

FORMS OF EASTERN-RITE TIMBER STRUCTURED CHURCHES IN POLAND

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Abstract

The scope of the paper is a comprehensive and synthetic presentation of the architectural forms of orthodox churches (cerkvas) on the western boundary of the area where timber forms of Eastern-rite churches can be found, which is the area appropriated to the Polish territory after World War Two. Many Orthodox timber churches have been preserved to date, and some churches are known from archival, iconographic and descriptive sources, even though they have perished. The churches display a big variety of forms and layouts, inspired by the architecture of Byzantine temples, Roman-Catholic churches, regional folk traditions and legal regulations – imposed by the foreign administration at the time of Poland's Partition period. These churches belonged to two Greek-Catholic (Uniate) dioceses: Chełm and Przemyśl. During the Union of Brześć in 1595-96, two thirds of the bishops from the Eastern territory of the Polish Republic present at the synod accepted the Union with the Roman Catholic Church – including the bishop of the Chełm diocese; whereas the Przemyśl diocese accepted the Union almost 100 years later, in 1692. In the period of the Partitions of Poland (the late 18th century – early 20th century) the Przemyśl diocese was appropriated to the Austrian annexation, where the Catholic authorities supported the Union, but the Chełm diocese belonged to the Polish Kingdom under the Russian rule, and, subsequently, it was converted to the Russian Orthodox rite. Such thesis is the starting point for detailed regional studies on their forms, layouts, external tissue, architectural details, etc., leading to the distinction of categories of local importance, determination of their distribution range and comparative studies.

Streszczenie

Temat obejmuje całościowe, syntetyczne ujęcie problematyki dotyczącej form architektury cerkiewnej zachodniego krańca jej występowania; czyli obszaru, który po II wojnie światowej znalazł się w obrębie granic Polski. Na tym terenie zachowało się jeszcze sporo przykładów drewnianego budownictwa cerkiewnego, ponadto pewna część obiektów nieistniejących znana jest z archiwalnych materiałów ikonograficznych i opisowych. Obiekty te charakteryzuje duża różnorodność form oraz układów przestrzennych, która znalazła inspirację w architekturze świątyn bizantyńskich, rzymsko-katolickich oraz ludowych tradycjach regionalnych a ograniczenia w przepisach – nakazach zaborczych władz administracyjnych. Cerkwie te należały niegdyś do dwóch diecezji greko-katolickich (unickich) – chełmskiej oraz przemyskiej. Podczas synodu brzeskiego w 1595-6 r. 2/3 biskupów Kościoła Wschodniego terenu Rzeczypospolitej przyjęło unię z Kościołem Rzymsko-Katolickim – w tym biskup diecezji chełmskiej, natomiast diecezja przemyska przyjęła unię prawie 100 lat później – w 1692 r. Natomiast w okresie rozbiorów (k. XVIII – pocz. XX w.) diecezja przemyska znalazła się pod zaborem austriackim, gdzie katolickie władze popierały unię, natomiast diecezja chełmska weszła w skład Królestwa Polskiego, będącego pod panowaniem prawosławnej Rosji i w efekcie zamieniona została na prawosławną. Teza ta to podstawa do przeprowadzenia regionalnych badań szczegółowych dotyczących formy, układów przestrzennych, szaty zewnętrznej, detalu i itd., prowadzących do wyróżnienia grup o znaczeniu lokalnym oraz wyznaczeniu zasięgu ich występowania oraz badań porównawczych.

Keywords: Eastern rite church, Ruthenian Orthodox church; Greek-Catholic (Uniate) church; One-cupola church; Three-cupola church, Church without cupola; Church crowned with a pavilion roof; Uni-partite, bipartite and tripartite layouts.

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to administrative changes in the outcome of World War II, considerable areas of the Eastern borderlands and their centuries-old heritage of material and spiritual culture have been appropriated beyond the Polish frontiers. Nowadays, only a narrow strip of the lands once inhabited by the Eastern rite followers is located within the Polish territory. Thus, this strip constitutes the western boundary of the area of the Eastern rite timber churches distribution in Poland (Fig. 1).

In the above mentioned area about 350 former Eastern-rite churches or chapels have been preserved, these wooden specimen of Orthodox architecture epitomize the landscape that used to be typical of the Eastern Borderlands of the Polish Republic (This is, however, just a small percentage, as many churches were destroyed much earlier in history: during the incursions into Poland of the Tartar military, Cossacks and Turks; in the course of more recent wars; at peacetime campaigns and resettlement operations organized by governments (1928-29, 1938, 1947 – the so called “Vistula operation”), or, simply, obliterated by neglect and natural disasters (in 2003 the Orthodox church in Opaka was destroyed by fire, and in 2006 – in Komańcza).

The existing churches display a big variety of forms and layouts, precision of workmanship or in many instances, decorative touches of all structural elements and details – framework beams, cornices, window and door framing, galleries.

Accordingly, the interest in these forms of architecture goes back to the end of the 19th century, and, in the early 20th century the first studies conducted in Galicia were published (*T. Obmiński* [2], *K. T. Mokłowski* [3], and others). Since that time, numerous publications devoted to different aspects of Orthodox church architecture have come out (*M. Dragan* [4], *R. Brykowski* [5], *F. Strzałko* [6], *M. Kornecki* [7], *J. Górak* [8], *S. Kryciński* [9] and others, also including writers from Western Europe). Hence, the inspiration for the author’s own “in-situ” studies of over 300 churches in the south and north of Poland. On the grounds of the studies and available reference literature, the factors shaping layout of Eastern rite timber churches may be determined, as well as their characteristic features, depending on their respective location.

2. INSPIRATIONS

The oldest temples were built not earlier than at the end of the 16th century (one of the oldest is the



Figure 1.
The distribution range of Orthodox timber churches in Poland [1]

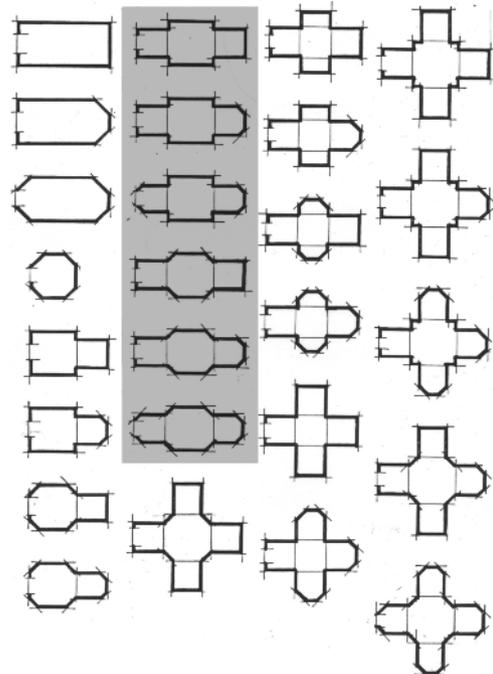


Figure 2.
Exemplary layouts of Orthodox timber churches: unipartite, bipartite, tripartite projected on the cruciform design (grey colour denotes tripartite layouts) [1]

Orthodox church in Ulucz dating, according to traditional sources, back to 1510-17, although most probably it was erected in the early 17th century) and back to the 17th century – however, the churches were many times reconstructed in the successive centuries; whereas, the predominant number of those that have been preserved date back to the 18th and 19th centuries, after the Church Union. Thus, the churches assumed

many features of the Roman Catholic temples, combining them with elements of Byzantine architecture, folk building traditions; and, with the regulations issued by the administration of the partitioned area concerning both architectural form and materials.

Undoubtedly, an important source of inspiration was the architecture of Byzantine stone temples. Some of the examples are Hagia Sophia (532-37), Hagia Eirene (construction commenced in 532), Saint Sergius and Bacchus (531-36) in Constantinople, blending longitudinal and circular layouts, with the central part highlighted by a cupola. The liturgical and functional requirements resulted in the tripartite layout of wooden churches, including three sections projected on the same axis: the narthex (women's gallery) – previously a place for neophytes/catechumens, the nave – for confirmed worshippers, the sanctuary – available only to the Orthodox priest (The tripartite layout with the three parts on one axis is considered as the most suitable arrangement in different religious cultures, as it expresses the three degrees of initiation: uninitiated, initiated worshippers, sanctuary – priest-deity).

The observance of such arrangement reflects a conservative nature of the Eastern Rite, following the Early Christianity traditions much more strictly than the Roman Catholic Church. (Fig. 2)

Also, stone architecture used circular forms. A specific nature of wood as a building material led to certain modifications, so the circle was replaced by the polygon (predominantly by the octagon). Following local building traditions, Byzantine cupolas were transformed into wooden ones or into pavilion roofs whereas semi-circular apses into polygon closures. The impact of Western art permeating the discussed area should also be recognized. A pattern to be followed was supplied by Gothic churches with polygonal presbytery. The tendency to go after Latin solutions may be identified in a group of Orthodox churches without cupolas. Their bodies devoid of typical dominants are reminiscent of Roman Catholic churches without cupolas. In this group there are churches with the bipartite layout: nave-sanctuary; but, in response to increasing number of worshippers in the course of years, the nave was often extended to the narthex or vestibule. Such simple layout, apart from the unipartite one, was used for centuries to erect sacral buildings for different creeds. However, there was still a discernible tendency to expose the nave. The churches reminiscent of Latin temples often do not have characteristic roofing or shingle tapestry of the external walls, which, instead, was replaced by timbering. The impacts of particular architectural styles are clearly recognizable – for exam-



Figure 3.
Hanna (Włodawa District, Lubelskie Voivodeship) – previous The Greek Catholic parish church dedicated to St. Peter and Paul and the Martyr St. Dimitri – about 1739-42 [the author's photograph]



Figure 4.
Śniatycze (Zamojski District, Lubelskie Voivodeship) – previous The Greek Catholic parish church dedicated to St. John Chrysostom – 1838 [the author's photograph]



Figure 5.
Kodeniec (Parczewski District, Lubelskie Voivodeship) – previous parish The Greek Catholic church dedicated to the Birth of the Holy Mary – 1791 [the author's photograph]

ple, Baroque ave-bell spirelets (Fig. 3), step-like gables (Fig. 4), or the façade with two spires which was patterned on the Roman Catholic church in Tomaszów Lubelski (Fig. 5).

The similarities and differences are also manifested in the interiors of the churches belonging to the two rites. In traditional Orthodox churches the iconostasis comes to the fore, whereas in Roman Catholic ones the lectorium functions as a partition, followed by balustrades and separating the nave from the presbytery. Some Greek Catholic churches, instead of the iconostasis, have a rood arch wall with semicircular cross-section – mainly in Podlasie region. Thus, the churches of the two rites look more alike. The Greek Catholic churches also show the influence of the stipulations of Zamoyski Synod (1720) – to make the Greek Catholic liturgy more similar to the Latin order. With increasing number of masses, side altars appeared, and next, pulpits, pews/ prayer decks, ornamented railings, banners, feretories, etc. (Fig. 6, 7, 8.)

Both Byzantine and Latin architecture have common Early Christian roots. It was Roman cupolas that served as a pattern for Byzantine ones (the Pantheon – the temple to all Gods, 118-125); furthermore, in the Renaissance and Baroque, West European architecture restored cupolas. However, each ethnic group created specific cultural forms, for example: Hucul Orthodox churches were built on cruciform projections and crowned with a cupola – as used in Ukrainian architecture of 20th century in a search for the “national” Ukrainian style; whereas Bojko Orthodox churches had characteristic “peaks”, while Lemko ones looked like a link between the Małopolska (southern part of Poland) Gothic churches and Eastern Orthodox churches. Other factors that influenced the architectural form of churches included, for example, the tastes and wealth of their founders – either landowners or plain parishioners.

3. AREAS OF DISTRIBUTION

It is feasible to differentiate the following areas where churches of similar features are found:

- Eastern rite churches with cupolas (one cupola or three cupolas) are grouped in the south eastern part of Zamojszczyzna – in the close to border strip of land, supplanting other architectural forms (3 cupolas – for example: Hrebenne 1600 – according to traditional sources, but definitely 1679; Zubowice 17th century – according to traditional sources: Dłużniów 1882; one-cupola churches in Bełżec 1756, Terebiń 1779, Sulimów 1890). Similarly, there are three-cupola churches dispersed in south-eastern Poland, for example: Chotyń 1613; Piątkowa 1732; Równia – early



Figure 6.
The interior of the Orthodox Russian Church dedicated to Martyr St. Paraskevi in Hola (Włodawski District, Lubelskie Voivodeship) – 1846-47 [the author's photograph]



Figure 7.
The interior of the Greek Catholic Church dedicated to The Uplifting of the Holy Cross in Dłużniów (Hrubieszowski District, Lubelskie Voivodeship) – 1882 – the lower part of the iconostasis was disassembled to adjust the church to the Roman Catholic rite [the author's photograph]



Figure 8.
The interior of the Greek Catholic Church dedicated to St. Peter and Paul and the Martyr St. Dimitri in Hanna [the author's photograph]

18th century. One-cupola churches may also be found in the close to border area (former Przemysł

Voivodeship) stretching towards the south: Poździacz 1737; Wola Wielka 1755; Prusie 1887; etc. and, sporadically in other regions: Ulucz, Czerteż 1742. It may be concluded that, as far as one and three-cupola Eastern rite churches in Poland and beyond its eastern border are concerned, their area of distribution constitutes only the north-western boundary of a vast territory, reaching up to Dnepr, on which they once used to be landmarks in the landscape [10]. (Fig. 9, 10.)

- In Lemko and Bojko churches there are often pavilion roofs with shapes resembling natural forms of the landscape (evocative of Carpathian spruces); typical of the architecture of highlanders and perfectly fulfilling their function in difficult climatic conditions. The main difference between the outlines of the churches of the above mentioned two ethnic groups is the presence of looming bell towers (belfries) over the narthex of the Lemko churches (However, in the eastern part of the area inhabited by the Lemko People in the 19th century some churches without bell towers were also erected: Komańcza, Turzańsk, Rzepedź, Sieniawa, etc.). Poland holds the northern boundary of the distribution of the Lemko churches – from Nowy Sącz in the west to the right bank of the Osława in the east. To the south, this area stretches over to the Slovak Carpathian Mountains and Carpathian Ruthenia. Although the Lemko churches are numerous represented (Powroźnik 1611, Owczary 1653, Kwiatof second half of the 17th century, Skwirtne 1837, Bartne 1842), the Bojko churches (with three almost equally high finials) are only, unfortunately, represented by the only one in Smolnik near Lutowiska (1791). In the past there were many Bojko churches in the Bieszczady Mountains, bordering, in the west, with Lemko churches. The eastern boundary of their distribution is constituted by the tributaries of the Łomnica River. It should be pointed out that temples referring to the form of Bojko churches may also be found in Podole, Wołyn, Polesie. There are also single examples of churches crowned with pavilion roofs (each having a slightly different form) in other regions of Poland (Radruż 1583, Rudka 1693, Kniazie 1785 (not preserved) [11, 12, 13]. (Fig. 11, 12, 13, 14.)
- As far as Hucul architecture is concerned, the “national-Ukrainian” style is clearly identifiable, represented by the churches projected on a slightly modified Greek cross and topped with one, three or five cupolas. Such structures, dating back to the end of the 19th and early 20th century, are also



Figure 9.
Example of a three cupola Greek Catholic Church: Piątkowa (Przemyski District, Podkarpackie Voivodeship) – previous parish church dedicated to St. Dimitri) – 1732 [the author's photograph]



Figure 10.
Example of a one-cupola Orthodox church: Ulucz (Brzozowski District, Podkarpackie Voivodeship) – previous parish church dedicated to St. Nicolas- 1510-17? Or 16th-17th century [the author's photograph]



Figure 11.
Example of a church crowned with the pavilion roof: Radruż (Lubaczowski District, Podkarpackie Voivodeship) – previous parish church dedicated to St. Paraskevi – 1583 [the author's photograph]

found in south-eastern Poland: Daliowa 1928, Hoszów 1939, Gładyszów – not earlier than 1934, and others. (Fig. 15).

- The churches without cupolas are distributed along the entire Eastern strip, predominantly in Podlasie and the valley of Chełmska Land, where cupolas and cupolas are hard to find (Witulín 1666, Hanna about 1739-42, Hóla 1846-47). They are uni-partite, bipartite and tripartite. In this group outstanding three-nave churches are located in the zone of Radzyń Podlaski (Rudno, Bezwóla, Przegaliny Duże) and the zone of Sokołów Podlaski (Grodzisk, Gródek Wieś, Rogów), which may be treated as local variations of churches without cupolas and making up groups of limited distribution. Moreover, churches without cupolas may be found in the area comprising the historical Eastern lands of the Polish Republic before the Partition Period. (Fig. 16)
- The category of churches without cupolas should also contain churches with low belfries topping the narthex. Their distribution is limited to only two regions: in the north – to the neighbourhood of Biała Podlaska (the most beautiful to be found in Ortel Królewski, 1706, and in Kościeniewiczze 1682); whereas in the south – to the neighborhoods of Zamość (Jarczów, according to traditional sources dating back to the 17th century). Similar structures, however, with different shapes, proportions and details may also be found in other regions. (Fig. 17)
- The "Byzantine-Russian" churches constitute the last category, distributed in the lands reaching from the previous boundaries of Galicia, where regional identities have been preserved, to the past Polish Kingdom under Russia's sovereignty in the Partition Period. They replaced churches built in accordance with traditional styles on the lands annexed by Russia. They display a great variety of design, structures, being, at the same time, an alien element of the vernacular landscape (Milejczyce 1888-1900, Telatycze 1902-4, Tokary-Koterka 1912). (Fig. 18.), (Fig. 19)

4. CONCLUSIONS

In every historical epoch different types of churches evolved and coexisted with one another. Some exceptions are the Byzantine-Russian churches built in the area of Chełm diocese in the 19th and early 20th century and the national Ukrainian churches erected at the same time in Przemyśl diocese.



Figure 12.
Example of Lemko Greek Catholic Church with the belfry above the narthex: Kwiatóń (Gorlicki District, Małopolskie Voivodeship) – previous branch church dedicated to Martyr St. Paraskevi – probably second half of the 17th century, according to traditional sources 1700, the belfry was constructed or refurbished in 1743 [the author's photograph]



Figure 13.
Example of Lemko Greek Catholic Church without the belfry: Turzańsk (Sanocki District, Podkarpackie Voivodeship) – previous parish church dedicated to The Archangel St. Michael – 1801-03 [the author's photograph]



Figure 14.
Example of Bojko Greek Catholic Church: Smolnik next to Lutowiska (Bieszczadzki District, Podkarpackie Voivodeship) – previous parish church dedicated to St. Dimitri – 1791 [the author's photograph]



Figure 15.
Example of the “National-Ukrainian” Orthodox church: Daliowa (Krośniński District, Podkarpackie Voivodeship) – previous parish church dedicated to St. Paraskevi – 1928 [the author’s photograph]



Figure 18.
Example a “Byzantine-Russian” Orthodox church: Milejczyce (Siemiatycki District, Podlaskie Voivodeship) – parish Orthodox church dedicated to St. Barbara – 1899-1900 [the author’s photograph]



Figure 16.
Example a Greek Catholic Church without cupola: Witulin (Białopodlaski District, Lubelskie Voivodeship) – previous parish church dedicated to the Archangel St. Michael – 1666 [the author’s photograph]



Figure 17.
Example a Greek Catholic Church without cupola but with the belfry above the narthex: Ortel Królewski (Białopodlaski District, Lubelskie Voivodeship) – previous parish church dedicated to St. David and Roman – 1706 [the author’s photograph]

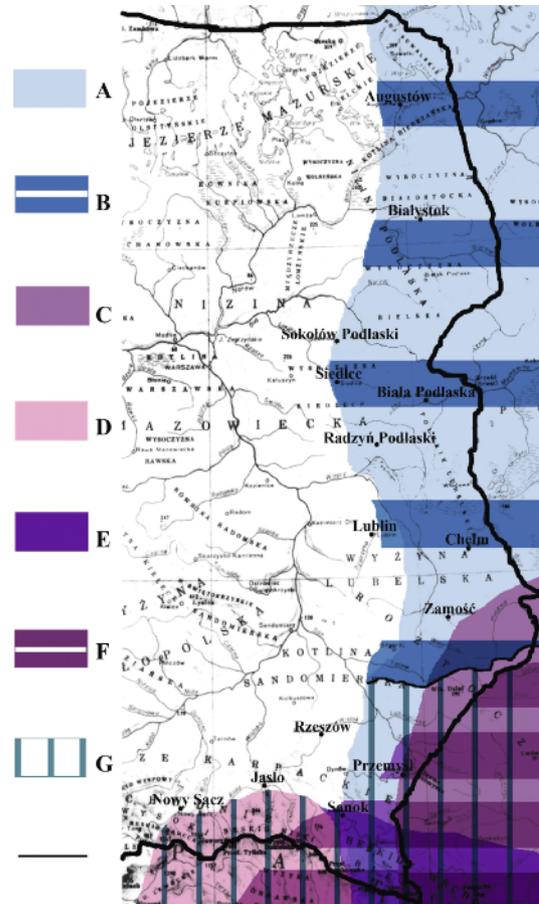


Figure 19.
Areas of the distribution of Orthodox wooden churches in Poland: A – churches without cupola, B – “Byzantine-Russian” churches, C – churches with cupola, D – Lemko churches, E – Bojko churches, F – “National-Ukrainian” churches, G – churches with pavilion roofs, the boundary of the diocese [compiled by the author]

In principle, the churches did not change their form in the course of time and the basic elements have been permanent: types of layout body of the structure. The elements that were subject of change include: proportions, roof structures and covering, manner of timbering, simplification of details, etc. It may be concluded on such grounds that the oldest, nowadays non-existent Orthodox timber churches erected in a given region had the same forms and layouts as their successors – preserved to date or known to us from iconographic or descriptive sources. It may be stated that, despite the passage of time and changes in the religions and political conditions a tendency to continue these forms is observed.

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