

Loreta Skurvydaitė

Vilnius University

ORCID:0000-0002-4350-448

Vivat, Crescat, Floreat: Greetings Sent to Vilnius University on Its Reopening in 1919

The reopening of Vilnius University in 1919 was a significant event for the city and community and was met with a profound and widespread emotional response.¹ The end of WW I, the dissolution of the Russian empire and other political factors created the conditions in Central and Eastern Europe for the emergence of independent states. Both Lithuania and Poland declared their independence. They also both nurtured ideas for the revival of Vilnius University, which was closed in 1832 by Tsar Nicholas I. There is extensive historiographical research on Stephanus Bathoreus University, and especially in Poland. During the XXI century, the centenary of the university's foundation in particular sparked a great deal of scientific interest and saw many interesting publications.² Generally speaking,

¹ Reopening document signed by Józef Piłsudski, Lietuvos valstybės centrinių archyvų [Lithuanian Central State Archives – hereafter referred to as LCVA], F. 1135, Ap. 13, B. 936, L. 1.

² Here are some of them: A. Supruniuk, M. A. Supruniuk, *Alma Mater Vilnensis 1919–1939. 100-lecie uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego w Wilnie 1919–2019 / Century Anniversary of Stephanus Bathoreus University in Vilnius 1919–2019 / Stepono Batoro Universiteto Vilniuje 100-metis 1919–2019*, Toruń 2019; A. Supruniuk, J. Szudy, eds., *Dzieje Wydziału Matematyczno-Przyrodniczego Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego w Wilnie (1919–1939)*, Vol. 1–2, Toruń 2020; M. Geron, ed., *Wydział*

the opening of a university represents a significant event for a city, region, or state, and marks a turning point in the reality before and after the university's emergence.³ The academic world quickly takes root in the political, economic and cultural, reality of the city and eventually in its everyday life. The celebration of a university's jubilee is always a great occasion. Universities seek to strengthen their position and image and announce their importance and excellence *urbi et orbi*. The greetings received on such an occasion are an interesting source of information about how a university is perceived by society.⁴ Well-wishers have used both textual and visual elements to express their ideas and feelings, making

Sztuk Pięknych na Uniwersytecie Stefana Batorego w Wilnie (1919–1939/45). Dydaktyka, twórczość i tradycja artystyczna, Toruń 2022; Z. Opacki, *Wydział Humanistyczny Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego w Wilnie 1919–1939*, Gdańsk, 2021; Z. Opacki, "Reaktywowanie czy powstanie? Dyskusja wokół utworzenia Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego w Wilnie w latach 1918–1919," *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 1998, Vol. 105, pp. 49–64.; A. Srebrakowski, "Litwa i Litwini na Uniwersytecie Stefana Batorego w Wilnie," in: W. K. Roman, J. Marszałek-Kawy, eds., *Stosunki polsko-litewskie wczoraj i dziś. Historia-kultura-polityka*, Toruń 2009, pp. 105–136; A. Srebrakowski, "Uniwersytet Stefana Batorego w Wilnie 1919–1939," in: A. Srebrakowski, G. Strauchold, eds., *Wrocław na litewskie millennium. Materiały z uroczystej konferencji z okazji 1000-lecia udokumentowania nazwy Litwa*, Wrocław 2010, pp. 81–107; M. Gawrońska-Garstka, *Uniwersytet Stefana Batorego w Wilnie. Uczelnia ziem północno-wschodnich Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (1919–1939) w świetle źródeł*, Poznań 2016; A. Supruniuk, "Alma Mater Vilnensis: okoliczności wskrzeszenia Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego w Wilnie," *Archiwum Emigracji: studia, szkice, dokumenty* 2020, Vol. 1–2 (26–27), pp. 112–136. Recent Lithuanian historiography: *Alma Mater Vilnensis: Vilniaus universiteto istorijos bruožai* [Alma Mater Vilnensis: Highlights of Vilnius University History], Vilnius 2012; *Alma Mater Vilnensis: Vilniaus universiteto turtai istorijos skersvėjuose (XVI–XXI amžiai)* [Alma Mater Vilnensis: Treasures of Vilnius University in the Great Vortextes of History (16th–21st century)], Vilnius 2016; *Alma Mater Vilnensis. A Short History of the University*, Vilnius 2020.

³ This article was prepared as part of the Vilnius City History Researchers' Programme funded by the Vilnius City Municipality in 2024. The project was titled *The Restoration of Vilnius University in 1919: Between the Mounted Warrior (Vytis) and the Eagle*.

⁴ For example, the Jagiellonian University celebrated its 500th anniversary in 1900. All the greetings sent by various organisations in Kraków and greetings from all over the world have been collected in the book *Księga pamiątkowa pięćsetletniego jubileuszu odnowienia uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 1400–1900*, Kraków 1901. Greetings from various guilds in Kraków were artistically decorated. They are held in the archives of the Jagiellonian University, Archiwum UJ, S II 954/166. In 1929, Stephanus Bathoreus University celebrated its 350th anniversary and also received numerous greetings. These documents are now held in the Lithuanian Central State Archives, LVIA, F. 1135, Ap. 23, B. 444.

such documents also an interesting iconographical source. However, Vilnius University might also be viewed as a particular case. This city with many names – Vilnius, Wilno, Vilna⁵ – was a densely woven fabric where every event, every era, and every symbol were grist for the mill of those who lived there. Vilnius city is a unique phenomenon, and as Theodore R. Weeks put it, “For Poles, Jews, and Lithuanians, Vilnius occupies a key position in national-cultural mythology.”⁶ This city was in constant turmoil in 1919 and 1920, with foreign administrations coming and going. Finally, in April 1919, Vilnius was taken by the Polish army. The process of the reopening of Vilnius University and its numerous challenges was described in the memoirs of the university’s first rector, Michał Siedlecki.⁷ The reopening was, by its very nature, an ambitious undertaking, neither self-evident nor easily achievable. The case of Vilnius was also significant in that the reopening of the university meant that Vilnius had returned to the list of major university cities. The article concentrates on the analysis of this particular iconographical source and does not delve deeper into the process of how the University came to life. The congratulatory messages sent on the occasion of the university’s reopening extended beyond just official documents. This written and visual source allows us to analyse the significance of Vilnius University, the memory of the university itself, and the most prominent figures of its historical pantheon. Furthermore, it helps us comprehend the relationship between the university and the city and the universal phenomena localised in the Polish Vilnius of the interwar period. Each greeting was distinctive, yet a comprehensive analysis reveals patterns in historical memory and visual narrative. Both the image and the text are of equal significance and frequently complement each other.

⁵ The title used in the exhibition “Vilnius, Wilno, Vilna 1918–1948: One City – Many Stories” curated by professors Giedré Jankevičiūtė and Andrzej Szczerbski in Vilnius, 9 Nov. 2023–4 Feb. 2024.

⁶ T. R. Weeks, *Vilnius between Nations. 1795–2000*, DeKalb 2015, p. 1.

⁷ M. Siedlecki, “Wspomnienia z pierwszych dwóch lat organizacji Uniwersytetu Wileńskiego,” in: *Księga pamiątkowa ku uczczeniu CCCL rocznicy powstania i wskrzeszenia Uniwersytetu Wileńskiego*, t. 2, Wilno 1929.

The congratulatory messages sent on the occasion of the reopening of Vilnius University under the name Uniwersytet Stefana Batorego (Stephanus Bathoreus University) can be grouped into several categories:⁸ correspondence, telegrams, and letters, including some greetings currently held at the Lithuanian Central State Archives.⁹ The remaining portion of the celebratory messages consists of substantial, frequently embellished letters from various organisations, societies, groups, or individuals, presumably sent during the festivities and which are now part of the collections of the Manuscript Division of Vilnius University Library.¹⁰ Some of these greetings have previously been exhibited at Vilnius University, as a part of the Stefan Bathory University Centenary Exhibition in 2019.¹¹ The exhibition was organised by the Faculty of History of Vilnius University, the Vilnius University Library, and the University of Toruń.¹² This article will focus on the elaborate greetings that are currently held by the Vilnius

⁸ Detailed information on the archival materials of Stephanus Bathoreus University held by the Lithuanian Central State Archives can be found in an article by A. Supruniuk, M. A. Supruniuk, "Archiwum Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego w Wilnie (1919–1939/1942). Historia, stan i perspektywy badawcze," *Z badań nad książką i księgozbiorami historycznymi*, 2017, pp. 147–169, <https://bookhistory.uw.edu.pl/index.php/zbadannadksiazka/article/view/65/69> (access: 10.2025).

⁹ LVCA, F. 175, Ap. 1(I)A, 20.

¹⁰ Vilniaus Universiteto Biblioteka, Rankraščių skyrius (Vilnius University Library, Manuscript Division – hereafter referred to as VUB RS), F 97-298. All greetings are catalogued under a single numeric designation which is used to reference all items mentioned in this article. I would also like to express my sincerest gratitude to Valentina Karpova-Čelkienė, Head Librarian of the Research and Heritage Collections Department of the Manuscripts Division of Vilnius University Library, who made the discovery of these documents somewhat unexpectedly and was kind enough to share her knowledge with me. I would also like to express my gratitude to my colleague Inga Leonavičiūtė, with whom I am engaged in close collaboration on the history of Vilnius University. Her expertise and insights have been invaluable.

¹¹ This was the second time that these items had been shown to the public. The first time was in 1929, to celebrate the 350th anniversary of the university and the 10th anniversary of its reopening, see: M. Dzikowski, *Wystawa jubileuszowa Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego 1579–1929 w Uniwersyteckiej Bibliotece Publicznej w Wilnie: 9–20 X 1929*, Wilno 1931, https://kolekcijos.biblioteka.vu.lt/objects/VUB01_000213045#00001 (access: 10.2025).

¹² The exhibition and the conference would not have been possible without the assistance of Professors Anna Supruniuk and Mirosław Supruniuk from the University of

University Library, as well as several now held by the Lithuanian Central State Archives.

The Vilnius University Library holds a portion of these greetings, one third of which feature a variety of decorative elements. The remaining items either lack such decorations or feature them only sparingly. In the latter case, a rubric – a decorative device used to highlight the first letter, individual letters, or lines of a text – is often used. The decoration on the greetings was hardly professional. Nevertheless, for those who decided to go beyond the conventional typewritten or handwritten letter, the embellishment of the greetings was of equal importance to the content. These vividly decorated letters were usually unsigned, leaving the identity of those who conceived of the embellishments uncertain. There is, however, a small number of signed works. Three of the illustrations were the work of Wacława Fleury, the daughter of Stanisław Filibert Fleury. Following in her father's footsteps, she pursued her artistic education at the Świt school in Vilnius in the early XX century. Fleury's greetings are distinguished by their portrayal of Vilnius, featuring the city and its prominent landmarks as the focal points of the images. The list of signatories also includes M. Tomaszewski and Józef Zacho[a]szewski. A number of works were signed with the abbreviation W. St[ł]-a. The signatures might indicate an artist's desire to be remembered and their understanding of the importance of their creative contributions. The creators may have sought the assistance of professional teachers of art or used a more "do it yourself" approach, but this does not diminish the importance of these greetings, and instead demonstrates the extent of the sincere involvement of different groups and individuals. The striking and naive artistic style of these letters reflects the personal touch of each greeter, providing a rare insight into the emotional response to the event.

The greetings featured a wealth of historicist elements, often depicting columns, arches, or ancient figures and garlands. Rasa Antanavičiūtė, an art historian specialising in the history of Vilnius and its monuments, has stated that, after 1919, the Polish community in the city lived through

Toruń. Their profound knowledge of the history of Stephanus Bathoreus University is a source of inspiration.

a period of patriotic euphoria manifested in attempts to commemorate every episode of national history.¹³ This patriotic enthusiasm was also evident in the greetings sent to the university. The historical dimension was present in almost every item, manifesting in various forms. Sometimes, evidence of the greeters' professional field influenced their design. In the greeting sent from the St. François de Sales Temperance and Work Society, we can see the personification of the society's activities in the depiction of a woman looking after and guiding a boy, accompanied by a variety of working tools and two small sketches of the city at the top of the letter. The greeting from employees of the Vilnius railway junction established a visual connection between the authors and the addressee. The image of a railwayman and the railway expressed a sense of professional self-awareness, while the history of the university was also represented (ill. no. 1).

The greetings encompassed a diverse visual range, but there are certain trends that might be defined as visual narratives.¹⁴ These can be classified into three principal categories. The *heraldic visual narrative* employed heraldry and various heraldic signs largely represented by the strongest symbols of Vilnius' interwar visual identity (the eagle and the mounted warrior) forming the main iconographic pattern. The *professional visual narrative* used signs typically associated with different professional groups. This category is particularly interesting, as it demonstrated a sense of professional identity. Not only did the greeters reflect themselves as members of a specific group, they also found a way to visually link the symbols of their professional identity to those of the university. This dual visual narrative also reflected the broad impact of the university's reopening on society. Many different professional fields found a way to express a connection between themselves and the university. And, finally, we can identify a *local visual narrative*: The sites and landmarks in Vilnius that held

¹³ R. Antanavičiūtė, *Menas ir politika Vilniaus viešosiose erdvėse* [Art and Politics in the Public Spaces of Vilnius], Lapas 2019, p. 157.

¹⁴ The term "iconographic narratives" exploring the identity of universities was used by G. S. Drori, G. Delmestri, A. Oberg, "The Iconography of Universities as Institutional Narratives," *Higher Education* 2016, Vol. 74, no. 2, pp. 163–180.

particular significance for both the Polish and Lithuanian communities were intertwined. Interwar Vilnius was a constant battlefield and a fertile ground for visual rhetoric. There were other signs and symbols that could be classified in different groups, such as those pertaining to religious and historical symbolism. The categorisation of the visual narratives into three groups represents preliminary research into the iconography of these objects. However, it does permit the identification of the main patterns and ideas that underpin the images. In some cases, the greetings used a multiplicity of visual narratives simultaneously. In cases where multiple visual narratives are used, the greetings are categorised in accordance with the predominant visual expressions.

The heraldic visual narrative

The heraldic narrative is the most evident, but it cannot be called the dominant narrative, since the professional narrative lags only slightly behind in second place. The main heraldic symbols featured were the Polish and Lithuanian coats of arms – the eagle and the mounted warrior. They were employed by various groups: students, professional heritage conservationists, teachers, nuns, local authorities, patriotic organisations, and the Church. The eagle of Poland and the mounted warrior of Lithuania were usually depicted in the coat of arms of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, or as a separate emblems following the tradition of heraldic display of the heraldry of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: the eagle on top, or on the right, the mounted warrior on the left or at the bottom. In rare cases, as in the greeting from the Polish Society of Technicians in Vilnius (Polskie Stowarzyszenie Techników w Wilnie) the coat of arms also included the emblem of Stefan Bathory, with the Polish crown placed on top of the shield, supported on by sides by two winged female figures (Ill. no. 2).¹⁵ Sometimes the eagle was used as a separate figure without a heraldic shield, as in the greeting sent from the Polish Soldiers Aid Society (Towarzystwo Pomocy Żołnierzowi Polskiemu).¹⁶ The salutation from

¹⁵ VUB RS, F 97-298.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

the Polish Women's Patriotic Union (Patriotyczny Związek Polek) displayed the coat of arms of the Uprising of 1832.¹⁷ The visual rhetoric was bolstered by a citation from Adam Mickiewicz – “Witaj jutrzenko swobody, za tobą zbawienia słońce”¹⁸ – thus establishing a connection between the two uprisings of 1830 and 1863–1864 against Russia and the “awakening” of Vilnius University in 1919. Ferdynand Ruszczyc used this coat of arms in his illustration of the symbolic transfer of the Vilnius city keys into the hands of Józef Piłsudski on the 26 April 1919.¹⁹ The coat of arms served as a powerful symbol of freedom and liberation.

The greetings are full of historical narrative and heraldic symbols reinforced these messages, creating an image of Poland as a distinct entity, devoid of virtually any references to the common Polish-Lithuanian history. The coat of arms of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and its depiction of a mounted warrior served merely as a decorative detail, a splendid ornament. The Lithuanian coat of arms had lost its subjectivity and was now depicted only as an integral part of Polish history. The use of the coats of arms of Poland and Lithuania was a common practice in interwar Polish Vilnius. For example, the student journal of Stephanus Bathoreus University, *Alma Mater Vilnensis*, featured a stylised coat of arms of Stefan Bathory on the cover page of its third volume.²⁰ The coat of arms of Stephanus Bathoreus University designed by Ferdynand Ruszczyc also used these two symbols.²¹ However, the strong dominance of only one heraldic figure – the eagle – was obvious.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ From the poem “Oda do młodości” [Ode to Youth: Hail, Dawn of Liberty! Thou carriest the Redeeming Sun so bright].

¹⁹ R. Antanavičiūtė, *Menas ir politika. Vilniaus viešosiose erdvėse*, Lapas 2019, p. 153, ill. no. 51.

²⁰ *Alma Mater Vilnensis* 1925, Vol. 3, author Zbigniew Kalizczak; Polish coat of arms with that of Stefan Bathory was used on the cover page of *Alma Mater Vilnensis* 1930, Vol. 7, author Zygmunt Kowalski, in: G. Jankevičiūtė, A. Szczerski, eds., *Vilnius, Wilno, Vilna 1918–1948: Vienas miestas daug pasakojimų* [Vilnius, Wilno, Vilna 1918–1948: One City – Many Stories], Parodos katalogas, Vilnius 2023, p. 223.

²¹ A. Supruniuk, M. A. Supruniuk, *Uniwersytet Stefana Batorego w Wilnie w fotografiach 1919–1939*, Toruń 2009, cover page.

The organisations that chose heraldic symbols are difficult to generalise. These were professional organisations such as the Polish Society of Technicians in Vilnius, the Society for the Protection of Historical Monuments in Warsaw (Towarzystwo Opieki nad Zabytkami Przeszłości), and the Polish Society of Local History in Warsaw (Polskie Towarzystwo Krajoznawcze); different political organisations, including the Polish National Democratic Party in Lithuania (Polskie Stronnictwo Demokracji Narodowej na Litwie), the Polish State Committee (Polski Komitet Państwowy), and the Eastern Border Defence Committee (Komitet Obrony Kresów Wschodnich); Vilnius city authorities such as the Council of the Protection of the Vilnius Region (Opiekuńcza Rada Ziemi Wileńskiej) and the Vilnius City Council; educational institutions, including the Parents Committee of the Polish Teachers Association in Warsaw (Komitet Rodziców przy Szkołach Stowarzyszenia Nauczycielstwa Polskiego), the Nazarene Sisters Schools in Vilnius (Wileńskie Szkoły Zgromadzenia Sióstr Najświętszej Rodziny z Nazaretu), the teachers and students of the Lithuanian Brasta, even an elaborate personal greeting from General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki;²² and also a greeting from the Apostolic Nunciature in Poland.²³ In the greeting from the Polish Student Corporation of the Riga Polytechnic University Welecia and Arkonia, Vilnius University was personified as a representative of Poland: "Ty, wcielone uosobienie Polski naszej." Poland, represented by the eagle, constituted the central axis of the heraldic narrative.

The professional visual narrative

The second group of greetings, the professional visual narrative, featured numerous details symbolising the professions of the greeters. The self-representation by professional communities was, on the one hand, shaped by recognisable symbols, but it also retained a degree of individuality. In addition, this group included the most expressive and romantically sentimental greetings.

²² All of these greetings are held at the Vilnius University Library, VUB RS, F 97-298.

²³ LCVA, F 175, Ap 1(I)A. 20, No. 20.

The Polish Red Cross Organisation in Vilnius (Towarzystwo Polskiego Czerwonego Krzyża w Wilnie) and the Sanitary Department of the Ministry of Military Affairs (Departament Sanitarny Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych)²⁴ chose the most apparent and reasonable symbol – a red cross (Ill. no. 3). In both instances the message was reinforced by the use of additional details. In the case of the Red Cross, this was a romantic portrait of a sister of mercy tending to wounded soldiers under a birch tree and wishing the university prosperity for the benefit of Polish science. The Sanitary Department used the canonical staff of Aesculapius encircled by a laurel wreath. The Vilnius Scouts depicted the Upper Castle, a prominent landmark in the city and the scouting cross (krzyż harcerski). The image on this greeting was signed by Józef Zacho[a]szewski.²⁵

An interesting choice was made by the Vilnius charitable organisation Sacred Heart House (Dom Serca Jezusowego).²⁶ The image is one of two greetings created by professional artist Wacława Fleury (Ill. no. 4). The artist chose a prominent landmark of the city – the Vilnius Cathedral. The offices of the charitable organisation were located a considerable distance from the city centre²⁷ with no pictorial view to explore. They chose instead to use the image of the main Catholic church in the city, one of the principal symbols of Catholic Vilnius, in their salutation. The cathedral and a crowd of people waving Polish flags were more appropriate for the patriotic and high rhetoric of this greeting.

The employees of the Vilnius District Technical Department (Wydział Techniczny Zarządu Okręgu Wileńskiego)²⁸ represented themselves with a pictorial seal depicting the symbolic instruments of their trade – an intersected hammer and axe. The personnel of the Technical Department saw themselves as a corporation with a seal depicting their tools. This rather medieval iconography of a corporative seal looked strange in the XX

²⁴ VUB RS, F 97-298.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ D. Lewicki, *Zakłady i salezjanie “Domu Serca Jezusowego” w Wilnie*, <https://www.delfi.lt/pl/kultura/zakladы-i-salezjanie-domu-serca-jezusowego-w-wilnie-63006062>

²⁸ VUB RS, F 97-298.

century, particularly given that it was not a physical seal but a drawing. It reflected the traditionalist outlook of the authors and was consistent with the prevailing attitude of many other greeters. The authors themselves and the overall image of the city of Vilnius could both be characterized by a nostalgic focus on the past.²⁹ The illustration on this greeting resembles one sent by workers who undertook the restoration of Vilnius University and thus it is plausible that the same person was responsible for creating both images. The text commences with an almost humble salutation “My, robotnicy wileńscy, którym dane było własnymi dłońmi przyczynić się do przywrócenia Wszechnicy Batorego [...]” (We, the workers of Vilnius, who were able to contribute with our own hands to the restoration of Stephanus Bathoreus University) (Ill. no. 5). It also included the iconic image of the central building of the university, a drawing of the seal at the bottom of the greeting depicting working tools, including an axe, a saw, a trowel, and a square. The document was accompanied by a notebook containing more than 300 signatures, including Polish, Lithuanian, and Jewish names. The text was an accurate reflection of the genuine sentiment toward the event and its profound impact on many individuals.

The employees of the Vilnius railway junction (Stowarzyszenia Spółdzielcze Pracowników Kolejowych Węzła Wileńskiego) used a pictorial representation of a railwayman with the tools of his trade and the railway stretching from a distance toward Vilnius University (Ill. no. 1). The picture itself depicted the Vilnius public electricity station and a small train carrying coal.³⁰ This salutation was the only one where the greeters chose to be depicted as individuals and not substituted or represented by various symbols as in other greetings. What is distinctive about this greeting is

²⁹ Giedrė Jankevičiūtė speaks of Vilnius as a city mired in the past in her article “Vilniaus kasdienybė Vilniaus dailėje” [Quotidian Vilnius Life in the Fine Arts], in: G. Jankevičiūtė, A. Szczerbski, eds., *Vilnius, Wilno, Vilna 1918–1948: Vienas miestas daug pasakojimų, parodos katalogas*, Vilnius 2023, pp. 167–169.

³⁰ The Vilnius Public Electricity Station was located close to the train repair depot (near the present-day Vilnius bus station). The station was fuelled by coal. The right bank of the Neris River was reconstructed and the railway to the station was laid to allow for coal transportation. This power station and railway are shown in the greeting. I am grateful to my colleague Aelita Ambrulevičiūtė for this localisation and its explanation.

that the image of the railwayman is surrounded by prominent figures of Vilnius University, namely King Stefan Batory, the University's first rector Petrus Skarga, and the renowned poet Adam Mickiewicz.

The Society for the Promotion of Fine Arts in Warsaw (Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie) presented an elegantly adorned greeting in the art deco style and expressed the hope that the university would continue to facilitate the promotion of Polish culture through the advancement of science and the arts (Ill. no. 6). The painting depicts two female figures holding a book and a palette, respectively, and a portrait of Stefan Bathory at the top of the composition.

The greetings in this group are notable for their visual appeal, suggesting that these professional groups had a clear understanding of their self-representation, conveyed in a manner that was both coherent and aesthetically pleasing.

The local visual narrative

The third group of greetings drew inspiration from the city of Vilnius and its distinct locations. The focus of the celebration, Vilnius University, was also prominent. In addition, the greetings in this group incorporate details that can also be attributed to the other two narratives.

A part of a lithograph depicting Vilnius University created by Philippe Benoist in 1850 was featured in the greeting from the Court and the Prosecutor's Office of Vilnius (Sąd, Prokuratura, Palestra Wileńskie). The Vilnius Dental Society's (Towarzystwo Wileńskich Lekarzy Odontologów) greeting displayed a view of the Upper Castle Tower, although the main decorative element was a Roman arch with stylised Bowls of Hygeia. The Society of the Ladies of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul (Towarzystwo Pań Miłosierdzia Świętego Wincentego a Paulo) chose to feature a drawing of the Observatory Courtyard of Vilnius University.³¹ The salutation from the Wawel Ethnographic Museum (Muzeum Etnograficzne na Wawelu) presented a different view, depicting a couple in ethnographic clothing gesturing toward the museum.

³¹ Renamed the Marcin Poczobutt Courtyard in 1919.

In greetings painted by Wacława Fleury, the artist chose two symbolic places, the first by Sacred Heart House, mentioned previously in the section about the professional narrative – the Cathedral and the Upper Castle Tower, the second one used for greeting by the Society for the Care of Children (Towarzystwo Opieki nad Dziećmi) the [then known as the] Representative Palace of the Republic (Pałac Reprezentacyjny Rzeczypospolitej).³² The image of cheerful children in front of the Palace might be seen as a symbol of a compassionate Poland and Vilnius as an integral part of the country (ill. no. 7).

The locations selected for the greetings were the city's most prominent landmarks and the most significant symbolic sites, held in high regard by both the Polish and Lithuanian communities. Rasa Antanavičiūtė has emphasized that the majority of symbolic locations valued by the Polish community in Vilnius were established even before the First World War.³³ According to Laima Laukaitė, the Polish and Lithuanian travel guides about Vilnius published during the interwar period applied the same narratives and employed the same visual materials.³⁴ It is thus unsurprising that the same images, shrouded in a romantic mist, were used in the different greetings.

The historic pantheon: the main historical figures used in congratulatory messages

The most significant figure appearing in these greetings was Stefan Bathory, the founder of the university named in his honour in 1919. We should note, however, that prominent figures from the XIX century university era were no less important than the king himself. Adam Mickiewicz, the brothers Jan and Andrzej Śniadecki, and Joachim Lelewel were mentioned with similar frequency. These XIX century figures were clearly of equal importance.

³² VUB RS, F 97-298.

³³ R. Antanavičiūtė, “Tarpukario Vilniaus simbolinės vietas” [Symbolic Places of Interwar Vilnius], in: G. Jankevičiūtė, A. Szczerski, eds., *Vilnius, Wilno, Vilna 1918–1948*, p. 82.

³⁴ L. Laukaitė, “«Aplankyk Vilnių – paminklų miestą»: turistiniai plakatai ir vadovai po miestą” [“Visit Vilnius – the City of Monuments”: Travel Posters and City Guides], in: G. Jankevičiūtė, A. Szczerski, eds., *Vilnius, Wilno, Vilna 1918–1948*, p. 161.

The period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the life of the university from its foundation to the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth went largely unmentioned. The two most prominent figures from the pre-XIX century period were Gediminas, Grand Duke of Lithuania, and Stefan Bathory, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania. The name Gediminas appeared mostly as part of the term “the city of Gediminas” while Stefan Bathory was identified as the King of Poland. The historical narrative was entirely Polish, reinforcing the notion that Vilnius was an entirely Polish city.

The city of Vilnius, the Gate of Dawn (Ostra Brama), and Our Lady of the Gates of Dawn were all mentioned as separate characters of historical memory. One of the greetings mentions both Our Lady of Częstochowa and Our Lady of the Gates of Dawn. The names of religious pilgrimages were not described in greater detail – they were so well known at the time that the greeting texts only mentioned a few geographical references.

Józef Piłsudski, a prominent figure in the restoration of the university, did not receive due recognition in the greetings. Indeed, those sending the congratulatory messages seemed to place more importance on the historical parallels and poetic process of the ceremony. This may be why such a prominent figure as Piłsudski was mentioned only infrequently, with only two direct references. It is also clear that the establishment of Vilnius University in the 16th century did not play a significant role in these messages and was presented only in the visual component of the greetings, identified by the founding date of 1578.

In many instances individual names were used to express the aspirations of Vilnius University and embody the ideas of science and freedom. The plural form was frequently employed: “[...] imiona Sarbiewskich, Poczobutów, Śniadeckich, Jundziłłów, Lelewelów, Grodków [...].”³⁵ This broadened the conceptual scope of these historical figures to an almost limitless degree.

This historical reflection was frequently shaped by the professional field of the greeters and their specific approach to historical memory had

³⁵ Greeting from the Adam Mickiewicz Literary Society in Lviv (Towarzystwo Literackie imienia Adama Mickiewicza w Lwowie), VUB RS, F 97-298.

a profound impact on the content of their message and also occasionally on the visual representation of the text. Medical professionals tended to lean more towards medicine, with references to Joseph Frank.³⁶ Those working in the natural sciences recalled prominent figures from their field, such as Śniadecki and Domeyko. Legal professionals made sure to mention such names as Jaroszewicz and Daniłowicz.

The historically-based greetings seem to have been frozen in the XIX century. As Grzegorz Piątek has observed: "Vilnius seemed to exist in a different time dimension, seen primarily through the prism of tradition."³⁷ Such notable figures as Lelewel, Słowacki, Śniadecki, Mickiewicz, Domeyko, and the Philomath and Filaret associations represented an unchanging historical landscape in the greetings. The only figure who was mentioned in the same line was Marcin Poczobut. All other Jesuits and the university's long history of over two centuries were reflected in a few mentions of the Skarga name. Inga Leonavičiūtė, a researcher of historical memories of Vilnius University, has noted that such XIX-century-era names as Mickiewicz and Lelewel were the prominent figures of the reopened Vilnius University. In 1919, "the poet [Mickiewicz] became the main symbol of the representation of the old university" and later, in 1929, historian Joachim Lelewel "became the main symbolic link between the old and new university during the remaining decade of Stefan Bathory University."³⁸ It seems reasonable to surmise that the admiration for the nineteenth century evident in the greetings was influenced by the pervasiveness of the image of confinement linked to the narrative of the university, and by extension, to the liberation of Poland from foreign domination. It was a motif of renewal and elation. The mythical phoenix metaphor was frequently used to describe the university's emergence from years of captivity and darkness.

A few greetings were not anchored in history, but were more focused on the present and the country's future. For example, the Union of Agricul-

³⁶ Vilnius Medical Society (Wileńskie Towarzystwo Lekarskie), VUB RS, F 97-298.

³⁷ G. Piątek, "Vaiduokliai bastione: Vilniaus įvaizdis tarpukario Lenkijoje" [Ghosts in the Bastion: The Image of Vilnius in Interwar Poland], in: G. Jankevičiūtė, A. Szczerski, eds., *Vilnius, Wilno, Vilna 1918–1948*, pp. 32–33.

³⁸ I. Leonavičiūtė, *Historical Memories of the University*, in: *Alma Mater Vilnenesis. A Short History of the University*, Vilnius 2020, pp. 189–191.

tural Cooperatives in Vilnius (Związek Kółek Rolniczych w Wilnie) sought to establish cooperatives throughout the country to serve the needs of the homeland. But such rhetoric was rare and the historical dimension prevailed in the greeting narratives.

Rhetoric and dominant themes

The majority of the greetings demonstrated an emotionally charged, uplifting, poetic, and often emotional rhetoric. It was common for well-wishers to use religious language or metaphors. Frequently, the tone was one of reverent humility, as if defined by the relationship of the authors to the addressee, i.e., the university, which was held above all greeters. This was undoubtedly indicative of the significance of the event. As is clear from the rhetoric present in the congratulatory messages, Polish society viewed the opening of the university as a moment of religious elation.

The main themes expressed by the greeters can be summarised into several categories, with each theme characterised by representative examples:

Resistance, liberation, and the resurrection of a nation and its culture

“The broken golden thread of the past has been reconnected.”³⁹ Vilnius and the experience of rebirth was profoundly significant for all those who cared about the culture of the homeland.⁴⁰ “The long-awaited hour has arrived, when justice is done and the age-old cry of a nation burdened by the weight of injustice falls silent.”⁴¹ The Filisters of Convent Polonia of the University

³⁹ “[...] Zerwana złota nić przeszłości nawiązana. Budzi się z ruin kultury [...] duch Zamojskich, Słowackich, Lelewelów [...]” – greeting from the Court and the Prosecutor’s Office in Vilnius, VUB RS, F 97-298.

⁴⁰ VUB RS, F 97-298, The Parents Committee of the Polish Teachers Association (Komitet Rodziców przy Szkołach Stowarzyszenia Nauczycielstwa Polskiego). The greeting explored the heraldic visual narrative through two main figures: the eagle and the mounted warrior.

⁴¹ “Wybita tak długo oczekiwana godzina, w której spełnia się sprawiedliwość i milknie od wieku brzmiąca skarga Narodu, obrażonego ciężarem nadmiernej krzywdy” – Polish National Democratic Party in Lithuania (Polskie Stronnictwo Demokracji Narodowej na Litwie). The Polish eagle occupies the entire image, VUB RS, 97-298.

of Dorpat (present-day Tartu) described themselves as the grandchildren of those who relocated from Vilnius to Dorpat in 1828 to escape persecution by Moscow, and then established a centre of Polish thought there.⁴²

“And here, after so many years of pain and sorrow, in this city of ours, which has suffered so much, today everything is coming to life again.”⁴³

The university which, according to the Polish Society of Technicians in Vilnius, was thrown into darkness eighty years ago under the brutal feet of the invaders had now risen like a phoenix from the ashes. They also expressed their gratitude to Polish soldiers for their heroism. This was the only text including a reference to the seizure of Vilnius.⁴⁴

Concern for and protection of the regions of the country

Vilnius was the sixth largest city in Poland during the interwar period.⁴⁵ The image of Vilnius and its university as being situated on the extreme eastern border of Poland was quite evident in the greetings. The Polish National Council for Belarusian and Inflant stated that Poland had always brought the light of education to its borderlands.⁴⁶ The Polish People’s Teachers Union in Lithuania recalled the university’s contribution to the

⁴² “[...] My, synowie i wnuki tych, co w 1828 roku od prześladowań moskiewskich w Wilnie na obcą przeniósłszy się ziemie, tam polskiej myśli założyli ognisko [...]”, VUB RS, F 97-298.

⁴³ “[...] I oto po tylu latach bólu i lez, w tem, tak ciężko doświadczonem mieście naszem, dziś na nowo wszystko budzi się do życia [...]” Polski Komitet Pański. The text and the visual narrative of the greeting carry a significant military tone, with the main symbol being the Polish eagle and the inclusion of body armour worn in the 16th–18th centuries by Polish winged hussars, VUB RS, F 97-298.

⁴⁴ “Jak Feniks z popiołów powstaje do życia prastara wszechnica wileńska. [...] przygaszone 80 lat temu brutalną stopą zaborcy. [...] To, o czem z utęsknieniem marzyły pokolenia, przyjęło kształty realne i kraj, któremu najeźdca odmawiał elementarnych praw do swobody i nauki, odzyskał upragnioną wolność i najwyższą uczelnię zawiązując niezrównanemu bohaterstwu żołnierza polskiego,” VUB RS, F 97-298.

⁴⁵ The population of Vilnius surpassed 200,000 in 1932, see: G. Piątek, “Vaiduokliai bastione: Vilniaus įvaizdis tarpukario Lenkijoje,” in: G. Jankevičiūtė, A. Szczerski, eds., *Vilnius, Wilno, Vilna 1918–1948*, p. 32.

⁴⁶ “[...] Polska niosła zawsze swym kresom pochodnię oświaty [...]” Polska Rada Narodowa Ziemi Białoruskich i Inflant, VUB RS, F 97-298.

education of the people of Lithuania.⁴⁷ In their greeting, the Committee for the Defence of the Border Regions referred to an independent Poland rising like a phoenix from the ashes, together with the border areas and the city of Vilnius, which were beginning to enjoy a new era of freedom.⁴⁸

The university as an outpost of Western civilisation

A greeting from the Polish student corporations Welecia and Arkonia from the Riga Polytechnic University emphasized the university's role as a bastion of Western civilisation, a shining light in the East, and a beacon of the humanities. For them, Vilnius University epitomised Poland: "You, the embodiment of our Poland."⁴⁹ The Farmers from the Vilnius and Kaunas Regions presented themselves as heeding the call of the nation: "My włościanie ziem Wileńskiej i Kowieńskiej przybyli do Wilna na zew naszej "Straży kresowej." The text of the greeting resembled a prayer with a final appeal to the Polish Senate to maintain peace among nations, as had been the case during the reign of Stefan Bathory.⁵⁰

The idea of the periphery of Western civilisation was perceived somewhat differently in the greeting sent by the Vilnius Carpenters' Union. In their view, Polish craftsmen were the main promoters and protectors of the Polish culture. The union's members had moved to the Vilnius region before the Polish-Lithuanian Union and remained loyal to their homeland. As a result, they were the bearers of Western civilisation and, thanks to them, this land had become part of Polish culture. This greeting was like an exclamation of vassal loyalty, characterised by an archaic style and a notable degree of self-assurance.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Polski Związek Nauczycielstwa Ludowego na Litwie, VUB RS, F 97-298.

⁴⁸ Komitet Obrony Kresów, VUB RS, F 97-298.

⁴⁹ "Ty, wcielone uosobienie Polski naszej", VUB RS, F 97-298.

⁵⁰ Delegacja Włościan Ziemi Wileńskiej i Kowieńskiej, VUB RS, F 97-298.

⁵¹ "Wileński Cech Stolarski – Hołd Ci Składa", VUB RS, F 97-298.

Divine justice

The main theme of these greetings was the joy of divine justice fulfilled. A deeply conservative and Catholic ethos was evident in many greetings from secular institutions. One such greeting came from the Society of Friends of Science in Vilnius, which placed greater emphasis on religious than scientific matters. The text was charged with a religious narrative invoking divine justice and resurrection. It also expressed the hope that the reopened university would serve as a sanctuary for Polish Christian civilisation.⁵² The message from the Polish Association of Public Schools under the Polish Teachers Association relied on a visual and textual mystical, religious narrative. It began with a quotation from the famous Polish romantic messianic text by Adam Mickiewicz entitled *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* [The Books and the Pilgrimage of the Polish People].⁵³ It was followed by an allusion to the resurrection of the university. The greeting was adorned with an arch and the figures of two women holding a cross and a torch.⁵⁴ Greetings from the Student Organisation of the Eastern Borderlands in Warsaw also referred to the resurrection of the old university in the city of Gediminas.⁵⁵

Somewhat more moderate religious tones also featured in greetings by various religious organizations, including the Vilnius Charity Society Jesus Heart House or the Polish Jesuits.

⁵² “[...] i niech stworzy tu ostoję polskiej, chrześcijańskiej cywilizacji.” Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk w Wilnie, VUB RS, F 97-298.

⁵³ “I umęczono naród polski i złożono w grobie, a królowie wykrzyknęli, zabiliśmy i pochowaliśmy Wolność”, Paris, 1832.

⁵⁴ Związek Nauczycielstwa Szkół Powszechnych przy Stowarzyszeniu Nauczycielstwa Polskiego, VUB RS, F 97-298.

⁵⁵ “Szczęść Boże. Na wymarzone zmartwychwstanie starodawnej Wszechnicy w Gedyminowym Grodzie”, – Koło Akademickie Kresów Wschodnich, VUB RS, F 97-298.

The university as a multinational institution and the multiethnic makeup of Vilnius and the university

This perception was the rarest among the greetings. Almost all of the messages limited themselves to the national dimension. The celebration of the event was profound but parochial. The perception of the university as an institution with far-reaching goals and a role within the global academic community, or the appreciation for the university's multiethnic makeup, was almost entirely absent in the congratulatory messages sent in 1919. It was quite evident that the concept of a modern university was not a primary concern for greeters. The very fact of the reopening itself, and the glorious legacy of Poland with Vilnius as an integral part of that past, were of far greater significance.

The Vilnius Society of Dentists perceived the university as a home of science and law equally important for all ethnic groups in the country.⁵⁶ Konstanty Żmigrodzki, the director of the Polish Museum in Rapperswil, expressed his hope that the university would promote harmony and love among the fraternal peoples of Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus.⁵⁷ The Vilnius Jewish Medical Association welcomed the revival of the university and expressed the hope that it would become a place of learning open to students from all nations. Their greeting, written in Latin, could be seen as an example reflecting a modern understanding of a university.⁵⁸

Some well-wishers perceived the reopened university as a place for several nations of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, now united in a newly reborn Poland. The greeting from the Jagiellonian University of Kraków emphasized the fraternal bond between Vilnius and Kraków, unit-

⁵⁶ "jako przybytek nauki i prawa, który w równej mierze promienieje dla wszystkich narodowości naszego kraju", VUB RS, F 97-298.

⁵⁷ "Oby była Ona krzewicielką zgody i miłości wśród bratnich narodów Polski, Litwy i Białorusi", VUB RS, F 97-298.

⁵⁸ "Sub tutela huius templi ut vivant, crescent, florent nobilissimae traditiones aliae matris ad utilitatem omnium sine exclusione civium, habitantium orbem nostrum", VUB RS, F 97-298.

ed by the Jagiellonian dynasty.⁵⁹ The significance of the university for the three nations of Poles, Lithuanians, and Belarusians was also mentioned in an individual greeting received from medical doctor Antoni Kuczewski of Zakopane.⁶⁰

A profile of the greeters

The reopening of the university evoked a profound response from the public and produced a flood of greetings and telegrams from all parts of the country. Such a level of public engagement will probably never be surpassed. A wide variety of associations and groups offered their congratulations, including: medical practitioners, dental surgeons, military personnel, carpenters, railway workers, pharmacists, miners, labourers, technicians, farmers, agriculturalists, monument-preservationists, local historians, museologists, religious organisations, welfare and relief organisations, members of the clergy, representatives of the courts and the prosecutor's office, the military, universities, student organisations, alumni, schools, teachers, pupils, scouts, town councils, regional councils, and so forth.

The authors of the messages were not only organisations, but also individuals, Polish scientists, and intellectuals. Professor Stanisław Witkowski, a classical philologist, medievalist, and papyrologist at the University of Lviv, wrote from Zakopane. He expressed his joy at the revival of the school of Lelewel, Śniadecki, and Mickiewicz, and its particular significance for the Polish community in the Lithuanian lands. Stanisław Kralikowski, professor of veterinary medicine at the University of Lviv, Archbishop Aleksander Kakowski scientist Emil Godlewski the Elder, and Father Władysław Sapieha also sent their congratulations. The message from General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki, mentioned previously, was notable for its grandeur,

⁵⁹ “Synowie jednego narodu, ramię w ramię i dłoń w dłoń, będziemy teraz kroczyć naprzód tem raźniej i tem skuteczniej w służbie Wiedzy i Prawdy [...]”, VUB RS, F 97-298.

⁶⁰ In his message brimming with national pathos, Kuczewski wrote about the former Vilnius University as a place where, according to him, speaking Polish was prohibited: “[...] nie wolno było nawet odezwać się po polsku [...]”, LCVA, F 175, Ap 1(i)A, 20. No. 28.

while the greeting from Dr. Antoni Kuczewski of Zakopane used a highly distinguished rhetoric. Kuczewski had been born in Vilnius and referred to himself as “a son from a land forgotten by God.”

Most of those reacting enthusiastically to the restoration of the university were men. The greetings pertain to the traditional sphere of activity ascribed to women in the early XX century, including care, education and religion. For instance, there were sixteen signatures on a greeting from the Parents Committee of the Polish Teachers Association for Schools (ill. no. 8). Only five of them were men, the rest were women. Women’s signatures can also be found on greetings from the Polish Red Cross Society, the Polish Language Teachers of the Vilnius Region, the Polish Soldiers Aid Society, the Society of the Ladies of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Saint Mary’s Sodalities, and the Society of St. Francis de Sales.

Greeters were conservative and very much oriented toward the past. They tended to be religious, bombastic, with a deep sense of injustice for what Poland had endured in prior centuries, but possessing a rather vague or unarticulated opinion about the future of the country or the university.

Concluding remarks

This textual analysis of congratulatory messages shows that the future was not a significant concern for the authors of the messages, who seemed to accept the future as a given. Expectations for the future were rarely expressed and the primary focus was directed instead on liberation and the past years of captivity. In many cases, this liberation was articulated in religious terms, employing concepts such as resurrection and renewal. The historical memory of the greetings, and of the greeters themselves, was infused with the great history of Poland, although it lacked historical details and comprehensiveness. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the place where the university was founded and had thrived, was virtually forgotten. The history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was largely omitted from the historical narrative and reduced to mere visual forms, such as the most symbolic places in Vilnius: the Cathedral, the Upper Castle Tower, and the Gate of Dawn. These places held significance for Poles and Lithuanians alike. The mounted warrior (*Vytis*), the Lithuanian coat of arms, when used in some greetings

formed an integral part of Polish history. All narratives reinforced the perception of Vilnius as a Polish city and, from its very beginning, Stephanus Bathoreus University was the embodiment of the Polish spirit.

The underlying visual narratives in these greetings were based on heraldic symbols, signs attributed to various professional fields, and localised images embodying Vilnius or places geographically connected to the authors. The historical depiction of the past and its overall importance for particular well-wishers also determined the importance of heraldic visual narratives. The language of the greetings was not only uplifting and reminiscent of heroic poems, but was often characterised by humility and a sense of abasement. This could be understood as a way of emphasising the significance of the event.

At the same time, the salutations were notably human. Despite the texts being full of pathos and hyperbole, typing errors and spelling mistakes were simply corrected by hand and attempts at redaction are evident. The greeting from the Polish National Council for Belarusian and Inflant – written in an aesthetically pleasing script with a rubricated initial letter – displayed a clear problem with the word “Inflant”, indicating a discrepancy in the spelling of the final letter.⁶¹ As a result, the word was corrected twice in the text. In the greeting from the Forensic Medical Institution at the University of Kraków, a typing mistake in the first sentence was simply corrected manually.⁶² The Academy of Mining in Kraków sent a double-sided list of a typed salutation that was full of mistakes and omissions – all of its errors were corrected by hand.⁶³ Why the text was not simply retyped remains unknown. Pathos was accompanied by elementary orthographic mistakes, and the grandeur was mixed with a human voice.

⁶¹ Polska Rada Narodowa Ziemi Białoruskich i Inflant, VUB RS, F 97-298.

⁶² LCVA, F 175, Ap 1(I)A, 20. No 15.

⁶³ LCVA, F 175, Ap 1(I)A, 20. No 25.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas [Lithuanian Central State Archives], F. 175, Ap. 1(I)A, 20; F. 1135, Ap. 13, B. 936, L. 1; LVIA, F. 1135, Ap. 23, B. 444.

Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Rankraščių skyrius [Vilnius University Library, Manuscript Division – hereafter VUB RS], F 97-298.

Antanavičiūtė R., *Menas ir politika Vilniaus viešosiose erdvėse* [Art and Politics in the Public Spaces of Vilnius], Vilnius 2019.

Drori G. S., Delmestri G., Oberg A., *The Iconography of Universities as Institutional Narratives, „Higher Education”* 2016, Vol. 71, no. 2.

Dzieje Wydziału Matematyczno-Przyrodniczego Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego w Wilnie (1919–1939), vol. 1–2, red. A. Supruniuk, J. Szudy, Toruń 2020.

Dzikowski M., *Wystawa jubileuszowa Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego 1579–1929 w Uniwersyteckiej Bibliotece Publicznej w Wilnie: 9–20 X 1929*, Wilno 1931.

Gawrońska-Garstka M., *Uniwersytet Stefana Batorego w Wilnie. Uczelnia ziem północno-wschodnich Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (1919–1939) w świetle źródeł*, Poznań 2016.

Księga pamiątkowa pięćsetletniego jubileuszu odnowienia uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 1400–1900, Kraków 1901.

Leonavičiūtė I., *Historical Memories of the University*, in: *Alma Mater Vilnensis. A Short History of the University*, Vilnius 2020.

Lewicki D., *Zakłady i salezjanie „Domu Serca Jezusowego” w Wilnie*, <https://www.delfi.lt/pl/kultura/zaklady-i-salezjanie-domu-serca-jezusowego-w-wilnie-63006062> (access: 10.2025).

Opacki Z., *Reaktywowanie czy powstanie? Dyskusje wokół utworzenia Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego w Wilnie w latach 1918–1919*, „Kwartalnik Historyczny” 1998, Vol. 105.

–, *Wydział Humanistyczny Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego w Wilnie 1919–1939*, Gdańsk 2021.

Siedlecki M., *Wspomnienia z pierwszych dwóch lat organizacji Uniwersytetu Wileńskiego*, w: *Księga pamiątkowa ku uczczeniu CCCL rocznicy powstania i wskrzeszenia Uniwersytetu Wileńskiego*, t. 2, Wilno 1929.

Srebrakowski A., *Litwa i Litwini na Uniwersytecie Stefana Batorego w Wilnie*, w: *Stosunki polsko-litewskie wczoraj i dziś. Historia-kultura-polityka*, red. W.K. Roman, J. Marszałek-Kawy, Toruń 2009.

–, *Uniwersytet Stefana Batorego w Wilnie 1919–1939*, w: *Wrocław na litewskie millenium. Materiały z uroczystej konferencji z okazji 1000-lecia udokumentowania nazwy Litwa*, red. A. Srebrakowski, G. Strauchold, Wrocław 2010.

Supruniuk A., *Alma Mater Vilnensis: okoliczności wskrzeszenia Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego w Wilnie*, „*Archiwum Emigracji: studia, szkice, dokumenty*” 2020, No 1–2 (26–27).

Supruniuk A., Supruniuk M. A., *Archiwum Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego w Wilnie (1919–1939/1942). Historia, stan i perspektywy badawcze, „Z badań nad książką i księgozbiorami historycznymi”* 2017, „tom specjalny”.

–, *Uniwersytet Stefana Batorego w Wilnie w fotografiach 1919–1939*, Toruń 2009.

–, *Alma Mater Vilnensis 1919–1939. 100-lecie uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego w Wilnie 1919–2019 / Century Anniversary of Stephanus Bathoreus University in Vilnius 1919–2019 / Stepono Batoro Universiteto Vilniuje 100-metis 1919–2019*, Toruń 2019.

–, *Vilnius, Wilno, Vilna 1918–1948: Vienas miestas daug pasakojimų* [Vilnius, Wilno, Vilna 1918–1948: One City – Many Stories], exhibition catalogue, eds. G. Jankevičiūtė, A. Szczerski, Vilnius 2023.

Weeks T. R., *Vilnius between Nations. 1795–2000*, DeKalb 2015.

Wydział Sztuk Pięknych na Uniwersytecie Stefana Batorego w Wilnie (1919–1939/45). *Dydaktyka, twórczość i tradycja artystyczna*, red. M. Geron, Toruń 2022.

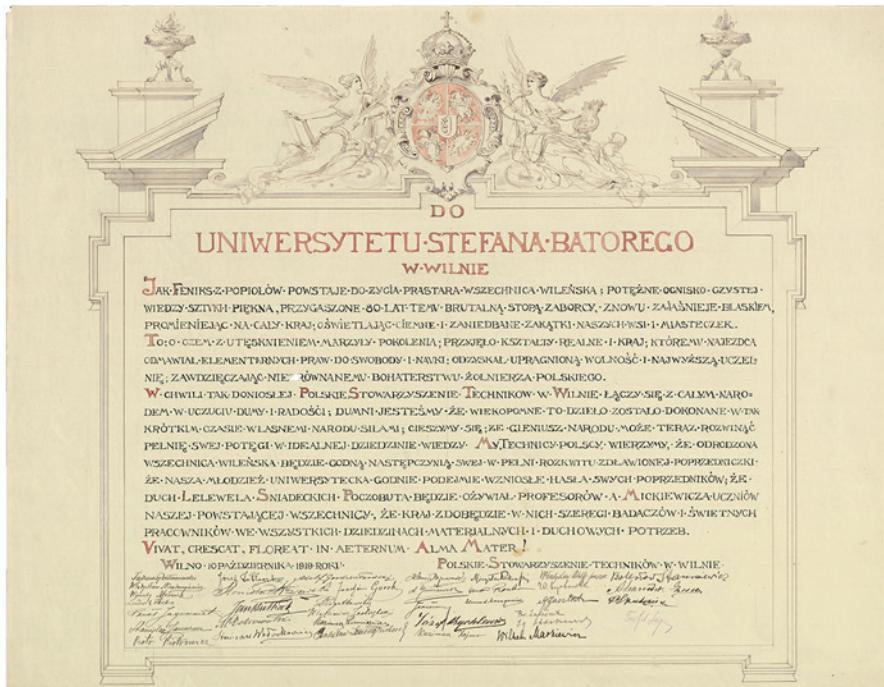
THE LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The illustrations of the greetings used in the article are from the Manuscript Department at Vilnius University Library (hereinafter referred to as VUB RS). All greetings are catalogued under a single numeric designation, which is used to reference all items mentioned in this article – F 97-298.

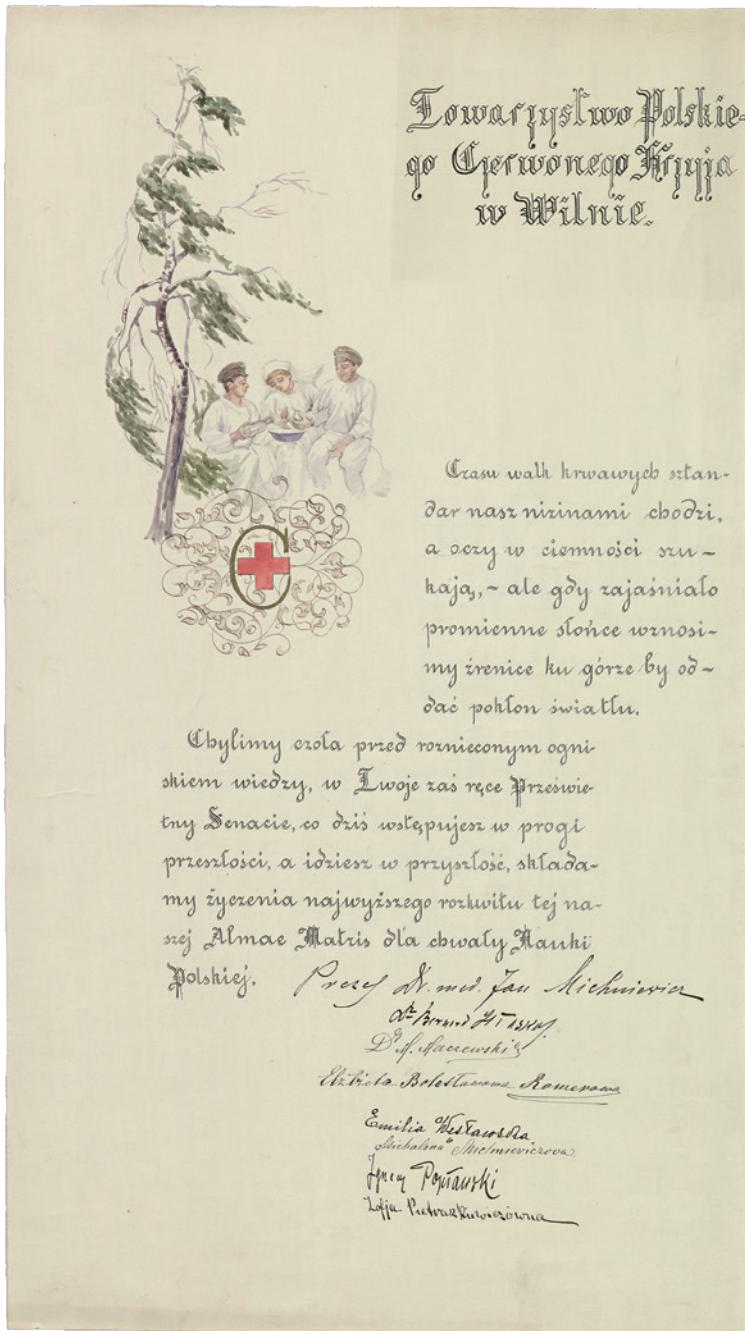
- Ill. no. 1. Greeting of Vilnius Railway Junction (Stowarzyszenia Spółdzielcze Pracowników Kolejowych Węzła Wileńskiego).
- Ill. no. 2. Greeting of the Polish Society of Technicians in Vilnius (Polskie Stowarzyszenie Techników w Wilnie).
- Ill. no. 3. Greeting of the Polish Red Cross Organisation in Vilnius (Towarzystwo Polskiego Czerwonego Krzyża w Wilnie).
- Ill. no. 4. Greeting of the Sacred Heart House (Dom Serca Jezusowego).
- Ill. no. 5. Greeting of the workers who undertook the restoration of Vilnius University (“My, robotnicy wileńscy, którym dane było własnymi dłońmi przyczynić się do przywrócenia Wszechnicy Batorego [...]”).
- Ill. no. 6. Greeting of the Society of Encouragement of Fine Arts in Warsaw (Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie).
- Ill. no. 7. Greeting of the Society for the Care of Children (Towarzystwo Opieki nad Dziećmi).
- Ill. no. 8. Greeting by Parents' Committee of the Polish Teachers' Association for Schools (Komitet Rodziców przy Szkołach Stowarzyszenia Nauczycielstwa Polskiego).



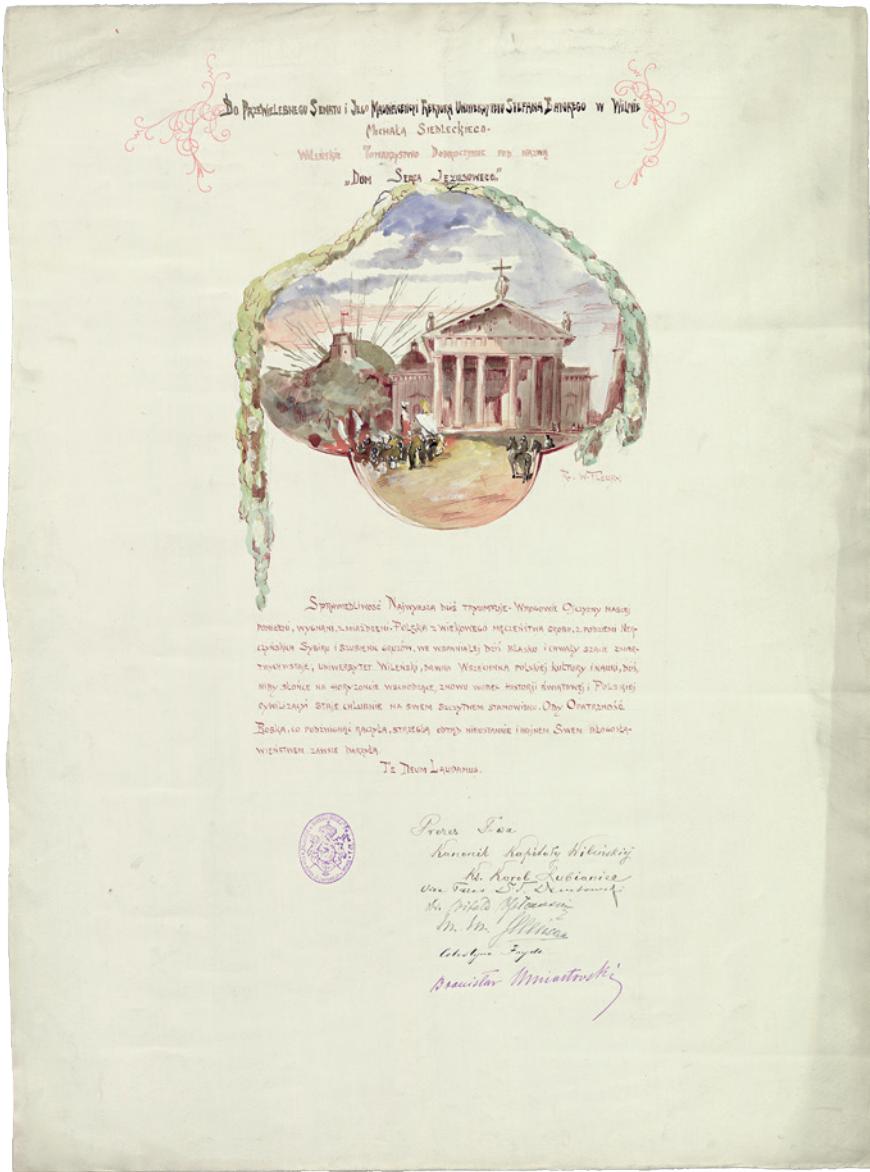
1. Greeting of Vilnius Railway Junction (Stowarzyszenia Spółdzielcze Pracowników Kolejowych Węzła Wileńskiego)



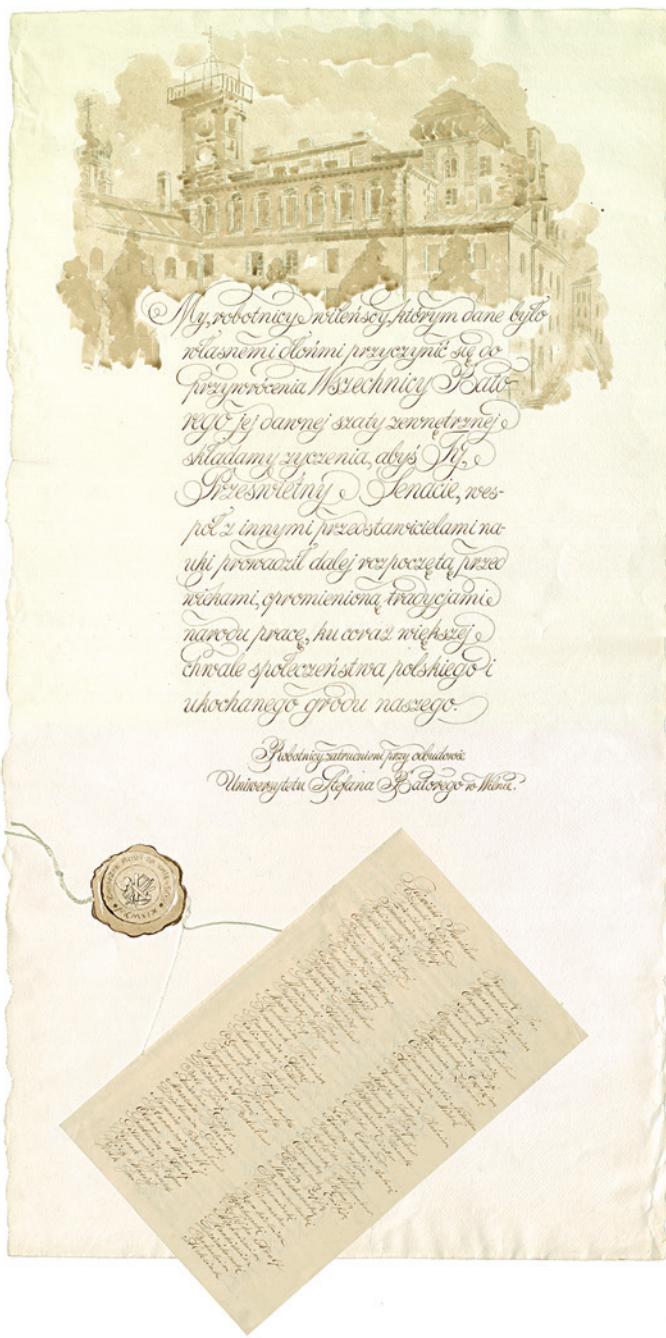
2. Greeting of the Polish Society of Technicians in Vilnius (Polskie Stowarzyszenie Techników w Wilnie)



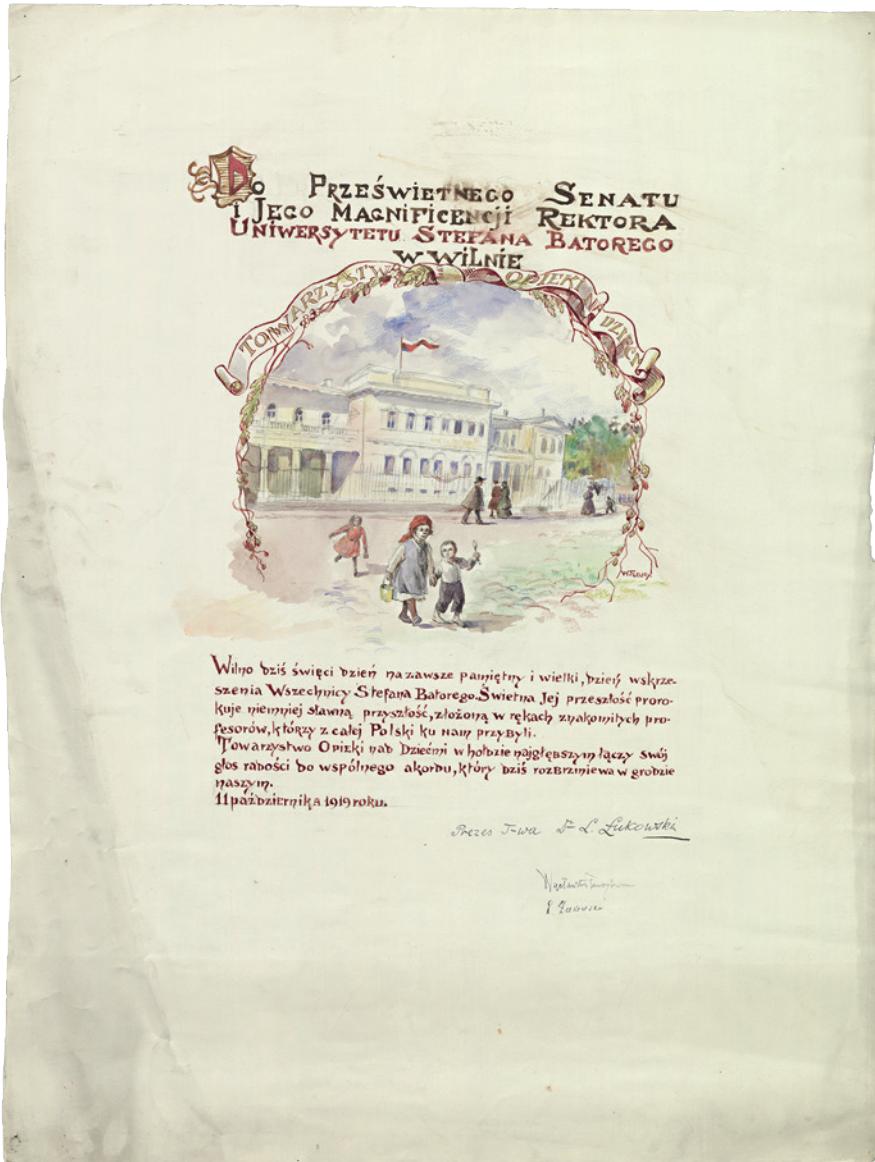
3. Greeting of the Polish Red Cross Organisation in Vilnius (Towarzystwo Polskiego Czerwonego Krzyża w Wilnie)



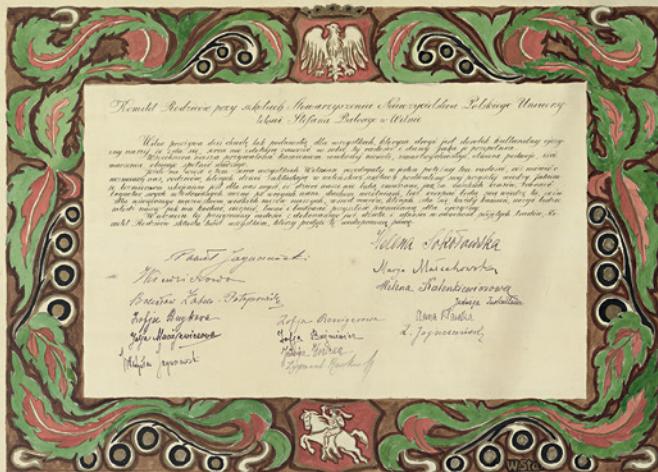
4. Greeting of the Sacred Heart House (Dom Serca Jezusowego)



5. Greeting of the workers who undertook the restoration of Vilnius University (“My, robotnicy wileńscy, którym dane było własnymi dłońmi przyczynić się do przywrócenia Wszechnicy Batorego [...]”)



6. Greeting of the Society of Encouragement of Fine Arts in Warsaw (Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie)



7. Greeting of the Society for the Care of Children (Towarzystwo Opieki nad Dziećmi)



8. Greeting by Parents' Committee of the Polish Teachers' Association for Schools (Komitet Rodziców przy Szkolach Stowarzyszenia Nauczycielstwa Polskiego)

Summary

VIVAT, CRESCAT, FLOREAT: GREETINGS SENT TO VILNIUS UNIVERSITY ON ITS REOPENING IN 1919

The article analyses an interesting written and visual source, namely the greeting letters sent by various individuals and organisations to the newly reopened Vilnius University in 1919. The messages of salutation sent on the occasion of the university's revival extended beyond the confines of official documents and are employed in this article to discuss the significance of Vilnius University, the memory of the institution, and the most prominent figures of its historical pantheon. Each greeting was distinctive, yet a comprehensive analysis reveals patterns in historical memory and visual narrative. An iconographical analysis of the greetings presented in this article was conducted through the classification of these visual narratives into three principal groups, the first group being the *heraldic visual narrative*, in which heraldry and a variety of heraldic symbols constitute the primary iconographic pattern. The analysis found that the heraldic narrative was the most prominent with the primary heraldic symbols being the Polish and Lithuanian coats of arms. The heraldic symbols served to reinforce the message of the greetings, thus creating an image of Poland as a distinct entity, devoid of virtually any reference to the common Polish-Lithuanian history. The second category constitutes a *professional visual narrative* exploring the signs typically associated with different professions. This group is of particular interest as it speaks of professional identity and also reflected the extent to which the reopening of the university had broadly influenced society. The professional visual narrative was full of details symbolising the profession of the greeters and this group was distinguished by highly expressive and romantically sentimental greetings. The article concludes that these professional groups had a clear understanding of their self-representation, conveyed in a manner that was both coherent and aesthetically pleasing. The *local visual narrative* encompassed places and landmarks of Vilnius. The sites in this group were the city's most prominent landmarks and its most significant symbolic sites, held in high regard by both the Polish and the Lithuanian communities. The article identifies Stefan Báthory, Adam Mickiewicz, the brothers Jan and Andrzej Śniadecki, and Joachim Lelewel as the most significant figures appearing in the greetings. It is evident that the aforementioned XIX century figures were undoubtedly viewed as having equal importance. It seems reasonable to suggest that the XIX century's exaltation in the greetings is conditioned by the pervasiveness of the image of confinement, which is linked to the narrative of the university, and by extension, to the liberation of Poland from captivity. The article defines

the primary themes explored by the greeters and summarises them into several categories: *Resistance, liberation, and the resurrection of a nation and its culture; Concern for and protection of the regions of the country; the university as an outpost of Western civilisation; divine justice; the university as a multinational institution and the multiethnic makeup of Vilnius and the university*. The article concludes that the future was not a significant concern for greeters, whose primary focus was on liberation and past years of captivity. The historical memory of the greetings and their authors was imbued with the great history of Poland, although it was lacking in historical detail and comprehensiveness. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, as the place where the university was founded and existed, was barely mentioned in the greetings. All narratives reinforced the perception of Vilnius as a Polish city. The language of the greetings was not only uplifting, reminiscent of heroic poems, but was also often characterised by humility and a sense of abasement. This could be understood as a way of emphasising the significance of the founding event. At the same time, the salutations were very human. The striking and naive artistic style reflected the personal touch of each greeter, offering a rare perspective on the emotional response to the event. Furthermore, it demonstrated the extent of the genuine involvement exhibited by different groups and individuals.

Keywords: Stephanus Bathoreus University, Vilnius University, historical memory, visual narratives, 1919.

Streszczenie

Artykuł poświęcony jest analizie unikatowego źródła pisanej i wizualnej – listów gratulacyjnych wysłanych przez różne osoby i organizacje z okazji ponownego otwarcia w 1919 r. Uniwersytetu Wileńskiego. Analiza ikonograficzna została przeprowadzona poprzez klasyfikację tych narracji wizualnych do trzech kategorii. Pierwsza kategoria to heraldyczna narracja wizualna (*heraldic visual narrative*). Analiza pokazuje, że narracja heraldyczna jest najbardziej czytelna, a głównymi symbolami heraldycznymi są herby Polski i Litwy. Symbole heraldyczne służą wzmocnieniu przekazu, tworząc tym samym obraz Polski jako odrębnego podmiotu, prawie niemającego odniesień do wspólnej, polsko-litewskiej historii. Druga kategoria to profesjonalne narracje wizualne (*professional visual narrative*). W tej kategorii zostały zanalizowane znaki kojarzone z poszczególnymi zawodami. Ta grupa przykładów jest szczególnie interesująca, ponieważ mówi o tożsamości zawodowej, a także odzwierciedla stopień, w jakim ponowne otwarcie uniwersytetu znalazło oddźwięk w społeczeństwie. Okazało się, że grupy zawodowe miały wyraziste samowyobrażenie,

które zostało przekazane w sposób spójny, a jednocześnie – estetyczny. Trzecia kategoria – lokalna narracja wizualna (*local visual narrative*) obejmuje wizerunki najważniejszych symboli Wilna, cieszące się dużą rozpoznawalnością zarówno wśród społeczności polskiej, jak i litewskiej. Odnotowane zostały postacie: Stefana Batorego, Adama Mickiewicza, braci Jana i Andrzeja Śniadeckich oraz Joachima Lelewela jako najważniejsze wśród przywoływanych w listach gratulacyjnych. Nie ulega wątpliwości, że wspomniani XIX-wieczni luminary są ważnymi postaciami. Uzasadniona wydaje się teza, że XIX-wieczna w swym charakterze egzaltacja w pozdrowieniach stanowi kontynuację opowieści o niewoli, odnoszonej także do uczelni, a co za tym idzie – do wyzwolenia Polski. W artykule wskazane zostały główne tematy, do których odwołali się nadawcy listów, a które można zatrzymać w kilku kategoriach: 1) Opór, wyzwolenie i zmartwychwstanie narodu i jego kultury; 2) Ochrona Kresów; 3) Uniwersytet jako ostoja cywilizacji zachodniej; 4) Boża sprawiedliwość; 5) Uniwersytet jako instytucja wielonarodowa, wieloetniczny charakter Wilna i samego Uniwersytetu. Z analizy wynika, że to nie przeszłość była w centrum uwagi autorów gratulacji. Skupiali się oni na wyzwoleniu i na aspekcie minionej niewoli. Pamięć historyczna gratulujących i treść pozdrowień jest przesiąknięta wielką historią Polski, choć brakuje jej historycznej szczególowości i kompleksowości. Wszystkie narracje wzmacniały postrzeganie Wilna jako miasta polskiego. Język listów był nie tylko podniosły, o stylistyce poematów heroiczych, ale często nacechowany poczuciem doznanego poniżenia. Uderzający i naiwny styl artystyczny odzwierciedla osobisty charakter każdego z pozdrawiających, dając rzadką możliwość obserwowania emocjonalnej reakcji na wydarzenie. Co więcej, pokazuje stopień autentycznego zaangażowania różnych grup i osób.

Słowa kluczowe: Uniwersytet Stefana Batorego, Uniwersytet Wileński, pamięć historyczna, narracje wizualne, 1919.