



Two events that took place as far back as the fourteenth century underlay the specific social and cultural phenomena in Poland between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. The first was the extinction of the royal line of the Piast dynasty with the death of King Casimir the Great in 1370. Casimir's successors no longer had the position of hereditary monarchs, so in order to strengthen their rule they were compelled to solicit support from the *szlachta*, a group encompassing the notions of western nobility and gentry. This political process, inaugurated in 1374 by King Louis of Anjou, resulted in a series of legislative acts of 1496–1505 that ensured the gentry full political power and unprecedented economic and fiscal privileges. The process of formation of a commonwealth of the gentry was solidified by the introduction of the principle of the free election of a king, after the Jagiellon dynasty became extinct in 1572. Thenceforth every member of the Polish gentry had the right not only to choose his king but also to offer himself as a candidate for the crown.

The second event of crucial importance was the marriage of Hedvige of Anjou, successor to the Polish crown, to Jagiello, grand duke of Lithuania, in 1386, thereby concluding a political union of the two states. The hitherto pagan Lithuania, a true eastern European power, a warlike neighbor continually attacking the Polish frontiers, was thus to be incorporated with Poland and Christianized. The union with Lithuania switched the country's life to another track and determined its entirely new political, economic, and cultural prospects.

Until the mid-fourteenth century Poland had been a state of medium size, nationally homogeneous, oriented westward in its culture and economy. The eastern frontier of the state also marked the limits of the Latin Christian world, beyond which lay Orthodox Russia and pagan Lithuania. The intensity of the changes is best illustrated on the map. In 1300 Poland, still divided into provincial principalities, occupied around 200,000 square kilometers (77,000 square miles), but by 1400 the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian state had increased more than three times.

The union with Lithuania was tantamount to turning a homogeneous nation into a multinational state and to changing Poland's orientation from West to East. Until as late as the end of the eighteenth century the direction of the country's development was determined by the immensity of its territory with a population of mixed national, religious, and cultural character and by the gradually increasing domination of the gentry. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the citizens of the Commonwealth who enjoyed full rights were convinced that its political system was ideal and permanent. The government was in the hands of the gentry embodying all virtues, representing a uniform cultural model based on the Jesuit educational system and deeply pervaded with baroque expression in language, literature, and art. Catholicism with its different rites was a dominant religion. Those professing other religions were tolerated, but Protestants were suspected of sympathizing with hostile Sweden, while some of the Orthodox groups were more and more clearly exponents of the political interests of Russia. The governmental system, advantageous to relatively numerous classes of the population, worked as long as Poland succeeded in maintaining more or less peaceful relations with her neighbors and enjoyed economic prosperity. However, around the middle of the seventeenth century it proved vulnerable to internal crises and invasions, and the end of the eighteenth century saw its final breakdown and the loss of independence.

POLISH
BAROQUE
ART
IN ITS SOCIAL AND
RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

JAN K. OSTROWSKI



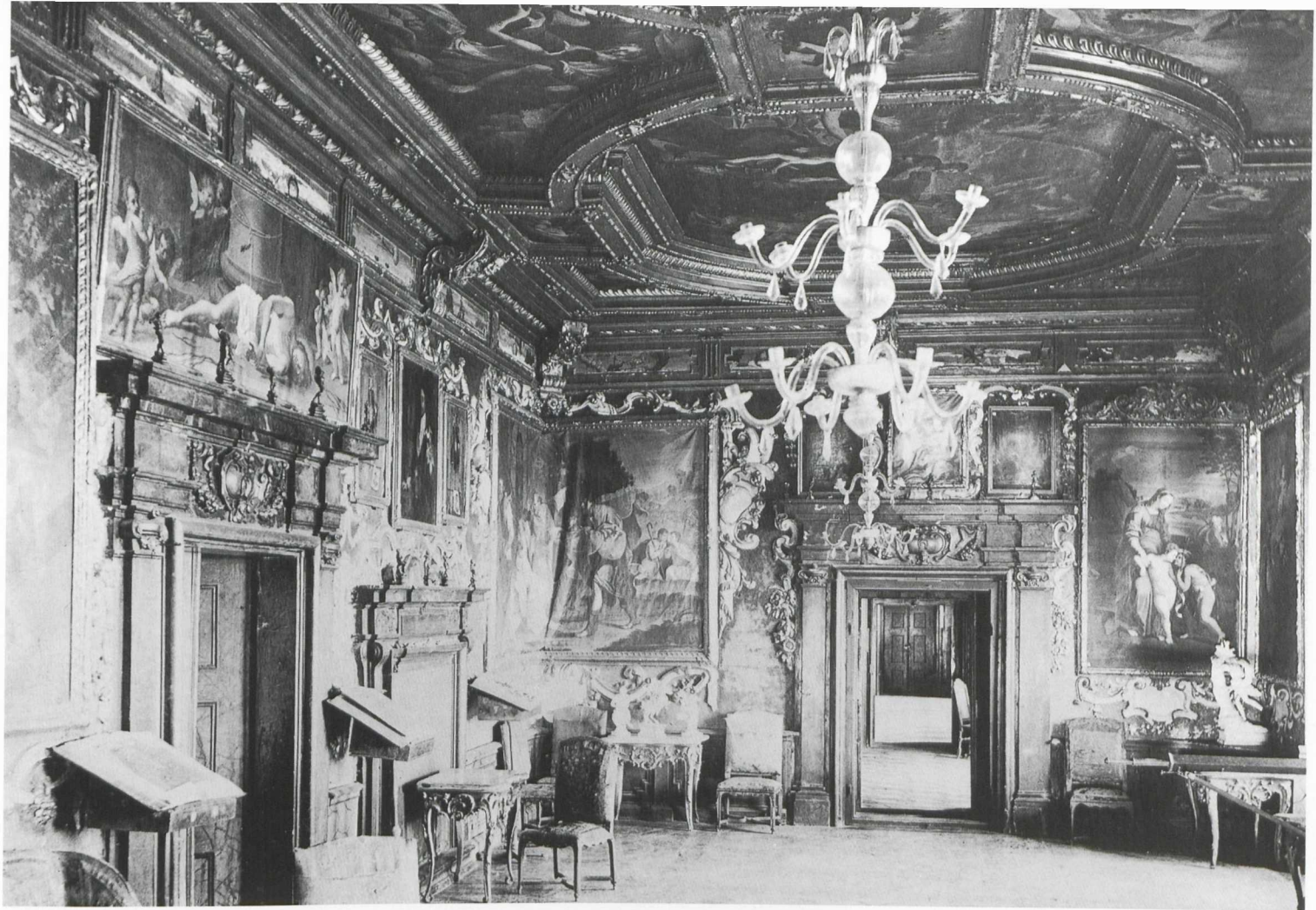
1. Augustyn Locci, *Wilanów Palace*, 1677–96, extended by Giovanni Spazio and Johann Sigmund Deybel, 1722–33

This suburban residence of King John III Sobieski was gradually developed from a modest manor house to a baroque palace.

In the light of its historical experience, a severe judgment is generally passed on the legacy of the Polish Commonwealth. Nevertheless, this does not alter the fact that the social and religious specificity of Poland from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries left its strong stamp on the country's culture and art. It is mainly this specificity, and not the originality of stylistic solutions, that determines the individual character of its culture and art.

Art of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries in Poland, as in fact of almost everywhere in Europe at that time, constituted a decorative setting in various spheres of life, a means of social communication, and a determinant of prestige on a par with sumptuous costume or the number of servants. He who commissioned a work of art had the upper hand over the artist, who in most cases contented himself with the humble position of an artisan. The output of this time is best treated as a unique historical record, revealing long-forgotten meanings and human attitudes. The gentry, a social class with numerous and affluent members, conscious of its distinct character, created an elaborate system of customs. This system embraced all spheres of life, regulating family, social, and political relations as well as economic activity and the way of waging war and, finally, a man's attitude toward transcendence, the manner of practicing religion, and forms of devotion. Some of these phenomena are best documented by contemporaneous works of art.

A member of the Polish gentry of this time, irrespective of his affluence or status in social hierarchy, spent most of his time in the countryside. The declining towns were an alien milieu for him, and the court of elected kings did not hold as much attraction for him as had the great courts of absolute monarchs. If he left his estate or the immediate neighborhood, it had to be for a clearly defined reason such as a military campaign, participation in the local assemblies of nobility, the *Sejm*, or a session of the Tribunal, the election of the new king, sale of grain in Gdańsk, a pilgrimage to a holy place, or a family celebration. His attachment to his home and his own country was not necessarily



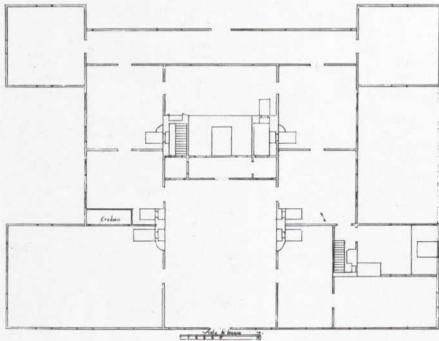
tantamount to backwardness or isolation, as the above-mentioned occasions afforded a good many contacts with the world, and a large proportion of the sons of the gentry were educated in various schools at home and abroad.

The setting for a gentleman's life was his country residence. Its size and form were a direct function of his wealth and importance, but it was always the center of his land that constituted his basis of living. Until the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the residences of the magnate elite, the richest and most powerful members of the gentry, usually had a form derived from medieval castles, these being several-winged layouts with inner courtyards in a Renaissance or mannerist mantle. With the development of artillery the castle walls lost their function of the main line of defense. Therefore the seventeenth century saw the predominance of a new type of residence, a palace forming a compact block surrounded by bastion fortifications. Finally, in the eighteenth century open layouts on a horseshoe plan prevailed (fig. 1). Apart from some local differences, most magnates' residences represented the types well known in other central European countries, frequently of clear Italian or French provenance.

Such a residence was a microcosm accommodating several hundred people, and with court troops, sometimes several thousand. The degree of its magnificence depended on the owner's affluence. Every castle or palace was filled with richly decorated weapons, precious vessels, and textiles brought from western Europe (Flemish and Dutch tapestries enjoying great popularity) and from the Islamic East. In the interiors decorative art usually took precedence over painting, although numerous inventories of palace picture galleries document several hundred paintings said to include works by great masters. The best-known example of this kind is the eighteenth-century gallery of the Rzewuski family at Podhorce, consisting of more than five hundred pictures (fig. 2). Close examination reveals that the early attributions to the masters were generally optimistic, since the paintings mentioned in the archives as works by Leonardo, Raphael, and Rembrandt are in most cases copies. A fully conscious practice of collecting pictures came with the Enlightenment in the second half of the eighteenth century.

2. Podhorce Palace, *Golden Room*, c. 1640, redecorated c. 1750

The famous Koniecpolski later Rzewuski and Sanguszko palace in Podhorce had been the best preserved Polish baroque residence until World War I. This 1880 photograph shows one of the state rooms.



3. Tylman van Gameren, *Plan of a Wooden Manor House*, c. 1670–80. University Library, Warsaw

During the seventeenth century a geometrical ground plan of Palladian villas was adapted to Polish residential architecture and fully incorporated into the Polish national tradition.

Palaces of the magnates formed only a small proportion of the innumerable Polish country houses, while the particularities of a gentleman's life, relating to economy and customs, were much more markedly reflected on lower rungs of the social ladder. The home of a gentleman, whether a wealthy owner of villages or a *szarak* working his field with his hands, was called a manor house. Initially this term referred not only to a dwelling proper but also to the entire homestead that functioned as the center of administration of the landed estate. It is hard to trace the early genealogy of the Polish country residence. Some masonry manor houses that continue the medieval type of dwelling tower date from the sixteenth century. They are usually two-storied and represent a simple spatial arrangement of no more than two or three rooms at each level. As a rule they functioned exclusively as the dwellings of the proprietors' families and, in the event of the threat of attack, as the last bulwark of defense. The accommodation for the servants as well as the kitchens, baths, and storerooms were located in separate, usually wooden buildings, the whole built-up area being enclosed by simple fortifications consisting of a palisade and possibly an earthen rampart and a moat.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century the process of integrating the hitherto scattered parts of a manor house within a single building had commenced. This was connected with the patriarchal lifestyle of the landed proprietor's family, a desire for comfort, and relinquishment of defenses that at least in the central regions of the country were markedly less needed. Those spacious manor houses of the new type seemed to exhibit a technological setback in comparison with a several-story masonry Renaissance manor. They were for the most part built of timber, the upper story usually being unused except for less important rooms in the attic. The reasons for these preferences, ensuing from the economic and social realities of the life of the landed gentry, may be found in contemporary writings. The models of spatial solutions were borrowed from Renaissance architectural treatises, above all from Serlio and Palladio. The layout that won the greatest popularity comprised an entrance hall on an axis with symmetrically arranged rooms on either side, ensuring the possibility of three to a dozen-odd rooms within a compact rectangular block, frequently enriched by angle alcoves (fig. 3). In this way the typical plan of a northern Italian, Palladian villa was implemented in countless structures all over the Commonwealth (fig. 4). Gradually adopted by ever-wider social groups, in the first half of the twentieth century this plan was still encountered in peasant houses in numerous regions of the country.

Particular parts of a manor house differed from one another in character, each fulfilling its specific function. The interior was divided into the men's section, which was open, assigned to receiving guests, and the women's rooms, more intimate, intended for housework and bringing up children. The furnishings of the residence were modest, this frequently contrasting with sumptuous clothes and military equipment. Not until the eighteenth century does literature record a quick evolution toward comfort or luxury. The hall was usually hung with weapons and trophies of the chase. The largest and most stately chamber was the dining room, where meals were eaten and meetings held. It was almost obligatorily decorated with family portraits. The plain wooden walls encouraged their being covered with textiles such as tapestries, carpets, or other hangings, this being still generally practiced in Polish homes today. The exterior of manor houses gradually acquired baroque features borrowed from monumental architecture. In the neoclassical period its obligatory element was a columned portico, which became a truly emblematic mark of a manor house. Even after the Second World



4. *Manor House at Ożarów, 1757*

This is a typical example of a baroque residence of a modest gentleman, conceived after the Palladian model.

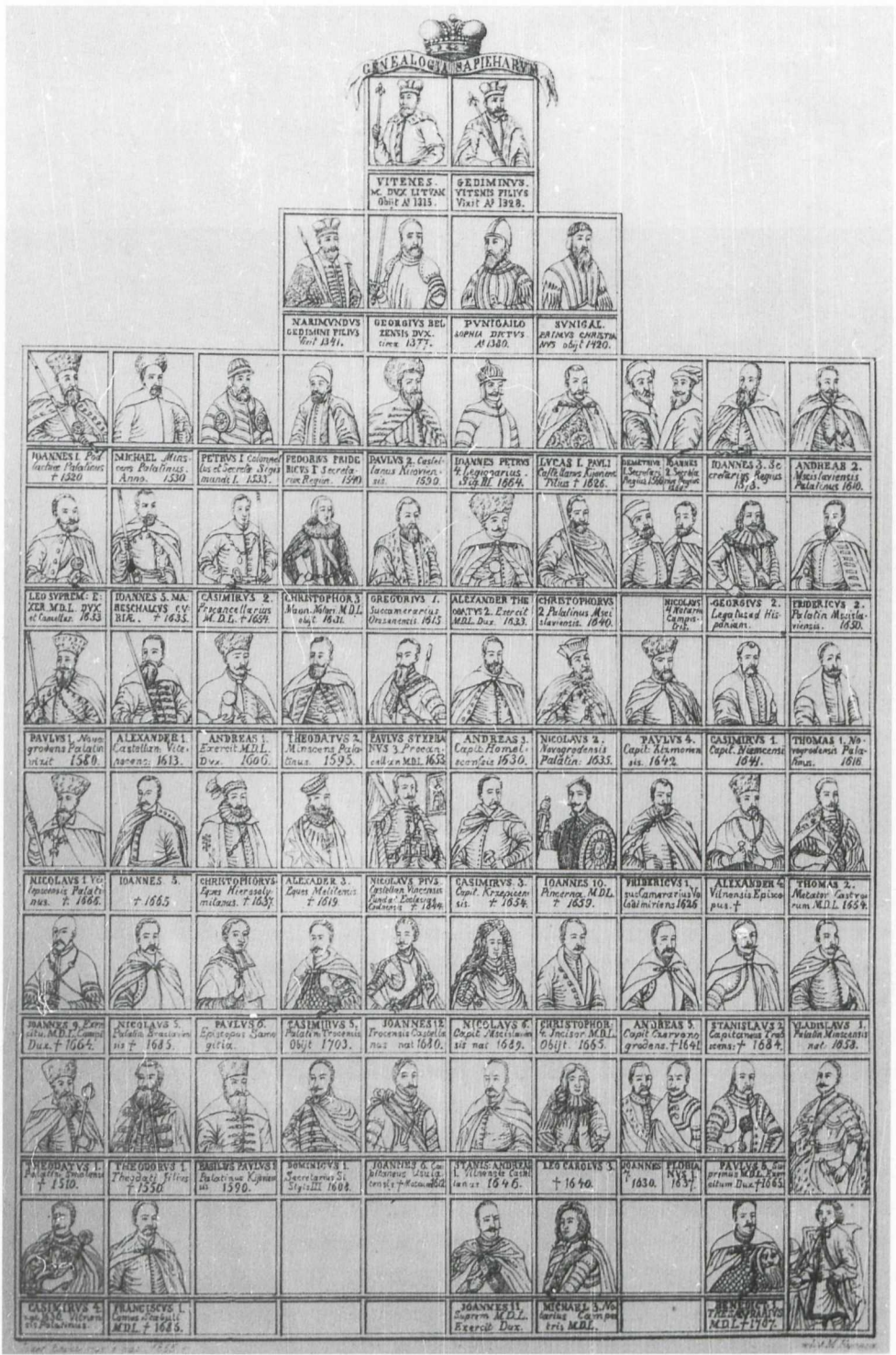
War, in some regions such porticoes were still used to distinguish the houses of the minor gentry, treasuring its ancestry, from those of its peasant neighbors.

A manor house, inhabited by several generations of a family and by numerous servants, constituted a veritable microcosm of the country life of the gentry. Its advantages and attractions were praised at length in baroque literature, and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it was at the center of the myth of the golden age of the gentry. Until the Second World War the Polish intelligentsia, in a marked proportion descended from the impoverished gentry, did not stop dreaming about the return from the town to the country, from a small flat to a spacious manor house in which everyone and everything was in the right, time-honored place. Financial success achieved by an industrialist, lawyer, writer, or artist was as a rule followed by the purchase of a country house in which the traditions of the landed gentry were consciously cultivated. Before the First World War and in the inter-war period this nostalgia found expression in a widespread vogue for urban or suburban villas stylized as baroque or neoclassical manor houses. This in fact was not only a manifestation of a sentimental longing but also of a search for a "national" style in art, demanded by the national consciousness developed by romanticism. Quite unexpectedly this phenomenon has revived in the last few years, albeit devoid of the theoretical foundation that was so characteristic of the early twentieth century. Polish post-modernism again readily refers to the Old Polish manor house, seeing in it one of the sources of overcoming the vulgarity and monotony of architecture determined by modern technology alone.

One of the most frequent occasions for a gentleman in the baroque period to come into contact with the visual arts was to commission a portrait of himself, of members of his family, or of his ancestors. However, the urge to create such pictures, except to some extent for graphic works, had nothing in common with the need for perpetuating a fleeting moment. In the baroque era a portrait was conceived as a monumental work

5. Princes Sapieha Gallery of Family Portraits, formerly in the church at Kodeń, after a 19th-century lithograph

This arrangement of true and fantastic family portraits was painted in a short period c. 1720 and occupied a wall in the family chapel.



expected to last forever as a document not only of the model's appearance but, in much greater measure, of his or her status and merit. It is probably not mere chance that in Polish writings of that epoch there are no descriptions of anyone sitting for a portrait, while they are so numerous in western European sources; on the other hand, there are references to the painting of portraits of the deceased both from nature, which was connected with the requirements of the funerary ceremonial, and on the basis of the earlier likenesses supplied to the artist as well as the relatives' instructions. This of course does not mean that no importance was attached to facial resemblance. On the contrary, one of the primary qualities of Old Polish portraiture is its realism, at times even physiognomical verism, so remote from the idealizing manner adopted by most western artists. As important as the model's features was the social code, encompassing



the format of a canvas, the pose, as well as surroundings, costume, and attributes. Baroque portraits very often bear coats of arms and inscriptions (or at least the initials of the model's surname and office), facilitating identification and dating of the works of art. Following these conventions sufficed for portraying someone long dead whose features were not known to anyone. Numerous galleries of ancestors abound in "portraits" of this kind, mass-produced to adorn the hall of a magnate's palace or the dining room of a manor house. Such painted genealogies, in which reliable documentation mixed with fantasy and fiction, could number from a few paintings up to scores of them. Sometimes they were executed within a short period by order of one person, this being exemplified by the Sapieha gallery in the family chapel at Kodeń (fig. 5). The opposite tendency is represented by the gallery of the princes Radziwiłł (fig. 6), which was built up from the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries according to a consistently applied scheme of composition and ideas.

Portraiture, treated as an important means of communication within a close-knit social group, generated a rich symbolic language that is largely forgotten today. Without referring to contemporary sources, one would not understand that the bare arm of Hetman (commander-in-chief) John Sobieski (not yet a king) in his equestrian portrait denotes his rank of officer (fig. 7), or that the atypical "Caucasian manner" of girding

6. Elżbieta Kiszka, born Princess Radziwiłł, 1700–1750. Art Museum, Minsk

This portrait, with oval laurel frame, heraldic eagle, and inscriptions, belongs to the Princes Radziwiłł gallery, which was built after a uniform pattern from the 17th to the 20th centuries.

7. Hetman Jan Sobieski (*the Future King John III*), c. 1670. Palace Museum, Wilanów

A bare arm was a traditional distinction of an officer. This portrait is a rare document of this almost forgotten custom.

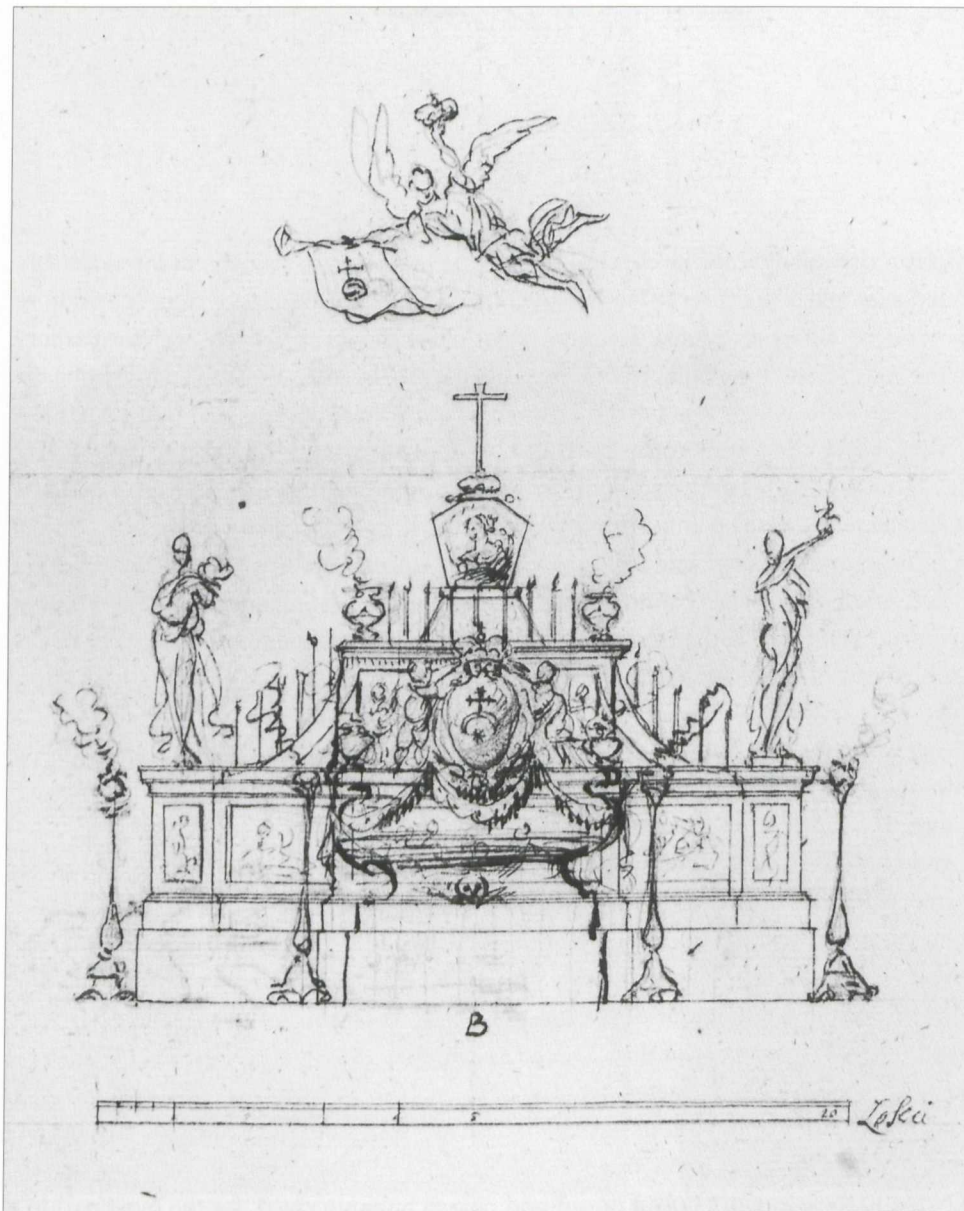


on Hetman Waclaw Rzewuski's saber (fig. 8) alludes to his participation in the Confederation of Radom in 1767, which caused his deportation to Russia and, in consequence, became his claim to glory as a patriotic martyr.

Portraits in the classical sense of the word, that is created exclusively for a commemorative-decorative purpose, are probably not the most numerous and surely not the most original ones among the extant Old Polish likenesses. The vast majority of sixteenth-century images of Poles are not paintings but tomb sculptures. The sepulchral monument to King Sigismund the Old in his funerary chapel at Cracow Cathedral, executed between 1529 and 1531, inaugurated the type of tomb that was to be imitated in hundreds of memorials until as late as the mid-seventeenth century. In them the deceased are as a rule represented reclining as if in slumber, clad in full-plate armor. In the reign of Sigismund the Old this kind of armor was still in use, but undoubtedly such costly and, with time, less useful gear was not worn by all of those knights sleeping on the tombs in Polish churches (fig. 9). That it functioned as an attribute of a knight identified with a *Miles Christianus*, and an attribute closely connected with a tomb at that, is best illustrated by the fact that at the same time painted portraits produced for the same clientele followed entirely different conventions.

A characteristic type of Old Polish portrait evolved in the second half of the sixteenth century, of later origin than the type of memorial with an armored effigy but in the period when the latter was still very popular. Although most painted portraits were also strongly conventionalized, for about a hundred years armor appeared in them only sporadically, mainly in royal likenesses and in archaized ones of long-dead ancestors. It does not mean that in those portraits members of the gentry relinquished heroization or emphasis on their knighthood. This role was played by the saber, an inseparable accessory, by signs of military rank such as different kinds of war maces, and by a national costume treated as a kind of military uniform. Especially great importance was attached to this last association. The national garb was obligatory for hetmans, the power of its military-patriotic connotations being evidenced by an episode from the Cossack war of 1649. During the battle of Zborów, King John Casimir, who usually followed a foreign fashion, dressed up in Polish costume, trying with this gesture of solidarity to stop the panic that spread in the army.

The situation did not change until the last quarter of the seventeenth century. In that period armor appeared in tomb sculpture only occasionally, whereas it materialized



8. *Hetman Waclaw Rzewuski, 1773–74.* National Museum, Warsaw

The painting is composed almost exclusively of iconographic concepts pointing to the high rank and pretended patriotic merits of the hetman. Rzewuski's national dress is the uniform of the Order of the White Eagle. The war mace, the arms, and the tents in the background stress his function of a military commander. The unusual "Caucasian" way of hanging his saber is an allusion to his role in the Radom confederation of 1767, and his beard, anachronistic at that time, recalls his suffering in a Russian prison.

9. Hanus Pfister, *Sarcophagus of Mikotaj Sieniawski (d. 1636).* Wawel Royal Castle, Cracow

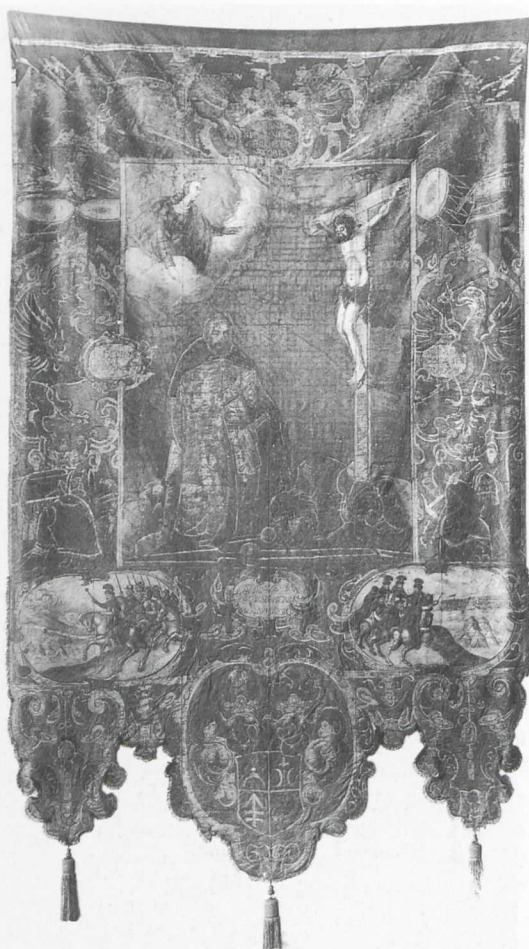
The type of a lying tomb figure in a sleeping attitude, set about 1530 by Bartolomeo Berrecci, was repeated in hundreds of imitations for about 100 years. The same solution was used in this unusual tin sarcophagus. Most such sleeping warriors had probably never used the anachronistic plate armor, which rather played the role of a traditional attribute of a nobleman.

10. Tylman van Gameren, *Design for Princess Gryzelda Wisniowiecka's castrum doloris, 1672.* University Library, Warsaw

The finest artists were commissioned to design and make decorations for funeral ceremonies. The design shows precisely the place of a coffin portrait in the composition of a *castrum doloris*.

with an increasing frequency in portraiture, attaining its apogee in the eighteenth century. Considering the fact that in the majority of cases the models wore western European plate armor, which had gone out of use about a hundred years before at the least, one can appraise the power of convention and the scale of demand for a fiction confirming the knightly status of the gentry, the more so as in that period Poland was a country almost completely demilitarized.

In addition to recumbent figures, sepulchral art created a good many other types of portraits of the deceased, painted and sculptured. Most have their counterparts in other countries, but two types are specific to Poland. One is the coffin portrait, which was fixed to a shorter side of the coffin itself and therefore well seen by all participants in the funeral (fig. 10 and cats. 99, 100, 102). After the ceremony these portraits were hung in churches, occasionally being set in stone or wooden epitaph tablets. The function of such a portrait determined its form. It was usually painted on a hexagonal or octagonal metal plate. The rendering was reduced to a bust or head, great emphasis being laid on the poignant realism of the physiognomy, which produced the effect of the physical presence of the person during the obsequies. At the same time the defunct represented by a portrait was the addressee of panegyric rhetoric, an obligatory element of the ceremony. Researchers see the origins of coffin portraiture in the 1586 likeness of Stephen Batory, painted on a metal plate which, however, was not yet of the characteristic shape.



11. *Tomb Banner of Jan Działyński (d. 1643)*. Parish Church, Nowe Miasto Lubawskie

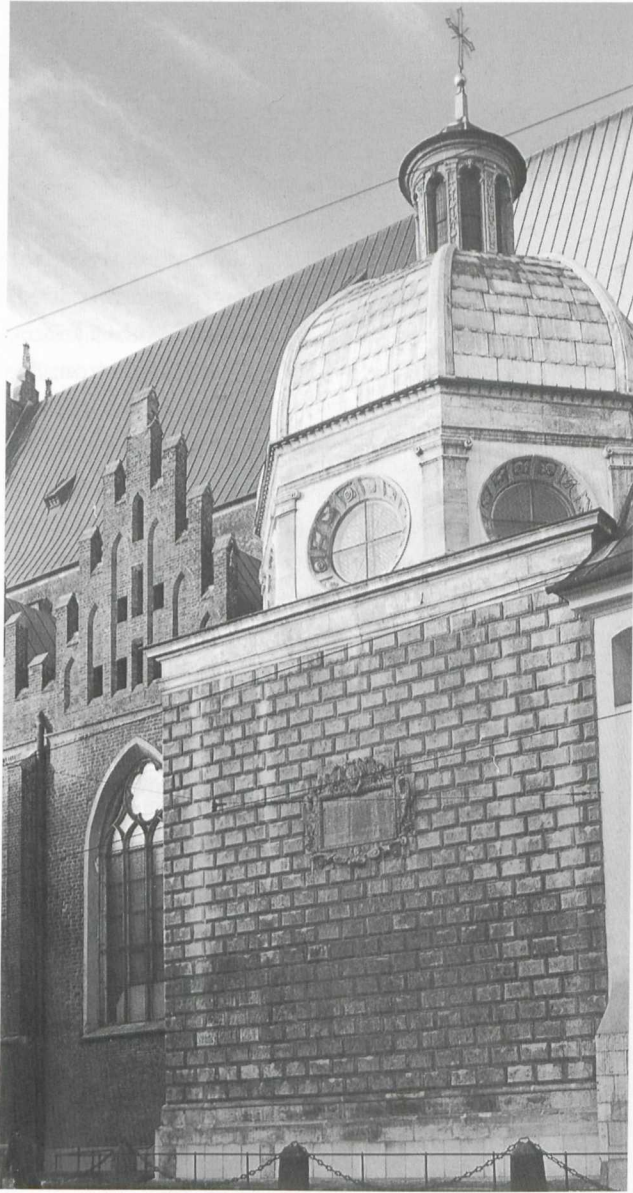
This huge banner is a kind of funeral monument, considered as particularly suitable for a soldier and in the 17th century very popular in Poland.

A coffin portrait attained its classical form in the seventeenth century, its latest reliably dated example being from 1814. The functional and formal origins of coffin portraiture have not been fully elucidated. This type of portrait is known exclusively from the territory of the Polish Commonwealth, where it was used in all Christian rites. It is worth noting the readiness with which this typical Polish custom was adopted by immigrants, as is evidenced by numerous coffin portraits of people bearing foreign names.

Similar customs and traditions lay at the origin of tomb banners (fig. 11). Their main element was the painted likeness of a deceased person, usually represented in the pose of an orant, in principle not unlike portraits in epitaphs or votive pictures of other types. Additionally, such banners carried devotional representations, knightly attributes, armorial bearings, and inscriptions. Most banners were made of purple damask, emblematic of the blood shed for the faith and mother country. It was chiefly soldiers who were entitled to banners of this kind, although there are also examples of their being made for clergymen, women, or even children. They were perhaps used during funeral ceremonies but were primarily intended as specific knightly epitaphs to be hung in a church. At times they replaced tombs of durable material or were suspended next to stone monuments. In some cases they were accompanied by suits of armor and other elements of military equipment belonging to the deceased. The first dependable references to tomb banners date from the early sixteenth century, and the last example from the heartland of Poland is dedicated to a gentleman who died in 1681. The abandonment of this original custom may have been connected with the unfavorable attitude of the Counter-Reformation Church toward the presence of secular elements inside sacred buildings.

It is evident from various sources that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries hundreds or perhaps even thousands of tomb banners hung in Polish churches. Owing to their fragility only a dozen-odd objects have survived, for the most part in a poor state of preservation. In this case, too, there is every indication that the idea of a specific knightly monument in the form of a banner was conceived in Poland. From there it probably found its way to some neighboring territories, as such banners are known from Spisz (Zips) and Orava, in those days both belonging to Hungary, as well as from Silesia and above all from East Prussia. The Prussian nobility, descendants of the Teutonic Knights, maintaining close relations with Poland, generally adopted the custom of making tomb banners and seem to have practiced it for another fifty years or so after it had died out in Poland. However, the pragmatic Germans replaced silk with the incomparably more durable copper plate.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the period of triumphant Catholicism in the Polish Commonwealth. Baroque piety, usually more ostentatious than spiritually or intellectually profound, gave rise to a multitude of splendid religious foundations, on the one hand treated as a means of meriting eternal life and on the other as a determinant of worldly prestige (fig. 12). While every place except for the largest towns had one parish church, the number of monasteries was as a rule unlimited. Hence the two centuries witnessed innumerable foundings of monasteries. Some magnate families were patrons of particular orders, endowing a dozen or more of these institutions. Surprisingly, monumental structures were also established by persons of high social and financial standing but far below the narrow elite. These facts give some idea of the scale of the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a relatively small group, at the same time clearly attesting to that group's preferences in managing their financial surpluses.



A desire to commemorate the founders of churches led to various initiatives of symbolic character, in some of which an ostentatious Christian humility was accompanied by risky baroque concepts and unbridled pride. Michał Kazimierz Pac, who died in 1682, ordered that his body be buried under the threshold of the Church of Saints Peter and Paul, founded by him in Vilnius (Wilno), but on the facade had almost blasphemous words placed, joining the family name with the titles of the Virgin Mary (*"Regina pacis funda nos in pace"*). The founders' coats of arms on the façades, portals, and vaults were practically a rule, but the Potocki family went so far as to give the form of their armorial sign to the crosses crowning churches. Similarly, Bishop Andrzej Stanisław Załuski placed a lamb, his family's heraldic figure, at the top of his chapel in Cracow Cathedral (fig. 13). There is even a church built on a plan resembling an arrow, the chief motif of the arms of the Kalinowski family.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Polish church architecture was typologically and stylistically connected with the art of Italy and the countries of the Holy Roman Empire. A clearly local custom was reflected in the extremely popular type of central, domed chapel-mausoleum derived from the Renaissance Sigismund Chapel at the Cracow Cathedral.

The victory of the Counter-Reformation bore fruit in the form of the development of the cult of the Virgin Mary and the appearance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of dozens of miraculous images of the Mother of God. The veneration of those

12. Circle of Santi Gucci, *The Myszowski Family Burial Chapel*, 1603-14. Dominican Church, Cracow

King Sigismund's chapel at Cracow Cathedral, built by Bartolomeo Berrecci in 1517-33, was imitated by noble families and prominent clergymen for more than a century. The Myszowski Chapel is a fine interpretation of Berrecci's model in the mannerist stylistic language.

13. *Top of the Dome*, Chapel of Bishop Andrzej Stanisław Załuski, Cathedral, Cracow, after 1758

This unusual motif has a double meaning. The lamb alludes to the Eucharist and the Apocalypse but is also the figure of the bishop's coat of arms.

pictures and of other holy images found particular expression in their being adorned with crowns and in their total or partial covering with sheet silver, frequently gilded, lavishly decorated with relief and engraved designs, and sometimes also with jewels. The coronation of a picture, sanctioning its special cult, required permission from the highest Church authorities and was a great religious ceremony attended by hundreds of clergymen and thousands of the faithful. Such coronations took the form of a baroque spectacle of several-days' duration, with a splendid plastic and musical setting, military escort, gun salutes, and display of fireworks. In many cases the crown added to a picture was simply an attribute of the Virgin, to which she had been entitled in iconography since the Middle Ages. The remaining silver appliqué elements on the pictures were a kind of votive offering from the faithful in thanksgiving for divine favors. Numerous Polish cult images won popularity in the form resembling metal reliefs, owing to their silver covers, while their painted layer remained practically unknown. This concerns, among others, the miraculous image of Our Lady of Częstochowa (see cat. 73), whose original Byzantine-Gothic form has been widely popularized only in the last few decades. The origins of the practice of decorating pictures with metal covers are rather obscure. Surely the inspiration provided by the Orthodox Church was not without some bearing here, as its icons were adorned in a similar manner. Nevertheless, this was not a simple adoption of the eastern custom. The covers and appliqué adornments on the Polish pictures usually consist of numerous elements that were added to a painting at a later date. In contrast, the metal covers of Orthodox icons were wrought of one piece of metal and were frequently more important than the painting itself, which merely filled the openings left in them with the faces and hands of the holy persons.

New kinds of church services gave rise to artistic solutions hitherto unknown. In various places throughout the country there sprang monumental complexes of Calvary chapels used during the mysteries of the Holy Week and during some Marian feasts. A specific type of altar is connected with the Forty Hours Devotion. To the widespread custom of holding solemn processions should be ascribed the development of the feretory, a special kind of two-sided picture in a sumptuous frame adapted to being carried by the faithful (cat. 76). The custom of carrying effigies in processions is known in all Catholic countries, and feretories with pictures were an exclusive Polish specialty.

Funerals of members of the social elite were another example of liturgy accompanied by a spectacle with a magnificent artistic setting. Sometimes prepared for several months, they gave rise to unique types of works of art, some of which have already been mentioned, and frequently accounted for new overall arrangements of church interiors. Intended in principle as ephemeral decorations, many a time they lasted for several decades. These extant elements of the baroque *pompa funebris* (cat. 103) are a great rarity and a priceless document of the custom of a bygone era.

Among the most interesting artistic phenomena in Old Poland, excellently illustrating the national and religious relations that prevailed in it, should be ranked a specific convergence of the architectural forms and decoration of churches of different Christian denominations that took place during the baroque period, especially in the eighteenth century. The art of Protestant churches participated in this process to a relatively small degree, because as far back as the sixteenth century it had evolved its own iconographic-functional canon and was impervious to influences of the Catholic counteroffensive. Nonetheless, it is worth noting here the occurrence in Protestant art of typical "Sarmatian" phenomena, such as coffin portraits and tomb banners. The eastern Church was quite a

different case. Already in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries there existed a kind of osmosis between Byzantine-Ruthenian and western art. This is exemplified on the one hand by late-Gothic Orthodox churches in Lithuania (Synkowicze, Małomożejków, Nowogródek, Supraśl) and on the other by the paintings of Ruthenian artists, preserved to this day in Roman Catholic churches in Cracow, Lublin, Wiślica, and Sandomierz. Orthodox icons frequently found their way to Catholic churches. These phenomena well reflect the mutual relations of the two religious and cultural formations. The Orthodox Church was ready to avail itself of western achievements in the domain of architecture, whereas it adhered strictly to its rigid canons in painting and the iconographic and functional structure of a church interior. The Catholics accepted without greater objections Orthodox painting, whose iconography did not contain any elements alien to them, while the form was seen as an expression of centuries-old tradition and spiritual quality. It was only as late as the second half of the sixteenth century that, on a wave of Counter-Reformation zeal, attempts, in fact futile, were made to ban the presence in churches of pictures painted by non-Catholics.

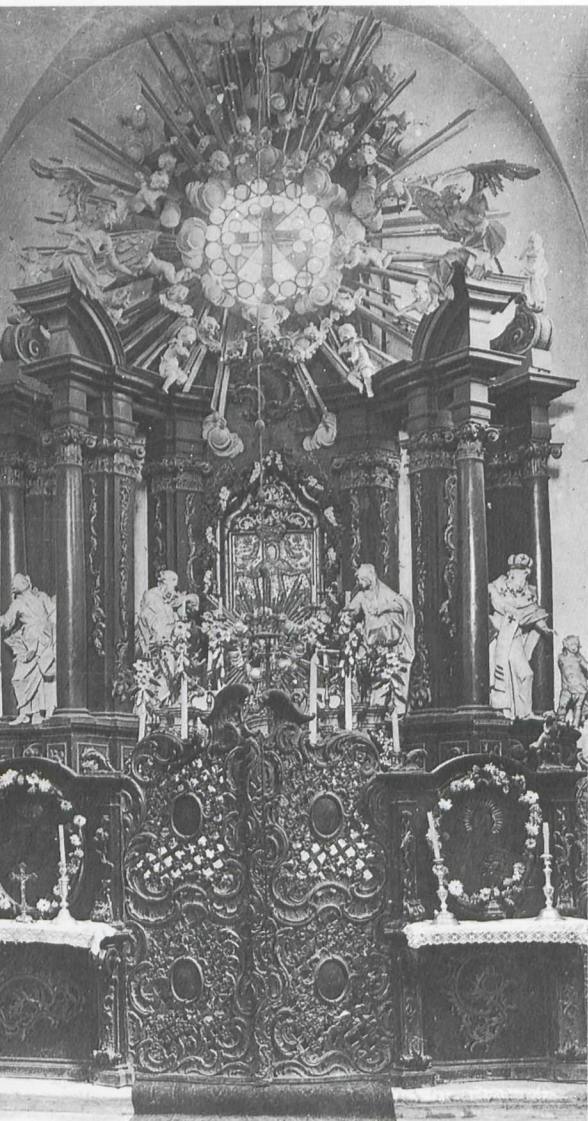
Certain closer contacts inevitably resulted from the many years' coexistence of various religious communities that availed themselves of the services of the same artists. For instance, at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, an Italian architect, Paolo Dominici called the Roman, built in Lvov a Bernardine church and the Orthodox church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin, the latter also known as the Walachian church. In stylistic aspect the architecture of the two structures is similar, but their spatial arrangements are different, and the Orthodox character of the Walachian church is clearly indicated by its three domes. At the same time there began a process of loosening the canons of Orthodox painting and of its closer and closer resemblance to western art (see cat. 104). A vital role was played here by western European graphic patterns used by icon painters and by an increasing number of commissions that they accepted for secular paintings, above all for portraits, which required the ability to render individual facial features of a sitter and familiarity with the rules of rendering three-dimensional space.

Although the 1596 union of the Churches warranted the preservation of the separate tradition of the eastern rite, with time it brought about profound changes in the art of the Greek Catholic Church. Its almost immediate consequence was that the Uniates were granted full civil rights in the towns governed by the Magdeburg Law. For artists this meant access to guilds and to a wider range of commissions, which accelerated the process of occidentalization of their art. However, no essential changes took place until the eighteenth century, the synod of the Greek Catholic Church held at Zamość in 1720 being considered an important moment in this respect. It was then that far-reaching decisions were taken with the purpose of making the Uniate liturgy resemble the Latin rite, these being soon reflected in art. At the same time the integration of the two rites went so far as to secure for the Uniate Church a great number of generous founders among Roman Catholic magnates, while in the previous century it could count on them only sporadically. For an eighteenth-century owner of vast estates a choice between the foundation of a Latin or a Greek Catholic church was an exclusively pragmatic decision connected with the pastoral needs of the local population. Thus prominent eighteenth-century Greek Catholic churches, such as Saint George's Cathedral in Lvov and the Basilian churches at Berezwezc (fig. 14) and Poczajów, rank among the outstanding achievements of the late baroque and rococo period in the Polish Commonwealth. In



14. *Basilian Church, Berezwezc, after 1753*

The architecture of this church, destroyed by the Soviet authorities after World War II, is one of the highest achievements of the rococo. It closely resembles Bavarian examples and is a prominent illustration of the Latinization of Greek-Catholic religious art in Poland.



15. High Altar, Greek-Catholic Pokrova Church, c. 1765, Buczacz

This example illustrates a perfect unification of the oriental iconostasis with the western altar.

their graceful forms, sinuous elevations, and moldings that could easily be mistaken for the works of the Austrian or Bavarian baroque one can hardly discern any links with the tradition of eastern Christianity.

Very important changes took place in the arrangement of the interiors of Greek Catholic churches. The iconostasis was reduced and modified to resemble a Roman Catholic retablo (fig. 15). There appeared side altars, pulpits, and figural sculptures until then almost unknown in Orthodox churches. It is worth noting almost concurrent, seemingly similar phenomena in Russian architecture, this being connected with the occidentalization of all spheres of the country's life decreed by Peter the Great. However, the Orthodox churches in Russia took on a baroque mantle only, whereas the traditional spatial structure of the edifices and of all elements of the interior that were related with the cult remained unaltered. Incidentally, during the Orthodox "reconquest" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that affected the eastern Polish territories captured by Russia and next by the Soviet Union, the specific elements of Greek Catholic art fell victim to an exceptionally brutal and systematic purge.

The Armenian Church in Poland went even further in its integration with Roman Catholicism than did the Greek Catholic Church. The Armenians formed large communities in the eastern regions of the Commonwealth as early as the fourteenth century. The credo of their Monophysite Church profoundly differs from both the Catholic and the Orthodox faiths; hence initially they kept their clearly distinct character, cultivating the artistic traditions of their far-off mother country. However, in 1630 the Armenian bishop of Lvov joined the union with the Roman Church. Although the Armenian ritual and liturgical language were retained, with time the union brought about a total assimilation of the Armenian minority, whose numerous representatives joined the ranks of the Polish gentry. The price that the Armenians paid for the union and their social rise was a gradual decline of their language and of their cultural individuality. Among a dozen-odd extant Armenian churches in the southeastern regions of the Polish Commonwealth, only the medieval Lvov Cathedral reveals features that are not found in Catholic church architecture.

Non-Christian communities held a vital position in the ethnic and cultural panorama of Old Poland. The most numerous among them were the Jews who had lived in the country since the early Middle Ages and who, with the passage of time, increased their proportional share in its population. Owing to doctrinal differences, it was impossible for Jewish and Christian religious art to come closer to each other. All the same, numerous, often splendid synagogues built in the Commonwealth followed the generally prevailing stylistic canons and frequently included elements typical of Polish architecture, such as, for instance, decorative parapets. On the other hand, in a country constantly short of qualified specialists, religious or national prejudices yielded to practical solutions, Jewish goldsmiths or casters being entrusted with the execution not only of articles of daily use but also of liturgical objects. Moreover, in the eighteenth century there appeared a Jewish engraver who accepted commissions for works in the field of Catholic iconography and painters of Jewish descent who covered church interiors with late baroque frescoes.



16. Mosque, Kruszyniany, late 18th century

Modest wooden mosques of the Polish Tatar Islamic community are astonishingly close to the churches from the neighboring villages. This example contains all external features of a church, including a turret on the roof, corresponding to an ave-bell turret.

The Muslim population, living in the Tatar military colonies, was far less numerous and also culturally weaker than the Jews. Therefore, while a synagogue cannot be mistaken for a church in Poland, the scarce and very modest mosques of the Polish Muslims hardly differ from wooden churches in the neighboring Christian villages (fig. 16).

This essay presents only a brief overview of the social and religious context of art in Old Poland. It is offered as a sociological key that might help to interpret Polish art and facilitate the proper perception of the exhibition. The artistic heritage of Europe consists not solely of masterpieces and great names, but also of a multitude of works affording priceless testimony to history and customs. In a panorama of baroque art, works by Bernini, Rubens, and Rembrandt stand beside coffin portraits and banner epitaphs. Without recognition of the full complement of Polish artistic production, the picture of European late baroque architecture and sculpture would disregard the original phenomena of the cultural borderland of the Polish Commonwealth's eastern regions and would therefore be incomplete.

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