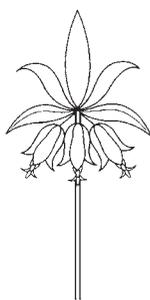


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Józef Rostafiński (1850–1928) — a pioneer of studies in the history of botany in Poland

Alicja Zemanek

Abstract

Józef Rostafiński (1850–1928), a professor of botany at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, was one of the first professional historians of botany in Poland. He published 38 publications in this field, devoted mostly to Mediaeval and Renaissance botany. The most valuable of them was *The Mediaeval Natural History* (1900, in Polish), based on manuscripts and early prints (12th century–ca.1530), which included over 500 plant taxa known in Central Europe in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. He was also an early student of ethnobotany; his *Wizard's Herbarium* (1895, in Polish), based on 16th–18th-century literature, contained information about superstitions and old rituals associated with herbs in Poland. The bibliography of Rostafiński's publications lists 553 items including, *inter alia*, botany (algae, slime moulds, vascular plants), history of botany and other natural sciences, history of cultivated plants, ethnobotany and plant nomenclature.

Józef Rostafiński (1850–1928) (Fig. 1) was one of the first professional historians of botany in Poland. As a young scientist working at German universities, he earned recognition for his research on lower plants and for authoring the first taxonomic monograph of the slime moulds (Myxomycetes). After being appointed professor of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow (Kraków), he became famous for his research on the border areas between the life sciences and humanities, for his pioneering studies in the history of botany, and for his work on the nomenclature of plants.

The J. Dyakowska Botanical Museum and History of Botany Research Unit (Botanic Garden, Institute of Botany, Jagiellonian University, Cracow), the archives of the Jagiellonian University and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cracow hold the manuscripts of Rostafiński. There are also materials in the archives of Jena, Halle and Strasbourg universities as well as Rostafiński's letters to William Farlow at Harvard University in Massachusetts.¹

The calendar of events in the life and activities of Józef Rostafiński

Childhood and early years (Warsaw 1850–1869)

1850 — On 14 August Józef Rostafiński was born in Warsaw as the only son of Wilhelmine née Wentzel and Michał Rostafiński, the director of Bank Polski in Warsaw. The family resided at an estate in Kłódno. Rostafiński had four sisters. In his childhood he developed an interest in plants under the influence of a friend of his parents, Father Józef Wszyński (1811–1874), a professor in natural sciences in the Ecclesiastical Academy in Warsaw. The botanist-to-be made his first herbarium when he was 11 (A. Zemanek 2000b).

1859–1863 — Rostafiński's parents moved to Warsaw, retaining Kłódno as a summer residence. In 1863 he graduated from the Karol Jurkiewicz's Upper Primary School for Boys.

1863–1866 — Rostafiński attended the Second Gymnasium (secondary school) in Warsaw,

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Figure 1. Józef Rostafiński (1850–1928).

where he further developed his interest in natural history under the supervision of the natural-history teacher, Ludwik Bogucki (1826–1906).

1866–1869 — Rostafiński studied in the Mathematics-Natural History Faculty of Warsaw University (Szkoła Główna), first in the Mathematics Section (1866/67), and later in the Natural History Section (1867/68–1868/69). He began floristic research under the guidance of Jerzy Alexandrowicz (1819–1894). He was also taught by Edward Strasburger (1844–1912), then a young associate professor (docent), later a professor at Jena and Bonn universities, and one of the fathers of cytology.

When the university underwent Russification in 1869, Rostafiński decided to continue his studies in Germany.

Studies and work in Germany (1869–1876)

Jena 1869–1870

1869 — On 17 November Rostafiński enrolled in the Philosophy Faculty of the University of Jena (Universität Jena), where Strasburger had been appointed professor. Apart from Strasburger’s lectures, Rostafiński also attended the lectures of the famous evolutionist, Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919).

Halle 1870–1872

1870 — On 16 November Rostafiński became a student of the University of Halle (Friedrichs-Universität Halle-Wittenberg), where Anton de Bary (1831–1888), one of the founders of mycology, was a professor of botany.

1871 — Rostafiński published his first scientific paper, on the reproduction of algae.

1872 — At the age of 22, he published in Vienna the monograph *Florae Polonicae Prodomus* (Rostafiński 1872) — a synthesis of the studies of the flora of vascular plants of the Kingdom of Poland (the northeastern regions of contemporary Poland) (B. Zemanek 2000).

Strasbourg 1872–1876

1872 — In the spring Rostafiński transferred to the University of Strasbourg (Universität Strassburg), where de Bary had been appointed rector and was organising a research school for studies of lower plants. In de Bary’s laboratory Rostafiński undertook research on slime moulds (Myxomycetes), then a little known group of organisms.

1873 — On 7 March Rostafiński obtained a doctoral degree at the University of Strasbourg on presentation of the thesis *Versuch eines Systems der Mycetozoen* (Rostafiński 1873), which contained the first taxonomic system for

the slime moulds. At the same time he started to work on a broad systematic monograph on the same topic.

1874 — On 1 January Rostafiński became an assistant to de Bary. At that time he was studying algae, in particular the marine brown algae of the Laminariaceae, by travelling to Cherbourg in Normandy and the marine research station Antibes on the French Riviera, where he worked (in March 1874) under the supervision of phycologist Gustav Adolph Thuret (1817–1875). This year Rostafiński published in Paris the first part of the monograph of slime moulds, *Śluzowce (Mycetozoa)* [Slime moulds] (Rostafiński 1874, 1875a, 1875b, supplement 1876), in Polish. This monograph, containing descriptions of 83 new taxa, became a classical reference and is still cited (Majewski 2000b).

1875 — On 16 December Rostafiński was appointed *Privätdozent* at the University of Strasbourg. In order to study herbarium materials of the Laminariaceae, Rostafiński travelled to Kew, near London.

1876 — In the summer semester of the 1875/76 academic year, he announced a lecture on freshwater algae. In 1876 the Royal Academy of Sciences, Literature and Fine Arts of Belgium (l'Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-arts de Belgique) announced a competition in the field of phycology. Only one entry was submitted, *Prodrome d'une Monographie des Laminariacées* (with 20 colour plates) by J. Rostafiński (Siemińska 2000).

In 1876/77 Rostafiński travelled to St. Petersburg, Stockholm, Uppsala, Copenhagen, Hamburg and Paris studying the Laminariaceae.

1877 — On 14 December his monograph of Laminariaceae (in manuscript) was awarded the gold medal, worth 600 francs, by the Royal Academy of Sciences, Literature and Fine Arts of Belgium. Unfortunately, its planned publication by the Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cracow never appeared, except



Figure 2. Józef Rostafiński in the gown of Dean of Philosophical Faculty of the Jagiellonian University (1884/85–1885/86).

for a preliminary outline published in Cracow (1877) and 14 lithographic plates (ca.1886) (Majewski 2000c, Siemińska 2000).

Professor and retired professor of the Jagiellonian University (Cracow 1878–1928)

1878 — On 25 October Rostafiński was appointed a professor of the Department of Botany and the director of the Botanic Garden of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow (Fig. 2). In the same year he was elected correspondent-member (in 1883 — full member) to the Academy of Arts and Sciences (later Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences). Over several years he restored the Botanic Garden (founded in 1783), commissioning a new palmhouse in



Figure 3. Józef Rostafiński with his children from his first marriage, Jan and Zofia, ca.1890.

1882 that continued in use until 1969. He laid the foundation for the further development of the Department of Botany, modernised its scientific laboratory, increased the museum collections and established a specialist library. Here Rostafiński organised his scientific school of botanical research (now called unofficially “Cracow Geobotanical School”) and introduced the study of algae and slime moulds into Polish science. He started pioneering work on algae of the Tatra Mountains (The Carpathians).

1881 — On 19 April in John the Baptist Cathedral in Warsaw, Rostafiński married Maria Ebert (1861–1890). They had two children, a son Jan (1882–1966), who was an animal scientist and professor of SGGW (Agricultural University in Warsaw), and a daughter Zofia (1884–1924),

who was a nun of the Nazareth order (Fig. 3).

July–September 1886, August 1888 —

Rostafiński stayed in Algiers with his wife, who was treated there for tuberculosis. During this stay in northern Africa, he travelled extensively, collecting material for a book on Algeria (Rostafiński 1888).

September 1888–April 1889 —

When his wife went on to Madeira for continued treatment, Rostafiński accompanied her for several months. During many excursions he collected material for articles in natural history. After Maria Rostafińska’s death (4 October 1890), Józef lived alone in Cracow while his children were raised in Kłodno by his mother and sisters.

In the late 1880s, Rostafiński’s interests became more interdisciplinary, and he carried out research on the border areas between botany, its history, linguistics and ethnobotany. The main directions of his studies became the history of cultivated plants, the history of botany and related sciences as well as the history of the Polish names for organisms, chiefly plants.

1895 — On 5 September Rostafiński married his second wife, Maria Tomaszewska (?–1943). They had two daughters: Halina Rostafińska–Choynowska (1897–1979), who wrote children’s books, and Justyna Służewska (1898–1928), who was a painter. In the late 1890s, the Rostafińskis bought a house in Zakopane, where they hosted both scientists and literary artists.

1900 — The Jagiellonian University (founded in 1364, and renewed in 1400)² celebrated the 500th anniversary of its refoundation. Upon this occasion Rostafiński published three books totalling over 1,900 pages. These were *Średniowieczna Historia Naturalna* [The Mediaeval natural history] (Rostafiński 1900c), *Słownik Polskich Imion Rodzajów* [Dictionary of Polish names of genera] (Rostafiński



Figure 4. The two-volume *opus magnum* by Rostafiński, *Średniowieczna Historia Naturalna* [The Mediaeval natural history] (1900) (980 pages long), and *Słownik Polskich Imion Rodzajów* [Dictionary of Polish names of genera] (1900) (about 800 pages).

1900b) (Fig. 4) and *Medycyna na Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim w XV Wieku* [Medicine at the Jagiellonian University in the 15th century] (Rostafiński 1900a) (Fig. 5).

1910 — On 30 September Rostafiński went into early retirement at the age of 60.

1911–1919 — He continued his intensive scientific work and devoted a great deal of time to organisational work at the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences. Rostafiński was one of the most active members in the history of the academy, taking part in the activities of three divisions: philological, historical/philosophical and mathematics/sciences, which he directed (1920–1923).

1919 — On 22 November Rostafiński was restored to active service at the Jagiellonian

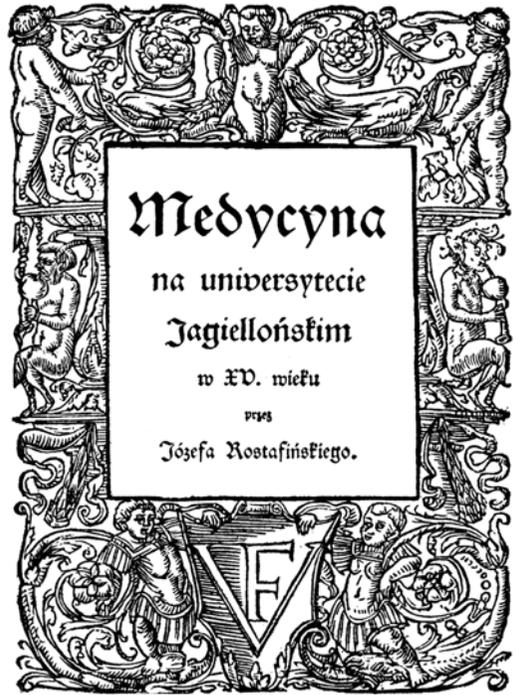


Figure 5. Cover of the book *Medycyna na Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim w XV Wieku* [Medicine at the Jagiellonian University in the 15th century] (Rostafiński 1900) containing abundant information on teaching medical botany at the University of Cracow in the 15th century.

University as professor of history of biology. In the 1921/22 academic year he stopped his lectures because of his worsening heart condition.

1921 — On 23 November he was awarded an honorary professorship of the Jagiellonian University.

1928 — On 5 May Józef Rostafiński died in Cracow. His funeral took place two days later at the Rakowicki Cemetery.

Rostafiński was a member of many scientific societies, both Polish and foreign, such as Zoologisch-Botanische Gesellschaft in Wien (1870), Botanischer Verein von Brandenburg (1871), Towarzystwo Nauk Ścisłych w Paryżu [Society of Exact Sciences in Paris — the Polish

society in Paris] (1873), and Société Nationale de Sciences Naturelles de Cherbourg (1874).

Twenty plant names commemorate Józef Rostafiński (two generic names and 18 specific epithets, including two specific epithets in fossils). Among the species, contemporary slime moulds (four, e.g., *Lachnobolus rostafińskii* Raciborski), algae (six, e.g., *Chamaesiphon rostafińskii* (Rost.) Hansgirg) and fungi (three, e.g., *Polyporus rostafińskii* Karsten) predominate (Mirek 2000).

Scientific activity of Józef Rostafiński at a glance

The bibliography of publications by Józef Rostafiński (Majewski 2000a) lists 553 items published during his life and 18 published after his death. More than two-thirds (374 publications, 68 %) are popular publications of various types. Scientific works include 179 items (32 %), with 97 (17 %) original papers.³

The multi-disciplinary activities of Józef Rostafiński earned him, whilst he was still alive, fame as a “Renaissance man.” Most of his scientific publications fell into seven domains, of which three — floristic studies of vascular plants and systematics of slime moulds and of algae — include the results of empirical studies. The remaining fields were more or less of an interdisciplinary nature: history of botany, history of cultivated plants, ethnobotany and the nomenclature of plants (Tab. 1). Rostafiński also published works on the history of zoology, pharmacy, medicine, agriculture and prehistory. In short communications and popular articles, he took positions on a much wider range of topics, including new and controversial problems in biology, such as the theory of evolution.

History of botany and other sciences

The earliest Polish publications on the history of botany date to the 18th century, but Rostafiński became the first professional historian of botany, a pioneer of this discipline as a separate branch of

Table 1. Number of Józef Rostafiński's publications in various fields of investigations.

Field of investigations	Number of publications
Botany (algae, slime moulds, vascular plants)	46
History of botany and other sciences	38
History of cultivated plants	29
Ethnobotany	8
Polish plant and animal names	18
Various	40
Popular	374
Total	553

research (A. Zemanek 2000a). He looked at the history of botany against the broad background of the history of culture and of the history of other branches of research, including medicine, zoology and agriculture. His record in the field of the history of science amounts to 38 publications.

Works on Mediaeval and Renaissance sources in natural history

In 1886 Rostafiński published an account of the oldest source of the flora of the Cracow area, a handwritten note on 59 species of plants written on 29 and 30 April 1490 by Jan Wels (ca.1430–1498), a physician and a professor of Cracow University. Rostafiński also discovered a manuscript, *Antibolomenum* (ca.1472), and identified its author, Jan Stanko (ca.1430–1493), a physician for the canon of the Cracow Chapter, and the most outstanding Polish botanist of the Middle Ages. The *Antibolomenum*, which is still kept in the Cracow Chapter Library at Wawel Castle, is a list of simple medicines based on plants, animals and minerals. The names are given in many languages including Arabic, Greek, Latin, German and Polish. The identification of plants and animals in *Antibolomenum* was remarkable. The manuscript referred to 523 species of plants, including 347 growing in Poland in the wild, and 219 species of animals, including 88 birds and 33

fishes, and was one of the most extensive of such lists in the world known from this period.

The two-volume *opus magnum* by Rostafiński, *Średniowieczna Historia Naturalna* [The Mediaeval natural history] (Rostafiński 1900c), is almost 980 pages long. The first part is a study of source materials (including the manuscript by Jan Stanko), while the second part presents reprints of them. The objective of the work was to compile (on the basis of written sources) a list of plant and animal species and of minerals known in the Polish lands between the 12th century and ca.1530, providing both their Polish and Latin names. The work includes the names of 508 plant taxa, 246 animal taxa, and 32 minerals. The total number of Polish names exceeded 4,000. This is the earliest work of its kind, that I have discovered during my research; however, since it was written in Polish, it has remained largely unknown.

The results of studies of the oldest 16th-century Polish printed herbals were included in two articles published in 1888, which contain many findings still relevant today.

The source publication of old Polish natural-history materials

Editorial work represented a major part of Rostafiński's efforts. He prepared 11 books in the natural sciences, medicine and agriculture published in Poland in the 16th–17th centuries. The most important among these was a more than 500-page book, *O Myśliwstwie, Koniach i Psach Łowczych Książek Pięcioro z Lat 1584–1690* [On hunting, horses and hunting dogs, in five books, published in the years 1584–1690] (Rostafiński 1914), which included, among other matters, a reprint of the earliest Polish ornithological work *Myślistwo Ptasze* [Bird hunting] (1584) by Mateusz Cyganski (descriptions of 136 bird species).

Wizard's Herbarium

As a result of circulating a questionnaire in 1883, Rostafiński collected abundant data on

vernacular names, uses, resources, customs and superstitions regarding plants. Unfortunately most of the material remained unpublished (Köhler 1993). Studying Polish Renaissance natural-history literature for many years resulted in a book, *Zielnik Czarodziejski to Jest Zbiór Przesądów o Roślinach* [Wizard's Herbarium or a collection of superstitions about plants] (1895). Using 14 works published in Poland during the period 1542–1778, the author compiled abundant information about superstitions and old rituals associated with herbs.

History of cultivated plants in Poland

Alphonse de Candolle (1806–1893), a member of the famous family of Swiss botanists, was a pioneer in the study of the history of cultivated plants. In 1883 he published his *Origine des Plantes Cultivées* (Candolle 1883), one of the first syntheses of this topic, which became a classic. Several months after the book appeared, Rostafiński published an extensive, 14-page long review in the Warsaw periodical *Ateneum* (Rostafiński 1883). The inspiring ideas of this work were perhaps the catalyst that caused Rostafiński to undertake his own studies on the history of cultivated plants in Poland (and in Central Europe).

Although Rostafiński apparently intended to write a major book on cultivated plants, this was never finished. Despite this, his contribution to the studies of the history of cultivated plants was considerable and covers 29 publications (nine original papers). Most were critical surveys of information about plants (and partly also on animals and minerals) included in the oldest manuscripts and printed books on natural history (12th–16th centuries). The value of Rostafiński's contribution is that he identified the pre-Linnaean names of species — a task which required enormous comparative studies. The work with interdisciplinary importance, *Średniowieczna Historia Naturalna* [The Mediaeval natural history] (Rostafiński 1900c), is not only a classical book

about the history of botany but also essential in studies of the history of cultivated plants. It contains identifications for about 110 species from various geographical areas known and often cultivated in Central Europe before ca.1530. Moreover, Rostafiński published articles devoted to several important sources, e.g., statutes by Charlemagne, in a version from the 11th century, which included the list of plants recommended for cultivation in the Frankish state (Rostafiński 1885), and on 17th-century catalogues of the royal botanic gardens in Warsaw (Rostafiński 1928). He also worked out the history of the use of several species, e.g., *Sium sisarum* L. (Umbelliferae) (Rostafiński 1884), a plant that originated from southeastern Europe and Asia and that was commonly cultivated throughout Europe before the year 1800 as a vegetable with sweet roots.

The scientific achievements of Rostafiński today

Rostafiński was one of the pioneers in the research of slime moulds and algae; some of his papers in the history of botany and ethnobotany were also precursors in their respective fields (the output in these two domains was not noted worldwide because his publications were in Polish). Table 2 lists his most important achievements. In the field of empirical botany, they include a flora of vascular plants of the Kingdom of Poland and the monograph of slime moulds.

As a historian of botany, Rostafiński earned national recognition in Poland. His studies of botany in Mediaeval and Renaissance times, as well as his critical editions of publications from the 16th and 17th centuries in the fields of medicine, agriculture and zoology are his most valuable works. The books on plant names have been deemed classics by botanists. But in the wider public perception in Poland, Rostafiński will always be remembered as a great populariser of botany and as an author of textbooks. His guide to the identification of plants (published in Polish

under various titles) has “survived” the author by more than half of a century (ed. 1, 1886; ed. 21, 1979).

Participation in the organisation of studies of the history of botany in Poland

Between 1910 and 1927 Rostafiński chaired the Commission on the History of Mathematics and Sciences in the Academy of Arts and Sciences (after 1918, Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences). In 1919, during the congress of Polish scientists, Rostafiński gave a lecture titled “The need for the history of botany in Poland,” which contained a program for research in the history of botany. In this program he suggested that lectures and seminars on the history of botany should start in Polish universities, that a journal specialising in the history of science should be established, and further editorial work should continue on the old Polish medical and agricultural sources. Near the end of his life, Rostafiński was teaching at the Jagiellonian University as the first lecturer in Poland on the history of biology (in the 1918/19–1921/22 academic years). He was a lone researcher in the field of the history of science, and he did not leave any students specialising in this area. However, scientists appointed in the Department of Botany of the Jagiellonian University, which he led for some time and which was later led by his student, Marian Raciborski (1863–1917), took up historical problems, although only on the fringes of other studies. The tradition of these studies continued for several generations. A student of Raciborski, Władysław Szafer (1886–1970), was a great expert and authority in the history of botany, writing more than a hundred publications in this field. Jadwiga Dyakowska (1905–1992), a student of Szafer, was committed to the studies of the history of science. Her name is commemorated in the name of the Botanical Museum and History of Botany Research Unit, the first of its kind in Poland, established in 1994 at the Botanic Garden

Table 2. The major scientific achievements of Józef Rostafiński

Field	The most important achievements	Year of publication
Botany		
Vascular plants	Published the flora of vascular plants in the Kingdom of Poland (central and northeastern Poland).	1872
Slime moulds	Created first taxonomic system. Wrote the first systematic monograph of the group, including the description of 15 new genera and 83 species.	1873 1874–1876
Algae	Studied reproduction in algae, <i>inter alia</i> , the epinival algae of the genus <i>Haematococcus</i> .	1875
	Wrote the first systematic monograph of marine brown algae of the Laminariaceae (manuscript lost), published outline of systematics.	1877
	Discovered merogony (a rare type of embryonic development) in <i>Fucus</i> .	1877
	Studied the algae of Poland in the Tatra Mountains. Wrote systematic monographs of the genera <i>Hydrurus</i> and <i>Sphaerogonium</i> (six new species).	1883
History of cultivated plants	Collected materials about the history of cultivated plants in Poland (from the 12th to 18th centuries).	1883–1900
Ethnobotany	Gathered information on plant-related magic and superstitions in Polish literature from the 16th to 18th centuries.	1895
Polish plant, animal and mineral names		
	Collected Polish names of plants (and, to a smaller extent, the names of animals and minerals) used between the 12th and 19th centuries.	1883–1900
	Prepared a dictionary of the Polish names of plant genera.	1900
History of science		
Botany, zoology, pharmacy	Studied the Polish Renaissance herbals.	1888
	Published the book devoted to natural-history knowledge in Mediaeval times.	1900
Medicine, zoology, agriculture	Published critical reeditions of Polish natural-history/botanical, agricultural and medical works in the 16th and 17th centuries (11 publications), including an ornithological study <i>Myslistwo Ptasze</i> [Bird hunting] by M. Cygański (1584).	1891–1914
	Wrote a book on the history of medicine at the University of Cracow (15th century).	1900
Prehistory		
	Proposed the Dnieper hypothesis about the origin of Slavs based, <i>inter alia</i> , on the analysis of plant and animal names.	1908

of the Institute of Botany at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow.

Acknowledgments

For his comprehensive assistance in writing the text and access to his collection of family memorabilia, I would like to thank Dr. Wojciech Rostafiński, Józef Rostafiński's grandson. I owe also sincere thanks to Professor Brigitte Hoppe (Institut für Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften, Ludwig Maximilians Universität, in Munich) for her help in researching the activities of Rostafiński in Halle and Jena. Figures copyright by the J. Dyakowska Botanical Museum and History of Botany Research Unit, Botanic Garden, Institute of Botany, Jagiellonian University.

Notes

1. The preparation of this paper was made possible due to the financial support provided by the Committee for Scientific Research in Poland (research project No. 6-P04G-023-15).
2. University of Cracow was founded in 1364 by King Casimir the Great. After his death in 1370 the university collapsed. In 1400 King Władysław Jagiełło renewed the university, which was later called Jagiellonian University to commemorate the Jagiełło dynasty.
3. Many scientific works were published in various versions (e.g., in Polish, in German, as summaries, etc.) since "scientific papers" and "original scientific papers" were distinguished.

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