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BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHURCH AND FORMER REFORMATI ORDER'S MONASTERY IN WĘGRÓW

Introduction

Monasteries are inscribed into the landscape of Poland and Europe. With this brochure, we would like to familiarize the readers with the history and architecture of the church and monastery of the Order of the Reformati in Węgrów.

Many people think that orders [religious communities] and monasteries are identical, and that they often function alike. Whereas, it is not exactly true. An order is a group of people which dedicates themselves to God and live according to the common rule and the constitution. They wear the same garment, or habit (but there are also such orders where wearing a habit is not compulsory). We may add also that both monks and nuns of various orders can live according to the same rule. For example, according to the rule of St. Benedict there live, of course the Benedictines, but also the Cistercians, the Camaldolese and the Trappists; according to the rule of St. Francis - the Franciskans, the Conventual Franciscans, the Capuchins, the Albertine Brothers; according to the rule of St. Augustine there live Augustinians, but also Canons regular and Norbertines. This happens due to the fact that a religious rule is usually fairly general. Thus, for orders to actually live according to a specific rule, it must be interpreted, i.e. explained in more detail. Religious constitutions or executive regulations serve this purpose. And so, different orders live according to the same rule, but they do have different religious constitutions. Therefore, although they share a common rule, their way of life differs from one another. A Superior General (often called a general, or the Minister General in Franciscan orders) is the head of an order. Such order can be divided into smaller administrative units, usually called provinces, headed by a Provincial superior.



The monastery in Węgrów seen from birdseye perspective.
Picture taken when revitalization works had been carried out (June, 2020). Photo by T. Sobisz

What is a monastery then? It would be easiest to say that it is the building where the monks [or nuns] live. However, such a definition would be rather imprecise, because it is the monks who make the building a monastery. There is no monastery without monks. Therefore, we may state that a monastery is the smallest religious community which has its superior, often called the prior, in case of the Franciscans it is a guardian, in female orders it may be a prior or an abbess.

Now, that we are enlightened what a monastery and an order mean, let us explain who the Reformati are. The Reformati have never constituted a separate order. It is one of the currents within the Order of Friars Minor *Ordo Fratrum Minorum* (OFM), commonly known as Franciscans. Strictly speaking, the Reformati are Franciscans of Primitive Observance.

1. Franciscans - Reformati

In order to understand who the Franciscans were, we need to know, at least in outline, the history of the Franciscans.

The founder of the order was, active in the thirteenth century, St. Francis of Assisi. In 1208, his followers joined Francis and began living together. During the lifetime of St. Francis of Assisi, there was a dispute concerning the shape of the new order. After the founder's death, it grew stronger. Not only did not the dispute within the Franciscan order ease, but it intensified, and the brothers differed even when it came to the habit's color; Conventual Franciscans wore black habits, and Observant Franciscans - brown. In such situation, on May 29, 1517, Pope Leo X officially divided the Franciscan order - the conventuals and observers - into two separate orders: the Order of Friars Minor Observants *Ordo Fratrum Minorum Observantiae* and the Order of Friars Minor Conventual *Ordo Fratrum Minorum Conventualium*. The bull of the Pope Leo X *Ite et vos vineam neam*, which divided the order, recognized the observers as the rightful heirs of St. Francis. Their superior received the title of Minister General of the Entire Order of Friars Minor.

Conventual Franciscans appeared in Poland in the years 1236-1237 in Wrocław and Kraków. The Observant Franciscans came to Poland in 1453 which had been related to the activity of St. John Capistran. At that time, the Observants founded a monastery and the church of St. Bernardine of Siena, thus they were commonly called in Poland - brothers of Saint Bernardine, and later simply Bernardines. Since the



"St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata" by Jan Niezbitowski.
Painting in the side altar, in transept of the central nave
in the post-monastery church in Węgrów.
Photo by M. Sobisz

Conventuals had the church of St. Francis in Krakow, they had been called brothers of Saint Francis, and later Franciscans. Before the Observants came to Poland, the Friars Minor Conventual had been simply called “brothers”, hence the name “Bracka [brothers] Street” in Krakow. Thus, we can now see that the names “Franciscans” for the Conventuals and “Bernardines” for the Observants are typically Polish. Outside of Poland, conventual Franciscans are usually called Friars Minor (from the Latin name *Fratrum Minorum*).

Over time, another reformational current emerged among the Observants themselves, i.e. supporters of strict observance. Among the supporters of strict observance, in the 16th century, among others, Reformati appeared.

Pope Gregory XIII granted in 1579 the Reformati their own statutes, but still together with the Observants it remained one Franciscan order. In Poland, the first supporters of strict observance were the Bernardines themselves (the Observants) headed by Gabriel of Gródek (Grodecki), who is considered the founder of the Reformati in Poland. Pope Gregory XV gave his consent to the Reformati’s settlement in Poland on July 13, 1621. A group of Reformati, headed by Fr. Aleksander of Padua, Fr. Cyprian Gozdecki and six other Italian Reformati came to Poland that same year. During their journey, the group was joined by Reformati from



Fresco „The Death of Saint Peter of Alcantara” by Sebastian Eckstein in the side chapel in the post-monastery church in Węgrów. Photo by M. Sobisz

Poland, who abode in Italian and German monasteries. They reached their destination on October 2, 1621. In just one year only, the Reformati founded seven monasteries. In 1623, during the meeting of the chapter in Zakliczyn near Dunajec, Fr. Aleksander of Padua founded two Reformati custodies in Poland. On May 12, 1693, both of them were elevated to the position of provinces by Pope Urban VIII. Thus, the autonomy of the Reformati in Poland was sealed. They had owned monasteries and had their own provincial superiors. They also had their own legislation, but the superior general (minister general) still remained the head both to the Bernardines and Reformati.

As time went by, the differences between the Bernardines and the Reformati began to blur. Hence, Leo XIII abolished all diversities, autonomies, differences in the legislation of the Observant Franciscans with the apostolic constitution *Felicitate quadam* of October 4, 1897. Also the local names of individual orders, such as Bernardines or Reformati, were abolished. Thus, the names of the Bernardines and the Reformati are now only historical names of the currents within the Order of Friars Minor.

To this day, there are three orders derived from St. Francis: Order of Friars Minor (still traditionally called in Poland Bernardines and Reformati, or 'brown' Franciscans), Order of Friars Minor Conventual



Fresco „Apotheosis of St. Anthony of Padua” by Michelangelo Palloni
in the side chapel in the post-monastery church in Węgrów. Photo by M. Sobisz



Mural paintings depicting Franciscan Saints in the monastery's cloisters. Photo by M. Sobisz

(called in Poland Franciscans or 'black' Franciscans, rarely 'conventual', in the West commonly referred to as Minorites) and the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin (colloquially Capuchins).

2. Węgrów - a multicultural town

Węgrów is a town on the border of Masovian and Podlaskie Voivodships. Until today, Podlasie is considered the most culturally diverse region of Poland, and eastern Podlasie is the only region in Poland where Catholics do not constitute a majority.

Węgrów has been a strong reformational center since 1558. When the last owner from the Radziwiłł family, Bogusław, possessed Węgrów, there were already people of German and Scottish origin in the town. A significant part of the town residents was of the Evangelical Reformed (Calvinist) and Evangelical-Augsburg (Lutheran) denomination. There was also a small group of people of the Orthodox faith. Apart from Christian denominations, a large group of Jews lived here.

Węgrów was not only multi-denominational and multi-religious, but also multi-ethnic. Poles, Germans, Scots, Ruthenians and Jews lived here. Among Catholics there were Poles and Germans, among Protestants - Poles, Germans and Scots; among Orthodox and Greek Catholics there were Ruthenians, and Jews professed Judaism.



Historic missal located in the monastery's basements, where the Museum Exhibition „Węgrów - the place where cultures and religions meet.” Photo by D. Matloch

3. The Founders

In 1664, Bogusław Radziwiłł, who was a Calvinist, sold Węgrów to Jan Kazimierz Krasieński of the *Ślepowron* coat of arms, who was of the Catholic faith. Both Jan Kazimierz Krasieński, the voivode of Płock, and his son Jan Dobrogost Krasieński initiated the idea of bringing the Reformati to Węgrów. Since 1668 also, like his father, the voivode of Płock. Once the town was purchased from Bogusław Radziwiłł, they proposed to fund the monastery of the Greater Poland Province of the Reformati of St. Anthony of Padua in 1668.

Reformati, due to their strict observance, were often settled in large custers of Evangelical people, such as in Węgrów, so that they were an example, but also an alternative for Catholics who saw the corruption of the Catholic clergy and considered moving to Protestant churches.

Probably monks filled churches in Węgrów due to low moral and intellectual level of the diocesan clergy. It was the Reformati, Bartolomites, Jesuits and Piarists who had a good reputation, and it is from these orders that the Krasieński family chose priests. It can be assumed that the Krasieński family, and certainly Jan Dobrogost, designated those orders, not to fight the Reformation, but to provide adequate spiritual care for Catholics. Jan Dobrogost himself, while remaining a Catholic, supported religious tolerance and strove to ease religious disputes.



The interior of the post-monastery church in Węgrów.
Photo by M. Sobisz

4. Building regulations of the Reformati

Initially, the Reformati built monasteries and churches of wood, more precisely of wood and clay. However, from the mid-17th century a new style developed in the architecture of the Reformati and their churches could also be made of brick. They were to be small, modest and without side aisles. A crucifix was always placed in the altar. The uniformity of the architectural form of Reformati churches from the 17th and 18th centuries had been preserved thanks to the specific and precise monastic legislation. Moreover, there

were functions appointed, like of *prefectus fabricae*, *inspector farricae* or *magister fabricarum*, whose task was to supervise the construction of the monastery and church so that the works were carried out in accordance with the Order and in accordance with the plan that had been approved by the provincial definitory. The factory prefect was appointed not only for construction of a new church, but also for renovation or reconstruction. Usually a priest was the factory prefect, and he was helped by a monastic brother with no ordination. Therefore, any construction or renovation was supervised by two monks. In the second half of the 17th century and in the 18th century, the Reformati built single-nave churches in the wall-and-pillar system, in the recess variant and several churches in the chapel variant, the church in Węgrów belongs to the latter.

Jan Dobrogost Krasiński, while funding the monastery and the church of the Reformati, had to comply with the religious regulations regarding architecture. All Reformati monasteries erected in Poland in the years 1622-1722 were built in accordance with the building regulations

of the Reformati (with three exceptions: in Kazimierz Dolny, in Góra Świętej Anny [Saint Anne Mountain] and in Pińczów. Those churches the Reformati received ready.

If we assume, as did A. Miłobędzki, that Tylman van Gameren designed the church, then we may be sure that he also had to comply with the building regulations of the Reformati. According to AJ Błachut, OFM, the building regulations of the Reformati, “not only substantially limited the funder and superiors’ influence, but also the architect’s freedom in terms of the spatial arrangement, the size of the building, the materials used, and even in the elements of architectural decoration.”



Jan Kazimierz Krasieński (1607-1669) of the Ślepowron coat of arms, Grand Treasurer of the Crown (Museum of Romanticism in Opinogóra).

5. The Reformati Foundation in Węgrów

As it has been already mentioned, the Reformati Foundation in Węgrów was a joint initiative of Jan Kazimierz and Jan Dobrogost Krasieński. However, it was Jan Dobrogost Krasieński who appeared in person in Warsaw at the meeting of the Reformati chapter in Greater Poland Province, asking them to accept the foundation on his behalf and *Parentis Ioannis Casimiri Krasieński* - also on behalf of his father.

Prior to the approval of the foundation, Fr. Bernard Gutowski, the Provincial superior of the Reformati Province in Greater Poland, issued a decree establishing a commission that was to go to Węgrów and there to assess the possibilities of the foundation. The commission was headed by Fr. Atanazy Krotosz, the guardian from Warsaw, and among the members there were Fr. Manfred Semplieński and two definitors: Fr. Marceli Bedlewski and Fr. Klemens Bolesławski.

This commission, headed by Fr. Atanazy Krotosza, was to assess whether the foundation was possible at all. It had to ascertain whether the Krasieński family actually possessed land that they could donate for the construction of a church and monastery and whether this area was actually suitable for a monastery. The commission had to find out whether the church authorities, i.e. the bishop, would agree to the foundation (Węgrów belonged to the diocese of Lutsk at that time), and to establish which monasteries operated near to the planned foundation. It was crucial for the Franciscan orders. All Franciscan orders (but not only) were mendicant - begging orders. This means that these monasteries collected money - the monks had to leave the monastery and ask people for donations. The monks collected money not only in Węgrów, but also in the neighboring towns. The inhabitants of Węgrów were unable to support the monastery by themselves. Thus, when two mendicant monasteries were located close to one another, a problem appeared. The area where the monks were allowed to collect the funds had to be divided, which meant that the income of each monastery was depleted. So, even at the very beginning there appeared a problem. In Liw (approx. 5 km from Węgrów), the Bernardine monks were planning to establish their foundation, and a similar commission came to Liw earlier. They protested against the Reformati foundation and directed their protest both to the bishop and Jan Dobrogost Krasieński, writing to the latter: "Our Majesty, Lord Crown Referendary, our Benefactor" and explaining that the protest was "Not about lands or Liw, but about heaven and gaining souls." The letter was executed by the Provincial of Bernardines of Greater Poland, Fr. Franciszek Varsaviensis. The dispute was settled in favor of the Reformati and they could proceed to the second stage of the foundation's implementation. At that stage, they had to gain all the necessary consents, i.e. the



Fragment of a discovered painting in the northern part of a monastery's cloister (August, 2020). Photo by M. Sobisz

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Portrait of Jan Dobrogost Krasieński by Michelangelo Palloni.
Source: Wilanów Palace Museum. Photo by Zbigniew Reszka

bishop's, Reformati General Definitory's, the Sejm's, the King's and the Pope's consent. We may see now that the foundation of the monastery was a complicated and staggered process.

The Reformati General Definitory's agreement for the foundation in Węgrów was obtained in August, 1668. In 1673, the bishop of Lutsk, Tomasz Leżyński (Leżeński), approved its location at the contemporary Długa [long] Street. On May 9, 1675, more plots of land were purchased from the townsmen: [from] Tomasz Szostek, Krystyna Makowszczońska, Jakub Kulinec, Maciej Sikorski, and Paweł Jewiczek. The purchase was made by Walenty Dramiński, administrator of Jan Dobrogost Krasieński's estate. After the purchase, as it was written in the foundation's book, "calming the plots for Reformati of Węgrów's foundation", the next stage of the enterprise could have been completed.

In 1676, the Sejm approved the foundation in the “Constitution of the Sejm of Cracow during the reign of Jan III the King of Poland.” That same year, Jan III Sobieski issued the document entitled “Approval of the Foundation of the Reformati Fathers in Węgrów,” in which the “Foundation of the Reformati Fathers (...) by Jan Dobrogost born in Krasne Krasieński, Crown Referendary (...) in Węgrów, in his hereditary town in the Podlaskie Voivodeship, the Land of Drohiczyn, which has been just brought to life for the glory of God (...) we approve the spaces where the church with the monastery and the garden are placed and we release them from any taxes for all time.”

The monastery and the wooden church were erected in 1693. The building of the brick church was commenced in June that year. Nevertheless, due to the Great Northern War there appeared difficulties to continue construction works. The war broke out right at the beginning of the 18th century; moreover, it was overlapped by the civil war in Poland in the years 1704-1706, between the supporters of the Wettins, known in Poland as Saxons, and the supporters of Stanisław Leszczyński. Węgrów had not been spared either. In 1703, the Swedish army burnt the parish church and the town itself was destroyed and plundered. The buildings of the Reformati did not suffer much damage, but, obviously, it was impossible to continue the works. In 1715, other military operations began, this time due to the Tarnogród Confederation. The Reformati experienced quite an unusual “adventure”. Three deserters: Jerzy Piotrowski, Jan Trzeciakowski and Jan Propp decided to... join the order. Of course, the regiment from which they had escaped quickly found the fugitives and surrounded the monastery in Węgrów, however, deserters appealed to Jan Dobrogost Krasieński for protection. Krasieński reassured that he would abstain from punishing them if they voluntarily leaved the monastery and returned to their regiment. And thus it happened.

The turbulent times impeded the construction of the monastery, however, even despite difficult conditions, it was being continued. Probably the construction accelerated approx. 1703, because Jan Dobrogost Krasieński began reconstructing the parish church burned by the Swedish army that year, as evidenced by the contract concluded with Carl Ceroni on August 12, 1703, witnessed by Józef Bellotti.

6. The Church and monastery

Brick Reformati Church of St. Peter of Alcantara and Anthony of Padua was built under Carlo Ceroni's direction. Father Michał Nachorecki became the factory prefect of the construction in Węgrów. It can be presumed that brother Mateusz Osiecki was the prefect's assistant. Osiecki made his monastic vows in 1694 and was probably sent for the first time to Węgrów as an assistant to the factory prefect. It is known that in 1709 brother Mateusz gained so much experience that he became the factory prefect during the renovation of the vault in the monastery in Łąki Bratniańskie. Brother Mateusz Osiecki was not only a factory prefect, but also an architect (perhaps self-taught). It is a fact that brother Mateusz was an exception because only a priest (father) was allowed to become a prefect, and a brother was his assistant. Brother Mateusz was not a priest, yet he would serve as a factory prefect many times. He himself designed and managed the construction of the Reformati's monastery and church complex in Boćki (1726-1741) and had been the court architect of Franciszek Józef Sapieha. He conducted also construction and renovation works at the collegiate church and the castle in Ołyka for Anna Katarzyna Radziwiłł née Sanguszko, worked for Stefan Rupniewski, the bishop of Lutsk, and for the Pauline Order. Of course, we may only assume that brother Osiecki participated in the monastery's construction, but there are strong reasons to state so.

The Reformati monastery and church complex in Węgrów consists of a four-sided two-storied monastery with cloisters and a patio (a garden located inside the monastery) and a church.

The monastery had been erected on a rectangular plan, like all Reformati monasteries. The cloisters were decorated with polychromes from the middle of the 18th century, which have partially survived to our times. In recent years, rescue and conservation works have been carried out on the polychromatic walls in the eastern and southern cloisters.

The monks' cells were located on the first floor of the monastery, the refectory (the place where the monks eat their meals) and the kitchen were located on the ground floor. On the ground floor there were also an infirmary and cells for guests. The monastery is adjacent to the church from the eastern side.

7. Church architecture

The church in Węgrów is typical of the Reformati - it preserves the elements characteristic of this order. It was erected in the Baroque style, it is a non-oriented, single-nave church with a barrel-cross vault, and chapels on both sides of the nave. Like all Reformati's brick churches from the 17th and 18th centuries, it had been built in a wall and pillar system. To explain what the wall-pillar system is, let us use the words of E. Kapińska: "This system required such filling of the spaces between the pillars with the wall, so that the pillars adhered to the interior walls, creating on the sides a series of shallow recesses or chapels (hence the recess or chapel variants)". The church in Węgrów was built in a chapel variant, similarly to the Reformati churches in Warsaw (1680), Biała Podlaska (1684) and later in Miedniewice (1748).

The walls of the nave are disconnected by pairs of Tuscan pilasters. The pairs of pilasters also divide the walls in the Reformati churches of the Greater Poland Province in Warsaw, Osieczna, Miejska Górka, Szczawno Kościelny and Łabiszyn. Also in the Lesser Poland Province, double pilasters were used, for example in the Church of the Reformati in Krakow. Double pilasters are characteristic not only for Reformati churches, but generally for baroque churches. In the case of the Reformati, double pilasters are much more common in the Greater Poland Province than the Lesser Poland Province. At the intersection of the nave and the transept, the architect placed a blind dome, and this is due to the building regulations of the Reformati, which prohibit domes in their churches. The blind dome is visible only from the inside, it is impossible to see it from the outside of the church.

The Church in Węgrów, like all Reformati churches in the Greater Poland Province, is more impressive than the Reformati churches of the Lesser Poland Province. This is due to the fact that the Reformati of the Greater Poland Province approached the building regulations with greater freedom than their brothers from the Lesser Poland Province. The result of this approach is the fact that the Reformati churches of the Greater Poland Province, although they remain poorer and more modest than many Baroque churches, have all the features of Mannerism and Baroque. Also the blind dome is a manifestation of a more informal approach to building regulations in the Greater Poland Province, decorated with an



„The Crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth“ by Andreas Schuler. Photo by P. Buta



Fresco "Triumphant Church" by Michelangelo Palloni in the transept of the post-monastery church in Węgrów. Photo by M. Sobisz

illusionistic fresco "The Triumphant Church" by Michelangelo Palloni. On the walls there are oval Stations of the Cross painted on canvas from the 18th century, probably by Sebastian Eckstein, who was also the author of frescoes in the side chapels of St. Mary Magdalene, in the chapel of St. Joseph (western chapels) and in the chapel of St. Peter of Alcantara (eastern [chapel]). The last chapel (eastern) of St. Anthony of Padua is decorated with a fresco by Palloni. The church decorations are complemented by paintings by Jan Niezabitowski from the end of the 18th century.

The feature that distinguishes the church in Węgrów from other Reformati churches, apart from the aforementioned blind dome, is a underslung choir (not supported by any pillar).

Another characteristic feature of all Reformati churches was the cemetery in front of the entrance to the church, surrounded by a wall in which the Stations of the Cross were placed. It was related to Franciscan spirituality. For St. Francis, meditating on the Passion was one of the foundations of the spiritual life (Francis was the first stigmatic). The Franciscans spread the Passion of Christ devotion, which initiated the

Stations of the Cross. In the 17th century, the Stations of the Cross was conducted in every Reformati church after the afternoon mass on Sunday.

Today, of course, there is no cemetery, only the wall with the Stations of the Cross remains, in the case of Węgrów these are modern stations, the original ones have not survived to our times. It may be added that an interesting situation takes place in the Reformati Church in Krakow. Here, in front of the entrance to the church, there is Reformacka Street, and the cemetery, and currently only the wall with the Stations of the Cross is on the other side of the street, opposite the entrance to the church.



Fence Wall after the renovation-restoration works had been completed.
The view at night with illuminated Stations of the Cross (October, 2019). Photo by M. Sobisz

In the basement of the church in Węgrów, like in other Reformati churches, there was a tomb. The most famous Reformati crypts are those from the church in Krakow, where 730 laypeople and 250 monks were buried, and 60 coffins with mummified corpses have survived to this day. The crypts in Węgrów, where 249 laypeople and 10 priests were buried, are no less interesting as more than 50 coffins with mummified bodies have survived until today.

How important this foundation was for Jan Dobrogost Krasieński is proved by the fact that he himself was buried in the basement of the Reformati Church in Węgrów, and not in the family crypts in Krasne, where both of his wives were buried. Recently, the sarcophagus in which the body of the founder rests has been renovated. On this occasion, the body of Jan Dobrogost was explored. After an initial inspection, it turned out that the robe in which he was buried, made of expensive material, as well as the pillow and headgear, were in very good condition.



Epitaph of Jan Dobrogost Krasinski located in the transept of the post-monastery church in Węgrów.
Photo by R. Postek



The restored sarcophagus of Jan Dobrogost Krasinski, which rests in the basement of the monastery church in Węgrów. Photo by M. Sobisz

The tombstone of Jan Dobrogost Krasinski is located in the northern wall of the transept of the church in Węgrów. It was made by Andreas Mackensen the Younger, the same who made the tombstone of Jan Dobrogost's wives in the church in Krasne. In 1701 Krasinski brought an action against him because of the wrong weight of the ordered silver epitaph from Węgrów. The last mentions of the artist refer to his stay in prison in August 1701. Jan Dobrogost employed three artists from Gdańsk to decorate the church in Węgrów. In addition to the aforementioned Andreas Mackensen the Younger, he also employed Andreas Schluter, whose work was the sculpture of *The Crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth* in the main altar of the church, as well as the altar itself. Andreas Schluter was employed earlier by Jan Dobrogost Krasinski, at the construction works of the Krasinski Palace in Warsaw, where he made decorations of tympanums depicting the victory of the Roman leader Marcus Valerius Messala Corvinus over the Gauls. The Krasinski family derived their origins from Marcus Valerius Messala Corvinus. Michał Witwerck of Gdańsk was another employed artist. He was a bellfounder, who cast a plate placed at the base of the founder's tombstone.

The construction of the church was completed in 1705, but the facade of the church was completed in 1709. Both churches of Węgrów, the Reformari and the town parish, were consecrated by the bishop

of Lutsk, Aleksander Wyhowski in 1711, and the consecration sermon was delivered by Fr. Jakub Wolski, the guardian of the Reformati monastery in Warsaw.

As we finish the description of the Reformati Church in Węgrów, let us return to the church's facade. It is decorated with a figure of a seraph - angel with six wings. In order to explain where this idea was originated from - to place the figure of a seraph in this place - we must return to the orfer's founder, St. Francis. According to a friend and first biographer of St. Francis, brother Thomas of Celano, On the feast of the



Facade of the post-monastery church in Węgrów.
The figure of Christ Seraph is visible in the coping. Photo by P. Buta

Exaltation of the Holy Cross on September 14, 1224, Francis prayed on the La Verna mountain contemplating the Passion of Christ. Suddenly Christ appeared to him in the form of a seraph, nailed to the cross. It was during this vision St. Franciszek received stigmata. Hence St. Francis is called a Seraphic Saint, the Franciscans themselves call their founder the Seraphic Father, and Franciscan Orders are called Seraphic Orders. In case of the Franciscans, when we see images of a seraph, we are dealing with Christ in the form of a seraph. A famous example of such a representation is depicted on the fresco by Giotto di Bondone "Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata" from 1325 in the Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence, or the same author's fresco decorating the Church of St. Francis in Assisi.

8. Monastery [as in Węgrów] in the Prussian province

In 1750, the Reformati Prussian Province of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary was created, and the monastery in Węgrów, along with other eleven monasteries in the Greater Poland Province, had been incorporated into it. In 1792 it counted 338 monks in 15 monasteries: Biała Radziwiłłowska (today Podlaska), Boćki, Brodnica, Kiszczork (Dzierżgoń), Gdańsk, Grudziądz, Łąki Bratiańskie, Płock, Pułtusk, Siennica, Toruń, Wejherowo, Węgrów, Włocławek and Zaręby Kościelne.

The change of the province in which the monastery in Węgrów was located impacted the role it played in the area. Since 1750, the novitiate of the Reformati of the Prussian province had been settled in the monastery in Węgrów. In 1760, the novitiate was relocated. Instead, a philosophical study was established to enable friars to prepare for priestly ordination. Until the end of the 18th century, the monastery counted about 17 - 22 monks and 6 - 10 clerical students.

In 1795, after the third partition of Poland, the monastery in Węgrów was incorporated into the Austrian partition, together with the monasteries in Biała Radziwiłłowska and Siennica. These three created their own Custody of St. Mother of God. In 1809, the custodies became part of the Duchy of Warsaw and these three monasteries re-joined the Prussian Province. After the Congress of Vienna, the monastery in Węgrów could be found within the borders of the Kingdom of Poland and still

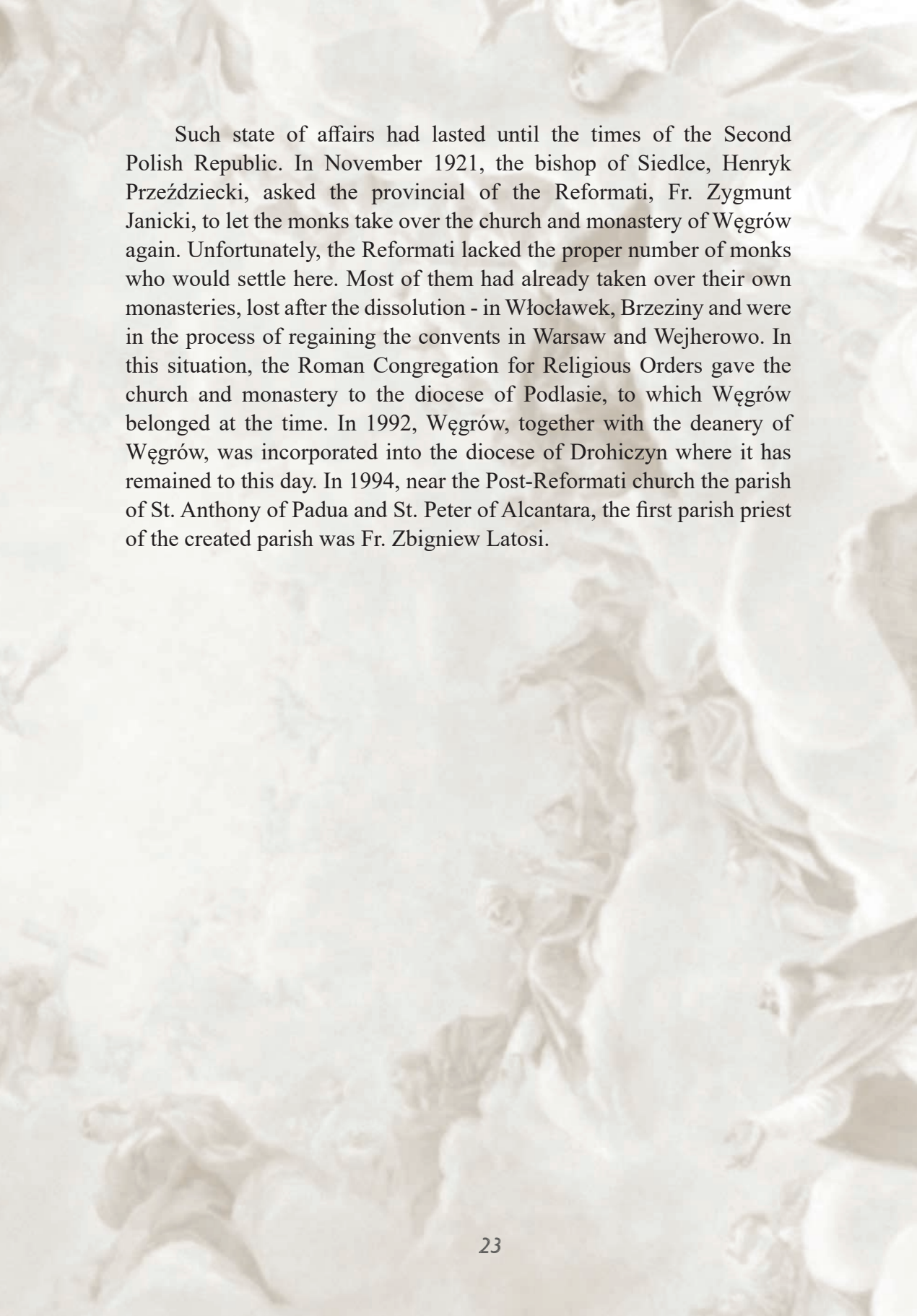
belonged to the Prussian Province. At that time, the number of monks in the monastery in Węgrów decreased, compared to the 18th century, and usually did not exceed 16 monks and 4 clerical students. In 1821 the novitiate was once again transferred to Węgrów. The monastery of the Reformati was close to dissolution that same year. It became possible due to the bull *Ex imposita Nobis* issued in 1818 by the Pope Pius VII, which allowed the Primate, Franciszek Skarbek-Malczewski, to dissolve monasteries and take over monastic property to endow the bishops and diocesan seminaries. The Primate - already infirm and close to death - triggered by bishop Szczepan Hołowczyc, executed a dissolution decree of April 17, 1819. After Franciszek Skarbek-Malczewski passed away, Bishop Hołowczyc became the Primate. He implemented the decree under which many monasteries and abbeys were dissolved, including Benedictine abbey on Łysa Góra. The property of the Benedictines was taken over, and the monks themselves were removed from the monastery in 1820. In such situation, a decision was issued to transfer the Reformati of Węgrów to Łysa Góra and to pass the monastery in Węgrów to the Tribunal and to the Mortgage Committee. Of course, the Reformati would receive solely the building of the former Benedictine monastery, without any property (even the Benedictine movable property was auctioned). In such situation, the Krasieński family - the funder, once again played a crucial role. A guardian from Węgrów, Fr. Tomasz Hilchen asked for help from General Wincenty, Krasieński's count (Zygmunt Krasieński's bard's father). Of course, the dissolution of the monastery funded by the Krasieński family was unacceptable to Count Wincenty Krasieński. Especially since Jan Dobrogost Krasieński had been buried in the crypts. Krasieński's intercession, but also of many influential people associated with Krasieński, brought the desired effect and the Reformati remained in Węgrów.

Unfortunately, forty-four years later, the Reformati had to face the problem of dissolution again; however, this time they could not count on any support because the decision about the dissolution was issued by the tsar himself. Everything happened in 1864 after the January Uprising had fallen. Among the repressions aimed at the orders which had actively supported the uprising, the tsar issued a decree of November 8, 1864, liquidating all orders in the Kingdom of Poland. The monks were deprived of the right to have a provincial superior, contacts with the

general superiors were strictly forbidden, and finally most monasteries were liquidated, including the monastery in Węgrów. The dissolution decree was read out to the Reformati of Węgrów in 1815. The monks were forced to leave the monastery and move to the monastery in Pilica. Only one monk remained in Węgrów - the guardian Fr. Onufry Zakrzewski, who also became the last Franciscan of Węgrów. From then on, the Reformati church had served as the rectoral church of the parish church in Węgrów, and the monastery buildings were taken over by the Russian Ministry of Education.



The Museum Exhibition „Węgrów - the place where cultures and religions meet” in the monastery’s basements in Węgrów. Photo by D. Matloch



Such state of affairs had lasted until the times of the Second Polish Republic. In November 1921, the bishop of Siedlce, Henryk Przeździecki, asked the provincial of the Reformati, Fr. Zygmunt Janicki, to let the monks take over the church and monastery of Węgrów again. Unfortunately, the Reformati lacked the proper number of monks who would settle here. Most of them had already taken over their own monasteries, lost after the dissolution - in Włocławek, Brzeziny and were in the process of regaining the convents in Warsaw and Wejherowo. In this situation, the Roman Congregation for Religious Orders gave the church and monastery to the diocese of Podlasie, to which Węgrów belonged at the time. In 1992, Węgrów, together with the deanery of Węgrów, was incorporated into the diocese of Drohiczyn where it has remained to this day. In 1994, near the Post-Reformati church the parish of St. Anthony of Padua and St. Peter of Alcantara, the first parish priest of the created parish was Fr. Zbigniew Latosi.



Zdjęcie z widowiska historycznego „Jan Dobrogost Krasieński i Artyści”
na rynku węgrowskim w dniu 27 sierpnia 2017 r. Fot. M. Rząca
Picture taken while historic performance entitled „Jan Dobrogost Krasieński and Artists”
was shown on the town’s square on August 27, 2017, by M. Rząca



Zdjęcie z rekonstrukcji pogrzebu Jana Dobrogosta Krasieńskiego w kościele poreformackim
w Węgrowie w dniu 19 marca 2017 r. Fot. M. Rząca
Picture taken during the reconstruction of Jan Dobrogost Krasieński’s funeral
in the post-monastery church in Węgrów, on March 19, 2017, by M. Rząca