

## **| The Anonymous Coronation of Empress Alexandra as Queen of Poland (1829–30). A Pictorial Vision of National Resurrection, or the Two Aspects of Illusion**

“A fever was consuming Warsaw and the whole country. The thought that the Russian emperor was going to be crowned as the king of Poland overwhelmed all minds. Finally, the impatiently anticipated day came: Sunday, 24 May. [...] Once he finished saying the oath, the emperor remained standing, while the empress and all the witnesses knelt and remained kneeling throughout the thanksgiving prayer which was recited aloud by the Primate. Afterwards, Woronicz stood up and exclaimed three times: ‘Vivat rex in aeterna [sic!]’ [...]. Polish hearts were beating very hard at that moment, but involuntary mistrust kept all mouths shut.”<sup>1</sup> The quoted passage comes from a diary written many years after the events of that May Sunday of 1829 by Natalia Kicka, née Bisping (1801–88), a gifted amateur painter,<sup>2</sup> aristocrat and eyewitness to the historic coronation of czar Nicholas I as king of Poland. Considering that her husband was killed two years later during the November Uprising (not to mention other relatives who died in battles against Russia), one can be quite baffled by her unbiased approach towards such a controversial event in the history of Polish-Russian relations. The autocratic czar crowns himself king of Poland?! Even if we sense the author’s ambivalent attitude towards the protagonist, it does not concern the fact itself – for Kicka the coronation was a coronation, not a farce for the amusement of the oppressor.

This enthusiast for romantic literature wrote the quoted words in an epoch which looked at czar Nicholas through the prism of Adam Mickiewicz’s drama *Forefathers’ Eve* and knew the coronation from Juliusz Słowacki’s *Kordian*, where the czar-king is likened to the devil, and the whole ceremony is described as an usurpation. Kicka, however, did not renounce her impression of that day, even though it was contrary to the ideas which prevailed many years later. Her memories transported her into the world where the Kordianesque devil appeared as the rightful “successor to the Valiants, Casimirs and Johns,” and the coronation as a symbolic moment of fortunate change in the nation’s history – a world which was yet to witness the bloody insurgent battles, the executions on the hillside of the Warsaw Citadel and the mass deportations to Siberia.

Amongst numerous press articles, occasional poems, diary notes, and even spy reports, there is only one painting which documents this memorable event: the anonymous *Coronation*

<sup>1</sup> Natalia Kicka, *Pamiętniki* (Warsaw: “Pax,” 1972), pp. 168, 170.

<sup>2</sup> *Słownik artystów polskich i obcych w Polsce działających. Malarze, rzeźbiarze, graficy*, Jolanta Maurin Białostocka and Janusz Derwojd et al., eds, vol. 3 (Wrocław-Warsaw-Krakow-Gdańsk: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1979), p. 402.

of Empress Alexandra as Queen of Poland (fig. 1) from the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw. This seemingly unattractive work, once subjected to an in-depth contextual and formal analysis, turns out to be an intriguing artistic statement regarding the specific historical period which gave birth to the culture of Polish Romanticism.

The *Coronation* is an oil painting on canvas, measuring 167 × 199 cm. It was deposited in the National Museum in Warsaw in 1923 by Ludwik Temler (1857–1938).<sup>3</sup> The donor, a shareholder of a large family-run tannery, was a renowned art connoisseur.<sup>4</sup> The significance of his collection is proved by the 1890 exhibition organized by the Zachęta Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Warsaw. Apart from works of the old masters, visitors had the chance to admire there a number of paintings by contemporary “native [...] only” artists, such as Jan Matejko, Henryk Siemiradzki and Julian Fałat.<sup>5</sup> This should come as no surprise, as Temler, an Evangelical with German roots, had a particularly strong sense of Polishness. As a child he witnessed the arrest of his father, who was later imprisoned in the Warsaw Citadel for giving financial support to the January insurgents. As a young man he was expelled from school for rebelling against Russification.<sup>6</sup> Temler’s patriotism, which manifested itself in supporting “only” Polish artists, gives a significant context to the fact that he had owned the *Coronation* and later donated it to the national collection.

The circumstances in which the painting was created are unknown. I have not found any mention of it in the numerous accounts of the 1829 ceremony. The first information about it can be tracked down in the museum’s inventory. In all likelihood, the *Coronation* was not displayed to the public (even at the 1890 exhibition),<sup>7</sup> or engraved. Apart from its subject, the only certain information is that it was painted between May 1829 and November 1830.<sup>8</sup> The *terminus ante quem* can be inferred from the assumption that after the outbreak of the November Uprising neither the Poles nor the Russians would be interested in painting the *Coronation*; moreover, they would have reasons to prevent any such attempts. It would have been impossible to glorify the pre-uprising Polish-Russian union in that period – in both writing and image.

Even though the painting was restored in the 1980s, the author’s signature was not revealed. Still, the question of its authorship remains quite intriguing. Only a few painters could have received such a commission. In Warsaw, these were only Antoni Brodowski, Antoni Blank and Aleksander Kokular. Formal similarities with the works of Wincenty Kasprzycki and thematic with Jan Klemens Minasowicz (the author of *The Interior of Saint John’s Church with the Catafalque During the Requiem Ceremony for the Soul of His Majesty, the Late Alexander I*)<sup>9</sup> do not allow to draw any definitive conclusions, as the second-rate position of both artists at that time excludes them from the circle of possible authors.

<sup>3</sup> The inventory record of the painting no. 32711 (Krystyna Sroczyńska) is stored at the Inventory Department of the National Museum in Warsaw.

<sup>4</sup> Eugeniusz Szulc, *Cmentarz ewangelicko-augsburski w Warszawie. Zmarli i ich rodziny* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1989), pp. 559–62.

<sup>5</sup> *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, no. 52 (1890), p. 413.

<sup>6</sup> Ferdynand Hoesick, *Powieść mojego życia (dom rodzicielski). Pamiątniki* (Wrocław–Kraków: Ossolineum, 1959), pp. 110–1.

<sup>7</sup> Janina Wiercińska, *Katalog prac wystawionych w Towarzystwie Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie w latach 1860–1914* (Wrocław–Warsaw–Kraków: Ossolineum, 1969).

<sup>8</sup> See Krystyna Sroczyńska, *Antoni Brodowski 1784–1832. Życie i dzieło* (Warsaw: Varsovia, 1985), p. 112.

<sup>9</sup> Stefan Kozakiewicz, *Warszawskie wystawy sztuk pięknych w latach 1819–1845* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1952), p. 178.

Jerzy Gutkowski linked the *Coronation* with the Englishman George Dawe,<sup>10</sup> tzar Nicholas's court portraitist, who at that time was in Poland, where he was to paint grand duke Constantine.<sup>11</sup> Yet the stylistic differences and Dawe's lack of interest in historical subjects indicate that this attribution should be dismissed. In 1829 the government of the Kingdom did indeed require his work, but the commission was to paint two portraits of "Their Majesties."<sup>12</sup>

According to the museum's current inventory record, the author of the painting remains unknown. However, it has not always been this way – the work was previously attributed to Antoni Brodowski, a student of Jacques Louis David and François Gérard. This attribution was later dismissed by Krystyna Sroczyńska.<sup>13</sup> Curiously enough, in the photographic documentation,<sup>14</sup> the painting is attributed not to Antoni, but to Józef Brodowski – a student of Johann Baptist Lampi, who was artistically active in Krakow at that time. Was this a coincidence, or a clue implying that before the canvas became a part of the museum's collection, it was linked to one of the Brodowskis? Is there any other explanation of the *Coronation* being attributed to two such different artists?

Let us compare the work with paintings by both Brodowskis, Blank and Kokular. Sroczyńska's opinion seems irrefutable. It is hard to find any similarities between the *Coronation* and the Brodowski active in Warsaw. The previous attribution must have been based on the assumption that he was the only painter likely to take on such a subject. As for Blank and Kokular, the only reason to link them with the work at hand is their high position in the artistic circles. Yet, contrary to Brodowski, neither of them had painted any ambitious historical paintings.

The attention to detail visible in the manner in which the uniforms of the officials are painted is consistent with Józef Brodowski's style (**fig. 2**). He made many studies of clerical decorations.<sup>15</sup> What supports the theory of Krakow being the home of the mysterious author is the composition, which evokes *The Inauguration of the Parliament in 1818* painted by Michał Stachowicz.<sup>16</sup> However, as far as we know Brodowski's oeuvre, he was not interested in historical subjects, contrary to his fierce rival, Józef Peszka. The awkwardness of composition and the unequal manner of executing the portrait parts (some prove the author's excellent education, while others are almost grotesquely simplified) would indicate Peszka's authorship. He often worked on "royal" subjects, painting portraits of monarchs. Another painting attributed to him

<sup>10</sup> Jerzy Gutkowski, "Ceremoniał koronacji Mikołaja I na króla polskiego w Warszawie," *Kronika Zamkowa*, 6(14) (1987), p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 136 (21 May 1829); Valerij A. Kulakov, "Dawe George," in *Saur Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon. Die Bildenden Künstler aller Zeiten und Völker*, Eberhard Kasten [et al.], ed., vol. 24 (Munich-Leipzig: Damdama-Dayal, 2000), p. 552.

<sup>12</sup> Central Archive of Historical Records (CAHR), Minutes of the Administrative Council of the Kingdom of Poland (ACKP), no. 17 – minutes from 30 April 1829, p. 324. Apparently, he painted both portraits while already in Warsaw – see *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 156 (13 June 1829).

<sup>13</sup> Sroczyńska, op. cit., p. 112. However, the previous attribution still appears in other sources: Wacława Milewska, "Uczta dla ludu w Ujazdowie w 1829 roku – miejsce niedosłzłego zamachu na cara," in *Arma virumque cano. Profesorowi Zdzisławowi Żygulskiemu jun. w osiemdziesięciolecie urodzin*, Barbara Leszczyńska-Cyganik, ed. (Krakow: Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, 2006), p. 183.

<sup>14</sup> Inventory record of the painting – see n. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Stanisława Opalińska, *Józef Brodowski. Malarz i rysownik starego Krakowa* (Krakow: Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Krakowa, 2005), pp. 137–42.

<sup>16</sup> Zbigniew Michalczyk, *Michał Stachowicz (1768–1825). Krakowski malarz między barokiem a romantyzmem*, vol. 2 (Warsaw: Instytut Sztuki PAN, Liber Pro Arte, 2011), pp. 96–7.

was the *Coronation of Alexander I as King of Poland*.<sup>17</sup> One should note that the then Free City of Krakow (Republic of Krakow) had close ties, both political and cultural, with the Kingdom of Poland. Therefore, it is probable that the author was a citizen of that city.

Concentrating on the style in which the faces are painted (fig. 3), I would be most inclined to attribute this painting to Aleksander Orłowski. My assumption is based especially on his profile portraits.<sup>18</sup> The artistic mediocrity of the painting might be explained by the old age of the artist (he was born in 1777), who at that time would not sit at his easel very often.<sup>19</sup> This Varsovian artist, highly esteemed during his lifetime, had for many years been living in Petersburg, where he was employed by the czar's brother, duke Constantine (one of the organizers of the 1829 coronation). He was also an important figure in the local Polish circles. He sometimes dabbled in historical painting, although he did not specialize in it. The weak point of this theory is that we do not have any information concerning Orłowski's alleged stay in Warsaw in the years 1829–30. Moreover, we do not even know if he had ever visited the Kingdom of Poland.

Before I proceed to the detailed analysis of the painting, I should first discuss the context of its creation. In 1815, when the news spread about the formation of the Kingdom of Poland, the Polish elite was overcome with elation. The new state was, in many respects, a continuation of the Duchy of Warsaw: a Napoleonic satellite state, whose army eagerly marched on Moscow no more than three years before. Despite the anti-Russian propaganda and the negative connotations regarding the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795 (in which Russia played a significant part), the year 1815 brought a breakthrough in the Polish-Russian relations. Alexander was acclaimed as a “saviour” and “resurrector of the motherland.” Even though the new country was smaller than the Duchy, the Russian graciousness seemed beneficial – Alexander granted the Poles what Napoleon had denied them. He provided the “resurrected” state with the symbolic background, on which the semiosphere of the national liberation movement was based: Poland replaced Warsaw on maps, and the royal replaced the ducal.<sup>20</sup>

Right until the 1830 uprising, the attitude towards the king was characterized by gratitude for the “reborn” Poland. However, that was not a time of an absolute lack of criticism. From the very beginning there were manifestations of mistrust, especially on the part of the most zealous Napoleonists. Later, specified objections were raised: above all, against breaching the liberal constitution. It turned out to be an ideal which was completely detached from reality and impossible to reconcile with the despotic traditions of the Romanovs as well as with the ambitions of Polish officials who had already acquired a taste for centralized executive power. In the face of unrest in Europe, Alexander was convinced that he should pursue the course of autocracy which he deemed the only way to save his people from the tragedy of another revolution. Despite his true enthusiasm for liberal ideals, he toughened the regulations in

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, p. 199, vol. 2, pp. 272–3.

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Mieczysław Wallis, “Autoportrety Orłowskiego,” *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, vol. 17 (1955), p. 329, fig. 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Słownik artystów polskich i obcych w Polsce działających. Malarze, rzeźbiarze i graficy*, Katarzyna Mikocka-Rachubowa and Małgorzata Biernacka, eds, vol. 6 (Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1998), pp. 300–12.

<sup>20</sup> Jarosław Czuby, *Zasada „dwóch sumień”. Normy postępowania i granice kompromisu politycznego Polaków w sytuacjach wyboru (1795–1815)* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2005), pp. 610–59; Piotr Paszkiewicz, *Pod berłem Romanowów. Sztuka rosyjska w Warszawie 1815–1915* (Warsaw: Instytut Sztuki PAN, 1991), pp. 141–4.

Russia and refused to tolerate opposition in Poland. Because of the controversial behaviour of his brother Constantine (who lived in Poland and was the commander-in-chief of the Polish army) and of his overzealous commisar, Nikolay Novosiltsev, the situation became even more exacerbated. A series of harsh decisions of the Polish government, inquiries and arrests (a normal phenomenon in Europe of that time), suicides of affronted officers and other incidents undermined the authority of the “resurrector of the motherland.”<sup>21</sup>

Still, many people faithfully stood by the “resurrected” royal majesty – as proved by Alexander’s symbolic funeral solemnities in Warsaw in 1826, worthy of pre-partition monarchs.<sup>22</sup> However, new problems emerged concerning the late czar’s successor. Nicholas was Alexander’s exact opposite. He had never been a supporter of liberal ideals, by which his brother (almost twenty years his senior) set so much store. Apart from the generational difference, the very circumstances in which he assumed the throne – the Decembrist Revolt – influenced his despotic tendencies. Nicholas avenged himself for the coup d’état with severe repressive measures. Discovering the contacts between Russian conspirators and the Polish Patriotic Society led to a well-known trial. The emperor insisted on a rigorous punishment of the would-be “regicides,” while the public opinion found those revelations hard to believe, as they expected the suspects to be exonerated.<sup>23</sup> The trial continued throughout the first three years of Nicholas’s reign, and the emperor intended not to set his foot on the Polish soil before the end of the proceedings.<sup>24</sup> When the verdict was announced (it was a sentence of acquittal), the czar could not shrink from travelling to Warsaw any more. The Poles were expecting better times to follow.<sup>25</sup> Obviously, not everyone shared this optimistic approach. A group of young enthusiasts of Byron and Mickiewicz started plotting another attempt on the monarch’s life.<sup>26</sup> However, during the last decade such revolts were being planned and sometimes even carried out also in other European countries whose citizens did not display any national liberation tendencies. It was the authority itself that was the enemy of romantic revolutionaries.

Around that time the question of coronation emerged. Nicholas’s arrival meant that the parliament (Sejm) had to be summoned. The previous session took place in 1825 and several issues had been waiting to be sanctioned by it. But preparing new bills to be put forward would delay the czar’s visit by months. The Varsovian government advised against waiting any longer. The patriotic euphoria caused by the announcement of the Parliamentary Court’s verdict

<sup>21</sup> Mikołaj Getka-Kenig, “Alyeksandr I i Polyaki. Istoriya mifa ‘voskresitelya otechestva,’” *Novaya Polsha*, no. 3 (2012), pp. 7–10.

<sup>22</sup> *Opis żałobnego obchodu po wiekopomney pamięci nayiaśnieyszemu Aleksandrze I...* (Warsaw: Natan Glücksberg, 1829). See also Paszkiewicz, *Pod berłem...*, op. cit., p. 145–50; id., “Sztuka i polityka. Warszawa podczas uroczystości żałobnych po śmierci Aleksandra I,” *Kronika Warszawy*, vol. 17 (1986), pp. 91–100; Juliusz Chrościcki, *Pompa funebris. Z dziejów kultury staropolskiej* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1974), pp. 87, 164, 211, 245, 248, 260.

<sup>23</sup> Hanna Dylągowa, *Towarzystwo Patriotyczne i Sąd Sejmowy 1821–1829* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970).

<sup>24</sup> CAHR, Office of the Secretary of State of the Polish Kingdom (OSSPK), no. 3930 – letter of Stefan Grabowski, minister and secretary of state to Walenty Sobolewski, chairman of the Administrative Council, 4/21 February 1827, p. 349.

<sup>25</sup> *Jenerał Zamoyski 1803–1868*, vol. 1: 1803–1830 (Poznań: Biblioteka Kórnicka, 1910), p. 285.

<sup>26</sup> Or so they claimed many years later. However, there exist no sources which would confirm the fact of the conspiracy in 1829. Henryk Głębocki, “Ofiara z imperium. Spisek koronacyjny 1829 – historia prawdziwa (?) w świetle nieznanych źródeł,” in *Ofiary imperium. Imperia jako ofiary. 44 spojrzenia / Imperial Victims. Empires as Victims. 44 Views*, Andrzej Nowak, ed. (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2010), pp. 183–213.

provided the emperor with a perfect opportunity to reinforce his authority. Nicholas realized that the Poles' good disposition was not the only thing at stake – at that time he waged war against Turkey. The lack of success in his military actions undermined the young monarch's position on the international arena. Peace on the western border was more than important to him, even though he did not even consider the danger of an uprising.<sup>27</sup> His suspicion was directed at Austria and Prussia, which would have been eager to stoke the flames of Polish patriotic pride and use it against the Romanovs, if they deemed it advantageous for their own imperial position.

Instead of summoning the parliament, the Polish dignitaries, supported by Constantine, suggested a coronation. This idea was not a figment of the ministers' creative imagination, but was based on the constitution. Article 45 read as follows: "All our successors [i.e., Alexander's] and heirs to the Polish throne are to be crowned as kings of Poland in the capital, according to a ritual which we shall institute, and utter the following oath: 'I vow and swear before God and on the Bible to preserve the constitution and strive with might and main to do so.'" At first, Nicholas was sceptical towards this idea (he had already been crowned once, as Russian czar), but he eventually agreed, encouraged by his brother – and so the preparations began. The news quickly spread in Warsaw and in the whole Kingdom: "The announcement of the coronation liberated Warsaw from the gloomy atmosphere which had enveloped the city since the Parliamentary Court. Everyone rejoiced in the hope of breathing the air of freedom, we all welcomed the dawn of a better fate."<sup>28</sup> Special celebrations were organized,<sup>29</sup> occasional publications were issued<sup>30</sup> and portraits of national heroes were printed.<sup>31</sup> On 14 May "Kurier Warszawski" published a special supplement with the "programme of the arrival and coronation."<sup>32</sup> A couple of days later, that same magazine wrote about "the senators, members of parliament and deputies" who "were arriving at the capital of the Kingdom of Poland, and about swarms of citizens at this moment so blessed, precious and honourable for the Poles."<sup>33</sup> Finally, on 17 May "there dawned the day long desired by the Poles."<sup>34</sup> Accompanied by the thunder of cannons, surrounded by the retinue of Polish and Russian officials, the emperor-king arrived, with his wife and the crown prince.

The festive arrival in the capital was the first chapter of the official ceremonial. The next one – the coronation itself – was to take place on 24 May. The czar devoted the week in between to acquainting himself with the Polish citizens. Nicholas visited military parades, strolled along the streets of Warsaw, granted audiences to military and civilian officials. The atmosphere of Warsaw was expressed through amateur poetry, published in newspapers.<sup>35</sup> Ludwik Adam Dmuszewski,

<sup>27</sup> Władysław Zajewski, "Koronacja i detronizacja Mikołaja I na Zamku Królewskim," in id., *W kręgu Napoleona i rewolucji europejskich 1830–1831* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1984), p. 293.

<sup>28</sup> Kicka, op. cit., pp. 159–60.

<sup>29</sup> *Gazeta Warszawska*, no. 145 (1 June 1829).

<sup>30</sup> *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 133 (18 May 1829).

<sup>31</sup> *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 153 (10 June 1829).

<sup>32</sup> *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 129 (14 May 1829).

<sup>33</sup> *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 132 (17 May 1829).

<sup>34</sup> *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 133 (18 May 1829).

<sup>35</sup> E.g., "Wiersz z powodu koronacji Mikołaja I Cesarza Wszech Rosji Króla Polskiego i N. Cesarzowej i Królowej Aleksandry," *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 139 (25 May 1829). Similar printed poems were sold as souvenirs. See *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 141 (27 May 1829).

the then director of the National Theatre and publisher of the widely read “*Kurier Warszawski*”, hung the following rhyme on the walls of his house: “It was the twenty-fourth of May / that Warsaw will rejoice eternally: / We saw NICHOLAS that day, / As during the sacred ceremony / On Piast’s and Jagiełło’s throne he sat down, / Crowned with the ancient Polish crown.”<sup>36</sup>

On the day of the coronation, the celebrations began in the morning with the consecration of the regalia in the cathedral. The precious symbols of the “resurrected” statehood were carried by the highest officials and dignitaries – senators, generals and members of the Council of State. The guests then went to the Senators’ Chamber in the Royal Castle. There was not a single free place to sit, neither in the lower rows nor in the upper galleries. The emperor and the empress arrived with their courtiers. Then came the “desired moment of the sacred ceremony,”<sup>37</sup> led by the Primate of the Kingdom, Jan Paweł Woronicz. According to the tradition of Russian autocracy, Nicholas himself put the crown on his head. Afterwards he said a prayer, asking God for help in preserving the constitution – the cornerstone of the “resurrected” Polish state. When the ceremony was completed, they went back to the cathedral to participate in a thanksgiving mass. In the evening, a festive banquet for the courtiers and members of the parliament was held in the Castle.<sup>38</sup>

Three weeks later, the royal family embarked on their return journey, leaving a positive impression. For some time afterwards, thanksgiving masses in the intention of the monarch were celebrated all over the country. In general, the public seemed satisfied with the coronation which gave hope for a brighter future. Six months later, opinions similar to the following one were expressed in public: “We have recently seen how this most powerful monarch, having arrived at our old-Polish dwelling and been crowned with the crown of the Piast dynasty, gave multitudinous proofs of his greatness; since that moment, we can see how this successor of the Valiants [Boleslaw the Valiant], Casimirs [Casimir the Great] and Johns [John III Sobieski] lavishes the gifts of his munificence on the Polish nation: they reach even the most humble abodes of beggars, and leave an immortal memory in the hearts of our people.”<sup>39</sup> Even though the quoted words were said by a state official during an election, the fact that their purpose was to win votes proves that Nicholas’s “black legend” was not yet prevalent at that time<sup>40</sup>.

“The scene of the coronation takes place in the Deputies Chamber [sic!] of the Royal Castle, at the end of the room, on a dais, under a canopy. The uniform-clad dignitaries stand in four rows in boxes situated at the sides, while the ladies sit in the galleries”<sup>41</sup> – Krystyna Sroczyńska’s concise description seems to convey the gist of the painting. At first glance, nothing remains to be added, nothing is superfluous. However, if we try to analyse the semi-otic matter of the scene more deeply, we see an intriguing artistic message which describes the complicated historical situation confronted by the painter.

<sup>36</sup> *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 141 (27 May 1829).

<sup>37</sup> *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 139 (25 May 1829) – including a full account of the ceremony.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Cited in: Tadeusz Łepkowski, “Propaganda napoleońska w Księstwie Warszawskim,” *Przegląd Historyczny*, vol. 53 (1962), p. 83.

<sup>40</sup> The initiators of the November uprising of 1830 intended to direct Nicholas’s attention to the widespread discontent of the Polish people about the current political situation of the Kingdom. An idea of dethronement came forth only after the political elite had realized that the emperor-king did not want to change anything.

<sup>41</sup> Inventory record of the painting – see n. 3.

The artistic vision of the *Coronation* is based on the illusion of participating in the depicted ceremony, the illusion of experiencing a real event without the assistance of the painter. The scene depicted on the canvas appears to be a situation frozen in time, a single glance of an eyewitness. It is not an autonomous, independent scene limited by the canvas. It is a part of a bigger whole, an “excerpt” of reality, the perceptible presence of which is accentuated by the enormous door jambs. The stone frame of the hall entrance, painted in the trompe l’oeil manner, is a frame within the painting – the strong colour contrast adds to the attractive visual effect: the austere grey is juxtaposed against the multicoloured “interior” part.

The “interior” view boils down to a room observed from the point of view of a person standing in front of the open door. Entering metaphorically inside the painting, we cross the threshold of the architectural space. Right next to the door stand the generals with their backs turned to the spectator – they guard the entrance to the hall in which the solemn ceremony is taking place (fig. 4). Their presence, and especially their position, intensifies the illusion. The spectator is encouraged to believe in his actual presence in the given space and time – he does not participate in the ceremony, which takes place within the walls of the Senators’ Chamber, but he observes it from the distance of the adjoining room.

The question of the “relocation” into the reality of the painting seems to be an important problem which defines the meaning of coronation scenes in general. However, in this instance, the position of the spectator, who is watching the main scene from a distance and from a different room, is exceptional. The authors of the most famous “coronations” of the early nineteenth century: Jacques Louis David (*The Coronation of Napoleon*) and François Gérard (*The Coronation of Charles X*) chose a different solution. In both cases, the spectator seems to be participating in the depicted scene, and even though he keeps an appropriate distance from the king’s majesty, he is not removed from the room in which the solemn ceremony is taking place.

In the case of *The Coronation of Napoleon*, the illusion of watching the scene from a gallery in the aisle was the essential propaganda “task” of the painting. The spectators were encouraged to believe that they had gained access to the splendour of the historic event which took place a few years before. Until then, they could learn about such occasions only from the press or from the accounts of the few witnesses who were granted access to the church. Now the authorities gave the illusory opportunity to verify the heard rumours. The aesthetic attractiveness of this representation was supposed to “suppress” the negative opinions about Napoleon, who by no means enjoyed general respect. The painter’s task was not very difficult. The moment of the meticulously designed ceremony depicted by David was “beautiful” by definition. Thanks to him, this unique aesthetic experience, which before 1804 had been accessible only to the highest elite, could be repeated four years later – this time to the entertainment of a more democratic audience.<sup>42</sup>

In this respect, Gérard achieved a no less spectacular effect in his *Coronation of Charles X*, painted almost twenty years later. It is worth remembering that this painting was supposed to compete with David’s vision – just as the ceremony itself competed with the festivities of the “Corsican usurper.” The illusion of observing the scene from the matroneum gave access to the event, while keeping an appropriate distance between the king and the potential spectator. The realism of the representation was achieved not only through attention to detail, but also through the dynamic depiction of the figures. The painting, which was displayed to the

<sup>42</sup> Todd Porterfield, Susan L. Siegfried, *Staging Empire. Napoleon, Ingres and David* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University, 2006), pp. 122–6.



public, was supposed to convey the enthusiasm of the portrayed officials to a less aristocratic audience, and last for years or even for generations.<sup>43</sup>

The illusion of personal participation in the depicted scene also seems to be quite an exceptional effect for Polish painting of the Kingdom period. It is worth noting that such possibility is excluded in the composition of Charles Santoire de Varenne's *First Arrival of Alexander I in Warsaw* (known from an engraving by Ludwik Horwat), Michał Stachowicz's *Inauguration of the Parliament in 1818* and Antoni Brodowski's *Alexander I Certifying the Foundation of the University*. In the first two paintings the point of view is not natural. While observing the inauguration of the parliament through Stachowicz's eyes would be impossible because of the spatial limitations of the Senators' Chamber, Varenne would need a special platform, whereas Brodowski seemed to boldly "approach" the monarch. According to Andrzej Ryszkiewicz, the latter painting was more of a collective portrait than a historical scene, and the spatial context was of little significance. It obviously did not display any illusionistic ambitions.<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, what exactly determined the choice of this particular observation point in *The Coronation*? Was it only the wish to emphasize the hierarchy? This perspective allows to see almost the whole interior and the entire assembly, i.e., all the participants of the ceremony. The privilege of being included in their midst could not give such an opportunity. The "coronation frame" applied by David and Gérard proves this statement – it is only a fragment of a limited and coherent ceremonial space. Earlier iconography of the parliamentary interiors shows that an intention of showing the whole scene did not enforce this kind of composition. Compared with the aforementioned paintings, the solution chosen by the author of the *Coronation* is quite innovative. Until then, artists approached this problem just like Stachowicz did – disregarding the realistic effect. The Senators' Chamber was viewed that way by Jan Piotr Norblin and Kazimierz Wojniakowski (who painted the scene of the enactment of the Constitution of 3 May 1791). By showing the entire hall in one frame, the painters expressed the ideal essence of the Polish parliament – an assembly of three equal states: the king, the senators and the deputies. The constitution itself was allegedly supposed to be the effect of their unanimity. The symbolic aspect was more important than the illusion of reality.

*The Coronation* is a deft combination of both. The painter realistically portrayed the interior, maintaining its symbolic potential. Some of his contemporaries identified the scene of the coronation in Warsaw with the so-called coronation parliament.<sup>45</sup> They did not base their assumption only on the pre-partition past, when such events preceded this solemn ceremony.<sup>46</sup> Senators, deputies as well as government officials would indeed gather in the capital on such occasions. The act itself was performed in the Senators' Chamber, in which the monarch customarily opened and closed the parliamentary sessions. The members of the parliament were the key participants of the coronation – their importance was emphasized by the banquet (an integral part of the ceremony) hosted solely for them and the king. Their position was equally

<sup>43</sup> Élodie Lerner, "Entre effervescence politique et artistique. Le Sacre de Charles X de François Gérard," *La Revue du Louvre et des musées de France*, no. 1 (2008), pp. 73–86; Mikołaj Getka-Kenig, "Tableau d'étiquette – między ceremonią a obrazem. Rozważania na temat *Sakry Karola X* pędzla François Gérauda," *Rerum Artis*, vol. 7 (2012), pp. 84–97.

<sup>44</sup> Andrzej Ryszkiewicz, *Polski portret zbiorowy* (Wrocław–Warsaw–Kraków: Ossolineum, 1961), pp. 135–6.

<sup>45</sup> CAHR, Government Internal Affairs Committee, no. 6180, p. 54; Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, *Pamiętniki czasów moich* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1868), p. 320.

<sup>46</sup> Juliusz Bardach, Bogusław Leśnodorski, Michał Pietrzak, *Historia państwa i prawa polskiego* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1987), pp. 62–3.

significant during services which accompanied the secular festivities. Last but not least, no information concerning the summoning of the parliament (an event which had been anticipated for four years) accompanied the news about the coronation. In such circumstances, the meeting of the czar with the members of both houses could be easily mistaken for a makeshift parliament. Even Nicholas believed that the ceremony in the Senators' Chamber could have been regarded as an extraordinary session – and he expressed his disapproval concerning that matter, presumably because he did not want his decision to be interpreted as evidence of his subordination to another sovereign: the nation represented by the parliament.<sup>47</sup>

In the case at hand, the illusion of real experience is inseparably connected with the clearly indicated hierarchy. “Great” history happens in the architectural space of the Senators' Chamber, beyond the spectator's reach – he can watch, but does not participate in the ceremony. Moreover, the possibility of watching the noble assembly in its entirety pushes him further from the king – the protagonist of the scene. In effect, Nicholas depicted here is the antithesis of Alexander from Brodowski's painting. He is a remote, blurred shape seen from afar. However, this does not necessarily imply his “smallness” in the axiological sense. The minute size of the royal figure is the result of optical principles and the distance between the spectator and the monarch. At the same time, a smaller (albeit still considerable) distance separates him from the Kingdom's elite, gathered around the king of “resurrected” Poland.

Securing a good place during the ceremony was a popular ambition, caused not only by curiosity, but also by the pursuit of prestige. The patriotic excitement was the backdrop for shallower emotions, the desire to “make oneself noticed,” show off one's position and bask in the glory of the monarch. The coronation verified the hierarchy of the Polish elite.<sup>48</sup> Members of the middle class spent exorbitant sums of money on renting places in balconies and windows of houses near the Castle, while wealthier citizens bought tickets to sit on a platform built for that occasion.<sup>49</sup> The Senators' Chamber was open exclusively to the highest military, civil and court officials and their wives and daughters – the then *crème de la crème*. Those whose rank did not grant them access to the hall, had to strive to gain favour of the dignitaries who were in charge of the available seats.<sup>50</sup> *The Coronation* depicts around 300 people filling the hall, but one may presume that their number was even greater.<sup>51</sup>

Let us analyse the meaning of architecture depicted in the painting. Looking at the canvas, one may easily come to the conclusion that the scene at hand does not show people surrounded by architecture, but architecture filled with people. This impression is determined by the crowded sides of the composition. In effect, the depicted space is mostly empty. The painter's intention might have been to emphasize the sublimity of the ceremony. According to the ideas prevailing in that period, the empty space, by monumentalizing the scene, captivates the spectator and renders him speechless, at the same time evoking the sensation of grandeur

<sup>47</sup> Nicholas's letter to Constantine from 18/30 March 1829, in *Correspondance de L'Empereur Nicolas I et du Grand Duc Constantin*, vol. 1: 1825–1829 (St Petersburg: impr. de M.A. Aleksandrov, 1910), pp. 325–6.

<sup>48</sup> Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Archivio Caetani di Roma, Fondo Rzewuski, no. 1 (V) – Anna Nakwaska, *Le Couronnement de Varsovie*, pp. 1–2.

<sup>49</sup> Tymoteusz Lipiński, *Zapiski z lat 1825–1831* (Krakow: published by K. Bartoszewicz, in A. Koziański's printing house, 1883), p. 139.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146; Józef Krasiński, “Ze wspomnień,” *Biblioteka Warszawska*, vol. 2 (1912), p. 412.

<sup>51</sup> During the official audience before the coronation around 500 people of both sexes were introduced to Nicholas. Presumably no more guests were invited to the Chamber. Krasiński, *op. cit.*, p. 415.

and rapture.<sup>52</sup> A similar effect can be seen in lithographs depicting the aisles of the Warsaw cathedral during the “funerary ceremonies” in memory of Alexander,<sup>53</sup> as well as of Varenne’s *First Arrival of Alexander I in Warsaw*, and of the engraving depicting the Ujazdowskie Field during a public feast in honour of king Nicholas in 1829.<sup>54</sup> In this case, however, the interior itself becomes a symbol.

The Senators’ Chamber cannot be treated as a purely functional room, whose purpose is to host parliamentary sessions. It owes its unique significance to the fact that it was where the “fathers of the fatherland” had assembled, the parliamentary sessions were opened and closed, and the representatives of the nation had direct contact with “their” king.<sup>55</sup> Its particular prestige in the previous period of the Duchy of Warsaw was confirmed in 1812 by the plan to embed a plaque commemorating the “resurrection” of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth by Napoleon in one of its walls.<sup>56</sup> The Chamber later became a shrine of yet another “resurrector.” In 1826 Nicholas donated Alexander’s Polish uniform to the senators, which was to be deposited there in a special “sepulchral” monument, as if in a church reliquary.<sup>57</sup>

What proves the persistence of the belief in the symbolic significance of this room is the 1839 painting *The Senators’ Chamber* by Marcin Zaleski. At that time both houses of the parliament did not exist, as a result of reprisals after the uprising. The canvas is not just an architectural composition: “historic” figures connected with the period of the partitions are seated in some of the chairs, including Adam Naruszewicz, Stanisław Staszic and Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz (who actually was still alive at that time, residing as a political emigree in France). They meet in definitely non-historical circumstances.<sup>58</sup> In Zaleski’s vision, the “greats” from the turn of the century gather in the Chamber like ancient heroes in the Elysian Fields.

Upon entering this temple of the state and nation, the spectator “encounters” the aforementioned six generals, who play the role of honorary guards. Their insignia of rank allow to establish that there are two Russians and one Pole on the left, and one Russian and two Poles on the right. The fact that these figures are exposed seems to express the belief prevalent in that period, namely that the army played a superior role in the political life of the Kingdom. In many respects, the most important figure in contemporary Poland was Constantine, who was the commander-in-chief of the army with overt statocratic ambitions. He despised civilians and often expressed this sentiment in public. He set much store by the symbolic emphasis of the superior role of the army, e.g., during royal audiences, when generals took precedence

<sup>52</sup> Richard A. Etlin, *Symbolic Space. French Enlightenment Architecture and Its Legacy* (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 2–9.

<sup>53</sup> Jan Feliks Piwarski, “Widok wewnętrzny kościoła katedralnego od wielkich drzwi w chwili modlitwy za duszę N. ALEXANDRA w dniu 7 kwietnia” and Michał Antoni Wysocki, “Widok wewnętrzny tegoż kościoła od wielkiego ołtarza w chwili składania na nim insygniów.” Both were published in *Opis żałobnego obchodu...*, op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> Milewska, op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>55</sup> The Chamber had already played an important role in earlier national iconography. Juliusz Chrościcki, *Sztuka i polityka. Funkcje propagandowe sztuki w epoce Wazów 1587–1668* (Warsaw: Polskie Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1983), p. 26.

<sup>56</sup> Janusz Polaczek, *Sztuka i polityka w Księstwie Warszawskim. Dzieje, formy, treść i dziedzictwo* (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2005), pp. 152–6; Jerzy Lileyko, *Sejm Polski. Tradycja – ikonografia – sztuka* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 2003), pp. 121–2.

<sup>57</sup> CAHR, ACKP, no. 14 – minutes of 28 February 1826, pp. 52–3; no. 16 – minutes of 17 May 1828, p. 221. See also Lipiński, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>58</sup> Zofia Aleksandra Nowak, *Marcin Zaleski (1796–1877). Katalog wystawy monograficznej* (Warsaw: Muzeum Narodowe, 1984), p. 58, cat. no. 23.

over ministers.<sup>59</sup> The prominent position of army officials was also typical of coronation ceremonies, which was determined not only by Constantine's opinions, but also by the Saint Petersburg custom. Nicholas did not avoid military entourage either, and bestowed the highest honours (such as ministerial positions, orders or hereditary titles) mainly on soldiers. He wore a general's uniform at both of his coronations – in Moscow and in Warsaw.

The symbolic meaning of the figures, who are deprived of their individual features because their backs are turned to the spectator, is intensified by the fact that they are positioned next to the Doric columns which support the gallery opposite the throne. One can hardly assume that a painter educated in a culture dominated by classical paradigms could be unaware of the symbolic value of such a configuration. A column supports an edifice which, metaphorically, could represent the world (also a "small" world, such as, for instance, a state).<sup>60</sup> The Doric order was associated with austerity and noble simplicity – qualities which define the classical ideal of masculinity,<sup>61</sup> which included military career, as masculinity is a virtue especially associated with soldiers. Considering the then prestige of the army, it seems probable that the said detail symbolizes the Polish-Russian union based on military power and forming the foundation of "resurrected" Poland.

The visual positioning of the monarch can be interpreted as enthronement – it is an attempt to translate the essence of royal majesty into the symbolic language of artistic expression. Regardless of the miniature size of the king's body, the monarch draws the spectator's attention – thanks to the use of perspective. The viewer's gaze, "advancing" deeper into the hall, "moves" towards Nicholas. Our attention is drawn in the same direction by the rich decoration of the throne, which brings to mind the canopy in Saint George's Hall in the Winter Palace. According to the official programme, it looked as follows: "[it was made of] crimson velvet, decorated with galloons, crepe and gold tassels; with the initials of His Majesty the Emperor and King and ostrich feathers on the top [...] it would be hung under the ceiling from four iron bars coated with velvet and gold galloons."<sup>62</sup> Thus decorated, the throne served as a monumental frame which elevated the king literally and metaphorically – by aesthetizing ("ornamentalizing") his dignity.

The illusion of distance determined the sketch-like representation of Nicholas (**fig. 1**). The painter gave the king a crown and an ermine cloak, but the synthetic depiction of his face deprives him of a specific identity. In case of the known portraits of Alexander, even the smaller ones (such as those painted by Varenne or Stachowicz), the attention to rendering identifiable features was remarkable. Considering the context of the representations from that time, I shall venture an assumption that the portrayed monarch was supposed to be defined not by his individual identity, but by the very fact of being the king of Poland. Contrary to Alexander, to whom the Poles were indebted, Nicholas had their devotion only as the continuator of his brother's work – which was best expressed by the meaningful writing on the medal minted for the coronation: "what greatness revived, loyalty shall strengthen."

<sup>59</sup> Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, *Pamiętniki z lat 1809–1820*, vol. 2 (Poznań: Księgarnia J.K. Żupańskiego, 1871), pp. 264, 273; Lipiński, op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>60</sup> Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli* (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1990), pp. 151–3.

<sup>61</sup> Nicholas Pevsner, "The Doric Revival," in id., *Studies in Art, Architecture and Design*, vol. 1 (London: Thames & Hudson, 1968), pp. 197–212.

<sup>62</sup> *Cérémonial du Couronnement de Sa Majesté Nicolas I<sup>er</sup> Empereur de toutes les Russies Roi de Pologne dans Sa Capitale de Varsovie / Obrzęd Koronacji Najjaśniejszego Mikołaja I<sup>o</sup> Cesarza Wszech Rosyi Króla Polskiego w Stolicy Królestwa w Warszawie*, [Warsaw 1829].

It is difficult to determine in what act the king is exactly shown. During the real ceremony Nicholas did not crown his wife, who arrived with the crown already on her head.<sup>63</sup> Instead, he placed the chain of the Order of the White Eagle on her shoulders, thus continuing the Russian tradition of decorating the emperor's wife with the order of Saint Andrew.<sup>64</sup> However, this characteristic insignia is not included in the painting – contrary to the facts, Alexandra is wearing the blue sash of the order. The king's symbolic gesture may have suggested the act of decoration.

Why did the painter choose this specific moment? One would hardly call it the central point of the ceremony. Reducing this issue to alleged inspiration with David's *Coronation* does not explain much. The painter's interest in the empress might be a reflection of general public sentiment. Nicholas's wife drew attention at least because of the fact that she was the first Polish queen the people had chance to see in eighty years. The last king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth Stanislaus Augustus (who abdicated after the state's collapse in 1795) was a bachelor,<sup>65</sup> whereas Elisabeth, Alexander's wife, never visited the Kingdom.<sup>66</sup> Her husband, who used to go to Warsaw every year, avoided travelling together due to the disintegration of marital relations. Therefore, Alexandra's visit was an important event. Everyone admired her attire, conduct and dancing skills. Note that the Polish government ordered the queen's portrait in 1829, while I am not aware of any such commission to portray Elisabeth in Alexander's time. Antoni Ostrowski (who later became a hero of the November Uprising) wrote in 1830 that thanks to the queen the Varsovian court achieved a true European status, worthy of Jagiellonian times.<sup>67</sup> Alexandra's presence had a positive influence on the atmosphere of the coronation and intensified the general enthusiasm.

Alexandra is shown in a specific situation: she receives the insignia of royal dignity from her husband, genuflecting in the act of *homagium* as seen in depictions of coronations by Gérard, David et al (e.g., in the *Coronation of Pedro I as King of Brasil* by Jean Louis Debret). The coronation of the spouse, following the monarch's self-coronation, was the first sign of the king's political sovereignty. Just as in David's vision Napoleon began his imperial reign with the coronation of Josephine, Nicholas acted similarly towards Alexandra – the person closest to him, the first one among his subjects, the mother of the future monarch. This interpretation corresponds with the views of the contemporary Poles, who – in accordance with the tradition of Polish elective monarchy – considered 24 May 1829 as the actual beginning of Nicholas's reign in Poland.<sup>68</sup>

The space between the king and the spectator is reserved for the circle of the chosen few who had the honour of playing the historic role of witnesses and participants. The artist showed the actual division between the men's ground level and the ladies' galleries. In case of the former, the dignitaries are grouped in four rows under the gallery. The size of the assembly

<sup>63</sup> Kicka, op. cit., p. 170.

<sup>64</sup> Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. From Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 138.

<sup>65</sup> The children the king had with Elżbieta Grabowska claimed that their parents had contracted a morganatic marriage. However, there is no reliable proof thereof.

<sup>66</sup> CAHR, OSSPK, no. 3930 – letter of Stefan Grabowski, minister and secretary of state, to governor Józef Zajączek from 26 May/7 June 1826, p. 349.

<sup>67</sup> CAHR, Archive of the Ostrowskis from Ujazd, no. 107 – Antoni Ostrowski, *Pamiętnik z sejmiku 1830 r.*, pp. 88–90.

<sup>68</sup> As proved by the poetry written about that occasion.

is indicated by the large number of heads – there are around 200 of them, apart from the several dozen people gathered around the throne. The faces in the front row are more accurately painted and have individual features. Most probably they are portraits of actual participants. Multicoloured order sashes diversify this part of the canvas chromatically. The atmosphere among the partakers is temperate and solemn. Only a few characters are looking towards the spectator. The rest are attentively observing the throne. One cannot exclude that the painter depicted the mood which really dominated the Senators' Chamber at that specific moment. According to the eyewitnesses, everyone went silent – partly out of fear, partly out of real emotion – when Nicholas put on the crown and Primate Woronicz cried “Vivat Rex in aeternum.” This is what Natalia Kicka claimed in the aforementioned excerpt from her journal. Leon Sapieha,<sup>69</sup> canon (and later bishop) Ludwik Łętowski<sup>70</sup> and Andrzej Edward Koźmian<sup>71</sup> had a similar memory of the event, as well as Tymoteusz Lipiński,<sup>72</sup> who recounted a second-hand relation. Apart from historical correctness, the decision to depict the situation in this exact way could have been determined by the desire to show the atmosphere of concentration which permeated all stages of the ceremony. If we recall other paintings of coronation scenes, we have to admit that the disposition of the figures is far from lively enthusiasm, with the exception of the chronologically latest *Coronation* by Gérard. Apparently, this was determined by cultural convention.

What is puzzling is the lack of clergy. According to the emperor's wish, the coronation did not have a religious character. The difference of confession between the Orthodox monarch and his Catholic subjects influenced the form of the ceremony, which only loosely conformed to the pre-partition tradition.<sup>73</sup> Eventually, the clergy retained a prominent position – the Primate, albeit not crowning the czar, handed him the insignia consecrated in a Catholic cathedral. The artist did not provide any information about this, as if he wanted to emphasize the secular character of the event. Still, what was the purpose of this factual distortion? Was it supposed to implicitly undermine the validity of the act which was inconsistent with the old-Polish custom (as in the pre-partition time only Catholics were allowed to sit on the throne)? Or maybe on the contrary, it was a suggestion of a new Poland not divided into more and less privileged confessions, according to the constitution of the Kingdom, which

<sup>69</sup> “Afterwards, the Primate delivered a speech, which he ended with the following words: ‘Now let us all exclaim in one voice: Long live our king!’ – and he cried ‘Vivat!’ thrice – not a single person answered. The Emperor and his wife looked at each other, their faces expressing consternation.” Leon Sapieha, *Wspomnienia z lat od 1803 do 1863* (Lvov: H. Altenberg, 1914), pp. 93–4.

<sup>70</sup> “When, after the coronation, [the Primate] cried ‘vivat rex,’ according to the ritual, altum silentium fell and neither Poles nor Muscovites were shouting.” Ludwik Łętowski, *Wspomnienia pamiętnikarskie* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1956), p. 35.

<sup>71</sup> “Exultation and elation were not expressed with a loud exclamation; they were not present in the hearts, and even if they had been, they would have been restrained by the presence of the grand duke, who, since the emperor's arrival, had not displayed a gracious and benevolent attitude [...] on this festive day, which should have been a national celebration, he surrounded the emperor with Russian guards, not Polish.” Andrzej Edward Koźmian, *Wspomnienia*, vol. 2 (Poznań: M. Leitgeber, 1867), p. 142.

<sup>72</sup> “And according to a witness who remained outside the walls of the castle, but noted his thoughts on the said day: [...] everything, down to the minutest detail, proceeded according to the programme, so far that when the Primate, with his triple exclamation of vivat rex in aeternum seemed to summon the partakers to shout, dead silence reigned, for the programme did not explain how one should behave; they understood that the vivat was allowed only to the Primate.” Lipiński, op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>73</sup> Anna Barańska, *Między Warszawą, Petersburgiem i Rzymem. Kościół a państwo w dobie Królestwa Polskiego* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 2008), pp. 562, 564–5.

stated that the “Roman Catholic faith,” although “specially protected by the government,” did not “threaten [...] the freedom of other confessions” which were entitled to the highest “protection.”

In conclusion, *The Coronation* is by no means an unambiguous painting. It is an intriguing testimony to the paradigm crisis which haunted the nationally conscious elites of the Kingdom between 1815 and 1830: people who were torn between a genuine faith in the revival of their motherland and the awareness of the Polish-Russian union’s realities, which did not fulfil their independence-oriented ambitions. Under the ceremonial lustre, so suggestively depicted by the painter, there is a problem of discrepancy between the two realities struggling to be reconciled: the old-Polish republican and parliamentary traditions of the pre-partition era, and the imported model of centralist monarchy of Russian origin which was both the foundation and price of the “revival.” No less interesting is the spectrum of means of artistic expression used for rendering this paradigmatic statement on canvas. Taking into account the ostensibly parochial and vernacular character of the painting, it still can be said that somewhat baroque spectacularism is mixed here with the reserve of more classicist realism. The visible rigidity of representation emphasizes the character of the depicted scene as a solemn ceremony of great historic significance. What is important, the artist does not engage the spectator in the proceedings. On the contrary – he puts him in the position of a neutral observer. On the one hand, this suggests the elevation of the coronation, shown as an assembly of “the best of the best” sons (and daughters) of the nation, gathered around the “resurrected” majesty of Polish monarchy. Therefore, the direct experience of “great” history is also available to the unprivileged majority of the nation, even though it is limited by impassable social convention. On the other hand, the alienation allows the spectator to keep his distance while interpreting the portrayed vision of national “resurrection” (which soon, after the November uprising’s outbreak in 1830, turned out to be merely an illusion).

I would like to thank Dr Agnieszka Rosales Rodriguez and Professor Juliusz Chrościcki from the Institute of Art History of the University of Warsaw for their valuable remarks and for the advice they gave me in the preliminary stages of work on this article.