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SMALL REVOLUTIONS – ATTEMPTS TO DECOMPOSE THE HISTORICAL FORMS OF TENEMENT HOUSE FAÇADES AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

MAŁE REWOLUCJE – PRÓBY DEKOMPOZYCJI HISTORYCZNYCH FORM FASAD KAMIENIC CZYNszOWYCH NA PRZEŁOMIE XIX I XX WIEKU

Abstract

The tenement house was one of the most conservative types of urban building. Erected in large centres as well as in small, traditional towns, filling the street frontages with façades, it certainly did not belong to the architectural avant-garde. What can you do with a certain shape and façade, an average builder, and a building that has to be profitable without generating high costs? Of course, there were artists such as Adolf Loos, who turned the 19th-century historicist aesthetic upside down. More frequent, however, were “small revolutions” in this field, as exemplified by the stylistic pluralism of this period, showing the numerous attempts to break away from the long-reigning historical styles, not always successful, but building a place for the great reformers of the inter-war period. The article presents, in various aspects, examples of interesting tenement-house solutions erected in the Polish lands at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Keywords: fin de siècle architecture, picturesque historicism, tenement house, Art Nouveau, early modernism

Streszczenie

Kamienica czynszowa była jednym z najbardziej zachowawczych typów budynków miejskich. Wznoszona zarówno w dużych ośrodkach, jak i w małych, konserwatywnych miastach, wypełniając fasadami pierzeje ulic, na pewno nie należała do awangardy architektonicznej. Cóż można zrobić, mając do dyspozycji określoną bryłę i fasadę, przeciętnego inwestora oraz budynek, który musi przynosić zysk i nie generować wysokich kosztów. Oczywiście zdarzali się twórcy jak Alfred Loos, przewracający do góry nogami świat XIX-wiecznej estetyki historyzmu. Częstsze jednak były „małe rewolucje” na tym polu, czego przykładem jest pluralizm stylowy tego okresu, pokazujący licznie podejmowane próby odcierania się od panujących długi czas stylów historycznych, nie zawsze udane, jednak budujące miejsce dla wielkich reformatorów dwudziestolecia międzywojennego. W artykule przedstawione zostaną w różnych aspektach przykłady ciekawych rozwiązań kamienic czynszowych wznoszonych na ziemiach polskich na przełomie XIX i XX w.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura przełomu XIX i XX w., historyzm malowniczy, kamienica czynszowa, secesja, wczesny modernizm

1. INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth-century tenement house, also referred to as a profit house, was a distinctive type of housing in most European cities that developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With the rise of industry, urbanisation, and the development of cities, a new type of residential building with many flats for rent was developed, adapted to changing patterns of property and social relations.¹ Tenement houses filled the streets and squares of cities, most often in compact buildings, resulting in an increased prominence of façades, which became the focus of special attention by designers and builders. It was the façades of the tenement houses that determined the character of the urban landscape, testified to the wealth of the inhabitants, and became the “calling card” of the buildings.

The beginnings of tenement houses in Polish cities date to the Classical period, but the main development of this type of building was associated with the Historicist era,² hence the so-called neo-styles in various interpretations were most often featured on their façades. An important phenomenon was the disjunction between the design of the structure and the functional layout, and the development of the front façade, which was a separate task for the designer. The façade did not have a direct impact on the functional qualities of the tenement, but acted as an advertisement for the building, testified to the investor’s or owner’s knowledge of fashionable architectural trends and world view, and raised the market value of the building. Luxury townhouses had façades developed according to individual designs with bespoke decorative elements. Cheaper developments used factory-produced detailing and were often inspired by pattern books and other professional publications. Façade were seen as collections of signs that were messages about the investors and users of the buildings.³

As technology developed, building methods were also modernised. A clear push for change was evident at the turn of the 20th century. The use of reinforced concrete and steel construction, which enabled the elimination of load-bearing walls, and the use of large glazing, as well as the construction of taller buildings (with the increasing introduction of lifts), also influenced façade design. Unfortunately, it was still common for architects to design façades separately, while horizontal plans were drawn up by building technicians. Resolving the contradiction between the modernisation of the façade and functional and structural layouts was still a difficult task, as summarised by Max Osborn in 1908, when he wrote: “The metropolitan tenement house poses one of the most difficult problems. Its material aims are so complicated, they are so saturated with purely practical requirements, that it is not easy from this confusing modern structure to pick out the main features of the organism on which only the possibility of an artistic exploration of the subject could be built...” This ended, according to the author, in “masking the internal diversity by means of historical styles”.⁴

¹ More on the definition of a tenement house: J. Kusiński, K. Stefański, M. Szymański, *Łódź. Kamienice*, Wydawnictwo Kusiński, Muzeum Miasta Łodzi, Łódź 2021, pp. 10–11; M. Pszczołkowski, *Toruńska kamienica czynszowa w latach 1850–1914*, Towarzystwo Naukowe w Toruniu, Toruń 2021, pp. 40–42; A. Łupienko, *Kamienice czynszowe Warszawy 1864–1914*, Instytut Historii PAN, Warszawa 2015, pp. 52–53; D. Bręczewska-Kulesza, *Najpiękniejsze bydgoskie kamienice czynszowe. Bydgoszcz Belle Époque*, Stowarzyszenie Centrum Kultury Belle Époque, Bydgoszcz 2014, pp. 8–9; A. Tomaszewicz, *Wrocławski dom czynszowy 1808–1918*, Via Nova, Wrocław 2003, p. 7.

² J. Kusiński, K. Stefański, M. Szymański, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

³ A. Tomaszewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁴ Quoted after: A. Tomaszewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

Despite this, there was no shortage of attempts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to take a new approach to the problem of the façade of the profit house. In opposition to historicism, a number of stylistic proposals emerged during this period, reverberating not only in large cultural centres, but also penetrating into medium and small urban centres and even those on the periphery. On the wave of resentment against historicism, against ossified, academic façade design, many new currents arose, setting themselves the task of breaking with the existing canon.⁵ As a result, the architecture of the turn of the century is characterised by stylistic pluralism and the interpenetration of various ideas, giving rise to modern architecture. The following article presents interesting realisations from this period created in the Polish lands, showing the heterogeneity characteristic of the turn of the century, the clash of influences and the penetration of modern currents into cities located in all partitions. In addition, attention was drawn to the interesting effects produced by the clash with local, traditional architecture. Façade design research conducted in 12 urban centres in Poland⁶ showed the presence of trends such as picturesque historicism, Art Nouveau, early classicising modernism, the “elegant style” limiting the decorativeness of façades, Landhaus and proto-modernism. These trends often overlapped and the influence of different cultural centres and local traditions was evident. All of these stylistic forms were still firmly rooted in historicism, yet represented attempts at change – “small revolutions” within the limits of contemporary society. Due to the vast amount of material and the limitations of this publication, only a few research aspects concerning approaches to architectural forms, their composition, and decoration at the turn of the century are presented. The article is only a contribution to a broader study of the subject.

Centres from all partitions of Poland were selected for the study, with varying characteristics such as the age and history of the town, population, degree of industrialisation, and location. In each of the selected cities, industry and commerce were developing and, consequently, the number of inhabitants, including a fairly affluent middle class, gradually increased, creating a demand for tenement houses with an adequate standard of housing. The work is part of a broader study of trends in the development of the front elevations of tenement houses in Poland from the mid-19th to the early 20th century and is not exhaustive of the subject.

2. “SMALL REVOLUTIONS” – SELECTED ASPECTS OF STYLISTIC CHANGES IN THE FAÇADES OF TENEMENT HOUSES AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY IN POLAND

New architectural currents, forming “small revolutions”, penetrated into cities in the Polish territories at different rates, to a greater or lesser extent regardless of their state affiliation, size, and industrialisation, creating very interesting and diverse realisations. At the turn of the century, reinterpretation, simplification, and reduction of historical detail occurred, replacement by Art Nouveau, and a change in the composition of the façade from symmetrical

⁵ The Berlin architect, Alfred Gessner, wrote about it in 1909: A. Gessner, *Das deutsche Miethaus*, F. Bruckmann A.-G., München 1909.

⁶ Research carried out by the author from 2023, as part of the project “The façade is the visiting card of a tenement house – trends in the development of front elevations of tenement houses in Poland from the mid-19th to the early 20th century”, funded by the Lanckoroński Foundations and the Bydgoszcz University of Technology.

to asymmetrical, or a return to modernised classical forms. Façades were given a picturesque effect by placing on them various architectural elements such as bays, loggias, balconies, turrets, roofs of different forms, or high gables, often of timber-frame construction.

In turn, the introduction of large glazing, the handling of large planes without openings, and the reduction of decoration resulted in focus on the shaping of the building mass. All these factors occurred in the same period, creating different stylistic forms, sometimes mixing, which was characteristic of the various attempts to move away from historicism. In the course of the research, it became apparent that exceptionally original buildings were often difficult to assign to a particular stylistic formation, as they escape generally accepted classifications.

The article addresses some aspects of the exuberant development of rental house architecture in the period under discussion. The first issue raised was the various possibilities of reworking historical styles that were used in various regions of the Polish lands at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. On the example of picturesque historicism with Neo-Gothic forms, differences in their interpretation and creations of new solutions were shown.

In relation to the specificity of Art Nouveau developing in the period under study, the next issue addressed was the influence of large architectural centres on the different interpretations of this style in cities of the Polish lands. Another issue highlighted is also related to Art Nouveau. It shows the façades on which new plant-form ornaments appeared, creating a new aesthetic quality with an unchanged composition.

At the beginning of the 20th century, some changes in the approach to the interpretation of the income house were noticeable. More intimate free-standing developments emerged, blending with the greenery and alluding to villa architecture, creating a new quality of town-house living. The final issue addressed in the article is the transition from the simplistic, “elegant” forms of reduced historicism to the forms of proto-modernist architecture, the final stage of a small revolution in the shaping of income house façades at the turn of the 20th century.

2.1. “REVOLUTION” OF COMPOSITION – PICTURESQUE HISTORICISM – VARIOUS REWORKINGS OF LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY NEO-GOTHIC FORMS

The trend known as picturesque historicism was one of the first attempts to move away from the ossified symmetrical façade compositions, favouring instead asymmetrical façades composed of many unique spatial forms. A large number of architectural elements were used, such as balconies, loggias, bays, turrets, and window openings that varied in form. This made the façades “busy and picturesque”. The style was popular in various European centres, particularly in Germany and Austria. Here, motifs referring to historical styles were used all the time, but in a new way, often combining various stylistic elements into interesting compositions. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the wave of “picturesqueness” saw a return to the rarely used Neo-Gothic style in residential construction, which was one of the most interesting interpretations of picturesque historicism and resulted in a number of original, highly varied designs.

Neo-Gothic forms, very distinctive in the city, applied to several tenements in Toruń. Interestingly, they referred more to the Hanoverian interpretation of Neo-Gothic than to the Gothic building tradition of the city, and still more to the bourgeois tenements of Toruń

from the 14th and 15th centuries.⁷ The “picturesqueness” of the composition stands out in the tenement house on 15 Sienkiewicza Street⁸ (Ill. 1), with an asymmetrical arrangement of architectural elements such as loggias, balconies, or bays and avant-corps topped with stepped gables and varied window cuts. At 36 Szeroka Street⁹, in the city centre, a small building was erected with an equally interesting façade distinguished by a vertical character and a high stepped gable. Both buildings are clad in red brick, also using glazed green and dark brown bricks, openwork cornices and friezes, as well as mouldings with Neo-Gothic forms and discreetly placed, stylised floral decorations.

A different approach to the picturesque Neo-Gothic styling was shown by Vilnius architects. Here, large, often corner tenements were built, faced with light cream-coloured bricks or (later?) plastered over, with corners emphasised with towers and oriels. In the townhouses, despite



Ill. 1. Toruń, 15 Sienkiewicza St., photo by author

their considerable width, an effort was made to emphasise vertical directions. Among the most interesting developments are the buildings at 5 Auku Street and 12V. Šopeno Street, both finished in brick veneer, with stylised motifs of Gothic gables, arcade friezes and crenellations, with chamfered corners enriched by bay windows in the form of towers. In the building on V. Šopeno, there is even a “Gothic” tracery in the high window above the entrance. The building in Auku Street is distinguished by bay windows set in a triangular plan, embracing the corner tower. (Ill. 2)

⁷ The author has conducted separate research on the origins and role of Neo-Gothic residential buildings in Toruń.

⁸ Start of construction: 1894, Archiwum Państwowe w Toruniu, Akta miasta Torunia, sygn. G4541.

⁹ Project 1896, start of construction: 1897, *ibidem*, sygn. G4521.



Ill. 2. Wilno, 5 Auku St., photo by author

Krakow's tenement houses included both large developments and more intimate buildings. A large complex of corner tenement houses for officials of the C.K. National Railway, to a design by Stanisław Ujejski (1908–1909), was erected at 6, 7, 8, and 9 Blich Street (respectively at the corners of 1 Sołtyka, 2 Gen. Dwernicki, Grzegórzecka Street, and 1 Kołłątaj Street).¹⁰ The buildings were given a picturesque Neo-Gothic styling in the spirit of castle architecture, in the zone of the last storey. The façades were still designed in a rather schematic manner, with a rusticated ground floor and evenly spaced windows, but the development of the corners of the buildings with stylised triangular gables, spire-like towers and the crowning of the buildings with arcade friezes, as well as the underlining of the axes with the entrances to the buildings with analogous gables, gave the whole a picturesque effect. (Ill. 3)

Intimate townhouses in the spirit of picturesque historicism with Neo-Gothic forms were designed by Jan Sas-Zubrzycki, at 7 Słowacki Street (his own house) and 9 Słowacki Street.¹¹ Particularly interesting seems to be the asymmetrical composition of the house at No. 9, where a tower covered with a pyramidal roof was placed on the eastern edge; among the windows of different sections, one was developed in the form of a semicircle, with a width corresponding to the two axes in the other storeys. Both townhouses feature bay windows

¹⁰ *Lista adresowa Gminnej Ewidencji Zabytków Krakowa wersja uaktualniona 22.08.2024 r.* [in:] BIP MK, 22.08.2024, no. 455–459, <https://www.bip.krakow.pl/zalaczniki/dokumenty/n/505678/karta> (access: 28.09.2025).

¹¹ J. Wowczak, *Jan Sas-Zubrzycki. Architekt, historyk i teoretyk architektury*, Towarzystwo Wydawnicze “Historia Iagellonica”, Kraków 2017, pp. 52–53, 71.



Ill. 3. Kraków, corner of Blich and 1 Sołtyka St., photo by author

and use red brick veneer, contrasted with light-coloured render. However, the bay window of the building at No. 9 was “glued” to the corner of the pyramidal roof of the tower.

It is also worth mentioning the Warsaw realisations in the spirit of Neo-Gothic from the late 19th century. Unfortunately, most of them no longer exist, but two interesting houses have survived, with a more purist approach to Neo-Gothic, but not completely devoid of the element of picturesqueness. An example of a reference to Italian patterns is the tenement house at 22 Ujazdowskie Avenue, where the openwork lightness of the façade with balconies and loggias against the background of a mosaic wall brings to mind the Gothic of Venetian palaces, and the colourfulness of the façade with horizontal stripes recalls the buildings of Siena.¹² However, the composition of the façade is symmetrical, with the central axis emphasised and framed by side avant-corps with stepped gables. A different interpretation of Neo-Gothic was applied in the development of the façades of the corner tenements at 68/70 Marszałkowska Street (no longer extant) and 72 Marszałkowska Street, where the style of pure Neo-Gothic was applied.¹³ Of note is the development of the truncated corner with a triangular gable and a high roof emphasising verticalism, framed by avant-corps also topped by triangular gables. Notable is the use of a wide repertoire of ceramic mouldings, brick friezes and cornices.

The above examples are only a small part of the possibilities offered by the juxtaposition of the forms of the various styles of past eras, in a new way that drew attention primarily to architectural elements rather than decoration. Architects composed façades by placing

¹² The building was erected according to a design of Józef Dziekoński in 1895; J. Roguska., *Neogotyki w architekturze warszawskich kamienic*, “Kronika Warszawy”, 1987, no. 3/4, p. 108.

¹³ The complex was built at the turn of the 20th century, *ibidem*, p. 110.

Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and many other forms side by side, but the manner of composition gave the façades a new character.

2.2. ART NOUVEAU NEGATION (?) OF HISTORICISM – VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF THE STYLE IN THE POLISH LANDS

The Art Nouveau architectural trend included a great many, completely separately designed buildings. They were united only by the idea of freeing themselves from the “tyranny of styles” by changing the nature of ornamentation and opposing the aesthetics of the 19th century. As a result, despite the space-shaping achievements of some of its representatives, Art Nouveau was limited to replacing historical detail with new ones.¹⁴ In most developments, it has not been possible to overcome the 19th-century disjunction between façade and interior. The more original buildings showed a departure from symmetry, emphasising vertical directions or accentuating wall planes. More often, however, designers limited themselves to superimposing new decoration on a symmetrically composed façade, combining it with other stylistic forms. Among the Art Nouveau decorative motifs present were floral forms and female heads with wavy hair, wavy lines and gables, flattened and horseshoe arches, as well as geometric decorations framed by stripes. In spite of a certain schematicism and limitations, many interesting designs emerged that were significantly different from historical styles.

Viennese Art Nouveau-influenced buildings can be found mainly in large southern cities such as Kraków and Lviv, but also in smaller towns such as Bielsko-Biała.¹⁵ Erected at the corner of 1 Wzgórze and 21 Barlickiego Street, the building designed by Max Fabiani is an example of a modern treatment of this type of building. Referring to the work of Otto Wagner, the architect used flat ornamentation, geometric legibility and a strong extraction of the value of the solid.¹⁶ (Ill. 4)

The different treatment of the façade decoration, even with a symmetrical composition of window openings and balconies, produced a “modern” effect. Linear, delicate decorations on flat façade walls, probably inspired by Jugendstil, can be found, for example, in Wrocław in the tenements at 7, 8, 9 and 15 Łukasiński Street. Among the decorative motifs are stylised roses – flowers and bushes, acanthus and laurel leaves, sunflowers, female heads with wings and a likeness of a woman playing the violin. There is also varied wall texturing. (Ill. 5)

The inspiration for Martin Dülfer’s designs can be seen in the building at 47 Dworcowa Street in Bydgoszcz,¹⁷ particularly in the upper part of the façade with a decoration of linear floral motifs placed in panels in the gable. A new façade solution involving a large plain wall was applied to the façade of the building at the junction of 13 Prądyński Street and Łukasiński Street in Wrocław.¹⁸ It features a slender female figure in a long, airy dress, surrounded by a border of floral elements.

Among the few projects in the spirit of Art Nouveau in Vilnius are the groups of tenement houses at 14, 22, 24, 26, 28 Pamėnkalnio Street, designed by Eduardas Rouba, a graduate of the Riga

¹⁴ M. Wallis, *Secesja*, Arkady, Warszawa 1984, p. 246; B. Lisowski, *Skrajnie awangardowa architektura XX wieku (1900–1914)*, Politechnika Krakowska, Kraków 1962, p. 41.

¹⁵ In the period under discussion, these were two separate towns bordering each other.

¹⁶ E. Chojecka, *Architektura i urbanistyka Bielska-Białej 1855–1939*, Śląski Instytut Naukowy, Katowice 1987, p. 60.

¹⁷ D. Bręczewska, *op. cit.*, p. 88, townhouse built in 1906.

¹⁸ Built in 1907, A. Tomaszewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 114.



III. 4. Bielsko-Biała, 1 Barlickiego St. and 21 Wzgórze St., photo by author



III. 5. Wrocław, 8 Łukasieńskiego St., photo by author

Polytechnic Institute.¹⁹ The façades of the simple-massed townhouses, influenced by the architecture of Riga, were composed asymmetrically, with a distinct vertical rhythm and flat, linear divisions. One can see elements of waves, shells, lilies, stylised geometric elements and fanciful patterns framed by stripes. In the relief decoration of the gable of the house at 28 Pamėnkalnio Street, long-necked cranes are placed on either side of fanciful sigmoidal patterns. The bas-relief in one of the window panels of the house at No. 24, depicts Dioscuri on horseback. (Ill. 6)



Ill. 6. Wilno, 24, 26, 28 Pamėnkalnio St., photo by author

An interesting example of a building reminiscent of St. Petersburg Art Nouveau is the corner house at 39 Gediminas Avenue.²⁰ At the street intersection, the architect placed a semicircular, slender bay window, topped by a terrace with a metal balustrade. The bay window is framed by avant-corps ending in stepped gables in wave-like form. The façades of the building were faced with light cream-coloured brick, combined with structural plaster and friezes of dark blue ceramic tiles. Among the few decorative elements were female heads and sculptural representations of an eagle and an owl. The architect used building materials that became popular in the early 20th century such as structural plaster, wrought metal and polished ceramic tiles.

2.3. “HOUSES IN CREEPER” – ART NOUVEAU FLORAL ORNAMENTS

A rich source of artistic ideas for Art Nouveau ornaments was the world of flora. The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the publication of numerous books and pattern books devoted

¹⁹ Built in 1912–1913, D. Bahranas, *Neoromantinės stilistikos paieškų atspindžiai XX a. pradžios Vilniaus modernio architektų kūryboje*, “Acta Academie Artium Vilmensis” 2003, no. 30, pp. 271–273.

²⁰ Projekt Fedor Lidval, about 1911, Lidval F.I., (1870–1945), architect [in:] Saint Petersburg Encyclopaedia, <https://www.ensspb.ru/object/2804007769?dv=2853931022&lc=eu> (access: 28.09.2025).

to floral ornamentation.²¹ The predilection for floral and plant motifs was emblematic of Art Nouveau in various countries, hence the adopted terms of Art Nouveau as “the Floral Style”, “Stile Floreale”, or “das florale Erlebnis”. Very popular motifs were sunflowers, vine shoots, chestnut leaves, while slightly less common motifs included edelweiss, lily of the valley, tulips, reeds, lilies, leaves and laurel trees, oaks or apple trees, thistles, roses and poppies.²² An example of an interesting use of floral decoration is the building at the junction of 15 Krasieńskiego Street and Smoleńsk Street in Kraków.²³ Under the eaves, a wide band composed of bundles of fern leaves was placed, and the windows below were framed by bundles of edelweiss. These flowers were also placed on the walls between the windows of the lower storeys. The entire decoration is delicately outlined.

In addition to the simple replacement of historical decoration with plant motifs, there are also projects in which the designers went further and even “overgrew” the façades with trees or creepers. The building at 6-8 3 Maja Street in Katowice is enriched with a colourful



Ill. 7. Katowice, 6-8 3rd Maja St., photo by author

²¹ P. Będkowska, A. Zemanek, *Ornamenty roślinne w architekturze sakralnej Krakowa (XIX–XX wieku, wybrane obiekty)*, “Opuscula Musealia” 2016, vol. 24, p. 95. DOI: 10.4467/20843852.OM.16.010.7443.

²² B. Makowska, *Motywy roślinne w dekoracjach krakowskich kamienic z przełomu XIX/XX wieku*, “Wiadomości Botaniczne” 2005, no. 3/4, pp. 5–14.

²³ Built in 1907–1908, B. Makowska, *Kamienice...*, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

decoration in the form of rooted oak trees “overgrowing” the bay window loggia and window panels.²⁴ (Ill. 7) In another Katowice development at 10 Pocztowa Street,²⁵ the same designer placed rooted apple trees with flowers and fruit in the under-window panels and in place of the window bands, branching off into the over-window zone, where female figures were placed among the foliage and fruit.

The façade of the Lodz tenement at 43 Piotrkowska Street was developed in a similar way.²⁶ In the symmetrically planned façade with avant-corps, the windows and parts of the lesenes enclosing the avant-corps are decorated with rooted trunks of laurel trees with leaves, from which branches with oak leaves grow back. An example of a tenement house with a linear decoration in the form of an apple tree with birds and fruit, freely “climbing” the wall, is the tenement house at 11 Śląska Street in Bydgoszcz.²⁷ (Ill. 8)



Ill. 8. Bydgoszcz, 11 Śląska St., photo by author

2.4. TOWNHOUSES IN THE FORM OF URBAN VILLAS

At the beginning of the twentieth century, more intimate, detached and surrounded by green tenement houses in the form of villas became popular in some centres (e.g., Poznań, Sopot, Gdańsk-Wrzeszcz, Bydgoszcz). An example of such developments is a complex of stately

²⁴ B. Klajmon, *Katowicka kamienica mieszczańska. 1840–1918. Śródmieście*, Centrum Dziedzictwa Kulturowego Górnego Śląska, Katowice 1997, p. 104. Older part of the building erected in 1906 by design of Ignatz Grünfeld.

²⁵ Built in 1902–1903, designed by Ignatz Grünfeld. *Ibidem*, p. 32.

²⁶ Built in 1901–1902, J. Kusiński, K. Stefański, M. Szymański, *op. cit.*, pp. 306–310.

²⁷ Erected ca. 1910, D. Bręczewska-Kulesza, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

tenement houses erected between 1903 and 1914 in Poznań, in the Jeżyce district, in the area of Sienkiewicza, Mickiewicza, Słowackiego and Roosevelta Streets.²⁸ The slender houses gave the impression of villas, they were designed with flair and at the same time, like town-houses, they provided income through the large number of storeys they had. The façades were decorated according to the principles of Art Nouveau, and later, after 1910, more modestly – in the spirit of simplified historicism and classicism. Green areas were designed in front of and between the houses, giving the whole district a significant proportion of green space. The simple building blocks showed a great variety of architectural elements. They were enriched with avant-corps, bay windows, loggias, turrets, some with upper storeys or gables of timber-frame construction, with delicate flat decoration with wavy lines, floral and idyllic motifs, and metalwork. This approach increased the standard and amount of light in the dwellings, as well as the number of elevations to be developed, as the side walls of the houses were also visible from the street. This broke up, to some extent, the façade of the compact buildings. (Ill. 9)

2.5. SIMPLICITY AND MODERNITY – SIMPLIFIED HISTORICISM AND PROTO-MODERNISM

At the beginning of the 20th century, a simple, elegant style, almost devoid of stucco decoration, became popular in the wave of the desire to reduce and simplify historicist forms. It was found in most urban centres. There were slogans for the introduction of major simplifications in housing construction. In his book *Um1800*, published in 1908, Paul Mebes presented examples of architecture from the period that exemplified simple, purposeful and aesthetically pleasing design.²⁹ Reduced historicist forms were readily combined with elements of native architecture, for example in connection with the search for national styles. The combination of vernacular and reduced historicist forms can be seen in the Krakow building at 1 Studencka Street, corner of 4 Podwale Street, which is still embedded in the historicist tradition.³⁰ The dominant element of the façades is the trilateral corner, framed by massive bay windows and crowned by a Renaissance attic, a direct reference to Krakow's cloth halls.

Examples of realisations in the spirit of simplified historicism can be found in almost every city. Decoration reduced to the entrance frame, panels under the windows of the third storey, the gable and rustication can be seen on the façade of the tenement at 22 3 Maja Street in Lublin. Another tenement house in Lublin, located at the junction of 15 Chopin Street and Okopowa Street, has an interesting façade composition. The façades were articulated with slightly interrupted avant-corps and an also avant-corp corner, crowned with gables of geometrical forms, with decoration in the form of stylised florals and Ionic cymatium. The huge building on the corner of 2 Kauno Street and 21 St Stephen Street in Vilnius also belonged to this trend. The multi-axial façade facing Kauno Street was similarly articulated with pseudo avant-corps with stylised, modest decoration with fanciful, geometric and Art Nouveau motifs. The decoration is partly in the under-window panels, partly above the windows. The corner of the building was accentuated with a bay window and topped with a cupola.

²⁸ J. Skuratowicz, *Luksusowe osiedle willowe przy ul. Mickiewicza*, "Kronika Miasta Poznania" 2000, no. 2, pp. 112–122.

²⁹ J. Posener, *Berlin auf dem Wege zu einer neuen Architektur. Das Zeitalter Wilhelms II*, Prestel-Verlag, München 1979, pp. 533–537.

³⁰ Built in 1910–1912. B. Makowska, *Kamienice...*, *op. cit.*, p. 170.



Ill. 9. Poznań, 32 Mickiewicza St., photo by author

Another interesting project was a tenement house at 25 Straszewskiego Street in Krakow, built using bricks and reinforced concrete.³¹ The façade is embellished with bay windows and balconies extending across the entire central part, as well as window openings with varied carvings. In addition, the ground floor area is covered with plaster rustic finish and the other storeys with linear rustication. The stucco decoration was very limited.

A separate group is made up of tenement houses with squat bodies, with compositions of architectural elements such as bay windows, most often with loggias, almost without decoration and employing large planes of smooth walls. This includes the building at 23 Różana Street, at the corner of 27 Niedziałkowskiego Street in Poznań. Similar forms with reduced decoration were also found in other tenement houses in the Poznań Wilda, such as houses at 12 Różana Street, 16 Różana Street and at the corner of 9 Saint Czeslaw Street. The composition of the

³¹ Built in 1910–1912. B. Makowska, *Kamienice...*, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

latter refers to the Landhaus style through the use of high gables, combining brick veneer in the lower part with plaster in the upper storeys. Buildings of this type can also be found in other cities, such as Katowice, at the junction of 1 Chopin Street and 24 Mickiewicza Street, or at 30 Mickiewicza Street at the corner of Sokolska Street, with a decoration of cobalt-coloured ceramic tiles. This group actually belongs to the trend of early modernism.

Also worth mentioning is a tenement house erected in 1910 in Warsaw, located at the junction of 12 Mokotowska Street and Zbawiciela Square.³² At the time, it was the tallest residential building in the city at 38 metres and eight storeys, using all the advances in technology. Originally, the building had a glazed roof under which a solarium and later a film studio were located. The ground floor and first floor, covered with linear rustication, formed a high base on which the whole was supported. The façades of the subsequent storeys were varied with bay windows emphasising vertical directions. Today, only a small part of the linear and sculptural decoration with Art Nouveau motifs, covering in particular the upper storeys of the building and the bays, has been preserved. As can be seen, modern technology did not always go hand in hand with a modern façade.

Recent examples include a smaller group of buildings with modernised façades, already only symbolically referring to historicism. This includes some very interesting realisations from the Kraków milieu. The tenement house at 15 Zwierzyniecka Street, designed by Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz³³ has a very simplified façade, with few divisions. The ground floor zone was punctuated by large shop windows and separated by a frieze with plant and floral motifs. The window risers in the first and second floor zones were separated by wide, flat pilaster strips, and the last storey was separated by a simple narrow under-window cornice. On the axis of the building, in the attic zone, there was a medallion surrounded by floral motifs. The tenement is an example of a successful break with historicism. (Ill. 10) The second building is a profit house designed by Karol Tici, erected at 3 Na Groblach Square.³⁴ The building received a façade with synthetic forms, referring to Classicism in a modernised manner. The central part of the pseudo avant-corp is topped with a triangular gable inspired by a tympanum, while the zone of the first and second floor of the avant-corp is articulated with wide, channelled lesenes. The simplified columns at the entrance and between the ground floor windows also refer to Classicism. The only decoration are the mosaics filling the space between the windows of the first and second floor in the avant-corp, referring to antique motifs. (Ill. 11)

Interesting realisations were also created in smaller, more provincial centres, as exemplified by several projects in Bydgoszcz. In the style of early modernism referring to classicism, a tenement house was erected at the junction of Gdańska and 2 Krasieński Street. The simple body of the building was emphasised by flat, wide lesenes articulating the elevations practically devoid of decoration. The body of the building was varied only by withdrawing the last storey located above the clearly marked eaves and by the application of a rather high, hipped roof. The building's only decorations – a meander under-eaves frieze and a serrated frieze – refer to Classicism. An unconventional solution in the tenement design was applied to the building at 6 Teatralny Square at the junction with Jagiellońska Street, erected in 1912.³⁵ The corner of the building was designed in the form of a large arch and topped with a circular

³² J. Zieliński, *Atlas dawnej architektury ulic i placów Warszawy*, vol. 11, Towarzystwo Opieki nad Zabytkami, Warszawa 2005, p. 375.

³³ Built in 1912, B. Makowska, *Kamienice...*, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

³⁴ Built in 1910–1912, B. Makowska, *Kamienice...*, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 91.



Ill. 10. Kraków, 15 Zwierzyniecka St., photo by author



Ill. 11. Kraków, 3 Na Groblach St., photo by author



Ill. 12. Bydgoszcz, 6 Theatre Square, photo by author

turret, placed at the level of the wing roofs. The stylised framing of the third-floor windows and the balustrades under the windows still referred to historical forms. The modified columns and lesenes, the close-to-square window blanks with dense divisions, and the logic of the composition reflected the desire for new forms of façade composition. (Ill. 12)

3. CONCLUSION

The tenement house, which was the primary place of residence at the turn of the 20th century, was subjected to many attempts to modernise, change its aesthetic content, or upgrade its construction. It was an important architectural subject, determining the character of the cityscape, but not always appreciated by architects. Because of the many complex interrelationships brought about by the residential function and the individual needs of the investors, the façade of the townhouse proved to be a difficult design problem, long solved by means of historical styles. However, the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, with many different attempts to move away from historicism, brought about changes that allowed subsequent generations to make a breakthrough in this group of buildings as well. Little by little, efforts were made to change the rules of composition, the ways in which architectural elements were used, or, finally, the forms and motifs of architectural detailing that had been in force since the mid-19th century. The article only touches on a small part of the

wide range of issues concerning this topic, but it is already apparent that, thanks to these efforts, the stylistic pluralism prevailing in the period under study provided a foundation for the activities of future modernists. With such a broad exploration, “little revolutions” were possible at various stages of the design of income houses. This article is only a contribution to the research and will hopefully encourage other researchers.

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