

# ALMA MATER JAGELLONICA



THE JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY SIXTH CENTENARY OF RENEWAL



# Let It Be a Pearl of the Inestimable Sciences...



Polltsch

*His Magnificence The Rector of The Jagiellonian University, Professor Franciszek Ziejka.*





## “Let It Be a Pearl of the Inestimable Sciences...”



These words are to be found in the deed of 12th May, 1364, issued in Cracow by King Casimir the Great. In this way the King brought to completion the endeavours several years to establish a university in Cracow, capital of the Kingdom of Poland. Having obtained the consent of Pope Urban V, he founded a Studium Generale comprising three faculties (without theology). Casimir's Studium Generale was to become the firm and fine foundation of an institution that in Poland has no peers: the Jagiellonian University. Although after its Founder's death this University suffered a decline, and perhaps even suspended its activities for several years, thanks to the enlightened Queen Jadwiga, its affairs were soon restored to their proper course. Already by the 1380's, a campaign started for the consolidation, and eventually renewal of this University. In 1397, in response to the plea lodged by Queen Jadwiga, Pope Boniface IX issued his consent to the foundation of a faculty of theology in Cracow. Two years later, just before her premature death, the Queen bequeathed her jewels for the renewal of the University of Cracow. This bequest enabled her consort, King Vladislaus Jagiełło, to complete the task. On 22nd July, 1400, the King endowed the Alma Mater Cracoviensis with the building located on a property purchased from Stanisław Pęcherz in ulica Żydowska (now ulica św. Anny), which was to serve as the University college. Two days later the Rector, Stanisław of Skalbimierz, started enrolling students; and on 26th July Piotr Wysz, Bishop of Cracow, delivered the first lecture in the renewed University of Cracow. Since those memorable events the Alma Mater Cracoviensis has been an established part of Polish life and culture, its fate inseparably linked with the history of the Poland and her people, and in her period of grandeur was the pearl in the Polish crown. When the internal structures of the state started to slacken and forces of anarchy assayed to gain the upper hand in the life of the nation, the University of Cracow declined in importance, too. But in the turbulent times of the wars in the 17th century, the University of Cracow served as the bedrock for the restoration of faith in the rebuilding of the country's native institutions and traditions of statehood. A measure symbolically confirming the unique position held by the University of Cracow in Polish life and affairs was taken by its authorities in 1655, in a decision calling for the dissolution of the University rather than its submission to the invading King of Sweden. It was no otherwise during the partitions: never was there a dearth of Cracovian students and fellows ready to volunteer for service in the insurrectionary forces fighting for freedom. In 1794 the Alma Mater Cracoviensis donated her entire treasury for the needs of the Kościuszko Insurrection. Her students served in the November Uprising (1830-31). In 1846 they again came forward to fight in the Cracow Uprising. There were considerable numbers of them on the battlefields of the January Uprising of 1863. They fought in the First World War, too. Neither did the University of Cracow surrender in the dark days of the Second World War, when Hitler's Nazi invasion force tried physically to destroy it by arresting and deporting well over a hundred of its senior faculty members to concentration camps in the notorious Sonderaktion Krakau. The University continued its teaching clandestinely. It was strong enough to withstand the Communist attempt to enthrall it, too. Despite the losses suffered in political show-trials and the dismissal of dissidents from their chairs and appointments, it held its head high and came out of this ordeal undaunted.

From the outset of its history the University of Cracow has served the Polish State. Founded by the will of a monarch who wanted well-trained individuals to assist in the running of the state, for six centuries this University has been wide open to all seeking an education. Never has there been a shortage within its walls of persons of learning in quest of the truth. Never has it been without students eager to learn the truth. Well-nigh the entire intellectual elite of Poland has passed through its halls. Individuals of the rank of Nicolaus Copernicus, the national poets Jan Kochanowski and Mikołaj Rej, the political writer Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski, and Karol Wojtyła the present Pontiff, studied here. The list of its distinguished scholars surely numbers thousands of illustrious personages, from Paulus Vladimiri and Joannes Broscius in its early days; pillars of the Enlightenment such as Jan Śniadecki and Hugo Kołłątaj; Józef Szujski in the 19th century, to academics like Roman Ingarden in recent times. And hundreds, even thousands of others. The description of the scientific advancements accomplished here - such as the liquidation of air by Zygmunt Wróblewski and Karol Olszewski, the discovery of the function of adrenalin by Napoleon Cybulski, or of the microbes of typhoid fever by Tadeusz Browicz, and many other developments which over the six centuries have contributed substantially to human progress - would fill huge volumes.

Thus firmly established in the history of its own nation and of world science, in 2000 the Alma Mater Cracoviensis will be celebrating the Sixth Centenary Jubilee of its renewal. It will not be the first jubilee celebrated by this abode of learning. The first time when the academic community of the Jagiellonian University decided to mark a centenary in such a way was in the 1860's. Thanks to the initiative of Józef Majer, one of its Rectors with distinguished services for the University, a committee was set up to honour the Fifth Centenary of foundation, which came in 1864. Unfortunately, the policy of Germanisation pursued by the Austrian government and the outbreak in the Russian partitional zone of the January Uprising (1863), in which numerous members of the University participated, limited those celebrations to a low Mass in St. Anne's University Church, a series of occasional articles in the press, and the issue of a jubilee publication entitled *Zakłady uniwersyteckie* (The Departments of the University). The permanent memorials of that first jubilee are the portraits of the University's two royal Founders, Casimir the Great and Vladislaus Jagiełło, by Leopold Löffler. These portraits now hang in the Aula of the Collegium Novum Building.

The second jubilee, for the Quincentenary of renewal, was commemorated in 1900. Preceded by several years of preparations, it was the first celebration of Polish learning on such a large, scale. Several hundred representatives of academia from all of Poland and abroad flocked to Cracow for the June of 1900. Official processions and church ceremonies, along with a public tribute paid the University by the municipal corporations in the Market Square accompanied the ceremony for the conferment of 71 honorary doctors' degrees on distinguished persons in the academic and cultural affairs (the novelist Henryk Sienkiewicz was one of them). The statue of Nicolaus Copernicus, by Cyprian Godebski, which was originally erected in the courtyard of Collegium Maius but now stands next to the Collegium Novum Building, is a memorial of those events.





There were numerous academic publications to mark the jubilee, such as a history of the University by Kazimierz Morawski, and a beautiful full-length portrait of Queen Jadwiga by Antoni Piotrowski, which now hangs in the Aula of Collegium Novum. The third of the University's jubilees, for the Sixth Centenary of its foundation, was celebrated in 1964. After years of playing down the part this institution of learning had performed in Poland's history, the Communist authorities decided it was time to organise a series of events to convince the world that a process of liberalisation was going on in Poland. A host of guests from Poland and abroad (according to a meticulously vetted short-list) was invited to attend. Naturally enough, the politicians, Władysław Gomułka and Józef Cyrankiewicz, took the opportunity to manifest an image of themselves as patrons of learning. But for Cracow's academic community itself the Jubilee was primarily an occasion for a series of building investments. The Jagiellonian University acquired new buildings for the Faculties of Mathematics and Physics, and of Biology. The construction of the Collegium Paderevianum Building was financed from what was retrieved of Ignacy Paderewski's bequest. The Jubilee also brought new lecture-theatres and laboratories for other institutions of higher education in Cracow, such as the Agricultural University. It was also the time when the first halls of residence were built in the students' campus.

The coming Jubilee for the Sexcentenary of the University's renewal has at least two dimensions. In the first place, it will undoubtedly provide a good occasion for thought about the role of science and learning at the dawn of the third millennium, about the expectations and the threats associated with this. But it will certainly also be an opportunity to articulate all the diverse needs of Poland's scholarship and higher education. We are convinced that the work which has been now going on for several years on the development of the University's facilities will be accomplished in the completion of the 3rd University Campus, at Pychowice on the outskirts of Cracow. This project, envisaged to last for the best part of the next two decades, will definitively enhance the conditions the Jagiellonian University offers for work and study. It will also enable us to increase our student intake by another 7-8 thousand. In this way we hope to have a first-rate academic staff working at an even higher rate of efficiency to educate the successors of Copernicus, Kochanowski, and Wojtyła at this University. In the firm belief that we will be able to accomplish this objective, I conclude this address with the words which in ancient times the magistrates of Rome used for the inauguration of their meetings, and which for six centuries have been used every year on Inauguration Day by the Rector of the Jagiellonian University opening the academic year: *Quod bonum, felix, faustum, fortunatumque sit!* May it be good, happy, auspicious and fortunate!

Franciszek Ziejka  
Rector of the Jagiellonian University.



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The late 16th-century decorated portal in the Aula of the Collegium Maius originally came from the Lords' Chamber of the Cracow Town Hall. Another portal in the Aula has the University's motto, "Plus ratio quam vis" (Reason more than force) inscribed over it.





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## Alma Mater Jagellonica

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