

Citation: Czechowicz, B. (2024). The unknown face of Catholic-Protestant dialogue in Central Europe? The forgotten seventeenth-century epitaph of the Swedish King Gustav II Adolf in the Collegiate Church of the Holy Cross in Wrocław (Silesia) (A. Ci-mała, Trans.). *Acta Baltico-Slavica*, 48, Article 3111. <https://doi.org/10.11649/abs.3111>

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The Unknown Face of Catholic-Protestant Dialogue in Central Europe? The Forgotten Seventeenth-Century Epitaph of the Swedish King Gustav II Adolf in the Collegiate Church of the Holy Cross in Wrocław (Silesia)

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the intellectual elite of Silesia – a region on the upper and middle Oder River being then a part of the Crown of the Kingdom of Bohemia – intensified their efforts to document ancient tombstones, epitaphs, and other memorial media. This was done by Protestants and Catholics alike. This heritage mostly survives as manuscripts (Czechowicz, 2004). Two of them, from 1682 and 1694, contain surprising information about the epitaph of Swedish King Gustav II Adolf in the Collegiate Church of the Holy Cross in Wrocław, a church that had been a “functional extension” of the cathedral since the fourteenth century. The first of these manuscripts was produced by Johann Jakob Brunetti, canon of the cathedral chapter in Wrocław, brother of the diocesan suffragan Johann Brunetti.¹

¹ Johannes Jakobus Brunetti, *Scriptori placuit monumenta, qua in sacellu[m] passim becoment primo loco antefere [...] Anno M DC LXXXII*, p. 16, National Library in Warsaw, Department of Manuscripts (Biblioteka Narodowa w Warszawie, Dział Rękopisów), catalogue no. (sygn.) Akc. 4196, p. 36. About the codex, see Czechowicz (2022).

The author of the second, more recent and more extensive, is the largely unknown Johann Nentwig Gette of Meissen.² Both manuscripts conveyed the content of the Latin epitaph:

Ad universitatem usq. / NON ULTRAE / in die novissimo / resurrectionem / Repositus expectat / tu igitur quisquis es / O VIATOR / Si Christianus / ac te mortalem cogitas / die saltem mortuo / REQUIESCAT / is vivus / mortalitatis sua memor / hoc sibi a monumentum / extru curavit / et quidem / ipsa internecionis / GUSTAVI ADOLPHI / Regis Svecorum / die / qua fuit / XVI NOVEMBRIS / ANNO MDCXXXII.³

In the manuscript by Johann N. Gette, the content of the inscription concerning the king is preceded by the heading: “*Hanc tumbam ingredi clesiderantes*”. In addition, next to it there is a sketch drawing of the coat of arms signed: “*Obiit d. 25. Januar. / anno . 1651 . aetat / 64 . Mens. 6*”. I have been unable to establish who they relate to.

Unfortunately, this is all we know about the unpreserved monument – presumably the king’s inscribed epitaph. A negative result was obtained from a query in the State Archive in Wrocław, where the collection of the Collegiate Church of the Holy Cross in Wrocław is rather meagre for the seventeenth century, as well as in the Archdiocesan Archive in Wrocław, where sources on the collegiate chapter from that period are also scarce. Certainly, such a monument existed – as attested by two independent sources – and this deserves attention. It is completely extraordinary that a ruler who was the pillar of Lutheranism in Europe is commemorated in a Catholic chapter church, located right next to the cathedral. The Collegiate Church of the Holy Cross on Ostrów Tumski in Wrocław, founded in 1288 and steadily built throughout the fourteenth century, was for centuries closely linked to the episcopal community. Many of the canons of the Holy Cross chapter were also canons in the cathedral chapter. The question therefore remains as to who, when and why made the effort to commemorate the Swedish Lutheran monarch in this very place – for Lutherans throughout Europe, he became a symbol of the struggle against the papacy and the Habsburgs for their rights (of the vast literature on the ruler, I will mention perhaps his recent biography by the Czech historian Radek Fukala (2022)). A period of fifty years from the monarch’s death at Lützen in the autumn of 1632 until the creation of the older of the codices in 1682 is to be discussed. We have only hypotheses to consider.

The definitive collapse of the revolt of the Bohemian states in 1622 marked the end of the first phase of the Thirty Years’ War, known as the Bohemian or

² In 1745, this manuscript was bound together with the codex which was then created *Extractus INSCRIPTIONUM SEPULCRALIU* by canon Wolf Erdmann von Seydlitz and bearing a common title *Sylloge variorum Monumentorum*, f. 86v, Wrocław University Library, Manuscript Department (Biblioteka Uniwersytecka we Wrocławiu, Oddział Rękopisów), catalogue no. (sygn.) R 1649.

³ The wording of the inscription in both manuscripts is almost identical, the differences concern the spelling of three words: *resurrectionem* (1682) / *resurrectionem* (1694); *Repositus* (1682) / *repositus* (1694); *Si Christianus* (1682) / *si Christianus* (1694).

Bohemian-Palatinate War. The victorious emperor was able to initiate a thoroughgoing re-Catholicisation of the Kingdom of Bohemia and the Margraviate of Moravia in 1627–1628, but in the three other constituent parts of the Crown of the Kingdom of Bohemia – Silesia and Lower and Upper Lusatia – the Lutherans, who were the majority, were able to enjoy certain religious freedoms, also owing to the diplomatic support of the Wettins. Particularly important was the position of Wrocław, the main city in Silesia. It was the seat of a bishopric and several wealthy monasteries, but at the same time it was an economically prosperous urban republic of merchants and bankers mostly of the Lutheran faith. Somewhat simplistically, we can say that the city consisted of the Catholic islands on the Oder River with its cathedral, chapters and monasteries, and the left-bank city, a city of burghers dominated by Lutherans. Although it was the second royal city of the Bohemian Crown after Prague, no Catholic monarch, including even the strongly pro-Catholic Habsburgs, allowed themselves to harass the Wrocław city council because of its Lutheranism.

This denominational dualism of the Silesian metropolis became quite apparent shortly before the death of Gustav II Adolf in 1632. In the summer of 1632, the city was threatened by an attack by the Brandenburg-Saxon-Swedish army, with which the Lutheran elite of the bourgeoisie sympathised. However, they could not afford an open act of disloyalty to the Emperor and King Ferdinand II of Bohemia. Diplomatic shrewdness, however, allowed them to save face before the Habsburg ruler, at the same time avoiding a Swedish attack that affected areas of the city under the bishop and the abbey of the Canons Regular of St Augustine.

The decoration of the vestibule of the house No. 47 in the main square in Wrocław, known from descriptions and engravings, dates from this time. It showed King Gustav Adolf on the ceiling among ancient Roman emperors. Thus, the Wrocław citizens glorified the Swedish king, who was close to them in terms of religion, in a private interior, in a discrete way, trying perhaps to gain the sympathy of the Swedish commanders but not to risk being exposed to the authorities in power. In fact, there are other known small manifestations of the admiration of Lutherans in Wrocław for Gustav Adolf (Oszczanowski, 2006). The creation of the epitaph in the Collegiate Church of the Holy Cross can be placed in this context. It is even possible to speak of a joint action between the Catholic cathedral clergy and the Lutheran city council, for, in 1632, the latter enabled the canons to evacuate valuables to the city on the left bank of the Oder at a time when Protestant troops occupied the bishop's island, which had no fortifications, plundering the cathedral and churches, the bishop's palace and the canons' residences. The Swedes turned the lower part of the two-storey Collegiate Church of the Holy Cross into stables (Feit, 1926; Krebs, 1904; Mandziuk, 1995, pp. 115–116; Marschall, 1980, p. 86). Thus, in both cases – the apotheosis of Gustav Adolf in the hallway of a house in the main square and the epitaph in the collegiate church – one could see an apotropaic action, intended to secure the

bishop's and bourgeoisie's part of the agglomeration from the Swedish army for years to come. After all, the question remains whether the Catholic side could afford to be more ostentatious than the Protestant bourgeoisie at the time. Or were those who, by definition, were loyal to the emperor allowed more?

After the death in 1624 of Bishop Charles of Habsburg (brother of Emperor Ferdinand II), the son of Polish King Sigismund III Vasa and nephew of the emperor, Charles Ferdinand, was chosen as his successor. He held this office from 1625 until his death in 1655, while also serving as bishop of Płock, Poland, from 1640. In 1648 he even wished to be the King of Poland after the death of his brother Władysław IV, and came close to gaining more support than his other brother John Casimir, by then a cardinal in Rome. In the end, however, he withdrew under pressure from non-Catholic circles. During his thirty years as bishop of Wrocław, Charles Ferdinand made rare trips to Silesia (four times in total, but it is worth noting that the last visit lasted two years: 1652–1654). He entrusted the administration of the diocese to his suffragan Balthasar Liesch von Hornau, who was also a canon of the Chapter of the Holy Cross. For Charles Ferdinand, the Swedish monarch Gustav II Adolf was a fairly close relative (they shared a common ancestor, Gustav I, who was a grandfather to Gustav Adolf and a great-grandfather to Charles Ferdinand). Political and confessional divergences did not necessarily cancel out blood ties after all. Although the supposition that the initiator of the Swedish king's epitaph may have been the bishop of Wrocław is very tenuous, it does not help us determine the time of the work's creation, as the period in question is from 1632, or rather 1635, when the canons returned to Ostrów Tumski, to 1655 (Galewski, 2011).

However, this is not the only cut-off date that can be linked to the creation of the epitaph. Indeed, there is a third clue in the search for answers about the circumstances of the Swedish king's commemoration in the Wrocław church. It is related to the conversion to Catholicism and the abdication of his only daughter, Queen Christina. This happened while Bishop Charles Ferdinand was still alive: in 1654, but the later circumstances associated with it seem more important. After her trip to Rome, the ex-queen maintained good relations with Archduke Leopold Wilhelm, brother of Emperor Ferdinand III, who soon (1656) became Bishop of Wrocław after Charles Ferdinand Vasa. It may also be significant that, by the decision of Pope Alexander VII, Christina was assigned two cardinal-legates in Rome to oversee her spirituality. These were Carlo de' Medici, dean of the college of cardinals, and Frederick of Hesse-Darmstadt. The latter became dean of the cathedral chapter in Wrocław in 1668, and from 1671 to 1682 held the dignity of Bishop of Wrocław. He did not arrive in his Silesian diocese until 1676 (Buchmann, 1883; Hoffmann, 1932).⁴

⁴ An impressive monograph was written on Queen Christina in the eighteenth century: [S.a.], *Historische Merkwürdigkeiten die Königin Christina von Schweden betreffend; zur Erläuterung der Geschichte*

Wrocław bishop from the Habsburg dynasty or cardinal from the Hesse-Darmstadt dynasty may have influenced the creation of Christina's father's epitaph in the collegiate church. A motivating circumstance may have been the construction of a chapel-mausoleum of the Polish Vasa dynasty in Kraków at the cathedral. It was erected by the efforts of the last Vasa on the Polish throne, John Casimir, in 1664–1672 (Saar-Kozłowska, 2006, pp. 581–582).

Unfortunately, it is impossible to venture beyond circumstantial evidence and conjecture here. It is simply worth taking note of the content of the inscription on Gustav Adolf's epitaph at this point. There is nothing of Counter-Reformation obstinacy or even mentoring in it. One can even say that it has a supra-confessional, all-Christian character, although the Lutheran "certainty of salvation" seems to shine through from the first words (*"Ad universitatem usque non ultrae in die novissimo resurrectionem repositus expectat tu igitur"*). The king was discreetly absolved in the following words, for the inscription brings reassurance and speaks of the rest this wanderer seems to have earned. After all, there is no literalism here. Rather, the hope is formulated that in another dimension everything will have a happy ending.

The description of the king as a wanderer (*"O VIATOR"*) brings to mind the work of the leading poet of the time, the convert Johannes Scheffler. After converting to Catholicism in 1653, he published under the pseudonym Angelus Silesius, and from 1664 to 1666 was court marshal to Bishop of Wrocław Sebastian von Rostock. In 1657, his popular epigrams *Geistreiche Sinn- vnd Schlussrime* appeared in print in Vienna. In 1675, they received a second, expanded edition with a title very important for our deliberations: *Cherubinischer Wandersmann oder Geist-Reiche Sinn- und Schluß-Reime*. The theme of the road appears here several times, for example: *"Die Wegescheide zur Ewigkeit: / Die Wegscheid ist hier. Wo lenkst du dich nu hin? / Zur Linken ist verlust / zur Rechten ist gewein"* (Angelus Silesius, 1675, p. 152); or: *"Der Weg zum Himmel: / Wenn du mein Pilger wilt inn Himmel dich erhöhen / So mustu nahe zu grad übern Kreutzweg gehen"* (p. 256). The poet also explains who the Christian is – this theme appeared in Gustav Adolf's epitaph – with the words: *"Ein Christ ist Gottes Sohn: / Ich auch bin Gottes Sohn. Ich sitz an seiner Hand: / Sein Geist. Sein Fleisch und Blut ist ihm an mir bekandt"* (p. 25). It is hard to avoid the impression that the spirit of this poetry is echoed in the inscription celebrating the king-wanderer heading towards eternity with an eschatological ballast that is uncertain from the point of view of Catholic orthodoxy.⁵

ihrer Regierung und insonderheit ihres Privatlebens, wie auch der Civil- und Gelehrtenhistorie ihrer Zeit Nebst zweyen noch nie gedruckten Werken dieser gelehrten Prinzeßinn (Historische Merkwürdigkeiten die Königin Christina von Schweden betreffend, 1751–1760).

⁵ The theme of wandering in an eschatological context (with references to the cross, which is important because of the invocation of Wrocław's Collegiate Church of the Holy Cross) also appears in the work of the Silesian Lutheran poet Daniel von Czepko *Sexcenta Monodisticha Sapientum* of 1655,

Interestingly, there is also no request, typical of Catholic eschatology, to pray for the salvation of Gustav Adolf's soul, as if to respect the fact that the monarch was a Lutheran. One could even go further and risk the claim that this is a Lutheran epitaph in a Catholic church. In Silesia, this would not be surprising. When the last Piasts died out in 1675, their Calvinist mausoleum, along with St John's Church in Legnica, was handed over to the Jesuits by decision of Emperor and King Leopold I of Bohemia, with the stipulation that they were to preserve the mausoleum without any interference. This is probably how Europe's only Jesuit church with a Calvinist chapel came into being (Kostowski, 1991). Perhaps a discreet precedent for it was the Protestant king's own Lutheran epitaph from a Catholic collegiate church, if it was older.

It is worth noting that on Bishop's Cathedral Island, commemorating the king would be nothing new. The same manuscripts that record the inscription of Gustav Adolf's epitaph also provide information about the picture-inscription epitaph of King Ladislaus Habsburg of Bohemia and Hungary, called the Posthumous, who died in Prague and was buried there in 1457. This epitaph was located in the cathedral (it was published in: Czechowicz, 2011a, pp. 188–190; Papajík, 2016, p. 250). However, it was not dared to display the memorial to the Lutheran king of Sweden in the main church of the diocese, instead choosing to use the Holy Cross Church next door. In the historical memory of Silesia, it was the "church of concord", founded in 1288 by Wrocław duke Henry IV Probus after a dispute, essentially a war, with Bishop Thomas II (this aspect of the understanding of the collegiate in modern times was pointed out by Dziurla, 1998). The interior of the collegiate church thus provided an excellent framework for an epitaph that could appear as a discreet act of reconciliation between Catholics and Lutherans – as a setting for a posthumous reconciliation between the Lutheran king and the Catholic Church, and this after his daughter Christina entered this path, which was appropriate from the Catholic point of view, in the sixth decade of the seventeenth century.

The point is that neither Bishop Leopold Wilhelm nor Cardinal Frederick of Hesse-Darmstadt were likely to champion such a reconciliation. Their actions were characteristic of a hard course calculated to strengthen Catholicism, which here in Silesia and especially in Wrocław was constantly confronted with a strong Protestant element. Therefore, I am inclined to believe that the epitaph was more of a private foundation than an act of propaganda significance. The latter statement leaves the

considered a source of inspiration for Angelus Silesius, for example: "*Er: wann Er: und was Er wann sie vor Andern / Die Cunitia wird auf Sternen wandern, / Und den Ticho de Brahe übersteigen, / Mag ihr Antlitz sie auf die Staffel neigen. / Was sol jene thun? Es zeigt andre Wonne / Die am Creutzes Stamm angezweckte Sonne*"; or: "*Wegen der Seeligkeit: / Der an dem Creutze hat vor dich genung gethan, / Rufft dir, Mensch folge mir, das Creutz ist deine Bahn*" (Czepko von Reigersfeld, 1930).

way open for considering Charles Ferdinand Vasa to have been a possible inspirer of the work, as well as Cardinal Frederick of Hesse, who was also related to Gustav Adolf, although more distantly, dating back to a common ancestor in the early years of the sixteenth century.

We do not know what happened to Gustav Adolf's Wrocław epitaph. It may have been removed as early as around 1710. It was then that a new main altar was set up in the collegiate church. It contains a large painting showing the Finding of the True Cross by St Helena (it is *in situ*, but in the north arm of the transept) and six monumental statues of St Bartholomew, St Andrew, St Hedwig, St Barbara, St Catherine of Alexandria and St Brigid or rather, St Catherine of Sweden (now in the National Museum in Wrocław). The creation of this altar has recently been linked to the reaction of the Wrocław cathedral clergy to the Altranstädt Convention of 1707. It was signed by Emperor and King Joseph I of Bohemia on one side and Swedish ruler Charles XII on the other. The latter, in accordance with the terms of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, was the protector-guardian of Silesian Evangelicals and interceded on their behalf during their march towards Saxony in the era of the Great Northern War, as they had been oppressed by the Habsburg administration for more than half a century. Evangelicals were then returned more than a hundred churches in the Wrocław diocese. Habsburg propaganda presented Charles XII, who made an alliance with Turkey after the Battle of Poltava, as a traitor to the interests of Christians. The Wrocław altar in the collegiate church, referring to the battle against the Muslims in defence of the Holy Cross and drawing on Swedish traditions, would therefore be a message of some sort to the young Charles XII, instructing him on the role a Christian ruler has to play (Czechowicz, 2011b). Such a programme could have referred to the older Gustav Adolf epitaph either as a complement to it or as a substitute, if it is assumed that it was removed on this occasion. The second variant is all the more likely because, as Arno Herzig states, the Silesian Evangelicals' sympathies for Gustav Adolf were an episode until they realised in the later years of the Thirty Years' War that the Swedes plundering the country were no better than the Emperor's troops. That is why Silesian Evangelicals also wrote critically about the king in the second half of the seventeenth century. Adoration for him came with Charles XII – for local Lutherans the new Gustav II Adolf (Herzig, 2006). Only that now the Catholics, threatened by Swedish interference, had many reasons to negatively regard Gustav Adolf as well as his successor to the Swedish throne.

It seems that Gustav II Adolf's epitaph did not live to see the nineteenth century in the Church, when the interest in mementos of the past was already strong. It is doubtful that the new Protestant rulers of most of Silesia – the Prussian Lutherans – did not notice it after 1742. Nevertheless, we are still speculating. It is to be hoped, however, that the publication of the information about Gustav II Adolf's former Wrocław epitaph will help someone in the future to find further accounts or

to interpret the known facts in such a way as to better clarify the circumstances of the creation and removal of this work.

Translated by dr Alicja Cimała

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The Unknown Face of Catholic-Protestant Dialogue in Central Europe? The Forgotten Seventeenth-Century Epitaph of the Swedish King Gustav II Adolf in the Collegiate Church of the Holy Cross in Wrocław (Silesia)

Abstract

The article presents surprising information about the existence of an epitaph of King Gustav II Adolf of Sweden in the seventeenth century in the Collegiate Church of the Holy Cross in Wrocław (Silesia). The monument commemorating the pillar of Lutheranism in Europe in a Catholic shrine – a sort of “functional extension” of the Cathedral of St John the Baptist – was undoubtedly unusual. Its existence is reported in two independent sources from 1682 and 1694. It is not known who might have funded the epitaph or when it was created; the period in question is fifty years from the king’s death in 1632. The content of the Latin inscription commemorating the king-wanderer, as he was referred to there, shows some affinity with the poetry of the Silesian Catholic poet Johannes Scheffler, known by the pseudonym Angelus Silesius (†1677). One of the circumstances favouring the creation of the epitaph may have been the period of Cardinal Frederick of Hesse’s service as Bishop of Wrocław (from 1672) – in Rome, he had previously been a tutor to the famous convert, the former Swedish queen Christina, Gustav Adolf’s daughter. It is also not known when the king’s epitaph was removed. It could have happened as early as around 1710, when a new high altar was built in the church. It was interpreted as a reaction of the Wrocław Catholic clergy to the Altranstädt Convention of 1707. That was when another Swedish king, Charles XII, spoke up for the Silesian Lutherans, thus becoming the epitome of evil for the Catholic prelates.

Keywords: Gustav II Adolf; Wrocław; funeral culture; Baroque; Catholic-Lutheran dialogue

Nieznane oblicze katolicko-protestanckiego dialogu w Europie Środkowej? Zapomniane siedemnastowieczne epitafium szwedzkiego króla Gustawa II Adolfa w kolegiacie Świętego Krzyża we Wrocławiu

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia sensacyjną informację o istnieniu w XVII wieku w kolegiacie św. Krzyża we Wrocławiu epitafium króla Szwecji Gustawa II Adolfa. Zabytek upamiętniający w katolickiej świątyni – swego rodzaju „rozszerzeniu” katedry

św. Jana Chrzyciela – filar luteranizmu w Europie bez wątpienia był czymś niezwykłym. O istnieniu epitafium informują dwa niezależne źródła z 1682 i 1694 roku. Nie wiadomo, kto mógł być jego fundatorem ani kiedy ono powstało. W grę wchodzi okres 50 lat od śmierci króla, zmarłego w 1632 roku. Treść łacińskiego napisu upamiętniającego króla-wędrowca, jak go tam określono, wykazuje pewne powinowactwa z poezją katolickiego poety śląskiego Johannes Schefflera, znanego pod pseudonimem Angelus Silesius (†1677). Jedną z okoliczności sprzyjających powstaniu epitafium mogło być objęcie diecezji wrocławskiej w 1672 roku przez kardynała Fryderyka von Hessen, który wcześniej w Rzymie był tutorem słynnej konwertytki, dawniej królowej szwedzkiej Krystyny, córki Gustawa II Adolfa. Nie wiadomo też, kiedy epitafium króla zlikwidowano. Mogło to się stać już około 1710 roku, kiedy w kościele powstał nowy ołtarz główny, co interpretowano jako reakcję wrocławskiego kleru katolickiego na konwencję w Altranstädt w 1707 roku. Wtedy to kolejny król szwedzki, Karol XII, wstawił się za śląskimi luteranami, tym samym stając się dla katolickich prałatów uosobieniem zła.

Słowa kluczowe: Gustaw II Adolf; Wrocław; kultura funeralna; barok; dialog katolicko-luterański

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Support of the work: The study was conducted at the author's own expense.

Competing interests: The author declares that he has no competing interests.

Publication history: Received: 2023-10-02; Accepted: 2024-09-09; Published: 2024-12-31.



INSTITUTE OF SLAVIC STUDIES
POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
1954–2024