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Cracow

For The Centenary of the Municipal Theatre in Cracow

In the 19th century, theatrical and opera buildings became a symbol of a flourishing architecture, combining cultural, technical and social aspects of the period. Théophile Gautier said that opera houses and also theatre buildings were at that time “une sorte de cathédrale mondaine de la civilisation”¹.

In Prague, Budapest and many other places, the construction of monumental theatres also symbolized national aspirations voiced by the countries pursuing independence. Everywhere, they foreshadowed a new era of technical and economic progress, of liberalism and democratization, of vigorous urbanization, and of the flourishing and popularization of art.

The Cracow theatre was completed at a challenging time. In 1889, when competition designs were being assessed in Cracow, there were only 300 theatre buildings in Germany, Great Britain, France, Austria-Hungary and Russia. Over thirty years later in 1926, their number had risen to about 2 500. In the late 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th century, some 1 500 new theatre buildings were erected in Europe alone. The Cracow theatre was constructed on the threshold of the economic prosperity, which would lead to the “industrialization” of theatre construction and to the creation of specialized design offices, such as the German and Austrian studios of Martin Dülfer, Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer, Jakob Heilmann and Max Littmann, Oskar Kaufmann, Carl Moritz, and Heinrich Seeling and Bernhard Sehring². In Central Europe more than elsewhere, to have a stately and modern theatre building was the ambition of almost every bigger city. But they rarely held design competitions, preferring to commission specialized firms to implement the projects instead. Therefore, the most renowned partnership of

¹ N. Pevsner *A History of Building Types*, Princeton, New York 1970, p. 86.

² H.-Ch. Hoffmann, *Die Theaterbauten von Fellner und Helmer*, München 1966, p. 9.

architects, Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer, designed about fifty theatre buildings between Odessa and Zurich at the turn of the century³.

The first great 19th-century theatres, including the Wielki Theatre in Warsaw, reflected the wish for unemotional monumentalism; at the end of the century, theatre buildings came to resemble wedding cakes. Bombastic Baroque became a favourite costume. The ambitions of the audience were best fulfilled by the charm and exuberance of coloured marbles, gilts, stuccos, bronzes, plush tapestries, fringes and hangings. In the 19th century, monumental theatre houses, not least opera houses, became — along with concert halls and museum buildings — a symbol of bourgeois resolve for the development of art, especially in the sense of artistic patronage. This is the reason why theatre houses were located in the prominent parts of the city, at the central squares⁴.

Bourgeoisie patronage maintained the hierarchical structure of a theatre building, despite the protests of many theorists of theatre (including young Wagner) who dreamt of populist theatre. In 19th-century architecture, theatre was comprehended as a temple of art and work of art in itself on the one hand, and as a commercial enterprise on the other⁵.

Nouveau riche patrons expected royal treatment. For this reason, in the mid-19th century, the striking difference between the decorations of the royal box and other boxes disappeared. These other boxes met the growing demands and satisfied the vaulting ambitions of the new class. This is why the expanded box system, derived from the 17th-century Venetian tradition, became a basic standard in 19th-century theatre architecture. Although the boxes did not usually offer the best visibility to the spectators, their success lay in the clear-cut division of the audience into social strata. This pleased not only the declining aristocracy, but also satisfied the ambitions of the new class, the bourgeoisie. The boxes and often the expanded system of the adjoining rooms became an important element of social life as well as a form of artistic patronage of theatres. It was good form to buy the boxes in perpetuity⁶.

Theatre, and especially 19th-century opera, was a favourite place for social meetings, where the performances were only a pretext. For the new class, theatre interiors became a sort of a new promenade, as illustrated by the expanded programme of interiors: lobbies, galleries, vestibules, grand staircases, which were a natural place for meetings and “fashion shows” during *entr’actes*⁷.

Even if we look at the theatre building from a purely functional perspective, as a structure connecting the auditorium with the performance, we

³ *Ibidem*, *passim*.

⁴ M. Carlson, *Places of Performance. The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture*, Ithaca-London 1989, p. 88.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 89 and 92.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 142-143.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 152-154.

must also recognize the practical function of interior decoration and ornamentation. These elements were aimed to make the building and its purpose more easily identifiable and so to draw the potential public. In the late 19th century, the massive buildings of theatres and national operas were provided with an extensive range of decoration based on iconography. The enlarged ideology was accompanied by the splendour of draperies, mirrors, gilt, marbles and candelabrum. In this way 19th-century theatre buildings became real "pagan shrines". Allegorical representations of the Muses, performances of outstanding playwrights and composers made them seem like cathedrals, to which the public made pilgrimages. This was best exemplified by the Paris Opera, the symbol of the capitalist prosperity and the dignified grandeur of the Second Empire. It was the culmination of style, the height and symbol of the aspirations of the new class in the reality of the fin-de-siècle which was full of contradictions⁸.

In the second half of the 19th century the shape of the theatre building was determined by ever more rigorous fire precautions and rapid technological progress. Fires became a plague to 19th-century theatres. In 1797-1897 there were 1,100 fires in theatre and circus buildings throughout the world. Only in 1882-97, five thousand people lost their lives in theatre fires. The tragic fires of theatres in Nice and Vienna (Ringtheater) in 1881, which claimed an estimated 650-1000 lives⁹, had enormous reverberations. In Austria, there was a fire in the Vienna Ringtheater, constructed in 1873-4 by Emil von Förster, who was later a laureate of the theatre competition in Cracow. In effect, modern regulations prescribed certain standards for theatre buildings, and many municipal governments realized the necessity for constructing new, safe theatre buildings. At the turn of the century, this would create an exceptionally favourable situation for theatre building. In the wake of the fires, the new building code demanded that theatre buildings should be no longer covered with one roof; different parts of the theatre were clearly grouped or differentiated, and a large number of independent staircases, corridors and exits were designed. The stage, the scene of almost half of theatre fires, became more clearly defined from the rest of the building. In the wake of a theatre fire in Nice caused by a gas explosion, gas lighting in theatres became quickly replaced with electricity, from the mid-eighties¹⁰.

For a long time, theatre building on Polish lands did not keep pace with changes in France and Germany. This was primarily a consequence of the backwardness of the Polish lands in relation to western Europe. A low rate of urbanization and lack of investment possibilities were not conducive to the building of monumental theatre buildings. Excluding Warsaw, which took advantage of the economic boom of 1815-30 to build the Wielki Theatre, it was not until the end of the 19th century that the remaining centres saw modern

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 163 and 186-187.

⁹ Hoffmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-26.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 25-31.

theatre buildings being built. Perhaps with the exception of Lvov, which in 1836-42 witnessed the construction of the Skarbkowski Theatre¹¹, one of the greatest and most modern theatre buildings in Europe in the first half of the 19th century. The lack of theatre investments gravely hindered the theoretical approach to the issue of theatre building. Although Polish professional magazines kept abreast of foreign achievements, there was no opportunity to put these ideas in practice¹². In addition to the competition for a theatre design in Lublin, the competition in Cracow played an important role in overcoming this obstacle, which was also of a psychological nature. The significance of the competition went far beyond Cracow and Galicia. The debate which arose in Cracow before the competition was announced showed a determined resistance and distrust among investors who did not take kindly to entrusting this building to Polish architects¹³. The competition in Cracow, or rather two competitions for the design of a new theatre, popularized the issue of theatre architecture on Polish lands and elsewhere. Thanks to the competitions, the distance between Polish theatre building and the leading architectural centres was greatly diminished, and the new generation of Polish architects produced evidence of its remarkable skill. They transferred the achievements of the schools they graduated from to the Polish milieu¹⁴.

The enormous effort connected with building the new monumental building of the Municipal Theatre reflected a conviction that Cracow played an exceptional role in the life of the nation. It was also a conscious act to enhance the cultural prestige of the city, and also improve its economic standard. This was clearly emphasized by Marshal of Galicia Eustachy Sanguszko in his address opening the building of the new theatre in October 1893: "Cracow has become European and artistic in expression, while not ceasing to be a sanctuary of monuments and learning. This transformation culminates in this ornamental building, built by the city for the Polish culture, and not by the nation for itself, as in Prague, but with the aid of the country, our spiritual capital Cracow bestows this truly royal gift on the nation, art and itself. Despite so many burning financial needs, Cracow has made this great

¹¹ Cf. M. Lityński, *Gmach Skarbkowski na tle architektury lwowskiej w pierwszej połowie XIX w.*, Lwów 1921, pp. 48-63.

¹² Cf. *O budowie teatrów* („Przegląd Techniczny”, 8: 1882, vol. 15), pp. 54-55, 77-79, 100-102, 126-127; (vol. 16), pp. 10-13; J. Heurich, *Najnowsze ulepszenia w budowie teatrów* („Przegląd Techniczny”, 10: 1884, vol. 20, pp. 8-11). Although some cities like Lvov, Cracow, Gdańsk, Radom had theatre buildings already in the first half of the 19th century, they represented an obsolete type of stage buildings. It was only the Polski Theatre in Poznań, from 1873-5, and especially the theatre in Lublin from 1886 that satisfied the criteria of modernity. Cf. B. Król-Kaczorowska, *Teatr dawnej Polski. Budynki – dekoracje – kostiumy*, Warszawa 1971, pp. 31-32 and 57.

¹³ L. Lameński, *Dzieje dwóch konkursów na projekt nowego teatru w Krakowie* („Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki”, 24: 1979), pp. 274 and 275.

¹⁴ The output of the competition – recently discussed in detail by Lechosław Lameński and Kazimierz Nowacki – was used also outside Cracow. (Lameński, *op. cit.*, *passim*; K. Nowacki, *Architektura krakowskich teatrów*, Kraków 1982, pp. 151-233).

sacrifice in the conviction of its royal past and out of a sense of obligation to the national theatre".¹⁵ The Cracovian theatre quickly became an integral part of the city's cultural life. It was also one of the greatest attractions pulling wealthy landed families to Cracow and positive proof that culture plays a role in forming a city¹⁶.

The opening of the Municipal Theatre crowned chapter in Cracow's life. It symbolized the culmination of the city's development, dating from the times of the first mayors Dietl and Zyplikiewicz, as a centre of conservative thought, a secluded oasis of Polishness and of reinforced historicism. It also foreshadowed a new era of capitalist modernity and spirit, which was knocking at the door of the city. This was reflected, among other things, in the installation of electricity in the theatre. It antedated the construction of a municipal power plant in Cracow by a decade or so.

As well as the National Museum established in 1879, the new theatre was to become the second Cracovian cultural institution to exert influence on other sectors of partitioned Poland. Since the restoration of the Cloth Hall in 1874-9, this was the greatest investment project undertaken by the city at the turn of the century. The enormous cost of building the new theatre was covered primarily by the amortization loan taken by Cracow in 1892 from the Czech Savings Bank in Prague, but a decisive role in the origin of the new stage was played by the bequest of Karol Kruzer, a writer and a landed property owner from Podole. In 1886 Kruzer, enraptured by a performance in Cracow's Sary Theatre, made an anonymous donation of 46 000 roubles for the building of the new Municipal Theatre. Before his death in 1889, he donated the proceeds from the sale of works of art. In total, the Kruzer foundation augmented Cracow with 100 000 Austrian guildens. In view of the building costs estimated by the theatre at 400 000 Austrian guildens, this was an enormous amount, and it had a decisive effect on the undertaking of this large enterprise by the city¹⁷.

Among the many points at issue, the question of location came to the fore. In the eighties, fast-growing Cracow began to suffer from a shortage of areas available for urban development. This was connected with the city's status as a frontier fortress, imposed by the Austrian authorities. The lack of new building plots and strict building restrictions on the part of the army made the realization of various projects difficult. For this reason turn-of-the-century Cracow, unlike other cities, was unable to develop a new centre beyond the area of the historic buildings. This is why the municipal borough had to implement an extensive investment programme in the area of the historic City Centre, often at the expense of the existing historic core¹⁸. This was especially difficult in the case of a location for the new theatre.

¹⁵ Eustachy Sanguszko, [Address delivered at the opening of the Municipal Theatre in Cracow] Kraków 1907, p. 50.

¹⁶ J. Purchla, *Matecznik Polski*, Kraków 1992, pp. 60-61.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 85-86.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 122, 123, 167.

A dozen or so proposals were considered, each with lesser or greater flaws. Finally, a controversial decision was made to situate the new building in Św. Ducha Square.

In fact, this was a radical decision — especially in Cracow, which saw the birth of an unusually reverential respect for historic buildings already in the first half of the 19th century. But this conscious choice proved the determination of the city, which was in a difficult situation.

Also the choice of a theatre design was in dispute from the very outset.

Twenty-one designs were submitted for the competition, among them a design by Jan Zawiejski, signed “Nobile officium iudicis”. This was a large number for the time; it included the designs of outstanding foreign architects — Emil von Förster of Vienna, the well-known Viennese partnership of Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer, Heinrich Seeling of Berlin, and less known designers from Prague, Leipzig, Berlin, Budapest, Reims and Hagenow. The Polish architects included Leonard Marconi of Lvov, and architects from Warsaw: Edward Goldberg and Teodor Glantz, Tomasz Pryliński, Tadeusz Stryjeński, Władysław Ekielski, Sławomir Odrzywolski and Karol Zaremba were a representative selection of architects from Cracow¹⁹. The jury of well-known architects, including Carl Hasenauer, Zygmunt Gorgolewski, or Zawiejski’s older colleague and collaborator, Julian Niedzielski, were caught in a cleft stick.

The standard of designs was very high, the competition becoming an excellent overview of the achievements of contemporary theatre building. Although the architects were restricted by an overdetailed competition programme, they showed their artistic imagination to full advantage. The works sent in were a good illustration of the evolution of architecture in the late 1880s, when historicism was drawing to a close. At that time, architects were eager to express themselves in forms referring to the mature Italian Renaissance, and also to the Baroque and Classicism. Stylistic eclecticism was a characteristic symptom of the slow decline of historicism. All these phenomena were evident in the competition designs. They were dominated by Renaissance and Classicist stylistic decorations. The designs were not free of stylistic syncretism²⁰. Stylistic originality among them was displayed by the proposals of the partnership of Sławomir Odrzywolski and Karol Zaremba, and by Jan Zawiejski. Both of them strove for charm in exterior elevations. Odrzywolski and Zaremba proposed to retain the elevations in the forms of the German Renaissance (*altdeutscher Stil*), which were then fashionable especially in northern Germany²¹. It is indisputable that the theatre competition in Cracow was the first such major enterprise in Polish architectural history, as illustrated by the publication of all the prize-winning designs in a separate

¹⁹ K. Nowacki, *O budowie teatru miejskiego w Krakowie* („Pamiętnik Teatralny”, 24: 1975), pp. 237 and 239.

²⁰ Lameński, *op. cit.*, pp. 281-282.

²¹ J. Purchla, *Jan Zawiejski. Architekt przełomu XIX i XX wieku*, Warszawa 1986, p. 268.

volume of an acclaimed series published by the Berlin publishing house of Ernst Wasmuth. Thanks to this, the results of the competition in Cracow became more widely known in European architectural circles²².

The building of the Municipal Theatre in Cracow is considered one of the more remarkable examples of eclecticism on Polish lands, and a work typical for the “‘grandiose’, ‘pompous’ style of the late 19th century [represented] most fully [by] massive public buildings overburdened with decorations”²³. In fact, the building of the Cracovian theatre is a classical example of late historicism. The characteristic plasticity and liveliness of architecture, the use of impressionistic effects, the principle of independence of different parts of the building, the atectonic dynamism in shaping the mass, and stylistic eclecticism were symptoms of the declining period of historicism and a foreshadowing of the secession. In Zawiejski’s stylistic evolution, the Cracow theatre was undoubtedly a new quality for someone who had expressed himself in the spirit of the Italian and German Renaissance, which strove to observe the principle of stylistic unity and leaned towards the canons of fully-fledged historicism. On the other hand, it is no surprise. As an eclectic work, it combined various elements and inspirations, which Zawiejski — who kept abreast of the changes in European architecture and was open to them — adopted as they occurred.

In the eighties, the Viennese milieu, from which Zawiejski rose and with which he was connected throughout, lived through a period of another stylistic decoration, the epoch of Neo-Baroque. The Neo-Baroque grandiloquence satisfied the aesthetic tastes of the viewers, and made it possible to best implement the canons of late historicism, which were in opposition to mature historicism. The Neo-Baroque spread all over Europe. It was characteristic both for Paris and Berlin; in Vienna it encountered the strong tradition of works by Fischer von Erlach and Hildebrandt, which bore on it its mark of local character. Of special significance was the construction of St. Michael’s Wing and the completion of the Imperial Forum²⁴. Semper and Hasenauer set a good example to other Viennese architects. The splendour of the interior decoration of the court museums was one of the finest, and most inspiring examples of the prevailing tendency in the treatment of prestigious interiors²⁵. The work in the direction of Neo-Baroque was developed by Zawiejski’s teacher, Carl König, by Friedrich Ohmann, Ludwig Baumann, Albert Ilg, and the Ferdinand Fellner (junior) — Hermann Helmer partnership²⁶.

The whole composition of the Cracow theatre is subordinate to the eclecticism of form as an aesthetic principle and to the method of construction.

²² *Stadttheater für Krakau* („Sammelmappe Hervorragender Concurrenz-Entwürfe”, Heft 25, Berlin 1893).

²³ A. Miłobędzki, *Zarys dziejów architektury w Polsce*, Warszawa 1978, p. 294.

²⁴ R. Wagner-Rieger, *Wiens Architektur im 19. Jahrhundert 1830-1920*, Wien 1970, p. 255.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 260.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 254-261.

Eclecticism idealized stylistic forms adopted from earlier periods, giving them a specific, undisputedly nineteenth-century character based on modern aesthetics²⁷. Many contemporary architects employing stylistic syncretism were convinced that they created homogeneous stylistic forms. For example, Charles Garnier, whose works are now textbook examples of eclecticism in architecture, was its opponent in his aesthetic views.

Compared to Zawiejski's earlier architectural activity, the complex design of the Cracow stage in a way forced him to borrow from various sources. It also imposed originality, which Zawiejski understood as a fresh and skilful interpretation of familiar and much used forms. Zawiejski's accurate choice of Garnier's Opera in the Paris²⁸, as a functional and applied model, imposed in a way conventional formal solutions, not excluding the possibility of using various motifs and inspirations. There were several sources, in fact. Firstly, the building of the Paris Opera. The architecture of the Cracow theatre not only imitates the general plan of Garnier's work, with its characteristic treatment of the roof, but also the sense of grandiloquent architecture of this Parisian sanctuary of art. The Opera, built in 1861-75 and a symbol of the Second Empire style, was generally considered neo-Baroque. It must be clearly emphasized, however, that in line with the eclecticism of the second half of the 19th century Garnier achieved the neo-baroque effect with stylistic elements taken from the late Italian Renaissance²⁹. This was similar in Cracow. "The building's exterior displays a sequence of late-Renaissance forms, using those motifs of Cracow Renaissance architecture that have been preserved in the Cloth Hall, in the town hall of Kazimierz, Tarnów, etc.", reads a description of the Cracow theatre in the Cracovian „Czasopismo Techniczne” of 1893³⁰. Also in this case, Renaissance elements were used to compose a building which was Neo-Baroque in expression. Another French building Zawiejski used as a model, in addition to the Paris Opera, was the theatre in Angers. Zawiejski repeated the composition of the sculpture decoration of the theatre façade³¹.

As well as French theatres, Zawiejski was inspired by Viennese architects. These influences were of a triple kind. The most obvious one was that of Heinrich von Ferstel, notably the architecture of the Vienna University. This can be seen in the treatment of some window openings and of the staircase, and in the introduction of characteristic motifs, etc.³²

²⁷ J. Lepiarczyk, *Z problematyki kompozycji urbanistycznej 2. poł. XIX wieku (Paryż i Wiedeń)* [in:] *Sztuka 2. poł. XIX wieku. Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Łódź, listopad 1971*, Warszawa 1973, p. 47.

²⁸ P. Krakowski, *Teoretyczne podstawy architektury wieku XIX* („Zeszyty Naukowe UJ. Prace z Historii Sztuki”, 15: 1979), p. 33.

²⁹ H.-R. Hitchcock, *Architecture Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Harmondsworth 1963, p. 198.

³⁰ *Nowy teatr w Krakowie* („Czasopismo Techniczne” [Kraków], 7: 1893), p. 234.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 235.

³² “Ferstelian” windows were already noticed by Kazimierz Nowacki (in his work: *Architektura....*, p. 216).

Another influence was the architecture of Viennese theatres, with which Zawiejski was familiar and whose architecture he remembered despite using Garnier's Opera as a model. The treatment of the Cracow theatre's vestibule shows the substantial impact of the Vienna Opera, built in 1861-9 by van der Nüll and Siccardsburg³³. A second stage which could not have escaped Zawiejski's notice was the Burgtheater, built in 1874-88 by Semper and Hasenauer. The building had forms bordering on late Renaissance and Baroque, had a very vivid composition and the character of Second Empire architecture³⁴. Its opening in the same year as the theatre competition in Cracow was announced, was for Zawiejski an important guide and encouraged him to choose the bombastic stylistic exterior decoration. It was also no coincidence that Carl von Hasenauer — the only living author of the Burgtheater — was invited to sit on the jury of the Cracow theatre competition.

In searching for different influences in the architecture of the Cracow theatre, we must pay attention to the activity of the famous Viennese partnership of Fellner and Helmer, which won first prize in the Cracow competition. By the late eighties, they had many significant theatre buildings to their name, and Zawiejski was familiar with their work. In discussing the influence of Fellner and Helmer's theatre architecture on Zawiejski's work in Cracow, we must point primarily to the municipal theatre in Brno (German: Brünn) in Moravia from 1881-2, because there are conspicuous similarities between the treatment of the main staircase and the auditorium in the Brno and Cracow theatres³⁵.

Putting aside the details of inspirations and technical solutions adopted by Zawiejski from the Viennese architectural partnership, we must note the wider role Fellner and Helmer played as creators of theatre architecture. In the 1880s they promoted in Central Europe a modern type of theatre building, originating from the Semperian tradition. It distinguished itself by a clear tripartite division of the building's mass, culminating a tower part and a loggia, which is usually placed at the front part³⁶. Fellner and Helmer's theatre interiors, despite varying historic decorations, were characterized by functionality and modernity³⁷. This high-quality standard of design must have inspired Zawiejski, who was studying theatre architecture closely in the late 1880s.

The third source of Zawiejski's Viennese inspiration was the stylistic evolution of Vienna in the eighties, notably the popularity of the Baroque. It is significant that Zawiejski's second outstanding teacher, Carl König, became at

³³ *Ibidem*; Wagner-Rieger, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-130; H.-Ch. Hoffmann, W. Krause, W. Kitlitschka, *Das Wiener Opernhaus*, Wiesbaden 1972, *passim*.

³⁴ Hitchcock, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

³⁵ Hoffmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.

³⁶ *Stadttheater ...*, pp. 32-42.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 50-77.

the time one of the best-known Viennese proponents of the Baroque³⁸. In contrast to other competition designs, Zawiejski's proposal distinguished itself not only by its compositional harmony which impressed the critics, but also, most importantly, by a considerable stylistic evolution. Most of the designs still remained under the influence of Neo-Renaissance or they classicized³⁹.

In addition to the influences of Paris and Vienna in the architecture of the Cracow theatre, we can also find local motifs, ably introduced in the composition. The third important stylistic vein of the theatre, they were Zawiejski's response to the prevailing demand for the "vernacular" form of architecture.

With the progress of historical forms, the sources of inspiration were extended by modern forms. It was then that a movement based on native inspiration appeared in Polish architecture among the cosmopolitan mixture of Neo-Renaissance and Neo-Baroque varieties⁴⁰. It originated in Cracow, where it had the best conditions to develop most fully. At the time Cracow saw the birth of the Polish history of art, whose theoretical accomplishments were used in the restoration of historic monuments, energetically undertaken for the first time. It was in Cracow at the turn of the 1870s and 1880s that a specific climate for the cult of the past was born, with regard to the future⁴¹. Also in Cracow were the aesthetically and ideologically finest examples of Polish Renaissance architecture, with the Royal Castle, Sigismund Chapel on Wawel, and the Cloth Hall in the foreground. It was these works that were to become the main source of inspiration.

The introduction of native motifs in the competition design gave the architect an extra advantage over the designs without such motifs; it is the more surprising that the competing architects were quite afraid of using "native motifs". Zawiejski's design went furthest in this respect, a fact considered a strong point by the critics⁴². In 1900 the Cracovian "Architekt"

³⁸ Wagner-Rieger, *op. cit.*, pp. 256 and 257.

³⁹ Cf. *Stadttheater ...*, *passim*; Lameński, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

⁴⁰ Cf. W. Dalbor, *Zagadnienia rodzimości architektury polskiej* („Prace Instytutu Urbanistyki i Architektury”, 3: 1953, 1), pp. 3-34; A. K. Olszewski, *Przegląd koncepcji stylu narodowego w teorii architektury polskiej przelomu XIX i XX wieku* („Sztuka i Krytyka”, 7: 1956, 3-4), pp. 275-300; T. S. Jaroszewski, A. Rottermund, „Renesans polski” w architekturze XIX i XX wieku [in:] *Renesans. Sztuka i ideologia. Materiały Sympozjum Naukowego Komitetu Nauk o Sztuce PAN, Kraków, czerwiec 1972*, and *Materiały Sesji Naukowej Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Kielce, listopad 1973*, Warszawa 1976, pp. 613-638; J. Skuratowicz, „Styl krajowy” w budownictwie rezydencjonalnym Wielkopolski przelomu XIX i XX wieku [in:] *Sztuka XIX wieku w Polsce. Naród -- miasto. Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Poznań, grudzień 1977*, Warszawa 1979, pp. 125-143; J. Skuratowicz, *Dwory i palace w Wielkim Księstwie Poznańskim*, Poznań 1982, pp. 105-114.

⁴¹ Cf. J. Purchla, *Liberalizm i symbolika a powstanie nowoczesnego Krakowa* [in:] *Kraków na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, Kraków 1983, pp. 115-123.

⁴² Cf. W. Wdowiszewski, *Przepisy budownicze, ogniowe i porządkowe dla miasta Krakowa*, Kraków 1891, p. 210; J. Niedziałkowski, *Konkurs na projekt teatru dla Krakowa* („Przegląd Techniczny”, 1889), p. 141.

monthly praised Zawiejski for using in the Cracow theatre the motifs of the attic, and also for “the application of tripartite stone door-posts according to the typical examples found on Wawel”, and considered this “a fortunate idea and gave [...] the whole building a native stamp”⁴³. Indeed, Zawiejski introduced the elements of the Cloth Hall attic and “Wawel motifs” organically and harmoniously in the theatre’s eclectic architecture. “The architect’s imagination scattered those lively and unconstrained Cracovian forms: they move the characteristic silhouette of the building upwards, saving it from triviality and monotony of exterior” — writes in 1893 the Cracovian “Czasopismo Techniczne”⁴⁴. It is hard to agree, however, with the opinion held since the theatre competition that the Cracovian motifs introduced by Zawiejski gave the building a native stamp. Zawiejski’s themes, referring to the local tradition, enlivened the building’s architecture without dominating it. The architecture of the Cracow theatre has a decidedly eclectic and cosmopolitan character, and the mascarons from the Cloth Hall are more ideologically meaningful than they are formally.

Despite the above-mentioned various inspirations, it must be emphasized that the Cracow theatre is an individual work and sets a new artistic standard. Zawiejski, using the Renaissance and Baroque motifs adopted from different areas eclectically, made an integral aesthetic whole, thus testifying to his individual talent.

Despite the fact that after 1893 Zawiejski would return to the problem of theatre design many times, in contrast to his rivals from Vienna, Fellner and Helmer, he never managed to construct another theatre building. None of his subsequent designs of this type matched the architecture of the Cracow theatre for its, originality and quality of treatment. The Cracow theatre at Św. Ducha Square placed Zawiejski among the most outstanding architects of the late 19th-century. Although in his working life he would create many other designs and projects worthy of respect, in the history of Polish and European architecture Jan Zawiejski will remain known primarily as the architect of the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Cracow.

The one-hundred-year-old edifice at Św. Ducha Square validates Théophile Gautier’s statement about the symbolic role of theatre buildings as late-19th-century temples of civilization. Its symbolism was additionally augmented by the complex situation of Belle Epoque Cracow, which was a special place full of contradictions, standing in between two eras. Late-feudal stagnation and backwardness on the one hand, and capitalist modernity and dynamism on the other, battled with one another also during the erection of the monumental Juliusz Słowacki Theatre. The municipal government’s deliberate decision to build the theatre proved its deep understanding of the influential function of culture in the developing city and of the exceptional role the former capital city of Poland played in the life of a nation deprived of its

⁴³ „Architekt”, 1: 1900/1901, p. 119.

⁴⁴ *Nowy teatr* ..., pp. 234 and 235.

own statehood. For this reason the façade of the theatre was adorned with a proud motto: "Cracow for national art". The opening of the new stage in October 1893 crowned the city modernization programme, which had been started already in the period of the first presidents of Cracow, Józef Dietl and Mikołaj Zyplikiewicz. It also symbolized a new chapter in its lively development, heralded not only by the spirited and monumental mass of the building, but also by electricity, used for the first time as lighting. It was also no coincidence that the newly-opened building was designated the role of a new centre of Cracow, entering the 20th century.

But the architecture of the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre still belongs to the 19th century. In a symbolic way it closes the "masked ball of architecture" of the 19th century⁴⁵. It is a climax and summary of the bombastic phase of historicism. It is also an eclectic work inspired by different sources. Comprehended in this way, the Cracow theatre synthesizes the achievements of late 19th-century Viennese, Parisian and German architecture, and at the same time reflects the capabilities and the state of aesthetic awareness of the local artists. The eclecticism of the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre was also illustrative of the contemporary debate on the universality and local character of architecture.

In Cracow historicism lasted for longer and assumed a special character thanks to the combination of national and symbolic themes in Cracow on the brink of World War I. Lack of independence gave rise to a cult of the glorious past and increased the aspiration for a national style in art and architecture, thus strengthening and prolonging the duration of historicism. For Zawiejski, who developed in the spirit of the epoch, this was a favourable phenomenon, which even encouraged him to take a conservative stance. A characteristic form of this conservatism was his tendency to introduce national themes, which lasted almost throughout the whole period of his creative work. This tendency was strongly marked in the architecture of the building at Św. Ducha Square. Characteristically, it did not assume a structural character, and the theatre, despite the introduction of many "local motifs" remained cosmopolitan in its expression. This observation applies not only to the architecture of Zawiejski, but also to the expression of the whole building as a specific *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This concept was symbolized by Siemiradzki's academic curtain, which lacked national ("Matejko's") themes and complemented well the "cosmopolitan pomposity" of the theatre's architecture. Seen in this light, the Cracow theatre exemplifies the change in expression and meaning of theatre building, so characteristic for this period.

The architecture of the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre is full of contradictions, the same way Europe and Cracow were in the late 19th century. Zawiejski deserves the credit for combining them both harmoniously. By a fortunate coincidence, notably accurate timing, the opening of the newly-built theatre was a success. Zawiejski proposed to Cracow the eclectic external decoration

⁴⁵ N. Pevsner, *Historia architektury europejskiej*, vol. 2, Warszawa 1980, p. 262.

of the theatre at the last moment — when pompous ambitions had reached a high point and emotions were turned to the past. The proposal aroused enthusiasm in conservative Cracow. The inconvenient location at św. Ducha Square did not allow the architect a town-planning success like that of the Parisian Avenue de l'Opera, but the theatre's interior designed by Zawiejski became his unquestionable achievement. The conservative Cracovian public liked not only its prestigious pathos, but also its hierarchic layout. The imperial box on the main axis of the dress circle was at the top of the whole system of boxes and more privileged seats, symbolizing the quasi-feudal division of the Cracow community⁴⁶. That is why the Cracow theatre is far from the ideals of the Wagnerian Reformtheater. The role of the Parisian bourgeoisie here was played by the Galician nobility and the Cracovian middle-class. What the Cracow stage has in common with the Wagnerian Bayreuth is that it quickly became the "pilgrimage cathedral" — the Santiago de Compostela of the Polish theatre⁴⁷.

On the other hand, the building at św. Ducha Square started to lose its relevance quite early in the face of a vehement reaction towards historicism and the revolutionary changes in art around 1900. Although in its Neo-Baroque, "lively" architecture we can see the seeds of Art Nouveau, the Cracow theatre in the eyes of the young, rebellious avant-garde was only a symbol of the receding era of kitsch and obscurantism.

"The new theatre resembles to me an inapt cake, which the generous dispenser has adorned with almonds, nuts and raisins. If one could only remove these decorations from the corners of the roof"⁴⁸ — wrote a severe critic of Cracow 19th-century architecture, on the threshold of the new century. It is beyond doubt, however, that one hundred years later, this opinion seems to be grossly unfair.

The importance of the architecture of the Cracovian theatre was proved by its impact. Already an international competition for the design of a new stage was a success. Eminent jurors and the participation of well-known foreign designers in the competition heightened its prestige. The competition also showed a high standard of works by Cracovian architects and broke the barrier of mistrust towards the local community. The international significance of the competition was expressed not only by the publication of the results in foreign publications, but also by the fact that the award-winning design by Fellner and Helmer was implemented in one of the central squares of Zurich, on the bank of a picturesque Alpine lake⁴⁹. The building designed by

⁴⁶ For social space of 19th-century theatre and its hierarchy cf. Carlson, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-157 and 185-190.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

⁴⁸ F. Chwalibóg, *Brzydki Kraków* [no place of public] 1908, p. 8.

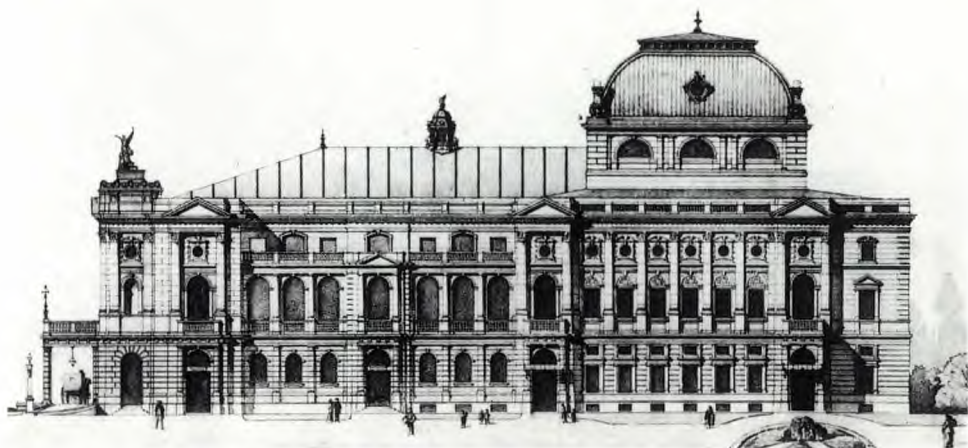
⁴⁹ Hoffmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-123, figs. 259-267; A. Cattani, *Baumarathon in Rekordzeit. In sechzehn Monaten ein neues Theater* [in:] *Stadttheater Opernhaus. Hundert Jahre Musiktheater in Zürich*, eds. M. Zelger-Vogt, A. Honegger, Zürich 1991, p. 14.

Zawiejski had some impact on the shape of the Croatian national theatre in Zagreb⁵⁰, built by Viennese architects in 1894-5, and also on the architecture of the new Municipal Theatre in Lvov.

A full and just evaluation of Jan Zawiejski's work will be possible only when we consider the slender financial means the architect had. This is especially important in comparing the Cracow theatre with similar buildings in European metropolises and cities, much richer than Cracow, where a similar architectural programme was implemented with much larger resources. In this context, the choice of the pompous historic dress can be read as an important ideological proclamation, which the artist interpreted very well.

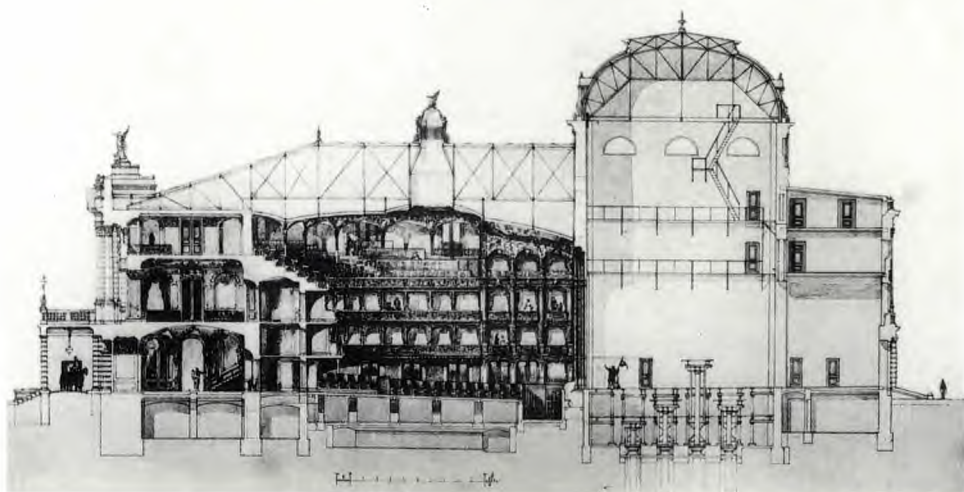
Translation: *Jerzy Pilawski*

⁵⁰ Hoffmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88, figs. 1-8; Hrvatsko Narodno Kazalište u Zagrebu, 1840-1860-1992, Zagreb 1992.



1. Cracow. F. Fellner, H. Helmer, T. Pryliński: competition design for the Municipal Theatre (1st prize in the 1st competition), side façade, 1889

2. Cracow. F. Fellner, H. Helmer, T. Pryliński: competition design for the Municipal Theatre (1st prize in the 1st competition), longitudinal section, 1889

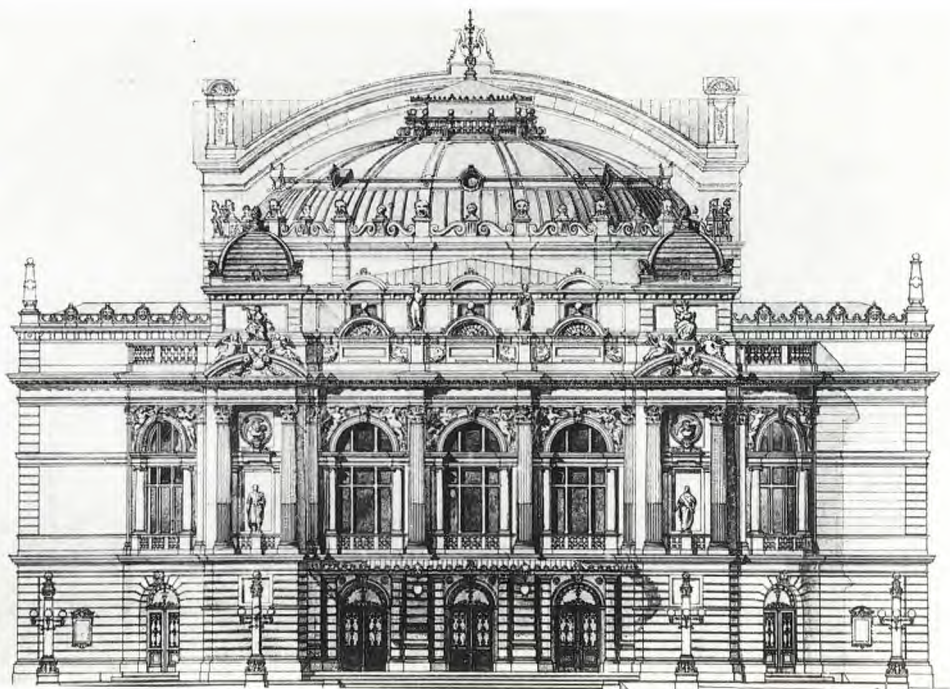




3. Cracow. S. Odrzywolski, K. Zaremba: competition design for the Municipal Theatre (2nd prize in the 1st competition), general view, 1889

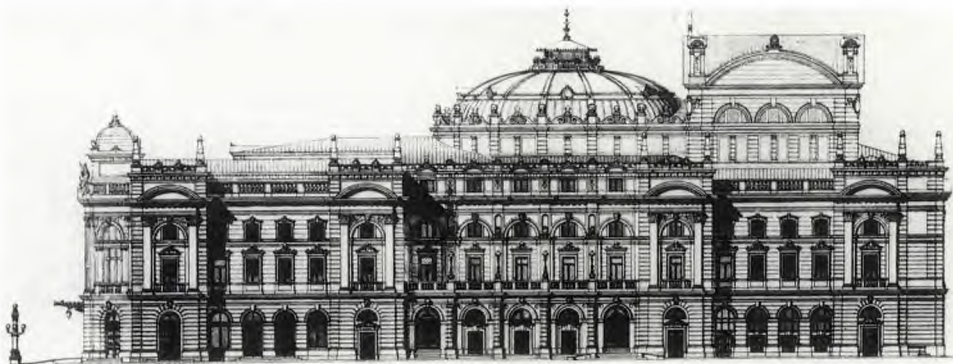
4. Cracow. S. Odrzywolski, K. Zaremba: competition design for the Municipal Theatre — alternative (2nd prize in the 1st competition), façade, 1889

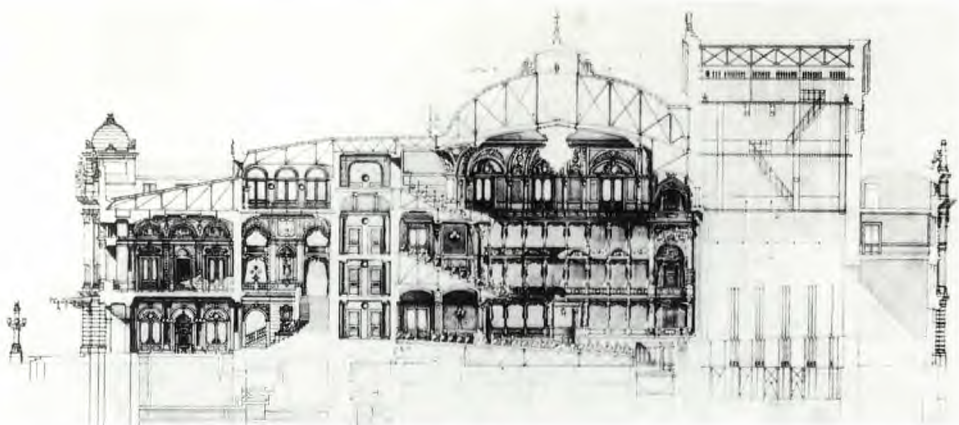




5. Cracow. J. Zawiejski: competition design for the Municipal Theatre (3rd prize in the 1st competition), façade, 1889

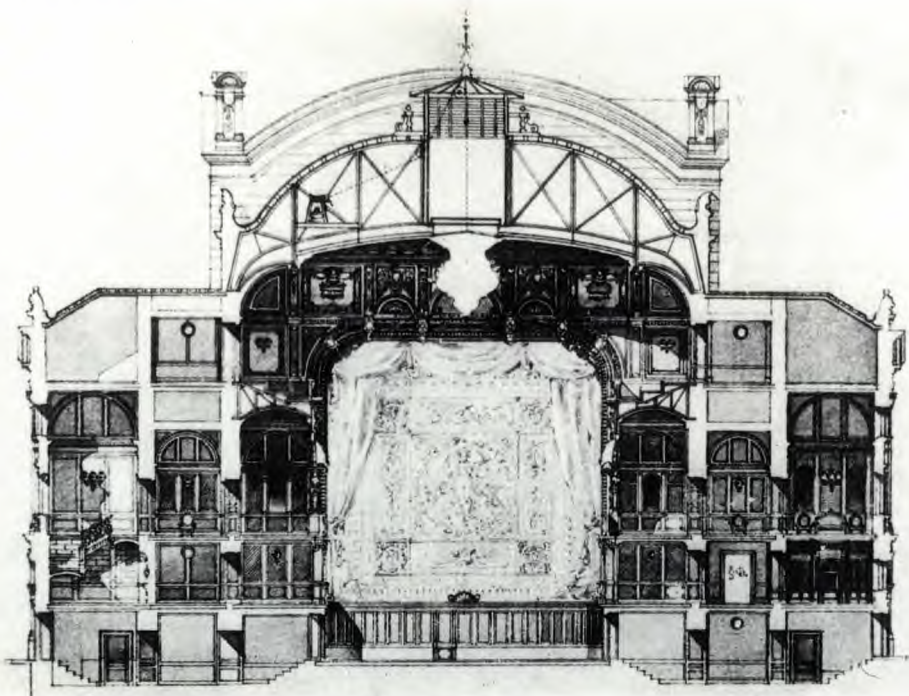
6. Cracow. J. Zawiejski: competition design for the Municipal Theatre (3rd prize in the 1st competition), side façade, 1889





7. Cracow. J. Zawiejski: competition design for the Municipal Theatre (3rd prize in the 1st competition), longitudinal section, 1889

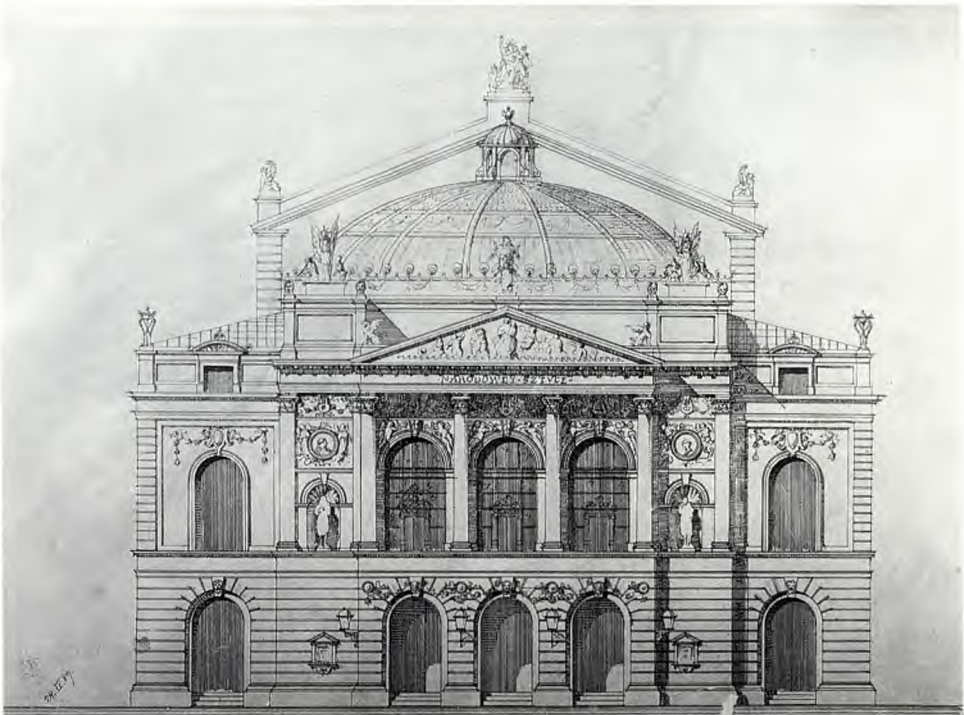
8. Cracow. J. Zawiejski: competition design for the Municipal Theatre (3rd prize in the 1st competition), cross-section, 1889





9. Cracow. E. von Förster: competition design for the Municipal Theatre (award in the 1st competition), general view, 1889

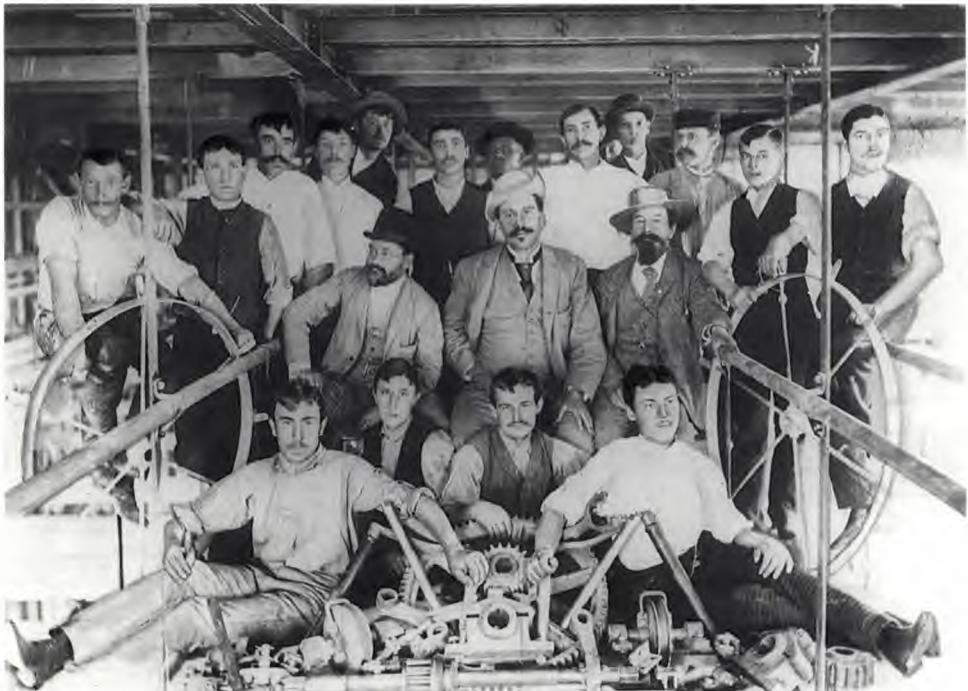
10. Cracow. T. Stryjeński, W. Ekielski: competition design for the Municipal Theatre — alternative, façade, 1889





11. Cracow. J. Zawiejski: Municipal Theatre, project implemented in 1889-1893, general view

12. Cracow. J. Zawiejski in the course of finishing work on the construction of the Municipal Theatre, 1893





13. Cracow. Municipal Theatre during the finishing work, 1893

14. Cracow. A building of the electric station and painting shop at the back of the Municipal Theatre





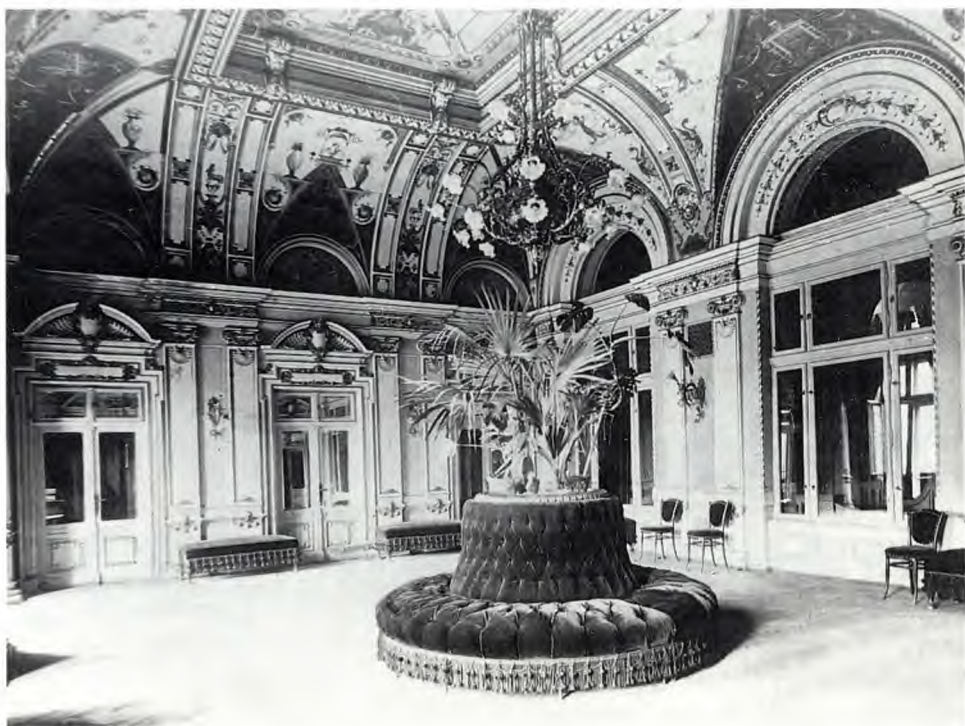
15. Cracow, Main staircase of the Theatre, 1893



16. Cracow. Main staircase of the Theatre, 1993



17. Cracow. Façade of the Theatre, 1889



18. Cracow. Foyer of the Theatre, 1893



19. Cracow. A plaque showing Zawiejski, placed on the main staircase of the Municipal Theatre to mark the twenty fifth jubilee of the stage



20. Cracow. Auditorium of the Theatre in the direction of the imperial box, 1993