

Plant ornaments in the architectural detail of Art Nouveau tenement houses and villas of Jeżyce and Łazarz in Poznań

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Abstract: The article presents the issues related to the use of plant ornaments in decorations and details of Art Nouveau tenement houses in Poznań. Elements of decoration and detail of selected examples of Art Nouveau buildings were discussed in terms of the most frequently used plant prototypes.

Keywords: plant ornaments, Art Nouveau, Poznań

Introduction

The floral motif in architecture occurs in many historical periods, but gains particular expression and importance and decorativeness during the Art Nouveau period. Art Nouveau, is the last ever style in architecture that was so rich in floral ornamentation and brought this decorative technique to a high level of design and execution. It has appeared both in architecture, art, furniture and in forms and utilitarian objects. Poznań is a rich example of such a phenomenon. It manifests itself in numerous Art Nouveau buildings erected in large areas of the city. Particularly important in this respect is the area of Jeżyce and Łazarz, in the region of streets: Roosevelta, Głogowska, Gąsiorowskie, Małeckiego, Rynek Łazarski, Głogowska, Niegolewskich, Jarochowskiego, Wyspiańskiego, Matejki, Szylkinga, Kraszewskiego, Dąbrowskiego, Mickiewicza and Poznańska [Fig. 1 A, B].

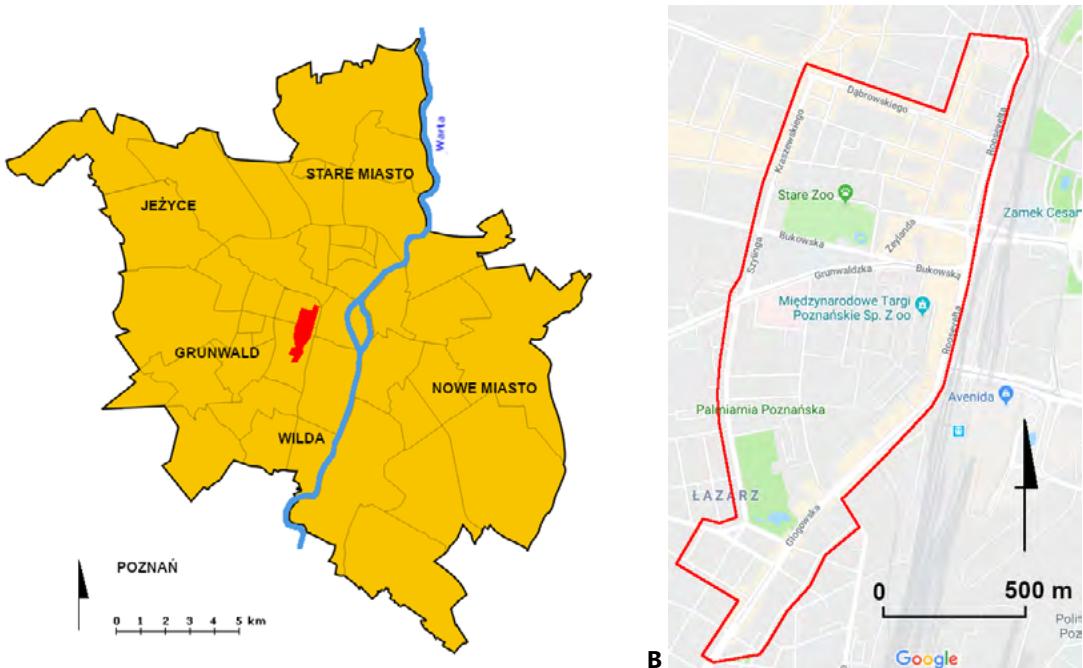


Fig. 1. A and B – The area of occurrence of Art Nouveau tenement houses and villas in Poznań. Source: study of P.P. Szumigała, K.O. Szumigała.

This area was part of the territories annexed to Poznań in 1907. The end of the 19th century and the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was a time when the main architectural and artistic note was Art Nouveau, hence in this area there is an abundance of buildings realized and preserved in this style. The dominant architectural structures of this period are townhouses and villas. Most of these buildings have survived to our times, but they are currently in varying states of repair.

The issue discussed in the article was described in the literature, among others, by Skuratowicz and Szurkowski (2002), who discussed the specificity of Poznań Art Nouveau architecture in terms of the richness of ornamentation and composition of the facades of buildings. On the other hand, the ornamental values of plants from a botanical point of view were presented by McVicar, Biggs (2007) and Urbański (2001), among others. Due to a high degree of unification of the projections, forms and spatial-functional arrangements of the buildings constructed at that time, which resulted from the applicable construction acts.

An important area of the architects' artistic activity was facades and architectural details, giving individual character to the buildings. They were also an expression of the investors' personal tastes, ambitions, and often a need to demonstrate their social status. Of course, the final shape and character of the object was a compromise between the investor's expectations and the stylistic and decorative trend preferred by the designers. Leading architects of the Poznań Secession period (Emil Asmus, Max Biele, Herman Böhmer, Oskar Hoffmann, Max Johow, Anton Künzel, Paul Lindner, Paul Pitt, Paul Preul, Anton Künzel, Karl Roskam) collaborated with well-known stucco, blacksmith, woodcarver, carpenter, stained-glass and other studios. From among the most interesting stucco workshops operating in Poznań and its vicinity, the following should be mentioned: Max Biagini, Antoni Krzyżanowski, Jan Raczyborski, Bolesław Richelieu, Bruno Sametzki, Artur Wagner, Paweł Cepkowski, Stanisław Dłużewski, Stanisław Prendki (Skuratowicz, Szurkowski; 2002). All this contributed to the fact that the completed buildings had high architectural, functional and artistic standards and were recognizable, associated and identified with their authors and owners.

The plant motif, due to its particular decorative, compositional and chiaroscuro qualities, was an important element in the creation of urbanized public space. It testified to the prestige of the investor or owner. Art Nouveau ornamentation in many cases referred to the tastes of the society and was a manifestation of the tastes of the Poznań elite at that time. It also involved an important factor, namely the identification of public space. Decorative elements of all kinds were often used for this purpose in earlier historical periods.

The botanical structure of the plant detail influences the "softening" of the architectural objects giving it "lightness" and "fluidity" of forms and at the same time expressive helioplastic and rich texture of the elevation. The predilection for plant forms in architecture manifested itself in the use of this ornamentation in almost all elements of the buildings erected at that time. Plant-inspired detail was used to decorate various parts of the façades: gables and roof tops, cornices, window and door openings, surfaces under and between window openings, entrance portals and door frames, balustrades of balconies and stairs, loggias, fences, canopies, stained glass, polychrome, etc. Art Nouveau, like no other period in the history of art and architecture, introduced a huge number of decorative patterns inspired by native plants – gardens, fields, forests, as well as exotic flowers. The ornamentation of this period included chamomiles, daisies, thistles, spurges, buttercups, rocket larkspures, common snowdrops, crocuses, mulleins, foxgloves, bluebells, lilies of the valley, cornflowers, primroses, poppies, mallow, snowdrops, nasturtiums, irises, sunflowers, geraniums, violets, flowers of broom, vetches, white buttercups, apple tree flowers and fruit, mistletoe stems, maple wings, chestnut leaves, inflorescences and fruit, and ears of grain (Wallis, 1984).

Materials and methods

The study area included selected parts of the city (Fig. 1 A, B). The subject of the research were facades of buildings and fragments of elevations visible from the side of public spaces – squares, streets and access roads. Twenty-six townhouses and one villa were surveyed. The research used the method of case study analysis – based on selected examples in the following aspects: aesthetic, botanical and architectural. The studied objects were subjected to comparative analysis consisting of matching the botanical prototype to the form and content of the architectural detail.

Results and discussion

Plant structures in architectural detail

The conducted research indicates that in Poznan Art Nouveau ornamentation, motifs inspired by flowers, bushes and trees were also dominant and most often used on building elevations. In the surveyed area 24 plants were identified, which were used to create Art Nouveau ornaments decorating various fragments of the façade (the acanthus motif, which also appears, but is a certain legacy of Neoclassical trends, was not included in the study).

The dominant and most often used inspirations for architectural ornaments in the surveyed area were motifs of the following flowers: acanthus, iris, jastronut (goldenseal) proper, scythe, poppy, thistle, primrose, rose, sunflower, tulip, and trees and shrubs: oak, apple, chestnut and grapevine. Motifs based on such plants as mistletoe, white lily, nenuphar, cudgel and plane tree appear slightly less frequently.

The stylistic development of the ornaments shows features of both French Art Nouveau and German-Austrian Art Nouveau (Jugenstil). Therefore, depending on the nature of the architectural mass and decorative procedures applied by the designers, we are dealing with elements of soft, flowing, subtle lines or more processed, synthetic geometric ones, close to the Vienna Secession. The analysis of decorative ornaments in the studied area proves that their creators were inspired by specific plant patterns in a very diverse way. Identification of botanical originals requires reference to the nature of transformations and deformations applied in that period not only in architectural ornamentation, but also in graphics, artistic craftsmanship, jewellery, etc. After analysing over four hundred floral ornaments used in 26 architectural objects in the designated area of Poznan, 24 plant species were identified as inspiration for the selected designs. Some of the details deviate from their original botanical forms because they were freely processed by the authors. These details took on universal shapes and their identification was possible through their connotation with the then "fashionable" plants in design. To sum up the research, a list of discussed Art Nouveau objects with floral details was prepared (Fig. 2 and Table 1), as well as a list of read and recognized relations between selected examples of architectural details and their botanical prototypes (Table 2).

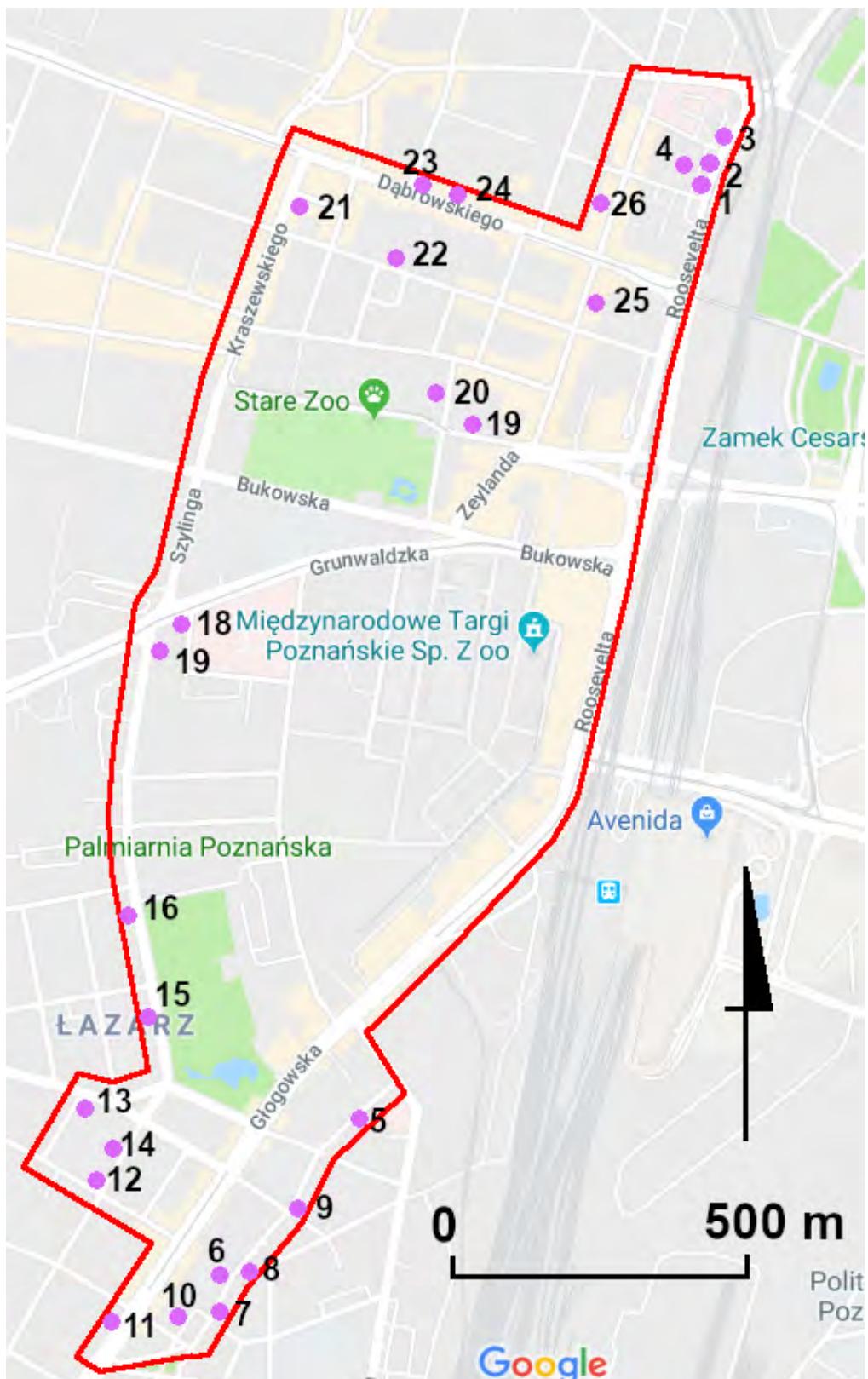


Fig. 2. Selected Art Nouveau buildings with a plant detail in Poznań. Numbering of objects according to table 1. Source: study of P. Tomczak, P.P. Szumigała.

Table 1. Selected buildings with Art Nouveau detail in Poznań

Object No	ADDRESS	YEAR OF CREATION	AUTHOR/DESIGNER
1*	4 Rosevelta Street	circa 1905	Herman Böhmer & Paul Preul
2*	5 Rosevelta Street	circa 1905	Herman Böhmer & Paul Preul
3*	6/7 Rosevelta Street	1906–1910	Herman Böhmer & Paul Preul
4*	3a, 4 Krasińskiego Street	1904–1905	Herman Böhmer & Paul Preul
5*	4 Małeckiego Street	1905**	author not identified
6*	16 Małeckiego Street	1902	Oskar Hoffmann
7*	21 Małeckiego Street	1909	author not identified
8*	24 Małeckiego Street	1905	author not identified
9*	27 Małeckiego Street/ 5 Strusia Street	1900	Oskar Hoffmann
10*	39 Głogowska Street	1903	Oskar Hoffmann
11*	78 Głogowska Street	1902	author not identified
12*	10 Limanowskiego Street/10/ 44 Matejki Street	1902	author not identified
13	1 Drużbackiej Street/ 13 Wyspińskiego Street	—	date and author not established
14*	46 Matejki Street	1903	author not identified
15*	52 Matejki Street	1902	Max Biele
16*	34 Niegolewskich Street	1904	author not identified
17*	2 Matejki Street	1900	author not identified
18*	20 Grunwaldzka Street	1901	Paul Pitt
19*	20 Zwierzyniecka Street	1902	Oskar Hoffmann
20	3 Gajowa Street	berore 1906	Oskar Hoffmann
21*	1 Kraszewskiego Street/ Jeżycki Market Square 2	1904	Oskar Hoffmann
22*	34 Słowackiego Street	1906	Paul Pitt
23*	39 Dąbrowskiego Street	1904–1905	Oskar Hoffmann
24*	33 Dąbrowskiego Street	date not established	Paul Pitt
25*	24 Mickiewicza Street	1902	Herman Böhmel & Paul Preul
26*	15 Mickiewicza Street	—	date and author not established

* The numbering of objects refers to figure 2. Source: compiled by P.P. Szumigała, P. Tomczak.

** Source: Borwiński (2013).

Table 2. List of botanical prototypes and their equivalent in the architectural ornament of Art Nouveau tenement houses and villas in Poznań



English oak
Quercus robur L. [1]



21 Małeckiego Street*



Pumpkin
Cucurbita L. [2]



78 Głogowska Street†



Domestic Apple
Malus Mill [3]



78 Głogowska Street†



20 Grunwaldzka Street†



46 Matejki Street*



Swedish Whitebeam
Sorbus intermedia [4]



4 Roosevelt Street*



Meadow buttercup
Ranunculus L. [5]



24 Mickiewicza Street*



Shasta Daisy
*Leucanthemum vulgare Lam.**



1 Kraszewskiego Street /
2 Jezycki Market Square



Mistletoe*
Viscum L.



34 Słowackiego Street*



Horse chestnut
Aesculus hippocastanum L.[6]



2 Zwierzyniecka Street*



52 Matejki Street*



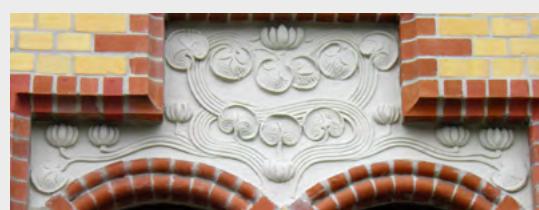
Crocus
*Crocus L.**



33 Dąbrowskiego Street*



Water lily
Nymphaea L. [7]



34 Niegolewskich Street*



Corn poppy
Papaver rhoes L.



6/7 Roosevelta
Street*



39 Dąbrowskiego
Street*



21 Małeckiego Street*



Thistle
Carduus L. [8]



39 Głogowska
Street*



21 Małeckiego
Street*



Bulrush
Typha L. [9]



34 Niegolewskich Street^{*}



Vial's primrose
Primula L.^{}*



27 Małeckiego Street / 5 Strusia Street



24 Małeckiego Street^{*}



Chinese Peony
Paeonia L. [10]



4 Roosevelta Street*



London Plane
Platanus acerifolia [11]



3 Gajowa Street*



Coltsfoot
Tussilago farfara L. [12]



27 Małeckiego Street / 5 Strusia Street*



Austrian clematis
*Clematis L.**



5 Roosevelta Street*



10 Limanowskiego Street / 44 Matejki Street*



Bindweed
Convolvulus L. [13]



2 Matejki Street*



Rose
Rosa L. [14]



3a Krasińskiego Street*



20 Zwierzyńiecka Street*



1 Drużbackiej Street / 13 Wyspiańskiego Street*



Sunflower
Helianthus annuus L. [15]



46 Matejki Street*



16 Małeckiego Street*



Spiraea
Spiraea [16]



4 Małeckiego Street*



15 Mickiewicza Street*



Tulip
*Tulipa L.**



15 Mickiewicza Street†



Grape vine
Vitis L. [17]



34 Słowackiego Street†



34 Niegolewskich Street†

Summary

The use of floral motifs in historical architectural detail was the result of period Art Nouveau fashion, which drew extensively on the aesthetic qualities of natural flowers, trees and shrubs.

An extremely unfavorable phenomenon is in many cases the loss of floral details and aesthetic values of Art Nouveau architecture as a result of war damages, many years of neglect in maintaining the technical value of buildings, unfortunate repairs and modernization of Art Nouveau tenements and villas, and the lack of adequate conservator's supervision.

An important problem in this respect is also the phenomenon of losing the skills of former master craftsmen by modern construction companies. There is a shortage of well-skilled workers in the restoration and reconstruction of historic architectural detail. The second extremely unfavourable phenomenon is the economic factor. The contemporary investor puts the main emphasis on obtaining maximum material benefits from renovated buildings and in many cases does not attach importance to the aesthetic and historical values of these objects.

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Source – Internet

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Ornament roślinny w detalu architektonicznym kamienic secesyjnych w Poznaniu

Streszczenie: W artykule przedstawiono zagadnienia związane z wykorzystaniem ornamentów roślinnych w dekoracjach i detalach secesyjnych kamienic Poznania. Omówiono elementy dekoracji i detalu wybranych przykładów budowli secesyjnych pod kątem najczęściej stosowanych prototypów roślin.

Słowa kluczowe: ornamenty roślinne, secesja, Poznań