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## **Jasna Góra in Polish and World Culture**

**U***ncovering one's sense of being human through the arduous effort of the mind is nothing but broadly understood cultural creativity.* In view of the vast number of definitions of culture, the very brief and coherent definition by Father Professor Mieczysław Krąpiec (Catholic University of Lublin) will be our basic guide. Of necessity, we will also have to work with some adjectives to more exactly qualify this fundamental meaning of "culture." Therefore "with regard to Jasna Góra as a very frequently visited Marian shrine" we will consider those manifestations of artistic culture that confirm the uniqueness of the Jasna Góra Shrine, including literature and music.

Works of art, works of human artistic endeavor, contribute to the visible substance of Jasna Góra to a large degree. The material structure of this national shrine is formed by both objects brought here by pilgrims as votive offerings and objects made here as elements of the interior decorations and furnishings of Jasna Góra's public rooms and buildings. And then there is the monumental architecture itself. Indirectly or directly, all those elements originated from the will and resources delivered by the pilgrims; therefore they are a depiction of their culture. However, the Pauline monks have always kept their eye on it, and influenced it. There are also intangible occurrences of artistic creativity: among them literary and musical works, originating in the experiences in the Jasna Góra Shrine. They too belong to that broadly understood treasury of works of art, closely related to that sacred place.

Both the material and the intangible evidence of the artistic creativity belonging to the shrine "if appropriately understood" can help to establishing the position that Jasna Góra held in the past, and holds now in the Polish and world culture. Obviously, we are limiting the review of the issues of artistic creativity when we examine here only one aspect of the presence of Jasna Góra in culture. There remains the usually extensive issue of the influence of the shrine on a broadly understood spiritual culture. Undoubtedly, this needs a separate study based upon the analysis of another sort of records, like written official and uncertified documents, records of pilgrims, reports and commentaries by the mass media. It seems that Jasna Góra as "the fortress of universal values": faith, hope, and love for your neighbor, became a symbol, a pattern and a point of reference. As it seems, this

forms an exceptional framework for those arriving for an appreciation of their dignity, destination, and the proper way of viewing other men.

The religious and cultural heritage of the Jasna Góra shrine have been emphasized in word and deed by the Head of the Catholic Church, John Paul II. The six hundredth anniversary of the presence of the miraculous icon of Jasna Góra of the Mother of God has become an occasion not only for a pilgrimage of the Polish Pope to his native country, but also for the address he gave about the picture of Mother of God itself: *"The Jasna Góra Icon is a piece of art. God's Providence employs the work of human hands, the work of human artistry and genius, to draw closer the deepest truths to our minds and hearts. God acts through the work of a man. The work of a man has seemingly become a visible sign of the mystery of God"* (John Paul II, March 16, 1983). From its foundation, the monks gave their strength, talents, and efforts to the care of that exceptional icon relic. The Holy Father says about the role of Jasna Góra: *"After all, Jasna Góra is not only a place of pilgrimages of Poles from Poland and from the whole world. Jasna Góra is a shrine of the Nation. One needs to keep an ear at that sacred place to listen how the heart of the Nation beats in the heart of Mother. It beats however, as we know, with all the tones of history, with all the echoes of life. But also with cheers of joy and victory!"* (John Paul II, Jasna Góra, June 4, 1979). On the other hand, the celebrations of World Youth Day in 1991 became the moment which revealed fully the new, already not only national and Polish or even European, but global meaning of that symbol, which Jasna Góra became in the spiritual culture of humanity, and of pilgrimaging man.

However, is the analysis of a meaning of Jasna Góra in culture only with regard to the manifestations of artistic creativity a relevant limitation? Arts, whether lofty and elite or popular and mass-oriented, when interpreted properly, can be a perfect image that reflects the diverse manifestations of the Jasna Góra shrine in the most broadly understood human culture, and particularly in the spiritual one. Nevertheless, in the case of Jasna Góra, history, spirituality and the arts blend into one indivisible whole. Let us then try to depict the most relevant elements of that whole as seen "largely but not exclusively" from the artistic perspective of man.

Before any description of the place of Jasna Góra in culture as broadly understood will be possible, one needs to stop a while at its place in the history of Poland, Europe, and the world. It is not possible to separate the facts in the domain of culture from historical events. Regarding the problem of the role of Jasna Góra in the history of Poland, this issue seems to have been well studied and it was frequently reported in both analytic and synthetic ways. Not in the least did this role confine itself to a presence in the religious life of the Poles. Starting from the moment of invitation of the Paulines to Jasna Góra in 1382, and of placing there the miraculous icon of the Mother of God, the shrine was constantly involved in the most important events of the history of Poland. As the examples, we can list here the challenge of King Władysław Jagiełło (Ladislaus Jagiello) to Duke Władysław Opolczyk (Ladislaus of Opole), and the appropriation of the monastery by the Jagiellonian dynasty; the iconoclastic incursion of the Hussites to Jasna Góra in

1430; the repair of the damaged icon and the next robbery of the shrine in 1466; the relative peace and stabilization from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> to the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when despite the development of the Reformation which threatened the position of the Catholic Church in Poland, there occurred a constant and systematic increase in the intensity of pilgrimage traffic; the involvement of the shrine in the events of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The most important ones for Polish history: the defense of the shrine during the Swedish “Deluge” (1655), the Lvov oaths of Jan Kazimierz (1656), the events of the Northern War (1702 and 1704), when repeated sieges of the monastery took place, finally, the struggles during the Bar confederation (1768-1772). All those are the moments relevant to the history of our motherland. The monastery, and since the first half of 17<sup>th</sup> century also the fortress “*Fortalitium Marianum*,” participated in them in a most active way. Nevertheless, besides the periods of wars and sieges, along with the periods of peace that alternated with them, the shrine witnessed not only religious ceremonies, but also political events: visits of monarchs, unofficial assemblies and negotiations, royal oaths, meetings of the Senate, and the receptions of foreign deputies by the sovereigns. In the later times, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the role of Jasna Góra as the constructive, unifying, and hope-bringing factor in the history of a nation struggling for its sovereignty, was extraordinary significant. This was true until the present time, and the shrine still plays the same role.

We recall here some individual events and some continuing historical processes, commonly known to us, the Poles. The role of Jasna Góra appears somewhat differently from a broader pan-European, or world-wide perspective. However, it is worth paying attention to one narrative that is increasingly visible along the span of time: the narrative of an universal, more than regional, and more than national character of the cult popularized by the shrine. Initially, it has been reflected in the history of Central and Eastern Europe, then of the whole continent, and finally, of the whole world at present.

One should remember that everything that has happened in the past and happens today in Jasna Góra, pilgrimage, those acts of spiritual and material human activity: the votives, focuses around the most valuable evidence and message. This is the Miraculous Icon of the Mother of God, a masterpiece set in definite coordinates of time and space, although at the same time evading attempts to enclose it in a precise framework. It has been very relevant that the Jasna Góra Shrine did not originate as a remembrance of a chance historical apparition (as, for example, in Lourdes), but it emerged and still develops around an object of awe, as this is the Sacred Icon, the Relic, existing there continuously for six centuries.

Since the first moment of the presence of the Miraculous Icon in Jasna Góra, emerged accounts of the earliest history of the Icon of the Black Madonna. Those accounts, still expanding with new narratives, were recorded in the beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> century, most certainly in 1517, by Mikołaj Lanckoroński, the author of one of the most comprehensive records of history of the picture. We can find there a description of the wanderings of the Icon of the Mother of God, made over almost the whole territory of the known world, before settling in Jasna Góra. First it was

moved from Jerusalem to Constantinople. Then, it was bestowed upon Charlemagne, and supposedly stored in Aquigran (Aachen). It was entreated by Lev, the prince of Russia, and settled in the castle in Bełz. Duke Władysław Opolczyk took it from there and founded the Jasna Góra convent of the Paulines. Bestowed upon the Częstochowa monks, it played the same role in its final place of rest as in all the previous ones: it was a palladium, a miraculous shield, heaven sent by God, protecting against ill fortune.

In these legends, we find some universalism. The Icon of the Mother of God became an important sign of faith that it is surrounded by admiration in any place of the Christian world where it might appear. Housed in the Jasna Góra Shrine, it has so long a tradition of a universal cult that it is actually a property of the whole Church, both of the Eastern and the Western one.

This universal character of history of the Miraculous Icon has its germane meaning for the future of the Jasna Góra Cult. As postulated, the Icon should have had a more than regional character. Two facts have additionally promoted it. First, the Paulines' monastic convent, which was honored to take care of the Sacred Icon, immigrated from Hungary, and up to the occupation of the Balkan territories and most of the Hungarian territory in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the Ottoman Turks, it kept up lively ties with its parent monastic province. It had a significant meaning for cultural relations in this part of Europe. In evidence, among others, is the constant presence of pilgrims from Hungary and Slovakia in Jasna Góra, the participation of eminent personalities from that part of Europe in the Paulines' Confraternity, and also the community "in the sense of origins" of the Cult of the Mother of God, first as the patron of Hungary, and then as the Queen of the Crown of Poland. After the defeat at Mohács in 1526, contacts between Hungary and Jasna Góra did not stop, but they took on a more occasional character. The magnificent votive of the Esterhazy family, housed to this day in the Jasna Góra treasury, "The Museum of Six Hundred Years of Jasna Góra," is evidence of their liveliness still in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The derivatives of that principal line of the Polish-Hungarian contacts were, as is possible to distinguish in the accounts, the contacts with the territory of Croatia, where there were Pauline monasteries, very important in the origins of the order, and "from among countries closer to Poland" with Slovakia, which united the Jasna Góra monks by the community of saintly hermits: Świerad and Benedict. Adding the permanent and lively contacts of Jasna Góra with nearby Silesia, although placed outside the borders of the Polish state, and more occasional, but important ties with Prague and Vienna, it becomes clear that the fore-mentioned universal character of the cult of Miraculous Icon, resulting from the transmitted tradition, was accomplished in practice mostly within the framework of contacts in Central Europe, to the southeast of the territory of the Crown.

The second relevant factor influencing the more than regional character of the cult of the Jasna Góra Mother of God was the icon itself. It comprises in an unusual way Byzantine traditions, its iconographical type and hieratic representation of the Madonna and Child, within the Western fine arts tradition, namely Gothic in the application of light and shadow effects, and soft modeling of the robes, and by

the element of intimacy and delicacy in the presentation of the Christ Child. The Częstochowa Icon as a religious picture, from the perspective of the Western Church, could be considered an icon from the theological perspective of the Eastern Church. The preoccupation about the primary function of the wooden Tablet of Częstochowa representation as an icon adored in Byzantium played here a pertinent role. That preoccupation, resulting from legendary traditions, has been confirmed in the light of the latest scientific research on the wooden panel of the representation. In a practical way, this twofold character of the Miraculous Representation reflected a great interest that “after all, not unaccountable” visitors from the territory of Eastern Orthodox Russia preserved toward the Jasna Góra picture. But it is also beyond doubt that a copy of the Częstochowa icon emerged already in the second half of 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Eastern Orthodox cult; first in the so-called calendar icons, and then “more profoundly” after 1813. Notwithstanding, in this case we deal here with a cult supported by the sovereigns of Russia, and in the context of tragic moments in the history of Poland. It does not, however, change the admiration the icon of Jasna Góra Mother of God has been granted, that it became an integral and lively element of religious cult in the Orthodox Church. Currently, when political concerns do not play the role they played during the Partitions of Poland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the common property of Cult of the Miraculous Picture can become a basis for ecumenical agreement between the members of different branches of Christianity.

That universalism comprised in the traditions of the Jasna Góra Representation has been realized still differently in the cultural relationships between Poland and Western Europe. Using a metaphor, one could say that almost always when Poland entered the arena of European history, Jasna Góra was “on the way” leading to that arena. The Relief of Vienna in 1683, when Jan III Sobieski during his march to the capital of Habsburgs stopped in Jasna Góra to conduct a special beseeching prayer before the Queen of Poland, is the best and most literal example. For the Poles, considering their state a bulwark of Christianity, the Jasna Góra picture was a special sign of their unshakable faith. No matter how one takes this fact from the perspective of the other countries of Catholic Europe, the Apostolic See observed the increasing cult of Jasna Góra Our Lady in Poland with the highest appreciation, and fully accepted it. Coronation of the Częstochowa representation with the Papal Crowns in 1717, the first ceremony of this kind outside of Italy, was practical proof of that appreciation. One can say that it was a symbolic moment: Catholic Europe acknowledged that the picture admired in Jasna Góra is something more than one amongst hundreds, if not thousands of Marian representations elevated in different parts of Europe. Since that time, the significance of Jasna Góra systematically increases, first in the European measures, then in the worldwide ones. The culmination of this process is our century: starting from the repeated coronation of the picture with the Papal Crowns in 1910, through the constant development of the Cult of the Representation in the interwar period. One of the decisive impulses at that time was the attribution of the victory in the Polish-Russian war of 1920, and of the “Miracle on the Vistula River,” to the intercession of the Jasna Góra Mother of God; and among the others, the contemporary apostolic nuncio in Poland,

Achilles Ratti, later Pope Pius XII, became an advocate of the cult of the Miraculous Icon. Those events occurred frequently to the post World War II period. Recently, the official statements of subsequent popes, and above all, of the Holy Father John XXIII, and Paul VI, played decisive roles. Such were also the personal votives and pilgrimages of the deputies of the Apostolic See to Jasna Góra: in 1967 cardinal Agostino Casaroli made a pilgrimage there, and Luigi Poggi in 1975. Finally, one should add here all the activity of the Holy Father John Paul II. All these contributed to the increase in the international pilgrimage movement, and because of that, to the increasingly common inclusion of Jasna Góra as a beacon of Christianity in world culture.

An attempt to realize the character and specificity of the artistic legacy concerning the functioning of the Częstochowa monastery, and most of all, of the material heritage of the shrine could be interesting. The uniqueness of Jasna Góra, compared to the different monumental complexes in Europe and the world, has been emphasized many times. However, it is not easy to realize from where that uniqueness is coming. Surely not from the crucial significance of artistic innovations applied here in history of universal art: the Jasna Góra monuments only incidentally represent the highest level of European art; they are mostly modest objects, however of good quality. Jasna Góra has never become a source of artistic impulses for the growth of a new style or direction of a broader scale, and there is no need to deny that obvious fact. Similarly, the range of the architectural concept of the shrine cannot be a reason for claiming its uniqueness in the history of art. On the other hand, apparently Jasna Góra is not just any modest object: it can impress by its force, picturesqueness, and the details that harmonize with the whole composition. In that respect, it does not, however, compare to the basilicas of Rome, or the Gothic cathedrals of France. Still, as mentioned before, not the amount of preserved objects, nor the balanced and very high level of the works of art collected in the shrine is decisive to the uniqueness of Jasna Góra. There are many bigger and better collections than this, which the centuries have deposited inside the walls of the Częstochowa monastery. However, also in this case, one should not forget about the considerable group of the works of art of highest value present in Jasna Góra. They are at least: the altar in the chapel of the Mother of God together with its silver arrangement, jewels on the robes covering the Miraculous Representation, and certain works of artistic craft accumulated in the treasury. Finally, Jasna Góra does not attract with any exceptional originality and any extraordinary character of the accumulated objects. One often finds worse, seldom better, but mostly similar works in many other sanctuaries of the world, for they belong to the realm of the same European culture.

Then, where should one see any uniqueness in Jasna Góra and its cultural heritage? Most of all, in its natural continuity of existence, and in a solid, steady, and unbroken for more than six hundred years increase in architectural forms, and of the pieces of sculpture, painting, and artistic crafts. In the stormy history of the world, this continuity is something rarely met with to this degree. Many centers of the arts can boast of the fact that they played a leading role in some single and decisive period of a given time; and later on was a decline in their creative potential.

It is the reverse in Jasna Góra: during the six hundred years of the existence of the shrine the impulse to create and accumulate works of art did not weaken, but on the contrary, its power steadily and constantly grew, and is still growing.

The uniqueness of Jasna Góra has its origin also in other details. Most of all, in the perfect adjustment of the shape of shrine to functions that it performs as a pilgrimage center for millions of people yearly. From an artistic point of view, there is also the unusually harmonious combination of successive elements of the architectural ensemble that grew in a completely natural way.

The uniqueness of Jasna Góra has its origin also in the fact of a surprising co-existence of manifestations of lofty, elite culture with the works of mass, "lower," and folk culture, popular in the fullest meaning of the word. Besides, it is important that these two, allegedly diametrically different kinds of works, do not compete with each other, but on the contrary, they merge into one creation, as is evident in the instance of the design and furnishings of the Chapel of the Mother of God. Here, next to the highest level of works of Augsburg goldsmithery (sculptures decorating the Altar of Our Lady of Jasna Góra), one can find modest votive plaquettes which border on provincial and folk art. Interestingly, the same phenomenon concerns the content of the meanings of the pieces of art prepared for the Częstochowa Shrine. Beyond objects that are tedious, complex, and difficult to interpret in their intentions, there also appear, in large numbers, accumulated objects that refer to the most simple and most elementary truths, feelings, and emotions.

The last, nevertheless relevant reason, for which the uniqueness of Jasna Góra deserves an emphasis is the earnestness and frankness of the creative message included in the works of art accumulated there. The votive collection does not have the features of a museum collection, but each offering or making of a work for Jasna Góra involves a deep personal experience of the donor or artist. In the accumulation of the accouterments of the votive culture in the shrine, there is not present any pure collector's motive. However, there is present a will for preservation of all that has survived and that seems the most precious to the pilgrims in this repository, which is the monastery.

All of these contribute to the position of the material heritage of Jasna Góra among the various monumental complexes of Europe and the world. One can also compare to a substantial degree the characteristic features of the material heritage mentioned here with an "intangible" artistic culture, with literature or music. It is important that the "cultural factors" involved in the functioning of the Jasna Góra Shrine in all these instances owe their existence to the authentic sincerity of the message that concerns this place, and to its unusual "commonness." Notwithstanding, we seldom realize the democratic character of the model of culture which popularized Jasna Góra.

Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and before the idea of the modern museum existed, the majority of the most significant artistic products of humanity remained inaccessible to the broader public. This was not the case at Jasna Góra. There functioned, and continue to function, customs demanding treatment of the pilgrims in a special way. There were also some sectors closed to an ordinary pilgrim by their enclosure.

However, the principle governing the shrine was the commonness of culture and a broader than elsewhere access to the cultural repository of the votive heritage of the shrine.

The Sacred Representation has been situated without interruption in the Chapel of the Mother of God, seldom taken out of its place and shown during the ceremonial processions. The interiors of the basilica and the chapel, together with the manifold works of sculpture, painting, etc., were constantly accessible to the pilgrims. In the immediate surroundings of the representation, on the altar and presbytery of the chapel, a much larger than the present quantity of the most valuable votives was exhibited. The others that were accumulated in the treasury have been displayed in this place on the occasion of important ceremonies. There also existed a custom of putting the treasury within the reach of some eminent pilgrims. The musical works that were popularized by the Jasna Góra orchestra, have been performed in the monastery. The pilgrims had also an opportunity to buy books from the monastery printing house, founded in 1693. Obviously, those manifestations of cultural life had different levels, mostly adapted to the receptivity and intellectual needs of the broadest masses of pilgrims. It is, however, important that the pilgrims had easy access to Jasna Góra's achievements of culture. Relevant is also that this democratic commonness depicting the manifestations of culture of the Jasna Góra shrine, has increased considerably over time.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and particularly during the last thirty years, mainly at the opportunity of celebrations of the Millennium in 1966, and the celebrations of six hundred years of the monastery's existence, much has been done to enable the broadest scope of the pilgrims to have access to the votive collection of the shrine. The subsequently prepared exhibits of a public character demonstrate it best: during the interwar period the Treasury, in more recent times the Arsenal, and in the 600<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Museum. The origins of these exhibits follows, "incomparable to other pilgrimage centers," the publication activity of a scientific and popular character, which draws the cultural traditions of Jasna Góra nearer. It has been mostly inspired by the guardians of the Sacred Place, the Paulines. These elements of a culture-forming role of the Jasna Góra shrine distinguish this place from similar ones that exist in the contemporary world. Unlike those pilgrimage centers, like Lourdes or Fatima, the long duration of the Cult of the Miraculous Icon of Our Lady, and the richness of the artistic collections of the Częstochowa monastery, make Jasna Góra not only a place of the Marian Cult, but also a lively source of culture in its most diverse manifestations.

In this short essay, it would be difficult to analyze all of the many aspects of Jasna Góra's role in Polish and world culture. It seems, however, that three factors are pointed to here: universality, sincerity, and commonness, which are the basis of the Jasna Góra shrine's cultural traditions and can be acknowledged as the most important ones. This is particularly so because in our contemporary times they are a proper foundation upon which one can found and develop traditions of the cultural values proposed by the pilgrimage center of Jasna Góra in Częstochowa that may increasingly broadly influence the spirituality of the whole world.