INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CONSERVATION SCIENCE
ISSN: 2067-533X Volume 16, Issue 4, 2025: 1701-1722 www.ijcs.ro
DOI: 10. 36868/IJCS.2025.04.06

THE 18th-CENTURY WOODEN TOWN HALL IN KROBIA: INSIGHTS FROM NEWLY DISCOVERED DOCUMENTS

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Abstract

The paper presents research results into the form and function of the no longer existing wooden town hall in Krobia, Greater Poland, dating from 1723. The discovery of historical documents recording the contract for the construction of the building and the results of archival and field research carried out within the market square in 2022 provided the basis for this study. The paper analyzes the formal, functional, and utility aspects of the town hall in the 18th-century town. This study shows the possibilities and limitations encountered when attempting a complete reconstruction of the building based on descriptive documentation alone in a situation where no iconography of the reconstructed building has survived. The research proves the existence of at least three successive town halls (including two wooden ones). At the same time, it contributes to further research on architecture, urban planning, and the transformations undergone by the cities of Greater Poland during the Baroque period, with particular emphasis on the town hall as the center of municipal power.

Keywords: *Krobia; Town hall; Wooden architecture; Greater Poland; 18th century*

Introduction

The premise for this paper was the discovery in Krobia's town records of the text of a contract for the construction of a town hall preceding the current one, dating from 1723. The history of the construction and location of town halls in the historical urban structure is not a well-recognized topic. So far, only single buildings, all of them of masonry, considered necessary due to their historical or artistic value, have received monographic studies. Contributions to this type of study nowadays are mainly the consecutive stages of archaeological and architectural research within existing town halls in, for example, Wrocław [1-3], Poznań [4, 5], Gdańsk, Toruń, Leszno, Zamość, Lviv or Środa Śląska [6]. As Jerzy Kowalczyk [7] noted, 'So far only town halls from the Gothic, Renaissance, and Classicism eras' have aroused the interest of architectural historians - and despite the passage of a quarter of a century since these words were written, they remain primarily valid. At the same time, according to the authors, one of the most underestimated methods of historical architecture research is the analysis of source documentation. In this respect (although also in the field of the study of Greater Poland's wooden architecture, albeit of a different function and somewhat later), extremely relevant to this text are the articles by Aleksander Jankowski [8, 9], which present a very similar methodology.

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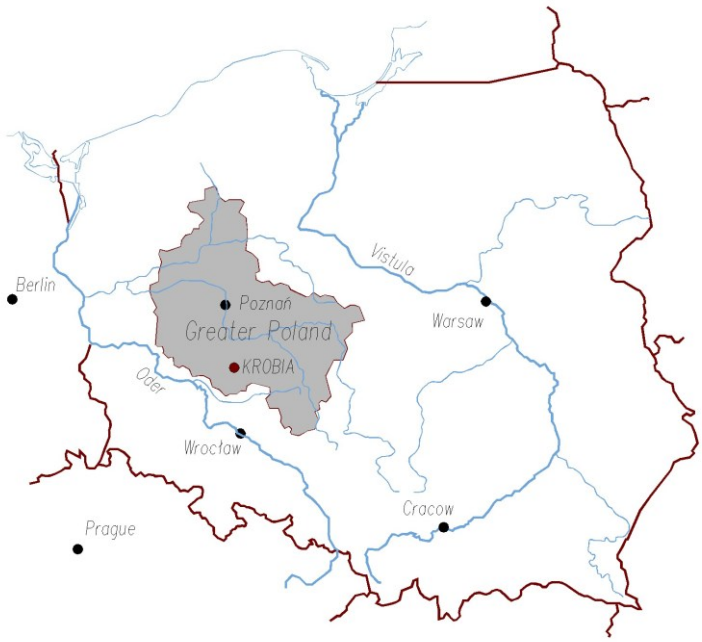

Fig. 1. Location diagram of Krobia in contemporary Poland

Krobia, located in southern Greater Poland, is currently one of the smaller towns in the region. First mentioned as a village in the first half of the 13th century, it likely obtained city rights in 1332. Like in similar towns, the town hall, as the seat of municipal authorities, served as the center of administration and a symbol of self-government autonomy. It had administrative, judicial, and economic functions, being the place of municipal council meetings, the proclamation of laws, and the conclusion of commercial transactions.

On a regional basis, the town halls in Silesia and Pomerania are the best known and studied [6, 10]. Town halls in Greater Poland (apart from Poznań) are an issue analyzed in the period of interest, i.e., the 18th century, mainly indirectly, in urban studies [6, 11].

Town halls located in smaller towns are even less likely to receive individual scientific publications, and the few that do occur for buildings in Poland concern masonry buildings. Each time, the contribution to a documented scientific analysis is made by archaeological research or revalorization works on the facilities [12-14].

We have even less information about wooden town halls. Mostly, all that is known is that the oldest of the town halls, particularly in settlements, were erected in wooden construction, which is partly confirmed by archaeological research. However, as to the spatial development of some of the discovered buildings, one can only guess their function [6]. Often, even less is known - it is assumed that the original market buildings were wooden. Still, the lack of material on this subject prevents a deeper analysis [15]. It is often assumed that these wooden town halls were repeating the forms of masonry architecture [7]. They do not appear to be a special type in studies on wooden buildings in Poland. They are only mentioned by Ignacy Tłoczek [16] as being privileged in location, distinguished by their form and size, in the also mostly wooden original buildings of Polish towns. The 1743 town hall in Sulmierzyce in Greater Poland, mentioned by him, remained the only existing building of this type even then [16]. Two others mentioned in the work as wooden town halls in Sławków and Zduny, covered with a monitor roof, had masonry ground floor walls and an arcaded structure [16], so they did not meet the criteria of reference buildings for the analyzed town hall in Krobia in terms of architecture and construction. Also, for

this reason, the already mentioned article by Aleksander Jankowski [8] was of great importance for developing this paper (especially after some findings had been made).

The most recent study by Barbara Arciszewska [17], which includes an analysis of the process of development of town hall forms in Poland between 1500 and 1750, also only mentions that the vast majority of town halls in Poland of that period were wooden and that only significant and prosperous towns could afford the luxury of a masonry town hall. She also mentions the town hall in Sulmierzyce as the only remaining example of this type of construction and a small number of other buildings for which information can be found in the sources [18, 19]. Arciszewska puts forward the claim that their form in this period, despite the inexpensiveness of the material used, ambitiously imitated masonry forms, reproducing solutions known from masonry architecture, such as porticoes, monumental staircases, or towers [17], constituting the peak achievement of this form of urban development. This was because, by the mid-18th century, they were being massively replaced by masonry buildings.

Due to the scarcity of data, it was decided to look for reference facilities outside Greater Poland. An example is the Bielsk Podlaski town hall [20].

There are also few studies discussing how to obtain source data for analyzing town halls as architectural structures and venues of social life in the 18th century, which provide basic indications of where to look for information on the structure and appearance of this type of building. Among the few are the works of Edmund Kizik [21-23], which refer neither to buildings located in Greater Poland nor to wooden structures, so they only give a general overview of the possibilities of searching for source material in this area. Therefore, the text by Jankowski [9], although not directly referring to town halls, has been an invaluable help.

Literature review

The current town hall in Krobia was built in 1840 on the site of an older one, about which no precise information was available until now. An analysis of Krobia's remaining town records and comparing the information found with the fragmentary descriptions known before have significantly changed the situation. A chronological summary of this information, which also takes into account the most recent discoveries, is as follows:

Andrzej Miałkowski argues that Krobia probably did not initially have a town hall [24]. In an older publication, Robert Grupa and Andrzej Miałkowski mention that the oldest town hall records in Krobia date back to the 15th century [25]. According to a record in the Krobia Council Book of 1722 [26], an earlier town hall with a wooden structure existed in Krobia before the building described here. At the beginning of the 18th century, however, it must have been in a catastrophic condition because the mayor and vogt of Krobia, 'considering the great ruin of the town hall, because now and then the wood is lost from it by bad people' (‘*Zważywszy wielką ruinę ratusza, bo co raz to z niego drzewa przez złych ludzi ubywa*’), allowed Walenty Trąbczyński to demolish it and use the wood to rebuild his burnt-down house. Trąbczyński paid 30 florins to the town for this. This method of raising additional funds was not unique in Greater Poland; it was still practiced after the mid-19th century [8].

An analysis of the remaining Krobia town records confirms that a separate facility was not used after demolishing the previous town hall at the beginning of the 18th century. This can be evidenced by dating such as this one from 1718: 'Having come into the house of the illustrious Mr. Maciej Żychlewski, Mayor for that time of Krobia (...)' (*‘Przyszedszy w dom Sławetnego Pana Macieia Żychlewskiego Burmistrza na ten czas Krobskiego’*) [26]. Similarly, the heading of entry 18.4.1723, cited later in this paper, contains the formula 'Actum in Residentia Proconsulari,' suggesting deliberations in the mayor's house [26]. Admittedly, the formula 'To the Office of Our Mayor of Krobia (...)' (*‘Do Urzędu Naszego Burmistrzowskiego Krobskiego’*) it is repeated much more frequently in these documents, but it does not refer in

any way to the place of the described event. Placing the local government's seat in officials' private homes was nothing unusual at the time [7].

However, thought began to be given to a new facility almost as soon as the previous one was demolished. This can be evidenced, for example, by an entry in the town records of 18.4.1723, in which the mayor was advised to expend the funds obtained from the sale of the town property 'for the common good, that is, for the edification' of the ruined Krobia town hall' (*'na dobro pospolite to iest na Edyfikacyą Ratusza zruinowanego krobskiego expendowac ma'*) [26]. It is worth mentionning that the term literally means 'the construction (rebuilding) of the ruined Krobia Town Hall'. In this context, the term 'edification' comes from the Latin aedificatio, meaning the process of building or erecting a structure. In the Polish language of the 18th century, it was a popular term used to describe both the construction of new buildings and the rebuilding of those that had deteriorated.

An analysis of the available archival material about the 18th-century town hall in Krobia should, therefore, be started with a historical town plan from 1796 by Ermann. This indicates that the 18th-century town hall was much smaller than the present one and closer to the market square's western corner. The original Ermann's plan did not survive the battles for Poznań in 1945. A photograph of it has survived to the present day in Henryk Münch's monograph [11, tab. XXIX], and an interwar sketch (also by Münch) in the collection of the State Archives in Poznań [27].

The discovered contract (further 'Contract') for the construction of the town hall was concluded on 8.7.1723 by the mayor and vogt of Krobia and the guild masters of the butchers' and shoemakers' guilds with Kacper Szeląg 'as Magister,' who came from Kobylin, and describes the new town hall quite precisely in terms of architecture, construction, and function. The facility was to be wooden ('with cladding on the buttresses'), 25×18 Old Polish ells in plan, two-story, 11 ells high, with a single-span tower, surrounded by porches with prepared balustrades. Downstairs is a large chamber with a vestibule, a chimney, a hayloft, and a fortress by the chamber. A transition through the town hall, between which there are to be butcheries on one side with shutter doors and gates. On the upper floor, there are two chambers: one for the court and the other for the Lords, Guildmasters, or Commoners, and a Hall for the community with windows. Where necessary, the staircase is to be fitted with sticks under the gable as the most convenient. With a small tower of one space, there is to be an increase of ells according to the proportion in addition to the curb' (*'Wkoło z gankami w balasiki nagotowane. Na dole izba wielka z sionką z kominem y komorą sienną z twierdzą wedle tey komory. Przejście przez Ratusz między którym przejściem maią bydź iatki po iedney stronie z drzwiami okiennicami y wrotami. Na wyższym piętrze maią bydz izby dwie: iedna Sądowa a druga dla Panów Cechmistrzów albo Pospołstwa y Sala dla gminu z oknami także. Gdzie będzie potrzeba wbale pod heblem balki laskowane iako nayprzystoini. Z wieszką o iednym przezdrzeniu, ktorey ma bydz wzwyż łokci według Proporcyi oprocz kurka'*) [26].

The exact time of construction is unknown. As late as February 12, 1726, in the Krobia records, we can find the dating: 'Actum Crobia in Residentia Proconsulis Feria 3tia ante Festum Sancti Valentini Presbyter proxima Anno Domini 1726' (*'It took place in Krobia at the residence of the proconsul on the Wednesday before the feast of Saint Valentine the priest, in the year of our Lord 1726.'*) [26, p. 399]. This is the last record indicating the functioning of Krobia offices in private residences. However, the first records indicating that the town hall was already finished and fulfilling its function did not appear until 1727. The earliest one indicating such a location dates from May 27, 1727, and reads: 'Actum in Praetorio Croben Feria 6ta ante Festum Sanctissimae et Individual Trinitatis proxima Anno Dni Millesimo Septingentessimo vicesimo Septimo 1727' (*'Drawn up in the town hall of Krobia on the sixth day before the Feast of the Most Holy and Incomparable Trinity, in the year of our Lord 1727'*) [26]. Another similar dating comes already from June 18, 1727, and reads: 'Actum in Praetorio Crobensi Feria Tertia post-Festum Sanctissimae et Individuae Trinitatis proxima Anno Domini 1727' (*'Drawn up in the town hall of Krobia on the Tuesday after the nearest feast of the Most Holy and*

Indivisible Trinity, in the year of our Lord 1727') [26]. Therefore, it can be assumed that the new town hall was used between February 1726 and May 1727.

Grupa and Miałkowski also describe the earlier building as a two-story house, built of wood with an impressive high bell tower, with butcher's shops around the old town hall and a prison in the building [25]. In a later publication, Andrzej Miałkowski [24] mentions the presence of a weighing machine with an extension and a pillory on the southern side of the town hall in the mid-19th century. However, these descriptions seem to overinterpret the available sources. No information about a 'magnificent' or 'high' tower has been found in any source records. According to the analyses carried out later in this text, it was relatively modest. Similarly, there are no records of the placement of meat markets or other facilities around the town hall. They are also not shown on the fairly accurate plan from 1793 [11]. They may have been added in the first half of the 19th century, although this seems unlikely, at least in the case of the pillory, especially in light of the information cited later in this article.

Further source information can be found in the descriptions of the construction of the current town hall, which was built, according to Miałkowski, in the middle of the 19th century on the site of an older building, mentioned in 1793 [24]. This earlier building was said to be '(...) a wooden, two-story building with a turret, on which a bell was first hung, and only later a town clock (...)' (*'drewniany, piętrowy z wieżyczką, na której najpierw wisiał dzwon, a dopiero później zegar miejski'*) [24]. Miałkowski also mentions that much correspondence has been preserved regarding the wood shingle roofing of the town hall and many houses in Krobia. Such a record can indeed be found in the town records, for example, under September 7, 1779, when it was forbidden to cover the houses on the market square and near the church with straw. It was also ordered that the existing thatched roofs be replaced within three months, under penalty of imprisonment (in the town hall - note by the author) and a fine [28]. On the other hand, the town hall bell is mentioned in the town records in an entry dated January 24, 1756, in connection with the organization of mayoral elections [29]. The election news was to be announced 'first by the town servants and then after the Town Bell is rung' (*'wprzód przez sług mieyskich a potym za ogłoszeniem Dzwonka Ratusznego'*).

The first records that may indicate the deteriorating technical condition of the building date back to 1778 [30]. The first recorded fine, intended for the 'repair of the Town Hall,' dates back to this time. Such sentences appear several times in later records.

In 1791 and 1792, the town hall building was still partially fulfilling its function despite its poor technical condition. The town hall prison was used for its intended purpose. This is evidenced, for example, by the recorded sentences in which the following is a component of the punishment: '(...) He will sit in the Town Hall for two days, and it will not be by night that he will sit (...)' (*'Zasiędzie Ratusz y tam przez Dwa Dni dniem a nie nocą siedzieć będzie'*) [31].

Further information about the functioning of the town hall (unfortunately, without assigning it to a specific room) comes from an entry in the Council Book, made in 1794, concerning the settlement of debts after the death of the town clerk, Grzegorz Latosiński. Firstly, an announcement about the pending proceedings was ordered to be posted on the town hall door (which allows for more detailed information from 1767). Secondly, the organization of a 'solemn auction to be held in the town hall' (*'Licytacyi Uroczystey w Ratuszu odprawić się maiący'*) was announced [32]. Both physically (although perhaps only occasionally) and symbolically, the Krobia town hall (even if physically in a deplorable technical condition) functioned as the town's focal point as recently as 1794.

However, due to the deteriorating technical condition of the town hall, a private apartment was again the seat of the city authorities from 1794 to the middle of the 19th century [24].

An essential addition to the 18th-century history of the Krobia town hall is the article 'Krobia in 1793' by Edmund Klinkowski, published in 1935 [33]. It describes the town based on the so-called Indaganda, i.e., a summary made by Prussian officials who took over the town after the Partitions of Poland. It mentions a 'timber-framed town hall which is used (...) for its intended purpose,' adding in a footnote that the town hall was 'deplorable' (*'w reglówkę zbudowany ratusz który używa (...) się dla jego celu uzupełniając jednak w przypisie, że ratusz*

znajdował się w jak najgorszym stanie'). In a note from 1805, we may read that due to the great ruin and the inability to heat the town hall in Krobia, it was necessary to rent a separate room in a particular civic house for the town hall sessions and the registry office from the very beginning of the organization of the Prussian administration [33]. Robert Grupa and Andrzej Miałkowski also mention that the town hall was renovated in 1799 and that a few years later, a town clock was installed in its tower [25]. However, there is some doubt here because the same publication states that the new clock was installed in 1804 because the old one was already significantly damaged [25]. This would suggest that the first clock was installed in the building much earlier. The authors also suggest that the new town hall was constructed by a fire that destroyed the old building. However, this does not seem likely, as historically documented significant fires have occurred in the city in 1656, 1759, and 1790. However, on the aforementioned plan from 1796 [11], the old town hall is still present, and its burning after this date would almost certainly have been recorded in municipal documents and the press. Klinkowski, on the other hand, also published 'Contributions to the history of Krobia in South Prussian times (1793 - 1806)' [34], in which he gives other reasons for the demolition of the old town hall and the construction of the new one. This text is also essential because it provides the most accurate information about the architecture of the town hall to date. In addition to confirming that the town hall roof was covered with shingles, it also mentions that 'the town hall is made of unhewn wood with a light clay coating (...), while the foundation consists only of field stones and clay, and these are placed right on the ground' (*'ratusz wzniesiony jest z blochów pociągniętych lekko gliną (...) natomiast fundament składa się tylko z kamieni polnych i gliny i to położonych tuż na ziemi'*) [34]. Further on, there is also the information: '(...) it seems that in the town hall, which was said to be unbeatable, there was no stove or the stove and chimney was so damaged that they did not dare to use them for fear of fire'. Finally, in 1805, the town hall was in such a bad condition that it was in danger of completely collapsing.

Materials and methods

The research adopted the method of archival and comparative study. The results of archaeological excavations carried out on the market square in Krobia in 2022 by ArchGeo Badania i Usługi under the direction of Łukasz Lisiecki [35] were also used as material to verify the theses.

The primary source for the work described in this paper is newly discovered records concerning the town hall in the Krobia town records. The most important part is the Contract's text dated June 8, 1723, for constructing the new facility [26]. It specifies both its function and its architecture and construction to a large extent. Further entries in Krobia's town records and other documents concerning this facility provide additional information.

Elements that could not be reconstructed based on preserved documents were reconstructed based on comparative analysis. For this purpose, many town halls (and other facilities) were analyzed between the end of the 17th and the middle of the 18th century. The facilities in the Greater Poland region were used as a basis. Still, in some cases, the analysis was extended to the other areas of the Kingdom of Poland. Attempts were also made to use comparisons with relatively well-documented buildings in the Silesia region. Still, these turned out to be sufficiently different to be considered unsuitable as reference material.

One problem here may be that the vast majority of the analyzed facilities only describe the form and construction of the buildings, not their function (perhaps considered obvious or difficult to determine).

Regarding facilities that could serve as a reference for the town hall in Krobia, two are worth mentioning: the town halls in Sulmierzyce and Zduny. All three towns are similar, ranging from around 3,000 inhabitants (Sulmierzyce) to just over 4,000 (Zduny and Krobia). The town hall in Zduny is slightly older than the one being analyzed. Unlike the one discussed here, it was built in 1684 and is a one-story masonry building. It was initially designed on a roughly square plan, with a small tower and a characteristic arcade on the west side.

However, the town hall in Sulmierzyce seems to be much more important for this comparison. Built in 1743, entirely of wood in a log construction, on a rectangular plan measuring approx. 12.5×7.5m (not including arcades), two-story, with a centrally located tower about as high as the width of the building. The roof is covered with wood shingles. An external staircase provides access to the second floor. Initially, it also had an arcaded gallery at the first-floor level, most likely removed during the reconstruction in 1879 [36]. The two-bay internal layout had a hallway (initially through) from which there was access to two prison cells, a punishment cell, an archive, and a lumber room. In the central part of the building, there was a massive masonry chimney providing heating for the facility. On the first floor were the mayor's room and the meeting room of the Town Council. Kowalczyk [7] points out one significant difference between the town halls in Sulmierzyce (and Rostarzewo) and the facility in Krobia. It lacks a commercial function. This can affect both the layout of the interior and the shape of the building. There are arcades at both reference facilities (Zduny on one side and Sulmierzyce on three sides).

It is also difficult to ignore the town hall in Poznań as a potential reference. However, due to the enormous disproportions resulting from the size of the two Greater Poland cities - Poznań and Krobia - it is unlikely to be a direct model [37].

An interesting example for comparison is the town hall in Rostarzewo, which was built in 1752 [6]. It is a masonry building, but its proportions, layout, and architectural forms can be used as a reference when attempting to reconstruct the town hall in Krobia.

Small towns in both Lesser Poland and Greater Poland had wooden town halls. In Ptaśnik's study, there is a description from 1773 of a wooden town hall in Grabów, classified as much more impressive since it was two-storeyed and had a tower [38].

'A square market square, in the middle of which is the town hall, built of hewn pinewood, with two storeys and porches, a small tower, and a small bell tower; the roof is shingled, old, and rotten. Downstairs are two large lumber doors with iron hinges, hooks, iron latches, and iron clasp locks. Good flooring made of hewn logs. On the second floor, there are good stairs, a lumber door to the courtroom with iron hinges and hooks, a simple lock, a hasp and iron strap for closing, a long table made of pine lumber, three benches around the room, a floor made of good lumber, two small windows with small glass panes, framed in wood' (*'Rynek w kwadrat, w środku ratusz z drzewa sosnowego ciosanego w węgły o dwóch piętrach i gankach zbudowany, z wieżą małą, w niej dzwonnica mała, dach gontami pobity, stary i zły. Na dole izby duże, drzwi do nich dwoje z tarcic na zawiasach i hakach żelaznych z wrzeiądzami i skoblem żalaznym do zamykania. Podłoga z balów żniętych dobra. Wchodząc na drugie piętro, wschody dobre, drzwi do izby sądowej z tarcic na zawiasach i hakach żelaznych z zamkiem prostym, skoblem i wrzeciądzem żelaznem do zamykania, stół długi z tarcic sosnowych, ławy wokoło izby trzy, podłoga z tarcic dobrych, okien dwa w szybki małe, w drzewo oprawne'*) [39].

The town hall building in Bielsk Podlaski [20] is also an interesting comparison. It was built between 1776 and 1780 according to the design of Jan Sękowski, the court architect of Izabela Branicka. Despite the structural differences (a masonry building), there are some formal similarities. It is a two-story house, without a cellar, with a centrally located small tower. It was built on a rectangular plan with dimensions of approx. 24×14.5m, with characteristically chamfered corners. Initially, there was a through hallway on the axis of the building. In her article, Ewa Narolewska [20] unfortunately did not attempt to identify the original functions of individual rooms, limiting herself only to a comprehensive description of potential features that could have been accommodated in this type of facility. However, the functional program of the town hall in Przeworsk in 1702 is known. At that time, the ground floor housed the great hall, shops, stables, and the municipal weigh house, while the ground floor housed flats. The basement was used as a prison.

Another well-documented building proper from this text's point of view is the town hall in Kórnik. Róża Kąsinowska described both the function of the edifice, completed in 1777, and the process of its construction starting from the Contract [40].

The essential study for a functional analysis of town halls from the 18th century is an article by Jerzy Kowalczyk [7]. He distinguishes between administrative, judicial, and commercial functions for this facility. Within the former, he lists the municipal council chamber, the mayor's office, the archive, the weight room, and one or two courtrooms and one or two prison rooms [7]. The rather unique and usually overlooked function of the town hall was also pointed out by Zdzisław Noga [41], who emphasized the role of the town chancellery as a place for creating and storing documents and thus also a place where the town scribe worked.

Results

In attempting to reconstruct the block of the Krobia town hall, it was first necessary to draw some assumptions of a general nature, arising from logic, experience, and common sense rather than from source data or literature studies. First and foremost, it was assumed that the town hall required a simple construction without unnecessary complications. This is necessitated on the one hand by the assumed construction material (wood) and on the other by the fact that 18th-century Krobia was not a wealthy center (Fig. 2).

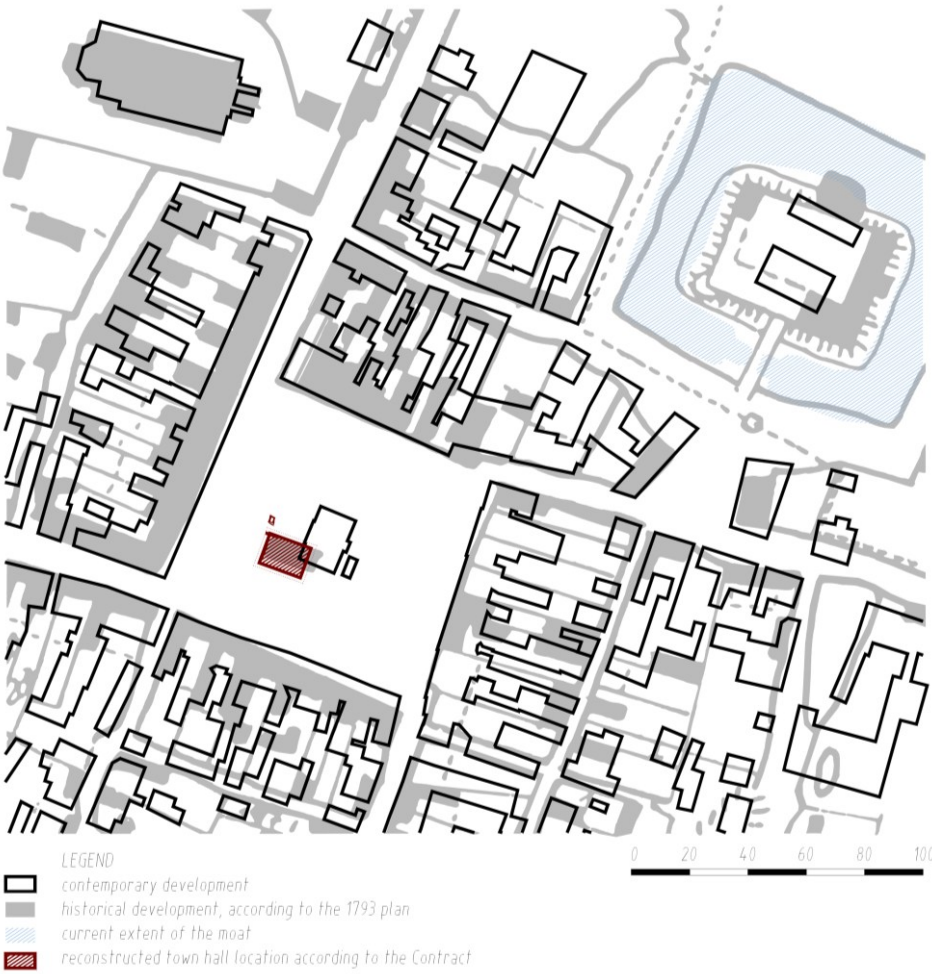

Fig. 2. Location diagram of the first town hall in Krobia against the background of historical buildings and the contemporary building line

It was assumed that the Old Polish ells were used as a measurement system. One ell was, therefore, equivalent to 59.6cm [42]. It was further assumed that the horizontal dimensions given in the Contract referred to the outline of the town hall in terms of the external walls and not along the line of the pillars surrounding the arcades. It was also acknowledged that the height given refers to the coping of the external walls.

Functional reconstruction

In the course of the research, the authors concluded that, given the significant differences in the programs and functional arrangements of the town halls analyzed and, at the same time, the excellently documented function of the town hall in Krobia, the reconstruction should begin with a precise identification of the facility's function.

According to the basic definition, the town hall is a representational public building whose primary function is to be the seat of the municipal government. Interestingly, the functional program of the town hall in Krobia does not include separate rooms for the mayor or the town council. There was also no jury chamber, such as was found, for example, in Kazimierz near Kraków [6]. This seems to be an unusual solution. It should be assumed at this point that the primary representative space of the town hall was the great chamber, heated and provided with a separate entrance, and the municipal authorities deliberated there. The courtroom, by its name, probably served for the deliberations of the courts, both (obviously) mayoral and aldermen's courts, as can be seen from the dating of some of the minutes [29]. Given that most of the surviving archival records are precisely court minutes, one should probably also look for accompanying functions in the courtroom, such as a municipal office or archive. For example, their existence can be evidenced by a record dated 14.3.1772 about a summons to collect money deposited at the mayor's office [29]. In addition, this is also confirmed by the provision formulated for the town hall in Grabów, which was erected at the end of the 18th century: 'for the town records to be deposited in the newly erected town hall' [39].

It isn't easy to clearly define the function of the other official rooms described in the Contract. While in the description of a chamber '(...) for the Lords Guildmasters or Commoners' (*'dla Panów Cechmistrzów albo Pospołstwa'*), the former seems obvious, but it seems illogical to connect them with the Commoners, understood as medium-wealth citizens with full civil rights [43]. Nevertheless, in Krobia's town records, one can find entries such as 23.05.1770, stating that the decree passed two days earlier 'against citizens harming' (*'przeciwko obywatelom szkody czyniącym'*) was 'read in front of all the commoners at the Town Hall and from the commoners unanimously accepted, confirmed, and approbated' (*'przed całym Pospólstwem na Ratuszu czytany y od tegoż Pospólstwa jednostaynie przyięty, potwierdzony y approbowany'*) [29]. The interpretation of the spatial layout written in the Contract with the separation of a common chamber for guild masters and commoners becomes more apparent when we assume that Krobia was a medium-sized episcopal town when the town hall was erected, which in the literature for the Greater Poland area is equated in character and function to a private town [37, 44]. Piotr Miodunka and Jan Ptaśnik even emphasize the very great importance of the commoners as the controlling and resolution-making body of the town, which was characteristic of small towns in parts of Poland [45, 38], while the presence of commoners in the municipal authorities as guild representatives was so frequent that it was considered by Jacek Wiesiołowski as one of the criteria for classifying the size of a town as medium-sized [46]. As explained by Ptaśnik [38], already in the mid-16th century in the Kingdom, the size of the council intended to represent the merchants and craftsmen in the city, i.e., the council of merchants and guild elders, was set at a maximum of 40 people in total, to whom royal decrees gave special supervisory powers over the municipal authorities. At the same time, by the adopted law, the state (order) of merchants and craftsmen, jointly constituting the commoners, formed a municipality (communitas) [38].

‘The Hall for the Commons’ was a collective space accessible to the general burghers [38]. Therefore, it can be regarded as a vast hallway - a waiting room before the courtroom and the hall of guildmasters and commoners on the first floor.

Paradoxically, the best-documented source is the prison function of the town hall [25]. 'Fortress' - and therefore, a prison cell is one of the elements specified in the Contract. Entries confirming this appear relatively frequently in the preserved documents. An example is the entry in the Council Book made in 1750 concerning the verdict of the mayor's court [29]. Once again, the prison function of the town hall also appears in the entry in the Commissary Book of 1767, with the mention of the town hall as a kind of information center also appearing there: 'The present Ordinance that each Citizen should be informed without delay during dry days close to the day of Saint Matthew, on the Town Hall is recommended to be published' (*‘Teraznieyszy zaś Dekret aby Każdemu z Obywatelów był wiadomy niezwłocznie pod Czas suchych dni blisko przed S. Mateuszem przypadaiących, na Ratuszu publikować się zaleca’*) [28]. Information about the use of the town hall doors as a notice board appears in town records reasonably regularly.

Another interesting discovery is associated with the prison function. Krobia did not have a pillory, and the 'town hall threshold' was used as a place for the public to inflict corporal punishment. Two verdicts of the vogt court from December 1764 are a case in point. Both concern multiple thefts (in the second case, a padlock from the town hall was stolen, among other things), in the second case, in combination with defamation. In the first case, '(...) the court ordered them to be publicly punished on the Town Hall's threshold with plagues of 100' (*‘sąd ią tedy rozkazał skarać publicznie na Progu Ratuszowym plagami 100’*) [30]. In the second one, in turn, '(...) the court first of all punished the theft, as it should be punished by the authorities, deciding that it should be publicly punished on the Town Hall's threshold with 50 plagues, and for disrespecting the Honourable Lady Mayor with another 50 plagues' (*‘sąd nayprzód zatęż kradzież, iako zwierzchności należy złe karać, decyduie ażeby cienta była na Progu Ratuszowym plagami 50. Zaś za niesławienie Sławet. Pani Burmistrzowy drugie plag 50.’*) [30]. Equally interestingly, according to the source records, punishments were sometimes administered in the town hall. Such was the case on July 21, 1777, when a case that today we would describe as a hooligan attack on a townsman from Osieczna, Valentine Wesołowski, was tried. One of the points of the verdict reads: 'Łukasz Foytowski, who mutually is not able to pay a fine, will also receive a hundred plagues at the Town Hall' (*‘Łukasz Foytowski że wzaiemnie nie iest sposobny do zapłacenia basarunku, także plag sto odbierze na Sali Ratuszney’*) [30].

The Town Hall in Krobia should be classified as a town hall with a commercial function [7]. However, it is not the typical 'commercial town hall' mentioned by Ewa Narolewska [47]. The author distinguishes between 'office' town halls, characteristic of free and so-called tribunal towns, and 'commercial' town halls, with a vestigial administrative part, typical of private towns. Meanwhile, the town hall in Krobia is an intermediate type - with a compact body, a substantial and (for a generally modest functional program) relatively extensive administrative part, but simultaneously containing a commercial function. The Contract mentions butcher's shops as part of the functional program. Their importance may be underlined by the guild masters of the butchers' and shoemakers' guilds, who were present when the Contract was signed. The first information on their use was found in the minutes of the Vogt court of June 3, 1767. At that time, a case was being considered for '(...) an insult made publicly at the Town Hall by the meat butcher's shops (...)' (*‘zniewagę uczynioną publicznie na Ratuszu przy mięsnych jatkach’*) [30]. So far, however, it has not been possible to recognize whether 'butcher's shops' in this case means only stalls or whether they were treated in the Contract as a form of mental abbreviation and were intended for trading in various types of products. It has also not been possible to establish how they were managed - were they leased to specific vendors, or did they remain

under the management of the guilds? Attempts to analyze the surviving guild books of Krobia have also failed to answer these questions 'The Book of Pupils of the Blacksmith's Guild' [48], 'Accounts of the Butchers' Guild in Krobia from 1786-1855' [49], 'Accounts of the Butchers' Guild in Krobia from 1796-1837' [50].

Like in Kórnik [40], there is no mention of a municipal weighing house in the case of the town hall in Krobia. Such a facility is also not mentioned in the town records analyzed or preserved guild documents. The only mention of such a facility can be found in the monograph by Miałkowski [24], which, however, refers to a much later period and, in addition, does not provide any sources for such information - thus remaining unreliable. There are, however, preserved records describing attempts made (unsuccessfully) by the town instigator Łukasz Pluciński to agree with the guild of millers on measures [29]. Perhaps this means that Krobia had no municipal scales.

External appearance reconstruction

The location of the 18th-century town hall has been established based on an analysis of the 1793 town plan and appears to be finally confirmed by the archaeological research results [35]. The superimposition of the archival plan [11] with the results of the excavations and the effect of the present reconstruction indicates that the remains of the northwest corner of the building were found. Thus, this would have been similar to the much earlier examples in Wrocław and Kraków, where the center of the market square was allocated for commercial purposes, and the space of authority was separated from its outermost part [6].

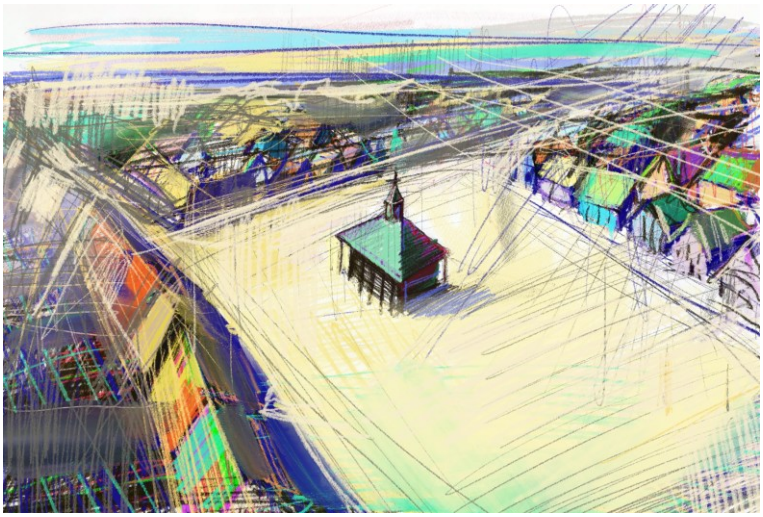

Fig. 3. Reconstruction of the location and body of the town hall from the first half of the 17th century

The method of finding the facility and its precise location is not in doubt. On the one hand, we have Klinkowski's description [34], according to which 'the foundation consists only of fieldstones and clay, and this is laid right on the ground' (*'fundament składa się tylko z kamieni polnych i gliny i to położonych tuż na ziemi'*), which is confirmed by the results of archaeological works [35].

It was assumed that window and door openings were arranged on the rhythmically spaced axes of the façade. Still, given the cost and availability of window glass at the time, it was assumed that windows were only installed where necessary. Based on an analysis of reference facilities (Sulmierzyce, Zduny, and others), it was presumed that their location was not due to an aesthetic concept of façade layout. Still, it was a result of the floor plans. This

supposition seems to be confirmed by the contract provision: 'A hall for the commune also with windows' (*'Sala dla gminu z oknami także'*), suggesting that windows were scarce in this investment. At the same time, window glass was already standard in Poland from the seventeenth century onwards [51], so it should instead be assumed that these savings were not definite.

Fig. 4. Reconstruction of the town hall block from the first half of the 17th century. View from the southern side

There were doubts about the definition of wall construction, mainly due to seemingly disparate information in the source documents. On the one hand, the Contract states: 'with cladding on the sill plates' (*'z obiciem na przyciesiach'*) [26], suggesting a timber frame construction. Klinkowski [34] confirmed this, mentioning that 'the town hall was built as a half-timber' (*'w reglówkę zbudowany ratusz'*). At the same time, further on, the same author writes that 'the town hall is erected from hewn logs' [34], suggesting a log frame or post-and-plank structure. A similar description from an 18th-century source concerning the church in Brody Poznańskie was quoted by Jankowski [9]. After the analysis, it was assumed that the town hall in Krobia could have had a double-wall structure similar to the abovementioned church and quite characteristic of Greater Poland of that time, for which Jankowski postulates the use of the name quasi-corner timbered-framework construction [9]. It is characterized by the presence of two independent carpentry systems in the structure of the perimeter walls: log and post-and-plank [9].

Mentioned in the Contract of 1732, 'a small tower of one space, in which there is to be an increase of ells according to the proportion in addition to the curb,' i.e., a single-space tower, was a relatively small structure. Kowalczyk emphasizes its function in town halls [7], writing about the deep-rooted symbolism of municipal and judicial authorities. The most popular solution was assumed, i.e., a tower in the middle of the roof [7]. The helmet issue is a highly complex problem, which is explored, for example, by Zygmunt Łuniewicz [52]. Thus, having no clues but only a vast number of unverifiable possibilities, it was decided to opt for the most straightforward and, at the same time, frequently occurring form of a regular pyramid on a square base, similar, for example, to the crowning of the tower of the town hall in Rostarzewo.

Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the town hall block from the first half of the 17th century. View from the southwest side

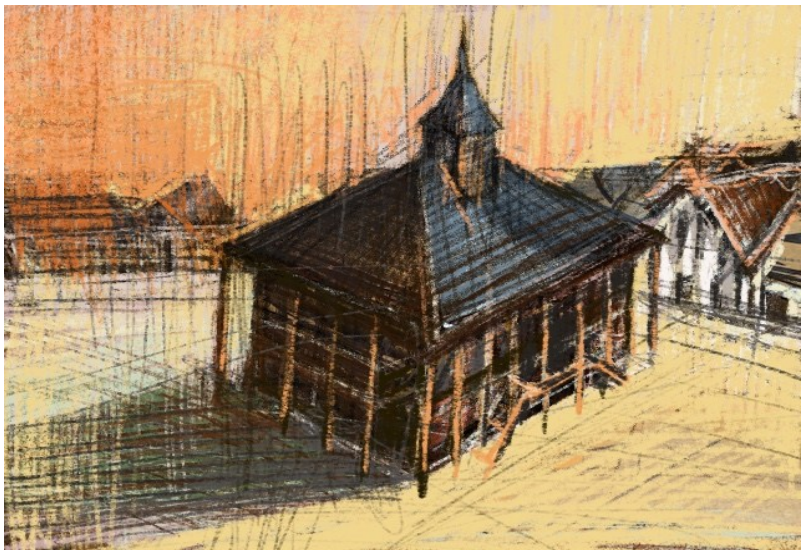

Fig. 6. Reconstruction of the town hall block from the first half of the 17th century. View from the western side

A simple hipped roof was adopted. This element is not described in any way in the source materials discovered, so the examples of Sulmierzyce and Bielsko Podlaskie were used to reconstruct it. A vast arcade supported by a row of columns surrounding the building on four sides, inspired by the town halls in Sławków and Zduny [7], and in terms of form, also by the town hall in Sulmierzyce, was adopted.

The description 'Around with porches in balustrades prepare' (*'wkoło z gankami w balasiki nagotowane'*), it also seems problematic. According to the 'Old Polish Dictionary' definition, a 'balas' is a pole, pillar, or column [53]. Therefore, the diminutive form 'balasik' can suggest a more minor form, such as a small column or baluster. This is all the more true since M. Arct's 'Old Polish Dictionary' already gives a handrail or balustrade as one of the definitions

of 'balas' [54]. On the other hand, according to the same source, a 'porch' is a flat roof, a terrace on or in front of a house, or, in another sense, a covered entrance or arcade, a porch, or a vestibule [55]. However, finding a potential reference to the town hall building in these meanings is difficult. On the other hand, according to M. Arct's 'Illustrated Polish Dictionary' [56], a balcony or gallery on the first floor was referred to as a 'porch.' This was the case with the 18th-century town hall in Koźmin Wielkopolski, visible in the drawing from 1792, published in 'Przyjaciel Ludu' from 1839 [57] (but also the façade of the town hall in Poznań) - and this was also the form adopted in the attempt to reconstruct the town hall in Krobia.

Internal layout reconstruction

While the names of rooms (or their sections) stated in the Contract are clear, their function is not always obvious. A similar problem concerns spatial relationships.

The term "fortress" used in the Contract refers to a prison cell, according to the Old Polish Dictionary [58]. In addition, the correctness of this interpretation is evidenced by, for example, the numerous previously cited sentences of the mayor and Vogt courts in Krobia.

The term 'passage through the town hall' was taken literally as a transverse corridor passing through the building on the ground floor. However, unlike the town hall in Rostarzewo [59], it could not function as a `gateway' to control transported goods. Due to the small size and location of the town hall, it does not serve as a 'transport shortcut.' Therefore, the passage through the town hall in Krobia must have been used for internal communication. It was assumed that the butcher's shop and the prison cell opened onto it. It was also believed there could have been a second entrance to the Great Hall.

The phrase 'large chamber with a vestibule' raises the most significant doubts in reconstructing the ground floor plan. It was assumed that if the room had an entrance from a passageway (a kind of hallway), the 'vestibule' leading to the room would not be specified separately. In connection with the definition of the hallway as an element connecting the interior of the building with its surroundings, both in the physical, social, and symbolic sense [60], it was assumed that such a provision in the Contract means that the great hall had a separate entrance from the outside. If so, the question arose as to whether this hallway was separated from the internal structure of the town hall or whether it was an added element. The description of a similar section in the Gołańcza castle, included in the monograph by Tomasz Olszacki and Artur Różański [61], was of great help in solving this dilemma. It describes a residential complex with a hallway, a chamber, and a living area. The authors describe the hallway as a connecting room but also as a room providing access to the combustion chamber of the fireplace. The chamber, on the other hand, is described as the storage area of the hallway. Considering the Contract for the town hall in Krobia: 'Downstairs is a large chamber with a vestibule and a chimney, as well as a hayloft and a fortress by the chamber' (*'na dole izba wielka z sionką z kominem y komorą sienną z twierdzą wedle tey komory'*) - it can be concluded that we were dealing with a highly similar complex. The only question that remains open is whether the mention of the cell refers exclusively to its location next to the hay chamber or whether it also means a connecting passageway.

Zdzisław Noga writes that the office and archive were often in separate chambers [41]. In the case of the town hall in Krobia, there is no mention of such rooms, so it can be assumed that one of the chambers mentioned fulfilled this role. Most likely, it was the court chamber. It is also possible that court sessions were held there. Hence, it was assumed that it had to be large enough to accommodate the mayor and members of the city council as well as the clerk and other participants in mayoral or Vogt council proceedings. It also had to have a cupboard or chest for storing the town registers. It was also assumed that it should be heated due to its function, which implies that it should be located by the chimney. The courtroom itself, located

on the first floor, seems to be a very typical solution; a similar solution was used, for example, in Zamość [62].

It is interesting to translate the commercial function of the town hall into its spatial layout. Considering the number of closing forms specified in the Contract ('a butcher's shop on one side with doors, shutters, and gates'), it was decided that they must be open both for passage through the town hall and outside the building.

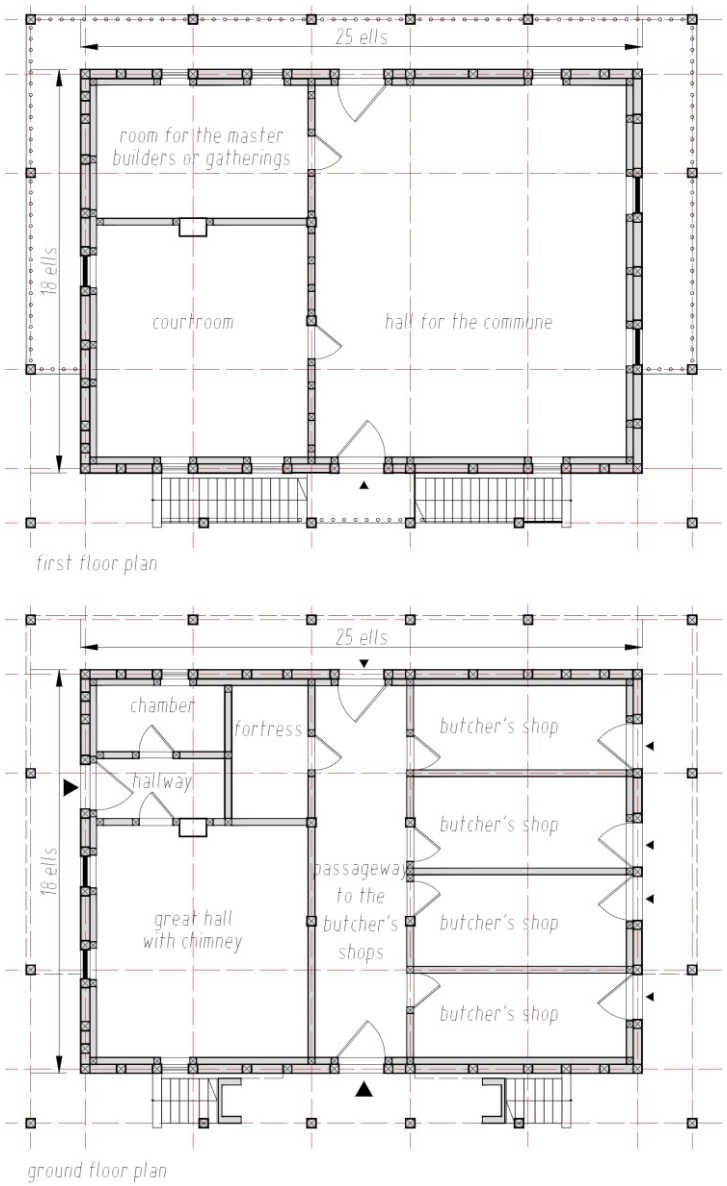

Fig. 7. Attempt to reconstruct the plans of the town hall building

The reconstruction reference parameters for selected structures or source materials are listed in the table below.

Table 1. Summary of reference parameters for reconstructing the wooden town hall in Krobia

Element	Description	Reference [source]
Location	Approximately 10 meters south and 15 meters west of the geometric center of the market, with the long side parallel to the southern wall of the market.	[11], [35]
External dimensions	Length: 25 ells (approx. 15m). Width: 18 ells (approx. 10.8m). Height: 11 ells per two floors (approx. 6.6m)	description in the Contract from 1723 [26], [11], [35]
Type of wooden structure	Double-wall construction (quasi-corner timbered-framework construction)	[33], [34], [8]
Type of foundation	Shallow foundation made of erratic stones on clay mortar	[34], [35]
Geometry of the block	Rectangular plan with a four-sided arcade and a centrally located single-space (single-story) tower	description in the Contract from 1723 [26] town hall in Rostarzewo town hall in Sulmierzyce
Geometry and roof covering	Hipped roof with a pitch of approx. 50 degrees, with roof hatches covered with wood shingles	[24],[34] town hall in Rostarzewo town hall in Koźmin Wlkp.
Geometry of the town hall tower	Single-space tower with a pyramid-shaped helmet on a quadrangular base	town hall in Rostarzewo town hall in Grabów [7]
Location of the tower	In the center of the roof, in the center of the plan	town hall in Sulmierzyce town hall in Sławków town hall in Koźmin Wlkp. town hall in Rostarzewo town hall in Kórnik town hall in Grabów
Arcades	Four-sided arcade supported by a row of columns	[7] town hall in Sulmierzyce town hall in Sławków town hall in Zduny
Functional layout of the ground floor	The layout of rooms according to the contract description: the great hall, hallway with chimney, chamber, fortress (prison), the passageway to the butcher's shops on one side (butcher's shops as a functional part of the town hall)	description in the Contract from 1723 [26, p. 390] Castle in Gołańcza
Functional layout of the first floor	The layout of rooms according to the contract description: two chambers – a courtroom and a room for the master builders or gatherings, and a hall for the commune	description in the Contract from 1723 [26]
Walk-through vestibule/hallway	A hallway that is aligned with the shorter side of the building and divides the ground floor into two equal parts	description in the Contract from 1723 [26] town hall in Bielsk Podlaski
Entrance to the first floor	External, doubled staircase placed symmetrically in the front façade	town hall in Sulmierzyce
Galleries	Gallery surrounding the town hall on three sides on the upper floor	town hall in Koźmin Wielkopolski town hall in Poznań town hall in Sulmierzyce [7]
Entrance to the building (location about the site plan	Entrances on the ground floor and first floor, centrally located in the longitudinal façade	town hall in Sulmierzyce
Division of the façade (axis layout)	The divisions were adopted in proportion to the size of the building. Main façade: 5 axes, entrance in the middle, two window axes on each	town hall in Rostarzew town hall in Sulmierzyce

	side of the entrance in the longer wall; side façade: 3 axes	
Proportions and size of window openings	Typical for the wooden architecture of that period and resulting from the modular division of the wooden façade of the building	town hall in Kórnik town hall in Grabów town hall in Zduny town hall in Sulmierzyce
Proportions and size of door openings	Typical for the wooden architecture of that period and resulting from the modular division of the wooden façade of the building	town hall in Grabów town hall in Zduny town hall in Sulmierzyce

Discussion

The presented reconstruction attempt raises as many research questions as it provides answers. At the current research stage, Kacper Szeląg's biography consists of fragmentary information. He was a citizen of Kobylin, and his municipal records show that he was there until the early 1760s [63]. In 1723, he was already a master, which means that considering the subsequent stages of learning, he must have been at least 25-35 years old [64], which may suggest that he was born between 1685 and 1695 at the latest. He is also mentioned in the records of the Poznań consistory, where he is recorded as protector of the town of Kobylin in 1727 [65]. The question remains as to why the townspeople of Krobia reached out to an "outside" contractor. In 1714, the blacksmith's guild in Krobia brought together blacksmiths and carpenters (Brothers of the Thesarian Trade) [66], wheelwrights, coopers, locksmiths, and coppersmiths [48]. The townspeople seemed relatively self-sufficient in constructing residential and farm buildings. The answer could be Kacper Szeląg's previous experience in creating more significant public or sacred buildings - however, this has not yet been confirmed. Therefore, there is a need for a deeper examination of the type and territorial scope of Szeląg's construction activities in the field of Baroque wooden architecture - so far, very poorly researched and constituting an essential element of the architectural heritage of Greater Poland.

The research that has been carried out still leaves some ambiguities regarding the function of minor elements of the building described in the Contract in cases where the scarcity of comparative material makes it impossible to relate to reference buildings. This is the case, for example, with the incomprehensible function of the porches surrounding the upper floor. The inner communication system and the elementary functional program of the first floor make it most likely that they did not fulfill a communication role, which would be the simplest explanation.

Due to the lack of preserved information about other constructions by Kaspar Szeląg that could serve as a reference for the spatial or stylistic decisions made, the form adopted in the reconstruction of the town hall in Krobia is a compilation of references to a set of comparable buildings but with different techniques and periods of construction or from the same period but with a different function. This makes it impossible to assign any individual stylistic features to the building.

The reference building, a late wooden Baroque town hall, has been preserved in Poland. It is much smaller than the town hall in Krobia and, therefore, has a simpler functional and spatial structure than the one described. At the same time, other descriptions or representations of the analyzed town hall have not been preserved, and this particular description is the most accurate possible record of its planned form and function, so its reconstruction cannot be made more detailed, and none of the presented solutions is fully indisputable. However, the field research carried out in the town hall area confirms the validity of the assumptions made, at least

in terms of urban planning, without providing any additional information on the architecture of the building.

Conclusions

The study of historical architecture is not limited to design or inventory documentation or stylistic or morphological analysis. The accidental discovery of a contract record and the attempt to reconstruct the building based on it made it possible to explain the mystery of the discoveries made at the excavation site in the market square in Krobia, which would not have been possible without the possibility of unambiguously identifying the dimensions of the no longer existing wooden town hall and knowledge of the technology used to build it.

The case study confirms that there is still a great deal of information in the archives, especially in documents from local centers, which is valuable for developing science. In this situation, the progressive digitization of all collections in the state archives is proving to be an activity of fundamental importance for research into historical architecture and urbanism. Access to the digitized collections of documents of Krobia in the State Archives in Poznań has significantly facilitated the search for their content describing the space of the 18th-century Greater Poland town.

Therefore, it is worth bearing in mind that in these digitized local archives, there is an enormous potential for knowledge, which is essential for the conservation of individual sites and areas, especially in the case of centers whose building and cartographic archives were destroyed during the war in Poland or whose location is unknown. In a situation where, in smaller settlements, no archives relating to the earliest forms of buildings have survived (or have never been created), the information contained in 'indirect' sources from that period can become very helpful in reconstructing historical spatial forms. This reconstruction can be carried out just as effectively using the verbal as the graphic record but requires researchers to have a more extensive comparative base of objects and reference forms for a complete interpretation of spatial phenomena described only verbally.

As a consolation, the wooden regional architecture proved to be so repetitive in form and readable in function that it can, with a high degree of probability, be reconstructed based on the very general guidelines contained in the verbal record.

This text contributes to further research into the function and form of the Baroque town hall in the Polish territories and the work of Kaspar Szeląg as an undiscovered and underestimated builder of Greater Poland.

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Received: March 28, 2025
Accepted: October 30, 2025