

Polish journeys on the trail of Antiquity

Eighteenth-Century Peregrinations



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Alongside numerous archaeological discoveries, the 18th century brought an upsurge of interest in the age of Antiquity across Europe. Young Polish nobles embarked on Grand Tours “to gather knowledge and experience,” the more adventurous ones blazing previously unfamiliar trails

This surging interest was fuelled by recently-made excavations at Herculaneum (starting 1738) and Pompeii (starting 1755). Giuseppe Antonini also popularized the discoveries at Paestum with his publication *La Lucania: Discorsi*. The Ancient world was becoming more accessible and less daunting with the growing availability of classical texts, as well as through its newly discovered relics, allowing scholars to gain insight into the everyday lives during the days of Ancient Greece and Rome. Travelers wanted to see the famous discoveries for themselves, at city remains or sites of religious cults, or at least to get their hands on ancient jewelry. Andrzej Abramowicz, describing the history of Poland’s fascination with Antiquity, says that “everything became tangible.” There was a surging popularity of sketches, publications, narratives, and articles inspired by Antiquity, as well as a fashion for collecting ancient artworks. The French translation of the work by the German archaeologist and art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke* caused an uproar in 1760s Paris. In his book *Mecenat artystyczny Stanisława Augusta* [“King Stanisław August: Patron of the Arts”],

the historian Tadeusz Mańkowski notes the account by the secretary of the Neapolitan envoy Fernando Galiani, “The book caused an incredible shift in French tastes, undergoing a crisis and a revolution. [...] Bronze and other sculptures, paintings, all were created following Herculean standards; snuff-boxes, fans, earrings, shop signs, all kinds of furniture – all is *a la grecque*. Goldsmiths, jewelers, lacquer-makers, upholsterers – none could make a living without books on Herculaneum.”

Polish passion for the Ancients

Poland was swept up by an Antiquity craze, and the widely-travelled nobility created ever-larger collections of small artworks. They gathered gems, intaglios, Etruscan vases, small pastels, miniatures, bronzes, and relief prints. The travelers were also known to bring back or order counterfeit antiques. In order to avoid such hoaxes, collectors sought expert opinions. In his *The Art of the Ancients, or the Polish Winckelmann*, Stanisław Potocki wrote, “The study of Antiquity, debased by halfwits of all kinds, ought to be returned to its original noble aim. Humiliated for far too long, after all it exists not solely to perfect the arts of the present day, to expand our tastes in all things beautiful, to spread a wealth of ideas, but also to shape the minds of young people and help them develop a sense of that which is beautiful, true and great, in the arts as much as in nature and in morality.”

Before the tome was published in Poland, the French edition was already well known. It encouraged more trips to Italy, with the participants learning about the local culture, archaeology, and the arts, frequently selecting their routes using tips in various guide books.

The most popular read, both before and during such journeys, was *Voyage d’un Francais en Italie* by Joseph-Jerome Lalande, published in Paris in 1769, and *Voyage d’Italie, ou, Recueil de notes sur les ouvrages de peinture & de sculpture, qu’on voit dans les principales villes d’Italie* (Paris, 1751). The author of the latter, Charles-Nicolas Cochin, finished his work with Paestum, thus



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Bernardo Bellotto
(known in Poland
as Canaletto),
"Capriccio Romano,
Colloseum," oil on
canvas, 1742-1747

sealing the fate of Naples and its surrounds as Europe's final boundary, both in terms of geography and civilization. For decades afterwards, the traditional Grand Tour route avoided the southern part of the Apennine Peninsula, while the poor condition and accessibility of Greece's antique relics rendered them largely unexplored until the 19th century.

Another popular volume was the *Observations upon the antiquities of the town of Herculaneum*, published jointly by Cochin and Jerome-Charles Bellicarde in London in 1753. Works by Giacomo Barozzi Vignola, discussing architectural theory, were also an excellent material for learning about art and its history. Other reference materials included a range of theoretical essays and works by Anton Rafael Mengs and Johann Joachim Winckelmann.

"I was here"

The archaeologist Tomasz Mikocki lists the names of 29 Polish scholars who described Antique arts in their notes, journals, diaries and letters. They included Hugo Kołłątaj, Ignacy Potocki, Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, Katarzyna Platerowa, Stanisław Poniąkowski, Stanisław Kostka Potocki, Stanisław Staszic, and Adam Jerzy Czartoryski.

Naturally, not all of them expressed a genuine understanding or even love of archaeology, architecture or painting. At times their interest was expressed through collecting artworks, or simply assembling any antiques. Those with insufficient funds to afford originals frequently settled on collecting casts, copies, and imprints. The collecting habits were often an expression of fashion or a simple snobbery, which could go as far as illegal smuggling of antique memorabilia.

In his journals, Stanisław Staszic wrote, "I saw that half of today's Romans make their living from their ruins, while stones brought by Ancient Romans from all corners of the globe are once again being plundered."

There were also instances of serious damage inflicted on ancient ruins by travelers wishing to leave their own mark on the bygone world. The walls of Nero's Domus Aurea in Rome bear inscriptions including "Paybylski; Radw[...]ski; Le Prince [...]Jablo[...]ski/polonais 1777; Comtesse de/Czernichew l'an /1792 le 19 Xbre; Le Comte Charozewski/ Polonais/1792; Le ct baworowski: W; Le ct. Chelkowski: W; Comte Charczewski: VS; Le comte Grabowsky, Polonais le 21 avril 1792."

Polish journeys on the trail of Antiquity

From the days of King Stanisław, the routes of quests in search of Antique monuments shifted significantly to the south of Rome. Visitors were attracted by new discoveries at Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabiae. Lovers of Antiquity, architects, and artists were also drawn to the beautifully-preserved Doric temples in Paestum and ruins at Segesta, Selinunte, Agrigento, and Syracuse.

The preserved Polish records of such journeys in search of Antiquity, or even just brief mentions of them, allow us to discern several different types of voyages. Some were educational, such as the Grand Tours taken by Michał Jerzy Wandalin Mniszcz, Stanisław

Count Moszyński's cabinets

An important Polish expert on Antiquity who played a significant role in introducing Greek architecture to Europe, especially the Doric order, was Count August Moszyński (1731-1786). A grandson of King August II the Strong, owner of collections of Antique artworks, son of Jan Kanty Moszyński, and collector of intaglios and a library of prints, he was brought up in Dresden and grew up in circles passionate about collecting.

He met Stanisław August Poniatowski, the future king of Poland, in Dresden, when Moszyński was serving as the Pantler of the Crown; the two built their friendship around their common passion for the Ancients. After Poniatowski's rise to the throne, Moszyński was put in charge of royal buildings, as well as becoming a member of the Board of the Royal Mint and the Treasury Board; the king moreover entrusted him with creating a royal collection and looking after the Warsaw Theatre. It was significant that the Count included his own collections of medals and antiques in the Royal collection, as recalled by the eminent mathematician and physicist Johann Bernoulli in 1778, stressing that he had been shown the collections by Moszyński himself. One of the cabinets contained "the most beautiful copperplates depicting monuments of ancient architecture [...] including the antiquities of Herculaneum," while another room held "a cabinet with antiquities, idols, lamps, cut stones, with stunning objects made of ivory and similar materials." The Count had amassed most of the collection personally during his journeys to Italy.

The collections seen by Bernoulli dated back to Moszyński's first trip taken during his youth; his second, to France and Italy between 1784-1786, was funded by the king himself. Although Moszyński was commissioned to write his travel journal – by then the Count had fallen on hard times, having been financially reckless – it in no way undermines the significance of his writings. Topics he discusses in his *Diary from travels around Poland, Germany, France, and Italy, 1784-1786* indicate the interests of Stanisław August, who – in spite of his great enthusiasm for Antiquity and Italian arts – never travelled to Italy himself.

As he departed on his journeys, Moszyński styled himself as the "Count of Leszczków." He was accompanied by his trusted secretary Siaud, his cousin Madame Bokum, an entou-



Academia

The Forum Romanum was a popular tourist destination in the 18th century, and of course remains so today

Poniatowski, and Michał Jerzy Poniatowski, or trips by mentors of young magnates, taken by Fr. Julian Antonowicz, Stanisław Staszic, and others. Other trips focused on research and the arts, taken by royal envoys and scholars including Michał Jan Borch, August Moszyński, Julian Niemcewicz, and Jan Chrystian Kamsetzer. Collectors of Antique artworks, including Franciszek Bieliński, Stanisław Poniatowski, Stanisław Kostka Potocki, Izabella Lubomirska nee Czartoryska, and Jan Feliks Tarnowski and Elżbieta Tarnowska, journeyed along their own trails. Jan Potocki, Stanisław Kostka Potocki and Michał Jan Borch took part in excavation expeditions. Yet another theme had participants (Edward Raczyński, Jan Potocki and Aleksander Sapieha) following in the trail of Antique literature.

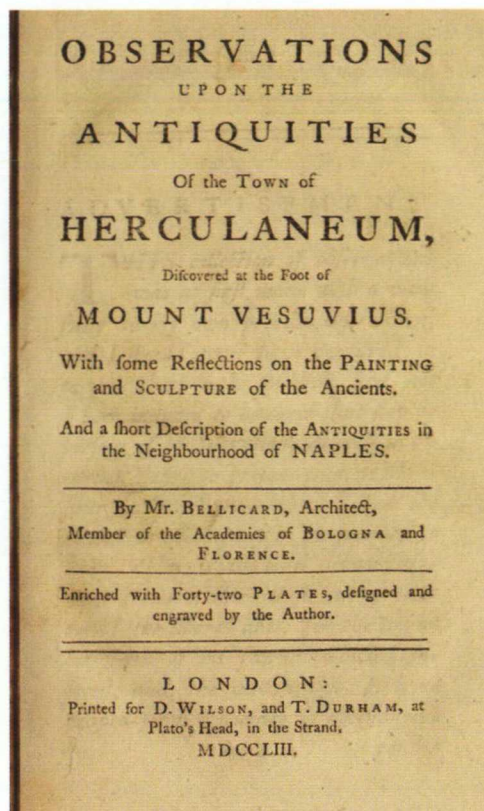
rage of servants, and his dog Amor. The journey passed without major incident; the party travelled via Kraków, Prague, Nuremberg and Strasbourg to reach Southern France. In late March 1785, Moszyński et al. took a sea route to Genoa and on to Livorno, Lucca, and Pisa. He stayed in Rome until October 1785, moving to Naples, and reaching Paestum in spite of progressing illness. He returned to Rome in April 1786, and travelled to Venice via Bologna and Ferrara. He passed away in Padua in June, during the final leg of his journey home.

Bringing the Coliseum closer to Warsaw

Moszyński frequently expressed his regret and frustration over the damage inflicted on ancient buildings. In Rome, he was especially saddened by the sorry state of the Coliseum. Convinced that Poland could have cared for it better, he “dreamed aloud” that Antique remains could instead be located nearer Warsaw. “The condition of the marble in my courtyard depresses me terribly. It is a veritable hospital of Ancient art: over fifty columns made of porphyry, alabaster, and other precious marble are undergoing their final metamorphosis into tabletops. In another place, around thirty heads lie in a heap, with no bodies, noses, faces, without forehead, mixed with fragments of steps or beams, damaged reliefs, engaged columns without capitals and with faded inscriptions. If only Warsaw was around twenty miles from Rome, some of these sculptures could be preserved for posterity; here, they are used to make mantelpieces, tabletops, or church floors.”

After Moszyński’s passing, his journal was conveyed the king (although it is unknown if it was complete), and became a valuable supplement to the Count’s letters. It contains information about numerous galleries, collections of numismatics, glyptychs, ceramics, tools and ancient paraphernalia. The traveler was fascinated by Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Etruscan objects; he made attempts to purchase famous and popular vases, known as Etruscan, as well as expressing his thoughts about ways of protecting Antique culture, which during his days was being systematically plundered and damaged.

Overall, the various journeys by 18th Polish nobles and scholars took them to Italy and beyond, to Sicily, Malta, Greece and Turkey. They focused on local architecture, arts, and history, as well as confronting the present-day under-



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Title page of an early guide to the Antique world, English edition, 1753

standing of Antiquity with the visions they had formed based on ancient texts, usually read during their youth. The 19th century would bring with it a new quality: travelers’ interests shifted to include Slavic as well Classical Antiquities, which – according to the thought of the time – would improve their understanding of Greek culture as a whole.

Nevertheless, the 18th century routes followed in search of the Ancients continue to affect the choices we make even today, when travelling to explore different countries and cultures. A review of contemporary tourist guides reveals that we still tread in the footsteps of these enlightened explorers from a few centuries ago. ■

Further reading:

- Ročko A. (2012). *Podróże oświeconych śladami antyku* [Polish Journeys on the Trail of Antiquity]. In: *Antyk oświeconych. Studia i rozprawy o miejscu starożytności w kulturze polskiej* [The Antiquity of the Enlightened: Studies and Essays on the Ancients’ Role in Polish Culture]. (Ed.). Chachulski T. Warsaw.
- Mikocki T. (1988). *A la recherche de l’art antique. Les voyageurs polonais en Italie dans les années 1750-1830*. Wrocław: PAN.