



History of Krakow

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Archaeological excavations prove that Wawel Hill was inhabited as early as the Old Stone Age. The Mounds of Krakus and Wanda, the legendary rulers of the settlement inhabited at their time by the Slavic tribes of Vistulans, probably come from the 7th century.

History of Krakow

The first documented reference to Kraków can be found in records from 965 of the Cordova merchant Abraham ben Jacob. He mentions a rich burg city situated at the crossing of trade routes and surrounded by woods.

In the pre-Piast period two dates related to the history of the City appear. Between 876 and 879 the Great Moravian Prince Svatopluk captured the future Lesser Poland, and after 955 Prince Boleslav the Cruel, brother of St. Wenceslas, introduced the Czech rule.

In the 10th century Kraków was incorporated to the Polish state, although it is difficult to verify whether it took place during the reign of Mieszko I in 990 or Boleslav the Brave in 999.

The Middle Ages

Certain facts and dates from the city's history can only be given as being 'after the year 1000'. A castle and a borough which existed at that time on Wawel Hill were fortified with a palisade and an earth wall. In the 10th and 11th centuries the first brick edifices were built (the castle and Romanesque churches), the cathedral and a basilica, as well as the St. Felix and Adaukt Church. In the year 1000 a bishopric was established in Krakow. In 1150 a cathedral school, the best educational establishment in Poland before the foundation of the university, was set up at the castle church. The regalia (the crown and sceptre of Boleslaus the Brave) were kept in the cathedral treasury. It had a rich library, with 28 books, including classic literature along with religious works, comedies by Terence, elegies by Ovid, and historical monographs by Sallust. In 1142, Bishop Robert consecrated the "second" Wawel cathedral, which had been built to replace the destroyed Romanesque church. The body of St. Stanislas, after it had been moved from the church at Skalka, and the relicts of St. Florian, were solemnly laid to rest at the new cathedral. The feudal division of Poland and continuous fighting between regional dukes did not interrupt the city's rapid development. In 1138, Krakow Castle became more important as the official home of the highest duke and, to some degree, the capital of Poland, according to the last will of Boleslaus the Wry-Mouthed. The buildings destroyed during the invasion of the Tatars in 1241 were replaced by new ones built in Gothic style. The location of the city according to the Magdeburg law in 1257 gave it a new layout with a centrally situated marketplace. In the 13th century the city was provided with a new fortification system of city walls, towers and fortified city gates. This system was gradually added to and modernised over the next few centuries. January 20, 1320 was the date of the first coronation; others followed over the next five centuries. The cathedral also became the Royal burial site. The reign of Casimir the Great (Casimir III 1310-1370), patron of the arts and sciences, proved to be of great importance for the city. The king founded two new cities, Kazimierz and Kleparz, which were closely connected with Krakow. Gothic, Franciscan and Dominican churches were built. St. Mary's Church, as well as the Corpus Christi Church and St. Catherine's Church were built in Kazimierz. Renovation of the cathedral and castle on Wawel Hill, and the Cloth Hall, Town Hall and other public buildings were continued. In 1364, Kazimierz the Great founded Krakow



Academy, which was the origin of the later Jagiellonian University.

Jagiellonian epoch

Sepulchral sculpture on the sarcophagus of King Kazimierz Jagiellonczyk in Wawel Cathedral - masterpiece of Veit Stoss.

Ladislaus Jagiello, Grand Duke of Lithuania, was crowned King of Poland in 1386 and started the greatest Polish dynasty, which ruled Poland for over 200 years. Krakow became the capital of a monarchy spreading over genuinely Polish territories as well as vast Lithuanian-Russian areas. The royal court played an important role in supporting artistic and cultural life. Outstanding humanists, scientists and artists came here from Italy, Germany and other countries. Famous sculptor Veit Stoss came from Nurnberg in 1477 to carve a large altar for St. Mary's Church by order of the citizens. After further rebuilding between 1499 and 1536, Wawel Castle was a pearl of Renaissance architecture, boasting the "Zygmuntowska" Chapel - the most beautiful sepulchral chapel in Poland. The castle was decorated with a collection of Arras tapestries ordered from Flanders. It proudly played the role of the royal seat of a powerful country: well up in the fashionable world of its time.

Cathedral seal (13th century) representing the Romanesque cathedral founded by Wladyslaw Herman. At the end of the 16th century Warsaw became the capital of Poland. Krakow lost its importance although it preserved its formal role as the site for royal coronations and burials.

The 17th century

Armour of a "husarz".

The "husaria" were the famous Polish heavy cavalry from the 17th century; in 1683, these soldiers under the command of King Jan III Sobieski, participated in the relief of Vienna which was besieged by Turks.

Persian sword (17th century) from the Royal Armoury

In the middle of the 17th century the Black Death decimated the city's population. The number of dead is estimated at over 20,000. Later, the Swedish army destroyed and ransacked Kazimierz and Kleparz, the suburbs and the old city. Krakow became a provincial centre of small-scale trade and skilled crafts. Only the Church remained as a patron of the arts at this time. The destroyed churches and monasteries were rebuilt in the new baroque style. The greatest architectural achievement at the time was St. Anne's Church, designed by Tylman of Gameren and stuccoed by Baldassare Fontana.

The 18th and 19th centuries

In 1702, the city was seized and devastated by the Swedish army again. Wawel Castle was burnt down. The following invasions of Prussian and Russian troops completed the destruction. Due to the first partition of Poland in 1772, the southern part of Little Poland was seized by the Austrian army. On March 24, 1794 Kościuszko's Insurrection began in Krakow. Temporarily included into the Warsaw Duchy, it was given the status of a "free city" after Napoleon's



downfall. Krakow then developed rapidly. The "Planty"(a green land ring) was set up in place of the city walls, which had been pulled down. New districts developed on the outskirts of the city. After the defeat of the November Insurrection (1831), Krakow preserved its autonomy as the only intact part of Poland. In 1846, it was absorbed into the Austrian Monarchy again. Despite being under foreign control, the city enjoyed some freedom. During this time Krakow became the symbol and centre of Polish traditions and the spiritual capital for all parts of the divided Poland. Scientific and cultural establishments developed dynamically. The Scientific Association of Krakow (Towarzystwo Naukowe Krakowskie) was the origin of the Academy of Sciences. In 1818, the Academy of Fine Arts was established and in 1854 the Society of the Friends of Fine Arts.

The 20th century

The approaching war against Russia prompted the growth of independence movements. Almost all political parties could act legally in Krakow, and in 1910, the paramilitary "Strzelec" (Rifleman) Association was founded. On June 6, 1914, the First Company of "Strzelcy" under the command of Józef Piłsudski set off from the "Oleandry" of Krakow. After independence was regained in 1918, Krakow became a significant administrative and cultural centre. Industry started to develop rapidly. Although the Second World War did not destroy Krakow's historical monuments, it ravaged the city in other ways. On November 6, 1939, professors of Jagiellonian University and the most outstanding representatives of the city's intellectual elite were arrested and transported to the concentration camp in Sachsenhausen. After the war Krakow lost its privileged position. The communist authorities wanted intellectual circles dominated by the working class. This aim was to be fulfilled by the mass of construction workers who were attracted to Krakow. Today however, it is artistic and scientific circles that create the image of the city, which now has over 800,000 inhabitants.