

TEKTONIKA

photo gallery

currently showing: STONE IN OUR WORLD
an exhibit of photographs of the stonework
of Lower Silesia

visit the TEKTONIKA gallery page at www.stonefoundation.org
to see these photographs in color

[BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

[STONE FOUNDATION HOME PAGE](#)

By Juliet Golden and Tadeusz Włodarczak

In the heart of Europe,

tucked in the southwest corner of Poland, is the historical region of Lower Silesia. It shares a 270-mile border with the Czech Republic and a 50-mile border with Germany. This region, the heart of Europe, is vastly diverse in terms of natural resources, in particular stone. Granite, basalt, syenite, serpentine, quartz, marble and alabaster, along with a wide variety of sandstones, are the mainstay of the region's stone industry. Other significant deposits of gold, silver, uranium and lignite have all been quarried here throughout the centuries. The discovery of copper in the region as recently as the 1950s placed Poland center stage among other major world producers of this raw material.

All This natural wealth has meant that throughout the ages Lower Silesia has been a coveted prize for rulers near and far. Over the last thousand years the region has changed hands (and national identities) several times; it has been ruled from Cracow, Prague, Vienna, Berlin, and, presently, Warsaw.

Large sculpted granite figures found on the slopes of Sleza, a solitary, somewhat mysterious mountain rising from a stretch of fertile plain in the middle of the province, date back to at least 4,500 BC and best attest to the long, special relationship local inhabitants have had with stone. In the Middle Ages, as a common form of punishment, convicted murderers carved large crosses from granite at the site of their crimes; they also were required to sculpt their murder weapons on the crosses. In the 18th century, the Prussian monarch Frederick II set his eyes on Lower Silesia. He was particularly interested in gaining control over the natural resources, especially the extremely rare greenish semi-precious stone, chrysoprase, which he later used to decorate the halls of his favorite palace at Sans Souci in Potsdam, near Berlin. (The world's first commercial mining of chrysoprase occurred in Lower Silesia following its discovery in 1740 near the town of Frankenstein.)

Throughout this region, stone has been a favorite building material used to construct everything from simple farmhouses to ornate cathedrals. As one travels through Lower Silesia, it is easy to discern what stone is available where by studying the buildings, churches and cemeteries found in any given area. The diversity in styles and quality of the stonework makes the region an open-air handbook on the art of stonemasonry.

Stone also recounts the region's brutal history. During a long



siege in the final months of World War II, Lower Silesia's capital—known then as Breslau and today as Wrocław—was largely destroyed; even today, many of the remaining buildings bear stark battle scars. As a part of the re-shuffling of borders that happened after the war, two hundred years of Prussian and German domination of the area came to an end. As a result, in one of the largest population transfers in history, approximately three million Germans were resettled from Lower Silesia to make way for Poles leaving their homes in towns and villages, located further east in today's Ukraine.

But even though the Germans were gone, their material culture remained. In the aftermath of post-war settlements, Poles set out to make this land theirs. German inscriptions were scratched from buildings, museums and market halls were blown up, and cemeteries were razed to the ground. Of the more than 70 pre-war cemeteries in the city of Wrocław, only two remain today. The gravestones were used for anything from paving streets to building animal runs at the local zoo—some were simply buried in mounds at the edges of the city. In the countryside, many of the more than 160 castles and palaces of the region were converted into multi-family dwellings to house workers of collective farms. Other historic monuments were left to the elements; many have decayed beyond repair.

With the fall of communism, attention is being focused on preserving the region's heritage. Many noble refuges has been restored and converted into swank hotels and rural retreats. There has also been a revival in interest in stonework. Mom-and-pop stone workshops have mushroomed in cities and towns across the region. Lower Silesian quarries churn out stone to cover the facades of new buildings and to build the streets in Warsaw and Berlin. The advent of the free market in this region has also rekindled the allure of carved stone. But this modest renaissance is a far cry from the grand traditions of Lower Silesian stonemasonry that flourished in the second half of the 19th century. Even today the Polish carvers

who rebuilt Wroclaw and Warsaw, and reconstructed many historic buildings across Europe in the post-World War II era, are dying off, making the Lower Silesian carver an increasingly endangered species. □

Tadeusz Wlodarczak and his companion, writer/photographer Juliet Golden, live near Wroclaw in Lower Silesia. "Tadek", an accomplished stonemason/carver is the instructor of the Stone Carving Workshop in Charleston in November, and together they will make a presentation at the Symposium about the stonework of Poland and the Czech Republic

Large prehistoric granite figures dot the slopes of Sleza, a solitary, somewhat mysterious mountain rising from a stretch of fertile plain in the middle of the province. These sculptures may date back to the Iron Age but there is no certainty about this, or about their significance.

In the Middle Ages, as a common form of punishment, convicted murderers were forced to carve large crosses from granite at the site of their crimes





The Grodziec castle is perched on a hilltop. Here is the outer gate with the guard tower.

View of the inner gate leading to the courtyard. Note the carved Green Man to the right of the arched entryway.



Hand carved sandstone is used here to create a structural arch.



The tunnel-like outer gallery commands a view of the valley below.

The galleries were equipped with "air toilets." They were convenient, and fairly hygienic, given the lack of what we would call modern plumbing. But they offered little privacy.





In the Renaissance, castles were not so important as defensive structures. Here in the entryway to the Grodno castle stone plays only a decorative role,

In the interior even the structural elements are highly ornamented.



A romanesque lion on deposit in the castle's lapidarium





This water tower, constructed following devastating flooding in 1903, is a good example of how brick work can be effectively combined with stone. While carved stone is used sparingly here, imagine how different this building would look without it.





This former official administrative building dates back to the second half of the 19th century and represents the height of achievements of Lower Silesian stone carvers. The W stands for Wratislavia, the Latin name for the city today called Wroclaw; the large Eagle in the center represents Silesia; above that, the next eagle represents Prussia.

Exquisite stonework is evident on this pilaster situated at the entryway of an early 20th century building located in the old Jewish Quarter.



This naturalistic lion's head is peering through a curtain of renaissance ornamentation.

Façade of the Kreszow Abbey. Built by the Cistercians, this is one of the best examples of Baroque art in Europe and remarkably different from the austerity of earlier Cistercian buildings. The abbey is slated to be added this year to UNESCO'S World Heritage List.

The author of this façade was a Czech sculptor Ferdinand Maxmilian Brokof, whose credits include some of the statuary Prague's Charles Bridge.

The façade reflects the deep religious discussions underway in 18th century Europe. The "saints" shown here are not depicted in the usual states of religious ecstasy.

Here Moses is shown negotiating with Jehovah.



Saint Ludgarda appears to be caught up in earthly contemplations.





A local swimming complex dating back to the early twentieth century was richly decorated with statuary and fountains. Unfortunately many of the most spectacular works disappeared in the immediate post-war years.

The photo at the right shows a fragment of the building's vaulted entry way. These fish were carved from Lower Silesian sandstone. The gold coloring and wavy sedimentation provides very warm, expressive material for carvers and masons.

These mascarons could be right out of Star Wars. They gaze down on passersby from the façade of an indoor swimming complex that dates back to 1895-1897. Very little of the richly decorated interior décor has survived to today. Lavish statuary and other ornamentation disappeared sometime after the end of the war.





[BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

[STONE FOUNDATION HOME PAGE](#)