

## MILANÓW — JOHN III SOBIESKI'S „VILLA NOVA“

On 23 April 1677 John III Sobieski became the owner of an estate situated in the village of Milanów near Warsaw. The same year the name of the village was changed into the Latin Villa Nova, soon polonized to Wilanów.

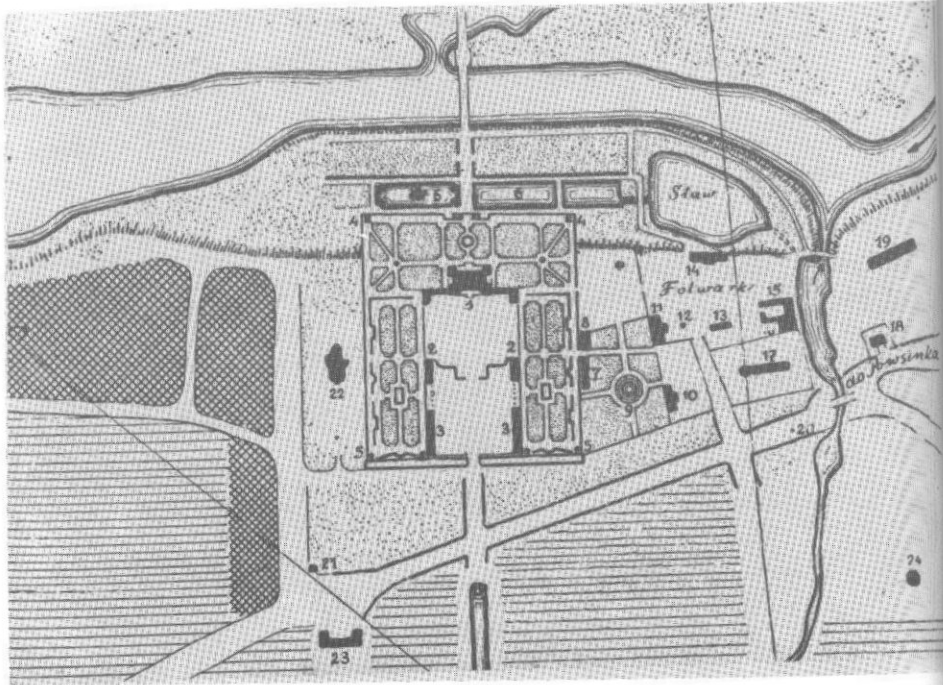
The designation "villa nova" referred not only to the new residence, "habitazione", at Milanów, but also to its newly formed "fattoria", or farms and gardens /Fig. 3/. The manor house /Fig. 4/ that John III had purchased was soon transformed into a villa /Fig. 5/ by the royal architect Agostino Locci who, in his correspondence with the king, treated the designation "villa nova" in a broader meaning: of a residence together with all estate and its various, not only dwelling buildings.

However the Latin inscription "Quod Vetus Urbs coluit nunc Nova Villa tenet", restricts its semantic meaning to John III's residence only. In this inscription "nova villa" is compared, it seems, to ancient Rome. This juxtaposition, though not opposition, was influenced by the view about the identical nature of the ideological programme of ancient Rome and 18th century pastoral life and the "villa nova" with its sculptures and painted decorations.

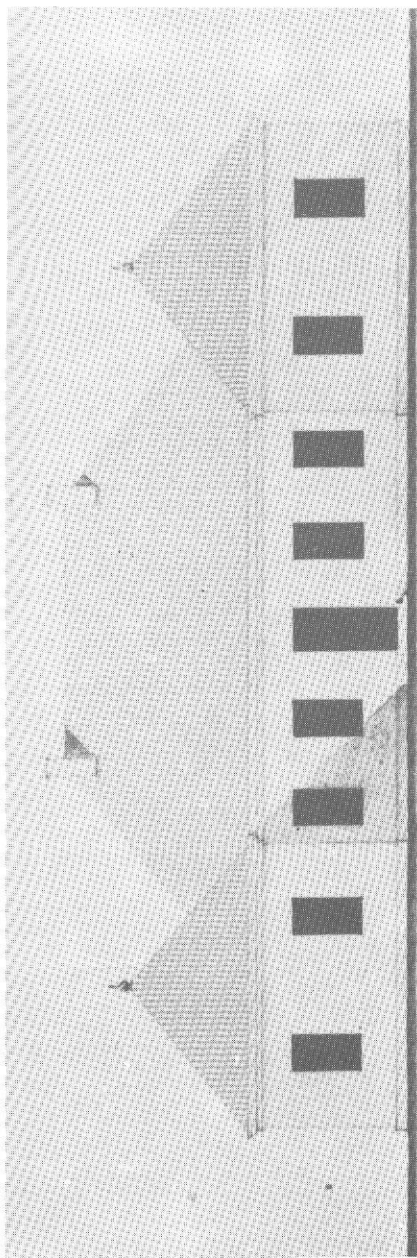
In the 16th century the "humanistic institution of villa" was crystallized in Italy, with its roots reaching back to antiquity. The notion of the "humanistic institution of villa" was formulated to designate in short the ideological and artistic problems associated with the Italian villa. John III must have been familiar with this idea, considering all the architectural treatises in his library. In his "Idea dell'Architettura Universale", Vincenzo Scamozzi wrote that "there is no finer, sweeter thing than agriculture for those who know how to use the villa". The villa, understood as a humanistic institution associated with the mythologization of agriculture, was regarded

as both the "shrine of agriculture" and "paradise on earth".

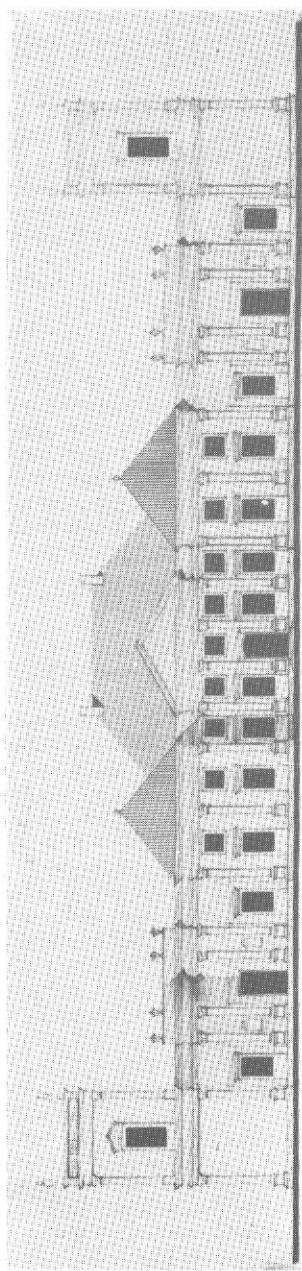
The idea of Wilanów was born of this cult of agriculture and rural life and it was carried out accordingly. Considering agrarism as the predominant economic system, John III tried to convey his ideological programme also in the decoration of the royal villa at Wilanów. The latter became not only a monument to his glory and fame but also a "shrine of revived agriculture". Glorification of agriculture and rural life as the king's conscious programme was expressed in the plafonds with representations of the "Four Seasons" painted by J. E. Siemiginowski, as well as in the accompanying scenes on the mouldings and friezes which are based on Virgil's "Georgics" and represent various events in the life of a village and farm work. The abundant decorations of the royal apartments served to propagate the cult of "holy agriculture" and awaken longing for the lost "golden age" which could be brought back only by the "Restituta Sancta Agricultura".



3. Wilanów. Plan of the situation from the original of A. Boy, 1682, elaborated by G. Ciołek



4. Wilanów. Original manor-house, a reconstruction of the front elevation, c. 1680



5. The Palace of Wilanów, a reconstruction of the front elevation from 1681—1682