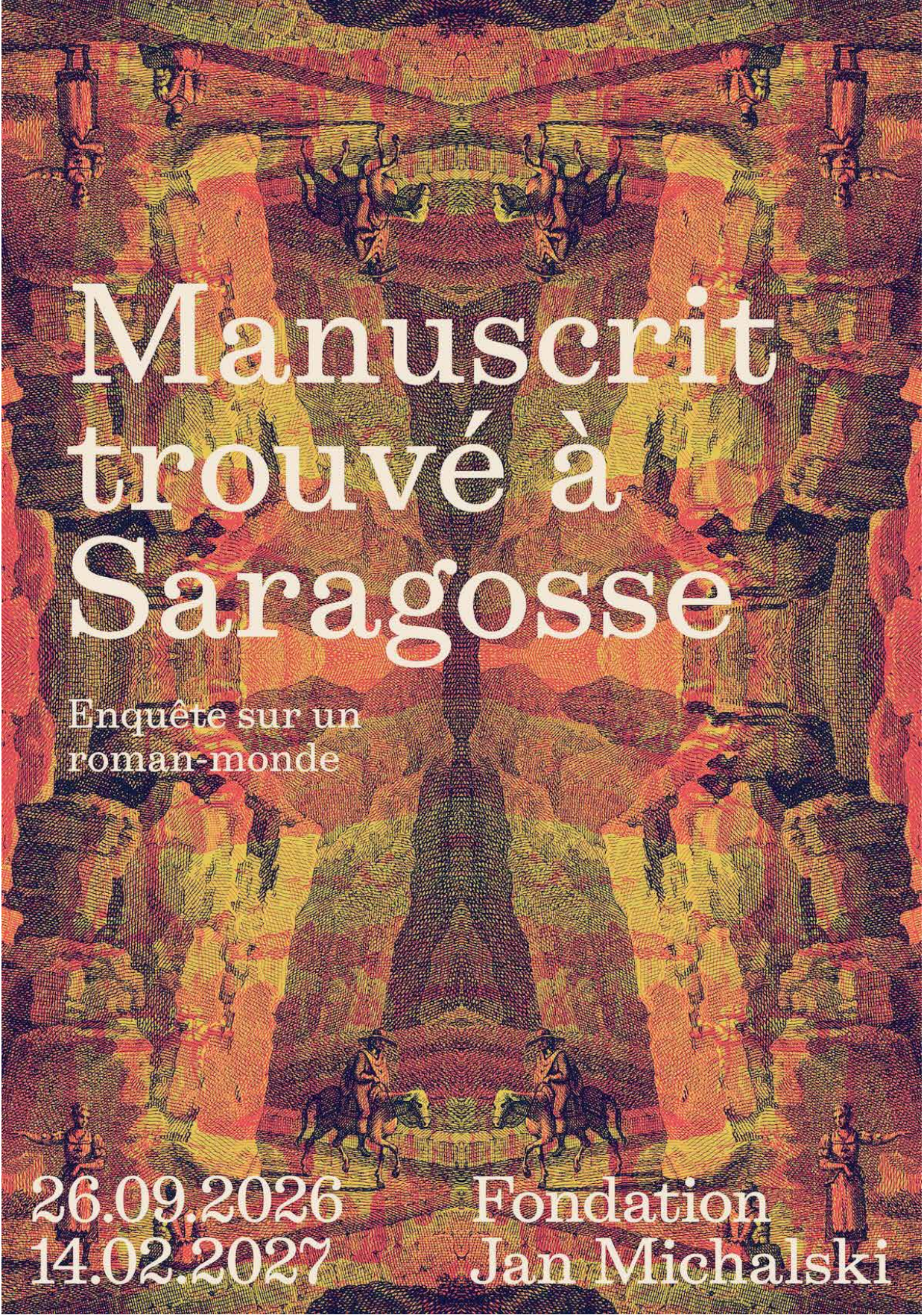


Press Release
Exhibition



Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse

Enquête sur un
roman-monde

26.09.2026
14.02.2027

Fondation
Jan Michalski

In the waning years of the Enlightenment, somewhere between the Ukrainian plains of Podolia and the byways of Spain a novel with the enigmatic title of *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* gradually took shape. The book itself and the story of how it came to be would prove both turbulent and legendary. Written in French between 1794 and 1815, this monumental work of fiction sprang from the imagination of the singular Polish count Jan Potocki (1761-1815), a scholarly traveler, historian, and scientist. *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* was penned incrementally and underwent countless revisions while a series of publishers gathered the leaves of Potocki's manuscript and brought out editions that were partial, abridged, or unfaithful to the original. It was only two centuries later that painstaking research established the existence of two authentic versions, dating from 1804 and 1810, which were finally published by Peeters in 2006 and Garnier-Flammarion two years after that. The first complete English translation, by Ian MacLean from the unabridged 20th-century French edition, was published by Viking in 1995.

Cut up into days and organized into "decamerons" (ten-day segments), the adventures of the young Alphonse van Worden in the Sierra Morena plunge us into the heart of a dizzying narrative construction. In a tumbling jumble of nested stories a number of traditions are tapped into, ranging from demonology, fantasy, the Bible and esoteric sources, to encyclopedias, doctrines, treatises, and yarns worthy of earlier libertine writers. As the hero gains insight into himself and the world, this kaleidoscope of tales speaks to us of both the ambition to encompass all knowledge and the fragility of certainties when confronted with the experience of multiplicity and otherness.

Bringing together a unique collection of archival documents and artworks and rare editions, the show highlights the meandering story of *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*, which has joined the masterpieces of world literature. At the point where *The Thousand and One Nights*, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, and M.G. Lewis's *The Monk* come together, this novel world, this teeming all-embracing book calls to us with surprising relevance today. In the face of proliferating narratives, before the many systems and doctrines of our world, how do we become subjects who are free to understand and choose?

Exhibition

from 26 September 2026 to 14 February 2027

Hours

Tuesday – Friday: 2 pm – 6 pm

Saturday – Sunday: 11 am – 6 pm

Admission

CHF 8.-: general admission

CHF 5.-: retirees, unemployed, disabled persons, groups (a minimum of 10 persons over 25 years old)

Free admission: under 25 years old, residents of Montricher, members of the library, Swiss Museum Pass, and the first Sunday of each month

La Canopée bookstore café

The Jan Michalski Foundation's bookstore café invites you to come in and read, daydream, chat, meet other readers and friends of the written word over a drink and a snack or light meal. Choose from our menu of seasonal homemade offerings. The bookstore always features a selection of titles related to the current exhibition.

Curators

François Rosset, Honorary Professor at the Faculty of Arts, University of Lausanne;
and Dominique Triaire, Professor Emeritus of French Literature, Paul Valéry
University Montpellier

The following have contributed materials from their collections

Bibliothèque cantonale jurassienne, Porrentruy
Bibliothèque de Genève
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
Bibliothèque polonaise de Paris
Médiathèque Émile Zola, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole
Médiathèque de Pontarlier
Nautilus Gallery, Krakow
National Archives, Poznań
National Library of Poland, Warsaw
Raczyński Library, Poznań
University of Warsaw Library
Jean Bonna Collection, Geneva
Marek and Charlotte Potocki Collection
Private Collection

Iconographic Excerpts

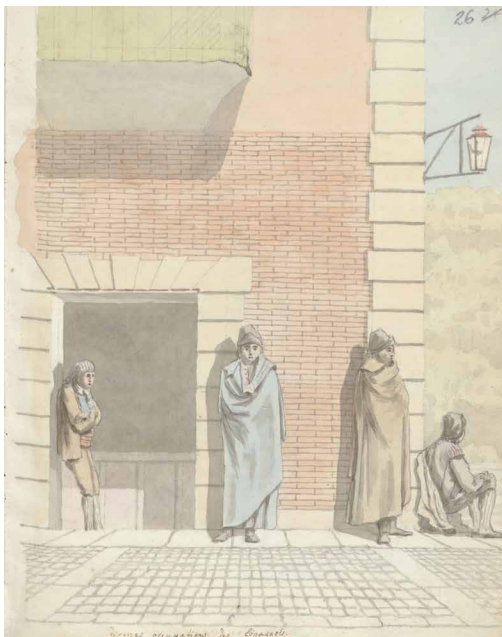
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aurelie.baudrier@fondation-janmichalski.ch



Jean Potocki
Caravane perse
[1791]

Graphite, ink and brown wash
on paper

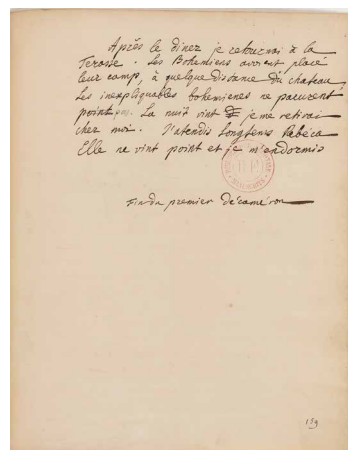
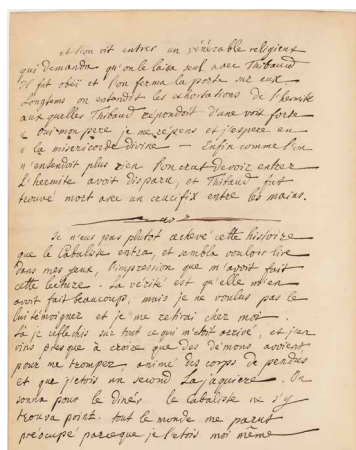
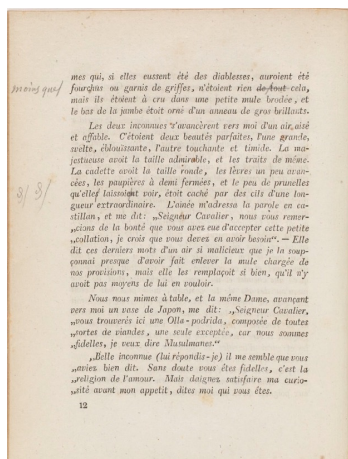
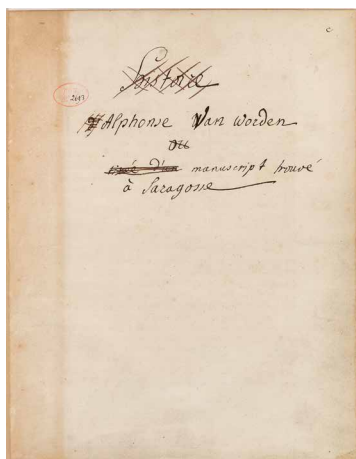
University of Warsaw Library



Jean Potocki
Dessins et notes du voyage en Espagne

[Between 1791 and 1794]
Graphite pencil and watercolor |
autograph notebook

National Archives, Poznań, Jarocin –
Radolińscy Collection



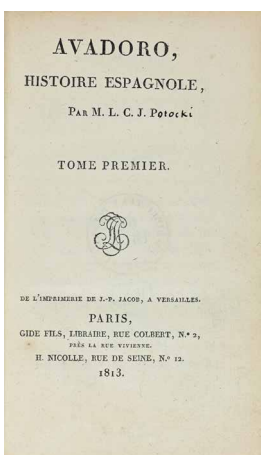
Jean Potocki
Alphonse Van Worden ou
Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse
 Saint Petersburg, 1804-1805 |
 Printer's proofs of the first ten
 days (first decameron) with
 autograph corrections and
 additions

Bibliothèque nationale de France,
 Rare Books Department



Liger (drawing) and Piriger
 (etching)
Vue du passage de la Sierra
Morena nommé Despeñaperros
 Etching and engraving | page
 from the Voyage pittoresque et
 historique de l'Espagne
 from Alexandre de Laborde,
 Pierre Didot, Paris, 1806

Private Collection



M.L.C.J.P. [Monsieur le Comte
 Jean Potocki]
Avadoro, histoire espagnole
 Gide fils, Paris, 1814

Institut Bibliothèque polonaise, Paris

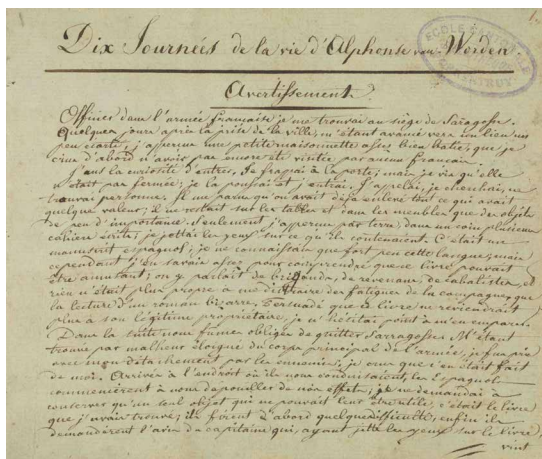


La Venta Quemada

[After 1814]

Watercolor on paper for the
[Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse]
| Non-autograph manuscript
notebook titled *The Ten Days of
the Life of Alphonse Van Worden*
| containing the foreword and the
first ten days

Bibliothèque cantonale jurassienne,
Porrentruy



Jean Potocki

[Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse]

[After 1814]

Non-autograph manuscript
notebook titled *The Ten Days of
the Life of Alphonse Van Worden*
| containing the foreword and the
first ten days

Bibliothèque cantonale jurassienne,
Porrentruy

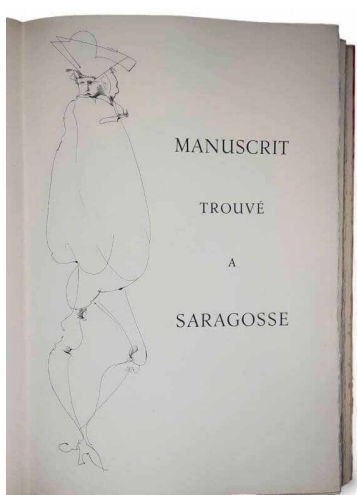


Jean Potocki

Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse

First edition | Gallimard, Paris, 1958

Institut Bibliothèque polonaise, Paris



Jean Potocki

Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse

illustrated by Leonor Fini

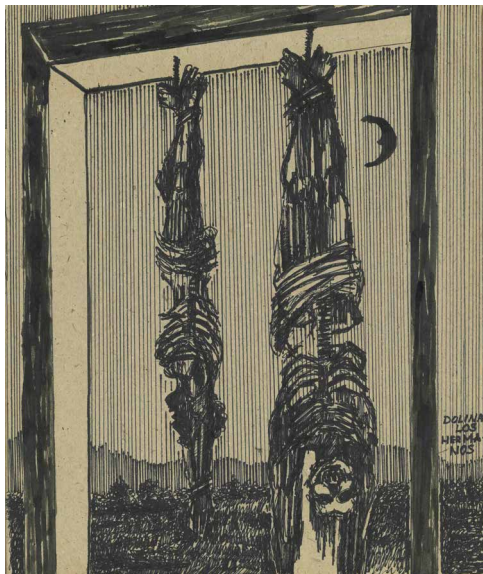
Compagnie des Bibliophiles du livre
d'art et de l'Amérique latine, Paris,
1961 | with twenty-one etchings |
Copy III/XXX on Arches wove paper

Marek and Charlotte Potocki Collection



Wojciech Has
Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie
 1965
 Black-and-white film | 182 min |
 Screenplay by Tadeusz Kwiatkowski,
 based on Jean Potocki

© Wojciech Has | Kamera Film Unit



Jerzy Kowal
Dolina Los Hermanos, illustration
 for *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*
 2005

Ink and black felt-tip pen |
 Sketchbook with sixteen drawings

Nautilus Gallery, Krakow
 © Jerzy Kowal

Biographical highlights

1761

Jean Potocki was born in Polish Ukraine into an aristocratic family, one of the most powerful and oldest of Poland's nobility.

1774-1778

Living in Switzerland with his brother Séverin and their tutor, the Vaudois pastor Louis Constançon. Little is known regarding his education.

1778-1780

Completed his studies in Vienna (present-day Austria). Served as an engineering officer in the Austrian army before and during the War of the Bavarian Succession. He then traveled to Malta where he was admitted as a knight of the Order of Malta in 1782. As part of his novitiate, he sailed the Mediterranean extensively on ships flying the Order's flag, calling at El Djem and the Island of Djerba (Tunisia), Sicily (present-day Italy), and Cádiz and Valencia (Spain).

1783

Researching the history of the Slavs in Hungary and Serbia; what he learned was to become fodder for his published writing starting in 1789.

1784

Long visits in Constantinople (present-day Turkey) and Egypt, which he would write up several years later in his *Voyage en Turquie et en Égypte* (Paris, 1788).

1785

Wed Julie Lubomirska (1767-1794). The young couple settled in Paris (France), where Julie would give birth to Alfred (1786) and Arthur (1787). Met Goethe and Johann Gottfried von Herder in Karlsbad (present-day Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic).

1786

In Paris he regularly called on the French woman of letters Germaine de Staël. Traveled for pleasure and scholarly research to Milan, Turin, the islands of Elba and Capraia (present-day Italy), Geneva (Switzerland), and Corsica (France).

1787

Taking on the role of observer, he visited a revolutionary Holland, which he was to describe later in *Voyage en Hollande* (Warsaw, 1789).

1788

Learned in Vienna that Prussia, which had participated in the first partition of Poland, was readying a new invasion of the country. He immediately returned to Warsaw (Poland) and played an active part as both a deputy and journalist in the Great Sejm (or Sejm Wielki, the "great parliament") that was to provide the country with a constitution in 1791, Europe's first.

1790

Caused a sensation by accompanying the French aeronaut Jean-Pierre Blanchard in a hot-air balloon ascent over Warsaw. With the help of his many contacts, he met the French revolutionary Mirabeau, who paved his way to following the debates as an observer inside the French National Assembly, dined with Lafayette, and kept company with the Jacobins.

1791

Seville, Málaga. Traveled to Morocco and after another stay lasting two months, returned to Cádiz and from there continued on to Lisbon (Portugal) and England.

1792

As an officer in the engineering corps of the Kingdom of Poland's Crown Army, he took part in combat against the Russians in Lithuania. Publication of *Voyage dans l'Empire de Maroc* (Warsaw, 1792).

1793

The Second Partition of Poland. Writing for the theater at Łańcut (present-day Poland), the château that belonged to his mother-in-law. He produced texts known as Parades, short lighthearted plays tricked out in the style of popular entertainments and inspired by the performances of traveling troupes on fairgrounds throughout Europe.

1794

Published *Les Bohémiens d'Andalousie* (Rheinsberg), a "comedy mixed with short arias, in two acts and in verse." Began writing the novel that he would eventually call *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* when it was published in 1805; several pages of this early draft, organized into "days," have come down to us. Death of Julie Potocka in Kraków (Poland).

1795

In contact with Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock and like the German poet, was quite disillusioned with the turn taken by the French Revolution, which had been enthusiastically welcomed at first. Third Partition of Poland.

1797

Following the dismemberment of Poland, began to make his peace with the Russian court and attended the coronation of Paul I. Obtained from Russian authorities a military escort to accompany him in a journey to the Caucasus that had colonialist motives while he was to pursue his ethnographic studies.

1799

Wed Constance Potocka (1781-1852). Their union would produce three children, André Bernard (in 1800), Irène (in 1803), and Thérèse (in 1805).

1800

Continuing his ethnographic studies of Slavic peoples, in this instance at the mouth of the Dniester, in Crimea and along the banks of the Southern Bug River. This research was to figure in his *Histoire primitive des peuples de la Russie* (Saint Petersburg, 1802).

1802

Shifting the focus of his research to a chronology of early antiquity. Alexander I of Russia appointed him privy councilor in the Asiatic Department.

1803

Traveled with his family to Florence and Venice (present-day Italy).

1804

Having always shown little interest in managing his estate and now facing financial difficulties, Potocki was forced to leave his family behind and return to Saint Petersburg (Russia) alone.

23 December: the Saint Petersburg Censorship Committee granted the author permission to publish the “Days” making up the first “Decameron” of the *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*. In all likelihood he had one hundred copies printed in early 1805.

1805

20 January: the Censorship Committee authorized the publication of Days 11 to 13; this series was printed the same year. As the director of the scientific corps of a diplomatic mission sent by Russia to China, he across Siberia (Russia), passing through Tomsk, Irkutsk, and Kyakhta.

1806

Following a dispute concerning protocol between the Russian ambassador and the Chinese authorities, the expedition turned back at Urga (present-day Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia), leaving Potocki furious (he would go on to write a bitter account of the journey). Still adding to *Manuscrit*.

1807

Working as the editor-in-chief of the *Journal du Nord*, a French-language periodical and organ for Russian propaganda. Also associating with the counter-revolutionary writer Joseph de Maistre, who was highly critical of the Polish writer’s “irreligion.” Began the fifth Decameron of *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* and decided to completely revise the novel.

1808

Left Saint Petersburg and returned to his Ukrainian estate, Uładówka, which was to be his main residence until his death.

1809

Divorced Constance Potocka. Made plans to leave to each of his five children a copy of his novel; only part of this bequest has come down to us. The historian and linguist Friedrich Adelung published a German translation of the first Decameron of *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* (the 1804 version) under the title *Abentheuer in der Sierra Morena. Aus den Papieren des Grafen von **** (Leipzig, 1810).

1810

Began a new version of *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*.

1813

Having arrived at Day 48, he sent the manuscripts of the first four Decamerons of *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* (the 1810 version) to the French bookseller Gide, who published, anonymously and most probably without the author’s knowledge, *Avadoro, histoire espagnole* (Paris). One year later Gide would publish, again anonymously, *Dix journées de la vie d’Alphonse Van Worden*.

1815

Finished his new version of the *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*, with the addition of Days 49 to 69.

23 December: at his Uładówka estate Potocki took his own life with a gunshot.

1829

The orientalist Julius von Klaproth, a disciple of Potocki, published posthumously *Voyage dans les steps d’Astrakhan et du Caucase* (Paris).

1834

The French man of letters Cousen de Courchamps wrongly slipped into his *Souvenirs de la marquise de Créquy* (Paris) excerpts from *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*, and would later publish (in 1841) the first pages of *Manuscrit* under his own name in the national press. Courchamps was convicted of plagiarism following a sensational trial.

1847

Working from several disorganized manuscripts that one of the author's heirs entrusted to him, Edmund Chojecki wrote a Polish translation of *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* titled *Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie*.

1958

The first faithful, if partial, edition of *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* published by Roger Caillois (Gallimard, Paris). This version is based on the 1805 edition as well as *Avadoro, histoire espagnole* (Gide, Paris, 1813).

1989

René Radrizzani brought out a new edition of *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* (José Corti, Paris), although based on Chojecki's Polish translation and manuscripts of the novel conserved in a private collection.

2006-2010

François Rosset and Dominique Triaire discovered several handwritten notebooks in the State Archives of Poznań (Poland) and the National Library of Spain (Madrid). Working from the twenty-two manuscript and published sources that are currently known and conserved, they reconstructed the two versions of the novel left by the author and published them with Peeters (Louvain 2006) and Garnier Flammarion (Paris, 2008). In 2010 they published the 1794 proto-version of the novel with Rodopi under the title "La première version du *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*," in *Jean Potocki à nouveau* (Amsterdam, pp. 323-431).

Nota Bene

For ease of reading, the geographic references have been updated.

Fondation Jan Michalski

Founded in 2004 by Vera Michalski-Hoffmann in memory of her husband as a way of continuing their shared commitment to writers and literary professionals, the Jan Michalski Foundation is dedicated to fostering creative writing and encouraging reading.

Designed as a small community in the heart of a natural setting, the foundation develops a range of diverse activities, around writing and literature. The library—multicultural, multilingual, and open to all—has nearly 80,000 works of modern and contemporary world literature. The foundation also hosts diverse cultural events: literary discussions, readings, projections, plays, concerts and performances. In addition, temporary exhibitions are mounted each year to show writing, literature, and books from different perspectives: the world of writers, the history of movements and genres, and the works of artists that bring together image and word are made available.

The writers-in-residence program, conceived to offer a conducive environment for creativity, has welcomed novice and established writers of all backgrounds who are beginning, continuing, or completing a project. Furthermore, the Jan Michalski Prize for Literature, awarded annually, honors an outstanding work of world literature, fiction or nonfiction. The foundation also provides grants for numerous literaturere-related projects beyond its walls.

The Jan Michalski Foundation offers a unique cultural space, open to the world, where writers, artists, and members of the public can mingle.

Press & Communication Contact

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