

PEASANT-MANIA

The Peasant Home from Reality to Idealization

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Theoretical Statement TPOD EPFL 2024–2025

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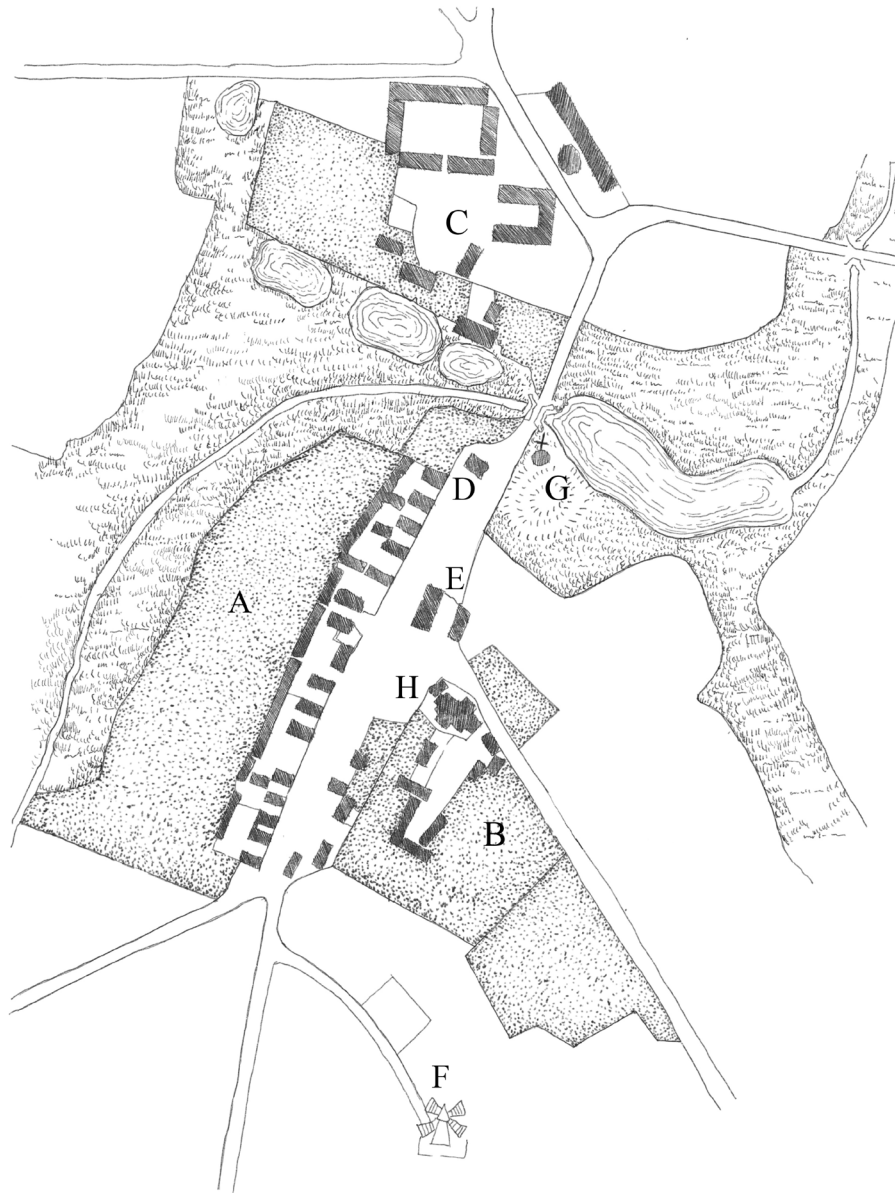
Peasant family in front of their home in Bronowice, 1912. Drawn by the author, adapted from a photograph by Karol Chotek, part of the collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Krakow, Poland.

INTRODUCTION

The architecture of Polish peasant homes occupies a space between the lived and the imagined, the material and the symbolic, all gathered within the self-contained world of the village, where life follows the rhythms of the land, the seasons, and the need to survive. The village was more than just a physical space, in the context of nineteenth century national trends, it became a powerful symbol to foster national identity, a site of cultural significance amidst the crisis of a stateless nation. The Polish landscape of the early nineteenth century was marked by the uncertainty caused by its political fragmentation, as the country was divided between three empires, depriving the nation of its independence. This event gradually suppressed Polish culture, language, and political autonomy. In this historical context, within a divided nation desperately seeking an identity, the native and mystical image of the peasant emerged as a powerful tool for symbolic narratives.

This thesis examines the duality of the Polish village as a lived reality shaped by centuries of systematic neglect and as a romanticized ideal celebrated in art, literature, and patriotic messages. Furthermore, it puts into question the idea of the “vernacular,” not intended as an expression of heritage but as a signifier shaped by socio-economic conditions and external forces that defined them. By uncovering the true dimension of peasant life, this study sheds light on the evolution of selected rural environments and their typologies, from forgotten entities to national icons. Simultaneously, the work analyses the artistic and intellectual fascination with peasant life, which by distorting reality aligned with ideological goals masked systematic poverty through a pastoral imaginary.

Through ethnographic research, historical accounts, and iconography, this thesis will examine the intersection of folk and high culture. It will trace how the depiction of peasant life, customs and architecture particularly during the period of “Peasant-Mania,” obscured the realities of poverty and labor while fostering a powerful message of unity in a time of foreign suppression. By analyzing rural typologies and the narratives that surrounded them, this work will trace the transformation of the Polish village from a pragmatic entity into a central motif in the intellectual discourse promoted by the elites.



A. Peasant Homesteads B. Parish C. Manorial Estates D. Forge E. Tavern
F. Windmill G. Road Cross H. Church

Village plan. Drawn by the author, adapted from Tomasz Czerwiński, *Budownictwo ludowe w Polsce* (Warszawa: Muza, 2006), 42.

THE VILLAGE ROMANCE

Unlike any other societal group, the peasant's life was tied to one single place, beginning and ending with the border of the same village. In contrast, even the poorest urban dwellers often relocated in search of better living conditions, while the nobility, despite their generational ties to manorial estates enjoyed traveling between different properties. The peasant, however remained bound to the same land, — a condition initially enforced by serfdom, which legally tied them to their village and strictly prohibited them from leaving. To the peasant, the village was not merely a location within the broader landscape but a self-contained universe. It was the site of their birth, life, and death, — a space where not only little opportunities but even the desire to travel beyond it were non-existent. As a result, generations of peasants lived in the same homes, cultivated the same plots of land, and engaged in the same communal traditions.¹ According to anthropologist Ludwik Stomma, peasants rarely ventured beyond 20 kilometers from their home, an area that marked the limits of their existence. Moreover, the peasants' lifestyle revolved around four primary spaces: their dwelling, the land, the local church, and the tavern, all located within a short walking distance.² This static lifestyle fostered a deep attachment to the land, which was expressed through the materiality of the village, resulting in later interest of ethnographers and folklorists.³

The old Polish village itself was organized according to territorial and economic systems rooted in feudal times. Once established in the Middle Ages, villages remained largely unchanged for centuries, with little to no prospects for transformation. While the feudal system defined the social structures of peasant settlements, the village itself was a more complex entity, consisting of manorial estates, a parish with a church, and other communal buildings such as forges, mills, and taverns.⁴ Each village was adapted to specific regional needs, whether for farming in the lowlands or the shepherding in the highlands.⁵ However, the concept of the “village” extended beyond its physicality to encompass its socio-economic and cultural significance. Far more than a picturesque escape or a *locus amoenus*, the village was a dynamic space shaped by the realities of rural life. It also served as a motif within both high and folk culture, a duality that underscores the diverse ways in which the village has been represented and understood.⁶

The living conditions of these villages have often been overlooked in the literary and historical discourse, overshadowed by narratives that prioritize the politically or culturally significant concerns of the high society. Historically, literature — shaped by the perspectives of the privileged elites — has portrayed rural life through the lens of condescending romanticism or ideological utility. From Renaissance Idylls inspired by classical antiquity to the Romantic idealization of the “noble peasant,” these depictions strongly obscured the harsh realities of feudal deprivation. In truth, peasant life was defined by economic dependency, social marginalization, and systemic exploitation.⁷

Zygmunt Gloger, a Polish Historian, describes the state of the villages as he observed them in 1864 in his work on wooden architecture.⁸ At that time, the village consisted of about 50 small, shuttered homes, mostly built in the eighteenth century, with little to no prospects for im-

1 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 6.

2 Ibid., 8.

3 Marian Magdziak, *Od Chłopskiej Chalupy do Domu Współczesnego Rolnika* (Łódź: Politechnika Łódzka, 2018), 24.

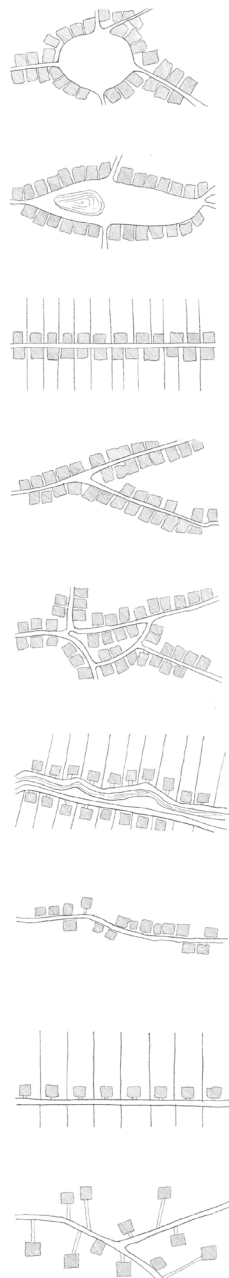
4 Tomasz Czerwiński, *Budownictwo Ludowe w Polsce* (Warszawa: Muza, 2006), 42.

5 Ibid., 48.

6 Andrzej Juszczuk, “Między Ideałem a Rzeczywistością: Obraz wsi w Polskiej Literaturze i Kulturze Popularnej,” in *Obce/Swoje: Miasto i Wieś w literaturze i Kulturze Ukraińskiej XX i XXI wieku*, ed. Katarzyna Glinianowicz and Katarzyna Kotyńska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Scriptum, 2015), 12–13.

7 Ibid., 17–20.

8 Zygmunt Gloger, *Budownictwo Drzewne i Wyroby z Drzewa w Dawnej Polsce, vol. I* (Warszawa: Druk Wł. Łazarskiego, 1907), 146.



Types of the arrangements of peasant farmsteads within different villages. Drawn by the author, adapted from Tomasz Czerwiński, *Budownictwo ludowe w Polsce* (Warszawa: Muza, 2006), 43.

9 Marian Magdziak, *Od Chłopskiej Chalupy do Domu Współczesnego Rolnika* (Łódź: Politechnika Łódzka, 2018), 19.

10 Ibid., 20.

11 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 11.

12 Ibid., 13–14.

13 Franciszek Ksawery Liske, *Cudzoziemcy w Polsce: L. Naker, U. Werdum, J. Bernoulli, J.E. Biester, J. J. Kausch* (Lviv: Gubrynowicz i Schmidt, 1876), 98–99.

14 Marian Magdziak, *Od Chłopskiej Chalupy do Domu Współczesnego Rolnika* (Łódź: Politechnika Łódzka, 2018), 21.

15 Sebastian Sierakowski, *Architektura Obejmująca Wszelki Gatunek Murowania i Budowania. Tom I* (Kraków: W Drukarni Akademickiej, 1812), 255–257.

16 Marian Magdziak, *Od Chłopskiej Chalupy do Domu Współczesnego Rolnika* (Łódź: Politechnika Łódzka, 2018), 22.

17 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 19–20.

provement. Under serfdom, peasants had neither the means nor the will to improve their comfort of living. Serfs were bound to lords who dictated their duties based on the productivity of their farmsteads. To minimize their labor obligations, peasants actively avoided further development.⁹ Moreover, repairing their homes required wood from local forests, owned and taxed by the serf lords. Unable to pay these taxes, peasants often lived in crumbling homes with collapsing roofs and rotting walls. Only when a house became entirely uninhabitable lords would permit repairs – tax-free, to prevent the loss of labor and profit.¹⁰ An anonymous peasant complaint addressed to The Polish Parliament from 1790 illustrates this reality, as peasants described their dwellings not as “houses” but as “sooty huts.”¹¹ Moreover, before the emancipation, peasants faced constant uncertainty; they could be evicted from their homes by landowners if they became ill or too old to work.¹²

The dire living conditions of the peasantry were further documented by both foreign visitors and Polish intellectuals. For example, a German traveler in the seventeenth century, U. Werdum noted that peasants and their animals often shared cramped spaces around the hearth, a scene he compared to the biblical Noah’s Ark.¹³ A more critical assessment on the treatments of the peasantry came from Jesuit intellectuals like Piotr Świtkowski and Sebastian Sierakowski. Świtkowski, addressing the ruling King of Poland (Stanisław August Poniatowski) in the eighteenth century, condemned the peasants’ living conditions. While the King prioritized funding lavish estates, he utterly neglected his rural subjects, leaving them to live in decaying huts. Świtkowski criticized these conditions as degrading, arguing that even animals deserved better shelter. He further urged the landowners to provide humane housing for the peasantry in order to encourage social loyalty and productivity.¹⁴ Sierakowski, explored similar themes in his 1812 work on architecture, in the chapter dedicated to the serf homes, he underscored the critical role of peasants, as the largest segment of society and the backbone of the monarchy, responsible for feeding the nation. His writing revealed a broader societal indifference of those in power, calling for a systematic change.¹⁵

Respected intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries directed their critiques at landowners, urging them to acknowledge the disgraceful living conditions of the peasantry. The writers not only held the privileged class accountable but also offered practical advice, often in the form of building treaties, on how to improve village conditions.¹⁶ However their observation gave rise to two distinct approaches. The first approach, represented by intellectual like Maurycy Mochnacki, combined reformist determination with an inherent sense of superiority. This group believed that proper education and modernization would elevate living standards. They even proposed radical measures, like an architectural competition in 1807, to design “modern” peasant homes. Unfortunately, the proposed structures built from compacted soil were damp, pest-ridden, and unstable sometimes collapsing and injuring or even killing their inhabitants. The second approach prioritized documenting rather than reform, laying the foundation for modern ethnography.¹⁷ Folklore studies focused on collecting and studying rural customs emerged in the late nineteenth century. These scholars often romanticized village dwellings, and produced selective documentation focused on overly sentimental portrayals

of peasants' existence, which emphasized rare moments of celebrations over the realities of labor and poverty.¹⁸

The turn of the nineteenth century was the time of major changes in Poland's political and economic landscape, which brought an evolution in the living conditions through land reforms, new social structures, and gradual modernization.¹⁹ These territorial divisions, a consequence of the Partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793, and 1795 marked a great tragedy for the Polish nation, as the country was systematically divided between three empires: Russia, Prussia, and Austria.²⁰ While some viewed the partitions as necessary for state interest, others described them as acts of betrayal, reflecting national bias in the European political landscape. For 123 years Poland was removed from the map of Europe.²¹ Foreign rulers forbade the use of the Polish language, suppressed its culture, and eliminated political autonomy to erase the memories of statehood.²²

These divisions brought various changes in the rural landscape. The major shift was the agrarian reforms of the nineteenth century, which, as noted Krzysztof Ślusarek, marked the first step for the future emancipation of the peasantry.²³ These reforms aimed to expand peasants' personal freedom by limiting corvée labor to three days, regulating the land use, and granting access to communal resources. Ultimately, these reforms sought to abolish the obligations of serfdom and transition rural communities from a feudal to a more modern economic structure, allowing peasants to buy, sell, or mortgage land.²⁴ However, bureaucratic resistance delayed reforms as the ruling government feared that freeing the peasants would lead to their "laziness" and harm the wealth of their estates. Nevertheless, the Polish revolutionaries viewed the land reforms as a way to win the support for future independence movements against foreign rule. Polish activists like E. Dembrowski and J. Goslar convinced the peasants to accelerate the abolition of feudal duties, which resulted in violent uprisings in 1846 in Krakow and Lviv.²⁵ These conflicts, fueled by deep social divisions and tensions within the rural communities led to the complete emancipation of the Peasantry in 1848 in the Austrian partition and in 1864, nationwide.²⁶ Thus, the agrarian reforms not only laid the groundwork for emancipation but also became a strategic tool for political gain, uniting social and national aspirations to secure peasant loyalty, often prioritizing political objectives over actual socio-economic needs.²⁷

The abolition of serfdom had a profound impact on the further development of rural environments. New, bigger village types emerged, adapting to updated farming methods and property regulations. Moreover, regional differences in settlements during this period became more pronounced, distinctly expressing local customs of building.²⁸ As the peasants gained personal freedom and land ownership, their life expectancy also increased; they started to invest in their dwellings, trusting that they would no longer be easily evicted. Ethnographer Oskar Kolber observed that peasants started to construct larger homes, resulting in more complex building arrangements, often expanding from single-room to two-room homes.²⁹ Similarly, Zygmunt Gloger re-visited a village in 1904 — 40 years after his initial visit — and reported that only two of the old houses remained, with the rest being replaced by newer, more modern structures, the author was impressed by how fast the freed community

18 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 21–22.

19 Tomasz Czerwiński, *Budownictwo Ludowe w Polsce* (Warszawa: Muza, 2006), 43.

20 G. Shaw-Lefevre, Baron Eversley, *The Partitions of Poland* (London: T. F. Unwin, Ltd, 1915), 5–6.

21 Ibid., 18.

22 Ibid., 335.

23 Krzysztof Ślusarek, *Uwłaszczenie Chłopów w Galicji Zachodniej* (Kraków: Historia Jagellonica, 2002), 17.

24 Ibid., 18–21.

25 Ibid., 25–27.

26 Ibid., 36.

27 Piotr Hapanowicz and Mariusz Jabłoński, eds., *Ludzie – Wydarzenia – Tradycja, 1815–1846* (Kraków: Strażnicy Pamięci, 2015), 29–33.

28 Tomasz Czerwiński, *Budownictwo Ludowe w Polsce* (Warszawa: Muza, 2006), 5.

29 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 9.

30 Zygmunt Gloger, *Budownictwo Drzewne i Wyroby z Drzewa w Dawnej Polsce, vol. I* (Warszawa: Druk Wł. Łazarskiego, 1907), 147.

31 Krzysztof Ślusarek, *Uwłaszczenie Chłopów w Galicji Zachodniej* (Kraków: Historia Jagellonica, 2002), 75–78.

32 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 7–8.

33 Krzysztof Ślusarek, *Uwłaszczenie Chłopów w Galicji Zachodniej* (Kraków: Historia Jagellonica, 2002), 112–116.

could progress when given the opportunity.³⁰

However, this didn't mean the end of hardship, as the peasants newly emancipated faced new challenges. They struggled to manage their resources independently, to cope with direct taxation, and inadequate land fragmentation, which often left plots too small to ensure self-sufficiency. Moreover, the advancement in housing progressed unevenly and slowly, varying across partitioned regions. Centuries of oppression left peasants unable to accept changes, with many of them refusing to embrace innovation, as widespread illiteracy made it difficult for them to navigate the legal systems, limiting their productivity and leaving them vulnerable to the new market economy.³¹ By the late nineteenth century, regions like Galicia [a historical land located in southeastern Poland and western Ukraine] remained one of the most malnourished communities. As a result, between 1860 and 1914, poverty and widespread hunger, drove over two million young peasants to emigrate to the United States, France, or Germany seeking better living conditions, and only a fraction of them returned.³² While the agrarian reforms and the subsequent led to profound social and economic changes, they also exposed the enduring struggles of rural communities, from inadequate resources to uneven progress, ultimately shaping the living conditions and architectural evolution of peasant homes, which became central to their way of life.³³



a. home b. barn c. pigsty d. stable e. granary

Different types of peasant homesteads. Drawn by the author, adapted from Tomasz Czerwiński, *Budownictwo ludowe w Polsce* (Warszawa: Muza, 2006), 50–59.

34 Zofia Cybulko, “Dom Mieszkalny w Zagrodzie Wydłużonej Typu Bielsko-Hajnowskiego,” *Biuletyn Konserwatorski Województwa Podlaskiego* 7 (2001): 189.

35 Tomasz Czerwiński, *Budownictwo Ludowe w Polsce* (Warszawa: Muza, 2006), 79.

36 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 23.

37 Ibid., 25.

38 Tomasz Czerwiński, *Budownictwo Ludowe w Polsce* (Warszawa: Muza, 2006), 48.

39 Zofia Cybulko, “Dom Mieszkalny w Zagrodzie Wydłużonej Typu Bielsko-Hajnowskiego,” *Biuletyn Konserwatorski Województwa Podlaskiego* 7 (2001): 191.

40 Ibid., 189.

41 Tomasz Czerwiński, *Budownictwo Ludowe w Polsce* (Warszawa: Muza, 2006), 50.

42 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 19.

43 Tomasz Czerwiński, *Budownictwo Ludowe w Polsce* (Warszawa: Muza, 2006), 51.

44 Ibid., 58.

45 Paweł Pyrzanowski, *Budownictwo Drewniane* (Warszawa: Politechnika Warszawska, 1994), 65.

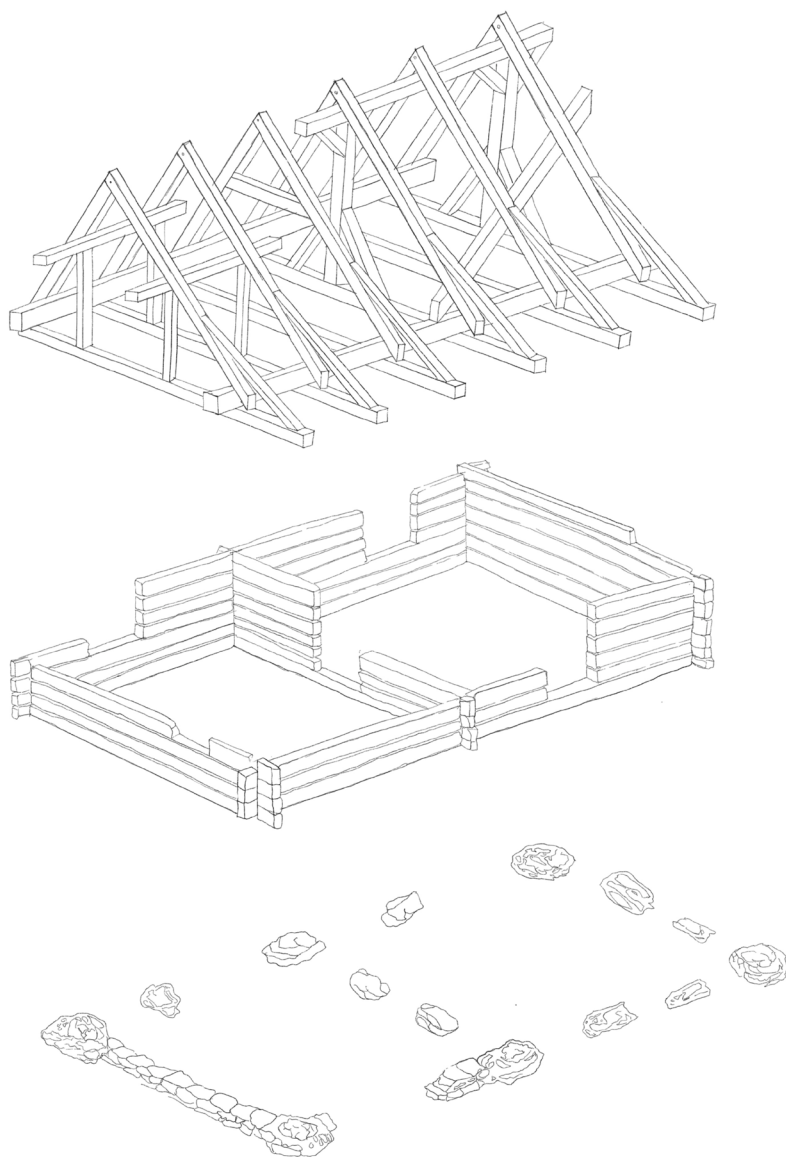
The peasant home is a building type consistently described in literature as essential to the life of a typical rural homestead. The nineteenth century dwelling, which is focal of this study, was a product of necessity, adaptability, and generational knowledge of local carpenters. Through continuous repetition of their craft, these carpenters eventually created the distinctive home types, found in every village.³⁴ These homes became a model for households, evolving into a standard of living passed down through generations of peasant families.³⁵ Ethnographers such as Marian Pokropek identified up to 40 regional variations of peasant dwellings, yet those differences were not intentional expressions of regional identity but rather a result of accessibility and immediate needs.³⁶ Despite the variety in design, peasant homes were uniform in their simplicity and practicality. They served primarily as shelters rather than as displays of local pride or style, embodying the pragmatic approach of rural communities.³⁷

The home was an integral part of the broader entity known as the peasant homestead (*Zagroda*), a spatially defined building complex essential to the rural economy and agricultural life.³⁸ The peasant dwelling, is often symbolically described as the “heart” or the “center” of the farm. Yet, it was rarely situated in the farmstead’s actual physical center; instead, the home was typically positioned facing the road.³⁹ As an inseparable part of the peasant’s environment, a homestead without a home would be a strange creation, described by Zofia Cybulko as “... a dead void without a reason to exist” (trans. by the author).⁴⁰

A typical farmstead established during the time of serfdom consisted of three main buildings: a residential home (*chata*), a barn (*stodoła*), and a pigsty (*chlew*). Wealthier farms also included granaries (*spichlerz*), stables (*stajnia*), and cellars (*piwnica*).⁴¹ Later artists often romanticized homesteads as pastoral spaces surrounded by orchards and gardens, but that was rarely the case. In most cases the typical yard was filled with mud, stripped of vegetation by roaming pigs and hens, with manure near the home, as described by a visiting architect, Maciej Marczewski. Despite these conditions, the farmstead was nevertheless a main hub of peasant life.⁴²

The typology of a rural farmstead was categorized based on several factors, including the size of the plot, the number and types of buildings, and their spatial arrangement. Typically, farmsteads were constructed on rectangular plots, with dimensions ranging from 15–40 meters wide and 20–100 meters long.⁴³ In compact villages, mostly dating back to feudal times, narrow plots led to, buildings being tightly grouped around a central courtyard, enclosed by wicker fences or gates. A distinctive variation of this layout was the “*okólnik*,” where the buildings formed an enclosed “fortress” around the courtyard, accessible only through a single gate. The peasant homestead represented a vital component of a Polish village, reflecting the living environment of agricultural production in feudal and post-feudal Poland.⁴⁴

The peasant’s home was fully constructed out of wood. Due to the scarcity of stone, “wooden” defined the entirety of folk architecture, from a simple barn to a grand church.⁴⁵ With its availability and ease of processing, the woodwork was mastered by the serfs even if they were not



Axonometry of structural elements of a peasant home. Drawn by the author, adapted from Paweł Pyrzanowski, *Budownictwo drewniane* (Warszawa: Politechnika Warszawska, 1994), 12–14.

46 Zofia Cybulko, “Dom Mieszkalny w Zagrodzie Wydłużonej Typu Bielsko-Hajnowskiego,” *Biuletyn Konserwatorski Województwa Podlaskiego* 7 (2001): 193.

47 Zygmunt Gloger, *Budownictwo Drzewne i Wyroby z Drzewa w Dawnej Polsce*, vol.1 (Warszawa: Druk Wł. Łazarskiego, 1907), 156.

48 Jan Sas-Zubrzycki, *Polskie Budownictwo Drewniane* (Kraków, 1916), 6–8.

49 Ibid., 12.

50 Zofia Cybulko, “Dom Mieszkalny w Zagrodzie Wydłużonej Typu Bielsko-Hajnowskiego,” *Biuletyn Konserwatorski Województwa Podlaskiego* 7 (2001): 192.

51 Jan Karłowicz, *Chata Polska* (Warsaw: Druk J. Rergera, 1884), 25–26.

52 Kazimierz Moszyński, *Kultura Ludowa Słowian. cz. 1, Kultura Materialna* (Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1929), 551–558.

53 Ibid., 541.

54 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 62.

55 Tomasz Czerwiński, *Budownictwo Ludowe w Polsce* (Warszawa: Muza, 2006), 63.

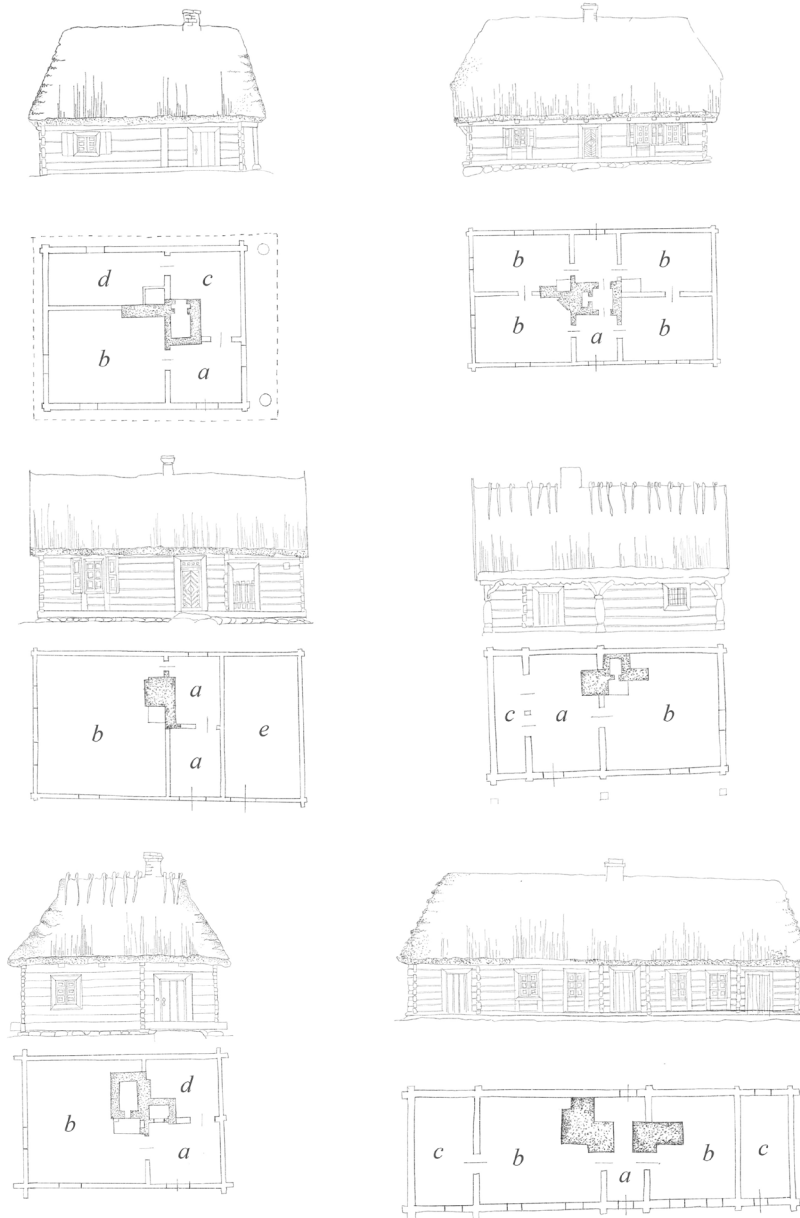
skilled carpenters. This resulted in buildings typically measuring 5–10 meters wide, 8–14 meters long, and under 3 meters high, tailored to the natural limitations of timber.⁴⁶ It’s also important to note that peasants strongly disliked the stone or brick houses introduced to the villages by Austrian rulers. Zygmunt Gloger notes that these buildings made peasants uncomfortable and even became the subject of mockery by neighbor farmers, who referred to them as “stone dwellers” (*kamienicznicy*). The peasants “endured” nearly ten years in safe brick houses built in a Galician village until their emancipation in 1864. When Austria annexed the region, peasants almost immediately demolished their brick homes and replaced them with wooden ones. Despite the fire-retardant properties of stone structures — opposed to wooden ones — even though fires frequently destroyed entire villages, further proving the peasant’s resistance to foreign changes.⁴⁷

Studies on wooden architecture often dismissed the role of skilled peasants who contributed to its lasting legacy and instead prioritized the perspectives of historians and academics, which delivered a fragmented understanding of these structures. Jan Sas-Zubrzyński argued that wooden architecture cannot be understood solely through academic analysis, as it requires a deeper understanding of local conditions.⁴⁸ He further noted that foreign scholars often misinterpret Polish wooden architecture, attributing its origins to Scandinavian or Hungarian influences, thus undermining its importance as a central source of national building tradition and its value to native communities.⁴⁹

In the studies of so-called “vernacular architecture,” the development of interior layouts has been of particular interest to scholars. Like the rest of the peasant environment, the domestic spatial arrangement was determined by family needs, practicality, function, and available resources, resulting in various typologies of the home plan.⁵⁰ However, certain rooms were present in each home: a vestibule (*sień*), a chamber (*izba*), and a compartment (*komora*). At the end of the nineteenth century, Jan Karłowicz, an ethnographer and folklorist, was the first scholar to categorize two main types of peasant homes according to their layout: one with a frontal entrance and a central vestibule dividing the space into two parts (“wide-fronted”), and a second type with a gable-wall entrance and interconnected rooms (“narrow-fronted”). This classification continues to be used in literature today; however, with the development of ethnographic studies, scholars implemented updated layout typologies.⁵¹

The more specific division of peasant homes was introduced in the twentieth century by Kazimierz Moszyński, who categorized them in terms of the number of bays.⁵² Early homes, particularly from the time of serfdom were always “single-bay” layouts, characterized by a rectangular plan divided by interior walls parallel to the gable wall. Moszyński described this arrangement as the most primitive form of a home.⁵³ The expansion of these homes was limited to horizontal additions along the longer wall. Moreover, the placement of the vestibule was defined by the location of the main entrance door, which could be central (“wide-fronted”) or asymmetrical (“narrow-fronted”).⁵⁴ Wealthier peasants often built single-bay homes with two chambers: the “black chamber,” which contained fire devices, and the “white chamber,” a more representative, cleaner part of the home.⁵⁵

PEASANT-MANIA



a. home b. barn c. pigsty d. stable e. granary

Different types of peasant homesteads. Drawn by the author, adapted from Tomasz Czerwiński, *Budownictwo ludowe w Polsce* (Warszawa: Muza, 2006), 50-59.

56 Zygmunt Gloger, *Budownictwo Drzewne i Wyroby z Drzewa w Dawnej Polsce*, vol. I (Warszawa: Druk Wł. Łazarskiego, 1907), 7.

57 Tomasz Czerwiński, *Budownictwo Ludowe w Polsce* (Warszawa: Muza, 2006), 65–66.

58 Ibid., 69–70.

59 Katarzyna Kurowska, “Mentalność Wsi w Malarstwie Polskim Drugiej Połowy XIX wieku,” *Zeszyty Naukowe Towarzystwa Doktorantów UJ. Nauki Humanistyczne* 24, no. 1 (2019): 101.

60 Ibid., 102.

61 Tomasz Czerwiński, *Budownictwo Ludowe w Polsce* (Warszawa: Muza, 2006), 80.

62 Ibid., 81–83.

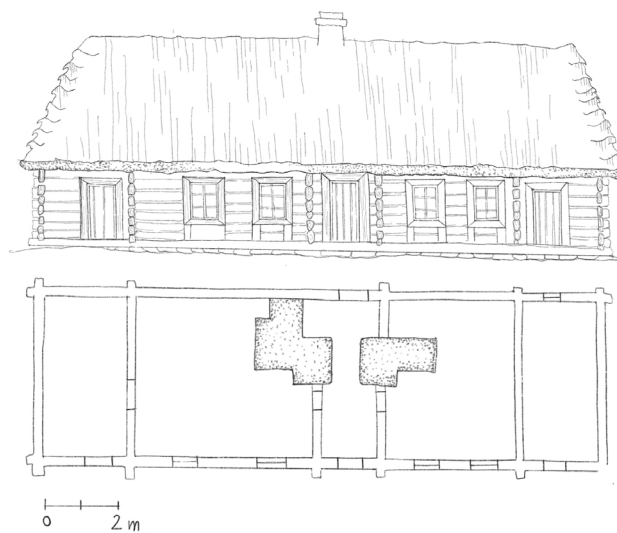
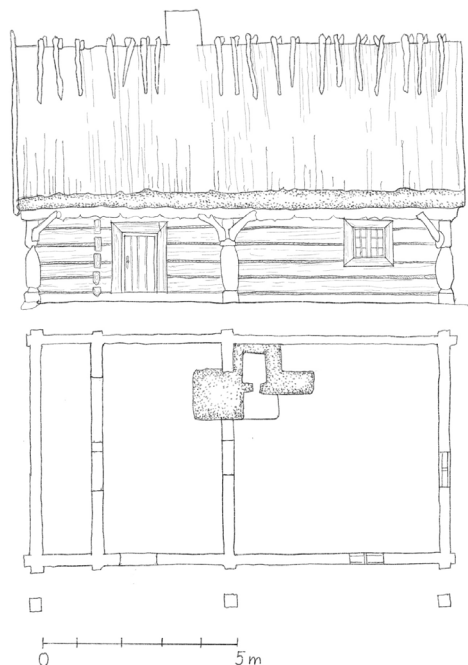
63 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 108–109.

The new typology — a “one-and-a-half-bay” layout — emerged when one of the rooms was divided by a perpendicular wall, creating two smaller spaces. The room that initiated this division was a bedchamber (*alkierz*), a small space intended for the elderly of the household, located near the furnace. Over time, this layout also came to accommodate kitchens or pantries, evolving with the needs.⁵⁶ The final “two-bay” layout became common among the wealthier peasants after emancipation. This spatial arrangement featured mostly a symmetrically arranged interior, divided by a central vestibule, and included: two chambers, two compartments or bedchambers, and two entrance doors.⁵⁷ Another distinct home type was found among some ethnographic groups like “Łemkowie,” who developed their living space alongside their livestock, with a stable under the same roof. This type was common in areas with limited land and small crop cultivation. It emerged during the time of serfdom, as the community needed to protect animals from harsh winters and theft. The evolution of home types highlights their practical, economic and regional adaptations.⁵⁸

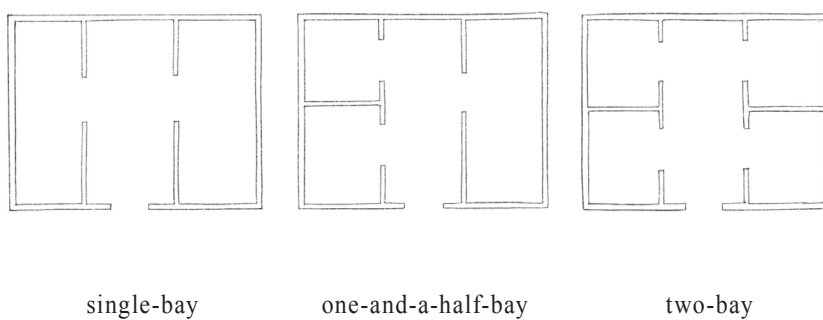
When discussing peasants’ domesticity, it is important to note that the peasant’s life operated based on two crucial cycles: the agrarian cycle, which dictated the rhythm of work, and the liturgical cycle which regulated the time of religious celebration, (i.e., their leisure).⁵⁹ These cycles structured daily life and, consequently, the organization of their domestic space. During labor cycles, everyday activities occupied the main room, centered around a furnace and usually occupied by the head of the family. The smaller spaces were reserved for the elderly or other relatives. The “white chamber,” more common after emancipation, became essential during religious and communal events such as Christmas Eve, weddings, pastoral visits, or funerals, that belonged to the liturgical cycle.⁶⁰

The furnishing of peasant homes was often moveable and prioritized practicality and adaptability to the evolving needs. The furniture arrangement followed two main layouts: diagonal (serfdom) and parallel (post-serfdom), which influenced the placement and use of key elements in the main chamber.⁶¹ The diagonal layout was centered around the “holy corner” (*święty kąt*), a space used as a domestic altar, located diagonally from the hearth and typically placed on the eastern wall. This area was of great importance to Slavic communities, featuring a wooden table, benches, and religious icons of Christ with the Virgin Mary, symbolizing the household’s spiritual protection. This served as a focal for family prayers or important religious gatherings with only honored guests allowed at the table.⁶² Opposite the “holy corner” were the sleeping areas. However, for most peasant families, individual beds were a luxury as one room was often inhabited by multiple members of the family. Basic sleeping arrangements included wide benches that doubled as daytime seating, long stools, or simply the warm surface of the oven. Additionally, straw-filled mattresses were used as sleeping areas for children and were rolled up during the day to save space. As for dining space, while the “holy corner” was used exclusively for religious celebrations, daily meals, when available, were eaten on portable tables accompanied by small stools. Due to limited space and food scarcity in the village, the meals were shared from the same pot or eaten directly on the stove.⁶³

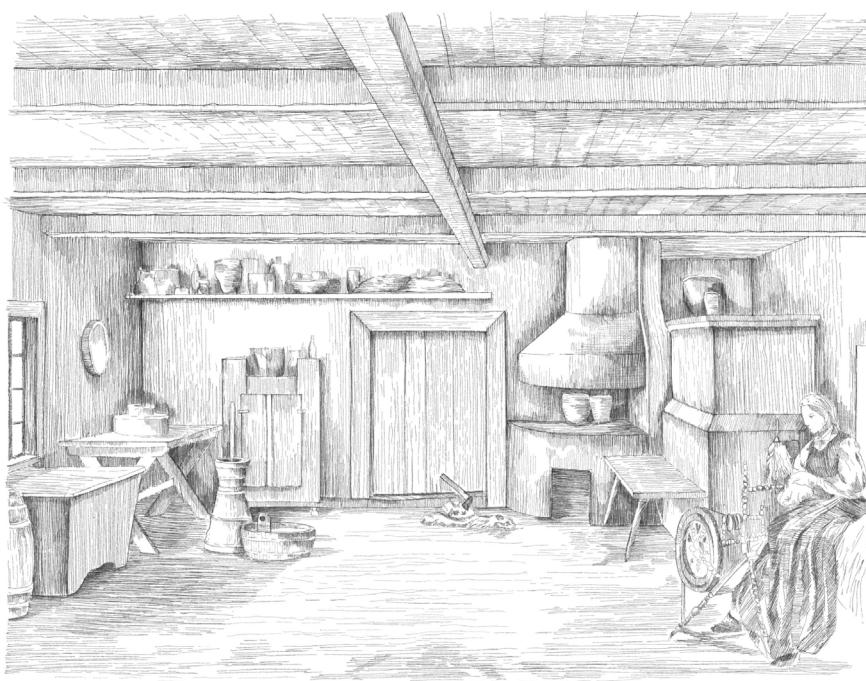
The parallel furnishing layout emerged later, prioritizing symmetry



Single-bay layouts, most common for early peasant homes. Drawn by the author, adapted from Tomasz Czerwiński, *Budownictwo ludowe w Polsce* (Warszawa: Muza, 2006), 61.



Three layout types, categorized by the number of bays. Drawn by the author, adapted from Paweł Pyrzanowski, *Budownictwo drewniane* (Warszawa: Politechnika Warszawska, 1994), 8.



Interior of the main chamber ("black chmaber"), 1867. Drawn by the author, adapted from Kazimierz Moszyński, *Kultura Ludowa Słowian. Cz. I, Kultura Materialna* (Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1929), 508.

64 Tomasz Czerwiński, *Budownictwo Ludowe w Polsce* (Warszawa: Muza, 2006), 86.

65 Zofia Cybulko, “Dom Mieszkalny w Zagrodzie Wydłużonej typu Bielsko-Hajnowskiego,” *Biuletyn Konserwatorski Województwa Podlaskiego* 7 (2001): 203–206.

66 Ibid., 190.

67 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 24.

and functionality. In this arrangement, sleeping areas were placed in the opposite corners or on either side of the doorway, leaving a space for a central table, which became a more formal place for daily family meals.⁶⁴ The new layout reflected an improvement in space management, and by the late nineteenth century, industrially produced furniture — such as cupboards, beds, or wardrobes — became more accessible, gradually replacing handcrafted equipment. The new furnishings were highly desirable by the peasants and even served as wedding gifts, marking a significant shift toward a commodified interior. Furniture evolved from serving mostly a pragmatic function to becoming symbols of status, shaped by broader market influences. As products of mass production and consumer desire, these items reflected modernity and extended their reach even into the peasant home.⁶⁵

The evolution of peasant home typologies — from their layout to their furnishing — demonstrates the will, adaption, and resilience of the peasant communities to changing social and economic conditions. From the materiality to the spatial organization, these homes illustrate a pragmatic response to the needs and resources available to rural households.⁶⁶ While sharing a foundation of practicality and simplicity, regional variations emerged, shaped by geographical conditions, local customs, and the demands of daily life. These differences were not merely functional adaptations but also cultural markers that distinguished one community from another. As described, the peasant home was not a static structure but rather a dynamic expression of rural life. This evolution becomes evident when examining specific communities, whose distinct architectural forms provide an example of how ethnographic and geographical factors influenced the peasant home.⁶⁷



Landscape and a Highlander homestead. Drawn by the author, based on a site visit in Kościelisko, Poland in 2024.

The previous chapter focused on the general representation of peasant homes, their variations, and their gradual evolution while introducing the concept of regional diversity. For a more focused analysis of the peasant home it is important to dedicate a case study of a specific community. Among these groups, the Podhale Highlanders (*Górale Podhalańscy*) are a particularly significant group in the broader discussion on national trends and the later search for identity found within native communities. This ethnographic group, closely connected to the later phenomenon of “Peasant-Mania,” will be the subjects of the study.⁶⁸

The Podhale Highlanders inhabited the Podhale region of Southern Poland, a land defined by the Tatra Mountains with its shepherding traditions. Compared to other ethnographic groups the mountain dwellers were especially celebrated by intelligentsia for their intricate woodwork, traditional construction techniques, and “unique mountain spirit.” However, before delving more into their environments, it is important to note — as described by Władysław Matlakowski, the first researcher of Podhale — that a highlander’s cottage closely mirrored a typical serf home layout, with only minor differences rooted, as in each cases in adaptation to a specific landscape.⁶⁹

The Podhale region, defined by its harsh, long winters and relentless rains, forced the Highlanders to construct their homes and farmsteads to withstand the unforgiving climate. The limited appearance of sunlight played a crucial role in shaping the orientation of their homes, which were strategically built to face the south, maximizing sunlight exposure, contrary to other regions where homes typically faced the road.⁷⁰ Farmsteads were arranged to shield courtyards from the southwestern winds, with barns placed at right angles to the house to achieve an enclosed layout. Poorer farms often relied on hardy trees like ash or birch.⁷¹

Highlander cottages were primarily constructed from durable, resinous spruce, with their trademark being the corner joint construction method: an interlocking technique that bound the structure so tightly that entire homes could be relocated without dismantling the structure.⁷² The roofs of the highlanders’ homes were particularly unique compared to other forms. Designed to withstand heavy snow, they featured gable shapes with a distinctive break at the lower slope. This design created wide eaves for added protection against the elements and was covered with overlapping wooden shingles or planks.⁷³

The Highlanders’ home itself was called “izba” or less commonly “chałupa,” and was composed of one or two chambers, a vestibule, and a compartment. The most significant space of the home was the main room known as the “black chamber,” gaining its name from soot and smoke that darkened the walls over time. This room, well-insulated for harsh winters and equipped with a hearth, served as a hub for all daily activities, including cooking, eating, and sleeping.⁷⁴ The hearth was always placed against the wall, separating the vestibule from the living chamber. This was a practical choice that ensured easy access to firewood while keeping the room clean. The hearth was more than just a heat source; it shaped the entire layout of the home, distinguishing even in the most modest homes as a livable space rather than just a shelter.⁷⁵ Traditional fire systems oc-

68 Roman Reinfuss, “Podhalański Fenomen,” *Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 42, no. 1/2 (1988): 9.

69 Marian Magdziak, *Od Chłopskiej Chałupy do Domu Współczesnego Rolnika* (Łódź: Politechnika Łódzka, 2018), 37.

70 Władysław Matlakowski, *Budownictwo Ludowe na Podhalu* (Kraków: Nakład Akademii Umiejętności, 1892), 15.

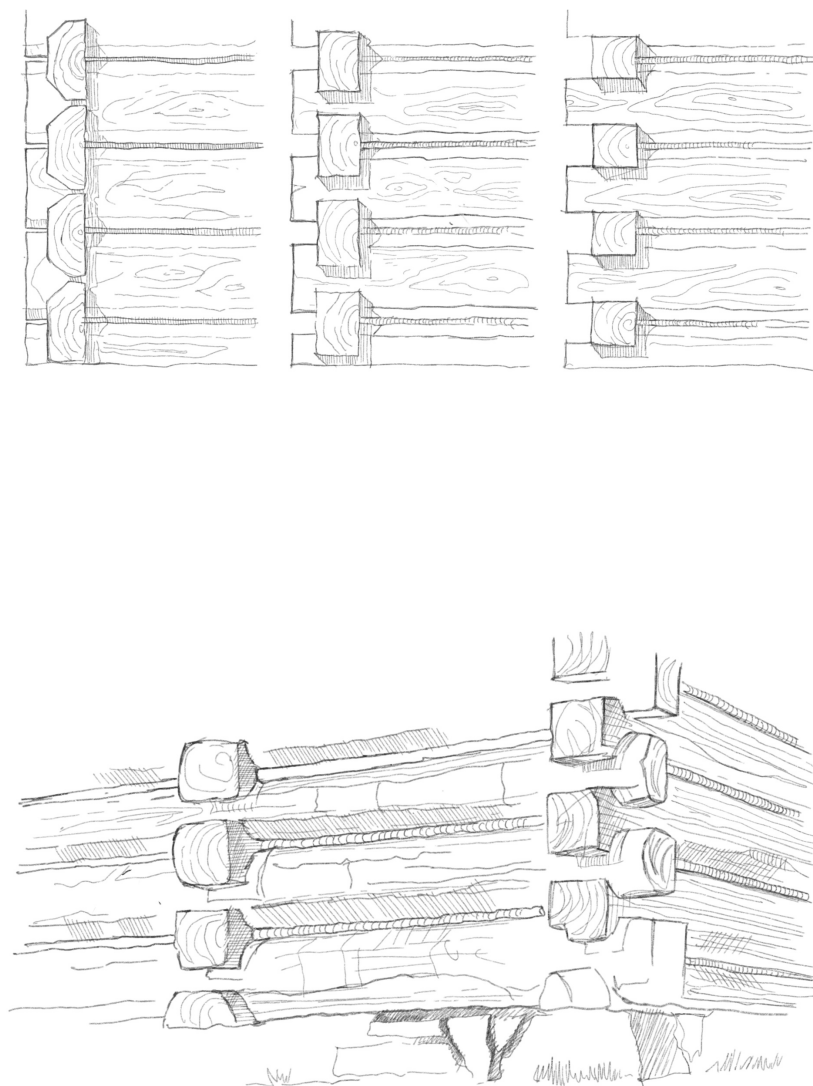
71 Ibid., 20.

72 Ibid., 26–28.

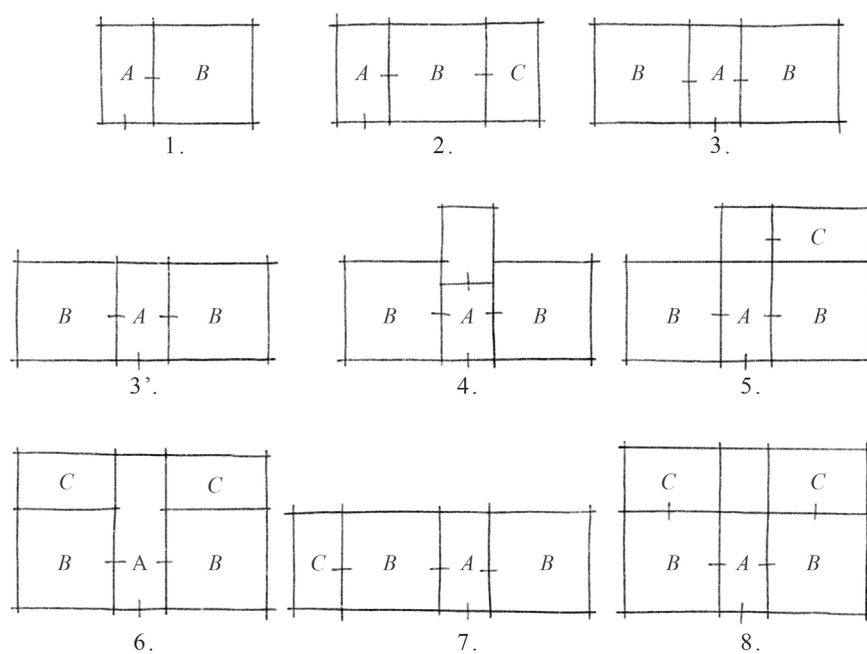
73 Ibid., 33.

74 Ibid., 29–30.

75 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chałupie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 75–77.

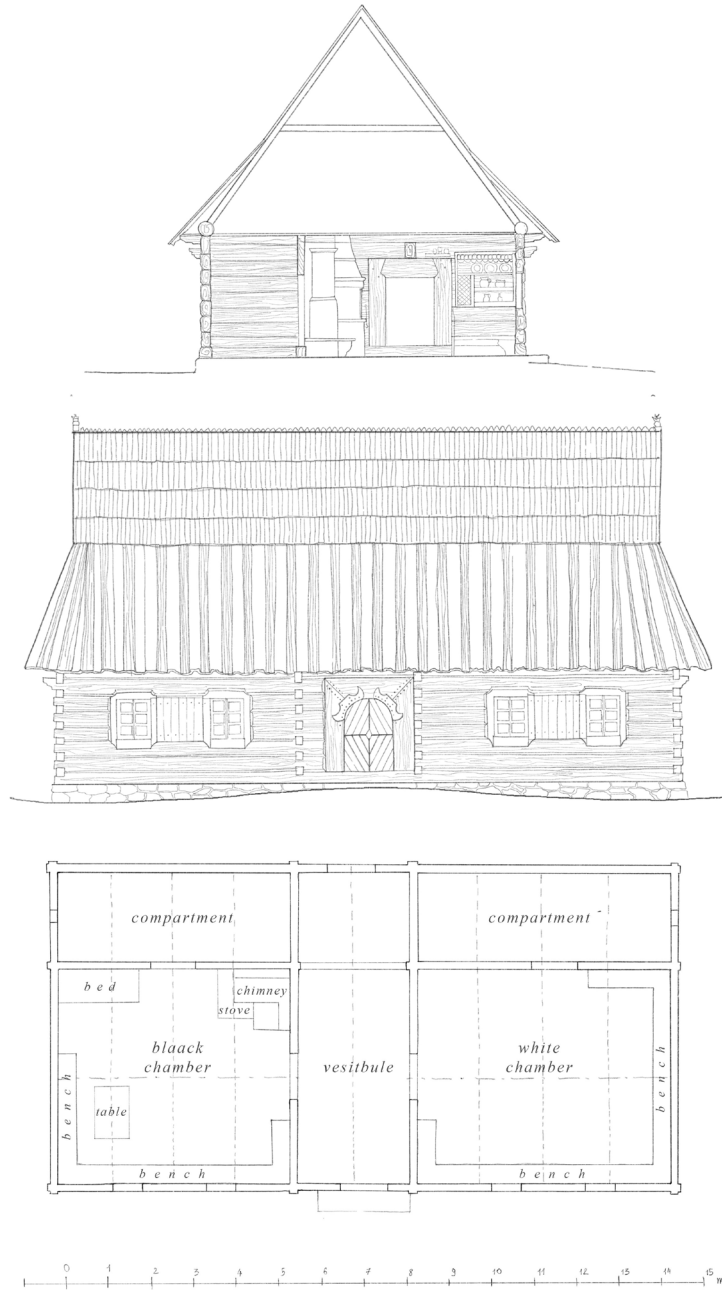


Highlanders' timber construction techniques. Drawn by the author, adapted from Zygmunt Gloger, *Budownictwo drzewne i wyroby z drzewa w dawnej Polsce*, vol.1 (Warszawa: Druk Wł. Łazarskiego, 1907), 106.



A. Vestibule B. Chamber C. Compartment

Eight layout types of Highlanders homes, identified by W. Matlakowski. Drawn by the author, adapted from Władysław Matlakowski, *Budownictwo Ludowe na Podhalu* (Kraków: Nakład Akademii Umiejętności, 1892), 65.



Section, elevation, and plan of a wealthy Highlander home. Drawn by author, dapted from Władysław Matlakowski, *Budownictwo ludowe na Podhalu: Tablice* (Kraków: Nakładem Wydziału Wydawniczego Stowarzyszenia Bratniej Pomocy Studentów Wydziałów Politechnicznych A.W., 1948), 15.

76 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 73–74.

77 Zofia Cybulko, “Dom Mieszkalny w Zagrodzie Wydłużonej Typu Bielsko-Hajnowskiego,” *Biuletyn Konserwatorski Województwa Podlaskiego* 7 (2001): 206–208.

78 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 78–79.

79 Klementyna Kozyra, “Krótka Charakterystyka Skrzyń Wiannyh ze Zbiorów Muzeum Wsi Radomskiej w Radomiu,” *Muzeum Wsi Radomskiej w Radomiu*, tom 10 (2022): 156.

80 Ibid., 157–162.

81 Władysław Matlakowski, *Budownictwo Ludowe na Podhalu* (Kraków: Nakład Akademii Umiejętności, 1892), 80–81.

82 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 57–58.

83 Władysław Matlakowski, *Budownictwo Ludowe na Podhalu* (Kraków: Nakład Akademii Umiejętności, 1892), 31–32.

84 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w chłopskiej chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 55.

85 Zofia Cybulko, “Dom Mieszkalny w Zagrodzie Wydłużonej Typu Bielsko-Hajnowskiego,” *Biuletyn Konserwatorski Województwa Podlaskiego* 7 (2001): 199–201.

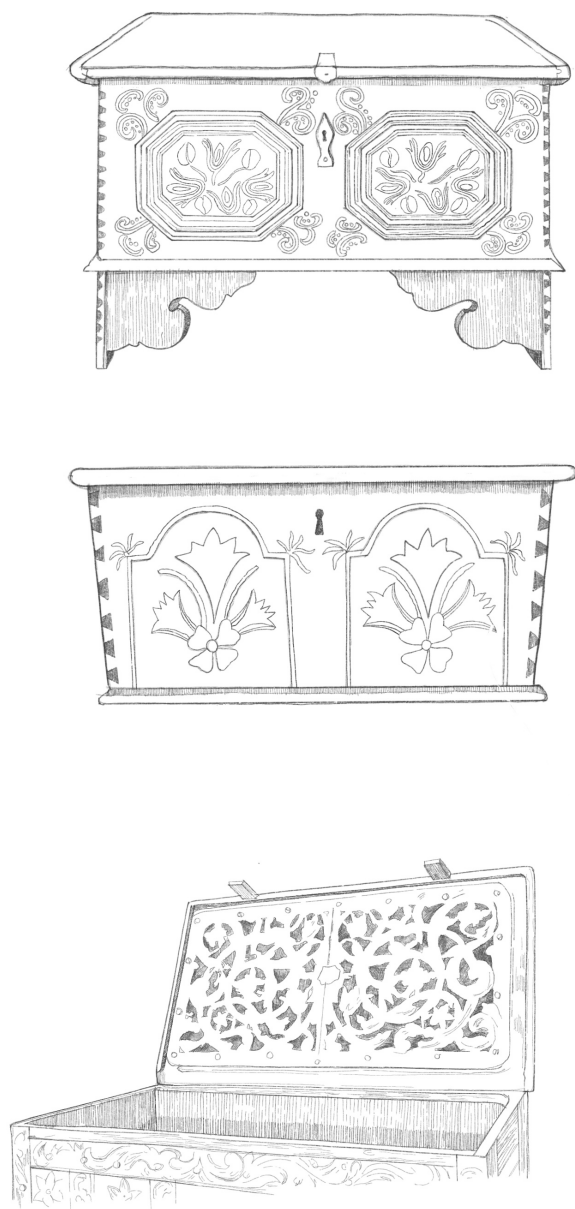
86 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 59–60.

cupied big portion of the room and included various fire devices such as bread ovens, heating stoves, and cooking tools.⁷⁶ However, the most advanced solution was the chimney that replaced the archaic ceiling holes. This improvement significantly reduced fire risks that villagers feared while also preventing the accumulation of smoke on the walls, which later encouraged the mountain dwellers to ornament their interiors.⁷⁷

Despite its many functions, this space was often overcrowded, with up to eight people living in a single heated room. To maximize the usage of space, each corner was densely packed with various items like clothes hung on the walls, exposing them to smoke and dust.⁷⁸ Furniture in these homes was scarce, as cabinets or wardrobes were too expensive to purchase. Instead the Highlanders would store their belongings in handmade baskets or hollowed-out trees, which were prone to damage from pets and moisture. According to Klementyna Kozyra, peasant furniture prioritized simplicity, the use of inexpensive, locally available materials, and minimal decoration.⁷⁹ One exception was the trunk (*skrzynia*) placed near the sleeping areas. These trunks were used to store the most valuable items and gained particular importance in peasant homes, especially during the eighteenth century, when they were mostly used to store the bride’s dowry. Their size and decoration were meant to display the family’s wealth and the bride’s suitability as a match, they were often painted with floral patterns and filled to the brim, sometimes deceptively with stones and bricks at the bottom to appear more desirable. After marriage, the trunks were displayed in the main room and in some cases, left open to be admired by visitors.⁸⁰

The “white chamber” was the second room, found only in wealthier homes. It was primarily used in the warmer months as it was uninsulated and without fire devices. The “white chamber” served as a representative area of the house, used mostly on Sundays, before visiting the church or for special events.⁸¹

Another standard room in the Highlanders home was the vestibule (*sień*), a transitional space separating the exterior from the interior and serving as a buffer against the elements. This space emerged in the early medieval times, and gained its name from “woven branches,” suggesting that its early form was simply made out of wicker. Over time, the vestibule evolved to be a fully integrated part of almost every home — except the smallest and poorest households — transforming it from a simple hut.⁸² Measuring up to 3 meters wide, the vestibule was constructed with a strong log framework, secured by vertical corner posts.⁸³ This room served a utilitarian purpose other than acting as a livable area, connecting the house to the rest of the homestead, and primarily used for labor as well as storage of work tools, grain mills, and water barrels.⁸⁴ The flooring of this room, which extended to the rest of the home, particularly in this region, was made out of compacted clay mixed with small stones or pine needles. However, these clay floors were prone to damage, unevenness, and accumulating dirt or moisture.⁸⁵ In some cases, heavy rain would ruin this flooring, turning it into mud and further exacerbating already challenging living conditions. Despite this, clay floors persisted even in the twentieth century this was due to the widespread belief that their heat absorption properties made them healthier and easier to clean than wooden alternatives.⁸⁶ Additionally, peasants refused to build proper



Examples of decorative trunks. Drawn by the author, adapted from Klementyna Kozyra, "Krótka Charakterystyka Skrzyń Wiannyh ze Zbiorów Muzeum Wsi Radomskiej w Radomiu," *Muzeum Wsi Radomskiej w Radomiu*, tom 10 (2022).

87 Kamil Janicki, *Życie w Chłopskiej Chacie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2024), 26.

88 Ibid., 15.

89 Władysław Matlakowski, *Budownictwo Ludowe na Podhalu* (Kraków: Nakład Akademii Umiejętności, 1892), 46.

90 Ibid., 48–50.

91 Ibid., 80–83.

92 Marian Magdziak, *Od Chłopskiej Chalupy do Domu Współczesnego Rolnika* (Łódź: Politechnika Łódzka, 2018), 37.

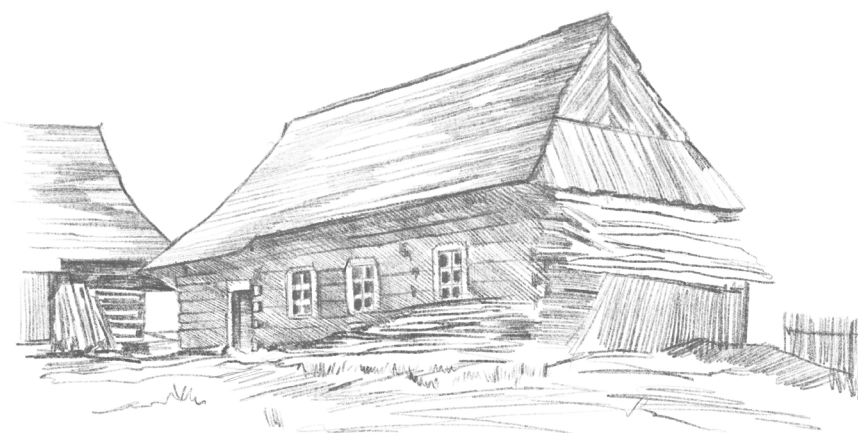
93 Beata Pranke, *Nurt Chłopotomanii* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2003), 78–79.

94 Ewa Baniowska-Kopacz, “Folk Architecture of Podhale,” *Ethnologia Polona* 35 (2014): 95.

foundations under their homes as they saw no need for such structural complexity. Instead the houses were, in most cases built directly on the ground or supported by stones at the corners in the case of Highlanders.⁸⁷

Beyond these functional features, the Highlanders’ homes also stood out for their unique ornamentation, which strongly contrasted with the utilitarian simplicity of other peasant dwellings. Ornamentation in peasant homes has long been romanticized in literary discourse, contributing to the narrative of an idealized image of the peasantry. However, its presence in serf homes was minimal or non-existent. As Józef I. Kraszewski noted in 1858, peasant cottages were primarily pragmatic structures born out of necessity and poverty, rather than artistic endeavors. Even basic elements, such as curtains, were regarded as unnecessary luxuries or as “caprices.”⁸⁸ This was not the case for the Highlanders, who distinguished themselves from other peasant groups and drew the interest of artists and scholars in search of native cultures. By the nineteenth century, advancement in carpentry tools, particularly thin saws, enabled Highlanders to develop intricate openwork patterns in wooden planks.⁸⁹ Interior beams were decorated with carvings of geometric patterns and plant motifs. At the same time, doors and windows were framed with inscriptions, religious monograms, blessings, or signatures. The external entrances of Highlander’s homes were particularly unique; compared to the simple ones found in other serfs’ homes, they often included arched tops and decorative patterns using wooden pegs.⁹⁰

The 1893 piece on Highlanders home by Matlakowski, documented the transformation of their home under the influence of changing societal values and external styles. He observed that the increasing adaptation of modern techniques in nineteenth century Poland posed as a threat to the distinct character of traditional Highlanders’ home.⁹¹ Matlakowski’s research marked the very first systematic documentation of Highlanders’ “vernacularity,” emphasizing the unique character of their architecture, recognizing their importance as a “cultural treasure” at risk of dilution or even disappearance. He further called for efforts to preserve and promote this legacy, highlighting the need to protect Polish “native styles” for future generations. His work also sparked a broader interest in the architectural heritage of Polish peasantry, leading to the phenomenon of “Peasant-Mania” and the creation of the “new national style” inspired by the mountain dwellers.⁹² The term “Peasant-Mania” describes a cultural movement among the urban elites, who idealized and romanticized peasant environments as the embodiment of Polish identity during the period of political and national suppression.⁹³ Highlander culture, in particular, became a focal point of this fascination due to its perceived purity, connection to land, and resistance to foreign influences ultimately inspiring the creation of the “new national style.”⁹⁴



Typical Highlander homestead in Podhale region. Drawn by the author, based on a site visit in Bukowina Tatrzańska, Poland in 2024.

95 Marian Magdziak, *Od Chłopskiej Chalupy do Domu Współczesnego Rolnika* (Łódź: Politechnika Łódzka, 2018), 28.

96 Ewa Baniowska-Kopacz, "Folk Architecture of Podhale," *Ethnologia Polona* 35 (2014): 79–80.

97 Marian Magdziak, *Od Chłopskiej Chalupy do Domu Współczesnego Rolnika* (Łódź: Politechnika Łódzka, 2018), 38.

98 Ibid., 37.

99 Władysław Matlakowski, *Budownictwo Ludowe na Podhalu* (Kraków: Nakład Akademii Umiejętności, 1892), 13–14.

100 Emilia Pomiankiewicz, "Ślady Ukryte w Harmonii Stylu Zakopiańskiego, Willa Oksza a Twórczość Kolonii Artystycznej Zakopanego," *Przestrzeń, Ekonomia, Społeczność* 12, no. 2 (2017): 80.

101 Stanisław Witkiewicz, *Na Przełęczy* (Warszawa: Nakład Gebethnera i Wolffa, 1891), 39.

102 Roman Reinfuss, "Podhalański Fenomen," *Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 42, no. 1/2 (1988): 11–13.

At the end of the nineteenth century, a peculiar phenomenon referred to as the "Zakopane Fixation" emerged, a term first introduced by Aleksander Świętochowski. The name described the growing fascination with the Tatra Mountains and its native communities – The Podhale Highlanders.⁹⁵ Zakopane, the region's informal capital, attracted numerous visitors, captivated by the mountain landscape, native dialects, and "mysterious" traditions unknown to the urban elites. The mentioned Władysław Matlakowski, with his earlier writings on the architecture of the mountain dwellers, brought widespread interest to Zakopane, as intellectuals became eager to further explore the topic.⁹⁶ Among these scholars was Stanisław Witkiewicz, an artist and amateur architect, who would become a central figure in popularizing and formalizing peasant homes. His later efforts and work on the "new national style" inspired by the Podhale Highlanders can be considered one of the first examples of the "Peasant-Mania" phenomenon in architectural discourse.⁹⁷

Witkiewicz, captivated by the aesthetic of a Highlander cottage, believed it to be an exemplary embodiment of all Polish features combined into a single structure.⁹⁸ However, as noted earlier, neither the floor plan nor the materials of Highlander architecture differed significantly from other serf dwellings. Furthermore, although the Highlanders were sheepherders and not typical farmers, they were still peasants who endured the same hardship.⁹⁹ Despite this, Witkiewicz continued to pursue his interest, developing his architecture theory on what he encountered in the mountains. This culminated in the creation of the "Zakopane Style," which he believed represented the very essence of "authentic Polishness" and should therefore be promoted as Poland's new "National Style."¹⁰⁰ The culture of Podhale was viewed as a model of dignity, freedom, and exceptional pride, qualities that, for Witkiewicz exemplified national resistance. In his work *Na Przełęczy* he described the peasants as free and untamed individuals, marked by strong spirit, refusing to submit to the feudal mentality, as he wrote "Lords, lords, you may remain lords but you shall not rule over us." (trans. by the author).¹⁰¹

Witkiewicz's development of the "Zakopane Style" was positioned in a unique historical context at the time when art, architecture, and literature shared common message of unity and resilience against the backdrop of Poland's partitions.¹⁰² While the country remained divided under foreign rule, the "Zakopane Style" was conceived as an ideological response to foreign domination. Witkiewicz's vision was to establish a uniquely Polish architectural language, distinct from globalized trends, widely enjoyed by high society in the nineteenth century. He believed that the geographical isolation of the Tatra Mountains had fully preserved folk designs from any external influences, making them a pure expression of national heritage. By adapting the construction methods and ornamental details of Highlander's home into formalized residential buildings, he sought to create a style that would distinguish Poland's identity and challenge the prevailing dominance of Western architectural styles. Furthermore, as described by Andrzej Szczerski, Witkiewicz called for an integration of "superior" fine and "inferior" applied arts, challenging the



Exterior and façade of *Willa Oksza* in Zakopane. Drawn by the author, adapted from an archival photograph of the villa dated 1896, collection of the Tatra Museum in Zakopane, Poland.

103 Andrzej Szczerski, "Stanisław Witkiewicz and the Zakopane Style," in *Poland - China: Art and Cultural Heritage*, ed. Joanna Wasilewska (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2011), 80.

104 Ibid., 79.

105 Krzysztof Kwiatkowski, "Styl Zakopiański Stanisława Witkiewicza i Jego Differentia Specifica / Stanisław Witkiewicz's Zakopane Style and Its Differentia Specifica," *PUA* 1, no. 1 (2020): 58.

106 Roman Reinfuss, "Podhalański Fenomen," *Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 42, no. 1/2 (1988): 15.

107 Andrzej Szczerski, "Stanisław Witkiewicz and the Zakopane Style," in *Poland - China: Art and Cultural Heritage*, ed. Joanna Wasilewska (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2011), 81.

108 Zbigniew Moździerz, *Przewodnik Szlak Stylu Zakopiańskiego* (Zakopane: Muzeum Tatrzańskie im. Dr Tytusa Chałubińskiego w Zakopanem, 2014), 73.

109 Andrzej Szczerski, "Stanisław Witkiewicz and the Zakopane Style," in *Poland - China: Art and Cultural Heritage*, ed. Joanna Wasilewska (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2011), 84.

110 Emilia Pomiankiewicz, "Ślady Ukryte w Harmonii Stylu Zakopiańskiego, Willa Oksza a Twórczość Kolonii Artystycznej Zakopanego," *Przestrzeń, Ekonomia, Społeczeństwo* 12, no. 2 (2017): 86.

111 Ibid., 80.

112 Zbigniew Moździerz, *Przewodnik Szlak Stylu Zakopiańskiego* (Zakopane: Muzeum Tatrzańskie im. Dr Tytusa Chałubińskiego w Zakopanem, 2014), 95.

113 Ibid., 98.

114 Władysław Matlakowski, *Budownictwo Ludowe na Podhalu* (Kraków: Nakład Akademii Umiejętności, 1892), 33.

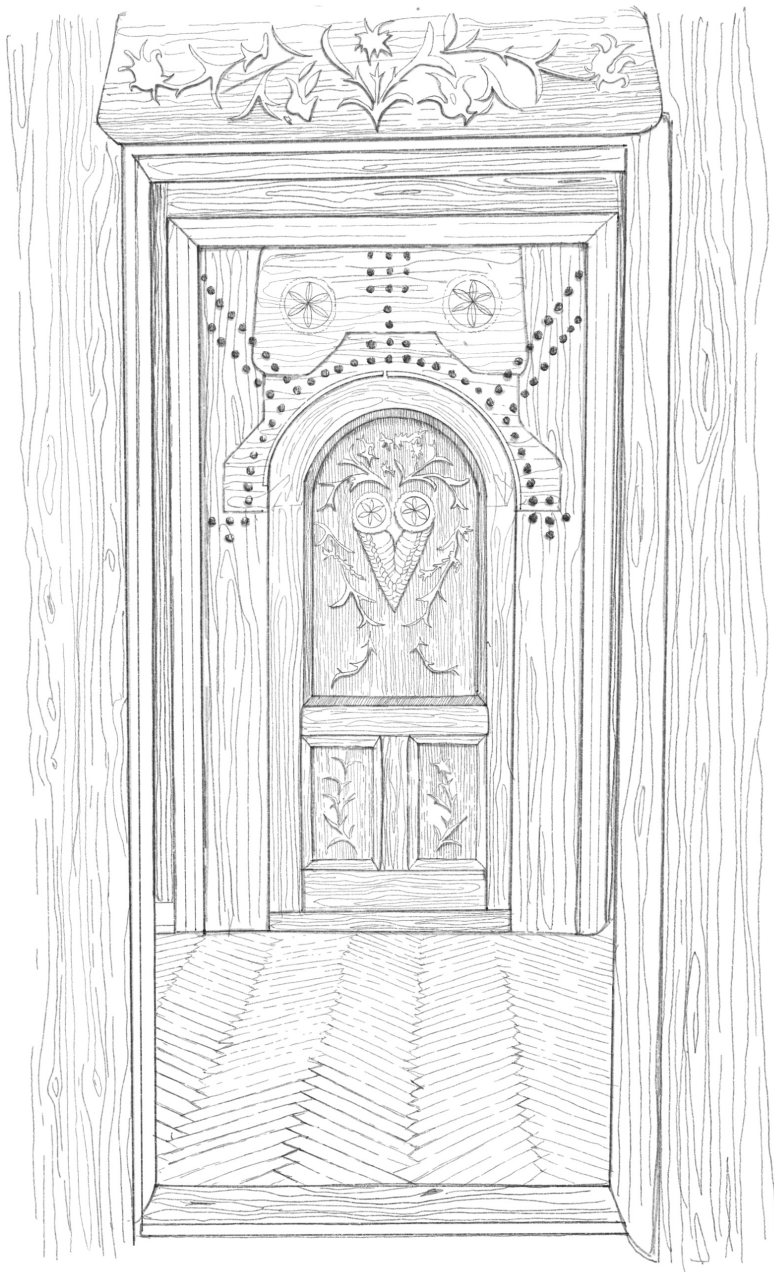
hierarchical division between them. He insisted that this synthesis was essential for the rebirth of the Polish art scene.¹⁰³ He envisioned the style as a unifying force capable of bridging class divisions, arguing that a national art form, rooted in folk traditions, could resonate with all social classes, from simple peasant homes to grand villas.¹⁰⁴

As the previous chapters described, a peasant's home had no means or intention to even act as a formal residence as envisioned by Witkiewicz. While this theory was truly idealistic, it had no power or basis to reflect nor acknowledge the reality of peasants' living conditions. Nevertheless, it became a powerful tool for fostering national identity, and the created style continues to be relevant, and applied to this day.¹⁰⁵

While the "Zakopane Style" was an original concept, it corresponded with broader European trends that focused on creating distinctive national styles, particularly in other regions under foreign rule.¹⁰⁶ These tendencies prioritized a newfound celebration of folk art, which drew Witkiewicz's interest to its Polish equivalents. As a well-travelled member of the high society, Witkiewicz had been exposed to diverse architectural examples in England, Germany, and Russia. This exposure allowed him to draw inspiration, as Andrzej Szczerski emphasizes, from movements such as the British Arts and Crafts and the work of praised Polish writers like Cyprian Kamil Norwid.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, as Zbigniew Moździerz suggests, Witkiewicz may have also been influenced by architects like Henry Hobson Richardson and the writings of Polish novelist Bolesław Prus.¹⁰⁸ However, what ultimately distinguishes the Zakopane Style is its direct adaptation of vernacular traditions, completely separating the style from the revival of historical forms.¹⁰⁹

The newly established style encountered some challenges, such as its reliance on timber-based structures, which made it difficult and costly to apply in regions other than the mountains or to translate the designs into materials like masonry, which is more popular for formal buildings. Yet, the style gained momentum, especially among wealthy Polish patrons. Witkiewicz's connections within elite social circles brought him many commissions, securing its influence on Polish architecture.¹¹⁰

The most prominent example of the "new national style" is *Willia Oksza*, the third villa designed by Witkiewicz. Constructed in 1896, with the canon of the "Zakopane Style," already established. The villa was built in Zakopane by Highlander carpenters familiar with the proposed construction methods.¹¹¹ While the building was influenced by the Alpine chalet, it incorporated "borrowed" ornamental and constructional elements found in Highlanders' homes to create something "truly Polish." The villa introduced a symmetrical, two-story frontal façade with side additions — a feature that became characteristic in Witkiewicz's later works.¹¹² The villa's exterior included decorative balconies and characteristic for the style, frontal arched windows, while its interiors featured pine wood carvings and Tatra motifs common in Highlander homes, all adjusted to modern, formal settings.¹¹³ However, a true Highlander cottage was always a single-story building and never featured balconies. Therefore, the use of these elements was completely new and unfamiliar to the native inhabitants.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the villa was originally designed as a residential building for wealthy owners who used it to host societal events until the outbreak of the First World War. In 1920, it was repurposed as a



Interior fragment of *Willa Oksza* in Zakopane. Drawn by the author, based on a site visit in 2024.

115 Emilia Pomiankiewicz, "Ślady Ukryte w Harmonii Stylu Zakopiańskiego, Willa Oksza a Twórczość Kolonii Artystycznej Zakopanego," *Przestrzeń, Ekonomia, Społeczeństwo* 12, no. 2 (2017): 82.

116 Marian Magdziak, *Od Chłopskiej Chałupy do Domu Współczesnego Rolnika* (Łódź: Politechnika Łódzka, 2018), 37.

117 Emilia Pomiankiewicz, "Ślady Ukryte w Harmonii Stylu Zakopiańskiego, Willa Oksza a Twórczość Kolonii Artystycznej Zakopanego," *Przestrzeń, Ekonomia, Społeczeństwo* 12, no. 2 (2017): 83.

118 Ibid., 87.

119 Krzysztof Kwiatkowski, "Styl Zakopiański Stanisława Witkiewicza i Jego Differentia Specifica / Stanisław Witkiewicz's Zakopane Style and Its Differentia Specifica," *PUA* 1, no. 1 (2020): 63–64.

medical facility, and over the decades, served as a dormitory. Finally, in 2011, it was fully restored by the Tatra Museum, which declared it as an object of National Heritage.¹¹⁵

The "Zakopane Style" developed alongside broader artistic movements, particularly the "Young Poland," which will be addressed in the next chapter.¹¹⁶ These creators contributed to the development of a significant artistic community in Zakopane. Its proximity to Krakow attracted artists who, like Witkiewicz, romanticized native folk culture, with many settling permanently in the heart of Podhale. Even during The First World War, Zakopane remained an artistic center, hosting notable figures who found there both refuge and inspiration. The art produced in the region focused on aesthetic form and visual framework rather than reflecting the harsh realities of the time, introducing Formalism to the region.¹¹⁷

This period also saw the rise of the Zakopane avant-garde and regional movements, which led to the creation of new institutions, such as the School of Woodworking. This art institution advanced design and sculpture, playing a significant role in sustaining Polish art during the war. Ultimately, the "Zakopane Style" became a symbol of national identity and cultural pride for a grieving nation.¹¹⁸ While the style was ideologically rooted in Highlander tradition, it remained largely accessible only to elite patrons, disconnected from the actual nature of peasant homes, which were built out of necessity for survival, not as pastoral escapes. Nevertheless, in the broader context of Polish independence, the style bridged art and national pursuit, fostering a sense of pride and cultural unity within the Polish nation.¹¹⁹



Józef Chełmoński, *In Front of the Tavern (Przed Karczmą)*, 1877. National Museum in Warsaw, Poland.

120 Beata Pranke, *Nurt Chłopomanii* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2003), 5–7.

121 Józef Zabielski, “Tożsamość Polaków w Kontekście Jednoczącej się Europy,” *Polonia Sacra* 11(29), no. 21/65 (2007): 6–9.

122 Kazimierz Wyka, “Młoda Polska Jako Problem i Model Kultury,” *Pamiętnik Literacki: Czasopismo Kwartalne Poświęcone Historii i Krytyce Literatury Polskiej* 54, no. 2 (1963): 376–380.

123 Marian Magdziak, *Od Chłopskiej Chałupy do Domu Współczesnego Rolnika* (Łódź: Politechnika Łódzka, 2018), 39.

124 Kazimierz Wyka, “Młoda Polska Jako Problem i Model Kultury,” *Pamiętnik Literacki: Czasopismo Kwartalne Poświęcone Historii i Krytyce Literatury Polskiej* 54, no. 2 (1963): 388–389.

125 Andrzej Juszczak, “Między Idealem a Rzeczywistością: Obraz Wsi w Polskiej Literaturze i Kulturze Popularnej,” in *Obce/swoje: Miasto i Wieś w Literaturze i Kulturze Ukraińskiej XX i XXI Wieku*, ed. Katarzyna Glinianowicz and Katarzyna Kotyńska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Scriptum, 2015), 21–22.

126 Marcin Kępiński, “Rodzina Wieś – Nostalgiczne Źródło Malarskich Inspiracji Mariana Kępińskiego,” *Zeszyty Wiejskie* 28, no. 2 (2022): 78.

The “Young Poland” (*Młoda Polska*) emerged alongside Stanisław Witkiewicz’s development of the “new national style.” This movement brought together significant literary and artistic figures who looked to rural communities as a source of national identity and artistic renewal during a time marked by cultural suppression. Inspired by the earlier works of Matlakowski and Witkiewicz, the movement celebrated the landscape, music, attire, and customs of Polish villagers – a phenomenon later described as “Peasant-Mania” (*chłopomania*). During the period of statelessness, the “simplicity” of peasant life and the reassuring imaginary of village homesteads offered a sense of belonging and a broader connection to national heritage, addressing shared territory in the absence of physical sovereignty.¹²⁰ In the context of nineteenth century, national identity is described by Józef Zabielski as an individual and collective construct deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts. It serves as a moral and existential framework that allows those individuals to position themselves within a shared narrative while shaping the broader consciousness of a nation.¹²¹ Artists associated with national movements sought to explore themes of native values and tensions between historicism and emerging modernity.¹²²

This era was also marked by a visible transformation in peasants’ mentality. By the late nineteenth century, their growing social awareness led to the establishment of their first political party in 1895 and increased presence in the social scene, including marital engagement with members of the high society. Freed from serfdom, the peasants grew aware of spreading interest in their environment and tried their best to improve their status after centuries of indignity.¹²³ However, despite their evolving status, depictions of peasants in popular art remained patronizing and provided fragmented image, designed to deliver a broader symbolic message.¹²⁴ Interest in peasant themes, particularly seen in paintings, first appeared at the end of the eighteenth century, with Jan Piotr Norblin as the early pioneer of incorporating rural themes into Polish art. However, the art of this period mostly focused on significant historical events, leaving depictions of peasants relatively irrelevant to the society at the time. By contrast, artists of the late nineteenth century embraced a wide variety of symbolism, using Polish peasantry as a means of expressing a national message.¹²⁵

One such artist was Józef Chełmoński, widely regarded as one of the best representatives of the Realist School of Art and a precursor of “Peasant-Mania.” Although born in Poland, he created most of his work in Munich and Paris, with the memories of the lost home-land inspired canvases illustrating the daily lives of Polish peasants. Critics held his works as “truly Polish” for their authentic character.¹²⁶ One of the recurring motifs in Chełmoński’s work, and amongst later creators of the movement, was the village tavern, which played a central role in the social fabric and daily rhythms of rural life. While often associated with drinking, the village tavern served as a main gathering place, acting as a form of a cultural center for the local peasant population. In an era when most peasants were illiterate, taverns became essential spaces for the distribution of local news and rumors, relying on oral communication. Neighbors



Józef Chełmoński, *Indian Summer (Babie Lato)*, 1875. National Museum in Warsaw, Poland.

127 Katarzyna Kurowska, "Mentalność Wsi w Malarstwie Polskim Drugiej Połowy XIX wieku," *Zeszyty Naukowe Towarzystwa Doktorantów UJ. Nauki Humanistyczne* 24, no. 1 (2019): 102.

128 Aleksander Świętochowski, *Historja Chłopów Polskich w Zarysie: W Polsce Niepodległej* (Lwów–Poznań: Nakład Wydawnictwa Polskiego, 1925), 288–290.

129 Katarzyna Kurowska, "Mentalność Wsi w Malarstwie Polskim Drugiej Połowy XIX wieku," *Zeszyty Naukowe Towarzystwa Doktorantów UJ. Nauki Humanistyczne* 24, no. 1 (2019): 103.

130 Ibid., 104.

131 Ibid., 112.

132 Zofia Ożóg-Winiarska, "Babie Lato na Obrazie Józefa Chełmońskiego i w Poezji Michaliny Chełmońskiej-Szczepankowskiej," *Kultura i Edukacja* 3, no. 109 (2015): 219–231.

133 Beata Frydryczak, "Babie Lato, Czyli Zmysłowość Wiejskiego Krajobrazu," *Kultura Współczesna. Teoria. Interpretacje. Praktyka* 116, no. 4 (2021): 119–130.

gathered there, and despite minor conflicts, social, familial, and religious milestones were celebrated.¹²⁷ However, it is important to note that alcohol consumption was deeply integrated into the lives of Polish peasants, as more than just a cultural habit. While the nobility drank to celebrate, peasants relied on alcohol to escape their despair. This behavior intensified when peasants were legally bound to purchase beverages exclusively from their lord's tavern, turning those visits into a daily routine. During religious celebratory events, imitating the nobility's drinking habits offered peasants a fleeting sense of equality with the higher social classes as well as a temporary psychological relief from oppression.¹²⁸

In *In Front of the Tavern (Przed Karczmą, 1877)*, Chełmoński uses the tavern, not just as a compositional element but also as a thematic narrative. In the painting, the tavern acts as a background to peasants engaged in expressive folk celebrations. The artist chose to deliberately place the villagers outside to emphasize their inseparable bond between communal joy and village. A large portion of the canvas features rough, disturbed soil — unusual at the time, as such elements were considered "dirty" and "unworthy" for fine artists of this period. This compositional choice symbolized the peasants' deep connection to labor and earth.¹²⁹ While the genre scene captures a joyful celebration, the muddy ground and melting snow introduce a somber tone, representing the transitional nature of changing seasons.¹³⁰ A similar motif appears in *Oberek (1877)*, where Chełmoński once again portrays an outdoor celebration, with a significant portion of the canvas dedicated to soil and a distant village landscape. The vibrant reds of the dancers, create a dynamic contrast with the surrounding environment of the village painted in muted tones. Katarzyna Kurowska describes these motifs as fleeting moments of joy, stressing that the paintings not only capture the energy of folk traditions but also serve as a reflection of national identity. The melancholic landscape heavily contrasts with the celebratory scene, mirroring Poland's political despair. The depiction of folk dance, in these works, becomes a powerful symbol of resilience and escape, embodying the ability of Polish people to find moments of hope amidst their painful reality.¹³¹

Another notable painting, *Indian Summer (Babie Lato, 1875)*, portrays a young peasant girl lying barefoot in a field, peacefully playing with delicate strands of silk. This seemingly simple genre scene depicts a fleeting yet deeply symbolic moment of rural life. The girl's relaxed posture and a calm pastoral setting suggest a moment of personal freedom, and a departure from social hardship. The muted tones of the landscape contrast with the vibrant yellow handkerchief. Zofia Ożóg-Winiarska describes the artist's attention to detail of the human figure as a link to rural existence and nature's cyclical rhythms of life.¹³² The painting reflects freedom, resilience, and enduring connection between people and their land, once again reflecting on Poland's attachment to the lost territory. The image of a peaceful peasant, physically "bonding" with their native soil, was recognized as a profound expression of cultural and national belonging.¹³³

Another key figure of the "Young Poland" movement and therefore "Peasant-Mania" phenomenon was Włodzimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer. A painter, poet, and independence activist. Tetmajer was one of the members of the "Five Peasant Enthusiasts," whose work was characterized by a deep admiration towards the Polish peasant world and its symbolic



Włodzimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, *Blessed (Święcone)*, 1897. National Museum in Krakow, Poland.



Włodzimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, *Dances in the Tavern (Tańce w Karczmie)*, 1895. Lviv Art Gallery, Ukraine.

134 Beata Pranke, *Nurt Chłopomanii* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2003), 78–79.

135 Stanisław Dziedzic, “Włodzimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer: W Dziewięćdziesięciolecie Śmierci Artysty i Polityka,” *Niepodległość i Pamięć* 21, no. 3–4 (47–48) (2014): 22–25.

136 Beata Pranke, *Nurt Chłopomanii* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2003), 13–14.

137 Ibid., 23–24.

138 Ibid., 33.

139 Ibid., 32.

140 Katarzyna Kurowska, “Mentalność Wsi w Malarstwie Polskim Drugiej Połowy XIX wieku,” *Zeszyty Naukowe Towarzystwa Doktorantów UJ. Nauki Humanistyczne* 24, no. 1 (2019): 107.

141 Beata Pranke, *Nurt Chłopomanii* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2003), 55–56.

142 Katarzyna Kurowska, “Mentalność Wsi w Malarstwie Polskim Drugiej Połowy XIX wieku,” *Zeszyty Naukowe Towarzystwa Doktorantów UJ. Nauki Humanistyczne* 24, no. 1 (2019): 108–109.

significance for the national imagination. The group formed during their studies at the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts; over a shared passion for rural themes, resulting in idealized depictions of peasant environments.¹³⁴ Despite his noble upbringing, his life was strongly connected with the world of the village due to his controversial marriage to a peasant woman, Anna Mikołajczykówna, which strongly influenced his works. Their union, between two members of different social classes, caused shock and a public scandal, temporarily removing Tetmajer from the social circles and forcing him to move to the village.¹³⁵ This marriage, the first of such in Kraków’s higher society, not only set a precedent for similar unions between the intelligentsia and the peasantry, but also inspired Stanisław Wyspiański’s celebrated drama *Wesele* (*The Wedding*), an allegorical exploration of Polish nobility, highlighting the undeniable tensions and unfulfilled aspirations between those two groups.¹³⁶ Tetmajer’s village mansion, *Tetmajerówka* eventually became a place for hosting marriages between his colleagues and peasant women, as well as a cultural hub, inviting discussion on art, national resistance, and future independence movements.¹³⁷

Tetmajer’s artistic legacy was based on colorful and joyful portrayals of rural existence, deliberately rejecting the grand historical themes emphasized in the Academy teachings at that time.¹³⁸ However, his perspective was deeply biased, presented through a lens of personal nostalgia. His work focused on embellished depictions of the romantic countryside, drawing inspiration from the village near Kraków where he resided with his peasant wife. Inspired by the previously mentioned Józef Chełmoński and French impressionist Jean-François Millet, he embraced *plein-air* methods to capture the interplay between light, shadows, and color of rural landscapes.¹³⁹

One of his most recognized works is the painting *Blessed* (*Święcone*, 1897), which captures the tradition of blessing Easter food. The celebratory scene depicts a crowd of peasant women and children engaged in a communal religious practice.¹⁴⁰ Tetmajer’s Impressionist-inspired work softens the appearance of architectural elements, instead bringing attention to the women dressed in traditional village attire. His use of vibrant hues highlights the richness of folk life, securing its role as a national treasure while also, emphasizing the beauty of peasant religious celebrations.¹⁴¹ However, Tetmajer’s work purposely avoids any signs of poverty or hardship, consistently presenting refined image of the folk. His approach aligns with the Young Poland’s ideal of the countryside as a source of vitality and national pride. By limiting the viewer’s perspective, he creates a sense of intimacy and curiosity, encouraging further interpretation. Through this communal portrayal, the village symbolizes a sense of unity and national strength. Moreover, as mentioned earlier Tetmajer was a passionate advocate for Polish independence. Thus, his work played a crucial role in translating the nationalist ideals of upper classes, with each canvas expressing a deep sentiment to Poland’s native cultures.¹⁴²

The village and its inhabitants were, in most cases, portrayed outdoors — in front of their homes, fields, or nature — as that was how society typically imaged them. However, one of Tetmajer’s paintings, titled *Dances in the Tavern* (*Tańce w Karczmie*, 1895), focuses on a communal

dance within the interior of the village tavern.¹⁴³ This canvas emphasizes the individuality of the villagers, all dressed in distinctive, rich folk attire, including handkerchiefs and wooden boots — symbols of how the peasants were envisioned by the high society. At the forefront is a woman, embodying a stereotypical strong peasant, who is supposed to represent the strength of the nation itself. The tavern's interior is filled with religious iconography glowing against the dark background. These elements symbolize the intersection of faith within the daily life of the peasants, connecting the sacred with the celebratory. As in the rest of his works, Tetmajer depicts joyful and festive moments of rural life, presenting the peasants as if they were removed from oppression, labor, and hardship, instead immersed in a simple and vibrant existence.¹⁴⁴

Later depictions of peasant portrayals find a literary parallel in Władysław Reymont's work — *The Peasants (Chłopi)*. Published in four parts between 1902–1908, the Nobel Prize-winning novel offers a rich ethnographic detail and psychological depth, capturing the rhythms of seasonal labor, communal traditions, and cultural heritage. Each part corresponds to a specific season, reflecting the cyclical stages of a peasant's existence.¹⁴⁵ However, according to Andrzej Juszczuk, this portrayal was heavily stylized, abstracting the rural world into a mythical, self-contained realm that overlooks the harsh socio-economic realities of the time. Systematic inequalities, dependence on landowners, and extreme hunger are missing in the novel. Reymont's work, while widely celebrated in Polish literature, indicates the disconnect between cultural representation and the lived realities of the peasants.¹⁴⁶

In contrast, Stanisław Wyspiański's play *The Wedding (Wesele)*, 1901) offers a more critical perspective on the notion of "Peasant-Mania." The drama explores this phenomenon by highlighting the peculiar fascination of the Polish elites with the peasantry while exposing their failure — or reluctance — to truly understand the mentality and struggles of the rural communities. Unlike other portrayals, Wyspiański presents the peasants as uninterested in forming alliances with the elites. Instead, they take a stand, advocating for radical changes to serve their interests.¹⁴⁷ Despite the critique of his contemporaries, Wyspiański remained influenced by the nationalist discourse of his time. Therefore, *The Wedding* questions the role of rural communities in Poland's fight for independence but ultimately reflects skepticism about the widely announced potential for unifying social classes. The play ends with a sense of missed opportunities and unresolved tensions between these two groups.¹⁴⁸

The Young Poland movement brought a visible shift in Polish literature and artistic endeavors, marking a transition from positivist ideals to symbolism, aestheticism, and existential themes. According to Radosław Okulicz-Kozaryn, Polish artists were influenced by European modernist currents, as seen in the works of Baudelaire and Verlaine.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, Piotr Korduba, in his analysis of the issues of folk art, emphasizes its origins as a product of elite tastes and judgments rather than an authentic expression of rural life. Korduba argues that Polish intelligentsia created a timeless yet romanticized image of the "folk" to promote both national message and Poland's international image as a land of vibrant culture. Furthermore, the chapter addresses the commercialism and strategic adaptation of these artists, who adjusted their work to align with the specif-

143 Beata Pranke, *Nurt Chłopomanii* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2003), 39–40.

144 Katarzyna Kurowska, "Mentalność Wsi w Malarstwie Polskim Drugiej Połowy XIX wieku," *Zeszyty Naukowe Towarzystwa Doktorantów UJ. Nauki Humanistyczne* 24, no. 1 (2019): 105.

145 Tadeusz Linker, "Zainteresowanie Młodej Polski epopeją a „Chłopi” Reymonta," *Ślupskie Prace Filologiczne. Seria Filologia Polska* 1 (2002): 87–109.

146 Andrzej Juszczuk, "Między Idealem a Rzeczywistością: Obraz Wsi w Polskiej Literaturze i Kulturze Popularnej," in *Obce/swoje: Miasto i Wieś w Literaturze i Kulturze Ukraińskiej XX i XXI Wieku*, ed. Katarzyna Glinianowicz and Katarzyna Kotyńska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Scriptum, 2015), 21.

147 Walery Gostomski, "Arcytwór Dramatyczny Wyspiańskiego 'Wesele'," *Pamiętnik Literacki: Czasopismo Kwartalne Poświęcone Historii i Krytyce Literatury Polskiej* 7, no. 1/4 (1908): 310.

148 Andrzej Juszczuk, "Między Idealem a Rzeczywistością: Obraz Wsi w Polskiej Literaturze i Kulturze Popularnej," in *Obce/swoje: Miasto i Wieś w Literaturze i Kulturze Ukraińskiej XX i XXI wieku*, (2015): 22.

149 Radosław Okulicz-Kozaryn, "Rok 1894. Właściwy początek Młodej Polski," *Wiek XIX. Rocznik Towarzystwa Literackiego im. Adama Mickiewicza* 47, no. 1 (2012): 15–16.

150 Piotr Korduba, “Jak Elity Wymyśliły Ludowość: Kłopoty ze Sztuką Ludową,” *Stan Rzeczy* 2, no. 23 (2022): 292–294.

ic aesthetic preferences and market demands of their urban patrons, at the expense of accurately portraying Polish heritage.¹⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

The artistic and literary fascination — or even fetishization — of the peasantry at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries resulted in romanticized rural landscapes while marginalizing the lived realities of peasant existence. The peasant home came to symbolize a tension between lived experience and symbolic representation, reflecting the struggles of a stateless nation in crisis. The “Peasant-Mania” served as not only an aesthetic movement but also as a cultural strategy, translating national values through pastoral fragments of folk existence. However, the selective focus on the picturesque and folklorist elements vividly obscured the peasants’ true heritage, which was defined by systematic neglect and a need for survival — an existence never intended to be an expression of regional pride or dignity. While the “peasant enthusiasts” celebrated the symbolic image of the village, their work reflected a rather stylized, mythical vision that was well-resonated with fellow upper-class members.

These portrayals were closely tied to the broader concept of folk culture, which emerged in the nineteenth century through ethnographic research. Scholars like Józef Burszta identified folk culture’s origins within the feudal system, yet its integration within popularized art established a shared sense of tradition. Ultimately, the fascination with peasants’ “true vernacularity” and their lived environments — when viewed through the lens of nineteenth century national trends — brought forth both romantic ideals and a sense of deep disconnection between social classes. The tension between authenticity and idyllic portrayals not only shaped the aesthetics of Polish artistic and literary works but also underscored the broader struggles of a nation striving for unity.

This re-invention of a peasant environment and the accompanying nostalgia for the simpler times offered a vision of hope in times of foreign oppression. It served simultaneously as a national message and a form of escapism. The peasant home, once a pragmatic response to serfdom and extreme poverty, was suddenly elevated to the status of a cultural artifact celebrated for its supposed “purity” and “dignity,” — a perception that, as this work stresses, was far removed from the truth.

In times of crisis and loss, the symbolic return to the vernacular became a means of reclaiming continuity in a fractured cultural landscape. Stripped of its defining qualities, the peasant home became the projection of national aspirations. Yet this idealization — rooted in nostalgia and myth rather than reality — has cemented the image of “vernacularity” that persists to this day as a nostalgic fantasy of an “authentic” and “untouched” rural world. Tied to nationalist ideologies, the “vernacular” has been adopted as a political and cultural tool to construct a reassuring sense of tradition. However, the ongoing idolatry of the “vernacular” is

fueled not only by the nativist ideals but also by class dynamics. The rural and the peasant are fetishized by urban audiences, who remain removed from the struggles of inequalities that define rural existence. The higher classes consume vernacular forms as cultural commodities, celebrating the aesthetics of village environments, while delivering a sanitized symbol of heritage conveniently reinforcing class privilege.

To critically engage with the “vernacular” is to confront the myths it preserves and the ideologies it serves. It is not enough to celebrate the “vernacular” as a symbol of tradition or identity; it must be understood as a continuous tool in shaping cultural, political, and economic discourses, often framed as a longing for authenticity in an increasingly changing world.

ANNEXE

Chronology “Peasant-Mania” in paintings



Józef Chełmoński, *Indian Summer (Babie Lato)*, 1875. National Museum in Warsaw, Poland.



Józef Chełmoński, *In Front of the Tavern (Przed Karczmą)*, 1877. National Museum in Warsaw, Poland.



Włodzimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, *Dances in the Tavern (Tańce w Karczmie)*, 1895. Lviv Art Gallery, Ukraine.



Teodor Axentowicz, *Folk Dance in Front of the House (Kołomyjka)*, 1895. National Museum in Warsaw, Poland



Włodzimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, *Engagement (Zaręczyny)*, 1895. National Museum in Szczecin, Poland.



Włodzimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, *Blessed* (*Święcone*), 1897. National Museum in Krakow, Poland.



Wincenty Wodzinowski, *Cracovian Wedding (Wesele Krakowskie)*, 1901. National Museum in Lublin, Poland.



Włodzimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, *Legacy (The Artist's Family)* (*Dorobek [Rodzina Artysty]*), 1905. National Museum in Krakow, Poland.

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Collective Rampart, Jean Richter

Gay Apocalypse, François Mégret

Mechanical Symphony, Paulina Ornella Beron

Murder on the Floorplan, Léo Perrin-Livenais

Peasant-Mania, Julia Maraj

Speculative Coastlines, Emile Iacopo Jourcin & Melina Schechinger

The Architecture of the Superblock, Michelle Mortensen

The Boundaries of Labor, Lea Marzinzik

Typological Mestizaje, María Ruiz Medina

Work It Home, Emilie Hamel

