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BIBLE, GOWN, HARMONIUM... THE MEMORY OF PROTESTANTISM AT MUSEUMS IN MASURIA

Historical Masuria was an area dominated by Protestantism from 1525, when the Reformation was introduced in the former monastic state – transformed into a secular duchy – by a decision of Albrecht von Hohenzollern, the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, until the end of World War II in 1945. Between the seventeenth and the nineteenth century, the Protestant or Evangelical faith was one of the two pillars of Masurian identity – the second was the dialect of Polish used by the Masurians. After the changes to the state border between Poland and Germany and the incorporation of Masuria as part of the so-called Recovered Territories into post-war Poland, the country saw a mass population displacement – the relocation of most Masurians to Germany and of Poles from the Kresy (eastern borderlands) and central Poland to Masuria. Consequently, the former Protestant majority became a minority in what had been their “own” land, while the area densely populated by Protestants – surrounding Catholic Warmia like a ring – became the region of the Evangelical diaspora. Throughout post-war Poland – except for Cieszyn Silesia – the Protestant population that had numbered almost a million Polish citizens before the war became a dispersed minority in their own country.

Despite the physical disappearance of the Masurian Protestants, cultural memory of them has been preserved in literature, local institutions and cultural associations. Numerous scholarly studies at local, national and international level provide knowledge on Masuria, in particular the historical monographs by Max Toeppen¹ and contemporary observations made by Andrzej Sakson² and Andreas Kossert³. In recent times, however, the Polish general public has learned most about Masurians and their lives in the difficult twentieth century not so much from the scholarly studies as from

¹ M. Toeppen, *Historia Mazur: przyczynek do dziejów krainy i kultury pruskiej/według źródeł drukowanych i rękopiśmiennych przedstawił Max Toeppen*, translated by M. Szymańska-Jasińska, edited and prefaced by G. Jasiński, Olsztyn 1995.

² A. Sakson, *Mazury – społeczność pogranicza*, Poznań 1990; *id.*, *Mazury – pomiędzy polskością a niemieckością*, Cracow 2004; *id.*, *Od Kłajpedy do Olsztyna: współcześni mieszkańcy byłych Prus Wschodnich: Kraj Kłajpedzki, Obwód Kaliningradzki, Warmia i Mazury*, Poznań 2011; *id.*, *Dziedzictwo Prus Wschodnich: socjologiczne i historyczne studia o regionie*, Dąbrówno–Olsztyn 2017.

³ A. Kossert, *Masuren: Ostpreußens vergessener Süden*, Berlin 2001 [Polish edition: *Mazury. Zapomniane południe Prus Wschodnich*, translated by B. Ostrowska, Warsaw 2004].

the award-winning film *Róża* (2011) by Wojciech Smarzowski. I refer to this film because when I was conducting my research – interviews with Masurian museologists so relevant to the topic discussed below – virtually every respondent made reference to *Róża*, pointing to the fact that Poles' general historical awareness has been increased owing to the success of that film. Likewise, students attending classes in regional culture at the University of Gdańsk stressed the importance of *Róża* – for them, a film as an element of popular or visual culture is a carrier of cultural memory and (more often than not the only) instrument of historical education. Bearing in mind the above-mentioned discrepancy between specialist and popular knowledge, my research will focus on the museum exhibition as a visual medium of conveying information. The first part of the article discusses the historical background of the Protestant question in Masuria and the museum landscape of modern Masuria within the borders of the province of Warmia and Masuria, and presents a selected method of analysing museum exhibitions, which is based on the semiotics of visual representations. The second part of the study focuses on the presentation and interpretation of selected cases in accordance with the chosen method of semiotic analysis.

MASURIA AND THE PROTESTANT COMMUNITY

The scholarly literature on Masuria is extensive, and yet the definition of the region's boundaries is a daunting task at a time when the Masurian province has been almost completely "demasurianised" (divested of its Masurian roots) – to use a term coined by Robert Traba.⁴ The term "Prussian Masuria", as opposed to Warmia, was probably used for the first time by Gotfryd Piotr Rauschnick in 1817 in his account of a trip to Prussia.⁵ A useful definition offered by Grzegorz Jasiński describes Masuria as "the lands inhabited by the Masurians when the term began to be used on a regular basis, that is in the second half of the nineteenth century."⁶ Therefore, as an area Masuria can be said to consist of such historical districts as "Ełk, Giżycko, Mrągowo, Nidzica, Olecko, Ostróda, Pisz, Szczytno and Węgorzewo as well as the southern parts of the Kętrzyn and Gołdap region."⁷ Despite post-war changes made to the names of most East Prussian towns, the tendency to restrict the historical boundaries of Masuria to the area that it occupied in the second half of the nineteenth century, i.e.

⁴ R. Traba, Mazury: o wymazywaniu i odzyskiwaniu, *Polityka Pomocnik Historyczny*: Prusy. Wzlot i upadek, 2012, vol. 3, p. 129.

⁵ P. Rosenwall [actually G.P. Rauschnick], *Bemerkungen eines Russen über Preussen und dessen Bewohner, gesammelt auf einer im Jahre 1814 durch dieses Land unternommenen Reise*, Mainz 1817, p. 207; quoted after M. Toepfen, *Historia Mazur...*, p. 26. See also: S. Hartmann, Ziemia pruskie w relacjach z podróży Jana Arnolda von Brandta, Jana Bernoulliego, Karola Feyerabenda, Krystiana Gottlieba i Gotfryda Piotra Rauschnicka, *Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie*, 2007, 1, p. 107.

⁶ G. Jasiński, *Słownik duchownych ewangelickich na Mazurach w XIX wieku (1817-1914)*, Dąbrówno 2015, p. 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*

to the period when Max Toeppen, the most eminent German historian of those lands, wrote his *History of Masuria*, is quite persistent.

Masuria would not have come into existence without the Masurians, although nowadays it has to continue without them. To be considered Masurian one had to be a member of the “Polish-speaking Evangelical population (mainly Lutheran) inhabiting the southern areas of East Prussia.”⁸ Despite historical exceptions (e.g. German-speaking Masurians in the later stage of germanisation in the first half of the twentieth century, or Polish-speaking Protestants inhabiting southern Warmia⁹), the Polish language (its Masurian variety) and Protestant denomination (most often Evangelical Augsburg, Evangelical Union after 1817, also including religious assemblies characteristic of Masurians) are considered the essential components of being Masurian, understood as a set of features constituting the ethos of the group in question.

Statistical data from the so-called long nineteenth century testify to the historical dominance, in terms of numbers, of the Protestant movement in the areas of East Prussia which accepted the Reformation. It should be noted that from 1815 East Prussia was divided into the Regierungsbezirke of Königsberg and Gumbinnen. At that time (1816), in the Königsberg region (535,500 inhabitants), Lutherans (i.e. Augsburg Evangelicals) constituted 78.3% of the population and the Reformed Evangelicals (Calvinists) 0.6%. Roman Catholics, inhabiting traditionally Catholic Warmia, constituted a strong minority of 20.6%, while the proportions of Jews and Mennonites were 0.3% and 0.06% respectively. In the Regierungsbezirk Gumbinnen Lutherans accounted for 93.6% and Calvinists 4.6% (making 98.2% Protestants in total), while Catholics accounted for 1.1%, Jews 0.5% and Mennonites 0.08%.¹⁰ The Prussian Union of Churches, formed in 1817 under the aegis of the Prussian king, united the Augsburg and Reformed Evangelicals (both German and French – the descendants of Huguenots taken in by Prussia). In 1905, a new Regierungsbezirk Allenstein was formed in the south of East Prussia. The figures for particular denominations in 1910 were as follows: 84.6% of Augsburg and Reformed Evangelicals united by the Union in Regierungsbezirk Königsberg, 96.5% in Regierungsbezirk Gumbinnen and 70.3% in Regierungsbezirk Allenstein. Catholics accounted for 13.6% of the population in Regierungsbezirk Königsberg, 2% in Regierungsbezirk Gumbinnen and 28.2% in Regierungsbezirk Allenstein. Jews and other religions constituted a minority among minorities and accounted for around 0.6–2.1% of the population.

Masuria made up about 30% of East Prussia, and included the districts of Nidzica, Ostróda, Szczytno and some parts of Kętrzyn in the original Regierungsbezirk Königsberg and the districts of Ełk, Giżycko, Mrągowo, Olecko, Pisz, Węgorzewo and some parts of Gołdap in Regierungsbezirk Gumbinnen. Most of Masuria became part of Regierungsbezirk Allenstein after its creation in 1905. In the nineteenth cen-

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ G. Jasiński, *Kościół ewangelicki w Olsztynie w XIX wieku*, in: *Olsztyn (1353-2003)*, S. Achremczyk, W. Ogrodziński (eds.), Olsztyn 2003, p. 265.

¹⁰ Statistical data in this chapter are cited after: G. Jasiński, *Słownik duchownych ewangelickich*, pp. 14-15.

tury, Masurians constituted between 24% and 26% of the inhabitants of East Prussia. With regard to the organisation of the religious life of Masurians in the nineteenth century, they were divided into a dozen or so dioceses. Their seats were in Działdowo (Soldau),¹¹ Elk (Lyck), Giżycko (Lötzen), Gołdap (Goldap), Kętrzyn (Rastenburg), Mrągowo (Ządzbork, Sensburg), Nidzica (Neidenburg), Olecko (Marggrabowa), Olsztynek (Hohenstein),¹² Ostróda (Osterode), Pisz (Johannisburg), Szczytno (Ortelsburg) and Węgorzewo (Angerburg). According to statistical data from 1913, there were 124 Masurian Evangelical parishes.

The end of World War II brought about a drastic change in the well-established (since the sixteenth century) denominational structure of Prussia, where Protestants constituted a strong majority. The population shift led to the rapid disappearance of the Masurian Protestant population, who had either fled the Red Army or left for Germany as a result of an inept repolonisation policy. Thirteen dioceses of the dissolved German United Church were replaced with a single Masurian diocese of the Evangelical-Augsburg Church, with its consistory in Warsaw. Despite the “disaster” of 1945, in the mid-1950s the Masurian diocese, with 46,000 faithful, was the largest Protestant diocese in Poland.¹³ However, the repression of Masurians as alleged “Germans” and their forced or voluntary emigration to West Germany contributed to the decimation of the Masurian population in post-war Poland:

Before 1945, the Masurian population on the territory they lived had almost no contact with the Catholics. [...] The change in the denominational structure of the country resulted in many conflicts. Most Catholics arriving from central Poland or from the Kresy (eastern borderlands) had had limited (if any) interaction with Protestants, knew nothing about the denomination, often fostered absurd myths, and as a rule identified Evangelism with Germanness.¹⁴

Out of approximately 80–100,000 Protestants in Masuria at the end of World War II, the number in the Olsztyn region dropped to just 6400 in the 1970s.¹⁵ Statistical data from 2011 refer to 3558 members of the Masurian diocese (the third largest in terms of the number of members in Poland, after those of Cieszyń and Katowice).¹⁶ It should be noted, however, that the “Masurian” diocese as it is known today covers not only historical Masuria and Warmia, but also the Suwałki and Podlasie regions. It is divided into fifteen parishes with seats in Białystok, Działdowo, Giżycko, Kętrzyn,

¹¹ Part of the Nidzica diocese until 1910. Cited after: G. Jasiński, *Słownik duchownych ewangelickich*, p. 399.

¹² Part of the Ostróda diocese until 1903. *Ibid.*, p. 418.

¹³ A. Friszke, *Ksiądz Edmund Friszke – dramat polskiego ewangelika*, in: *Ewangelicy duchowni i parafianie. Powojenne lata w Olsztynie i na Mazurach*, S. Kruk (ed.), Olsztyn 2007, p. 41.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁵ K. Bielawny, *Kościół ewangelicko-augsburski na Warmii i Mazurach po II wojnie światowej w spojrzeniu historyczno-ekumenicznym*, Olsztyn 2008, p. 7. See also: A. Jagucki, *Mazurskie dole i niedole. Wspomnienia i refleksje z lat pracy na Mazurach*, Olsztyn 2004, pp. 37-41.

¹⁶ Statistics Poland [GUS]: *Wyznania religijne, stowarzyszenia narodowościowe i etniczne w Polsce 2009-2011*, Warsaw 2013, p. 57.

Mikołajki, Mrągowo, Nidzica, Olsztyn, Ostróda, Pasym, Pisz, Ryn, Sorkwity, Suwałki and Szczytno. These parishes are further divided into 31 branches, located mainly in villages and towns with an even smaller Protestant community. The parish in Sorkwity is the only rural parish that has survived. Such figures as the pastor and his wife, who used to be so characteristic of the Masurian landscape and described by Masurian writers (for example, Ernst Wiechert in *Das einfache Leben* or *Missa sine nomine*), have disappeared from the modern countryside. The sense of being a minority which has often been harassed by the Catholic majority¹⁷ and the memory of conflicts related to the forceful takeover of Evangelical churches by the Roman Church even as late as the 1980s¹⁸ are still alive among the Protestants in Masuria, both the few indigenous inhabitants still living there and newcomers from other parts of the country. Has this historical change in the situation of the Masurian Protestant community been reflected in the museums of the region, which are supposed to be institutions whose principal mission is to preserve collective memory?

MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS AS A CARRIER OF MEMORY OF A GROUP

Since the Enlightenment, museums have played an important role in European culture, and for about two hundred years they have been among the most important institutions of the Modern Age. Donald Preziosi, the art historian, says that museums, as one of the instruments serving to describe the past and the projected future, are “primarily social tools used for creating and sustaining modernity.”¹⁹ At the same time, according to Pierre Nory, the French researcher and the father of “memory studies”, museums are “sites of memory” (*lieux de mémoire*) forming the axis of the crystallisation of group identity of a given community. Using selected artefacts and narratives, they present to residents and tourists certain ideas that the group has about itself, constructing (or re-constructing) the worlds of the past.²⁰

Museums shape history, memory and meaning by arranging artefacts singled out from our and other societies; these artefacts are then displayed in an arrangement suitable for the visitors.²¹

Nowadays, despite the significant loss of the “temple of knowledge” status which dates back to antiquity, museums are multifaceted and dynamically developing insti-

¹⁷ A. Czesła, *Tożsamość ewangelików olsztyńskich*, in: *Ewangelicy duchowni i parafianie. Powojenne lata w Olsztynie i na Mazurach*, Olsztyn 2007, pp. 107-123.

¹⁸ K. Bielawny, *Kościół ewangelicko-augsburski na Warmii i Mazurach po II wojnie światowej w spojrzeniu historyczno-ekumenicznym*, Olsztyn 2008, vol. III: *Problemy z obiektami sakralnymi w kościele ewangelicko-augsburskim*, pp. 136-222.

¹⁹ D. Preziosi, *Nowoczesność ponownie: Muzeum jako trompel'oeil*, in: *Display. Strategie wystawiania*, M. Hussakowska, E.M. Tatar (eds.), Cracow 2012, p. 65.

²⁰ See also the entry “Muzeum” in: *Modi memorandi. Leksykon kultury pamięci*, M. Saryusz-Wolska, R. Traba (eds.), Warsaw 2014, pp. 246-251.

²¹ *Ibid.*

tutions. Dorota Folga-Januszewska, an expert in museums, defines them in the following way:

[...] a modern museum is still a permanent institution which has to be profitable in order to survive, serves as a tool for societies and their politics for determining their identity and values, is publicly accessible both on the web or through personal communication systems, researches the heritage of humanity and its environment, acquires exhibits and simulacra, conserves collections or carriers on which they are stored, make them open to the public and exhibits them, creates new realities for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.²²

Moreover, Masuria, the land of – according to sentimental writers – “dark forests and crystal lakes”, almost forgotten by history, became in the nineteenth century an area where *Heimattmuseen* (as they are called by Siegfried Lenz in his famous book *The Heritage*), the “sites of memory” of local communities, were established. The year 1945 was a turning point which marked the beginning of the Polish–German population shift and thus changes in the religious composition of Masuria. That year also represents a turning point in the paradigm of cultural memory, which will inevitably be reflected in the collections and exhibitions of regional museums. It is worth noting that for the purpose of modern research it is difficult to talk about “Masurian museums” (due to the problem of precise determination of Masuria’s borders) and one should rather refer to them as museum institutions in the province of Warmia and Masuria. Let us discuss briefly the contemporary museum landscape as it is presented in official data from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (henceforth MKiDN) and the National Institute for Museums and Public Collections (henceforth NIMOZ).²³

In May 2017, there were 24 museums (not including their branches) in Warmia and Masuria province, and all had statutes which complied with the Museum Act and were approved by MKiDN, which means that they had a founder, certain collections and an exhibition concept. At that time, there were 692 museum institutions from all over Poland on the ministerial list, which means that museums from Warmia and Masuria province represent 3.46% of such institutions in the whole country (however, this figure would be higher if five dynamic regional branches of the Museum of Warmia and Masuria in Olsztyn were included, alongside another three in Olsztyn). It should be noted, however, that neither the MKiDN nor the NIMOZ list includes all institutions which claim to be “museums”, whether due to the fact that they are controlled by other structures than MKiDN or by decision of their founders (as in the case, for example, of the private Masurian Museum in Owczarnia near Kętrzyn).

²² D. Folga-Januszewska, *Muzeum. Fenomeny i problemy*, Cracow 2015, pp. 152–153.

²³ The list can be accessed at <http://bip.mkidn.gov.pl/pages/rejestry-ewidencje-archiwa-wykazy/rejestry-muzeow.php>. The MKiDN list accessed on 18 May 2017 included 692 museum institutions from all over Poland. The list maintained by the National Institute for Museums and Public Collections (NIMOZ), which is not as up-to-date as that of MKiDN, includes 643 museums as of 1 July 2016: <http://nimoz.pl/pl/bazy-danych/wykaz-muzeow-w-polsce> [accessed 23 May 2017].

The museums in Warmia and Masuria province include institutions with different status in the museum hierarchy. Those listed in the National Register of Museums have the highest status. There are four such institutions in the province: the Museum of Warmia and Masuria in Olsztyn (registered in 2006), the Folk Architecture Museum and Ethnographic Park in Olsztynek (registered in 2008), the Nicolaus Copernicus Museum in Frombork (registered in 2009) and the Museum of Folk Culture in Węgorzewo (registered in 2012). These institutions are overseen by the government of Warmia and Masuria province. However, the province is not the only institution entitled to establish a museum: the Museum Act also gives broad freedom to legal entities and individuals in this respect. The MKiDN list comprises 14 museums controlled by the local authorities, founded by starosties, communes, towns and counties in the province (for example, Działdowo, Elbląg, Ełk, Kętrzyn, Pisz, Piecki, Orzysz). Two museums were established by church institutions, one Roman Catholic (the diocese of Elbląg) and one Protestant (the Parish Congregation of the Evangelical-Augsburg Parish of the Holy Trinity in Mikołajki). Eight museums were founded by natural persons, that is, by foundations, associations and private individuals. Several museums (6) have the status of “museum under construction”, which does not mean that they are not operational. For instance, the Local History Museum in Ełk is an active museum conducting research, although it does not yet have a permanent seat.

The administrative division poses a certain problem for researchers: the present area of Warmia and Masuria province is an artificial construct consisting of various historical lands and created as a result of the administrative reform of 1999. It includes Warmia, Masuria, part of Żuławy, Powiśle and the Suwałki region. Determining the mental and geographical boundaries of individual regions which have different historical traditions is a difficult task, especially in reference to historical Masuria; this is mainly due to the fact that the sense of its uniqueness has now been lost in favour of the artificial conglomeration called “Warmia-Masuria”. Therefore, for the purposes of the present study the definition offered by Max Toeppen in the second half of the nineteenth century has been adopted (after World War II, the researcher Władysław Chojnacki used a map “Masuria in the times of Max Toeppen” when referring to the two most important constituents of the Masurian historical identity: use of the Masurian dialect of the Polish language and membership of the Protestant denomination²⁴). According to that definition, the following museum institutions from the most recent MKiDN list lie within the area of historical Masuria: the branches of the Museum of Warmia and Masuria in Mrągowo, Szczytno and Morąg; the Interactive Museum of the State of the Teutonic Order in Działdowo; the Museum of the Battle of Tannenberg in Sębark; the Folk Architecture Museum and Ethnographic Park in Olsztynek; the Local History Museum in Ełk; the Wojciech Kętrzyński Museum in Kętrzyn; the Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński Museum in Pranie and its branch – the Michał Kajka Museum in Ogródek; the Museum of Folk Culture in Węgorzewo; the Regional Mu-

²⁴ Map attached to: W. Chojnacki (ed.), *Zbory polsko-ewangelickie w byłych Prusach Wschodnich, Reformacja w Polsce*, vol. XII, 1953-55, no. 45-50.

seum in Piecki; the Regional Museum in Ostróda; the Museum of the Army, Military Science and the Orzysz Lands in Orzysz; the Museum of Pisz; the Museum of the Polish Reformation in Mikołajki; the Museum of Icons and the Old Believers' Culture in Wojnów; the Manor House in Muławki; the Museum of Military Equipment in Mrągowo; the Masurian Militaria Museum in Kętrzyn; and the Railway Tradition Museum in Węgorzewo.

Since the presence of topics related to Protestantism in Masuria, as one of the two pillars of the historical Masurian identity, is the question discussed in this article, only those institutions where one could expect collections and narratives referring to Protestantism, i.e. church, history, regional, ethnographic (including open-air) and biographical museums, were chosen for further research. Therefore, in-depth studies were carried out at eight museum institutions, two of which will be discussed in detail in this paper: the Folk Architecture Museum and Ethnographic Park in Olsztynek and the Museum of the Polish Reformation in Mikołajki. They were chosen because their exhibitions are located in “sacral” spaces²⁵ (in the vicinity of a working Protestant church) or “post-sacral” ones (in spaces that served Protestants before 1945).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS. A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF THE EXHIBITIONS

The research question is how the “Masurian spirit” is presented in current permanent museum exhibitions in historical Masuria, and more specifically how one component of the historical Masurian identity – Protestantism (Evangelicalism), introduced in the sixteenth century by the Reformation – is present in the museums' narratives. What do the Masurian museums in 2017 tell their visitors about Masurian Protestants? Where do they talk about them; what exhibits are testimonies, relics and carriers of the memory of the once dominant denomination in the region? How are these exhibits described? Indeed, do they talk about them at all? Perhaps they are silent, constructing their “Masurian” museum narrative around other components?

The main thesis on which the selected research method is based is that of the so-called new museology²⁶ which defines the museum as an institution focused primarily on the communicative function, expressed in the formula *to preserve – to study – to communicate*.²⁷ Therefore, the space of a museum, including its location, the architecture of the museum building and the shape of the exhibition space, is also considered

²⁵ I put the term “sacral” in inverted commas because in Protestantism, unlike in the Roman Catholic Church, the church building itself is not considered a sacred space.

²⁶ Cf.: P. Vergo, *Milczący obiekt*. and A. Szczerski, *Kontekst, edukacja, publiczność – muzeum z perspektywy „Nowej Muzeologii”*, in: *Muzeum sztuki. Antologia*. M. Popczyk (ed.), Cracow 2005, pp. 313-344.

²⁷ A. Ziębińska-Witek, *Historia w muzeach. Studium ekspozycji Holokaustu*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu M. Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2011, p. 26.

a carrier of a message.²⁸ Jana Scholze, a museologist and curator, considers not only the objects themselves but also the creators of the exhibition to be senders of the message conveyed by the exhibition. In Scholze's opinion:

[...] Exhibitions can be described as places where labelling and communication processes occur. These processes can be briefly but at the same time ideally described as follows: the curators of an exhibition present the content, intentions and expectations that they associate with the selected objects from their own or foreign collections; then the designers turn these ideas into the reality of spatial arrangements in which the exhibition visitors gather experience and new knowledge, which should correspond to the content conveyed by the exhibition. The process of coding and decoding information is a signing process – because the exhibition space, exhibits and the ways of arranging them become signs that refer to specific content and also to less clearly defined meanings.²⁹

It is obvious that an exhibit cannot “speak for itself”. The visitor – if not a member of an organised group shown around the museum by a guide – must independently analyse the objects and their arrangement,³⁰ decoding the message created by the authors of the exhibition. A visitor to an exhibition at a historical or ethnographic museum is helped in this respect by a whole range of additional visual linguistic messages such as exhibit labels, information boards, free catalogues, etc. Audio guides can also perform this function.

Semiotic analysis is one of the methods³¹ enabling decoding of the meaning and message of the exhibition. It is based on the assumption that the objects used to construct museum exhibitions – exhibits, exhibit labels, information boards, replicas and scale models, elements of stage design and lighting – are signs, and as such can be analysed using the terms and methods of cultural semiotics, proposed by such scholars as Charles S. Peirce, Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes. A consistent method based on the findings of Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes (denotation and connotation) and Umberto Eco (the theory of codes) has been proposed by the aforementioned Jana Scholze, who postulates an in-depth interpretation of the exhibition, consistent with three types of messages characteristic of a museum exhibition:

1. A message generated by a single exhibit;
2. A message generated by objects arranged in relation to each other in the exhibition space;
3. A message generated by the museum viewed as a public and social institution – the general context of the presentation.

²⁸ S. Paul, *Kommunizierende Räume. Das Museum*, in: A.C.T. Geppert, U. Jensen, J. Weinhold (eds.), *Ortsgespräche. Raum und Kommunikation im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Bielefeld 2005, p. 353.

²⁹ J. Scholze, *Kultursemiotik. Zeichenlesen in Ausstellungen*, in: J. Baur (ed.), *Museumsanalyse. Methoden und Konturen eines neuen Forschungsfeldes*, Bielefeld 2010, p. 129 [translated by A.H.]

³⁰ On the situation of independent visitors see: M.I. Sacha, *Samotność w muzeum*, in: *Edukacja muzealna. Konteksty teoretyczne i praktyczne*, U. Wróblewska, K. Radłowska (eds.), Białystok 2013, pp. 73-85.

³¹ A semiotic analysis can be regarded as the base method on which interpretative methods, for instance, those characteristic of narratology, performance studies or film theory (exhibition as film), can be superimposed.

The three types of messages correspond to three types of decoding, referred to by Scholze as denotation, connotation and metacommunication. Denotation refers to a single exhibit and consists in decoding the utility function of a particular object – usually the primary function for which the object was created. Decoding the utility function enables the visitor to name the object and assign it to a familiar category of objects.³² However, objects do not become exhibits only because of their utility function, but because of their potential ability to represent (for instance, through metonymy or synecdoche) certain content that can be interpreted by decoding the object as a component of a larger arrangement, which may consist of authentic artefacts, models and replicas, descriptions, information, etc. Scholze uses the term connotation to denote the type of decoding occurring at this level:

Connotations refer to the associations between a particular object and cultural processes, systems of norms and values, as well as individual life stories. These various relationships influence the manifestation of the object, and even more the associations and evaluations related to it.³³

The object may bring up a whole range of various connotations, which makes it difficult to manipulate it in such a communication situation as a museum exhibition, with its curators who select exhibits having certain specific intentions in mind and hoping that their intended connotation will be interpreted by the visitor in the same way. Therefore, it is impossible to predetermine the set of potential connotation meanings of a museum exhibit – because it is dependent not only on the intentions of the curators, the arrangement and museum context, but also on the cognitive and social competences and life experiences of the visitors.

Metacommunication – the third and last level – is a means of studying the role of the general context of an exhibition in a particular museum, as well as the impact of intentional actions of the exhibition authors on its reception, potential meanings and evaluation. Exhibitions are specific spatial structures which are the products of disputes over history, culture and society – and as such they reflect the scientific and political beliefs, personal and institutional intentions, and sympathies and antipathies of their curators and designers.³⁴

How to develop the above theoretical considerations into practice, i.e. field research combining the visual documentation and analysis of exhibitions with in-depth interviews of museum experts?³⁵ This problem may be explained using the example of a cast-iron tool for baking communion wafers, which was found in a museum in May 2017 by a pastor who had left it as a deposit there. The object in question was found in an ethnographic exhibition, in a staged peasant kitchen, and was described

³² J. Scholze, *Kultursemiotik: Zeichenlesen in Ausstellungen*, pp. 140-141.

³³ J. Scholze, *Medium Ausstellung. Lektüren musealer Gestaltung in Oxford, Leipzig, Amsterdam und Berlin*, Bielefeld 2004, p. 32 [translated by A.H.]

³⁴ J. Scholze, *Kultursemiotik*, p. 141.

³⁵ The field research was carried out between 29 April and 7 May 2017 at eight museum institutions in Warmia and Masuria province.

as a “waffle iron”. Most probably, the museum expert responsible for this particular exhibit interpreted the denotation of its primary utility function as a “tool for making waffles”. Thus, to be consistent with his/her interpretation, the expert labelled the tool as a “waffle iron”. Following this erroneous denotation, the expert went on to place the object in the broader context of a “country kitchen”, implying the connotation “a type of food preparation equipment”. This connotation is consistent with the third level of metacommunication, i.e. the mission of an ethnographic museum as an institution presenting “everyday life in the countryside in the past centuries”. On the other hand, seen from the pastor’s point of view, the whole of this thought process must be a source of irritation and will probably result in the withdrawal of the object from the museum.

MUSEUMS IN THE MASURIAN CULTURAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS AND ANALYSIS OF THE EXHIBITIONS

Museum architecture, and its aesthetic and psychological significance as a tool for enhancing the prestige of the collections and their donors to the public, is a theme often discussed by art historians and museologists.³⁶ Different classifications of new museums have been suggested. For instance, according to Diane Ghirardo, they can be categorised as “sanctuaries”, “warehouses”, “commercial cultural centres” and the like.³⁷ Such a classification is supposed to refer to the museums’ functions rather than their architectural forms. Zdzisław Żygulski imposes a certain order on the chronological development of museum architecture, starting with the Parthenon and the Pantheon, churches and palaces, and ending with fortresses, bunkers, pyramids and transparent, surreal, zoological and biomorphic forms.³⁸ These concepts, which were formulated for the purpose of the analysis of architecture as a form of “high art”, which by definition is an aesthetic object, are not useful in relation to the architecture that is the subject of my study, namely that of regional museums in historical Masuria. Generally, their current seats were not built with the intention of housing collections and exhibitions, but for practical purposes related to administrative power, religious worship or everyday life. My attempt to analyse the significance of the museum seat and its location as a message directed at the potential recipient focuses primarily on the association between the building as such and the presence or absence of material manifestations of the Protestant culture discussed in this paper. It is also important to pay attention to object labels, namely the descriptions and information available to the visitor, as well as the way in which the museum’s seat is presented in the media.

³⁶ E.g. M. Pabich, Budynek muzealny – najcenniejszy eksponat?, *Muzealnictwo* 2004, 45, pp. 145-153.

³⁷ D. Ghirardo, *Architektura po modernizmie*. Translated by M. Motak and M.A. Urbańska. Toruń–Wrocław 1999, pp. 69-96.

³⁸ Z. Żygulski Jr, Przemiany architektury muzeów, *Muzealnictwo* 2004, 45, pp. 106-124.

It can be initially assumed that material artefacts associated with the life of Masurian Protestants will be found primarily in buildings formerly serving the purpose of worship, for example, in churches and chapels which were abandoned by Protestants or taken over by Catholics, as well as in buildings adjacent to churches such as old parsonages or schools. Based on the above assumption, two institutions have been selected for analysis: the Museum of the Polish Reformation in Mikołajki (formerly located in a working Evangelical church, now in a building adjacent to the church) and the Folk Architecture Museum and Ethnographic Park in Olsztynek (two buildings belonging to the church and two parsonages).

Case 1: The Museum of the Polish Reformation in Mikołajki

The early history and the exhibits of the Museum of the Polish Reformation in Mikołajki were described by Dominik Krysiak.³⁹ That author discussed the origins and development of the parish in Mikołajki, as well as the fortunes of the Protestant pastors and residents of the town from the sixteenth century until 2006. The Museum of the Polish Reformation, which Krysiak considered an “inseparable part” of the Evangelical-Augsburg parish of the Holy Trinity, was described by him as an institution “of a unique nature on the national scale”,⁴⁰ mainly because it contributed to the preservation of “monuments of Polish literature and printing in Masuria before 1945”.⁴¹ Despite what he says are limited sources, Krysiak carefully traces the turbulent organisational history of the museum since its inception in 1973, emphasising the role of its creator and initiator, Rev. Władysław Pilch (Pilchowski⁴²). He lists the successive locations of the museum: in a working Protestant church (1973–1988), in a building which formerly served as a school on Kolejowa Street (1991–2002) and was given to the parish by the town authorities, and finally in a building in the immediate vicinity of the church, which just after the war served as a parsonage and then a residential building – and where, following renovation, the museum is housed today. In the second part of his book, the author describes the Museum’s collections, presenting the characteristics of Polish Protestant printing in Silesia and Masuria and compiling an inventory of exhibits, which includes 255 books on display.

The literary exhibits are divided into the following categories: 1) the Bible, the New Testament, the Gospels: a) as translated by Martin Luther (10); b) as translated in Gdańsk in 1632, the so-called Gdańsk Bible (11); c) the New Testament and the Gospels (7); 2) songbooks (29); 3) postils, sermons, prayer books, tracts and others (59);

³⁹ D. Krysiak, *Muzeum Reformacji Polskiej: historia powstania oraz zbiory*, *Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie*, 2007, vol. 2, pp. 187-234.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Father Pilch’s Silesian name was “polonised” in the 1980s as a result of the verbal abuse that the Pilchs suffered from Catholics in Masuria. This information was obtained during an interview with the family.

4) agenda, catechisms, church laws (18); 5) other books: a) reformers' biographies (14); b) books on the history of the Church and the Reformation (40); c) books for religious education (10); d) dictionaries, philosophical works, lexicons (8); e) moral treatises and others (13); f) literary works (5); g) Evangelical calendars (9); h) the Holy Scripture, the Gospels – editions in various languages (19); i) official periodicals (3); 6) parish documents; 7) reprints. Among the exhibits, Krysiak also lists graphics, copies of paintings and photocopies, and plates with the names of residents who died during World War I. He supplements his classification with biographical notes on authors, publishers and priests, contained in footnotes.

How does the formal and thematic classification proposed by this researcher, consistent with library collections, translate into the way the exhibits are displayed? What space does the museum offer and how does it transform a library into an exhibition? Finally, how does it define itself to visitors? Let us start with the last question, since it relates to the first index signs that visitors encounter. These are two plates attached to the entrance door. The first says: "Museum of the Polish Reformation / The Evangelical-Augsburg Parish of the Holy Trinity / Founded by Rev. Władysław Pilchowski in 1973". The second plate, written in Polish and German, informs visitors about opening hours and welcomes them to the "Museum of the Polish and European Reformation" ("Museum der Polnischen und Europäischen Reformation"). It can be concluded that the term "European", missing from the official name of the museum, but consistent with the nature of its collections, was added to encourage foreign guests, mainly Germans, to visit the museum.

The museum is located on the ground floor of a two-storey building. At the entrance there is a small vestibule with a ticket office and a small shop, and to the right of the entrance there are two large rooms from which a corridor leads to two other rooms located to the left of the entrance. After visiting the four rooms and the corridor, the visitor returns to the starting point. The layout of the rooms is identical on the left and right side of the entrance on the ground floor, as is their arrangement, which consists of rows of horizontal, glass showcases and wall boards (graphics, documents, photographs, etc.). Window shades do not admit strong daylight; a soft semi-darkness illuminated with artificial light, and silence, prevail in the halls. The visitor is actively involved in the exhibition only through individual reading: of the descriptions and quotes on the wall boards, the original title pages of the books displayed in the cases, and detailed descriptions and explanations placed next to the cases. The visitor's interaction with the exhibit is only indirect – the books are protected by glass and there is no possibility of reading them directly (in digital form, for instance).

Non-literary exhibits seem to play a secondary role. These are graphics and copies of paintings, photographs and documents (e.g. architectural documentation of the church in Mikołajki). However, one can also find here a ski which used to belong to Adam Małysz, three harmoniums (relocated from Protestant churches in Masuria which had been taken over by Catholics), plaques with the names of residents of Mikołajki and its surroundings killed during the wars, as well as toys and scale mod-

els of buildings made by residents of the Arka Evangelical Social Welfare Centre in Mikołajki.

The central theme of the exhibition is the European, Polish and local character of the Reformation, and this determines the thematic order in which the exhibition should be viewed. The first hall, with its fifteen metre-high showcases aligned parallel to each other, is a kind of introduction to the history of the Reformation. The other rooms are similarly arranged. Visitors read information plates describing the principles of the Reformation and its causes. In the showcases they can see hymnals, songbooks, psalters, editions of the Holy Scriptures, postils (collections of sermons) by Samuel Dambrowski, etc., opened at their title pages. The plates contain bibliographical descriptions of the displayed books, information on the history of Protestantism, biographical notes on figures associated with the Reformation and quotes from Protestant writings (including those which are “not obvious”, that is, by writers not perceived by the general public as Protestants, such as Stefan Żeromski, Józef Beck and Józef Piłsudski). A great number of books are related to Cieszyn Silesia – writings from the former Duchy can be regarded as a representation of the region of Poland with the highest number of Protestants. Finally, in the last room before the exit door, the exhibits presented in the showcases refer to the local community – these are books of the parish in Mikołajki, chronicles, architectural documentation of the church, confirmation certificates, etc., supplemented with photographs of parish life and a pastor’s gown hanging on the wall.

The way in which the exhibition is arranged and the nature of the collections make the Museum of Polish Reformation suitable for a visitor who wishes to act as reader. It may take two or three hours to read the object labels carefully and look at the titles of the books on display. The book as an exhibit is available and unavailable at the same time – it is open, yet impossible to read, hidden under glass in a showcase that looks like a school bench you have to lean over – to bow your head in the silence of this museum library. The books communicate the essence of independent reading of the Bible and religious writings in the life of Protestants, but at the same time they do not enable real reading. They are exhibits which are not perceived as “books to be read” but as witnesses to history, aesthetic objects and – above all – objects saved from the hands of a new Polish Catholic community which settled in Masuria and which neither understood them nor needed them, as they were “German” and “heretical”.

It should be stressed that Rejnold Kuchn, the museum’s curator since 2002, has played an important role in communication between the exhibition and its audience, in this museum which – partly for financial reasons – is designed in a traditional and unmodern way. The curator is the author of the descriptions and the explanations, but above all he tries to make visitors more familiar with the history of the Reformation by narrating his own story. His important role as an intermediary between visitors and the objects is evidenced by dozens of entries in the museum guestbook, in which his role as guardian of the exhibition has been emphasised many times. In their entries (mostly in Polish, German, English and Russian), visitors express gratitude for “a learned conversation about faith and the Church”, “a friendly and sincere conversa-

tion”, “insightful information about the history of the Reformation”, “interesting and enriching conversation”.⁴³ The exhibits speak – though not for themselves, but owing to living people whose lives have been inseparably connected with the museum. However, despite the important role that the curator has in face-to-face communication at the exhibition, the Museum of the Polish Reformation is not visible in online communication: for example, it is the only one of the museums surveyed that does not have its own Facebook profile or its own website by means of which visitors might contact it.

The significance of the Museum as a kind of a “rescue station” for books abandoned by the departing Masurians or mistreated by the new Polish settlers is highlighted at the entrance to the museum, in a biographical note on the founder of the institution, Rev. Pilch, and a description of the origins of the institution: “The pastor’s love for collecting Old Polish Reformation printed matters (printed in Gothic) became a pretext for him to be arrested and put in prison, where he stayed for several months.”⁴⁴ So these were a kind of “rogue books”, rejected by the official narrative, both political (communist) and religious (Roman Catholic). Looking after them was associated with danger and suspicion from those around, but thanks to successive guardians and curators they were saved – this is how the main message of the Museum should be understood. The Museum has become an institution protecting the last relics of the Protestant community, which used to be the dominant majority in Mikołajki and throughout Masuria.

Case 2: The Folk Architecture Museum and Ethnographic Park in Olsztyniek – former Protestant churches as exhibition spaces

In several working Protestant churches in Masuria, local pastors combine the practical function of the place (active worship) with an exhibition function, by providing plates and showcases with exhibits (usually books). Here, however, I intend to focus on church buildings that have lost their original function as places of worship or imitate it for the needs of a modern open-air museum. Two church buildings in Olsztyniek fall into this category: one in the city centre currently serving as an exhibition hall, the other located in a central, prominent place in the Folk Architecture Museum and Ethnographic Park in Olsztyniek.

The Exhibition Hall in Olsztyniek

The original building (although rebuilt in the 1970s after war damage) is the former Protestant parish church near the market square in the centre of Olsztyniek. Those who visit the town can see a beautifully renovated church building, with one nave

⁴³ Copied from the Museum’s guestbook.

⁴⁴ Copied from the description below Rev. W. Pilch’s (Pilchowski’s) photograph.

and a huge tower, whose main entrance faces the town walls. The former main entrance is not used nowadays, its function having been taken over by the former side door. Various visual information signs which function as index signs are attached to the church building on the outside: golden letters forming the inscription MUSEUM above the entrance, a board advertising the current temporary exhibition, and plates giving information about the address of the building and the fact that it now belongs to the Museum of Folk Architecture. At the back of the church, or in fact at the former “front” – as the main entrance used to be the one at the tower – there is only a faded plaque stating that the renovation of the building was co-financed by the Foundation for Polish–German Cooperation.

The interior of the church is divided into two rooms available to visitors: a ticket office and a small shop in the side entrance, and a one-room exhibition hall for temporary exhibitions. On the day of the survey, the main hall housed an exhibition titled “The uniqueness of folk musical instruments”, showing collections on lease from the Museum of Folk Musical Instruments in Szydłowiec (including fiddles, mandolins, zithers, pipes, shawms, a jukebox and devil’s fiddles). The exhibition is enriched by artefacts from the collections of the Folk Architecture Museum and Ethnographic Park in Olsztynek, and by a reconstruction of scenes of dancing in an inn and of travel by horse and cart, all involving dummies in “Masurian” folk costumes.

An exhibit which might serve as a symbolic sign of the content defined as “Protestantism” is a harmonium from the collection of the open-air museum in Olsztynek. The instrument, dating from 1752, was temporarily moved from the open-air exhibition, from a parsonage – the house of an Evangelical pastor, reconstructed in 2013 as a replica of a cottage from Bartężek. In December 2012, Rev. Federick Tegler from Freunde Masurens, an association from Scharnebeck, gave the harmonium to the museum with the intention that it be placed in a “Pfarrhaus” (parsonage).⁴⁵ Marta Żebrowska, of the Museum of Folk Architecture, writes that: “The harmonium is an important exhibit in the chamber. Such a key wind instrument or a piano were common instruments at a parsonage. As visual representation was lacking in Protestantism, music and songs played a significant role.”⁴⁶ At this point it is difficult not to make a critical remark – when transferred to a temporary exhibition dedicated to folk instruments, the harmonium ceased to be such an “important” and “essential” part of an exhibition about the everyday life of the Protestant family. In the new context, the object is just “one of many types of instruments” (it represents a certain type and era) and is subsumed in the variety of exhibits displayed at the exhibition. Its secondary (though primary for the donors) religious connotation was relegated to second place

⁴⁵ The report on the donation of the gift can be found on the Association’s website: <https://www.freunde-masurens.de/aus-dem-jahr-2012/> [accessed 24 May 2017].

⁴⁶ M. Żebrowska, Rekonstrukcja wyposażenia plebanii ewangelickiej z Mazur z początku XX wieku w Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego – Parku Etnograficznym w Olsztyнку, *Zeszyty Naukowe Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego – Park Etnograficzny w Olsztyнку*, 2013, vol. 4, p. 151. (*Ibid.* A photograph showing the harmonium as a part of the equipment of the parsonage.)

and became blurred. Moreover, there is no description offered in the form of index signs.

Some conclusions may now be drawn following initial observation of the museum: there is no visual information on or near the church building that would tell visitors about its denominational provenance. Nor can such information be found on the website of the Museum of Folk Architecture. The note describing the Exhibition Hall refers only to a “former parish church located in the centre of Olsztynek” and lists the fires, reconstructions and renovations undergone by the building and its inclusion in the “organisational structures” of the Museum in 1985.⁴⁷ Summing up: with regard to the Protestant church building, we may identify not only desacralisation⁴⁸ – changing of its religious function to a museum function, when the building destroyed at the end of World War II became an exhibition hall – but also obliteration (omission) of information about its earlier denominational affiliation in both real space (index signs around the building) and virtual space (the website). To find such information, it is necessary to consult the specialist literature – a history of Olsztynek⁴⁹ or Protestant publications.

Replica of a Protestant church from Rychnowo

The second “sacral” building (a faithfully reproduced replica) is a wooden, thatched Protestant church from Rychnowo, located in the representative area of the “village square” near the entrance to the open-air ethnographic museum in Olsztynek. Next to an interesting, atypical church building built on an octagonal plan, there is a replica of the church tower from Mańki. It should be noted that the replicas of the two buildings were made during the creation of the Ostpreußisches Heimatmuseum in Königsberg in the years 1910–1913; along with a dozen other reconstructed buildings they were moved to Olsztynek in 1938–1942.⁵⁰ The museum informs visitors of this fact both in materials available for payment, and on its website.⁵¹

Visitors to the open-air museum can freely explore the church interior, where they can see restored polychrome and partially reconstructed church furnishings such as

⁴⁷ Website: <http://muzeumolsztynek.com.pl/pl/o-muzeum/salon-wystawowy.html> [accessed: 23 May 2017].

⁴⁸ Today, Protestants from Olsztynek who were deprived of the opportunity to use this church following the war are organised in affiliate churches of the Olsztyn parish. They hold Sunday services in the chapel at 19 Mrongowiusza Street, built in 1939 by the foundation of Carl Schaeffer. They are active on social media; they have a Facebook profile called “Luteranie w Olsztyнку” (“Lutherans in Olsztynek”; 483 Likes as at 24 May 2017). Cf.: *Kościóły i kaplice Diecezji Mazurskiej. Kalendarz 2015-2017*, Olsztyn 2015, p. 84.

⁴⁹ M. Toeppen, *Historia okręgu i miasta Olsztyńska*, transl. by M. Sacha, editing and introduction by G. Białuński and G. Jasiński, Dąbrówno 2004, p. 44 ff.

⁵⁰ R. Dethlefsen, *Führer durch das Ostpreußische Heimatmuseum*, Königsberg 1913. W. Chodkowska, M. Sablajak-Oleędzka, Z. Adamiec, *Historia Ostpreußisches Heimatmuseum w Królewcu*, Olsztynek 2015, pp. 34-44.

⁵¹ Website: <http://muzeumolsztynek.com.pl/pl/o-muzeum/historia.html> [accessed: 23 May 2017].

pews (including patron's pews), a choir and a pulpit. The original (not reconstructed) altar was relocated from the church in Różyńsko Wielkie, as may be deduced by visitors from an inscription in German on the back wall of the altar ("Eigentum der Kirchengemeinde Gr. Rosinsko"). Behind the altar, on the back wall hidden from the eyes of the faithful sitting in pews, there is a polychrome showing a huge figure of Martin Luther with the inscription "LUTORUS" [sic] placed underneath.

Like the original Protestant church in Olsztynek, which now performs an exhibition function, the replica of the Protestant church from Rychnowo has no description labels attached to it which would indicate the denominational provenance of the building (or rather of its original). The inscription in three languages (Polish, English, German) on the outer wall of the church in front of the entrance enigmatically informs the visitor that this is a "church yard" where the following objects can be found: "10a. Church from Rychnowo (Grunwald commune, Ostróda district, a replica of the building from 1714); 10b. Church tower from Mańki (Olsztynek commune, Olsztyn district, a replica of the structure from 1685); 10c. Stone wall surrounding the church area; 10d, e, f. Grave stelae (reconstructions of objects dating from the mid-nineteenth century)."⁵²

Similarly, the objects inside the church – according to the traditional practice of "imitating the reality" still observed in many open-air museums – are not provided with any description labels that would explain the type and meaning of the polychrome and furnishings of the replica church to an ordinary visitor (exploring it without a guide). Certain elements that might give the visitor a clue as to the Protestant provenance of the building (such as the portrait of Martin Luther mentioned above) are hardly noticeable due to their location. For instance, during a virtual tour, available on the Museum's website, one cannot see the painting as it is hidden behind the altar.⁵³ On the other hand, observing visitors' behaviour, one may conclude that some of them automatically interpret the replica of the church in the open-air museum as a "Roman Catholic church" – part of the sphere of Catholic *sacrum* – as evidenced by their gestures of crossing at the threshold and kneeling in front of the altar. This means that visitors adapt the object they see to their own cultural context, not having an opportunity to confront it with another – the museum context or the Protestant context.

One can learn from the scholarly literature that the figure of a baptismal angel is missing from the present-day interior furnishings of the replica of the church from Rychnowo. This sculpture – coming from the same period as the original building – was intended by Richard Dethlefsen, the founder of the original open-air museum in Königsberg, as an element complementing the altar complex, the pulpit and the baptismal font so important in Protestant churches. Wiesława Chodkowska writes that "The figure of a baptismal angel was becoming more and more common in all Prussian lands in the seventeenth century."⁵⁴ The sculptures of baptismal angels were char-

⁵² Inscription copied from an information plate. The brief descriptions on the plates are supplemented with clear floor plans of the buildings.

⁵³ <http://www.mbl.sklodowski.pl/> [accessed 24 May 2017].

⁵⁴ W. Chodkowska, *Anioł chrzcielny z Sankt Lorenz, Zeszyty Naukowe Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego – Park Etnograficzny w Olsztyнку*, 2011, vol. 2, p. 15.

acteristic only of Protestant churches, and it may now be assumed that the presence of such a sculpture in the church furnishings – in the absence of reliable information on an information board or in a guidebook – might encourage visitors to look for a different context than the Roman Catholic one. However, according to research conducted by Chodkowska, in the late 1980s the baptismal angel, which originally belonged to the open-air museum in Königsberg (from 1913) and then to its successor, the open-air museum in Olsztynek, was mistakenly moved to the church in Jerutki.⁵⁵ Renovated and well-maintained, the angel is still there, being used by the Roman Catholic parishioners who took over and renovated the church in the 1980s.⁵⁶

Can the Museum's decision to reveal so little information about the objects somehow be explained? "We did not want to go into such small detail"; "This information was supposed to be found in the guide" – these are quotes from the answer given by the museum employee responsible for the design of the plates, when asked why the description of the replica of the church from Rychnowo lacked information about its Protestant origin. What is more, a purchase of the open-air museum's guidebook⁵⁷ does not help to clear up any doubts: the building is consistently referred to as the "church" or as a "replica of the church from the region known in the pre-war literature as the Oberland", without specifying its denominational provenance.⁵⁸ Paradoxically, these "details" did not pose a problem for the nuns from the Congregation of the Little Sisters of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, who in 1946 took over the original Protestant church in Rychnowo, about 20 km from the museum in Olsztynek, for the purposes of Roman Catholic worship. The following information reliably describing the history of the building can be found in a long text placed on a publicly accessible plate in front of the church:

In the sixteenth century, the Reformation transformed religious life here and confirmed Lutheranism – as a result of which the local community became a Protestant community and remained such until the end of World War II. The existing church – the third in succession – was established in 1714. [...] Its interior is covered with figural polychrome attributed to Gottfried Hintz from Königsberg. There is a depiction of the Original Sin on the ceiling, figures of the Apostles on the walls, and a full-length portrait of Martin Luther. [...] The Late Gothic altar (triptych) from the previously existing temple is very valuable. A scene showing the Crowning of the Blessed Virgin Mary is placed in the central part of the altar. On the wings are scenes from the life of Jesus and Mary. The altar dates to 1517 and its designer belonged to Lucas Cranach's circle.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

⁵⁶ A. Rzempełuch, *Przewodnik po zabytkach sztuki dawnych Prus Wschodnich*, Olsztyn 1993, p. 134. W. Chodkowska, Przerwana translokacja kościoła z Jerutek w gminie Świętajno i jej skutki, *Zeszyty Naukowe Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego – Park Etnograficzny w Olsztyнку*, 2015, vol. 5, pp. 49-58.

⁵⁷ I regard the information coming from materials and resources available to visitors for additional payment (guidebooks, guide service, audio guide) as secondary in the act of communication between the museum institution and visitors as discussed here.

⁵⁸ *Przewodnik Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego Park Etnograficzny w Olsztyнку*, E. Wrochna (ed.), Olsztynek 2015, pp. 21-24.

⁵⁹ Description on the information plate.

In conclusion, the location of an exhibition in a church building enhances the prestige of the exhibits through an implied contact with the *sacrum* and the favourable location of such buildings in the town centre. In the described case of Olsztynek, we are dealing with a partially original (reconstructed) former Protestant building with an original religious function, obliterated by conversion into a museum. The function as a place of worship is not mentioned in the descriptions, which refer only to the location of the building and its new exhibition functions. On the other hand, the replica of the church from Rychnowo in the open-air museum is an iconic sign relating to the original building, which, however, produces an effective illusion of “truth” and “authenticity” for some visitors, mainly due to the basically complete church furnishings – a strong illusion despite the information provided by the index signs that it is a replica. At the same time, the denominational affiliation of the original church is not mentioned.

Case 3: The Folk Architecture Museum and Ethnographic Park in Olsztynek – buildings adjacent to the church as exhibition sites

In addition to churches, buildings in which one would expect to find artefacts related to Protestantism in Masuria include those adjacent to the church which originally served utility functions, for example, as a pastor’s house, parish office, church school, etc. Also, this location, in close proximity to the centrally located church, should be considered favourable – it enhances the prestige and accessibility of prospective exhibitions. The Museum of the Polish Reformation in Mikołajki, discussed above, is one example of such a location.

The Mrongowiusz House in Olsztynek

A home is a private and intimate space – the place of residence of an “ordinary” person, inaccessible to the public eye. Musealisation transforms the values of a home space: the house of a famous person becomes a public place of remembrance; the house of an “ordinary” man becomes an illusion of everyday life in times that are now past. The Mrongowiusz House in Olsztynek is a house of a famous figure: “the birthplace of Krzysztof Celestyn Mrongowiusz (1764–1855), the great son of Masuria”.⁶⁰ It can be found in a side street by the market square next to the defensive walls surrounding the town, currently – due to the closure of the main entrance and its relocation to the porch in the aisle – at the rear of the former Protestant church. In the past, its location was more prestigious, as the house faced the former main entrance. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Max Toeppen, an outstanding researcher into Masuria who originated from Olsztynek, wrote:

⁶⁰ A quote from the leaflet *The Mrongowiusz House in Olsztynek*, written by G. Jasiński and J. Sikorski, available at the museum free of charge.

As far as we can remember and trace their history, the parsonage, the curate's house and the school were located next to the church. According to one of the documents of that time, the parsonage was a "poor but quite large" building. Furthermore, the curate had a "suitable house with a stable and a garden. However, since he complains that he lacks a separate room for studying the books, it was agreed with the venerable Council that it would give its consent to build a comfortable room by the wall behind the curate's house".⁶¹

Until the end of the nineteenth century, a two-storey building served as a school and an apartment for the school's rector. This position was held, among others, by Bartłomiej Mrongowiusz, the father of the great scholar. Nowadays, the building is an exhibition hall. On the ground floor there is a room with heavy wooden furniture characteristic of the period: a wardrobe, a bench, a table and an upholstered chair. The minimalistic furnishings of the hall and objects associated with worship – a crucifix on the wall, a candlestick and a thick book (implying the Bible) lying on the table – give visitors a sense of loneliness and cause them to focus on the Word of God. It is difficult to say whether the staging is intended to reflect the mood of a classroom, since there are no benches for pupils, but it may certainly allude through its simplicity to ideas of the "Protestant" life. The exhibition on the first floor consists of showcases aligned in rows along the walls, and drawings and paintings hanging on the walls. The showcases contain mainly prints, books and documents related to Mrongowiusz's scholarly and preaching activity.

The Mrongowiusz House used to be a school, described by Toeppen in the following way: "The existing school building with the year 1684 inscribed on it, which most probably refers to the year of its construction, is probably the oldest building, except for the church, in the town."⁶² However, assuming that a typical visitor who explores the town is not familiar with Toeppen, it seems desirable to focus on the descriptions placed on the building. Two plates should be considered: one which states that the building belongs to the Museum, and a second which is a sign indicating a "place of remembrance" dedicated to an outstanding figure in the space originally associated with that figure. The text on the commemorative plaque states: "Krzysztof Celestyn Mrongowiusz, an outstanding scholar, linguist and fighter for the Polish character of Masuria, was born in this house on July 19, 1764. On the hundredth anniversary of his death in 1955 – the residents of Warmia and Masuria." Next to the Mrongowiusz House stands a former parsonage (not part of the museum), while on the square in front of the parsonage there is an approximately two-metre-high stone pedestal with a bust of Mrongowiusz and the inscription "Krzysztof Celestyn Mrongowiusz 1764–1855". The church buildings (i.e. the Exhibition Hall), the Mrongowiusz House, the former parsonage and the adjacent school complex erected on the walls of the former Teutonic castle form a harmonious centre of a Masurian town.

But where is a typical visitor supposed to obtain information about the Protestant provenance of these buildings and of Mrongowiusz himself? The descriptions

⁶¹ M. Toeppen, *Historia okręgu i miasta Olsztynka*, p. 50.

⁶² *Ibid.*

offered by the museum do not contain such information. Only at another location several hundred metres away, behind the city walls on the square at the former bailey, can the tourist see an open-air presentation of display boards (in place since 2007), including one titled “Historical figures associated with Olsztynek”.⁶³ Among seven biographical notes displayed there, that on Mrongowiusz takes pride of place.⁶⁴ From the perspective of a researcher looking for traces of Protestant culture in museums and exhibitions, interest is aroused by the beginning of Mrongowiusz’s biographical note: “Krzysztof Celestyn Mrongowiusz (1764–1855) – an outstanding pastor, linguist, translator, editor, philologist, philosopher and defender of the Polish tradition, a European builder of bridges between nations.”⁶⁵ His Protestantism is emphasised here by the use of the colloquial term ‘pastor’. Information related to this topic can also be found on the museum website, in a note describing the Mrongowiusz House.⁶⁶ This note uses the explicit terms “Evangelical parish” and “Evangelical school”, whereas such information is missing from the description of the church itself.

The reconstruction of a Protestant parsonage in the replica of a Bartężek farmhouse in Olsztynek

The open-air museum in Olsztynek hosts a unique and thus interesting example of an exhibition initiative: the reconstruction of a Protestant parsonage in a farmhouse from the village of Bartężek. Like the Rychnów church described above, the farmhouse is also a twentieth-century copy of a nineteenth-century building. The replica⁶⁷ was commissioned by Richard Dethlefsen, the provincial Conservator of Historical Monuments in Königsberg, as an example of a wooden vernacular dwelling in Oberland (now Ostróda). On the wall is a notice with basic information about the building and its plan. Information about the furnishings can be found only in the museum guidebook, which is available for purchase.⁶⁸

The presentation of the building’s interior, typical of an open-air museum, gives visitors the illusion that they are witnessing the everyday life of a pastor and his family in the early twentieth century. The exhibits are not labelled, as is the case with all exhibitions in this museum. To the left of the entrance hall is the pastor’s office space. There is a big, well-lit chamber with a large table, chairs and furnishings typi-

⁶³ Exhibition prepared by the Department of Education, Culture and Promotion of Olsztynek town hall.

⁶⁴ The remaining biographical notes include those on: Fryderyk Karol August Dewischeit, Max Pol-lux v. Toeppen, Paweł Antoni Jedzink, Hieronim Derdowski, Emil Adolf v. Behring and Feliks Klikowicz.

⁶⁵ Text on the information plate.

⁶⁶ <http://muzeumolsztynek.com.pl/pl/o-muzeum/salon-wystawowy.html> [accessed 25 May 2017].

⁶⁷ W. Chodkowska, M. Sabljak-Olędzka, Z. Adamiec, *Historia Ostpreußisches Heimatmuseum w Królewcu*, Olsztynek 2015, pp. 22–23.

⁶⁸ *Przewodnik Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego Park Etnograficzny w Olsztynku*, ed. E. Wrochna, Olsztynek 2015, pp. 31–32.

cal of a “guest room”. There are exhibits related to religion, in particular a massive crucifix and a lithograph depicting a scene in a church. There is also a smaller office room. Its function is signalled by documents, books, and above all a typewriter on the desk. There is an open wardrobe, in which a pastor’s robe on a hanger can be seen. This creates the illusion that the pastor is preparing to leave the house. The inquisitive visitor will notice another exhibit related to Protestantism, namely a colour portrait of Martin Luther resembling the famous work of Lucas Cranach the Elder.

The space on the right side of the entrance hall is designed to illustrate the private life of the pastor’s family. The functions of the largest chamber are those of a living room. There is a table, chairs, furniture to store clothes, and a chest of drawers. In this space the presence of a woman – the pastor’s wife – is underlined. This is done by the placing of a chest of drawers with a mirror, an armchair and a side table for needlework utensils. Next to the living room there are two smaller rooms arranged as a kitchen and bedroom. There are appropriately dated utensils on display, such as food containers and crockery with inscriptions in German, bed throws, chamber pots, and men’s and women’s Sunday attire. Religious objects include an offset print of a Confirmation event hanging above the bed in the bedroom, a black-and-white print of an image of Christ in the Garden of Olives, and a cross and small candlesticks standing on the chest of drawers.

This reconstruction of the interior of a Protestant parsonage in a building which had long served as an office space closed to the public is explicated at length by Marta Żebrowska in her paper about the parsonage exhibition.⁶⁹ She justifies the decision to place a new exhibition in the farmhouse from Bartężek, which had ceased to be used as office space and had been refurbished, as follows:

It was the heritage of Masurian Protestantism that became an inspiration and the reason why we decided to prepare a new exhibition in the Folk Architecture Museum. This exhibition illustrates the furnishings and functions and in part also the everyday life in a Protestant parsonage in the early twentieth century.⁷⁰

The exhibition was opened to the public in 2013. It was introduced as follows:

A new exhibition opened during the jubilee celebration was “An Evangelical parsonage” reconstructed in the farmhouse from Bartężek. The décor goes back to the 1930s and its standard resembles that of a burgher house. In the building private and office rooms are presented. The exhibits include some from our collections as well as objects passed to us for this very reconstruction and objects loaned by private persons. The most interesting exhibits are the nineteenth-century harmonium passed to us by *Der Verein Freunde Masurens* (The Union of Friends of Masuria) in Scharnebeck, Germany, the pastor’s robe with bands and a stole donated by Pastor Fryderyk Tegler, old prints and

⁶⁹ M. Żebrowska, Rekonstrukcja wyposażenia plebanii ewangelickiej z Mazur z początku XX wieku w Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego – Parku Etnograficznym w Olsztynku, *Zeszyty Naukowe Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego – Park Etnograficzny w Olsztynku*, 2013, 4, pp. 149-155.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

theological books. The authors of the exhibition are Jadwiga Wieczerek (senior curator) and Marta Żebrowska (assistant curator in the Ethnology Department of the museum).⁷¹

Żebrowska underlines the importance of the many consultations which she and Wieczerek held with Protestant pastors and their families. This was the basis for the interesting reconstruction, which is unique among museums of this kind that I have researched. The display and exhibits tell a story to visitors in spite of the absence of labels inside the farmhouse.

Concern may nonetheless be expressed regarding alterations made to the exhibition. According to the authors of the exhibition, one of the most important exhibits should be the harmonium, which – in addition to its symbolic function – is to emphasise the important role of music and musical education in the life of a Protestant family and parish. Other important objects are the old prints, copies of the Bible and theological books, in view of the Protestant doctrine *sola scriptura*. The books have the most appropriate connotation with Lutheranism, the work on translating the Bible, the role of its translation into vernacular languages and the emphasis put on universal education. As it happened, at the time of my research at the museum (the May holiday long weekend, which attracts significant numbers of visitors) there were no books on display, and the harmonium had been moved to a temporary exhibition of folk instruments in the exhibition hall in Olsztynek. The harmonium is surely not a folk musical instrument. Undoubtedly its primary connotation is music, but its secondary connotation is Protestantism, and this was the reason why the harmonium was donated to the museum. This secondary connotation should have been respected by the museum staff who made the decision to relocate the harmonium.

CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH PROSPECTS

In this paper, exhibition spaces in two important museums in Masuria – the Museum of the Polish Reformation in Mikołajki and the Folk Architecture Museum and Ethnographic Park in Olsztynek – have been reviewed in an attempt to find how artefacts related to Protestantism, as a pillar of the Masurian historical identity, are presented in these two “institutions of memory”. To systematise my presentation, I have used semiotic analysis, concentrating on the levels of denotation and connotation. Consequently, I have analysed the exhibits and their descriptions on the assumption that museum exhibitions serve to communicate a message (as media). The carriers of the information are descriptions and labels, and these have therefore been in focus. They are important because they can introduce some content into the compendium of cultural memory (or exclude it). Pauline Turner Strong, who has carried out research into museum labels, writes that:

⁷¹ E. Wrochna, Działalność Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego – Parku Etnograficznego w Olsztynku w roku 2013, *Zeszyty Naukowe Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego – Park Etnograficzny w Olsztynku*, 2014, 5, p. 114.

The semiotic model offers a particularly systematic and integrated approach to the relationship between representation and communication in museums – an approach that reveals some of the more subtle ways in which labels function not only as sources of information and interpretation but also as mechanisms of social inclusion or exclusion.⁷²

The metacommunication level is primary in semiotic analysis. At this level the mission of the museum, its rank and social role are considered, and also – last but not least – the politics of memory, as reflected in subsidies, grants and personnel decisions. An analysis of the metacommunication level of the museums described is a research proposal whose realisation by far exceeds the scope of this study, and for this reason I will attempt only to provide a metaphor interpreting my findings.

Considering the relative spatial isolation, the authenticity, and the character of exhibits in the Museum of the Polish Reformation in Mikołajki, a suitable metaphor would be Noah's Ark. This is a space where books are collected and held to save them from a world which has become unfriendly to the endangered "tribe". The visitor turns into a reader, and this is because the exhibits are *written*. The reader does not visit the museum by chance. The museum does not advertise itself. This is a place for *insiders*. There, the memory of Masurian Protestants means both commemoration and protection against external threats.

In Olsztynek, which is a popular tourist destination known for many events in the open-air museum, the situation is different. This space is largely not authentic, as its premise was to recreate the old building types of East Prussia. The marketisation of museums in Poland at the turn of this century has led this space to be made more attractive to a visitor who is not Umberto Eco's introvert or a focused reader, but rather Zygmunt Bauman's more extravert tourist, who is on the move and looks for sensory experiences, information and fun. This is the visitor whom the museum addresses with its strategy of giving only short descriptions of the buildings and very limited (if any) labels for the exhibits. The "Protestant" spaces and artefacts become spaces and objects which are movable, replaceable, often unqualified and silent among many exhibits which illustrate "rural life in the former East Prussia". In spite of the interesting reconstruction of the old parsonage (along with the blurring of the information about the Protestant provenance of the two church buildings), the approach of this museum illustrates the processes undergone by Masurian Protestants in the twentieth century: expulsion, resettlement, and the obscuring of their story in official narratives about the region.

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Keywords: Masuria, museology, Masurian Protestants, historical memory

⁷² Pauline Turner Strong, *Exclusive Labels: Indexing the National "We" in Commemorative and Oppositional Exhibitions*, *Museum Anthropology* 1997, 21 (1), p. 42.

ABSTRACT

This article considers the contemporary museum landscape in the territory of historical Masuria. Assuming – first of all – that the historical pillars of Masurian identity before the Second World War were the Polish language and the Protestant faith, and – secondly – that museums are institutions whose purpose is to archive, select and present artefacts as well as construct narratives about the cultural memory of a group, the author considers the question of the presence of Protestant themes in the exhibitions of selected present-day Masurian museums. An exhibition is understood here as a message addressed to receivers, and therefore the author uses the method of semiotic analysis of the visual stratum of selected exhibitions. The choice of the exhibitions discussed in the article is limited to museums located at operating Protestant churches (the Museum of the Reformation in Mikołajki) and in former sacral buildings abandoned by Protestants after 1945 as well as a reconstruction of a parsonage (exhibitions on the site of the Folk Architecture Museum and Ethnographic Park in Olsztynek).

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