

Juraj Gembický

The Bell Foundry Workshop of the So-Called Gaal Family in the Spiš region

Until today there exist, and are in use, some of the best representatives of the medieval bell foundry-handcraft in Slovakia: gothic bells of the best quality, as well as a collection of unique medieval bipartite calyx-shaped bronze baptismal fonts, mostly still in use in the territory of the Spiš region. All of them came from the so-called Gaal family bell foundry workshop, with very typical relief decorations, epigraphic ornamentation and perfect design.¹ They are real examples of the diversity and progressivism of the bell foundry handcraft in our territory, together with many lost or still not discovered bronze-cast candlesticks, lamps, tables, sculptures, liturgical vessels and other kinds of products of this trade.

Master Conrad (called “Gaal”) is the founder of our most important and earliest represented medieval non-monasterial bell foundry workshop in Slovakia, who, as a bell founder for this territory, is also the earliest known by name.² The so-called Gaal workshop (or Gaal foundry) in Spišská Nová Ves (Slovakia) was active between 1357 and 1516. In scholarly publications it was called so based on the family name of most of the masters from there, reconstructed from published historical sources, where the name “Gaal-naw,” contracted as “Gaal,” is mentioned.³ In 1357, master Conrad (“Conrad campanista”),⁴ working together with his brothers Nicolas and John (“Nicolao et Johanni Campanorum fusoribus”),⁵ cast probably one of the largest known bells of medieval Europe (with a lower diameter of 280 cm, a height of 300 cm, and a weight of around 13 000 kg, according to the reconstruction based on research of the bell-form and the place of its casting) for the royal court in Visegrád.⁶ King Louis the Great, of the House of Anjou, gave him several privileges as a reward for this bell.⁷ It was the beginning of his bell founding carrier, during which



*Fig. 1. The reconstruction of the big bell in Visegrád.
Drawing: Gergely Buzás.*



Fig. 2. Revúca: not-preserved medieval bell Quirin from Hans Wagner. Photograph from publication: DUBOVSKÝ, D.: Revúcke kostoly, zvony a ich tvorcovia. Revúca 2004.

his activities as well as his followers' workshops were relocated to the Spiš region in today's Slovakia, with its centre in Spišská Nová Ves, with easy access to natural sources—copper, wood and tin (very close to the centre, Krakow in Poland).⁸ There is also one interesting hypothesis in campanological literature about an earlier bell foundry workshop (the so-called pre-Gaal workshop, connected with examples of baptismal fonts in Tvarožná, Stará Lesná and in Košice), active here before the time of the establishment of the Conrad family workshop in Spiš, which would probably establish a continuity with the previous activities, and it would also assume its ornamental structure forms.⁹

As for the concrete works of master Conrad there is, for example, the bronze baptismal font in Švedlár (originally cast for the locality Stillbach), in whose decoration we can find 10 forms of the coat of arms of Louis the Great of the House of Anjou;¹⁰ the big bell in the village of Kysak (near Košice) from 1375, the oldest dated preserved bell in Slovakia,¹¹ and the great bell in Hrabušice (Spiš), from the 14th century, which, according to legend, comes from the Carthusian monastery in Kláštorisko (Lapis refugii) in Spiš.¹² In the latest unpublished article of Juraj Spiritza¹³ there are other works attributed to master Conrad: the lost bell in Batizovce, the lost bell from the Spiš castle (with a fragment found),¹⁴ the bell from Nižné Lapše (today in the East-Slovakian museum in Košice),¹⁵ as well as the so-called Middle-bell from campanile in Poprad, Spišská Sobota,¹⁶ which might be connected with the fragments of the bell found in the crypt of St. Leonard in Wawel in Krakow.¹⁷

Regarding bell foundry activities in the period after Conrad (from the 14th to the 15th centuries) we find bell founder John from Spišská Nová Ves (“Johannes Glockengiesser,” sometimes mentioned in literature as Ján Weygel),¹⁸ whose activities were recorded during his stay in Poland between 1386 and 1389, where he left



Fig. 3. Svedlar: detail of baptismal font from 14. century from master Conrad. Photography: Juraj Gembický.

2 bells in Holy Mary's Basilica (Kosciol Marijacki) in Krakow.¹⁹ The "Urban" bell in Biecz (Poland) is also attributed to him.²⁰ Then, after master John, Nicolas the younger (Big bell in Harichovce), supposed to be Conrad's nephew, and bell founder Mathias ("Mathias, Mattes Glockengisser de Nova Villa"),²¹ were active during the 15th century, who were followed by another generation of bell founders, by brothers Vincent and Paul ("Vincentius fusor campanarum, Paulus dictus Gaal"), probably grandsons of Conrad's brother Nicolas the Older.²² In the latest research of Juraj Spiritza, according to the interpretation of the uncial initials "MG," used on some artefacts from the bell foundry in Spiš (baptismal font in Lubica, Kežmarok), another one is identified and supposed to be made by a member of the family, Monogramist MG, who was originally identified as Mathias Gaal.²³ The last known and important master of this family workshop was Hans Wagner (*magister iohannes Wagner de nova villa, Hannes Wagner*), active between 1475 and 1513 (with his work continued by his unknown journeyman, working together with his widow Ursula until 1516, according to J. Spiritza).²⁴ His most progressive, late works (baptismal font in Spišské Vlachy) belong to the early examples of Renaissance art in Spiš.

There are other known works—bells and fonts—attributed to this workshop, which are located outside the Spiš region, for example, a clock-bell in the Cathedral of St. Elisabeth in Košice from 1516, a lost bell of magister Augustinus in Turňa nad Bodvou near Košice,²⁵ another lost bell in Revúca (Gemer region),²⁶ a bell preserved in Žehňa (Šariš region), Gemerská Poloma (Gemer), Janík and Čečejevce (in the surroundings of Košice),²⁷ a bell in Lupča (Liptov region),²⁸ and a bell in Sabinov²⁹ or in Bardejov³⁰ (Šariš region); a baptismal font in Štítňik in Gemer;³¹ as well as others in more distant localities, like a bell from Nižné Lapše (today in Poland), bells in Krakow, a baptismal font from Liptovská Teplá (Liptov region, today preserved in the National Museum in Budapest),³² and a baptismal font in Gyöngyös. These examples in-

dicating the influence and spreading of the products of the workshop in a territory larger than the homeland Spiš or Eastern Slovakia during the active period of the existence of the workshop.

The latest international Slovak-Hungarian research concerning the bell foundry workshop of Master Conrad and his followers has yielded new and important findings and interpretations. Participants were a group of specialists from the Hungarian National Museum in Visegrád and Juraj Gembický from the Monument Protection Office in Košice (Slovakia, in connection with a project for the years 2007–2009). The aim of the project was the preparation of detailed documentation and an international exhibition complemented with a catalogue, as well as ideal and real reconstructions of Conrad's largest bell in Visegrád in the future.

The preserved artefacts from the territories of Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, the products from Master Conrad's bell foundry and the beauty of these historical bells and baptismal fonts form an important part of our common European cultural heritage.

The cooperation between our office (the Monument Protection Office, its colleagues and authors) with Mrs. Prokopp in preparing the international exhibition on medieval wall paintings in the heart of Europe (which has also been presented in part in Košice) was a heart-warming example of collaboration between Hungarian and Slovakian researchers.

This tradition may be seen as continuing as a new cooperation has begun in our Office with Hungarian colleagues in, for example, researching the Gaal family bell foundry. We hope that the two Slovak articles in this collection will express our sincere thanks for this collaboration.



Fig. 4. Bardejov, Slovak-Hungarian team in bell-research: Juraj Gembický, Zsuzsa Grósz, Máttyás Szőke, Gergely Buzás. Photography: Erika Zoltán.

Notes

- 1 Basic studies and publications: GLATZ, A. C.: *Stredoveké kovolejárstvo v Spišskej Novej Vsi*. In: Zborník Spišská Nová Ves 1. Spišská Nová Ves 1968, 241–255; SPIRITZA, J.: *Gotická lejárň v Spišskej Novej Vsi v r. 1357–1516*. In: Krásy Slovenska, 1970, 8, 344–347; SPIRITZA, J. – UČNÍKOVÁ, D.: *Spišské gotické krstiteľnice z tvorivého okruhu Konráda Gaala*. In: Zborník Slovenského národného múzea – História 12. Bratislava 1972, 35 passim; SPIRITZA, J.: *Spišské zvony*. Bratislava 1972; SPIRITZA, J. – BORODÁČ, L.: *Podoby starého Spiša*. Bratislava 1975; SPIRITZA, J.: *Masters of bronze beauty*. In: Panorama of Slovakia, 1976, 2, 30; SPIRITZA, J.: *Gotische Taufbecken und Glocken aus Zips-Neudorf*. In: Das Münster. München 1993, 4, 309–313; SPIRITZA, J.: *Gothic fonts in Spiš*. In: Slovakia, 1994, 11, 50–53; SPIRITZA, J.: *Glockengiesser in der Slowakei*. In: Karpaten Jahrbuch 1998, 67–74 (in Stuttgart); VERŐ, M.: *Spätmittelalterliche Erztaufbecken in Ungarn: In der Zips und in Bartfeld*. In: Acta Historiae Artium, 43. Budapest 2002; LUTZE, K.: *Metallene Taufbecken des Mittelalters – Bronze, Messing, Zinn, Bley, Gusseisen*, unpublished manuscript, in print.
- 2 See in: SPIRITZA, J.: *Prehľad zvonolejárov pôsobiacich v 14.–20. storočí na Slovensku*. In: Corpus campanarum Slovaciae I., 1992; SPIRITZA, J.: *Biografický slovník zvonolejárov činných na Slovensku v druhom tisícročí*. Bratislava 2002.; *Allgemeine Künstler Lexikon*. SAUR, K. G. München – Leipzig 2005, Band 46, 482.
- 3 PAJDUSSÁK, M.: *Szepesvármegye középkori ércöntvényei és azok mesterei*. In: Szepesmegyei Történelmi Társulat Évkönyve, Levoča 1909, 65–101.
- 4 PATAY, P.: *Corpus campanarum antiquarum Hungariae. Magyarország régi harangjai és harangöntői 1711 előtt*, Budapest 1989.
- 5 See: ILLÉSY, J.: *Igló király korona- és bányaváros levéltára*. Budapest 1899.
- 6 SZŐKE, M.: *Harangöntőforma köpenyrészének töredékei Visegrádról*. In: Művészeti ipar Lajos korában. 1342–1382. Budapest 1982, 317 passim; SZŐKE, M.: *650 éve öntötte Konrad mester a visegrádi nagy harangot*. In: Középkori harangöntések ásatási nyomai. Informative bulletin of the exhibition “A 6. harangöntő történeti ankét alkalmából rendezet poszterkiállítás,” 7.6.2007, Budapest; PATAY, P.: *Alte Glocken in Ungarn*. Budapest 1977.
- 7 ILLÉSY, J.: ibidem (as in note 5); PAJDUSSÁK, M.: ibidem (note 3).
- 8 Compare in works of SPIRITZA, in note 1, 2.
- 9 GLATZ, A. C.: ibidem.; SPIRITZA, J. – UČNÍKOVÁ, D.: ibidem; LUTZE, K.: ibidem (as in note 1); SPIRITZA, J. – PETROVIČ, J. – OSTROLÚCKA, M.: *Magister iohannes WAGNER de nova villa – Pôvodca zvonov a bronzových krstiteľníc z rokov 1475–1513*, unpublished manuscript (2007).
- 10 See works of J. SPIRITZA and studies about baptismal fonts (in note 1).
- 11 GEMBICKÝ, J.: *Zvony a zvonolejáři v Košiciach*. Trnava 2000 (diplomová práca).
- 12 SPIRITZA, J.: *Tri povesti o zvonoch zo Spiša*. In: Zborník Spiš, 1973, 3–4, 287 passim.; with foto in: SPIRITZA, J. – BORODÁČ, L.: ibidem.
- 13 SPIRITZA, J. – PETROVIČ, J. – OSTROLÚCKA, M.: *Magister iohannes WAGNER de nova villa – Pôvodca zvonov a bronzových krstiteľníc z rokov 1475–1513*, unpublished manuscript (2007).
- 14 VALLAŠEK, A. – FIALA, A.: *Spišský hrad. Stredná a južná časť horného hradu – nálezová správa*. In: Archív of Monument protection office of Slovak Republic in Bratislava, sign. T-1247, 56; MENCLOVÁ, D.: *Spišský hrad*. Bratislava 1957.
- 15 GEMBICKÝ, J.: ibidem.
- 16 CHALUPECKÝ, I. – ŠTUBŇA, K.: *Georgenberg – Spišská Sobota und ihre Denkmäler*. Spišská Nová Ves 2006; JANKOVIČ, V.: *Vojtech Pisch (1816–1880) a jeho Liber memorabilium*. In: Slovenská Archivistika, 1971, 2.; SPIRITZA, J.: *Spišské zvony*. Bratislava 1972.
- 17 ROKOSZ, M.: *Zvony i wieże Wawelu*. Kraków 2006.
- 18 SPIRITZA, J.: *Prehľad zvonolejárov pôsobiacich v 14.–20. stor. na Slovensku*. In: Corpus campanarum Slovaciae I., 1992; SPIRITZA, J.: *Biografický slovník zvonolejárov činných na Slovensku v druhom tisícročí*. Bratislava 2002.; WEINELT, H.: *Das Stadtbuch von Zipser Neudorf und seine Sprache*. München 1940.
- 19 PEKÁR, K.: *János harangöntő mester Iglón 1426-ban*. In: Archeologia Értesítő, 1911, 287; SEMKOWICZ, W.: *Spiszka sztuka odlewnicza i jej związki z Krakowem w wieku XIV*. In: Rocznik Krakowski 25. Krakow 1934, 129 passim.; SZYDLÓWSKI, T.: *Dzwony starodawne z przed roku 1600 na obszarze Galicji*. Kraków 1922.
- 20 SPIRITZA, J. – PETROVIČ, J. – OSTROLÚCKA, M.: ibidem.
- 21 BALLAGI, A.: *Magyarországi városok régi számadáskönyvei*. Recenzia in: Archeológiai Értesítő. Budapest 1886, 171.
- 22 See studies of J. SPIRITZA.
- 23 SPIRITZA, J. – PETROVIČ, J. – OSTROLÚCKA, M.: ibidem.
- 24 Ibidem.
- 25 GEMBICKÝ, J.: ibidem.
- 26 DUBOVSKÝ, D.: *Revúcke kostoly, zvony a ich tvorcovia*. Revúca 2004; FRÁK, G.: *Záhľadný zvon Quirin v Revúcej*. Revúca 2000.
- 27 According the last practical documentation in regions, managed by Monument-protection office in Košice and Prešov.
- 28 SPIRITZA, J.: *Staré zvony v okr. Liptovský Mikuláš*. In: Zborník Liptov, 1977, 4, 131 passim.
- 29 BENKŐ, E.: *Erdély középkori harangjai és bronzkeresztelő medencéi*. Cluj 2002.
- 30 MYSKOVŠKY, V.: *Bártfa középkori műemlékei 1.*

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St.Egidius church and hospital, sign. 1649, 49–52.

31 VERŐ, M.: ibidem; LUTZE, K.: ibidem.

32 Ibidem (see also: CZOBOR, B.: *Die historischen Denkmäler Ungarns*. Wien 1896)