Commemorations and the National Revitalization of Kraków

Lviv, September 2008
The image of the city of Kraków as an important Polish historic and cultural center and place of national “pilgrimages” is hardly news to anyone who has ever paid a visit there. However, this depiction would have been harder to imagine in the 1870s. The city had become a dilapidated provincial backwater, bereft of its earlier claim to greatness. Although medieval capital of the Polish state, Kraków lost that designation after King Zygmunt III Wasa moved his court to Warsaw at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; henceforth, one can speak of Kraków’s decline. To be sure, kings of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth still came to Kraków to be crowned and, ultimately, to be buried. They found their final resting place on Wawel Hill: beneath the Polish Westminster, Wawel Cathedral, were the crypts containing the tombs of Polish royalty.

After the partitions of the late eighteenth century, Kraków nonetheless for a time served as a tiny successor to that enormous entity known as the Commonwealth: as the Free City of Kraków, tightly sandwiched in between the partitioned zones of Prussian Poland, Russian Poland and Austrian Poland, it attracted Poles, and trade, from the three partitions. But all had changed after the revolutionary events of 1846, which led to Kraków’s incorporation into the Habsburg province of Galicia. Kraków was demoted to the status of playing a weak second fiddle to Lemberg/Lwów/L’viv, the capital of Galicia. By the 1870s, Kraków – long since transformed into an Austrian garrison town--was a far cry from what it would be by the eve of World War I: the “Polish Rome,” the spiritual capital of Poland, and the quintessential Polish stage for national celebrations. Even into the 1880s,

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2 For more on Kraków’s fate, see, for example, Stanisław Windakiewicz, Dzieje Wawelu (Kraków: nakładem Krakowskiej Spółki Wydawniczej, 1925), esp. 160ff.
3 The rare non-royal was also buried there. In the early nineteenth century, the remains of two recently deceased military heroes were brought (translated) to the crypts: those of Tadeusz Kościuszko and Prince Józef Poniatowski.
as Kraków historian Jacek Purchla admits, it was “a center stunted, but awakening to life – a peculiar reservoir of old Poland frozen in time.”

One of the reasons why Kraków was “awakening to life” during this period was due to a series of commemorations of anniversaries that the Poles could construe as national. Commemorations of important dates from Polish history as well as significant individuals helped to construct a modern Polish nation in the half-century preceding World War I. They also helped to transform the city of Kraków – the seat of the overwhelming majority of these Polish celebrations – from Austrian garrison town to spiritual capital of Poland.

Various aspects of these large public celebrations can be seen as furthering a Polish national agenda in this quintessentially Polish city. That said, these nationally-oriented festivities were often fought by those who claimed within the province and city to represent the nation. Getting them off the ground was often difficult, even within the Habsburg province of Galicia and under the relatively benign rule of Emperor Franz Joseph. For even a city as full of the Polish past as Kraków was had been infused with Habsburg symbols: witness the transformation of the royal castle, so visible atop Wawel Hill, into a Habsburg military outpost. Hearts and minds likewise needed to be changed after decades of Habsburg rule. To be sure, Poles within Galicia were much freer than their brethren under Hohenzollern and Romanov rule next door. Yet the Polishness of many of them had been tempered by a knee-jerk Habsburg loyalism that kept them from being truly conscious Polish patriots. What would happen if Poles came to forget that they were Polish – if they complacently accepted foreign rule, even in a place like Kraków that had known it for but a

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short time? But forget they did not,—in part thanks to the commemorations that took place in the last third of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth.

In order better to give a sense of how this transformation from Habsburg backwater to imagined capital of Poland came to pass, let us begin by considering the commemoration that truly put Krakow back on the national stage: the 1879 jubilee of the Polish writer Józef Ignacy Kraszewski. It demonstrates how the opportunity to host a jubilee celebration led to the revitalization and subtle re-polonization of the urban environment. At the same time, it likewise shows how commemorations served to bring together Poles from the various empires and representing different visions of what it meant to be Polish.

That the city began its upward trajectory with the Kraszewski jubilee certainly would surprise those familiar with Galician politics. The dominant political group within the city at that time was the Kraków conservatives. The conservatives detested the liberal Kraszewski and thought his historical novels too positive about the Polish past. Furthermore, these local notables were no fans of public commemorations. Suspicious of popular opinion, the conservatives feared the malleability of the masses; they feared no less the rank-and-file Polish intelligentsia, easily excitable where matters of national sentiment were concerned. The conservatives thus opposed any acts that might incline the nation to indulge itself emotionally and jeopardize the relative well-being that Austria-Hungary afforded the Poles. They did not look kindly on any signs of Polishness that overstepped the bounds of quaint ethnic custom or linguistic prerogative allowed the Galicians by their emperor.⁶

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⁶The main points of the Kraków conservatives’ program have been laid out in Stanisław Estreicher, Znaczenie Krakowa dla życia narodowego polskiego w ciągu XIX wieku: Odczyt wypowiedziany w “Klubie Społecznym” w dniu 21 października 1931 roku (Kraków: W.L. Anczyca i spółki, 1931), 66-7.
How, then, did they come to celebrate Kraszewski? For celebrate they did, for a week in September 1879. Thousands of guests from outside Galicia as well as from the Habsburg province came to Kraków to commemorate the writer. And, as we shall see, the event made a mark on the city. By the end of the festivities, the commemoration was being praised for having “pulled decrepit Kraków” out of its “tight casket.”

The choice of “decrepit Kraków” as the locus of the big public commemoration of the writer’s jubilee may seem odd at first glance. It was even more puzzling, as Kraszewski had little connection to the city. He was not even a Habsburg subject. Rather, the writer was born in the eastern borderlands (kresy) and lived in Warsaw before moving, after the January Insurrection, to exile in Dresden. Yet the city had much to offer the Poles. Paradoxically, it turns out that Kraków’s main drawbacks – its marginality and backwardness – were likewise its greatest strengths. The fact that Kraków had been ignored for so long meant that the city maintained a direct connection to the historical past, still visible in the premodern layout of the city and its generally intact architectural ensemble. Wawel Hill, with its castle, cathedral, and crypts; the market square, with town hall tower, Cloth Hall (Sukiennice), and St. Mary’s; and the various narrow streets within the confines of the Planty (the green belt that sprouted where much of the medieval fortifications had once stood) all brought to mind the former Polish state and its previous glory. The very stones seemed to speak Polish to visitors from outside the region. That Kraków was not the provincial capital of the Habsburg crownland of Galicia but rather a remote outpost meant that the city was less permeated with imperial content; it had the potential to revive its

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8 That is, all but the Planty itself, the tearing down of medieval walls having been ordered by the occupying Habsburgs at the beginning of the century.
Polishness without having to compete with the dominant imperial idea that led, for example, to Lwów’s expansion and development under Habsburg rule.\(^9\)

The idea to celebrate Kraszewski in Kraków, incidentally, came not from the Kraków conservatives but from outside the province. Wishing to commemorate their colleague, the literati of Warsaw sought a possible venue for a large public celebration where Poles from the various partitioned lands could participate. Located near the intersection of the Hohenzollern, Romanov, and Habsburg empires and on a railway line, Kraków was well situated. And, as already suggested, there were other reasons to favor the city that had more to do with the atmosphere of the place in question.

The argument for Kraków was further strengthened by the city’s mayor, Mikołaj Zyblikiewicz. He offered to let the commemoration take place in Old Cloth Hall, which was in the process of being renovated. This large Renaissance hall in the center of Kraków’s main market square was the perfect place to hold the expected crowds. It also served as a pretext to get the Kraków conservatives to participate. For they were adamant about not having anything to do with Kraszewski. Several conservatives even considered absconding to Paris for the duration to avoid the celebration.\(^10\) Zyblikiewicz nonetheless thought that these local notables could be convinced to stay if the unveiling of the newly renovated Old Cloth Hall were scheduled for the same time. The dual commemoration, thus, would result in the full range of guests being present – some to fete Kraszewski, some to celebrate the renovation of Old Cloth Hall, and some to participate in both celebrations.


The festivities, thus, were from the very outset ambiguous. There was a tension between the two camps: one emphasizing urban renewal, the other national renewal. Mayor Zyblikiewicz somewhat precariously straddled the fence, dealing with each camp in turn and trying to turn the event into something that he could proudly take credit for.

Kraszewski was cognizant that the jubilee was only in part about himself. As he later acknowledged,

I am all too convinced that … nothing is happening for me, but rather for the Polish idea that stands above all of this. Advantage has been taken of cleverness, and the great unity of our nation, torn asunder for a hundred years, has manifested itself. It is beyond my understanding how it happened that no one attempted to prevent this. This has significance. I myself disappear entirely and do not credit myself with anything, but I am happy that I served as a pretext and, at least, a pretense for this great gathering.\(^\text{11}\)

Kraszewski saw his commemoration as transcending his own person and rallying the nation as a whole. It was the “Polish idea” and not his accomplishments that were being celebrated in Kraków. The speech he was to make in Old Cloth Hall had to be carefully crafted so as to be publishable in all the partitioned lands, so that he might speak to the nation in the name of the nation. Yet even Kraszewski, as a symbol, was in a way malleable: this is seen in the fact that someone in Vienna contrived the awarding of the Great Commander Cross of the Order of Franz Joseph to him, thus making it, if not obligatory, then desirable for all present in Kraków (including the conservatives) to fete him.\(^\text{12}\)


\(^{12}\)That award was all the more remarkable, given that Kraszewski was not a Habsburg subject.
Yet, despite such developments, not all segments of society took part in the jubilee celebration. Most notably absent were the clergy. Influential ultramontanes had demanded that the writer go to confession in Kraków before they would participate in the jubilee. Kraszewski’s anti-clerical stance and continued intransigence resulted in an odd balancing act, with each side holding its ground. This is best illustrated by the actions of the two main figures in this relationship, the newly consecrated bishop of Kraków, Albin Dunajewski, and Kraszewski. While Dunajewski blessed Old Cloth Hall (the event favored by the conservative and clerical camps), the liberal, anti-clerical writer proceeded to collect his imperial order from the authorities. The Kraków bishop then made his escape from what would be the scene of the main event of Kraszewski’s jubilee, which took place inside the freshly blessed building. Inside Cloth Hall, however, there was no question of who was being feted: Kraszewski was the recipient of the hundreds of gifts bestowed upon him by delegation after delegation from across the Polish lands and beyond.

The most significant “gift” of the festivities was not bestowed upon Kraszewski, although apparently it was inspired by him. The journalists present in Kraków had arranged for a festive dinner – not on the official schedule of events – to celebrate Kraszewski. It was said that “[n]ever before perhaps in such a tight space had such a mass of Polish

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13 This intransigence vis-à-vis the Church also resulted in peasants not being led en masse to the celebration by Father Stanisław Stojałowski, who had successfully led pilgrimages of peasants on other (religious) occasions. They might have been convinced to make such a national pilgrimage, had Stojałowski urged them to in his populist newspapers, Pszczółka and Wieniec.

14 It should be noted that the bishop would take part in other commemorations: for example, as a newly minted cardinal he led the church service in honor of the deceased poet Adam Mickiewicz, whose remains were placed in a crypt of Wawel Cathedral in 1890.

15 This was also clear from the numerous souvenirs available for purchase in Kraków during the festivities. Most of the commemorative medals, rings, portraits, even jubilee hats featured Kraszewski, not Old Cloth Hall. See, for example, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, 224642 V, 17, Rara; “Kronika miejscowa i zagraniczna,” Czas, 3 October 1879.

It should be noted that a pyramid of cabbages from the nearby village of Krowodrza was also a gift given to Kraszewski, which suggests that some peasants at least were aware of the jubilee. For more on peasant consciousness of the jubilee, see Dabrowski, Commemorations, 35-7.
intelligentsia gathered, such color and selection.” \(^{16}\) Those present included the renowned Polish artist, Henryk Siemiradzki. Not a Cracovian, Siemiradzki hailed from the eastern borderlands (kresy), although since 1872 he had made a living as an artist in Rome. During the course of the dinner, Siemiradzki—making a toast—stunned the audience by offering his most recent painting of note, Nero’s Torches, to the homeland. \(^{17}\) Despite the classical subject of the enormous canvas—the burning of Christians at the stake, in the sight of Nero and his court—the painting spoke to the partitioned Polish nation and its plight. Poles identified with the early Christians, persecuted by the Romans, and hoped for a similarly happy ending: for, despite their persecution, the Christians ultimately inherited the empire. By donating this painting, Siemiradzki thus encouraged his compatriots—albeit obliquely—not to lose hope. And that was how the painting ultimately was understood, if a police report on one of the unofficial dinners is to be believed. \(^{18}\)

This so-called “royal gift” of Siemiradzki’s inspired a veritable wave of responses on the part of other Poles present in Kraków for the festivities. \(^{19}\) Of greatest significance for the city, Mayor Zyblikiewicz accepted the painting in the name of the nation and offered the second floor of the newly renovated Old Cloth Hall as the site for a National Museum. Nero’s Torches, thus, would serve as a figurative cornerstone for the museum. The following day, other Poles decided to offer works for the new museum, which was well on its way to being established.

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\(^{17}\) The word used was the somewhat ambiguous kraj, which can be rendered as “crownland” or “province” (here, referring to Galicia) or “country” (where the reference would be to the non-existent Poland).

\(^{18}\) For more on the message of hope, see Księga pamiątkowa jubileusz J.I. Kraszewskiego 1879 roku (Kraków: nakładem komitetu wydawniczego, 1881), 81-2. A discussion of the true significance of Siemiradzki’s painting can be found in a police report on the dinner at the Sharpshooters’ Hall later that week (Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie, DPKr 24, 703/pr/79).

\(^{19}\) The words of the president of the Society of Fine Arts, Count Henryk Wodzicki cited in Księga pamiątkowa, 81-2.
All of these deeds helped to lend an unambiguously Polish national note to the festivities. Even the efforts of the conservatives could not counter the effect of Siemiradzki’s initiative. (Indeed, one of the conservatives gave a speech after Siemiradzki’s toast in which he tried to quench the ardor of those patriots.\textsuperscript{20}) Despite their influence within the city and within Galicia, the Kraków conservatives—with the exception of Zyblickiewicz\textsuperscript{21}—were shown to be only bit players in the larger national narrative. Perhaps they could keep the masses of the Polish intelligentsia from becoming over-excited; they nonetheless could not subdue the patriotic fervor of the crowds, who desired more such celebrations. In a letter to our “beloved Kraków brothers,” a group of jubilee guests published their wish that Kraków experience more such times in which such an atmosphere of hearts and minds, such splendor and celebration, such a … joyful and sublime life … should be no longer only an exceptional, extraordinary occurrence, but might enter into the common mode, having become the natural and necessary result of the situation and the need of the nation.\textsuperscript{22}

And, indeed, more would be in the offing in the following years and decades, the “age of Polish commemorations.”\textsuperscript{23} Ultimately, the Kraków conservatives would learn that their best tactic was not to decry, let alone avoid, the festivities but rather to take on a leadership

\textsuperscript{20} This was historian Józef Szujski. The text of his speech was published in “Obchód w Krakowie jubileuszu pięćdziesięcioletniej pracy literackiej J.I. Kraszewskiego,” Czas, 7 October 1879, and is discussed in Dabrowski, Commemorations, 43.

\textsuperscript{21} Although he, too, continued to straddle the fence between the two camps. For more on this as well as on the amazing career of this fascinating individual, see Dabrowski, Commemorations, chap. 1.

\textsuperscript{22}“Kochani bracia Krakowianie!” (signed Goście Jubileuszowi—“Jubilee Guests”) (Kraków: nakł. zbiorowym, druk. W. L. Anczyca i sp., 1879); Biblioteka Jagiellońska, 224642 V Rara, 52.

\textsuperscript{23} Dabrowski, Commemorations, 18.
role once it became evident that Polish society was intent upon celebrating a given event or person.  

Although the festivities came to an end, the commemorations continued to reverberate. A visit of Kraszewski to Emperor Franz Joseph in Vienna apparently prompted another important development in Kraków: the restoration of Wawel Castle as royal (imperial) residence, to which the emperor agreed the following year. This move, initiated once again by a non-Galician, helped to reinvigorate the city; it played down its status as garrison town and played up its status as the spiritual capital of Poland. Indeed, the entrance of nationally conscious Poles into the Austrian garrison town helped to highlight its Polishness. Whereas back home in Russia or Germany they could only dream of holding such celebrations, here in Galicia—in Kraków—it was possible to act in patriotic ways.

These Polish patriots—and those who were to come to Kraków in the ensuing decades--were as much inspired by the medieval city as by the celebrations that took place in it. Certainly Siemiradzki’s experience of the newly refurbished Old Cloth Hall inclined the artist to offer his painting to be housed there. Both the new National Museum and Wawel Hill, with its complex of historic buildings, served as big draws for Polish pilgrims and helped to refocus Cracovians in national ways. Thus, despite the fact that Kraków’s notables were still not ready, in 1879, for their city to assume publicly the role of Polish spiritual capital, the jubilee celebration of Kraszewski and the concomitant influx of outsiders injected an important national note into the city.

24 For how the conservatives seized control over the translation, in 1890, of the remains of Polish Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz from Paris to Kraków, see ibid., 85ff.
25 For more on the Kraszewski connection here, see Henryk Wereszycki, “Międzynarodowe echa jubileuszu Kraszewskiego w 1879 roku,” Dzieje Najnowsze 6 (1974), no. 3: 3. This process nonetheless took decades: Wawel Castle did not pass into Polish control until 1905.
26 Already for the Kraszewski jubilee, a new guidebook to Kraków had been published; one assumes that outsiders sought to learn more about the historic city during their stay.
Further commemorations, desired by the jubilee visitors, continued to contribute to Kraków’s national reinvigoration. Other central spaces were acquiring new national meaning. This can be seen through the proliferation of commemorative tablets and monuments over the next years. A particularly rich year for these was 1883, the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the Relief of Vienna: tablets on St. Mary’s and the Carmelite Church at Piaski as well as a free-standing monument to Sobieski in the Sharpshooters’ park were all erected. Nonetheless, Kraków’s most famous monument is doubtless the one commemorating the poet Adam Mickiewicz that graces the main market square, adjacent to Old Cloth Hall. It was erected in 1898, the centenary of the poet’s birth.

The monument to Adam Mickiewicz in Kraków almost never saw the light of day—and this after literally decades of being planned. Funds for the monument were already being collected at the time of the Kraszewski jubilee, among other things, and by 1883 nearly 100,000 guldens had been amassed—a huge amount for the stateless Poles. Despite this incredible national largesse, two thorny problems emerged: the shape that the monument was to take as well as its location. As regards the first dilemma, three highly contested competitions held in the 1880s produced no model that any of the juries (let along popular opinion) could fully agree upon. The result was a monument that was deemed an artistic disaster. This can be seen from an interchange at the 1898 unveiling between Mickiewicz’s son Władysław and Stanislaw Badeni, the Galician provincial marshal.


Asked how he liked the fussy bronze monument, Mickiewicz replied, “It’s very bad,” to which Badeni responded, “It could have been worse.” The latter was right. Badeni was part of the committee that had demanded that the original bronze head of the poet be recast: its laurel wreath resulted in Mickiewicz looking more like an Indian chief than a classical hero. Yet even that did not do much, as we see, to fix the monument—still on view in Kraków’s main square today.

The second problem—its location—was only somewhat more easily resolved. For where should one put a monument to Poland’s preeminent poet? The broader Polish public on the whole favored the site of Kraków’s main market place, next to Old Cloth Hall. The heart of the city should be designated for the poet dearest to Polish hearts. But this choice was not immediately obvious to Cracovians and/or other Galician Poles. After all, Mickiewicz had no connection with Kraków, hailing instead (like Kraszewski) from the eastern kresy (borderlands). This situation resulted in a number of less central squares—some not even yet built!—to be suggested as more appropriate places for this “foreigner.” Ultimately, however, the municipality refused to reconfigure a corner of the verdant ring around the medieval city, the so-called Planty, to hold the monument and forced the committee to abide by the earlier decision that placed Mickiewicz in the central market square. Even today, the Mickiewicz monument in Kraków remains a well-known Polish landmark—a place where Poles traditionally agree to meet.

However, the most successful commemoration involved the unveiling of a different bronze monument. It took place on the occasion of the largest of all prewar

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29 Władysław Mickiewicz, Pamiętniki (Warsaw: nakład Gebethnera i Wolffa, 1933), 3: 368.
30 That is, in its reproduced form. For the monument had been destroyed by the Germans during World War II. It was rebuilt, just as it had been, after the war.
31 More details on the poet’s potential peregrinations can be found in Dabrowski, Commemorations, 137-143.
commemorations in 1910, the five hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald. This time, the monument was not the result of endless committees and competitions but rather the outright gift of a single Pole, the pianist Ignacy Jan Paderewski. Paderewski commissioned the work from a young Polish artist, Antoni Wiwulski, and kept the design secret—perhaps to avoid the complaints and criticism that so colored the Mickiewicz monument preparations. Local and provincial authorities likewise decided where to place the monument: in Matejko Square. Although not in the heart of the medieval city, it too was a choice location: Matejko Square was directly across from the Barbakan (Barbican), which marked the entrance to the medieval city via Florian Gate. Given the fact that so little was known about the monument, its unveiling—before throngs of Poles, with a choir bursting out in song—was quite dramatic. Furthermore, the fact that a single Pole had been responsible for a work of that magnitude kept the Polish masses properly in awe. The unveiling, and Paderewski’s speech that followed, were the highlight of the 1910 festivities. Once again, a Pole hailing from the eastern borderlands had left a distinct mark on Kraków.

Another way the city was revitalized nationally was through the permanent influx of nationally conscious Poles. While, as Jacek Purchla has argued, many Polish notables came to make Kraków their home, one can also argue for the significance of the translation of the illustrious dead.32 For within a year of the Kraszewski jubilee, the crypt of the church of Saint Stanisław at Skalka was transformed into a national pantheon. First to be solemnly reburied there was the medieval chronicler Jan Długosz; he was followed, in quick succession, by other “persons of merit in the nation.”33 Within the decade, even

33 See Pamiętnik pierwszego zjazdu historycznego polskiego im. Jana Długosza, odbytego w Krakowie w 400-tną rocznicę jego śmierci (Kraków: nakładem Akademii Umiejętności, 1881), 14.
Kraszewski would find his final resting place in this spot, his funeral yet another big event in Kraków. In addition, the Wawel crypts were soon (in 1890) augmented by the remains of another illustrious Pole: the poet Adam Mickiewicz.\footnote{The translation of his remains to the Wawel crypts is the subject of Dabrowski, Commemorations, chap. 3.}

Once again, the Poles’ desire to honor Mickiewicz encountered countless roadblocks on the way. Not the least of these concerned the special national significance of the Wawel crypts. They, after all, housed the tombs of Poland’s royalty—a Polish Westminster, as it were. Mere mortals—certainly poets—were not to be countenanced for burial there. They could find their final resting place in the Skałka crypt (doubtless why it was so designated). However, precedent for a Wawel burial had been set during Kraków’s brief period of independence as the Free City of Kraków in the first half of the nineteenth century. At that time, Cracovians had seen fit to entomb two outstanding Polish military leaders, Tadeusz Kościuszko and Prince Józef Poniatowski, in the Wawel crypts. If Polish military leaders could be buried in the Wawel crypts, the reasoning went, so too could the spiritual leader of the Poles, Adam Mickiewicz. (For, while I have not gone into his biography here, Mickiewicz was widely recognized not only as Poland’s preeminent poet but as a leader of the nation at a time when more traditional figures failed it.)

Ultimately it took the exertions of students to overcome official Galician foot-dragging and make arrangements for Mickiewicz’s remains to be transported from Paris to Kraków. Despite their efforts, the students were eventually relegated to a small auxiliary role as pallbearers during the celebration, the authorities having managed to wrest control over the festivities from them, ostensibly in order to lend to the funeral the necessary gravitas that only the elected officials of the nation (read: the Habsburg realm) could do. A
newly consecrated Cardinal Dunajewski—the same clergyman who would not celebrate Kraszewski in 1879—presided over the funeral. One might thus speak of the triumph of provincial secular and religious leaders over those who had fought for decades to bring Mickiewicz “home.”

It was nonetheless a glorious and festive—if solemn—day, rich in color, song, and impressions. The procession preceding the catafalque, which made its way through the center of the town to Wawel Hill, contained representatives over a hundred different organizations bearing wreaths, and many onlookers were also decked out in Polish national dress. Included in the procession was a delegation of peasants—one of the first signs that they felt themselves to be sons and daughters of the formerly noble nation. With their forty-four wreaths of grasses and grains from all over the Polish lands, they spelled out the message: “To Adam Mickiewicz from the folk of all the lands of Poland.” Others trumpeted other messages that stated their relation to the great poet.

The general public seemed to be moved by the funeral, which offered an occasion for collective national mourning. As one individual later reminisced, “everyone, the rich and the poor, the old and the young, felt as brothers, children of a common mother, to whom with certainty they had never felt love so strongly as in that moment.”35 Despite the fact that each participant could see but little of the entire funeral, each felt part of something much bigger than him- or herself. The streets of Kraków appeared to be full of such sentiments that day.

Which brings me to yet another way the city’s connection to Polishness was strengthened. In addition to the public space occupied in the course of the near ubiquitous

35 Marya Ploderówna, “Dzień 4-go lipca r. 1890 w Krakowie (Wspomnienie),” Wiek Młody 6, no. 10 (20 May 1898): 87-8.
procession accompanying each commemoration, Cracovians invested other spaces with new meaning. For example, the commons known as the Błonia became the site of commemorative activities in 1910: during the Grunwald anniversary, the Polish gymnastic society known as the Falcons held synchronized gymnastic exercises on that expanse of land. Also worth noting was the outdoor mass celebrated there as part of the festivities. It set the precedent for a similarly well-attended event: a mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II during his first visit to Poland as pope in 1979. Thus one can say that the events of the half-century before World War I helped to make Kraków a favored spot for national pilgrimages.

So much for the transformation of Kraków via the celebration of national anniversaries. It took such events such as the Kraszewski jubilee, initially sponsored by non-Cracovians, to transform this “reservoir of old Poland“ into a living, breathing center of a new, modernizing Polish nation. Local fears were initially overcome by cleverly combining a celebration of urban renewal (the renovation of Old Cloth Hall) with the commemoration that was to initiate national renewal. This allowed the local to be infused with new national content much earlier than would otherwise have been possible, given the rule of the Kraków conservatives.

The city of Kraków had much to offer those who chose to celebrate the nation via commemorations and their offshoots. New uses were found for historic (old) places and spaces. This was seen in the transformation of Old Cloth Hall into a site of commemorations as well as the home for a new National Museum, in the reclaiming of Wawel Castle as royal residence under Polish (not Austrian military) control, and in the

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36 The present pope, Benedict XVI, celebrated mass there during his 2006 visit to Poland.
transformation of Skałka into a Polish pantheon. Yet other spaces were nationally „marked“ with tablets and monuments, or otherwise put to temporary use during the commemorative processions and other large public events. Such events would help to set the stage for public commemorations and celebrations in Kraków in the decades, even centuries, to come.

Patrice M. Dabrowski (Ph.D. Harvard University, 1999) is the author of Commemorations and the Shaping of Modern Poland (Indiana University Press, 2004). Her most recent articles (several of them prize-winning) have appeared in Austrian History Yearbook; East Central Europe, L’Europe du Centre-Est. Eine wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift; and Slavic Review, and she has authored chapters in a number of edited volumes, including Capital Cities in the Aftermath of Empires: Planning in Central and Southeastern Europe (Routledge, 2010). Dabrowski’s current book-length projects include a second monograph, tentatively entitled “Discovering” the Carpathians: Episodes in Imagining and Reshaping Alpine Borderland Regions, and a popular history of Poland. She currently teaches Central and East European history at the University of Massachusetts Amherst under the auspices of the Amesbury Professorship of Polish Language, Literature and Culture, and for several summers has served as Director of the Harvard Ukrainian Summer Institute.