Piotr P. Czyż

Leon Wyczółkowski's *The Wawel Treasury* as an Artistic Reflection on the History of Poland

The exhibition *The Masters of the Pastel. From Marteau to Witkacy. The Collection of the National Museum in Warsaw* gave prominence to the pastel paintings of Leon Wyczółkowski, in particular *The Wawel Treasury* series of 1907,[1] consisting of 17 compositions of various size.[2] They are executed in pastel, the artist's favourite technique since 1892, which he mastered achieving technical and artistic brilliance. He painted the greatest number of pastels at the end of the 19th century and in the 1900s, mostly creating symbolic portraits, landscapes (usually views of the Tatra Mountains and landscapes of Granada) and still lifes, the majority with flowers. Many of these works followed the then-fashionable trend of *japonisme*.[3]

However, *The Wawel Treasury* is an exceptional instance in Wyczółkowski's pastel painting. And just like a century ago, when it was presented in Krakow, Warsaw and Poznań, the pastel series depicting artefacts from the Wawel Cathedral treasury still leaves a strong impression on viewers today with its brilliant technique and the theme of the history of Poland and Polish spiritual and material heritage. To understand the meaning of *The Wawel Treasury*, one needs to examine the artistic experience of the painter that was partly responsible for the genesis of the series.

Leon Wyczółkowski (1852–1936) began his artistic education in the Warsaw Drawing Class under Aleksander Kamiński, Rafał Hadziewicz and Wojciech Gerson. Originally, he was mainly interested in historical painting that occupied the then-highest place in the hierarchy of genres. He made his debut in 1873 with the painting *St Casimir and Długosz* exhibited at the Zachęta Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Warsaw (TZSP). Also in this period, he painted

[1] See Piotr P. Czyż, *Skarbiec wawelski*, in *Mistrzowie pastelu. Od Marteau do Witkacego. Kolekcja Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, scientific editor Anna Grochala, exh. cat., Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, 2015–2016, Warsaw 2015, pp. 468–87, cat. no. I.202 – I.218. Photograph from the exhibition (fig. 7, p. 100).

[2] The 17 pastel works depict the following items of artisanal handicraft stored in the Wawel Cathedral: coffin of St Stanislaus; coronation sword of Augustus III, lance of St Maurice and sword of Sigismund II Augustus; cross of princely diadems, so-called Saracen-Sicilian box and so-called rummer of St Hedwig of Silesia; rationale and so-called box of Queen Jadwiga; chalice of Bishop Maciejowski, so-called box of Queen Jadwiga and goblet "made by King Sigismund III"; velum of Queen Jadwiga; reliquary with the Holy Nail; reliquary of St Stanislaus; reliquary of St Florian; reliquary funded by King Sigismund I; chalice "made by King Sigismund III"; chalice of Bishop Padniewski; ewer and basin used in the Maundy Thursday Liturgy; golden rose; mitre of Bishop Strzempiński and crosier of Bishop Gembicki; chasuble funded by Piotr Kmita; coronation cape.

[3] See Anna Król, *Wyczół w Japonii. Inspiracje japońskie w twórczości Leona Wyczółkowskiego / Wyczół in Japan. Japanese Inspirations in the Work of Leon Wyczółkowski* (Krakow, 2012); Łukasz Kossowski, Małgorzata Martini, *Wielka fala. Inspiracje sztuką Japonii w polskim malarstwie i grafice* (Warsaw, 2016).

the *Defense of Trembowla*, *Murder of St Adalbert* and *Sigismund Augustus with Barbara*[4] (all three considered lost), and later the *Flight of Maryna Mniszchówna* (1877, 1882). Having completed his studies under Aleksander Wagner at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich (1875–77), he moved to Krakow and enrolled in a course at Jan Matejko's "Majsterszula" (Master School). It was where Wyczółkowski developed his interest in the history of the former Polish capital and its centuries-old monuments including the Wawel Castle – the symbol of Polishness. Accepting the Matejkos' invitation to live with them, he had a chance to view objects of artisanal handicraft collected by the master. He also had an opportunity to see for the first time the artefacts borrowed by Matejko from the cathedral's treasury while working on the compositions *The Hanging of the Sigismund Bell* and the *Battle of Grunwald*.[5] The student diligently sketched the artefacts in his *Skarbczyk* [Little Treasury], as he called his sketchbook.[6] It was probably at that time that he got to know one of the greatest national relics: the Lance of St Maurice that became the ideological axe of one of the pastels' composition, maybe the most important item in the whole series.

In 1878 and 1889 Wyczółkowski visited Paris, where he became familiar with the current trends in art, including Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, from which he borrowed a brightened colour palette and the famous purple hues, yet, apart from a few exceptions, did not apply the divisionist rules.[7] Symbolism derived from his fondness for the poetry of Juliusz Słowacki provided an equally strong source of inspiration. Also important were contacts with Adam Chmielowski, a follower of Arnold Böcklin (under the influence of Chmielowski in 1880, Wyczółkowski came up with a new, hyperpoetical version of *Alina*, illustrating a scene from Słowacki's tragedy *Balladyna*), or a friendship with Jacek Malczewski. The painter could have not remained indifferent towards the work of Witold Pruszkowski, cited as the first Polish symbolist, whom he met in Warsaw. Wyczółowski's interest in history continued in his symbolist work.[8]

One of the first examples of symbolism in his art are works bearing the common title *Petrified Druid* (1892–94; e.g., versions known from the National Museums in Krakow and Warsaw), in which he revealed his fascination with the Ukrainian steppes – the "fossilized sea," according to his own words. The druid appears as the figure of a Celtic priest and Slavic bard playing the lyre while travelling across eastern borderlands of the historical Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Jerzy Malinowski sees him as a Slavic counterpart of Ossian or Derwid with a harp, a character from Słowacki's *Lilla Weneda*.[9] The work's symbolism did not go unnoticed by contemporary critics who suggested that the "the artist's spirituality must be explored

[4] In particular, this last subject found its place in the national iconography, becoming one of its symbols; no wonder then that a young artist attempted to challenge the topic. See Waldemar Okoń, *Alegorie narodowe* (Wrocław, 1992).

[5] As a rule, the Krakow chapter did not lend items from its treasury. An exception was made for Jan Matejko who borrowed furniture from the cathedral as well as the rationale of Queen Jadwiga, the sword of king Sigismund II Augustus, the chasuble of Batory, the mitre of Bishop Strzempiński and the lance of St Maurice.

[6] Tadeusz Z. Bednarski, *Krakowskim szlakiem Leona Wyczółkowskiego* (Krakow, 2003), p. 69.

[7] Marta Nikiel, "Elementy impresjonistyczne w twórczości Leona Wyczółkowskiego," in *W kręgu Wyczóła*, Michał F. Woźniak, ed. (Bydgoszcz, 2013), pp. 17–34.

[8] Wacława Milewska, "Leon Wyczółkowski i Juliusz Słowacki. Inspiracje, paralele, odniesienia," *Bydgoski Rocznik Muzealny*, Ann. 3 (2013/2014), pp. 133–88.

[9] Jerzy Malinowski, "Motyw palingenezy w twórczości Leona Wyczółkowskiego," *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, no. 3 (1977), pp. 296–305.

by the viewer's own intuition."[10] This painting also reveals a fascination with mountains that combine the raw peril of nature with the beauty of the native landscape. Wyczółkowski adopted the Tatra Mountains as his leading subject for years. Sometimes, inspired by legends and tales, he depicted them in an anthropomorphic manner, in particular Giewont[11] and the rocky silhouettes from the series of the *Legends of the Tatra Mountains*.[12] The Tatras, just like the Wawel Hill, symbolized prehistoric Polishness. The two places were linked to each other by legends and history; here ancient kings and knights "slept" who guarded the country, ready to rise and rush to rescue their homeland.[13]

In 1895, Wyczółkowski began to work at the School of Fine Arts in Krakow and his affiliation to the city began that lasted more than 30 years. As observed by Franciszek Klein, "Krakow had [...] its assets, especially precious for a painter, since it was a city of time-honoured, magnificent art encrypted in old portals, houses, streets, palaces, churches, temple treasuries, alluring courtyards, not to forget the old royal castle. No wonder that this infinite abundance of architectural motifs, this bottomless treasury of picturesque views attracted and stimulated the sensitivity of an artist."[14] The Wawel and its "dormant" royal tombs became the theme of a consequent series of Wyczółkowski's works, *Sarcophagi* (1894–99)[15] (**fig. 1**). According to Malinowski, in this series "Wyczółkowski contrasts two worlds: the world of former rulers and the oblivion to which they were condemned."[16] The "feeling of oblivion" is introduced by elements symbolizing transformation: the overlaying spiderweb and objects left behind and scattered around. The series was inspired by the exploration of the Wawel tombs that involved the participation of Jan

[10] Władysław Maleszewski, "Wystawa obrazów Leona Wyczółkowskiego w salonie Towarzystwa Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych," *Biesiada Literacka*, no. 7 (1897), p. 108.

[11] See Bartosz Frydrychowicz, "*Giewont o zachodzie słońca* Leona Wyczółkowskiego. Pomiędzy symbolizmem a impresjonizmem," in *W kręgu Wyczóła*, op. cit., pp. 71–78. Apart from the painting from a private collections discussed in Frydrychowicz's study in which the mountain peak is lit by the sunset, Giewont was also depicted in the painting *Giewont against the Sky* (1899, considered lost). In this nocturne, the starry, majestic sky contrasts with single lights from the windows of huts at the foot of the mountain. Both pictures referred to legends and contemporary poetry, while the very silhouette of the mountain, as observed by Malinowski (op. cit., p. 301), brings associations with one of the petrified kings earlier immortalized in the *Sarcophagi* series. According to Malinowski, Giewont "was subjected to transformation and gigantization on a cosmic scale." Giewont and the panorama of the Tatra Mountains are also featured in the portraits painted around that time, i.a., of Jan Kasprowicz, Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer and Jadwiga Krysińska.

[12] The series was planned to include 28 pastels depicting anthropomorphized mountain views in symbolic form inspired by folk tales and legends. Only one composition from this series is known, from the Upper-Silesian Museum (Muzeum Górnośląskie) in Bytom.

[13] The legend of dormant knights, so often retold in the 19th century, describes a cave under Giewont where the king Bolesław the Bold with his knights are said to have fallen asleep. Another legend, cited by Józef Mączyński, describes an "underground castle" hidden under the Wawel, with a grand hall filled with armoury, where kings of the past clad in coronation robes are seated around a table. From there, once a year, neighing horses and trumpets can be heard, and after midnight, king Bolesław the Brave strolls across the Wawel Castle courtyard. See Józef Mączyński, *Kilka podań i wspomnień krakowskich* (Krakow, 1855).

[14] Franciszek Klein, *Notatnik krakowski* (Krakow, 1965), p. 70.

[15] Wyczółkowski planned around 30–40 studies of royal tombs. Apart from the sketches, three oil paintings have been identified: in the National Museum in Poznań (*Sarcophagi*, 1895, inv. no. Mp.99), in the National Museum in Krakow (*Sarcophagi*, 1896, inv. no. MNK II-b-765), in the National Museum in Warsaw (*Sarcophagus of Queen Jadwiga*, 1898, inv. no. 190449 MNW), and a painting from the Museum of Greater Poland (Muzeum Wielkopolskie) in Poznań, known from a pre-war photograph: *Sarcophagi of the King and Queen in the Crypt* (1895, cf. inv. no. DDWneg.3270 MNW) as well as the version presented in 1896 in Zachęta, only known from a description and reproduction (see Milewska, *Leon Wyczółkowski*..., op. cit.).

[16] Malinowski, *Motyw palingenezy*..., op. cit., p. 299.

Matejko who depicted them in sketches and paintings (*Interior of the Tomb of Casimir the Great*, 1869). Just as the dormant kings and knights awaiting the revival of their homeland while asleep under the mountain, the tombs also symbolized the expectation of the return of their native country's prime. Wacława Milewska writes: "*Sarcophagi*, reconciling the symbolism of death and resurrection seem to express the idea of the tomb-cradle, the death that preserves life."[17]

A prominent place in this series is occupied by Queen Jadwiga of Poland, whose patinated tomb-model in the late Gothic style was sculpted by Wyczółkowski assisted by Konstanty Laszczka in 1895.[18] The model was employed by the artist for his studies of the successive versions of *Sarcophagi* in which, beside the queen, the figure of the king also appears from the tomb of Casimir the Great. Together with Laszczka, Wyczółkowski also sculpted a design for a commemorative plate on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Krakow Academy celebrated in 1900, placing Władysław Jagiełło's tomb between the silhouettes of Queen Jadwiga and Casimir the Great.[19] The queen became "the link" between the dynasties of Piast and Jagiellon. In the late 19th century, Jadwiga became an object of veneration on a national scale and the question of her beatification was frequently raised. The 500th anniversary of her death in 1899 and the 500th anniversary of the Jagiellon University in the following year placed the queen in the centre of nationalistic thinking combining the Christian tradition of Poland, its centuries-long dynastic reign and political independence and the development of science and culture.

The figure of Queen Jadwiga recurred in Wyczółkowski's work. The pastel work *Fairy Tale*, representing the bust of a strongly built woman with a crown on her head, can be associated with the queen (**fig. 2**).[20] Also the motif of the Crucifix of Queen Jadwiga was employed by the artist multiple times (in an oil painting of 1896 and in later graphic versions of the subject).

The dormant state of former monarchs from the tombs is contrasted with vitality, strength and optimism emanating from the composition *Knight among Flowers*. The work of 1904 followed a miniature model of a monument-tribute to Matejko sculpted by Wyczółkowski.[21] A horseman in gilded Polish Hussar armour blows the horn, a panorama of the Tatra Mountains behind his back, awakening the tulip-studded meadow. It is a harbinger of the approaching independence of the Polish state.

The views of the Wawel Hill and the studies of the Wawel Cathedral and Castle may be regarded as symptomatic of the artist's interest in history. Royal tombs, sepulchral crypts,[22] "Evangelical living stones (*lapides vivi*)," as put by Michał Rożek,[23] were frequent subjects of

[17] Milewska, *Leon Wyczółkowski...*, op. cit., p. 162.

[18] Leon Wyczółkowski, *Queen Jadwiga*, plaster, The National Museum in Krakow, inv. no. MNK II-rz-335. The model made by Wyczółkowski and Laszczka could have been used as the model for the Queen's tomb.

[19] Leon Wyczółkowski, *Sarcophagi*, plaster, wood, The National Museum in Krakow, inv. no. MNK II-rz-354.

[20] Pastel from the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw. See *Mistrzowie pastelu...*, p. 462, cat. no. I.197. Images of Queen Jadwiga appeared in Polish art of the late 19th century, for instance of Jan Matejko (pictured among the founders of the Jagiellonian University), Czesław Tański (as the monarch and founder of the University and paraments from the royal treasury), Antoni Piotrowski (as the queen and founder) or Piotr Stachiewicz (as the protector bringing comfort to the poor).

[21] The piece is in the collection of the Polish Library in Paris. Another explicit tribute to Matejko is *Stańczyk* of 1898 (the National Museum in Krakow) – one of the most symbolic works of Wyczółkowski.

[22] The first popular iconographic inventory of royal monuments and tombs was the work *Monumenta Regum Poloniae Cracoviensia* by Michał Stachowicz, engraved in the years 1822–27 by Fryderyk Krzysztof Dietrich.

[23] Michał Rożek, *Symbolika i magia Krakowa* (Krakow, 2000), p. 21. The author remarked that "the monuments were perceived as silent traces of tumultuous fates, full of rises and falls. For the social elites, the Wawel Castle and

his works. The Cathedral was the destination of the nation's pilgrimages; visiting it, the educational aspect aside, was close to celebrating the "mystery of national history," as noticed by Klementyna Hoffmanowa in 1827: "This is our Capitol and Pantheon in one; here the majesty of our kings was exhibited; here Poland's glory shone for centuries; here it continues to shine today in the magnificent cathedral,"[24] while Józef Ignacy Kraszewski called it the Westminster of Poland. After the ceremonial funeral of Adam Mickiewicz in 1890, the cathedral became the "place of rest of kings and national heroes, equal to kings, yet also of king-ghosts."[25] "The specific *genius loci*, revealing itself on the Wawel Hill since the dawn of history, inspired actions of particular importance for the country and nation. The royal castle and cathedral – even when they were endangered by purposeful destruction – stimulated the life of the nation deprived of its state, a reminder of the glorious history that they had witnessed."[26]

In 1905, the Wawel Hill, occupied by Austrian barracks, was returned to the Polish nation. What the reconstruction of the Marienburg castle or the completion of the Cologne Cathedral represented for the Germans, for the Poles it was the dream of returning the Wawel to its proper place in the cultural and social life of the nation and its renovation.[27] Wyczółkowski's interpretation of a subject inseparably linked to the Wawel Hill integrated him into the circle of artists who drew inspiration from the site that occupied a special place in the heart of Poles.

The Wawel Treasury

The treasury, adjacent to the cathedral from the northeastern side, was the room from which the major renovation of the cathedral began in 1895.[28] In 1880, the treasury's guardian was priest Ignacy Polkowski who inventoried it in the years 1880–81. Priest Polkowski also commissioned a special chest to store and exhibit precious artefacts from the treasury (**fig. 3**). He also contributed to the popularization of the knowledge about the stored national memorabilia, publishing guidebooks and the album *The Wawel Cathedral Treasury* complete with commentaries and 32 charts, illustrated by Ludwik Łepkowski (1882).[29]

As aforementioned, Wyczółkowski could have seen and sketched the items from the treasury when he lived with the Matejkos or visited the treasury or the anniversary exhibition at the

Cathedral had always been associated with royal tombs. Meditation over a tomb belonged to a Romantic canon, as the symbol of not only passing, but also of patriotism that called for action."

[24] Cited after: Janina Kamionka-Straszakowa, "*Do ziemi naszej". Podróże romantyków* (Krakow, 1988), p. 187.

[25] Cited after: Jacek Urban, *Katedra na Wawelu* (Krakow, 2000), p. 352.

[26] Cited after: Maria Borowiejska-Birkenmajerowa, *Serce Polski. Zabytki i świadomość narodowa* (Krakow, 1991), p. 74.

[27] Wawel also inspired many other Polish artists, who both made it the theme of their works and designed monumental works aimed at decorating or fundamentally transforming buildings located there. The renovation process of the monuments on the hill became a national venture. The most famous designs were cartoons for the cathedral's stained glass windows (Stanisław Wyspiański), the design for the "Akropolis" planned to house the main national institutions (Stanisław Wyspiański and Władysław Ekielski) or the monumental sculpture *Procession to Wawel* by Wacław Szymanowski. See *Wawel narodowi przywrócony. Odzyskanie zamku i jego odnowa 1905–1939*, exh. cat., 2005, Wawel Royal Castle – State Art Collections (Krakow, 2005).

[28] Urban, *Katedra*..., op. cit., p. 305. Józef Mehoffer was assigned to execute polychromy in the treasury in 1901. The realization of the project was cancelled after he finished the vault in late 1902 and early 1903, and the design was estimated too modern and too much in spite of the room's original character.

[29] See Dariusz Nowacki, "Skarbiec katedralny na Wawelu w XIX wieku – zarys problematyki," *Studia Waweliana*, vol. 3 (1994), pp. 169–79.

Jagiellonian University. By reason of their historical character and beauty, the artefacts offered an attractive subject for an artist. In contrast to the sarcophagi series, for which Wyczółkowski crafted a sculpted model in order to produce a historicizing creation, here the theme was all set; it only "sufficed" to "portray" it and transpose the entire symbolic charge into a new work of art.

The artist managed to achieve a magnificent effect creating a series of specific *trompes l'œil* that were intended to deceive the eye of the beholder to such an extent as if to replace the original pieces. "Upon entering the room where the works are exhibited – wrote Zofia Stankiewicz-Skorobohata – we are under the impression that the row of glass cases actually contains the original precious memorabilia – one cannot believe one's eyes, one cannot believe that an artist could have brought out such a strange three-dimensionality and formidable power and truth of colour in a picture."[30] Jan Kleczyński was astonished to view the contemporary works from the State Art Collections presented at the Royal Castle in Warsaw: "What are these golden chasubles, gems hanging in these generously lit rooms? Have they got such exhibits, too? I come closer. Why, is it possible? These are actually paintings! It is not a rhetoric figure on my part, but my direct impression."[31] The idea that Wyczółkowski aimed at "deceiving" the viewer is confirmed by the naturalistic depiction of the framework with a nail on which the coronation cape and Kmita's chasuble are hung (**fig. 4**). Obviously, as already observed when the series was first exhibited, it is not a "scientific documentation" or an artistic reproduction of the artefacts. Their picturesque and painterly rendition disqualifies them as a faithful iconographic source.[32] An example could be provided by the the pastel *Ewer and Basin for the Maundy Thursday Liturgy* (**fig. 5**), where the intricate, rich iconography based on early modern prints of personifications of European countries and the four natural elements (**fig. 6**) is reduced to the play of highlights from light cast laterally that shows the volume and diversified texture of goldsmithery, but prevents the viewer from deciphering the meaning of the scenes represented on particular objects.

Wyczółkowski was fascinated by the richness of matter and colour of the items crafted of gold and silver threads, pearls, gemstones, gold, silver and iron, ivory or rock crystal that stimulated his sensitivity to colour and light. The theme itself stirred his historical imagination and sensitivity. All the emotions infused the exceptional series that almost became an illustration of the notion of *intensivism* – term coined by Cezary Jellenta in the late 19th century that was meant to describe painting that is capable, like other areas of human activity, of expressing human spirit so that "later, from pictures, the soul of a century or a nation could be deciphered."[33] Wyczółkowski, rejecting documental precision while emphasizing the sophisticated forms of the artefacts by means of colour and light and his brave pastel technique, extracted the essence of their substance and history, leaving out – as Jellenta wrote – "all that distracts one's attention and disintegrates impressions into lateral and less necessary observations."[34]

[30] Zofia Stankiewicz-Skorobohata, "*Skarbiec wawelski* Leona Wyczółkowskiego," *Bluszcz*, no. 2 (1908), pp. 19, 20.

[31] Jan Kleczyński, "Współczesna sztuka polska na Zamku Królewskim," *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 93 (1926), p. 17.

[32] Copies and illustrations depicting products of artisanal handicraft were not a rarity back then, just to cite the *Album starożytności polskich* (Album of Polish Monuments) or full-colour copies of polychromy or artistic objects commissioned by the Warsaw art collector Dominik Witke-Jeżewski still in the 20th century.

[33] Cezary Jellenta, *Galerya ostatnich dni. Wizerunki, rozbiory, pomysły* (Krakow, 1897), p. 316.

[34] Jellenta, *Galerya...*, op. cit., s. 320.

According to Wyczółkowski's monographist Maria Twarowska, in the case of *The Wawel Treasury* the individual compositions are not still lifes but "*sui generis* historical portraits, objects depicted as individualities."[35] Although Twarowska observes that the term "portrait" in reference to Wyczółkowski's still lifes has almost become a cliché, she nevertheless confirms that "it is a justified judgement that may be applied to a great number of his works."

On the other hand, in her analysis of the perception of still lifes of Władysław Ślewiński, Olga Boznańska and Wyczółkowski in contemporary criticism, Agnieszka Dombrowska observes that "in the history of objects depicted in painting, Wyczółkowski's composition is an intermediate link between the attribute 'detached' from a figure and details endowed with passion in Romantic painting."[36] Dombrowska is of the opinion that the artefacts arranged together form a still life in the formal sense of the term, while works depicting a single item, like for instance *Chasuble Funded by Piotr Kmita*, do not fulfill these criteria. Underlining the role of light in this series, Dombrowska regards it as one of the symptoms of Polish luminism so strongly tied to symbolism and remarks that "matching together 'national relics' from various eras of Poland's prime, bringing them back to life by casting light on them, seems to stand for a 'dream about power,' a sign of resurrection and, similarly as in Polish poetry after 1900, a kind of 'struggle of life against lifelessness.'"

Already in the posthumous exhibition organized in Warsaw's Zachęta Gallery in 1937, Maria Twarowska noticed analogies in Wyczółkowski's work to Matejko's painting in the catalogue's introduction: "The monumental series of *The Wawel Treasury* is not 'pure painting' – though Wyczółkowski's bold artistry shows on every step – these are paintings oozing with lyricism, their rich contents hidden between the verses of the painterly poem. Only second to Matejko and Wyspiański's Wawel stained glass designs, this is a powerful continuation – devoid of scenes and actors – of Polish historical painting."[37]

This insightful observation of Twarowska may be further developed and one is tempted to search for new contexts of Wyczółkowski's work. The abandonment of thematic historicism in art, observable since the 1880s in favour of, as Wiesław Juszczak put it, "profound and internal historicism," resulted in the "latent" presence of history, now the domain of feelings and emotions, in landscapes or portraits.[38] The same could be said of Wyczółkowski's work. *The Wawel Treasury*, while not illustrating any historical scene, shows the actual "protagonists" of history – artefacts found in events of the past.

If a depiction of objects appears as a continuation of historical painting, the series may be regarded as a suite of "national relics," referring to the suites of rulers and personalities. Persons (saints, monarchs, bishops) are replaced here by artefacts. A "historical caleidoscope" emerges, in which it is not the narration of a historical painting, a scene set in the past and dressed in historical costume that gives an impulse to reflect on the history of the country – but symbolically loaded relics. Wyczółkowski achieved the goal that he shared with historical painters; after the first bout of admiration for the artistic form and tricks, the viewer begins

[35] Maria Twarowska, *Leon Wyczółkowski* (Warsaw, 1973), p. 22.

[36] Agnieszka Dombrowska, "Martwa natura Ślewińskiego, Boznańskiej i Wyczółkowskiego w opinii krytyki," *Roczniki Humanistyczne*, vol. 4 (1988–89), pp. 25–43.

[37] Maria Twarowska, "Leon Wyczółkowski jako malarz," in *Leon Wyczółkowski 1852–1936. Dzieła malarskie. Przewodnik TZSP 125. September 1937* (Warsaw, 1937).

[38] Wiesław Juszczak, *Malarstwo polskiego modernizmu* (Gdańsk, 2004), p. 62.

to grasp the symbolism of depicted objects. The series, similarly as Matejko's late historical painting, encourages reflection on the many centuries of Polish history.

The depicted artefacts are composed as if they were placed inside a glass case. The impression is enhanced by the original glass sheets protecting the delicate surface of the works until the present day. The real-life scale imposes the impression of confronting the original. Scarlet-red, cobalt blue or green backgrounds of soft fabrics on which the items are exhibited dominate in the series, yet exceptions also occur, as exemplified in the pastel with the coronation sword of Augustus III, the lance of St Maurice and the sword taken from the tomb of Sigismund Augustus (**fig. 7**). In this work, the missing background is particularly effective: untouched, neutral, as if it were a *demipastel*.[39] Focus is on the vertically positioned objects that cast shadows upon what may be understood as a shroud. In the centre is the national relic – the lance of St Maurice. After the crown treasury was plundered by Prussians and the Polish regalia were destroyed (only the sword known as Szczerbiec survived, returned to the Wawel in the interwar period), the swords depicted in the pastel – one manufactured on the occasion of the coronation of Augustus III, the other taken from the tomb of King Sigismund Augustus – are here substitutes of Szczerbiec, the coronation sword. The work's symbolic message is obvious, being the continuity of the Polish state and the importance of Krakow as the royal city.

The group of artefacts related to royal dignity and power and the tradition of the Kingdom of Poland also includes the cape which combines elements of two coronation capes, of Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki and of Eleonor of Austria. The main decoration of the cloak is the three-dimensionally embroidered White Eagle – the emblem of the Kingdom of Poland, holding the insignia of royal power (sword and sceptre) in its claws and wearing the royal orb on its chest. The other pastel referring to royal power depicts the reliquary of St Sigismund,[40] containing the martyr-king's relics and funded by King Sigismund I the Old (**fig. 8**). St Sigismund, paragon of a ruler's virtues, was the Polish monarch's patron saint and received particular veneration from the royal houses of the Luxembourgs and Jagiellons. The third pastel related to a monarch shows a chalice "made by King Sigismund III." The ruler was an amateur goldsmith said to have crafted the chalice for the Wawel Cathedral. The fourth work that can be associated to the notion of Polish statehood is the reliquary of St Florian, one of the four main patron saints of the Polish Kingdom. All listed pastel works feature the uniform green-and-scarlet-red background that could be interpreted as the sign of the struggle for independence and hope for the revival of the state (green) redeemed by the blood of martyr heroes (red).

A work that combines the sacred and the profane sphere, royal authority and sanctity, depicts the cross made of princely diadems, the so-called Saracen-Sicilian box and the so-called rummer of St Hedwig of Silesia, that is, items that were originally secular and became sacralized in the process (**fig. 9**). The cross that could have originally been a crown was traditionally linked to King Casimir Jagiellon. It is flanked by the box and the rummer. The small box of silver-plated gold, decorated with battle scenes and imaginary animals, was probably manufactured in the 12th century and eventually became a reliquary. The engraved rummer also changed its primary character due to its relation with the person of St Hedwig of Silesia and a belief that an individual drinking from it was "granted the miraculous grace of God." The

[39] *Demipastel* ('half-pastel') is a pastel work in which the "neutral" background is left partly untouched, due to which the painted-over areas become more exposed. The technique was employed by Kazimierz Mordasewicz in his portraits.

[40] Sigismund of Burgundy (516–23), died a martyr's death, saint of the Catholic Church.

pastel's composition with the centrally positioned cross and siding rummer and box resembles the group of Crucifixion (the chalice could symbolize a vessel collecting the blood of Christ).

It should be remarked that the two main characters of the series, hovering on the borders of secular and ecclesiastic power, were St Stanislaus and Queen Jadwiga. St Stanislaus may be associated with at least five compositions, and Queen Jadwiga – with three. In particular, three pastels directly linked to the Krakow bishop and patron saint of Poland, seem to be of significance to the message pertaining to the entire series. The first one depicts a coffin (sarcophagus) of St Stanislaus placed in the middle of the cathedral's nave under a Baroque ciborium. The silver coffin is shown slightly from below, at an angle, as if seen by a person passing by the tomb. This perspective brings to mind the last scene of Stanisław Wyspiański's play *Bolesław the Bold*, in which a coffin, illuminated by lightning, falls on and crushes the rebellious ruler.[41] In Wyczółkowski's pastel, the sarcophagus looks rather monumental, while the play of light brilliantly renders the beauty of patinated silver. Two reliquaries of the saint: a box for the skull and a reliquary in the shape of the hand of the saint with votive rings were placed on the scarlet-red background (**fig. 10**). The painter employed colour that symbolized martyr saints and their virtues and merits (similar colours are in the backgrounds of reliquaries related to Jesus Christ or the Passion – *Reliquary with the Holy Nail*, *Ewer and Basin for the Maundy Thursday Liturgy*, *Golden Rose*). The third work associated with Stanislaus from Szczepanów is the chasuble funded by Piotr Kmita – the chasuble's panel contains scenes arranged in a shape of the cross illustrating the life of the bishop saint. Scarlet-red is featured in the textile embroidered in gold thread.

The artefacts linked to Queen Jadwiga are distinguished by the background in the colour of lapis lazuli – associated with God and Heaven, and the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. The most important object is the rationale depicted next to the so-called Queen Jadwiga's box, traditionally said to be part of her trousseau. The rationale, replacing pallium, worn by Krakow bishops for special ceremonies, was said to have been embroidered with pearls by the Queen herself, while the ivory casket decorated with scenes from medieval romances (made in Paris in the second quarter of the 14th c.) was also associated with her (the pastel is also exceptional for the reason of being the only one to have been copied by Wyczółkowski in a replica)[42] (**fig. 11**). Yet another artefact related to Jadwiga is the velum (according to a legend, embroidered by the Queen herself), arranged together with a Baroque gremiale and an alabaster relief with the Crucifixion, crafted in England in the second quarter of the 15th century. The Christological and Eucharistic messages are conveyed by the depiction of crucified Jesus and a textile used for holding the monstrance containing Corpus Christi. In the third pastel, also displaying the cobalt blue background, is the chalice of Bishop Maciejowski, the so-called box of Queen Jadwiga and the goblet "made by King Sigismund III." What is uncanny here is the repetition of one of the articles from the treasury – the ivory box that is also featured in the pastel with the rationale. These items have totally diverse functions: from a secular goblet to a box adorned with chivalric scenes that was also employed as a reliquary to the chalice used by a priest during the celebration of the Eucharist. Particularly striking in this collection of diverse objects from various eras is Wyczółkowski's mastery in rendering texture (ivory, enamelled gold or amber) and the diversification of the play of light on absorbent or reflective surfaces of objects.

[41] See Bednarski, *Krakowskim szlakiem*..., op. cit., pp. 160, 161.

[42] Author's replica is in the collections of the Wawel Royal Castle, inv. no. 6028.

The remaining two pastel works could be categorized as illustrating the dignity of Krakow bishops. These are: the mitre of Bishop Strzempiński and the crosier of Bishop Gembicki with the figure of St Peter and the posthumous chalice of Bishop Padniewski.

The group of artefacts depicted by Wyczółkowski consists of national and ecclesiastic relics related to the past tradition of the Polish Kingdom, its rulers, patron saints and Krakow bishops who crowned the monarchs. The complex relations between particular works from the series create an historical narrative across the grain of Polish history. Only a profound reflection on these artefacts and Wyczółkowski's perspective on them permits a fuller interpretation of the series that was often regarded by contemporary art critics as a mere show of virtuosity by a master fascinated with precious artefacts. The creation of *The Wawel Treasury* undoubtedly involved the idea of exploring national pride and encouraging reflection on Polish history through the promotion of precious artefacts from the treasury in the form of their simulacra, when the originals themselves were not accessible. The sacred and the profane sphere meet in the series where intertwining events from Polish history are symbolized by the precious objects. Pastel works combined in a series become a vehicle of intense patriotic emotions. It should be perhaps added that the artist never again resumed the theme.[43]

The Wawel Treasury – after the first presentation in November 1907 in Zygmunt Sarnecki's art gallery *Ars* in Krakow[44] – was exhibited twice in Warsaw's Zachęta Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts (1907/8 and 1912) and in Poznań's Society of Friends of Fine Arts (1910), each time arousing interest in the public that did not fail to notice the manifestation of Polish spirit in the series. Fortunately, the works were not dispersed and were purchased in 1919 as one set by the Polish State for the developing State Art Collections.

Was *The Wawel Treasury* Wyczółkowski's last work that combined historicism and symbolism? Definitely not. In the artist's oeuvre, the Wawel and precious artefacts and monuments of Krakow appeared repeatedly in later works. Wyczółkowski's last favourite theme, greatly respected by him, were trees that he drew and portrayed in lithography for so many years. In this case, however, he managed to reach even more deeply into the history of the country, taking his historical reflection a step back before Christianization, to the era of holy timberlands and groves, expressing his honest pantheism.

Translated by Karolina Koriat

[43] Franciszek Klein encouraged Wyczółkowski in the latter's final years to prepare colour lithographs based on the series, to which the artist is said to have answered: "Dear Mr Klein, you require the impossible from me, I wouldn't be able to come up with something like that today. Today, I can only play with flowers, such an effort would be too much." See Franciszek Klein, *Notatnik krakowski* (Krakow, 1965), p. 73.

[44] An idea was proposed to send *The Wawel Treasury* to Berlin, but concern arose that the series or single works could find buyers there and the complete set could be dispersed and made inaccessible to the public. The collector of Polish art Dominik Witke-Jeżewski made an attempt at purchasing the series, without success, probably discouraged by the price.