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The Insignia of Ecclesiastical Authority as a Subject of the Arts and Social Sciences

Abstract

Insignias of the ecclesiastical authority are a category of objects that in many respects stand out from other artefacts. Their impact on the viewer is (at least potentially) multi-layered, and the social functions performed by individual insignias, as previous research has shown, may vary significantly. This article attempts to answer the question about the appropriateness of drawing on the methodology used in social science, not only the humanities and liturgics, in research on insignias. The argument put forward is that these objects have been undergoing formal and semantic transformations in the last two centuries, thereby highlighting their social function, which can be demonstrated by research taking into account problems in the field of communication sciences, as well as the psychology and sociology of art.

Keywords: insignia, religious art, symbolism, social functioning of the artefact, methodology.

Insygnia władzy kościelnej jako przedmiot badań nauk humanistycznych i społecznych

Abstrakt

Insygnia władzy kościelnej stanowią kategorię przedmiotów wyróżniających się pod wieloma względami spośród innych obiektów sztuki. Oddziaływanie na odbiorcę jest (przy-

najmniej potencjalnie) wielowarstwowe, a pełnione przez poszczególne insygnia funkcje społeczne, jak wykazały wcześniejsze badania, mogą się znacznie różnić. Artykuł stanowi próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie o celowość odwołania się w badaniach nad insygniami do metodologii nauk społecznych, nie tylko zaś humanistycznych i liturgiki. Postawiona została teza, że przedmioty te w ostatnich dwóch stuleciach ulegają przemianom formalnym i znaczeniowym, eksponującym ich społeczne funkcjonowanie, co ujawnić mogą badania uwzględniające problemy z zakresu nauk o komunikowaniu, psychologii i socjologii sztuki.

Słowa kluczowe: insygnia, sztuka religijna, symbolika, funkcjonowanie społeczne przedmiotu, metodologia.

Introduction

Insignias (symbols) of ecclesiastical authority belong to a category of artefacts that are destined for research by various academic disciplines. Their origins not only have characteristics that are in common with the insignias of spiritual authority in other religions, but also with those of secular authority. In artistic terms, they are a category of objects which, in many respects, differ from other works of art. According to liturgical nomenclature, they belong to the broader category of *pontificalia*. As a set of insignias, they belong to the hierarchs of the Church – bishops and other persons with the entitlement to use (at least some of) them – in accordance with the prescriptions of canon law. The manner of their use is determined by liturgical laws. In this article, my considerations will be confined to episcopal insignias: the crosier, the ring, the pectoral cross and the mitre, based on research concerning objects belonging to the aforementioned categories and connected with Poland.¹

These objects are elitist in nature, which is often accentuated – though not always – by the costly materials used to make them, their artistic form, and the iconographic message they convey which combines religious symbolism, topical aspects of spirituality and social issues. The question concerning the complexity

¹ It is not the purpose of this article to give the complete state of research, so only those works that can be considered most representative of the particular issues are cited. I omit full bibliographic data of these works, which can be found in the bibliographies of the books: Katarzyna Bogacka. 2004. *Pastorały w Polsce. XI–XVIII w.* Marki: Michalineum; Katarzyna Bogacka. 2008. *Insygnia biskupie w Polsce Pierścień, pektorał, infuła. XI–XVIII w.* Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax; Katarzyna Bogacka. 2021. *Ornamenta episcoporum. Społeczna historia i symbolika insygniów biskupich na ziemiach polskich. 1801–1919, 2.* Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton.

of the message comes fully to the fore in the insignias dating from the nineteenth century and later, due to the dynamic transformation of the socio-political, as well as the religious and cultural contexts. Their impact on the viewer is therefore, at the very least, potentially multi-layered, and the social functions performed by the individual insignias-artefacts, as previous research has shown², can vary considerably.

This article attempts to answer the question of the desirability of referring to the methodology used in the social sciences when studying insignias, rather than just that of the liturgics and humanities: such as art history and iconography. The argument put forward is that these objects – which in artistic terms are mostly conservative in form – have been undergoing both formal and semantic transformations over the past two centuries, thereby highlighting their social function. The conclusions drawn during the extensive research that has already been carried out – which covers many individual artefacts and is rooted in the social history of art, taking into account communication science and the psychology of art – all lead to identifying the current place of insignias in culture, understood according to Jan Szczepański's definition as “the totality of the products of human activity, material and immaterial, values and recognized ways of behaviour, objectified and accepted in any collectivity, transmitted to other collectivities and to subsequent generations”³.

As concrete artefacts, and sometimes works of art, insignias belong to material culture. Since their *raison d'être* is the recognition of a higher, more transcendent order in which their message and functioning are rooted, they also belong to symbolic (spiritual) culture. By tradition, their existence is associated with religious culture and – from the *a priori* assumption made by liturgy – derives from values pertaining to the sphere of the sacred, which correspond to human needs of a spiritual nature and, to some extent, other needs, such as aesthetic and social ones. Indeed, at least the potential share of values related to the intrinsic self and the corresponding material needs, prestige, etc. should be taken into account. For example, from the point of view of those entitled to wear them, one should consider the need for power, which – especially in the Church – should be understood as a service to the community. From the point of view of the faithful – these insignias symbolize their need to belong to the community of the Church as the mystical body of Christ and to be under the leadership of the successors of the apostles.

² See Bogacka. 2021. *Ornamenta episcoporum*, 1.

³ Jan Szczepański. 1963. *Elementarne pojęcia socjologii*. Warszawa: PWN: 47.

1. Insignias as objects for the study of liturgy and art history

The objects described as insignias of religious authority were and are for the most part made for the hierarchs of the Catholic Church. These are primarily insignias of episcopal and papal (Bishop of Rome) authority. The main context for their study was, at least until the end of the nineteenth century, liturgy as well as art history. This former perspective, belonging to the theological sciences of systematic theology and liturgics (reflecting on the celebration of liturgy as a place of faith) and historical liturgy (studying its historical aspect), left specific artefacts aside. The movement for the renovation of the liturgy, which began in the nineteenth century with Pius X's *Motu proprio Tra le sollicitudini* promulgated on 22 November 1903, described as "classical" (official), which culminated in the convocation of the Second Vatican Council in 1962⁴, contributed to the renewed interest in liturgical insignias. At the end of the nineteenth century, liturgical compendia, lexicons and ecclesiastical encyclopaedias with entries discussing the history of the various types of insignias, illustrated with examples of selected artefacts, mainly medieval, rarely early modern, began to appear on a larger scale.⁵

Art history and archaeology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries introduced Romanesque and Gothic insignias into academic circulation.⁶ The results

⁴ Burkhard Neunheuser. 1976. „Sto lat ruchu odnowy liturgicznej zapoczątkowanego przez o. Prospera Guérangera. Przeszłość i perspektywy”. *Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny* 29 (4): 198, 203. Author emphasizes that it was characteristic of the liturgical movement of the nineteenth century to extend to the whole of the Church the classical, monastic liturgical celebration, undertaken in the age of renewal “based on the strict observance of Catholic tradition according to the Church’s Magisterium which is considered infallible, and therefore according to strict liturgical norms and according to the spirituality of the Roman rite. This epoch is also the time of the development of scholarship aimed at studying the origins of the Church, exploring its universal history, and above all it is the era of the origins and development of historical studies of the liturgy.” Neunheuser. 1976. „Sto lat ruchu odnowy”, 198.

⁵ The entries in encyclopaedias on the Catholic faith and liturgy, such as the *Encyclopaedia of the Church* (*Encyklopedia Kościelna* 1873–1896), based on a German encyclopaedia, or the American *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1912) are representative examples. They contain comprehensive entries on *pontificalia*, including the different types of insignias, covering (to varying degrees) their history, symbolism and liturgical use. Archbishop Antoni Julian Nowowiejski, a leading Polish liturgist, wrote about the liturgical use of insignias in his studies, as well as: Rev. Alojzy Jougan (1899), Bishop Karol J. Fischer (1911), and works by foreign authors such as Rev. John A.F.P. Nainfa (1926; 1st ed.: 1909), and Rev. Joseph Braun (1924) were also well known. See Bogacka. 2021. *Ornamenta episcoporum*. 2. Bibliography: 178ff.

⁶ Among the earliest pioneering studies of individual insignias associated with Poland are short articles within broader studies or annals. Aleksander Przeździecki and Edward Rastawiecki (1860–1869) were the first to publish Bishop Tomasz Całowański’s Gothic crosier. Archbishop Nowowiejski (1930; 1931, 427) correctly identified it as having earlier belonged to Bishop Andrzej Krzycki (d. 1537), later Primate of Poland. Stanisław Chodyński (1892), followed by Jan Fijałek (1896) and Władysław Łuszczkiewicz (1896), described the insignia discovered in the tomb of Bishop Maciej of Gołańcz (d. 1368) in Włocławek Cathedral. Władysław Abraham (1912) published an article about a Gothic crosier in the collection of Princes Czartoryski, believed to be the property of the first Polish

of these studies, which were included within the history of sacred architecture, sometimes the biographies of the owners, are part of the development of the historical sciences in the nineteenth century, becoming not only a large branch of humanistic knowledge, but also, as Szymon Askenazy wrote, “one of the most important types of public service”.⁷ The concept of historicism as a great cultural movement is explained by Ewa Letkiewicz: “History, harnessed to the service of the nation, incorporated in politics, became one of the most powerful instruments through which the ‘awakened’ nations of Europe, exploring their past, legitimizing their identity, deliberately looked back to the historical periods which they perceived as moments of pride, their greatest national successes and achievements, periods of their greatest cultural and political significance”.⁸ Since the nineteenth century, with the publication of the results of archaeological research, the nature of the stock of medieval episcopal insignias associated with Poland became increasingly clear. This trend continued in the inter-war period and after the Second World War⁹, until the present day, where it has expanded to cover insignias up to and including the twentieth century.¹⁰

Belonging to the domain of art history, notes on individual insignias were probably the earliest to appear in foreign-language studies of private art collections. These provide the first information on the Limousin crosier in the collection of the

Cardinal, Zbigniew of Oleśnica (d. 1455), incorrectly attributing it to the Archbishop of Lwów (now Lviv, Ukraine) Jakub Strepa of the Strzeżmień coat of arms (d. 1409). See Bogacka. 2004. *Pastorały w Polsce*. Bibliography, 453ff.

⁷ Ewa Letkiewicz. 2017–2018. „Nurt historyzmu w dziewiętnastowiecznej biżuterii europejskiej”. *Sztuka i Kultura* 5: 288.

⁸ Letkiewicz. 2017–2018. „Nurt historyzmu”, 288–289.

⁹ One could mention the works from 1930s by Marian Gumowski (1932) and Antoni Laubitz (1934/1935, 9–24) on Romanesque insignias discovered in Gniezno Cathedral during the archaeological excavations carried out in 1926–1931, or Adam Bochnak (1938) on artefacts from the tomb of Bishop Maurus (d. 1117) in the St Leonard’s crypt on Wawel Hill, published immediately after their discovery. After the Second World War the stock of discovered insignias increased thanks to archaeological work carried out in the cathedrals in Poznań and Wrocław, as well as in the collegiate church in Tum near Łęczycza, which was reflected in the increase in the number of publications from the 1950s onwards, including several important articles by Krystyna Józefowiczówna (the earliest from 1954), Józef Kaźmierczyk, Janusz Kramarek, Czesław Lasota (1980), Andrzej Nadolski et al. (1960). For a more complete listing of the relevant works, see the bibliographies in: Bogacka. 2004. *Pastorały w Polsce*; Bogacka. 2008. *Insignia biskupie w Polsce*. The state of research on medieval episcopal burials in Kraków Cathedral was presented by Elżbieta Dąbrowska. 1996. *Średniowieczne pochówki biskupie w katedrze krakowskiej*. Stan badań. In *Katedra krakowska w średniowieczu. Materiały sesji Oddziału Krakowskiego Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki*. Ed. Kazimierz Kuczman, Joanna Daranowska-Łukaszewska, 107–125. Kraków: Dejot.

¹⁰ Examples include of works: Anna Drażkowska (2014) on the insignias of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Bishops of Przemyśl, and the chapter of the book by Wiesław Wysocki and Andrzej Żak (1997) on the insignias excavated from the tomb of Bishop Władysław Bandurski (d. 1932). See Bogacka. 2021. *Ornamenta episcoporum*. Bibliography, 174, 194.

Działyński family in Gołuchów.¹¹ A similar tradition is presented by the descriptions of the contents of church treasuries made by art historians.¹² It is worth emphasizing that they contain reliable (though often still scant) knowledge on individual works of art, which differs significantly from the brief entries in church inventories, which often provided only information on bullion, precious stones and the material value of an object. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, the popularization of knowledge about insignias was aided by exhibitions of a religious and patriotic nature, among other objects of sacred art, and their inclusion in accompanying publications (the forerunners of contemporary catalogues).¹³

In research undertaken after the Second World War, attention was increasingly focused on early modern insignias discovered in cathedral treasuries and collections. Since the 1950s, individual insignias have been included in general studies on the history of Polish artistic craftsmanship, including the history of goldsmithing¹⁴, as well as museum collections and collections.¹⁵ Monographs of individual objects

¹¹ See a list of mainly French-language guides since the 1880s: (18.12.2023). <http://muzeumpamięci.umk.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Goluchow-Zbiory-Zamku-xx.-Czartoryskich.pdf>.

¹² Examples of studies of the treasuries of the historical Polish cathedrals of Gniezno (1874) and Kraków (two works from 1881) published by Rev. Ignacy Polkowski can be mentioned here, as well as those which only found their way to Poland after the Second World War, such as in Kamień Pomorski by Walter Borchers (1933), and the first diocesan museums, such as the one in Wrocław by Rev. Alfons Nowack (1932). See Bogacka. 2021. *Ornamenta Episcoporum*, 188; Bogacka. 2004. *Pastorały w Polsce*. Bibliography, 456, 471.

¹³ In the period under discussion, an important cultural event was *Exhibition of Relics from the Times of King Jan III Sobieski and His Age* in Kraków on the bicentenary of the Battle of Vienna (described by Władysław Łuszczkiewicz 1883), which presented the richly incusted mitre (*mitra pretiosa*) of the Bishop of Kraków, Andrzej Lipski (d. 1631), restored by the then Bishop of Kraków, Albin Dunajewski. See Bogacka. 2021. *Ornamenta episcoporum*, 1, 342ff. The exhibition "In Honour of the Mother of God" in Warsaw in 1905 should also be noted, with the accompanying publications: the first, under the same title, by Hipolit Skimborowicz and the anonymous *Album of the Marian Exhibition*. On display at the time was, among other things, Bishop Maciej of Gołańcz's crosier, excavated from his grave in Włocławek. See Bogacka. 2004. *Pastorały w Polsce*. Bibliography, 137ff.

¹⁴ For example, Adam Bochnak and Julian Pagaczewski included insignias discovered in the cathedrals of Kraków and Gniezno and in the collegiate church in Łęczycza in their study of medieval artistic craftsmanship (1959); similarly Bochnak and Kazimierz Buczkowski (1971) extended their study to include early modern times. See Bogacka. 2008. *Insignia biskupie w Polsce*. Bibliography, 318. Zdzisław Żygulski, when compiling the history of handicrafts up to and including the twentieth century, included only a few examples of medieval insignia; see Zdzisław Żygulski. 1987. *Dzieje polskiego rzemiosła artystycznego*. Warszawa: Interpress. Insignia were mentioned only rarely in the subsections on craftsmanship or goldsmithery in *Katalog Zabytków Sztuki w Polsce* [Catalogue of Art Monuments in Poland], a serial publication listing art objects from all over Poland, published since 1951. Of significance is the publication by Aleksandra Świechowska, who showed insignias as an essential part of Romanesque artistic craftsmanship in Gniezno Cathedral (1970). Jan Samek made the greatest contribution to describing examples of not only mediaeval, but also early modern and nineteenth- and early twentieth-century insignias in a broader artistic context (1988). See Bogacka. 2008. *Insignia biskupie w Polsce*, Bibliography, 476, 479.

¹⁵ Mentioned above Żygulski developed a new Collection of Czartoryski Princes guide (1968).

and groups of objects distinguished by a common provenance were produced.¹⁶ In this period it is worth noting the first compilation of one category of insignias kept in Poland – crosiers – by Jan Samek (1975).¹⁷ Nevertheless, insignias were seldom a subject of study – at least until the end of the twentieth century.

The last decades of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries saw a marked increase in the interest in the subject of artistic craftsmanship, including goldsmithing, as well as sacred goldsmithing, and many of its branches thereby providing comparative materials that were invaluable for the study of insignias. During this period, insignias – which it is also worth noting for those objects which had hitherto not been studied – were included in expert considerations of various aspects of cultural history. For example, objects excavated from graves were combined with broader funerary issues by Elżbieta Dąbrowska (1996) and with matters relating to the semiotics of dress by Anna Drażkowska (2014). Katarzyna Bogacka show the religious aspect of sepulchral culture demonstrated by reliquary insignias, ideologically rooted in the cult of relics (2009).¹⁸ These publications show a wider range of their social functions than in previous periods.

Between 2004 and 2021 Bogacka compiled studies that were devoted exclusively to insignias associated with Poland: medieval and early modern crosiers, then medieval and early modern rings, pectorals and mitres, and finally rings, pectorals and mitres from 1800–1918. On the basis of extensive library and archival searches, it was possible to introduce new objects (which were sometimes not widely known) into academic circulation and to identify sets of particular types of insignias stored within Poland’s contemporary borders, with common provenance or iconography, as well as to single out particularly valuable works. The last of these publications is an attempt to trace the impact of changes in the way of thinking about insignias – which is part of a much broader transformation of social consciousness – on the shaping of the social role of insignias (through their form and decoration) and on their reception. In the same period, partial studies devoted more attention to “interpreting” the iconography of the decoration of individual insignias and explaining the (unconventional) shaping of their fate by their owners, in relation to their personalities and the different stages of their lives. In this way, the significance of the

¹⁶ The first category represent the important monographs of Bishop Tomasz Strzemiński’s *mitra pretiosa* by Bochnak (1966) and Bishop Andrzej Krzycki’s crosier by Rev. Ryszard Knapiński (1981), the second one – the study of three Limousin crosiers in Polish collections by Elżbieta Dąbrowska (1992). See Bogacka. 2008. *Insignia biskupie w Polsce*, 318; Bogacka. 2004. *Pastorały w Polsce*, Bibliography, 465, 458.

¹⁷ Samek 1975.

¹⁸ See Bogacka. 2008. *Insignia biskupie w Polsce*. Bibliography, 318; Bogacka. 2021. *Ornamenta episcoporum*. Vol. 2. Bibliography, 174, 177.

insignias belonging to prominent figures such as Archbishop St Zygmunt Szczęsny Feliński and Cardinal Mieczysław Halka Ledóchowski were analysed (2012, 2013). An attempt was made to show how an object becomes a symbol of the values to which its owner attests through his life. This psychological approach was a starting point to more fully demonstrate the role of the religious, political and cultural realities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the social functioning of certain insignia. Examples include works on the history and symbolism of the ring of Wilhelm Athanasius Kloske in the Archdiocesan Museum in Gniezno (2016) or the Ring Marking One Thousand Years of Poland's Baptism – considered in a socio-cultural context, as well as, among other things, the symbolism of modern amber insignia with figural decorations, made in the workshop of Mariusz Drapikowski (articles from 2019).¹⁹

The aforementioned overview of the research on insignias published to date is confined to those for which the starting point is a specific object, rather than solely its iconography or source description.²⁰ This approach, which allows a formal analysis of the work, has a long tradition in art history dating back to Heinrich Wölfflin's theory of form and style.²¹ With regard to unknown works, its application becomes a necessary prelude to further research which should focus on analysing the content. Of course, not all theoretical and methodological options currently offered by art history are used by scholars of insignias. This is because given this type of research, a dominant liturgical-based approach is assigned to objects with a sacred purpose.

Therefore, in many contemporary works, the main focus of which is on the symbolic message of the insignias, or rather their decoration (i.e. not part of their actual construction), a key role is played by the historical context in which particular aspects of a given stage of cultural, social or ecclesiastical history are highlighted. Moreover, the significance of at least some insignias is explained in connection with the biographies of their owners: their experience of events of general significance and their more or less autonomous creation of reality. In this way, individual objects acquire the rank of a symbol in today's perception.

¹⁹ See Bogacka. 2021. *Ornamenta episcoporum*. Vol. 2. Bibliography, 175.

²⁰ Recently, authors, disregarding specific artefacts, consider in an in-depth way the phenomenon of the use of insignias in specific ritual socio-cultural contexts like Krzysztof R. Prokop (Bogacka. 2021. *Ornamenta episcoporum*. Vol. 2. Bibliography, 189) or re-examine their liturgical function like Rev. Szymon Lewandowski (see Szymon Lewandowski. 2015. „Od laski pasterskiej do pastorału”. *Teologia i Człowiek*. Kwartalnik Wydziału Teologicznego UMK 30 [2]: 95–110).

²¹ Anne D'Alleva. 2008. *Metody i teorie historii sztuki*. Transl. Eleonora Jedlińska, Jakub Jedliński. Kraków: Universitas: 21–22.

However, nowadays, since we are often confronted not only with the creation of new contexts for the functioning of religious objects, but also with wide-ranging cultural and even civilizational changes, there is also a need to respond to these challenges, also in relation to such a conservative subject of research. Therefore, the last part of the article will present some of the possibilities offered by the social sciences.

2. Insignia from the perspective of the social sciences

One can start with the observation that the research on insignias after the year 2000 meets the demands made by sociologists of art: the first one concerning the need for “many systematic monographic studies that would make use of reliable factual data” and the second one concerning verifiable “hypotheses concerning the relationship of art to social life and the social content present in the work of art”.²² (An example is the aforementioned study on the social history of the ring of Bishop Wilhelm Athanasius Kloske.) More liberal use of the precepts of the social sciences and their methods is possible after carrying out some research in the field of art history, symbolism and, as far as possible, the social context of the work (identifying its owners, creator). As Marian Golka notes: “in relation to the product of art itself, sociology, as a science, is quite helpless and has little to say in the matter. However, its competence, as a research tool, increases when learning about the context of this work – its creation, circulation, presence and reception”.²³

Przemysław Kisiel points out that “the very foundation of traditional sociological perspective is understanding art in its social environment”, and that “a work of art interests sociologists as an element that organizes social life. According to Stanisław Ossowski, from a sociological point of view, the work of art will interest us in at least three ways: as a particular product of social life; as an object giving rise to specific emotional reactions, influenced by the social environment; [finally] as a centre of new social relations”.²⁴

Exploring the use of the possibilities provided by the social sciences in the study of insignias is also related to their specific nature as objects of sacred art intended

²² Marian Golka. 1996. *Socjologiczny obraz sztuki*. Poznań: Ars Nova, 18.

²³ Golka. 1996. *Socjologiczny obraz sztuki*, 10.

²⁴ Przemysław Kisiel. 2004. „Miejsce socjologii sztuki wśród nauk o sztuce”. *Principia* 39: 207–208.

for church hierarchs, i.e. persons of high social status who fulfil specific roles. At the same time, as already mentioned, they are objects of liturgical use, but not exclusively, as they also function outside the liturgy. Both their basic symbolism – as a set of insignias of clerical authority and particular types of insignias – and the symbolism of their decoration refer to transcendence and the resulting fundamental values – truth, goodness and beauty. In turn, they refer more specifically to the history of salvation, pointing to Christ and individual persons, as well as the ideas, events and objects that have marked their presence in this history.

The specific nature of the object of study briefly described here seems to shift the focus towards theology. Without diminishing its importance as central to the existence of all sacred art, it is worth noting that it is the cognitive accessibility of theological content that ensures contact with the viewer. The context of this accessibility, which has already been studied many times, and which is often entirely secular (in museum institutions and the virtual world), is also an important issue.

Makers of modern insignia, as can be inferred from their works, often seem to be aware of the challenges they face in reaching an audience through an object. Hence, it is not surprising that in the art of the second half of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, various styles of insignia were in circulation, ranging from the traditional to the avant-garde. A further research problem is therefore the question of the appropriateness of the forms and symbols used in modern religious art in relation to the viewer's emotionality and cognitive capacity. As relevant research has demonstrated, the form and decoration of some modern insignia are closely linked to the communication of moral values and personal role models.

The appreciation of the role of symbolism, which is natural in the study of sacred art, only began to undergo a paradigm shift in cultural sociology from the 1970s onwards. At that time, it was pointed out that in different human communities, the symbols common to them are understood differently and associated with different practices, and their meaning is subject to processes of differentiation and negotiation. Moreover, "the study of the symbol, its interpretation and the changes in symbolic interactionism, become fundamental for explaining the duration and dynamics of social life".²⁵ This approach makes it possible to put into a theoretical framework the explanation for the fixed and changeable aspects of the

²⁵ Magdalena Gajewska, Piotr Pawliszak. 2012. „Socjologiczna analiza symboli centralnych w procesach i praktykach społecznych – wprowadzenie”. *Miscellanea Anthropologica et Sociologica* 13: 28–29.

insignias' symbolism. In turn, referring to Victor Turner's approach, the condition of the cultural system which is based on symbols can be considered through the prism of symbols, which seems relevant especially in conditions of crisis. When the participants of a collectivity are confronted with diverse and contradictory interpretations of symbols in the public sphere, this threatens both the individual's identity and that of the collectivity.

Another of the issues already raised in the research on insignias, namely their role in communicating meaningful messages, is gaining theoretical support in sociology. Modernity – which has lasted since the late eighteenth century – which derives its own models from itself and establishes the “primacy of subjectivity”, calls into question or even makes it impossible to reach agreement through social interaction. It is also worth reflecting on the contemporary meaning of communicating through an insignia (understood as a complex cultural text requiring preparation before it is read). Does it still concern the content symbolized by the insignias, as intended by their creators, or rather the interpretation of the recipients. This question seems relevant in view of the process of the secularization of the viewers and the aforementioned diversity of contexts for the presentation of insignias.

Conclusion: insignias of ecclesiastical authority and community values

The fundamental assumption concerning insignias of ecclesiastical authority is that they have a symbolic function in relation to the religious community that is subject to this authority. The relationship between the community and its superior (leader) is established by a number of practices related to the insignia (of which I will mention the more important ones):

- the funding of the insignia by members of the community and gifting them on the occasion of a bishop's elevation and consecration or ingress, sometimes also: “as a substitute” for lost insignia;
- the gathering of the community during solemn liturgies involving the display of the insignia – visually and sometimes verbally (e.g. liturgical texts during the ceremony of their presentation on the occasion of a sacristy, or references to the symbolism of the insignia during the homily);
- the participation of historical insignia in the constitution of a “community of memory” (e.g. the wearing of the historical insignia of predecessors in the diocese during the ingress).

Insignias of ecclesiastical authority in their traditional understanding as conceived by the liturgy, and not negated by the history of art, were meant to sustain the spiritual community. Indeed, their symbolic message always played a primary role in relation to their aesthetic qualities (even if outstanding and supported by costly materials). The research already carried out shows that the media's participation in the communication of objects (insignias) symbolizing the community (the bishop-pastor and the faithful – the diocesan church) has been growing since the late nineteenth century. It also allows these objects to “function” in the virtual world – publishing them on websites, virtual collecting, bringing them closer to the viewers (visually and verbally).²⁶ The media creates contexts that “paraphrase” the real world (in which the insignia function) because they carry a different ideological message, in which they “absorb” the material aspect of the objects. The question, then, is whether they have the power to change the symbolism of the object, to assign it to another reality (e.g. museum, secular). In these new contexts, the symbolism of the insignia remains mostly unexplained, and any reference to spirituality is often missing. A community whose main characteristic was transcendence may be replaced by another, established/formed according to pragmatic criteria. Nowadays one tends to observe an affirmation of non-Christian values, with a misunderstanding of religious symbolism, and consequently a turn from a spiritual to an aesthetic community. One can therefore ask the question about the role of insignias in the formation and maintenance the individual and social identity in the contemporary catholic Church.

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²⁶ Bogacka. 2021. *Ornamenta epicoporum*, 30ff.

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