

A LITTLE KNOWN FACT FROM THE WORK
OF ADAM KOCHAŃSKI AT THE COURT
OF JOHN III AT WILANÓW

Until recently the numerous Polish and foreign publications about Adam Kochański, one of the better known 17th century members of the Society of Jesus, regarded him mainly from the point of view of his activity in the field of mathematics, mechanics and chemistry, as well as clock-making and gnomonics. The other side of his activity; his cooperation in forming the ideological-artistic programme of the royal palace at Wilanów, was dealt with for the first time half a century ago by Professor Juliusz Starzyński, author of a monograph on Wilanów. Following Professor Starzyński's example we have established that Kochański not only "was in charge of compasses and clocks for the palace" and suggested "the decorative programme of the king's Library", but was also the main author of the ideological programme of the decoration of the palace elevation and interiors. Kochański arrived at John III's court at Wilanów in 1677, when the palace was under construction. Though he was employed by the king to tutor the young princes and take care of the library, John III also used his services in matters connected with the decoration of his residence in 1681-1686.

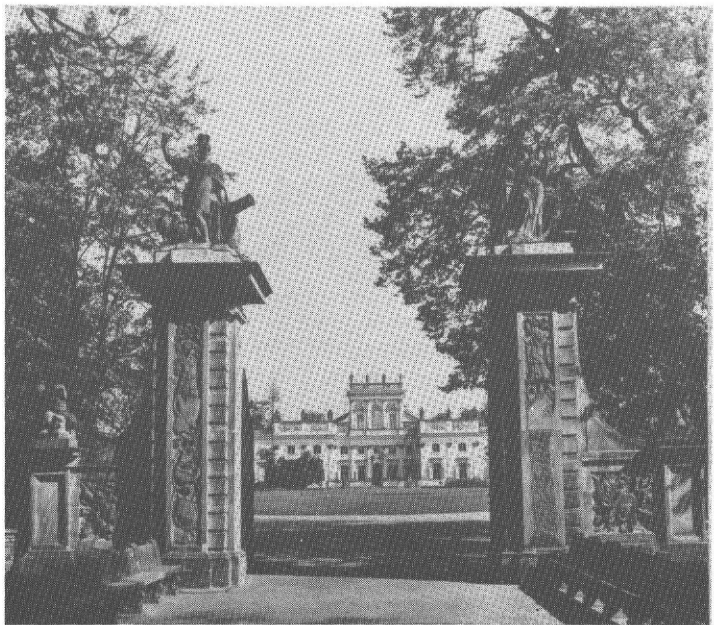
Among the numerous royal courtiers and other persons in close contact with the king, Kochański was the one with the best knowledge of symbols and emblems, artistic iconography, the history and literature of antiquity, not to mention the Bible, all of it owing to his versatile education in various Jesuit colleges and easy access to the king's rich library. Thus he possessed complete knowledge of those basic humanistic fields which were helpful in designing the artistic and ideological programme of the Wilanów palace. With what he had learnt in Jesuit colleges and in contacts with Jesuit scholars and their works, he played at the side of the builder of the Wilanów palace, Agostino Locci, a role similar to that performed half a century earlier by Francesco Braccioni at the

side of Pietro da Cortona at the Barbierini court in Rome, or earlier still by Giovanni Aguschi, a Roman theoretician of art, who cooperated with Annibale Carracci in the decoration of the Galleria Farnese.

In accordance with John III's intentions, the programme designed by Adam Kochański, presented the royal residence - as far as its front façade was concerned - as the seat of the highest authority, and at the same time a temple of beauty and virtue and a monument to the Polish monarch's glory, merits and military successes. From the garden side it treated it as an allegory of a prosperous Commonwealth under the rule of John III and Marie Casimire.

As far as the interior was concerned, John III's residence became an apotheosis of the victorious king and just and prosperous reign of the royal couple, as well as a temple of revived farming.

Each element of this programme was derived from sources which were familiar to Father Kochański, from mythology, from Virgil and Ovid, modern treatises devoted to symbols and glorification of royal authority, and even the Bible.



16. Wilanów. Main entrance to the Palace