



# IN STANISŁAW'S LABYRINTH

Photography by Jakub Ostałowski

Dozens of corridors. Thousands of stairs. Rooms large and small. Offices and laboratories. Alcoves, nooks and crannies. One can easily lose oneself in the Staszic Palace, amidst a treasure-trove of knowledge hard to come by anywhere else.

THE STASZIC PALACE





## ACADEMIA Insight In the Lens



Stanisław Staszic, a prominent Polish philosopher, writer and political activist in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, believed that scholars have not fulfilled their calling, their social purpose, until their knowledge has facilitated the progress of the factories and crafts of Enlightenment. He himself had heeded this calling. In 1800 he co-founded the Society of Friends of Science. He also acknowledged that science and scholars needed suitable headquarters in Warsaw. Antonio Corazzi, a graduate of the Florence Academy of Fine Arts, brought his idea to life. Unfortunately, Staszic did not enjoy his creation for very long. He died three years later and was given a final farewell in the Society's residence at Nowy Świat. In 1830 the building received a notable "guardsman," when a monument was erected in front of the main entrance depicting the astronomer who changed people's perception of the world. Sometime later, after a somewhat unfortunate adorning of its facade with majolica bricks, the residents of Warsaw jocularly referred to the building as "the Byzantine gingerbread, right behind Copernicus' head."

The fate of the Staszic Palace has been as turbulent as the times it has seen. After the November Uprising, when the Society was dissolved, not only was it subject to numerous redevelopments, but also its tenants were rapidly changing. They included the Lottery Directorate, the Medical and Surgical Academy, a Russian secondary school for boys, and finally the Orthodox Church of St. Tatyana of Rome. Its original purpose was restored when it became the seat of the Warsaw Scientific Society, after Poland regained its independence in 1918, and then that of the Polish Academy of Sciences in the 1950s, after the building was raised from the rubble of war.

Science is present here throughout the day. In the labyrinth of corridors and the plethora of rooms one can meet philosophers and prominent sociologists, historians and linguists, orientalists and rural researchers, literary and legal experts. Science is also present here in the evenings, during conferences, seminars, and lectures of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Sometimes science even stays up until dawn, when Museum Night or the Science Festival take place here. And if Stanisław Staszic were alive today to witness this bustle of activity around science he would be proud of his idea and the work it took to create this place for the work of enlightenment. Because, as he used to say, only such work makes us useful citizens.

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