

TREASURES OF THE ACADEMY

To help celebrate the Polish Academy of Sciences’ 70th anniversary, the historic Staszic Palace is hosting a commemorative exhibition showcasing some of the centerpieces of the Academy’s extensive collections.

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PAS Archives in Warsaw

The 70th anniversary of the Polish Academy of Sciences (falling in 2021) has represented an excellent opportunity to showcase many of the collected “treasures” of Polish science. The Academy continues the traditions of older scientific institutions and, via its numerous scientific and auxiliary units (the PAS institutes, archives, libraries, and museums) located throughout Poland, it holds collections that represent an integral component of Poland’s and indeed the world’s cultural and scientific heritage. To commemorate the occasion, the staff of the PAS Archives, in collaboration with selected other Academy institutions, curated and assembled a commemorative exhibition. It has been put on display at the historic Staszic Palace, which once housed the Royal Society of Friends of Science in Warsaw (one of Poland’s oldest scientific societies), and remains an important meeting-place and site for scientific manuscript and library collections.

The exhibition’s 20 display-boards feature a variety of unique exhibits, on loan from the PAS institutions, that are rarely presented to the general public. These include: a thirteenth-century Cistercian parchment document; a seventeenth-century print with drawings showing technical devices used at the time with notes on their efficiency and certain “health and safety regulations”; a set of hand-drawn maps that are valuable relics of Polish cartography; globally unique atlases and dictionaries; old photographs, including a reproduction of a daguerreotype from before 1860; a royal medal from 1765; a letter from 1946 sent by Albert Einstein to the Polish physicist and television pioneer Mieczyslaw Wolfke; eighteenth-century botanical specimens; zoological objects, such as a unique specimen of the woolly rhinoceros – one of the largest ice-age herbivores alongside the woolly mammoth; and one of the most extensive collections of insects in Poland. The exhibition also features glass, silver, and bronze decorations discovered at the Weklice archaeological site, beautiful watercolors by the actress Helena Modrzejewska (Modjeska), unknown photographs of Warsaw and several other Polish cities, and documentation of political groups from the Polish parliamentary elections in 1993.

Other noteworthy exhibits, provided by libraries of the Academy, include: a manuscript of Part III of Adam Mickiewicz’s poetic drama *Dziady* [Forefathers’ Eve]; portraits and caricatures of Kazimierz Twardowski, Adam Mickiewicz, and Boleslaw Prus; an amusing and somewhat bawdy seventeenth-century drawing from Gen. Michał Heindenreich’s diary; a parchment document from 1447 in which King Casimir IV forbids, under the penalty of the confiscation of property, the sale of beer not brewed in Kraków; and an incunable by the surgeon, alchemist, and botanist Hieronymus Brunschwig on the epidemic of plague and its treatment methods, with a hand-colored woodcut showing a scene of doctors holding consultations over the bed of a plague patient.

The display-boards also present information about the project partners, drawing public attention to their valuable collections. A symposium was also held in connection with the exhibition.

The exhibition “Treasures of the Academy” offers a unique chance to examine a wide variety of truly historic objects in one place. It underscores how one of the tasks of the Polish Academy of Sciences, since its inception, has involved gathering and preserving scientific, natural, and historical collections. ■



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The poster for the “Treasures of the Polish Academy of Sciences” exhibition