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Gdańsk: Specificity of Its Architecture in the Modern Era. The Question of National and Regional Identity

Keywords:

Architecture of the 19th and twentieth centuries, national identification, Neo-Renaissance, Danzig, Gdańsk, history of architecture

Abstract:

The architectural heritage and the mode of its analysis and interpretation, especially in the perspective of the national and regional question, can and often does become an issue prone to manipulation. The attempts to define national and regional identity by means of cultural legacy have accompanied research into art and also the creation of modern architecture in the spirit of national Historicism since the 19th century. The place where the phenomena can be observed in a particularly acute way is Gdańsk, a city of extremely complicated identity, multicultural structure, and a rich architectural output, the latter having been on a number of occasions subject to national interpretations or over-interpretations.

The architecture of Gdańsk has for years been the subject of a heated debate of both German and Polish architects, historians of architecture, and conservators. In recent years politicians have also joined in the debate, and so have writers. Discussed have been the general attempts to define factors and means of visual identification, definitions of cultural belonging, and definitions of the historical-architectural affiliation of the cultural heritage of the city. Another debate issue has been the need to apply all this heritage or its elements to the creation of the urban landscape (both as new districts and filling in the architectural substance in the old ones) as clear signs of regional identification. At the same time, the majority of monuments have become the subject of scholarly abuse and interpretative manipulation, used for the sake of propaganda or merely rhetoric, often with no understanding of architectural issues or the specificity of the history of architecture on this territory.

The paper analyses the issue of the relation of architectural forms and rhetorical formulas, namely the combination of architecture and specific contents treated as signs of local identity, as well as the changeability and interpretational flexibility of those issues with regard to the needs of political circumstances (idioms versus interpretational variants, stereotypes, research myths, likings versus scholarly idiosyncrasies). Special attention will be paid to the Gdańsk architecture of the second half of the 19th century and its contemporary and later interpretations in the perspective of the regional and national identification.



The architectural heritage and the mode of its analysis and interpretation, especially in the perspective of the national and regional question, can and often does become an issue prone to manipulation.¹ The attempts to define national and regional identity by means of cultural legacy have accompanied research into art and also the creation of modern architecture in the spirit of national Historicism already since the 19th century. The place where the phenomena can be observed in a particularly acute way is Gdańsk, a city of extremely complicated identity, multicultural structure, and a rich architectural output, the latter having been on a number of occasions subject to national interpretations or over-interpretations.²

The major problem concerning Gdańsk touches not only on the very issues of national and local interpretation of the history of the architecture of the city by art historians, but first of all the translation of those interpretations into architecture raised in the city in the 19th and 20th centuries by German architects until 1944 and the Polish ones after 1945, which in consequence means the translation of those interpretations into the processes of restoration, conservation, and reconstruction of Gdańsk historic monuments.³

The architectural heritage of the old Gdańsk, by which is meant the main sphere of interest of the researchers into medieval and early modern art and the architectural cityscape that it shaped, was dominated by buildings raised during the period when

¹ The departure point for the present analysis was found in my paper whose fragments have been used here, see Małgorzata Omilanowska, "The Question of National and Regional Identity on the Example of Polish and German Interpretations of Gdansk Architecture in the 19th and 20th Centuries," *Acta Historiae Artium* [Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae] 49 (2008): 294–303. Some of the issues have also been tackled in *eadem*, "Gdańska czy(li) niemiecka? Problematyka identyfikacji narodowej i regionalnej na przykładzie architektury Gdańska lat 1871–1914," in: *eadem*, *Budowanie nad Bałtykiem. Studia z historii architektury Gdańska, Pomorza i Żmudzi XIX–XX wieku* (Gdańsk: Fundacja terytoria książki, 2018), 42–51.

² Jacek Friedrich, *Walka obrazów. Przedstawienia wobec idei w Wolnym Mieście Gdańsku* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2015).

³ *Idem*, *Neue Stadt in altem Gewand. Der Wiederaufbau Danzigs 1945–60* (Köln–Weimar–Wien: Böhlau, 2010); *idem*, *Odbudowa Głównego Miasta w Gdańsku w latach 1945–1960* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz, terytoria, 2015).

Gdańsk belonged to the Polish crown. Naturally, already during the Teutonic times – in the 13th and 14th centuries and in the first half of the 15th century – a number of important lay and sacral edifices had already been built, yet many of them, for example the Town Hall of the main city, in the course of time underwent substantial alterations or were added extensions significant for their external reception, such as a huge tower added onto the Marian Church. In effect, only one important symbol of the city, namely the Crane Gate, dating from the Teutonic period has, apart from churches, survived unaltered until the modern times.

The most attractive, and as time has shown, the most important buildings in the perspective of the reception of Gdańsk architecture in later centuries, were either created or thoroughly altered in the second half of the 15th century, throughout the 16th century and in the first half of the 17th century. The buildings of the Great Armoury, the Green, High, and Golden Gates, the Old Town Hall, and the Manor of the Brotherhood of St. George, as well as of the altered Main Town Hall and the Artus Manor have become the icons of the city. The character of the city is also shaped by dozens of tenement houses of typical narrow façades crowned with gables and preceded by perrons. The profile of the city dominated by edifices from the High Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and Mannerist and Baroque periods was additionally consolidated by a construction stagnation which lasted through the 18th and the majority of the 19th centuries.

Anyone at least rudimentarily familiar with the facts from the Polish-German relations finds it absolutely obvious that from the very beginning of the research into it, the artistic legacy of Gdańsk was bound to turn out to be a sphere of controversy and extremely differentiated interpretations between the Polish and German art historians. For the German scholars, Gdańsk architecture constituted an integral part of the German cultural legacy, yet the Poles regarded the buildings from the period when the city belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a part of their own tradition, interwoven, whether we want it or not, with various influences resulting from a peculiar character of a multi-denominational, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural state.

The present paper is not an appropriate opportunity to discuss in detail the German and Polish state of research into the architecture of Gdańsk. Let us remind ourselves, however, that the German research into Gdańsk architecture as seen in the perspective of German art started really early.⁴ The best-accomplished Gdańsk buildings could be found already among the prints of Georg Möller's portfolio published in 1821,⁵ whereas the publications from the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s, mainly by Wilhelm Lübke,

⁴ I do not mention here earlier publications of topographic-descriptive character prepared mainly among the Gdańsk circle.

⁵ Georg Moller, *Denkmaehler der deutschen Baukunst, 1er Theil: Beiträge zur Kenntniss der deutschen Baukunst des Mittelalters* (Leipzig: Leske, 1821).

consolidated in the general German awareness the image of Gdańsk architecture of the Renaissance as one of the better examples of German architecture.⁶

Views of Polish scholars on the architecture of Gdańsk (I do not deal here with some detailed topographic studies) began to appear at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁷ The researchers traced in it first of all Netherlandish and Italian influences, at times literally denying any connection that it may have had with German art. It is enough to mention in this respect controversies regarding the terminology with reference to the architecture of the 16th and 17th centuries. The Germans defined those buildings as raised in the style of the German Renaissance and Baroque periods. The Poles, in turn, preferred the term Northern Renaissance and Mannerism, eagerly emphasising the main feature of this architecture, namely its relationship with Netherlandish architecture, sometimes even excessively promoting the concept of Netherlandism in the context of Gdańsk.⁸

The 18th century brought no essential alterations in Gdańsk's townscape. After 1793, Gdańsk was encompassed within the boundaries of Prussia, whereas during the Napoleonic wars it suffered enormous devastation, for some decades to come losing almost entirely any economic importance, at the same time initiating the period of stagnation that affected the creation of new buildings. It was only once a new West Prussian Province had been formed post-1878, namely after the establishment of the German Empire, when Gdańsk was elevated to the status of the capital of the province, that a new momentum in the development of the city was gained, economic growth accelerated, and a stimulus emerged for the expansion of the city and enriching it with new public buildings. The historicism of the second half of the 19th century determined the choice of a style from the past for them. The decision was made to follow the German Neo-Renaissance, already popular in the architecture of many German towns.⁹

The phenomenon has already been extensively discussed in German literature, and recently its full monograph compiled by Ralf Mennekes has been published.¹⁰ In Polish research, it was Rafał Makąła who studied the German Neo-Renaissance.¹¹ Although

⁶ Wilhelm Lübke, *Geschichte der deutschen Renaissance* (Stuttgart: Ebner & Seubert, 1873).

⁷ Tadeusz Kruszyński, *Stary Gdańsk i historia jego sztuki* (Kraków: Księgarnia Wydawnicza J. Czerneckiego w Wieliczce, ca. 1912).

⁸ Jacek Friedrich, "Netherlandism of Early Modern Gdańsk Art in the Eyes of Polish Researchers before 1945," in: *Netherlandish Artists in Gdańsk in the Time of Hans Vredeman de Vries. Material from the Conference* (Gdańsk: Museum of the History of the City of Gdańsk, Lemgo: Weserrenaissance-Museum Schloss Brake, 2006), 23–29.

⁹ Omilanowska, "Architektura Gdańska lat 1871–1914; gdańska czy(li) niemiecka?," in: *Mece-nat a artystyczne oblicze miasta. Materiały sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki*, ed. Dariusz Nowacki (Kraków: Stowarzyszenie Historyków Sztuki, 2008), 169–184.

¹⁰ Ralf Mennekes, *Die Renaissance der deutschen Renaissance* (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2005).

¹¹ Rafał Makąła, "'Neorenesans północny' jako niemiecki styl narodowy na przełomie XIX i XX wieku," in: *Recepcja renesansu w XIX i XX wieku. Materiały sesji SHS*, ed. Małgorzata

this obviates my need to discuss the question, let me reiterate that it appeared in German architecture after the mid-19th century, while what served as the direct impulse to pay attention to the monuments of the German Renaissance was the restoration of Schwerin Castle. In the 1860s, German Neo-Renaissance appeared in Saxon architecture, while in the 1870s it was already a widespread phenomenon in architecture throughout the whole of Germany. Almost from the beginning, architects referring to the tradition of the German Renaissance would resort to local models. Thus there soon appeared in the professional literature such terms as the “Nuremberg Style” or even the “Althenberg Style.”¹² Thanks to its national but also local and bourgeois connotations, the style was appreciated by the Emperor and the opinion-forming circles of the architects affiliated to the Akademie der Bauwesen, this in effect leading to the situation in the last quarter of the 19th century and early twentieth century when it turned into an official, though not sole, national style of the Empire.

In 1880–1887, several projects were implemented in Gdańsk, these being first and foremost the buildings of the Supra-Presidency and Western Prussian Public Notary (Oberpräsidial- und Regierungsgebäude) designed by the Berlin architect Karl Friedrich Endell (Fig. 1) and of the Governance of the Western Prussia Provinces (Landeshaus) designed by the Berlin architectural company Ende & Böckmann (Fig. 2).¹³

The third important public building raised in the German Neo-Renaissance style as initiated by the authorities was the extension of the main Post Office edifice: Kaisers Postamt in Długa Street, while in 1880–1882, at the junction of Ogarna and Poczтовая Streets, the edifice of the Telegraph Office was raised by August Kind after the design of Otto Hintze (Fig. 3).¹⁴

Wróblewska-Markiewicz (Łódź: Stowarzyszenie Historyków Sztuki, 2003), 307–314. There also earlier bibliography on the topic. Gdańsk Neo-Renaissance has also been studied, e.g., in Kazimierz Pospieszny, “Neorenaissance-Architektur in Danzig (Gdańsk),” in: *Renaissance der Renaissance*, ed. Georg Ulrich Großmann (Schriften des Weserrenaissance-Museums Schloß Brake, Bd. 8, München: Deutsche Kunstverlag, 1995), 133–142; Jacek Bielak, “Wielka Synagoga gdańska An der Reitbahn 11/13 w latach 1887–1939,” in: *Studia z historii sztuki i kultury Gdańska i Europy Północnej. Prace poświęcone pamięci Doktor Katarzyny Cieślak*, eds. Jacek Friedrich, Edmund Kizik (Gdańsk: Stowarzyszenie Historyków Sztuki Oddział Gdańsk, 2003), 417–435; Zofia Maciakowska, “Gdański konkurs architektoniczny z roku 1902,” in: *Kamienica w krajach Europy Północnej*, ed. Maria Sołtysik (Gdańsk: Nadbałtyckie Centrum Kultury 2004), 327–337; Bronisław Małecki, Jakub Szczepański, “O odcieniach ‘swojskości’ w architekturze Gdańska. Gdańskie formuły patosu,” in: *Gust gdański*, eds. Bronisława Dejna, Jakub Szczepański (Gdańsk: Nadbałtyckie Centrum Kultury, 2004), 20–43; Friedrich, *Walka obrazów*, 48–68.

¹² Mennekes, *Die Renaissance*, 152.

¹³ Małgorzata Omilanowska, “Die Entfestigung Danzigs im Kontext der Umgestaltung der deutschen Städte im Laufe des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in: *Die maritime Stadt – Hafenstädte an der Ostsee von Mittelalter bis in die Gegenwart*, eds. Tomasz Torbus, Katarzyna Anna Wojtczak (Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki PAN, 2017), 315–360; Friedrich, *Walka obrazów*, 51–54.

¹⁴ Katarzyna Anna Wojtczak, “Julius Albert Gottlieb Licht (1821–1898) – architekt miejski Gdańska” (PhD dissertation, Uniwersytet Gdański, 2019), 164–165.

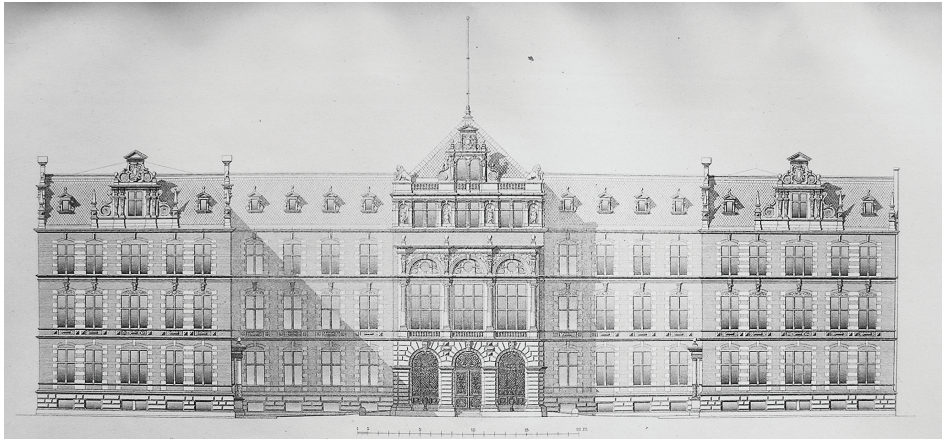


Fig. 1. Gdańsk, Design of the Supra-Presidency and Western Prussian Public Notary (Oberpräsidial- und Regierungsgebäude), 1888, Karl Friedrich Endell, *Zeitschrift für Bauwesen* 39 (1889), Bl. 1

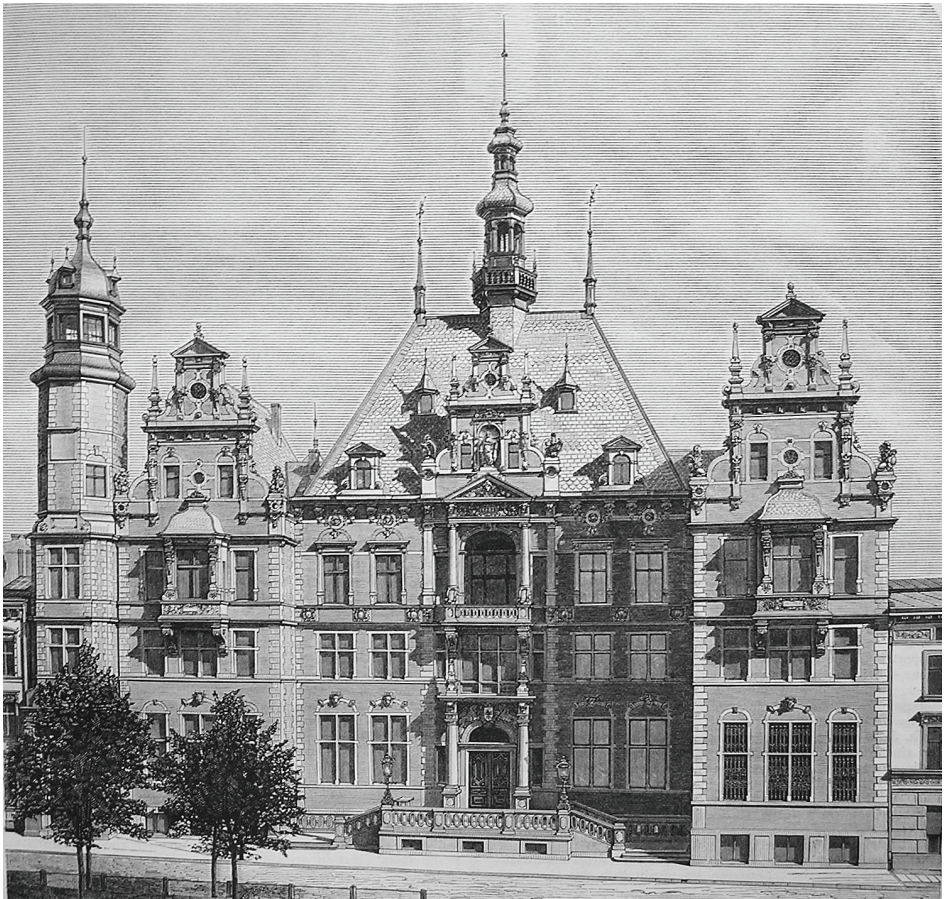


Fig. 2. Gdańsk, Design of the Governance of the Western Prussia Provinces (Landeshaus), 1887, Ende & Böckmann, *Zeitschrift für Bauwesen* 37 (1887), nos. 4–6, 201–202



Fig. 3. Telegraph Office, corner of Ogarna and Pocztowa Streets, 1880–1882, Otto Hintze and August Kind, Photo private collection

Around the same time the latter also raised two other important edifices in Gdańsk: the Great Synagogue and the building of the Saving Bank (Sparkasse, Fig. 4).¹⁵ In the professional media in which all the designs were published it was emphasised that the buildings stylistically adhered to German Neo-Renaissance; additionally, on a specified wish of the then city's *Oberbürgermeister* Leopold von Winter, as is testified by source texts, a clear reference to the local architectural

¹⁵ Bielak, "Wielka Synagoga."

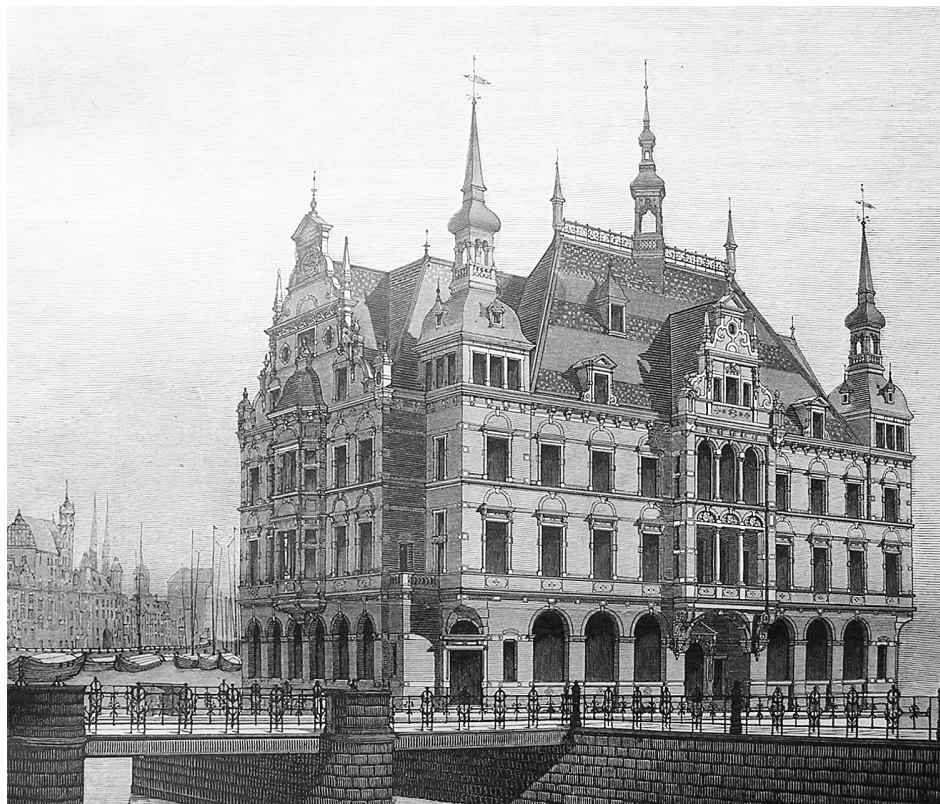


Fig. 4. Gdańsk, Building of the Sparkasse Saving Bank, 1886, Ende und Bockman, *Deutsche Bauzeitung* 20 (1886), 55, 325

legacy was enhanced.¹⁶ Winter was most likely aware of the importance of old architecture and the potential it contained for shaping new architecture, since it was at his instigation that the Mannerist gables, dismantled in the 1830s, were restored to the Green Gate after Licht's design.¹⁷

In view of the research into the architecture of German Neo-Renaissance, which points to its strong national and bourgeois connotations as well as its relationship with the myth of the Hanseatic League,¹⁸ the choice of this very style for the new architecture of Gdańsk, the capital of an Empire's province, may be considered most just from the point of view of the city authorities' political ambitions, which was later testified by Gdańsk's career. It allowed to enhance

¹⁶ Pospieszny, "Neorenaissance-Architektur."

¹⁷ Ernst Blech, *Danzig als Kunststätte* (Danzig: Saunier, 1904), 28; Wojtczak, "Julius Albert Gottlieb Licht," 147–148.

¹⁸ Mennekes, *Die Renaissance*.

the fact that Gdańsk belonged to the Empire, and at the same time it signalled its local distinctiveness, it made reference to the bourgeois tradition of the town and referred directly to the times of the former grandeur of the city whose restoration was the dream of its inhabitants.

The second stage of the extension of Gdańsk took place in 1895–1910, after the modern city fortifications had been pulled down. The period coincided with the boost in Gdańsk's prosperity that had also animated construction projects. In the final five years of the 19th century and in the 1900s, Gdańsk expanded, turning into a modern metropolis. The German Neo-Renaissance, at that point officially acclaimed as the national style, by none other than Emperor William II himself, became almost an obligatory style of the majority of buildings erected in Gdańsk at the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1894, the design of a large market hall on the former Dominican site was created; it was raised according to the design by two architects employed by the city, Ernst Otto and Karl Fehlhaber (Fig. 5). The modern steel frame of the basilica structure of the hall was given an appearance stylistically echoing Gdańsk late Gothic and Renaissance buildings, which the critics of the time highly appreciated. A particular emphasis was put on the little towers bristling the whole mass of the hall, and on being an almost literal quote from the decoration of the nearby Church of St Catherine. The German Neo-Renaissance also appeared on the elevations of the new Post Office building on Długa Street designed by Karl August Langhoff (1895–1899) as well as on the building of the General Command in Hucisko Street (1895–1899). Around 1898, the unaccomplished design of the extension of the Barbican complex on Długa Street for the needs of the Municipal Library and the Archives was created.¹⁹ Its assumption was to leave the Prison Tower and the Mannerist edifice of the Torture Chamber almost unaltered, while placing between them a Neo-Renaissance edifice added variety with Neo-Mannerist gables and octagonal turrets on the corners.

The dismantling of the fortifications west of the city also enabled the construction of a new railway station with an impressive departure hall completed in 1900 (Fig. 6), raised after the design of Alexander Rüdell, Paul Thoemer, and Georg Cuny. The direct reference of the shape of the clock tower to the Main City Town Hall was clear to everyone, while making the echoing of the Gdańsk Renaissance obvious.

In this context it seems that the most interesting is the episode related to the construction of the Technical University (Technische Hochschule Danzig)

¹⁹ Omilanowska, "Die Danziger Stadtbibliothek und ihr Neubau in Wilhelminischer Zeit," in: *Bibliotheksarchitektur um 1900. Die Kieler Universitätsbibliothek von Gropius und Schmieden im Kontext europäischer Bibliotheksbauten*, eds. Klaus Gereon Beuckers, Nils Meyer (Kiel: Verlag Ludwig, 2020), 297–316.



Fig. 5. Gdańsk, Design of the Market Hall, 1894 Ernst Otto i Karl Fehlhauer, *Danzig und seine Bauten*, Berlin 1908, s. 200



Fig. 6. Gdańsk, Main Railway Station, 1898–1900, Alexander Rüdell, Paul Thömer and Georg Cuny. Gavrił Baranovskij, *Architekturnaja Enciklopedia 2. poł XIX wieka*, vol. 2, liv. 4, 139

complex.²⁰ The decision to select German Neo-Renaissance as the style for all the complex buildings was made in Berlin; it was also in Berlin that the Ministry of Public Works designed the first complex, with Hermann Eggert initially working on it, to be followed by Georg Thür (Fig. 7). Already in the first publications written among the Berlin circle on the planned university it was said that “in the architectural forms a reference to the sphere of Danzig’s old Renaissance buildings should be sought.”²¹ In 1899, the designs were given a positive opinion by the Akademie der Bauwesen, yet on the Emperor’s order, “auf Allerhöchste Anordnung,” the initially designed forms apparently referring to Dutch Renaissance were replaced by “Alt-Danzinger Bauweise” forms that were closer in character.²² The final implementation designs authored by Albert Carsten were, in fact, enriched with a much greater number of gables than Eggert and Thür had assumed.

Higher prosperity and the assigning of new plots for construction on the site of the former city fortifications dismantled from the west and north of the old centre increased the number of construction projects around 1900 and immediately afterwards. At that point, subsequent : state and municipal public projects were launched, including in particular the buildings for the Police Presidium, insurance, archives, and courts. Furthermore, several new bank edifices were built, most importantly the new seat of the Reichsbank. Almost all of them had elevations designed in German Neo-Renaissance, which both in the intentions of their authors and in social perception were judged as works referring to Gdańsk architecture of the Golden Age.

The building of the Police Presidium raised in 1902–1905 after the designs of Alfred Muttray (responsible for planning the building) and Otto Klooppel (the elevation designer) in the view of the critics of *Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung* followed the forms of the “Danziger Spätrenaissance” (Fig. 8).²³ A competition was launched for the design of the Insurance Building (Landesversicherungsanstalt), won in 1902 by the Dresden architect Curt Hempel; in the press the affinity of his architecture with the Arsenal building was pointed to.²⁴ The design of the Reichsbank was authored by Max Hasak, a Berlin architect who specialised

²⁰ Hans-Dieter Nägelke, *Hochschulbau im Kaiserreich. Historische Architektur im Prozess Bürgerlicher Konsensbildung* (Kiel: Verlag Ludwig, 2000), 279; Małgorzata Omilanowska, “Cesarz Wilhelm II i jego inicjatywy architektoniczne na wschodnich rubieżach Cesarstwa Niemieckiego,” in: *eadem*, *Budowanie nad Bałtykiem*, 64–77.

²¹ “Der Plan einer neuen Technischen Hochschule in Danzig,” *Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung* 19/21 (1899): 124.

²² “Die Neubauten für die Technischen Hochschule in Danzig,” *Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung* 22/74 (1902): 454; Nägelke, *Hochschulbau*, 279.

²³ Otto Sarrazin, Friedrich Schultze, “Die neuen Polizeidienstgebäude in Danzig und in Stettin,” *Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung* 26/63 (1906): 395–399.

²⁴ Curt Hempel, “Zwei Neubauten auf den neuen Wallgelände in Danzig,” *Neue Kunst in Alt-preussen* 1/4 (1912): 146–148, 150.

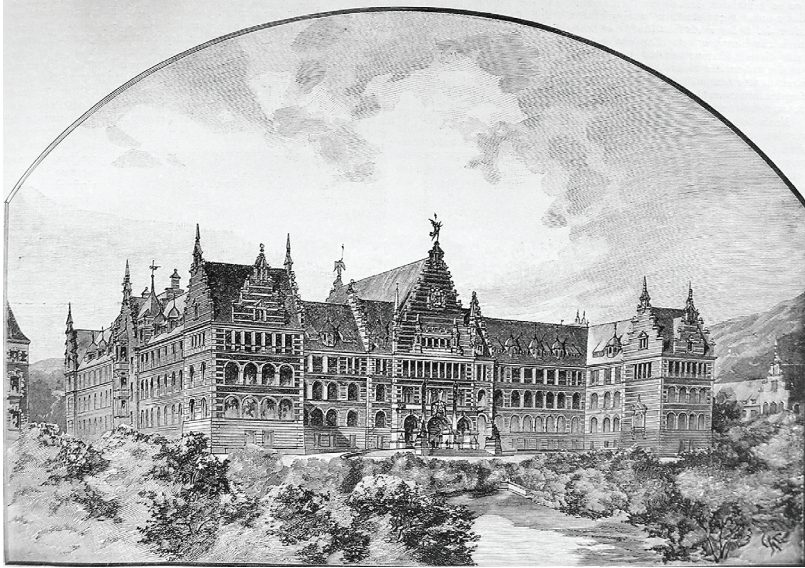


Fig. 7. Gdańsk, Rejected version of the design of the Technical University (Technische Hochschule Danzig), 1899, Hermann Eggert and Georg Thür, *Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung* 19 (1899), no. 91, 551



Fig. 8. Gdańsk, Edifice of the Police Presidium (Polizeidienstgebäude), 1902–1905, Alfred Muttray and Otto Kloepfel, *Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung* 26 (1906), no. 63, 397

in bank buildings. (Fig. 9) In *Architektonische Rundschau* he explained his use of the “Danziger Bauweise” forms, since they also proved appropriate for shaping the elevation of a bank building.²⁵

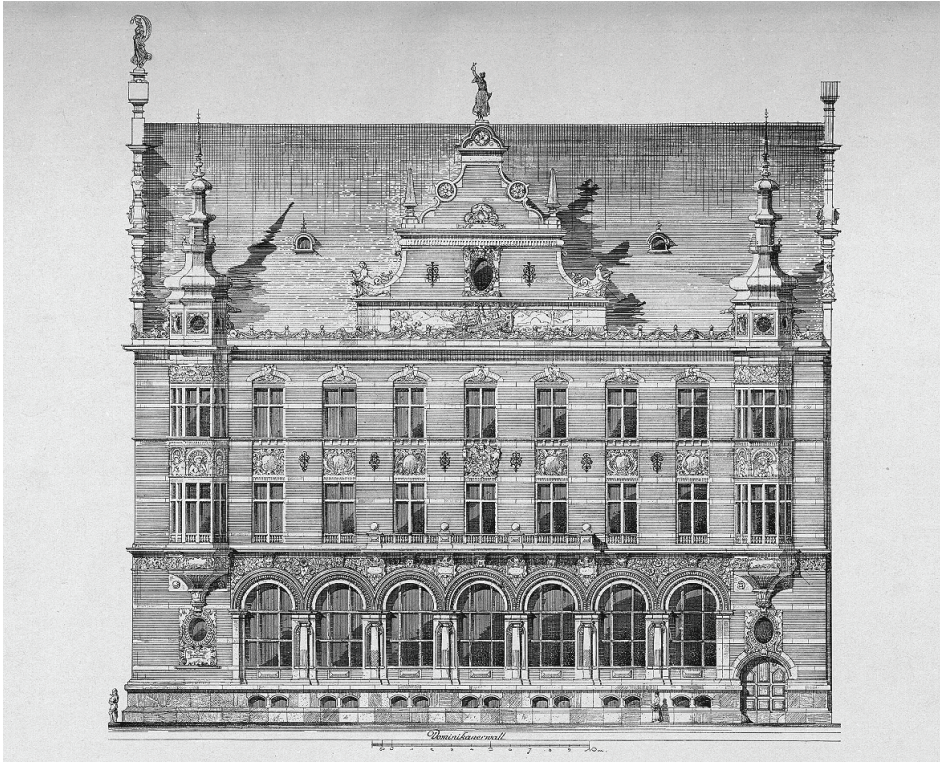


Fig. 9. Gdańsk, design of the Deutsche Reichsbank, 1904, Max Hasak, *Architektonische Rundschau* 20 (1904), no. 4, taf. 32

The German Renaissance style with echoes of Gdańsk architecture was also applied in the design of the building of the Archives, created in Berlin in the Ministry of Public Works by Georg Thür, co-author of the design of the Gdańsk University of Technology. One of the last Gdańsk state projects in the style of the German Renaissance, pertaining still to the 19th-century Historicism was a huge edifice of the Court implemented in 1907–1910. The design was authored in the Berlin Ministry of Public Works under the supervision of construction advisor Eduard Saal.²⁶

²⁵ Max Hasak, “Der Neubau der Reichsbank in Danzig (Am Höhen Tor Ecke Dominikanerwall),” *Architektonische Rundschau* 20/4 (1904): 28–30.

²⁶ Karolina Kaczmarek, “Zespół gmachów sądowych przy ulicy Nowe Ogrody w Gdańsku,” *Porta Aurea* 15 (2016): 128–154.

Moreover, the German Renaissance also became the dominant style in the architecture of tenement houses, villas, department stores, hotels, and private banks, shaping the character of the new buildings raised, particularly in the post-fortification zone. Following the example of other German cities, in Gdańsk, too, in 1902, a competition was organised to choose the so-called Gdańsk façade. The aim was to collect the most accurate ideas for the updated solutions for tenement-house façades, in harmony, however, with the character of the city buildings.²⁷ It is difficult to define today how resonant the competition was, yet it remains a known fact that those designs were used when the Freymann Brothers Department Store was built.²⁸

The German Renaissance was obviously not the only style featured in the architecture of Gdańsk in the late stages of Historicism. In the architecture of school buildings, Neo-Gothic forms were often reached for; these were also considered appropriate for the building of the Municipal Library. Raised in 1902–1904 after the design of Karl Kleefeld and Karl Fehlhaber, it was described in *Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung* as follows: “Modest and robust shaping of the building of raw brick nicely echoes medieval buildings of Gdańsk.”²⁹ Thus, there was no major contradiction with the intentions of the clients commissioning Neo-Renaissance buildings.

Already at the stage of formulating the competition’s conditions, Neo-Gothic forms were considered the most appropriate, for the National Land Bank and the Governance of the Western Prussia Provinces as well, for structures that were planned to be raised in the direct vicinity of the Prison Tower. Such was the case not only with the design by Hurt Hempel, responsible mainly for the elevation, that was chosen for implementation (since the main building was designed by Fritz Tiburtius), but also that which was awarded the second prize, namely the design by Albert Schutte and Adolf Volmer, were regarded by the critics of *Zentralblatt für das deutsche Baugewerbe*, as echoing “the brick architecture of the old Gdańsk buildings.”³⁰

The new architecture of Gdańsk in 1880–1910 was equally German and Gdańsk in its stylistics; it allowed for both national and local identification, which was clearly read by the then German inhabitants of the city. This did not, however, remain equally obvious for the Poles: as much as the local identification was clear also for them, the relationship with the national German style were no longer so. This is testified not only by the writings of the period, from the reports

²⁷ Maciakowska, “Gdański konkurs,” 327–337.

²⁸ Ernst Schade, “Geschäftshäuser,” in: *Danzig und seine Bauten* (Berlin: Ernst, 1908), 226.

²⁹ “Der Neubau der Stadtbücherei in Danzig,” *Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung* 25/61 (1905): 382–383; Omilanowska, “Die Danziger Stadtbibliothek.”

³⁰ Schutte & Volmer, “Geschäftshaus der Provinzial-Landschafts-Direktion in Danzig,” *Zentralblatt für das deutsche Baugewerbe* 4/26 (1905): 305.

on the expeditions of Polish architects to Gdańsk³¹ to the guide texts on the other extreme,³² but also the episodic – as it might be, but meaningful at the same time – use of the “Old Gdańsk” style in the exhibition pavilion of the Okocim Brewery built in Lvov by the Cracow architect Tomas Pryliński in 1894. The use of the “Old Gdańsk forms” was in the eyes of the commissioning entity meant to emphasise the long tradition of beer brewing in Okocim, as a matter of fact located in the south of Poland, in the then-Galicia.³³

The dominance of German Neo-Renaissance in Gdańsk architecture was in a way consolidated by establishing a strong centre of research into the old architecture of the city created at the Architecture Department at Gdańsk Technical University in 1904. The architects who formed it became a conservative opposition versus any attempts to build differently, in a more modern manner, in compliance with German and European avant-garde trends in architecture, while promoting conservative solutions. Meanwhile, the Gdańsk milieu willingly accepted the influence of Heimatschutzbewegung, which was soon to be seen in the architecture of villa quarters, first of all in Langfuhr and the estates in the style of “garden-cities, such as for example the complex of a clerks” cooperative in Neuschottland.³⁴

Even before the outbreak of World War I, the focus on the past and the values of old architecture yielded the first attempts to restore the original homogeneous character to the old quarter of the city. In practice, this meant the rejection of the buildings from the first half of the 19th century, yet at the same time the first voices of criticism of late Historicism could be heard. In 1910, on the initiative of the private properties’ owners, a competition was held to alter two houses adjacent to the Baroque Schlüter, so-called, in Jopengasse (today’s Piwna Street). The winning design was authored by Carl Anton Meckel and Max Flier, and it assumed the stylistic adjustment of the buildings to be altered both to the above-mentioned houses and buildings along the whole street (Fig. 10). In effect, a pastiche on Baroque architecture was achieved: formally, very close to the Schlüter House, yet featuring shapes that those houses most probably had never had.³⁵

The first “non-Gdańsk” designs clearly departing from the previous stylistics applicable to Gdańsk architecture appeared, and, most importantly, were awarded

³¹ Jakub Lewicki, “Recepcja architektury gdańskiej w środowisku lwowskim na przełomie XIX i XX wieku,” in: *Studia nad architekturą Gdańska i Pomorza*, ed. Andrzej Grzybkowski (Warszawa: DiG, 2004), 215–226.

³² Kruszyński, *Przewodnik po Gdańsku*, 11.

³³ Lewicki, “Recepcja architektury,” 220.

³⁴ Jagoda Załęska-Kaczko, “Walka z kryzysem mieszkaniowym w Gdańsku około 1900 r. Urbanizacja Nowych Szkotów w Gdańsku w świetle idei Miasta-Ogrodu,” *Porta Aurea* 11 (2012): 163–202.

³⁵ “Das Schlüterhaus in Danzig,” *Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung* 33/35 (1913): 235–237; also: 36 (1913): 247–248.



Fig. 10. Gdańsk, design of the Schlütterhaus in Jopengasse, 1910–1912, Carl Anton Meckel and Max Flier, *Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung* 33 (1913), no. 37, 249

only in the competition for the city hall, Stadthalle, adjudicated in 1911.³⁶ The first prize was given to Adolph Stahl, an architect from Szczecin, while the awarded designs included, among others, the proposal of Curt Hempel in line with the trend of modernised Neo-Classicism from about 1910.

³⁶ "Stadthalle in Danzig," *Deutsche Konkurrenzen* 27/7 (1911/1912): 1–31.

In the inter-war period, during the existence of the Free City of Danzig, architects affiliated with the Architecture Department of the Technical University continued to have a decisive voice on the shape of Gdańsk architecture.³⁷ They effectively hampered all attempts to raise any avant-garde designs in the historical city centre, which Martin Kiessling, holding the office of Gdańsk's city architect in 1927–1929 verified personally. He had succeeded to have two schools raised according to his designs in some other districts of Gdańsk, yet the idea to introduce any modern urban solutions in the strict centre of the city was strongly criticised, mainly by Otto Kloeppel, and such projects, in fact, remained unaccomplished.³⁸

After the National Socialist Party had won power in 1933, in Gdańsk a broad campaign to restore the monumental centre of the city was started. Within six years a great effort was undertaken to restore the old aspect of the city by returning the facades to their original looks. Some of the actions included removing shop windows enlarged at the expense of the original windows and doors at the turn of the 19th century, and reducing the number of aggressive advertisements. The key aim was to alter houses that “did not match” the historical architecture in the spirit of the architecture of the old Gdańsk.³⁹ Buildings from the 19th and early twentieth centuries that fell victim to those alterations first. Their Neo-Renaissance forms characteristic of late Historicism no longer matched the concept of the true Old Gdańsk architecture of the generation deciding on the new shape of the centre of Gdańsk in the 1930s. The accomplished result proved to create a very homogenous whole, especially as any remains reminding of the fact that the city had once belonged to Poland and which had survived the Prussian times were as a matter of fact eliminated.

The year 1945 resulted in an almost complete annihilation of the historic centre of Gdańsk, whereas in the aftermath of the decision of the great powers the city was to be on the territory of the Polish People's Republic. Its former inhabitants who had not managed to evacuate before the war front arrived, were displaced, their homes to be occupied by Poles coming mainly from the eastern territories of Poland incorporated into the Soviet Union. A new stage in the history of the city started, in which political and social needs related mainly to the need to tame space and gain new identification motivated the decision to rebuild the destroyed city centre. The pieces that had survived from the times of Prussia where then cursed, and only those edifices which for utilitarian reasons could be used without any greater financial input survived. Instead, the old architecture from the times of the Polish-Lithuania Commonwealth was worth restoring, due mainly to the fact

³⁷ Friedrich, *Walka obrazów*, 152–195.

³⁸ Karina Rojek, “Tradycja versus nowoczesność. Polemika na temat przyszłej architektury Gdańska (1927–1928),” *Porta Aurea* 7–8 (2009): 382–395; Birte Pusback, *Stadt als Heimat. Die Danziger Denkmalpflege zwischen 1933 und 1939* (Köln–Weimar–Wien: Böhlau, 2006), 203–209.

³⁹ Pusback, *Stadt als Heimat*, 192–203.

that in the course of the debate the opinion on its Polishness prevailed.⁴⁰ As a result of the reconstruction all the city “icons” were faithfully restored: the city gates, churches, town halls, the Artus Manor, and the Court of St George, yet the residential architecture was rebuilt in order to satisfy the needs of an already new working estate, hiding ordinary apartment blocks grouped around internal courtyards behind the “Gdańsk” gabled narrow façades that had once been very densely built up.⁴¹ On the very occasion an attempt to “Polonise” or rather “de-Germanise” the reconstructed buildings was made to consciously manipulate iconographic motifs of the façade decoration, especially along the stately route along Długa and Długi Targ Streets.⁴² The complex of the reconstructed old centre of the city was to become the symbol of Poland’s eternal presence on the Baltic.

An amazing newest chapter in the history of the reception of Gdańsk architecture and searching for the places of local identification began in the 1990s. Apparently, among the circles of quite an influential group of Gdańsk intellectuals a concept was born to reconstruct the works of Neo-Renaissance architecture from Wilhelmine times, as the latter was regarded to be an excellent example of the Gdańsk genius loci and a signpost for modern architects searching for a new expression for Gdańsk architecture.⁴³ Paradoxically, in the eyes of some contemporary Gdańsk residents the German architecture, the Gründerzeit turned out to be an attractive alternative to some contemporary designs. The result of a such-conceived policy of cherishing the local genius loci and revealed in the brick-stone elevations, volute gables, bay windows, and Renaissance turrets, can be seen, for example, in the buildings raised in the 1990s along the southern street front of Stażewna Street (former Milch-kannengasse), where in synthetic plasters the facades of houses from the times of the Gründerzeit were recreated, albeit not extremely faithfully.⁴⁴ The seductively picturesque quality of those buildings effectively overcomes in many Polish beholders historical, and until recently, negative connotations. Paradoxically, this possibility of local identification with the architecture of the German times turned

⁴⁰ Friedrich, *Neue Stadt*; *idem*, *Odbudowa Głównego Miasta*.

⁴¹ *Idem*, “Główne założenia odbudowy historycznego Gdańska,” in: *Kunstgeschichte und Denkmalpflege. IV. Tagung des Arbeitskreises deutscher und polnischer Kunsthistoriker und Denkmalpfleger. Toruń 2.–6. Oktober 1997*, ed. Michał Woźniak (Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 2002), 213–222; *idem*, “Kontinuität und Innovation beim Wiederaufbau Danzigs,” in: *Architektur und Städtebau im Südlichen Ostseeraum zwischen 1936 und 1980*, ed. B. Lichtnau (Berlin 2002), 169–174; Beata Dziubicka, “Kino ‘Leningrad’ w Gdańsku,” *Porta Aurea* 9 (2010): 226–244; *idem*, *Neue Stadt*; *idem*, *Odbudowa Głównego Miasta*.

⁴² *Idem*, “Wystrój dekoracyjny Drogi Królewskiej w Gdańsku w latach 1953–1955,” *Gdańskie Studia Muzealne* 6 (1995): 111–133.

⁴³ *Idem*, “Problem “gdańskości” w architektonicznych upodobaniach współczesnych gdańszczan,” in: *Gust gdański. Materiały z sympozjum 23–24 października 2002*, eds. Bronisław Dejna, Jakub Szczepański (Gdańsk: Nadbałtyckie Centrum Kultury, 2004), 82–98.

⁴⁴ Dominika Piluk, “Próby uobecnienia tradycji w gdańskiej architekturze lat dziewięćdziesiątych XX w.,” *Porta Aurea* 17 (2018): 244–268.

out to be very attractive, as it provides an opportunity to create yet another Gdańsk myth on the city's tolerance, openness, and multi-ethnic character, meaning features desirable for the united Europe of the twenty-first century.

Actually, the analysing of Gdańsk's architectural legacy in the national categories of the Polish or German qualities has created a number of myths, fabricating this or that myth for the purpose of current political needs. Over the last two centuries authors writing about Gdańsk architecture have developed a whole range of strategies of appropriation supported by a strong awareness of a multi-century-long Polish-German national conflict. And the easiest way out always turned out to be the reference to the local dimension of things, the mythology of an always free and independent Gdańsk, overwhelmed by that genius loci which allowed it to maintain cultural continuity despite a complicated political history.

The Renaissance architecture of Gdańsk, interpreted by scholars, architects, and the 19th-century Prussian residents of Gdańsk served as grounds for creating the architecture of Historicism in its national style, yet of a local connotation, which apparently 100 years later has been regarded by the Poles living in the city as a manifestation of the genius loci, and has been raised to the status of a two-aspect model: of local identification and a trans-national tolerance at the same time.