

Oksana Oleksiivna Salata*

orcid.org/0000-0003-2498-1483

Bolesław Stelmach**

orcid.org/0000-0002-8392-5353

A Crime against Historical and Cultural Heritage: Destruction of the Architectural Image of the Main Street of Kyiv in 1941

Zbrodnia przeciwko dziedzictwu kultury i historii. Zniszczenie architektonicznego oblicza głównej ulicy Kijowa w 1941

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Introduction

In May 2018, the participants of the International Conference on Reconstruction “Challenges of World Heritage Restoration,” held in Warsaw, expressed deep concern about the growing impact of armed conflicts on cultural heritage sites, especially within the historic districts of cities and archaeological sites [Warsaw recommendation 2022]. This problem is also of concern to experts in Ukraine. Architects and historians are concerned about the condition of many buildings that were destroyed and heavily damaged during the full-scale Russo–Ukrainian War.

Today, entire cities are being destroyed in Ukraine. The cultural and historical heritage that was created over many centuries by a people who respected their history and cherished their architectural heritage is being destroyed. The war against the Ukrainian people is not the first example of Russian aggression. In 1919, the Bolsheviks sought to capture Kyiv. The city’s buildings were also destroyed by Soviet troops retreating from the city in 1941. The city was rebuilt again and again. Unfortunately, it was not always possible to restore the architectural heritage in the form they had before the

destruction. The city lost its architectural and stylistic features but acquired new outlines.

The transformation of the image of Ukrainian cities has been studied by well-known Ukrainian historians and architects: N.M. Kondel-Perminova, in her book entitled *Khreshchatyk – Communicator between Times*, made a historical excursion into the space of centuries, where she revealed important milestones in the development of the Ukrainian capital [Kondel-Perminova 2021] of Kyiv architecture. Shevtsova [2000, pp. 26–33] presented the architectural and spatial features of Khreshchatyk’s development and delineated the periods of transformation of architectural styles in the street’s development.

European scholars have also studied the issues of destruction and reconstruction. Michał Krupa, M. Lisińska-Kuśnierz, Ł. Bednarz, and A. Mamedov studied the perception of architectural works as cultural and historical heritage by ordinary citizens [Krupa et al. 2021]. The deliberate destruction of ideologically significant buildings and the construction of Soviet buildings in their place to radically change the ideology of the people were presented by M. Orlenko, L. Kobylarczyk, D. Kuśnierz-Krupa, and Y. Ivashko [Orlenko et al. 2020, p. 61].

* Prof. Ph.D., Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University

** Ph.D. D.Sc. Eng. Arch., Łódź University of Technology, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Environmental Engineering

* prof. dr, Kijowski Uniwersytet Metropolitalny im. Borysa Grinchenki

** dr hab. inż. arch., Politechnika Łódzka, Wydział Budownictwa, Architektury i Inżynierii Środowiska

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The destruction of cultural heritage monuments against the backdrop of Soviet terror and repression was studied by N. Antonenko and O. Deriabina [2020, p. 9].

The destruction of the image of Warsaw was studied by K. Utracka. In her works, Utracka showed that after the surrender of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, the trials of the city's inhabitants did not end. The Nazi occupiers continued to destroy the city until the most valuable part of the historic city was destroyed [Gołębiewska 2020].

The process of reconstruction of certain parts of Wrocław after Socialist Realism in the late 1950s and early 1960s was presented in the work of well-known Polish scholars J. Majczyk and A. Tomaszewicz. They showed the process of abandoning Soviet Socialist Realism and restoring the traditional architectural styles that prevailed in the city before the Soviet period [Majczyk, Tomaszewicz 2017, p. 186].

According to S. Dyak, the massive destruction of the physical fabric of cities during the Second World War required the active participation of experts in the field of construction: architects and planners. The author showed that already during the war, projects supported by the Soviet government began to be created, they were mainly ideological in nature [Dyak 2023].

Materials and methods

This study used historical and comparative, causal, quantitative, and statistical methods; compositional and stylistic analysis of the architectural and spatial organization of Khreshchatyk, its individual buildings, and design proposals. In the process of researching this topic, the history of the formation of the spatial composition of Khreshchatyk Street, its construction and reconstruction; the stages of restoration of various structures and architectural details were studied.

The analysis of the planning and spatial structure of the main street of the capital and the surrounding areas made it possible to identify the compositional and visual interrelationships of architectural dominants and individual unique architectural forms. The study of Khreshchatyk's planning structure was carried out mainly in two directions: archival searches and the study of photographs taken by contemporaries.

The main archival sources were written documents (topographical, statistical, and economic descriptions of the city, which contain information about the architectural objects we needed), historical maps and plans of the city, graphic and pictorial images, photographs, as well as design materials and topographic surveys.

Results and discussion

Formation of the spatial and compositional structure of the street in the Soviet traditions of the 1930s

According to documents and archival materials, by the beginning of the twentieth century, Khreshchatyk had finally emerged as a single architectural complex. It

was an urban planning ensemble characteristic of the historicist and Modernist periods with dense rows of perimeter buildings. The authors of the buildings on Khreshchatyk were such prominent national architects of the pre-revolutionary era as V. Horodetskyi, V. Nikolaiev, E. Bradtman, G. Shleifer, P. Andriev, F. Lidval, A. Krauss, P. Sparro, and others. This development brought the street to the level of many European cities. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the street was the main transportation thoroughfare of Kyiv. It was home to provincial and municipal administrative offices, the main post office, telegraph, the best retail outlets, cinemas, seven of the most important Kyiv banks, etc.

The peculiarity of Khreshchatyk's spatial composition is not just the consideration of landscape characteristics, but the priority of the landscape as a component. Located in a valley between two picturesque hills, Khreshchatyk has numerous spatial linkages with the surrounding buildings. This is manifested in the termination of the streets connecting Khreshchatyk with the Upper Town with high-rise landmark buildings on the odd-numbered side; the asymmetrical composition of the even and odd sides of the building; smooth bending of the street route, which follows the shape of the relief; creation of gaps-curtain walls and arched passages in the building, which form additional visual connections [Mokrousova 2009, p. 231].

Important transformations in the architectural image of Kyiv began to take place in 1934, when the Soviet party leadership recognized the city as a natural and geographical center and decided to return the function of the capital of the Ukrainian SSR to the city [XII Congress of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine 1934]. For Kyiv, this meant the beginning of great transformations—the transformation into a city of industrial and transport purposes and a center of Ukrainian socialist culture [Explanatory Note to the General Plan of Reconstruction of the City of Kyiv. 1936].

Many interesting buildings of different eras and styles appeared on this street. Among them are classical mansions and buildings of the mid-nineteenth century, apartment buildings in the eclectic style of the late nineteenth century, large Constructivist bank buildings of the early twentieth century, and Soviet architecture buildings of the 1930s. For several decades, buildings on Khreshchatyk Street were built, extended, and remodeled. This is what attracted people to the main street of the capital (Fig. 1, 2).

The basis of the city's reconstruction was the first Soviet master plan for Kyiv in 1936. Its development was imbued with ideological guidelines and underground party supervision. A government commission demanded that the city's master plan be developed as soon as possible. Therefore, in six months, architects H. Holovko, V. Zabolotnyi, M. Hrechyna, P. Yurchenko, A. Zinchenko, and A. Matushevych, led by P. Khoustov, presented and approved the main provisions



Fig. 1. Khreshchatyk Street, view from Besarabia Square, as depicted in the nineteenth century, postcard; source: Collection of the G. Pshenychny Central State Archive of Phonographic and Film Documents.

Ryc. 1. Chreszczatyk, widok z Placu Besarabskiego, XIX w., pocztówka; źródło: Zbiory Centralnego Państwowego Archiwum Dokumentów Fonograficznych i Filmowych im. G. Pszenicznego.



Fig. 2. Khreshchatyk Street, view from European Square, as seen in the nineteenth century, postcard; source: Collection of the G. Pshenychny Central State Archive of Phonographic and Film Documents.

Ryc. 2. Chreszczatyk, widok z Placu Europejskiego, XIX w., pocztówka; źródło: Zbiory Centralnego Państwowego Archiwum Dokumentów Fonograficznych i Filmowych im. G. Pszenicznego.



Fig. 3. Kyiv Horse Circus, 1941; source: Collection of the G. Pshenychny Central State Archive of Phonographic and Film Documents.

Ryc. 3. Kijowski Cyrk Konny, 1941; źródło: Zbiory Centralnego Państwowego Archiwum Dokumentów Fonograficznych i Filmowych im. G. Pszenicznego.



Fig. 4. Khreshchatyk Street, Kyiv National Hotel, 1934; source: Collection of the G. Pshenychny Central State Archive of Phonographic and Film Documents.

Ryc. 4. Chreszczatyk, Hotel Narodowy w Kijowie, 1934; źródło: Zbiory Centralnego Państwowego Archiwum Dokumentów Fonograficznych i Filmowych im. G. Pszenicznego.

of a new general plan with clear functional zoning [Khreshchatyk, the Central Department Store, and the even numbered side of the street 1930].

Changes in the general plan and development also affected the main street of the capital, where mainly city institutions and organizations were located. The 1936 general plan of the city assigned Khreshchatyk a significant position. In the late 1930s, Khreshchatyk underwent a series of redevelopment projects. This concerned transportation, which was supposed to connect different parts of the city with the central street [Pshenychnyi Central Department of Physical Education and Sports of Ukraine 1937].

Due to the dense development, new construction on Khreshchatyk created certain difficulties. Floors were added to many buildings and facades were partially reconstructed. The most reconstructed buildings were the shops that faced the street.

Architect N.M. Kondel-Perminova notes in her book that Khreshchatyk, like most Soviet cities, was swept by the “militarist virus.” In this regard, several

buildings on Khreshchatyk that faced Tsarska Square underwent significant modifications.

At the end of the 1930s, one of the buildings on Khreshchatyk was reconstructed into the Frunze Defense House (architects O. Linetskiy and I. Ilyinskiy) to attract the masses to the Red Army. It was noteworthy that the civilian facades took on the outlines of fortifications. The ground floor with a clear arcade rhythm with a relief upper wedge stone served as a stylobate on which the upper floors rested [Linetskiy 1936].

In 1935, the construction of the Kyiv Department Store of the Consumer Cooperative began according to the design of architects V. Friedman and I. Metsoian. The grand opening of the new Central Department Store as a subdivision of the People’s Commissariat of Trade of the USSR took place in 1938 [Pshenychnyi Central Directorate of the State Defense Academy and Military Academy of Ukraine 1938].

On the eve of the Second World War, the central street had two passages, the old and the new. In fact, it was a commercial and residential complex at 15 Khreshchatyk

Street, built in 1913–1915 by the famous Russian architect P. Andreev. The smooth facade walls were made expressive by relief inserts-mascarons, garlands, and figurative compositions on the themes of ancient mythology, which stylized classical iconography [Erofalov-Pilipchak 2010, p. 13]. These structures were of high artistic value. After the nationalization of the new Khreshchatyk passage, various institutions were located there, and some apartments were provided to representatives of the Soviet nomenclature. In 1936, the architect P. Postyshev proposed adapting the passage into a large children's shopping center. The idea of the reconstruction was to bring the passage's premises closer to Khreshchatyk by building up the courtyard and rebuilding the main entrance. To this end, the architects of the Second Architectural and Artistic Workshop of the City Council, O. Linetskyi Oleksandr and V. Bulion, designed a rounded platform with a diameter of 32 m in the front of the courtyard, which connected the passage of the passage with the main entrance. The interior design was as close as possible to the worldview of a child [Linetskyi 1936, p. 13].

Destruction of the architectural image of Khreshchatyk by Soviet troops

While retreating from Kyiv, the engineering department of the 37th Army of the Soviet Army carried out the task of the leadership to mine the most important objects of the city that Nazi officers could use for their own purposes. This work was carried out on a rather large scale.

All significant administrative buildings, the unique Assumption Cathedral of the Kyiv Pecherska Lavra, and almost all buildings on Khreshchatyk Street and the adjacent streets in the city center were mined. In the early days, the Yevhenia Bosch Bridge was blown up. No one in the Soviet army leadership thought that a significant number of residents remained in the city and had to live and work somewhere. In addition, it was clear that as soon as the buildings began to explode, the German occupation administration would blame the city's residents.

On September 24, 1941, buildings began to explode on Khreshchatyk. The first building to fall into ruins was the one on the corner of Sverdlov Street, followed by the next one. Buildings exploded one after another, and the fire was growing and spreading on both sides of the street. It was impossible to extinguish the fire, as the retreating Soviet troops destroyed the city's water supply system.

According to the memoirs of Kyiv resident Anatolii Kuznetsov, the explosions were extremely powerful: "The explosion was so powerful that glass flew out not only on Khreshchatyk itself, but also on the parallel streets of Pushkinska and Mehringa. Glass was falling from all floors... At the same moment, a second explosion of even greater power occurred in the ruins of the same building. Now the walls fell, the commandant's office turned into a mountain of bricks. The

third explosion blew up the house across the street... People first rushed to the burning buildings, then fled to the parks above the Dnipro, to Volodymyrska Hill, to Shevchenko Boulevard. The explosions were heard randomly in different places, and it seemed as if the whole city was burning and exploding. The city was on fire for five days" [Tsalyk 2021].

The explosion also destroyed the Hippo Palace, the Horse Circus. The building was designed by architect Eduard Brandtman. The style of the building was dominated by eclecticism, as well as the architect's own style in the spirit of fashionable Art Nouveau. He is also the author of the Art Nouveau mansion of Arshavsky, built in Kyiv on Liuteranska Street later. The architect made extensive use of reinforced concrete, glass, and décor, which are characteristic of the Art Nouveau style. A wide three-part arch-window was placed on the main facade of the building, which became the architectural dominant of the two-story structure with the restraint of the corner décor (Fig. 3).

The house of the entrepreneur V. Detering on Khreshchatyk was a significant loss, as it represented an example of typical Kyiv architecture of the late nineteenth century. The main facade was designed in the spirit of eclecticism, with elements of the Renaissance and Baroque. The composition of the main facade was built as a symmetrically axial, five-part composition. The vertical division of the facade is emphasized by rusticated lobes. The richness of the architectural decor increased from the bottom up. The facade was completed with a massive cornice with modillions and a rectangular attic wall. The wall was crowned with a cupola with a spire, which was lost in a fire and never restored. The central part is crowned with a curved figured pinnacle and highlighted by a vertical niche-arched. The original interior decoration has not been preserved. The layout of the premises was changed [Tretiak 1998, p. 127].

No less interesting was K. Pastel's apartment building on the corner of Khreshchatyk and Mykolaivska streets. The building impressed with its Viennese Art Nouveau forms, followed by apartment buildings in the style of "merchant architecture" by Degtyarev, Bisk, Linnichenko, Madame Klug, Kalif, and other eminent homeowners. But the main landmark in this row was undoubtedly the National Hotel (architect Mykolaiv), which closed the odd side of the street. The architect managed to turn an ordinary three-story building into an imposing castle with rooms for visitors by building massive towers with residential premises at the corners. However, the building was destroyed by explosions and fires [Tretiak 1998, p. 104] (Fig. 4).

The explosion also destroyed the famous Ginzburg Skyscraper (Fig. 5, 6). The building had 2 floors, four-story ceilings, and was 67.5 m high with a tower offering magnificent views. There were no buildings of this scale in Ukraine or in the Russian Empire. Ginzburg's skyscraper was one of the tallest buildings in Europe. 94 apartments (some had eleven rooms), a huge



Fig. 5. Khreshchatyk Street, Ginzburg House, 1936; source: Collection of the G. Pshenychny Central State Archive of Phonographic and Film Documents.

Ryc. 5. Chreszczatyk, Dom Ginzburgów, 1936 r.; źródło: Zbiory Centralnego Państwowego Archiwum Dokumentów Fonograficznych i Filmowych im. G. Pszenicznego.



Fig. 6. Remains of damaged buildings along Khreshchatyk Street in the Fall of 1941; source: collection of the Malakov family.

Ryc. 6. Pozostałości zniszczonych budynków przy Chreszczatyku jesienią 1941 r.; źródło: zbiory rodziny Małakowów.



Fig. 7. Remains of the Ginzburg House, 1941; source: collection of the Malakov family

Ryc. 7. Zgliszcza po Domu Ginzburgów, 1941 r.; źródło: zbiory rodziny Małakowów.

staff of service personnel: the building immediately became a legend because it was the most modern in Kyiv, with rare forged elevators made by the American company Otis. The first floors were used for grocery stores. It was a comfortable place to live. Many businessmen and celebrities of the time did so [Tretiak 1998, p. 94].

After numerous explosions and fires, the buildings on the odd-numbered side of Khreshchatyk Street were

destroyed. The collection of photographic documents of the State Archives of the Kyiv Oblast contains materials that testify to the destruction of the first quarter of Architect Horodetskyi Street (modern street names); Zankovetska Street; Stanislavskyi Lane; the lower part of Lutheranska Street, part of the buildings on Prorizna Street; the outermost houses on Pushkinska Street from Prorizna to Bohdan Khmelnytskyi Street; almost the entire even side of Instyutyska Street [Collection of photographic documents 1942, p. 4]. Here we also find a map of the destroyed central part of Kyiv [Collection of photographic documents 1942, p. 6]. In a matter of days, the capital's residents lost their favorite theaters, cinemas, shops, post offices, hotels, a conservatory, and a music school. The massive explosions turned the historic center of Kyiv into ruins, destroying 324 buildings, some of which were lost forever. The fires killed not only representatives of the occupation authorities, but also a significant number of Kyiv residents. An even greater number of city residents lost their homes (Fig. 7).

The biggest tragedy for Kyiv residents was the explosion of the Assumption Cathedral of the Kyiv Cave Monastery. For centuries, the monastery has been not only a religious but also a cultural, educational, artistic, and scientific center of the city and Ukraine as a whole. The Assumption Cathedral was founded in 1073 and built from 1075 to 1078. It was originally a cross-domed, six-pillared, three-nave cathedral with one central spherical dome on a cylindrical pediment. There were choirs in the western part. In the eastern part of the church there were three apses, faceted on the outside and cylindrical in the interior. The cathedral was built using the opus mixtum technique, i.e., from plinth and stones with cement mortar. There were frescoes and mosaics on the walls of the cathedral. The spatial composition of the interior was completed by the floor: it was mosaic in the altar, and the rest was partially laid with red slate slabs. In 1767–1769, architects S. Kovnir and Y. Bilynsky crowned the cathedral's facades with Baroque pediments with lush ornamental floral carvings on fresh plaster [Historical and urban planning studies of Kyiv 2012, p. 179] (Fig. 8).

Traditionally, the most prominent residents of Kyiv and Ukraine were buried in the Assumption Cathedral: princes, metropolitans, archimandrites, and many others. A special place in the interior of the cathedral was occupied by the sculptural tombstone of Prince Kostiantyn Ostrozkyi.

As a result of the mining of the cathedral by the Soviet secret services, only fragments of the eastern wall, part of the baptistery, the altar of St. John the Theologian, and two pillars of the eleventh century remained of the architectural monument [Kabanets 2011] (Fig. 9).

But the destruction of the city did not stop with the beginning of the Nazi occupation. The next destruction occurred in the fall of 1943, when, under pressure from the Soviet army, German troops were forced to retreat west of the Dnipro. Fires broke out in Kyiv again: the Defense House, the Institute of Noble Girls,



Fig. 8. Ruins of the Dormition Cathedral of the Kyievo-Pecherska Lavra, 1941; source: collection of the Malakov family.
Ryc. 8. Ruiny Katedry Zaśnięcia Matki Boskiej, Peczerska Łavra, Kijów, 1941 r.; źródło: zbiory rodziny Małakowów.



Fig. 9. Cathedral of the Dormition, Kyievo-Pecherska Lavra, 1941; source: Collection of the G. Pshenychny Central State Archive of Phonographic and Film Documents.
Ryc. 9. Katedra Zaśnięcia Matki Boskiej, Peczerska Łavra, Kijów, 1941 r.; źródło: Zbiory Centralnego Państwowego Archiwum Dokumentów Fonograficznych i Filmowych im. G. Pszenicznego.

the university, and residential buildings on the city's central streets burned.

Conclusions

Thus, buildings that were examples of modern architecture, buildings that shaped the face of the Ukrainian capital, were destroyed. Kyiv in those days was a terrible picture of a burning city. In addition to the ruins on Khreshchatyk, there were many buildings that suffered heavy damage due to the war. The destruction of the buildings on the main street of Kyiv seemed to interrupt the evolution of eras in architecture. This problem is much broader than our paper and requires further research.

It is worth noting that a competition was held for the best architectural project for the comprehensive reconstruction of the city's central street. It was held in several

stages. The projects had to comply with the principles of Soviet urban planning and ideological principles. The reconstruction lasted until the late 1950s, and the street acquired new architectural outlines and style. The study of the reconstruction process requires in-depth study and comprehension, as it was carried out in the ideological paradigm of the Soviet regime.

Today, just as during the Second World War, the destruction and mass export of cultural property from the territory of Ukraine by the Russian occupiers is taking place, and it is striking in its scope. The Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine has recorded more than 400 episodes of damage and destruction of cultural heritage sites as of early July 2022. They can only be compared to the actions of Nazi Germany in the territories it occupied during the Second World War.

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Abstract

This paper discusses the tragic consequences of armed conflicts for the cultural and historical heritage, within the historic districts of cities; the process of deliberate destruction of buildings on the main street of Kyiv in the fall of 1941 by the Soviet army. The article shows the spatial composition of Khreshchatyk formed on the eve of the Second World War; characterizes the landscape and transformations that took place in the architectural image of the capital of Ukraine in the 1930s; presents some interesting buildings of different eras and styles. The text shows Khreshchatyk as a single architectural complex that was finally formed by the end of the 1930s. Using historical, comparative, and causal methods, the authors determined that buildings that were examples of modern architecture and eclecticism, buildings that shaped the face of the Ukrainian capital, were destroyed. The image of the destroyed city and individual buildings is presented; many buildings were distorted by explosions.

Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia tragiczne skutki konfliktów zbrojnych względem dziedzictwa kulturowego i historycznego w obrębie historycznych dzielnic miast, w tym proces celowego niszczenia budynków na głównej ulicy Kijowa jesienią 1941 przez Armię Czerwoną. Tekst ukazuje kompozycję przestrzenną Chreszczatyka uformowaną tuż przed II wojną światową, charakteryzuje krajobraz i przemiany, jakie nastąpiły w wizerunku architektonicznym stolicy Ukrainy w latach trzydziestych XX w.; prezentuje również wybrane, interesujące obiekty z różnych epok i w różnych stylach. Pokazuje Chreszczatyk jako zespół architektoniczny, który ostatecznie uformował się właśnie w tym okresie. Używając metody badań historycznych, komparatywnych i przyczynowo-skutkowych, autorzy ustalili, że zniszczono budynki wystawione w stylu modernistycznym i eklektycznym, obiekty, które ukształtowały obraz stolicy Ukrainy. Przedstawiono obraz zniszczonego miasta i jego pojedynczych budynków, z których wiele zburzono w wyniku eksplozji.