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A Synagogue in Olyka: Architecture and Legends

S E R G E Y R . K R A V T S O V

DWELLING, belonging to a place and having a 'sense of place' that is socially and culturally constructed, plays an important role in the formation of human identity (Sheldrake 2001: 9–11; see also Tuan 1976). Identification with place, commonly associated with people rooted or settled over long periods of time in one location, extends to groups of diaspora people such as Jews, often viewed as being on the move (Bar-Itzhak 2001: 22). My thesis is that the creation of a narrative with local references is especially significant as a strategy for mobile Jews in Europe who seek identification with a place dominated by a non-Jewish majority. Further, I will argue that a sacred place, one related to a theological conception of time and space, is cognitively constructed through legends to root this experience in a usable past (Sheldrake 2001: 30).

Architecture arranges place for rituals, which perpetuate memory. Accustomed as it is to studying material objects, architectural history describes the physical attributes of a structure, and dates it. The work of architectural historians is linked to cultural studies in that the historians seek the meanings of the material as revealed in related verbal texts and visual iconography. A cultural approach reconstructs a building and its milieu as they were seen and understood by contemporaries, including the building's architects and their clients, the local authorities, and the community and its neighbours. Through such reconstruction we can often gain insights that are not available through literary or material means alone.

An example is a synagogue in Olyka, a Volhynian town which has successively belonged to the ancient Rus, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Polish Kingdom, imperial Russia, the Second Polish Republic, and the Soviet Union.¹ At the centre of a fertile area populated by Ukrainians and ruled at different times by members of the Ruthenian/Ukrainian, Polish, and Lithuanian nobility, it attracted a community of Jews, who settled there and plied their various trades and crafts for three and a half centuries. Though these activities connected them to the local population and to the rulers of the city, the Jews preserved their identity in a local population dominated by Christian denominations, including Orthodox, Calvinist, and Greek and Roman Catholic. Central to both Jewish and Christian communities was the visible sacred symbol of the synagogue or church, and in their

synagogue architecture Jews felt a need to substantiate a Jewish presence, organized around their sacred space, in their own eyes and in the eyes of other communities.

As a typical example of a shtetl, or town that in the Jewish imagination preserved a folk life, Olyka attracted the ethnographic expedition of S. A. An-ski (Shlomo Z. Rappoport, 1863–1920). In 1913 An-ski and his colleagues documented the Jewish community of Olyka as a living entity (Sergeeva 2001: 173–4); later, in 1925, its image was captured by the outstanding Polish photographer Henryk Poddebski (1890–1945). This community disappeared during the Holocaust. It is remembered in a collective memorial book (Livne 1972), and a work of personal reminiscence (Grinstein 1973). The only remaining vestiges of the town's Jews are an old brick house in the former Jewish quarter and a monument erected recently at the place of execution of more than 4,000 Jews in the summer of 1942.

Here my aim is to reconstruct Olyka's main synagogue, known as the Great Synagogue, as a virtual site of memory. It is remembered by both Jews and non-Jews, although in different ways. In certain matters, the memory of non-Jews constitutes a counter-narrative. For instance, Bohdan Chmielnicki (c.1593–1657), who played a role in the history of the town, is said to be 'of eternal memory' for the Ukrainians, while in the Jewish view his memory should be blotted out like that of Amalek (Deut. 25: 17, 19; see Hannover 1983: 25; Lindheim and Luckyj 1996: 54). Belarusian, Ukrainian, Russian, and Polish historiographies are informative concerning the Jewish past of Olyka, while Jewish sources are largely silent, or give a legendary narrative of events. Thus, both legend and history contribute to the construction of a place of memory. It can be imagined as a multi-storey building, a structure of meanings, whose floors and the links between them need to be mapped.

Architectural Record of the Synagogue in Olyka

Olyka is one of the oldest settlements in Ukraine, first mentioned in the Laurentian Codex in 1149 (p. 323). For almost four hundred years, from 1544, it was in the possession of the noble family of Radziwiłł. In 1564 it was granted a town charter following the pattern of Magdeburg (Chlebowski and Walewski 1888: 527–8). Jews had apparently begun to settle in Olyka by 1591, when Stanisław 'the Pious' Radziwiłł (1559–99) prohibited them from building houses in the marketplace (Stecki 1887: 34). In 1637 they were allowed to rent wooden stores adjacent to the town hall, which stood in the marketplace, and from 1645 on they could replace their stores with new masonry ones on the western side of the marketplace (Stecki 1887: 40–1). These changes occurred at a time when Prince Stanisław Albrycht Radziwiłł (1595–1656) was altering the town's layout. The Jews, together with the Catholics (mainly Poles), settled permanently in Olyka's

downtown district, called *Serednye Misto* ('midtown' in Ukrainian). They avoided the eastern section of the town, called *Zalisoche*, and the southern suburb of *Zavorotyya*, which was inhabited mainly by Ukrainians (Tersky 2001: 27).

The Ukrainian uprising led by Chmielnicki marked the beginning of a terrible time for Olyka. On 30 August 1648 Radziwiłł's serfs joined the rebels, plundering the town and its castle (Radziwiłł 1974: 47). In June 1651 about 18,000 Cossacks attacked Olyka again. This time, the peasants loyal to Radziwiłł burned down the suburban villages, and fortified their positions in the midtown area. They not only managed to withstand three assaults, but in a brave defence also slaughtered three companies of Cossacks. Furious Cossacks, who faced the approach of the Polish army, robbed the town, set it ablaze, then, on 19 June, retreated (Hrushevsky 1928: 276–9). At the outbreak of the uprising in 1648, thirty Jewish households had been listed in the town; by June 1649 only twenty survived.² These calamities halted the development of *Serednye Misto*, which by 1662 numbered only ten domiciles, compared to 107 in *Zavorotyya*, and ninety-nine in *Zalisoche*.³

Restrictions on Jews in the city were not completely forgotten in later times. In 1686 the prince's commissar reconfirmed the prohibition on Jews erecting houses in the marketplace. Despite this, in many respects Jews had obligations equal to those of their non-Jewish neighbours: they were compelled to participate in the fortification of the town, working on ramparts and palisades, roads and dams with their own handcarts, spades, and axes, they had to keep watch over Radziwiłł's palace and the town hall during the night, and they were asked to delegate several men—'compromisers rather than quarrellers'—to help with the municipal accounting.⁴ Development of the Jewish area was slow, and thirty-six plots still stood empty in *Serednye Misto* in 1719, while at this time the synagogue and the rabbi's house were taxable, from which we can infer that they were in use.⁵ The surrounding community imposed order on the Jewish sector. Thus, after the source of a fire that broke out in 1752 was identified as the house of a mute Jewish tailor, the long blocks of residential housing were forcibly broken into smaller units as alleys were driven between them running from the marketplace to the river.⁶ In 1787 the non-Jews accused the Jews of neglecting their obligations in respect of tidying the city and paying municipal taxes.⁷ In January 1788, as if in response, the Jews complained to Prince Karol Stanisław Radziwiłł (1734–90) about the burden of high taxes and prices, and the bad economic situation in general. They calculated Radziwiłł's debts to the Jewish community of Olyka, and concluded their epistle with an application for the reconstruction of the synagogue, which had been destroyed in a fire:

Since the synagogue burned down in 1787 the congregation has not yet acquired appropriate material for a new building, and will accept with gratitude the aid of His Great Princely Lord's Grace and merciful benefactor in procuring credit, and asks to issue orders also to His Grace Mr Przetocki the forester to allow the release of wood from the

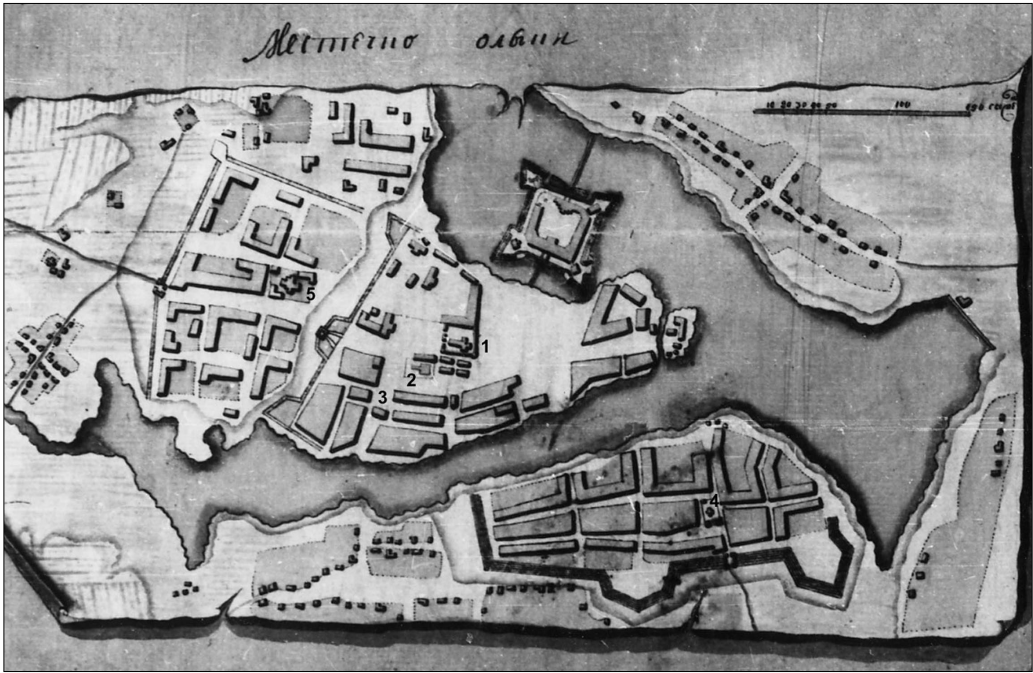


Figure 1 Plan of Olyka, last decade of the eighteenth century. (1) Catholic collegiate Holy Trinity church; (2) town hall; (3) the Great Synagogue; (4) church of the Presentation in the Temple; (5) the Orthodox Holy Trinity church. *Reproduced by courtesy of the Russian State Military Historical Archive, Moscow*

forest, as well as to His Grace the Manager of Olyka not to bar access to the sawmill. As soon as the rescued congregation enjoys the benefit of a new synagogue, it will take upon itself the new obligation of praying to the Highest Throne of God for the prolongation of the Prince's reign in good health, and will declare its continued loyalty . . . bowing its heads at the Prince's feet . . . the whole congregation of Olyka.⁸

The oldest known depiction of the Great Synagogue that was built as a consequence of this appeal is found in the town plan from the last decade of the eighteenth century (Figure 1), where it appears as a large, rectangular building, the construction material of which is not specified, though we know it was built of wood.⁹ Two large fires which occurred in Olyka in 1803 and 1823 could have damaged this structure. The illuminated drawing by Napoleon Orda from 1874 shows the triple-tiered hipped roof of this synagogue rising above the roofs of the midtown district (Figure 2). Its age cannot be dated more accurately than somewhere between 1788 and 1874.¹⁰

Shortly after Orda made his drawing, the synagogue, which supposedly burned down, was replaced by another. Photographs of this new Great Synagogue were taken in the early twentieth century, in the last decades of its



Figure 2 View of Olyka: pencil drawing illuminated with watercolours, by Napoleon Orda, 1874. The huge structure on the right is the Catholic collegiate Holy Trinity church; the multi-tier hipped roof of the synagogue can be seen rising above the dwelling houses on the left. *Reproduced by courtesy of the National Museum, Kraków*

existence (Figures 3, 4, and 5). It was a large, though unpretentious, rectangular log structure. The building included a vestibule, the women's section on the second floor, and a double-height prayer hall in which four timber pillars supported the ceiling, which was divided into nine bays by wooden imitations of retaining arches. The extant photographs show a flat ceiling in the outer bays of the hall; we have no visual record of the central bay. A choir gallery occupied the rear of the hall, which had large, round-headed, paired windows cut into its southern, eastern, and northern walls. The building had exterior galleries on the first and second floors on the west, and was covered with a double-tiered hipped tin roof. There were two symmetrical, low, plastered half-timbered extensions under lean-to roofs in the south and north; these housed the craftsmen's synagogues (Livne 1972: 107). Inside, the prayer hall had an octagonal *bimah* (platform) at the centre; to the east was the *aron hakodesh* (holy shrine) flanked by barley-sugar 'Solomonic' columns, and topped by the Tablets of the Law and the hands of the high priest raised in blessing under a canopy. Here also was the *duhan* (pulpit) for the *sheliaḥ tsibur* (public reader), decorated with a *mizrah* ('east' plaque) inscribed with the year 1879, thus giving an approximate date for the whole structure. The synagogue was similar to the one in the neighbouring town of Torhovytsya, built in the early nineteenth century, which similarly featured a



Figure 3 The Great Synagogue, exterior view from the south-east. Photo: Solomon Yudovin, 1913. *Reproduced by courtesy of the Petersburg Judaica Centre*



Figure 4 The Great Synagogue, exterior view from the south-west. Photo: Henryk Poddębski, 1925. *Reproduced by courtesy of the Instytut Sztuki, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw*

double-tiered hipped roof, paired round-headed windows, and the nine-bay layout of the prayer hall with the ceiling divided by wooden imitations of retaining arches (Piechotka and Piechotka 1996: 353–4).

Figure 5 The Great Synagogue, interior view towards the *aron hakodesh*. Photo: Henryk Poddębski, 1925. Reproduced by courtesy of the Instytut Sztuki, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw



It is not surprising that Holocaust survivors remember the Great Synagogue in general terms, if at all, and pay more attention to Olkya's eight hasidic synagogues (Livne 1972: cf. pp. 36 and 107). By the 1930s these synagogues had probably become more important, while the Great Synagogue—still a significant symbol of the Jewish presence in the town—was only used on special occasions. The structure was not well cared for: the logs at the corners were excessively long, and the exterior walls were not sided in planking, thus exposing the structure to rot (Figure 3). An elderly woman referred to in the sources as 'righteous Freydke' looked after the *aron hakodesh*, Torah mantles, and prayer books (Kremer 1972: 72). The Great Synagogue stood intact on the eve of the liquidation of the Olyka ghetto on 29 July 1942 (Livne 1972: 302). However, it did not survive the war. Its fate was shared by 404 dwelling-houses and 326 auxiliary structures in the town (Klymash et al. 1970: 286).

Legends of the Olyka Synagogue

The Jewish legends about the Great Synagogue of Olyka contrast with the documentary sources. All of them are narrated in Yiddish. One of these narratives was published in 1903, and in 1913 it was recorded by Abraham Rechtman (1880–1972), one of the participants in An-ski's ethnographic expedition (Biber 1903: 5–6; Rechtman 1958: 70–1). The legend tells how the Jews, together with the famous rabbi David ben Shmuel Halevi Segal (known as the Taz, 1586–1667) took refuge in the local fortified masonry synagogue during the Chmielnicki uprising:

In 1648, when Chmielnicki's Cossacks murdered thousands of Jews in Ostroh, the Taz managed to escape with his family to Alik, a small hamlet defended by a strong fortress with ancient cannons placed in its walls. Initially, Chmielnicki's men were afraid to approach the fortress of Alik; but later, in 1649, the Cossacks did make an attempt to overrun the fortress. They advanced on Alik and began to shell the town. The Jews of Alik cowered in their synagogue, which was built like a fortress, praying and fasting. Among the Jews of Alik gathered in their synagogue was the Taz, who was a frail man. As a result of the protracted praying, crying, and fasting he could barely stand on his feet. They say that, almost fainting from exhaustion, he leaned his head against a pillar and immediately fell asleep. He dreamt that a sweet voice was reciting the verse from 2 Kings 19: 34: 'I will protect and save this city for My sake, and for the sake of My servant David.' Waking up, he ordered all of them to keep praying and crying and wailing, for, he said, salvation was near. And indeed the miracle ensued: suddenly the old and rusty cannons began to fire, the murderous bands fled to the four winds, and the town of Alik was saved. In commemoration of the miracle that had occurred, the Taz composed special penitential prayers. The Jews of Alik had the custom of reciting them every year on the day that the miracle occurred, 26 Sivan. (Rechtman 1958: 70–1)¹¹

Another version of this legend describes the same episode as taking place in the local castle, one of the most fortified in the vicinity, rather than the synagogue (Livne 1972: 19). The penitential prayer of 26 Sivan follows another one on 20 Sivan, allegedly composed by the Taz to memorialize the persecutions of 1648 in Olyka. The rabbinical authorities of Poland saw the attack of 12 Elul 5408 (30 August 1648), like other disasters of that year, as merely an extension of the persecutions in Blois nearly 300 years previously, so they marked the attack by reciting the prayer on 20 Sivan (Biber 1903: 7–10), the date of the initial attack. In a second conflation of historical events, I would suggest, memory further shifted the miracle of the retreat of the Cossacks from Olyka from 1651 to 1649 so that the attack could be seen as part of the disasters known collectively as *gezerot taḥ vetat*—the decrees (meaning 'the divine decrees', or the heavenly retributions) of the years 5408 and 5409, corresponding approximately to 1648 and 1649 (and therefore to the attacks perpetrated on the Jews by Chmielnicki in those years). In the oral tradition 1648 is of particular significance because the Zohar saw it as a

year of messianic occurrences (Scholem 1973: 88). The Council of Four Lands, the Jewish self-governing body of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, fixed 20 Sivan (instead of the historically correct date for Olyka of 12 Elul 5408, corresponding to 30 August 1648) as the date for commemoration of the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648 and 1649, while the prayer of 26 Sivan was adopted to mark the historical salvation of the besieged community on 30 Sivan 5411 (corresponding to 19 June 1651).

The legend in its two versions makes little distinction between the fortified synagogue and a castle, both referred to by the biblical metaphor of the divinely saved city. In this context, such details as castle or a synagogue as the backdrop to the scene were unimportant. However, the narrative does supply the synagogue with an interior pillar, against which the exhausted Taz could lean his head, thus adopting the layout of the four-pier synagogues of neighbouring Ostroh or Lutsk (Kravtsov 2005a: 320–4). In this way memory fixes the chronology and topography in general terms, eliminating and changing secondary details and adding new ones to make the scene more vivid. In historical terms, it does not prove the existence of a masonry synagogue in Olyka in the mid-seventeenth century.

Another legend, recorded elsewhere in Ukraine, is known in two versions, published by An-ski and by Rechtman in 1925 and 1958 respectively. An-ski's version reads:

For a long while the Jews of Alik had been begging their nobleman to build them a synagogue, and the Christians had been pleading for a [Catholic¹²] church. He, for his part, wanted to build a town hall.

Well, one day the nobleman was taken so ill that it seemed no one could cure him. So he made a vow to build a large and beautiful church. But he remained as sick as ever; indeed, he grew weaker by the day. When he felt that he was at his last gasp, he made a vow to build a large and beautiful synagogue. Lo and behold, he felt better at once.

After he had fully recovered, he began to think about which of his vows he should keep first. If he built the church first, the Jews would take offence. If he built the synagogue first, he would provoke the Christians. If he followed his own wishes and built the town hall, the Jews and the Christians would all be angry. So he decided to have all three structures built simultaneously and to make them identical.

He hired a famous foreign architect and instructed him to erect the three buildings at exactly the same time, stone by stone. The architect drove three posts into the ground to indicate where the church, the synagogue, and the town hall were to be built. Then he stretched a rope from post to post and, balancing himself on it, went backwards and forwards, laying brick after brick in sequence. As the buildings rose, he tied the rope higher and higher up the posts. And that was how he was able to build the three structures simultaneously.

They were the most beautiful buildings in the world, so beautiful that the nobleman, worried lest the architect construct others as wonderful somewhere else, had the posts cut down just as all three were finished. As a result the architect fell from the ropes and died.

When I visited Alik, I came upon an old church, but I did not see either a [masonry] synagogue or a town hall.¹³ I was told that these had both burned down some time ago. (An-ski 1925: 248–9¹⁴)

Rechtman's version differs at a number of points:

The Count¹⁵ of the shtetl Olik was a wicked and vicious man. He mistreated his own peasants and never allowed the Jews to get away with anything. Time and again the Jews petitioned him, asking permission to build a synagogue, but, just as he denied his peasants the right to build a church,¹⁶ the Count repeatedly refused the Jews' request.

One day it happened that the Count became seriously ill. All the best physicians from the big city were summoned to his bedside, but to no avail; on the contrary, his condition worsened as the days passed and his life began to ebb away. Then the Count sent for the priest and asked him to pray to God for a cure. He promised the priest that if God would listen to his prayer and if he would recover he would build the church. However, the Count's health did not improve. He felt his strength continue to ebb and his life nearing its end. Finally, the Count ordered emissaries to go and fetch the rabbi, and to ask him to pray for his recovery. Again he made a promise: if the rabbi's prayers were answered he would build a synagogue for the Jews. And it happened that immediately after he had given his word to the rabbi, the Count began to feel better and after a couple of days he was totally cured. Leaving his sickbed, the Count did not forget his promises, neither to the Christians, nor to the Jews, and he was determined to fulfill both requests. Yet he could not decide which of the two promises he should keep first: if he began with the church, the Jews would complain; if he started with the synagogue, the Christians would feel wronged. Eventually he hit upon an ingenious solution; the Count ordered the two buildings to be built simultaneously. And so, the masons followed the Count's orders. They dug holes in the ground for both buildings simultaneously and began laying the foundations. Then they laid one brick on the wall of the church and the next on the synagogue's. After a short while both buildings were completed: they looked identical.

It was said that when the church and the synagogue were finally finished, the Count came to have a look. Inspecting the buildings, he could not take his eyes off them, the architecture was so sublime. The Count left feeling very troubled. The next day he called for the architect and had him put to death. The Count could not bear the thought that this architect might be invited by another count anywhere else to build anything as wonderful. (Rechtman 1958: 54–5)¹⁷

These two versions of the story are not identical with the original account, lost by Rechtman in his native Proskuriv during the Russian Civil War. An-ski's version was published posthumously in 1925. Rechtman wrote down his reconstruction of the original text in about 1918, and had an opportunity to make a comparison with An-ski's version before his own was published in 1958. 'I have therefore tried not to repeat the stories already published, unless my version is different in some way', Rechtman states in his introduction (1958: 25).¹⁸

In both permutations this narrative is a variant of the master builder tale—type 1099, 'The Giant as Master Builder', in Aarne and Thompson's *Tale Type Index* (Thompson 1957). In the most common version of the tale, a giant, a troll,

or a devil who is a master builder builds a cathedral in a certain city, and has to accomplish the work by a certain deadline. As remuneration for this task he demands something impossible or horrible, such as the sun and moon, or the eyes of the person who has commissioned the building, unless somebody can guess his name (only the devil remains nameless). The name is guessed, and the giant loses not only his payment but also his life (Uther 2004: 37–8). The existence of the master builder tale is confirmed in the Snorra Edda (c.1220/30), while popular versions were widespread in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, mostly in Swedish, Norwegian, and German folklore. The tale is known in an Edda version, as well as in Scandinavian, Baltic, and west and south European sources (Taloš 1977). The legend of Olyka, with its motif of bricks laid one by one in two buildings simultaneously, is a variation of the west European tale of two giants building a church: both have the use of only one hammer, which they throw to each other each day.¹⁹ Close analogues of the tale are known in Little Poland (Dobrzycki 1983: 11; Heyduk 1980: 57–8), west-central Poland, and in Vienna (Jaindl 1992: 27–8; Knoop 1909: 53–4). The narrative of Olyka mentions neither the builder's remuneration nor his name, and instead of the deadline we have the simultaneous construction of two buildings (in Rechtman's wording) as in the Viennese legend of St Stephen's towers.

Jewish legends often seek to assign antiquity to a synagogue, thereby establishing its legitimacy in the eyes of the law. They do this by making various fantastic claims, attributing the synagogue's origins to supernatural providence, a hoary past, or some factor in the non-Jewish realm: the synagogue always existed—it was unearthed centuries ago (Sataniv and many other places); it was built eight hundred years ago (Ostroh); it was built during the short period of Turkish occupation (Husyatyń); it used to be a Protestant church, prohibited in the early seventeenth century (Pidhaitsi); it used to be a part of an ancient fortification (Lutsk) (Bar-Itzhak 2001: 154; Kravtsov 2005b: 84–94). Jews' desire to establish the antiquity of a particular synagogue led them to use particular architectural styles suggestive of age, such as the Gothic Survival style used in the synagogues of Volhynia, Ruthenia, and Podolia well into the early eighteenth century (Kravtsov 2005b). In the Olyka story, such a claim is strengthened by associating the Great Synagogue with other venerable buildings, namely the town hall and the Catholic church in An-ski's version, or the 'peasants' church' in Rechtman's. Unlike the early twentieth-century narrator of the legend, the Jews of pre-war Olyka believed that their synagogue was 'only' two hundred years old (Livne 1972: 107).

An additional theme in the Olyka story is jealousy, which causes the death of the builder.²⁰ Initially, the Count pretends to be a fair judge, willing to override the mutual jealousy ascribed to both Jews and peasants for the sake of peace in his Ukrainian city. However, ultimately it is the Count himself who is the jealous one, capable of killing the master builder, whose only sin is his excellence. The final

section echoes the introduction, where the Count is described as a wicked and vicious man. This, and the central theme of the simultaneous construction of the synagogue with other ancient monuments, both appear to be related to competition among the religious communities of Olyka, each with a desire to prove the legality of its presence in the city.

The motif of a synagogue built as a sign of the Count's gratitude for Jewish prayers for his health is a reflection of the actual wording of the Jewish request for a new synagogue quoted above. The legend presents the prayer as the cause of the lord's recovery and hence the construction of the new synagogue, whereas the letter of 1788 mentions the construction of the synagogue as a precondition for a new prayer to be offered for his health. Both texts include so many similar elements, though in different causal configurations, that the legend can be perceived as an echo of the real application for a new synagogue. The need for wood was a story that was often repeated in Olyka, where the synagogue burned down more than once, and the forest was always in the nobleman's possession. However, the notion of a new obligation to pray for the lord's health makes this account unique, dating it to the late 1780s. Linking the building date to older structures could reflect the presence of the real synagogue in the same place for a long time, from about 1590 on, close to the historical facts. Nevertheless, it is hardly believable that a wooden synagogue ever replaced the masonry one that appears as a backdrop in the legend of the Taz.

The legend of Olyka's synagogue depicts it as a sublime and wonderful building, the most beautiful in the world. This is presented as a good thing, in contrast to the legends of the righteous women, the Golden Rose of Lviv and Mirale of Brailiv, who sacrifice themselves to expiate the excessive beauty of a synagogue (Bar-Itzhak 2001: 150–3). Moreover, the Olyka story does not express anxiety about the synagogue design being modelled on the non-Jewish pattern, suggesting the architectural taste of a narrator who lived in a magnate-owned town relatively tolerant of the Jews, away from the ghettos of the old royal cities with their fear of persecution and their notorious restrictions on the height and exterior decoration of synagogues. Such prohibitions regarding the construction of new masonry synagogues were generally in force in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Kravtsov 2005b: 84–9).

An architect as the victim of the lord's jealousy was a recurrent theme in folklore in Radziwiłł's cities: it is said that Giovanni Maria Bernardoni (1541–1605), the architect of the Cathedral of Christ's Body at Nyasvizh (1593) was blinded by his jealous client (Shishigina-Pototskaya 1997: 12).²¹ Vasył Slobodyan, a student of Ukrainian architecture, relates a legend regarding an architect 'who had built the castle and the whole city of Olyka', and was put to death by Prince Radziwiłł.²² Thus, the subject entered Jewish folklore from the narratives of the surrounding community.

It can be concluded that the legends of Olyka use categories of time and place for the aetiological explanation of vital matters, such as surviving a massacre or possession of a synagogue. The function of time and place in these narratives follows the rules of the genre, substituting days for years, synagogue for castle, and result for cause. The legend of a synagogue built at the same time as a church is a variant of the international master builder tale, which has a parallel in local Ukrainian folklore. The jealousy, though a universal motif, reflects real features of everyday life in multiethnic Olyka. The motif of bricks laid one by one is used to suggest the venerable age of the synagogue, which is a Jewish central European theme found in other local legends. The legend can point to a historical moment, when a new prayer for the prince's health as a thanksgiving for the wood for the new synagogue was introduced. The narrator appears to be free from concerns about the height of the synagogue or the material used in its construction, restrictions which derive from legislation in the royal Polish and Lithuanian cities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This points to the comparatively late origins of the legend.

Architecture Meets Legend

In his ethnographic essay An-ski reported that the legend of the Olyka synagogue provides important though controversial architectural information. Most striking are the differences between the three buildings situated in the midtown area, at a 'rope's distance' from each other, and described in the legend as identical. They were to some extent familiar to An-ski from his visit to Olyka. By a process of elimination, I propose to find a structure that might have supplied the model for the Great Synagogue among the public buildings of Olyka.

The Calvinist church—converted in 1580 to the Catholic church of the Holy Trinity, dedicated in 1592 to the Apostles Peter and Paul, and still standing to the west of the marketplace—could not have supplied a model for the synagogue building, since its plan is based on the Greek cross (Brykowska 2003: 41–2, 44).

The huge Holy Trinity collegiate church, which, though now abandoned, still dominates the midtown area, was sited on the advice of the Jesuit architect Benedetto Molli, designed by Giovanni Maliverna, and built between 1635 and 1640; it was modelled on Jesuit patterns, such as the Gesù church in Rome (Zharikov 1985: 81).²³ Founded by Stanisław Albrzycht Radziwiłł, the Grand Chancellor of Lithuania and the overlord of Olyka, it was the place of worship for the Catholic citizens, including college students, as well as the residents and guests at Olyka's castle situated across the esplanade and moat. Its capacious crypt was designed to be the place of eternal rest for the princely Radziwiłł family. In contrast to synagogue architecture, both the exterior and interior of the church were richly decorated with sculptures.

The town hall was built between about 1637 and 1647, at the same time as the Holy Trinity collegiate church, and was much smaller than the latter, as can be

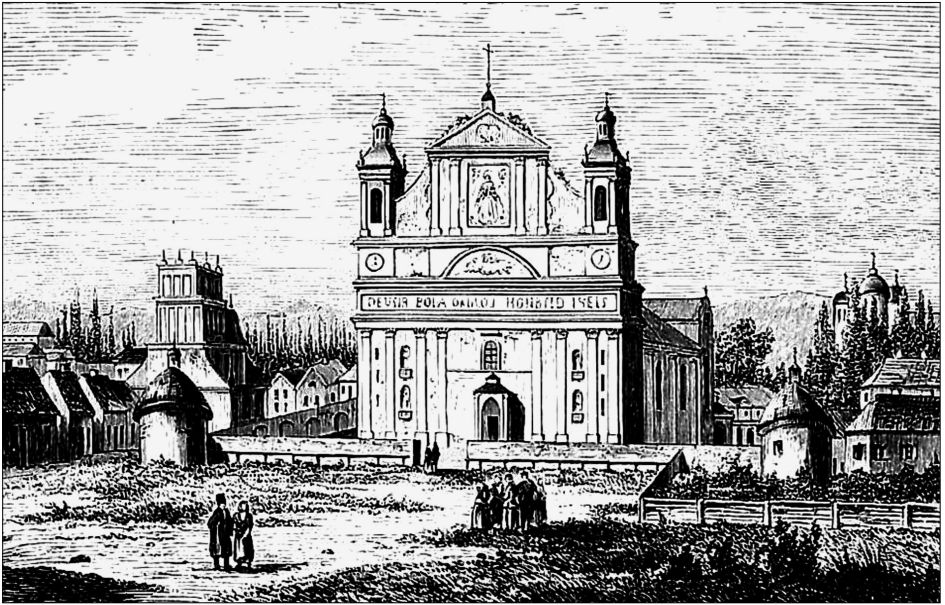


Figure 6 Engraving of Olyka. The large structure in the centre is the Catholic collegiate Holy Trinity church; the small one to the right is the Orthodox Holy Trinity church at Zavorottya; on the left is the town hall. *From Tygodnik Ilustrowany (1860), 586*

seen from an engraving of 1860 (Figure 6) (Anon. 1860: 586; Brykowska 2003: 45). Its design essentially followed that of the town hall of 1596 in Nyasvizh, another city in the possession of the Radziwiłłs, though its tower was much lower than that in Nyasvizh, and had very little in common with the sacred buildings of Olyka (Pashkow et al. 2001: 77, 527).

A third church, the Orthodox church of the Holy Trinity, which in 1886 took the place of its precursor in Zavorottya which was destroyed in a fire, is crowned with five domes, and is very unlike the synagogue architecture of Volhynia (Teodorovich 1889: 983–4). The remaining candidate for the Christian edifice that might have supplied a model for the Great Synagogue is the Greek Catholic, later Orthodox, church of the Presentation in the Temple (Figure 7) in Zalisoch, ²⁴ the eastern district of Olyka, situated across the river Putyivka from the Jewish quarter. This area was bounded by the city fortifications of Olyka in the 1620s and 1630s. Later it became a separate village; however, its inhabitants continued to call themselves *mishchane* (townsmen). Their parish church was constructed in 1784 (Teodorovich 1889: 984). The extant church is masonry, with a wooden dome based on an octagonal plan after the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, in accordance with the theme of the Temple made explicit in the dedication of the church—Christians in medieval and later times often thought that the Dome (a Muslim structure) was actually Solomon’s Temple, and therefore used it as a model for church architecture. The church of the Presentation is one



Figure 7 Church of the Presentation in the Temple at Zalisoch. Photo: Sergey Kravtsov, 2003

of a very small group of Volhynian churches to follow this design (Kowalczyk 1997: 400, 402; Zharikov 1985: 76–7), and was probably modelled on the octagonal cemetery chapel of All Saints (1773–5) in the Volhynian town of Pochayiv (Rychkov 1995: 87–8; Zharikov 1986: 76–7). Its decorative elements include paintings of the Four Evangelists in the cupola and eight icons of the remaining Apostles at the piers.²⁵ Thus the composition expresses ‘the twelfold completeness of the chosen people’, a reference to the twelve tribes of the Old Testament, and explicit also in the twelve alabaster figures of the Apostles in Olyka’s Holy Trinity collegiate church (Averintsev 1991: 355). During my visit in the town in 2006 I asked the priest, Father Mykolay—a local resident since 1962—about legends regarding the origins of his church. He said that it was erected on the parishioners’ account. Asked whether Radziwiłł allowed the construction, he replied: ‘The old prince would never prohibit such a comely thing’, obviously referring to the collective image of the Radziwiłłs as Olyka’s benefactors (see Teodorovich 1889: 984). An interesting legend explained the presence of a tank shell in the church’s wall, a modern version of the story of a miraculously unexploded cannonball that hits a sacred building, known from the Maharsha syn-

agogue of Ostroh and Lviv Cathedral. However, Father Mykolay could not remember any legend linking the church to a synagogue of Olyka.

The octagonal design of the church of the Presentation in the Temple could have been an acceptable model for synagogue architecture in the 1780s. In a responsum dating from 1788 Rabbi Ezekiel ben Judah Landau of Prague expressed no opposition to a plan to build an octagonal synagogue, as long as it was not intended to follow a non-Jewish model (Landau 1969: no. 18). The question had been submitted to the rabbi by the Ashkenazi community of Trieste, where an octagonal synagogue was never actually built. The idea emerged again in Berlin as a competition design for a synagogue in 1848, and was realized the same year in the German city of Hildesheim, and later in Paderborn (1881), and in Bad Driburg-Pömbesen (1886) (Birkmann and Stratmann 1998: 148–9, 192–3; Bothe 1983: 79, 81). However, in Olyka, this kind of synagogue design remained a purely theoretical possibility. It is my contention that the architectural element that suggests a comparison between the church and the synagogue in Olyka is not the octagonal shape but the cupola over the central bay of the wooden synagogue. It is not referred to in any document, but it could have been easily accommodated in the high, multi-tiered roof evident in Orda's drawing, as was the case in many other synagogues. The similar synagogue of Torhovytsya (Figure 8)—with its



Figure 8 Interior view of the synagogue at Torhovytsya. Photo: Szymon Zajczyk, before 1939. Reproduced by courtesy of the Insytut Sztuki, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw

Figure 9 Hebrew printer's mark showing the Dome of the Rock as a messianic temple, printed in the books of Marco Antonio Giustiniani, Venice, 1552. The image shows the temple as a twelve-sided structure, though the Dome of the Rock is octagonal. The Hebrew inscriptions read as follows: on the banner, 'The [latter] glory of this house shall be greater [than the former], says the Lord of Hosts' (Haggai 2: 9); above and below the temple, 'For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God [for ever and ever]' (Micah 4: 5); on the temple itself, 'House of the Lord' (2 Chronicles 36: 7) (translations from the Standard English Edition). *Reproduced by courtesy of the Gross Family Collection*



wooden imitations of retaining arches which divide the flat ceiling into nine bays—accommodated a central, twelve-sided cupola decorated with the signs of the zodiac. This composition could have been repeated in Olyka. The centric structure of the Dome of the Rock, which tops the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, was also a recognizable messianic symbol in Jewish art from at least the sixteenth century (Figure 9; Sabar 1998). It is represented in the illustration of the messianic temple in the 1739 Passover Haggadah of Issachar Baer ben Yaacov Hayim of Olyka (Figure 10).²⁶ It could have served as the common denominator in the late Baroque Christian and Jewish sacred architecture of Volhynia. In the case of the synagogue it could only be seen from the interior, whereas in the case of the church it could be seen from the exterior. It appears only in the Jewish narrative.

The interpretation of an interior cupola as modelled on the Dome of the Rock, and hence alluding to the Temple at Jerusalem, is an alternative to the accepted view that such constructions refer to the Tabernacle, the portable sanctuary (Hubka 2003: 93–4; Piechotka and Piechotka 1996: 129–30), an interpretation that implies that the Jews saw themselves as nomads. However, the literary image of the Polish Jews as people wandering in the wilderness is a comparatively recent trend, evident in the writing of S. Y. Agnon (1888–1970) and Aaron Zeitlin (1898–1973); it would be anachronistic to attribute it to pre-Zionist times (Bar-Itzhak 2001: 37–8). The interpretation that I am proposing for the interior cupola would remove the apparent contradiction between most of the building, evidently an imitation of masonry architecture, and the cupola, which allegedly symbolizes



Figure 10 Page from Issachar Baer ben Yaacov Hayim of Olyka's Passover Haggadah (1739), showing the messianic temple as an octagonal domed structure. MS Mic 8896, fo. 37v. Reproduced by courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary

a tent. The cupola would more likely emphasize the hope for the rebuilding of the Temple rather than the Tabernacle, a symbol of wandering.²⁷

The four wooden pillars seen in photographs of the synagogue in Olyka were also a symbol of the Temple of Jerusalem. The four-pier, nine-bay synagogue layout was introduced into Polish masonry architecture during the 1620s in the synagogues of Lviv and Ostroh. It was based on the imaginary reconstruction of the Temple after Ezekiel's vision by the Jesuit theorist Juan Bautista Villalpando (Kravtsov 2005a: 317–24). The barley-sugar shape of the 'Solomonic' columns of the *aron hakodesh* in Olyka were another element thought to have been originally inspired by the Temple at Jerusalem: Catholics believed that the barley-sugar columns of St Peter's shrine in Rome had been brought there from the destroyed Temple, and the Jews then took this architectural element from the Christians (Ward-Perkins 1952). Thus, various applications of the same sacred prototype were somewhat tautological but convincing metaphors of the Temple. They pointed, elsewhere, to the Promised Land, the Holy City, and the rebuilt Temple, and to the eschatological future expected 'speedily in our days'. This connection between the actual place of residence and prayer and the sacred 'elsewhere' is expressed in Jewish legends of the subterranean passage to Jerusalem, the stones of the Temple being incorporated in the building of a synagogue, and the miraculous transfer of all the synagogues of the Diaspora to the Holy Land as taught in the Talmud (BT *Meg.* 29a (Epstein 1984); for a folkloric interpretation of this theme see Bar-Itzhak 1992, 2001: 38).



Figure 11 Interior of the Maharsha synagogue, Ostroh. Photo: Henryk Poddebski, 1922. Reproduced by courtesy of the *Insytyt Sztuki, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw*

Architecture states these links in its own language. The wooden synagogues of Olyka or Torhovytysya echo the masonry Maharsha synagogue of Ostroh (Figure 11); they should be interpreted not only in the physical terms of their design, or as wooden replicas of a masonry model, but also culturally and spiritually as a sequence of places where the Taz taught, took refuge, and saved a small community. Local, individual and collective salvation thus finds itself caught up in a wider story of redemption, and both the local and the universal are legible in the architecture of these synagogues.

The dates of the church of the Presentation in the Temple (1874) and of the application for the new synagogue (1788) coincide with the period when Prince Karol Stanisław Radziwiłł was lord of Olyka. Referred to by his nickname *Panie Kochanku*, he was one of the most colourful and controversial personalities of his time.²⁸ From a Jewish viewpoint he was definitely ‘a wicked and vicious man’, unlike most of his noble family. A long list of his ‘feats’ on the Jewish street is given by philosopher Solomon Maimon (1754–1800), who was born in Nyasvizh: the prince once jestingly opened the veins of the local Jewish barber; being drunk, he urinated on the church altar and then levied a tax of wax on the Jews as a sin-offering for the purification of the church; accompanied by his court, he went to a synagogue, smashed windows and stoves, threw the Torah scroll on the floor, and

hit a pious Jew who tried to rescue it with a musket-ball (Maimon 1954: 63–5). A folk tale known from a Polish source tells how Panie Kochanku demanded the extermination of all the Jews of Nyasvizh (Maciejowski 1878: 136–7).²⁹ Other stories describe him ordering a Jew to climb a tree, shooting him, and then declaring himself happy with having killed ‘a cuckoo’; or riding horses into a crowd of Jews returning from sabbath prayers, catching a Jew, and then releasing him in a field beyond the *eruv* (boundary), thus rendering him unable to return home before nightfall; or kidnapping Jewish girls (Stokfish 1976: 20–4).³⁰ There are many anecdotes about and by Panie Kochanku, in which he appears as a malevolent trickster or a spendthrift gentleman but a master of his word. Towards the end of his life he was possessed by a passion to relate fantastic stories (Michalski 1972: 260). I have not found, however, any analogue to the legend of the Great Synagogue of Olyka in Radziwiłł’s legacy.

The architect who served Panie Kochanku was Leon Lutnicki. He signed his works as a ‘warrant officer’, ‘architect’, or ‘surveyor’.³¹ His most interesting project was the Altana Palace (1780) at the Alba Park by Nyasvizh (Figure 12). This was an extravagant, three-storey octagonal building with rusticated corners, and bucrania in the capitals of the pilasters and in the frieze that ran round the exterior of the building. It included minarets topped with crescents, and a concave

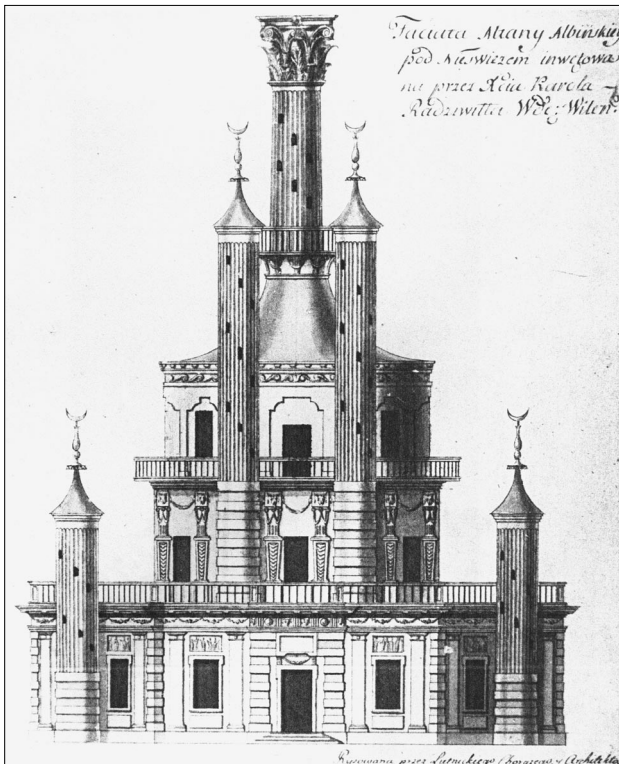


Figure 12 The Altana Palace, Alba Park by Nyasvizh. Drawing by Leon Lutnicki, 1780. Reproduced by courtesy of the University Library, Warsaw

'Chinese' roof crowned with an enormous Corinthian column. The local legend of Nyasvizh compares this building, destroyed in the Napoleonic Wars, to St Sophia in Constantinople (Shyshyhina-Patotskaya 2001: 35). The Corinthian order together with the octagonal plan suggest an affinity with the Temple of Solomon (Kravtsov 2005a: 315–16), thus glorifying the wisdom and divine inspiration of its founder. This design might be related to models from Freemasonry known to Panie Kochanku (who was apparently among the founders of the Masonic lodge known as 'Au Vertueux Voyageur') and his stepbrother Maciej Radziwiłł (1749–1800), the second steward of the 'Zum Tempel Weisheit' and 'Isistempel' Masonic lodges (Hass 1982: 107).³² However, I do not see any direct link between the Freemasons' legend of Hiram as a master builder of the Temple, killed by his wicked apprentices, which circulated among the elite (see Curl 2002: 32–4), and the Jewish folk tale of the Olyka synagogue, mainly because of the considerable number of differences between the stories. Panie Kochanku is by no means seen in the legend as King Solomon, a client of Hiram, and his pretension to be a just judge is vain. As for Lutnicki's fate, he reconstructed St Michael's Catholic church and another church of the Eastern rite at Nyasvizh in 1790, the year of Prince Karol's death, and went on to serve his successor, Prince Dominik in 1793 (Michalski 1972: 260; AGAD, AR 21-L100, fo. 40).

Thus, the church of the Presentation in the Temple and the wooden synagogue of the late 1780s were the possible models for the legend. Their architectural elements could well have been similar, given the significant references to the Dome of the Rock and the Temple of Jerusalem. Since the dates of construction are known, we can identify the 'wicked and vicious' overlord of Olyka as Karol Stanisław Radziwiłł. However, his architect Leon Lutnicki could not have been the victim in the story as he was still alive three years after his client's death.

The Jewish memory of Olyka as expressed in local legends is related to its history. Legends adapt history to the rules of the genre, and to the knowledge of the sacred past and promised future. In this way, a castle and a synagogue can be interchangeable, years can become days, and a prayer miraculously saves the Jewish community and heals its benefactor. Here, in the circle of a narrator and his listeners, the Jews feel protected by their faith, able to survive the calamities in their native town.

The Jewish legends exploit diverse sources, including the Scriptures, as in the legend of the Taz, and the folkloric themes of the neighbouring non-Jewish communities, such as the master builder tale. Such a cultural exchange between Jewish and Ukrainian folklore is possible as long as the subject does not touch directly on the relations between these two groups but rather involves a third force, the wicked and vicious prince with his architect, and projects the evil onto them.

In the realm of architecture, communication between Jews and non-Jews is easier to assess, since the sacred buildings quote the same iconographical source

or family of sources related to the Temple of Jerusalem. The Great Synagogue of Olyka was a sign of Jewish commitment to the place, even in the days when it was seen as less important in comparison to other, newer, houses of prayer. It was vital for the local Jews to convince themselves of its antiquity, and hence legality. At the same time, it spoke, through its architectural language, of other venerable places, such as Ostroh, from where it had borrowed its plan, and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the legendary source of inspiration and radiation of the divine beauty, the final spiritual destination.

Notes

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1 Today Olyka belongs to the Volynska *oblast'* of Ukraine. Its Yiddish name is Olik or Alik; Olyka is its Polish name.

2 TsDIAUK, collection 25, registry 1, file 263, fos. 675^v–676.

3 AYuZR, pt 7, vol. iii, 121.

4 AGAD, AR 20-9-4, fos. 56–7.

5 Ibid., fos. 60–2.

6 AGAD, AR 20-12-3, fos. 4–5.

7 AGAD, AR 20-9-7, fos. 85–8.

8 The Polish text reads:

Po spaleni w r. 1787 bożnicy, jeszcze dotychczas kahał nie wystarawszy się zdanych materiałów na nowey zbudowanie, zebrze wspomagającey od Jego Wielkksiążęcej Miłości Pana i Miłościwego Dobrodzieja w uzyskaniu zaliczeń tak i do Jegomości Pana Przetockiego leśniczego, o dozwole nie lasu na wypuszczenie drzewa, jako też y do Jegomości Ekonomy Ołyckiego o niewzbronienie tartaku.

Żądanych dobrodziejstw skorzystaniem pod ratowany kahał w nowozbudowanej mianej bożnicy y nowy zabierze obowiązek błagania Tronu Najwyższego Boga o przedłużenia dni pełnych milego zdrowia Książę cemu Panowaniu, i ponowi chęci do wiernego zostawiania w dozgonnym wyznaniu że razem z nami czoła swoje pod stopy książęce schylaiąc—Prawdziwy.

Jaśnie oświeconey waszej książęcey mości | Pana Dobrodzieja | Podnózek y szczere życzący | Poddany | Cały kahał ołycki | Pisan na Ołyce | Dnia 25 januarij 1788 roku.

See NARB, collection 694, registry 2, fos. 9–10.

9 RGVIA, file 21546, fo. 1.

10 MNK, III-r.a. 4218 (file 'Volhynia'). The drawing is labelled *Olyka*; the inscription in the underlay reads: 'Wołyń. Olyka,—kościół parafialny 1874' (Volhynia. Olyka,—the Catholic parish church). See Piechotka and Piechotka 1996: 296–7 (the Piechotkas erroneously date Orda's drawing to c.1867).

- 11 The translation is taken from Bar-Itzhak 2001: 136.
- 12 The original Yiddish word is *kostsiol*, corresponding to the Polish *kościół* (a Catholic church). See An-ski 1925: 248.
- 13 An-ski's expedition had definitely seen and photographed the wooden synagogue of Olyka.
- 14 Translation from Weinreich 1988: 330–1.
- 15 Yiddish: *dukas*.
- 16 Yiddish: *kloister*. This could mean any denomination of church.
- 17 Translation by Mikhail Nosonovsky from State Ethnographic Museum 1992: 71.
- 18 Translation *ibid.* 15.
- 19 Petzoldt 1978: 274–5 and 450, no. 446b. In west Ukraine I have heard a builders' joke about two carpenters. One throws the other an axe: 'Pass me the axe mate!—Catch it!—Ahhh!—What does "Ahhh" mean? Have you caught it or not?'
- 20 It is classified as a universal motif W181.2 in Thompson 1957: 497.
- 21 This theme can be identified as motif S165.7 according to Thompson 1957: 312.
- 22 A local schoolteacher told this story to Vasyl Slobodyan in 1984.
- 23 On Polish parallels to the Holy Trinity collegiate church in Olyka, see Brykowska 2003: 46–8.
- 24 The Ukrainian term for the Presentation in the Temple is *Stritennya*.
- 25 Actually, there are two tiers of icons of the Apostles, the older icons above the new ones, both depicting the same figures.
- 26 New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, MS Mic 8896, 37^v.
- 27 For more criticism on Hubka's Tabernacle theory see Moshe Rosman's review of Hubka, *Resplendent Synagogue* (Rosman 2006: 165–8).
- 28 'Panie Kochanku' means 'My Darling Lord'. On Karol Stanisław Radziwiłł see Borucki 1980; Jodłowski 2001; Królikowski 2000; Maciejowski 1985; Michalski 1972; Sidorowski 1987; and Stępnik 2003.
- 29 This subject was used by the Russian Jewish writer Lev O. Levanda (1835–88) in his novel *Gnev i milost' magnata* (Odessa, 1912).
- 30 The motif of a 'cuckoo' is also found in a legend about Hieronim Florian Radziwiłł (1715–60): see Jodłowski 2001: 10.
- 31 The Polish reads 'chorąży i architekt'. See Warsaw University Library's collection of graphics, Zb. Krol. P. 188, nos 1–3. The Polish word for surveyor is *geometra*. See *ibid.*, no. 4.
- 32 The stepbrothers were close from the late 1770s: see Anusik and Stroynowski 1972.

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- MNK. Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie [National Museum, Kraków].
- NARB. Natsional'nyi arkhiv Respubliki Belarus' [National Archive of Belarus Republic].
- RGVIA. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv. [Russian State Military Historical Archives].
- TsDIAUK. Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi istorychnyi arkhiv Ukrainy v misti Kyievi [Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine, Kiev].

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