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# THE CONSERVATOR'S SCRUTINOUS EYE – SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF ART

The interiors of the Imperial Castle in Poznań are embellished with scores of different stone varieties. In order to preserve and renovate them, an in-depth conservation examination needed to be performed.



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**T**he Imperial Castle was built by order of the German emperor Wilhelm II on the site of Poznań's former municipal fortifications. Designed by Franz Schwechten, the new residence was commissioned on 20 August 1910. It is a monumental three-level structure with an irregular shape. In accordance with the Kaiser's wish, it was built in Neo-Romanesque style to manifest the German spirit and the glory of the Holy Roman Empire. The emperor's new residence nestling in the very heart of Poznań was intended to ultimately set the seal on the incorporation of the Greater Poland region (Wielkopolska) into the German Reich.

In 1918 the Castle was officially taken over by the State Treasury of the newly reemerging Polish state, and nominally it served as a residence of the Polish President. Its interiors had official and educational uses, with part of the Castle housing the Ministry of

the Former Prussian Province and lecture halls of the University of Poznań. During World War II the building was seized by the Nazis, who resolved to convert the former imperial residence into a residence for Hitler and the Governor (*Reichsstatthalter*) of the province of Wartheland. None other than Albert Speer was hired for the reconstruction works; he soon named young architect Franz Böhmer as his successor and protégé. It was agreed in consultation with Hitler, who showed a keen interest in the progress of the works throughout the War, that the Castle's interiors would be converted in the spirit of Third Reich architecture. One pertinent aspect of the intended refurbishment was the plan to remove all traces of the Wilhelmine period, which had its ideological roots in medieval German culture and Christianity.

The works got under way in early 1940 and were continued with varying intensity until 1945 by German companies which partly making use of Polish forced labor. The layout of the rooms, their functions and decorations were thoroughly revamped. The Emperor's former chapel was turned into a monumental entrance to the Castle, intended for the use of the Führer. The Chancellor's offices and private rooms were to be located on the first floor, while the

The Führer's cabinet on the first floor (a panorama compiled of several photos). The room's colors, the red-brown flooring and the green walls, are particularly striking

## ACADEMIA INSIGHT Heritage Conservation

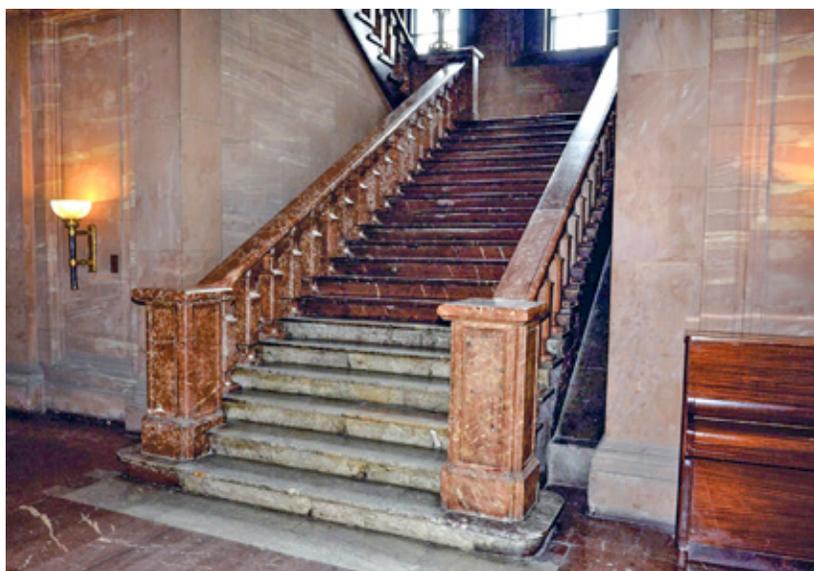


The grand stairway opening up from a vast hallway. All the original decorative elements and fittings are easily visible here: stone cladding, reliefs, coffered ceiling and massive, brass lamp holders

The second grand stairway was heavily damaged. During the conservation works after WWII, some elements such as handrails were restored. Given the lack of original stone, the scagliola technique (i.e. plaster imitation of stone) was used. The result of the work and its quality command admiration

second floor was to house the offices of the Governor, and the attic – his private lodgings. The plans of the alterations to be introduced within the Castle itself were developed and on an ongoing basis agreed with Böhmer and Arthur Karl Greiser, the Reichsstatthalter of the Wartheland, who would then present them to Hitler. At a further stage Heinrich Michaelis, author of Hitler's infamous Alpine residence in Obersalzberg, was included in the design work.

The works were continued regardless of the deteriorating situation on the front. In 1944, there were even plans to reestablish the Führer's main headquarters there following the liberation of East Prussia, the region where the Wolf's Lair (Wolfschanze), Hitler's military HQ, was situated. The Castle was finally deserted by the Germans in January 1945 and taken over first by the Soviet and later the Polish army, which maintained barracks on the site until 1963.



The Castle's interiors in the present form date back to the period of Nazi occupation. The Castle houses the city's bustling Zamek Culture Center, which runs a cinema and a theatre on the premises, organizes concerts and offers a wide range of educational activities for children and youth.

Over time, maintaining the Castle's interiors in a suitable technical and aesthetic condition has grown more and more problematic. The building has been entered into the Register of Historic Monuments, and therefore any works need to obtain prior approvals from the relevant heritage conservation authorities.

### Examination

The first step was to explore the Castle's interiors to draw up a statement of the scope of necessary conservation works. This encompasses a broad range of various activities being conducted simultaneously in several fields with the aim of establishing the detailed history of the site, compiling the iconography, studying the architectural forms, details, fittings and decorations, evaluating the artistic assets, preparing photographic and pictorial documentation and – last but not least – analyzing each object's state of preservation. For the Imperial Castle, the process focused primarily on the interior decorations, comprising stained glass, window woodwork, stucco, polychromies, stonework, and other types of fit-out works. Given the extent of the task, it was subdivided into smaller parts. The present author and his associates were commissioned to analyze the stone cladding in the Castle's interiors. The team examined the rooms on the ground, first and second floors. The topical scope of the process comprised such elements of the interior as floorings, stairs and balustrades, stone cladding on the walls, architectural details (cartouches, reliefs) and patina plaster panels.

The first stage of the works included updating the architectural inventory, adding supplementary information. The precise locations of the stone cladding and details were plotted on the plan. The next step involved a methodical inspection in order to identify all stone elements. Each such detail or element was then photographed and described. Information on visible damages or repaired chips or cracks was also compiled. Stone samples from locations out of sight of an average viewer were also collected. A total of 100 samples were secured and sent to the University of Wrocław's petrographic laboratory to identify the rocks.

Each sample was immersed in epoxy resin and then sanded down to a transparent thin section, to allow microscope tests to be run. Thanks to an extensive comparative base containing rock fragments from various quarries and locations across Poland, which has been accumulated for decades at the University



of Wrocław, the type of the stone or even the specific quarry from which a given piece originated were identified. On the basis of the gathered descriptive and photographic material as well as the results of laboratory tests, an expert report was drafted, presenting the conclusions regarding further conservation work.

Direct examination of the stone cladding was performed in parallel to the collection of stone samples. The structure of the consecutive layers and adhesion of the mended fragments (i.e. spots where the stone had been repaired after WWII) was probed with small and precise tools such as dental excavators and scalpels. In this way, additional information about the state of preservation of stone fittings in the rooms under examination was obtained.

Despite certain alterations and the destruction suffered during the War, the main Castle building has almost kept intact the original shape devised by Franz Schwechten. As regards the interior decorations, however, practically nothing of the original design has survived; the rooms remain a gloomy remnant of Nazi plans for domination. An art historian will appreciate the artistic forms: the restyled colonnades or portals and interior designs with varying amounts of cladding and details, size, and choice of colors. A conservation specialist will regard with interest the medley of materials, the precision of workmanship and the state of preservation.

The stonework decorations in the interiors of Poznań's Castle can be characterized as being in good condition. A prevailing majority of the decorative elements are complete save for the grand stairway balustrade, which was half restored using the scagliola technique. There are some visible chips and cracks in the flooring at all levels, mostly in the corridors, where numerous repairs were made rather negligently, by inlaying small irregular stone chips in mortar. Other damages mostly include nicks and dents caused by

use of the building, especially where there was a lot of movement – on the edges of door frames or wall paneling near the elevators. Some damages were inflicted during the installation of the technical systems inside the building. Yet another type of damage was caused in the stonework as a result of war activities, taking the form of chips 1-1.5 cm deep in the flooring and wall cladding.

All the elements are coated with layers of organic material of varying origin. The flooring is covered with coats of wax and polishing paste, which were also negligently or carelessly applied during maintenance work on the lower parts of the floor skirting and door framing. This has led to substantial, deep staining of the vertically mounted elements made from porous and compact types of stone.

Layers of atmospheric origin, including dust or tar deposits accumulating over the years, can be observed on the walls and door frames. Other types of damage include stains from paint and organic substances caused by heavy use, or those associated with technical works in the Castle, such as repainting or filling in cracks or chips with mineral mortars.

The examination conducted at Poznań's Castle first and foremost aimed to identify the original varieties of stone, establish the state of preservation of the stone elements, and determine the scope of the necessary conservation works. The information garnered during the conservation examination was used to formulate specific conclusions for conservation work, concerning such issues as the method of stone cleaning, necessary replacements or repair of the stone details. As the next step, a program of conservation works was drafted and a building design for indoor renovation works was prepared. If not for such a thorough conservation examination, the damaged fragments would not have been repaired so as to restore the Castle's interiors to their former glory. ■

Photo 1  
Damaged portion of limestone flooring which had been filled in with cement. During the conservation work, the concrete had to be removed and the stone had to be replaced, using material from the identified quarry – in this particular case, micritic limestone Ammonitico Rosso from Italy

Photo 2  
One of many fireplaces in the Imperial Castle in Poznań. The gorgeous texture of organodetrictic limestone Auberg Grau from a German quarry is well visible

Further reading:

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