

Who was Jeremias Joseph Knechtel?

A few Remarks about an Unknown Baroque Painter from Bohemia¹

Emilia Kłoda / e-mail: emiliakloda@gmail.com
Institute of History, University of Wrocław, Poland

Kłoda, E. (2016). Who was Jeremias Joseph Knechtel? Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal 8/1, 65–76.

Jeremias Joseph Knechtel came from Česká Kamenice. Having moved to Legnica around 1700, Knechtel obtained city rights and became the guild member there. When he applied for the post of the court painter in Prague in 1730, he hoped his career would blossom closer the center of the Habsburg monarchy. In 1735 Christian Müller got the honored title and Knechtel's dream was never fulfilled.

Nowadays there are 180 known works by the Master from Legnica. The paintings executed during the "baroquisation" of the Jesuit church in Świdnica (1700–1720) are typical for Knechtel's early work and illustrate the Prague inspirations in his style. In the Knechtel's later works the dynamic narration and the analogies to Czech art are reduced at the expense of the devotional depictions of individual saints or the subtle scenes illustrating the Life of Mary.

Knechtel worked for Jesuits, Franciscans, Benedictines, Cistercians and Augustinians. Cistercian abbot Geyer was one of the most important patrons of the artist. Knechtel executed the cycle of the Fictional Portraits of the Piast Dukes of Silesia (1720) for him.

The master from Legnica was also inspired by the works of the Michael Leopold Willmann. Two cycles of the Stations of the Cross by Knechtel's workshop are based on the copperplates designed by Willmann. The painter worked for the noble families. Most of them were Habsburg-oriented Catholics, with one exception: August von Uechteritz. In 1735 he commissioned works by Knechtel for the protestant church in Giebuttów.

Key words: *Jeremias Joseph Knechtel; Baroque Painter; Bohemia*

¹ This article is the summary of the few years' research about life and work of Jeremias Joseph Knechtel. The research was carried mainly by the Institute of Art History at the Wrocław University and it was crowned by the exhibition of painter's works in the Muzeum Miedzi in Legnica. The publication accompanying the exhibition contains the Master's biography, articles about his technique and milieu and complete catalogue of his paintings. Koziet, A., Kłoda, E. (Eds.) (2012). *Jeremias Joseph Knechtel* (exh. cat.). Legnica, Muzeum Miedzi. At the moment the research about the painter is supported by the project *The Baroque Painting in Silesia* financed by The Ministry of Science and Higher Education through The National Programme for the Development of Humanities. The research is also co-financed by EU within The European Social Fund.

When the court painter of Prague, Petr Keck, died in 1730, artists started to apply for the prestigious post. On the 7th of May 1730 the court writer Johann Heinrich Dieneber had been asked to prepare an evaluation of the candidates. Among the nominees there was a painter called Knechtel, who had boasted about his portraits and numerous commissions from the Czech nobility. Dieneber criticized Knechtel's paintings, but he also admitted that he "saw almost nothing of his art-pieces apart from a few copies" and "master showed us a little of his work."² Knechtel wasn't the only one applying for the court position. The other candidates were: Frantz Anton Müller, an apprentice from Venzel Lorentz Reiner's workshop, Paul Friedrich Fahrenschohn (1677–1740), an artist from Chomutov, and Johann Cajetan Mons. Dieneber favourably rated Müller's paintings saying "from what I saw, Müller is greater than Knechtel in artistry, and he also invents and creates beautiful landscapes and narrative scenes by himself (...) and he paints them with fair composition using the fine brush."³ Müller was also the student of Reiner, who was considered the best artist in Prague at that time. His knowledge about cleaning the old paintings was another important advantage. Fahrenschohn was described by the court writer as "a good, honest man, painter as well as an architect of Illuminations and Castor Doloris."⁴ Dieneber ranked Mons last among the artists because he had never seen any of his paintings. The evaluation prepared in May 1730 was not the ultimate judgement. There were new candidates: Jan Jindřich Schégl and Antonín František Hampisch. The court officials could not make the final decision, and the prestigious post of court painter in Prague remained vacant.⁵

Even though Dieneber used in his evaluation the name Johann, the painter Knechtel can be identified as the Master Jeremias Joseph Knechtel (1679–1650). He was born in Bohemia and lived in Legnica in Silesia. During the first half of the 18th century there was no other painter called

² "Hr: Knechtel aber (...) nur ein paar Copien / von Seine Kunst sehen Lassen"; "Von Knechtel aber hab. / nichts als ein paar Copeyen gesehen". – The archive of the Prague Castle, Dvorní stavební úřad collection, sign: HBA 502 (letter of 7 March 1730).

³ "so viel ich gesehen so guth d Erste Nahmens Frantz Muller dem 2te Johan Knechtel in der Kunst wirth uber treffen, auch Inventirt und machet d selbe hubste Landschafft und Historien Bield (...) und fuhret solcher auch selbsten eine hubste stellung und feine freune Pinsell". – *Ibidem*.

⁴ "ein gutter ehrlich man, welcher sich auch shon vormacher bey ferichtung von schadener Castrum Dolorid und Illuminationen". – *Ibidem*.

⁵ Kunešová, J. (2007). *Život a dílo dvorního malíře Františka Antonína Müllera (1693–1753)* (MA thesis). Olomouc: UP, pp. 11–12; Novotný, A. (1947). *Z Prahy doznívajícího baroka 1730–1740*. Praha: Atlas, pp. 91–92.

Knechtel, whose position was high enough, to have had such aspirations. Moreover, among scholars there is no agreement about the Knechtel's first name. The 19th century chronicles and historical descriptions of Silesian sacral buildings give only the surname of the painter. In the 20th century the scholars started to use names Jeremias, Johann, Ignaz or the ambiguous initials J. J. The explanation for that situation is the existence of many artists from the Knechtel family. The scholars assigned some paintings by the master from Legnica as the work of other members of Knechtel's family. Jeremias Josephs's nephew Johann Ignaz is a good example of this. He was born in Żagań, where he probably studied in his uncle's workshop in Legnica and in 1729 he started an independent carrier in nearby town Świdnica. Many scholars attribute Jeremias Josephs's works to him.⁶

All misleading information could be corrected thanks to existing documents from the 17th and 18th century. Jeremias Joseph Knechtel was baptised on the 11th of May 1679 in Šelty near Česká Kamenice. His father Georg Anton was also a painter.⁷ Having moved to Legnica around 1700, Jeremias Joseph Knechtel obtained city rights and became the guild member there in 1703. A year later he got married with the Burgomaster's daughter Maria Eleonora Blancke.⁸ The wedding took place in Żagań, but the married couple settled down in Legnica, where the painter led his workshop. The newcomer from Bohemia had no problems with adjusting to the society in Legnica. The godparents of his children were high officials and the city elite representatives.⁹ The artist became the grandmaster and the guild's jury very quickly. Knechtel was an active burgher as one of the twelve members of the municipal council (*Zwölfer*).¹⁰ However, the Master was aware of the fact, that Legnica was a small provincial city in Silesia.

⁶ Kłoda, E. (2012). Zamiast wstępu: odkrywanie Jeremiasa Josepha Knechtla. In Koziel, A., Kłoda, E. (see note 1), pp. 9–14.

⁷ "George Knechtel Richtter undt Mahler in Schelt. sein Weib Eva ein sohnlein getauft: Jeremias, Pathen: George Zuncke Ober. Tobias Zuncke. Eva George Heydin". – State Regional Archives Litoměřice, Sbirka matrik Severočeského kraje collection, sign. L67/2 (Římskokatolický farní úřad Kamenický Šenov, Matriky, 2, 1671–1714).

⁸ "Haben sich aussgebitten lassen der kunstlichen hh. Jeremias Knechtel Mahler allhier der hh. Georgy Antony Knechtel Oberichtes zu Schelten in Böhmen hhl. Sohn mit der edlÿ jungfl. Maria Eleonora der hh. Joh Jacobi von Blanckes Burgermeister zu Sagan elh. Tochte. Diese sindl zu Sagan getraut worden". – The Archdiocesan Archive in Wrocław, Księgi metrykalne collection, sign. 23 (Liegnitz, kathol. Pfarrei: Trauungsbuch, 1, 1659–1718).

⁹ The Archdiocesan Archive in Wrocław, Księgi metrykalne collection, sign. 23 (Liegnitz, kathol. Pfarrei: Taufersbuch, 1, 1659–1718).

¹⁰ The State Archive in Wrocław – Legnica branch, Akta miasta Legnicy, before Prussia collection, sign. 4 (Denkwürdigkeiten der Stadt Liegnitz).

When he wrote the letter to the Prague court in 1730, he hoped that his career would further blossom closer the centre of the Habsburg monarchy. In 1735 the Prague officials finally reached an agreement and Christian Müller got the honoured title of the court painter.¹¹ Knechtel's dream of Prague was never fulfilled. Nevertheless, the court writer Dieneber was right, when he wrote, that it was impossible to evaluate the painter's oeuvre after seeing a few works. Knechtel was an uncommonly fruitful artist. Apart from portraits he executed many works for the nobility, Catholic Church, Silesian cities and even Protestants. His successful career ended with his death in 1750. How did the newcomer adjust to the local community and painter's guild in such a short time? Why was his career so quick and fortunate? What was the reason for the constant and enormous interest in his work in Silesia? Was his position high enough to allow him to candidate for the post of the Prague court painter? Let the paintings themselves answer all those questions.

Nowadays there are 160 known and preserved works by the Master from Legnica and there are at least 20 paintings that are considered lost or destroyed. As Andrzej Kozieł noted, Knechtel was one of the most productive baroque painters in Silesia. It seems probable the artist achieved such effectiveness by applying Michael Willman's production methods in his workshop in Legnica. Just like the "Silesian Apelles" in Lubiąż, Knechtel used graphic prototypes or repeated his own compositions; hence the conceptual phase was much shortened.¹² It is hard to say to what extent the apprentices were involved in the work. Judging from the unequal quality of the signed pieces one can assume, that the Master often relied on his apprentices. This article describes a few Knechtel's paintings which are perfect examples of his working methods, his style and its origins.

The works executed during the "baroquisation" of the Jesuit St. Stanislaus and St. Wenceslaus church in Świdnica around 1700 are the earliest of Knechtel's commissions in Silesia.¹³ The transformation of the gothic church into the pompous baroque spectacle was an important element of the counter-reformatory Jesuit strategy. The majority of the artists working in Świdnica came from Bohemia. They were church servitors (craftsmen with special privileges, working legally for the Church

¹¹ Kunešová, S. (see note 5), p. 12.

¹² Kozieł, A. Jeremias Joseph Knechtel a malarstwo barokowe na Śląsku. In Kozieł, A., Kłoda, E. (see note 1), pp. 109–110.

¹³ Hoffmann, H. (1930). *Die Jesuiten in Schweidnitz. Zur schlesischen Kirchengeschichte*, 3, p. 154.

officials without any obligations to the city guilds) or artist-monks, who worked only for their own order.¹⁴ It is possible, that Knechtel came to Silesia as a Jesuit servitor, devoted to the counter-reformation. He worked for that monastic order all his life, preparing paintings and frescoes for the abbeys in Głogów, Otyń, Twardocice and Żagań.

Within the years 1700–1720 Knechtel created many canvases for the Jesuit church in Świdnica.¹⁵ The *Saint Wenceslaus has pagan idols destroyed to build Christian churches* (1720) is one of them [1]. It hangs in the main nave along with the other scenes from the lives of the church patrons: St. Stanislaus and St. Wenceslaus. The art-piece is typical for Knechtel's early work and illustrates the Prague inspirations in his style. The picture is influenced by a painting by Karl Škréta the Elder, the greatest Czech painter in the 17th century (1641, The Archdiocesan Museum, Olomouc). The inverted composition indicates that Knechtel used the engraving based on the original painting by the Master from Prague.¹⁶ The artist from Legnica didn't copy Škréta's work without adding his own ideas and changes. For example, moving the scene of demolishing the pagan idols from the far background to the front made the whole piece more dramatic and interesting. The painter added the heavenly clouds with cherubs and the new church under construction. On one hand *Saint Wenceslas has pagan idols destroyed to build Christian churches* repeats the composition by Škréta, while on the other hand it exemplifies Knechtel's reliance on the style of his probable teacher – Johann Georg Heinsch even though no written documents from Heinsch's workshop were found to prove this hypothesis. Sufficient evidence exists, however, to argue that there is a connection between those two artists. They are both known for their predilection for overcrowded scenes with painstaking study of details and highly expressive, theatrical gestures that are derived from the Rudolphine

¹⁴ Galewski, D. (2007). Kościół Jezuitów w Świdnicy. In Kapustka, M., Kozieł, A., Oszczanowski, P. (eds.) *Śląsk i Czechy. Wspólne drogi sztuki. Materiały konferencji naukowej dedykowane Profesorowi Janowi Wrabecowi*. Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis, Historia Sztuki, 24, pp. 249–266.

¹⁵ Kozieł, A., Kłoda, E. (see note 1), pp. 190–198.

¹⁶ The Škréta's painting was a part of the larger cycle intended for the cloister of the Augustinian Monastery in Zderaz. The graphic prototype was created by the Augustinian Henricus a Sancto Petro. It comes from the *Life of St. Wenceslaus* (1643–1644) written by Aegidius a S. Joanne Baptista, the Abbot of the Augustinian Monastery in Prague. Dobalová, S. (2010). The St. Wenceslas Cycle and Other Paintings for the Zderaz Monastery. In Stolarová, L., Vlnas, V. (eds.). *Karel Škréta. His work and his era* (exh. cat.). Praha: Národní galerie, pp. 156–163.

Mannerism.¹⁷ There are also similarities in their painting methods, for example the clear contours, sharp, contrasting colours and smooth, glossy surface.¹⁸

It is evident, that the commissions for Świdnica Abbey differ from the Knechtel's later work. The dynamic narration and the visible analogies to Czech art are reduced at the expense of the devotional depictions of individual saints or the calm, subtle scenes illustrating the Life of Mary. The piece *St. Ann teaching St. Mary* (The side altar in the Franciscan Church in Złotoryja) is a good example of that kind of composition. The Master from Legnica signed the painting in the bottom left corner (*Jer: Jos: Knechtel Pinxit / Liegnitz Tempore 1724.*). The elements such as the gentle, girlish figure of Mary reading and the caring gesture of St. Anna hugging her daughter create the atmosphere of familial warmth and lovingness. Compared with the painting *Saint Wenceslaus has pagan idols destroyed to build Christian churches*, the piece from Złotoryja is less dynamic both in structure and colouring. The reddish bole from underpainting, visible through thin upper layer, underlines the warm hues in the composition. Nevertheless, one can still find resemblances to Heinch's work. The way Knechtel depicted the strings of pearls in the hair and on the hands of St. Mary (as if each pearl was an individual spark of reflected light) is remarkably similar in structure to the necklaces painted by the Prague Master. The pearls as well as the roses falling from the sky and the fruits on the table have something in common: due to the perfectly smooth surface of the painting they all look like scintillating, polished jewellery. In some paintings this effect is emphasized by the relief of metal applications in the shape of the crown, enriched with gold-plating and gems. Knechtel created many similar compositions with the lyrical, cloying atmosphere.¹⁹ It seems probable, that the Master from Legnica gained the patron's trust by the repetitiousness of his works and his glossy, highly finished style.

The paintings in Złotoryja were commissioned by a Franciscans Monastery. It should also be noted, that Knechtel worked not only for Jesuits, but also for Franciscans, Benedictines, Cistercians and

¹⁷ Šroněk, M. (2006). *Jan Jiří Heinsch. Malíř barokní zbožnosti (1674–1712)*. Praha: ÚDU AV Ř, pp. 143–148.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 108–109.

¹⁹ The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne in the filial St. Nicholas church in Stanów and the filial St. Bartholomew church in Uciechów, *St. Ann teaching St. Mary* in the parish St. Nicholas church in Jelenin and the parish Assumption of Mary church in Słup, The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the parish St. John the Baptist church in Legnica.

Augustinians. Cistercian abbot Dominicus Geyer (1662–1726) was one of the most important patrons of the artist. Knechtel executed the cycle of the Fictional Portraits of the Piast Dukes of Silesia dated to about 1720 for him.²⁰ The paintings were probably hanging in one of the representative chambers in the monastery and they all are characteristic for Knechtel's painting style. The portraits are based on the same compositional scheme, which will here be demonstrated on the one painting *Henry II The Pious*. The Piast Duke (1196/1202–1241) is often described in the historical documents as the *miles christianus* – the defender of the Christian religion. In the picture, Henry the Pious is shown full-length, as he spears the Tatar and tramples on him victoriously. Under the portrait there is a cartouche describing his life and his death during the battle of Legnica (9 IV 1241).²¹ The scene behind the Duke depicts legendary rain of fire that had plagued the Mongolian army camp near Wrocław. It was believed that the Blessed Ceslaus's prayers brought the rain on the infidels.²² The composition and the use of colours reflect Knechtel's Prague inspirations. The flexuous, unnatural pose of the figure and the cool, metallic blue in the centre are derived from the Bartholomeus Spranger painting *The triumph of Wisdom* (around 1595, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie, Vienna). Knechtel's works generally combine strange colour contrasts with disproportional figures and complex poses, and for that reason Knechtel can be considered the heir to Rudolphine Mannerism. The striking similarity to the Spranger colour palette is a satisfying indication to argue that the artist was educated in Prague, where he saw the original Spranger paintings there.

The master from Legnica was also inspired by the works of the best Silesian baroque painter, Michael Leopold Willmann. Two cycles of the Stations of the Cross executed in Knechtel's workshop are based on the copperplates designed by Willmann. Bernhard Rosa, an abbot from Krzeszów, commissioned the engravings, which were published in 1682 in Kłodzko, as the illustrations for the Passion Prayer Book. At the same

²⁰ Of at least 11 paintings, only 10 survive today: 8 portraits of the Dukes and 2 portraits of the Duchesses. The cycle chronologically starts with Władystaw II the Exile, the originator of the Silesian Dukes line (1105–1159), and ends with Bolko II the Small – the last independent Piast Duke of Silesia (1309/1312–1368).

²¹ *Henricus Pius Dux Liegnic: Avus Fundatoris. / Uxor Anna Ottocari I. Regis Boëmiæ Fillia. / [...]is a Tartaris ... Aprilis 9.*

²² Sebzda, B., Kłoda, E. (2012). Barokowy cykl portretów Piastów śląskich z dawnego klasztoru Cystersów w Krzeszowie. In *Wokół Karkonoszy i Gór Izerskich. Sztuka baroku na śląsko-czesko-lużyckim pograniczu*. Edited by Andrzej Kozieł. Jelenia Góra: Muzeum Karkonoszkie, pp. 157–169.

time the complex of chapels containing Stations of the Cross were built near the Krzeszów Abbey. The Prayer book was created as a spiritual guide in the Passion of the Christ. The Willmann's engravings were also released separately, which led to their enormous popularity. The compositions designed by "Silesian Apelles" were frequently used by other artists (Knechtel among them) and they became the most common way to depict the Passion of the Christ in Silesia.²³ Nevertheless, the Master from Legnica strongly modified the original compositions; hence his *The Stations of the Christ* are remarkable. The master from Legnica selected separate figures, scenes and gestures from the copperplates and combined them anew, using his own, slick manner, utterly different from the rough, impasto style of "Silesian Apelles". The eighth Station of the Cross from the St. Jacob the Elder Church in Sobótka (1721) is a good example of that procedure.²⁴ The painting illustrates the moment, when Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem. In general the composition repeats Willman's engraving. Jesus is depicted in the middle, as he bears the Cross and turns to the women on the left. There is also the landscape with Golgotha, but the painter reduced it to the top right corner. The figure of the Roman soldier in the foreground however is derived from Spranger's *Resurrection of Jesus* (1575–1580, Strahov Premonstratensian Monastery, Prague). One can find another interesting detail on Knechtel's eighth Station of the Cross. At the bottom of the canvas, beside the artist's signature, there is a coat of arms revealing the commissioner's identity. Knechtel executed his work for the family Flad von Ehrenschild. Considering that the family had no lands or interests near Sobótka, one can assume, that the whole cycle was intended for some other church.²⁵

The Master from Legnica worked not only for the family Flad von Ehrenschild, but also for many other noblemen such as Hans Anton von Schaffgotsch, Anton Wilhelm von Almesloe, August von Uechtritz, Maria Eleonora von Schweidnitz and the families von Nostitz, von Hatzfeld and von Reibnitz. Most of them were Silesian, Habsbourg-oriented Catholics, with one exception: August von Uechteritz. He was a member of

²³ In the Prayer Book there are 32 copperplates designed by Melchior Küssel, Georg Andreas Wolfgang The Elder and Johann Jacob von Sandart. Kozieł, A. (2006). Angelus Silesius, Bernhard Rosa i Michael Willmann, czyli sztuka i mistyka na Śląsku w czasach baroku. *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis*, 2872, *Historia Sztuki*, 23, pp. 203–214.

²⁴ Kozieł, A., Kłoda, E. (see note 1), pp. 173–179.

²⁵ Sękowski, R. (2003). *Herbarz szlachty śląskiej. Informator genealogiczno-heraldyczny*, II: D–G. Katowice, p. 172; Blažek, C. (1977). Der abgestorbene Adel der preußischen Provinz Schlesien und der Oberlausitz. In *J. Siebmacher's grosses Wappenbuch*, XVII: *Die Wappen des schlesischen Adels*. Neustadt an der Aish, pp. 79–80.

a protestant family, which had lands in Upper Lusatia, beyond the borders of Silesia. In 1735 he commissioned two works by Knechtel for the main altar in the protestant church in Giebuttów (now the catholic Michael Archangel church).²⁶ The paintings in Giebuttów (*The Resurrection* and *The Ascension of Jesus*) are unique in the artist's oeuvre. It is the only existing evidence that he worked for Protestants. What is even more interesting is that the canvases are placed in the monumental architectonic altar, which reflects the baroque forms created by the artists working for the counter-reformation. The paintings themselves do not differ from the works executed for the catholic churches. In *The Resurrection* Jesus is depicted in the middle as he rises from the tomb. The vivid red of his robe dominates the composition. His dynamic, flexuous pose reminds the Mannerist flamboyant figures. Around the Christ there is a heavy mass of swirling clouds. An almost identical Jesus figure can be seen in the Knechtel's painting *The Holy Trinity* commissioned by the Jesuits (1732, the main altar in the St. Peter and St. Paul Church in Twardocice). It is astonishing that the artist used the same composition and painting methods in art-pieces of such different theories and intentions.

Undoubtedly Knechtel could adjust for the particular commissions. He never limited his work to one field and his workshop was very enterprising. But why are there just a few works which can prove that? When one narrows the analysis to the still existing paintings, it would seem that Knechtel was only a counter-reformatory artist. According to the archival documents, the painter executed many works for profane interiors, including many portraits. His workshop took part in decorating the Knight Academy in Legnica and town halls in Legnica and Bolestawiec. Dieneber's note from the Prague archive is one of many pieces of evidence that Knechtel was a portraitist. Unfortunately, all described art-pieces are missing or destroyed. The engraving *Portrait of the Pastor Gottfried Kleiner* by Florian Bertholomaeus Comaeus Strachowsky, based on the Knechtel's painting, is the only work that gives us the notion of how those portraits could look like.²⁷ The explanation for this is simple. The sacral buildings were less devastated throughout the centuries and the sacral paintings in churches remain untouched. The portraits and profane pictures, usually smaller and thus easier to

²⁶ *Słownik geografii turystycznej Sudetów II. Pogórze Izerskie (2003)*. Edited by Marek Staffa. Wrocław: I-BiS, p. 200; Brzezicki, S., Nielsen, Ch., Grajewski, G., Popp, D. (Eds.) (2006). *Zabytki sztuki w Polsce. Śląsk*. Warszawa: DiG, p. 258.

²⁷ Koziół, A., Kłoda, E. (see note 1), pp. 236–237.

transport, changed places and owners. During the Second World War lots of art-pieces were destroyed or transferred abroad. Hence, it is hard to verify what had happened to them.

The majority of surviving paintings were executed for the monasteries. In the last decade of his life, Knechtel worked for the Augustinian Monastery in Żagań. He created art-pieces for the Żagań Abbey and for the smaller churches under the Augustinian jurisdiction.²⁸ Among them there is one outstanding hagiographic cycle painted on the choir stalls in the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Żagań. The 18 scenes from the life of St. Augustine were commissioned by Simon Thaddeus Rihl, the Augustinian Abbot. The painter put signatures (*Jeremias Jose: Knech... / pinxit 1747*) on two paintings from the cycle: *The Baptism* and *The Death of St. Augustine*.²⁹ The painted decoration of the choir stalls is one Knechtel's best works. It combines a perfect dynamic narration with a slight change in the painting method. The intricate story of life and work of St. Augustine is based on the autobiographical *Confessions* and *The Golden Legend* by Jacob de Voragine. The compositions are partially derived from the graphic cycle *Vita S. Norberti canonicorum praemonstratensium patriarchæ* by Theodore Galle published in Antwerp in 1622. Although Knechtel used some figures and elements from Galle's copperplates, his works remain original ideas permeated by his specific painting method. Knechtel's figures are in characteristically complex, theatrical poses that overfill the small canvases. The fictional architecture painted in brown and grey tones creates the monochromatic background for the narrations. The vivid red and blue clothes of St. Augustine build the contrast which dominates almost every composition. The Żagań cycle is an interesting example of the late artist's style. The slick, scintillating manner seems to evolve into a freer style with the visible brushwork. The paintings on the choir stalls are viewed at close range; hence one can fully admire the artistry and beauty of the cycle. The thin brush-strokes,

²⁸ Ibidem, pp. 182–187.

²⁹ The canvases are placed on the stalls in the chronological order: 1. *Birth of St. Augustine*, 2. *Education of St. Augustine*, 3. *Augustine leaves the church* 4. *His Mother St. Monica drives him away from her table*, 5. *St. Monica prays for her son*, 6. *St. Augustine becomes an advocate*, 7. *St. Augustine becomes a teacher*, 8. *St. Augustine listens to the St. Ambrose's homily in Milan*, 9. *St. Monica follows her son to Milan*, 10. *St. Augustine meditates and regrets his sinful life*, 11. *The Baptism of St. Augustine*, 12. *St. Augustine travels to Africa*. *St. Monica dies in Ostia*, 13. *St. Augustine is ordained as priest*, 14. *St. Augustine becomes a bishop*, 15. *St. Augustine fights with the heresy* 16. *St. Augustine establishes the Augustinian Order*, 17. *St. Augustine writes his testament*, 18. *Death of St. Augustine*. Only 16 canvases are original. The paintings number 16 and 17 were 16 and 17 were replaced with 19th century copies.

the subtle hues of grey, brown and violet and the carefully applied gleams create the finest art-piece in the Knechtel's oeuvre.³⁰

In the last decade of his life, the Master from Legnica created nothing comparable to the Scenes from the life of St. Augustine. Moreover, the paintings dating to 1740s alter in quality. Some works are executed in the interesting freer manner with visible brushwork and refined hues. Many paintings however, contain disproportional figures, incorrect composition and distasteful colour contrasts. Both kinds are often signed with the same name, but those of poor quality seem to be executed by the mediocre members of the workshop, without the master's touch. It is probable, that in the late 1740s Knechtel was too old and sick to paint and the apprentices finished all his art-pieces alone. Among them was the artist's granddaughter, Antonia della Vigna. Apparently she helped her old grandfather and organized the production in the workshop. After Knechtel's death she wanted to continue her career as a painter, but she wasn't accepted by the painter's guild in Legnica. She finished the basic education in her grandfather's workshop. After his death, she worked with the Master from Wrocław, Johann Heinrich Kynast, who came to Legnica to paint for the Benedictine Sisters. Still, the painters could not admit the woman into the guild because she couldn't become a wandering journeyman as the rules required. Antonia della Vigna tried to avoid the strict regulations by writing letters to King Friedrich and asking for his protection. Despite that, she never became a guild member. The Masters from Legnica criticised her efforts as inappropriate. A woman in the guild was something unacceptable and compromising.³¹ Eventually she gained the right to work outside the guild and to execute narrative paintings and portraits. In Silesia there was one known work by Vigna, but it has been missing since 2004. It hung in the small church in Jazzkotle near Wrocław. It had Vigna's signature dated with the year 1756. The only existing documentation of the painting is a small black-and-white photograph from the Provincial Heritage Monuments Protection Office in Wrocław. Nevertheless it can easily be seen, that Vigna never achieved her grandfather's artistry and she could be responsible for the mediocre quality of the late paintings created in his workshop.

The exact date of Knechtel's death is known from the he funeral record in the parish register: "1750 25 August † 28 August begraben Liegnitz

³⁰ Koziel, A., Kłoda, E. (see note 1), pp. 220–226.

³¹ Arnold Zum Winkel, Ernstes und heiteres aus dem Leben einer Liegnitzer Innung. *Wir Schlesier* VII, 1926/1927, No 21, pp. 647–648.

Herr Jeremias Knechtel Historien=und Kunst Maler wie auch wohl verordneter Zwolfer und der lubl. Mittels der Maler und Bildhauer Geschworener (...) ist zu dem Franciscanen begraben wurden.”³² The artist is described as a guild’s judge, a member of the city council and, above all, a great painter. The Master from Legnica was a respectable burgher, and an honourable member of the guild. He was appreciated by the wealthy patrons and his workshop became popular in all of Silesia. His rapid career was built on the active membership in the painter’s guild combined with individual commissions for the monasteries. As a guild member, Knechtel executed works for the council and burghers from Legnica – the portraits or the decoration in the Knight Academy and the town hall. The city contracts and portraits helped him to enter the protestant and noble circles. At the same time, Knechtel worked for Jesuits, Benedictines, Cistercians and Augustinians. His career as a counter-reformatory painter could develop quickly, because the Silesian Monasteries were closely connected and often recommended to each other the reliable artists. His workshop produced many large altarpieces with strong ideological content, such as *The Holy Trinity* in the Jesuit church in Twardocice. However it should be noted that Knechtel’s most interesting paintings were intended for the intimate, private devotion, like the canvases on the chair stalls in Żagań or the cycle of the fictional portraits of the Piast Dukes in Krzeszów. The artist’s success was also based on the well-functioning workshop. Knechtel achieved almost everything in Silesia, but his ambition was higher than that. His application for the title of the court-painter in Prague demonstrated his hopes and aspirations. The Master from Legnica dreamt of a great career in Prague, the Capital city of the Bohemian Crown. His candidature was rejected and he stayed in Silesia till the end of his life.

³² The Archive of the National Museum in Wrocław. Erwin Hintze Card Index collection (Silesian Painters), fol. 455.