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**Origins of the left-bank residence of the Piasts in Wrocław.
Duchess Anna's curia
in the heart of the Oder riverside ducal grounds***

Abstract. This article presents the most recent research findings and offers a critical summary of previous studies on the origins of the left-bank residence of the Piasts in Wrocław. Drawing on the archaeological and architectural investigations conducted between 1994 and 2020 at the site of the so-called Duchess Anna's Curia, as well as a review of historical sources, the study discusses the discovery of relics of a previously unknown residential structure predating the Mongol invasion. These remains were unearthed during investigations of the Church of Saint Matthias founded in the 13th century by Duchess Anna Přemyslidka for the Order of the Crusaders with the Red Star. The article also reexamines the original form and function of Saint Matthias Church, identifying it as a private church (*Eigenkirche*), as evidenced by the remains of a planned westwork tower and other architectural elements. It is hypothesised that the temple can be identified as part of a ducal residence based on an architectural analysis and its historical context.

Keywords: Middle Ages, Wrocław, Lower Silesia, tower, castle, church, hospital.

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The construction of ducal foundations undertaken by the Silesian Henrys and their wives in Wrocław on the left bank of the Oder has drawn much interest among researchers since at least the 19th century¹. Successively, this area housed ducal, monastic, and urban developments, shaping the unique character of this part of the medieval city. On the western side of this territory stood the ducal castle (commonly referred to as the left-bank castle to distinguish it from the older Piast stronghold on Ostrów Tumski), followed by the hospital and monastery of the Military Order of the Crusaders of the Red Star along with Saint Matthias Church founded by Duchess Anna in 1253. Further east, the Poor Clares' convent was established in 1257 with Saint Clare's Church, also under Anna's patronage. The area was further enriched by the Franciscan monastery and Saint James Church founded by Anna and Henry II after bringing the friars from Prague in 1236–1237, along with numerous manorial estates and curias belonging to abbots, bishops, and secular feudal lords. Additionally, the left-bank quarter included a Jewish district with four synagogues, a feature commonly found near ducal residences in medieval Central Europe (Fig. 1). The architecture of the area north of Uniwersytecka Street (formerly Żydowska Street) and Nankiera Square (formerly Rycerska Street), which was under the direct control of the ducal family, differed from the typical residential development characteristic of medieval municipal cities, especially in the early period of urban formation. This distinction was evident in the scale, materials, and functions of the buildings, as well as in their lack of connection to the standard burghers' plots. For a long time, this area remained under the direct authority of the ruling dukes who were free to allocate it for religious and charitable foundations or pursue their own investment projects (Goliński 1999).

A key research question concerns the original form and function of Saint Matthias Church and its relationship to the ducal curia. A major discovery shedding light on this issue was first presented in Radosław Biel's PhD thesis, "The monastery complex of the Military Order of the Crusaders of the Red Star in medieval Wrocław" (Biel 2021). This research identified relics of a substantial stone feature at the heart of the left-bank Piast ducal district, near Saint Matthias Church and the hospital complex. The location and architectural characteristics of this structure suggest that it possibly represents a lost residence associated with the ducal couple, providing new insights into the origins of the left-bank section of Wrocław. A recently published article, "*Turris latericia destructa* – the court of Duchess Anna in Wrocław and the latest research" (Biel 2024), synthesizes prior studies on the left-bank ducal territories, offering a reassessment of historical accounts, stratigraphy, and architectural relics. Particular attention was given to the 2020 discovery of a large stone structure in the crypts of Saint Matthias Church. Radosław Biel

¹ The recent review of sources and studies was presented by Mateusz Goliński (1999) and later expanded upon by Radosław Biel (2021).



Fig. 1. The ducal grounds on the Barthel Weiner plan from 1562. 1 – left-bank castle; 2 – Knights of the Cross with the Red Star; 3 – Poor Clares; 4 – Franciscans (after Weiner 1929)

proposed that its foundations may belong to an earlier building, possibly identifiable as the curia of Duchess Anna Přemyslidka (ca. 1201–1265) or even as the “destroyed tower” (*turris latericia destructa*) referenced in historical sources.

This article further develops the topic focusing on a detailed architectural and stratigraphic analysis that also covers the most recent phase of Saint Matthias Church, particularly, the hypothesis regarding a planned but unrealised westwork and the role of the so-called “gallery tower”. The study integrates archaeological data, architectural surveys, and historical source analysis to reassess the temple’s relationship to the ducal residence. Additionally, it presents examples of similar sacral-residential complexes in Wrocław and other medieval cities. By building on the previous research, this study contributes new insights into the development of ducal architecture in the region.

Curia

The finding of the building possibly older than the Saint Matthias Church is linked to the issue of the ducal curia, often associated with Duchess Anna. The term “curia” in medieval sources is ambiguous, as it could refer to both a ducal residence, a complex of administrative or utility buildings, and some area that was more or less distinctive. The interpretative challenges are further compounded by the fact that this term appears in documents referring to various ducal structures and institutions, rendering the reconstruction of its exact layout and boundaries a research challenge that has persisted since the 19th century (Grünhagen 1861; Młynarska-Kaletynowa 1986; Małachowicz 1994; Goliński 1999; Biel 2024). The first key reference to the left-bank curia appears in the 1253 foundation charter of Saint Elizabeth’s Hospital (CDS 1875, no. 815, pp. 22–23; SUB. 1984, nos. 60, 61, pp. 50–53), which states as follows.

[...] Bona autem, quae memorato hospitali et ministris prelibatis donamus et super quibus idem hospitale nostrum fundatum est, sunt haec: Curia in qua consistit ipsum hospitale et ecclesia sancti Matthiae in eadem constructa. Item pars curiae dominae matris nostre usque ad turrem latericam destructam post obitum eiusdem relinquam vero partem predictae donamus claustro et conventu fratrum minorum in Wratislavia².

This document confirms the existence of a curia complex that included the hospital, Saint Matthias Church, and a ruined tower situated on its periphery. At the same time, it suggests that the division of this estate between the Knights of the Cross with the Red Star and the Franciscans did not occur until after Duchess Anna’s death.

Further insights come from the privilege from 1268, which lists, among others, one curia *inter duo fossata* – between two ditches and another *iuncta est claustro sancte Clare* (SUB. 1988, no. 63, pp. 56–57). Later documents from 1300 and 1309 refer instead to another curia located opposite the churches of Saint Clare and Saint Matthias (*curiam suam sitam contra ecclesiae sancte Clare* and *unam curiam ex opposito domus sancte Clare, ubi itur de sancto Matthie versus sanctam Claram a dextris in acie sytuatam*). Based on these records, Mateusz Goliński placed the latter on the southern side of today’s Bishop Nankier Street (Goliński 1999, pp. 17–19).

² “[...] The goods, in turn, which we donate to the aforementioned hospital and staff, and due to which our hospital is founded, are the following: the curia, in which the hospital itself is located and Saint Matthias Church built on it. Similarly, part of our mother’s curia up to the ruined brick tower – after her death, in fact, we donate the remaining part of the above-mentioned [curia?] to the monastery and convent of Friars Minor in Wrocław” (Małachowicz 1994, p. 19).

Determining the actual course of mentioned ditches has been challenging due to centuries of landscape transformations in Wrocław. As some researchers have suggested, the unusual layout of Bishop Nankier Square may be a remnant of an old ditch (Goerlitz 1935; Goliński 1999, pp. 17–19). However, detailed geoarchaeological studies indicate that while the meandering Oder played a key role in shaping the medieval city's topography, there is no direct evidence of a watercourse running precisely beneath Bishop Nankier Square. However, excavations near Nowy Targ Square have revealed a regulated watercourse 7–12 m wide and 1.1 m deep, with banks reinforced with fascines (Konczewski, Piekalski 2010, pp. 139–140). This suggests that it may have originally served a defensive function. Another important clue is the presence of an elevated area near the University of Wrocław's courtyard, which may be a proof of man-made and natural modifications related to the spatial organisation of the curia (Badura 2010, p. 40; Badura, Kastek 2018, pp. 139–143).

Previous research has not provided definitive evidence for the existence of a tower at the location indicated in the 1253 document. The oldest known tower seems to be the one later incorporated into the Imperial Castle, known from iconographic sources, but its origins are linked to the organisation of the Oder crossing in 1230–1231 (Konczewski *et al.* 2007, pp. 225–253; Chorowska, Mruczek 2022). However, this tower was located further west, beyond the extent of the area between the assumed borders. In light of a hypothetical reconstruction of the left-bank Wrocław topography in the first half of the 13th century, the discovery of the remains of a large stone building beneath Saint Matthias Church, situated in a gap between two watercourses, may provide additional support for a new interpretation (Fig. 2). If this structure was indeed part of a ducal residence, it is possible that its remains were mistakenly identified as the ruined tower mentioned in the 1253 document. These interpretations are not definitive and significant uncertainties remain. The exact configuration of the two ditches mentioned in the sources is still unclear, as archaeological and geoarchaeological research has yet to provide unambiguous confirmation of their locations and function. Moreover, the precise relationship between different curias, the ruined tower, and the surrounding landscape remains under discussion. Nevertheless, the discovery of substantial stone foundations in this area lends a fresh perspective.

Lost building

The most recently uncovered structure had a rectangular outline with dimensions of at least 16.8 m in length and at least 9.5 m in width, its interior divided with a massive wall, indicating a deliberate functional division of that space (Fig. 3: B). The average thickness of its strip foundations reached 1.3 m, a substantial measurement

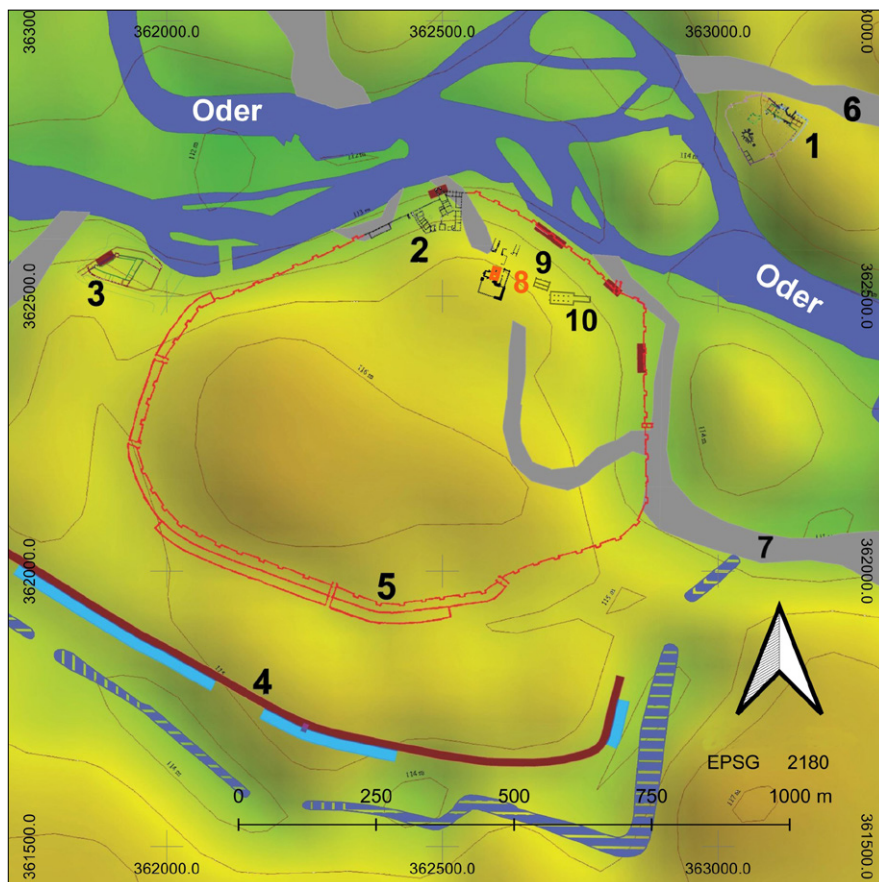


Fig. 2. Wrocław in the second half of the 13th century. The Old Town and Wrocław castles against the background of the natural humus level and identified oxbow lakes of the Oder and Oława rivers. 1 – castle on Ostrów Tumski; 2 – left-bank castle; 3 – left-bank castle II (Arsenal); 4 – earth fortifications: sandy-fascine-humus rampart with a 13th-century moat; 5 – 13th-century brick defensive perimeter; 6 – oxbow lakes of the Oder; 7 – oxbow lake of the Oława; 8 – location of the oldest tower building from the first half of the 13th century, discovered under the Church of Saint Matthias (after Badura, Kastek 2019, p. 154, with modifications by the authors)

that suggests the building was designed for long-term stability and possibly carried significant weight. These foundations were constructed using gneiss glacial erratics, a material choice consistent with early medieval masonry in Silesia. The erratics averaged 60 cm in width, with the largest – a granite boulder – exceeding 1 m, emphasizing the robust nature of the structure.

The relics of these foundations were found in the Baroque crypt under Saint Matthias Church and its sacristy, occurring in four key locations that had already

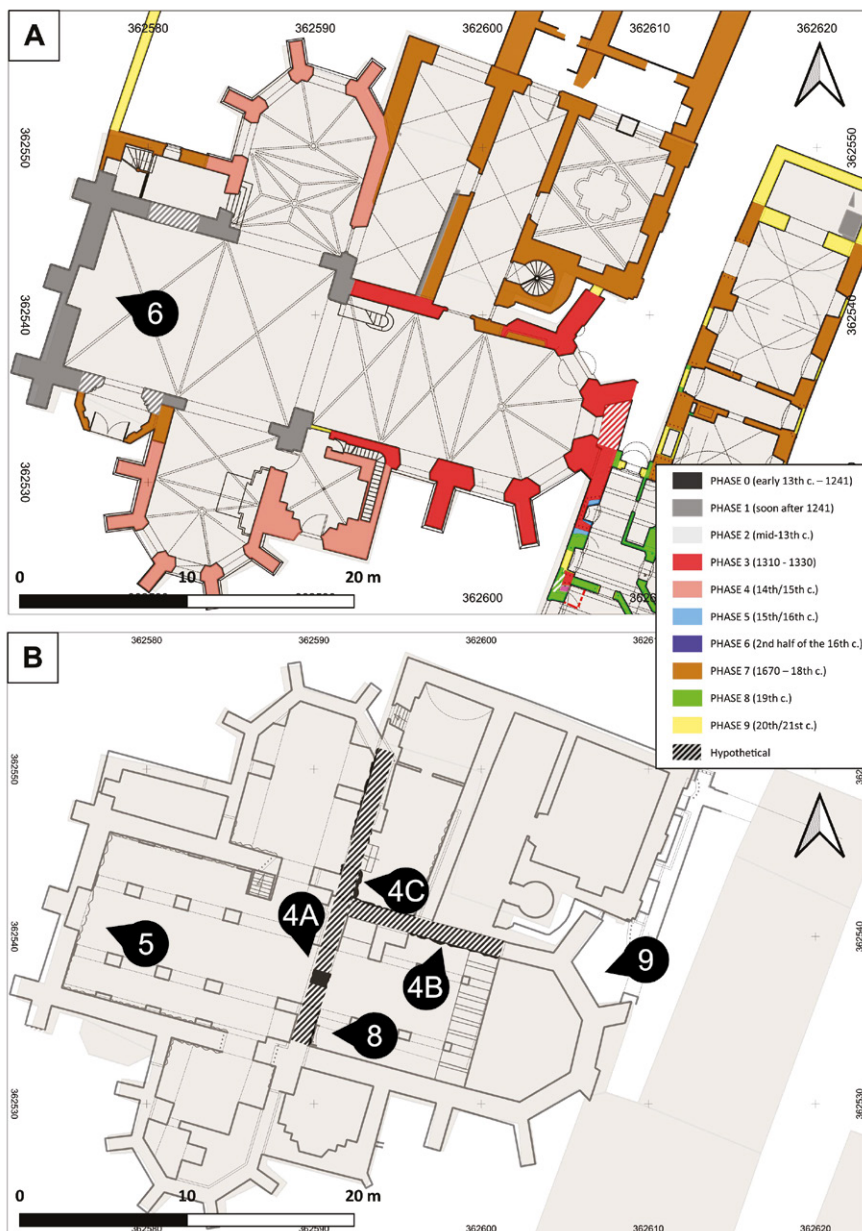


Fig. 3. Saint Matthias Church with locations where the photographs were taken. A – chronological phases of Saint Matthias Church and the surrounding monastic complex at ground level based on architectural analysis; B – locations of identified remains of the older stone feature beneath Saint Matthias Church (drawing by R. Biel)

been exposed during archaeological investigations between the years 1992 and 2006 (Małachowicz 1994; Biernat *et al.* 2003; Kastek *et al.* 2006; Mruczek, Lasota 2006). These remains were substantial, rising up to 60 cm above the present usable level of the crypt and forming structural berms for later walls, in some places widening them by as much as 30 cm. However, despite them being clearly visible, they remained unrecognised for years, misidentified as foundation offsets for the later church and sacristy walls. This misinterpretation persisted due to the advanced age of the later structures, which were built using the distinctive Slavonic brick bond (two-stretcher) and a stone strip foundation of field pebbles.

However, this seemingly rather simple solution complicated the separation of the lower part of the berm made of large boulders from the higher part which was built of finer stones by means of a thick layer of ductile humus enriched with numerous charcoals, lumps of mortar, and small fragments of bricks which in some places reached 12 cm in thickness (Fig. 4). Upon closer examination, this layer was revealed to have occurred quite consistently under all the walls of Saint Matthias Church and its sacristy, and throughout the area where the church was built. Unlike the layer, the foundation “berms” composed of large erratics were identified only beneath two specific walls, namely, the northern wall of the presbytery (Fig. 4: C) and the eastern wall of the church body (Fig. 4: A). The latter extended northward, continuing beneath the eastern wall of the northern transept, which simultaneously served as the western wall of the sacristy (Fig. 4: B). The use of spatial modelling further confirmed the structural continuity of these berms across these sections. An unexpected finding was that these “berms” were connected despite the clear architectural distinction between the nave and presbytery, constructed in the Slavonic (two-stretcher) bond, and the transept, built approximately 150 years later in the Gothic (single-stretcher) bond (Kaczmarek 1999). Corroborated through both stratigraphic field studies and GIS-supported analysis, this chronological discrepancy suggests that the berms may belong to an earlier independent construction phase rather than to serve a functional purpose within the church’s original layout. The existence of these elements cannot be attributed to the sacristy, as its second wall was a later addition to the presbytery (Figs. 3, 4).

All these discrepancies could be explained in the following way, i.e., Saint Matthias Church was erected on a single thick fill of the previously levelled ground, which buried the remains of a large pre-existing structure of an undetermined origin, function, and date of destruction. This earlier building must have been dismantled shortly before the construction of Saint Matthias Church, as its foundations were partially reused in the later construction. The term “partially” is crucial here, as the footprint of this older structure did not align with the layout of Saint Matthias Church, extending beyond its outline. This inconsistency led to misinterpretations in previous studies. During an inspection conducted beneath the chancel arch in 2003, a 130 cm-thick stone foundation wall was identified (Biernat

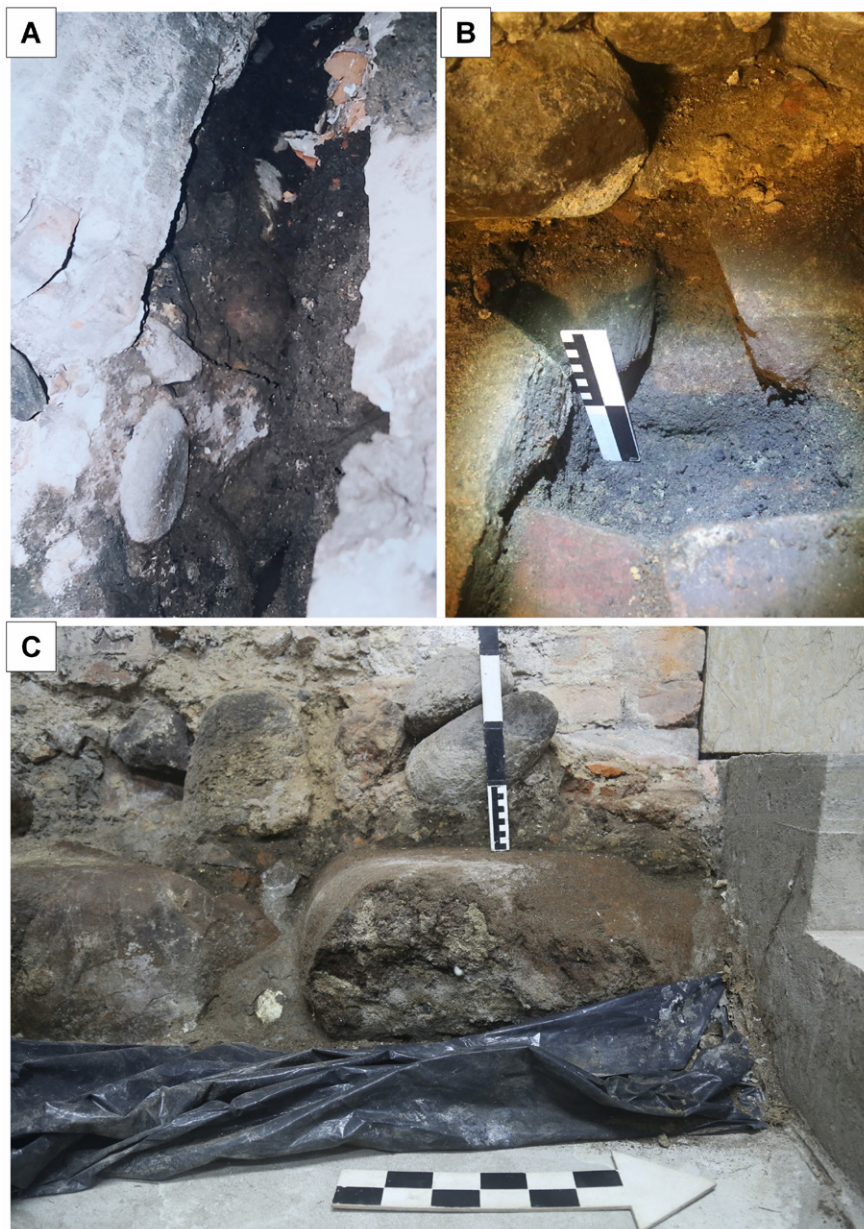


Fig. 4. Close-up of the humus layer with charcoal and medieval artefacts, separating the foundation of a supposed residential tower and the later walls of Saint Matthias Church, discovered at the crypt level. A – under the chancel arch; B – under the north wall of the chancel; C – under the west wall of the room adjacent to the chancel from the north (A – photo by D. Biernat, B, C – photo by R. Biel)

et al. 2003; Kastek *et al.* 2006; Mruczek, Lasota 2006). At that time, this discovery was interpreted as evidence supporting the hypothesis about the two-phase development of the church, wherein the nave was constructed first, followed by the addition of the presbytery. However, this hypothesis has since been contradicted by subsequent studies on the structural nodes of the church, carried out in 2020, which indicates a more complex construction sequence and suggests that these foundations belong to an earlier, independent phase of development.

At present, the remnants of the older building are visible in four locations, specifically, in the southwest corner of the vestibule to the crypt located under the so-called Maciejówka, along the entire length of the eastern wall of the northern transept, at the junction of the church body and the southern wall of its first choir gallery, and beneath the northern wall of the choir gallery (Fig. 3: B). These remains indicate a bipartite, rectangular structure, oriented along a north-south axis, which suggests that it did not serve a sacral function but was rather of a residential or defensive nature. The presence of a massive dividing wall within the structure reinforces this hypothesis, as such a layout was characteristic of residential towers or administrative buildings in the early medieval period. The closest analogies for this type of plan are bipartite residential towers, which were a common architectural solution in both older (Wrocław, the castle on Ostrów Tumski) and younger castles (Świny, Świdnica, Wierzbna, Siedlęcín). Given the stone strip foundations of the structure, if it was a residential tower, it is likely that its superstructure incorporated brickwork, following patterns observed in early ducal architecture in Wrocław. However, due to the incomplete exposure of its full dimensions, it remains possible that the building was a tripartite palace rather than a bipartite tower, such as the bishop's palace on Ostrów Tumski in Wrocław or the ducal palace in Jelcz near Wrocław.

An additional argument for the secular nature of the building lies in its location in the urban layout and defensive conditions. As the research on Wrocław's towers has shown (Mruczek, Legut-Pintal 2024), their presence was not always driven by strictly military needs; often, they served as status symbols and residential structures. In the 13th century, such towers, though originally inspired by feudal architecture, quickly became symbols of prestige. While the findings beneath Saint Matthias Church could indicate a ducal residence, they do not conclusively align with all historical descriptions (Biel 2024). However, a further argument supporting this hypothesis is the proposed original function of Saint Matthias Church. The layout of its foundations and traces of a western gallery suggest that it may have been planned as a court chapel, aligning with the typical arrangement of ducal residences, where the main complex included an associated chapel. Consequently, its construction may have been closely tied to the post-1241 restructuring of Duchess Anna's curia.

Saint Matthias Church

Saint Matthias Church is first mentioned in written records from 1253 as part of a larger complex overseen by the Knights of the Cross with the Red Star. The same document refers to Duchess Anna's curia and a "demolished brick tower" (*turrem latericiam destructam*), although – as discussed – the reasons for the tower's destruction remain unknown. However, the presence of the Knights of the Cross with the Red Star in Wrocław is documented in even earlier sources. Established in 1233 by Duchess Agnes initially to provide care for a hospital adjacent to Franciscan and Poor Clare convents in Prague, the brotherhood quickly achieved the status of a separate religious order. As Maria Starnawska noted, the transformation of a hospital brotherhood into a formal order was typical for this type of religious community (Starnawska 1999, p. 118).

Although the Wrocław branch of the order has generated a substantial scholarly literature³, the exact date of the Knights' arrival in Silesia remains disputable. The most widely accepted view is that they arrived between 1241 (or more precisely 1242) and 1248 (or 1246) (Starnawska 1999, pp. 118–120). However, another hypothesis, supported by authors such as Marek Słoń holds that the foundation described in the 1253 document merely formalised earlier endowments dating back to the years 1241–1242, during Duchess Anna's regency, as it was only then that she used her title as the ruler of Silesia, and only her and her sons are mentioned in the document (Słoń 2000, pp. 132–133)⁴. This issue is significant because it affects whether the church was built in 1253 or sometime earlier, and thus can influence its original function. Most researchers associate Saint Matthias Church exclusively with the Knights of the Cross, with some of them linking it to the Hospital of Saint Elisabeth already existing at that time according to written sources (Starnawska 1999, p. 119). Some, like Alfred Grotte (1937, pp. 38–39), even proposed that it originated as a synagogue due to its proximity to the medieval Jewish quarter of Wrocław. However, the idea that the building's intended purpose could have evolved between the aftermath of the Mongol invasion and the issuance of the 1253 document offers a compelling explanation for its eventual role as a ducal chapel. This interpretation aligns with the view of a "ducal foundation of truly monarchic scale" (Słoń 2000, p. 133).

Over the past two decades, partial investigations carried out in Saint Matthias Church yielded new findings that have not been published, for the most part, until recently. Nevertheless, a widely cited view – often following the work of Edmund Małachowicz (1994) – has long held that the church originally featured a single nave

³ An overview of the sources and studies has been presented, among others, by Maria Starnawska (1999), Kazimierz Dola (1968), and Marek Słoń (2000); however, little to no attention has been given by historians to the architecture.

⁴ It is worth a mention after Marek Słoń (2000), that Paul Pfotenhauer (1878, p. 69) found a copy of a record from the years 1253–1282, where Anna is listed as the sole founder.

with two bays on a rectangular plan, measuring approximately 14 m by 10 m. This interpretation was further supported by evidence obtained in the course of conservation efforts undertaken by Andrzej Legendziewicz in 2006 (unfortunately, mostly only photographic documentation has been preserved). At that time, portions of the western bay of the nave were uncovered. About halfway along the northern wall, the eastern edge of a blocked ogival window was identified, and near the arcade leading to the transept arm there appeared to be a trace of a demolished lesene. Together with the relic of the window opening and preserved Wendish-bond masonry, these observations indicate a two-bay layout broadly matching the present-day dimensions of the nave. It should be noted, however, that some scholars have suggested a possible four-bay configuration with a central column (Małachowicz 1994). No archaeological investigation has yet been undertaken in the middle of the crypt, so the existence of a pillar cannot be definitively confirmed or refuted – an important consideration, given that three single-pillar churches are known to have existed in the 13th- and 14th-century Wrocław (Małachowicz 1973).

Likewise, the western section of the church has long been the subject of particular scrutiny, both because of its unusually thick central buttress and a deep niche that ascends from the foundations almost to the gable (Fig. 5). Early interpretations viewed this niche as the remains of a large portal, but closer investigation revealed traces of toothings on either side, which appear to have been deliberately cut and then refinished in medieval times (Fig. 6). The niche is about 0.85 m deep and



Fig. 5. The niche for the planned westwork tower starts almost at the foundation level, composed of large glacial erratics. In this area, no lower stone layer attributed to the residential tower was identified – only a humus layer was present (photo by R. Biel)



Fig. 6. Western wall of Saint Matthias Church. A – niche interpreted as the base for a planned westwork tower, with visible brick toothings for the intended side walls; B – close-up of the northern tothing, showing traces of medieval reworking and refacing (photo by R. Mruczek; archives of Akme)

2.47 m wide, with additional toothing approximately 0.83 m in width, stretcher from the niche's edge by a band of bricks measuring at most one length of a stretcher face, that is, ca. 27 cm. Such a configuration suggests that side walls might once have been planned around this niche – perhaps indicating a partially built western tower or other vertical structure. These alterations suggest that a more complex structure was planned there – most plausibly a west tower containing an elevated gallery (empora). This hypothesis finds analogies in several Silesian private chapels (*Eigenkirchen*) and knightly foundations, where a westwork or tower gallery served the liturgical needs and social status of the founder. For example, the church in Pogwizdów was supposed to refer to the gallery tower of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Vincent Church in Olbin and symbolise the power of the Silesian nobility. This problem was perfectly analysed by Tadeusz Kozaczewski (1975, pp. 27–39), who compared a large number of churches of knightly foundations with collator galleries from the area of Silesia, and by Andrzej Tomaszewski (1974), who devoted a separate study to them. The single-nave plan of the church with possible collator's triforium further supports this view. The idea of building a tower must have been abandoned before the formation of gables at the height of the cornice crowning the peripheral walls, because the unused toothings were chopped off and treated again with triangular grout in the Middle Ages (Mruczek 2012, p. 140). However, any attempt to reconstruct the appearance of this gallery based on such limited data would be speculative and should be treated as conjecture rather than a factual reconstruction.

At the same time, researchers have long been focused on the highly articulated 13th-century portal that now opens from the south into the westernmost bay of the nave. According to recent publication (Adamski 2017, pp. 431–433), the portal's chalice-like capitals, prismatic imposts, and wide fluting framed by small shafts or rolls are more in keeping with late thirteenth-century sculpture, likely closer to its final quarter (Fig. 7). Earlier dating results, including that of Hanna Kozaczewska-Golasz that point to a date before 1240 (Kozaczewski, Kozaczewska-Golasz 2009, pp. 189–190), remain controversial – particularly given the parallels in Lwówek Śląski, Złotoryja, Cieszyn, and the Dominican church in Wrocław, all generally dated to around 1300 or slightly earlier. In its present form, this portal measures about 3.8 m in width, though Kozaczewska-Golasz pointed out that several voussoirs and jamb blocks have been rearranged or altered, suggesting an original width closer to 3.3 m, with an overall height of ca. 4 m in both configurations (Kozaczewski, Kozaczewska-Golasz 2009, pp. 189–190). Regardless of the precise moment of its carving, numerous details indicate that the portal's current position is secondary. While various hypotheses have been presented, the hypothesis favoured by the authors that it was moved from the north to the south wall should be treated with caution. Nonetheless, practical considerations suggest that, in analogous examples, placing a portal in the north wall could have allowed for the

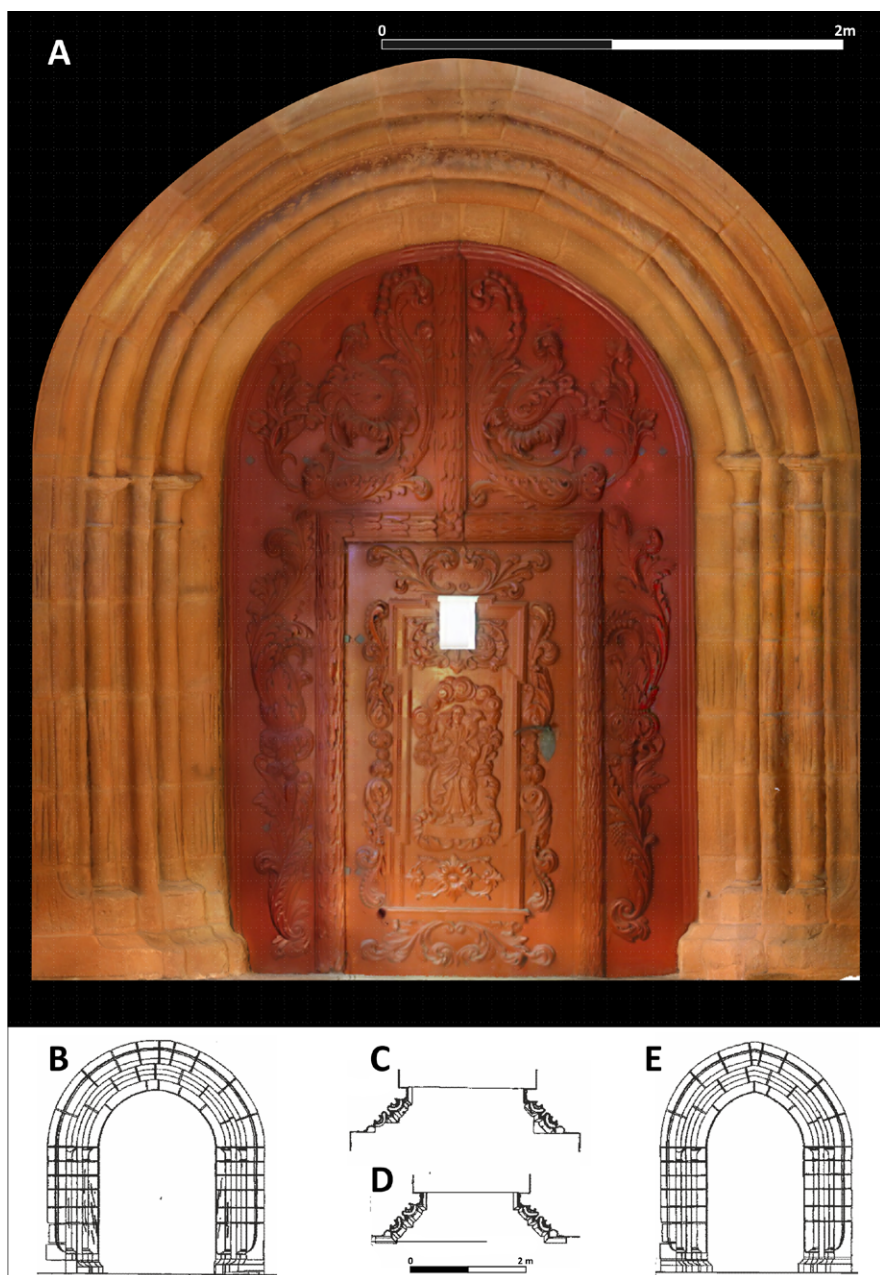


Fig. 7. Main portal of Saint Matthias Church. A – photogrammetry of the portal; B, C – current state; D, E – reconstruction of the original state (after Kozaczewski, Kozaczewska-Golasz 2009, pp. 189–191; developed by R. Biel)

creation of a passageway (cloister) along the northern walls, linking the church to a building to its east. Given the significant remodelling carried out in later centuries, the portal's earliest location may no longer be reconstructable. It remains a matter of speculation as to when precisely it was transferred to the southern facade. Some suggest the relocation might have coincided with the Baroque makeover, while others favour the period of northern transept construction (Biel 2021). One should note that medieval architectural elements in Wrocław were occasionally reused or repurposed only in later projects, as demonstrated by the well-known example of the Ołbin portal moved to Saint Mary Magdalene's Church in the 16th century (Świechowski 1970, pp. 3–5).

Among earlier researchers, there was no firm consensus on the original shape of the choir. Ludwig Burgemeister was the first to suggest that it was "small and rectangular" (Burgemeister, Grundmann 1934), but failed to provide a detailed reconstruction. This is mostly due to the fact that the crypt beneath the present chancel is shorter than the modern choir, ending near the Baroque columbarium, preventing direct investigation of any medieval walls in the eastern zone. Building on fragmentary remains reportedly uncovered in 1992 by Maciej Małachowicz and Czesław Lasota, Edmund Małachowicz developed a commonly accepted hypothesis of a choir rectangular in plan that measured around 6.7 m by 15 m, reinforced with rectangular buttresses (Małachowicz 1994, pp. 123–124). In that reconstruction, the choir stretched nearly to the lateral wall of Saint Elizabeth's Hospital, yet without touching it, and comprised two bays of cross vaulting divided by a transverse arch. However, during the refurbishment on the north and east sides of the chancel in 2006 (Kastek *et al.* 2006), no structural traces were found to confirm this plan (Fig. 8). Although earlier researchers recognised that this wall belonged to a separate structure, their reconstruction of its course relied on the limited relics available at the time, which may have contributed to the extended rectangular choir hypothesis. It is also possible that some relics were removed in the interval between the two campaigns. If one still assumes a straight-ended choir, it bears mentioning that by the mid-13th century, rectangular closures were becoming less common in Silesian ecclesiastical architecture (Kozaczewska-Golasz 2013, p. 53).

On the other hand, a polygonal ending – consisting of at least three angled segments – would reflect a broader Silesian trend in the first half of the 13th century, as seen, among others, in Saint Giles Church on Ostrów Tumski in Wrocław or in the parish churches in Buków, Czerwony Kościół, Konradów, Gościszów, and Nowy Kościół (all from the first half of the 13th century). On a regional scale, the prototype of this solution may be found in more complex pentagonal systems – applied in the Collegiate Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Głogów, the adjoining palace chapel of Saint James in Wrocław, and the late Romanesque castle chapel on Ostrów Tumski, as well as in the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Michael's Church in Złotoryja, Saint Nicholas Parish Church in Głogów, and the chapel in the



Fig. 8.
Toothings visible in the crypt at the former junction of the nave and the southern wall of the first chancel of Saint Matthias Church (photo by R. Biel)

eastern wing of the Premonstratensian Abbey in Ołbin. Similar solutions appear in churches at Tyniec nad Ślężą and Lusatian Jędrzychowice. Across Central Europe, they emerged first in the cathedrals of Magdeburg and Bamberg and in the churches of Altenburg, Memleben, and Freiberg. A particularly relevant parallel may also be found in early mendicant layouts such as the Dominican church in Toruń, as well as in Prague – especially Saint Francis Church at Saint Agnes Monastery, where the Military Order of the Crusaders of the Red Star originated from.

Regardless of which option proves correct, no researcher has questioned the notion that the original body of the church and its first chancel were built in a single campaign in the 13th century. Indeed, the 2020 investigations confirmed that remnants of the southern wall's original toothings remain visible in the crypt (Fig. 9). The south presbytery wall was tied to the nave through outward (convex) toothings, whereas the northern presbytery wall was linked by inward (concave) ones, from which the northern annex wall also proceeds. This narrow annex, commonly interpreted as a sacristy, stands on the same stone foundation that once supported an



Fig. 9. Location where a buttress of the chancel, reconstructed according to Edmund Małachowicz's proposal, was expected. Excavation of the northern wall of the polygonal chancel in 2006 revealed no traces of an older chancel (photo by R. Mruczek; archives of Akme)

earlier building phase and abuts the northern wall of the presbytery. Between this room and the church chancel, there is a passage that has been shaped to its present form in the Baroque period, though it probably dates back to the 13th–14th century. A brick analysis conducted with the help of Mariusz Caban⁵ further supports the hypothesis of a single construction phase for the nave and the chancel. While the choir walls feature a second format of longer bricks (up to 300 mm, albeit less than 1% of the total), the main corpus of measured bricks – median dimensions around 91 mm by 125 mm by 266 mm – closely corresponds to the data from the western edge of the northern wall of the first palace on Ostrów Tumski, broadly dated to the mid-13th century (Chorowska *et al.* 2021, pp. 140–142).

In the 14th century, the church was thoroughly reshaped into the cruciform layout described in detail by Romuald Kaczmarek (1999, pp. 146–152), who emphasises that the current two-bay chancel with a 5/8 apse – together with single-bay transept arms – reflects a later medieval development rather than a unified original design. Elaborate corbels adorned with Evangelists' symbols, along with keystones displaying intricate foliate masks, date chancel's remodelling to approximately the years 1320–1330, showing affinities with the workshop active at Holy Cross Collegiate Church (Kaczmarek 1999, p. 152; Adamski 2017, pp. 431–433).

⁵ Using the methods and the database developed as part of his PhD thesis (Caban 2023).

Hospital

Important transformations were also taking place in the surrounding hospital-monastic complex of the Knights of the Cross with the Red Star, particularly to the east and north of Saint Matthias Church. Archaeological research has revealed that at least some of the buildings on the southern side of the compound were erected atop layers associated with the earlier cemetery level. This is evidenced by damaged burials discovered during excavations, including a double grave containing two adult males and clusters of disarticulated human bones (Kwiatkowska 2006). Ceramic pottery fragments recovered from this context date back to the first half of the 13th century (Buśko *et al.* 2003, p. 18). Among these buildings, there was a long building, approximately 30 m by 10 m large, located east of Saint Matthias Church, and a compact group of three buildings located north of the church. All these structures were erected using faced brick in a two-stretcher bond and the excavations intending to unearth their foundations cut through the aforementioned cultural layers. It should be noted that the church and the long building that was situated to the east of it differed from the others due to the use of cross buttresses in the corners and their combination into a single compositional layout that was subordinated to the east-west axis of the church (Fig. 10). The Order of the Crusaders with the Red Star was distinguished by its ability to quickly adapt the buildings entrusted to them for their own purposes, which is reflected in the flexible approach to spatial and functional planning of their Wrocław convent (Vlček *et al.* 1997, pp. 376–378, 649–651; Starnawska 1999, pp. 118–127).

The oldest northern buildings were devoid of buttresses and although irregular, their layout referred to some extent to the functional and spatial layout of monasteries where the eastern and northern wings would have contained such rooms as the chapter house, refectory, and fraternity. If this was indeed the case, then the so-called sacristy should rather be identified as part of the cloister or porch connecting the monastery to the church. In this situation, the impressive profiled offset portal with little columns could have been located in the northern wall of the body or the chancel, leading to the cloister. Based on the current state of knowledge, however, we are unable to identify its exact location and based on graphic documentation, it was assumed that it was located in the place where the northern transept was added in later phases.

Conclusion

The curia of Duchess Anna may be understood as a transitional form of a residence, bridging the gap between early Piast palatia and the later, more fortified ducal and royal castles of the High and Late Middle Ages. Its evolution reflects broader

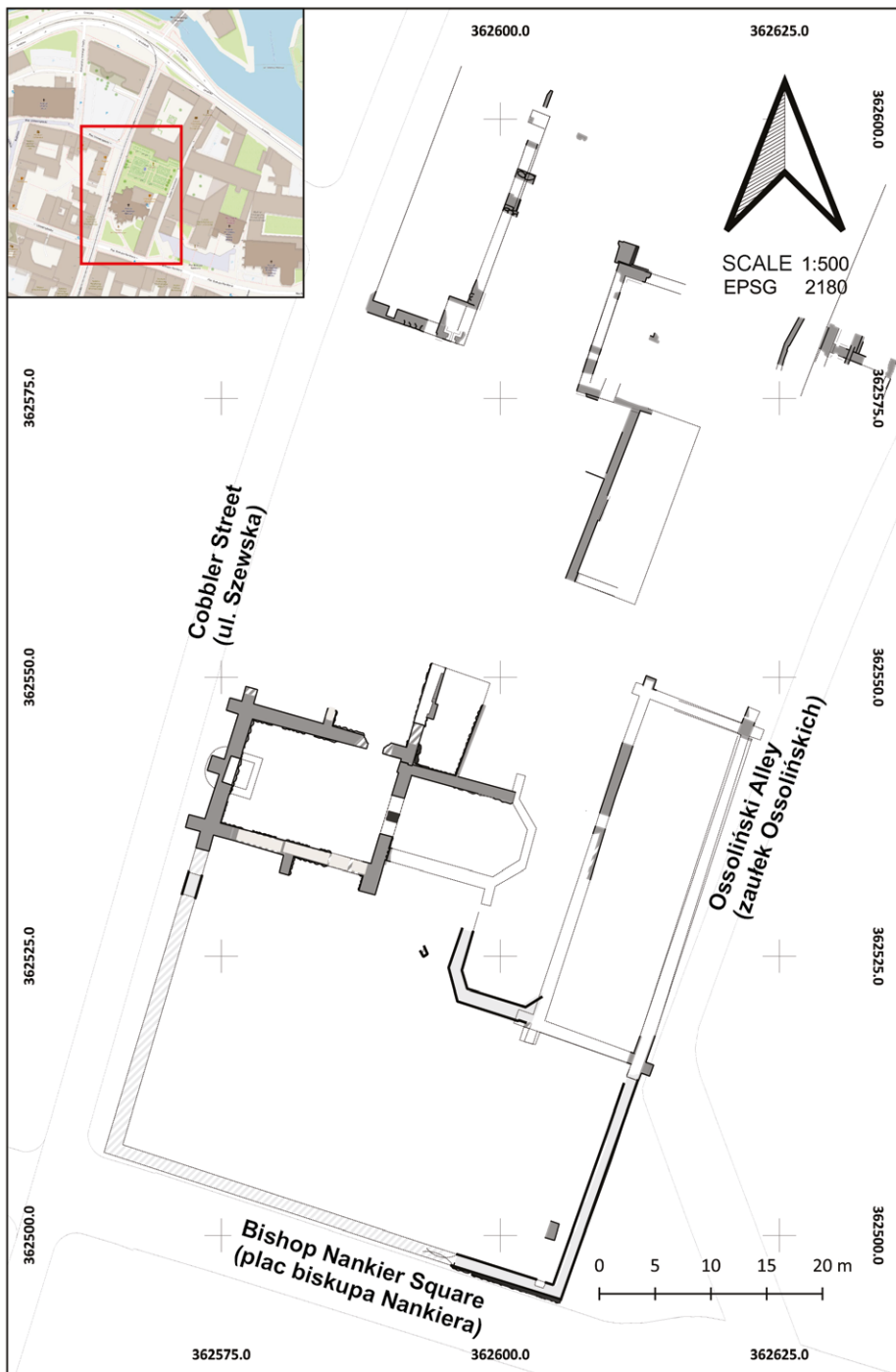


Fig. 10. Plan of the preserved remains of the monastic complex of the Knights of the Cross with the Red Star and Saint Matthias Church in Wrocław by the end of the 13th century, with hypothetical reconstructions of buildings overlaid on the modern urban layout. The inset map indicates the location within the city (developed by R. Biel)



Fig. 11. Saint Matthias Church, condition as of 2018 (photo by R. Biel)

patterns observed in Central European elite dwellings, where administrative, defensive, and ceremonial requirements were repeatedly reshaped in response to changing political and urban conditions. Although historical references to a “ruined brick tower” might suggest that Saint Matthias Church occupies the site of this earlier structure, identifying them as one and the same continues to pose problems. While some documents suggest that the widow’s curia associated with Duchess Anna extended to the vicinity of the tower, its exact extent and location remain the subject of scholarly debate. One of the hypotheses proposed in recent research even places a certain curia on the opposite side of Rycerska Street. Nevertheless, archaeological findings indicate that the relics of the pre-church building extend both north and south of the present church footprint, though the extent of these remains is not yet

fully understood. Edmund Małachowicz was one of the most prominent advocates of the hypothesis that Saint Matthias originally functioned as a ducal chapel, suggesting its construction even before 1241 based on its formal similarities to Saint Elizabeth Church and Saint Mary Magdalene Church, both dated to the first third of the 13th century (Małachowicz 1994). However, he lacked access to more recent archaeological discoveries, which significantly alter the interpretation of this site. While Małachowicz placed the remnants of the ducal court and the so-called ruined tower east of the church, excavations have since revealed that at least one earlier structure was situated directly beneath Saint Matthias Church.

It also appears that the structure predating Saint Matthias Church was likely destroyed during the Mongol invasion of 1241. Afterward, the cleared remains were overlaid with an earthen fill, and in front of the future site of the church a cemetery was established. This burial ground may have included victims of the invasion, potentially even companions of Duke Henry, whose own remains were interred in the crypt of the nearby Franciscan Church of Saint James. In the founding of Saint Matthias Church, it is plausible that the Piasts envisaged a gallery tower, thereby both sanctifying the cemetery and establishing a court chapel designed to accommodate elite patronage. Numerous analogies with Silesian churches featuring gallery towers, such as Pogwizdów or the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Vincent Church in Olbin, further support this hypothesis, highlighting the widespread presence of such architectural solutions in knightly and ducal foundations of the region. Subsequently, an elongated palace was erected to the east, at a right angle to the church's axis (now the Old Parsonage). In 1253, all grants were finally confirmed to the Military Order of the Red Star, who had already been present in Wrocław and had been running Saint Elizabeth's Hospital since at least 1248⁶. The other hospital and monastery buildings, the relics of which were discovered north of the church, probably date back to that time.

In the third quarter of the 13th century, the curia of Duchess Anna began to lose its status as an autonomous ducal seat, a process linked to wider transformations in political authority and urban structures. The foundation of the New Town in 1263 and the increasing autonomy of the burgher community led to the progressive integration of ducal lands into the city's administrative structure. The 1261 foundation charter explicitly mentions conflicts over ducal slaughterhouses and gardens, indicating a struggle between ducal authority and urban governance (Młynarska-Kaletynowa 1986, pp. 100–101). Despite the recent progress, the precise function, extent, and dating of the earlier structure beneath Saint Matthias Church remain only partially understood (Fig. 12). Further archaeological surveys could clarify the scope of the buildings and their original function.

⁶ As we know from the document of the bishop of Wrocław Thomas I (Sub. 1977, no. 350, p. 221; more in Starnawska 1999; Słoń 2000).

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