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Synergy of architecture and theology on the example of wooden Orthodox churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship with blue façades

Introduction

One of the characteristic features of a building is its colour, and while in the case of secular buildings it is most often related to aesthetics, in the case of churches, especially Orthodox ones, the choice of the colour of the façade may depend on theology. The conclusions contained in this study may become useful to designers creating new religious buildings of this type.

Scope and content of the study

The Podlaskie Voivodeship is home to the largest concentration of Orthodox churches in Poland. This region is often called Podlasie, but its historical boundaries are not clearly defined and have changed over the years. For this reason, the territorial scope of the research was defined in the area of the current Podlaskie Voivodeship, where the Orthodox churches are part of two Orthodox dioceses¹: Białystok-Gdańsk and Warsaw-Bielsk Podlaski.

Orthodox churches located in the analysed area are wooden buildings with different façade colours, sometimes changing over the centuries. Blue is a common colour and the authors of the article focus on it. Their aim is to determine the reasons why this colour was chosen

for finishing the façades of the churches, with particular emphasis on the theological aspect. As shown in the work, this aspect is very important when it comes to the decoration, but also the external image of Orthodox churches.

After conducting research and photographic inventories, the authors determined the number of all such churches, compared their basic features, and then verified the thesis regarding the influence of theology on the choice of blue colour for finishing a large number of wooden Orthodox churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship.

Due to the nature of the article, the study includes all blue parish churches, regardless of the period of their construction, located in the Podlaskie Voivodeship; branch churches, cemeteries and chapels are omitted. They will be the subject of subsequent publications.

The topic of blue wooden parish churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship was undertaken due to the lack of studies related to this topic.

The state of research

The main part of the study focused on issues related to the influence of theology on shaping the colours of the architecture of blue wooden parish churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. There are few publications on research on this interdisciplinary topic. The only item is an article by Katarzyna Woszczenko, in which the author described the theological reason for using the green colour when finishing the wooden façades of Orthodox churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship [2]. A church is at the same time the house of God and an architectural structure [3]. Despite this obvious synergy of theology and architecture, these issues are presented separately in studies. Most of the studies on which this article is based are concerned with theology or broadly understood architecture.

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¹ A diocese is a unit of the administrative division of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church, subordinate to the bishop. There are six dioceses in Poland, they are not related to the administrative division of Poland into voivodeships, they often cover areas of several voivodeships [1, p. 156].

Theological publications [4]–[16] cover the topics of the Orthodox faith, church teachings and iconography. The authors also used works on the history of the colour blue [17]–[19], studies on sacred architecture and Orthodox Christianity [20]–[24], and on wooden architecture, including Orthodox architecture [25]–[30]. The results of conservation work found in the conservation office² and its online archives, catalogues of monuments [31]–[33], a radio program [34], as well as articles found in online sources of Orthodox churches and communes [35]–[38] turned out to be extremely helpful. Much valuable information comes from conversations with Orthodox priests³.

Theological aspects determining the image of the blue Orthodox church

The Orthodox church has always looked for a combination of architecture and artistic expression that best shows its importance as a symbolic image of the Church and the universe [4, p. 223]. It is intended to be a reflection of the vision of the Temple of Heavenly Jerusalem [5, pp. 125, 126], which is confirmed by the words of Patriarch Germanos I: *The temple is an earthly heaven, in these heavenly spaces God lives and walks* [6, p. 384]. According to the Fathers of the Church, God's Beauty is a fundamental biblical and theological idea, therefore the beauty of the world continues in a transcendent reality, similar to beauty and goodness [5, p. 29]. If a church is to be a paradise on earth, it must also be beautiful and beautifully reflect the teachings of the Church. Its furnishings, decor and icons express theology through the symbolism of colours, shapes and numbers [7, pp. 205–209]. Symbols mean connection with the Divine, communication, meeting with the Creator and His Beauty. The canons of beauty in the case of Orthodox churches are not defined directly, but based on the above analysis it can be concluded that a church is beautiful when it reflects theological teachings.

The famous theologian Father Sergius Bulgakov in his great work emphasized that [...] *Orthodoxy, especially in Byzantium and Russia, received the gift of seeing the beauty of the spiritual world* [8, p. 146]. Two natures combine in a church – material and spiritual. The first one is available through the senses, the second one through symbols [9]. In the Orthodox Church, one of such portals that allows you to pass from what is visible to what is spiritual are icons with their complexity of internal beauty, symbolism of colours, shapes and signs. Colours are not only a decorative element, but have their own language through which they strive to express the invisible world. They are

mystical, they open the way to the spiritual world. The iconographer uses various colours, but also the so-called *asystka*⁴ [10, pp. 93–96]. Just as those who write icons use different colour intensities, in the conducted research the term blue will be understood as all its shades, from dark navy blue, through sapphire, to light blue.

The obvious origins of the connection between blue and divinity should be sought in the *Holy Bible*. In the *Book of Exodus*, in the story about making a covenant with God, Moses and his people ascended Mount Sinai, where [...] *they saw the God of Israel, and under his feet what looked like a creation made of sapphire plates, blue as the sky itself* (Exodus 24:10) [11]. There is an obvious connection between God – His divinity – the blue of precious stones – the blue of the sky – the heavenliness. The divinity of Christ is reflected in the blue colour of His clothes on icons. At the Seventh Ecumenical Council, the icon was placed on an equal footing with the *Holy Bible*, as a type of theology, initiation into God [12, pp. 120–156]. Icons are created according to the canons and principles established by the Holy Fathers of the Church, nothing is accidental here, the symbolism of the robes, gestures and attributes of the depicted saints is specified [10, pp. 3, 4]. In iconography, according to these canons, blue is an autonomous unity with red; they symbolize heaven and earth, truth and mercy, goodness and beauty. That is why the Saviour's clothes are two-coloured – the shirt directly touching the body is red, and the outer garment is blue, which causes a greater share of blue. In this combination, red symbolizes earthly, human nature, life, martyrdom, suffering, blood, but at the same time it is a royal colour; blue, in turn, expresses heaven, divinity, the depth of revelation and the unattainability of mystery. The colours of the Mother of God's robes are the same, but arranged in reverse proportions – the undergarment is blue and the outer scarf is red. This order reflects the combination of virginity and motherhood in Her, symbolizing the earthly woman who gave birth to God. In both historical and contemporary iconography, there are depictions of the Mother of God in completely blue robes, they were especially common in the Balkans and Byzantium [13, pp. 19–40]. One of such examples of the representation of the Theotokos in a blue robe is the *Enthroned Mary with the Child, between Saint Theodore and Saint George* from the 6th century located in the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai [12, fig. between pp. 16, 17]. This is one of the most common iconographic types of Our Lady – the Mother of God on a throne, the so-called *Queen of Heaven* [13, pp. 110, 111]. References to this naming of the Mother of God exist in paraliturgical Marian songs, i.e. to *Царице Небесной*⁵. In Poland, the Mother of God, treated as the protector of the nation, is even called the Queen of Poland [13, pp. 104, 105]. In line with the theme of Our Lady Queen of Heaven, the blue robe may be a ref-

² Record cards of monuments of architecture and construction, register of monuments no.: A-630 dated 31.12.1986, A-14 dated 11.11.2000, A-57 dated 12.05.2003, A-39 dated 19.11.1976, A-746 dated 31.12.1990, A-144 dated 14.12.2005, A-242 dated 16.07.2009, A-583 dated 19.02.2015, A-64 dated 28.12.1984, A-36 dated 12.01.1993, A-55 dated 27.02.2003, A-385 dated 10.05.1977, A-235 dated 16.06.2009, A-97 dated 7.12.1994, A-83 dated 3.11.1951, A-620 dated 22.12.1986, A-104 dated 15.05.1998, 5758, A-497 dated 26.03.1980, 6186.

³ Information from conversations with Orthodox priests has been referenced in the footnotes of the article, the authors have their recordings and/or typescripts.

⁴ *Asystka* consists of strokes of increasingly lighter or golden paint in an area of a given colour, creating the impression of a fine mesh and thus showing joy and light [1, p. 94].

⁵ *Царице Небесной* (read: Caryce Niebiesnoj; Eng. Queen of Heaven); Mother of God known as Tsarina or Tsarina of Heaven, appears in many songs in the songbook of paraliturgical songs and religious poetry.

erence to the characteristic blue dress of the Byzantine empress. The Theotokos did not belong to the aristocracy, and in the times in which She lived, dyes were expensive, so dyed clothes were the exclusive privilege of the wealthy class, so it could not have been from a reflection of Her actual outfit [14, pp. 115–118]. Particularly in Byzantine and Balkan iconography, the depiction of the Theotokos in completely blue robes was intended to emphasize Her purity, virtue and virginity, and to expose Her purity. Iconographers, due to the church's absolute lack of tolerance for the painter's fantasy, often considered old icons as models [12, p. 137]. In this way, the iconographic patterns created in the early days of Christianity, recorded in canons and principles, have survived to this day [15, p. 57].

In the Orthodox Church, individual religious holidays have their own assigned colour. Blue accompanies services related to the Theotokos holidays, i.e. those related to the Mother of God. The clergy then put on blue liturgical vestments [16, pp. 148, 149]. Inside the church, decorative blue tablecloths are placed over the *analoj*⁶. Our observations also show that some of the faithful participating in services related to the cult of Our Lady include this colour in their clothes.

Blue dyes and their function

Blue pigment is quite rare in nature, one example is natural ultramarine obtained from the mineral lapis-lazuli, which is the most expensive of blue pigments [17]. Blue dyes include woad native to Europe and indigo imported from the Middle East and Africa, both of plant origin, as well as the mineral azurite [18, pp. 19–28]. For various economic and functional reasons, in the 1st half of the 18th century, these dyes were gradually replaced by their artificial counterparts, also used in construction [18, pp. 143, 144], [19]⁷.

The parish priest in Koźany, Fr. Jana Kojło emphasized that the sacred building and its furnishings are particularly important for the church's faithful⁸. It can therefore be assumed that one of the reasons for using precious blue dye to paint the façades of churches and dye the liturgical vestments of the clergy was to emphasize their importance.

Orthodox churches of Podlasie

The areas of the Podlaskie Voivodeship are known for their multinational and multiethnic, and therefore also multi-religious nature [20]. Poles, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Tatars and Jews have lived here side by side for centuries, which was especially visible until the outbreak of World War II. In no other area of Poland can we find churches of different religious denominations located so close together [21, p. 164]. This diversity had a significant

impact on the formation of wooden architecture in the studied region.

Currently, areas in Poland characterized by a large number of people of the Orthodox faith are the Podlaskie Voivodeship and the Lemko region (around Rzeszów, Przemyśl and Gorlice) [22, pp. 9–11], [23]. However, it is in the Podlaskie Voivodeship that the largest number of believers of the Orthodox Church live and it reaches over 85% of all its faithful in Poland [23], [24, p. 5].

In the Podlaskie Voivodeship, until the mid-19th century, almost exclusively wooden structures could be found. This is confirmed, among others, by the fact that around 1930 in Narew most of the buildings were made of wood, except for the only known example of brick construction, i.e. the chapel of St. Wawrzyniec at the ecumenical cemetery [25]. In rural areas until World War II, only wooden construction was common [26, p. 7]. Due to the richness of primeval forests, wood as a building material was easily available here [27, pp. 85, 86] and at the same time cheaper than stone or brick [28]. There was no shortage of experienced carpenters in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. They combined the method of building generally accepted in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth with local regionalism, characteristic of a given village. The patterns of architectural styles coming from abroad were not well received in wooden construction, which is why it retained its national character and regionalization for the longest time. Methods of construction and decoration were passed down from generation to generation. This is how the typicality prevailing in a given area at a given time developed [29, pp. 24, 25, 136–138].

The most common type of wall construction in wooden buildings in these areas is log construction, also known as log construction. In this type of construction, the length of the building walls corresponded to the length of the available beam, which resulted in a high demand for raw material. This is the reason why, as Elżbieta and Piotr Marciszyn emphasize, buildings in log construction were built in areas rich in wood, such as the regions of the Podlaskie Voivodeship, where buildings of this type were erected for the longest time [21, pp. 7, 8].

Therefore, parish churches made of log constructions with blue façades were selected for research.

Research methodology

Our research consisted of several stages. It began with research in the records of the Provincial Office for the Protection of Monuments in Białystok, which has been ongoing since October 2022. 75 buildings that met the assumed criterion were analysed – they were supposed to be wooden Orthodox churches. At that time, it was found that these facilities were clearly divided into groups in terms of the colour of their façades. For this reason, the research was fragmented into colour ranges, which included, among others: green [2], white, blue and brown churches (Table 1). Among these groups, buildings that changed their colour were also noticed. After selecting the most numerous, blue group of churches, four functional groups were distinguished – parish churches, branch churches,

⁶ *Analoj* – the name of the church lectern on which a decorative tablecloth is placed and on it an icon and/or a cross [1, p. 87].

⁷ It should be mentioned that blue dyes used in construction were often whitened, thus obtaining different shades [19].

⁸ Conversation with Fr. Jan Kojło, parish priest in Koźany, 23.03.2023.

Table 1. The number of researched existing Orthodox churches that are currently blue compared to the number of Orthodox churches with façades in a different colour depending on the time of their construction (elaborated by K. Woszczenko)

Tabela 1. Liczba zbadanych istniejących cerkwi obecnie niebieskich w porównaniu z liczbą cerkwi z elewacjami w innym kolorze w zależności od wieku ich budowy (oprac. K. Woszczenko)

Time of construction	Orthodox churches that are currently blue	Orthodox churches with façades in a different colour now
16 th	1	0
17 th	0	2
18 th	7	7 (1)*
19 th	14	21 (2)*
20 th	5	14 (2)*
21 st	1	3

* In brackets is the number of churches that were blue in the past, but are now in a different colour.

cemetery and chapels. The next stage was to narrow the scope of research to blue (28) and then to 21 parish churches. In a further stage, basic information about the buildings was analysed, divided into churches with blue façades at present (Table 2) and in the past (Table 3). The next element of the research was photographic inventories carried out from February to April 2023 and getting to know the current condition of the facilities. The last stage was a comparison of the number of blue churches in particular centuries against the number of other colours of the wooden façades of Orthodox churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship.

Results

The information presented in this chapter (also in tables) was prepared on the basis of data contained in the records of architectural and construction monuments mentioned (see footnote no. 2) and in the literature on the subject [31, pp. 351, 357, 358, 364, 374], [32, pp. 5–7, 39, 188–190, 193–195, 228–230], [33, pp. 54, 77].

Table 2. Researched parish wooden Orthodox churches from the Podlaskie Voivodeship that currently have blue façades (elaborated by K. Woszczenko)
Tabela 2. Badane parafialne drewniane cerkwie z województwa podlaskiego mające obecnie niebieskie wykończenie elewacji (oprac. K. Woszczenko)

Town	Patron Saint	Date of construction*	Wooden façade colour	Colour of details
Augustowo near Bielsk Podlaski	Saint Ap. John the Theologian	1813–1814 (or 1870–1876)	blue	natural wood, dark blue
Bielsk Podlaski	Saint Archangel Michael	before 1789	blue	dark blue, green, red
Dubicze Cerkiewne	Protection of the Mother of God	1946–1953	blue	white
Koterka (parish Tokary)	Icon of Our Lady of All Afflicted Joy	1912	blue	dark blue, brown
Koźany	Exaltation of the Cross of the Lord	1886	blue	white
Narew	Exaltation of the Cross of the Lord	1881–1885	blue	white
Pasynki	Nativity of Saint John the Baptist	1892	blue	white, dark blue
Ploski	Transfiguration of the Lord	end of the 18 th century	blue	white
Podbiele	Saint Prophet Elijah	1876	blue	white
Puchły	Protection of the Mother of God	1913–1919	blue	white, brown
Rajsk	Saints Peter and Paul	1910 or 1912 in Poturzyn 1962–1963 in Rajsk	blue	white
Rogacze	Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary	18 th century or 1 st half of 19 th century	blue	white
Saki	Saint Demetrius	18 th century	blue	brown
Stary Kornin	Saint Archangel Michael	1892–1893	blue	dark blue, white
Suwałki	All the Saints	1891	blue	white
Szczyty-Dzięciółowo	The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist	1785	blue	white
Werstok	Exaltation of the Cross of the Lord	1768	blue	white

* The construction date was given in three formats depending on the one given in the sources as: specific year, period or century of construction completion.

Table 3. Researched parish wooden Orthodox churches from the Podlaskie Voivodeship that have blue façades in the past (elaborated by K. Woszczenko)

Tabela 3. Badane parafialne drewniane cerkwie z województwa podlaskiego mające w przeszłości niebieskie wykończenie elewacji (oprac. K. Woszczenko)

Town	Patron Saint	Date of construction*	The colour of the façade in the past	The current colour of the façade
Kuraszewo	Saint Antoni Pieczerski	1868	blue (wooden façade)	dark natural wood
Malesze	Saints Peter and Paul	1946	light brown, blue (wooden façade)	light natural wood
Milejczyce	Saint Barbara	1899–1900	blue (wooden façade)	natural wood
Orzeszkowo	Assumption of the Lord	1955	light blue (siding)	brown

* The construction date was given in three formats depending on the one given in the sources: specific year or period of construction completion.



Fig. 1. Views of the smallest researched Orthodox churches:

a) parish church of St. Ap. John the Theologian in Augustów (near Bielsk Podlaski),

b) parish church of the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist in Szczyty-Dzięciółowo (photo by K. Woszczenko)

II. 1. Najmniejsze obiekty wśród badanych: a) cerkiew parafialna pw. Św. Jana Teologa w Augustowie (k. Bielska Podlaskiego), b) cerkiew parafialna pw. Ścięcia Głowy Św. Jana Chrzciciela w Szczytach-Dzięciółowie (fot. K. Woszczenko)

Comparative analysis of the number of churches that are currently blue and those with façades in other colours depending on the age of their construction

The number of blue wooden façades of Orthodox churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship in relation to the number of other colours of façades in particular centuries is presented in Table 1. Churches that probably had blue façades at the time of construction were also taken into account (see * in Table 1). Due to the frequent lack of descriptions regarding the original colour of the façade in the sources, the principle of the oldest available description or photographic documentation was adopted.

Results of the analysis of parish blue wooden Orthodox churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship

The research began with churches that currently have blue façades. Basic information such as the church's name, dating, colours of wooden façade and details are summarized in Table 2.

Orthodox churches have a tripartite interior: first from the entrance is the women's gallery (called the vestibule, intended for catechumens and penitents), then the nave (for the faithful) and the presbytery (for the clergy) [30, pp. 19–22]. It was noticed that the tripartite division of the interior is visible in most of the researched buildings

also in their external shape. The exception to this rule are the two smallest buildings – the Orthodox church in Augustów near Bielsk Podlaski (Fig. 1a) and in Szczyty-Dzięciółowo (Fig. 1b). It is concluded that the small volume of the churches mentioned is the reason for this.

The Orthodox churches included in the analysis were built in wooden log constructions. These are also oriented churches, with the exception of the parish church in Ploski (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2. View of the western façade of the parish church dedicated to Transfiguration of the Lord in Ploski (photo by K. Woszczenko)

II. 2. Widok na elewację zachodnią cerkwi parafialnej pw. Przemienienia Pańskiego w Ploskach (fot. K. Woszczenko)

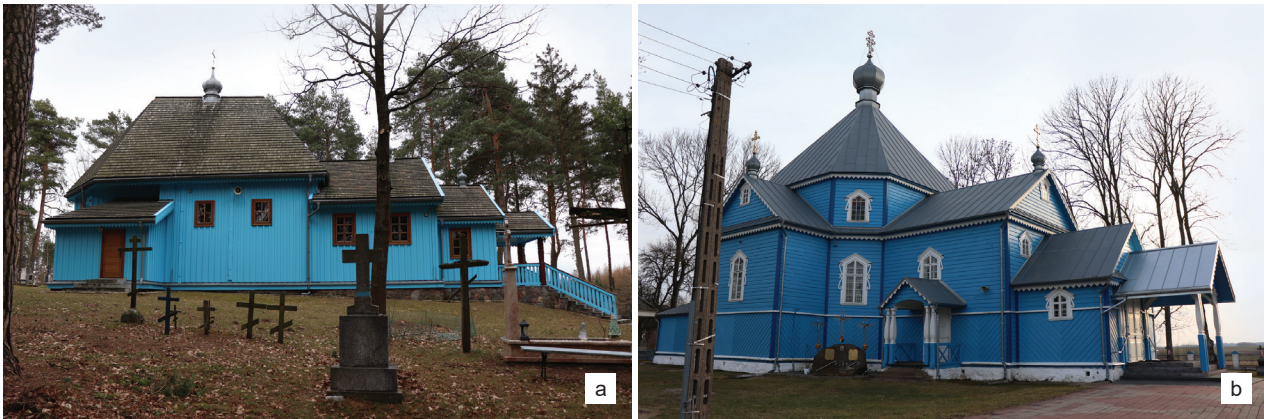


Fig. 3. Views of the examined structures that do not have a tower over the vestibule:

a) parish church of St. Dmitri in Saki, b) parish church of St. Archangel Michael in Stary Kornin (photo by K. Woszczenko)

II. 3. Badane obiekty nieposiadające wieży nad przedsionkiem:

a) cerkiew parafialna pw. Św. Dymitra w Sakach, b) cerkiew parafialna pw. św. Archanioła Michała w Starym Korninie (fot. K. Woszczenko)

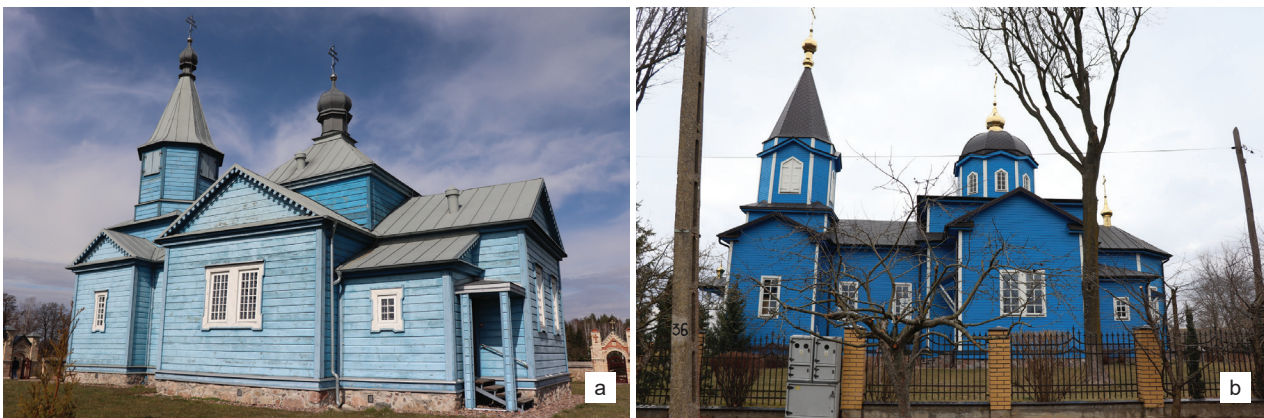


Fig. 4. Views of the researched buildings with a similarly shaped body with a tower above the vestibule:

a) parish church of Exaltation of the Cross of the Lord in Kożany, b) parish church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Rajsk (photo by K. Woszczenko)

II. 4. Badane obiekty mające analogicznie ukształtowaną bryłę z wieżą nad przedsionkiem:

a) cerkiew parafialna pw. Podwyższenia Krzyża Pańskiego w Kożanach, b) cerkiew parafialna pw. św. Piotra i Pawła w Rajsku (fot. K. Woszczenko)

and the temporary church of St. Anna⁹, located next to the parish church in Stary Kornin. The Orthodox churches in Saki (Fig. 3a) and in Stary Kornin (Fig. 3b) are examples that do not have a tower over the vestibule in their architectural shape. However, the Orthodox churches in Kożany (Fig. 4a) and Rajsk (Fig. 4b) have the above-mentioned towers.

The analysed churches included those that underwent various types of transformations. The Orthodox church in Rajsk (Fig. 4b) was moved in 1962 from Poturzyn to its current location, while the current parish church in Suwałki, although it was not moved from another place, until 1940 served only as a cemetery church.

The most interesting building in terms of the richness of colours seems to be the Orthodox church in Bielsk Podlas-

ki (Fig. 5a), which was renovated many times (1895, 1971, 1998) and since 1971 has had an interior and façades made according to the colour design of Wiktor Gutkiewicz¹⁰. It is the only structure that combines several colours in a decorative way – the blue boarding of the façade creates a background for window and door details in red, green and dark blue. It is also one of the largest studied buildings.

The largest and most decorated building is the Orthodox church in Puchły (Fig. 5b), characterized by an extremely fragmented body and rich carving decorations. A slightly smaller building with a similar shape is the Orthodox church in Koterka (Fig. 6). Another example of two buildings with an identically shaped body are the Orthodox church in Narew (Fig. 7a) and the Orthodox church in Pasyunki (Fig. 7b). The Orthodox church in Podbiele (Fig. 8) is architecturally shaped in a similar, but simplified

⁹ A temporary church was built during the construction of the main church, from material from the old bell tower, to maintain the continuity of services, see: record card of monuments of architecture and construction, register of monuments No. A-630 from 31.12.1986.

¹⁰ Wiktor Gutkiewicz (1913–2007) – a famous Białystok painter and set designer at the Białystok Dramatic Theater. Aleksandra Węgieerki [34].

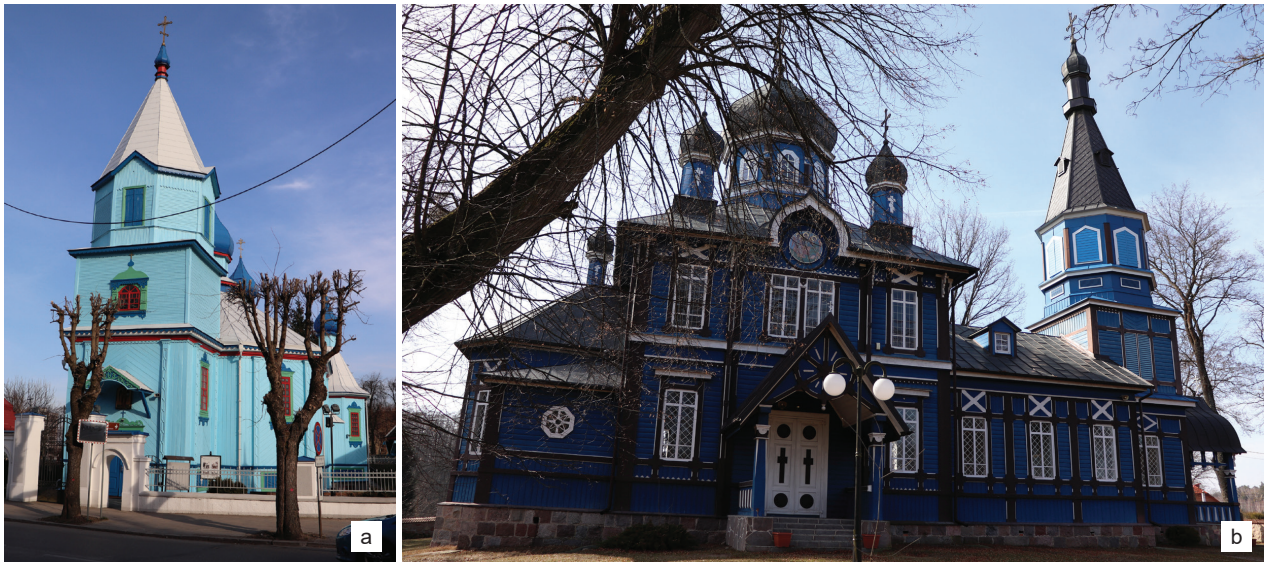


Fig. 5. Views of the largest researched buildings: a) parish church of St. Archangel Michael in Bielsko Podlaskie, b) parish church of Protection of Mother of God in Puchły (photo by K. Woszczenko)

II. 5. Obiekty największe wśród badanych: a) cerkiew parafialna pw. św. Archaniola Michała w Bielsku Podlaskim, b) cerkiew parafialna pw. Opieki Matki Bożej w Puchłach (fot. K. Woszczenko)

way – including the fact that there are no side entrances with decorated porches, and the drum above the nave is lower and covered with a less complicated roof. Analysing the appearance of the buildings' shapes, it was noticed that the church in Dubicze Cerkiewne (Fig. 9a) and Rogacze (Fig. 9b) were the most solid.

It was found that some facilities changed the colours of their façade finishes during their existence. The church in Narew changed its colour at least twice – initially it was blue, then it was green, until in 2019 the original blue colour of the wooden façade was restored. It should be assumed that not all details of the changes in the colour of the façade are known due to the fire that took place in 1990, when – as the current parish priest says – *part of the church's documentation burned down*¹¹.

In addition to the Orthodox church in Narew, four other churches had different façade colours in the past, and currently they are blue. These will be the following Orthodox churches: in Ploski – until renovation in 2020 it was brown in colour [35]; in Puchły – until 2014 it was grey-green (although archival photos available in sources suggest that it was a light blue colour, which was destroyed over the years and consequently changed its shade to grey-green) [36]; in Rogacze – brown until 2011 [37] and in Suwałki – where the façades were originally green, later blue-grey until renovation in 2013–2021¹².

Four buildings should be distinguished which have *czasownia*¹³ or branch churches related to the cult of the

Virgin Mary in their parish. These are: parish in Koźmany – branch of St. Kazan Icon of Our Lady in Pańki-Zajaczkki, where, by the way, [...] *the biggest feast in the parish is on the day of the Kazan Icon of Our Lady*¹⁴; parish in Narew – chapel of St. Kazan Icon of Our Lady in Narew; parish in Ploski – cemetery chapel of St. Kazan Icon of Our Lady in Knorozny and the parish in Werstok (parish church, Fig. 10) – branch of St. Blessed Virgin Mary in Opaka Duża [37], [38]. Thanks to this, in the parishes mentioned above, the Mother of God is particularly worshipped and additional celebrations related to Her are held.

Conducting numerous conversations with clergy, the authors often came across statements regarding the association of the colour blue with the sky and/or the Theotokos, while Father Paisjusz, a monk from the monastery of St. Demetrius in Saki also added that [...] *the colour blue was also easily available*¹⁵.

The next group studied are wooden Orthodox churches, which had blue façades in the past, but today have different façade colours (Table 3).

When looking at the buildings from this group, it should be mentioned that during the renovation of the church in Kuraszewo, the blue roof was left, despite the change in the colour of the wood on the façades.

The experience related to the inventory of the Orthodox church in Malesze, which was undergoing renovation at that time, also seems interesting. A new form work in the colour of light natural wood was noticed on the side and rear façades, while the previous one – blue – was still present in the entrance part (tower). Sources show that the church originally had light wood façades.

¹¹ Conversation with Fr. Michał Dudicz, parish priest in Narew, 15.03.2023.

¹² Conversation with Fr. Łukasz Ławreszuk, parish priest in Elk and Suwałki in the years 2011–2018, 08.04.2023 and a conversation with Fr. Marek Kozłowski, current parish priest in Augustów and Suwałki, 12.06.2023.

¹³ *Czasownia* (colloquially) – a chapel, i.e. a small Orthodox church, usually without a separate place for a presbytery [1, p. 232].

¹⁴ Conversation with Fr. Jan Kojło, parish priest in Koźmany, 23.03.2023.

¹⁵ Conversation with Father Paisjusz, a monk from the monastery of St. Dmitri Sołuński in Saki, 28.03.2023.



Fig. 6. View of the southern façade of the parish church of Icon of Our Lady of All the Afflicted Joy in Koterka (photo by K. Woszczenko)

Il. 6. Widok na elewację południową cerkwi parafialnej pw. Ikony Matki Bożej Wszystkich Strapionych Radość w Koterce (fot. K. Woszczenko)

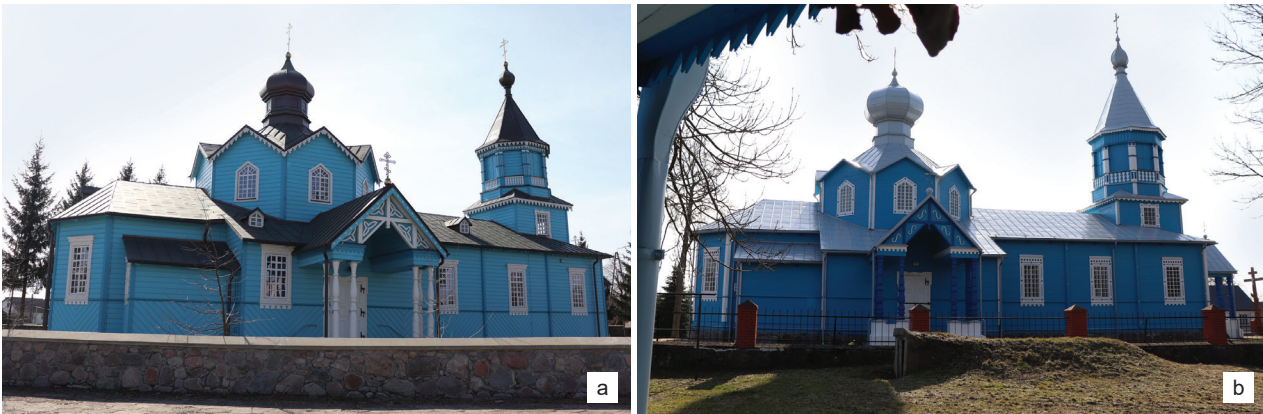


Fig. 7. Views of the examined buildings with a similar shape:

a) parish church of Exaltation of the Cross of the Lord in Narew, b) parish church of Nativity of St. John the Baptist in Pasyunki (photo by K. Woszczenko)

Il. 7. Badane obiekty mające analogiczne ukształtowanie bryły:

a) cerkiew parafialna pw. Podwyższenia Krzyża Pańskiego w Narwi; b) cerkiew parafialna pw. Narodzenia św. Jana Chrzciciela w Pasynkach (fot. K. Woszczenko)

Among the buildings with blue façades, the Orthodox church in Orzeszkowo has an interesting history. From the 1990s until the reconstruction in 2009, its façades were finished with light blue siding, and today they are finished with brown wooden boarding. According to the current parish priest Rafał Wawreniuk, the earlier finishing of the façade could have been due to its good availability and the influence of the then prevailing trend. There is also a possible connection with the feast of the Ascension of the Lord, which is associated with heaven and heavenliness, like the colour blue itself. It should be assumed that this is also the reason for the presence of blue clapboard inside the presbytery¹⁶.

¹⁶ Conversation with Fr. Rafał Wawreniuk, parish priest in Orzeszkowo, 12.03.2023.

It was noticed that the colour blue is used not only to finish the exterior of the churches, but is also present in their interiors. An example of this is the parish church in Dubicze Cerkiewne, where the interior has light blue ceiling boarding, or the iconostasis with blue details in the church in Narew.

Conclusions

The Orthodox Church has been combining theology and aesthetics for centuries. A temple of beauty is one that takes into account the richness of theological symbolism in its aesthetics. The article shows the multitude of meanings of the colour blue. In theology, blue is associated primarily with God and His divinity and symbolizes heaven, truth, goodness, the unattainable divine mystery, and virtue. The Mother of God, because She is an earthly being

Fig. 8. View of the northern façade of the parish church of St. Prophet Elijah in Podbiele (photo by K. Woszczenko)

Il. 8. Widok na elewację północną cerkwi parafialnej pw. św. Proroka Eliasza w Podbielu (fot. K. Woszczenko)



Fig. 9. Views of the researched buildings which have a solid shape:
a) parish church of Protection of the Mother of God in Dubicze Cerkiewne,
b) parish church of Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Rogacze
(photo by K. Woszczenko)

Il. 9. Obiekty podlegające opracowaniu mające przysadzistą bryłę:
a) cerkiew parafialna pw. Opieki Bogurodzicy w Dubiczach Cerkiewnych,
b) cerkiew parafialna pw. Narodzenia NMP w Rogaczach
(fot. K. Woszczenko)

who gave birth to God, is often depicted in iconography in fully or partially blue clothes. This is a reference to Her purity and virginity.

Among the wooden Orthodox churches in Podlasie, there are currently and in the past buildings with façades in various shades of blue. Analysing the possible reasons why this particular colour was chosen to finish the façades of the examined buildings, it was shown that the colour blue is associated with the Virgin Mary and Her cult.

The current research conducted showed the existence of 75 traditional wooden religious buildings in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. Among all the wooden Orthodox churches known so far in this area, there are 33 existing buildings associated with the colour blue (21 parish churches, 4 branch

churches and 8 cemetery churches). They constitute 44% of all buildings of this type in the analysed area. The article includes 21 parish churches, of which 17 buildings currently have blue façades, and 4 had blue façades in the past. In the group of modern blue Orthodox churches, 13 buildings were also characterized by white details on the façades, which makes the combination of blue and white the most popular among them.

The studied parish churches come from the following centuries (Tables 2, 3): 18th century (6 currently), 19th century (7 currently and 1 in the past), 20th century (4 currently and 3 in the past). Additionally, in the comparative analysis of the number of blue Orthodox churches in relation to the number of other churches in particular centuries of



Fig. 10. View from the east-south of the parish church of Exaltation of the Cross of the Lord in Werstok (photo by K. Woszczenko)

Il. 10. Widok od strony wschodnio-południowej na cerkiew parafialną pw. Podwyższenia Krzyża Pańskiego w Werstoku (fot. K. Woszczenko)

their construction, a clear dominance of the construction of wooden churches in the 19th century is visible. The largest absolute number of blue churches was also built in the 19th century. This trend coincides with the increasing popularity of using blue colour for external wall finishing in rural buildings, the reason for which is most likely to be sought in the discovery, popularization and widespread availability of synthetic ultramarine at that time [19].

The churches discussed can be divided into 3 groups in terms of their patrons: those related to the Mother of God and Her feasts (4), with Christ (5) and with various Saints (12). During the research, it was noticed that 4 parishes have chapels dedicated to the cult of the Virgin Mary. Therefore, a total of 8 studied buildings are related to the cult of the Mother of God, which constitutes 38% of all the examined Orthodox churches.

Summary

The results of the conducted research constitute a strong argument confirming the thesis about non-aesthetic grounds for the use of blue colours in the façade decoration of Orthodox churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship, resulting from theological symbolism. The colour blue is associated primarily with God and divinity. In the case of the studied churches, it is also related to the cult of the Theotokos. This is not a condition that always occurs, but – according to the study – it applies to 38% of the facilities in question. When designing new Orthodox churches, the theological meaning may be expressed in the use of blue in accordance with the symbolism adopted in the Church and the tradition prevailing in a given area.

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Abstract

Synergy of architecture and theology on the example of wooden Orthodox churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship with blue façades

The article presents research results regarding the importance of the synergy of theology and aesthetics of the architecture of blue Orthodox churches in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. The research was conducted using manuscript sources, subject literature, private communications and Internet sources. Photographic inventories of the sacred buildings under study were also carried out.

The Podlaskie Voivodeship has the largest number of Orthodox churches in Poland. Due to the good availability of wood, these areas are associated with wooden construction. A characteristic feature of wooden Orthodox churches located in the analysed area is the colourful finish of their façades. Colours have rich theological symbolism, especially visible in icons. Blue is often associated with the Theotokos, but also universally with divinity. The study covered 17 parish churches that currently have blue façades in the following towns: Augustowo, Bielsk Podlaski, Dubicze Cerkiewne, Koterka, Kożany, Narew, Pasynki, Ploski, Puchły, Podbiele, Rajsk, Rogacze, Saki, Stary Kormin, Suwałki, Szczyty-Dzięciołowo, Werstok and 4 facilities with blue façades in the past – in Kuraszewo, Malesze, Milejczyce and Orzeszkowo. The churches were described in terms of the date of construction and the colour of the façade finish. The majority of the buildings are oriented, have a tripartite interior visible from the outside and were built in a log construction. Exceptions to these rules are included in the text.

Our research has shown a connection between the blue colour of the façade and the Mother of God and theological symbolism. When designing new churches, the use of blue should be taken into account in accordance with the symbolism adopted in the Orthodox Church and the tradition prevailing in a given area.

Key words: architecture, Orthodox church, blue, theology, symbols

Streszczenie

Synergia architektury i teologii na przykładzie drewnianych cerkwi województwa podlaskiego z elewacjami w kolorze niebieskim

W artykule zaprezentowano wyniki badań dotyczące znaczenia synergii teologii i estetyki architektury niebieskich cerkwi prawosławnych województwa podlaskiego. Badania zostały przeprowadzone z wykorzystaniem źródeł rękopiśmiennych, literatury przedmiotu, komunikatów prywatnych i źródeł internetowych. Przeprowadzono także inwentaryzacje fotograficzne opracowywanych obiektów sakralnych.

Na terenie województwa podlaskiego występuje największa liczba cerkwi prawosławnych w Polsce. Ze względu na dobrą dostępność drewna tereny te są kojarzone z budownictwem drewnianym. Cechą charakterystyczną drewnianych świątyń prawosławnych znajdujących się na analizowanym obszarze jest różnobarwne wykończenie ich elewacji. Kolory mają bogatą symbolikę teologiczną widoczną szczególnie na ikonach. Błękit jest często kojarzony z Bogurodnicą, ale też uniwersalnie z boskością. Opracowaniem objęto 17 cerkwi parafialnych mających obecnie elewacje w kolorze niebieskim w miejscowościach: Augustowo, Bielsk Podlaski, Dubicze Cerkiewne, Koterka, Kożany, Narew, Pasynki, Płoski, Puchły, Podbiele, Rajsk, Rogacze, Saki, Stary Kornin, Suwałki, Szczyty-Dzięciołowo, Werstok oraz cztery obiekty z niebieską elewacją w przeszłości – w Kuraszewie, Maleszach, Milejczycach i Orzeszkowie. Świątynie zostały opisane pod względem daty budowy oraz koloru wykończenia elewacji. Przeważająca część obiektów jest orientowana, ma widoczny z zewnątrz trójpodział wnętrza oraz została wybudowana w konstrukcji zrębowej. Wyjątki od tych reguł zostały ujęte w tekście.

Badania wykazały powiązanie niebieskiego koloru elewacji z Matką Bożą i symboliką teologiczną. W przypadku projektowania nowych świątyń należy wziąć pod uwagę zastosowanie niebieskiego koloru zgodnie z przyjętą w Kościele symboliką i tradycją panującą na danym terenie.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, cerkiew prawosławna, niebieski, teologia, symbolika