

Katarzyna Woszczenko\*, Adam Musiuk\*\*

## *White wooden Orthodox Churches of the Podlaskie Voivodeship: architecture and theological symbolism of the colour white*

### *Abstract*

The article presents the results of research on the significance of the theological symbolism of the colour white in the context of Orthodox church architecture in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. The analysis was carried out on the basis of manuscript sources, academic literature, private communications, online materials, and a photographic fieldwork of selected buildings. The study encompassed seven Orthodox churches and chapels located in Białystok, Hajnówka, Lewkowo Stare, Miększe, Ryboły (Pietraszki sacred forest site), Stawiszcz and Wygoda. Both the dates of their construction and the changes in façade colour schemes over time were taken into account. The findings indicate that, while in secular architecture the colour white primarily fulfills an aesthetic function, in sacred architecture it refers to deeply rooted theological symbolism associated with God, Jesus Christ, and the concept of the church as the house of God. Particularly significant is its association with St Michael the Archangel, who is sometimes depicted in iconography wearing white robes. It was further observed that white occurs more frequently in the architectural elements of Orthodox churches with façades of other colours. The authors emphasise that, in the design of new Orthodox churches, tradition and colour symbolism should be taken into consideration, as they are of significance not only for the theological aspect but also for the architectural one.

**Key words:** cultural heritage, architecture, Orthodox Church, theology, symbols

### *Introduction*

As Wojciech Michera observes, [...] *colours are like illnesses – everyone experiences them, everyone considers themselves an expert, yet in reality, very little can be said about them with certainty* (1987, 83–114). Architects, as creators of the spaces that surround us, are influenced by colour, which undoubtedly plays a crucial role in shaping, organising, and sustaining these environments. Architects' attitudes towards colour appear to be both subjective and varied.

According to Krzysztof Ludwin, this attitude was still rather restrained only a few years ago (2017, 7, 8, 96), whereas Maria Wojtyśiak emphasises the significance of colour as an inherent component of architecture (2003). In her doctoral dissertation, Justyna Tarajko-Kowalska notably points to the rich chromatic tradition of Poland (2005, 2). Numerous further examples could be provided; however, it is essential

to recognise that an understanding of colour appears to be of particular importance in architectural practice, especially in the design of sacred buildings.

In secular architecture, façade colour primarily serves an aesthetic function and largely depends on the designer's personal judgement. In contrast, in the case of religious structures – particularly those of Orthodox Christianity – colour often derives from theological foundations and may significantly influence conceptual and formal design decisions.

### *Scope and content of the research*

The Podlaskie Voivodeship is characterised by the highest concentration of Orthodox churches in Poland. Within its boundaries are located two dioceses<sup>1</sup>: the Białystok-Gdańsk

\* ORCID: 0000-0001-5442-9994. Faculty of Architecture, Białystok University of Technology, Poland, e-mail: k.woszczenko@pb.edu.pl

\*\* ORCID: 0000-0001-9685-9597. Faculty of Architecture, Białystok University of Technology, Poland.

<sup>1</sup> A diocese is an administrative unit of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church. In Poland, there are six dioceses, each covering the territory of several voivodeships or geographical regions, which is reflected in their names.

and the Warsaw-Bielsk dioceses. The region is home to numerous wooden Orthodox churches with façades painted in a variety of colours, including blue (Woszczenko, Musiuk 2023), brown, green (Woszczenko 2023), beige, and white.

The ongoing research, the results of which are being successively published, encompasses all wooden Orthodox churches situated in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. The present article focuses on those churches whose façades are white. In analysing the rationale behind the choice of white, particular emphasis is placed on the theological aspect, which plays a significant role in shaping both the exterior and interior finishes of Orthodox sacred architecture. The term “white” has a broad meaning across different languages and may encompass a range of shades – from light yellow through beige and white to grey (Forstner 1990, 115, 116). The present study concerns churches that are distinctly white, while those with lighter façades will be discussed in a subsequent publication.

Archival and field research (September 2023–August 2025), together with multiple photographic fieldwork (March 2023–October 2025), have enabled the identification of all white Orthodox churches in the region. The following section presents a catalogue of these buildings, accompanied by key data, followed by an examination of the hypothesis regarding the theological influence on the choice of façade colour and its relevance to contemporary design.

The study of white wooden Orthodox churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship was undertaken due to the clear lack of research on this subject and constitutes a continuation of earlier research (Woszczenko, Musiuk 2023; Woszczenko 2023).

### *State of research*

The principal focus of this article is the influence of theology on the use of colour in the design of wooden Orthodox churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. Several publications have addressed related themes, including a study by Katarzyna Woszczenko and Adam Musiuk on the symbolism of the colour blue (Woszczenko, Musiuk 2023) and a separate work by Katarzyna Woszczenko devoted to the symbolism of the colour green (Woszczenko 2023).

A church represents a synergy of theology and architecture; it is both the House of God and a building intended for religious worship (Musiuk 2016). Nevertheless, in existing studies these two areas are often treated separately. The present research draws upon texts concerning colour theory, theological concepts, and architectural studies in a broad sense. Publications on the study of colour (Libera 1987; Kaiser, Boynton 1996) focus on human perception and the linguistic semiotics of colour. Theological works and primary sources (Patrologia Graeca 1865; Bazyli Wielki 1972; Nastolnaja kniga swiaszczennosłużytiela 1983; Forstner 1990; Baldock 1993; Quenot 1997; Radziukiewicz 2001; Evdokimov 2003; Pismo Święte 2004; Skibińska 2018) concern the Orthodox Christianity, Church teachings, and iconography.

The study also draws on works related to sacred architecture (Kuprianowicz, Hawryluk 1989; Sasna 1990; Brykowski 1995; Sosna 2000; Kabac 2007; Kazimiruk 2014; Musiuk 2016; Woszczenko, Musiuk 2023; Woszczenko 2023),

as well as historical (Powieść minionych lat 2005) and psychological publications (Progoff 1953), alongside terminological dictionaries (Kubalska-Sulkiewicz, Bielska-Łach and Manteuffel-Szarota 2003; Przyczyna, Czarnecka and Ławreszuk 2022). Additional sources include online materials (the website *orthodox.pl*) and interviews with Orthodox priests.

Given the evident shortage of interdisciplinary studies combining theological and architectural perspectives, this research was undertaken to provide insights that may assist architects involved in designing wooden Orthodox churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship.

## *Overview of the research*

### *The colour white*

The colour white is sometimes described as the absence of colour; however, Newton’s theory of colour demonstrates that it is, in fact, a mixture of coloured rays (Kaiser, Boynton 1996, 12–16). White is generally understood as a pure shade, free from admixtures of grey or black (Libera 1987) – this is how it is perceived by a typical observer. In Greek, the term λευκος (leukos) denotes the colour white with a very broad spectrum, encompassing shades from light yellow through beige and white to grey (Forstner 1990, 115, 116).

In the light of the above, the topic has been divided into two separate studies. The present article focuses exclusively on white wooden Orthodox churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship, whereas a subsequent publication will address churches with light-coloured façades falling within the aforementioned spectrum.

### *Theological aspects determining the image of white orthodox churches*

*A church is regarded as an earthly heaven, and in these heavenly spaces God dwells and walks among people* – these striking words of Patriarch German I underscore the extraordinary significance of the Christian temple and are cited in numerous theological studies (Patrologia Graeca 1865, 384). The Byzantines approached space as the dwelling of God, engaging in architectural exploration aimed at reconciling the human with the transcendent and infinite reality of God. According to historical accounts, the envoys of Prince Vladimir of Kiev, after visiting Constantinople, reported: *We did not know whether we were in heaven or on earth; for there is no spectacle or beauty on earth comparable to this, and we cannot describe it, only that God dwells there among people* (Powieść minionych lat 2005, 95–97). The concern here was not merely aesthetic; it was about the presence of God among people, which is inherently beautiful, uplifting the soul, and inspiring awe. The Church Fathers consider Divine Beauty a fundamental biblical and theological concept; thus, the beauty of the visible world is extended into the beautiful and good immaterial reality (Evdokimov 2003, 29).

A symbol expresses something mysterious; its existence, while beyond intellectual comprehension, can be experienced as simultaneously intimate and distant. Sensory experience merges with spiritual or subconscious perception

(Baldock 1993, 11–13). Humans have a tendency to understand the world rationally, yet, as Carl Gustav Jung argues, they suffer from a hunger for symbols (Progoff 1953, 184–187, 292). Symbolism in the Orthodox church is multifaceted and complex. Within the temple, two natures coexist: the material, experienced through the senses, and the spiritual, apprehended through symbols (Radziukiewicz 2001). Icons in Orthodox churches facilitate the transition from the material to the spiritual world through their intricate beauty, colour symbolism, numerology, and iconographic signs. Their colours are not mere decoration but constitute a mystical language expressing the spiritual realm (Quenot 1997, 93–96).

Visually, white appears as the absence of colour, and is therefore associated with lightness (Sendler 1988, 153, 154). White may symbolise the Creator in glory, as the source of all things, and His Divine energy, accessible to human understanding. It is associated with light and the penetrating illumination of God (Hart 2015, 169, 170). Numerous passages in the Holy Bible refer to white. At the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, *the clothing of [Jesus] became white as light* (Mt 17:2; Mk 9:3; Lk 9:29)<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, the Evangelists describe the garments of the angels present at the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ (Mt 28:3; Mk 16:5; Jn 20:12; Acts 1:10). The Book of Revelation contains the most references to white, where it symbolises perfect purity, victory, and eternal glory: the twenty-four Elders are clothed in white (Rev 4:4), as is the *great multitude, beyond numbering* (Rev 7:9); the Bride of the Lamb – the Church – is arrayed in pure, white, shimmering byssus<sup>3</sup>, signifying the righteous deeds of the saints (Rev 19:8; 3:4; 6:2; 15:6; 19:11–14) (Forstner 1990, 115), particularly referring to martyrs.

The colour white carries multiple symbolic meanings: purity, Divine teaching and knowledge, as well as joy and happiness (Hart 2015, 169, 170; Quenot 1997, 96–98). In Isaiah's vision, God says: *Your sins shall be as white as snow; they shall become as white as wool* (Isa. 1:18), referring to white as a symbol of victory over sin. As a sign of freedom from sin and spiritual enlightenment, individuals receiving baptism are clothed in white garments (Quenot 1997, 98). In early Christianity, the deceased were often buried in baptismal garments (Forstner 1990, 445). The Gospel describes: *Joseph took the body [of Jesus] and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud* (Mt 27:59). According to St Basil the Great, the white baptismal garment, which adorns us in heaven, *conceals our humanity, overcoming corporeal mortality and enfolding what is mortal in the indestructible* (Bazyli Wielki 1972). Today, this tradition persists only partially: although the deceased are covered with white shroud, baptismal garments are rarely used. This illustrates the ambivalence of the colour white (Sendler 1988, 153, 154), as its symbolism relates both to life and rebirth, as well as to death and transience.

As previously noted, white also symbolises joy and festive occasions; Ecclesiastes encourages the enjoyment of life: *Let your garments always be white* (Eccl. 9:8).

In iconography, white robes are primarily associated with angels and with Jesus Christ on icons depicting, among others, the Transfiguration, the Harrowing of Hell, the Resurrection, and the Ascension. White also represents the dove symbolising the Holy Spirit (Sendler 1988, 153, 154; Hart 2015, 169, 170).

The origin of the white robe of angels is related to their function. Their primary task is the glorification of God the Father. In His presence, they worship Him, serve Him, and participate in His governance of the world. Constantly in His presence, they extol His glory and majesty. They act as messengers of God (e.g., St Archangel Gabriel announcing the Good News to the Mother of God – Lk 1:30–31), protectors, comforters strengthening faith, intercessors before God for humanity, deacons, or envoys conveying God's mercy to the righteous and His wrath to the wicked (e.g., St Archangel Michael<sup>4</sup> leading the heavenly hosts against Satan and his followers, Jud 9; Rev 12:7; see Skibińska 2018). The functions of angels are therefore directly linked to the Creator, and thus to His light.

In the Orthodox Church, particular feasts are associated with different colours. White accompanies feasts dedicated to Jesus, primarily the *Feast of Feasts*<sup>5</sup> – *Pascha* – as well as feasts of St John the Baptist, the sacraments of baptism and marriage, and funeral liturgy. During these occasions, clergy wear white vestments (OCS: *oblaczenie*<sup>6</sup>; *Nastolnaja kniga swiaszczennosłużytiela* 1983). Within the church interior, decorative white cloths are placed on lecterns (OCS: *analoj*<sup>7</sup>). Observations indicate that some faithful also wear white when participating in services on the Feast of the Resurrection.

### *Orthodox churches of the Podlaskie Voivodeship*

Wooden sacred architecture holds an important place in the history and landscape of the Podlaskie Voivodeship, due to the ready availability of timber as a building material, the prevalence of carpentry craftsmanship, and the multi-religious character of the region. This topic has been described in more detail in studies on green Orthodox churches (Woszczenko 2023) and blue Orthodox churches (Woszczenko, Musiuk 2023); consequently, the present article provides only a concise overview.

<sup>4</sup> The white colour of the garments in depictions of St Archangel Michael does not appear consistently; nevertheless, there are numerous examples of icons that feature it.

<sup>5</sup> *Pascha*, also known as the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, is referred to as the *feast of feasts*, as it is the most important celebration in the Orthodox Church (Przyczyna, Czarnecka and Ławreszuk 2022, 340, 341, 442, 489).

<sup>6</sup> *Oblaczenie* – a liturgical vestment, one of the garments worn by a clergyman during the performance of a religious service, in Old Church Slavonic (OCS) (Przyczyna, Czarnecka and Ławreszuk 2022, 433).

<sup>7</sup> *Analoj* – a type of lectern in an Orthodox church, on which a decorative cloth is placed, together with an icon and/or a cross, the Gospel book, or other liturgical texts (Przyczyna, Czarnecka and Ławreszuk 2022, 87).

<sup>2</sup> Biblical quotations translated into English come from the edition: *Pismo Święte* (2004).

<sup>3</sup> Byssus (sea silk) – a valuable white fabric made from the silky threads produced by the rapidly coagulating secretion of molluscs, used in antiquity and the Middle Ages, primarily in the area around Tarentum (Kubalska-Sulkiewicz, Bielska-Łach and Manteuffel-Szarota 2003, 45).

Table 1. Wooden Orthodox churches of the Podlaskie Voivodeship that currently or previously had white façades (elaborated by K. Woszczenko, based on: Kabac 2007; Sosna 2000, 201–202, 219–223, 413–417; Kuprianowicz, Hawryluk 1989, 4; Sasna 1990, 4; Kazimiruk 2014; orthodox.pl; interviews with Orthodox priests: Fr. Adam Jakuc from the parish of St John the Theologian in Białystok, September 29, 2023;

Fr. Jarosław Łojka, parish priest of the Nativity of St John the Baptist in Pasynki, October 3, 2025; Fr. Adam Ostapkowicz, parish priest of the Protection of the Mother of God in Zubacze, October 9, 2023; Fr. Jan Romańczuk, parish priest of the Nativity of St John the Baptist in Hajnówka, October 10, 2023)

Tabela 1. Badane drewniane cerkwie województwa podlaskiego mające obecnie i w przeszłości elewacje w kolorze białym (oprac. K. Woszczenko, na podstawie Kabac 2007; Sosna 2000, 201–202, 219–223, 413–417; Kuprianowicz, Hawryluk 1989, 4; Sasna 1990, 4; Kazimiruk 2014; orthodox.pl; rozmowy z księżmi prawosławnymi: ks. Adamem Jakucem z parafii pw. św. Jana Teologa w Białymstoku, 29.09.2023; ks. Jarosławem Łojką, proboszczem parafii pw. Narodzenia św. Jana Chrzciciela w Pasynkach, 3.10.2025; ks. Adamem Ostapkowiczem, proboszczem parafii pw. Opieki Matki Bożej w Zubaczach, 9.10.2023; ks. Janem Romańczukiem, proboszczem parafii pw. Narodzenia św. Jana Chrzciciela w Hajnówce, 10.10.2023)

Locality	Function	Dedication	Built*	Former façade colour	Current façade colour
Białystok	temporary parish church	St John the Theologian	2007**	–	white
Hajnówka	cemetery church	All Saints	1952/1953	white (before renovation in 2017–2018)	natural wood with a warm tone
Lewkowo Stare	parish church	Saints Peter and Paul	XVIII	white (before renovation in 2018)	beige
Miękiszewo	chapel	Icon of the Mother of God <i>Life-Giving Spring</i>	2022	–	white with blue elements
Ryboły (uroczysko Pietraszki)	chapel	Icon of the Mother of God <i>Life-Giving Spring</i>	1926	white with blue elements in October 2020	natural wood with a warm tone
Stawiszczewo	cemetery church	Miracle of St Michael the Archangel	1965	white (before renovation in 2021)	white (plaster)
Wygodna	cemetery church	Transfiguration of Jesus	1840	white (before renovation in 2013–2014)	natural wood with a warm tone

\* The construction date is presented in three formats, depending on the source: as the specific year of completion, the period of construction, or the approximate age of the building.

\*\* The year of construction given refers to the date of reconstruction in the current parish. The building originally belonged to the Hajnówka Forest District and later served as a temporary church, among other locations, in Hajnówka, Czyże, and the Nowe Miasto district in Białystok.

The research focused on Orthodox churches and chapels constructed in wood, with façades painted white.

## Methods

The research was conducted in several stages. It began with an examination of the records of the Voivodeship Office for the Protection of Monuments in Białystok, a process that has been ongoing continuously since October 2022. A total of 113 structures meeting the established criteria were analysed – wooden Orthodox churches and chapels – a figure reflecting the state of research as of October 2025. The task proved demanding, as not all buildings are listed in the heritage register, while some were identified only during photographic fieldwork.

During the course of this process, it was observed that the surveyed buildings could be clearly grouped according to the colour of their façades. The structures were categorised into the following colour ranges: blue, green, brown, and the lightest, whitish tones (white, beige, pale yellow). It was also noted that certain buildings had changed colour over the course of their existence. Previous studies focused on blue and green churches, whereas the present research concentrated on those with light-coloured façades, which were further divided into two categories – white and light.

In the subsequent stage, basic information concerning the white buildings was compiled, and changes in the colour of their façades were recorded (Table 1). Another compo-

nent of the research involved photographic documentation, carried out intermittently between March 2023 and October 2025, accompanied by an assessment of the current condition of the buildings. The final stage consisted of comparing the number of white churches with that of buildings featuring other façade colours among the wooden Orthodox churches of the Podlaskie Voivodeship.

## Results

Below are presented the parish churches, cemetery churches, and chapels of Podlaskie Voivodeship with different functions, built at various times. The criterion for selecting the buildings for the study was the colour of their façades – white.

Orthodox churches have a tripartite interior: from the main entrance, there is the narthex for catechumens and penitents, followed by the nave for the faithful, and the sanctuary for the clergy (Brykowski 1995, 19–22). The tripartite division of the interior is often visible externally in the shape of the building. The churches analysed are oriented<sup>8</sup>.

The research demonstrated that, at present<sup>9</sup>, only the following buildings possess purely white façades: the temporary

<sup>8</sup> Orthodox churches are oriented, which means that the sanctuary is located on the eastern side and faces east.

<sup>9</sup> State of research as of October 2025.





Fig. 1. Temporary Orthodox parish church of St John the Theologian in Białystok, September 2023 (photo by K. Woszczenko)

II. 1. Tymczasowa cerkiew parafialna pw. św. Jana Teologa w Białymstoku, wrzesień 2023 (fot. K. Woszczenko)



Fig. 3. Orthodox chapel of the Icon of the Mother of God Life-Giving Spring in Mięgisze, October 2025 (photo by K. Woszczenko)

II. 3. Kaplica pw. Ikony MB Życiodajne Źródło w Mięgiszach, październik 2025 (fot. K. Woszczenko)



Fig. 2. Orthodox cemetery church of the Miracle of St Michael the Archangel in Stawiszczach: a) May 2016 (photo by J. Karcz), b) August 2023 (photo by K. Woszczenko)

II. 2. Cerkiew cmentarna pw. Cudu św. Michała Archaniola w Stawiszczach: a) maj 2016 (fot. J. Karcz), b) sierpień 2023 (fot. K. Woszczenko)



Fig. 4. Orthodox cemetery church of All Saints in Hajnówka: a) August 2015 (photo by J. Karcz), b) August 2023 (photo by K. Woszczenko)

II. 4. Cerkiew cmentarna pw. Wszystkich Świętych w Hajnówce: a) sierpień 2015 (fot. J. Karcz), b) sierpień 2023 (fot. K. Woszczenko)





Fig. 5. Orthodox cemetery church of the Transfiguration of Jesus near the village of Wygoda: a) October 2010 (photo by G. Kossakowski, source: <http://www.ciekawepodlasie.pl/opis/1085,Cerkiew+cmentarna+p.w.+Przemienienia+Pa%C5%84skiego.htm>, accessed September 23, 2023), b) September 2023 (photo by K. Woszczenko)

Il. 5. Cerkiew cmentarna pw. Przemienienia Pańskiego w pobliżu wsi Wygoda: a) październik 2010 (fot. G. Kossakowski, źródło: <http://www.ciekawepodlasie.pl/opis/1085,Cerkiew+cmentarna+p.w.+Przemienienia+Pa%C5%84skiego.htm>, dostęp 23.09.2023), b) wrzesień 2023 (fot. K. Woszczenko)

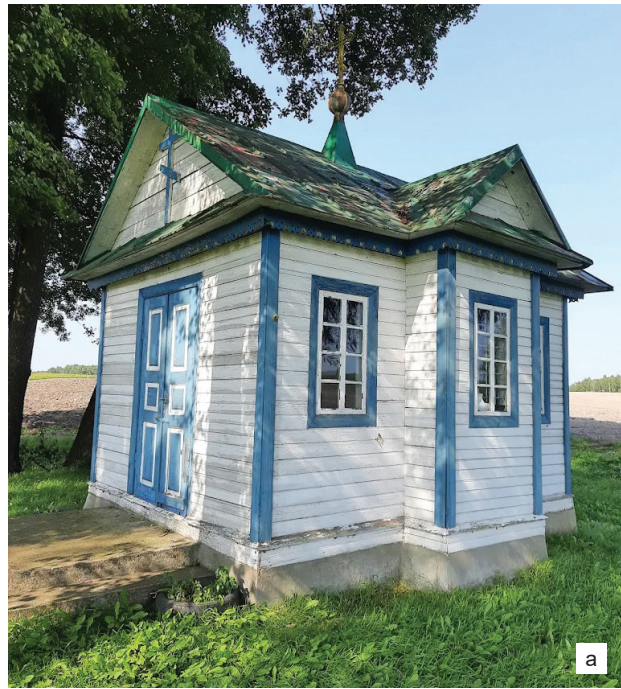


Fig. 6. Orthodox chapel at the Pietraszki sacred forest site near the village of Ryboły: a) September 2020 (photo by J. Chruścicki), b) November 2024 (photo by K. Woszczenko)

Il. 6. Kaplica na uroczysku Pietraszki w pobliżu wsi Ryboły: a) wrzesień 2020 (fot. J. Chruścicki), b) listopad 2024 (fot. K. Woszczenko)

parish Orthodox church<sup>10</sup> of St John the Theologian in Białystok (Fig. 1) and the cemetery Orthodox church in Stawiszczu (Fig. 2). The Orthodox chapel in Miększe (Fig. 3) is white with blue elements on its façades. In the past, white façade finishes were present on the cemetery Orthodox churches: in Hajnówka (Fig. 4) and near the village of Wygoda (Fig. 5), as well as on the chapel at the Pietraszki sacred forest site near the Ryboły (Fig. 6) and the parish Orthodox church in Lewkowo Stare (Fig. 7).

<sup>10</sup> It currently serves as a parish church, fulfilling this function until the completion of the proper church building. Previously, the building functioned as the parish church of St George the Victorious in Białystok, in the Nowe Miasto district.





Fig. 7. Orthodox parish church of Saints Peter and Paul in Lewkowo Stare:  
a) July 2013 (photo by K. Maciejewska), b) July 2023 (photo by K. Woszczenko)

Il. 7. Cerkiew parafialna pw. św. Piotra i Pawła w Lewkowie Starym:  
a) lipiec 2013 (fot. K. Maciejewska), b) lipiec 2023 (fot. K. Woszczenko)

White is frequently used in the architecture of wooden Orthodox churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship for elements such as vertical corner boarding, window and door frames, and the surrounding woodcarving decorations. It is also applied to woodcarving decorations under the eaves, at the gables, and to the posts supporting entrance canopies (Fig. 8). During the research and photographic fieldwork, individual whitewashed gravestones were also noted in the cemetery, for example in Czeremcha Wieś (Fig. 9) and near the village of Wygoda.

### Conclusions

Research conducted up to October 2025 indicates that there are 113 wooden Orthodox churches and chapels in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. Among these, ten structures current-

ly have façades in shades of white (8.9% of the total), including one temporary parish church, two parish churches, five cemetery churches, and two chapels. Of these, seven can be classified as distinctly white, either at present or historically. Only two currently have purely white façades, while one features a white façade with blue architectural elements. It may be presumed that practical considerations account for this pattern, as white exteriors tend to deteriorate and become soiled relatively quickly.

Considering buildings that were white in the past, the total rises to 14, representing 12.5% of all wooden Orthodox churches recorded up to October 2025. Nevertheless, white architectural elements frequently appear on the façades of churches painted in other colours, particularly blue. Tombstones in cemeteries are also occasionally painted white.





Fig. 8. Examples of wooden Orthodox churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship, featuring façades in different colours with white architectural elements (photos by K. Woszczenko)

Il. 8. Przykłady drewnianych cerkwi województwa podlaskiego w różnych kolorach elewacji z białymi detalami (fot. K. Woszczenko)

The surveyed buildings are dedicated to various saints. In Orthodox Christianity, the colour white is associated with the Resurrection of Christ, and indeed every Orthodox church is in some way identified with the Resurrection. The theological symbolism of this colour is extensive, yet closely connected with God and with Jesus Christ. It may therefore be inferred

that white is suitable for churches dedicated to all saints, as well as for the very concept of the church as the House of God. Particular attention should be given to the cemetery church in Stawiszcz, whose patron is Saint Archangel Michael, who is often depicted wearing garments incorporating elements of white – a characteristic feature of angels.



## Summary

The results of the research provide strong evidence supporting the thesis that the use of white in the architecture of wooden Orthodox churches is rooted not only in aesthetic considerations but also in theological symbolism. White is primarily associated with God and Jesus Christ. Given its rich and profound symbolic meaning, the use of this colour should be carefully considered in the design of façades, architectural elements, and interiors of wooden Orthodox churches.

Translated by  
Katarzyna Woszczenko



Fig. 9. White graves in the cemetery in Czeremcha Wsieć (photo by K. Woszczenko)

Il. 9. Białe nagrobki na cmentarzu w Czeremcha Wsi (fot. K. Woszczenko)

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### ***Streszczenie***

#### ***Białe drewniane cerkwie prawosławne województwa podlaskiego: architektura i symbolika teologiczna koloru białego***

W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań dotyczących znaczenia symboliki teologicznej koloru białego w kontekście architektury cerkwi prawosławnych województwa podlaskiego. Analiza została przeprowadzona w oparciu o źródła rękopiśmienne, literaturę przedmiotu, komunikaty prywatne, materiały internetowe oraz inwentaryzację fotograficzną wybranych obiektów. Opracowanie objęło siedem cerkwi i kaplic prawosławnych zlokalizowanych w Białymstoku, Hajnówce, Lewkowie Starym, Miękiszech, Rybołach (uroczysko Pietraszki), Stawiszczach i Wygodzie. Uwzględniono zarówno daty ich budowy, jak i zmiany kolorystyki elewacji w czasie. Wyniki badań wskazują, że biały kolor, choć w architekturze świeckiej pełni głównie funkcję estetyczną, w architekturze sakralnej nawiązuje do głęboko zakorzenionej symboliki teologicznej, związanej z Bogiem, Chrystusem i ideą świątyni jako domu Bożego. Szczególne znaczenie ma jego powiązanie ze św. Archaniołem Michałem, niekiedy przedstawianym w ikonografii w białych szatach. Stwierdzono ponadto, że biel częściej pojawia się w detalach architektonicznych cerkwi o innych kolorach elewacji. Autorzy podkreślają, iż w przypadku projektowania nowych cerkwi prawosławnych należy uwzględniać tradycję oraz symbolikę koloru, co ma istotne znaczenie zarówno dla wymiaru teologicznego, jak i architektonicznego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dziedzictwo kulturowe, architektura, cerkiew prawosławna, teologia, symbolika