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The Architecture of the Eastern Orthodox Churches in Lower Silesia – its Origin and Influence on the Region

The Orthodox Church in Lower Silesia

The beginning of the Orthodox Church in Lower Silesia dates back to the mission of the Saints Cyril and Methodius (9th century) and their disciples. The mission, which took place with the blessing of the Patriarch of Constantinople when Christianity was still undivided, was in a sense special. Firstly, it was conducted in a language understood by the Slavs (at present known as Old Church Slavonic language). Secondly, it covered the area whose ownership was claimed by German bishops, connected with the Latin culture. It was connected with unavoidable penetration of the cultural heritage of the East and the West. Thirdly, it was the first Christian mission which reached the area of present Poland. This is confirmed for instance by archeological excavations (e.g. items found in the 19th century near Stary Wołów: a skeleton with a small bronze icon depicting Theotokos with Christ on an oxidized bronze chain and a pectoral of an Eastern Orthodox bishop – dated to the 10th century [5] or a medallion with the figure of St. George from the 12th century from the Cathedral Island in Wrocław which resembles the Byzantine depictions [4]). The presence of the Byzantine culture and Eastern Christianity has been preserved also in some Lower Silesian names of towns [e.g.] Wysoka Cerkiew (or Cerekiew) near Rudna (at present Grodowiec), Cerekwica near Trzebnica.) [*Cerkiew in Polish means Orthodox church*]. The Benedictine monastery in Oleśnica (the 14th–15th century) where religious services were celebrated in Slavonic [9] was also a beneficiary of the Slavic mission. It was a phenomenon on a European scale (similar monasteries existed only in Cracow and Prague). As a result of the division into Eastern and Western Christianity (known as the Great Schism from 1054) and the fall of Constantinople

(1453) the Latin culture, with Roman Catholicism as its main denomination, began to dominate in Lower Silesia.

The return of Eastern Orthodox services in Lower Silesia took place probably as late as at the beginning of the 20th century. In the years 1899–1901, a small Orthodox church was built to meet the needs of the Orthodox patients of the tubercular diseases center in Sokołowsko (Fig. 1). It served this purpose until the end of the 1930s. During World War II an Orthodox church which was ruled by the Russian Orthodox Church in Berlin operated in Wrocław (its exact location is not known). The Evangelical church of St. Christopher at Dominikański Square was also used.

After the war, as a result of territorial changes and resettlements, the territorial structure of the Orthodox Church in Poland changed. The Autocephalous Church of Poland (PAKP) suffered severe losses. It is estimated that about 90% of its possessions from 1938 was lost. What remained out of 4 million believers in Poland was about 300 thousand believers, one whole diocese and remnants of another, one monastery and 223 Orthodox churches – mainly in the east of Poland. The Orthodox education as



Fig. 1. Dr. Røempler sanatorium with the Orthodox church; postcard from 1899 [7]

Il. 1. Sanatorium dr. Røemplera wraz z cerkwią; pocztówka z 1899 r. [7]

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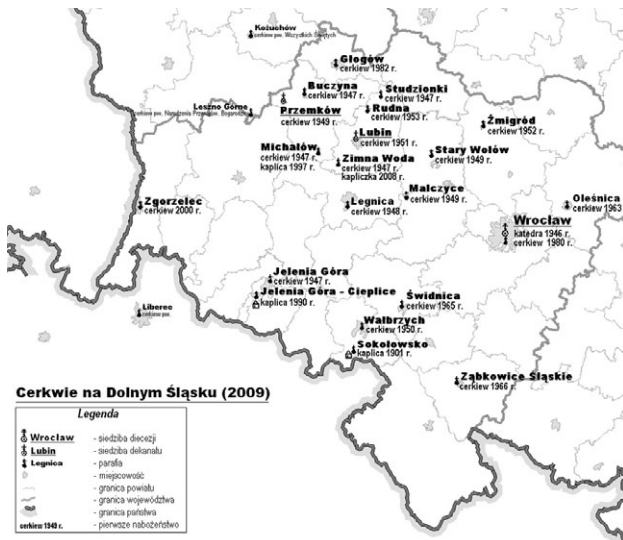


Fig. 2. Orthodox parishes in Lower Silesia
 II. 2. Parafie prawosławne na Dolnym Śląsku

well as the factories of Orthodox church furnishings were liquidated. Furthermore, there were organizational problems caused by taking overpower by the communist party.

Another blow for the Orthodox community was the “Vistula River” resettlement operation (1947–1952) during which the Ukrainian population (including Lemkos) was displaced from Lublin, south Podlasie and Rzeszów regions, as well as the Bieszczady Mountains, Przemyśl and Crocowa regions to the “Regained Territories” (west and north Poland). About 140 thousand people were resettled. Over 20 thousand resettlers, including 5–6 thousand of the Orthodox came to Lower Silesia [3]. They were displaced according to the rules imposed by the authorities, namely they were forbidden to gather in one town or settle within 30 km from the regions’ capital cities or state borders. They were also forbidden to return to their homeland.

In this extremely difficult administrative and political situation, the hierarchy of PAKP began to organize the

Orthodox Church structures on the Regained Territories. The Orthodox Church in Lower Silesia developed as a multiethnic community of Byelorussians, Russians, Ukrainians, Lemkos, Poles, Bulgarians, Romanians, Greeks. The religious services were (and still are) celebrated in the languages such as Church Slavonic, Polish, Ukrainian, Church Slavonic – with Lemko pronunciation and partly in Greek. The growth of religious life was possible after the Polish Orthodox Church Diocese of Wrocław-Szczecin was founded in 1951. Lower Silesia was included in two regions: Wrocław and part of Zielona Góra with a dozen or so parishes whose formation began already in 1946 (Fig. 2).

The state authorities for apparent reasons did not want to help the Orthodox Church. The organization of religious life faced a lot of adversities such as the lack of clergymen, no temples and no liturgical implements. Over the first years after the war religious services were usually celebrated in private homes and priests would travel even a few hundred kilometers to get there. The equipment of such ‘temples’ at first included only the liturgical implements collected hastily by the believers from their home Orthodox churches. Later on it was brought from other abandoned Orthodox churches (e.g. the iconostasis from the Orthodox church in Sosnowiec was brought to Wrocław). After many attempts the authorities also allowed taking over and adapting abandoned protestant churches. Examples include for instance the church of Annunciation of the Holiest Mother of God in Malczyce (former evangelical church of the emperor Wilhelm designed by Hans Poelzig – an excellent German architect) and the Orthodox cathedral church at St. Nicholas Street 39 in Wrocław.

The lack of the permit (until 1980s) for constructing the Orthodox own temples and the multiethnic community of the believers were the reasons why the architecture of the Orthodox churches in Lower Silesia became unique on the scale of the whole country. This paper describes the architectural solutions applied in the Orthodox churches in Wrocław, Sokołowsko and Michałów.

Wrocław

The history of Wrocław explains why while looking for the Orthodox church at St. Nicholas Street you will not find a building similar to typical Orthodox temples. The first prayer meetings after the war of the Orthodox in Wrocław were held in private apartments. This changed when PAKP acquired (23.01.1947) the chapel at Dąbrowskiego Street 14/16 (today Adventists’ church). However, the poor condition of the temple and the impossibility to go in procession around the temple (it is especially import during holiday processions) was the reason why the Orthodox community requested that the authorities grant them another building which would meet the ritual requirements. In 1963, PAKP was granted the ownership of the post-evangelical church of St. Barbara (originally built as a catholic cemetery church) (Fig. 3).

The first mentions about this building regard a chapel (1268) which was extended after the 15th century. During

World War II the church was ruined in about 70%. The destruction was completed by arson in July 1945 and

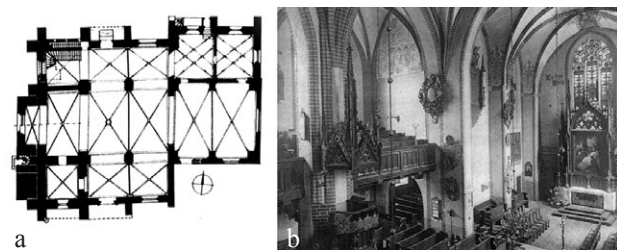


Fig. 3. St. Barbara church in Wrocław: basement plan (a) [2] and interior, 1900–1945 (b) (from the archives of the Orthodox cathedral parish in Wrocław)

II. 3. Kościół św. Barbary we Wrocławiu: rzut przyziemia (a) [2] i wnętrze, lata 1900–1945 (b) (z archiwum prawosławnej parafii katedralnej we Wrocławiu)



Fig. 4. Middle section of the altar from St. Barbara church (from the archives of the Orthodox cathedral parish in Wrocław)

Il. 4. Część środkowa ołtarza z kościoła św. Barbary (z archiwum prawosławnej parafii katedralnej we Wrocławiu)

post-war looting. It is an interesting point that the ruins of the temple from 1957 were the location for a few sequences of “Ashes and Diamonds” – a film directed by Andrzej Wajda. The priceless altar St. Barbara (Fig. 4) and a wooden epitaph with an apocalyptic depiction of the “Last Judgment” (the National Museum in Warsaw) miraculously survived the post-war conflagration. The 27 epitaphs, which can be seen on the external walls of the temple and next to it on the parish building, also somehow were spared from total destruction. Another item which also escaped destruction is the tomb stone of duke Waclaw Żagański (died in 1488) – at present in the National Museum in Brzeg Opolski. At the request of the very duke his tomb was located under the entrance to the temple on the south side to show his asceticism and humility towards the believers.

Today’s Orthodox cathedral church is geographically oriented with three naves – with presbytery facing east – hall from the 14th and 15th century, two vaulted spans and a single-nave, simple enclosed choir and the vestry from north-east. Form the west there are two towers with square cross sections and one additional span between them to lengthen the nave and a vestibule adjoining the span. The dimensions of the church are 32.70 × 24.60 m. The irregularity of the plan (Fig. 3a) and space probably result from a lengthy construction process, however, among many different theological opinions on the build-



Fig. 5. Interior of the Orthodox cathedral of the Birth of the Mother of God in Wrocław – present view (photo: A. Konachowicz)

Il. 5. Wnętrze wrocławskiej prawosławnej katedry pw. Narodzenia Bogurodzicy – widok obecny (fot. Andrzej Konachowicz)

ing there is also one according to which the medieval builders gave the church a stylized form of the Crucified Body of Christ.

Unlike the external appearance, which does not distinguish the church from among tens of other catholic sacred buildings (the walls and the building plan remained the same after reconstruction), the interior is quite different than the interior typical of this type of buildings. The adaptation of St. Barbara church which was performed by the Orthodox community is strikingly simple and natural in its character. The additional objects of religious cult, which are required by the tradition and liturgical practices of the Orthodox Church, were well incorporated into the historical Gothic interior. Consequently, they seem to be a ‘natural’ complement of the original architecture of the church. This is definitely the result of Gothic style whose numerous elements convey the same theological message in both Christianity of the East and Christianity of the West. The very space in the building suggests the central cross plan, because the dimensions of short aisles correspond with the spans of the towers (Fig. 5). This church (like any other Gothic churches) in fact encourages to place the iconostasis inside. That is why the most significant change inside the temple – installation of the granite iconostasis with contemporary minimalistic forms (by Professor Jerzy Nowosielski) – was not too difficult. In fact it does not constitute a wall but it is almost open-work. Its effect on the space is created and enhanced by the confrontation with the deep presbytery. This feature of the space of the iconostasis by contrast with a horizontal strip of colorful icons, distinctly visible in the background, vividly displays them. Adjusted to the iconostasis, a round and suspended low horos – the main chandelier – clearly emphasizes the central character of the space right before the iconostasis.

Before its destruction the temple had numerous polychromes and paintings, few of which can be admired on old photographs. When the iconostasis was being created, the vaulting above the presbytery, the vestibule, the porch and a small chapel had contemporary polychromes (by Professor Jerzy Nowosielski; a fresco with the scene of Crucifixion by Sotiris) similar to the masterpieces from late Medieval Rus. In time the large windows (two east and two west ones in the porch) were filled with stained glass by Professor Adam Stalony-Dobrzański, in its form similar to the Russian-Byzantine style.

The wooden iconostasis in the side chapel (1884) is also worth special attention; it comes from the Orthodox

church from Sosnowiec which was destroyed in 1938 (Wolfgang Dall – an evangelical German was the founder of that Orthodox church of St. Nicholas). It has interesting architecture with eclectic features based on Baroque motifs. The plan of icons is in classic order which developed in Rus at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries. The iconography of the iconostasis from Sosnowiec represents a very high artistic level, quite unusual for sacred 19th century paintings.

The altar of St. Barbara (1447), the epitaphs and the tomb stone of duke Żagański or the first pulpit in town (1533) are significant specimens of art that extends beyond the borders of the region. These medieval accents

combined with contemporary ones, in a sense modern elements, create a specific architectural harmony which served to express the meaning not so evident earlier in Wrocław, the meaning deriving from a different branch of Christian art.

The Orthodox cathedral in Wrocław and its surrounding create an unusual enclave in the very center of the city close to the busiest intersections. The vibrant and over 740 year long history of the Orthodox church located at St. Nicholas Street is palpable around it. In 1996, the Orthodox cathedral church of the Birth of the Holiest Mother of God was included in the Wrocław Quarter of Four Temples – also called an exemplary District of Mutual Respect.

Sokolowsko



Fig. 6. Orthodox church of Archangel Michael in Sokolowsko at present: view from outside (a) and interior (b) (photo: D. Bator)

Il. 6. Cerkiew pw. archanioła Michała w Sokolowsku obecnie: widok zewnętrzny (a) i wnętrze (b) (fot. D. Bator)

Sokolowsko is a village located in the Wałbrzyskie Mountains at the altitude of 600–936 m above sea level. Since 1854 it has been a health resort [8].

The Orthodox church (Fig. 6) was built there in the years 1900–1901 as a result of a lot of effort of the Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Vladimir (seated in Berlin) for the Orthodox patients who would visit the famous health resort in Sokolowsko (Görbersdorf in German) in great numbers for treatment. The plot for the construction of the church was sold by doctor Rudolf Røemper. On September 3, 1901, with the blessings of the Metropolitan Bishop of Saint Petersburg Palladius, the Protopresbiter Aleksey Graf von Maltzew from Berlin consecrated the church. A lot of great guests representing authorities, medical communities and aristocracy participated in the ceremony. The church served the Orthodox until the 1930s. Later the furnishings of the church: altar, sculptured iconostasis, bell and implements were taken to an unknown place. After World War II the church was abandoned, neglected and vandalized. For many years the local Medical Center ZOZ used it as a morgue and anatomy laboratory. In the 1970s, an elite club was planned to be housed in the building. In the period between 1980 and August 16, 1996 the church was a private property used commercially as a summer holiday house.

Attempts at reclaiming the building formally as the ownership of the Orthodox Church which were made in the years 1991–1994 were unsuccessful. It was only because of the attempts of the Orthodox Church parish of St. Cyril and Methodius in Wrocław and the help of the “Renovabis” foundation that the church was bought back and after general renovation of the interior its original design was restored. On April 5, 1997 Archbishop Jeremiah, the Ordinary of the Diocese of Wrocław-Szczecin, consecrated the new cross which crowned the dome of the church.

The church is located at the end of the resort park on a hill at whose foot there is a little water pond. The huge spruces which grow around the church make it look even smaller than it is in reality. The temple has three parts and a basement. Its small vestibule with a rectangular layout is covered with a gabled roof. The vestibule adjoins from the west side the nave which is cubic with a hipped roof,

crowned with a shapely onion-like cupola on a slender lantern. The presbytery, with three semicircular apses connected with one another, adjoins the nave from the east. By the middle apse from outside there is a roofed entrance to the basement with a boiler room. The temple has a high stone foundation. The same material was used to build the original 8 steps leading to the entrance as well as the retaining walls located on both sides of the steps. The façades of the church were constructed of clinker bricks with the use of a number of shapes to highlight window reveals, corners, entrance, horizontal and vertical division lines as well as beautiful ogee-shaped cornices. The whole temple has a well-thought-out design, including its function as well as ergonomic and aesthetic

aspects (designed for the purpose of the former tubercular diseases health resort Görbersdorf).

A temporary iconostasis with icons by Witaljusz Sadowski, an iconographer from Lviv, was placed in the church in 1998. After the temple was reclaimed there were plans to make polychromes and a permanent iconostasis (Fig. 6b). The works were commissioned from Michał Bogucki, an iconographer who at the same time settled in Sokołowsko and became the custodian and caretaker of the church. The icons for the iconostasis were brought from central Poland, from one of the churches which were disassembled in the 1920s. The renovation works were completed and a special consecration of the temple was held on November 10, 2001.

Michałów

Michałów (Michaelsdorf in German) – a village in the commune of Chocianów near Legnica – for many people, not only in Poland, a place associated with the Lemkovska Vatrasy (watch-fires) which have been organized there for 25 years. Once a year thousands of Lemko culture lovers gather in that small village located in the middle of the forest. What draws them there is the attractive program of Vatrasy. Apart from groups presenting the Rusyn culture they have also enjoyed the performances of other groups from Brittany, New Zealand and China.

The place where the church is located today and where the Vatrasy take place is called the “Centrum”. It was the center of that Lemko Michałów which was further divided into the “Przedmieście”, “Kurejówka” – the name transferred from Florynka (Małopolskie region; most of the post-war Orthodox who lived in Michałów were deported from that village), “Łąki” and “Cegielnia”, in contrast to the very village where Poles lived – as explained by Jan Dziadyk [after: 6].

The first Orthodox service was celebrated in Michałów on August 28, 1947. It took place in a makeshift chapel in a private home (in two larger rooms) of a local parishioner. “It was a strange church; nobody would find even the slightest similarity to the one which the dwellers of Florynka left in their home village. It had the same Florynka atmosphere when people were there. On top of that there was its name – St. Michael church. The dwellers of Florynka had to leave their church but they took the patron with them into the unknown world and nobody could take him away from them” [6].

In Michałów they set up church choirs and cherished the old forms of singing. The cultural life slowly began to grow. In 1970, the parish had about 70 congregants. At that time on the initiative of the priest and with the support of the parishioners it was possible to properly equip the temple with the missing liturgical implements. The parish in Michałów functioned like that until 1989.

In 1987, the believers from Michałów decided to construct a new church. The idea was not new – already in the 1970s the caretaker of the church began to collect build-



Fig. 7. Orthodox church of St. Archangel Michael in Michałów: view from outside (a) and interior (b) (photo: A. Szpytko)

Il. 7. Cerkiew św. archanioła Michała w Michałowie: widok zewnętrzny (a) i wnętrze (b) (fot. A. Szpytko)

ing material. When the works began the organizers of the watch-fires decided to use income from next Vatrasy on building the church. After many years of consistent efforts it was to be erected in the Michałów “Centrum”, near the square where the Vatrasy were held.

The square was consecrated and the cornerstone of the structure was laid on May 3, 1987. Thanks to the

generosity of the parishioners the whole investment was completed in 1989 and on August 6 it was consecrated.

The church (Fig. 7) which was built in Lemko style is a place of prayer for the local community. Undoubtedly it is also a jewel of Michałów and the small group of the believers is proud of it. It is the first building on the territory of the Polish Orthodox Diocese of Wrocław-Szczecin which was built from scratch by one parish alone. The parishioners donated for this purpose all necessary funds and their own work. Engineer Bolesław Rutkowski was the architect of the church.

The design of the church in Michałów resembles that of churches made of stone which appeared in Western Lemkivshchyna at the end of the 18th century (often referred to as “Josef style”). This is a small three-section temple with the sanctuary (presbytery), nave and narthex. Each part of the church is covered with a square multi-spherical dome. It is built of bricks and covered with metal sheet with wooden elements on the façades. The church is crowned with a tower built over the west part of the main hall of the church covered with a double cupola. The upper section of the wall of the tower has wooden vertical boarding and the lower one at the entrance has a fairly large roof from the west side supported by wood-

en posts. Over the nave there is a metal sheet gable roof with symmetrical heads above windows in the side walls. The rectangular presbytery adjoining the nave is covered with a three-slope hipped roof (with a traverse slope from the east) with a little smaller pitch. Over the nave and the presbytery, centrally along each of the hips, there are bulbous turrets with false lanterns.

Just like its overall shape, the interior of the temple resembles the interiors of Lemko-style Orthodox churches. The rood arch is filled with a small two-tier iconostasis, whereas in the nave there are pews from the north and south. Embroidered towels on icons (Fig. 7b) impart a special character to the interior, resembling the decoration of the temples in South-East Poland and West Ukraine.

Apart from the Orthodox church, there is another slightly smaller building in Michałów – a Marian votive shrine. Building thanksgiving shrines by the roads was a tradition in the mountains. The believers celebrated the 50th anniversary of the resettlement of Lemkos to Michałów – on July 7, 1997 by unveiling a commemorative plaque and a thanksgiving shrine of the Holiest Mother of God to commemorate “the dead and the living believers” [6].

Lower Silesia – “the melting pot”

Historically Lower Silesia belonged originally to Poland (the Piast dynasty), then to Czechia and later to Germany. The Polish past of that region is an episode in its history but it seems that only because of it it was possible to build unity which could go beyond ethnic divisions and a sense of temporariness as well as a specific suspension in time and space of the settlers who came here from all over. Their expectations and emotions were sometimes extremely different – ranging from respect of the past to its brutal destruction. Polish Silesia from centuries ago does exist in the works of historians but it was not in the memories of those who came here to live after World War II. What we call Regained Territories, was not for most of the local population regained. On the contrary – they were often forced to live on foreign land.

Lower Silesia was not exceptional. After the war it was rather a place of residence than home. The continuity of pre-war local tradition was severed, and the fact that only 7000 people who lived on the territory of Wrocław region before 1939 stayed there at the end of 1947 proves that [1]. However, the authorities wanted to create a harmoni-

ously functioning society whose tradition and culture were supposed to be expressed by the term “Lower Silesianness.” Sociologists and historians have different opinions on the alleged success of that plan, however, it seems that the external pressure faced resistance, which made it difficult to grow roots and unify external ethnic traditions, rather than building a common culture together. This confirms the folk character of the Lower Silesian culture and contemporary national tendencies.

Silesia, which is a border region, undoubtedly was (and still is) a place of coexistence of different cultures, religions and nationalities which often complement one another. Some material evidence of that diversity are the temples. They remind us that the values developed by our ancestors and the ancestors of our kinsmen are timeless and they defy any divisions. Preserving them for future generations requires a continuous and broad activity of not only present owners. The religious architecture makes it possible for different ethnic and culture groups to learn about one another and as a result the society becomes more sensitive and tolerant.

Summary

The area of South-West Poland is dispersedly inhabited by the Orthodox. This structure practically has not changed since the beginning of the formation of Orthodox parishes to date (Fig. 2). The Orthodox Church has solidified and grown into the Lower Silesian landscape. At present few people are surprised at the three-bar crosses on the towers of Gothic churches. The Orthodox Church architecture in

Lower Silesia is material evidence of religious activity and awareness of the Orthodox tradition. It also says a lot about the complicated history of this land. Regardless of the time of origin (or adaptation) and the architectural value of these temples, they are all worth our attention.

The buildings described in this paper are just some of many examples which outline the development of the

Orthodox Church architecture in Lower Silesia. Obviously most of the existing Orthodox temples are adapted buildings. There are few buildings which were originally designed as Orthodox churches. Today we know only about one Orthodox church which was built before World War II and still serves its original purpose (Fig. 6). However, the fact that it was easy for local people to adjust to new architectural forms demonstrates that Orthodox churches do not (did not) have to be something strange for the landscape of Lower Silesia.

After World War II there were occurrences of planned and deliberate or senseless or maybe simply natural destruction of the architectural monuments of German culture and civilization in Lower Silesia. If it wasn't for the efforts of the Orthodox Church to donate these buildings for cult purposes of the Orthodox community, many

of them (often of significant architectural and urban or even sentimental value) would fall into ruin or would be irretrievably destroyed. It can be said then that the Orthodox Church became the custodian of a part of historical heritage of Lower Silesia.

Leaving aside the evaluation of each building separately, all of them together create an extraordinary group of historical monuments, and as such they have a great value, especially in the landscape of South-West Poland. The Orthodox churches not only add to the architectural landscape of Poland and testify to its history but they also contribute to preserving the diversity in its broad sense. Nowadays this diversity, whose one of the main features is the pursuit of unification, has become a significant value.

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Architektura cerkiewna na Dolnym Śląsku – geneza i wpływ na sylwetkę regionu

Potrzeba adaptacji budynków na potrzeby sakralne wyznań chrześcijańskich pojawiła się w Polsce szczególnie w okresie powojennym, na skutek ruchów migracyjnych i wysiedleńczych. Jednym z oryginalnych przykładów takich zmian na skalę krajową są cerkwie prawosławne Dolnego Śląska.

Key words: ecclesiastical/church architecture, architecture of Lower Silesia, adaptations of the orthodox churches

W artykule przedstawiono historię pojawienia się na Dolnym Śląsku obiektów sakralnych należących do Kościoła prawosławnego. Opisano kilka przykładów adaptacji budynków użyteczności publicznej oraz obiektów sakralnych należących do innych wyznań. Przedstawiono także wpływ architektury cerkiewnej na krajobraz architektoniczny regionu.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura sakralna, architektura Dolnego Śląska, adaptacje cerkwi

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