

1911 Encyclopædia Britannica, Volume 7 — Cracow



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CRACOW (Pol. *Krakov*; Ger. *Krakau*), a town and episcopal see of Austria, in Galicia, 212 m. W. by N. of Lemberg by rail. Pop. (1900) 91,310, of which 21,000 were Jews, 5000 Germans and the remainder Poles. Although in regard to its population it is only the second place in Galicia, Cracow is the most interesting town in the whole of Poland. No other Polish town possesses so many old and historic buildings, none of them contains so many national relics, or has been so closely associated with the development and destinies of Poland as Cracow. And the ancient capital is still the intellectual centre of the Polish nation.

Cracow is situated in a fertile plain on the left bank of the Vistula (which becomes navigable here) and occupies a position of great strategical importance. It consists of the old inner town and seven suburbs. The only relics of the fortifications of the old town, whose place is now occupied by shady promenades, is the Florian's Gate and the Rondell, a circular structure, built in 1498. Cracow has 39 churches—about half the number it formerly had—and 25 convents for monks and nuns. Of these the most important is the Stanislaus cathedral, in Gothic style, consecrated in 1359, and built on the Wawel, the rocky eminence to the S.W. of the old town. Here the kings of Poland were crowned, and this church is also the Pantheon of the Polish nation, the burial place of its kings and its great men. Here lie the remains of John Sobieski, of Thaddaeus Kosciuszko, of

Joseph Poniatowski and of Adam Mickiewicz. Here also are conserved the remains of St Stanislaus, the patron saint of the Poles, who, as bishop of Cracow, was slain before the altar by King Boleslaus in 1079. The cathedral is adorned with many valuable objects of art, paintings and sculptures, by such artists as Veit Stoss, Guido Reni, Peter Vischer, Thorwaldsen, &c. Part of the ancient Polish regalia is also kept here. The Gothic church of St Mary, founded in 1223, rebuilt in the 14th century with several chapels added in the 15th and 16th centuries, was restored in 1889–1893, and decorated with paintings from the designs by Matejko. It contains a huge high altar, the masterpiece of Veit Stoss, who was a native of Cracow, executed in 1477–1489; a colossal stone crucifix, dating from the end of the 15th century, and several sumptuous tombs of noble families from the 16th and 17th centuries. The Dominican church, a Gothic building of the 13th century, but practically rebuilt after a fire in 1850; the Franciscan church, also of the 13th century, also much modernized; the church of St Florian of the 12th century, rebuilt in 1768, which contains the late-Gothic altar by Veit Stoss, executed in 1518, during his last sojourn in Cracow; the church of St Peter, with a colossal dome, built in 1597, after the model of that of St Peter at Rome, and the beautiful Augustinian church in the suburb of Kazimierz, are all worth mentioning. Of the principal secular buildings, the royal castle (*Zamek Królowisk*), a huge building, begun in the 13th century, and successively enlarged by Casimir the Great and by Sigismund I. Jagiello (1510–1533), is situated on the Wawel, and was until 1610

the residence of the Polish kings. It suffered much from fires and other disasters, and from 1846 onward was used as a barracks and a military hospital; it has now, however, been cleared out and restored. The Jagellonian university, now housed in a magnificent Gothic building erected in 1881–1887, was attended in 1901 by 1255 students, and had 175 professors and lecturers. The language of instruction is Polish. It is the second oldest university in Europe—the oldest being that of Prague—and was famous during the 15th and 16th centuries. It was founded by Casimir the Great in 1364, and completed by Ladislaus Jagiello in 1400. Its rich library is now housed in the old university buildings, erected in the 15th century, in the beautiful Gothic court of which a bronze statue of Copernicus was placed in 1900. The Polish Academy of Science, founded in 1872, is housed in the new university buildings. In the Ring-Platz, or the principal square, opposite the church of St Mary, is the *Tuchhaus* (cloth-hall, Pol. *Sukiennice*), a building erected in 1257, several times renovated and enlarged, most recently in 1879, which contains the Polish national museum of art. Behind it is a Gothic tower, the only relic of the old town hall, demolished in 1820. The Czartoryski museum contains a large collection of objects of art, a rich library and a precious collection of manuscripts, relating to the history of Poland.

Among the manufactures of the town are machinery, agricultural implements, chemicals, soap, tobacco, &c. But Cracow is more important as a trading than as an industrial

centre. Its position on the Vistula and at the junction of several railways makes it the natural mart for the exchange of the products of Silesia, Hungary and Russian and Austrian Poland. Its trade in timber, salt, textiles, cattle, wine and agricultural produce of all kinds is very considerable. In the neighbourhood of Cracow there are mines of coal and zinc, and not far away lies the village of Krzeszowice with sulphur baths. About $2\frac{1}{2}$ m. N.W. lies the Kosciuszko Hill, a mound of earth 100 ft. high, thrown up in 1820–1823 on the Borislava hill (1093 ft.), in honour of Thaddaeus Kosciuszko, the hero of Poland. On the opposite bank of the Vistula, united to Cracow by a bridge, lies the town of Podgorze (pop. 18,142); near it is the Krakus Hill, smaller than the Kosciuszko Hill, and a thousand years older than it, erected in honour of Krakus, the founder of Cracow. About 8 m. S.E. of Cracow is situated [Wieliczka](#) (*q.v.*), with its famous salt mines.

History.—Tradition assigns the foundation of Cracow to the mythical Krak, a Polish prince who is said to have built a stronghold here about A.D. 700. Its early history is, however, entirely obscure. In the latter part of the 10th century it was annexed to the Bohemian principality, but was recaptured by Boleslaus Chrobry, who made it the seat of a bishopric, and it became the capital of one of the most important of the principalities into which Poland was divided from the 12th century onwards. The city was practically ruined during the first Tatar invasion in 1241, but the introduction

of German colonists restored its prosperity, and in 1257 it received “Magdeburg rights,” *i.e.* a civic constitution modelled on that of Magdeburg. In this year the *Tuchhalle* was built. The town, however, had yet to pass through many vicissitudes. It suffered again from Tatar invasions; in 1290 it was captured by [Wenceslaus II.](#) of Bohemia and was held by the Bohemians until, in 1305, the Polish king Ladislaus Lokietek recovered it from Wenceslaus III. Ladislaus made it his capital, and from this time until 1764 it remained the coronation and burial place of the Polish kings, even after the royal residence had been removed by Siegmund III. (1587–1632) to Warsaw. On the third partition of Poland in 1795 Austria took possession of Cracow; but in 1809 Napoleon wrested it from that power, and incorporated it with the duchy of Warsaw, which was placed under the rule of the king of Saxony. In the campaign of 1812 the emperor Alexander made himself master of this and the other territory which formed the duchy of Warsaw. At the general settlement of the affairs of Europe by the great powers in 1815, it was agreed that Cracow and the adjoining territory should be formed into a free state; and, by the Final Act of the congress signed at Vienna in 1815, “the town of Cracow, with its territory, is declared to be for ever a free, independent and strictly neutral city, under the protection of Russia, Austria and Prussia.” In February 1846, however, an insurrection broke out in Cracow, apparently a ramification of a widely spread conspiracy throughout Poland. The senate and the other authorities of Cracow were unable to subdue the rebels or to maintain order, and,

at their request, the city was occupied by a corps of Austrian troops for the protection of the inhabitants. The three powers, Russia, Austria and Prussia, made this a pretext for extinguishing this independent state; and as the outcome of a conference at Vienna (November 1846) the three courts, contrary to the assurance previously given, and in opposition to the expressed views of the British and French governments, decided to extinguish the state of Cracow and to incorporate it with the dominions of Austria.

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