

THE ROYAL GATE AT WILANÓW AND ITS ARTISTIC AND IDEOLOGICAL EXPRESSION

One of the most valuable monuments dating from the period of John III, which is of particular interest also because of its artistic and ideological symbolism, is the stone gate leading into the royal residence at Wilanów /Fig. 16/.

It is crowned with statues sculpted by Stefan Szwaneer, which represent the "Sarmatian /Polish/ Mars" as a personification of John III with an allegory of victorious war and "Pax", as an image of triumphant peace. Both these figures of ancient origin, in the 17th century signified not only the old Roman maxim according to which "durable peace can only be a result of a victorious war; they also meant that Sobieski ascended the Polish throne thanks to his victorious wars against the enemies of his country and that his greatest merit was to ensure the country's peaceful development.

The war trophies and the Sobieskis' armorial shields on the two pillars of the gate express the thought that John III rose to the royal dignity thanks to his virtue of fortitude /virtus heroica/ and honour /honos/. In addition the same military items borrowed from classical triumphal-martial iconography turn the royal gate at Wilanów into a kind of "porta triumphalis".

Finally the two statues of bears on the abutments of the gate again constitute an allusion to the king's virtues, that is fortitude, wisdom and prudence in his dealings with the foe.