

Marcus van der Meulen

The Construction of a National Patrimony? Restoration of Gothic Cathedrals and Churches in the Polish People's Republic

After the Second World War, a ruined Polish state was rebuilt in ways that redefined the country both geographically and politically. Geographically, the loss of eastern territories to the Soviet Union, including the historic cities of Vilnius and L'viv, was compensated during Allied conferences by the transfer of territory from defeated Germany to the new Polish state to form the so-called recovered territories.¹ Politically, a socialist regime was established with the support of the Soviet Union; this became the Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa (Polish People's Republic, hereafter PRL). The approach to historic buildings in this new state was not only defined by the destruction that had taken place between 1939 and 1945 but also influenced by postwar changes in the political, economic, and social systems.² Wartime destruction had sparked discussions among representatives of the architecture and monument preservation communities concerning the possibility and necessity of rebuilding historic structures.³ The new socialist regime took the protection, preservation, and even the reconstruction of the nation's architectural heritage very seriously and supported the restoration of historic buildings by allocating significant funds for this purpose.⁴ A substantial portion of the restored structures were medieval churches; as religious structures, these were potentially counterrevolutionary.

Yet during the radical, or Stalinist, phase (1947–56) of the PRL under the leadership of Bolesław Bierut (1892–1956), a state opposed to the construction of places of worship initiated and supported the restoration of numerous Gothic churches and cathedrals.⁵ So much so that I will argue there was a process of “re-Gothicization” as part of a policy of nation building by the Stalinist state. Churches and cathedrals were restored to an ideal former state taken from their long history, one that was assumed to be untouched by foreign, especially German, influences. This was achieved by removing later interventions, particularly those in Baroque, neoclassical, and nine-

1 R.M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

2 Bogusław Szmygin, *Kształtowanie koncepcji zabytku i doktryny konserwatorskiej w Polsce w XX wieku* (Lublin: Wydawnictwa Uczelniane, 2000), 117.

3 Szmygin, *Kształtowanie koncepcji zabytku*, 146.

4 Jan Zachwatowicz, *La protection des monuments historiques en Pologne* (Warsaw: Editions Polonia, 1965), 34.

5 Mateusz Opaliński, “Zgody nie wyrażono”: Problem budownictwa sakralnego w diecezji łódzkiej 1945–1989 (Łódź: Księży Młyn, 2018), 61–74.

teenth-century historicist styles, and by constructing an often-invented Gothic exterior and interior. The Gothic church, in essence, came to represent the Polish nation.

This development is seemingly contradictory and requires clarification. Not only did a socialist state advocating atheism have a troubled relation with religion and religious buildings, but restoring and rebuilding Gothic structures seems particularly illogical given that this style was often associated with the (recently defeated) Germans. Through an analysis of the status of Gothic in Polish territory beginning in the eighteenth century and going through the era of Prussian, German, and Russian imperialism to the 1970s, I show how Gothic came to embody the Polish nation. The new PRL-led Polish state, with close ties to the Stalinist Soviet Union, needed a built heritage that supported the national state-constructing myth. That was to be the so-called Piast concept, which held that Poland had always been a homogeneous nation within its (newly defined) territorial boundaries. Re-Gothicization thus had a decisive political goal: uniting the nation against a common enemy (presented primarily as German and Lutheran) and so legitimizing the new state. Reconstructing Gothic buildings became an instrument for constructing a unified nation.

Claiming Authority over Religious Buildings

To understand the reconstruction of Gothic churches and cathedrals in Poland, it is necessary to consider the cultural transformation experienced by the nation during the long nineteenth century. It was not until November 1918 that Poland regained independence after a long and traumatic period that had started in the late eighteenth century when the country was divided between its three imperialist neighbors: Russia, Prussia/Germany, and the Hapsburg Empire. Architecture during this period of partitions became a political tool for cultural transformation, particularly in the German- and Russian-controlled territories where strategies of Germanization and Russification were implemented.⁶ Both Russia and Prussia built garrison churches (churches for the troops) for specific religious denominations and in particular styles as a strategy to claim authority over the territories they now controlled. In Vistula Land, as the Russian part of Poland was known between 1867 and 1915, Orthodox religious buildings in an architectural idiom alien to the region were erected following that strategy; their numbers far exceeded the actual need for Orthodox places of worship.⁷

The Russification of the urban landscape was particularly pronounced in Warsaw. The most famous example is the now-demolished Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in

6 Michał Pszczółkowski, "Architecture as a Tool of Transculturation in Polish Lands during the Partitions," in *Art and Politics*, ed. Dragan Damjanovic et al. (Zagreb: FF-press, 2019), 325–33.

7 For Orthodox religious buildings as tool of cultural imperialism, see Piotr Paszkiewicz, *Pod berłem Romanowów: sztuka rosyjska w Warszawie 1815–1915* (Warsaw: Inst. Sztuki PAN, 1991).



Fig. 6.1: Warsaw, Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, ca. 1910; photograph by K. Wojutyński. Warsaw, National Library. Photo: Public domain.

Saxon Square (Fig. 6.1), but garrison churches sprung up in highly visible places throughout the city. These Russian and Orthodox buildings exhibited both an architectural language until then alien in this part of Europe and a highly political iconography. In some places in Vistula Land, Catholic churches “were forced to have hideous, Byzantine-Moscow and onion-like cupolas,” as one critic put it after Poland regained independence in 1918, suggesting that onion domes and Byzantine-inspired forms embodied Russian imperialism for the native population.⁸

In the German parts of partitioned Poland, the connection between state and religion, between throne and altar, was enhanced because Lutheranism was part of state ideology.⁹ The desire to strengthen the German character of the east of its empire was also repeatedly stressed as a justification for the construction of public buildings. This brought with it a form of Gothic style, which was adopted as the leading building tradition in the annexed territories. Ever since Goethe’s 1773 essay *Von Deutscher Baukunst* (On German Architecture) praised Strasbourg Cathedral as a German monument, the

⁸ Pszczółkowski, “Architecture as a Tool,” 331. For more on the Russian use of neo-Byzantine architecture as a political tool, including a discussion of the Nevsky cathedral in Warsaw, see the contribution by Ivan Foletti in this volume.

⁹ Piotr Birecki, *Das Evangelische Kirchenbauwesen in Westpreußen: Die Beziehungen zwischen dem Staat und der Evangelisch-Unierten Kirche* (Torun: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2022), 341.

German-speaking world considered Gothic architecture to be of German origin.¹⁰ More specifically, Gothic came to be associated with the Teutonic (German) Order, a military-religious institution whose main seat was in the thirteenth-century brick castle of Marienburg (Malbork in Polish).¹¹ Thus, in the nineteenth century, the most commonly used style for places of worship was a historicist architecture inspired by medieval “brick Gothic” (*Backsteingotik*) buildings of northern Germany, particularly those found in Hanseatic cities along the North and Baltic Seas.



Fig. 6.2: Ludwig Dühm, Garrison Church in Olsztyn, early twentieth century. Photo: Author.

Lutheran garrison churches were constructed in Olsztyn (Fig. 6.2), Szczecin, Gdańsk-Wrzeszcz, and Grudziądz in this style.¹² Along with churches designed for the troops, Lutheran parish churches were also built in the same style (for example in Bydgoszcz

¹⁰ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “On German Architecture,” trans. John Gage in *German Essays on Art History*, ed. Gert Schiff (New York: Continuum, 1988), 33–40.

¹¹ Pszczółkowski, “Architecture as a Tool.” The Teutonic Knights organized regular crusades, forced pagan populations to convert, and essentially colonized parts of northern Poland and the Baltics. The Order was defeated by the Poles and Lithuanians at the Battle of Grunwald-Tannenberg in 1410.

¹² Birecki, *Das Evangelische Kirchenbauwesen*, 333.

[Bromberg]) while Catholic churches were demolished.¹³ Unsurprisingly, the Polish opinion at the time was that German chancellor Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* between the Prussian state and the Roman Catholic church was a strategy aimed at Germanizing the Polish population through a concerted effort to alter the built environment.¹⁴ During the First World War, it was observed that Gothic was "a German architecture . . . imposed on us with a wave of Teutonic intrusion; we must fight it as it is foreign to our own traditions."¹⁵

Interwar Inclinations

The legacy of the partitions meant that the Second Polish Republic (1918–39) had a challenging time rebuilding the country. Understandably, questions related to architecture, church construction, and the renovation of public buildings were of lesser importance to the government of this young state than more pressing social and political issues.¹⁶ Yet in the architecture and monument preservation communities, reconstruction became a topic of debate after decades of Russification and Germanization.¹⁷ During the interwar years, the idea took shape that reconstruction in a national style should be considered "the duty of a patriotic society."¹⁸ There was also a theoretical debate about what Polish characteristics in architecture might look like: what should the appearance of Catholic churches be and what distinct role should they play in shaping the Polish political and cultural landscape? At the same time, it became clear how difficult it was to capture any characteristics defining a Polish architectural style. It was much easier to determine what was *not* Polish: this was Gothic. Because of its historic association with Germany, the Gothic style was perceived by many as an insult to the Polish people and their built environment in the interwar period.¹⁹

Actual reconstructions began relatively spontaneously during the First World War after Russian troops left the Polish territories and abandoned their places of worship. The Orthodox churches, built in the distinctive Russian-Byzantine style, were not

13 Pszczółkowski, "Architecture as a Tool."

14 Rudolf Jaworski, *Handel und Gewerbe im Nationalitätenkampf: Studien zum Wirtschaftsgegnung der Polen in der Provinz Posen (1871–1914)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986).

15 "W sprawie odbudowy wsi i miasteczek," *Gazeta Rolnicza*, 2 January 1915, 9.

16 The war-damaged town of Kalisz was an exception.

17 Anna Tejszerska, "National Style in the Reconstruction of Poland After World War I—Theory and Practice," trans. Agnieszka Tarabula, in *Reconstructions and Modernizations of Historic Towns in Europe in the First Half of the Twentieth Century: Nation-Politics-Society*, ed. Iwona Baranska and Makary Gorzynski (Kalisz: Kaliskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, 2016), 143–71.

18 Aneta Borowik, "O jednej z odmian narodowego romantyzmu. 'Styl wschodniomałopolski': geneza, twórcy, przykłady," in *Sztuka Kresów Wschodnich*, ed. Andrzej Betlej and Anna Markiewicz (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Text, 2012), 7: 212–13.

19 Tejszerska, "National Style in the Reconstruction of Poland," 147.

simply abandoned but converted for use by other denominations, mainly Catholicism. The conversion process necessitated remaking the interiors because of differences in liturgy, but it also extended to the buildings' exteriors. Initially, architectural interventions consisted of barely more than a pragmatic removal of Moscow-style ornaments; later, the process turned into more of a remodeling in either a neoclassical or modernist style.²⁰ Since the construction of Russian Orthodox churches during the years of partition had far exceeded the need for places of worship, the functional conversion of these sites for use by different denominations did not solve the problem of a sizeable number of buildings that were both empty and resented. As a consequence, some were demolished, such as the abandoned Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Warsaw, pulled down between 1924 and 1926. The plan for this action was supported by the architect Mikołaj Tołwiński, who argued that the demolition would not be "an act of political or religious hatred, but . . . a patriotic duty."²¹ In the 1930s, the state revived the idea of building a national shrine in Warsaw—the Temple of Divine Providence—possibly as a riposte to the destroyed cathedral. The archbishop of Warsaw, Cardinal Kakowski, presented official recommendations in which he argued that there were not only differences between Muslim mosques, Jewish synagogues, and Christian churches, but also that a Catholic church was different from an Orthodox *cerkiew* or a Protestant *Kirche*. Importantly for our subject, the cardinal's recommendations went further, as he categorized Christian churches by their architectural styles: Baroque was considered Ukrainian and Orthodox, while Gothic was German and Lutheran. For the Catholic structure, Kakowski proposed modernism as the appropriate style, which was indeed used for many new parish churches built (often without official state permission) in the PRL.²²

Although the idea of reconstructing the country's built environment in a way that would embody the Polish nation changed somewhat over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, the general consensus in the Second Polish Republic regarding Gothic was dismissive—the red brick Gothic style was best avoided.²³ After 1945, however, churches were restored in precisely this idiom, a surprising change in architectural policy that raises three questions: Why did a socialist state feel compelled to restore medieval churches? What did the Gothic style represent in the PRL? And, finally, how can the shift in its appreciation be understood?

20 In Warsaw, the Protestant Ascension Church near Lublin Union Square is an example.

21 Mikołaj Tołwiński, *O pomnikach i cerkwiach prawosławnych* (Warsaw: Galewski i Dau, 1919), 6.

22 Aleksander Kakowski, "Referat I. Em. Kardynała ks. Aleksandra Kakowskiego w sprawie projektowanej budowy świątyni 'Opactwa Bożej,'" *Architektura i Budownictwo: Miesięcznik ilustrowany* 8 (1932), 68–69. This official document by the Polish episcopate explicitly used the Russian and German words for "church." It also asserted that modernism was appropriate for the design of the Temple of Divine Providence "as long as it doesn't resemble a factory."

23 Pszczółkowski, "Architecture as a Tool."

Restoring Gothic

It was during the Stalinist phase of the PRL that the restoration of a large number of churches and cathedrals was not only initiated but also often (largely) completed. Although many of these structures had been damaged during the Second World War, the restorations cannot simply be explained as the result of a need for places of worship since, as mentioned above, the construction of new churches was actively opposed by the state in this radical era during which church-state relations were in great crisis, with increasing official attacks on the Catholic Church, including the imprisonment of priests.²⁴ “Bricks and stones from war-damaged churches are now used to build prisons in which numerous priests are being held,” the theologian D. J. Dunn wrote at the time.²⁵ One of the jailed priests was Stefan Wyszyński (1901–81), who had been appointed archbishop of Gniezno and Warsaw in 1948. His example, to which many more could be added, proves that the hostility of the state toward religion during the Stalinist period was significant. Yet precisely the same state initiated, financed, and coordinated the reconstruction of a large number of medieval churches and cathedrals, most of them built in the Gothic style. Wyszyński, now a cardinal, wrote to the leader of the PRL, Bierut, on 8 May 1953: “We want to emphasize that the state has made a significant contribution to this reconstruction work [on the churches].”²⁶ This restoration of churches in a state hostile to religion is unexpected and demands explanation.

In the German Democratic Republic, the national postwar reconstruction effort included a secularization of the urban landscape.²⁷ The socialist regime in East Berlin was unambiguous in its understanding that “a socialist city does not need Gothic churches.”²⁸ Its counterpart in Warsaw, however, was of a different opinion. The Polish socialist regime supported the restoration of historic buildings, including places of worship, but it required the buildings to be remodeled in line with a Communist reinterpretation. Some preservation professionals objected to this political instrumental-

²⁴ Opaliński, *Zgody nie wyrażono Problem budownictwa sakralnego*, 61–74.

²⁵ Georges Castellan, “*Gott schütze Polen!*”: *Geschichte des polnischen Katholizismus 1795–1982* (Freiburg: Kerle, 1981), 226–27.

²⁶ Castellan, “*Gott schütze Polen!*”.

²⁷ Marcus van der Meulen, “One Ideology, Two Visions: Ecclesiastical Buildings and State Identity in the Socialist Capital during the Post-War Rebuilding Decades 1945–1975, East-Berlin and Warsaw,” in *State Construction and Art in Central East Europe 1918–2018*, ed. Agnieszka Chmielewska, Irena Kosowska, and Marcin Lachowski (New York: Routledge, 2022), 268–77.

²⁸ As Walter Ulbricht, First Secretary of the German Democratic Republic, allegedly exclaimed when he saw the reconstruction model for Dresden in 1953. See Andreas Golinski, *Dresden zum Weitererzählen: Von Kaffeefiltern, Drachenboten und verbogenen Hufeisen* (Dresden: Books on Demand GmbH, 2010), 16.

zation of architecture and restoration.²⁹ Yet a conservation manual from the 1950s mentions that conservation and reconstruction of historic buildings are “not detached or isolated in a complex of creative changes in various fields On the contrary, they are ideologically related to the entirety of life, just like in other People’s Republics following the example of the Soviet Union.”³⁰ The conservation and restoration of historic buildings was thus part of an interpretation of the past and of national traditions that could perform educational and ideological tasks in the hopes of shaping contemporary individuals living in a socialist society.³¹ Any restoration project from this period should therefore be seen within the framework of Bierut’s totalitarian regime.

To show how Polish Gothic churches were restored in this period, I now come to my four case studies; together, they give a full picture of how Gothic in Poland was re-framed, reinterpreted, and even newly assembled.³² St. Mary’s Church in Gdańsk offers a good example of how restoration in post–World War II Poland could be complex and political (Fig. 6.3). Gdańsk posed a problem for the PRL and its efforts to legitimate territorial claims over this former Hanseatic, largely German-speaking city. But the city, and especially the Gothic St. Mary’s Church, also provided an opportunity. Scholarship during the socialist era emphasized that St. Mary’s had been remodeled between 1484 and 1502, that is, during the period when Gdańsk had come under royal Polish rule.³³ This remodeling, influenced by brick building traditions of the Teutonic Order (which were not, strictly speaking, Polish), was subsequently reinterpreted as representing the late Gothic style particular to Gdańsk.³⁴ The church’s star-shaped vaults were understood to be a typical element of this assumed local tradition and so were meticulously restored in 1947–48.³⁵

It was not only the architecture of St. Mary’s that needed interpretation; the church also fell under suspicion because the Lutheran Reformation was perceived negatively in the PRL. Catholics had lost this vast brick Gothic church as their place of worship in 1572, after some decades of simultaneous use by Protestants and Catholics.³⁶ In the PRL, the underlying assumption was that Catholicism, unlike Lutheranism, was Polish, in

29 Piotr Majewski, *Czas końca, Czas początku: Architektura I urbanistyka Warszawy historycznej 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Bellona, 2018), 421.

30 Józef Lepiarczyk, *Konserwacja zabytków architektury* (Kraków: Państwowe wydawnictwo naukowe, 1954), 126.

31 Szmygin, *Kształtowanie koncepcji zabytku*, 136–37.

32 Many more medieval churches and cathedrals were restored during the Stalinist phase of the PRL, including the Romanesque Tum collegiate church (1947–61), the Cieszyń Rotunda (1949–55), and the Gothic Church of SS. Martin and Nicholas in Bydgoszcz (1952–54).

33 See, for example, Stanisław Mossakowski, “Art in Poland in Copernicus’s Time,” trans. Bogusław Bucziński, in *Poland: The Land of Copernicus*, ed. Bogdan Suchodolski (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1973), 148.

34 Mossakowski, “Art in Poland,” 146–47.

35 Bohdan Szermer, *Gdańsk: Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Warsaw: Interpress, 1971), 106.

36 Stanisław Bogdanowicz, *Die Basilika zu St. Marien in Danzig* (Dülmen: Laumann, 1993), 10.

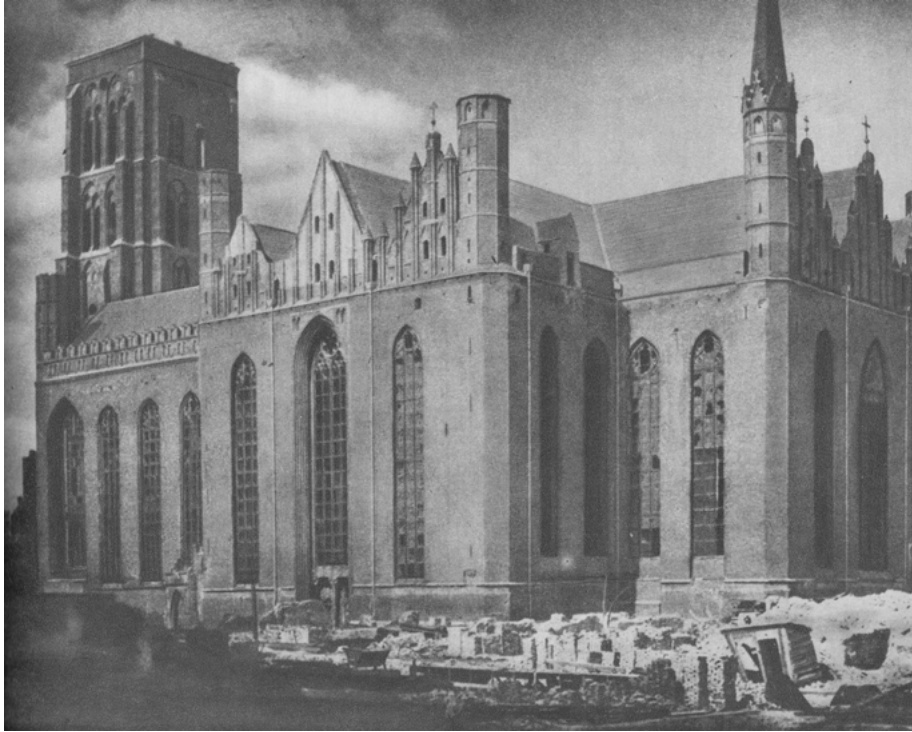


Fig. 6.3: Gdańsk, St. Mary's Church after World War II; photograph by T. Wański from *Piękno Polski Ludowej* (Warsaw, 1952). Photo: Wikimedia Commons (public domain).

keeping with the “Polish-Catholic” (*Polak-Katolik*) concept that had developed in the nineteenth century.³⁷ In the years after the Second World War, the damaged building was reframed to emphasize more sharply its Catholic identity. St. Mary's was now called the “Cathedral of the Sea” and identified as the church of the “Metropolitan of the Polish Coast,” even though it had never been the seat of a bishop.³⁸ When the Polish state gave it to the Catholics after the war, this transfer of ownership was presented as a restoration to its original, rightful users.³⁹ Reallocating Lutheran places of worship to Catholics must be understood within the context of mass migration after the Second World War, when German-speaking Lutheran natives of Gdańsk, Pomerania, and Silesia left and were replaced by Poles coming from central Poland and territories that had

³⁷ Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, vol. 2., 1795 to the Present (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 152–65.

³⁸ Aleksander Masłowski, “Gdańskie rocznice: Powrót katolików do Kościoła Mariackiego,” <https://gdansk.naszemiasto.pl/gdanskie-rocznice-powrot-katolikow-do-kosciola-mariackiego/ar/c1-2997732>.

³⁹ Masłowski, “Gdańskie rocznice.”

become part of the Soviet Union.⁴⁰ From this Catholic perspective, St. Mary's had been misappropriated by the Lutherans. The church's interior, however, home to fine Gothic painted and carved altarpieces, offers an outstanding example of medieval religious art and preserves a significant amount of pre-Reformation fixtures and fittings, including the important carved wooden sacrament tower of 1482 in the choir. St. Mary's thus confirms that Lutheranism served as a "preserving force" for medieval Catholic religious art by freezing it in time, and so counters the view that Protestants mistreated Catholic churches after the Reformation.⁴¹

A second example of preservation that contradicts the narrative of Lutheran misuse of churches and shows how medieval art was reframed after World War II is the wooden chandelier in Kołobrzeg (Kolberg), a coastal town in Pomerania situated between Gdańsk and Szczecin. The chandelier was donated by the Schleiffen family. Scientific research conducted in the PRL claimed to have uncovered this name; it changed it, however, from the German Schleiffen into the Slavic Śliwinów.⁴² Examples such as this and St. Mary's illustrate how heritage reinterpretation became a crucial tool for the young PRL's efforts to legitimize the inclusion of the recovered territories that had been German until 1945. Through its restoration policies (as much as in other media, such as texts), the PRL asserted that during the Middle Ages these spaces and objects had been Polish.

Rebuilding Gothic

The Second World War had left many towns and cities in the PRL badly damaged. Notable here was Warsaw, where the deliberate annihilation of the built environment after the failed 1944 uprising served as a tragic nadir (Fig. 6.4). Across the country, the destruction was typically blamed on the Nazis. Jan Zachwatowicz (1900–83), general conservator of monuments of the PRL, spoke of the determination to reconstruct the lost heritage after the intentional destruction of Polish patrimony by the fascist invaders (a common characterization of the Germans in the postwar years).⁴³ Polish authorities, however, may have considerably exaggerated the level of destruction, as some historians have suggested.⁴⁴ Overstating the war damage should be seen as a

⁴⁰ Davies, *God's Playground*, 413–81.

⁴¹ Johann M. Fritz, *Die bewahrende Kraft des Luthertums: Mittelalterliche Kunstwerke in evangelischen Kirchen* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 1997). For other examples of this phenomenon in present-day Poland, see Janina Kochanowska, *Perły Pomorza* (Szczecin: Oficyna IN PLUS, 2011).

⁴² Robert Śmigieński, *Kołobrzeg przewodnik milenijny* (Kołobrzeg: Agencja Reklamowa "Plus," 2000).

⁴³ Jan Zachwatowicz, "Program i zasady konserwacji zabytków," *Biuletyn historii sztuki i kultury* 1–2 (1946): 48–52.

⁴⁴ Mark Mazower, "Reconstruction: The Historiographical Issues," in *Postwar Reconstruction in Europe: International Perspectives, 1945–1949*, ed. Mazower (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 17–28, at 23.



Fig. 6.4: The ruins of Warsaw Archcathedral in 1945; photograph by Zdzisław Wdowiński; first published in *Spółdzielczy Instytut Wydawniczy "Kraj,"* 1950. Warsaw, National Library. Photo: Public domain.

deliberate strategy adopted by the PRL to obtain more funds for the reconstruction of the country (the largest foreign donor was the Soviet Union) and for reasons of propaganda, as repairing historic buildings was presented as the recovery of what the Nazis had deliberately destroyed.⁴⁵

Of the many war-damaged Gothic churches restored in Wrocław, the cathedral was considered to be of emblematic significance.⁴⁶ The diocese of Wrocław had been established around the year 1000 by the first king of Poland, Bolesław I Chrobry (ca. 967–1025), who was also associated with the foundation of the first Polish ecclesiastical province, the archdiocese of Gniezno (of which Wrocław was a suffragan diocese). The pre-World War II cathedral was the result of an accumulation of different building layers, including a restoration campaign carried out between 1873 and 1875 when the city was part of the German empire. Again, the decision to restore the destroyed cathedral after World War II was not an obvious one in the young socialist state since, in addition to doubts about the feasibility of the restoration, the appropriateness of reviving a religious building was in play.⁴⁷ Between 1949 and 1951, archaeolog-

⁴⁵ Bolesław Bierut, *Der Sechsjahrplan des Wiederaufbaus von Warschau* (Warsaw: Książka u Wiedza, 1951), 24.

⁴⁶ Edmund Małachowicz, *Katedra Wrocławska* (Wrocław: Polska Akademia Nauk Oddz. we Wrocławiu, 2000), 173.

⁴⁷ Marcin Bukowski, *Katedra Wrocławska. Architektura* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1962), 159.

ical examinations, which recovered remnants of the Romanesque building, were nevertheless carried out.⁴⁸ The scholarship of the time presented the anonymous medieval builders as having been local. No proof for this claim was offered, but the aim was to highlight the Polish character of the master builders and refute any possible German or Bohemian connection.⁴⁹

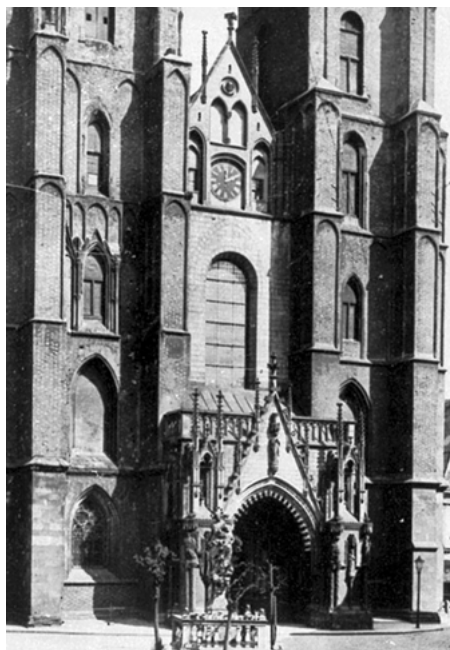


Fig. 6.5: Wrocław, Cathedral, Western front before 1945. Photo: Public domain.

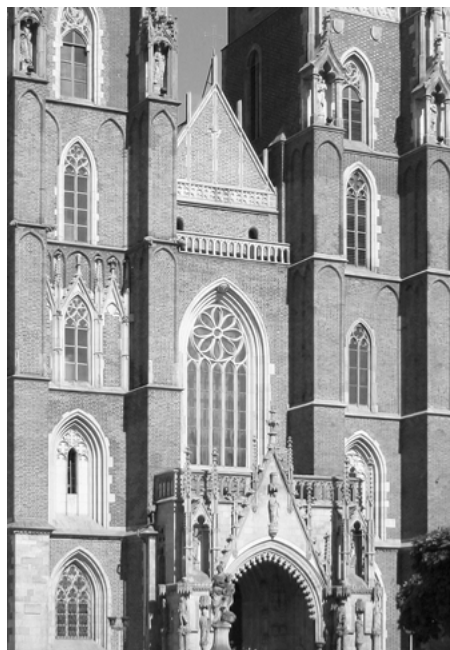


Fig. 6.6: Wrocław, Cathedral, Western front after reconstruction. Photo: Author.

Mainly financed by the state, the reconstruction project was led by the restoration architect Marcin Bukowski under the supervision of Zachwatowicz.⁵⁰ They added a new Gothic gable to the facade and a large window with tracery in place of the smaller rounded window that was there prior to the war (Figs. 6.5 and 6.6). These changes altered the entire western front, especially since the spires, built well after the Middle

⁴⁸ Günther Grundmann, *Dome, Kirchen und Klöster in Schlesien* (Frankfurt am Main: Weidlich, 1961), 121.

⁴⁹ Małachowicz, *Katedra Wrocławska*, 173.

⁵⁰ Protocol of 31 October 1949, Wrocław, Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu, Akta WDO z lat 1945–1951, nr sygn. 133, p. 12. On Bukowski, see Zenon Prętczyński, *Wspomnienia o profesorach Wydziału Architektury Politechniki Wrocławskiej (z lat studiów 1947–1952)* (Wrocław: OWPW, 2005), 30–35.

Ages, were not reconstructed.⁵¹ The interior, particularly the area around the choir, saw the largest intervention, as neo-Gothic additions such as the balusters above the choir stalls were taken down and the rebuilt vaults were given a more severe appearance (Figs. 6.7 and 6.8). In general, the reconstructed forms were simplified while the brick walls were left unplastered.⁵²



Fig. 6.7: Wrocław, Cathedral, Chancel before 1945. Photo: Public domain.

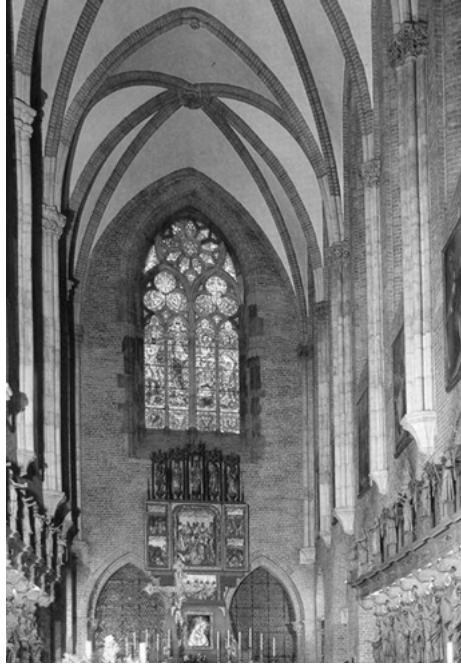


Fig. 6.8: Wrocław, Cathedral, Chancel after reconstruction. Photo: Public domain.

These choices were common in the restoration of Gothic buildings in the PRL because the simpler features were interpreted as characteristic of Polish Gothic and contrasted with what was perceived to be the more ornate Gothic in Bohemia and neighboring parts of Germany. Even though the Duchy of Silesia during the fourteenth century came under Bohemian suzerainty (and Prussian during the eighteenth century), Wrocław Cathedral was considered the most notable example of Silesian and Polish archi-

⁵¹ The present spires, elongated versions of the neo-Gothic spires, were constructed between 1989 and 1991; Małachowicz, *Katedra Wrocławska*, 171.

⁵² Katarzyna Sonntag, “Der Fall Wrocław: Die Suche nach einer neuen Heimat und Identität,” in *Denkmal–Heimat–Identität: Denkmalpflege und Gesellschaft*, ed. Martina Ullrich (Dresden: Thelem, 2019), 80–93.

ture of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁵³ The postwar reconstruction was intended to underline its exemplary character as a Polish Gothic building, distinct from German or Bohemian models. This emphasis on the period when Silesia was undoubtedly Polish was particularly important for Silesian cities such as Wrocław. A clear indication that restoration politics were at work here is the fact that not all of the city's religious heritage received the same level of attention and care as the Gothic churches. Just as the restoration work on the cathedral started, Wrocław's ruined New Synagogue was cleared to make space for a parking lot for a nearby police station.⁵⁴

Although the damage done to Poznań Cathedral was considerably less than to its counterpart in Wrocław, its reconstruction was more dramatic: it is a perfect example of what can be called re-Gothicization. "The German towers . . . so alien to the Polish spirit still stand, whereas Polish churches, including the cathedral, lie in ruins," wrote the architect Zbigniew Zielinski, later the city's director of planning and development, in a report about Poznań's situation on 8 August 1945.⁵⁵ Such an account, exaggerated as it may be, embodies the sentiment of the time, when German and Polish heritage were routinely juxtaposed and contrasted. Poznań's cathedral is closely associated with Mieszko I (ca. 930–92), the first historically documented member of the Piast dynasty and leader of a (mythical) sovereign Polish state, who likely founded the original church.⁵⁶ Both Mieszko and his son, Bolesław I Chrobry, were believed to have been buried there. Photographs from 1945 show fire damage to the roof and other limited damage to the interior, but the building was in relatively good condition apart from the facade.⁵⁷

The current appearance of the cathedral is the result of the reconstruction carried out between 1948 and 1956 (Figs. 6.9 and 6.10).⁵⁸ As in Wrocław, the building consisted of various historical layers, including ones dating from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries; the restoration program opted for the recovery of that medieval fabric. It was understood that "against German theories," the cathedral "was not inspired by the German

53 Zygmunt Świechowski, *Architektura na Śląsku do połowy XIII wieku* (Warsaw: Budownictwo i Architektura, 1955).

54 Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 137.

55 José M. Faraldo, "Medieval Socialist Artefacts: Architecture and Discourses of National Identity in Provincial Poland," in *Europe, Nationalism, Communism: Essays on Poland*, ed. Faraldo (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 2008), 13–39.

56 Szczesny Skibiński, "Królewski charakter katedry poznańskiej," in *W kręgu Katedry*, ed. Jacek Wierszowski (Poznań: KMP, 2003), 126–56.

57 A collection of historic images of the cathedral can be found on CYRYL, Wirtualne muzeum historii poznania, https://cyryl.poznan.pl/items/search?page_num=2&per_page=400&sort_by=&title=Katedra&place=Poznan.

58 Szczesny Skibiński, *Katedra poznańska* (Poznań: Księgarnia Św Wojciecha, 2001).



Fig. 6.9: Poznań, Cathedral, Western front in the 1930s; photograph by Henryk Poddebski. Warsaw, National Library. Photo: Public domain.



Fig. 6.10: Poznań, Cathedral, Western front after reconstruction. Photo: Author.

Gothic, nor even by Prague Cathedral, but had its own model.”⁵⁹ Scholars today might challenge this claim of artistic independence, but it was the assumption that guided the restoration. More than a renovation, then, this was a full-fledged rebuilding. Some notable changes to the neoclassical interior were the addition of a (hypothetical) triforium in the chevet and invented Gothic ribbed vaults.⁶⁰ These new vaults were set about a meter too high, however, and transformed the building’s original proportions. Also, some chapels of the ambulatory were adjusted by demolishing the existing vaults. This opened up the space to the (relic?) rooms above, creating lanterns illuminating the chancel and ambulatory; this involved the erasure of traces of former floor levels and communicating gaps between the chapel towers. During the reconstruction, some of the original structure was pulled down and rebuilt, a process that destroyed the actual medieval church that had emerged during the remodeling (although its appearance was fortunately captured in photos). Overall, the interventions produced an invented Gothic chevet, one that only partially rests on scientific evidence.

⁵⁹ Jerzy Ros, “Poznańskie refleksje,” *Życie Warszawy Gazeta*, 8 April 1948, 3.

⁶⁰ Andrzej Kuszczalski, “Prezbiterium katedry poznańskiej: Rekonstrukcja faz, układ, związki i wpływy,” in Wiesiołowski, *W kręgu Katedry*, 157–78.



Fig. 6.11: Poznań, St. Mary's Chapel on Cathedral Island; photograph by Henryk Poddębski. Warsaw, National Library. Photo: Public domain.

The transformation of the main facade, which had been most damaged, was even more drastic. There were attempts to go back to the oldest stages, but hardly enough remained to recover the Gothic building. Instead, the new front towers were modeled after those at Gniezno; the gable, meanwhile, echoed brick Gothic religious buildings of the vicinity, in particular a nearby chapel (Fig. 6.11). The towers posed particular problems for the restorers; sketches and a model show considerable variations.⁶¹ Ultimately, they opted for roofs inspired by an eighteenth-century drawing of the facade. Interestingly, the decision to have these copper roofs in a later architectural style than the Gothic brick work created what was to become a common Polish hybrid, linking the appearance of Poznań cathedral with analogous religious buildings in Kraków, Gniezno, and elsewhere.

Of all the ecclesiastical buildings covered in this essay, the most badly damaged was St. John's Archcathedral in Warsaw, which basically had been razed to the

⁶¹ An interesting sketch dated 1949 from the archive of the city conservator can be found at <https://cyryl.poznan.pl/content/archive/623/10KjfpI4WazEU9i4ZcBm.jpg>.

ground in 1944 (see Fig. 6.4). Admittedly not of the greatest architectural importance, this was, at its core, a brick Gothic hall church of the late fourteenth century that had been used by the medieval Piast dukes of Mazovia as their castle chapel and mausoleum. The prewar condition of the building was the result of a thoroughgoing restoration project carried out by Adam Idzkowski between 1837 and 1842 in a neo-Gothic style (Fig. 6.12).⁶²



Fig. 6.12: Warsaw, Archcathedral, Western front before 1939; photograph by Henryk Poddebski. Warsaw, National Library. Photo: Public domain.

After the Second World War, the state's general conservator Zachwatowicz directed its reconstruction, which began in 1947 and was extremely well funded, especially considering the more pressing needs for functional structures such as housing.⁶³ This reconstruction can also be classed as a re-Gothicization (Fig. 6.13).

⁶² Tadeusz Zagrodzki, *Gotycka architektura katedry Św. Jana w Warszawie* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2000), 6.

⁶³ Maria I. Kwiatkowska, *Katedra św. Jana* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1978). There were several allocations of funds for the reconstruction of Warsaw's main churches in the pe-



Fig. 6.13: Warsaw, Archcathedral during reconstruction, ca. 1950; photograph by Alfred Funkiewicz (?) first published in *Spółdzielczy Instytut Wydawniczy "Kraj,"* 1950. Warsaw, National Library. Photo: Public domain.

For example, a high-gabled roof was rebuilt to make the building dominate the skyline of the historic city. The most interesting intervention, however, concerns once again the main facade. Initial proposals ranged from rebuilding the nineteenth-century neo-Gothic facade to the construction of an entirely new and conjectural Gothic tower.⁶⁴ Ultimately, a proposal for a brick Gothic style was adopted (Fig. 6.14). But rather than a reconstruction rooted in scholarly evidence, it was an interpretation of how the gable *could* have looked, based on other Gothic churches and cathedrals found across Poland.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, the cathedral facade is now held to exemplify *narodowego* (national style) and offers a telling glimpse into the complexities of restoration practices in the 1950s.⁶⁶

It was not only the fabric of Gothic religious buildings that was recovered. Church interiors were also restored, but in a way that could serve as display spaces for local

riod 1947–56, on which see Józef Sigalin, *Warszawa 1944–1980: z archiwum architekta* (Warsaw: PIW, 1986), 2: 404–10.

⁶⁴ Several design proposals are held in Warsaw, Warsaw University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture collection.

⁶⁵ See the resemblance to the facade of the Church of SS. Stanislas, Dorothea, and Wenceslas in Wrocław, as noted by Kwiatkowska, *Katedra św. Jana*, 224.

⁶⁶ Marek Walczak, *Kościół gotycki w Polsce* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo M, 2016), 170–76.



Fig. 6.14: Warsaw, Archcathedral of St. John, Western front. Photo: Author.

art production from the Gothic period. Often that entailed removing, relocating, or even demolishing existing objects. The destroyed choir of Wrocław Cathedral, for example, was reconfigured by bringing in a late Gothic carved wooden altarpiece from a church in Lubin (Lower Silesia) and choir stalls from another church in Wrocław.⁶⁷ In Poznań, the main altar of the cathedral was, despite limited fire damage, completely dismantled in an intervention that also destroyed a substantial part of the eighteenth-century interior by the architect Ephraim Szreger. The neoclassical altar was replaced by a late Gothic carved altarpiece brought in 1952 from a church in Góra Śląska in the recovered territories of Silesia (Figs. 6.15 and 6.16). And early photographs of the reconstructed cathedral in Warsaw show what appears to be a Gothic wooden altarpiece in the choir.⁶⁸ This kind of reassembly of church interiors was common.

This process of the museumization of Gothic churches continued even after the radical phase of the PRL was over, as is shown by St. James's Church in Szczecin (Stettin) in Pomerania. Not only is this another example of the conversion of a Lutheran into a Cath-

⁶⁷ Małachowicz, *Katedra Wrocławska*. The wooden altarpiece was replaced in 2019 by the silver *Jerin Altarpiece* made by Nitch and Fichtenberger in 1591 that had adorned the chancel before 1945.

⁶⁸ See the photographic comparison of the ruined and rebuilt cathedral interior in Adolf Ciborowski, *Warschau: Zerstörung und Wiederaufbau der Stadt* (Warsaw: Interpress, 1969), 90



Fig. 6.15: Augustyn Schoeps, Main altar in the chancel in 1945, Poznan Cathedral. Poznan Municipal Publishing House. Photo: CYRYL: Poznań Virtual History Museum (public domain).



Fig. 6.16: Poznan, Cathedral, Interior looking towards the chancel after reconstruction. Photo: Wikimedia Commons/David Castor (CC 1.0 Generic).

olic place of worship, but also of a redecoration relying on relocated Gothic religious works of art supposedly made by local craftsmen. Pomerania's anonymous altarpieces were ascribed to Polish workshops despite their clear Netherlandish characteristics.⁶⁹ The most extraordinary case is the church's main altarpiece, which is a modern assembly of several elements believed to have been created in local workshops (Fig. 6.17).

The presence of such objects arguably makes the reconstructed building more a museum to Pomeranian Gothic art than a place of worship. An interesting counterpoint to this trend is Hans Memling's famous *Last Judgement* triptych (1467–71). It had been in St. Mary's Church in Gdańsk since the fifteenth century, but, after the Second World War, was taken to the Soviet Union for a decade; when it was returned to Gdańsk, it went back not to St. Mary's but to the city's branch of the National Museum. Similarly, the late Gothic *St. Reinhold Altar* by Jan de Molder and Joos van Cleve was relocated from the same church in the same years to the National Museum in Warsaw. It is likely that both altarpieces were transferred from St. Mary's to the nation's most important museum because they were documented examples of Netherlandish art.⁷⁰ They (and many others) illustrate how medieval art found in Polish churches

⁶⁹ See for example Mossakowski, "Art in Poland," 148.

⁷⁰ Wojciech Bonisławski "‘Sąd Ostateczny’ w muzeum czy w kościele?", *Wyborcza*, 26 April 2019. The *St Reinhold Altarpiece* was made in an Antwerp workshop; its painted wings are by Joos van Cleve.



Fig. 6.17: Szczecin, St. James's Church, Main altar. Photo: Author.

that could not be reinterpreted as local productions (and thus potential national patrimony) ended up in museums, especially the National Museum in Warsaw.

Typically, restorations of Gothic churches and cathedrals in the PRL were intended to recover the authentic medieval architectural fabric. St. Mary's Church in Gdańsk offers a good illustration of how the concept of authenticity was understood at the time; it also demonstrates how Gothic brick churches were reframed and reinterpreted. The examples from Warsaw and Poznań lie at the other end of the spectrum of approaches to reconstruction. There, the interventions did not recover the buildings as they had been before the war damage, but relied instead on the creative ingenuity of architects and their assumptions of how the buildings could have been; or, perhaps more accurately, how they *should* have been. This restoration practice—the re-Gothicization, as I have called it—of war-damaged religious buildings remains contested in preservationist circles, but it was not uncommon in Europe at the time. One need only look to the Church of St. Michael in Hildesheim for another striking example in Western Europe of a similarly dramatic postwar reconstruction.⁷¹ But there is an essential difference: the particular political motivation for the restorations in the PRL, a question to which I now turn.

⁷¹ See Hartwig Beseler, "Der Wiederaufbau der Hildesheimer Michaeliskirche nach Kriegszerstörung," in *Rekonstruktion in der Denkmalpflege: Überlegungen-Definitionen-Erfahrungsberichte*, ed. Juliane Kirschbaum and Annegret Klein (Bonn: Deutsches Nationalkomitee für Denkmalschutz, 1998), 64–70.

No Myth, No Nation

Why, one must ask, were Gothic Catholic churches restored in the PRL and why was this done by a socialist state despite the buildings' religious character and the association of the Gothic style with Germany? The Polish Communist Party, the main initiator and sponsor of the restorations I have been discussing, understood that it needed a myth to rebuild the nation after the war. The Polish myth that best served its interests was the so-called *koncepcja piastowska* (Piast concept). Representing a mystical union of nation and territory, it had been developed in the early twentieth century in opposition to what was known as the Jagiellonian concept. This, the leading historiographical notion during the Second Polish Republic, favored an understanding of the nation as multiethnic and multireligious.⁷² But in 1945, the Polish Communist Party, supported by Stalin, adopted the Piast concept, which was rooted in the legendary belief in an ancient Polish nation living in harmony and unity under the rule of a peasant son named Piast.⁷³ The reality is that, before 1945, Poland had been a multinational state composed of numerous ethnic minorities; the PRL, on the other hand, saw itself as the first Polish state to be ethnically homogenous and the Piast concept provided an excellent (if fictitious) opportunity to define the nation's characteristics as well as its territorial boundaries.⁷⁴ Soon, maps were drawn demonstrating that the borders of the new state coincided with the lands of the early medieval Piast princes.⁷⁵

The state assigned scholars a clearly defined task: provide historical legitimacy to the new political order. The Piast concept served this task well, for it held that the Poles had been robbed of their "inheritance" and lost the control over their native lands with the arrival of alien peoples, such as Germans, Jews, and Ukrainians. In support of this historical claim, art historians during the PRL pointed out that different ethnic groups with their own artistic traditions had lived in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569–1795).⁷⁶ Accordingly, historic buildings could be classed as Polish, German, Jewish, or Ukrainian.⁷⁷ But it was the research of medievalists, in particular, that could be used to connect the Piast concept to modern Poland. Historians

72 Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 323–27; Norman Davies, *Polish National Mythologies* (New Britain: Central Connecticut State University, 1998).

73 Davies, *Polish National Mythologies*.

74 Maciej Górny, *Przede wszystkim ma być naród: Marksistowskie historiografie w Europie Środkowo-Wschodni* (Warsaw: TRIO, 2007).

75 Davies, *Polish National Mythologies*, 20.

76 So, for example, Stanislas Mossakowski wrote in 1973: "The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth . . . was inhabited [sic] by Poles, Lithuanians, Ruthenians and Byelorussians as well as by other immigrant groups: Germans, Armenians and Jews, each of which possessed and tried to uphold different artistic traditions." Mossakowski, "Art in Poland," 145.

77 Julia Roos, *Das multikulturelle bauliche Erbe: Denkmalpflege und Wiederaufbau in Polen von 1944 bis 1956: Beispiele aus Stettin und Lublin* (Hamburg: Diplomica, 2010).

went back to the early and High Middle Ages to find historical backing to substantiate Polish claims to territories regained after the Second World War (Pomerania, parts of Silesia, and the city of Gdańsk) that were a particular challenge to integrate into the new Polish state.⁷⁸ They emphasized that Silesia had been one of the core regions of the early Polish nation and that Pomerania lay within its political influence. In a similar fashion, the medieval relations between Poland and the Teutonic Order were treated as a metaphor for modern Polish-German relations, with the Polish victory in the Battle of Grunwald-Tannenberg in 1410 seen as an apogee that presaged the post-1945 situation.⁷⁹ The restoration of a unified Polish kingdom in the early fourteenth century was taken as another important historical precedent, and, in this case, architecture was given a crucial part to play.⁸⁰ The reign of King Casimir the Great (r. 1333–70), in particular, was summed up with the saying that the sovereign had acquired a wooden Poland and rebuilt it in stone.⁸¹ Gothic buildings begun under his rule stood as tangible confirmations of this axiom because they replaced earlier buildings, some of them in wood. This was notably the case for Warsaw's cathedral which was rebuilt in stone in the fourteenth century. In socialist Poland, then, the Middle Ages were portrayed as a period of national triumph.

The Piast concept also needed tangible representation. But that patrimony was lacking since buildings from the tenth to the twelfth centuries were almost nonexistent. The collegiate church at Tarnobrzeg and the Cieszyń Rotunda are exceptions and, unsurprisingly, both of these religious buildings were meticulously reconstructed during the radical era of the PRL. But those were unusual survivals. Instead, it was Gothic ecclesiastical buildings that best served the state's desire to deemphasize Poland's multi-ethnic and multi-religious past in order to promote the anticipated national unity. They survived in sufficient numbers and could be reinterpreted to represent a nation untouched by foreign influences. Gothic cathedrals and churches became the visible symbol of the Piast concept; and it was as the embodiment of this idea that they could function as a national patrimony useful for the socialist Polish state. In Warsaw's reconstructed stone archcathedral, for example, the tomb of the last medieval Piast dukes of Mazovia was given a prominent location. Moreover, the resemblance between the building's facade and that of St. Dorothea's Church in Wrocław, personally founded by Casimir the Great, was understood to be intentional.⁸² The high point of the use of medieval buildings to establish a national identity is likely Poznań Cathedral. As the alleged burial site of Mieszko I and Bolesław Chrobry, this monument is even more

78 Jürgen Heide, "Introduction to the Medieval Section: Imaginations and Configurations," in *Imaginations and Configurations of Polish Society: From the Middle Ages through the Twentieth Century*, ed. Yvonne Kleinmann (Göttingen, Wallstein, 2017), 37–45.

79 Heide, "Introduction," 39.

80 Heide, "Introduction," 40.

81 Kazimierz Tymieniecki, *Polska w średniowieczu* (Warsaw: PWN, 1961), 120–50.

82 See, for example, Kwiatkowska, *Katedra św. Jana*, 224.

closely related to the first Piast princes who were seen to mark the beginning of Polish nationhood. Yet since Poznań was the capital of the Prussian province of Posen during the partition era, it had also been a distinct example of Germanization.⁸³ This made the city a particularly fraught location; the re-Gothicization of the cathedral to unparalleled levels must be understood as the result of a desire to construct a counterpart to another of the city's most important buildings, the German imperial castle and the foreign cultural imperialism it represented.⁸⁴

The problem of religion remained a challenge, however, and one can say that the PRL tried to shape national identity through the religious built heritage but detached from religion itself. In his introduction to *Churches in Poland*, published in 1966, a year of national celebrations, Zachwatowicz made clear that restoring churches was foremost an act of cultural history, given that it revived heritage destroyed by the Nazi fascists. While the nation may have clad itself outwardly in forms of Gothic religious architecture, a new society was nonetheless in the process of emerging, one based on socialist doctrines. The result of this historical process was reconstructions that are more than attempts to bring back buildings dating to a certain period or serving a religious purpose. The facades of the cathedrals of Poznań and Warsaw (see Figs. 6.11 and 6.16) are a hybrid of Gothic and modern forms, not a restoration properly speaking (as in Wrocław). As such, they can be seen as deliberate attempts to preserve the memory of destruction through reconstruction. It was important for the nation to understand that the Polish heritage had been under attack by foreign forces and then rebuilt by the socialist leaders.

According to Zachwatowicz, what should be reconstructed were elements from the past that could be considered valuable, rather than what existed directly prior to the destruction.⁸⁵ For him, and for the socialist regime, the buildings that have been the subject of this essay were unambiguously Catholic and therefore opposed to the Lutheran *Kirche* or the Russian Orthodox *cerkiew*. Furthermore, these cathedrals and churches had been constructed in a Gothic style that could be associated with the sovereign rule of the Piast dynasty. As a reaction to the Lutheran and German assault from the west, on the one hand, and the Orthodox and Russian assault from the east, on the other, the reconstruction of Gothic or Catholic churches became a vehicle to affirm national pride. A reconstructed Gothic church could simultaneously represent the past and the present: it symbolized both the historic sovereign nation under the Piasts *and* the modern socialist state as defender and heir to the Polish legacy.

⁸³ Pszczółkowski, "Architecture as a Tool."

⁸⁴ For the German use of architecture in Poznań to express a political position, see the contribution by Bernd Carqué in this volume.

⁸⁵ Jan Zachwatowicz, *Ochrona zabytków w Polsce* (Warsaw: Polonia, 1965), 46.

Aftermath

The landscape of religious buildings that emerged during the reconstruction period after the Second World War was very different from the one when Poland had regained independence in November 1918. After 1945, a nation was created with an almost homogeneous religious character. Built traces of centuries of Judaism in the Polish territories had largely been erased between 1938 and 1945. The presence of neo-Byzantine Russian Orthodox and neo-Gothic Lutheran religious buildings had also been significantly reduced in a process that had already begun during the First World War. In short, what emerged during the post-1945 reconstruction era was a landscape of Gothic, Catholic, and, therefore, *Polish* churches and cathedrals, seemingly untouched by the consequences of the Lutheran Reformation or the partitions by its imperialist neighbors Prussia and Russia.

It was in the 1960s that the myth of the Piasts reached its pinnacle with state-organized celebrations commemorating the “Millennium of the Polish State” (*Tysiąclecie Państwa Polskiego*). The Catholic Church, in its opposition to the socialist, secular state, seized the opportunity to celebrate its own millennial commemoration, the “Baptism of Poland.”⁸⁶ This event commemorated Mieszko I’s adoption of Christianity in 966, but used his individual baptism as a metaphor to represent the moment when Poland had entered the stage of history as a sovereign state.⁸⁷ Soon after, the Church was able to position itself, rather than the socialist regime in Warsaw, as the true heir to the Piast (that is, Polish) legacy. Cardinal Wyszyński played a vital role in the celebrations, seizing the occasion to emphasize the historical (meaning Catholic) character of the Polish nation. Simply put, the Church was becoming the main opponent to the socialist regime. Ultimately, the 1978 election of Cardinal Wojtyła of Kraków as Pope John Paul II succeeded in creating a sense of national unity and an increasingly organized political opposition to socialism.⁸⁸ The medieval religious buildings reconstructed by the early socialist state unexpectedly turned into Trojan horses and became one of the key foundations from which resistance against the totalitarian state was waged, ultimately helping to overthrow the PRL.

⁸⁶ Davies, *God’s Playground*, 413–81.

⁸⁷ Stanisław Rosik, “The ‘Baptism of Poland’: Power, Institution and Theology in the Shaping of Monarchy and Society from the Tenth through Twelfth Centuries,” in Kleinmann, *Imaginations and Configurations*, 46–53.

⁸⁸ Jan Rydel, “Sacrum Poloniae Millennium: Bemerkungen zur Anatomie eines Konflikts im ‘realen Sozialismus,’” in *Der Kampf um das Gedächtnis: Öffentliche Gedenktage in Mitteleuropa*, ed. Emil Brix and Hannes Stekl (Vienna: Böhlau, 1997), 231–50.

