

Tadeusz Wierzejski (1892–1974): Museum Donor or Persona Non Grata?

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ABSTRACT

Tadeusz Wierzejski was the most generous museum benefactor in Communist Poland, donating to 25 museums in the country. In the cases of the National Museum in Warsaw, the Royal Łazienki Palace, the Wawel Royal Castle and the District Museum in Toruń, his gifts – in their size as well as their quality – exceeded these institutions' acquisitional possibilities in those days. The artistic calibre of these groups of works attests to the versatile professional knowledge possessed by Wierzejski. As donations, they were the culmination of his passion for collecting and the outcome of his fifty years of practically uninterrupted activity as an art dealer. Having started out in Bydgoszcz after the First World War, he developed his business fully in Lviv and continued in the extraordinary circumstances of German-occupied Kraków. Where he operated the longest, i.e., for nearly thirty years, was in post-war Warsaw, in constant 'hit-and-run battle' with the socialist reality, systemically hostile toward private initiative and ownership. The methods he resorted to in the People's Poland period were not always ethical – he was not averse to looted goods or the illegal export of artefacts abroad. Arguably, however, his actions were a response to the pathology of the political system, a dimension which goes largely unnoticed by Wierzejski's critics today. Even worse, his detractors tend to indiscriminately repeat rumours of Wierzejski's collaboration with the Germans during the occupation, which have been following the collector's name since that time but were found to be baseless by the communist investigators in pursuit of him. The author of the paper attempts a polemical discussion with these opinions, citing little-known or ignored facts from the dealer's life and proposing an analysis of his post-war activity that takes into account the country's cultural policy and the situation of museums at the time. The paper concludes with a plea for the objects donated by or purchased from Wierzejski to undergo provenance research, which may define the status of the artefacts acquired from the man and add to the existing knowledge on the outstanding but equally controversial collector, donor and dealer.

KEYWORDS

art trade in Poland 1920–1970, collecting, pre-war Lviv, occupied Kraków, helping Jews, Katyń investigation, Wawel 1945, Communist Poland museum policy, PP Desa, provenance research in museum collections

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The art dealer, collector and museum donor Tadeusz Wierzejski, dead for more than fifty years now, has interested me for a long time. I first came across the name Wierzejski more than a decade ago, while conducting archival research at the Institute of National Remembrance (INR) on the looting and trade of art during the Nazi occupation of Poland.¹ My work led me to an extensive set of materials from an early-1970s investigation into a large-scale gold and art smuggling operation that had come to be known as the 'Mętlewicz affair'. Subsequently, I searched for information on Wierzejski in a number of museum archives and talked to people who had known him: museum workers and art historians, collectors, dealers, journalists, lawyers and the sole close relative of the man himself. Yet, there is a reason why I had never written in depth about him until now. He has been an elusive, vexing figure to me, and remains so to this day; all the more so that I treat my role in all of this as that of a historian and not a prosecutor or attorney, defender or accuser. While it is true that this article deals with the actions of a man who has been dead for more than half a century, to a great extent it also concerns the state of Polish museology in the post-war period and into the present.

In 2016, the District Museum in Toruń put on an exhibition called *The Tadeusz Wierzejski Collection in Polish Museums*, in which the museum's own Far Eastern art holdings donated by the collector in 1966 were shown alongside

pieces from more than a dozen other museums (including the Wawel Royal Castle, the Royal Łazienki Museum, and the National Museums in Warsaw, Wrocław and Poznań) that had been donated by, or in some cases bought from, Wierzejski.² Also shown in that exhibition were a number of items from the collector's bequest to the Royal Castle in Warsaw, coerced by law enforcement authorities in 1974, just several months prior to his death. The Toruń exhibition, as its curator wrote in the catalogue, was to look back at the 'legendary collector and dealer' and at the same time allow the beneficiary institutions to 'honour the memory of their benefactor'.³ The following year, in *Cenne, Bezcenne, Utracone* magazine, the long-time art market observer Janusz Miliszewski lamented that Wierzejski, who 'had his life upended for political reasons in the communist period, fell into obscurity after his death even though, being an outstanding collector in the true European mould, he could have been the seed for the development of collecting culture in the country'.⁴

Painting an entirely different picture of Wierzejski was Prof. Michał Haake in his book *Utracone arcydzieło. Losy obrazu 'Targ na jarzyny' Józefa Pankiewicza* [Lost masterpieces. The fortunes of Józef Pankowicz's painting 'The Vegetable Market'], published in 2020 by Adam Mickiewicz University Press.⁵ In it, the author attempts to prove the thesis that the titular Pankiewicz painting, residing in the National Museum in Poznań since 1948, is in fact a forgery.



fig. 1 Tadeusz Wierzejski standing next to a display case containing items donated by him, shown in the exhibition *Decorative Art, Donations and Acquisitions 1945–1964* at the National Museum in Warsaw (15 June – 1 Aug. 1964), The National Museum in Warsaw
photo Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie

As Haake stated in an interview with *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily, ‘the main hypothesis I allowed myself to propose is as follows: the painting might have been passed off on the then-director of the museum, Zdzisław Kępiński, by Tadeusz Wierzejski’ [emphasis here and later by N.C-L.].⁶ In reply to the interviewer’s question about who Tadeusz Wierzejski was, Haake (in a similar vein as in his book) let loose a number of very serious accusations, the likes of which had ever been as explicitly levied only by tipsters, secret police agents and investigators

in Communist Poland. This is perplexing, especially considering that the author also had this to say in the book: ‘I deeply explored all leads concerning the art dealer Tadeusz Wierzejski’s occupation-era activity, but found no connection with the painting *The Vegetable Market* from Poznań’.⁷

I would like to quote the passage with Haake’s accusations against the collector: ‘Before the war he [Tadeusz Wierzejski] was a well-known art dealer in Lviv [Lwów / Lemberg]. During the war – as corroborated by

witness testimony and court documents – he started doing business with Pieter Nicolaas Menten, a Nazi of Dutch ancestry living in Poland, who committed crimes and looted Polish and Jewish property in the territory of Galicia. [...] According to statements from witnesses questioned shortly after the war by the Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes, [Wierzejski] informed him [Menten] where valuable works were being kept. There is also testimony stating that Wierzejski's co-workers helped Menten to transport looted works. After Menten's departure from Kraków, Wierzejski became the next *treuhänder* – the administrator of the Jewish property looted by Menten. And there is a hypothesis [whose?] that he himself came into possession of a significant amount thereof. Wierzejski was also accused of plundering artworks after the war in the [post-war Polish] Western Territories; and of exporting artworks abroad via Brazilian and Portuguese diplomats. There are whole volumes of records that detail the process [i.e., the so-called Mętlewicz affair and its documentation at the INR]. In the 1970s, the group involved were put on trial. Wierzejski was charged but the case was dropped because he died. [...] He was accused of having possession of originals, but then sending copies to state museums with the originals going abroad. Conducive to all of this was the chaos of the post-war years and the ravaged state of the museum collections that were being rebuilt. On top of that there was the communist government and its nomenclature, which hoped to profit from this too. For a long time Wierzejski was untouchable because he was collaborating with them'.⁸

Wierzejski fared no better at a conference titled 'The 21st Century Museum. On the Centenary of the 1st Congress of Polish Museums in Poznań', organized in June 2022 at that city's National Museum.⁹ In the discussion of museum professionals – with such notables as the director of the Wilanów Museum, Paweł Jaskanis, and his vice-director, Dr hab. Dorota Folga-Januszewska in attendance – the collector, dead for more than half a century, was thoroughly dragged through the mud on the basis of the copious INR materials used by Haake, which most of the attendees had no knowledge of. The

sole person who undoubtedly knew these records was the Adam Mickiewicz University professor Ewa Syska, a historian, source studies specialist and author of the 2014 book *Marian Swinarski (1902–1965) poznański antykwaryusz i bibliofil* [Marian Swinarski (1902–1965), a Poznań book dealer and bibliophile]. Though no less critical of Wierzejski, she was the only one at the conference to bring up the need for careful and thorough study on the connections between the post-war art trade and museum policy.

The INR materials were, however, conscientiously studied by the authors of two publications appearing in 2023. The first of these is a book by Monika Luft that put an investigative eye to the Mętlewicz affair, titled *Pejzaż z przemytnikiem. Jak wywożono z PRL-u dzieła sztuki i antyki* [Landscape with a smuggler. How art and antiques were removed from Poland in the communist period].¹⁰ The other is a two-part work by Jacek Dehnel titled *Łabędzie* [Swans].¹¹ In the first volume, Dehnel, who himself is a distant relative of the Mętlewicz, gives a family history perspective on the biggest case of art, gold and currency smuggling in the Communist Poland period. Volume two expands on and somewhat verifies the personal story against the documents at the INR, filling in gaps and supplementing it with added subtext and commentary from the author.

Luft, meanwhile, offers a meaty and objectivity-minded review of the materials from the sprawling investigation conducted by the Security Service, communist police and prosecutor's office in the first half of the 1970s. Dehnel, being a writer and wielding a familiarity with art history (as evidenced, if nothing else, by the history of Count Heinrich von Brühl's *Swan Service* interwoven into the main narrative), relied on various other archival materials and print sources, which, coupled with the family stories and the author's natural volubility, come together to unexpected effect into a panorama of the life of the so-called 'privateers' operating in Communist Poland, reading like something of a continuation (albeit a somewhat wordy one) of Leopold Tyrmand's *The Man with the White Eyes*.

Despite their obvious differences, both authors regard Wierzejski as one of the main antagonists in the story, as had the communist investigators. After all, in writing about the man

and his activities, both are stuck in interpretive ruts left over from the communist period. Of course, I do not argue for the post-war plunder, illegal export of art and smuggling of gold to be condoned, or for Wierzejski's involvement to be negated, though I do object to him being made into a cheap scapegoat – something that Haake and occasionally Dehnel can't seem to resist doing. What, after all, seems to evade all of the aforementioned critics – with the exception of arguably Prof. Syska – is the realization that, in a system like that of Communist Poland, illegal actions of the kind we are talking about were practically inevitable and, more importantly, not much more pathological than the very reality they – objectively speaking – brought harm to.

Communist Poland and its cultural policies, including laws and lower-level regulations on the legal status and accession of museums, often set the stage for overt violations of ownership rights and international law (the nationalization of so called post-German property and 'abandoned' [read: post-Jewish] property; agricultural reform and the issue of 'post-manor' property; provenance manipulation; the Polonization of post-war Polish Western Territories heritage), not to mention the violation of the imperative of 'due diligence' in the purchase of museum objects. Along with all this came the nationalized art market, controlled by the state-owned company PP Desa established in 1950. In Desa's way of doing things, it was enough for sellers to provide a declaration that they were indeed the owner of the object being sold, which was tantamount to a license to invent fictitious, if not openly falsified, provenances. Alongside chronic underfunding for museums, the impossibility of engaging in real private collecting, and the prohibition of taking practically anything created prior to 1945 out of the country, the situation made for pathology *par excellence*, especially compared to how things were under the pre-war system. The fact that all of this happened for the sake of the wellbeing and protection of a national culture decimated during the war and occupation doesn't change the matter. Nor does the situation that many museum professionals participated in the process of rebuilding the nation's heritage with deep dedication and in good faith, with widespread support from the public, at that.

Despite its difficult evaluation, I find in Wierzejski's activity evident signs of disagreement with and even opposition to the systemic pathology described above. But before I attempt to justify this thesis, I wish to note that a new exhibition of Meissen porcelain that opened in 2024 at the Wawel Royal Castle, in which the majority of the artefacts (and ones of very high quality, to boot) were items donated by Wierzejski in 1966 (that is, a few years before the investigation into the Metlewicz affair was initiated), treats the donor as a *persona non grata*, his name absent in the exhibition's description and the room, which had borne his name since the arrival of the donation (as stipulated in the donation agreement), now being called the Porcelain Room.¹²

Wierzejski's Activity Up to 1939

Wierzejski witnessed and functioned in several political eras and systems.¹³ Born in 1892 in Stanisławów (today Ivano-Frankivsk), he managed to finish law school in Lviv just before the outbreak of the First World War. During the war he served in the Austrian army, and from 1918 in the Polish army, fighting in the so-called Defence of Lviv. He left the army in 1921 with the rank of a captain, spending the next two years in Bydgoszcz, which by then lay within the western borders of the sovereign Republic of Poland. We do not know for sure what brought him to the city but it was likely family matters, seeing as his father, Józef, was living there at the time (and died there in 1925). It was in Bydgoszcz, however – and this is why I even mention this short episode – that Wierzejski made his public debut in the three capacities that would define him for the rest of his life: as an art dealer, collector and museum donor (and co-curator).

His first foray in the role of a *kunsthändler* was not without its problems. The 1921 swap with the Wielkopolskie Museum in Poznań of four Jan Matejko stained glass window cartoons for St Mary's Church in Kraków in exchange for three German paintings from the collection of the former Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum in Poznań (by Max Slevogt, Fritz von Uhde and Wilhelm Trübner) came under public fire (in part because it was executed without the required ministerial approval and because the paintings by German artists were then sold in Berlin).¹⁴

Well-received, however, was Wierzejski's contribution to the inauguration of the City Museum in Bydgoszcz in 1923. Though the institution had practically no collection of its own, 'Mr Wierzejski made a short-term loan of an assortment of Persian rugs and rococo furniture, along with one Wouwerman and two Italian paintings (a Tiepolo? and a Maniasco [sic])'¹⁵ which 'would not look out of place in any magnate's residence'.¹⁶ On top of that, the collector personally saw to the arrangement of the works in the exhibition and donated a kontush sash from Słuck to the museum.

Returning to Lviv later that year, Wierzejski enrolled – being more than thirty years old – in art history studies at Jan Kazimierz University, which he completed in 1928. One of his mentors at the school would be Professor Władysław Podlacha (1875–1951), in whose seminar the 'best paper', according to the future eminent archaeologist and museum professional Kazimierz Michałowski (1901–1981), 'was the one on Rembrandt's etchings, delivered by Captain Tadeusz Wierzejski'. Michałowski and Wierzejski would remain friends until the collector's death.¹⁷ The paper really must have been superlative for the author to win the praise of Podlacha, and with hefty competition too, as some of Wierzejski's fellow classmates alongside Michałowski included several highly respected future historians and museum workers: Mieczysław Gębarowicz (1893–1984), Ksawery Piwocki (1901–1974), Zbigniew Hornung (1903–1981) and Helena Blum (later Kozakiewicz, 1904–1984). Not long after submitting his paper, Wierzejski visited the Dresden Gallery, where, equipped with a letter of recommendation from his mentor, he was granted the rare privilege of being able to handle some of their prized porcelain artefacts.¹⁸ In time, Wierzejski would become an outstanding expert on the artform.

As early as 1926, while still a student in Lviv, Wierzejski is appointed 'permanent expert and court appraiser for the artistic industry sector, specializing in paintings, sculptures, furniture, rugs, embroidery, bronzes, etc. of artistic value', soon thereafter being named an appraiser for the Chamber of Commerce and Customs Authority, as well as for a number of insurance companies.¹⁹ In 1927, he opens the Lamus antiques shop with a friend from law school,

Dr Ignacy Philipp, originally on Ossolińskich St and then moving near the famous promenade on Romanowicza St.²⁰ Philipp rather quickly stepped away from the business to focus on his in-depth study of the work of artists active in Galicia in the nineteenth century. After that, Wierzejski ran Lamus alone, standing out among his peers in the field for his academic education. He also managed an auction house called the Lviv Public Auction Hall, which required considerable organizational skills in addition to expert knowledge.²¹ Wierzejski's capabilities are evidenced by the several exhibitions he co-organized in Lviv,²² for which he loaned artefacts from his constantly growing private collection, as well as by his sales and early donations to museums, for whom he would also sometimes consult as an appraiser.²³ These activities would not have been possible without a broad network of connections with curators, fellow collectors and dealers.²⁴ As far as other dealers go, Wierzejski maintained a particularly close professional relationship, shared business interests and friendship with the eleven-year-younger Józef Stieglitz from Kraków (1903–1990), the son and eventual business partner of Abraham Stieglitz, who owned and operated a well-known pre-war antiques and art shop on Kraków's Main Market Square.

Some evidence of Wierzejski's connections and correspondence survives in various museum archives today. In these materials we find indirect evidence of otherwise undocumented relationships that the man maintained with people who owned art and antiques (like fine furniture, silver, textiles, porcelain, bronzes and other kinds of artistic handicrafts) who were either his clients or wished to entrust him with items from their collections. As more esteemed collectors, gentry members (many of whom were forced by the difficult economic situation to sell off their family estates) and other respected citizens joined his circle of acquaintances, the dealer's renown and position grew, which in turn translated to a higher level of trust in the authenticity and provenance of the goods he sold, their quality, and therefore value, guaranteed by his knowledge and experience. There is no disputing that in pre-war Lviv, Tadeusz Wierzejski sat at the top of the art market hierarchy.

This comes through, if nothing else, in a letter dated 27 January 1934 to the custodian of the Wawel Castle collection, Stanisław Świerż-Zaleski (1886–1951)²⁵: ‘Dear Mr Custodian I thank you for your letter and the news. I will be travelling to Kraków in the early days of February. For now, though, I come to you with a different matter. Yesterday, I finalized the purchase of what remains of the Poturzycka Gallery, consisting of 224 paintings.²⁶ Though no marvels remain, there are still some very fine canvases left. I have heard that Mr Lauterbach²⁷ supposedly mentioned that a couple of the larger paintings might be of interest to Prince Sanguszeko of Gumniska for Podhorce (today Pidhirtsi), which is said to lack any decent paintings. Do you know anything about this? Might you be of assistance? Should I contact Lauterbach directly? Or can Hornung²⁸ or Czołkowski²⁹ help? Who else might I offer them to? I was told by Dr Werchracki about a certain three paintings, from whose series a fourth remains in Lviv, that have been identified in Warsaw as original Snyderses. Do you know anything about this? Are they signed? I kindly ask for a short but prompt reply and I extend a sincere hand to you. Yours, T. Wierzejski’.

In a letter sent almost forty years later to the director of the Wawel Castle, dated 18 November 1972, regarding Wierzejski’s donation of the painting *Madonna and Child* to the Wawel collection, we read: ‘The painting is reproduced in colour in Haldane Macfall’s *Malarstwo flamandzkie i niemieckie* [Flemish and German painting] (translated from the original English by Józef Ruffer), published in Lviv, plate XXV, as a work of van Dyck. It belonged to the esteemed art collector Helen Dąbcańska-Budzynowska, residing in Lviv on the street bearing her name (Dąbcańska St) at address no. 3. Due to my close social relations with Mrs Dąbcańska, I know that around 1926 she hosted the renowned and outstanding expert Alexander [Abraham] Bredius, upon whose assessment the painting was reproduced as a van Dyck.’³⁰

Wierzejski’s professionalism and growing status allowed him to work in the 1930s with Lviv’s premier art restorer, Jan Marksens (1883–1961). Between February 1934 and January 1935, Marksens restored ninety paintings that Wierzejski had bought from the aforementioned Poturzycka Gallery,³¹ after which the collector noted:

‘On none of the paintings did I, upon very scrupulous inspection, detect any loss of the old paint or overpainting with fresh paint. All spot fill-ins with putty in damaged areas exhibited great care and aesthetic restraint. Finally, as far as I can ascertain, the varnish, and especially the matt and semi-matt varnishes you used recently, is holding up very well on all of the paintings, is adequately pliable and, having been so thinly applied to the paintings, render them all the more impressive’.³²

From the late 1920s, among Wierzejski’s clients was the wealthy Lviv-based Dutch businessman and collector Pieter Nicolaas Menten (1899–1987).³³

The War and Occupation

In 1939, the forty-seven-year-old Tadeusz Wierzejski enjoyed a stable and prominent position in his field. He was unmarried and had no children. With the outbreak of the Second World War, Lviv experienced a mass influx of people fleeing from central Poland, soon followed by Soviet occupation. In September of that year, Józef Stieglitz, a Jew, stays with Wierzejski in his apartment on Dąbrowskiego Square, having decided to get his family out of Kraków before the Germans took the city (temporarily placing them in Złoczów (today Zolochiv)).³⁴ A few weeks later, in November, Menten visits Wierzejski’s apartment with a request for the latter to draw up an inventory and valuation of his collection, which Wierzejski had seen in Lviv before its alleged seizure by the Soviets at Sopot near Stryi, where Menten had bought a woodland property some years prior. Apparently having decided to return to the Netherlands, which was possible only with a stopover in Kraków, the capital of the General Government (GG), Menten has the inventory drafted with compensation in mind, needing to show such a document at the Dutch consulate and to the German-Soviet resettlement commission. To the surprise of other Dutch nationals returning to their country from Lviv, Menten and his wife end up staying in occupied Kraków. He declares his allegiance to the Third Reich and begins working with the German authorities, especially with the Nazi security service (Sicherheitsdienst, SD). This would enable his brazen looting of art over the following three years and ultimately make him rich.

Stieglitz, whose entire family (including his father, Abraham) was deported from Złoczów and exiled to Siberia, decides to stay in Soviet-occupied Lviv and operate between the nationalized resale market and the grey market.

Being a former captain in the Polish army and an affluent art dealer, Wierzejski fears for his safety in Soviet Lviv and chooses to relocate to German-occupied Kraków.³⁵ Before he receives permission to travel to the GG as a former officer in the Austrian army, he deposits his sizeable collection on loan at three Lviv museums whose directors and custodians are his friends and acquaintances from university: he leaves his paintings at the Lviv Gallery of Art, his artistic handicrafts at the Museum of Artistic Industry, and his silver and 'other trinkets' at the Jan III Sobieski National Museum.³⁶ He will also alter his personal data, going from Tadeusz Jakub Wierzejski, born in 1892 in Stanisławów, to Antoni Tadeusz Wierzejski, born in 1886 in Jarosław. This is without a doubt a safety precaution: as per the Nuremberg Laws, Wierzejski is a *Mischling* since his maternal grandmother was Jewish and since he was delivered by a Jewish midwife.³⁷ I mention this because it is an indication of his foresight (founded on a lack of illusions) as well as of his uncertainty as to what awaited him in the GG.

Wierzejski arrives in Kraków in May 1940 and moves into Józef Stieglitz's apartment. Like Menten, and possibly on Menten's recommendation, he takes a job as an art appraiser for the Kraków Chamber of Industry and Commerce. He also takes up a post as a *treuhänder*, a German authority-appointed manager, and is put in charge of overseeing several wineries and vodka distilleries, and later of a small chemical factory in Podgórze.³⁸ In Kraków's Stradom neighbourhood he opens a small antiques shop, which, like its predecessor in Lviv, he calls Lamus. Spread out across several shipments in 1942, Wierzejski manages to get his private collection back from the museums and friends he had left it with in Lviv, which has been occupied by the Germans since July 1941; in this he receives some degree of help or protection from Menten, including access to SD transport. He puts much of these holdings on loan at the National Museum in Warsaw (known then as the Stadtmuseum and closed to visitors). To do

so he receives approval from the museum's director, Stanisław Lorentz (1899–1991), who reports to the German commissary director Alfred Schellenberg but also secretly oversees the culture branch of the underground Government Delegation for Poland, handling matters related to art in the broadest sense (museums, documentation of wartime losses, the art market, assistance to artists and cultural institution workers, etc.).

In the spring of 1943, after Menten leaves the GG on order of SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler (taking with him to the Netherlands – with Himmler's permission – three train cars full of looted property, including many works of art), Wierzejski takes Menten's place as the *treuhänder* of four Jewish antiques shops in Kraków, one of them being the Abraham Stieglitz Antiques Salon. In Warsaw, he briefly considers opening an art shop on Mazowiecka St, and in late 1943/early 1944 enlists Lorentz's help in purchasing a historic house on Krakowskie Przedmieście St. The building is where he plans to keep the collection shipped in from Lviv and new acquisitions, all of which he intends to donate to Warsaw's National Museum in the future.

Taken cursorily, all of this sounds suspicious, to say the least. One might, therefore, conclude that today's resounding accusations concerning Wierzejski's conduct during the war, which I cite from Haake, and which after the war contributed to the collector's infamy, are fully justified. Yet, the damning material relating to the occupation years collected during the communist-period investigation tends to be taken at face value, without conscientious verification of its evidential value and without broader historical analysis. Only adding fuel to the allegations is the fact that, for a lack of documentation and witnesses, and due to the customary air of discretion surrounding the art trade, many details will likely forever remain hidden.

Here are some facts that undermine the black-and-white judgements of the rash 'inquisitors' out there. Wierzejski was named *treuhänder* of the aforementioned alcohol production plants and paint and lacquer factory at the request of their Jewish owners.³⁹ On top of that, he helped them – and some of their employees – survive, sending money to those in

hiding and food into the Kraków ghetto and later into the concentration camp in Płaszów.⁴⁰ Those who survived had their companies returned to them by Wierzejski shortly after the Germans left the city in January 1945. He also offered help to persecuted art and antiquities dealers. He provided monetary support to the family of Samuel Katzner (Samuel Katzner Antiques at 5 Bracka St, called Kassinogasse St during the occupation) and helped them hide, returning their shop to them after the war and sharing with them its income from the occupation period.⁴¹ For Józef Stieglitz's older brother Jakub, who stayed behind in Kraków in 1939 and worked for Menten in their father's antiques shop until being deported in 1942, Wierzejski tried to open an antiques shop in Warsaw, where Jakub would be safer due to the fact that few people knew him there.⁴² After Menten left the GG, Wierzejski hired a German woman who sympathized with the Poles to work at the Stieglitz Antiques Salon.⁴³ Right after the war, the salon was taken over by Józef Stieglitz's sister Gizela, who had returned (briefly) to Kraków and to whom Wierzejski offered counsel at her brother's request. Ruth Philipp, the daughter of his old friend from Lviv, Ignacy Philipp, having fled Lviv for Kraków when faced with being detained in the ghetto, was given a job (and shelter) by Wierzejski at the paint and lacquer factory in 1942.⁴⁴ In a similar way, with his sister Zofia Wallnerowa, he helped Małgosia Montag (alias Motowska), who had been brought over from Lviv.⁴⁵ Luft mentions this fact. Dehnel, meanwhile, likely never discovered this detail as, following the trail of Wierzejski's suspicious connections with Menten, he takes the liberty of assuming a baffling degree of nonchalance (even if it wasn't about hiding a Jewish child): 'when the gestapo was "persecuting" (arrested? followed?) Wierzejski's sister, Zofia Wallnerowa, in Nowy Targ, Wierzejski sought help from Menten, who had considerable influence within the Nazi power structures. His intervention must have been successful, because Wierzejski gifted the Dutchman with a gold tobacco box in return'.⁴⁶ Wierzejski himself made mention of that request and reciprocal show of gratitude in a letter to Stieglitz in March 1942. This happened at the height of Aktion Reinhardt, a Nazi campaign in which thousands of people were transported

from the ghetto in Lviv to the death camp in Bełżec.

Among those who received help from the collector there were also many non-Jewish Poles, including the well-known theatre director Wiliam Horzyca (1889–1959) in Lviv and the pre-war director of the Silesian Museum Tadeusz Dobrowolski (1899–1984) in Kraków. To quote the Polish Wikipedia page on the latter man: '[...] on 6 November 1939, [Dobrowolski] was arrested by the Germans along with other academic staff members of Kraków schools as part of the Nazis' Sonderaktion Krakau campaign and was imprisoned in Kraków, Wrocław (then Breslau) and the Sachsenhausen camp (November 1939 – February 1940). He returned to Kraków with lung problems and in a state of general emaciation. While at the camp, his apartment was seized along with his valuable book collection and scholarly materials. Until 1942, he supported himself by painting portraits, later working as an art expert for the Appellate Court and as the head of a paint and lacquer factory'.⁴⁷ These last two functions Dobrowolski owed to Tadeusz Wierzejski.

Throughout the occupation, from Lviv to Wiśnicz to Kraków and Zakopane, Wierzejski provided material support to the aforementioned conservator Marksens, with whom he had worked closely in the 1930s. Additionally, in 1944, he helped Marksens relocate all of the contents of his impressive restoration workshop to Kraków and Zakopane.⁴⁸

Altogether, Wierzejski provided help to more than 350 people (with at least thirty Jews among them) and charitable institutions during the occupation. He estimated his support to have amounted to over one million złotych – a huge sum. Even the firmly antagonistic and sceptical communist investigators had to acknowledge – in light of the surviving evidence – that all of his help and the financial outlay it entailed was factual.⁴⁹ And still, Wierzejski's critics today fail to note this extraordinary conduct. Either that or they simply downplay it, suggesting it was not much compared to the profits reaped by Wierzejski, who – to cite the embarrassingly insouciant accusations of Haake – 'came into possession of a big chunk of the Jewish property looted by Menten', or made a killing on trading art during the occupation, as has been

suggested at the conference in Poznań. And Dehnel's assumption of 'the suspects endorsing the suspects'⁵⁰ as he drew an analogy between Wierzejski's actions and the post-war [sic] relationship of Menten and Stieglitz, is outright shocking.

Obviously, it is easier to take Wierzejski as a villain than to try to understand how a person could have made such great sums of money in occupied Kraków, so great – one might add – that even the lucrative business of art sales could not have generated them. Meanwhile, to any historian interested in the period of the occupation, the answer is clear: alcohol! At that time, alcohol was the strongest and most reliable currency, and Wierzejski, being a *treuhänder* of wine and vodka production facilities, had unlimited access to it. It was predominantly money earned from the sale of spirits – official yet conducted on the enormous black market – that facilitated his far-reaching aid. It also made it possible to entertain the idea of buying a historic house on the prestigious Krakowskie Przedmieście St in Warsaw. The fact that vodka could 'work miracles' is evidenced by a letter from Wierzejski to Marksens. On 12 May 1944, Wierzejski reports from Kraków that he is sending to Marksens four crates containing tools from Marksens's conservation workshop and packages with his own paintings, along with a litre of vodka. He also expresses hope that it all goes well and writes 'because I asked the driver to take good care of these things and promised him more vodka upon receiving word from you that they have been delivered properly'.⁵¹

As a matter of fact, Wierzejski made no secret of the fact that during the occupation he managed to significantly increase his assets, which were already impressive even before 1939, by investing his income in art.⁵² He acquired works at antiques shops (at Lamus, four shops owned by Jews and others in occupied Kraków, in Warsaw and in Lviv) and directly from endangered or impoverished owners, as well as from individuals who were in unlawful possession of such items, including dodgy middlemen. There is no doubt that among these items were pieces confiscated and sold by the Germans and some obtained through Menten, who is known to have sold works by Polish painters to Polish buyers from his apartment in

Kraków. Emblematic of the situation is the story of Władysław Ślewiński's 1904 painting *The Sea in Brittany*. Wierzejski acquired the canvas in 1943 from the Germans, having seen it hanging on a wall in one of their bureaus in Kraków. When he decided to donate it to the Wielkopolskie Museum in Poznań in 1947, it occurred that the painting had been part of the collection of the National Museum in Kraków, a fact that Wierzejski had no knowledge of when he bought it. Having learned its provenance, he handed it over to the museum that was its rightful owner, just as two years later he returned to the same museum Artur Grottger's painting *In the Choir*, which had gone missing during the occupation but was eventually tracked down by Wierzejski.⁵³

Wierzejski's accusers tend to forget that Stanisław Lorentz, the director of the National Museum in Warsaw and a friend of Wierzejski's at the time, as well as Feliks Kopera (1871–1952), the director of the National Museum in Kraków, and Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz (1883–1948), the Wawel collection caretaker, all considered it perfectly appropriate to rescue Polish paintings from destruction or removal into the Reich by purchasing them from art dealers or even – whenever possible – buying them back from the German looters themselves.

Ruth Philipp would tell me in a telephone conversation that Wierzejski 'had a knack for business that my father could never dream of. And he was charming. [...] He could easily wrap the Germans around his little finger. He helped them make purchases; not by actually working with them but with his knowledge. He saved my father's paintings. Supposedly, he sent two Germans to Lviv to get them out of the cellar where my father had put them away in two crates. After the war he returned them to my family'.⁵⁴

Wierzejski's modern-day critics generally avoid the subject of his supposed connections with the Armia Krajowa (AK, Home Army). One ironically remarks that although it is true that Wierzejski is said to have been a member, there is curiously little information on the subject in the man's usually very thorough documentation. Could it be that this critic forgot how dangerous it was in post-war Poland to possess original materials indicating that the Katyń Massacre (the murder of fifteen thousand Polish Army

officers) was the work of the NKVD (the Soviet People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs).⁵⁵ Wierzejski himself was well aware of that. His November 1966 account of the efforts to secure Wawel Castle subsequent to the Germans' flight from the city begins like this: 'During the occupation I was a member of the Home Army. My direct superior was Antoni Hniłko, commander of the signal corps'.⁵⁶ That was the 5th Kraków Division of the Home Army, which in 1944, as we now know, possessed copies of the Germans' documentation on the Katyń Massacre with original artefacts.⁵⁷ They were split up by Colonel Hniłko in Kraków and put away at several different sites, only to vanish after the Soviets moved in.⁵⁸ Some of these papers are said to have been entrusted to Wierzejski and stashed by him at Stieglitz's Antiques Salon on the Main Market Square. In an bid to confiscate them, the NKVD conducted a search of the premises on 17 March 1945.

The Post-War Years

In 1945, Tadeusz Wierzejski is 53 years old. The city that was once his home and with which the self-proclaimed Leopolitan will always have an emotional bond is now part of Soviet Ukraine and named Lviv. In Poland, the communists take power. Provided a platform by the August 1944 Decree [Pol. Sierpniówki] aiming to bring Nazi war criminals and collaborators to justice, several female workers of the vodka factory accuse Wierzejski of mistreatment and collaboration with the Germans. The case is dismissed⁵⁹ and in 1946 Wierzejski decides to move to Warsaw.

But let's go back to January 1945 for a moment. Wierzejski recalls: 'On the morning of 18 January 1945, the engineer Szyszko-Bohusz [the pre-war director of the Wawel Castle restoration project who continued to work there under the Germans in a lower capacity, and who – as Wierzejski writes – was also a Home Army member] and I went to Wawel, where I was appointed acting Castle Manager. What we encountered was: 1) no lights, 2) no central heating, 3) no water supply, 4) many doors and windows blasted out by the detonation of the Dębnicki Bridge, 5) hundreds of mixed-up keys, which made it difficult to lock any of the Castle's

chambers, 6) the Franck [sic; Governor General Hans Frank] kitchen and cellar burgled on the night of 17 January./ In those circumstances, along with the janitors Kruk, Stępień and others whose names I don't remember, we proceeded to block the ripped-out doors and windows in order to secure the castle's rooms from the numerous rogues idling about in wait for an opportunity to steal something./ Our office was located in the Curate's House./ Szyszko-Bohusz handled the technical and administrative sides./ Besides securing the doors and windows, the biggest concern were the roofs, large sections of which were without shingles. The snow melting in the attics caused ceiling leaks in several rooms, like the 'Heads Hall' and others nearby. We put down pots taken from the Franck kitchen to catch the water./ We didn't have money for any kind of work. On my intervention, we received the first 300,000 złotych from Janina Szulcówna, a Home Army treasurer (currently J. Kulmanowa, a National Bank of Poland clerk, residing at 15 Floriańska St); the next disbursement came in the sum of 500,000 złotych, which I received from Voivode Adam (?) Ostrowski./ These sums, and the incredibly dedicated work of the janitors allowed us to seal up the Wawel rooms holding collections and safeguard them against theft./ On one of the first days, Tomasz Kruk handed me an envelope with two keys inside, which he had been given by the administrator von Palezieux. Written on the envelope was the address 'An den zukunftigen Verwalter des Schlosses'.⁶⁰ These were keys to the cellars in the south wing of the Castle, where we discovered hundreds of crates from the Jagiellonian Library, the National Museum in Warsaw, the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw, etc. In addition to the crates, the various chambers in the cellar contained: a large Crucifix, a packed tent, and, [in] the chamber with shelves, many items of gold and silver, including the so-called St Hedwig Chalice, the Wieliczka Monstrance, a rock crystal Goblet gifted to Chodkiewicz, maces, swords and many other objects which I don't recall./ On a table in the corridor connecting the chambers there were boxes with catalogues of objects that had been sent away, and a row of photographs. On top of one of the boxes was a piece of paper with handwriting in pencil, reading something along the lines of: "Alle in

diesem Verzeichnis angeführten Gegenstände wurden von mir auf Befehl des Herrn Gouverneurs Frank verpackt und nach Schloss Seichau überführt". The word "Seichau" was crossed out'.⁶¹ This report, recorded on 22 November 1966 on the request of the then director of Wawel Castle, Prof. Jerzy Szablowski (1906–1989) and kept in the collector's legacy in the archives of the State Art Collection at Wawel, does not appear in any publication concerning the man.

Wierzejski remains at Wawel for three months.⁶² Next, he gets involved in the work of the so-called revindication committee rescuing and safeguarding moveable historical property from Gdańsk and Pomerania, headed by Prof. Michał Walicki (1904–1966), and prepares an inventory of moveable historical property from right-bank Warsaw. In 1946, he becomes a court art expert for the Warsaw District Court, and in 1950 an expert for the Polish Chamber of International Commerce, as well as a full-time appraiser for the newly-established Desa State Art and Antiques Company. In the Stalinist period, in 1951–1957, he works at the National Museum in Warsaw as a custodian of the so-called Subsidiary Museums (regional museums) and Branches of the National Museum, where one of his responsibilities is to furnish splendid interiors for the palaces at Łazienki, Nieborów and Wilanów, an area in which he had unrivalled expertise.

In 1957, at the age of 65, Wierzejski leaves the National Museum. It is not only due to his poor health but – as something of an open secret – to his increasingly frequent clashes with Director Lorentz regarding things like the inferior treatment of artistic handicrafts at the museum and these artefacts' woeful storage conditions, but also Lorentz's disapproval of his involvement in the art market. The retired museum custodian receives approval, almost unheard of in communist Poland, to conduct retail sales out of his home, specializing in the sale and purchase of antiques. He manages to do this by convincing the necessary authorities that the fundamental aim of his planned commercial activity is to expand his private collection in order to one day donate it to public collections.

Before the ratification of the 1962 act on the protection of art and museums (which

rescinded the obligation to register works of art in private ownership and replaced it with a requirement to obtain conservatorial approval to remove them from the country), Wierzejski's officially reported collection numbers 580 objects, many of them works of very high class. They are kept in a detached house on Obrońców St in the Saska Kępa neighbourhood and at a similar property on nearby Nobla St, which is occupied by his sister and her family and his long-time and closest business associate, Helena Winiarzowa.⁶³ On Obrońców St, Wierzejski was finally able to create something he had been working towards throughout the occupation in Warsaw: a kind of small private museum of interiors. Every connoisseur I managed to track down and talk to who had visited the house – regardless of the critical attitude that many of them harboured toward the collector – spoke of Wierzejski's collection in nothing but superlatives. They emphasized not only the quality of the objects he had amassed, from Old Master paintings to furniture, textiles, porcelain, silver, clocks, etc., but also their arrangement in stylistically uniform groups within the interiors.

It was also on Obrońców St that Wierzejski wrote his single book on oriental rugs, published in 1970.⁶⁴ It was co-authored by Prof. Maria Kałamajska-Saeed, who died in 2023 but was still fresh out of university at the time. She told me about Wierzejski's immense knowledge, noting that her role in the project was limited to little more than recording and organizing what he had told her in their series of meetings on Obrońców St.⁶⁵

Now, to wrap up this 'official' biography, a word on the collector's donations to public museums. Wierzejski was without a doubt the most noteworthy private museum donor in the communist period in Poland. Altogether, he donated to 25 museums, choosing the items in accordance with the institution's profile. I will only mention a few of his most valuable donations, which together form a thematically cohesive artefact group of the highest artistic quality.⁶⁶

The first of these Wierzejski made in 1948, when he gave a set of 71 objects to the National Museum in Warsaw. In his nomination of the collector to be awarded a Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta in recognition of the deed (he ended up receiving a lower rank

Gold Cross of Merit), Director Lorentz wrote: 'For many years Tadeusz Wierzejski has been collecting works of Polish art with an intent to donate them to the Museum. Forced to put the works into hiding during the war, risking his life, he succeeded in preserving them for Polish culture and now, having added to the collection, he has donated these works to our Museum. The set consists chiefly of Polish paintings from the eighteenth century, prints, Polonica from the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, eighteenth-century Polish furniture, tapestries, rugs, gold wares, Polish-made clocks, glassware, ceramics, etc., with the objects spanning from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century'.⁶⁷

In 1965 the collector donated 29 valuable artefacts from the King Stanisław period to decorate two rooms of Warsaw's Royal Łazienki Palace. The following year, the 74-year-old Wierzejski gave two outstanding sets of works to the same institution (as he stressed, in honour of the millennial anniversary of Poland adopting Christianity). To Wawel he gifted 150 items of Meissen porcelain (among them a magnificent Crucifixion sculptural group by Johann Joachim Kändler, 23 'Polaczki' figurines and vessels from the *Swan Service* and *Sutkowski Service*), as well as several paintings and pieces of furniture from the Saxon period. All of these items significantly bolstered the Wawel exhibition with furnishings for its Polish kings of the Wettin Dynasty rooms. Also around that time, he gave to the District Museum in Toruń a collection of Far Eastern art (about 150 objects, many of them very precious), thanks to which the country's premier exhibition of its kind emerged at Kamienica Pod Gwiazdą [Under the Star House].⁶⁸ Both donations, further built upon over the following years, were made under carefully defined conditions outlined by Wierzejski via official contract. These stipulations not only dictated how the donor was to be commemorated but also mandated that the groups of works be displayed in their entirety and subjected to scholarly analysis. Wierzejski would make his final donation in 1973 in the form of an eighteenth-century Venetian boudoir presented to the National Museum in Poznań, destined for the palace in Rogalin.

Wierzejski's March 1974 donation to the Royal Castle in Warsaw, consisting of 350 ob-

jects representing a variety of artforms and artistic handicrafts, was not another voluntary gift from the 82-year-old terminally ill collector. He was blackmailed into it by the security service agents who were interrogating him, with his good name on the line.⁶⁹

Here, we come to Wierzejski's 'concealed' biography, meaning his involvement in the art grey market and the related findings collected by the communist security service and law enforcement. This is all covered extensively in Luft and Dehnel's publications, to which I refer anyone interested. Above all, this pertains to claims that up to the mid-1960s Wierzejski took an active part in the plunder and illicit trade of art and the organized smuggling thereof to other countries (e.g., parts of the *Swan Service* and paintings by German artists from the post-war Polish western borderlands, as well as works by Polish Munich-school painters and examples of historic handicrafts). In later years, being a grey eminence in the legal and illegal art trade, Wierzejski tended to focus on assessing and appraising works for other individuals in this sphere: the brothers Tomasz and Witold Mętlewicz and other Polish middlemen, South American diplomats and Czesław Bednarczyk, the Vienna antiques shop owner who represented the final link in the chain of people involved in such dealings. The profits from this trafficking in currencies and gold flowed back into the country by way of a certain Swiss bank, with some percentage remaining in individual accounts in the bank.⁷⁰ Wierzejski was also accused of years of tax evasion and – something that has never been proven – silver counterfeiting. Of Haake's charge that the art dealer 'had the originals in his possession, with copies going to state-owned museums and the originals sent abroad', I have found nothing in the INR archives or in the books of the two authors. I cannot rule out, however, that one of the other suspects pinned these claims on Wierzejski at some point during the investigation, as had been the case with the trumped-up accusations of the man having hundreds of thousands of dollars stashed away in a Swiss bank account.

The list of factual and alleged wrongdoings grows longer thanks to the collector's agreement to work with the Ministry of Public Security, which started in July 1950, as the risk of

arrest loomed over Wierzejski. In January 1957, his name was stricken from the list of confidential informants as someone of no use to the service due to his reluctance to contact security service agents and his unwillingness to share information.⁷¹ Also, coming out very unflatteringly is the list of Wierzejski's protectors from the Polish United Workers' Party 'brass', which in the sixties included the so-called 'Moczarists' with ties to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The primary issue that arises is how do we fairly – or as objectively as possible – scrutinize and judge Wierzejski's unofficial – and, from the perspective of the law at the time, illegal – professional activity. This is a job for researchers. That is, of course, with the caveat that the analysis proceed with consideration for the realities of Communist Poland, and in particular its economic and cultural policies, the situation of its museums, and their methods for building public collections.

In today's context, however, in a world with a real art market in which the players are museums as well as other public institutions and organizations, private collectors, art dealers, galleries and auction houses, and where the international art trade, regulated by appropriate laws (and, among them, restrictions) is a matter of course, the actions of Tadeusz Wierzejski would be both understandable and rational. Auction houses would relish having an expert of his class, with his knowledge, intuition and experience, and for museums he would be a dream partner, one they would compete for in the hope of landing something from his collection.

That was the kind of art market that Wierzejski was part of in the Second Polish Republic, when he lived in Lviv. And over his five decades of professional activity, despite the war and occupation, and despite communism engulfing Poland, he remained loyal to his original choice: to be an art dealer, collector and partner to museums (in various roles – from seller to donor). Not only did he have a nose for business, dependable intuition and a keen, well-honed visual memory, he was also exceptionally hard-working and systematic, and – something that is particularly important – he developed an excellent working method. This is evidenced by his legacy residing at Wawel Castle, in the form of a professional, multi-language book collection

numbering more than a thousand volumes. So does his vast, methodically organized and annotated archive of clippings from Western specialist press and auction catalogues. Today, the ultraviolet lamp that he used to spot forgeries and cracks in porcelain sounds comical, but in the fifties it was cutting-edge. His knowledge about historical artistic handicrafts – Polish as well as foreign – was truly unrivalled in the country, all the more so that it uniquely combined an understanding of the history of artistic disciplines and techniques with years of practice in handling original works of various, but often very high, quality. It's no wonder that, for years, students interested in such things were sent by their art history professors at the University of Warsaw to the collector's home on Obrońców St, or that he was addressed as 'Professor Wierzejski' by people in his field.⁷²

A collector and art dealer is judged on the quality of his collection, whose calibre grows when weaker pieces are replaced with better ones. Besides knowledge, connections and assiduousness, this requires ever larger monetary outlays. The financial woes of museums in Communist Poland, even the most prestigious ones, were a constant, purchase budgets were pitiful and the battle for each and every US dollar to buy not even art but simply books or exhibition catalogues, was usually a losing one. To have the funds to develop and improve his collection – be it in Polish złotys or foreign currency – Wierzejski didn't have a choice: he had to operate on the grey market and accept the fact that certain items would be exported illegally and sold in the West. Whether he set limits to what he could tolerate and what those limits were we don't know and – with some exceptions – likely never will. Nonetheless, based on his donations and bequest to the Royal Castle in Warsaw, we can believe what he said to the secret police agent who interrogated him toward the end of his life: '[...] if something silly comes in, Major, some porcelain trifle or what have you, it comes in and it goes out. I hang on to only the finest things, Major, and nobody even realizes the good that I'm doing. Just think how many things I've rescued from being taken out of the country'.⁷³ To the diehard critics of Wierzejski, I recommend taking note of the opinion of one of the questioned witnesses, who

himself was anything but a supporter of the man: 'though the methods he used in his activity are reminiscent of gangster tactics [...] thanks to him and his passion, many, very many, works of art were saved from being sent away, lost or even destroyed, and his collection will one day be a huge contribution to the spoils and memory of national culture'.⁷⁴

Running through the investigation materials is a certain doubt, formulated in various years and by various people (witnesses, suspects and investigators), whether Wierzejski's aim was indeed to donate the collections he amassed to public museums, as he had declared, if we recall, already toward the end of the occupation and would reiterate repeatedly after the war. Meanwhile, to me, his declarations seem indisputable since – as he stated not long before his death in an interview with Barbara Łopieńska – 'only then does collecting on a larger scale make sense. I'll be gone but the collection will remain. I've always wanted the collection of Tadeusz Wierzejski to be a collection worth seeing'.⁷⁵

Wierzejski was no spendthrift; he liked comfort but he lived a modest life and didn't travel abroad (aside from a few short work-related trips to Vienna). He never started a family of his own, but he provided security to his sister's family. Trading art and collecting was his whole life. Regardless of what drove him – a hunter's instinct, addiction, vanity? – he was a professional through and through, one who didn't want or didn't know how to bend under the pressures and absurdities of the Communist Poland reality. In this regard, he stayed 'pre-war' to the end. Obviously, we can and will argue about how his activity ought to be judged. But, if this is to

be a productive conversation, it must proceed within a framework of serious study of Communist Poland's cultural policies and museum practices, and of the methods and ways in which museum objects were acquired.

There remains, however, a matter of some urgency, one that I haven't seen addressed by anyone writing or talking about Wierzejski, be it positively, negatively or objectively. What do we do with the museum objects of unknown provenance donated by or purchased from him? And the provenance is in fact unknown in the case of most of his donations. He himself, as we can presume, had a general knowledge of the histories of these objects and was aware of the possible questions regarding where they came from, but he kept these things to himself. It goes without saying, however, that this attitude was not unusual. Doing the same were Polish museums and *Desa*, and the tendency was endorsed by the Ministry of Culture and Art. It was also permissible in the West; museums often looked the other way regarding unclear provenance, and the market camouflaged it. Today, such practices, especially when it comes to public collections, are simply unacceptable. For this reason, it would be right to conduct thorough provenance research regarding the works donated by Wierzejski to public collections or purchased from him. In keeping with modern-day museum standards, it is only such research that can validate the status of acquired objects, without disavowing the class of the collector, which in Wierzejski's case remains unequalled.

Translated by Szymon Włoch

NOTES

- ¹ This research resulted in several studies, including Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, 'Habent sua fata libelli. Okupacyjny rynek sztuki w Warszawie a własność żydowska', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, Ann. 10 (2014), pp. 185–208; ead., 'Grabieżca ze znakiem Q. O rabunkowej działalności Pietera Nicolaasa Mentena (1899–1987)', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, Ann. 11 (2015), pp. 173–206.
- ² See *Dürer, Gysbrechts, Willmann... Kolekcja Tadeusza Wierzejskiego w polskich muzeach*, ed. Paweł Czopiński, exh. cat., District Museum in Toruń (Toruń, 2016).
- ³ *Dürer, Gysbrechts, Willmann...*, p. 11.
- ⁴ Janusz Miliszkiwicz, 'Przedmioty nie umierają, żyją jako anonimowe', *Cenne, Bezcenne, Utracone*, nos 1–4 (2017), p. 206 ff.
- ⁵ See Michał Haake, *Utracone arcydzieło. Losy obrazu Targ na jarzyny Józefa Pankiewicza* (Poznań, 2020). Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Seria Historii Sztuki, no. 45.
- ⁶ Violetta Szostak, 'Oryginał z przechyloną głową [wywiad z Michałem Haake]', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 12 Feb. 2022, <https://classic.wyborcza.pl/archiwumGW/9189313/ORIGINAL-Z-PRZECHYLONA-GLOWA> [retrieved: 9 July 2024].
- ⁷ Haake, *Utracone arcydzieło...*, p. 138.
- ⁸ See Szostak, 'Oryginał z przechyloną...!'.
⁹ The conference 'Muzeum XXI wieku. W 100-lecie I zjazdu muzeów polskich w Poznaniu', The National Museum in Poznań, 1–3 June 2022, discussion on the first day of the conference: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-SEr4grCYjQ> [retrieved: 9 July 2024].
- ¹⁰ See Monika Luft, *Pejzaż z przemytnikiem. Jak wywożono z PRL dzieła sztuki i antyki* (Łomianki, 2023).
- ¹¹ See Jacek Dehnel, *Łabędzie*, vols 1–2 (Kraków, 2023).
- ¹² Royal Castle State Art Collection at Wawel Archives (further: AZK PZS), Museum Objects (further: Objects), Objects from Tadeusz Wierzejski – donations, loan buyouts (further: Wierzejski), ref. no. AZK-PZS-II-115 – donation contract of 3 Nov. 1966. Pt V, p. 2: 'Prof. Dr Jerzy Szablowski certifies that, in accordance with the wishes of the donor, the donated historical objects will be used in the permanent exhibition and kept as a cohesive collection in the room known as the "Saxon Room" in Wawel Castle, with information stating that the collection was donated by the donor being permanently displayed'. In fairness, I must add that Wierzejski is mentioned in information on the porcelain exhibition on the Wawel Castle website, and his name remains on a plaque honouring donors to the Wawel Royal Castle.
- ¹³ Unless stated otherwise, facts from the life and work of Tadeusz Wierzejski are taken from Katarzyna Paczuska's master's thesis titled 'Tadeusz Wierzejski (1892–1974) kolekcjoner i ofiarodawca' defended in the Department of Artefact and Museum Studies at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, under the supervision of Prof. Zygmunt Waźbiński in 1993, TS (I thank the author for making it available to me), and from Czopiński's text in the exhibition catalogue *Dürer, Gysbrechts, Willmann...*, pp. 9–18.
- ¹⁴ Here, Dehnel does not pass up the chance to mention the rumours (cited from the appendix to Paczuska's master's thesis) going round at the time in Poznań museum circles but never substantiated, on Wierzejski's two stints in prison, while also downplaying his right to clear his name; see Dehnel, vol. 2, p. 175.
- ¹⁵ National Archives in Bydgoszcz (further: APB), Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum in Bydgoszcz, file: Museum history – the Museum's opening, ref. no. 0003, p.17 – Speech at the grand opening of the City Museum in Bydgoszcz given by the museum's director, Rev. Jan Klein, in August 1923.
- ¹⁶ M. Win., 'Dialogi Dnia. Przechadzka po Muzeum Miejskim i rozmowa przytem z kustoszem jego ks. Kleinem', *Dziennik Bydgoski*, no. 215 (1923), pp. 2–3.
- ¹⁷ Kazimierz Michałowski, 'W muzeach wśród zabytków – jak studiowałem?', *ITD: ilustrowany magazyn studencki. Pismo Zrzeszenia Studentów Polskich*, no. 50 (12 December 1976), p. 6, cited after: Paczuska, 'Tadeusz Wierzejski...', p. 11.
- ¹⁸ Institute of National Remembrance (further: AIPN), Investigation records of the case of Tadeusz Wierzejski (further: Wierzejski Records), ref. no. 01255/629 – from Barbara

- Łopieńska's unpublished interview with Wierzejski conducted in 1974 for *Kultura* weekly in connection with the collector's 'donation' to the Royal Castle. N.b., in 1954, Wierzejski saw to it that the NMW bought the book collection of Prof. Podlacha, who died in 1951, from his heirs. See The National Museum in Warsaw Archives (further: AMNW), Personal records. Wierzejski Tadeusz, delivery acceptance form 153/248 – Tadeusz Wierzejski, letter to NMW management dated 4 December 1954.
- ¹⁹ AMNW, Personal records, Wierzejski Tadeusz, delivery acceptance form 153/248 – Decree of the Head of the Poviát Court in Lviv from 8 November 1930, Prez: 681 5/26 (copy).
- ²⁰ From the author's 22 May 2017 telephone conversation with the granddaughter of Ignacy Philipp, Elizabeth Philipp, residing in Seattle. Also writing about Wierzejski's shop is Sławomir Bołdok in an unpublished work titled 'Lwowskie środowisko plastyczne', p. 478. I thank the author for making it available to me.
- ²¹ It remains unclear whether Wierzejski ran the Auction Hall until the outbreak of the war in 1939 or just to the mid-1930s and if he ran the Lamus shop simultaneously or suspended its activity periodically. Wierzejski himself offers conflicting information on this subject in his biography from 1951 (AMNW, delivery acceptance form 153/248, different in the interrogation on 17 Feb. 1951 at the Tax Inspection General Directorate, AIPN, Wierzejski Tadeusz Jakub, ref. no. 001043/1169). It is different still in Paczuska, 'Tadeusz Wierzejski...', p. 12 and Bołdok, 'Lwowskie środowisko...', p. 478.
- ²² As examples, Czopiński names the *Exhibition of Lviv Old Masters up to 1894* (Society of Friends of Fine Arts in Lviv, 1924), *Exhibition of 18th-Century English Prints and Furniture* (Museum of Artistic Industry in Lviv, 1931, Wierzejski was also a co-author of the catalogue), *Exhibition of Jewish Artistic Industry* (Museum of Artistic Industry in Lviv, 1933), *Mementoes of Ignacy Krasicki in the Light of the Era* (Ossoliński National Institute, Lviv, 1935), and *Still Life in Polish Painting* (The National Museum in Warsaw, 1939), *Dürer, Gysbrechts, Willmann...*, p. 12.
- ²³ Including the Ossoliński Institute in Wrocław and Lubomirski Museum in Lviv, the Wawel collection, the Silesian Museum, and the National Museums in Kraków and Warsaw.
- ²⁴ The names of some of them are given by Czopiński in the catalogue (p. 13) and Paczuska in her master's thesis (p. 13).
- ²⁵ AZK PZS: Paintings and Sculptures (including furniture and stained-glass windows), Sales offers, donations, loans, purchases 1908–1939, ref. no. AZK-PZS-I-108, p. 142.
- ²⁶ 'It [the Poturzycka Gallery] exists thanks to the collecting passion and funds of Count Ignacy Miączyński, the Chairman of the Sejm of the Estates of Galicia, an outstanding magnate and diplomat, deceased in 1809. After his death, by way of new family relations, it passed into the possession of the family of Count Dzieduszycki and henceforth bore the name Counts Miączyński-Dzieduszycki Gallery, or, after its ancestral estate, Poturzycka Gallery', we read in the introduction to *Katalog Wystawy sprzedaży obrazów starych mistrzów*, Pałac Sztuki Hotel Europejski (Lviv, 1934).
- ²⁷ Jan Alfred Lauterbach (1884–1943) was an art historian, conservator and museologist, who in 1928–1937 served as the director of the State Art Collection headquartered at the Royal Castle in Warsaw. He was killed having been denounced by a Polish informer.
- ²⁸ Zbigniew Hornung was a university friend of Wierzejski's. Before the war he served as the district conservator in Lviv, and during the city's Soviet and German occupations as the custodian and deputy director of the Lviv Painting Gallery. After 1946 he initially lived in Warsaw, then from 1949 in Wrocław (serving as the director Silesian Museum and head of the Faculty of History at the University of Wrocław). He died in 1981.
- ²⁹ Aleksander Czołkowski (1865–1944) was a historian, archivist, and cofounder and longtime director of the History Museum of the City of Lviv and the King Jan III Sobieski National Museum. He is laid to rest at the Lychakiv (Łyczakowski) Cemetery in Lviv (Lwów).
- ³⁰ AZK PZS, Objects, Wierzejski, ref. no. AZK-PZS-II-115, p. 86. Abraham Bredius (1855–1946) was a Dutch art historian, scholar and collector. He served as the director of the

- Mauritshuis in The Hague (1889–1909), authored a catalogue of works by Rembrandt (Bredius 1935), and donated his possessions to the museum bearing his name in The Hague.
- ³¹ Karolina Zalewska, 'Wojna i pokój w konserwatorskiej biografii Jana Marksena', in *Badania polskich strat wojennych. Inspiracja biografią Jana Markseny. Wybrane materiały pokonferencyjne*, ed. Aleksandra Trybuła (Zakopane, 2023), p. 54.
- ³² Wierzejski to Marksen, *ibid.*, pp. 54–55.
- ³³ On Wierzejski's pre-war acquaintance with Menten, see Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, 'Grabieżca...', p. 177 ff.
- ³⁴ In this section of the article, facts concerning Stieglitz and Menten, as well as Wierzejski (in addition to information given by Paczuska and Czopiński) are taken from my study 'Grabieżca ze znakiem Q' (see n. 1) and materials for a book I am in the process of finishing on the relationship of these three men during the German and Soviet occupations, which will contain a bibliography more detailed than the one herein.
- ³⁵ In April 1940, units of the German Resettlement Commission began to operate in Lviv and several other cities in Ukraine. At the time, a total of 66,000 people were brought into the GG.
- ³⁶ AIPN, Wierzejski Tadeusz Jakub, ref. no. 001043/1169.
- ³⁷ The German word *Mischling* ('half-breed') was a shameful Nazi term. Wierzejski's mother, Maria, née Stesłowicz, was the daughter of Aleksander Stesłowicz and Julia, née Reich: Latin baptism data, AIPN, Wierzejski records, ref. no. 01255/629. Wierzejski obtained a copy of this record and the baptism record for Antoni Tadeusz Wierzejski in 1940. The document was antedated.
- ³⁸ These were companies in Kraków's Podgórze neighbourhood: Bannet. Wine-Based Beverage Company; Kordjał. Vodka and Liqueur Steam Factory; Salus. Fruit Wine Factory; Vin-Renome. Fruit Wine and Mead Factory, and Paint and Lacquer Factory.
- ³⁹ To have Wierzejski appointed to these positions, the owners of the companies gave a large bribe to a German Treuhändstelle clerk. AIPN, ref. no. 01255/629.
- ⁴⁰ 30 May 2017 telephone conversation with Ruth Philipp, residing in Seattle.
- ⁴¹ 14 November 2014 conversation with Marta Stebnicka, residing in Kraków. Her mother, Irena Stebnicka, worked at Katzner's antiques shop at 5 Bracka St from mid-1942 to the end of the German occupation. It was there, among other places, that the widow of Samuel Katzner went into hiding.
- ⁴² AIPN, Wierzejski records, ref. no. 01255/629 – Letter from Wierzejski to Józef Stieglitz from November 1941, in which the subject of 'helping Kuba' is discussed; Menten was to mediate in handling the matter in Warsaw. We cannot rule out, however, that the Kuba in question was a different man, namely the Warsaw antiques dealer Jakub Klejman, who was in hiding on the so-called Aryan side and who, as we know from other sources, also received help from Wierzejski.
- ⁴³ 14 November 2014 conversation with Marta Stebnicka. In 1944, Marta Stebnicka worked at Stieglitz's antiques shop on the Main Market Square in Kraków, at the time when the shop's *treuhänder* was Tadeusz Wierzejski.
- ⁴⁴ 30 May 2017 telephone conversation with Ruth Philipp.
- ⁴⁵ AIPN, Records concerning Tadeusz Wierzejski's and later Zofia Wallnerowa's hiding of a girl named Małgosia Motowska or Montag, ref. no. 392/1353. This is mentioned in Luft, *Pejzaż z przemytnikiem...*, p. 184.
- ⁴⁶ Dehnel, *Łabędzie*, vol. 2, p. 187.
- ⁴⁷ Tadeusz Dobrowolski, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tadeusz_Dobrowolski [retrieved: 9 Nov. 2024].
- ⁴⁸ Zalewska, 'Wojna i pokój...', p. 63.
- ⁴⁹ AIPN, Wierzejski records, ref. no. 01255/629 – J. Janielak, service report [*notatka służbowa*], 20 Feb. 1974. Major J. Janielak concludes that the amount of 'original documents' (letters, telegrams, etc.) that Wierzejski kept with pedantic precision, 'with names and addresses included, makes it possible to ascertain that Wierzejski did actually lend such help and that, in this regard, his conduct during the occupation is not questionable'. Unfortunately, most of the documents seized from Wierzejski by the Security Service on 25 Feb. 1974 have been destroyed. Another reason, in addition to his pedantic nature,

- that the collector kept all of these documents was foresight combined with a sense of uncertainty, that same thing that in 1940 led him to alter his personal documents.
- ⁵⁰ Dehnel, *Łabędzie*, vol. 2, p. 193.
- ⁵¹ Letter from Wierzejski to Marksens dated 12 May 1944, cited after Karolina Zalewska's presentation during the conference *Badania polskich strat wojennych. Inspiracja biografiami Jana Marksa* at the Tatra Museum, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0s6r4KIM_k, at the 3:24:25 mark [retrieved: 20 Apr. 2025].
- ⁵² Wierzejski appraised his net worth in 1939 to be 150,000 zlotys; 'I increased my fortune significantly through my activities during the occupation, mainly investing in paintings and antiques'. He estimated it to have been a 50 per cent increase. AIPN, ref. no. 01255/629.
- ⁵³ Paczuska, 'Tadeusz Wierzejski...', Appendices 1 and 7.
- ⁵⁴ 30 May 2017 telephone conversation with Ruth Philipp.
- ⁵⁵ Signed by Julia Bristigerowa, the director of Department V of the Ministry of Public Security, the order for Wierzejski's arrest in July 1950 cites the collector's involvement in 'investigating the Katyń Massacre' as one of the reasons for his arrest.
- ⁵⁶ AZK PZS, Objects, Wierzejski, ref. no. AZK-PZS-II-115, p. 48. 'Also enlisted in the Home Army was Szyszko-Bohusz, the then director of the Wawel Royal Castle restoration project'; Jan Pachonki, 'Hniłko Antoni', in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, ed. Kazimierz Lepski et al., vol. 9 (Wrocław, 1960), p. 552.
- ⁵⁷ Tomasz Dziedzic, 'Akta katyńskie doktora Robla. Powstanie i losy tak zwanego Archiwum Robla oraz sylwetka jego twórcy', *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Historyczne*, 139 (2012), pp. 125–147, see also <https://historia.rp.pl/historia/art11252541-ipn-szukaj-skrzyni-z-katynia> [retrieved: 17 June 2024].
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.140 ff.
- ⁵⁹ 'Sierpniówki' – the colloquial term for the 31 August 1944 decree of the Polish Committee of National Liberation on bringing to justice Nazi criminals guilty of murder and abuse of civilians and prisoners of war and prosecuting traitors to the Polish Nation.
- ⁶⁰ Which translates to: 'To the future castle administrator'.
- ⁶¹ AZK PZS, Objects, Wierzejski, ref. no. AZK-PZS-II-115, pp. 48–49. Which translates to: 'On order of Governor Frank, all of the objects on this list have been packed up by me and sent to the Seichau Castle'. [Pol. Sichów Castle; its last German owners were the von Richthofen family].
- ⁶² Arch. MNW, Personal records, Wierzejski Tadeusz, ref. no. 153/248 – Handwritten biography of Tadeusz Wierzejski drafted on 3 October 1951.
- ⁶³ Wierzejski obtained full ownership of the house on Obrońców St only in the early 1960s, which suggests that his allegedly colossal material assets were exaggerated to incriminate him in the investigation.
- ⁶⁴ See Tadeusz Wierzejski, Maria Kałamajska-Saeed, *Kobierce wschodnie* (Warsaw, 1970).
- ⁶⁵ The conversation with Maria Kałamajska-Saeed took place on 19 November 2017 in Warsaw.
- ⁶⁶ Detailed information on Tadeusz Wierzejski's donations to museums can be found in the catalogue for the Toruń exhibition: *Czopiński, Dürer, Gysbrechts, Willmann...*
- ⁶⁷ AMNW, Donation documents L-Ż 1938–1993, ref. no. 320/64 – Letter from Stanisław Lorentz to the Minister of Culture and Art dated 23 January 1948. Wierzejski was awarded the same decoration in 1956 for his lifetime work, and in 1957 he was honoured with the Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta.
- ⁶⁸ In 1966, despite these two extraordinary donations from Wierzejski to Wawel Castle and the District Museum in Toruń, the nomination for the donor to be awarded the Order of Polonia Restituta, submitted by the Wawel collection director, Prof. Jerzy Szablowski, was denied. At the time, the venerable collector received titles for service to the cities of Kraków and Toruń, as well as a 'Meritorious for Polish Culture' Gold Medal.
- ⁶⁹ Both authors, Dehnel and Luft, describe these actions of the security service convincingly.
- ⁷⁰ I remind the reader that in Communist Poland private buying and selling of art and gold, as well as possessing foreign currency, was prohibited, while keeping one's money in a US dollar accounts at a state bank was like being robbed blind due to the exchange rate.

- ⁷¹ AIPN, ref. no. 001043/1169.
- ⁷² 19 November 2017 conversation with Maria Kałamajska-Saeed.
- ⁷³ ‘Just as ladies go out for coffee and talk, collectors gossip about antiques “going around” in Poland. If it “goes around” then it’ll “come to me,” Wierzejski would say, cited after: AIPN, Wierzejski records, ref. no. 01255/629 – Barbara Łopieńska’s unpublished interview with Wierzejski.
- ⁷⁴ Dr Eugeniusz Onoszko, chief of appraisers at Desa, AIPN, Wierzejski records, ref. no. 01255/629.
- ⁷⁵ AIPN, Wierzejski records, ref. no. 01255/629 – Barbara Łopieńska’s unpublished interview with Wierzejski.

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