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*Architectural heritage protection in Volyn in 1920–1930
as a source of cultural and national identity*



Fig. 1. St. Uspenska Lavra
in Pochaiv. Overall view

Attitudes to the historical and architectural heritage of the state situated in its territory determine not only the general level of culture, but also a considerable degree of self-awareness of a group of people as a community which is united by the historical background, spiritual and material heritage, requiring constant care and promotion. We know that at this stage of the development of the world civilization, this problem is especially acute in two cases: mainly in the period of strengthening of the state as an independent political union and globalization

and similar processes related to the levelling of national cultural characteristics.

After regaining independence by Poland in 1918, this problem became very sharp. Therefore, in our opinion, activities in the field of ancient monuments protection, including architectural and urban heritage were selected as a way to protect the national identity in this period. “Humanity today has deeply looked into the essence of sights and sees in these visual witnesses history of the spirit reflection of people, its culture evidentiary testimony, the arguments of those characteristics that are in the field of art created national individualism, finally, source of motivation for the development of national art. From this point of view of understanding, sights appear in the light of their

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Fig. 2. St. Basil Church in Vladimir in Volyn

true value. Therefore, care about preservation of national works of art from ancient times, arising from a love to the motherland and its great past and no less captivating beauty, fascinated by the sculptural forms in architecture, sculpture and painting, is characteristic for each cultural community. Everywhere we see the principle, put forward to an important place: the efforts of our duty to preserve monuments for the offspring in the least changed, most authentic state” [9, p. 16] – this the basic thesis in the field of cultural heritage preservation was included in one of the Regency Council decrees, issued in late October 1918, in the eve of independence of Poland.

Significant destruction caused by the First World War in Great Poland, especially in its south-eastern part, has been a factor for starting the work in this direction. Numerous facts of destruction of material substance of objects slightly changed the approaches, declared in the document quoted above, in favour of reconstruction and restoration of hundreds of architectural objects across the entire state.

Particular weight was given to the monument-preservation work in the “eastern borderlands” (Kresy) – on the territories of Kholmshchyna, Podlasie, the western part of Volyn, Polissia and Belarus, annexed to Poland by the Treaty of Riga in 1921. These territories needed special efforts of “return” after more than a century of being in the administrative limits of the Russian Empire. Visualisation of the Russian presence was reflected primarily in the architectural image transformations of religious buildings,

as well as in open neglecting of these and other buildings that represented preliminary “Polish” period (beginning with the Union of Lublin in 1569) and earlier, “pre-union” times in the history of the region. As the Polish researcher P. Dettloff says, the Imperial Archaeological Commission in St. Petersburg “... engaged exclusively Byzantine monuments of culture, without regard to the historical buildings from the territory of the Kingdom of Poland, which belonged to the works of the Western culture” [10, p. 41].

Modern Polish scientists in their works touched the problems of organization and methods of monument-preserving activities of the Second Polish Republic, considering this area of architectural activity in the national scale. The most fundamental, in particular, is research of J. Levitsky and P. Dettloff [10]. Tangential to our researched topic are publications of M. Tshevik and Y. Zhyvitskyj. However, the motivational aspect of the complex work carried out in Volyn was not investigated separately.

Aim. We pay particular attention to monument-preserving activity in Volyn in 1920–1930 as a means of visualization and consolidation of the national identity.

The range of inventory work which was planned to be carried out in the Second Polish Republic as soon as possible was directly proportional to the desire of fast crystallization of the Polish nation by developing the sense of common ethnic origin, in particular the cultural community, “whose members are joined or united on the basis of common historical memory, some myths, symbols and traditions” [5, p. 16]. Therefore, the proposed article will discuss only one aspect of cultural heritage in Volyn in the interwar period – fixation, preservation, restoration and reconstruction of **individual architectural structures-symbols**, materialized evidence of the historicity of the nation, its high cultural development and belonging to the Western civilization as opposed to the Eastern one which was outside.

A number of actions of the Polish authorities aimed at organizing the monument-preserving work contributed to improving the situation: first of all, issuance of the Minister of Arts and Culture Ordinance dated April 5, 1919 on the establishment of preservation offices. Besides state bodies of Preservation – Restorers Departments established the Council of restorers in 1919. To resolve the monument-preserving tasks in a particular region and on specific buildings, the special institution of the Congress of the Council of Restorers was founded, the first works of which took place in April 1919 [6].

Every citizen who loves his country and its past, has to value historical sites and monuments of the past, which after various historical disasters, and in the last period – after the occupants left and the World War I storms ended, now in the revived Polish Republic face complete damage and destruction.

One of the greatest concerns of the revived Polish state was indeed a proper organization of monument protection which was reflected in the Decree of 31.10.1918 on the care of monuments of art and culture. These intentions, planned on a large scale, could not be introduced later in life due to the necessity of economy, dictated by the state.

There is a great concern that while these views in this regard will be crucial, a lot of sites will no longer exist in the absence of proper care and preservation. Only joint efforts of the government, communities and society can save these cultural monuments of the past.

These words, quoted from “okolnyk” of the Interior Minister Sl. Skladkovskiy (Nr. Min. 778/27) from 12.05.27 are extremely important, because they emphasise the value of the highest state official attention to the internal administration of our national cultural heritage in the field of monuments.

First of all, there is a great need to have an accurate list of these monuments in order to take care of them efficiently. Realizing this need, civilized European states have long started the scientific inventory of monuments and have done a lot of work in this field. It is sufficient to say that the inventory works have already been completed in England, France, Italy and Germany (...).

In Poland, works in this area were postponed. Occupying states, realizing the weight of monuments that prove the greatness of our country and people, made it impossible for us to have access to our sites (Russia), or performed an inventory by themselves, giving it favourable political overtones.

A typical example of such work is the inventory of Poznan [principality – O.M.] performed (...) by Professor of Architecture Juliusz Kohte. This scientist researched all valuable monuments of architecture, sculpture, paintings, decorative arts, construction and related industries with great integrity and ability.

This work, which lasted 12 years, with a whole army of assistants, is of paramount value and is part of the inventory of the German Reich; it consists of eight volumes, published on good paper, lavishly illustrated and is now the only completed systematic study in the field of inventory in the lands of Poland. However, the prominent scientist was unable to avoid the German chauvinism. This is evident in the list of artists and craftsmen who worked on the lands of Great Poland in the arts. No Polish surnames – German ones only (...).

From the Polish papers in this area we are proud to highlight the publication of Krakow Academy of Sciences, the folder of conservators ancient [Ancient History – O.M.] and reports on research of art history in Poland. The materials collected by Malopolska restorers, especially Professor Marian Sokolovskiy and Professor Stanislaw Tomkovich constitute today rich scientific material, which, however, unfortunately in many cases is still awaiting publication, as a result of governmental and social indifference and a general lack of funds.

In connection with inventory work, without which it is not possible to achieve reasonable care and preservation with the most extensive network of companies and sites of care over the government efforts, the Polish government on 31.10.1918 established the network of restores whose number is seven in Poland today.

Their main task is to conduct scientific inventory of monuments in the provinces entrusted to them. I would like to point out that the Lublin district, which should interest us primarily consists of Lublin, Polissia and Volyn



Fig. 3. Jesuit monastery in Kremenets. St. Ignacio Church

provinces. Unfortunately, the large area of the district as well as a lack of permanent professional assistance, forces a restorer to a considerable effort, the results of which from the numeral side are insignificant.

I would like to point out that in one small area of so-called “Prowinz Pozen” Kohte, with the help of the major works of the highest class workers (Dr. Warachauer), performed the assigned work in 12 years.

Lublin restorer in today’s situation had to spend about 40 years on the most primitive investigations of his district. Without mentioning in general that the world of processing, systematization and publication of the results of this quadragenarian work would still remain an open problem to be tackled in subsequent years, I would like to emphasize that this particular case is not a question of ambition of a single scholar. It is a matter of life and death of Polish artistic culture (...).

Volyn province, where the XII Congress of Restorers was held in September this year, understands the case and is sincerely concerned about the destiny of their monuments, mute witnesses of ancient Polish greatness on these lands which were Russified with such enthusiasm. They intend to subsidize work in the field of inventory, preservation of monuments of art and culture by means of municipalities [2, pp. 61–64].

In late 1927 Jerzy Siennitskiy (1886–1956) – Restorer of the Lublin district delivered an emotional speech before the headmen of the county town council of Volyn. He placed special emphasis on major challenges, which in this period were experienced by the professionals in daily inventory process both in the state in general and in Volyn.



Fig. 4. Palace in Vyshnivets.
Overall view from the courtyard

During the years 1919–1921 and 1923–1930 E. Sienitskiy performed considerable amount of work in the field of monument preservation. In his work he combined the work of architect practitioners and academic researchers. Due to the active search, in the years 1925–1930 the foundation registry monuments located on the territory of historical Volyn was established. In addition, the report materials that are stored in State Archive of Volyn region [2], and the city of Lublin and Lublin province [19] reflect the activities of arts and culture restorers in Lublin, Polissia and Volyn provinces, contain information on the character of preservation activities on specific buildings and permissions to introduce local changes in structure and environment.

The report for the second half of 1927 tackles the problem of the technical condition of the studied monuments of Volyn, where the information is accompanied by brief historical references, stylistic characteristics of buildings, data reconstruction and repairs as well as a description of works of art available in the interior. The list includes the following items: architectural complex of the former Franciscan monastery in Mezhyrichi Ostrogski (now in the Rivne region); Mstislav Cathedral (Holy Virgin Uspinya Church) in Vladimir in Volyn (now in the Volyn region); bell tower at the Cathedral Gate Mstislav in Vladimir in Volyn; “Bishop castle” in Vladimir in Volyn; architectural ensemble of the former Carmelite church and monastery in Vyshnivets (now the territory of Ternopil region); Vyshnivets parish church in [2, pp. 45–56].

According to the list, the first group of objects that were carefully studied were the most significant in view of the construction period (Mstislav Cathedral), formation peculiarities (monastery in Mezhyrich Ostrozki) and those that were somehow associated with eminent national history (the building in Vyshnivets).

The Decrees of the President of the Polish Republic on March 6, 1928 “On the care of monuments” [17] and the Minister of religious confessions and public education on July 17 that year “On implementing the registry of the monuments” [16] confirmed the importance of ongoing work, made the concept of monuments more specific, the criteria by which objects can be registered and their struc-

ture determined. Detailed instructions provided in these documents were based on substantial, almost a decade-long experiences of the inventory.

Up to 1928 the card catalogue included the objects located in more than eighty towns of Polissia and Volyn province, with the total number reaching almost one hundred seventy [19, pp. 235–242]. The directory arrangement was the first step on the way to include these objects to the aforementioned official national register of monuments. Speaking of the works performed during the decade, the main Restorer of the Volyn district Z. Revskiy noted that at the end of 1937 there were 405 items in the inventory positions, and their number over the past two years doubled [15, p. 224]. It should be noted that apart from the Catholic temples, in the number of inventoried objects there were also included the oldest Orthodox churches, representing groups of traditional wooden architecture.

During the research work in Volyn, some considerable practical solutions were applied. In particular, in the mid 1930’s during the repair of St. Basil church in Vladimir in Volyn, where fragments of Roman masonry were cleared of plaster, which, according to the contemporary restorer of Volyn Y. Dutkevich, “will facilitate future reconstruction of the original form-eastern Roman architectural and sculptural decoration of this valuable monument” [11, p. 229]. Moreover, in 1937, experts began the work to remove Russian layers – domes and bell towers. In the Russian Empire the image reconstruction and the volume reconstruction of the temple were dealt with, according to Countess Uvarova, so as to “hurt every eye that is at least a little familiar with the artistic monuments and their style” [4, p. 79]. As for the return of its original to the temple, then in our opinion, such a desire had also the following arguments: “Roman” part of the architectural and constructive solutions made the monument nearer to the Western civilization circle, “Eastern” – was consistent with the promotion of the Polish Orthodox Church, ancient wooden structures of Kyivs’ka Rus in the church building as such, that best meet its canons [8].

In general the demolition of the onion-formed domes became an immediate measure to restore the original

forms of religious buildings, destroying traces of Russian statehood and ideology. In the same way the authentic forms were returned by means of completion of the main tower of the post-Jesuit church facade in Vladimir [14, p. 253], church in Boremel (Rivne region), Bernardynian towers in Dubno, eliminating the Russian restructuring period in the church in the Novy Zagoriv (Volyn region) after repossession of these temples, dismantling typical for Russian architecture roofs over the entrance to the Uspenskiy Cathedral and Lavra monastery in Pochaiv [15, p. 225], reconstructing the “Russian” annex to the former Jesuit monastery in Kremenets [18, p. 351].

The pragmatic goals that urged the Polish government in Volyn and other associated areas to pay attention to the restoration of historic, mostly secular objects should also be noticed. Bodies of public administration, public order, educational institutions and other institutions organized in the provinces, required a large number of buildings and facilities. For this purpose, the ancient castles and palaces were adapted more seldom than the monastery buildings, which in various circumstances were taken over by the state. In the early 1930's column porticos were restored along with some elements of decoration and detail in Vyshnivets palace [15, p. 227]. Large-scale repair and reconstruction began in the early 1920s initiated by the owners of the residence – counts Grokholski; they were continued in the years 1924–1925, when the estate was purchased by the state as the property of Kremenets county municipal union to house various institutions here (hospitals, Crafts School and others.) [20, p. 485; 18, p. 352]. Important place in the plans of the local authorities was taken by the restoration of the palace of kn. Lyubomyrskiy in Rivne for the location of the magistrate here [3, p. 484], Bernardine and Dominican monasteries in Lutsk – as government agencies [13, pp. 2–3], reconstruction of a medieval castle of Czartoryskiy in Klevan and a penitentiary [12, p. 302], rehabilitation and reconstruction of important buildings and building of the Overgate Ostrozki-Lubomirski Castle in Dubno for the location of the county municipality, county local government, official state housing, the office of inspector of schools and police barracks [7].

A special place among the local monuments which were restored in Volyn was occupied by Lubart castle in Lutsk. Back in 1922, a special commission consisting of representatives of local authorities invited from Warsaw and local experts was set up and it worked on the problem of urgent steps to strengthen the castle. Previous studies were based on materials inventory of 1910–1912, made during the expedition led by a renowned architect K. Ivanitskiy of the Imperial Archaeological Commission (measure drawings and photographs) [1, pp. 44, 75]. The state of emergency of solid defence building was twice



Fig. 5. Lubart Castle in Lutsk. Gate Tower

discussed at the congresses of the Restorers in 1921 and 1927, but lack of funds did not allow performance of all the necessary works. At the end of 1920 the tower was strengthened as it was in the worst condition, in the following years the basements were cleaned and some lost walls were restored. In 1939 an authoritative Polish scientist Jan Zahvatovych from the Institute of Polish Architecture of Warsaw Polytechnic was invited to draft the plan of further work to observe the castle. For further accumulation of funds and performance of work, local authorities allowed to make reservations for tour top Lutsk castle ruins and supported the release of special editions of its history. Collected money from sold brochures was directed to the treasury of reconstruction. Constant attention, support and continual promotion of this building, which witnessed a long history and was considered a symbol of the Polish State in Volyn is a telling example of finding a path of the national identity.

In general we can state that in 1920–1930 in Volyn in monument-preserving activities one form of identity was established – traditional, which during the revival of the Polish statehood was based on the restoration of the lost architectural monuments that expressed particularly valuable national and cultural identity.

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Ochrona dziedzictwa architektonicznego Wołynia w latach 1920–1930 jako środek tożsamości kulturowej i narodowej

W okresie odnowienia niepodległości Polski w latach 1920–1930 odbyła się znaczna aktywizacja działalności dotyczącej opieki i konserwacji pamiątek architektury. Na terenie Wołynia, który został dołączony do II Rzeczypospolitej, został zrealizowany duży zakres prac w dziedzinie inwentaryzacji oraz renowacji znakomitych zespołów architektonicznych

i oddzielnych budowli. Działalność ta może być rozpatrzona jako jeden z przejawów konstruowania tożsamości narodowej polskiego etosu w warunkach państwa wielonarodowego, jeden ze sposobów budowy moralnych podstaw narodu w tym okresie oraz wizualizacji tych procesów przez środki architektoniczne.

Key words: Volyn, cultural heritage, identity

Słowa kluczowe: Wołyń, dziedzictwo kulturowe, tożsamość