

CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE NUMISMÁTICA  
INTERNATIONAL NUMISMATIC COUNCIL  
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DE NUMISMATIQUE  
INTERNATIONALER NUMISMATISCHER RAT  
CONSIGLIO INTERNAZIONALE DI NUMISMATICA

COMPTE RENDU 68/2021

PUBLIÉ PAR LE SECRÉTARIAT DU CONSEIL

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## COUNTESS NATALIA ANNA KICKA *NÉE* BISPING (1801-1888)

Natalia Anna Kicka *née* Bisping was a painter, collector of Polish national memorabilia (in which she included coins and medals) and an amateur archaeologist. She was born in 1801 in Vilna, in the Russian partition, to Piotr Bisping, member of the Polish nobility, marshal of the Wołkowysk County, and Józefa Kicka.<sup>1</sup> As a child she had received careful home schooling on the family estate at Hołowczyce. In 1815 she moved to Warsaw to continue her studies, staying with her grandmother Józefa Kicka *née* Szydłowska.



Fig. 1. Botanical Garden of the Vilna University, c.1830. Drawing by Karol Raczyński, lithograph by Maciej Przybylski, 1832-1837. National Library Warsaw (public domain).

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<sup>1</sup> German 1966-1967.

Natalia Kicka was greatly influenced by the family tradition learnt at home, love for her homeland and a whole-hearted readiness to serve her country.<sup>2</sup> Her personality had been shaped by Romanticism and prominent artists, intellectuals and politicians of Vilna (Fig. 1), more notably, Joachim Lelewel one of whose interests was numismatics.<sup>3</sup>

Natalia's adulthood would be overshadowed by the November Uprising and the Russo-Polish War of 1830–1831. At this time, on 27 January 1831 she married Count Ludwik Kicki, her almost 40-years' old uncle, a general of the Polish Army, "... a man of a heroic valour and truly dauntless bravery".<sup>4</sup> Too soon he was killed in the Battle of Ostrołęka on 26 May 1831.<sup>5</sup>

For the rest of her life Natalia Kicka would cherish the memory of her husband. Her years after the Uprising were spent on travels with her daughter, abroad and at home. After her daughter's premature death at twenty, the countess continued moving in artistic, literary and political circles. She often went to France and Dresden, where she took refuge to escape arrest in late 1863, after the outbreak of the January Uprising. Two years later she returned to Warsaw where she engaged in charity work and cultural activities.

In Warsaw she engaged in numismatics and collecting national memorabilia. She amassed a sizable collection of Polish coins and medals from the period between the Middle Ages to the reign of the last king of Poland, Stanislaus Augustus (1764–95). Some of her close friends were collectors of similar memorabilia. Of special value for Kicka were her contacts with Karol Beyer, collector and animator of the Polish numismatic movement in the Russian partition.<sup>6</sup> Beyer supplied sought-after coins not only to the Warsaw numismatics community, but also to collectors outside the Congress Kingdom of Poland, first foremost, to Count Emeryk Hutten-Czapski. Beyer was also an agent and a friend who assisted Countess Kicka in building up her collection of coins and medals.

It is likely that Natalia Kicka took part in social gatherings dedicated to numismatics held on Thursdays in Beyer's apartment, the seat of the unofficial Warsaw numismatic society. Since 1856 they became regular, held at the Merchants Association,<sup>7</sup> but because of Russian policing restrictions no official numismatics association was established. This numismatic community included, besides Natalia Kicka: Kazimierz Stężyński-Bandtkie, Karol Beyer, Karol Blicher, Teodor Dembowski, Jerzy Gauger, Justynian Karnicki, Walery Kostrzębski, Konstanty Miler, Paweł Muchanow, Bolesław

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<sup>2</sup> Filipow 2013, pp. 159–67.

<sup>3</sup> Puzynina 1988, p. 174.

<sup>4</sup> Patelski 1921, p. 155.

<sup>5</sup> Tarczyński 1980, p. 399.

<sup>6</sup> Triller 1970, p. 192; Triller 1964, p. 189; Czerski & Maciaszek 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Czerski & Maciaszek 1995, p. 21.

Podczaszyński, Stanisław Pusch, Baron Edward Rastawiecki, Countess Izabela Starzyńska, Count Henryk Stecki, Kazimierz Stronczyński, Wiktor Szaniawski, Count Stanisław Walewski, Count Tomasz Zamoyski and Józef Zellt, and very likely, also Tymoteusz Lipiński, Józef Przyborowski and Aleksander Weinert. With time the group decreased in size.<sup>8</sup>

Konstanty Miler assisted Natalia Kicka in complementing her numismatic collection, and she was a godmother of his son.<sup>9</sup> Acting on advice from Miler, Kicka entrusted the writing of a catalogue of her collections to Walery Kostrzębski, former assayer of the Warsaw Mint, recognizing his acumen and erudition.<sup>10</sup> This happened around 1868. The catalogue was to be on the model of a manuscript catalogue of collections brought to the capital of the Kingdom of Poland and shown to the antiquarians of Warsaw by Count Emeryk Hutten-Czapski. This was a catalogue of the Count's collections published in print at a later date.<sup>11</sup> Kicka was in contact also with Antoni Ryszard, a bibliophile, bibliographer and collector of coins and medals active in Cracow, but most notably, with Senator Kazimierz Stronczyński. In 1866 this the most senior of Polish numismatists sold to Kicka his excellent collection of medieval Polish coins for a sum of 9,000 Polish złotych.<sup>12</sup>

As befitted a self-respecting 19<sup>th</sup>-century antiquarian Countess Kicka interested herself also in archaeology and late in life would publish the results of her studies in print. This had brought her to a cooperation with the Warsaw periodical *Wiadomości Archeologiczne*.<sup>13</sup> The plates, drawings and engravings included in these publications were probably her own, as the countess was a skilled draughtswoman and painter.

In 1882 Countess Kicka published a brief note dedicated to a coin of Khan Tokhtamysh with a countermark of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Vytautas in the Warsaw review *Przegląd Bibliograficzno-Archeologiczny*.<sup>14</sup> The Tatar coin of interest was a specimen from her numismatic collection. The same or a very similar Tatar coin with a Lithuanian countermark is recorded in the collection of Count Józef Tyszkiewicz at Birże (then in the Kovno Governorate) described by its owner with an annotation in his "Index of Lithuanian coins".<sup>15</sup> The description of this coin drew the interest of Countess Kicka who noted: "I was very keen to add this specimen to my modest collection". Once again Beyer came to her aid: „thus, after a few years' search

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<sup>8</sup> Filipow 2003, pp. 22–3. The members of the Warsaw numismatic club were listed in the Cracow journal *Wiadomości Numizmatyczno-Archeologiczne*, 1891.

<sup>9</sup> Kicka 1972, p. 541.

<sup>10</sup> Filipow & Kuklik 2012; Filipow 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Hutten-Czapski 1871–1916.

<sup>12</sup> Strzałkowski 1991, p. 70; Suchodolski 2005, pp. 11–12; Ryszard MS, I/2, p. [120 — unnumbered pp.].

<sup>13</sup> Kicka 1881, 1882a; German 1966–67.

<sup>14</sup> Kicka 1882b.

<sup>15</sup> Tyszkiewicz 1875, p. 28.

I purchased the piece from him [*i.e.*, Beyer]”, and she published its drawing in the article.<sup>16</sup> Today, after a long discussion, numismatists have agreed to attribute the countermark to Vytautas; at the same time, the countess had concluded mistakenly that “the Tatars had been forced to strike on their coins the heraldic charge of the Lithuanian dukes, this is demonstrated by the coin presented in the introduction”.<sup>17</sup>

Today the contents of the coin and medals collection of Natalia Kicka are poorly understood. The catalogue of the collection drafted by Walery Kostrzębski was lost. One specimen mentioned by Józef Tyszkiewicz as belonging to Kicka’s collection was a rare *szóstak* of Augustus II with initials and heraldic charge of Ludwik Pociej, Treasurer of Lithuania, struck in 1707 in the Moscow mint.<sup>18</sup>



Fig. 2. Natalia Kicka, née Biszpink (*recte*: Biszpina). Engraved by Edward Nicz, according to a photograph by Walery Rzewuski, from *Kłosa*, 1888, vol. 46, no. 1191, p. 261 (public domain).

<sup>16</sup> Kicka 1882b, p. 48.

<sup>17</sup> Kicka 1882b, p. 49.

<sup>18</sup> Tyszkiewicz 1875, p. 26, pl. XV.

Natalia Anna Kicka nee Bisping (Fig. 2), lived to a venerable old age and died in Warsaw on 4 April 1888.

The fate of her numismatic collection was typical for many collections amassed during the long period of partitions “to lift up hearts”. Piast coins from Kazimierz Stronczyński’s collection were purchased by Emeryk Hutten-Czapski. Kicka’s niece, Helena Przybyłowska received coins of Sigismundus I the Old (1506–1548) to Michael (1669–1673). Coins of other elective monarchs: Stephen Bathory (1576–1586), John Casimir (1649–1668), the Saxonian dynasty (1697–1763) and Stanislaus Augustus (1764–1795) passed to Natalia Dobrzańska who sold the coins of Stanislaus Augustus to Wiktor Szaniawski, coin collector, landowner from Przegaliny near Radzyń Podlaski.

Despite her contribution to upholding Polish culture under the partitions, Natalia Kicka, avid numismatist and guardian of Polish national consciousness deserves a greater recognition and commemoration than accorded to date.

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