

**Retabulum: An Interdisciplinary Comparative Research on Winged Altarpieces from Upper Lusatia, Silesia, and Franconia - examining joining techniques, materiality, and (inter)mediality of wooden altar shrines with the assistance of dendrochronology**

Altarpieces, defined as (art)works of painting and sculpture with religious themes set above or behind a Christian altar, assumed various forms depending on the time of their creation and location. The second half of the 15th century and the beginning of the next century mark a period of remarkable popularity for winged retables—trptychs and pentptychs—especially in Central and Western Europe. These works often featured extremely monumental and complex structures, consisting of a shrine closed with one or more pairs of wings. Each piece created an intricate system of artistic and theological expression, designed to evoke emotions, convey messages, and serve as a tool for both private and collective devotion, while organizing and decorating sacred spaces.

Late medieval winged retables have been artifacts of enduring interest to researchers for many decades. Generally, a significant amount of focus, particularly in interdisciplinary research that combines approaches from history, natural sciences, and physical sciences, has centered on the elements found in sculpture and painting. Issues related to the technology and functionality of non-artistic components—the construction of shrines and wings, as well as metal and wooden joints and fittings, which fall under the domain of conservation and restoration sciences, have remained overlooked. Consequently, there is a significant gap in research, particularly regarding late Gothic altarpieces from Silesia and Upper Lusatia, that needs to be addressed.

The project's main goal is to conduct an interdisciplinary analysis, with a primary focus on dendrochronology, of 34 selected winged altarpieces from Upper Lusatia, Silesia, and Franconia, created between approximately 1450 and 1530. This analysis will concentrate particularly on previously overlooked technological and conservation aspects, such as wood characteristics, carpentry and joinery techniques, as well as fittings production, alongside historical and artistic research. The project seeks to define, detail, and examine the craft practices and technological standards existing in the specified regions during the designated period. It will also investigate how techniques and pre-fabricated solutions were transferred between these areas. Non-invasive dendrochronological studies of the wood from shrines and retabula wings will not only lead to more accurate dating but also help assess the types, sources of origin, and quality of the materials used. A key aim of the project is to re-evaluate the roles of carpenters in the creation of winged altarpieces in Upper Lusatia, Silesia, and Franconia during the Late Gothic period. The analysis of archival materials, including the few surviving contracts and the even rarer drawing sketches (*Visierungen*), aims to clarify the various aspects involved in ordering altarpieces. This encompasses the roles of commissioners, financing, soliciting artists and materials, and organizing work. Additionally, it aims to explore how the retables functioned in their original settings. Conclusions will also be drawn from the established knowledge of each retable's materiality and history, focusing on analyses of their (inter)mediality, agency, and their influence on devotional practices in the lead-up to the Reformation.