

GRZEGORZ RYTEL<sup>1</sup>

## THE TOPOS OF TRADITION. MAUSOLEUM DESIGN TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN THE EUROPEAN CULTURE

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### TOPOS TRADYCJI. WZORCE I TENDENCJE W PROJEKTOWANIU MAUZOLEÓW W KULTURZE EUROPEJSKIEJ

#### Abstract

The essential function of a mausoleum, namely to protect human remains, is reflected in a compact and solid building construction, which is rather closed than open. The second function, namely creating a space for commemorating the dead calls – due to transcendental references – for using architectural forms which are deemed timeless. Thus, one should not be surprised that the architecture of those sepulchral and commemorative structures is rooted in tradition, and architects rarely decided to experiment with new forms. This article discusses fundamental trends and the most important references to archetypal patterns in mausoleums designed across Europe, while pointing to some attempts at breaking the pressure of tradition.

*Keywords: sepulchral and commemorative architecture, mausoleum, tradition*

#### Streszczenie

Pierwszą, podstawową funkcją mauzoleum jest ochrona szczątków zmarłych, a to znajduje odzwierciedlenie w zwartej, spójnej bryle o zdecydowanie zamkniętym charakterze. Druga funkcja – tworzenie przestrzennych ram kultywowania pamięci o zmarłych – ze względu na transcendentne odniesienia skłania do stosowania form architektonicznych odczytywanych jako ponadczasowe. Nie powinien więc dziwić fakt, że architektura obiektów sepulkralno-kommemoratywnych, jakimi są mauzolea, zakorzeniona jest w tradycji, a architekci rzadko decydowali się na eksperymenty z nowoczesnymi formami. Artykuł omawia zasadnicze tendencje i najważniejsze odniesienia do archetypicznych wzorców w projektach mauzoleów w Europie, ukazując również próby przełamania dyktatu tradycji.

*Słowa kluczowe: architektura sepulkralno-kommemoratywna, mauzoleum, tradycja*

„A culture which features a clearly defined attitude to time and the past, develops a tradition, a set of beliefs, common understanding of ideas and images operating in collective consciousness. The tradition forms a natural basis for the creation of standards. Although developed by means of subsequent achievements stored in the collective consciousness, tradition is deemed something everlasting. Ideal images created in this way are extremely

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<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Arch. Grzegorz Rytel, Department of Architectonic Heritage and Art, Faculty of Architecture, Warsaw University of Technology, grzegorz.rytel@gmail.com; ORCID 0000-0001-8392-7597

long-lasting and unfading”, wrote Jan Białostocki<sup>2</sup>. Such images, building up throughout thousands of years in the tradition of sepulchral architecture and art shape the image of a grave as a solid structure which protects human remains and gives room for cultivating the memory of the deceased. Respect of and references to tradition in sepulchral architecture date back to the ancient times – they are present in the grave structures of the New Kingdom of Egypt or in the fact that the Romans dubbed all the graves featuring monumental and rich architecture mausoleums. The belief – commonly shared in the early modern period – that the ancient models are most appropriate to be followed in sepulchral and commemorative architecture can be explained chiefly by their being regarded as dateless, and thus most suitable to confer the transcendental dimension of death. It seems that contemporary forms which accompany earthly life rarely fulfil those expectations as the ones that have simply not survived the test of time.

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A pyramid originating from the Old Kingdom of Egypt is the structure which has typically been associated with the funeral and burial culture. A motive of a pyramid in different proportions, repeated and modified in subsequent ages, has become a symbol of a universal structure which corresponds well with the eternal spiritual dimension of death. A Dictionary of Architectural Terms by Augustin-Charles d’Aviler, published in Paris in 1691, provided the following definition of a pyramid: „Pyramids are sometimes built on the occasion of extraordinary events, but as they symbolize immortality, they most often serve as grave monuments, such as the Pyramid of Cestius in Rome and the pyramids in Egypt”<sup>3</sup>. Pyramid-like tombs and obelisks became popular in the European art after two Chigi Family members had been buried at their burial chapel adjacent to Santa Maria del Popolo church in Rome, according to Raphael’s design<sup>4</sup>. Although Egyptian pyramids did not provide for rooms dedicated to carrying out commemorative rites and they were only used as graves, their manifestations in modern sepulchral art being limited to sculptural decorations only, the 17th century architecture of the First Polish Republic produced two mausoleums in the form of slender pyramids based on cuboid *cellas*. Both were erected for Polish protestants. The first pyramid grave, erected in Krynica near the Castle of Krupę, hides the remains of Paweł Orzechowski, an Arian deceased in 1612. The second pyramid was erected near Beresteczko for earl Aleksander Proński who died in 1631 as a practicing Calvinist. Both burial sites located far away from settlements and a universal form of *sepulchrum* may in both cases be explained by social and denominational conditions prevailing during the Counter Reformation period. At the turn of the nineteenth century, as a result of the influence of the Enlightenment period and a „re-discovery” of the architecture and art of Ancient Egypt as a consequence of research conducted during the Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt in 1798, the pyramid form, subject to various

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<sup>2</sup> Białostocki J., *Innowacja i tradycja* [in:] *Tradycja i innowacja. Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Łódź, Listopad 1979*, PWN, Warszawa 1981, p. 10. [Innovation and Tradition [in:] Tradition and Innovation, Proceedings from the Session of the Association of Art Historians, Łódź, November 1979]

<sup>3</sup> Mossakowski S., *Mauzoleum Morsztynów w Warszawie* [in:] *Funkcja dzieła sztuki. Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Szczecin, Listopad 1970*, PWN, Warszawa 1972, p. 228. [The Morsztyns’ Mausoleum in Warsaw [in:] Function of a Work of Art. Proceedings of the Session of the Association of Art Historians]

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

adjustments, was often used for the construction of graves located in parks designed in the period of Enlightenment and Romanticism.

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Cultures based on the ancient Mediterranean architecture and art kept copying the functional and spatial canon of a mausoleum in the form of a two-level structure with a *cella* for carrying out commemorative rites placed above the grave crypt. The dual purpose of the building was reflected quite clearly in the very structure which was formed into a light peripteros constructed above a tall and massive pedestal. This form was characteristic of Hellenistic graves of Asia Minor, which were constructed on the areas featuring interpenetration of Greek and Persian cultures. Examples include two graves well-known today: the Nereid Monument from Xanthos and the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus. The latter delighted so much the contemporaries with its grand scale, well-captured proportions and lavish decorations and ornaments, that it was deemed one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. A Latin word for the structure, derived from the name of Mausolus of Caria – a satrap for whom it was built – has since been used throughout the cultures rooted in Ancient Greece and Rome to describe a building which combines funeral and commemorative functions. A compact burial crypt plays a role of a closed and well-protected grave, which was a typical form of burial for the communities which settled around the Mediterranean, as well as for Indo-European tribes incoming to Europe.

People of the second half of the 18th century cherished a belief that the deceased may only be remembered by the future generations if their graves feature ancient architectural form. What is interesting, references to the ancient tradition by means of using architectural forms deriving from Ancient Greece and Rome rather do not allude to the above mentioned models of the Hellenistic mausoleums. Family mausoleums erected according to the Ancient Roman pattern *in agris suis*, with the majority of forms based on classical patterns, refer to typical schemes of the ancient temples, the artistic means being significantly reduced due to a small scale of the structure. Peripteros was usually reduced to a pseudoperipteros, the most appropriate model (based on a number of examples) being a prostylos. Expertise in the use of the classical forms depended on education and building skills. It ranged from outstanding examples of the 18th century neoclassical style designed by new trend-setters, to simplified and not always skillful interpretations of the ancient principles, which materialized even in mid-twentieth century. The mausoleum for Georg von Hoym and his family in Brzeg Dolny – the only existing work of prematurely deceased Friedrich Gilly – a teacher of Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Leo von Klenze and Carl Ferdinand Langhans, is an expression of deep understanding and respect to the spirit and the idea of the ancient classical architecture while making attempt at innovative interpretation of the tradition.

Among the designs drawing on the ancient classical tradition, the most popular were structures with a circular ground plan, such as rotundas. Prototypes of that kind of structure form a broad range of circular ground plan buildings of the ancient times, the purpose of which was not entirely similar – starting from ancient Greek tholoi (beehive tombs), through ancient Roman civilian graves from the period of early Roman Empire and emperors' mausoleums to early Christian martyria. In the neoclassical period, however obvious the drawing on the ancient architecture could be, attention must be paid to structures whose designers did not limit themselves to using traditional spatial models but were looking for new solutions in terms of form and composition, to reflect the spirit of the time and the needs of an order-

ing party. In one of three designs of a mausoleum commissioned by king Stanisław August Poniatowski to Johann Christian Kamsetzer, a rotunda topped with a dome received three avants-corps distributed evenly round the cylindrical building. In this way the whole design gained on dynamism because – in the absence of the main axis – the focus was made on the rotatability of the principal massing. The rotation effect is reinforced by horizontal and continuous rustication.

The mausoleum of Theoderic the Great – a Germanic ruler of the Kingdom of Italy – is of particular importance for its shapes the image of how a classical sepulchral and commemorative structure, which refers to the ancient times while not directly drawing on classical forms, should look like; one can even say that it is in opposition to the Ancient Roman heritage and refers to the Roman Empire successor, if not the conqueror. For the modern Germans the mausoleum in Ravenna has become a reference point, a certification and ratification of a victory in the battle of the Teutoburg Forest, a token of independence from the Latin tradition, from which – in terms of denomination – they broke free thanks to Martin Luther. The German feeling of a national community – reborn after the Napoleonic wars on the wave of Spring of the Peoples – willingly referred to the ancient Germanic tradition. The architecture of the mausoleum in Ravenna became undoubtedly an inspiration to Wilhelm Kreis when designing Bismarck Towers in Lößnitz (Radebeul) and in Szczecin (Stettin)<sup>5</sup>. More distant and equivocal references concern mausoleums in Lossainen and on St. Anne's Mountain. The design of a family mausoleum of admiral Reinhold von Fischer in Lossainen (Łęzany) in mid 1920s (before 1927), although belonging formally to its times due to its vividly expressionistic character, is deeply rooted in tradition. In case of a mausoleum of Freikorps soldiers fallen during the Silesian Uprisings, built in 1938, historical associations are broadened. It seems that the design by Robert Tischler – the chief VDK<sup>6</sup> architect and designer of a few *Totenburgs*, i.e. sepulchral and commemorative structural and spatial designs dedicated to fallen German soldiers – apart from references to the grave of the Gothic king of Italy, also bears culturally corresponding references to a castle built in Apulia region upon the order of Frederic II Hohenstauf. Architectural iconicity of Castel del Monte was obviously an additional asset when referring to the heritage of the famous king of Germany and the Holy Roman Emperor. Affinities with the famous seat of the Hohenstaufs in terms of forms and ideas may also be found in another *Totenburg* built upon the VDK initiative more than a decade earlier according to the design by Walter and Johannes Krüger, namely the Mausoleum of the Battle of Tannenberg. Remodeled in 1934 to a mausoleum for Marshal Paul von Hindenburg – the winner of the Battle of Tannenberg of 1914 and the President of Germany – the site became, by virtue of Hitler's decision, a national memorial for soldiers fallen on all the fronts of the Great War (*Reichsehrenmal*). For the sake of comparison, the 1930s designs of rotundas built for burial and commemoration of the Italian soldiers fallen in the Great War, although similar in terms of idea and firmly rooted in the tradition of ancient architecture, much differently utilize (in somewhat privileged way) a classical Roman glossary of architectural elements of structure and dec-

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<sup>5</sup> In 1899 Wilhelm Kreis won a contest for a design of the so called Bismarck Towers. As a result his design was used to build 47 towers under the „Twilight of the Gods” project. The total of approx. 240 towers were built as a result, according to various designs.

<sup>6</sup> Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (The German People's Association of War Grave Custodians) – a non-state funded organization established in 1919 for the purpose of taking care of graves of fallen German soldiers buried outside Germany.

oration, without, however, losing the character of source tradition as a result of diverse processing and interpretation.

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The above mentioned Bismarck Towers became a negative point of reference for the author of a comment to the results of the contest for a design of a Mausoleum of Those Fallen in the Battle of Ostrołęka in 1831, announced in March 1930. In a short description of the winning design the author of the comment, which was published in „Architektura i Budownictwo” [Architecture and Construction] monthly wrote: „Although the design is serious in terms of concept, it obviously bears a stigma of heavy grandiosity of the German „Bismarck monuments”, which seems to be rather inappropriate when used to commemorate our November Uprising which broke out in the Romanticism period of the 1830s”<sup>7</sup>. The contest, in which only sculptors were invited to participate, was won by Romuald Zerych, who presented a design made jointly with an architect Borys Zinserling. A monumental mausoleum structure was designed on a crest of an earth embankment of a fortress built by the Russians on the battlegrounds near Ostrołęka. It is a subsequent layer of a cultural palimpsest which has been written over during the last two hundred years<sup>8</sup>. The designers managed to achieve the monumentality effect typical of a structure built for sepulchral and commemorative purpose, while not drifting far away from the leading architectural trends of the 1920s and 1930s. The architectonic form designed by Zinserling and Zerych, while respecting the canonic functional and spatial requirements of a mausoleum, is far more modern than the German *Totenburgs* mushrooming in the 1930s.

What form would be appropriate according to the author of the above mentioned comment? The answer is difficult, but maybe it is appropriate to recall at that very moment a structure featuring a totally different formal character and a totally different aura, undoubtedly closer to the tradition of Polish architecture. The mausoleum in Żłoczów, dedicated to 22 Polish officers and soldiers who died in combat in the period 1918–1920, was designed by Wiesław Grzymalski as a rotunda with Polish baroque features, carefully designed in its basic proportions as well as in details, which well harmonized culturally with the Lviv region landscape.

The accusation of „heavy grandiosity” is somewhat treacherously linked with an attempt by modernists to accommodate monumentality and solemnity required of burial sites with the principal modernist trend towards weightlessness of the architectural design. The last structure of that kind built in Poland before the outbreak of World War II – mausoleum of General Gustaw Orlicz-Dreszer in Gdynia at Oksywie – was completed in the summer of 1939. The authors of the final design were Max Potrawiak, Jan Bogusławski and Stanisław Sikora<sup>9</sup>. The

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<sup>7</sup> Architektura i Budownictwo [Architecture and Construction] 1930, no. 3, p. 120.

<sup>8</sup> More information about it can be found in: Górski M., Rytel G., *Fort Bema i mauzoleum poległych w bitwie pod Ostrołęką. Pamięć miejsca – miejsce pamięci* [Bem's Fort and mausoleum of the battle of Ostrołęka. Memory of place – place of memory], Architectus 2016, no. 1(45), pp. 73–82; Rytel G., *Rewitalizacja fortu i mauzoleum poległych w bitwie pod Ostrołęką, Studium przypadku* [in:] A. Dziewulska, J. T. Królikowski, A. Starzyk (eds.), *Rewitalizacja miast i obszarów wiejskich. Studium przypadku*, Szkoła Wyższa im. Bogdana Jańskiego, Warszawa 2014, pp. 109–118. [Revitalization of the Fort and Mausoleum of those Fallen in the Battle of Ostrołęka, a Case Study [in:] Revitalization of Urban and Rural Areas. Case Studies].

<sup>9</sup> More information about the contest and formation of a team of designers and the construction work

upper chamber dedicated to commemorating the deceased was designed as an open roofless „interior” separated from the square side by ornate bars, and opening towards the sea through a vertical aperture along the axis with an openwork pattern of a cross. Elevated altar slab is the only piece of furniture “inside”. The beneath lying crypt could be entered into from a lower terrace from the side of the sea. Thus, the two seemingly contradictory aspirations were achieved in a perfect way. The monumental character was achieved without constructing a standard commemorative chamber. The ceremony of transferring General Orlicz-Dreszser’s body to the mausoleum took place on 16 July 1939. The pictures from the event show architecture highlighting „skilful, accurate and magnificent play of masses seen in light”. The mausoleum was destroyed by the Germans in winter 1939/1940. A question remains unanswered, how could such an unconventional *cella* fulfil its function in totally different weather conditions, let’s say on November 2nd when All Souls’ Day is celebrated in Poland?

If, after the death of Marshal Luigi Cadorna in 1928, it was decided to commemorate the Great War commander so praiseworthy to the fascist party, the work could only be assigned to Marcello Piacentini – the most important designer of monumental architecture under the Mussolini regime. The mausoleum on the bank of Lake Como, completed in 1932, attracts attention due to an intriguing lack of internal cohesion. A strive to make the structure weightless, contrasting the full with the empty by means of supporting a granite pylon on polls above the entirely open interior hiding the sarcophagus, is totally contrary in its nature with a securing role of a grave.

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Although discussions on the theory of art, conducted throughout the subsequent art periods, feature constant changes in perception of the role of and attitude to tradition, they have, despite their alleged originality and ingeniousness, been reflecting a limited spectrum of possible views. What seems to be particularly interesting is arguments against the main trend of hitherto prevailing opinions. In a period favoring the past one can find artists renowned for respecting tradition, who appear to be visionaries foretelling future trends. And the other way round – the supporters of progress who instigate new trends present the results of pondering over the orderly logic of once well-established aesthetic canons.

The portfolio of sketches and designs by Karl Friedrich Schinkel which have never materialized, apart from the designs intended to commemorate Frederic the Great, grandiose in scale, monumental in terms of the means of expression and conventional in terms of general concept, includes a theoretical and visionary design of a mausoleum for queen Louise who died in 1810. The concept promises a spatiotemporal sequence of impressions, facilitated by the surrounding greenery of the park and a well thought and studious architectural form. The park alley leading to the mausoleum sets out the space, casts a shadow, leads to the entrance portico, in which thick darkness surrounds the nave’s interior, where the queen’s sarcophagus protected by angels is well-highlighted by strong light cast from three glass apses forming

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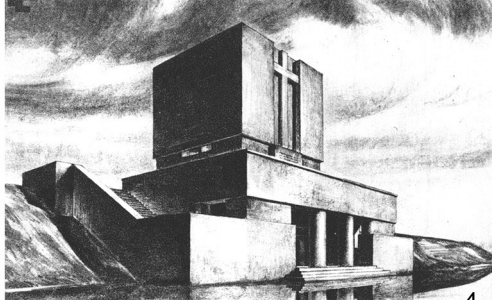
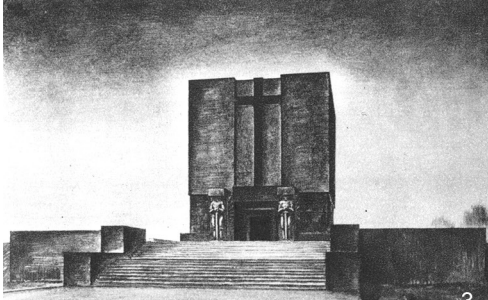
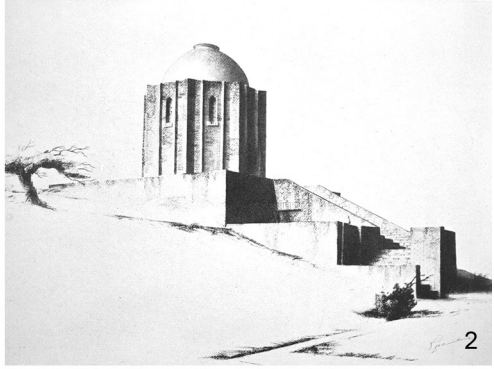
itself can be found in: Rytel G., *Mauzoleum generała Orlicz-Dreszera na Oksywiu na tle ówczesnych tendencji w projektowaniu obiektów kommemoratywno-sepulkralnych* [in:] M. J. Sołtysik, R. Hirsch (eds.), *Architektura XX wieku i jej waloryzacja w Gdyni i w Europie, Modernizm w Europie – Modernizm w Gdyni*, Urząd Miasta Gdyni, Gdynia 2017, pp. 67–72. [Mausoleum of General Orlicz-Dreszser at Oksywie at the background of hitherto trends in designing commemorative and sepulchral structures [in:] *XXth Century Architecture and Revitalizing thereof in Gdynia and Europe. Modernism in Europe – Modernism in Gdynia*].

a three leaf clover-shaped termination. onto. Gothic forms do not limit the architect's invention; they help materialize the immaterial vision, otherwise impossible to embrace by human cognition. The design is a manifesto of ideas, a voice in the ongoing discussion, it is a search for the architecture of the approaching romanticism period, an attempt at expressing the most important issues of our existence by means of architecture.

In 1921, during another period featuring sharply different attitude to tradition and different assessment of innovation in architecture and art, Adolf Loos designed a mausoleum for Max Dvořák. In his last works, the historian and art theoretician, and Alois Riegel's disciple, pointed to a close relationship between changes in art and the following changes in culture, i.e. the Hegel's *Zeitgeist*. The recollection of Dvořák's views seems to be vital in the context of the meaning of the Loos's design. The mausoleum design, although bearing no direct references to the architecture of the previous periods and free from formal borrowings from the past, seems to be deeply rooted in tradition. Known merely from a picture stored at the Viennese Albertina, it clearly illustrates the designer's concept. It is a meaningful example of discipline in the construction of architectural form based on the rules which are firmly rooted in the most broadly understood building tradition. The designed form is not an unequivocal communication of the structure's function, but one can guess a certain solemnity of the function from the attempt to make a small scale structure monumental. Knowing about the planned function of the structure, the subsequent designing steps appear to be clear and well understood. The Dvořák's mausoleum, as „(...) the Chartres Cathedral, is a duck (and a decorated shed at the same time)”<sup>10</sup>, it does not present the dichotomy so vividly defined by Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour, and this is due to deep rooting in tradition and respecting the Vitruvian principle of *decorum*, so important for the coherence of architectural expression. The structure was designed on square base, on the central plan characteristic of sepulchral and commemorative structures. The mass of the building was designed according to the classical rule of thirds. A relatively broad and low stereobate-podium carries the major cube-shaped structure topped with a four-step pyramid. The entrance passage located on the axis, the height of which twice exceeds its width and is half smaller than the height of the essential part of the structure leads us inside while setting the main axis. The window opening in the side wall indicates the functional character of the interior accessible to those commemorating the deceased. Compact form of the structure – to refer to the theory by Juliusz Żórawski – justifies an assumption that the opposite side wall has been composed symmetrically to the main axis, so the interior is well-lighted from both sides thanks to window openings located above the sight line of people standing inside. The base of the step-pyramid top protrudes beyond the outline of the main part of the structure, which underlines the individual character of the top and which secures the walls against rainwater. The assumed form of topping suggests central corbel vault above the interior, which additionally underlines the monumental character of the structure, already well-noticed from the outside. The brickwork drawing shows a wall built from cuboid, presumably ashlar, elements. The design points to the construction character of the wall, with lintels above the openings and with corbel vault topping. According to the beliefs voiced by Loos, the architecture of a mausoleum lacks ornaments, but employs a certain type of decoration, skillfully used by the architect, to communicate the most important information about the structure, as it is in case of *architecture parlante*. However, a more accurate, genetically

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<sup>10</sup> Venturi R., Scott Brown D., Izenour S., *Learning from Las Vegas*, Karakter, Kraków 2013, p. 118.



*arch. i mal. H. Szupka*  
PROJEKT POMNIKA BOHATERÓW POLEGŁYCH W BOMBY 1931. POD OSTROLEKĄ. WIDOK ZE SZKICU WYSTAWOWEGO

*arch. i mal. H. Szupka*  
PROJEKT POMNIKA BOHATERÓW POLEGŁYCH W BOMBY 1931. POD OSTROLEKĄ. WIDOK ZE SZKICU WYSTAWOWEGO



matching comparison is the architectural form invoked by Loos, coming across which, because of its shape, proportions, size and method of construction, „(...) a somber mood would come over us and a voice inside us would say, »There is someone buried here«<sup>11</sup>.

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In the context of the three principal focus-depending „understandings” of tradition in humanities and social sciences, suggested by Jerzy Szacki ((1) focus on the process – tradition as transmission of cultural elements from one generation to the other, (2) focus on what is transmitted – tradition as heritage and (3) tradition as community attitude to the past), in reference to the issues discussed herein it seems justified to distinguish one more, namely *instrumental* „understanding” of tradition – the tradition of form as a means of expression used intentionally for communicating contents in a way which is comprehensible to recipients. The architecture of sepulchral and commemorative structures strongly resists formal innovations. The solemnity of death calls for respect, also in terms of the accompanying architectonic forms.

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<sup>11</sup> Loos A., *Architektur* [in:] A. Loos, *Sämtliche Schriften. Erster Band*, München 1962, p. 317.

- Ill. 1. Friedrich Gilly, Mausoleum of Georg von Hoym, Brzeg Dolny (former Dyhernfurth), approx. 1802, photo: G. Rytel
- Ill. 2. Emil Fahrenkamp, Mausoleum of Admiral Reinhold von Fischer, Łęzany (former Lossainen), approx. 1925, Platz G. A., *Die Baukunst der neuesten Zeit*, Im Propyläen-Verlag, Berlin 1927, s. 474
- Ill. 3. Borys Zinserling, Romuald Zerych, design of the Mausoleum of those Fallen in the Battle of Ostrołęka on May 26th 1831, 1930, front view, drawing from contest design, a charity gift card from the collection of G. Rytel
- Ill. 4. Borys Zinserling, Romuald Zerych, design of the Mausoleum of those Fallen in the Battle of Ostrołęka on May 26th 1831, 1930, view from the moat side, drawing from contest design, a charity gift card from the collection of G. Rytel
- Ill. 5. Max Potrawiak, Jan Bogusławski, Stanisław Sikora, Mausoleum of General Gustaw Orlicz-Dreszer, Gdynia-Oksywie, 1939, photo: E. Jędrzejewski, the archives of Jerzy Bogusławski
- Ill. 6. Adolf Loos, Mausoleum for Max Dvořák, 1921, The Albertina, Vienna

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**Author's note:**

Faculty of Architecture of Warsaw University of Technology, Department of Architectonic Heritage and Art; fields of research: history and theory of architecture, sepulchral and commemorative architecture, Brazilian modernism and the work of Polish architects-immigrants in Brazil, vernacular and new vernacular architecture.