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REMARKS OF A JAGIELLONIAN
UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR
CONCERNING THE STATUES
OF VENUS SEEN IN THE YEAR 1845
IN ITALIAN MUSEUMS

Abstract: *Michał Wiszniewski (1794-1865), professor of the Jagiellonian University, philosopher, psychologist, historian and historian of literature, visited Italy in 1845. Apart from academic activities, he was also for some time involved in politics, which resulted in his emigration to Italy in 1848, during the turbulent period of this year's Revolutions. He died in Nice, which in 1860 was incorporated to France, and earlier had belonged to the Kingdom of Sardinia. He was buried in the capuchin church on the mount Cimies near Nice. During his stay in Italy in 1845 he visited monuments and museums, and made very detailed notes. Among others he wrote the first and also only Polish description of the rooms and collections of the Museo Borbonico (nowadays the Museo Archeologico Nazionale) in Naples. He devoted whole sections to the ancient sculptures of Aphrodite-Venus. He compared various statues of Venus: the Capitoline Venus, the Medici Venus and the crouching Venus by Doidalsas. One of the numerous Roman copies of this work is kept in the museum in Naples, together with the statue of Venus Kallipygos, discovered in Rome in the 16th century. The same museum possesses also the so-called Venus of Capua, discovered c. 1750 and reconstructed with certain degree of liberty in 1820 by the sculptor Augusto Brunelli, disciple of Antonio Canova. Brunelli supplemented the arms, parts of the nose and garments; moreover, he added the figure of Eros, which by now had been removed, but can be seen on the 19th century drawings. Wiszniewski*

saw and described the statue in this shape. During his stay in Sicily, in the museum of Syracuse he admired the statue of Venus discovered in 1804 by the archaeologist Saverio Landolino, and named after him. It is still one of the most important objects of this museum. His short impressions are the only Polish texts that describe the Greek sculptures representing Aphrodite, even if they are less well known than the Venus of Milo from Paris.

Keywords: Michał Wiszniewski; Jagiellonian University; statue; Venus of Capua; Kallipygos Venus; Venus Landolina

Nowadays the most well known ancient statue of Aphrodite is the famous sculpture found in 1820 on a small Greek island of Melos (Milo), and known as Venus of Milo. It is being kept in the Louvre, and together with the Nike of Samothrace and the Laocoon Group it has become one of the symbols of Greek art, thanks to thousands of postcards, slides, movies, compact discs, large and small modern replicas made of various materials, as well as variations by famous artists (e.g. Salvador Dalí, Venus de Milo with drawers). It also found its place in literature, for instance in one of the most well known Polish novels, Stefan Żeromski's *Ludzie Bezdomni* [*Homeless People*, 1899], where several pages of the first chapters are devoted to impressions on this statue.

Venus of Milo outstripped in fame the well known and admired earlier Roman copies of the Knidian Aphrodite by Praxiteles – Venus Medici (known as early as 1559), Venus Capitolina (found in the Viminale during the pontificate of Clement X in the years 1670-1676), Venus of Arles (discovered in 1651) and many more. The travellers from all over Europe, visiting Florence, Rome and Paris, admired these statues and very often mentioned them in their *memoirs*.

Similarly admired was the atypical Crouching Venus, attributed to Doidalsas, preserved in numerous copies in the Louvre, the British Museum, the Galleria degli Uffizi, the Hermitage and many more museums. One of such copies belonged once to the famous Farnese collection in Rome, which was moved in 1786 to Naples, and is now kept in the local Museo Archeologico Nazionale.

The same museum hosts another non-typical statue of the goddess, discovered in 1594, also belonging to the aforementioned Farnese collection, located in the Renaissance Palazzo Farnese. This statue is the Venus Kallipygos (Pl. 1: 1), discovered in the 16th century. Some sources

mention Nero's *Domus Aurea* as its finding spot. It was moved to Naples together with other family treasures. The missing head was added at the end of the 17th century, and the conservator Carlo Albacini decided for its arrangement, so that the goddess looks in the direction of her back and buttocks. Because of this particular pose it was rarely reproduced in the prudish 19th and 20th century books on ancient art.

The same museum hosts the so-called Venus of Capua (Pl. 1: 2), found at the top of the auditorium (*cavea summa*) of the amphitheatre in Capua c. 1750, and reconstructed in 1820 by the sculptor Augusto Brunelli, disciple of the famous Antonio Canova. It was executed during the reign of the emperor Hadrian as copy of the bronze original from the 4th century BC. Brunelli supplemented its arms, fragments of nose and parts of garment, moreover, he added the figure Eros, now removed but present on the 19th century drawings (Pl. 1: 3).

These sculptures were seen in 1845 by Michał Wiszniewski (1794-1865) – philosopher and psychologist, historian and historian of literature,¹ who since 1831 was professor of the Jagiellonian University. Apart from academic life he was also active in politics for some time. On 24/25 February 1846, during the so-called Krakow uprising he attempted a *coup d'état*, presenting himself as the 'Leader of the Polish Nation' and dictator in place of Jan Tyssowski, who did the same one day (or, more precisely: one night) before, on 23/24 February. After several hours in office, residing in the so-called Grey House [*Szara Kamienica*] in the Krakow Market Square, he was compelled to flee to Wrocław, due to the intervention of Edward Dembowski, who forced his way to the abode of the rebels with a large group of people; he was condemned to death *in absentia* by the revolutionary tribunal. However, as soon as in mid-March he returned to Krakow and after a trial by the Imperial and Royal commission, he emigrated in 1848 to Italy, which became the arena of the turbulent events of the Springtime of Peoples revolutionary movements.

¹ The life and works of this scholar was presented in detail by Julian Dybiec (1970). Among the most important books by Wiszniewski are: *Bacona metoda tłumaczenia natury* [*Bacon's Method of the Explication of Nature*] (1834), *Charaktery rozumów ludzkich* [*The Characters of Human Minds*] (1837) – the latter believed to be the first Polish publication in psychology – *O rozumie ludzkim* [*On the Human Mind*] (1848) and the monumental *Historia literatury polskiej* [*History of Polish Literature*] (vols 1-10, 1840-1857). From the point of view of the current paper the most important of his books is *Podróż do Włoch, Sycylii i Malty* [*The Journey to Italy, Sicily and Malta*], edited, supplemented from the manuscripts and provided with explanations and afterword by Henryk Barycz (Wiszniewski 1982).

He died in Nice, which in 1860 was incorporated to the territory of France, but earlier had belonged to the Kingdom of Sardinia as Nizza.

He is the author of the first and also the only Polish description of the rooms and collections of the Museo Borbonico in Naples (currently the Museo Archeologico Nazionale). One excerpt of the text reads as follows:

‘... of pleasant impression is Venus, who after her victory on the mount of Ida tramples Minerva’s helmet and places Juno’s crown on her own head. She holds a sceptre and a spear in her hand, the badges of her vanquished rivals. A mischievous Cupid nearby points at the arrow which is about to pierce the heart of Helen, since Venus ordered him to prepare the prize for Paris. This child was elaborated by Brunelli, who aptly guessed his presence from the traces of feet visible on the base. She was found in the amphitheatre of Capua. This Venus, however, even though she had triumphed in the judgement of Paris over Minerva and Juno, would not stand against the Kallipygos Venus, who could easily be placed by the side of the Medici Venus. I am lacking in words to describe the perfection of every muscle, movement, figure, and the loveliness of this statue’s face. Possibly the image of a beautiful Greek girl with a slender nose going in straight line with her brow, with smiling eyes and lips, with the freshness of youth all about her, as if only partly uncovered, as if she was leaving the bath and in that very instant was turned into white marble by Medusa’s mask, can direct our thoughts towards this masterpiece from the most excellent time of the Greek art. She was found in the ruins of the Golden Palace of Nero in Rome; some asserted she was the Venus for whom the citizens of Syracuse erected a temple to commemorate the fortuitous end of the quarrel between two pretty women from this city, who contended for the precedence in beauty, but this Venus may be the statue in the museum of Syracuse, which is very close to the Neapolitan in its beauty...’ (Wiszniewski 1982, 302).

At the beginning of August 1845 Wiszniewski sailed to Palermo, and after the visit in Segesta, Selinus, and many more ancient and modern places, he reached Syracuse. He made the following note on the local museum:

‘The Museum, whose collection ought to have been enriched with the ancient monuments found in the ruins of Syracuse, is not large, since everything is being taken to Naples. It does, however, possess one but of great beauty statue of Venus coming out of her bath, which was discovered in 1804 among the debris of shattered columns close to the catacombs, without head and right hand, of Parian marble. This statue, mentioned by Athenaeus,²

² Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* 12.554c-e, quotes the anecdote about two Syracusan sisters who boasted their pretty buttocks. They were married by two brothers from the same town. Athenaios also writes that there was a temple of Aphrodite with this epiclesis. The Polish translation of the work of Athenaios, by K. Bartul and J. Danielewicz, published in Poznań

and rightly compared to the Medici Venus, belongs to the golden age of Grecian sculpture, and is called la Callipigia* di Lampridio; she is the sister of the Kallipygos Venus from Naples' (Wiszniewski 1982, 361).

This 'Venus coming out of her bath' was discovered in 1804 by the archaeologist Saverio Landolina Nava (1743-1814) in the nymphaeum located in the Syracusan Achradina district.

Even nowadays this statue (Pl. 1: 4), executed in the 2nd century AD, and named 'Venus Landolina' after her discoverer, is one of the masterpieces in the Syracuse museum, named after the prominent archaeologist Paolo Orsi, who managed the museum in 1895-1934.³

The short impressions presented here are the only Polish texts that describe these beautiful, even if less well known Greek statues of Aphrodite.

Translated by Agnieszka Fulińska

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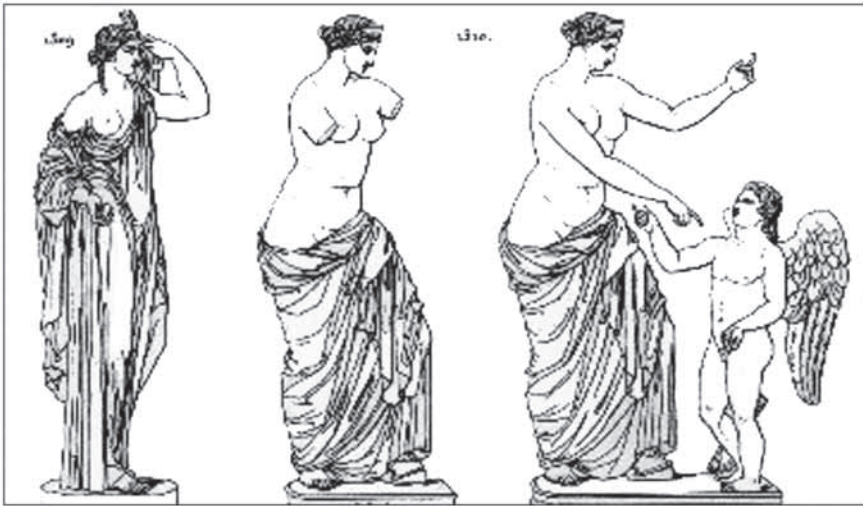
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in 2010 is entitled *Uczta mędrców*, and the anecdote in question is on page 1020.

* Wiszniewski's note: *Those who have the command of the Greek tongue would know well what 'callipigia' can mean; I do not find it proper to translate this word into Polish, because the ideas of decency among the Greeks differ from ours. Perceived decency differently.*

³ The Syracuse statue was admired among others by the famous novelist Guy de Maupassant, who visited Sicily in 1885, and devoted to the sculpture several pages in his essay *La Sicile*, In *La vie errante*, Paris 1890. Cf. also Guy de Maupassant, *Sycylia*, transl. K. Łyczywek, Szczecin 2008, 33-35.



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Pl. 1. 1 – Statue of Venus of Capua with the Eros’ statue added by Augusto Brunelli.

Reproduced from Clarac 1832-1834, pl. 598, n° 1310

2 – Statue of Venus of Capua. Napoli, Museo Archeologico Nazionale. From the author’s archive

3 – Statue of Venus Kallipygos. Napoli, Museo Archeologico Nazionale. From the author’s archive

4 – Statue of Venus Landolina. Siracusa, Museo Archeologico Regionale di Paolo Orsi. From the author’s archive