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# THE OVERLOOKED COLLECTION

## The Ancient Art Collection of the Princes Czartoryski Museum

### Abstract

Without a doubt, the Princes Czartoryski Museum's position amongst Polish museum institutions is significant both because of its history and on account of its collections. The collection of paintings, graphics, arts and crafts and armaments was supplemented by ancient artefacts thanks to Prince Władysław Czartoryski, who, by working on the premise of a 'scientific establishment', was acquiring them in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Those works of art were included in the permanent exhibition, since for Czartoryski and the Museum's management at that time, the status of those objects as representing the development of art history was obvious.

This changed after WW2 with the institution's incorporation into the National Museum of Kraków in line with the policy then of eliminating private ownership and when the permanent exhibition was reorganised. As a result, ancient art disappeared from the exhibition's scenario despite the enlargement of the exhibition space. Following the exhibition curator's long efforts to organise a permanent exhibition, it became possible to display the antique collection in the Princes Czartoryski Museum's Arsenal. The paper includes an analysis of the situation of the persistent exclusion of this part of the Museum's collection within a wider exhibition, promotion and substantive context.

**Keywords:** Princes Czartoryski Museum, National Museum in Krakow, ancient art collection, history of exhibition

In the history of the Czartoryski family's museum collections we can distinguish three stages of shaping the structure of the ancient art collection and its function in the context of the whole museum. The first stage is the time of establishment of the museum in Puławy. *Dux femina facti*, that is, in modern translation, the female leader of the project was Princess Izabela Czartoryska. In the shape of the first museum building we can see clear antique architecture inspirations: faithful reproduction of the shape of the Roman temple of Vesta in Tivoli in the park in Puławy and its name – Temple of the Sibyl (1801) – the inspiration for the museum building was drawn from the spirit of antiquity with the intention to make a reference to the sphere of sacrum and prophetic traditions (Żygulski 2009: 25–43). The key to the Temple of the Sibyl took the form of a caduceus with the ΜΝΗΜΗΣ ΑΝΟΙΓΩ ΙΕΡΟΝ inscription reflecting the founder's idea – I Open the Temple of Remembrance. In the second museum building – the Gothic House opened in 1809 – fragments of ancient architecture and sculptures covered one of the walls, called the “Roman” wall (Żygulski 2009: 185). There, utility objects were kept as historical memorabilia, mainly from the Roman provinces: several oil lamps, beads, rings, coins and even Roman and Egyptian bronze figurines, as well as symbolic objects such as a piece of lava, twigs, grass and moss from famous ancient sites. All these objects were supposed to make visitors aware of the continuity of civilization, the attitude of the founder of the museum towards the past, represent distant times and create an appearance of antiquity. The son of the Princess, Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, contributed to this collection by sending marble Roman architectural fragments from Italy ordered by his mother, while his daughter Maria Wirtemberska collected small commemorative objects from Pompeii. Also, a few other people from Princess Izabela's circles, such as General Michał Sokolnicki, thanks to a trip to Germany and Belgium which she financed, sent consistent fragments of antique buildings, coins and lamps, and “large beads collected on the field where Varus fought”<sup>1</sup>. Out of the ancient objects, mostly described in a way that makes it difficult to identify them, included in the *Souvenirs Catalogue* of the Gothic House in Puławy published in 1828 (Czartoryska 1828), only a few objects have survived in the collection to this day. These are Roman bronze rings<sup>2</sup>, oil lamps (Gorzelany 2001: 123–131), a fragment of a bronze

1 In *Catalogue of the Gothic House* see Czartoryska 1828: no. 144.

2 Inv. Nos. MNK XI–248 – MNK XI–263 (Czartoryska 1828: nos. 225, 1345, 1348, 1350–1352, 1346).

statue (Moczulska 2005: 151–156), an Egyptian figure of Imhotep – a metal god statue brought from Egypt in Napoleon times by a Polish officer<sup>3</sup>, an Egyptian figure of Harpocrates – a bronze god statue from Egypt<sup>4</sup>, a bronze statue of the god Mercury<sup>5</sup> found in the Black Sea region, which was included in the collection of Tadeusz Czacki in Porycko, who also contributed to Puławy. After his death in 1817, Adam Jerzy Czartoryski finalised a huge purchase of a very valuable library of Czacki from Porycko with added items described as “Polish and foreign peculiarities” with the abovementioned “god Mercury”.

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The second, key stage in the formation of the ancient collection was the acquisition of a collection by Prince Władysław Czartoryski in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its display as part of the permanent exhibition in the Czartoryski Museum in Kraków, which occupies three connected buildings: the Palace, the Monastery and the former Arsenal. Initially, the Gallery was located in three rooms on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Palace. Jerzy Mycielski’s guide to the Painting Gallery (1893: 40–42) says that the third smallest room (in post-war times and now the place where Leonardo da Vinci’s *Lady with an Ermine* is displayed) was still unfinished, contained a Flemish carpet hanging on one of the walls and ancient objects with painted decorations, such as two Egyptian sarcophagi, fragments of Roman frescoes, two mummy portraits, Egyptian and Coptic fabrics displayed behind glass. The selection criterion was technique – the objects were to present the oldest examples of painting – thus fitting into the narrative of the medieval and modern picture gallery located in the two other rooms (Gorzelański 2018: 162–164). Mycielski draws attention to “two sarcophagus portraits excavated from Egyptian caves, bearing the features of the last years of the Ptolemaic era, and further to ancient Egyptian and Coptic fabrics also from the land by the Nile, some painted and others woven in tapestry”. Mycielski devotes most space to mummy portraits as examples of panel painting. He quotes the story of their discovery by Theodor Graf in 1887 and praises

3 MNK XI–264 (Czartoryska 1828: no. 134).

4 MNK XI–265 (Czartoryska 1828: no. 661).

5 MNK XI–281.

the state of their preservation. He characterises two portraits in the collection of Władysław Czartoryski as follows: “The first one, painted on tempera, but probably also modelled in an encaustic way, is full of the most subtle shades and presents a young, beautiful woman. The second one is a man’s face, swarthy and dry, with huge fiery eyes, raven-black, thick curly hair, a moustache and a short-cut beard, full of strength and energy and as such truly beautiful, painted much more roughly, but even more characteristic than the previous one; surely it is some Egyptionised elegant Greek man from the last days of the Roman Empire...” (Mycielski 1893: 41). Historic ancient paintings were treated not as archaeological objects, but as the oldest examples of the development of the art of painting and were part of the narrative of the art exhibition. Mummy portraits (Parlasca 1977: 395), Coptic and Egyptian fabrics (Moczulska 1988: nos. 17, 19, 20, 141, 153, 154, 161) were among objects purchased by Czartoryski in the winter of 1889/90 during his journey through Egypt. The sarcophagi, briefly mentioned by Mycielski, were purchased by Czartoryski’s agents operating in Egypt. The first one, Copt Makarios Shenouda, enjoyed a good reputation as an experienced man, who independently searched for historic objects and also acted as an agent in their sale. The second one was a Polish correspondent of “Wędrowiec”, Stefan Marusieński. His knowledge was superficial, but he tried to buy directly from fellaheen, who extracted historic objects from opened graves. The agents sent two sets of objects in 1884 and 1885 (Moczulska, Śliwa 1972: 85–104; Gorzelany 2014: 250–252). In addition to the two sarcophagi, the Museum also received a bronze falcon sarcophagus, stone and wooden stelas, bronze and wooden figurines, cladding tiles, clay dishes, mirrors, grave cones, ushabti figures, baskets, stone vessels, faience necklaces, amulets and small jewellery – a total of 154 items. The exhibition in Room III (Fig. 1, 2) was expanded by another four rooms on the second floor of the Palace, which is confirmed by a list drawn up by Roman Jodko-Narkiewicz (Princes Czartoryski Library, BCz 12770–12772). It features more than 550 objects, which indicates that visitors could see all the objects included in the collection.

Room IV – Antiquarium (now the Renaissance Room) was dedicated to the art of Greco-Roman antiquity. Greek, Etruscan and Roman objects were grouped basically by material – Greek vases, terracotta figures, olive oil lamps, bronze items, jewellery, glassware, small marble fragments – and by size: in 9 (cabinets) free-standing display cases, wall display cases, 7 glass cases and small bell-shaped cases, as shown in a 1929 photo, such as the centrally positioned case with the Etruscan bronze box, number 1 in the inventory of the ancient art

collections. The other objects were placed on the floor and cabinets and hung on the walls: among others, a Roman mosaic obtained in 1893 from the floor of the tomb in Ostia made in *opus tessalatum* and *opus vermiculatum*, depicting Hercules with the Cretan bull (Daszewski 1985: 78–86), as well as fragments of Roman (Sadurska 1992: no. 15) and early Christian sarcophagi: one probably from the catacombs of St. Sebastian in Rome (Sadurska 1992: no. 108), the second found in 1632 in the Vatican necropolis (Sadurska 1992: no. 109) and the third found in Rome near Villa Medici (Sadurska 1992: no. 105). Parts of two of them, the sarcophagus with the scene of *traditio legis* and the sarcophagus with the apostles, are currently kept in the Museo Pio Cristiano (Gorzelany 2014: 256–257). Apart from the display cabinets, there were also large vases, an Etruscan urn and fragments of Roman sculptures.

Their arrangement is visible in two photographs from 1929 and 1948 (Fig. 3, 4). The corresponding fragmentary shots of the room show changes in the layout of the objects in the showcases. An initial comparison of the types of objects: a showcase with Greek ceramics – a showcase with glass vessels – a showcase with terracotta figures shown in the 1929 photograph gave way to a more substantial arrangement with a group of black and white vases, red and red-figure vases and South-Italian ceramics in separate showcases.

The opening of room IV resulted in a correction of the theme of room III to Egyptian and eastern objects, that is, in moving the abovementioned mummy portraits, which were juxtaposed with an Etruscan votive head and an urn lid, to the new room.

Most of the exhibits presented in the showcases were acquired by Władysław Czartoryski at Parisian auctions or in antiquarian transactions, some from antique dealers. On the shelves, we can see, among others, kylixes by Amasis Painter (Bulas 1935: pl. 5, 1a–b; Gorzelany 2007a: 25–31) and Onesimos (Bulas 1935: pl. 8, 1a–c) bought in the early period of the collector's activity, as well as vases acquired in 1890 and 1893 from Neapolitan museum conservator Giuseppe Mele and his son August (Gorzelany 2014: 247–248). The first batch included, among other things, a red-figure Chicago Painter stamnos from the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC found in Nola with an image of a warrior's farewell (Bulas 1935: pl. 11, 1a–b), a Kerch pelike found in Capua from the Workshop of the Hippolytos Painter (360–350 BC) decorated with a Dionysian scene (Bulas 1935: pl. 13, 4; Gorzelany 2011: 35–48), and a black-figure krater by Painter from Tarquinia RC 6847? (520–510 BC) with a double-sided representation of a carriage with a coachman (Bulas 1935: pl. 4, 1 a–b), a black-figure band cup from

550–530 BC decorated with non-sense inscriptions (Bulas 1935: pl. 5,2) and a black-figure skyphos with a representation of Pegasus made by a painter from the Little Masters Group from 540–530 BC (Bulas 1935: pl. 5,4). In the second group were a Siana kylix from the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC (Bulas 1935: pl. 4,3a–b), red-figure vessels such as hydria with a rare scene of the madness of the Thracian king Lycurgus by Late Mannerist Painter from 460–450 BC (Bulas 1935, pl. 12,1, 14; Gorzelany 2011: 35–48; 2012a: 35–47; Topper 2015: 139–171), hydria by Painter Q? from the last quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC with Paris and Helena (Bulas 1935: pl. 13,2; Gorzelany 2013: 139–141), kylix from the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 5<sup>th</sup> century BC with a representation of satires and maenads (Bulas 1935: pl. 8,2a–c) and amphora from the Workshop of Shuvalov Painter, ca. 435–420 BC (Bulas 1935: pl. 12,3a–b). Although Mele was famous for supplying vases of good quality to private collectors and public museums, he also sold historic objects reconstructed to varying degrees, glued, supplemented, repainted, as evidenced by the objects bought by Czartoryski.

An amphora by Painter Leagros, visible in the black-figure ceramics cabinet in the 1948 photo, was purchased from Italian antiquarian and archaeologist Riccardo Mancini. It was found during the excavations he carried out in August 1888 in Orvieto in an area belonging to Cesare Zampi within the Canicella necropolis in two-chamber tomb No. 22 (Bulas 1935: pl. 4,2; Moczulska 1989a: 197–198 no. 9.8).

Czartoryski also obtained an Etruscan amphora by Painter Micali (about 500 BC) from Mancini, decorated with a frieze of walking hares (Bulas 1935: pl. 15,9 a–b; Moczulska 1989: 199–200 no. 9,11), displayed with terracotta figures and an amphora by one of the leading painters of Campania, Ixion Painter (330–310 BC) with a representation of Niobid Chloris protecting herself at the Demeter statue (Bulas 1935: pl. 18,2; Gorzelany 2017: 18–21), as well as two bucchero amphoras (Bulas 1935: pl. 15,4–5; Moczulska 1989: 202–203 no. 9,16). In total, the museum collection was enriched by 40 items of Orvieto or Etruscan-Campanese provenance, as Mancini, in addition to selling historic objects extracted from tombs, also worked as an agent trading in other finds.

Numerous Greek terracotta figurines visible in the showcases constituted attractive collector's items in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, despite negative voices about their originality. The ones acquired back in the 1870's, when the copists' activity was just beginning to develop, are ancient objects, whereas the Prince's subsequent acquisitions – especially directly from Greek antique

dealers Lambros and E. Triantaphyllos or through antique dealers or at auctions – raise doubts or are clearly forgery (Gorzelany 2012b: 213–221).

Above the passage, there is a fresco with a sacral-idilical scene, which based on the way it is painted and the theme can be classified as the 4<sup>th</sup> Pompeiian style (Ostrowski 1972: 61–68). This fresco was purchased in 1891 from antique dealer V. Barone of Naples (Gorzelany 2014: 255).

The preserved photographs do not show the room on the ground floor of the Museum called the Lapidarium, where Roman sculptures were placed. There was a statue of Medici-type Venus from the beginning of the first century, also obtained from antique dealer Barone (Gorzelany 2019: 244–246). In the same year Czartoryski acquired, probably from the collection of Alessandro Torlonia (Gorzelany 2019: 246–252), a set of sculptures, supposedly from Ostia. Only one of these statues, a small male torso in a chlamys (Mikocki 1994: no. 79), set in the 18<sup>th</sup> century on a grave slab (Sadurska 1990: no. 10), is visible in the 1948 photo. Other statues acquired in this set include a female torso (Mikocki 1994: no. 89) and a torso with a paludamentum on the shoulder (Mikocki 1994: no. 80), both set on architectural elements – an Ionic capital and the base of a Ionic column respectively, as well as a statue of a young man in a chlamys from the Antonine period (Mikocki 1994: no. 78) bought with modern additions: an added head (Bieńkowski 1919: 150–151; Gorzelany: 2019: 250) from another sculpture and a modern base.

All these sculptures, despite their undeniable technical and artistic value, were not available to the public, perhaps due to the weight and dimensions making it difficult to carry them through the narrow staircase to the second floor of the building where the exhibition of ancient art was located. The reason could also be necessary conservation work on the sculpture of Venus and on the Etruscan sarcophagi, which was only undertaken in the 1980s due to technological advancements and the determination of the curators of the ancient collection to open the first permanent exhibition after the war.

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The aforementioned conservation works concerning a significant part of the ancient collection were carried out during a changed mode of operation of the Princes Czartoryski Museum, which was incorporated into the National



Museum in Kraków in 1950. The change of ownership and manner of looking after the objects within the more extensive structures of the state museum begins the third stage in the life of the ancient collection. From an exhibition point of view, it was not initially advantageous.

The pre-war exhibition was closed in 1954 as a result of the need to modernise it. After several years of renovations, it reopened in 1959, but despite the enlargement of the exhibition space, there was no room for ancient art. A group of curators/art historians defined historic art objects as objects created later than ancient ones. Thus, the term “archaeological collections” arose in the inner-museum narrative, which had not previously been used in the Princes Czartoryski Museum in the context of objects from the Mediterranean area, but was reserved for objects obtained from excavations in Poland. Removal of ancient art objects from art history, with their clear depreciation, became quite common in the attitudes of art historians, not only from Kraków. This “inferior” part of the collection, which was not displayed, was presented only at temporary exhibitions: “Greek Vase Painting” (September–December 1964), “Egyptian Art” (1965), “Etruscan Art” (September 1967 to January 1968), “*Antichità dall’Umbria a Cracovia*” (1989). It was not until the second half of 1963 that it was established, in accordance with the decision of the then manager of the Czartoryski Museum, Dr Marek Rostworowski, that the first-floor room of the Arsenal would become the place for its permanent exhibition. This was possible thanks to an earlier transport of the library collections, which had been located there, to the new building at 17, Św. Marka street. In the renovated Arsenal, an exhibition of the most valuable objects, moved there due to the renovation of the Palace, was held in 1974 – consistently without ancient art (Gorzelany 2010: 203). In later years it was planned to use the hall on the first floor of the Arsenal for an exhibition of militaria, and also for artistic crafts storage. It was only in the early 1980s that preparations for the opening of a permanent exhibition of ancient art began. However, the political and economic situation was not favourable to the financing of new exhibition projects. The work was only completed in 1993. An exhibition by Krystyna Moczulska, organised according to a design by architect Tadeusz Nowak, was held in a separate space in the Princes Czartoryski Museum. The visiting route led from the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the Palace through the exhibition rooms in the Monastery to the Arsenal and then back to the painting gallery on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Palace. The unique atmosphere of the exhibition was influenced not only by the spacious hall of the Arsenal building, but also by the modern arrangement solutions and enlarged



set of exhibits with the collection of the National Museum in Krakow, objects from the depository of the Potocki Family from Krzeszowice, and a selection of objects from the collection of the Institute of Archaeology of the Jagiellonian University (Fig. 5).

The arrangement of the exhibition led the visitors on a route starting from the youngest objects from the late antique era. In the subsequent cabinets there were objects of Roman, South-Italian, Hellenic, Etruscan, Greek, Cypriot-Pal-estinian and Punic and Egyptian art, as well as some examples of objects related to the cultures of the ancient Middle East. This arrangement corresponded to the territorial and chronological division and, at the same time, to the way archaeologists discovered successive cultural layers, reaching the oldest ones (Gorzelańska 2007b). In 2010, a long period of renovation of the Palace initiated by the Princes Czartoryski Foundation began. The need to remove the exhibition reignited “anti-antique” moods, as the Gallery of Ancient Art remained the only exhibition that could still receive visitors. The maintaining of this state of affairs involved a constant struggle with the postulates of curators/art historians to close the hall, transform it into a storage space, or an exhibition of the most valuable monuments from the collection – seemingly, because these were scattered throughout Poland by the Princes Czartoryski Foundation after many temporary exhibitions. There were constant announcements in the media that the Princes Czartoryski Museum was closed due to renovation. At the same time, although there were somewhat contradictory ads about the Ancient Art Gallery open in the Arsenal, this communication chaos meant that promotion of the Ancient Art Gallery encountered serious difficulties and was side-tracked in every aspect of educational and exhibition activities. Every few months, there were again plans to close it, to complement it with freely scattered paintings, artistic craftsmanship objects and militaria, or to display “Lady with an Ermine” by Leonardo da Vinci on the wall by fragments of papyrus with the texts of the Book of the Dead in the Egyptian part of the Gallery. Each of these concepts resulted from unfulfilled ambitions of art historians and a difficulty of accepting the still functioning exhibition of ancient art in a situation of natural suspension of exhibition activities, as is the case with any museum located in an old building, which from time to time requires thorough renovation works. Each of these concepts undermined the safety of the exhibition both in terms of conservation and logistics, and dismissed the substantial value of the collection. Eventually, Rembrandt’s “Landscape with the Good Samaritan” was placed on an easel surrounded by Roman sculptures in 2016, and a year later, after the

Ancient Art Gallery closed down, the exhibition called “Most Valuable. Czartoryski Princes Collection” was opened in the Arsenal. This time, the painstaking work on restoring the value of ancient art brought some effect, although it was not without significance that some of the objects had to remain at this new temporary exhibition due to the lack of storage space.

The separate perception of the Princes Czartoryski Museum as “proper” in the part located in the renovated Palace and comprising valuable art collections vs. this additional part with the ancient collection in the Arsenal gradually became embedded in the attitudes of both tourists and a growing number of fast-changing employees of the non-substantial departments of the National Museum in Kraków. The last straw in the process was the purchase by the Polish state of the collections and buildings from Prince Adam Karol Czartoryski in December 2016 and the beginning of the widely promoted last phase of the Palace’s renovation. It was financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage as part of the project entitled “The Past for the Future – Renovation and Fitting of the Princes Czartoryski Museum, National Museum in Kraków to Provide Access to a Unique Collection”, which was completed on 20 December 2019. The media message was clear: the Princes Czartoryski Museum is only the Palace building and the exhibition of medieval and modern art (with a small addition of library collections). The publication issued as part of the project, entitled “The Princes Czartoryski Museum” mentioned the ancient art acquisitions of Prince Władysław Czartoryski only briefly (Chelmecka 2019: 24, 35). Also the new homepage of the Princes Czartoryski Museum (accessed 22.09.2020) informs that it is **“the most valuable in Poland and one of the most valuable collections in Europe. *Lady with an Ermine* by Leonardo da Vinci and *Landscape with the Good Samaritan* by Rembrandt van Rijn, as well as many other masterpieces not only in the field of painting, but also sculpture, craftsmanship, militaria, applied arts, can be seen in 26 exhibition rooms, on two floors of the renovated Palace of the Czartoryski Museum”**. More interested Internet users can find in the “Collections” tab four thematic galleries from the time of promotion of the Ancient Art Gallery in 2010–2016.

At the time of writing this text, work on a new exhibition of ancient art is in progress. Despite the lack of media coverage, the Arsenal building also received funding from the Social Committee for the Restoration of Krakow’s Monuments (SKOZK) and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, allowing for renovation, superstructure and arrangement of the Gallery. Its opening is planned for April 2021 (Fig. 6). However, it is only reconnecting all three build-

ings of the Princes Czartoryski Museum – after the renovation of the centrally located Monastery – into a single route that can contribute to joint promotion of the entire collection and revival of the collecting idea of Prince Władysław Czartoryski to create in his Museum a picture of the diverse aspects of art development since antiquity. *Nec Hercules contra plures*: perhaps also generational changes and aspects connected to university education indicating the importance of preserved ancient objects in the development of later art will influence art historians' perception of Mediterranean archaeology.

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Fig. 1



Fig. 2





Fig. 3



Fig. 4

## The Overlooked Collection...



Fig. 5



Fig. 6