

Art collecting in Poland From the Middle Ages to the present day *Andrzej Rottermund*

In general, trends in art collecting in Poland from the early Middle Ages to the present day have followed the same course as in Western Europe. The similarities stem from our shared cultural roots; yet there are also many differences, which spring from our tumultuous history punctuated by dramatic political, economic and social changes.

One of the features of art collecting is the transience of the collections themselves. Although this instability has been experienced throughout Europe, Poland's political history is particularly heavily marked by invasions, wars, partitions, destruction and plundering of the country's resources. It is one of the main reasons for the distorted image of art collecting in Poland. Not only have many rich collections not been preserved – collections from royal, ecclesiastic and noble treasuries – but in many cases their inventories and many other important records have been lost. This is the chief problem we encounter when attempting to reconstruct the history of art collecting in Poland, as well as the contents and artistic standard of the early Polish collections. Royal collections were particularly important in Western European countries, as they later became the basis of the holdings of the great museums, such as the Prado in Madrid, the Louvre in Paris and the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. When an elective monarchy was established in Poland in 1572, the royal collections became private assets owned by the king personally. Some of Poland's monarchs – including Jan II Casimir Vasa (1609-1672) – took their collections abroad;¹ others, such as Stanislaus II Augustus Poniatowski (1732-1798), bequeathed their collections to heirs, who subsequently sold them off.² Augustus II the Strong (1670-1733) and Augustus III the Saxon (1696-1763), kings of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and electors of Saxony, kept their invaluable collections in Saxony rather than in Poland! Our country thus simply did not have suitable conditions for building national collections.

The most lasting collections in Poland are church treasuries. The two most prominent in significance and richness are at the tomb of St Adalbert in Poland's first capital, Gniezno, and at the tomb of St Stanislaus in Krakow, capital of the Kingdom of Poland. And even so both suffered pillage and

destruction. Nothing remains of the treasures housed in the oldest cathedrals of the Gniezno metropolis, founded in 999, or its suffragan dioceses in Krakow, Wrocław and Kołobrzeg, or of the adornments of the monasteries and churches erected by Poland's first three monarchs.³ Fortunately there are written and archaeological testimonies of this heritage, and a few artefacts from the original collections remain, such as the so-called spear of St Maurice (cathedral treasury, Wawel Royal Castle in Krakow) and an agate goblet known as the chalice of St Adalbert (Archdiocesan Museum in Gniezno).

Studies of art collecting in Western Europe indicate that one of the most important driving forces behind this activity was the desire to emphasise social status through the ownership of rare or outstanding works, which helped enhance the prestige of a person, a family, or – in the case of the royal collections – an entire country. In Poland, despite the changes of regime and the fact that the king's position was weaker than in most other European countries, the royal collections never lost their symbolic significance as an attribute of supreme national authority. However, from the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century Poland's noblemen were more concerned with other means of enhancing their status, rooted in the ideology of Sarmatism. This chiefly involved major investments in architecture, mainly religious, and in staging ceremonial events such as lavish feasts and funeral ceremonies conducted with pomp and splendour. From the sixteenth century onwards the leading social and economic doctrine, popularised by translations of numerous classical texts, advocated participation in constructive activities as the best means of achieving prestige and raising one's social rank.⁴ Even Cosimo de' Medici believed architectural works to be a more valuable means of preserving a family's good name than collections of art.⁵ The grander and more ornate a building and the more precious its materials the better, as it was a reflection of the splendour of its founder. Journals kept by Polish nobles who travelled around Western Europe evidence this preference. They were most impressed by the grandeur, wealth and material value of the buildings they saw. Naturally, this pertained only to the highest ranking nobility, as described by the Polish historian Gottfried Lengnich: "Although through their birth all nobles are equal, the ranks they hold elevate one above another. And thus a senator is above one who does not sit on the Senate."⁶ What Poland lacked was inherited aristocratic titles, which were what clearly defined one's position in the social hierarchy in absolute monarchies. In Poland hereditary titles were replaced by public offices and ranks, which determined on which rung of the social ladder one stood. It should thus be remembered when analysing art collecting by the nobility that this social stratum was not uniform but in fact extremely varied in terms of wealth. Magnates were the wealthiest group, owning vast swathes of land. On the next rung down were the middle nobility, followed by the lesser nobility and, after them, the so-called "peasant nobility", who often hardly differed from the peasants themselves.

In this climate, assembling a collection of exceptional artworks was not regarded as the best financial investment. What was a good investment, since it brought significant income and social advancement, was land. Scholars who have studied transactions in land and other assets among the nobility of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries stress how the importance attached to owning real estate increased extraordinarily during this period.⁷ Nevertheless, this does not mean that nobles were not interested in accumulating artworks. Even though there were far fewer collectors in Poland than in Western Europe, it would seem that the collections of the Polish nobility were a match for those of their western counterparts. Douglas and Elizabeth Rigby, describing the history of medieval art collecting in Western Europe, wrote: "A nobleman who possessed three leathern garments qualified as a rich man. A bed was a luxury. How then could one bother with such pleasant divertissements as books or antiques?"⁸ In Poland the situation was somewhat different, at least among the wealthier magnates. Fifteenth-century sources list the contents of their treasuries, which were filled with jewels, valuable arms and tableware. Collections belonging to nobles from the Middle Ages until the late seventeenth century consisted chiefly of jewels, parade armours, gold and silver items, precious and semiprecious stones, rugs and various textiles.

The Polish royal collections of the seventeenth century were similar in nature, although it should be noted that they also had a specific, symbolic function which distinguished them from among other collections, both ecclesiastical and secular.⁹ King Sigismund II Augustus (1520-1572) assembled such a collection, which was comparable in wealth to others of Western Europe. Remnants of the collection – such as part of a series of tapestries (now numbering around 170, housed in Wawel Royal Castle in Krakow) and the king's parade armour, made in Nuremberg in the workshop of Kunz Lochner (now in the Royal Armoury of Stockholm) – bear witness to its superb contents. Unfortunately nothing remains of the king's collection of jewels, which was said to have surpassed even the most famous Italian collections in its artistic value.¹⁰

Historians of collecting, who study the relationships between deliberately assembled items displayed in living spaces and objects used to furnish those spaces, believe that there is generally a balance between those elements.¹¹ It is likely that this was the case in most homes of magnates and nobles. Records of movable assets owned by the nobility of Greater Poland (Wielkopolska) in the seventeenth century indicate that, although works of art were only accessible to a small portion of nobles, they were nevertheless an important feature in the decoration of homes. We refer to these documents instead of to the inventories of magnates' possessions – which are more dazzling in their splendour – because they show that artworks were commonly collected by the Polish nobility, at least by the middle nobility. Jewels, parade armours, silverware, decorative fabrics and other precious objects have always been listed among the

most valuable possessions of nobles. It is worth noting the hierarchy of these possessions – paintings were listed near the very end, along with tools and kitchen utensils, showing that they were valued more for their utilitarian purposes than for their aesthetic merit. Indeed, of the two hundred inventories analysed, more than two-thirds list decorative fabrics and parade arms; almost half include silverware and jewels; and only one out of five mentions paintings.¹²

A record compiled in November 1699 of the movable assets of Chrystian Kierski, castellan of Rogoźno and therefore a member of middle nobility, features 236 items of silver tableware and 87 jewels, including diamonds and rubies set in gold, pearls, and clocks.¹³

Inventories provide particularly detailed descriptions of clothing, various types of fabrics and rugs, and parade armour, including extremely valuable sabres whose various components and sheaths were made of gold.¹⁴

Descriptions found in the records of the movable assets belonging to the nobility often provide information about the provenance of works of art. It may be inferred from these sources that they mainly came from abroad – for example, silverware can mainly be traced back to Augsburg, fabrics to France, Italy or the East, and furniture and clocks to France. Bearing in mind the nobility's conspicuous dislike of all things foreign, it is interesting to note this evidence of their pragmatic separation of ideology from the practicalities of everyday life.

I believe that in a period when the nobility account for about eight per cent of the population of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, we may confidently speak of a widespread social trend of collecting decorative artworks. In addition, the inventories of assets of the bourgeoisie suggest that the collections of the wealthier burghers should also be considered for their artistic merit, in particular those belonging to inhabitants of Gdańsk, Krakow and Poznań.¹⁵

The phenomenon of the universal trend of collecting decorative artworks raises the question of the nature of this activity. This is mainly because, in the history of European collecting, interest in decorative and utilitarian artworks is generally considered to have peaked during the nineteenth century.¹⁶ The question thus arises of whether those collections – or at least some of them – were assembled with the awareness of their unique value and with the aim of exhibiting them.

Applying our understanding of the universality of this trend and the types of objects collected by the Polish nobility and bourgeoisie to other social phenomena, such as religious practices, family relationships and notions of well-being and prestige, may help us answer another question: to what extent did the practice of art collecting underpin the political and social system of the Commonwealth?

It seems likely that the widespread practice of collecting gave rise to a system of distribution and valuation of the luxury objects deemed “desirable” by those social strata. But did a developed art market exist? It is impossible to answer those questions accurately at the current stage of research.

The early days of Polish art collecting show little evidence of interest in collecting antiquities such as sculptures, ceramics, coins, medals and cameos – a key aspect when assessing the status of Italian and French collections of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Although written sources confirm that Queen Bona Sforza (1494-1557) owned a collection of antique vases, no further information is available about the collection.¹⁷

Another rarity in noble residences was the *Kunst- und Wunderkammern*, cabinets of curiosities, which were common in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Western Europe. We know that Adam Kazanowski (c. 1599-1649), marshal of the Crown Tribunal, had a *Wunderkammer* in his Warsaw palace;¹⁸ and also that Michał Krzysztof Radziwiłł “The Orphan” (1549-1616)¹⁹ probably set up a cabinet of curiosities at his family home in Nieśwież, which also housed a gallery of family portraits, a numismatic collection, an armoury and a library. It is also known that his son Aleksander Ludwik Radziwiłł (1594-1654) had a similar cabinet at his Lubecz residence. The contents of the cabinet are known through a surviving inventory from 1641.²⁰ Aleksander Ludwik Radziwiłł belonged to the closest circles of Prince Ladislaus (1595-1648), and the two spent two years travelling around Western Europe together. This would have influenced the magnate’s passion for collecting, especially as Prince Ladislaus, son of King Sigismund III Vasa (1566-1632), possessed a cabinet of the arts in his Warsaw palace which was “portrayed” in 1626. Other members of the Radziwiłł family – Krzysztof II (1585-1640) and his son Janusz (1612-1655) – had a cabinet of curiosities at their residence in Birże.²¹ Philip II (1573-1618), Prince of Pomerania, also established a cabinet of the arts at his castle in Szczecin in the early seventeenth century. Prince Ladislaus, Aleksander Ludwik Radziwiłł and Philip II used their cabinets to display *naturalia* alongside *artificialia*, but not the curiosities and monstrosities that were so typical of *Wunderkammern*.²²

Whereas exceptional collections of paintings began to be assembled in Western Europe at the turn of the seventeenth century, the collections held by Polish nobles and burghers remained traditional. As pointed out earlier, inventories of palaces, manors and bourgeois homes most frequently listed jewels, silverware, parade armour and fabrics. Paintings are only mentioned sporadically, and annotations relating to a dozen or so paintings can in no way be regarded as evidence that collections were formed on the basis of the paintings’ aesthetic merits. When paintings do appear in inventories from the turn of the seventeenth century, they include portraits of family members and monarchs, and religious paintings. This was due to the widespread Counter-Reformation propaganda. We find numerous Madonna and Child effigies and

paintings depicting the lives of Mary and Jesus alongside themes from the lives of saints, in defiance of the Protestants' objections to the cult of the saints – hence the numerous images of the apostles, evangelists, fathers of the Church, saints Anne, Catherine, Mary Magdalene and Jerome, and local saints Florian and Roch.

Mythological themes, which were harshly criticised by advocates of the Counter-Reformation during the first half of the seventeenth century, also made their appearance around the same time. The picture collection of Mikołaj Wolski (1553-1630), court marshal of King Sigismund III Vasa, met a sad, widely-known fate: Wolski ordered the destruction of all paintings thought to inspire immorality and sin.²³ In turn Fabian Birkowski (1566-1636), a Dominican monk, attacked mythological themes in art, writing: "For you can see the poison of the sight everywhere; obscene paintings are everywhere, in bedchambers, dining rooms, in gardens and on fountains, above doorways, on goblets and chalices."²⁴ Bishop Jan Dymitr Solikowski (1539-1603) went even further in denouncing this form of art in the 1580s, demanding not only that any paintings he deemed untoward should be burned, but also that their makers should "burn with them".²⁵ The nobility's scant interest in painting as a form of art is evidenced by an almost complete absence of mentions of paintings in journals documenting their travels around Western Europe.

Based on written sources, the modest iconography and even more modest remains of old Polish collections of paintings, we may posit a theory that the small number of paintings in the homes of the middle nobility and the bourgeoisie was compensated for by the far richer collections held by the royalty and the magnates. In Western Europe, the collecting of paintings on a large scale took off towards the end of the Renaissance, and earlier instances should be regarded as of a sign of patronage rather than collecting. In other words, the origins of picture collecting in Poland roughly coincide with the appearance of a near-obsessive urge to amass paintings, a phenomenon which dates back to the seventeenth century.

The seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century witnessed the flourishing of artistic and scientific patronage on the part of Poland's magnates. In addition to funding impressive architectural endeavours, magnates often owned fine art collections, including paintings from European schools. Marshal Adam Kazanowski (ca. 1599-1649); Krzysztof Opaliński (1609-1655), voivode of Poznań, and his brother Łukasz, marshal of the Crown Tribunal (1612-1662); Jan Dobrogost Krasiński (1639-1717), voivode of Płock; Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski (1642-1702), grand marshal of the Crown; Franciszek Salezy Potocki (1700-1772), voivode of Kijów; Elżbieta Sieniawska née Lubomirska (1669-1729); Waclaw Rzewuski (1706-1779), grand hetman of the Crown; Franciszek Bieliński (1683-1766), grand marshal of the Crown; Lew Sapieha, grand chancellor of the Crown; Michał Kazimierz Pac, grand hetman of Lithuania; and

Kazimierz Michał Radziwiłł, voivode of Vilnius, are just some of the many outstanding patrons of the arts.

Scholars of Polish collections of works by European masters are attempting to reconstruct the network of contacts between collectors in main Polish cities and artists in Europe. Research shows that between the mid-sixteenth and the end of the eighteenth century Polish collections included works by Europe's most outstanding artists, including Rubens, Rembrandt, Dürer, Raphael, Titian, Veronese, Ribera, Van Dyck and Jan Brueghel de Velours.²⁶

One of the basic questions that arise when studying collecting is where valuables and artworks were held, and how they were displayed. The importance of this subject is demonstrated by the numerous publications devoted to this matter from the late sixteenth century onwards.²⁷ In noble residences in Poland it was common either to allocate certain rooms within the main castle, palace or manor for this purpose, or to erect a separate building for storing precious objects. Inventories mention such rooms, calling them "treasuries", "repositories", or simply "kunstkamkern". Many noble residences had a separate building known the "treasury", which held jewels, parade armours, items made from precious metals and stones, rare books and other valuables. A few such buildings remain and many more are known from iconography, including the Horostyta estate in the Włodawa district, and Nohorodowicze and Adamowa in the Słonim district.²⁸ Often this function of treasury was fulfilled by a separate building known as a granary, which was found on almost all estates. Paintings, sculptures and tapestries were mainly used to decorate ceremonial areas – staircases, antechambers and assembly halls – or private rooms, especially bedrooms. This was how collections were arranged in the royal castles of Krakow and Warsaw, and in the residences of the magnates of Wiśnicz, Podhorce and Nieśwież.

The first major change in the way artworks were displayed occurred in Western Europe in the early decades of the seventeenth century.²⁹ Two types of spaces were adapted to be used almost exclusively as exhibition rooms. The first was the so-called "cabinet", which is widely known in seventeenth-century iconography as a retreat for collectors of paintings;³⁰ the other was hallways and broad passageways known as "galleries".³¹ Judging by a painting attributed to Etienne de la Hyre (c. 1583-1643) depicting the art collection of Prince Ladislaus, and by surviving designs of palace interiors by Giovanni Battista Gisleni (1600-1672), it is likely that these types of spaces first appeared during the early decades of the seventeenth century.³²

From around the start of the eighteenth century, Polish trends in art collecting closely mirrored Western European tendencies. The Polish nobility shared with other European aristocracies a keen enthusiasm for antique art. This enthusiasm manifested itself in working expeditions to Italy,³³ during which aristocrats discovered classical antiquities; Stanisław Kostka Potocki

(1755-1821) went one step further by carrying out archaeological excavations and going on to assemble Poland's first collections of antique art.³⁴ The most splendid collection of Greek vases and gems and of Roman coins and sculptures was held by King Stanislaus II Augustus Poniatowski (1732-1798). Greek vases and sculptures were a passion of Princess Izabela Lubomirska née Czartoryska (1736-1816), who owned residences in Łańcut and Wilanów near Warsaw. Her son-in-law, the aforementioned Stanisław Kostka Potocki, amassed a large collection of Greek vases over many years and added to it his archaeological finds. Other fine collections of antiquities were those of Helena Radziwiłł née Przeździecka (1753-1821) in Arkadia and of Izabela Czartoryska née Fleming (1746-1835) in Powązki near Warsaw and later in Puławy. General Michał Ludwik Pac (1778-1835) owned collections of fragments of Roman sarcophagi, urns and decorative and architectural sculptures in his palaces in Dowspuda and Warsaw. Similar collections were held by Anna Potocka née Tyszkiewicz (1779-1867) in her Warsaw properties, and by Artur Potocki (1787-1832) in Krakow. Also worthy of note are collections of antiquities owned by Stanisław Poniatowski (1754-1833), nephew of King Stanislaus II Augustus: in addition to classical sculptures, probably housed in his Warsaw palace, he also owned a collection of gems that was famous in Europe. As well as antiquities, all the aforementioned aristocrats had rich and fascinating collections of European art, which, together with their patronage, exerted an enormous influence on the shaping of neoclassical art in Poland. One of the most important collections of European paintings was that of the Czartoryski family. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Adam Kazimierz and his wife Izabela née Fleming assembled an outstanding collection of European paintings at their Puławy residence, including Leonardo da Vinci's *Lady with an Ermine*, Rembrandt's *Landscape with Good Samaritan* (both now in the Czartoryski Foundation in Krakow), and Raphael's *Portrait of a Young Man* (lost during the Second World War).³⁵

During her long life Princess Izabela Czartoryska née Lubomirska amassed a substantial collection of European art, which she kept at her many residences, although the majority were held in Łańcut.³⁶ She owned some 2,000 works, mainly by contemporary artists including Fragonard, Watteau, David, Vigée-Lebrun, Angelica Kauffmann and Josef Grassi. One of the most valuable works in her collection was a sculpture by Antonio Canova, *Prince Henryk Lubomirski as Cupid* (Castle Museum in Łańcut). Her son-in-law, Stanisław Kostka Potocki, also possessed a large collection of Western European paintings, sculptures and drawings, as well as Chinese and Greco-Roman art. He set up a gallery of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European art at Wilanów palace near Warsaw, opening it to the public in 1805. The paintings included his equestrian portrait painted by Jacques Louis David in 1781 (Palace Museum in Wilanów).³⁷

Another interesting collection of painting and sculpture was assembled by Primate Michał Poniatowski (1736-1794), brother of King Stanislaus II Augustus, after travelling to Italy between 1789 and 1791.³⁸ Unfortunately, it was completely dispersed within only a few years. Ignacy Krasicki (1735-1801), Prince-Bishop of Warmia and Poland's leading Enlightenment poet, amassed a rich collection of drawings and prints at his residence in Lidzbark Warmiński.³⁹

However, it was Poland's last monarch, Stanislaus II Augustus Poniatowski (1732-1798), who played a crucial role in the country's history of art collecting.⁴⁰ The king had received a very broad education, and his frequent trips abroad familiarised him with the philosophical and artistic trends of the age. He modelled his initiatives in the fields of architecture, the fine arts and art collecting on the most brilliant European courts, mainly those of France and England. His close relationship with the court of St Petersburg was also very important: throughout his two-year stay there Poniatowski must have been impressed by the power of expression of the artistic media used at the court to underline the sovereign's authority and spread important political concepts. During his time in the Russian capital the future king of the Commonwealth became familiar with the functioning of royal patronage and, as he resided at the court and witnessed its everyday life, he learned things he could not have gleaned from other European royal courts. The brilliant, wide-ranging patronage of the Russian court in the mid-eighteenth century, which became the most active centre in Europe at the time – owing in part to the purchase of the Brühl collection in 1769 and that of Walpole in 1779 – must have made a lasting impression on the future monarch's aesthetic sensibilities.

Paintings by Old Masters played a key role in Stanislaus's cultural policy. At the beginning of his reign Marcello Bacciarelli (1731-1818), director general of royal works for many years, recommended the principles on which art purchases should be based: "Since I have learned that Your Majesty wishes to create a cabinet of beautiful paintings, allow me to present my idea. Those [paintings] which should please Your Majesty can only be obtained at a great cost, after a long time and not without much effort so as to not be fooled. In order to avoid this, the matter must be kept secret, since once the public learn that Your Majesty wishes to purchase paintings, they will sell them dear, knowing that the buyer is a monarch [...] As far as the sum is concerned, in my view it should be divided into two parts, three-quarters for paintings and one-quarter for creating a cabinet of engravings. I am convinced that over the course of a decade, at no great expense, Your Majesty shall have a gallery with a good selection of paintings and a handsome collection of engravings."⁴¹ In spite of this warning, the king was inundated with offers. Through his agents he was active in the most important markets trading in Old Master paintings: Rome, Florence, Venice, Bologna, Naples, Hamburg, Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, Amsterdam, Paris and London.⁴² The royal library held books, albums and prints illustrating the greatest European collections of paintings. Volumes

devoted to famous European art galleries – the Medici Gallery in Florence, the Electoral Gallery in Düsseldorf, that of Frederick II at Sanssouci and the Royal Gallery in Dresden – enjoyed pride of place. It also housed many luxurious publications, often illustrated, describing contemporary collections of Greco-Roman sculptures, in particular those of the Capitoline Museum in Rome and the Museo Pio-Clementino in the Vatican.⁴³

The status of the royal picture collection at the time of the king's abdication is described in an inventory of paintings compiled in 1795 listing 2,289 paintings and several hundreds of framed miniatures in pastels and gouache. Unfortunately, a significant part of the collection was sold off and dispersed after the king's death. Today we are able to identify just 400 or so of the paintings listed in this inventory. Based on these works and the brief entries in the inventory of 1795, together with descriptions of the gallery made by connoisseurs who visited it before 1795, we can attempt to trace the origins of the royal picture collection.⁴⁴

After analysing the contents of these royal collections of Old Master paintings from the perspective of both artistic schools and themes, we may conclude that they are a typical example of the eighteenth-century "man of taste". The majority were seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works, some by French masters such as Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Antoine Watteau, Jean-Baptiste Greuze, Hubert Robert, Nicolas de Largillière, Jean-Marc Nattier and Pierre Hubert Subleyras. There were also many paintings by Flemish masters, including Adriaen Brouwer, David Teniers the Younger, Jan Brueghel, Peter Paul Rubens, Anton Van Dyck and Jacob Jordaens. Many Dutch artists are also listed, such as Albert Cuyp, Jean-Baptiste Goltzius, Willem van Honthorst, Ferdinand Bol, Govaert Flinck, Jan Steen, Gabriel Metsu and Adriaen van Ostade. Another group constituted works by Rembrandt, including the masterpieces *Polish Rider*, *Girl in a Picture Frame*, and *Scholar at the Lectern*. Paintings of the German school were limited to the eighteenth century, focusing on Dresden masters such as Johann Samuel Mock and Christian Wilhelm Ernst Dietrich. There were not many paintings from England, even though the king frequently stressed his interest in English art. The finest examples are *Romeo and Juliet*, a large canvas by Benjamin West, and a portrait of George III by Thomas Gainsborough. The surviving paintings suggest that the majority of attributions in the gallery catalogue of 1795 are either correct or very likely.

Therefore we should also lend credibility to the attributions to Italian masters. The catalogue lists masterpieces by some of the most outstanding Italian artists, such as Giorgione, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian and Veronese. Other fascinating paintings are ascribed to Correggio, Guide Reni and Annibale Carracci. Unfortunately it is impossible to match most of these attributions to the originals, as they have yet to be located or identified.

Another chapter in the history of royal art collecting involves paintings by contemporary artists, such as Anton Raphael Mengs, Pompeo Batoni,

Angelica Kauffmann, Jean Pillement and Bernardo Bellotto. However, the king's interest in those artists leaned more towards patronage than collecting.

The royal collection of drawings was created in a similar manner to the collection of Old Master paintings. Stanislaus II Augustus assembled a collection of drawings from the most important European schools, although it never quite matched the standard of the painting collection. Scholars of the royal collection of drawings believe that many were wrongly attributed, and that it included numerous copies and rather poor works. This was most likely due to Warsaw's distance from the market centres and the limited competence of the monarch's agents. Despite this, there were several outstanding works among the 1,800-strong collection, of which 726 are still extant. Italian drawings included works by masters such as Giorgio Vasari, Francesco Salviati (de Rossi), Alessandro Allori and Giovanni Battista Pittoni. The Flemish and Dutch schools were represented by excellent drawings by such artists as Peter Paul Rubens, Jacob Jordaens and Rembrandt. Works of the French school, numbering over 100, included some superb drawings by Jean-Baptiste Oudry, François Boucher, Blaise Nicolas Le Sueur and Jean-Honoré Fragonard. Lastly, a set of over 60 German drawings constituted another important part of the collection.⁴⁵

As with the collection of paintings, the drawings included a section of contemporary works by artists working at Stanislaus's court, as well as architectural and decorative drawings, which were closely linked to the king's artistic and architectural patronage activities.

Another section of the royal collection – prints and sculptures – had a different purpose. These works were chiefly used as a resource “database” for court artists. Stanislaus wrote to August Moszyński (1731-1786), his friend and longstanding “custodian” of his collections: “My prints and medals are nothing more than a diversion in comparison with the other objects [...] yet I also consider their useful aspect, and I wish them to be of use to others after my death.”⁴⁶

Thanks to the efforts of Moszyński and his successor Marcello Bacciarelli (1731-1818), towards the end of the king's reign his collection of engravings numbered almost 70,000 items. It was mainly assembled during the eighteenth century to provide Stanislaus's court artists with models and sources of inspiration. This is why it was organised by topic instead of by schools, the usual system in major European collections which served to promote certain engravers. Care of the collection of engravings and drawings was entrusted to the *Bibliotheca regia*, a wide-ranging court institution which housed not only books but also scientific objects and works of art – manuscripts, maps and scientific instruments, coins, precious and semiprecious stones, minerals, gems, small sculptures made of marble, bronze and ivory and other antiquities, as well as biological specimens. From an organisational perspective it was a relic of the traditional court *Kunstkammern*, which were maintained in some

European courts more by the force of tradition than by the rational requirements of Enlightenment collecting.

Changes in the style of collecting and in how items were exhibited can be seen in Stanislaus's attempts to separate his two most spectacular galleries: painting and sculpture.

As shown in surviving architectural drawings and hinted at in correspondence between Stanislaus and Marcello Bacciarelli, finding the best means of presenting the royal collections – a question involving artistic and ideological aspects – was one of the king's greatest concerns.

The *Bibliotheca regia*, the royal scientific collection, was located in a wing of the Royal Castle in Warsaw, constructed between 1779 and 1782. In 1786, after the Royal Castle had been fitted out, the king and his artistic advisers focused their attention on embellishing the monarch's summer residence in Łazienki. Over the course of a decade the king transformed Łazienki into one of Europe's finest palace and park complexes; its final character can be described as a museum-villa, as it was directly inspired by the famous Roman villas – Villa Borghese, Villa Albani, Villa Medici and Villa Ludovisi – which housed some of the most valuable artworks of Antiquity and of the king's day. The reports he received from Marcello Bacciarelli, André Le Brun and August Moszyński on their journeys to Rome and his access to numerous etchings provided Stanislaus with a full understanding of the style of furnishing and functioning of Roman villas. The example of English collectors and connoisseurs, then at the forefront of Europe in aesthetic matters, was also important to his plans for extending Łazienki. In their elegant country residences, built during the eighteenth century, English collectors devoted separate spaces to sculpture and picture galleries.

In Łazienki palace, the most valuable paintings were to be hung on the walls of the spacious ground-floor hall known as the Picture Gallery. The Sculpture Gallery was located in the Great Orangery. The royal architects recommended using the gallery to display copies of some of the most famous antique sculptures of the time: *Laocoön and His Sons*, the *Belvedere Apollo*, *Meleager* and *Amazon* from the Vatican collection, *Hercules* and *Flora* from the Farnese collection, and *Mercury* from the Ludovisi collection.

As with the paintings, the key document in helping us to reconstruct the contents of the royal sculpture collection is the inventory of 1795, which tells us that the holdings comprised 176 marble sculptures, 23 marble vases, 57 stone sculptures, 2 stone vases, and 563 plaster casts.

The collection was rather utilitarian, much like the previously described collection of etchings. Thanks to publications, travellers' accounts and press information, the king was well versed in the latest archaeological discoveries and activities on the antiquities market. And yet he collected neither sculptures nor other works unearthed in excavations. Those he did own – a mere 16 – were gifts from various people.

We can identify at least four ideas that underpinned the development of the king's sculpture collection. Firstly, carefully selected statues, busts and reliefs were intended to complement the royal architectural and furnishing style. Secondly, the king attempted to obtain a set of sculptures that would fulfil the requirements established by contemporary museum collections – that is, copies of the most famous antique sculptures. Thirdly, he aimed to assemble a representative set of casts in plaster to be used for educational purposes at the planned Academy of Fine Arts. The ultimate aim of the collection, assembled with such great discernment, was personal pleasure and aesthetic enjoyment; for this purpose the king had marble and bronze reduced-size copies of famous antique and contemporary sculptures placed in his private apartments at Łazienki.⁴⁷

Although there were no public museums in Poland at the time, the king had been presented with a few ideas for such an institution. In 1775, the Sejm (parliament) gave consideration to a project entitled *Thoughts on Establishing a Musaeum Polonicum*, submitted by the grand marshal of the Crown Michał Jerzy Mniszech (1748-1806).⁴⁸

In 1780 Wincenty Potocki (1740-1825), the owner of a sizeable collection of paintings, drawings, prints, sculptures and decorative art, intended to publicly display his collection of European paintings at his Warsaw palace under the name of *Museum Potocianum*.⁴⁹ In turn, in 1785 Józef Jerzy Ossoliński, voivode of Podlasie, planned to open to the public an art gallery linked to an art school. Around the same time Stanisław Kostka Potocki proposed establishing Poland's first public museum of fine arts, which, like the other projects, never progressed from theory to practice. All these plans were closely connected with the extensive programme of state reforms implemented during the 1780s.

This period of nearly a century, in which Polish collecting actively espoused European trends, was interrupted by the partitions that eventually led to the country's loss of independence. The tragic circumstances of the stateless nation forced changes upon the spirit of Polish art collecting; as in other areas, it was now required to be driven mainly by patriotic and nationalistic reasons.

For patriotic reasons, the most keenly collected and conserved Polish artworks and memorabilia were those connected with the nation's history and lost sovereignty. This gave rise to the construction, in 1801, of a museum pavilion in Puławy Park, based on the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli. The founder of the first Polish museum, Princess Izabela Czartoryska née Fleming (1746-1835), named it the Temple of Sibyl. The facade bears the inscription "the Past bequeaths to the Future". Despite the building's architectural style, mementoes of Poland's history were exhibited inside it. In the centre, on a granite altar, was an ebony Royal Casket containing precious relics that once belonged to Polish royalty – jewels, miniature portraits of monarchs, fragments of clothing, and other items removed from royal tombs. Shields, swords and banners from

various military victories, especially those against the Turks, were arranged behind the altar. Two display cabinets held various historical mementoes, mostly connected with national heroes.⁵⁰

In his book *History and Its Images*, Haskel describes the Puławy Museum as follows: “The Temple of Sibyl, which had been conceived after the final dismemberment of Poland, was more a giant reliquary than a museum. Its contents were varied in character, but all had one feature in common: they provided tangible proof that a great Polish Kingdom had once existed. The purpose of the Temple was to display a coherent view of history in visual form [...] Historical collections of the kind to be seen in the Gothic House at Puławy Park were by no means rare in Europe during the early years of the nineteenth century. However, the notion of putting what were taken to be authentic objects from past epochs to the service of an ideology, as was done at the Temple of Sibyl, was still unusual, although there were plenty of religious precedents. Its cause was soon to be widely followed.”⁵¹

At the same time, Princess Czartoryska placed her collection of Western art and historical mementoes on display in the nearby Gothic House. One of the works on show was *Lady with an Ermine*, a masterpiece by Leonardo da Vinci.

After Poland lost its sovereignty, it was no longer possible for the Polish authorities to set up national museums, and therefore this role was largely taken over by the Polish aristocracy at their residences. In contrast to traditional noble residences where the decoration was focused on family history and the individual founder, these museums prioritised such values as patriotism, the sciences and the arts. Examples of this style are the palaces of Działyński in Kórnik, Raczyński in Rogalin, Zamoyski (known as the Blue Palace) in Warsaw, Tarnowski in Dzików, Ludwik Michał Pac in Dowspuda, Branicki in Sucha, Wincent Krasiński in the Krakowskie Przedmieście in Warsaw, the Przeździecki Museum in Warsaw and the Lubomirski Museum in Lwów.

This did not mean to say that these collections did not hold outstanding works by Western European artists. Indeed, the apartments of the Zamoyski palace in Warsaw were decorated with works by Annibale Carracci, Angelika Kauffmann and François Gérard,⁵² while the Tarnowski family owned Rembrandt’s *Polish Rider*⁵³ (now in the Frick Collection, New York) and a collection of Italian neoclassical sculptures in their palace in Dzików.⁵⁴ Even so, family and patriotic collections were largely predominant.

Z. Ostrowska-Kęmbłowska describes these museum-residences as follows: “[...] they are being created as a substitute for proper public institutions at a time when it is impossible to set up more conventional museums, scientific institutions, and so on. Yet they differ from those ‘normal’ institutions. They are being created in more or less clear opposition to the authorities, and not only in defence of one’s own interests, but also those of the nation, the society and the politics.”⁵⁵

For the same reasons museums and libraries with a nationalistic slant were being set up outside the country. In 1870, a group of Polish émigrés founded the Polish National Museum in Rapperswil, Switzerland. The idea of the Polish Museum in Rapperswil met with wide-ranging support, enabling the institution to bring together an exceptionally valuable collection of historical mementoes, artworks, books and documents, and even national relics – such as the heart of the Polish national hero, Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746-1817). In this case the museum collection served a primarily political function, playing an active role in mobilising people to undertake various activities with the ultimate aim of winning back Poland's independence.⁵⁶ The Polish Library in Paris, established in 1838, and the Copernican Museum in Rome, opened in 1879, were similar in nature.⁵⁷

It has been estimated that only one-sixth of all the items amassed by Polish collectors at the time were paintings and sculptures of the Western European schools. As pointed out, for patriotic reasons the items that were most keenly collected and preserved were works by Polish artists and historical mementoes. It is therefore worth briefly examining the collectors who focused on assembling Western works of art.

Atanazy Raczyński (1788-1874), who was highly considered among collectors of Western European art, is particularly noteworthy. Between 1826 and the year of his death he assembled a fine collection at his Berlin palace, mainly including works by Spanish, Italian, Flemish, Dutch and German artists. The collection was moved to Poland in 1903, and is now owned by the Raczyński Foundation and on display in the National Museum in Poznań.⁵⁸

Another outstanding collector of contemporary Polish and Western European paintings was Edward Aleksander Raczyński (1847-1926), Atanazy's great-nephew. In his gallery in Rogalin palace he amassed over 200 paintings, mainly by French, German and Belgian masters. These works are now owned by the Raczyński Foundation and held at the National Museum in Poznań.⁵⁹

The region of Wielkopolska or Greater Poland also has links with some of the most outstanding Polish collectors of the nineteenth century, such as Izabela Działyńska née Czartoryska (1830-1899) and her husband Jan Działyński (1829-1880). The collection housed in their palace in Gołuchów included superb examples of European decorative arts from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, among them a number of high-quality French enamels. Greek vases and antique jewellery were the pride of the collection. Their collection of engravings by Western European artists was also of excellent standard. The former Gołuchów collection was pillaged during the Second World War, and what remains of it is divided among the National Museum in Warsaw, the National Museum in Poznań and the Czartoryski Museum in Krakow.⁶⁰

Seweryn Mielżyński (1805-1872) was active in Miłosław and Poznań in Greater Poland. An avid collector of western painting, he amassed 170 fine works, most of which are now in the National Museum in Poznań. Mielżyński also owned an extensive collection of Polish art including paintings, prints, drawings, coins and medals.⁶¹

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, army generals Aleksander Chodkiewicz (1776-1838)⁶² and the aforementioned Ludwik Michał Pac⁶³ also assembled significant collections of European paintings. Chodkiewicz's numbered several hundred paintings, and also included drawings, engravings and medals. It was sold in auctions held in 1823 and 1824 and the auction catalogue is the only surviving testimony of its contents. Nor is the collection of Ludwik Michał Pac (d. 1835), originally featuring around 300 paintings, fully preserved.

A similar fate was met by one of the greatest and most extensive Polish collections of western art of the first half of the nineteenth century, that of Józef Kajetan Ossoliński (1758-1834). It contained over 500 canvases, including many paintings from the former gallery of King Stanislaus II Augustus. The collection was also sold off at an auction after its owner's death.⁶⁴

In the mid-nineteenth century Poland was home to some 350 art collections. As in Western Europe, in addition to the original collections held by the nobles, churches and burghers, new ones were being assembled by the wealthy modern bourgeoisie. They were a new type of collector, generally devoid of deep-rooted family traditions, and whose artistic tastes were more inclined towards contemporary art. Their points of reference were the exhibitions of contemporary arts organised at renowned public galleries, such as the Royal Academy of Arts in London and the Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts (Zachęta) in Warsaw. In Poland this new bourgeoisie was dominated by leading entrepreneurs of Jewish origin, such as Leopold Kronenberg (1812-1878), Jan Gottlieb Bloch (1836-1902) and Mathias Bersohn (1823-1908).

Owing to the political situation and lack of sovereignty, during the nineteenth century the development of Polish collections and museums ran a different course than in the majority of Western European countries and the USA. In Germany and Italy collecting was aimed at strengthening national unity, while the massive museum buildings being erected in South Kensington in London, on Museum Island in Berlin, at the Ring in Vienna and in the square outside the Kremlin in Moscow were monuments to the political programmes of the empires. In Poland the national spirit was forced into hiding in rooms of noble residences and humble town or church buildings, or sought refuge in halls of regional associations and organisations, and the purpose of the collections assembled by these modest museums was to preserve the memory of the lost state and encourage a struggle for its return.

Polish museums thus missed their opportunity to be housed in splendid buildings and to display prestigious collections. Meanwhile, museums in other parts of the world were receiving rich legacies both from old aristocratic families and from multimillionaires belonging to the newly-formed bourgeoisie. As if this were not enough, Andrzej Mniszech (1823-1905) moved the collection belonging to his father, Karol Filip Mniszech (1798-1844), from Wiśniowiec in historic Polish lands to Paris. A similar fate was met by the collection of Lew Sapieha. Paris also became home to a significant portion of the collection of General Ludwik Michał Pac. The Tarnowski family sold Rembrandt's *Polish Rider* to the Frick Collection in New York. Karol Lanckoroński (1848-1933) added to his collection in Vienna, while Michał Tyszkiewicz and Andrzej Mniszech expanded theirs in Paris. And these are just some examples of the fates met by Polish art collections.

After Poland regained its independence in 1918, it was one of few European countries without its own national museum. The need to create one arose when, under the Treaty of Riga of 1921, collections taken to Russia during the nineteenth century returned, while some citizens of the reborn state began to express a wish to transfer their collections to national repositories. This resulted in the creation of the National Collections, a body organisationally responsible to the Directorate of National Buildings, which also had in its care the royal castles of Warsaw and Krakow and Łazienki Royal Park.⁶⁵ Around this time the National Collections received gifts of several large private collections, such as a set of paintings by Leon Piniński (1857-1938) and the collection of the Krosnowski family. The largest museums in Poland were city museums, including the national museums in Krakow and Warsaw, and the Wielkopolska Museum in Poznań. They received large collections of works of art from Antoni Strzałecki (1844-1934), Stanisław Ursy-Rusiecki (1862-1944) and Maria Róża Taube née Kronenberg, which contributed to the expansion of the National Museum in Warsaw. Some large collections were brought back to Poland, such as that of the Polish Museum in Rapperswil and the aforementioned collection in Atanazy Raczyński from Berlin.

However, movements in the other direction were also common. Between 1918 and 1939 Poland lost a number of works: Dürer's *Portrait of a Young Venetian Woman* from the collection of the Wańkowicz family and Antonello da Messina's *Head of Christ* from the collection of the Ostrowski family were both sold to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna; Cranach's *Stigmatisation of St Francis* from the collection of the Wiktor family was sold to the gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna; Simone Martini's *Annunciation* from the collection of the Przybyślawski family was sold to the Lehman collection in New York; and two masterpieces by Hals from the collection of the Grabowski family were sold to the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection in Lugano.⁶⁶

Following the Second World War, Polish museums and private collections alike suffered great losses. Many works of art were burned, including the Zamoyski collection in the Blue Palace in Warsaw (including the *Portrait of Zofia Zamoyska née Czartoryska with her Sons* by François Gérard). Many works disappeared without trace, including Raphael's *Portrait of a Young Man* from the Czartoryski Collection in Krakow. Some were taken out of Poland, including the collection of Alfred Potocki from Łańcut.

After 1945 most of the private collections that were salvaged, especially those originating from old noble palaces and manors, were taken over by the state and placed in museums. Even today, 20 years since the change of regime in Poland, the legal status of confiscated private collections remains unregulated, which puts museums at risk of claims from previous owners.

There are currently hardly any major private collections of old Polish and Western European art, although there is a large group of collectors in the process of assembling such collections. There is a growing art market, which is essential to the healthy functioning of a market economy. Unfortunately, limited budgets mean that museums are rarely able to purchase what they would like to. Larger outgoings are financed by sponsors, while the museum collections are mainly expanded through private bequests or gifts from individuals, chiefly Polish collectors residing abroad. The most generous gifts made in recent years are those of Karolina Lanckorońska (1898-2002) to the royal castles of Krakow⁶⁷ and Warsaw;⁶⁸ by Julian Godlewski (1903-1982) to that of Krakow; by Andrzej Ciechanowiecki (b. 1924) and Teresa Sahakian (1915-2010) to that of Warsaw;⁶⁹ and by Tomasz Niewodniczański (1933-2010), who placed works on deposit at Warsaw castle in 2009.⁷⁰

Collections held by Poles living abroad are also worth mentioning. One of the richest is that of Barbara Piasecka-Johnson (b. 1937) in the USA, which can nonetheless be viewed in Poland at periodic exhibitions.⁷¹

And yet it is not in private collections but in museums and church collections that we find the finest treasures of the modest remains of Poland's former heritage, which bear witness to the wealth of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It is they that allow us to organise such exhibitions as the one currently on show in Madrid.

The history of Polish collecting summed up in this article contradicts the theory that Poland, located as it is on the outskirts of Europe, has little in common with the more developed forms of Western European culture.

Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann is right in pointing out that "the culture of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was as rich and as varied as were the peoples who inhabited the largest realm of Russia in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe".⁷² Although this vision focuses on the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, I believe that we may confidently extend it to earlier periods. The fact that Polish collecting often imitated Western European models does not mean it was a peripheral or, less still, a provincial

phenomenon. After all, it should be remembered that this was how the majority of European countries behaved as well. Adapting or drawing inspiration from foreign models never blurred the individual character of Polish collecting, which, far from being simply an import of Western European standards, always expressed the diversity and variety of the everyday life of the Polish people and the political environment in which the collections were assembled.

* This is a new, much expanded and changed version of an essay published in *Thesauri Poloniae. Schatzkammer Polen. Zur Geschichte der polnischen Sammlungen*, exh. cat. (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 3 December 2002 to 2 March 2003), Vienna, 2002, pp. 15-31.

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