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## A Church for the Polish People: On the Contest for the Parochial Church in the Warsaw District of Praga

### Introduction

In 1886 the periodical *Przegląd Techniczny* announced a contest to design a church for the parish in the Praga district of Warsaw.<sup>1</sup> The chosen design, authored by Józef Pius Dziekoński, underwent numerous modifications and was subsequently realised in the years 1888–1901 (Fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> Consecrated on 29 September 1901, the church was dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel and St. Florian the Martyr.<sup>3</sup> In the interwar period the spires of the church were dismantled and replaced with lower, lighter ones because of the building's subsidence.<sup>4</sup> Sadly, this intervention did not save it from destruction; the church was blown up during the Second World War. Its present form is the result of a complete reconstruction.<sup>5</sup> Initially a parochial church only, in the year 1992 it became the cathedral of the newly created Warsaw-Praga Diocese, and has held the rank of a minor basilica since 1997.<sup>6</sup>

1 A. Majdowski, *Budownictwo kościelne w twórczości projektowej Józefa Piusa Dziekońskiego (1844–1927)* [Church architecture in the oeuvre of Józef Pius Dziekoński (1844–1927)], Warsaw, 1995, p. 37.

2 Ibid., p. 196.

3 “Z tygodnia na tydzień. Poświęcenie kościoła św. Floryana na Pradze” [Week to week. The consecration of the church of St. Florian in Praga], *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, 1901, 42, no. 40, pp. 779–780. Hereinafter the full name of the church will be omitted, in accordance with the standard used in relevant historical sources.

4 A. Majdowski, “Z dziejów budowy kościoła pw. świętych Michała i Floriana” [On the history of the church of St. Michael and Florian], in: *Świątynie prawego brzegu. Kościół katolicki w dziejach prawobrzeżnej Warszawy* [Temples of Vistula's right-hand bank. The Catholic Church in the history of east-bank Warsaw], Warsaw, 2009, p. 133.

5 T. Krogulec, “Stanisław Marzeński (1904–1992) – budowniczy kościołów” [Stanisław Marzeński (1904–1992) – a constructor of churches], *Almanach Muzealny*, 2010, 6, pp. 225–227; A. Majdowski, op. cit., p. 137.

6 <http://katedra-floriana.waw.pl/historia/ustanowienie-diecezji> [accessed 30 April 2018].



**Fig. 1.** Józef Pius Dziekoński, the façade of the church of St. Michael the Archangel and St. Florian the Martyr in Warsaw, constructed 1888–1901, condition in 1935, photo: Henryk Podębski



**Fig. 2.** Józef Pius Dziekoński, the Church of St. Michael the Archangel and St. Florian the Martyr in Warsaw, view from the south, constructed 1888–1901, condition in 1913, photo: Zakład Graficzny B. Wierzbicki i S-ka

The church in Praga (Fig. 2) won substantial acclaim and fame even before its construction was completed, as is apparent from, for instance, the fact that the “centennial contest” organised by *Kurier Warszawski* labelled the edifice as the most important work of Polish architecture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> For present-day users and scholars, however, the significance of the church may be difficult to grasp. There is a number of reasons for this perception; the most important one, perhaps, is related to the architectural form of the edifice, which is rather typical for the time period in question. As early as 1914 Leon Gościcki stated that the temple is a copy of the Votivkirche in Vienna and many other 19<sup>th</sup>-century structures, only in brick.<sup>8</sup> The same opinion was repeated in more recent works, for instance by Krzysztof Stefański<sup>9</sup> and Andrzej Majdowski.<sup>10</sup> How, then, can one explain the extraordinary fame that the church of St. Florian used to enjoy? As far as the development of Polish architecture is concerned, how significant was the contest for its design? Does it deserve further study or even a note in historiographic publications?

The present article attempts to defend the view that the crucial significance of the contest in the history of Polish 19<sup>th</sup>-century architecture manifests itself mainly in essays, debates, press articles and other texts written in direct connection with the event under analysis. Referring to selected source material, I describe the circumstances in which the contest was announced, its requirements and the criteria according to which the winning design was chosen. In addition, the present analysis accentuates the crux of the conflict that resulted in the contest and the manner in which the architect himself chose to address the matters discussed in the course of the debate.

My analysis elaborates on many topics which have already become the subject of interest for other scholars. Similarly, the sources mentioned here have been cited many times previously, although, in my personal estimation, only rarely were they subjected to a more thorough and critical analysis. Providing a direct connection between the themes present in many different publications and the facts related to the contest, as well as to the theoretical discussion it generated, appears to me to constitute a valuable contribution to the systematisation and development of the study of Polish architecture in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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7 “Konkurs stulecia. Nasza twórczość naukowa, literacka i artystyczna w XIX wieku” [The centennial contest. Our academic, literary and artistic works in the 19<sup>th</sup> century], *Kurier Warszawski*, 1901, 81, no. 1, p. 16.

8 L. Gościcki, *Budowa świątyni: wskazówki praktyczne przy wznoszeniu i odbudowie kościołów oraz zdobieniu ich wnętrza* [Constructing a temple: practical guidelines for erecting and rebuilding churches, as well as decorating their interiors], Warsaw, 1914, p. 10.

9 K. Stefański, *Polska architektura sakralna w poszukiwaniu stylu narodowego* [Polish sacred architecture in search of a national style], Łódź, 2000, p. 49.

10 A. Majdowski, *Studia z historii architektury sakralnej w Królestwie Polskim* [Studies on the history of sacred architecture in the Kingdom of Poland], Warsaw, 1993, p. 137.

## The sources and the current state of research

The effort undertaken in the present article is preliminary and exploratory in nature. Given the strict spatial constraints of an academic article, it is not possible to discuss all the sources that in one way or another refer to the contest for the design of the church of St. Florian. The present work will therefore focus on a selection of texts, the choice of which merits a detailed explanation.

First, the analysis turns to an article written by the Warsaw-based art critic and journalist Karol Matuszewski<sup>11</sup> in 1881.<sup>12</sup> Although penned before the contest was announced, it offers an overview of theoretical problems and financial, legal and administrative difficulties all architectural projects undertaken in Warsaw in the 1880s were facing, presenting them in a more thorough manner than any other source with which I am acquainted. Many of the issues noted by Matuszewski were also discussed in other (often much earlier) publications,<sup>13</sup> yet his article provides the most synthetic synopsis of the topics in my circle of interest.

The core of the present analysis comprises texts published in *Przegląd Techniczny*, which delineate the architectural contest. These are, in chronological order, the announcement of the contest,<sup>14</sup> the report from the contest committee meeting,<sup>15</sup> the presentation of the awarded designs,<sup>16</sup> and finally the text declaring that the chosen and amended project would be implemented.<sup>17</sup> These sources constitute a natural basis for all further discussion.

The key to understanding the controversy caused by the contest for the design for the church of St. Florian lies in a single line included in the list of requirements: "the building is to be ogival in style, made of brick, in the so-called Vistula-Baltic vein".<sup>18</sup> Particularly the term "Vistula-Baltic", widespread at the time, motivated numerous authors to attempt to define it or to offer a critical evaluation. To outline

11 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 31–33.

12 K. Matuszewski, "O architekturze u obcych i u nas uwagi ze stanowiska estetycznego" [On foreign and domestic architecture from an aesthetic standpoint], *Biblioteka Warszawska*, 1881, 3, pp. 75–93, 382–405.

13 For instance, the need to develop a national jargon of architecture and the backwardness Poles displayed in that regard was noted by Sebastian Sierakowski as early as in 1812. Cf. S. Sierakowski, *Architektura obejmująca wszelkie gatunki murowania i budowania* [Architecture including all types of masonry and construction], vol. 1, Cracow, 1812, pp. 1–2.

14 "Konkurs na sporządzenie szkicu do projektu kościoła dla parafii praskiej m. Warszawy" [A contest for presenting a design sketch for a parochial church in the Praga district of Warsaw], *Przegląd Techniczny*, 1886, 23, no. 9, p. 263.

15 "Sprawozdanie komisji konkursowej z osądzenia szkiców projektu budowy kościoła dla parafii praskiej m. Warszawy" [The report of the contest jury after considering the design sketches for the church in the Praga district of Warsaw], *Przegląd Techniczny*, 1887, 24, no. 4, p. 93.

16 "Projekty kościoła dla parafii praskiej m. Wwy" [The designs for the parochial church in the Praga district of Warsaw], *Przegląd Techniczny*, 1887, 24, no. 5, p. 125.

17 "Budowa kościoła parafialnego na przedmieściu Praga" [The construction of the parochial church in the Praga suburb], *Przegląd Techniczny*, 1888, 25, no. 5, p. 115.

18 *Konkurs na sporządzenie...*, p. 263.

the conflict that arose over the required architectural forms, the present work juxtaposes two articles.<sup>19</sup> One was written by Franciszek Ksawery Martynowski, a journalist, antiquarian, theorist of conservation and art critic active in Warsaw;<sup>20</sup> the other is by Prof. Władysław Łuszczkiewicz, a Cracow-based specialist in art history and conservation, regarded as one of the founding fathers of mediaeval studies in Poland.<sup>21</sup> Significantly, both essays were written in 1887, that is, after the contest was announced but before it was concluded. Their authors made direct references to the above-mentioned phrase and employed various means to influence the architects involved in the competition and to affect the final results. An interesting addition to this topic is provided by an article by Józef Pius Dziekoński written in 1900,<sup>22</sup> in which the architect retrospectively discusses his almost finished work and the discussion it provoked.

Neo-Gothic architecture has not been thoroughly analysed as a subject in Polish history of art for a number of reasons, the most noteworthy one being the long-lasting prejudice against 19<sup>th</sup>-century architecture stemming from, among others, the dominance of the theoretical and aesthetic paradigms of modernism.<sup>23</sup> As far as early studies are concerned, however, the pioneering work by Andrzej K. Olszewski, which tackles the issue of the Vistula-Baltic style, deserves a mention.<sup>24</sup>

As regards more recent publications, the problems highlighted by the contest for the Praga church were discussed in detail by Krzysztof Stefański and Andrzej Majdowski. The former analyses the church of St. Florian in his comprehensive

19 W. Łuszczkiewicz, "Kilka słów o naszym budownictwie w epoce ostrołukowej i jego cechach charakterystycznych" [Brief notes on domestic architecture in the ogival era and its characteristic features], *Przegląd Techniczny*, 1887, 24, no. 3–6, pp. 53–54, 81–82, 115–117, 148–150; F. K. Martynowski, "O stylu wiślano-bałtyckim" [On the Vistula-Baltic style], *Wiek: gazeta polityczna, literacka i społeczna*, 1887, no. 51, p. 3.

20 Cf. B. Wierzbicka, *Franciszek Ksawery Martynowski 1848–1896. Polihistor, teoretyk restauracji zabytków, krytyk sztuki* [Franciszek Ksawery Martynowski 1848–1896. A polyhistor, theorist of art conservation and art critic], Warsaw, 1998.

21 Cf. T. Dobrzeńcki, "Władysław Łuszczkiewicz – badacz sztuki romańskiej w Polsce" [Władysław Łuszczkiewicz – a scholar of Romanesque art in Poland], in: *Myslo sztuce. Materiały Sesji z okazji czterdziestolecia istnienia Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Warszawa, listopad 1974* [Thoughts on art. Materials from the session organised on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Society of Art Historians, Warsaw, November 1974], Warsaw 1976, pp. 253–271; M. Rzepińska, *Władysław Łuszczkiewicz malarz i pedagog* [Władysław Łuszczkiewicz, painter and educator], Cracow, 1983.

22 J. P. Dziekoński, "Kościół parafialny świętego Floryana na Pradze pod Warszawą" [The parochial church of St. Florian in Praga near Warsaw], *Architekt*, 1900, no. 1, pp. 6–10.

23 W. Bałus, *Gotyke bez Boga? W kręgu znaczeń symbolicznych architektury sakralnej XIX wieku* [Gothic without God? On the symbolic meaning of church architecture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century], Toruń, 2011, pp. 23–26.

24 A. K. Olszewski, "Przegląd koncepcji stylu narodowego w teorii architektury polskiej przełomu XIX i XX w." [An overview of the concepts of a national style in the theory of architecture in Poland between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century], *Sztuka i Krytyka*, 1956, 7, no. 3–4, pp. 275–372, 391–394.



work on 19<sup>th</sup>-century architecture in the territories of Poland,<sup>25</sup> as well as in a more specific study on the search for a national style in ecclesiastical architecture.<sup>26</sup>

Andrzej Majdowski, in turn, is a scholar who merits a more detailed introduction in the context of the subject under analysis. He authored the only existing publication listing all edifices with a religious function designed by Józef Pius Dziekoński.<sup>27</sup> Majdowski's studies and articles on the history of ecclesiastical architecture discuss the issue of the national style and the various opinions on the Vistula-Baltic style.<sup>28</sup> The source material accumulated in his works is truly admirable and, in my estimation, merits further and more detailed study. Lastly, Majdowski is the author of the only article focused on the contest for the design of the church of St. Florian.<sup>29</sup> It concentrates on the recorded facts as related to the course of the contest and the process of the temple's construction.

A broader background for the present analysis may be provided by the most significant works on neo-Gothic architecture in Poland – studies on the oeuvre of the most prominent architects and the implementation of their ideas.<sup>30</sup> Valuable

25 K. Stefański, *Architektura XIX wieku na ziemiach polskich* [19<sup>th</sup>-century architecture in Polish territories], Warsaw, 2005, pp. 127–131.

26 K. Stefański, *Polska architektura sakralna...*, pp. 46–52.

27 A. Majdowski, *Budownictwo kościelne w twórczości projektowej Józefa Piusa Dziekońskiego (1844–1927)* [Church architecture in the design oeuvre of Józef Pius Dziekoński (1844–1927)], Warsaw, 1995, pp. 37–38.

28 A. Majdowski, “Nurt narodowy w architekturze sakralnej Królestwa Polskiego od drugiej połowy XIX wieku” [The national style in sacred architecture of the Kingdom of Poland since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century], *Nasza Przeszłość: studia z dziejów Kościoła i kultury katolickiej w Polsce* [Our past. Studies on the history of the Church and the Catholic culture in Poland], vol. 64, Cracow, 1965, pp. 5–54; idem, “O poglądach na styl wiślano-bałtycki w polskiej architekturze sakralnej XIX wieku” [On the views on the Vistula-Baltic style in Polish sacred architecture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century], *Nasza Przeszłość: studia z dziejów Kościoła i kultury katolickiej w Polsce*, vol. 78, Cracow, 1992, pp. 303–327; idem, *Studia z historii architektury...*, pp. 39–66, 125–142.

29 A. Majdowski, *Z dziejów budowy kościoła...*, pp. 125–137.

30 W. Bałus, “Architektura sakralna Teodora Talowskiego” [Church architecture by Teodor Talowski], *ZNUI, Prace z Historii Sztuki*, 1992, no. 20, pp. 53–79; idem, “Działalność architektoniczna Jana Sasa-Zubrzyckiego w świetle jego poglądów teoretycznych” [The architectural works of Jan Sas-Zubrzycki in the light of his theoretical views], *Sprawozdania z Posiedzeń Komisji Naukowych Krakowskiego Oddziału PAN*, 1990, 32, no. 2, pp. 279–281; J. Frycz, *Neogotyki i restauracja zabytków w Polsce* [Neo-Gothic and the restoration of historical works in Poland], Warsaw, 1973; T. S. Jaroszewski, *Henryk Marconi i neogotyki* [Henryk Marconi and the neo-Gothic], Białystok, 1976; T. S. Jaroszewski, *O siedzibach neogotyckich w Polsce* [On neo-Gothic residences in Poland], Warsaw, 1981; Z. Ostrowska-Kęmbłowska, *Dzieje Kaplicy Królów Polskich czyli Złotej w katedrze poznańskiej* [The history of the chapel of the Polish kings or the Golden Chapel in the Poznań cathedral], Poznań, 1997; J. Wowczak, *Jan Sas-Zubrzycki: architekt, historyk i teoretyk architektury* [Jan Sas-Zubrzycki: architect, historian and theorist of architecture], Cracow, 2017; A. Zabłocka-Kos, *Sztuka, wiara, czucie: Alexis Langer – śląski architekt neogotyku* [Art, faith, feeling: Alexis Langer, a Silesian architect of the neo-Gothic], Wrocław, 1998; J. Żywicki, *Architektura neogotycka na Lubelszczyźnie* [Neo-Gothic architecture in the Lublin region], Lublin, 1998; idem, *Urzędnicy: architekci, budowniczowie, inżynierowie cywilni... Ludzie architektury i budow-*

context information is also found in publications regarding the category of historicism in architecture,<sup>31</sup> comprehensive works on architectural contests,<sup>32</sup> as well as anthology works on the issue of nationalism in art and art history.<sup>33</sup>

## On architecture in Poland and abroad

The idea to use mediaeval architecture as a model for future designs has a long and complex history in Poland. The contest for the design of the church of St. Florian, announced in 1886, was preceded by several decades of debate on the Gothic style, national architecture, and the manner in which it was supposed to emerge in Poland after it regained its independence. Matuszewski's article is therefore only a convenient tool which I decided to use to emphasise the issues crucial for the analysis at hand, namely, the national style, the vision of the reborn Gothic style, and the need to organise open architectural contests.

Matuszewski's essay opens with the issue of the national style, of its possible definition, the factors behind its emergence, and the possibility of developing it artificially. In Matuszewski's view,

the original simplicity of life or the multiplication of needs and expectations stemming from higher education, the mildness or harshness of climate, the principal occupations and lifestyles of the people, and moreover, the religious cult and the natural environment of the given land, which may supply people with varying building materials such as stone, marble, wood, clay and so forth – all of these circumstances influence the manner in which dwellings and public edifices are built.<sup>34</sup>

It should be noted that he emphasises the complex nature of factors shaping architecture, as well as the mundane aspects of its development. In my estimation, it is the multi-aspectual attitude that sets Matuszewski apart from other authors.

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*nictwa w województwie lubelskim oraz guberni lubelskiej w Królestwie Polskim w latach 1815–1915* [Officials, architects, constructors, civil engineers... The people of architecture and construction in the Lublin Voivodship and the Lublin Governorate in the Kingdom of Poland in 1818–1915], Lublin, 2010.

- 31 W. Bałus, "Zjawisko historyzmu w architekturze wieku XIX. Próba opisu" [The phenomenon of historicism in 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture. An attempt at a description], *Dzieła i Interpretacje*, 1995, 3, pp. 69–80; *Sztuka i historia: Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki* [Art and history: Materials from the session of the Art Historian Society], ed. M. Bielska-Łach, Warsaw, 1992; Z. Tołłoczko, *"Sen Architekta" czyli o historii i historyzmie architektury XIX i XX wieku* [An architect's dream; on the history and historicism of architecture and ], Cracow, 2015.
- 32 M. Rudowska, *Warszawskie konkursy architektoniczne w latach 1864–1898* [Warsaw architectural contests in 1864–1898], Warsaw, 1972.
- 33 *Art and Politics: The Proceedings of the Third Joint Conference of Polish and English Art Historians*, eds. F. Ames-Lewis, P. Paszkiewicz, Warsaw, 1999; *Nacjonalizm w sztuce i historii sztuki 1789–1950* [Nationalism in art and art history 1789–1950], eds. D. K. Konstantynów, R. Pasieczny, P. Paszkiewicz, Warsaw, 1998.
- 34 K. Matuszewski, *O architekturze u obcych...*, p. 76.

The quoted passage seems an apt illustration of the core issues in the discussion regarding the national character of Polish architecture. Other authors tended to focus on one aspect or another, for instance construction,<sup>35</sup> symbolism,<sup>36</sup> accordance with climate,<sup>37</sup> or harmony with everyday practical needs.<sup>38</sup> Matuszewski takes note of all these factors and accentuates their importance in the process of developing a national style of architecture.

This attitude also provides an answer to the question of whether a national style may be created artificially. The author compares the process to the emergence of a language. As he puts it, “none of them materialised in the head of a scholar, none exists owing to the ideas of writers, even though in this respect the influence of the latter has always been profound”.<sup>39</sup> A national style cannot therefore be developed on a purely theoretical foundation. Nevertheless, exceptional works and remarkable artists may successfully influence its development. This may be regarded as the reason for the need to organise architectural contests and for the hopes resting therein, so clearly emphasised by Matuszewski. It is such contests that may, by means of fair competition, result in the emergence of landmark works, i.e. ones that may pave the way towards further development of local architecture.

Matuszewski moves on to discuss the issue of the architectural style he sees as suitable to become the foundation for the national style of construction. He supports the proponents of the Gothic Revival, emphasising the need to make use of more modern materials, i.e. iron and glass.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, he offers a stern criticism of the continuous practice of copying ancient models. In his own words, “such denial of one’s own spiritual essence, such slavery of thought as is exemplified by Schinkel’s allegedly Hellenistic school, inevitably kill the creative imagination of the artists working within such narrow constraints”.<sup>41</sup>

It ought to be noted that at the time when Matuszewski’s article was written, the cityscape of Warsaw already featured significant edifices bearing deliberate resemblance to mediaeval styles, including the Gothic. Matuszewski refers, for

35 W. Łuszczkiewicz, “Czyli można konstrukcyę kościołów gotyckich krakowskich XIV wieku uważać za cechę specyjalną ostrołuku w Polsce?” [May the construction of 14<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic churches of Cracow be regarded as a characteristic feature of the ogival style in Poland?], in: *Pamiętnik I Zjazdu historyków polskich* [Proceedings of the first session of Polish historians], Cracow, 1881, pp. 53–63.

36 J. K. Sas-Zubrzycki, *Styl nadwiślański jako odcień sztuki średniowiecznej w Polsce* [The Vistula-Baltic style as a tone in mediaeval art in Poland], Cracow, 1910, pp. 23–32.

37 The issue of southern and northern climate constitutes the main topic of the polemic between Rafał Krajewski and the author known under the pen name “Ostoja”. Cf. R. Krajewski, “O architekturze narodowej” [On national architecture], *Gazeta Codzienna*, 1860, 125, pp. 1–3; Ostoja, “Kilka słów o architekturze narodowej” [Brief notes on the national architecture], *Kronika Wiadomości Krajowych i Zagranicznych*, 1860, 15, pp. 3–4.

38 A. Brykczyński, “W jakim stylu najwłaściwiej u nas kościoły budować?” [What style is the most appropriate to build our churches?], *Przegląd Katolicki*, 1893, 31, no. 46, pp. 726–728.

39 K. Matuszewski, op. cit., p. 81.

40 Ibid., p. 83.

41 Ibid., p. 82.



instance, to the remodelling of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, completed in 1840,<sup>42</sup> the church of St. Peter and Paul in the Koszyki area, completed in 1886,<sup>43</sup> and the edifice of the Evangelical Reformed Church at Leszno street, dating from 1880.<sup>44</sup>

All of these buildings were bitterly criticised by Matuszewski. He described the earliest design by the Warsaw-based architect Adam Idźkowski in the following manner:

The idea of returning this ancient masterpiece of Polish church architecture to its original ogival form [...] may have been valuable, yet the architect mismanaged it in his execution. Suggestions and motifs for the plans of the temple's reconstruction [...] should have, in my opinion, been sought rather in the characteristic works of the Polish ogival style, i.e. the so-called Vistula-Baltic style, such as the churches in Cracow, Wiślica, Włocławek and other cities. However, Idźkowski, whose education lacked, of course, any archaeological component [...], chose to go a different way altogether. Without further consideration, he reached for the models of the English Gothic and clad our church in these vestments, which, though original and opulent, are unfamiliar, and turned the edifice unrecognisable; thus adorned, the church looks like a foreign marvel.<sup>45</sup>

This passage refers to a number of issues that deserve a closer look. The criticism is directed not at the inaccurate use of Gothic forms, but at the fact that local forms were disregarded in favour of foreign ones. This view represents a significant change in how architecture was perceived in Poland. Around the year 1860 some authors still expressed doubt as to the justifiability of erecting buildings in mediaeval styles;<sup>46</sup> Matuszewski sees this as obvious. As Majdowski observes, this revaluation may be associated with, among others, the work of the pioneers of Polish archaeology of art, such as Władysław Łuszczkiewicz, Karol Kremmer and Józef Łepkowski, as well as with the emergence of technical periodicals (*Inżynieria i Budownictwo* from 1879, *Przegląd Techniczny* from 1875), which clearly promoted mediaeval styles at the time.<sup>47</sup>

This is the context in which Matuszewski invokes the term "Vistula-Baltic", which was then in common use and was identified with native, Polish architecture of the Middle Ages. Majdowski traces the origins of the term to the 1860s<sup>48</sup> and

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42 K. Stefański, *Architektura XIX wieku...*, p. 80.

43 Ibid. p. 126; construction works on the church did not begin until 1883, yet in 1881 Matuszewski was already criticising the closed nature of the contest and the fact that neo-Gothic designs by Z. Kiślański and A. Schimmelpfenig were rejected.

44 Ibid., p. 121.

45 K. Matuszewski, op. cit., p. 383.

46 Cf. R. Krajewski, op. cit., pp. 1–3.

47 A. Majdowski, *Nurt narodowy w architekturze...*, pp. 28–29.

48 In this context Majdowski invokes, for example, the church in Wielka Łąka near Toruń, in 1863 described by *Tygodnik Katolicki* as erected in the "Slavonic-Baltic style". The term, combining ethnicity and geography, was later replaced with a more memorable label "Vistula-Baltic style", which was more suggestive in conveying the idea of the cohesive nature of the Gothic architecture found between the coast of the Baltic Sea and the Carpathian Mountains. Cf. Majdowski, *O poglądach na styl...*, pp. 307–309.

notes that in the 1880s it became a substitute for “national spirit” in church architecture.<sup>49</sup> It should, however, be emphasised that very few authors attempt to analyse it more thoroughly; the “Vistula-Baltic style” functions as a self-explanatory term illustrated only with a small number of arbitrarily chosen examples. Matuszewski mentions some mediaeval structures of Cracow, Wiślica and Włocławek, providing no explanation as to what these edifices have in common and what distinguishes them from the architecture of other regions of Europe. The proposed vision of a “Polish” Gothic style is therefore imprecise. The ultimate form of the Vistula-Baltic style may only crystallise as a result of practical competition between architects within the framework of open architectural contests.

Matuszewski’s opinion on the church in Leszno is very similar to his views on the cathedral of St. John. Once more, his criticism focuses on the disregard for native models of Gothic architecture, although he also takes note of the inconsistencies in style, which he does not perceive as justified.<sup>50</sup> In Matuszewski’s essay, the unsatisfactory result of the newly completed project becomes the starting point for a broader analysis of the practical causes for the – in his view – poor quality of Warsaw architecture. Among the many existing factors, he mentions and discusses the destruction of historical buildings, the absence of research on early architecture, the changes introduced into projects behind closed doors, profiteering, cutting costs by using low-quality materials, the great number of new projects and the related similarity of decoration, loopholes in construction law, and the practice of giving licenses to individuals without sufficient qualifications.<sup>51</sup> Matuszewski sees the recurring issue of open architectural contests as one possible path towards improving the state of affairs. He writes:

It is well-high inconceivable that, having made the decision to erect a new church and gather the necessary funds, we do not always follow the example of all the other nations of the world – that is, we do not announce a contest for the design of the structure, thereby losing the opportunity to acquire the best designs possible and to utilise the greatest artistic talent available at the given time.<sup>52</sup>

Matuszewski rightly observes that organising architectural contests was a widespread practice at the time in many regions of Europe. As early as in 1849 the Viennese architects from the circle of the Akademie der Bildenden Künste were demanding that the authorities mandate the organisation of contests for the design of public edifices.<sup>53</sup>

Open contests in themselves do not, however, necessarily result in the development of architecture based on truly domestic models. In this context, Matuszewski mentions the church in Leszno: “Since it was decided that the new church is to

49 A. Majdowski, *Nurt narodowy w architekturze...*, p. 32.

50 K. Matuszewski, op. cit., p. 391.

51 Ibid., pp. 397–405.

52 Ibid., p. 393.

53 M. Rudowska, op. cit., p. 19.

be built in the ogival style, would it not be more appropriate, or even necessary, to look away from models of architecture alien to this land, choosing instead the flavour which had indeed been used here for several centuries?"<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that he clearly suggests that future contests openly request designs in the national (i.e. Vistula-Baltic) variation of the Gothic style. This postulate was soon to be implemented in the requirements for contest entries for the design of the Praga church in 1886.

## The contest announcement

The factors that influenced the architecture of Warsaw in the early 1880s are exceedingly complex. The most notable issues include the theoretical discussions around the concept of a national style, which had continued for many years, the growing interest in native Gothic architecture (in terms of historical research as much as architectural practice and art conservation), as well as the need to organise open contests for designs, increasingly often voiced in the relevant milieus. Competitions of that kind were regarded as an opportunity to create landmark works which would then set the direction of further development for other architects in the country.

These were the circumstances in which the contest for the design of the church in Praga was announced. The proposal to erect a new temple came from the prelate Ignacy Dudrewicz, who was the parson in the district.<sup>55</sup> The requirements for contest entries were published in *Przegląd Techniczny* in 1886.<sup>56</sup> Only Polish artists whose designs complied with a number of prerequisites could participate. The majority of the requirements were technical or functional in nature. The entire structure was to have a vaulted ceiling and walls plastered only on the inside. The chosen material was brick, with only a small amount of shaping brick and ashlar stone. The design was to include a sacristy and a mortuary chapel. The budget for the project amounted to 250 thousand roubles, whereas the architects submitting the best three designs were to be rewarded with 500, 300 and 200 roubles respectively. The requirements also specified the need to include detailed estimates of the cost of construction.

The designs submitted to the competition would become the property of the construction committee. Moreover, the contest jury reserved the right to refrain from awarding any design, to not implement the winning design, as well as to not entrust the execution of the project to the awarded architect. These restrictions were criticised by F. K. Martynowski, who described them as a "convenient escape

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54 K. Matuszewski, op. cit., p. 392.

55 J. Starożyk, "Kościół św. Michała Archanioła i Floryana na Pradze pod Warszawą" [The church of St. Michael the Archangel and St. Florian in Praga near Warsaw], *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, 1898, 29, p. 569.

56 *Konkurs na sporządzenie...*, p. 263.

clause for unfair intentions”.<sup>57</sup> He expressed the fear that the designs amassed by the committee may be used by an architect hired outside the contest to develop and execute a final design of the church. As he adamantly emphasised, in the case of a public contest “any shadow of the influence of personal interests must be dispersed”.<sup>58</sup> He also noted with obvious indignation that it would be immoral to award an architect and then eliminate him from the possibility of executing his own design (especially since the contest prizes did not cover the costs related to preparing a design). It must, however, be emphasised that ultimately none of Martynowski’s fears came true.

The requirements for the contest entries included predominantly technical, functional and legal issues. Only one passage referred to the question of the artistic aspects of the design, namely, that “the building is to be ogival in style, made of brick, in the so-called Vistula-Baltic vein”.<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, the passage includes the phrase “the so-called (...) vein”, which may suggest that even the organisers of the contest had no certainty as to the correct use of the term “Vistula-Baltic”. It is the adjective “ogival” that serves as the clear and unquestionable indication of the desired style. This fact may, in my opinion, be counted as one of the manifestations of the ambiguity Martynowski analysed in his article, regarding the precise meaning of the term Vistula-Baltic and the justifiability of using it as a label for a distinct style.

## On the Vistula-Baltic style

In the context of the contest, the above-mentioned complications caused justified doubts. As Martynowski rightly observes, the stylistic preference chosen by the committee “is virtually unknown to the general public, whilst the majority of builders [...] avoiding study and original work is not even sure where to look for appropriate models”.<sup>60</sup> To ensure a satisfactory conclusion to the contest, the author undertakes to define the Vistula-Baltic style, enumerating the architectural forms characteristic for it and the mediaeval edifices on which new structures designed in this vein were to be modelled.

In the introduction to his essay, Martynowski states that “aside from the French, the German, the English Gothic and so forth, there emerged the Polish form of the ogival style, significantly different from those others [...]. It is this Gothic style that we call ‘Vistula-Baltic’, which, in turn, is clearly distinguishable from the ogival architecture that developed in Cracow”.<sup>61</sup> In his view, the style under analysis spread “way beyond, further than Gdańsk and Würtemberg, Brandenburg

57 F. K. Martynowski, “Z powodu konkursu na kościół parafii praskiej” [Regarding the contest for a church for the Praga parish], *Kurier Warszawski*, 1886, no. 317b, p. 2.

58 Ibid.

59 *Konkurs na sporządzenie...*, p. 263.

60 F. K. Martynowski, *O stylu...*, p. 3.

61 Ibid.

and the neighbouring lands”.<sup>62</sup> The broad territorial scope of the style as presented by Martynowski is truly noteworthy. The region he describes corresponds with what modern studies refer to as “brick Gothic” or *Backsteingotik*. Both the currently recognised styles and the formula of the Vistula-Baltic style were distinguished by the use of brick as the principal building material. It is most likely for this very reason that Martynowski’s description of the style does not include the architecture of 14<sup>th</sup>-century Cracow basilicas, which often featured a combination of brick and stone both for construction elements and for their facing.<sup>63</sup>

It should be noted that, in contrast with the modern terms, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century label suggests a connection between this style of brick architecture and Polish tradition; it is apparent in the term itself including the word “Vistula”. The lands through which the river flows, as far as the Baltic Sea, were argued to have been the birthplace of the style. Consequently, Martynowski attempts to draw the broadest possible scope of its presence and describe it as resulting from “Polish” cultural influence.

Martynowski’s justification for the consistency of the broad territorial scope and its cultural affinity is based on two arguments. Firstly, the lands are presented as having a more or less tight connection to “Polish” dynasties. This thesis is rarely mentioned by other authors, presumably due to its questionable nature. It would also be difficult to subject it to a more thorough analysis, since Martynowski himself chooses to offer no explanation as to its inclusion.

Secondly, the author refers to the assumption regarding the Slavic roots of the inhabitants of the region in question, who allegedly cultivated their traditions in spite of the later German colonisation. It is the aesthetic sensitivity, the needs and the circumstances of these communities that influenced the specific features of this Gothic style. As Martynowski puts it,

this circumstance is a clear indication that the Vistula-Baltic Gothic is a Slavic and Polish creation, from time to time subjected to strong German and Teutonic influences. One must not forget that in the mentioned provinces the spirit and the community of Slavic Polish people was the underlying social component at the time of this style’s development.<sup>64</sup>

This view stemmed from the historical writings of the time.<sup>65</sup> Its popularity may, in turn, be discussed in terms of political disputes and conflicts between scholars from different countries clashing in the field of emerging academic disciplines.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> A. Grzybkowski, *Gotycka architektura murowana w Polsce* [Stone Gothic architecture in Poland], Warsaw, 2014, pp. 129–131.

<sup>64</sup> F. K. Martynowski, *O stylu...*, s. 3.

<sup>65</sup> S. Maroński, “Słowianie Meklemburscy i walka stronnictwa niemieckiego ze słowiańskim przy wyborze biskupa dyecezyi szweryńskiej” [Mecklenburg Slavs and the fight between the German and the Slavic faction over the appointment of the bishop of the Schwerin diocese], *Biblioteka Warszawska*, 1881, 3, pp. 22–48.



In a further section of the article, Martynowski defines the features of the Vistula-Baltic style.<sup>66</sup> Forms he considers characteristic include the frequent appearance of “niches” (in modern terminology: blind windows) and pilasters (in modern terminology: pilaster strips or lesenes) to define the walls, accentuating arcades with moulding and the widespread use of polygonal simple pillars as a base for well-defined ribs. He notes the ubiquity of stepped gables and the rarity of “openwork”, i.e. open tracery on façades. Martynowski also presents a sizeable list of structures he deems compliant with the Vistula-Baltic style. The buildings he enumerates are found mainly in Poznań, Włocławek, Pelplin, Frombork, Toruń, Vilnius, Kowno, Lübeck, Wismar, Malbork, Bydgoszcz, Krzywino, Kobylin, Warsaw and Płock.<sup>67</sup>

Martynowski's efforts certainly deserve proper recognition. Although the academic nomenclature has since undergone many changes, the set of features he identified does seem to generally correspond to the most popular forms of the architecture of the region under analysis. This being said, the hypotheses he presented were not supported by any thorough study. Martynowski merely systematised the views appearing in academic sources at the time, illustrating them with examples. His deliberations are hardly academic, given that he does not utilise the proper tools. The listed edifices are not stylistically analysed, no sources are consulted, at times no justification is given for the hypotheses proposed. In his text, the “Vistula-Baltic style” remains a very ambiguous term. His attempt to specify it is limited to assembling a catalogue of its formal features illustrated with a set of loosely connected mediaeval works.

The phrasing of the rules of the contest for the design of the church of St. Florian also prompted Władysław Łuszczkiewicz to speak his mind. His essay was published in four parts in *Przegląd Techniczny* (the very periodical that announced the contest, with which Łuszczkiewicz had had no earlier connection) as the competition was underway.<sup>68</sup> The Cracow-based scholar discussed the Vistula-Baltic style, the justifiability of using this term and the artistic value of the related architecture in highly critical terms.

Łuszczkiewicz's attitude was determined mainly by his academic interests. In contrast with Martynowski, he based his theories on (often pioneering) research on mediaeval architecture. The majority of his works are brief monographs on specific edifices, including the Basilica of Corpus Christi and the Church of St. Catherine with the Augustinian monastery in Cracow, the Cracow Cloth Hall, and monasteries in Mogiła, Wąchock and other towns.<sup>69</sup> Given his profound academic and didactic

66 F. K. Martynowski, *O stylu...*, p. 3.

67 Ibid.

68 W. Łuszczkiewicz, *Kilka słów o naszem...*, pp. 53–54, 81–82, 115–117, 148–150.

69 W. Łuszczkiewicz, *Kościół Bożego Ciała: jego dzieje i zabytki* [The Church of Corpus Christi: its history and artefacts], Cracow, 1898; idem, *Kościół św. Katarzyny z klasztorem OO. Augustynianów* [The Church of St. Catherine with the Augustinian monastery], Cracow, 1898; idem, *Sukienice krakowskie: dzieje gmachu i jego obecnej przebudowy* [The Cracow Cloth Hall: the history of the edifice and its present restoration], Cracow, 1899; idem, *Wieś Mogiła przy Krakowie*,

oeuvre, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Łuszczkiewicz was most likely the greatest authority in the nascent field of the history of mediaeval architecture in Poland.

Let us therefore analyse Łuszczkiewicz's principal theories, leading to his criticism of the requirements for the design of the church in Praga. As a starting point for his essay, Łuszczkiewicz defines his view on the development of mediaeval architecture, saying that "ornamentation aside [...], the main impulse for the development of construction in the Middle Ages was thus the struggle with the material, inciting people to seek more and more perfect methods, to achieve bolder and bolder forms. This is, in essence, all there is to the history of mediaeval church architecture".<sup>70</sup> Łuszczkiewicz isolates the struggle against the laws of physics undertaken for many centuries by mediaeval architects as the principal driving force behind the development of architecture. He therefore criticises architects who imitate Gothic forms only in the plan or ornamentation:

Is it rightful to conjure systematisations classifying epochs according to the spatial plans of churches or their ornaments, or to claim that we imitated Teutonic buildings constructed solely of brick? A much more prudent approach would be to analyse historical buildings according to their construction, since, as stated above, it was among the principal aims of mediaeval architects.<sup>71</sup>

This passage indicates that Łuszczkiewicz's study was based on the assumption of the primacy of constructional solutions over all other aspects of Gothic architecture.

The above-mentioned views are the foundation for Łuszczkiewicz's postulate that the architecture of 14<sup>th</sup>-century Cracow was superior to that of other regions of Poland. His arguments may be summarised in the following three points. Firstly, he notes the issue of construction methods, well-researched and well-described in the case of Lesser Poland. Here, the solutions to the problem of strutting the walls of the main nave in Cracow's basilica-type churches is particularly important for Łuszczkiewicz's theory.<sup>72</sup> The construction method he described is presented as indicative of the autonomy of Polish architecture at the time.<sup>73</sup> Gothic structures in the north of Poland, Łuszczkiewicz argues, are still relatively unexplored. He regards that latter style as being most probably of German provenance and traces its origins to the forms of the Romanesque monasteries in Jerichow and Lehnin.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the conclusion he draws seems obvious. Since Polish architects do have their own, well-studied and well-described models from Cracow, repeating foreign forms is neither logical nor justified.

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*jej klasztor cysterski – kościółek farny i kopiec Wandy* [The village of Mogiła near Cracow, its Cistercian monastery – the parish church and the Wanda Mound], Cracow, 1899; idem, *Reszty romańskiej architektury dawnego opactwa cysterskiego w Wąchocku* [The remains of the Romanesque architecture of the former Cistercian abbey in Wąchock], Cracow, 1892.

70 W. Łuszczkiewicz, *Kilka słów o naszem...*, pp. 202–203.

71 Ibid., p. 207.

72 Cf. A. Grzybkowski, op. cit., pp. 118–119.

73 W. Łuszczkiewicz, *Czyli można konstrukcję kościołów...*, pp. 53–63.

74 Idem, *Kilka słów o naszem...*, p. 53.

Łuszczkiewicz's second argument refers to the building materials. He writes that "the magnificent monuments to Prussian brick construction are striking due to the apparent mastery of brickwork and the grandeur of all finished and unaltered works [...] that invariably affects every expert".<sup>75</sup> It may therefore seem that Łuszczkiewicz does recognise the artistic value of brick Gothic. However, he immediately adds that these features "become irrelevant when compared to the true monuments to the Gothic style, the stone-built churches and cathedrals of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century".<sup>76</sup> This is related to the fact that, in works representing the so-called "Cracow School", brick was used only to build up the walls. The parts which scholars found the most interesting – i.e. load-bearing elements, window jambs, details, mouldings, portals and so forth – they were made of stone. It should be noted that in the quoted passage only stone architecture is deemed worthy of being called the "true" Gothic. Brick is regarded as synonymous with economic and artistic poverty. Łuszczkiewicz goes as far as to deny brick buildings the label of "Gothic". As he puts it, "proper Gothic does not exist where no appropriate stone could be found".<sup>77</sup>

In further sections, Łuszczkiewicz's argumentation is based around examples in which constructional solutions commonly known from stone Gothic structures were reduced in brick buildings due to substandard material. He therefore attempts to prove the superiority of one type of architecture over the other. Łuszczkiewicz's line of thought is not free from error and misinterpretation. He writes, for instance, that as a result of using brick "the marvellous practice of surrounding the church presbytery with lower side aisles and a circle of chapels [...] was discontinued".<sup>78</sup> This statement is, however, at variance with the form of the most emblematic structures of the analysed style. In fact, several Mecklenburg churches feature ambulatories with a so-called circumambulation of integrated chapels.<sup>79</sup> In this context, the church of the Virgin Mary in Lübeck provides an example which was well known in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; Łuszczkiewicz must have been aware of its existence.<sup>80</sup> It should also be noted that a polygonal ambulatory (although with no chapels) may also be found in the monastery in Oliwa. Cracow churches, on the other hand, do not include such architectural features. Only the Wawel cathedral has an ambulatory, albeit in a more simple, rectangular form.

Łuszczkiewicz's essay contains more inconsistencies of this kind. The obvious question to ask at this point is whether its author criticises architecture with which he is not well acquainted. Is he subconsciously trying to twist the facts to fit the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>79</sup> E.g. the Cistercian monastery in Bad Doberan, the church of the Virgin Mary in Stralsund, the church of St. Nicholas in Wismar, the collegiate church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Stargard Szczeciński and many others.

<sup>80</sup> Dziekoński mentions the church of the Virgin Mary in Lübeck as one of the many sources of inspiration for his design. Cf. Dziekoński, *Kościół parafialny świętego Floryana...*, p. 8.

narrative he constructed? Is this a conscious choice aimed at influencing the prospective architects of the church in Praga, nudging them towards following 14<sup>th</sup>-century Cracow models? While a definitive answer is impossible to provide, it seems relatively clear that in presenting their views, both Martynowski and Łuszczkiewicz misuse arguments and cherry-pick examples of historical architecture to achieve a specific goal. Consequently, the criticism Majdowski directs at authors using the term “Vistula-Baltic style” (such as Matuszewski and Martynowski<sup>81</sup>) may be considered exaggerated, given the fact that, while discussing Łuszczkiewicz’s analysis, the same author states that “Brief notes on domestic architecture in the ogival era has first and foremost proven the ideological bankruptcy of the Vistula-Baltic style.”<sup>82</sup>

## The results of the contest and the implementation of the chosen design

Between 27 March and 4 April 1887 all contest entries were displayed in the Warsaw Municipal Government Hall.<sup>83</sup> The jury made their choice in two successive voting sessions. During the first one the committee took into account all the entries (25 in total), whereas only the best six designs were reviewed during the second session. In both sessions a decisive majority of votes went to the design authored by Józef Pius Dziekoński. It ultimately won 15 votes, while the runner-up received only five. The award for the second place was given to Władysław Marconi; the one for third place to Ignacy Jórski.

The contest jury consisted of 14 architects and 6 members of the Construction Committee.<sup>84</sup> Descriptive evaluations of all the entries, as well as a chart comparing data such as the projected size of the church, the costs of construction and so forth, were published in a special report in *Przegląd Techniczny*.<sup>85</sup> In most cases the committee members criticised the same aspects of the designs; the most common faults they found include flawed proportions of the form (mainly of the spires in relation to the main body), impractical arrangement of the doorways (especially side entrances and those leading to the mortuary chapel), problems with providing enough light in the interior, and excessively small details that obscured the composition or generated additional costs. Of particular interest are complaints regarding the lack of clear features of the desired style. It ought to be emphasised that, ultimately, none of the submitted entries fully met the jury’s expectations regarding the Vistula-Baltic character of the architectural form.

The final report of the jury contains very few clues as to why it was Dziekoński’s design that was chosen. The design was not remarkable in terms of scale; nor was it the cheapest. The jury criticised the side aisles for being too low, as well as the

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81 A. Majdowski, *O poglądach na styl...*, pp. 313–314.

82 Ibid., p. 319.

83 *Projekty kościoła dla...*, p. 125.

84 M. Rudowska, op. cit., p. 32.

85 *Sprawozdanie komisji konkursowej...*, p. 93.

architect's decision to surround the presbytery with a simple ambulatory and to include a passage along the façade, beneath the spires, which weakened the construction. The elevations were deemed "relatively close to the Vistula-Baltic vein, if a little too slight", whereas the windows of the main nave were openly regarded as "not entirely the right style".<sup>86</sup>

The actual reasons for the final selection are difficult to discern. Majdowski points primarily to the superiority of the functional solutions included in the awarded design.<sup>87</sup> A number of other factors may also have been of importance. First of all, it must be admitted that Dziekoński enjoyed a certain amount of fame at the time. Following a contest organised in 1883, in 1886–1894 he supervised the remodelling of the church of St. Alexander in Warsaw.<sup>88</sup> Between 1885 and 1888 he was also participating in the construction of Karol Schreiber's neo-Gothic chapel in Łódź, which he designed together with Edward Lilpop.<sup>89</sup> Thus, when the contest for the church of St. Florian was announced, Dziekoński was involved in two prestigious projects involving ecclesiastical architecture. He may therefore been regarded as an expert in the field. In this case, the contest for the Praga church would allow him to consolidate his professional status.

The fact that Dziekoński's design featured the characteristic ogee motif among the pinnacles of the transept gables could have also played a role. In my estimation, the jury may have considered this stylistic choice to be a clear reference to the façade of the church of St. Anne in Vilnius. It ought to be emphasised that many 19<sup>th</sup>-century scholars portrayed that church as an excellent example of native Polish Gothic.<sup>90</sup> This reference becomes obvious when one considers the heading (a short catchphrase name given to each of the contest entries) for Dziekoński's design. It read: "The church of St. Anne in Vilnius".<sup>91</sup>

Finally, the connections Dziekoński might have had among the clergy cannot be disregarded. The architect appears to have been very consistent in building his professional status in affiliation with the Catholic Church. In 1893 he was appointed architect of the Warsaw diocese, and became a permanent member of the consistory council.<sup>92</sup> In the course of his career Dziekoński designed or remodelled (working in association with others) more than eighty Catholic churches.<sup>93</sup>

86 Ibid.

87 A. Majdowski, *Z dziejów budowy kościoła...*, p. 129.

88 K. Stefański, *Architektura XIX wieku...*, p. 127.

89 Ibid., p. 137.

90 Cf. W. Łuszczkiewicz, *Kilka słów o naszym...*, p. 54; Martynowski, *O stylu...*, p. 3; A. Nieniewski, "Architekt Józef Dziekoński" [The architect Józef Dziekoński], *Przegląd Techniczny*, 1908, 46, no. 1, p. 14; A. J. Nowowiejski, *Wykład Liturgii Kościoła Katolickiego* [Explication of the liturgy of the Catholic Church], Warsaw, 1893, p. 202.

91 *Sprawozdanie komisji konkursowej...*, p. 93.

92 W. Kumor, *Ustrój i organizacja Kościoła Polskiego w okresie niewoli narodowej* [The system an organisation of the Polish Church at the time of partitions], Cracow, 1980, p. 57; after: A. Majdowski, *Budownictwo kościelne...*, p. 18.

93 Ibid., pp. 193–199.



Following a session of the contest committee, the chosen design was authorised to be implemented.<sup>94</sup> The Ministry of Internal Affairs instructed the Warsaw municipal authorities to hand over a plot of land that used to accommodate a redoubt.<sup>95</sup> Construction works were financed solely from citizen donations; despite their generosity, the funds accumulated at the start of the project were insufficient. Ensuring constant funding also proved very difficult. It therefore became necessary to introduce certain modifications to the initial design. The most important changes include reducing the length of the central nave by one span and substituting the majority of ashlar stone in all façades with shaping and clinker brick.<sup>96</sup>

In spite of financial difficulties, construction work proceeded, fuelled by monetary contributions (for instance Alexandra, the wife of August Count Potocki, donated 10,000 roubles<sup>97</sup>), as well as the established practice of parish members funding specific furnishings or elements of sculpted decoration. *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* reported that the bell was funded by Jan Kozłowski, a resident of Targówek. Piotr Kruszewski, the owner of the house at no. 176 Targowa Street, who died in 1896, bequeathed the entire revenue from the sale of this property for the construction of one church spire. Michał Podhorski, a citizen of Volhynia and resident of Praga, funded the sculpture of St. Michael the Archangel. The matching figure of St. Florian was financed by Henryk Piaseczyński, a veterinarian from Praga.<sup>98</sup> The stone crucifix above the entrance to the mortuary must also be mentioned in this context, as its base still bears the engraved inscription: "FUNDAVIT ANDREAS MICHAŁSKI KOLONUS IN ZĄBKI 1886" (Fig. 3).

The cornerstone of the church was laid on 13 June 1888 by Archbishop Wincenty Teofil Popiel.<sup>99</sup> Brick for construction works was provided by Kazimierz Granzow's factory in Kawęczyn, while the stone elements were made of Szydłowiec sandstone.<sup>100</sup> Dziekoński himself supervised the implementation of his design. Masonry works were managed by master mason Władysław Czosnkowski, Teodor Skonieczny made the sculptures, while master carpenter Karol Bevensee handled the production and mounting of wooden elements.<sup>101</sup> Prominent figures of Polish academia, culture and politics voted the church of St. Florian to be the most important work of Polish architecture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century even before the construction was completed.<sup>102</sup> The consecration of the church took place on 29 September 1901.

The facts presented above, including the names of the donors and craftsmen involved in the construction of the church, seem of much importance. The circles of

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94 *Budowa kościoła parafialnego...*, p. 115.

95 J. Starożyk, op. cit., p. 571.

96 *Budowa kościoła parafialnego...*, p. 115.

97 J. Starożyk, op. cit., p. 572.

98 Ibid., p. 571.

99 *Z tygodnia na tydzień. Poświęcenie...*, p. 779.

100 J. Starożyk, op. cit., p. 570.

101 Ibid., p. 569.

102 *Konkurs stulecia...*, p. 16.



**Fig. 3.** Unknown author, the cross above the entrance to the mortuary chapel in the Church of St. Michael the Archangel and St. Florian the Martyr, constructed presumably before 1901, condition in 2018, photo: Jan Nowicki

Warsaw architects, critics, historians and theoreticians of art indubitably held certain hopes and ambitions regarding the contest for the design of St. Florian's. It was also an outlet for their interest in history. Yet the significance of the church, as well as its fame, may rather be attributed to the simple message conveyed by the construction of the Praga church. Financed by local parish members, designed by Polish architect, a graduate of the School of Fine Arts in Warsaw,<sup>103</sup> built of brick fired in a local factory by Warsaw masons, adorned with sculptures made by a Polish artist, the church of St. Florian was naturally predisposed to become a source of national pride for the Polish people, the embodiment of all their dreams about a church.

The location of the edifice also had its implications. The massive Catholic church was erected almost directly next to the Orthodox Cathedral of Mary Magdalene. The latter, built for the Orthodox community in Praga, was to testify to Warsaw's allegiance to the Russian Empire.<sup>104</sup> The church of St. Florian could therefore be

<sup>103</sup> A. Majdowski, *Budownictwo kościelne...*, p. 9.

<sup>104</sup> P. Paszkiewicz, *Pod berłem Romanowów. Sztuka rosyjska w Warszawie 1815–1915* [Under the standard of the Romanoffs. Russian art in Warsaw 1815–1915], Warsaw, 1991, pp. 83–84.

seen as something of an architectural counterpoint to the structure erected by the occupiers. Thus, the project of constructing a new temple offered the local community more than an opportunity for active participation, involvement, and fostering and cultivation of interpersonal relations. The architectural forms chosen for the building also reflected the need to emphasise a certain identity: Polish, perpetual, Catholic. The location of the church only further emphasised this meaning.

## A word from the architect

The last significant contribution to the discussion around the contest under analysis came from Józef Pius Dziekoński, who published a related article in 1900.<sup>105</sup> He referred to the contest requirements, the changes introduced to his design during its implementation, as well as to numerous technical issues connected with the construction (commenting, for instance, on the quality of the available materials and some matters of engineering). For the most part, however, the article constitutes Dziekoński's response to Łuszczkiewicz's arguments presented above. Thus, this text may be seen as the artist's opinion on his work, an attempt at ending a debate which had been ongoing for years.

First of all, it is apparent that Dziekoński was not indifferent to the issue of following domestic models. Although describing his church as associated with the architecture of the German lowlands, he states that "some motifs for stylish ornamentation of the façades were inspired by historical works of church architecture scattered throughout our lands".<sup>106</sup> Visual references to the church of St. Anne in Vilnius must be mentioned in this context, as well as the diamond vault over the mortuary chapel, interpreted at the time as modelled after the gallery in the Collegium Maius in Cracow.<sup>107</sup>

Secondly, Dziekoński clearly shared Łuszczkiewicz's views on the superiority of stone Gothic structures over brick ones, since he cites the monograph discussed above and paraphrases its main points. He also states that "it is in such architecture that we ought to seek models for building our churches".<sup>108</sup> On the other hand, Dziekoński notes that the church of St. Florian in Praga was built of a material Łuszczkiewicz deemed second-rate.

It may be assumed that Dziekoński was trying, *post factum*, to explain why building a church in the Cracow style, so favoured by Łuszczkiewicz, had been impossible. He refers mostly to the predominant use of brick for architectural details, emphasising financial concerns, as well as "lack of fondness for grandiose

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105 J. P. Dziekoński, op. cit., pp. 6–10.

106 Ibid., p. 6.

107 Cf. J. Starożyk, op. cit., p. 572. The article also includes the only image of the original chapel vaults of whose existence I am aware.

108 J. P. Dziekoński, op. cit., p. 6.

architecture".<sup>109</sup> Such statements can be interpreted as regret over the changes introduced to the design during its implementation. Dziekoński's initial concept involved using a much greater amount of stone; the design happened to follow Łuszczkiewicz's postulates, so the architect was able to refer to them and shift the responsibility for the insufficiently "Polish" nature of his Gothic to problems beyond his direct control. In such circumstances, Dziekoński himself could only express his hope that the situation improves in the future: "Should the condition of transport make it possible for the northern part of the country, situated beyond the line of quarries, to have as much access to ashlar stone as Cracow does, our architecture, especially in terms of churches, will achieve much progress".<sup>110</sup>

In my estimation, Dziekoński truly did hold stone Gothic in higher regard than brick Gothic. It should be noted that his first neo-Gothic design, Scheiblers' Chapel in Łódź, was made of stone. It is, however, unlikely that he shared Łuszczkiewicz's views regarding the connection between specific materials and architecture's affinity to certain national traditions. Dziekoński never discussed this issue in his earlier essays.<sup>111</sup> It seems instead that it was Łuszczkiewicz's authority that inspired Dziekoński to attempt a dialogue with the theses put forward by the Cracow-based scholar.

Some corroboration for this theory comes from the fact that Dziekoński saw it as necessary to explain why he did not follow Łuszczkiewicz's instructions in his design for the church of St. Florian. He writes that

arranging the pillars of the nave in the Cracow manner, i.e. with a protruding side escarpment crosswise from the aisle, is not a fortunate solution, and thus there was no choice but to resort to arch buttresses known from French construction. Examples of such arches in brick structures can be found in basilicas in Lübeck and Toruń, as well as in the handsome new church of St. Michael in Wrocław.<sup>112</sup>

The choice of examples mentioned in this passage testifies to Dziekoński's (at least) basic familiarity with brick Gothic architecture. The church of St. Jacob in Toruń is one of the few brick Gothic structures in Royal Prussia that feature an external flying buttress. In Mecklenburg, where the church of St. Mary in Lübeck is located, such solutions were much more common. Thus, Dziekoński attempts to justify the use of an element typically associated with stone French Gothic in a brick structure. Parts of Dziekoński's other publications also seem to suggest a thorough knowledge of the architecture of the region. He mentions, for instance, the restoration of the Malbork castle and the ceramic frieze with an inscription on the external façade of the presbytery in the Toruń church of St. Jacob.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>111</sup> J. P. Dziekoński, "Budowanie kościołów z cegły palonej" [Building brick churches], *Przegląd Katolicki* 1894, 32, no. 39, pp. 614–616; idem, *Monografia kościoła parafialnego w Będkowie* [A monograph on the parochial church in Będków], Cracow, 1893.

<sup>112</sup> J. P. Dziekoński, *Kościół parafialny świętego...*, p. 6.

<sup>113</sup> J. P. Dziekoński, *Monografia kościoła...*, p. 6.

## Conclusion

The present article analysed texts published in *Przegląd Techniczny* and referring to the successive stages of the contest for the design for a parochial church in the Warsaw district of Praga, as well as essays, discussions and press articles written in connection with this event. The aim was to try to connect the themes appearing in various publications and the recorded facts related to the contest as well as the theoretical discussion it generated. In my opinion, the juxtaposition of different types of sources is the key to revealing the crucial role of the contest in the development of Polish sacred architecture and the theory thereof.

The contest for the design of the church of St. Florian combined a fascination with the Gothic style, which had been growing since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ongoing research and restoration projects, as well as the concurrent debate regarding national architecture and the numerous attempts at defining and developing it. It was the first event in the history of Polish architecture in which designers were expressly instructed to create a church in the Gothic style. Moreover, following the emerging trend of interest in domestic art and the popularisation of the term “Vistula-Baltic style”, the organisers of the contest decided to specify that inspiration for the design was to be sought among existing structures located on territories that were at the time associated with Polish culture. These circumstances clearly indicate the exceptional nature of the enterprise.

The breakthrough nature of the contest is also evident from the discussion sparked by the phrase “in the so-called Vistula-Baltic vein” being included in the contest requirements. Essays by Martynowski and Łuszczkiewicz, analysed in the present article, constituted one of the few contemporary attempts at a more thorough analysis of this problematic term. The question of the Vistula-Baltic style was inherently connected to the issue of the identity of Gothic architecture in Poland and its characteristic features. For the emerging field of mediaeval studies, these matters were of utmost importance.

Lastly, an analysis of the contest for the church of St. Florian reveals the complexity of the issue of architectural work in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The image of architecture of the period is made up of ambiguous terms, theoretical problems, legal and political circumstances, methods of acquiring funds for construction, national sentiments, historical awareness, academic research, the emancipation of the profession of architects, new phenomena such as architectural contests, easy access to journals, and many other factors. Events such as the competition for the design of the church of St. Florian are discussed by an exceptionally broad array of sources, which make the above combination of factors more easily understandable to the modern scholar. It may therefore be argued that the contest discussed in the present analysis, as well as other similar enterprises, constitute the perfect material for future studies.

*Translated by Julita Mastalerz*



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## Abstract

The present article discusses the architectural contest for the design of the Praga parish church in Warsaw, announced in 1886. The author aims to establish whether this event had any significant impact on the development of Polish architecture and its theoretical principles. He reviews the reasons for its importance and attempts to establish whether it constitutes suitable material for more thorough studies, the results of which would merit a prominent place in the historiography of 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture in Poland. The critical interpretation presented in this article is based primarily on texts published in *Przegląd Techniczny*, which discuss the successive stages of the contest, as well as selected press articles and essays written in direct connection to this enterprise. The author analyses texts by Karol Matuszewski, Franciszek Ksawery Martynowski, Władysław Łuszczkiewicz and Józef Pius Dziekoński, which are crucial for understanding the complex nature of the issue of the contest. The analysis leads to the conclusion that it was not the ultimate form of the church, but rather the combination of emotions, hopes, interests and controversies provoked by the announcement of the contest and the phrasing of its requirements that determined the crucial role of this event in the history of Polish architecture in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:** gothic revival, sacral architecture, national style, church of St. Michael and Florian in Warsaw, Józef Pius Dziekoński