

Paths to Reality: Remarks on the Glaziers' Workshops Practice in Cracow, c. 1380–1440

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In his analysis of the relationship between stained glass and other forms of the visual arts around 1300, Robert Suckale termed the style of painting of that period, characterised by contrasting colours and dominant position of contour, as 'Glasstil' ('Glass-style'), thus emphasising the leading and style-forming role of stained glass at that time (R. Suckale, 'Glasmalerei im Kontext der Bildkünste um 1300', in *Himmelslicht. Europäische Glasmalerei im Jahrhundert des Kölner Dombaues (1248–1349)*, exh. cat., Cologne, 1998, pp. 73–77). He also advanced a hypothesis that the transformations taking place in art north of the Alps, beginning around 1320–1330 and prompted by impulses coming from Italy, had led – by the mid-fourteenth century – to a change in the existing relationship between various arts. As a result, stained glass lost its dominant position to panel painting, and it was the latter art that had been setting the tone of stylistic solutions ever since. Notwithstanding the fact that Suckale's thesis may be an oversimplification, there is no denying that in the above-mentioned period stained-glass makers had to face an enormous challenge of a tendency to realistically depict the world, brought from the south.

Central-European stained glass is particularly well fitted for exemplifying the above phenomenon. The painting of the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century used soft modelling whose translation into the stained-glass medium was a challenge that required resorting to new solutions. The question I'll try to answer in the proposed paper is: What solutions, with regard to the stained-glass technique, did the glaziers use to satisfy the need of translating the tonal qualities of the new painting into stained glass, and where did these solutions derive from? Tempera panel painting was hardly a suitable model in this respect. Far more appropriate strategies were provided by the, then vigorously developing, drawing techniques and the new and ever more powerful graphic medium. I am going to take a closer look at these relationships, taking as an example the art of the capital of the Polish Kingdom. In Cracow, glaziers, along with painters, wood carvers and gilders belonged to one craftsmen guild, and the role they played in the city's artistic milieu is attested by the fact that in the first half of the fifteenth century glaziers often held the office of the guild's seniors. It must be noted as well that it was in stained glass, and not in panel painting, that more numerous works were produced in Lesser Poland, leaving a testimony to the multiplicity of workshops active there and the variety of relationships they maintained with other regions in Central Europe.