



Jadwiga Gwizdałówna

Architektura Wawelu w czasie okupacji niemieckiej 1939–1945

[Architecture of the Wawel Royal Castle during the German Occupation 1939–1945]

Zamek Królewski na Wawelu, Kraków 2019

In recent years, there has been a visible rise in interest in researching the architecture from the period of the German occupation in Poland, in particular concerning investments undertaken by the Germans themselves. This is favored not only by the relative abundance of previously poorly acknowledged (and local) archival material, but also by access to “troublesome” heritage in the form of post-German residential and public buildings. These relatively few, although characteristic, buildings (more were designed than were actually constructed) were erected pursuant to the orders of the Nazi authorities in the General Government, the Reichsgau Wartheland or the Regierungsbezirk Zichenau, and are a reminder of a terrifying but also extremely interesting period in the history of Polish architecture. With the increased research on the native architecture of the inter-war and post-war periods, it seems natural to deepen our knowledge of interventions made in the Polish architectural landscape by its historical occupiers. It is not only the historians of architecture or (more broadly) art, but also historians of the occupation that benefit from this. For the Germans, architecture represented an important tool for the cultural colonization of the conquered territories, and as such should not be overlooked for instance by researchers of Germanization policies.

Among the surviving examples of “occupation” architecture in Poland (as opposed to Nazi architecture from the areas that were part of the Third Reich before the war), a special place is occupied by the Wawel Hill in Kraków. This complex of architectural monuments to the historical grandeur of the Polish state, currently one of the most fervently protected national heritage sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List, also includes pieces of Nazi origin. They are mementos of the wartime fate of Wawel as the residence of the General Governor Hans Frank; following the end of the war, they were adapted for museum purposes and are still used as such to this day.

The German transformations of the buildings located on Wawel Hill, including both the projects and the construction that was actually undertaken, are the subject of the publication presently under review, published in 2019 by the Zamek Królewski na Wawelu publishing house. It is the first such detailed discussion of this issue, which has only received a cursory mention in other literature thus far. The author, Jadwiga Gwizdałówna – an architect by education with a doctorate from the Kraków University of Technology – is a retired archivist of the Wawel Castle collections, which contain many items of source material relating to the architecture of the hill from the period of the occupation. In her research to date, Gwizdałówna has examined various topics from the history of Wawel (both its architecture and, for example, its green spaces). In chronological terms, she is familiar with both the early Middle Ages and the end of the 19th century. She is also the author of the monumental 2005 exhibition “Wawel narodowi przywrócony. Odzyskanie zamku i jego odnowa 1905–1939” [Wawel restored to the nation. The reclamation of the castle and its renovation 1905–1939].

The publication under review is not her debut work dedicated to the architecture of Wawel during the occupation. In 2011–2012, Gwizdałówna published articles on this subject in the “Rocznik Krakowski” [Kraków Yearbook], of which one was devoted to the “echoes of Nazi architecture” on Wawel Hill, and another concerned architectural sculptures from the period. The present work is a significant development of her previous findings, contributing significantly to the development of our knowledge of the architectural heritage of the occupation in general.

The book is divided into ten chapters, including an introduction with an overview of the literature to date. The author has decided not to write an ending or a summary. Her analysis begins in the second chapter, in which the author provides a synthetic description of the buildings located on Wawel Hill in the interwar period, i.e. a period when restoration works were still underway after the hill was recovered from Austro-Hungarian hands at the beginning of the 20th century. The third chapter, also quite brief, is devoted to the functioning of Wawel Hill as the official seat of the General Governor, as well as to the management system of the hill in relation to construction projects. The author discusses in detail the organization of the Franz Koettgen and Edgar Horstmann design office in Wawel, which dealt with the documentation of renovation and adaptation works in this area.

These works are discussed primarily in the extensive fourth chapter. Gwizdałówna has divided this section into eleven parts, each of which has been dedicated to one carefully analyzed subject: (1) the residence of Deputy Governor Josef Bühler in the building of the former diocesan museum, (2) the General Governor’s office in the former kitchens and royal stables, (3) the kitchen annex of the chancellery building, (4) the Senators’ Tower connected to the chancellery, (5) the General Governor’s

residence in the castle, (6) the former Austrian hospital intended to house officials (including the chief of police) and offices, (7) the Bernardyńska Gate, the main entrance gate, (8) Sandomierska Tower, (9) the ss headquarters in the former convalescent hospital, (10) the residential building for officials and craftsmen in the former theological seminary, (11) the residential building for officials in the vicar's house (where Wilhelm Ernst von Palezieux, the occupational conservator of Wawel, resided). A particularly valuable supplement to the content of this chapter is the rich illustrative material, including reproductions of projects and photographs from the period that also present the private apartments of the highest dignitaries of the General Government.

The fifth chapter concerns the projects for the reorganization of the outer courtyard (situated in front of the chancellery building) and the immediate surroundings of the hill. While the courtyard ultimately avoided a significant transformation, the Germans did order some demolition for aesthetic and communication purposes in the vicinity of Wawel Hill. The topic of chapter six concerns technical infrastructure, such as shelters or garages.

In chapter seven, the reader will find information about the "construction economy," and therefore financial issues. In this case, the author admits that she has not made use of all the readily available source material, i.e. the documentation of the General Government in the collections of the Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw. While aware of their existence, she has limited herself to an analysis of the sources exclusively from the Kraków archives. This is important because she has consequently obtained only partial estimates, a serious drawback of her publication – indeed, incomprehensible for the historian – which cannot be justified with the words "this task [i.e. query outside Kraków] goes beyond the scope of this study and remains open for further research" (p. 233). The use of the publicly available Warsaw archives on the history of Wawel during the occupation could have also broadened the author's knowledge in other aspects of the topic she has undertaken.

The aim of chapter eight was to place the design of Wawel Hill in the context of Nazi architecture and its decorative arts, especially the New Reich Chancellery in Berlin, the photos of which are provided in the publication. It is a typically historical and artistic argument focusing on the so-called style of the Third Reich and its manifestations in the Wawel Hill projects, especially in the building of the Chancellery of the General Governor, which has survived to this day. Gwizdałówna notes, however, that while "features of the architecture of the Third Reich were also reflected" in Wawel, "local conditions did not allow for large scale and grandeur, and required other solutions" (p. 247) than those characteristic of the Nazi style. In this chapter, the author also discusses the relationship between Koettgen and Horstmann's design office with artists and companies from German-occupied Europe who supplied various pieces of equipment to Wawel.

Chapter nine presents the profiles of the Germans, who lived on Wawel Hill, and the Poles, who were employed there. Among the occupiers, only Frank, Bühler, Friedrich Wilhelm Krüger (Higher SS and Police Leader in the General Government) and Wilhelm Koppe (his successor) “deserved” more extensive biographies. Gwizdałówna noted many details about their stay on the hill. The section devoted to the workers of Polish origin is quite short, but equally valuable in terms of factual material. Poles were mainly employed to work on the reconstruction of Wawel; they were also hired by the Koettgen and Horstmann design office, in which Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz, who had taken charge of the Castle restoration before the war, was the main draftsman. The Germans also used the services of Polish companies (stonemasons, locksmiths, bronze- and glassworkers, bookbinders and carpenters) to handle the interior finishing.

The tenth and final chapter of the publication is devoted to the post-war renovation of Wawel, including construction in the former German buildings. We therefore learn about the significant changes that have taken place and the loss of the original details of the interior (as in the case of the General Governor’s Chancellery, the current seat of the management, substantive departments, warehouses and some of the conservation studios of the Royal Castle museum). This chapter, however, leaves a certain dissatisfaction. There are not enough descriptions of the damage to Wawel caused by the German-Soviet conflict at the beginning of 1945. Gwizdałówna devoted only general references to them, and she could have made use of the Wawel inventory materials preserved in the National Archives in Kraków, in the collection of documents of the Provincial Office. Moreover, photographs documenting the appearance of the hill at that time are available at the Historical Museum of the City of Kraków.

The publication is supplemented by appendices consisting of tables with lists of basic information on the works of Polish and German construction, craft, industrial, executive and delivery companies, as well as architectural drawings of individual buildings that were created in the Koettgen and Horstmann office.

As mentioned above, the book has no ending. The author, however, shares her general assessment of the German construction “legacy” in the chapter on economic issues. She notes that it is positive that “several buildings with usable cubature, adapted to various functions, and infrastructure in the form of installation networks and roads facilitating communication were built.” At the same time, however, “the occupant’s achievements are negative,” a thesis that is difficult to disagree with after reading the book. As the author stresses, “the Germans undertook tasks that Poles had started, or intended to carry out in the future, according to their own plans, to the needs and style of their architecture.” What is more, “during the construction works, the Germans caused a lot of damage, destroying the underground relics during excavations for installations and deepening basements, as well as smashing architectural accents

for use at other construction sites.” Finally, Gwizdałówna also emphasizes that “they introduced irreversible changes to the historical system in several places, and they gave the buildings the form of Nazi architecture” (p. 235). In addition to the purely architectural reasons, the very historical context makes this Wawel heritage extremely controversial and worthy of preservation (although it has not survived untouched by post-war and even modern reconstructions) as a testimony of German aggression and the tragic fate of Poles during the war.

In summary, Jadwiga Gwizdałówna’s book is a significant contribution to the research on the architecture of the General Government and the assessment of the realities of the German occupation in general despite some shortcomings in the source material, especially the high inexcusable resignation from inquiries in the Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw. It is a study rich in factual detail, characterized by extensive archival illustrative material. Although the insight with which its author goes into construction details reveals the pen of an architect, not a historian, it certainly deserves attention from beyond the narrowly understood sphere of architectural research.

Mikołaj Getka-Kenig

(transl. by Ian Stephenson)