

The Great “Reigness”



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Palaces, manor houses, and churches erected by magnates during the Baroque were an expression of the patrons’ artistic passions and a demonstration of their families’ power

“A great owner of such shrewdness that she had meetings with the whole of Europe,” was how Elżbieta Sieniawska née Lubomirska (1669-1729) was described by Erazm Otwinowski, author of the *Memoirs of the Reign of Augustus II*. She was also a lover of the arts, and an outstanding founder whose artistic patronage at the turn of the 18th century is only comparable to that of King Augustus II.

Scholarly lady-in-waiting

Elżbieta Lubomirska was most likely born in Końskowola as the only child of Court Marshal of the Crown Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski, one of the greatest writers and patrons of the era, and Zofia Opalińska, educated at the “scholarly court” of Marie Louise Gonzaga. Elżbieta could be proud of her outstanding family connections; many of her ancestors were behind some considerable artistic foundations. She received a thorough education at the Visitationist Sisters’ boarding school in Warsaw. The next step along her educational path was her arrival at the court of Marie Casimire Louise de La Grange d’Arquien Sobieska in 1676. Spending time at the Queen’s side was crucial for Elżbieta’s future: her manner became even more refined, and the social circles she moved in helped her gain experience for her future political, economic, and cultural activities. She became skilled at conversation and the complex romantic games of the era; she perfected the latter, using them to her advantage as a political tool. The determined Lubomirska soon became one of the Queen’s favorite ladies-in-waiting, and with time, this trust became a genuine, heartfelt friendship. The wealthy and affluent Elżbieta was an excellent candidate for marriage. In 1687, she married Adam Mikołaj Sieniawski, heir of considerable lands in the Eastern reaches of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, stretching from Podole to Lesser Poland.

Artful politics

The combination of the Lubomirski family’s splendor and significance with the Sieniawski family’s wealth and hetman traditions provided a perfect starting point for Elżbieta’s political and cultural activities. Adam Mikołaj received the title of Grand Hetman of the Crown in 1706 and became the Castellan of Kraków in 1710, making the couple one of the most influential at the time. Adam Mikołaj became the first secular senator, and during the period of interregnum, he was the *de facto* leader of the army. According to the 19th-century historian Ludwik Dębicki, “The Sieniawskis rose so high that after the Saxon dynasty came to an end, it seemed that the throne upon which Sobieski and Wiśniowski once sat would become theirs.” And although it was not to be, they styled themselves as the first couple of the Commonwealth, making no secret of their ambitions. However, their activities were not driven by the popular 18th century European fashion for building, but rather by the hetmans’ love of the arts.



Hungarian National Gallery

Portrait of Elżbieta Sieniawska née Lubomirska, painted by Adam Manyoki in the early 18th century



Renata Niesińska

Fragment of a ceiling in the Wilanów palace with a representation of Elżbieta Sieniawska as Flora, created by Giuseppe Rossi

The family owned nearly 60 properties of various sizes, including a dozen or so handsome residences: palaces in Warsaw, Wilanów, Łubnice, Lublin, and Kraków, wooden manors in Przybyślawice, Oleszyce, and Wysock, fortified castles in Brzeżany, Międzybóż, Stare Sioło, and Tęczyn, and more modest manors in Borszczowice, Drozdowice, and Laszki. They also held many sacral foundations, with the Church of the Visitationist Sisters in Warsaw, the Church of the Piarist Fathers in Kraków, the Capuchin Monastery in Lwów, and the Dominican Church in Sieniawa as the most prominent. Their major patronage activities were largely made possible by the many outstanding artists and craftsmen working at the art studio at the palace in Łubnice under the direction of the architect Giovanni Spazio. They also hired other artists for individual commissions, such as the architect Carlo Antonio Bayo and the sculptor Johann Georg Plersch.

For the family's splendor

The hetmaness Sieniawska's patronage activities can be viewed from the Ciceronian perspective of "*publicam magnificentiam diligit*," or "they love public magnificence." Her rich collection of paintings and sculptures was perceived by her contemporaries as a kind of symbolic "costume." We can recall here the thoughts of the noblewoman Zuzanna Mogilska concerning the extensive palace in Łubnice, where "Having found the palace in such grand and extraordinary decoration I concede that it lacks naught but the royal canopy, which with God's help I should hope to see soon." The former royal residence in Wilanów near Warsaw, bought on 3 July 1720 following prolonged negotiations with Augustus II, played a particularly important role in shaping Sieniawska's image as a powerful magnate. It was her crowning moment during the process of buying out royal property, which the hetmaness looked after following Marie Casimire's departure for Rome; she became the owner of palaces in Wysock and Surochów, as well as lands

near Tarnopol. The Wilanów palace was in a very sorry state at the time of purchase. Sieniawska not only renovated the building, but also finished both the side wings and ingeniously weaved her own family's ideas into the former residence of Augustus II. Wilanów was a fashionable location, frequently visited by leading magnates and the King himself. Sieniawska was well aware of the residence's "media" function, as shown clearly by her words in a letter to her husband: "The Wilanów walls are being cunningly restored, and the King's heart is breaking." Sieniawska's other quasi-royal enterprise was the construction of a Convent of the Visitationist Sisters in Warsaw, with direct links to the foundation of Marie Louise Gonzaga, the wife of Władysław IV and a distant relative on her mother's side. She devoted a handsome sum of 120,000 zlotys to this particular project. The construction of the Capuchin Monastery in Lwów (1707) was closely based on the designs of the Warsaw church of the order, founded by John III.

Sieniawska's attitude and personality, heavily immersed in social, political and artistic circles, mean that we can regard her as a predecessor of future enlightened female arts patrons. It's also worth stressing that the hetmaness was admired by Izabella Lubomirska née Czartoryska.

Her extensive, thoughtful artistic patronage was heavily inspired by John III and later by Augustus II on one hand, while on the other – by the French salon developing in Paris in the late 17th century, which was instrumental in the growth of female patronage of the arts across Europe. ■

Chcesz wiedzieć więcej?

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