THE CHAPEL OF ST. CASIMIR IN VILNIUS –  A COUNTER-REFORMATION LANDMARK

Summary. The present study takes issue with the accepted view (cf. Vikipedija) that the Chapel of St. Casimir in the Cathedral of Vilnius (1623–1636) resembles the Pauline and the Sistine Chapels in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. A closer look and comparison of the dimensions, geometry, materials, and internal décor, however, reveals significant differences. The defining architectural features of the Chapel of St. Casimir do not derive from these Baroque chapels but from multiple Biblical and Early Christian sources. (This study focused on the Chapel’s interior features that survived the 1655–1661 occupation of Vilnius.) Its cubic core recalls the twenty-cubit amplitude of the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. The black marble walls (noir de Namur) allude to the blackening acacia wood of the Ark of the Covenant holding the Ten Commandment stone tablets that Moses received from the Lord on Mt. Sinai. The ox-blood colored pilasters (vieux rouge de Rance) recall the porphyry columns of the Aedicule that sheltered the Tomb of Christ in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem. The Chapel’s reduced Greek cross plan derives from Vitruvius and recalls Early Christian mausoleums. The Ionic column capitals in the Chapel duplicate the ones in the entrance portals of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome and in the Confessio above the tomb of St. Peter the Apostle in the Roman necropolis underneath the Basilica. The Council of Trent upheld Early Christian customs, precedents, and traditions. Materializing the Council’s values, the Chapel became a landmark of the Counter-Reformation. The study at hand relied heavily on the indispensable archival documents gleaned by Povilas Reklaitis, Paulius Rabikauskas, SJ, Zenonas Ivinskis, Mintautas Čiurinskas, Birutė Rūta Vitkauskienė, and Piotr Jacek Jamski.

Keywords: Council of Trent, Ark of the Covenant, Temple of Solomon, Holy of Holies, Vitruvian Man, Aedicule, Confessio, Medici Chapels, Constante Tencalla.

INTRODUCTION

The Chapel of St. Casimir in the Cathedral of Vilnius, built 1623–1636 and dedicated to St. Casimir (1458–1484), the patron saint of Lithuania, embodied the Council of Trent’s (1545–1563) values regarding the ecclesiastical arts. The Holy See convened the Council to confront the Protestant Reformation, to clarify the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, and to address its shortcomings. The twenty-five sessions defined the Counter-Reformation, to clarify the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, and to address its shortcomings. Its twenty-five sessions defined the Counter-Reformation, affirming the legitimacy and historical continuity of Roman Catholicism. The Council did not address church arts as such but upheld Early Christian customs, precedents, and traditional practices. While Protestants rejected the very notion of sainthood, Roman Catholics steadfastly continued the Early Christian practice of honoring saints’ relics and burial sites, celebrating their feast days, and including their names in hymns, litanies, and prayers. After the Council closed, Charles Borromeo, the Archbishop of Milan (1564–1584), canonized in 1610, elaborated in minute detail the Council’s broad starting position. He also explained that churches could be richly adorned, employing all the arts to present, clarify, and affirm the teachings of the Catholic Church (Fig. 1).

Minding the Council’s aims and St. Borromeo’s counsel, Sigismund III Vasa, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania (1587–1632), and Eustachijus Valavičius (Eustachy Wollowicz), Bishop of Vilnius (1616–1630), established the Chapel in the Cathedral of Vilnius to enshrine the relics of St. Casimir and to celebrate the *ritus semiduplex* upgrade of 1621 that legitimized his veneration
The Chapel’s defining architectural features – cubical core, twenty cubit amplitude, reduced Greek cross plan, black marble walls (*noir de Namur*), ox-blood hued marble columns and pilasters (*vieux rouge de Rance*), and Christianized Ionic capitals – referred directly to specific Biblical and Early Christian sources. Materializing the Council’s sensibilities about ecclesiastical art, the Chapel of St. Casimir became a canonical highlight of the Counter-Reformation’s architectural legacy (Fig. 2).

**PART I – FROM LOCAL CULT TO CANONIZATION OF PRINCE CASIMIR**

Prince Casimir, a scion of the Polish-Lithuanian Jogaila (Jagiello) dynasty and a deeply devout Roman Catholic from childhood, practiced lifelong habits of personal austerity and intense piety. His ascetic life and habitual fasting eventually weakened his health, and, at the age of twenty-five, he succumbed to a lung ailment in Grodno. His

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**Fig. 1. Vilnius. Chapel of St. Casimir. View of exterior from the southeast. Kęstutis Paulius Žygas photographer, 2019**

**Fig. 2. Vilnius. Chapel of St. Casimir. Ebony retable of 1630s set into current interior. Kęstutis Paulius Žygas and David Richardson computer drawing, 2018. Based on P. Jamski and W. Markiewicz, Barok-Historia-Literatura-Sztuka, T. 12, Nr. 2 (24), 2005**
remains were transferred to the Cathedral of Vilnius and interred in the Royal Chapel, dedicated to Most Holy Mary and Sts. Andrew and Stanislaus, where he had often meditated and prayed. His brother Alexander, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania (1501–1506) and both consorts of King Sigismund II Augustus (1548–1572), Queen Elizabeth (1543–1545) and Queen Barbora Radvilaite (1550–1551), were later interred alongside. Increasing numbers of devout pilgrims came to pray and honor the deceased Prince Casimir. After several miracles were reported, his veneration developed into a popular local devotion (Fig. 3).

In 1501 King Alexander and Albertas Taboras, Bishop of Vilnius (1492–1507), reported the miracles to the Holy See. Pope Alexander VI (1492–1503) responded by granting indulgences to pilgrims venerating Casimir at the Royal Chapel. Pope Leo X (1513–1521) formed a commission in 1517 to ascertain the facts regarding the sanctity of Prince Casimir’s life and to investigate the alleged miracles. The commission prepared a report in 1521, but it was lost with other crucial documents during the devastating 1527 Sack of Rome. The canonization process stalled for decades thereafter but was renewed at the century’s end. Grigalius Svencickis (Gregory Swiecicki), canon of the Vilnius cathedral (1597–1617), journeyed to Rome in 1602 carrying letters from Sigismund III and Benediktas Vaina, Bishop of Vilnius (1600–1615), petitioning for the canonization of Casimir and seeking his worldwide recognition (Fig. 4).

Pope Clement VIII (1592–1605) issued the papal letter, or breve, “Quae ad Sanctorum” on November 7, 1602, allowing the liturgical celebration of St. Casimir at the rite duplex level according to the rubrics of the Roman Breviary. Unless pre-empted by a feast day of greater significance, specific readings and prayers dedicated to St. Casimir would be read annually on the fourth of March, commemorating the day he died. The breve recounted his
life and the miracles credited to his intercession – defeat of Muscovy’s army, raising Ursula from her deathbed, and healing the infirm, the blind, and the disabled. St. Casimir’s veneration, however, was confined to the Commonwealth, and Vilnius became the cult’s epicenter.

Canon Svencickis remained in Rome several months acquiring printed prayers and texts about St. Casimir, also a labarum, a large, elaborately decorated banner with his image. Delayed by a plague outbreak, Vilnius jubilantly celebrated the canonization with a series of events May 10–12, 1604. The festivities started with a grandiose, six-hour long triumphal procession carrying the breve and labarum from the city gate to the Cathedral. Church bells, cannonades, and an orchestra accompanied the guilds, students, schoolchildren, confraternities, sodalities, Catholic and Uniate clergy, senators and nobility. Once inside the Cathedral, the labarum was laid on the saint’s sarcophagus. The following day, Clement VIII’s breve was read during Mass. The ceremonies ended on the third day with the laying of the foundation stone for the Church of St. Casimir, completed in 1616 and presently facing the Vilnius Town Hall.

The quest for worldwide recognition of St. Casimir continued. Sigismund III petitioned the Holy See again in 1620 to formally include the saint’s feast day in the Roman Breviary. The Sacred Congregation of Rites considered the request and on December 12, 1620, granted it the lowest simplex grade. Bishop Valavičius submitted a corresponding petition. The Sacred Congregation replied on January 23, 1621, to consult the pontiff. Paul V (1605–1621) confirmed raising the ritu duplex grade (assigned in 1602) to the higher ritu semiduplex level. The Sacred Congregation then ordered the next printings of the Breviary and the Missal to include St. Casimir and assigned the ritu semiduplex grade to his fourth of March feast day (Fig. 5).

Pope Paul V died on January 28, 1621 and was succeeded by Pope Gregory V (1621–1623), elected on February 9, 1621. A quickly-convened consistory reviewed the various decisions that Paul V had made during his last days. St. Casimir’s heightened status was ratified and decreed on March 3, 1621, expanding his veneration from Vilnius to all Roman Catholics worldwide (Fig. 6).

The ritu semiduplex upgrade heartened Sigismund III and Bishop Valavičius to establish an entirely new and magnificent architectural setting for St. Casimir’s relics. The selected site was just outside the Cathedral’s southeast corner, close to main altar and to the Palace of the Grand Dukes. The four Valavičius brothers had been granted the premier site for their family chapel. The Bishop and the King decided to make a transfer, sealing the agreement on March 8, 1623. The Valavičius Chapel was exchanged for the Royal Chapel holding the remains of St. Casimir (second to the left from the Cathedral’s entrance). At the year’s end, Constante Tencalla arrived in Vilnius to start the
THE RESONANCE OF TWENTY CUBITS

The Chapel of St. Casimir’s cubic core recalled the specific length, width, and height of the Holy of Holies in Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem. The Lord stated its amplitude thus: “The interior of the inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high, he overlaid it with pure gold.” (1 Kings 6: 20). This innermost sanctuary sheltered the Ark of the Covenant, a small chest containing the Ten Commandment stone tablets that centuries earlier the Lord gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

The Holy of Holies’ twenty-cubit amplitude echoed through the ages, resonating from the Second Temple and Herod’s temple of Biblical times in...

Fig. 8. Moses preparing the Ark of the Covenant. Tabernacle is in the distance. Print. Gerard Hoet (1648–1733) artist. Figures de la Bible. La Haye: P. de Hondt. 1728. Wikimedia Commons
Jerusalem into the Early Renaissance and the Old Sacristy in Florence, finished in the 1440s, further into Late Renaissance and the El Escorial royal palace in Spain, finished in 1584, and further still to the Counter-Reformation and the Chapel of St. Casimir in Vilnius. J. B. Villalpando, SJ, (1552–1608) and J. del Prado, SJ, (1547–1595) illustrated a speculative reconstruction of Solomon’s Temple and the Holy of Holies in In Ezechielem Explanations (Commentary on Ezekiel) issued in Rome, 1594–1604. Philip II, King of Spain (1556–1598), financed this celebrated three-volume treatise, spreading and focusing attention on this hallowed sanctuary (Fig. 10–11).

The Chapel of St. Casimir’s twenty-cubit dimension recalled the Holy of Holies’ interior, measured from one bare structural wall to the other before the walls were overlaid with gold. Twenty Biblical cubits are about the same as twenty Florentine braccia. The braccio nominally referred to the length of a forearm taken from the elbow to the longest finger tip. The actual length of the braccio, however,
was inconsistent as it varied from one Italian city to another. Constante Tencalla used the Florentine \emph{braccio} (0.5836 meter) to establish the Chapel’s cubic core, measuring 11.43 meters.\textsuperscript{22} When the presumed thicknesses of the marble panels and the mortar holding them is added, perhaps twelve centimeters (about 4.7 inches on each side), a total width of approximately 11.67 meters is obtained. Equalling twenty Florentine \emph{braccia}, the dimension sized the interior’s undecorated cubic core, the distance from the surface of one bare structural wall to its counterpart on the opposite side (Fig. 12).

The Chapel’s cubic core reflected the interior amplitude of the Old Sacristy located south of the transept of the Church of San Lorenzo in Florence. The Sacristy’s interior was likewise twenty Florentine \emph{braccia} measured before its bare structural walls were covered with plaster.\textsuperscript{23} Its renowned architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) had erected a spacious dome above Il Duomo, the city’s cathedral. Nothing like it had been built in Europe since the demise of the Roman Empire a thousand years earlier. For its part, the Old Sacristy became one the most significant buildings of the Early Renaissance, influencing more than thirty churches and chapels built in Italy during the second half of the fifteenth century\textsuperscript{24} (Fig. 13).

\textbf{A REDUCED GREEK CROSS}

The art historian Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574) recounted that his friend Michelangelo (1475–1564) admired the Old Sacristy.\textsuperscript{25} Designing the New Sacristy in 1520–1534, also called the Medici Chapel, at the same Church of San Lorenzo, he applied the older building’s twenty Florentine \emph{braccia} interior dimension to establish the size of the new building’s cubic core.\textsuperscript{26} He slightly enlarged the core by adding a ten \emph{braccia} wide extension in the middle of each side, thereby creating the wide and shallow arms of a reduced Greek cross. The enlarged
sides accommodated the sarcophagi and seated sculptures of the Medici dukes. By comparison, the cross arms and the vertical arms of a typical Greek cross plan resemble a plus sign. Such arms are fully developed and extend clearly from their spatial cores (Fig. 14–15).

The basic geometry of the reduced Greek cross plans of the Medici Chapel and the Chapel of St. Casimir is a circle centered on a square, both forms having the same area. The scheme derives from the Roman architect Vitruvius’ (80/70 BCE–15 AD) notion that the proportions of temples should reflect the ideal proportions of human bodies.
human body’s relationship to the circle and to the square. Leonardo da Vinci’s (1452–1519) drawing of the Vitruvian Man visualized this idea, centering the circle on the navel, the square on the groin. His upraised hands touch where the circle and square intersect. The centerpoint of the human body, however, is actually at the groin. Centering both circle and square on the groin creates an alternative version of the Vitruvian Man. In this case the figure’s horizontally extended arms touch the point where the circle and square intersect (Fig. 16–18).

Applying this diagram to a square of twenty cubits overlaid by a circle of the same area, the circle intersects the sides of the square at five cubits from each corner. The circle makes arcs on the square’s external sides. Framing them with straight and orthogonal lines produces the wide and shallow arms of a reduced Greek cross. The dimensions obtained are the same as those defining the reduced Greek cross

Fig. 16. Vitruvian Man. Drawing. Circa 1490. Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) artist. Note: circle was centered on the navel, but the square was centered on the groin. Gallerie dell’Accademia, Venice. Wikimedia Commons

Fig. 17. Drawing. Left: Da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man. Center: Alternative Vitruvian Man. Note: both circle and square are centered on the groin. Right: square and circle of the same area overlaid on a 20 braccia square. Drawing by Kęstutis Paulius Žygas and David Richardson, 2019

Fig. 18. Drawing. A 20 braccia square overlaid on a circle of the same area produces a 22.36 braccia reduced Greek cross. Drawing by Kęstutis Paulius Žygas and David Richardson, 2019
plans of the Medici Chapel and the Chapel of St. Casimir (Fig. 19).

Originally, the Chapel of St. Casimir’s reduced Greek cross arms held the main altar and two side altars that were replaced at the end of the seventeenth century by the pair of murals seen today. The reduced Greek cross plans generally recall the Greek cross form of Early Christian mausoleums, like the Tomb of Queen Galla Placidia (388–450), built around 430 in Ravenna, Italy, also Renaissance centralized churches, and, of course, the 1506 project by Donato Bramante (1444–1514) for the new St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome (Fig. 20–21).

THE CACHET OF BLACK, SILVER, AND GOLD

The Chapel of St. Casimir’s dramatic but somber chromatic polarity of silver and gold objects set against black differed diametrically from the colored marble enhancing St. Peter’s Basilica and several private and papal chapels recently built in Rome. Besides using richly-hued marble from Italian quarries, the Romans also employed spolia – attractive marble architectural fragments found scattered among the ruins of antique buildings. Associated and esteemed for their venerable associations with the first Christians, the spolia at hand found a second life in the Eternal City’s new buildings.

Fig. 19. Reduced Greek cross of 22.36 braccia (Left) compared to plans of the Medici Chapel (Center) and the Chapel of St. Casimir (Right). Drawing by Kęstutis Paulius Žygas and David Richardson, 2019

Fig. 20. Vilnius. Chapel of St. Casimir. Plan of interior and western wall section detail. Drawing by Kęstutis Paulius Žygas and Momoko Welch, 2013
The Chapel’s builders were familiar with the colorful Roman chapels, but they sought another estimable solution. Instead of importing richly-hued marble, they chose to use high-quality, reliably black marble from quarries in Flanders, Belgium today. Black marble recalled acacia, a hardwood that gradually darkens and eventually turns black. Moses employed acacia to construct the original Tabernacle, a temporary sanctuary sheltering the Ark of the Covenant. This small chest, also of acacia, held the Ten Commandment stone tablets that he had received on Mt. Sinai. Scrupulously following the Lord’s directions, Moses fashioned the Tabernacle’s fittings from silver and gold: “You shall hang [curtains] on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, which have hooks of gold and rest on four bases of silver.” (Exodus 26: 32). Four centuries later Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem to permanently house the Ark of the Covenant (cf. Fig. 8).

Proceeding from the sacred to the secular realm, the prestige of black attire in royal courts and black furnishings, each in their own modest way, reinforced the notion of using black in the Chapel of St. Casimir. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the most prestigious color for fine apparel was black. Artists as diverse in temperament as Titian (1490–1576), Bronzino (1503–1572), and El Greco (1541–1614) painted portraits demonstrating the tremendous cachet of black costumes in Italy and Spain, doubtless influenced by the persuasive views of Baldesar Castiglione (1478–1529). Later on, Peter Paul Rubens (1572–1640), Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), and Rembrandt (1606–1669) depicted their Catholic and Protestant patrons in prestigious black furs, black velvets, black silks, and black armor. Black attire accented with gold and jewelry became a color contrast long favored by royals and the wealthy. After Sigismund III received the Order of the Golden Fleece in 1600 the Spanish taste for fine black garments highlighted with a touch of silver or gold became all the more fashionable in Kraków, Warsaw, and Vilnius.

Around 1612, black marble became the preferred material for the pietra dura (hardstone) cabinets, tables, and portable altars created in the Medici workshops. Semi-precious stones – agates, chalcedony, jasper, amethyst, crystal, malachite, and lapis lazuli, sometimes accented with silver and gold – graced these prized furnishings. The splendid Ex-voto of Cosimo II portrayed the Grand Duke haughtily kneeling before an altar in a small chapel with black marble walls. Il Duomo of Florence is seen through the window. It was a short leap of the imagination to transfer the example of the ex-voto and black marble cabinets, often resembling architectural models, from miniature architecture into full-scale buildings (Fig. 22–23).
The Lady Chapel (Die Gnadenkapelle), a freestanding black marble building inside the Benedictine abbey church at Einsiedeln in Switzerland, shelters the medieval Black Madonna miraculous statue. The small structure was finished in 1620, a few years before work began on the Chapel of St. Casimir. Santino Solari (1576–1646), Salzburg’s chief architect, built the Lady Chapel. Tencalla and Solari probably knew of each other’s work, as they were fellow Lombards and had concurrently worked in the Vatican (Fig. 24).

The use of black marble grew apace in Poland after 1600, proliferating to such an extent during the next two centuries that the entire era has been called “the period of black marble.” After the untimely death of his first consort Anne of Habsburg, Queen of Poland and Sweden (1592–1598), Sigismund III decided to create a funerary chapel in the Wawel Cathedral of Kraków, a counterpart to the King Sigismund Chapel. A decade after his death the crypt of the Vasa Chapel was finished in 1644, but its splendid black interior and embellishments were completed 1664–1667. If the decision to use black
marble was made before construction started on the Chapel of St. Casimir, the Vasa Chapel could have influenced the similar decision in Vilnius. Otherwise, it would have been the other way around.

Prince Władysław Vasa, Bishop Eustachijus Valavičius, and Constante Tencalla visited Florence separately and saw the huge Chapel of the Princes (Cappella dei Principi) under construction outside the western wall behind the altar of the Church of San Lorenzo. Ferdinando I, Grand Duke of Tuscany (1587–1609), planned to cover its immense octagonal interior with black marble, but his successors ultimately rejected the idea and chose dark marbles instead.

The Grand Duke’s most ambitious, but entirely illegal, project for the Chapel of the Princes also came to naught. Together with Fakhr-al-Din, Emir of the Druzes in the Levant (1591–1635), he concocted a plan in 1603 to extract the Tomb of Christ from the Aedicule in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Jacopo Inghirami, Admiral of the Tuscan fleet (1603–1624), would facilitate the venture and transport it from Jerusalem to Florence. The confederates of the Emir and the Admiral surreptitiously entered the church and actually began to detach the Tomb from the Aedicule. But once discovered, they escaped and fled the crime scene empty-handed. Had the sacrilegious removal succeeded, the Medici would have acquired Christendom’s most hallowed architectural relic. The Tomb of Christ would have become the Chapel of the Princes’ sacred centerpiece. Its newly-acquired prestige would have far surpassed the status of St. Peter’s Basilica. Without the sacred Tomb of Christ, the Chapel of the Princes became an immense Medici mausoleum lacking the raison d’être for its grand interior.

**ECHOES OF PORPHYRY**

Antonio, a Franciscan monk from Italy, visited the Chapel of St. Casimir and charmed by its splendor mentioned in a brief report (*breve ragguaglio*) in 1657 that, among other things, porphyry graced its interior: “In the castle there is a Royal palace, likewise a Cathedral, and the remains of renowned St. Casimir are protected in a special chapel next to the main altar. The sanctuary was built through the generosity and piety of Władysław Vasa from expensive marble, porphyry, and other decorations created by the hands of gifted architects and sculptors.”

Actually, the Chapel’s pilasters were made from *rouge de Rance* marble whose ox-blood color resembles porphyry. (True volcanic porphyry was long unavailable because its only quarry in the world in Egypt had closed at the end of the Roman Empire in the fourth century AD, a thousand years earlier.) Bishop Valavičius and Constante Tencalla had encountered porphyry *spolia* in Rome, but they did not defer to Roman usage. Instead, the porphyry in the Chapel of St. Casimir directly referenced the porphyry columns in the external walls of the Aedicule in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem. Nicholas “the Orphan” Radvila (Radziwiłł), Prince of the Holy Roman Empire (1549–1616), mentioned them and other examples in his pilgrimage diary *Hierosolymitana peregrinatio* (*Journey to Jerusalem*), published in 1601. The easy-to-read, adventure-filled travelog eventually received four editions in Latin, nine in Polish, two in German, and one apiece in Russian and Lithuanian (Fig. 25).

Prince Radvila’s two-year long journey through the Levant, the Holy Land, and Egypt started in Venice in 1583. His meticulous travel notes provided raw material for the resulting best-seller. Containing the plan of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and a depiction of the Aedicule, the illustrations helped readers to visualize the sanctuary where the Prince had spent three separate nights, praying from dusk to dawn. Reaching the Aedicule and the Tomb of Christ inside it for the first time, he kissed it several times. He noted that the Aedicule’s exterior columns were made of porphyry. The Franciscans, Custodians of the Holy Land, gave the Prince a small fragment of porphyry from the broken Flagellation Column long venerated at Mount Zion in Jerusalem. Returning home, he donated the relic
to his parish Corpus Christi Church in Nesvizh, in Belarus today (Fig. 26).

COLUMNS, CAPITALS, AND DEDICATIONS

The pair of rouge de Rance marble columns framing the Chapel of St. Casimir’s entrance portal bring to mind the pair of africano marble columns in the central entrance portal of St. Peter’s Basilica. Africano is the only marble containing black minerals that heighten its strong colors. Originally, the africano column pair stood inside Old St. Peter’s Basilica close to the entrance. Transferred to the new building, their re-use emphasized the new basilica’s ties to its predecessor. Their original dramatic hues drew attention to the most important and frequently used central portal, differentiating it from those on either side. Their colors are now subdued, bleached by centuries of direct sunlight.

The capitals on the two columns flanking the entrance portal to the Chapel of St. Casimir were subtly individualized – the marble of the eastern architrave is markedly darker than the marble of the western architrave. Avoiding exact duplication, the difference underlined the notion that each column was a separate entity. In Biblical terms, they recalled the pair of pillars in front of Solomon’s Temple – Jachin and Boaz. In a Christian context the column pair recalled apostles Sts. Peter and Paul, also the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Cathedral’s southeast corner bay originally had a large balcony directly above the entrance to
the Chapel of St. Casimir. The balcony’s northern side was open and overlooked the Cathedral’s main altar. A door on the balcony’s southern side opened to a small loge in the Chapel reserved for the royal family. An external covered wooden bridge connected the balcony to the second floor of the Palace of the Grand Dukes, facilitating passage to and from the Cathedral. The bridge did not survive the 1655–1661 occupation of Vilnius.

A long black beam inscribed Sancti Casimiri, an escutcheon, and a simple black cross now surmount the entrance to the Chapel. The escutcheon and the cross are where a door once opened from the balcony into the royal loge. The escutcheon holds the coat of arms of the Commonwealth – a Polish eagle and the Lithuanian Vytis. Below and to the escutcheon’s left, the crown of the Lithuanian grand dukes; to the right, their sceptre.

Carlo Maderno (1556–1629), chief architect of the new St. Peter’s Basilica from 1603, created a Christian variant of the Ionic column capitals once inside Old St. Peter’s Basilica. The original capitals survive on the Holy Column and on the Solomonic columns in the Basilica’s central piers (Fig. 27). Maderno’s variant featured a winged cherub head at the top of the capital, directly above the egg and dart motif between the Ionic volutes. The cherubs assertively differentiated these capitals from the pagan Ionic capitals of ancient Greece and Rome. These variant capitals graced columns in the Confessio, a sunken area below the Papal Altar and above the remains of St. Peter the Apostle in the Roman necropolis directly below (Fig. 28–29).

Constante Tencalla and his fellow craftsmen carved such capitals for the Basilica’s vestibule and entrance portals. In Vilnius he replicated them for the eight flat wall pilasters in the Chapel’s interior. The angled pilasters in the four corners do not have such capitals; wingless heads crown those angled corner pilasters instead. The capitals on the

Fig. 27. Rome. St. Peter’s Basilica. Interior. View of Baldachin, Papal Altar, and stair to the Confessio. James L. Stanfield photographer, 1986. National Geographic Society
columns flanking the Chapel’s entrance portal also lack winged cherubs, differentiating them from the flat pilaster capitals with winged cherubs in the Chapel’s interior (Fig. 30).

Tencalla reflected Pietro Cataneo’s (1510–1569) precepts about church design and décor. The architect and theoretician explained that the interior of a church symbolized the soul of Christ, while the exterior symbolized the body. Since the soul is more beautiful than the body, the inside of a church should be more pleasing than the outside. The interior and exterior were of unequal significance. Translating the notion into specific architectural terms, Cataneo stated that the simple Doric order should be used on the exterior, while the elegant, attractive Ionic order was appropriate for the interior. Tencalla followed Cataneo’s precepts to the letter – the Doric order marked the exterior pilasters, while the Ionic order crowned pilasters inside. The Chapel’s sandstone exterior was a very modest affair compared to the splendid interior of marble highlighted with treasures of silver and gold (Fig. 31).

Eagles with outstretched wings and a small sheaf of wheat on their chests feature the frieze panels on either side of the pilasters framing the altar, also the frieze on either side of the pilasters below the royal loge. Eagles surmount horns of plenty. The eagles and sheaves of wheat actually referred to two separate heraldic bearings. The sheaves of wheat referred to the Vasa coat of arms, the emblem of
Sigismund III. The eagle with outstretched wings referred to the heraldic eagle emblem of Pope Paul V Borghese. The same eagles appear on plaques in the facade of St. Peter’s Basilica, situated below the Benediction Loggia and above the two smaller portals on either side of the central entrance portal.

The Borghese eagle in the Chapel’s frieze recalled Pope Paul V who had approved the *ritus semiduplex* grade for St. Casimir’s feast day (Fig. 32).

A long Latin inscription is carved on the frieze of the facade of St. Peter’s Basilica. Translated, it

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**Fig. 31.** Vilnius. Chapel of St. Casimir. Interior. Southwest corner. Frieze. Circa 1630. Note: Ionic capital with winged cherub head and Borghese eagle. Kęstutis Paulius Žygas photographer, 2019
states: “Paul V Borghese, Roman, Pope, in 1612, the seventh year of his pontificate, [built] to honor the Prince of the Apostles.” The inscription acclaimed the Pope as much as it did St. Peter. The dedicatory epitaph and elaborately framed escutcheon on the Chapel of St. Casimir’s facade likewise acclaimed Sigismund III and Władysław IV. The Commonwealth’s Polish eagle and Lithuanian Vytis emblazoned the heraldic shield. A diminutive Order of the Golden Fleece hangs below the shield. The large plaque below it contains the Chapel’s dedicatory epitaph. The translation reads: “To the Greatest and Most Gracious God. St. Casimir, son of King Casimir Jagiellon, guardian saint and defender of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, prince and kinsman. Sigismund III, King of Poland and Sweden, built, fostered, and furnished this chapel, a lasting memorial of his piety and respect. Władysław IV, transferring the saint’s remains [to this chapel] honored, finished and dedicated in the Year of our Lord 1636, the fourteenth day of August.”

Władysław IV came to Vilnius in March to prepare for the Chapel’s dedication. His sister Princess Anne Catherine Constance Vasa (1619–1651), accompanied by a numerous retinue, arrived in June after a twenty-four day journey from Warsaw. The night before the dedication St. Casimir’s relics were taken from the Goštautas–Chodkevičius Chapel and placed on a catafalque in the Cathedral’s center. Following a night-long vigil, Masses were held throughout the morning in the various chapels, the last one celebrated by Abraomas Vaina, Bishop of Vilnius (1630–1649), and accompanied by the royal orchestra and choir. The triumphal procession started in the Cathedral at three in the afternoon and traced its way through the principal streets, triumphal arches accenting the way, treelined for the occasion. Like in 1604, the procession consisted of clergy, senators, nobles, dignitaries, and members of guilds, confraternities, sodalities, monastic orders, schoolchildren, and students. St. Casimir’s relics in a bejeweled silver sarcophagus, his royal regalia on a gilt cushion, and the labarum, the centerpieces of the cortege, were immediately followed by the bedridden Władysław IV, portered in a sedan, and members of the court. The procession returned to the Cathedral around seven, and the sarcophagus was placed above the Chapel’s
altar. Archbishop Mario Filonardi, Apostolic Nuncio to the Commonwealth (1635–1643), blessed the relics and the ancient hymn *Te Deum laudamus* was sung, completing ceremonious relic transfer.

THE RETABLE AND THE INTERIOR’S DÉCOR

Master Hans Jacob Bair and his namesake son had created the altar’s ebony retable in Augsburg in the late 1620s. The silver sarcophagus holding St. Casimir’s relics, set inside the retable’s base, was visible through a metal screen. At the bottom register a large Crucifix scene dominated the retable’s center; Most Holy Mary, St. John, and a kneeling Mary Magdalen completed the scene. Statues of Sts. Sigismund and Casmir stood on either side. Statues of Sts. Peter and Paul in the middle register flanked a relief of the Holy Ghost. A seated sculpture of God the Father, worshipped by a pair of kneeling angels, crowned the entire composition of silver plaques and statues. The present stucco retable replaces the original ebony retable lost during the 1655–1661 occupation of Vilnius, during the so-called Deluge.

Sigismund III and Władysław IV Vasa were the Chapel’s most steadfast and generous patrons, inspiring gifts from more donors. Some gave votives, medals, and jewels that covered the walls on either side of the retable, while others donated expensive decorative objects and liturgical vessels. The white Carrara marble frames above the eight wall niches contained silver plaques illustrating scenes from the life of St. Casimir. The mensa of each smaller side altar held six solid silver candlesticks and statues of the six apostles. Cecilia Renata, Queen of Poland (1637–1644), consort of Władysław IV Vasa, donated a lamp of pure gold hung by the altar. Queen Constance (1605–1631), Sigismund III’s second wife, gifted a large, solid silver chandelier. Hanging in front of the main altar, its sixty-three candles illuminated the entire interior. Precious liturgical vestments and bejeweled cult accoutrements of silver and gold were originally kept in a small treasury, now defunct, just outside the Chapel’s southwest corner.

EPILOGUE

When hostilities broke out with Muscovy in 1654 the Commonwealth’s poorly-led and underpaid army did not mount co-ordinated defenses. Fearing imminent occupation by Cossacks and Muscovite troops, in mid-summer of 1655 Jurgis Tękevičius, Bishop of Vilnius (1649–1656), evacuated liturgical objects, archives, and St. Casimir’s relics to safety. John II Casimir, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania (1648–1668), had already requisitioned the cathedral’s silver and gold to melt it down for soldiers’ pay. Shortly after the Bishop had prudently left, Vilnius was occupied virtually unopposed, overrun by foreign troops for the first time ever. Two years later a plague broke out, decimating the city’s populace. The invaders plundered and devastated Vilnius until their expulsion by Lithuanian troops in 1661. Twenty plus years after the splendid Chapel’s consecration, the shrine was stripped bare. John II Casimir had vowed to restore it to its original splendor, but after thirteen years of war, losses to Sweden in the west and to Muscovy in the east, during the so-called Deluge, he abdicated in 1668, retiring to an abbey in Paris. The royal promises came to naught – the priceless artistic treasures were melted down and gone forever (Fig. 33).

When peace returned, the Cathedral of Vilnius was slowly restored. In the 1690s Giovanni Pietro Perti (1648–1714) created a wealth of stucco decorations covering the retable above the altar, the pendentives, the drum, and the dome. The pair of murals *The Opening of St. Casimir’s Coffin* and *The Miracle by St. Casimir’s Coffin* by Michelangelo Palloni (1637–1712) date from that time. The intriguing three-handed St. Casimir’s icon above the altar acquired a silver cover early in the eighteenth century. The silver sarcophagus dates from about 1745. The gold and silver-gilt, chalice-shaped pulpit supported by an eagle was created in the first third of the eighteenth century. The eagle’s outstretched wings and turned head allude to Pope Paul V’s Borghese heraldic emblem. The eagle also refers to St. John the Evangelist. The small silver statue of the seated saint holding a crucifix in one
hand and a lily in the other, now on the sarcophagus, may date from the pre-Deluge interior. The eight larger-than-life, silver-gilt statues of wood in the wall niches were created in the 1730s by unidentified artists. Linking St. Casimir to personages of earlier times, consensus about their true identities remains elusive (Fig. 34).

Restorations and additions made the Chapel’s interior resplendent once again, albeit, somewhat less dazzling than before the Deluge. Except for the retable, drum, and dome, the Chapel’s main architectural features – cubic core, twenty braccia amplitude, reduced Greek cross plan, black marble walls, ox-blood pilasters, and Ionic order capitals – remained as before. Enriched by venerable allusions, the Chapel’s somber and tranquil ambience recalls the gravitas and piety of apostolic times (Fig. 35).

References

THE CHAPEL OF ST. CASIMIR IN VILNIUS – A COUNTER-REFORMATION LANDMARK


_________. *Instructiones Fabricae et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae*. Milan, 1577.


Notes
3 King Sigismund III and Bishop Valavičius died before seeing the building finished. King Władysław Vasa (1632–1648) and Abraomas Vainas, Bishop of Vil nius (1631–1649), completed the Chapel. 
5 Ibid., 200, No. 89.  
6 Ibid., 324, No. 20.  
8 Čiurinskas (2003), op. cit., 218–223.  
9 Some feast days (like Christmas) were fixed in the liturgical calendar while others (like Easter) varied from year to year. Consequently, saints’ feast days were ranked by their relative importance, allowing celebrations of greater significance to preempt those of lesser significance when coincidences occurred. Simplex grade was designated for ordinary days, semiduplex for more important days, and totum duplex for days of exceptional importance. 
12 Ibid., 200, No. 89.  
15 Constante Tencalla worked in St. Peter’s Basilica 1610–1630. He was born in Bisseone, a small town on the eastern shore of Lake Lugano at the foothills of the Alps. Through his mother, Lucia Castelli, he was related to the architect Matteo Castelli (1560–1632). Through his wife Marta Porro he was related to Domenico Fontana (1543–1607), Carlo Maderno (1556–1629), Flaminio Ponzio (1560–1613), Francesco Borromini (1599–1667), and Carlo Fontana (1638–1714). Francesco Borromini, born in Bisseone and christened Francesco Castelli, changed his last name to Borromini on settling in Rome. Carlo Fontana was the clan’s last important architect. See Howard Hibbard, Carlo Maderno and Roman Architecture 1580–1630 (London: Zwemmer, 1971), 99–101.
27 Around 1500, centralized Greek-cross churches became increasingly popular. The prime examples were S. M. delle Carceri in Prato (begun by Giuliano da Sangallo in 1485), S. M. della Consolazione in Todi (begun by Cola da Caprarola in 1504), and S. Biagio in Montepulciano (begun in 1518 by Antonio da Sangallo the Elder).


32 Sigismund I the Elder received the Spanish Order of the Golden Fleece in 1518; Sigismund II Augustus, 1556; Sigismund III Vasa, 1600; Władysław Vasa, 1615; John Casimir Vasa, 1638; Michał Karibut Wyżyńcowieck, 1669; Augustus II the Strong, 1697. August III received the Austrian Order of the Golden Fleece in 1721. Prince Casimir was never awarded the Order of the Golden Fleece. The image on the Venerabilis Icon was overpainted, probably in 1594. See Sigita Maslauskaitė, Šventojos Kazimiero atvaizdo istorija XVI–XVIII a. (Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 2010), 43–60.


36 Hibbard, op. cit., 199: “A large rustic fountain in the woods, called ‘dello Scoglio’ or ‘dell’Aquila’ was built in 1611–1612 with dolphins, dragons, and tritons carved by Santi Solaro, Stefano Maderno, and Carlo Fancelli ...”
We believe that Santi Solaro andantino Solari were the same person, because it was not unusual for variants of a given person's name to be entered into the Archivio Fabbrica payment ledgers.


38 Stanisław Mosaikowski, King Sigismund Chapel at Cracow Cathedral (1515–1533) (Kraków: IRSA Publishing House, 2012), 35.

39 Albert Wiuk Koiałowicz, SJ, Miscellanea rerum ad Statum Ecclesiasticum in Magnio Lituanica Dacatu, Vilniae: Tippis Academicis, 1650, 80–81, states that Eustachius Wolowyck was a legate of Sigismund III to the Florentine duke and Pope Paul V, but does not mention dates. See also Wincenty Przygałowski, "XVI. Eustachy Wolowyck" (1616–1630), zywy, zybsko wileńskich (Petersburg, 1886), I, 73. Valavičius was the Vice-Chancellor of Lithuania 1615–1616, so the visit may have occurred during that time. Or, it may have coincided with the ad limina visit to Rome 1620–1621. During Pope Paul V’s (1605–1621) long pontificate the Grand Dukes of Tuscany were Ferdinando I (1587–1609), Cosimo II (1609–1621), and Ferdinando II (Feb. 1621–1627).


42 The remains of Cosimo I, Ferdinando I, Cosimo II, Ferdinando II, Cosimo III, and Francis I were interred in the Chapel of the Princes’ crypts.


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SV. KAZIMIERO KOPLYČIA VILNIUJE – KONTRREFORMACIJOS ARCHITEKTŪROS ORIENTYRAS

Santrauka


Reiškiniai žodžiai: Tridento visuotinis susirinkimas, Sandoros skrynia, Saliamono šventykla, Šventųjų Šventoji, Vitruvijaus žmogus, edikula, išpažintis, Medičių koplyčios, Konstantas Tenkala.


Paulius Rabikauskas, ibid. In 1958 he placed the relics under the altar, but in 1993 placed them above the altar.


About 292 centners of silver were requisitioned from the Chapel of St. Casimir. Povilas Reklaitis, “Šv. Kazimiero koplyčia Vilniuje,” Aidai, 1958, nr. 4, balandis, (unpaginated copy on-line). Cites J. I. Kraszewski, Wilno od początków do r. 1750 (Wilno, 1840–1842), II, 212. As a centner is about 50 kilograms, or 110 pounds, 14,600 kilograms, or 32,000 pounds of silver (i.e. 16 tons) were taken away. By comparison, in 1701 Louis XIV requisitioned some 50 tons of silver objects, melting them down into bullion for the wartime-depleted royal treasury.


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