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MYTHS AND FADS – A CASE STUDY OF TOWNHOUSE FAÇADES FROM THE TURN OF THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

MITY I MODY NA PRZYKŁADZIE FASAD KAMIENIC Z PRZEŁOMU XIX I XX W.

Abstract

The paper analyses selected townhouses from the turn of 19th and 20th centuries whose façade details and decorations contain certain local (Zakopane style) and foreign (Egyptian) motifs. The purpose of this study is to emphasize that the search for the inspiration in folk art opened the door for the manifestation of one's own identity in architecture, while the reception of Egyptian art was a reflection of trends prevalent at the time. The research supports a conclusion that the incorporation of the Zakopane style in Krakow's townhouses was primarily superficial and symbolical, being largely reduced to the use of decorative motifs and details referring to the Zakopane style, without any interference with the form of the structures themselves.

Keywords: architectural detail, architectural decoration

Streszczenie

Praca analizuje wybrane kamienice z przełomu XIX i XX w., na których fasadach wykorzystano motywy rodzime (zakopiańskie) i obce (egipskie). Celem pracy jest podkreślenie, że poszukiwanie inspiracji w sztuce ludowej dało możliwość manifestowania własnej tożsamości w architekturze, a recepcja sztuki egipskiej była wyrazem podążania za modą. W wyniku badań wysnuto wnioski, że projekty fasad kamienic inspirowanych stylem zakopiańskim i sztuką egipską miały powierzchowne i symboliczne znaczenie, sprowadzały się do stosowania motywów dekoracyjnych i detali, natomiast nie ingerowano w strukturę form.

Słowa kluczowe: detal architektoniczny, dekoracja architektoniczna

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses selected townhouses from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries whose façade details and decorations contain certain local (Zakopane style) and foreign (Egyptian) motifs. In both cases, the inspiration resulted in exotic cladding placed on the façades of traditional townhouse forms.

The purpose of this study is to emphasize that the search for the inspiration in folk art opened the door for the manifestation of one's own identity in architecture, while the reception of Egyptian art was a reflection of trends prevalent at the time. The artists relied on folk art

to contribute to the formation and restoration of national art.¹ This phenomenon may be analysed as falling within the canon of historicism, characterised by the turn towards yet another category of native models and the extension of their subjective range, ensuring the transparency of references to sources. The authors also sought to reflect themselves in other cultures as in a mirror, which helped them to clarify their own identity in confrontation with mythical works, for instance of Egyptian origin. The reception of this specific art was an echo of the European fascination with Egypt.

The adopted traditional research methodology (desk research, photographs of the buildings) has allowed for the presentation of selected townhouses from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries erected in Poland, along with several examples from other European countries (England, the Czech Republic, Estonia). The paper analyses details and decorations found on the façades. The examples were selected in order to illustrate the myths expressing the faith in the rebirth of the national art thanks to the inspiration with folk art, as well as the rich symbolism and fads prevalent at that time.

2. NATIVE FOLK MOTIFS ON TOWNHOUSE FAÇADES FROM THE TURN OF THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

Among the diverse stylistic claddings of the façades of townhouses from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, we may find those employing the motifs from native folk art, including the so-called Zakopane style. The characteristic features of folk ornamentation, including the leading role of line and silhouette, flat composition, *horror vacui* – the compulsion to fill all the empty spaces with ornaments – as well as preference for plant motifs, were all a perfect match for Art Deco. In professional literature of the period, we read that the forms inspired by folk art are worth copying as... “they have been ‘tried’ over centuries and by generations, they are in a symbiotic relationship with the climate, they directly respond to the needs and, finally, they excel in their simplicity – the quality which is the most important criterion for any art.”² The popularisation of the art of the Podhale region resulted from the individual sensitivity and patriotism of researchers, architects, and artists.³

The Zakopane style has never gained the status of a universal proposal in brick buildings. Rather, its use has been limited to folk ornamental motifs, such as the imitation of pegs or window and door niche profiles stylised as dovetails. The transposition of the Zakopane style to brick buildings was discussed in the professional literature at that time. The authors pointed out to the different properties of materials and the need to employ different tools in wooden and brick structures.⁴ No full-fledged Zakopane-style townhouses were erected, and the style was introduced only in the form of ornamental motifs on the façades. One example of such a case is the townhouse at 30 Chmielna St. in Warsaw (1860–1861, project

¹ Z. Możdziej, *Styl zakopiański w architekturze* [in:] J.M. Roszkowski (ed.), *Regionalizm – Regiony – Podhale. Materiały z sesji naukowej (Zakopane 4-6 grudnia 1993 r.)*, Wyd. Muzeum Tatrzańskie-go, Zakopane 1995, pp. 23–52.

² J. Sas-Zubrzycki, *Sposób zakopiański w architekturze*, vol. 2, Architekt, Kraków 1906, pp. 29–32.

³ i.a. Władysław Matlakowski, Jan Gwalbert Pawlikowski, Władysław Jabłoński, Edgar Kováts and Stanisław Witkiewicz.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

of reconstruction Jarosław Wojciechowski, 1905–1906) (Ill. 1a–c). Its façade is ornamented with a “quarter-sun” motif in the gable along the axis, a finial frieze, and decorations between windows. Likewise, in the case of Tadeusz Czarnecki and Felicja Smulikowska’s townhouse at 38 Piekarska St. in Lvov (proj. Kazimierz Mokłowski, 1903–1905)⁵ the architects incorporated Zakopane-style motifs, including the first and second floor window niche profiling typical of wooden architecture, roses, peg imitations in window framing, floral and geometric decorations of cantilevers or the wooden entry doors.

The search and the efforts to develop a folk-art inspired national style may be also found in other European countries at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. It was an attempt at establishing the separate nature of nation states, in particular in moments important for their independence and autonomy. The inspiration with folk art emphasized the importance of cultural heritage and may be found, for instance, in window and door frame details as well as in ornaments on balustrades of the balconies or cantilevers.

2.1. TOWNHOUSES WITH ZAKOPANE MOTIFS IN KRAKOW

Krakow is one of the cities where we find numerous examples of townhouses with façades ornamented with motifs typical of Zakopane.⁶ The ornamental frieze inspired by folk motifs was designed above the ground floor and below the first-floor windows of the townhouse at 3 Kurkowa St. (proj. Kazimierz Zieliński, 1907) (Ill. 1d). Carpentry-inspired chamfering of window and door framing as well as folk-stylized ornaments were used to decorate the façades of the townhouses at 3 Kochanowskiego St. (proj. Kazimierz Zieliński, 1903) (Ill. 1e), 30 Konarskiego St. (1st quarter of the 20th century, 2nd floor superstructure M. Krawczyński, 1925) (Ill. 1f) and 5 Filipa St. (proj. Kazimierz Zieliński, 1908–1909) (Ill. 1g). In the last of the abovementioned cases, the designer used a frieze with Zakopane motifs above the ground floor and below the top cornice. Ground floor door and window framing have the “wood-like pseudo-carved” dovetails. The portal is ornamented with a lintel with panels decorated with roses, “quarter-suns” and “ears.”⁷ The wooden door, on the other hand, is ornamented with a panel with a “sun,” while the framing of the ground floor windows with a geometrical ornament with a cross. The first-floor window framing is stylised upon a wooden construction with ogee-shaped chamfering and pegged connections.⁸

Yet another interesting example is the townhouse at 36 Piłsudskiego St. (proj. Sławomir Odrzywolski, 1907–1908) (Ill. 1h), whose entry portal is ornamented with a frieze with a peacock motif, emphasized along the axis with a Podhale-style pin. The preference for Zakopane motifs is particularly visible in the work by one architect, Kazimierz Zieliński. Of 25 townhouses in Krakow designed by him six have façades with folk motifs; for instance, the townhouse at 4 Garncarska St. (proj. Kazimierz Zieliński, 1906–1907) (Ill. 1i) uses peg motifs in framing and friezes.

⁵ K. Mokłowski, *Sztuka ludowa w Polsce*, Księgarnia H. Altenberga, Lwów 1903, <https://archive.org/details/sztukaludowawpo00mokgoog> (access: 16.05.2021).

⁶ B. Makowska, *Kamienice krakowskie z przełomu XIX i XX w. i okresu międzywojennego położone na obszarze pomiędzy pierwszą i drugą obwodnicą – charakterystyka form i ich ewolucja*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Krakowskiej, Kraków 2014, pp. 73–75.

⁷ A. Siwek, „Zakopiańska” dekoracja elewacji kamienic krakowskich, *TeKi Krakowskie*, 2001, no. 13, pp. 128–129.

⁸ B. Makowska, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

The motifs of pins and sequin patterns were also used on the façade of the Celestyn Czynciel's house at 4 Market Square (proj. Ludwik Wojtyczko, 1906–1908). Likewise, the restored façade of the medieval townhouse at 4 Szpitalna St. (project of the façade Władysław Ekielski, 1899) has details and ornaments typical of the Zakopane style. On the ground floor of the building, there is a wooden display window divided by pillars with stylized dovetail tenons.⁹ In the top cornice frieze, there is a pseudo-carved star, while the lintels of the first-floor windows are ornamented with symmetrical floral motifs, a heart-shaped pattern referred to as *parzenica*, a pattern called *gaj* and a rose filled with a stylised edelweiss.¹⁰

The inspiration with the Zakopane style is visible in the design of the townhouse decorations,¹¹ while their traditional layout has not been changed. Bossage shaped using mortar was to remind passers-by of the end of the crowning beams in wooden structures, while the window and door framing were modelled upon lintels and wooden poles.

3. EGYPTIAN MOTIFS ON TOWNHOUSE FAÇADES FROM THE TURN OF THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

Apart from native motifs, façade details and ornaments of the townhouses from the turn of 19th and 20th centuries were also inspired by foreign cultures, including the Egyptian art. Here the designers relied on the papyrus motifs, the lotus flower, as well as palmettes in friezes and columns. Egyptian motifs are particularly frequent in sacral art (as volute ornaments in Baroque churches) and sepulchral art (a pyramid and an obelisk). According to Franciszek Ksawery Giżycki, Egyptian architecture was the least appropriate in the case of residential buildings, as a result of profound differences in the needs and customs of the inhabitants of both countries. According to him, Egyptian buildings had heavy, tomb-like forms, which did not correspond with the residential purpose of buildings. The author claimed that the “bent cornices and windows ornamented with sculptures serving as an emblem for certain religious practices are the sole objects from the Egyptian architecture that may be used in residential buildings.”¹²

The reception of Egyptian art was an echo of the European fascination with Egypt triggered by the Napoleon's campaign (initiated in 1789) and the figures in the monumental, multi-volume work entitled *Description de l'Égypte*.¹³ The work was the product of research by 160 scientists and about 2,000 designers who participated in Napoleon's campaign in Egypt in the period 1798–1801. The specific volumes of the series were published from 1809 to 1822.

⁹ A. Siwek, *op. cit.*, pp. 123–140.

¹⁰ B. Tondos, *Zapomniana sztuka góralska oraz materiały do terminologicznego słownika budownictwa i zdobnictwa*, Oficyna Podhalańska–Filar, Kraków–Kielce 1999, pp. 34–51.

¹¹ The Zakopane motifs were used also on townhouse façades at 1 Kochanowskiego St. (proj. Kazimierz Zieliński, 1903), 40 Piłsudskiego St. (proj. Władysław Ekielski, 1898–1899), 29 Krowoderskiej St. (proj. Leopold Tlachna, 1908), 20 Konarskiego St. (1st quarter of the 20th century), 15 Krasińskiego Av. (proj. Apolinary Pezdański, 1907–1908), 23 Krasińskiego 23 Av. (proj. Ludwik Wojtyczko, 1908), 19 Siemiradzkiego St. (proj. Józef Siwek, 1910–1911) and 8 Wielopole St. (about 1905).

¹² F.K. Giżycki, *O przyozdobieniu siedlisk wiejskich*, N. Glücksberg, Warszawa 1827, p. 10.

¹³ *Description de l'Égypte ou Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française*, vol. 1–12, C.L.F. Panckoucke, Paris 1809–1822, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/services/engine/search/sru?operation=searchRetrieve&version=1.2&collapsing=disabled&rk=21459;2&query=dc.relation%20all%20%22cb333411490%22> (access: 14.05.2021).

Of the townhouses whose façade decorations and details are inspired by Egyptian art, we should mention the three-storey Egyptian House at 6–7 Chapel St. in Penzance, Cornwall (1830–1835) – “The façade, shaped as a pylon gateway, is loosely copied, by an unidentified architect, from the Egyptian Hall in London, designed in 1811.”¹⁴ The building was constructed by John Lavin (mineralogist and Egyptologist) in the period 1835–36. Its façade decoration was intended as a kind of advertisement for the owner who traded in minerals, and later also stone obelisks and other ornaments. Lotus bud columns flanking entrance to the building, Coved cornices above windows and two obelisk caryatids. Yet another example worth mentioning is a two-storey building of Odd Fellows Hall (so-called Egyptian House) located at Ker Street in Devonport Plymouth in UK. It was built in 1823, built to the designs of John Foulston.¹⁵

One interesting townhouse whose façade ornaments were inspired with Egyptian art may be found at the corner of 1 U Svatého Ducha St. and 10 Elišky Krásnohorské St. in the district of Josefov in Prague. Built in 1915, it has a peculiar façade with a caption reading “during the war” (*ve světové válce*) and a figure in Egyptian garments holding a sword encircled with swirling figures of fighters (Ill. 2a). Likewise, Egyptian motifs were also used to decorate the façade of an eclectic townhouse at 18 Pikk St. in Tallinn (proj. Jacques Rosenbaum, 1910) – Egyptian women with bare torsos located above the entrance and herms just below the roofline.

3.1. TOWNHOUSES WITH EGYPTIAN MOTIFS IN KRAKOW

One example of the use of Egyptian art-inspired motifs to ornament the façades of Krakow’s townhouses is the so-called Egyptian House, which used to be located at the corner of Retoryka 10–12 and Smoleńsk 10–12 in Krakow (proj. Benjamin Torbe, engineer K. Lachnik, 1893–1896, renovated in 1929).¹⁶ The townhouse was commissioned by Józef Kulesza, who owned a masonry and sculpture workshop. Its façade was lined with quoins in the form of pylons. What is more, the *cavetto* cornice, typical of Egyptian architecture, topped the ground floor and the entire building (Ill. 2b-g). The entrance portico supported on columns held the cornice with two sitting pharaoh statues flanked with lying sphinxes and obelisks. The entire façade below the crowning cornice was covered with hieroglyphic inscriptions.¹⁷

The designs for the building may be still found at the Municipal Architecture Archive¹⁸ in Krakow, testifying to the original design of the façade. The location of the ornament with the winged sun disc motif has changed – rather than above the top floor windows along lateral axes, it was placed at the central axis and above the ground floor windows. On top of this, ornaments representing human figures were added in first floor window jambs. The three-storey townhouse had a traditional form with a gable roof and a double staircase at the back bay of the building. The quoins had an obtuse form which reinforced the monumental nature of the form. The ornaments were layered on the façade while the obelisks and sphinxes were placed in front of it. In 1929, the building underwent extensive renovation, and many

¹⁴ M. Snodin, M. Howard, *Ornament. A Social History Since 1450*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1996, p. 182.

¹⁵ L. Cook, *Odd Fellows Hall (Egyptian House)* [in:] Devonport. A Waterfront Neighbourhood of Plymouth, updated March 2012, http://www.devonportonline.co.uk/historic_devonport/buildings_historic/oddfellows/oddfellows.aspx (access: 14.05.2021).

¹⁶ B. Makowska, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

¹⁷ L. Zinkow, *Dom w barwach piramid*, Alma Mater, 2004, no. 61, pp. 39–41.

¹⁸ National Archives in Kraków, sygn. ABM 10/12 Retoryka St., f. 741.

decorations were removed. The surviving elements include the old door ornamented with papyrus stems and lotus, as well as winged sun disks flanked with *ureuses*. The ephemerality of the fad, and – most importantly – problems with maintaining the ornaments in good condition are the factors contributing to the removal of the decorations. As reported by Stanisław Mróz,

the polychrome faded out and was washed out by the rain, obelisks started to crumble at the bottom, while the sphinxes lost their mouths and paws. Most importantly, however, the Egyptian house has ‘lost its originality’ – the novelty of the ornaments wore off and people stopped paying attention to them.¹⁹

The exotic motifs were then replaced with Modernist profiling and simple, geometricized forms. A new façade cladding consistent with Modernism was used instead.

According to Leszek Zinkow, the ornaments that survived in the lobby on the ground floor represent the personification of Nile (the townhouse was formerly located upon the Rudawa river),²⁰ the figures of sphinxes and palms. The decorations on the second floor include a triumphant ruler killing an enemy with a club. During the period of struggle for independence, such ornaments were of symbolic importance.

What is more, Egyptian motifs also appear in the ornaments of other townhouses in Krakow. A scarabaeus ornamenting the portal of the townhouse at 8 Zybkiewicza St. (proj. Józef Pakies, 1905–1906) is to bring both luck and protection (Ill. 2h). The insect, wings folded, rolling a ball of fertilizer, was believed to be a symbol of the transformation of life, endowing it with meaning. In Egypt, a Scarabaeus with folded wings was a symbol of rebirth and often took the form of a winged sun disc (Cherpi – the god of the rising sun).

The winged sun disc motif ornaments the crown of the portal of the townhouse at the corner of 35 Karmelicka St. and 28 Batorego St. (proj. Teodor Talowski, 1887–1890) (Ill. 2i). The symbol was placed above the doors and gates of temples and was believed by the Egyptians to provide protection against evil. The belief in the protective power of Krakow’s house emblems had a rich and extensive tradition and continued also in its exotic forms including Egyptian motifs.

4. SUMMARY

Townhouse details and decorations from the turn of 19th and 20th centuries were mythical stories that expressed the society’s belief in the rebirth of the national art through the inspiration with folk art. Since some of the façades have been preserved, the stories may continue to be passed on through the original, eye-catching forms. These myths referred to collective emotions, solidified the history of the nation and promoted traditional values.²¹ During the fight for independence, they could contribute to social unity, creating a shared culture and identity. Yet another property of the myth is its symbolic nature and the hidden meaning-bearing

¹⁹ St.M. [Stanisław Mróz], *List z Krakowa. Koniec krakowskiego Egiptu*, Ilustrowany Kurjer Codzienny, no. 248, 14.09.1930, p. 2.

²⁰ L. Zinkow, *Imhotep i pawie pióra. Z dziejów inspiracji egipskich w architekturze polskiej*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków 2009, pp. 173–184.

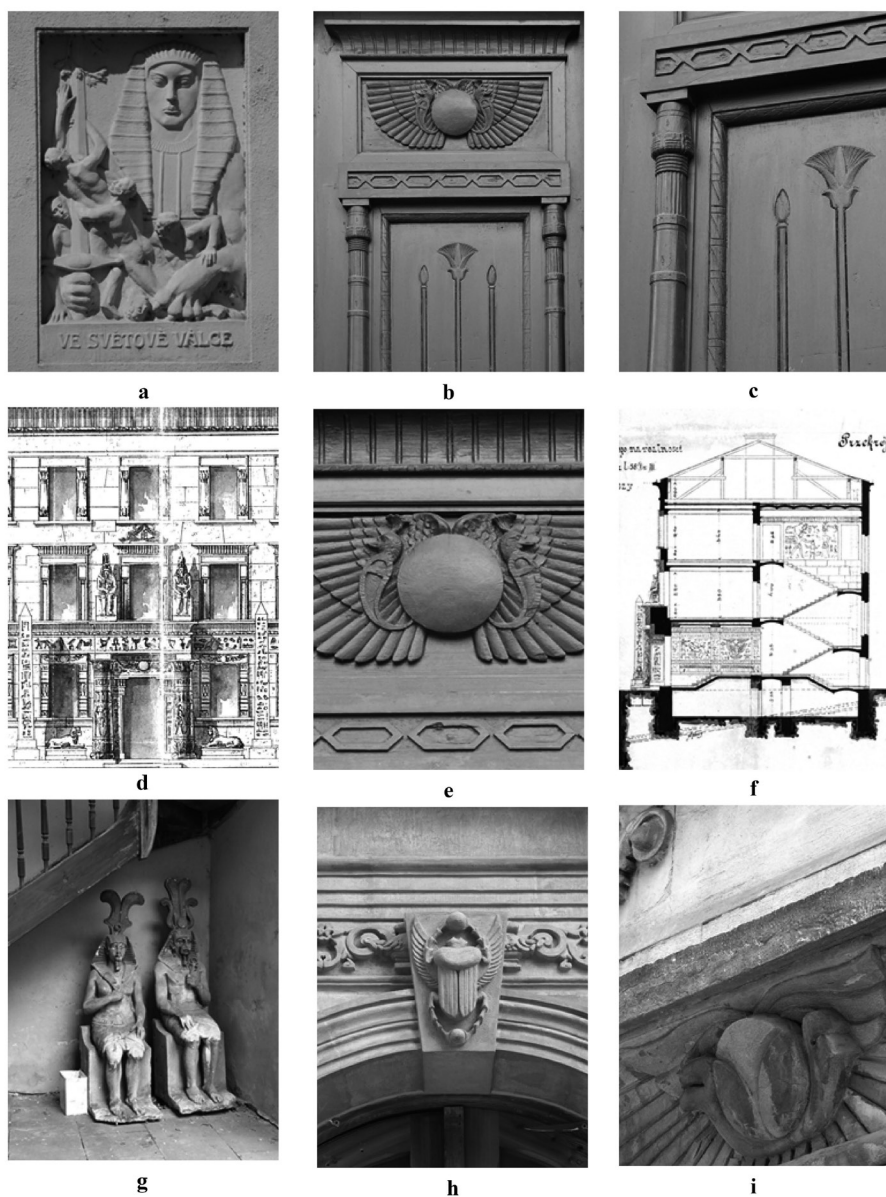
²¹ W. Kopaliński, *Słownik mitów i tradycji kultury*, Rytm, Warszawa 2011.

ing function. A rich symbolism of Egyptian art-inspired details and decorations ornamenting townhouse façades is a good example of this trend.

The research supports a conclusion that the incorporation of the Zakopane style in Krakow's townhouses was primarily superficial and symbolical, being largely reduced to the use of decorative motifs and details referring to the Zakopane style, without any interference with the form of the structures themselves. The difficulties in overcoming the barriers of materials and structures made this style a myth rather than a universal proposal in brick architecture. Expertise regarding wooden construction was not useful for erecting brick buildings, but became a source of creative inspirations for architects. Likewise, Egyptian architecture was mainly a source of detail and ornament motifs due to their symbolic meaning and original forms. Folk and Egyptian motifs became the elements of façade decorations, which could be relatively easily replaced. The townhouse façades served as a pretext for the architects to present their own artistic beliefs and an expression of both the taste of investors following the latest fads and their professional passions. In the past they drew public's attention as an original advertisement, to become a tourist attraction over time.



III. 1. Zakopane motifs on the façades of townhouse from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (photos by the author): a-c. 30 Chmielna St. in Warsaw; d. 3 Kurkowa St. in Krakow; e. 3 Kochanowskiego St. in Krakow; f. 30 Konarskiego St. in Krakow; g. 5 Filipa St. in Krakow; h. 36 Piłsudskiego St. in Krakow; i. 4 Garncarska St. in Krakow.



III. 2. Egyptian motifs on the façades of townhouse from the turn of the 19th and 20th century (photos by the author): a. 1 U Svatého Ducha St./10 Elišky Krásnohorské St. in Prague; b-g. 10–12 Retoryka St./10–12 Smoleńsk St. in Krakow (fragment of the façade and section according to National Archives ABM, f. 741), 10–12 Retoryka St.; h. 8 Zyblikiewicza St. in Krakow; i. 35 Karmelicka St. in Krakow.

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