

STUDIES ON THE RECENTLY ACQUIRED PORTRAIT  
OF JAN SOBIESKI

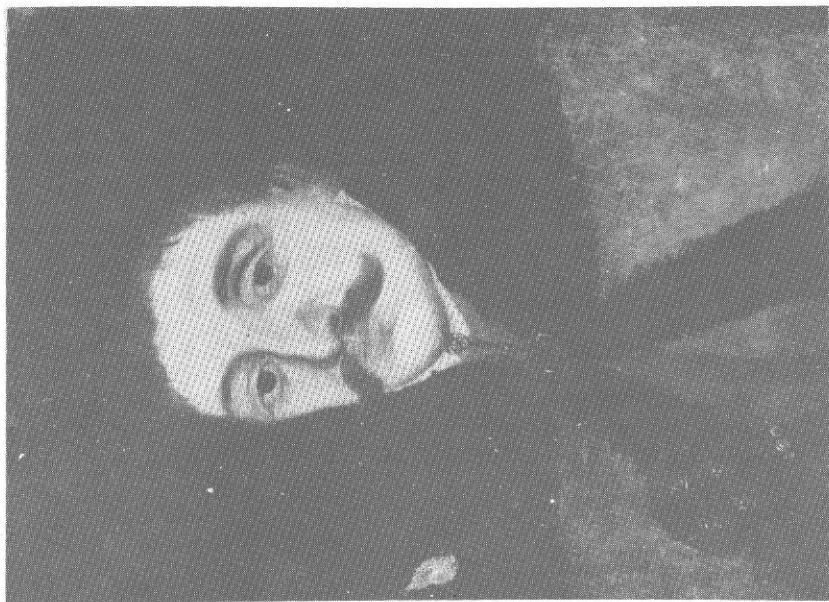
In 1978 the Wilanów Gallery acquired a portrait considered to be a likeness of John III (Sobieski) (Fig. 61). Its bad condition, numerous missing bits and tears, made it necessary to apply indispensable conservation measures and to carry out investigations aimed at establishing later accretions. The investigations proved that the portrait of the king is a result of the 19th century repainting of a portrait of a young nobleman quite unlike John III. When the 19th century layer had been removed we saw a typically 17th century Sarmatian portrait painted probably in the circle of the Lvov guild painters. The likeness is devoid of any idealization and the artist's attention must have all been on the physiognomy of the sitter, while his attire is treated flatly, with no attempt at modelling (Fig. 62).

Following this discovery we faced the problem of establishing the identity of the sitter. According to the family tradition of the owner, this portrait, for generations, had been regarded as a likeness of John III. Therefore our investigations centred on other representatives of the Sobieski family. It had to be a military man, as indicated by a bulavamace in the picture.

On the basis of the "Herbarz polski" by K. Niesiecki, the "Złota księga szlachty polskiej" by T. Zychliński and a drawing dating from 1786, which shows the Sobieski genealogical tree, it seems probable that the sitter in the Wilanów portrait is John III's relative, also Jan (John) Sobieski, son of Remigian. Born in c. 1650, Jan Sobieski was twice married: to Cecylia Wapowska of Radachowice and then Konstancja Kossakowska, daughter of the castellan of Kiev. In 1672-1676 he took part in military campaigns against Turkey and the Tartars in the cuirassier regiment of Franciszek Dzieduszycki, and in 1683 fought at Vienna under John III. It is probably owing to his relative's gallantry that in 1692 John III appointed him

field military guard, in 1693 attempted to acquire for him the starosty of Dębowica in the Jasło county, and in 1696 nominated him grand cup-bearer. Jan Sobieski served in the army for 38 years, in 1698-1710 as colonel, commander of a cavalry regiment.

It is undoubtedly interesting that in one canvas portraits of two different representatives of the Sobieski family were united and what is more both of them shared the same love of martial art.



62. Portrait of Polish noble Jan Sobieski (picture with removed brushworks of later periods). Polish painter, 17th century



61. Portrait of King John III Sobieski (picture before restoration). Unknown painter, 19th century