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## **The International Range of Votive Offerings at Jasna Góra**

One of the most characteristic religious habits connected with the Sanctuary at Jasna Góra is the bringing of votive offerings. These are put, literally and figuratively speaking, on the altar, before the Miraculous Image of God's Mother, in the Chapel devoted to her. Votive offerings were material objects, often small plaques, brought with beseeching or thanksgiving intentions. They concerned mainly worldly matters - recovery from illness, beseeching for progeny, protection against wars and calamities, e.g. the plague. Votive offerings were brought in by individuals as well as whole families, monasteries or towns. This habit was almost indispensable starting from a king to the poorest citizens of *Res Publica*. Initially, votive offerings were impermanent, (archival information concerning those in polychromatic wax goes back to the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century). Thereafter, although it not as a rule, they were melted down according to the needs of church. Offerings made of metal or precious metal were kept for longer periods. The most ornamental ones were stored and preserved in the sanctuary permanently, e.g. jewellery on the image of God's Mother, badges (the earliest date to the 17<sup>th</sup> century), and other eminent masterpieces of Polish and European goldsmithing exhibited mainly in treasury. Liturgical garments and vessels might also be of votive character. Over the course of time, the range of offerings began to expand, including objects of folk art, documents, keepsakes, etc.

The origin of votive offerings is also of great significance, however the origin of offerings themselves (i.e. a place where they were made) and the origin of donors differed sometimes. Very often, the representative of Polish political and cultural elite donated objects made in the most noble European centres (Augsburg, Viennese, Italian masterpieces, etc). On the other hand, objects of oriental origin (mainly Turkish and Persian) were brought to Jasna Góra as trophies of victory (e.g. objects connected with the Relief of Vienna during the Polish - Turkish war in 1683). There must be some general time limits as far as the origin of votive offerings are concerned. The first one is the 18<sup>th</sup> century - the epoch of the Partition of Poland and decline of Polish nationality. Up to that time, votive offerings were brought in from the whole territory of Poland (fewer from Lithuania which was also a part of *Res Publica*), although they were not made there. Until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, votive offerings were

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brought from Hungary since the Częstochowa Monastery of the Pauline Fathers had its roots there. There were some offerings, although not many, yet important from the artistic point of view, brought from Austria (from the Habsburgs, on the occasion of the marriage of Eleanor and king Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki in 1670), Germany (the Saxon Wettins who had their electoral throne in Dresden and royal one in Poland), France (gifts of Maria Leszczyńska - the Polish Queen) and from Italy (the earliest ones - wedding garments of the Queen Bona donated, perhaps, after 1518, and later, those of cardinals and dignitaries of the Roman Curia).

The richness of gifts from many European centres was completed by those made abroad, although donated by the Polish kings and notables (e.g. the Augsburg objects as a donation of representatives of Waza and Sobieski royal families; Italian coral set as a donation from King Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki; a Viennese cross brought by Mary Josephine - a wife of August III Sas, and a Viennese cup endowed by Polish magnate, Jerzy Lubomirski - both dated of the 18<sup>th</sup> century).

The turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and then, regaining independence in 1918 closed the second period of votive offerings at Jasna Góra. The whole 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period dominated by Polish offerings, especially those from the Russian part of partitioned Poland. The reason was the political situation of Poland during the years of Partition. Those votive offerings were rather simple silver plaques, sometimes of serial production. Nevertheless, there were also some unique objects, in terms of their geographical origin, e.g. votive offerings of Polish deportees to Siberia. There were a decreasing number of offerings brought by monarchs and the Polish aristocracy.

Since the end of World War II, the Sanctuary at Jasna Góra has regained its international significance. Next to considerably larger amount of Polish votive offerings, were donations from all European countries - from Ireland to Turkey, which indicated role Jasna Góra as a destination for pilgrimages, official and unofficial delegations. Their offerings were more modest, less precious; they were rather symbolic gifts - medals and badges.

Pontifical votive offerings have added a special dimension to the donations. According to the tradition of the Vatican, often these offerings were objects previously given to Popes, on the occasion of jubilees or visits to countries. John XXIII donated a Spanish monstrance, John Paul II - a cross made in Milano, etc. Obviously the gifts of John Paul II are numerous among them, Italian offerings hold a prominent position.

After World War II, mainly within recent years, the number of offerings from non-European countries has increased. A significant amount of those offerings was brought by Polish emigrants from the USA (a pen of Henryk Sienkiewicz, Polish writer, was the earliest gift in 1910). Now and again, votive offerings from exotic countries are presented, e.g. sculpture of God's Mother made of ivory (exhibited in the Museum of Jasna Góra) donated by John Paul II. Others have been brought by Polish missionaries. Occasionally, there are traditional folk objects (mainly souvenirs), e.g. objects in the style of the North American Indians. It is easily noticed that

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since presenting votive offerings to the Miraculous Image of Our Lady is rather European habit, the majority of them, from outside of Europe, are donated by Poles. This may change in the future, nevertheless, for the time being, offerings brought to Jasna Góra do not reflect the international character of pilgrimages of last few decades.

It should be highlighted that votive offerings at Jasna Góra are mainly relections of the history of Poland and human spiritual life. Their richness in form and symbol creates a spiritual and artistic message for pilgrims from all over the world.

Among the vast groups of votive offerings gathered at Jasna Góra, two especially, offered to the Image of Our Lady, demand more attention - as their emotional value cannot be any means be overstated. The first of them are the gifts of Pope John Paul II. The two most important placed on the altar in the chapel are: the Golden Rose offered to the Virgin Mary on 4th June 1979 and a special votive offering - namely a gold heart made from filigree with an inscription - the motto of the Holy Father: "*Totus Tuus*", which was placed at the sanctuary on 22nd June 1983. The other votive offerings of John Paul II are at the 600th Anniversary Museum of Jasna Góra. Apart from the cross-crosier presented to the Holy Father in Milan and the African Madonna statue, other items exhibited include a special blessed candle (standing next to the candles bestowed on Jasna Góra by Pius XII and Paul VI), chalices - linked with the subsequent pilgrimages of popes to Jasna Góra, medals, rosaries and other objects connected with the personage of the Polish Pope (for example the symbolic keys to the town of Częstochowa and the "Act of Granting Honourary Citizenship of Częstochowa" to the Holy Father). The evidence of Pope John Paul's great zealous devotion to Our Lady of Częstochowa makes a great impression on pilgrims coming to the sanctuary.

The votive offering from the former President of the Republic of Poland - Lech Wałęsa, given officially in September 1995 is of different character. It consist of 170 mementos - the most important of which are the medals received by Lech Wałęsa during his presidency. These are unique and the whole collection is of paramount importance to Polish culture. This votive offering supplemented Lech Wałęsa's earlier gifts - including the Noble Peace Prize medal and the pen with which he signed the Gdańsk Agreement of August 1980 - which are pieces of historical evidencce. They also show the ardent faith of the contributor, who, like the past rulers of Poland, placed at the Alter of the Motherland everything that comprises a material document of their times, and the role they played in the history of Poland.