

NEMYRIV IN THE PODOLIA – A FORGOTTEN URBAN EXPERIMENT OF THE LATE 18TH CENTURY

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In contemporary Ukraine, there are two towns named Nemyriv. One is located in the Lviv Oblast, the other in Podolia, Vinnytsia Oblast. It is the latter, so far wholly unstudied, that was the subject of a radical planimetric transformation in late 18th century. Some measurement plans found among archival materials have now made it possible to have a closer look into Nemyriv's fascinating history of town planning experimentation.

The first attempt at systematising what is known of Nemyriv was Lucyna Stadnicka's series of articles entitled "Niemirów Podolski kiedyś i dziś" (The past and present of Nemyriv in Podolia).¹ Near the town in its shape at the time, Stadnicka noticed evident remains of trenches and bulwarks which she considered evidence that the settlement once served defensive purposes. However, recent archaeological studies seem to suggest this gigantic stronghold (nearly 1000 ha in area) dates back to the times of Scythians, approximately 7–5th centuries B.C.,² and therefore could not be in any way associated with the more modern history of the town.

In mid-16th century Nemyriv was owned by the Czetwertyński family. Later it became property of the House of Zbaraski, then the House of Wiśniowiecki. In the years 1670–1672 Nemyriv was visited by Ulryk Werdum, who described his stay as a fairly pleasant experience: "*It used to be a charming little town, surrounded by an embankment with wooden gates. From the south it is protected by a lake, on whose bank a nice castle stands. The papal church is made of stone, the Ruthenian one of wood and the town hall is wooden too. The town is now an inherited property of Mr Żabnicki.*"³

In 1737, in the Nemyriv castle Józef Potocki received visitors from three warring countries: Russia, Austria and Turkey. The following two-month talks

proved unsuccessful, but the very fact of the so-called Nemyriv Assembly being convened there is testimony to the importance of the town at the time.

There is no cartographic record of the spatial arrangement of the early settlement in Nemyriv's present location. Looking at topographic evidence and the natural environment around the town, as well as the surviving street grid and the remains of the bulwark, one might hypothesise about the overall spatial pattern of the ancient settlement (Fig. 1).

Major changes in the arrangement and architecture of Nemyriv came to be when the city became property of Grand Chamberlain of the Crown, lieutenant-general of the Army of the Crown, member of Parliament and an ardent collector Wincenty Potocki. According to surviving documentation, in 1771 he inherited from his childless brother Franciszek a major sum of money and the Nemyriv region in the Braclaw Province, including the towns of Nemyriv and Kowalówka, as well as 60 villages and manors.⁴ He also owned lands in the Zbaraż Principality, Sandomierz Province and in Lithuania. Wincenty Potocki was an ardent collector of art, a hobby which took much of his time and money.⁵ His biographers report his many trips to Paris and his delight in the city's cultural and artistic life. Among Parisian Poles he was considered a man of progressive views, though one of his acquaintances said about him: "*full of reproach for his fellow Poles, all truly Polish traditions seem to him most crooked*".⁶ This opinion can give us some clue as to the reason for Potocki's city planning ambitions in Nemyriv and his large scale urban experiment. It was his way of expressing his enthusiasm for western European cultural trends and of adopting them in the Polish eastern frontier. It was not without reason that in his article about Nemyriv Roman Aftanazy called Potocki "*the greatest benefactor of this town*".⁷

¹ L. Stadnicka, *Niemirów Podolski niegdyś i dziś*, "Gazeta Lubelska", 1884, No. 219–223.

² *Nemyrivske gorodyšče*, Encyklopedia Ukrainy, Vol. 7, Kiev 2010, p. 366–367.

³ See: X. Liske, *Cudzoziemcy w Polsce*, Lviv 1876, p. 113.

⁴ Polski Słownik Biograficzny (PSB) [*Polish Biographical Dictionary*], Vol. 28/2, issue 117, Wrocław 1985, p. 228.

⁵ See: X. Liske, p. 249.

⁶ PSB, Vol. 28/2, issue 117, p. 227.

⁷ R. Aftanazy, *Dawne województwo Braclawskie, Materiały do dziejów rezydencji*, Vol. XA, Warsaw 1991, p. 191.

It was without doubt Wincenty Potocki's deliberate choice to make Nemyriv his main residence in the south-east of Poland. Several factors contributed to this decision: the adjacency of principal farm lands, the presence of town infrastructure, mild climate and picturesque landscapes of the Podolia region. In his travels, Potocki was eager to explore new economic trends, and incorporated them upon his return in the management of his lands. For example, he initiated large-scale production of potash in Nemyriv.

The western inspirations and creative ambitions of Wincenty Potocki eventually caused him to undertake the task of reconstructing Nemyriv according to the latest town planning trends of the late 18th century, a time when classicism not only reigned in architectural stylistics, but was also being introduced to urban design. But it was not only architectural considerations that prompted the great reconstruction. The project was primarily aimed at creating a complex of commercial facilities that would cater to the town's needs and ensure production of goods to be sold on external markets. The manufacturing plants included a tannery which produced "English quality" leather, a broadcloth manufacturing facility, a weapon factory (which manufactured sabres and rifles), a hat manufacturer, a percale factory and other production plants.

In 1779, king Stanisław August granted the town a right to organise 8 more fairs – 5 week-long and 3 two-week-long,⁸ which means there was a need for developing local craftsmanship and both retail and wholesale trade infrastructure. One can infer from this that by the end of 1770s, the town had already gone through a major spatial transformation process, and a far-reaching programme for developing social, industrial and housing architecture had already been implemented. To better provide for experienced foreign masters, Potocki had several dozen identical buildings erected along the main street.

The difficulty maintaining the quality of manufacture and problems selling the products soon put an end to the economic zeal of the landlord, and in 1785 Potocki sold the percale factory to Henri Amiet'u and Co. who demanded customs duty exemption on goods shipped to Russia and Turkey.⁹

The new planning efforts quickly bore the first results. According to a Prussian traveller, lieutenant engineer Hammard, already in 1783 Nemyriv could boast a well-developed infrastructure. There were nearly 400 houses, several market squares, inns with stables and four churches: one Greek Catholic, two Roman Catholic and one Protestant. Mentioning the town to be the property of one of the richest noblemen of Ukraine, Hammard notes that the owner's castle stood on a high granite hill and housed a textile factory, which in 1784 employed 120 workers. At the time, the plant was managed by a German named Miller.¹⁰

Sadly, no materials survive that would offer detail of the original design for the reconstruction of Nemyriv. There are, however, three measurement plans of the city which survived to our time and can give us some general idea about the matter. There is also reason to believe that Wincenty Potocki actively participated in the transformation process. The example set by king Stanisław August Poniatowski might have prompted some of the most affluent nobles to do so.

The earliest of the available measurement plans of Nemyriv is dated 1784¹¹ (Fig. 2). Drawn simplistically by Captain H. De Baver (Bover?), the plan offers no detailed key as to the buildings it represents. There are only a few inscriptions regarding the most prominent edifices within the town's architecture, notably the castle ("le chateau"), the fair ("la foire"), the parade ground ("place de parade"), the general headquarters ("quartier general"), two suburbs ("fauxbourg Sloboda" and "fauxbourg Stelluvca"), and the road to Kowalówka. To the north, the Jewish cemetery is marked ("sepulture des juifs"), which might indicate that Jews accounted for most of the local population at the time.

The map was by no means a design, but being the earliest cartographic source regarding Nemyriv, it is a fairly accurate testimony of the compositional pattern used by an unknown designer. It is probably the closest representation of the original design, which has not survived to our times.

It is possible that the transformation of the town was entrusted to a French expert, which might indirectly explain the French key to the map. One can speculate whether captain H. de Baver might have

⁸ V. K. Guldman, *Pamjatniki stariny Podolii. Materialy dlja sostavlenija archeologičeskoj karty Podol'skoj gubernii*, Kamieniec Podolski 1901, p. 108.

⁹ T. Korzon, *Wewnętrzne dzieje Polski za Stanisława Augusta (1764–1794)*, vol. II, Kraków 1883, p. 240.

¹⁰ O. Vintoniak, *Ukrajina w opysach zachidniojevropskich podorožnykiv drugoji polovyny XVIII stolittja*, Lviv-Munich 1995, p. 83.

¹¹ Russian State Military and Historical Archives, f. WUA, d. 22217, l.1, "Plan de la Ville Nimmerov en Ukraine Polonoise où il y avoies le quartier general de l'armee Russie", 1784, Fait du Capitaine H. de Baver (Bover?).

been the author of the original design for Nemyriv. Even if he was not an architect or military engineer, it is quite indisputable that the landlord himself contributed to the transformation process.

An important feature of the 1784 plan was the information on topography, locations and buildings situated on the former castle grounds. The choice of Nemyriv as the place of experiment was no doubt inspired by the magnificent view to the north west from the elongated hill. This kind of topography was beneficial both for the castle and the town, situated a little higher. In 1784, the former castle grounds were elongated in shape and their architecture was irregular, composed of several buildings. Of the fortifications, the plan only shows two symmetrical, oval bastions. There are no other markings of any kind of defensive structure, though even today there are traces of a former moat that probably separated the outer yard from most of the castle ground. It cannot be ruled out therefore that the castle used to be structurally divided into a small core at the tip of the cape protruding into the water and the rest of the land by the castle gates.

The 1784 plan is interesting for the spatial arrangement and composition it presents. The central point of the arrangement is the castle, which, even though it had long lost its defensive function, retained its architectural structure. The straight main street connected the castle with old city gates on the hill, which were incorporated in the embankment that half-circled the town from the outside. The street was the main compositional axis between the castle and the gates. Along this axis, closer to the castle, commercial buildings were situated (marked “la foire” on the plan), with a semi-enclosed yard surrounded by five symmetrical structures. The yard was partly open to a big, representative rectangular square, proportioned approximately 1:1.5. Our attention is drawn to the axis of urban architecture beyond the old city limits, extended southwards as a wide street, with around fifty symmetrical residential buildings on both sides. The plan shows arable grounds where Bolesław Potocki’s palace and park were to be built later on.

Another plan of Nemyriv, dated 1788 and bearing Russian inscriptions¹² (Fig. 3), is a testimony of the time when Russian army was stationed in the town. Contrary to the 1784 plan, this document is highly detailed and the graphics are much better quality. Also, it contains the names of the authors – Russian offic-

ers and engineers Fedor Korotkov and Pavel Avakov. There is a detailed key, with 17 points. Five of the town’s industrial plants (the percale factory, a water mill, brickyards, breweries, the tannery), marked with letters H to M, are described as property of Count Potocki. Comparing this document with the earlier one allows one to track the architectural transformation that took place in between. In the old town, one can even spot the new palace of W. Potocki, accompanied by a small garden.

The level of detail of the 1788 plan makes it possible to recreate the way Nemyriv must have looked at the time (Fig. 4). The changes it had undergone cast doubt on the measurement character of the earlier plan, which was probably more of a design, since apart from the existing parts of the town, it depicted the envisaged ones, e.g. the straight rows of identical houses along the two streets beyond the old town – one street extending from the main axis of the town and the other that led from the gates to the north-east, to Kowalówka. The latter street was crowned at its end with a big classicist church in early 19th century (Fig. 5).

What happened next in the history of the town can be traced on the third plan of Nemyriv titled “Plan of the Polish town of Nemyriv”,¹³ signed by major-general Nikolai Berdyaev (Fig. 6). It is not dated, but the content suggests it must have been produced later than the two discussed above. From the reference to a “Polish town” it can be inferred that the plan was developed in early 1790s, shortly before the second partition of Poland. This is further evidenced by the key, which also contains 17 items, but differs in details. The key mentions that count W. Potocki’s palace was being demolished by the owner himself, which allows us to pinpoint fairly reliably the date of the plan to be 1794. From the key one can also learn that the count still lived in the palace at the time. Other evidence of the later origin of the plan compared to the other two is information on the denominational affiliations of the churches. While the second plan had two Greek Catholic churches marked, the third identifies them both as Orthodox. This was because in accordance with an ordinance by czarina Catherine II, the process of liquidation of the union had just begun in the south west of the Russian Empire, reaching its peak in 1793, after the second partition of Poland. According to the documents of the Podolia consistory, within just two years (1794–1795), in Braclaw Governorate alone,

¹² RSMHA, f. 349, o. 19, d. 4347, “*Plan pol’skago mestečka Nemirova*”, 1788.

¹³ RSMHA, f. BYA, d. 22218, “*Plan pol’skago mestečka Nemirova*”, undated (around 18th cent.).

1,295,471 people converted to Orthodoxy, including former Uniats of both sexes, together with 1442 churches.¹⁴

The absence of reliable evidence regarding the location of the first palace of Wincenty Potocki caused researchers to place it where the magnificent palace of Bolesław Potocki and Maria Shcherbatova came to be in later years. A renowned expert Roman Aftanazy argued that all palaces in Nemyriv stood in the same spot first selected by Wincenty Potocki.¹⁵ In fact, cartographic sources rather suggest that later palaces were situated beyond the old town limits, on the territory which in late 18th century was still rural area.

The third plan of the town specifies the location of sacred architecture. Its arrangement was governed by the general planning composition and none of the churches could be said to dominate the skyline. Only the Lutheran church, because of the count's affiliations with the denomination, was situated in close adjacency to Potocki's dwelling, and was founded by him.¹⁶

The old Roman Catholic church was situated between the market square and the castle. It was modest in size (not even 15 metres long) and most probably made of wood. The three Orthodox churches marked on the town plan included one on a hill within the old town and two smaller ones in the suburban Sztyłówka. Since the location of the big church, formerly Greek Catholic, clearly does not correspond with the orthogonal grid of the new spatial arrangement of the town, it can be presumed to have been built long before the urban transformation started. The Jewish synagogue stood on the upper edge of the old town, west from the market square, among a rather chaotic cluster of Jewish houses. In the second town plan, the building is clearly marked as a square with two symmetrical side annexes.

Nemyriv's annexation by the Russian Empire caused Wincenty Potocki to sell his lands to Szczęśny Potocki in 1802 and leave the country. Under the new ownership, local building initiatives assumed a more chaotic character. And while the fame of the local craft was still alive in contemporary mentions of the town, from then on Nemyriv's small enterprises faced a gradual decline.¹⁷

The 19th century was marked by some dynamic developments in the town's architectural history. While the main street retained its role as the main axis of the urban scheme, the architecture changed according to the whims and tastes of the local population. The repetitive rhythm of identical houses was soon lost as a result of some being demolished and some new ones erected. In the early 20th century, the architecture along the main street had already acquired a rather chaotic appearance, which was characteristic of most Podolian towns, and only here and there was it possible to discern traces of regularity characteristic of the original design (Fig. 7).

Palace architecture returned to Nemyriv brought back by Bolesław Potocki, with active assistance from architect Franciszek (Franz) Miechowicz (1783–1852), a prominent professor at the Krzemieniec School and later dean of the Faculty of Mathematics at St. Vladimir University of Kiev. After he was dismissed from his university position for political reasons, he went on to design a number of buildings in Nemyriv, notably the new palace for count Bolesław Potocki.¹⁸ The construction site earmarked for this purpose was an undeveloped area beyond the old town area. On a 1866 plan of the town, the palace itself is not marked. There is only a general inscription naming the entire complex as the "palace and park of Countess Stroganov"¹⁹ (Fig. 8).

The second half of the 19th century was a period of rapid development for Nemyriv.²⁰ The town architect Franciszek Miechowicz designed two more Orthodox churches – the Holy Trinity Church on the left from the road leading southward from the Catholic church (not preserved) and a church for a female monastery, to the north, halfway from Nemyriv to Kowalówka (also not preserved). A new Orthodox church built in the Neo-Byzantine style in 1881²¹ served as a compositional contrast to the Catholic church. This contrast is clearly visible in the schematic town plan from the early 20th century²² (Fig. 9).

In the years 1894–1917, Bolesław's palace was replaced by the count's granddaughter Maria Shcherbatova (born Stroganova) with a new magnificent Neo-Classical edifice designed by architects G. Griner

¹⁴ N. I. Petrov, *Podolija. Istoričeskoje opasanije*, SPb, 1891, p. 212.

¹⁵ R. Aftanazy, op. cit., p. 195.

¹⁶ PSB, Vol. 28/2, issue 117, p. 228.

¹⁷ T. Święcki, *Opis starożytnej Polski*, Vol. 2, Warsaw 1928, p. 20.

¹⁸ G. O. Šenk, *Narysy z istorii Pol'schi. Poljaki w Nemyrowi*, Vinnycja 2008, p. 54.

¹⁹ Vinnytsia Oblast State Archives (VOSA), f. 39, o. 4, sp. 1, a. 125. "Plan m. Niemirova grafini Marii Stroganovoj s pokazaniem wykuplonych krest'janskich usadeb. Sostavljen v 1866 godu".

²⁰ L. Stadnicka, op. cit., No. 221, p. 1.

²¹ D. V. Malakov, *Po Braclavščine (od Vinnicy do Tulčina)*, Moscow 1982, p. 91.

²² VOSA, f. 896, op. 1, sp. 93, a. 1.

and J. Kramarz²³), which we can still admire today (Fig. 10). The facade of the new palace faced south west. In front of the building, there was an extensive park, reaching the small river Mirka, which formed a little pond where a weir was made. Along the north bank of the pond an artificial canal was dug out for recreational purposes, but it was not entirely preserved to this day. All these are marked on the measurement plan from the early 20th century. In the park, an irregular grid of walking paths can also be seen. The smaller, northern part featured some auxiliary buildings. The entire complex is a beautiful place and today it houses a sanatorium and a healthcare facility.²⁴

Summary

In the years 1710–1766, over 40 new towns were established in western and central Poland, of which only two were royal properties.²⁵ Almost all were small trade and rural settlements and only some constituted new districts of pre-existing towns (Trzciel, Przysucha, Lublin).

A very dynamic period of urban development during the 1st Republic of Poland was the reign of Stanisław August. The “king-architect”²⁶, as he was fittingly nicknamed, implemented a number of urban development projects and encouraged similar initiatives among Polish nobility.²⁷ In the aristocratic circles the king’s projects served as an effective impulse to implement this kind of improvements²⁸ and promote the growth of domestic industry, thus counteracting excessive foreign imports. The pursuit of economic growth of royal and aristocratic domains through urban planning and construction initiatives was inspired by the achievements of French and German enlightened absolutism. One of the most prolific town founders and modernizers was Antoni Tyzenhauz, administrator of royal estates in Lithuania, Treasurer of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Starost of Hrodna, who founded a number of new towns and manufacturing plants in the years 1760–1770.²⁹ A particularly bold project of his was the design for a new town

Łosośnia near Hrodna, which was to be accompanied by a complex of industrial and administrative facilities as well as residential buildings grouped around several round squares, with streets radiating out from them.³⁰

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that this social and economic movement attracted Wincenty Potocki, especially since the king himself was so involved in the many construction projects. One of them was the reconstruction of the burnt town of Koziernice where one of the royal mansions was situated. The new classicist design by architect Jan Kanty Fontana (1782)³¹ featured an axial composition, from the mansion, the market square and a symmetrical complex of public facilities (town hall, school, parsonage, hospital), up to the Catholic church behind which a broad avenue ran. On both sides of the avenue were an Evangelical Orthodox church and a synagogue. Perpendicular to the main axis was a transverse axis which allowed for the entire composition to be further developed in two more directions.³²

One might be tempted to surmise that the urban planning developments instigated by Wincenty Potocki were genetically associated with the transformations in Koziernice. While the arrangement in Koziernice had a very formal and representative character, the transformations in Nemyriv were purely utilitarian in nature, as evidenced by the commercial use of the site previously occupied by the castle. As far as spatial arrangement of the new architecture is concerned, in Nemyriv, much like in Koziernice, it was strictly geometric, with two compositional axes clearly dominating in the layout: the main axis leading from the castle through the town and the transverse axis, which is still visible as a street in today’s Nemyriv.

Late 18th century was a time when new urban planning initiatives aimed at reconstructing and expanding Polish towns in private lands, especially in the south west of the country.³³ In Volhynia, two urban transformations are commonly discussed in literature: the one in Korzec and the one in Katerburg.³⁴ But while the improvements of Jerzy Czartoryski in Korzec were very limited in nature (a regular market square in the town centre) and the project of count Jan Andrzej

²³ *Pamjatniki gradostroitelstva i architektury USSR*, Vol. 2, Kiev 1985, p. 24.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

²⁵ W. Kalinowski, S. Trawkowski, *Polish towns to the mid of XIX century*, Warsaw 1965, p. 54.

²⁶ W. Ostrowski, *Wprowadzenie do historii budowy miast. Ludzie i środowisko*, Warsaw 2001, p. 216.

²⁷ W. Kalinowski, S. Trawkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

²⁸ W. Kalinowski, *Zarys historii budowy miast w Polsce do połowy XIX wieku*, Toruń 1966, p. 32.

²⁹ W. Kalinowski, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

³⁰ A. Miłobędzki, *Zarys dziejów architektury w Polsce*, Warsaw 1968, p. 252–253.

³¹ S. Łoza, *Architekci i budowniczowie w Polsce*, Warsaw 1954, p. 79.

³² W. Kalinowski, *op. cit.*, fig. 77.

³³ W. Kalinowski, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

³⁴ See: W. Trzebiński, *Działalność urbanistyczna magnatów i szlachty w Polsce XVIII wieku*, Warsaw 1962, p. 133–134.

Plater in Katerburg concerned only a small village,³⁵ the Nemyriv design stands out as one that brought a more far-reaching transformation to the pre-existing town structure.

Nemyriv was the only attempt at introducing a unified town structure and design concept in Podolia. It was Wincenty Potocki's creative response to the new city planning trends of the 1790s, when classicism not only dominated in the architectural style of park and palace complexes but also influenced town transformation processes, spreading far beyond the major centres of European enlightenment movement, reaching thousands of miles away, even to the distant town of Nemyriv in Podolia.

The story of Nemyriv is an example of how privately owned Polish cities developed in the Age of Enlightenment in line with the modernizing attitudes of their owners, becoming exceptional works of urban art.³⁶ It is often emphasized in literature that this phenomenon merits more attention from researchers on account of its unique character.³⁷ The history of urban development in Poland owes much to the influential, foreign educated Polish nobility. The urban experiment undertaken in Nemyriv in the last decade of the 1st Republic of Poland is an original example of this kind of influence and a reflection of the then popular trends in city planning. Knowing the story of this experiment is a step towards recognizing many nearly obliterated traces of the Polish 18th century creative thought in the contemporary fabric of the former Polish eastern frontier.

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³⁵ P. Rychkov, *Korets and Katerburg: two urban experiments in Volhynia in the late 18th century*, Architectural Heritage of Volhynia. Collected papers, vol. 4, Rivne 2014, p. 75–81.

³⁶ A. Wyrobisz, *Miasta prywatne w Polsce XVI–XVIII w. jako inwestycje kulturalne*, „Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej”, Vol. XXVI, 1978, issue 1, p. 48.

³⁷ W. Trzebiński, *Działalność urbanistyczna...*, p. 5.