

# The Building at 8, Dunajewskiego in Cracow, known as „The Ship”

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This paper presents a building designed by architect Waław Krzyżanowski, commissioned by the Land Bank (*Bank Rolny*). The Bank purchased the plot in question in the 1930s, and construction of the building started before WWII, in 1938, at the former site of the Hotel Krakowski (designed by Filip Pokutyński), one of Cracow landmarks at the time. The decision to pull down the hotel building was made within

the project of “Greater Cracow,”<sup>1</sup> which included

1. „The idea of ‘Greater Cracow’ was conceived in the early 20th century. It was to symbolize a new stage of the city development after neighbouring villages were incorporated. (...) In the period between WWI and WWII, architects and town planners working in the Regulation Office started to execute a number of development plans for the newly incorporated areas, to make them worthy of the term ‘Greater Cracow’. A symbol of these activities was the redevelopment of the areas of the old railway ring line, where a major avenue, with its sections

1. BPH Bank, Cracow. Photo by the author





2. BPH Bank, Cracow. Photo by the author

the redevelopment of the 19th-century streets. Krzyżanowski designed the building so that it would resemble an elegant and majestic "ship ploughing the waves"<sup>2</sup>, in response to the marine trends in architectural design, in fashion at the time.

The construction of the *Bank Rolny* building at 8, Dunajewskiego in Cracow was preceded by a number of design versions. The original version of the design was not executed though.

The version accepted for construction was a corner building composed of two parts: the higher – residential, and the lower – housing the bank's front office as well as office rooms. An interesting thing is that, in order to raise the money for its construction, donation certificates were issued, bought by, among others, the Bank employees. The history of the building is most interesting. Its construction started in 1938 and was continued by the German invaders, who changed the shape and size of the building, making it lower than designed and eliminating steel structural elements. The building was

named after Poland's 3 greatest Romantic poets was built, with some monumental buildings like the National Museum, Jagiellonian Library or the University of Mining (AGH)". After: Maszczak Marek, Skrejko Magdalena, authors and curators of the exhibition „Greater Cracow” in the Museum of Photography, Cracow.

2. After: Żychowska Maria Jolanta, *Między tradycją a awangardą. Problem stylu w architekturze Krakowa lat międzywojennych*, Monograph 113, Cracow University of Technology, Cracow 1991, p. 126, passim.

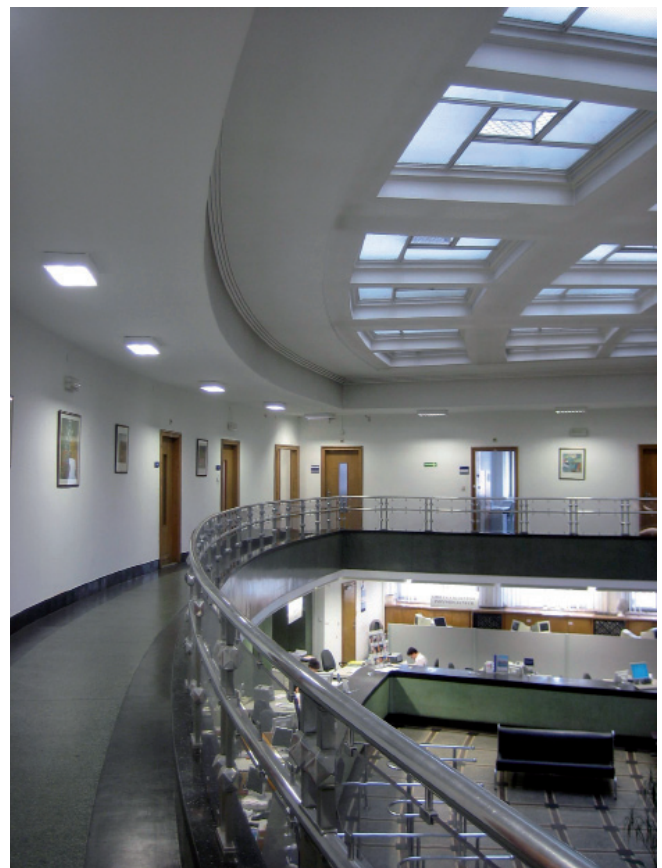
completed in 1953. After WWII, it housed both *Bank Rolny* and the National Bank of Poland (*Narodowy Bank Polski*).

Finishing works were performed under the designer's vigilant eye. The building has numerous beautiful details, particularly terrazzo-covered walls and pillars, and a gorgeous, monolithic and monumental front room counter. Fine, en masse-coloured terrazzo, with its harmony of colours still delights with its ingenuity, elegant shape, quality of material and impeccable workmanship.

The composition of the floor fans out from the entrance, corresponding with daylight distribution provided by a skylight, practically taking the whole surface of the front office ceiling. Some elements of fixtures and equipment have survived till today. The building also has a roof terrace with a view on the street junction; originally, the terrace was designed to house tea gardens.

Another turning point in the history of the building was its handing over to the Warsaw-based BPH Bank (it houses a branch of the Bank till now). At that moment, its decline started, a kind of decay of the place and the building itself. Apart from its well-preserved interior, not much has survived of the building's past splendour. The terrabona (plaster looking like stone!) of the bank segment was covered with paint,

3. BPH Bank, Cracow. Photo by the author



thus separating this part from the rest of the building, and the windows were blanketed with advertisements. Inside the bank segment, the terrazzo on the walls and pillars has survived. The whole front office counter remains intact, although, reportedly, there are plans to demolish it. There were some hasty attempts to damage it to show its poor condition; the counter, however, proved damage-resistant then, yet plans to remove it have not been given up. The removal of the counter as well as other elements of the décor would have harmful effects on the coherent composition of the building, now historical, with one of the few, well-preserved examples of bank interior of that time.

The residential part of the building was not as lucky as the bank. While the district heating system was being modernised, the whole aesthetics was ruined; to make things worse, hanging lamps were replaced with industrial fluorescent panels. With its splendour and elegance gone, the building is no longer a respectable tenement house of the prewar period; now it looks dirty and run-down.

The devastation of the interior and exterior of the residential part of one of the outstanding and most valuable examples of Cracow prewar architecture is outrageous. The more so as preservation officers show no interest whatsoever. And its creator, Waław Krzyżanowski, a well-known architect, must be turning in his grave.

So what next? It is difficult to say if preservation officers will take any action, as they did nothing to preserve other Cracow buildings in their original state, for example: the façade of the tenement house in street Długa painted wild purple; tenement houses with top-floor extensions whose form, aesthetics and style do not match the original volume; terrabona façades of the outstanding works of prewar architecture painted over (the PKO Bank building in Wielopole Street, designed by A. Szyszko-Bohusz; the former IKC building by J. Struszkiewicz), or the dilapidated building in Łobzowska Street, at Słowackiego Avenue (the so-called Professors' House, architect L. Wojtyczko), with its run-down "ceramic" elevations.

On the other hand, there are also examples of architectural continuity (which J. Żórawski discusses), where efforts have been made to preserve the building's original character: the top-floor extensions of the tenement house in street Retoryka; the house in street Emaus, where the original detail was retained despite heat insulation of the exterior; and the continuation of the original concept while extending the Jagiellonian Library.

Is there a way to prevent our predecessors turning in their graves and the descendants cursing us seeing the helplessness of preservation



4. National Museum, Cracow. Photo by the author

officers and the thwarting of aesthetic efforts? In my opinion, it is necessary to educate through art (in its broad sense) both people responsible for monument preservation and the public. We need art in its multi-level sense, because "people need to use and enjoy art as they need food and air", as Herbert Read wrote<sup>3</sup>. Would anyone approve an antique display cabinet to be coated with oil paint?

In Poland, there is no respect for Modernist and contemporary architecture viewed as art and our common good, bearing testimony of ourselves and our history. There is no sense of beauty, and at the same time there is common consent to ugliness and mediocrity. Do conservators not feel offended by a bright-yellow gas box on the Modernist façade (the Bank in Dunajewskiego Street, designed by W. Krzyżanowski), billboards on the National Museum building (by B. Szmidt, J. Juraszyński and J. Dumnicki) and the Jagiellonian Library (by W. Krzyżanowski)? Even in protected areas?

There are numerous charters devoted to cultural heritage protection, such as the 1964 Venice Charter; its Article 1 states that the concept of a historical monument applies not only to great works of art but also to more modest works of the past that have acquired cultural

3. Read Herbert, *Wychowanie przez sztukę*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1976, p. 341.



5. District of Nowy Kleparz, Cracow. Photo by the author

significance with the passing of time<sup>4</sup>. The charters deal with the issues of historical towns and cities and their architecture, stating that any activity that is a durable and characteristic document of its time must be safeguarded. Therefore, even the buildings not registered as historical monuments should be safeguarded, those in Cracow in particular. Cracow buildings

4. Kadłuczka Andrzej, *Ochrona Zabytków Architektury, Vol. 1, Zarys doktryn i teorii*, Stowarzyszenie Konserwatorów Zabytków, Cracow 2000.

of the 1920s and 1930s are part of a heritage site, so any renovation work requires monument preservation officer's acceptance; therefore, we may assume that the negative examples presented in this paper were approved or at least not challenged by preservation officers.

The Preamble to the Charter of Cracow 2000<sup>5</sup> states: "Heritage cannot be defined in a fixed way. One can only define the way in which the heritage may be identified. Plurality in society entails a great diversity in heritage concepts as conceived by the entire community; therefore, the tools and methods developed for appropriate preservation should be adapted to the evolving situations, which are subject to a process of continual change". Are our preservation officers prepared for such an approach?

What we need is architectural conservators trained, constantly and continuously, in the field of contemporary art and architecture, which is also included in the Cracow Charter. Only systematic training and education of people through art will help understand the cultural heritage of the past, the present, and the future. And then good continuation, contemporary creation and adaptation to new functions will be able to coexist, and architecture of the place will be understood.

And then "The Ship" in Dunajewski Street, Cracow, will be safely moored<sup>6</sup>.

5. *Cracow Charter*, International Conservation Conference, IHAiKZ WA PK, Cracow 2000.

6. Fabijański Marcin, Purchla Jacek, *Historia architektury Krakowa w zarysie*. Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001; Gyurkovich Jacek, *Współczesne koncepcje Architektury Miejsca*, International Conservation Conference Cracow 2000, Vol. 6, Cracow 1999.

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