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Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Lübeck
as an architectonic expression of Hanseatic culture

The medieval culture of German Baltic Front was determined mainly by a Hanseatic community which was established at the end of the 12th century and which at the beginning associated merchants and later even the whole cities. The Hansa, which represented a sort of a prototype of today's European Union, constituted a unique organisation whose influence on the political, economical and social situation of the discussed region cannot be overestimated. It also performed a culture-producing role and this article attempts to present the influence it had on the architecture of this region on the example of one of the most important building achievements of southern Germany – Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Lübeck.

The Hanseatic League has its origins in the late 12th century when German merchants began their economic expansion in the Baltic Sea basin. Soon, the German merchants who periodically visited Gotland[1] [2] were accompanied by other merchants coming from the newly founded cities on the east coast of the Baltic Sea and together they formed 'universi Mercatorem Imperii Romani Gotlandiam frequentantes'[9][2]. In the course of time, the merchants started trade exploration of other Baltic region countries and of those situated by the Northern Sea [8][3]. Representatives, who were chosen in the particular cen-

tres, wielded court power and if necessary they represented merchants before the town authorities where they held their offices. The 13th century brought a gradual transformation of the merchant community into the community of towns. This type of initiatives took place quite often in Medieval Europe, however, no other merchant union or town centre lasted for such a long time or got such a position like the Hansa. For many years, the system, which seemed to be purely commercial, became a serious economic and political partner which had enough power to impose blockades, declare wars, conclude international treaties and to force other contemporary countries to respect its laws and interests. Since the 13th century the Hansa monopolised trade along the big axis Novgorod–Tallinn–Lübeck–Hamburg–London, it conducted trade with southern Germany and Italy and its ships travelled even to France, Spain and Portugal. In the period of the most remarkable development, which took place in the 14th century, about 150 towns belonged to the Hansa. In the context of the position that the Hansa had in medieval Europe, it is really astonishing when we notice that it had no legal status, office workers, it did not posses its own financial means, neither the fleet nor the army and it did not have relative sovereignty as its members came under the law of local feudalists [1][4]. The purpose of establishing the Hansa and its driving force was the need to defend the rights of its merchants abroad and to develop trade. Solidarity of the Hansa's members ensured its existence during the next centuries.

The most important centre of the Hanseatic community was Lübeck whose location took place as a result of the earl of Holstein Adolf II's decision concerning the final pacification of pagan Obotrites[5]. For that purpose, he brought settlers from Holland and Flanders and set

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[1] Dollinger P. *Dzieje Hanzy XII–XVII w.*, Warszawa 1997, p. 35.

[2] Samsonowicz H., *Późne średniowiecze miast nadbałtyckich. Studia nad dziejami hanzy nad Bałtykiem w XIV–XV w.*, Warszawa 1968, p. 20.

[3] Historians connect the trade expansion of German merchants with German colonisation on the East, the so called 'Drang nach Osten'. On the one hand, the reason of colonisation was a desire to subordinate the regions on the east side of the River Elbe, which were still considerably pagan at the beginning of the 12th century and on the other hand, a necessity to annex new terrains caused by overpopulation of western Germany and excessive plotting of lands given by Landlords as well as through the liberation of peasants. This also caused immigration of settlers to the regions of Holstein and Brandenburg, which was accompanied by evangelisation mission and setting up merchant centres. Samsonowicz H., *Hanza władczyni mórz*, Warszawa 1958, p. 13.

[4] Dollinger P., *op. cit.,* p. 11.

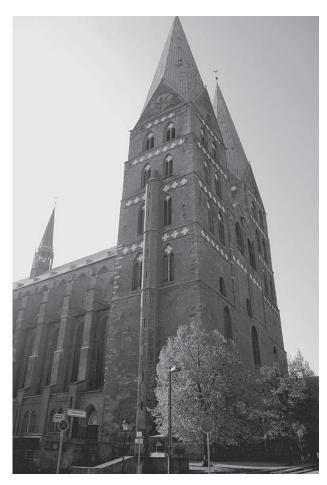[5] Holm W., *Lübeck, die freie und Hanse Stadt,* Leipzig 1900, p. 16.

Fig. 1. Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Lübeck
– view from north–west. Photo by author

In the Baltic Sea area civilisation processes occurred basically in different conditions than it was the case before in Western Europe. These processes started at the time of the crisis of the scholastic philosophy which had formed the model of the Western Europe medieval culture. Also, the flourishing trade contributed to the growth of self-awareness of town communities and led to the creation of the democratic middle-class culture. The educated town communities expressed their claims and ambitions in form of realisations of secular architecture as well as sacral architecture. The second half of the 13th century brings about the need to build new churches adapted for gatherings of a big town community. Traditional forms of a transept basilica did not seem much attractive considering a limited space for the laity and a feudal system of power which was manifested in this type of structures. Because of these reasons, the investors' attention was concentrated on the hall space which was already developed and functioned within smaller churches whose standardised height and integrated naves corresponded with the functional needs of commune councils as well as with the requirements of the appropriate representation.

Rebuilding of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Lübeck, as a result of which a traditional vaulted Roman basilica of the feudal phase was transformed into a hall church, became an unusually significant impulse in the development of hall architecture of the Baltic area. At least two hypotheses appear in relation to the genesis of the hall type in the architecture of northern Germany. The hall type was earlier introduced in the south of Germany in Hesse along with St. Elisabeth Church in Magburg and Cistercian Church in Haina. According to Teresa Mroczko, a group of hall churches on the basilica plan, which originates from the church in Haina, shows the way of adaptation of the French classical Gothic forms within a local German building tradition. The Roman combined system was replaced by a Gothic arrangement of bays called traveé (the nave rectangular in form of squares of aisles) and with this division, which originates from France, Hesse builders connected the hall arrangement which was taken from Westphalia traditions (a collegiate church in Herford, the cathedral body in Paderborn) [6][9]. The created hybrid could be transported from the territories of Hesse to the Baltic area. On the other hand, the second concept suggests that in the territory of northern Germany the hall shape was introduced as an independent church space along with a group of churches originating from the nine-field hall in Gadebusch. The other hypothesis seems more probable in the case of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Lübeck because the arrangement of bays was not based on the fully produced traveé system (bays of aisles had a plan of the rectangular situated longitudinally to the church axis). Undoubtedly, choosing a new spatial form constituted the way of manifesting political and social aspirations which were expressed in this way on the architectural ground. The development and heightening of the aisles, which used to be too narrow and less functional,

up a merchant centre near the old settlement of Obotrites called Old Lübeck[6]. The location in 1158 probably included a territory around a big, rectangular market square which was surrounded with stands and cloth halls in the north–east corner where the town hall was supposed to be built soon[7]. In 1160 the seat of the bishop was moved to Lübeck and construction works on two churches were started – a cathedral and Marienkirche. During the next years, Lübeck was granted numerous privileges confirmed by Frederick I Barbarossa and in 1226 Frederick II conferred on the town 'civitas Imperii' dignity[8]. This dignity was not conferred on any other town situated beyond the River Elbe, which increased Lübeck prestige and in connection with its growing material power predestined this town to become a leader of Hanseatic trade which started to develop at that time [4].

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[6] Its location by the River Trava 20 km from the sea and 50 km from Hamburg seemed particularly beneficial. The distance from the coastline protected a newly set up town from pirates' attacks and at the same time the navigable Trava made it possible for ships to sail to the interior of the land. The vicinity of Hamburg enabled to set up a land route thanks to which it was possible to direct trade further to the west with the avoidance of sailing on the River Sund.

[7] The market square was probably situated between the district around the duke's castle in the north and the church district in the south, ibidem, pp. 17–18.

[8] Ibidem, pp. 19–21.

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[9] Mroczko T., *Architektura gotycka na ziemi chełmińskiej*, Warszawa 1980, p. 109.
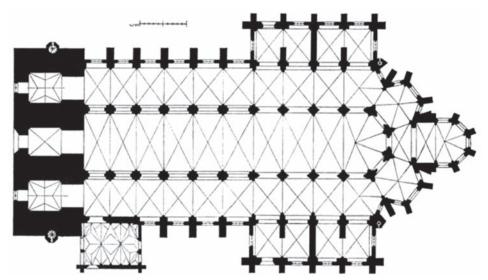
Fig. 2. Blessed Virgin Mary
Church in Lübeck – plan, source:
http://www.kirchengucker.de
/2007/05/13/marienkirche-in-
-lubeck dated 15.11.2010

Fig. 3. Blessed Virgin Mary
Church in Lübeck – view
of the choir from south–east.
Photo by author

changed the traditional basilica form space adapting it for the needs of the growing congregation [1][10].

　　We can reconstruct the form of this Gothic hall space of the Lübeck church thanks to first of all architectural relics which are preserved in the area of southern walls. They show that the walls of the pedestal storey were arranged in each bay with two ogival niches and in each of them a big circular window was placed. A little higher, at the height of the upper window sills of the aisles, there was a gallery around the whole church interior. According to Jarzewicz, this system roots date to the Roman Normand architecture, while in Lübeck it appeared thanks to the late-Roman cathedral in Bremen which was the seat of archdiocese – the superior of Lübeck diocese [5][11]. Mroczko, while analyzing

the origins of this solution, points out that the two-storey wall arrangement was based on the French ground through reduction or fusion of three-storey solutions consisting in getting rid of the triforium zone or connecting it with the under-window zone [6][12]. The two-storey system with the under-window gallery and a by-pass on the first floor situated in the deep arcade window interiors with ogival passages in wall intra-window pillars was widely used from circa 1225 on the territories of southern and central Germany. It is quite probable that the process of transmitting this form was possible thanks to trade contacts of Hanseatic merchants who, apart from penetration of the Baltic Sea basin, were also interested in the regions of middle and southern Germany using river and land trade routes.

　　Circular arches of the vault led from wall pillars and they were connected with each other in the space between

[10] Böker H.J., *Die Mittelalterliche Backsteinarchitektur Norddeutschlands*, Darmstadt 1988, p. 93.

[11] Jarzewicz J., *Gotycka architektura Nowej Marchii. Budownictwo sakralne w okresie Askańczyków i Wittelsbachów,* Poznań 2000, p. 140.

[12] Mroczko T., op. cit., pp. 49, 173.

Fig. 4. Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Lübeck
– view of the body and choir. Photo by author

pillars forming in this way a graduated arrangement of the wall, which reduced the massive structure of the walls. The hall rebuilding also included the transept as well as the root of the choir gallery. In the place of the demolished southern transept front a porch was built whose construction was completed in 1270, which is confirmed by the date of consecrating the altar and the burial which took place there. Its eastern gable with a three-level form articulated with blind windows was preserved under the roof in the porch of the mayor chapel which was built later at the eastern side. The original porch probably had a crossed and ribbed vault, however, when a new by-pass choir gallery with a basilica form was built, the re-organisation of its space and introduction of pillars into the interior, which divided it into two bays, took place. The name of the whole architectural trend – *Viertelstab gotik* – originates from the application of circular shaped stones in the window splayed embrasures and also in the area of the porch vaults. Their sizes, which were in accordance with the size of normal bricks, made it possible to achieve a homogenous course of the pattern in the pillar profiles and window frames which resulted in limiting the number of harmonised shaped stones in pillars. Moreover, their composition was a sign of mature – Gothic stylistic forms which stood in opposition to explicitly separated architectural elements of the Roman buildings.

The hall stage of the church rebuilding can also be seen in the area of the façade. The core of the present two-tower western massif, which comprises the central part of the massif up to the height of the first floor, constitutes the remaining of the original one-tower organisation of the façade with the porch in the basement opened to the interior of the nave. In the 14th century the existing development was already accomplished by means of the gable and in this way it was connected with the system of two towers situated on the sides [1][13]. The tower massif, which was built in the western bay of the body, constitutes a significant distinguishing feature of sacral buildings in the regions of the Baltic area. Its form originates from a feudal residential tower (*kamenate*), from defensive functions which churches performed during the first stage of functioning as well as from transformations which Carolingian westwork underwent. Rectangular massifs (with one or two towers) as well as the massifs founded on the plan similar to the square with a single tower with a basement opened with two or three arcades and a feudal gallery or worship chapel situated on the higher floor appeared as a result of the westwork reduction. The original military functions of the tower massif, with the increase of political autonomy and economic power of towns, were replaced by symbolic functions. The tower dominating over the city, where important town documents were kept and sessions of the city council took place on the upper floor – until town halls were built – was treated as a symbol of independence and power of the middle class [5][14].

Unfortunately, the representative form of the hall church turned out to be insufficient for the manifestation of middle class ideas of independence, autonomy and democracy. The new concept was not realized until the end and already in the course of its implementation – probably in about 1280 – it was again replaced by the basilica plan which referred to the Gothic form of a cathedral basilica. Trade contacts with towns of Flanders, Westphalia and Rhineland allowed familiarization with the concept of the cathedral church which developed since the 12th century in towns of Ile–de–France and later it was accepted in the territories neighbouring France. Lübeck also used this concept; however, this distinguishing form of the French cathedral was used while erecting the city parish church but the whole form was filled with different meaningful elements. Only a pair of pillars situated on the border of the choir and body was left from the Roman basilica, while in the designed hall a part of surrounding walls was used, which determined the proportions of the new church. Generally, the Gothic rebuilding took place in two most important stages. The first stage comprised the choir, while the other referred to the body.

A new form of the choir included three crosswise elongated polygonal chapels with 5/8 closure and surrounded

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[13] Böker H.J., op. cit., pp. 94–95.

[14] In the area of southern Germany, Westphalia was the most significant part; a block tower put by the western façade was a very typical solution there. Jarzewicz J., op. cit., pp. 58–61.

Fig. 5. Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Lübeck – view of the choir from the northern side. Photo by author

by ambit and ring. The particular character of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church consists in fixing the ring in three sides beyond the chapels by-pass space – along with the corresponding ambit bays they have cross-ribbed vaults. In this way a sort of standardisation and spatial uniformity were achieved, while a free flow of space differed from a separated series of chapels of French Gothic cathedrals or the Köln cathedral [1][15].

Cathedral – Gothic model of orientation was seen in the interior, particularly in the cross-section of pillars which included a dense series of pear profiles. The pillar core with a square cross-section can only be seen in the corners. Above the high zone of arcades in a thin membrane of walls additionally reduced by blend panels, there is a basilica zone of upper windows which are supported from the outside by open flying buttresses. Resignation from a triforium, determined a two-storey structure of the internal choir walls. Above the arcade floor – thanks to the differentiated width of walls – a surrounding porch was introduced, which led through the internal wall pillars and which is separated from the choir space with a tracery balustrade with articulated pinnacles. It presents an interesting procedure of introducing a motif, which was used in the external structure so far, into the interior of the building. Narrow supporting vault columns (*German: Dienst*), which are placed at the entire height of the pillars, decide about a vertical connection of two storeys situated one above the other.

The Virgin Mary choir naturally transformed the cathedral – Gothic model by converting its complex formal expression into the brick material. A spatial relation of chapels with the by-pass bays can be found in the north French and Dutch architecture in numerous examples dating back to the early Gothic period. The starting point of the series is the choir of Soissons cathedral completed in

1212, with references to the cathedral in Bayonne built in 1213 and Quimper in Brittany built in 1239. Another aspect which proves the inspiration with the Quimper solution is a similar wall organization with a gallery which goes above the triforium around the entire interior. However, there are no similarities to linear profiles of Lübeck choir arcades in Quimper. This suggests referring to a different formal tradition, perhaps to choir arcades of Köln cathedral, whose construction started in 1248, where pear profiles interspersed with grooves and we can observe a tendency for standardization consisting in the connection of a particular system of single or grouped in three or five narrow supporting columns with their vault function. The standardization of the form repertoire constituted a significant factor which made it possible to transfer this system into the brick material without the necessity to use differentiated brick shaped stones. However, in the cathedral choir in Köln there are no similarities to the applied in Lübeck pillar of disk arcs profiles directed downwards and interrupted only by a narrow capital zone band. This still belonged to the phase of experiments and appeared in the sacristy of Köln cathedral in 1277[16]. The cathedral sacristy solution was transferred to the Utrecht cathedral choir which showed a conceptual dependency on the Köln building, which can be seen in the choir closure (7/12). On the other hand, the Lübeck church is connected with Utrecht by the integration of by-pass chapel spaces with its bays. Uniformity of the internal choir in the Lübeck church caused a basic modification of Köln and Utrecht scheme. Connections with Köln were further proved by capitals and narrow supporting columns (*Dienst*) made in lime stone with their naturalistic presentation of leaf forms. However, the window tracery with a simple form

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[15] Böker H.J., op. cit., p. 140.

[16] This motif shall be used, in the form deprived of the capital turning point, in the hall space of the ground storey of the cathedral southern tower; its preserved plan dates back to 1290. Ibidem, p. 142.
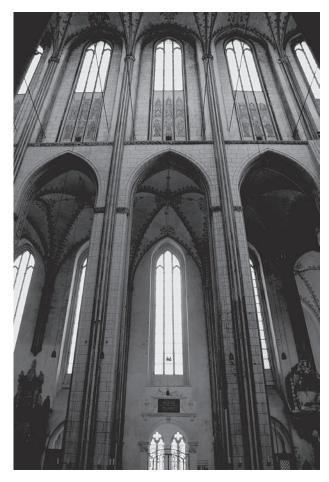
Fig. 6. Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Lübeck – nave body.
Photo by author

of lancet arches originates from the spirit of brick architecture[17].

The confirmed relations between the choir of Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Lübeck and the sacristy of the Köln cathedral consecrated in 1277 indicate that the construction works on the Lübeck choir were started in 1280. In 1277 there was a dispute between the city council and the cathedral chapter concerning the patronage of the parish church, which was ended in 1286 by the decision on the city patronage. This dispute might have been the reason why the church choir was given the form which referred to the architectural tradition of Gothic cathedrals by manifesting the position and claims of the powerful city commune[18]. The connections of the church with the city commune were mentioned explicitly again in circa 1390 when the city council commissioned the construction of a chapel for their own purposes, *Bürgermeisterkapelle*, in the southern part of the city. It was here that the city councilors were officially received into office and in the chapel upper storey a strong room was located where the official city documents were kept: charters, certificates of privileges and contracts. This part of the church is the property of the city until today [3][19].

The trading activity supported by the Hansa concentrated mainly on merchant's entrepreneurship and it introduced democratic social relations at the same time. This contributed to the formation of middle-class self-awareness and a sense of identity of city commune members. The need for manifesting new social ideas was reflected in the employment of the architectonic forms associated with highly artistic types of sacral architecture. The employment of the hall form in order to ensure enough space for the city congregation and the subsequent introduction of the cathedral choir in the basilica concept increased the prestige and dignified the construction of the most important church of the city commune. The fact that the city parish was given cathedral forms illustrates visibly the increasing power of the middle class. Transposition of the architectonic elements from France, Flanders, Rhineland or Westphalia could take place thanks to the wide trading contacts that were already possible at that time.

Trade routes and merchant contacts in the Middle Ages performed the role which went far beyond a given economic zone. The vast majority of the medieval Europe inhabitants were limited in their peregrinations to their immediate surroundings, while religious missions, pilgrimages or diplomatic trips were not sufficient for the purpose of gaining knowledge about other territories. Therefore, the development of trade and financial contacts provided opportunities to cross borders, both those physical and those connected with awareness, as well as it enabled establishing contacts with other centres. Ships and carts carried material goods, people and widely understood civilization ideas, in this way indirectly fulfilling a culture-producing role. Although it was not their main goal, the merchants contributed to shape Europe's face as a 'cultural entirety – not uniform but internally communicative' [7][20]. The efficiency of this method of transfer of architectural concepts is evidenced by the fact that the hall type church first and next the basilica type equipped with the cathedral choir were popularized as a city church model in the areas of the southern Baltic coast. The same transformation as it was in the case of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Lübeck were later observed in the case of St James's Church in Stralsund. The hall churches with the forms which were dependent on the Lübeck solution appear not only in the territory of Mecklenburg but also in Old Margraviate of Brandenburg and Western Pomerania, while the cathedral choir dominated the architectural expression of churches in Stralsund, Rostock and Wismar and even a Cistercian church in Doberan. Due to the political and economical position of Lübeck, which resulted first of all from its leading role in the Hanseatic League and obtaining middle-class liberties, the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Lübeck became a model church solution and it dominated over the architectural landscape of the medieval cities of the Baltic Sea region.

[17] Ibidem, pp. 140–143.
[18] Ibidem, p. 144.
[19] Enns A.B, Stiebeling H., *Lübeck. Ein Führer durch die Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler der Hansestadt*, Lübeck 1999, p. 52.

[20] Myśliwski G., *Wrocław w przestrzeni gospodarczej Europy (XIII –XV w.) – centrum czy peryferie*, Wrocław 2009, pp. 18–19.

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[10] http://www.kirchengucker.de/2007/05/13/marienkirche-in-lubeck dated 15.11.2010.

Kościół NMP w Lubece jako architektoniczny wyraz kultury hanzeatyckiej

Artykuł zainspirowany został fenomenem Hanzy, której działalność zdeterminowała oblicze ekonomiczno-polityczne i społeczne średniowiecznych miast niemieckiego Niżu Nadbałtyckiego. Aczkolwiek działalność Hanzy koncentrowała się na sferze wymiany handlowej, dała ona również impuls dla wykształcenia się samoświadomości mieszczańskiej. Tym samym wywarła ona wpływ na architekturę miast płn. Niemiec, która zaczęła stanowić obszar manifestacji roszczeń rosnącego w siłę mieszczaństwa, zarówno w obrębie budowli świeckich, jak i sakralnych. Celem artykułu jest wskazanie na przykładzie kościoła NMP w Lubece do jakich form architektonicznych sięgnięto w celu wyrażenia hanzeatyckich dążeń polityczno-społecznych. W związku z tym kolejne części artykułu poświęcone zostały prezentacji istoty organizacji hanzeatyckiej, wskazaniu uwarunkowań polityczno-społecznych średniowiecznej Lubeki, omówieniu architektury kościoła NMP i analizie jej wyrazu stylistyczno-formalnego w kontekście kultury hanzeatyckiej. W podsumowaniu podjęta została również kwestia na ile rozwiązanie wprowadzone na gruncie kościoła mariackiego w Lubece stało się nośnym i atrakcyjnym wzorcem dla innych miast hanzeatyckich, określając pejzaż architektoniczny terenów niemieckiego Niżu Nadbałtyckiego. Tym samym artykuł podejmuje próbę podjęcia kwestii kontekstu miejsca i czasu jako wyznaczników kultury w architekturze.

Key words: Lübeck, Hanseatic culture

Słowa kluczowe: Lubeka, kultura hanzeatycka