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# ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE OF EASTERN CHRISTIANITY HISTORICAL, LEGAL AND SOCIAL DETERMINANTS IN SOUTH-EAST POLAND

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(Received 8 April 2021, revised 17 May 2021)

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## **Abstract**

After one hundred twenty-three years of partitions, in 1918, the Second Polish Republic (commonly known as Interwar Poland) reappeared on the map of Europe. In 1923, the eastern border of the Second Polish Republic was finally established. At that time, the Ukrainian minority was estimated at 4-5 million people, forming the so-called territorial minority living mostly in the eastern voivodeships of Poland. The relation between the Polish state, Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Catholic Church on the territory of the Second Polish Republic is considered to be one of the most complicated in the history. The division of society in terms of nationality and religion was very pronounced and represented an important political issue. Multicultural and multi-ethnic Poland adopted a policy to build a strong country based on the Roman Catholic Church, which was privileged in terms of numbers of believers and legislation. The believers of the Eastern Orthodox Church were subjected to Polonisation and their religious buildings were revindicated. The undertaken actions resulted in the rise of nationalist sentiments, which culminated in 1938, when Orthodox churches were demolished on the territory of the Second Republic of Poland. The article describes the historical, social and legal background that enabled these actions and attempts to determine the present and lost resources of sacral architecture, which is part of the multicultural heritage of the country.

*Keywords:* Orthodox Church, Eastern Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, revindication, Polonisation

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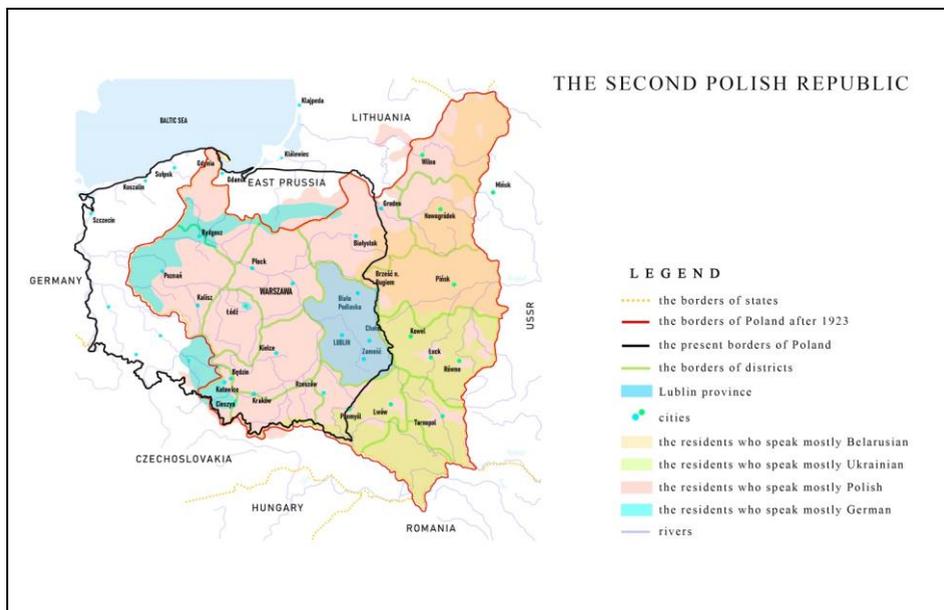
## **1. Introduction**

The relationship between the Polish state, Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Church on the territory of the Second Polish Republic was one of the most complicated in the history of Poland. After the period of partitions (at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries), the Eastern Orthodox Church was

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associated by the Polish authorities with the Kremlin (the Russian Orthodox Church) and its ideology, which aimed at rebuilding the former superpower by using national themes. The Metropolitan Archbishop of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Andrey Sheptytsky, supported the national liberation sentiments of the Ukrainian minority, estimated at the time at around 4 million people. In terms of confession, about 60% of Ukrainians declared at that time to be Greek Catholic, 39% - Orthodox, while 1% were Protestants [1]. On the area of Lublin Voivodeship, the Ukrainian minority amounted to 8.5%, but in Hrubieszów Poviát, it was already 78% (Figure 1). The struggle between Western influences (Latinisation) and Eastern influences (Byzantisation) in the Greek Catholic Church became one of the most important issues in the Church discussion in the interwar period [2]. The main goal of the Polish state was the de-Russification of Orthodoxy, which was to be followed by Polonisation and the construction of the Orthodox Church structures based on autocephaly [3]. The topic of the Orthodox Church in the Second Republic has been studied by many historians, sociologists and theologians, and has been the subject of many publications focused on the state-society-religion axis [4]. Until now, however, no attempt has been made to describe existing resources of Orthodox churches in Lublin region, which is the subject of this paper.



**Figure 1.** Territorial range of the Second Republic of Poland in relation to the present country borders, including the settlement of national minorities.

## 2. Structure - hierarchization

Figures regarding the structure of the Eastern Church in the territory of the Second Polish Republic date back to 1922, when the eastern borders of the

country were finally established. The Orthodox Church was then divided into five dioceses: the diocese of Warsaw (Lublin, Łódź, Warsaw, Kielce, Lviv, Pomerania, Poznań, Tarnopol, Ivano-Frankivsk and Silesia Voivodships), diocese of Pinsk-Polesie (Polesie Voivodship), diocese of Grodno-Novogrudok (Białystok Voivodship, a part of the Novogrudok Voivodship), diocese of Volhynia and diocese of Vilnius [5]. The estimated number of Orthodox churches in the territory of the Second Polish Republic, resulting from the ratio of the number of Orthodox Christians per one parish church, amounted to about 1,294 religious buildings, while the number of believers was estimated at 3,405,963 people in the country. On average, 2,632 believers belonged to a single parish and there were 2,542 people per one priest [5]. The distribution of church buildings was not uniform in every voivodship but was connected with the density of the population of the Eastern rite. In addition to Orthodox Christians, the territory of the Second Polish Republic was also inhabited by members of the Greek Catholic Church, which was divided into the archdiocese of Lviv and the dioceses of Przemyśl and Stanisław.

### **3. Orthodox church - symbolism**

The temple of the Eastern Church is referred to, in Old Slavonic, as 'cerkiew' - an Orthodox church - the House of God. In Poland this name has functioned since the 15<sup>th</sup> century and originally meant a Christian temple [6]. The architectural form of the Orthodox church, its location and organisation were based on a strict canon and symbolism directly related to the liturgy and tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church under the influence of mysticism inherited from Oriental cultures [6]. The temples were intended to be a symbol "manifesting the presence of God", being "one huge icon" of His presence [7]. The symbol thus became an indispensable category, which evolved by incorporating Western influences [8] and building its own layer of meaning shaped under the influence of the centuries-long theological tradition, representing a natural extension of the hierophany [7]. Since the time of the Old Testament, the temple has been a symbol of the faith of the people, bringing the nation together and constituting a space for integration, shaping values and worldview [9]. The temples thus embodied the multicultural and multi-ethnic character of the region [10]. In the areas of the Second Polish Republic an Orthodox church was most often based on a plan of an elongated rectangle, with an altar almost always oriented to the east. The buildings were covered with tented roofs crowned with domes, which were the perfect compositions representing the vault of Heaven. The domes were organising the space of the temple and were also associated with anthropomorphic symbolism - the dome symbolised the Christ himself [7]. The very shape of the domes, their arrangement and size ratio also had a meaningful sense. A single dome symbolized one God, three domes - the Three Divine Persons and four were a symbol of the four Evangelists. Their shape was also important - the onion-shaped dome symbolized a fiery prayer and the characteristic elongation was a

symbol of prayer to Heaven [6]. The body of the temple was identified with the Universal Church of Christ and the Universe. It also often symbolised a ship and referred to Noah's Ark heading east.

Due to the fact that in 1931 the rural population constituted 72.5% of the population, and the Orthodox and Greek Catholic minority [11], which was an important part of it, lived mainly in non-urbanised areas, Orthodox Church buildings were a common element of the landscape in the villages of the eastern borderlands, Chełm and Southern Podlasie regions.

Most often these buildings were situated on an exposed plot on a hill. Separated from the surroundings, the sacred space of a temple was emphasised by a wooden or brick fence, a bell tower and high vegetation in the form of lindens, oaks or ash trees. Orthodox Church complexes often bordered on cemeteries. Depending on the availability of construction materials, Orthodox churches in Poland were usually built of pine wood in a log structure [12]. In wealthier towns and cities, brick constructions were also used. The architectural form of a church was closely related to the liturgy. The Orthodox churches always had a tripartite structure consisting of the sanctuary (for the clergy only), nave (Latin: *navis* - a ship) and the narthex (also called women's gallery).

#### **4. The geopolitical situation**

In order to analyse the state of the resources of Orthodox church architecture in the territories of the Second Polish Republic, one should consider a number of aspects concerning the geopolitical situation of the country at that time, its social and legislative situation determining the actions taken towards the Ukrainian minority.

##### **4.1. Historical aspects**

After the defeat of the German Empire of the Wilhelmine Period and Tsarist Russia in 1918, after one hundred twenty-three years of partitions, a Polish state reappeared on the map of Europe, known as the Second Polish Republic (II Rzeczpospolita Polska). The Polish-German border was established on the basis of the Treaty of Versailles of 1919, which also provided for plebiscites in Warmia and Masuria, Powiśle and Upper Silesia. The Polish border with the USSR was established on the basis of the Treaty of Riga of 1921. A year later the region of Central Lithuania was incorporated into the Second Polish Republic and thus the Polish-Lithuanian border was formed, which was not recognised by Lithuania. In 1923, the eastern border of the Second Republic was finally accepted on the international scene [11]. In relation to the territory of the First Republic (1772), the greatest changes with regard to territory occurred in the east of the country. In 1938, the area of the country was 388634 km<sup>2</sup>, of which 69% was former Russian, 20% - Austrian and 11% - German lands [11]. The geostrategic position of Poland should be regarded as extremely unfavourable, as it was located between two centres of power - the

Soviet and German one. The total length of the borders at that time was 5529 km, and the neighbours of the Second Polish Republic were: Germany, Czechoslovakia, Latvia, Romania, Hungary, Lithuania, the Free City of Gdańsk, and Soviet Union [13].

#### **4.2. Social aspects**

The Second Polish Republic was a non-homogeneous country in terms of nationality. The basic data concerning the structure and status of the population were provided by two censuses of 1921 and 1931, the latter being more representative due to the fact that it covered the entire territory of the Second Polish Republic. According to the first census, conducted on 30 September 1921, out of 27 million people inhabiting the territory of the Second Polish Republic, 69% were Poles, 15% - Ukrainians, 8% - Jews, 4% - Belarusians, 3% - Germans and about 0.09% - Lithuanians [14, 15]. In 1939, the estimated population was 38.1 million people [11]. The attitude of the state towards minorities became the key issue of the newly formed national statehood and was not an isolated phenomenon in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe [16]. In 1923, the eastern border of the Second Polish Republic was finally formed and the Ukrainian minority was estimated at 4-5 million people, constituting the so-called territorial minority, living mostly in the eastern Voivodeships of Ternopil (70%), Ivano-Frankivsk (50%), Novogradok and Lviv [5]. In comparison to other nationalities, the Ukrainian community stood out significantly in terms of national identity, structure, hierarchy and cultural level. The idea of an independent Ukraine openly supported by the Metropolitan Archbishop of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Andrey Sheptytsky, became particularly dangerous for Poland.

#### **4.3. Legal aspects**

The Republic of Poland never had in its plans a multi-national politics of the country. The Polish state policy towards the Ukrainian minority was based on two opposing tendencies operating in parallel, namely: the liquidation of the Orthodox Church and its simultaneous organisation and structuring under the control of the state [17]. A strong, homogenous state was to be created on the basis of one religion and language, and the main idea was to build a national cohesion based on a community unified by one religion - Roman Catholicism [18]. The Orthodox population, being the most numerous minority became a subject of a number of conversion and Polonisation actions. As a result of World War I, the structures of the Eastern Orthodox Church were significantly destroyed. The remaining Church hierarchy in Poland recognised the sovereignty of Moscow, which was unacceptable for the newly formed Polish state [19].

To this end, a program for the assimilation of Ukrainians called the revindication and Polonisation campaign was established. The actions of this campaign can be divided into three stages: the first in the years 1918-1924, the second in 1929, and the third in the years 1936-1938.

Initially, the Polonisation campaign was based on the revindication by the Roman Catholic Church of church buildings taken over by the Eastern Orthodox Church during the partitions of Poland. Orthodox churches, which were symbols of enslavement and Russification, were also demolished. The partitioner often located them in prominent public places. The examples could be the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Saxon Square in Warsaw or the Cathedral of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross in Litewski Square in Lublin.

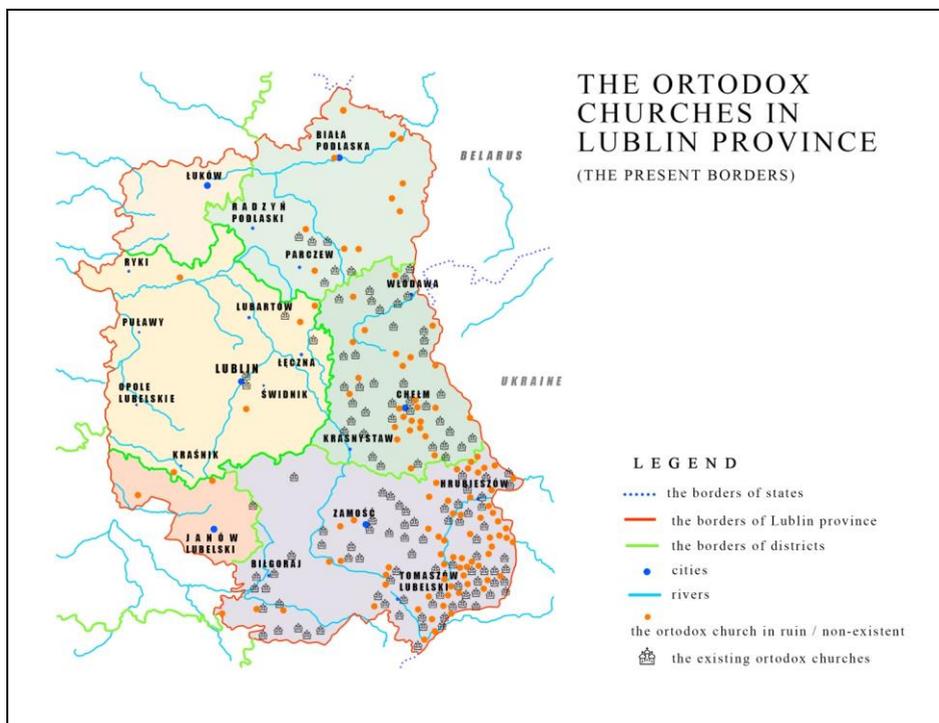
The construction material obtained from demolition of Orthodox churches was later used for the construction of other public buildings. The legal basis for this action was provided by the *Decree on compulsory state administration*, which in the first article envisaged the seizure by the state of the post-Orthodox Church property and property representing the endowment of the Orthodox clergy [The Journal of Laws, pos. 67, No 21 Decree on compulsory administration of the State, 28.12.1928]. In 1919, the Ministry of Religions and Public Enlightenment decided to close and seal the abandoned Orthodox churches. These buildings were then left alone and due to the lack of use and maintenance, they were supposed to self-destruct [G. Kuprianowicz, *Odbieranie i burzenie cerkwi prawosławnych w latach dwudziestych*, [https://www.cerkiew1938.pl/burzenie\\_cerkwi\\_w\\_latach\\_20-tych.html](https://www.cerkiew1938.pl/burzenie_cerkwi_w_latach_20-tych.html), accessed on 21.03.2021]. Various articles were published in the press and brochures with instructions on how to demolish Orthodox Church buildings erected in the times of Russian partition [20].

However, the demolition actions often were initiated by the local population. The estimated number of Orthodox churches taken over by the Catholic Church was about 215 [21] in comparison to 1914, when there were 640 Orthodox churches in former Uniate buildings and 240 in former Roman Catholic buildings on Polish territory. As a result of the first wave of revindication, the Roman Catholic Church took over 175 Uniate temples and 140 buildings, which originally functioned as Roman Catholic churches [22].

In 1925, the Eastern Orthodox Church normalised its legal personality through autocephaly and thus fully separated itself from the sovereignty of Moscow, gaining the ability to manage its own property [23]. However, this did not end its problems with property in the Second Polish Republic.

In 1929, the Roman Catholic episcopate filed 755 lawsuits in the courts claiming the acquisition of Orthodox churches and councils that were half under the administration of the Orthodox Church. At the same time, the legality of these assets was questioned. The Roman Catholic Church demanded the return of key Orthodox buildings, such as: Dermansky Monastery, Holy Dormition Pochayiv Lavra, Orthodox Church of the Holy Spirit and Monastery in Vilnius, Kremenets, Symne and Zhyrovichy Monasteries [23]. Despite the fact that the request was unjustified, as stated by the Supreme Court, 23 Orthodox churches

were destroyed at that time. By the end of the 1930s, the Catholic Church had taken over 144 former Uniate and former Latin churches in the Lublin region. Based on the data from the Orthodox Metropolis of the Chełm and Podlasie regions in 1929: 67 Orthodox churches functioned as Orthodox churches, 165 were consecrated as Roman Catholic churches, 96 were closed, 24 were burnt down and 25 were demolished. Some Orthodox churches were also adapted to other functions. In the Lublin region four of them were converted into schools and one into a dwelling house [17].



**Figure 2.** The existing buildings of Orthodox churches in present borders of Lublin Province.

In the 1930s, the policy of the Second Polish Republic became increasingly focused on national issues and adopted even stricter course towards the Eastern Orthodox Church. Its apogee was reached in 1938, when a mass action of demolishing Orthodox churches in the Chełm and southern Podlasie regions began. The action was preceded by a press campaign, and then the closure of non-affiliated parishes began. The basic guidelines for the Polonisation of the Chełm region were religious, administrative and social campaigns based on the statement that “all Orthodox Christians of the Chełm region are Russified Poles who fell away from Polishness due to the oppression of the partitioners” [17]. In June 1938 these activities were taken over by the army, whose primary goal was to marginalise the problem of political activity of the Ukrainian minority in the Lublin region [24]. It should be noted that this was

largely due to worsening situation of Poland in the international arena, as well as a number of other factors, such as the rise of separatist tendencies among the Ukrainian minority and the growing ‘Ukrainianisation of the Orthodox Church’ in the southern and eastern part of the Lublin region [24]. As a result of a two-month action, 127 Orthodox churches were demolished (13 - Biała Półka Poviát, 9 - Bilgoraj Poviát, 20 - Chełm Poviát, 33 - Hrubieszów Poviát, 33 - Tomaszów Poviát, 10 - Włodawa Poviát, 1 - Zamość Poviát) (Figure 2). The Roman Catholic Church received 3 temples, 4 of them were converted into mortuaries [24]. The above-mentioned action was not justified by legal acts, it was contrary to the provisions of the March Constitution, which assumed the equality of religions, but at the same time the leading religion of the Roman Catholicism [23], what is more, this action did not have the approval of the Roman Catholic Church [18], and raised huge controversies both at home and abroad. Revindication-Polonisation campaign with lesser force continued on the territory of the Second Polish Republic until the outbreak of the Second World War.

## 5. Experiment

The aim of the research was to identify the current stock of existing Orthodox churches in Lublin Voivodeship and to create a database regarding their periodisation, type of construction material used, location, possible revindication and registration in the register of monuments in Lublin Voivodeship. The research also included the information on their current use. Photographic documentation showing the current state of preservation of a building was also carried out. The collected data were systematised in a specially designed building card (Table 1). The experiment consisted of 6 parts based on determination of quantitative register of existing buildings, objects registered in the register of monuments, quantitative register of wooden and brick buildings, estimated dates of their construction and indication of the number of revindicated churches together with the current function of a building. The above data was used to create an inventory of existing buildings described in the following subsections of the experiment.

### 5.1. Archival query

The archival research consisted in verification of historical materials concerning the existing Orthodox church buildings in Lublin Voivodeship. The sources used were both scientific publications and architectural documentation or archival records. The research was divided into three stages. The collected material became the basis for creating a database on the discussed objects.

*The first stage* concerned the analysis of available digitised material and its verification. *The second stage* focused on the bibliographical analysis of non-digital material available only in the form of manuscripts, paper reprints and leaflets. *The third stage* involved a query of archival source materials made

available by the offices, archives and parishes that are in possession of the buildings under study.

## **5.2. Local inspection and photographic documentation**

The authors of the text carried out research based on field trips, local inspections and photographic documentation of Orthodox Church buildings located within the borders of Lublin Voivodeship. The research started in 2015 consisted in local visits during which photographic documentation and basic inventory measurements of each of the studied buildings were made. During the on-site research, information was systematically entered into a created template of a building card.

## **5.3. Inventory of existing Orthodox churches**

On the basis of the completed inventory, the authors created the database of Orthodox Church buildings preserved in the region of eastern Poland. The research area was delimited by the contemporary borders of Lublin Voivodeship. On the basis of archival queries and local inspections, each building was described according to a prepared building card (Table 1). The cards contain information concerning the periodisation, type of construction material used, location, and current function of a temple. The catalogue created in this way made it possible to systematise data on Orthodox Church buildings, taking into account respectively:

- number of existing objects,
- number of objects listed in the register of monuments,
- number and proportion of preserved wooden to brick buildings,
- periodisation of Orthodox churches,
- number of Orthodox churches restored as part of activities in the years 1919-1938,
- current use and functioning.

**Table 1.** Quantitative overview of the Orthodox Church buildings in Lublin Voivodeship.

<b>State of conservation</b>	<b>number</b>	<b>Percentage share</b>
Demolished	152	52
Existing	138	48
Total number	290	100

## **5.4. Quantitative overview of Orthodox churches in Lublin region**

Thanks to collected information it was possible to create a register of Orthodox church buildings and to make a quantitative list of existing Orthodox churches, partly preserved as remains of buildings and non-existing buildings demolished during the Polonization and revindication campaign in the interwar period [21] (Table 1). On the basis of archival and field research, the number of

Orthodox churches in Lublin Voivodeship was estimated at 290. As a result of the revindication action in the years 1919-1939, only 138 objects remained.

### **5.5. Orthodox churches entered into the register of monuments**

After analysing the list of monuments entered in the register of immovable monuments of Lublin Voivodeship and the register of archaeological monuments of Lublin Voivodeship [Publication no. 1/2021 of the Lublin voivodeship monument conservator in Lublin, of 12 January 2021 regarding the list of monuments entered in the register of immovable monuments of the Lubelskie Voivodeship and in the register of archaeological monuments of the Lubelskie Voivodeship], a catalogue was created to show the quantitative ratio of objects with conservator's protection to objects without such protection. Among 138 preserved Orthodox churches some were also rebuilt 102 (74%) and placed under conservator's protection, 36 (26%) are currently not on the list. Some of these buildings have been rebuilt over the years or another temple was built in the place of the original church, which is also subject to such protection. Some of the Orthodox churches built relatively recently are not considered as historic objects. Instead, they are listed in the register as sacred objects of the Eastern denomination.

### **5.6. Wooden and brick Orthodox churches**

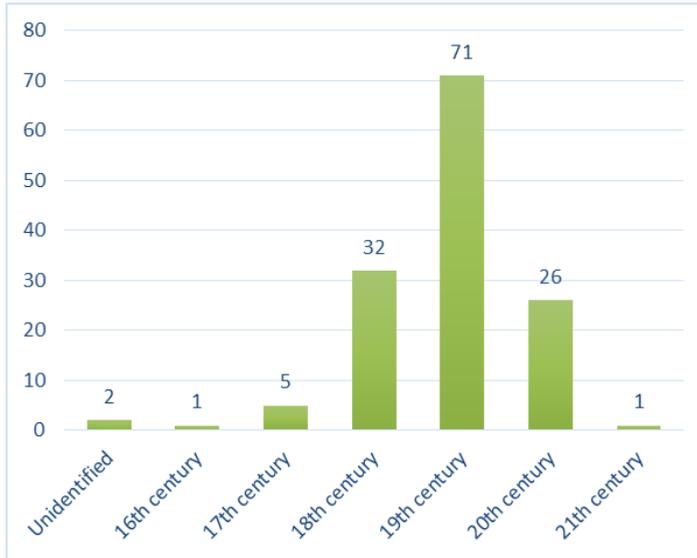
The survey carried out allows also to determine the quantity of objects in terms of material solutions. Out of 138 (100%) surveyed objects, only 48 (35%) wooden buildings and 90 (65%) brick churches have been preserved.

### **5.7. Dating**

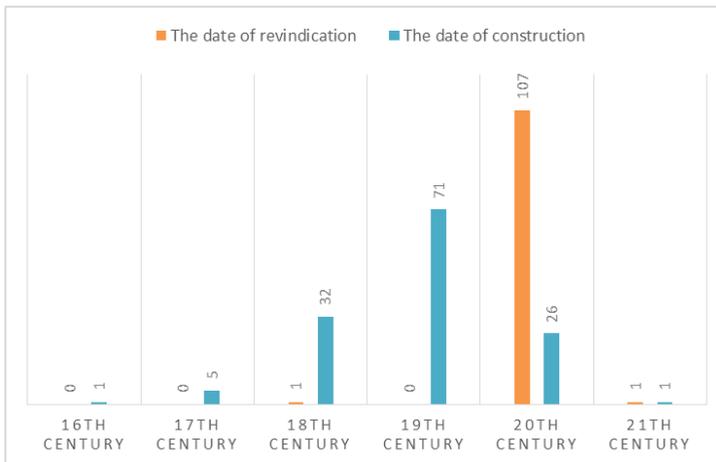
The next stage of the research was an attempt to periodise the current inventory of Orthodox Church buildings. Due to the lack of detailed information on some of churches and discrepancies in archival records, the research results were based on the method of dating by centuries (Figure 3). The oldest building of the existing stock is dated to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the youngest to the current century.

### **5.8. Number of buildings taken over by the Roman Catholic Church**

This part of the research concerns the quantitative and temporal comparison of the existing buildings with the buildings taken over in the years 1919-1938 by the Roman Catholic Church (Figure 4). The diagram shows the number and date of establishment of particular Orthodox churches in the Lublin region compared with the number of buildings revindicated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



**Figure 3.** Dating of the construction of particular objects from the current inventory of Orthodox churches in the Lublin region.

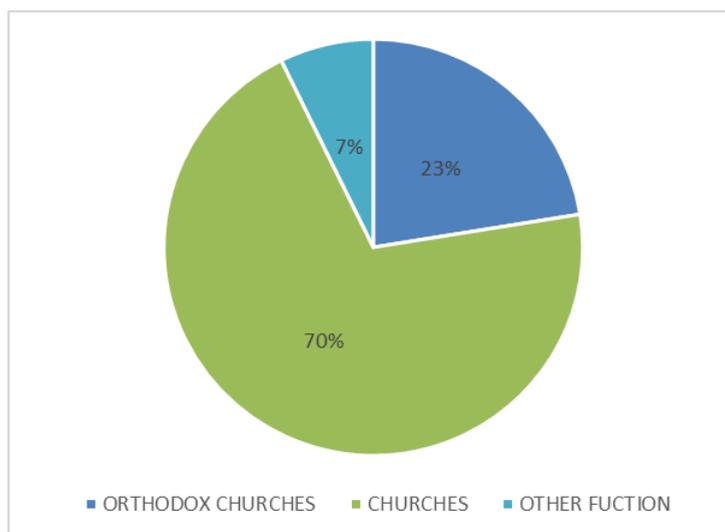


**Figure 4.** Quantitative comparison on the basis of dating of existing and revindicated Orthodox churches in the Lublin region.

### **5.9. Current function**

On the basis of the on-site survey and the available materials, a functional-utility analysis of the current inventory was carried out. The result of the collected data is a quantitative overview divided into Orthodox churches, Catholic churches and churches fulfilling other non-religious functions (Figure 5). At present Catholic churches comprise 97 sites (70%), Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches - 31 sites (23%) and churches fulfilling non-sacred functions -

10 sites (7%). Objects in a state of disrepair or in disuse were defined as fulfilling other functions. Some of them are owned by private persons or serve as public utility buildings (e.g. the District Museum in Chełm).



**Figure 5.** Quantitative overview of existing buildings according to their function.

## 6. Conclusions

Summing up, a number of aspects should be taken into consideration. Firstly, the Polonisation and revindication campaign was based on two opposing ways conducted in parallel. On the one hand, the Polish state sought to eradicate the Eastern Orthodox Church by marginalising its influence (closing down unaffiliated parishes, seizing property, etc.). On the other hand, actions were undertaken to assimilate the Ukrainian population in order to build a religiously homogenous Polish state. The massive action of demolishing Orthodox churches in 1938, despite the military guidelines, was not endorsed by the law and was incompatible with the then constitution, while the reactions it provoked brought about an opposite effect - the consolidation of the Orthodox community and a strong response condemning these actions both at home and abroad. As a result of the campaign, the resource in the form of historic Orthodox Church buildings was irretrievably lost and disappeared from the cultural landscape of the Lublin region. On the basis of the conducted research, the number of church buildings that were previously serving as Orthodox churches was determined and their classification in terms of adaptation to new purposes and the way they were used was carried out. A dating was made, on the basis of which the time of erection of Eastern Rite Church buildings was determined as the period from 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was the time when Orthodox culture flourished most in the Polish lands as a result of the Russification policy of the partitioner. The data recorded by the authors illustrate the number of buildings taken over and adapted by the

Catholic Church, as well as those demolished and burned as part of the revindication campaign in the interwar period. This is an irreparable loss to the cultural heritage of our country and to the multicultural legacy of this part of Central and Eastern Europe.

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