

Formal balls and municipal celebrations in 19th century Krakow

2018-12-20

Balls were popular among 19th-century residents of Krakow as they sated the locals' hungry appetite for entertainment and gossip. During the carnival season balls took place nearly every day, even during the difficult periods of the 19th century.

Initially balls were organised mainly by the nobility and aristocracy. The situation started to change with the emergence of charity events. It often happened that aristocracy divided the room with a rope or chairs to separate themselves from the other guests.

Circumstances changed with the balls held by Artur Potocki since his ambition was to "uproot the Saxon traditions" and show that there were "finer forms of entertainment other than overindulgence." The ball at the Skorupek family held in 1853 was particularly memorable. Following the western fashion, two suppers were served: a warm English-type dinner at midnight and a cold meal before dawn in line with French customs. However, refreshments for the second meal were stored in a cool porch and butlers who came with coats to pick up their masters helped themselves to the fare on offer. One of the ladies from the Estreicher family recalls that it all ended in a brawl.

The city council also organised balls. Upon the invitation of Mayor Józef Dietl on 15 February 1868, many eminent Krakow locals visited the town hall; the first pair dancing the polonaise was Mayor Dietl himself with countess Potocka – wife of Adam Potocki. Maria Kietlińska recalls that "there was a cold buffet in the two adjacent rooms on the sides with a profusion of fine wines, confectionery and fruit (...) there were some disgruntled people for whom it was beyond comprehension not to have cutlets with gravy for dinner and they complained to the mayor for not serving a warm meal (for 1000 guests)".

One of the most renowned events of 19th-century Krakow was the jubilee of Kraszewski combined with the official opening of the Cloth Hall after its renovation. "Delegations from all over Poland, from each partition, came to Krakow. (...) the committee office was crowded with people storming to get tickets for the ceremony" - wrote Alfred Szczepański. The celebration started on 3 October 1879 when Kraszewski was greeted with bread and salt by the Mayor of Krakow, Mikołaj Zyblikiewicz.

The next day, on 4 October 1879, there was a ticketed dinner with an entry fee of 10 Polish zloty. "The guests at the banquet were nearly all from outside Krakow. There were over 800 people; tables were arranged in three rows across the entire room and yet could hardly accommodate such an enormous number of diners." The guests ate dishes prepared by Wentzl: red borscht with dumplings, pasties, pike, perch, salmon with mayonnaise, deer, partridges, pheasants, capons, mixed stewed fruit drinks, ice cream, cheeses, fruit and black coffee. 366 bottles of champagne were purchased as well as 244 bottles of Ofner wine and 200 bottles of white Hungarian wine. 150 kilograms of fish were shipped from Vienna and 900 rolls bought for the banquet. The guests could admire a layered sponge cake with jam sent by confectioners from Warsaw. The cake was 1.5 m in diameter and was decorated with a life-sized bust of Kraszewski made of sugar.

The following day (5 October) in the Cloth Hall "the greatest [ball] in Krakow in decades" took



place. The ball to celebrate the jubilee of Kraszewski was sponsored by the city council and hosted three thousand people.

Sources:

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