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*The Imperial Theme in Art and Architecture
of the Polish Vasas*

*Motywy imperialne w sztuce i architekturze
polskich Wazów*

This essay reconsiders two of the most famous monuments in Poland, the Warsaw Castle and the Sigismund Column. It argues that both evoke imperial themes, with reference to a model provided by the Habsburgs for both the architecture and the sculpture, but present them in ways that specifically express the ambitions of the Vasa dynasty.

Keywords: Royal Castle in Warsaw, Sigismund Column, the Vasa dynasty, art and power.



Artykuł jest jeszcze jedną próbą analizy dwóch znanych polskich zabytków – Zamku Królewskiego i Kolumny Zygmunta w Warszawie. Postawiono w nim tezę, że oba te dzieła wyrażają treści imperialne nawiązując do wzorca stworzonego przez Habsburgów zarówno dla architektury, jak i rzeźby, a jednocześnie modyfikując je tak, by odpowiadały konkretnym dążeniom dynastii Wazów.

Słowa kluczowe: Zamek Królewski w Warszawie, Kolumna Zygmunta, sztuka i władza, dynastia Wazów

The recent exhibition and essay volumes *The World of the Polish Vasas* demonstrated that politics, personalities, and the arts in the Poland-Lithuanian commonwealth were enmeshed with many European lands during the reigns of the Vasa kings.¹ These rulers claimed to rule over several large realms: the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the kingdom of Sweden comprising Sweden (with its overseas possessions), Finland, and Estonia, and (at least as pretenders) Muscovy with its Russian territories. By most definitions, their conglomeration of kingdoms constituted an empire. This essay re-examines the application of the concept of the imperial theme to Vasa Poland. This theme has been a major topic in studies of early modern European culture,² but one not usually associated with the Polish Vasas in contrast with the treatment of what has been called the “Jagellonian Empire.”³ Reconsidering Sigismund III’s expansion of the Royal Castle in Warsaw and the column erected nearby it in his honor, this essay argues that the Vasas expressed imperial aspirations in these two key monuments, whose associations were inflected by Habsburg-inspired designs and imagery.⁴

Imperial Aspects of the Warsaw Royal Castle under Sigismund III

While previous discussions of the Royal Castle in Warsaw under Sigismund III (Fig. 1) have largely considered its Italian sources,⁵ one may well look fruitfully elsewhere. Although Italian-speaking architects were active in many places in Poland, the penchant

* I wish to thank Aleksander Musiał and Jacek Żukowski for assistance and for supplying bibliography.

¹ Jacek ŻUKOWSKI, ed., *Świat polskich Wazów. Przestrzeń – Ludzie – Sztuka* (Warsaw: 2019); Jacek ŻUKOWSKI, Zbigniew HUNDERT, eds., *Świat polskich Wazów. Eseje* (Warsaw: Zamek Królewski w Warszawie – Muzeum, 2019). The catalogue entries and the bibliographies to the various essays include the most pertinent bibliography, which is not cited again here, as citations are restricted to specific references.

² The classic treatment of the topic is Frances A. YATES, *The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (Boston and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975). See also for the application of this theme to the Austrian Habsburgs pertinent to the discussion in this essay Thomas DaCosta KAUFMANN, *Variations on the Imperial Theme in the Age of Maximilian II and Rudolf II* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1978).

³ As exemplified by Jan BIAŁOSTOCKI, *The Art of the Renaissance in Eastern Europe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976), 4–5.

⁴ Only recently has Habsburg impact on the arts (as opposed to political relationships) of the Vasas been recognized, though not yet thoroughly discussed: Michał WARDZYŃSKI, “Rezydencje królewskie Wazów – europejskie inspiracje architektury i rzeźby,” in ŻUKOWSKI, HUNDERT, *Świat polskich Wazów*, 259–74. Wardzyński states that Vasa connections with the Habsburgs are key, and adduces some comparisons with buildings in Central Europe, but does not compare the Warsaw Castle with contemporary early seventeenth-century residences, nor specify Central European sources, nor make inferences from more than layout, and also does not consider free-standing sculpture.

⁵ See Mariusz KARPOWICZ, *Artisti Ticinesi in Polonia nel ‘600* (Agnò Lugano: Arti Grafiche Bernasconi, 1983), 57–8; and especially Mariusz KARPOWICZ, *Matteo Castello, architekt wczesnego baroku* (Warsaw: Neriton, 1994), 19–34; and Adam MIŁOBĘDZKI, *Architektura polska XVII wieku* (Warsaw: PWN, 1980), 117–8, with references to previous literature. The latest monograph Marek WREDE, *Rozbudowa Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie przez Zygmunta III* (Warsaw: Arx Regia, 2013) also relates the plans and concepts of the Warsaw Castle to Italy.

to concentrate on Italy, especially Rome or after that, France, for artistic ideas may however be related to a lingering inclination to ignore or downplay other connections.⁶ In any case, regardless of the presence of the same architect (Jan Trevano) in both Kraków and Warsaw, the Wawel and Warsaw Castles share few features in common that could unquestionably demonstrate the use of Italian sources in Warsaw. Furthermore, reasons for the transfer of the main royal residence and seat of government from Kraków to Warsaw that catalyzed the construction of the Zamek clearly point to another direction than southward.⁷

One may instead consider Sweden, for instance. Sweden long preoccupied Sigismund III. After becoming ruler of Poland-Lithuania, in 1594 Sigismund was crowned king of Sweden. Rule over these two vast realms opened imperial perspectives, but Sigismund encountered resistance in his northern kingdom. The Swedish Riksdag did not bend to his will: while Sigismund was absent in Poland, without his consent his uncle Charles was named regent in 1595. In 1597 civil war broke out. In 1598 Sigismund took an army to Sweden to assert his authority, but was decisively defeated both militarily and politically. In 1599 he was deposed as king of Sweden, and in 1600 Charles became de facto ruler. In 1604 Charles was formally crowned king, ruling as Charles IX of Sweden. From 1621 Swedish armies brought war to lands under the dominion of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Despite such setbacks, Sigismund III nevertheless remained fixed throughout his reign on the goal of regaining the Swedish crown.⁸

Recent historiography has established that only after the debacle in Sweden in 1598 did Sigismund determine to establish his main Polish residence in Warsaw. Warsaw was nearer the Baltic, hence Sweden: it could well have been regarded as more central in his expansive, if contested, empire. At any rate, the enlarged castle in Warsaw provided a suitable residence to replace Tre Kronor Castle in Stockholm, the main Swedish royal residence. In 1599 extensive construction began in Warsaw.⁹

The expanded castle in Warsaw corresponds in general to contemporary conceptions of how a ruler's residence could represent magnificence.¹⁰ Its magnitude and prominent place in the Warsaw cityscape bodied forth the king's grandeur. But beyond its size and location, both its forms and materials correspond to some specific features of Swedish royal residences: to Gripsholm, where Sigismund was born, and to Tre Kronor in Stockholm before it burned down in 1697. Despite its difference in size in comparison with Grips-

⁶ See Jacek FRIEDRICH, "Polish authors of Netherlandism in the art and architecture of Gdańsk," in *Art of the Southern Netherlands: Gdańsk and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*, ed. Jacek TYLICKI, Jacek ŻUKOWSKI; with cooperation with Agnieszka Żukowska (Gdańsk: The Gdańsk Shakespeare Theater, 2017), 199–212; Thomas DaCosta KAUFMANN, [Review Article] "Jan Białostocki, *The Art of the Renaissance in Eastern Europe*," *Art Bulletin*, no. 58 (1978): 164–69; and conversely for the disjunction of scholarship ID., "Will the Jagellonians again have their Day? The State of Scholarship on the Jagellonians and Art in the Hungarian and Czech Lands," in *Die Jagellonen. Kunst und Kultur einer europäischen Dynastie an der Wende zur Neuzeit*, ed. Dietmar POPP, Robert SUCKALE (Nuremberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2002), 207–14. The work of Tylicki, Wardzyński, and of Piotr Oszczanowski may indicate that the tide is turning in regard to the treatment of art history of the Vasa period.

⁷ Wardzyński mentions "kierunek południowy," referring however to the Habsburgs, but not Sweden, as key for the Vasas. See WARDZYŃSKI, "Rezydencje królewskie Wazów," 259.

⁸ See for the general background and the wars of the 1620s Robert L. FROST, *The Northern Wars. War, State and Society in Northeastern Europe, 1558–1721* (Harlow: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 2000), 102–28, and 46, 88, 114, 117, 256 for Sigismund's desire to recover the Swedish throne.

⁹ As argued in WREDE, *Rozbudowa Zamku Królewskiego*.

¹⁰ Discussed most recently in Thomas DaCosta KAUFMANN, "Artes Ante Bellum. Die Künste vor dem Dreißigjähriger Krieg in Mitteleuropa und darüber hinaus," in *Bellum et Artes*, ed. Susanne JAEGER and Claudia BRINK (Leipzig: GWZO, 2021), 13–35.



*Fig. 1 Zamek Królewski (Royal Castle) in Warsaw, view from the Castle Square.
Photo by Adrian Gryczuk, Open Access*

holm (it is larger), and in design with Tre Kronor (it is more compact and also pentagonal), the Warsaw Castle shares with them such elements as corner towers and the use of brick (according to old images of Tre Kronor, with plaster covering) to which stone accents have been applied. The use of brick construction in Warsaw moreover contrasts with the rarity with which this material was utilized in most early Polish castles and palaces. Such features do appear in Royal Prussia and in some other places in northern Poland, but this too may be related to their geographic location, underscoring the northern connection. For construction in brick is associated with traditions of building around the Baltic.¹¹

But other aspects of the Warsaw Castle do not resemble the brick structures of the period built in Poland, including Royal Prussia, or elsewhere around the Baltic, including Sweden. The Warsaw Castle does not have the scrolled gables and highly ornamented portals seen in contemporary buildings at Gdańsk, or at Gripsholm or Tre Kronor.¹² The

¹¹ Jan BIAŁOSTOCKI, "The Baltic Area as an Artistic Province," *Hafnia* 4 (1976): 12; Henry-Russell HITCHCOCK, *Netherlandish Scrolled Gables of the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: New York University Press for the College Art Association of America, 1978), 9. See further for articulation of gable and attic treatment as markers of stylistic geography in Eastern (and northern) Europe BIAŁOSTOCKI, *The Art of the Renaissance in Eastern Europe*.

¹² For Gdańsk, see the previous note. Gripsholm, as reconstructed after plans of 1537 by Henrik von Cöllen may be seen in a view from Erik Dahlbergh, *Suecia Antiqua et Hodierna*, Stockholm, 1719, illustrated in *Sweden. A Royal Treasury 1550–1700*, ed. Michael CONFORTI, Guy WALTON (Washington and Minneapolis: National Gallery Of Art, Washington, D.C., 1988), 39, fig. 3. Tre Kronor's appearance may be viewed in a painting signed and dated 1661 by Govert Camphuysen (Stockholm, Stadsmuseet; photo in the public domain) and in a painting attributed to his workshop probably of the same date (Uppsala, University Collections, Inv. No. UU 52; photograph Rikjsbureau voor Kunsthistorisch Documentatie, The Hague, no. 1001162630). Fredric BEDOIRE, *Guldålder. Slott och Politik i 1600-talets Sverige* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 2001), 12–27, describes the development of Swedish castle architecture in the 16th century.



*Fig. 2 El Escorial, Lateral Façade.
Photo by Salomon Segundo, Open Access*

long exterior walls of the Zamek also lack decoration with pillars, pilasters, or other features besides window frames and stringcourses found on such buildings. In these respects, the Zamek contrasts conspicuously with other Polish buildings of the period. As Adam Zamoyski aptly commented “...the Warsaw Castle was strikingly severe in contrast to the Wawel and other Renaissance residences. There are no decorated parapets, no loggias or colonnades. The pentagonal building was massive in aspect...”¹³

The Castle’s concentrated mass and lack of surface decoration also differ markedly from large contemporary Polish urban dwellings. The so-called *Przybyła* houses (sometimes called palaces) in Kazimierz Dolny that were built in 1619, the same year the Warsaw Zamek was completed, provide a pertinent comparison.¹⁴ The arcades, elaborated gables, decorated attics, and profuse stucco decoration seen in Kazimierz Dolny are all missing in Warsaw. The comparison of Warsaw and Kazimierz Dolny is telling, not only because another royal residence lies 350 meters from the houses in Kazimierz Dolny, or because design features of the Kazimierz Dolny residences offered an option often found in other Polish castles of the time. Recently published documents indicate that Kazimierz Dolny was well known to the builders of the Warsaw Castle: lime for construction was being sent to Warsaw from Kazimierz Dolny.¹⁵ The same material was thus being used both to create the gesso ornament on the *Przybyła* houses and to cement together the bricks of the Warsaw Castle, as well as perhaps to apply plaster to cover the exterior.

¹³ Adam ZAMOYSKI, *The Polish Way. A Thousand-Year History of the Poles and Their Culture* (London: John Murray, 1987), 192.

¹⁴ For the most recent, thorough account of these “palaces” see Katie JAKOBIEC, “Beyond form and fancy: the merchant palaces of Kazimierz Dolny in Poland,” *Architectural History* 60 (2017): 37–89.

¹⁵ WREDE, *Rozbudowa Zamku Królewskiego*, 215–216, no. 8.

The combination of severity in design, lack of scrolled gables, and use of brick construction found at the Warsaw Castle may be better compared to buildings in other lands beyond Italy. Long stretches of walls made of brick covered with plaster are found for example in contemporary buildings in Spain, as at the Plaza Mayor in Madrid. The Plaza Mayor was commissioned by King Philip III and completed the same year that Sigismund's reconstruction of the Warsaw Castle ended, 1619.¹⁶ The structures at the Plaza Mayor have corner towers, as does the Warsaw Castle: these were recognizable traits of royal palaces in the time of Philip II, Philip III father, as were the slate roofs inspired by those in the Low Countries, then under Spanish rule. Unlike the tower of Philip II's Alcazar, the towers on the Plaza Mayor, like those on the Warsaw Castle, are ornamental rather than functional. Like the Warsaw Castle, the buildings around the Plaza Mayor also lack the ornamented gables and decorative treatment of windows prevalent in designs that spread from the Netherlands to the Baltic and elsewhere in Europe.¹⁷

The Plaza Mayor is regarded as a prime representative of the *estilo desornamentado*, the disornamented style. This style has been described as the purified form of classicism preferred by Philip II.¹⁸ The predilection of buildings in the Spanish *estilo desornamentado* for austerity, simplicity, clarity and order also relate to the Portuguese variant of this style, what is called in Spanish *estilo llano*, or in Portuguese, *chão*.¹⁹ Since Portugal was under Spanish control from 1580, their realms were united: the two styles are closely related, and may for sake of simplicity be considered to be one, as the same architects (notably Juan de Herrera) associated with this style worked in both Spain and Portugal.

The most prominent examples and exemplars for the diffusion of this style and its use for royal palaces and other official buildings throughout the Iberian empires are indeed buildings on which Herrera worked for Philip II.²⁰ The most important example of the style is El Escorial (Fig. 2). Its lateral facades display most prominently the Escorial's characteristic long unarticulated stretches of wall with unadorned windows. Parts of the palace at Aranjuez remaining from Philip II's time also provide possible points of comparison for Warsaw in that they have "brick walls with white stone ornamentation [that] reflect traditional Spanish building."²¹

While the Warsaw Castle is otherwise comparable to the structures around the Plaza Mayor, it lacks the pilasters, half-columns, or arches found in the architecture of Philip III. In these regards it seems closer in style to Philip II's buildings than are Philip III's constructions. And the reduction of any architectural ornament (especially in its side facades) in these Spanish examples, as in Warsaw, differentiated them from the palaces in Rome and Latium with which the Zamek has been compared.²²

¹⁶ See Jesús ESCOBAR, *The Plaza Mayor and the shaping of Baroque Madrid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), for discussion of the buildings around this plaza, their sources, and impact on later urban and palace designs.

¹⁷ This and related topics are treated most comprehensively in Konrad OTTENHEYM and Krista DE JONGE, eds., *The Low Countries at the Crossroads. Netherlandish Architecture as an Export Product in Early Modern Europe (1480–1680)* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013) (Architectura Moderna, 8).

¹⁸ See for a definition of the *estilo desornamentado* and the origins of the term Catherine WILKINSON-ZERNER, *Juan de Herrera, Architect to Philip II of Spain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), especially 27–31.

¹⁹ George KUBLER, *Portuguese Plain Architecture: Between Spices and Diamonds, 1521–1706* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 1972).

²⁰ For the Escorial and Philip II's preference for this style there see George KUBLER, *Building the Escorial* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

²¹ WILKINSON-ZERNER, *Juan de Herrera*, 66–9.

²² See note 6.

Despite its distance from Iberia, Poland had many cultural contacts with Spain, as well as political relations from the 1590s, and it is possible that Spanish architecture was known in Poland.²³ It nevertheless not necessary for such direct knowledge of Spanish architecture to have existed, because buildings resembling those in the disornamented style inspired by the Spanish model appear in places elsewhere in Central Europe that would have been known in Poland. Significantly, they are found in palaces associated with the Austrian branch of the Habsburgs, whose connections with Spain were multiple and intense, and with whom Polish relations became close during the period of the Vasa kings.²⁴

One major example is the Schloss in Linz, Upper Austria (Fig. 3), which was built during the early 1600s for Emperor Rudolf II Habsburg (r. 1576–1612). (It is worth noting that the preceding building had provided a residence from 1566 until her death in 1572 for Catharine, the former Queen of Poland.) The Linz Schloss possesses features that resemble the plain style. Its facades have long flat walls that except for quoins at their corners and vertical strips that occasionally punctuate them are otherwise unadorned.

Rudolf II began planning a new residence in Linz in 1599, the same year the reconstruction of the Warsaw Castle began. The emperor, whose personal involvement with the arts contemporaries compared to King Sigismund's,²⁵ examined and approved designs for the building, much as his uncle, cousin, and sometime brother-in-law Philip II of Spain had closely overseen the construction of the Escorial. At Linz construction seems to have been delayed for several years, but in 1604 the actual building was begun. In January 1607 Rudolf II announced to the Estates of Upper Austria, of which Linz is the capital, that he intended to move from his residence in Prague to the Linz Schloss. This decision and the style of the building were both likely inspired by Rudolf II's experiences in Spain: Rudolf had spent seven crucial years of his youth at the court of Philip II exactly while the Escorial was being built. He would have known that Charles V retired to Yuste, and that Philip II in effect did so to the Escorial. Rudolf II continued to have an interest in Spanish architecture, as he later obtained drawings of Spanish palaces: in 1604 he received a book on the interpretation of the Temple of Solomon by Juan Bautista Villalpando, who was a member of the circle of Herrera and whose ideas have been interpreted as offering a key to a meaning of the Escorial.²⁶ When Rudolf announced that he would retire to Linz, he thus probably was thinking of making the Schloss there his Escorial. (Unlike Philip II he was however never able to do so, because the building was not completed until 1614, two years after his death.)

²³ Cultural relations between Spain and Poland during the Vasa Period are laid out in Ervin C. BRODY, "Spain and Poland in the Age of the Renaissance: A Comparative Study (Part 2)," *Polish Review* 15 (Winter 1970): 57–112.

²⁴ Ryszard SKOWRON, "W rodzinnej Europie. Związki i relacje polskich Wazów z innymi dynastiami europejskimi," in ŻUKOWSKI, HUNDERT, *Świat polskich Wazów*, 325–6, emphasizes the importance of these relationships and their consequences.

²⁵ Balthasar EXNER DE HIRSCHBERG, *Valerius Maximus Christianus* (Hanau: Hanoviae Aubrii & Schleichius Hanoviae Typis Wechelianis, 1620), 31: "Rudolphus II. Imperator ingeniosissimus fuit pictor & aurifex, ut qui ipse coronam auream & mensam ex meris gemmis fecerit, in primis horologiorum Artifex fuit. Fusione quoque tormentorum aenorum summe delectatus singulisque diebus ad minimum horam largitus est eorum inspectioni. Torneator egregius fuit Sigismundus Poloniae Rex..." For Sigismund as a painter see note 61 below.

²⁶ See Pablo JIMÉNEZ DIAZ, "Spain, Prague, and the Habsburg Ideology: Some Aspects of the Architecture of Rudolf II," in *Rudolf II, Prague and the World: Papers from the International Conference, Prague, 2–4 September, 1997*, ed. Lubomír KONEČNÝ, Beket BUKOVINSKÁ, Ivan MUCHKA (Prague: Artefactum, 1998), 11–15. Erwin MAYER-LÖWENSCHWERT, *Der Aufenthalt der Erzherzoge Rudolf und Ernst in Spanien 1564–1571* (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1927). The impact of Rudolf's education in Spain, including his introduction to geometry is discussed more recently by William EAMON, "The Scientific Education of a Renaissance Prince," in *Alchemy and Rudolf II*, ed. Ivo PURŠ, Vladimír KARPENKO (Prague: Artefactum, 2016), 129–38.



Fig. 3 *Schloss in Linz. Photo by NeoUrfahtaner, Open Access*

Linz is but the largest surviving example of several late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century imperial Habsburg residences that Rudolf II had constructed in a similar style. These include such buildings as the Amalienburg in the Vienna Hofburg and the Schloss at (Kaiser-) Ebersdorf: both have a similar quadrangular disposition, flat surfaces, and facades with many windows.²⁷ Echoing the description of the disornamented style as a “purified form of classicism,” Petr Uličný has also called attention to the use in Prague of a style he names “puristic.”²⁸ He finds this style present in the original design of a façade of a wing of the Prague Castle that Rudolf II had erected at the same time the Warsaw castle was being built.

Jiří Kroupa has independently noted the appearance of what he also called a “puristic” style in the residences Cardinal Franz von Dietrichstein (František z Ditrichštejna) and Karl von Liechtenstein rebuilt at Mikulov and Valtice in southern Moravia in the first years of the seventeenth century.²⁹ These had unarticulated façades, as did that of the

²⁷ This and the previous paragraphs summarize the arguments made in Thomas DaCosta KAUFMANN, “Linz – des Kaisers Kulturhauptstadt um 1600? Ein Escorial in Oberösterreich?,” in *Des Kaisers Kulturhauptstadt. Linz um 1600*, ed. Christina SCHMID (Weitra: Bibliothek der Provinz, 2012), 39–54. See further Thomas DaCosta KAUFMANN, “Zur Zierd: Revisiting the Prague Kunstkammer,” *Studia Rudolphina*, 17–18 (2018 [published March 2019]): 147.

²⁸ Petr ULIČNÝ, *Architektura Albrechta z Valdštejna: Italská stavební kultura v Čechách v letech 1600–1635 (Architecture of Albrecht of Wallenstein: Italian Building Culture in Bohemia in 1600–1635)* (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2017), 838. For Kroupa, see the next note.

²⁹ See for this theme Jiří Kroupa, unpublished lecture delivered at the Masaryk University, Brno, March 23, 2012 in a symposium whose results are in part published in Ondřej JAKUBEC, ed., *Central European and American Perspectives on Visual Arts in Early Modern Europe* (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2014). See further for these buildings Jiří KROUPA,

Liechtenstein Palace in the Malá Strana in Prague as it was reconstructed in the early 1620s for Karl von Liechtenstein.³⁰ Cardinal Stanislav Pavlovsky z Pavlovic (d. 1598), who preceded Dietrichstein as archbishop of Olomouc, built several palaces in Moravia (Vyškov, Kelč, Kromeríž) with similar features.³¹

Both Dietrichstein and Liechtenstein held important positions at Rudolf II's court in Prague. Dietrichstein was born in Spain, spoke Spanish, and had a Spanish circle of associates. After the Battle of White Mountain in 1620 Liechtenstein became the Habsburgs' stateholder (viceroy) in Prague. These aristocrats have been identified as the leading Catholic magnates in the pro-Habsburg camp: this group has moreover been called the "Spanish Party" in the Czech Lands.³² They also represent the expression of a long history of relations between the Czech Lands and Spain that had an impact on the arts.³³ Pavlovsky has also been associated with the militantly Catholic, pro-Habsburg group in Moravia.³⁴ It is likely that these patrons, especially Dietrichstein, whose father was ambassador to the Spanish court and who would thus also have seen the Escorial under construction, were cognizant of the Habsburg, royal, and imperial associations of the style, as conveyed by its use by the Habsburgs, emperors *de facto* (in Iberia and its possessions) and *de iure* (in Central Europe).

Protestant rivals and opponents of the Habsburgs were certainly aware of the representative, imperial significance of this style. It has been said of such earlier Protestant observers that like Philip II of Spain, "even when employing *all'antica* or Italianate forms more exclusively designers and their patrons saw no need to adhere strictly to Italian points of convention. They looked to Fontainebleau as filtered through Spanish examples, and especially the Escorial." For example, although one might not immediately think of the Escorial as a model for the Castle of Frederiksborg built by King Christian IV of Denmark, a foe of the Habsburgs in the Thirty Years' War, the king himself probably did.

Umelci. Objednavatelé a styl. Studie z dejin umeni (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2006), fig. 13, 15, 16, and "'Moderni fiori'. Kardinála z Ditrichštejna, protobarok a umelecká funkce na Morave po roce 1600," in *Kardinál František z Ditrichštejna a jeho doba. XXIX mikulovské symposium 11.–12. října 2006*, ed. Emil KORDIOVSKÝ, Miroslav SVOBODA (Brno and Mikulov: ČR-Moravský zemský archiv v Brně, Státní okresní archiv Břeclav se sídlem v Mikulově, Muzejní a vlastivědná společnost, 2006), 55–67.

³⁰ See Pavel BALČEK, ed., *Umelecké památky Prahy. Malá Strana* (Prague: Academia, 1999), 359. Petr MAŤA, *Svet české aristokracie (1500–1700)* (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2004), 215, publishes a reconstruction of the façade on the west side of the Malostranské Náměstí in Prague, and says that in comparison with the slightly later Valdštejn Palace it was quickly designed and without greater artistic aspirations. However, since there is only one document (dated 22 December 1623) pertaining to the planning of the palace Maťa's first point cannot be established with certainty. See Herbert HAUPT, *Fürst Karl I von Liechtenstein Obersthofmeister Kaiser Rudolf II und Vizekönig von Böhmen. Hofstaat und Sammeltätigkeit. Edition der Quellen aus dem liechtensteinischen Hauskarchiv* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1983), Textband: 43, and Quellenband: 258, no. 553. The present essay argues against the interpretation offered by the second point made by Maťa.

³¹ Ondřej JAKUBEC, ed., *Stanislav Pavlovský z Pavlovic (1579–1598). Biskup a mecenáš umírajícího věku* (Olomouc: Muzeum umění Olomouc, 2009), 91–4, 104–5.

³² See Josef V. POLIŠENSKÝ, *The Thirty Years War*, trans. Robert Evans (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 71 (for Dietrichstein) and 72–4 for Liechtenstein. For more on Dietrichstein in this regard see Pavel BALČEK, *Kardinál František z Ditrichštejna (1570–1636)* (Kromeríž: Muzeum Kromerížska, 1990), and for Liechtenstein see HAUPT, *Fürst Karl I von Liechtenstein*.

³³ For this earlier history see Pavel ŠTEPÁNEK, *Čechy a Španělsko ve středověku. Dejiny a umeni* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2008); ID., "Morava a Iberský poloostrov – Vztahy Moravy ke Španělsku a Portugalsku v letech 1400–1600," in *Od Gotiky k Renesanci. Výtvarná kultura Moravy a Slezska 1400–1550*, Vol. 1, ed. Ivo HLOBIL, Marek PERŮTKU (Olomouc: Moravská Galerie, 2002), 49–54.

³⁴ See most fully Ondřej JAKUBEC, *Kulturní prostředí a mecenát olomouckých biskupů potridentské doby* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého Olomouc, 2003).

In an official guide to Frederiksborg written in 1646 that must reflect the king's views, Johan Adam Berg remarked that "Spain shows foreigners its Laurence Church [the Escorial], France its Fontainebleau, Venice and Electoral Saxony their art and treasure chambers [*Kunst- und Schatzkammer*], and Denmark this castle."³⁵ It may also be noted that like the Warsaw Zamek Frederiksborg also uses brick with light stone ornamentation, and has corner towers – and as Berg's remarks indicate, these features were not associated in Denmark with the Netherlands.³⁶

The style exemplified by the Escorial and its emulators was moreover adopted for residences by other enemies of the Vasas and the Habsburgs. It is found for instance in the block-like Princely Palace rebuilt from 1613 by Bethlen Gabor of Transylvania in what was his capital at Alba Julia (now Romania). Later it is found in Schloss Friedenstein, the ducal residence that looms over the town of Gotha. Schloss Friedenstein was erected in the 1640s by Prince Ernst the Pious of Saxe-Gotha-Coburg (brother of Bernhard of Saxe Weimar, the Swedish and then French general in the Thirty Years War) after he received rule over a duchy newly created for him in Thuringia. Its severe undecorated masses had an impact on the style of several slightly later palaces in the region: the later seventeenth-century castles at Weimar, Zeitz, Weissenfels, and many other places emulate that at Gotha.³⁷

Much as did many other contemporaries, it seems likely that Sigismund and his architects knew about the connotations of the style in which they chose to build the Warsaw Castle, including its Habsburg associations.³⁸ In addition to the prestige that association with the Habsburgs offered and the financial and military aid that they might have been sought to provide against Poland's eastern enemies, the Habsburgs also supplied the Vasas with an important source for ideology and propaganda, as Ryszard Skowron has suggested.³⁹ Despite Archduke Maximilian III Habsburg's claim to the Polish throne and the ensuing armed conflict that occurred at the beginning of his reign, King Sigismund III quickly reached a rapprochement with the House of Austria (Habsburg). Both Maximilian III's and Sigismund III's claims to the Polish throne had been based on their descent from the Jagellonians, and Sigismund evoked the consanguinity of the two houses in his correspondence with Rudolf II, Maximilian III's older brother.⁴⁰ This evocation also relates to

³⁵ Quoted in Kristoffer NEVILLE, *The Art and Culture of Scandinavian Central Europe* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2019), 90.

³⁶ *IBID.*, 91.

³⁷ See Georg SKALECKI, *Deutsche Architektur zur Zeit des Dreissigjährigen Krieges* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1989), 226, 228–34; *Barocke Fürstenresidenzen an Saale Unstrut und Elster* (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2007).

³⁸ Monika BRUNNER, "Rudolfinische Fassadenarchitektur als Herrschaftsrepräsentation. Die Außengestaltung der Prager Galeriestrassen zum Residenzgarten und ikonographischen Umfeld," in *Krakau, Prag und Wien. Funktionen von Metropolen im frühmodernen Staat*, ed. Marina DMITRIEVA, Karen LAMBRECHT (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000), 305–12, also calls attention to a group of buildings of the Rudolfine period and earlier with long facades and relates them at least in Rudolf's case to what she calls imperial and Habsburg iconography. However, Brunner considers both articulated and unarticulated facades: her chief reference point, the Prague castle garden façade, is incorrectly characterized (cf. note 29 above), and she fails to distinguish the dating and identification of patrons of buildings she mentions, e.g. Liechtenstein. She also leaves open the explanation for the phenomenon she describes.

³⁹ Ryszard SKOWRON, "The House of Vasa and the House of Austria: Correspondence from the Years 1587–1668. Project Description," in *The House of Vasa and the House of Austria. Correspondence from the Years 1587 to 1668*, pt. 1, ed. Ryszard SKOWRON; with cooperation with Aleksandra BARWICKA, Miguel CONDE PAZOS, Friedrich EDELMAYER, Rubén GONZÁLEZ CUERVA, José MARTÍNEZ MILLÁN, Krzysztof PAWŁOWSKI, Tomasz POZNAŃSKI, Manuel RIVERO, Ryszard SZMYDKI (Katowice: Wydawnictwo UŚ, 2016), 22.

⁴⁰ See for example letters sent 31 August and 26 October, 1607 from Sigismund II to Rudolf II in which the latter is addressed as "domine consanguinee" among other titles, published in Jacek ŻUKOWSKI, "Philipp II Holbein – złotnik

the Vasas' creation of a parallel, Habsburg myth of descent to that they claimed from the Jagellonians. Sigismund's successor Władysław IV had the Marble Hall in the Warsaw Zamek adorned with what were regarded as both Habsburg and Jagellonian ancestors.⁴¹

Marriages knitted together Habsburg-Vasa relationships. Sigismund wed first one daughter of Archduke Karl of Inner Austria, son of Emperor Ferdinand I and Anna Jagellonka, and then another, both confusingly called Anna in Poland. They were sisters of Ferdinand II Habsburg, ruler of Inner Austria from 1598 and emperor from 1619, hence first cousins of Emperor Rudolf II, and accordingly of his brothers, the future Emperor Matthias (r. 1612–1619), and Archduke Maximilian III. Rudolf II served as godfather (by proxy) to two of Sigismund's daughters. Sigismund's son and successor Władysław IV Vasa married Cecilia Renata, daughter of Emperor Ferdinand II and sister of future emperor Ferdinand III (r. 1637–1657).

Contemporary international relations make it likely that Habsburg inspiration helped provide an imperial model for the Warsaw Caste. Just at the time the building was being planned the Vasas and Habsburgs were increasing their collaboration. They had common interests in opposing Sweden, Muscovy, and the Turks, with whom Rudolf II was conducting the "Long Turkish War" that lasted between 1593 and 1606. The Spanish were also interested, like the Poles, in maintaining trade with the Baltic. Furthermore Sigismund, the Spanish kings, and Sigismund's once and future brother-in-law Emperor Ferdinand II all supported the militant tendencies of the Counter-Reformation Church and the concomitant advancement of an ideal of absolute rule: this was suggested by Sigismund's support for the Jesuits in Poland, and for absolutism in Sweden (and if he could have succeeded, in Poland).⁴² A treaty of alliance between the Habsburg imperial court and Poland was worked out in 1597 and 1598. In 1597 an embassy from Philip II (with strong Jesuit participation) came to the Austrian Habsburg courts and to Kraków and Warsaw.⁴³ The Spanish mission also sought to advance the completion of the Imperial-Polish treaty, and to see mutual Spanish and Polish interests promoted in the North and especially the Baltic Sea, where the Dutch and English had blockaded Gdańsk. The Spanish embassy had numerous outcomes, including on Polish use of Habsburg symbolism, as will be discussed.⁴⁴ Strong reasons therefore would have existed for the adaptation of the disornamented style favored by the Habsburgs for a Polish royal residence at a time while King Sigismund III could have envisioned a Swedish-Polish-Lithuanian empire.⁴⁵

i agent artystyczny Zygmunta III w świetle dokumentów z Narodni archiw w Pradze," *Kronika Zamkowa* (5 [71]) 2018 (2019): 77 (doc. 1) and 70 (doc. 2).

⁴¹ First pointed out by Juliusz A. CHROŚCICKI, *Sztuka i polityka 1587–1668* (Warsaw: PWN, 1983), 48–9.

⁴² Robert BIRELEY, *Ferdinand II, Counter-Reformation Emperor, 1578–1637* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), provides the best account of the emperor.

⁴³ A major source for the embassy by one of its Jesuit entourage reveals these strong tendencies and clearly expresses its biases: see Thomas SAILLY, *Brevis narratio legationis excellentissimi D. Francisci de Mendoza....* (Brussels: apud Rutgerum Velpium, 1598).

⁴⁴ Its aims and results are summarized succinctly by Ryszard SKOWRON, "Ceremoniał przyjęcia ambassadora hiszpańskiego Francisca de Mendozy na warszawskim dworze Wazów w roku 1597," *Kronika Zamkowa* (4[70]) 2017 (2018): 25–46; Skowron's essay also points to previous bibliography.

⁴⁵ If the Royal Castle in Warsaw may ultimately compared to the Escorial, then the appearance of the royal villa in a garden in Ujazdów with its plain façade and corner towers that Sigismund had rebuilt at the end of an axis with the Zamek might be read as a Polish Aranjuez. See the illustrations in Jolanta PUTKOWSKA, *Architektura Warszawy XVII wieku* (Warsaw: PWN, 1991), 59, fig. 36 and 37.

The Sigismund Column Reconsidered

Vasa imperial aspirations are manifest in another major Warsaw landmark, the Sigismund Column (Fig. 4) erected in a plaza just outside the Castle in 1644. While they have disagreed about details of the interpretation, scholars have in general recognized that the Sigismund Column was a visible statement of royal propaganda placed at a prominent point on a main urban axis.⁴⁶ More than that, the relief inscription on the western plaque at the base of the monument uses larger majuscule characters to pick out the words POLONIAE..SUECIAE REX...MOSCORUM, inviting a reading that the ruler is king of many realms, hence an emperor. Scholarship on the column has already observed that the monument is related to similar commemorations of ancient Roman emperors and that the sculptural type of Sigismund relates to figures of Emperor Maximilian I Habsburg.⁴⁷ However, much more may be said about the imperial allusions of the Sigismund Column.

Let us start with its acknowledged and obvious relation to columns erected to celebrate the victories of Marcus Aurelius and of Trajan in ancient Rome. Both Roman monuments could have been present in the minds of people in the early seventeenth century, as they had been restored by Pope Sixtus V in 1588 and 1589. Sixtus V also moved and re-erected several obelisks, including one that was set up in 1585 in front of St. Peter's basilica, which also attracted much popular interest.⁴⁸ Domenico Fontana published a book on these projects, which was republished and was one of many on the topic that caught the attention of writers from Italy to Germany.⁴⁹ These events were probably well known in Poland, as is suggested by an illustration of the erection of Sigismund's column in the lower left of the Hendrik Hondius print of the column (Fig. 5) that may be compared to large illustrations of the erection of the Vatican obelisk by Domenico Fontana.⁵⁰

But in re-erecting the columns to Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, the pope did not place images of Roman emperors back on their tops. Instead, they were adorned with statues of the two saints, Peter and Paul, who had established Papal primacy. (Peter is atop that of Trajan, Paul on top that of Marcus Aurelius.) Other columns contemporary with that erected to Sigismund in realms ruled by Catholic monarchs in Central Europe outside

⁴⁶ CHROŚCICKI, *Sztuka i polityka 1587-1668*, especially pp. 151–6.

⁴⁷ As was pointed out in the comprehensive article by Juliusz A. CHROŚCICKI, "Forum Wazów w Warszawie," *Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki* 25, no. 3-4 (1980): 233–58. However, the thesis of this article that the column may be associated with the Polish ideal of the szlachta's "golden freedom" would seem to be contradicted by the royal and authoritarian claims of the monarch.

⁴⁸ See Brian A. CURRAN, Anthony GRAFTON, Pamela O. LONG, Benjamin WEISS, *Obelisk: A History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 104.

⁴⁹ Domenico FONTANA, *Della trasportatione dell'obelisco vaticano et delle fabbriche di nostro signore Papa Sisto V* (Rome: Domenico Basa, 1590), reprinted 1604. See Renato MASIANI, Cesare TOCCI, "Ancient and Modern Restorations for the Column of Marcus Aurelius in Rome," *International Journal of Architectural Heritage* 6, no. 5 (2012): 542–61, which gives an account of Fontana's restoration and the contemporaneous literature on it; CURRAN et. al., *Obelisk*, 134 reports on the wide reception of Fontana's work.

⁵⁰ A good recent illustration of the print with vignettes including the texts for the plaques, (legible in magnification; the texts are of course still visible on the monument and on photographs of it) is found in Artur BADACH, "Sztuka w kręgu królowej Ludwiki Marii Gonzagi – o niektórych sposobach kreowania obrazu władcy," in *Ludwika Gonzaga (1611–1667) Między Paryżem a Warszawą*, ed. Anna KALINOWSKA, Paweł TYSZKA (Warsaw: Zamek Królewski w Warszawie – Muzeum. Rezydencja Królów I Rzeczypospolitej, 2019), 137. The giant prints of the erection of the Vatican obelisk are illustrated in CURRAN et. al., *Obelisk*, 104–5.



Fig. 4 Sigismund Column in Warsaw. Photo by Adrian Gryczuk, Open Access

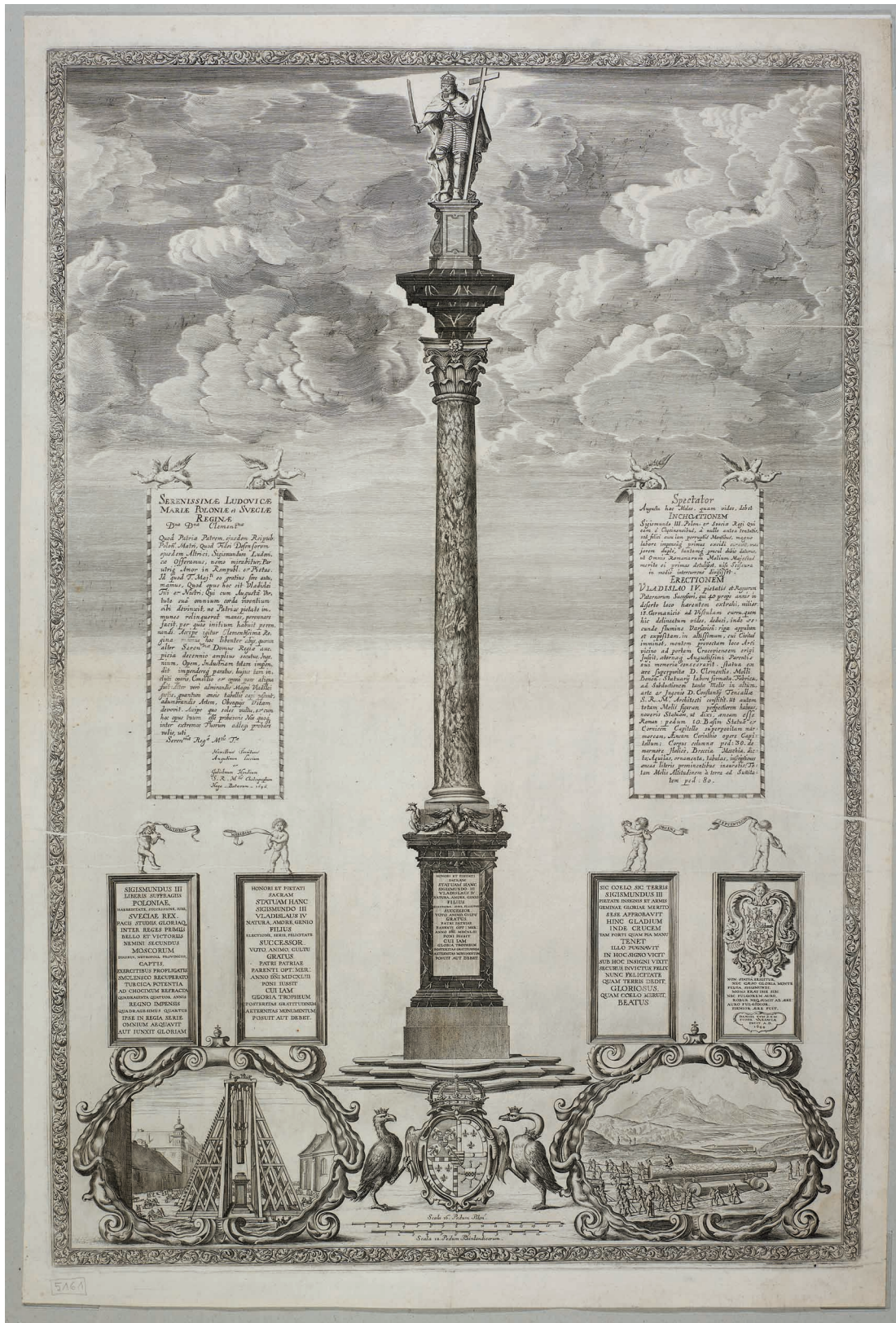


Fig. 5 Wilhelm Hondius after Agostino Locci the Elder, View of Sigismund Column, Haga, 1646, copperplate, paper, Royal Castle in Warsaw – Museum (nr inv. ZKW-dep.IP/G-18), Dr Tomasz Niewodniczański's Collection (sygn. 5161), dep. Deutsch-Polnische Stiftung Kulturpflege und Denkmalschutz (Görlitz). Photo by Andrzej Ring, Lech Sandzewicz

Poland were comparable: they explicitly had a religious emphasis in the placement of the Virgin on top.⁵¹

This usage appears first in Munich, Bavaria, where the Mary column was modeled on one to the Virgin erected in 1615 in front of the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. The Virgin was regarded as patron of Bavaria, and she appears as *Patrona Bavariae* in a statue placed by Duke Elector Maximilian I over the entrance to the Munich Residence in 1614–1616. Bavarian troops carried into battle images of the Virgin Immaculate (standing on a half-moon, crushing serpent under her): the 1620 victory at the Battle of White Mountain on the outskirts of Prague where they played a decisive role was attributed to their carrying one such image. In 1638 Maximilian fulfilled a vow he made in 1632 to erect a column to the Virgin if Munich (and Landshut) were rescued from the Swedes: it stands before the Munich Town Hall.⁵² The column incorporates an earlier statue of the Virgin with fighting angels at its foot that express triumph. Inscriptions suggest interpretations that they triumph over sin and evil as well as over heretics, schismatics and unbelievers, embodied by enemies of the Catholic cause the duke supported. It shows the Virgin Immaculate carrying the Christ child and holding a scepter as queen of heaven – or rather as empress, because she wears a type of crown that is recognizably imperial (to be discussed below). As a symbol of Catholic symbol of triumph over heretical Protestants, the image of the Virgin Immaculate became widespread in Bavaria and beyond.

The erection of a stone Mary Column in Vienna in 1647 results from a similar vow made in the hope of rescue from the Swedes. It was sponsored by the Emperor Ferdinand III, who had seen the Munich column in 1641, and by the Jesuits, before whose church am Hof it originally stood, before it was replaced by the bronze version now found there. It too showed the Virgin Immaculate atop the column with militant angels (in the form of putti) brandishing swords at its base. Inscriptions as well as many published polemics suggest that this image also symbolized the triumph of the Catholic faith, and the victory of the Habsburgs under Mary as commanding general and patron over their Protestant enemies.⁵³

The Mary Column in Prague also expressed similar beliefs. It was erected with imperial and Jesuit sponsorship in 1650 on the Old Town Square. The Old Town (*Staré Město*) had resisted Swedish attacks in 1648, which had occurred after the Westphalian treaties had been signed that were to end the Thirty Years War. After the war an imperial commission decided to place the column on the Old Town Square. Torn down in 1918, it stood opposite the Town Hall in front of which the leaders of the revolt that had started the war had been executed. The Prague Mary column began a Habsburg-initiated wave of columns in the Czech lands, where again such sculptures celebrated Catholic victories over heretics.⁵⁴

While the Sigismund column incorporated the ideal of triumphal celebration inherited from antiquity and the conversion of such monuments into a Christian message, it is signi-

⁵¹ Marco BOGADE, “Marian Columns in Central Europe as Media of Post-Tridentine Policy of Recatholisation,” *Ikon* 10, no. 1 (2017): 329–36 summarize information on the Marian columns recapitulated here.

⁵² For this column and its interpretation see Johannes ERICHSEN, “Die Mariensäule in München,” in *Ein Museum der bayerischen Geschichte*, ed. Katharina WEIGAND, Jörg ZEDLER (Munich: utzverlag GmbH, 2015), 260–88.

⁵³ See Anna CORETH, *Pietas Austriaca. Ursprung und Entwicklung Barocker Frömmigkeit in Österreich* (Vienna: Verl. für Geschichte und Politik, 1959), 43–54. See further Herbert KARNER, “Pietas Mariana und die Heilung der Städte,” in *Sakralisierungen des Herrschers an europäischen Höfen*, ed. Herbert KARNER, Eva-Bettina KREMS, Jens NIEBAUM, Werner TELESKO (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2019), 31–156, especially 139 ff.

⁵⁴ See Howard LOUTHAN, *Converting Bohemia. Force and Persuasion in the Catholic Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 160–62 and 276–78.

ficant how it did so, because in placing the king rather than saints or the Virgin on top it obviously differed from all these other monuments. Critics, among them the papal legate to Poland, may have attacked it for this very reason: they thought that it was pretentious to place a mortal instead of an immortal on top of columns. The date of the erection of the cross, which was the day of the festival of the erection of the Holy Cross, may also have caused some consternation, especially since in 1643 the Bernardines had placed a cross on the column they erected nearby the Warsaw Castle in reaction to the Sigismund column.⁵⁵

However, the festival date chosen for the erection of the Sigismund column suggests that another Christian conception of an imperial column was probably intended. The holiday celebrates the finding of the True Cross by Emperor Constantine's mother, St. Helena, Constantine's dedication of churches built on the site of the Holy Sepulcher and Mount Cavalry in Jerusalem, and the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius's return of the True Cross to Jerusalem after the Sasanians had taken the city (the Sasanians could also have been seen as types of the Turks.) The erection of the column on this holiday appears to have been a knowing gesture that was meant to present Sigismund III not just as a Roman Emperor who is comparable to Trajan or Marcus Aurelius, but to another victorious ruler who was venerated as a saint, the first Christian emperor, Constantine.

The imagery which accompanies Sigismund's portrayal on the column, including the garlands and eagles adorning the base, the draping of the king in a coronation cape, and insignia (to be discussed in the excursus), have been seen as royal, but they also have imperial connotations. These may respond as well to the representation of Mary with the imperial crown in Munich, and in any case they repeatedly reinforce the connection with Constantine. Another inscription on the plaque calls attention to the cross, which Sigismund holds in one hand, and the sword, a distinctly Polish saber, but derived however, as was much else in Polish self-identity, from the Turks. Along with the armor he wears and the knightly order (of the Golden Fleece, to be discussed in the excursus) Sigismund, as has been noticed, is depicted as a Christian knight, and even more significantly as a defender of the faith, a worthy Christian ruler.⁵⁶

It has not yet been stressed that by portraying Sigismund III carrying both a sword and a cross, the statue also associated him directly with Constantine's vision of the cross. According to the life of Constantine by Eusebius, before the battle of the Milvian Bridge that Constantine won over Maxentius he saw the sign of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription, "in this symbol you will conquer" (*in hoc signo vinces*). The image of Constantine's vision was well known at the Vasa court, where it served as the subject of a gilt plaquette made 1615–1620 by Tobias Kramer in the workshops of Sigismund III that was probably given by Archbishop Karol Ferdynand Vasa to the shrine in Częstochowa in 1642, a year before the column was designed.⁵⁷ In fact the same inscription on the plaque on the Sigismund column that mentions the sword and cross paraphrases the words associated with Constantine's prophetic vision, reading "in this symbol he has conquered" (*in hoc signo vicit*). The clear implication is that Sigismund is a ruler who like Constantine embraces and has conquered in the sign of the cross.

The identification of Sigismund with Constantine would have been more obvious if the 1949 restoration had not partly obscured, or rather discolored the column. The restorers

⁵⁵ See CHROŚCICKI, *Sztuka i polityka*, 154.

⁵⁶ For the arguments in the preceding sentences see Jacek ŻUKOWSKI, "Kto stoi na kolumnie Zygmunta?," *Mówią Wieki* 7, no. 678 (2016): 22–5.

⁵⁷ ŻUKOWSKI, *Świat polskich Wazów*, 172, cat. no. V.57.

did not use the same kind of stone out of which the original column shaft had been made, but instead employed Strzegom granite. The piece of granite they utilized has a yellowish cast, which creates a much different impression than the column must originally have had. For the original column shaft was composed of Chęciny limestone, otherwise known as Holy Cross limestone. It is also noteworthy that this stone is known as Sigismund marble (somewhat incorrectly, because it is actually limestone) from its association with that king's frequent use of it, and also perhaps because the Chęciny quarry was opened in 1595 during the reign of Sigismund III.

Unlike Strzegom granite, Chęciny stone has a red and white cast. It consists of white and red particles: depending on the light it may appear pink or even purplish. It is thus comparable to porphyry, as Michał Wardzynski also recognized in his excellent book on marble and alabaster sculpture and architecture in Poland-Lithuania.⁵⁸ It should be emphasized that the breccia-like disposition of color in the veins of Chęciny stone, in which red areas appear to be interspersed with white spots, is specifically how Agostino del Riccio defines porphyry in his 1597 manuscript on stones. Del Riccio defines porphyry as having “*color rosso da moltissimi punti bianchi variato*” (red color varied with very many white points).⁵⁹ The Italian sculptors and designers of the column would most likely have been familiar with this characterization of porphyry.

The decision to use Chęciny stone for the column was not simply an aesthetic one, as has been implied in the past, even though this may have gone into it. King Władysław IV did like and did use multicolored stones in other projects, much as did King Sigismund, who was a competent painter⁶⁰ and who also had a taste for polychromy in architecture. But more thought went into the choice, as it did in antiquity, because porphyry was relatively hard to obtain in Europe (it is quarried in Africa, from whose sources Europe would have been cut off in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century).⁶¹ The importance of the association of Chęciny stone with porphyry is that porphyry was linked with Roman emperors: purple was an imperial color, associated with the dye used to color garments, and designated as such in various sumptuary laws. Porphyry was consequently used for example for the tetrarch monument of four emperors (including Constantine) originally from Constantinople that is now attached to the Church of San Marco, Venice. It was this sort of association with the Roman imperial past that led Cosimo de' Medici in sixteenth-century Florence to have a statue of Justice carved out of assembled ancient fragments of porphyry to surmount a column taken from the baths of the Roman Emperor Caracalla.⁶² Most important, a column made from porphyry itself served as the base for the column of Emperor Constantine that stood in a forum in Constantinople, as Wardzynski has also noticed.⁶³ But it is also noteworthy that the association of porphyry columns with imperial traditions survived through, or rather was also revived in the Middle Ages: most interestingly, Em-

⁵⁸ Michał WARDZYŃSKI, *Marmur i alabaster w rzeźbie i malej architekturze Rzeczypospolitej / Marble and Alabaster in Sculpture and Small-Scale Architecture in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth* (Warsaw: Fundacja Hereditas, 2015), 221–4.

⁵⁹ Agostino DEL RICCIO, *Istoria delle Pietre*, anastatic copy of Manuscript 230 Biblioteca Riccardiana, ed. Paola BAROCCHI (Florence: S.P.E.S., 1979), fol. 12r.

⁶⁰ See ŻUKOWSKI, *Świat polskich Wazów*, 68–70, cat. no. III, 5; 101, cat. no. IV, 1.

⁶¹ See Suzanne B. BUTTERS, *The triumph of Vulcan: sculptor's tools, porphyry, and the Prince in Ducal Florence*, 1 (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1996), 76–9, 82–3.

⁶² *IBID.*

⁶³ WARDZYŃSKI, *Marmur i alabaster*, 222. Wardzyński does not however comment on the implications of the Constantinian connection.

peror Frederick II Hohenstaufen used a purple-colored porphyry-like breccia comparable to the breccia-like Chęciny limestone for columns in his Castel del Monte in Apulia. Such connections may have been known in Poland, as Queen Bona (Sforza) was born and died in Bari, only fifty-five kilometers distant. Be that as it may, the reddish column, associated with Constantine through the imperial column in Byzantium, would have further supported the association of Sigismund with Constantine, and through him with Byzantium.

But over whom has Sigismund been victorious (the inscription claims he has been second to none in war and victories [*bello et victoriis/nemini secundus*]) as a devout Christian ruler, a new Constantine? The plaque celebrates him on the one hand for having beaten the Muscovites, citing his victories, taking of Russian provinces, and chiefly his recuperation in 1611 of Smolensk, the signal victory of his reign. On the other hand, it celebrates his triumph over the Turks, whose power it says was broken at Chocim, where a major battle took place in 1621. These events would have been meaningful for Sigismund's successor Władysław, as he reverently calls himself on the column's northern plaque. In 1632 Władysław defended Smolensk from a Russian siege. In 1633–34 Władysław fended off an Ottoman advance in the south of his realm, thereafter gaining Turkish recognition of Polish sovereignty.

1632 was also the year in which Gustavus Adolphus died at the Battle of Lützen. In 1634 the Swedes lost the battle of Nördlingen, leading to the Peace of Prague in 1635 that was favorable to the imperial and Catholic cause.⁶⁴ The fate of the Swedes, particularly the death of Gustavus Adolphus, is tied in to the erection of the column: the Polish Vasas' continuing claim to the Swedish crown is represented by the inscription that designates Sigismund *Sueciae Rex*. Like his father Władysław hoped to regain the Swedish throne. After his offer to renounce this claim was rebuffed in 1632, the year he began his reign in Poland-Lithuania, Władysław nevertheless retained ambitions for Sweden. The death of Gustavus Adolphus, leaving only a young daughter, made this goal suddenly appear attainable.⁶⁵ Plans were discussed in the 1630s to marry Władysław to Elizabeth of the Palatinate, until it was clear that this union would not enable the Polish king to retake the Swedish crown.⁶⁶ The turn to a Habsburg marriage, which led to the wedding with Regina Constanza, the emperor's daughter, was one consequence, as this opened other possibilities. Władysław IV's Swedish ambitions however remained alive until the definitive moment when Queen Christina turned eighteen and could fully assume her role as queen of Sweden: this happened in 1644, the year the column was erected.⁶⁷

In any case, the representation of Sigismund as Constantine may also be interpreted as an adoption of an imperial ideal turned toward the east. The idea that the Polish Vasa king would defeat the Turks, retake Constantinople and remake it a Christian capital was current from the early years of Sigismund's reign.⁶⁸ Władysław IV himself would have been very familiar with the idea of representing a Vasa ruler as victor over the Turks in the guise of a new Constantine, because he himself had been presented in this way. A cantata with a libretto by Giovanni Ciampoli (1589–1643) performed for Władysław on the occasion of his visit to Rome in 1624 referred to the prince himself as Constantine. Ciampoli's *La*

⁶⁴ The best detailed account of the events of the Thirty Years War is Peter H. WILSON, *Europe's Tragedy: A New History of the Thirty Years War* (London: Allen Lane, 2009). For Lützen see ID., *Lützen* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2018).

⁶⁵ FROST, *The Northern Wars*, 142.

⁶⁶ Władysław CZAPLIŃSKI, *Władysław IV i jego czasy* (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1972), 179–84, 205–8.

⁶⁷ WILSON, *Europe's Tragedy*, 577.

⁶⁸ As summarized by SKOWRON, "Ceremoniał."

Vittoria del Principe Valdislao in Wallachia celebrates the prince's victories won during the wars with the Turks in the early 1620s (the first battle of Chocim was the main encounter in this war). Ciampoli calls the Turkish empire "Byzantine," because the Turks ruled over what had once been Byzantium. The cantata ends with the prophetic vision that under the auspices of Pope Urban VIII Władysław will see the diadem of Constantine, the crown that indicates he will be the new Christian emperor of East.⁶⁹

The idea that Władysław IV might gain a crown over Constantinople persisted during his reign. When Regina Constanza Habsburg died, also in 1644, the Byzantine connection evidently contributed to the attraction of the Gonzagas as a potential match. At one of the celebrations of Władysław IV's marriage to Marie Louise Gonzaga de Nevers in 1646 a column was erected which sported the intertwined crowns of the Paleologans, who had been emperors of Byzantium at the time that the Turks conquered Constantinople. The Paleologans were ancestors of the Nevers branch of the Gonzagas.⁷⁰ In keeping with the associations with Constantine and his column, a contemporary description of the marriage ceremony by Mikołaj Zabicki specifically refers to Władysław IV as king of Poland as being a column, and does not use the familiar trope that the ruler, and Poland, is a bulwark of Christianity.⁷¹

The claim to be a new Constantine who was to rule over Byzantium may also be regarded as an expression of Polish propaganda meant to counter Muscovite claims. The Muscovite tsars claimed that they were the legitimate heirs to Rome, that Moscow was the third Rome after Byzantium and Rome itself. In Poland a counter-claim was made, that Warsaw, not Moscow, was the Third Rome.⁷² The Sigismund column is thus a monument not only to the Vasas as kings of Poland and Sweden, as stated on the inscriptions on the plaques, and as defenders of their realms against the Turks, and would-be conquerors of Constantinople who are new Constantines, but as rightful successors of the Romans they are rulers of the Third Rome. Further research may suggest that the claim to be the Third Rome is also underpinned by theological arguments such as those that supported the Uniate movement that Sigismund III had promoted. This movement had been launched by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which was signed in 1595, and it continued to be debated on theological grounds including those that referred to Poland as the third Rome through the 1640s.⁷³

Finally, it is also possible that imperial imagery of the Sigismund column in evoking recent events may have drawn from a particular interpretation of the columns of the Trajan and Marcus Aurelius that might have equated the Romans' enemies with ancestors of the regions the Poles were to conquer. The reliefs on the column of Trajan narrated his victories over the Dacians, a people of Southeastern Europe who ruled in an area located in Romania that was at the time subjected to the Turks. Seventeenth-century publications note the conquest of Dacia and describe Marcus Aurelius's reliefs as showing his triumph over the Sarmatians. The association with the Sarmatians may in this juxtaposition seem

⁶⁹ Giovanni CIAMPOLI, *Rime Scelte* (Rome: Fabbio di Falco, 1666), 148.

⁷⁰ See Jacek ŻUKOWSKI, "Architektura okazjonalna na uroczystości zaślubin i koronację Ludwiki Marii Gonzagi w roku 1646," *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* 73, no 1-2 (2011): 45–91. Id., *Żądza chwały. Władysław IV Waza w ikonografii perforacyjnej* (Warsaw: Muzeum Pałacu Króla Jana III w Wilanowie, 2018), 379–87.

⁷¹ Mikołaj ŻABICKI, *Aquila Polona...* (Warsaw, 1646) as summarized in ŻUKOWSKI, *Żądza chwały*, 379.

⁷² This line of interpretation, first suggested in Thomas DACOSTA KAUFMANN, *Court, Cloister, and City: The Art and Culture of Central Europe 1450–1800* (Chicago and London: Weidenfeld Nicolson Illustrated, 1995), 246, does not however appear to have been noticed in subsequent Polish scholarship on the Sigismund Column.

⁷³ See Aleksandra SULIKOWSKA, "Inter dissidentes in religione: Relations between Denominations and the Debate on Images in the Old Commonwealth of Poland," *Ikonotheke* 24 (2013): 5–25, especially 20–5.



*Fig. 6 Crown of Rudolf II
(Austrian Imperial Crown).
Photo by Andrew Bossi,
Open Access*

paradoxical, but we may recall that Polish kings of the seventeenth century might be portrayed as both Sarmatian and as Roman, as seen in the portraits of Jan Sobieski.⁷⁴

To conclude: the representation of Sigismund III incorporated an imperial ideal, but one that while related to also diverged from that expressed by the Habsburgs. While Spanish Habsburgs styled themselves as the “Catholic kings” and Central European Habsburgs were in actuality Holy Roman Emperors, the Polish Vasas made their own distinctive, imperial claim, associated with the East. The Sigismund Column announces Vasa imperial aspirations, which allude to another notion of empire, not that of Charlemagne or his successors in the Holy Roman Empire, but that of Constantine and Byzantium.

Excursus: A Hypothesis on Vasa Use of Insignia

Two insignia designate Sigismund III as king on the Sigismund Column in addition to the cape: his crown and the Order of the Golden Fleece. While these have been regarded as being royal signs when they appear in Vasa portraits, they also have imperial overtones.

⁷⁴ See the overview in Paweł JASKANIS, Stella ROLLIG, Maike HOHN, Konrad PYZEL, eds., *Jan Sobieski. Ein polnische König in Wien* (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2017). The variable identity of Władysław IV is treated in Thomas DaCosta KAUFMANN, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 148–50.

Although it has been referred to as a Swedish crown, or the Vasa crown, the crown Sigismund wears is neither. Similar crowns to his already appear in imagery from the reign of Sigismund August, who was neither Swedish nor a Vasa. Nor was this crown unquestionably a coronation crown, because that diadem would have been preserved in the treasury in the Wawel: its appearance on coins, independent of portraits, suggests rather that like the regalia of the Holy Roman Emperor, it had a more symbolic function.⁷⁵ Whether or not Sigismund III acquired the actual crown Sigismund August had owned and pawned is moot: its appearance in repeated Vasa portraits suggests that it was regarded as a “House” crown, one that stood for the dignity of the House of Vasa and the ruler’s reign.⁷⁶

The Order of the Golden Fleece is of course the order of the House of Habsburg. Its presence alludes to Vasa affiliation with the House of Habsburg/Austria, and hence with the Holy Roman Emperor, since with one brief exception Habsburgs occupied this position from 1452 until the end of the Empire in 1806. The receipt of the order was also a sign of Habsburg favor. Indeed, among the results of the Habsburg-Vasa diplomacy of the 1590s in 1599 Sigismund III was awarded and in 1600 received the Golden Fleece.⁷⁷

Like the Habsburg House Crown, which appears in much imagery and of which is emulated in several burial crowns in addition to the actual one made for Rudolf II (Fig. 6), the Vasa House crown was not simply a royal crown.⁷⁸ This can be seen by comparison with the crowns worn by tomb effigies of earlier Polish kings. A royal crown was typically a simple ring, which as in the Polish and Habsburg examples could be embellished into a crown with lily forms: such an embellished ring-crown is but one element of both the Habsburg and Vasa house crowns. Both these sorts of crowns, as exemplified by the still extant crown made for Rudolf II that later served as the Austrian imperial crown, had a hoop that extended from the forehead to the neck. In the Habsburg case, this was meant to evoke the crown of the Holy Roman Emperor, the so-called Crown of Charlemagne, which had a hoop, and also a bishop’ mitre, to allude to the emperor’s claim to possess sacral as well as secular authority.⁷⁹ While the appearance of the hoops on the Vasa crown suggest that it is emulating the widely disseminated image of the Habsburg crown and its imperial symbolism, the Polish crown lacks reference to a mitre but adds a second ring. A hypothesis to be investigated by future scholarship is that it thereby evokes the imperial ideal in manner different from the Habsburg house crown or that of the Holy Roman Empire, whose single hooped crown was associated with its founder Charlemagne, by expressing it in a related but somewhat different form. Could the Polish crown thereby be claiming another imperial destiny, as the multiple associations of the Sigismund Column did with the tradition of Constantine?

⁷⁵ Barbara STOLLBERG-RILINGER, *The Emperor’s Old Clothes: Constitutional History and the Symbolic Language of the Holy Roman Empire*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 41–3.

⁷⁶ For the identification of the crown and the interpretation here offered see Feliks KOPERA, *Dzieje Skarbcia Koronnego* (Kraków: Spółka Wydawnicza Polska w Krakowie, 1904), 157; Jerzy LILEYKO, *Regalia polskie* (Warszawa: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1987), 94–5; Michał ROZEK, *Polskie koronacje i korony* (Kraków: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1987), 81–2, 94; Michał MYŚLIŃSKI, *Klejnoty Rzeczypospolitej. Zawartość Skarbcia Koronnego na Wawelu w świetle jego inwentarzy z lat 1475–1792* (Warsaw: Instytut Sztuki PAN, 2007).

⁷⁷ See the general account in SKOWRON, “The House of Vasa.”

⁷⁸ Hermann FILLITZ, *Die Österreichische Kaiserkrone und die Insignien des Kaisertums Österreich* (Vienna: Herold Verlag, 1959) remains the best general introduction.

⁷⁹ See Julius von SCHLOSSER, *Die deutschen Reichskleinodien* (Vienna: In Kommission bei Alfred Hölder, 1920).

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