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ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION DURING THE REIGN OF JOHN III SOBIESKI

The ascension of John III to the Polish throne awakened various hopes, also hopes for various indispensable reforms, including reform or at least modernization of the educational system. New definite proposals were put forward that the king was expected to put into effect.

The reformers of the educational system had two aims in view: modernization of the existing monastic and secular schools and establishment of a knights' college which would educate future military commanders.

During the reign of John III these reformist ideas were promoted by the Jesuit Bartłomiej Nataniel Wasowski, who had gained experience in this field in the course of thorough studies and experiences acquired in Poland and abroad. During his European travels he made penetrating notes on the organization of education, curricula and teaching methods, and also on mutual dependence of such theoretical subjects as theology, philosophy, history and law and practical knowledge, where he included arithmetics, geometry, physics, as well as horse-riding, fencing, military drill, artillery, military tactics and engineering, etc.

The initial work on the establishment of the knights' college came in 1671 and practical classes began in 1673. The school's organization was based on western models and according to Wasowski's plans teachers were to be brought from the west as well. Wasowski presented his plan to John Sobieski, then Grand Hetman. Recalling such models as schools in Naples and Venice he tried to prove that his school in Jarosław would educate career officers who would enjoy respect of authorities and among citizens. Apart from professional knowledge its students would learn discipline, political wisdom and a sense of responsibility for state matters. The Jesuit principles were to be as important as forming prudent attitudes.

The school was in existence for two years only. In later years Wąsowski did not return to the subject of a knights' college, although as the superior of the Jesuit college in Poznań he established there a mathematical school which in 1678 he transformed into an academy. The curriculum of this academy encompassed lectures on theory of architecture. For the opening of those classes Wąsowski published an architectural treatise, entitled "Callitectorum seu de pulchre sacrae et civilis..."

In his dedication to Jakub Sobieski, son of John III, Wąsowski emphasized the importance of architecture in lending lustre to the ruler's activity and embellishing the country.

In his books and lectures at the Poznań academy he introduced his Polish readers and listeners to the principles of European architecture and drew their attention to its basic aspect: the idea of beauty and symmetry which should guide it.

Wąsowski failed to carry through his ambitious plans of establishing a knights' college despite the promises of John III. However he succeeded in setting up a school of architecture. Thanks to his efforts a special curriculum was drawn up and young people began to be educated in this field. It should be remembered that according to him the royal family were to extend their protection to all projects in this sphere. It was within the court circle that Poland's only genuine architectural treatise was written to become at the same time the first Polish academic handbook in this field.

Bartłomiej Wąsowski's activity in the sphere of military and architectural studies was undertaken during the reign of John III and under his direct influence. Therefore it constitutes an important element of contemporary culture and at the same time is evidence of the monarch's intentions, shrewdness and unfulfilled hopes.