



## Review

Christofer Herrmann

*Mittelalterliche Architektur im Preussenland. Untersuchungen zur Frage der Kunstlandschaft und -Geographie,*

Mihael Imhof Verlag, Petersberg 2007, 816 pages, 1425 illustrations.

Christofer Herrmann's book is about mediaeval architecture on the former Prussian territories, which is presented in its regional and geographical context. The author focused on the architecture between the rivers of

Vistula and Niemen – the region whose history is full of turns in the Polish and German-Prussian statehood. At present this is a north-east part of Poland and a small Russian territory neighbouring with Lithuania. Christofer Herrmann is an art historian, he graduated from Mainz University, has been living in Poland for fifteen years and now is a professor at Gdańsk University.

Christofer Herrmann referred to the work of the remarkable German art historian Georg Dehio who was the originator and author of the first volumes of the series 'Handbuch der Deutschen Kunstdenkmäler', which were published one hundred years ago. This series has been published until today and it contains synthetic descriptions and catalogues of art monuments from the former territories of Germany. More than fifty years ago, issued as part of this series was a volume about the art of the former Prussian territories (Ernst Gall, *Detschordensland Preussen*, 'Handbuch der Deutschen Kunstdenkmäler', München-Berlin 1952). The architecture of the former Prussian territories was also the subject of works of many Polish researchers. The existing state of research was presented in 'Catalogue of art monuments in Poland', which has been issued since 1951, in the series 'Art Monuments in Poland' as well as in the collective work about Gothic architecture in Poland (*Gothic architecture in Poland*, Warszawa 1995).

Christofer Herrmann's book describes churches, castles and town halls and it consists of two principal parts – synthesis and catalogue. It is complemented by footnotes, an index of town names and a list of sources and studies. In the synthetic part, after presenting the state of research, the author analysed architecture according to



one scheme. He applied a computer information program GIS and presented statistical data on the geographical base and on charts. In this way, he tried to systematise and determine the typology of architectonic forms and present the regions in which stylistic similarities occurred.

An important part of the work constitutes the description of features of the particular functional architectural types – churches, castles and town halls. The author set apart types of churches and determined the number of hall buildings, churches with presbyteries, with the tower or the tower and the presbytery. The same statistical research was conducted by the author with reference to functional elements (for example, sacristies, porches, towers) and architectural details (for example, tops, pillars, windows, vaults). He also compared the churches in which the presbytery was built as the first part with those where the nave was built first. He also concentrated on the churches which were built in one phase or in two phases. The basis for determining these architectonic types was also the complexity of the building's projection. The author distinguished the churches with the presbytery closed in simple or polygonal way, the churches without the presbytery with the tower and finally, the hall buildings. The author also discussed the constructions of churches. In the further part of his synthesis, the author analysed castles and town halls in a similar way.

The next part of the work refers to formal and technological comparisons. The author particularly concentrated on such decorative forms as tops, walls, pinnacles, blind windows, etc. Moreover, the problem of using terracotta slabs, tracery polychrome painting and building walls of dark brick and making patterns with this brick was tackled. Special emphasis was placed on vaults as well as on types of materials and building techniques. The following types of constructions were discussed: wooden, wooden and brick, stone and brick, brick. The brick architecture was analysed with regard to the size of the used bricks. Additionally, the types of profiled and glazed bricks were considered. Next, the author made an analysis of proportions and metric quantities of buildings and he discussed the problems referring to the organization of the building site, the costs connected with the building process and participation of craftsmen of various specialties.

The next chapter of this book refers to the search for directions of architectonic forms transfer. The author confirmed the existing opinions about the transfer of building standards from Pomerania, Mecklenburg and Brandenburg. He also took notice of similarities of Prussian buildings to English and oriental forms. He considered the influence of the Prussian architecture on the buildings which were erected in the neighbourhood. During his analyses, he also used a statistical and geographical method. He compared not only buildings as a whole, but also their particular elements such as tops and towers. He reflected on dependencies of church forms on liturgy and he ana-

lysed the transfer of formal standards from buildings of various functions. The synthesis was completed by an attempt at assessing the artistic level of the Prussian architecture which was conditioned by historical and functional factors. Apart from this, the author considered the years 1350–1400 as the period of greatest prosperity in the building industry and he set apart the following three stylistic periods: early, developed and reducing.

An integral part of the study is a catalogue which contains almost 800 towns and villages and descriptions of almost 1000 buildings, including 427 which have never been discussed before. Each description was elaborated according to the following scheme. After the functional type of the building was determined, the author presented the condition in which its mediaeval part was preserved. Then, he discussed building materials and presented the description of the structure. In the further part, he mentioned the most important dates connected with the structure and dating system of the building process. The descriptions were completed with the assessment of the artistic level and presentation of the relevant bibliography. The dating was based, among others, on written and iconographic sources, documents, chronicles, the building code and accounting books. Herrmann also used formal comparative analyses – for example, the dating criteria was based on the format of bricks, their colours and types of joints. He used the method of dendrochronology as a dating method and determined the time of the building of rafter framings of thirty structures. The catalogue part is richly illustrated. In this catalogue, the author included archival drawings (sometimes published for the first time) as well as current photographs of architecture. The whole catalogue is structured in a way which is legible and easy to understand.

The study of Christofer Herrmann presents the current state of knowledge about the mediaeval architecture of former Prussia and is an excellent starting point for further architectonic research. New research perspectives are connected with the development of computer documentation techniques and also with the improvements in absolute dating methods such as dendrochronology, thermoluminescence, C<sup>14</sup> carbon analysis, etc. Besides, under the modern stratifications sometimes there are hidden unknown mediaeval relics whose discovery may change our opinions about the old architecture.

However, the publications such as the reviewed book will not lose their value, namely documentation studies which register the state of buildings at the particular periods of time. Such documentations often become the only trace of the architecture which for various reasons suffered destruction. This is not the only value of Herrmann's book. It has been edited in a superb way with an impressive layout.

*Ewa Luźyniecka*

***Średniowieczna architektura na ziemiach pruskich.  
Badania z zakresu historii sztuki w kontekście geograficznym i krajobrazowym***

Praca Christofera Herrmanna to książka o średniowiecznej architekturze dawnych ziem pruskich, ukazująca jej regionalny i geograficzny kontekst. Autor skupił się w niej na architekturze między Wisłą a Niemnem, którego historia była pełna zwrotów w polskiej i niemiecko-pruskiej państwowości. Obecnie jest to północno-wschodnia część Polski i niewielki obszar Rosji, sąsiadujący z Litwą. Christofers Herrmann jest historykiem sztuki, absolwentem Uniwersytetu w Moguncji (Meinz), od piętnastu lat mieszka w Polsce i jest profesorem na Uniwersytecie w Gdańsku.

Przedmiotem analiz autora były kościoły, zamki, i ratusze pruskie. Książka składa się z dwóch zasadniczych części – syntezy i katalogu. Jest uzupełniona przypisami, indeksem nazw miejscowości, spisem źródeł i opracowań. W części syntetycznej, po omówieniu stanu badań, autor próbował usystematyzować i ustalić typologię form architektonicznych oraz przedstawić rejony występowania podobieństw stylistycznych. Odrębną częścią pracy jest katalog zawierający prawie 800 miejscowości i opisujący blisko 1000 budowli, w tym aż 427 omówionych po raz pierwszy.

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Praca Christofera Herrmanna prezentuje obecny stan wiedzy na temat średniowiecznej architektury dawnych Prus i jest doskonałym punktem wyjściowym do dalszych badań architektonicznych. Nowe perspektywy badawcze są związane zarówno z rozwojem komputerowych technik dokumentacyjnych, jak i z udoskonalaniem bezwzględnych metod datowania takich jak dendrochronologia, termoluminescencja, analizy węgla C<sup>14</sup> itd. Nadal także pod nowożytnymi nawarstwieniami są ukryte czasami nieznanymi średniowieczne relikty, których odkrycie może zmienić nasze wyobrażenia o dawnej architekturze.

Nie będą jednak traciły na wartości takie publikacje jak recenzowana książka, czyli prace o charakterze dokumentacyjnym, rejestrującym stan zachowania obiektów w poszczególnych czasach. Te dokumentacje stają się niekiedy jedynym śladem architektury, która z różnych przyczyn uległa zniszczeniu. Nie jest to jedyny walor książki Herrmanna. Jest ona edytorsko bardzo dopracowana, z efektowną szatą graficzną.

*Translated by T. Setkiewicz*

