
AUTHENTIC OR NOT? ART HISTORIAN'S REFLECTIONS ON CASTLE RECONSTRUCTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY POLAND

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ABSTRACT: In Poland, most castles were destroyed as early as the 17th and 18th centuries as a result of numerous wars. In the following centuries, an unfavourable political situation or just economic considerations caused numerous demolitions. A significant number of castles disappeared, or functioned as 'romantic ruins'. A few important castles were rebuilt in the 19th century, in the spirit of 'historical revival'. In the 20th century, many of the most important buildings were rebuilt or even reconstructed from scratch. In most cases, the sites were rebuilt immediately after the end of the war, by people who knew the buildings from autopsy, before demolition.

For many years, castle ruins functioned in the Polish landscape as 'permanent ruins'. After the fall of communism, reconstruction of some castles began at the beginning of the 21st century. The most spectacular example may be the 'reconstruction' of the castle in Poznan - one of the most important cities in Poland. It was rebuilt on the basis of poor iconographic material - no older than from the 18th century. However, a large part of city dwellers support the fact that the former capital of Greater Poland had 'reclaimed' its castle. Another 'reconstruction' of recent years is the Bobolice Castle, praised by numerous tourists and heavily criticised by art historians and conservators.

Contemporary castle reconstructions are becoming a worrying trend. It may, in future pose a serious threat to the authentic, substance of historical castle buildings.

KEY WORDS: Reconstructions, Castles, Authenticity

Defensive castles lost their *raison d'être* with the developement of the firearms and artillery. In the 17th century some of them had already become ruins. Others were converted, or rebuilt into open residences, with no military-defence purposes. These tendencies were characteristic all over the Europe.

In the early 19th century, in a wave of Romantic tendencies, reconstructions of castles began. Initially, these were ahistorical 'visions' of castles. Over time, reconstructions were carried out using increasingly scientific, historical knowledge. Destroyed or ruined buildings were rebuilt, in a 'medieval' style. Wartburg Castle received a new, albeit old-style building, and Neuschweinstein Castle was built in a fancy style. The reconstructions of Marienburg (nowadays Malbork in Poland), or Haute-Koenigsburg Castles were the result of archaeological and architectural research. However, it was also not without many faults and historical errors.

In France, the most spectacular was the reconstruction from the ruins of Pierrefonds castle. It is one of the best examples of the conservationist 'school' of Viollet-le-Duc.

Analogous trends also occurred in 19th century Poland. The castle of Kórnik, is an example of a romantic, neo-Gothic realisation. Designed (with the participation of Karl Friedrich Schinkel) before 1830, it was erected in the years 1843-1861 and is an example of the transformation of a Gothic-Renaissance private castle into a magnate residence. The building was absolutely transformed. A picturesque silhouette was created, imposing decorations inspired by the patterns of Gothic architecture, which - in this form - never existed here. Some of the interior decoration refers to the English Gothic (St. George's Hall at Windsor Castle), some other forms refers to Moorish architecture¹. Another later example of a complete reconstruction, in a completely different style, is the castle in Gołuchów. From 1875 onwards, the Renaissance defensive mansion was transformed into a building in the French Renaissance style. The Polish manor became a copy of a chateau on the Loire. An almost perfect copy, with original elements from historic residences purchased in France. The interior of the castle, which was intended for a would-be Polish king, was also completely transformed and filled with old furniture and high class antiques. Prominent architects were also employed here: the French Maurice Ouradou (Viollet-le-Duc's son-in-law), and Zygmunt Gorgolewski².

The situation in Poland changed after 1918. After independence, state patronage emerged. It was no longer only aristocrats who rebuilt their castles. The royal castle Wawel, in Krakow, was recovered by the Polish community while it was still under Austrian occupation, at the beginning of the 20th century. The restoration works, which had already begun before the First World War, were continued throughout the inter-war period. Destroyed and turned into barracks by the occupants, the castle was converted into a museum. After changes it restored the vision of Wawel Castle as a royal residence of the Renaissance and Baroque epoques. Despite the lack of authentic furnishings, it was possible to recreate the atmosphere of the royal residence within the preserved

¹ Skuratowicz, J. (1981). *Dwory i pałace w Wielkim Księstwie Poznańskim* (p. 37–42). Wydawnictwo Poznańskie.

² Sadowski, Ł. M. (2006). *Kostium francuski a architektura rezydencjonalna polskiej arystokracji i ziemiaństwa w latach 1864–1914* (pp. 80–83). Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki PAN.

walls. Conservation works were also carried out after World War 2, during which the castle fortunately did not suffer any damage. In principle, it is still ongoing, even in modern times³.

Another case in point is the fate of Poland's second most important residence, the Royal Castle in Warsaw. It was also restored and maintained in the inter-war period. At that time it served as the seat of the President of Poland. During the Second World War, it was deliberately and planned destroyed by German sappers. Only a small section of the wall remains of the original structure - the rest has been turned into rubble. In this case, it is difficult to even speak of a ruin. Shortly after the Second World War, decisions were made in Poland to rebuild the monuments. This included the centres of entire cities (Warsaw, Gdańsk, Wrocław) as well as individual buildings. It is somewhat of a paradox that, for example, the Teutonic castle in Malbork was rebuilt (reconstructed again), while the Polish royal castle in Warsaw had to wait more than two decades for a decision on the matter. The reason was, of course, political. The Communist regime, despite its earlier decisions to rebuild, did not want to rebuild the royal residence. The Royal Castle in Warsaw, whose reconstruction began in 1971 and was completed in 1984, was one of the last of its kind. Despite the time distance since the 'disappearance' of the original building, it was reconstructed by people who knew it from autopsy, from pre-war times. The reconstruction was based on solid iconographic material. Much of the authentic interior furnishings were returned to the completely new walls. These had been rescued earlier - at the risk of their lives - by Polish art historians, conservators and museum workers during the German occupation from the ruins of the burnt-out castle. It survived the war and was re-installed in the reconstructed building⁴. It is a paradox that the present Royal Castle in Warsaw contains more authentic interior furnishings, decorations and details, than the never fully demolished Wawel Castle in Krakow.

Historic preservation in Poland developed after World War 2. The enormity of the damage to historic buildings necessitated comprehensive measures. As mentioned above, whole towns were reconstructed. These actions were often controversial and not in accordance with international documents and guidelines. Most of these documents (Charters) were co-edited and signed by Polish conservators. The same ones who rebuilt Polish monuments. In fact, this was not a typically Polish specificity after World War 2. Similar measures were probably carried out in all war-ravaged countries⁵. Despite these controversies, the names of Polish conservators and architects (Zachwatowicz, Bieganski, Michalowski and others), have become known worldwide. In 1960's and 1970's: 'Polish conservator's school' began to signify scientifically supported high-class technical and artistic conservation workmanship. It was repeated with humour, but also with appreciation in the circles of our Western colleagues, that *wyborowa vodka* and conservators - are the export hits of the Polish People's Republic⁶.

³ Kajzer, L., Kołodziejewski, S., Salm, J. (2001). *Leksykon zamków w Polsce* (pp. 243, 246). Warszawa: Arkady. See also: *Wawel Narodowi Przywrócony. Odzyskanie zamku i jego odnowa 1905–1939*. Katalog wystawy, marzec–czerwiec 2005 (2005). Kraków: Zamek Królewski na Wawelu.

⁴ Kajzer, L., Kołodziejewski, S., Salm, J. (2001). *Leksykon zamków w Polsce* (p. 531). Warszawa: Arkady

⁵ Tomaszewski, A. (Ed.). (2021). *Ku nowej filozofii dziedzictwa*. (pp. 183, 198, 207). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 257.

The collapse of the communist system in Poland (1989) brought hope for positive change. The former residences, manor houses of the landed gentry in particular, were often in a tragic situation. They were programmatically neglected and brought to ruin due to their ideological hostility towards the system. In 2000, the eminent Polish conservator and architectural historian Andrzej Tomaszewski wrote that the care of historic preservation has been handed over to politicians. Responsible positions are taken by political party designees rather than in recognition of their competence. Although Tomaszewski was writing here in the context of foreign conservation cooperation programmes, it seems that these words can also often be applied to specific actions towards monuments⁷.

In this context, in contemporary Poland, what is the issue of conservation and reconstruction of historic buildings? What does the care for the preservation of their authenticity look like? We will try to sketch this problem using examples of contemporary activities on historic castles.

Alongside Krakow and Warsaw, Poznan was one of the most important cities in the Kingdom of Poland. However, unlike the aforementioned cities, the castle of the capital of Greater Poland region (Wielkopolska) has not survived. Already on maps from the early 16th century, showing the city skyline, we can see that it has lost its defensive qualities. On the map from: *'Civitates Orbis Terrarum. Theatri praecipuarum totius mundi urbium liber sextus'* by Frans Hogenberg and Georg Braun published in Cologne in 1617, we can see that it no longer has a tower. Severely damaged and rebuilt, it took on the form of a townhouse in the 18th century, losing its 'castle' character. In 19th century views and photographs, it does not stand out in the skyline of the city. Its role as a fortification centre is taken over by the Prussian Citadel to the north. Between 1905 and 1907, a new 'castle' was built on the then western outskirts of the city: (Royal Residence Castle-Königliches Residenzschloß). Designed by architect Franz Schwechten, this monumental Neo-Romanesque building was intended as a visible symbol of German rule over this part of Poland. After Poland regained its independence, the new castle aroused controversy with its architecture. It was not demolished; it continued to perform its representative functions. Nevertheless, already in the inter-war period, the first ideas of rebuilding the old Polish castle appeared. These ideas were revived during the communist period. "During the post-war housing of the city, in 1949 Zbigniew Zieliński proposed the restoration of the (...) residence in the Gothic-Renaissance style, assuming also the reconstruction in this spirit of the former archive building. The project had little in common with the form of the 16th-century castle known from descriptions and was not supported by the General Conservator of Monuments (Jan Zachwatowicz). The concept was accused of too much creative ingenuity on the part of the architect, not supported by sufficient source material, and the envisaged change in the form of the 18th century edifice was considered inappropriate"⁸. In the 1960s, when the clean-up of the castle hill began, new concepts for its development emerged. New projects were created, most often as an attempt to adapt the only surviving fragment to new requirements (the grounds were taken over by the museum). The

⁷ Ibidem, p. 210.

⁸ <https://odbudowarekonstrukcjapogania.wordpress.com/2017/03/26/zamek-krolewski-w-poznaniu-nowy-zabytek-czy-nowotwor/>

18th-century building was to be preserved, and new modernist blocks were to be added to it. These projects were typical of the 1960s style of Polish Modernism. Some (design by A. Holas from 1969) also envisaged the 'reconstruction' of the castle tower. Also in modern forms⁹.

The lack of a castle, in the capital of an important region, in an important historical city, in one of the first capitals of Poland, caused a need among some inhabitants to restore the memory of the place. This has developed into an idea to 'rebuild' the castle. One of the most common opinions was to compare it with other Polish cities: 'There is no building in the capital of Greater Poland that bears witness to the city's role in Polish history, especially at the beginning of that history. The Wawel Castle was restored to its royal majesty after the First World War (during the Partitions of Poland there were barracks there). In the era of Edward Gierek, the Royal Castle in Warsaw was rebuilt'¹⁰. It was emphasised that the lack of a castle in Poznań creates a feeling of a 'deficit of Polish history'. The empty castle hill resembles 'a man without a head'¹¹.

In 2002, on the initiative of a local politician, Włodzimierz Łęcki, the Committee for the Rebuilding of the Royal Castle in Poznań was established. A competition was quickly launched, and despite the negative opinions of the art historian community, it was decided to choose the design by Witold Milewski. The late Baroque building was left in place. The new wing and tower were added from the south, added on medieval and later additions. The architect's idea was to recreate the castle, according to its state in mid-16th century. Meanwhile, in 2004, a presumed appearance of the castle in the 16th century was published by Jan Skuratowicz. Milewski's realisation differs significantly from it. The 18th-century building left behind did not exist 3 centuries earlier. It was therefore impossible to reconstruct the actual body. The new realisation created a new arcade layout that did not exist before. A tower was built which is known not to have existed in the 16th century. Rather, it was a height-reduced extension to the main complex. The original height of the tower is not known at all. Except a historic tower's height, we do not know how it was looking. Everything is covered with imaginary roof. It is known that the tower certainly did not look like that. It had a different scale, a different form. The number of architectural errors or misrepresentations of various kinds is really considerable (ahistorical belvedere, Gothic portal in a place where it never occurred). Another issue is the material used. A machine-made brick (looks like a mock-up for a movie) was evenly laid on the earlier relics. The covering of these relics with tons of cubic metres of concrete probably destroyed forever

⁹ The exact history of the castle and its 'reconstruction' including all the projects is described by Tomasz Ratajczak. See: Ratajczak T. (2012) Nowy zamek w Poznaniu - negatywny przykład adaptacji relikwów średniowiecznej architektury, [in:] *Zamki w runie - zasady postępowania konserwatorskiego*. B. Szmygin, P. Molski (Eds.), https://www.academia.edu/8927098/Nowy_zamek_w_Poznaniu_negatywny_przyk%C5%82ad_adaptacji_relikt%C3%B3w_%C5%9Bśredniowiecznej_architektury_w_Zamki_w_runie_zasady_post%C4%99powania_konserwatorskiego_red_B_Szmygin_P_Molski_Warszawa_Lublin_2012?auto=download&auto_download_source=social-news

¹⁰ <https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/130712-poznan-jest-miastem-krolewskim-i-nie-ma-zamku-o-jego-odbudowaniu-zapomniano>

¹¹ Ibidem,

the possibilities for possible archaeological research in the future¹². The castle has also changed the city's skyline. More than 40 metres high, on a hill, the tower is visible from many places. A very noticeable change is in the view from the Old Market Square (Stary Rynek) in the heart of the historic city. According to a section of the public, critical of such a reconstruction, with its dominant silhouette, the castle resembles the „house of Gargamel”, the Smurfs negative cartoon character. And this is also the nickname it has acquired.

A realisation on a much smaller scale, which has, however, also stirred up a great deal of controversy, is the ‘reconstruction’ of Bobolice Castle (historically in Lesser Poland-Małopolska region, nowadays in Silesia). It was built by the Polish King Casimir the Great in the mid-14th century. Later it was ruled both by the Crown and by various knightly and magnate families. After the Swedish wars in the 17th and 18th centuries, the castle was abandoned in 1661 and began to fall into ruin. In the 18th century, the castle was only partially inhabited, after which it was subject to further demolition. By the 20th century it was already a ‘permanent ruin’ and as such was entered in the register of monuments before World War 2. The lack of iconographic material made it impossible to reconstruct its layout¹³. Despite this, the current owner, a local politician, has decided to ‘rebuild’ it. Senator Jarosław Lasecki officially opened the castle in 2011, after 12 years of ‘reconstruction’. According to the castle website: ‘Today, after a reconstruction lasting many years, Bobolice Castle has returned to the state of its years of greatest splendour. Along with it, the whole area is developing as it did centuries ago. A hotel and a restaurant have been built in Bobolice, and the town has become one of the most popular addresses on the tourist map of Poland’¹⁴. As Michał Ziębik writes in the article ‘How Bobolice Castle was rebuilt’: ‘Prior to the reconstruction work on Bobolice Castle, privately financed archaeological, architectural and structural research was carried out for several years by the Lasecki family under the supervision of (...) specialists (...)’ The research has made it possible to determine the outline of the castle's oldest foundation, as well as the nature of the later 16th- and 17th-century alterations.’ According to the author: ‘The measures taken were not only reconstructive, but even salvaging. Without them, the castle would probably have met the fate of the Ostrężnik fortress, of which only a few fragments of the wall and a pile of stones remain today’¹⁵. Checking the comments on the internet, on social media sites, in most cases Bobolice is rated positively. Even if some note that the castle is glaringly new, opinions prevail that it has been saved, additional jobs have been created for local people, and the area has been revitalised. The castle was used by filmmakers as a set for the popular historical TV-series ‘The Crown of Kings’ („Korona królów”). The success - including commercially - has led Lasocki (together with his brother) to also carry out a similar ‘restoration’ at nearby Mirów Castle. Last but not least, Senator Lasocki has received

¹² <https://odbudowarekonstrukcjapogania.wordpress.com/2017/03/26/zamek-krolewski-w-poznaniu-nowy-zabytek-czy-nowotwor/>

¹³ Kajzer, L., Kołodziejski, S., Salm, J. (2001). *Leksykon zamków w Polsce*. (p. 94). Warszawa: Arkady

¹⁴ <https://www.zamekbobolice.pl/zamek.html>

¹⁵ <https://prenumeruj.forumakademickie.pl/fa/2010/11/jak-odbudowano-zamek-bobolice/#:~:text=Prace%20archeologiczne%20dostarczy%C5%82y%20poza%20tym,si%C4%99%20%C5%9Bcian%20i%20mur%C3%B3w%20zamku.>

many congratulatory letters from the authorities for his 'conservation' activities. In 2011 he was awarded the high rank Polonia Restituta Knight's Cross by the President of Poland Bronisław Komorowski.

What is the opinion of art historians on this subject? It is worth referring again to the words of Tomasz Ratajczak. This Poznań-based art historian is not only critical of the castle in Poznań, but also spares no remarks on Bobolice. In his opinion, what we are dealing with here is the construction of a completely new building that has absorbed the historic ruins. In Bobolice, it was not the reconstruction of a destroyed castle, but the construction of a completely new building on the site and using the historic ruin. This building is stylised as a historic building, but stylised in a fatal way. That is, it drastically falsifies the architectural history of the place. Ratajczak regards this as barbarism and the destruction of a monument. In his opinion, the current castle in Bobolice does not recreate anything. It is a stylized medieval castle, which in its form, very loosely and with a whole lot of mistakes, refers to the modern castle that was located there¹⁶. Let us add that Senator Lasecki brought a libel suit against Ratajczak. This suit was recently lost by Lasecki

Many art historians and architects agree with this opinion. Jan Salm even describes it as a 'pseudo-reconstruction'¹⁷.

These two examples of the 'renovation' of castles are the most famous. In addition to these, there have been several somewhat smaller but similar realisations in recent years. Certainly the reconstruction of Tykocin Castle can be considered similar. Here, also, a local investor, a private person 'reconstructed' the building, which until the 20th century had survived only as fragments of walls and the outline of the fortification. However, in Tykocin, the architect used plans found in the archives in St Petersburg¹⁸.

Another example is the 'reconstruction' of Gostynin Castle. It has been heavily criticised by Przemysław Nowogórski. In his opinion, ahistorical buildings have been erected, destroying and obliterating the original structure (there are more of them than there were on the castle hill). 'The Gostynin facility has been likened to an amusement park or a roadside inn. But at the same time, it makes a mockery of the revitalisation of monuments and of current conservation principles and theories'¹⁹.

¹⁶ <https://www.slazag.pl/zamek-w-bobolicach-historia-zniknela-rozmawiamy-z-historykiem-sztuki-dr-tomaszem-ratajczakiem-z-uam-w-poznaniu>

¹⁷ Salm, J. (2024). Zamki i ich ruiny w krajobrazie. Refleksje nie tylko o ochronie zabytków. *Ziemia*, LXX(1), 259.

¹⁸ More about Tykocin Castle in: Bis M., Bis W. (2015). Zamek w źródłach historycznych, [in:] M. Bis, W. Bis (Eds.), *Tykocin – zamek nad Narwią (XV-XVIII w.). Badania archeologiczne w latach 1961-1963 i 1999-2007* (23-66). Warszawa: IAE PAN.

¹⁹ Nowogórski, P. (2013). Mit odbudowy zamku w Gostyninie. *Nasze Korzenie*, 5, 14–19. Retrieved from https://bazhum.muzhp.pl/media//files/Nasze_Korzenie/Nasze_Korzenie-r2013-t5/Nasze_Korzenie-r2013-t5-s14-19/Nasze_Korzenie-r2013-t5-s14-19.pdf

The examples described here are among the most spectacular and controversial. We believe that the objects created in this way are not ancient buildings and in fact should not be treated as authentic. They can be described as 'created in the early 21st century, referring (sometimes very loosely) to existing buildings in the same place'. But not as original historical buildings. It is impossible to create a castle without having iconography, source material. Proponents of this type of 'reconstruction' like to cite the reconstruction of the Royal Castle in Warsaw as an example. However, as we mentioned above, this castle was rebuilt on the basis of solid materials, and by people who remembered it from before its destruction. Nor are the examples of Berlin (the Royal Castle) and Vilnius (the Castle of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania), which are often cited, an analogy. Indeed, both of these buildings have disappeared from the face of the earth. But they were also rebuilt on the basis of iconographic sources (albeit, in the case of the Vilnius castle, much older and weaker).

So are there any positive examples? Of course there are. Jan Salm cites objects that have been conserved according to the rules. They maintain the forms of the ruins and have not been subjected to interventions that destroy or obliterate their authentic substance. The castles in Lubawa and Besiekiery are cited as examples of such revitalisations. Both fulfil their function as tourist sites that can be visited, and at the same time their structure has not been disturbed. As we can see, it is possible to create historic buildings that are protected in the right way and fulfil their cultural and tourist purposes.

The creation of 'fake' monuments, new-old castles, is of course not just a Polish speciality. All over Europe there are groups of people who would like to rebuild castles. In addition to wealthy private investors (often involved in political activities), the support of politicians themselves is a major problem. The influx of funds from the European Union also encourages local authorities to invest in this type of reconstruction. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the countries of central and eastern Europe, which were already admitted to the EU in the 21st century²⁰.

We would like to conclude this text with a somewhat anecdotal reference to a story from 90 years ago. One of Poland's best-known journalists and war correspondents, Melchior Wańkowicz, toured Poland's north-eastern territories in the 1930s. During his trip, which was later described and published in the form of articles and a book, he described the numerous residences of the Polish landed gentry and aristocracy that still existed at the time.

Arriving at the 1612 mansion, owned by a landowner, nobleman named Rymsza, he noticed: 'an ugly wooden balcony', added to the residence. In addition to the extension, the owner had broken the windows through the old walls. When asked by a journalist what the conservator thought of this, Mr Rymsza replied: 'The conservator cried, of course, until my anger took over and I said: "(...) it's a good thing there were no conservators in Krak's time (...) because they wouldn't have let us build the Wawel Castle and we would still be sitting in the Dragon's Cave preserving it"²¹.

²⁰ The author would like to thank Dr Adrian Crăciunescu from Bucharest for information on the recent restorations of castles in Romania (Capidava, Deva, Rasnov, Rupea, Feldioara).

²¹ The Dragon's Cave is a cave located below Wawel Castle in Krakow. Krak was the medieval legendary founder of this city. Wańkowicz, M. (1980). *Anoda i katoda*, 1, (p. 21). Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.

The attitude to historic buildings described by the journalist was probably quite common among Polish landowners. On the other hand, a little further on in the same book, the example of Mir Castle is described. This building, located on nowadays territory of Belarus, is one of the few preserved castles in that area. Reconstruction at great expense was carried out in the interwar period by a Polish aristocrat, Prince Mirski. In Wańkiewicz's book, one can see the difference in the treatment of monuments by a simple, rural gentry landowner and an educated aristocrat²².

In contemporary Poland, unfortunately, the situation is somewhat reminiscent of that before World War 2. Again, a private owner of a monument, despite the legal protection of the object, decides on its appearance. Perhaps the situation is even more difficult at the moment, as disregard for conservationists and guidelines is characterised not only by private individuals but also by officials and politicians. It seems that the situation is quite dangerous for monuments and requires a strong reaction and education. Let us hope that this will happen. And let's hope that further work carried out on the historical monuments, castles respects its authenticity.

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²² Ibidem, p. 77.

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