

The Brukenthal National Museum Treasury is one of the most valuable and famous in Romania, holding several liturgical and laic gilded silver works produced by local masters, widely acclaimed as masterpieces of Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque goldsmith art in Central Europe.

Within this Treasury collection there is a relatively small number of rare items that we might expose and interpret as „memorabilia” or „mirabilia” in the spirit of the so-called „cabinets of curiosities”, due to their original and peculiar artistic or historic values. The current study aims to present some data about a work from this category, and to describe in details another one, both being decorated in medallions featuring portraits of monarchs, whose identification and analysis send us to different episodes of the tumultuous history of Poland.

The first silver work we shall briefly describe is a beaker, [fig. 76](#) hammered in oval medallions with two portraits – identified by accompanying inscriptions – one of Stephen Bathóry, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania in 1576–1586 (married to Anna Jagellon), and the other one of Constantia, Archduchess of Austria (married to Sigismund III Vasa), Queen consort of Poland and Grand Duchess of Lithuania in 1605–1631<sup>1</sup>. [fig. 77](#) [fig. 78](#) Their association is very strange due to the fact that the future Queen of Poland, Constantia, was born in 1588, i.e. two years after Stephen Bathóry’s death. A possible explanation for joining the two portraits, while rejecting the assumption of a confused identification of the royal couple, may be related to the University of Vilnius, founded by Stephen Bathóry in 1579 (*Alma Universitas Vilnensis et Societatis Jesu Academy*), which soon became one of the most renowned

## POLISH ROYAL PORTRAITS REPRESENTED ON SILVER WORKS IN THE COLLECTION OF THE BRUKENTHAL NATIONAL MUSEUM TREASURY

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<sup>1</sup> Konstancja Habsburg, *Habsburżanki na polskim tronie. Groagh’s Blog (Austria Est Imperare Orbi Universum)*, May 26, 2009, <http://www.groargh.wordpress.com/category/habsburzanki-na-polskim-tronie>.

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[fig. 76](#) Silver beaker with socle, German workshop („J.D. Schleißner & Söhne”, Hanau), end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Brukenthal National Museum, inv. T. 1609)

**fig. 77** Detail of the silver beaker: *Portrait of Stephen Bathóry*, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania in 1576–1586

**fig. 78** Detail of the silver beaker: *Portrait of Constantia* (married Sigismund III Vasa), Archduchess of Austria, Queen consort of Poland and Grand Duchess of Lithuania in 1605–1631

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2 Lidded tankard, German workshop (J.D. Schleißner & Söhne, Hanau), end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, silver (800‰), cast, hammered *au repoussé*, etched; H. 23 cm, D. 10,5 cm x 12 cm, W. 785 g (MNB inv. T. 1409).

scientific and cultural institution of the Commonwealth. Thirty years later, during the siege of Smolensk in the course of the Polish-Russian war, the young Queen Constantia is recorded for two years (1609–1611) as a resident in the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Vilnius, making various donations, including those for the University. Consequently, it seems plausible that the beaker was created in relation to a jubilee anniversary of the University of Vilnius.

The second silver work under discussion is a lidded tankard that highlights an equestrian portrait of Jan III Sobieski in a circular medallion, framed at the bottom with the inscription: „JohANN III. Sobieski vor Wien 1683”<sup>22</sup>. **fig. 79**

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**fig. 79** Silver tankard with lid, German workshop („J.D. Schleißner & Söhne”, Hanau), end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Brukenthal National Museum, inv. T. 1409)

King of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1674–1696, Jan III Sobieski managed to establish during his reign a much-needed period of political stability<sup>3</sup>.

A graduate of the Faculty of Philosophy of the Jagellon University in Krakow, speaker of several languages, he met during his two-year journey through Western Europe some significant political figures of the time (the French General Louis II de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, then Charles II Stuart – King of England, Scotland and Ireland – as well as the sovereign Prince of Orange, William II). In his youth Sobieski became familiar with the Turks' fighting tactics and traditions in Istanbul, where he was sent by John II Casimir Vasa to gain the experience necessary for a future army commander that he was promised to be appointed<sup>4</sup> (John II Casimir Vasa, King of Poland in 1648–1668, was the son of Queen Constantia, whose portrait is represented on the above-mentioned beaker).

The brilliant victory against the Turks at Hotin – on 11 November 1673 – obtained by Polish Hussars under the command of Hetman Jan Sobieski<sup>5</sup>, coincided with the death of Michael I, King of Poland since 1669. These circumstances propelled Sobieski onto the throne of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the following year. The aforementioned battle was subsequently considered a prelude to the legendary Battle of Vienna fought in 1683. A military genius and a skillful diplomat, Jan Sobieski won a long series of further battles against the Turks and the Russians and has remained in the collective memory the greatest king that Poland ever had.

The Battle of Vienna shook the power and hindered the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in Western Europe. The decisive combats to relieve the two-month Siege of Vienna by the Ottoman Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa were waged on 11 and 12 September 1683 by the Polish army under the command of King Jan III Sobieski. The brave sovereign is represented on the Brukenthal National Museum silver tankard in the foreground of the Battle of Vienna scene, riding a strapping stallion, whose rearing the rider curbs with a firm grip. The king is crowned with laurels like the ancient Emperor Augustus, holding his menacing sword in the raised right hand. fig. 80

3 O. Forst de Battaglia, *Jan Sobieski, 1674–96*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of Poland*, vol. 1, Cambridge 1950, p. 532–556.

4 Jan III Sobieski, [http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/John\\_III\\_Sobieski.html](http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/John_III_Sobieski.html), May 20, 2015.

5 S. Millar, P. Dennis, *Vienna 1683: Christian Europe Repels the Ottomans*, London 2008, p. 17.

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fig. 80 Detail of the tankard: *Equestrian portrait of Jan III Sobieski during the Battle of Vienna in 1683*

- 6 A. Pagden, *Turning the Ottoman Tide – John III Sobieski at Vienna 1683*, <http://www.historynet.com/turning-the-ottoman-tide-john-iii-sobieski-at-vienna-1683.htm>, July 28, 2008.

The composition of the background scene is narrated in a gradual way: seen on the left side there are several tents, cannons and piles of cannonballs, barrels of powder and arms abandoned on the battlefield as well as bodies of fallen Turkish Janissaries; [fig. 81](#) depicted under the front legs of the rearing horse there is the astonished Grand Vizier fleeing the battlefield, terrified, hands raised above his head, symbolizing the collapse of the recently glorious Ottoman Empire. [fig. 82](#) (Following the defeat, a few months later Kara Mustafa was executed in Belgrade)<sup>6</sup>. On the right side of the battle scene background there are horsemen of the Polish King's rearguard, with flags waving in the wind and threatening spears, chasing and crushing the remains of the Ottoman army; smoke from the exploding bombs rises to the sky.

The consequences of the Battle of Vienna were of extreme importance, both politically and religiously. The triumphal victory resulted in stopping the expansion and the influence of the Ottoman army in Europe, triggering the decline of the Ottoman Empire and marking the beginning of the Habsburg hegemony in Central Europe. The Pope acclaimed Sobieski the „Savior of Vienna and of the Western European civilization”.

The model that inspired the silversmith's representation of Sobieski riding his horse on the lidded tankard from Sibiu can be traced in an engraving by John Luyken (painter, engraver and poet from Amsterdam, 1649–1712), bearing the following inscription in German: „Blutige Feldschlacht der Pohlen wieder die Turcken bey Chozim, unter dem Feldherrn Sobietski den 11 Tag Novembris Anno 1673 gehalten”. [fig. 83](#) As evidenced by the inscription, the engraved scene depicts the Battle of Hotin, fought on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1673, which resulted in a brilliant victory over the Turks obtained by the Polish army under Sobieski's command. (The engraving was realized before 1680 to illustrate Andreas Müller's book, „Das Verwirreten Europae..., von 1673 biß 1676...”, published that year

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[fig. 81](#) [fig. 82](#) Details of the *Siege of Vienna in 1683*



**fig. 83** Engraving by John Luyken (1649–1712): *Equestrian portrait of Jan Sobieski during the Battle of Hotin in 1673* (The National Digital Library Polona / CBN Polona)

in Amsterdam. The book provides a description of political events occurring in Europe in 1673–1676 and it appeared as a follow-up to Pieter Valckenier’s volume from 1677 that presented historical events taking place in Europe in 1664–1672).

The appearance of the Polish commander riding his stallion on the lidded tankard from Sibiu is taken out of the original context of the engraving mentioned above, and – with just a few small adjustments of interpretation – it overlaps with the image of the most humiliating defeat of the Turks in their history, brought about by Sobieski’s army during the Siege of Vienna in 1685.

In terms of iconography some specific features of King Sobieski’s portrait are transposed from the engraving on the lidded tankard, such as his physiognomy, stature and the riding position, the way he is holding the sword in his right hand and almost the full aspect of the horse; naturally identical is the representation of the fallen Turk with a big turban on his head, lying between the horse’s hind legs, and quite similar is that of the Turk with hands raised in a gesture of despair seen under the right hoof of the horse **fig. 81** **fig. 82**.

Compared with an oval tray – made of gilded silver by a goldsmith of Gdansk in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century – which reproduces on its inner surface an analogous equestrian portrait of King Sobieski<sup>7</sup>, the tankard from Sibiu shares many more details of the background battle scene with John Luyken’s engraving. However, in contrast to his bareheaded portrait on Luyken’s engraving, King Sobieski is represented – both on the tankard and on the tray – wearing a laurel wreath on his head. Sobieski’s portrayal as a winner crowned with laurels appears on a series of medals issued since 1677 (1679, 1681, 1684 etc.) as well as on a gilded silver tray depicting „Sobieski’s triumphant return from the victorious Battle of Vienna” by Johann Gottfried Holl (master of Gdansk, active in 1678–1689) and on a picture of Sobieski’s court painter Jerzy Eleuter Szymonowicz-

7 Decorative gilded silver tray, workshop in Gdansk, late 17<sup>th</sup> century (Castle Montresor, France); see photo in Archive-Lessing-images.com (no. 26-04-01/62).

Siemiginowski (1660–1711), realized in ca. 1693, exhibited in the Museum of Wilanów (a Baroque Palace built for Sobieski). There are probably other examples closer to the image on the tankard of Sibiu. The rondel featuring the Polish King's portrait in the foreground occupies the whole front wall of the tankard, being set in a rich vegetal arabesque of twisted ornaments with acanthus leaf endings, interspersed among rosehip fruit and stems, corollas of flowers and oval medallions like graceful mirrors. The S-shaped curved handle of the tankard – with its large loop positioned above and terminated by an eagle head – is decorated with a Herm wrapped in acanthus leaves; used as a decorative element that catches the hinge cover there is an antefix with circular perforations. The overall shape of the tankard, the cover with a wavy rim and the complex decorative composition reflect specific features of the Baroque style.

The master marks stamped on the tankard lid are those of the Schleißner family workshop in Hanau, Germany. Working in the company founded by his father, Daniel Philipp August Schleißner (1825–1891) visited many private and public collections and analyzed a great number of original Renaissance, Baroque and Rococo goldsmith works, accumulating extensive knowledge of aesthetics and design. By combining them with his contemporary techniques, Daniel Philipp August Schleißner created a series of silver works in these established styles. His business success brought fame to the city of Hanau as the largest producer of „Silver Style” in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In conclusion let us say that, considering some specific figurative images engraved on silver works as starting points for detailed analysis, we are amazed to see how complex history lessons can be woven around these topics. The goldsmiths had the aspiration and ability to express in their art the significance of some epoch-making events and to reflect the personality and significance of illustrious personages of their time.

## References

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5-7, mit einem zweifarbigen Titelblatt, 16 gestochenen Portraits und 13 (von 19) doppelseitigen Kupfern, 812 Seiten, 44 Seiten, 7 Blatt 21 x 32, hellbraunes späteres Oldr mit goldgeprägtem Rückentitel und Voll-Rotschnitt).

„The Golden Horn Collection. Ancient Coins, World Coins, Medals, Orders, and Decorations”, *Stack's Auction Gallery*: 117, nr. 4021. New York, January 12, 2009.

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## Streszczenie

W zbiorach skarbcza Narodowego Muzeum Brukenthala w Sibiu, należących do najwartościowszych i najbardziej znanych w Rumunii, znajduje się kilka liturgicznych i świeckich argentariów wykonanych przez lokalnych rzemieślników, a uznawanych powszechnie w centralnej Europie za arcydzieła złotnictwa z okresu średniowiecza, renesansu i baroku. Stosunkowo niewiele przedmiotów z tej kolekcji możemy interpretować jako „memorabilia” czy też „mirabilia” rozumiane w duchu „gabinetów osobliwości”, ze względu na ich nietuzinkowe i szczególnie walory artystyczne czy historyczne. Niniejszy artykuł poświęcono dwom dziełom sztuki z tej kategorii dekorowanym medalionami z portretami władców, których identyfikacja i analiza odsyła nas do burzliwej historii Polski. Pierwsze z nich to kubek zdobiony kutymi owalnymi medalionami z dwoma portretami, które rozpoznajemy dzięki towarzyszącymi im inskrypcjom – jednej dotyczącej Stefana Batorego, Króla Polski i Wielkiego Księcia Litewskiego w latach 1576–1586 i drugiej, odnoszącej się do Konstancji, Arcyksiężnej Austrii, Królowej Polski, i Wielkiej Księżnej Litewskiej w latach 1605–1631.

Drugie omawiane dzieło to srebrny kufel z pokrywą, na którym widnieje portret Jana III umieszczony w okrągłym medalionie, obramowany u dołu inskrypcją: „JohANN III. Sobieski vor Wien 1683”. Monarchę zaprezentowano jadącego na koniu na tle bitwy pod Wiedniem. Wzorem starożytnego cesarza Augusta król jest ukoronowany laurem, w prawej, wzniesionej ku górze dłoni trzyma miecz. W tle po lewej stronie widnieje kilka namiotów i armat, stosy kul armatnich, beczek prochu i porzuconej broni oraz ciała poległych na polu bitwy tureckich janczarów. Poniżej, przed przednimi nogami konia zaskoczony wielki wezyr ucieka z pola bitwy. Unosi ręce nad głową, przez co w symboliczny sposób ukazuje upadek imperium osmańskiego.

Wizerunek polskiego dowódcy jadącego na koniu znajdujący się na kufle z Sibiu został zaczerpnięty z grafiki Johna Luykena i nasuwa na myśl obraz najbardziej upokarzającej wojennej klęski w historii Turcji, odniesionej podczas oblężenia Wiednia w roku 1683. Kształt kufła, pokrywa z falistą krawędzią i kompozycja dekoracji odzwierciedlają szczególnie cechy baroku. Pierwszoplanowy medalion przedstawiający portret polskiego króla zajmuje cały front kufła; otacza go bogata roślinna arabeska ze skręconych ornamentów zakończonych liśćmi akantu, przepleciona pośród owoców i łodyg róży. Uchwyt kufła, wygięty w kształcie litery „S” został ozdobiony hermą owiniętą w liście akantu. Kończy go duża pętla umieszczona powyżej. Nad nią zwieńczenie z głową orła, ujmujące zawiasy

pokrywy. Przy nim na samej górze znajduje się antefiks z okrągłymi otworami. Znak złotnika wybity na pokrywie kufła wskazuje na pracownię Schleißner w Hanau z Niemiec. Kufel jest dziełem sławnego rzemieślnika Daniela Philipa Schleissnera (1825–1891). Zważywszy charakterystyczne motywy rytowane na srebrnych rękodzielach, z których wysnuć możemy zadziwiająco bogatą lekcję historii, stwierdzamy, że złotnicy mieli aspiracje i zdolności zarówno wyrażania w sztuce znaczących dla epoki wydarzeń, jak również przedstawiania wybitnych i barwnych osobistości swoich czasów.

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