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country. But many since then have found their way back, some from Canada in 1961, some spotted at art auctions, purchased and returned to comprise today's exhibits.

What comes with castles is everything we read about as children – the treasures, armory and more: 136 Flanders Tapestries (all that remain from ravages of war); 13th century Turkish tents and armour; a maze of staterooms, studies, halls; Zodiac, Bird and Eagle Rooms (16th and 17th centuries).

In the Jadwiga and Jagiello Room the famous coronation sword “Szczerbiec” is displayed. It's a 13th-century copy of the weapon used by Boleslaw the Brave (a Piast) during his triumphant capture of Kiev in 1018. After that, Szczerbiec was the blade touching monarchs' shoulders at coronation ceremonies right to the 18th century. It too sat in Canada for safekeeping during the war.



Royal Castle of Wawel in Krakow, Poland

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Polish culture also had its Oriental impact in early contacts with Armenia, Iran, Turkey, China and Japan (16–19th-century Chinese and Japanese porcelain). However, the war loot from 17th-century conflicts with Turkey predominate. In 1683 Jan Sobieski defeated the Turks in Vienna. To honour him, the pope bestowed upon him Knighthood of the Order of the Holy Ghost, with full regalia and trappings.

A 16th-century sword held by the hand of Zygmunt the Old, survives along with the oldest royal banner made in 1533 for the coronation of Catherine von Habsburg, third wife of Zygmunt August. These also survive, along with many weapons, shields, helmets, banners, swords and spears from five centuries of war with a series of foreign invaders. St. Maurice's spear presented to Polish Prince Boleslaw Chrobry – first king of Poland – in 1024 by German Emperor Otto III, commemorates a brief spell of friendship in German-Polish relations.

From about the 11th to 20th centuries, Poland was one of the most plundered and fought-over countries in history, by Teutonic Knights, Mongols, Swedes, Turks, Russians, Prussians, Germans to name a few. From 1867 to 1918 it was the domain of Austria-Hungary. If you look at some old maps, Poland has simply vanished from the face of Europe. It just isn't there. All one sees is Russia, Prussia and Austria-Hungary. Yet the Church as principle defender of the nation's identity never faltered; the people's fierce sense of nationalism, adherence to Polish customs, tradition and their Catholic faith, has preserved their uniqueness so many have tried to obliterate, and failed. Ultimately Poland has withstood all the tests of time even though levelled to rubble by WWII. It suffered at the hands of the Nazis as no other. It lost almost a quarter of its population and virtually its entire Jewish community. It lost its eastern lands to the USSR. These are well-known facts of history.

Yet is there really much difference in “new” history and “old” history? Is there a connection between *any* life and the destinies of the masses of humanity on our planet who have come and gone but especially with everyone who's here now? For me the answer is yes.

Though Earth's repeating cycle of linear events has consistently coughed up an endless sea of attackers and the attacked, aggressors and victims where only the people and weapons have changed, somehow the collective human spirit has miraculously managed to forge itself into tougher character and substance.