

“Noble Rivalry Between People of Good Will” How Citizens Created the National Museum in Warsaw¹

The National Museum in Warsaw, the greatest and, at the same time, one of the oldest museum collections in Poland, is still sometimes perceived as an institution stemming from the tradition of state centralism or even as emanation of bureaucratic capital-city-centralism.² This stereotype of an anachronistic, oversized and ungovernable institution that stained the Museum’s image over the years – and keeping in mind that until recently, also the image of all Polish museums in the popular view that used to be prevalent in the media – resulted among other factors from the continuity break in historical memory that occurred during the communist period in Poland that erased from the national memory the awareness that the Museum came to being – owing to donations and efforts of individual citizens.

Since the very beginning of its existence, and in the period 1916–1939 in particular, the Museum formed and expanded its collection mostly on the basis of donations and bequests of thousands of Poles, either based in the country or dispersed abroad, who gifted works of art as well as their entire collections, the latter ones not rarely having been amassed with the intention of enriching the future or emerging national collection. According to a preliminary, modest estimation, out of more than 140,000 objects collected in the NMW before the Second World War, about 70–80 percent were donated by private persons and various social institutions.³

Krzysztof Pomian’s model of museum classification according to the genesis of their collection permits to categorise the NMW as an euergetic museum.⁴ Though its predecessor – the Museum of Fine Arts – was established in 1862 at the instigation of the authorities

¹ This text is an expanded version of a lecture read at the National Museum in Warsaw on 13 June 2012 as part of the event series accompanying the NMW’s 150th Anniversary. For the quote – see n. 40.

² For an extensive discussion on the topic of the stigma of the state centralism burdening the image of Warsaw museums – see Andrzej Rottermund, “Muzealnictwo warszawskie. Próba charakterystyki,” in *200 lat muzealnictwa warszawskiego. Dzieje i perspektywy. Materiały sesji naukowej, Zamek Królewski w Warszawie, 16–17 listopada 2005 roku* (Warsaw, 2006), pp. 36–37.

³ I would like to thank Roman Olkowski, until 2012, deputy of the NMW Chief Registrar, for his consultation.

⁴ Krzysztof Pomian, *Zbieracze i osobliwości. Paryż–Wenecja XVI–XVIII wiek* (Warsaw, 1996), p. 324 (1st edition: *Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux. Paris, Venise. XVI^e–XVIII^e siècle* [Paris, 1987]). The term *euergeticism* (adj. *euergetic*, from Greek εὐεργετέω – ‘benefactor of the city’), introduced by Pomian to international museological literature, was for the first time used by André Boulanger in his dissertation *Aelius Aristide et la sophistique dans la province d’Asie au II^e siècle de notre ère* (Paris, 1923; 2nd ed. 1968). This term was also employed by Henri-Irénée Marrou in his work *Histoire de l’éducation dans l’Antiquité* (Paris, 1948). The term became widespread owing to Paul Veyne’s acclaimed book *Le pain et le cirque. Sociologie historique d’un pluralisme politique* (Paris, 1976).

at the government level,⁵ it seems obvious that in the context of Poland partitioned among three neighbouring states this founding act pursued aspirations of the then Polish society.⁶ A society that was devoid not only of its state, but, unlike other European countries, also the legacy of the royal collections which could have become the nucleus of a national public gallery. Characteristically, the nucleus of the collection of the newly-founded institution were, among others, 30 paintings amassed by a civil servant from Warsaw, Piotr Fiorentini, originally bequeathed to the School of Fine Arts and transferred to the Museum in 1879. Today's museum public would certainly find it difficult to believe that the very existence of the Museum (first renamed as the National Museum of the Capital City of Warsaw, then the National Museum in Warsaw),⁷ was put in jeopardy because of the authorities' restrictions and obstacles presented by Tsar's officials. Throughout the pioneering period, it would be repeatedly closed down, with its collections transferred to makeshift storerooms. In the course of almost 25 years (1876–1900), they remained inaccessible to the public, and, as revealed by modern-day calculations, in the years 1862–1938 they would be removed to various buildings as many as 50 times.⁸ The euergetic genesis and the scale of commitment of its donors distinguishes the NMW among the majority of European national museums, as it appears closer to the philanthropic tradition of creating museum collections in the USA, like for instance the National Gallery in Washington or the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The donors of the Warsaw Museum came from all social classes – from landowners and bourgeoisie to impoverished town dwellers; there were also workers⁹ as well as peasant

⁵ The Act of Public Education and Upbringing in the Kingdom of Poland of 20 May 1862 was passed at the instigation of the director of the Commission of Denominations and Public Education in the Kingdom of Poland, Aleksander Wielopolski. By virtue of the Act, the SGH (Warsaw School of Economics) was founded, the Central Library was established on the basis of the reformed Government Library, and the School of Fine Arts underwent reorganization.

⁶ The social background and the exceptional unanimous collaboration of a large group of citizens promoting the foundation of the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts (*Zachęta*) in Warsaw in 1860 is emphasized by Agnieszka Morawińska – see "Zachęta. Inicjatywa obywatelska," in *200 lat muzealnictwa warszawskiego...*, op. cit., pp. 235–36.

⁷ "The Museum of Fine Arts was primarily [in 1916] suggested to be renamed as the 'Museum of the Capital City of Warsaw,' and then – as the 'Polish Museum.' While the variant 'Polish Museum' began to be used on forms, it was not sustained, and the name 'National Museum' was returned, whose traditions harked back to the year of the Museum's establishment – 1862. The final decision was certainly inspired by the name of the Krakow National Museum founded in 1879, whose main goal was collecting works of art and relics of the past that were either Polish or related to Poland, which was impossible in Warsaw [under Russian government]. [...] What was implied by the name 'National Museum' in the period of partitions of Poland was that it not only gathered chiefly works of Polish art and culture, but also that it was created by the Polish nation and not by the government, foreign at that time, and that it was financed due to public fundraising and donations of works of art and relics of the past." After: Stanisław Lorentz, "Dzieje Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie," *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, Ann. 6 (1962), pp. 24–25.

⁸ Dorota Folga-Januszewska, "Muzeum Sztuk Pięknych i Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie w latach 1862–2004," in *200 lat muzealnictwa warszawskiego...*, op. cit., p. 62.

⁹ One example of a donation made to the Museum by a worker would be the set of marble sculptures and fragments of decoration robbed in 1656 by Swedish troops from the Kazimierz Palace in Warsaw, accidentally discovered and pulled up from the bottom of the Vistula in 1910, donated by the sand miner Waldemar Paś in March 1939 to the then-organized Museum of Old Warsaw. The NMW Director, Stanisław Lorentz, deeply impressed by Paś' patriotic stance and moved by his dramatic financial situation, addressed the city hall in a bid to find employment for Paś – see NMW Archive (further on referred to as: ANMW), Dokumentacja darów [Documentation of donations], teka [file]: Dary P, 1916–1939, sygn. 320/55,teczka [folder]: Dar Paś Władysław [Donation of Paś Władysław], Letter from S. Lorentz to the director of the Personnel Department of the Municipal Government in the Capital City of Warsaw, 11 April 1939. See also: "Cenne rzeźby z pałacu Kazimierzowskiego znaleziono na dnie Wisły. Cenny dar dla Muzeum Narodowego," *Gazeta Polska*, no. 69 (10 March 1939), p. 8.

farmers. The thick volume *Ofiarodawcy Muzeum* [Museum Donors]¹⁰ (fig. 1), recording their names in the years 1857–1936, lists multiple landowners, like the print collector and art patron Dominik Witke-Jeżewski¹¹ or the numismatic collector Count Kazimierz Sobański¹²; particularly numerous intellectuals: humanists (e.g., philosopher and editor of the Universal Encyclopaedia, Seweryn Smolikowski),¹³ lawyers (e.g., painting collector Stanisław Krajewski); physicians (e.g., sigillographer Witold Żurkowski),¹⁴ engineers (e.g., architect Stefan Szyller)¹⁵ and artists (e.g., painter Leon Wyczółkowski) (fig. 1). There are eminent politicians, e.g., Ignacy Jan Paderewski¹⁶; diplomats (collector of medieval art, member of the information bureau of the League of Nations in Geneva, Stanisław Neyman),¹⁷ emigrant activists (e.g., Paris-based librarian and collector of *polonica*, Władysław A. Strzembosz)¹⁸; army officers (e.g., collector of old prints, General Stefan Dembiński),¹⁹ industrialists (e.g., co-creator of Polish arms and railway industries and connoisseur of modern graphic art, Leopold Wellisz)²⁰ and craftsmen, like for instance the famous master of artistic smithery, Roman Szewczykowski.²¹ Among the creators of the Museum's collection we will encounter representatives of various denominations and people of diverse viewpoints: socialists – e.g., the PPS [Polish Socialist Party] deputy Adam Pragier,²² and adherents of the National Democrats –

¹⁰ "Ofiarodawcy Muzeum" [1857–1936], NMW, Inventory Department, MS. Following the ultimate realization of Fiorentini's last will, the volume begins with his bequest that precedes in time the year when the Museum was established. More on the topic of the history of the Museum and its collection including key donations and purchases – see Stanisław Lorentz, "Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie. Zarys historyczny," *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, Ann. 1 (1938), pp. 1–65.

¹¹ Piotr P. Czyż, "Dominik Witke-Jeżewski (1862–1944)," in *Miłośnicy grafiki i ich kolekcje w zbiorach Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, Anna Grochala, ed., exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw, 2006 (Warsaw, 2006), pp. 106–56. See also: Beata Gadowska, "Działalność publiczna i donatorska Dominika Witke-Jeżewskiego w świetle literatury i archiwaliów ze zbioru Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie," in *Polskie kolekcjonerstwo grafiki. Ludzie i instytucje*, Ewa Frąckowiak, Anna Grochala, eds (Warsaw, 2008), pp. 60–69.

¹² Lorentz, *Muzeum Narodowe...*, op. cit., pp. 23, 62–63.

¹³ Joanna Sikorska, "Seweryn Smolikowski (1850–1920)," in *Miłośnicy grafiki...*, op. cit., pp. 160–90.

¹⁴ "Notices nécrologiques: Witold Żurkowski," in *Huitième Congrès de la Société internationale de chirurgie. Varsovie, 22–25 juillet 1929* (Bruxelles, 1929), p. 120.

¹⁵ I.a., Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Trajan's Column in Rome*, c. 1774–75, etching, inv. no. Gr.Ob.W.176434 MNW, donation of Stefan Szyller of 1932, The Digital National Museum in Warsaw [online], at: <http://www.cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/dmuseion/docmetadata?id=4293&show_nav=true>, [retrieved: 11 April 2019].

¹⁶ *Paderewski*, Joanna Bojarska-Cieślak, Magdalena Pinker, Joanna Popkowska, eds, exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw, 2018 (Warsaw, 2018).

¹⁷ Paulina Ratkowska, "Trois chapiteaux romains dans la collection du Musée national de Varsovie," *Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie*, Ann. 13, n° 1 (1972), pp. 35–53.

¹⁸ Marcin Romeyko-Hurko, "Władysław Alojzy Strzembosz (1875–1917)," in *Miłośnicy grafiki...*, op. cit., pp. 238–64.

¹⁹ Joanna A. Tomicka, "Stefan Dembiński (1887–1972)," in *Miłośnicy grafiki...*, op. cit., pp. 306–36.

²⁰ Ewa Milicer, "Leopold Wellisz (1882–1972)," in *Miłośnicy grafiki...*, op. cit., pp. 268–302.

²¹ Małgorzata Białostocka, "Żeliwne dekoracje w twórczości Romana Szewczykowskiego," *Ochrona Zabytków*, no. 4 (2006), p. 51. Ryszard Bobrow, "Początki kolekcji sztuki dekoracyjnej w Muzeum Narodowym w Warszawie" [online], in *Muzeum w polskiej kulturze pamięci (do 1918 r.). Wczesne instytucje muzealne wobec muzeologii cyfrowej*, Copernicus University in Toruń, 2018, at: <<http://muzeumpamieci.umk.pl/?p=3009>>, [retrieved: 11 April 2019].

²² From the donation of Adam Pragier, i.a., the works of Wyczółkowski – see The Digital National Museum in Warsaw [online], at: <http://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/dmuseion/results?action=AdvancedSearchAction&type=3&search_attid=14&search_value=Pragier%2C+Adam+Szymon+%281886-1976%29+&kolekcja&skipSearch=false>, [retrieved: 11 April 2019].

just to cite the Paris-based journalist and diplomat Kazimierz Woźnicki²³; assimilated Jews, e.g., writer and expert on Romanticism, Leopold Méyet²⁴; Roman Catholic priests, like Canon Józef Mrozowski²⁵; Evangelicals – Judge Jakub Glass²⁶; freemasons – e.g., Piotr Fiorentini,²⁷ or theosophists – Mieczysław Geniusz.²⁸ Donations streamed in to the Museum not only from Warsaw and major Polish cities like Lviv and Krakow, but also from the remote provincial estates in Kresy (Eastern Borderlands). The institution in the making could count on the support of Poles living in traditional emigrant centres in Europe – St Petersburg, Paris, Geneva, Rome, London, but also of the fellow countrymen settled in the remotest corners of the world: Turkey, Egypt, the USA, Mexico, China or Japan.²⁹

The actual significance of private donations may be demonstrated through the examples of the most famous paintings which constitute today's Museum image and identity and which have since been rooted in public memory as part of tradition and artistic canon providing a link between successive generations. Owing to the generosity of the donors, the following outstanding paintings can today be cited as public property: Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' *Academic Study of a Male Nude*³⁰ (donation of Cyprian Lachnicki, 1908) (**fig. 2**), Aleksander Gieryski's *Sand Miners*³¹ (donation of Zofia Gajkiewicz, née Hulewicz, 1920), Daniel Schultz's *Portrait of King John II Casimir*³² (donation of Antoni Strzałecki, 1929), Władysław Ślewiński's *Two Breton Women with a Basket of Apples*³³ (donation of Alina and Jakub Glass, 1935), Józef Chełmoński's *Partridges*³⁴ (donation of Zdzisław Jasiński, 1946), Leon Wyczółkowski's *Fishermen*³⁵ (donation of Stanisław Krajewski, 1946) or Willem Claesz Heda's *Dessert. Still Life with a Pie, Wine, Beer and Nuts*³⁶ (donation of Edward Raczyński and his family of 1991). The aforementioned bequest of Mr and Mrs Glass is a telling example how much value can be brought to a gallery through a single family collection. The bequest made to the Museum included, among other objects, 46 paintings: six other oils by Ślewiński,

²³ Marcin Romeyko-Hurko, "Kazimierz Woźnicki (1878–1949)," in *Miłośnicy grafiki...*, op. cit., pp. 194–234.

²⁴ Piotr P. Czyż, "Leopold Méyet (1850–1912)," in *Miłośnicy grafiki...*, op. cit., pp. 42–72.

²⁵ Jadwiga Marlewska, "Pinakoteka plocka i jej twórca," *Notatki Płockie*, 34/2–139 (1989), pp. 32–40.

²⁶ *Wystawa darów i nabytków I, 1935–1936*, exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw, September 1936 (Warsaw, 1936), p. 10.

²⁷ For Fiorentini's bequest, see Lorentz, *Muzeum Narodowe...*, op. cit., p. 5.

²⁸ Aleksandra Majewska, "'Wątek egiptologiczny' w życiorysie Mieczysława Geniusza," *Światowit*, vol. 42, fasc. A (1999), pp. 77–83.

²⁹ For information on Museum's donors and the list of persons and institutions that deposited archive materials at the NMW in the period 1917–1951 that includes those who donated or deposited manuscripts exclusively, amounting to 190 names and 16 institutions – see Czesława Sadkowska, "Zbiór materiałów rękopiśmiennych przekazanych z Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie do Archiwum Głównego Akt Dawnych w Warszawie," *Archeion*, vol. 45 (1967), pp. 113–117, 121–124.

³⁰ Inv. no. M.Ob.292 MNW.

³¹ Inv. no. MP 962 MNW.

³² Inv. no. MP 2448 MNW.

³³ Inv. no. MP 106 MNW.

³⁴ Inv. no. MP 424 MNW.

³⁵ Inv. no. MP 4751 MNW.

³⁶ Inv. no. M.Ob.583 MNW.

ten works by Stanisław Wyspiański, six by Witold Wojtkiewicz, two by Jan Stanisławski as well as single pieces by Julian Fałat, Wojciech Gerson, Konrad Krzyżanowski, Józef Mehoffer, Józef Pankiewicz, Wojciech Weiss and other artists.

The scale of generosity is also worth observing in a broader perspective. The aforementioned record book of the Museum donors contains more than 2800 records, among which names of private persons prevail, though institutions and organizations are also numerous.³⁷ The pages documenting the first 50 years of the Museum's existence feature only single records, with their number dramatically soaring since 1916 – that is, the moment when the Museum acquired its first permanent quarters on Podwale Street. In the following years, the number never dropped under 100 donors, oscillating between 110–190 donors per year. The second dramatic growth marks the year 1928 – shortly after the beginning of the construction of the new building on Aleja 3 Maja. The analysis of this interesting document reveals a significant drop – the only one in the entire interwar period – of the number of donors in the years 1930 and 1931 to the lowest level from 1916 (101 and 100, respectively), which may be interpreted as an obvious symptom of the Great Crisis. Interestingly, in the course of the following years, still on the bottom of economic recession, the number of donors reached its maximum: 191 in 1932. This listing testifies to a permanent influx of donations (in the course of 20 years, statistically one donation every two or three days).

The contributions of individual citizens of reborn Poland as well as purchases made by municipal authorities and subsidies from research institutes produced visible effects.³⁸ Whereas in 1898 the Museum possessed few more than 700 objects, in the years 1915–25 – at the dawn of Polish independence – the collection grew to be almost 80 times larger (from c. 1200 to more than 100,000 objects), to reach more than 145,000 inventory items in 1938.³⁹

As a response to this wave of enthusiasm, two large exhibitions were held in the newly constructed museum wing, shortly after the position of the Museum director was assumed by Stanisław Lorentz. The first *Exhibition of Donations and Purchases* shown from October 1936 through January 1937 presented the major collections acquired in the years 1935–36. The exhibition catalogue included profiles of selected donations and purchases as well as words of acknowledgement which are definitely worth citing: “The guarantee of putting the donations into proper use for the sake of the greater good of our national culture will undoubtedly be a factor enhancing generosity which will possibly assume forms of noble rivalry between people of good will. The more we are prompted to highlight the merits of those

³⁷ Because of its commemorative character, the document only includes annual lists of subjects, without the extent or description of a given donation. It is worth adding that individual donors oftentimes donated several gifts throughout one year, which means that the data contained in the volume should not be identified with the amount of donations, whose precise number would require much more detailed archival-statistical research on acquisitions.

³⁸ In the years 1916–38, the NMW allocated 3.5 million zlotys in total for purchases of works of art. The highest annual subsidy for this purpose – 0.5 million zlotys was granted to the Museum in 1925 – see Lorentz, *Muzeum Narodowe...*, op. cit., p. 53. The Museum was financially supported by, i.a., the Józef Mianowski Fund that subsidized the activities of the Iconographic Archive in the years 1916–18 – see Katarzyna Mączewska, “Bronisława Gembarzewskiego Archiwum Ikonograficzne i jego rysownicy w latach 1914–1923 / Bronisław Gembarzewski's Iconographic Archive and Its Draughtsmen in the Years 1914–23,” *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie. Nowa Seria / Journal of the National Museum in Warsaw. New Series*, 7(43) (2018), pp. 11–57. The policy of building a well-thought-out collection was supported by special financial gifts, e.g. from Władysława Reynel or Stanisław Neyman – see *Wystawa darów i nabytków I, 1935–1936*, exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw, 1936 (Warsaw, 1936), p. 5.

³⁹ Lorentz, *Muzeum Narodowe...*, op. cit., pp. 14, 23, 46, 61–63.

who have donated so far, refusing to be discouraged by housing difficulties or insufficient storerooms, hurrying to donate for the public good either their entire collections – that sometimes have been the outcome and purpose of a collector's entire lifetime, if not a work of several generations – or relatively minor objects, oftentimes a precious heirloom testifying to the culture of past centuries. [...] Their noble generosity will always shine as a brilliant example for the next generations of donors, for those whose share will be to conclude this great work, born of the love of the eternal spiritual values contained in works of art and culture, and of the civil comprehension of the necessity of sharing these values with the broadest possible layers of the nation."⁴⁰

Opened several months later, lasting from June to July 1937, the second *Exhibition of Donations and Purchases* was in a great measure devoted to the collection of prints of Dominik Witke-Jeżewski and the porcelain collection purchased from Ryszard Stanisław Ryszard. It is worth emphasizing that the exhibition catalogue featured a personal statement by the latter collector. Commenting upon his own collection, Ryszard recalled museums which fascinated him since his childhood and formed his future passion. He pointed at the scientific foundations of art collecting, the significance of relations between collectors and museums and the necessity of maintaining collection integrity and making it accessible to the public: "the collection ought to provide scientific evidence, source and illustration for scientific research and study. First and foremost, this material is provided by museum collections, yet before they have been amassed and sufficiently developed – and they are never truly complete [...], the material should grow in private collections, that most often, if they comply with the conditions, are eventually absorbed by a museum. [...] Every collector's dream is, obviously, to preserve the integrity of the collection, to safeguard its existence and to make it accessible to the greatest number of native and foreign viewers. If also this last goal is finally achieved, the collector will have found his aspirations completely satisfied."⁴¹

The reading of Ryszard's statement encourages us to examine the intentions and motivations of other art collectors. Invaluable information on this topic may be derived from the museum archive department that stores the donors' letters and wills.⁴² One recurring theme will be the sense of patriotic or civil duty, understood in both ethical and material terms. This imperative is emphatically formulated by Wincenty Walewski in his will from February 1918, in which he bequeathed almost 40 canvases by Jacek Malczewski, Maurycy Gottlieb, Józef Brandt and other artists to the Museum: "Being of opinion that the duty of each citizen who loves his country is to dedicate part of his wealth or work for the public good, and thereby to increase national wealth. Motivated by this thought, I hereby bequeathe [...], the entire little collection of paintings."⁴³ The statements not so rarely imply an intention of amassing works of art and historical relics for the sake of national collections that could emerge in favourable future. In 1906, the widow of Roman Szewczykowski, Joanna, following the will of her late husband, chose the inheritor of his valuable collection. She gave it to the newly established Museum of Industry and Agriculture with the reservation that should a National Museum

⁴⁰ *Wystawa darów i nabytków I...*, op. cit., pp. 4–6.

⁴¹ Ryszard Stanisław Ryszard, "Słowo od zbieracza," in *Wystawa darów i nabytków II, 1 X 1936–1 IV 1937*, exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw, 1937 (Warsaw, 1937), pp. 5–11.

⁴² ANMW, Dokumentacja darów, sygn. 320/1–320/133.

⁴³ ANMW, Dokumentacja darów, teka: Dary W, l. 1891–1939, sygn. 320/61,teczka: Dar Walewski Wincenty, copy of his last will, handwritten, 12 February 1918, with an annotation of 11 March 1918. See also "Zapis dla muzeum narodowego," *Kurier Warszawski* (23 July 1918), p. 5.

be founded in Warsaw, the collection be transferred there.⁴⁴ Whereas the Museum was nominally and formally a municipal institution from 1898, the contemporaries considered it an institution of symbolical, and *in spe* or *in potentiam* – national rank, which found expression in numerous documents or even attempts to rename it.⁴⁵

The letters from donors often contain an interpretation of collecting and donating activity as a factor of civilisational advancement of Poland after the period of partitions. “The contribution to Polish collections is, in my view, the sacred duty of each citizen, since it is in this way solely that we will be able to ‘make up’ for the time lost during the period of bondage” – wrote Kazimierz Woźnicki from Paris when discussing his print collection.⁴⁶ Another time, he declared: “For almost thirty years now – accepting ‘sacrifices’ that were significant, yet oddly pleasant for a collector – I have attempted and continue to attempt to amass a collection [...] that could potentially enrich our public collections to which I have decided to donate it.”⁴⁷

Wealthier collectors, who could afford methodical and careful building of extensive collections, would grant access to them at their own homes to researchers, students and artists, lend them to temporary exhibitions, and finally donate them to the Museum for educational and other purposes – in order to develop and popularise historical knowledge and artistic taste. The founder of the core of the NMW’s graphic art collection, Dominik Witke-Jeżewski, was not the only one who was guided by such aspirations. His ambition was also, like in the case of many emigrant art lovers, to collect the globally dispersed graphic *polonica*, a pursuit which he summed up years later stating that wherever he had been able to, he had strived to “collect Polish things for the Polish museum.”⁴⁸

The most outstanding, specialised donors were obviously aware that they were laying foundations for new galleries and filling crucial gaps in the national public collections. Dr Witold Żurkowski declared that he made his donation “being in possession of a collection of manuscripts amounting to around one thousand items from past centuries, beginning with the 16th [century] [...] and wishing that my collection amassed throughout the years become the nucleus of a sigillographic collection, testifying to the high culture of the Polish nation in the remote past [...]”⁴⁹ The true founders of collections of new museum departments expressed their hope that their gesture would find followers and encourage other connoisseurs: “I enclose just one wish – that the collection constitute a separate sigillographic department, which might in time be expanded by donations of other owners of similar collections” – added Żurkowski.⁵⁰ The same goal was pursued by the Polish consul in Tokyo, Stanisław Dem-

⁴⁴ Lorentz, *Muzeum Narodowe...*, op. cit., p. 23.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 1. In autumn 1915, the Museum Commission of the Warsaw City Hall planned to organise the Board of the Polish Museum and even employed this name in documents, but ultimately it was abandoned – see *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴⁶ ANMW, Dokumentacja darów, teka: Dary W, l. 1891–1939, sygn. 320/61,teczka: Dar Woźnicki Kazimierz, letter from K. Woźnicki to the NMW Director, B. Gembarzewski, 3 December 1926.

⁴⁷ The Polish Library in Paris, Kazimierz Woźnicki Archive, akc. 4415, Letter from Kazimierz Woźnicki to the Polish Ambassador in Paris, Alfred Chłapowski, 27 January 1928.

⁴⁸ Letter from Dominik Jeżewski to the NMW Director, Stanisław Lorentz [n.d.], after: Czyż, “Dominik Witke-Jeżewski...”, op. cit., p. 115.

⁴⁹ ANMW, Dokumentacja darów, teka: Dary U–Z, l. 1921–1955, sygn. 320/62,teczka: Dar Żurkowski Witold, Letter from Witold Żurkowski to the President of the Capital City of Warsaw, Władysław Jabłoński, 23 November 1926.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

biński, who, upon announcing the donation of his impressive collection of art of Far East, shared his wish that it provide a "stimulus for other collectors to enrich the national collections that – as far as I know – include rather few examples of this art."⁵¹

In the face of the uncertain future of the Warsaw institution, an act of donation armed with appropriate legal clauses could serve as leverage aimed at inclining local authorities to erect a museum building. A legal construction of this kind was introduced by the second director of the Museum, Cyprian Lachnicki, in his will of 1902. He bequeathed his valuable collection of paintings, drawings, prints and photographs to the city of Warsaw, and more precisely to an institution directed by him, under the condition that not later than two years after his death a decision be made to erect new museum quarters. Otherwise, the entire Lachnicki's legacy would be auctioned off to finance the Information Bureau of Extreme Poverty established by him in 1870.⁵² The leverage proved effective. In 1908, two years after the testator's death, the government fulfilled the obligation and decided to construct the museum building; a special commission was summoned to serve this purpose and the works of art, in accordance with Lachnicki's last will, were transferred to the then Museum quarters on Wierzbowa Street.⁵³ Still in 1918, following Lachnicki's example, a similar clause was inserted in his last will by Aleksander Karwowski: "I bequeathe the artistic collection to the Museum of Fine Arts, should it be given its own building – [and] if it were not constructed before my death or in the course of several following years – to the Society of the Encouragement of Fine Arts (Zachęta). And if even this proved impossible – to an inheritor from my family [...]."⁵⁴

Naturally, a frequent motif inclining collectors to donate to the Museum, in particular after its position had strengthened, was the concern for the future of their collections after their death – especially in the case when there were no descendants, no actual interest or financial means of their family members or in the face of potential family conflicts. This uncertainty was accompanied with the faith in the continuity and duration of the institution, including the rule of integrity of donated collections. Hence so many, less or more explicit references to the perpetual character of donations in the donors' letters, like for instance one made by Apoloniusz Unruh in reference to a donated rare publication from the period of the November Uprising: "Having no one to leave this precious heirloom to, I am delighted to leave it to the custody of the National Museum in Warsaw, hoping that it will find there the well-deserved care and rest forever."⁵⁵ Bequests clearly banning the transfer or dispersion of collections were included in the wills of Piotr Fiorentini, Father Józef Mrozowski and others.⁵⁶

⁵¹ ANMW, Dokumentacja darów, teka: Dary D, l. 1922–1942, sygn. 320/42, teczka: Dar Dembiński Stanisław, Letter from Stanisław Dembiński to the NMW Director, Stanisław Lorentz, 7 June 1939.

⁵² More on Lachnicki's life, work and donation – see Ewa Łomnicka Żakowska, "Cyprian Lachnicki (1824–1906)," in *Miłośnicy grafiki...*, op. cit., pp. 16–22.

⁵³ In 1912, planning an investment, the Warsaw city hall purchased an appropriate lot, yet shortly thereafter the Museum received the old building on Podwale Street. The building of the new quarters began as late as 1927, and was only completed 30 years after the will had been read – in 1938.

⁵⁴ ANMW, Dokumentacja darów, teka: Dary K–Kl, l. 1918–1939, sygn. 320/48, teczka: Dar Karwowski Aleksander, the last will of Aleksander Karwowski, 16 September 1918.

⁵⁵ ANMW, Dokumentacja darów, teka: Dary U–Z, l. 1921–1955, sygn. 320/62, teczka: Dar Unruh Apoloniusz Władysław, Letter from Apoloniusz Władysław Unruh to the NMW Director, S. Lorentz, 29 April 1937.

⁵⁶ For Fiorentini's bequest – see Lorentz, *Muzeum Narodowe...*, op. cit., p. 5. "I also reserve that none of the objects destined for museum purposes may ever be sold or exchanged for another [...]" – after: ANMW, Dokumentacja darów, teka: Dary M: Mi–Mü, l. 1924–1939, sygn. 320/53, teczka: Dar Mrozowski Józef, the last will of Father Józef Mrozowski, 1 February 1924.

Among the preserved donation formulas, occasional bequests are worth closer inspection, for instance those motivated by a wish to celebrate national holidays or the opening of the Museum's new quarters. The mounts of two woodcuts from Albrecht Dürer's *Apocalypse* series feature two patriotic dedications of their donors – the Patrzykał siblings. *The Woman of the Apocalypse* (fig. 3) was given a dedication: “Donated on the anniversary of the celebration of the Constitution of 3 May to the National Museum of the Capital City of Warsaw by sisters: Zofia and Stefania Patrzykał: Warsaw on 3 May 1917” (fig. 4), while *Angels Holding the Four Winds of the Earth* – an analogous inscription signed by the brothers Stanisław and Antoni.⁵⁷ The NMW collection also includes commemorative donations, as in the case of Wojciech Gerson's painting *Casimir the Great and Jews* of 1874, gifted by Tadeusz Polak two days after he was widowed, as a “donation of the late Emilia Polak, née Stefanowicz from Lviv.”⁵⁸

The acquisition, maintenance of the possession of or a decision to donate multiple objects often required various sacrifices from their owners. Kazimierz Woźnicki, after donating to the Museum his collection of more than 1000 prints,⁵⁹ announced the shipment of a rare print despite a sudden loss of his position at the Polish Embassy in Paris and facing a shortage of livelihood: “Although I ought not to buy foreign engravings, since I haven't earned anything for several months, yesterday I purchased a very interesting print by Ziarnko, which, once I will have celebrated it myself, in several weeks, I will allow myself to send to you.”⁶⁰ Upon donating the rare set of prints from the *Uniforms of the Polish Army* series by Fryderyk Krzysztof Dietrich, the Polish independence campaigner Apoloniusz Unruh recounted dramatic events during the years when the patriotic treasure had to be hidden (e.g., in a flour storehouse) from the search by Tsarist gendarmerie and then bolshevik Cheka (secret police) in Warsaw, Kiev and Zhytomyr⁶¹ (fig. 5). One particularly moving testimony of personal sacrifice is the letter from the Jeziorański family, the relatives of the director of the Communications Department of the National Government, Jan Jeziorański, who was executed alongside Romuald Traugutt in 1864. Responding to a question from the Museum's director, they agreed to donate, among others, the cross with which the Uprising participant was executed, with the reservation of

⁵⁷ *Woman of the Apocalypse* (inv. no. 11610 MNW); *Angels Holding the Four Winds of the Earth* (inv. no. 11611 MNW), woodcut, from the *Apocalypse* series, Latin edition (Nuremberg, 1511). See also: Helena Domaszewska, “Ryćciny Albrechta Dürera w zbiorach Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie,” *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, vol. 16 (1976), p. 12; therein Antoni Patrzykał erroneously mentioned as Adam.

⁵⁸ The painting is today referred to as *Reception of Jews*, inv. no. MP 2035 MNW, donation of 14 February 1939. See <<http://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/dmuseion/docmetadata?id=5006>>, [retrieved: 11 April 2019]. ANMW, Dokumentacja darów, teka: Dary P, l. 1916–1939, sygn. 320/55,teczka: Dar Polak Tadeusz, letter from Tadeusz Polak to the NMW Director, S. Lorentz, 29 December 1938. The painting donated by Gerson in 1888 to a lottery for the benefit of a shelter for Polish academics in Vienna was purchased by the father of the author of the letter and not resold in the course of the following 50 years despite the owners' financial hardship.

⁵⁹ Marcin Romeyko-Hurko, “Kazimierz Woźnicki (1878–1940),” in *Miłośnicy grafiki...*, op. cit., pp. 194–234. See also: id., “Kolekcjonerzy, antykwarjusze i bibliofile. Z korespondencji Kazimierza Woźnickiego,” in *Polskie kolekcjonerstwo...*, op. cit., pp. 80–102.

⁶⁰ ANMW, Dokumentacja darów, teka: Dary W, l. 1891–1939, sygn. 320/61,teczka: Dar Woźnicki Kazimierz, letter from K. Woźnicki to the NMW Director, B. Gembarzewski, 26 November 1926. It mentions Jan Ziarnko's etching *Concino Concini's Satire of Life and Death*, 1617, inv. no. Gr.Pol.5820 MNW.

⁶¹ Fryderyk Krzysztof Dietrich, after Jakub Sokołowski's drawing, *Uniforms of the Polish Army of 1831*, Warsaw 1831, inv. no. Gr.Pol.2754/1–30 MNW. See ANMW, Dokumentacja darów, teka: Dary U–Z, l. 1921–1955, sygn. 320/62,teczka: Dar Unruh Apoloniusz Władysław, letter from Apoloniusz Władysław Unruh to the NMW Director, S. Lorentz, 29 April 1937.

their right to maintain family tradition by borrowing the crucifix for a couple of days so that it could be used, as a relic, each time a family member should lay on a deathbed.⁶²

Contribution to the formation of the national collection was generally only one segment of art collectors' public activity. Many of them were also active philanthropists, involved in numerous social institutions and charities, for instance aiming to popularise education or fight poverty. It suffices to cite the President of the Information Bureau of Extreme Poverty, Cyprian Lachnicki, Vice-President of the Society for the Care of Children, Count Kazimierz Sobański, or the founder of the "Samarytanin" [Samaritan] Charity Society, Seweryn Smolikowski. Smolikowski, like a dozen or so intellectuals and Museum donors, was member of the Committee of the Society for the Public Library, which in 1907 founded the Warsaw library on Koszykowa Street.⁶³ Dominik Witke-Jeżewski had his life motto borrowed from the Renaissance poet Jan Kochanowski included in his bookplate: "A jako kto może niech ku pożytku dobra wspólnego pomoże" [However one can, may he contribute to the common good]. He funded scholarships for students of art schools and financially supported the Institute of the Blind and the Deaf. Art collectors based abroad helped emigrant charities, e.g., Władysław Strzembosz was active in a credit union called the "Honour and Bread" Institute [Instytucja "Czci i Chleba"] in Paris, and Mieczysław Geniusz during the First World War - in the General Committee for the Relief of War Victims in Poland.⁶⁴ Geniusz was an engineer tied for the most of his life with Egypt and bequeathed to the Museum, i.a., a major collection of ancient objects. Shortly before his death, he published two brochures in which he proposed a utopian vision of the system of the Polish Republic and international relations. Among his eclectic views presented in the first of the two publications, ideas could be found that today sound rather modern, for instance, the principle of social control over the government works, social contract, expert participation of authority with effective use of resources of public collections, as well as the vision of the United States of Europe.⁶⁵ In the latter brochure, Geniusz discussed a proposition of creating a network of local museums and memory houses, emphasising the significance of such institutions for the education and civil formation of children and youth and for the integration of local communities. The author referred to the notions of "self-love" and personal prestige as natural and effective factors motivating people to act in the public sphere, like helping to form regional collections; therefore he encouraged citizens to establish Golden Books of Merits in each commune.⁶⁶

Geniusz's ideas may sound naive today. However, the NMW archive preserves a letter that illustrates such idealistic views very well. In spring 1936, the Museum received a parcel from a ten-year-old inhabitant of the village of Szczeka in the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship, Tadeusz Anioł, who, having found a silver 6-grosz coin of King John Casimir of 1660 on the ground,

⁶² ANMW, Dokumentacja darów, teka: J-J, l. 1921-1959, sygn. 320/47, teczka: Dar Jeziorański, letter of the Jeziorański family to the NMW Director, B. Gembarzewski, 22 November 1933. The donation made on 12 January 1934 encompassed the mentioned crucifix (inv. no. 76975 MNW) and a cigarette holder (inv. no. 76976 MNW) with a cache for the Uprising documents. After the Second World War, both relics were acknowledged as war losses.

⁶³ Joanna Sikorska, "Seweryn Smolikowski (1850-1920)," in *Mitośnicy grafiki...*, op. cit., pp. 160-90.

⁶⁴ Until the present day, Geniusz tends to be believed to be, rather erroneously, the prototype of the protagonist of the brave teenage boy Staś Tarkowski from Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel *In Desert and Wilderness* - see Krystyna Nizio, "Mieczysław Stefan Geniusz w kręgu działaczy niepodległościowych i literatów," *Pamiętnik Biblioteki Kórnickiej*, no. 13 (1977), pp. 115-37.

⁶⁵ Mieczysław Geniusz, *O polską myśl narodową i państwową* (Warsaw, 1920).

⁶⁶ Id., *Uświadomienie narodowe. Muzea gminne i Złota Księga Zastług* (Warsaw, 1920).

decided to give it to the “National Museum of Old-Time Relics in Warsaw.” In a disarming style embedded with errors, he emotionally wrote of the found “pięniądź” [instead: *pieniądz*, ‘coin’]: “I read from it what various fates of Poland it has lived through so far. It survived the terrible captivity of Poland, but also came to see independence. I ask you to place it ‘in the Museum’ so that it can still enjoy our independence. And let each viewer read from it what it went through during its life”⁶⁷ (fig. 6). Director Lorentz, moved by the boy’s edifying attitude, sent back his answer without delay with words of gratitude and assurance that the letter “was read in the Museum with sheer pleasure,” with the photos of the Museum attached as well a promise to also send the Museum guidebook planned to be published shortly.⁶⁸ Several months later, the name of the donor, most probably the youngest one in the history of the Museum, was included in the “Museum Donors” book and in the list of donors in the catalogue of the first *Exhibition of Donations and Purchases*, among dozens of meritorious personalities and respectable institutions.⁶⁹

Altruistic attitudes of hundreds of art collectors and Museum donors may today seem a noble anachronism to many. However, the cited examples prove the legitimacy of Pomian’s thesis that euergetism is a political phenomenon and that there is a correlation between the involvement of individuals in the public affairs and an inclination to donate one’s wealth for the common good of a community, while the existence of euergetic museums may serve as a measure of democratisation of the political system, local and civil freedom.⁷⁰ In this view, the expansion of native artistic and historical collections may be understood as an inherent element of civil society. As much as today’s most popular model – liberal and individualistic – assumes autonomy of citizens, and the libertarian model – even opposition of citizens against the state, the activity of the Museum’s benefactors reflects the idea of civil society as understood in the republican tradition. “The aim of such society is the common good of all citizens that is superior to the good of an individual. A man, realizing his goals, acts according to his nature taking care of the common good” – as briefly summarized by Marek Barański. In the republican thought – he continues – “the status of being a citizen was not associated with the inherent privileges of an individual, but first and foremost with the duty to care for the common good, which was supposed to be favoured by the practice of civil virtues. The republican tradition of the civil society is casually described as the tradition of citizen virtue, focusing on the common good and putting an equation sign between the private civil sphere of the society and the political sphere. [...] The precondition is the functioning of the state based on a stable political order, creating balance between what is universal and what is particular.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ ANMW, Dokumentacja darów, teka: Dary A, l. 1923–1939, sygn. 320/37,teczka: Dar Anioł Tadeusz, letter from Tadeusz Anioł to the NMW Director, S. Lorentz, 27 April 1936. Despite serious efforts, I did not manage to determine the fates of the donor or establish contact with his family. By reason of wartime transfers of the NMW’s numismatic collection and destruction inflicted to it, the identification may today prove impossible. I would like to thank Eliza Walczak from the NMW’s Coins and Medals Chamber for the consultation.

⁶⁸ Ibid., letter from the NMW Director, S. Lorentz to T. Anioł, 8 May 1936.

⁶⁹ *Wystawa darów i nabytków I...*, op. cit., p. 19.

⁷⁰ Pomian, *Zbieracze i osobliwości...*, op. cit., pp. 326–27.

⁷¹ Marek Barański, *Organizacje pozarządowe w społeczeństwie obywatelskim* [online], pp. 3–4, [update: 22 November 2009], at: <www.ngo.us.edu.pl/skrypt/I.doc>, [retrieved: 11 April 2019]. In the quoted fragment, the author discusses the question after: Dorota Pietrzyk-Reeves, *Idea społeczeństwa obywatelskiego. Współczesna debata i jej źródła* (Wrocław, 2004), pp. 52 ff.

The duration, scale and effects of the collective involvement in the creation and development of the National Museum in Warsaw belong to the succession of phenomena in the tradition of social activity in Poland like the Warsaw Charity Society, the "Honour and Bread" Institution, the Józef Mianowski Fund, the National Defence Funds or the Social Committee for the Care of Old Powązki Cemetery.⁷² Undoubtedly, the ceremonial act of delivering the building of the National Museum in Warsaw by the government and municipal officials to the Polish society in June 1938 (**fig. 7**)⁷³ had a merely symbolical character. The authorities constructed the building, yet the institution itself as well as its collection were in great measure the fruit of generosity and determination of several generations of citizens.

Translated by Karolina Koriat

⁷² For the beginnings of the Warsaw Museum of Fine Arts in the context of private patronage and charity – see Grzegorz P. Bąbiak, *Sobie, ojczyźnie czy potomności... Wybrane aspekty mecenatu kulturalnego elit na ziemiach polskich w XIX wieku* (Warsaw, 2010), pp. 108–11.

⁷³ Stanisław Ostoja-Chrostowski (?), *Akt oddania społeczeństwu nowego gmachu Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie przy Al. 3 Maja 13 w dniu 18 czerwca 1938 r.*, 1938, parchment, paper, sealing wax, gouache, China ink, gold paint, NMW, inv. no. rkps 1794.