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THE CONSTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF SAINT-ALEXANDER'S CHURCH IN WARSAW: BUILDING A STATE IDENTITY

Abstract

In this article, I argue that the Church of Saint Alexander on Three Crosses Square in Warsaw should be interpreted as a monument representing state identity. First, it describes the construction of the church in the early 19th century as part of the state-sponsored transformation of the capital during the period of Congress Poland, 1815–1831. The building was established and funded by the state. The original design of this building turned out to be unsuitable for its function as a parish church and for this reason the church was remodelled. This happened against the background of the Russification of Warsaw. After the World War II, the church was rebuilt by the socialist state as part of the reconstruction of the capital of the Polish People's Republic. It will be argued that the reconstruction to its early 19th century appearance was politically motivated.

INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Poland (Królestwo Polskie) was established at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The government of Congress Poland, as this state was colloquially known, anticipated a reform of the state, from a predominantly agrarian economy and feudal country into a modern society based on industry and capitalism.¹ These reforms of the economy, of administration and of society also changed the role of the capital and ultimately its appearance.² This was a transformation from an aristocratic city with residences of the nobility towards a modern capital. New buildings for administrative purposes such as ministries, a national bank and mint, and other public buildings such as the Grand Theatre were created.³ New spaces for public life were shaped mostly within the existing urban framework reminiscent in a way of a Forum Romanum. The conviction that the appearance of monumental buildings and public space could be beneficial for public life was one of the lasting legacies

1 Robert F. Leslie, "Politics and Economics in Congress Poland 1815–1864," *Past & Present*, no. 8 (1955): 43–63.

2 Marcus van der Meulen, "The Appearance of Public Building(s) in Constitutional Congress Poland, 1815–1831," in *The Governance of Style. Public Buildings in Central Europe, 1780–1920*, eds. Maximilian Hartmuth, Richard Kurdiovsky, Julia Rüdinger, and Georg Vasold (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag Wien, 2023), 55–72. <https://doi.org/10.7767/9783205217541.55>.

3 *Ibid.*



Fig. 1. The Church of Saint Alexander in Three Crosses Square in Warsaw. Photograph by Marcus van der Meulen, September 2021.

of the architectural theory of the Enlightenment.⁴ In these new public spaces, public buildings and monuments were erected, for example Thorvaldsen’s Copernicus Monument in front of Corazzi’s Society of Friends of Science Building (Pałac Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk).⁵ The transformation from aristocratic residential city to modern capital saw the arrival of state patronage in Poland.⁶ The state and government took initiative for the construction of public buildings and public space, of which Bank Square (Plac Bankowy) can be regarded its greatest achievement.⁷

19TH CENTURY TRANSFORMATIONS

One of the new public spaces was Alexander Square, since 1919 called Three Crosses Square (Plac Trzech Krzyży, **fig. 1**),⁸ created at the intersection of New World (Nowy Świat), Ujazdów Avenue (Aleje Ujazdowskie) and Mokotów Street (Ulica Mokotowska) at the southern entrance of the city. The state intended to erect a monument in this new square commemorating the fact that the monarch, Alexander Romanov, King of Poland as well as Emperor of Russia, had granted Congress Poland a very liberal constitution.⁹ In a letter to the viceroy (Namiestnik) of Poland, Józef Zajączek, published in the *Warsaw Gazette* (*Gazeta Warszawska*) in 1816, the Minister of the Interior, Tadeusz Mostowski,

4 Barry Bergdoll, *European Architecture 1750–1890* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 45.

5 Van der Meulen, “The Appearance of Public Building.”

6 Stanisław Lorentz and Andrzej Rottermund, *Neoclassicism in Poland* (Warsaw: Arkady, 1984), 44.

7 Van der Meulen, “The Appearance of Public Building.”

8 Jerzy S. Majewski, “Od rozdroża Żółtych Krzyży...,” *Stolica*, no. 4, April, 2017, 10–17.

9 Rett R. Ludwikowski, *Constitution-Making in the Region of Former Soviet Dominance* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 12–13.

Fig. 2. The Triumphal Arch designed by Jakub Kubicki erected in 1809, view towards New World Street. Engraving by Carl August Richter after drawing by Zygmunt Vogel. Public domain.



pleaded for the erection of a triumphal arch in the location where the monarch would enter the city.¹⁰ In this letter Mostowski recalled the constitution and the government granted by the monarch. The initial intention was to replace a temporarily conceived arch (**fig. 2**) built at the southern entrance with a permanent structure.¹¹ This arch had been erected in 1809.¹² Designed by Jakub Kubicki (1758–1833) it commemorated the “glorious return of the national army” from the Battle of Raszyn, which had prevented the capture of the Duchy of Warsaw by the Austrians in that year.¹³ Funds for the construction of the arch were collected through the taxation of state employees.¹⁴ A square was laid out and instead of a triumphal arch a functional building, a long-awaited parish church, was erected. Plans to erect a church in the Ujazdów district dated back to the second half of the 18th century and evolved into Kubicki’s never-completed monumental project for the Temple of Supreme or Divine Providence (Świątyni Najwyższej Opatrzności), intended to commemorate

10 Mikołaj Getka-Kenig, “Rządowe inwentarze pomnikowe ku czci Aleksandra i ideologii ‘zmarłychwstania’ polskiego w latach 1815–1830” [Government Monument Inventories in Honour of Alexander and the Ideology of Polish ‘Resurrection’ in the Years 1815–1830], *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, no. 4 (2016): 695–732.

11 Piotr Paszkiewicz, *Pod berłem Romanowów. Sztuka rosyjska w Warszawie 1815–1915* [Under the Sceptre of the Romanovs. Russian Art in Warsaw 1815–1915] (Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1991), 143.

12 Stanisław Łoza, *Architekci i budowniczy w Polsce* [Architects and Builders in Poland] (Warszawa: Budownictwo i Architektura, 1954), 163.

13 Jarosław Czuby, *The Duchy of Warsaw, 1807–1815: A Napoleonic Outpost in Central Europe*, trans. Ursula Phillips (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 63–77.

14 Andrzej Majdowski, “Przekształcenia przestrzenne kościoła p.w. sw. Aleksandra w Warszawie” [Spatial Transformations of the Church St. Alexander in Warsaw], *Ochrona Zabytków*, no. 1 (1994): 22–35.

the Constitution of May 3, 1791.¹⁵ The idea of building a church instead of an arch is attributed to the monarch himself, although there is only mention of a suggestion made by the monarch in a letter addressed to an unnamed president of the senate.¹⁶

In May 1818, the Polish administrative council issued a decree authorizing the use of the money raised for the arch's construction to fund the construction of a church.¹⁷ However, the building's evolution reveals that its role as a parish church was of less importance. The design of the building was awarded to the architect Chrystian Piotr Aigner (1756–1841), *éminence grise* of Polish architecture at the time.¹⁸ Aigner had been architect to some of the most prominent aristocrats of the period, including the influential Czartoryski family, and had been appointed chair of architecture at the recently established School of Construction and Surveying at the University of Warsaw in 1817.¹⁹ According to Majdowski Aigner was awarded the honour of designing the commemorative church as a royal favour.²⁰ Aigner designed a centrally-planned building with a dome and two similar porticoes with columns and pediment. The final design by Aigner resembles a design for the Ujazdów church project by Kubicki made in 1785–1786.²¹ Aigner's pantheon (**fig. 3**) can be considered a replacement for the intended but never executed Temple of Divine Providence.²²

On June 15, 1818, Minister of Revenues and Treasury Jan Weglinski laid the foundation stone for the pantheon.²³ The ceremony, described as manifestly governmental,²⁴ was attended by members of the administration and the clergy.²⁵ An article in the *Warsaw Gazette* about the ceremony referred to the church as “a monument.”²⁶ The interior of the building was to be adorned with “sculptures and busts to immortalize great men of the nation.”²⁷ Wooden buildings to the north of the church were demolished.²⁸ This created a public

15 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 Reconstruction and Art in Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. Irena Kossowska, Marcin Lachowski and Agnieszka Chmielewska (New York: Routledge, 2023), 268–277. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003265818-28>.

16 *Magazyn Powszechny* [Common Magazine], November 29, 1834, 337.

17 Protocol from the Administrative Council, file ref. 6 sec. 201, May 26, 1818.

18 Tadeusz Stefan Jaroszewski, *Chrystian Piotr Aigner, architekt warszawskiego klasycyzmu* [Chrystian Piotr Aigner, Architect of Warsawian Classicism] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970), 6.

19 Van der Meulen, “The Appearance of Public Building.”

20 Andrzej Majdowski, “Importy włoskie w architekturze dziewiętnastowiecznych kościołów warszawskich” [Italian Imports in the Architecture of Nineteenth-Century Warsaw Churches], *Nasza Przeszość: studia z dziejów Kościoła i kultury katolickiej w Polsce*, no. 79 (1993): 249–278.

21 Warsaw, Ujazdów, Ujazdów Church – project by Jakub Kubicki, Print Cabinet of the University of Warsaw, accessed January 6, 2022, <http://egr.buw.uw.edu.pl/node/35559>.

22 Van der Meulen. “One Ideology, Two Visions. Ecclesiastical Buildings and State Identity.”

23 Majdowski, “Przekształcenia przestrzenne kościoła,” 22–35.

24 Getka-Kenig, “Rządowe inwentarze pomnikowe,” 695–732.

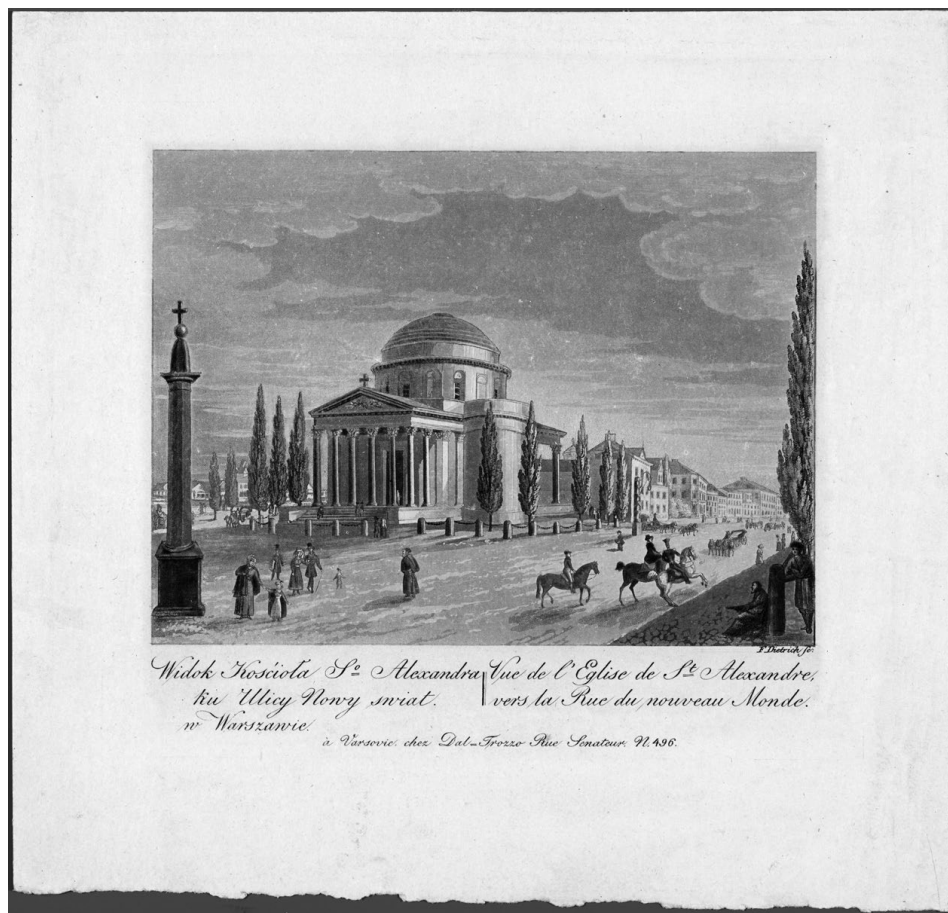
25 Majdowski, “Przekształcenia przestrzenne kościoła,” 22–35.

26 *Gazeta Warszawska*, no. 49, June 20, 1818.

27 *Gazeta Warszawska*, no. 80, October 5, 1819.

28 Ibid.

Fig. 3. The Church of Saint Alexander in Warsaw, view towards New World Street, 1827–1829. Engraving by Antoni dal Trozzi after drawing by Fryderyk Krzysztof Dietrich. Public domain.



square with the Neoclassical pantheon-shaped church as its foremost building. The building was established as an ideal construction, an anchor point in the maze of a chaotic city, embodying the Neoclassical ideal of the ordered city. The building itself was a cost-effective design, with a round shape that, as Durand pointed out, is the cheapest solution for a building.²⁹ Decoration on the exterior was kept to a minimum. Aigner created two equal facades eliminating the traditional church typology: the appearance of the building was the same as seen from New World or from Ujazdów Avenue.

The construction of the building lasted eight years, and on June 18, 1826, the church was inaugurated by archbishop Wojciech Skarszewski, the Primate of Poland.³⁰ The building is sacred architecture, but not strictly Catholic. The interior on a circular floor plan is quite small and completely covered by a dome. In Aigner's original design, the main altar is no more than a niche. As mentioned above, the intention was to adorn the interior with busts and statues of great men, yet due to a lack of funds these were never realised.³¹ The only known depiction of the interior before its remodelling in a Neo-Renaissance

²⁹ For more information, see Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand, *Précis des leçons d'architecture données à l'École Polytechnique* [Details of the Architecture Lessons Given at the Polytechnic School] (Paris: Bernard, 1802–1809).

³⁰ The Parish of Saint Alexander in Warsaw, accessed January 6, 2022, <http://www.swaleksander.pl/>.

³¹ Getka-Kenig, "Rządowe inwentarze pomnikowe," 695–732.



Fig. 4. The Church of Saint Alexander in Alexander Square after transformation by Józef Pius Dziekoński, view towards New World Street, 1910–1926. Photographer unknown. Public domain.

style shows a Neoclassical space without any obvious focus on a main altar.³² The building is not very suitable as a parish church, as it is too small and does not conform to the customs for the celebration of the liturgy, and this became a reason to remodel the church in the coming decades.

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The Russian authorities used military force to suppress the Polish Uprising of 1830, which was put down in 1831.³³ In the coming decades the Kingdom of Poland was gradually integrated into the Russian Empire. In this process, Warsaw is altered from the Polish capital into a Russian provincial town. The late 19th century saw a transformation of the built landscape by remodelling some existing buildings and construction of others representing tsarist authority.³⁴ The Russification of the urban landscape was particularly intense in Warsaw, with over forty Russian Orthodox churches constructed and an iconographic program in both architecture and decoration that often had a political meaning.³⁵ This was a symbolic manifestation of Russian authority as architecture had become a tool to shape the urban landscape. During this period, the parish of Saint Alexander endured its plans to convert the building into a comprehensive parish church by adding a nave and bell towers. Several designs were made and, ultimately, the designs by Józef Pius Dziekoński (1844–1927) were realized (**fig. 4**).³⁶ The Neoclassical pantheon by Aigner disappeared under a Neo-Renaissance veil during the remodelling between 1886 and 1895.

32 Undated and anonymous painting in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw, see: <https://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/pl/katalog/508201>.

33 Piotr S. Wandycz, *The lands of partitioned Poland, 1795–1918* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 106.

34 Paszkiewicz, *Pod berłem Romanowów*, 6.

35 Ibid.

36 Majdowski, “Przekształcenia przestrzenne kościoła,” 22–35.

20TH CENTURY INTERVENTIONS

After World War I ended in 1918, Poland reclaimed its independence, making Warsaw the capital of a free and independent Polish state once more. The Russian provincial city of Warsaw disappeared during the interwar period, and a modern capital began to emerge. A process of de-Russification began which was in effect part of the construction of a new state identity. Initially some buildings were remodelled, while later religious buildings associated with Tsarist rule were demolished. The demolition of the Russian Orthodox cathedral of Alexander Nevsky (**fig. 5**) in central Warsaw was described by Mikołaj Tołwiński, professor of architecture, as “a civil obligation.”³⁷ Buildings of the second half of the 19th century were generally seen as evidence of a continual degradation of the Polish identity of the urban landscape.³⁸ During the interwar period, the need to reconstruct the nation according to a national style was felt by prominent architects such as Stefan Szyller (1857–1933) and Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz (1883–1948).³⁹ Reconstruction should be understood here as blurring the differences in public architecture caused by the Partitions of Poland and replacing them with a common Polish *landscape*. Architecture was perceived as crucial in unifying the fragmented combination of building traditions due to the partitions.⁴⁰ However, there was no unequivocal answer to the question posed by Szyller: “Do we have a Polish Architecture?”⁴¹ Any



Fig. 5. The Cathedral of Alexander Nevsky in Warsaw, around 1920. Photographer unknown. Public domain.

37 Mikołaj Tołwiński, *O pomnikach i cerkwiach prawosławnych* [About Monuments and Orthodox Churches] (Warszawa: Księgarnia Jerzego Dunin-Borkowskiego 1919), 5–6.

38 Peter Martyn, “Emergent Metropolis and Fluctuating State Borders: Architectural Identity and the Obliteration of Warsaw in the First Half of the Twentieth Century,” in *Borders in Art: Revisiting Kunstgeographie*, ed. Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius (Warsaw: Institute of Art, 2000), 139–149.

39 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*, eds. Iwona Barańska and Makary Górczyński (Kalisz: Kaliskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, 2016), 143–171.

40 Tadeusz Barucki, *Architektura Polski* [Polish Architecture] (Warsaw: Arkady, 1985), 108–109.

41 “Czy mamy polską architekturę?” [Do We Have a Polish Architecture?], Lecture held in 1913 by Stefan Szyller at the Warsaw Circle of Architects.

architectural language that predated the partitions of Poland was acceptable to represent Polishness.⁴² Several styles were described as Polish, even as functionalism became the dominant architectural language for public buildings in the later interwar period. Regarding its capital status, Warsaw was perceived as lacking metropolitan allure. This culminated in 1934 in a conference entitled Greater Warsaw as the Capital of Poland, where several architects and planners discussed the remodelling and further development of the capital.⁴³

The possibility of realizing plans to remodel or reconstruct Warsaw and make it truly the capital of the Polish nation was made conceivable by the destructions of World War II. An underground urbanist committee that later became the bureau for reconstruction was active in Warsaw during the conflict. This committee, which included Bohdan Pniewski and Jan Zachwatowicz from the Warsaw Technical University (Politechnika Warszawska), made an analysis of the city, and according to Zachwatowicz in 1984, concluded that classicism of the late and early 19th centuries had been the dominating tendency in shaping Warsaw.⁴⁴ This marked a clear break with the trend towards a national style for the reconstruction of the nation during the interwar period.

Warsaw was rebuilt after the war as the capital of the Polish People's Republic (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa). The first designs for rebuilding the city were functionalist and inspired by Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (International Congresses of Modern Architecture; CIAM).⁴⁵ The designs for rebuilding the city were observed by delegations of experts from the Soviet Union. In relation to the designs, Viktor Veniaminovich Baburov and Sergey Yegorovich Chernyshev note that a functionalist city is capitalist, and that a truly democratic city has public spaces around public buildings where citizens can gather.⁴⁶ The experts from Moscow advocated to create squares and rebuilding heritage. The reconstruction of built heritage seemed to interest Moscow very much.⁴⁷ Rebuilding built heritage, especially when it had been destroyed by the fascist invader, was already presented in the Soviet Union as an act of patriotism by Igor' Grabar'.⁴⁸ This aspect in the reconstruction of Warsaw was propagated in the publications of, for example, Adolf Ciborowski.⁴⁹

42 Andrzej K. Olszewski, "Problemy architektury" [Architectural Problems], in *Polskie życia artystyczne w latach 1915–1939*, ed. Aleksander Wojciechowski (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1974), 493–499.

43 Tadeusz Tołwiński, "Wielka Warszawa, Jako Stolica Państwa" [Great Warsaw as the State Capital], *Architektura i Budownictwo 1934*, no. 5 (1934): 154–162.

44 Jan Zachwatowicz, "Komisja Rzecznawców Urbanistycznych przy Zarządzie Miejskim Warszawy w latach 1939–1944" [The Commission of Urban Experts at the City Council of Warsaw in 1939–1944], *Rocznik Warszawski*, no. 17 (1984): 245–307.

45 Grzegorz Piątek, *Najlepsze miasto świata. Warszawa w odbudowie 1944–1949* [The Best City in the World. Warsaw under Reconstruction 1944–1949] (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2020), 181–183.

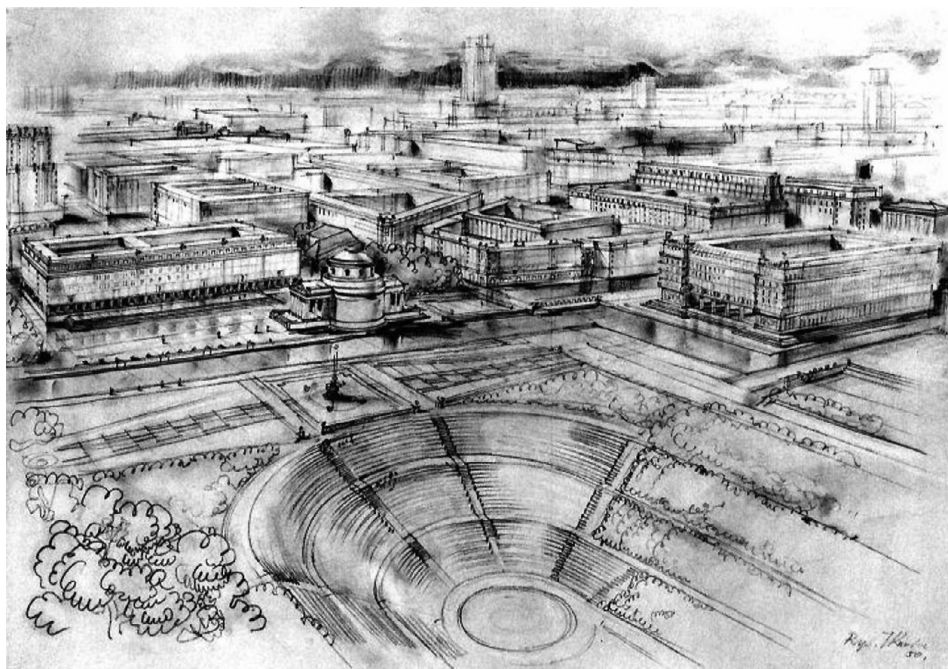
46 Jan Gorski, *Warszawa stolica Polski Ludowej* [Warsaw, Capital of the Polish People's Republic] (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970), 371.

47 Marek Barański, "Opinie o odbudowie starego miasta w środowiskach zagranicznych" [Opinions on the Reconstruction of the Old Town in Foreign Circles], *Kronika Warszawy*, no. 5 (2000): 71–80.

48 Grabar' Igor', Восстановление памятников культуры [Restoration of Cultural Monuments], *Советское искусство*, November 28, 1944, 2.

49 See for example Adolf Ciborowski, *Warsaw: A City Destroyed and Rebuilt* (Warsaw: Interpress, 1969).

Fig. 6. Sketch of the Three Crosses Square as shown in the publication *The Six Year Plan for Rebuilding the Capital*, around 1950. Sketch by Jan Knothe. Public domain.



In 1947, a first design for rebuilding Saint Alexander's Church was made by Szyszko-Bohusz. This design to renovate the church to its pre-war state, however, was rejected by the Office for Rebuilding the Capital (Biuro Odbudowy Stolicy), the BOS.⁵⁰ According to the BOS, the construction of the new Ministry of Economic Reconstruction (Państwowej Komisji Planowania Gospodarczego, PKPG) created new urban conditions, and the design of the church had to be adapted accordingly.⁵¹

In 1949 a new masterplan for rebuilding the capital was presented: the Six Year Plan for Rebuilding the Capital, promoted by Boleslaw Bierut, *de facto* leader of the Polish People's Republic.⁵² Later published as a political pamphlet, this masterplan also included the reconstruction of Three Crosses Square. A sketch of the new square (**fig. 6**) shows a public meeting room, recalling the recommendations by Baburov and Chernyshev, connecting several public buildings. Just outside of the sketch, but part of the overall urban plan, is the National Museum. There is the House of the Party (Dom Partii), the seat of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, to the right and to the left the building of the Ministry of Economic Reconstruction, both under construction when the Six Year Plan was presented. Central in the sketch room is a roman pantheon, the original appearance of Saint Alexander's Church before later remodelling.

50 Jerzy S. Majewski, "Kosciol sw. Aleksandra – rocznica odbudowy" [Church of St. Alexander – Anniversary of the Reconstruction], *Wyborcza*, accessed January 6, 2022,

<https://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,34880,1250391.html?disableRedirects=true>.

51 Majewski, "Kosciol sw. Aleksandra."

52 For more information, see Boleslaw Bierut, *Szescioletni plan odbudowy warszawy* [The Six-Year Plan for the Reconstruction of Warsaw] (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1950).

The notes from the archives of Józef Sigalin (1909–1983), head architect of the reconstruction of the capital, note that the guiding principle in the reconstruction was the reconstruction of “a historical sequence” from Castle Square to the Belweder Palace on Ujazdów Avenue.⁵³ The construction of new public buildings such as the House of the Party on this historical sequence or succession of buildings and public space is *nie narusza, ale wzegoca*, not a violation but enrichment of the reconstruction.⁵⁴ Rebuilding the succession of buildings and public space is clearly not to be interpreted as a replication of the pre-war situation, but an accumulation of historic buildings and public space, adapted if necessary, such as Corazzi’s Society of Friends of Science,⁵⁵ and enhanced with new buildings representing the ruling political party, such as the Home of the Party and Ministry of Economic Reconstruction.

The only church that Sigalin mentions in the sequence of public space and historical buildings is Saint Alexander’s.⁵⁶ A competition was organized for its rebuilding. The winning submission aimed at reconstructing the pantheon by Aigner. The Primate’s Office for Rebuilding Churches (Rada Prymasowska Odbudowy Kościołów), the bureau of the Archdiocese of Warsaw that directed and helped finance the rebuilding of churches, objected to this design.⁵⁷ It correctly noted that the building would have much less space for parishioners, and was not suitable for the celebration of Mass. The state continued its plans, however it did allow a design competition for a modern church nave which was won by Szyszko-Bohusz, yet was never executed.⁵⁸ The church’s function as a place of worship was unimportant in the plans for reconstruction. The reconstruction of the church was officially approved on May 1, 1949.⁵⁹ On April 3, 1950, the authorities approved budgets for the construction of four churches, including Saint Alexander’s.⁶⁰ Although demolition of the free-standing bell tower was initially postponed in 1951,⁶¹ it was ultimately destroyed despite citizen protests.⁶² The rebuilding project was led by Stanisław Marzyński and

53 Józef Sigalin, *Warszawa 1944–1980 z archiwum architekta*, tom 1 [Warsaw 1944–1980 from the Architect’s Archive, vol. 1] (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1986), 337–339.

54 Sigalin, *Warszawa 1944–1980*, Vol. 1, 337–339.

55 Maciej Olenski, “Reconstruction or Creation? The Phenomenon of ‘Replication’ in the Reconstruction of Historic Warsaw Buildings in the Light of the Conservation Doctrines of the Athens Charter,” in *Reconstructions and Modernizations of Historic Towns in Europe in the First Half of the Twentieth Century*, eds. Iwona Barańska and Makary Górzynski (Kalisz: Kaliskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, 2016), 479–491.

56 Sigalin, *Warszawa 1944–1980*, Vol. 1, 337–339.

57 Jerzy S. Majewski, *Czekając na odbudowę. Warszawa 1945–1950 w obiektywie Karola Percherskiego* [Waiting for Reconstruction, Warsaw 1945–1950 through the Lens of Karol Percherski] (Warsaw: Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego, 2016), 175.

58 Majewski, “Kosciol sw. Aleksandra.”

59 Józef Sigalin, *Warszawa 1944–1980*, z archiwum architekta [Warsaw 1944–1980, from the Architect’s Archive] Vol. 2, (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1986): 105.

60 Sigalin, *Warszawa 1944–1980*, Vol. 2, 404.

61 *Ibid.*, 411–412.

62 Piotr Majewski, *Ideologia i konserwacja. Architektura zabytkowa w Polsce w czasach socrealizmu* [Ideology and Conservation, Historic Architecture in Poland in the Times of Socialist Realism] (Warszawa: Trio, 2009), 96–98.

Fig. 7. Three Crosses Square in Warsaw with on the left the Ministry of Economic Reconstruction under construction and on the right the Church of Saint Alexander still in ruins, 1948–1949. Photograph by Leonard Jabrzemski. Public domain.



realized between 1949 and 1952.⁶³ Aigner's pantheon was reconstructed with some modifications so that the building would better complement the Ministry of Economic Rebuilding (**fig. 7**).⁶⁴ The church was consecrated on September 21, 1952, by Archbishop Stefan Wyszyński.⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

Saint Alexander's Church is a public building dating back to constitutional Congress Poland, destroyed during World War II and rebuilt as part of the masterplan of reconstruction of the capital of the Polish People's Republic. The first construction was erected by the state as a monument to the resurrection of a sovereign Polish state. The pantheon by Aigner was part of a transformation of the capital. It is unclear whether the architectural language of Aigner's pantheon was a conscious choice for the founders or the result of the prevailing architectural method. It can be argued that Neoclassicism was the result of economic building methods of the time.⁶⁶ The pantheon represents not only the period of Congress Poland, but more generally an alleged state Neoclassicism initiated by Stanislas Poniatowski, a reading of Neoclassicism in Poland that found its cumulation in a publication by Lorentz and Rottermund.⁶⁷ The church was reconstructed to its neoclassical design by Aigner as part of the reconstruction of a sequence of buildings and public space. Rebuilding the built heritage destroyed by the Nazi invader was perceived as an act of

63 Majewski, "Od rozdroża Złotych Krzyży...", 10–17.

64 Majewski, "Kosciol sw. Aleksandra."

65 The Archdiocese of Warsaw, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://archwwa.pl/parafie/warszawa-sw-aleksandra/#historia>.

66 Van der Meulen, "The Appearance of Public Building."

67 See Stanisław Lorentz and Andrzej Rottermund, *Neoclassicism in Poland* (Warsaw: Arkady, 1984).

patriotism. Aigner's pantheon became a built monument in a succession of public buildings and historical monuments as envisioned by the socialist state. Continuity was emphasized against a possible disruption of rebuilding the city. The socialist state thus aimed to present itself as the natural successor to previous sovereign Polish governments. The church's function as a place of worship was secondary, as it had little relevance in the masterplan and overall design of the state square, where, above all, the church became a monument to statehood.