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The Icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa. From the Anjou to the Jagiellonian Dynasty

The first Pauline outpost in Poland was inagurated in Częstochowa on the 9th of August 1382 e.g. on the eve of the feast of the patron of the mother monastery¹. The friars came from the St. Lawrence monastery on the Mons Clara near Buda founded by the Hungarian monarch Louis the Great, who furnished it with the relics of St. Paul the Hermit brought from Venice. Due to this transfer of relics the monastery became the chief centre of the order following a unique canonical-eremitical rule. It has been established beyond any doubt that the monastery in Częstochowa was founded on the initiative of King Louis. Weary of prolonged illness, the King, who spent his last years attempting to strengthen the dynasty and keep Poland within his sphere of influence, was not the one who performed the act of foundation himself; it was delegated by him to a relative of his, his palatine and advisor—prince Ladislas Opolczyk. The Jasna Góra foundation constitutes the spiritual heritage of King Louis's—the sponsor of the Pauline Order and the founder of four Pauline monasteries in Hungary. Prince Opolczyk,

¹ The whole literature concerned with the foundation of the picture is discussed in: E. Śnieżyńska-Stolot, Geneza, styl i historia obrazu Matki Boskiej Częstochowskiej (The origin, style and history of the image of Our Lady of Częstochowa), [in:] 'Folia Historiae Artium' XI, 1973, p. 31 - 34. Recent works are discussed by Z. Rozanow, Obraz Matki Boskiej Częstochowskiej (The image of Our Lady of Częstochowa), [in:] Jasnogórska Bogurodzica 1382-1982, Warszawa 1982. Recently A. Różycka-Bryzek and J. Gadomski, Obraz Matki Boskiej Częstochowskiej w świetle badań historii sztuki (The image of Our Lady of Częstochowa as investigated by art historians), [in:] 'Studia Claromontana', V, 1984, 31, p. 49-50. The more important historical literature: A. Prochaska, Napad husytów na Częstochowę w 1430 r. (The Hussits Raid on Czestochowa in 1430), [in:] 'Kwartalnik Historyczny', XXI, 1907, p. 309-320; A. Gieysztor, Lassitude du gothique? Reflecte de l'iconoclasme Hussite en Pologne au XVe siècle, [in:] Ars auro prior. Studia Joanni Białostocki sexagenario dicta, Warszawa 1981, p. 224. The political aspect of the Jasna Góra foundation was brought out by H. Weidhass, Wladislaus von Oppeln. Ein Beitrag zum Thema Czenstochau, [in:] 'Forschungen und Forschrifte' 1966, XXXX, 8, p. 244-249. O. Halecki, used this information in his treaties: Un appel d'Hedwige d'Anjou à la Reine des cieux, [in:] 'Antemurale', 1971, XV, p. 55.

brought up in Hungary and the king's favourite utterly devoted to the cause of the dynasty — would not have been able to accomplish the foundation had he not been fashioned by the atmosphere prevailing at the court. There seems to be little point in ascribing an individual contribution to either founder. Częstochowa lay on the territory given by Louis to loyal vassal so it was obvious that the name of Ladislas had to be affixed on the foundation document.

Following the tradition of St. Stephen the Great, who in his last will bequeathed Hungary to the Holy Virgin, Louis the Great observed a special devotion to Mary as the patroness of Hungary and his dynasty. The King used to donate her images renowned for miraculous properties to the monasteries he founded with his mother Elisabeth (a daughter of the Polish King Ladislas Łokietek) or to the celebrated pilgrimage centers in Europe connected with his state and dynastic policy: the cathedrals of Aachen, Prague, and Cracow, the churches in Mariazell (Styria) and St. Clara Order in Old Buda (fig. 1-3). The cult of those miraculous pictures promoted the Anjou dynastic diplomacy, while the religious life at the court centered around pilgrimages they attracted. Louis's holy pictures were believed to be Italian works of art but they may have been created in Hungarian painting workshops, which customarily collaborated with goldsmiths. The pictures were adorned with gold and silver plating a kind of so called 'basma'. The 'basmas', in turn, were embellished with Anjou coats of arms, which prompted their loyal subjects to think that the dynasty owed its magnificence and dignity to the protection of these images of Mary so much renowned for their grace. The lilies that expressed the regal majesty of Mary were at the same time Anjou's heraldic emblems.

The Anjous did not stand alone in their cult of the holy images of Our Lady. The pictures imitating Byzantine patterns were brought from Italy to a number of European countries. They enjoyed great popularity due to their archaic form and the legend that attributed their creation to St. Luke. Such a picture of the holy Virgin, believed to have been painted by St. Luke, was allegedly brought to Prague by Charles IV in 1368. The emperor received a gift from the king of Cyprus Peter I Lusignan: the famous picture of Our Lady later known as the Holy Virgin from Roudnice².

Częstochowa was destined by King Louis to become a center of holy dynastic pilgrimages for the Polish line of the Anjou, since by virtue of the Koszyce Charter (1374) one of king's daughters was to ascend to the Polish throne. When this moment came and Elisabeth of Bosnia sent the nearly 11 years old Hedwig to Cracow in late summer of 1384, she wanted her daughter to reign successfully; thus following the dynastic tradition, she provided her with a holy picture. The picture of Mary with the child,

² H. Aurenhammer, Marienikone und Marienandachtsbild. Zur Entstehung des halffiguren Marienbildes nördlich der Alpen, [in:] 'Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft', 1955, IV, p. 135-138; J. Myslivec, Česká gotiká a Byzanc, [in:] 'Uměnî', 1970, XVIII, p. 244.

renowned for miraculous deeds was placed at Jasna Góra (Mons Clara) on the 31st of August 1384. It was to ensure Divine benevolence for the reign of Hedwig, who was crowned queen on the 16th of October.

Conceived as a votive offering of the dynasty the picture arrived to Poland as a part of the dowry of the king's young daughter. She came to her new homeland where she was to marry Wilhelm Hapsburg, to whom she had been betrothed since early childhood. Opolczyk, who was in Buda at that time, was not present among the numerous Hungarian noblemen that accompanied her. He would have been the best protector of Hedwig and the executor of the dynastic mission of bringing the picture and offering it to the Jasna Góra order. Scholars have not yet decided who handed the picture to the Paulines. This fact, however, is of little significance since all people concerned had but one goal: enhancing the glory of the Anjou dynasty. According to a later source, it was done by Opolczyk's confidential officials: the general starost Jerzy Slosz (Swas), Konssopior, a former Ruthenian starost Jan Radło, the starost of the Bolesławiec district Jan Schof from Toplyn and the starost of the Opole district Wiktor from Mierzyce. They handed the picture over to the monks along with the story concerned with its apostolic origin. The monks also learned that Opolczyk captured the picture in the Belz castle situated in Halich Ruthenia which he had ruled since 1372.

Where the picture was placed - we do not know. Our Lady's chapel at Jasna Góra is first mentioned as the place of its safekeeping by Zbigniew Oleśnicki in a document dating from 1450. Viewed from the political perspective the matter proves to be a spectacular diplomatic achievement of Louis. He followed French and Naplese patterns putting them to the test in Hungary. Louis's reign was an excellent lesson of diplomacy for many outstanding statesmen of the Jagiellonian era. Even long after the death of his powerful protector Opolczyk remained in service with the Anjou. He was Hedwig's protector on behalf of her mother. Although he was appointed trustee of Hedwig and Wilhelm Hapsburg's marriage, he remained close to King Jagiełło and was even godfather to the King, whom he never much liked. Only later on his endless disputes with his sovereign led to exile and the loss of properties he had acquired in Poland. Throughout her short reign Hedwig kept up the dynastic tradition of Our Lady's cult. She founded altars under the invocation of the Holy Virgin in the Cracow cathedral and generously furnished the parish church of St. Mary in the capital. Together with Jagiełło she invited the white Friars dedicated to the cult of The Virgin Mary and commenced the erection of their church in the Cracow district of Piasek.

King Jagiełło's interest in the Jasna Góra picture can be understood when we realize that it was Hedwig's family votive offering. The King simply continued in this manner the dynastic policy of his relatives and predecessors on the throne: his father-in-law and his wife. In 1393 Jagiełło and Hedwig confirmed the foundation of Jasna Góra and offered salaries to the monks.

In 1414, long after the queen's death, Jagiełło entrusted Hedwig, dynasty and his predecessors on the Polish throne to the Holy Virgin. The son of Ladislas Jagiełło and Sonka Holszańska's Ladislas III (1425–1444) was also the heir of Anjou tradition. Following Louis the Great, also the king of both Poland and Hungary, he offered the picture showing the crowning of the Holy Virgin to the Hungarian Chapel in the Aachen cathedral dedicated to his patron (fig. 4). The Polish monarchs would appeal to the Anjou tradition even in the XVII century. Polish kings of later ages considered Hedwig to be the spiritual mother of the House of Jagiellonians, although it was Sonka Holszańska who was the actual mother of the Jagiellonians. The kings of the Wasa dynasty thought of themselves as descendants of Jagiellonians and Anjou.

No real analysis of all Louisian pictures is possible since none of them has been preserved in the original state. In 1767 the pictures from Aachen and Mariazell were replaced by copies, which were restored or painted anew in the XIX century. The only items from the XVI century that have come down to our times are so called 'basmas' that allow us to establish the original sizes. In spite of that, scholars have long speculated on the authorship of the originals and believed them to be the works of Tomaso da Modena. The Crowning of the Holy Virgin was associated with Cimabue. What the Jasna Góra picture looked like can only be inferred from how it looks now (fig. 5). It is preserved in a very poor condition and the paint coating tends to flake off: Although a great amount of conservation work has been done (three times in this century) and extensive research carried out, no analysis of the pigments has so far been completed.

Hodegetria from Częstochowa is characterized by narrow lean face depicted en face with the two scars running through the right cheek. The head is wrapped with a coat that fulfills a decorative as well as the compositional function. A big flat body does not consort with a relatively small head, a stiff inflexible hand is shown against the background of the trunk. The size of the nimbus, similar to that in the picture from Aachen and Mariazell, gives ground for assuming that originally the nimbus in Częstochowa, as the ones in Aachen and Mariazell, were decorated with stones. (This assumption is confirmed by 'Translatio' which also informs us that the picture was originally covered by precious plates. The Aachen pictures bear features of the XIX century neoraphaelism while the Jasna Góra picture lacks any conspicious style characteristics, which makes recognition difficult.

Jan Długosz in *Historia Poloniae* (many scholars follow his example) mentioned the profanation and destruction of the picture on the 16th of April 1430 — the Easter Day. Jasna Góra was allegedly attacked by the Hussites led by prince Frederic Ostrogski allied with Witold — the Grand Duke of Lithuania, who was at odds with King Jagiełło at that time, which gave a political dimension to this event. The robbers took away precious stones and plates from the nimbus and cut the Virgin Mary's face with a

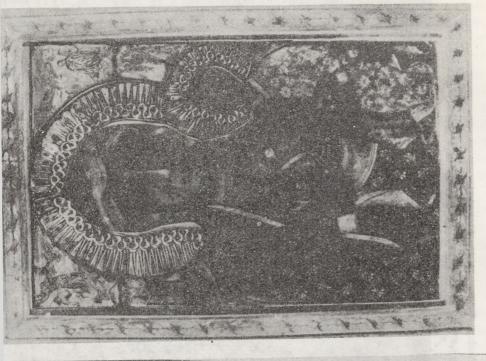


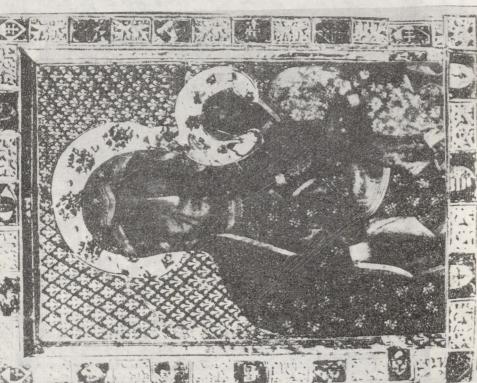
1. Holy Virgin with Infant Jesus, Mariazell, Town Church



3. Holy Virgin with Infant Jesus, Aachen, Treasury of the Cathedral







6. Our Lady of Częstochowa, hypothetical state after preservation works completed in 1434

5. Our Lady of Częstochowa, hypothetical state before 1430

sabre. The king had the picture renovated in Cracow in 1430-1434 and he exploited this occassion for dynastic and political purpose. Jagiełło could now give new shape and contents to the Anjou tradition. The renovation of painting created an excellent opportunity for reviving the memory of Hedwig and for manifesting good will in a still vivid issue of union of Western and Eastern church. At that time Hedwig's canonization was under way. In 1426 Wojciech Jastrzebiec, the archbishop of Gniezno, acting on bishop Oleśnicki's suggestion enacted a decree to establish a commission for investigating Hedwig's virtues and miracles³. Jagiełło believed that the canonization would enhance the prestige of the Jagiellonians as a European and Christian dynasty. Hedwig's family heritage, to which nimbuses of numerous saints added lustre, was to the King's immense advantage. Jagiełło had long profited from the popularity of his late wife, as an ideal queen: her beauty an inalienable attribute of a ruler - matched her exceptional intelligence and sensitivity. As she endowed the Lithuanian duke with royal power she also lent splendor to all of Jagiełło's wives. Jagiełło took care of the Jasna Góra picture associated with Hedwig and by the same token reinforced glory and prestige of his Royal House. Thanks to the painstaking renovation several original elements of the picture were preserved: silhouette, big nimbus, the hieratic iconic pattern, scars on the face, gestures of the hand, coatfolds. It stands to reason that the present appearance of Holy Mary's face is due to a Ruthenian master who was renovating the picture in Cracow in 1431-1434. The countenance he painted was devoid of armenoid traits that were characteristic of icons - big eyes, soft, round shape of the cheeks. From the anthropological point of view Holy Mary's visage is closer to the Mediterranean type. An unknown artist who learned his craft in a non--Mediterranean culture and surroundings wanted to show off his skill in the Sienese mode of painting - at that time in vogue all over Europe. It is possible that in southern Poland he became acquainted with frescoes or even pictures fashioned in the Italian style. Mary's face acquires certain features of Mediterranean idealization: narrow eyes and a wisp of hair falling along the cheek, which slightly softened the expression of the scarred visage. The eyes, however, were set straight and not aslant as it was in the case with Siena masters. The face exhibits certain individual traits: a long wide-nostril nose and a wide filtrum. As a result, the picture is stylistically incongruous, which makes its classification so difficult. All the above considerations prove that the hypothesis about the Italian origin of the picture, which has been put forward by a number of scholars, is untenable⁴.

³ This was first noticed by anthropologist prof. K. Kaczanowski to whom I am grateful for the consultation.

⁴ It has been done by J. Fijałek, M. Sokołowski, W. Podlacha, F. Kopera, S. Tomkowicz, K. Pieradzka, H. Weidhass, B. Rothermund, E. Śnieżyńska-Stolot. The relevant literature is summarized in: E. Śnieżyńska-Stolot: *The origin, style and history, op. cit.*, p. 7–8.

In the course of the renovation a goldsmith of Cracow made a silver 'basma' with engraved scenes depicting the act of Salvation and Redemption and directly referring to the life and deeds of King Jagiełło. It was then that new nimbuses came into being as well (fig. 6). The task of the renovation was presumably accomplished by the painters from Ruthenia who made the frescoes for Jagiello⁵. The King owed his interest in the Orthodox Church painting to the atmosphere prevailing at the court of his mother (princess Juliana of Tver) in Vilna, which was shaped by strong Ruthenian influences. Ladislas Jagiełło protected the 'artels' which came from the neighbouring Orthodox Church lands and decorated Roman Catholic churches, chapels or even the royal bedroom with cycles of paintings. Of the ten items mentioned in historical sources only three are extant in Wiślica. Sandomierz and in the chapel of the Lublin castle. Sonka Holszańka, the fourth wife of Jagiełło, was brought up in the Orthodox Faith. Her influence on the King must have been considerable since she gave birth to the long expected heir to the throne. Supported by powerful Oleśnicki she conducted a policy striving at securing the throne for her sons.

In Europe, where he was known under the name of New Constantine, Jagiełło was famous after he had introduced the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania (1387 and 1413) and Ruthenia (1418) striving at the unity of both the lands and the churches. Nothing is known about works of art from Western Europe which would bear witness to the piety of the King. Ruthenian icons were more akin to the taste of the Lithuanian baptized only at the age of 36 than were Italian pictures. We are led to this conclusion by the fact that Jagiełło financed Ruthenian paintings. It has been suggested before that they emphasized the equal rights of the two denominations in the country ruled by King Jagiello. Presumably, the King wanted to exploit the renovation of the Jasna Góra image for political and dynastic purposes. This picture still functions as an icon in the national consciousness. At that time in Poland differences between Roman Catholic and Orthodox cults were negligible. In spite of a formal separation in the XI century, the Churches of the West and the East were aware of their common origin and of a long common history. The issue of reunion was incessantly brought up. The two churches were very close by virtue of the common Slavic-Byzantine culture.

Two scars carved on the right cheek and filled with red print are a very important feature of the Jasna Góra image. They come from the original

⁵ The picture is perceived in this manner by the public and numerous scholars writing on the subject. For example A. Rogow, *Ikona Matki Boskiej Częstochowskiej jako świadectwo związków bizantyjsko-rusko-polskich* (The icon Our Lady of Częstochowa as a witness in links between Poland, Russia, and Byzantium), [in:] 'Znak', 1976, XXVIII, No. 4, p. 509 – 516. See also E. Ch. Sultner: *Ikonen und Kult*, [in:] *Kunst der Ostkirche*, *Ikonen*, *Handschriften*, *Kultgeräte*. Stift Herzogenburg, Ausstellung des Landes Niederösterreich. 7 Mai – 30 October 1977. Herzogenburg 1977, p. 43.

picture and due to their exceptional rarity of appearance they allow us to indicate the artistic origin of the picture. Such scars are also present in two icons at the Athos mountain. Scars were carved and clothed blood painted on the right cheek of Portaitissa from Iwiron and Panaglia Esphaganani. Scars on the cheek of the Holy Virgin of Jasna Góra indicate that originally it was an icon created in the artistic circles associated with Athos⁶. From there it arrived to Hungary and Jasna Góra. The Byzantine icons the Anjou kings kept at the court in Buda met the same needs as other Italo-Byzantine images of Mary: they guaranteed prosperity and a successful reign. The three icons mentioned above reflect the legend about wounds inflicted upon a sacred image by an infidel7. As well-known legend concerned a blasphemous damage done to one of the icons from Athos in the times of Emperor Leon III (the first half of the 8th century). This tale could have been known in Cracow. Throughout the XIV and the XV century Athos had numerous contacts with the world. The sacred Mountain was visited for longer or shorter periods of time by monks from Slavonic Europe: archbishops Grzegorz Camblak and Cyprian among them.

The legends about wounds inflicted upon a picture by an infidel originated in Byzantine already in preiconoclastic times. This early Byzantine heritage spread widely in Western Europe in the XIIIth century: the age of great heresies although it was recorded much earlier in St. Martin of Tours' writings. The infidels varied depending on the epoch and needs: they were Jews, Saracens, Hussites, Turks, adherents of Luther. The popularity of the tales about the infidel's blasphemous deed increased in the folk piety of the XV century. In Neukirche near Heiliger Blut close to the Bavarian-Czech border a wooden sculpture of Virgin Mary with Infant Jesus dating from that period is to be found. A Hussite standing nearby inflicts a sabre wound on the Virgin's head. At that time also in the hamlet situated in Valle Vigezzo in Piemont Mary painted on the outer church wall started to bleed when struck by an infidel. This cruel deed made the image come miraculous-

⁶ This artistic circle was pointed out by a heated discussion has been going on T. Mroczko, B. Dąb, Gotyckie Hodegetrie polskie (The Gothic Hodegetria from Poland), [in:] Średniowiecze. Studia o kulturze (The Middle Ages. Studies in culture), t. III, Warszawa 1966, p. 18–32; E. Śnieżyńska-Stolot, The origin, style and history, op. cit., p. 16–23, concerning the origin of the picture. Roughly three points of views prevail: opting for the Italian, Eastern or Central Europe an origine of the picture. Summary in: E. Śnieżyńska-Stolot, The origin, style and history, op. cit., p. 7–8.

 $^{^7}$ The problem is discussed at great length by L. Kretzenbacher, Das verletzte Kultbild. Voraussetzungen, Zeitschichten und Aussagewandel eines abendländischen Legendentypus. Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Sitzungsberichte 1977, I, München 1977, p. 8–117, particularly p. 8, p. 29–31, p. 69–73. I am grateful to dr hab. Barbara Dąb-Kalinowska for referring me to this very important source and for her valuable comments.

⁸ This paragraph is based on Kretzenbacher, op. cit., p. 58-99.

ly to life. Such sacred sculptures and images became the pilgrimage and cult centre all over Europe from the Balkans and the Alps to Ruthenia. The miraculous pictures always had an unusual origin: they were painted by St. Luke or they emerged from the sea. They invariably brought salvation to nations and states. All of them, although of supernatural origin, found a firm place in real historical situations. Długosz, who informs us about the attack at Jasna Góra, presumably repeated those vivid tales. In its social function the icon of the Holy Virgin at Jasna Góra displays numerous affinities with the icon of the Holy Virgin of Smoleńsk. The latter found its way from Byzantium to Lvov. Nowadays it is to be found in the Dominican Church in Gdańsk. This icon, like that of Jasna Góra, constitutes a national palladium.

In Jagiełło's times the Eastern cult of Mary met with that growing in Western Europe throughout the XIV and XV century. The loca sacra associated with this cult, which were created in Cracow at that time, bear witness to the folk piety widely spreading in our country at the turn of the XVI century. The cult of miraculous images was the most spectacular form of this social and religious phenomenon¹⁰. Folk religion converged with the cult of the Holy Virgin popular with emperors and kings. Legends concerned with the miraculous images of Mary were current in Byzantium and in Ruthenia and emperors were known for remarkable devotion to them. Mary's protection guaranteed the emperor's success and most churches in Constantinopole were dedicated to the Holy Virgin. Jagiełło, the 'New Constantine', became, due to the House of Anjou, heir to imperial Byzantine tradition. He originated the cult of Holy Virgin in Poland, which lasts till the present day. The direction which the social functioning of Jasna Góra picture took nicely exemplifies the exploitation of the works of art for dynastic and political purposes. Turning an icon into an object of the Roman Catholic cult became an artistic symbol of the unity of churches in the Polish--Lithuanian Commonwealth governed by King Jagiełło. It was at that time, when the idea of union was being questioned after the convention in Łuck (the crisis lasted till the real union in Lublin or even later) that the efforts of those who, like Jagiełło, Świdrygiełło and Witold (dead at that time) strove towards the union of the church and the state, materialized. In 1434 the

⁹ B. Dąb-Kalinowska, Ikona Matki Boskiej Smoleńskiej w kościele dominikanów w Gdańsku. Problem kultu i funkcji (The icon of the holy Virgin of Smoleńsk in the Dominican church in Gdańsk. The question of cult and function), [in:] Problemy interpretacji dziela sztuki i jego funkcji społecznej (The problems of the interpretation and social function of works of art), ed. K. Kalinowski, Poznań 1980, p. 131–136 (Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Seria Historii Sztuki, nr 10).

¹⁰ A. Witkowska, Kulty patnicze piętnastowiecznego Krakowa. Z badań nad miejską kulturą religijną. (The pilgrim cults of Cracow in the XV-th century. Studies of urban religious culture), Lublin 1984, p. 110.

Pope sent a safe conduct to the metropolitan bishop of Kiev, whom he wanted to receive in person.

Towards the end of his life the old king was guided primarily by the reason of state but also perhaps by an intimate intention of uniting the universal with the particular. In his life Roman Catholicism and the Orthodox faith were represented by his first and his last wife. Długosz says that the King never parted with a gift from Hedwig: a ring on which a double letter M was engraved and which was held to symbolize two Christian models of life: vita activa (Martha) and vita contemplativa (Mary). Jagiełło may have believed that Hedwig personified contemplative Mary while Sonka — the mother of his heir — stood for resourceful Martha. The Jagiellonian idea of equality of the two denominations and cultures — the expression of the celebrated Misterium Caritatis as the basis of the public life was brough to bear on the Jasna Góra picture. Our Lady of Częstochowa, associated with the honoured and beloved queen Hedwig was (in the middle of the XVI century) declared the queen of Poland.

Translated by Adam Wójcicki