

**Franciszek Ziejka**

## **The City of Cracow and the Jagiellonian University**

### **The Ceremony of Awarding the Jagiellonian University with the Gold Medal *Cracoviae Merenti* by the Authorities of the City of Cracow**

Wawel Cathedral, May 12, 2000, 5:00 p.m.

Your Eminence,  
Your Excellency,  
Messrs Ministers,  
Mr Voivode, Mr Marshal,  
Mr President of the City of Cracow, Mr Chairman of the Council of the City of  
Cracow,  
Honourable Councillors of the Capital Royal City of Cracow,  
Rectores Magnifici,  
Members of the Senate of the Jagiellonian University,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

**O**n behalf of the Academic Community of the Jagiellonian University I would like to thank most heartily the Authorities of the City of Cracow for the gold medal *Cracoviae Merenti*, a magnificent jubilee gift for the Jagiellonian University. I am filled with joy for this special distinction to be bestowed upon the Jagiellonian University and the Cracow Bishopric celebrating the millennium of its existence. I am also deeply convinced that this feeling is shared by the whole University, as well as its numerous alumni. Hereby, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Council and the Government of the City of Cracow for this beautiful gesture. I declare that will be immortalised in the University chronicles, while the precious medal will be displayed in a place of honour at our University Museum. There it will be admired not only by our students and faculty members, but also by the tourists who come in crowds to our Museum.



On May 12, 2000, a ceremonial meeting of the Cracow City Council was held at Wawel Cathedral. During the meeting gold medals "*Cracoviae Merenti*" were awarded to the Cracow Bishopric on its 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the Jagiellonian University on the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its restoration. The medals had numbers 2 and 3. (The first medal was awarded to Pope John Paul II). In the photograph from the left: Cardinal Franciszek Macharski, Archbishop Metropolitan of Cracow; Professor Franciszek Ziejka, Rector of the Jagiellonian University and Professor Andrzej Go³aœ, the Mayor of Cracow (Photo by K. Pollesch).

#### The City of Cracow and the Jagiellonian University!

These two institutions have grown into one entity within the common awareness of the Poles, as well as of foreigners, to such an extent that today no one can imagine Cracow without that University nor this University in a different city. The organic link of these two institutions has survived for over six centuries. At present it has become a special mode of their common existence.

Let us recall that the connection of the Municipality of the City of Cracow was formally established exactly 636 years ago, on May 12, 1364. On this date, King Casimir, whom posterity nicknamed "the Great", issued a foundation charter of the Cracow Academy. He wrote therein about establishing in the Royal City of Cracow a *studium generale*, a *pearl of exquisite sciences*, which was to educate *men eminent in the maturity of their council, distinguished in their virtues, and*



Rector Franciszek Ziejka thanks for the award of the medal to the Jagiellonian University (Photo by K. Pollesch).

*proficient in various abilities*. On the same date, the councillors and aldermen of the City of Cracow issued their own document, in which they confirmed the rights and privileges of the scholars who were to pursue knowledge in the *studium generale*. In particular, they guaranteed free entry and exit into and from the city to the students and professors of the university, as well as safety of accommodation and stay and exemption from customs fees. It should be emphasised that no city in Europe had issued any such decrees before. Only a year later, the Councillors of the City of Vienna issued a similar document in connection with the establishment of a university in their city.

On the memorable date of May 12, 1364, the relationship between the city and the University (called Jagiellonian since 1818) was established for good. Today it is neither a proper time nor place to enumerate them even in the briefest form. One thing, however, is certain. It would take a very large volume, full of facts, to write them all down. I myself believe that one day it will really be written down in full. It will recall the numerous proofs of the University's faithful service to the city,

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manifesting itself, among others, through the numerous participation of its students and professors in the defence of Cracow against hostile armies. This, for instance, was the case in 1655 during the defence against the Swedes. (Worth mentioning here is the resolution of the Senate of the University passed at that time in which the Senate decided to leave the city occupied by Charles Gustavus' army. The decision concerned also the refusal to pay homage to that king, for which John Casimir awarded the University in 1661 by granting it a privilege exempting it from paying taxes to the Municipality of the City of Cracow.) A specific place in the book will be certainly given to the history of participation of the students and professors of the Jagiellonian University in Kościuszko's Insurrection, as well as the decision of the University Senate of that time to contribute the treasures of the University for the needs of the uprising. The book, however, will record not only the military aspects of the connections between the Jagiellonian University and the city. It will describe the sacrifice and devotion of the professors to fighting the plague which many times attacked the city. There will also be mentioned the instances when the representatives of the University took part in governing the city (e.g. the case of Józef Dietl, a professor and rector of the University who was also a great president of our city). There will also be some pages devoted to the generosity of the city towards the University. The allocation, within the development layout of the city, of the land for the third university campus is one such example. The authorities of the city play an important role in developing in that area the necessary infrastructure that would allow the University to start implementing the plan of erecting a new campus there. Of course, the book will include information about the disputes between the University and the authorities of the city or about the riots and unrest caused by the students. However, in this solemn moment, when the authorities of the city, the authorities of the Bishopric as well as the Senate of the University are meeting for the first time in the history of this city, in Wawel Cathedral, in the presence of eminent guests, please allow me not to pursue the subject of mutual connections of the University and the city any further. Above all, I would like to talk here about the important status of our city in the life of the Polish nation and about its millennium-long fame and glory.

For a long period of several centuries, the city was a happy capital of the Polish Kingdom. During the times when Wawel Hill was the seat of the Piast and Jagiellonian Dynasties, Cracow, like other European metropolises of that time, was alive with activity. Also the Polish Kingdom had an important position in the family of European countries, since it was a rich and powerful country, famous for its eminent men. After Cracow had ceased to be the capital and Wawel had become empty, dark clouds started gathering over Poland as well. Dust of forgetfulness and the distant echoes of the past glory were the icons of the former capital for almost two centuries, during which Poland was under the reign of elected kings.

The disasters falling on the Republic of Poland in the last decades of its existence did not spare the city either. However, it is a notable fact that at the moment when the threat of the final downfall hung over Poland, our city was the venue from



The Senate of the Jagiellonian University at Wawel Cathedral during the Holy Mass inaugurating the Jubilee of the Jagiellonian University (May 12, 1999) (Photo by K. Pollesch).

which the Chief Commander, Kościuszko, urged the nation to take up the struggle in defence of the Motherland. In spring 1794, the dwellers of Cracow were the first people to join Kościuszko and fight under his banners. They willingly shed their blood in battlefields.

However, in the face of the anti-Polish union of the three neighbouring powers the split blood of the patriots and their sacrifice proved to be vain. Soon, Poland vanished from the map of Europe and the former capital became a bone of contention of the partitioning powers. Moscovian, Prussian and eventually Austrian soldiers marched along its streets. Then came the tragic years of national slavery. The partitioning powers intended to turn Cracow, with its University and Wawel Castle, into a tiny, provincial, border town of the great Austrian monarchy. In their opinion it did not even deserve to be granted the function of an administrative centre of Galicja, the newly created district of that monarchy. With the purpose of the utmost humiliation of both the inhabitants of Cracow and of all Poles, a decision was made to convert the castle of the Polish kings into barracks for the partitioning army. Only Wawel Cathedral, the most important Polish church, in which more than a dozen Polish kings were crowned and which for several centuries had

been a royal necropolis, was spared the utmost sacrilege. The deathly remains of the Polish Kings were not thrown away from the cathedral vaults because of the collective outcry of the enslaved nation, which protested twice in this way, in 1796 and 1846.

Sentenced to oblivion by the partitioning powers and transformed into a border fortress, Cracow did not, however, surrender. The *genius loci* of that city accounted for the situation that in spite of the enemy's expectations, in the times of national slavery, when the Poles were spilling their blood in the battlefields of the successive national uprisings and on the fronts of many European wars, Cracow became the unquestioned spiritual capital of the Poles. The city walls remembering the times of the former glory, the churches, Wawel Hill, the earthen mounds of the old-time rulers, Kościuszko's mound, as well as the Jagiellonian University contributed to the fact that the former capital of the Polish Kingdom was gradually transformed into a mighty refuge of Polish culture and a bastion of Polish national identity. Pilgrimages of the inhabitants of the lands belonging to the three partitioning powers, as well as of the Poles dwelling elsewhere in the world, became the national imperative of the Poles during that epoch of slavery. In 1884, such a national pilgrimage to old Cracow was made by Ignacy Domeyko, a former member of a secret society of students at the Vilnius University and Mickiewicz's close friend. In the 1880s, he enjoyed popular respect in the remote country of Chile, where he was a scholar and distinguished rector of the University in Santiago de Chile. In his diaries he described the impressions from the visit paid at Wawel Cathedral: *Our living history dwells in those vaults [of the cathedral] and in the ornamented chapels. Someone who is attracted by the world or by vain science and whose heart has turned cold in its love of the country, ought to enter this place, to sigh and to pray. And may he leave this place as a Pole. Someone disheartened at the sight of the suffering of our lands that were once so mighty and at the sight the power of the enemy should enter this place, look at the crosses on these tombs and may he become inspired and full of hope. If someone has an idea to become a German, a Russian or a Frenchman for the sake of money or for the lack of faith, he should also come here, just out of curiosity, and at least for a moment he should humble himself. Then he will repudiate himself and he will be ashamed.* Twenty years later Domeyko's voice was echoed by the words of another son of Cracow, Stanisław Wyspiański. In one of his dramas he convinces us that in that church *everything is Poland, each stone and each particle, and a person who enters it becomes a part of Poland and a part of that structure.*

In the times of partitions, together with the incoming pilgrims, the spirit of Polish art and literature came back to Cracow. Once the streets of this city were walked by artists of such rank as Veit Stoss, Bartolomeo Berecci, Mikołaj Rej, Jan Kochanowski, Łukasz Górnicki, Wespazjan Kochowski, Jakub Wujek and Piotr Skarga. Now their footsteps were retraced by numerous writers and artists, such as Włocławek Pol, Adam Asnyk, Jan Matejko, Juliusz Kossak, Stanisław Wyspiański and Lucjan Rydel. The task of transforming Cracow into the spiritual capital of the enslaved Poles was also carried out by the scientific circles concentrated around the

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Jagiellonian University and the Academy of Sciences, in which most prominent were the names of such great scholars as: Józef Szujski, Michał Bobrzyński, Karol Olszewski, Marian Smoluchowski and many, many others. Remembering all that, it is easier to understand why our city was the venue from which in 1914, on an August day, the cadre company of Piłsudski's legions set out for their victorious battle for Poland. It is also easier to understand why free and independent Poland manifested itself in full bloom in our city on October 31, 1918.

During the inter-war period Cracow devoted its best forces to revive Poland so that it could build its state administration. At that time a group of more than 500 professors left the Jagiellonian University in order to create new academic centres in Warsaw, Poznań and Vilnius. The avant-garde trends in art and literature were also born here in those years.

Cracow also did not yield during World War II and throughout the period of occupation. In spite of the criminal assault on the academic circles of the city (the deportation of 180 scholars to a concentration camp) and in spite of general terror, it managed to preserve its dignity of the spiritual capital of Poland. It was so also in the period of communist enslavement of the nation after 1945. Even then, exposed to very painful experience, it succeeded in maintaining its royal dignity.

Today the former capital of the Piast and Jagiellon Dynasties faces another golden period in its history. This is the city of His Holiness John Paul II. With its magnificent churches, a number of saints and the blessed who used to live here and with many monks and nuns who live here it continues to be one of the most important centres of religious life in this part of Europe. With more than a dozen higher education schools and the Polish Academy of Sciences and over 100,000 students, it is a real cradle of the intellectual elite of this country. With two winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature and a large number of other eminent writers, artists, painters, film and theatre people its is a true, not just nominal capital of cultural life in Central Europe. With its proverbial liveliness and the diligence of its inhabitants, with the wonderfully restored historic monuments and the beauty of Wawel Hill, the Main Market and numerous nooks and crannies it still remains a live treasury of national relics and a symbol of Poland.

I think that the facts mentioned here in the briefest possible way fully justify my immense joy with which on behalf of the Jagiellonian University I accept the medal *Cracoviae Merenti* from the authorities of Cracow. Expressing my thanks once again I may only assure the inhabitants of the Wawel city and its authorities, that the University will certainly continue doing its best in order to contribute to the glory of the city.

In 1868 Wincenty Pol wrote:

*"(...) there is such a belief  
That as long as the Alma Mater exists,*

*God will not turn away His face,  
Since still there is spun the gold thread  
Of faith and light, history and life.”*

The Jagiellonian University has been spinning the golden thread of faith and light for more than six centuries. It is also its intention to carry on as long as Cracow exists, since these two entities are joined into one forever. And no one can imagine Cracow without the Jagiellonian University nor the Jagiellonian University in any other city.

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