

Pietra dura is an artistic technique relying on working various semi-precious and decorative stones, including decorative rocks: diverse varieties of marble, limestone, onyx, opicalcite and alabaster, as well as some non-stone substances of organic origin such as coral, amber or mother-of-pearl. Their common characteristics are an intense, saturated colour or interesting pattern of veining, their rarity, as well as their high hardness and fine grain, which allows them to be polished to a high lustre.

Pietra dura (plural: *pietre dure*) means 'hard stone' in Italian. In the field of art, this term is used in Italian to refer not only to the technique itself, but also to all the products made with its application, whether three-dimensional, such as vessels, figurines or cameos, or two-dimensional, in the form of mosaics or inlays; the latter are called *commesso di pietre dure* for precision. The term *commesso* in this case means a mosaic made of thin slabs of coloured stones with irregular forms; this feature makes them different from the mosaics using small *tesserae*, which are geometrically shaped. A specific variation of *commesso di pietre dure* are items containing raised, carved elements that form a low relief (Italian: *bassorilievo*).

Within Polish art history the term *pietra dura* has come to be applied to two-dimensional works (sometimes with elements of relief) and is used interchangeably with the term *mozaika florencka*, i.e. Florentine mosaic. These terms are treated as identical by the *Słownik terminologiczny sztuk pięknych*,¹ as well as by Agnieszka Bender, author of the only article on the subject to be published in Poland.² Also in more recent English-language literature there is a tendency to apply the term *pietra dura* to all objects whose main material is hardstones, and to reserve the term *commesso di pietre dure* for works decorating surfaces.³

'A SECOND TABLE, FLORENTINE, INLAID WITH VARIOUS JASPER, A FOUNTAIN IN THE CENTRE'. PIECES IN COMMESSO DI PIETRE DURE IN THE COLLECTIONS OF JOHN III SOBIESKI AND HIS FAMILY

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1 *Florencka mozaika*, in: *Słownik terminologiczny sztuk pięknych*, ed. K. Kubalska-Sulkiewicz (Warszawa, 1996), p. 115.

2 A. Bender, 'Meble dekorowane techniką pietra dura, scagliola i pietra paesina', in: *Studia nad sztuką renesansu i baroku*, vol. 12, ed. I. Rolska-Boruch (Lublin, 2015), pp. 337–363.

3 Contributing to this was the exhibition 'Art of the Royal Court. Treasures in Pietre Dure from the Palaces of Europe', presented in 2008 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and organised in collaboration with Italian researchers. In the book that accompanied the exhibition, emphasis was laid on terminological precision, with the terminology brought close to the Italian one; there was also a glossary of terms. The texts collected in the catalogue focus for the most part on the history of *commesso di pietre dure* production north of the Alps. It is a valuable addition to the primarily Italian-oriented literature on the subject; see *Art of the Royal Court. Treasures in Pietre Dure from the Palaces of Europe*, eds W. Koeppel, A. M. Giusti (New York, 2008).

Since every work in *commesso di pietre dure* is at the same time a *pietre dure* work, this nomenclature can by no means be considered incorrect, but it is certainly less precise and raises the question of what to call three-dimensional products in this situation. When using the term 'Florentine mosaic', in turn, it is worth clarifying whether what is meant is the *commesso di pietre dure* technique in general (as, for example, in Polish tapestries are referred to as *arras*, and this means a certain type of fabric, not necessarily one produced in Arras), or only those objects which originated in the capital of Tuscany, since, although the technique is closely linked to Florence, their production was also undertaken, if only for a while, in Prague, Paris and other places.⁴ It seems, however, that the term 'Florentine mosaic from Prague' would sound unfortunate, and that a more apt synonym for *commesso di pietre dure* is 'stone inlay'. The term 'Florentine mosaic' should be reserved specifically for works produced in Medici manufactories.

In sum, the *commesso di pietre dure* technique in its mature form consisted of the precise cutting of thin slabs of decorative and semi-precious stones, which were then polished and fixed to a base, usually a slab of slate, by means of mastic putty, so as to obtain the desired geometric or figural pattern (Fig. 1).

The focus of the current article is on the *commesso di pietre dure* works associated with the movable property of John III Sobieski and members of his immediate family. Works in *pietre dure* which were not stone mosaic, which the king also owned, will be omitted.

The most important publications on stone mosaics are the studies by Anna Maria Giusti,⁵ the long-standing director of Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence, an institution that is the heir to the Medici manufactories producing works in this technique and now primarily a research facility specialising in their conservation. In addition, the Opificio houses a museum presenting a unique collection of Florentine mosaics and expounding the traditional methods of their production.

The Polish research output concerning the *pietra dura* technique is rather modest, being, in essence, limited to the above-mentioned article on furniture, 'Meble dekorowane techniką pietra dura, scagliola i pietra paesina' by Agnieszka Bender.⁶ The author herself has indicated that the text is a preliminary study of the subject and only signals the need for further research.

4 On *pietra dura* production in Prague in Bohemia, see R. Distelberger, 'The Castrucci and the Miseroni: Prague, Florence, Milan', in: *Art of the Royal Court. Treasures in Pietre Dure*, pp. 28–39. On Paris, see F. Knothe, 'Pierres fines: The Manufacture of Hardstone Works at the Gobelins under Louis XIV', in: *ibid.*, pp. 40–53.

5 A. M. Giusti, *Pietre Dure. The Art of Semiprecious Stonework* (Los Angeles, 2006). Cf. eadem, *Pietre Dure. Hardstone in Furniture and Decorations* (London, 1992); eadem, 'Roman Inlay and Florentine Mosaics: The New Art of Pietre Dure', in: *Art of the Royal Court. Treasures in Pietre Dure*, pp. 12–27.

6 Bender, 'Meble dekorowane techniką pietra dura', pp. 337–363.



Fig. 1

Tabletop, Florence,
seventeenth century, Museum
of King Jan III's Palace
at Wilanów

The topic of the Polish visitors to Florence and the accounts written by them, which is important in the context of the current issue, is much better researched. Małgorzata Wrześniak makes it her focus in the study *Florencja-muzeum. Miasto i jego sztuka w oczach polskich podróżników*⁷. Although not all of her conclusions seem fully justified (for example, she sometimes seems to exaggerate the Polish travellers' admiration for objects in Florentine mosaic), the great value of this publication lies in that it gathers material that was scattered and sometimes difficult to access.

Of great value to the present study is the introduction by Anna Kwiatkowska to the text of the *Inwentarza Generalnego Kleynotow, Sreber, Galanteryi y Ruchomosci [...] odprawiony d. 10 9bris Anno Domini 1696* [General Inventory of jewels, silverware, curios and movables [...] compiled on 10 November 1696], which is the most important document in the context of the subject discussed herein.⁸

A technique (or rather a group of similar techniques, sometimes difficult to clearly demarcate) whose material were variously shaped slabs of coloured stones was known since Antiquity. It was used by the Sumerians, who created, among others, the famous artefact of unclear function, known

7 M. Wrześniak, *Florencja-muzeum. Miasto i jego sztuka w oczach polskich podróżników* (Kraków, 2013). In reference to accounts dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth century, see *ibid.*, pp. 53–132. Particularly valuable is the bibliography included therein, covering both printed sources and studies on topics related to Polish travellers who visited Florence in the early modern period.

8 A. Kwiatkowska, *Inwentarz Generalny 1696 z opracowaniem*, Ad Villam Novam. Materiały do dziejów rezydencji series, vol. 6 (Warszawa 2012), *passim*. This document is hereinafter referred to as *General Inventory* (translator's note).

as the Standard of Ur (2900–2334 BC). The use of all kinds of coloured stones and decorative rocks became widespread in the eastern Mediterranean during the Hellenistic period. The penchant for varied types of ‘hard stone’ wares resulted in a significant development of the art of working them – glyptics, or hardstone carving, including cameo engraving.⁹ The heritage of the Hellenistic world became an inexhaustible source of cultural models for the Romans. The economic potential of the Roman Empire meant that stones from all over the known world came to its capital in great abundance, especially during the Imperial period. The technique known as *opus sectile*, which anticipated *commesso di pietre dure*, was a Roman development.¹⁰ Later, this ancient heritage was to be of great importance. Not only did it provide an ideological and formal template for the Renaissance, a period when Antiquity was so eagerly emulated; in addition, this concentration of material turned the Eternal City into a *sui generis* quarry; raw materials, sometimes ones impossible to obtain by other means, could be acquired there, with the result that many early-modern works of art were created by reusing excavated objects.¹¹

The profound crisis of the western part of the former empire caused a rupture in workshop continuity and a regression in the use of stone for decorative purposes. A crucial role in overcoming this predicament was played by Byzantium, where glyptic art had not been forgotten. Contacts with Constantinople led to a number of developments in Italy, such as, in particular, floors making use of a variant of stone mosaic known as *opus alexandrinum*, produced by the Cosmati family in Rome, which contributed to a renewed interest in stone as an artistic medium. Depictions of coloured stones in painting, which began to be created roughly in the lifetime of Giotto di Bondone (born Angiolo di Bondone; ca. 1266–1337), became widespread during the Quattrocento. Concurrently actual stones began to be used in the decoration of buildings, and in the following century this resulted in a full revival of the art of working them.¹²

The term *commesso di pietre dure* refers to early-modern works that first, around the middle of the Cinquecento, began to be made in Rome and shortly afterwards in Florence. Workshops in Rome turned out almost exclusively table tops with distinctly geometric forms related to architecture and patterns composed around a large, centrally placed slab of extremely

9 F. Barry, *Painting in Stone. Architecture and Poetic of Marble from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (New Haven, 2020), pp. 110–112.

10 Decorations in the Roman basilica of Junius Bassus, made in the second quarter of the fourth century, are particularly important examples of *opus sectile*. Thanks to the fact that the building was later turned into the Christian church of St Andrew, known as Sant’Andrea Catabarbara, these works largely survived into early modern times and were generally accessible; see Giusti, *Pietre Dure. The Art*, p. 10.

11 Ibid., p. 156.

12 Ibid., pp. 208–238.



Fig. 2

Table with a top made in the *pietra dura* technique, Rome, fourth quarter of the sixteenth or beginning of the seventeenth century, National Museums Liverpool

valuable and decorative stone, usually marble (Fig. 2).¹³ The *commesso di pietre dure* production in Rome ceased in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, while in Florence, thanks to the patronage and sincere interest of the Medici, the technique developed and achieved considerable popularity, becoming, so to speak, the city's *specialité de la maison*. The distinctive floral/animalistic variety of 'Florentine mosaic', with floral motifs, bouquets of flowers, fruit, birds and insects on a black background, was developed in Florence.¹⁴ Crucial to its formation was Jacopo Ligozzi (1547–1627), initially a leading painter and 'cataloguer of nature' in the service of Grand Duke Francesco I de' Medici (r. 1574–1587), for whom he created numerous works on paper, accurately depicting various specimens of flora and fauna. Later, under Ferdinand I (r. 1587–1609), Ligozzi headed the Galleria dei Lavori, established in 1588 – an institution that united the Medici art workshops into a single venture.¹⁵ As a pattern designer for the artisans employed at the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, a workshop operating within the Galleria dei Lavori that produced

¹³ Ibid., pp. 21–46.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 47–108. The black background was usually made of the so-called 'Belgian Black' marble (Noir Belge), i.e. homogeneous limestone quarried in the Meuse basin, in the vicinity of Namur or Dinant.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 68–69. Cf. Z. Ważbiński, *Ut Ars Natura, Ut Natura Ars* (Toruń, 2000), pp. 117–134.

Florentine mosaics, Ligozzi played a leading role in the nature themes getting firmly established in the local artistic production.¹⁶

From 1604 onwards, the most important task entrusted to the Medici manufactories was the decoration of the chapel designed as the mausoleum of the Medici family, then being built, under the direction of Matteo Nigetti (1570–1648), at church of San Lorenzo in Florence (Fig. 3). It was originally planned to decorate the entire interior of the Chapel of the Princes (Italian: Cappella dei Principi) in the technique of *marmo comesso*, but the project was never completed. In the seventeenth century, the chapel and its decorations were nevertheless widely regarded as an exceptional work. Jakub Sobieski, the father of the future king, who saw it only a few years after the works had begun, described it as a ‘magnificum opus’ which in future ‘may be counted inter orbis miracula’,¹⁷ Father Bartłomiej Nataniel Wąsowski stated that the chapel ‘is commonly regarded [...] a miracle and the greatest ornament of Florence’,¹⁸ and Jan Michał Kossowicz spoke of it as ‘the chapel of Saint Lawrence, famed throughout Europe’.¹⁹

The seventeenth century saw the apogee of the popularity of the technique under discussion. Luxurious wares produced at the Opificio travelled to outside the borders of Italy, both as a result of purchases and as diplomatic gifts from the grand dukes to various personalities, which contributed to their spreading across almost the entire continent.²⁰ Cabinets – pieces of furniture with a multitude of drawers, used for storing precious trinkets – decorated with *pietra dura* panels were very popular.²¹

16 The strong links between Florentine mosaics and the natural world were highlighted by Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi in her text ‘The Flowering of Florence: Botanical Art for the Medici’ published in the catalogue of an exhibition under the same title. Particularly valuable for the present study is the subsection on the relationship between the botanical interests of successive Medici rulers and the production of *pietra dura* pieces, where Tomasi argues that the dominance of floral and animal motifs was not a coincidence, but a deliberate act; see L. T. Tomasi, ‘The Flowering of Florence. Botanical Art for the Medici’, in: *The Flowering of Florence. Botanical Art for the Medici*, eds L. Tongiorgi Tomasi, G. A. Hirschauer (Washington, 2002), pp. 58–70.

17 J. Sobieski, *Peregrynacje po Europie i droga do Baden*, ed. J. Długosz (Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków, 1991), pp. 179. All excerpts from Polish-language sources have been translated solely for the purpose of the present article; seventeenth-century texts, originally in archaic Polish, have been rendered in modern English (translator’s note).

18 M. Jesiotr, ‘Bartłomieja Nataniela Wąsowskiego Relacja z Podróży po Włoszech. Marzec–Październik 1655’, in: *W kręgu sztuki polskiej i grafiki europejskiej*, ed. K. Moisan-Jabłońska (Warszawa, 2011), p. 249.

19 J. M. Kossowicz, *Diariusz podróży po Europie (1682–1688)*, ed. A. Markiewicz (Warszawa, 2017), p. 589.

20 Giusti, *Pietre Dure. The Art*, p. 88.

21 Z. Dolczewski, ‘Sepety i gabinety’, in: *Rzemiosło artystyczne. Materiały Sesji Oddziału Warszawskiego Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki*, ed. R. Bobrowa, vol. 2 (Warszawa, 2001), pp. 93–116. Dolczewski has shown that in the past, chest-like pieces of furniture containing numerous drawers, which today are referred to as *kabinet*, *sepet* or *sekreтарык*



Fig. 3

Cappella dei Principi at the church of San Lorenzo in Florence, under construction from 1604, designed by Matteo Nigetti

In that period, Florentine wares were not just a means of decorating surfaces. As a product, they emerged at the point where an interest in mineralogy, gemmology, botany – or, more broadly, natural history and the surrounding world, intersected with the possibilities of learning about them and attempts at cataloguing them.²² These wares fitted into the important category of *natura artificialis*, nature perfected by man through his creative collaboration with it.²³ They were also a response to the awareness of the impermanence of painted images, which, in an attempt to grant likenesses the quality of lasting forever, were contrasted

(roughly translatable as ‘cabinet’, ‘coffer’ and ‘secretary desk’), did not have a uniform Polish-language terminology and were most often referred to as *szkatula* (‘casket’); see *ibid.*, pp. 114–115. Yet the term *szkatula* may, but does not have to refer to a cabinet; it much more often signified simply a small decorative box. Items described as *wielka szkatula* (‘large casket’), on the other hand, can definitely be identified as cabinets.

²² Tomasi, ‘The Flowering of Florence’, pp. 58–70.

²³ Ważbiński, *Ut Ars Natura*, pp. 239–245.

with images in stone.²⁴ As a result, objects featuring in this technique are closely linked with the early-modern culture of curiosity, and pieces decorated with it can be viewed not only as luxurious furnishings, but also as potential carriers of deep ideological content, even if this content was not always universally understood.

After the Medici dynasty died out in 1737, the grand-ducal manufactories went into crisis and some workshops moved to Naples. The masters who remained in Florence worked mainly for the Vienna-based court of the new grand duke of Tuscany, Francis Stephen (1708–1765) from the Lorraine line of the Habsburg dynasty, who since 1745 had reigned as Holy Roman Emperor Francis I. The character of the products turned out by the Opificio changed completely at this point. The compositions created in that period, which imitated painting and depicted groups of many figures against an architectural landscape, were more in keeping with the taste of the era.²⁵ Once admired for their beauty and uniqueness, and valued for the costliness of the materials used in their making and for the time-consuming nature of the creative process, *pietra dura* wares became no more than fine, somewhat sentimental trinkets.

The opinion voiced by Stanisław Kostka Potocki (1755–1821), who stayed in Florence several times, seems symptomatic of these changes. Viewing the collections there, he expressed a generally low assessment of articles in *commesso di pietre dure*. He considered that they were ‘not in good taste’ and were valued ‘for their craftsmanship, [and] for the material of which they were made’. Potocki, the author of the ‘Polish Winckelmann’, preferred the classical beauty of ancient statuary, and while he did mention that stone mosaics were regarded to be ‘the finest Florentine product, the most expensive that is known’, he nevertheless said – as his example taking a table top decorated with such a mosaic – that ‘the drawing on it is not beautiful, and the effect certainly does not correspond either to the amount of work or the money for which it was acquired’.²⁶

24 The book accompanying the exhibition that took place in late 2022 and early 2023 at the Borghese Gallery in Rome, its English version entitled *Timeless Wonder. Painting on Stone in Rome in Cinquecento and Seicento*, is worth mentioning here. The exhibition included Florentine mosaics. It showcased the role of stone as an artistic medium presented in the context of the reflection on the permanence of a work of art undertaken in the aftermath of the destruction brought about by the Sacco di Roma in 1527; see *Timeless Wonder Painting on Stone in Rome in the Cinquecento and Seicento*, eds F. Cappelletti, P. Cavazzini (Rome, 2022).

25 A. M. Giusti, ‘Roman Inlay and Florentine Mosaics: The New Art of Pietre Dure’, in: *Art of the Royal Court. Treasures in Pietre Dure*, pp. 21–24.

26 All quotations in this paragraph after Wrześniak, *Florence-muzeum*, pp. 182–183. Cf. S. K. Potocki, *O sztuce u dawnych czyli Winkelman Polski* (Warszawa, 1992; first edition 1815).

Little information is available on objects made in *commesso di pietre dure* that came to the Commonwealth in the period before John III Sobieski's accession to the throne. In addition, the sources in question are relatively late, dating from around the middle of the seventeenth century.

Extremely interesting in this context is the account of Father Bartłomiej Nataniel Wąsowski, already mentioned above, concerning his visit to Florence. He found himself in the capital of Tuscany in 1655 as a preceptor to young magnates, Mikołaj and Zygmunt Grudziński, during their travels around Europe. Wąsowski was a Jesuit and a well-educated man; he was particularly passionate about architecture.²⁷ He and his charges inspected the collections belonging to the grand duke, including the works of *pietra dura*, and they also visited the Opificio that produced them, that 'workshop of toil beyond measure, [where] a speck is divided over many days, a board is laid over many months and years'.²⁸ Of particular relevance to the subject at hand is the entry in which Wąsowski reports on the purchase of Florentine mosaic plaques made towards the end of their stay:

On the first of April, the day of our departure, in order not to forget Florence completely, we bought some marble plaques with representations of birds and flowers made of stones. They are not cheap. One such plaque – average in workmanship and yet not simple – costs almost an imperial thaler. The thirteen that we bought to make and decorate a casket were acquired for 90 Polish florins; they were made using a better technique, requiring more work.²⁹

This passage points to the practice of purchasing Florentine mosaic plaques during travels in Tuscany. This was one of the ways in which such plaques found their way to the lands of the Polish-Lithuanian state, where they were used to make furniture decorated in the *pietra dura* technique. It also contextualises such products as a kind of deluxe souvenir of a trip to Italy, or more precisely to Florence, and confirms that

27 Later, Wąsowski was active as a builder/architect and he published a treatise on the subject. He described his travels in an account entitled *Europea Peregrinati*, which still remains in a Latin manuscript. Extensive passages from it, including those concerning his stay in Florence, have been published in a Polish translation by Małgorzata Jesiotr; see eadem, 'Bartłomieja Nataniela Wąsowskiego Relacja', pp. 243–276. Wąsowski resigned there from giving a typical, strictly chronological account of his stay in Florence in favour of an issue-oriented approach, and his narrative on the *pietra dura* technique is distinguished by a broad approach to the subject and a knowledge of it resulting from the author's artistic interests. In describing the Florentine mosaics, Wąsowski highlighted not only the material value of the pieces he had seen, but also the beauty of the artistic medium: coloured stones from all over the world. Cf. Wrześniak, *Florencja-muzeum*, pp. 96–114.

28 Jesiotr, 'Bartłomieja Nataniela Wąsowskiego Relacja', p. 248.

29 Ibid., p. 252.

although expensive, they were within the financial reach of visitors from the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania. Regrettably, the later fortunes of these thirteen plates purchased on 1 April 1655 are not known.

Another valuable document is an inventory titled *Rejestr rzeczy po Szwedach i ucieczkach zostających spisany w roku 1661 dnia 1 grudnia na Wiśniczu* [Register of things remaining after the Swedes and escapes compiled in 1661 on 1 December at Wiśnicz] edited by Władysław Tomkiewicz.³⁰ This extensive list of movables dating from the reign of the Vasa dynasty describes in detail the items furnishing a magnate residence, including numerous works of art.³¹ Objects undoubtedly decorated with Florentine mosaic in the possession of the owner of the Wiśnicz castle, Aleksander Michał Lubomirski (1614–1676), were ‘Table inlaid with stones in Florentine workmanship’,³² i.e. with its top decorated in the *pietra dura* technique, and ‘Large casket with Florentine stones, made in Warsaw after the Swedes’.³³

Queen Louise Marie Gonzaga too owned a *pietra dura* cabinet, as indicated by the inventory drawn up after her death in 1667 in connection with the return of her movable property to her heirs in France.³⁴ Unfortunately, the document does not provide any further details about this piece of furniture.

Further source research offers the hope of finding further information about pieces decorated with the *pietra dura* technique present in the

30 W. Tomkiewicz, *Z dziejów polskiego mecenatu artystycznego w wieku XVII* (Wrocław, 1952), pp. 261–304.

31 *Rejestr rzeczy* includes items which were not looted during the Swedish invasion (The Deluge), in the course of which the castle had been looted three times; it allegedly took 150 carts to transport the spoils. Hence the movable property included in the inventory consisted of those objects which for some reason failed to be stolen by the Swedish invaders, but probably above all those which were evacuated from the Lesser Poland residence and returned to it after the danger had ceased.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 281.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 282. Agnieszka Bender suggested that the enigmatic annotation ‘made in Warsaw after the Swedes’ probably means that this piece of furniture was made in Warsaw using plates brought from Florence by one of the travellers visiting the city. It is, however, difficult to say whether this was in fact the case, and whether the piece was made from scratch after the Swedish invaders withdrew from the capital or some modifications were made to an already existing, perhaps partly destroyed cabinet.

34 *Un grand cabinet de pierre de rapport de Florence*. Zbigniew Wójcik was the first to research this document; see Z. Wójcik, ‘Testament królowej Ludwiki Marii’, in: *Sarmatia artistica. Księga pamiątkowa ku czci profesora Władysława Tomkiewicza*, ed. J. Białostocki (Warszawa, 1968), pp. 129–134. Ryszard Szmydki published the text in the French original; see R. Szmydki, ‘Pośmiertny inwentarz Ludwiki Marii Gonzagi, 1667 r.’, *Rocznik Warszawski*, vol. 23, 1993, pp. 261–294. A cursory discussion of the information on the queen’s movable property as contained therein was made by Paul Freus; see P. Freus, *Majątek polskiej królowej w epoce nowożytnej (na podstawie stanu posiadania Ludwiki Marii Gonzagi)*, pp. 1–14, www.wilanow-palac.pl/majatek_polskiej_krolowej_w_epoce_nowozytnej_na_podstawie stanu_posiadania_ludwiki_marii_gonzagi.html (accessed 30 Jan. 2024).

Commonwealth,³⁵ but it seems that any new finds will not significantly change the picture: the wealthiest members of society did possess such pieces of furniture, but they were very few in number.

Against the background outlined above, the remainder of this article will trace information relating to objects made in the *commesso di pietre dure* technique owned by King John III or members of his immediate family and heirs. It is worth noting at this point that the surviving documents relating to the king's movable property were mostly created after his death and provide the most information about the furnishings of his main residences, Wilanów and Żółkiew.

The rich furnishings of the Wilanów residence from the final period of John III's life are relatively well known thanks to the survival of *General Inventory*, the inventory compiled a few months after the king's death on 17 June 1696.³⁶ This document was first published by Aleksander Czołowski in 1937, but unfortunately with numerous errors.³⁷ The full text of the Wilanów inventory, together with an extensive analysis, was published by Anna Kwiatkowska in 2012.³⁸

The manuscript was created in circumstances arising from the necessity of distributing the king's estate among his three sons: James Louis (1667–1737), Alexander Benedict (1677–1714) and Constantine Ladislaus (1680–1726), and his widow, Queen Dowager Marie Casimire de la Grange d'Arquien (1641–1716). The turbulent events following the king's death and the ensuing disputes over the division of the estate were most comprehensively presented by Aleksandra Skrzypietz in her work *Królewscy Synowie – Jakub, Aleksander i Konstanty Sobiescy*.³⁹

35 Manuscript documents relating to the Radziwiłł family deposited at the Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw seem to be particularly promising in this context. A preliminary analysis of selected inventories has shown that these Lithuanian magnates did possess objects made in the *pietra dura* technique; see Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw (AGAD), Archiwum Warszawskie Radziwiłłów, Dział XXVI: Rejestry skarbców i wszelkiego ruchomego majątku [Registers of treasures and all movable property], sign. 1/354/0/26/45, 1/354/0/26/74 and 1/354/0/26/97.

36 Anna Kwiatkowska stated that although the document has a daily date, this does not necessarily indicate the time of its writing; even though it was most likely compiled in 1696 or shortly after, in reality only the death of Alexander Sobieski in 1714 sets the definitive *terminus ante quem*; see Kwiatkowska, *Inwentarz Generalny*, pp. 29–30.

37 A. Czołowski, *Urządzenie Palacu Wilanowskiego za czasów Jana III* (Lwów, 1937), pp. 29–84; reprinted without alterations in: W. Fijałkowski, *Królewski Wilanów* (Warszawa, 1996), pp. 170–201. A critical analysis of Czołowski's edition was published by Anna Kwiatkowska; see Kwiatkowska, *Inwentarz Generalny*, pp. 14–25.

38 *Ibid.*, passim.

39 A. Skrzypietz, *Królewscy synowie – Jakub, Aleksander i Konstanty Sobiescy* (Katowice, 2011), see chapter 'O ojcowską koronę', pp. 247–344. Krzysztof Kossarzecki recounts these events from the perspective of the distribution of the late king's property; see K. Kossarzecki, *Źródła do dziejów Sobieskich z Archiwum w Mińsku i zbiorów fran-*

The inventory concerns not only the objects held at Wilanów, but also the contents of the family's Warsaw treasuries. The inventories included in it are a compilation of earlier partial inventories, currently unknown, while the objects which had not appeared in those inventories were added in the sections titled 'Extra regestrum'. Paintings held at Wilanów were inventoried separately; a list of paintings located in the family's city residence, Marywil, was also included, as well as a summary record of fourteen paintings from the Casimir Palace.

In total, the inventory contains approximately 3,500 very diverse objects.⁴⁰

These included jewellery, sumptuous objects of everyday use, and works of art. The furnishings and art collections of Wilanów came to be in the king's possession in a variety of ways: by means of foreign purchases made through agents, as diplomatic gifts or spoils of war, thanks to domestic production, etc.⁴¹

However, the text of the inventory did not record all the objects that were in the royal villa at that time. It is difficult to explain why only the movables located on the ground floor of the Wilanów residence were listed, while the furnishings of the rooms on the upper floor were entirely omitted. It is not known whether this was because all the items therein were not the property of the late king and as such did not belong to the estate, or whether there was some different explanation for this omission; nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that the inventory, although extensive, is incomplete and cannot be regarded as a comprehensive documentation of the Wilanów movables.⁴²

cuskich, Ad Villam Novam. Materiały do dziejów rezydencji series, vol. 7 (Warszawa 2012), pp. 10–46.

40 Kwiatkowska, *Inwentarz Generalny*, pp. 40.

41 W. Fijałkowski, 'Jan III Sobieski i jego mecenat kulturalny. Bilans zainteresowań, inicjatyw i dokonań polskiego monarchy na polu kultury artystycznej i umysłowej w drugiej poł. XVIII w.', *Studia Wilanowskie*, vol. 1, 1973, pp. 86–88. On John Sobieski's foreign purchases and his network of agents, see A. Markiewicz, '„Un petit ballot de livres nouveaux”'. Kilka uwag o bibliotece Jana III', *Studia Wilanowskie*, vol. 25, 2018, pp. 95–106, eadem, '„Le peintre de Breda”'. Przyczynek do prac Ferdinanda van Kessela dla Jana III', *Studia Wilanowskie*, vol. 27, 2020, pp. 13–33. Cf. M. Wardzyński, 'Holenderskie i flamandzkie importy rzeźbiarskie dla króla Jana III w Wilanowie (1679–1696). Mechanizmy zamówień – artyści i dzieła – wzory', in: *Jan III Sobieski. Historia. Dziedzictwo. Pamięć*, eds B. Dybaś, A. Zienlewska (Warszawa, 2021), pp. 115–138.

42 Kwiatkowska writes: 'If some items are provided with annotations informing where from and to where they had been moved [...], are we to understand that other items, those without annotations, were recorded at their permanent location? Does the absence of an annotation as to the item being moved from the palace's upper floor to its ground floor in order to be registered, they were not there? This is not possible. Perhaps they did not belong to John III? What is more, Marie Casimire's movables were noted in this document as well, and after all, some of the rooms on the first floor belonged to the queen. Could it be that the items on the first floor were of little value? On the ground floor, even old mattresses and headrests were recorded'; see eadem, *Inwentarz Generalny*, p. 40.

The text of *Inwentarz Generalny* contains information on a relatively numerous group of objects decorated with Florentine mosaic. Occasionally, owing to the abbreviated nature of the descriptions, it is not certain whether the object in question was indeed decorated in this technique, but in many cases this interpretation seems reasonable and probable.

In the section *Galanterye y Złota z Willanowa które się do Działu sprowadziły oddane przez Pana Dyniewicza* [Curios and Gold Items from Wilanów that were submitted for property division by Mr Dyniewicz], there is a 'Box with Florentine pieces, 64 stone pictures in it'.⁴³ This entry leaves no doubt that this was a substantial collection of Florentine mosaics, numbering a few dozen pieces. It seems likely that they were acquired with a view to being used to decorate a piece of furniture, e.g. a cabinet, and that they were brought to the Commonwealth in similar circumstances to Father Wąsowski's Florentine acquisition described above. However, it is not known whether this was in fact the case, and why the collection was kept in a box; whether it was awaiting future use or whether it formed part of an older object or objects.

Further on in the inventory there is the entry: 'A pair of Florentine pictures, one with a frame the other without a frame, of stone, [featuring] miscellaneous flowers'.⁴⁴ Agnieszka Bender suggested that 'the quoted sentence [sic!] seems to indicate that one of the paintings had a frame made of *belle pietre*'.⁴⁵ This interpretation, however, seems incorrect; for if one of the pair of pictures did not have a frame, it means that there was only one frame in evidence, hence the use of the adjective *kamiennie* (Polish: 'of stone' in the feminine/neuter plural, thus in agreement with the word *obrazy* – 'pictures', not with *rama* – 'frame') refers not to a frame, but to a pair of Florentine pictures depicting floral motifs typical of works in this technique. This interpretation seems all the more legitimate given that in the remainder of the inventory, stone images made in the Florentine mosaic technique are included several times, functioning as independent pictures, framed and hanging on walls.⁴⁶

The 'Florentine casket inlaid with stone of various colours',⁴⁷ located in the 'Walled treasury in the Wilanów Palace itself, to the right as the pal-

43 'Pudło z Florenskimi Sztukami w nim obrazków Kamiennych No 64'; *ibid.*, p. 81, no. 111. The box, together with its contents, was to be inherited by Alexander Sobieski.

44 'Obrazow Para Florenskich Ieden z Ramą drugi bez Ramy Kamienne, w kwiaty rozne'; *ibid.*, p. 81, no. 113. This item, too, was to go to Prince Alexander.

45 Bender, 'Meble dekorowane techniką pietra dura', p. 354.

46 Which, incidentally, was in line with the understanding of the term *obraz* ('picture'/'image') at the time. See Kwiatkowska, *Inwentarz Generalny*, p. 24. *Inwentarz Generalny* records most of the independently occurring Florentine mosaic plaques in the section entitled *Inwentarz Obrazow wszystkich...*, meaning an inventory of all pictures.

47 'Szkatuła Florenska Kamieniem roznoego Koloru sadzona'; *ibid.*, p. 82, no. 124. It was to be inherited by Crown Prince James Louis.

ace is entered on the farmstead side', can be regarded as a work using the technique of *pietra dura* as a decorative element. The entry's brevity makes it impossible to determine whether this was indeed an object decorated with Florentine mosaic, but this seems very likely. In the case of other objects made in the *pietra dura* technique, the inventory also uses the participle adjectival form *sadzony* ('inlaid'/'set with'); but if the object in question were set with polished precious stones, e.g. in the form of cabochons, then instead of the singular *kamień* ('stone'), which appears in the text, the plural *kamienie* ('stones') would have been used, as is repeatedly the case in the text of *General Inventory* with regard to such decorated wares. It is also likely that it would have been defined exactly what kind of stones were involved, as this would have been essential in the context of the item's valuation.⁴⁸ Yet the inventory-taker only mentioned that these stones were of various colours. All this, combined with the Florentine provenance of the object in question, prompts the conclusion that it was a casket decorated with Florentine mosaics.

The same room contained also the 'Florentine stone inkwell *alias* apothecary casket'.⁴⁹ It is possible that this entry, too, referred to an object decorated with the technique in question, but again the brevity of the description makes a clear interpretation impossible. Nevertheless, the fact that it was a stone object of Florentine provenance makes this assumption plausible, since the author of *General Inventory* was clearly aware that this was the term used for works made in this technique. Inventoried in the Queen's Bedroom was a 'Large jasper casket with drawers of rich Florentine workmanship, inlaid with various stones with silver, inside on the bottom nine pictures of stone, eighteen of metal, pieces fallen off it are in the drawers'.⁵⁰ It is thus evident that in her bedchamber, Marie Casimire had a cabinet richly ornamented in various artistic techniques, including, it seems, stone plaques in the *pietra dura* technique. At the time the *Inventory* was taken, the piece was apparently not in the best condition.

48 One example was 'Puarek Aspisowy Dyamentami Rubinami y Szmaragami sadzony, Szacowany Aureos No. 175' [A jasper goblet set with rubies and emeralds, valued at 175 gold pieces]; see *ibid.*, p. 84, no. 144.

49 'Kałamarz Kamienny Floręcki alias Apteczka'; *ibid.*, p. 83, no. 131. It was to be inherited by Prince Constantine. Pieces mentioned below were not assigned to a specific inheritor.

50 'Szkatuła wielka Aspisowa z Szufladami Florenską bogatą robotą, kamienmi roznymi sadzona ze Srebrem, na spodzie we wnętrzu Obrazków Kamiennych dziewięć Metalow Osmnascie, sztuki od niey odpadłe są w Szufladach'; *ibid.*, p. 86, no. 171. This cabinet was included in the allocation of James Sobieski's legacy in 1728, where its description was expanded to include information on its base: 'y Stolik pod nią z Mosięzną Listewką' ['underneath it, a table with brass edging']; National Historical Archives of Belarus in Minsk (Нацыянальны гістарычны архіў Беларусі), fond 694, sign. 58_057, p. 204, no. 5.

In King John III's antechamber there was a 'Large Florentine casket made with various stones, tortoiseshell, adorned with silver, with a clock on top which is in repair at the clockmaker's'.⁵¹ It was thus a piece of furniture decorated with tortoiseshell panelling and silver appliqué, most probably with elements of Florentine mosaic. Unfortunately, although it must have been a grand and extremely valuable object, little more can be said about it.

In the king's bedroom, in turn, there were two tables with top decorated with Florentine mosaics. The first of them was a 'Florentine table inlaid with various jasper stones on golden carved wooden legs in various persons'.⁵² The laconic phrasing and freedom of the punctuation used in *General Inventory* makes it impossible to confidently decide whether the phrase 'various persons' referred to the wooden legs carved in the shape of herms, or to the motifs depicted on the table top. The syntax used would suggest that it referred to the legs; yet the motif depicted on the tabletop, one made of the rare and prized Florentine mosaic, might seem a more important detail to record than the shape of the legs. Yet one more point could speak in favour of the first eventuality. A document titled *Connotacya Statui Marmuru Karrarskiego y innych rzeczy w Willanowie pobranych d. 17 Augusti 1707*,⁵³ held in the National Historical Archives of Belarus in Minsk, contains a list of objects that had been seized by the soldiers of Tsar Peter I at that point in the course of the Third Northern War (1700–1721).⁵⁴ The looted objects were mainly sculptures; but there were also others. One of them was a 'marble table of variously inlaid stone in eight squares from Her Majesty the Queen's study [which] was taken, on a wooden pedestal'.⁵⁵ It is unfortunately not certain that this was the same table as the one recorded in the *General Inventory*; however, given that in 1696 there was apparently only one

51 'Szkatuła wielka Florenska roznymi kamienmi wyrabiana zołwiowa, Srebrem adornowana, na Wierzchu zegar który iest u Zegarmistrza wnaprawie'; Kwiatkowska, *Inwentarz Generalny*, p. 89, no. 204.

52 'Stół Florenski roznymi Aspisowymi kamienmi sadzony na złocistych rzniętych Nogach drewnianych w rozne Osoby'; *ibid.*, p. 89, no. 208. The translation is deliberately stunted to reflect the ambiguity of the original (translator's note).

53 National Historical Archives of Belarus, fond 694, op. 1, sign. 58, *Connotacya statui marmuru kararyjskiego y innych rzeczy w Willanowie pobranych d. 17 augusti 1707*, fols 109r–109v. Another version of the document is in the Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw (Archiwum Głównym Akt Dawnych, AGAD), Archiwum Radziwiłłów, Dział X: Archiwum Warszawskie Radziwiłłów, Archiwum domowe Sobieskich, inedited document, *Connotacya statui marmuru kararyjskiego y innych rzeczy w Willanowie pobranych d. 17 augusti 1707*.

54 Wardzyński, 'Holenderskie i flamandzkie importy rzeźbiarskie', p. 129.

55 'stół marmurowy roznym nasadzany kamieniem w osm kwadratów z Gabientu królowej Jmści [który] wzięto, na pedestalu drewnianym'; National Historical Archives of Belarus, fond 694, op. 1, sygn. 58, *Connotacya statui*, 109v. In the Warsaw version: 'Stół marmurowy w 8. kwadratów roznym na sadzany kamieniem'.

table matching the description, one with a stone top and wooden legs, it is quite possible that this was the same piece, which in the meantime had been moved from the king's bedroom to the queen's study.⁵⁶ Otherwise, the inevitable assumption would be that someone had brought this piece of furniture, a rarity at the time, to Wilanów during the turbulent period of the Sobieski family's fight for John III's legacy; but this seems unlikely. Still, regardless of whether it was the same piece or two different ones, the phrase 'inlaid stone in eight squares' is puzzling. What may have been meant were eight square slabs of different stones laid side by side; alternatively, it may have been a more complex geometric pattern of interlocking squares in the style of late sixteenth-century wares. If so, this would mean that the Russian army had managed to grab a truly extraordinary piece of furniture. Perhaps in the future, when research in Russia becomes possible, this question can be answered.

Another table to be found in the king's bedroom seems to have been an equally puzzling object. It is described as 'A second table, Florentine, inlaid with various jaspers, a fountain in the centre, this one is without legs'.⁵⁷ Agnieszka Bender points out that 'from the description it is not clear whether a fountain was shown in the centre of the motif or whether some kind of fountain was installed in the centre of the top'.⁵⁸ It would be difficult to find any seventeenth- or eighteenth-century piece that would have an actual fountain in the centre of the table top. The fountain motif was, however, quite evidently a part of the iconographic repertoire of Florentine makers using the *pietra dura* technique. It is found, for example, in the central panel of a cabinet held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Fig. 4).⁵⁹ The surrounding plaques decorating the drawers feature birds, so together the representations form a larger arrangement that depicts animals flocking to a watering place.⁶⁰ It is

56 A second table with a stone top had a base of the same material and was located in the queen's antechamber, no. 166. It too may have been taken from Wilanów in the same circumstances. *Connotacya statui* mentions 'Stół czarny z takimisż stalugami czworograniasty z Pod obrazu S. Antoniego' ['Black table with stand in the same colour, four-cornered, from underneath the picture of St Anthony'].

57 Kwiatkowska, *Inwentarz Generalny*, pp. 89, no. 209.

58 Bender, 'Meble dekorowane techniką *pietra dura*', p. 353.

59 *Pietre dure* cabinet with St Catherina of Alexandria, ca. 1630–1640, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. no. m.77.1.15 – LACMA, digital collection: collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O157672/pietre-dure-cabinet-with-st-cabinet/ (accessed 13 Nov. 2024). A similar motif appears, for example, on a seventeenth-century Florentine plaque auctioned at Christie's on 19 May 2021; see: www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6313328 (accessed 13 Nov. 2024).

60 A similar concept was often applied when the central panel depicted Orpheus playing the lyre: the smaller panels surrounding it depicted the animals that he lured with his music. A Flemish cabinet with Florentine *pietra dura* panels, dating from the second half of the seventeenth century, auctioned at Christie's on 23 July 2020, www.christies.com/lot/lot-6268609 (accessed 13 Nov. 2024), is an example.



Fig. 4

Cabinet, Paris or Antwerp, ca. 1630–1640, Florentine mosaic panels: first half of the seventeenth century, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

not clear why the piece did not have legs at the time the document was written. They may have been damaged, for example, during some spatial rearrangements caused by the inventory-taking. However, it cannot be completely ruled out that the top was in the king's bedroom before his death as a peculiar decoration. After all, the room contained panels made in the *pietra dura* technique, hanging on the walls in the manner of paintings. One of them was an 'Image in Florentine stone work, of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, head of the Angel knocked off, in gilt metal frame'⁶¹ and a 'Stone image on which fashioned fruits in bassorilevo and flowers, in a lapis lazuli vase framed in black'.⁶² The first therefore depicted a religious scene and the second was a typical Florentine mosaic motif of flowers and fruit, in a vase laid in lapis lazuli. The term *bassorilevo* (Italian for bas-relief, low relief) refers to the fact that some elements were three-dimensional. It is a variation of the technique in question; Father Bartłomiej Nataniel Wąsowski wrote about it that it is made 'in such a way that the relief protrudes above the plane – this feat is considered the most difficult and valuable'.⁶³ In the king's bedroom there was also a 'natural marble picture, a battle of the Amazons in gilt brass frame, marble *numismata*, silver angels upon

61 'Obraz Florenskiej roboty Kamienny, zwiastowania Panny Marij, główka od Anjoła Odrącona, wramkach metalowych złocistych'; Kwiatkowska, *Inwentarz Generalny*, p. 127, no. 86.

62 'Obraz kamienny na którym robione Frukta Bassorilevo y kwiaty, w Wazo Lapis Lazuri wramkach czarnych'; *ibid.*, p. 127, no. 87.

63 Jesiotr, 'Bartłomiej Nataniela Wąsowskiego Relacja', p. 248.

it'.⁶⁴ The phrase 'natural marble' may refer to a type of stone known as *pietra paesina*, or ruin marble in English, found naturally in Tuscany, whose consecutive layers, visible when cut, resemble phantasmagoric landscapes filled with ruins.⁶⁵ It is unlikely, however, that the stone itself showed a battle scene; the figures of the Amazons were probably painted on it.⁶⁶ In addition, the frame of the painting appears to have contained samples of various marbles.

As for other rooms, in the 'Upper Treasury, in which there were paintings from the Lower Gallery and the Library' there was a 'Florentine stone picture, on it a parrot sitting in a cherry tree, in black frame'.⁶⁷ This was another example of a Florentine mosaic panel featuring a typical floral and animal motif, functioning as a wall decoration in the manner of a painting. Finally, in the King's wardrobe, there was a 'Casket of ivory bone, jasper pieces set in it'.⁶⁸ The terse phrase *sztuki aspisowe* ('jasper pieces') makes it impossible to ascertain whether those were figural representations in Florentine mosaics or the single stone insets.⁶⁹

64 'Obraz marmurowy Naturalny, Amazanek Batalia wramach złocistych mosiężnych, na których Numismata Mamurowe, Anjołkowie Srebrni'; Kwiatkowska, *Inwentarz Generalny*, p. 127, no. 82. The 'marble *numismata*' decorating the frame were probably engraved stones, i.e. glyptic wares. Sobieski's collection did contain single pieces of engraved stones; see Gębarowicz, *Materiały źródłowe*, p. 147.

65 Ruin marble consists of fine-grained carbonate rocks, marlstones or marbles. It occurs in Tuscany, e.g. in the vicinity of Volterra. On this type of decorative rock, see M. Serra, A. Borghi, L. M. Gallo, 'Petrographic features, genesis and provenance of Pietra Paesina collections of the Regional Museum of Natural Sciences of Turin', *Periodico di Mineralogia*, vol. 79, 2010, pp. 95–111.

66 Pieces of this kind were made by, among others, Antonio Tempesta (1555–1630), e.g. *The Crossing of the Red Sea*, Galleria Borghese, Rome, inv. no. 501, www.collezione-galleriaborghese.it/en/opere/the-crossing-of-the-red-sea (accessed 13 Nov. 2024), or *The Calling of Saint Peter*, *ibid.*, inv. no. 497, www.collezione-galleriaborghese.it/en/opere/the-calling-of-saint-peter (accessed 13 Nov. 2024). The Museum of Applied Arts in Poznań displays a seventeenth-century painting *A Procession to Golgotha* made in this technique; it is owned by the National Museum in Poznań, inv. no. MNP Mo 321.

67 'Skarbczyk Gurny, w którym były Obrazy z Galerij dolney z Biblioteki [...] obraz Florenski Kamienny, na którym Papuga na drzewie Wisniowym Siedzi, wramach czarnych'; Kwiatkowska, *Inwentarz Generalny*, p. 141, no. 208.

68 'Szkatuła Słoniowej kosci Sztuki wniesy Aspisowe wprawiane'; *ibid.*, p. 94, no. 263.

69 The *General Inventory* additionally contains several items that are indirectly related to the Florentine mosaic technique or the ambiguity of description does not allow to determine the technique used in their making: 'Picture from the Holy Father Ottoboni [Pope Alexander VIII] bassorilievo, richly gilt, St Ignatius *cum sociis suis*, in smooth gilt metal frame, bottom of lapis lazuli and amethyst stone, on a silk rope having tassels with silver', p. 126, no. 79; 'Picture of Passion Christi on sheet metal, in a Florentine frame of stone, wound round with wire', p. 126, no. 80; 'Picture of the Virgin Mary, mosaic, in carved, non-gilt boxwood frame', p. 130, no. 119 (here, however, what was meant was probably a micromosaic laid with minute *tesserae*, since nowhere else does the *Inventory* apply the term of 'mosaic' to Florentine mosaic); 'Picture in which a marble ewer and various fruits, frame covered in rough hide, gilt', p. 133, no. 141. Pictures where marble is used

John III's main residence outside Wilanów was Żółkiew (today: Zhovkva), a magnificent residence in Crown Ruthenia and the then family nest of the Sobieski family, in whose vicinity their most important landed estates were located.⁷⁰

A complete inventory of the movables in the Żółkiew castle at the time when it was owned by John III does not exist. The inventory of 1671, published by Mieczysław Gębarowicz,⁷¹ was more concerned with the condition of the building and mentioned only a few pieces of equipment, including a few marble tables. It is possible that the remaining furnishings were evacuated due to the warfare then ongoing in Ruthenia and the resulting threat of looting.⁷²

However, there exist several inventories dating from the period when Żółkiew was owned by the heirs of John III, namely, the king's youngest son, Prince Constantine Ladislaus (until 1726), the king's eldest son, James Louis (until 1737), and finally James's daughter, Caroline Marie de Bouillon (until 1740). Although these inventories date from later times, it is highly probable that a sizeable proportion of the movable furnishings of the castle recorded in them came from the collection amassed by the late king. It is worth noting that his heirs, plagued by

as the painting surface are numerous, e.g. 'Picture on black marble of Lord Jesus praying in the Garden, Vandyck the painter, in gilt frame', p. 131, no. 128; further on: p. 136, no. 176; p. 138, no. 191; p. 139, no. 194, p. 143, no. 229. Since these pieces are not discussed in the article with regard to the phrasing of inventory notes, their descriptions are here translated without the Polish original; the originals are found in the Polish language version of the article in the current volume of *Wilanów Studies* (translator's note).

70 On the history of the Żółkiew castle, see T. Bernatowicz, *Królewska rezydencja w Żółkwi* (Warszawa, 2009), pp. 11–46.

71 *Inwentarz zamku żółkiewskiego spisany die 30 Martii, Anno 1671*; see M. Gębarowicz, *Materiały źródłowe do dziejów kultury i sztuki XVI–XVIII* (Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk, 1973), pp. 117–122.

72 It is known that this precaution was taken two years later: 'Regestra skarbców, rzeczy, tak z Żółkwi, Lwowa, Jaworowa, Kazimierza, w Gniewie spisane, die 3 januarii 1673' [Register of treasures, objects from Żółkiew, Lvov, Jaworów, Kazimierz, written down in Gniew, die 3 januarii 1673] is an inventory of goods transported to Pomerania, where the inventory was compiled, from various places, mainly from the areas in Ruthenia threatened by warfare. This is a partial inventory, with no information on Florentine mosaic works; see *ibid.*, pp. 123–127. The inventories of the baths in Żółkiew also date from the times of John III: 'Regestr opisania łaźni w zamku żółkiewskim po odjeździe Króla Jmci na sejm do Warszawy in Anno 1690 die 5 Januarii' [Register of the description of the baths in the Żółkiew castle after the departure of His Majesty the King for the parliament in Warsaw]; see M. Gębarowicz, *Szkice z historii sztuki* (Toruń, 1966), pp. 221–230. It does not mention any works in Florentine mosaics; there are only pictures of 'Little dogs, a pair, behind glass, painted as if on a marble floor'; see *ibid.*, p. 222. The second document, entitled 'Regestr obrazów zostawionych w łaźni po drugiej stronie od folwarku, A. 1694' [Register of pictures left in the baths on the other side of the farmstead, y. 1694], does not contain information on Florentine mosaics either; see Gębarowicz, *Materiały źródłowe*, pp. 144–145.

constant financial problems, tended not to enlarge the artistic collections inherited from their ancestors.⁷³ For this reason, although chronologically these documents belong to the following era, the data they contain complete the picture of John III's possessions.

The inventory of Żółkiew castle entitled *Inwentarz Zamku Żółkiewskiego w R. 1726*⁷⁴ published in 1891 by Ludwik Finkel contained entries on several picture made wholly or partly in Florentine mosaic. These included 'Two paired pictures in true golden mosaic frames, *alias* in various agates, one featuring a bird on a bush and the other flowers in a jug'.⁷⁵ These were typical motifs features on Florentine mosaic plaques. In addition, 'two [pictures] similar to each other, made of natural stone, one disintegrated into halves, in black frame edged with gold, the other whole in gold frame, where a ship is shown in mosaic'.⁷⁶ Here, too, the phrase *kamienne samorodne* ('of natural stone') probably refers to *pietra paesina*, one plaque of which was decorated with an image of a ship made in *pietra dura*.⁷⁷ Recorded further on was 'above the door, in a gilt-edged frame, a natural stone picture, with added mosaic. Beside it, a landscape in a small gilt-edged frame, made of natural stone'.⁷⁸ It is thus clear that the Żółkiew castle had more items of this kind, but this time there is no information as to what image was added to the naturally created landscape. Finally, there was an image described as 'smaller, in true mosaic, representing a tiger'.⁷⁹

A later inventory of the castle, entitled *Inwentarz Ruchomości Skarbca Żółkiewskiego z 1738 roku*,⁸⁰ records a 'Box with little stones of various colours, which are allegedly from a Florentine *mosaico* image; therein a piece of rock in which bone *numisma* are set; therein some stuff of

73 Skrzypietz, *Królewscy synowie*, pp. 378–380.

74 L. Finkel, *Inwentarz Zamku Żółkiewskiego w R. 1726* (Kraków, 1891).

75 'Dwa obrazków parzystych w złotych ramkach mozaicznych prawdziwych, alias w różnych agatach, jeden wyraża ptaszka na krzaczku a drugi kwiatki w dzbanuszkę'; *ibid.*, p. 2.

76 '[obrazków] podobnych sobie dwa, kamiennych samorodnych, jeden wpół rozpadniony, w czarnych ramach brzegiem pozłocistych, a drugi cały w złotych ramach, gdzie mozaiką przydany okręt'; *ibid.*, p. 4.

77 A similar piece made from a *pietra paesina* plaque with a ship added in the *pietra dura* technique was on offer at the Hermann Historica GmbH auction house on 22 Nov. 2021, www.invaluable.com/auction-lot/two-florentine-pietra-paesina-images-17th-century-151-c-dcb47da959?objectID=165855934&algIndex=undefined&queryID=6f7252de6c0511023059ac29f1a467d8 (accessed 30 Jan. 2024).

78 'nade drzwiami w ramach brzegiem pozłocistych. obrazek kamienny samorodny, mozaiką przydany. Wedle niego landszaft w ramach małych, brzegiem pozłocistych, kamienny samorodny'; Finkel, *Inwentarz Zamku Żółkiewskiego*, pp. 4.

79 'mniejszy prawdziwej mozaiki, reprezentujący tygrysa'; *ibid.*, p. 5.

80 Gębarowicz, *Materiały źródłowe*, pp. 164–172.



Fig. 5

Casket, according to tradition owned by Queen Marie Casimire, Florence, seventeenth century, Museum of King John III's Palace at Wilanów

shining white stone'.⁸¹ In this box, among other curiosities, there were remnants of destroyed Florentine mosaics, some of them perhaps coming from the above-mentioned pictures, which apparently, contrary to their creators' intentions, did not prove to last forever.

In addition to objects associated with the royal couple which are known only from archival records, Polish museum collections hold two caskets decorated in the *pietra dura* technique which are sometimes linked with Queen Marie Casimire de la Grange d'Arquien.

One of them now belongs to the collection of the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów (Fig. 5).⁸² It is a seventeenth-century Florentine product, richly decorated with *commesso di pietre dure* panels.⁸³ The casket was purchased by a member of the Potocki family – nineteenth-century owners of Wilanów who were keen art collectors, but it is not certain whether this was Stanisław Kostka or his son Aleksander.⁸⁴ The purchase was dictated by the tradition that the casket had once belonged to Queen Maria Casimire.⁸⁵ Under the label 'Marysieńka's Casket', it was on show, together with many other objects, at the 'Exhibition of antiquities and objects of art held at the Potocki Palace in Warsaw at

81 'Pudelko z kamykami różnego koloru, które mają bydź od obrazu mosaico florentskiego; tamże skały sztuka, w którym numisma kościane wrosłe; tamże jakaś materia z kamienia białego połyskującego'; *ibid.*, p. 166.

82 Warsaw, Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów, inv. no. Wil.328.

83 On this casket in detail: A. Kwiatkowska, 'Meble trzech pokoleń Potockich', *Studia Wilanowskie*, vol. 26, 2019, pp. 97–98.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

85 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Krakowskie Przedmieście Street for the benefit of the Shelter House of the Protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary' held in 1856.⁸⁶

The association of the Wilanów casket with the person of the queen must be approached with great caution, since the basis for this attribution was information transmitted orally in the nineteenth century; nevertheless, it should be noted that *General Inventory* does record an object of this kind, namely, a 'Florentine casket inlaid with stones of various colours'. The dating and the highest artistic level of the Tuscan product now in Wilanów permit the assumption that Queen Marie Casimire owned, if not this very casket, then a very similar one. In consequence, among all the extant Florentine mosaic works the existence of which is attested in historical collections of the former Commonwealth, the piece in question functions today in a context that is perhaps the closest to its original one.

The second casket described as having formerly belonged to Queen Marie Casimire is the property of the National Museum in Warsaw.⁸⁷ This casket found its way into a public collection thanks to a donation by the painter, collector and art restorer Antoni Strzałecki (1844–1934).⁸⁸ Described as a French or Florentine product,⁸⁹ it is made of ebony and has the form of a rectangular box with chamfered corners, covered by a richly moulded lid. It is decorated with oval *pietra dura* panels in relief, featuring insects and fruit on leafy branches against a black background. In addition, the casket has ornamental decoration in gilt bronze, in which semi-precious stones are set to form fruit garlands. The variety of *pietra dura* used in its making is thus precisely the one described by Father Wąsowski as the most difficult to make and the most highly valued.

Its surviving original case, made of wood covered with crimson silk, is a rarity. Its lid bears the monogram MA, the interpretation of which as 'Marie d'Arquien' was the basis for linking the casket with the queen.⁹⁰ Yet these initials may, of course, point to a person other than Marie

86 *Katalog wystawy starożytności i przedmiotów sztuki 1856 urządzanej w Palacu Jw. hr. Augustostwa Potockich w Warszawie na Krakowskim Przedmieściu na korzyść Domu Schronienia Opieki Najświętszej Maryi Panny* (Warszawa, 1856), pp. 153–154, no. 537. J. Paprocka-Gajek, 'Wilanowska perspektywa warszawskiej „Wystawy starożytności” w pałacu Potockich w lecie 1856 roku', *Studia Wilanowskie*, vol. 26, 2019, pp. 179–244, no. 537.

87 National Museum in Warsaw, inv. no. SZM 1676.

88 A. Strzałecki, *Artystyczne zbiory Strzałeckich* (Warszawa, 2022), pp. 519–520. The casket in question appears in a 1918 portrait of Antoni Strzałecki painted by Zygmunt Strzałecki, see National Museum in Warsaw, inv. no. MP 1240.

89 In the National Museum in Warsaw catalogue, inv. no. MP 1240, it is identified as a Florentine product dating from the early eighteenth century, whereas in the book *Artystyczne zbiory Strzałeckich*, as a French product from the late seventeenth century. Cf. Strzałecki, *Artystyczne zbiory*, p. 519.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 520.

Casimire; hence, being unconvincing, this attribution should be treated with considerable caution.⁹¹

A most interesting object linked with the heirs of John III is the frame of the painting *The Virgin of the Snows* situated in the southern altar at the chancel arch in the Reformed Friars Minor church of the Most Holy Name of Jesus in Pilica (formerly Cracow voivodeship, currently the Silesian one) (Fig. 6). In this frame, elements of a piece of furniture decorated with Florentine mosaic, donated to the monastery by its foundress Maria Józefa Sobieska née Wessel (ca. 1685–1761), were reused at a later date.⁹²

The donatrix came from Mazovian gentry of average affluence, but members of her family belonged to the Sobieski court. Little is known about her youth.⁹³ The event that determined her adult life was her secret marriage to Prince Constantine Ladislaus Sobieski (1680–1726), the youngest son of the late king, which took place on 18 November 1708. By virtue of the sacrament, Maria Józefa went from being a lady-in-waiting to being a formal member of the Sobieski family, as well as a relative of the Roman Emperor and several European ruling families; hence the marriage



Fig. 6

Frame of the painting *The Virgin of the Snows*, 1753–1754, the Reformed Friars Minor church of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, Pilica

91 The fact that the monogram is crowned with a crown identified by Aleksander Strzałecki as a margrave's one creates a problem, since it can hardly be linked to Queen Marie Casimire; see *ibid.*, p. 520.

92 Warsaw, National Institute of Cultural Heritage (Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa), Department of Inventories and Registers of Movable Heritage (Dział Ewidencji i Rejestru Zabytków Ruchomych), movable heritage inventory cards, card no. KAX 000004382, Pilica, monastery church of the Name of Jesus, ed. A. Sudacha, 1972.

93 The early stages of Maria Józefa's life are recounted in a nineteenth-century fictionalised memoir written by her distant relative Sabina Grzegorzewska née Gostkowska; see S. Grzegorzewska, *Pamiętnik o Maryi Wessłównie królewiczowej Konstantowej Sobieskiej: spisany ze wspomnień rodzinnych* (Warszawa, 1886). Information contained in this book should therefore be treated with considerable caution. Cf. A. Sikorski, 'Maria-Józefa z Wessłów żona królewicza Konstantego Sobieskiego', *Rocznik Polskiego Towarzystwa Heraldycznego*, Nowa Seria, vol. 4, 1999, pp. 189–202.

was widely regarded as a misalliance.⁹⁴ A few weeks later, the prince rejected his bride and the Sobieski family soon sought to invalidate the sacrament, as it thwarted Constantine's chances of succeeding to the throne of Poland, which previously had been quite substantial.⁹⁵ Maria Józefa's later fortunes were dominated by the proceedings, which dragged on for several years. The ruling by the tribunal of the Roman Rota on the legitimacy of the marriage resulted in the reconciliation of the spouses, who settled together in Żółkiew. This period did not last long, however, ending with the prince's death in July 1726.⁹⁶ A property settlement concluded with James Louis, the last surviving son of John III, allowed the widowed Maria Józefa to purchase the Pilica estate in 1730. In the 1740s she founded the construction of a Reformed Friars Minor church and monastery in the village of Biskupice (now the northern part of the town of Pilica).⁹⁷ In 1753, due to her deteriorating health, Maria Józefa decided to hand over the estate to her nephew, Teodor Wessel (d. 1791), and she herself went to Warsaw, where she died a few years later. Upon leaving Pilica, she donated to the monastery she had founded a painting of *The Virgin of the Snows*, which was a seventeenth-century copy of the twelfth-century icon *Salus Populi Romani* held in the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. According to tradition, Maria Józefa received this image as a bequest from her brother Father Augustyn Adam Wessel (1678–1735), bishop of Livonia and later bishop of Kamieniec (today: Kamianets-Podilskyi). Apart from that, she also donated to the monks an ebony secretary desk decorated with Florentine mosaic panels showing birds, insects and plants. This piece was used to create the frame for the above-mentioned painting. The result is a unique work of art, made between 1753 and 1754 by one of the then members of the Pilica congregation, the carpenter and woodcarver Brother Martynian Wolski.⁹⁸

The exact original appearance of the secretary desk is difficult to assess on the basis of its surviving elements. It probably had the shape of a rectangular box topped with volutes in the upper part of its frame. The central part was presumably decorated with the larger panel now mounted at the top of the painting's frame, and the other nine pairs of plaques were set

94 On the issue of their marriage, in detail: A. Skrzypietz, *Królewscy synowie*, pp. 481–488.

95 Skrzypietz devotes an entire chapter, entitled *W wirach wielkiej polityki*, to the issue of the Sobieski family's efforts to obtain the Polish throne during the Third Northern War (1700–1721); see eadem, *Królewscy synowie*, pp. 247–344.

96 A. Sikorski, 'Maria-Józefa z Wesslów', pp. 197–198.

97 H. Błażkiewicz, 'Dzieje parafii Pilica w okresie przedrozbiorowym', *Nasza Przyszłość. Studia z dziejów Kościoła i kultury katolickiej w Polsce*, vol. 57, 1982, pp. 194–195.

98 A. J. Błachut, 'Martynian Wolski', in: *Słownik artystów reformackich w Polsce*, ed. A. J. Błachut (Warszawa, 2006), pp. 141–142. Cf. Cracow, Archives of the Virgin Mary of the Angels Province of the Order of Friars Minor, no signature, *Archivum conventus Pilicensis ab Anno Domini 1739*, p. 19.

in the symmetrically arranged drawers. It seems to have been a seventeenth-century piece made in northern Europe, probably in the Northern Netherlands.⁹⁹ The *pietra dura* panels used in its making certainly came from Florentine workshops. Compared to other pieces of its kind, the original desk appears to have been relatively simple, not a particularly luxurious product of cabinet-maker's craft. The *pietra dura* panels represent an average degree of workmanship; the seven panels with depictions of butterflies are among the simplest figurative images achievable in this technique and available from the Opificio delle Pietre Dure.

It may be assumed that this piece of furniture came into Maria Józefa's possession as a part of the legacy of her husband and that it originally belonged to the Sobieski family. This would be supported by at least the hypothetical dating of the piece, as well as by the fact that Maria Józefa herself, coming from a gentry family of limited means, presumably did not inherit it from them (although this cannot be ruled out in relation to her brother the bishop). The Sobieski collection certainly included a large number of furnishings ornamented with Florentine mosaic and Maria Józefa undoubtedly came into possession of a number of objects from the legacy of Constantine Ladislaus.¹⁰⁰ Also in this case there is, regrettably, no certainty that it once belonged to John III or Marie Casimire. Still, it seems that of the objects known to scholarship, it is the Pilica mosaic frame that is most likely to have been a part of the royal collection.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to ascertain whether the collection of works in *commesso di pietre dure* in the possession of John III and his family was an exceptional phenomenon in the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania, or whether, on the contrary, it was a typical element of the furnishings of magnate residences at that time. Against the background of the abundant information on the artistic collections held by the Sobieski family, data on the collections of their contemporaries, members of the intellectual and financial elite, seem scarce. No contemporary inventories are available for the residences of such magnate patrons as Jan Andrzej Morsztyn

99 This seems to be confirmed by the presence of a carved ornament of very fine waves, known as rippled or waveform moulding (German: *Flammleiste*; French: *moulures ondées*; Polish: *w rzekę*), which was extremely popular in Dutch woodcarving of the period.

100 A set of liturgical vestments preserved in the former collegiate church (now the parish church of St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist) in Pilica, in which fragments of earlier embroideries were reused, is an example. These embroideries, linked with the ceremony of awarding John III the Order of the Holy Spirit (1676), were brought from Żółkiew to Pilica by Maria Józefa Sobieska; see *Odsiecz Wiedeńska 1683. Wystawa jubileuszowa w Zamku Królewskim na Wawelu w trzechsetlecie bitwy. Tło historyczne i materiały źródłowe*, vol. I, eds A. Franaszek, K. Kuczman (Kraków, 1990), note 222; *Zespół paramentów z symbolami Orderu Świętego Ducha*, note by M. Piwocka, pp. 182–184, vol. 2, Figs 161–164.

(1621–1693), Jan Dobrogost Krasieński (1639–1717),¹⁰¹ Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski (1642–1702),¹⁰² or members of the Pac family: Krzysztof Zygmunt (1621–1684) and Michał Kazimierz (1624–1682).

The situation regarding the Lithuanian Sapieha family of the Lis coat of arms is somewhat different. As in the case of the Pilica frame, the former church of the Reformed Friars Minor in Boćki in Podlachia contains traces of furniture decorated with Florentine mosaic which once belonged to the members of that family and was reused to decorate the consecrated space.¹⁰³ Thirty-four panels were inserted into a tabernacle, made in 1738–1739, in the main altar and five such plaques were inserted into the tabernacle, dating from the early 1740s, in the side chapel, which was used as the family mausoleum. The pictures used in the decoration of these structures were probably obtained from three pieces of earlier furniture and constitute the most numerous surviving collection of their kind in the territory of the former Commonwealth. Assuming that the pieces of furniture donated in the 1730s and 1740s for the purpose of decorating the church were worn-out items that had gone out of fashion, they could have dated from the second half of the seventeenth century, and this would testify, albeit indirectly and hypothetically, to furnishings decorated in this technique being present in the collections of Lithuanian magnates in the times of John III.

Yet even if this was, in fact, the case, single pieces decorated with Florentine mosaic are known to have been preset in the Commonwealth from the middle of the seventeenth century at the latest. By comparison, *General Inventory* contains information about a single box in which there were no less than sixty-four plaques of this type! The question, then, is whether the large number of various *pietra dura* items attested in the

101 A later inventory of the Krasieński Palace in Warsaw, dating from 1713 and attached to the will of Jan Dobrogost Krasieński, contains no information on pieces made in the Florentine mosaic technique; see I. T. Baranowski, *Inwentarze Palacu Krasieńskich później Rzeczypospolitej* (Warszawa, 1910), pp. 1–35.

102 The only source regarding the movable property in the Ujazdowski Castle, owned between 1674 and 1702 by Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski, is the account of Jean-François Regnard, who visited the residence in 1683 and saw a large collection of paintings and a silver Augsburg cabinet containing a *perpetuum mobile* machine; see Z. Rewski, 'Warszawa z czasów Sobieskiego w pismach J. Fr. Regnarda', *Stolica*, vol. 8, 1953, no. 28, p. 13. Cf. S. Mossakowski, 'Rezydencja Ujazdowska Stanisława Herakliusza Lubomirskiego', *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, vol. 31, 1969, no. 4, pp. 363–364.

103 On the Boćki set, see *Katalog zabytków sztuki w Polsce*, Seria Nowa, vol. XII: *Województwo podlaskie (bialostockie)*, ed. M. Zgłiński, part 4: *Powiat bielski*, eds Z. Michalczyk, D. Piramidowicz, K. Uchowicz, M. Zgłiński (Warszawa, 2019), pp. 68–90, on the tabernacle, p. 76, Fig. 324. Cf. K. Chmielewski, 'Konservacja barokowego tabernakulum z ołtarza w kościele parafialnym w Boćkach', *Biuletyn Konserwatorski Województwa Podlaskiego*, vol. 5, 1999, pp. 67–76. On the Boćki furnishings, which became a model for other churches of the Reformed Friars Minor, see M. Kałamajska-Saed, 'Modelowy wystrój kościoła reformatów w Boćkach', *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, vol. 42, 1980, no. 2, pp. 145–158.

collections of the Sobieski family results from the good state of preservation of the archival records relating to them, or whether works made in this technique were more numerous in their collections than in those of other members of the magnate elite of the time, and if so, can potential reasons for this state of affairs be ascertained.

King John III Sobieski was widely perceived by his contemporaries as a man of excellent education and one endowed with a particular curiosity about the world that surrounded him.¹⁰⁴ He was exceptionally fond of nature, and his passion for the natural world in the broadest sense of the term is a matter of common knowledge. He was a keen gardener; Karolina Targosz writes: 'The growing of fruit and flowers was, from the earliest years of the Sobieski marriage, a theme that united Jan and Marysienka's shared domestic interests. [...] Much space in their letters is occupied by requests, orders and reminders to buy and watch over the progress of their plants, expressions of joy when the effects of gardening and fruit-growing were successful, especially when it came to new species imported from abroad, and grief when gardens and orchards withered away'.¹⁰⁵ It is known that Sobieski was extremely fond of spending long hours strolling through the gardens at Wilanów and that he owned a magnificent menagerie. It seems, therefore, that the sumptuous Florentine mosaics, which at the time took the works of nature: flowers, birds and insects as their main motif, were in keeping with the king's aesthetic preferences and taste. His predilection for them may be confirmed by the numerous works in this technique collected in his bedroom.

Sobieski most probably never crossed the Alps and never saw Florence or the works of art gathered there, including the finest *pietra dura* pieces, with his own eyes.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, after 1685 he maintained a lively

104 Accounts on this subject by various persons were gathered by Karolina Targosz; see eadem, *Jan III Sobieski mecenasem nauk i uczonych* (Warszawa, 2012), pp. 12–16. According to Wojciech Fijałkowski, 'a lifelong desire to educate himself, a curiosity about many things and a constant thirst for knowledge were among the characteristic features of Sobieski's mindset, highlighted by secular and ecclesiastical dignitaries who came into contact with the king and by travellers visiting Poland'; Fijałkowski, *Jan III Sobieski*, p. 10.

105 Ibid., pp. 363–366. For more on the king and his court's interest in botany, zoology and natural sciences, see Targosz, *Jan III Sobieski mecenasem*, chapter IV, 'Wśród korespondentów Academiae Naturae Curiosorum. Zainteresowania przyrodą i medycyną', pp. 336–441.

106 His youthful journey across Europe, which he made with his brother Marek, was interrupted in 1648 by news of unrest on the eastern borders of the Commonwealth. It is generally assumed that Sobieski never reached Italy. However, according to a different view, first expressed by Karol Szajnocha, Sobieski made a pilgrimage to Rome in 1667; see idem, 'Jan Sobieski banitą i pielgrzymem', in: *Szkice historyczne*, vol. III (Warszawa, 1930), pp. 159–161. One of the more recent studies that support this view is M. Smoliński, 'Progetti per il monumento di Giovanni III Sobieski a Roma', in: *Innocenzo XI Odescalchi. Papa, politico, committente*, eds R. Bösel, A. Menniti Ippolito, A. Spiriti, C. Strinati, M. A. Visceglia (Roma, 2014), pp. 353–362.

correspondence with the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo III de' Medici (1642–1723, r. from 1670), also on botanical subjects. In fact, Cosimo sent a considerable number of seedlings of rare varieties of fruit trees to Wilanów, and with them a gardener specialised in their cultivation.¹⁰⁷ The close relations and common passions that linked the Polish monarch with the chief patrons of Florentine mosaic workshops may have facilitated acquisition of pieces decorated in this technique.

There is, alas, no evidence that the significant number of items decorated in *commesso di pietre dure* owned by the king and his family was the result of their particular enthusiasm for Tuscan wares, even though the circumstances cited above would make such an assumption rational. Also, the fragmentary nature of the available comparative material relating to the movable property of the Polish and Lithuanian magnates contemporary to John III makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the prevalence of Florentine wares in the Commonwealth at the time, at least at the current stage of the research.

Finally, it is worth noting that the times of John III were the period of the peak popularity of *commesso di pietre dure* wares. They were fashionable and sought-after throughout Europe at the time, and their popularity was fostered by a concurrent increase in supply, which was always severely limited by both the small number of active workshops and the labour intensity of the production process. In Florence, works on the Cappella dei Principi had slowed down and the need to find additional sources of income to continue them meant that more wares were produced for export.¹⁰⁸ This was also the period of activity of French manufactories attached to the court of King Louis XIV under the Manufacture royale des meubles de la couronne aux Gobelins, which was established in 1668 and operated until the 1790s.¹⁰⁹ The closure of the Bourbon workshops signalled the end of the boom, and although these wares would continue to be valued in the eighteenth century, they would no longer be held in the same esteem as in the last decades of the previous century.

107 Targosz, *Jan III Sobieski mecenasem*, p. 368.

108 Giusti, *Roman Inlay*, p. 20.

109 It is worth noting that it is possible that wares from France came to the Commonwealth (and therefore to the collection of John III) and that they are referred to in the archival documents as Florentine despite their French origin because of the close association of *pietra dura* technique with Florence. Similarly, *robota auszpurska* ('Augsburg work') was the term for a type of metal wares, not necessarily ones originating in that city or, as has already been mentioned, a tapestry may be known as *arras* even though it has not been made at Arras. However, the absence of information on the subject so far makes these assumptions unverifiable. On the interest in Florentine mosaic wares in France, their importation and production of analogous works, and the question of ornamentation, see E. Colle, 'Le meuble italien et la France', in: *Rinceaux et figures. L'ornement en France au XVIIe siècle*, ed. E. Coquery (Paris, 2005), pp. 145–153.

Research devoted to the material culture of past eras in the territories of the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania faces a whole series of difficulties and limitations. Pieces made in the *commesso di pietre dure* technique, like all objects of artistic craftsmanship, were susceptible to change of place; they were exported, sold, destroyed, and being valuable, they also suffered in a special way from bouts of historical turmoil, with the result that at present, all their examples from the territories of the former Commonwealth to have been identified in the course of research are known to us only indirectly, i.e. from written sources or as significantly transformed objects. In addition, the state of preservation of Polish archival material from the period in question is fragmentary due to a succession of wars, looting, fires and other calamities, as well as neglect and ignorance. A further difficulty is added by the concise, laconic phrasing, elliptical grammar and punctuation of entries in inventories and similar documents, which often does not allow for unambiguous identification of an object. Nevertheless, the benefits of this type of research certainly encourage further efforts. Above all, further archive search queries, with a focus on both the Sobieski family and other magnate families, could provide new information. It is possible that such research could provide the missing comparative material for the royal collection. It would also be worthwhile to pinpoint the routes by which these pieces found their way to the Commonwealth: were they merely souvenirs from voyages, or were they commissioned, for example through artistic agents operating in Italy? No less interesting is the question of how these pieces were perceived by their contemporaries: as a precious memento of a voyage? A marker of prestige and wealth? A valuable curiosity and a demonstration of the creative abilities of Man interacting with Nature? Further research may yield a considerable number of fascinating discoveries, even though it must be admitted that many important questions will never be answered.¹¹⁰

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- 110 Finally, it is worth mentioning that J. Kuśmierski, Ł. Przybylak and A. Ziemlewska have recently pointed out that the edition of the diplomatic correspondence of John III's secretary in the Florence State Archive, which is the one commonly used by Polish researchers, dates from almost two hundred years ago and contains numerous errors. At the same time, they pointed out that the Florentine archives may contain other valuable materials connected with Poland; see J. Kuśmierski, Ł. Przybylak, A. Ziemlewska, '„Citri et Aurea". Wymiana wiedzy i doświadczeń w zakresie historycznych kolekcji cytrusów', *Studia Wilanowskie*, vol. 27, 2020, pp. 163–172.

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