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“Esgrafiado segoviano” as an expression of the city’s regional tradition and identity

Introduction

Segovia is an example of a city whose historic center abounds in buildings with façades entirely or partially covered with geometric sgraffito. Consistently applied and developed for centuries, this form of façade decoration can become a distinguishing element of the architecture of a city or an entire region. The reason for taking up this topic was to draw attention to the historical and formal continuity of the technique used and to the effect of architectural coherence that resulted from its use over the centuries. The origins of sgraffito in Segovia are associated with the local alcazar and date back to the turn of the 11th and 12th centuries¹. They were created in the following centuries depending on fashion and periods of prosperity or economic stagnation of the city. After a short break in the 4th quarter of the 20th century, sgraffito in Segovia was revived, with renovations and restorations of damaged decorations. It is a good example of a tradition constantly alive, resulting from an interesting multicultural history. Given the history of the city and the continuity of the tradition of decorating buildings with this technique², as well as the large amount of both historical and contemporary sgraffito reconstructed or creatively restored on the façades, it can be considered a regional phenomenon that can be a factor

in building the identity of the city and, along with the aqueduct, should become a symbol of Segovia.

The aim of the article is not only to present the sgraffito of Segovia, its forms, motifs and threads of meaning, but also an attempt to place them in the context of this type of decoration used in other cities and regions of Spain. The paper discusses the problem of the originality of Segovia sgraffito and its importance in building the identity of the city, including its contemporary identity. All the presented analyses are the result of research conducted by the author in situ.

Research status and methods

Segovia sgraffito has been the subject of inquiry by local scholars, but few have devoted more attention to the topic. In studies on Segovia from the early 20th century, one can find references on the subject linking the origins of the technique to the Middle Ages. For example, the topic was discussed by Marques de Lozoya in a study on the typology of residential houses in Segovia [2]. Luis Peñalosa, among others, has drawn attention to the artistic aspect of Segovia sgraffito [3]. The models of sgraffito and their typology in the province of Segovia have been dealt with by Aurora de la Puente Robles [4]. Since the 1990s, extensive research on the phenomenon of sgraffito in the city and region of Segovia has been carried out by Rafael Ruiz Alonso. The author devoted his doctoral dissertation to this topic, in which he presented research on the history and origin of this technique in Segovia, its technical and stylistic evolution, discussed the materials and tools used by the artists, and made an extensive analysis of the motifs and forms used. In addition, he included in the work a very extensive and comprehensive bibliography [5]. The researcher is also the author of a number of articles and books dealing with sgraffito both in Europe and the world, as well as in the

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¹ The royal palace in Segovia was first documented in 1122, although it may have existed earlier.

² The turbulent history of Spain and Segovia, the economic crises affecting the city since the 17th century, and the changing fashions caused periods of abandonment of the use of sgraffito. However, after they were overcome, it became a very popular technique again. More on the history of Segovia [1].

Segovia region [6], [7]. A broader view of the city's architecture and urbanism was provided by José Antonio Ruiz Hernando [8] and Miguel Ángel Chaves Martín [9] in their publications. The ornamentation of the Segovian sgraffito also interested mathematicians, who studied the decorations in terms of crystallographic symmetry groups [10].

In the course of the research, historical studies on the development of the sgraffito tradition in Spain were carried out to highlight the distinctiveness of this form of decoration in Segovia from other centers. A critical analysis of the literature and sources as well as architectural and conservation studies was made. In situ research was also carried out, during which, among other things, rich photographic material was collected that was necessary for the formal analysis of the decorations studied.

Wall sgraffito

The technique of wall sgraffito has given and still gives many possibilities for formal solutions of façade and interior decoration. Used in both official and residential archi-



Fig. 1. Various techniques of decoration in arabic architecture – Generalife, Alhambra, Granada (photo by D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

Il. 1. Różne techniki dekoracji w architekturze arabskiej – Generalife, Alhambra, Granada (fot. D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

ture or bourgeois or folk, it changed depending on the historical period and region. It gained its greatest popularity in Europe during the Renaissance, especially in Italian works. However, sgraffito accompanied the architecture from ancient times through subsequent eras. It was present in the Middle Ages, Baroque, Classicism, 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as in the 20th and 21st centuries. Decorations made in this technique recurred in different forms and with different frequency³. They could perform two basic functions. The first one was the protection of the wall against external factors and the second one was the decoration of the walls of the building, both the elevation and the interior. Sgraffito was often used to cover walls erected in cheap techniques and not very representative. This paper examines the decorative function of sgraffito.

When we take a closer look at this decorative technique we can see a great variety of patterns and motifs, iconographic content, textures, colors and materials or tools used, which gives great creative possibilities and diverse effects. Also the choice of decorated architectural element, such as lintels, window frames or the entire façade, gives a completely different result. In its diversity, sgraffito may be perceived as a fresco or a drawing created by grooving and scratching. Gottfried Semper wrote that the style of sgraffito resembles niello in magnification⁴.

Sgraffito decorations used various means of artistic expression. They could create the illusion of visually changing architectural elements or create their imitations, such as rustications, plastic framing of openings, etc. The use of geometric ornamental motifs in sgraffito was a very common practice. The use of such motifs on the entire surface of the façade could create the impression of delicate, “lacy”, almost unreal walls. Figural representations were often a manifestation of religious beliefs or progressive views of the owner of the building, they could also have moralistic overtones.

Sgraffito in Spain

Sgraffito in Spain has a long tradition dating back to antiquity, varying from region to region. The origins of this technique are quite difficult to determine. The earliest traces of sgraffito were found in Mérida, where the contrast between smooth and rough surfaces was used, another in Medina Elvira [14]. Decorations with geometric forms were used in the interiors of the caliph palaces of Andalusia as early as the 11th century. Among various decorative techniques used in the Alhambra complex in Granada, one can also find sgraffito (e.g., in Patio de los Leones, in Generalife) (Fig. 1).

In Spain, especially in areas that were for hundreds of years under Arab rule, cheap and effective Muslim decorative techniques were adopted. They were used mainly in the

³ For more on sgraffito, e.g.: [11]–[13].

⁴ An extensive article on sgraffito techniques and technology as well as motifs and themes used in its historical aspect was published by Marzanna Jagiello-Kołączyk in “Architectus” journal. However, it concerned mainly sgraffito in Italy and German-speaking countries, which were under their cultural influence [13].

Mudejar style combining Islamic with Christian elements – Romanesque and Gothic, popular since the 12th century and still found in the 18th century in Aragon, Toledo, Madrid or Segovia. The decorations covered large parts of the elevation or only emphasized its fragments. They were also used in patios, cloisters (e.g., Casa de los Picos in Segovia) or building interiors [15⁵, pp. 151–153]. Especially popular were the yeseria and sebqka techniques, related to sgraffito, which later can still be found in realizations in the spirit of neomudejar, such as in the “estilo sevillano”.

The 16th century brought novelties from Italy that were applied in parallel to the traditional decoration in the spirit of Gothic and mudéjar. They concerned both the technique and the motifs used. On the façades, figural scenes appeared that dealt with moralistic themes, among others from Aesop’s fables, Renaissance ornamentation in the form of mermaids, bucranions, medallions or horns of plenty. Sgraffito moved from a typically “plaster” technique to the field of wall painting. However, decorations in the spirit of the Renaissance were relatively few, used mainly in private architecture, such as Palacio de los Condes de Valdelagrana (Trujillo, Cáceres), where Renaissance forms were combined with elements from the “New World”.

The following centuries saw an evolution towards the demands of Baroque and Rococo, whose first works appeared in the Valencia region between 1642 and 1710. At that time, numerous buildings in many towns in the province received decoration with Baroque and Rococo forms in various combinations. A wider range of colors was also introduced to sgraffito [16]. Among the temples, the interior of the church of San Esteban in Valencia stood out, covered between 1678 and 1683 with a sgraffito decoration of stylized floral forms in white placed on a blue background [17].

The new currents spread to other regions, including Catalonia, where they aroused great interest. Barcelona became the main center of sgraffito from the 18th century onwards, a period of economic boom in the city associated with free trade and business conducted in the colonies. The innovations of Catalan sgraffito in the 18th century influenced the further development of this technique. At that time, motifs such as monumental human figures showing gods and historical figures, as in Masía Masferer near Barcelona, or atlantes and caryatids, as in Barcelona’s Casa dels Velers, a building decorated in 1763, or Casa Moixó, were used. Scenes referring to arts or crafts were also depicted. Among many figural representations placed on the façade of St. Martin’s Church in Barcelona, there were musical angels and cantors (made in 1762) [15, pp. 167–169]. Such traditional approach in the following century influenced the decoration of building walls in smaller centers, which lacked wide artistic discourse and used patterns known for centuries [15, pp. 172, 173].

The next phase of sgraffito decoration bloom was brought by Barcelona’s “modernism” at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Within its framework, three trends can be distinguished. Modernisme de La Renaixença movement referred to the romantic and nationalistic Catalan cultural movement from the beginning of the 19th century willingly using medieval motifs. The second trend was more eclectic, assimilating European architectural and decorative forms. The third stemmed from the work of Antonio Gaudí, who used sgraffito decoration in a very diverse and unconventional way [18, p. 57].

The common denominator for these three trends was the use of sgraffito, both as a supplement of other forms of decoration or as a superior motif covering the whole façades, but here also in combination with other materials and decorative techniques.

In Art Déco architecture, Madrid became the leading center, where the tone was set by the Callao Cinema, a 1926 work by Luis Gutiérrez Soto with somewhat neo-Baroque and neoclassical forms. A sgraffito reminiscent of a tapestry filled large surfaces of panels.

In the 2nd half of the 20th and into the 21st century, sgraffito became a renewed interest in Spanish cities. There has been an increased interest from municipal authorities looking for regional traditions and center identities. The town of Matorell in Catalonia was named “pueblo de los esgrafiados” (sgraffito town), the mayor of Valdefuentes in Cáceres proclaimed his town “capital mundial del esgrafiado” (sgraffito capital of the world). Teaching centers for this technique have been established, numerous scientific studies are being carried out, and the decorations arouse the interest of artists and builders. The tradition of covering the walls of buildings with sgraffito is also cultivated in Segovia, where this decoration covers a significant part of the buildings, often entire walls, which is why it is called “la piel de Segovia” (the skin of Segovia) [19].

“Esgrafiado segoviano”

The multicultural sgraffito tradition in Segovia

The original forms associated with sgraffito in Segovia were discovered during work carried out in 1987 at the castle, where irregular, polygonal forms were exposed on the lower parts of a wall made of unhewn stones (mampostería). In the higher parts, increasingly regular shapes were found, diverging from the grouted gaps and turning into regular circles at the top. In addition, small pieces of slag were embedded in the joints of the mortar lines. The investigated walls date to the end of the 12th century [20]. This type of masonry decoration consisting of various sized rounded forms with relief shapes existed in many buildings from the 11th–13th centuries such as the churches of Santa Eulalia, San Marcos, San Justo, Torre de Hercules (in the Dominican convent) and others. Nowadays only few traces remain, many decorations were destroyed, often during renovations [20].

The effect of “writing or drawing”, which is created on the wall by combining different shapes of stones with

⁵ The author has extensively characterized the development of sgraffito in Spain, noting the significant differences between different regions. He has also included an extensive bibliography of the subject.

convex, contrasting colored mortar, can be considered the stylistic genesis of sgraffito, although of course the technique of execution has nothing to do with sgraffito [5, pp. 184–187]. The walls of the Alcázar and the Torreón de Lozoya tower (the entrance to the palace) can be considered as places where the transition from the technique of decorative stone grouting to sgraffito with serial motifs is evident [5, pp. 190, 191, 244] (Fig. 2).

The 15th century was probably the period when the “first sgraffito” was created, the decoration began to be “separated” from the stone base and forms similar to Gothic masquerade such as drops or “fish bladders” were used. This type of decoration has been preserved in the patio and tower of the Casa de los Picos [5, p. 190]. Further development of the discussed technique in the 15th and 16th centuries led to the use of repetitive, regular motifs placed on the entire façades. At that time, thanks to the Trastamar family, many mudejar decorations were created in the castle chambers. The similarity of the forms and the



Fig. 2. The Alcázar in Segovia
(photo by D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

Il. 2. Alcázar w Segowii
(fot. D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

few surviving Islamic sgraffito may attest to the influence of Islamic art⁶.

As in the rest of Spain, Renaissance forms were rarely found in the decoration of buildings in Segovia and were rather used for interior decoration as, for example, in Torreón de Lozoya, where grotesque forms, stylized elements of flora and fauna, and bucranions were used [15, pp. 157–159].

The Baroque period marks the beginning of the city’s economic crisis which was associated with the end of the previously prevailing large building movement. In addition, in Spanish architecture at this time one can see a very strong influence of the austere and purist forms of the Escorial. There was a return to the use of smooth plastering of walls, without relief decoration, which was replaced by illusionist painting decoration, imitating architectural elements [5, pp. 245–247]. The sgraffito technique was still used in other cities of the province, but it no longer enjoyed such great popularity.

In the following centuries, Segovia’s economic situation did not improve. The constant political tensions of the 1st half of the 19th century did not serve the development of the city, whose population was lower than at the end of the 16th century and the buildings were in a worse condition. Until the 18th century, the construction of private houses often used materials that were not very durable, such as adobe⁷, which was used to fill the frame structure, resulting in the destruction of the walls, especially since many buildings remained unoccupied [20].

From about the middle of the 19th century, a movement of urban remodeling and beautification began in major Spanish centers (e.g., Madrid, Barcelona). In Segovia, the “renovation” of the city began with paving and lighting the streets and bringing in water. The issue of cleaning up the buildings and renovating the façades was raised during the session of the City Council in 1856. However, due to the poor economic situation, much of the cost was to be borne by the building owners, who protested against such decisions. In addition, attention was drawn to the possibility of destroying the traditional Segovian walls of stone, brick or frame construction by plastering them. The dispute, which reached as far as the Ministry of the Interior, ended only in 1859. It was decided that all buildings were to be plastered according to the design prepared by the town architect. Only buildings constructed of hewn stone were excluded [5, pp. 272–285], [22]. Eventually, thanks to the City Council’s decision, Segovia changed its appearance, becoming, as Antonio Ruiz Hernando wrote, [...] *a city that was stuck in the 16th century and dressed in new clothes at the end of the 19th century* [8, p. 148].

Among the façades renovated in the 2nd half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, those covered with sgraffito looked best. Sometimes, it was combined with stucco or painted elements. Most often stencils with traditional motifs were used and the decoration was placed on the whole

⁶ For more on the affinity of Segovian sgraffito and Islamic art (mentions in [2] and [6]).

⁷ Large blocks formed from mud mixed with straw and dried in the sun [21].

façade. Motifs taken from the forms of historicism architecture or Spanish “modernism” were used less frequently. Unfortunately, individual designs of the whole façade were not usually carried out, and a coherent elaboration of all elements is rare [5, p. 285].

In this way, sgraffito became an element that gave coherence to the architecture of Segovia, influencing the unification of the façades of buildings erected in different constructions. Francisco de Alcántara wrote about “Segovia plaster” in 1909: [...] *although it is not exclusive to Segovia, it is the one where the most old specimens can be found and it is still used as a durable finish, able to accept different decorations* [23, p. 7]. Sgraffito was used until the 1980s. Because of the high cost of execution, the lack of contractors skilled in this technique, and the aversion to ornament in new architecture, this form of façade decoration disappeared. However, thanks to the efforts of the city and provincial government, it is now making a comeback and a number of façades are still being renovated using sgraffito.

Motifs and forms

Analyzing the motifs and shapes that make up the sgraffito decorations found on the façades of Segovia buildings, one can observe their evolution from irregular forms resembling a drop of water to circles and their fragments, variously situated, other geometric figures, and stylized floral forms: tendrils, rosettes, and fish scales. From these initial simple models, a great number of sgraffito sequences were created by enriching and differentiating the motifs. 169 different models have been found in Segovia alone, and as many as 664 in the whole province [20].

Rafael Ruiz Alonso divided the motifs found in Segovian sgraffito into geometric ornaments, forms imitating architectural elements such as rustications, battered walls, joints, zoomorphic ornaments inspired by Renaissance patterns of arabesques and grotesques, and “objects”: sundials, dials, inscriptions [5, pp. 313–381]. In some geometric ornaments, pieces of cinders were incorporated into the tangent points of lines, as seen in the façade of the Alkazar.

Among these motifs, the oldest group is made up of rounded shapes, then turning into circles on mortar applied to the stone walls. An example of such sgraffito is the Torreón de Lozoya at Plaza San Martín 5 / Plaza de Medina del Campo. The tower is the surviving part of a palace built in the 15th century [24] (Fig. 3). The remains of sgraffito imitating stone blocks and motifs of interlocking circles and “fish bubbles” can be found on the façades of Casa de los Peces at 46-48 San Francisco Street, constructed in the 15th century [25]. A beautiful sgraffito, of varied form, consisting of 3 models, covers Palacio del Conde Alpuente [25], constructed at the end of the 15th century at 3 la Alhondiga Street. The decoration was placed above the ground floor. The corners of the building and the areas next to the windows were decorated with a “linear” modeling of rectangular areas (imitation of stone blocks?). In the ground floor up to the windows of the second story, the ornamentation consists of larger

and smaller circles with radial “tears”. The zone above is occupied by circles arranged in strips with inscribed 4 crooked “tears” connected with a small circle in the middle (Fig. 4). Such motifs were popular in later sgraffito decorations until the 20th century.

The popularity of sgraffito technique in Segovia is evidenced by the fact that even the façades of farm buildings were finished in this way. A well-preserved example from the 16th century is the former granary belonging to the Palacio del Conde de Alpuente complex (10 de la Alhondiga Street), which is now the municipal archive [25]. The façade was covered with sgraffito in 3 strips, at the bottom there is a pedestal in the form of imitation of stone blocks, further there is a strip of “fish scale”, and the remaining part is decorated in a way similar to the decoration of the palace ground floor (Fig. 5).

The most numerous group are the sgraffito with geometric ornaments, which were made with stencils in the 19th and 20th century. By means of various combinations of figures, by reversing the arrangement of stencils in a continuous series, alternately, according to the horizontal or vertical symmetry or by using different arrangements of figures, a lot of heterogeneous combinations were obtained. Motifs imitating stone claddings such as rustication or simple “cuts” of flagstones or other architectural elements are also quite common. Houses covered with



Fig. 3. The Torreón de Lozoya at 5 Plaza San Martín / Plaza de Medina del Campo (photo by D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

Il. 3. Torreón de Lozoya przy Plaza San Martín 5 / Plaza de Medina del Campo (fot. D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)



Fig. 4. The Palacio del Conde Alpuente at Plaza Platero Oquendo (photo by D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

Il. 4. Palacio del Conde Alpuente przy Plaza Platero Oquendo (fot. D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)



Fig. 5. Sgraffito decoration on the façade of the former farmhouse, now the Municipal Historical Archives, 10 de la Alhongido Street (photo by D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

Il. 5. Dekoracja sgraffito na fasadzie dawnego budynku gospodarskiego, obecnie Miejskie Archiwum Historyczne, ul. de la Alhongido 10 (fot. D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

decorations in the form of seashells⁸, with corners and areas above windows decorated with candelabra ornaments, medallions and plant tendrils look very nice (Fig. 6). Another decorative motif is the sundial, a beautiful example of which is a slightly older house at 11 Plaza la Merced, which was the former seat of the bishop (Fig. 7).

The arrangements of the sgraffito decoration on the façades of particular buildings also differ significantly. They cover the whole façade or selected parts or storeys. Most often they are used from the second storey upwards, leaving the ground floor zone plain. In richer solutions

separate borders were placed around window openings, other models were applied on each storey, and sometimes storeys and corners were separated with strips (Fig. 8). The decoration of the large zones of the façade, especially if the motif is strongly convex, gives an impression of a “lace”, unreal wall, which at the juxtaposition of many such façades gives a very interesting effect. In more modest façades only particular elements are decorated such as windows or entrance frames, building corners or elevation fragments. Often the richer borders around the windows are combined with simpler sgraffito imitating rustication (Fig. 9).

Chiaroscuro plays a very important role in this technique, deeper in case of more plastic and convex sgraffito. In the discussed decorations, the differences are quite big; in some works with plastic relief, its height reaches

⁸ These include contemporary decorations made with traditional methods on traditional plasters, such as the sgraffito with seashells on the tenements at 1 Plaza del Corpus and 7 Isabela Católica Street [25].



Fig. 6. Sgraffito with seashells on the tenements at 1 Plaza del Corpus and 7 Isabela Católica Street (photo by D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

Il. 6. Sgraffito z muszulkami na kamienicach przy Plaza del Corpus 1 i ul. Izabeli Katolickiej 7 (fot. D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

ca. 2 cm, while in the flattest ones, the convexity of the surface layer is at most a few millimeters. Color contrast plays a similar role. The same motif looks completely different in deepened and contrasted sgraffito than in shallow and similarly colored layers of plaster. In Segovia, both versions are encountered.

There are also different technical variants such as embossed and scratched sgraffito, consisting of two or more layers, can also be made with different materials and with different tools. Finally, different stencils were used, such as metal or stone⁹. Thus, even using the same pattern, the final effect on the wall can be very different, making the seemingly unified façades of the buildings considerably

⁹ This was described in detail by Ruiz Alonso [5] tools pp. 36–44; materials pp. 46–64 and technique pp. 66–87.



Fig. 7. Sundial on the façade of the house at 11 Plaza la Merced (photo by D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

Il. 7. Zegar słoneczny na elewacji domu przy Plaza la Merced 11 (fot. D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

different, resulting in a very interesting and unprecedented solution in the aspect of the entire Segovia center (Fig. 10).

“Esgrafiado segoviano” as part of the city’s identity

Cities have long had a need to emphasize their own distinctiveness and individuality. Nowadays, in the era of globalization, such aspirations have intensified. Conscious attempts to shape the identity of a city or region are increasingly important in the policy of promoting urban centers. The identity of a city should be based on the unique character of the local culture or the physical features of a given place. A very important role is played by a well exposed cultural heritage. In other words, the essence of a city’s identity can be described as “a set of historically conditioned characteristics” [26, pp. 37, 38]. According to another definition, the distinguishing features of a city’s identity can be called features that significantly distinguish it by creating its uniqueness, individuality and character [27, p. 55].

Sgraffito in Segovia, present for centuries in the architectural culture of the city, has become an authentic element of its identity and meets the criteria of a unique



Fig. 8. A late 19th-century building with decoration on the entire façade, 14 Isabela Católica Street (photo by D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

Il. 8. Kamienica z końca XIX w. z dekoracją na całej fasadzie, ul. Izabeli Katolickiej 14 (fot. D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

cultural heritage. This way of decorating buildings, with such intensity, a certain unification and, at the same time, a variety of designs is found only in Segovia. Due to its original form and its numerous applications on the façades of the majority of the buildings in the city center, it is a striking element that is associated with Segovia and, consequently, it is undoubtedly its distinctive feature. Analyzing the sgraffito found in other cities and regions of Spain, one can see a clear distinctiveness of the forms and motifs used in Segovia. Segovia's sgraffito decoration may be more modest and rarely combined with other decorative techniques, as is the case, for example, in Barcelona.

In addition, this technique was used not only in architecture but also in applied arts, which offers great opportunities for the production of various local goods, "under the sign" of sgraffito as the second "icon" of the city next to the aqueduct.

As part of the activities to promote "esgrafiado segoviano", geometric motifs from the façades of buildings were used in an interesting way to design the lighting for Christmas 2013. Enlarged stencils of sgraffito fragments, made of lamps placed on racks were located in different places in the old town. This "glowing sgraffito" designed by local artist Adrian Cugar, was an interesting form of reference to urban traditions [28].



Fig. 9. A banded window with sgraffito decoration, 32 Cervantes Street (photo by D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

Il. 9. Okno w opasce z dekoracją sgraffito, ul. Cervantesa 32 (fot. D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

Finally, it is worth mentioning the specialization "Mural Techniques and Procedures" opened in 1985 at the School of Applied Arts and Artistic Professions of Segovia (Escuela de Artes Aplicadas y Oficios Artísticos de Segovia), in which sgraffito is an essential part of the curriculum [29]. Art education in Segovia dates back to the 18th century, when the scholar Espinosa de los Monteros created a drawing school to spread artistic knowledge among artisans and workers in the area. This tradition has remained today, adapted to new functions and requirements for artistic studies. This is a commendable concern for the survival of vanishing professions and shows the interest of the city council and provincial government in the future of this technique, so closely related to Segovia. The school cooperates closely with the city authorities. As part of their internship, students restore sgraffito in Segovia and make new decorations such as the staircase in the Dirección Provincial de Educación de Segovia [30].

Summary

The sgraffito technique in the decoration of buildings has a long tradition and a great number of multiple stylistic and technical forms. It has accompanied mankind since antiquity and changed with the subsequent epochs. The sgraffito decorations placed on Spanish buildings, popular also in small towns, have such a variety of faces. Both traditional designs made with stencils and stylish innovations from different historical periods can be seen here. Against this background, the sgraffito decorations in Segovia are

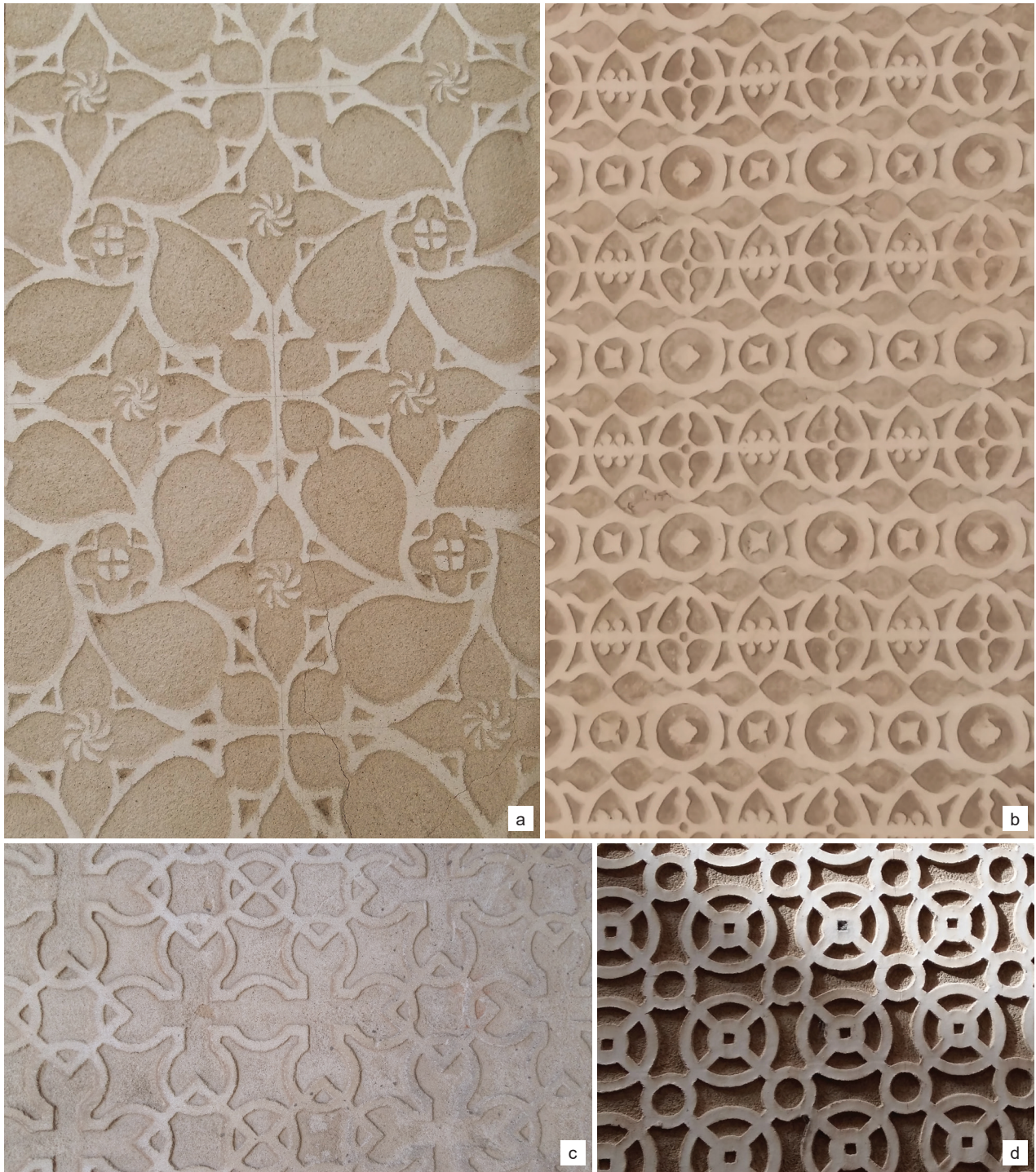


Fig. 10. Examples of sgraffito decoration on tenements (photo by D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

Il. 10. Przykłady dekoracji sgraffitowej na kamienicach (fot. D. Bręczewska-Kulesza)

undoubtedly an original product of the local, medieval building tradition. The decorations, based on geometric figures, cover the façades of the buildings or highlight the architectural elements of most of the houses in the historic buildings of the city. Apparently similar patterns show, however, a great variety and at the same time these decorations set the tone for the whole architecture, creating a very original whole that distinguishes Segovia's buildings from other urban centers and is undoubtedly part of the city's identity.

The analysis of the historical and contemporary aspects of the development of sgraffito in Segovia, as well as its form and style in comparison with other Spanish centers of this art, leads to the recognition of this form of decoration as a regional phenomenon that is a factor that builds the identity of the city and its symbol on a par with the famous aqueduct.

*Translated by
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Abstract

“Esgrafiado segoviano” as an expression of the city’s regional tradition and identity

The historic centre of Segovia abounds in buildings with façades entirely or partially covered with sgraffito decoration. Consistently applied and developed over the centuries, this consistent form of façade decoration has become a distinctive feature of the architecture of the city and the region. The aim of the article is to investigate Segovian sgraffito as an expression of the regional tradition and identity of the city.

During the research, historical studies were carried out on the development of the sgraffito tradition in Spain. They allowed to emphasize the distinctiveness of this form of decoration in Segovia compared to other centers. A critical analysis of literature and sources as well as architectural and conservation studies was performed. In situ tests were also carried out, during which a rich photographic material was collected, necessary for the formal analysis of the tested decorations.

The article follows the development of the sgraffito technique in Segovia against a historical background. A brief analysis of the formal decoration was carried out based on the in-situ studies carried out by the author. Subsequently, the influence of sgraffito on the cohesion of the city’s architecture was investigated. Finally, it was considered whether sgraffito could become part of the identity and business card of the city. The article focuses on the decorative function of sgraffito as part of regional architecture. After analysing the historical and contemporary aspects of the development of sgraffito in Segovia, this form of decoration can be considered as a regional phenomenon, representing a factor for the identity of the city, which, together with the aqueduct, can become the symbol of Segovia.

Key words: Segovia, sgraffito, elements of city’s identity

Streszczenie

„Esgrafiado segoviano” jako wyraz regionalnej tradycji i tożsamości miasta

Historyczne centrum Segowii obfituje w budynki z elewacjami w całości lub w części pokrytymi dekoracją wykonaną w technice sgraffito. Spójna forma zdobienia elewacji budynków, konsekwentnie stosowana i rozwijana przez stulecia, stała się elementem wyróżniającym architekturę miasta i całego regionu. Celem artykułu jest zbadanie segowiańskiego sgraffito jako wyrazu regionalnej tradycji i tożsamości miasta.

W trakcie badań przeprowadzono studia historyczne nad rozwojem tradycji sgraffito w Hiszpanii. Pozwoliły one na uwypuklenie odrębności tej formy dekoracji w Segowii na tle innych ośrodków. Dokonano krytycznej analizy literatury przedmiotu i źródeł oraz opracowań architektoniczno-konserwatorskich. Na podstawie rezultatów badań in situ, podczas których zebrano bogaty materiał fotograficzny, przeprowadzono analizę formalną tych dekoracji. Następnie zbadany został wpływ sgraffito na spójność architektury miasta. W końcu rozważono problem, czy sgraffito może stać się elementem tożsamości miasta i jego wizytówką. W artykule skupiono się na dekoracyjnej funkcji sgraffito jako elementu regionalnej architektury. Po przeanalizowaniu aspektów historycznych i współczesnych rozwoju sgraffito w Segowii można uznać tę formę dekoracji za regionalne zjawisko, będące czynnikiem budowania tożsamości miasta, które tak jak akwedukt może stać się symbolem Segowii.

Słowa kluczowe: Segowia, sgraffito, elementy tożsamości miasta

