



POLAND II. PERSIAN ART AND ARTIFACTS IN POLISH COLLECTIONS

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Persian art has been present in Poland since medieval times. Interest and fascination in it resulted in the fact that many orders were made for both works of Persian art and Persian artistic craft products. Among the objects—bought or brought back as war booty, like carpets, textiles, tents, richly ornamented weaponry, gold products—illuminated Persian manuscripts were also to be found. This fostered a desire in the Polish society to become better acquainted with the culture of the Iranian peoples, and it also initiated the creation of collections of Persian art in Poland. The majority of the collections were originally created by aristocratic and noble families of the former Polish Commonwealth. In Polish collections, one finds historic objects coming from different periods of Iranian statehood—from the Achaemenids, the Arsacids, and the Sasanians, to the early medieval Persian dynasties, like the Samanids and the Buyids, and finally the Safavids and the Qajars.

The interest towards Persian art in Poland was the consequence of the



country's political and diplomatic contacts with Persia, which resulted from a common threat on the part of Ottoman Turkey. The first attested date for the contacts is the year 1474, when an ambassador from the Republic of Venice, Caterino Zeno (Catherinus Zeno), visited the court of the Polish King Kazimierz Jagiellon (r. 1447-92) in Krakow. Returning from negotiations with Uzun Ḥasan (r. 1457-78) of the Āq Qoyunlu dynasty, Zeno brought a letter from the Turkoman ruler, which contained a proposal to organize an anti-Ottoman coalition (Długosz, XI, p. 327; Brzeziński, 1935a, pp. 2-3; Idem, 1935b, p. 24). Notes in customs-house books made in Krakow as early as at the end of the 15th century mention Persian carpets brought into the city.

Textiles and carpets. In 1553, Polish King Zygmunt August (r. 1530-72) ordered the castellan Spytek Jordan to purchase 132 Oriental carpets (Mańkowski, 1935, p. 22), and in 1585 King Stefan Batory (r. 1576-86) bought textiles from Armenian merchants and ordered carpets in the East. King Zygmunt III Vasa (r. 1587-1632) ordered from Persia, among other things, sashes and weaponry via the intermediation of the Armenian Sefer Muratowicz from Lvov (present-day Lviv, Ukraine), who was sent to Kashan (Kāšān) in 1601 on a diplomatic mission (Muratowicz, pp. 35-36, 42, 47). In 1609, Shah 'Abbas I (r. 1588-1629) sent to the Polish king, via his foreign advisor Robert Shirley (1581-1628), a diplomatic letter and costly gifts. In 1642, the textiles that had been brought from Kashan (in the center field of one of them is placed the Wheat Sheath—the Vasa dynasty's coat of arms) became part of the dowry of Zygmunt III's daughter, Anna Katarzyna Konstancja (1619-51), who was wed to Philipp Wilhelm von der Pfalz Wittelsbach (1615-90), Elector of Bavaria. These textiles are now preserved in the Residenz Museum in Munich (Mańkowski, 1935, p. 27). As reported in the sources, King Jan Kazimierz (r. 1648-68) was also in possession of a Persian carpet with gold and silver background (Biedrońska-Słota, 1983, p. 94). Poles had a feeling for the beauty of Oriental art, and a theory was advanced that the Polish nobility were not of the same Slav stock as the peasantry, but descendants of the Sarmatians. The "Sarmatian" ethic—Sarmatism—was visible principally in manners and tastes of the Polish nobility.

As confirmed by furniture inventories found in Polish castles, Persian art was collected by many aristocratic families, like Lubomirski (Wiśnicz, 17th century), Sieniawski (Brzeżany, 1762), Radziwiłł (Lithuania, 18th century), Potocki (Tulczyn Niemirów, 18th century), and Krasiński (Rogalin, 18th century). The Sanguszko family (Podhorce, 18th century) also owned a large



collection of Persian art, which is nowadays dispersed. Among the items from their collection are a well-known Persian carpet from the 16th century, now preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and a 16th-century Persian tent ornamented with velvet and presenting scenes with the epic heroes Eskandar and Rostam, of which fragments are held by the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C. In 1616 at his castle in Dubno, Prince Ostrogski had silk carpets interwoven with gold; similarly, in 1653 the Firlej family possessed several dozens of silk carpets in their estates in Dąbrowica and Ogrodzieniec, (Biedrońska-Słota, 1983, p. 98).

In 1878, at the world exhibition in the Polish Hall of the Trocadero Palace in Paris, Prince Władysław Czartoryski exhibited, among the most distinguished works of art from his collection, seven Persian carpets woven with silk threads and brocaded with gold and silver. Since they were shown in the Polish Hall and some of them contained the arms of the Czartoryski family (they had been doubtless specially made for this occasion), such carpets began to be called “Polish.” From that time onward, the attribute “Polish” came into universal use for this group of Persian carpets; in time, it was replaced with the name “so-called Polish” (Biedrońska-Słota, 1983, pp. 93-94).

Works of Persian art were enthusiastically imitated in Poland. The first silk sashes, which became a typical element in the clothing of the Polish nobility, were brought from Persia in the 17th century (Taszycka, pp. 44-49), and by the end of the 18th century sashes with Persian patterns were made by Polish manufactures, run mainly by Polish Armenians. These textile workshops were called *persjarnie* (Persianeries). From the wealth of Persian works of art which had reached Poland through commerce, as diplomatic gifts, or as war booty rescued from wars and dissolutions of estates, foundations were laid for later private and museum collections. The most famous Polish collections of works of Oriental art mainly comprised textiles, for the most part Persian. These were collections of Włodzimierz Kulczycki (1862-1936) in Lvov and Erazm Barącz (1859-1928) and Feliks Jasiński (1861-1929) in Krakow.

In 1911 Józef Rostafiński purchased the “garden” carpet dated to about 1700 for the National Museum in Krakow (Biedrońska-Słota, 1982, pp. 48-49; [FIGURE 1](#)), and in 1922, Józef Fedorowicz donated to the same museum a broad Persian silk sash dated to the late 17th-early 18th century. In 1929, Feliks Jasiński, a collector and passionate enthusiast of Eastern art, presented to the same collection, among other items, a Persian sash from the beginning of the 18th century. In 1949, a Persian sash was donated to the National



Museum in Krakow by the collector Leon Kostka, and in 1965 another sash, with figures of falconers at the ends, was bought from the family collection of Ksawery Puśłowski (*Arcydziela sztuki perskiej ze zbiorów polskich*, p. 100; [FIGURE 2](#)). The National Museum in Warsaw received, together with an entire collection of sashes for the Polish noblemen's robe (*kontusz*), a Persian sash from the collection of the Potocki family in Krzeszowice; the National Museum in Poznań was presented with a sash from the collection of the Sapieha family in Krasiczyn. Besides, another Persian sash is available at the Castle in Kórnik owned by the Zamoyski family (*Arcydziela sztuki perskiej ze zbiorów polskich*, p. 99).

Among the few historic Persian textiles, whose association with Poland date back to the 19th century only, mention should be made of a fragment of silk tapestry border, which has been held by the Jan Matejko House in Krakow and which comes from the collection of the painter Antoni Chlebowski (*Arcydziela sztuki perskiej ze zbiorów polskich*, cat. no. 62). The only collection which was imported to Poland is that of Mme Teresa Sahakian, the wife of a Belgian collector. In 1989-90 she donated her collection to the Royal Castle in Warsaw.

Persian historical objects also found their way into museum collections via the intermediation of the following well-known Krakow antique dealers: Marek Szwarc, Jakub Jutkiewicz, and Izydor Judda. Thanks to Izydor Judda, a cloth-of-gold tapestry of wonderfully-conceived pattern was purchased for the Museum of Technology and Industry in Krakow. Besides the collectors mentioned above, Helena Dąbczańska (1863-1956) donated many Persian textiles to the museum from her own collection. Single historic objects were offered by Emila Pydykowska, Stanisław Cercha, Stanisław Tomkowicz, and the Rev. Józef Bąba. A sizeable number of them were transferred from the Museum of Technology and Industry to the National Museum in Krakow after the liquidation of the former in 1952 (Biedrońska-Słota, 2002, pp. 20-23).

In addition to museum collections, many Persian textiles are found in Polish churches and monasteries. Churches ordered the textiles to use them as liturgical ornaments just as often as they received them from donors. Upon comparing the textiles, it turned out that many samples of textiles are fragments of the same pieces that had been divided once upon a time. For example, liturgical ornaments of the same textile are to be found at the Diocesan Museum in Sandomierz and at the Dominican monastery in Tarnobrzeg; a tapestry donated by the Tarasowicz family is found at the National Museum in Warsaw, while a fragment of an identical textile is held at



the National Museum in Krakow; at St. Mary's Church in Krakow is found a chasuble with depictions of roses, hollyhock bushes, a parrot, a butterfly, and a doe, and a fragment of a textile just like that is available at the National Museum in Krakow. All in all, these samples of Persian textiles in Poland form a collection of great artistic and historical value (*Arcydzieła sztuki perskiej ze zbiorów polskich*, pp. 90-101; Piwocka, pp. 93-157, 297-312).

One half of the so-called "Krakow-Paris Carpet," made in Herat or Tabriz in the second half of the 16th century and belonging to the Krakow Wawel Cathedral, is found at the Royal Castle in Wawel, while its other half is preserved in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. In 1785, this carpet, still in its entirety, was given to the Wawel cathedral by Elias, Count Wodzicki, the county administrator of Krakow and a descendant of Jan Wawrzyniec Wodzicki, a participant of the Vienna campaign of 1683 against the Ottomans (*Arcydzieła sztuki perskiej ze zbiorów polskich*, cat. no. 36). Another noteworthy carpet belongs to the collection of the Princes Czartoryski. It is commonly called "With the Animals" and was made in a workshop in Tabriz, after painters and other craftsmen from Herat had moved there in the 16th century. This carpet was doubtless among the war booty brought back from Vienna in 1683 by the Crown Field Hetman Mikołaj Hieronim Sieniawski (1645-83) and, together with the remaining part of the booty, came into possession of Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski (1734-1823), the Hetman's great grandson (*Arcydzieła sztuki perskiej ze zbiorów polskich*, cat. no. 35).

Manuscripts, paintings, and lithographs. From the 16th century onwards, news about Persian poetry and the beauty of the books produced in Persia reached Europe. Richly ornamented and illustrated manuscripts were collected by the following famous Polish aristocratic families: Czartoryski, Zamoyski, and Potocki. Presently, the largest collection of them is to be found at the library and museum of the Princes Czartoryski Foundation in Krakow. The largest number of manuscripts was collected by Prince Władysław Czartoryski (1828-94), an amateur orientalist. This collection suffered during World War II; some of the manuscripts were destroyed or stolen. Gradually, the lost works have been regained, and at present, the Czartoryski Library holds over a dozen of books and albums of paintings and calligraphy (*moraqqa*), and the Print Department of the Czartoryski Museum possesses an interesting collection of paintings (Bromowicz and Mękarśka, pp. 17-34). These resources are being successively expanded.

Among the oldest items in this collection is an illuminated manuscript of the



Kamsa of Amir *Ḳosrow Dehlavi* dated 22 Jomādā I 894/22 April 1489, which contains 17 later paintings of the Bukhara school from the beginning of the 16th century. It comprises 241 folios of 24 x 16 cm and was calligraphed by Solṭān Ḥosayn in *nasta'liq* script. The manuscript of 'Aṭṭār's *Manteq at-ṭeyr* dated 1494 contains 293 folios measured 21.5 x 12 cm and includes 9 paintings of Shiraz school. The calligraphy, in *nasta'liq* and *nask* scripts, is the work of Šeyḵ Moršed-al-Din. The codex is bound in a skillfully made binding, executed in the Turkoman style of Shiraz, which is contemporary to the manuscript. A copy of the *divān* of Ḥāfez comes from the beginning of the 16th century; it is written in *nasta'liq* script and illuminated with four paintings of the Safavid school of the same period. A copy of Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma*, dated 1619, contains 26 well-preserved paintings of Isfahan school. The text, arranged in four columns per page, is written in *nasta'liq* by Kamāl-al-Din Aşil. The manuscript comprises 480 folios of 38.5 x 25 cm; the binding was later restored in Europe (FIGURE 3, FIGURE 4, and FIGURE 6 and FIGURE 7).

Very interesting are two folios with paintings from the Rezā 'Abbāsi school (FIGURE 8 and FIGURE 9) preserved in the National Museum in Krakow.

The Library of the Institute of Oriental Philology at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow owns a collection of eleven Persian books lithographically printed in Persia and India and coming from the period of 1856-1917 (some of them undated). These are mainly works of classical poets (e.g., Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma*, printed in 1858), but the collection also includes Abu'l-Ḥasan Yağmā's *Ketāb-e ḡazaliāt al-qadim* dated 1866. An undated *Šāh-nāma* (with a handwritten note on endpaper about the birth of a child in 1921) contains a dictionary of difficult words and black-and-white illustrations.

Weaponry and craft items. For centuries, Polish aristocratic families had had examples of Persian weaponry in their personal Oriental collections that were transformed only in the 19th century into museum-type collections, later often donated to museums. In 1895, the National Museum in Krakow was enriched by a gift from Władysław Kościelski (Sefer Pasha). This was a collection of Persian weaponry from the 16th-19th centuries. The most valuable object in this collection is a suit of armor attributed to Shah Solaymān I (r. 1666-94), probably made in Isfahan in 1680. After many years of research on the Kościelski collection, the exhibition "Masterpieces of Persian Art from Polish Collections," held in Warsaw and Krakow in 2002, presented this suit of armor as a set: a horned helmet (*kolāh-ḳud*), "cuirass" armor comprised of 5 plates (with "virgin breasts" carved on the breastplate), forearm armor for left hand,



and a shield (*Arcydziela sztuki perskiej ze zbiorów polskich*, pp. 80-82, cat. nos. 123-26; [FIGURE 10](#)).

In 1961, the National Museum in Krakow received a collection of ancient weapons from the Middle East, including some Persian. The origin of this collection is exceptional. Poles exiled by the Soviets to Siberia from the eastern borderlands of the Republic of Poland in 1939-41, were freed on the basis of the Sikorski-Majski Pact and became part of the 2nd Corps of the Polish Army. During actions in the Middle East, they bought examples of Eastern weaponry at bazaars, with the idea of enriching the collections of museums in Poland after the war. In general, they themselves did not return to their native country, but they sent the collection to Poland via the intermediation of the Polish Institute and the Władysław Sikorski Museum in London. The main information about Polish collections of Persian weaponry is found in the catalog of a large exhibition held in Malbork in 2000, which is entitled “16th-19th Century Persian and Indo-Persian Weapons from Polish Collections.”

Also interesting are Polish collections of metal, ceramics, and glass. Among the most significant metal objects is a silver epergne with the figure of a boar (*Arcydziela sztuki perskiej ze zbiorów polskich*, no. 255, pp. 35, 116), which is attributed to the late Sasanian period (6th century-early 7th century), as well as a silver bowl from the 5th-6th century (*Arcydziela sztuki perskiej ze zbiorów polskich*, no. 256, pp. 43, 116). Persian ceramics are represented in greater numbers ([FIGURE 11](#)). The exhibition of ceramics at the National Museum in Warsaw opens with an amphora made of pink clay from the Middle Parthian period (1st century BCE to 1st century CE). The amphora is wheel-made and glazed with green enamel (*Arcydziela sztuki perskiej ze zbiorów polskich*, no. 282). In the same collection, among early medieval ceramic objects, the most noteworthy are ceramic bowls (*tās*) from Nišāpur or Samarqand, dated to the 10th century (*Arcydziela sztuki perskiej ze zbiorów polskich*, nos. 284-86), as well as a model of a house or holy sanctuary (*Arcydziela sztuki perskiej ze zbiorów polskich*, no. 299) dated to the 12th-early 13th century and originating from the region of Kāšān-Gorgān-Rayy-Sāva. In 1921, Władysław Semerau-Siemianowski donated to the National Museum in Warsaw a rich collection of glass objects from the 8th-11th centuries, which derive from Persia and the Near East and include bottles, flacons, and bottle-flacons (*šiša-ye ‘aṭr*, *‘aṭrdān*; see *Arcydziela sztuki perskiej ze zbiorów polskich*, nos. 340-64).

Coins. Besides Persian textiles, weaponry, and craft products, Polish collections



also possess Persian coins minted over the centuries. Ancient times, which form a decided minority among the available items, are represented by coins of the Achaemenids (558-330 BCE), the Persian satraps, the Arsacids (247 BCE-224 CE), as well as the Sasanians (224-651 CE). The collection of the Regional Museum in Toruń holds, among the coins of the Achaemenid kings, silver *sigloi* minted in the years 425-333 BCE (Krzyżanowska, p. 32), as well as a gold *daric* (Gk. *dareikōs statēr*, hence the term ‘stater’) coin, transferred to the collections of the National Museum in Krakow in 1996 (Bodzek and Korczyńska, p. 37). Coins of the Persian satraps represent a minor collection. Among the most interesting exhibits are a tetradrachm of Sabakes (Achaemenid satrap of Egypt, d. 333 BCE) from the Collection of Walery Amrogowicz, presently in the possession of the Regional Museum in Toruń (Mielczarek, pp. 413-16), as well as a stater of Pharnabazus and Datames, minted in Tarsus in 379-374 BCE, and a bronze coin of Tissaphernes of Astyra (ca. 400-395 BCE) from the National Museum in Krakow. A more numerous group among ancient Persian coins is represented by silver coins of the Arsacids—among others, silver drachms of Tiridates I, Arsaces I, Mithradates I, Artabanus II, Phraates II, Vologases V (for their reigning dates see [ARSACIDS](#)), as well as the tetradrachms of Gotarzes, Pacorus II (Krzyżanowska, pp. 33-34). Polish collections of Persian coins are completed by drachms of the the Sasanian kings, from Ardašir I (r. 224-41 CE) to Kōsrow II (r. 590-628 CE). Some of them were transferred on deposit to the National Museum in Krakow by Mirosław Kruszyński.

A great role in the multiplication of collections of Persian coins was played by treasures of early medieval Islamic coins, which were found in Polish territories already from the end of the 18th century onwards. Aside from the more rarely represented coins of the Buyids (320-454/932-1062), the most numerous group among them is formed by *dirhams* of the Samanids (204-395/819-1005), coming from the mints of Central Asia and Khorasan. Already in the late 9th and early 10th century, rulers of the Samanid dynasty, nominally subjects of the Abbasid caliphs, were interested in trade with Eastern and Central Europe (Lewicki, pp. 219-33). Dirhams of the Samanids in Polish collections represent all rulers of that dynasty who minted silver coinage. The largest collection of Samanid dirhams, which is in the possession of the Archeological and Ethnographic Museum in Łódź, was discovered in 1945, in the village of Klukowicze, Podlaskie Province (Czapkiewicz et al., p. 7). Of the 641 coins of Esmā’il b. Aḥmad (r. 279-95/892-907), 506 were minted in Čāč (present-day Tashkent), 124 in Samarqand, and 3 in Marv. All these coins



come from the early period of Samanid mintage (years 281-89 of the Hijra, that is, 894-5 to 901-2 CE).

A significant number of coins found their way to museum collections from private individuals. Some Samanid and Buyid dirhams in the collections of the State Archeological Museum in Warsaw originate from treasures found in Zalesie (A. Kmietowicz and Kubiak, pp. 27-165, 281-92), Obra Nowa (Felczak et al., pp. 12-20, 25-26), and Piwonice, not far from Kalisz (Kubiak et al., pp. 141-45). The Czapski Palace (a branch of the National Museum in Krakow) received Samanid and Buyid dirhams, which come from a treasure found at Dzierznica, via the intermediation of Zygmunt Zakrzewski and Henryk Mańkowski (A. Kmietowicz, 1994, pp. 161-67). A large collection of Samanid silver coins is in the possession of the Archeological Museum in Posen. It is here that a decided majority of the finds from Dzierznica ended up, together with 32 dirhams from Łądek in Wielkopolskie Province, found in 1923 (F. Kmietowicz, pp. 209-30). Some coins minted in Persia by rulers of various dynasties are to be found in the collections of regional museums. Thus, the Regional Museum in Ciechanów possesses a hack silver hoard, found in 1982 in that same town, which comprises 51 whole coins of the Samanid emirs, minted the years 292/904-5 to 363/973-4. Besides, this collection includes a group of dirhams and fragmentary coins from the Buyid dynasty: among others, dirhams of 'Emād-al-Dowla, Rokn-al-Dawla, and 'Azod-al-Dawla (Bartczak, 1997, pp 43-59). These coins make a characteristic component of late Oriental finds from the territory of Poland. Coins of the Samanid princes (Esmā'il b. Aḥmad to Maṣṣūr b. Nuḥ) from the private collection of Stanisław Niewiński have enriched the collection of the Regional Museum in Bydgoszcz (Pietroń, 1999, pp. 10-11).

Collections of ancient Iranian coins are complemented by more modern samples: silver coins of the Safavid dynasty (907-1148/1502-1736), dominated by four *šāhi* (*abbāsi*) coins of Shah Ḥosayn I (r. 1106-35/1694-1722), minted in 1131/1718-19 to 1133/1720-21 in Tiflis (Tbilisi) and Isfahan (*Arcydziela sztuki perskiej ze zbiorów polskich*, nos. 379 and 380), as well as silver and copper coins of the Qajars—among others, silver *riāls* and *fulus* from the 19th century, minted at Tabriz, Isfahan, and Rasht (Majda, 1996, pp. 151-55).

List of exhibitions of Persian art held in Poland:

Exhibition of Historic Objects in Honor of the 200th Anniversary of the Relief of Vienna, Sukiennice (Cloth Hall), National Museum in Krakow, 1883.



Historic Objects from the Times of Kings Stefan and Jan III, in the Military Museum building, on the occasion of the 400th birthday of Stefan Batory and the 250th anniversary of the Relief of Vienna, National Museum in Warsaw, Military Museum in Warsaw, 1933.

Islamic Carpets, Asian and European Ceramics, National Museum in Krakow, 1934.

Persian (Iranian) Art and Its Influences, Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Warsaw, 1935.

Oriental Writing and Books, National Museum in Warsaw, 1958.

Relief of Vienna 1683. Exhibition at the Royal Castle on Wawel Hill in honor of the 300th anniversary of the battle, Krakow, 1983.

Pride and Freedom. A Picture of the Polish Nobility during the Baroque Era, National Museum in Poznań, 1991.

The Orient in Polish Art, Krakow, 1992.

Traditions of Persian Writing, Jagiellonian University Institute of Oriental Philology and Jagiellonian Library, Krakow, 1993.

Throne of Mementoes. In Honor of the “Most Noble and Victorious Jan III Sobieski, King of Poland,” on the 300th Anniversary of his Death 1696–1996, Palace Museum in Wilanów, 1996.

Jan III Sobieski–Castrum Doloris 1696–1996, District Museum in Radom, 1996.

The Sarmatian Taste, District Museum in Rzeszow, 1995.

Persian Art of the Qajar Period 1779-1924, Zamoyski Museum in Kozłówka, 1996.

Persian and Indo-Persian Armor of the 16th-19th Centuries from Polish Collections, Castle Museum in Malbork, 2000.

Masterpieces of Persian Art from Polish Collections, National Museum in Warsaw, National Museum in Krakow, 2002.



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Idem, "Ormianie polscy. Odrębność i asymilacja" (Armenians of Poland. Difference and assimilation), *Katalog wystawy w Muzeum Narodowym w Krakowie*, Krakow, 1999, pp. 33-35, 142-45.

Idem, *Leksykon sztuki koberniczej* (Lexicon of carpet-weaving art), Krakow, 1999.



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