

ACADEMIA Focus on Women in Science

Cleo – one of the nine daughters of Zeus and the titan Mnemosyne, the muse of history.



# THEY PAVED THE WAY

In 2014 the Jagiellonian University celebrated its 650th anniversary. The description of the university's history on the jubilee website, however, makes no mention of the first female students – even though it was the first Polish university to welcome women.

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**G**aining access to secondary and higher education for women was the greatest success of the Kraków emancipation movement. The establishment of the first female secondary school with the right to matriculate, and the appearance of first female students at the Jagiellonian University can be attributed to one woman, Kazimiera Bujwidowa, who relocated from Warsaw to Kraków in 1893 when her husband, Prof. Odon Bujwid, was offered a position at the Jagiellonian University. Let's examine the state of women's education in Kraków at that time. Bujwidowa knew that without reforming secondary education, women had no chance of being admitted to universities.

## Private secondary schools

In Galicia, the southern part of partitioned Poland then under Austro-Hungarian rule, there were no secondary schools for women until the 1870s. Only girls from "good" and wealthy homes were educated at boarding schools. Folk schools existed in district towns but they taught only at elementary level.

In 1869 the Austrian Ministry of Denominations and Education made the decision to establish post-elementary schools for girls. All-female departmental schools began to emerge in 1871, which in time adopted a practical curriculum, as well as all-female teacher colleges, which prepared students for a specific career. Secondary schools began to appear in 1900, but their curriculum significantly differed from that of all-male schools. They did not ensure eligibility for admission to universities.

The St. Scholastica Municipal Departmental School for Women was established in 1871, as the first public school for girls in Kraków. The school opened on 1st September 1881 and offered three vocational courses, including a women's work course and a business course. The courses were developed by Maria Mayerberg and Maria Źarska. In 1886 these vocational courses were transformed into the School for Women's Practical Work. Maria Mayerberg became its principal, and by 1912 the school was renamed the Municipal Industrial School for Women.

Kazimiera Bujwidowa, however, did not think much of the school and its vocational courses: "In Austria, and thus in Galicia, the only options for women are folk schools and universities, because the available departmental and middle schools are poor substitutes for secondary education. Aside from teacher colleges there are no vocational schools for women, as the so called schools for women's work, with their hemstitching and English or traditional German embroidery, or various



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art courses, such as wood firing or porcelain painting, make a mockery of true arts and crafts.”

In 1895 Bujwidowa and her husband joined the Kraszewski Association of Scientific Aid for Polish Girls, which operated in Switzerland and helped women who were planning to attend universities. Bujwidowa founded and presided over the committee to establish an all-female secondary school. In January 1896 the committee became the Society of the Secondary School for Girls, chaired by Odon Bujwid, Napoleon Cybulski and Bronisław Trzaskowski. The Society owned the school, which opened in September 1896. It was the first private all-female secondary school in the Polish lands with the same curriculum level as the all-male secondary schools, which allowed women to apply to universities. Until 1918 there were only three all-female secondary schools in Kraków, which offered the opportunity to apply to universities. All were private, because the Austrian administration was

a major dispute. In September 1904 the situation was exacerbated by a teacher, Marcelina Kulikowska, who refused to bring her pupils to Mass. The conservative daily *Czas* reported on the incident, accusing the school of exhibiting “non-Christian and non-nationalistic attitudes”, and the teachers, contemptuously referred to as “the Genevan maidens” (Kulikowska and Witkowska were graduates of the University of Geneva), of “bringing moral decay to Kraków.” The events were discussed during the debates of the National Parliament in Lwów and by the Archbishop of Kraków. Eventually, Marcelina Kulikowska was fired from her job as a result of the scandal, Principal Trzaskowski resigned, and transferred to a new school along with several teachers in 1905.

The second all-female private secondary school was the Queen Jadwiga Private Secondary School for Girls who taught its pupils “in a religious and national spirit”. The school was owned by the Friends of Queen Jadwiga Secondary School Society.

The third such school was the Helena Strażyńska Private Secondary School for Girls, established in 1902, and granted public rights in the 1905/06 academic year. It did not accept Jewish girls. The first examinations were conducted in 1908, and in the 1914/1915 academic year it was renamed the Józef and Maria Lewicki Private Secondary School for Girls.

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not interested in establishing a public secondary education program for girls.

The pupils attending the First Private Secondary School for Girls were taught by the likes of Marcelina Kulikowska, Helena Witkowska, Stefania Sempołowska and Ewelina Wroblewska. The first group of girls graduated in 1900. Twenty-one girls sat for their secondary school examinations at the St. Anna Secondary School for Boys, in front of a committee which included the archbishop and the city’s mayor. But the first Polish female graduate from Kraków was Helena Donhaiser, who passed her secondary school exam on 5th June 1899, also at the St. Anna School. Donhaiser studied for her exams at a boarding school. The St. Anna Secondary School was the only school in Kraków permitted by a Ministerial Order to carry out extramural examinations for women. It wasn’t until 1907 that the First Private Secondary School for Girls was granted the right to conduct these examinations.

Earlier, however, differences in views among the members of the school’s management resulted in

## University students

Thanks to research by Ewa Chudoba and Anna Smywińska-Pohl, we know that the “Principal School of the Crown” (as the Jagiellonian University was then called) welcomed its first female students at the end of the 18th century. They were midwives, attending the midwifery course at the Collegium Physicum. The first women appeared on the list of students in 1788, and the course existed until 1850.

The first women to graduate from the Kraków university received their diplomas in 1824. They were two sisters, Filipina and Konstancja Studzińska, both nuns, who worked in the pharmacy of the St. Lazarus Hospital. After ten years of practice they applied to Jagiellonian University authorities for permission to take the exam and receive a degree. For a year they attended extramural classes, and in August 1824 they passed the exam and received their diplomas. This was a unique phenomenon on a European scale. It wasn’t until about 1850 that women could attend university (Geneva, Zurich), and only by 1867 were they allowed to work as pharmacists (the Netherlands).

In 1868, Adrian Baraniecki established the private Higher Courses for Women in Kraków in affiliation with the Technical and Industrial Museum. They offered three courses of study: humanities, natural science and art. The courses were very popular, mainly due to the teaching staff, which mostly included uni-

## POLAND'S FIRST SCHOOLS ADMITTING WOMEN

versity professors (who at the same time opposed the presence of women at the Jagiellonian University). The standard of the courses offered was rather diverse, as were the qualifications of the students, who were admitted without having to take an entrance exam.

In 1894 at the Pedagogical Congress in Lwów, Bujwidowa presented a proposal to admit women to higher education, which was adopted by a small majority of votes. That same year she initiated a mass campaign encouraging women to apply to Jagiellonian University as auditors under the 1878 Regulation of the Ministry of Denominations and Education. Until then, only one woman, Ludmiła Kummingsberg, had taken advantage of this Regulation permitting women to attend lectures as auditors “in extraordinary circumstances”; she attended the classes in 1880 but was not allowed to sit for exams or receive a diploma. In 1894, out of dozens of applications, authorities accepted three women to Jagiellonian University, and so Jadwiga Sikorska, Janina Kosmowska and Stanisława Dowgiałło began their university studies. They were pharmacists with three years of pharmacy practice under their belts. In the end, Austrian women were granted the right to apply for admission to universities under the Regulation of the Austrian Ministry of Denominations and Education adopted on 29th March 1897. In 1898 this regulation was extended to include female nationals of other countries. It took longer for some faculties of the Jagiellonian University, however, to accept women to their programs. The Faculty of Medicine at the Jagiellonian University began accepting female students in 1900, whereas it took the Faculty of Law until 1918.

In the 1890s Maria Dulębianka fought for the right of women to attend the Kraków School of Fine Arts (renamed the Academy of Fine Arts in 1900). The rector, Julian Fałat, who supported this cause, went as far as offering Olga Boznańska a position to head the painting department at the planned Women's Faculty, but it wasn't until 1918 that the Academy began to accept women. Since they were not allowed to study at the public university, women instead attended private art schools.

One such renowned institution was the School of Painting and Drawing for Women founded by Tola Certowiczówna. It operated in the years 1897–1902 in Kraków on Na Groblach Square. Another popular choice was the School of Fine Arts for Women ran by Maria Niedzielska, founded in 1908. One of its graduates was Zofia Stryjeńska, who would become a renowned painter.

## Research staff members

In 1894, before women were allowed to officially become regular students, Maria Skłodowska-Curie ap-

plied for a research assistantship at the Jagiellonian University. By that time she had already received her degree in mathematics and physics from the Sorbonne – but the future Nobel Prize winner was not admitted to work at the Polish university, simply because of her gender.

The first woman to graduate and receive her doctorate degree from the Jagiellonian University was Stefania Tatarówna, from the Faculty of Philosophy on 11 September 1906. The first woman to graduate and receive her doctorate from the Faculty of Medicine was Helena Donhaiser-Sikorska (also in 1906), already mentioned above as the first woman in Kraków to receive her secondary school degree. Prior to that, two women received official certification from the Jagiellonian University of doctorate degrees they had obtained abroad: Zofia Moraczewska in 1900 and Bronisława Dłuska (sister of Maria Skłodowska-Curie) in 1902.

The first female professor at the Jagiellonian University was Helena Willman-Grabowska, who received her title in 1928.

University authorities were very reluctant to grant assistantships to women and did so very rarely. By the outbreak of World War I, only ten women worked at the Jagiellonian University in assistantship positions. In 1904, Wanda Herzog-Radwańska became the first female research assistant at the Faculty of Medicine. That same year, the Jagiellonian University Senate refused to allow women to seek the higher-doctorate DSc (*habilitation*) degree, required for the rank of associate professor (*docent*). In 1906, Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska, who had earned her doctorate at the University of Zurich, had her habilitation application denied. Such denials continued until 1920, when Helena Gajewska received her habilitation during the interwar period. The first woman to receive the title of Full Professor of the Jagiellonian University was Helena Willman-Grabowska – she had become a Professor in 1928, but wasn't awarded the title of Full Professor until 1937.

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### Further reading:

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Chudoba E., Smywińska-Pohl A. (2017). *Córki Nawojki. Filozofki na Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim 1897–1967. [Daughters of Nawojka: Women Philosophers at the Jagiellonian University]*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Libron.

<http://www.przestrzenkobiet.pl/eng/news/>

<http://www.herstorie.pl/about-the-project/>