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ORIENTALISATION OF ARTISTIC TASTE  
IN POLAND DURING THE REIGN  
OF KING JOHN III SOBIESKI

In the second half of 17th century the strongest influence of Muslim art on artistic workmanship and decorative art in Poland as well as on other branches of cultural activity could be observed. The years of King John III Sobieski's reign were the climax of orientalisation of artistic activity and habits of Polish nobility. Old Polish culture favoured the popularization of Orient style and Persian and Turkish influence in king John's III time. The diplomatic and trade links between Poland and the countries of Near East, first of all Ottoman Turkey and Persia, which had already existed in 14th century speeded up the import of such products as carpets, tapestries, arms etc. Thus, Polish artistic workmanship was more and more influenced by Turkish and Persian decorative forms and motifs. Poland also played the role of an agent in the trade between East and West which made the acquaintance with Orient products even easier. Longlasting contacts with the countries of Near East and their culture were the reason that Polish orientalism became a cultural phenomenon going much deeper and lasting much longer than in other European countries.

There is no doubt that Eastern art was very appealing and its features fully suited the artistic taste of Polish nobility. Those were mainly rich colours and attractiveness of decorative forms and motifs. The 17th century orientalism in Poland was not limited to the nobility clothes or colourful tapestries. It also meant surrounding oneself with Eastern artistic products in everyday life, either originals or those made in Poland and based on oriental patterns. A proof of this big demand for oriental products are the old family collections of oriental objects and royal and nobility inventories which often mention Persian and Turkish products. It is also known that there were special trade missions sent to Turkey and Persia in order to buy tapestries and carpets. This wide assimilation of Turkish and Persian decorative motifs and

forms by the Polish nobility was the result of the fact that Oriental art was thought to be something familiar, not exotic. The king himself was the best example, as he loved and admired Turkish and Persian art. It was during his reign that the workshops producing things imitating Persian and Turkish patterns rapidly grew in power. Therefore, if we take into account all elements of cultural life in Poland during king John's reign, such as decorative art, artistic workmanship, man's clothes and some less known fields such as customs and baroque literature, we can state that Oriental art produced a special kind of "oriental taste" among Polish nobility and the climax of it took place in the time of king John's III reign.