

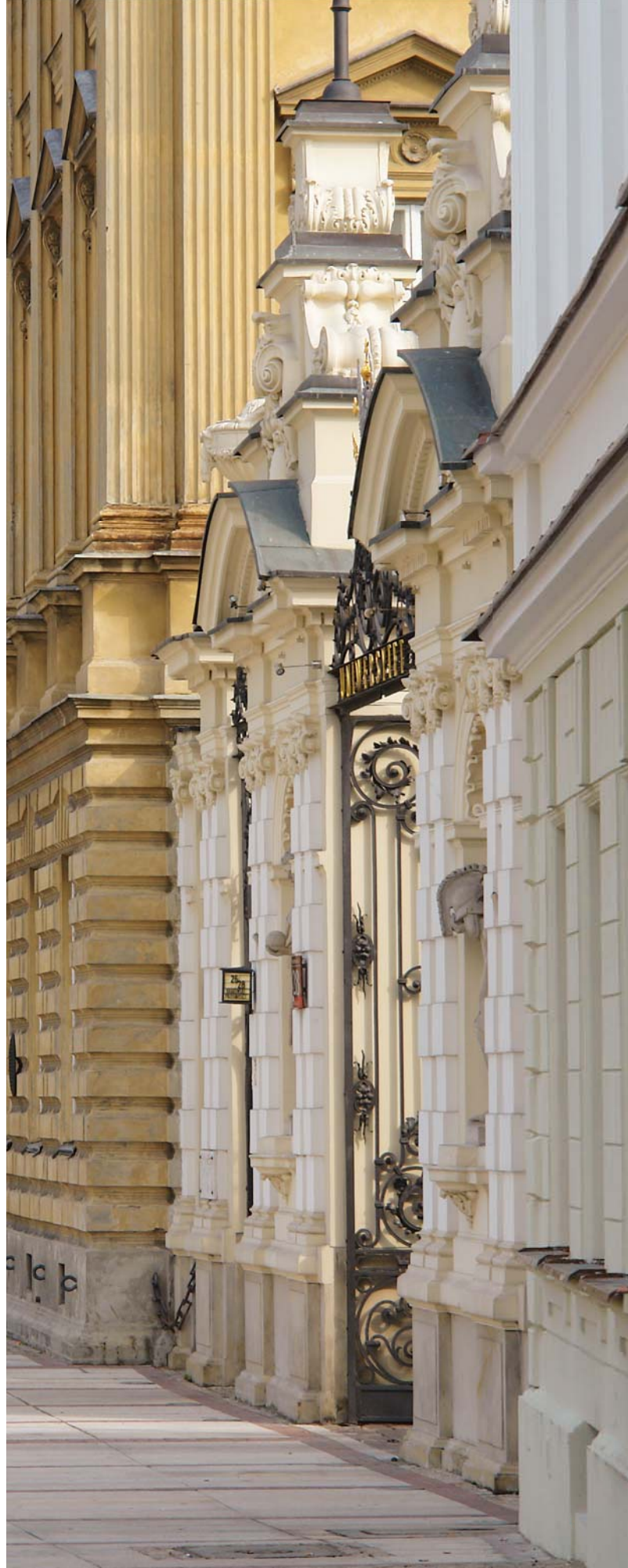
Entrance to knowledge

100th anniversary of the main gate
of the University of Warsaw (1911-2011)



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Most citizens of Warsaw associate the University of Warsaw primarily with its main gate, crowned with an eagle – the national emblem of Poland. The view of the gate is well-known from personal experience, films or press photographs. It has served as a kind of logo, symbol or flagship of the University for the last 100 years. Its presence has marked more than a half of the whole period of the UW history, for the people walking along Krakowskie Przedmieście and passing by the gate, which leads to the University yard, the gate automatically means the University. For many of us the main gate is the only association with the University, the territory behind the gate remains unknown and mysterious. The names of such buildings as Kazimierzowski Palace, former Rectorate building or the Main School do not sound familiar even to some students. Thus, also for them, like for many of us, the main gate remains the most memorable and best recognized part of the University; once you go through this gate and commence your studies, you will never be the same again.



From the Saxon times to the Congress Poland

The works on establishing the University of Warsaw were conducted between 1808 and 1818 (the act of founding was drawn up in November 1816), however, the history of the gate goes much further back in the past to the first half of 18th century, when Kazimierzowski Palace (named after king Jan Kazimierz) was one of the royal residences. The form and shape of the entrance to the residence at the time of the Waza dynasty remains unknown, but numerous precious documents and iconographic evidence originate from the Wettins époque (1696-1763). In 1732 in the location of the present UW main gate, king August II ordered to erect “a decorative gate for carriages, with two small adjacent guardhouses.” The gate was intended to mark a new spatial organization concept on the axe linking Krakowskie Przedmieście and Kazimierzowski Palace. Developing the concept was commissioned to Jan Zygmunt Deybl and Joachim Daniel Jauch (pictures 1-2).



1. The gate of Kazimierzowski Palace, 1732

The underlying concept of the gate was a three-part arch of triumph, crowned with a metal globe with the signs of Zodiac. Feliks Paweł Jarocki entered the following description of the gate in his *Chronicle of Kazimierzowski Palace* of approximately 1846: “In Krakowskie Przedmieście street, where today we can see the pillars joint with chains, there used to be a decorative stone gate with a large metal globe on top. The main gate and the side gates for pedestrians were made of iron, were transparent, made of beautiful ornamental wrought iron. Next to the gate, on its both sides, there were two small one-floor guard houses constructed, adjacent to the side buildings.”

The gate erected by the Saxon architects lasted until June 12th, 1819. The end of its existence is marked, again, in Jarocki's priceless *Chronicle*: “When the spring came, the rush for construction works resumed in almost all the parts of the palace yard. The above mentioned stone gate in Krakowskie Przedmieście street [...] with the small buildings was destroyed; the pillars joint by chains replaced the gate.”

2. Bernardo Bellotto, The view on Krakowskie Przedmieście, 1778, ZKW



The time of iron gate

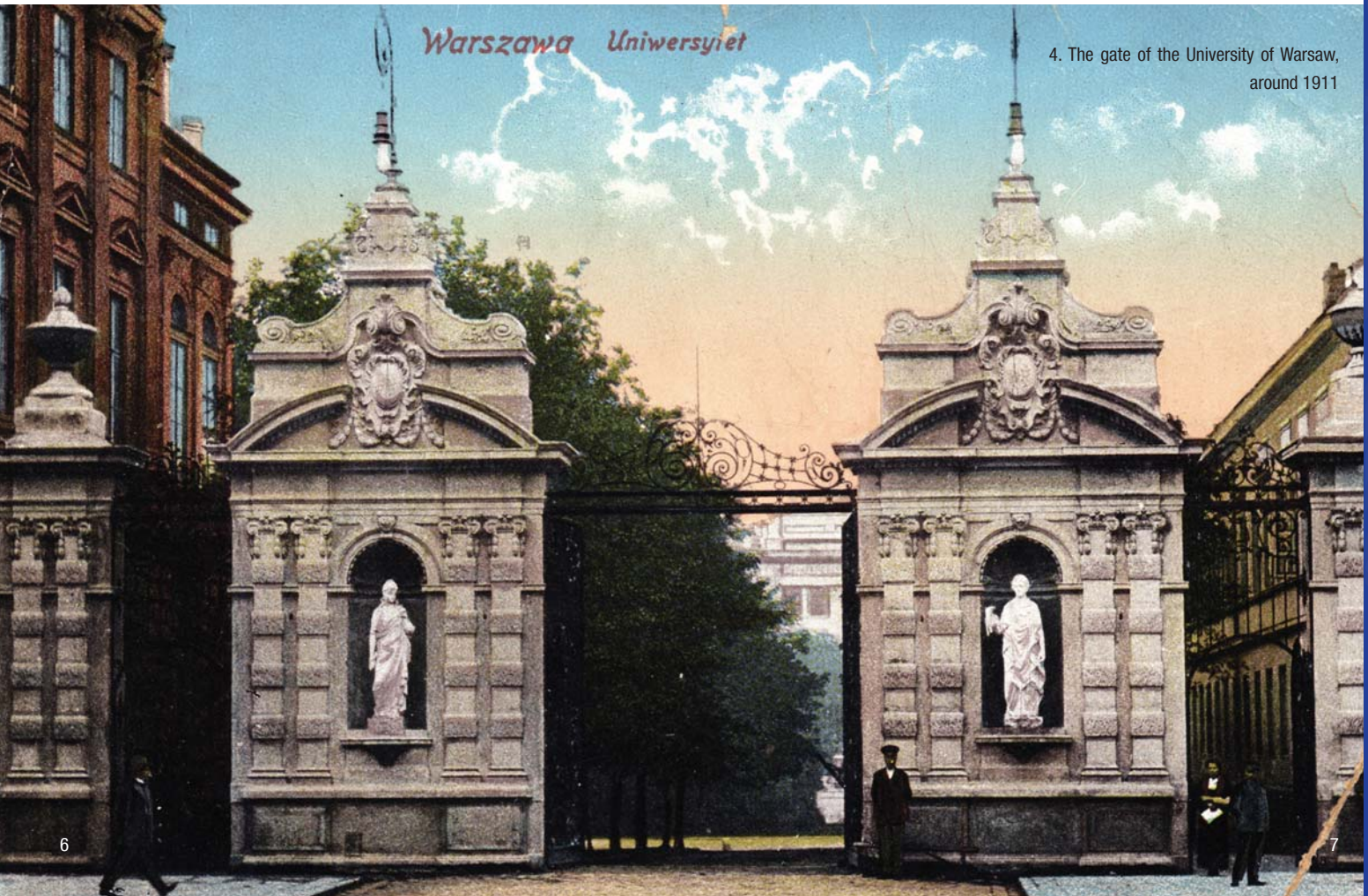
In 1823 a new University gate was erected; a modest one and moved back towards the palace. The fence located in line with the building hosting then the Zoological Pavilion and the Museum of Fine Art – today the seat of the Institute of History – closed the campus, thus creating so called university street leading to Krakowskie Przedmieście. One could enter the campus through an iron gate installed in a 3.5-metre high fence, or through one of two symmetrically placed pedestrian entrances (picture 3).



This status quo lasted for approximately 80 years until the University Council decided to erect a new gate. The decision is described in a text of 1909: “The University Board decided that the iron gate, located now at the end of the street leading from Krakowskie Przedmieście, shall be moved forward to the regulation line thus liquidating the existing street. It was also required that the magistrate shall remove the electricity transformer or, in case it remains, the magistrate shall provide electric power, free of charge, to lit 2 arc lamps in the University yard as well as on holidays it shall electrically illuminate banners. The street in question was arranged by the magistrate, it received cobbles and pavements at the magistrate’s expense.”

The new gate, which we can recognize now, is located at the same place as the Saxon stone gate, at the beginning of the university street, in one line with the facades of Uruski Palace and St. Roch hospital (picture 4). Immediately after the idea of erecting a new gate was formulated in 1909, a talented architect was searched for. Stefan Szyller was selected; previously he had designed, among others, the building of the University of Warsaw Library, today referred to as the Old Library or Former BUW. In one of the Warsaw newspapers of August 7th 1910 we can read as follows: “The works on dismantling the old gate leading to the University area, which is located at the plot

3. The gate of the University of Warsaw, around 1900

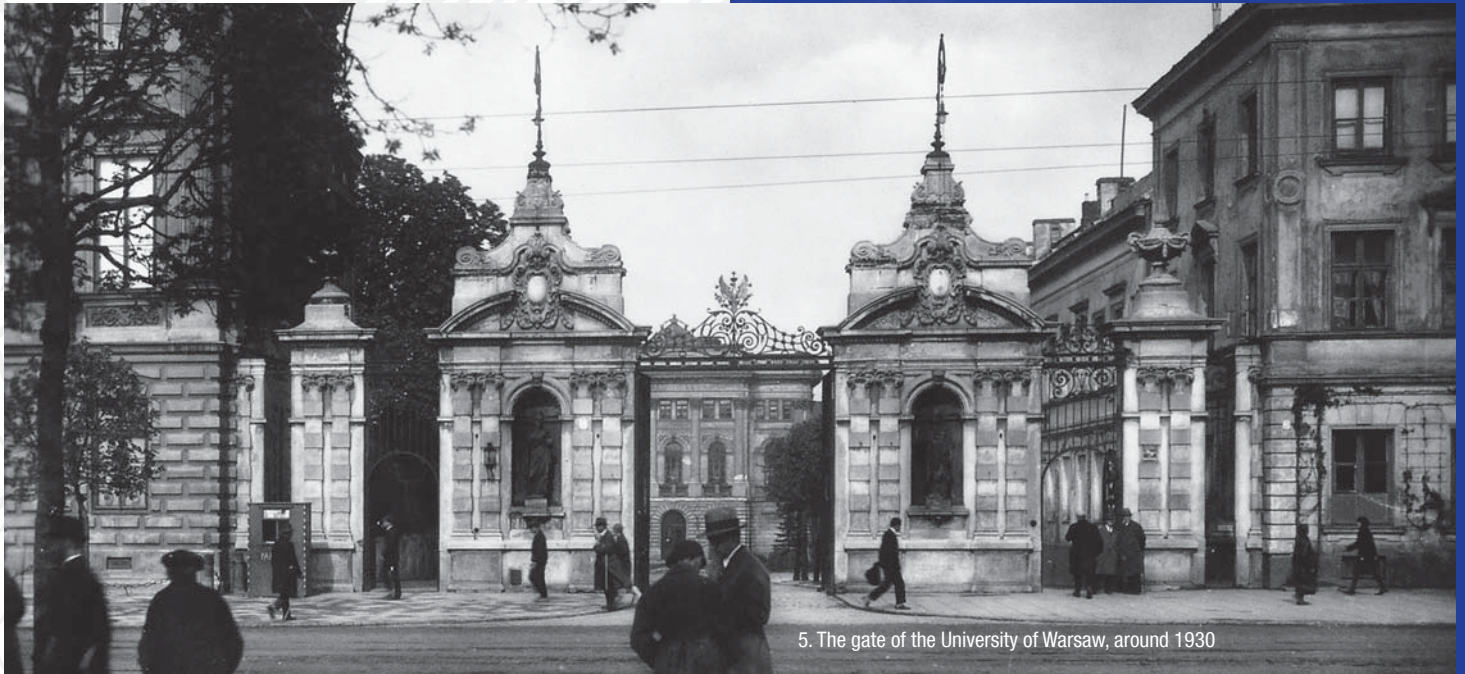


4. The gate of the University of Warsaw, around 1911

border were initiated. At the same time a new gate has almost been completed, overloaded with ornaments, decorated with statues made of stone and electric lamps.” It is quite probable that the intention of the commissioning party and the architect was to complete the construction before the 1910/1911 academic year inauguration. However, despite the advancement of finishing works, the deadline was not met and some finishing works were continued in 1911. One of the press articles seems to confirm this presumption: “The completion of the new University gate in Krakowskie Przedmieście was postponed, despite relatively favourable conditions, until spring; the iron parts are not ready yet. After the completion of the gate and the guardhouse behind its left pillar, the old gate at the end of the university street will be dismantled.”

by five stars (the emblem of the University), are made of wrought cast iron bars with woven floral elements (pictures 5-6).

Making the sculptures was commissioned to Zygmunt Langman who previously had made statues for other Warsaw academic institutions. The artist, whose numerous works were inspired by Ancient art, also on this occasion, followed some Ancient patterns. Unfortunately, neither the whole gate, nor the sculptures received favourable opinions in press. In a popular “Słowo” newspaper we can read as follows: “The architectonic evaluation of the gate, intended by the designers to be a real decoration of Krakowskie Przedmieście, is left by “Kurier Warsz[awski]” to experts”. After “Świat” we can quote: “the gate [...] with the figures of questionable artistic taste.” Although it would be hard



5. The gate of the University of Warsaw, around 1930

The new University main gate

The new three-leaf gate is a typical example of eclectic art. We can notice some elements of Renaissance, baroque and regent styles. Its form is completely different from the form of previous gates. The gate consists of four pillars, with the middle two supporting the main entrance and wider than the ones at the sides. They are also decorated with alcoves with full statues; one of them presenting Athena (Minerva) and the second one Urania – one of the Muses. Each of the alcoves is surrounded by couples of Ionian rusticated pilasters supporting a protruding upper section of entablature; above a parted jerkin head can be seen, topped by a decorative cartouche. Both the middle pillars-aediculae are topped by cast iron electric lamps. Also the side pillars, topped by sculptures of vases, are decorated with the couples of rusticated Ionian pilasters. The side pedestrian gates as well as the two-leaf central gate topped with the eagle surrounded



6. The gate of the University of Warsaw, around 1930



7a. Urania, the Museums of Vatican



7b. Urania

to argue with the critical opinions about the gate, which became an inherent part of Krakowskie Przedmieście in 1910-1911, the vicious remarks concerning the sculptures should be considered as unjustified and excessively spiteful. Most probably none of the critics was aware of the fact that both the sculptures were following the Ancient originals exhibited in the Museums of Vatican. In other words, they were not the products of artistic imagination of the sculptor but an adaptation of ancient statues, which Zygmunt Langman saw many times as a grant beneficiary who spent many years in Rome.

Urania, placed in the alcove of the University gate, modelled after excellent Ancient monuments, most probably symbolises not only astronomy, but also other disciplines, in particular, exact sciences (pictures 7a, b). The statue of Athena symbolizes not only peace, but also, in combination with Urania, wisdom and knowledge in the humanities and natural sciences (pictures 8a, b). Both the sculptures made by Langman and placed on the flanks of the central part of the gate, thanks to their allegoric meaning create the atmosphere of "entrance to knowledge" at our almost 200-year-old University.



8a. Athena, the Museums of Vatican



8b. Athena

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In 1916 the gate was first crowned with the emblem of the University – an eagle with the wings spread, surrounded by five stars symbolising five original faculties; in the left talon the eagle holds a palm leaf (the symbol of perseverance) and in the right one – a bay branch (the symbol of success and reward) (picture 9). The ceremony of unveiling the gate crowned with the eagle took place after the service in Visitationist Church, when the academic year was officially inaugurated at the University and Polytechnics.



One of the Warsaw newspapers reported the event as follows: "After the solemn academic service the ceremony of unveiling the Eagle on the University gate was held. The ceremony was resumed by the speech of Rector Brudziński to the crowds, gathered at the main gate of the University in Krakowskie Przedmieście, with the flag of the University in the middle. "If this symbol – said the Rector – can crown our University in particular, it will indicate that Polish youth coming through this gate should be illuminated not only by Knowledge aiming at the brightness of the Sun, but also, inspired by enthusiastic

9. The eagle on the University gate, 2011

willingness to perform civil work, Love for Homeland. In this solemn moment of unveiling the emblem of our University and the emblem of Poland I would like to cheer: "Long live Alma Mater!" The words were very well heard by the crowd, while from behind the veil the white and silver Polish eagle emerged surrounded by five golden stars – the emblem of the University. It was welcomed in silence so adequate on this solemn occasion. And the crowd gathered in the street was gazing for a



while at this symbol of the independence of the Polish nation, the symbol heralding the forthcoming better future for Poland” (“Godzina Polski” October 8th, 1916, No 280, p. 8). Also the editors of “Świat” published a photograph of Rector Brudziński by Marian Fuks (picture 10).

10. The ceremony of unveiling the eagle on the University gate, 1916, MUW

11. Urania, around 1946



12. Athena, around 1946

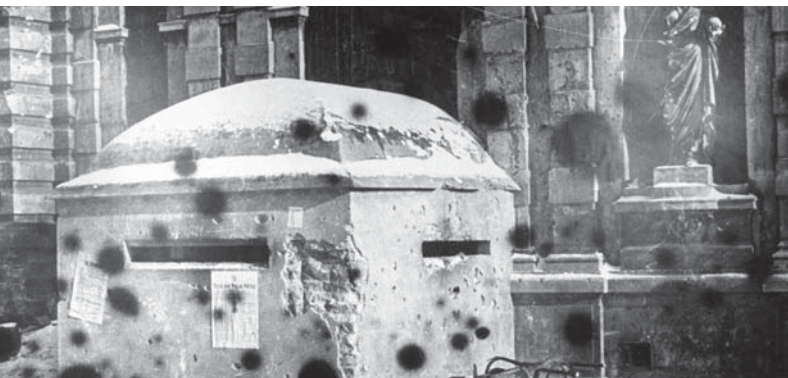


World War II

The renovation of the gate

From the moment of unveiling the eagle until the outbreak of the Second World War the gate remained unchanged and numerous Warsaw families took photographs in front of it on many occasions. During the occupation the situation changed shortly before the beginning of Warsaw Uprising when German guardhouses were extended by a bunker.

This fact combined with intensifying gunfire led to serious damage of the sculptures. Apart from many holes left as a result of automatic gunfire on the trunks of both the statues, there were also damages of different nature. The photographs taken at the end of the war show the sculptures with their heads and limbs parted (except Urania's arm holding the globe); the parted head of the Muse is lying at the lower part of the statue. This illustrative material allows for the estimation of damage done to the figures during World War II (pictures 11-14).

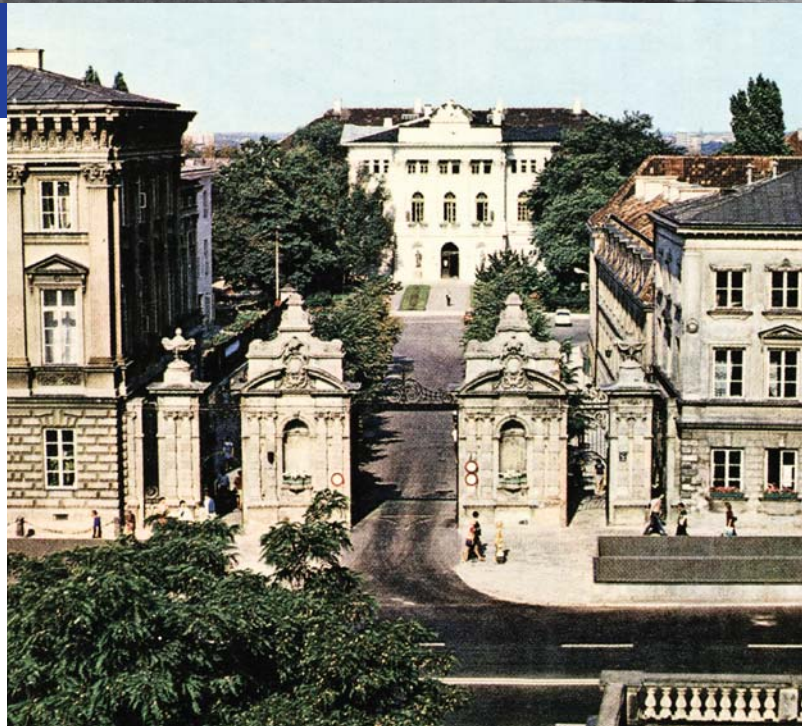


13, 14. The gate of the University of Warsaw with the German bunker, around 1944, MUW



15a. The gate of the University of Warsaw, the 70s, BUW

15b. The gate of the University of Warsaw, the 70s, BUW



After the war the renovation of the gate was performed. In one of the official documents we can read as follows: “The University of Warsaw hereby applies for the permission to renovate the Main Gate of the University of Warsaw, 26/28 Krakowskie Przedmieście, in order to bring the gate back to the condition of usability. Currently the condition of the walls poses threat to public safety and the condition of metal parts does not allow for closing the area”. The request was soon approved. Unfortunately, until the 80s of the 20th century both the alcoves remained empty (pictures 15a, b). At the end of 1979 the authorities of the University sent the sculptures restoration design to the Monument Conservation Institute. The supervisor on the University’s behalf was Professor Tadeusz Jaroszewski. The sculptures were made by two sculptors-conservators: Edward



16. Urania, 2011



17. Athena, 2011

Jeliński, who made the statue of Athena, and Jacek Jabłoński, who restored the statue of Urania (pictures 16-17). The remarkable resemblance of the statues to the originals is amazing, since the artists were restoring the sculptures exclusively on the basis of a magnified photograph of the gate, delivered by Professor Tadeusz Jaroszewski. Also, this fact undoubtedly determined the differences between the former and present sculptures, resulting from lack of possibility to identify certain details even at the largest possible magnification. For instance, in Urania's hand there is a scroll, not a graver. Athena does not hold an olive branch in her left hand any more; the helmet in her right hand has a "baroque style" crest.

The sculptures made at the turn of 1980 and 1981 were placed in the alcoves in the following year. Over the next two years the Monument Conservation Institute from Łódź renovated the whole gate. A unique artefact of that time is a plaster cast of Urania now stored on the territory of University campus (pictures 18a, b). The cast in a way bridges the past and the present times.

Today the sculptures, despite being slightly altered, still focus our attention as significant part of the iconographic content of the monumental gate leading to the historic UW complex, often referred to as campus, although not quite adequately. While entering the University we also get immersed in the world of goddesses personifying wisdom and knowledge about the universe, in the world of the humanities and natural sciences.



18a. Urania, plaster cast, 2004



18b. Urania, plaster cast, 2010

The return of the crowned eagle

The renovation of the gate after the war did not include topping it with the crowned eagle. Instead, the emblem of the People's Republic of Poland was placed there – an eagle without the crown. The real original emblem of the University – a crowned eagle surrounded by five stars was stored in the Chamber of the Senate in Kazimierzowski Palace. In the 80s, however, a growing pressure aimed at restoring the traditions could be observed. Before 1989 the crowned eagle, or precisely the real emblem of the University topped the gate again. The event was described by Professor Stefan Kuczyński in a beautiful essay published in an extensive joint publication *Ars et Educatio. The artistic culture of the University of Warsaw* (2003): “At the inauguration of academic year 1984/1985 the gate was decorated by a cast bronze, filed and patinated university eagle, made according to the former pattern – crowned, beyond any doubt, with the deserved bay and palm branches in its talons, surrounded by the stars. Initially, the eagle was black, harmonizing with the colour of the bars in the gate, with golden crown, bay and palm branches and the stars. This drew attention of experts and public opinion to inappropriate colour of the eagle itself. After a few years the colour was changed into silver, now also patinated with time”.



19. The gate of the University of Warsaw, 1989

At the end of the 80s the gate was a symbol of so long awaited freedom. This can be seen in the photograph of 1989, showing the main gate of the University when the III Republic of Poland was created and students demanded their rights and privileges (picture 19). This was a unique historic moment when our “entrance to knowledge” was expressing so much through the



20. The gate of the University of Warsaw, 2002

contents of numerous banners and placards. Another photograph with the gate in its central part reminds us of the times when in Kazimierzowski Palace and its surroundings the Corps of Cadets was functioning between 1765 and 1794, where, among others, Tadeusz Kościuszko and Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz were educated. The portrait of the former one was placed on a balloon floating over the main gate in 2002 and reminding us of our heroic past (picture 20). While celebrating the 100th anniversary of the University main gate we are preparing for the celebration of the forthcoming 200th anniversary of our University remembering the names of all its professors and alumni.



1911-2011



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Publisher: the Museum of the University of Warsaw

Illustrations: Promotion Office Archive, BUW – the University of Warsaw Library, MUW – the Museum of the University of Warsaw, ZKW – the Royal Castle in Warsaw, Department of the Classical Tradition in the Visual Arts IA UW

Design: Maciej Tarkowski

Print: WEMA Ltd.

ISBN: 978-83-64551-03-1