

In 1988, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles began negotiations to acquire an exceptionally important work by Tiziano Vecelli (c. 1487–1576), namely, the *Portrait of Alfonso d'Avalos, Marchese del Vasto, in Armor with a Page* (probably created in January–February 1533, oil on canvas, 110 × 80 cm; inv. no. 2003.484) (Fig. 1); the negotiations were formally sealed only in 2003.¹ Given the excellent provenance register presented in the Los Angeles museum's digital collection,² it is surprising that Polish art historians have not at least commented on the topic.³

Jean Habert traces the painting's origin to the collection of the kings of Poland, John III (1629–1696) and/or Stanislaus Augustus (1732–1798), with whom it is associated by family tradition.⁴ A hypothesis which, as it seems, is not documented by any source material⁵ is cited by the J. Paul Getty Museum team and users of Jodi Cranston's open-source platform *Mapping Paintings* (Boston University, Massachusetts, with support from the Kress Foundation), where the Sobieski family's palace at Wilanów was identified as one of the stages in the painting's 'journey' (*Itinerary Points*).⁶ Unfortunately, research to date does not link

COMMUNICATION

PORTRAIT OF ALFONSO D'AVALOS BY TITIAN FROM THE POTOCKI COLLECTION

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- 1 B.B. Fredericksen, *The Burdens of Wealth. Paul Getty and His Museum* (Bloomington, 2015), p. 402.
- 2 *Getty Museum Collection*, www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/1096PT (accessed 26 Feb. 2023).
- 3 A press article by Marek Kozubal containing a simplified extract of the painting's provenance was published during the preparation of this material: M. Kozubal, 'Ślady wspaniałej zaginionej kolekcji Potockich', *Rzeczpospolita*, 16 June 2022, www.rp.pl/historia/art36523861-slady-wspanialej-zaginionej-kolekcji-potockich (accessed 3 March 2023).
- 4 'La première trace certaine du portrait remonte à la collection de la famille polonaise des Potocki, dont il faisait partie, et en dernier lieu à celle du comte Félix Nicolas Potocki, qui était né à Tulczyn en Pologne en 1845 et mourut à Paris en 1921: la collection fut constituée au XVIII^e siècle et la tradition familiale rapporte que le portrait proviendrait des collections des rois de Pologne, Jean Sobieski (1629–1696) et/ou Stanislas Auguste Poniatowski (1732–1798), dernier souverain du pays', J. Habert, *Le portrait d'Alphonse d'Avalos par Titien*, introduction P. Rosenberg (Paris, 1990), p. 10.
- 5 Cf. A. Kwiatkowska, *Inwentarz Generalny 1696 z opracowaniem*, Ad Villam Novam. Materiały do dziejów rezydencji series, vol. 6 (Warszawa, 2012); D. Juszczak, *Tycjan i Veronese*, in: id., *Malarski zbiór króla Stanisława Augusta*, doctoral dissertation, Institute of Art History, Faculty of History, University of Warsaw (Warszawa, 2020), pp. 140–150.
- 6 *Mapping Paintings*, www.mappingpaintings.org/paintings/tgajieli-alfonso-d-avalos-marchese-del-vasto-with-page (accessed 25 Feb. 2023). The *Mapping Paintings* project was preceded by a similar project *Mapping Titian* (www.mappingtitian.org) referring to the works of Titian. See J. Cranston, 'Mapping Paintings, or How to Breathe Life Into Provenance', in: *The Routledge Companion to Digital Humanities and Art History*, ed. K. Brown (New York, 2020), pp. 109–119.

Fig. 1

Tiziano Vecelli, *Portrait of Alfonso d'Avalos, Marchese del Vasto, in Armor with a Page*, probably January–February 1533; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

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the *Portrait of Alfonso d'Avalos* with any of the paintings listed in the collections of John III and Stanislaus Augustus.

Count Karl von Wilczek (1888–1949) reports that the portrait of Alfonso d'Avalos del Vasto, Marquis of Pescara (1502–1546), a general in the army of Emperor Charles V,⁷ which came from the Potockis' collection established in the eighteenth century, was already then thought to be a work by Titian.⁸ The collection in question was the one held in Tulczyn: in his monograph on the Tulczyn residence, Stanisław Krzyżanowski (1841–1881) describes a portrait by Titian depicting 'some proud knight dressed in exquisite armour', adorning the palace's

7 P. Humfrey, *Titian. The Complete Paintings*, introduction M. Lucco, eds T.-H. Borchert, Ch. Brown, M. Lucco, The Classical Art series (New York, 2007), cat. no. 97, pp. 146–147. On the circumstances in which the portrait was painted, see also J. Saviello, cat. note 65, in: *Titian and the Renaissance in Venice*, exhibition catalogue, introduction P. Demandt, eds B. Eclerey, H. Aurenhammer (Munich, 2019), p. 180.

8 K. Wilczek, 'Ein Bildnis des Alfonso Davalos von Tizian', *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, vol. 63, 1929/1930, p. 240.

‘gallery’.⁹ Could Stanisław Szczęsny Potocki (c. 1751/1753–1805) have received the painting as a gift from the last sovereign of Poland, as the J. Paul Getty Museum speculates? Possibly, although it is likely that no documentary evidence of such a gift (indisputably a royal one) has yet been found.

Susanna Biadene believes that the painting may have been removed from the family’s estate in Tulczyn to France by the son of Stanisław Szczęsny, Mieczysław Potocki (1799–1878), who settled permanently in the capital.¹⁰ It is known that before selling the family estate of Tulczyn to the Stroganovs, he had the most valuable objects from the Tulczyn collection moved to Paris.¹¹

Mieczysław’s son, Mikołaj Szczęsny (1845–1921), kept his collection, including the *Portrait of Alphonse d’Avalos*, in the Hôtel Potocki at 27 avenue de Friedland.¹² The heir of Mikołaj, the fourth owner of the Łańcut entail Alfred Antoni Potocki (1886–1958), did not donate the painting to the Musée du Louvre (as was the case with several other works, donated in 1922 under Mikołaj Potocki’s last will of 25 August 1920¹³). In 1923, he transferred the Hôtel Potocki to the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and in 1925, he sold the *Portrait of Alphonse d’Avalos* to Martine-Marie-Pol de Béhague, Countess de Béarn (1870–1939), owner of a collection (including works by Fragonard and Goya) held at 123 rue Saint-Dominique.¹⁴ After the

9 ‘Opodal od owęj kopii utworu arcymistrza szkoły rzymskiej spogląda na cię ze złocistych ram oblicze jakiegoś dumnego rycerza ubranego w wykwintną zbroję. Opisywać go nie myślę wcale; dość będzie na tém, że powiem, iż on jest pędzla Ticiania, który wsławiwszy się nie tylko przez swe kompozycye, lecz także również ogromną liczbą wykonanych przez się z całym włoskim artystem portretów, uzmysłowił w tu będącym wizerunku dumę i pychę starego rycerza’ [Not far from this copy of a work by the grandmaster of the Roman School, the face of some proud knight dressed in exquisite armour gazes at you from within the gilt frame. I have no mind to describe him at all; it is sufficient for me to say that it is by Titian, who, having made himself famous not only by his compositions, but also by the vast number of portraits executed with all the Italian artistry, in this likeness revealed all the pride and arrogance of the old knight], S. Krzyżanowski, *Tulczyn. (Monografia)* (Kraków, 1862), p. 15.

10 *Titian, Prince of Painters. Supplement to the Catalogue*, ed. S. Biadene (Washington DC – Venice, 1990), p. 2.

11 R. Aftanazy, ‘Tulczyn’, in: id., *Materiały do dziejów rezydencji*, part 2: *Ziemie ruskie Korony*, vol. 10A: *Dawne województwo braclawskie*, ed. A.J. Baranowski (Warszawa, 1991), p. 391.

12 *Titian, Prince of Painters*, p. 2. On the history of the Hôtel Potocki in Paris, see M. Gailard, ‘Les splendeurs de l’ancien Hôtel Potocki’, *L’Oeil*, July–August 1989, pp. 54–59.

13 T.F. de Rosset, *Polskie kolekcje i zbiory artystyczne we Francji w latach 1795–1919. Między „skarbnicą narodową” a galerią sztuki* (Toruń, 2005), pp. 70, 142–143. Alfred Potocki brought some of the objects he had inherited at the time to the palace in Łańcut, as mentioned by Aldona Cholewińska-Kruszyńska in: *Łańcut. Dzieje rezydencji Potockich* (Olszanica, 2009), p. 128.

14 *Titian, Prince of Painters*, p. 2; E. Fowles, *Memories of Duveen Brothers*, introduction E. Waterhouse (London, 1976), p. 46.

death of Countess de Béarn, the painting was inherited by Marquis Hubert de Ganay (1888–1974), also resident in Paris. The origin of the *Portrait of Alfonso d'Avalos* was described at the time as being ‘from the collection of King Stanislaus of Poland (according to tradition)’.¹⁵ After 1974, the painting was inherited within the family (Charles de Ganay and his four brothers: Jean-Louis, André, Michel, Paul), after which it was sold to AXA Oeuvres d’Art (Paris, 1990).¹⁶ The J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles became the subsequent owner of the work (from 2003).

Archival documents from the Getty Research Institute digital resource introduce a new thread to the history of the painting after its sale in 1925, which is worth examining in the context of the history of the global art market. An excerpt from the January 1928 correspondence preserved in the files of the influential Duveen Brothers company proves that several years after seeing Titian’s *Man in Armour* at Countess Potocka’s, their art dealers were still trying to obtain from the new owner, Countess de Béarn, a price for this remarkable work.¹⁷ Duveen Brothers successfully lobbied among European aristocrats in favour of the wealthier American collectors of the time, which in the period from the late nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth century resulted in several transfers of exquisite cultural treasures from Europe to the United States.¹⁸ It would not be an exaggeration to say that the company’s lucrative deals exacerbated the dispersal of European historical collections. The effects of Duveen Brothers’ operations in Poland during the company’s most prosperous period (1880–1908: directed by Joel and Henry Duveen; 1908–1940: directed by Joseph Duveen, ‘the most successful art dealer of all time’¹⁹) await reliable recognition and evaluation.

Conclusions

If the *Portrait of Alfonso d'Avalos* truly did not come from the royal collections of the Sobieski and/or Poniatowski families, the question arises by what means Stanisław Szczęśny Potocki came into possession of the painting. And if the traditional version is to be believed, where are the sources in support of it?

15 H.E. Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian. Complete Edition. II. The Portraits* (London, 1971), cat. no. 9, pp. 78–79.

16 Habert, *Le portrait*, p. 10; *Getty Museum Collection*.

17 Getty Research Institute, Duveen Brothers records, 1876–1981 (bulk 1909–1964), Series II. Correspondence and papers, Series II.A. Files regarding works of art: Potocki Castle, Lanczut, Poland, 1925–1931, acc. no. 960015 (bx.273,f.24), hdl.handle.net/10020/960015b273f024 (accessed 28 Feb. 2023).

18 Ch. Vignon, *Duveen Brothers and the Market for Decorative Arts, 1880–1940* (New York, 2019), pp. 13–14. On the behind-the-scenes details of the Duveen Brothers’ strategy until the late 1930s, see also Fowles, *Memories*.

19 F. Gennari Santori, *The Melancholy of Masterpieces. Old Master Paintings in America 1900–1914* (Milan, 2003), p. 16.

D'Avalos and Titian probably met in 1530 in Bologna during the coronation of Charles V.²⁰ In the winter of 1533, the Venetian master painted a portrait of his compatriot, an experienced military man, in full armour, with a petite page at his right side, who hands him a helmet held in his outstretched arms. Subsequently, this exquisite image allegedly passed on to the marquis' son, Francesco Ferdinando (1531–1571), and then, in turn, to his son, Alfonso Felice (1564–1593). Later, there is a gap in the record of the sequence of owners, filled solely, and only conjecturally, by the names of John III and Stanislaus Augustus.²¹ What does this archival silence tell us? – Cranston wonders.²² The only question is whether this is a case of silence of archival material or its inaccessibility, including the archives of Mieczysław and Mikołaj Potocki, once energetically sought by Jerzy Łojek.²³

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21 *Getty Museum Collection*.

22 Cranston, 'Mapping Paintings', p. 110.

23 Cf. J. Łojek, *Potomkowie Szczęsnego. Dzieje fortuny Potockich z Tulczyna 1799–1921* (Lublin, 1983²), p. 243, 280–298.

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