Toruń Gingerbread of Old

(...) And if we were today to wake up those sleeping in boxes and museums, and fortunately still carefully preserved, old wooden gingerbread forms, we would witness a huge procession of saints, kings, knights, ladies, bollards, soldiers, the whole once great, now extinct, art industry would come alive. "

(...) in the lush Baroque Toruń gingerbread's great shape and taste was born, its fame goes to the royal and princely courts, palaces, quiet monasteries and the bustling colourful fairs of Central Europe. The nicest tasty gift, pours its fragrance and entertains the eye with a fancy form (...) - p. 266

Simultaneously, in order to preserve the tradition of the former appearance of gingerbread, bakery owners order copies of forms worn by frequent use, while maintaining their style. (p. 267)

Stanisław Dąbrowski, Toruń Gingerbread of Old, in: Annual of the Scientific Association in Toruń, Toruń 1926

Nostalgic Memories…

(...) The old noble form of gingerbread kings, ladies and knights disappeared only with the coming of mechanical production. Gingerbread Saint George with a dragon, Adam and Eve, a gingerbread carriage pulled by gingerbread horses - you can see it only in museums (...) They amuse the eye with the simplicity of their flat figures covered with intricate Baroque ornament. Some have something of a village holiday, others resemble rich carvings of Gdańsk furniture, others are naive folk woodcuts. Because the former decorative gingerbread was made of both the baker's craftsmanship and woodcut's skills (…)

Zbigniew Lengren, Toruń Gingerbread, Przekrój magazine vol. 105, 13-19.04.1947, p. 12

Gingerbread Press Forms

(...) The fact that a considerable amount of artistically carved wooden gingerbread press forms with coats of arms of towns, figures of nobility, burghers and soldiers from the 16th to the 18th century, and above all images of the Vasa kings: Zygmunt III, Władysław IV, and their royal wives (...) were found in Toruń companies of Gustav Weese and H. Thomas - interested the researchers.
(...) these forms were made by gingerbread maker apprentices, whose education included not only the skill of preparing sweet leaven and marzipans, but also the ability to cut forms in pear wood. (...) the level of their performance constituted the proper certification of their professional qualifications. When one of the apprentices wanted to look for another employer, he would put his woodcut boards in a sack and, on arrival to another city, presented his achievements to the new master. Owners of confectionery shops sometimes purchased the forms they liked from such "Wandermeisters" (wandering masters).

Tadeusz Seweryn, Pierniki krakowskie (Kraków Gingerbread). Kuryer literacko-naukowy (Literary and Scientific Journal), addition to number 356 of the Kuryer Codz. (Everyday Newspaper) of 25.12.1931

The Artistic Life of Old Polish Sweets

Toruń gingerbread makers often portrayed historical figures. (...) Scenes from the Bible and from mythology were among the favourite illustration theme for making gingerbread.
(...) Recognition of Toruń gingerbread is combined with the admiration of the refined artistic forms, both grace of the past and a sweet smell come from them. A new procession of miniature people, dressed in rich, pompous robes: kings, saints, gods, knights, ladies, soldiers is constantly emerging from old wooden forms. (…)
(...) As the Toruń figural gingerbread is really an ace among other sweets related to it, it beats the Lviv, Kraków, Poznań and Silesia with its delicious appearance.
(...) The fame of Toruń gingerbread is based on several centuries of tradition! Little Copernicus probably ate them from the family oven, - they were baked at the coronation and royal wedding ceremonies, - city councillors used them to alleviate Swedish grievances. A giant gingerbread was sent as a gift to Catherine the Great and was admired at her court. (…)
(...) Gingerbread makers families inherited their trade for centuries. The dowry received by their daughters included the workshop and the whole lot of old forms and kilograms of years-old prepared dough (because of its quality depend on its age!)
The forms never lost their relevance, the cake was still made of old designs, despite the fact that these gingerbread gentlemen and ladies appear to the public in very unfashionable robes. What's more, there is a tendency to make new forms archaic, by giving the forms, carved for example in the nineteenth century, a baroque or rococo character.
These forms were carved laboriously in a lime or pear tree by gingerbread maker apprentices, if they showed talent in the art. However, professional Toruń woodcarvers, known for their intricate work, which we admire on preserved organs, gates, doors and furniture, made more exquisite forms. Their forms are distinguished by style, harmony of lines and proportion of shapes. (...) The flat-modeled figures, in robes covered with very dense ornamentation, resemble the figures of saints painted on baroque altars
(...) The decorations and style of Toruń gingerbread forms show the influence of Dutch art radiating onto Poland through Gdańsk.
(...) for Christmas, figures of infants, fish, stars, and angels were baked, - on Epiphany day, plaques with homage to the Magi in the stable were mede, - the day of St. George, patron of knights and of the Court of Artus was celebrated by baking his figure on a horse, in armour, while piercing a dragon. During Easter, gingerbread scenes from the Passion, lambs and symbolic pelicans appeared, and during the year figures of the Mother of God, and Saint Nicholas were baked. On the solemn day of Saint Catherine children were given the famous "katarzynki" (Catharines gingerbread) (…)
Figures of Swedish officers, ensigns, trumpeters, and an angel with the inscription "Viva peace" are the echo of the war experiences of Toruń in the 17th century. The turbulent Toruń rococo period usually shows us images of grenadiers, cuirassiers, hussars, dragoons and Russian eagles, busts of Kościuszko and Bonaparte. During the Biedermeier period gingerbread makers baked decorative hearts, lyres, baskets of flowers and as a novelty: locomotives.
The newly-weds received wedding gingerbread as a gift: a bachelor and a lady, roosters, pigeons and frivolous scenes with rhymes. Children were given soldiers, animals and alphabet boards. Clown and harlequin figurines were made during the carnival. A polite and frugal gentleman could give gingerbread gloves to a lady instead of real ones, as was the custom during the Renaissance.
Less than a thousand old gingerbread forms, kept by the owners (Weese, Thomas, Ruchniewicz) and the Town Museum, - tell us about the old Toruń and its art, that is so strongly rooted here, supported by the rich and ornamentation-loving patricians.

Stanisław Dąbrowski, Piernik toruński. Artystyczny żywot staropolskich łakoci (Toruń Gingerbread. The artistic life of Old Polish sweets), AS vol. 31, 30.07.1939, p.22

Collections of gingerbread forms in Toruń from the 17th century to 1926, in the light of Stanisław Dąbrowski's inventory

The collection of gingerbread forms at the District Museum in Toruń currently includes 274 objects. The first forms in Toruń (collected with the awareness of their value for the cultural heritage of the city and the region) have been acquired by the City Museum since at least the beginning of the 20th century. The earliest mentions of including wooden gingerbread forming blocks in the museum collection come from 1908.

(...) In 1926, in an article published in the Annual of the Scientific Association in Toruń, Stanisław Dąbrowski gives a detailed description of Toruń gingerbread form collections collected by both private entrepreneurs, factory owners and museums. The dream collection is estimated at 772 pieces. (...) The data contained in Dąbrowski's inventory contributed to the recognition of the forms found after the turmoil of the war after 1945. To this day, it is the basic source for research on this museum collection.

(...) The Toruń collection of gingerbread and marzipan forms in the District Museum in Toruń belongs to one of the oldest and best recognized collections in Poland. Its unique value is demonstrated by the high artistic level of the blocks, the possibility of linking them to specific gingerbread workshops and their owners, as well as the history of displaying and making them available to a wider audience. Research on the collection of gingerbread forms contribute to a better understanding of the importance of Toruń gingerbread as material and immaterial heritage in the culture of memory of Toruń.

Anna Kornelia Jędrzejewska
District Museum in Bydgoszcz

ICONOGRAPHY OF GINGERBREAD FORMS BY S. DĄBROWSKI

(...) A gingerbread cake was a New Year's gift of the old tradition - a memory of old sacrificial cakes, also associated with the cult of the dead (…)
(...) Gingerbread angel head in a star, biblical scenes, or gloves, many of which were baked by Toruń gingerbread makers were gifted on that day. While a boar or a pig and a doll: a male or female figure, and a cradle was to bring luck for the New Year.
(...) And gingerbread fish were gifted in Toruń, because fish is a symbol of the old custom: it is a form of rent payment!
(...) After the New Year, weddings begin. And pies with family coat of arms are baked, for those who can afford them, and if not with the city coat of arms, and many of them were baked in Toruń. And gingerbread hearts, symbols of love and engagement, were baked.
(...) Hearts decorated with romantic flower garlands can also be found in the collections of Toruń Forms.
(...) Gingerbread couples in love, boy and a girl, were baked in the past, they symbolised the power of happiness, symbolized fertility.
(...) There are figures of animals present around people: bear, deer, and of those domesticated: ox, donkey, calf.
(...) In medieval mysteries about paradise, there is always a tree under which Adam and Eve stood. (...) These spectacular scenes convey to us the primitive expression of Toruń gingerbread (...) Very theatrical, according to past concepts, stylized outfit is worn by gingerbread angels that are numerous in Toruń's collections. The group depicting the Adoration of the Three Kings is a distinct echo of the religious scene. The figures of the Virgin Mary with Baby Jesus have the same features of modern dress as the paintings of the 17th and 18th centuries, this was also widely used in performances.
(...) Details of the outfit visible in the gingerbread forms stored in the company of Gustaw Weese and Herman Thomas show that local mysteries of St. George might have been the inspiration. In the first forms show the outfit of a 17th century military dignitary, and therefore a contemporary one; while the forms from the second factory, show a primitively archaic outfit, kind of Roman, spectacular from the helmet with a plume down to shoes and trousers.
Over time, as traditions fade, in the 19th century the gingerbread holy knight will be replaced by a modern hussar or postilion!
The figures of savages, Indians, or other similar fantastic characters can be considered memories of the moresca dance in African costumes, popular at courts and folk fairs of the 16th century.
(...) Here are some of the reflections and possibilities that come to mind when reviewing the interesting inventories of gingerbread Forms (...) I present a sketch of the motives, patterns, habits and customs, and circumstances that guided the hand and chisel of the gingerbread Forms maker.
These products made old Toruń's name famous easier and wider than its beautiful architecture.

Stanisław Dąbrowski, Historja różnych zwyczajów odczytana z toruńskich form piernikowych (History of Various Customs Read from Toruń Gingerbread Forms), Słowo Pomorskie journal, 1931.12.24

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A Wealth of Gingerbread Designs

(..) There are various forms: large and small, damaged and well preserved, with various themes, style, mastery of performance, significance and symbolism. These forms were made by craftsmen, true artists of their trade, who when sculpting the form, had to foresee the final effect, the gingerbread made from such form. At the same time, the form had to be durable, made of strong wood so as to serve for years.
(...) we are struck by their incredible wealth and the fact that we are, in a way, in direct contact with the past, the people of those times, their everyday lives, the way they viewed life and the world. They teach us history, they present objects and clothes, they depict material culture, and at the same time the taste and style of thinking of the people of the 17th, 18th, and 19th century.
The themes of these forms are very diverse: fish, birds and animals, musical instruments, swords, guns, the alphabet, horse riders, carriages, figures of women and men, genre scenes. Their shape - always sophisticated, compact and sculptural, sometimes intricate, lacy, fancy, simply beautiful.
(...) Each of the forms surprises - if not in whole, then with a detail, the way of treating a detail, the sense of space, and the infallible intuition of prediction. (...)

Tadeusz Marciniak, Dziwne misterium w piwnicach Ratusza (A Strange Mystery in the Town Hall Basement), Nowości newspaper, 1-2. 07.1978

Preface to the Gingerbread Forms Catalogue

(…) The "Nameless" gingerbread art, based on woodcarving and closely related to the art of representation, has become something like a synonym of Toruń (…)"
(...) iconography of gingerbread representations, very diverse and complicated in terms of not only themes, but also the "indented" lines, this specific ornamentation, sometimes creating from ancient motifs (…) unexpected linear collisions or "chiaroscuro" or even sculptural events.
(...) depictions of mostly human and animal figures, while the images of famous personalities require a comparative study with existing painted or drawn portraits, just like a group of animals could become a field for research of rituals, magic and exotic fauna; a variety of other topics such as: religious, allegorical, moral, fairy-tale, mythological, work, heraldic, etc., I emphasize this in connection with the extremely rich ornamentation (...) as well as geometric along with decorative and ornamental motives of folk art.

Jerzy Remer, Przedmowa, w: Pierniki toruńskie i inne w zbiorach Muzeum w Toruniu (Preface, in: Toruń and Other Gingerbread in the Collection of the Museum in Toruń), Toruń, 1956, pp. 5-7

Toruń Gingerbread in the Collections of the Museum in Toruń

Gingerbread forms were usually made of wood, less often of baked clay.

(...) Gingerbread forms (...) usually have the shape of a rectangular block, with an average thickness of 1-4cm, with a concave bas-relief image. Images were placed on one or both sides of the block; sometimes there are several or even a dozen or so images on one block. There are also forms in which, apart from the actual images, there are also tiny images that play the role of test sketches, intended to be transferred enlarged to a separate form.
(...) When sculpting the forms, it should always be borne in mind that the image on the block is only a negative. Only the gingerbread pressed out of the form became a positive. (p. 18)
(…) Forms for figural confectionery products were usually carved by the gingerbread makers themselves.
(…) it should be assumed that the particularly beautiful forms, intended for making gingerbread for high-ranking personalities, were the work of professional woodcarvers or graphic designers. (p.19)
(...) Unfortunately, we do not know any author of Toruń gingerbread forms by name; the creators of these forms were not in the habit of placing a full signature on their works (...) Under no circumstances should the contractor's signature, initials (engraved in wood or burned) be placed on the side edge of the form, on its reverse or next to the carved image: these are usually the initials of the gingerbread workshop owner that the form belonged to. (p. 20)
Beautifully ornamented gloves - a frequent motif in gingerbread woodcarving - probably had symbolic significance: dating back to the Renaissance period, it was a custom to send gloves to people when one wanted to show special respect and friendship. (p. 25)
Although gingerbread forms are the work of various authors, they still have some common features, characteristic in general for gingerbread woodcarving. The tendency for representative presentation of figures can be recognized as such a feature: figures, both human and animal, are generally presented statically, turned "en face" (people) or with the profile (animals) towards the viewer. (pp. 26-27)
Just like in case of faces, woodcarvers have little interest in the activities of the figures.
(...) The artist put the greatest emphasis on the model's outfit and hairstyle. Clothes, usually very rich, were presented with extraordinary meticulousness and precision, emphasizing even the smallest details of the outfit, lace collars and cuffs, frills, embroidery. The clothes, both male and female, are densely covered with ornaments of various motifs. In contrast to human physiognomy, usually not much different from each other, the costumes show a great variety, providing rich material for costume studies. (p. 27)
Toruń gingerbread forms are generally much smaller than those from other gingerbread centres (...). Gingerbreads over half a meter in size are rare in Toruń (…)
In terms of artistic level, Toruń gingerbread can be easily included among the most beautiful in Europe
(...) in Poland Toruń gingerbread forms are second to none: even Silesian forms lag behind the works of Toruń woodcarvers. (p. 30)
(...) The art of cutting out gingerbread images borders on sculptural art, but is particularly closely related to graphics, especially woodcutting. The essence of this relationship is not only about drawing patterns from contemporary copper engravings and woodcuts: it is all about the similarity of technique and style. (P.34)
In comparison to other works of fine arts of the 17th and 18th century Toruń, gingerbread woodcarving represents the highest artistic level. In the Baroque era, Toruń experienced a period of decline in the field of art, which is associated with the general decline of the city during this period, in contrast to the great economic and artistic flourish of the Middle Ages. (...) Only the art of carving gingerbread forms developed in Toruń on a truly European scale, surpassing all other Polish centres in this respect. (p. 36)
(...) In artistic terms, the 19th century gingerbread carving does not reach the heights achieved in earlier centuries; Over time, one can notice an increasingly progressive process of schematizing presented content and its iconographic depletion. Special companies producing gingerbread forms are created during this period; Toruń gingerbread factories used such forms, made by the A. Kempf company from Nuremberg, the A. Kohler company from Hamburg or the H. Nabers company from Düsseldorf; images carved on these forms were most often limited to ornamental motifs. (…) during the nineteenth century, everyday objects gradually lose their artistic value and thus cease to be works of art. (pp. 38-39)
In the 20th century, the art of carving gingerbread forms disappears almost completely. (p. 40)

Janina Kruszelnicka, Pierniki toruńskie i inne w zbiorach Muzeum w Toruniu (Toruń and Other Gingerbread in the Collections of the Museum in Toruń), Toruń, 1956

In a good form

Toruń gingerbread products were known and appreciated for their unique taste, but also among others: for quality and artistic value, undoubtedly thanks to the intricately carved gingerbread forms. Forms were used to prepare the so-called decorative gingerbread, not for eating. It is thanks to the forms that Toruń specialities gained both unusual shapes and beautiful, subtle decorations.

The dough used to make decorative gingerbread did not contain any conditioners, thanks to which the baked gingerbread kept its shape and pattern imprinted in the form. A portion of the dough was pressed into the carved pattern, and then, after removing from the form - the shaped gingerbread was baked in the oven.

Traditional wooden forms for gingerbread have a characteristic, rectangular shape. Patterns were carved on one side, but often also on both sides, of the form. The themes that most often appear are universal, timeless symbols, with an easy-to-read message: a heart, an infant, fashionable ladies in beautiful clothes, brave cavaliers, a coach, etc. Typical Toruń motifs include: the coat of arms of Toruń and a folding pattern of six medallions connected together, i.e. Catherine.
For the production of forms, woodcarvers most often used fruit wood (in Toruń, apple and pear wood were preferred).

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History of Toruń Gingerbread Department

VARIETY OF FORMS

(...) The variety of forms resulted from the special nature of Toruń gingerbread. (…)
(...) With colourful polychrome, richly gold-plated, it pleased the eye more than the palate. It was a unique art piece, imported by a nobleman, returning home from Gdańsk. It was a decorative gift and a nice souvenir. (...) Such gingerbreads were probably kept for a long time at home, as gems and curiosities.
(...) He wanted to bring something that would smell of overseas travel, the Toruń gingerbread seller offered him the entire menagerie. From an elephant to a savage Indian with feathers. However, if he wanted a jest the Toruń gingerbread seller was also ready in this respect. A nobleman could treat himself to one of the many gingerbreads that depicted cheerful scenes. Drunken nobility, a duel, (...) various events of life in a caricature
(...) To this day, by strange twist of fate, the earliest (...) gingerbread royal portraits of Zygmunt III, his wife, Władysław IV and Cecylia Renata preserved. We know about these last two portraits and about the majestic seal of this king that they were made to celebrate the royal marriage. Portrait forms of other monarchs have not survived to this day.
(...) Toruń gingerbreads were works of art, items of beauty, wealth and style of the era
(...) Unfortunately, we do not know the names of the wood carvers. But true artists were among them. Their works that created this incomparable charm that resulted in the fame of Toruń gingerbread.

Jan Grabowski, Piernik toruński. Nie kucharz lecz artysta. - Dla oka nie dla języka. – Cacka i pamiątki. Rozmaitość form. – Od stajenki betlejemskiej do króla. – Nieznani artyści. (Toruń gingerbread. Not a chef but an artist. - For the eye, not for the tongue. - Gems and souvenirs. Variety of forms. - From the Bethlehem stable to the king. - Unknown artists), Kuryer literacko – naukowy journal, 25.12.1928

Gingerbread in old Poland

(...) Due to various uses, the formats and the topics carved on forms also varied.
(...) It is visible that, little effort was given to personalize the facial features, while the details of clothing were presented very accurately, even trying to imitate embroidery and fabric patterns in women's dresses, an ornament on a weapon or a chain weave. Much attention was devoted by artisans to animals, many of them were cut in hard wood, from which the forms were made. In Toruń, the motif with the city coat of arms was also repeatedly used.

Pierniki w dawnej Polsce (Gingerbread in old Poland), Anna Męczyńska, Nowości newspaper, 3.04.1978

Gingerbread for kings and Marshal Piłsudski. Patriotic traditions in the history of Toruń gingerbread

(...) In the 1920s, the Weese and Thomas companies donated Toruń figural gingerbread made from old forms to the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków. These gingerbreads were displayed, among others, at the Wawel Castle. Today they are an invaluable source for research. Forms from Toruń were lost during World War II. Fortunately, baked goods have survived in Kraków. Among them are royal gingerbread and Tadeusz Kościuszko's profile. They are the oldest known preserved Toruń gingerbread, almost 100 years old!

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https://www.historiaposzukaj.pl/wiedza,historiomat,832,historiomat_pierniki_patriotyczne.html