

The Arrest of Christ. *Part of the Augustinian Retable* *by Nicolaus Haberschrack, ca 1468*

Inv. no. MNK I-600, former inv. no.: NI 53401; the work acquired for the Museum in 1936



Figs. 1, 2. Nicolaus Haberschrack, *The Arrest of Christ*, ca 1468, tempera on limewood, 125 × 104.5 × 1.5 cm, support butted with glue of vertical limewood boards, in 1962–1967 impregnated with wax-resinous mass and the cradling attached

The painting was a part of the retable (reredos) of the high altar in Augustinian Saint Catherine's Church in the Kazimierz district in Krakow. A source of 1468 concerning a contract made between the Augustinians and "Nicolaus Haberschrak pictor de cracovia" refers to this work. It is the first case in the history of the construction of altarpieces in Krakow when we both know the name of the artist and have the work (part of it).

ICONOGRAPHY OF THE PAINTING

The arrest of Christ is described in all the Gospels (Mt 26:47–56; Mk 14: 43–52; Lk 22: 47–54; Jn 18: 1–12). According to the Synoptic Gospels, having prayed in Gethsemane alone, Christ returned to his disciples who were asleep. Having woken them up, he encouraged them to pray (Lk) or announced that the “hour has come” and the moment of betrayal was imminent (Mt, Mk). At this moment “a large crowd” (*turba*) arrived led by Judas. According to the Synoptic Gospel accounts, these were the guards of the temple carrying out the order of the High Priest Caiaphas. According to John, they were accompanied by a detachment of Roman soldiers. The way of arresting Christ by the “crowd” is described in detail only by Mark 14: 46: “At illi manus iniecerunt in eum et tenuerunt eum”. In the Jakub Wujek (a Polish Jesuit, d. 1597) Bible this passage is translated very literally, very appropriate to this painting, namely: “They assaulted him with their hands and arrested him” (It should be emphasised that the modern translation “The men seized Jesus and arrested him” does not convey the violence of grabbing Christ by his arms and clinging to his robe, which can be seen in the painting). Only John (18: 12) mentions that Christ was bound (*ligaverunt eum*), which can be seen in the painting – his left wrist is being tied. Moreover, the man standing in a red turban is about to throw a lopped chain on his neck. This motif was not taken from the Gospel, though. It was probably introduced to the Passion iconography by the Upper German Passion treatise from the mid-15th c. – *Christi Leiden in einer Vision geschaut*. Haberschrack’s picture shows simultaneously the whole sequence of events that took place in Gethsemane. The action is triggered by Judas’ kiss, which was a sign identifying Christ. The motif of the Judas kiss was thoroughly dwelled on in medieval Passion meditations as the opposite of a holy kiss – a symbol of peace (cf. 2 Cor 13:12). Here artists had an opportunity to contrast impressively two faces – of the betrayer and the betrayed one, what is repulsive and what is beautiful, what is ignoble and what is noble. Judas is wearing a yellow robe. The colour of his clothes resulted from the medieval understanding of yellow – “the false gold”, the colour of betrayal and dishonour, associated with prostitutes, heretics, Saracens, and in particular Jews, who were ordered by the Fourth Council of the Lateran (1215) to wear a yellow pointed hat (*pileus cornutus*). Judas also stands out with his red hair and beard. This is how traitors and betrayers, both from the Bible and chivalric epics, were represented in the Middle Ages. Starting from the 13th-century altarpieces from Wetter and Hofgeismar (fig. 3), the Judas kiss was usually depicted in the centre of the scene of the Arrest. In *the Augustinian Retable* the artist chose a completely different, much rarer pattern.

The group of Christ and Judas has been moved to the background, to the left of the main axis. The foreground, in the centre, is occupied by the figure of St Peter with a sword struggling with an armed man in a green cape. One may get the impression that Haberschrack wanted to draw the viewer’s attention to the episode with St Peter. In the context of these dramatic events in Gethsemane, Peter is mentioned by John while the authors of the Synoptic Gospels do not give the name of the disciple trying to defend Christ. John is also the only one who mentions the name of the attacker wounded by Peter – Malchus. Luke, Matthew and Mark only write about the “high priest’s servant”. As the high priest’s servant, Malchus supervised the guards of the temple and led the action. Therefore, it was not accident he became the target of Peter’s attack.

The episode with Peter and Malchus was developed in devotional literature through *Vita beatae virginis Mariae* (ca 1230/1240), popularised from the end of the 13th century in the translation by Walther of Rheinau. As to art, excluding a relief in Naumburg (ca 1250; fig. 4) and a miniature in the Bamberg Book of Psalms (ca 1230/1240) – as neither of these works created a vivid tradition – Haberschrack’s depiction had no precedence. The compositional highlighting of the group of St Peter and Malchus can actually be seen in the work of Martin Schongauer (fig. 5) and then his imitator Hans Leonhard Schäufelein, but in this depictions it is still Christ that is in the centre, and Peter occupies the left or right edge of the picture. It is not until the works by Albrecht Dürer, his *Engraved Passion* (1508; fig. 6) and *Small Woodcut Passion* (1511) that we can see a similar solution of depicting St Peter in the foreground at the expense of depicting Christ and Judas in the depth of the picture. However, the sense of the scene is different. In Dürer’s works Peter is aiming a blow at Malchus and has not hurt him yet. What is more, in Haberschrack’s work Malchus is compositionally linked not so much with Peter as with Christ who is healing his wounded ear.

Perhaps it is this difference that emphasises the essence of the message of not only this part, but also the whole *Augustinian Retable*. Haberschrack depicted Christ’s last miracle here, in this way linking together his public activity, whose beginning is marked by another scene depicted in the Kazimierz altarpiece: *The Wedding Feast at Cana*, the first of his miracles. In accordance with the Augustinian spirituality, the painting emanates the gentleness of Christ, who showed charity – *caritas* – to his persecutors. God’s action, mercy, is incomparably better than the will of the human, who trusting his own sense of justice, is drawing his sword.



Fig. 3. *The Arrest of Christ*, a scene on the Passion retable in Hofgeismar (Hesse), an Evangelical church, ca 1300



Fig. 4. *The Arrest of Christ*, Naumburg, the Evangelical cathedral, relief on the rood screen of the west gallery, ca 1250



Fig. 5. Martin Schongauer, *The Arrest of Christ*, copperplate engraving L. 20, after 1480



Fig. 6. Albrecht Dürer, *The Arrest of Christ*, copperplate engraving from a Passion series, 1508

HISTORY OF THE RESTORATION AND CONSERVATION OF THE PICTURE

The first restoration we know about was carried out by the painter Józef Bogacki (1837–1898) in 1884–1886. The analysis of the history of the restoration treatment and the preserved parts of the retable has shown that he also removed a painting, probably severely damaged, from a Marian series, from the reverse. He glued slats of coniferous wood onto the reverse, which were supposed to stabilise the support damaged by insects.



Mechanical cavities were filled with fillers and the painting layer was reconstructed in oil. In 1948, another conservation treatment was carried out by the painter Mieczysław Gąsecki (1883–1948). He removed overpaintings from the front and some of the 19th-century slats strengthening the support from the reverse and began to fill the cavities in wood by adding inserts and putty. His death put an end to the works (figs. 7, 8).



Figs. 7, 8. State of the painting before and during Gąsecki's conservation treatment, 1948



Fig. 9. State of the reverse while removing 19th-century boards strengthening the support damaged by insects, 1962

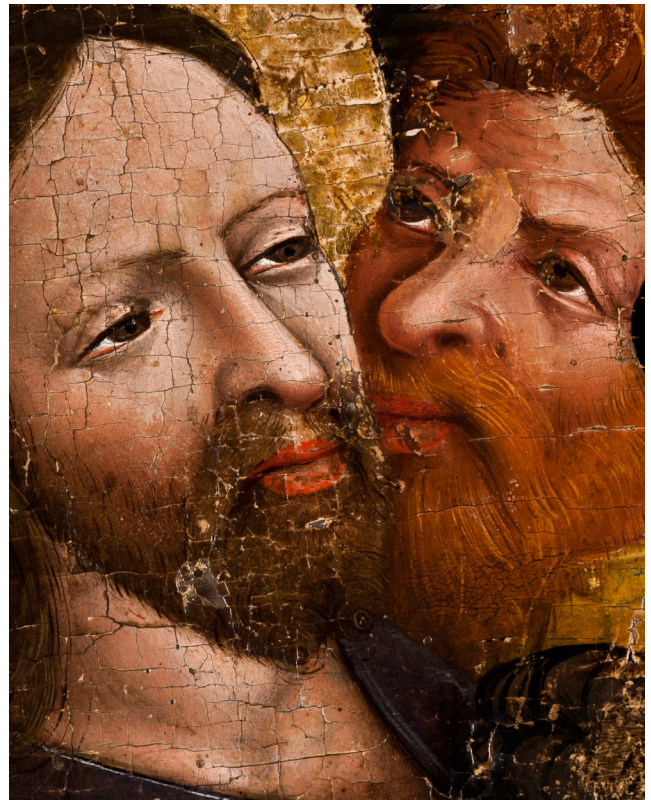
In 1962–1963 and 1966–1967, conservation work was done in the studio of the National Museum in Krakow by Maria Niedzielska, Irena Bobrowska and Andrzej Załuski. After securing the front, 19th-century boards were removed from the reverse (fig. 9). The losses in the structurally destroyed wood were filled by adding 38 wooden inserts, cradling was done, attaching it to nine vertical limewood slats glued into the structure of the support. The wooden support was impregnated with a solution of shellac in methylated spirits. It was applied through the cavities and blisters in the painting layer in the front. Flaking paint was backed with polyvinyl acetate, then the front was pressed with wax encaustic in high temperature, repeating this treatment many times. The same encaustic was used to impregnate the wood on the reverse, retouches and reconstructions of large parts of the painting were done and the damar-wax varnish was applied onto the front.

THE TECHNIQUE AND TECHNOLOGY OF EXECUTION

The technique and technology of the painting's execution are typical of medieval painting in Małopolska [Lesser Poland]. The support is made of limewood, covered with linen canvas with a simple plain weave in three horizontal gores, the edges butted together. Two kinds of ground were applied onto canvas, coarse-grained grey kaolinite ground in two layers and light cream chalk-glue ground in around five layers. After smoothing away the ground and applying the sketch of the composition a sharp tool was used to engrave the contour in the ground, separating the gilt and silver-plated areas from the painted ones. On the layer of the ground impregnated with a binder the composition was drawn with a brush in a black water-soluble paint. Lines marking the contour of the figures, the general shape of robes and folds were painted with confident long brushstrokes, the darkest shadows were marked with several parallel thinner lines. Faces were painted schematically, drawing auxiliary lines, in search of form, and decisive brushstrokes in the case of facial lines (figs. 10, 12). Before starting to paint, gilding and silver-plating were done in a glue technique, gold leaves were applied on a priming layer made of a red bole, silver on light ochre clay. A layer of thin grounding based on white lead was applied under painting layers, landscape, architecture and painted robes. This weakened the visual effect of

the black drawing on the painting layer and added luminosity to the ground which darkened as a result of impregnation with the binder. There is no layer of white lead under gilding.

A painting palette consists of the pigments and dyes typical of the Middle Ages. The following were identified: lead white, tin-lead yellow, natural ochre, natural azurite, emerald green, cinnabar, natural iron red, organic red – alizarin from the roots of the dyer's madder (*Rubia tinctorum*), organic black. The binder in the painting layer is tempera grassa. The painting is based on pure colours, there are various shades of red, green and toned down colours with a variety of hues of pink and violet. The paint is usually applied in two, three layers; robes are painted on the smooth underpainting, finished with glaze; there are also impastos of almost pure white lead. Under the dark-blue painting layer of Christ's robe based on azurite on white underpainting a layer of additional red underpainting was identified (figs. 14, 15). The modelling of the complexion turns from shadow to light, light parts marked with paint based on lead white, shadows were deepened with umber, distributing it evenly; cheeks were marked with smoothly applied cinnabar glazes, while the highest lights, around eyes, on the nose, forehead and beard were highlighted with impastos of pure white lead with clear



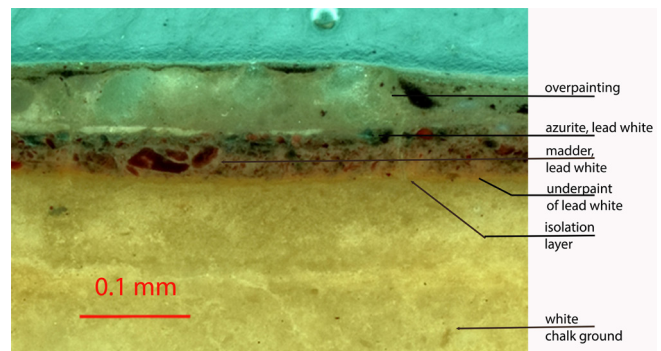
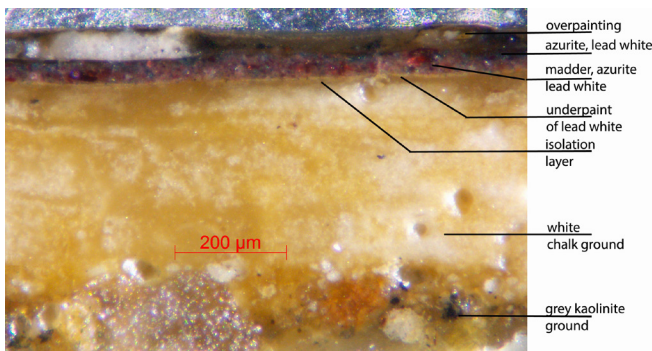
Figs.10, 11. Judas' kiss, photo taken in near infrared juxtaposed with a picture in daylight. The part of complexion clearly shows a drawing with a paintbrush in black paint on the ground. Initially the artist wanted to make Christ's beard longer, with long curls, here the beard is shorter, more elegant. Judas' initially hooked nose has a regular shape in the final work.

brushstrokes. The colour of the figures' complexion is diversified and depends on the character type of a particular figure, their social status and age. To paint the armours of the soldiers the painter skilfully used painting and post-gilding techniques, combining silver-plated parts of armours with gold accents such as brassards, belts or clasps decorated with the use of one round

punch and knurling. Parts of chainmails, helmets, shin pads and gloves are painted on silver or gold with black contour lines of different thickness, shadows are deepened with dark glaze or hatching. Silver-plated armours are juxtaposed with capes and tunics in intense red, green and yellow colours.



Figs. 12, 13. St Peter's grey hair and facial hair painted with the use of white lead and a small amount of azurite to obtain black and grey colour, hair is drawn with a precise line, photo in near infrared, in daylight.



Figs. 14, 15. Cross-section of the painting layer of Christ's robe, microphotograph in visible light VIS and ultraviolet light UV

STATE OF THE PRESERVATION OF THE PAINTING

The general state of the painting is bad. It concerns not only the wooden support, but also the painting layer. The structure of lime wood is severely damaged mainly as a result of unfavourable climatic conditions in the past and the presence of insects. A lot of exit canals and holes can be seen both on the reverse and the surface of the painting layer. There are also marks of numerous repairs and conservation treatments. The gluing of vertical slats in the structure of the support and the pasting of cradling to them (figs. 2,17) caused considerable deterioration of the state of preservation of the entire object.

It caused the appearance of vertical cracks in the support on the reverse between the slats and the surface of the painting was severely deformed. The deformation visible on the surface of the front is also caused by flaking paint and the ground and badly prepared fillers which fill numerous losses. The painting layer and the ground are badly cracked. On the elevated edges of cracks paint is worn through and washed. Most of the retouches and overpaintings are darkened and changed colouristically. The surface of the painting is covered with a few uneven layers of varnish.



Fig.16. Photo in ultraviolet light (UV), visible greenish fluorescence of varnishes with clear streaks left by the paintbrush, dark marks of colour retouches



Fig.17. Radiograph (RTG), bright and dark marks show losses in the painting layer and the ground filled with fillers with different compositions

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Photographic acknowledgements:

Figs. 1, 2, 10–13, 16, 17: P. Frączek; 3: Bildarchiv Foto Marburg; 4: W. Marcinkowski; 5: photo from *Oeuvre de Martin Schongauer*, Paris 1881; 6: photo from *Das Leiden Christi. Zwölf Holzschnitte von Albrecht Dürer [...]*, Berlin 1908; 7, 8: S. Kolowca; 9: A. Załuski; 14, 15: P. Karaszkiwicz



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