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THE ORIGINS OF PAINTINGS
IN JOHN III SOBIESKI'S
COLLECTION

Another stage in historical research conducted in the Wilanów painting gallery was the first attempt at identifying individual pictures in the collection of John III (Sobieski), the first owner of Wilanów.

Our research was based on "Pamiętniki z czasów Jana Sobieskiego. Diariusz i relacje z lat 1691-1696" (Diaries from the times of John III 1691-1696) and successive inventories of Wilanów and the remaining Sobieski estates dating from the years 1671 to 1696. The latter in particular both give a picture of the specific atmosphere of the sumptuous royal interiors and provide a lot of information on their furnishings. Penetrating study of these inventories enabled us to identify at least some of the paintings that once adorned the walls of the Wilanów palace.

For example the inventory dating from 1696 indicates that John Sobieski favoured Dutch painting. This inventory mentions a number of pictures by Dutch masters, including some by Rembrandt, of which we have identified six. Thus two portraits (Portuguese Rabbi and Jewish Woman in a Cap) (Fig. 7) that are mentioned as adorning the king's Bed-chamber, are probably to be seen today in the Lanckoroński mansion in Vienna. According to the inventory the pictures showing The Adoration of the Magi and Hagar Leaving the House of Abraham, once decorated the Dutch Cabinet; the former is today on display in Leningrad's Ermitage while the latter may be the same which is to be seen in London's Victoria and Albert Museum. Two Rembrandt paintings, Grand Old Man and Plumed Head, have not been traced.

Apart from Rembrandt, we notice that the pictures mentioned in the inventory include some on themes typical of the art of Vermeer van Delft. It seems that one of them was Lowe Letter, today in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.



7. Portrait of a Jewish woman in a cap. Painting by Rembrandt van Rijn.
Coll. Lanckoroński family, Vienna



8. Portrait of Władysław Dominik Ostrogski. Painting by B. Strobel. Coll.
National Museum, Warsaw

Of the other paintings listed in the inventory we should also mention Lady Playing the Clavichord, today, as a work by Emanuel de Witte (1617-1692), in the Boymans Museum in Rotterdam; and the Feast of King Ahasuerus by Pieter Lastman and Dutch Woman and Dutch Man, today both in the painting gallery of the National Museum in Warsaw. The painting showing Actaeon with Dogs is probably identical with the one which once was to be seen in Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski's Gallery as a work by Arie de Vois from 1672, and today adorns the interior of the Łazienki palace in Warsaw.

We have also identified some pictures which have survived at Wilanów until today, for example, Old Woman Watering Flowers in the Window by Gerrit Dou, Madonna with Child and St. John, with a Basket of Fruit of the Italian school, Street Musicians by Bernardo Strozzi, Salome with the Head of St. John from Cranach's studio, and two still-lives by Abraham Mignon.

Everything seems to indicate that the following portraits which today are gems of the Wilanów gallery of portraits come from the royal collection: Queen Eleonora, wife of King Michael Korybut Wiśniowiecki, Dominik Ostrogski, painted by Bartłomiej Strobel (Fig. 8), portrait of John III with his family and youthful portraits of Sobieski's younger sons.

Perhaps following further painstaking research and investigation we shall be able to identify the remaining pictures from John III's collection which have probably been scattered through various galleries in the world.