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# THE SYMBOLISM OF MODERN AMBER INSIGNIA WITH FIGURAL DECORATIONS FROM THE DRAPIKOWSKI STUDIO

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## **Abstract**

In sacred art in Poland, amber began to be used more widely in the twentieth century, whereas the largest group of insignia for the ecclesiastical hierarchy was made in the latter period in the Drapikowski Studio in Gdańsk. Mariusz Drapikowski is the creator (either alone or in collaboration with his co-workers) of many sacred objects including the famous Jerusalem Triptych, the riza for the icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa as well as insignia for the ecclesiastical hierarchy. He gives them a modern form using amber and its properties as a material (differentiations in colour, the possibility of using it for carving as well as encrustation, combining it with other types of decoration and inscriptions). Using these means, Drapikowski exploits the symbolic potential of amber and gives his works a symbolism which carries both a traditional Christian message as well as one connected with the life of the contemporary Church. Using the combined methods from History of art and Social sciences - iconographic-iconological analysis, analysis of context, interview with the artist and analysis of Internet sources - allowed the author to show the symbolics and social context of the group of the prominent works of goldsmithery, which are able to express universal spiritual ideas in the way adequate to expectancies of contemporary recipients.

*Keywords:* crozier, pectoral cross, symbolism, ecclesiastical hierarchy

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## **1. Introduction**

This article discusses the symbolic meaning of amber in Polish contemporary episcopal insignia made in the studio of Mariusz Drapikowski. As mentioned in my previous article devoted to the Polish amber insignia [1], they incorporated the symbolic meanings of this raw material connected with their intended function, and also the iconography and history of a particular item. The use of amber in the insignia of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Poland was revived in the second half of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century thanks to amber craftsmen, among whom Mariusz Drapikowski (b. 1960) holds

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a special place due to the scale of his activities and the artistic value of his work. In 1983 he graduated with distinction from the Faculty of Sculpture and the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź. Besides sculpture, he also specializes in goldsmithery and amber crafts, and since 1984 he has been operating a studio in Gdańsk - Drapikowski Studio. In his early days he focused on making jewellery. The turning point in the firm's business was a 'papal' crucifix he made in 1999 - from silver, amber and pear wood - as a gift from the citizens of Gdańsk to Pope John Paul II. After making this piece, he began receiving prestigious commissions from both the Church in Poland and abroad [2].

Since then Mariusz Drapikowski's artistic achievements have been largely concentrated on the use of amber in sacred works of art such as altars, monstrances, crucifixes, reliquaries, liturgical vessels, and episcopal insignia. The pieces which have brought him the most renown are an amber and diamond *riza* (revetment) for the icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa at Jasna Góra, a retable 'Heavenly Jerusalem' (*Jerusalem Triptych*) for the fourth Station of the Cross in Jerusalem, blessed in 2008 by Pope Benedict XVI, and a thirty-kilogram amber millennial monstrance (Pol. Monstrancja Milenijna) for Saint Bridget's Basilica in Gdańsk. He is also collaborating with other amber craftsmen from Gdańsk to build a monumental (11 x 9 m) retable in the form of a triptych in the cathedral in Gdańsk-Oliwa; this triptych is even larger than the famous Amber Room. Together with his son, Kamil Drapikowski, he is working - successively - on the 'Twelve Stars in the Crown of Our Lady' which consists of installing amber altars in various places around the world, especially in troubled areas. To date such altars have been set up in Jerusalem and in Ozernoe in the Kostanay Province, in Kazakhstan. The next three are: for Yamoussoukro, capital of the Ivory Coast, in Kibeho in Rwanda and in South Korea.

Mariusz Drapikowski also makes sculptures and undertakes conservation work, including prestigious projects such as the reproduction - at Poland's national shrine - of the altar wall in the chapel of Our Lady of Częstochowa in the church of the Pauline Fathers at Częstochowa (which includes the tabernacle and the reconstruction of silver sculptures), for which he was awarded the title of Confrere of the Pauline Order. Mariusz Drapikowski has been decorated and has received many awards for his artistic accomplishments - which have a notable social dimension; these include the Silver Cross of Merit, the Commander Cross of the Order of Saint Stanisław with Star, and the Saint Brother Albert Medal. His work is exhibited in the Vatican Museum, the Museum of Art in Riga, at the Museum in Malbork, and also in the Amber Museum in Gdańsk [3; [http://www.gedanopedia.pl/?title=DRAPIKOWSKI\\_MARIUSZ](http://www.gedanopedia.pl/?title=DRAPIKOWSKI_MARIUSZ), accessed 07.06.2018; [www.drapikowski.pl](http://www.drapikowski.pl), accessed 07.06.2018; <http://www.gdansk.pl/rada-miasta/Laureaci-medalu-ksiecia-Msciwoja-II,a,7754>, accessed 07.06.2018].

Among the insignia made by Mariusz Drapikowski - rings, pectoral crosses and crosiers - I shall discuss three which differ due to their distinctive figurative decorations. Using the symbolism of amber, each insignium and its decoration conveys both a religious message and one that is also ageless, while, at the same time, being associated with the contemporary history of the Church

in Poland. Each object also testifies to on-going international contacts within the universal Church. In order of execution these three objects are: the crociera made for Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone and Archbishop Władysław Ziółek and the pectoral cross made for Cardinal Joachim Meisner.

## **2. The crociera of Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone**

This crociera has a massive rounded crook - shaped like a question mark - made of silver and which is gently curved at the base. The upper section of the crook is made from an elongated, irregularly shaped piece of honey coloured amber. At the base of the crook there is a nodus made of white amber which is cylindrically shaped and which forms a pedestal (as in the original) for the silver figure of Christ – the Good Shepherd, which is a miniaturized copy of an early Christian sculpture dating from the first half of the fourth century found in the Catacombs of Saint Domitilla in Rome. The insignium bears the coat of arms of Cardinal Bertone, then retired Secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith.

The crociera was commissioned by the Archbishop of Wrocław, Cardinal Henryk Gulbinowicz and was gifted, in the name of the diocese, to Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone on 16 June 2007 during a mass at the church in Gdańsk Zaspá marking the twentieth anniversary of Pope John Paul II's visit. Mariusz Drapikowski, who was commissioned to make the insignium, suggested to Cardinal Bertone a motif consisting of the most famous Christian sculpture of the Good Shepherd in the volute. Not only did the cardinal accept the design, he also ordered a mitre with a depiction in the titulus of the same sculpture — *en grisaille* on a gold background. He used these insignia during the anniversary mass in Gdańsk. Repeating the motif of the Good Shepherd strengthens its ideological message and points to the subject's early Christian sources, taken from pagan antiquity, which were sometimes repeated using the same composition [4].

The figure of the shepherd was well known to people in ancient times, and its symbolic meaning of a good, caring God has its origins in the Bible. In the Old Testament for example Psalm 22 (23) begins with the words: *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want*. In the New Testament, the Good Shepherd was inextricably linked to the person of Christ (Matthew 2.6, 9.36, 25.32, 26.31; Mark 6.34, 14.27; John 10.2, Hebrews 13.20; 1 Peter 2.25, 5.4; Revelation 7. 17).

The early Christian motif depicting Christ the Good Shepherd with a lamb on his shoulders refers directly to those parts of the New Testament which emphasize his direct relationship, care and willingness to give his life for each one of them (Luke 15.5; Matthew 18.3; John 10.11, 10.14) [5]. The model was an ancient image of Hermes Kriophoros based on a sculpture by Calamis, fifth century BC) [6], among which the most famous is in the Museo Pio Cristiano in the Vatican. It was believed to be an illustration of a Christian work 'The Shepherd of Hermas', and from the fifth century, a likeness of Christ. Among

the biblical sources of a figure depicted in this way, the parable of the Good Shepherd comes to mind (in particular Luke 15.4–6), whose love helps save the lost sheep [7].

The figure of the Good Shepherd carried a universal message of Christ's salvific love. This also applies to the shepherds of the Church, in particular bishops because they possess the fullness of priesthood [8]. According to the liturgist, like Jesus, who redeemed mankind by dying on the Cross and who therefore carries a Cross instead of a shepherd's staff, so a bishop has a crosier that symbolises authority and a shepherd's care for his flock. It was assumed, after Honorius of Autun (twelfth century), that the crosier stood for "the importance of learning, which sustains the Lord's flock and gathers it in the pasture of life" (PL 172, 610) [9].



**Figure 1.** (a) Crosier, with a figure of the Good Shepherd, belonging to Martin Graf, Abbot at the Cistercian Abbey of Neuzelle, Prague, 1727, Pelplin, Diocesan Museum, Photo: K. Bogacka; (b) Crosier with a figure of the Good Shepherd belonging to the Polish Primate, Cardinal August Hlond, <http://abpgadecki.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Abp-G%20decki-Piotrk%20b3w-194.jpg>; (c) Crosier with a figure of the Good Shepherd belonging to Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, [www.drapikowski.pl/index.php?mod=sakralia&aid=5](http://www.drapikowski.pl/index.php?mod=sakralia&aid=5).

Cardinal T. Bertone's insignium is the third known to me crosier connected with Poland which depicts the figure of the Good Shepherd. In the oldest - the crosier of Martin Graf, Abbot of the Cistercian Abbey of Neuzelle - in Pelplin, [10] the Good Shepherd is shown wearing a coat and a hat, thereby giving the statuette a Baroque style (Figure 1a). A crosier depicting a figure wearing a short tunic, shown in movement, alluding to the early Christian type, belonged to the Primate of Poland, Cardinal August Hlond, Archbishop of

Poznań and Gniezno in the years 1926–1946, and after him to Stanisław Gądecki, Archbishop of Poznań from 2002 (Figure 1b).

The immediate context of this insignium were the celebrations which took place in June 2007 marking the twentieth anniversary of Pope John Paul II's visit to Gdańsk and the hopes of his rapid canonization and early beatification - which was expressed by the crowd at his funeral with cries of and banners bearing the words 'Santo subito!' This idea was entrenched in the 'Prayer for the beatification and canonization of the Servant of God, John Paul II': "(...) He [the Spirit of Love], entrusting himself entirely to Your mercy and the maternal intercession of Mary, revealed to us the living image of Jesus the Good Shepherd, showing saintliness, which is a measure of Christian life, as a way of achieving eternal union with You. (...)" [11] The comparison of a bishop and a shepherd, which is ever present in the Church, relates to Christ and his vicar on Earth.

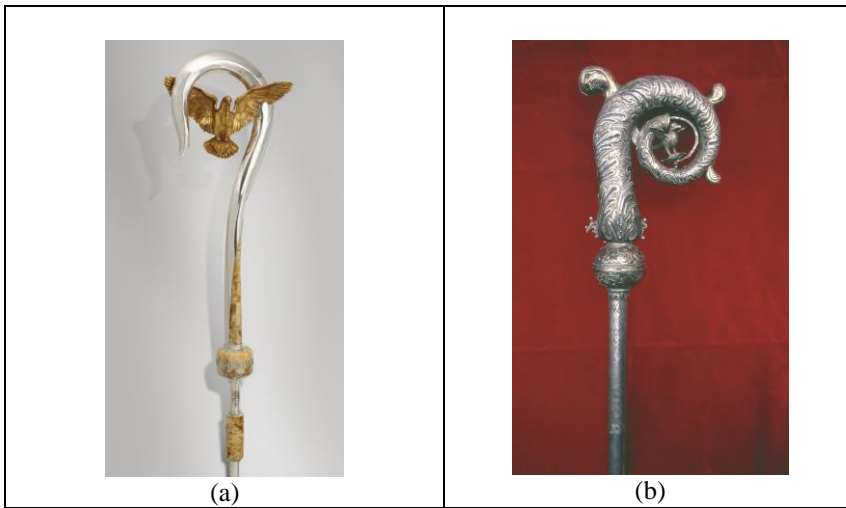
The huge piece of golden amber above the figure of the shepherd is, in accordance with Ezekiel's prophecy, a sign of God's revelation. Its meaning in relation to Christ - the Good Shepherd can be explained in the context of John's theology of light. The shape of the amber and silver crook suggests the gate through which the shepherd of the sheep enters, unlike the thief and robber (John 10.2) in the parable of the Good Shepherd. Jesus is also the gate leading to salvation (John 10.9–10), lighting the way of the person passing through with a gentle glow, symbolized by the electron and silver. The brightness of the gate is reminiscent of the many allusions to light in the Gospel of Saint John, through which Jesus came into the world (John 1.9–10) and which He himself personifies: "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" (John 12.46). The essence of this light is life: "In him [the Word] was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1.4). The amber, being a substance that is part of a living plant, with its warmth, brightness and magnetic powers, may be a visual symbol of these words.

Attention is drawn to amber's magnetic properties by the amber in the frontal part of the crook which has - as part of a shepherd's staff - a similar symbolism, i.e. gathering together the faithful and the conversion of sinners. The nodus - which is also the pedestal for the figure of the Good Shepherd - is made of amber which is of a light and gentle colour. In the triple symbolism of the crosier's form: attraction, consolidation and admonishment, the nodus, which supports the hand, brings to mind Pope Innocent III's words claiming that the shepherd's staff represents the power of Christ, support and comfort.

### **3. The crosier of Archbishop Władysław Ziólek**

This is the only crosier in the group which is decorated with a non-anthropomorphic sculpture. The crook of the staff has a classic shape, smooth, rounded and made of silver, and bears a large gilded sculpture of a dove with outspread wings - the symbol of the Holy Spirit (Figure 2a). Pale coloured amber was used to make the nodus and to decorate the stem just above the

nodus. The insignium was designated for Władysław Ziółek, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Łódź (from 2004 to his retirement in 2012).



**Figure 2.** (a) Crosier with amber with sculpture of the dove of the Holy Spirit, made for Archbishop W. Ziółek of Gdańsk, M. Drapikowski, 2009/2010, [www.drapikowski.pl/index.php?mod=sakralia&aid=5](http://www.drapikowski.pl/index.php?mod=sakralia&aid=5); (b) Crosier of the Abbess Elżbieta Piwnicka, Toruń, Hans Herden, c. 1631, Żarnowiec, Benedictine Abbey, Photo: K. Bogacka.



**Figure 3.** (a) Idealized contemporary likeness of the dove as a symbol of the Holy Spirit; (b) Dove of the Holy Spirit, alabaster window, designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, c. 1660, Saint Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, the so-called: *Cathedra Petri* (1657–1665).

Mariusz Drapikowski contacted the Archbishop of Łódź in 2005 during work on the amber *riza* for the icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa at Jasna Góra, and in 2008 he made a fountain-cum-monument of Saint Faustyna Kowalska for Piotrkowska Street in Łódź (also the seat of the archdiocese). Immediately afterwards, in the year 2009/2010 Mariusz Drapikowski made the crozier under discussion.

The motif of the dove refers directly to the episcopal appointment of Archbishop Władysław Ziółek: *In virtute Spiritus*, and it is therefore reminiscent of the appeal of the episcopal ministry. The dove's outspread wings signify the power of God's Spirit, in accordance with the words of the psalm "therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings" (Psalm 36.7). This symbol is directly related to the description of Christ's Baptism in the gospels (Matthew 3.16, Mark 1.10, Luke 3.22, John 1.32), and it is also mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, starting with the description of the creation of the world: "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of water" (Genesis 1.2).

The symbol of the Holy Spirit, which has a fundamental meaning in this insignium, carries a wealth of theological content associated with the Third Person of the Holy Spirit and its influence in the Church. The presence of the Holy Spirit is particularly interesting in this context - at the appointment of a Bishop and as well as assisting the bishop in his ministry, which is expressed by distributing the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The significance of this issue has often been reflected in religious iconography, including the symbolism of the Holy Spirit as an attribute of a pope or a bishop. Also in works made for the Church by goldsmiths, the presence of the Holy Spirit has a long tradition in the form of a columbarium - a vessel for the Eucharist in the form of figures of doves, suspended above the altar in churches [12].

The image of the dove on this crosier relates to the tradition of insignia with a similar motif in the volute. The oldest example known to me is an English crook dating from 1120–1130, made of walrus bone, with the dove of the Holy Spirit in the volute (Musée National du Moyen Âge, Paris). In Poland, similar iconography can be found in the crosier of the Abbess of the Benedictines in Toruń, Elżbieta Piwnicka, the work of Hans Herden dating from c. 1631, now in Benedictines cloister in Żarnowiec (Pomerania, Poland) [10, p. 240–246] (Figure 2b) and the crosier of Bishop Czesław Sokołowski (1877–1951) from the Warsaw workshop of the 'Bracia Łopieńscy' (Łopieński Brothers) dating from 1919, in the Archbishops' Palace in Warsaw [13]. The Gdańsk crosier was not inspired by earlier insignia, although the dove was also shown frontally, with outspread wings.

The idealized realism of the symbol of the Holy Spirit is reminiscent of the crosier from the Łopieński Brothers' workshop, and also relates to contemporary visual messages of a religious nature (Figure 3a). The contrast between the silver-white and gold tones, and also the symmetry of the dove, facing the viewer, has its source in the concept for the stained glass window which is in the central part of the so-called Cathedra Petri (Saint Peter's Throne) in Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican City (Figure 3b). The meaning of this particular model is due to the rank of the main Christian church, which is symbolized by the splendour of its architecture and art. As regards the decoration of the crosier, this association indicates the relationship between the hierarchy and the Church in Rome.

#### 4. Pectoral cross of Cardinal Joachim Meisner

Unlike the insignia discussed above, when making the pectoral cross for Joachim Meisner, Mariusz Drapikowski did not allude to realistic forms, instead he used conventional figures, defining their shape by juxtaposing silver and two types of amber, and well as using strong chiaroscuro, which is suggested by the difference in the translucency of the materials.

The pectoral cross has the form of a cross with a short upper crossbar, with the figure of Christ - which takes up almost the entire surface - being embraced by Mary who is standing in front of the crucifix. The cross is made of silver, the figure of Jesus of gold-coloured amber - the head and chest of transparent amber, whereas the neck, shoulders and visible part of the loins and leg are made of opaque amber. The Holy Virgin, however, is made of blue amber, which is rare.

Mariusz Drapikowski made the pectoral cross in c. 2010 for Cardinal Joachim Meisner, Archbishop of Cologne as a gift from his family. According to the artist, he was in contact with the Cardinal from 2005, and when making the Jerusalem Triptych, the concept of which was based on the Cardinal's reflections on the Apocalypse of Saint John. Also after the triptych was completed, Cardinal Meisner, and the Archbishop of Łódź, Władysław Ziółek, and the Bishop of Radom, Zygmunt Zimowski, offered up prayers [*Woman of Jerusalem – Queen of Peace. Coverage of the installation of the altar of the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for the Fourth Station of the Cross in Jerusalem*, 24 January 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgngqYIR6sY>, accessed 20.07.2018].

Mariusz Drapikowski explained that when designing the pectoral cross he wanted to emphasize the Cardinal's devotion to the Mother of God, which was rooted in his childhood in Silesia (the Cardinal called Mary "the most beautiful Silesian girl", and this devotion remained throughout his entire life, also as Archbishop of Cologne. [P. Kucharzszak, *Jest z najpiękniejszą śląską kobietą*, <http://katowice.gosc.pl/doc/4023006.Jest-z-najpiekniejsza-slaska-Kobieta>, accessed 20.07.2018] Cologne Cathedral, dedicated to Saint Peter and the Blessed Virgin Mary, which houses a famous reliquary of the Three Kings, is reminiscent of the role of the Mother of God in the work of Redemption.

The picture of Mary near the cross was handed down to us Saint John the Evangelist (John 19.25-27), and the tradition of examining Mary's experience was begun in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus (second–fourth centuries) and early Christian writers such as Saint Ephrem the Syrian (fourth century). Western literature adopted the Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a dramatic-cum-lyric genre at the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and gave them a musical form [14]. Because Saint John is not present in the image under discussion, in the planctus consoling Mary, he focuses on the motif of Mother and Son and the spiritual content which evoke the cross which encompasses the whole story of salvation.





**Figure 4.** Pectoral Cross of Cardinal Joachim Meisner, Gdańsk, M. Drapikowski, c. 2010, [www.drapikowski.pl/index.php?mod=sakralia&aid=5](http://www.drapikowski.pl/index.php?mod=sakralia&aid=5).

The composition of the pectoral cross also alludes to this idea, and is in line with early images of the Crucifixion in northern European art. The influence of the Viennese triptych of Rogier van der Weyden can be discerned in the proportion of the figures; Jesus's bowed head, the pose of Mary and her poignant gesture of embracing the cross, and also in the arrangement of the chiaroscuro, which is masterfully suggested on the flat amber surface. The analogies are even more obvious after cropping the figures of Jesus and Mary, and then superimposing them in accordance with the composition of the pectoral cross (Figure 4).

Emphasizing the closeness of Mother and Son, like on the woodcut of the pre-Raphaelite Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, indicates that His suffering on the Cross directly affects her. However, it is hope rather than drama which is the dominant idea in the pectoral cross - in accordance with the Cardinal's motto: *Spes nostra firma est pro vobis* (That our hope for you may be steadfast).

The fact that Mary is shown embracing Jesus and not the Cross is an allusion to images of the Holy Virgin and Child, which point to Mary's Divine Motherhood. It also brings to mind images of the Pietà, especially in scenes which differ from the traditional mediaeval presentation, such as the Pietà Rondanini of Michelangelo. The fact that Mary is facing Christ is also symbolic and corresponds to the idea of her mediation and through whom the faithful and the viewers pray to Jesus.

The amber figures on the pectoral cross speak through the symbolism of the amber and its colour. The golden figure of Jesus indicates He is the Light of the world and the Son of righteousness. Mary's blue coat shows her as the Queen of Heaven, Mother of God-Man and the merciful Mother and Advocate of all mankind [15].

The pectoral cross was composed in such a way that the gold amber would emerge from the blue amber, whose open form with outstretched arms is reminiscent of a flower, and it can be interpreted like a green twig (*Virga*) from the Tree of Jesse, according to Tertullian's definition. The colours of the sea and tears, and the sun and fire are reminiscent of the origins and properties of amber. The emergence of the sun from the waters of the sea, the source of life symbolizes the birth and resurrection of the Sun - a symbol of Jesus.

## **5. Instead of a conclusion**

The insignia - dating from the beginning of the twenty-first century - with decorative figures made by Mariusz Drapikowski are closely connected with his other sacred works and are also in keeping with their historical and social context. The story behind the *Jerusalem Triptych* and its journey to the Holy Land plays a very important role. While on its way to its final destination, it was blessed by Pope Benedict XVI. It was also a process which led to the triptych's 'spiritual birth', in which all three hierarchs were engaged. Cardinal Joachim Meisner and Archbishop Władysław Ziółek were among the members of the clergy who joined in the prayers which were offered when the Triptych was presented in Saint Bridget's Basilica in Gdańsk on 6 August 2008. Mariusz Drapikowski saw this as an indispensable element in the process of the Triptych's creation: "the process began of 'filling' this vessel with prayers. If not for these prayers, the whole intention behind it would have been pointless." [16] Archbishop Ziółek accompanied the triptych at the Vatican, and Cardinal T. Bertone was also present [16]. Based on the Book of the Apocalypse, the Triptych's symbolism, according to Cardinal J. Meisner's theological interpretation, influenced, in my opinion, the iconography of the insignia which was created several years later.

Mariusz Drapikowski's sacred works stem from his spirituality. He compared it to writing an icon, therefore treating it like a religious act - an intense prayer — which has both an individual and social meaning: "my work must evoke feelings of sacredness, serve the people, help people pray in silence, come to rest. So there is the feeling of being in an extraordinary place, time and space, you have to prepare for this, get in the mood." [J. Kulpińska, *Nadworny jubiler Kościoła Katolickiego*, 2008, [www.pb.info.pl/archiwum/artyku-1621-nadwornyjubiler.htm](http://www.pb.info.pl/archiwum/artyku-1621-nadwornyjubiler.htm), accessed 12.06.2018] In accomplishing the spiritual dimension of his work, the artist makes use of amber as a basic material or leitmotif in all his works, drawing on its rich potential, and its symbolic and cultural significance.

On discussing the significance of all the insignia of the church hierarchy, it is obvious that we should not only take into account the materials used to make them but also - and above all - the artistic skill with which they were executed and the well thought out iconography. The insignia presented show the talent and creative energy of the designer and craftsman who made them, and the effectiveness of searching for new opportunities to achieve the intended artistic expression. The basis of this is technical perfection and an excellent knowledge of the material.

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