

## | A Painting by Jean de Troy from the Collection of Wojciech Kolasiński at the National Museum in Warsaw

Residing in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw is a painting titled *Praying Monk*, originally purchased in 1888 for the Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw as a work of an unknown Spanish painter (**fig. 1**).<sup>1</sup> Its owner was Wojciech Kolasiński (1852–1916), a painter, collector and art restorer who had amassed a large and valuable collection of paintings and artistic handicrafts.<sup>2</sup> Władysław Wanke once recalled that the administrative director of the Drawing Class and honorary director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw, Cyprian Lachnicki, sometimes hired Kolasiński to perform conservation work on art pieces. The painter travelled throughout Europe, attended auctions at the Parisian Hôtel Drouot, and, for some time, was co-owner, along with Władysław Tyszkiewicz, of the Galerie Adalbert on Trębacka Street in Warsaw.<sup>3</sup> After Kolasiński's death, his widow sold off a part of his holdings to other Warsaw collectors, with the rest being put up for sale at the Rudolph Lepke auction house in Berlin in 1917.<sup>4</sup> It is not known where Kolasiński acquired the work discussed in this article. Victor Champier recalls that Lachnicki's collection included a painting by Francisco de Zurbarán titled *Ascetic*,<sup>5</sup> which never appeared in Lachnicki's Paris auction in 1867.<sup>6</sup> What is interesting is the fact that the Museum of Fine Arts catalogues for the years 1895 to 1913,

<sup>1</sup> The painting was acquired for the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts on 18.10.1888 for 150 rubles. See NMW Archives, Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw Records, ref. no. 1b & 24. Expatriated by the Germans during the Second World War, recovered via restitutions from Krakow in 1946.

<sup>2</sup> On Kolasiński's collection, see Władysław Wanke, "Znawca starej sztuki," *Świat*, no. 27 (1916), p. 3; SAP, vol. 4, 1986, pp. 62–63; Maria Kluk, "Wojciech Kolasiński (1852–1916). Painter, Conservator, Collector," *Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie*, 39 (1998), pp. 104–13; Konrad Ajewski, "Warszawskie kolekcjonerstwo militariów historycznych okresu zaborów," pt. 1: "Zbrojownie i zbiory," *Muzealnictwo*, 47 (2006), p. 39; Hanna Benesz, Maria Kluk, *Early Netherlandish, Dutch, Flemish and Belgian Paintings 1494–1983 in the Collections of the National Museum in Warsaw and the Palace at Nieborów. Complete Illustrated Summary Catalogue* (Warsaw, 2016), vol. 2, p. 352 (index of works from Kolasiński's collection at NMW); Tomasz F. de Rosset, „By skreślić historię naszych zbiorów”. *Polskie kolekcje artystyczne* (Toruń, 2021), pp. 17–179.

<sup>3</sup> Wanke, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Sammlung des Verstorbenen Herrn A. von Kolasiński – Warschau. Zweite Abteilung: Gemälde alter Meister ersten Ranges, Ausstellung Freitag den 1. Juni bis Montag den 4. Juni 1917* (Berlin, 1917); Ajewski, op. cit., pp. 39–40, p. 44, n. 104–10.

<sup>5</sup> Victor Champier, *L'année artistique. Troisième année 1880–1881* (Paris, 1881), p. 284.

<sup>6</sup> See *Catalogue de la collection des tableaux de M. Lachnicki. Paris, Hôtel Drouot, le samedi 15 juin 1867* (Paris, 1967).

a period not long after the purchase of the work in question, list the painting as a work of none other than Zurbarán.<sup>7</sup>

Residing in the collection of the Musée Atger in Montpellier are two sanguine drawings by Jean de Troy (1638–91). One of them, showing a monk in profile sitting at a small table and reading a book, is signed on the passe-partout: *Etude de portrait d'un cordelier / de Troy fecit Monspli* (**fig. 2**).<sup>8</sup> The other, signed *Etude de portrait d'un cordelier / de troy fecit*, shows a resting friar in frontal view, with his hands laid on an open book (**fig. 3**).<sup>9</sup> The same young man served as the model in both sketches. It was on the basis of these two drawings that Robert Mesuret deemed the oil painting *Portrait of a Monk* (**fig. 4**) from the Musée des beaux-arts in Narbonne to be a work of Jean de Troy.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike the other famous, respected and influential members of the Troy family, Jean remains a somewhat obscure artist, though long-ongoing research into the artistic life of baroque-period Toulouse and Montpellier allows for an increasingly fuller understanding of his oeuvre.<sup>11</sup> Jean de Troy came from a family of artists. His younger brother François de Troy (1645–1730) served as court painter to King James II of England during the monarch's exile in France and as the director of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris in the years 1708–11. His nephew Jean-François de Troy (1679–1752), meanwhile, was one of the illustrious and influential artists working in the court of Louis XV and served as the director of the French Academy in Rome in 1738–52.

In 1674, having failed to achieve the title of *peintre des capitouls* in Toulouse, Jean de Troy moved to Montpellier, where he resumed his work as an artist and educator with the support of the archbishop of Narbonne and head of the Estates of Languedoc, Cardinal Pierre de Bonzi. In 1679, Troy secured a loan in the amount of four-hundred livre and opened a painting academy in Montpellier, which operated until 1687.<sup>12</sup> He became the beneficiary of most of

<sup>7</sup> *Katalog wystawy obrazów Muzeum Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie nabytych po zamknięciu Muzeum w Pałacu Paca zajętych w 1876 roku na Sąd Okręgowy [...] i najlepszych obrazów przyłączonych do Muzeum z b. Szkoły Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie* (Warsaw, 1895), p. 13, cat. no. 48; *Katalog obrazów Warszawskiego Muzeum Sztuk Pięknych znajdujących się w czasowym lokalu tegoż Muzeum przy ulicy Wierzbowej Nr 11, Warszawa* (Warsaw, 1900), p. 33, cat. no. 160; *Katalog obrazów Warszawskiego Muzeum Sztuk Pięknych znajdujących się w czasowym lokalu tegoż Muzeum przy ulicy Wierzbowej Nr 11* (Warsaw, 1902); *Katalog obrazów Warszawskiego Muzeum Sztuk Pięknych znajdujących się w czasowym lokalu tegoż Muzeum przy ulicy Wierzbowej Nr 11* (Warsaw, 1908), p. 33, cat. no. 160; Pius Weloński, *Katalog obrazów Warszawskiego Muzeum Sztuk Pięknych, znajdujących się w czasowym lokalu tegoż Muzeum przy ulicy Wierzbowej No 11 (Plac Teatralny) ułożył P. Weloński* (Warsaw, 1909), p. 43, cat. no. 308; id., *Katalog obrazów Warszawskiego Muzeum Sztuk Pięknych, znajdujących się w czasowym lokalu tegoż Muzeum przy ulicy Wierzbowej (Plac Teatralny) No 11 ułożył P. Weloński* (Warsaw, 1913), p. 43, cat. no. 308.

<sup>8</sup> Jean de Troy, *Study of a Seated Monk in Profile*, sanguine, white chalk, 36 × 24.5 cm, legate of Xavier Atger from 1829, inv. no. MA 186 recto, Musée Atger, faculté de médecine de l'Université de Montpellier.

<sup>9</sup> Jean de Troy, *Study of a Monk en Face with a Book*, sanguine, white chalk, 34.5 × 28.5 cm, legate of Xavier Atger from 1829, inv. no. MA 187 recto, Musée Atger, faculté de médecine de l'Université de Montpellier.

<sup>10</sup> Jean de Troy, *Portrait of a Monk*, oil on canvas, 170 × 145 cm, Musée des beaux-arts, Narbonne, inv. no. 859.3.73, in the collection since 1859, from the collection of Maurice Peyre, cf. Robert Mesuret, "Jean de Troy," *Gazette des beaux-arts*, janvier (1955), pp. 40, 44. Two variations of the artist's surname appear in the literature, with and without the particle "de." The artist himself signed his name *Jean Troy* or *Troy*.

<sup>11</sup> *Le portrait toulousin de 1550 à 1800*, Jean Penent, Christian Pélign, Jean-Paul Suzzoni, eds, exh. cat., Musée des Augustins, Toulouse, 1987–88 (Toulouse, 1987), p. 85–93; *Dessins français du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle dans les collections publiques françaises*, exh. cat., Musée du Louvre (Paris, 1993), p. 266; Dominique Brême, *François de Troy 1645–1730*, exh. cat., Musée Paul-Dupuy, 1997 (Toulouse, 1997), pp. 14–18.

<sup>12</sup> *Le portrait toulousin...*, op. cit., p. 86; Brême, op. cit., p. 15. By a decree of 1676, the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris allowed for the establishment of regional academies.

the major commissions in Montpellier, painting many official portraits as well as religious compositions for the city's cathedral. He also took commissions for paintings intended to decorate the residences of influential city officials and nobles.

It is known that in around 1665 Jean de Troy travelled to Rome in the company of Antoine de Trinquaire, a monk in the convent of the Cordeliers of Montpellier, and the son of the influential Samuel de Trinquaire, seigneur de la Greffe. Antoine de Trinquaire was a three-time provincial head of his order and a great lover of art, and it is likely his image that appears in the painting at the Musée des beaux-arts in Narbonne.<sup>13</sup> The artist also had ties to the Cordeliers through his younger brother Pierre de Troy, who was a member of the order in Toulouse.

The Friars Minor (Franciscans) were known in France as Cordeliers, the name deriving from the French word *corde*, meaning 'rope,' which these monks used to cinch their habits. As legend has it, the Franciscan convent in Montpellier was founded by Saint Francis of Assisi himself during his visit to Languedoc and consecrated by Cardinal Gui Foucaud in 1264.<sup>14</sup> In the Middle Ages, the convent was an important place of religious worship. In 1564, the monastery was completely destroyed by the Protestants during the religious wars of the time, to be again regained by the Cordeliers in the early 1630s, albeit in a much smaller form compared to the earlier Gothic structure. In 1791, under the rule of the Jacobins, the buildings were put up for sale and once again came into the possession of the Protestants. In 1930, the church and the old monastery premises were stripped of their religious function and adapted to serve the city's cultural department (housing cinema screening rooms).

The aforementioned *Portrait of a Monk* from the collection of the Musée des beaux-arts in Narbonne shows a seated man in a Franciscan habit absorbed in a book. The open tome lies on a folding wooden table. Next to it is a skull, behind which are some other books and a brass candlestick with a candle. The monk is dressed in a dark brown habit cinched at the waist with a white rope attached to which is a rosary. The cell is spacious but devoid of decoration; it demonstrates the modesty and simplicity of the life of the Montpellier Cordeliers.

For many years, the painting *Praying Monk* residing in Warsaw was believed to be a work of Zurbarán. In 1938 Juliusz Starzyński and Michał Walicki attributed it to Andrea Sacchi.<sup>15</sup> Like Walicki, Jan Białostocki too supported the painting's attribution to an Italian artist, though never venturing to specify a particular circle or school.<sup>16</sup> Pierre Rosenberg, meanwhile, suggested François de Troy as the possible creator.<sup>17</sup> It was only Barbara Brejon de Lavergnée who was able to connect the Warsaw painting with the work of Jean de Troy.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Jean Penent, Christian Peligry, Jean-Pierre Souzzoni, *Le portrait toulousain. Catalogue d'exposition*, Musée des Augustins, Toulouse, 1987–1988, Musée des Augustins (Toulouse, 1987), p. 89–91; *Dessins français du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle...*, op. cit., p. 266, cat. no. 138.

<sup>14</sup> Article available online: <<https://archives-pierresvives.herault.fr/ark:/37279/vta55958e95d6d78>>, [retrieved: 17 May 2022].

<sup>15</sup> Juliusz Starzyński, Michał Walicki, *Katalog galerii malarstwa obcego*, The National Museum in Warsaw (Warsaw, 1938), p. 25, cat. no. 44.

<sup>16</sup> Jan Białostocki, Michał Walicki, *Malarstwo europejskie w zbiorach polskich 1300–1800* (Warsaw, 1955), p. 498, cat. no. 177; *Malarstwo europejskie. Katalog zbiorów*, Andrzej Chudzikowski, ed., The National Museum in Warsaw (Warsaw, 1967), vol. 2, p. 267, cat. no. 1662.

<sup>17</sup> A non-surviving letter to Jan Białostocki, mentioned in the item card, Collection of Old European Art, The National Museum in Warsaw.

<sup>18</sup> *Dessins français du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle...*, op. cit., p. 266, cat. no. 138 b.

The Warsaw painting's attribution to Jean de Troy today seems fully justified. Much like on the Narbonne canvas, the artist shows a drab interior typical of the monumental architecture of the French classicising Baroque. Sitting at the small wooden table, the monk rests his head on his hand in a contemplative pose while the fingers of the other hand hold the book open in front of him. The man is shown *en face* in the centre of the composition, filling nearly the entire surface of the canvas. Particularly eye-catching is his bare foot, accentuated with strong light and thereby contrasting starkly with the monk's dark robe. It is a brown habit cinched at the waist with a white rope with three knots and a rosary. The interior is highly reminiscent of that of the Narbonne painting, stocked with identical crude furniture, the kind that probably furnished the cells of Montpellier monastery. Both canvases attest to the artist's technical mastery and proficiency in the use of tracing and chiaroscuro. The Narbonne composition, with its numerous retouchings and yellowing varnish, varies only slightly from the Warsaw canvas, whose colours are cooler and almost monochromatic – creating a stage for the wealth of small colour nuances. Particularly noteworthy is the treatment of the areas shrouded in semi-darkness, with a distinct accentuation of the contours of the forms, brought out with intense light, like the monk's right hand, his left forearm, the bare foot, or the book lying at the table's edge. The intense light contrast dominating throughout the composition was initially the reason for both paintings being attributed to Spanish artists like Juan Ribalta, Alonso Cano or Zurbarán.<sup>19</sup>

We do not know the circumstances or dates behind either of the two paintings' creation. Françoise Collange recalls that Jean de Troy's stay in Rome around the year 1675 and his contact with the city's painting milieu had a decisive influence on his artistic development.<sup>20</sup> After that trip, the artist started receiving numerous commissions.<sup>21</sup> Troy's aforementioned works for the Cordeliers could well be from the 1680s, the most prolific period in the artist's career, and the two monk portraits likely come from the monastery in the city.

The meditating friar from the Warsaw painting holds open with his right hand an old book with a visible inscription reading *LIBER XII*. In this, the artist perhaps alludes to a Franciscan rule dictated by the order's founder in 1209–21 and sanctioned by the pope in 1223. Chapter XII (Book XII) *On those who wish to go among the Saracens and other infidels* obliges monks to undertake an evangelical mission among nonbelievers and infidels, a dictate that seems to have been particularly pertinent in the period of the Counter-Reformation. The Rule of the Order of Friars Minor, based on the initial premises of Saint Francis of Assisi, defined the conduct of the monks. Isolated, devoted to prayer and having divested themselves of all material property, they were to be prepared to offer aid to the poor and needy. After the bloody events of the religious wars in France, the brothers strove to continue the evangelical mission set out for them by the order's founder.

Troy's sanguine studies of a monk from the Atger Museum in Montpellier, along with the paintings from the Musée des beaux-arts in Narbonne and the National Museum in Warsaw, could have been parts of a larger artistic project – a gallery of portraits of famous clerics of the 17<sup>th</sup> century created for the monastery. Surviving inventories of collections dissolved during

<sup>19</sup> Penent, Peligry, Souzzoni, op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>20</sup> *Les collectionneurs Toulousains du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. L'Académie royale de Peinture, Sculpture et Architecture*, exh. cat., Musée Paul-Dupuy, Toulouse, 2001 (Toulouse, 2001), pp. 234–35.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

the French Revolution mention portraits of people of the church and other works seized or secured by the government.<sup>22</sup>

To this day, the collection of Wojciech Kolasinski is yet to undergo comprehensive study. Little is known about the man's collecting activity. In 1877–96, the National Museum in Warsaw purchased many works from a dealer, some of which were lost during the Second World War.<sup>23</sup> The Berlin auction of Kolasinski's paintings and artistic handicrafts evidences the breadth and diversity of his interests, and illustrates the knowledge and verve behind his activity.

Residing today in the collection of the National Museum is an unfinished copy of *Praying Monk* (**fig. 5**) of unknown provenance, erroneously attributed to Stanisław Czajkowski (1878–1954).<sup>24</sup> The painting was made likely after 1895, when Jean de Troy's work, still thought to be one of Zurbarán's, was on display at the premises of the Museum of Fine Arts, initially occupying the Nepros House at 11 Wierzbowa Street, and from 1916 the gallery at 15 Podwale Street. This is a typical academic work, the kind of exercise to have been assigned to students of the Drawing Class in Warsaw. It seems that the original must have been a precious item from the growing collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, since it came to be used as an educational aid.

Translated by Szymon Włoch

<sup>22</sup> A plafond at the Cours des Comptes, Aides et Finances (present-day courthouse), two altars for the Saint-Étienne Cathedral, both produced in 1687.

<sup>23</sup> Benesz, Kluk, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 352.

<sup>24</sup> Oil on canvas, 170 × 103 cm, The National Museum in Warsaw, inv. no. MP 3564 MNW.