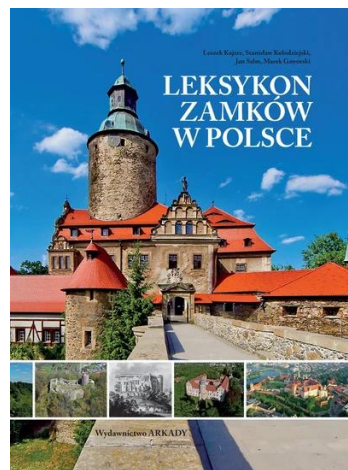


Leszek Kajzer, Stanisław Kołodziejski, Jan Salm, Marek Gaworski, *Leksykon zamków w polsce*, Arkadi, Warszawa, 2022, pp. 592, ISBN: 978-83-213-5213-8

"Leksykon Zamków w Polsce" (The Lexicon of Castles in Poland), authored by Leszek Kajzer, Stanisław Kołodziejski, Jan Salm, and Marek Gaworski, a team of distinguished Polish historians and architects, is an ambitious and comprehensive work that delves into one of the country's most captivating architectural and historical legacies: its castles. Published by Arkady in 2022, the book positions itself as a definitive guide to Poland's medieval and Renaissance fortifications and castles, a heritage shaped by centuries of conflict, power struggles, and artistic achievements. The lexicon blends historical depth with architectural precision, but its execution, while admirable, leaves room for critique in certain areas.



The 2022 edition of the lexicon is a continuation and significant expansion of a work that has long been regarded as a cornerstone in the study of Polish castles. Earlier editions of the lexicon laid the foundation for the comprehensive and detailed exploration of Poland's architectural heritage, establishing the authors as leading figures in the field of castellology.

The first edition of "Leksykon Zamków w Polsce" appeared in 1994 and was celebrated for its pioneering approach. It offered a systematic catalog of castles across Poland, combining historical insights with architectural analysis. However, its scope and depth were limited compared to contemporary standards, partly due to the state of archaeological research at the time and the constraints of publishing resources.

Subsequent editions addressed these limitations by incorporating new archaeological discoveries, improved historical methodologies, and updated architectural surveys. The lexicon grew in both scope and detail, with each edition reflecting advancements in the study of Polish medieval and Renaissance fortifications. Notably, the inclusion of detailed maps, photographic documentation, and architectural plans became a hallmark of the work, enriching its academic and visual appeal.

The extended edition from 2001 incorporated new archaeological discoveries and historical research. It expanded the catalog to include additional castles, including lesser-known ruins, reflecting a growing interest in documenting less prominent sites. Enhanced visual elements, such as basic architectural plans, began to appear.

A revised edition from 2010 marked a significant improvement in both content and presentation. It featured updated entries based on recent archaeological findings and restoration projects. High-quality photographs, detailed maps, and architectural diagrams enriched the reader's experience. The text also offered a deeper exploration of each castle's historical and cultural context.

An anniversary edition was published in 2015 to celebrate over two decades since the lexicon's debut, this edition paid homage to the progress made in the study of Polish castles. It included detailed case studies of key sites and addressed modern conservation efforts. The 2015 edition was praised for its more accessible format, appealing to both specialists and history enthusiasts.

While earlier editions were groundbreaking for their time, they often focused on major and well-preserved sites. In contrast, the latest edition strives for inclusivity by documenting lesser-known and even ruined structures, acknowledging their cultural and historical significance. This approach not only broadens the lexicon's appeal but also highlights the authors' commitment to preserving Poland's entire castellological heritage, regardless of a site's current condition. Each edition reflects the evolving state of archaeological research, historical scholarship, and the authors' dedication to documenting and preserving Poland's rich architectural legacy.

The most recent 2022 edition, the subject of the present review, represents the most comprehensive and visually engaging iteration to date, and can be considered as a culmination of decades of meticulous work, setting a new benchmark in the field. It benefits from years of accumulated research, including findings from ongoing restoration projects and archaeological excavations. Furthermore, it places a greater emphasis on regional diversity, exploring how different historical and cultural influences shaped castle construction in various parts of Poland.

In summary, the evolution of "Leksykon Zamków w Polsce" from its early editions to the 2022 release mirrors the progress of Polish historiography and architectural studies. Each edition builds on the strengths of its predecessors, with the latest version standing as a testament to the ongoing effort to document and celebrate Poland's rich historical landscape.

The lexicon (the 2022 edition) is organized alphabetically, offering readers an encyclopedic format that is both accessible and practical for reference purposes. It covers hundreds of castles, ranging from grand royal residences, like Wawel Castle in Kraków (p. 238-244) to lesser-known regional strongholds, such as the ruins of Bobolice Castle (p. 87-88). Each entry includes key information about the castle's location, historical significance, architectural features, and current condition. Photographs, maps, and architectural plans accompany the text, providing a visual complement to the detailed descriptions.

The castles presented in "Leksykon Zamków w Polsce" are a testament to Poland's rich and diverse historical and architectural heritage. As previously mentioned, this comprehensive lexicon includes hundreds of entries, ranging from monumental and well-preserved fortresses to enigmatic ruins, providing a detailed exploration of the country's castellological landscape. Each castle reflects a unique blend of historical eras, cultural influences, and architectural styles, making the book a valuable resource for understanding Poland's past.

Prominent structures such as Malbork Castle and Wawel Castle receive significant attention in the lexicon. Malbork, the largest brick castle in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is celebrated for its Gothic architecture and historical importance as the headquarters of the Teutonic Order. The book provides an in-depth analysis of its architectural innovations, its role in medieval politics, and its subsequent transformations (p. 291-298). Similarly, Wawel Castle in Kraków is explored in detail, with discussions on its evolution from a medieval fortress to a Renaissance royal palace, highlighting its role as a cultural and political center in Polish history (p. 238-244).

The lexicon also traces the architectural evolution of castles, from early wooden fortifications to massive stone strongholds and later Renaissance and Baroque adaptations. The inclusion of architectural plans, diagrams, and detailed descriptions helps readers understand how these castles were constructed and adapted over centuries to meet changing military and residential needs. For example, the transformation of Książ Castle into a palatial residence demonstrates the adaptability of these structures to new cultural and political realities (p. 511-513).

On the other hand, the lexicon showcases the remarkable regional diversity of Polish castles. In the north, the influence of the Teutonic Order is evident at castles like those from Gniew (p. 173-174) and Kwidzyn (p. 258-261), characterized by their imposing brickwork and defensive layouts. The south features castles such as those from Niedzica (p. 316-317) and Czorsztyn (p. 140-141), perched on dramatic mountain landscapes and reflecting a mix of defensive and residential purposes. The central regions include castles like those from Czersk (p. 134-136) and Oporów (p. 345-346), which demonstrate the interplay between medieval fortifications and Renaissance aesthetics. This regional approach emphasizes how local geography, and history shaped the development of these sites. For instance, castles in Silesia often exhibit Germanic architectural influences, reflecting the region's historical ties to the Holy Roman Empire, while those in Lesser Poland bear the marks of Italian Renaissance aesthetics.

Beyond the well-known landmarks, the lexicon also sheds light on lesser-known castles and ruins, many of which are integral to local identities and folklore. For instance, the ruins of Chojnik Castle, set amidst the Sudetes Mountains, are not only

an architectural treasure but also a source of legends that enrich the cultural tapestry of the region (p. 207-209). Similarly, castles like the one from Kórník (p. 235-237) reveal the layers of history embedded in smaller communities, from medieval foundations to Baroque and Neo-Gothic transformations.

A positive aspect is that a significant portion of the book is dedicated to castles that have fallen into ruin, highlighting the fragility of Poland's architectural heritage. Sites such as the remnants of Krzyżtopór Castle (p. 503-506) and Bolków Castle (p. 96-99) are explored for their historical significance, even as they face ongoing challenges in preservation. The lexicon serves as a poignant reminder of the fragility of these structures and the cultural loss that their neglect would entail. By including these ruins, the authors underscore the importance of documenting and protecting these structures, which remain powerful symbols of Poland's past. However, the book stops short of offering concrete suggestions for preservation strategies or engaging with contemporary debates about restoration practices. Given the authors' expertise, their insights on these issues would have been a valuable addition to the lexicon.

As one can observe, a notable strength of the lexicon is its effort to represent the diversity of Poland's regions. The authors highlight how geography, political circumstances, and cultural influences shaped the construction and evolution of castles in different parts of the country. Despite this regional sensitivity, the book sometimes falters in providing adequate historical context for the castles' roles in broader historical events. While individual entries are detailed, the lexicon lacks a cohesive narrative that ties these structures to key moments in Polish history, such as the Swedish Deluge (1655-1660), the partitions (1772, 1793, 1795), or the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815). A more integrated historical framework would have enriched readers' understanding of how these castles fit into the larger tapestry of Poland's past.

Another one of the book's greatest strengths is that the authors succeed in documenting a staggering array of castles across Poland, highlighting not only well-preserved structures but also ruins and sites with scant remains. This inclusivity reflects a commendable dedication to capturing the full spectrum of Poland's castellological heritage. The authors' credentials lend the book considerable authority. Leszek Kajzer and Stanisław Kołodziejski are renowned experts in Polish medieval history and archaeology, while Jan Salm and Marek Gaworski bring along a rich architectural expertise. Together, they provide a nuanced understanding of the historical and cultural contexts in which these castles were constructed and used.

The entries demonstrate meticulous research, incorporating primary sources, archaeological findings, and previous scholarly works. This level of detail elevates the lexicon beyond a mere catalog, making it a valuable resource for historians, architects, and especially for preservationists, because while celebrating Poland's castellological

wealth, the book also highlights the challenges of preservation. Many of the castles documented are at risk due to neglect, environmental factors, or limited funding for restoration. The authors' detailed descriptions of each castle's current condition serve as a call to action for continued conservation efforts, emphasizing the need to safeguard these sites for future generations. However, the focus on academic precision sometimes comes at the expense of readability. The writing style can be dense, with technical terminology that may challenge non-specialist readers. While this is understandable given the book's intended audience, it limits the lexicon's appeal to casual enthusiasts of Polish history or architecture.

Another one of the "Leksykon Zamków w Polsce"'s strength is the visual presentation, which is undeniably impressive. The high-quality photographs capture the castles from various angles, showcasing their architectural details and surrounding landscapes. These images bring the text to life, allowing readers to appreciate the beauty and diversity of Poland's castles. The inclusion of maps and architectural plans is equally praiseworthy, as they provide valuable context and help readers understand the spatial organization of these structures. However, the book's design is not without flaws. The dense layout, with tightly packed text and small font size, can make reading a strain. Additionally, while the photographs are stunning, the lack of a consistent labeling system for the images occasionally causes confusion. Readers might struggle sometimes to connect specific descriptions in the text to their corresponding visuals. A more deliberate integration of text and imagery would have enhanced the book's usability.

As an academic work, "Leksykon Zamków w Polsce" caters primarily to professionals, and serious enthusiasts. Its encyclopedic format and depth of detail make it an invaluable reference for those researching Polish castles or medieval architecture. However, this focus on academic rigor limits its accessibility to general readers. The lack of a glossary is particularly problematic. Many entries use specialized architectural and archaeological terms without explanation, which may alienate readers unfamiliar with the terminology. A glossary or an introductory chapter explaining key concepts would have broadened the book's appeal without compromising its scholarly integrity.

As a short conclusion, I personally believe that "Leksykon Zamków w Polsce" remains a monumental achievement that reflects the dedication and expertise of its authors: Leszek Kajzer, Stanisław Kołodziejewski, Jan Salm, and Marek Gaworski. It stands as an essential resource for anyone interested in Polish castles, offering a wealth of information that is both comprehensive and authoritative. The book's visual elements and regional inclusivity further enhance its value as a reference work. Despite a few shortcomings, nevertheless, this book remains a landmark publication

in the field of Polish castellology. Its detailed documentation of Poland's castles ensures that this architectural heritage will be preserved, not only in stone but also in scholarship, for future generations.

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