

# Protected and Protecting Dual Relations between the Sapieha Family and the Miraculous Image of Our Lady of Kodeń

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**Abstract** In the light of traditional approaches to the post-Tridentine coronation of images in East-Central Europe, the aim of this paper is to analyse the coronation of the miraculous icon of Our Lady of Kodeń in 1723 from a different point of view, highlighting the unique dual relationship between the image and the Sapieha family. Using the specific example of the Madonna of Kodeń, this study will emphasise the political influence of divine images beyond their religious meaning. It will also provide a unique opportunity to gain insight into the creation of a family legend about their special relationship with the Mother of God.

**Keywords** Jan Fryderyk Sapieha. Sapieha family. Our Lady of Kodeń. Coronation of Miraculous Images. Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Kodeń.

**Summary** 1 Phenomena of Miraculous Images. – 2 Two Engravings from Leipzig. – 3 Family Gallery. – 4 The Adventures of Mikotaj Sapieha. – 5 Latin Issue. – 6 Preparation for the Coronation. – 7 Conclusion.

## 1 Phenomena of Miraculous Images

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the doctrines and regulations of the Council of Trent “started to spread across the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as an element of the growing Catholic Reformation” (Augustyniak 2008, 393). The special veneration of the Virgin Mary was “one of the essential aspects of the growing local piety”

(Ciesielski 2004, 195). Amid the critical times of the *Swedish Deluge*<sup>1</sup> and the frequent plague epidemics that followed the war conflicts, the impoverished population of Poland sought refuge in the Mother of God with a plea for protection. In 1656, King John II Casimir Wasa<sup>2</sup> took a holy oath at the Assumption Cathedral in Lviv, officially recognising the Virgin Mary as the guardian of Poland. The monarch urged people to fight against numerous enemies and placed the Commonwealth under the protection of the Mother of God, calling her the queen and patroness of the whole country and all its inhabitants.<sup>3</sup>

The veneration of the Virgin Mary was expressed in a variety of rites and ceremonies. The most spectacular of these became widespread during the Wettin period (1709-63). The coronation of images of the Virgin Mary was the “sumptuous and opulent” (Nowakowski 1898, 61) manifestation of devotion to her.<sup>4</sup> On 8 September 1717, Krzysztof Jan Szembek crowned the first miraculous image of the Mother of God in modern Poland, known as the *Black Madonna of Częstochowa*. The third coronation,<sup>5</sup> on which I will concentrate, took place in 1723 in the village of Kodeń,<sup>6</sup> which had been in the possession of the wealthy Sapieha family since 1511.<sup>7</sup> The coronations of the divine images such as *Our Lady of Kodeń* has been studied by historians according to the traditional approach used to analyse all

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**1** The *Swedish Deluge* (potop szwedzki) was a series of military conflicts in the mid-seventeenth century in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Between 1648 and 1660, the Cossacks of Bohdan Khmelnytsky, the Russians and the Swedes sacked the Commonwealth on a number of occasions and destroyed its capital, Warsaw.

**2** Unless otherwise indicated, all names of persons and places, with the exception of the monarchs, are given in their original Polish/Ukrainian form.

**3** The subsequent victory of John Casimir’s army was attributed to the miracle of the Virgin Mary. Her role in the success of the war also strengthened the already growing Marian devotion.

**4** In addition to its liturgical significance, this ritual was used for dynastic and political propaganda. Coronations in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth united the nobility and peasants through pilgrimages and mutual participation.

**5** The second coronation after Częstochowa took place in Trakai, in the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Trakai Mother of God was crowned on 4 September 1718 by Bishop Konstanty Kazimierz Brzostowski.

**6** Kodeń has a fortunate geographical location at the crossroads of various trade routes. Situated on the banks of the Western Bug River, Kodeń had been trading with the Baltic ports of Gdańsk, Elbląg and Königsberg (now Kaliningrad) since the Middle Ages. The river enabled the exchange of goods with Volhynia, Podlasie and Red Ruthenia along the border between Poland and Ukraine, as well as with Belarus and Lithuania.

**7** Members of this family, who claimed to be descended from the Gediminids, vied with the Radziwiłł family in the second half of the seventeenth century to become the most influential house in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Sapieha family had a reputation as wealthy patrons of the arts and culture, in addition to their role as benefactors and supporters of the Catholic Church in Poland. The Sapiehas were divided into two main branches; the older one was based in Różana and became known as the Różański branch. The younger Kodeński branch gathered around Kodeń.

revered Baroque images: firstly, as a magnificent homage to the Virgin Mary,<sup>8</sup> secondly, as an example of Baroque performance culture,<sup>9</sup> and finally, as a significant post-Tridentine influence in East-Central Europe.<sup>10</sup> I have developed another hypothesis explaining the liturgical act as a personal achievement of Jan Fryderyk Sapieha,<sup>11</sup> who owned Kodeń at that time.

Sapieha was aware of the fact that the image had a special connection with his family, since his great-grandfather, Count Mikołaj Sapieha, had brought it back from abroad in 1630, thereby laying the foundations of a Marian shrine in Kodeń. Although most aristocratic families in Poland and Lithuania possessed valuable paintings and other treasures, few items were so closely associated with specific members of the family as the icon from Kodeń was with Count Mikołaj. Jan Fryderyk decided to use the Marian devotion for his purposes, knowing about the unique position of the Virgin Mary in Polish society and people's incomparable love for her. He developed an elaborate plan that would lead to the creation of a cult of his family icon to emphasise this unique relationship and draw attention to his house, which was fighting for its position at the royal court. The project of the 'Madonna of the Sapiehas' was a twofold one. On the one hand, it promoted the family's relics among pilgrims and ordinary people; on the other, it was a celebration of the family's unique relationship with the Virgin Mary, which set it apart from other aristocratic houses. The Sapiehas' popularity among the common people would also increase by presenting their family as a house chosen by the Mother of God. From 1707 to 1723, when the coronation took place, I determined several tasks that Sapieha completed in order to unite the noble family with a venerated image. Following in the footsteps of Jan Fryderyk, the process of establishing the veneration of the image of *Our Lady of Kodeń* is presented here in chronological order.

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**8** In the second half of the nineteenth century, the importance of the cult of the Virgin Mary on the territory of Poland became an important topic for Polish historians. Books from this period summarise all known information on images of the Virgin Mary, although they generally lack a critical analysis of the sources. For the period from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century see, for example, Pruszkowski 1898; Fridrich 1907. The special emphasis on the role of the devotion to the Virgin Mary continues to this day as one of the approaches to the theme. See Dywan 2014; Chomik 2003 for further information.

**9** The analysis of divine coronations as part of the Baroque phenomenon of street performances and theatricality is mostly represented in modern Czech historiography, see Royt 1999; Vrabelová 2012; Malý 2019. For the most detailed information about the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, see Baranowski 2003.

**10** See Augustyniak 2008; Witkowska 1988; Nabywaniec, Lorens, Zabraniak 2019.

**11** Jan Fryderyk Sapieha (1680-1751) was the most famous representative of the Kodeń branch of the Sapieha family. He held several positions in the government of the Commonwealth, serving as Grand Recorder of Lithuania, Castellan of Trakai and Minsk. In 1735 he was appointed as the Grand Chancellor of Lithuania.

## 2 Two Engravings from Leipzig

In 1707 as part of his ‘Grand Tour’<sup>12</sup> the young Jan Fryderyk “wandered all over Europe” (Sapieha 1995, 429), studying at the universities of Halle, Rostock and Leipzig, before moving to the Holland to continue his education in Utrecht and Leiden. While in Leipzig, the nobleman paid a visit to the workshop of the famous artist Martin Bernigeroth, who was the most important supplier of engravings to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (cf. Huber 1796, 39). Sapieha asked him to engrave a picture of *Our Lady of Kodeń*. The engraving was used for the first time by Jan Fryderyk on the cover of his book, which was published in Toruń in 1720. Historians have not yet accepted the purchase of the engraving as part of the long process of creating a Marian family legend (Kałamajska-Saeed 2006), probably due to the considerable time gap between the moment of the order and the first use of the image. The Latin inscription written by Bernigeroth on the base of the image suggests that Sapieha had already thought of its future use.

Below the silhouette of the Virgin, we can read the following text:<sup>13</sup>

Virgini Deiparae Reginae Poloniae in cunctis adversitatibus Protectici Haeres devotissimae Praedecessorum Suorum rendarius Magni Ducatus Litvaniae Brestianensis, hanc Beatae Mariae Imagerali Codnensi, innumeris Benecifius Claram in Coden Sapieha, Castelanum Vilnensi anno 1636 obtenam, & Roma allatam lica, in Diecesi Luceoriensi, Palatinatugium aeterna Devotionis excudi unicae Domus Sapieahane & in nuperrimis malis expertae Patronae venerationis Joannes Sapieha Gubernator cum Juris diction Palatinatenem de Guada Luppe, in Ecclesia Prapositus & Gratio-sissimam per Nicolaum Comitem nensem ex speciali Sancta Sedis Favore ae in praedicta ab Eodemque fundata Basi Brestianensi sita, depositam, in Homa curavit Anno Domini 1707.  
Bernigeroth Sculps. Lips. (Walicki 1720, 9)

Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Queen of Poland in all adversities, the most devoted heir of her predecessors, the Brest Voivodeship in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, this image of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Kodeń, which was obtained by Nicolaus Sapieha, the Castellian of Vilno, in 1636, together with numerous other luminous

<sup>12</sup> The Grand Tour was the custom of a traditional trip through Europe undertaken by noble and upper-class young European men. This tradition was established at the end of the seventeenth century and survived until the nineteenth century. One of the key destinations was pilgrim shrines in Italy and Spain.

<sup>13</sup> In this case, the first names of Jan Fryderyk and Mikołaj Sapieha were kept in their Latin form.

donations, was brought from Rome to the diocese of Łuck in the Voivodship of Poland, to be forever worshipped by the House of Sapieha; and to be venerated as the patron saint of Joannes Sapieha, the Governor of the province of Guada Luppe, who suffered from malicious evils. With the special favour of the Holy See, the image was placed and taken care of in the most virtuous and gracious Basilica built by Nicolaus Sapieha in the aforementioned Brest Voivodeship. Anno Domini 1707. Bernigeroth, sculptor from Leipzig

Two main concepts contained in the text are at the centre of Jan Fryderyk Sapieha's subsequent activities. Firstly, the readers realised that the image appeared in Poland only because of Mikołaj Sapieha's unique position and special relationship with the Holy See. Of all the families in Europe, the Pope chose to give the precious relics to one Sapieha, and it was his house that was chosen by the Virgin Mary and has been protected by her ever since. Secondly, the Sapieha family presented themselves as the main worshippers and protectors of *Our Lady of Kodeń*. A significant fact is that the engraving was purchased from the most prestigious workshop that supplied portraits of the royal family. Sapieha's actions at this moment show that he had no regrets about the expenditure of money and that he was only using the services of the monarch Augustus II.

Two years after the creation of the first engraving, Sapieha returned to Leipzig for a new commission for Bernigeroth: "a personal portrait with the insignia of the Grand Recorder of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania" (Łomnicka-Żakowska 2003, 284). Sapieha then began the second phase of his outstanding project of the Sapieha ancestral icon, in which he could use his new portrait.

### 3 Family Gallery

Since the end of the 1630s, the painting of the Virgin Mary has been kept in the Church of St Anne in Kodeń.<sup>14</sup> Count Mikołaj Sapieha, who founded the church and supported its construction, was buried there in 1644 together with his wife Jadwiga Anna. After their burial, the Church of St. Anne served as a necropolis of the Kodeń line of the Sapieha family. At the beginning of 1710 Jan Fryderyk ordered 76 portraits of his ancestors, starting with the Lithuanian prince Witold.

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<sup>14</sup> The construction of a stone church in Kodeń began in the summer of 1629 with the financial support of Mikołaj Sapieha and his wife, Jadwiga Anna Woyna. The couple promised that their church would not be inferior to Saint Peter's Basilica. The new church was consecrated in 1635.

The portraits were painted by various local and foreign masters. The family gallery<sup>15</sup> became known as *Tabula genealogica domus Sapieharum* (Genealogical Table of the Sapieha Family; Tłomacki 1996, 275). Sapieha's distant cousin Kazimir Jan, the head of the Różanski branch of the family, helped his relative to collect information and data about their common heritage and sent him a number of materials relating to their famous ancestors (cf. Kałamajska-Saeed 2006, 59).

The family tree is presented on a large table with nine rows of portraits of the famous Sapiehas, arranged in chronological order, with a short description of each one. Two heroes of the history of the Kodeń shrine are in the most prominent place: Count Mikołaj, who brought the divine image to Kodeń, and Jan Fryderyk, who was the main benefactor and the creator of the gallery. The portrait of the second Sapieha is based on an engraving made by Martin Bernigeroth in 1709. He is depicted as a young man, the most splendid representative of his family, in the full splendour of all the orders and titles he had acquired in his lifetime.

The fact that the paintings were not placed in the Sapieha's main palace in Kodeń, but in St Anne's Church, could be explained as follows: this gallery symbolises the monumental epitaph of the family, which for many generations has placed itself under the protection of the Mother of God. At the same time, all the visitors to the church and the numerous pilgrims could see the family portraits next to the miraculous icon, which again emphasised the inseparable history of the icon and Sapiehas. The portrait of Mikołaj Sapieha, holding the temple of Kodeń with the miniature of *Our Lady of Kodeń* behind him, confirms once again that this church was founded by the Sapieha family, who also purchased the icon for all pilgrims. Visitors may feel as if they are under the silent control of all the family members watching them from the walls. The presence of the Sapiehas around the divine image was maintained by the numerous tombs of family members near the high altar.

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**15** Similar ancestral galleries began to be built during the reign of Augustus II (1709-33), when the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania was gradually recovering from a long period of war. The time of peace allowed the wealthy aristocrats to satisfy their desires, which not only served the common good but also their personal interests. Sapiehas' pedigree became one of the first galleries of its kind.

#### 4 The Adventures of Mikołaj Sapieha

In 1720 a book was published in the Toruń typography in Polish, entitled *History of the Miraculous Image of Kodeń*. The author of this edition introduced himself as Jakub Walicki, the chaplain in Kodeń and “the lowest servant of the most honourable *pan* ‘lord’, the founder and benefactor Jan Fryderyk Sapieha” (Walicki 1720, 6). Walicki’s book was the first written account of the story of Sapieha’s great-grandfather, Mikołaj, and his visit to Rome, which was briefly mentioned under the engraving of *Our Lady of Kodeń* from 1707. Walicki described the adventurous story of Count Mikołaj the Pious, who contracted an unknown but dangerous disease shortly after 1629. Despite his doctors’ care, Mikołaj’s health deteriorated rapidly and soon all that could be done was hope and prayer. Aware of the nearness of death, Count Mikołaj promised God that if he survived, he would make a pilgrimage to Rome. Sapieha and his wife Jadwiga Anna visited Italy in 1630, although the illness did not disappear. After seeing the divine icon of the Virgin Mary in the Pope’s private chapel, Sapieha miraculously recovered. However, as soon as he left the chapel, he began to feel ill again. Sapieha asked Pope Urban VIII for the image, realising that only its constant presence could bring him a healthy life. Attributed to the hand of the Evangelist Luke, the Pope refused to sell or give away the icon. Sapieha had the option of accepting the will of the Pope, as a faithful Christian would do, but he chose not to do so. Having bribed the guards with 500 golden ducats, he removed the icon from the wall of the Chapel and fled the city before dawn. Urban VIII soon discovered the loss of the precious image, suspected that Sapieha was the culprit, and sent his armed men in search of the thief (cf. Walicki 1720, 10-15). “Sapieha left Italy, hurrying along mountain roads, in the dark, faster than the wind”, wrote Walicki, “travelling through Hungary and Lviv, and after a year returned to Kodeń” (15), where he placed the image in the family church of the Holy Spirit until a more presentable stone church was completed.

In the following years, according to Walicki, Sapieha exchanged letters with the Pope and his Apostolic Nuncio in Poland, Honorius Visconti, explaining his actions. However, both remained adamant and Sapieha was excommunicated from the Catholic Church. The nobleman reconciled with Rome only in 1634, when he opposed the possible marriage of Władysław IV Wasa with the Lutheran princess Elizabeth of the Palatinate, and rejected this proposal in the Polish Parliament, using the right of *‘liberum veto’*<sup>16</sup> (cf. Walicki 1720, 15).

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<sup>16</sup> The right of the *liberum veto* was granted to all members of the Parliament (Sejm) in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It allowed any member of the Sejm to force

For more than two centuries, historians did not doubt the author's personality and the veracity of his story;<sup>17</sup> they considered Walicki a true representative of the Church. In accordance with today's generally accepted interpretation,<sup>18</sup> there has never been a chaplain by the name of Jakub Walicki; this name is completely fictitious. The real author of the book was Jan Fryderyk Sapieha, who pretended to be a monk who used the authority of the Catholic Church and took advantage of the momentum in the statements of its members. Whether we consider Sapieha's sacrilege to be a fact or not: the publication has fulfilled its purpose. In a simple and engaging language that was understandable to the majority of the population, the author presented an 'objective' view of the history of the image. He emphasised once again the unity of the icon and the Sapieha family. The rapid distribution of the book also contributed to the spread of information about the image of *Our Lady of Kodeń* and the adventures of Mikołaj Sapieha throughout the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

## 5 Latin Issue

One year after the publication of the *History of the Miraculous Image of Kodeń* Jan Fryderyk prepared another edition on the family icon in Latin, which was published in Warsaw in 1721 under the title *Monumenta antiquitatum Marianarum* (Ancient Monuments of the Virgin Mary). This was the first time that Sapieha published under his real name rather than a pseudonym (cf. Zajac 2020, 99). The appearance of his name was not the only innovation of his new Latin book. The 1720 edition was aimed at a wide range of readers, regardless of their status; the second book was intended for the ecclesiastical elite. In the preface, Sapieha dedicated this text to

Santissimo Ac Beatissimo Patri Innocentio XIII. Divina Providentia Pontifici Maximo.

The Most Holy and Blessed Father, by Divine Providence Pope Innocent XIII. (Sapieha 1721, 7)

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an immediate end to the current session and nullify any legislation by vocally expressing his wish to stop the activity.

**17** The novel *Błogosławiona wina* (Holy Guilt) (1957) by the famous Polish writer Zofia Kossak-Szczucka popularised the possible sacrilege of Mikołaj Sapieha in the twentieth century.

**18** For further analysis of Jan Fryderyk Sapieha pseudonym Walicki see Carl, Wrede 2007; Chemperek 2020.



The devotion to the Pope also influenced Sapieha's style. The first difference was in the language of the edition, which was written in Latin only. In the 1720 book, Sapieha's ancestor was portrayed as a rebellious, free-spirited adventurer who was supported by the author and won the sympathy of the readers. The 1721 book presents a different portrait of Mikołaj, with many dark and contradictory traits. He is portrayed as a "criminal man full of sins" (Sapieha 1721, 150) who stole the miraculous painting because of a "serious illness that affected his mind and nerves" (151). *The Ancient Monuments of the Virgin Mary* allowed Jan Fryderyk to use all his writing skills and his knowledge of classical philosophy and ancient literature. He recreated a kind of ancient tragedy, criticising his great-grandfather and his scandalous behaviour, being "shocked by his actions" (147-8) in Rome and admiring the wisdom and calm of Urban VIII, who did not take immediate revenge.

Sapieha's portrayal of Mikołaj Sapieha as a criminal corresponds with Jan Fryderyk's own dubious actions: in the last part of the book, Sapieha frequently referred to letters written by Nuncio Visconti, in which he was supposed to praise Mikołaj's heroism and courageous defence of the Catholic Church during the parliamentary session on the marriage of Władysław IV Wasa and the Lutheran princess Elizabeth of Palatinate (444-52). This at first sight credible source is completely fictitious, the archive of the Polish Parliament doesn't mention any statements ever made by Mikołaj Sapieha, so his possible dispute with the king probably never happened. In addition to the correspondence of Nuncio Visconti, Sapieha provided other convincing sources: a list of votive gifts to the miraculous image<sup>19</sup> and a list of miracles that occurred after the icon was transferred to Kodeń<sup>20</sup> (474-90). Neither of these documents related to the icon was real, and fabricated sources were used to prove the antiquity and miraculous character of the icon. The actions of Jan Fryderyk and his lies to the head of the Church are no less shocking than the possible sacrilege of Our Lady of Kodeń.

When analysing the nobleman's plan, I was struck by one moment in particular: his effort to describe his ancestor as a thief, which is in sharp contrast to his previous actions. In the gallery of the Sapieha family in Kodeń, Mikołaj is portrayed as a devout and almost saintly man who built a stone temple and received the icon of *Our Lady of Kodeń* as a special gift from the Pope. What was the reason for this dramatic change in the narrative? Baroque *curiositas* 'curiosity' is one possible reason. An important element of Baroque consciousness

<sup>19</sup> Most of them were given by Sapiehas as the most faithful and devoted family.

<sup>20</sup> Many of the miraculous healings were of members of the Sapieha family, but ordinary peasants could also be found on the list.

was “curiosity about people, places, the laws of nature and wonders, the desire to learn and the passion for new knowledge” (Strużyńska 2016, 35). In the eighteenth century, journals reporting unexplained, miraculous and rare events were sought after. The society liked to read stereotyped stories, in which the famous aristocrat Sapieha as a cheeky thief was a perfect fit.

When Jan Frederyk wrote his works, there were more than 400 Marian shrines in the Crown Lands of Poland. Not far from Kodeń, in the town of Sokal, there was a miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary from the fourteenth century. The *Madonna of Sokal* was considerably older than the one of Kodeń and had been known to pilgrims for several centuries. In 1746, when Benedykt Chmielowski published the first Polish encyclopaedia *Nowe Ateny* (New Athens) in the definition of ‘divine icons’, only twelve verses were devoted to the medieval *Madonna of Sokal*, while 33 verses were devoted to the relics of Kodeń (cf. Chmielowski 1746, 941-2). Equally important for Sapieha was the need to speed up the process of fame of the Kodeń image: with two coronations already held in Częstochowa and Trakai, he was in a hurry to make ‘his’ or ‘Sapieha’s’ coronation one of the very first, so that people would remember it before many others took place.

## 6 Preparation for the Coronation

In 1721, fourteen years after he had visited Leipzig and ordered the engraving of the Virgin Mary, Jan Fryderyk almost fulfilled his plan. He had already published two books, one in Polish for the common readers with a taste for adventure and scandal, and another in Latin, in a peculiar and high language for the eyes of the Pope. Both editions attracted attention and helped to glorify the Sapiehas and their family icon, which was reproduced on the first pages as a copy of the original engraving made by Bernigeroth. The only thing that was missing was the coronation itself. Realising how many Marian shrines were waiting for their chance to catch the Pope’s eye, Sapieha decided in the second half of 1722 to accelerate the process and approach the Holy See. Together with Stefan Bogusław Rupniewski, the Bishop of Łuck, they began to correspond with the delegates of the Catholic Church. In September 1722, Rupniewski wrote a letter to the new Apostolic Nuncio in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Vincentius Santini, in which he reported on the “passionate desire of Jan Fryderyk Sapieha”<sup>21</sup> to crown the image of Kodeń. In November, Santini sent another letter to Cardinal Annibale Albani,

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<sup>21</sup> Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Archivio del Capitolo di San Pietro, Madonne Coronate 5, f. 271c.

the archpriest of St Peter's Basilica in Rome. In his letter, Santini informed Rome of Sapieha's wish to crown his miraculous image and he also added documents proving the antiquity and divinity of *Our Lady of Kodeń* prepared by Jan Fryderyk Sapieha and Stefan Rupniewski.<sup>22</sup> Pope Innocent XIII gave his approval in May 1723, less than six months after having received the necessary information, and reacted exceptionally quickly.<sup>23</sup> The fact that, for the first time, the golden crowns for the Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus were not made from the special fund of the Count Pallavicini may have prompted such a swift reaction from the Holy See.<sup>24</sup> Jan Fryderyk suggested paying for the crowns from his savings.<sup>25</sup> The coronation of Our Lady of Kodeń took place on 15 August 1723, during the celebration of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Stefan Rupniewski, who helped Sapieha prepare the documents for the Pope and wrote letters to the Apostolic Nuncio, was chosen to crown the divine image. When the golden crowns touched the heads of the Virgin Mary and Jesus, Sapieha's plan was complete.

## 7 Conclusion

Although Jan Fryderyk, like the majority of the Polish *szlachta* 'nobility', was a devout Catholic, his desire to organise a canonical coronation of his family icon was more than a desire to praise the Mother of God. His actions were mainly an attempt to show off his family and himself and to increase the fame of Sapiehas. Over the course of two decades, Jan Fryderyk gradually built up a legend about the theft of a precious icon from Rome and spread information about its miraculous nature. The magnate established a link between his family and the divine icon by means of five basic steps. Sapieha's portrait gallery showed all the parishioners and pilgrims who came to Kodeń that this family was under the care of the Virgin Mary, who in turn was under the protection of Sapiehas. Jan Fryderyk's two books

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**22** Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Archivio del Capitolo di San Pietro, *Madonne Coronate* 5, f. 271b.

**23** Usually, the Pope gave his permission within a year. However, there were cases when the coronation was delayed for several years. The preparations for the coronation of the icon of *Podkamin* were delayed for twenty years, and the *Madonna of Bołszowce* was coronated after eight years of waiting.

**24** In the first half of the seventeenth century, Alessandro Sforza Pallavicini, Count of Piacenza, who was famous for his devotion to the Virgin Mary, with the blessing of Pope Urban VIII, set up a special fund for the sponsorship of golden crowns. The first crowned image to be paid for by Pallavicini's donation was the *Madonna della Febbre* in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome in 1638.

**25** Sapieha set an example for other aristocrats in Poland and Lithuania, who also began to sponsor the crowns.

helped in their own way to distribute information about the image in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the Kodeń branch of Sapiehas started relinquishing their status as the preeminent representative of the Commonwealth. They lost half of their property and never regained their previous glory and influence from the era of Jan Fryderyk. The Church of St. Anne has not exhibited the gallery of family members since the twentieth century, and historians have revealed more secrets about the story concerning the acquisition of the icon, yet Sapieha's legacy endures. Through assiduous labour, Jan Fryderyk erected a lifelong tribute to himself as the patron, contributor, and supporter of the Catholic Church, but, above all, as a Sapieha – a member of the family, which was chosen, among others, by the Virgin Mary.

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