

NEW MATERIALS TO THE WAR ICONOGRAPHY
OF KING JOHN III SOBIESKI

The best proof of the popularity of John III in Poland and abroad is his war iconography, especially that part of it which was inspired personally by him. Most of these works were mentioned in A. Czołowski's "Ikonografia wojenna Jana III", however new items that have escaped so far the researchers' notice keep cropping up. These include two works to which this paper is devoted.

1. The Battle of Chocim (1673), by an unknown artist, oil on canvas, 148 by 290 cm (Fig. 11). The picture painted in the Mniszechs' castle at Laszki Murowane, between the 19th and early 20th centuries it remained in that family's residence at Wiśnicz. Lost during the First World War it was discovered in Kiev in 1972 and at present, as a property of the Lvov Painting Gallery, it is to be seen in the castle at Olesko.

The battle is shown against the background of a map of the eastern borderlands of Poland, with, marked on it, rivers, including the Dnester, towns and strongholds, among them the central fortress of Kamenets Podolsk and the nearby castle and army encampment of Chocim. The picture is a bird's eye view of the battlefield at the critical moment when the Polish-Lithuanian army had pushed the Turks towards Kamenets and was being attacked from the rear by the troops of the pasha of Bosnia. This attack was repelled by the hussars and the Turks were routed.

This representation seems to correspond with reports on the course of the battle coming from the most reliable sources and could mean that the painter had seen it all himself. However this is contradicted by some inaccuracies in the appearance of architecture, especially the Chocim castle, as well as by the inscription on band where the date is given erroneously. The Latin text of the caption to the right seems to confirm the supposition that the picture was painted in three stages. The first part of it dates from early 1674 and concerns the map, the battle scene, part of

the markings of the localities and the text which refers to Sobieski as a hetman. At some later date the painting was completed, and so was the text, and finally the band with the title of the painting was added and covered part of the background.

The picture was commissioned by Jerzy Mniszech who took part in the battle of Chocim. The painter executed the geographical background on the basis of Pierre du Val's "Carte de Pologne et des Estats qui en dependent" and Makowski's "Map of Lithuania". Subsequently he or some other artist, working under the direction of Mniszech, superimposed upon it the battle scene. The painter, probably a master craftsman from Lvov, had never seen the area depicted and had not been present at the battlefield.

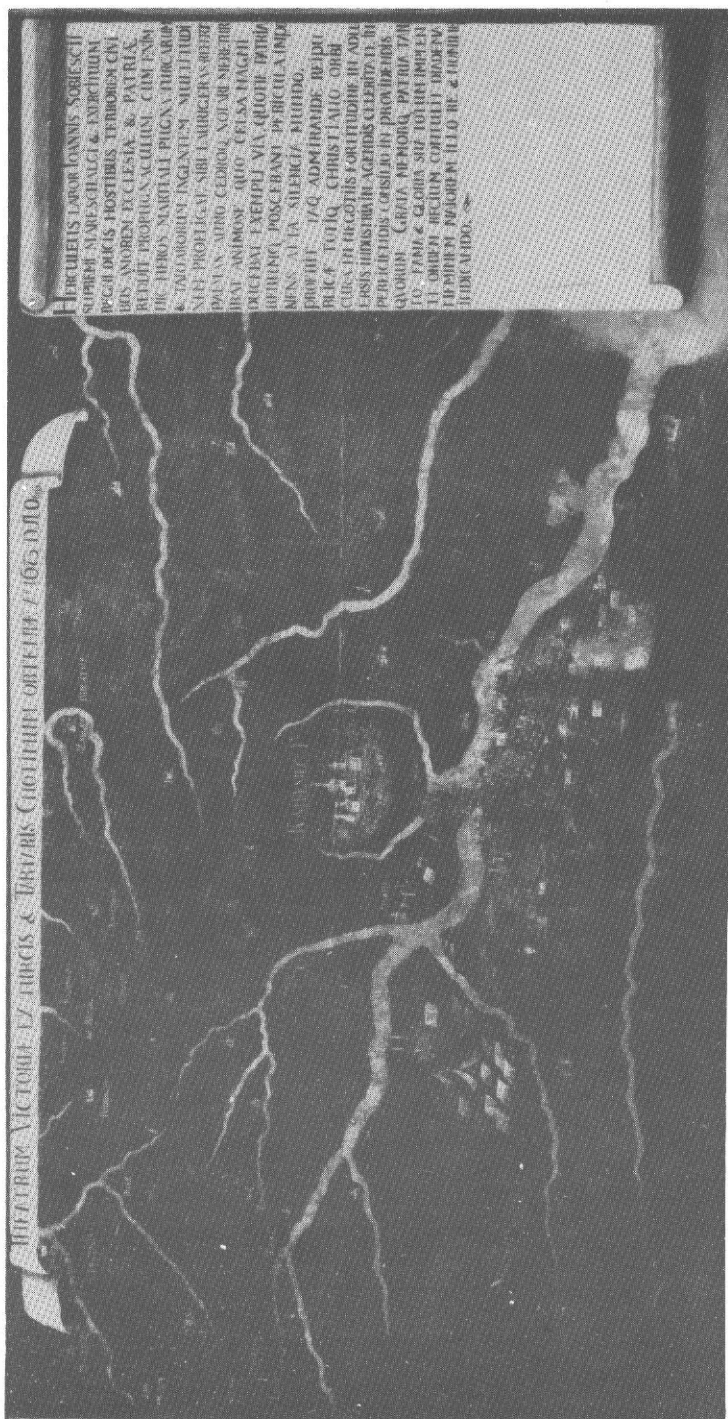
2. The Battle of Chocim, engraved by Wawrzyniec-Laurenty Krzczonowicz. Copperplate, 29.6 by 35.1 cm; supplement to J. Bennet's print "Virtus dexteræ Domini" (Fig. 12).

The print shows the battlefield at noon, with a rather broad view taking in the left bank of the Dnester. The centre of the composition is occupied by the Turkish encampment surrounded by a double ring of Polish and Lithuanian troops. The Polish army is preparing for battle and is still outside the camp, while the Turk are in retreat. There are many more such inconsistencies. Bennet's print is dated 14 January 1674, so the artist had little time to complete his work, and hence its shortcomings.

As far as the degree of reliability is concerned, it is superior to the painting mentioned above since it seems certain that both the initiator and the author of this work either witnessed or participated in these events personally. And since they were connected with Lithuania, they belittled the role of the Polish army while emphasizing that of the Lithuanian troops, which is a serious departure from historical truth. The work stands out for keen observation and realism as well for correct rendition of figures.

A similar rendition of the battle of Chocim is to be found in J. Bensheimer's etching, superior as regards its formed aspect. However Krzczonowicz's work surpasses it as far as authenticity is concerned.

The three works mentioned above are the oldest views of the battle of Chocim. They show this battle from the southern side, from which its course and the site of the battle could be observed. Another group of works show the battle from the northern side, for example the excellent prints by Romeyn de Hooghe.



11. The Battle of Chocim (1673). Unknown painter from 2nd half of 18th century. Coll. Castle of Olesko