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TORUN IN THE DAYS OF COPERNICUS

Napis: ...



The author presents the shape and atmosphere of the city of Toruń in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. He describes the most interesting gothic monuments which he also reveals in photographs. He characterizes Toruń as an outstanding example of medieval town planning and stresses the role of the environment from which came our

GREAT ASTRONOMER

In its style the work approaches a reportage presenting the picture of the town towards the end of the fifteenth century, referring to the elements of the spatial layout and single objects which have survived.

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BOHDAN RYMASZEWSKI

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OF
COPERNICUS

URBAN DEVELOPMENT,
ARCHITECTURE, ART



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On the cover:
Toruń in the middle of 17th cent. — from Merian's map



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1. Panorama of the Old City

A friend and disciple of Nicholas Copernicus, Jerzy Joachim Retyk, wrote in *The Praise of Prussia*: „Toruń was once famous for its trade, now it owes its fame to its great son and my teacher”.

And indeed, as his birth place, Toruń still shares the fame won by the eminent astronomer. However, if we look back from the perspective of five centuries, both elements mentioned by Retyk become closely connected since successful trade missions contributed to the prosperity of the town, gave an impulse to the flowering of architecture and art, promoted education and created favourable conditions for the advance of learning.

Both the atmosphere of Toruń and its material basis in the early days of Copernicus were among the formative influences which shaped the mind of the future destroyer of established „truths”. Commercial prosperity allowed the sons of merchants to undertake expensive studies abroad. Later on, as they joined expanded business dealings and took part in the further development of the town they were able to introduce the progressive achievements of the contemporary world to the native soil.

In the second half of the fifteenth century Toruń, one of the biggest towns of Poland at that time, was of medium size judging 5

by North European standards. The population within the town walls amounted to 10 000 inhabitants while Gdańsk and Wrocław were twice as large. Bruges and Ghent, which had numerous affiliations with Toruń, had like London 50 000 while Paris had 200 000 inhabitants. But other important French towns did not generally exceed 10 000 at the end of the fifteenth century.

The native town of Copernicus was extremely busy and had the reputation of a wealthy commercial centre of international importance. Situated on the Vistula, in spite of a 200-km-distance from the Baltic sea, it drew considerable gains from overseas trade. In the fourteenth century this was in the hands of 172 Toruń merchants and it was then that Toruń began to be called „the inner Baltic port of Poland's territories”. Large quantities of goods passed through it in the course of exchanges between North-West, West- and East-European countries as land routes were largely used. Poland, Ruthenia, Hungary sent raw materials, forest produce and corn while England and Flanders sent high quality cloth, herrings and sea salt. The share of the citizens of Toruń in these commercial operations resulted in profits reaching as much as 700%. No wonder that in 1454—1466 Toruń could afford to pay nearly 200 000 grzywny * assigned for the war against the Teutonic Knights. This sum was 80 times greater than the yearly income of Cracow and 270 times that of Poznań.

The citizens of Toruń apportioned a large part of their financial resources to the extension and embellishment of their town. It was admired by foreigners and the inhabitants were proud of it. It was Jan Długosz, the Polish historian, who wrote among others: „Toruń is famous for its most beautiful buildings and roofs of burnt brick, so that one can hardly find another place equal to it in beauty and situation”.

Since the middle of the fifteenth century the town was governed by one council, but in the urban composition earlier conditions continued to be reflected.

* Grzywna — a medieval monetary unit. 1 Polish grzywna = 190 gm. of silver.



2. Panorama of Toruń from the Vistula - first half of 17th cent.

THE SPATIAL LAYOUT

The Old Town was separated from the New Town by walls, evidence of the fact that since the thirteenth century there existed two independent entities. Moreover, on the Vistula side it was divided by a third equally autonomous area—that of the Teutonic Castle which pushed the New Town away from the river. The process of mapping out the town took place in stages but the whole plan matured at the end of the thirteenth century. In the later period until the end of the fifteenth century only essential blocks were formed which determined spatial effects, so that at the time of Copernicus Toruń was among leading examples of medieval town planning. The logical distribution of single functions perfectly harmonized with architectural highlights, their situation, scale and proportion. Altogether they constituted one complex which fully deserved to be called an artistic creation.

Above the girdle of defensive walls broken by towers and gates rose the tops and roofs of houses, dominated by the massive bulks of churches and the tower of the Old Town Hall. In both towns the main accents were laid more or less on parallel lines and directions approximating to the diagonals cutting the market squares. Owing to this layout one could see — both from the riverside and from the opposite direction, the north — first the massive shapes of two parish churches rising above the crown of housetops, then to the left of each church the tower of the Old Town Hall and the roofs of the New Town Hall dimin-

ishing in perspective, and still farther, going in the same direction — two other churches. In the panorama of the Old Town from the west, or of the New Town from the east, beyond the silhouettes of monumental buildings, were outlined, shadowlike, the buildings of the same function from the area of the twin town.

The whole town complex, in spite of a scrupulous exploitation of usable space, did not give the impression of being overcrowded; on the contrary, each element presented a well composed picture in which there were no perspectives ending on the horizon since it was closed by some remarkably proportioned monumental building — a house, tower, dungeon or a defence gate. The size of single buildings was in harmony with thirteenth century sizes of squares and streets. These proportions have not been changed to the present day because they were laid out with a remarkable imagination: they range from 16—19 m. in width, so they correspond to the regulations defined in the building law of 1928. The houses built along them reached the height of nineteenth and twentieth century tenement houses of several stories while the churches rose considerably above them, the 27 m. naves of St. John's and St. Mary's churches seeming loftier than they really are because of the contrast with the surrounding lower buildings.

The monumental features of the sacred and secular architecture of Toruń, however, were not meant to overwhelm man, as was the case with the pyramids of Egypt. It did not produce complexes, on the contrary, it filled the observer with optimism and faith in the capabilities of man.

THE RIVERSIDE

The waterway which linked Toruń with the outside world was the Vistula river. The ships of Toruń merchants sailed down the river to the Baltic sea and to far-away countries. It was also the route bringing foreign tradesmen with their goods. The harbour extended along the Old Town section of the riverside. It was closed by the monastery and the monastic church of the Holy Spirit in the west and by a bridge in the east. At the

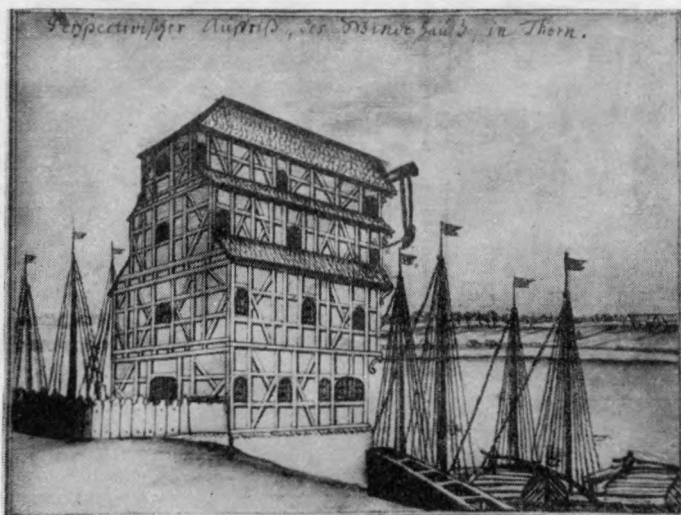
8 beginning of the fifteenth century it was built as a so-called ska-

- A. Turris S. Martini
- B. Turris S. Petri
- C. Turris S. Pauli
- D. Monasterium Franciscanum
- E. Monasterium S. Augustini
- F. S. S. Augustini
- G. Turris S. Martini
- H. Turris S. Petri
- I. Turris S. Pauli
- K. Turris S. Martini
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- U. Turris S. Petri
- V. Turris S. Pauli
- W. Turris S. Martini
- X. Turris S. Petri
- Y. Turris S. Pauli
- Z. Turris S. Martini



3. Toruń in the middle of 17th cent. - from Merian's map

ting or pontoon bridge. Not before the end of that century stone piers were erected on which wooden gangways were laid. The New Town of craftsmen had no immediate access to the Vistula because the inhabitants of the Old Town were jealous of their commercial rights and did not want to admit any rivals to share them. To make the best of their transactions they solicited for privileges. In 1457, among others, they obtained from king Kazimierz Jagiellończyk the confirmation of the law of storage for merit in the war against the Teutonic Knights. According to this act tradesmen travelling from Silesia or Great Poland were obliged to put their goods on sale in Toruń. The citizens made their wharf spacious and comfortable. There were often up to a dozen ships, barges and boats lying there. They were moored to a wooden bridge about 200 m. long from which goods were transhipped. Two cranes were used for this purpose — a bigger and a smaller one similar to the well-known crane of Gdańsk. Between the town walls and the waterway, besides wooden sheds, there were also brick storehouses facing the Vistula with their gable tops. Not far from the bridge a bath building and a slaugh-

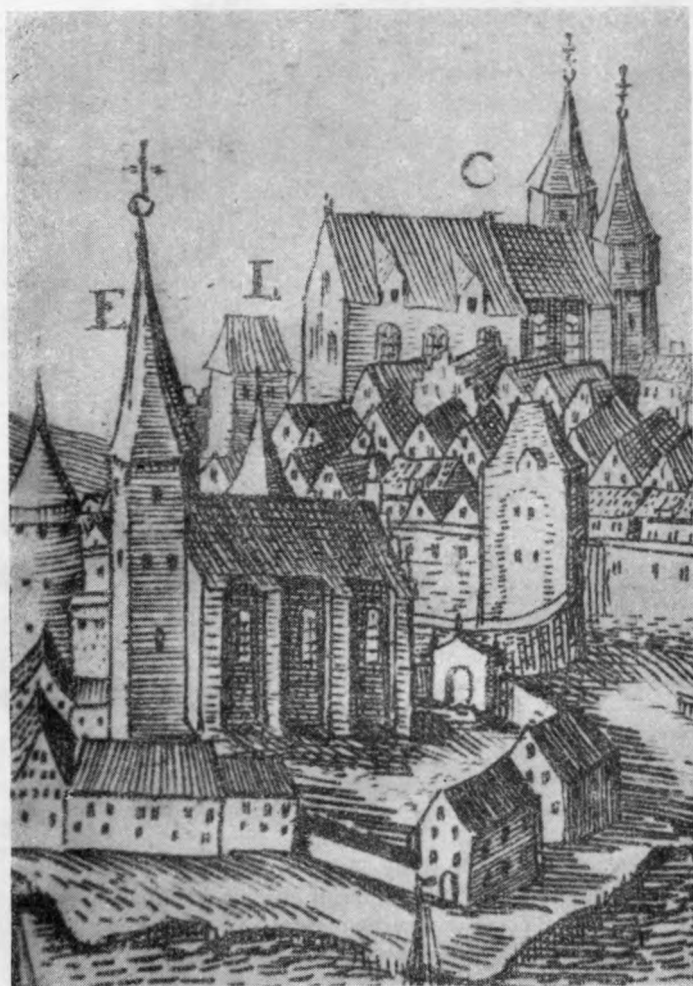


4. Crane on the Vistula riverside - Steiner's drawing from the middle of 18th cent.

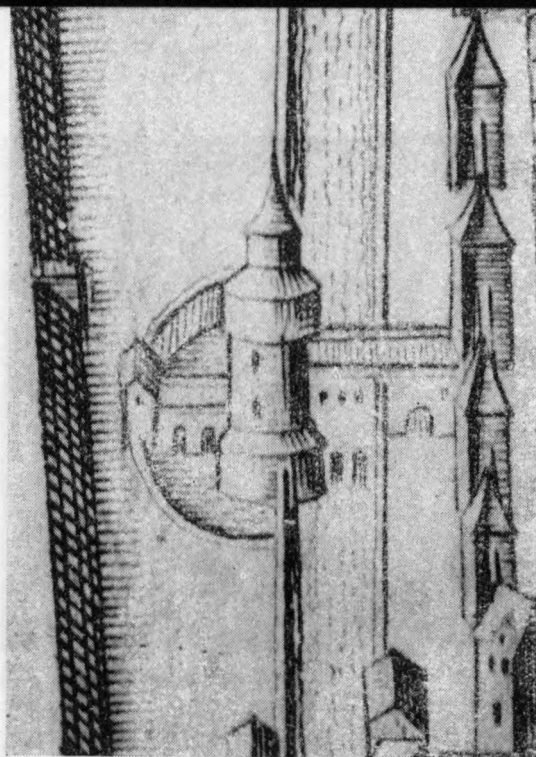
ter house were raised. It was the busiest part of the town, full of bustle and noise. Crowds of merchants and sailors speaking different languages mixed with native harbour workers and ordinary lookers-on.

THE FORTIFICATIONS

The riverside was separated from the town by fortifications. There was no moat there and only one range of walls was raised while other parts of the Old Town were surrounded by a double girdle. The general opinion was that the Vistula alone constituted a sufficient shield against an attack from the South. In the west the riverside was protected against a possible enemy invasion by a well fortified monastic complex of the Holy Spirit situated close to the bank. In the east it was guarded by the defensive system of the Teutonic Castle. Since it was demolished
 10 in the fifteenth century this part was secured by a rampart of



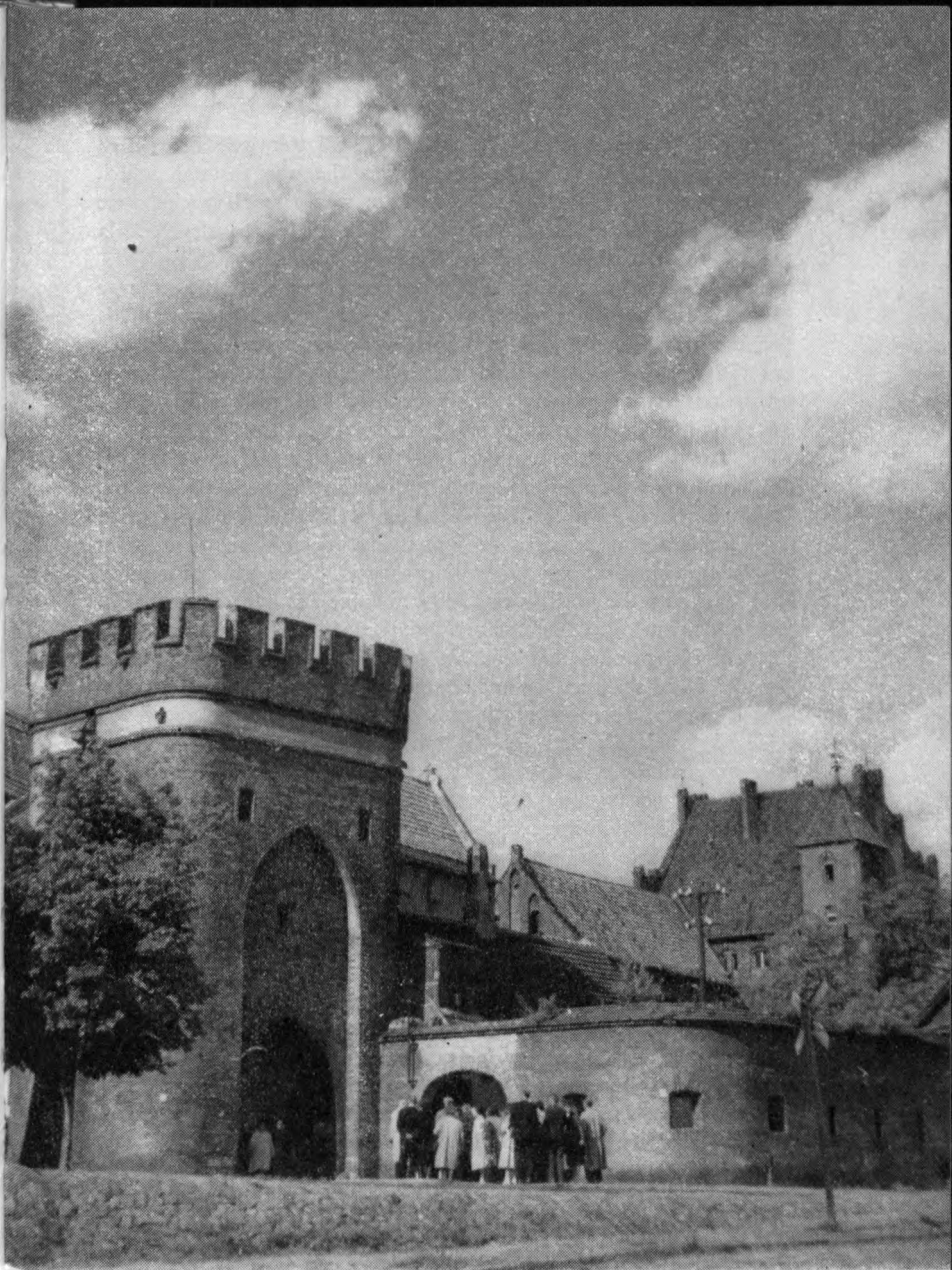
5. The monastery and monastic church of the Holy Spirit - erected in 14th cent.,
demolished in 17th cent. A drawing from the first half of 17th cent.



6. Barbican near Old Toruń Gate, raised in the first half of 15th cent. A drawing from the first half of 17th cent.

timber-earthwork which also protected the bridge-front. The town was entered from the riverside by four defensive gates: the Monastic Gate (also called the Holy Spirit's), the Sailors' Gate, Bath Gate (or Schools') and the Bridge Gate (originally called the Carriers'). These constructions were built from brick like the whole medieval fortification system of Toruń which consisted of two entities — the Old and the New Town. In the former, apart from the above mentioned gates, there were two more which guarded the main land exits: the Chelmno Gate in the north and the Old Toruń Gate in the east, as well as two others leading to the New Town: Paul's Gate, otherwise called Prison Gate, and the Broad Gate, also called Coppersmiths' Gate. On the other

12 hand the New Town had its main exits protected by the Straight

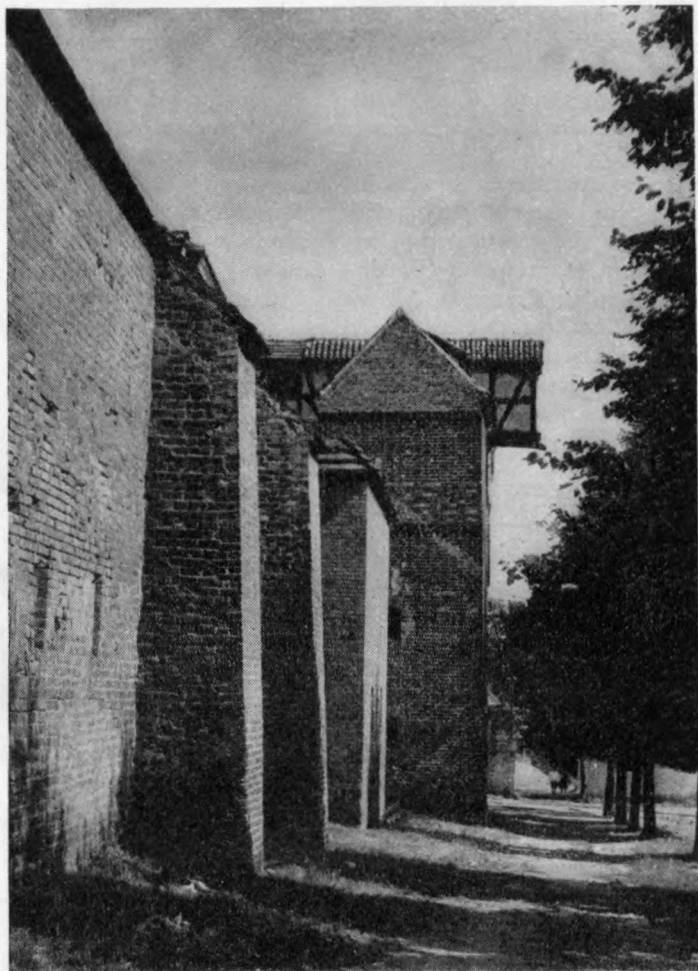


7. Bridge Gate raised in 1432 by the town master mason Jan Gotland. Originally covered with a high tile roof

Gate, St. James' and St. Catherine's. The latter was also called the Cow or Cattle Gate because it was the way through which cattle were led out. Besides these there was a small wicket gate at the exit from Great Tanners' Street. It led to the Vistula meadows or to the area of the Teutonic Castle.

In the days of Copernicus the town walls were on the average six metres high. They were strengthened by over 30 towers. This system was planned and in a great measure completed as early as the thirteenth century. It was later only perfected by reconstruction, raising of new towers or heightening of walls. Some sections had to be repaired many times over.

The Town Council, anxious to provide a strong defensive system, did not spare money to keep the fortifications in good shape. A decree issued by the Town council of the neighbouring town of Chełmno may serve as an interesting example of the concern about the fortifications. According to this decree a person guilty of damaging the walls was liable to have his ear cut off. The same offense would not have been more leniently treated in Toruń. No wonder then that in spite of the devastation caused by the Swedish wars the medieval fortifications survived almost entirely until the nineteenth century and it was not until the tide of „modernization” reached the town that Prussian authorities ordered the gothic gates, towers and walls to be demolished, so that today we can only see some remnants mainly along the riverside, in Rapacki square, the Podmurna Street and small fragments in the New Town. These objects having survived several hundred years have mostly lost their ornamentations and taken on a more austere look. As they were being raised they were furnished with ornaments though not so lavishly as other buildings nevertheless the custom of decorating was not unusual in this type of architecture. Nearly always the towers and gates had ceramic friezes with geometric ornaments, while pictorial motifs were introduced on plastered strips and in niches. Some wall sections were decorated with rhomboid patterns from dark brick *zendrówka*. The custom of decorating the fortifications can be explained by the fact that they were to reveal the wealth and power of the town to the foreigners. Moreover, they were built by the same master builders who raised other buildings in the town. Thus the above mentioned Bridge Gate, surviving today, was built by a town mason, Jan Gotland, in 1432. He was also



8. Fourteenth century defensive tower, transformed into a crane in 18th cent. and called „crane” since that time

which was considered then, as it is today, to be one of the most representative objects of medieval architecture having more than national significance.

Besides the Vistula river Toruń had no natural defensive features. This deficiency was compensated by engineering constructions. The waters of a small river, Mokra, were conveyed to the moats surrounding the walls and raised to the required height by means of specially constructed weirs. One of them was built near the Holy Spirit's monastery (today the playground of the Students' Hostel of the Building College), the other was near the Teutonic Castle. In this way considerable water reservoirs were created which were also utilized for driving mills and for fullers. The moats surrounding the town were several metres deep and about 40 metres wide. They alone constituted a serious obstacle to possible invaders, since the defenders hiding behind the outer range of walls could shoot at the assailants with good effect.

Behind this first barrier there was an open stretch of ground or terrace, a dozen metres wide. For the defenders placed within the second range of defences — towers and gates — it constituted like the moat a perfect target area through which the attackers had to pass before breaking into the town. This system was planned as early as the first stone fortifications were being raised in 1250. Until the days of Copernicus it was considerably enlarged owing to great progress in the development of firearms. By that time both the assailants and the defenders used cross-bows, bows and catapults side by side with muskets and artillery. Consequently new defences had to be created. The thirteenth and fourteenth century towers of Toruń were three-wall-constructions and were not covered on the town side. They reached a dozen metres in height and were topped with roofs sloping down on four sides. They contained several platforms on which the defenders were placed and indispensable materials were stored. The lack of the fourth wall facilitated hauling up ammunition supplies and guaranteed that in the event of the tower being captured it was not sheltered against an attack by the defenders of the town. Thus with the exception of the gates which were often inhabited by the poor the oldest towers of Toruń as well as the walls provided shelter only from outside. A tower was furnished with battlements. They protected the defenders situated on wooden
16 balconies hanging on a support. These balconies were covered



9. Burgher's House built in 1489, several times transformed, restored in 19th cent. Originally served as a summer residence of the Shooting Fraternity

with a roof but they were uncovered on the town side. The battlements were pierced with arrowslits through which the enemy was shot at with guns, crossbows and bows. The crenels enabled the defenders to push down the assailants with poles, swords and axes. This kind of warfare had not yet been given up in the fifteenth century but firearms were becoming more and more effective. Therefore the gates being considered the weakest points in the defences a new protective system of foregates and barbicans was raised. They were to protect against an assault on

gates and entrances by battering rams, still frequent in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It was rendered difficult owing to the barbicans which became keypoints in the defences. In 1429 two masters, Vynkenczayl and Anselm, erected a powerful defensive tower before the Old Toruń Gate. It was a dozen metres high and contained six floors. Wheelshaped, it was situated outside the moat and surrounded with a wall and a ditch filled with water over which a drawbridge was built. The last but one top landing of the barbican was machicolated, i.e. provided with a parapet with openings in the floor for dropping stones on the assailants. The top floor was covered with a conical roof. The tower had numerous loop-holes through which gun fire could be directed. The barbican communicated with the tower by means of a stone gallery called a „neck” which contained — like the walls — wooden parapets and loopholes. From these stands the whole forefield was covered with gunfire if necessary and so were the moat and the space between the walls.

A similar barbican was erected by master mason Łukasz before the Chełmno Gate in 1449 and in this way a second entrance to the Old Town was secured while three more „modern” towers were added there in the course of the fifteenth century. They were located at the corners of the outer walls and were also cylindrical. They were named: the Cat's Head, Cat's Paw and Cat's Tail. Only the first of the above mentioned has survived and it was considerably transformed in the nineteenth century. The towers in question as well as the barbicans were transformed into artillery stands, their fire range covering the whole forefield of the „land” defensive line between the Vistula and the New Town. The fortification system of the New Town was also strengthened in the fifteenth century. Before St. James' Gate two powerful cylinder-shaped towers covered with conical roofs were placed next to each other. They constituted a sort of barbican vividly reminiscent — like many other fragments of the fortifications described above — of Flemish defensive architecture which in those days reached a particularly high standard.

The burghers took good care of military training. They realized that the most ingenious fortification system would be ineffective if well trained defenders were scarce. Therefore special organizations, called shooting guilds or cock-fraternities, were founded in medieval towns. These organizations promoted social entertain-
18 ment and sports, their religious character was often stressed, but

their aim was obviously military. Their name is derived not from the guncock but from the domestic bird which served as a traditional target for shooting exercises. The cock consisted of five wooden parts set high upon a perch. It was shot at from a crossbow or from firearms. The person who was able to knock it down with one shot became a „king” and won „all liberties”. Prizes were also awarded for throwing down single parts. The competition was always organized by the fraternity as a festive occasion. The distribution of prizes in the Town Hall was also accompanied by great pomp, e.g. the „king” was awarded a silver or a gilded cock. Thus distinguished, he had a right to appear at the head of a procession on other occasions.

In the early days of Copernicus the shooting contest took place not far from his home, near the Old Toruń Gate where a perch with a cock had been set up between the walls near the barbican since 1411. A similar one had been placed between the walls near St. James’ Gate of the New Town since 1431.

In 1489 a patrician fraternity of St. George obtained a new residence and shooting field near the Teutonic castle. A Burgher’s House, still in existence, was built between the walls within the Old Town area. It was fundamentally transformed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It served as a summer residence of the fraternity. In the neighbouring moat a shooting field was made and it was used up to the beginning of the present century. The shots fired over the centuries left scars in the dam.

THE TEUTONIC CASTLE AREA

In the urban design of medieval Toruń the Teutonic Castle was of central importance. The whole structure was topped off with a high tower. The tower was built in the shape of a cross. The tower was built in the shape of a cross. The tower was built in the shape of a cross.



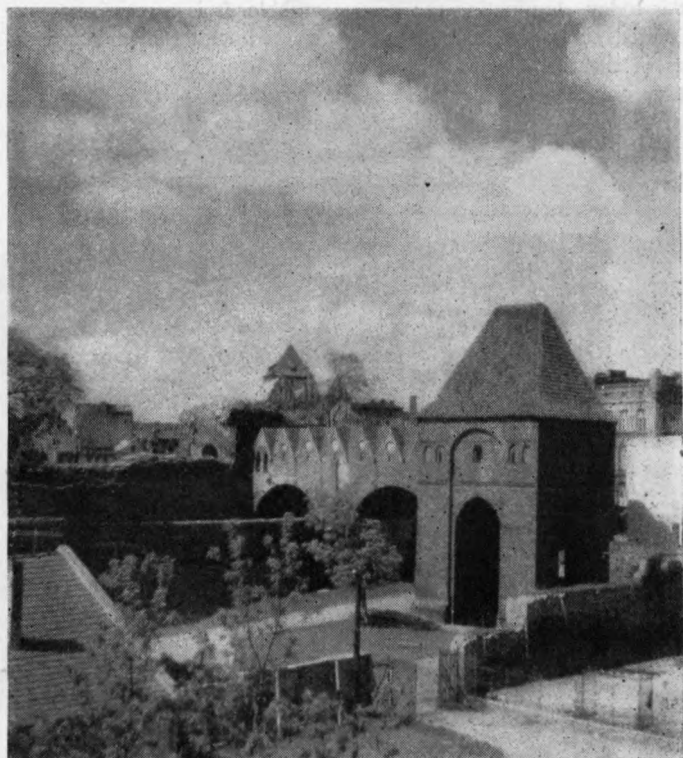


10. Bird's eye view of the ruins of the Teutonic Castle. The construction began about 1230 and developed until it was demolished in 1454. After it had been used for centuries as a rubbish tip it was uncovered during the conservation works of 1958-1966

THE TEUTONIC CASTLE AREA

In the urban design of medieval Toruń the Teutonic Castle was of central importance. The whole structure was mapped out as a triangle with the river Vistula at its base. It was squeezed between the Old and the New Town area constituting a sort of wedge in the spatial layout. The Teutonic Order played a similar divisive role in political life. The Knights often had recourse to the Roman principle of „divide and rule” by fanning rivalries which arose from differences of interests between the citizens of the Old and the New Town.

20 Hence it is not a matter of mere coincidence that the Teutonic



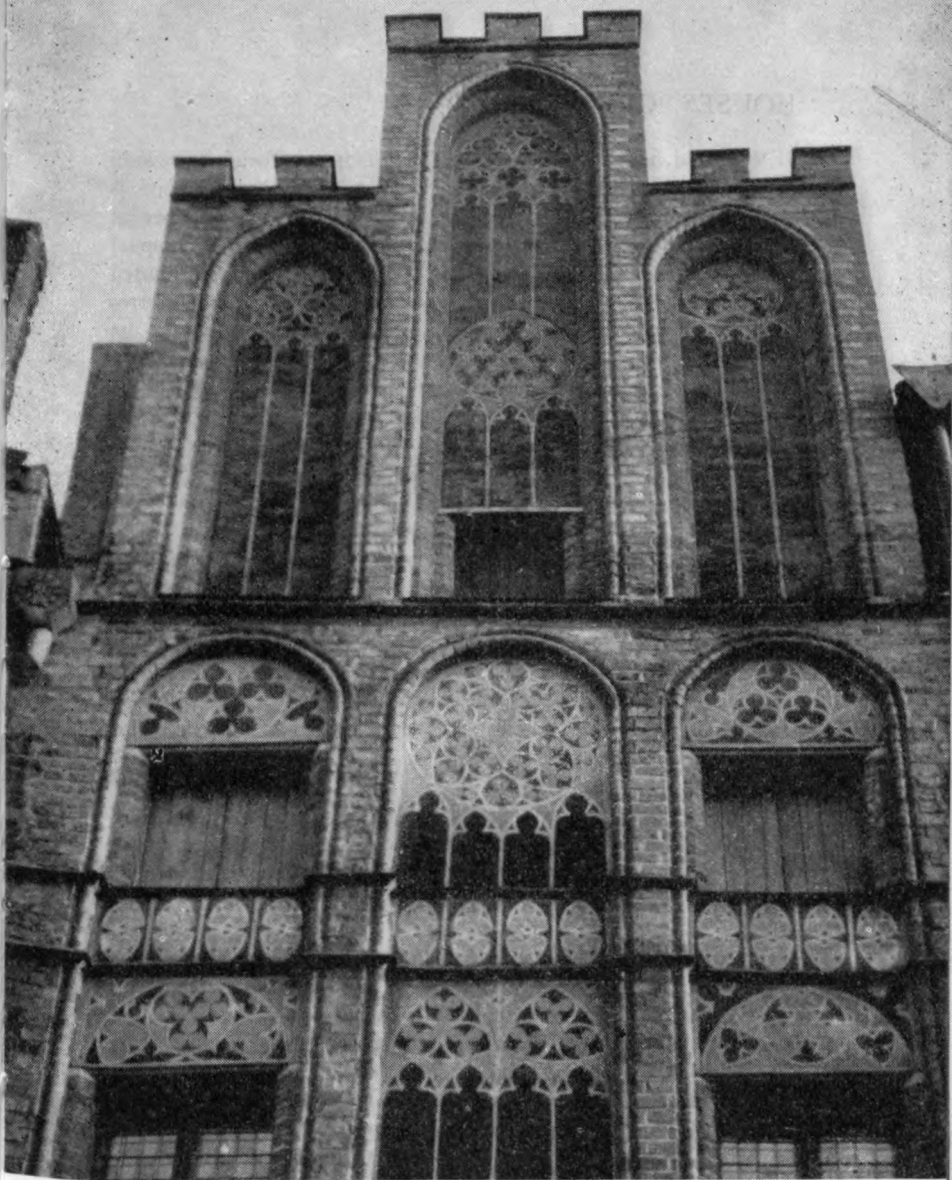
11. 14th-century *gdanisko* - i.e. lavatory of the castle

Order was expelled and their seat demolished on the day when the two independently governed towns became united. This event took place in February 1454, i.e. 19 years before Copernicus was born. It remained vividly impressed on the memory of the citizens in the second half of the fifteenth century. There was also physical evidence to remind the inhabitants of it — the ruins of the castle. In the seventies and eighties of the fifteenth century only one object — the so-called *gdanisko* — remained untouched as 21

it is today, dominating the heap of rubble. It is a massive tower situated above a stream. It communicated with the main premises of the castle by means of a gallery hanging on big arcades. It was a lavatory. This element could not be of any considerable defensive significance and left there among the ruins of the magnificent Teutonic buildings it remained as a sarcastic symbol. It was stressed by the fact that in the early days of Copernicus the castle area was used as a common rubbish tip.



12. 13th-century boss from the ruins of the Teutonic Castle



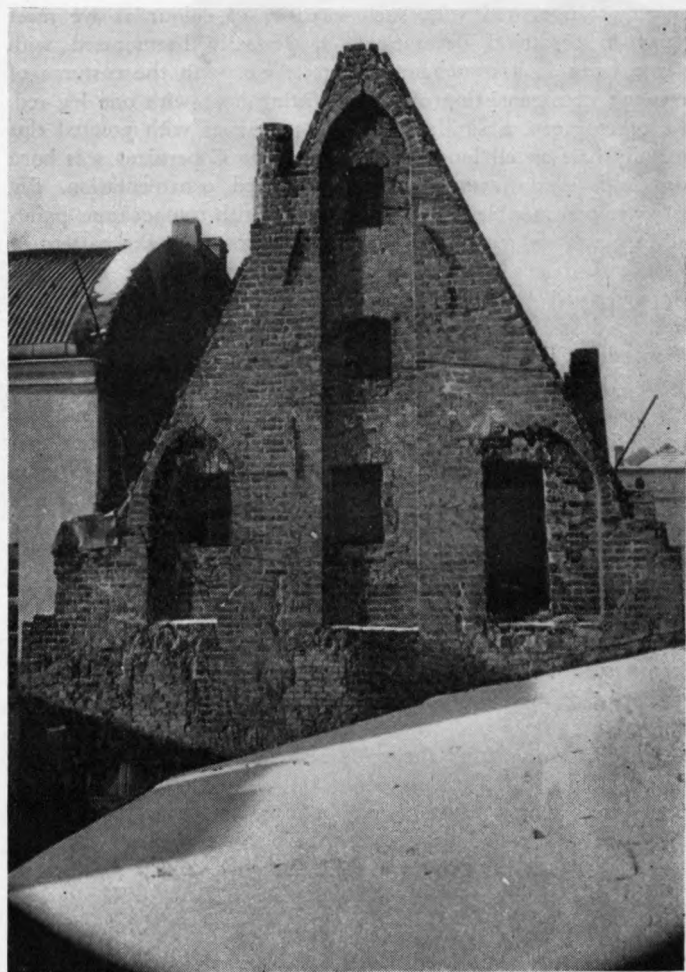
13. Façade of the house in which Nicholas Copernicus was born. The top and painted decorations were reconstructed in 1964 after authentic details were discovered during conservation works

HOUSES, GRANARIES

If we could have a bird's eye view of medieval Toruń we would notice above all its great regularity. In spite of slight deviations in the line of certain streets most of them cut one another at a right angle making quadrangles of houses built in compact rows, their high-pitched tops facing the street. They were situated on narrow plots several metres wide and some score of metres long. They usually ran from one street to another divided by walls or fences. Some of the plots were divided into two because this is how they were mapped out in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; not earlier than the fifteenth century different owners joined them by purchasing the other half which made them twice as long. A few medieval buildings had small rear-quarters one floor high, but in most cases the courtyard was occupied by warehouses or gardens. On the whole the plots were rather spacious and wherever there were windows in the dwelling houses sunshine freely penetrated inside. Today actually a dozen gothic backhouses have survived while there might have been only twice as many in the Middle Ages. They often had vaulted groundfloors used as kitchens or larders. The first floor contained mainly servants' rooms. In the backyard there were sometimes, though rarely, single buildings. They were built of brick and usually served as stores or other household premises.

Many owners wished to give their houses a more representative and striking appearance. It was frequently dictated by a wish to advertise one's own residence as housing a shop or a craftsman's workshop to which customers were invited. They were also attracted by signs wrought in iron which in the days of Copernicus fulfilled a function similar to that of modern neon advertisements, their role being naturally confined to the daytime because at night the streets were not lit up. To raise their prestige, which was of no small importance in their business dealings, the burghers took care to give the most attractive decorations to the façades. Apart from polychrome paintings elevations were often ornamented by means of glazed bricks and elements of artificial stone. This kind of ornament can be seen today e.g. on the houses at Nos 5 and 6 Żeglarska (Sailors' Street) or 12 Św. Ducha (The Holy Spirit's Street).

24 Towards the end of the fifteenth century brick surfaces of a great number of house elevations were painted with lime paint



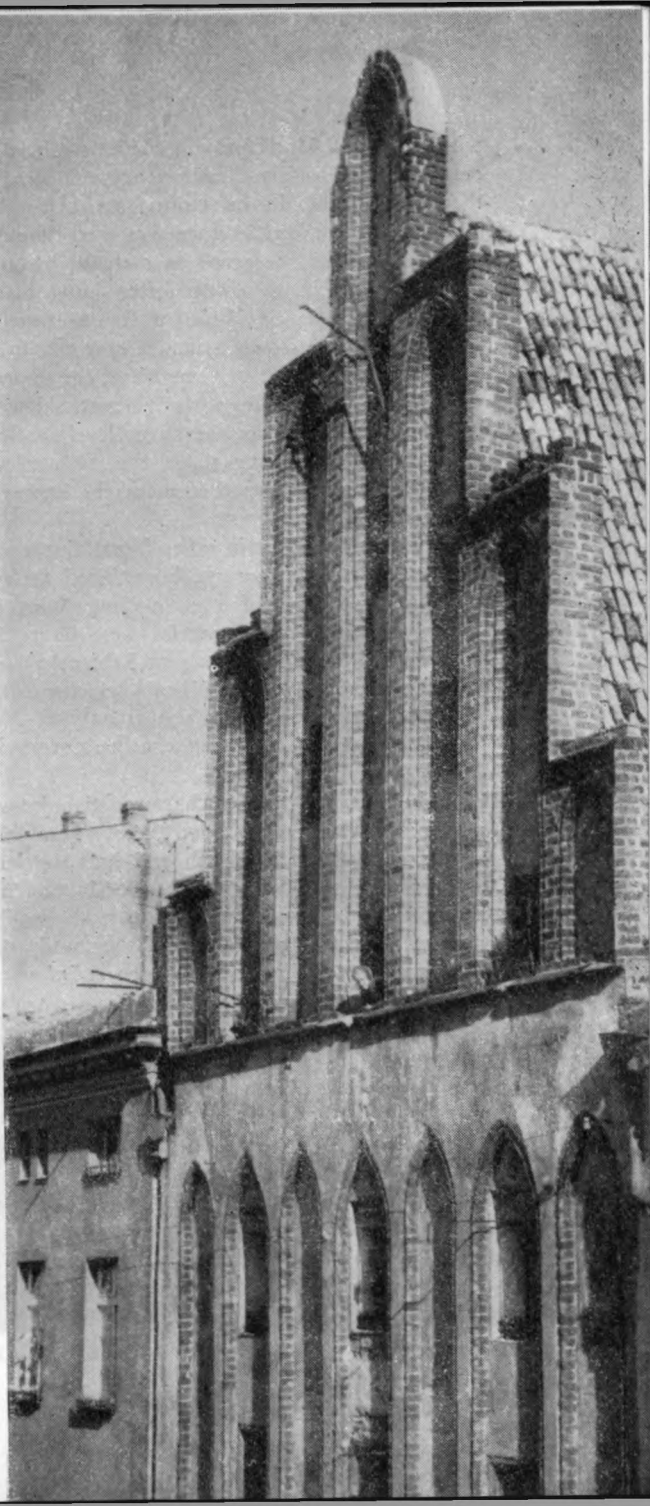
14. Backyard top of a fourteenth century house at No 10 Żeglarska (Sailors' Street)

in grey-blue or red with such intensity of colour as we meet today in theatrical decorations. It perfectly harmonized with clothes seen in a contemporary street: e.g. with the costume of a young man consisting of a close-fitting hose with one leg red, the other green, a similar coat and red shoes with pointed tips actually half an ell long. The house where Copernicus was born also had a contrasting intensely coloured ornamentation. Big brick framed moulded niches were filled with compositions painted on plaster in red, white and black representing the pattern of rosettes and tracery of contemporary representative buildings. Moreover, all brick elements of the house were covered with bright red and only the portal was definitely black. The surfaces of blends, friezes, lintels of artificial stone and shutters on the second floor and in the loft — the latter indicating that this part was used as a store — also had a multicoloured ornamentation. Its motifs are not exactly known to us, we can only say that similar elements in Toruń houses were covered with polychrome geometric ornamentation in contrasting colours, e.g. the white combined with black or red. Unfortunately such specimens have reached us only in fragments.

In the fifteenth century the town was proud to have stone-paved streets within the area surrounded by the defensive walls. „Cobble stones” covered the Old and New Town markets and streets over a surface corresponding more or less to the width of the present roadways. They sloped down on both sides which enabled the water to flow into wooden troughs forming a sort of open gutter. The water from the roofs also flowed into them carried off by wooden or pitch-coated basket water-spouts. The water-spouts were placed between neighbouring houses at the level of lower roof-edges and conducted a few metres beyond the wall face of the building ending in a tin gargoyle which represented the head of a fantastic animal.

In the place of the present sidewalks there were porches which formed a sort of terraces 3—4 m. wide and 2 m. high each. They were ascended by steps placed in the very middle with the entrances to the cellars located on both sides. If the weather was fine merchants displayed goods in the porches of their houses. After business hours, especially on summer evenings, they served as places of recreation. The terraces were often covered with temporary roofs and walls so that instead of the main entrance the house

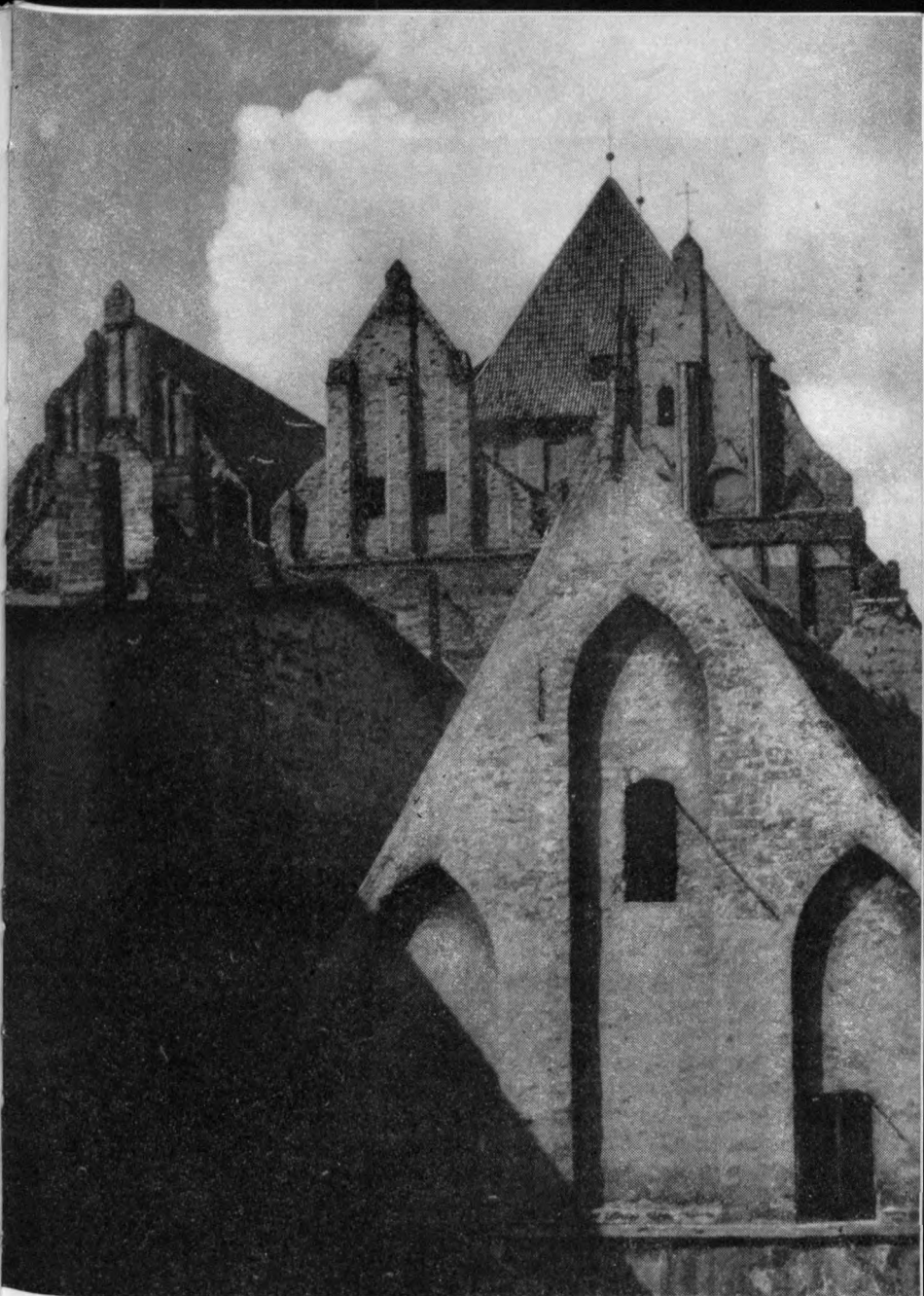
15. A house from
the middle of
14th cent. at No.
15 Copernicus
Street



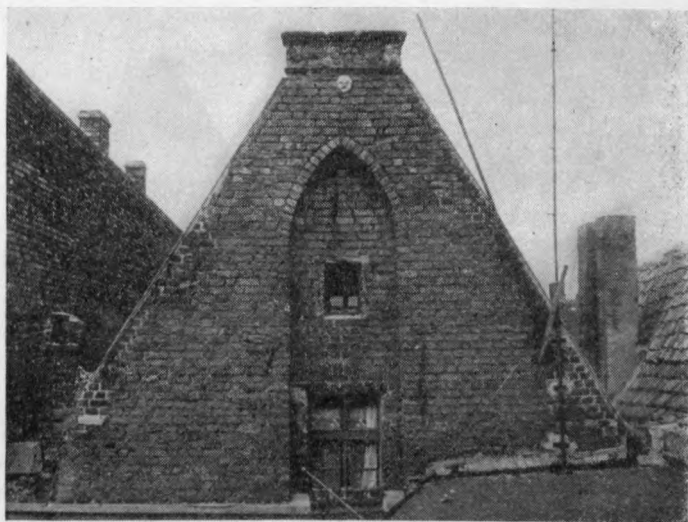
with paintings. Municipal authorities strongly objected to this for reasons of fire safety. Regulations were also issued to the effect that porches should be built from non-inflammable material. Thus, apart from brick, stone was used though it was not widely spread in Toruń. It served as material to build steps or carved pillars on which the owner often hung his sign acting as an emblem of the house, different figures were also placed at the top of the house — e.g. a lion, a star etc. In a great number of houses, including that of Copernicus, the upper edge of the porch was slightly higher than the present sidewalk because in the course of five centuries the street level in the historical part of the town was raised by about 2 m. We must therefore bear in mind that single houses then made the impression of being much higher than they are now.

In medieval Toruń as in other North-European cities there were so-called granary-houses which combined the function of a dwelling house with that of a grain-store. Apart from these a great number of fine brick granaries were built. They were situated mainly in the area of the present Rabińska and Podmurna Street near the river port on the Vistula which made the transportation of goods very convenient. The granary at No. 4 Piekary (The Bakers' Street) is today an excellent example of this kind of architecture.

Individual houses had a characteristic almost uniform interior pattern: on the ground floor there was a large hall, i.e. a big space covering all the width and half the length of the house. It served not so much as a corridor but rather as a shop, a reception chamber, sometimes even a kitchen, but most often it was the favourite living room of the family in the leisure hours. In one corner of this place wooden stairs were raised which led to the upper floors. Behind them a narrow passage led to the backyard. In the other corner there was a big hearth covered at the top with a large chimney hood supported by an oak pillar. Behind the hall a large backroom was usually located. It served as a bedroom or as a goodsstore, sometimes a workshop was arranged there. The first floor usually contained two rooms: a lower front room which corresponded in height more or less to our modern apartments, and a much higher backroom looking on the yard and usually richly ornamented. Its function was similar to that of the representative chamber in the castles of the gentry where distinguished guests were received. But there were



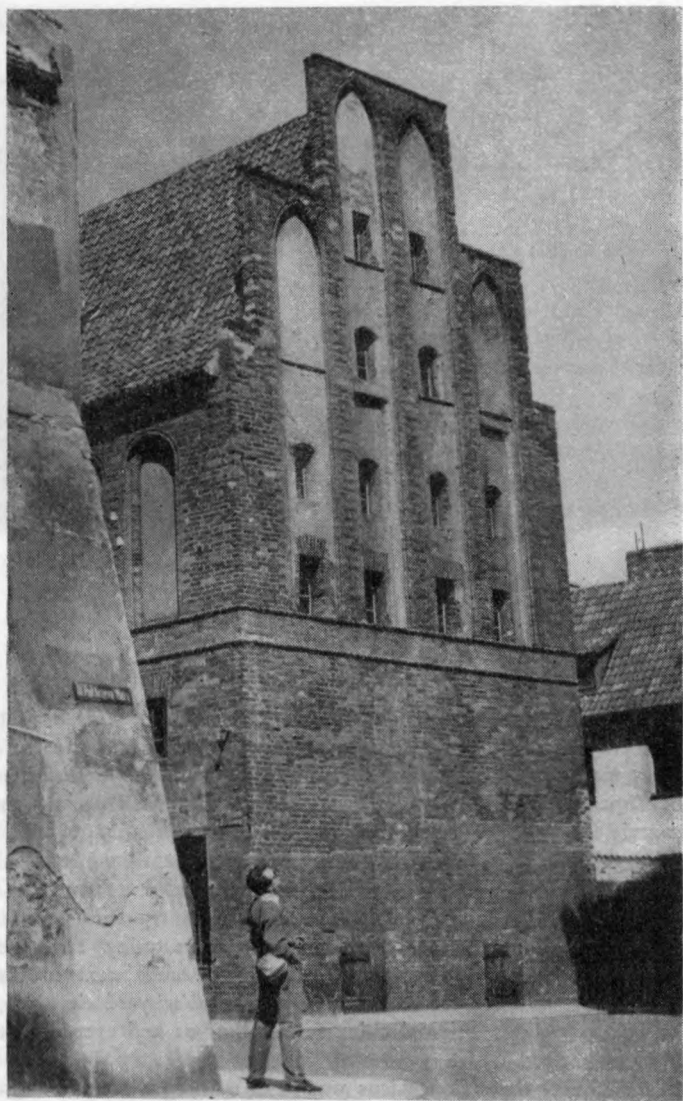
16. 14th century top of a courtyard elevation



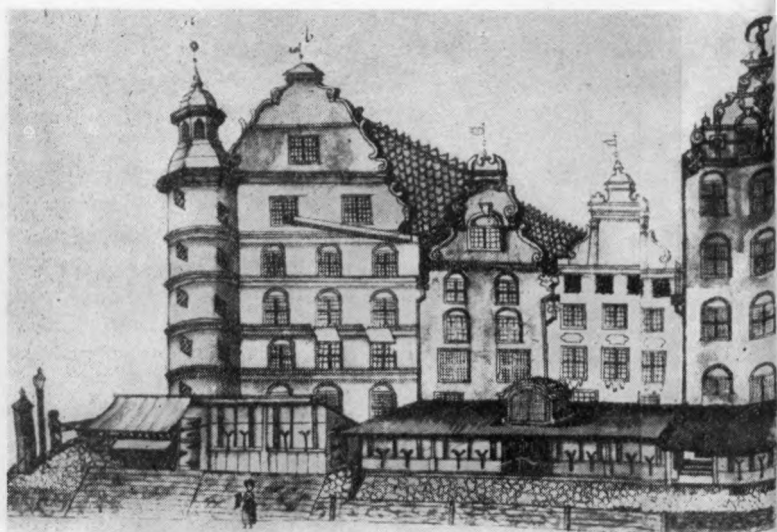
17. Backyard top of a 15th century house at No. 22 Mostowa (Bridge Street)

houses in which only the ground floor was inhabited, other landings being used as storerooms. With growing needs wooden galleries were made in the front hall — which in the Middle Ages often reached 6 m. in height — to be used either as bedrooms or storerooms. Sometimes the hall was completely built up with a kind of „hanging rooms”. Other rooms were frequently divided by partitions of painted moulded boards, but in spite of that the rooms were much larger than even the largest ones in modern houses.

Storerooms were generally located in cellars, on the second floor and in the loft which usually consisted of 2 or 3 levels. These premises had no glasspanes but only wooden shutters. It facilitated the transportation of goods which were hauled up by means of wheel cranes. These wheels were placed on the very top of the house although there were houses which possessed interior lifts like e.g. the one surviving today at No. 13 Szczytna Street. At the end of the fifteenth century almost all houses

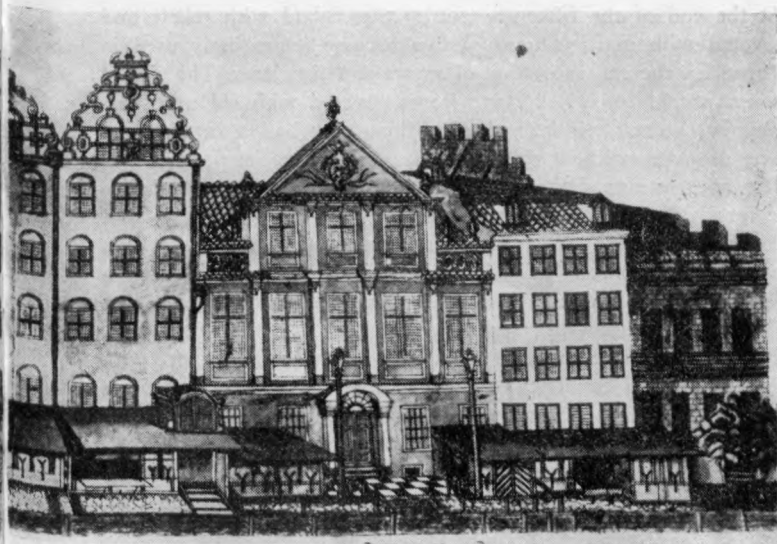


18. Granary at No. 4 Pickary (Bakers' Street) from 14th cent. rebuilt in 15th cent. and partly in 19th cent.



within the Old and New Town were built of brick, only a part of them possessing a skeleton construction today called the Prussian wall. Not one building raised in that technique in the time of Copernicus has survived. It was far less durable than objects completely made of brick. But there are more than 200 brick-houses dating from the Middle Ages. Many of them have retained almost all parts of the gothic design although most of the original elements have been covered by later masonry and screens. A number of houses reveal their birth certificate today. Thus the house at No. 15 Copernicus Street, which stands next to his birthplace, has a fourteenth century front and backyard elevation, as well as ceilings, original chimney installations and even a part of floor paving.

In the house where Copernicus was born nothing has unfortunately remained of the original interior design. We can only suppose
32 considering the quality of the elevation preserved, that its inte-



19. Booths and porches in front of the houses in Żeglarska Street. Schreiber's drawing from 1783

rior was sumptuously equipped. The big hall, as in other contemporary houses, must have had a decorated high timber-vault made of moulded or only bevelled beams, or a kind of beam-roof made of logs running lengthwise. Such surfaces were sometimes enriched by painted masks of fantastic animals emerging from a combination of geometrical figures and stylized plants and flowers. Ornamented roofs were made according to the means of the family in all inhabited rooms, only storerooms remaining undecorated. The walls, in particular those of the big hall and the back-room on the first floor, were usually covered with polychrome paintings. They often represented elaborate religious themes, but lay themes were not infrequent. The house at No. 15 Szczytna Street contains a fragment of a fifteenth century polychrome painting which represents a scene of courtship. The family house of Copernicus at 36 Old Market Street was also decorated with wall paintings.

At the end of the fifteenth century tiles inlaid with reliefs and covered with multicoloured glazing became increasingly used in Toruń for the ornamentation of stoves and fireplaces. The richest houses might have had stone floors covered with coloured glazing but most often instead of a floor they had a ceramic paving of plates without coloured glaze or any special pattern. The houseowners desired to have most carefully executed architectural details such as carved banisters on the staircases, front doors, balustrades, galleries, pillars supporting chimneys, built-in cupboards. Ironwork of all kinds was of remarkable accomplishment, there were knockers, door fixtures, signs, flags placed on the housetops and called weathercocks. In spite of the fact that they were made of plain iron they vied in elegance with nightlamps and candlesticks made of precious metals, sometimes even gilded. With clocks and artistic bookbindings they belonged to the most valuable objects in the house equipment.

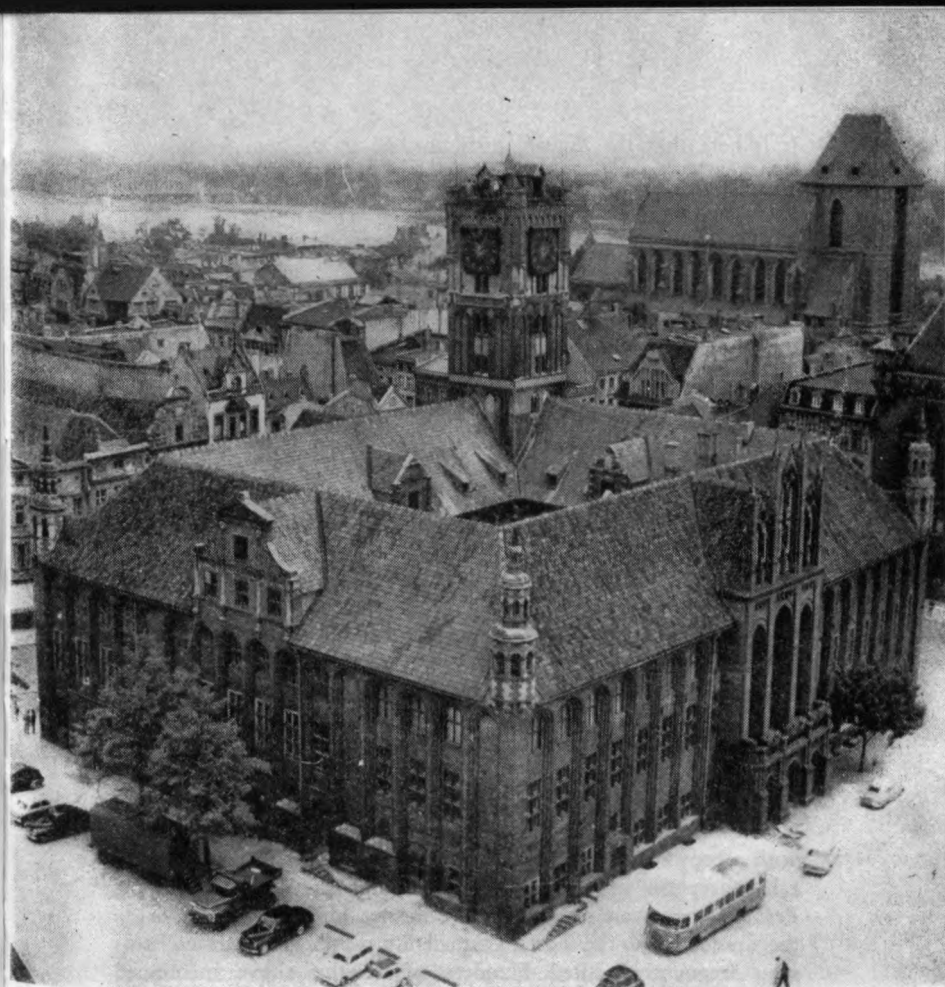
THE OLD MARKET SQUARE

The life of medieval Toruń — apart from the riverside and the streets leading there — centered mainly in the market squares. In the last quarter of the fifteenth century after the Old and New Towns were united and only one council remained, the importance of the Old Market Square increased. In fact it had long before become a far more attractive place for the population than the New Market Square since it was here that crowds of tradesmen of different origin used to meet and all important social events took place.

The houses round the Old Town Market Square stood in compact rows, all of equal height and breadth, but each owner was anxious to make his house different from those of his neighbours. Hence a considerable variety in the colour and plastic design of individual houses. They also differed in the solution of architectural details since they were raised in different stages and by numerous building workshops.

The owners of these houses were generally representatives of the town patriciate who possessed houses in other parts of the town. The Old Market Square near Arthus Hall was traditionally the

34 home of the municipal secretary. He owned a comparatively mo-



20. Old Town Hall, erected during 13th and 14th cent. At the beginning of 17th cent. a floor was added to it; burnt in 1703, rebuilt in the middle of 18th cent.; restored in 19th and 20th cent.

dest, two-window house. Other houses were usually more impressive and had three windows. They were, however, not exclusively reserved for mayors and aldermen. Less „worthy“ citizens also lived here. A census made in the middle of the fifteenth century reveals that besides well-known personages the Old Market Square was inhabited by two tailors, a candlemaker and a driver.

It is here that the mayors distinguished in the war against the Teutonic Knights had their residences: Herman Reusap, Tileman vom Wege, a relation of Copernicus'— von Allen-Meldzynski, and one of the leaders of the Prussian League, Gabriel Bażynski, a knight.

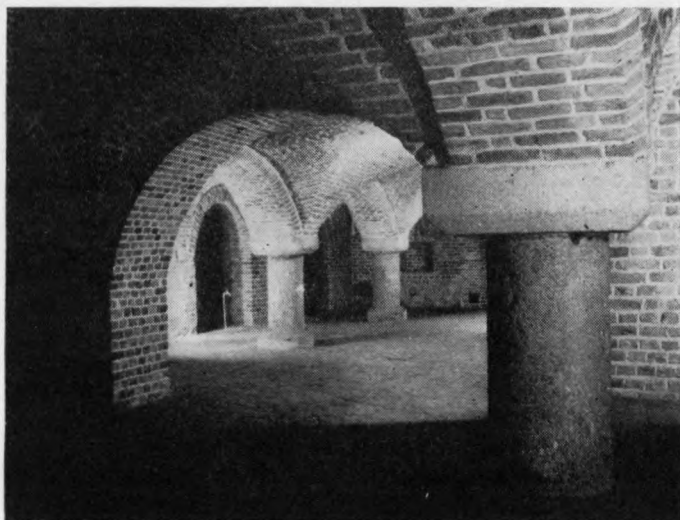
Since 1463 the Copernicus family owned a house at No. 36 Old Market Square in which they lived after 1480. The neighbouring house at No. 35 belonged in 1490—96 to Philip Callimachus, tutor to the sons of king Kazimierz Jagiellończyk.

THE OLD TOWN HALL

The building of the Old Town Hall covered an area considerably more than one hectare in the Old Market Square. At the end of the fifteenth century it was one floor lower than it is now. Moreover, the four corner turrets and the main tower were surmounted by spires covered with tin plate and the roofs of different wings were covered with tiles. They rose from behind a crenellation encircling the building as could be seen in the defensive walls. This building was then considered among the most remarkable of its kind in Northern Europe. Its architecture was similar to that of the magnificent cloth halls and trade halls of Bruges, Ghent and Ypres. This does not imply that we are here concerned with a copy of those objects since it was an individual architectural conception only related to buildings in Western Europe. Perhaps they were known to the master builder Andrzej or to the founders, i.e. the Town Council. Its members were merchants who frequently visited Flanders where the above mentioned buildings were perfectly adapted to commercial functions, combined with an impressive form.

The Town Hall was only partly a seat of the authorities, most of the space being taken up by premises designated for commercial purposes. The west wing housed cloth halls also called the trade or merchant's house. The first floor of that wing consisted of one big hall daily used by clothiers but if necessary serving as a representative chamber. It was covered with a timber roof, probably with beams and boards furnished with coloured ornamentation while all ground floor premises had brick vaulting with

36 coloured ribs. In the north-west corner of that floor the town



21. Town Hall cellars - in the days of Copernicus beer was sold here

scales were placed. The rest of the wing was taken up by clothiers. In the parallel east part all kinds of bread and pastry were sold. The court of justice, or as it was called, the Bench, was in the north wing of the ground floor. It had three big window openings through which people could watch the trial. A small council room for magistrates and a prison cell were located next to it.

The seat of the council was in the south wing near the tower whose lower floor served as archives, armory and treasury. In the Middle Ages single rooms of this building were enriched with painted decorations which unfortunately have not survived. Some elements, however, have remained and they testify to the colourful exterior of the Town Hall. They are medieval polychrome paintings in the niches of the tower visible today on the second floor. Originally they were outside, but in the seventeenth century a third floor was added and in this way they were placed under a roof. They remind us of the fact that in the days of

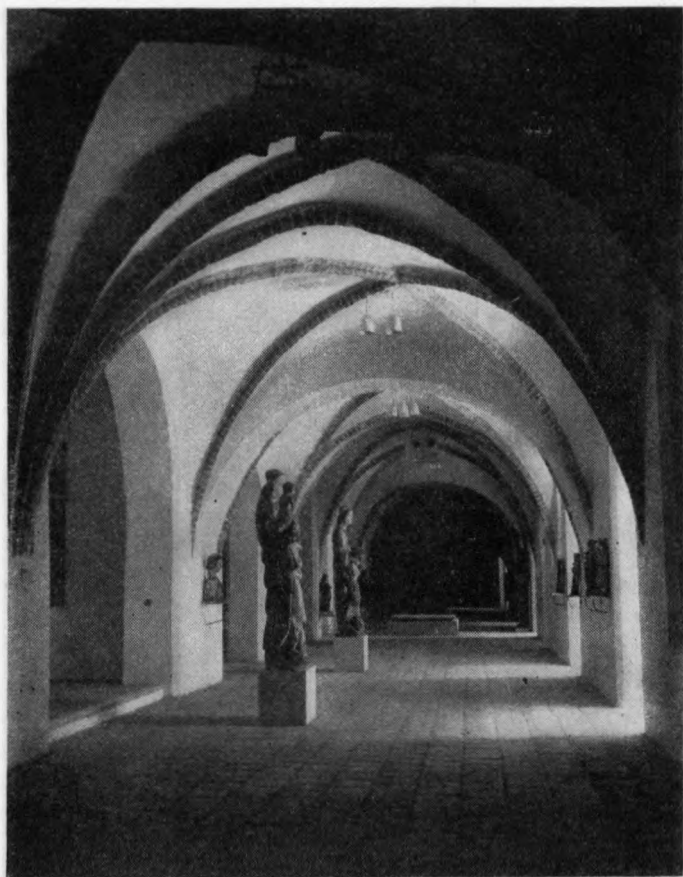
Copernicus almost every fragment of the building or object was eagerly used up for ornamentation and colouring. The Middle Ages delighted in intense colours and contrasting combinations. On the tower and — as may be conjectured — on other parts of the Town Hall brick was painted bright red. In the niches and on other plastered fragments geometrical motifs were painted in black, red and white. Their simplicity and gaudiness at the same time render the atmosphere of those times when the gaps between sublime nobility and crime or wisdom and barbarity were extremely small. Similarly the realistic and the mystic, delight in formal beauty and caricature verging on the monstrous, existed side by side, every day, suggesting that it was a buoyant epoch, passionate, manifesting itself in extremes.

When we look today at the venerable Town Hall building we admire the perfect harmony of its proportions and the distribution of architectural detail. It is difficult to believe that in its days of glory this august monument was surrounded by booths and market stalls. In accordance with the contemporary idea of a market they were lavishly painted in bright colours which must have formed a vivid background to the figures of patricians dressed in costly furs and clothes ornamented with silver, sometimes gold and precious stones.

The Town Hall tower could be seen from every point of the town. Made of brick with only small stone fragments, it was more than 40 m. high. It was surmounted by a conical top and flanked by four turrets similar in shape but only half as high. At the very summit of the tower there was a ball covered with gold leaf on top of which a metal flag was placed. The four dials of the clock constituted a landmark visible from afar. They had gilded hands and figures distinguishable from the suburbs. This clock — mechanical since the fifteenth century — fulfilled not only its practical function, indicating the time, but also indicated that this was the control centre of the town life. It is interesting to note that one of the popes, prompted by the same ambition, ordered clocks to be placed on church towers. On the top landings of the Town Hall tower bells were hung. They were used to call members of the council to a meeting, to toll or ring on great festive occasions.

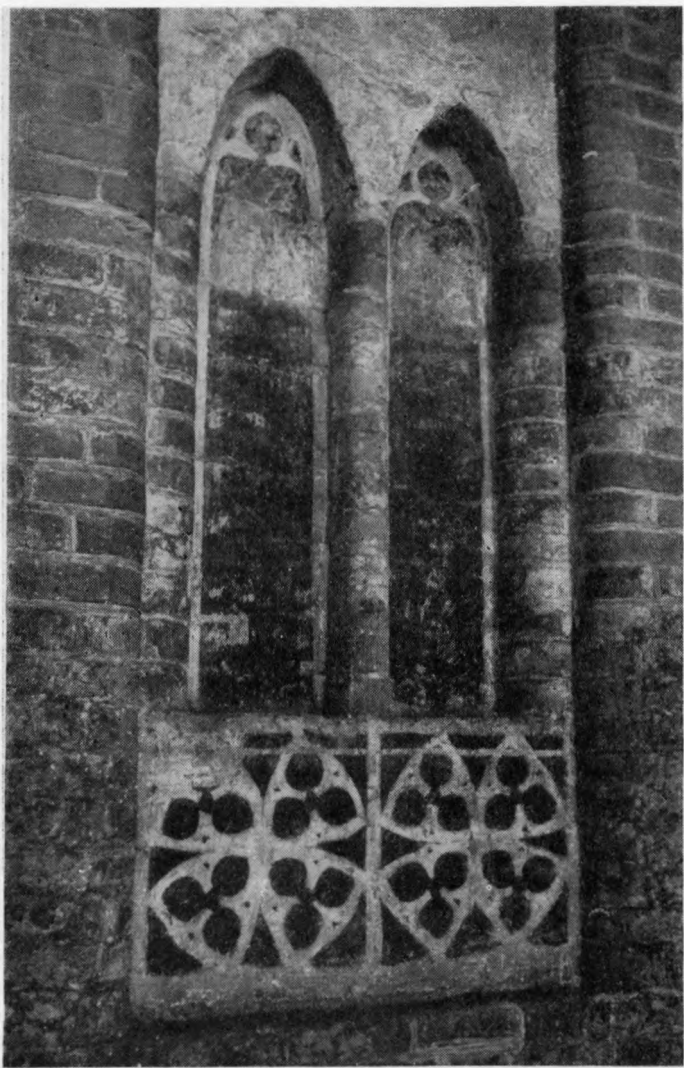
The Town Hall cellars served a very different purpose from prestige matters. There were several entrances leading down from

38 outside inviting visitors to have a drink of beer or wine. Only



22. Old Town Hall - groundfloor of the east wing where bread benches were originally placed. Now exhibition rooms of the District Museum presenting gothic art

the „worthies” were treated to the latter while beer was drunk by everybody just as tea or coffee is today. That is why the brewing industry developed on a considerable scale in the Middle Ages. The town had its own lucrative breweries, some of them owned by private persons. They were located both within and 39

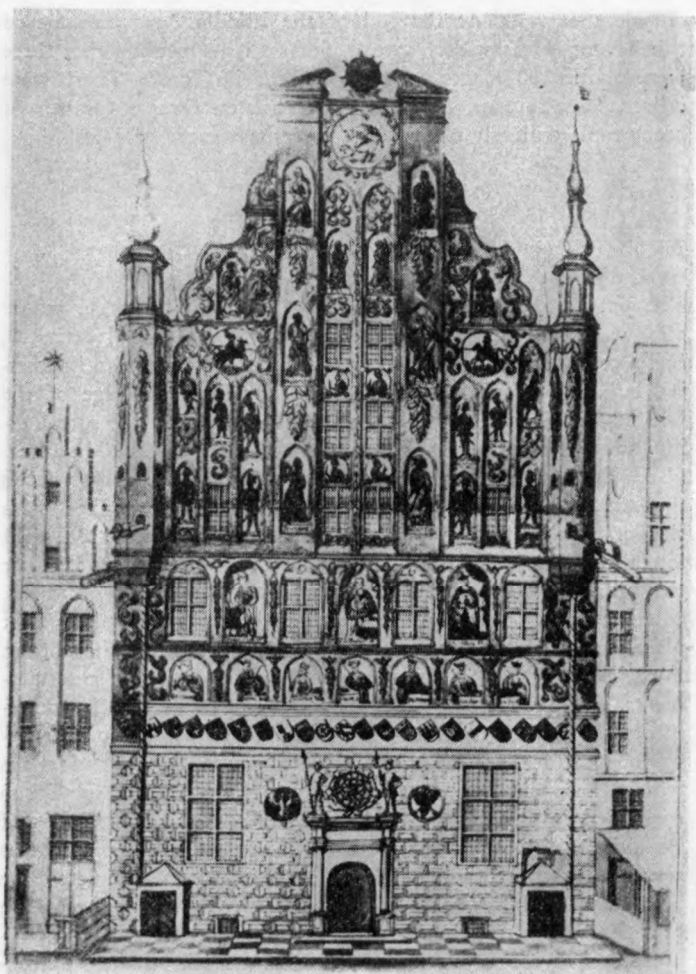


23. Medieval painted decorations on the elevation of Town Hall tower representing a detail of exterior design of this building. Now situated on the second floor under a roof raised in 17th cent.

outside the walls. At the end of the Middle Ages the sale of this beverage was widely spread. Suffice it to mention that there were above 100 places which sold beer in Toruń. These were cellars, inns, taverns, or guild public houses. Over a tumbler of beer people willingly played dice, sometimes cards or chess.

ARTHUS HALL

The patriciate belonging to the fraternity of St. George, whose aim was „to promote entertainment, piety and social activity”, had a centre of its own which was Arthus Hall. It was an impressive building standing in the middle of the south edge of the Old Market Square. It was taller and broader than the surrounding houses. Its architect is unknown, nor has the building survived. From available documents it appears that this object faced the street with its ornamented high-pitched top flanked with slender pinnacles. Big lead-mullioned windows admitted light into the big hall downstairs. The hall had vaulting supported by two pillars. It was here that the most important festive occasions, entertainments or simply a dance or an artistic performance took place among which mysteries, popular in the fifteenth century, must be mentioned. A dance was one of the favourite entertainments. Strict measures were taken to ensure that such amusements should not become indecorous. Since 1300 „improper behaviour” at a dance was fined. Among many official celebrations which took place in Arthus Hall the second treaty of Toruń concluded in 1466 was of special significance in the history of Poland. On the basis of this act Toruń and other Prussian towns returned to the Crown of Poland. These events stimulated the inhabitants and remained impressed in their memory for a long time. It was for them an opportunity to watch a pageant — a fashion review of its kind — solemn church services, tournaments, performances of minstrels or fools. For these purposes a special scaffolding was raised in front of the Town Hall. In the same place, but on different occasions, execution platforms were built. Some of the executions took place outside the town but they were always public. It was an exciting event attended by crowds. Executions, regardless of the „specific weight” of the crime were staged like an impressive performance. The final route



24. Arthur Hall in Old Market Square, built in 14th cent., transformed during the Renaissance and Baroque period – pulled down at the beginning of 19th cent. Steiner's drawing from ca. 1744

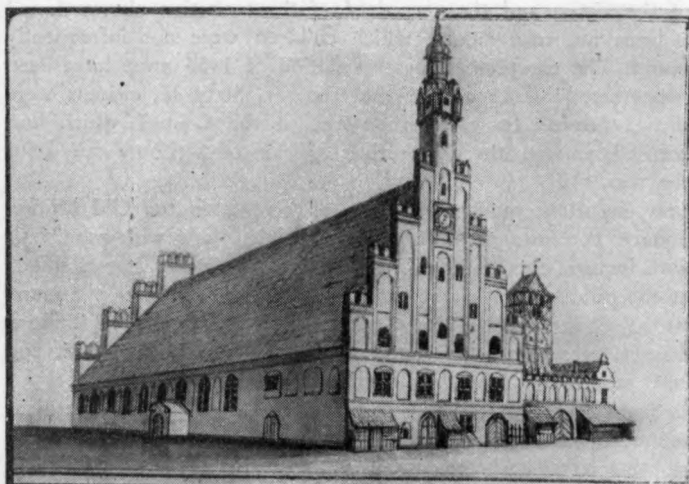
of the victim and the very deed of the execution always found a large audience among which children were not infrequently found. The exceptional mass execution of 1456 must have been remembered to the end of that century. Sixty six citizens were then beheaded for a rebellion against the Council which was accused, among others, of unjust division of a tribute raised for the war.

Less important punishments also took place in the Old Market Square. For instance, selling of sacks filled, half with pure, half with impure, oats was punished with an iron collar. It was staged at the pillory standing at the corner of the Old Market Square, Broad Street and Butter Street (today Żeglarska or Sailors' Street). Nearby on the south-east side of the Market fruit and herb sellers displayed their goods.

In front of the pillory, in the place where today the Copernicus monument is standing, a well was sunk. Similar ones were placed at other street corners. A well of this kind can be seen today in the wall surrounding St. Johns' church. It dates probably from the seventeenth century and its stone ornaments are in the style of that epoch, while the former ones must have had gothic details.

THE NEW MARKET SQUARE

The New Town, like the Old, had its own market square and Town Hall. Although it was mainly inhabited by craftsmen the Town Hall of this settlement also possessed its weighing room and clothhall. It was a brick house covered with a sloping roof, closed on both sides with ornamented tops. On the north side, parallel to the main building, stood a low house in which bread benches were situated. This structure was divided from the Town Hall proper by a courtyard enclosed by walls on the two remaining sides. The whole complex was surrounded by wooden booths and market stalls in which lesser tradesmen and craftsmen were selling their goods. In the Town Hall cellars a beershop was run and next to it there were prison cells. In front of the building there was a pillory. Butchers' stalls ran all the way from the New Market Square up to Wielkie Garbary (Great Tanners' Str.). There was also a pharmacy in the Market Square; it must



25. New Town Hall, built in 14th century, reconstructed later. Pulled down in 1818. A drawing from the middle of 18th cent.

have been located either in a small booth or in a house of modest appearance in which the apothecary lived with his family. This is where he used to prepare and sell drugs. It is worth mentioning that there were about eight shops of this kind in medieval Toruń. It is difficult to identify the site of the original apothecary's in the New Market Square. The building in which it is today comes from the Middle Ages and tradition seems to claim that an apothecary's has been there for centuries. On the other hand it is known that it was a very small shop in the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries, hence it is legitimate to think that in the days of Copernicus the house in question served another function while there must have been at least a small drugstall in the vicinity. This house is among the most representative surviving examples of secular architecture of the New Town area. In spite of the nineteenth century masonry it has a clearly distinguishable gothic pattern of richly moulded niches rising up to the third floor. Brick pilasters of this house were painted rose colour in the fifteenth century. It may be supposed



26. St. John's - Old Town parish church

that plastered niches were furnished with multicoloured decorations.

In the early days of Copernicus the majority of surviving gothic houses were being raised after the great fire of 1413 and particularly that of 1455 when a large part of the New Town was burnt down during the siege laid by the Teutonic Knights. With the exception of the above mentioned house the remaining buildings were generally more modest in appearance than those of the Old Town area. On the street side they were enriched with gable tops; they also had porches.

THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN

The panorama of the Old Town today is dominated by St. John's church. It was also the main landmark of old Toruń towards the end of the Middle Ages. Toruń's return to Poland at the end of the 13-years-war (1454—1466) was marked by growing artistic and architectural activity. It is connected with the economic development in which privileges accorded by king Kazimierz Jagiellończyk played a significant part. Fresh life was given to the town by royal land grants. At the same time, after the conclusion of the second peace treaty the economic position of Gdańsk was strengthened. The result of it was a competition between Toruń and Gdańsk which was reflected in the artistic production. The building of St. Mary's church in Gdańsk and of St. John's church in Toruń may serve as an example of this rivalry. The artist who participated in both foundations was Jan Brandt. He was engaged on the reconstruction of the Old Town parish church at its last stage in the eighties of the fifteenth century, then he worked in St. Mary's church in Gdańsk. He was an eminent architect and sculptor, the best evidence of which is the fact that the tomb of St. Adalbert executed by him in the cathedral of Gniezno was for a long time supposed to be the work of Wit Stwosz. It was not until documents revealed that he was put under bishop's arrest for failing to keep the term of contract that his authorship was finally identified.

The stonework of the old parish church must have been planned on a larger scale than what we can see today, in order to give
46 full scope to master Brandt's capabilities. The surviving corbels



27. St. John's church - 14th century stone corbel from the vestry

designed to support figures which have never been made seem to bear evidence to this fact. But it has not detracted from the plastic effects of the church which has well-calculated proportions and details of refined taste. Suffice it to mention the lace-like attic above the north porch ascribed again to Brandt. On the whole the parish church of the Old Town to some extent presents a record of the architectural development of medieval Toruń. The building of the tower in 1407—1433 and the heightening of the nave and aisles completed in 1468—1472 are among the most important events. The first building stage is a landmark too, not only because it is connected with the erection of the first sacred building in the land of Chelmno: about 1260 the building started with the chancel where a star vault was executed — which was a revelation. This remarkable architectural form introduced in the land of Chelmno as early as the second half of the thirteenth century was at that time known only in England but not in Germany or Flanders.

The well-proportioned interior was sumptuously decorated with sculpture and painting. At the intersections of vaulting ribs bosses of artificial stone were placed. This material, used in Toruń for architectural decoration throughout the Middle Ages, was mainly plaster, although natural sandstone brought from Gotland was also used. After discharging goods ships brought this useful stone as ballast. Local quarries were exploited too. The New Town possessed them since 1434. In spite of that architects and sculptors willingly applied artificial stone.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, apart from stonework, the chancel of St. John's church was enriched with painted decorations. The vaulting ribs were covered with floral ornaments, wallbricks were painted red while joints were set off by white paint. The free surface was used for pictorial representations. In the thirteenth century the patron saints of the church were represented on the wall by two big figures of both St. Johns while symbolic images of four Evangelists were wrought into a wheel painted on the wall. Elaborate religious themes with complex subject matter were introduced in the fourteenth century. An example of this is the work by an anonymous artist of high rank representing the Last Judgment with the Crucifixion and the tree of Jesse — the genealogy of Christ and a whole panorama of good and evil deeds, the cave of hell, heaven and purgatory. In



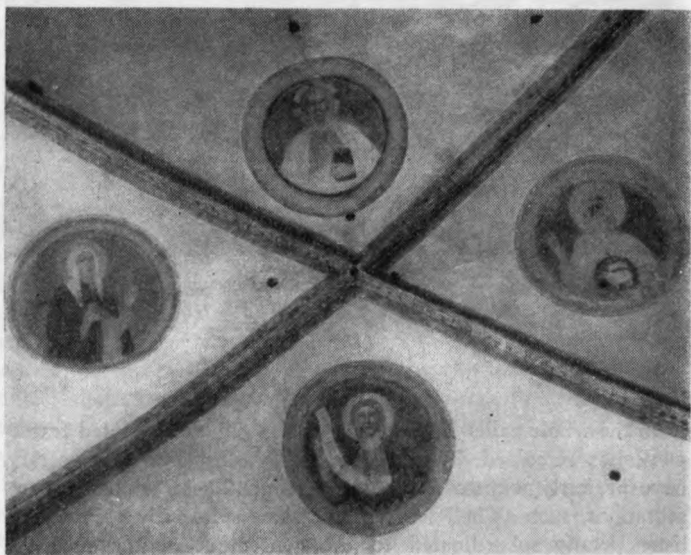
28. Porch of St. John's church: ornamented top (last quarter of 15th cent.)

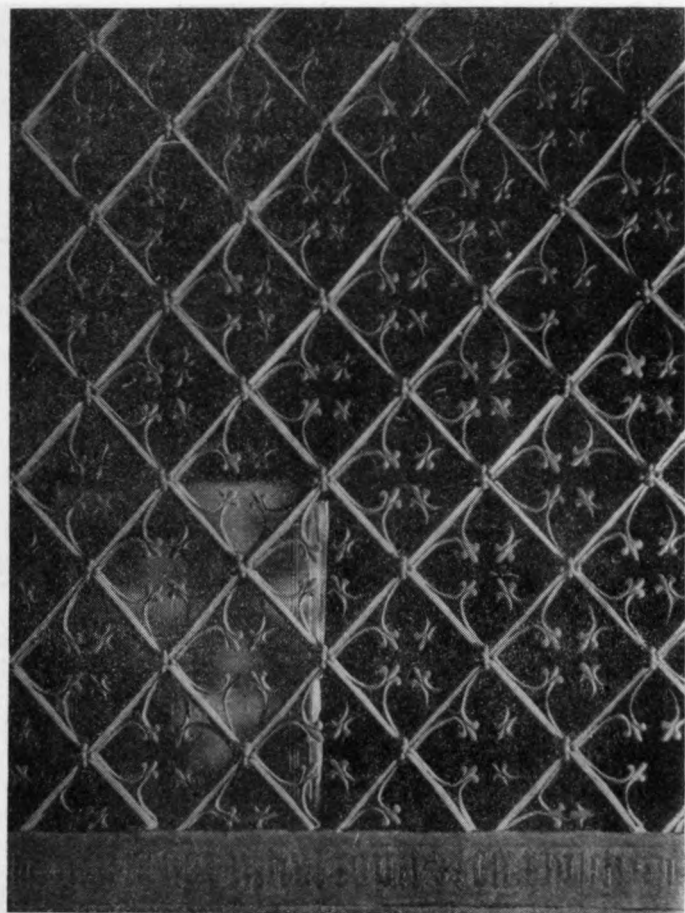
from the whole gallery of cardinal virtues only ornamented framework has remained. The „Seven deadly sins”, on the contrary, have perfectly withstood the test of time. These symbolic representations, such as hell scenes, have some splendidly painted realistic details subordinated to the conception of the medieval 49

painter. He did not lack courage or satiric dash, either, since side by side with the unfaithful wife pulled by the devil, and other naked figures tortured in hell, he presented a bishop and monks pushed down to hell on a wheelbarrow.

In the fifteenth century the chancel and some walls of the aisles and chantries were covered with many other polychrome scenes. Only a few of them can be seen today because they were covered by modern masonry and many have been completely destroyed. In the Middle Ages the effect of wall paintings was intensified by the filtration of light through the mosaic of stained glass. It changed with the time of day, season and the intensity of sun-rays, depending on the weather. From the original medieval glasswork of St. John's church only a few fragments have survived. They are in the chancel window and have been incorporated into the main work executed by a stained-glass artist, E. Kwiatkowski, after World War II. In this composition the stained glass

29. St. John's church - detail of 13th century polychrome painting on the chancel vault





30. 14th century grill which secured the book collection in St. John's church

approaches the medieval pattern. Thus in its main assumptions it reminds one of the window designs prevailing in the days of Copernicus. What level it reached can be illustrated today by fourteenth century quadrangles of stained glass from the Domi-

nican church now exhibited in the District Museum of Toruń. They represent scenes from the Old Testament. Until the first quarter of the nineteenth century they filled the windows of the above mentioned church where they must have created a contemplative mood not so much by their theological impact as by an intense pattern of colour which did not make the viewer very much inclined to search for the meaning of particular scenes and symbols.

Sculpture and easel painting were much more communicative. The medieval Old Town parish church contained a large collection of works from this field. At the end of the fifteenth century it was still more enriched when the high altar was constructed from which only a few sculptures have survived, now exhibited in the District Museum. It was then that two magnificent pictures were painted — the *Deposition* and the *Flagellation* — now on exhibition in the National Museum in Warsaw. They illustrate the high standard of late gothic painting in Toruń, then influenced by Netherlandish art.

When these pictures were painted Copernicus had already left Toruń. Yet I mention them, although they do not belong to the group of works which constitute his early background, because they bear evidence to the flowering of art in Toruń at the end of the fifteenth century and serve as an incomparable typological and costumological document which reveals figures of rich merchants of Toruń at the end of that period.

Similar portraits can be found in sculpture. Two remarkable statues which come from St. Mary's church are standing in St. John's church today. The third one belonging to the same group of „soft style” can be seen in a chapel at Barbarka near Toruń. The former two were made about 1400 in stone and painted in polychrome, the third was completed half a century later. The best known of them is the statue of the Beautiful Madonna of Toruń standing in the chancel, supported by a corbel with the bust of Moses. It was deprived of its original colour in the nineteenth century. As a matter of fact today the original corbel supports only a copy made by a sculptor, W. Marciniak, because the original statue was carried away by the Nazis and has not been recovered. Another admirable statue of this church is that of Mary Magdalene placed on a side altar of the eighteenth century. Unfortunately it was repainted in oil in the nineteenth century. The

52 statue of St. Barbara of Barbarka chapel, which in the days of



31. St. John's church - Moses' bust from about 1400 - detail of the corbel supporting the Beautiful Madonna of Toruń

Copernicus stood in St. John's church, has survived in authentic colours. All three sculptures, without being the work of one master, equally illustrate the high standard of modelling the whole figure which can be seen in the details of skillfully arranged folds of the garment and realistically finished faces and hands. Sculptures from the preceding century are also valuable examples produced by Toruń workshops which had many affiliations with Bohemia, although they had not yet reached the highest virtuosity. Among the most representative specimens of this originally numerous group of fourteenth century statues there are consoles of artificial stone made for the vestry of the church and a large crucifix, today placed on the high altar but originally hanging from the rainbow arch. Scarcely a dozen gothic statues have survived in St. John's church while in the Middle Ages their number was several times higher. But even those remnants of the past sufficiently illustrate the richness of plastic art of those days, not only in the work created by an artist but also in that of more ordinary character manifested in the colourful costumes of common citizens. It can be illustrated by some high altar reliquary herms representing carved portraits of merchants.

In medieval Toruń the commissions for plastic art were not confined to native artists or foreign masters. A great number of works, particularly objects of artistic craft, were imported from renowned centres. But most often the work of native artists was not inferior to them, witness the fourteenth century grills which close built-in cupboards in the chancel of the parish church. One of them served as a bookcase which contained scores of richly bound manuscripts. At first they were lent out, but in 1402 the Council forbade this in order to prevent the collection from being lost.

This cautious decision was fully justified considering that single code books laboriously copied and illuminated were not less valuable than goldsmith's work kept in the neighbouring cupboard. Chalices, monstrances, patens and other altar plate were secured by similar iron grating. In the course of centuries many of these objects were lost and only some specimens of medieval goldsmiths' art have survived. Similarly very few other gothic objects of the parish church have reached us. There are, among others, a thirteenth century font and fragments of pews dating from the first half of the fifteenth century.

54 The medieval parish church served not only purely religious



32. 14th century reliquary herm from St. John's church

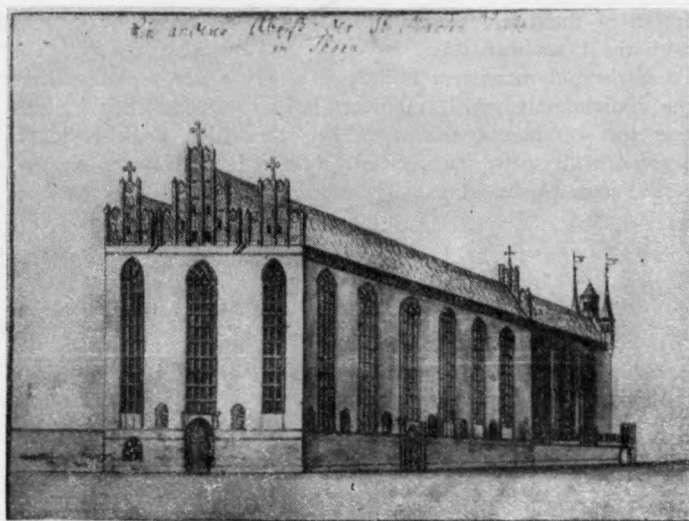
functions. It was the place of general festive occasions because religious experience was closely linked with everyday ceremonies and the exceptionally spacious interior of the church was well adapted for such purposes. On the occasion of royal visits solemn services were celebrated which gave an opportunity for a display of wealth and elegance. Nicholas Copernicus might have seen one of these in 1480 when king Kazimierz Jagiellończyk arrived in Toruń at the time of the Twelfth Night Fair. He was then accompanied by 4000 horsemen. They were received with great pomp. The organizers of the entertainments and festivities did their utmost to appear in all their splendour in order to emphasize their social prestige. Therefore town councillors dressed in coats trimmed with precious fur collars and fur lining did not look less impressive than the knights. Their costume was completed by hats trimmed with silver buttons, and belts and sword sheaths ornamented with this metal. The well-educated patricians were aware of their intellectual superiority to the majority of the

gentry. Their pride and sense of dignity was based on their wealth. This was also extended to extra-material matters. Like great nobles and high clergy they wished to be remembered after death. It was expressed in the foundation of epitaphs in the church or in the surrounding churchyard. A bronze epitaph hanging in the chancel of St. John's church is an exceptionally beautiful example of this custom. It was made about 1361 in Bruges, specially commissioned to commemorate the late mayor Jan Soest and his wife.

THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY

Within the townwalls there was also the Franciscan monastery and church of St. Mary. The church and its 27-m.-high nave and aisles date from the last quarter of the fourteenth century. It was a great artistic and structural achievement which influenced the fifteenth century development of St. John's and the building of St. Mary's church in Gdańsk. The interior of St. Mary's church in Toruń is impressive, above all, because of its soaring effect which was obtained through an excellent sense of proportion between the height of the nave and aisles, their width, the thickness of buttresses and pillars from which — without any capitals — star vaults grow out. It perfectly harmonizes with tall windows filled, in the Middle Ages, with stained glass. The authentic remains of gothic stained glass from this church can be seen in the District Museum in Toruń; the present stained glass, reminiscent of the original atmosphere, comes from the turn of the present century. According to the rule of the Franciscans who were a mendicant order St. Mary's church was given only spires instead of a tower. In the Middle Ages the nave and aisles were covered with three parallel roofs closed with ornamented tops in the east and west. The exterior was moderately proportioned, painted decorations having been added, among others, to the spires and tops. They represented threecoloured geometrical motifs. But the interior was furnished with a whole complex of multicoloured figures. The vaults were studded with stylized flowers and stars, on the walls large figures of saints and whole scenes from the New Testament were painted. These paintings were probably executed

56 by a workshop which arrived from Bohemia and brought trans-



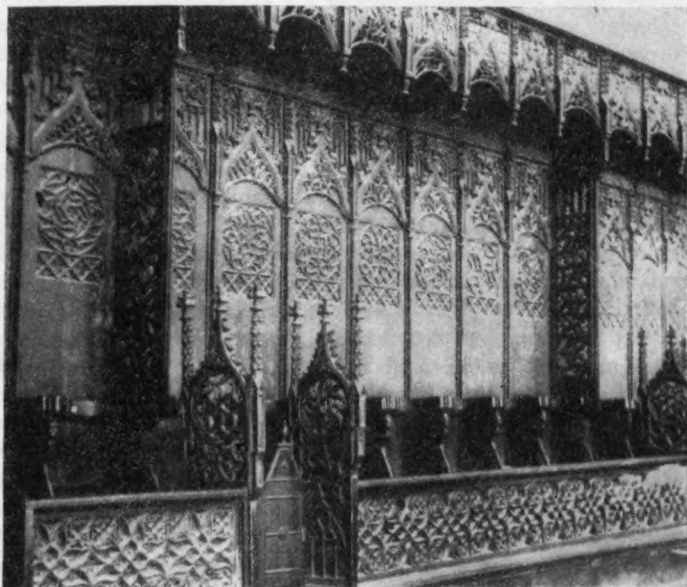
33. St. Mary's church - 14th century. Steiner's drawing from ca. 1740

formed patterns from Italian painting well known in their native country. The wings of St. Mary's high altar, now exhibited in the National Museum in Warsaw, are the work of this group of painters. At the time when it was completed this altar, much older than the well-known work of Wit Stwosz of St. Mary's church in Cracow, was the most outstanding achievement of its kind in this country. Sumptuously gilded and multicoloured it filled almost the whole span of the „rainbow arch” which closed the way from the nave to the chancel. In the chancel, at the place where medieval monks used to gather for daily prayers, two rows of stalls were placed in the first half of the fifteenth century. The benches were covered with carved decorations of perfect design in which apparently recurring motifs offer a striking variety of pattern combining an effect of integration with individual shaping of each detail. Carved portraits can also be found among them. But in spite of refined form no colour or gilding was applied here. The natural colour of wood resembling the

frocks of the friars seated in the stalls was more in harmony with the Franciscan rule.

From the old monastery buildings, a whole century older than the church, only small fragments have survived. They indicate that this complex consisted of two-story high brick buildings covered with lofty roofs. Small cloistered yards were situated within some of the wings.

34. St. Mary's - stalls from the first half of 15th cent.





35. The Monastery and monastic church of the Dominicans - built in the Middle Ages, since then many times transformed; demolished in 1833. Steiner's drawing from the middle of 18th cent.

THE DOMINICAN CHURCH

A rival monastic order of the Dominican friars settled in the rival New Town. Their church and monastery were located on the north-east side of that district in the area (today occupied by Motozbyt—automobile parts store) between the streets: Zaullek Prosowy—Dominikańska—Gen. Sikorski's Walls). It was divided from the Old Town by a moat considerable fragments of which have survived. The Dominican monastic church, like that of the Franciscan friars, was of impressive height. It was a two-nave composition with the chancel closed on three sides and it possessed a richly decorated interior. Apart from the stained glass — now exhibited in the District Museum — it contained valuable sculpture, paintings and altars. In 1833 when Prussian authorities issued orders to pull down the church some relics were transferred to the New Town parish church of St. James.



36. Fragment of 14th century stained glass window from the Dominican church, now exhibited in the District Museum in Toruń

THE CHURCH OF ST. JAMES

The New Town had a parish church of its own. The foundation stone was laid in 1309 and the main bulk completed in 1340. About a hundred years later the present tower was raised. In the early days of Copernicus a row of chantries added on the north and south almost completely screened an admirable con-



37. New Town parish church erected in 14th century, rebuilt in 15th cent.

struction of flying buttresses and „towers of strength” which surrounded the church in the fourteenth century. This design was motivated by the fact that the church was planned like a basilika in which the aisles were lower than the nave and the vaults pressing on the walls needed additional exterior supports. This kind of solution widely spread in West-European architecture 61



38. St. James' church - 14th century wall polychrome painting-detail



39. St. James' church - fourteenth century Madonna

was rarely applied in our brick buildings; hence it seems legitimate to presume that the architect of this church must have been a foreigner who could not resist adopting a spatial layout traditional in this country. In his artistic vision he must have appreciated the polygonal shape of the chancel rather than the rectangular one characteristic of this region. In order to combine two contrary architectural assumptions he created an illusion of a polygonal shape within the design of a rectangle which was obtained by slanting buttresses and window reveals. In this way he achieved an original and unique combination of the West-European architectural manner with the local needs and building tradition. It was completed by carefully elaborated architectural and plastic detail. It consists of highly varied brick shapes, moulds,

pinnacles and glazed lettered friezes disposed in the form of a foundation inscription. The church has also been given richly painted decorations both inside and outside. Today exterior paintings have survived only on the porch walls but originally geometrical motifs recurred symmetrically in many parts of the church.

The New Town parish church, far smaller than that of the Old Town, did not dominate the panorama, but squeezed modestly almost into the boundary of the New Town rose above the trees of the surrounding churchyard.

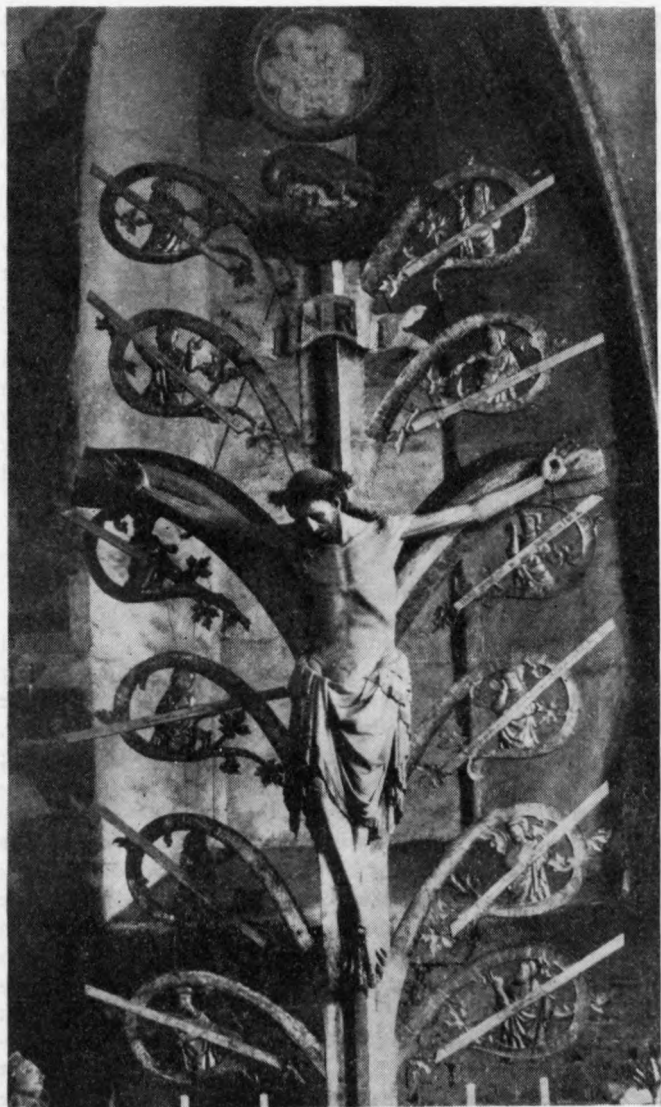
Among numerous medieval objects of this church it is worth while to mention in particular the picture of the passion now hanging in the chancel. It was executed obviously under the influence of Netherlandish painting about 1500. Against the background of fantastic architecture the artist has shown a gallery of realistically painted figures disposed, according to the requirements of the main theme, in cycles recalling the contemporary mystery plays. Genre scenes enable us to reconstruct the everyday life of Toruń merchants at the end of the Middle Ages and introduce us into the climate of the period in which Copernicus lived.

Another easel painting has fortunately survived in the collection of St. James' church. It is the Virgin with the Child painted on an oval board. The composition of the subject matter recalls Italian masters though it was created in the atmosphere of North European workshops.

A whole complex of polychrome paintings from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries which cover the interior of this church must also be mentioned among influences of North European art which reached Toruń through Bohemia. Two medieval crucifixes of high workmanship — the so-called black and the mystic crucifix — now in this church belong to this period of creative activity.

During conservation works carried out between the wars, a recess was uncovered in which a balustrade of an organ emporium was placed. It indicates that this church already possessed an organ in the fourteenth century.

From eight churches existing in the Middle Ages in Toruń only three have survived. History of art has recognised them as outstanding monuments of our architecture with an important role



40. The mystic crucifix from the Dominican church, now in St. James' church; end of 14th cent. - detail

been given to the Dominican monastic church demolished in the nineteenth century. It is difficult to say anything about the artistic level of the Holy Spirit's Church (it stood approximately in the area of the so-called Raclawice barracks of 1820) because of the lack of material. The other three suburban churches which will be described further on were of much inferior standard.

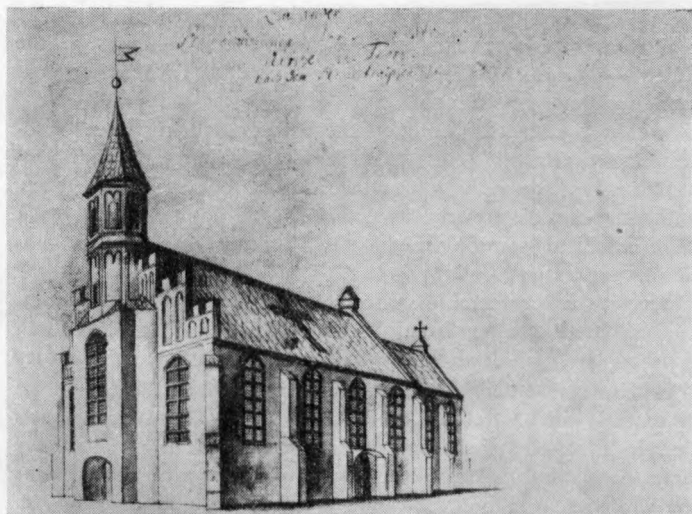
The number of churches in Toruń testifies to the fact that they were built in answer to a sober calculation of needs. In contemporary French cities there was one large church to about 200 inhabitants; in Toruń — to more than 1500. In Cracow, which at that time was not much bigger, there were scores of churches. It must have been the result of the fact that the capital had numerous founders like bishops and great noblemen while in Toruń foundations were shared by merchants. Their cash-box was often better provided than the royal treasury but they were thrifty in their expenditure. They wanted to impress not by the quantity but quality of erected churches — and they perfectly succeeded in reaching this aim.

THE SUBURBS

The medieval town enclosed with an enceinte was separated from its suburbs. For reasons of defense the area immediately neighbouring the walls and moats was not built up. In spite of that the fortified area and the open space needed each other. Workers and lesser customers came up to town from the suburbs; on the other hand there were workshops, gardens, fields and holiday residences of rich citizens beyond the walls.

To the east of the New Town, next to the Castle area, there were meadows, beyond them — timber stores, a brickkiln, a pitch-store and a dockyard. Farther on vineyards spread along the sloping banks of the Vistula. Excellent wine is said to have been produced here in the Middle Ages. The street situated today in the former vineyard grounds is still called Winnica (i.e. a Vineyard). Farther up the river there is a village called Kaszczorek lying in the muddy valley of the river Drwęca. A humble fourteenth century church has survived there. It remembers the last days of the mendicant brotherhood of beghards dissolved by the pope in the fourteenth century. In the days of Copernicus there

66 were numerous vineyards with bowers in that area too. One of



41. St. George's church - raised in 14th century, demolished at the beginning of 19th century. Steiner's drawing from about 1740

the vineyards belonged to the Copernicus family. It was situated in a straight line 5 km away from the Old Town almost on the suburban boundary line, but within the lands owned by the town of Toruń. At the end of the fifteenth century these possessions covered an area of 30 thousand hectares including a hundred villages. The suburbs were large and inhabited by several thousand people. That is why already in the thirteenth century magistrates were appointed for the suburb of Mokre and other suburbs had their Bench or law court appointed separately.

Beyond the defensive line, apart from houses, cottages and inns built mainly from timber but covered with tiles, there were a few water mills and a few industrial workshops. Thus at the site of the present University Library in Góry Piekarskie bakeries were situated. As a matter of fact the majority of craftsmen producing bread lived within the walls, mainly in Piekary (Bakers' Street) and sold their goods in the trade halls of the Town Hall, but for reasons of fire precaution big baking ovens built of clay

were located in the above mentioned place outside the walls. Smiths and tanners likewise had representative houses in the town but smithies were situated beyond Old Toruń Gate and tanneries beyond Chełmno Gate.

Down by the riverside, around the present Rybaki Street (Fishers' Str.) there was the small settlement of Małe Rybaki. A watermill stood there by the pond created by means of dams, and cottages picturesquely situated down the sloping Vistula bank were inhabited by people plying their fishing trade from generation to generation.

There was a considerable settlement inhabited mainly by craftsmen situated not far from Chełmno Gate. It spread on both sides of the road leading to Chełmno. Two fourteenth century brick churches stood there: St. Lawrence's, placed between the present Nowicki Street and the Artillery Arsenal, and St. George's church located in the area of the present petrol station. They were surrounded by small churchyards enclosed with walls. Near the churches were built so-called hospitals or a kind of refuge. In this suburb, too, although at a considerable distance from the inhabited area there was a leper hospital, a shelter for infectious patients, mainly lepers. The main waterline also ran through this suburb conveying water to the Old Town from springs existing in Bielany (near the present Mechanical College). It flowed from big reservoirs through underground wooden pipes. In the Old Town water was drawn from small wells, placed at street corners. The houses of the rich possessed their own branch conduits. Apart from this water system the town had a number of natural wells in front of some houses which were particularly important in time of siege.

The biggest suburb of medieval Toruń was Mokre. It spread along the road from Chełmża to Grudziądz. The section next to the town was called Małe Mokre. Then the road branched off eastward. The settlement along this road was called Wielkie Mokre. It consisted of scattered houses with the building of the Bench of Mokre standing in the centre. The inhabitants of this suburb owned many pastures, consequently cattle breeding developed in this region. That was why a special square was allotted for the purchasing of cattle and horses. A slaughterhouse was also built.

In the vicinity of the present Kaszownik, on the rivulet Mokra,
68 two big ponds were made by means of dams and three water-



42. Ruins of Dybow castle built by order of the Polish King Wladyslaw Jagiello after 1425

mills were operating there. Between this place and the New Town there was again a settlement called villa Polonicali — a Polish village. Some score metres away from St. Catherine's Gate at the entrance to the suburb of the same name stood St. Catherine's 69

church. Like the two above mentioned ones it was built of brick and covered with tiles. It was surrounded by a wall and a small churchyard. Nearby there was a refuge for the old and sick, called a hospital.

In the days of Copernicus the whole suburban area consisted of rather scattered buildings with a great number of gardens and orchards. Some of the roads there were paved.

KĘPA BAZAROWA

There was a very peculiar settlement of huts on a Vistula island called Kępa Bazarowa. This place, covered by primeval forest trees still surviving, was inhabited by all sorts of botchers, craftsmen plying their trade illegally, i.e. outside the guild. It was to this place that the Town Council used to expel women of bad reputation. It was later malignantly called the Monkey Grove.

DYBÓW-NIESZAWA

Next to the island on the left bank of the Vistula king Władysław Jagiełło ordered a castle to be built in 1425. Its ruins can be seen today. In the last quarter of the fifteenth century life in the castle was at its heyday. It was inhabited by the royal governor of the castle, sometimes the king and his family stopped there. The castle was a massive quadrangle with four turrets placed at the angles and an entrance gate from the south. Its situation and well fortified walls created favourable conditions for a settlement and soon a rival town of Toruń called Dybów-Nieszawa was raised. A wharf, a town hall, trade benches, granaries and numerous houses were built. A brick church of St. Nicholas was erected. Owing to direct contacts with Kuyavia the inhabitants of Dybów-Nieszawa frequently interfered with transactions of Toruń merchants. The Town Council of Toruń, on the ground of services rendered in the war against the Teutonic Knights, applied to the king for the liquidation of the rival town.

Kazimierz Jagiellończyk finally agreed in 1462 and ordered Nieszawa to be transferred some scores of kilometres up the river while only six taverns were to be left near the castle to meet

the needs of travellers. This liquidation was not fully effective because in the early days of Copernicus new houses rose on the left bank of the Vistula and trading ships put in at the harbour. The church of St. Nicholas survived until the eighteenth century. But the suburb of Podgórz did not exist in the Middle Ages.

Five centuries have gone by since the days of Copernicus during which time his native town has undergone many transformations. The colourful pageantry of that epoch has vanished for ever to give way to grey crowds of the twentieth century. They move along between the walls of the old city of Toruń often unaware that they are passing by architectural monuments and objects of art — witnesses of historic events — which formed the background to the early life of the Great Citizen of Toruń.

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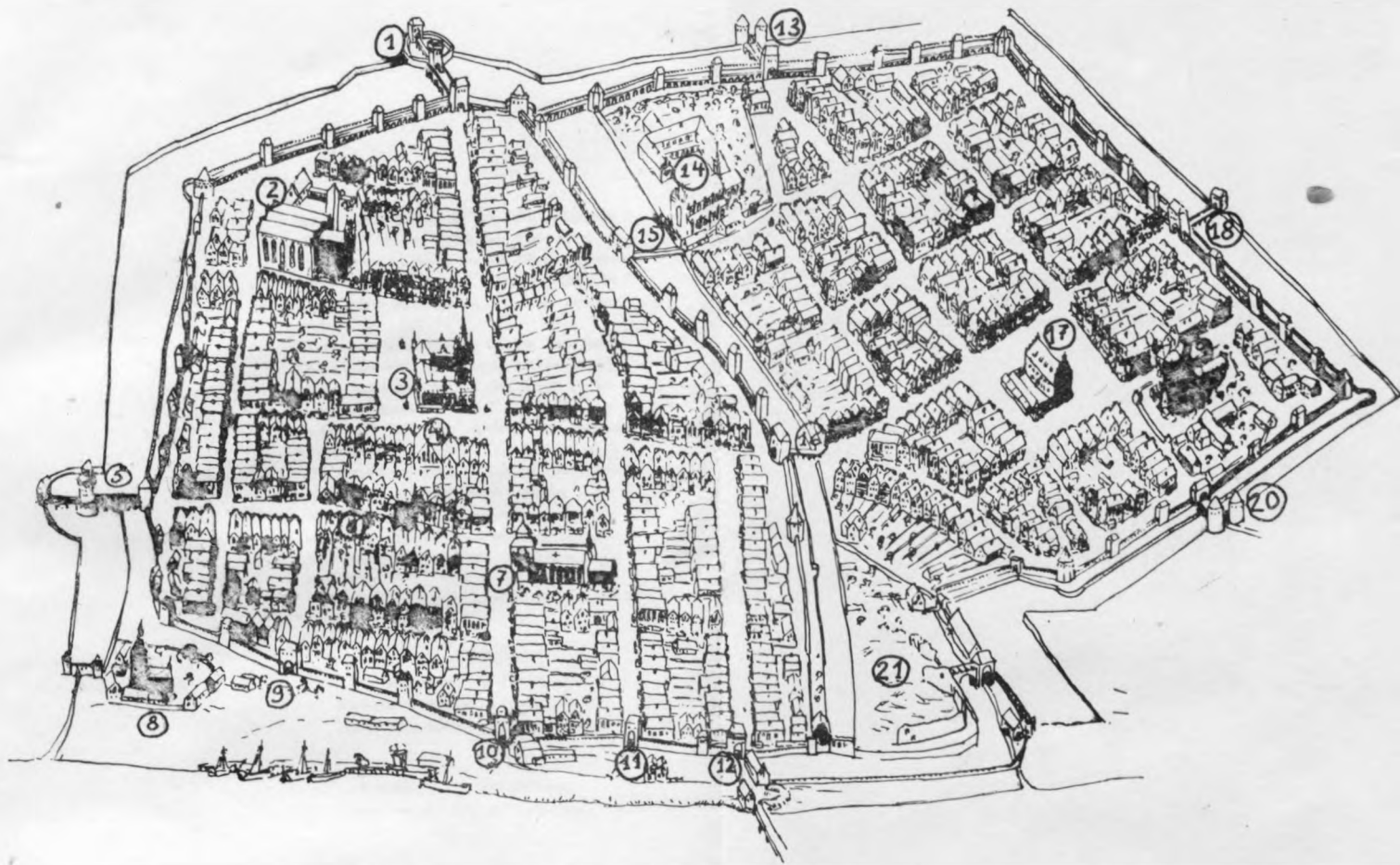
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ZAKŁADY GRAFICZNE W TORUNIU



Torun within the defensive walls at the end of 15th century
(reconstructed by Bohdan Rymaszewski)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. The defensive system of Chelmo Gate | 12. Bridge Gate |
| 2. St. Mary's church with the Franciscan monastery | 13. The defensive complex of the Straight Gate |
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In commemoration of the fifth centenary of the birth of Nicholas Copernicus - the Toruń Scientific Society (Towarzystwo Naukowe w Toruniu) publishes special Copernican Publications for the general public.

The issues published up to now have been concerned with such topics as the history and architecture of the Old Town of Toruń in Copernicus' time, Copernicus' family, his life and activity at various administrative posts, Copernicus' book *On the Revolutions*, its contents and meaning in comparison with ancient astronomy, Copernicus' own books and instruments, as well as the bearing of Copernicus' work on modern cosmology and astronomy.

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