

Maria Bogucka

TOWN HALL AS SYMBOL OF POWER

Changes in the Political and Social Functions of Town Hall in Gdańsk till the End of the 18th Century

The Polish name *ratusz* originates from the German *Rathaus* — “home of the council”, some times also called the “burghers’ house” — *Bürgerhaus*. The institution was strictly connected with the idea of a self-governing urban centre endowed with special rights, that is with the early medieval town. The oldest town halls came into being already in the 12th century, bearing at first the name *domus consulum* (Soest 1120) or *domus civium* (Cologne 1149). In Poland they appeared at least 100–150 years later. When the necessity arose to call meetings at which to discuss the common interests of burghers, it was at first sufficient to have a small room, usually on the first floor above the market hall, in which the merchant laid out their goods and drew up transactions, and in which also the town scales were arranged¹. As the town court also at first had its seat in the town hall it was often called the “court house” (German *Richthaus* or *Dinghaus*)². Located in town halls were also the archives with the most valuable and important urban documents, town’s office, seats of the town guards, sometime also the prison, finally often an inn and pharmacy owned by the city. Apart from the meetings of the town authorities, court hearings and commercial transactions, the town hall rooms (or square in front of the building) saw ceremonies connected with important political events on the town- and countrywide scale such as the rendering of homages, signing of treatises etc. It was here also, in the town hall, that the social life of the rich towns people was concentrated, festivities and banquets were held on the occasion of holidays,

¹ Cf. O. Stiehl, *Das deutsche Rathaus im Mittelalter in seiner Entwicklung geschildert*, Leipzig 1905, pp. 10 ff; J. Spille, *Rathäuser im Rhein — Neckar — Raum bis 1800*. Quellen und Forschungen zur hessischen Geschichte 62, Darmstadt und Marburg 1985, pp. 18 ff.

² O. Stiehl, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

weddings, funerals etc. Thus the town hall was the very centre of life and activities of the town, its main multifunctional headquarters, satisfying various requirements and needs of the burghers. It was not only building, but also, and perhaps even mainly an institution. It was precisely the town hall which fulfilled also an important symbolic function, being a visible sign of the town's autonomy, of its wealth and importance. Hence the situation in the very centre of the town, in the main market or in the main street, as well as the outstanding architecture of the town hall, usually surpassing in size and splendour other urban constructions. Alongside church towers, the town hall towers dominated the panorama of every town and it was here that the great clock was placed to measure time of daily existence, of work and leisure of the town's population.

As from mid-19th century Town Hall of Gdańsk Main City has boasted a wealth of literature, illustrating the interest it awoke³. Its past should, however, be considered against the town's history as a whole, and not just against the legal and political situation of the townspeople only, or against the history of the urban architecture. The past of the Town Hall in Gdańsk constitutes an important part of the urban socio-political history as well as a part of the history of the urban mentality, and it is from this point of view that it will be here analysed.

Up to the close of the 18th century Gdańsk remained an exceptional town, both in the scale of the Polish Commonwealth as well as of the Baltic region, and thus of the whole North-Eastern Europe⁴. It was an extremely dynamic town, attaining a population of 70–1000,000 inhabitants in the first half of the 17th century, this figure being very considerable even in the scale of Western Europe at that time⁵. A great commercial metropolis, economically dominating over the huge Polish hinterland in the 16th–17th centuries⁶, the main partner of Amsterdam in its turnover with the Baltic until

³ Cf. J. C. Schultze, *Danzig und seine Bauwerk*, Danzig 1855; K. Hoberg, *Geschichte und Beschreibung des Rathauses der Rechtstadt Danzig*, Danzig 1857; P. Brandt, *Das rechtstädtische Rathaus zu Danzig*, Danzig 1909; K. Gruber, *Zur Baugeschichte des Rechtstädtischen Rathauses* in: "Ostdeutsche Monatshefte", Vol. 9, 1928, № 6; E. Keyser, *Die Baugeschichte der Stadt Danzig*, Köln-Wien 1972; T. Domagala, *Ratusz Głównego Miasta w Gdańsku w latach 1327–1556*, in: *Sztuka półwyspu Bałtyku (Art on the Baltic Coast)* Warszawa 1978.

⁴ Cf. Jeannin, *L'Europe du Nord-Ouest et du Nord aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, Paris 1969, *passim*.

⁵ Cf. M. Bogucka, *Danzig an der Wende zur Neuzeit*, "Hansische Geschichtsblätter", Jg. 102, 1984, p. 95.

⁶ Cf. S. Hoszowski, *The Polish Baltic Trade in the 15th–18th Centuries*, in: *Poland at the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Stockholm*, Warsaw 1960; M. Bogucka, *Handel zagraniczny Gdańska w pierwszej połowie XVII w. (Gdańsk's Foreign Trade in the First Half of 17th Century)*, Wrocław 1970.

at least the mid- 17th century⁷, and playing the role of an important intermediary in Western Europe — trade⁸, Gdańsk was simultaneously a great centre of industrial production and of handicrafts⁹ as well as of credit operations¹⁰ on a scale incomparable with other towns of the Baltic region as well as of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The ambitions of the Gdańsk burghers and particularly of the ruling elite were tremendous — shaped after the calibre of the town's economy and demography, maybe even surpassing it. Much was written already about Gdańsk's legal and political situation in early modern times. From this extensive literature I shall refer here to W. Czaplński's observations, these probably best defining the character of the town, comparing it to a great feudal lord, to a magnate the typical for such one notions of himself and imperious aspirations¹¹. It certainly had an impact on the structures of Gdańsk's Town Hall.

In the Middle Ages, before the arising of an uniform urban community, Gdańsk had not one but four town halls: alongside the Main and Old Town Halls there were two others: the Young City and Osiek Town Halls¹². The latter two were abolished in the mid- 15th century as rival power centres for the Main Town. The Old Town retained, albeit to a limited extent, its municipal autonomy and thus conserved its seat — a separate Old Town's Hall¹³. Due to the Old Town Council subordination to the Main Town Council, its social and political role was, however, greatly restricted.

Since the mid- 15th century the Main Town Hall was the real centre of power as well as a symbol of the whole township of Gdańsk. The history of the building as well as the history of the institution (and in this study the interest will be focused on the Town Hall as an institution rather than as a building, the latter being a subject of research for the art historians) is, as mentioned, strictly related to the general history of the town and its ruling elite.

⁷ A. E. Christensen, *Durch Trade to the Baltic about 1600*, The Hague 1941.

⁸ Cf. E. Cieślak, *Wybrane problemy handlu gdańskiego w okresie rozbiorów Polski*, "Rocznik Gdański", Vol. 33, 1973, N° 1.

⁹ M. Bogucka, *Gdańsk jako ośrodek produkcyjny od XIV do połowy XVII wieku (Gdańsk As a Production Centre from the 14th to the mid- 17th Century)*, Warszawa 1964.

¹⁰ M. Bogucka, *Les lettres de change et le credit dans les echauges entre Gdańsk et Amsterdam dans la première moitié du XVIII^e siècle Actes du Cinquième Congres International d'Historie Economique*, 1970, Moscow 1976, Vol. IV, pp. 31 ff.

¹¹ W. Czaplński, *Problem Gdańska w czasach Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej*, "Przegląd Historyczny", Vol. 43, 1952, N° 2.

¹² R. Curicke, *Der Stadt Danzig Historische Beschreibung*, Amsterdam–Danzig, 1688, p. 52.

¹³ Cf. J. Habela, *Ratusz staromiejski w Gdańsku (The Old City Town Hall in Gdańsk)*, Wrocław 1975.

The origin of the Main Town Hall reaches back to 13th century. T. Domagała refers it to a document issued by Ladislaus Łokietek (The Elbow) in 1298, in which Łokietek permits the construction of a *pallatium* in Gdańsk, where merchants from Lubeck could store and sell their goods, and matters subject to the town's jurisdiction would be heard. The *pallatium* was also granted the privilege of asylum¹⁴.

This oldest of the Gdańsk town halls, organized after West-European patterns and combining trade with judicial functions, survived the events of 1308 and was extended in 14th century. It worked also after 1346 as in Gdańsk the Lubeck law was replaced by that of Chelmno (the new *locatio* in 1378)¹⁵. The Town Hall in those times performed various socio-economic functions: in one part of its cellar bear was sold, in another the prison was arranged; the ground floor enclosed merchants' hall alongside with the town treasury and scales. On the first floor the Council's and court rooms were located, and in the corner called Great Christopher — the archives¹⁶.

The changes in the town's legal system resulted in the restructuring of the Town Hall. According to the Culm law, the juridical activities were now performed by a separate body — the Bench — for which it was necessary to build a special meeting room. This was carried out by demolishing the old skeleton structure of the first floor and building two new brick-built storeys. As from that time, the Town Hall was a two-storey building with the Council on the first floor and Benchers on the second.

The rapid development of the town demanded further expansion of the Town Hall, the original size of which was suited to the modest needs of a rather small urban community. In the second half of the 14th century Heinrich Ungeradin, master Tidemann and the carpenter Gruwel extended small building according to the instructions of the Council, by hightening — among other things — the formerly low Council's conference room and giving it a more imposing appearance. Most probably at that time the Town Hall got its first tower, this being an important symbolic sign of the growing ambitions of the town authorities.

The Thirteen-Years' War opened the way to a new, splendid period in the history of Gdańsk: the city became Poland's main export centre (about 80% of the Polish Commonwealth's seaborne trade)¹⁷. It enabled its inhabitants to accumulate considerable riches, such as no other town in Poland as

¹⁴ T. Domagała, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 125.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 127.

¹⁷ Cf. S. Hożowski, foot-note N° 6.

well as in the Baltic region could even dream of¹⁸. Polish King Casimir Jagellon favoured Gdańsk with several large privileges¹⁹; they became the basis for the town's exceptional socio-political position in the 16th–18th centuries.

The Thirteen Years' War constituted also an important stage in the development of the Town Hall. As mentioned, the urban community in Gdańsk was united and two rival centres of power — Osiek and New Town — were abolished; the latter virtually ceased to exist. In the years 1454–1457 the Town Hall was made ready for a royal visit: Casimir Jagellon stayed there twice, 1.5.–7.6.1457 and 11.8.–7.8.1468²⁰. As the royal residence the Town Hall was heightened by the third storey, in which the armoury was situated; also reconstructed and heightened was the tower, in 1466 crowned with a spire²¹. In the years 1486–88 the tower's wooden construction was replaced by a brick-built one, the whole being crowned in 1492 with a new slender spire built by Heinrich Hetzel and Michael Ekingier. T. Domagała connects all those improvements with the new special function of the Town Hall which was to house Polish monarchs²². Apart from Casimir Jagellon two Polish Kings: Alexander (25.5.–7.6.1504) and Sigismund "The Old" (17.4.–23.7.1526) also stayed here²³.

Housing of the Polish Kings was a highly important function, worthy of special note, as it illustrates the ties between Gdańsk and Poland's rulers. The residing of the King in the Town Hall was a symbolic gesture of exposing to the ruler the very "heart" and "brain" of the town, as well as demonstration of real subjection of Gdańsk's burghers towards their suzerain. The culminant points of this subjection were the homage paid to Casimir Jagellon by the townspeople of Gdańsk in 1457 as well as the trial of the participants of the urban revolt held by Sigismund "The Old" in 1526, both events unrolling in the front of the Town Hall²⁴. The fact, that Sigismund August while visiting Gdańsk in 1552 (8.7.–1.9.) resided in the home of one of the prominent burghers instead in the Town Hall, was due not to

¹⁸ Cf. M. Bogucka, *Z problematyki zysków w handlu bałtyckim. Handel Gdańsk — Europa Zachodnia 1550–1650 (The Profits in the Baltic Trade. Exchange Gdańsk — Western Europe 1550–1650)*, "Rocznik Gdański", Vol. 40, 1980, N° 1.

¹⁹ E. Cieślak, *Przywileje Gdańska z okresu wojny trzydziestoletniej na tle przywilejów niektórych miast bałtyckich (Gdańsk Privileges from the Times of Thirteen Years' War Against the Background of Privileges of Other Hanzeatic Towns)*, "Czasopismo Prawno — Historyczne", Vol. 6, 1954, N° 1.

²⁰ I. Fabiani-Madeyska, *Gdzie rezydowali w Gdańsku królowie polscy? (Where Did the Polish Kings Reside in Gdańsk)*, Wrocław — Gdańsk, 1976, pp. 8, 116.

²¹ T. Domagała, *op. cit.*, pp. 136–137.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 140.

²³ I. Fabiani-Madeyska, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

²⁴ *Historia Gdańska (The History of Gdańsk)*, Ed. E. Cieślak, Vol. II, Gdańsk 1982, p. 245.

works being carried out in the rear of this building, as some historians try to explain. After Sigismund “The Old” no other Polish king ever held the residence in the Town Hall — and this has certainly a special significance. The aspirations of the Gdańsk’s upper strata had grown to such an extent that from the mid–16th century the relations between the town (or rather its Council) and the central authorities of the state began to be reshaped²⁵. The disputes, often drastic clashes between the Kings Sigismund August, Stephen Batory, Ladislaus IV and Gdańsk constitute the best proof in this field. The fact, that the Town Hall from the mid–16th century became reserved for the use of the town authorities only and was as jealously guarded by them as the power itself, could be seen as the symbol of their exuberantly growing ambitions.

It was during these years, however, that the Town Hall opened its doors, to a certain extent, to the representatives of the urban middle strata. The so-called “Third Order”, established in 1526, was to meet in the Town Hall. This was, after all, the result of not so much the democratic changes in the town’s political system, as the desire of the Council to maintain strict control over the newly formed body. It is enough to acquaint oneself with the formulations on the subject in the work by R. Curicke²⁶ to get the impression that the members of the “Third Order” were to enter the Town Hall not as partners but as subjects of the Council. They were to be called there by the Council and controlled by it as members of the low ranking body; appointed by the Council, they could debate on proposals made by Council only²⁷. Despite the restricted range of its activities (at least in the first stage of its existence) the Council preferred to keep an eye on the “Third Order”, hence probably the decision to hold its meetings in the Town Hall.

Simultaneously the Town Hall doors were definitely closed to all commoners, who yet in the 15th century were able, without great difficulty, to enter this building on various occasions. The most symptomatic fact was the disappearance of any commercial accommodations from the Town Hall. Comparing the Town Hall of Gdańsk with the Town Hall of the neighbouring city of Toruń, a significant difference in their structures and functions can be noted. The impressive dimension of Toruń Town Hall (wings 13–14 m. deep, grouped around a courtyard of the size 28x19 m., a tower 40 m. high)²⁸ also expressed the considerable ambitions of the burghers there. It was, however, a Town Hall in which the ground floor was occupied by

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 579 ff.

²⁶ R. Curicke, *op. cit.*, pp. 52, 123 ff.

²⁷ *Historia Gdańska (The History of Gdańsk)*, Vol. II, pp. 556 ff.

²⁸ O. Stiehl, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

various shops, where one could buy almost everything needed for everyday use — from bread to hatbands; hence the townspeople entered the building daily and unceremoniously. It was here also that various social occasions were still celebrated in the 16th– 18th centuries, such as balls, wedding receptions, funeral banquets etc. Thus a characteristic feature of Toruń Town Hall in early modern times was the continuation of its multifunctionality typical of all European towns halls in the Middle Ages; it did not serve to create barriers between the town authorities and town inhabitants, but rather contributed to strengthen common social bonds and ties between them.

In Gdańsk the medieval multifunctional character of the Main City Town Hall was gradually limited in the 16th– 18th centuries. The barrier between the town authorities and common burghers was successfully erected by several material and psychological means. Not only did trade disappear from the Town Hall building; already in the mid– 15th century social life of the richer circles was transferred to the neighbouring (equally exclusive) the so-called Artus Court. The construction of a separate Arsenal at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries resulted in the transfer of the arms stores from the Town Hall to this building; only some small stocks of arms remained in Town Hall for tactical and strategic reasons. The “everyday” judicial practice also disappeared from the Town Hall. As from about 1530 justice sittings of the Bench took place in the Artus Court, later (1549) the Council purchased a separate house near the Artus Court for this purpose²⁹. In 1712 the Benchers moved to the new building adjoining Artus Court (Długi Targ no 43)³⁰. The Town Hall prison was retained in rudimentary form only, probably for psychological reasons. Prisoners in the 16th– 18th centuries were put permanently in the so-called Prison Tower (near the High Gate) where also the pillory, removed from the Town Hall, was located in 1604³¹.

According to the plans of the town authorities, the Town Hall was to be a “sacred space” of authority, almost a temple, the seat and symbol of the town’s highest power. It is worth to recall that the Council of Gdańsk at that time began to call itself a Senate, according to old, distinguished Roman tradition. The limitation of old utilitarian functions and banishing from the Town Hall of all daily, “trivial” activities could, of course, as some old studies did, be explained by the shortage of space. It was, however, in the mid– 16th century, that two great fires (1550 and 1556) destroyed the old, cramped Gothic building and thus opened the possibility of rebuilding and

²⁹ P. S i m s o n , *Geschichte der Stadt Danzig*, Vol. II, Danzig 1918, p. 175.

³⁰ *Gdańsk, jego dzieje i kultura (Gdańsk, Its History and Culture)*, Warszawa 1969, p. 196.

³¹ R. C u r i c k e , *op. cit.*, p. 60, P. S i m s o n , *op. cit.*, p. 528.

expanding the Town Hall in its new Renaissance shape. The architecture of the new Town Hall was consciously formed by Gdańsk authorities, who were able to spend for this purpose huge sums of money in order to design the construction according to their own wishes.

Famous architects and master-builders from the Netherlands e.g. Wilhelm van den Meer (Barth the Elder), Dirk Daniels, Anthony van Obberghen, were engaged in the construction of the new Renaissance Town Hall. Three new wings which formed an inner courtyard were built on the North side. The Eastern wall from the side of Długi Targ (Long Market) was crowned with an open-work attic and decorated with the coat-of-arms of Poland, Gdańsk and Royal Prussia. In the whole building the small Gothic windows were substituted by large rectangular Renaissance windows. The next centuries added but little to this decor. In the mid-17th century the Town Hall gained a baroque portal, its annex — a second floor. A further storey to the annex was added in the 18th century. In the years 1766–1768 Daniel Eggert completed a new rococo-classicist portal of the main entrance, with coat-of-arms of Gdańsk and rich stonework decoration. This new, splendid Town Hall constituted the dominating accent of the main street of Gdańsk — Long Street. Thanks to a bend of this street the building appeared in full view immediately after one's passing through the so-called Golden Gate — the main entrance to the city. The Town Hall was the most outstanding lay building in the town. Its tall, slim tower overlooked town architecture and was visible from the whole surrounding region. It was embellished by a clock (the measuring of the time was an important attribute of power)³² and a carillon of 15 bells. The summit boasted a gilded figure of the Polish King Sigismund August. This constituted a bow on the part of the town Council to the powerful monarch, whose heavy hand had weighed over Gdańsk several times. It was this King who once imprisoned the Gdańsk mayors and considerably weakened town's position by incorporation of Prussia during the Diet at Lublin in 1569; he also sponsored both of the Karnkowski's Commissions and the so-called Karnkowski's Statutes. Sigismund August certainly knew how to inspire the respect in Gdańsk. His successors to the Polish throne up to August III did not have such achievements. Hence also many efforts were made in Gdańsk to forget that the figure on the Town Hall tower represented Sigismund August: in the second half of the 17th century Reinhold Curicke writes simply of the "gilded figure of a man" at the top of the Town Hall tower³³.

³² Cf. J. Le Goff, *Au Moyen Age: Temps de l'Eglise et temps du marchand*, "Annales ECS", 15/1960 N° 3, pp. 417 ff.

³³ R. Curicke, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

Despite the rebuilding of the Town Hall, its exterior was much more modest than the magnificence of its interior, and this was already noted by the contemporaries³⁴. It is an interesting example of the mentality of the Gdańsk upper strata: with all their pride they disliked exhibiting the wealth. As a further example could serve the testaments of Gdańsk rich burghers, very laconic usually, without revealing the size of the left property and only disposing of the proportions according to which it was to be divided. In the opinion of the Gdańsk elites wealth was to ensure the owner a high standard of living, authority and power — but public manifestation of riches was considered unnecessary and even harmful. A small group of chosen people only were to enjoy the sight and use of luxury.

This principle affected the shaping of the Town Hall. Its site plan illustrates clearly the functions of the Town Hall in early modern times. The building accommodated the highest offices of the town: custom duties office, archives, cash box department, trade control office, and, of course, the conference rooms: the Great (so-called Summer or Red Chamber) and Small (Winter) Chambers of the Council, as well as the Chamber of the Bench. It was here that the most important decisions were made on matters concerning the internal life of the town as well as its external policies.

According to the ideas conceived by such famous mayors of Gdańsk as Constatin Ferber, Bartholomy Schachmann and John Speimann, Town Hall as institution was to perform two basic socio-political functions: to dominate over the town and to represent it. Both were connected to the demonstration of power and strength of the town's ruling elite. It was put into effect by dazzling all who crossed the threshold of the Town Hall with splendour and might. The scholars' controversy as to the extend to which the Town Hall in Gdańsk was designed after the Doges' Palace in Venice should not be considered solely from the point of view of the history of art; the problem belongs certainly to the history of mentality. Gdańsk Town Council, assuming the pose of the Roman or Venetian Senate desired without any doubt to make Gdańsk into a Venice of the North. Thus, after removal from the Town Hall of such utilitarian activities as trade, administration of justice and entertainments, only activities directly related to the displaying of power were left, such as meeting of town authorities (in particular Council's sessions) and mayors official workings with some technical services connected with them (chancellery, archives, finance offices, guardroom).

The interior of the Town Hall was splendidly furnished. Such famous artists as Jan Vredeman de Vries, Isaak van dem Blocke, Anthony Möller,

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

had contributed to it. The works of the art accumulated here expressed the consistent, broadly developed ideological programme of the Gdańsk ruling elite at the high of its power; it was illustrated by themes of paintings and sculptures, by their composition, by emblems and inscriptions displaying the philosophy and hierarchy of values instructed on the mentality of Gdańsk rulers. On entering the entrance hall one was met with the Latin sentence: *Precedit labor, sequitur honor* — “honours follow labour”. Looking from the ceiling decorated with the coats of arms of some prominent Gdańsk families was the image of Concord. Thus work and harmony were to constitute the foundation of an ideal urban society. The ideas of the Gdańsk elite are reflected to the full in the painting on the ceiling of the Town Hall’s main room — the Red Chamber³⁵. It is worth to mention that the first decorations of the ceiling by Jan Vredeman were removed after barely a dozen or so years, as they failed to satisfy the prestige seeking demands of the Council. The work was entrusted — this time certainly after issuing detailed instructions — to Izaak van dem Blocke. As a result the ceiling of the Red Chamber was given a highly complicated and suggestive decoration, constituting a specific apotheosis of the Town Council and simultaneously illustrating its style of ruling, its practice of policies. None of the 25 ceiling paintings is of a fortuitous character, nothing here is superfluous, everything is arranged in accordance with the well thought-out socio-political system of views of the collective Maecenas — a group ruling the town in the 16th and 17th centuries, thus when the city of Gdańsk was at peak of its power and wealth. This system of views and values presented in scenes borrowed from the Bible and ancient history was perfectly legible to people of the Renaissance and Baroque, whose education was based on punctilious knowledge of the Bible and antiquity. Here the painting of “Helvidius Priscus and the emperor Vespasian” illustrates the defence of freedom as the main task of the town authorities in their relations with the central power (we must recall that these were the years following the fierce clash which the city had with King Stephen Batory and just before the great conflict with Ladislaus IV). The painting “Servilius and Appius” calling to mind the conflict between the patricians and plebs in ancient Rome, suggests that the idea of concord should unite citizens and prevail over particular interests. The painting “Atillus Regulus” postulates faithfulness to the town authorities and stamps it as an expression of the greatest patriotism. “Alexander the Great and Hephaestion” calls in mind the necessity to keep a secret (this postulate of discretion in matters of authority and policy is repeated in many

³⁵ Cf. on this subject the study by R. Iwanoyko, *Apotheoza Gdańska (Gdańsk’s Apotheosis)*, Gdańsk 1976.

works of arts in the Town Hall). Many painted allegories of a biblical and mythological character supplement and expand the programme with additional elements such as the idea of the divine origin of authority and wisdom (“David before the council of judges”, “Solomon’s prayer”), the warning against impiety (“The fall of Jericho” below which the inscription warns: “When the Lord does not watch over a town, it is useless to guard it”).

The central field of the ceiling of Red Chamber is occupied by a great composition frequently presented and analysed by many scholars: the “Allegory of Gdańsk Trade”, or, as some would say: the “Apotheosis of Gdańsk Links with Poland”³⁶. In this picture Gdańsk is represented as an ideal “God’s city” — a town chosen by the Providence and given special opportunities. God Himself had founded the basis of Gdańsk’s prosperity. This prosperity would be guaranteed by people’s trust in Heavenly care and strong fidelity to the principles of faith. The programme of this picture reflects the ideas of the Protestantism with a Calvinist tinge quite clearly (and in the early 17th century Calvinists predominated among the members of the Council), strongly accenting the connection of Heaven and Earth as the foundation of town’s power and of the well-being of its inhabitants.

The allegory, below a multicoloured rainbow, shows the Vistula river carrying on its waves barges and boats filled with grain as well as Long Market in Gdańsk with crowds of merchants, Polish noblemen, rafters, musicians. Coats-of-arms of Poland, Lithuania, Gdańsk, Royal Prussia, carved in wood by Simon Herle, a famous Gdańsk’s sculptor, circle round the painting. Thus the apotheosis of the Town’s Council authority is united with the apotheosis of the Gdańsk’s trade and of Gdańsk’s links with Poland. It is also expressed in the maxim below the rainbow: *Coelesti iungimur arcu* — “We are linked by Heaven”. The delicate matter of Gdańsk’s political subordination to Poland is not mentioned in the painting. The fierce disputes with Polish Kings did not prevent, however, the founders of the Town Hall to order for the White Chamber — one of the splendid rooms in the building — a portrait gallery of Polish monarches.

Summing up: Gdańsk Main City Town Hall, gradually resigning from its multifunctional character and undergoing architectural transformations became at the end of the 16th– begin of the 17th centuries a specialized institution symbolizing towns’ wealth and power as well as the great prestige and ambition of its ruling elite. The Town Hall interior with its magnificent painted and sculpted decorations was passing an important ideological and

³⁶ H. Si k o r s k a, *Apoteoza łączności Gdańska z Polską (Apotheosis of the Union Gdańsk and Poland)*, “Biul. Historii Sztuki” Vol. XXX, 1968, pp. 228 ff.

political message to visitors. According to the intentions of the Council, the mystery of power, inaccessible to outsiders and “laymen”, full of well guarded secrets (the door to the Small Council Chamber, where winter meetings took place, bore the image of a man with a warning finger on his lips) was to be unrolled here. Even the period of the town’s crisis and decline in the second half of the 17th and in the 18th centuries did not change the position of the Town Hall nor the basis of its conception. It was only on 7th May, 1793, when General Raumer entered the Town Hall to accept the homage of the cities of Gdańsk and Toruń on behalf of the King of Prussia, that the symbolic role of the Gdańsk’s Town Hall as a civic institution and symbol of power collapsed, although the splendid walls of this building had to survive till the Second World War.