

Introduction

For at least 130 years the Chinese Rooms, created by Stanisław Kostka Potocki on the first floor in the main body of the Wilanów Palace, housed his collection of what was then called 'Chinese things' (Polish: *chińszczyzna*): original artworks and craftworks imported from Asia, as well as their European imitations, the *chinoiseries* (Figs 1–5). These included, among others, paintings on paper, numerous ceramic items, vessels, paintings on glass, sculptures in various materials, including ivory, articles of clothing and accessories, as well as furniture in this style.

The emergence of this rich collection resulted from an intercontinental and intercultural circulation of goods and ideas, which was rapidly gaining momentum at the time. In order to maintain, and fully display, one's status as a statesman, politician, art expert and Enlightenment scholar in touch with the intellectual elite in Poland and abroad, it was important and symbolic to possess objects coming from distant parts of the world. Similarities have been drawn between Potocki's attitude to art collecting and the nature of the activities of Henri Léonard Jean-Baptiste Bertin (1720–1792), one of the five ministers of state at the court of Louis XV, who acquired objects for his collection through Jesuit missionaries residing in China, as well as Jean Theodore Royer (1737–1807), who acquired from the thriving Dutch East India Company original objects brought by its ships from overseas.¹

Potocki's interest in the history, art and culture of Asia was also largely scientific, founded on the philosophical and historiosophical ideas of the Enlightenment period.² Even though Potocki, unlike Royer or Bertin, did not have direct commercial contacts with the Far East, in his research he drew on the same classic works,³ such as books by Jean-Baptiste du Halde,⁴ Athanasius Kircher,⁵ William Cham-

THE CHINESE APARTMENT OF STANISŁAW KOSTKA POTOCKI: A PROPOSAL FOR THE CHRONOLOGY OF ESTABLISHING THE ROOMS AND POSSIBLE CHANGES IN WALL DECORATION BEFORE 1832

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1 For more on Henri Bertin's art collecting and links with China, see K.I. Choi, 'Portraits of Virtue: Henri-Léonard Bertin, Joseph Amiot and the "Great Man" of China', *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*, vol. 80, 2015–2016, pp. 49–63.

2 B. Bibik, I. Kopania, 'Uniwersum Chin w klasycznym języku Europy. Jean Theodore Royer (1737–1807) i jego „Nomenclator Sinicus”', *Litteraria Copernicana*, 2019, no. 4(32), pp. 107–111.

3 D.N. Zasławska, *Chinoiserie w Wilanowie* (Warszawa, 2009), pp. 288–291.

4 J.B. du Halde, *Description Géographique, Historique, Chronologique, Politique et Physique de l'Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie Chinoise ... ornée d'un grand nombre de Figures et des Vignettes* (Paris, 1735).

5 A. Kircher, *China monumentis qua sacris qua profanis, nec non variis naturae et artis spectaculis, aliarumque rerum memorabilium argumentis illustrata*, commonly known simply as *China Illustrata* (Amsterdam, 1667).

bers⁶ or John Barrow.⁷ Subjecting Asian art to a critical appraisal on a par with European art in his 1815 treatise *O sztuce u dawnych, czyli Winkelman polski* [On the Art of the Ancients, or, the Polish Winckelmann], Potocki was, in fact, quite ahead of his time.⁸ The chapter *O sztuce u Chińczyków* [On Art of the Chinese] is the first essay on this subject in Europe, preceded only by William Chambers's much shorter introduction to his *Designs of Chinese buildings* published in 1757.⁹

The collection of Asian art assembled by Potocki was displayed in the Chinese Apartment on the first floor of the palace's main body. The suite consisted of five rooms, which in the 1832 inventory were referred to as the First and Second Cabinet on the Side of the Orangery and the Lake, the First Room, the Middle Room and the Third (or Quiet) Room (Fig. 5). In the 1960s, all elements of the Apartment's interior were removed as part of the conservation and renovation works then conducted in the palace. The history of the changes to its decoration and furnishings is to a large extent researched and published in the studies by Danuta Zasławska, Anna Kwiatkowska, Marzenna Ciechańska, Dorota Dzik-Kruszelnicka and Karolina Alkemade.¹⁰ The least is known about the early years of its existence.

It is accepted as a possibility that the Chinese room, or rooms, in this part of the palace may have been created around the mid-1820s, but, as the research for this study has shown, this hypothesis is based on historical

6 W. Chambers, *Designs of Chinese buildings, furniture, dresses, machines, and utensils* (London, 1757).

7 J. Barrow, *Travels in China, containing descriptions, observations, and comparisons, made and collected in the course of a short residence at the Imperial Palace of Yuen-min-yuen, and on a subsequent journey through the country from Peking to Canton* (London, 1804).

8 S.K. Potocki, *O sztuce u dawnych czyli Winkelman polski*, vol. 1, eds J.A. Ostrowski, J. Śliwa (Warszawa–Kraków, 1992).

9 Zasławska, *Chinoiserie*, pp. 252.

10 Cf. ibidem; also A. Kwiatkowska, e.g. 'Historia lakierowanych saskich mebli w pałacu wilanowskim', in: *Chinois. Drezdeńska sztuka lakiernicza w Pałacu Wilanowskim*, ed. M. Kopplin (Warszawa, 2006), pp. 149–192, and eadem, 'Meble trzech pokoleń rodziny Potockich', *Studia Wilanowskie*, vol. 24, 2019, pp. 83–117; M. Ciechańska, *Papierowe obicia ścienne w pałacu w Wilanowie. Studium portretowe* (Warszawa, 2010); D. Dzik-Kruszelnicka, *Warstwy czasu, warstwy materii, warstwy znaczeń. Analiza funkcji, technik i treści. Konserwacja chińskiego przedstawienia Kobiety z dwójką dzieci z Pałacu w Wilanowie* (doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Prof. M. Ciechańska PhD(habil.), computer printout), Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw (Warszawa, 2018); M. Ciechańska, D. Dzik-Kruszelnicka, M. Herman, 'A Collection of 18th Century Chinese Wall Coverings at the Wilanów Palace, Poland. A Historical, Technological and Conservation Research Project', in: *Investigation and Conservation of East Asian Cabinets in Imperial Residences (1700–1900)*, eds G. Kirst, E. Iby (Wien–Köln–Weimar, 2017), pp. 4–7, 59; K. Alkemade, 'Wybrane elementy wystroju apartamentu chińskiego na piętrze korpusu głównego pałacu wilanowskiego i jego zmiany na przestrzeni dziejów – nowe spojrzenie', *Studia Wilanowskie*, vol. 26, 2019, pp. 57–82.



Fig. 1

The First Chinese Cabinet before the furnishings were dismantled, 1955, photograph, PPKZ Archive in the National Institute of Cultural Heritage Archive



Fig. 2

The Second Chinese Cabinet before the furnishings were dismantled, 1955, photograph, PPKZ Archive in the National Institute of Cultural Heritage Archive

Fig. 3

The First Room in 1911,
 photograph, National Institute
 of Cultural Heritage Archive



Fig. 4

The Second Room in 1930,
 photograph National Institute
 of Cultural Heritage Archive



Fig. 5

The Third (Quiet) Room
 in 1911, photograph, National
 Institute of Cultural Heritage
 Archive



sources whose unambiguous interpretation is problematic. The earliest craftsmen's contracts which the author of this study was able to access and which undoubtedly include the Chinese Rooms (since they are mentioned there by name) date only from as late as 1820, while the first surviving inventory of the palace furnishings from the Potocki era was written in 1832 and shows that the Rooms were then fully furnished. Later publications, dating from the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, contain many inaccuracies. It is thus necessary to seek other sources of information to establish the history and conjecturally reconstruct the appearance of the Chinese Apartment in the period until the late 1830s.

The research for the present article focused primarily on completing data on the chronology of establishing particular rooms within the Apartment and the decoration of their walls. In this context, a methodical revision of the known sources in which Potocki's Chinese Rooms are mentioned was carried out, and new information was sought in publications of a diverse nature dating from 1796 to 1955. To add to the material preserved in the Wilanów Economic Archive (Archiwum Gospodarcze Wilanowskie, in the footnotes: AGWil.) and the Potocki Public Archive (Archiwum Publiczne Potockich, in the footnotes: APP), a systematic search for descriptions of the palace was made, which covered not only those descriptions that appeared in Polish and foreign guidebooks published since the beginning of the nineteenth century, but also in encyclopaedias, scholarly works on geography, accounts of travels in Poland, and memoirs written by the Potocki family's friends and guests. Various biographical notes on Stanisław Kostka Potocki were also included. The exact content of early research works on the palace and collections was verified. As a result, this study proposes potential new ways of interpreting the known descriptions of the collection and the Chinese Apartment, and revises some of the hitherto operative hypotheses about its early history.¹¹

The elusive beginnings of Stanisław Kostka Potocki's Chinese Apartment

By the end of the eighteenth century, Stanisław Kostka Potocki had already amassed a significant collection of artworks and craftworks from Asia, as well as European pieces based on their appearance. This was still before his wife Aleksandra Potocka became the owner of the Wilanów Palace, which happened in 1799. The museum opened six years later;

¹¹ The article expands on and updates information presented in the author's doctoral dissertation: A. Konopko, *Cztery reliefowe malowidła w stylu chińskim z Muzeum Pałacu Króla Jana III w Wilanowie – interdyscyplinarne badania oraz konserwacja dzieł z pogranicza sztuk i kultur*, supervisor: Prof. Marzenna Ciechańska PhD(habil.), auxiliary supervisor: Monika Stachurska PhD(habil.), Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw (Warszawa, 2024).

Księga do wpisywania się gości, that is a commemorative ‘book for visitors to sign in’, was available from 5 August 1805. Some of the visitors described their impressions in a few words, but none of them mentioned any display of ‘Chinese things’; nor is there any such remark in the descriptions of Poland and Warsaw dating from 1796–1820. Such descriptions customarily included Wilanów, and the royal apartments and the picture gallery were almost always at least mentioned in them, and often described in some detail; the library and the collection of medals were also featured.¹²

The description in Wiktor Czajewski’s guidebook of 1893 provides grounds for the conjecture that the two small rooms on the north side of the Apartment ‘seem to be the oldest sanctuary of Chinese things of Wilanów, as they have long been called Chinese Rooms in the inventories’.¹³ It is not clear, however, to which inventory Czajewski was referring. In the inventory from the time of Izabela Lubomirska’s ownership of Wilanów, compiled in 1793, these two rooms have no decoration in Oriental style, whereas in the one from 1832 they are called the First and the Second Cabinet on the Side of the Orangery and the Lake, and all five rooms of the Apartment are labelled Chinese Rooms.

Publications from the first half of the twentieth century concerning the painted decoration of the Chinese Rooms also contain information unconfirmed by source materials and to rely on them would be to incur a considerable risk of error. Kazimierz Zawadowski dated them to the late eighteenth and the first years of the nineteenth century, and Bohdan Marconi, to the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁴ This was probably due to the fact that at that time the founding of these rooms was not yet linked to the person of Wojciech Jaszczołd (or Jaszczołt, Jaszczołt),

12 No mention of any collection of Asian art that could be held in the Warsaw palace at the time is found in the earliest known, relatively detailed description of Potocki’s art collection: A.T. de Fortia de Piles, *Pologne Et Autriche* (Paris, 1796) (= *Voyage De Deux Français En Allemagne, Danemarck, Suède, Russie Et Pologne, Fait En 1790–1792*, vol. 5), pp. 52–55. Detailed description of palace interiors dating from the first and second decade of the nineteenth century are rare, and those that exist omit the Chinese Rooms: J. Zawadzki, *Geografia powszechna* (Wilno, 1812), p. 116; C.G.D. Stein, *Nowy dykcjonarz jeografii powszechny; dawný i terażniejszy; stawiający [...]*, vol. 2 (Wrocław, 1813), p. 451; T. Święcki, *Opis starożytny Polski*, vol. 1 (Warszawa, 1816), pp. 251–252; J. Krasieński, *Przewodnik dla podróżujących w Polsce i Rzeczypospolitey Krakowskiej* (Warszawa, 1821), p. 35, and published a year earlier, the edition in French: idem, *Guide du Voyageur en Pologne et dans la république de Cracovie contenant, la description des principales villes et de leurs environs, des maisons de plaisances* (Warszawa, 1820), p. 37.

13 W. Czajewski, *Ilustrowany przewodnik po Warszawie i okolicach. Willanów, Czerniaków, Morysin, Gucin, Natolin. Wraz ze szczegółowym spisem 1000 obrazów z Galeryi Wilanowskiej* (Warszawa, 1893), pp. 89–90.

14 K. Zawadowski, *Wilanów. Przewodnik* (Warszawa, 1950), pp. 65–66; B. Marconi, ‘Konserwacja obrazów i malowideł ściennych’, *Ochrona Zabytków*, vol. 15, 1962, nr 3(58), pp. 49–50.

who was said to have created them in 1813.¹⁵ As ascertained by Karolina Alkemade, the original and so far the only source of this information, later repeated by other authors, was *Słownik malarzów polskich* [Dictionary of Polish painters] by Edward Rastawiecki, published in 1850.¹⁶ In the preface to the first volume, Rastawiecki wrote that the materials he had used were references in historical works, periodicals, literary journals, newspapers, inventories of painting collections, and ‘enquiries made amongst the families and closer acquaintances of painters’.¹⁷ Jaszczółd had three sons, whose memory of their father was certainly still vivid at the time Rastawiecki was collecting information for his dictionary. In fact, Franciszek Jaszczółd, who continued his father’s artistic legacy, eventually becoming one of the most original architects of the neo-Gothic trend, was nearly Rastawiecki’s peer in age. Wojciech Jaszczółd’s own diaries and notes are reported to have burnt in 1814;¹⁸ they would certainly have been an invaluable source of information about his artistic activities in Wilanów.

Another questionable piece of information comes from Wojciech Fijałkowski’s *Wnętrza pałacu w Wilanowie* [Interiors of the Wilanów Palace] and is repeated in many subsequent publications. It is the statement that the Chinese Apartment was created before 1816. As evidence for this hypothesis, Fijałkowski mentions two letters: from Ludwik Kropiński, dated 1810, and Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, dated 1816, but he does not cite their contents. Karolina Alkemade has shown that there is no letter from Kropiński containing any information about the collection of Asian art in the file bearing the signature stated by Fijałkowski, and that Niemcewicz writes only that ‘the Elector is in raptures over Chinese things’ and does not mention the existence of an entire suite of rooms.¹⁹ These conclusions can be further clarified.

As Fijałkowski himself indicates, the source of this information is a footnote in the study *Biblioteka Wilanowska: dwieście lat jej dziejów, 1741–1932* [The Wilanów Library: two hundred years of its history, 1741–1932] by Jadwiga Rudnicka. In his (undated) letter, Kropiński expressed his wish to ‘gaze again, while the eyes serve, at the diverse beauties of Wilanów’.²⁰

15 Jaszczółd is presented as a multitalented architect, painter and decorator, trained in the ateliers of Franciszek Smuglewicz and Marcello Bacciarelli. A painting *St Anthony* by Jaszczółd is still found in the church of the Reformed Franciscans in Kazimierz Dolny; cf. E. Rastawiecki, *Słownik malarzów polskich tudzież obcych w Polsce osiadłych lub czasowo w niej przebywających*, vol. 1 (Warszawa, 1850), pp. 208–209.

16 Alkemade, ‘Wybrane elementy wystroju apartamentu chińskiego’, p. 59.

17 Rastawiecki, *Słownik malarzów polskich*, p. III.

18 Ibidem, p. 209.

19 Alkemade, ‘Wybrane elementy wystroju apartamentu chińskiego’, pp. 60–61.

20 In the third volume of the letters – the one pointed to by Rudnicka – there is one more letter from Kropiński, dated 10 March 1810, but it is not linked with the matter under

In *Biblioteka Wilanowska*, these two letters provide the basis for the statement that ‘Wilanów attracted attention [...] because of the gallery and the Chinese things’, rather than because of its library.²¹ This context makes it explicable that the above-quoted letter by Kropiński was intended to serve as proof of the popularity of the gallery, and the letter by Niemcewicz, as proof of the popularity of ‘Chinese things’.²² According to research by Anna Mateusiak, however, the ‘Elector’ mentioned in Niemcewicz’s letters was not Frederick Augustus I Wettin, the king of Poland and elector of Saxony, but Ignacy Niemcewicz – the author’s cousin, to whom he maliciously gave the nickname of the ‘Elector of Neple’ (from the name of the family estate of Neple), and titled him this in his correspondence with friends. This identification of the man in question definitely fits better with the mocking tone of the letter and its very personal content.²³ Nonetheless, ‘Chinese things’ were to be found in many rooms of the Wilanów Palace, with the ground-floor Chinese Cabinet at the fore.

The context of the creation of the Chinese Apartment

Despite considerable lacunas in the extent of our knowledge, there are well grounded indications pointing to the existence of rooms where the collection of Oriental pieces was on display, located on the first floor in the main body of the palace, at least a few years before Potocki’s death. In 1793, those rooms were modestly decorated and sparsely furnished. The First and Second Cabinet were the only rooms in this suite to contain some Chinese and Japanese items (tea bowls, teapot, table),²⁴ and at the same time, not having any definite utilitarian function, they may have truly been the first ones to hold Potocki’s collection of Oriental pieces. Potocki’s mother-in-law, Izabela Lubomirska, had created a Chinese Apartment in her Łańcut estate already before 1802 and this certainly provided him with an additional impulse to set up a similar display. Towards the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century Potocki was already in possession of a large collection of Asian art. Pieces

discussion; APP, sign. 265, Listy różnych osób do Stanisława Potockiego [Letters from various persons to Stanisław Potocki], vol. 3: 1810, pp. 100–101.

- 21 J. Rudnicka, *Biblioteka Wilanowska: dwieście lat jej dziejów, 1741–1932* (Warszawa, 1967), pp. 98.
- 22 APP, sign. 265, Listy różnych osób do Stanisława Potockiego [Letters from various persons to Stanisław Potocki], vol. 5: from 1814 to 1816, pp. 275–276.
- 23 Alkemade, ‘Wybrane elementy wystroju apartamentu chińskiego’, p. 60; A. Mateusiak, *Tryptyk piastowski Juliana Ursyna Niemcewicza* (Łódź, 2015), pp. 51.
- 24 Wilanów Economic Archive (Archiwum Gospodarcze Wilanowskie, hereinafter: AG-Wil), section XXI, Zarząd Pałaców, Muzeum i Parków Wilanowskich [Administration of the Wilanów Palaces, Museum and Parks], sign. 171, Inwentarz Pałacu Wilanowskiego y Wszystkich w nim znajdujących Meblow Obrazów c.t.c. Diebus Septembris 1793 spisany [Inventory of the Wilanów Palace and all the Furniture, Pictures etc. found therein, compiled September 1793], pp. 93–108.

he had inherited from the earlier owners of the palace (including his mother-in-law Izabela Lubomirska) were complemented with pieces he accumulated on his own, which he had been doing since at least his journey to England in 1787.²⁵ The collection was extended in the early years of the nineteenth century, first with pieces acquired at the auction of Father Rogaliński's effects, which took place in the year 1804.²⁶ The next pieces added to the collection came from Paris, purchased there in 1808–1809;²⁷ those were the last acquisitions of 'Chinese things' to have been made on such a grand scale. Later mentions of potential procurement of similar pieces are few and far between,²⁸ which suggests that by the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century the collection was largely formed. In the beginning, these pieces were most probably used for the decoration of the living quarters, but their growing number necessitated finding space for their long-term keeping as well.

In 1806, soon after the opening of the museum, the construction and decoration of the Chinese Arbour, designed by Aigner,²⁹ was being

25 A. Kwiatkowska, 'The journey to France and England March 1787 – January 1788', in: *Grand Tour. The Birth of a Collection of Stanisław Kostka Potocki*, trans. Klaudyna Hildebrandt, eds P. Jaskanis, A. Rottermund, A. Kwiatkowska, A. Ekielska-Mardal (Warszawa, 2006), pp. 176, 180–181.

26 AGWil, section. I, Anteriora, sign. 302, Pamiętnik interesów samego J.O. Stanisława Kostki Potockiego Senatora i Wojewody [The Business Journal of His Excellency Stanisław Kostka Potocki Senator and Voivod Himself], pp. 110.

27 A. Kwiatkowska, 'The journey to France and England March 1787 – January 1788', pp. 174–184; idem, 'The journey to France January – August 1808', in: *Grand Tour. The Birth of a Collection*, pp. 201, 203, 206–207, 209.

28 Among them letters held in the Potockis' Public Archive: one from Sierakowski, dated 2 June 1814 in Paris, informing that an auction of Lebrun's effects is to take place and that 'small shops are full of Chinese things, porcelain pieces, bronzes and bric-a-brac'; in addition, Sierakowski advised the purchase of 'a beautiful Chinese chest [...] to be bought for three hundred fr[ancs] and five vases [...] in celadon and two en relief, also inexpensive' (APP, sign. 265, Listy różnych osób do Stanisława Potockiego [Letters from various persons to Stanisław Potocki], vol. 5: 1814–1816, p. 31), and one from Biełkowski, dated 24 December 1819, this one also in Paris, in which he wrote: 'giving for a Christmas present a Chinese Vase /:which I am sending:/ and for which it will be more seemly to stand in the beautiful and numerous Wilanów Collection side by side with its compatriots than to yearn [for them], lonely, in my little House' (APP, sign. 265, Listy różnych osób do Stanisława Potockiego [Letters from various persons to Stanisław Potocki], vol. 7: 1819, p. 189).

29 Alkemade, 'Wybrane elementy wystroju apartamentu chińskiego', p. 59. As his inspiration, Danuta Zasławska (*Zasławska, Chinoiserie*, pp. 283–284) points to kiosks in William Chambers's book *Designs of Chinese buildings, furniture, dresses, machines, and utensils* (Londyn, 1757), Plate IV, and George-Louis Le Rouge's *Détails des nouveaux jardins à la mode (Jardins Anglo-chinois etc.)*, vol. 3 (Paris 1776–1787), Plate XXI. To these patterns, it is possible to add illustrations from J.G. Grohmann, *Ideenmagazin für Liebhaber von Gärten, englischen Anlagen und für Besitzer von Landgütern* (Leipzig, 1802), fasc. 46, Fig. VI; fasc. 48, Fig. III.

completed (Fig. 6).³⁰ The description of the planned painted decoration of the ceiling does not suggest an overall use of a 'Chinese' style, yet the appearance of the structure and the use of the term 'kiosk' in its description permit us to identify it as such. The structure thus named was 'a garden arbour on posts, in the Chinese style, built on a raised level'.³¹ As pointed out by Marzenna Ciechańska, the ceiling decoration included the motif of fantastic dragons in medallions; the same motif also featured, in a number of versions, in a few rooms on the palace's first floor,³² which may indicate the use of the same patterns.

The 'painter from Puławy Mr. Jaszczółt',³³ who according to Rastawiecki came to Wilanów in 1813 in order to furnish the Chinese Rooms, had cooperated with Aigner and Potocki for years. In Olesin, he supervised the construction works of the residential and utility buildings, and the making of the painted decoration thereof, in the years 1791, 1803–1804, 1806–1807 and 1811–1812.³⁴ He was staying at Olesin on 16 May 1808.³⁵ Jaszczółt's drawings held in the National Library are dated to ca. 1812.³⁶ A few among them may be linked with his designs for Olesin, even though many (including the only three bearing Jaszczółt's signature) are copied from the periodical *Ideenmagazin für Liebhaber von Gärten, englischen Anlagen und für Besitzer von Landgütern* published in Leipzig by Johann Gottfried Grohmann.³⁷ In addition, Jaszczółt su-

30 The roof was to be painted once again the following spring, with oil paint, and the 'spike' was to be gilt by the painter Dombrowski (AGWil, section I, Anteriora, sign. 302, Pamiętnik interessów... [Business journal], pp. 217–218).

31 T. Żebrowski, *Słownik wyrazów technicznych dotyczących się budownictwa* (Kraków, 1883), p. 188.

32 Ciechańska, *Papierowe obicia ścienne*, pp. 161–162.

33 The name in this spelling appears in the Business Journal in the context of the contract for works in Olesin in 1806–1807 (AGWil, section I, Anteriora, sign. 302, Pamiętnik interessów [Business Journal], pp. 201, 227–228).

34 Ibidem and T.S. Jaroszewski, 'Olesin', *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, vol. XXIV, 1962, no 1, p. 99.

35 On this date, five separate missives to or from Olesin were entered into the incoming post register, bearing the names of Jaszczółt and a whole group of important personages: Mrs Stanisław Potocki, Cellary the plenipotentiary, Kisieliński the bursar and Zabiello (AGWil, section XVII, Allegata Kasowe, sign. 62, Reiestr listów z Olesina na pocztę Markuszewską oddawanych i odbieranych w Książce pocztowej Klementowickiej zapisanych, od 15 Maia do 5 Czer. 1808 [Register of letters from Olesina submitted at the Markuszewo post office, entered in the Klementowice post book from 15 May to 5 June 1808], p. 531). It is possible that the completion of the 1806–1807 contract was delayed, since Aleksander, who came to Olesin with his children on 25 May, wrote that 'Olesin is lovelier than it was', but his father's house, in which they settled, was not yet fully furnished (APP, sign. 285, Listy hrabiego Alexandra Potockiego do rodziców i różnych osób od r. 1789 do 1832 r. [Letters of Count Aleksander to his parents and various persons from 1789 to 1832], p. 700).

36 Wojciech Jaszczółt and other creators in: Biblioteka Narodowa, *Ornaments de Jardine*. 3 Cahr., 1750–1850, sign. WAF.52.

37 Apart from one, captioned as 'intended for Olesin', many of those drawings are not real designs for buildings there, contrary to what has sometimes been suggested; cf.



Fig. 6

A Picnic at the Chinese Arbour, watercolour, 1850, photograph, National Institute of Cultural Heritage Archive

pervised construction works at Natolin in the years 1813–1814.³⁸ The records in *Wydatki kasy domowej* [Household purse expenses] indicate that in addition to those large-scale enterprises, from ca. September 1814

K. Gutowska-Dudek, *Rysunki z wilanowskiej kolekcji Potockich w zbiorach Biblioteki Narodowej*, vol. 2 (Warszawa, 1998), pp. 14–15. Three drawings bearing Jaszczold's name were identified by Tadeusz Stefan Jaroszewski as copied from the issues of *Ideen-magazin* from 1799: the hunting lodge of Prince Dessau by the road to Leipzig, from fasc. 29, Plate X; Gothic church designed by [?] Röber, from fasc. 32, Plate I; chapel in Park des Herzogs in Weimar, from fasc. 34, Plate V; cf. T.S. Jaroszewski, *O siedzibach neogotyckich w Polsce* (Warszawa, 1981), p. 118, note 24. Other drawings, similar but not bearing his name, showing picturesquely situated small timber houses, can be found in fasc. 21, Plate VII (1796), fasc. 40, Plate IV (1802), and fasc. 42, Plate VI (1802).

38 S. Lorentz, *Natolin* (Warszawa, 1970), pp. 59.

until March 1815 Jaszczółd was also the director of the *fabrica* at Stad-nice Wolickie,³⁹ that is, he supervised construction works at the Wolica estate, where utility buildings were being raised at the time.

It has been confirmed that Jaszczółd did work at the palace in 1813, when Potocki was not in Wilanów; this is in keeping with information gleaned from Rastawiecki. Letters from that year contain, among others, information that Jaszczółd lived in the palace and received a fixed salary of 120 zloty,⁴⁰ and that he was instructed to send Potocki a report on a previously assigned task.⁴¹ Later, he was also given permission to work outside the palace 'if he has some time left' for that,⁴² and received an assignment to inquire about a Titian painting he had previously sent out to be repaired.⁴³ It is not known whether the disposition was for a painting intended for the gallery, but it would nevertheless confirm at least part of the information on this painter's tasks in Wilanów as given by Rastawiecki. Jaszczółd's work at the palace must have been important, since Potocki emphasised keeping him on a fixed salary while at the same time he ordered his administrators to seek savings, reduce salaries and even dismiss some of their subordinates.⁴⁴

Yet Potocki was absent from Wilanów throughout that year. he had left for Cracow, together with the government, still in 1812; then he went to Dresden and Leipzig, where he was arrested after the battle, and did not return until July 1814, his health severely damaged. His

39 AGWil, section XVI, Kasa Generalna i Kasa Domowa Potockich, potem Branickich [The General Purse and Household Purse of the Potocki, later Branicki], sign. 469, Rachunki kasy domowej z roku od dnia 1 julii 1814-o do dnia 1 julii 1815 r. [Accounts of the household purse for the year from 1 July 1814 to 1 July 1815], pp. 9, 35.

40 In addition, Potocki ordered that the pantry boy be 'given to Father [?] Jan, not to Jaszczółt, as was [illegible; ordered?] at my wife's departure'; Kopia dyspozycji dla p. Kruczkowskiego, marzec (?) 1813 r. [Copy for Mr Kruczkowski, March (?) 1813]: APP, sign. 328, Brouillon listów w różnych interesach JW Hrabi Potockiego pisanych, zaczęty Roku 1812 [Draft book of various letters written re His Lordship Count Potocki's business, begun 1812], pp. 60–77.

41 Letter to the plenipotentiary Dominik Cellary, 7 June 1813 from Prague, APP, sign. 328, Brouillon listów, pp. 74–75.

42 Letters dated 7 and 8 December 1813 from Leipzig: APP, sign. 236.2, Listy Hr[abiego] Sta[nisława] Potockiego do syna, t. 2: od 1810 do 1821 r. [Letters of Count Stanisław Potocki to his son, vol. 2: from 1810 to 1821], pp. 148–159.

43 He writes to Aleksander: 'Ordonner a Jaszczółt de s'enquerir d'un tableau du Titian que J'ai donné a reparer a un homme, dont J'ai? Dieu merci oublié le nom, et tâches Cher Alexandre de rechercher le dit tableau. Le nom de l'homme me revient. Il s'apelle Mayer', i.e. 'To order Jaszczółt to enquire about the picture by Titian which I have given to be repaired to a man whose name I have, thank God, forgotten, and try, Dear Aleksander, to find that picture. The name of that man came to me. He is called Mayer'.

44 'The hardness of the times and the circumstances enforces a limitation, as much as possible, of our expenses'. List do Ochrońskiego (?) ekonoma Klementowickiego [Letter to Ochroński (?), steward of Klementowice], no location, no date (1 Dec. 1812?): APP, sign. 328, Brouillon listów, p. 14.

wife joined him around March 1813, having previously made final arrangements with his staff. His son Aleksander was also absent from Wilanów for most of that time.⁴⁵ The only person to have stayed there was his daughter-in-law, Anna Potocka née Tyszkiewicz, who may have seen to the completion of the works at the palace, similarly as she had been involved in the renovation of her father-in-law's suite in 1806.⁴⁶ Yet Anna had also other duties to attend to, mainly involving the children and the Natolin estate, and thus the circumstances attending this project were very unfavourable both in terms of organisation and the available financing.

From the contents of Potocki's letters and the wider context of his private situation, it may be inferred that, in the face of all the difficulties, the work on the Chinese Rooms may have been delayed and only completed after his return, still by Jaszczołd, who had been awaiting further instructions, in the meantime also dealing to some extent with the *fabrica* at the Wolica estate and, possibly, the picture gallery as well. A confirmation of this assumption may be sought in the entry from *Książka do zapisywania Expensy Pieniężney* [Book for the recording of money expenses] cited by Wojciech Fijałkowski, where it is stated that in October 1815 the carpenter Jakub Simmler received payment for work in the 'Chinese rooms'.⁴⁷ However, no document bearing this title has been found in the Wilanów Economic Archive. At that time, there was only one other Chinese Cabinet in the palace, on the ground floor, and the residential suite in the south wing did not yet have Chinese decoration. Although it may have contained elements of decoration in this style from the outset, it was referred to as the Voivode's Suite or the Suite of His Excellency the Master, while the name 'Chinese rooms' was later reserved for the upstairs rooms in the main body of the palace. It is possible, therefore, that finishing works on the interior continued until around 1815.

45 In March 1813, Aleksander left for Lvov, Austria and Germany, where he was still staying in August. Then the correspondence breaks off, so it is not known when exactly he returned. He was not present in Wilanów on 13 December 1813. The cities are given in letters in: APP, sign. 284, *Rękopisma i listy Aleksandra Potockiego od 1812 do 1818 r.* [Manuscripts and letters of Aleksander Potocki from 1812 to 1818], and APP, sign. 285, *Listy hrabiego Alexandra Potockiego do rodziców i różnych osób od r. 1789 do 1832 r.* [Letters of Aleksander Potocki to his parents and various persons from 1789 to 1832].

46 Ibidem, p. 529.

47 W. Fijałkowski, *Wnętrze pałacu w Wilanowie* (Warszawa, 1977), p. 123, note 14, after: Mat. Żr. 147, pp. 4, with the date: November 1814. Information on the payment to Simmler is found in Source Materials (*Materiały Źródłowe*, here: Mat. Żr. 147) przechowywanych in the Museum of King John III's Palace at Wilanów, containing notes from: AGWil, section XIX, *Administracja Dóbr Wilanowskich* [Administration of Wilanów Estate], *Książka do zapisywania Expensy Pieniężney, 1810–1823* [Book for the recording of money expenses, 1810–1823] (no signature given).

Painted decoration in the Chinese Room in 1821

Surviving contracts and accounts indicate that the years 1820–1821 in particular were a time of intensive decorating efforts and various works carried out by craftsmen associated with the collection of Asian art. Among others, the carpenter Simmler was involved in the making of new “Chinese” furniture stylised to look like bamboo, and Fisher and Roth re-worked, made or repaired numerous pieces of furniture, sculptures and vases.

In 1821, Wojciech Kiciński completed some painting works in the Chinese Room; their extent is known from an undated contract inserted among the documents covering the period between June and 7 August of that year.⁴⁸ Judging by the nature of the tasks described therein, the works involved, at least in part, a renovation of the existing décor: the painter was to freshen up the ‘slightly spoilt’ painted decoration of the plafond, cornices and reveals of the doors and windows. On the walls, he painted puce panels and yellow niches, and he gilt the little eagles, Chinese letters and ‘alagrecks’ on them.⁴⁹ He also touched up or painted afresh the leaf motifs on the background of a trellis, which ornamented the window reveals and the passage to the neighbouring room.

Some of the words used in the contract may have had more than one meaning. According to period dictionaries, a plafond (Polish: *plafon*) could, at least hypothetically, mean either a flat ceiling or a wooden one with beams,⁵⁰ while the panels (Polish: *filunki* or *filonki*), that is the flat elements between slats (the latter usually wooden and convex), could be plain surfaces of the wall (in which case *filunek* was just a different name for *otoczyna*⁵¹), but they could also be separate panels of wood or metal.⁵² Yet the variety of possible interpretations as to the appearance of these elements notwithstanding, they all were present, in one form or another, in the decoration of the Quiet Room; this is evident from the 1955 photographs. They were also present in the First Room and the Middle Room, but not all of them at the same time. Thus, if the contract concerned only the Quiet Room, no information is available as to the other two rooms having a ‘Chinese’ décor in the year it was signed.

Marzenna Ciechańska has established that the set of six *panneaux* with genre scenes cut out from an eighteenth-century Cantonese wallpaper (Wil.1877, Wil.1913–1917, Fig. 7) before 1832 may have been located

48 AGWil, section I, Anteriora, sign. 305, Kontrakty i Rachunki JWo Woiewody [Contracts and Bills of His Lordship the Voivode], p. 98.

49 From *à la grecque* (French), ornament of a line bent at right angles (Żebrowski, *Słownik wyrazów technicznych*, p. 3), nowadays known as the meander [author’s addendum].

50 Żebrowski, *Słownik wyrazów technicznych*, pp. 242, 283, 286.

51 A. Zdanowicz et al., *Słownik języka polskiego* (Wilno, 1857), p. 9.

52 Żebrowski, *Słownik wyrazów technicznych*, pp. 77, 219.

in the Middle Room instead of the dados known from twentieth-century photographs, but this could not be determined with certainty.⁵³ However, ceiling beams and ‘carpentry panelling’ had existed in that room since the times of Izabela Lubomirska; they were painted white and sky blue, with gilt slats.⁵⁴ It is not impossible that these elements were later re-used, altered to fit the requirements of the display of Asian art.

An additional context concerning mainly the Quiet Room and the First Chinese Cabinet is provided by another contract with Kiciński, this time dated 30 August 1821,⁵⁵ which contains a description of the required works, to be conducted in the private rooms on the first floor in the south wing of the palace.

The décor in the Green Bedroom was to be in the ‘Chinese’ style patterned on that in the Puce Room. As to the already discussed Quiet Room (which was also called the Puce Room), the renovation and new decoration of the ceiling and wall there had either been completed by that time or the works in both rooms were intended to be done in parallel. Stanisław Kostka Potocki died suddenly on 14 September 1821, before the terms of the contract were fulfilled. A later inventory does not record the Green Room (currently the Chinese Room with an Alcove) as having the described decoration.⁵⁶

The point in the contract whereby Kiciński undertook ‘to gild two frames with good gold, the oval bottom of each, while on the corners and around to paint Chinese ornaments [...]’ most probably concerned two of the four relief paintings today bearing inventory numbers Wil.1908–1911 together with their wooden frames (Wil.6244/1a, Wil.6244/3a, Wil.6244/10,⁵⁷ Wil.244/4a). The golden floral ornament on the red background of the frames of the relief landscapes makes a clear reference to the decoration of japanned



Fig. 7

One of six panneaux with medallions from an eighteenth-century Cantonese wallpaper, inv. no. Wil.1877

53 Alternatively, they could be located in the Yellow Room, mentioned in the next contract with Kiciński from the same year, pertaining to private rooms in the south wing of the palace, on the first floor; cf. M. Ciechańska, *Papierowe obicia ścienne*, pp. 138–139.

54 AGWil, section XXI, Zarząd Pałaców, Muzeum i Parków Wilanowskich [Administration of the Wilanów Palaces, Museum and Parks], sign. 171, Inwentarz Pałacu Wilanowskiego [Inventory of the Wilanów Palace], pp. 97.

55 AGWil, section I, Anteriora, sign. 305, Kontrakty i Rachunki [Contracts and Bills], pp. 108.

56 Kiciński completed a part of the works, including those in the White Room (today Hunting Room with an Alcove), in keeping with the recommendation to conduct them as fast as possible, as confirmed by surface removals occasioned by conservation works in 2005–2007; cf. Ciechańska, *Papierowe obicia ścienne*, p. 152.

57 Frame 6244/1a is made of a different kind of wood; it is probably a later reconstruction.

Fig. 8

The 'leaves with a little gallery' in the window reveals of the Quiet Room, 1955, photograph, detail, National Institute of Cultural Heritage Archive



Fig. 9

The 'little gallery in the doors' between the Middle Room and the Quiet Room, 1955, photograph, detail, National Institute of Cultural Heritage Archive





Fig. 10

Architecture with a Bridge,
panel with appliqués,
Wil.1911, obverse in
diffused light, condition after
conservation, 22 April 2022,
Archives of the Faculty of
Conservation and Restoration
of Works of Art, Academy of
Fine Arts in Warsaw

furniture made or renovated at that time by Fisher and Roth, especially the doors of the cabinets from the workshop of Martin Schnell, and the geometric motifs from a desk designed by Potocki. The relief panels were ultimately mounted on the walls of the First Cabinet on the Side of the Orangery (Fig. 10–11), but this seems to have happened after 1821, since in that year they are recorded during works conducted in the private rooms.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ The only mention of oval frames to have been found (although illegible handwriting precludes full certainty) comes from 26 August 1810, when Potocki, about to leave Warsaw for Olesin, left dispositions for the workmen. He ordered the carpenter Cybulski to 'carve two frames (?) in an oval, which Grundmann would take with him to the [Wilanów] Palace' (AGWil, section I, Anteriora, sign. 302, *Pamiętnik interesów...* [Business journal], pp. 264). Later, in 1821, in the *Kontrakty z rzemieślnikami* [Contracts with artisans], there is an undated note with a brief enumeration of works from the above-mentioned contract with Kiciński concerning the Chinese Room. In this note, the frames (Polish: *obramy*) are mentioned as *ekramy*, and in the nineteenth century the word *ekram* meant 'a small cover or hood; a fireside screen; a shield against light or flame' (Zdanowicz et al., *Słownik języka polskiego*, p. 292). This would suggest that relief paintings Wil.1908–1911 and their red frames were intended to serve in one of those utilitarian functions; however, considering the not very durable technique of their making and materials sensitive to changes in humidity and temperature, this seems hardly probable.



Fig. 11

Frame inv. no. Wil.6244/4a

The walls of that room were additionally decorated with a simple painting on plaster, whose dating is as yet not determined; it was discovered by Władysław Marconi in 1913 in the course of a conservator's intervention caused by water infiltration and mould growth (Fig. 12).⁵⁹ The

⁵⁹ First published in: Alkemade, 'Wybrane elementy wystroju apartamentu chińskiego', p. 70, Fig. 6, preserved in: AGAD AGWil, section XXI, Administracja dóbr wilanowskich [Administration of Wilanów Estate], sign. 166, Korespondencja admin.-gospodarcza dotycząca pałacu i Muzeum w Wilanowie [Administrative and economic correspondence re the palace and Museum at Wilanów], p. 41.



Fig. 12

A photograph
of the north-east corner
of the First Chinese Cabinet,
1913, signed by Władysław
Marconi, Central Archives
of Historical Records
in Warsaw

photograph shows a fragment of painted decoration on the walls, with light-coloured *panneaux* bearing an illegible ornamentation bordered by black frames with a geometric frieze. The shape of these pale *panneaux* conforms to the shape of the oval panels inv. no. Wil.1908–1911 with rectangular frames, and the smaller elongated paintings on silk from the set inv. no. Wil.1904–1907 (Fig. 13). It is known that in 1832 these paintings hung on the walls of the Cabinet on their own, set in narrow, painted wooden frames stylised to look like bamboo,⁶⁰ so the black frames on the plaster may possibly have been either a design for the intended decoration or the initial background to these paintings.

⁶⁰ They are painted also on the outside, metal hanging hooks are extant on the stretcher frames, whereas the description in this inventory mentions only 'landscapes on wooden stretchers', and not a panelling extant in the Museum, which occupies all the walls; the dados in the Middle Room, in contrast, are described precisely as such, by means of the term *lamperie* (=dados).



Fig. 13

A Genre Scene, painting on silk, inv. no. Wil.1904, after conservation

The assumption that the above-described painted decoration on the walls can be dated to ca. 1821 at the earliest is supported by two crucial arguments. From the contract with Kiciński it transpires that works on the decoration of the oval relief panels was only ongoing at that time. In addition, if in the place of the rectangular spaces at the bottom there had been the same paintings that are extant today, this fact would date the painting on plaster to 1816 at the earliest, since chrome yellow and Schweinfurt green, which were employed in the making of the paintings inv. no. Wil.1904–1907, came into use only in that year.⁶¹ This would concurrently explain why the contracts with Kiciński contain practically no mention of the Cabinets: they would have been painted for the first time ca. 1821 or even later.

The years 1821 to ca. 1832

The first very detailed description of the Chinese Rooms after Potocki's death was published by Łukasz Gołębiowski in 1827. This was not his first publication that considered the Wilanów residence, but in the earlier edition of the *Opis historyczno-statystyczny miasta stołecznego Warszawy* [The historical and statistical description of the capital city of Warsaw] from 1826 Gołębiowski discussed the palace in a rather brief manner, omitting the Chinese Apartment altogether.⁶² In the extended and corrected edition issued in the following year its description is much longer.

In fact, Gołębiowski began the description of the palace interiors with the Chinese Rooms, even before he focused on the famous Wilanów painting gallery. This may have been because the suite was a new attraction, only recently made available to visitors by Stanisław Kostka Potocki's

61 V. Otero-Matias, *Historically Accurate Reconstructions and Characterisation of Chrome Yellow Pigments*, Masters thesis, University of Lisbon 2010, computer printout, core.ac.uk/download/pdf/303713046.pdf (accessed 10 Nov. 2022), p. 3; P. Mactaggart, A. Mactaggart, 'Green Pigments', in: *Pigment ID using Polarised Light Microscopy*, 2007, academicprojects.co.uk/green-pigments/ (accessed 12 Nov. 2022).

62 Ł. Gołębiowski, 'Opis historyczno-statystyczny miasta stołecznego Warszawy', in: *Kalendarzyk polityczny na 1826 rok*, publ. J. Netto (Warszawa, 1826), pp. 647, 656.

widow and son following the completion of decoration works after his death. Gołębiowski mentioned that the damage to the Apartment in the south wing, suffered during a fire in December 1824, had already been repaired. In June 1825, Aleksandra Potocka bought upholsteries for the Chinese Rooms.⁶³ In the same month, Wojciech Kiciński received the considerable sum of 1460 zloty for painting the Parlour, Bedroom and Flame Room. Other works continued until October 1826.⁶⁴ This would narrow down the timeframe for Gołębiowski's putative visit to sometime in the second half of 1826 or perhaps 1827 before his *Opisanie historyczno-statystyczne miasta Warszawy* went into print. It is conceivable that the opening of the rooms to the public may have occurred in this period.

Gołębiowski noted that Aleksandra Potocka gave him access to the catalogue of the palace's paintings and furnishings.⁶⁵ His account is enthusiastic, filled with admiration for the collection. Gołębiowski mentions four rooms, perhaps treating the First and the Second Cabinet together due to their uniform décor (or perhaps one of the rooms was not accessible yet). He describes the contents of the Apartment as a whole, without the division into particular spaces. In addition to the long list of objects, pieces of furniture, articles of clothing and accessories, he includes the information that the place contained a number of 'makata'⁶⁶ of puce velvet, embroidered, or silk ones in various colours, or dark ones, yellow and blue sewn over with silks, and still other upholsteries are of Chinese percales or painted papers', as well as 'pictures, drawings, mirrors'.⁶⁷ He does not mention painted decoration at all, even though the contracts with Kiciński indicate it had to be present at least in the Quiet Room.

The 1832 inventory contains descriptions of textiles that can be linked with the *makata* fabrics mentioned by Gołębiowski: 'Yellow satin embroidered in many-coloured flowers, 6½ ells, *makata* of dark blue satin with Chinese golden stripes [...] 3 lengths, *makata* of nut-brown satin in gold and many-coloured flowers and patterns [...], *makata* of puce velvet embroidered in gold, with one velvet band in green,

63 AGWil, section XXI, Zarząd Pałaców, Muzeum i Parków Wilanowskich [Administration of the Wilanów Palaces, Museum and Parks], sign. I.302, Wyrachowanie Wyłożonych Kosztów na restauracyę Pokoj przez pożar Ognia w Pałacu Willanowskim uszkodzonych w dniu 28 Grudnia 1824 r. [Assessment of costs incurred for the restoration of the rooms damaged by fire in the Wilanów Palace on 28 December 1824], p. 14.

64 Ibidem, pp. 11–16.

65 Ł. Gołębiowski, *Opisanie historyczno-statystyczne miasta Warszawy* (Warszawa, 1827), p. 242.

66 In the nineteenth century, the word *makata* denoted fabrics, usually embroidered and multicoloured, used for upholstering both walls and furniture (Zdanowicz et al., *Słownik języka polskiego*, p. 801).

67 Gołębiowski, *Opisanie historyczno-statystyczne*, pp. 232–233.

huge puce *makata* of silk with broad sky-blue band, embroidered in gold [...].⁶⁸ There would certainly not be enough of those fabrics to cover all the walls.

Even though *makata* fabrics were used also for upholstering pieces of furniture, the fact that they are mentioned in one group with textile or ‘paper’ ones may suggest we are dealing with a wall decoration. Such application of many richly decorated, multicoloured *makata* fabrics was not a typical way of decorating Chinese Rooms in other residences of the era. It is also possible that Gołębiowski enumerated those fabrics solely on the basis of the catalogue given to him by Countess Potocka.

Yet if the *makata* fabrics did indeed hang on the walls, this may have been just a temporary decorative arrangement, applied because the works interrupted by Potocki’s death needed to be completed, and a way to delay the finishing of Chinese Rooms in the face of the expenses incurred to refurbish the Voivode’s Apartment after a fire; this temporary arrangement would have preceded the final, or nearly final, appearance of the Rooms as known from the 1832 inventory. In the years 1829–1830 large-scale works were conducted there again. First, in December 1829, the carpenter Cybulski repaired the flooring there; ‘glass for the Chinese Rooms and the Great Hall’ was purchased in April 1830, in June a locksmith installed metal fittings on fifteen windows there and completed some other works (the Cabinets and three rooms had the total of fourteen windows), in July ‘nails and iron’ were purchased for them, and Wojciech Kiciński was again engaged to do some paintwork in August. For the job of ‘the painting of three Chinese Rooms’ he received the payment of 1400 zloty, which almost equal his already-mentioned fee of 1825, which he received for laying the painted decoration in three rooms in the private apartments damaged by fire, which job had to be done from scratch.⁶⁹ The same register of expenses indicates that in 1830 Kiciński received a similarly large payment, 1000 zloty, for painting the ‘Cabinets by the Chinese Rooms’.⁷⁰

Dictionaries of the era explain the word ‘cabinet’ (Polish: *kabinet*) in more than one way. In the context of interiors, it could be used as a synonym to the word *gabinet*,⁷¹ which meant a room devoted to, for

68 AGWil, section XXI, Zarząd Pałaców, Muzeum i Parków Wilanowskich [Administration of the Wilanów Palaces, Museum and Parks], sign. 174, Inwentarz Pałacu Wilanowskiego [Inventory of the Wilanów Palace], p. 76.

69 AGWil, section XXI, Zarząd Pałaców, Muzeum i Parków Wilanowskich [Administration of the Wilanów Palaces, Museum and Parks], sign. I.300 Książka do zapisywania Expensy Pieniężney na Pałac Wilanowski od 1go Lipca 1823 do 1go lipca 1828 roku [Book for the recording of money expenses for the Wilanów Palace from 1 July 1823 to 1 July 1828], pp. 112, 116, 121–122. The document covers the period up to April 1831.

70 Ibidem, pp. 122.

71 M.A. Troc, *Nouveau dictionnaire François, Allemand et Polonois*, vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1779), pp. 369.

instance, private studies or to keeping and viewing interesting objects. In many nineteenth-century dictionaries, this word appears as a counterpart to *cabinet* in other European languages.⁷² It also sometimes occurred as signifying a cupboard with many drawers;⁷³ yet the pieces of furniture in the Wilanów collection which today are described as *kabinet* in the inventories of 1832 and 1837 are called *szaflka*, a small cupboard. Since on that occasion Kiciński was not commissioned to do any paintwork concerning furniture and the name of ‘Chinese Rooms’ was in the period 1821–1837 applied only to the First, Middle and Quiet rooms, it is not inconceivable that the *kabinety* (plural) in Kiciński’s contract were the First Chinese Cabinet and the Second Chinese Cabinet, treated separately.

The Chinese Rooms after 1832

In the inventories of 1832 and 1837 the Chinese Apartment was described in enough detail to permit the identification in today’s collection of many object mentioned therein. At that time, the Apartments were already fully furnished and decorated. Even though the description of walls and ceilings was rather general, their appearance – with the exception of the First Cabinet and the ceiling of the Quiet Room, the latter repainted by Antoni Strzałecki in 1884 – corresponded to what is seen in twentieth-century photographs.

No letters or guests’ accounts written after 1832 have been found that would describe the Chinese Apartment. Subsequent descriptions of the décor and furnishings of Chinese Rooms published in guidebooks and encyclopaedias are, in essence, copies or abridged and edited passages from *Opisanie ... Warszawy*. Mentions of the puce velvet *makata* fabrics drawn from Gołębiowski’s description appeared in those texts until the 1850s.⁷⁴ As in the first half of the nineteenth century, guidebooks and other publications usually only mentioned the Chinese Rooms along the rest of Wilanów’s attractions and in many cases omitted them

72 E.g. in Żebrawski, *Słownik wyrazów technicznych*, p. 80. It does not occur in the context of such pieces of furniture as chests of drawers or wardrobes.

73 J.W. Bandtke, *Nouveau dictionnaire portatif françois, polonois et allemand. Nouvelle édition augmentée ... Nowy słownik kieszonkowy francuzko-polsko-niemiecki. Nowa edycja poprawiona*, vol. 1 (Breslau, 1820), p. 144.

74 Apart from publications where the rooms are no more than mentioned, e.g.: [Anon.], ‘Willanów’, *Lwowianin, czyli Zbiór Potrzebnych i Użytecznych Wiadomości*, vol. 1 (Lwów, 1837), p. 44; K. Kucz, *Pamiętniki miasta Warszawy z roku 1853* (Warszawa, 1854), p. 242; A. Połujański, *Opisanie lasów królestwa Polskiego i gubernij Zachodnich Cesarstwa Rosyjskiego pod względem historycznym, statystycznym i gospodarczym* (Warszawa, 1858), p. 65 and later: F. Fryze, *Najnowszy przewodnik po Warszawie* (Warszawa, 1873), p. 90; M. Baliński, T. Lipiński, *Starożytna Polska pod względem historycznym, jeograficznym i statystycznym opisana*, vol. 1 (Warszawa, 1885), pp. 563–564.

altogether.⁷⁵ Longer, original descriptions appeared only in the texts by Skimborowicz (1877) and Czajewski (1893).⁷⁶ A number of subsequent inventories was compiled from the 1860s onwards, but the appearance of the walls was not taken into account in them. The last more extensive stage of the modernisation of the Apartment's décor to be undertaken were the above-mentioned works by Antoni Strzałecki in 1884.

Later, the damage incurred by this part of the palace as a result of the war caused the Chinese Rooms to be closed to the public in 1947; in the following year Benedykt Tyszkiewicz described their condition as 'dramatic'. The 1955 reports by Jerzy Maniewski and Czesław Stefański mention 'the absence of glass in the windows, the lack of heating, dampness and mechanical damage'. Despite the voices raised in favour of preserving this suite,⁷⁷ the final photographic documentation was made (now held in the National Institute of Cultural Heritage Archive), all the furnishings were dismantled, the wall paintings were knocked down, and the Chinese Apartment of Stanisław Kostka Potocki ceased to be.

Conclusion

The years until 1832 remain the least researched period in the history of the Chinese Apartment on the upper floor in the main body of the palace. Thus, it still remains to be established whether it is possible that the first works were conducted there ca. 1813–1814 with the participation of Wojciech Jaszczołd, who at that time was completing some unspecified commission in the palace.⁷⁸ However, it has proved possible to ascertain some new facts, as well as to partially verify earlier hypotheses concerning the chronology of works undertaken in those rooms and to pose new ones, thus producing a more complete picture of the early history of the Chinese Apartment established by Stanisław Kostka Potocki.

75 As in: J. Słowaczyński, *Polska w kształcie dykcyonarza historyczno-statystyczno-jeograficznego* (Paris, 1833–1838), p. 448; *La Pologne historique, littéraire, monumentale et pittoresque*, ed. L. Chodźko (Paris, 1836), p. 70; S.H. Plater, *Mała Encyklopedia Polska*, vol. 1 (Leszno–Gniezno, 1847), p. 535, where four Chinese Rooms are mentioned. This number arises most probably from treating the Chinese Cabinets as one room, the way it had been done by Gołębiowski.

76 H. Skimborowicz, *Willanów. Zbiór widoków i pamiątek* (Warszawa, 1877), pp. 123–124; Czajewski, *Ilustrowany przewodnik po Warszawie i okolicach*, pp. 87–96.

77 A. Ekielska-Mardal, 'Konserwacja dekoracji ściennych apartamentu chińskiego w Wilanowie w latach pięćdziesiątych XX wieku. Dyskusje i dokumenty', *Studia Wilanowskie*, vol. 17, 2010, pp. 31–32.

78 In a contract referring to the Chinese Room the painting of puce panels was mentioned in two different points, once, as it seems, in the context of the surface of the wall, and the other time in that of the landscape frames. Apart from that, the framing of landscapes is first described as slats (*listwy*), later as panels (*filonki*). It is a matter for consideration whether the landscapes in question were located in one room or two neighbouring ones, although this may be a matter of some ineptitude in the wording of the contract.

The contents of contracts signed with the painter Kiciński may suggest that at least the rudiments of the Chinese Apartment housing a rich collection existed, in an unspecified form, in this part of the palace before 1821. The Quiet Room may have been the first space where the wall décor was designed and produced in 1821 (or, in part, even earlier) with the intention of exhibiting the Asian collection there. Most of the wall décor of at least some of the rooms described by Gołębiowski (four or five, if he treated the Cabinets collectively) was most probably produced before 1827. It is possible that Gołębiowski's account was written soon after they had been opened to the public. The subsequent stage of large-scale works in those rooms was carried out in 1829–1830, when Kiciński received large payments for 'the painting of three Chinese Rooms' and the 'Cabinets by the Chinese Rooms', the latter possibly being the First and the Second Cabinet.

Further research perspectives

Some of the most important sources of information on the Chinese Rooms, that is the contracts and bills, are dispersed over many units of the Wilanów Economic Archive. It is greatly probable that further research will lead to the discovery of new materials of this kind (especially among the expenses of the Household Purse, the Palace Purse, and the private 'purses' of Stanisław Kostka, Aleksandra and Aleksander) which hopefully will make it possible to determine a more precise chronology for the process of establishing the exhibition of Far Eastern art in that part of the palace.

The letters of Stanisław Kostka, Aleksandra, Aleksander and Anna extant in the Potocki Public Archive, as well as the documents held in, among others, Allegata Kasowe (Financial Attachments) archive or Potocki's private files in the Wilanów Economic Archive, clearly indicate that the dispositions concerning construction and decoration works were mostly given directly to the workmen or to work supervisors, whereas the details, such as the finishing or the choice of colours, Potocki would often leave to his wife or daughter-in-law. The circumstances of the year 1813 naturally prevented him from writing his Business Journal and he was sending out much fewer letters; also, his wife and son were not in Wilanów at the time, whereas previously the latter had been sending his father detailed reports of events at home, including the progress of the works carried out in the palace. It is possible that the details regarding the conduct of those works should therefore be sought in the letters from Stanisław Kostka's daughter-in-law Anna Potocka. In addition, the count's correspondence with the workmen, such as Wojciech Jaszczołd, or reports of work supervisors have so far not been found.

The chance of there existing some as yet undiscovered printed texts in which the Chinese Rooms before 1832 would be described in detail is

rather small. Newspapers and periodicals, on the other hand, are still unexplored in this respect, and so are the memoirs of visitors to Wilanów, which too occasionally contain information on the palace's interiors; a case in point is the memoir of Ludwik Szaniecki, who in the year 1809 was shown round the royal rooms 'as well as the newly furnished apartments, in which both taste and fine arts hold court'.⁷⁹

In addition, new conservation research and conservation procedures on the existing elements of the furnishings – especially of the First Cabinet – which have survived almost in their entirety may also further our knowledge of the history of the Apartment in the period before the 1832 inventory was compiled.

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Warsaw and the Museum of King John III's Palace at Wilanów, she conducted research and conservation works concerning four relief paintings inv. no. Wil.1908–1911 executed in mixed techniques, formerly in the First Chinese Cabinet. Her academic and private conservation work focuses on pieces of this kind, which combine a variety of materials and techniques, mainly painting and textile ones.

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Research on the identification of the composition of samples taken from the Wil.1911 painting was carried out under an agreement between the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów and the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and financed from the Academy's own funds in 2019–2022. The results of the research on the Wil.1904 painting were achieved under an agreement with the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów for the conservation of this object in 2023.