

# Iconotropy of images of Saint Barbara from the Upper Silesian coal mines: the case of “Graf Franz” / “Wawel” mine

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**The process of coal mine restructuring, primarily involving mine closures, is changing the economic image of Upper Silesia from a land of the industry to a post-industrial area, erasing most of the traces of its great industrial past.**

Decisions of winding up the coal mines affect the excavations and most of the surface buildings, resulting in their demolition or change of function. These changes affected also the pithead buildings, which, apart from their primary function in several communities, served as public chapels until the local churches were built. The pithead buildings housed objects with cult potential – altars with images of Saint Barbara.

Paintings, and more rarely sculptures, depicting this Saint acquired on the mines’ premises were mostly funded by the owners, management, and boards of directors, with the highest numbers at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These were objects destined for religious worship by miners as part of their work duties or voluntarily<sup>1</sup>. The availability of these art objects was limited almost exclusively to the labourers<sup>2</sup>. The images of

1 From 1769 until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, morning prayers before work were mandatory. The time spent praying (about 15–20 minutes) was part of paid working time: B. Piecha-van Schagen, *Kult świętej Barbary wśród górników kopalń węgla kamiennego w XIX i XX wieku*, t. 1, Zabrze 2018, p. 115–124.

2 In several communities, the pithead building served as a public chapel until the local churches were built. Hiring industry facilities was a pastoral practice of the

Saint Barbara found in the workplaces proved to be very sensitive to economic, and above all political, developments. For this reason, these art objects were often moved from the industrial premises or removed from the mines. My research helped to establish the history of the images at a time when the presence of religious objects in public spaces and cult practices were forbidden. I also investigated the restoration of the images of Saint Barbara in 1980, the changes to the space to which they were returned, and the relocations resulting from the restructuring of the industry. The displacements that have occurred over some 60 years have caused particular consequences for the objects: the transformations of space, alternating their meanings and changing the function in the context of different types and forms of piety.

I believe that by transferring the images of the patron saint from mines to churches<sup>3</sup>, these objects lost their original ontic status, theological content, and aesthetic dimension. Due to the termination of coal extraction, the miners were no longer the only group for seeing them as the objects of visual devotion. In other words, political and economic history changed the meaning of the objects as well as those who interacted with them. While researching the history of the images of Saint Barbara from their creation until transferring them from the mines, I noticed that the transformation had a radical dimension in many cases. In the opinion of several miners, the "replacement" of the statues was actually a "misplacement"; the visual improvement was recognised as the harm to its aesthetic origin. As this issue has not yet been the subject of separate analysis, it seems important to conduct it for both academic and (possibly) practical reasons. The process of "turning" Saint Barbara images may be exemplified by a stone sculpture originating in the "Wawel" coal mine in Ruda Śląska.

The transmigration of motifs, imagery meanings, and objects themselves within religious art has been of interest to scholars from the fields of culture, theology, and art history. The long persistence of motifs was first pointed out by Robert Graves, who used the functioning of mythological figures in his work. He popularised the term Iconotropy as the mis- or reinterpretation of myths or images within later cultures and other

Diocese of Wrocław: J. Myszor, *Duszpasterstwo parafialne na Górnym Śląsku w latach 1821–1914*, Katowice 1991, p. 13–14.

3 During the first three phases of the restructuring of the coal mining industry, no activities were carried out to document the circulation of images of Saint Barbara from the mines. After the decommissioning of the coal mines, they were moved to places which, according to the mine workers, guaranteed their preservation, e.g. to parish churches, museums, etc.

religions. In the visual arts, the issue of displacement and transmission was explored by Jan Białostocki and Erwin Panovsky, who disseminated iconographic research. This Polish art historian included theoretical considerations of “encompassing themes” and “archetypal images” in his academic papers. These are important issues for iconographic research in a broad sense, but above all,

The legacy of this Polish art historian is important today as – amidst the variety of subjects that he addressed – he analysed works of art as cultural symptoms that were not restricted to iconographic reductionism, and they were always linked to external agents capable of altering their meanings<sup>4</sup>.

To identify this dynamic, the term iconotropy has been used for several years in the history of art and the history of literature. The transformations of the figure of Jesus in the fictional literary narrative, defined as iconotropy, became the subject of the analysis by Theodore Ziolkowski published in 1972<sup>5</sup>. In 2007, William J. Humblin defined it as “the accidental or deliberate misinterpretation by one culture of the images or myths of another one, especially to bring them into accord with those of the first culture”<sup>6</sup>. According to Jennifer Rust, iconotropy also applies to religious objects:

[it – B.P.-S.] refers to the conversion of religious iconography from one mode of the spiritual organisation to another. The term thus generally defines a process in which no particular form necessarily precludes another; instead, traditional models tend to overlay each other<sup>7</sup>.

Iconotropy is not a sanctioned discipline or even a full-fledged research tool of iconography, although “it engages in an analysis of symbolic concepts concerning the social life – especially the religious sphere – of images, and how these concepts were perceived by concentric communities of spectators who generated secondary meanings”<sup>8</sup>. The study of iconotropy

4 J.T. García, S. Sáenz-López Pérez, *Introducción. Iconotropy and the alteration of religious images*, [in:] *Iconotropy and Cult Images from the Ancient to Modern World*, ed. J.T. García, S. Sáenz-López Pérez, New York 2022, p. 3.

5 T. Ziolkowski, *Fictional transfigurations of Jesus*, Princeton 1972.

6 W.J. Humblin, *Iconotropy and the JS Abraham Fascimiles*, [in:] *The Interpreter Foundation*, access: 29.10.2022.

7 J. Rust, “Image of Idolatryes”: *Iconotropy and the Theo-Political Body in “The Faerie Queene”*, “*Religion & Literature*”, 2006 No. 3, p. 137.

8 J.T. García, S. Sáenz-López Pérez, *Introduction. Iconotropy and the alteration*

in this sense became the subject of the most recent publication *Iconotropy and Cult Images from the Ancient to Modern World*, published in 2022 and edited by Jorge Tomás García and Sandra Sáenz-López Pérez. The authors of the texts mainly deal with the shift in the original meaning of religious imagery and the impact of this phenomenon on the visual forms of it in art up to the modern era<sup>9</sup>.

Because the images of Saint Barbara had always been influenced by external factors (economic and political), the use of iconotropy as a lens appears the most appropriate. The various events triggered by the flow of the “Great History” and the fluctuating financial situation of the industrial plants have impacted the meaning and visual shape of images of Saint Barbara.

Indeed, iconotropy as a method was being used to diagnose and describe the transmission of images of religious art between religions, faiths, and civilisations from Late Antiquity until the modern days (for example, the issue of the destruction of images of saints during the Reformation on the same basis as pagan idols were destroyed introducing Christianity<sup>10</sup>). However, it is important to recall the research of Jan Assmann, who pointed out “that the ancient Egyptians used an iconotropic reinterpretation of their symbols”<sup>11</sup>. These referenced studies lead me to believe that shifting the meanings of religious images also occurs in the present, even within a single Christian denomination (Catholicism in this case). It is possible through analysing the objects’ primordial functions and forms, the spaces in which they were originally located, and tracing their transformations and shifts up to the placement of images in locations apart from the coal mines. In the case of the sculpture from the “Wawel” mine, we are dealing with a transfer from an industrial site to the church and a change in the visual form of the image, and therefore in this paper, I want to examine whether these facts are related. It is the iconographic reductionism, the theological and formal shift that will be analysed within this article.

*of religious images*, [in:] *Iconotropy and Cult Images from the Ancient to Modern World*, ed. J. T. García, S. Sáenz-López Pérez, New York, p. 4.

9 M. Musillo published a text discussing the transformation of images of the Virgin Mary in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese and Japanese religious art: *Avalokiteśvara is mutating again: Chinese and Japanese encounters with the Virgin Mary*, [in:] *Iconotropy and Cult Images from the Ancient to Modern World*, ed. J.T. García, S. Sáenz-López Pérez, New York 2022, p. 183–196.

10 The phenomenon has been discussed by M. Aston, *Faith and Fire: Popular and Unpopular Religion, 1350–1600*, Ohio 1993.

11 J. Assmann, *Semiosis and Interpretation in Ancient Egyptian Ritual*, [in:] *Interpretation in Religion*, ed. S. Biderman and B.-A. Scharfstein, Leiden, 1992, p. 92.

The archival sources are the base for this study: the documentation of the pithead building of the “Graf Franz” (shaft of the “Brandenburg” coal mine) which is the branch in Gliwice of the State Archives in Katowice and the archival documents from the Private Archive of Reverend Henryk Piecha. In the collections of the state institution, there is the unit Rudzkie Gwarectwo Węglowe, part of which are documents originating from the Board of the Ballestrem Goods Directorate (Ballestrem’sche Güterdirektion) containing the complete documentation of the construction of the pithead of the “Nicolaus” shaft<sup>12</sup>. In the Private Archive can be found the following sources: interviews conducted by Henryk Piecha in 1986–1988 with mine employees, copies of documents developed by church officials (i.e. Report from the strike in 1980 written by the parish priest in Ruda Śląska), photographs documenting the appearance of the Saint Barbara sculpture after it was placed in the pithead building in 1980. The remaining material was collected during fieldwork conducted by me and financed by the Marshal of the Silesian Voivodeship as part of a Grant in the Field of Culture (Stypendium w dziedzinie kultury) in 2007. At that time, I interviewed coal mines employees<sup>13</sup> and made visual documentation of the sculpture located in the church of Saint Pius X in Ruda Śląska. Archival documents and graphic material will be used to carry out the analysis and support the narrative of this paper.

The micro-world of miners’ devotion to Saint Barbara in Upper Silesia functioned with the steady rhythm of its particular history, without being subject to any political agenda until the end of the Great War and the outbreak of revolution in Germany in 1918. Finding a foothold in the stability of economic and social life, the presence of representations of Saint Barbara and the accompanying devotion produced a complete and holistic phenomenon. The phenomenon was a merging of art and theology.

As the sources tell us, the pithead building of the “Nicolai” shaft<sup>14</sup> coal mine was designed and built under the direct supervision of the architect Hans von Poellnitz<sup>15</sup>, working from 1908 for Count Franz von Ballestrem.

12 State Archives in Katowice, Branch in Gliwice [SAKatowice BG], Rudzkie Gwarectwo Węglowe w Rudzie Śląskiej (RGW), 599, 600.

13 Interview with J.D., coal miner from the “Franciszek” mine, born 1925 and E.S., coal miner from the “Franciszek” mine, born 1930, recorded by B. Piecha-van Schagen, 21.09.2007; interview with F.P., coal miner from the “Paweł” mine, born 1949, recorded by B. Piecha-van Schagen, 17.08.2007.

14 The coal mine was established in 1912 by splitting from the “Wolfgang” mine and was reunited with it in 1929.

15 Hans von Poellnitz (1876–1953), German architect. He graduated from two technical schools – in Charlottenburg (currently Berlin) and Karlsruhe. He worked in

The construction was aesthetically homogeneous. The investment carried out in 1912 was the last one conducted by the Firm until the outbreak of war, and the last one acquired with the panache characteristic of this foundations in Upper Silesia since the 1880s<sup>16</sup>. The building was a typical turn-of-the-century manifestation of the *Gesamtkunstwerk's* aesthetic and religious formation. Like the other pitheads buildings in Bielschowitz (currently Bielszowice, the quarter of Ruda Śląska)<sup>17</sup>, Mikultschütz (currently Mikulczyce, the quarter of Zabrze)<sup>18</sup>, or Roßberg (currently Rozbark, the quarter of Bytom)<sup>19</sup>, it was built according to the same principles of creating an architectonically and continually homogeneous space. A certain analogy between the concept carried out by von Poellnitz and the medieval practice of *fabrica ecclesiae* can be drawn. The concept of entirely consistent church composition and the conceptual process had been transferred to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries by the architects operating in Upper Silesia<sup>20</sup>, and this analogy is not exaggerated.

The Board of the Ballestrem Goods Directorate (Ballestrem'sche Güterdirektion), in carrying out most of its investments, decided not only on the choice of the architect but also on the supplier of services and materials based on the commercial offers. The interior decoration of the building followed the pattern worked out in Upper Silesia. Based on an interior design created by von Poellnitz, two companies offered their services: the "Hermann Kapst. Eisenbetonbau, Stuck- und Cementstein- Fabrik" from Beuthen (currently Bytom), trading concrete and cement elements for architectural decoration, and the "Werkstätte für künstlerische Bildhauer- und Stuck- Arbeiten". They were supposed to deliver the following decorative

the estate administration of the Count of Ballestrem (Ballestrem'sche Güterdirektion) as Head of the Building Service of the concern, whose centre of management was in Ruda. He designed the director's villa, a school with a gymnasium (currently the Municipal Museum in Ruda Śląska), a workers' estate, the family tomb of managing director Franz Pieler and the pithead of the "Graf Franz" coal mine: [anonymous], *Herrn Regierungsbaumeister a. D. Hans von Poellnitz zum Geleit in den Ruhestand*, "Nach der Schicht. Werkszeitung der Gewerkschaft Castellengo-Abwehr" 1938, Nr. 3, p. 1.

16 The management of the Gleiwitz mine began their efforts to build the pithead building on 28 June 1913. The first plans for the building, drawn up by Georg and Emil Zillmann, envisaged a separate area to house a cult object. Due to economic difficulties, the building was not yet completed in 1916: SAKatowice BG, Kopalnia „Gliwice” w Gliwicach, 166 and 167.

17 The pithead building in Bielszowice was built in 1906.

18 The pithead building was built in 1908.

19 The pithead building was built in 1911.

20 I. Kozina, *Dzieje budowy kościoła w Goduli – „Fabrica ecclesiae” 2. połowy XIX wieku*, [in:] *Przestrzeń, architektura, malarstwo. Wybrane zagadnienia sztuki górnośląskiej*, red. E. Chojecka, Katowice 1995, p. 43–50.



Photo No. 1. The pithead building of "Graf Franz" coal mine

Source: "Nach der Schicht. Werkszeitung der Gewerkschaft Castellengo-Abwehr" 1938, Nr. 3, p. 3

elements: 8 pedestals (plinths) 1.70 m high of polished sandstone, 8 pilasters 1 m wide and 5.10 cm high, 8 pilasters 0.8 m wide, 60 cm of architrave 0.35 m high to match the width of the pilasters, 8 window frames of two different sizes, 3 pieces of door framing for the offices and 2 pieces of door framing leading to the vestibule, 2 half-pilasters for the altar area, one framing for the altar niche, a keystone for the altar niche and one curved cornice for the altar niche. The order clearly shows that both the interior and exterior were to be made of uniformly coloured light sandstone in a classicising style. The vertical alternation of the walls marked out by pilasters and the horizontal alternation marked out by the architrave brought its aesthetics closer to the pithead building of the "Donnersmarckhütte" mine in Mikultschütz. The total costs calculated by the "Werkstätte" were 2,485.50 marks<sup>21</sup>. As these were considered too high, the board attempted to discern costs from other fabricators, including "Wendrich und Lasse. Stuck, Beton- und Kunststeinwerk" from Beuthen (currently Bytom) and the mentioned H. Kapst's firm. The decision was made to diversify the orders among various suppliers. The Kapst's company supplied the keystone and the capitals placed on the sides of the niche. The company "Abzug und Lage. Bildhauerei und Stuckgeschäft" from Oppeln (currently Opole) delivered the stucco in the corridor and the pithead room. A separate bill from the company included the polishing of the marble surfaces. Kapst was also commissioned to deliver reinforcement work under the staff using steel mesh, using a relatively new technique patented by Carl Rabitz in 1878.

21 SAKatowice BG, RGW, 599.

The well-documented description of the ordering of the interior furnishings of the "Graf Franz" pithead building does not allow for a complete reconstruction, but it does provide sufficient opportunity to situate the ideological assumptions of this space concerning other pithead buildings. The principal task is to establish the ontic status of the image of Saint Barbara placed in it, and thus also of the pithead building. For this reason, the only inconvenience is the lack of direct information confirming the purchase of the altar table, which, according to the testimonies, was placed in the pithead building below the altar niche (Altarnische)<sup>22</sup>. An employee of the mine recalled, [...] *there was a niche in the wall of the building, a niche like for altars and there was an altar and at the back [of it – B.P.-S.], there was this figure of Saint Barbara. The altar was somewhere a metre and a half [centimetres – B.P.-S.], maybe a metre and a half, and she was even a bit higher, and the niche was also high, maybe even up to four metres*<sup>23</sup>. A year after the opening of the pithead building, the parish priest of Saint Joseph in Ruda Śląska, Father Antoni Ogan, celebrated mass there once a quarter, which would not have been possible without the altar table<sup>24</sup>.

The placement of an image of Saint Barbara in the pithead building of an Upper Silesian coal mine before 1914 was an almost permanent feature<sup>25</sup> of the culture associated with the spiritual life of miners. The stylistic and semantic parallel between the churches being built at the same time was emphasised by the placement of wooden altars and retables with images in the Nazarene style<sup>26</sup>. The solution proposed by von Poellnitz differed from this modus used in pithead buildings since at least the 1860s<sup>27</sup>. The interior with a niche retable, in which the figure of Saint Barbara is placed above the altar table, is part of a trend in religious art which is not

22 „[...] Die hl. Barbara in die Altarnische im Zechensaale zu stehen kommen“: SAKatowice BG, RGW, 599; interview with J.D., coal miner from the "Franciszek" mine, born 1925 and E.S., coal miner from the "Franciszek" mine, born 1930, recorded by B. Piecha-van Schagen, 21.09.2007.

23 Private Archive of Rev. Henryk Piecha, Folder: "Wawel" Coal Mine, interview with an anonymous informant (audio recording), recorded by H. Piecha, ca. 1986–1989.

24 SAKatowice BG, RGW, 929.

25 There were cases of no images of St Barbara or other religious symbols being placed in the coal mines in Upper Silesia. This situation occurred, for example, in "Gräfin Laura" and "Oheim" coal mines: B. Piecha-van Schagen, *Kult świętej Barbary wśród górników kopalń węgla kamiennego Bytomia Zabrze i Gliwic w XIX i XX wieku*, PhD diss., University of Silesia in Katowice, 2014, p. 124–125.

26 B. Piecha-van Schagen, *Kult św. Barbary...*, p. 131–139.

27 The painting from the "König" coal mine in Königshütte was created between 1840 and 1850, probably in Munich. In 1853, it was donated to the new church of St Barbara in Königshütte, see. J. Chrzyszcz, *Fest-Schrift zur 50-jährigen Jubel-Feier der katholischen St. Barbara-Pfarrgemeinde in Königshütte O.S.*, Königshütte 1902, p. 23–24.



very popular in Upper Silesia and which should be associated with the classicising tendencies in church decoration. In Catholic sacral architecture, the use of antique and renaissance stylistics was not quite popular, however, Catholic clergymen discussing art in the periodicals connected with the Christian revival movement tried to introduce antique and renaissance elements into church interiors, referring to the idea of the beauty of proportion and the human body, the source of which is God. More successfully, antique reminiscences appeared in Protestant architecture. After the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, following the Protestant church's takeover of the Constantinian-style basilica in Trier, architects began to make more successful use of classicising aesthetics. The edicule-like altars there inspired, among others, Berthel Thorvaldsen, the designer of the interior elements of the church in Copenhagen<sup>28</sup>. In contrast, the aesthetics operating within Catholic churches, despite the lack of clear guidelines, as in the case of the Protestant church, was far more focused on the implementation of the neo-Gothic *Gesamtkunstwerk*<sup>29</sup>.

The care with which the stucco workmanship was chosen and the aesthetic consistency of the design clarify that, despite the failure to preserve the original understanding of the nature of the cult object in the pithead building, great attention was paid to the interior furnishings and there is no doubt that the "Graf Franz" shaft pithead building implements a classicising *Gesamtkunstwerk*. With this execution were largely accepted the spiritual needs of the employees of the "Graf Franz" shaft, who had visual contact with the cult image without the time limits set by the duration of the religious service.

The existence of such a bottom-up spiritual demand is vividly demonstrated by von Poellnitz's efforts to commission a sculpture of Saint Barbara. The Ballestrems' architect intended for a 2.20-metre-high sculpture to be placed in the altar niche in the pithead building. The first commission for it was placed with Carl Burger, a sculptor living in Berlin. It is not known what inspiration or contacts directed von Poellnitz to the graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts (Akademie der Bildenden Künste) in Munich, an acclaimed artist who, until the outbreak of the First World War, had made many religious objects for churches. The stylistics of Burger's work, monumental and revealing Wilhelminian, Baroque features, were to blend perfectly with the interior designed by von Poellnitz. However, the commission did not happen, as the management was anxious to com-

28 H.P. Hilger, *Altäre und Ausstellung rheinischen Kirchen*, [in:] *Kunst des 19. Jahrhunderts in Rheinland*, Trier 1980, p. 118–119.

29 B. Piecha-van Schagen, *Kult św. Barbary...*, p. 132–134.

plete it quickly. Current obligations for the sculptor stood in the way, but the reason for the cancellation was most likely the pricing he had made. For the statue of Saint Barbara, he demanded 1,800 marks<sup>30</sup>.

At the same time, an enquiry about the making of the statues of Saint Barbara and Saint Nicholas was made to the famous Breslau stonemasonry firm “R. Pausenberger Nachf., Breslau II. Antonio Rossi, Michael & Schott. Haustein und Marmorwerke. Atelier für Grabmalkunst“ founded in 1858. Atelier, run after Pausenberger’s death by a descendant and his partners, carried out architectural works as well as small decorative arts and tomb sculptures. They proposed to make both sculptures from “Neu Warthau’s sandstone”<sup>31</sup> in a baroque style. Furthermore, the commissioners, aware of the specificity of the depiction, decided not to identify the image iconographically with the patronage of the Saint over the miners. In a letter to the contractors, they argued that: “As far as we know, Saint Barbara, the patron saint of miners, is always depicted with a sword and chalice”<sup>32</sup>. There was a sketch of the sculpture attached to the letter that was depicting the Saint equipped with only two attributes: a sword and a chalice<sup>33</sup>. In the letter correspondence between the mine and the stonemasonry company, all the proposals were agreed to, except for the suggested depiction of Saint Barbara.

It is not known whether the proposed “Baroqueisation” was taken too far concerning the classicising style of the interior, or whether the sketch was considered aesthetically unsuitable. As suggested (by von Poellnitz et al.), the wish was expressed for the sculpture to be a spatial realisation of a “painting from Venice”. Although the decision-makers were unsure of the authorship of the desired image, the Management referenced a painting by Palma the Elder (il Vecchio) located in the polyptych in the church of Santa Maria Formosa in Venice. The painting, representing the Italian High Renaissance, was surprisingly popular with the management of the Upper Silesian coal mines. It was initially distributed through numerous copies made by August Wolff, and later

30 Along with the statue depicting Saint Barbara, Ballestrem’sche Güterdirektion wanted to commission a smaller statue of Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of the head of the family at the time.

31 The location of the quarry is in the Lower Silesia (Dolny Śląsk) region: Neu Warthau’s (currently Wartowice) and Bunzlau (currently Bolesławiec).

32 SAKatowice BG, RGW, 599.

33 This was an offer accompanied by an iconographic description and an offer to deliver a sketch (also of the St Nicholas sculpture). The sketches have not survived in the archival records.

through reproductions and non-professional copies<sup>34</sup>. The altar is part of the interior of the artillerymen's chapel, and the iconographic elements (two cannon barrels) clearly define the Saint's patronage of this professional group. It can only be assumed that the decision to change the style of the sculpture was taken by von Poellnitz, as the reference to Renaissance aesthetics was more maintaining the architecture of the interior. In addition, as I mentioned, the functioning of the copies in the Upper Silesian mines contributed to the fact that reference was made to a well-known and widely acclaimed masterpiece. The dissatisfaction expressed by the ordering parties must have put the order in jeopardy because on 8 November a representative of the Company, Schott, came to Ruda to present the latest sketches of the sculptures and discuss the details<sup>35</sup>.

The sketches presented failed to meet the stylistic and aesthetic requirements of the commissioners. On 19 November 1912, a request for the sculptures (Saint Barbara and Saint Nicholas) was made to a professor at the Royal School of Arts and Crafts (Königliche Kunst- und Gewerbeschule) in Breslau, Theodor von Gosen, presenting him with details of the execution<sup>36</sup>. The artist sent a negative reply as early as 23 November, at the same time recommending Robert Bednorz, sculptor native of Pilzendorf (currently Grzybowice, the quarter of Zabrze), as a possible executor of the statues<sup>37</sup>. There are many indications that the ordering parties abandoned their efforts to commission a sculpture from the esteemed artist and decided to continue their cooperation with the Breslau stonemasonry firm. On 3 December 1912, the "Michael und Schott" Company sent a letter to the Ballestrem Goods Directorate (Ballestrem'sche Güterdirektion)

34 August Wolff made a painting for the "Myslowitz" coal mine in 1901 (extant object), and the "Gräfin Johanna" mine in 1909 (lost). Reproductions of the painting were also included in the catalogue of prints published by Ernst Arthur Seemann, prepared for the 56<sup>th</sup> Congress of German Catholics (56 Generalversammlung der Katholiken Deutschlands) in 1909: B. Piecha-van Schagen, *Kult św. Barbary...*, p. 145–148.

35 SAKatowice BG, RGW, 599; Nicolausschacht Bauten.

36 „Zu schreiben: Herrn von Gosen, Bildhauer, Breslau, Kunstschule. Für die Zechengebäude des Nikolaus-Schachtes unserer neuen Graf Franz – Grube beabsichtigen wir 2 Statuen in Sandstein (hl. Nikolaus und hl. Barbara) in Auftrag zu geben. Der hl. Nikolaus soll einschließl. Bischofshut 1.20 m., die hl. Barbara 2.20 m hoch sein Ersterer soll in einer offen Vorhalle (Maurenische), die hl. Barbara in die Alaternische im Zechensaale zu stehen kommen. Wir ersuchen Sie ergebenst, uns auf die beiden Statuen umgehend einen für uns unverbindlichen Kostenanschlag einzureichen unter Beifügung von Skizzen der gedachten Ausführungsart sowie photographischen Abbildungen bereits ausgeführter ähnlicher Statuen. Bei einer eventl. Auftragserteilung müßten Sie sich verpflichten, die Statuen spätestens am 15. März 1913 bestimmt anzuliefern": SAKatowice BG, RGW, 599.

37 SAKatowice BG, RGW, 599.

thanking them warmly for placing an order with them for the two figures and at the same time asking for further guidance:

We have immediately made enquiries about the procurement of the image of Saint Barbara that you requested and will receive it within the next few days. We will then immediately make a new clay model on a smaller scale and send you a picture of it. [...] Finally, we would like to ask you politely and without delay to let us know how large the figures should be. We assume that the frame for the figure of Saint Barbara already exists, and that we are therefore limited to certain plinths of stone buildings<sup>38</sup>.

On 29 March 1913, both figures were sent to Ruda. The image of Saint Barbara was eventually based on a popular painting depicting the patron saint of Italian artillerymen and was made of a natural-colour sandstone. The sculpture, however, did not capture the cannon barrels at the feet of the Saint. What differs is the design of the crown and the fact that the sculpted Barbara holds a sword in her right hand and a chalice in her left hand instead of a palm leaf. Also, the composition of the sculpture is slightly more compact than that of the figure painted by Palma the Elder (Vecchio).



Photo No. 2. Palma the Elder (il Vecchio), central panel of the polyptych with the Saint Barbara in Santa Maria Formosa church in Venice

Source: public domain

The niche retable designed by von Poellnitz corresponded with the above-mentioned object from the mine in Mikultschütz primarily ideologically, and it should be emphasised that these were the only two such objects in the Upper Silesian coal mines. In the case of the "Donnersmarckhütte" mine, the Classicists forms of expression of the decorative arrangement of the wall surfaces and the vault distance these buildings from the generally functioning modus indicating the "temporality" of the contact with the sacred, as both objects were originally not equipped with any element veiling the image of Saint Barbara<sup>39</sup>. They were, thus a straight copy of a niche retable from a Renaissance temple space, such as the church of Solesmes, the cathedral of Rodez or the parish church of Bouilly<sup>40</sup>. The evocation of an aesthetic not very popular in the Catholic Church, in contrast to the neo-Gothic and its accompanying Nazarenism, seems to have been a rather surprising choice given the miners' religious custom of covering up the image of Saint Barbara after the service. neo-Gothic or modern retabulae equipped with a shielding system<sup>41</sup> were ideal cult objects, functioning as such only in the context of religious practices performed "in relation to them" during the short-time hierophany.

The temporary visual contact with the sacred was accompanied by prayers of baroque origin supporting the figure of Saint Barbara as a Minister of the Holy Sacrament. Miners, whose lives were endangered every day, asked their Patron Saint for the protection from a rapid, unexpected and non-Christian death rather than for a rescue. Then, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Barbara, as the Eucharistic Intercessor, available *per visio* during the service, was at the core of Catholic mining spirituality. The patron saint "exercised her protection on the mine site, creating – in the medieval sense – a unified world, melding sacred and profane into one"<sup>42</sup>. The prayers and hymns found in the prayer books for the miners only exposed Barbara in this role – she was supposed to arrive on time with a viaticum so that the miner would not die underground without contact with God. This way, the temporary hierophany, complemented with the

39 The niche retable from the „Donnersmarckhütte” coal mine was re-fitted with lockable single-field wings covered with pictorial decoration by the amateur painter Peter Rymarczyk. Currently, missing.

40 J. Braun, *Der christliche Altar in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, Vol. 2, München 1924, p. 387, photo 294.

41 An archival search of the objects reveals that, in addition to retables with movable single or double sash wings, a drop-down stave or curtain shutter was also used.

42 B. Piecha-van Schagen, *Święta Barbara w kopalni, czyli górniczy lęk przed umieraniem*, [in:] *Miasta górnicze i górnictwo w Europie Środkowej. Pamięć – dziedzictwo – tożsamość*, red. A. Barciak, Katowice – Zabrze 2019, p. 275.

theology, was responsible for creating the miners' devotional model referring more to reverence for the Blessed Sacrament, than to the religiosity of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century peasants and labourers<sup>43</sup>.

The functioning of a bottom-up desire for temporary contact with the sacred, resulting precisely from a sense of sacredness and skill and the need to separate sacred and unholy time, is confirmed by the placement of the wings closing the niche in the "Donnersmarckhütte" coal mine. However, the gradual fading of the custom of collective devotions in honour of the Blessed Sacrament and Saint Barbara held in the mines meant that the contextual cult status of the objects associated with temporal *ostentatio* was disappearing. The lack of implementation of limiting contact time with the sacred can be understood as part of the gradual secularisation of everyday life, or as a *licentia poetica* of the architect, who prioritised the aesthetic coherence of the design over the utilitarianism dictated by miners' religious customs. Notably, the placement of the altar table in the pithead building unambiguously introduces the possibility of a cultic (not just potential) function for both the altar itself and the retable. This is all the more likely because in the pithead building of the mines owned by the Ballestrens: "Elisabeth" (the "Wolfgang" mine in Ruda) and "Castellengo" (in Rokittnitz, currently Rokitnica, the quarter of Zabrze) Holy Masses were held once a month for the inhabitants of the surrounding area.

The history of this image of Saint Barbara from the "Graf Franz" mine remains straightforward to this point. Unfortunately, it is not known what its fate was during the November Revolution in Germany in 1918, when many images of Saint Barbara were damaged by striking workers, nor is it known where the sculpture was kept during the National Socialist occupation – especially after 1941 when almost all religious objects were removed from the mines. It has also not been possible to establish whether the Polish Communist authorities ordered the removal of the altar after 1948, although it is known that it was in a state resembling its original appearance in 1954<sup>44</sup>. It is clear, however, that it was set up in the pithead building, a niche altar until the 1960s, although it is difficult to say whether it served as a cult object. The circumstances of living and working in a communist state meant that public devotional practices could not take

43 W. Świątkiewicz, *Tradycja i wybór. Socjologiczne stadium religijności na Górnym Śląsku*, Katowice – Wrocław 1997, p. 36–51; J. Górecki, *Pielgrzymki na Górnym Śląsku w latach 1869–1914*, Katowice 1994, p. 170–173; J. Myszor, *Duszpasterstwo...*, p. 240–241.

44 Interview with J.D., coal miner from the "Franciszek" mine, born 1925 and E.S., coal miner from the "Franciszek" mine, born 1930, recorded by B. Piecha-van Schagen, 21.09.2007.

place, which directly affected the status of the object. Interestingly, during the period of Stalin’s anti-religious policy, the image was not removed or destroyed. This means, therefore, that we are dealing with a unique object, which was not subjected to a drastic transformation involving its destruction. As a result, it was an important part of the miners’ religious culture, and certainly the visual piety of those miners for whom the “Franciszek” shaft was still a working one. At the same time, the lack of conservation work meant that the statue itself retained its original appearance – made of non-polychrome sandstone. In front of such an object, they could express their piety daily on their way to work. This situation lasted until the expansion of the mine linked to the modernisation of the buildings and the transfer of the production to the “Central” shaft<sup>45</sup>.

In the case of the sculpture from the “Wawel”<sup>46</sup> coal mine, this modernisation had a significant impact on the shifting of the image. Although the construction of new, larger and more capacious shaft buildings was a direct result of increased employment, renovations, carried out on a mass scale, fulfilled an additional function by pursuing the objectives of the laicisation policy. The construction of a new pithead building in the “Wawel” mine as part of the mine expansion between 1960 and 1966 meant that the old one was no longer used – it was to be converted into an additional chain bath hall<sup>47</sup>. One of the interviewees, a valuable and unique source of knowledge in this regard, pointed out the connection between the “modernisation” of the pithead building and the removal of the statue:

*The idea arose to arrange a bathhouse for the miners in this pithead building. Simply to rebuild it, to adapt it for a bathhouse. [...] And Saint Barbara continued to stand in this disused pithead building. [...] Well, and now there was the problem of what to do with the altar, although it was not very important because, after all, it was only a piece of a table, right, but what to do with this statue? And at that time there was a Party<sup>48</sup> official at the mine, his name was Wezner, and he, of course, in consultation with the director, gave the order that Saint Barbara was to be handed over to the Jesuit fathers at Saint Mary’s Church. The then parish priest*

45 J. Jaros, *Kopalnia „Walenty-Wawel” – organizacja, gospodarka i technika produkcji*, [in:] *Kopalnia „Wawel” 1752–1987*, Katowice 1987, p. 121.

46 In 1931, the coal mine was incorporated into the “Wolfgang – Wawel” mine.

47 Private Archive of Rev. Henryk Piecha, Folder: “Wawel” Coal Mine, Interview with an anonymous informant (audio recording), recorded by H. Piecha, ca. 1986–1989.

48 Polish United Workers’ Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza).



stated briefly, “He is not taking the statue of Saint Barbara to the church because Saint Barbara belongs to the miners. The owner of the mine donated her and she has been standing there for, let’s say, 70 or 60 years, and she should remain there, and no one is entitled to take her away”. Well, so because of that position [...] of the parish priest of the time in that parish, well, what to do? And at that time, the order was to wall up this statue – this niche, to put up a wall and let it stand there. However, the then head of the Building Department, Jerzy Lazar, a very religious man, a deep believer, after discussing the matter with a few other people at the mine who lived with the issue, [...] they all concluded that it would be best if we simply put Saint Barbara in storage, as we were sure she would return eventually. She was taken out of her niche, and Mr Lazar had a wooden chest made especially for her, a massive box made of logs, made of thick wood, padded with sawdust, and that’s where the statue was put in the box. And the chest stayed there in the pithead building, but in a separate room, under lock and key. And it was Mr Lazar who had the keys to it, and it was deposited there<sup>49</sup>.

By the decision of the communist authorities, the statue of Saint Barbara was to be inaccessible to the miners. They did not use the previous (so-called old) pithead building, as all administrative activities were moved to a new facility erected in the 1960s<sup>50</sup>. It should be noted that the relocation of the statue by the miners was an image-protecting act. It was purely out of religiosity and the commitment to the symbolic values that this statue held. Comparing the fate of this figure with the statue of Saint Barbara from the “Mikulczyce” coal mine, which was walled up in an altar niche by order of the party authorities<sup>51</sup>, it can be said that the miners in Ruda safeguarded the image. Although, according to the objectives of the party authorities, its relocation was radical and was intended to erase Saint Barbara from the miners’ culture and liquidate their *sensus numinis*.

The hidden statue was not forgotten; moreover, the knowledge that it was in storage contributed to the establishment of a symbolic community to remember the cult of Saint Barbara in the mines – forbidden at the time by the state authorities. As mining traditions associated with the patron saint were transferred from collective behaviour in the mines to

49 Private Archive of Rev. Henryk Piecha, Folder: “Wawel” Coal Mine, Interview with an anonymous informant (audio recording), recorded by H. Piecha, ca. 1986–1989.

50 In 1971, the “Walenty-Wawel” and “Paul” coal mines were merged into one plant named “Wawel”.

51 B. Piecha-van Schagen, *Kult św. Barbary...*, p. 466.

the private sphere and collective behaviour in parish churches, the statue became a symbol. The religious sculpture was given the importance of symbols of the political struggle for religious freedom and the freedom to practice religion in public, and in the workplace<sup>52</sup>. This was all the more significant given that in many other mines in Upper Silesia, miners who fought to preserve images of Saint Barbara in their pit head buildings were harassed by the authorities, and members of miners' orchestras who took part in religious Saint Barbara's Day celebrations had their instruments confiscated. In this way, the statue of Saint Barbara underwent a semantic shift – from being an object of potential cult status, it became at the same time the transmitter of a myth of past miners' religiosity and an anti-state political symbol. The power of this symbol was made even stronger by the fact that it was hidden away.

There was no object of devotional significance in the mine's new pit-head building – on the gable wall was a polychrome depicting a daemon: the treasurer (skarbnik) of supernatural proportions, which was a tool of the laicisation of social life<sup>53</sup>. The communist visual propaganda promoted the figure of the "good treasurer" who saved the miners, supported and helped them. Thus, the treasurer subsumed the apotropaic functions of the figure of Saint Barbara. It was only during the so-called "Solidarity carnival"<sup>54</sup> at the turn of August and September 1980 that the miners regained the possibility of restoring the image of the patron saint to public access. The ideological loosening moment meant a bottom-up opportunity to place images of Saint Barbara in the mines. "It is significant that the first to claim Saint Barbara were people who had in their majority not grown up in the Upper Silesian miners' tradition" – employed at the "Manifest Lipcowy" coal mine<sup>55</sup>. They were followed by miners from all Upper Silesian coal mines, including the "Wawel" mine. During the strike, when the initiative to reactivate the cult emerged, the return of the statue

52 M. Bortlik-Dźwierżyńska, *Barbórka czy Dzień Górnika? Czyli słowo o tym, jak partia ze świętą konkurowała*, [in:] „Przewodnia siła Narodu”. *Z dziejów partii komunistycznej na Górnym Śląsku i w Zagłębiu Dąbrowskim 1945–1990*, ed. T. Kurpierz, Katowice 2010, p. 46–47.

53 Private Archive of Rev. Henryk Piecha, Folder: "Wawel" Coal Mine, Interview with an anonymous informant (audio recording), recorded by H. Piecha, ca. 1986–1989; B. Piecha-van Schagen, *Górnicza demonologia*, [in:] *Leksykon mitów, symboli i bohaterów Górnego Śląska w XIX i XX wieku*, ed. A. Michalczyk, B. Linek, Opole 2015, p. 114–116.

54 The 16-month period between August 1980 and December 1981, during which the communist authorities allowed civil liberties to be partially released.

55 B. Piecha-van Schagen, *Kult św. Barbary...*, p. 615.

of Saint Barbara was first on the list of demands of the Strike Committee<sup>56</sup>. Although the above-mentioned Jerzy Lazar was no longer alive at the time, older workers remembered that the statue from the pithead building of the “Mikołaj” shaft was still located on the premises of the old pithead building. Thanks to the fact that the Party authorities agreed to all the postulates, *the Construction Department of the mine prepared a beautiful such a socle, a base with a height of ... somewhere one metre, or one metre twenty. Such a plinth. And on this socle, Saint Barbara was placed*<sup>57</sup>.

At night, on 2 September, a group of strikers

*simply carried the statue in this box from the place where it was kept to the pithead building on their shoulders [...] it was carried on the shoulders of the miners from the “Mikołaj” shaft to the new pithead building, which I would say is about 200–250 metres [...]. It..., it was probably more than twenty people, or maybe more. It was a special wooden construction, and they carried it on their shoulders. They placed it in the box, as it was, and then it was taken out of the box and [...] thanks to such a mechanical device, it was lifted onto the plinth*<sup>58</sup>.

The rectangular plinth was placed on the gable wall of the building, on which the statue was placed together with the original sandstone base. Due to its excessive dirt, the statue was painted white, ordinary emulsion paint, while the attributes: crown, chalice and sword head, were painted gold. The repainting was carried out on the staff's initiative, without consulting anyone with artistic or architectural training. To separate the space of the “religious” area, a vertical strip of grey was painted on the face of the wall, providing a visually better contrast than the pale green wall.

56 Private Archive of Rev. Henryk Piecha, Folder: “Wawel” Coal Mine, Interview with an anonymous informant (audio recording), recorded by H. Piecha, ca. 1986–1989.

57 Private Archive of Rev. Henryk Piecha, Folder: “Wawel” Coal Mine, Interview with an anonymous informant (audio recording), recorded by H. Piecha, ca. 1986–1989.

58 Private Archive of Rev. Henryk Piecha, Folder: “Wawel” Coal Mine, Interview with an anonymous informant (audio recording), recorded by H. Piecha, ca. 1986–1989.



Photo No. 3. Saint Barbara figure in the "Central" pithead building of "Wawel" mine

Author: H. Piecha, 1986

The crew's act of will was a direct result of the memory preserved among the workers, transmitted to the following generations of miners. Their physical effort resulting almost out of desperation to regain the spiritual good taken from them was appreciated by Bishop Herbert Bednorz in his pastoral letter on the events of the Autumn of 1980<sup>59</sup>. In his letter, Bednorz wrote about spontaneous, bottom-up apostolic initiatives in the workplaces of the diocese:

59 The letter is dated 31 January 1981 pithead building does not allow for a complete reconstruction, but it does provide sufficient opportunity to situate the ideological assumptions of this space concerning other pithead buildings. The principal task is to establish the ontic status of the image of St Barbara placed in it, and thus also of the pithead building. For this reason, the only inconvenience is the lack of Nr. 4-5, p. 94-98.

Sometimes heroic deeds were performed, such as at the “Walenty-Wawel” mine, where the miners found a magnificent stone statue of Saint Barbara, weighing about two tonnes, in an old scrapyards at night, and carried it on their backs to the mine’s pithead building. For this, I once again express my highest appreciation to these miners<sup>60</sup>.

The Bishop of Katowice took part in the restoration of the cult of Saint Barbara in the “Wawel” mine, thus contributing to keeping the memory alive. The reconsecration of the image took place on 5 October 1980, at a field altar set up in front of the pithead building, and the ceremony was presided over by Bednorz<sup>61</sup>.

In the mid-1980s, the plinth on which the sculpture was set was clad with marble slabs. Identical slabs were fixed to the front wall up to the height of the pedestal, giving the composition the appearance of permanence and some splendour. Since the placement of the depiction of Saint Barbara, bouquets have been laid on and around the plinth, mainly on the occasion of the annual Saint Barbara’s Day (Barbórka). The statue was refreshed each year with fresh layers of white paint. The new structure, reminiscent of a memorial rather than an altar, became the venue for celebrations on 3 and 4 December. Thus, the “Saint Barbara’s-monument”, placed in the mine’s-site, marked this space as the location of a specific spatial-cultural code, a mental space drawing on, among other things, the miners’ memories, perception of themselves and their heritage – closely linked to the cult of Saint Barbara. Available sources indicate that the image of Saint Barbara in the form of a statue was located in the new pithead building until the final phase of the mine’s decommissioning. It was then transported to the church of Saint Pius X in Ruda Śląska.

Although the phenomenon of the presence of images of Saint Barbara in the Upper Silesian mines seems “self-evident”, the specificity of the sources is interesting due to the scarcity of sources and archival documentation. This also applies to the events of the last 30 years related to the restructuring of the coal industry in Upper Silesia. As part of measures limiting coal production, mines were gradually extinguished and closed. Due to this policy, the “Wawel” mine was shut down in 1998. The circumstances revealed the need to dispose of the statue of Saint Barbara from

60 Ibidem, p. 97.

61 B. Piecha-van Schagen, „A kaj jest Barbórka?” *Biskupi górnośląscy wobec odnawiania kultu św. Barbary w kopalniach węgla kamiennego w roku 1980 – wspólnota pamięci*, [in:] *Biskupi w rzeczywistości politycznej Polski „Ludowej”*, Vol. 2., ed. R. Łątka, Warszawa 2022, p. 505–506.

the pithead building. According to those involved in the relocation of the sculpture, this was a carefully prepared process initiated by the workers and aimed at securing the artefact:

*And that statue stood there from the year [19]80 until it was decommissioned, until it was taken to the church of Saint Pius X in Ruda. As long as they were mining there, as long as there was that area, and then, at the end of the 90s, it was moved to Pius' [church – B.P.-S.]. And the crew were seeking a place to put this Barbara so that she wouldn't be destroyed because she was a beautiful thing. We looked at the neighbouring churches, and we were most interested in those churches where the "Wawel" mine operated. That was Godula<sup>62</sup>, Orzegów<sup>63</sup>, the churches in Ruda... and since the closest church was "Pius", and because the coal mine management office was near this parish, we decided that it would be good if it was accepted by the parish priest. There were no problems, and only transport had to be arranged. So, there was a special car, she [Saint Barbara figure – B.P.-S.] was put on the car – it is solid sandstone, about two metres high<sup>64</sup>.*

According to research, the statue was removed a second time from the place it was intended to be placed by the founders. This time, however, it was a permanent shift due to the annihilation of the original site, which was its primal and prior context.

After being moved to the church of Saint Pius X, the statue was restored, but rather than to clean the painting applied unprofessionally in 1980 and restore the original natural surface of the stone, it was newly painted. On the initiative of a city councillor and the parish priest, a realistic polychrome was commissioned from a restoration studio. One informant expressed a negative opinion of the formal transformation made, *Then they painted it, but it looked prettiest just cleaned, in sandstone and only that crown, sword and chalice were gold<sup>65</sup>*. The motives behind the polychrome work are not clear, as the sculpture transformed in this way does not formally relate even to the church's decoration in the slightest. In addition, after the statue was placed in its permanent location (the side chapel next to

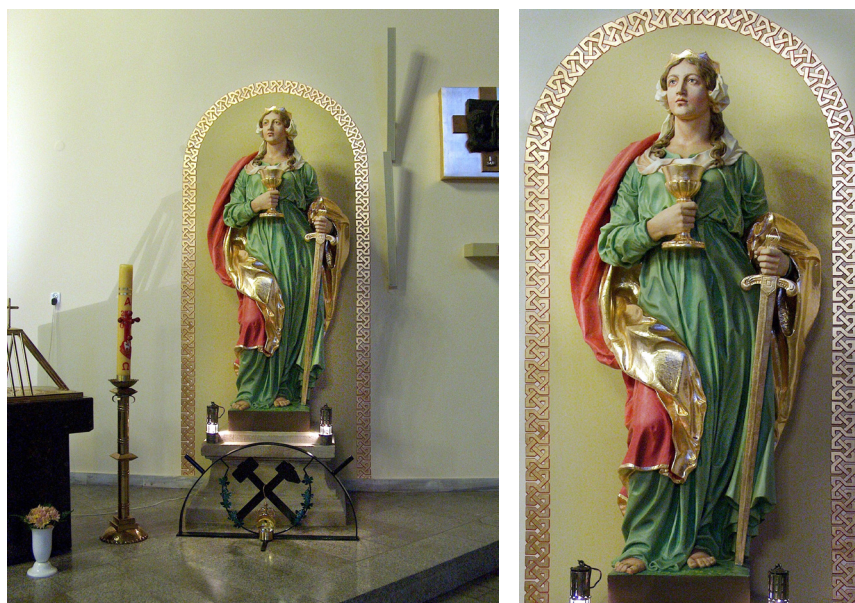
62 The quarter of Ruda Śląska.

63 The quarter of Ruda Śląska.

64 Interview with F.P., coal miner from the "Pawel" mine, born 1949, recorded by B. Piecha-van Schagen, 17.08.2007.

65 Interview with F.P., coal miner from the "Pawel" mine, born 1949, recorded by B. Piecha-van Schagen, 17.08.2007.

the baptismal font), a miners' emblem made of metal was attached at the bottom of the statue's pedestal and two miners' lamps were put on the pedestal, thus emphasising the statue's mining origin.



Photos No. 4-5. Saint Barbara figure in the church of Saint Pius X in Ruda Śląska  
Author: B. Piecha-van Schagen, 2007

The collected and diverse sources, which are arranged chronologically, show the typical vicissitudes of Upper Silesian images of Saint Barbara from coal mines. Based on other research I have conducted, I can say that the shifting and formal changes of the sculpture from the “Graf Franz” / “Wawel” coal mine have the status of a case study. This narrative shows that the transfers of images of Saint Barbara had been driven by political and economic actions. These two factors caused the relocation of the statue, including its hiding in a specially prepared chest, and its transfer to the church. In each of these situations, the workers initiated the actions to protect and save the object from below.

The figure's transfers that were carried out resulted mainly in a formal change, but also in a change of meaning of the place where they were located. In the case of the pithead building of the “Graf Franz” shaft, we can undoubtedly regard it as a cult object in the form of an *altare fixum*. The design of the niche retable placed over the altar top allowed for the performance of cultic activities, including celebrating the Holy Mass. One can, therefore, definitely attribute the object as cultic, or at least as an object

with such potential. In contrast, the form in which the miners restored the statue of Saint Barbara some 20 years after its removal no longer suggests the status of a cult object in any sense. Rather, the positioning of the statue on a plinth is indicative of secular connotations of hero worship. The object placed in the pithead building in 1980 is a memorial, a commemorative object rather than one that supports devotional practices. The subsequent relocation of the sculpture to the parish church and its incorporation into a side chapel, but not as a retable, resulted in the depiction of Saint Barbara becoming a devotional object – another image of the patron saint placed inside the church in response to the religious demand of the faithful. The iconotropy of the sculpture of Saint Barbara from the mine in Ruda Śląska indicates that these objects (images of Saint Barbara placed in the mines) are extremely sensitive to external factors causing their contextual transfers and displacements.

At the same time, as the sources indicate, the changing status of these objects in the landscape of mining culture is accompanied by changing forms of piety. The altar with the niche retable designed by von Poellnitz was not only the result of an aesthetic concept – it was instead the result of the custom of practising collective morning services in the mines. Even during the inter-war period, miners would gather in front of the altar to say a prayer, although these were not services organised by the management. “The worship of Saint Barbara in a sacred space ripped out of the profane pithead not only gave a sense of security against the prospect of working in unpredictable conditions, but also [...] created a sense of community”<sup>66</sup>. With the presence of altars erected according to liturgical regulations, the pithead building became a place of recurring hierophany<sup>67</sup>.

The relocation of the statue, or rather its extraction from hiding and set in the new pithead, in which the treasurer (skarbnik) was the symbolic dominant, thoroughly changed the meaning and function of the altar sculpture. Its symbolic value was primarily linked to its ideological opposition to the miner’s demon. The treasurer was characterised positively by the communist authorities and portrayed as a protector of miners. He was thus to act as a substitute patron saint for Saint Barbara. The miners of the “Wawel” mine, by placing the image of Saint Barbara in the pithead building, restored order and balance between the sacred and the profane

66 B. Piecha-van Schagen, *Ółtarze św. Barbary jako wyznaczniki świętości miejsca i czasu w przestrzeni kopalnianych cechowni*, [in:] *Katowice. W 144 rocznicę uzyskania praw miejskich*, ed. A. Barciak, Katowice 2010, p. 275.

67 M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, translated by W.R. Trask, New York 1963, p. 24–29.



according to their emotional needs and cultural memory. An analogy is made with the placement of the statue on a plinth, which is after all characterised by its analogy with Greek sepulchral stelae and the understanding of the architectural element of space that is the column. Its “religious, sepulchral (emphasising the idea of eternity) and glorifying function led to the development of the idea of a »monument«”<sup>68</sup>. Such a structure naturally combined the sacred and the profane by commemorating (thus immortalising) the figure depicted. Through the existence of such a “historical memorial”, surrounded in addition by evidence of living remembrance and reverence (the laying of flowers) in a space reluctant to the presence of the sacred, they introduced an element of *numinosum* into a space of non- (or even anti-) religious predestination. However, they reduced the image of Saint Barbara to the status of a symbol, both religious and political.

The further relocation of the statue from the “Wawel” mine also changed its status and devotional relationship. In the mine’s pithead building (both old and new), all workers had contact with the statue, regardless of their relationship with the sacrum. The non-religious entered into a relationship with it – if only visually. The statue’s location in the church rather made it accessible only to believers participating in religious practices. In addition, it is now not an image accessible only to those employed at the mine – it is part of the decoration of a church located in a housing estate from the 1970s. Furthermore, it no longer functions as a cult object – it is not located on the altar. As a devotional object, it serves, according to the concept of Gert von der Osten<sup>69</sup> and Hans Belting<sup>70</sup>, as a “religious contact” or even a dialogue with the viewer (believer). The openness of the viewer, to his or her emotions expressed, for example, in the act of visual piety, is linked to the residence of this image in an ordered sacred, cultic space. Barbara – the devotional object also rubs up against religious kitsch, i.e. an art form that often levels perfectly inaccessibility and remoteness from the sacrum. Religious kitsch art is an adaptation of form to spiritual needs. As Maria Poprzęcka pointed out,

All assimilation or interpretation of a phenomenon consists precisely in reducing it to arrangements that are already known and considered natural. Understanding a text or image is accomplished by relating it to

68 B. Piecha-van Schagen, *Kult św. Barbary...*, p. 650.

69 G. von der Osten, *Der Schmerzesmann: Typengeschichte eines deutschen Andachtsbildwerkes von 1300 bis 1600*, “Forschungen zur der deutschen Kunstgeschichte. Jahresgabe des Deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft” 1935, t. 7, passim.

70 H. Belting, *An Anthropology of Images. Picture, Medium, Body*, Princeton 2011, passim.

a type of expression or pattern that is in some sense natural and intelligible. This process is variously called taming, retrieving, and making plausible<sup>71</sup>.

The aesthetic value of elitism as artistically conceived by von Poellnitz, centered on the balanced relationship between aesthetics and theology, has been replaced by another correlation. It is based on the link between aesthetics and ethics<sup>72</sup>, which “naturally translates into an ambiguous relationship with the arts, as well as, [...] the objects and images that make up what has been called »lived religion«<sup>73</sup>. It may seem kitsch as being an inappropriate tool for representing the sacred, the sacred seems to be “above” this style. To a certain extent, the negativity quoted above regarding the covering of the statue with naturalistic polychrome reinforces this conviction. It seems to be an isolated voice. However, it is difficult to agree with the opinion that kitsch as “stylistic deficiency” corresponds to “theological deficiency”. In my opinion, the conscious decision to make the polychrome is a reflection of the “lived religion” of the decision-makers, who after all represent the same cultural habitus. We should therefore look at the “aesthetic deficiency” of the Saint Barbara sculpture as an expression and evidence of a relationship with the sacred, a lived religion, rather than as a demonstration of a lack of understanding of theology. At this point, it is correct to agree with David Morgan’s statement,

First, popular practices often leave nothing behind but material objects, which means that the objects are the only way of accessing the beliefs that constituted the religious life of ordinary people. Second, what people do with objects reveals the life of the body, of feelings, practices, and ideas that form the basis of lived religion<sup>74</sup>.

The displacements of the statue of Saint Barbara from the “Wawel” coal mine turned out to be “translations” of its meaning, status, function, and artistic manifestation. The forced negotiations with the space(s) caused the image of Saint Barbara to transform, to change – from a cult object representing the patron saint of artillerymen to a devotional object commemorating a closed mine and a manifestation of lived religion.

71 M. Poprzęcka, *O złej sztuce*, Warszawa 1998, p. 253.

72 F.B. Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*, London 1990, p. 3.

73 E. McIntyre, *Rescuing God from Bad Taste: Religious Kitsch in Theory and Practice*, “Literature & Aesthetics” 2014, No. 2, p. 86.

74 D. Morgan, *Art, Material Culture and Lived Religion*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*, ed. F.B. Brown, New York 2014, p. 496.

However, these shifts should not be taken at face value. The iconotropy of the image proves that these translations did not occur through misunderstanding, abandonment or neglect – on the contrary, each of the transpositions resulted from the attachment of the representatives of the mining profession to the image of their patron saint, a symbol, an object of longing for emotional fulfillment and identity.

Summary

## Iconotropy of images of Saint Barbara from the Upper Silesian coal mines: the case of “Graf Franz” / “Wawel” mine

The article discusses the formal changes to the image of Saint Barbara from the “Graf Franz” / “Wawel” coal mine and the accompanying ontological changes to the object in the light of politically and economically motivated transformations.

The images of Saint Barbara placed in the pit head buildings of the coal mines in Upper Silesia particularly intensively at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were objects of religious cult, and were mostly created by the professional artists. As objects of miners’ piety, based on devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, they represented the idea of an art object unified with theology. During the communist rule in Poland, the statue of Saint Barbara was removed from the pit head building and hidden by the miners, and given the status of a symbol of resistance against the state authorities. The returning of the image to the pithead building in 1980 and repainting it with technical paint made it a religious and political symbol, while also serving as an apotropaic object. After the liquidation of the “Wawel” mine, the sculpture, covered with a realistic polychrome, serves as a devotional object in the Church of Saint Pius X in Ruda Śląska.

Keywords: Religious image, Saint Barbara, iconotropy, religious art, lived religion, coal miners, Upper Silesia