

ANNA SYLWIA CZYŻ

JOHN III SOBIESKI IN THE ART AND WRITINGS  
OF POLISH AMERICANS\*

The first wave of Polish emigration to North America – apart from the craftsmen who crossed the ocean with the English in 1608 specializing in the production of glass, tar, pitch, and soap – is associated with the first partition of Poland and the first unsuccessful national uprising. It was during this time that participants like Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746-1817) and Kazimierz Pulaski (1745-1779) became heroic figures in the American War of Independence (1775-1783)<sup>1</sup>. The next wave was linked to the failure of the November Uprising, followed by another after the fall of the January Uprising. As before, it was primarily members of the nobility who emigrated to the USA at that time. Of the regular Polish waves of emigration to North America, the largest wave did not take place until the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where the

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Prof. ANNA SYLWIA CZYŻ – Vytautas Magnus University V. Kavolis Transdisciplinary Research Institute; e-mail: anna.sylwia.czysz@vdu.lt; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7923-1204>.

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<sup>1</sup> A. BROZEK, *Polonia amerykańska*, Warszawa: Interpress 1977, pp. 9-15. The introduction to the article consists of rephrased opening excerpts from the following texts: *Motywy niepodległościowe w dekoracji najstarszych tzw. Polish Cathedrals*, [in:] *Niepodległość i nowoczesność: Studia z historii sztuki*, eds. L. Karwowski, D. Kacprzak, S.P. Kubiak, Szczecin–Warszawa: Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki 2019, pp. 43-62 and *Wątki niepodległościowe w dekoracji tzw. Polish Cathedrals – na marginesie badań dokumentacyjnych polskich parafii w USA*, [in:] *Stan badań nad wielokulturowym dziedzictwem dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, eds. W. Walczak, K. Łopatecki, vol. 11, Białystok: Instytut Badań nad Dziedzictwem Kulturowym Europy 2020, pp. 435-454. Due to a lack of familiarity with the history of early immigration to the USA, as well as the different context and target audience of this publication, the decision was made to include these repetitions, which serve as the foundation for the main deliberations. I would like to thank Dr. Paweł Sieradzki from the Research Centre on the Polish Diaspora and Polish Ministry at the Catholic University of Lublin for his initial consultation on the topic.

rapid industrial development of the USA created a demand for a large and inexpensive labor force. Fleeing poverty in their divided country, Poles, along with other nations of Central and Eastern Europe, became the ‘fuel’ for the dynamically growing cities in the region then proudly called the Steel Belt (today’s Rust Belt)<sup>2</sup>.

Immigrants, seeking the chance for a new and better life, wanted to live within their own communities – that is among people similar to themselves who could support one another in a variety of ways. The first organization, the Polish committee, was established as early as 1834 by the exiles of the November Uprising. Marcin Rosienkiewicz (1792-1859), an immigrant from this wave of immigration and a former teacher from Kremenets (now Ukraine), established the first Polish library in Philadelphia. He was also responsible for founding the first Polish school. The first permanent Polish theater opened in Chicago in 1873.

However, with the onset of mass economic migration, the greatest effort was dedicated to the founding of churches that were built through the initiative

<sup>2</sup> In the cities, the Poles formed neighborhoods (e.g., in Chicago: Stanisławowo, Jackowo, Trójcowo, and Młodziankowo – names derived from the patron saints of the churches), while in rural areas, they established settlements. The émigrés from 1831 tried to establish New Poland (Nowa Polska, IL). However, the first permanent settlement was Panna Maria, TX, established in 1854 by Franciscan Leopold (Bonawentura Maria) Moczygęba (1824-1891), along with emigrants primarily from his family village of Płużnica Wielka (near Strzelce Opolskie). The number of immigrants varied from about 150 to 800 people. Two years later, in this village the first Polish church in the USA was erected together with the parochial school of St. Joseph. The priest continued his mission in the Northern States where, from 1857, he established Polish parishes and schools. Together with Rev. Wincenty Barzyński (1838-1899) he set up the Polish Roman Catholic Union in America, and with Rev. Józef Dąbrowski (1842-1903), he established the Polish SS. Cyril and Methodius Seminary in Detroit in 1885 (from 1909 in Orchard Lake, MI). *Pamiątka srebrnego jubileuszu parafii św. Stanisława Kostki w Pittsburghu, PA. Kalendarz na rok pański 1901. Historya wszystkich polskich rzymskokatolickich parafii w diecezji Pittsburgskiej*, Pittsburgh [1900], pp. 90-91; 1867-1917. *Złoty jubileusz najstarszej polskiej parafii świętego Stanisława Kostki w Chicago, Illinois*, [Chicago 1917], pp. 16, 23, 35; T. LINDSAY BAKER, *The Reverend Leopold Moczygemb, Patriarch of Polonia*, “Polish American Studies” 41(1984), no. 1 (Spring), pp. 66-109; W. MLECKO, *Parafia jako przestrzeń zmartwychwstania społeczeństwa (szkic o działalności ks. Wincentego Barzyńskiego w Chicago)*, [in:] *Zmartwychwstańcy: ku duchowemu odrodzeniu społeczeństwa*, ed. W. Mleczko, Kraków: Wydawnictwo św. Jana Pawła II 2015, p. 149. See also S. BARSZCZEWSKI, *Polacy w Ameryce. Zarys obecnego stanu wychodźstwa polskiego w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki Północnej*, Warszawa: Nakładem i Drukiem M. Arcta 1902, pp. 5-11, 37; E. MODZELEWSKA-OPARA, *Dorobek pisarski i misja kulturalna polskich emigrantów w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki w latach 1831-1842*, Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka Publishing 2022, pp. 63-65, 70-72, 79, 85-86; *Polish Cathedrals. Polskie dziedzictwo religijne, kulturowe, społeczne i materialne w Stanach Zjednoczonych*. Leksykon, eds. J. Gołębowski, M.A. Furtak, vol. 1, Lublin: TN KUL 2023, pp. 6-7.

of the Poles themselves. The role of priest evolved to be more than that of priests from the ‘old country’. Churches became centers for social activity, in addition to the usual focal point for religious life. Therefore, schools were built alongside them, self-help and social organizations were established there, and parishes were seen as official spaces for public life – political and cultural – especially in the context of the sense of loss of national sovereignty for these communities. To this end, churches often included auditoriums that served as venues for meetings and events, school plays, amateur theater performances, and concerts<sup>3</sup>.

The organization of emigrant life was significantly influenced by the cultural model brought by them from the homeland. Due to the partitions, the Church, alongside the emerging class of intelligentsia, took on the responsibility of preserving the ‘national essence’. Equally important was the fact that Polish emigration to the USA from the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was predominantly made up of peasants and laborers. These were, by their nature, uninterested in the ‘Other’, often viewing it with a mix of fear and a distinct sense of superiority and uniqueness for their own customs and religion. A certain type of megalomania developed around the idea of nationality, demonstrated by the clear increase in identity awareness among the lowest social classes, in confrontation to the hardships of life in the USA. These processes overlapped with nostalgia and the idealization of the abandoned homeland, fostering a cult for familiar customs and traditions<sup>4</sup>. The desire to preserve faith and tradition, combined with greater financial means and, above all, the social and religious freedom – that would have been unavailable to them in Poland – resulted in the multidimensional functioning of Polish communities.

<sup>3</sup> S. BARSZCZEWSKI, *Polacy w Ameryce. Zarys*, pp. 11-12; W.I. THOMAS, F. ZNANIECKI, *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce*, vol. 5: *Organizacja i dezorganizacja*, transl. A. Bartkiewicz, introd. J. Szczepański, comm. J. Chałasiński, Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza 1976, pp. 32, 34-39, 50-52; W. MLECZKO, *Parafia jako przestrzeń zmartwychwstania*, pp. 127-128, 132, 134-135, 143, 146; P. SIERADZKI, *Polacy – katolicyzm – Ameryka*, [in:] A.S. Czyż, B. GUTOWSKI, P. SIERADZKI, *Parafie i kościoły polskie w Michigan, Massachusetts i Minnesocie*, Warszawa: Polonika 2021, pp. 18-20, 23; E. MODZELEWSKA-OPARA, *Dorobek pisarski*, pp. 82-83, 89-93, 95, 155; *Polish Cathedrals*, vol. 1, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> For contemporary commentators on emigrant life, preserving Polishness was of key importance. It was also the attitude of the émigrés of 1831. See for example: S. BARSZCZEWSKI, *Polacy w Ameryce. Zarys*, pp. 16-24, 30-31, 73-74 (here is also an honest account of the education levels of the Poles, their limited involvement in social life in the US, and how this affected decision-making processes at local and state levels); W.I. THOMAS, F. ZNANIECKI, *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce*, pp. 16-18, 27; E. MODZELEWSKA-OPARA, *Dorobek pisarski*, pp. 84-88.

These communities, often characterized by ethnic insularity<sup>5</sup>, were guided by the call: ‘If we wish to remain Poles here in exile, we must unite in Catholic circles, in Polish parishes’<sup>6</sup>.

Given the mass emigration to the USA and its complex self-organization, the Polish diaspora was referred to as the ‘Fourth Partition’<sup>7</sup> in social writings at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. A key role in its self-definition was played by various themes interpreted through the lens of identity and independence<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, historical and religious heroes were sought who, on the one hand, could highlight the distant and glorious past of the Polish state and, on the other – aligned with the spirit of the times – could be portrayed as willing martyrs for the endangered homeland in need<sup>9</sup>. This included such figures as St. Jozafat Kuncewicz, St. Casimir, St. Stanislaus Kostka, St. Adalbert of Prague and St. Stanislaus. Also, St. Hedwig of Silesia and her son Henry II the Pious, and Jadwiga of Poland (beatified in 1979, canonized in 1997) were accentuated.

The glorious lives of the aforementioned queens were particularly significant, becoming a kind of compensating factor for the failures of a nation without a state. In Polish churches, they were depicted alone or accompanied by other saints, as well as in scenes related to the Battle of Legnica<sup>10</sup> and the

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<sup>5</sup> For the record, it should be noted that such ethnic enclaves were created by all nations emigrating to the USA, especially in first and second generations. A. BROŻEK, *Polonia amerykańska*, p. 27, 43; E. MODZELEWSKA-OPARA, *Dorobek pisarski*, pp. 102-103; *Polish Cathedrals*, vol. 1, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Pamiątka srebrnego jubileuszu*, p. 63. This publication also featured an article titled *Obowiązki Polaków na obczyźnie* (*Duties of Poles abroad*, pp. 152-155), which emphasized that each Pole ‘should remember God and preserve the faith of their ancestors, as it forms the foundation and basis for happiness [...]. A religious person [...] will be a good Pole and good [American] citizen’ (“ma pamiętać o Bogu, wiarę ojców swoich zachować, bo to najpierwszy fundament i podwalina szczęścia [...]. Człowiek religijny [...] będzie dobrym polakiem i obywatelem”). The youth were encouraged to pursue education and strive for social advancement, while being cautioned against marrying individuals from other nationalities. See also 1867-1917, pp. 33, 37-38, 48; P. SIERADZKI, *Polacy – katolicyzm – Ameryka*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>7</sup> Polish parishes in the USA were entered into the *Register of Roman-Catholic Church in the Republic of Poland (Schematyzm Kościoła Rzymsko-Katolickiego w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej)* in 1925. In the years 1870-1930 there were about 800 Polish parishes established in the USA. P. SIERADZKI, *Polacy – katolicyzm – Ameryka*, pp. 11-12, 15.

<sup>8</sup> More on this topic: A.S. Czyż, *Motywy niepodległościowe*, pp. 43-62.

<sup>9</sup> R. PRZYBYLSKI, *Klasyczny, czyli prawdziwy koniec Królestwa Polskiego*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1983, pp. 202-203, 205-207, 274-275.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. the stained-glass window in St. Hedwig’s Church in Chicago (1915) executed in the workshop of Franz Xaver Zettler (1841-1916) in Munich; the stained-glass window in the Holy

Christianization of Lithuania<sup>11</sup>, emphasizing the importance of these events not only for Poland but also for the history of Europe<sup>12</sup>.

Behind the representation of historical events, with a clear emphasis on their historical and religious mission, was a coherent narrative portraying Poland as the *Antemurale Christianitatis* (Bulwark of Christendom), which referred to the old theme of a Catholic Poland and a Catholic Pole,

who shaped his entire history  
Into a single crusade endeavor  
To protect not Christ's tomb, but his faith  
from the Turks and Tatars' assault:  
[who was] Europe's shield and support,  
Who died in the Battles of Legnica, Sokal and Cecora,  
Khotyn and Vienna

(który całą swą powieść dziejową  
Ułożył w jedną tylko wyprawę krzyżową,  
Co nie grobu Chrystusa, lecz Chrystusa wiary  
Strzegł pilnie przed dzikimi Turki i Tatary:  
[...] Europy tarczą i podporą  
Co ginął pod Legnicą, Sokalem, Cecorą,  
Pod Chocimiem i Wiedniem)<sup>13</sup>.

In this context, John III Sobieski and his victorious Battle of Vienna were also brought to mind. The confrontation was depicted on the ceiling of St. Stanislaus Kostka Church in Pittsburgh, with an addition of the church's patron saint – a young Jesuit who was supporting the Polish army. Above it was a depiction of the holy patrons of the homeland before Mary, the Queen of Poland. In the description of the church dating from 1900, it was emphasized

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Innocents Church in Chicago (1922); the stained-glass window in the Holy Rosary Church in Baltimore (ca. 1927); paintings in the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Pittsburgh (ca. 1905). *Polish Cathedrals*, vol. 1, pp. 215, 323; vol. 2, pp. 353, 415.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. the stained-glass window in St. Hedwig's Church in Chicago (1915); paintings in St. Laurence Church in Philadelphia (1912) and in St. Casimir Church in Baltimore (ca. 1950). *Polish Cathedrals*, vol. 1, p. 215; vol. 2, pp. 366, 429.

<sup>12</sup> See poem *Psalm do wszystkich świętych patronów Polskich* (*Psalm to all Polish patron saints*), [in:] *Pamiątka srebrnego jubileuszu*, p. 21. See also MODZELEWSKA-OPARA, *Dorobek pisarski*, pp. 289-290.

<sup>13</sup> *Pamiątka srebrnego jubileuszu*, p. 21. The tradition of depicting historical scenes in temples is, of course, not new, but in this context, it also relates to the strong trend of such representations in the churches of Polish Galicia.

that the paintings ‘were carefully chosen by the parson to suit a Polish church, as they represent our national heritage’ (“trafnie bardzo przez [...] ks. Proboszcza dobrane, bardzo stosowne są do kościoła polskiego, są to bowiem pamiątki [...] nasze narodowe polskie”)<sup>14</sup>.

Marian themes intertwined with the idea of independence, expressed through the then-popular *Prayer for the Homeland* (*Modlitwa za Ojczyznę*), in which the Virgin Mary was implored to plead with her Son ‘to bring the Homeland [...] in its distress back to its former glory and to avert [...] punishment’ (“ażeby Ojczyznę [...] w utrapieniu się znajdująca – do dawniejszej sławy doprowadzić raczył i kary [...] odwrócił”). This is connected to a long tradition of seeking succor from the patrons of the Polish Commonwealth. The outward veneration of saints distinguished Poles in American society, despite its widespread and multi-denominational religious character. This act played a significant role in shaping their identity and unity, particularly in the context of strengthening national consciousness and in the struggle for a homeland that no longer existed on the map of Europe but which had a dignified and numerous representations in heaven<sup>15</sup>. The country could also take pride in having a king who defended the continent against the Islamic advance. By placing the likeness of John III Sobieski, as seen on the ceiling of a church in Pittsburgh, alongside saints, his figure was sacralized, elevating the monarch to the same status as the heavenly patrons of Poland.

This decoration was not unique. The Battle of Vienna was depicted in a stained-glass window in the transept of St. Stanislaus Church in Cleveland (destroyed in 1900), paired with another window portraying the Battle of Grunwald<sup>16</sup>. Other scenes which were also eagerly depicted in churches included King John III’s communion before the battle (e.g., stained glass windows in Connecticut churches: one from a workshop in Aachen executed in

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<sup>14</sup> *Pamiątka srebrnego jubileuszu*, p. 31. Illustrations in A.S. CZYŻ, *Motywy niepodległościowe*, pp. 54, 58.

<sup>15</sup> It is illustrated by a popular steel engraving titled *Prośba do Bogarodzicy, świętych i błogosławionych polskich* (*Request to the Mother of God, Polish saints and blessed ones*) by Jan Nepomucen Lewicki (1795-1871) from 1862, later copied in various versions, along with a poem *Hymn do miłości Ojczyzny* (*A hymn to the love of the homeland*) by Ignacy Krasicki (1735-1801). One version is published in: *Pamiątka srebrnego jubileuszu*, p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> On a side note, let us also mention the stained-glass window from St. Josaphat Church in Cleveland, founded by Rev. Józef Kociński (a pastor in 1915-1917), depicting the *Prussian Homage* based on Jan Matejko’s painting. The stained-glass went missing after 1998, when the church was closed and transformed into an exhibition venue. A.S. CZYŻ, *Motywy niepodległościowe*, p. 57.

1926 in New Haven<sup>17</sup> (Fig. 1), and another in Newark), emphasizing the monarch's piety and his trust in God. In the now-demolished St. John of God Church in Chicago (pulled down in 2010), renowned painter John A. Mallin (1884-1973), of Czech descent, painted in 1940 'a beautiful historical painting above the entrance to the sacristy, depicting King John III Sobieski, the conqueror of the Turks and Tatars and defender of Christianity' ("ponad wejściem do zakrystii śliczny obraz historyczny, przedstawiający Króla Jana III Sobieskiego, pogromcę Turków i Tatarów i obrońcę chrześcijaństwa"). In this painting King John III Sobieski is paying homage to the enthroned Virgin Mary with the Child (Fig. 2). He is accompanied by Saint Casimir, a hussar and a scytheman. This image is completed by a painting on the opposite wall, which depicts Archangel Michael and soldier saints, including St. Florian, Joan of Arc, St. George, and St. Maurice, with St. Peter's Basilica in the background (Fig. 3). Therefore, the themes of both frescoes were compatible, and they appeared in the context of the ongoing Second World War, when soldiers fought 'against subversive and pagan Nazis, communists, and other -isms striving to dominate the entire world' („stan żołnierski” walczył „przeciwko wywrotowym i pogańskim nazistom, komunistom i innym nizmom starającym się opanować cały świat”)<sup>18</sup>. American soldiers, including those of Polish descent, who died for the freedom of European countries are symbolized by a kneeling figure in uniform, holding a banner.

Portraying John III Sobieski as equal to the saints did not change in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is evidenced, for example, by a stained-glass window – a gift from the Polish Women's Alliance of America to the Polish Museum of America in Chicago (1946) – which depicts the kneeling monarch alongside his patron, St. John the Evangelist (Fig. 4). The inscription on the banner reading 'Saint John, pray for us' ("Święty Janie módl się za nami"), refers equally to the apostle and the monarch, next to whom the coat of arms of Poland is placed<sup>19</sup>. The painting in the chapel of the rectory at St. Stanislaus Kostka Church in Chicago, executed by Mark Daniels and Joseph Tesmer in the 1980s-1990s is another example of the sanctification of

<sup>17</sup> This church also features an image of Władysław Jagiełło. A.S. CZYŻ, Kościół pw. św. Stanisława Biskupa i Męczennika, New Heaven, Connecticut, [in:] K. CHRUDZIMSKA-UHERA, A.S. CZYŻ, P. SIERADZKI, Parafie i kościoły polskie w stanach Wisconsin, Pensylwania, Ohio, Nowy Jork, Maryland i Connecticut, Warszawa: Polonika 2023, p. 351.

<sup>18</sup> St. John of God Church 1907-1957 Golden Jubilee, [Chicago 1957], p. 28.

<sup>19</sup> In the top section there is a band with a text "1674 JOANNES III SOBIESKI REX POLONIAE 1696" held by figures wearing imaginary costumes, styled after historical ones. In 2024, the stained-glass window underwent maintenance funded by POLONIKA Institute.

the king (Fig. 5). Corners of the chapel were decorated with paintings depicting St. John the Baptist, St. Hyacinth, St. Stanislaus the Bishop, St. Stanislaus Kostka, St. Casimir, St. Methodius, St. Cyril, and St. Josaphat. The paintings on two opposing walls show St. Adalbert converting the Prussians and John III Sobieski paying homage to God after the victory at Vienna<sup>20</sup>. These paintings clearly accentuate the missionary theme together with the idea of defending the faith.

In the year 2000, a composition by Dennis Orlowski (b. 1944) was created, located in the lower church of St. Florian in Detroit. John III Sobieski is part of a symbolic composition which employs a system of signs and symbols to tell the history of Christian Poland – a homeland of hardworking and enterprising people. However, it was ‘so often torn apart by its neighbors’ (“przez sąsiadów tylekroć szarpanym”)<sup>21</sup>, as depicted on schematic maps of Poland dated 1918, 1935, and 1945, featuring black eagles tearing apart a white one. Paintings also show Kazimierz Pulaski, a scytheman, Szczerbiec, Mieszko, Casimir III the Great and St. Stanislaus the Bishop, Władysław II Jagiełło with St. Jadwiga of Poland, Sigismund I the Old with Bona Sforza and John Paul II and Lech Walesa. John III Sobieski appears in the panel depicting the defense of Jasna Góra Shrine (dated 1655), accompanied by hussars, even though he never participated in this event (Fig. 6). His image, set alongside a miraculous icon, reinforces the idea of the king as a pious defender of faith and homeland.

The rather poor execution of Dennis Orlowski’s work should be contrasted with the artistically excellent procession of saints and rulers of Poland in the Saint Anne Chapel in the National Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Doylestown, PA, which was created for the millennium celebrations<sup>22</sup>. It represents the Church Triumphant moving towards Mary, the Queen of Poland, and uniting with the Church Pilgrim – that is, successive generations of the Polish diaspora visiting the sanctuary (Fig. 7).

The Church Triumphant and the Church Pilgrim, along with John III Sobieski as an important figure in Polish historical-religious imagery, can also be seen in the living theater – Millennium Panorama – at the Sanctuary of Our

<sup>20</sup> *Polish Cathedrals*, vol. 1, pp. 105-106.

<sup>21</sup> The poem *Psalm do wszystkich świętych patronów Polskich* (*Psalm to all Polish patron saints*) by Narcyza (Gabriela) Żmichowska (1819-1876) reprinted in: *Pamiątka srebrnego jubileuszu*, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> The sanctuary built between 1955 and 1966 by Jerzy Szeptycki (1915-2004), an architect of Polish descent. There are figures of Bolesław Chrobry and John II Casimir among the kings.

Lady of Czestochowa, run by the Salvatorians in Merrillville, IL. The movable nativity scene, situated behind the main altar, with ‘its scenography referring to famous places in Poland, [...] characters wearing regional costumes from various regions of Poland, intertwine with lively music, and the dignity of saints and kings majestically walking in adoration of Jesus, remind us of the thousand-year old history of Christianity in Poland’<sup>23</sup>. John III Sobieski concludes the procession of Polish monarchs including Mieszko, Bolesław Chrobry, St. Jadwiga of Poland, and John II Casimir. The Millennium Panorama also features elements connected to the United States, including George Washington against the backdrop of the Capitol<sup>24</sup>, and Kazimierz Pulaski on horseback with the American flag.

The presence of John III Sobieski in the context of American history reflects a shift in the perception of the king, which in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was seen as the defender of Europe and Christianity against the Turks. The perception of the king transformed into a symbol of the struggle for freedom and unity of an oppressed nation, as well as an emblem for unyielding courage, independence, and liberty<sup>25</sup>. Interestingly, on the Old Continent, it was not only the Poles who identified with him but nearly all nations fighting for their independence<sup>26</sup>. It is no coincidence that Paweł Sobolewski (1816-1883), an emigrant from 1831, chose to open the list of prominent Poles with an image of John III Sobieski in the first issue of the magazine “Poland: Historical, Literary, and Picturesque”. Intended as a luxurious publication and addressed “to the people of the U.S. of America”, the magazine was designed to serve as an elegant addition to living rooms<sup>27</sup> (Fig. 8). The lithograph, based on a drawing by Eustachy Wyszyński – another emigrant of the November Uprising – who copied the king’s image from the publication *La Pologne historique, littéraire,*

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.salwatorianie.us/panorama-of-the-millennium.html> [access: 12.26.2024].

<sup>24</sup> Its pendant features the figure of John Paul II and St. Peter’s Basilica.

<sup>25</sup> R. PRZYBYLSKI, *Klasyczny*, pp. 225, 228, 262.

<sup>26</sup> J. ŚLIZIŃSKI, *Jan III Sobieski w literaturze narodów Europy*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej 1979, pp. 281-308, 346, 379-383, 393-398.

<sup>27</sup> The magazine was published intermittently from January to September 1842. The lithographic prints based on Leonard Chodźko’s publication were of poor quality (they were produced at G.W. Lewis’s printshop in New York, located at 736 Nassau Street). For this reason, the project failed, not finding enough readers. The initiative to publish a magazine in English arose from the need to promote the history of Poland and support immigrants following the uprisings. J. GERASIK, *Paweł Sobolewski i jego „Poland” – pierwsze polonijne wydawnictwo periodyczne w USA z 1842 r.*, “Bibliotekarz Podlaski” 62(2024), no. 1, pp. 311-314, 319.

*monumetale et illustrée*<sup>28</sup>, was accompanied by an article introducing John III to American readers<sup>29</sup>.

Paweł Sobolewski's narrative which focused on the king's heroism, was not original. The author, in a manner typical of Polish literature of the time, depicted also the king's flaws, including his submissiveness to Maria Kazimiera and the weakness of his rule in later years<sup>30</sup>. He highlighted the victory at Vienna, portraying Leopold's cowardice and the rejoicing of the saved Austrians. In Sobieski's character, the author combined the ideals of an ancient knight with the moral piety of a Christian and the Polish love of freedom, comparing the king to George Washington<sup>31</sup>. The idea of presenting John III Sobieski in the context of the fight for independence also guided Paweł Sobolewski when writing his book *John Sobieski, the King of Poland, Conquers the Turks under the Walls of Vienna...* (Chicago 1883; reprint 1983). The book featured an illustration of the monarch's portrait, reprinted from the lithograph in "Poland: Historical, Literary, and Picturesque"<sup>32</sup>. In the same spirit, August Antoni Jakubowski (ca. 1815-1837) also highlighted the accomplishments of the victor of Vienna in *The Remembrances of a Polish Exile*, reminding us that "the victories of Sobieski, and the delivery of Vienna, had caused her [e. g. Poland] name to be celebrated in all Europe, yet we find no traces of song but those which are written on her land. The letters are the graves of her sons, which are deserted by even nightingales to chaunt their dirge"<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> L. CHODŻKO, *La Pologne historique, littéraire, monumetale et illustrée*, t. 2, Paris: Bureau Central 1836-1837, after p. 472.

<sup>29</sup> Additionally, the first issue featured four lithographs depicting: the Ostroh castle and the monument of Copernicus, Jadwiga of Poland, the monument of Prince Poniatowski from Warsaw, the Temple of the Sibyl and the Gothic House in Puławy. There were articles about them. See J. GERASIK, *Pawel Sobolewski*, p. 313.

<sup>30</sup> The prevailing opinion was that Maria Kazimiera's intrigues dashed any hopes of the throne for Jakub. *Pamiątka srebrnego jubileuszu*, p. 101.

<sup>31</sup> 'The life of this hero, this intrepid Polish patriot, cannot fail to be of universal acceptation. Joining all the spirit of ancient chivalry with the moral grandeur of Christian piety and an extraordinary desire to secure the independence of his country, he finds few parallels in history, and can, perhaps, only be compared to the immortal Washington'. P. SOBOLEWSKI, *John Sobieski, "Poland, historical, literary and picturesque"* 1842, no. 1, p. 1. See also E. MODZELEWSKA-OPARA, *Dorobek pisarski*, pp. 268, 272.

<sup>32</sup> Sobolewski's wife, Eudoksja, was said to be a descendant of the king, which contributed to his active efforts in promoting the legacy of John III (*John Sobieski*, p. 248); J. GERASIK, *Pawel Sobolewski*, pp. 327, 329. See also a naïve story based on Paweł Sobolewski's book: *Jan III Sobieski, król Polski, obrońca chrześcijaństwa pod Wiedniem*, Chicago 1883 [2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1910], illustrated with a modest half-figure portrait of the king (POLONA BN).

<sup>33</sup> A.A. JAKUBOWSKI, *Wspomnienia polskiego wygnańca. The Remembrances of Polish Exile*, transl. and eds. J. Ławski, P. Oczko, Białystok: Alter Studio 2013, p. 67.

Naturally, the representation of the monarch was prominently emphasized during the grand celebrations marking the bicentenary of the Vienna victory. These celebrations not only contributed to a rise in patriotic sentiment but also helped popularize the idea of Poland's independence amongst other nations<sup>34</sup>. Particularly significant celebrations and events took place in the communities with the largest Polish diaspora in Chicago<sup>35</sup>, Milwaukee, Detroit, and New York. In New York, following a solemn evening mass celebrated at St. Stanislaus Church, a procession emerged, featuring an orchestra, flags, and a banner reading: "The Bi-centennial celebration of the liberation of Vienna by Jan Sobieski, King of Poland. September 12<sup>th</sup> 1883". The procession headed to the Germania Assembly Rooms for a ceremony, the program of which included speeches, solo and choir performances by the Stanisław Moniuszko Society, recitations (including some in English), and motion pictures. The event was attended by numerous reporters and notable figures, making it a great moment to highlight the aspirations of the Polish people for independence<sup>36</sup>. It should also be mentioned that insurgents from both the November and January Up-risings who had sought refuge in the US participated in these celebrations<sup>37</sup>.

Riding the wave of post-jubilee enthusiasm, under the framework of the Polish Roman Catholic Union of America, King John III Sobieski Societies began to form within parishes (in Chicago: 1884, the parish of St. Stanislaus Kostka's Church; before 1914, the parish of St. Adalbert's Church, the parish of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, the parish of St. Mary of Perpetual Help Church, St. Joseph parish, St. John Cantius parish, the parish of St. Salomea Church; SS. Cyril and Methodius parish in Lemont, IL; the parish of the Sweetest Heart of Mary Church in Detroit, MI; the parish of St. Stanislaus Kostka's Church in Bay City, MI; the parishes of St. Stanislaus Church and Assumption Church in Buffalo, NY; the parish of the St. Casimir Church

<sup>34</sup> Z. WÓJCIK, *Jan Sobieski. 1629-1696*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1994, pp. 527-528; E. MODZELEWSKA-OPARA, *Dorobek pisarski*, p. 272.

<sup>35</sup> "Dziennik Chicagowski" 4.4.1891.

<sup>36</sup> "Gazeta Toruńska" 1883, no. 240, p. 3; Z. WÓJCIK, *Jan Sobieski*, p. 532; *Odsiecz wiedeńska 1683. Wystawa jubileuszowa w Zamku Królewskim na Wawelu w trzechsetlecie bitwy*, vol. 1, eds. A. Franaszek, K. Kuczma, Kraków: Państwowe Zbiory Sztuki na Wawelu 1990, pp. 23-24. See also 1867-1917, p. 152; *Polish Cathedrals*, vol. 1, p. 95; vol. 2, p. 162.

<sup>37</sup> E. MODZELEWSKA-OPARA, *Dorobek pisarski*, p. 251. The anniversary was also celebrated in 1983. *1683. Tercentenary battle of Vienna...* [exhibition catalogue at the Polish American Museum Foundation], Port Washington, NY 1983; *Valor at Vienna. John III Sobieski 1683 1983*, Port Washington, NY 1983; *Tercentenary battle of Vienna and second annual banquet...*, Port Washington, NY 1983; *1683 Tercentenary battle of Vienna*, Chicago, IL 1983. These publications covered biography, family, and battles of John III.

in Cleveland, OH; in the parish of St. Andrew Church in Calumet City, IL, it was the Cavalry of King John III Sobieski, in the St. Laurentius parish in Philadelphia, PA, it was the Guard of King John III Sobieski established in 1899; and in St. Hyacinth Basilica in Chicago it was the Civic Club of King John III Sobieski founded in 1916). These organizations were focused on independence, with some also having a paramilitary aspect. They were involved in the financial support of the parish, the organization of religious life, and the providing of assistance in times of death or illness for their members<sup>38</sup>. In Springfield, MA, there was the Brotherhood of John III Sobieski's Charity (Towarzystwo Brackiej Pomocy Jana III Sobieskiego) under the patronage of St. Joseph Church, founded in 1910 (Fig. 9)<sup>39</sup>. In the agricultural settlement of Wilno, MA, founded in 1883, Poles organized an insurance society called "The Sobieski Mutual Fire Insurance Company"<sup>40</sup>. This list also included somewhat less 'serious' initiatives, such as the one from St. Casimir's Parish in Detroit, where a Music Society under the name "Sobieski Band"<sup>41</sup> was established. A reflection of these organizations is the American Polish Club Sobieski in Greenacres, Florida (1959), with its influence on identity-building and social character<sup>42</sup>.

Paintings presenting John III Sobieski were displayed not only in churches, but also within a broader context<sup>43</sup>, such as Polish history, or, as with Paweł Sobolewski, incorporated into the narrative of the fight for independence in

<sup>38</sup> *Polish Cathedrals*, vol. 1, pp. 103, 148-149, 163, 193, 256, 271-272, 290, 371, 384; vol. 2, pp. 63, 178, 196, 231, 303, 363.

<sup>39</sup> The ribbon (in the catalogue described as a pennant) from the collection of the Central Military Library in Warsaw (DZS Eks-461). Portrait of the king is based on the lithograph of Eustachy Wyszyński.

<sup>40</sup> TERESA O.S.F., *Polish Settlements in Minnesota 1860-1900*, "Polish American Studies" 5(1948), no. 3-4, p. 70; J. RADZIŁOWSKI, *On the Wind. Life in Minnesota's Polish farming communities*, "Minnesota History" 58(2002), no. 1, pp. 19-26.

<sup>41</sup> *Polish Cathedrals*, vol. 2, p. 27.

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.americanpolishclub.com/home-p/> [access: 11.02.2024]. There were also Polish settlements named after the Lion of Lechistan, such as Sobieski in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Additionally, there were streets dedicated to the king, such as the one in Buffalo. TERESA O.S.F., *Polish Settlements*, pp. 69, 71; LUCILLA C.R., *Polish Farmers and Workers in the United States to 1914*, "Polish American Studies" 15(1958), no. 1-2, p. 2; J. RADZIŁOWSKI, *On the Wind*, pp. 23, 27.

<sup>43</sup> E.g. the portrait from the collection of the Polish Museum in Chicago (inspired by the print by Nicolas de Larmessin I from 1684), and, also from the same collection, the image of John III at the Battle of Vienna, which is a mix of the motives from the paintings by Jerzy Eleuter Szymonowicz Siemiginowski (after 1686) and Martin Altomonte (1694). Another example is a copy by Tadeusz Żukotyński (1855-1912) based on the pictorial guide to the kings and queens of Poland by Jan Matejko from years 1890-1892. See also the illustrations in the aforementioned publications accompanying the tercentenary of the Battle of Vienna.

the United States. This is evidenced by colorful lithographs “Pamiątka obchodu Konstytucji 3<sup>go</sup>Maja 1791-1891 w Amaryce” (“Commemorative print celebrating centennial of the Polish Constitution, March 3, 1791-1891”), for which the copyright from 1891 was held by S.F. Czapliński and Pelagia Majewska. The lithographs were published in large yet varied formats and printed on paper of differing quality, including luxury paper (Fig. 10), by Kurz & Allison Art Studio in Chicago<sup>44</sup>.

In the center of the discussed lithograph, we see a neo-Gothic altar with figures of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, reminiscent of those found in Polish churches in the United States. On the cloth covering the altar table, there is an inscription: “Przed twe ołtarze zanosim błaganie / Ojczynę wolną racz nam wrócić Panie” (“Before Your Altars, we offer our prayers: Return to us, O Lord, our free fatherland”), a quote from a hymn associated with the 1863 uprising<sup>45</sup>. Two women, dressed in attire that is neither fully historical nor fully confederate, approach the priest holding the gift of the crown of thorns – a symbol of the martyrdom of Poland and of the Polish people. On both sides of the altar there are scythemen and soldiers of various Polish uprisings unified under the Dutch (sic!) flag<sup>46</sup>. On the left, there is a figure representing a Polish national and a member of a church organization wearing a characteristic badge.

Presented above is the enthroned Virgin Mary holding the Child Jesus in her arms. The gathered people plead to her: “Królowo Korony Polskiej Maryo Przyczyn się za Ojczyną Naszą” (“Holy Mary, the Queen of Poland, pray for Our Homeland”). Their prayers are presented and reinforced through the intercession of the Polish patron saints, who include St. Stanislaus Kostka, St. Prince Casimir, St. Stanislaus the Bishop (on the right) and St. Hedwig of

<sup>44</sup> One of the copies of the lithograph, printed on thick textured paper (59x74 cm) is preserved in the Central Military Library (DZS Pl. 2150, Ill. 16). The composition of “Pamiątka stuletniej rocznicy powstania Tadeusza Kościuszki” (“A souvenir of the hundredth anniversary of Tadeusz Kościuszko's uprising”) was based on the lithograph “Pamiątka obchodu Konstytucji 3<sup>go</sup>Maja”. The copyright to this work from 1894 was held by Jutrzenka Publ. Co. (The Gast Uth & Eng. Co, New York & Chicago). It was published as a bonus with “Tygodnik Polski *Jutrzenka*” (Cleveland). This very rare print can be found at the vicarage of St. Stanislaus Church in Buffalo.

<sup>45</sup> The song was composed between 1816 and 1828, with lyrics by Alojzy Feliński and music by Jan Nepomucen Kraszewski (later simplified over time). It was banned in the Russian Partition in 1862. As a religious-patriotic hymn, it served as an anthem for a nation striving to reclaim its place on the map of Europe. A.G. PIOTROWSKA, *Polskie pieśni o funkcji hymnu narodowego, “Sprawy Narodowościowe”* 24-25(2004), pp. 156-157.

<sup>46</sup> It is a distorted representation of the Polish flag. Refer to the bonus from “Tygodnik Polski *Jutrzenka*” mentioned in the previous footnote, where the Polish flag is reversed, with red on top. Similar faux Polish sashes are worn by the figures gathered around the altar in both lithographs under discussion.

Silesia, St. Hyacinth and St. Adalbert the Bishop (on the left). The composition is completed along its axis by a banner with the words “Ave Maria Regina Regni Poloniae”, emerging from a crown supported by two angels (on the left side of the altar there is a blue flag bearing the Marian monogram and text “Regina Poloniae”). On both sides of the composition, within neo-gothic tracery frames, there are busts of Polish monarchs along scenes of the proclamation of the Constitution of 3 May 1791, and the partition of Poland (a version of “Kołacz Polski” the “Troelfth Cake” composition). Below are portraits of notable figures, most of whom can be associated with the Constitution of 3 May, and who form symbols of the military, political, and spiritual – in the literary field – struggle for Poland. There is Tadeusz Rejtan (1742-1780), Stanisław Małachowski (1736-1809), Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), Józef Kraszewski (1812-1887), Hugo Kołataj (1750-1812) and Józef Poniatowski (1763-1813). In the bottom section, the portrait of George Washington is accompanied by figures of Kazimierz Pulaski and Tadeusz Kościuszko, placed within fields decorated with laurel wreaths, over two escutcheons: one representing the November Uprising and the other the USA, both joined by an American eagle with spread wings. The escutcheons are placed on oak branches, tied by a ribbon. The bottom part of the lithograph also features images of two battles: the Battle of Vienna and the Battle of Racławice.

The described print combines patriotic compositions with a pictorial list of Polish kings and portraits of famous Poles, which were extremely popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>47</sup>. As the lithograph was published in the USA, the figure of George Washington and American heraldic motifs were emphasized alongside the Polish heroes of the American War of Independence. In this way, as in the aforementioned examples of art and literature, the idea of fighting for a common cause resonated. It is noteworthy that John III Sobieski is depicted twice in the lithograph: once in the list of Polish kings, and again in the depiction of the Battle of Vienna. Stanisław August Poniatowski is also depicted twice (additionally in the title scene of the *Adoption of the Constitution of 3 May 1791*) and Tadeusz Kościuszko (in the scene constituting a pendant to the Battle of Vienna i.e. the Battle of Racławice). Although the lithograph was created to honor the Constitution, the second in the world after the American one, its true heroes are those who fight with arms for the prosperity of their country.

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<sup>47</sup> For examples see *Katalog portretów zbiorowych osobistości polskich i obcych w Polsce działających*, vol. 8, ed. H. Widacka, Warszawa: Biblioteka Narodowa 1997.

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According to Benedict Anderson, the American historian and political scientist, it can be stated that John III Sobieski became part of the “imagined community”, and one of its symbols shaping a sense of distinctiveness and limitedness in the context of the external world<sup>48</sup>. The king was depicted alongside saints and in sacred spaces reserved for them, elevating him to the status of Poland’s heavenly patron saints<sup>49</sup>. However, while Polish saints were depicted independently of the specificity and history of the USA, Sobieski was associated with the idea of the struggle for freedom, including also America’s fight for independence. It is worth noting that he did not, nor could he, become a hero of the same status as Pulaski and Kościuszko. In addition to the ideals of liberation, unlike the other two figures, John III Sobieski also embodied the concept of monarchism. Polish emigrants were mostly peasants, the diaspora was democratic and republican. The king was a proud symbol of old times, but he was not a hero a simple emigrant could identify with. Hence his figure in the art and writings of Polish Americans is actually rare.

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<sup>49</sup> Another monarch whose image was frequently depicted in Polish churches in the United States was Władysław Jagiełło. He was typically shown in scenes of the Christening of Lithuania and, less often, in depictions of the Battle of Grunwald. See above.

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## JOHN III SOBIESKI IN THE ART AND WRITINGS OF POLISH AMERICANS

## Summary

In view of the mass emigration to the USA and its multifaceted self-organisation, the Polish community there was described in social literature at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries as the "fourth district". Various motifs interpreted in the spirit of identity and independence played a key role in its self-definition. Therefore, historical and religious heroes were sought who, on the one hand, could point to the distant and glorious past of the Polish state and, on the other hand, in accordance with the character of the era, could be presented as voluntary victims for the sake of their needy and threatened homeland. One of the figures highlighted in this context was Jan III Sobieski. The article refers to works of art and literature created in the Polish diaspora. As it turns out, the king was seen as a symbol of the struggle for freedom and unity of a nation in captivity. He was a symbol of indomitable courage, independence and freedom. Jan III Sobieski was depicted in the company of saints and in sacred spaces reserved for them, equating the king with Poland's heavenly intercessors. However, while Polish saints were depicted in isolation from the specifics and history of the United States, Sobieski was associated with the idea of fighting for freedom also in the context of the American struggle for independence. It is worth noting, however, that he did not become a hero on a par with Pulaski and Kosciuszko. Unlike the latter two, Jan III Sobieski represented monarchism in addition to the idea of freedom. The Polish community was a working-class one, and although the king was a proud symbol of times past, he could not become a hero with whom a simple emigrant could identify.

**Keywords:** John III Sobieski; Polish community in the USA; Polish churches in the USA

## JAN III SOBIESKI W SZTUCE I LITERATURZE AMERYKAŃSKICH POLAKÓW

## Streszczenie

Wobec masowości emigracji do USA i jej wieloaspektowej samoorganizacji tamtejszą Polonię określano w piśmiennictwie społecznym przełomu XIX i XX wieku jako „czwartą dzielnicę”. Klużową rolę w jej autodefiniowaniu odgrywały różnorodne motywy interpretowane w duchu tożsamościowym i niepodległościowym. Poszukiwano więc historyczno-religijnych bohaterów, którzy z jednej strony mogliby wskazywać na odległą i chwalebną przeszłość państwa polskiego, a z drugiej zgodnie z charakterem epoki mogliby zostać ukazani jako dobrowolne ofiary na rzecz potrzebującej i zagrożonej ojczyzny. Jedną z postaci, którą eksponowano w tym kontekście, był Jan III Sobieski. W artykule przywołano dzieła plastyczne i literackie, które powstały w środowisku polonijnym. Jak się okazuje, króla postrzegano jako symbol walki o wolność i jedność narodu znajdującego się w niewoli. Był znakiem nieposkromionej odwagi, niezależności i wolności. Jana III Sobieskiego pokazywano w towarzystwie świętych i w przestrzeniach sakralnych dla nich rezerwowanych, zrównując króla z niebiańskimi orędownikami Polski. O ile jednak świętych polskich pokazywano w oderwaniu od specyfiki i historii USA, o tyle Sobieski łączony był z ideą walki o wolność także w kontekście amerykańskich zmagań o niepodległość. Warto jednak podkreślić, że nie stał się bohaterem na miarę Pułaskiego i Kościuszki. Jan III Sobieski oprócz idei wolnościowych, w przeciwieństwie do dwóch wymienionych reprezentował też monarchizm. Polonia była zaś ludowa, a król choć był dumnym znakiem dawnych czasów, nie mógł stać się bohaterem, z którym mógłby utożsamić się prosty emigrant.

**Slowa kluczowe:** Jan III Sobieski; społeczność polska w USA; polskie kościoły w USA

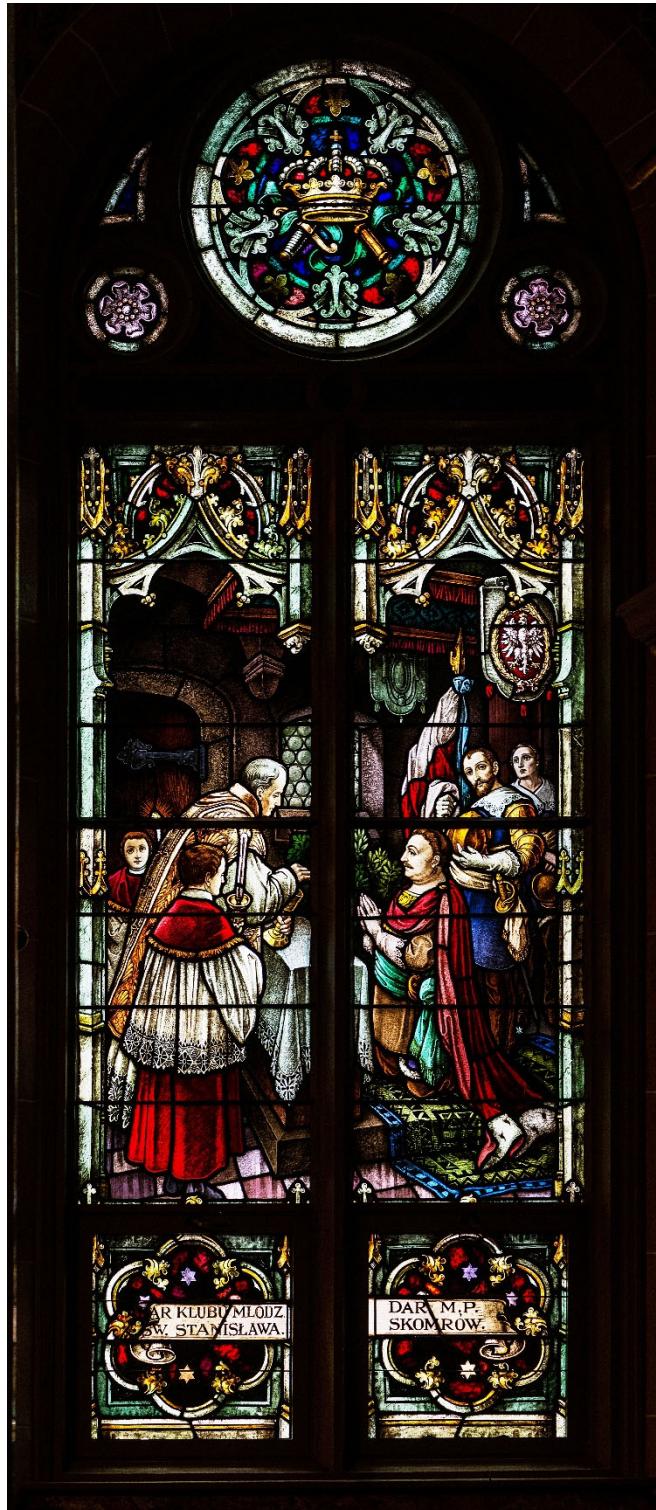


Fig. 1. *The Communion of John III Sobieski before the Battle of Vienna*, 1926, St. Stanislaus Church in New Heaven. Photo by Norbert Piwowarczyk



Fig. 2. John A. Mallin, The Holy Mary with Baby Jesus, surrounded by King John III Sobieski, Saint Casimir, a hussar, and a scytheman, 1940, St. John of God Church, pulled down in 2010.

Photo reprinted from *St. John of God Church 1907-1957*

*Golden Jubilee* [Chicago 1957]



Fig. 3. John A. Mallin, Archangel Michael and soldier saints against the backdrop of St. Peter's Basilica, 1940, St. John of God Church, pulled down in 2010.

Photo reprinted from *St. John of God Church 1907-1957 Golden Jubilee* [Chicago 1957]



Fig. 4. John III Sobieski with Saint John the Evangelist, 1926.  
Photo courtesy of the Polish Museum of America in Chicago

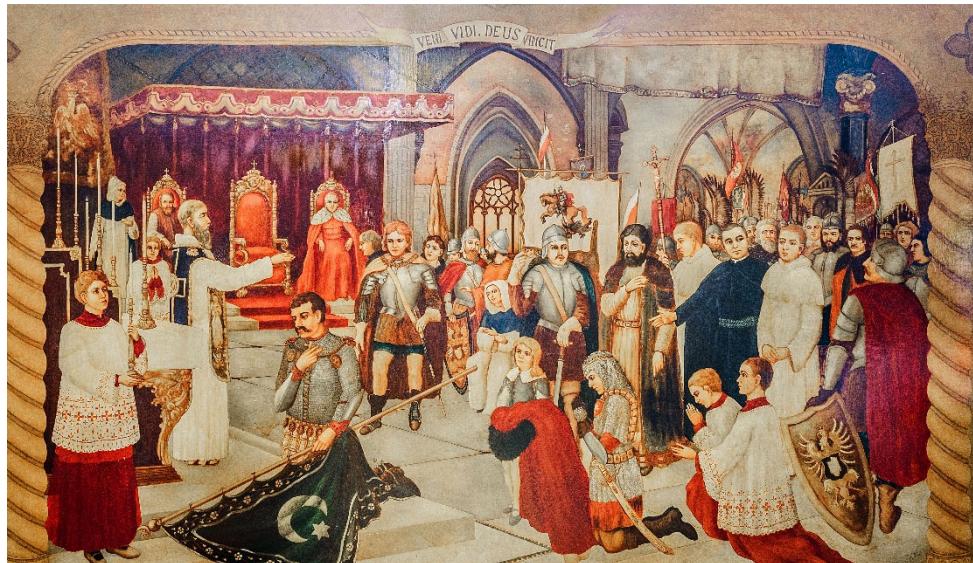


Fig. 5. Mark Daniels, Joseph Tesmer, *The Communion of John III Sobieski before the Battle of Vienna*, 1980-1990. The chapel of the rectory at the church St. Stanislaus Kostka in Chicago.  
Photo by Norbert Piwowarczyk



Fig. 6. Dennis Orlowski, John III Sobieski and the Siege of Jasna Góra, 2000, St. Florian Church in Detroit. Photo by Norbert Piwowarczyk



Fig. 7. A fragment of the procession of the Polish kings in the Saint Anne Chapel in the National Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Doylestown, ca. 2000.  
Photo by Norbert Piwowarczyk



Fig. 8. John III Sobieski, in: "Poland, historical, literary and picturesque" 1842, no. 1,  
before p. 1. National Library in Warsaw

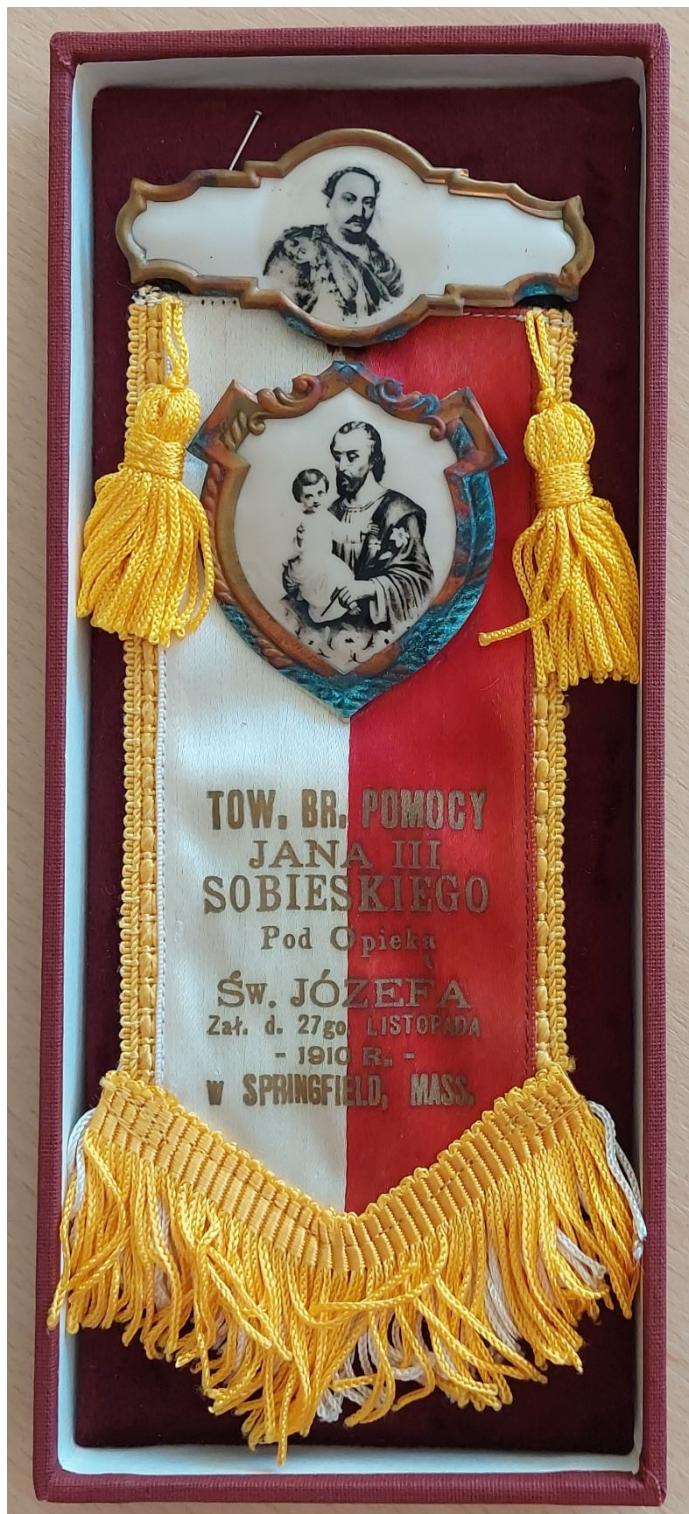


Fig. 9. A ribbon of the Brotherhood of John III Sobieski's Charity under the patronage of St. Joseph in Springfield, MA, 1910, the Central Military Library in Warsaw. Photo by Anna Sylwia Czyż



Fig. 10. *Pamiątka obchodu Konstytucji 3<sup>go</sup> Maja 1791-1891 w Amaryce*  
(Commemorative print celebrating centennial of the Polish Constitution,  
March 3, 1791-1891). The Central Military Library in Warsaw