

On 30 June 2022, a new permanent exhibition was officially opened in the twelve halls of the northern wing of the Wawel Castle, bearing many references – one of them being its name – to one of the most important institutions of the Kingdom of Poland and subsequently the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania. The period of three years that has passed since the exhibition's opening offers sufficient grounds for a retrospection, stimulated by the numerous and variously expressed opinions on the New Crown Treasury. This paper focuses on two key issues: firstly, the artefacts belonging to the Wawel Museum's on display in the Treasury and the way they have evolved over the past century, and secondly, or perhaps mainly, their derivatives: the various concepts for displaying precious objects in a location that used to be the centre of the monarch's residence in the times of the last Piasts and during the reign of the Jagiellon dynasty.

The period of Old Poland

This paper does not concern the detailed history of the Crown Treasury, which has been a part of the Wawel Castle since at least 1475, the date when its oldest surviving inventory was compiled. The final chapter in the history of the institution which until the end of the eighteenth century was one of the clear marks of the Commonwealth's sovereignty, as well as Cracow's status as a capital city, is linked to the looting carried out in 1795 by order of King Frederick William II of Prussia, who thereby wished to symbolically seal the downfall of Poland.¹

It needs to be noted that since the time of the Renaissance modernisation of the Wawel Castle, the entrance to the Treasury has led through the so-called Treasurer's Vestibule in the eastern part of the castle's northern wing to the right, into the rooms known as the Treasurer's Cellars, which housed the Treasury Registry and the Crown Archives.² The most valuable pieces were stored in chests, others in the *armaria*, that is, cupboards lining the walls, or on tables, mainly in the Gothic chamber in the corner

THE NEW CROWN TREASURY AT THE WAWEL CASTLE. THE GLORY OF THE COMMONWEALTH IN TWELVE SCENES

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1 No modern monograph on the Crown Treasury has so far been written, while existing publications require numerous corrections and amendments; see F. Kopera, *Dzieje skarbcza koronnego, czyli insygniów i klejnotów koronnych Polski* (Kraków, 1904); M. Myśliński, *Klejnoty Rzeczypospolitej. Zawartość Skarbcza Koronnego na Wawelu w świetle jego inwentarzy z lat 1495–1792* (Warszawa, 2007); K.J. Czyżewski, 'Wawelskie zbiory militariów', *Studia do Dziejów Dawnego Uzbrojenia i Ubioru Wojskowego*, vol. 14, 2015, pp. 271–299; D. Nowacki, 'Skarbiec Koronny na Wawelu – utracony Skarb Królestwa i jego muzealne odsłony w XX i XXI wieku', *Renowacje i Zabytki*, 2021, no. 1, pp. 80–88.

2 A. Fischinger, M. Fabiański, *Dzieje budowy renesansowego zamku na Wawelu około 1504–1548* (Kraków, 2009), *passim* (following the index).

of the so-called second and third Renaissance palaces. This room was built in the mid-fourteenth century as the centre of a ceremonial residential suite on the second floor of the Hen's Foot section of the castle (currently the Hall of Casimir the Great). In the neighbouring residential chamber in the northern hall of the Danish Tower, also built in the fourteenth century (now known as the Hall of Jadwiga and Jagiełło), the crown insignia, enclosed in sealed chests and boxes, were stored from the second decade of the sixteenth century onwards. By virtue of the 1501 privilege issued by Alexander Jagiellon and several regulations, including a number of provisions in the constitution of the Piotrków Sejm of 1562 and the Coronation Sejm of 1576, access to the Treasury was reserved for the crown treasurer, assisted by senators: the castellan of Kraków and the voivodes of Kraków, Sandomierz, Poznań, Kalisz, Vilna (today: Vilnius) and Troki (today: Trakai). Each change of the treasurer was to result in a new inventory of the Treasury being taken.

The elective monarchs, swearing the *Pacta conventa*, would vow to look after the Treasury, to augment it and to seek the return of jewels that had been pawned. The process of pawning systematically depleted the treasury of the Commonwealth of valuables, most notable of which was the vast collection of jewels once owned by Sigismund Augustus, which was lost in this manner in the seventeenth century. Many monarchs, including Stephen Báthory, Sigismund III, and, in particular, John Casimir, or even John III Sobieski, treated the state institution as their personal purse, thus contributing to the loss of precious objects; this process is, in many instances, documented by sources.³

On the eve of the looting of the Treasury by the Prussians, between 18 and 21 April 1792, 'the Commissioners of the Treasury of the Commonwealth of Both Nations [...] went to the castle and placed all the deposits from the Treasury on several tables in the castle hall; which jewels anyone with a ticket was allowed to see'.⁴

A museum reference to the historic institution in the twentieth and early twenty-first century

Let us briefly characterise the first of the issues signalled at the outset, namely, the process of collecting the valuables that constitute the display in the New Crown Treasury today.

The success of the perfectly conducted efforts to reclaim Polish works of art from the Soviet Union, carried out based on the provisions of the Treaty of Riga, gave rise to the idea of referring to the tradition of the Crown Treasury in the museum collection displayed at the Wawel Castle, in the rooms historically occupied by the Treasury. Thanks to the commitment of many scholars, notably Marian Morelowski and Stanisław

³ See note 1.

⁴ M. Rożek, *Polskie koronacje i korony* (Kraków, 1987), p. 91.



Fig. 1

Hall of Casimir the Great with
the Crown Treasury display,
1933, The Wawel Royal
Castle Visual Documentation
Archive

Świerz-Zaleski, as well as Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz, who designed a part of the modest exhibition that opened in 1930 (Fig. 1), the display referred to the historic Treasury, even though at that time the only artefacts connected with it were the castle interiors, severely damaged by the Austrian army in the nineteenth century, and the Szczerbiec sword and the court (state) flag made for the wedding of Sigismund Augustus to Catherine of Austria in 1553.⁵ For these two artefacts, Świerz-Zaleski and Szyszko-Bohusz created a *sui generis* shrine in the Hall of Jadwiga and Jagiełło. The Hall of Casimir the Great, in turn, housed a modest assortment of jewels, mostly presented in wall-mounted cabinets, although there were also a few free-standing display cases of questionable beauty. The most important pieces on show were objects made of gold, recently reclaimed from the USSR, granted by government committees to the Wawel Castle in 1928 and brought there from Warsaw in the aftermath of the Exhibition of Reclaimed State Collections.⁶ Most of these pieces came from the Radziwiłł family treasury in Nieśwież (today: Nyasvizh), which was confiscated by the Russians between 1812 and 1813.

⁵ *Najpiękniejsze w Skarbcu. Pamiątki królewskie*, ed. D. Nowacki (Kraków, 2022), pp. 12–17, 172, cat. no. 1 (K.J. Czyżewski), pp. 24–25, 172, cat. no. 2 (M. Ozga).

⁶ W. Suchodolski, *Wystawa Rewindykacyjna Zbiorów Państwowych* (Warszawa, 1929).

During archival research conducted by the Polish reclaim delegation, the Nieśwież provenance was confirmed for eight silver pieces (Fig. 2), a pair of ivory plaques, and some pieces of ceremonial weaponry and military equipment from the armoury of King John III in Żółkiew (today: Zhovkva).⁷ These items became the starting point for a new exhibition at the Wawel Castle.

On the occasion of the anniversary of the Relief of Vienna celebrated in 1933, following their conservation at the Wawel Castle, the most valuable of the Nieśwież pieces were displayed in a room in the tower of Sigismund III, adjacent to the Hall of Casimir the Great. A display case, amply lit by a pair of windows, was placed in the centre of the Hall, containing the mantle of a Chevalier of the Order of the Holy Spirit presented to John III by the legates of Louis XIV at the collegiate church in Żółkiew on 30 November 1676. Displayed next to it was the consecrated sword and hat awarded to the king by Innocent XI under the *breve* of 25 March 1684, presented to him in Żółkiew on 25 July 1684.⁸ Also on display, loaned from the Potocki family of Krzeszowice, was a blade of a consecrated sword, bearing an inscription, the date 1675 and the coat of arms of Clement X, believed at the time to have been gifted to Michał Korybut.⁹

In the 1930s, dozens of gold objects, clocks, textiles and pieces of weaponry and military equipment were acquired for the Treasury and periodically displayed in the chambers on the first and second floor of the Castle. This happened mainly thanks to the determination of Stanisław Świerż-Zaleski, who successfully convinced many owners of historical memorabilia scattered in the farthest corners of Poland to the idea of reviving the Crown Treasury, including Witold Cieński from Ossowce, Dobiesław Kwilecki from Kwilicz, the Ledóchowski family of Lipnica Murowana, Henryk Loewenfeld from Chrzanów, the Lubomirski family of Kruszyna, Stanisław Łącki from Posadowo, Włodzimierz Łukasiewicz and Róża Łukasiewicz (née Dzwonkowska) from Lvov, Maria Ogińska from Poznań, wife of Michał Ogiński, the Potocki family from Krzeszowice, Maria Szembekowa née Fredro from Siemianice, the Tarnowski family from Śniatynka, and even Szymon Szwarc from Vienna and the Tyszkiewicz family from Paris.¹⁰ In fact, Prince Adam Ludwik Czartoryski, who possessed the pieces of military equipment, banners and tomb *spolia* taken from Wawel by Tadeusz Czacki, one of the last

7 The abundance of publications on these artefacts guided the decision to limit the scholarly apparatus to the necessary minimum.

8 *Najpiękniejsze w Skarbcu*, pp. 100–121, 174, cat. no. 22 (M. Piwocka).

9 *Odsiecz wiedeńska 1683. Wystawa jubileuszowa w Zamku Królewskim na Wawelu w trzechsetlecie bitwy. Tło historyczne i materiały źródłowe*, eds K. Kuczman, A. Franaszek (Kraków, 1990), vol. I, p. 184, cat. no. 223 (J.T. Petrus).

10 S. Świerż-Zaleski, 'Jak rosła Skarbiec i Zbrojownia w Zamku Królewskim na Wawelu', *Światowid*, vol. 15, 1938, no. 7, 12 Feb. 1938, p. 4.



Fig. 2

Marian Morelowski, drawing of a cup from the treasury of the Radziwiłł family in Nieśwież, Petrograd, 1923, Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw (AGAD), Marian Morelowski Papers

custodians of the Crown Treasury,¹¹ was the only person to consistently undermine the sense of reviving the Crown Treasury.

The odyssey of the Wawel treasures, evacuated from Cracow in the early days of the Second World War and returned from Canada in 1959 and 1961, is well known. The German rule over the Wawel Castle resulted in the historic rooms being converted into a casino. Both at the time and after the end of the war, the Gothic interiors were furnished with a modest set of furniture, sculptures and pottery.

11 R. Skowron, 'O powrót na Wawel królewskich pamiątek ze zbiorów książąt Czartoryskich', *Studia Wawiliana*, vol. 11/12, 2002/2003, pp. 274–279.

Plans for an enlarged exhibition of the Treasury were prepared even before the return of the Canadian deposit, based on a concept by Jerzy Szablowski and Andrzej Fischinger. The exhibition opened on 19 September 1959, just after the first batch of treasures was recovered, and its permanent opening took place in 1960. The display cases and the harmonious layout of the exhibits, based on the principle of *amor vacui*, were designed by Adam Młodzianowski, who was also responsible for the graphic design of the posters and printed guides that set the standards for Wawel publications for many years to come (Fig. 3–4).

Among the displayed artefacts which during the long-standing directorship of Prof. Szablowski (between 1950 and 1989) constituted one of Poland's most important collections of valuables,¹² the ones particularly worth mentioning are the ceremonial sword of Sigismund I, stolen by the Prussians from the historical Treasury in 1795 and returned to Poland in 1962 as a gift from a circle of Poles gathered around the General Sikorski Institute in London, as well as a chalice founded by Casimir the Great for the shrine of Saint Adalbert in Trzemeszno, donated by Julian Godlewski from Lugano to commemorate the millennium of Poland's baptism.¹³ Silverware from the family collection in Krasiczyn, donated by Michał Sapieha after its discovery in a cache at the Wawel Castle in 1976, is notable among the items on deposit.¹⁴ Prof. Szablowski's strenuous efforts to obtain funding and attract suitable offers resulted in a great many purchases, in many cases of world-class pieces of goldware, for instance platters from the tableware of Sigismund III, the eagle-shaped vessel from the service of John Casimir Vasa (from Andrzej S. Ciechanowiecki in London), a gold mace linked to Prince Władysław Sigismund Vasa (the pearl of Bruno Konczakowski's collection held in Cieszyn) or an palace altarpiece of Augsburg make from the Potocki residence in Péchar, believed to be a field altar once owned by John III (purchased from Pelagia Potocka in Cracow).¹⁵ Despite the bleak era

12 J. Szablowski, 'Skarbiec wawelski coraz piękniejszy', *Polska*, 1974, no. 4 (236), pp. 30–31.

13 *Najpiękniejsze w Skarbcu*, pp. 18–23, cat. no. 2 (K.J. Czyżewski); D. Nowacki, 'Kasimirus Dei Gratia Rex Poloniae procuravit – złotnicze fundacje Kazimierza Wielkiego w świetle dotychczasowych badań', in: *Umarł król. 650. rocznica śmierci Kazimierza Wielkiego*, ed. P. Tysza, M. Zawadzki (Warszawa, 2020), pp. 60–63.

14 *Sapiehowie. Kolekcjonerzy i mecenasi. Katalog wystawy 4 października – 31 grudnia 2011*, eds S. Link-Lenczowska, J. Winiewicz-Wolska (Kraków, 2011), pp. 299–305, cat. no. 141–143 (D. Nowacki); *Świat Rembrandta. Artyści. Mieszczanie. Odkrywczy*, red. A. Jakubowska (Warszawa, 2021), pp. 286–287, cat. no. VIII.13 (D. Nowacki).

15 *Najpiękniejsze w Skarbcu*, pp. 42–45, 172, cat. no. 8 (D. Nowacki), pp. 64–69, 173, cat. no. 13 (R. Ochędusko), pp. 94–97, 174, cat. no. 20 (D. Nowacki); Ch. Kowalski, *Die Augsburger Prunkkabinette mit Uhr von Heinrich Eichler d. Ä. (1637–1719) und seiner Werkstatt* (Berlin, 2011), pp. 43–45, 56, 82, 161–164, 203, cat. no. 10, Figs 61–62, 146–152, 154.



Fig. 3

Hall of Casimir the Great as arranged in 1960, photo 1980, The Wawel Royal Castle Visual Documentation Archive



Fig. 4

Hall with ceremonial arms in the Crown Treasury as arranged in 1960, photo 1995, The Wawel Royal Castle Visual Documentation Archive

of the socialist economy, even purchases on the Western European antiquarian market were successfully made, as evidenced by a jewel in the shape of an eagle seated on a branch acquired at Premisela & Hamburger in Amsterdam in 1963.¹⁶ The former curator of the goldware collection, Andrzej Fischinger, made systematic changes to the exhibition as new exhibits arrived, and implemented a programme of scientific surveys of the collection which constituted a paragon of research at the time.¹⁷

The directorship of Prof. Jan Ostrowski (between 1989 and 2019) coincided with the decapitalisation of the Treasury's exhibition infrastructure, increasingly out of step with contemporary conservation requirements. It was also a period characterised by an increase in the number of excellent pieces condemned to being kept in storage due to the shortage of exhibition space. After 1990, the museum could take advantage of the opportunities provided by the adjustment of the value of the Polish currency and its newly acquired convertibility. The intensive search efforts, as well as the availability of funding for the purchase of loaned pieces and for systematic purchases – including, from 1994, directly at auctions at Sotheby's in Geneva and later also at the antiquarian market and in auction houses of Germany, Austria, France and the UK¹⁸ – made it possible to complete and significantly expand the collection. Since then, it is possible to speak of a consistent purchasing policy focused on gold artefacts dating from the sixteenth

16 D. Nowacki, M. Piwocka, 'Orzeł w Skarbcu Koronnym na Wawelu. Ze studiów nad klejnotami doby manieryzmu', *Studia Waweliana*, vol. 6/7, 1997/1998, pp. 157–177.

17 One of its results was the publication of the study by A. Fischinger, D. Nowacki, *Złotnictwo dawnych Prus Królewskich i Księżęcych w zbiorach Zamku Królewskiego na Wawelu* (Kraków, 2000).

18 Works purchased abroad have a large literature now; see e.g. D. Nowacki, 'Z rybą w herbie', in: *Festina lente. Prace ofiarowane Andrzejowi Fischingerowi w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, eds M. Piwocka, D. Nowacki (Kraków, 1998), pp. 37–42; M. Piwocka, D. Nowacki, 'Jedność Europy widziana poprzez manierystyczne klejnoty', in: *Amulet – znak – klejnot. Biżuteria w Polsce. Materiały IV Sesji Naukowej zorganizowanej przez Toruński Oddział Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki oraz Międzynarodowe Targi Gdańskie S.A. w Gdańsku w dniach 6–7 marca 2003 roku*, ed. K. Kluczwajd (Toruń, 2003), pp. 14–15, 168, Fig. 7; *Zbiory wawelskie: zakupy – depozyty – dary 2000–2006. Katalog wystawy, lipiec–październik 2007*, Zamek Królewski na Wawelu (Kraków, 2007), pp. 54, 67–68, cat. no. 77, 93, 94 (D. Nowacki), Fig. 51, *Zbiory wawelskie. Nabytki 2008. Katalog wystawy, czerwiec–wrzesień 2009*, Zamek Królewski na Wawelu (Kraków, 2009), pp. 45–48, cat. no. 41–44 (D. Nowacki); *Zbiory wawelskie. Nabytki 2012. Katalog wystawy, listopad 2013 – styczeń 2014*, Zamek Królewski na Wawelu (Kraków, 2013), pp. 47–50, cat. no. 44 (D. Nowacki); *Zbiory wawelskie. Nabytki 2014. Katalog wystawy, czerwiec–lipiec 2015*, Zamek Królewski na Wawelu (Kraków, 2015), pp. 16–17, cat. no. 2 (J. Winiewicz-Wolska), pp. 40–41, cat. no. 21–22 (D. Nowacki); *Zbiory wawelskie. Nabytki 2015–2016. Katalog wystawy, czerwiec–wrzesień 2017*, ed. J.T. Petrus (Kraków, 2017), pp. 47–53, 96–97, cat. no. 26, 70 (D. Nowacki); *Gdańskie arcydzieła sztuki złotniczej ze zbiorów Zamku Królewskiego na Wawelu*, ed. A. Frąckowska (Gdańsk, 2018), pp. 10–11, cat. no. 4 (D. Nowacki); *Zbiory wawelskie. Nabytki 2017–2018. Katalog wystawy, kwiecień–czerwiec 2019*, ed. J.T. Petrus (Kraków, 2019), pp. 64–65, 66–80, cat. no. 67, 70–83 (D. Nowacki). See note 22, 25.



Fig. 5

Jan Kostecki photographing sideboard silverware in the Crown Treasury: a test of the new arrangement in the Hall of Casimir the Great, 2015

and seventeenth century (Fig. 5–6). Among the most valuable of those are two Gothic toasting vessels, a pair of candlesticks with the coats of arms of Stephen Báthory, a silver matrix of the Swedish chancellery seal of John Casimir Vasa, and the most symbolic of all those acquisitions: a set of Old Polish badges of the Order of Saint Stanislaus containing several unique pieces, such as the chapter member's *distinctorium* (a canon's cross) or two of the so-called 'small orders', as well as valuable examples of order crosses from the period of Old Poland, order stars created on individual orders at the end of the eighteenth century, as well as order miniatures and historical badges.¹⁹ Equally

19 D. Nowacki, 'Późnogotycki srebrny kubek w zbiorach Zamku Królewskiego na Wawelu', in: *Claritas et Consonantia. Funkcje, formy i znaczenia w sztuce średniowiecza. Księga poświęcona pamięci Kingi Szczepkowskiej-Naliwajek w dziesiątą rocznicę śmierci*, eds M. Jakubek-Raczkowska, J. Raczkowski (Toruń–Warszawa, 2017), pp. 305–321;



Fig. 6

Testing a set of goblets for the new arrangement in the Hall of Casimir the Great, 2015

notable were ancient vessels and, first and foremost, the Lanckoroński engraved gem, a masterpiece of Byzantine hardstone carving, all donated in 2000 by Prof. Karolina Lanckorońska and the Lanckoroński Family Foundation following the return of the gem (which the Austrian government had forced the Lanckoroński family to ‘donate’ after the war) from the Kunsthistorisches Museum.²⁰

First stage of the modernisation of the Treasury

Between 2019 and 2020, Custom Cube, a Wrocław-based company, designed and made new display cases that met the stringent standards for the protection of artefacts – several intended for the Casimir Hall and one to contain the Szczerbiec sword. The Castle’s directors originally intended their arrangement to replicate the display layout created by Prof. Młodzianowski in the early 1960s. In the end, however, they accepted the custodian Dariusz Nowacki’s argument about the need for changes in the layout and dimensions of the cases, resulting in a marked change in the quality of the display, which was immediately apparent when the Treasury was opened after renovation (Fig. 7–8). Suffice it to say that the Casimir Hall now houses more than three hundred artefacts, meeting the often-voiced expectations of visitors, who want an opulent display rather than the noble restraint that characterised the exhibition during Prof. Szablowski’s time.

The change of directors in 2020 coincided with the wait for the National Archives to vacate the rooms on the ground floor of the north

Najpiękniejsze w Skarbcu, pp. 36–39, 172, cat. no. 6 (D. Nowacki), pp. 88–91, 174, cat. no. 18 (D. Nowacki), pp. 154–161, 175, cat. no. 28–29 (D. Nowacki).

20 *Zbiory wawelskie: zakupy – depozyty – dary 2000–2006*, pp. 35–37, cat. no. 42–45 (D. Gabrys), Fig. 29–30, pp. 48–49, cat. no. 69 (D. Nowacki), Fig. 44.



Fig. 7

A committee approving new display cases in the Hall of Casimir the Great after the change of arrangement in 2019, photo 2019, The Wawel Royal Castle Visual Documentation Archive

wing. This period finally came to an end in the autumn of that year, with the energetic involvement of Prof. Andrzej Betlej.

The donations and purchases made in recent years perfectly complement the earlier collections and relate as directly as possible to the possessions from the period when Wawel was the primary residence of the Polish monarchs. The castle is also interested in objects that parallel the content of the monarchs' private treasuries, as well as the ceremonial credenza which, in the times of Sigismund I, is known to have adorned the first chamber on the first floor of the Castle's north wing from the side of the staircase,²¹ directly above the current Treasury exhibition.

The quintessential example of the activities carried out in this area is the case of the two Renaissance *enseignes*, which made it possible to recall the highest quality of the lost Wawel Castle valuables by acquiring objects from the same period and artistic milieu. A jewel of outstanding quality depicting David with the head of Goliath²² was acquired

21 Fischinger, Fabiański, *Dzieje budowy renesansowego zamku*, p. 173 according to the index.

22 Y. Hackenbroch, *Enseignes. Renaissance Hat Jewels* (Firenze, 1996), p. 53, Fig. 54; *Brilliant Europe. Jewels from European Courts*, exhibition catalogue, Brussels, 24 Oct. 2007 – 17 Feb. 2008, eds D. Scarisbrick, C. Wachaudes, J. Walgrave (Brussels, 2008), pp. 94–95 (D. Scarisbrick).



Fig. 8

Hall of Casimir the Great after the change of arrangement in 2019, photo 2019, The Wawel Royal Castle Visual Documentation Archive

for the Treasury in 2024. The existence of a jewel with David in the historical royal treasury is attested by the accounts of the court of Sigismund Augustus from 1571, namely an entry stating:

die 18 Juni, Varsoviae: Upon the personal order of His Majesty the King, I have given [i.e., paid] Blasio de Vauls and Sennato (Servato?) Marel, Frenchmen, for the pendant, in which the figure of David and Golian [sic!] made of gold, with ten rubies, eighteen diamonds and three pearls in it, and for two rings [...], I have paid per grossos florenos ducentos Sexaginta. His Majesty the King took the jewels to his own [place]; I have a receipt from these merchants dico... fl. 260.²³

Another brooch with David ('of diamonds') and a 'Goliash head' is recorded in the inventories of the Crown Treasury from 1609–1611, 1659 and 1673.²⁴ A similar solution was employed in 2020, substituting a piece that is no longer preserved by purchasing another, equally outstanding *enseigne*, this time featuring Tarquin and Lucrezia²⁵ – a scene known to have appeared in Renaissance jewellery in only one archival account concerning a jewel in the collection of Sigismund Augustus. A recently published

23 Linked with the archival record by M. Piwocka, 'Klejnuty w Polsce złotego wieku', in: *Rządzić i ołsniewać. Klejnuty i jubilerstwo w Polsce w XVI i XVII wieku. Eseje*, eds D. Nowacki, M. Piwocka, D. Szewczyk-Prokurat (Warszawa, 2019), p. 33, note 97.

24 Myśliński, *Klejnuty Rzeczypospolitej*, pp. 173, 238, 314.

25 M. Piwocka, D. Nowacki, *Tarkwiniusz i Lukrecja – renesansowy klejnot w zbiorach wawelskich*, Kraków 2020.

inventory of the monarch's personal jewels, dated 17 July 1576 and carried out on the occasion of the arrival of the king's successor, Stephen Báthory, in Tykocin, contains the following entry: 'A medallion, on it the figure of Violentia mulibry [muliebris] with two table-cut rubies, three table-cut diamonds, a small ruby and an emerald seed around it'.²⁶ Almost identical entries appear in the inventories of the Crown Treasury of 1607, 1609–1611, 1632, 1659 (a copy of the 1611 inventory) and 1669. They record the same set of precious stones around the plaque, the latter referred to by the Italian word *medaglia* or (in the 1669 inventory) *medallia*.²⁷ The jewel no longer appears in the *Taxa precjozów* [List of precious items] of 1676.²⁸ Such purchases, based on years of research and archival queries, now appear to be one of the tried-and-tested methods of reconstructing an image of our historical collections.

The New Crown Treasury

In 2020, as the National Archives began relocating from the Wawel Castle, Director Betlej immediately pushed for a new permanent exhibition of the Crown Treasury. The deadline of only two years, an extremely tight one for such a large-scale project as the creation of a permanent museum exhibition in an entire wing of the castle (an area which, at that point, had not yet been examined from an architectural and conservation point of view), necessitated very intensive conceptual work and the preparation of several different variants of the exhibition script. These studies were modified during construction and conservation works, which also included changes in the layout of the rooms, that could be achieved without detriment to the historic substance of the Wawel Castle. The final sequence of the exhibition's narrative was additionally influenced by the requirements concerning the flow of tourists and the adaptation of the rooms to accommodate visitors with special needs, as well as spatial and architectural considerations, particularly the size of the individual rooms.

Our experience working on the exhibition *Rzqdzić i ołsniewać. Klejnoty i jubilerstwo w Polsce w XVI i XVII w. / To Rule and to Dazzle. Jewels and Jewellery in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 16th and 17th Century*,²⁹ which was focused on similar matters, including the history of the Crown Treasury, national insignia and works of artistic goldsmithery held in Poland, prompted us to work together on the script for the New Crown Treasury. Our insights into the museum

26 A. Stankiewicz, 'Nieznany inwentarz klejnotów króla Zygmunta Augusta z 1576 r.', in: *Rzqdzić i ołsniewać*, p. 53.

27 Myśliński, *Klejnoty Rzeczypospolitej*, s. 155, 177, 206, 240, 283; Piwocka, Nowacki, *Tarkwiniusz i Lukrecja*, pp. 23–24.

28 Piwocka, Nowacki, *Tarkwiniusz i Lukrecja*, p. 24.

29 The Royal Castle in Warsaw – Museum, May – August 2019.



Fig. 9

Testing a set of tankards and vessels decorated with coinage for the new table arrangement in 'The Treasure of Silver and Gold' room in the Crown Treasury, 2021

visitor's sensitivity to the processes involved in the selection and accumulation of historical artefacts were particularly important here (Fig. 9), as were our findings as to the prudent use of multimedia that form an integral part of the exhibition structure and our experience with various set design devices to use in establishing a narrative that would evoke strong emotions and forge a specific vision of the past based on remnants of former wealth.

The designers of the exhibition, the Wzorro Design S.C. company from Katowice, were selected following a tender answered with ten proposals. Difficulties in obtaining proposals that complied with the future exhibition's fundamental principles resulted in the need to issue extended comments explaining, in various ways, the purposefulness of specific visual solutions. In addition, the subsequent designs by Wzorro Design frequently missed the qualities of three-dimensional artefacts of widely differing sizes and with a variety of display needs (Fig. 10). Some of the artistic solutions were successfully corrected and fine-tuned only during intensive and constructive work with the makers of display cases, the Interplastic and Custom Cube companies. For example, the excellent, innovative technical solution for the opening of the display case with the large table must be attributed to the commitment of Katarzyna Kisielewska from Interplastic (Fig. 11). It is also necessary to raise the issue of certain compromises between the assumptions found in the exhibition script and the designers' proposals regarding the sizes and positioning of individual



Fig. 10

A render for 'The Treasure of Silver and Gold' room in the Crown Treasury, design by Wzorro Design S.C., 2022, The Wawel Royal Castle Visual Documentation Archive

display cases, which still not only have a significantly detrimental impact on the aesthetic perception of the whole, but also make it difficult for an average visitor to understand the concepts contained in the script and explained on the boards displayed in each room. Fortunately, the audience perceives the exhibition as a whole as varied, interesting and appropriate to the nature of the display as a treasury space. The concept of the New Crown Treasury display arose from our personal reflection on history and the Polish-owned treasures. In addition to resulting in important findings concerning the history of early-modern jewellery in Poland, the aforementioned *Rządzić i olśniewać / To Rule and to Dazzle* exhibition and its accompanying research project were a successful attempt to bring together all the surviving historical jewels from the sixteenth and seventeenth century in a single exhibition. It illustrated their ubiquity in the era in which they were created, as well as the fact that only a tiny fraction of that wealth has survived to this day. The same is true of the set of objects held at the Wawel Castle. On the one hand, it is a magnificent collection of jewels that are mostly national relics, accumulated anew and with great difficulty; on the other, viewing this collection makes us painfully aware of its shortcomings in relation to the contents of the royal treasury in the past. We made a limited attempt to underscore those shortcomings in order to evoke certain emotions in visitors, but generally we minimised them while highlighting the historical and artistic value of the existing artefacts, to put that value in a limelight, so to speak, or create it anew, thus enhancing the perception of the artefacts. This was successful in the case of the mantle of the Knight of the Order of the Holy Spirit once owned by John III



Fig. 11

Table arrangement in 'The Treasure of Silver and Gold' room in the Crown Treasury, 2022

or Sigismund III Vasa's chessboard. The same approach was adopted, with perfect results, by the first authors of the exhibition in the Hall of Jadwiga and Jagiełło, where visually monumental display turned the Szczerbiec sword into an absolute symbol of Polish history.

A museum exhibition is a narrative, but it does not aim to deceive; it is meant to create in the viewer's imagination and mind an image of a certain historical truth, which is revealed by presenting works of art. The artefacts are not only witnesses, but also reliable sources dating from specific periods. It is the museum exhibition that not only adds value to historical artefacts, but also credibly evokes the tastes, values and customs characteristic of the periods in question; this is accomplished by means of the selection and gradation of artefacts and, subsequently, by establishing relationships between them and by singling some of them out, by defining the space they are to occupy and the scope of the written commentary (complemented by, for instance, a film screening), as well as other visuals. An exhibition shows the contemporaneity or subsequence of certain phenomena and the manner in which they resulted from one another, points out the differences between them, their progression, intensity or insignificance. The relevance of the visual setting (light, colour, presence or absence of stylisation in the appearance of exhibition equipment, presence or absence of additional set-design elements) to the exhibition's content, to the specific images of the past and the emotions that the exhibition is meant to evoke in relation to those images, is of the utmost importance for the proper communication. In the New Crown Treasury, we moved away from a strict, linear presentation of history, which would have impossible due to obvious shortcomings in the historical material; instead, we tried to use objects to create a sequence of certain specific situations or historical moments.

In the first room, entitled 'Symbols of Statehood', the main visual piece is a fabric with the coat of arms of Ladislaus IV, which was most probably the cloth of honour positioned behind the royal throne. Placed centrally, opposite the entrance, surrounded by state flags from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, it is intended to evoke the image of the throne room.

The banners, along with various insignia, were present in the Crown Treasury as objects essential to the exercise of state power and the accompanying state ceremonial. It is worth noting that the Wawel collection is the most important collection of *vexillum* standards dating from the Old Poland period.³⁰ The presence of one of the most important relics of the historical Treasury, one recorded in its inventories until the end of its existence, i.e., the court banner of Sigismund Augustus from 1553 with the coats of arms of Poland and Lithuania, emphasises the nature of the Crown Treasury as a state institution.

It was a conscious choice to begin the narrative of the treasures collected at the Wawel Castle with items of the highest importance. This also serves as a metaphor: the visitors admire delicate fabrics that are still extant, unlike precious jewels or even brick buildings, such as Cracow's Town Hall where John Casimir received the banner in 1657. It was given to him by members of a patriotic confederation of citizens as a sign of their loyalty against the enemies (*contra hostes*) in the Polish-Swedish war. Saved from the Crown Treasury by Tadeusz Czacki in 1796, it was first held in the Temple of the Sibyl in Puławy, then, in 1848, carried away to St Petersburg, from where it was reclaimed in 1924; two years later it was transferred to the Wawel Castle.³¹ The banners also symbolise the indestructibility of the concept of the Polish State, which is manifested in heraldry. The *vexillum* standard of Gdańsk, a city that was 'the jewel in the Crown of the Commonwealth', is also displayed in this context; it is the only surviving *vexillum* of Gdańsk dating from the period of Old Poland.³²

The idea of placing in the first room, somewhat symbolically, the state flag that had covered Marshal Piłsudski's coffin during his funeral at the Wawel Castle on 18 May 1935 was considered. In the end, however, it was decided not to do that – in fact, not to display this artefact at all,

30 M. Piwocka, 'A collection of historic flags at the Wawel Royal Castle, Cracow', in: *Proceedings of the XX International Congress of Vexillology, Stockholm, 27th July to 1st August 2003*, ed. J.O. Engene (Bergen, 2004), pp. 481–496.

31 S. Świerż-Zaleski, *Zbiory Zamku Królewskiego na Wawelu* (Kraków, 1935), p. 26; Piwocka, 'A collection of historic flags', p. 492.

32 *Pod królewską koroną. Kazimierz Jagiellończyk a Gdańsk w 560. rocznicę wielkiego przywileju. Katalog wystawy zorganizowanej przez Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Gdańska w dniach 26 maja – 1 października 2017 roku*, ed. E. Bojaruniec-Król (Gdańsk, 2017), pp. 103–104, cat. no. III.10.1 (M. Piwocka).

because, although belonging to the Wawel Castle collection, it is historically distant from the narrative of the Crown Treasury.

Due to the fact that the textile artefacts have to be displayed either positioned horizontally or aslant, which is inconsistent with the way they were originally presented and the effect they once had on viewers, we wanted to evoke their function by hanging lengths of delicate silk fabrics in the shape of banners on either side of the cloth of honour that used to be a backdrop to the royal throne. They were also intended to make the imposing architecture of the hall with its clear vaulted cradle somewhat unreal, not least through the subtle mapping of heraldic motifs included on them. However, the forms and textures of those fabrics as proposed by the designers did not work well in that interior.

The exit from the first hall is flanked by two banners from the period of the Saxon electors on the Polish throne, and an equestrian portrait of Aleksander Jan Jabłonowski, Grand Standard-Bearer of the Crown with the state banner. This leads the visitor out of the royal throne room of a castle or a palace, into the room entitled 'Trophies and Symbols of Military Glory'.

Trophies – including very important pieces, such as the famous two swords from Grunwald – occupied a prominent place in the Crown Treasury from the times of its creation. Alongside these witnesses to national victories, the room housed ceremonial weapons and pieces of equestrian equipment, which were used at official parades, triumphs and state ceremonies, but also functioned as precious objects, since they were sent away as expensive diplomatic gifts. In the exhibition, the collection of ceremonial weapons held at the Wawel Castle, with a few relics from the Crown Treasury, was used to create an emotional narrative about the military glory of the Kingdom of Poland and the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania.

In this room, the tour begins with four pieces from the historic Treasury. These objects have been treated like religious relics, enclosed in three slender glass cases reminiscent of reliquaries and placed at a certain distance from other pieces displayed in this space. The first is perhaps the most mysterious artefact on display in the Treasury, traditionally thought to be a Teutonic Order cavalry sword (*koncerz*) from the time of the great war against the Teutonic Knights.³³ The others are two ceremonial maces, a sign of high rank in the royal guard, and the blade of a consecrated sword presented to Stephen Báthory in 1580.³⁴

Given that the Wawel Castle's collection of ceremonial horse tack features more than a dozen magnificent pieces, many of illustrious

33 M. Talaga, 'Miecz sprawiedliwości? Nowe spojrzenie na koncerz z dawnego Skarbcia Koronnego', *Studia Waweliana*, vol. 16, 2015, pp. 43–66.

34 *Najpiękniejsze w Skarbcu*, pp. 64–69, 173, cat. no. 13 (R. Ochęduszek), pp. 76–79, 174, cat. no. 15 (K.J. Czyżewski).

provenance, it was chosen as the fundamental element to produce a spectacular visual effect. Display figures of horses wearing these pieces constitute the visual focus and, above all, the axis of this room's narrative concept. The collection, thus, required thoughtful design solutions.

Architectural constraints prompted lengthy discussions and resulted in differences of opinion concerning the form of the display racks for the horse tack, the number of harnesses to be shown (we suggested ten) and the number of display cases. We wanted to achieve an evocative effect similar to that of the three runaway horses in the *Türkische Cammer* in Dresden, but with a different message. This visual reference was included in the exhibition script.³⁵ We included a clear narrative in which a dynamic group of riders would gallop towards the viewer with the banners of defeated enemies under their horses' hooves. The cavalcade of horses would be followed by the victorious leader surrounded by hetmans and cavalry-masters; he would be symbolised by a parade chainmail and a golden mace linked to Ladislaus Sigismund Vasa,³⁶ with those royal artefacts surrounded by the maces of the commanders. The accumulation of luxurious military equipment would underscore the splendour of the victors.

We thought that in order to achieve a monumental effect, the space, which was divided into two narrow halls, would have to be unified as much as possible. We proposed several detailed variants, which took into account different extents to which the secondary architectural structures could be modified. The designers, however, came up with completely different concepts, which strayed away from the script. Fortunately, ideas such as enclosing each set of horse tack in a separate display case reminiscent of cramped stalls in a stable, which would have been combined with the visually aggressive flooring from the interwar period preserved in one of the rooms, were not implemented. The two adjoining interiors were integrated by means of a single large glazed exhibition space running through the two rooms, with added mirrors that confuse the viewer's eye. The arrangement of eight horse figures in the large display case (Fig. 12) brings to mind a parade of the kind seen in the Wawel friezes rather than a dynamic cavalcade of the knights of the Commonwealth, but, in the opinion shared by a considerable proportion of the visitors, the effect is spectacular.

As has already been said, debates about the shape of the display racks to support items of horse tack were also very heated. Conservative attitudes prevailed at Wawel, including excessive reverence towards the previously used Modernist openwork frames designed

³⁵ Due to the limited volume of this paper, we have refrained from citing other inspirations, given that some of them were negative in nature, as we sought to draw constructive conclusions from similar displays created worldwide in the course of the past thirty years.

³⁶ *Najpiękniejsze w Skarbcu*, pp. 42–45, 172, cat. no. 8 (R. Ochęduszek).

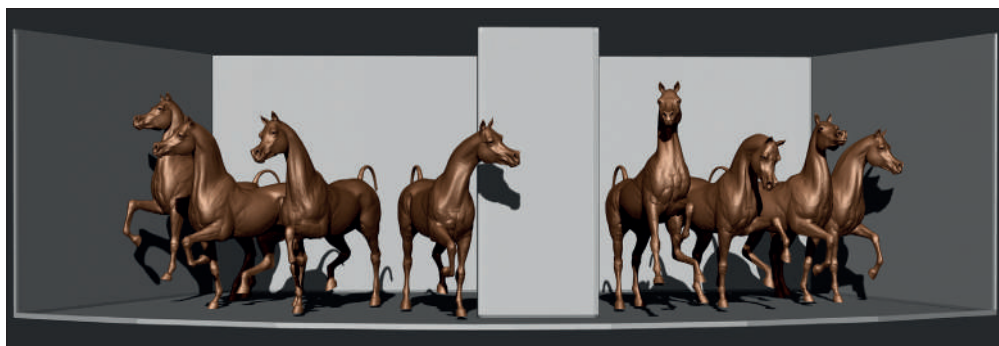


Fig. 12

One of the renders for a display case with horses in the 'Trophies and Tokens of Wartime Glory' room in the Crown Treasury, 2022, The Wawel Royal Castle Archives

by Młodzianowski. Their form, however, was far from suitable either to the specific architecture of the room, dominated by barrel vaults and arches, or to the planned effect, where the viewer was supposed to feel well-nigh under attack by a group of galloping, three-dimensional horses. The script we had proposed envisaged realistic versions of the models, made with a technique that imitated natural animal features, especially in terms of the texture of the skin and different types of colouring, but the proposal suggested by Prof. Betlej, who wanted to commission the prominent sculptor Paweł Orłowski to design the racks, was better in terms of quality. Orłowski's vision of horse figures, strongly alluding to Cubism yet still organically shaped, are characterised by a monumental expression that could perfectly serve to achieve the desired narrative effect of a triumphant charge by Polish knights. Unfortunately, this idea was abandoned. The seemingly endless debates concerning not only the appearance, but also about the scale of the horses, fortunately resulted in the decision to make 3-D scans of the bridles. This allowed the team to obtain reliable data concerning the size, and therefore possible breeds, of the horses that wore them. Animal models were created on the basis of these measurements. The exhibition script also included a concept for a project of the conservation of selected items of parade tack and their use in a film planned to be a part of the exhibition. The script for the film material involved presenting the pieces on the backs of Arabian horses of many colours. The scenes were planned to be shot outdoors and would include repetitive sequences (horses standing still, a fine gait, then trot, a smooth turn, etc.) for a rhythmically composed quasi-frieze referring to the Renaissance paintings in the Tournament Hall, the Hall Under the Review of Troops, and ceremonial parades. Additional scenes were to be filmed at the Wawel Castle as a B-roll – bringing several horses into the courtyard through the Berrecci Gate and a sequence shot against the backdrop of the arcades. A panoramic frieze with an overview of beautiful horses and historic tack would provide a cyclically changing but fairly static reference point to the pieces of tack in the display cases, allowing the individual artefacts to be recognised and looked at in motion.

The aim of this complex project, in addition to enriching as well as promoting the exhibition, was to make the Wawel artefacts more legible and valuable through a presentation aligned with their original purpose, showing the arrangement of the parade equestrian equipment on a horse's back, croup and head in natural lighting and during actual movement that would highlight the artistic qualities of the elements of tack, the play of light on cloth-of-gold and cloth-of-silver fabrics, precious stones and metal surfaces. As far as we know, such a presentation had no precedent in the world's museums to date, but the rather good condition of some of the pieces (which were, after all, originally intended for this kind of use) under a strict conservation regime would have allowed the project to go ahead. Such a display of artefacts would have resulted in their lively, even emotional reception. For visitors less familiar with the subject matter (including children), it could have been an invaluable aid to understanding the function of those objects and the effect that such splendid equipment once had during triumphal parades or ceremonial entries. The footage that could have been produced in connection with the exhibition would have had enormous potential, if only in the much-needed promotion of the subject of Old Polish culture beyond Poland's borders.

However, the decision was made, with various reasons behind it, not to seek funding for a project that definitely posed numerous challenges and was controversial from the standpoint of conservation. All that emerged was a conventional video sequence showing the details of the tack, which was at best a substitute for the undertaking suggested in the script.

The plan to place the display case with the banners of defeated opponents as sunk in the flooring under the visitors' feet (and from the conceptual standpoint – under the hooves of the horses in the cavalcade), was also abandoned, due to technical constraints. In addition, concerns were voiced about the inappropriate character of such a solution; however, we believe that the memorabilia in question pertain to a specific historical moment, sufficiently distant that the emotions evoked by them should not be transferred on contemporary political relations. The importance of these artefacts is extraordinary: the banner of the Silesian army of Archduke Maximilian captured by Hetman Jan Zamoyski at Byczyna symbolises the beginning of the Vasa dynasty, while the pennon of Charles X Gustav's dragoons captured by Hetman Stefan Czarniecki heralds the end of that dynasty's time on the Polish throne.³⁷

In the case of this room, artistic solutions proposed by the Wzorro company needed far-reaching modifications. Fortunately, the final result retains the essential elements of the approved concept, although, for

37 Piwocka, 'A collection of historic flags', pp. 483–484, Fig. 5; eadem, 'Proporzec Karola X Gustawa w zbiorach Zamku Królewskiego na Wawelu', *Studia Waweliana*, vol. 11/12, 2002/2003, pp. 167–176.

various reasons, some of the pieces are not satisfactorily highlighted. We hope that the future revisions of the exhibition will enable us to better accentuate, for instance, the excellent collection of blunt weapons (*bulawa* and *buzdygan* maces) used as military distinctions, displaying them in such a way that they do not merely act as components of a decorative panoply, but that their ideological function is highlighted as well.

One of the key points of the Wawel exhibition, the *Rex Triumphator* room, primarily collects the signs of various honours received by John III. The exaltation of the triumphant monarch, an idea related to the content of the previously described space, is the main message of the exhibition of exquisite artefacts gathered in the fourth room, most of which come from Sobieski's castle in Żółkiew and after 1740 were the pride of the Radziwiłł treasury in Nieśwież.

The proper display of the mantle of the Chevalier of the Order of the Holy Spirit sent to Sobieski by Louis XIV required highlighting the function of this badge of honour and, at the same time, the quality of this masterpiece of French embroidery of the Baroque period. The magnificence, splendour and scale of the other badges of honour, presented to the monarch in 1684 by the legate of Pope Innocent XI, dictated that the manner of their display be theatrical, with the exalted leader descending from above to his subjects. This arrangement was intended to recall the theatrical nature of the Baroque courtly ceremonial, in which similar artefacts played key roles.

The issue of the rank and function of valuables as diplomatic gifts is further developed in the next space, entitled *Stanislao contra Augusto Rege*, where, in addition to gifts (a saddle, stirrups, a cup and a platter given by the sultan to Stanisław Małachowski when the latter was sent as an envoy to Turkey on the occasion of the signing of the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699)³⁸ included the king's personal gifts given in an attempt to build international relations and influence politics in Europe during the Wettin dynasty's reign in Poland. The narrative of this room accentuates the polarisation of the gentry as a social class, the emotions and political sympathies of the time. A telling example is the banner of Leszczyński's supporters bearing an inscription *Pro fide, rege, et Stanislao Rege*, which hangs down from the vault. After the banner was captured by the supporters of Augustus III, the monarch's name in the inscription was changed to *Augusto*.³⁹ A film material serves to recall that the coronation insignia from the Crown Treasury played the role of a bargaining chip in this conflict. They were stolen by the supporters of the 'Piaśt' candidate (as Leszczyński was called to underline his being a 'native' contender for the throne) in order to prevent the coronation of the elector

38 *Odsiecz wiedeńska 1683*, vol. I, pp. 272–273, cat. no. 476–477, vol. II, Fig. 294–295.

39 Piwocka, 'A collection of historic flags', p. 483.

of Saxony, which nevertheless took place on 17 January 1734 and was the last ceremony of royal anointment to be held at Wawel.

The first five rooms of the exhibition accentuate significant moments in the Polish history, including situations involving the fate of the Crown Treasury, through the choice of pieces to be displayed and accentuation of selected artefacts. The banner and tapestries with the figure of Sigismund Augustus in the first room accentuate the ruler whose passion for collecting impacted the addition of new artefacts to the State Treasury, namely, an extraordinary collection of jewels which Sigismund Augustus collected in secret, unbeknownst to his subjects. The state matters discussed earlier, which are presented by means of textiles, give way to warfare in the Vasa era. Military spending financed by pawning valuables had the effect of depleting the State Treasury. The task of linking the fate of the institution that was located in these rooms to events in 'grand history' was one of the reasons why we opted for dynamism and even a modicum of drama in the way the trophy room's most important exhibits were shown and arranged.

The same is true of the splendour – partially military splendour – in the hall dedicated to John III. The theatrical nature of the representation of the ruler (including a head made on the basis of a 3-D scan of the only surviving three-dimensional likeness of the monarch dating from the period)⁴⁰ is slightly caricatured (not least because of the very massive conservation frame used to display the mantle) and stands in deliberate contrast to the information about the pawning of most of the Treasury's valuables to pay for wars with the Ottoman Empire, as a *sui generis* illustration of the final blaze of the Commonwealth's glory – a glory that was already somewhat superficial, an ostentation that covered the by then very real problems of the State.

The viewers who allow themselves to be led and enchanted by the abundance of ceremonial weapons and diplomatic gifts, move on to the empty Renaissance hallway (Room 6 – 'The Royal Majesty'), where the narrative about the history of the Crown Treasury, annihilated in the year of the fall of the Commonwealth (1795), is completed. The empty treasure chest was meant to illustrate the story in a literal way. Only the film sequence evokes the historical iconography to highlight some of the lost heritage.

In the room entitled 'The Tapestries of Sigismund II Augustus – Treasure of the Commonwealth', another chest carries a message pertaining to the further history of the Treasury's valuables. A set of chests that became museum pieces before our eyes, while previously for many years serving a utilitarian function in a museum, bears witness to the odyssey

40 Cf. A. Badach, *Rzeźba. Katalog zbiorów, Zamek Królewski w Warszawie, Fundacja Zbiorów im. Ciecchanowieckich, Fundacja Teresy Sahakian* (Warszawa, 2011), pp. 198–200, 417, cat no. 169 (dated to after 1683).

of Poland's national treasures. These chests, commissioned in France and Canada in 1940 and 1941, were first used to hide the treasures of the Wawel collection in a Canadian bank before their return to Poland in 1959 (with the tapestries returning only in 1961). Some of these chests protected the tapestries of Sigismund Augustus, which in the Commonwealth had been treated as a national treasure and on several occasions listed in the Wawel Castle inventories immediately following the contents of the Treasury proper, and as such complemented the Crown Treasury. To reinforce this message, a special room has been dedicated to the tapestries, alongside two other places where they are used to present other messages.

One exquisitely preserved tapestry hangs in this room, whose decoration symbolises Sigismund Augustus's main political idea: the union of Poland and Lithuania, recalling the historical moment when the tapestries became the property of the Commonwealth. Displayed beside it are a dozen or so of fragments of tapestries that were cut into pieces in Tsarskoye Selo and Gatchina (Russia) in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The idea of presenting a historical way of storing the tapestries – rolled up and wrapped in linen, to show that the tapestries were hidden rather than displayed on the daily basis – was unfortunately not implemented. This was also how they were transported to save them from destruction and looting, and how they became pawned items, as valuable as gold or silver. This function was to be made suggestively apparent to visitors to the Wawel Castle, where tapestries are the jewel of the collection and one of the actual surviving Polish national treasures.

The adjoining room (despite the scarcity of space in the Treasury) was dedicated to the Crown Archive, an institution closely linked to the Crown Treasury, which operated here until the time of King Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski, when its holdings were transferred to Warsaw. Unfortunately, the Wawel collection does not hold any artefacts from the Archive, which are of fundamental importance to Polish history; the Crown Archive materials include royal accounts, documentation of international affairs, as well as the inventories of the Treasury, which are, of course, particularly fascinating to us. For this reason, the exhibition script was from the outset supposed to highlight a display case for the temporarily loaned documents of similar importance, currently stored in the Central Archives of Historical Records, the Ossolineum and the Czartoryski Library. It was also assumed that the layout of this small room would introduce the viewer to the atmosphere of an old archive. We wanted to achieve this effect through a large-format film sequence (*live photo*) running on loop in the window recess. The static shot (one fixed frame, still camera, no close-ups) was intended to show the interior of the archive with a series of folios. The only moving element was to be provided by the light gliding through the dark space, bringing out manuscript titles on the shelves from the darkness. Unfortunately, this

idea never came to fruition, and the designs proposed by the visual artists fell short not only of the effect planned in the script, but also of the very function and meaning of an archive. The resulting display lacks a clear, individual character to build the atmosphere and add to the story, and is hardly fortunate in terms of the placement of the display cases in the space. Seal matrices from the period of Old Poland, however, were displayed in an impressive manner, thanks mostly to the Interplastic team who constructed the display case. The fact that dozens of objects – both decorative seals with dies cut in precious stones and metal matrices created between the mid-sixteenth and the early nineteenth century – finally did go on display can be attributed almost solely to the persistence of Prof. Ostrowski, who was particularly keen to expand the sphragistic collection. The pearls of this collection are the eighteenth-century seals of the Sapieha and the Jabłonowski families, Poland's largest collection of rotating matrices, and a true rarity: the silver matrix of the Swedish chancellery seal of John Casimir Vasa.

Instead of the original relics of the Crown Archive, only selected royal documents from the Wawel archives – unrelated to the institution to which the exhibition in this room is devoted – are periodically shown in the main display case. The other museum artefacts are also contextually relevant to the issues they were intended to illustrate.

A pseudo-Gothic portal, revealed during the renovation of the rooms after the National Archives moved out, leads to the next space. Even though it was installed by the occupying German forces as an ornament of the entrance to the casino, it has been preserved as a witness to history and due to its artistic qualities.

In this room, we adopted a literal approach to illustrate the Old Polish descriptions from the subsequent audits of the Treasury. The exhibition recalls the historical method of storing valuables, which were not only kept in chests and trunks with 'castle-like locks', but also piled up on simple tables and shelves.

In the middle of the spacious chamber, visible from the several preceding rooms as an block of silver-and-gold brightness, stands an Italian table from the early seventeenth century with more than fifty examples of goldsmithery, mainly toasting vessels, placed on it (Fig. 11). This spectacular arrangement, which not only closes the enfilade of rooms in which lighting had to be limited, but also is a glittering substitute to the lost valuables from the historic Treasury, could be made solely thanks to the expertise and determination of successive Wawel custodians, starting with Stanisław Śwież-Zaleski. The last three decades in particular have seen a qualitatively and quantitatively significant expansion of the collection of European early-modern goldsmithery.

The group of vessels decorated with coinage is the largest such collection in Poland. It includes exceptional objects, such as a gold cup with the

coat of arms of Jan Opaliński⁴¹ or a bowl in the shape of a kovsh from the Nieśwież treasury of the Radziwiłł family.⁴² The Wawel collection of tankards from Gdańsk is now so representative⁴³ that a decision was recently made to halt its expansion. The state of the collection of Augsburg goldsmithery is somewhat different. Pieces of silverware purchased in recent years were particularly important, going significantly beyond the average artistic level of these types of products, to recall those bought at auction in 2023: the magnificent flask with *The Procession of Venus* by Abraham Drentwett and the excellent tankard by Jakob Jäger with a scene from the story of Gideon.⁴⁴

Some of the silverware presented at the exhibition under discussion here has been placed in display cases that evoke the shelves described in the old inventories. Coins were treated similarly, displayed in simulated stacks accentuating their function as a store of wealth. In 2024, the orders and distinctions, which did not quite connect with the message of this hall, were replaced with the Wawel Castle's collection of jewellery from the seventeenth and eighteenth century, which had been very significantly expanded over the past two decades as a result of consistent efforts, mainly acquisitions focused on the need to create an adequate arrangement for the New Crown Treasury. After all, what would a royal treasury be without jewels?

In the Casimir Hall, the main chamber of the former Treasury, the 2019 display cases were left in place, and the only changes concerned the set of objects on display and their layout. This historic space was further highlighted by the accumulation of royal memorabilia, in particular those pertaining to the Vasa dynasty. The character of the place was accentuated by combining medieval artefacts with a fresco bearing the monogram of Queen Jadwiga, by placing them directly beneath the relics of a Gothic painting. By combining this group of artefacts with ancient and Byzantine objects (the Lanckoroński engraved gem), the exhibition recalls the diversity of the holdings of the Crown Treasury, one of whose surviving pieces is a Byzantine staurotheke (a deposit of the National Museum in Cracow). Historic artefacts considered to be national relics, the Szczerbiec sword and the sword of Sigismund I, are highlights of the collection. They are presented in the Hall of Jadwiga and Jagiełło, which was left mostly unchanged, with only minor technical and visual corrections, to continue in its role as a national shrine.

41 *Najpiękniejsze w Skarbcu*, pp. 134–141, 175, cat. no. 24 (D. Nowacki).

42 *Tesori d'arte di Cracovia dal Museo Reale di Wawel*, ed. S. Link-Lenczowska (Roma, 2008), p. 110, cat. no. 90 (D. Nowacki).

43 A. Frąckowska, *Srebrne kufle gdańskie XVII i XVIII wieku. Typologia, stylistyka, ikonografia* (Warszawa, 2013), *passim*. See note 17.

44 D. Nowacki, *Złotnictwo augsburskie w zbiorach Zamku Królewskiego na Wawelu* (Kraków, 2025), pp. 31, 145–149, 160–165, cat. no. 21, 24.



Fig. 13

The Cabinet of Curiosities in the Crown Treasury, arranged in 2022, photo 2022, The Wawel Royal Castle Visual Documentation Archive

Referring to the function and presentation of valuables at the Wawel Castle in the period of Old Poland, a monumental arrangement of the royal credenza, laid out in 2019, was left in the Hall of Casimir the Great, as it makes a great impression on visitors (cf. Figs 7 and 8); this confirms that the policy of consciously shaping the collections of antique silverware through purchases and other efforts, and displaying them in sizable sets (like on the large table in the previous room), is having a tangible effect, shaping the visitors' perception of the court culture in past eras. In Poland, only the Wawel Castle's collection contains a rich enough assortment of Mannerist and Baroque sideboard vessels to assemble a credenza display worthy of the most distinguished palace. Another set of this quality would be impossible to assemble in Poland, a country that had been repeatedly plundered and deprived of historic artefacts.

The way in which expensive royal artefacts were collected and displayed is also alluded to in another of the rooms – 'The Cabinet of Curiosities'. The striking display, which was based on the element proposed by Dariusz Nowacki, namely, the chessboard given to Sigismund III by Hieronim Wołłowicz,⁴⁵ was creatively interpreted by the designers (Fig. 13). The concept for a sequential illumination of individual sets of monuments using active glass did not work out for technical reasons and had to be abandoned.

The method of adding and multiplying objects, which complements each other to reinforce the message's power, is often very effective in

⁴⁵ *Najpiękniejsze w Skarbcu*, pp. 46–51, 173, cat. no. 9 (D. Nowacki).

museum practice. It provides visitors with the satisfaction of noticing certain regularities that scholars often take for granted. For example, the set of Mannerist and Baroque silverware produced in Augsburg is not only a reflection of material wealth, but also helps draw the viewers into the specific world of these artefacts, allowing them to experience their function and understand the original impact of these luxury objects. Their creators intended these objects to leave a lasting impression at first glance, and this was achieved through the quality of their surfaces, their scale, and the plasticity of varied relief. The same is true of the horse tack, which, when presented as a set, ceases to be perceived as isolated objects, as mere *spolia* from a triumphal parade, whereas this could have been so had they been enclosed in individual display cases.

In full awareness of our responsibility for the Wawel Castle and for these surviving relics of Polish heritage, we proposed this and other display techniques because we wished to create a *theatrum* proper to the times in which these artefacts were created and used, as well as to articulate specific issues concerning their history, court culture, ceremonies, the ways of collecting and affirming precious objects. By avoiding a more literal approach, we aimed to create an effect that would move the viewer's imagination, and more, we wanted to evoke the feelings and emotions associated with moments of struggle and triumph: pride in national history, sadness caused by loss, admiration and amazement at the beauty and uniqueness of the works of past masters, as well as personal reflections on the need to appreciate and care for what remains.

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