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Fig. 1 (right): J. Gregory according to M. Willmann, *The Holy Family with Young St. John the Baptist*, 1795, Prague, National Gallery, Photo by the gallery.



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The Function of Michael Willmann's Drawings*

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The fundamental issue of interdependence of the form of drawings and their function has attracted surprisingly little attention in hitherto conducted research on Michael Willmann's drawings. Though as far back as in 1919 Joseph Meder in his incomparable work warned against treating drawing as *einheitliche Kunstgattung* [...], *als etwas Absolutes*, recommending: *Vor jeder Zeichnung [...] nach Zweck, Absicht oder Bestimmung fragen*¹, a long lasting line of the description of Willmann's drawings has been established by the picture of Willmann as a romantic genius-creator, vehement visionary, expressing in art his religious exultation – the picture suggestively sketched by Ernst Kloss in his fundamental monograph of the artist². Thus notwithstanding the obvious “subsidiary” character of the existing Willmann's works, they were treated almost as an autonomous formula of the artist's creation³. The formal variety of the works was to no effect described both in the categories of the evolution of style and as an expression of the artist, about whom Hubertus Lossow as late as in 1994 wrote that *es verging wohl kaum ein Tag in seinem Leben, an dem er nicht gezeichnet hat*⁴. The present paper – a belated effort to gain an answer for the postulated by Meder elementary question – shows the drawing activity of the artist in a new light. In all probab-

ity, Willmann was not such a passionate draughtsman as it was thought until recently. His less numerous produced drawings in fact seem to originate rather from a deeply-rooted guild tradition and workshop praxis, than conceived in the category of *disegno* creation of a modern artist.

A group of mostly lost Rembrandtesque drawings by Willmann, known from the facsimile series by Joseph Gregory from the end of 18th century⁵, occupied a special place in the artist's *œuvre*. An extremely sketchy aspect of those works as well as the lack of connection with the paintings ranked them, according to the Jaromir Neumann's expression, as the *drawing monologue* of the artist – the apogee of the drawing output of Willmann⁶. That romantic monologue in reality turned out to be a pragmatic dialogue of young Willmann, studying in Amsterdam the rudiments of composition, with the accessible art of mainly Italian Renaissance, available for him in the form of engravings⁷. According to the biography of the artist published in the Latin edition of Joachim von Sandrart's *Teutsche Academie Willmann*, who could not afford apprenticeship at a *very famous master's*, bought a set of “prototypes”, basing on which, adopting *the methods of Jacob Backer and also of Rembrandt and others*, started *very severe exercises*⁸.



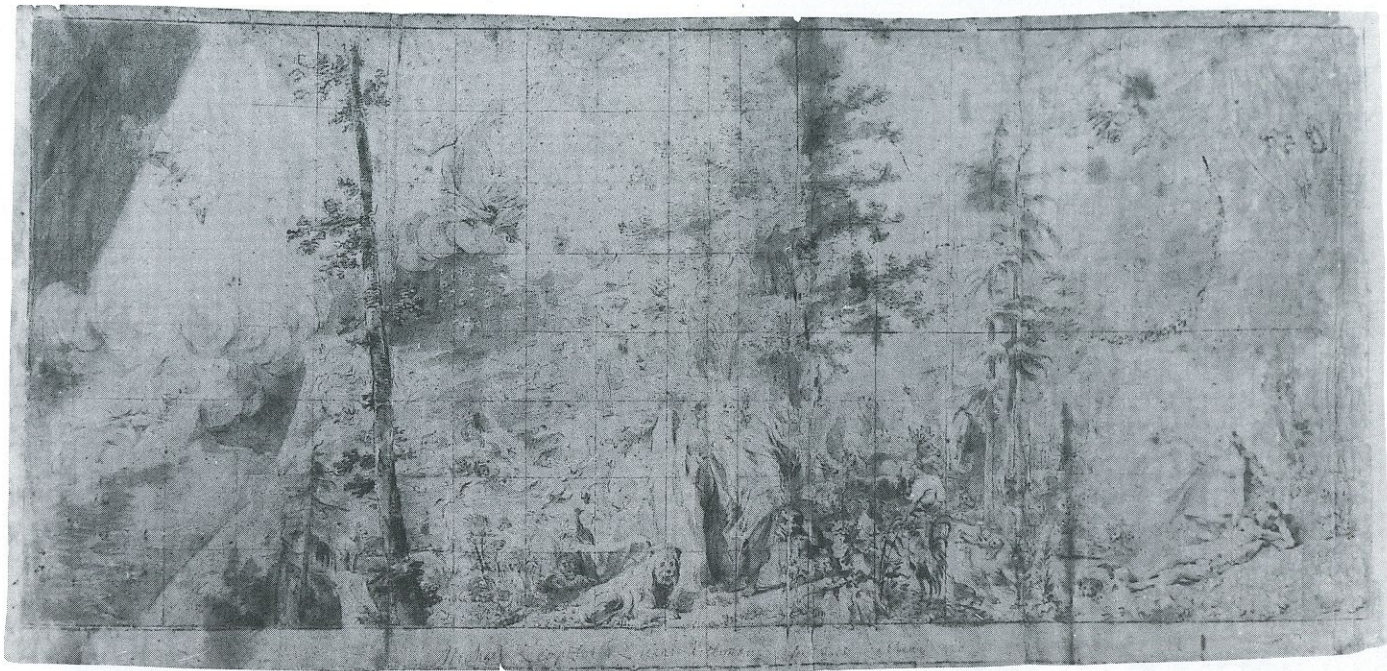


Fig. 2 (above left): J. Gregory according to M. Willmann, *The Birth of Mary*, 1794, Prague, National Gallery, Photo by the gallery.

Fig. 3 (below left): J. Gregory according to M. Willmann, *The Massacre of the Innocents*, 1794, Prague, National Gallery, Photo by the gallery.

Fig. 4 (above right): M. Willmann, *Six Days of Creation*, 1668, Warsaw, National Library, Photo by the library.

That autodidactics of his was begun by a rudimentary practice, namely the study of single figure or a group of several figures, such as for example *The Holy Family with St. John the Baptist* [fig. 1], based on the engraving by M. Rota after Tycian (Il. Bartsch 2). Next step Willmann learned was to ameliorate thus copied scenes by adding onto them new human figures. For example, the scene *The Birth of Mary* [fig. 2], copied in its entirety from the anonymous engraving after G. Romano (Il. Bartsch 6), was developed by the addition of three figures placed in the background. The most creative exercise by Willmann were the efforts to make a totally new composition by an appropriate arrangement of separate fragments of one or two engravings. A dynamic but uniform and balanced composition of the exemplary drawing *The Massacre of the Innocents* [fig. 3] was created by compiling single figures and groups redrawn from the two engravings: by M. Denta after B. Bandinelli (Il. Bartsch 21) and by Ph. Galle after F. Floris (Il. Bartsch 29). Thus the emphasized by the researchers sketchy form of those works in fact appears to result from the specific compositional interpretation of the graphic "prototype". In other words, it ensues directly from the attempt to capture in a model those elements and their connecting relations which constitute – in Willmann's own term – *Ordinanz* of the visual representation⁹. It is not known for how long after having left Amsterdam Willmann continued making such compositional sketches. Undoubtedly, they were purposefully kept by the artist and together with his

collection of the graphic "prototypes", accompanied him in his later artistic career.

In 1660 Willmann settled down in Leubus in Silesia upon the invitation of the abbot of the local Cistercian monastery, Arnold Freiberger. This fact precipitated the period of intense creative activity of the artist, marked by unremitting work for numerous catholic and protestant customers, as well as for secular founders. The necessity of prompt coping with the flood of orders made Willmann efficiently reorganize his workshop. Most probably, already since the work on the first part of the Leubuser martyrdom series (1661–62) the painter hired for larger orders additional collaborators¹⁰ while the very process of production of a standard religious picture became extremely simplified. Most of large-format canvases meant for church interiors were left in the form of rough sketches, where very often beneath a layer of paint a bole ground could be seen. The inventive phase of the work was no less simplified by the extensive use of the artist's collection of graphic models and Willmann's artistic skill, gained through the aforementioned Amsterdam practice. In this way, the composition of a picture consisted of assembling suitable "prototypes", which Willmann copied in their entirety, as was the case with the lost *Angels' Pieta* from 1661, based on the anonymous engraving after Otto van Veen (Holl. 3), or compiled from their fragments a new work of art. The latter procedure is evidenced for example by *The Martyrdom of St. Andrew* from 1662, based on the engraving by A. Voet II according to Rubens, enlarged by



Fig. 5 (opposite right): M. Willmann, *The Ancestors of St. Joseph*, c. 1692, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, Photo by Jörg P. Anders.

Fig. 6 (above left): M. Willmann, *Abraham's Sacrifice*, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, Photo by Jörg P. Anders.

Fig. 7 (above): M. Willmann, *The Model of a Sitting Woman with Studies of Feet*, Warsaw, National Museum, Photo by the museum.

Fig. 8 (below left): J. Eibelwieser, *The Models of Heads*, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, Photo by Jörg P. Anders.





adding among else the figure of the kneeling man, adopted from L. Vosterman's engraving, also according to Rubens (Holl. 88). Noteworthy is the fact that only two Willmann's drawings are known, which are directly connected with the phase of the artist's work on composition and its transfer onto the support of the prepared picture: the precisely rendered *Six Days of Creation* [fig. 4] and the more sketchy work *The Ancestors of St. Joseph* [fig. 5]¹¹. Moreover, both works were created during the realisation of particular orders – a canvas with a large number of small details¹² and fresco decoration in St. Jo-

seph church in Grüssau¹³, which required the prior preparation of a cartoon. This, of course, does not rule out the possibility that some general compositional sketches of the paintings were prepared by the artist and after having been made use of, discarded or re-used as a surface for a new drawing. In my opinion, however, it is more likely that Willmann, widely availing himself of graphic "prototypes", made compositional sketches for his pictures only sporadically, in special cases, while his staple procedure was to make a contour brush sketch directly on the grounded surface of the painting, in the un-

derpainting layer. Apart from the sketchy, nearly *alla prima* formula of working out the paintings another argument supporting this hypothesis is the way Willmann's "master", Rembrandt, worked. According to the latest findings of the Netherlandish team of researchers, Rembrandt supplanted the preparatory drawing on paper by a monochromatic brush sketch in oil made directly on the surface of the grounded support¹⁴. Willmann seems to have made more often drawings which were not connected with any particular painting but were supposed to complete his bank of graphic models – the



works, to which the painter's own phrase – *Inventionis* could be applied. This may have been the function of the unpublished so far representation of *Abraham's Sacrifice* [fig. 6]. The scene was accompanied by an extensive artist's commentary which, as I suppose, could have pointed out subjects of the scenes for the future use of the drawing as a "prototype" of composition¹⁵. Apart from the enumeration of the six burnt-offerings from the Old Testament, together with a meticulous identification of their biblical source, on the back of the drawing some additional notes concerning the age of the biblical persons as well as the quantity, species and the age of the sacrificed animals were annotated. One of the inscriptions: *Isac ist 25 Jahr alt [. . .] da er solten geschlachtet werden* could have been for Willmann the clue conducting him to make use of *Abraham's Sacrifice* as one of the models for *The Ancestors of Joseph* [fig. 5], specifically a silhouette of kneeling Isaac. This set of graphic and drawing compositional models, which was the basis of the functioning of the painter's workshop, was

surely supplemented by some models of the representation of a single human figure, such as for example *The Model of a Sitting Woman with Studies of Feet*¹⁶ [fig. 7], and also by drawing sets of "prototypes" of heads and other elements of human body. Although we are not in the possession of authentic Willmann's drawings of this type, there are sixteen drawings made by his associate, Johann Eibelwieser from Breslau, till now ascribed to Willmann [fig. 8]¹⁷. Those drawings allow us to infer that Willmann, following in the steps of Rembrandt¹⁸, used to manufacture this type of works serving as workshop models for his apprentices and associates. The hitherto conducted research on Willmann artistic activity has revealed but scarce reflections on the model of functioning of the multi-personal artist's workshop. The lack of any holistic examinations of the painting oeuvre by Willmann and his circle turns us to the words of the artist himself, recorded in the one of the letters to the abbot of Sedlec, Heinrich Snopek. Willmann, recommending his stepson and pupil Johann

Fig. 9 (above left): M. Willmann, *An Apostle*, before 1692, Warsaw, National Museum, Photo by the museum.

Fig. 10 (above right): M. Willmann, *The Assumption of Mary*, 1702, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, Photo by Jörg P. Anders.

Fig. 11 (opposite above): M. Willmann, *Christ Healing the Sick*, 1676–78, Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Photo by the Graphische Sammlung Albertina.



Christoph Liska, as a fully self-dependent painter stressed that ... *mein Stieffsohn braucht auch weder meiner Modelley noch Inventionis* ...¹⁹. This meant that Liska, already as a student and associate of his step-father not only have used the set of master's compositional ideas but also, that working on a picture, he needed a previously prepared *Modell* – as can be assumed from the correspondence – an oil sketch²⁰. This in turn implies that the preparation of final models of the realised by Willmann paintings took place in a technique much easier, faster and having more potential than drawing – an oil sketch made on canvas or paper. A considerable amount of preserved sketches – we are cognizant of seventeen retrospective pieces [fig. 9] – indicates clearly that this type of procedure was a constant element in the functioning of the painter's workshop²¹. Neumann supposed that the oil model of the painting *The Martyrdom of St. Philip and Jacob* for Sedlec was sent by Willmann for acceptance to the abbot Snopek²². It seems however, that presenting oil sketches of the ordered works to the founders, if ever happened, was sporadic. It may have taken place with the respect to an abbot of the monastery where Willmann's workshop realised the order. The analysis of the preserved corre-

spondence between Willmann and the abbot Snopek, as well as the letters sent by the abbot of the Cistercian monastery in Camenz to the painter, his widow and his step-son²³ makes ground for the hypothesis that Willmann presented the projects of the works to the not-Leubus customers using the means of drawings on paper. However, the preparation of such work, referred to in the letters as *Entwurf*, was restricted to the paintings most important to the founder. Among the six pictures sent to the abbot Snopek, only the painting meant for the main altar of the new monastery church, was preceded by two, not extant drawings, which were the design of the work. Similarly, out of the eleven pictures ordered for the monastery church in Camenz only *The Assumption of Mary* from the main altar had been as an *Entwurf* presented for approval to the abbot Gerard Woiwode. On the basis of such drawings founders expressed to the artist their opinion of works. The abbot of Camenz, very content of the received work, which most probably was Berlinian *Assumption* [fig. 10], ordered the execution of the project but *außer daß der beyl. Geist, so im oberen Blathe [. . .] kommet*²⁴, which was taken into account by the artist in the painting²⁵. The accepted drawn *Entwurf* used to be most probably kept by the found-

ers, or, in the case of signed contract, used to be enclosed with it. From the above presented facts it seems right to conclude that a group of Willmann's drawings, formally corresponding to the Berlinian *Assumption*, which means works of relatively completed form, made sometimes on blue paper and characterized by the high degree of conformability with the corresponding Willmann's paintings – for example Vienna's *Christ Healing the Sick* [fig. 11] or signed *The Apotheosis of the Great Kurfirst* from Braunschweig²⁶ – are precisely these drawings, which were sent to the foreign founders as *Entwurfs*.

That set of works, constituting a separate formal modus, should be enlarged by the numerous preserved drawn projects to engravings made by mainly Augsburg and Nürnberger engravers. These works represented mostly religious themes, such as a series of illustrations to the *Grüssauer Passionsbuch*²⁷, depictions of Cistercian saints²⁸, or, realised graphically only in the second half of the 18th century, cycle *Joys and Sorrows of St. Joseph*²⁹. Those drawings, made by Willmann to the order of the editors of the engravings – the abbots of the Cistercians monasteries, especially Bernard Rosa from Grüssau, formally fluctuated from relatively precise, meant



Fig. 12 (below left): M. Willmann, *St. Benedict*, 1686–88, Oslo, Nasjonalgalleriet, Photo by J. Lathion, ©Nasjonalgalleriet.

Fig. 13 (above left): M. Willmann, *Christ Meeting His Mother*, 1678–82, Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie, Photo by the gallery.



Fig. 14 (above): M. Willmann, *The Apotheosis of Joachim von Sandrart*, 1682, Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Photo by the Graphische Sammlung Albertina.

Fig. 15 (opposite above): M. Willmann, *The Adoration of Mary as Empress and Queen of Austria*, 1668, Oslo, Nasjonalgalleriet, Photo by J. Lathion, ©Nasjonalgalleriet.



for gaining the founder's acceptance linear *Entwurf* formula – such as for example the unpublished so far drawing *St. Benedict* [fig. 12] from the Cistercian saints series³⁰ – to the fluid, brush-painted sketches, such as *Christ Meeting His Mother* [fig. 13] from the passion cycle³¹, which resembled in form oil *Modells*, made by the artist for his collaborators:

The elaborated form of drawn *Entwürfs*, which as complete drawings surely had an impact on the founder also by the author's artistic skill, corresponded to a large extent to the formal shape of Willmann's autonomous drawings. *The Apotheosis of Joachim von Sandrart* [fig. 14], enclosed with the flattering letter to the author of *Teutsche Academie*³² was given the shape surprisingly conformable with the expressed by Sandrart in his work preferences as far as the form of the drawing was concerned. Meticulously elaborated by Willmann foreground with the central figure of Sandrart seems to plead the compliment *fleissig* used by Sandrart with the respect to the drawings by Dürer and Aldegrever, or the words of appraisal written about Holbein's anticlerical works: *auf das alleremsigste und sorgfältigste*³³. Although the

background parts of the drawing were not so elaborated and Willmann, as if knowing Sandrart's negative attitude to anything *un-ausgesonnen* or *wild-durchgangen*, self-critically admitted in the letter that the drawing is *an villen orten sehr gestimpelt*³⁴, the drawn *Apotheosis* must have been so evocative of the skill of the master of Leubus that Sandrart, probably not knowing any other Willmann's work, decided to place his biography in the Latin edition of his work, published a year later.

The formula of *fleissig* elaborated pen drawing was most probably utilised by Willmann also in works executed on orders, as independent drawings. The unpublished so far presentative drawing, depicting *The Adoration of Mary as Empress and Queen* [fig. 15]³⁵ came into being probably on the order of the cardinal Friedrich von Hessen, posed in the bottom left corner of the scene as a worshipper and signed as *der Canonicus fridericus*. This adorable Willmann's work was made in 1668 on the occasion of the cardinal's appointment to the post of cathedral dean in Wrocław and was probably meant to be presented to the emperor in order to gain his support for Friedrich's exertions for the post

of the bishop of Wrocław³⁶. This must have been the procedure resorted to quite often by the Silesian clergy in order to secure the emperor's grace because four years later abbot Rosa, pleading with emperor Leopold I as a representative of Silesian states the lowering of taxes, gave the emperor a costly Willmann's picture *The Return of Holy Family from Egypt*³⁷. If the ordered at Willmann's drawing really was to be given to the emperor, that meant the highest possible at the time appraisal of the artist's skill as draughtsman. Treating the drawing, made as Sandrart would have said, *mit Kunst und Fleiss*, as a work which could secure emperor's support, in fact equalled autonomous drawings by Willmann with his paintings as a form of artistic expression. That high artistic value of the drawing was emphasised by Willmann himself by giving the work truly "pictorial" dimensions (430×620 mm) as well as by signing in the bottom left corner, under the figure of the founder, with the full signature in Latin version, reserved for large-format etchings and more important paintings – works, which as has been written in the biography of the master, *made his name widely famous*³⁸.

- (1) J. Meder, *Die Handzeichnung. Ihre Technik und Entwicklung*, Wien 1919, p. 21, footnote 1.
- (2) E. Kloss, *Michael Willmann. Leben und Werke eines deutschen Barockmalers, Breslau [1934]*.
- (3) Kloss 1934, pp. 142–145; J. Neumann, *Expresivní tendence v české barokní malbě. 2, „Galéria“*, 8 (1984), pp. 206–207, 223–224; H. Lossow, *Michael Willmann (1630–1706) – Meister der Barockmalerei, Würzburg 1994*, pp. 84–93; V. Manuth, *Aspekte der Zeichnungskunst Willmanns*, [in:] *Michael Willmann (1630–1706). Studien zu seinem Werk. exh. cat.*, ed. M. Adamski, P. Łukaszewicz, F. Wagner, Salzburg 1994, pp. 143–160.
- (4) Lossow 1994, p. 93.
- (5) 20 etchings published in Prague in 1805 (*Grafická sbírka Národní galerie, Prague, Inv. Nos. R 55001–55020*). So far only one work from the copied drawings, the scene Unfaithful Thomas before Christ, has been found by Pavel Preiss (*Museum of Czech Literature, Prague, Inv. No. IK – 1324/v/19*).
- (6) Neumann 1984, p. 207.
- (7) See: A. Koziel, *Michaela Willmannova droga na „szczyty sztuki“*. Wczesne rysunki artysty w grafikach Josefa Gregory'ego, „*Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*“, 58 (1996), Nos. 3–4, pp. 285–306.
- (8) J. de Sandrart, *Academia nobilissimae Artis Pictoriae [. . .], Noribergae 1683, part II, book III*, p. 393 ff.
- (9) The letter dated 22nd May 1702 – *Státní oblastní archiv, Treboň, sign. XLVII/4*.
- (10) Kloss 1934, p. 62.
- (11) *Aneks do katalogu wystawy „Michael Willmann (1630–1706)“*, [Wrocław 1994], No. II. 1; Salzburg 1994 *exh. cat.*, No. R 10 (V. Manuth).
- (12) Lossow 1994, No. A 1.
- (13) *Ibidem*, No. A 149.
- (14) E. van de Wetering, *Studies in the workshop practice of the early Rembrandt, Amsterdam 1986*, pp. 17–23.
- (15) *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett (Inv. No. KdZ. 16229)*.
- (16) A. Kozak, *Rysunki Michaela Willmannowa w Muzeum Narodowym w Warszawie*, [in:] *Materiały konferencji poświęconej sztuce Michaela Willmannowa*, ed. by B. Steinborn, Wrocław 1995, pp. 49–50, fig. 13.
- (17) E. Bock, *Die deutschen Meister. Beschreibendes Verzeichnis sämtlicher Zeichnungen. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin 1921*, Nos. 7471–7477, 7493; *Master Drawings from Sacramento. The E. B. Crocker Art Gallery, Sacramento 1971 (Checklist)*, Nos. 41, 46–49, 51–52; Lossow 1994, No. B. 58.
- (18) J. Bruyn, *On Rembrandt's Use of Studio-Props and Model Drawings During the 1630s*, [in:] *Essays in Northern European Art presented to Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann on his sixtieth birthday*, Doornspijk 1983, p. 57.
- (19) The letter dated 22nd April 1702 – *Státní oblastní archiv . . .*
- (20) The letter dated 22nd May 1702 – *Státní oblastní archiv . . .*
- (21) Lossow 1994, Nos. A 10, 12, 52, 73, 74, 83, 92, 96, 108, 114, 119, 146; A. Koziel, *review from: Lossow 1994, „Dziela i Interpretacje“*, 3 (1995), pp. 127–143, Nos. 47, 54, 55; Salzburg 1994 *exh. cat.*, No. R 12 (V. Manuth); *The auction catalogue: Sotheby, New York, 20. 5. 1993, No. 303*.
- (22) Neumann 1984, pp. 180–181.
- (23) *Státní oblastní archiv . . .*; O. Hejnic, *Příčinky k dějinám stavby chrámu Panny Marie v Sedlci u Kutné Hory, „Památky archeologické a mistopisné“*, 23 (1908–1909), pp. 418–432 (Nos. 3, 5); P. Skobel, *Michael Willmann's Gemälde in der ehemal. Cisterzienser Stiftskirche zu Kamenz in Schlesien, Schweidnitz 1920*.
- (24) Skobel 1920, p. 7.
- (25) Lossow 1994, No. A 48.
- (26) Salzburg 1994 *exh. cat.*, No. R 2 (V. Manuth); Lossow 1994, No. B 23.
- (27) Salzburg 1994 *exh. cat.*, Nos. R 14 a–s (V. Manuth).
- (28) C. K. Nagler, *Neues allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon . . .*, vol. 22, München 1852, p. 63, No. 32.
- (29) P. Preiss, *Zwei Marginalien zur Grüssauer Ikonographie* [in:] *Krzeszów uświęcony łaską*, ed. by K. Bobowski, H. Dziurla, Wrocław 1997, pp. 216–228.
- (30) Oslo, *Nasjonalgalleriet (Inv. No. NG. K. & H. B. 16382)*.
- (31) Salzburg 1994 *exh. cat.*, No. R 14 k (V. Manuth).
- (32) *Ibidem*, No. R 8 (V. Manuth).
- (33) Quotation after: J. S. Held, *The Early Appreciation of Drawings*, [in:] *Studies in Western Art: Acts of the Twentieth International Congress of the History of Art*, ed. M. Meiss, Princeton 1963, vol. 3, p. 84.
- (34) Quotation after: Kloss 1934, p. 149.
- (35) Oslo, *Nasjonalgalleriet (Inv. No. NG. K. & H. B. 16825)*. See: A. Coreth, *Pietas Austriaca. Ursprung und Entwicklung barocker Frömmigkeit in Österreich*, Wien 1959, pp. 54–59.
- (36) See: W. Dersch, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kardinals Friedrich von Hessen, Bischofs von Breslau (1671–1682)*, „*Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte Schlesiens*“, 62 (1928), S. 272–330. I am deeply grateful to Piotr Oszczanowski for help to solve the problem of foundation of this drawing.
- (37) N. von Lutterotti, *Archivalische Belege für Arbeiten Michael Willmanns und seiner Werkstatt im Auftrag des Klosters Grüssau*, „*Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte Schlesiens*“, 64 (1930), p. 129.
- (38) Sandrart 1683, p. 393.

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