

# **Public Commemoration, Modern National Identity and the Crisis of Neoclassicism - The Case of Early Nineteenth-Century 'Resurrected' Poland**

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(Wersja polska zob. RIHA Journal 0206 / For Polish version, see RIHA Journal 0206)

## **Abstract**

The years between 1815 and 1830 constitute an important period in the history of Poles as a modern national community. During these years, the traditional way of thinking about Poles as a nation of nobles was gradually giving way to a more democratic vision. This socio-political transformation coincided with the development of Neoclassicism in the fine arts. However, the artistic canon of ideal forms appreciated by academics and aristocratic art lovers alike proved too hermetic for modern artistic enterprises such as public monuments of heroes cherished by the masses. This article investigates two such monuments: Bertel Thorvaldsen's equestrian statue of prince Józef Poniatowski in Warsaw, and the monument to national hero Tadeusz Kościuszko in Cracow.

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## **Introduction**

[1] The years 1815 to 1830 were a particularly significant period in Polish history. Along with the collapse of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, whose political existence ceased in 1795 as a result of the Partitions of Poland (in 1772, 1793 and 1795), the traditional model of society, with the nobility as an exclusive social group with unique political rights, was fully compromised. The rather unpopular project of granting limited civil rights to persons from outside the nobility, introduced for a short period by the reforms of the Great Sejm in the years 1788-1792, proved a historical necessity in 1807, when Napoleon revived the Polish state in a territorially reduced form under the name of the Duchy of Warsaw. Making all citizens equal before the law, as well as including the majority of the bourgeoisie

as legitimate participants in political life (with the right to vote and stand in elections), served towards the construction of a modern sense of national community, upon which depended the stability of the state's existence.<sup>1</sup> The latter, however, proved rather fragile, since Napoleonic Poland collapsed together with Napoleon's Empire.

[2] Nevertheless, the non-traditional democratic conception of the Polish national community held its relevance in the subsequent surrogate of the Polish state, which was 'revived' in 1815 in the form of a constitutional Kingdom of Poland (commonly known as Congress Poland). The Kingdom was formed at the Congress of Vienna by Napoleon's conqueror and occupant of the Duchy of Warsaw, the Russian Emperor Alexander I, who became its ruler with the title of "King of Poland".<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the Napoleonic legal legacy became the basis for a relatively democratic (by then dominating standards) political life in the Free City of Cracow (Republic of Cracow), another state formed by the Congress of Vienna on the former territory of the Duchy of Warsaw.<sup>3</sup> These new political entities proved to be short-lived: the constitutional Kingdom of Poland existed from 1815 to 1830 (formally to 1832), whilst the Free City of Cracow endured from 1815 to 1846. However, in the over century-long history of the Polish struggle towards independence, they provided an important and groundbreaking experience in developing a national way of socio-political modernisation and in contributing to its progress.

[3] This socio-political transformation, which occurred both in the Kingdom of Poland as well as in the Free City of Cracow and undermined the traditional identification of Polishness with the nobility, was meaningfully correlated with a fundamental transformation of artistic culture in these areas, primarily in Warsaw, as the largest urban centre, and to a lesser extent also in Cracow. Social democratisation coincided with the introduction of such modern phenomena as state institutions of artistic education, public exhibitions, commercialisation of artistic activity, art criticism in the press, and a general development of public discourse on art as a field of culture that concerned not only aristocratic patrons, but could also attract a wider public attention.<sup>4</sup> Stefan Kozakiewicz, a scholar

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<sup>1</sup> More on the Duchy of Warsaw in: Jarosław Czubaty, *The Duchy of Warsaw, 1807-1815: A Napoleonic Outpost in Central Europe*, transl. Ursula Phillips, London 2016.

<sup>2</sup> More on the Kingdom of Poland in: Frank W. Thackeray, *Antecedents of Revolution: Alexander I and the Polish Kingdom, 1815-1825*, New York 1980; Janina Leskiewiczowa and Witold Kula, eds., *Przemiany społeczne w Królestwie Polskim, 1815-1864*, Wrocław 1979.

<sup>3</sup> On the Free City of Cracow see: Stefan Kieniewicz, "The Free State of Cracow, 1815-1846", in: *Slavonic and East European Review* 66 (1947), 69-89.

<sup>4</sup> See: Stefan Kozakiewicz, "Malarstwo warszawskie na tle przemian gospodarczych, społecznych i politycznych w Królestwie Polskim (1815-1830)", in:

specialising in 19th-century Polish painting, wrote that at the time "culture ceased to be an exclusive privilege of the richest, and court property: it reached to wider groups of urban intelligentsia with bourgeois or noble background".<sup>5</sup> These changes coincided with the development of Neoclassicism as a form of visual expression favoured by representatives of the socio-political elites. This artistic idiom, which referred to 'natural' rules and expressed the idea of a hierarchical order, was apparently most suited to the tastes of those at the top of the hierarchy of a democratising society, who could use art as a means of control of the changing world.

[4] The combination of the socio-political and artistic changes found a particularly strong expression in public commemorative enterprises, which in themselves were characteristic products of modernity. They referred to artistic means of expression which the elite used in constructing and directing a collective identity of Poles who regained their allegedly 'resurrected' state (by distinguishing selected outstanding figures or events).<sup>6</sup> The artistic form of statues or architectural structures emphasised the significance of this type of permanent intervention in public space, as well as it worked – according to the premise that formal beauty was inseparable from moral beauty – as a means to legitimise a given monument's idea.<sup>7</sup> The communicative role of this form was a crucial aspect of monument designs, yet reaching this goal required innovative solutions in the case of monuments addressed to a wider audience. The classical form of artistic expression, considered an ideal among the academics and aristocratic art lovers, with its reference to antique precedents and resulting reliance on the humanist erudition of the viewer, proved too elitist to fulfil its function. Instead of fostering an adherence to moral ideals, Neoclassicism contributed to social alienation of the ideological messages of art works.

[5] The present article discusses this problem in relation to two monuments from this period, dedicated to the memory of two of Poland's first national heroes to be cherished by the masses, whose public cult was a characteristic trait of this period: the monument of prince Józef

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*Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* 14 (1952), 33-61; Stefan Kozakiewicz, "Malarstwo warszawskie w latach 1815–1850: podłoże rozwoju", in: *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie* 6 (1962), 189-371, here 196-261.

<sup>5</sup> Stefan Kozakiewicz, "Wstęp", in: *Warszawskie wystawy sztuk pięknych w latach 1819-1845*, Wrocław 1952, xi-xxxiv, here xii. The original quotations cited in this article are in Polish; all the quotations have been translated by Karolina Kolenda.

<sup>6</sup> On contemporary public memorials in the Duchy, Kingdom and Free City: Mikołaj Getka-Kenig, *Pomniki publiczne i dyskurs zasługi w dobie "wskrzeszonej" Polski 1807-1830*, Cracow 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Sebastian Sierakowski, *Architektura obeymująca wszelki gatunek murowania i budowania*, vol. 1, Cracow 1812, 218; see also: Getka-Kenig, *Pomniki publiczne*, 9-18.

Poniatowski in Warsaw and the monument of Tadeusz Kościuszko in Cracow. In the case of the former, the classical form was seen as controversial by democratised audiences, while in the case of the latter, it was immediately rejected. In both cases, an alternative was to employ non-classical formal solutions, either a faithful representation of the contemporary 'national' attire of the portrayed figure in place of an antique robe, or a reference to a local rather than classical tradition of commemoration. Both situations – the choice of form that expressed popularly understood 'familiarity' rather than alleged universality, understandable in fact only to the elites – seem to confirm the thesis of the impact of the processes of social democratisation of art reception on formal changes in art, which in the case of early 19th-century art meant that the authority of Neoclassicism was dismissed in favour of romanticism.<sup>8</sup>

### The Monument of Józef Poniatowski in Warsaw

[6] The idea to erect a monument to prince Józef Poniatowski (1763-1813), the commander of the army of the Duchy of Warsaw who died during The Battle of the Nations at Leipzig, was put forward in 1814 by his family, who wished to "immortalise the glory of the leader whose loss will always be mourned by every soldier and fellow countryman".<sup>9</sup> This private initiative, whose further development was undertaken by the deceased commander's friend, General Stanislaw Mokronowski (1761-1821), was approved by the authorities of the 'resurrected' Kingdom of Poland despite the controversies that the cult of the Prince could potentially generate. Poniatowski was the Polish commander in 1812 of the military campaign against the Russian Emperor Alexander I, who, as a result of Napoleon's defeat, became the creator of the new surrogate Polish state. This made Poniatowski the symbol of the Poles' defeat in their fight alongside the French, although it was, in fact, Polish determination in their fight for independence (rather than for the French interests) that earned Alexander's favours and pushed him to partly rebuild Poland under his rule. This way, Poniatowski also became a symbol of political zeal, while publicly expressed praise for his actions legitimised the Napoleonic episode in the history of the national struggle for independence. This was particularly important for those who actively participated in the construction of a new Poland under Alexander's rule and were also former officials of the state apparatus of the Duchy of Warsaw. Prince Józef Poniatowski also provided perfect material for a modern national hero because, in spite of being an aristocrat and a nephew of the last monarch

<sup>8</sup> See: Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, vol. 3, *Rococo, Classicism and Romanticism*, 3rd edition, London 1999, 163-164.

<sup>9</sup> See letter of Adam Jerzy Czartoryski to Stanisław Mokronowski from 6 January 1814, in: Biblioteka Książąt Czartoryskich, Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie [The Princes Czartoryski Library, The National Museum in Cracow], 5442, 121-122.

of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, he was praised as a commander of a modern (mass conscription) army.<sup>10</sup>

[7] The committee for the construction of the monument, chaired by Mokronowski, began a public collection, organised as a way to gather the funds for this purpose, but also to invest the enterprise with a collective social dimension, thus attesting to Poniatowski's popularity and to the universal appreciation of his heroism. At the same time, Mokronowski was concerned with the formal aspect of commemoration. At a relatively early stage, the committee reached the conclusion that the most appropriate form would be a monumental equestrian statue. This intention was first publicly communicated in May 1817. The general referred to the consultation he had with fine art experts, emphasising that the question of the hero's attire was not yet decided upon. Clearly, then, this issue was controversial from the very beginning. The committee addressed the "most famous European masters", asking them for the conditions and a design for the monument.<sup>11</sup> Among them were Antonio Canova (1757-1822) and Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844), both residing in Rome, as well as their younger colleague from Berlin (not long before also a Rome-based artist), Christian Daniel Rauch (1777-1857).

[8] The most important among the mentioned experts was prince Stanisław Poniatowski, an acclaimed collector and patron, permanently based in Rome (coincidentally, also a cousin of the deceased leader).<sup>12</sup> Poniatowski told the committee that the most suitable choice in this case would be to model the monument on the statue of Marcus Aurelius on the Capitoline Hill. This oldest known equestrian statue, commemorating one of the most popular Roman emperors and warriors, could have seemed an appropriate point of reference for a military hero with royal connections. It was Stanisław Poniatowski's opinion that the intended idealism of his cousin through a classical reference was not in discord with his representation in a contemporary uniform. To substantiate his claim he referred to a precedent in the form of the statue of Niccolò III d'Este (mid-15th century) in Ferrara, which combined an antique model with a non-antique attire.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> On the army of the Duchy of Warsaw and the Kingdom of Poland see: Czuby, *The Duchy of Warsaw*, 79-94; Eligiusz Kozłowski, "Armia", in: *Przemiany społeczne w Królestwie Polskim 1815-1864*, Wrocław 1979, 199-229.

<sup>11</sup> *Gazeta Warszawska* from 17 May 1817, no. 39, 985.

<sup>12</sup> Information about a non-extant letter from Stanisław Poniatowski to Stanisław Mokronowski from 10 February 1817, in: Henryk Mościcki, *Pozgonna cześć dla księcia Józefa (pogrzeb-pomniki-pieśń i legenda)*, Warsaw 1922, 87-88. On Poniatowski as a collector and aesthete see: Andrea Busiri Vici, *I Poniatowski e Roma*, Florence 1971, 313-365.

<sup>13</sup> Mościcki, *Pozgonna cześć*, 87-88.

[9] The latter issue – antique vs. contemporary clothing – proved so controversial that even the compromise proposed by Stanisław Poniatowski did not help reconcile the opposing sides in Warsaw. When on 30 September 1817 Mokronowski published another report on the progress of their work, informing that a comparison of offers suggested that Thorvaldsen was the best choice, the question of the hero's clothing was still open.<sup>14</sup> Mokronowski wrote that the Danish master advised the use of "Roman attire", but he did not refuse to make a sculpture in "national" clothing if the committee wished so. Mokronowski noted that the Warsaw-based experts were unable to reach a conclusion about the "shape of the monument" or "the pose of the hero and the horse" either, clearly objecting to Thorvaldsen's proposal to "show the prince at the moment when he urges his army to battle". Reluctant to suggest a definite solution to this problem, Mokronowski referred to the opinions shared by the donors. In his reply to one of the letters that suggested rejecting the Roman stylisation, Mokronowski openly wrote: "honourable Sir, your opinions are shared by most of the monument's donors".<sup>15</sup>

[10] The choice between the prince's contemporary or antique clothing was not merely a matter of aesthetic preference, but a factor that determined the monument's ideological content. The Warsaw experts certainly considered antiquity a model worthy of following, as evidenced by their choice of sculptors: Canova, Thorvaldsen, and Rauch. Meanwhile, the controversy concerned the extent to which Poniatowski should be presented in an antique costume, seeing that he was both an aristocratic and a popular hero. Notably, on the territory of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the artistic practice of presenting contemporary or recently deceased figures in antique costumes was not very widespread (not mentioning the Polish Kingdom itself), and was limited to a small aristocratic elite.<sup>16</sup> This was a group of closely tied people for whom, we can argue, antique identification was a means to elevate themselves above the rest of society.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Gazeta Warszawska* from 30 September 1817, no. 78 (second supplement), 1950.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Gustaw Olizar to Stanisław Mokronowski from 2 November 1817 and Mokronowski's reply from 22 December 1817, in: Aleksandra Melbechowska-Luty and Piotr Szubert, eds., *Posągi i ludzie: antologia tekstów o rzeźbie polskiej 1815-1889*, vol. 1, p. 1, Warsaw 1993, 163.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Tadeusz Dobrowolski, *Rzeźba neoklasycyzmu i romantyzmu w Polsce*, Wrocław 1974; Katarzyna Mikocka-Rachubowa, *Rzeźba włoska w Polsce około 1770-1830*, vol. 1-2, Warsaw 2016.

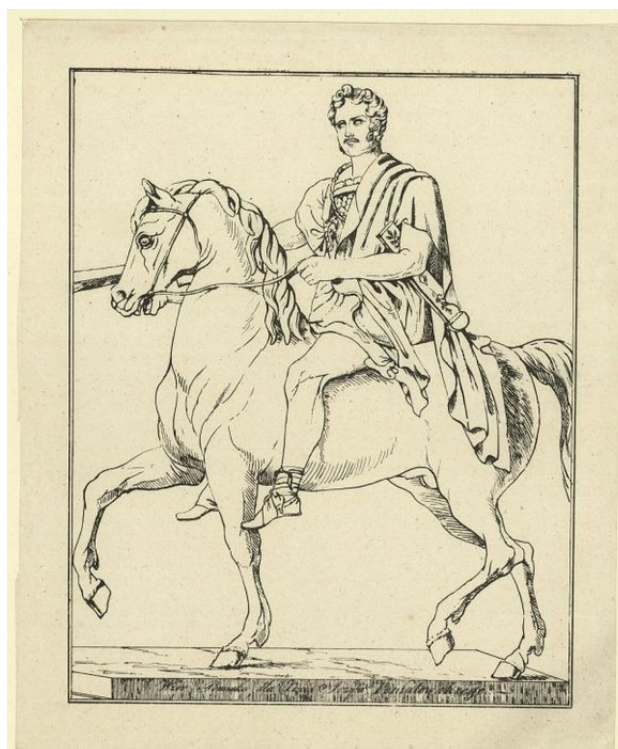
<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ryszard Przybylski, *Klasycyzm, czyli prawdziwy koniec Królestwa Polskiego*, Warsaw 1983, 353; Anna Lewicka-Morawska, *Między klasycyzmem a tradycjonalizmem: narodziny nowoczesnej kultury artystycznej a malarstwo polskie końca XVIII i początków XIX wieku*, Warsaw 2005, 206; Janina Kamionkova, *Życie literackie w Polsce w pierwszej XIX wieku*, Warsaw 1970, 11-137.

[11] A characteristic proof of Mokronowski's indecisiveness about the costume was the fact that he sent to Thorvaldsen a design of the monument with prince Józef dressed in his usual uniform, drawn up by the Polish painter Aleksander Orłowski (1777-1832) (Fig. 1). Finally, however, under the influence of Thorvaldsen, who preferred the antique costume from the beginning, the monument committee decided upon the latter. The authority of the Danish artist must have convinced them to do so, as did the wish to promote the Polish hero through a great artwork of the famous artist whose knowledge on how to achieve this goal was trusted. Thorvaldsen argued that the goal of the monument was to immortalise the hero and, therefore, Poniatowski's monument should imitate antique sculpture, which he saw as representing timeless canonical beauty.<sup>18</sup> Works on the model finished, however, as late as in 1828. It arrived in the Kingdom of Poland a year later and was publicly presented in Warsaw, in Krasieński Square, near a theatre building (Fig. 2). While the committee's final choice of an antique costume, although announced in the press, had not provoked an emotional reaction earlier on, this public presentation of the monument for popular judgement proved that Mokronowski's former hesitation was fully grounded (Mokronowski [1761-1821] had died in the meantime). The monument's artistic form became an object of controversy in the press, who focused on the adequacy of the academic ideal to the sculpture's specific role as a public monument.



<sup>18</sup> A non-extant report regarding the justification of Thorvaldsen's opinion from 1820, in: Mościcki, *Pozgonna cześć*, 104-106.

1 Aleksander Orłowski, Design for Poniatowski's Monument, 1818, watercolour, 135 x 123 cm. The National Museum, Warsaw (photo © Małgorzata Kwiatkowska/The National Museum in Warsaw)



2 Bertel Thorvaldsen, Model for Poniatowski's Monument, 1829-1830, lithography, 21,8 x 17,2 cm. The National Library, Warsaw (photo: POLONA)

[12] The most vivid expression of this controversy was the polemic published in the weekly journal *Rozmaitości Warszawskie* [*Warsaw Miscellanea*]. Adam Idźkowski (1798-1879) was the first to voice his opinion.<sup>19</sup> This young architect, a graduate of the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Warsaw, now employed by the government, declared that inasmuch as the sculpture itself and the fame of its maker required no vindication, he decided to speak to refer to the "infinite number of ridiculous" and rarely, as he saw them, "justified remarks". The aim of the article was, therefore, to "straighten out" the impressions about the artistic quality of Thorvaldsen's monument. Idźkowski positioned himself as a teacher who explained to those viewers who were critical, and therefore lacking the required education ("each person makes assessments based on their own liking, rarely on some knowledge of art") why Thorvaldsen's work was the best form for commemorating the national hero.

[13] Idźkowski's article began with the author's account of his conversation with an ardent critic of this sculpture, who claimed "with

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<sup>19</sup> *Rozmaitości Warszawskie* 39 (1829), 291-296; 40 (1829), 299-306; 41 (1829), 307-311.



utmost certainty" that it was far from perfection, since it was lacking "a semblance of new ideas" and, moreover, contained "a false costume" reflected in the "pedantic servitude to antiquity". According to Idźkowski, this critic's love of novelty, suggestively reflected in his own clothing ("made in accordance with the craft of Parisian fashion magazines"), was linked in this case with the wish to commemorate Poniatowski in historic attire that suggested his nationality. Only then could Thorvaldsen's monument sincerely depict "a hero truly worthy of the Sarmatian tribe". The grotesque portrait of the critic's personality was supposed to convince readers of the parochialism that stood behind this form of anti-classicist national fanaticism, which was fully expressed in his final statement that if Thorvaldsen had been born a Pole, his countrymen would not have let him make his eccentric art even for the price of fame it procured him in the world. Idźkowski gave an account of his futile attempts to convince his interlocutor that "rules of attire for a statue should be different from those of a living person" because they were not subject to change and, therefore, achieved timeless relevance through the imitation of an antique model. He also told him that the nation could only gain in greatness, since a monument in antique costume would be a permanent symbol of "nobleness, gratefulness, and respect of the nation for its geniuses and those who sacrificed for its cause".

[14] Idźkowski juxtaposed this conceited "ignoramus" with another interlocutor, whose well-groomed and moderate clothing heralded his good manners and well-balanced conduct, while visible "honorary symbols" suggested his "honourable sacrifice [...] in service of a monarch or community" (which means that, just like Idźkowski, he was a state official). This interlocutor expressed his delight with the sculpture's artistic merit that made it equal to the most accomplished portraits of ancient Romans. Yet, he was surprised, especially as Poniatowski's former soldier, as to why a "monument of the country's gratitude" and "a souvenir of our century, our mores" drew its model from ancient Rome. Idźkowski, seeing that his interlocutor was inadequately educated in the arts, but that his doubts were motivated by "nobility" and "rightfulness", eagerly presented him with an explanation. He repeated and developed his earlier theses, emphasising that, over time, a monument truthful to its historical reality would become a caricature of its subject, and instead of attracting viewers it would repel them. Moreover, Idźkowski argued that it was nobler to reject a primitive recording of contemporary fashions and provide proofs of Polish attachment to the universal ideal of art, whose discovery was supposed to substantiate the uniqueness of antiquity and the high level of its civilisation.

[15] Idźkowski noted that as much as ancient art had been appreciated for centuries, it was only in "our times" that people became truly aware (he mentioned Johann Joachim Winckelmann) that the reason for this

attraction to antiquity was the inherent human inclination for nature and truth. In his view, sources of this awakening came from democratic social change, as well as a greater appreciation of individual talent (adding also to social prestige and financial status), which liberated artists from the influence of aristocratic patrons, who did not recognise real beauty and treated art instrumentally. As it turned out, democratisation of society not only freed artists from the dictates of the rich (which, in the Kingdom of Poland at least, was a large generalisation since the rich nobles, from which group the majority of art experts were recruited, had a considerable influence on the development of modern art institutions), but also exposed the effects of their artistic freedom to the critique of the democratised society.

[16] Idźkowski's article does not present a sharp contrast between the positive image of the educated elite and the negative image of the ordinary people, but rather a more subtle evaluation of the differences visible in the world views of participants of the new public sphere. Significantly, the basic aspect of differentiation of the participants in this aesthetic debate was their relationship with the state. The interlocutor who identified himself with the state apparatus expressed positive opinions about the form approved by the elites, while the private man (who represented not so much the lower classes of society, but rather its well situated bourgeoisie that gained the most from the democratisation of political life in the Kingdom) voiced his objections quite freely. By means of his negative opinion of the latter, Idźkowski reveals himself as a defender of social community based on authority (i.e. hierarchy) rather than democratically distributed freedom, whose benefits were enjoyed also by random people, remaining outside the group of true citizens – which, to him, meant those who served the state (led by a social elite).

[17] Soon enough, Idźkowski's article received a response from an anonymous critic,<sup>20</sup> who admitted that he was not an expert in fine arts, but, at the same time, thought he had the right to voice his opinion about the form of the national monument.<sup>21</sup> Significantly, he used the pseudonym Krakus, which can be seen as an expression of his attachment to the national 'antiquity', as opposed to the universal, classical antiquity.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Some critics identified this pseudonym with Maurycy Mochnacki: Władysław Tatarkiewicz and Dariusz Kaczmarzyk, "Klasycyzm i romantyzm w rzeźbie polskiej", in: *Sztuka i Krytyka* 7 (1956), 31-73: 68; Stanisław Świrko, *Słowacki – poeta Warszawy*, Warsaw 1961, 28; Maria Irena Kwiatkowska, "Malarstwo i rzeźba w latach 1765-1830", in: Mariusz Karpowicz, ed., *Sztuka Warszawy*, Warsaw 1986, 232-290: 289.

<sup>21</sup> *Gazeta Polska* 331 (1829), 1425-1426; reprinted in: *Rozmaitości Warszawskie* 50 (1829), 382-386.

<sup>22</sup> Krakus was a legendary founder of Cracow, a historic capital of the Polish Kingdom, with whom its citizens associated the prehistoric mound situated on the

This author accused Idźkowski of trying to impose his opinion on the public by arbitrarily dividing the wise, that is, those who accepted Thorvaldsen's sculpture, from the fools who wished to see the "Polish commander" in "Polish dress". Krakus agreed that every artwork that sought to immortalise a given figure or historical moment should be based on "firm" rules, since that was the only way to effectively transmit their memory to future generations. Yet, he criticised Idźkowski's understanding of these rules, since, in his view, it was mimesis rather than idealisation that was the measure of artistic perfection. He was convinced that the best possible imitation of observed reality was a rule that should be particularly closely observed by artists working with historical subjects, where the "idealisation" cherished by Idźkowski should be "very much avoided". "Placing the art master outside history" was in conflict with the essence of historical subject matter: the historical cannot be also timeless.

[18] This thesis, contradicting the bumptious intellectuals, was a starting point for another that concerned the purpose of public commemoration. Krakus found nothing surprising in the fact that Poles wished to find in their "national monument" some features of nationality. Prince Poniatowski's dress, depicted according to historical reality, was an important element of the chronological identification of this representation, and was seen by Krakus as a marker of national specificity. Poniatowski's monument was supposed to be not only "a monument to the prince's individual greatness", but also to the "faithfulness", "spirit", and "customs of Poles in the early 19th century" in which this greatness found its source. Krakus voiced also his critical view of Idźkowski's support of the idea that Poniatowski should be distinguished from the rest of the Polish army through his antique costume. The monument, he argued, should not isolate Poniatowski's merit from its social context, but depict him as a truly national hero, who is above all the symbol of the collective effort of his subordinates.

[19] The opposition between classic-universal elitism and national-historical egalitarianism constituted a foundation of the ideological conflict that can be observed in this polemic. Up until this time, historians have linked this discussion with the wider issue of Polish culture, namely, the conflict between the Romantics and the Classicists.<sup>23</sup> This context is suggested by the magazine itself, where Krakus published his response to

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outskirts of Cracow (the so-called Krakus Mound), which is more extensively discussed in the second part of this article.

<sup>23</sup> See: Tatarkiewicz and Kaczmarzyk, *Klasycyzm i romantyzm*, 68; Maria Janion and Maria Źmigrodzka, "Romantyczna legenda księcia Józefa", in: *Pamiętnik literacki* 68/1 (1977), 55-95: 77-78 (the same in: Janion and Źmigrodzka, *Romantyzm i historia*, Gdańsk 2001 [first edition: 1978], 327-328); Dobrowolski, *Rzeźba neoklasycyzmu i romantyczna*, 128; Maria Irena Kwiatkowska, *Rzeźbiarze warszawscy XIX wieku*, Warsaw 1995, 24.

Idźkowski's text, that is, *Gazeta Polska*, which maintained close connections with the *milieu* of the Warsaw Romantics. Assuming the role of the spokesman for the nation's opinions (i.e. of the people, in this case), who opposes the elite's tastes (hermetically sealed from the masses), was a tactic that was characteristic of the Romantics, with their susceptibility to democratic ideals. The very attitude to Poniowski's monument as a national monument, which was shared by the members of the monument committee, including Mokronowski, from the start, was a challenge to the classic paradigm of commemoration. Limited in scope of what it communicated, the classical ideal was unable to meet the expectations of the nation as a whole, which at the time meant an increasingly democratised viewer. The latter did not identify either with the paradigm of timeless beauty, or with its inherent idea of universality and the timelessness of historical subject matter.

[20] Despite these controversies, the monument committee decided to complete the works on the cast (this decision was driven by the great cost of the model delivered by Thorvaldsen). Poniowski's monument was supposed to stand in front of the government building of the Kingdom of Poland. However, this process was interrupted by the outbreak of the November Uprising in 1830, which was inspired by the examples of the July Revolution in France and the uprising in Belgium of the same year, and directed against the autocratic ambitions of the Kingdom's authorities. The final defeat of the Poles in their fight against the Russians made it impossible to unveil the monument, which fell into the hands of the victorious commander Ivan Paskevich, who took it as his war trophy. Only after the First World War, when the cult of Poniowski and other Poles in the service of Napoleon was still widespread, was the monument officially unveiled in Warsaw. However, the original bronze cast from 1829-1831 was destroyed during the Second World War. The present monument standing in the Polish capital is a copy made on the basis of the second version of the model, preserved in Thorvaldsens Museum in Copenhagen.<sup>24</sup> Earlier artistic controversies are now long past, while Poniowski's monument, one of the greatest masterpieces of Neoclassicism, is still an object of interest to historians in Poland and beyond, as manifested by its inclusion in internationally published syntheses of the history of European sculpture as well as art history at large.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> On the history of Poniowski's monument after the year 1830 see: Hanna Kotkowska-Bareja, *Pomnik Poniowskiego*, Warsaw 1971, 50.

<sup>25</sup> See: Horst W. Janson, *19<sup>th</sup> Century Sculpture*, New York 1985, 71; Matthew Craske, *Art in Europe 1700-1830: A History of the Visual Arts in an Era of Unprecedented Urban Economic Growth*, Oxford 1997, 257-258.

## The Tadeusz Kościuszko Monument in Cracow

[21] The idea to erect a monument to Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746-1817), a leader of the anti-Russian uprising of 1794 that preceded the final dissolution of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, emerged soon after the news of the hero's death in Switzerland reached the Polish public. A month after Kościuszko died, *Gazeta Krakowska* [Cracow Gazette] published an article by the local citizen Franciszek Jaczewski (a lawyer by profession).<sup>26</sup> He claimed the right to speak "in the name of all Poles without exception", and argued that nowhere in the Polish lands was there "even the most modest mud hut where the name and achievements of this famous man were not well-known and dearly appreciated, where he would not be cherished and blessed and where his death were not mourned with utmost sorrow". He claimed that a public funeral (even the most resplendent) would not suffice, since Kościuszko deserved a public commemoration of the adoration he enjoyed among his fellow countrymen.

[22] Jaczewski made a reference to the Warsaw community's efforts to erect a monument to Poniatowski. According to Jaczewski, Kościuszko had an "undeniable right" to be commemorated by the Polish people whose dedication to him was "at least similar" to the one that inspired the "unfading sacrifice" of those who donated funds for the monument of Prince Józef. What, in his view, was particularly motivating for the Poles was the wish to avoid potential accusations of "neglecting this sacred obligation that was truly cherished in the heart of every Pole". The construction of Kościuszko's monument was to prove to the world that in Polish eyes not the "greatness of one's family" but individual merit earned the praise of the entire nation. His mention of the "greatness of the family" was a reference to Poniatowski, whose remains were buried several months before in the royal crypt of the Wawel Cathedral in Cracow not only because of the prince's merits, but also because of his close consanguinity with the last king of pre-partition Poland-Lithuania. However, the cult of Kościuszko as a hero who brought together all the inhabitants of the Polish lands (aristocracy,<sup>27</sup> on the one hand, and "mud hut" dwellers, on the other) was not contrasted here with the cult of Poniatowski, but presented as a complementary process. Kościuszko's monument was not conceived in competition with Poniatowski's, but rather as a way to exonerate the nation from any allegations of favouring anyone due to their elite status.

[23] Jaczewski's initiative was of a private nature and it is difficult to assess its impact on the events that followed. Yet, it should be treated as a

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<sup>26</sup> *Gazeta Krakowska* 93 (1817), 1131-1132.

<sup>27</sup> See e.g.: Leon Sapieha, *Wspomnienia (z lat od 1803 do 1863 r.)*, Lviv 1914, 5-6; Katarzyna Jedynakiewicz, *Osobowość i życie codzienne Tadeusza Kościuszki*, Łódź 1996, 88.

public manifestation of the atmosphere of this period, which also introduces a social context for the subsequent monument initiative, taken up by the authorities of the Free City of Cracow in response to the statement issued by the Viceroy of the Kingdom of Poland in February 1818.<sup>28</sup> The head of the government of the 'resurrected' Kingdom mentioned the topic of Kościuszko's commemoration when discussing financial settlements between the Kingdom and the Free City of Cracow for bringing the hero's remains to Cracow, where he was to be buried next to Poniatowski on the Wawel Hill. The government of the Kingdom assumed that Cracow's authorities and citizens would not only honour Kościuszko with a grand funeral, but also with a monument befitting his greatness.<sup>29</sup> Admittedly, the Warsaw ministers, with the Viceroy as their leader (himself a veteran of the Kościuszko Uprising), might have felt sincere respect or even adoration for Kościuszko, yet the Kingdom's authorities' engagement in the initiative towards his public commemoration served current political interests. After all, identification with the achievements of the popular leader (who was personally sceptical about the idea of Poland's 'resurrection' by Alexander's mercy<sup>30</sup>) helped legitimise the post-Congress regime.

[24] Authorities of the Free City of Cracow made no unnecessary delays in their work to fulfil their task. Next to the importance of maintaining good relations with the Kingdom for the small republic's political, cultural, and economic situation, equally significant was the potential gain regarding publicity – focusing the attention of the general Polish public on the Free City and highlighting the position of the former Polish capital. Notably, Kościuszko was important for the Free City of Cracow for reasons that went beyond his personal connections with the city dating back to the year 1794, when it was chosen as the location of the uprising's onset. Equally important was his involvement in the socio-political emancipation of the peasant masses and their inclusion into the national community. This was of particular significance to the Free City which, since the very beginning of its existence, spearheaded social changes in the Polish countryside, developing the laws from the period of the Duchy of Warsaw regarding the personal freedom of small farmers. In 1815, the City initiated a special farmers' committee whose role was to replace feudal service with rent

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<sup>28</sup> Letter from Józef Zajączek to the Ruling Senate of the Free City of Cracow from 9 February 1818, in: *Pamiętnik Budowy Pomnika Tadeusza Kościuszki*, Cracow 1826, page unnumbered (evidence IV).

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Ignacy Miączyński to the Ruling Senate of the Free City of Cracow from 15 February 1818, reprinted in: *ibid.*, page unnumbered (evidence IV).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. letter from Kościuszko to Adam Jerzy Czartoryski from 13 June 1815, cited in: [Karol Boromeusz Hoffman], *Rzut oka na stan polityczny Królestwa Polskiego pod panowaniem rosyjskim przez ciąg lat piętnastu od 1815-1830*, Warsaw 1831, 51-54.

paid in properties belonging to the state and the Church.<sup>31</sup> Strengthening relations (however gradual and projected to span many years or even generations) between the city and the non-noble inhabitants of the countryside was among the major political ambitions of the Free City. Therefore, the cult of Kościuszko could work as a distinct symbol and an instrument of this policy simultaneously, offering a common ideological point of reference in the relations between the ruling elite and the small farmers (whose trust had to be first secured).

[25] On 21 February 1818, the president of the Cracow Senate (i.e. the government of the Free City), Stanisław Wodzicki, sent an official letter to the rector of the Jagiellonian University asking him for advice regarding a design for the monument.<sup>32</sup> Wodzicki emphasised that the "intention of said monument" would be to "inform future generations about those virtues of the hero that his soul displayed in particular abundance, that is, the combination of greatness and humility". For that reason the monument should show no "grandeur or extravagance". The idea of the combination of "greatness and humility", a form of conceptual guideline for monument designers, has its source in reasons beyond financial concerns. Humility, among other features, was particularly strongly associated with Kościuszko. Humility (or actually "simplicity", coming with "courage, generous sacrifice, and great character") was also mentioned by the minister secretary of state of the Kingdom of Poland in a letter written on behalf of Alexander to Franz Xaver Zeltner, at whose home Kościuszko spent the last years of his life.<sup>33</sup> There were even rumours that the Swiss executor of the commander's will initially refused to hand over his remains claiming that only in Switzerland was it possible to give him a funeral "with utmost simplicity", according to Kościuszko's wishes.<sup>34</sup> His humility was linked with his openness to the peasantry, that is, to this social group whose proverbial "simplicity" became the object of his particular concern during the uprising of 1794.

[26] It is unknown when the Senate came to the conclusion that the most appropriate form of expression for Kościuszko's monument would be a mound, with obvious references to prehistoric artificial hills from areas

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<sup>31</sup> Wojciech Bartel, *Ustrój i prawo Wolnego Miasta Krakowa 1815-1846*, Kraków 1976, 20; Krzysztof Groniowski, *Uwłaszczenie chłopów w Polsce. Geneza, realizacja, skutki*, Warsaw 1976, 84-89.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Stanisław Wodzicki to Walenty Litwiński from 21 February 1818, in: *Pamiętnik Budowy*, page unnumbered (evidence II).

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Ignacy Sobolewski to Franz Xaver Zeltner from 14 December 1817, in: *Pamiętnik Budowy*, page unnumbered (evidence III).

<sup>34</sup> *Mowa z powodu zejścia z tego świata wiekopomnej pamięci Tadeusza Kościuszki bywszego Naczelnika wojsk polskich w czasie żałobnego obchodu przez jednego z dawnej artylerii weteranów w Białymstoku dnia 3. maja 1818 roku miana w Warszawie*, Warsaw [1818?], 10.

nearby Cracow – the Krakus and Wanda mounds – erected, as legend has it, to honour the first rulers of these lands. Present knowledge of this issue is insufficient to provide conclusive answers, yet this matter is not crucial for the discussion presented in this paper. What is significant here is that the authorities of the Free City made this decision and then consistently ushered in its practical implementation. A bill passed by the Senate on 21 February 1818 (the date of Wodzicki's letter to the rector), which informed Cracow's citizens about the plans to erect the monument, already contained a mention of the Krakus mound. It was indicated as a local example of a modest monument honouring an outstanding individual but erected through the effort of numerous people united for this purpose, making it so imposingly permanent and monumental.<sup>35</sup> However, in this case, this earliest known association of Kościuszko's cult with Cracow area mounds represented not so much a formal but rather an ideological inspiration. Only later did it transform into the concrete idea of building a new mound to honour the contemporary hero. Yet, initially, this motion was not received enthusiastically; on the one hand, there were those who dismissed building mounds as a pagan custom, and on the other, calculations were presented that suggested the cost would be too high to handle.<sup>36</sup>

[27] An alternative came with a design of classic provenance, presented by a member of the Senate and amateur architect, Sebastian Sierakowski, coincidentally one of those who considered the mound form a pagan relic.<sup>37</sup> He proposed installing an obelisk. The design had two alternative versions (Fig. 3a, 3b). Apart from the shape, the two versions shared only the images on the monument's main part whose sides showed Kościuszko's profile, the Polish Eagle and Lithuanian Vytis, as well as the coat of arms of the Free City of Cracow. The reliefs in the pedestal part were different.

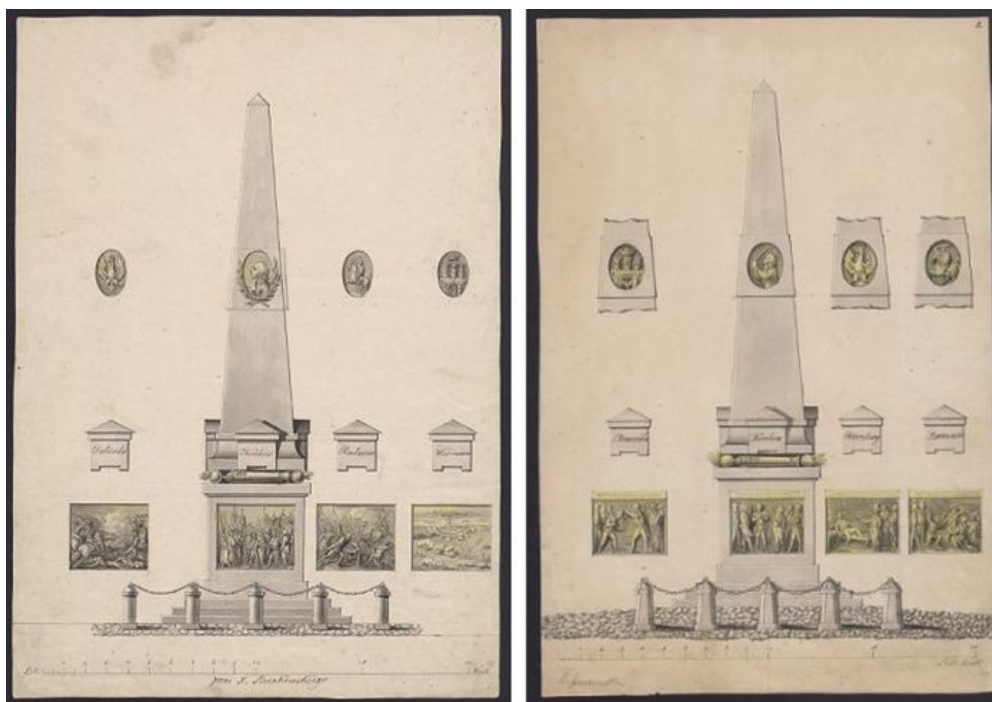
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<sup>35</sup> The National Archive in Cracow, Archive of the Free City of Cracow, V-7, 195-198.

<sup>36</sup> Michał Rożek, *Kopiec Kościuszki w Krakowie*, Kraków 1981, 82; Letter from Stanisław Wodzicki to Marcin Badeni from 10 June 1820, Biblioteka Naukowa PAU i PAN w Krakowie [The Library of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Polish Academy of Sciences in Cracow], 1696a, 296-296v.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Zbigniew Michalczyk, *Michał Stachowicz (1768-1825): krakowski malarz między barokiem a romantyzmem*, vol. 1, Warsaw 2011, 213-214; Rożek, *Kopiec Kościuszki*, 80.





3 Sebastian Sierakowski, Design for Kościuszko's Monument, 1818-1820: a) first version, watercolour, 39,3 x 26,4 cm, b) second version, watercolour, 39 x 27,9 cm. The Jagiellonian Library, Cracow (photo: The Jagiellonian Library)

With his design of alternative versions, Sierakowski offered the authorities of the Free City a choice between the promotion of the cult of an exclusively national hero and one with a national and international relevance all at once. Notably, both versions were addressed to a Polish viewer, as evidenced by Polish-language inscriptions. However, the target audience encompassed both viewers with a fundamentally classical education, as well as ordinary, uneducated people. For this reason Sierakowski chose to "avoid any symbols or mythological adaptations", as those that the people "would not understand and possibly interpret awkwardly".<sup>38</sup> In his view, then, he developed a design that could have been comprehensible also for those who remained outside the realm of classical association. Yet, in his choice of the obelisk as the form of the monument's expression, the designer did not seek to move beyond the classical format of monumental communication. Sierakowski wished for his monument to reach an extended group of viewers, yet he did not allow himself to compromise in favour of those less informed; therefore he employed conservative tools that he considered the only acceptable and appropriate solution.

[28] Sierakowski's design was never executed. The authorities of Cracow finally decided to erect the mound, in accordance with the preferences of

<sup>38</sup> Quote from a manuscript version of the monument's design: *Kosztorys i inne projekta architektoniczne Sebastiana Sierakowskiego*, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, 1065, page unnumbered.

President Wodzicki (Fig. 4). This decision was most probably dictated by a new estimated budget, which suggested the possibility of reaching a satisfactory result with a lower cost than initially assumed.<sup>39</sup> An undeniable asset of the mound as the form of the monument was its durability and local origin, emphasised even by Sierakowski in his architectural treatise from 1812, where he wrote about the "Polish genius" that gave rise to a form of commemoration that was admittedly primitive, but unmatched in its durability.<sup>40</sup>



4 Kościuszko Mound in Cracow, after 1823, lithography, 14,8 x 21,9 cm. The National Library, Warsaw (photo: POLONA)

[29] However, particularly important in the context of Kościuszko's monument was the issue of the orally transmitted legend as a source of knowledge about the person for whom the mound was raised. Its peak was to house a "block of porphyry extracted from the local rocks above the

<sup>39</sup> Letter from Stanisław Wodzicki to Marcin Badeni from 18 June 1820, Biblioteka Naukowa PAU i PAN w Krakowie, 1696a, 299v.

<sup>40</sup> Sierakowski, *Architektura*, vol. 1, 217-218. Noteworthy, mounds were not forms exclusive to this part of Europe, but were also erected – as emphasised in special publications on the Kościuszko Mound – in other parts of the continent, including the area of ancient Greece; see *Pamiętnik budowy*, 10-11. Moreover, at the same time as the mound in Cracow, another monument-mound was being constructed at the site of the Battle of Waterloo, also as a reference to the prehistoric form of commemoration that was characteristic for the ancient Batavi that inhabited those lands. See: Marcel Watelet, "Ériger la mémoire d'un lieu: le monument de Waterloo et le ministère du Waterstaat (1816-1830)", in: Marcel Watelet and Pierre Couvreur, eds., *Waterloo: lieu de mémoire européenne (1815-2000): histoires et controverses*, Louvain-La-Neuve 2000, 161-183.

Vistula", with only Kościuszko's name carved in the stone.<sup>41</sup> In the future, when peasants from the area would take over part of the responsibility to sustain the living memory of the commander, this stone was to become "an eternal [...] proof of the legend spread by local inhabitants" about the fact that the mound was dedicated to this particular hero.<sup>42</sup> Addressed to an educated viewer with ties to the city, the inscription was to confirm in writing what would otherwise be spread around orally, as was the case with the Krakus and Wanda mounds.<sup>43</sup> In this respect, very significant was the location of Kościuszko's monument, which initially provided a link between the urban and the rural space. Rather than in the strict city centre, as originally planned, the decision was made to commemorate Kościuszko in a typically rural area. At the same time, this specific location allowed Cracow citizens to admire the mound from the city, while a short distance from the centre could encourage them to take up walking trips to the mound.

[30] From the very beginning, peasants took part in the construction of Kościuszko's monument. Their representatives were invited to participate in an official inauguration of the construction works on the "grave" (this was an alternative term used to refer to the mound, traditionally used also in reference to the mounds of Krakus and Wanda). Peasants were addressed in an official speech delivered by general Franciszek Paszkowski, an old friend of the deceased hero and the chair of the committee of the construction of the mound, who treated gathered farmers as representatives of one of the four major groups of Polish society: next to the Poles who were not peasants, their wives, sisters, and daughters (Polish women) and their underage sons (youth). In this perspective, peasants were clearly distinguished from the more homogenous, noble-bourgeois, yet they were not put outside national frames. Emphasising the fact that Kościuszko truly appreciated farmers and "always tenderly" cared about their fate, Paszkowski encouraged them to "diligently add clods of earth to his grave". In Paszkowski's view, peasants' participation in the act of Kościuszko's commemoration was a proof that "the nation cannot perform any great and magnificent deed without [their] simplest and most disinterested contribution".<sup>44</sup> The method of erecting the mound, which was simple and did not require any special skills, as well as opening the way to engaging all groups of society,

<sup>41</sup> Appeal of the managing committee for the construction of the grave of Tadeusz Kościuszko to the Polish people, in: *Pamiętnik budowy*, page unnumbered (evidence IX).

<sup>42</sup> *Pamiętnik budowy*, paged unnumbered (evidence IX).

<sup>43</sup> More on peasants who preserved the memory of Krakus and Wanda thanks to the mounds in: Jan Duklan Ochocki, *Pamiętniki*, vol. 1, Wilno 1857, 236; Franciszek Salezy Jezierski, *Rzepicha matka królów, żona Piasta, między narodami sarmackimi słowiańskiego monarchy tej części ziemi, która się nazywa Polska*, Warsaw 1794, 26-28.

could, thus, be symbolically charged, becoming an expression of the democratic ideology that stood behind the idea for the monument.

[31] The mound's construction committee was also planning to purchase the area of the entire hill where the mound was erected with the intention of starting a settlement named in honour of Kościuszko.<sup>45</sup> This settlement would provide a home for selected peasant families whose members fought under his command in 1794. This way, having their own land at their disposal, those peasants would become the best guardians of the monument erected in honour of he who gave them the possibility to serve Poland, and in this way to improve their lives by earning this generous award. The Kościuszko settlement would, then, constitute a small-scale version of the social ideal that Kościuszko wished to realise on the scale of an entire nation, and which was also the intended direction of the rural reforms introduced at the time by the Free City of Cracow.

[32] Peasants were also remembered on the occasion of the nationwide collection for the construction of the monument. Published by the committee, A list of names of those who contributed funds for the monument of Tadeusz Kościuszko, from 1822, contained 5917 names, primarily individual donors, but also collective donations: in Cracow itself 92 out of the total of 749 donations were of this type. For this reason, it is impossible to draw from this list information about the exact number of financial contributors. However, these numbers suggest the mass scale of the enterprise, which spanned the Free City of Cracow, the Kingdom of Poland, the western governorates of the Russian Empire, and the Grand Duchy of Posen. Next to the landed gentry, including representatives of its richest elites, the list also included officials, burghers, Jews, as well as numerous peasants. The latter were listed as individuals (they were mostly farm owners, but occasionally also farm-hands), but some as members of large groups that devoted to the cause the days of their feudal service. Despite legally sanctioned personal freedom in the Free City and the Kingdom, in practice, complete independence was probably not common among this group. Notably, the collection was coordinated by representatives of the landed noble elite. Next to high-level officials, mostly also landowners, they were primarily members of the aristocracy. Regardless of whether this was an expression of peasants' sincere attachment to Kościuszko, their contribution to the collection should be treated primarily as a proof that the elite who organised it wished to have

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<sup>44</sup> Franciszek Paszkowski, *Mowa miana przy założeniu podstawy mogiły za pomnik Tadeuszowi Kościuszce na górze Bronisławy dnia 16go Października 1820*, Cracow 1820, 12.

<sup>45</sup> More on this idea in: Jan Gordziałkowski, "Plany założenia osady włościańskiej dla weteranów insurekcji 1794 roku (1821-1852)", in: *Kraków w powstaniu kościuszkowskim: Materiały sesji naukowej odbytej 28 maja 1994*, ed. Jan M. Małecki, Cracow 1996, 75-92 (= *Rola Krakowa w dziejach narodu*, vol. 14).

their names on the list. Just like on the occasion of the official inauguration, they were allowed – in this symbolic way – controlled participation in a national community.

[33] Noteworthy, it was not just the mound's connection with the peasants, as a specific type of architecture, that was the reason why those who initiated and conducted the building of Kościuszko's monument decided to employ this original form of commemoration. Some sources provide arguments such as the symbolism of the beginning of the Polish state, associated with the mounds of Krakus and Wanda. This symbolism was made to serve the purpose of highlighting the significance of Kościuszko as a figure who brought to an end the pre-partition stage of Polish history<sup>46</sup>. However, none of these reasons works to depreciate the powerfully present peasant-related aspect. After all, the form of commemorative objects may be motivated by several propaganda goals at once, which work to complement one another. In this case, the extremely simple form of a prehistoric mound not only linked the long history of the Polish state with the idea of the citizenship of masses of simple country folk, since this kind of connection could be made also with classical means of expression. But, more than anything, the Mound made it possible to include peasants into the group of receivers of this ideological message.

[34] In conclusion, the examples of spectacular artistic objects in public space discussed in this paper prove that the classical ideal did not respond to the specific social function of these objects. The cult of both modern popular heroes, which was an expression of a democratised conception of a national community, required an artistic form of expression that would allow popular identification with the object of commemoration. Neoclassicism, as an elitist idiom, remained beyond the sphere of comprehension for a common viewer. Therefore, as an alienating form, it was contested on the level of reception of an already completed work – as was the case with Poniatowski's monument – or rejected at the preliminary design stage – as was the case with Kościuszko's monument. In both cases, an alternative came with a familiar form that did not refer to erudite associations drawn from antiquity, but represented the hero in a realistic (contemporary) manner, or positioned him in a local historical context that could be comprehensible for a broad group of viewers.

### **About the Author**

Mikołaj Getka-Kenig, b. 1987, studied history and art history at the University of Warsaw and at The Courtauld Institute of Art, and received his doctoral degree at the Department of History at the University of Warsaw in 2016. Since then he worked at the Jewish Historical Institute in

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<sup>46</sup> Statement of the Senate from 19 VII 1820, in: *Pamiętnik Budowy*, page unnumbered (evidence V).

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