

I.

Warsaw in the time of the Duchy of Warsaw and the Congress Kingdom (1807–1831)

IMAGES AND SYMBOLS

Three paintings, all made in Warsaw in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, commemorate the key events in the history of post-Partition Poland. The first, by Kazimierz Wojniakowski, known only from an aquatint by Jan Ligber, refers to Napoleon's arrival in Warsaw and the city's resulting liberation from the Prussians (Fig. 1).¹ On 18 January 1807 the National Theatre on Krasieński Square staged *Perseus and Andromeda*, a lyrical drama by Ludwik Osiński with music by Józef Elsner, in honour of Napoleon. Perseus' rescue of Andromeda from monsters was an obvious allusion to Napoleon freeing Poland from the aggressive partitioning states. The highlight of the performance was Wojniakowski's tableau, produced according to ideas proposed by Osiński and Wojciech Bogusławski, the director of the National Theatre. A radiant medallion with Napoleon's likeness was placed in the centre, with a winged figure of Fame rising above it and blowing a trumpet. Below, to the right, a Genius was depicted liberating an armoured knight from his grave by pulling back a board with the word RESURGAM, while a female figure knelt to the left, with her face turned to the Napoleonic Sun and her open arms indicating the royal insignia with the Polish emblem abandoned at her feet. From her lips emerged the motto

SPES IN TE. This is how Warsaw, full of hopes of a better future, resorted to a prospect named ORIENS, already known in antiquity.

The second painting, produced in 1809–1811, is entitled *Napoleon Conferring the Constitution on the Duchy of Warsaw in 1807* (Fig. 2), while the title of the other, dating from 1828, is *Tsar and King Alexander I Conferring the Document Founding the University of Warsaw* (Fig. 3). The authors of these works are Marcello Bacciarelli (1731–1818), at one time court painter to King Stanisław Augustus, and Antoni Brodowski (1784–1832), Professor of Painting at the University of Warsaw.² Bacciarelli's canvas shows the scene as taking place in an interior at the palace in Dresden. King Frederick Augustus of Saxony, grandson of King Augustus III of Poland and Elector of Saxony – not shown in the painting – was designated to rule the Duchy; he was named heir to the throne in the Constitution of 3 May 1791.³ Napoleon is shown sitting on a dais, with Charles Maurice Talleyrand and Hugo-Bernard Maret standing by his side, surrounded by Polish dignitaries: Stanisław



1807

1. Jan Ligber after Kazimierz Wojniakowski, *Napoleon as Oriens*, a banner made for the National Theatre in Warsaw in January 1807, aquatinta, the National Theatre, Warsaw



1807

2. Marcello Bacciarelli,
*Napoleon Conferring
the Constitution
of the Duchy of Warsaw
in 1807*, oil on canvas,
1811, MNW

Małachowski, Jan P. Łuszczewski, Ludwik Gutakowski, Piotr Bieliński, Ksawery Działyński, Wincenty Sobolewski, Stanisław Kostka Potocki, and Józef Wybicki. Annibale Carracci's painting, *The Genius of Fame*, is discernible in the background – the Fame depicted in it was to prophesy good fortune to the Congress Kingdom.

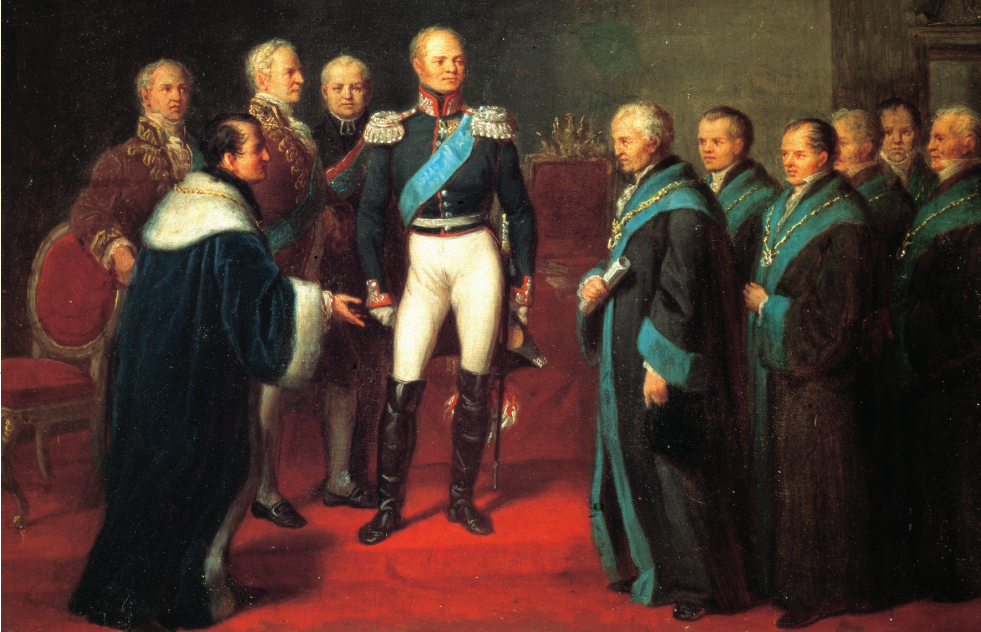
1828

3. Antoni Brodowski,
*Tsar and King Alexander I
Conferring the Document
Founding the University
of Warsaw*, reproduction
of a lost painting, 1828



In Brodowski's canvas, painted to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the founding of the University, Napoleon's vanquisher, Alexander I, tsar of Russia and uncrowned king of Poland, is seen handing the document to the first rector of the University, the Reverend Wojciech Anzelm Szweykowski.⁴ This momentous event is witnessed by the Minister of State, Stanisław Staszic (see Fig. 5), the Minister of Public Enlightenment, Stanisław Kostka Potocki – both on the right – and Jan Wincenty Bandkie, Feliks Jan Bentkowski, Jacek August Dziarkowski, Paweł Szymański, and Michał Szubert. The composition of both paintings follows the same convention, but it is not clear whether the events really took place. The constitution of the Duchy, although signed by Napoleon on 22 July 1807 in Dresden, was handed to the delegates not by the emperor himself, but by the same Hugo-Bernard Maret who is depicted in the painting. When Alexander I signed the document founding the University on 19 November 1816 in St. Petersburg, Szweykowski had not yet been appointed rector. Nor was the tsar present at the University's official inauguration which took place in Warsaw on 14 May 1818, although he had visited the city in the last days of April and been shown around the university's grounds.⁵ In the supplement to No. 35 of *Gazeta Warszawska* we read:

On the same day [28 April] around noon, His Imperial Majesty condescended to visit the local public Library located in the Kazimierzowski Palace. The members of the Royal University of Warsaw, apprised of this intention beforehand, gathered in the main hall of said Library and awaited his arrival: when it had taken place, the Monarch, who was received at the entrance to the palace by His Excellency Count Stanisław Potocki, Minister of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment, with the assistance of Their Excellencies Staszic, Sierakowski, Lipiński, and Linde, Members of the Government Commission, viewed the peristyle and the marble plaque, installed on the wall above the stairs, with the Latin inscription: *Regnante Alexandro I. Consilium Institutionis publicae, aedes has, vetustate et flammis dirutas, restituit, auxit, Musis dicavit 1817* ['In the reign of Alexander I this building, despoiled by time and flames, the Council of Public Institutions has rebuilt, enlarged and given to the Muses as their residence in the year 1817']. Having passed through the first room, assigned for the use of the readers, he viewed the room where there is a collection of Slavic and Polish books including also the incunabula and manuscripts; from there he passed into the Great Room, which comprised three rooms put together and which houses foreign literature. There the Rector of the



4. Anonymous artist, *The Founding of the Faculty of Science and Fine Art at the University of Warsaw*, oil on canvas, c. 1830, MNW

1830

Royal University of Warsaw, His Excellency the Dean, the Reverend Szweykowski was introduced to the Monarch by the Minister, as well as the Professors, in the order of the five Academic Faculties.⁶

Whereas Bacciarelli's painting is of a rather symbolic character, Brodowski's shows a situation which may have taken place during the event described above, although this fact has thus far not received any attention from scholars. Nevertheless, the composition of both works is similar, and they share a similarly dramatic history. Although the originals have not survived, Bacciarelli's painting is known from a reduced copy in the National Museum in Warsaw, and Brodowski's from an oil sketch in the National Museum in Poznań. Brodowski's finished painting, of a much larger format, used to hang in the halls of the University; unfortunately it was taken to Russia in 1915 and destroyed by fire during the Bolshevik Revolution.

Both Brodowski and Bacciarelli's paintings are known from several prints; Brodowski's work was also adapted by an anonymous painter of limited talent, active in the 1830s or 1840s, in a small-format painting (Fig. 4). This little-known painting, like *Napoleon Conferring the Constitution*, belongs to the National Museum in Warsaw. It is almost a mirror image of Brodowski's canvas, but the rector, clad in an ermine-lined robe, is seen to the left of Napoleon, like Staszic and Potocki (and

another, unidentified dignitary). On the right is a group of six, not five, deans (whereas the first University had only five faculties). The most venerable of the deans, standing at the front of the group, is being introduced to Alexander I by the rector; he is holding a rolled-up document in his right hand.⁷ The scene, therefore, does not depict the symbolic founding of the University, but the establishment of one of its faculties. The sixth dean is most probably Marcello Bacciarelli, who held the title of honorary Dean of the Faculty of Science and the Fine Arts until his death on 5 January 1818 – so he could not have been present during the royal visit in April of that year; thus the scene is a depiction of the establishment of this particular faculty.

THE INCEPTION OF THE CONGRESS KINGDOM

The Kingdom of Poland, commonly and somewhat ironically known as the Congress Kingdom, was born out of the Duchy of Warsaw and was officially proclaimed in Warsaw on 20 July 1815. The scene shown in Bacciarelli's painting therefore concurs with Poland's history, in which Napoleon's place was taken by Alexander I. The transformation



5. Portrait of Stanisław Staszic, steel engraving, after 1826, the Museum of Warsaw

1826

of one political entity into another was relatively smooth. This is best attested to by the fact that Count Stanisław Kostka Potocki (1755–1821) was a central figure in both, as is depicted in both paintings. Potocki had been educated in Italy and was the author of several works, including the paper reconstruction of Pliny the Younger's famous Villa Laurentina. He promoted the publication of books such as the album of prints made after Salvatore Rosa's paintings, and he was himself portrayed by painters of such stature as Jacques-Louis David. Towards the end of his life, Potocki passionately devoted his time to the issues of science and education (see Fig. 11).⁸ In the Duchy of Warsaw, he was an active member of the Governing Commission, the Educational Directorate, the Council of State and the Council of Ministers; in the Congress Kingdom he was appointed Minister of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment. He served as Minister already in 1815, although officially the Government Commission for Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment was not established until 7 January 1817.⁹ By then his fortunes had greatly improved, whereas in 1813 his situation was rather dramatic. He was arrested after the Battle of Leipzig, in which Prince Józef Poniatowski was killed, and spent some time in prison.¹⁰ In July 1814 he returned to Wilanów, and in May of the following year was designated head of the Department of the Enlightenment. Together with many other dignitaries of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Duchy of Warsaw, Potocki had been convinced of Tsar Alexander's good intentions. In 1816, even Tadeusz Kościuszko, who did not return to Warsaw although the turmoil had died down, gave one thousand francs – which at that time was a substantial sum of money – for a triumphal arch to be erected in honour of the tsar.¹¹ The arch was to stand in the Three Crosses Square [Plac Trzech Krzyży] in Warsaw, in the place of the ephemeral wooden arch which had stood there during the celebrations marking Alexander's ceremonial entry into Warsaw on 12 November 1815. Ultimately, in accordance with the tsar's own wish the church of St. Alexander, modelled on the Pantheon in Rome, was erected instead of an arch. In 1814 Kościuszko corresponded with the tsar and discussed the issue of Polish prisoners of war; he even met with him during the Congress of Vienna, on 25 May 1815 in Braunau.

One of the greatest tokens of appreciation for the new monarch was the hymn *Boże, coś Polskę* [God, you have Poland for so long protected] by Alojzy Feliński, subtitled *Hymn for the Anniversary of the Proclamation of the Kingdom of Poland, by order of the Commander in Chief given to the Polish Army to be sung*.¹² This hymn, although substantially modified, is still sung on official occasions:

God, you have Poland for so long protected,
Cloaked her in radiance of power and splendour,
Shielded from foes and perils unsuspected,
From woes foredoomed and dangers did defend her;
Before your altars our pleas we bring,
O, Lord Almighty save our gracious King!

God, you took pity on her downfall's shame
In sacred struggle helped her with your power
Had the world witness the glory of her name
And know her valour in her darkest hour

Before your altars our pleas we bring,
O, Lord Almighty save our gracious King!

You who now raised her with miracles renewed,
And the Angel of Peace sent to restore her,
Under one sceptre joined in a brotherhood
Two nations locked in a fratricidal warfare

Before your altars our pleas we bring,
O, Lord Almighty save our gracious King!

Restore new Poland to its old renown
And make her happy under his command
Let two friend nations under his one crown
Bloom, ever blessing his reign in this land;

Before your altars our pleas we bring,
O, Lord Almighty save our gracious King!

Franciszek Salezy Dmochowski expressed his hopes for the happy future of the Kingdom with equal enthusiasm, although in a slightly exaggerated manner in his *Wspomnienia od 1806 do 1830 roku* [Reminiscences of the years 1806 to 1830]:

My youth and that of my peers began under auspicious omens. His Imperial Majesty, Tsar Alexander I showed ever-increasing tokens of amity and grace towards our nation. Prisoners of war taken during the 1812 campaign were returning. The handful of men who remained by Napoleon's side until his fall returned to Warsaw, most graciously received by the Monarch, and with them returned the

ashes of their commander, Prince Józef Poniatowski. On the 9th day of May 1815, the Monarch, in a letter written in his own hand, notified Count Tomasz Ostrowski, the Voivode and Chairman of the Senate, that the existence of our country would be assured and the Kingdom of Poland would be restored. By his order the army began to be reorganized, and the governmental decree then issued, and the organic statutes which followed soon after bestowed on our government a new form, similar to the one which has existed in the Duchy of Warsaw, but freer by far and more favourable for progress and development of education, industry, and agriculture.¹³

Also the general outline of the Kingdom's borders was similar to that of the Duchy of Warsaw, although the former was far smaller. In his magnanimity, the tsar deemed it right to 'cede' the region known as Greater Poland [Wielkopolska] to Prussia. Kraków was also outside its borders. Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz wrote: "I grieve over Kraków and Gniezno: we have lost the cradle and the graves of the Polish monarchy".¹⁴ Yet, at the same time, he was of the opinion that "the only hope we have is in Alexander, our King". Another hope, which soon turned sour, was that the Russian empire's western provinces – lands which used to belong to Poland – would be incorporated into the Kingdom; Alexander had indicated this was his desire. Although Alexander may indeed have wanted to "restore" Poland in 1815, he abandoned the plan after meeting with strong criticism from his ministers and the majority of the aristocracy.¹⁵ The Congress Kingdom encompassed only one-sixth of Poland's lands from before 1772, even though its size (128,000 square kilometres) and population (close to 3 million; 4.3 million by 1830) still placed it among average-sized European states.¹⁶ It was indeed paradoxical that the tsar of autocratically governed Russia granted the Congress Kingdom one of the most modern constitutions of the time, which he signed on 27 November 1815.¹⁷ At that time, however, many Poles already doubted the tsar's good intentions and despaired of the Congress Kingdom's continued existence. The well-known panegyrist of country life, Kajetan Koźmian, wrote in his *Pamiętniki* [Memoirs]: "Many men of estate in Poland regarded it as anachronistic that the Kingdom of Poland with its liberal constitution should be joined with despotic Russia, anachronistic particularly in view of the freedoms which were by its writ granted by Grand Duke Constantine, so that Tsar Alexander's sincerity seemed to them suspect and they began to doubt it".¹⁸ The fears of those doubting "men of estate" turned out to be, at least in part, well-grounded. In the early 1830s – a mere five years after having been granted – the



6. Seal of the Royal University of Warsaw, in use until 1823, MUW



7. Seals of the Royal University of Warsaw, in use until 1823, MUW

articles of the constitution began to be broken with increasing frequency. In his famous *Powstanie narodu polskiego* [The Rise of the Polish Nation], Maurycy Mochnacki wrote: “To show to Europe he [Alexander I] had constitutional rituals, orations at the opening and closing of the parliamentary sessions. To take all power away from the constitutional decree, to introduce in the Congress Kingdom of Poland the same absolutism with which he ruled Moscow, he had his brother”.¹⁹ That brother was, of course, the Grand Duke Constantine, who was truly hated not only in Warsaw; a man whose behaviour and decisions manifested an almost paranoid despotism. His actions were supported by the ubiquitous tsarist commissar Nikolai Novosiltsov, by an army of informers which, particularly after 1822, had vastly increased in numbers, and by ever more severe and rigorous censorship.

Even the Congress Kingdom’s coat of arms clearly displayed its dependence on Russia, by then home to fifty million inhabitants. It featured the great two-headed Black Eagle of the tsars with the tiny White Eagle of Poland on its breast.²⁰ Only two institutions, the Polish Army – whose commander was none other than the detested Grand Duke Constantine – and Warsaw University were allowed to use the banner and the coat of arms with the White Eagle (Fig. 6). This, however, changed in the first days of 1823.²¹ From January 1823 onwards, the coat of arms and seals of the university featured the White Eagle on the breast of the two-headed Black Eagle.²² The emotions of Poles living in the Congress Kingdom over this emblem were perhaps best expressed by Jan Czyński in a novel, written in 1833 but published in 1876, entitled *Cesarzewicz Konstanty i Joanna Grudzińska, czyli Jakubini polscy* [The Grand Duke Constantine and Joanna Grudzińska, or Polish Jacobins]: “Once a year Tsar Alexander, the king of Poland, would visit Warsaw: and at that time the vast banner with the black, two-headed eagle would flutter on the highest tower of the castle. The tiny white eaglet all but disappeared