

Wooden Churches (Poland)

No 1053

1. BASIC DATA

<i>State Party:</i>	Republic of Poland
<i>Name of property:</i>	Wooden Churches of Southern Little Poland
<i>Location:</i>	District: Malopolska (Little Poland); Commune: Biecz; Village: Binarowa; Commune: Jasienica Rosielna; Village: Blizne; Commune: Nowy Targ; Village: Debno; Commune: Haczow; Village: Haczow; Commune: Lachowice; Village: Lachowice; Commune: Lipnica Murowana; Village: Lipnica Murowana; Commune: Jablonka; Village: Orawka; Commune: Sekowa; Village: Sekowa; Commune: Luzna; Village: Scalowa.
<i>Date received:</i>	30 June 2000; Management plan received: 30 December 2002.

Category of property:

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a serial nomination of architectural monuments.

Brief description:

The wooden churches of southern Little Poland represent outstanding examples of the different aspects of the medieval church building traditions in the Roman Catholic culture. Built using the horizontal log technique, common in eastern and northern Europe since the Middle Ages, the buildings were sponsored by noble families and became also a symbol of prestige, representing a highly qualified wooden alternative to the masonry structures in urban centres.

2. THE PROPERTY

Description

The nine properties in southern Little Poland represent different aspects of these developments, and include the churches of *Binarowa*, *Blizne*, *Debno*, *Haczow*, *Lachowice*, *Lipnica Murowana*, *Orawka*, *Sekowa*, and *Scalowa*. Most of these date from the late 15th century, being completed in the 16th century, except for *Lachowice* and *Scalowa*, which were built in the 18th century. They were all designed for the liturgies of the Roman Catholic Church. They are generally located in the centre of a village (except for Lipnica Murowana, which is outside the defence walls). All were built as horizontal log constructions. The interiors have rich painted decoration and fittings that initially date from the late Gothic period, later often over-painted in Baroque and Rococo styles. The

buildings are characterized by high roofs covered with wooden shingles.

1. The church of the Archangel Michael (Binarowa)

The parish church of Binarowa was probably first built around 1500, with a roof of *zaskrzynienia* type. In 1595 a tower was added to the west end, and at the beginning of the 17th century the church was enclosed by an external arcade. In 1602-08 a ridge turret was added to the roof. The church was renovated in 1641-50, and a chapel was added to the north end. Window openings were enlarged and new polychrome decoration replaced the earlier stencilled work. The church has a crypt under the sacristy and the exterior, the tower, and the south porch are roofed with shingles; other roofs are covered with galvanized metal sheets. The interior is painted in thin tempera. The earliest, stencilled ornament of the ceiling is from the beginning of the 16th century in late Gothic style. Most of the Baroque paintings are from the 17th century. The Gothic sculptures of the end of 14th century are probably from an earlier church at Binarowa and the reliefs of various saints are from the 15th century. Most other decoration, including the pulpit, altarpiece, and the Crucifix, are from the 17th century. After 1909, the roofs of the nave, the chancel, and the upper part of the tower were covered with galvanized sheeting, the shingle covering of the walls was replaced by weather-boarding, and the *zaskrzynienia* of the nave was supported by a pillared arcade.

2. The church of All Saints (Blizne)

The parish church of Blizne is referred to in the 14th and 15th centuries. In 1549 the church had its first bell tower, and the interior had a rich painted decoration. The remarkable Last Judgement scene is from this period. The present bell tower is first mentioned in 1646, when also the arcades were built around external walls and the interior was newly decorated. In the early 18th century there were changes to interior decorations and furniture. The 16th century altar was replaced in 1720, using parts of the old one. The church was restored and the arcades were removed in 1811. The churchyard has a wooden enclosure and there is a late 20th century chapel. Near the church, there is a singular group of wooden buildings of the presbytery.

3. The church of Archangel Michael (Debno)

The church of Debno is first mentioned in 1335, and it became a parish church in 1400. The present building is the second on the site and it dates from late 15th century. The tower was added in 1601. The arcade around the exterior wall and the south porch are from the 17th century. The exterior walls and the roofs are covered with shingles or weatherboarding. The walls at the top of the tower have wooden lacework decorations, which are also found in the interior. This church has a unique example of medieval decorations. The ceiling and the interior walls are painted using stencils from the 15th and 16th centuries. The decoration contains more than 77 motifs; there are frequent architectural motifs recalling Gothic forms. There are also animal and human motifs other than religious. The Crucifix is from the 14th century, probably from an earlier building, and it is the oldest element in the church. Similar examples exist in Slovakia (1330-70) and are known as 'Hungarian

Mystical Crosses'. The altar is from the 14th century, a work from a guild workshop in Cracow.

4. The church of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Archangel Michael (Haczow)

The auxiliary (earlier parish) church of Haczow has original Gothic polychrome decoration from the late 15th century, although the building has been dated to the previous century. At the beginning of the 17th century the church was enclosed by an earthen defensive rampart. In 1624 the tower, a ridge turret and the external arcade were constructed and the round window openings were cut in nave walls. In 1784-89 the sacristy was enlarged, the northern chapel was built, a treasury and new arcades were added, and the roof over the nave was remodelled. In 1864 the interior of the church was substantially restored and modernized. The roof, damaged in 1914, was renewed in 1915.

5. The church of St. Peter and St. Paul (Lachowice)

The parish church of Lachowice was built in 1789 from a donation, and it was consecrated in 1792; the bells date from 1802-06. The furniture was designed in Baroque style but was substantially altered in 1836. In 1846 the Stations of the Cross were installed in the external arcade. There were more renovations later, but the form and decorations have been kept. In 1930 the interior decorations were renewed.

6. The church of St. Leonard (Lipnica Murowana)

The church of Lipnica Murowana was built at the end of the 15th century. From this date have survived parts of the polychrome decoration stencilled on the ceiling of the nave. The church was situated outside the defensive wall of the township and had the function of a cemetery church, a function that it still fulfils. It has been renovated many times, but this has not significantly affected its form or spatial arrangement. The ornamental polychrome decoration of the ceiling of the chancel dates from the 16th century; the walls were painted in 1689 and those of the nave in 1710-11. In the 17th century an external arcade was built around the church. The western portal was added in 1837. A crypt under the nave contains the Ledochowski family grave.

7. The church of St. John the Baptist (Orawka)

The beginnings of this parish were connected with the re-Catholicization of the region by the Austrian Emperor Ferdinand III. The construction of the church of St. John the Baptist began in 1651 and the bell tower is from 1656, but the church was only consecrated in 1715. A brick-built chapel was added in 1728. The church was renovated in 1816-19 and the tower was remodelled in 1901. In 1926-27 the chapel was covered with a cupola, which was removed in 1935 and rebuilt as it had been earlier. A new ridge turret was built in 1935.

8. The church of St. Philip and St. James the Apostles (Sekowa)

This auxiliary church (earlier the parish church) was built around 1520, on the site of an earlier church. The building has a square plan with no aisles; the chancel has a three-sided east end and the building is covered with a high roof. Some renovation took place in the 17th century and there were further changes in the 18th century with the addition

of the towers, the stone paving around the church, and the high external arcades. The sacristy and the choir were added prior to 1819. The ceilings and the interior walls were covered with neo-Gothic decorations in the late 19th century. During World War I Sekowa was in the front-line zone since the Austro-Hungarian trenches were near the church, which suffered some damage from military action.

9. The church of Archangel Michael (Szalowa)

The parish church of Szalowa was built in 1736-56 and consecrated in 1756. The interior was completed in 1782. The vestibules in the façade are later additions; there is a separate new vestibule by the sacristy. This church differs from the others because of its architectural form, though it still built using the same technique as the rest. The church has a nave and two aisles, and it is built in a basilica form. The extremely rich Baroque-Rococo polychrome decoration and fittings date from the 18th century. The west front has two towers over the aisles, integrated with the facade and provided with small onion-shaped cupolas. A 19th century fence with a masonry bell-tower surrounds the churchyard.

History

The history of Poland goes back to the unification of the Christian lands and the constitution of the kingdom in the 10th and 11th centuries. Marked by important progress and the foundation of dozens of new cities in the 14th century, Poland's most impressive development is from the end of the 15th to the 18th centuries, when it was united with Lithuania and formed an empire ranging across the whole of central Europe. It is against this background that one can also see the development of wooden architecture in southern Poland, where it has been an inseparable element of the cultural landscape.

Churches have been of particular significance in the development of Polish wooden architecture, and an essential element of settlement structures, both as landmarks and as ideological symbols. They were an outward sign of the cultural identity of communities, reflecting the artistic and social aspirations of their patrons and creators. In early Poland, churches were elite buildings of exceptional significance due to the importance of their patrons, who were usually monarchs, Church officials, monasteries, and finally knights (later aristocrats). Church building was not the work of folk carpenters, except much later, in the 18th and 19th centuries, in a period of increasing social and cultural differentiation.

The oldest well preserved Roman Catholic wooden churches date back to the 15th century. They demonstrate the participation of professional craft workshops belonging to guilds and builders' lodges, sometimes employing both carpenters and masons. These churches are complex, of good craftsmanship, and free from improvisation in their construction. The few well preserved late medieval churches have many features in common. The typical church building was composed of a nave, almost square in plan with a narrow chancel, and generally with a three-sided east end. The churches were orientated with their altars to the east. Originally, the churches were built without towers, which were added later. There were various architectural developments, such as roof structures, in succeeding centuries, and some of the solutions are

unique in Europe. The Gothic character of medieval churches was emphasized by simple stylistic details, such as the shape of door and window openings, arcades, and arches. Until the second quarter of the 16th century there was a common plan for the churches.

The internal fittings were in the style of the period, produced in guild workshops, and the themes and presentations followed rigorous ideological and iconographic rules. New architectural elements, such as towers and arcades, started appearing in the late 16th century, and strict adherence to the old church type was gradually abandoned. From the beginning of the 18th century there was a tendency to exceed the limitations of the traditional model, a symptom of institutional and social changes, and architects or skilled dilettantes attempted to apply to wood Baroque concepts developed in brick architecture. This is an interesting chapter in the history of the wooden sacral architecture, represented in basilica- and aisled-hall churches, sometimes with cupola-covered chapels or cruciform buildings with a central plan, facades with two towers and elaborate interiors with spiral columns, cornices, all executed in wood in 'imitation' of brick architecture. Later styles, such as late Baroque, the Regency, and Rococo, also had an impact and mural decoration is used in illusionist compositions to increase the impression of interior spaciousness. In the 19th century there were revivals, and wooden churches were built with classicist or neo-Gothic features but mostly in details and interiors. The beginning of the 20th century was marked by an interest in the beauty of folk art and the 'rediscovery' of a 'national' architecture.

Management regime

Legal provision:

The monuments are the physical and legal property of the Roman Catholic Church, represented by Church authorities (Bishops) and parochial administration.

The monuments are inscribed in the Register of Monuments and are protected on the basis of the requirements of Polish law. They are also included in conservation zones, which are defined in the land-use master plans of each of the communes.

All the churches are provided with three levels of protected areas: a direct protection in the indicated core area, a buffer zone including the immediate surroundings, and a landscape protection zone, where the main viewpoints from the surrounding hills indicate the limits of the restricted area.

Management structure:

Direct care of the monument remains in the hands of the owner (the Church). Monitoring and control over the conservation work are the responsibility of the Provincial Commissioner for Historical Monuments and of the Historic Monuments Protection Service. The administration of some communes also includes a Department of Architecture, which is responsible for the protection of the church.

The buffer zones defined in the nomination document are divided into two categories: a) the traditional enlarged conservation or protection area, and b) the long-distance

protection, including the surrounding cultural landscape and marking on the map different long-distance viewpoints to be included and protected by the spatial planning. The buffer zones around the nominated properties and conservation areas are mostly defined in accordance with the borders of the historic settlement. An exception is the buffer zone surrounding the conservation area at Lipnica Murowana, where the church is situated outside the walls of the medieval settlement and is used nowadays as a cemetery chapel. Here the buffer zone includes the free territory of meadows and pastureland on the east side, which was also used in the past by the small villages of Lipnica Murowana Gorna and Dolna.

Justification by the State Party (summary)

The log-built Catholic timber churches in Poland are unique phenomena closely related both to general European architectural trends and to the local building tradition. They were the most valuable and elite buildings, the creation of which was closely connected with the social, cultural, and political structures of the medieval state. They are witness to a centuries-long development process, and the oldest source references to them date back to the 11th century. Subsequent centuries are well documented in the archival resources, beginning from the registers of 'St. Peter's Pence' to the detailed reports and inventories contained in the diocesan records of the Visitations of the bishops to parishes under their care. Wooden churches also became a motif in literature and art. They were noticed by foreign travellers as structures having no equivalents in other countries.

The chosen churches also contain interiors of exceptional artistic quality, which reflect the development of European art from the Gothic to late Baroque and contemporary times, many of them of museum quality. It should be mentioned that the Polish wooden churches took their functional spatial composition from liturgical requirements adopted from the West. They form an exceptional enclave situated at the boundary between the cultures of the East and the West, in the area of Christian Slavs.

Criterion iii: The proposed group of timber churches are unique relics of the centuries-old development of a tradition, only dying out in our times. The demise of this tradition has been caused by modern demographic conditions, and technological and stylistic tendencies. These buildings no longer have the prospect of further development, and have become a monument to a vanished epoch. As has been emphasized, they are a unique phenomenon, and appear only in a closely defined area of Polish territory, at the cultural boundary between East and West.

Criterion iv: The selected timber churches are pre-eminent examples of the survival of a tradition of construction of timber buildings which was once much more widespread, and which was connected with the most important ideological concepts of Christian Europe. They are the most representative examples of these structures (which is reflected in the range of their type and identity). These structures preserve lost technological knowledge and constructional skills specific to the historical period in which they were constructed. Modern technology is no longer related to these material traditions.

Criterion vi: All the proposed structures have fulfilled a liturgical and cult function for an unbroken period of several centuries. Around these churches have materialized cultural values having universal value, and at the same time acting as a focus for and a document of local cultural identity. Without change, they fulfil the purpose for which their founders and builders created them, retaining their historical form and at the same time fulfilling the needs of modern religious life.

3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

Actions by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the nine churches in January 2001. Following the recommendation of ICOMOS, in June 2001, the Bureau decided that further consideration of this nomination be deferred to await the outcome of a comparative study.

In June 2002, the Committee decided that there should be a comprehensive management plan for all the churches. This was provided by the State Party on 30 December 2002.

Conservation

Conservation history:

The dates of construction of the churches in the present nomination range from the 15th to the 18th centuries. Over the centuries the buildings have been subject to some alterations, thus acquiring a historical stratification. Typically, the buildings have had the tower added in a later period, as well as the external gallery that has become a characteristic feature of several of the churches. Also in the interior, there have been changes regarding the painted decoration and the furniture and fittings, respecting the taste of the time. As a whole, the various additions and alterations are in harmony with the whole of the architecture and can therefore be considered enrichment acquired through their useful life.

State of conservation:

The churches have survived surprisingly well up to the present, some with hardly any change. In a relatively few cases the buildings have suffered from damage, such as the church of Sekowa, damaged during World War I and subsequently repaired. The churches have generally been subject to restoration in recent decades. This has also given the opportunity to use modern scientific methods to remove later paint layers and to reveal underlying older decoration. It has thus been possible to reacquire parts of the medieval appearance of the interior of the oldest churches. Restoration has also given an opportunity for systematic survey and research of the buildings and the verification of their history. It has shown, for example, that many of the buildings have retained much of their original material and structure: this is rare in the case of wooden constructions, which are generally subject to weathering and loss of material.

Management:

Following the condition for inscription decided by the Committee in its session in June 2002, the State Party has provided a comprehensive management plan for all the six churches that were recommended for inscription. This plan identifies the principal means of organisation and control of the properties. It takes into account the legal and administrative framework, as well as the factors affecting the properties. For each property, the plan identifies the responsible organisations, resources, and the objectives of conservation policies for their short- and long-term management.

Risk analysis:

Fire is a constant hazard for historic wooden buildings. It is understood that the State Party is taking measures where necessary to update the fire prevention facilities at all the churches. The sites of the properties are not subject to any particular hazards either from development or from natural causes.

Authenticity and integrity

The wooden churches of southern Little Poland have been preserved exceptionally well through the centuries. They have all maintained their original structure, much of their fittings, and even much of the first layers of painted decoration. Some of the churches have hardly been altered since their completion (including the construction of the tower and the external arcade, which are often of later date). Others have been subject to alterations, particularly in the 18th century, and to redecoration in the Baroque-rococo style. Such changes have, however, been in the character of the architectural conception of the buildings, and can be considered a part of their historical value.

The rural settings of the churches and their relationship with the landscape have been preserved. It is satisfying to observe that the nominated areas also include the auxiliary structures related to church functions, which contributes to the integrity of the sites concerned.

The buildings have also been in continuous use as church buildings, a scene of traditional ceremonies and rituals, until the present day. Recent restorations have been carried out respecting the authenticity and historic integrity of the buildings and sites.

Comparative evaluation

In the 2001 evaluation, ICOMOS recommended that a comparative study be undertaken extending to central and eastern Europe. Consequently, the State Party has provided a comparative study on church architecture in wood, taking into account Catholic and Protestant churches in central Europe. This study has been complemented by studies carried out in Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine, covering a wider region and different beliefs (Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Lutheran, and Calvinist). It is noted that a comparative study has already been carried out on Nordic church buildings.

On the basis of these studies, ICOMOS is satisfied that the group of Roman Catholic churches selected from Little Poland is representative of this type of construction. In

particular, the six churches of medieval origin can be considered to be outstanding representations of such traditions. Taking into account the results of the studies, ICOMOS considers that there is potential for completing the selection with examples of different types of church buildings in the other countries of the region.

Outstanding universal value

General statement:

The wooden churches of southern Little Poland represent a church-building tradition that goes back to the Gothic of the Polish Middle Ages. Six of the nominated properties date from the 15th and 16th centuries; three properties are more recent, dating from the 17th and 18th centuries, and documenting the continuation of the traditions. The churches are built using horizontal log technique, common in the vast region of eastern and northern Europe since the Middle Ages. The buildings present many characteristic features that define their singularity, including the overall architectural form, the roofs, the towers, and the arcades around the building. The Polish wooden church took its functional and spatial composition from liturgical requirements adopted from the West, but forming a sort of enclave between East and West.

Considering the social and political situation in Poland from the 15th century onwards, and the commitment of noble families to sponsor the construction of church buildings not only for the cult but also as symbols of their own prestige, these churches have strong social significance. They represent a wooden alternative to the architecture developed in masonry structures in urban centres, as well as an alternative that used the best available craftsmanship and technology.

Furthermore, the churches are exceptionally well preserved testimony of medieval decorative systems, and how these concepts were continued and further developed over the centuries, when other styles became more dominant, especially Baroque and rococo. The churches have retained their original architectural form and liturgical use, and also the rural setting of the sites has remained exceptionally well intact.

Evaluation of criteria:

Criterion iii: The churches are considered to bear an exceptional testimony to the tradition of church building from the Middle Ages. The churches have also been preserved in the context of the vernacular village and landscape setting.

Criterion iv: The nominated churches are exceptionally well preserved and representative examples from the medieval type of church, which respected the ambitions of their sponsors.

Criterion vi: Even though the churches obviously have continued fulfilling their liturgical and cult function for several centuries, ICOMOS does not consider this to be sufficient for applying this criterion.

4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation for the future

ICOMOS considers that this nomination could be completed with properties in Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and/or Ukraine, where the churches can represent later periods as well as other types of traditions (potential for serial nomination).

Recommendation with respect to inscription

That the six medieval wooden churches of Binarowa, Blizne, Debno, Haczow, Lipnica Murowana, and Sekowa be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of ***criteria iii*** and ***iv***:

Criterion iii: The wooden churches of Little Poland bear important testimony to medieval church building traditions, as these related to the liturgical and cult functions of the Roman Catholic Church in a relatively closed region in central Europe.

Criterion iv: The churches are the most representative examples of surviving Gothic churches built in horizontal log technique, particularly impressive in their artistic and technical execution, and sponsored by noble families and rulers as symbols of social and political prestige.

ICOMOS, March 2003