

Relationship between emblems and seals

Images of the emblems and coats of arms of various owners and entities – rulers, states, cities, the nobility, bishoprics and voivodeships – were placed on many objects for public display: on shields, banners, insignia, luxury and artistic objects. They were carved in wood or stone as architectural elements, engraved or embossed on coins to guarantee their authenticity, and displayed on cannons as a visible sign of the threat of use of force by those in power. Seals occupied a special place on the very long list of armorial bearings. They were used to authenticate treaties, foundations, diplomas and to prevent tampering with correspondence. They differed from money minted with the emblem of the ruler in that they were not intended to pass from hand to hand, but were applied to a specific document, usually with a given recipient in mind. As a result, they had a unique value, even though they were created by applying a matrix – intended for re-use – to the face of the document. They were countersigned by the issuer or his representatives. In the case of signet-seals, this connection was even more personal.⁶⁹

Therefore, before examining the provenance of the university emblem, it is necessary to determine the relationship between the emblem and the seal.

Did the university's seal only bear an image of the emblem, which was designed independently, or functioned as an idea, or was the emblem designed specifically for the seal and did it exist primarily as a seal impression?

At least twice in the university's history – in 1936 and 1950 – committees were appointed to address the issue of the lack of a coat of arms, i.e. an emblem in the field of the shield, each of a specific tincture.⁷⁰ To this day the university has never had a symbol

⁶⁹ Signet seals belong to private individuals and are used in the name of the owner to validate documents executed in their name; their authenticity has no bearing on the office held by the owner.

⁷⁰ In the 1930s, a committee tried to decide on a heraldic description of the university's coat of arms, however no decision was made whether to separate the coat of arms from the emblem on the seal, so the matter was not resolved either formally or legally. When the Academic Senate established another committee to discuss the emblem and seal in 1950, Aleksander Gieysztor and Władysław Tomkiewicz proposed that the UW coat of arms should bear the traditional emblem on a blue field. The shield was to be neoclassical or neo-Gothic in shape, as these were the types used by the Herald's College in the Congress Kingdom of Poland. This information is taken from a paper prepared by the two historians for the commission's discussion. Archiwum PAN (Archives of PAS; further: APAN), III, 280, Materiały Władysława Tomkiewicza (Documents of Władysław Tomkiewicz), fol. 19.

VII. Detail from the print *Alexander I Presenting the Act of Founding of the University of Warsaw to the Polish Deputation*, engr.: F. Corsi, drawing: A. Kolberg, 1831, UW Museum

The symbolic scene of Tsar Alexander I's presentation of the foundation act to Rector Wojciech Szwejkowski shows the document authenticated with a seal, most likely a wax seal attached to a cord and enclosed in a skippet. The engraving repeats a detail from a painting, now lost. It is not known whether the painter actually reproduced the appearance of the deed, but the corroboration formula on the document does mention 'an imprint of the seal of Our Kingdom of Poland' ('wyciśnięcie pieczęci Królestwa Naszego Polskiego').

⁷¹ ‘Herbem Uniwersytetu, a zarazem pieczęcią był ...’ (The coat of arms of the university, and at the same time the seal, was ...). J. Bieliński, *Królewski Uniwersytet Warszawski (1816–1831)*, vol. 1, p. 402. Bieliński’s terminology requires clarification. According to today’s terminology, the image of the university eagle is the device on the coat of arms, not a full coat of arms. Nevertheless, in the case of a semantic interpretation, as presented in this chapter, Bieliński may have considered the emblem on the seal as equivalent to a coat of arms. However, in his discussion of seals which bear coats of arms, Marcin Hlebionek warns against automatically equating the two terms: ‘it must be strongly emphasized here that the device on a seal is not always identical with a coat of arms, and the relationship between coats of arms and devices on seals is quite complex.’ M. Hlebionek, ‘Pieczęć jako medium, dzieło sztuki i źródło historyczne’, in: *Opracowanie materiałów sfragistycznych...*, p. 62. Hence, among other things, the need for a detailed examination of the conditions for the creation of the seal and emblem of the University of Warsaw and their relationship.

⁷² Paragraph 5(1) of the Statutes defines the symbols of the university, which are ‘the emblem, seal and banner of the university’. ‘Statut Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego uchwalony 26 czerwca 2019 r. uchwałą nr 443 Senatu Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego’, *Monitor Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego* 2019, item 190. The description of the emblem and permissible use are described in: ‘Wzory symboli Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego’, Appendix no. 1 to the Statues, para. 1.

⁷³ ‘The historical (traditional) seal of the university is the one bearing its emblem, which is applied to documents of special importance, including honorary doctorates and renewals of doctoral degrees.’ ‘Wzory...’, para. 2.

in this form; it uses only an emblem. Meanwhile, Bieliński – thanks to whom the contents of no longer existing archival records concerning the establishment of the university’s principal symbol are known to us – wrote about the approval in 1817 of the design of the ‘coat of arms’⁷¹ and a seal as an inseparable set. Other researchers into the history of the university who saw no need to comment on this information, followed in his wake. This may cause confusion or lead to misunderstandings for today’s readers, especially those unfamiliar with the complex workings of sphragistics and heraldry. This is because today’s use of university emblems differs significantly from that of two centuries ago. Meanwhile, present-day realities affect our perception of history, as they often lead to implicit assumptions. Therefore the contemporary use of the university’s emblems will be examined and the role of seals bearing two images that are closely and historically related to the university’s emblem will be brought to the reader’s attention.

Today, the emblem of the University of Warsaw – as well as the aforementioned heraldic signs – appears in many places and on numerous objects, both ceremonial and of everyday use. It can also be found on the Rector’s insignia, is embroidered on the banner and reproduced on the wall of the meeting room of the University Senate in the Kazimierzowski Palace. In the public space, the most well-known image of the university eagle tops the main gate on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, leading to the university’s historic grounds. The emblem in the form of a standardized logo is used on diplomas (on the cover), paper used for official correspondence and business cards, as well as on commemorative items, bookmarks, sweatshirts, bags and pens. The university’s principal symbol is not dependent on any of these objects; its legal status is defined by the university’s current statutes, while a two-century-old tradition endows it with emotive power.⁷² The fact that diplomas and other documents are stamped – in keeping with the law – with the state emblem rather than the university’s emblem is no obstacle to seeing the university eagle as a sign that contributes to the identity of the academic community. The statutes also mention a special seal, but it is for ceremonial purposes so is rarely used.⁷³

When searching for an example of the relationship between the emblem and seal dating directly from the era in which the University of Warsaw was founded, for comparative purposes, reference can be made to the establishment of the imperial and royal emblem of the Congress Kingdom of Poland in 1815. This



Fig. 7. Emblem of the University of Warsaw on the main gate, photo: H. Kowalski

is a close example not only chronologically, but also functionally, as it was the symbol of the state that replaced the university's eagle on the seal a few years later. Furthermore, both the Congress Kingdom and the university used the symbol of the White Eagle as an essential component of their armorial bearings, although its role differed in both cases. It was incorporated into both emblems, which carried two different messages. The eagle was the main element on the oldest university emblem. On the state emblem, the two symbols were combined: the Russian Empire and historical Poland, based on the state's hierarchical structure, where the former element



Fig. 8. Imperial and royal emblem of the Congress Kingdom of Poland on a document of the Heraldic Commission of the Congress Kingdom of Poland confirming the ennoblement of Ignacy Nosarzewski, 1837, ANK

dominated over the latter. Approved by Alexander I, the design was first presented to the public in Warsaw on 20 June 1815, during a ceremony in which officials took an oath of allegiance to the new monarch.

Flags and plaques bearing this sign were displayed in three important places in the capital of the Congress Kingdom: at the Royal Castle, the city hall and the Krasińskich Palace.⁷⁴ The inhabitants of Warsaw and members of delegations arriving from various parts of the country, seeing the symbols both in the urban space and in many other places where they were on display, could familiarize themselves with the design chosen by the emperor of Russia, and now also the king of Poland.⁷⁵ However, it was the coins minted at the Warsaw Mint that contributed most to the spread of the new symbol. The emblem of the Congress Kingdom of Poland was placed on the reverse. The state emblem was used on stamped paper which citizens had to use when filing motions with government offices. The image was sent to departments in the form of coloured sample drawings constituting the 'norm'.⁷⁶ It was also to be found on the seals of government offices. The chancelleries of the central authorities quickly complied with this obligation, but in the case of towns and municipalities, enforcing the

⁷⁴ K. Bartoszewicz, *Utworzenie Królestwa Kongresowego*, Kraków 1916, p. 163.

⁷⁵ These are mentioned by Kuczyński: S.K. Kuczyński, 'Orzeł Biały i barwy...', p. 38.

⁷⁶ 'Attached for each Department is one standard Coat of Arms of the Kingdom of Poland, copied from the original, by the hand of the Most Excellent Emperor of All Russia the King of Poland signed.' AGAD, RTKP, 1/183/0/173/53. Cf. G. Trafalski, 'Herb Królestwa Polskiego w 1831', *Rocznik Polskiego Towarzystwa Heraldycznego* 2019, vol. 18, p. 224, fn. 4.

provision was met with great resistance and dragged on for over several years.⁷⁷ This did not change the fact, however, that regardless of the actual state of the seals of the government office of the Congress Kingdom, the state's emblem existed as a symbol accepted by Alexander I, introduced under Article 37 of the Constitution of 1815.⁷⁸ It should be noted that seals played an important but not exclusive role in this system of symbols.⁷⁹

The problem of the relationship between the university emblem and the seal is complicated by the fact that the university's symbol was not a completely new design; its most important and predominant component was another emblem – the White Eagle – with a long history and an established tradition.⁸⁰ Originally, it was more closely associated with the charge on the coat of arms than the seal impression. The oldest depiction of the White Eagle as the emblem of the Kingdom of Poland is known from the reverse of the seal of King Przemysław II (1257–1296), where the eagle was depicted on a triangular-shaped knight's shield. Thus, the seal served as the carrier of an image of the coat of arms, and not as a presentation of the emblem. The symbols of princes and knights were painted on battle shields and embroidered on banners, mounted as a jewel, i.e. an ornament and insignia on the helmet. It was not until the next rulers of Poland that the emblem was used as an independent component on their seals, made with great artistic finesse and craftsmanship for Kings Władysław Łokietek and Kazimierz the Great. In the following centuries the White Eagle appeared on myriad utilitarian objects and works of art (some of which are at times difficult to categorize); seals occupied a special place among them.

The question of the relationship between the emblem of a state or institution and the image on its seal is therefore unclear. The objective of the discussion begun here is to determine whether the university's oldest seal merely repeated the image of the emblem, or whether the seal and the emblem should be regarded as one inseparable symbol, both ideological and physical, expressed in the form of the most important of the university's seals. If the emblem was an independent, approved sign, then the subsequent order to remove it from the seal did not officially redefine the university's symbol, but merely eliminated one of the spaces on which its image was used. In the second case, the removal of the emblem from the seal actually meant the elimination of the original symbol of the university which would have significant consequences and far-reaching implications.

⁷⁷ K. Dorcz, 'Pieczęcie miejskie i gminne oraz wykonawcy pieczęci w Księstwie Warszawskim i Królestwie Polskim (do 1830 r.)', *Rocznik Polskiego Towarzystwa Heraldycznego* 2004, vol. 6, p. 65.

⁷⁸ The constitution did not specify the design, but directed that a design chosen by the monarch be used.

⁷⁹ In the collection of the UW Museum there is an appointment signed by Alexander I himself and authenticated by a wafer seal with an image of the emblem of the Congress Kingdom of Poland. It is a document issued to Charles Varenne, a professor of painting at the Faculty of Sciences and Fine Arts of the Royal University of Warsaw, appointing him a Knight of the Order of St Stanislaus – Fourth Class. The document is in French and Polish, issued 11/23 January 1823 in Warsaw, on Alexander I's return journey from the congress in Verona to Russia. MUW/610. My thanks to Dagmara Dąbrowska for pointing out this document.

⁸⁰ *Orzeł Biały – 700 lat herbu...*, in particular the following articles: Z. Piech, 'Wokół genezy...'; S.K. Kuczyński, 'Treści...'; P. Mrozowski, 'O stylizacji Orła Białego w sztuce polskiej', pp. 43–53.