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“Slavic” or “Germanic Spirit”? Examples of the Ideologisation of Arcades in Research on Architecture in the 19th and 20th centuries¹

Abstract

Travelling across present-day Poland, it is only exceptionally possible to come across a specific type of historic urban and rural houses with a ground-level section open on three sides and supported on columns or posts. Yet still in the first half of the 20th century, in some areas of Europe this type of a house was commonly found, and already a century earlier it had intrigued researchers investigating among other things, its origins of development. Within the current borders of Poland, arcaded houses are found in greater concentration in territories that in the past belonged to different political organisms and thus their research was conducted with the adoption of different optics. It is noteworthy that arcades were easily subjected to various more or less conscious manipulations in order to justify their native character, sometimes understood as belonging to particular peoples, regions, nations or even races. The paper provides hypothesis that arcades are a construction element extremely liable to ideologisation. In order to illustrate this problem, the paper presents methods of interpreting the origin of arcades in former East and West Prussia, Silesia, Lesser Poland and Lublin Province in the period from almost the beginning of the 19th century, when researchers started to be interested in this element, until 1939 when Erich Kulke's book was published, which was the clearest result of arcades' ideologisation. These interpretations were divided into a few main groups, which made it possible to compare the narratives and to show how the same arguments could lead to different conclusions. Unique issues, characteristic only of particular regions, were also identified. Ultimately, an attempt was made to answer the question of what influenced the liability of arcades to ideologisation. Since the authors of the research, often architects, promoted the preservation and use of arcades referring to old

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patterns in new developments, the question was also asked whether such developments actually occurred.

Keywords: medievalism, arcade architecture, arcades, art historiography, Poland, West Prussia, Silesia, Lesser Poland, Lublin Province

In the area of contemporary Poland we can identify at least several regions, where arcade architecture played (or sometimes still plays) a significant role. What merit consideration is, on the one hand, the popularity of such construction elements in houses and its impact on the urban and rural landscape, and, on the other hand, the long tradition of its research, mostly in the areas of former East and West Prussia, Silesia, Lesser Poland and Lublin Province.

Arcades as a construction and decorative element generate a whole lot of issues and questions, still waiting for consideration and convincing answers. Some of them cover the very basics, such as the origins of this architectural element and its cradle, from which the idea of constructing houses with arcade fronts spread into vast areas across Europe. Research literature on the history of both rural and urban houses, conducted since the beginning of the 19th century, provides premises to presume that arcades were liable to various, more or less consciously conducted manipulations, mostly to justify their native character, often understood as something belonging to certain peoples, regions, nations or even races. It can be, therefore, claimed that arcades has been subjected to various ideologisations. In order to prove this claim, this paper will demonstrate how the origins of arcades were interpreted in different regions, which are now parts of Poland and earlier used to belong to other political organisms, in the period from the early 19th century, when the researchers began to show their interest in that field, until 1939 when the most vivid example of its ideologisation was created - a book by Erich Kulke. The interpretations will be divided into two main groups of topics, which will allow to trace narration vectors and to demonstrate the same arguments could have led to different conclusions and which issues were unique for particular regions. Finally, we will answer the question: what made the arcades so liable to ideologisation? As the researchers, often architects themselves, promoted preservation of arcades and their use in new investments as elements corresponding with the old patterns, an additional question appears: were such projects indeed completed?

In contemporary Polish language the term “arcade” (*Polish: podcień/podcienie*) describes a ground-level section of a building, open on three sides and supported on columns or posts and refers, primarily, to residential architecture.² In the past the term had a broader meaning, e.g. in the second volume of *Polish Language Dictionary* from 1807 it is defined simply as “a shaded place”,³ and could denote various forms

2 The definition in Polish Language Dictionary: *Słownik Języka Polskiego PWN*, <https://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/podcie%C5%84.html> [accessed 30 August 2021].

3 S. B. Linde, *Słownik języka polskiego*, vol. 2, part 2, Warszawa, 1807.

of areas shaded by a roof. Similarly broad meaning has the German term “Laube”, and its multiple uses were shown in the dictionary by the Grimm brothers.⁴ Not taking too deep dive into the linguistics, it should only be mentioned that Polish “podcienie”, Czech “podloubí”, Italian “portico” or German “Laube” are terms used in literature in various contexts and sometimes other, unusual terms were used to describe the same constructions.

In the publications presented below the terms “arcade” and “Laube” were usually used without any detailed descriptions or definitions, as their authors assumed that the word meant exactly what was being discussed in the text – i.e. entrance arcades of rural houses (usually detached ones), townhouses (creating systems of arcaded fronts), castle cloisters and wooden walkways and galleries in the urban backyards.

The current state of knowledge tells us that various forms of covered walkways and entrances were constructed in different historical periods all over the globe to protect people and property from unfavourable weather.⁵ Sometimes, however, particular solutions gained popularity in a given territory and became a unique, characteristic phenomenon, for example arcaded houses (or complexes thereof), which in the urban environment of Europe have their roots in medieval architecture. Their existence in cities is confirmed at least in 13th century, and the solution became incredibly popular throughout the centuries in many parts of the continent, also transpiring into the rural areas. The question of their origins and the routes along which they spread across Europe remains open.

In 1878, in Marburg a General Assembly of German Associations for History and Antiquities (*Gesamtverein der deutschen Geschichts- und Altertumsvereine*), an organisation established 36 years earlier and grouping both scientists and amateurs interested in the history of German-speaking lands, took place.⁶ The assembly can be regarded as a form of cornerstone for systematic research of historical houses in the mentioned area due to then-accepted postulate for carrying out a complex inventory of historical buildings.⁷ Throughout the years, consistently conducted documentation,⁸ historical and ethnographic works yielded data which allowed for attempts of creating architectural characteristics of houses in different regions,

4 *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*, digitalisierte Fassung im Wörterbuchnetz des Trier Center for Digital Humanities, Version 01/21, <https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB> [accessed 30 August 2021].

5 Compare the remarks in: K. Dumała, “Przyrynkowa zabudowa podcieniowa. Źródła inspiracji drogi przenikania wzorców, analogie”, in: *Dom w mieście średniowiecznym i nowożytnym*, ed. B. Gediga, Wrocław, 2004, p. 106.

6 *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften: Akteure, Netzwerke, Forschungsprogramme*, eds. M. Fahlbusch, I. Haar, A. Pinwinkler, vol. 1, Berlin–Boston, 2017, p. 1033.

7 Ibid.

8 An early result of such activity was a collection of graphics representing examples of wooden architecture, published in 1883 and edited by *Verbande Deutscher Architekten- und Ingenieur-Vereine* and *Gesamttvereine der Deutschen Geschichts- und Alterthums-Vereine*: H. Cuno, C. Schäfer, *Holzarchitektur vom 14-18 Jahrhundert*, Berlin, 1883.

as well as singling out certain unique features and placing them in supraregional context.⁹ Those final actions are typical for the research of arcaded architecture in the eastern fringes of German settlement area (mostly East and West Prussia and Silesia). Publications from the 19th and early 20th century usually mention the topic of arcades in broader works about rural architecture of particular areas, sometimes only in footnotes, sometimes dedicating whole chapters to it. Nevertheless, the question of origins of such constructions is always present.

Arcades were also spotted in the 19th century in other regions of modern-day Poland, identified as remnants of old cultures and featured in multiple articles published in hiking magazines. For instance, in 1838 an anonymous author in "Przyjaciel Ludu" ["The Folk's Friend"] mentioned arcaded cottages in the area around Jarocin, and in 1866 the town of Krosno and its market square arcades were described in "Tygodnik Ilustrowany" ["The Illustrated Weekly"], additionally illustrated by a famous Polish history painter Jan Matejko.¹⁰ In both cases the houses were described as beautiful. Drawings by Matejko, presenting disappearing wooden architecture, including wooden arcaded houses, heavily influenced the consciousness of later researchers and were often cited as the most ornamental examples, such as houses in Wiśnicz or Muszyna.¹¹ However, more extensive and methodical research of arcaded architecture was conducted later, in the beginning of the 20th century.

As it has been already mentioned in the introduction, the researchers in particular regions reached into various themes in their attempts of drawing out the genesis of arcade architecture, often looking into the local historical and cultural (or even environmental) peculiarities. However, the same arguments were sometimes used to support completely different claims.

One of the early attempts of researching arcade architecture is the work by August von Haxtenhausen from 1839, which presents the characteristics of villages in East and West Prussia.¹² The author identifies two main types of rural residential buildings: the Prussian one, present across the entire East and West Prussia, and the Lithuanian one. One of the characteristics of the former type was supposedly its arcaded entrance (in the work called "Vorlaube"), also present in Prussian town-

9 In 1906 a two-volume work, composed of a text and a collection of images was published: *Das Bauernhaus im Deutschen Reiche und in seinen Grenzgebieten*, Dresden, 1906. For the purposes of comparative research it was also useful to recognise the structures of houses in non-German speaking areas. E.g., the works of Karl Rhamm from the Germanic-Slavic borderlands were particularly appreciated: K. Rhamm, *Ethnographische Beiträge zur germanisch-slawischen Altertums-kunde*, vol. 1: *Die Grosshufen der Nordgermanen*, Braunschweig, 1905; idem, *Urzeitliche Bauernhöfe in germanisch-slawischem Waldgebiet*, vol. 1: *Altgermanische Bauernhöfe im Übergange vom Saal zu Fletz und Stube*, Braunschweig, 1908.

10 "Ułamek o architekturze", *Przyjaciel Ludu*, 1838, 4, vol. 2, no. 49, pp. 386–387; "Okolica Krosna. Z notat podróży Józefa Łepkowskiego", *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, 1866, XIII, no. 329, pp. 17–18.

11 For instance: S. Szyller, *Czy mamy polską architekturę?*, Warszawa, 1916, p. 44; L. Puszet, *Studia nad polskim budownictwem drewnianem*, part 1: *Chata*, Kraków, 1903, p. 63; K. Mokłowski, *Sztuka ludowa w Polsce*, Lwów, 1903, p. 270; C. Thullie, "Podcienia i arkadowane dziedzińce w za-bytkowej architekturze Polski", *Teka Komisji Urbanistyki i Architektury*, 1971, vol. V, pp. 119–131.

12 A. von Haxthausen, *Die ländliche Verfassung in den Provinzen Ost- und Westpreußen*, Königsberg, 1839.

houses. The author sees this element as “something southern-oriental” and links its origins with the arrival of German knights in the discussed area,¹³ probably earlier observed during the Crusades. Despite the fact that such architecture is present “here and there” all across Germany, the author considered it to be common and widespread only in Prussia.

Bernhard Schmid – a provincial conservation officer in West Prussia – also claimed in 1904 that arcades (Vorlaube) were uniquely characteristic for the rural architecture of the region.¹⁴ The state of research on the origins of such forms was not advanced enough for him. Schmid only claimed that the presence of arcaded houses on the right side of the Vistula is limited to the Prussian core, dominated almost entirely by the German culture brought there by the Teutonic Order. Perhaps the forms of rural houses were influenced by the local urban landscapes, as most of the towns in the Order’s territory featured arcades running around the central market square. Schmid also pointed at the fact that arcades have existed in towns founded on the Kulm law (Gniew, Olsztyn) since the medieval period. There is no doubt that they should be linked with German cultural sources, which were later borrowed by rural architecture.¹⁵

Schmid, in the catalogue of antiquities of the County of Marienburg, noticed that arcades in their basic understanding (Vorlauben) are usually such simple and obvious architectural forms that they have existed since the ancient times in all possible territories, from southern Greece to Scandinavia, in temples, townhouses and rural cottages.¹⁶ Therefore the use of an arcade in architecture is nothing uncommon, but its form used in rural arcaded houses is uniquely Prussian. According to Schmid such forms might have arrived from the south, via Silesia, Bohemia and Tyrol, although examples from Bern and Münster show that arcaded houses were built virtually everywhere. A new thread in the issue of origins of such architecture in Schmid’s work is the inspiration taken from the Teutonic Order castles and their cloisters.

As it can be seen, the researchers of East and West Prussia tried to solve the riddle of the origins of arcades in local history and noticed the possible influence of Teutonic Order castle cloister architecture, whose provenance might be “oriental”. It should be mentioned that due to known examples of medieval arcaded townhouses, their precedence before their rural counterparts was widely accepted. This comes with surprisingly low awareness (or intentional ignorance) of the existence of arcaded houses in other German territories, perhaps resulting from the fact that the research was limited only to rural areas of a given region. The phrase “here and there” used by Haxthausen encompasses, for instance, an impressive number of towns with arcaded houses in Bavaria. An interesting addition to the theories

13 Ibid., p. 69.

14 B. Schmid, “Westpreußische Holzbauten”, *Mitteilungen des Westpreußischen Geschichts-Vereins*, 1904, 3, p. 26.

15 Ibid., p. 149.

16 B. Schmid, *Die Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler des Kreises Marienburg*, vol. 1: *Die Städte Neuteich und Tiegenhof und die ländlichen Ortschaften*, Danzig, 1919, p. LXXIX.