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ALEKSANDER GIEYSZTOR, THE FIRST DIRECTOR OF THE ROYAL CASTLE IN WARSAW

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Aleksander Gieysztor happened to play the role of one of the most outstanding Polish museum curators in the 20th century. Slightly contrary to his will and intentions, since he certainly had not planned to crown his illustrious and numerous achievements as a researcher into the past, mainly mediaeval, with holding the position of a director of a unique museum that the rebuilt Royal Castle in Warsaw became. Gieysztor regarded his work at the Castle as well as the office as his duty: service to society: *it seems to me appropriate for humanists to be feeling that what they are doing is a kind of service to a larger community. The Castle, indeed, provides this feeling of service to historical tradition which thanks to it is being consolidated*, were his words in 1986.¹ The service was really of great significance, since in the 1980s and 90s, Polish society were longing for symbols shaping, or more appropriately said, rebuilding their feeling of historical identity. Meanwhile, the Warsaw Castle was precisely such a symbol, appealing strongly to imagination.

Efforts and work for the reconstruction of the Castle, and later its refurbishing and managing, were possibly the most moving intellectual adventure that Aleksander Gieysztor happened to experience. He is said to have pronounced the following words when looking at the reconstructed, though not refurbished as yet, Castle: *A book may be read by someone or not, however the Castle will continue standing!*² When asked why he dedicated so much energy to the Castle, he apparently spontaneously responded: *Because it was here that our history happened.*³ These very words seem to hide the extent of emotions that were aroused in Gieysztor by the Castle as the symbol of the Polish past and one of the most important signs consolidating Polish identity. This is what he himself wrote about it: *Obvious symbols do not require the grandiloquence of interpretations. In one flash they focus numerous meanings of the word and the image. This is what has happened to the Royal Castle in Warsaw in the nation's contemporary awareness. The name of the*

*building inspires infallible associations with the state's history, with the splendour of the majesty of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, her defeats and revival until WW II when our state reappeared in a new shape and the feeling of century-long continuity and national identity shared by its citizens.*⁴ In Gieysztor's view the Castle gained its full autonomy precisely as an annihilated and rebuilt symbol: *let us not forget that the Castle acquires its full symbolic saturation as of 17 September 1939 when it suffered in the conflagration, and until our times when we open wide its gates resting on new hasps.*⁵ On another occasion he remarked: *The Castle was being destroyed deliberately beginning as of October 1939 as the symbol of the Polish state and Polish culture. ...And as the symbol of the Polish state and Polish culture it was rebuilt with the will of the people. The works were launched in 1971. Until last year [i.e. 1983 – P.M.] there had been no single zloty of the state budget in its walls. Only citizens' donations allowed its restitution, Gieysztor emphasized proudly. At this point a reflection and question are inevitable whether today Polish society, far wealthier, enjoying living in a free state, anchored in international structures giving the feeling of security, would be capable of making a similar effort, all sharing the same emotions?*

Gieysztor was really well prepared to play the role of the Castle's Director, even though he was neither a museum curator, nor even an art historian. He considered himself first of all a historian, yet he highly appreciated the cognitive worth of artistic facts. In the spring of 1992, he said at the International Congress of Art History in Berlin: *on no account should a historian remain indifferent towards art which in an entanglement woven of intelligence, emotions, and will has captured testimony to human creativity.*⁶ In every artwork Gieysztor was able to perceive a valuable source of historical cognition, equally important and expressive as a chronicler's narrative, a note written down by an annalist, or a legal act. By no means did he treat history of art as



1. Employees of the Royal Castle in Warsaw wishing Aleksander Gieysztor happy 65th birthday, Grand Courtyard, 17 July 1981



2. Stefan Łebkowski from South Africa is donating a Slutsk sash to the Royal Castle in Warsaw. 23 August 1981



3. UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher visiting the Royal Castle, Marble Room, 3 November 1988



4. Aleksander Gieysztor celebrating 50 years of his academic career: Aleksander Gieysztor with the employees of the Royal Castle in Warsaw; from the left e.g.: Krystyna Przybysz, Dariusz Chyb, Anna Saratowicz-Dudyńska, Hanna Małachowicz, Bożenna Majewska-Maszkowska, Aleksander Gieysztor, Anna Kozłowska, Katarzyna Jursz, Daniel Artymowski, Grażyna Marcinkowska, Bożena Steinborn, Council Chamber, 6 October 1986

an ancillary branch of science, supportive to the mainstream of historical cognition. Contrariwise, fully acknowledging its sovereignty, he presumed that knowledge of art cannot be separated from history, while what he regarded as the sphere of the most fruitful cooperation of both disciplines was that area of cognition which investigates the genesis of a work of art as seen from its social conditionings, directing the cognition towards *the birth of a work or an artistic fact, the birth treated as a response to the expectations or needs of more or less numerous social groups or an individual... It is in this realm that the research of symbolic messages is taken into account, the messages whose carriers are artists; challenges that are entrusted to them, and responses they give through their artistic choices and means which they have at their disposal. Socio-historical investigations and iconographic searches unveil the primordial function of a work of art, the one that it performed in the environment contemporary to its creation. Secondary functions appear and superpose in layers in the course of years and centuries, supplanting or diminishing the primordial functions, giving way to other ones, primarily esthetical... to which we need to add age and rarity affecting the artwork's perception as a museum object, or a heritage piece, or a symbol.*⁷

The artwork's esthetical functions were, in Gieysztor's view, of secondary importance; what he cared most vividly

about was the work's ideological message and social aspect. Thus in his academic work through the analysis of the work's form he did not pose questions related to dating the art, to the work's artistic genesis; he did not attempt to find out its attribution, value novelty, or its positions in the style relations' chain. Yet, he was an art 'connoisseur'; like not many else, he was able to perceive, evaluate, and appreciate the beauty of form characteristic of the most varied creations of human crafts. He was endowed with esthetical sensitivity, reinforced by unique artistic erudition: knowledge and memory of the most exquisite works and their largest collections. He had the capacity of putting these skills to good use, also as the Director of the Warsaw Castle.

Gieysztor's interest in art history did not result from his characteristic intellectual attitude: openness to new research concepts or following 'trendy' tendencies in conducting historical studies. The vision of global history marking out an important place for artistic sources in the process of reaching the full picture of the past emerged after WW II, and crystalized even later. Meanwhile, Gieysztor's interest in art history was of an extremely individual character, reaching back his years at the University of Warsaw. He clearly was ahead of his time, paying so much attention to a historic artwork as an important element of historical cognition. In the interview given in 1986 to Maria Koczerska,



5. Aleksander Gieysztor's retirement; in the photo from the left: Andrzej Brydowski, Technical Director; Andrzej Rottermund, Castle's Director; Aleksander Gieysztor; Marek Makowski, Chief of the Castle Guard; Leszek Kieniewicz; Danuta Gawin, Manager of the Foreign Cooperation Department; Marian Mizeraczyk; Józefa Pazdyk, Chief Accountant; Marta Męclewska, Numismatic Cabinet Curator; Bożenna Majewska-Maszkowska, Curator of the Castle Research Centre; Marian Sołtysiak, Manager of the Arx Regia Publisher; Andrzej Derelkowski, Chief Cataloguer; Paweł Sadlej, Chief Conservator; Danuta Łuniewicz-Koper, Deputy Director; Ewa Suchodolska, Curator of the Historical-Archival Centre; Krystyna Jaworowska, HR Chief Officer; Bożena Wiórkiewicz, Curator of the Educational Centre; Alina Dzięcioł, Library Curator; Hanna Małachowicz, Kazimierz Stachurski, Senators' Stairs, 31 October 1991

when asked about his university studies, Gieysztor responded: *My studying history of art was quite brief, although I did attend Zygmunt Batowski's introductory seminar, as well as classes in mediaeval history of art run by Michał Walicki. However, studying two disciplines: history and history of art proved for me in practice difficult to combine. History simply fascinated me more. Still, during the studies and afterwards, I always tried to stay in contact with historic monuments.*⁸ It is possible that Gieysztor's decision to give up studying history of art was inspired by the authority of Tadeusz Manteuffel: *One day, when I was finishing my duty at the library of the Institute of History of the University of Warsaw, Reader Tadeusz Manteuffel approached me, asking whether I had time, because he wanted to invite me home for a moment. I left, following him, excited... When we arrived at his place, he asked me to sit down in his study; the maid brought tea and some cake. After a moment's silence, looking at me with his penetrating eyes, he said something of the kind: Focus, please, on history studies, mediaeval, they are serious studies, and in the future you may become prominent. History of art! Obviously, it is both beautiful and interesting, but a medievalist has to learn all this anyway, actually by the way, is what Gieysztor is said to have been telling listeners with amusement years later in Nieborów.*⁹

Gieysztor's bonds with art history, initiated during the studies, resulted in the fact that following WW II, on 1 July 1945, he started working at the Institute of Art and Monument Inventorying established by the Ministry of Culture. Although already in October Gieysztor became Assistant Professor at the History Department at the University of Warsaw, he continued fulfilling the Institute's tasks, becoming involved also in its organizational works. Gieysztor's attitude was already then characterized by the aspiration to renew research goals and methods by a comprehensive view of historical events, which led him to heading the research into the beginnings of the Polish state. This was the task Polish historians set to themselves in 1948 in view of the approaching millennium of the Polish statehood, and Gieysztor worked out its interdisciplinary investigation programme. Its assumption was an extremely close cooperation among archaeologists, historians, and representatives of other disciplines concentrated on the complex research into the major centres of the early Piasts' state.¹⁰

The programme presented by Gieysztor was highly appraised by scholars. Michał Walicki went as far as finding in it an outline of a new research school.¹¹ Indeed, in the interdisciplinary approach to clearly defined goals Gieysztor was extremely innovatory. He also proposed to establish

a separate organisational unit to coordinate the research. In response to this, he was appointed head of the Team for the Research into the Beginnings of the Polish State, which he served until 1952, following which he continued until 1955 as Deputy Director of the Institute of the History of Material Cultural of the Polish Academy of Sciences. It was the archaeological research that played the leading role in the implementation of the programme, but the participation of other disciplines was of great impact, too, also of history of art which was assigned new tasks while more and more new relics of the artistic culture of the early Middle Ages were being discovered.

Gieysztor's involvement in the millennial research also yielded several studies tackling the main issues of the early-mediaeval artistic culture. Among the major publications of Polish mediaeval studies mention has to be made of the collective monograph under Michał Walicki on the exquisite work of the Romanesque period, namely *The Gniezno Doors*. Gieysztor was among the authors of the monograph, while his paper *The Gniezno Doors as the Expression of Polish National Awareness* enchants with a novel approach and suggestive interpretation of the programme of this historic monument.¹² He was able to perceive in it a social aspiration which he associated with the cult of St Adalbert, as well as the intensified expansion of Poland's rulers and the Church into Prussia, this permitting him to date the foundation to 1170–80. He observed in the doors' *message a peculiar monarchism embodied in the scenes with rulers in majesty, who although foreign, but performing typical and comprehensible functions, first of all in the scenes with Boleslaus the Brave whose legend was perfectly testified to after Gall*.¹³ Nothing more penetrating on the circumstances



6. The Holy Father's visit to the Royal Castle in Warsaw on his 4th Pilgrimage to Poland; John Paul II and Aleksander Gieysztor in the Knights' Hall, 8 June 1991



7. The Holy Father's visit to the Royal Castle in Warsaw on his 4th Pilgrimage to Poland; President Lech Wałęsa, John Paul II and Aleksander Gieysztor in the Knights' Hall, 8 June 1991

of the foundation of the Gniezno Doors has been written since this masterly interpretation revealing the spirit of the iconological method, at the time almost unknown in Poland.

Years later, when a copy of the doors to the Płock Cathedral was returning from Nowogród, being other monumental bronze doors that the Romanesque period enriched Poland with, they too challenged Gieysztor to the interpretation of their ideological message, in the perspective echoing the fundamental meaning of the importance of the language of symbols in the Middle Ages: *People of the time around the 12th century... were deeply affected by the symbolism of what connected them to the invisible and distant. The signs expressed with the word and recorded in fine arts and music served the community of thought and emotions reaching... towards the thought structures that are most durable here on earth and in the transcendental perspective.*¹⁴ Not very extensive size-wise, the essay on *The Płock Doors* is one of the best examples of the skill in reading the mediaeval language of symbols.

The millennium of the Baptism of Mieszko I, officially celebrated in 1966 as the millennium of the Polish state, challenged historians of all specialties to present the record of their research conducted for many years. Among the works of Gieysztor's related to the millennium there were also syntheses dedicated to the artistic culture of pre-historic Poland and from the early-Piast period prepared for the first volume of the grand panorama of the *History of Polish Art* compiled in compliance with Michał Walicki's concept and under his guidance. Gieysztor's enormous contribution was to assume the editing effort and succeeding in publishing the work in 1966 after Walicki's death.

At that time Gieysztor also took over the academic commitments of the late scholar, opening his seminars to Walicki's doctoral students. Art historians were given an exceptional opportunity to participate in meetings revealing new perspectives before the mediaeval studies in Poland. Also historians could substantially benefit from the presence of doctoral students dealing with art who participated in the seminars. The introduction of Walicki's doctoral students to the courses launched a new tradition: from then on, many art historians, including the author of the present article, found in Gieysztor a friendly instigator, promoter, and knowledgeable editor of their academic papers.

Gieysztor was undoubtedly strongly fascinated by the phenomenon of a portrait, particularly the mediaeval one. In 1979, with exquisite essays he commented on the inspiring *theatrum* of the national history that the Exhibition 'Poles' Self-Portrait' mounted by Marek Rostworowski created. The collective portrait of Poles in the Middle Ages was written by Gieysztor with the pen borrowed from chroniclers, and he accurately characterized the mediaeval portrait: *How dukes looked at themselves and what image they wanted to convey to the contemporaries is best answered by their coins and seals... a figurative presentation of the ruler... It affected the beholder as a reminder of the majesty. Even if not everybody was able to or had to decipher the details of clothing and armours, insignia and emblems... then the beholder was receiving the strong conviction of the authority of the ruler, of the brave, chivalrous, or majestic, judge figure of the duke. Gieysztor justly summed up the portrait character of those effigies: They predominantly appeal with*

*their posture, clothing, insignia, coat of arms, and the least with their face.*¹⁵

However, as of 1971 it was history of art, though essentially a single historic monument, namely the Warsaw Castle, that came to the fore in Gieysztor's career. His interest in it did not start merely with the memorable approval of the Communist state authorities of the decision to have the Castle rebuilt and to establish the Civil Committee for Rebuilding the Royal Castle. Aleksander Gieysztor also became member of its Presidium and Head of its Historical-Archaeological Section. He was among the people who, grouped around Stanisław Lorentz, were aware of the historical and social prestige of the Castle, and from the beginning had actively tried to reconstitute it. Gieysztor was quite modest about his participation in these initial activities: *I was, indeed, from the very beginning witness to various efforts of Stanisław Lorentz. When in 1949 he offered me to also join the small authors' group to prepare the Castle's monograph meant to serve as a decisive argument to have it rebuilt, I committed myself to writing a chapter on the mediaeval history.*¹⁶ *The Castle: History of Its Construction* was not published, however all the documentation it contained was extremely useful during the actual reconstruction.

Mazovia, yet firstly Warsaw and its historic monuments had been an important point of interest to Gieysztor even before 1971, however as of 1971 it was the Castle that came to the fore. Next to Stanisław Lorentz and Jan Zachwatowicz, Aleksander Gieysztor was one of the most active members of the Committee for Rebuilding the Castle. As a matter of fact, the first years of the reconstruction required the most intense works of the Historical-Archaeological Section he headed. Its task was to investigate the Castle plot before the works on the foundations could be started.¹⁷

Along the progress of the construction works, the number of tasks at the Castle increased. The most urgent and challenging were the questions related to the reconstruction of the décor and furnishing. To meet these, in February 1973 the so-called Castle Curator Board was founded; Gieysztor was at its head next to its President Stanisław Lorentz and Jan Zachwatowicz; the Board acted as a collegial body managing the Castle. Its main tasks were to analyse, assess, and possibly approve the interior designs: *in the 1970s we would meet weekly, dealing not only with the progress of the construction, but also the questions of the future furnishing. There the idea of the Castle was born, the idea that today has been almost fully implemented,* recalled Gieysztor some years later.¹⁸ In Gieysztor's eyes, it was Stanisław Lorentz who played the leading role in the Board: *our informal leader, albeit extremely effective, was Stanisław Lorentz. He had a slightly authoritarian temperament, but at the same time the capacity to find co-workers who could implement his ideas.*

The Castle Board was also the platform where the discussion was conducted on the function that the rebuilt residence was to perform in order to meet social expectations. It was preliminarily defined as early as in June 1972 when the official name of the Castle was decided: The Monument to Polish History and Culture. This evocation, however, required being translated into definite tasks, for which to a great degree it is Gieysztor who takes the main credit. He



8. Ceremony of the opening of the Royal Castle in Warsaw; the urn with Tadeusz Kościuszko's heart is brought in, Grand Courtyard, 31 August 1984

perceived the Castle's functions in symbolic categories: *The ideological and emotional content brought into the Castle always implied treating it as a symbol, a kind of a peculiar metaphor of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and as a peculiar substitution with the language of art... Deliberately destroyed as a symbol, the Castle was rebuilt as a symbol, a kind of metonymy or pars pro toto, expression of the whole of the national culture through its exquisite part*, he said at the Music Academy in Warsaw on 3 October 1991. On another occasion he added: *The name of that edifice evokes unambiguous associations with the history of the state: Poland's majesty's splendour and defeats, her revivals, until WW II.*²⁰

The translation of the monumental function of the Castle declared in its name to the museum display language was not an easy task, and was to consist, *firstly in the work of the possibly most faithful restitution of the form, and secondly in filling it with the possibly most topical content.* The Castle was to remain the museum of interiors, *albeit respecting the tradition related to each hall, chamber, and passage, furnished abiding by the rule of subordinating the works of art to the motif in history lived by the Castle and at the Castle.*²¹ Due to the old functions of the Castle: the seat of the superior power, Gieysztor was of the opinion that it had to be a living Castle, *involved in our political, social, and cultural life, a venue where next to a great display of the national history artistic culture collected over the centuries, state acts and most prestigious ceremonies would take place,*

as well as highly-profiled cultural and academic manifestations, he declared in 1981 in the Senatorial Hall on the 190th anniversary of the Adoption of the 3 May Constitution.²² He was aware of the uniqueness of such a conception: *Thus the museum layout has been created, Gieysztor wrote in 1982, which thanks to the scale of its assumptions and issues, the richness of historical content, and the potential for social impact shall find rare counterparts in Poland and outside the country.*²³

He was faced with implementing this concept as of 1980 after having been appointed the first Castle's Director. Stanisław Lorentz was the main advocate of his candidacy for this position. Although the thought of running the rebuilt at that point Castle could not be strange to Gieysztor, the very proposal to take on this position took him by surprise. In his letter dated 2 January 1980 to Gerard Labuda, a historian he was friends with, he wrote: *And I believe I will be shortly closing my Castle service, as we are awaiting the appointment of the Director, and our social bodies, very work-consuming, are winding down. I have put quite a lot of work into the Museum's scenario: interiors of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth of the 16th–18th century, I have learnt a lot, and it was great fun for me over the last years.*²⁴ However, creating a new museum institution and running it made Gieysztor anxious. On 25 March 1980, he wrote to Labuda: *I am in danger of taking on – for several years? – the Castle, I visited Karkoszka today, tomorrow I am going to see Najdowski.*²⁵ Lorentz forced the authorities, using

*blackmail – 40 copies of the letter ready to be dispatched – as for me, he used the authority of my history teacher in the first grade, that is what happened. I took my first steps under his guidance. It is a very complicated mess and my only hope rests in several deputies.*²⁶

Despite all his anxiety, Gieysztor assumed the responsibility of running the Castle. He remained its Director for over ten years. The very stepping into the problems of the reconstruction and furnishing the interiors required from him extensive knowledge of modern art, as well as advanced skills in practical translating it into the language of exposing historic interiors. Running the rebuilt Castle, however, not as yet refurbished, posed new challenges to him, though it constituted an enormous intellectual adventure. *The Castle is not merely construction and administration, not even the question of imagination. It is also the necessity to enter the bases of scholarly restitution. Over the recent years, I have created for myself as if the second area of expertise which could be called the history of Polish culture from the 16th to the 18th century. Since this is what the Castle represents, I needed to study the topic a bit, and I continue doing it... The work at the Castle is to a great degree like theatre directing: from the elements that are found in situ, and the elements created by us. We thus direct a show, although its lines were written a long time ago, or dressed in symbolic signs... From*

*loose elements an interior that conveys some content is created... Such work is in a way creative, and contributing to it is greatly satisfying.*²⁷ The satisfaction could occasionally prove deeply emotional: *All of us who contributed to raising the Castle from rubble and destruction, and who of those present did not contribute? – we all are living a day of deep emotion. The undertone is very special if we bear in mind that for the first time in over a hundred and fifty years, the Senatorial Hall can once again serve as the venue for recalling the May Constitution, the most exquisite Seym Act adopted in this interior,* were Gieysztor's words in the Senatorial Hall when on 2 May 1981 he was greeting the participants of an academic conference dedicated to the Constitution.²⁸

As the Director he endeavoured for the Castle collections to be of the highest possible level: *We have also been increasing the artistic quality [of collections – P.M.] with new acquisitions. They bring much joy, at times also emotions,* he declared in 1985.²⁹ He also knew that in the Castle esthetical predilections should be subordinated to a certain idea of Old-Polish culture as a whole... *At the Castle you cannot create a gallery of masterpieces as is done in museums; this would be inappropriate from the point of view of the state of artistic culture in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries where very good works bordered on worse ones.*³⁰ This is what Gieysztor's work as chair of



9. Ceremony to celebrate Andrzej Ciechanowiecki being awarded the Order of the White Eagle; visible among the public are, e.g.: Agnieszka Morawińska, Jerzy Gutkowski, Great Treasury, 15 August 1998

(Photos: 1-9 – M. Bronarski; courtesy of the Royal Castle in Warsaw)

collegial advisory bodies, namely the Castle's Interiors Committee or Purchase Committee, consisted in: making sure that the artworks collected at the Castle were presented in harmony with their proper function or the function of the interiors for which they were meant. In this aspect he was able to uncover a deep ideological message: *The reference to the symbolic syntax of King Stanislaus Castle and after 1918 in the present reconstruction finds its deep sense in the Stanislaus Augustus Programme: the King deliberately applied great patriotic didactics, imbuing with it the interiors that were created under his guidance. These issues are continuously better known thanks to exquisitely advanced studies in their ideological aspects. In this play of symbols of its time (and the Knights' and Assembly Halls are not merely its only theatre, albeit the most sumptuous) there were threads even older, but still topical at the time involved, like the arrangement of the emphases of the main façade architecture with the dominant of the tower: symbol of power, or the legend of John III, or the continuation of the Seym tradition, enriched most strongly with the May 3 Act.*³¹

The intensive work for the Castle and at the Castle for almost thirty years, as of 1991 on the position of the President of the Scientific Council, was undoubtedly Gieysztor's major contribution to history of art and development of Polish museology. Gieysztor never ceased emphasising that the work he contributed to accomplish was the result of a collective effort. The team of co-workers he formed consisted of powerful individualities, occasionally of pronounced temperament. Some debates,

particularly in the Interiors Committee happened to be really heated. Nonetheless, they led to constructive conclusions, this substantially owing to the personality of Gieysztor who had the decisive voice: *One of the special qualities of Aleksander was the skill at conducting academic debate within its own limits and for its own sake. He was an ideal moderator in every debate and an ideal academic teacher*, recalls Gerard Labuda.³² Gieysztor's artistic erudition perfectly allowed him to be play the role of a moderator in the world of modern art.

In conclusion, it is utterly necessary to emphasize that it is impossible to exhaust the defining of the role Aleksander Gieysztor played as the Castle's Director, as well as an art's researcher and expert. He had an enormous impact on the circle of those for whom the past is an important reference for living the present. Gieysztor always displayed an extraordinary, inevitably friendly interest in another person. Both the person from the past, whose living conditions, anxieties, aspirations, and predilections he always aspired to learn about, and in the contemporary person, in whom, regardless of that person's age and academic status, he would always spot a partner to join in the adventure of unveiling the past. It is thanks to all this that Aleksander Gieysztor succeeded in creating a peculiar environment, in inspiring a wide circle of people who proved ready to overcome their research routine, and to risk looking anew at the face of Clio.

Abstract: Aleksander Gieysztor (1916–1999) was unquestionably one of the most outstanding representatives of the Polish humanities in the 20th century. He considered himself a historian, and his basic workplace was the Historical Institute of the University of Warsaw, while his research focused around mediaeval culture. He became a museum professional slightly against his own will, in the last decades of his career, when taking on the position of the Director of the rebuilt Royal Castle in Warsaw. Despite thinking of himself as a historian, Gieysztor was well prepared to exert the function, since he had always been extremely interested in artistic sources, as important and clear as a historiographer's narrative or a chronicler's note. Not only did numerous publications testify to his interest, but he also formulated the programme of the Team for the Research into the Beginnings of the Polish State, which he headed in 1948–1955. Owing to its historical and symbolical significance, the Warsaw Castle took an important position

in Gieysztor's career. He was by Stanisław Lorentz's side from the very beginning, supporting him in his efforts to have the Castle rebuilt, the project neglected by Poland's Communist authorities. Having become member of the Civil Committee for Rebuilding the Royal Castle, Gieysztor headed its Archaeological-Historical section. From 1973 he became member of the so-called Castle Curator Board: a team which collegially managed the Castle. Esthetical sensitivity and artistic erudition, as well as a thorough knowledge of old-Polish culture provided Gieysztor with an excellent background to fit with the group of scholars decisive for the shape and educational programme of the reconstructed Castle; later, individually, they allowed him to find satisfaction in the role of the Director heading its refurbishing. Gieysztor acknowledged this project to have been his greatest intellectual challenge in the last decades of his academic career. However, he regarded it as his duty: service to society longing for symbols to shape its historical identity.

Keywords: Aleksander Gieysztor, Medieval Studies, Royal Castle in Warsaw, rebuilding of historic monuments, reconstruction.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Nauka jako służba. W 70-lecie urodzin i 50-lecie pracy naukowej prof. Aleksandra Gieysztora* [Science as Service. On Prof. Aleksander Gieysztor's 70th Birthday and 50 Years' Academic Career], interview-chat with Maria Koczerska, 'Kronika Warszawy' 1985 (published 1986), Vols. LXIII-LXIV, Nos. 3-4, p. 125.
- ² R. Jarocki, *Opowieść o Aleksandrze Gieysztorze* [Story of Aleksander Gieysztor], Warszawa 2001, p. 276.
- ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 276-7.
- ⁴ A. Gieysztor, *Zamek Królewski w świadomości narodowej* [The Royal Castle in National Awareness], 'Ochrona Zabytków' 1987, Vol. XL, Nos. 1-2, p. 5.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- ⁶ A. Gieysztor, *Art et historie, historie et historiens*, in: *Künstlerischer Austausch. Artistic Echange. Akten des XXVIII. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte*. Berlin, 15.-20. July 1992, Berlin 1993, p. 25.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8.
- ⁸ *Nauka jako służba...*, p. 122.
- ⁹ R. Jarocki, *Opowieść o Aleksandrze...*, p. 276.
- ¹⁰ A. Gieysztor, *Polskie millenium. Z zagadnień współpracy historii i archeologii wczesnodziejowej* [Polish Millenium. On the Questions of the Cooperation of History with Early Historic Archaeology], 'Przegląd Historyczny' 1948, Vol. XXXVIII, pp. 391-406.
- ¹¹ Opinion voiced in the debate, see 'Przegląd Historyczny', *ibid.*, p. 408.
- ¹² A. Gieysztor, *Drzwi Gnieźnieńskie jako wyraz polskiej świadomości narodowościowej w XII wieku* [The Gniezno Doors as the Expression of Polish National Awareness in the 12th Century], in: *Drzwi Gnieźnieńskie* [The Gniezno Doors], M. Walicki (ed.), Vol. I, Wrocław 1956, pp. 1-2.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- ¹⁴ A. Gieysztor, *Przed portalem katedry* [In Front of the Cathedral Portal], in: *Romańskie Drzwi Płockie* [Romanesque Płock Door], J. Chojnacki (ed.), Płock 1983, p. 7.
- ¹⁵ A. Gieysztor, *Polski homo medievalis w oczach własnych* [Polish Homo Medievalis in His Own Eyes], in: *Polaków portret własny* [Poles' Self-Portrait], Kraków 1979, pp. 22, 31.
- ¹⁶ *Nauka jako służba...*, p. 122.
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Table of contents 2020: <https://muzealnictworocznik.com/issue/12766>