

Unearthed Treasures Beneath 13th-Century Church Stun Experts

Archaeologists in Chełm, Poland, have uncovered hundreds of rare, custom-made glazed tiles under a 17th-century Basilian monastery adjoining a 13th-century basilica. The tiles, bearing heraldic symbols and bishop Józef Lewicki's initials, date between 1711 and 1730 and shed new light on monastic craftsmanship and liturgical life.

Excavations began beneath the wooden upper-floor of the Basilian monastery next to the Basilica of the Birth of the Virgin Mary. The basilica was originally founded in the 1200s and has served Orthodox, Eastern-rite, and now Roman Catholic congregations. Lublin Voivodeship conservators described the findings as "sensational"—an apt descriptor for hundreds of green-and-brown glazed fragments designed for use in a ceremonial stove.

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Each tile was custom-made, bearing symbolic imagery such as a bishop's coat of arms and initials of Józef Lewicki, then-superior and later bishop of the Chełm Eparchy. Conservation teams are now meticulously inventorying and reconstructing the pieces.

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These glazed tiles indicate a sophisticated level of ecclesiastical art in the early 18th century. The use of green and brown glazing and personalized heraldry point to resources and attention dedicated to the monastery's interior design. Such detail aligns with the period's Baroque revival in

liturgical architecture across Catholic Europe.

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This discovery complements a wave of recent archaeological revelations in Poland, including a rare weapon found on the Baltic coast and a 500-year-old ring near Wawel Castle in Krakow. Each find reinforces Poland's deep and layered Christian heritage—rooted in medieval foundations and nurtured through centuries of faith.

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Conservation authorities continue studying and reconstructing the tiles. This project promises further insights into 18th-century monastic life, church architecture, and the individuals who guided the faithful in eastern Poland.

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