

THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE TURKS IN POLISH-LITHUANIAN COMMONWEALTH UNDER THE REIGN OF JAN III SOBIESKI



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Polish texts in Latin about the relations of Poland to the Ottoman Empire reveal certain characteristic ambiguities of these relations. Even if Poland was regarded as a Bulwark of Christendom there was opposition to the idea of a crusade that could be taken advantage of by the Habsburgs. In the religious context the main concern was the Reformation. In various respects Poland was in between the East and the West and Oriental culture was influential. The idea of an Eastern – ‘Sarmatian’ – origin of the Polish aristocracy prompted the image of Jan III Sobieski as Sarmatian king, yet he was also seen as a new Godfrey of Bouillon, the hero of Tasso’s Gerusalemme liberata.

Neighbours

The Polish king Jan III Sobieski rescued the capital of the Habsburg monarchy from the Turkish siege in 1683. The fact that one hundred years later the Habsburgs took part in the Partition of Poland and furthered its disappearance from the European maps for 123 years must be called irony of fate. On the other hand, the Turks, who were defeated by Sobieski, never recognized the final partition of Poland. What is more, when the Crimean War broke out between Turkey and Russia, one of Poland’s partitioners, the most important poet of Polish Romanticism, Adam Mickiewicz, came to Constantinople in order to help the Polish nation and create a legion of Polish soldiers in the Turkish army. These plans did not succeed, though, and Mickiewicz died in Istanbul in 1855. A settlement near Istanbul called Polonezköy or Adampol – the latter name being a tribute to its creator Adam Czartoryski – is a permanent reminder of Polish immigration at the time.

During the course of its history, Poland, later the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, bordered the Islamic East. Relations between the neighbours were not always peaceful, but it is important to remember that in the 16th and 17th century the Turks were only one of many enemies of Poland, and bordering with the Ottoman Empire did not only result in conflicts. During several hundred years, the peace between Poland and Turkey was broken only a few times. Poland did not take part in the war with Suleiman the Magnificent

during the siege of Vienna in 1529, and the political texts published on this occasion in Cracow had a reflexive, rather than a hortatory, tone¹. Furthermore, the latter publications describing skirmishes with the Turks did not overtly display anti-Turkish rhetoric such as characterised Philippe Bosquier's book *Vegetius Christianus* (Christian Vegetius, Cologne 1615) on warfare against the Turks. Admittedly, in the years 1543–1544 Stanisław Orzechowski published two Latin speeches, *De bello adversus Turcas suscipiendo ...ad equites Polonos oratio* (The Speech to Noblemen of Poland to take up War against the Turks) and *Ad Sigismundum Poloniae regem Turcica secunda* (The Second Turcica directed at Sigismund, the King of Poland), in which he called for a crusade against the infidels. In the first speech it was not so much fear that was expressed, as concerns for the noblemen's freedom:

non ad bellum vos ego voco, sed ut imminentem servitutem depellatis moneo, quacum nihil homini peius accidat, tamen inprimis vobis ad libertatem et imperium natis intolerabilis est, equites, vos enim ex omnibus propemodum gentibus vere in libera Re publica estis nati. Haec enim demum vera libertas putanda est, in qua omnes servi sunt legum, dominus vero nemo, quo fit, uti sicut liberate, ita etiam dignitate omnes sitis pares.²

I am not calling you to war, but I remind you that you should reject the menacing enslavement, beyond which there is nothing worse for a human being, but most of all it is unbearable for you knights, who are born for freedom and to rule; since only you among almost all the nations, were born in a truly free country. One should understand it as true freedom when everyone is subjected to law but nobody is a ruler, and that is why you are all equal in freedom as well as in dignity.

These words did not so much relate to Poland's foreign politics as they pointed to its political and social system. Stanisław Orzechowski also called for a declaration of war on Turkey, though, arguing that it was better to fight on the territory of the enemy than to wait for an attack. In the meantime, as Jerzy Ziomek reported, the Polish king used diplomatic means in an attempt to avoid aggressive action between Poland and Turkey, and "rejected the archaic idea of crusades, predicting, not without reason, that the Habsburgs would turn the results of a crusade to their advantage."³ The Polish leader made attempts not to provoke the High Porte, and the society of noblemen was sceptical of the anti-Turkish league that was propagated by Vienna and

¹ Milewska-Ważbińska 2000.

² Orzechowski 1543, AV v.

³ Ziomek 1977, 205.

Rome.⁴ Simultaneously, rumours began to reach Poland about the Ottomans' imminent defeat. Although these were mostly rhetorical displays of panegyric literature, they influenced the visions articulated by Polish writers and poets.

Despite many tensions, until the 17th century Polish-Turkish relationships were relatively peaceful because Turkish expansion was not directed towards Polish lands. Polish society had somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the Turks – it was regarded as an alien world, but simultaneously as a world that was fascinating with its richness and exotic appeal. Permanent diplomatic relations were established between Turkey and Poland. Captive Polish prisoners who had converted to Islam were present at the Turkish court, and some even held important positions there, including Joachim Strasz (Ibrahim Beg), a converted Pole who was taken into Tatar captivity when he was young and who served as an emissary to Poland and an interpreter during the 16th century. In the 17th century one of the prominent diplomats at the Turkish court was the interpreter, painter, musician, poet and scholar Wojciech Bobowski (Ali Bej, Ali Ufki). The beautiful Tatar captive Roxelana, known as Hürrem, the wife of Suleiman the Magnificent and mother of the sultan Selim II, originated from the Eastern borders of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. After the death of the Polish king Sigismund I the Old she sent a letter of condolences to his son and successor, Sigismund II Augustus. In the mid-17th century, Franciszek Mesgnien-Meniński, born in Lorraine, took part in a legation to Istanbul and later stayed there as a resident. He was the author of the dictionary *Thesaurus Linguarum Orientalium*, published in Vienna in 1680. The dictionary comprised entries from the Turkish language translated into Latin and partly into Italian, German, French and Polish. Mesgnien-Meniński also published a book of Turkish grammar.

It is important to mention that in the Old Polish Catholic society of the 17th century, Polish attitudes towards representatives of other religions, as many sources indicate, were as cautious as those towards believers in the Prophet. In the era of Inquisition and religious wars, Poland prided itself of being a "nation without burning stakes." However, in the 17th century the majority of the Polish noblemen accepted the Counter-Reformation slogans and argued that only the Catholic faith guaranteed salvation and was worthy for a Sarmatian. This conviction was supported by Old Polish rituals and state as well as private ceremonies – especially funereal ones – which were closely related to Roman-Catholicism. That is perhaps the reason why the Catholic society seemingly was more afraid of heresy than of Muslims. Jan Chryzostom Pasek, a Polish diarist from the second half of the 17th century, wrote that in the year 1683, Polish Protestants living in Gdańsk were asking

⁴ Tazbir 1970, 152.

God to grant victory to the Turks. The author himself took part in a bar fight when one of the Protestants loudly expressed a wish that streams of Catholic blood would flow in Vienna.⁵

Enemies

One of the major conflicts between Turkey and Poland, the Battle of Țuțora (*Cecora*), took place in the years 1620–1621. Here the Polish military commander Stanisław Żółkiewski – the great-grand-father of the Polish king Jan III Sobieski – died.

In 1621 troops of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth bravely defended the Chocim (Khotyn) stronghold against the Turkish army under the command of Sultan Osman II. The triumph at Chocim was one of the greatest successes of the Polish armed forces in the 17th century. Władysław Waza (Vasa), who would become king later on, gained renown in Europe and won the respect of the noblemen for his participation in the battle. Jakub Sobieski – the father of the prospective king – fought at Chocim under the command of the great Lithuanian hetman Jan Karol Chodkiewicz. After Chodkiewicz's death the command of the Commonwealth troops was taken by Stanisław Lubomirski, Jakub Sobieski became his advisor and participated in peace talks. The father of the prospective King Jan III wanted the events from the notable weeks spent at the Chocim stronghold to remain forever in the memory of future generations. With this in view, he initiated the writing of a war journal, and later – following the example of Julius Caesar – war diaries in Latin. The finished work entitled *Commentariorum Chotinensis belli libri tres* (*Three Books of Comments on the Chocim war*) was published for the first time in Gdańsk in 1646.

The same theme was used fifty years later by Waclaw Potocki. His *Transakcja wojny chocimskiej* (*The Progress of the War of Chocim*) is a historical epic. Written in a 13-syllable verse – a measure typical of the Polish *carmen heroicum* – the composition had the features of a classical epic. The poem comprised 10 books, with the first two telling about preparations for war, and the others describing each day until the initiation of peace talks and dismissal of the troops. The epic began with an invocation to God, and descriptions of battle scenes and speeches of commanders were patterned after the works of Homer, Virgil and Lucan. The historical subjects and lack of the traditional epic apparatus drew attention particularly to *Bellum civile* (*Pharsalia*) by Lucan as the basic epic model for *Transakcja wojny chocimskiej*. Potocki's poem was characterized by loose narration interspersed with numerous digressions on moral and political topics.

⁵ Pasek 1989, 237.

Working on his epic, Potocki used both printed and handwritten sources, including Jakub Sobieski's *Commentariorum Chotinensis belli libri tres* as well as oral tradition. In his epic Potocki idealized the Polish commanders, in particular Jan Karol Chodkiewicz, simultaneously painting the Turks in bad light, including descriptions of Sultan Osman as a violent, haughty and cruel man. Potocki used historical comparisons to express his own opinions on social and political matters, idealization of old heroes served as a criticism of contemporary leaders, whose extravagance and greed he harshly criticized. His poetic chronicle, packed with chivalric spirit, glorification of Polish soldiers and open hatred toward pagans, was designed to raise the spirit of his contemporaries. The force of the descriptions, the richness of the language and the vividness and realism of the scenes were some of the factors that contributed to the particular beauty of this work.

In the 17th century, Poland waged equally bloody wars with the Cossacks, Swedes and Moscow. Although there was a general conviction that Poland and Hungary as countries served the defence of Christian Europe against the invasion of Islam, as *antemurale Christianitatis* – Bulwark of Christianity, on a daily basis Polish Catholics feared Protestants more than of Muslims. Tatar units had fought in the Polish Army from 15th century onwards. 16th and 17th century battles with Orthodox Moscow and Protestant Sweden likewise used auxiliary Tatar units. Jan Sobieski commanded a 2,000-man strong regiment of Tartar cavalry during his time as Grand Hetman of the Crown during the war with Sweden in 1656. This regiment came to Poland at the order of the sultan Mehmed IV, who supported Poland during the war of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Polish Tatar regiments also took part in the Battle of Vienna.

Between East and West: The Culture of Sarmatism

Geographic vicinity to the Ottoman Empire induced the citizens of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to hold a realistic view of the political system and the organization of the Turkish state.⁶ Polish envoys, merchants and craftsmen frequently visited Istanbul and many visitors were impressed by the city. Its architecture and art gave rise to admiration and left an imprint on the aesthetic taste of Polish and Lithuanian nobility.

Mutual influence between cultures was a lasting feature of Old Poland. In the Nobles' Commonwealth (*Rzeczpospolita szlachecka*), both the Orthodox Church and Islam were geopolitical, economic and cultural factors.⁷ The ethnically and religiously varied vicinity was of crucial importance for the

⁶ Backvis 1975.

⁷ Prejs 1999, 7.

cultural osmosis, that characterised the Eastern borders of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Furthermore, the Polish nobility emphasized their alleged origins in the militant peoples called the Sarmatians, who between 4th and 2nd century BC populated the area north of the Sea of Azov. Arguing this lineage, the Polish nobility invoked ancient authors, in particular Ptolemy, Pomponius Mela and Pliny the Elder. The term "European Sarmatians," coined by Ptolemy to describe the peoples living in north-eastern Europe, was introduced into modern Polish literature by the historian Maciej Miechowita in his publication *Tractatus de duabus Sarmatiis Asiatica et Europiana et de contentis in eis* (Treatise about two Sarmatians, European and Asian, and what can be found in each one, 1517). Gradually, the conviction that Polish citizens originated from Sarmatians became firmly established among writers and poets. The Polish nobility believed that Sarmatian warriors conquered and initiated their rule over the primitive Slavs.

The culture created by the Polish nobility, called Sarmatism, was, on the one hand, based on political ideology related to ancient values inherited from the Roman Republic and the Catholic faith, and, on the other hand, shaped by the influence of the Orient. Paradoxically, this influence was especially noticeable after the defeat of the Turks in the Battles of Chocim and Vienna. The reign of Jan III Sobieski contributed to a great extent to the popularization of oriental patterns in Polish applied arts and crafts. As Polish scholars point out, the defeated and humiliated Turkey had a larger influence on the dress and weapons of the nobility in Poland than the once intimidating and victorious Turkey did.⁸ It is interesting to notice that in the Battle of Vienna in 1683, the appearance of Polish knights and Turkish soldiers were very similar.

Polish scholar Tadeusz Mańkowski called the Old Polish culture "the taste of Europe married to the taste of Asia," referring to an 18th century saying about Poles by Karol de Ligne.⁹ Moreover, the culture of Sarmatism strengthened Polish identity, providing the nobility a distinctive identity differentiated from both West and East.¹⁰ Hence, when the nobility articulated contrasts between Poles and Turks they did not imitate Western European patterns but appealed to their own ancient, Sarmatian lineage. Sarmatians were perceived as courageous knights and warriors, an image of Poles which also proliferated in historical awareness, politics, literature and arts in the 16th and 17th century. Only in the early 18th century did fashionable oriental patterns of a different, Western European, origin become influential in Poland. The popularity of Eastern motifs in the 18th century was, as Polish

⁸ Tazbir 1986, 131–134; Łoziński 1969, 161.

⁹ Mańkowski 1946, 111.; Prejs, 1999, 26.

¹⁰ Mańkowski 1946, 31.

scholar Marek Prejs underscores, paradoxically a sign of Polish culture becoming more European in those times.

The combination of the belief that the nobility originated from the Sarmatians and the impact of Poland's border with Turkey was reflected in Polish dress, applied arts and crafts, traditional customs, culinary tastes and language. A sweet cake with nuts, figs and raisins (*mazurek*) that up to the present days is eaten by Poles during Easter likely originated in 17th century Turkey. The gentry dress consisting of a long garment (*żupan* from Turkish: *džubbah*) together with an outer garment (*kontusz* from Turkish: *kontosz*), a hat decorated with a brooch (*kolpak* from Turkish: *kalpak*) and high leather shoes (*baczmagi* from Turkish: *Baczmak*) was fashioned after Turkish dress. In the 17th century, a wide kontusz sash (*pas kontuszowy*) with an Eastern pattern was the most distinctive element of the Polish dress. Initially these sashes were imported from Turkey and Persia but later they were also manufactured in Poland. The curved sword – the essential element of the nobleman's dress – had its origins in a similar weapon used in Turkey. The military hierarchy distinctions – bulawas and maces (Polish: *buzdygan*, Turkish: *bozdogan*) referred to the Eastern club weapons both in the name and shape. Their golden or silver heads were often incrustated with precious stones, most often turquoise, which was considered lucky in Islamic countries. Polish cavalry used light shields called *kalkan* (from Turkish: *kalkan*). Another Turkish inheritance were the carpets put on the floor (Polish: *dywan*, Turkish: *diwan*) and tapestries hung on the walls (Polish: *kilim*, Turkish: *kilim*), which still today ornament Polish houses. The lifestyle of the Polish nobility contributed to the 17th century perception of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as exotic. Rubens' painting *The Head of Cyrus brought to Queen Tomyris* displayed the Eastern grandeur of the Massagetean Queen's court. The men from the retinue are dressed similarly to the Polish dress of the time, according to the idea that members of an eastern tribe from the 6th century BC looked similarly.

Poles travelling around Europe were eager to emphasize their identity with distinctive clothes and customs. The 1633 journey of the Treasurer of the Crown Jerzy Ossoliński to Rome became quite famous. His retinue was memorialized in the etching of Florentine graphic artist and painter Stefano della Bella, as well as in a later painting by Bernardo Bellotto, called Canaletto. The aim of the Ossoliński envoy was to gain the support of the Pope Urban VIII in the anticipated war—not with Turks, but with Sweden. The splendour of a 300-person legation, precious stones in the horse tacks and Eastern ornamentations evoked admiration and awe among the inhabitants of Rome. For European societies, the Polish Nobles' Commonwealth served as

a cultural link between the West and the East due to the trade route and transit to the East in its territory.

Godfrey and the “Sarmatian” King

Sarmatian culture is widely considered to have been at its peak in the times of Jan III Sobieski. Often called the “Sarmatian” King, Sobieski represented two ideals of nobility – a courageous warrior and a settled nobleman. The court of Sobieski excelled in customs of nobility and in Sarmatian lifestyle.¹¹ As mentioned above, the King’s father, Jakub, took part in the 1621 Battle of Chocim and the peace negotiations that followed. His son – the young hetman Jan Sobieski – later fought the Tatar and Turkish armies.¹² Jan Sobieski’s success in these battles greatly contributed to his popularity. It is commonly believed that Sobieski’s elevation to Polish king resulted from the Tartar defeat in the Lesienice battle near Lviv and the victory over Turks at the Battle of Chocim in 1673, which earned Sobieski the moniker “the Lechistan Lion.” Thanks to his victories over the Muslims, especially at the Battle of Vienna, Jan III Sobieski was also called the Polish Godfrey, since he in many people’s eyes embodied the Christian knight fighting infidels.¹³ Referring to the Polish king with the name of Godfrey of Bouillon – one of the leaders of the first crusade, that aimed at liberation of the Holy Land and Christians from the Muslim rule – not only recalled historical events but also literature. Godfrey was the main character of Torquato Tasso’s epic poem *Jerusalem Delivered* (*Gerusalemme Liberata*), a popular work in the 17th century Poland thanks to Piotr Kochanowski’s Polish translation, first published in 1618 and reprinted in 1651 and 1687. Although the plot of *Jerusalem Delivered* was based on historical events during the siege and liberation of Jerusalem, much of the inspiration behind the poem derived from contemporary events – the Turkish expansion in Christian Europe.

The comparison of Sobieski to Godfrey was widespread in Poland, as it is apparent in the texts and titles of plays performed in Jesuit school theatres of the 17th century. One of the performances staged by the students of the Jesuit College in Warsaw in 1685 had the title *Imago victoriae ab Ioanne III rege Poloniae de Turcis relatae in Godifredo Bullonio Primo Rege Hierosolymarum adumbrata* (*The Image of the Victory of Jan III Sobieski the King of Poland over the Turks reflected in Godfrey de Boullion, the first King of Jerusalem*).¹⁴ The play took place in two locations, Palestine and the environs of Vienna. The character of the crusaders’ leader was portrayed so

¹¹ Bogucka 1994, 42.

¹² Wimmer 1983, 23.

¹³ Sokołowska 1977, 259.

¹⁴ Korotaj e.a. 1976, 328–329.

often in 17th century because he represented the universal virtues of a heroic knight combined with contemporary national and religious values. These topics were well received by Polish audiences. Struggles between Christians and infidels evoked strong emotions in the 17th century. This motif especially dominated epic writing in Christian countries influenced by perceived threats from the expansion of Muslims, including Arabs, Turks and Tatars. In many French, Italian and Spanish epic poems the heroes, including Godfrey, Roland, and El Cid, were praised for fighting Muslim infidels. Ivo Gundulić, a poet from Dubrovnik, dedicated his epic poem *Osman* to the Polish-Turkish battles and the victory in the Battle of Chocim. In the poem, Władysław IV, a future king of Poland, served as the main character, and Gundulić expressed hope that all Slavs together with the Christian world would soon be liberated from the Turkish yoke.¹⁵ Texts about the struggles with the infidels became increasingly relevant in 17th century Poland due to the situation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Their aim, however, was not only to disseminate historical facts. The writers directed their texts to readers who were their contemporaries, took part in the same events and experienced similar emotions. Moreover, they had a clear propagandist aim. Many perceived Sobieski's victory in the Battle of Vienna during the latter period of Nobles' Commonwealth as a confirmation of Poland's role as the Bulwark of Europe. At that time, numerous writings aimed at showing Poland as *antemurale Christianitatis*. Portraying the Battle of Vienna in literature satisfied the ambitions of epic poets. The character of Jan III Sobieski brought even more excitement to the topic, and the best writers of the time characterized the ruler with emphasis on the features comprising the King's "Virtutes": Iustitia (Justice), Prudentia (Deliberation), Magnanimitas (Magnanimity), Clementia (Gentleness) and Fortitudo (Valor).¹⁶

Jan III Sobieski as an epic hero

Military and political successes predestined Jan III Sobieski to the role of a hero in the highest literary genre of the 17th century – the epic poem. European poetry commonly had the ruling king as a hero of an epic poem.¹⁷ The popularity of this literary genre stemmed from a desire to articulate historical events in literary terms. Epic poetry served that function for several centuries.

The victory at Vienna became the topic of many texts in Poland as well as abroad. In Western Europe it was praised in Latin and as well as in vernaculars: Italian, French, German, English, Czech, Spain, Portuguese and

¹⁵ Barac 1969, 76–78; Rapacka 1975; Darasz 1997.

¹⁶ Singer 1981, 31.

¹⁷ Hobdell Jackson 1982, 16.

Swedish.¹⁸ Among the Polish works about the victory at Vienna were, in Latin: *Carmen de liberatione Viennae ab obsidione per Joannem Sobieski Regem Poloniae* (A Song about the Liberation of Vienna from under the Siege by Jan Sobieski, the King of Poland) and *Elogiastica descriptio factorum triumphalium Joannis III* (A Praise of Triumphant Deeds of Jan III) by Jan Kwiatkiewicz; *Sarmatia laureata* (Sarmatia Decorated with a Laurel) by Jakub Boczyłowic; in Latin a version of the Polish text by Wojciech Stanisław Chrościński: *Tuba vocalis fama ac aeviternae memoriae* (The Trumpet of everlasting Fame and Memory); *Io triumphale* (An Exclamation of Triumph), *Bellaria Martis Sarmatici* (War Deeds of Sarmatian Mars) and *Vota Poloniae sub tempus belli Viennensis 1683* (Polish Gifts of the time of the Viennese Battle 1683) by Jan Wojciech Janicki; *Fulmen Orientis Iohannes III rex Poloniarum* (The Lightning of the East Jan III King of the Poles) by Wojciech Bartochowski.

Two Latin epic poems in dactylic hexameter and modelled on Homer and Virgil deserve special attention: *Sobiesciados carminum libri quinque* (Five Books of Sobiesciada) by Andrzej Wincenty Ustrzycki was published in Venice in 1686 and Jan Kaliński published *Viennis* in Warsaw in 1717. Ustrzycki wrote *Sobiesciados carminum libri quinque* right after the glorious victory of the Cross over the Half-Moon at the Battle of Vienna when all Europe was paying homage to the Polish King. This work was one of many tributes to the Polish king and the knights serving their duty to God and Nation. In effect, it was an epic biography of Sobieski, culminating in the victory over Turks in the Battle of Vienna. At the time he wrote it, Ustrzycki could not have predicted that he was describing the last moments of glory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and that soon Europe would cease to be grateful to these liberators of Vienna, and in fact willingly accept their partition. At the time, though, it was deeply meaningful that the author portrayed Sobieski as the hero for whom Polish epic poetry had been waiting for almost 200 years. Jan III Sobieski was in fact the last modern hero revered in Old Polish epic poems. Ustrzycki's composition did not find worthy followers, and the style of the biographic epic poem slowly perished due to the lack of both heroes and sublime subject matter. In *Viennis* by Kaliński Jan III Sobieski no longer served as a main hero; by this time Leopold I was the driving force behind the military actions. In this text the fate of the world and the individual peoples' destiny depend on God's will, and biographical plots are subjugated historical events. While biography was not as interesting to the author of *Viennis*, his attempt to describe reality in epic form and invigorate the dead genre of epos by introducing a moral message deserves attention.

¹⁸ Klimaszewski 1983 *passim*.

The content of both of these works accurately rendered historical events. Apart from Sobieski, other historical characters appear in their pages: Leopold I and his deputy Karl Ferdinand Waldstein, papal nuncio father Marco from Aviano, Prince Charles Alexander of Lorraine, Emeryk Thököly, the leader of Hungarian uprising, and among the Turks, Sultan Ibrahim I and his two wives, Mehmed IV and the vizier Kara Mustafa. The movements of the armies are also accurately recorded, and the description of Sobieski's last days before leaving Poland has a special place in the books. The authors describe the celebrations taking part in Cracow with chronicler's accuracy. Both epic poems have an interesting plot woven into historical content – the farewell of the military leader with his beloved. Both Ustrzycki and Kaliński describe the parting of Sobieski with his wife before he left for Vienna, which indeed took place on the 21st August 1683. Both poems also highlight a cordial welcome of the King in Silesia. In Kaliński's work personifications and allegories are in play. The action proper of his poem begins when the Emperor Leopold I send Christian Religion to Heaven to win God's support. Religion has a long journey among the stars before reaching God and asking for help. The Goddess of the Moon – Luna – attempts to hinder this process due to her support for the Turks. The epic poems of Ustrzycki and Kaliński meet all the requirements to be considered historical epics, exemplars of the genre that was in high esteem in Old Poland. Both authors wanted to describe the historical events in the highest of literary genres. It must be emphasized that the aim of the authors was not to attack the enemy but to praise the victor. In all the epic poems one finds a laudatory tone including phrases that are characteristic for this kind of a rhetorical show (*genus demonstrativum*) in contrast to *genus deliberativum* characteristic for political speeches.

Wespazjan Kochowski, who participated in the Vienna campaign, authored three works dedicated to the battle of 1683. In 1684 he wrote *Commentarius belli adversus Turcas* in Latin and a poem in Polish titled *Dzielo Boskie albo pieśni Wiednia wybawionego* (*God's Deed or Songs of Vienna Liberated*). The latter poem, imitating *Jerusalem Delivered* by Torquato Tasso and written in the form of octaves, begins with a request directed to the muse Calliope to support the work and includes the appropriate invocation of the Mother of God, justified by the subject matter of the composition describing a "Christian war." In his poem Kochowski presented historical events including Waldstein's legation to the King of Poland, the battle of 1683 and the meeting of Jan III Sobieski and Emperor Leopold. Throughout the text, the fighting Christians are supported by God and angels. The poem was originally planned to be much longer with a view of telling the entire story of the Turkish collapse, yet only book one was finished.

In 1695 Kochowski published another work titled *Trybut należyty albo Psalmodia polska (Due Tribute or Polish Psalmody)* in Częstochowa. Kochowski deliberately styled this work after the biblical Book of Psalms, and it comprised thirty-six religious and patriotic psalms. In the 19th century Adam Mickiewicz followed a similar style when he created his *Księgi narodu i pielgrzymstwa polskiego (Books of the Polish Nation and Pilgrimage)*. In both these works, the location of Poland at the border of the Christian world served as the basis for Sarmatian Messianism.¹⁹ Kochowski indicated similarity between the history of the ancient people of Israel and the history of the Commonwealth, which is presented as the New Israel.²⁰ Intertwining the divine and the national dimension *Psalmodia* underpins the Sarmatian outlook. God’s will is realized by a nobleman – Sarmatian Jan III Sobieski. Through references to the Old Testament idea of a chosen people and biblical stylization, the liberation of Vienna is interpreted within the framework of philosophy of history. It was not the Viennese victory as a historical fact that was important, but its moral dimension. *Psalmodia* was the poet’s lyrical testament and his final reckoning.

In a historical and cultural labyrinth

This is what literature says. When facts are taken into consideration, it is obvious that Sobieski’s underwriting of the alliance with the emperor of Austria in 1683 was not just motivated by dreams of the everlasting fame of a hero, but was also, and above all, forced by the political situation. The Polish king realized that the Turks could establish a great army that would be able to attack Poland from Eastern and Southern Ukraine and reach as far as Cracow. Sobieski would not be able to hold a defence against the Turks in three places simultaneously. The alliance with the Habsburg monarchy was a political strategy which benefited Poland as well.

Despite the death of his great-grand-father at the hands of the Turks Jan III Sobieski did not hold personal hatred towards the Turkish nation. Nor does he seem to have had an anti-Turkish or anti-Tatar obsession, as some scholars formerly have claimed.²¹ The future victor at the Battle of Vienna visited Istanbul in 1654 as an envoy. Turkish was one of the languages he knew.²² Only once did he explicitly call the Turks “barbarians” in the letters to his beloved wife Maria d’Arquien Sobieska. Although he was undoubtedly pleased by his victories by the Porta river, he was not unbudging, but was always trying to improve the political relations with Turkey. He also stayed a

¹⁹ Tazbir 1970, 7.

²⁰ Obremski 1995, 14.

²¹ Suchodolski & Ostapowicz 2008, 15–16.

²² Wójcik 1983, 50.

realist in assessing the Turks. Despite the afore-mentioned comparison with Godfrey de Bouillon, Jan III Sobieski did not display fanatical hatred towards the Muslims; he did not consider them to be enemies, but political opponents with whom he had to fight. The fact that the Turks referred to him as the Lion of Lechistan, a term of admiration for a worthy opponent, indicates that the respect was mutual. It should also be remembered that Turkish captives brought from the Battle of Vienna settled in close proximity of the King's summer residence in Wilanów and eventually assimilated into the Polish society. They were responsible for many of the construction projects in the Palace and its surroundings, and for many years they faithfully served the King and his family.

An assessment of the Polish society's attitude towards the Turks in the times of Jan III Sobieski on the basis not only of historical sources but also on customs and cultural texts is not unambiguous. The paths of the citizens of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth are often winding and bizarrely twisted as the path of the Polish King Jan III Sobieski of the Janina coat of arms. Wojciech Tygielski claimed that:

Polish history was defined by two factors of major importance: belonging to the Latin civilization, originating from the Mediterranean culture (which signified being open to cultural and civilizational inspirations of that origin) and being placed at a physical distance from its main centres – on the border between the Roman-Latin and Byzantine-Orthodox worlds, with all the ensuing political and cultural consequences.²³

For the citizens of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the geographical state was not identical with the political and cultural one. The former can be located at the eastern borders of Europe close to the Muslim Orient, while the latter includes the common European heritage of Greco-Roman antiquity and Christian religion.

²³ Tygielski 2010, 247.

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