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THE PROTECTION OF EASTERN CHRISTIAN MONUMENTS BY POLISH ART HISTORIANS (1945–1989)

Abstract. This article presents the history of Eastern Christian heritage in Poland after World War II and of those art historians who tried to stop the destruction of such monuments. In the Stalinist era, only institutions associated with the Catholic Church attempted to halt this process. The Tarnów Diocese has the largest number of Greek Catholic churches preserved *in situ*, thanks to the efforts of Bishop Jan Stepa and his successor Jerzy Ablewicz, as well as local priests Mieczysław Czekaj and Jan Solak. During the thaw after 1956, the newly established museums of wooden architecture in Sanok (1958) and Nowy Sącz (1965) became important venues. Many art historians conducted inventory research despite the opposition of local authorities, for example, Joanna Szczęk-Roguska, Jerzy Tur, Barbara Tondos and Romuald Biskupski, who left behind vast collections of documentation and important publications. Thanks to them, state collections were established in Łańcut, Sanok, Nowy Sącz, and Przemyśl. Significant contributions were made by Kraków art historians, led by Janina Kłosińska, curator of the National Museum in Kraków. The Catholic University of Lublin, as an independent institution, became a centre for research on Orthodox art, with such scholars as Ryszard Brykowski, Tadeusz Chrzanowski and Barbara Filarska. Professor Chrzanowski, in particular, organised research expeditions and holiday trips for students, who could gain professional knowledge of architecture and movable cultural heritage. He repeatedly emphasised the need for research on the cultural heritage of Ukrainians and Belarusians as a legacy of the entire Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Keywords: Polish art historians; Eastern Christian art; Communism; protection of monuments

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OCHRONA ZABYTEKÓW CHRZEŚCJAŃSTWA WSCHODNIEGO PRZEZ POLSKICH HISTORYKÓW SZTUKI (1945–1989)

Abstrakt. Artykuł przedstawia historię dziedzictwa chrześcijaństwa wschodniego w Polsce po II wojnie światowej oraz działalność historyków sztuki, którzy starali się powstrzymać niszczenie zabytków. W okresie stalinowskim jedynie instytucje związane z Kościołem katolickim podejmowały próby zahamowania tego procesu. Diecezja tarnowska posiada największą liczbę cerkwi greckokatolickich zachowanych *in situ*, dzięki staraniom biskupa Jana Stepy i jego następcy Jerzego Ablewicza, a także lokalnych księży Mieczysława Czekaja i Jana Solaka. Dopiero odwilż po 1956 roku sprawiła, że nowo utworzone muzea architektury drewnianej w Sanoku (1958) i Nowym Sączu (1965) stały się ważnymi ośrodkami ochrony dziedzictwa.

Wielu historyków sztuki prowadziło badania inwentaryzacyjne mimo sprzeciwu władz lokalnych, między innymi Joanna Szczęk-Roguska, Jerzy Tur, Barbara Tondos i Romuald Biskupski, którzy pozostawili po sobie obszerne zbiory dokumentacji oraz ważne publikacje. Dzięki ich działalności powstały państwowe kolekcje w Łańcucie, Sanoku, Nowym Sączu i Przemyślu. Należy również wspomnieć o znaczącym wkładzie krakowskich historyków sztuki z Janiną Kłosińską, kustoszka Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie, na czele.

Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, jako niezależna instytucja, stał się centrum badań nad sztuką prawosławną. Z uczelnią związani byli między innymi Ryszard Brykowski, Tadeusz Chrzanowski i Barbara Filarska. Szczególnie prof. Chrzanowski organizował wyprawy badawcze oraz wyjazdy wakacyjne dla studentów, umożliwiając im rozwój zawodowy w zakresie architektury i zabytków ruchomych. Wielokrotnie podkreślał potrzebę badań nad dziedzictwem kulturowym Ukraińców i Białorusinów jako spuścizną całej Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów.

Słowa kluczowe: polscy historycy sztuki; sztuka chrześcijaństwa wschodniego; komunizm; ochrona zabytków

The study of art history in Poland ran into many difficulties after the Second World War, as the communist authorities strictly controlled national science, and research on Eastern Christian art was tolerated as part of the study of Byzantine civilization. Inventory works were discontinued and many planned publications were not published.¹ The maintenance of monuments, started at the end of the nineteenth century, was discontinued. For political reasons, the heritage of the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic churches related to the history of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was practically reduced to inventory activities.

Many monuments of wooden architecture were destroyed after the Operation Vistula (Pol. akcja „Wisła” – the codename for the 1947 forced resettlement) when the Lemko

¹ Cf. Paweł Dettloff, “Inwentarze i katalogi zabytków Małopolski: historia i współczesność,” in *Inwentaryzacja zabytków w Polsce: dzieje, metody, osiągnięcia*, ed. Michał Woźniak (Toruń: Towarzystwo Naukowe, 2021), 133–58, https://heritage.torun.umk.pl/storage/fm/shares/Inwentaryzacja%20zabytk%C3%B3w%20w%20Polsce%202021/Inwentaryzacja_KSIAZKA_-_5-03-2024.pdf

population was displaced from the south-east of Poland.² Few institutions have attempted to salvage the remains. The bishops and clergy of the Catholic Diocese of Tarnów played the greatest role. In 1951, during the most intense period of Stalinism, Bishop Jan Stepa (1892–1959), erected 22 parishes in Lemko villages, appointing new parish priests in the former Greek-Catholic churches. He obliged them to make as few changes as possible to the historic interiors. Therefore, the altar was placed in front of the iconostasis without moving the old infrastructure. Over the years, more churches have been welcomed, most of them located in Krakow Voivodeship (województwo krakowskie).³ In Rzeszów Voivodeship (województwo rzeszowskie), it was much more difficult to obtain the consent of the authorities for Catholic priests to take care of churches. The communist authorities were much more oppressive there than the policymakers in Kraków. The next bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Tarnów, Jerzy Ablewicz (1919–1990), took special care to ensure that wooden churches were properly protected, and in the 1960s many churches were preserved, such as the one in Owczary near Gorlice.

The efforts of Father Mieczysław Czekaj (1938–2016) deserve recognition here. He worked in different locations in the Diocese of Tarnów and as an art historian he looked after not only Catholic but also Greek Catholic monuments.⁴ Thanks to him, many icons and other Eastern Christian objects have survived. Another clergyman who contributed to the protection of the icons was Father Jan Solak (1885–1961). As the parish priest of St Catherine Parish in Grybów (1921–1961), he collected items from nearby empty Greek Catholic churches. The works painted in the seventeenth century are extremely interesting; today they can be seen in the local museum.⁵ Because of the actions taken by the Catholic Church, not only wooden churches, but also icons survived, which we can now admire in the collections of the Diocesan Museum in Tarnów, in the Grybów Parish Museum, and in the Museum of the Nowy Sącz Region.

The initial post-war years were the time when south-eastern Poland was depopulating as a result of deportation of the Lemko communities. Not many Polish people decided to settle down, especially those who were supposed to work in new cultural institutions. However, art historians educated in university centres in the central part of the country were slowly arriving.

² Timothy D. Snyder, “‘To Resolve the Ukrainian Problem Once and for All’: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ukrainians in Poland, 1943–1947,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, no. 2 (1999): 108–15.

³ Marian Kornecki, “Sztuka cerkiewna na terenie diecezji tarnowskiej i jej losy po 1945,” *Currenda* 1–3 (1991): 131.

⁴ Celina Cempa, “Ks. Mieczysław Czekaj (1938–2016),” *Towarzystwo Miłośników Ziemi Łabowskiej*, June 4, 2020, <https://tmzl.labowa.edu.pl/aktualnosci/2020/06/04/ks-mieczyslaw-czekaj-1938-2016>.

⁵ Agnieszka Gronek, “O XVII-wiecznych ikonach warsztatu muzyńskiego w Muzeum Parafialnym w Grybowie,” *Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne* 118 (2022): 127–40.

The newly established wooden architecture museums, the so-called open-air museums (Pol. *skansen*) (in 1958 in Sanok and in 1965 in Nowy Sącz), as totally secularized institutions, became places where Catholic and Orthodox churches were moved and where icons were collected. There, the museum employees carried out conservation works aimed at preserving as much of the heritage of our ancestors as possible. A new periodical was established in Sanok, *Materiały Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego w Sanoku* (The materials of the Folk Architecture Museum in Sanok), which published a number of articles on conservation issues. The texts, extremely important in regard to the technique of relocating old houses, churches, and other wooden buildings, were interesting to the employees of similar institutions established in Poland.

There were also museum repositories (Pol. *składnice muzealne*), where unwanted works of art were stored, for example near the Łańcut Palace and the Repository in Muszyna, as well as unwanted relics from confiscated estates of Greek Catholic churches.⁶ The communist authorities organized such depots throughout Poland, especially in Silesia.⁷ They include collections from damaged museums, monasteries, and churches, as well as unidentified collections from Nazi Germany. In the south east, such institutions were also created to preserve the resources of Lemko churches.

We need to mention some art historians who settled in the south of Poland. Joanna Szczęk-Roguska, Jerzy Tur (1933–2009) and Romuald Biskupski (1935–2008), University of Warsaw graduates, became formidable proponents of preserving icons, gathering them in safe places and creating impressive collections.

The icons were not exhibited in museums in southern Poland because the authorities at the time would not allow any activities promoting Christian heritage. The above-mentioned art historians organized exhibitions in central Poland, where such monuments did not arouse so much controversy. A series of exhibitions was organized at the Archaeological Museum in Kraków. The presentations were created by Jadwiga Malinowska of the Museum of Folk Architecture in Sanok. Similar presentations were held at the Warsaw Archaeological Museum.⁸ Icons were also displayed at the Bydgoszcz Museum. Thus, the art of the Lemkos (who were not presented as a separate ethnic group) slowly became the object of interest among students who started to come to south-eastern Poland as amateurs. Their activity as part of the Beskid Guides Circle was continuously monitored by the communist secret services.

Barbara Tondos and Jerzy Tur made great contributions. They documented hundreds of monuments, and the entire collection is now held by the Ruska Bursa centre

⁶ Kornecki, "Sztuka cerkiewna," 10.

⁷ Lidia M. Kamińska, "Powojenne składnice przemieszczanych dóbr kultury w Polsce. Przyczynek do szerszego opracowania," *Muzealnictwo*, no. 57 (2016): 74–80.

⁸ Jadwiga Malinowska, *Ikony z Sanoka. ZIV-XVIII wiek* (Kraków: n.p., 1976).

in Gorlice.⁹ They carried out restoration and stocktaking works in the former Rzeszów Voivodeship. Jerzy Tur was one of the originators of the Museum of Folk Architecture in Sanok, founded in 1958. The couple took part in the organization of the museum repository at the Łańcut Castle.¹⁰

To this day, we can admire beautiful works held in the Łańcut Castle complex, the National Museum in Przemyśl and the Historical Museum in Sanok. Joanna Szczęk-Roguska created a central catalogue of icons in Polish collections, containing comparative materials and photos. Their friend Jarosław Konstantynowicz had to leave his hometown Sanok to live near Warsaw, teaching in local schools.¹¹ This Ukrainian art historian collected materials for the planned publications at home, but only one article was published after the war. He donated icons to the Folk Architecture Museum in Sanok and his entire photographic documentation and typescripts were posthumously deposited there.

It is also worth mentioning the professors who educated generations of new researchers, most notably Professors Michał Walicki (1904–1966) in Warsaw and Vojislav Molè (1886–1973) in Kraków. Among them, Janina Kłosińska (1920–2007) was an important figure in research on the art of the Eastern Christian Church. During the late 1960s, she started to promote icon painting by organizing a series of exhibitions in Poland and Germany. In 1966, she prepared a prestigious exhibition of icons in Recklinghausen, Germany, under the title “Icons from Poland”.¹² She explained that they came mainly from the Lemko region, but a curator of the National Muzeum in Kraków linked them to the Wallachian migration to these areas. Her next work was the above-mentioned catalogue, then a monograph on Byzantine art.¹³ The subject of polemics is the term proposed by Janina Kłosińska in 1973 in the catalogue for the collection of icons held by the National Museum in Kraków.¹⁴ Kłosińska argued that church painting in Central Europe is stylistically almost uniform, regardless of administrative and state divisions. Her proposal

⁹ Katarzyna Tur-Marciszuk, “O projekcie,” Cyfrowe Archiwum Jerzego Tura i Barbary Tondos, n.d., <https://www.lem.fm/archiwa/oprojekcie.php>.

¹⁰ Nataliya Maletska-Novak [Наталія Малецька-Новак], “Inheritance from Barbara Tondos and Jerzy Tur in Ruska Bursa,” Lem.fm, November 10, 2016, <https://www.lem.fm/inheritance-from-barbara-tondos-and-jerzy-tur-in-ruska-bursa>.

¹¹ Hubert Ossadnik, “Jarosław Bohdan Konstantynowicz (1893–1971) i jego dzieło na tle zbiorów archiwalnych Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego w Sanoku,” in „*Do piękna nadprzyrodzonego*”. Sesja naukowa na temat rozwoju sztuki sakralnej od X do XX wieku na terenie dzisiejszej diecezji chełmskiej kościoła rzymskokatolickiego, prawosławnego, grecko-katolickiego, vol. 1, *Referaty*, ed. Krystyna Mart (Chełm: Muzeum Chełmskie, 2003), 201–11.

¹² Janina Kłosińska, *Ikonen aus Polen. Museen der Stadt Recklinghausen* (Recklinghausen: Ikonenmuseum, 1966).

¹³ Janina Kłosińska, *Sztuka bizantyńska* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1975).

¹⁴ Janina Kłosińska, *Ikony*, Seria: Katalogi zbiorów Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, vol. 1 (Kraków: Muzeum Narodowe, 1973).

to define icons as Carpathian – created in the territories of today’s south-eastern Poland, eastern Slovakia, western Ukraine, Moldova and Transylvania – was accepted by some Polish, Slovak,¹⁵ Hungarian¹⁶ and Romanian¹⁷ researchers. At that time, her research results were part of the fashionable trend of art history promoting the art of regions such as the Danube, Rhenish, and Mosan Schools. In 1980, Kłosińska published an album of icons in several language editions.¹⁸ When she began to publish her works, the promotion of Ukrainian culture was not well-received for political reasons.

The Catholic University of Lublin became a very important place for educating future museum and institutional employees involved in the protection of monuments. It was a place where students came from all over Poland, gaining education not only in the field of art history, but also in history, philosophy, and aesthetics. The program of study was comprehensive and structured so that the graduates could find various jobs. Moreover, considering the difficulties in finding a job for people holding a diploma from a Catholic university in a communist country, they needed to have a wide range of qualifications.

Ryszard Brykowski (1931–2017) was one of the first researchers to publicly announce a report on the protection of wooden churches in the former Rzeszów Voivodeship. A Pole born in Kołomyja in the Hutsul Region, a former scout, he left his hometown after the second World War and studied art history at the Catholic University of Lublin.¹⁹ After graduating in 1956, he started working at the Central Office for the Protection of Monuments and Museums in Warsaw (Centralne Biuro Ochrony Zabytków i Muzeów w Warszawie) and then at the Art Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences. In 1957, he published the first report on Eastern Christian wooden churches. These were the times when all scientific publications were censored, so he could not directly criticize the authorities, although he already had quite clearly defined views.

Brykowski had fine photographic documentation and was constantly documenting the monuments that already lay in ruins at that time. He travelled from village to village to gather as much information as possible. In the above-mentioned report, he presented the state of research and tables comparing data on the preserved churches in 1939 and 1955. At the end of the article, he provided a list of damaged churches. In the following years, Brykowski returned to this subject many times, publishing subsequent reports. He also

¹⁵ Magda Keleti, *Ikony 16.- 18. Stoleti na Slovensku. Národní galerie v Praze, Jiřský klášter* (Praha: Národní galerie, 1984).

¹⁶ Bernadett Puskás, “Intenzülő a gyermek Jézussal-ábrázolások az Északkelet-Kárpátok vidékének ikonjain,” *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* 37, no. 1–4 (1989): 66–97.

¹⁷ Marina E. Sabados, “Iconografie și stil în pictura din Moldova secolului al XV-lea. Fresca, pictura pe lemn, miniatura. Vedere comparativă,” *Ars Transilvaniae* 3 (1993): 41–53.

¹⁸ Janina Kłosińska, *Icones de Pologne*, trans. Maurice Zinovieff (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1987).

¹⁹ Paulina Byzdra-Kusz, “Ryszard Brykowski (1931–2017),” KUL, n.d., https://www.kul.pl/ryszard-brykowski-1931-2017,art_89816.html.

initiated the publication of the Inventory of Sacred Wooden Architecture in Poland.²⁰ He authored many monographic works: *Drewniana architektura kościelna w Małopolsce XV wieku* (Wooden church architecture in Lesser Poland of the 15th century, 1981), *Lemkowska drewniana architektura cerkiewna w Polsce, na Słowacji i Rusi Zakarpackiej* (Lemko wooden church architecture in Poland, Slovakia and Transcarpathian Ruthenia, 1986), and *Drewniana architektura cerkiewna na koronnych ziemiach Rzeczypospolitej* (Wooden church architecture in the Crown lands of the Republic of Poland, 1995).

Marian Kornecki (1924–2001) did the same, but he took care of the architecture of Catholic churches. He published a series of booklets in which he presented individual historic churches in Poland. As an experienced art historian, he travelled for years garnering a massive amount of documentation.²¹ It was partially used in the publications of the Catalogue of Monuments in Poland, prepared usually with a friend from Kraków, Prof. Tadeusz Chrzanowski.

Tadeusz Chrzanowski (1926–2006), a native of Moroczyn in eastern Poland, repeatedly emphasized the need for research on the cultural heritage of Ukrainians and Belarusians. He grew up in the world at the intersection of Eastern and Western civilizations.²²

As an experienced monument inventor, an outstanding art historian, and a photographer, journalist and poet, he organized scientific trips and holiday trips for students to gain expert knowledge of architecture and movable monuments. He focused his interests primarily on research in Polish art, but he topics related to the art of the Orthodox Church as well.²³

Chrzanowski expressed that for the first time in his book *Sztuka ziemi krakowskiej* (The art of the Kraków Land).²⁴ He presented the entire region in light of Latin and Byzantine influences. The publication depicts monuments from the Middle Ages to the present day. He emphasized the ethnicity of those areas and was the first researcher to consider the history of Polish art in a broader context.

²⁰ Konstanty Czawaga, "Ryszard Brykowski w pamięci Kołomyjan," *Kurier galicyjski*, January 21, 2021, <https://kuriergalicyjski.com/ryszard-brykowski-w-pamieci-kolomyjan>.

²¹ Marian Kornecki, "Drewniane świątynie w Polsce, wczoraj, dziś i jutro," in *W obronie kościołów i cerkwi drewnianych*, ed. Jarosław Giemza, Anna Fortuna-Marek, and Jerzy Tur (Rzeszów: Stowarzyszenie Pracownia Kultury Tęczy, 2000), 27–33.

²² Lechosław Lameński, "Profesor Tadeusz Chrzanowski (1926–2006)," *Przegląd Uniwersytecki*, no. 1 (2006), https://www.kul.pl/prof-tadeusz-chrzanowski-1926-2006,art_42172.html.

²³ Tadeusz Chrzanowski, *Kresy, czyli obszary tęsknoty* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2009), 7.

²⁴ Tadeusz Chrzanowski and Marian Kornecki, *Sztuka ziemi krakowskiej* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1982).

At the end of the 1970s, he often travelled to Romania with his two friends Marian Kornecki and Ryszard Brykowski.²⁵ They decided to publish a book on the history of Romanian art, which became the first such monograph outside the country. Chrzanowski emphasized the role of comparative research and repeatedly encouraged students to cross borders and travel to neighbouring countries, which was not easy at that time. He was one of the organizers of the Niedzica Seminars, whose role was to bring together art historians from neighbouring countries (Czechoslovakia, Hungary). However, Chrzanowski regretted that at the annual meetings there were no scholars from Ukraine or Romania, and that most of all of the lectures focused on the art of the Eastern Christian church in question.

The planned publication on Romanian art was created with much difficulty. Travel restrictions limited the exploration of all the most important monuments. Maria Elena Enăchescu, an ethnographer and art historian, provided assistance. She dealt with the history of wooden architecture in Transylvania and conducted inventory work as part of her duties at the Romanian Academy of Sciences.²⁶ She also helped Polish researchers to gather the most important literature by donating part of her book collection to them.

In the introduction to the book on Romanian art, Chrzanowski emphasised common elements existing in the areas along both sides of the Carpathians, and in his later publications he encouraged research there. In the book published in 1979, there is an extensive chapter devoted to wooden architecture by Ryszard Brykowski.

Many other art historians have tried to bring Poles to the world of the Christian East, but for reasons of space we cannot present them here. We owe them the possibility of admiring old churches and beautiful icons. This short presentation of people who have contributed to the protection of Orthodox monuments is only a small part of the history of our cultural heritage. The importance of our predecessors deserves great recognition. The truth is they lived in extremely difficult times and they dared to protect the remnants of their neighbours' material culture. We now live in different times, so let us recall the heroism of those who left a huge legacy in the form of publications and documentation that we find in museums and archives.

²⁵ Ryszard Brykowski, Tadeusz Chrzanowski, and Marian Kornecki, *Sztuka Rumunii* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1979).

²⁶ Maria Elena Enăchescu, "R. Brykowski, T. Chrzanowski, M. Kornecki, *Sztuka Rumunii*" (report), *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art* 17 (1980): 144.

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naukowa na temat rozwoju sztuki sakralnej od X do XX wieku na terenie dzisiejszej diecezji chełmskiej kościoła rzymskokatolickiego, prawosławnego, grecko-katolickiego, vol. 1, *Referaty*, edited by Krystyna Mart, 201–11. Chełm: Muzeum Chełmskie, 2003.

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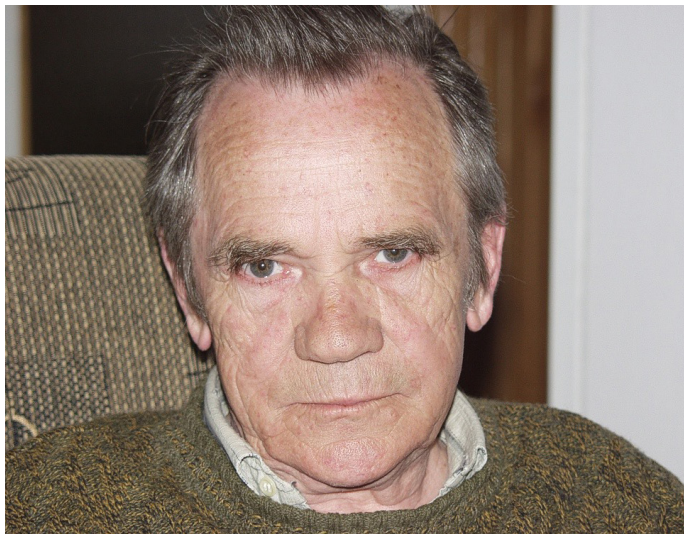
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FIGURES



1. Bishop Jan Stepa



2. Romuald Biskupski



3. Tadeusz Chrzanowski



4. Barbara Tondos, 1958. Babara Tondos and Jerzy Tur Archive. Ruska Bursa, Gorlice



5. Jerzy Tur, ca. 1960. Babara Tondos and Jerzy Tur Archive. Ruska Bursa, Gorlice



6. Greek Catholic wooden church in Gładyszów. Babara Tondos and Jerzy Tur Archive.
Ruska Bursa, Gorlice



7. Greek Catholic wooden church in Bieliczna, 1960. Babara Tondos and Jerzy Tur Archive.
Ruska Bursa, Gorlice



Student meeting on Christmas Eve: (background, from left) Ryszard Brykowski, Tadeusz Chrzanowski, Jerzy Baranowski, Jadwiga Kuczyńska, Jacek Woźniakowski, Barbara Filarska; (foreground, middle): Henryka Olszewska (facing left), Jacek Freilich (facing right). Catholic University of Lublin, ca. 1982