

# Vehicles of Memory: The Past and Power in Old Krakow (until the end of the 18th century)

## Abstract

How did the political elites of old Krakow approach their shared past?

According to the widespread belief, the citizens of pre-partition Poland (until the end of the 18th century) lacked a robust sense of identity or collective memory. The author of this work challenges this notion. He argues that the burghers of Krakow actively sought to forge a distinct, official narrative of their city's past.

The initial part of this book delves into the legal and institutional framework of urban "memory policy". The imperative to affirm and strengthen the legal authority of the municipal privileges safeguarded at the town hall appears to be crucial to the continuous evocation of the city's history.

The subsequent part of the book explores the role of communal ceremonies in shaping the collective memory of Krakow's political elites. The spotlight is on the city's most significant ritual – the annual swearing-in ceremony of the Krakow City Council members. The commemorative aspects of the election rite materialized through the age-old tradition of compiling catalogs of council members.

The third section of the monograph is a case study unraveling the phenomenon of imposing and manipulating the official narrative of the urban past, referring to the rebellion of Vogt Albert (1311–1312). The author traces how the ducal and royal authority shaped the official, propagandistic rendition of the Krakow bourgeoisie's uprising.

In the final stretch of the book, the legend of the ennoblement of Krakow's citizens by Leszek the Black in 1285 takes the center stage. The author posits that this legend originated in the 16th century within the political elite of Krakow, serving as an ideological counterweight to the black legend of Vogt Albert's rebellion.

Throughout the entire examined period, the legitimization of municipal autonomy and self-government remained the overarching goal of the memory policy pursued by the Krakow City Council. The emphasis on the “perennial” participation of the townspeople in national public life, as well as their affiliation with the noble estate (*szlachta*), appears an even more distinctive feature.

Paradoxically, the persistent highlighting of the ties between Krakow and the royal throne, along with the adaptation of political ideology developed by the Polish nobility, can be seen as an expression of the weakness of municipal autonomy.