

INTRODUCTION

The University of Warsaw is one of a sizeable group of European and American universities which were established in the Age of the Enlightenment. It was founded at the same time as the Humboldt University of Berlin (1811), the University of Virginia in Charlottesville (1819) and the University of London (1822).¹ However, unlike these institutions, its past was fraught with difficulties, especially in the nineteenth century. The University, which is an integral part of Warsaw, suffered a fate similar to that of the city itself. Its history is also akin to that of the entire Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth which was partitioned by the neighbouring powers in the late eighteenth century (1772–1795), and essentially wiped off the map for more than a hundred years. Hopes for Poland's rebirth grew in the early nineteenth century, first awakened by the Napoleonic campaigns in 1806, and then the Congress of Vienna in 1815.² However, the Duchy of Warsaw (1807–1813), and later the Kingdom of Poland, established in 1815 and better known as the Congress Kingdom, were but poor substitutes for such a revival. Although Napoleon disappointed many Poles by recreating Poland as only the Duchy of Warsaw (see map), this small state's existence made it possible to establish the Congress Kingdom. The great hopes which rested in the liberal and relatively reformist Alexander I (1801–1825) – tsar of Russia and subsequently king of Poland – turned sour soon after 1820. His successor to the thrones of Russia and Poland, Tsar Nicholas I,³ further limited the Congress Kingdom's independence thus precipitating the outbreak of the November Uprising in 1830.⁴ The tsar was dethroned as king of Poland by an act of the Polish Parliament, and military activities continued for seven months. The Uprising was nevertheless doomed to fail.

The University, established in the years 1808–1818 by a group of Warsaw intellectuals, officially sanctioned by Alexander I on 19 November 1816 and formally inaugurated on 14 May 1818, was closed down in 1831. In the years which followed, its most valuable treasures – including the library, a vast collection of more than 100,000 prints and drawings, a collection of coins and medals and many other works of art

– were taken to St. Petersburg. Thus, the University, founded but twenty years earlier, ceased to exist; and the Faculty of Science and the Fine Arts along with the other four faculties disappeared with it. It only regained its independence in 1915, although it was revived briefly under the name of the Central College or the Main School between 1862 and 1869. The majority of the University's treasures, lost in the nineteenth century and returned after the Polish-Bolshevik War in 1920, were destroyed by the Nazi Germans during the Second World War. Yet, despite these terrible losses, the rebuilt Campus at Krakowskie Przedmieście and the splendidly reconstructed Botanic Garden in Aleje Ujazdowskie with its Astronomical Observatory have retained their monumental character and are among the most magical and picturesque places in Warsaw.

Like the scholars active in many European and American universities – namely, Cambridge, Oxford and Harvard – the founders of Warsaw's University were intent on fulfilling the noble ideals of an institution of higher education which would have its own art collection that would play a vital role in the teaching process. For the first time in the history of Polish artistic culture, the works produced by the artists who were the University's professors and students were shown at public exhibitions which enjoyed tremendous popularity. Fortunately, several nineteenth-century paintings, prints, and drawings have survived and give us an excellent idea of what those events looked like, helping us to understand the true dignity and prestige of Warsaw's first University. These enlightenment ideals were invoked even as late as in the interwar period, when the University acquired Renaissance medals – subsequently destroyed during the war – and extended its patronage to the very successful archaeological excavations at Edfu in Egypt (1936–1939). These ambitious plans were thwarted repeatedly because of Poland's complicated and often tragic fortunes, and the fate of Warsaw, which was cruelly pillaged after the November Uprising, and almost razed to the ground during the Second World War. The impact of Warsaw's first University – which, by and large, continued the tradition of King Stanisław Augustus' artistic patronage – on the city's and Poland's artistic culture was considerable.⁵ The numerous University buildings, erected in later periods and located in various parts of Warsaw, played a vital part in shaping the city's architectural landscape.

This book, richly illustrated with little-known or hitherto unpublished materials, is addressed to a wide circle of readers. It can be read as an introduction to the University's history, and as a guide to its historic monuments and collection of plaster casts, as well as the engravings and drawings housed in the University Library Print Room.

The first five chapters discuss mostly the achievements and heritage of the Faculty of Science and the Fine Arts, and also of the School of Fine Arts, which existed on the University campus in the years 1844–1862 (1865). They also focus on the history of the University buildings, its emblem, and other symbols. The following chapters approach various aspects of the University’s scientific and intellectual achievements in the context of Poland’s history. Thus, the book gives an account of the most important events covering two hundred years of the University’s history and introduces profiles of its rectors, outstanding professors and graduates. The reader will find the names of scientists and scholars active in almost all fields of human knowledge, many of whom were not only academics of worldwide renown, but also professed lovers and connoisseurs of art. It is worth remembering that at universities – and the University of Warsaw is no exception – an interest in architecture and artistic creativity often transgresses the boundaries between the various faculties. As an example, Fryderyk Skarbek, Professor of Economics, lectured at the Faculty of Law and was also a gifted painter who helped organize the University’s art exhibitions. Students of this same faculty included Zygmunt Krasiński, an outstanding poet, and Edward Rastawiecki, author of the three-volume *Słownik malarzów polskich* [Dictionary of Polish Painters, 1850–1857], an important publication on the fine arts. Of equal value are the source materials, hitherto unpublished, which relate to the history of the University’s artistic culture, collected and reviewed by Feliks Paweł Jarocki (1790–1865), Professor of Zoology (see Fig. 47), and later curator of the University buildings, as well as similar materials collected by August Roman Kręcki (1843–1920), a clerk at the Warsaw-Vienna Railway, student of the Central College and participant in the January Uprising of 1863.⁶ Jarocki is the author of the invaluable *Kronika Pałacu Kazimierzowskiego z ostatnich 34 lat (1812–1846)* [Chronicle of the Kazimierzowski Palace in the past 34 years (1812–1846)], whereas Kręcki collected unique materials on the School of Fine Arts. The work of both scholars, especially Jarocki’s manuscript, will be referred to repeatedly in the present publication.

The tale of the history and legacy of the University of Warsaw would not be complete without information on the Botanic Garden, the new Library and the university buildings located outside the central campus at Krakowskie Przedmieście. Both the new Library and the buildings at the Ochota Campus, i.e. the CeNT 1, CeNT 2 and CeNT 3, boast fascinating architectural form and excellent spatial solutions. These buildings, as well as the European Centre for the Geological Education in Chęciny near Kielce, are discussed in Chapter X. The book

contains also five Appendices, which refer, among others, to the Chopin family's apartment, to Stanisław Kostka-Potocki and to the Nobel Prize laureates who have been associated with the University of Warsaw.

In the foreword to the first edition of his famous *Pamiętniki czasów moich* [Memoirs of My Time], Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz (1758–1841) wrote: “We are living in the times of memoirs; never have more been published than now”.⁷ As an alumnus of the School of Chivalry, former aide-de-camp to Tadeusz Kościuszko (then a citizen of the United States of America), co-organizer of Warsaw's intellectual life during the Congress Kingdom, and Chairman of the Society of Friends of Learning in the years 1827–1831, Niemcewicz had an ample scope of topics to reminisce upon. Furthermore, memoirs, diaries, and other commemorative publications from the past two centuries provide us with a good picture of the University, its rectors, deans, professors and students. We shall be referring to them often, so as to recreate in the best possible manner the events spanning those two hundred years and the atmosphere which prevailed.

In writing this book, I received help and support from many individuals and institutions. I would like to express my gratitude to the staff of many of Warsaw's libraries: the University Library (BUW); the Libraries of the Institute of History, the University of Warsaw, and of the National Museum in Warsaw; the Libraries of the Association of Historians of Art, and of the Institute of Fine Arts of the Polish Academy of Sciences. My special thanks go to the staff of the University Library Print Room, as well as the staff of the Department of Numismatics and the Department of Polish Drawings at the National Museum in Warsaw, of the Museum of Warsaw, and of the Royal Łazienki, who made numerous photographs available to me. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the late Professor Maria Wawrykowa, who reviewed and supplemented chapters VII and VIII of my book, to Dr Marek Ostrowski, Janusz Rudziński and Michał Dąbski, the authors of superb photographs, and to Krzysztof Załęski for information on drawings and prints of the historic University precinct. Tomasz Senduła helped translate the Latin inscriptions,⁸ while Mikołaj Baliszewski and Małgorzata Przybyszewska prepared the photographs for publication. Professor Anna Sadurska and Professor Teresa Zarębska, who are sadly no longer with us, will always be remembered with fond gratitude; in the last years of their lives, both scholars participated enthusiastically in research on the historic University precinct.

It is with great and genuine pleasure that I recall conversations on the history of the University, especially over the past thirty-five years,

which I had with the former Rectors: Professors Henryk Samsonowicz, Włodzimierz Siwiński, Piotr Węgleński and in particular with Andrzej Kajetan Wróblewski who also provided me with his unpublished papers.

This book could not have been written without the constant and zealous cooperation of my wife Anna and of Hubert Kowalski. My wife helped me in my research on period source texts, copied the most important excerpts we found, and served as the first editor of the emerging text. Hubert's diligent search through various archives and museum collections unearthed invaluable materials and photographs, often ones which have never before been published. My gratitude also to Klaudyna Michałowicz, Anne-Marie Duk-Fabianowska, Aleksandra Koutny-Jones and Beata Jankowiak-Konik for all their efforts to make this book available to English-speaking readers. ■

NOTES

- 1 See Anderson 2004.
- 2 Summerville 2006; Jarret 2014.
- 3 The Act of Deposition released by Parliament on 25 January 1831 is housed in the Polish Library in Paris.
- 4 Leslie 1969.
- 5 The term “tradition” is being used in this book in a very wide sense. To some degree I follow here the approach to this topic to be found in Hobsbawm 1992.
- 6 See *PSB*, vol. 15 (1970), pp. 632–633; vol. 10 (1962–1964), pp. 296–297. The manuscript of Jarocki's *Kronika* [Chronicle] is now in the Archive at Krzywe Koło Street in Warsaw, whereas written materials from the legacy of Kręcki, who was preparing to write a monograph on the School of Fine Arts, can be found in the Library of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences and in the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw. The oeuvre of both scholars has hitherto been used to a very small degree. Neither Jarocki's *Kronika*, nor materials collected by Kręcki are mentioned in the quoted *PSB* entries. Among Jarocki's scholarly achievements in the field of zoology, the treatise *O pająkach przędzących* [On spinning spiders] is worth mentioning; he was moreover on friendly terms with the Chopin family and accompanied young Fryderyk in his trip to Berlin in September 1829.
- 7 Niemcewicz 1957, vol. 2, p. 311.
- 8 Those inscriptions were re-translated into English through Polish and the resulting versions were consulted with Mr. Senduła (K.M.)