

The temporary exhibition presenting Johannes Hevelius as a scholar and artist, along with works by contemporary artists associated with the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw inspired by the activity and discoveries of the famous astronomer, was opened at the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów on 22 April 2022 (to close on 15 August 2022). The event was scheduled to take place in the preceding year, but was postponed due to the pandemic. The postponement of the opening date proved favourable to further work on contemporary objects in dialogue with the historical collection of works by Johannes Hevelius. The exhibition was presented in the Banqueting Hall and in the Orangery building. In addition, selected elements of decoration related to astronomy were signalled in the area of the palace and the Wilanów park.

The exhibition *The Moon and Sobieski's Shield. Hevelius' Masterpieces and Contemporary Art* was composed of works by Hevelius and the Sobiesciana loaned from the Gdańsk Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences, selected objects from the collection of the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów, and contemporary sculptures, prints, paintings, installations, and multimedia (Fig. 1 and 2). Dorota Folga-Januszewska, an expert in graphic art, was the originator of the exhibition. Its formula and scope took a clear shape during the talks with Anna Walczak, director of the Gdańsk Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences, from where most of the presented objects were loaned. The concept was co-developed by the artists of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, together with the employees of the Wilanów museum responsible for its organisation: Aleksandra Głowacz and Marta Gołąbek, and a team preparing a special programme accompanying the exhibition.

The presented works contributed to a story of the relationship between the astronomer and the court of King Jan III. The monarch was keenly interested in sciences, including astronomy.<sup>1</sup> During his sojourns in Gdańsk, he would visit Hevelius's astronomical observatory; he was also the astronomer's patron. Sobieski's scientific and artistic patronage encompassed the entire body of Hevelius's work: the study of the sky and the publications documenting its results. The cooperation between the astronomer and the king was beneficial for both parties: it was the king who equipped Hevelius's studio, and in return, he received the most famous gift, valuable in terms of image and propaganda: Sobieski's

COMMUNICATION

## THE MOON AND SOBIESKI'S SHIELD. HEVELIUS' MASTERPIECES AND CONTEMPORARY ART

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<sup>1</sup> K. Targosz, *Jan Heweliusz uczony – artysta* (Wrocław, 1986), pp. 36–37.



Fig. 1

*The Moon and Sobieski's Shield. Hevelius' Masterpieces and Contemporary Art* exhibition.  
The historical section, general view

*The Moon and Sobieski's Shield. Hevelius' Masterpieces and Contemporary Art* exhibition.  
The contemporary section, general view

Fig. 2



Shield (*Scutum Sobiescianum*), a constellation described by Hevelius and named after the king's coat of arms.

The Heveliana kept in the Gdańsk Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences are almost a complete collection of all printed works by the famous astronomer: from the first treatise, published in 1647, entitled *Selenographia sive Lunae descriptio*, to posthumous editions (*Prodromus Astronomiae* and *Catalogus stellarum fixarum, Firmamentum Sobiescianum sive Uranographia*).<sup>2</sup> Some of them were printed in Hevelius's own printing house. Sumptuously bound volumes are characterised by a beautiful editorial design, luxurious finishing, and an interesting history. The importance of this collection of works by Johannes Hevelius is evidenced by the fact that it was added to the Polish National List of the 'Memory of the World' UNESCO Programme in 2021. The works *Prodromus astronomiae*, *Firmamentum Sobiescianum* and *Machinae coelestis pars posteriori* from 1679 were dedicated to King Jan III. They are decorated with artistic frontispieces, vignettes, illustrations, while the atlas consists of a rich set of extremely interesting engravings of high artistic quality, depicting constellations (in figurative form) and both the northern and the southern hemispheres of the sky. Three men cooperated in the creation of the prints: apart from the engraver, the author himself and the local painter Andreas Stech were also involved in the work.

Among the prints presented in the Banqueting Hall of the Wilanów Palace, pride of place was taken by two works named in the title of the exhibition. One of them was *Scutum Sobiescianum* – a representation of a part of the northern hemisphere of the sky with seven stars described by Hevelius (Fig. 3). The constellation commemorated King Jan III and his family. The shape of the group of stars resembles the smooth shield in Janina, the Sobieski family coat of arms. The engraving comes from *Firmamentum Sobiescianum sive Uranographia*, the third part of Hevelius's astronomical treatise *Prodromus astronomiae*. The other print is a map of the Moon, a unique work engraved and etched by Hevelius himself, from the work *Selenographia, sive Lunae descriptio*. It represents the surface of the Moon visible from the Earth along with the limits of its libration. The artistic quality of this work still amazes us with its perfection and the obtained value contrast that show the diversity of the surface of the Moon (Fig. 4).

In addition, at the *Moon and Sobieski's Shield* exhibition the monumental work of the historian and astronomer Stanisław Lubieniecki, *Theatrum cometicum*, was made available to the general public for the first time. This new acquisition in the collection of the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów contains letters that Lubieniecki exchanged within

2 M. Michalska, *Heveliana*, in: *Księżyc i Tarcza Sobieskiego. Heveliana dawne i sztuka współczesna* (Warszawa, 2022), pp. 36–37.

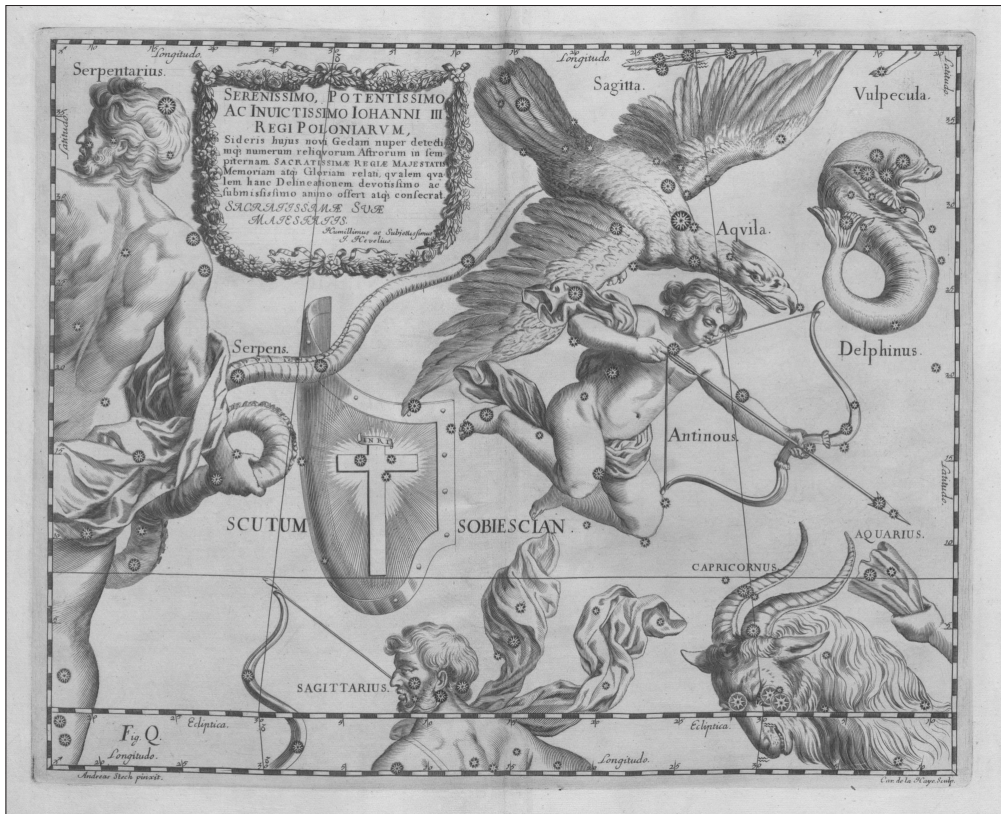


Fig. 3

*Scutum Sobiescianum*,  
in: Hevelius' *Prodromus  
astronomiae*

the framework of the Commonwealth of Scholars with Johannes Hevelius, dealing with the subject of comets.

The exhibited objects from the collection of the Gdańsk Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences also cast light upon the king's relationship with the city of Gdańsk. The so-called Sobiesciana, that is exhibits referring to Sobieski himself and to the members of his family, shed light on their relationship. The collection consists of occasional texts and prints that commemorate events from King Sobieski's life (Fig. 5).

*Moon and Sobieski's Shield. Hevelius' Masterpieces and Contemporary Art* exhibition combined history with the present and the arts and science of the Baroque era with various forms of expression of 21st-century artists. Works by lecturers and postgraduate students of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw were gathered in the Orangery and park in the historical residence at Wilanów. Contemporary prints, paintings and installations referred to the activities of the Gdańsk astronomer and were inspired by Hevelius's research of the sky (including the observations of the Moon and the constellations he discovered), as well as the visual layer of his scientific works. The exhibited works were created by Magdalena Boffito, Mariusz Bonna, Paulina Buźniak, Nastazja Ciupa, Aleksander Czekaj, Małgorzata Ćwiek, Mateusz Dąbrowski, Paul Wirkus, Natalia Dołgowska, Henryk Gostyński and Anna Szyjkowska



Fig. 4

*Tabula Selenographica, in:  
Hevelius' Selenographia, sive  
Lunae descriptio*

Piotrowska, Krzysztof Jabłonowski, Maciej Januszewski, Katarzyna Stefania Józefowicz, Anna Kacprzak, Kimba Frances Kerner, Beata Konarska, Klaudia Krynicka, Magdalena Kubik, Irena Ławruszko, Ewa Łuczak, Ryszard Ługowski, Paweł Nowak, Dorota Optułowicz McQuaid, Błażej Ostojka Lniski, Aleksandra Owczarek, Alina Potemska, Zuzanna Sitarska, Piotr Smolnicki, Jacek Staszewski, Magdalena Nowakowska Troniewska, Wojciech Tylbor Kubrakiewicz, Andrzej Węclawski, Małgorzata Zaremba, Karolina Zimna-Stelmaszewska and Igor Żukowicz.

From the Banqueting Hall, where the historical part of the exhibition was located, the visitors would continue into the Royal Apartments, where objects inspired by cosmological themes, all dating from the time of King Jan III, were displayed. The iconographic program of the palace decoration is full of references to the nature of the universe and the changing knowledge about it. 'There are also a number of references that entitle us to understand the palace as a microcosm, an image of the Commonwealth, if not downright a reflection of the harmony of the universe'.<sup>3</sup> The marble staircase of the palace became an exhibition space for contemporary

<sup>3</sup> D. Walawender-Musz, A. Janda, *Mysterium Cosmographicum króla Jana*, in: *Gwiazdy Sobiesciańskie* (Warszawa, 2012), p. 35.



Fig. 5

*The Moon and Sobieski's Shield. Hevelius' Masterpieces and Contemporary Art exhibition.*  
The historical section, general view

*The Moon and Sobieski's Shield. Hevelius' Masterpieces and Contemporary Art exhibition.*  
The contemporary section, general view

Fig. 6



paintings; art installations were also placed around the park. Beata Konarska's work *Space* was located on the upper terrace of the gardens. This spatial form was composed of multicoloured metal elements moved by the wind. Mateusz Dąbrowski's work *Hevelius* was presented on the lower terrace of the Baroque garden. Laid out centrally on the lawn, it formed the shape of a star. The installation was gradually overgrown with grass, melting into the landscape of the Wilanów gardens.

The second part of the exhibition was placed in the Orangery building. The display, designed by Barbara Kowalewska, was arranged according to the scheme of the eight phases of the moon (Fig. 6). The motif of the moon can be seen in many works presented at the exhibition, while references to 'Sobieski's Shield' can be found in Karolina Zimna-Stelmaszewska's works. The artist, using graphic techniques that gained popularity in the seventeenth century, namely the etching and the aquatint, prepared a three-dimensional model of the *Scutum Sobiescianum* constellation, accompanied by its graphic representations. The gesture of placing a memorial in the sky combines the tradition of naming constellation after heroes with the need to mark out a space where they can be honoured. Ryszard Ługowski's work *Monument to the Polish Cavalry in the Horsehead Nebula of the Orion* constituted an ironic response to the monument-mania, simultaneously referring to Polish *ressentiment* in relation to the interwar period.

The exhibition is accompanied by educational activities created for individual visitors, young people as well as adults, and includes educational walks, art workshops, culinary and calligraphic workshops. Accompanying events were organised in cooperation with the partners of the exhibition, the Polish Space Agency POLSA and the Polish Astronomical Society, to popularise Johannes Hevelius's scientific achievements and encourage the observation of the sun and the moon. In order to minimise the barrier to accessing the historical part of the exhibition located in the Banqueting Hall (i.e. in the Belvedere of the Wilanów Palace), a video with an online tour was prepared. An audio description of the temporary exhibition was also provided for the visually impaired. The programme accompanying the exhibition was prepared by Joanna Jaroć, Adrian Ordakowski, Katarzyna Pietrzak, Joanna Pniewska, Martyna Sowińska-Paszowska vel Pasek, and Marta Walewska.

Two publications were developed to accompany the exhibition: a catalogue designed by Lech Majewski, author of the visual identification of the exhibition, and a book by Piotr Pietrzak entitled *Niebo Heweliusza* [Hevelius's Sky], intended for families with children.

The exhibition of the Hevelius-related memorabilia at the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów was designed to show, on the one hand, beautiful evidence of the old scientific thought, perpetuated in an interesting artistic form, and its impact on art and science in the seventeenth century;

on the other hand, it was to remind that heritage is a stimulator of contemporary culture. Hevelius's scientific publications preserved to this day can be perceived as an extremely inspiring source, both aesthetically and scientifically. This was confirmed by the exhibition *The Moon and Sobieski's Shield. Hevelius' Masterpieces and Contemporary Art*, which, testified that the reflection on the universal exceeds the constraints of time.

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