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THE WOODEN CHURCHES OF THE LUBUSKIE PROVINCE. THE PERSISTENCE OF ARCHITECTURE TO KEEP THE SPIRIT ALIVE

The wooden churches in Lubuskie Province are distinctive group of monuments, very interesting in terms of architecture. The material persistence of these structures is the basic condition to keep the spirit of these old temples alive.

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The register of the monuments of the Lubuskie Province includes 425 temples. As many as fifty-two of them are wooden churches raised in the framework construction. Most of them are located in the northern and central part of the province. Certainly, there are more of them but not all are included in the restoration files.

So far, few of them have aroused the interest of researchers, architectural historians, art historians or monument restorers. Apart from the temples in Klępsk, Chlastawa, Osiecznica, Kosieczyn and Kalsk, they have not been the subject of serious research. In fact, they are often very special objects as far as their age, contents as well as constructional and functional solutions are concerned.

The Lubuskie Province is a territory composed of lands with various historical and geographical affiliations and, as a consequence, with a diverse and rich legacy preserved in the matter of its cultural heritage. They include Silesia, Brandenburg (Marcia), Wielko-

polska, Lower Lusatia and Marcia Borders. The affiliation of individual regions to different statehoods as well as their religious transformations had a powerful impact on the sacral architecture of today's Lubuskie.

From the beginning of the 16th century (when the reformatory movement was born), most of the area of today's Lubuskie Province was subordinate to three states which treated the questions of denomination and the freedom of religion in different manners. The Wschowski, Międzyrzecki and Babimojski regions were characterized by religious tolerance. Strong support for the Catholic Church could be seen in areas belonging to the Habsburgs, i.e. the former Zielonogórski district and the northern part of the Świebodziński district. The influence of Protestantism was noticeable in areas subordinate to the Hohenzollerns, i.e. the Torzymiski region as well as the Gorzowski, Strzelecko-drezdencki and Krośnieński districts.

The temples is Kosieczyn, Nowa Wioska, Boryszyn and Niedźwiedz as well as the church in Trzebule,

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raised on an octagonal plan, are recognized as the most representative churches in the framework construction. Recent dendrochronological research made it possible to establish that the church in Kosieczyn was built in 1389. Therefore, this object now ranks as one of the most culturally valuable wooden churches erected in the framework construction in Poland.

A separate group includes churches with mixed layouts where the oldest elements built in the framework construction were joined with the walls being the effect of further rebuilding. The temple in Klępsk deserves special attention. Here, the eastern and western wall make remains of the framework edifice from the 14th century, while the chequered northern and southern wall result from the 16th-century rebuilding.

The church in Kalsk is untypical and special from the constructional point of view. It makes an example of an edifice whose double construction consists of an internal framework rim and a later external wall.

Churches located on the Varta riversides have got different features. They are younger yet equally interesting temples. Their appearance was related to the cult needs of the community which inhabited these areas in the period of the so-called Frederic colonization. These were Protestant temples in Przynotecko, Gralewo, Chwałowice, Świerkocin, Krobielewo and Oksza. Towers were added to many of them in the 19th century.

A special church from among chessboard objects is the Evangelical church built in the years 1746–1748 in Zielona Góra. It is distinguished by its limiting outlines as well as its construction. Walls of poles and noggings form a beautiful chessboard outline. This construction has got no struts. However, its spatial rigidity and stability is guaranteed by the construction of two-storey inner galleries bound with the circumferential walls and the roof.

The state of the preservation of wooden churches in the Lubuskie Province is diverse. Nearly all of them still fulfill sacral functions. After World War II, they were adapted for Catholic temples which, in some cases, caused a necessity of reorganizing their interiors, too. Let us have a closer look at several of them.

The Church of the Visitation in Klępsk. The richest contents.

This temple was erected in the 14th century. From 1567 till 1945, it acted as an Evangelical parish church. Originally wooden, it was rebuilt in 1581. The construction of the northern and southern wall was changed from framework to chessboard. Owing to an dendrochronological analysis, it was possible to establish that the church was constructed in the years 1367–1377. In the light of the research, it was stated that only the western gable was not rebuilt and preserved its original character. Earlier, they thought that the eastern gable was maintained in its original condition, too, but wood dating binds it with further church rebuilding. The body of the main nave and the presbytery received some annexes.

On account of its unique Gothic-Renaissance décor, the post-Evangelical temple in Klępsk is a rare monument of sacral art, both in this region and in Poland. Full of highly valued works of art – painting, sculpture and craftsmanship – it plays a significant role in the material as well as spiritual dimension.

From among its priceless interior decoration, let us mention a late-Gothic triptych with a Madonna with Child, the polychromies of the structural ceiling with biblical themes from 1610–1613, the woodcarvings and paintings in the inner galleries, a baptismal font (1581), a pulpit (1614), a music choir, stalls and tombstones.

As I have already said, the church in Klępsk is an unusually valuable example of sacral architecture in

The wooden churches of the Lubuskie Province. Selected examples



the Lubuskie Province. However, its technical condition arouses some objections, mostly on account of many focuses of biological corrosion (insects, moulds). In the nearest future, it will be necessary to carry out an expertise for determining the degree of the technical wear of the entire construction. Then, a design of refurbishment and reinforcement will be prepared so that the great temple décor and construction can last for more hundreds of years.

The Church of Heavenly Mother, Queen of Poland in Radzików. Recently restored.

The church in Radzików was raised in 1712 in the chessboard construction. German subject literature sometimes mentions the 15th century. It is possible that a church already existed in this village at that time but certainly not in the same place. Such a hypothesis could be supported by the fact that a Gothic longcase altar, perhaps brought here from an older church, could be seen in the *new* church until the 1990s. Unfortunately, some priceless sculptures were stolen. Lately, however, a hope for regaining them appeared.

In the spring of 2009, the refurbishment of this temple began. About 45% of the corroded wood as well as the covering were exchanged, the roof truss was reinforced. The sacristy was pulled down which revealed the original form of the southern wall. The window and door woodwork was reconstructed. The tower was boarded, while its roof received an onion-shaped top with a brass sphere and a cross. The external cement and lime plasters were removed. New plasters, whose physical and mechanical features are similar to lime, were applied only in the spaces of the wooden framework. The wooden construction was preserved. Even from a distance, one can see the outline of the dark chessboard against the background of the light cream plasters. New benches, illumination and the pastel colours of the walls gave a new quality to this interior.

The church in Radzików is not the most valuable object of around sixty wooden churches in the Lubuskie Province. However, considering the poor technical condition of this object which may cause a building catastrophe, it was necessary to take urgent steps in order to save it. Following through on that, its old look was restored.

The Church of the Immaculate Conception in Witaszkowo. An object which recovered its original appearance.

The church in Witaszkowo was built in 1749 in the chessboard construction. This object was erected on the projection of a rectangle with a trilaterally closed presbyterial part. The compact body of this temple is covered with a pitched roof and a quadrilateral ave-bell. The original roofing was ceramic; after World War II, it was replaced with galvanized steel sheet. The chessboard construction was filled with bricks, the fields were plastered. The northern and southern wall were treated similarly. Between nine poles, there are four narrow windows. The whole is topped with profiled cornice. The trilateral eastern wall is symmetrically composed of eight poles. There is a window on the middle axis. The western wall, divided by eight poles, forms the front façade. Here, in the middle axis, there is a single-leaf door to the temple. All the poles are fastened together by short noggings, while the rigidity of the construction is guaranteed by braces located in the extreme fields.

Not so long ago, this object was described as a brick church. Its cement and lime plaster, called *sheepskin*, completely concealed the chessboard construction from the outside, while hard panel boards covered with wallpaper made the finishing of the internal walls.

The church in Witaszkowo is nothing special in this region. It is rather a typical representative of

this type of temples. Let me remind you, however, that it was considered as a middle-class, little, single-space brick church for a long time. Only recently, when the external plaster fell off as a result of the action of atmospheric conditions, the original chessboard construction came to light. The impermeable external plaster and the internal linings accelerated the process of the biological corrosion of this wooden construction. Quick refurbishment saved the temple from a disaster. The original appearance of the church was restored as well, both outside and inside.

It seems that the example of the church in Witaszkowo may be an indirect proof for the existence similar, unrecognized objects in the Lubuskie Province. Perhaps the list of its wooden churches will be extended.

The Church of Simon and Jude Thaddeus the Apostles in Kosieczyn. With reinforced construction.

The church in Kosieczyn was raised in the framework construction. For many years, there were arguments related to the date of implementation. Information included in prewar German literature, which suggested the year 1406, was disputable. Even the author of the so-called white charter prepared for the monument put down a question mark instead of the date of construction. However, in recent years, answers have been found. An dendrochronological analysis, commissioned by the Lubuskie Provincial Monument Restorer, produced some interesting results. The most probable date of constructing the temple is 1389; the turn of the 14th century was taken for granted. The roof truss was made in 1417 of wood from trees cut down between 1406 and 1416. The tower, which was previously dated to the 18th century, was built in 1431.

Over the span of hundreds of years, this construction was transformed and altered many times.

The biggest changes were introduced in the course of preparing the apparent vault. Fragments of truss beams were cut out in order to gain a space for this construction. It resulted in a loss of the rigidity of the truss. Stretching forces, which resulted from these modernizations, made the temple walls lean to the outside. The roof truss was seriously misshaped and deformed. In the mid-20th century, the walls were reinforced with steel channels, while the southern wall, which was leaning the most, was supported with obliquely installed steel double-T bars. These protections prevented further destruction but their appearance marred this beautiful building.

Such a manner of protecting the construction of the temple walls was treated as temporary. That is why an original design of reinforcing and stiffening the roof construction has been prepared recently. A system of steel lines hung on collar beams and rafters with cut-off ends of truss beams efficiently eliminated the causes of wall and roof misshaping. One of its advantages is the fact that it cannot be seen from the outside. The temporary steel supports were removed.

Restoration works in the church in Kosieczyn finished this year. Another historic wooden church will be presented to the inhabitants. Changed, restored, with regained elements of its old contents, certainly more beautiful and more genuine.

The wooden churches of the Lubuskie Province form a group of objects with strong historical, artistic and scientific values. Fast intensification of research concerning this group of monuments is a necessity. All the abovementioned examples prove that many of about sixty historic wooden churches located in this province are in danger of a building catastrophe. From outside, they look presentable. Whitewashed walls and preserved dark wood make the impression that their technical condition is very good. However, the described examples show that

it is not true. The renovation of the interiors of these temples, the restoration of their contents, sculptures, paintings, polychromies will be possible provided that suitable durability of the constructions of these churches is secured.

The duration of wooden churches in the Lubuskie Province, their architecture (form), construction (material substance) and unchangeable functions (exploitation) is the guarantee of the imperishability of the spirit which has been hiding in these temples for ages.