near the back entrance (*ad partem posticam templi*) corresponds to the centuries-old tradition of the Western Church, which was continued in the period after the Council of Trent. The practice in the times after the Council of Trent, which was also used by Protestants, was additional protection of access to the baptismal font in the form of the closed fence [1, pp. 128–132]. In the protocol, the inspector mentioned liturgical aspects and functional places of the baptism celebration, but he did not describe the baptismal font's decoration. However, like today, the fact that it had a copper vessel inside⁹ (*intus vas*

cupreum fusile) can be considered a premise which makes it possible to associate the baptismal font mentioned in the protocol with the analysed monument – a baptismal font inspired by a bestiary.

Artistic provenance of the baptismal font decoration

Kuczyńska, when discussing medieval stone baptismal fonts in Poland, drew attention to the relatively numerous works of Gotland provenance. These baptismal fonts came to the Baltic countries from Gotland [5, pp. 9, 10, 25–27]. They had bowls which were decorated in two ways, i.e. the first type presented bowls with arcaded architecture carved on their surfaces, which symbolized the casing of the source of water of life [12, pp. 50, 51]. The second type had bowls which were decorated with the motif of fantastic animals. Both types of baptismal fonts came to the areas of Western and Eastern Pomerania. Baptismal fonts with multi-side bowls, which were decorated with the motif of fantastic animals/beasts have been preserved in our lands in seven examples¹⁰. Although they are dated at the mid-14th century, they formally belong to the late Roman style; the discussed baptismal font from Grudziądz is among them [5, pp. 25, 26]. Four baptismal fonts have the biggest number of common features, although each of them has the original composition of the bowl decoration. They are in Chełmno (parish church, made in Gotland limestone), from Lubiana (at present at the National Museum in Szczecin, made in Gotland limestone), in the church in Wilamów (Sieradz Land) and in the parish church in Grudziądz (Fig. 8). The bowls of these baptismal fonts are flattened and their supports have not been preserved or have been transformed. The figures of animals, which are presented in a shallow relief, have a similar profile layout, hieratic poses without expressions, walking movement, and “plant tails”. Animals/beasts are surrounded by a quasi-architectonic/arcaded frame which in three cases is made from boards filled with routs (Chełmno, Wilamów, Grudziądz). Among these four formally related baptismal fonts, the bowl from Grudziądz is undoubtedly compositionally the richest and at the highest level in terms of art.

The preserved late Romanesque baptismal fonts, which are decorated with motives from bestiaries, have different workshop implementation, although they are similar in terms of iconography and ornamentation. Therefore, they were made or came from the environment in which artists used similar iconographic and formal models in their own way. Kuczyńska [5, p. 27] associated them with a complex of Gotland baptismal fonts which were defined as Fröjel Group from around the mid-14th century by Scandinavian researchers [13, pp. 88–90]. The name of the group originates from the decoration of the baptismal font bowl from the 1st half of the 14th century and is situated in the church

baptismal font cover; on the edges there are only holes after the structure anchoring the lid on the baptismal font.

⁵ *Fons baptismalis lapideus ahenum habet ex aere fusum* [9, p. 41].

⁶ Protestants occupied the parish church in Grudziądz in the years 1572–1598.

⁷ *Sequitur australis porta cum vestibulo adstructo [...]. Altare trium Regum paulo ulterius ad columnam sculpture gracilis [...]. Ex cuius oppositio ad partem posticam templi baptisterium collocatum est, ut feretur tempore possessionis lutheranae, cancellis cratibusque ligneis optime saeptum et serata munitum, cui tamen piscina deest. Intus vas cupreum fusile, fons pellucidus et mundus* [10, p. 293].

⁸ In this case, the term *piscina* refers to a small well under the flooring of the church, into which the baptism water used was poured, previous year's holy oils as well as water used for washing altar cloths [11, p. 991].

⁹ This vessel is cited once again in part of the protocol, where metal equipment belonging to the parish church was listed and here it was defined as *ahenum in fonte* [10, p. 299].

¹⁰ These are baptismal fonts preserved in Wilamów [14, pp. 36, 37, 62], Lubiana (at present, at the National Museum in Szczecin) [15, pp. 32, 33], Chełmno, Grudziądz, Elbląg (up to 1945) [16, pp. 36, 37, 62], Górsk and a fragment of the baptismal font bowl in St. James' Church in Toruń [17].

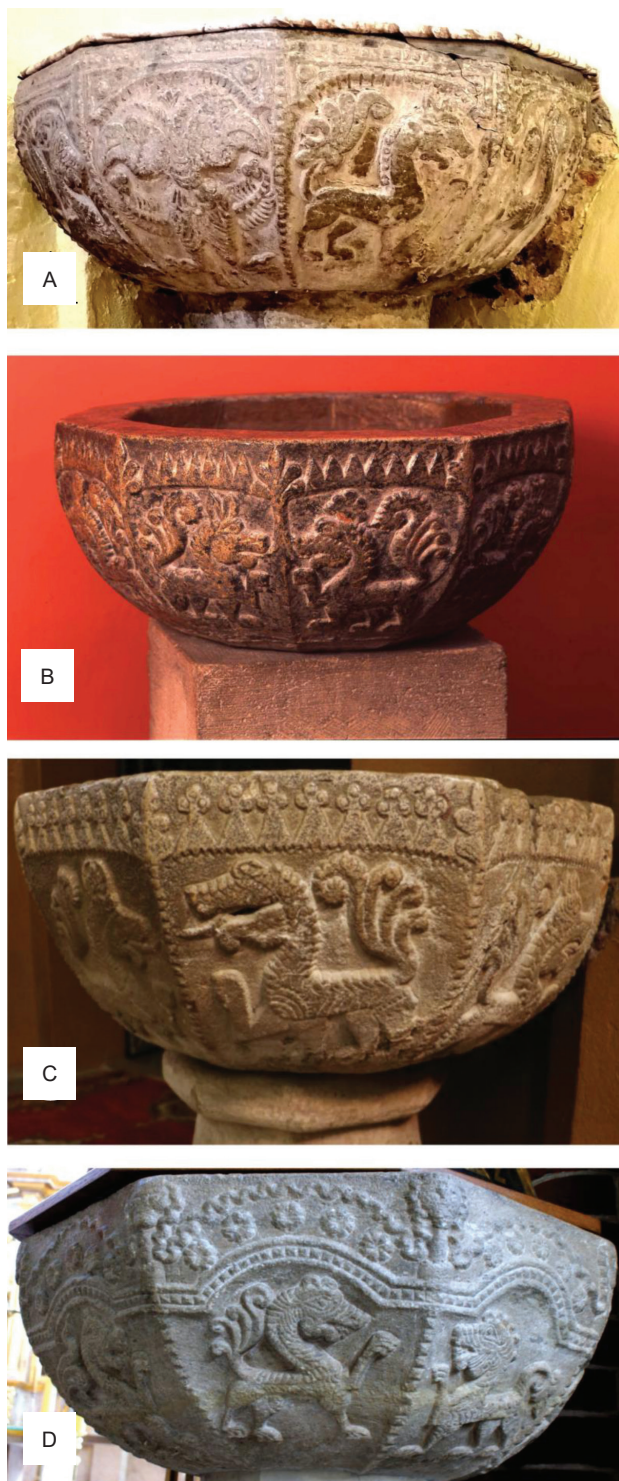


Fig. 8. Baptismal fonts associated with Fröjel Group with a bowl decorated with fantastic animals/beasts.

- A. Parish church in Chełmno (photo by R. Niedźwiedzki),
 B. Church in Lubiana,
 currently in the National Museum in Szczecin
 (photo by G. Solecki),
 C. Parish church in Wilamów (photo by City Hall in Uniejów),
 D. Parish church in Grudziądz (photo by E. Łużyniecka)

II. 8. Chrzcielnice łączone z Grupą Fröjel o czaszy dekorowanej fantastycznymi zwierzętami/bestiami.

- A. Kościół farny w Chełmnie (fot. R. Niedźwiedzki),
 B. Kościół w Lubianie, obecnie w Muzeum Narodowym w Szczecinie
 (fot. G. Solecki),
 C. Kościół parafialny w Wilamowie (fot. Urząd Miasta w Uniejowie),
 D. Kościół farny w Grudziądzu (fot. E. Łużyniecka)

in Fröjel on the west coast of Gotland (Fig. 9)¹¹. Baptismal fonts from this group were produced in Gotland in the 14th century and were broadly exported not only to, inter alia, churches in southern Sweden, provinces Skåne (Västra Karaby), Småland, Östergötland, Västergötland (Falterbo, Västra, Malmö), but also to Denmark (Magleby, Uggerslev, Traeden), Schleswik-Holstein, Mecklenburg, as well as to Western and Eastern Pomerania. The distinctive features include an eight-field composition of the body; the presence of fantastic animals/beasts shown in profiles and without any features of aggression; the figures of animals are usually enclosed by arcades supported by columns or boards with routs and placed in pairs with their heads turned to each other; the edges of the bowl fields are always accented, e.g. by rout lines and/or symbolic motifs (a cross, the Tree of Life, figures of people or human heads); striving for decorativeness and symmetry of the composition.

The repertoire of figural and ornamental forms was taken from the oldest artistic tradition which shaped the stylistics and iconography of Gotland baptismal fonts decorations by workshops within the framework of Fröjel Group. The beginnings of this tradition are associated with the so-called Master Byzantios [18, p. 221]. He was the artist, probably of Lombard origin, who appeared in Scandinavia within the framework of the organisation of Italian stonemasons and sculptors working on the construction of the cathedral in Lund. In the 2nd half of the 12th century Master Byzantios finally settled in Gotland and founded a workshop which specialised in the production of baptismal fonts whose characteristic form and decoration created the bases for Gotland works in the 13th and 14th centuries [19, pp. 249–253]. It was him who segmented the octagonal shape of the bowl by means of the harmonious and symmetrical rhythm of the arcades based on low supports; he enriched the fields between arcades in an ornamental or figurative way; apart from biblical scenes, in the fields of arcades he presented a fantastic bestiary made in a flat relief; in a part of the baptismal font support he placed four heads, i.e. of man, ram, lion, and panther. The variety of presented animals, including exotic ones (camel, elephant) and fantastic, sometimes of ancient origin (centaur, harpy, griffin), makes it possible to claim that Byzantios and his workshop used the illustrated tractate entitled *Physiologus* [20, pp. 26–35, 42–46, 51–54], [21] as well as other bestiaries and initiated inspiration with these works in Gotland workshops [19, p. 249]. Byzantios' baptismal font from the church in Öja in Gotland (at present, Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm) is a good example of this kind of decoration. Here, we can also mention the works of Byzantios' followers from the so-called Bestiarius Group from the 3rd and 4th quarters of the 12th century (Fig. 10) [12, pp. 17–19]¹². On baptismal fonts, Byzantios as well

¹¹ Photographic documentation along with factual information about Swedish baptismal fonts from Fröjel Group is presented by portal KRINGLA.NU which is run by the Council of the Swedish National Heritage, <https://kringla.nu/kringla/sok?text=Fr%C3%B6jelgruppen&referens=shm/art/910504F1> [accessed: 5.07.2023].

¹² Photographic documentation along with factual information on baptismal fonts from Bestiarius Group is presented by KRINGLA.NU

as his followers presented animals devoid of wildness or aggression by means of modifying zoomorphic details, i.e. a tail and a tongue which were replaced by winding plant stems. These authors implemented their works mainly in Gotland sandstone and sometimes also in limestone.

The author of the baptismal font from the parish church in Grudziądz – as evidenced by his work – was perfectly familiar with the repertoire of ornamental forms and the iconographic tradition functioning in the workshops of Fröjel Group. By confronting the baptismal bowl from Grudziądz with the works associated with this group in Scandinavia, it is necessary to point to the higher artistic level of the sculptor who made it. He is a creator with a shaped style. He is characterized by greater symmetry of the composition and the precision of the carved matter development as well as clear striving for decorativeness of forms (rouls, linear grooves on animal bodies, fancy shapes of “plant-like tails”, ornamental character of hair of the heads presented on edges). In St. Nicholas Parish Church in Grudziądz there is a preserved characteristic work of this author, in which he used various compositional and iconographic solutions found in the decoration of baptismal fonts connected with Fröjel Group. These include development of arcades’ decorations and their supports with the use of rouls (Fig. 9B, C, D); profile images of fanciful animals presented in a flat relief and devoid of features of aggression (Fig. 9A–D); the application of sequins/small rosettes above arcades (Fig. 9B, C, D); human heads/figures on the edges of fields of the baptismal font in the space between the arcades (Figs. 7, 11); a very characteristic method of developing long wavy hair on the heads from the upper edges of the baptismal font (Figs. 7, 11A, D). The Gotland artistic formation of the author of the baptismal font from Grudziądz is beyond any doubts. However, it is necessary to draw attention to the important innovation which appeared in his work. In the tradition of Gotland baptismal fonts with bowls decorated with arcades, the scenes presented in arcades (e.g. biblical) were not interrelated. The figures of animals/beasts were presented in a similar way, i.e. without any mutual relationship (Fig. 10). The beasts decorating baptismal fonts from Fröjel Group are usually depicted in pairs facing each other at the edges of the bowl (Figs. 8, 9). However, in the composition of the baptismal font in Grudziądz, all animals/beasts are shown with the right profile and walk in one direction, i.e. to the lion heraldically shown with the left profile (Figs. 4–7). In this baptismal font there is a clear two-zone symmetrical layout of the composition of the whole which is divided into an animal procession zone and the arcaded frieze zone crowning the upper part of the bowl.

The issue which in the current discussion on the history of the baptismal font did not give a definitive explanation, was the answer to the question whether the baptismal font from Grudziądz is an import from Gotland or Scandinavia or it was made where it is now by a Gotland sculptor. Kuczyńska – as already mentioned – was in favour



Fig. 9. Bowls of Scandinavian baptismal fonts from Fröjel Group:
A. Fröjel, parish church (photo by S. Simonsson),
B. Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm (photo by L. Karlsson),
C. Västra Karaby (currently Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm) (photo by L. Karlsson),
D. Magleby, parish church (photo by G. Pedersen)

II. 9. Czasze skandynawskich chrzcielnic z Grupy Fröjel:
A. Fröjel, kościół parafialny (fot. S. Simonsson),
B. Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm (fot. L. Karlsson),
C. Västra Karaby (obecnie Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm) (fot. L. Karlsson),
D. Magleby, kościół parafialny (fot. G. Pedersen)



Fig. 10. Details of baptismal fonts decorated with motifs of fantastic animals framed by arcades from the Bestiarius Group, 3rd–4th quarter of the 12th century: A. Filsby (Småland) (photo by L. Karlsson, Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm),

B. Näveljö (Småland) (photo by L. Karlsson, Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm),

C. Tjureda (Småland) (photo by L. Karlsson, Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm),

D. Svanshals (Östergötland, currently Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm) (photo by L. Karlsson, Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm)

Il. 10. Detale czaszy chrzcielnic dekorowanych motywem fantastycznych zwierząt ujętych arkadami z Grupy Bestiarius, 3.–4. ćwierć XII w.:

A. Filsby (Småland) (fot. L. Karlsson, Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm),

B. Näveljö (Småland) (fot. L. Karlsson, Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm),

C. Tjureda (Småland) (fot. L. Karlsson, Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm),

D. Svanshals (Östergötland, obecnie Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm) (fot. L. Karlsson, Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm)

of the second solution arguing that the hard stone from which it was made was not imported from Gotland [5, p. 27]. Piotr Birecki recently presented the opposite and intriguing opinion on the provenance of the baptismal font claiming that [...] *it was not made in the local stonemason's workshop, but was brought, as it is widely accepted, by knights who took part in the fights against pirates in Gotland in 1398* [22, p. 122]. Unfortunately, the author does not reveal the source of this information and a general character of the statement “as it is widely accepted” does not constitute an argument in the discussion on the provenance of the monument¹³.

When arguing with the opinion of Kuczyńska, it should be indicated that in fact Gotland sandstone – fine-grained and easy to process stonework – was a material which was

usually used by stonemasons and sculptors. It was also the most common stone exported in completed products and as a building/sculptural material from Gotland exported to almost the entire area of the Baltic Sea. However, it is known that this was not the only stone employed by the Scandinavian and Gotland sculptors who also took advantage of the rich diversity of stones in the territories of today's Sweden – one of the richest in stone deposits areas in Europe. Publications by Klaus-Dieter Meyer, a geologist and petrographer, on the provenance of baptismal fonts' rocks in the territory of northern Germany, and in particular the results of his recent research on the matter of Scandinavian stone baptismal fonts from this area and from Sweden [23], showed that baptismal fonts made of Scandinavian stones might have been made of different types of limestone, various types of sandstone, granite, gneiss, soapstone, amphibolite. The quoted author by recalling representative examples indicated that baptismal fonts which were made in similar stone also showed similar stylistic features specified by the hardness and structure of the stone [23, pp. 80, 94]. Apart from Gotland sandstones, the matter for baptismal fonts was also hard quartz-

¹³ In my opinion, claims that the baptismal font was brought by knights and the related date – 1398 – constitute a modern creation which tries to connect the Grudziądz baptismal font with the expedition of the Teutonic Order to Gotland under the command of Konrad von Jungingen in 1398 against the Victual Brothers (*Fratres Vitalienses*) – common pirates looting ships on the Baltic Sea.

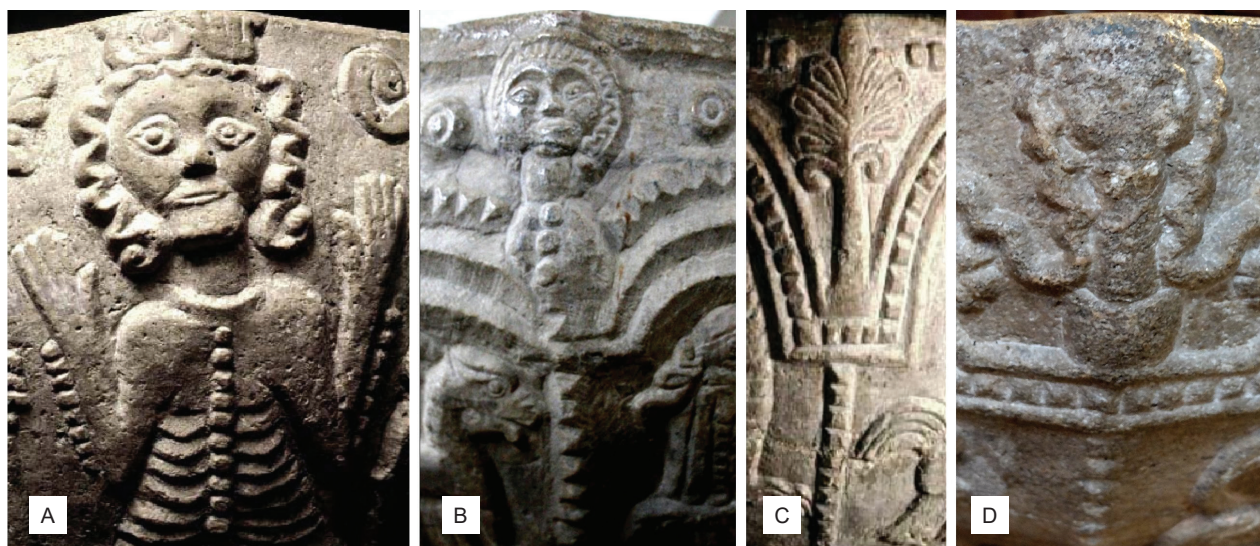


Fig. 11. A characteristic motif of heads/human figures/Tree of Life on the edges of the baptismal font fields in the space between the arcades:

A. Falsterbo (photo by L. Karlsson, Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm), B. Magleby (photo by E.G. Antoňana),

C. excerpt from baptismal font (photo by L. Karlsson, Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm), D. Grudziądz (photo by J. Nowiński)

Il. 11. Charakterystyczny motyw głów/ postaci ludzkich/ Drzewa Życia na krawędziach pól chrzcielniczy w przestrzeni między arkadami:

A. Falsterbo (fot. L. Karlsson, Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm),

B. Magleby (fot. E.G. Antoňana),

C. fragment chrzcielniczy (fot. L. Karlsson, Statens Historiska Museum Stockholm), D. Grudziądz (fot. J. Nowiński)

ite sandstones found in Sweden, inter alia, in the vicinity of Gävle and Höör [23, pp. 84, 95]. In the summary of his research, Klaus-Dieter Meyer points out that apart from recognized environments and materials for the production of Scandinavian baptismal fonts, which we encounter in a wide area of northern Europe, baptismal fonts made of local rocks and in small quantities were always produced and exported. And although they are not researched more thoroughly as regards the export of Scandinavian baptismal fonts, they should also be taken into consideration [23, p. 94]. According to K.-D. Meyer's conclusions, the stone hardness cannot constitute a circumstance which excludes the import of a ready work from Scandinavia, including Gotland. In the case of the baptismal font from the parish church in Grudziądz, formal as well as compositional and iconographic analogies connecting its author with the stylistics of baptismal fonts from Fröjel Group – formed from the 1st half of the 14th century (Fröjel) up to the end of this century – support the creation of the baptismal font in the territory of Scandinavia in the circle of the influence of Gotland models.

A closer premise for the dating of the Grudziądz work is the similarity of ornamental elements (roulets on arcades, small rosettes/sequins on the crowning frieze) and a very characteristic way of presenting and developing long wavy hair of the figures shown on the edges of the bowl with analogous elements of the baptismal font decoration preserved in the church in Västra Karaby in Scania (limestone, Fröjel Group; Fig. 9C). The female figure depicted on one of the edges of the bowl has a head decorated with a cruseler in the form of an inverted letter U – a characteristic element of women's fashion, which was popular since the mid-14th century. This cruseler also adorns the head of a woman on one of the edges of the baptismal font in

Magleby in Denmark (limestone, Fröjel Group; Fig. 9D). Isis Sturtewagen's studies of the history, form, and popularity of a cruseler in the Netherlands as well as in northern and central Europe showed that in the area of southern Sweden, including Scania, a cruseler in the above-mentioned form was popular in the period from around 1350 to 1400 [24, pp. 21, 83]. The decoration of the baptismal font from Västra Karaby must have been accomplished after 1350. A close similarity of forms of the baptismal font from Grudziądz with this work makes it possible to put forward a hypothesis regarding a similar time to its creation, i.e. after 1350. In this situation, Karl H. Clasen's suggestion, which was also repeated by Łoziński, that the Grudziądz baptismal font might have been created in the 3rd quarter of the 14th century, is becoming quite probable.

The issue of the provenance of the Grudziądz work which was discussed for years was definitely solved by the petrographic expertise of a baptismal stone sample¹⁴. It was commissioned to Wojciech Bartz PhD during the writing of this article. He is an assistant professor at the Department of Experimental Petrology of the Institute of Geological Sciences of the University of Wrocław. Petrographic studies showed that [...] *a sample of the rock taken from the baptismal font in St. Nicholas Church in Grudziądz represents sedimentary and carbonate rocks – limestone. It consists practically only of rhombohedral carbonate crystals developed in various forms. Some of the carbonates are sparite crystals and the subordinate part are elements of a pelite character (micrite). [...]*

¹⁴ A stone sample from the inside of the baptismal font bowl on its edge, with the consent of the parish priest, canon Dariusz Kunicki, was taken by Professor Ewa Łużyńska and the author of this article in April 2023.

A grey colour of the rock and a carbonate character in combination with the location of the object from which the sample was taken may suggest the origin of the rock raw material in which the baptismal font from Gotland Island was made. Silurian limestone found here is very often found in the architectural details of Northern Poland. However, typical limestone varieties have a biogenic character and abound in numerous carbonate bioclasts. The so-called limestone from Hoburgen, which is rich in sparite cement, is similar to the sample in terms of petrographic features [25, p. 1]. Hoburgen limestone deposits are located at the southern end of Gotland and form a cliff coast of this part of the island.

Summing up the discussion on the authorship and origin of the baptismal font from St. Nicholas' Church in Grudziądz, it is possible to indicate not only the Gotland models which its author used, but also the Gotland provenance of the stone in which it was carved – deposits of limestone Hoburgen. Therefore, this work should be treated as an import from Gotland.

Iconography and ideological content of the baptismal font decoration

The shape and decoration of baptismal fonts in the Middle Ages resulted from the fact that they stored baptismal water solemnly consecrated once a year (on Holy Saturday) – the only and irreplaceable matter of the sacrament of baptism, fundamentally different from the so-called holy water, commonly used in liturgical ceremonies and in the devotional practices of the faithful. An important element of the ceremony of consecration of baptismal water was its exorcism, through which – freed from all devilish power – it became a holy source of cleansing and regenerative water. Those washed in it during baptism were fully purified from sins and freed from evil. The consecration of baptismal water made it a holy and sanctifying thing, a carrier of divine power, fruitful in salvation [1, pp. 107–111].

The presence of consecrated baptismal water in the baptismal font resulted in its shape (originally cylindrical) being differentiated, formally separating a bowl with water from the base. According to the early Christian tradition continued by the Roman Church, the shape of the bowl in the late Middle Ages was usually octagonal, symbolizing rebirth to a new life through baptism and the promise of resurrection [1, p. 111, especially note 24]. The symbolic shape of the bowl was accompanied by its ornamentation, which could emphasize various contents related to the essence of the sacrament: the holiness and life-giving nature of baptism, the victorious power over evil, the transformation of the baptized, the hope of salvation through Christ and with Christ, the reality of paradise. The artistic and iconographic distinction of the bowls of baptismal fonts emphasized the presence of baptismal water in them, providing the faithful with visual proof of the holy power and effectiveness of the sacrament.

The above-mentioned ideological content related to the form and decoration of medieval baptismal fonts was fully realized in the case of the baptismal font from the parish

church of St. Nicholas in Grudziądz¹⁵. In order to illustrate the theological message (which was probably presented to him by the person who commissioned the work – this will be discussed later), the creator of the baptismal font – in accordance with the tradition long present in his artistic environment (Master Byzantios) – used symbolic representations of animals, whose iconography and drama of the action with their participation were taken from the already mentioned medieval bestiary – the *Physiologus* [21]. As already emphasized, the composition of the bowl decoration has its center, which is a field with the representation of a lion (Fig. 7). The treatise *Physiologus* also begins with a description of the lion, which considers it the king of animals, symbolically referring it to Christ. The *Physiologus* describes three types of lions, and the first type is illustrated on the baptismal font: a carved lion stands calmly, has a curly mane, a noticeably large head and an accentuated tail¹⁶.

The remaining seven animals, which have toothed mouths and paws with claws, short hair and maneless necks, are difficult to identify zoologically due to their ornamental styling. Their representations on the baptismal font in Grudziądz represent the images of beasts described in the *Physiologus*¹⁷. These beasts, just like in the bestiary works by Master Byzantios and his followers and in Fröjel Group, are devoid of savagery and aggression¹⁸. Their symbolic representation and importance in the baptismal font decoration program is evidenced by the fact that the artist deprived them of animal tails, replacing them with floral forms – fancifully curled plant tendrils (Figs. 5, 6). Describing the dragon, considered a symbol of Satan in the Middle Ages, the *Physiologus* states that dragon venom is not found in the teeth, but in the tail [21, p. 63]. As mentioned above, washing with exorcised baptismal water during baptism also resulted in exorcism – freedom from evil and its power. In this case, depriving the beasts of their tails – a symbol of devilish power – and replacing them with lush plant tendrils illustrates the effect of the exorcism performed in baptism¹⁹. Receiving the sacrament had

¹⁵ In 2016, an article by Marek Szajerka was published on the symbolism of the Grudziądz baptismal font. It is difficult to argue with this text, the author of which, setting out to identify the symbols of the bowl decoration, does so on the basis of incorrect identification of artistic forms and iconography, and the interpretation is based on subjective associations, without references to the artistic, iconographic and symbolic tradition [26].

¹⁶ *There are three types of lions, some are small, curly-maned and calm, others have an elongated body, and still others have a straight and sharp mane. Their feelings are expressed in the head and tail, their courage is in the chest, and their strength is in the head [21, p. 38].*

¹⁷ *The name of beast rightly belongs to lions, leopards, foxes, tigers, wolves, monkeys, bears and others that use both mouths and claws, with the exception of snakes. They are called beasts because of the power that makes them fierce [21, p. 38].*

¹⁸ According to Kuczyńska, *beasts [...] devoid of the expression of destructive power; [...] their stiff and posed figures on baptismal fonts from the 14th century seem to have primarily a decorative role [5, p. 28].*

¹⁹ This way of illustrating evil tamed by holy action occurs, among others, in the decorations of Romanesque portals – masks with plant tendrils coming out of the mouth (e.g. Czerwińsk around 1140, Wrocław portal from Olbin, 1230s) and in the programs of monastic and canonical stalls, where dragons acting as canopy partitions and supports, have

sanctifying power, baptism conferred divine grace resulting in salvation, announced participation in the happiness of paradise and enjoying the fruits of the paradise Tree of Life (*arbor vitae*). The symbolism of the Tree of Life was expressed by plant motifs on baptismal fonts [1, pp. 111, 112], [27, pp. 57–64]. The beasts with plant tails on the bowl of the baptismal font in Grudziądz symbolically illustrate the newly baptized who are thus freed from the power of Satan and transformed so that they march in a harmonious line towards Christ, symbolically shown as a lion-king. The hieratic nature of the procession of animals/beasts gives the whole thing a solemn, ceremonial expression. The text of the *Physiologus*, describing the panther (which he also perceives as a symbol of Christ), points in a moralizing commentary to the need to follow Christ and the aroma of His teaching, since He will lead those who follow Him to salvation: *We should as soon as possible [...] that is, as souls transformed by baptism [sic!], follow in the footsteps of the oils of the commandments of Christ, in order to move from earthly things to heavenly ones, so that the King may bring us into his palace, that is, into his city of Jerusalem and to the mount of all saints* [21, p. 62].

This eschatological perspective, presented in the last sentence of the *Physiologus* moralistic commentary, is the fulfilment of the hope of salvation, which begins at the baptismal font in a sacramental ceremony. At the baptismal font in Grudziądz, a lion symbolizing Christ the King will lead the souls transformed by baptism to *his city of Jerusalem, to the mount of all saints* – this meaning can be read from the architectural elements placed on the baptismal font and the accompanying decorations (frieze and arcades with decorations of routs, rosettes, Fig. 7). The eight long-haired heads shown on columns with bases in the upper part of the baptismal font, above the frieze and arcades, have the character of an architectural decoration with a symbolic meaning. They can be perceived as monumental images of saints decorating the architecture of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Such heads or human figures on other Gotland baptismal fonts (Figs. 9, 11) represented baptized people of various ages, sexes and states who had achieved salvation (Figs. 9C, D, 11C – the Paradise Tree of Life).

The ideological message and the corresponding iconographic program of the baptismal font from the parish church in Grudziądz have a well-thought-out and coherent

character. To illustrate defined theological content, the creator of the baptismal font skilfully used compositional solutions and artistic forms existing in his artistic environment at the time the work was created. It is necessary to emphasize its originality and artistic level, which distinguish the baptismal font in Grudziądz in relation to its contemporary implementations of Gotlandic and Scandinavian provenance.

As already mentioned, the iconographic composition of the decoration of the Grudziądz baptismal font is an original work and – despite analogies – differs from related Gotland works by a procession of beasts moving in one direction and a clear two-zone, symmetrical arrangement of the entire composition. These differences against a background of the solutions existing in the Gotland tradition and the coherent and unique ideological program of the work allow us to hypothesize that this program was given to the creator of the baptismal font along with the order for its construction. Could this program have been created in Grudziądz? I think so – within the Teutonic Order, developing a theological concept for the decoration of the baptismal font for the parish church was not unique. It should be borne in mind that at a similar time, in the last quarter of the 14th century, a program for the altarpiece setting in the chapel of the Teutonic castle was created, outstanding in its theological message; this work is known today as the *Polyptych of Grudziądz* [28, pp. 87–100]. The use of information about animals contained in the *Physiologus* and the accompanying moralizing comments in this environment in the 14th century was also not unusual, much less belated. In his research on the history and reception of the *Physiologus*, Friedrich Lauchert showed that from the 13th century to the end of the Middle Ages, inspiration from the content of this bestiary in literature, poetry, preaching and art was common in Europe [29, pp. 164–195]. Therefore, the development of an ideological program for the decoration of the Grudziądz baptismal font in the 2nd half of the 14th century, based on the descriptions and comments contained in the *Physiologus*, was not unique or atypical. From there, the program prepared in Grudziądz could reach Gotland, which had been an important centre of Hansa activity since the 12th century, through trade contacts within the Hanseatic connections of the towns on the Vistula river in the territory of the Teutonic state. The finished work probably arrived in Grudziądz via the same route.

dragon's tails replaced by rich plant tendrils (e.g. Loccum, stalls in the former Cistercian church, around 1250; Kołobrzeg cathedral, chapter stalls, 1340; Schulpforta, stalls in the former Cistercian church, mid-14th century.

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Abstract

Late Romanesque baptismal font from St. Nicholas Church in Grudziądz – import from Gotland

The article discusses the study of the baptismal font located next to the presbytery of Saint Nicholas parish church in Grudziądz. The aim of the research conducted in 2023 was to verify current views on its centuries-old history. Our study presents the history of the object, its artistic provenance, iconography and ideological content.

Based on the research, it was found that the late Romanesque baptismal bowl is an original work of Gotland provenance, dating back to the 2nd half of the 14th century. Its Gotland origin is evidenced by formal, compositional and iconographic analogies connecting its creator with the style of Gotland workshops known as the so-called Fröjel Group that was active in Gotland and southern Scandinavia around the mid-14th century. The decisive argument for the origin of the baptismal font from Gotland was the petrographic examination of its stone carried out in July 2023, which showed that it was made of Gotland limestone found in the Hoburgen deposits. This work should therefore be treated as an import from Gotland.

The article also emphasizes that in order to illustrate the theological message, the creator of the baptismal font – in accordance with the tradition present in his artistic environment – used symbolic representations of animals, the iconography of which and the dramaturgy of actions involving them were taken from the medieval bestiary – *Physiologus*. The beasts shown on the baptismal font, exorcised by baptism, walk in a row towards Christ symbolized by a lion.

Key words: Gotland, Grudziądz, St. Nicholas Church, baptismal font, Fröjel Group, *Physiologus*

Streszczenie

Późnoromańska chrzcielnica z kościoła św. Mikołaja w Grudziądzu – import z Gotlandii

W artykule zostały omówione badania chrzcielnicy ustawionej przy prezbiterium fary pw. św. Mikołaja w Grudziądzu. Celem badań prowadzonych w 2023 r. była weryfikacja dotychczasowych poglądów na temat jej wielowiekowej historii. W pracy została zaprezentowana historia obiektu, jego proveniencja artystyczna, ikonografia i treści ideowe.

Na podstawie badań stwierdzono, że późnoromańska czasza chrzcielnicy jest oryginalnym dziełem gotlandzkiej proveniencji, datowanym na 2. połowę XIV w. Za jej gotlandzkim pochodzeniem świadczą analogie formalne i kompozycyjno-ikonograficzne łączące jej twórcę ze stylistyką warsztatów gotlandzkich znanych jako tzw. Grupa Fröjel, czynnych na Gotlandii i w południowej Skandynawii około połowy XIV w. Decydującym argumentem o pochodzeniu chrzcielnicy z Gotlandii stało się badanie petrograficzne jej kamienia w lipcu 2023 r., które wykazało, że została wykonana z gotlandzkiego wapienia występującego w złożach Hoburgen. Należy zatem traktować to dzieło jako import z Gotlandii.

W artykule podkreślono także, że w celu zilustrowania teologicznego przesłania twórcza chrzcielnicy – zgodnie z tradycją obecną w jego środowisku artystycznym – sięgnął po symboliczne przedstawienia zwierząt, których ikonografię oraz dramaturgię akcji z ich udziałem zaczerpnął ze średniowiecznego bestiariusza – *Fizjologa (Physiologus)*. Ukazane na czaszy chrzcielnicy bestie, egzorcyzmowane przez chrzest, idą w szeregu ku Chrystusowi symbolizowanemu przez lwa.

Słowa kluczowe: Gotlandia, Grudziądz, kościół św. Mikołaja, chrzcielnica, grupa Fröjel, *Physiologus*