

The Palace of the Cracovian Bishops in Kielce

It is considered to be the best-preserved architectural construction in Poland from the Vasa dynasty times. The palace belonged to the Cracovian bishops who owned large estates in the Świętokrzyski region. The residence founded by bishop Jakub Zadzik (1582-1642) was erected on the Cathedral Hill. In the years 1637-1644, a one-story building was raised, its roofs decorated with towers on roof hips. The design of the Kielce palace is attributed to Thomas Poncino of Lugano (Italy), an author of numerous sacral and lay buildings in Poland. A principle of triple division was applied during the construction of the palace front, supposedly following orders of the founder who was an enemy of the Arian movement rejecting the dogma of the Trinity.

The front yard of the palace was enclosed with walls. There was a grand entrance gate from the city side and a flower and kitchen garden in the backyard. It was known as an Italian garden and had a 17th century layout of flowerbeds.

Remodeled in the 18th century, the palace acquired a Baroque appearance with one-story wings on both sides of the front yard. Orangeries were arranged in the palace garden, while the administration section was provided with stables, coach-houses, manege, granary and brewery. Some of them have survived till the present time.

The Italian Garden was arranged according to the example of castle gardens usually located inside the fortifications. The central part was occupied by symmetrically arranged four beds with herbs and flowers in bloom, while the whole lot was surrounded by fruit trees. Special steps running close to the palace loggia were leading to the garden. A giardino segreto, or a small private garden, was placed very close to the palace wall; it was accessible only for the palace owner and could be entered from the apartment via a stair-case located in the alcove.

When the civil authorities took over the bishops' estates in 1789, the garden was divided into plots designated for civil officers; it resulted in the disappearance of original garden arrangement and its vegetation. It was returned to its original 17th century shape in 2003, while the flower beds were reconstructed to their state from the mid-18th century.

Following the nationalization of bishops' properties (1789), the palace hosted different institutions to eventually become the seat of the National Museum in 1971. Permanent exhibitions were soon arranged and conservation works started on the reconstruction of the bishops' apartment and the palace garden. The palace interiors were marked by the original function of the building. The upper level chambers preserved their original interiors, beam-framed floors, paintings and friezes on the walls. Interior decorations of the chambers are a good example of palatial furnishings from the 17th and 18th centuries. They include furniture, tapestries, paintings, pieces of arms and weapons, as well as items of goldsmithery in the treasury. Plafonds are worth of particular attention: paintings on the ceilings of three chambers depict activities of the palace founder.

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Krzyżtopór Castle

The castle is located in a little town of Ujazd situated near the south-eastern boundary of the Świętokrzyskie Mountains.

The castle of Krzyżtopór in Ujazd had a defensive character. Its construction that took 13 years was supervised by Italian architect Lawrence Senes, who also designed the project. Built inside massive stone walls with bastions at the five corners, this mannerist palace embodied the structure of the calendar. It had four towers symbolizing the four seasons and 12 big halls, one for each month. Exactly 52 rooms were built, one for each week in the year, and 356 windows. The building occupied an area of 3.2 acres, its walls were 600-meter-long and its cubature amounted to 70 thousand cubic meters. Marble and mirrors were used in the interiors of the underground stables, while the ball room had an aquarium in place of the ceiling. The water supply installations used water from the local spring, and rooms were heated with warm air coming to them through special air passages.

The walls of the residence were decorated with portraits of the family ancestors and closer relatives of the Ossoliński family. They were supposed to be a proof of the family power and its great contributions to the fame of the Polish Republic.

The present-day ruins of the Krzyżtopór castle can only stir our imagination to visualize a really spectacular form of a 17th century magnate residence in Poland. Its founder could not enjoy it for a long time as a year after its completion Krzysztof Ossoliński died of a heart attack traveling to Cracow in order to take part in the sejm (parliament) session. The property was taken over by his son Krzysztof Baldwin Ossoliński. As captain of the Polish hussars, he joined a military campaign to defend Poland's eastern borders and died during the battle near Zborów in 1649, hit with a Tartar arrow. Swedish invaders turned the castle into their headquarters in 1655, but leaving the castle seriously destroyed and looted it. The destruction was completed by king Józef Rákóczi II with his Hungarian troops and Cossacks. The castle remained in use till 1770, but its subsequent owners were not able to maintain that monumental structure and it fell into ruin.

According to the Ossoliński family chronicle, a pit-a-pat of galloping horses woke up the castle guards in August 1649. They looked down the walls, but saw only one rider. They recognized the castle owner Krzysztof Baldwin Ossoliński. When the gates were opened, the knight was nowhere to be seen. Some time later the residents of the castle learned that the owner was killed during the battle of Zaborów in the province of Podolia. It is believed that ever since that time a rider in hussar's full armor has been appearing on the castle walls at dark or at night.

A White Lady also appears in the old castle. After being crossed in love, she became a nasty shrew. A legend has it that she kept a little white dog that recognized bad people. When the dog barked at a person, he or she was immediately thrown into the castle dungeon. Knowing the lady's unpleasant habits, one of the guests killed her as soon as the dog started barking at him. In spite of that, she continues to appear with her pet on the castle walls on certain nights.

The Krzyżtopór castle owes its status of an unconquerable fortress to the location and modern fortifications. Erected on a rocky foreland, the castle was surrounded by natural ravines and swamps. On the outside, the fortifications were additionally protected by a pentagonal earth bank with bastions on the corners.

Tourist Information Center in Ujazd

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Szydłów

acquired the name of Polish Carcassonne thanks to its well-preserved medieval urban layout and fortification walls (680 m) with the Renaissance Cracovian Gate. Built of the locally extracted limestone in the 14th century, the city walls were 1080 meters long and 1.8m thick. The town and its castle erected by king Kazimierz III Wielki in 1354 were additionally protected by a moat; its remains are still visible. Located within the city walls, the castle sits on an escarpment of an elevation gently dropping towards the valley of a little river Ciekąca. The castle in Szydłów hosted royal family members only from time to time. It was built in place of the former ducal residence. The main two-story Gothic building had some elements kept in the early-Renaissance style. Its rectangular risalit on the southern side contained the castle chapel. Both levels had wooden floors. The upper one was located close to the walls and known as the Knights' Hall. The building of the entrance gate is a part of the eastern section of the walls. In the western part of the castle yard stands a building known as the Skarbczyk, most probably a reconstructed and reshaped 16th century tower.

Szydłów suffered from fires throughout the centuries, but the most devastating one occurred in 1541. Soon the city was rebuilt and the castle was reconstructed in the Renaissance style. Nevertheless, it never resumed its former functions of a royal residence.

After the fire in 1630 and ravages committed by the Swedish troops during the deluge of 1656, the castle was renovated and the former entrance was

replaced by a building with gate. The final destruction of the castle took place during the passage of the Napoleon's army.

In the late 1960s important battlefield scenes were filmed near the castle in Szydłów for the purpose of the historical movie entitled Pan Wołodyjowski.

According to legend, a figure of the White Lady with a torch in hand appears on the castle walls, and the sound of galloping horses can also be heard. The locals say that a knight on a black horse passes near the castle walls every night.

In the 19th century the castle was remodeled to become a shelter for horses and coaches. Only three of its five Gothic portals survived the reconstruction works. The castle was turned into a permanent ruin in 1946. Of the partly preserved castle premises worth a visit is the Cracovian gate, Knights' Hall and the Skarbczyk, now the seat of the Regional Museum.

Tourist Information Center in Szydłów

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Regional Museum

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Chęciny

Ruiny On top of the highest rocky mountain in the environs, known as Mt Zamkowa, stands a ruin of the Gothic Royal Castle of Chęciny. It was erected before 1306, and king Władysław Łokietek, bishop Jan Muskate, and king Władysław II are mentioned as its founders.

The castle is an excellent example of medieval fortress situated on an elevation. In such cases, the castle walls were fitted to the elongated shape of the elevation. The castle yard was surrounded by 9-meter-high walls with loop-holes and parapet walks for guards. The fortress of Chęciny can be divided



Palace of the Cracovian Bishops in Kielce



Castle Krzyżtopór in Ujazd



Castle Krzyżtopór in Ujazd



Castle in Szydłów



Castle in Szydłów

into two parts. The upper one was built around 1300 and is closed with two round towers with walls 2-meter-thick. The lower part was added in the late 14th century and is composed of a yard with quadrangular tower and a ogival wicket door. The locally extracted gray lime stone was used as construction material for the castle walls, although there are parts built of red and pale sandstone and brick. The towers are round and can be entered only from the upper level. The road leading into the castle was constructed close to the walls so that defenders could keep it under full control. The approaching tract was protected by a dry moat and a timber bridge that could be burnt down in case of an enemy attack. The bridge led directly into the castle gate. The massive inner tower known as donjon was the last refuge for defenders.

In addition to its military and residential functions, the castle – from the end of the 14th century – was used as prison for members of landed gentry as well as for prisoners of war of high rank. Beginning with the early 17th century, the castle hosted the office of Chęciny starosts and served as municipal and communal archives.

Informacje praktyczne:

Tourist Information Center in Chęciny

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www.checiny.pl

Sandomierz Both the Sandomierz defensive walls and the castle were constructed during the reign of king Kazimierz III Wielki (14th c.). The castle was erected on the Castle Hill in place once occupied by a stronghold (10th c.).



Castle in Chęciny

It was a residence of prince Henryk Sandomierski, son of king Bolesław III Krzywousty (1086-1138).

The southern corner tower is the oldest part of the castle. The castle was enlarged during the reign of king Zygmunt I Stary (1467-1548) and later during the rule of his son Zygmunt II August. Till the present time survived only the part that linked two corner towers. Above the southern entrance visitors can see the plaque commemorating election of king Zygmunt I Stary with date (1520) and a cartouche containing the royal eagle. This fragment of the building was built with the use of a specially fired brick known as zendrówka laid in rhomboidal pattern. Master Benedykt, nicknamed Sandomierski, was supervising the whole process of construction. He was also the author of two-storied arcaded galleries running around the closed castle yard.

The castle was seriously damaged during the Swedish Deluge (mid- 17th c.), when it was dynamited. A few hundred inhabitants were buried under the debris. The only part that survived was the western wing, which was reconstructed during the reign of king Jan III Sobieski (1629-1696). Following the 3rd Partition of Poland (1795), the Austrians turned the castle into a prison and a seat of the court of justice. It ceased to be a prison only in 1959. Now the castle houses the Regional Museum.

Tourist Information Center in Sandomierz

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Castle in Sandomierz

Tourist Information Center in Sandomierz

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The castle of Sandomierz is a very mysterious place – all people agree that it has underground passages, but nobody knows where they are. According to an old legend, there were three such passages constructed for the castle crew in case of need. One of them was mainly used by the king going to the holy mass so it led directly to the cathedral. Through the second one that gave an access to the other side of the Vistula defenders could escape or dispatch a messenger carrying a plea for rescue. The third passage is supposedly 10 kilometers long and ends in the locality of Skotniki. It also could serve the castle crew as an rescue route in dangerous situations.

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Kurozwęki The palace in Kurozwękai is sometimes called a little Wawel; it is certainly the most interesting monument of lay architecture in the environs of Staszów.

The first palace was erected before the year 1400 on a little elevation surrounded by the swamps often flooded by River Czarna. Often enlarged and reshaped during the subsequent centuries, it acquired its present early Baroque appearance in the 17th century. Eventually a few buildings in different styles were joined to form two palatial wings combining residential and representative functions. This process was completed at the turn of the 17th century, when two-stories arcaded galleries were constructed on the southern, western and northern sides of the courtyard. The surface of the yard was raised, interiors were placed on the same level, and staircase with one landing was constructed in the southern gallery. The building acquired its final shape thanks to modernization of the whole complex carried out in the rococo style. However, elements of different architectural styles are still visible.

There are two pavilions in the park – a feature quite rare in Poland. Once they used to be identical. The one on the right retained its original shape from the late 17th century. The one on the left is currently under renovation works.

Prominent magnate families such as the Kurozwęckis, Lanckrońskis and Sołtyks used to live in Kurozwęki for centuries.

The palace and the park returned to the last owners, the Popiel family, in 1991. They are doing their best to restore the residence to its former splendid appearance.



Palace in Kurozwęki

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HIGHLIGHTS OF
THE ŚWIĘTOKRZYSKI
REGION



CASTLES AND PALACES