

Introduction

This catalogue is the result of research into the oldest seal matrices of the University of Warsaw.

Only six copies of these priceless artefacts have survived to this day from the first set of sixteen made in 1818.¹ They are housed in the collections of the University of Warsaw Museum (UW Museum) and are on display in the permanent exhibition. The matrices used for sealing documents, although small in size, are impressive due to the finely engraved and detailed images of the university's emblem. This attention to detail, the finely rendered proportions of the eagle and its placement in the circular field of the matrix attest to the excellent skills of the die sinker who created what are indeed small works of art. On the ink seals, the emblem is drawn as a low relief, while on the matrices for use with sealing wax, the university's symbol takes the form of an intaglio composition that is incised into the plate of the matrix.

¹ Each surviving artefact is described separately in the 'catalogue' section. In addition to the first set from 1818, the catalogue presents further sets and other seals relevant to the subject that are in the collection of the University of Warsaw Museum.

The task of compiling a study of these museum objects was initially rather modest in scope, but has expanded with the study of archival records, seals and other sources relating to the origins of the university's emblem. This made it possible to supplement and, in some cases, reinterpret previous findings on the founding of the university's most important symbol in 1817. This was possible above all thanks to first-hand contact with museum artefacts, which is invaluable for the historian. It was the differences between the actual appearance of the artefacts and their descriptions in the archives – the source of existing knowledge and the basis for interpretations established hitherto – that provided the impetus to expand the research. As a result of the analyses carried out, one of the fundamental reasons for the use of the White Eagle emblem on the university's coat of arms differs from what had been assumed to date.



Fig. 5. Seal of the Royal University of Warsaw for use with ink, 1818, UW Museum, photo: M. Bogacki

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