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# WWII VICISSITUDES OF THE INSIGNIA OF KING AUGUSTUS III

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The behind-the-scene developments of the 1733 election seem to be well known. Maybe less is known about the execution of the set of insignia to be used during the coronation of King Augustus III and his spouse Maria Josepha. Since the supporters of Stanisław Leszczyński, elected by the Election Sejm in Warsaw to become Poland's ruler, did not want to release the Cracow coronation regalia, Augustus III ordered to have new insignia commissioned; actually two sets of those: for himself and his spouse. The commission was given to the Dresden jeweller Johann Heinrich Köhler, while the jewels for the final product had been removed from other jewellery pieces that belonged to the princely family. Following the coronation ceremony, the insignia were sent to Dresden. Similarly as other precious objects that were property of the House of Wettin they were placed at the so-called Grünes Gewölbe (Green Vault), treasury of the Saxon electors located at the Dresden Royal Castle (Residenzschloss). The 'borrowed' gems removed from the regalia were then replaced with glass imitations. It was for almost two centuries that the insignia of Augustus III and Maria Josepha remained deposited in Dresden. As a result of the abdication of King Frederic Augustus III of Saxony on 13 November 1918, the family requested the return of the goods that belonged to the Wettins. In 1924, the Parliament of the Free State of Saxony decided to pass e.g., the insignia to Frederic Augustus III, to the family. The former ruler, who had left Saxony and moved to the Sibyllenort estate (today Szczodre), decided to sell the regalia. He finally exchanged them for a collection of porcelain figurines by Johann Joachim Kändler, 18<sup>th</sup>-century artist working for the Meissen Porcelain Manufactory (author of the e.g., *Swan Service* executed for Henryk von Brühl). A party in this transaction was the Vienna antique dealer of Polish descent Szymon Szwarz of Pollack & Winternitz. Fully aware of the value of the regalia for our history, he contacted the Director

of the National Museum in Warsaw (MNW) Prof. Bronisław Gembarzewski offering the sale of the insignia. The offer was accepted without undue negotiations: the Museum purchased the insignia of Augustus III and his spouse Maria Josepha for 175.000 zlotys. These facts so far are widely known. Meanwhile, the WW II vicissitudes of the insignia are in majority of the studies summed up in one laconic sentence: at the beginning of the occupation, the regalia were transported do Cracow, to be sent to Dresden in 1942, following which they were taken over by Soviet troops, to return to Warsaw in 1960 as a gift from the Soviet Embassy.<sup>1</sup> It was assessed that the war fate of the only coronation insignia set preserved in Poland, since the mediaeval regalia were lost as a result of Poland's partitions,<sup>2</sup> did not succeed in being given a broader study owing to the lack of source materials. As it turns out, however, the documents tackling the WW II story of the Saxon regalia, albeit dispersed, can be found today in the Warsaw Archive of the National Museum and the Central Archives of Modern Records.

Before proceeding to the WW II story of the coronation insignia of King Augustus III and his spouse Maria Josepha, let us recall that in 1939 MNW did not undertake any activity meant to prepare the collection for evacuation: neither to the provinces nor abroad. The only decision made to protect the exhibits against the possible warfare was to place the most precious items in crates. In the last weeks before the German aggression some items from the collection (mainly golden coins) were hidden in the cellar of the Museum edifice in Jerozolimskie Avenue. It remains unknown why Director Stanisław Lorentz did not decide to evacuate from Warsaw selected works of art, including the insignia. After all, the state authorities agreed to evacuate in early September 1939 the Wawel treasury from Cracow, the most precious manuscripts from Warsaw (including the *Holy Cross Sermons*, *Saint Florian Psalter*, *Heilsberg Code* by



1. Collections of Saxony rulers kept at the Grünes Gewölbe, the 1930s

Gallus Anonymus, *Chronicle* by Wincenty Kadłubek, as well as Chopin's manuscripts), and the first edition of the two-volume *Gutenberg Bible* from Pelplin. The MNW collection remained in the capital, becoming an easy prey for German officials who already during the first occupation weeks began the action of 'securing' art works in the Polish territory. In October 1939, the supervision of museum and private collections within the General Government was taken over by the Austrian art historian Dr Kajetan Mühlmann, Special Delegate for the Securing of Artistic Treasures in the Former Polish Territories (Sonderbeauftragten für den Schutz und die Sicherung von Kunstwerken in den besetzten Ostgebieten).<sup>3</sup> In order to more effectively fulfil his tasks, the Special Delegate assigned two operational teams: the Southern Group located in Cracow, whose task was to penetrate art collections in the south of Poland, and the Northern Group located in Warsaw, whose task was to operate throughout the north of the occupied country.<sup>4</sup> The latter group was headed by Kajetan's stepbrother Dr Joseph Mühlmann.<sup>5</sup> It was precisely members of the Northern Group who 'secured' the MNW collection. The preserved documents show that they focused on the collections of paintings, sculptures, historic furniture, artistic crafts, ceramics and china, textiles and old coins. There exist preserved lists of inventoried items and of those art works which were taken to Cracow, the capital of the General Government created on 26 October 1939, in order to 'secure' them against theft and destruction as official materials read.<sup>6</sup> These documents, however, do not mention the coronation insignia of Augustus III and his spouse Maria Josepha. Even Dr Kajetan

Mühlmann's report, describing in detail the activity of his office, does not contain any information on finding the Saxon coronation regalia at MNW. An assumption can be made that the list of the 'secured' items focused on art works, several months later incorporated into a special catalogue titled *Sichergestellte Kunstwerke im Generalgouvernement* presenting the most precious (selected) objects taken over in the territory of the General Government. All that is known at this stage is that the insignia of Augustus III, on the decision of General Governor Hans Frank, were initially transported to Cracow. This may have been the result of the Governor's megalomania: his Party companions dubbed him 'King Stanislaus'.<sup>7</sup> In mid-1940, however, the regalia returned to the Warsaw Museum: it remains unknown either for what reason and on whose decision.

Meanwhile, in October 1941, the coronation insignia of Augustus III and his spouse became the focus of interest of the highest authorities of the Third Reich. On 14 October, Dr Hans Lammers, Chief of the Reich Chancellery, wrote to Hans Frank in reference to them. To begin with, he emphasised the historical and political impact of the Saxon regalia: *The coronation insignia are an exquisite goldsmithery piece by the famous court jeweller of Augustus II the Strong Johann Heinrich Köhler of Dresden. Therefore, they are not merely an important symbol of Saxon jewellers' artistry, but they also represent active eastern policy conducted by Augustus II the Strong and Augustus III which bound Poland and Saxony for over 70 years.*<sup>8</sup> In the further part of his letter, Lammers informed Frank that it was Adolf Hitler's personal wish for the insignia of Augustus III, as works

representing Saxon Baroque, to 'return' to the Dresden Grünes Gewölbe. Also Martin Mutschmann, Gauleiter, of Saxony, was informed about the Chancellor's decision. The General Governor informed respective officials about the content of Lammers's letter: Ludwig Leist, Warsaw Starost, and Dr Alfred Schellenberg, Delegate for Warsaw museums. The latter instructed the pre-war MNW Director Dr Stanisław Lorentz to prepare a report on the issue (during the Nazi occupation Lorentz was 'the Polish Head of the Museum': *der Polnische Leiter*). Schellenberg remarked: *although I have the list of art works belonging to the National Museum and secured by Dr [Josef] Mühlmann, however, I do not have the list of objects brought back to the Museum [MNW] from Cracow. For the sake of keeping things under control, please, provide me with the names [of this type] of objects: it suffices to point to the ordinal on the list. I shall subsequently introduce the necessary changes on the list I already have among my documents.*<sup>9</sup> Lorentz prepared the requested information already on the following day. Thanks to this, Schellenberg could inform the Warsaw Starost Chancellery that *two crowns, two sceptres, two orbs, and one coronation mantle were secured in December 1939, and transported to Cracow, following which last summer [namely in mid-1940], together with some other objects, they were brought back to the National Museum in Warsaw. Upon the visual examination I have concluded that the crowns, the sceptres, and the orbs are made of gilded silver, and the inserted gems have been replaced with worthless crystals, or possibly tinted glass.*<sup>10</sup>

The topic of the coronation insignia of Augustus III and his wife returned in the discussion between the Reich Chancellery and the General Government Office in March 1942. Hans Lammers wrote the following in his letter: *Further to our conversation, I would like to request the instruction to transport the coronation insignia, currently in Warsaw, in order to pass them directly to the Reich Governor of Saxony Gauleiter Mutschmann. In response to Führer's wish, Gauleiter Mutschmann will place them in the Treasury of Saxon Baroque in Dresden.*<sup>11</sup> The authorities in Warsaw could do nothing but fulfil the Reich Chancellor's wish. Dr Alfred Schellenberg was to personally supervise the transport. A plan was made for the insignia to arrive in Dresden on 1 April 1942, this confirmed in a cable dispatched by Schellenberg to Gauleiter Mutschmann of 20 March 1942 and a certificate informing that *Mr Herbert Büttner, clerk at the District Police Head Office at the Warsaw Municipality, shall accompany Dr Schellenberg and Mrs Irmgard Schellenberg on a trip to Dresden as part of a confidential mission.*<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the document contained a request addressed to all the officials to provide their respective assistance in accomplishing this specific mission. On 28 March 1941, Schellenberg received a written instruction from the office of the Special Delegate for the Securing of Artistic Treasures in the Eastern Occupied Territories to organize a safe transport *for the known purpose*. On 31 March 1941, a cabled response arrived from Dresden informing that rooms had been booked at the 'Bellevue' Hotel for Schellenberg and his wife. Prof. Fritz Fichtner, Director of the Dresden Museum, was authorised to take over the insignia. The archival materials do not contain the protocol of receiving the objects, however, at



2. Coronation regalia of King Augustus III elector of Saxony and his wife Maria Josepha



3. Coronation robe of King Augustus III elector of Saxony

MNW there is Alfred Schellenberg's letter to Fritz Fichtner of 8 April 1942: *Having returned to Warsaw, I would like to express my gratitude, also on behalf of my wife and Mr [Herbert] Büttner: everything went smoothly.*<sup>13</sup> On 11 April 1942, Dr Alfred Schellenberg informed Special Delegate Dr Kajetan Mühlmann on the course of his mission: *In compliance with the instruction and the cabled information to Ministry Counsellor Wolsagger in Cracow, on 2 April 1942, I personally handed the coronation insignia to Reich Governor Gauleiter Mutschmann, however, the Warsaw Mayor formulated a request for Saxony to compensate for the loss. I have had an idea of donating [to Warsaw museums] doublets of the collection of Dresden porcelain, which will be displayed at the City Museum in Warsaw.*<sup>14</sup>



4. Dr Kajetan Mühlmann, Special Delegate for the Securing of Artistic Treasures in the Former Polish Territories, talking at the Wawel to Dr Hans Frank, Governor-General of Poland

A b s c h r i f t.

Der Reichsminister und Chef der Reichskanzlei  
Nr. 14556 A

Berlin W 8, den 14. Oktober 1941  
Fosstrasse 6.  
z. Zt. Führer-Hauptquartier

An den  
Generalkouverneur  
Herrn Reichsminister Dr. Frank  
K r a k a u  
Adolphplatz Krakau 1

Betr. Krönungsinsignien August III. von Sachsen und seiner Gemahlin Maria Josepha.

Sehr verehrter Parteigenosse Frank!

Bei der Auseinandersetzung zwischen dem Lande Sachsen und dem "Herrschen Haus Wettin" erhielt der Letztere die Krönungsinsignien August III und seiner Gemahlin Maria Josepha - 2 Kronen, 2 Scepter, 2 Reichsapfeln und 1 Krönungsmantel - mit denen im Jahre 1733 das Kurfürstentum zum König und zur Königin von Polen in Krakau gekrönt wurde. Diese Krönungsinsignien sind hervorragende Goldschmiedearbeiten des berühmten Hofjuweliere August des Starken, Johann Heinrich Köhler in Dresden. Sie sind somit wichtige Zeugen sächsischer Goldschmiedekunst und haben als Symbole der von August dem Starken und August III betriebenen Ostpolitik, die Polen mit Sachsen mehr als 70 Jahre verband, besondere Bedeutung.

Seit 1733 befanden sich die Krönungsinsignien im Grünen Gewölbe zu Dresden und gehörten zu dessen hauptsächlichsten Sehenswürdigkeiten. Im Jahre 1926 gelangten sie laut Bericht der Sächsischen Staatszeitung Nr. 77 vom 1. April 1926 durch Raub an das Nationalmuseum in Warschau, wo sie wahrscheinlich bis zu Beginn des Krieges im Jahre 1939 aufbewahrt worden sind.

Im Hinblick auf die Bedeutung dieser Krönungsinsignien hat der F Führer angeordnet, dass sie der Schatzkammer des sächsischen Barocks in Dresden, in die sie aus historischen Gründen gehören, zugewiesen werden sollen.

Im Auftrage des Führers bitte ich Sie daher, über den Verbleib der Krönungsinsignien Nachforschungen anzustellen und, falls der Wunsch des Führers entsprechend, in die Schatzkammer des sächsischen Barocks in Dresden überführen zu lassen. Über den Fortgang der Angelegenheit bitte ich, mich zwecks Unterrichtung des Führers auf dem laufenden zu halten.

Ab schrift dieses Schreibens habe ich dem Reichstatthalter in Sachsen übersandt.

Heil Hitler!  
Ihr sehr ergebener  
ges. Dr. L a m m e r s

Für die Richtigkeit:  
*S. Mayer*

5. Hans Lammers's letter to Hans Frank dated 14 October 1941 on the Saxon insignia

A detailed invoice for the costs incurred in relation to the trip to Saxony was attached, thanks to which we can find out that e.g., having left Dresden on 2 April 1942, Schellenberg and his wife went to Wroclaw where they spent two nights in their flat.

Moreover, Alfred Schellenberg informed on the course of his mission the Warsaw Starost. Ludwig Leist expressed his expectation that Dresden would somehow compensate the Warsaw collection for the loss it had suffered. *In return for the coronation insignia of Augustus III [the government of Saxony] should secure an equivalent to Warsaw. [Ludwig Leist] will be extremely grateful to Mr [Schellenberg] for sharing this view with Reich Governor Gauleiter Mutschmann; on the form and all the remaining details just the two of us shall communicate. Additionally, I personally do not see any obstacles for the Saxony government to share the extensive number of ceramic doublets with Warsaw, which could serve as a display at the reopened Museum of the City of Warsaw.*<sup>15</sup> Schellenberg informed Prof. Fichtner about the expectations of the Warsaw authorities. Both agreed that the most appropriate form would be to express such a wish in a formal letter by Ludwig Leist addressed to Gauleiter Mutschmann. Among the archival materials at the National Museum in Warsaw a draft of such a document has been preserved; we read in it the following: *On 1 April 1942, upon my instruction, Dr Schellenberg personally delivered to you in Dresden the coronation insignia of King Augustus III coming from Poland. As you must realize, the transfer of such exquisite silver jewellery works is an acute loss to the collection of a museum entrusted to my*

7. November 1941

An den  
Adjunkten des Stadttheatermanns  
in W a r s z a h e

- Der Referent für Kultur -  
Fr. VIII. 101-1005/06 Tgb. 2192/41  
Dr. Schellenberg

SA-Sturmführer Raschmayer  
im H. S. u. S. S.

Betrifft: Krönungsinsignien August III. und seiner Gemahlin.

Auf Ihre Bitte um Berichterstattung in obiger Angelegenheit teile ich Ihnen folgendes mit:

Die Krönungsinsignien bestehend aus: 2 Kronen, 2 Sceptern, 2 Reichsapfeln und 1 Mantel wurden im Dezember 09 abgeholt und nach Krakau gebracht und kamen dann im Sommer des vergangenen Jahres wieder mit anderen Gegenständen an das Nationalmuseum in Warschau zurück. Meine Berichterstattung der Stücke ergab, dass es sich bei den Kronen, wie bei den Sceptern und Reichsapfeln nur um silbervergoldete Arabesken handelt, in denen die steinernen Kristalle, buntfarbige Glasstücke sind. Die Erklärung hierfür ergibt sich aus der Tatsache, dass 1733 vor dem Generaladmiralen August III. der König Stanislaw Leszczyński die alten polnischen Krönungsinsignien weggeschafft wurden und dass man dann in der Verlegenheit, allein für die Krönung in Krakau diese Krönungsinsignien von dem Goldschmied Köhler herstellen liess. Die Originale kamen später wieder zurück, wurden nach der Befreiung von Polen nach Deutschland gebracht und vermutlich in den Besatzungsgebieten geschmolzen.

Die fraglichen Krönungsinsignien in diesem Museum, die laut obige Gesetzblatt Nr. 37 vom 31. 8. 1934 zum Familienbesitz der Albrechtischen Linie des Hauses Wettin wurden, wurden von dem letzten König von Sachsen dem Kunsthändler A. Schwarz in Wien für eine Kermis-Ausstellung erworben und dieser Kunsthändler hat dann die Krönungsinsignien an das Museum für 125 000 Zl. verkauft, d. h. handelt es sich hier um einen Preis, der mit dem wirklichen Werteselbst an sich in keinem Einklang zu bringen ist.

Kunsthändler ist es wünschenswert, dass bei Übergabe dieser Insignien die Stadt Warschau goldend macht, welchen Preis sie dafür angeboten hat.

In der Anlage sende ich Ihnen den Vorgang zurück.

S

6. Dr Alfred Schellenberg's letter to Warsaw Starost Ludwig Leist of 7 November 1941

care in Warsaw. Bearing in mind the fact that today in our cultural heritage those German cultural values, once also rooted in the Polish soil, the transfer of the coronation insignia from here to the Dresden Grünes Gewölbe constitutes merely a justification of the restoration of the historic status. Regarded in a purely ideological sphere the act does not change the fact that the Polish state acquired the insignia at one point rightfully, paying for them 175.000 zlotys, amounting at the time to approximately RM 100.000.<sup>16</sup> In the continuation of his letter, Leist suggested for Mutshmann to order a selection of objects of Saxon porcelain, and have them dispatched to Warsaw. Their display was planned at an exhibition prepared for Germans inhabiting the General Government. On 15 April 1942, Prof. Fichtner dispatched a letter to Dr Schellenberg. The official was informing his colleague about having passed the suggestion of the Warsaw officials with respect to a ceramic collection which could serve as a compensation for the given insignia. He also asked for information to be prepared on the sale of the MNW regalia. Alfred Schellenberg turned for help in this respect to S. Lorentz. On the occasion he expressed his doubt whether Frederick Augustus III had exchanged the coronation insignia for a ceramics collection. Taking the opportunity of the letter, aware of the need to sign for the exportation of such valuables, Schellenberg issued a receipt to the Museum reading: *I hereby confirm that the royal regalia of Augustus III dating from 1734 composed of the following elements:*

*two crowns, two sceptres, two orbs, one coronation mantle, were handed to me on 31 March 1942 by the Director of the City Museum of Warsaw, 13 Dritte Meistrasse.<sup>17</sup>*

On 18 April 1942, Ludwig Leist received an answer from Gauleiter Mutschmann's office reading: *The Reich Governor read your letter dated 13 April 1942 with much interest, however, he is not authorized, neither does he have any tools at his disposal, to select any objects pertaining to the state collections and transfer them to be at your discretion. Let me add that the coronation insignia were transferred to Saxony on Führer's personal order.<sup>18</sup>* The polite form of the document harbours no illusion that the Gauleiter had any intention of compensating for the insignia having been transferred to the Dresden Museum, arguing possibly that the authorities of Saxony could not be held responsible for the decision made by the Reich Chancellor. Meanwhile, the Warsaw Starost's Office were determined not to give in. Ludwig Leist obliged Dr Alfred Schellenberg to continue the negotiations. When asked by Schellenberg about Gauleiter Mutschmann's decision, Prof. Fichtner responded he had not information on the Saxon government negatively reacting to the Warsaw Starost's request. This did not alter the fact that no efforts were made to compensate the Warsaw Museum for the suffered loss. Prof. Fichtner informed Schellenberg about the attempt to clarify the issue of the sale of the insignia by the House of Wettin (Haus Wettin).

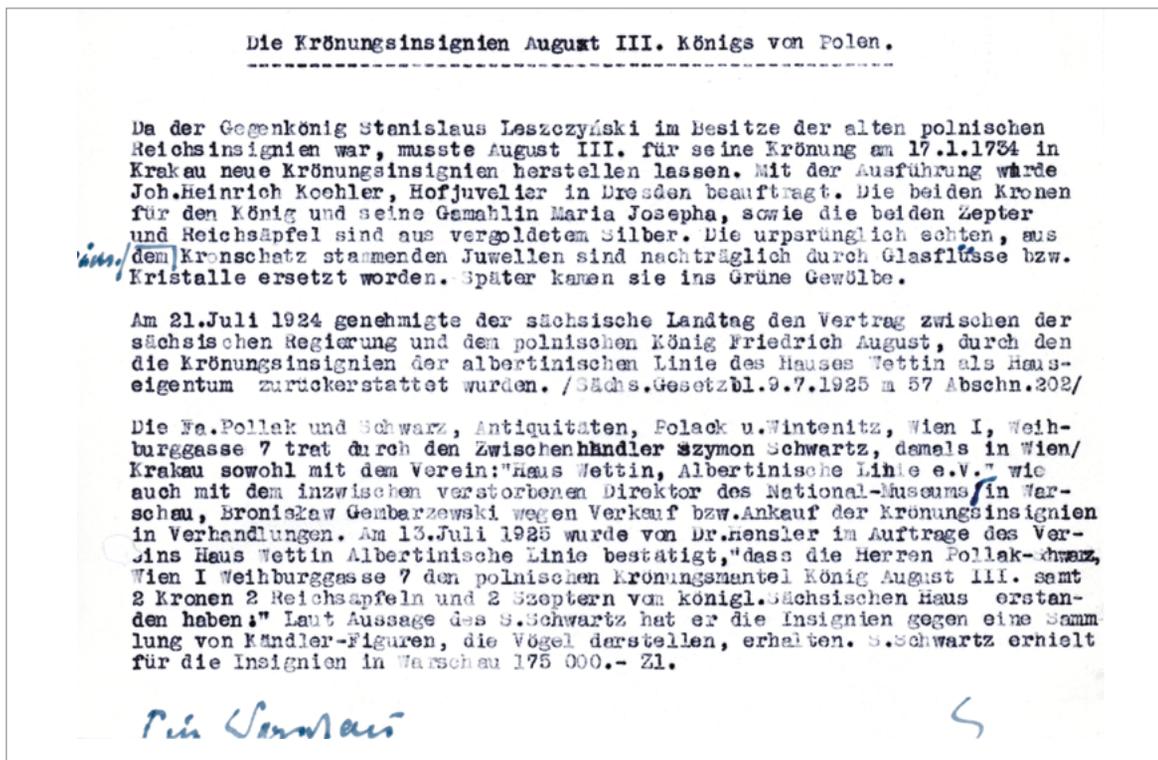


7. Martin Mutschmann, Gauleiter of Saxony, (bottom row, first from the left) together with Franz von Epp, Bavarian Gauleiter, and Fritz Sauckel, Gauleiter of Thuringia (on the right) in 1937



8. Photo ID of Dr Alfred Schellenberg

However, it was thanks to the materials kept at the Warsaw National Museum that the history of acquiring the coronation insignia of Augustus III and of his spouse Maria Josepha was clarified. Their copies, accompanied by his personal report on the matter, were passed to Schellenberg on 7 May 1942 by Dr Stanislaw Lorentz. He confirmed that the purchase transaction had been concluded on 21 July 1925, and the intermediary in it was the antique dealer Szymon Schwarz who had acquired the insignia *in the course of an exchange in which he offered a collection of porcelain figurines representing birds*.<sup>19</sup> The National Museum in Warsaw was represented in the transaction by the then Museum Director Prof. Bronisław Gembarzewski. No more details of the case were known to the Museum management: Prof. Gembarzewski had passed away on 11 December 1941. Lorentz attached the receipt of the insignia purchase by the Vienna antique dealers issued on 15 July 1925. *It is hereby confirmed that MrMr Pollak-Schwartz, of Vienna I, 7 Weihburggasse, purchased a Polish coronation mantle of Augustus III together with two crowns, two orbs, and two sceptres at the Königlich Sächsisches Haus*.<sup>20</sup> The document was signed by Dr Erwin Hensler from the Board of the Association of the House of Wettin Albertinian Line (Haus Wettin Albertinische Linie). On the grounds of the material prepared by Stanislaw Lorentz a report for the German authorities on the history of the insignia of Augustus III was prepared. Alfred Schellenberg, the author of the report, wrote e.g., that the return of the insignia to King's descendants took place upon the decision of the Saxony government. The information contained in the catalogue



9. Information confirming the purchase of the insignia by the Vienna Pollack & Winternitz antique shop

of the Grünes Gewölbe Museum from 1884 explained that *following the coronation act the precious jewels used for making the crowns were removed and placed in the next room (Jewel Room). The insignia are used today during various church ceremonies (funerals, etc.), the gems having been replaced with crystals and minerals.*<sup>21</sup> Schellenberg sent a copy of the report and of the documents kept at the National Museum in Warsaw, including Dr Erwin Hensler's note on the objects' sale, to Prof. Fichtner.

The question of the dispatch of the insignia of Augustus III to Dresden aroused some questions among General Government's officials. On 27 May 1942, Dr Adolf Watzke, President of the Main Department of Science and Education, wrote to the Special Delegate for the Securing of Works of Art in the Eastern Occupied Territories. He wanted to know more about the background of the whole issue. Josef Ernst, a close colleague of Dr Kajetan Mühlmann responded: *As for the above case, I am aware of it. However, as it happened on Führer's order, and it was a secret state mission, I am not authorized to share any information.*<sup>22</sup> In view of this, Watzke decided to turn to Warsaw Starost Ludwig Leist for some explanation.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the answer on this matter has not been preserved in the MNW archives; on the other hand, the President of the Main Department of Science and Education may have received the explanation on the phone or in a face-to-face meeting. The lack of any further correspondence may suggest that none of the officials wished to polemicise against Adolf Hitler's decision on the matter.

During the last months of the war, the insignia were evacuated to a safe repository. The evacuation of the most precious sections of the art collection kept in Dresden was necessary because of the air raids that had become a great threat to the city. Carpet bombing on 13 and 14 February 1945 led to an enormous destruction of industrial infrastructure and civilian space. Dresden's Gemäldegalerie, Grünes Gewölbe, and many other culture facilities were damaged.<sup>24</sup> Thanks to the earlier decisions the majority of the valuable collections had been evacuated to the provinces, e.g., to the Weesenstein Palace in which paintings, prints, porcelain, and others were located,<sup>25</sup> as well as to the Königstein Fortress; the latter gave shelter to the majority of the Grünes Gewölbe collections. Thanks to this German museum curators succeeded in protecting the collections against the Allies' air raids. However, they were unable to secure priceless historic objects against the actions of the Soviet Trophy Brigades which in early 1945 began searching for art works kept in the territories seized by the Red Army. The decision to create those teams coincided with the conclusions at the Yalta Conference (2–11 February 1945). One of the topics tackled by the Allies was the issue of war reparations for the damage caused by the occupation authorities of the Third Reich. The decision that the Germans were to cover the damage incurred in kind encouraged Joseph Stalin's decisions with respect to culture. The Council of People's Commissars established the Committee on the Arts which was to prepare the operation of 'securing' art collections found in the territories occupied by the Red Army.<sup>26</sup> Already in February 1945, groups responsible for fulfilling this task began their operation at the back of the First Ukrainian Front and the First and Second Belarussian Fronts.



10. Dr Adolf Watzke, President of the Department of Science and Education

Their heads were respectively: Boris Filipov, Director of the Moscow Drama Theatre, Andrey Bielokopitov, Director of the Moscow Art Theatre, and Leontiy Denisov, Head of the Department of Fine Arts, of the above-mentioned Committee on the Arts. To assist these groups numerous specialists in culture and arts were assigned, e.g.: Sergiei Sidorov of the Department of Fine Arts of the Committee on the Arts; Andrei Chegodaiev and Lev Kharko of the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow; Vladimir Shcherbinin and Yevgeniy Sushchenko of the State Symphony Orchestra of the USSR; Prof. Vladimir Blavatski, art historian and archaeologist; Sergei Grigorov, Secretary of the Committee on Monument Preservation and Registration; Vasilii Klimov and Boris Koptsov of the Moscow Tretyakov Gallery; Prof. Victor Lasariev, a specialist in Italian Renaissance; and Natalia Ivanovna Sokolova of the Moscow Museum of the Modern Western Art.<sup>27</sup> And it was the latter who played an extremely important role in searching for the Dresden art collections.

In February and March 1945, Natalia Ivanovna Sokolova participated in the operation of 'securing' museum collections throughout Upper and Lower Silesia.<sup>28</sup> In early May, she was assigned to assist the Trophy Brigade commanded by Leonid Rabinovich and operating in Dresden.<sup>29</sup> Sokolova was to find the art collections missing in Dresden museums, since the Russians were certain the objects had not been destroyed during the February 1945 bombing. Thanks to the collected information Sokolova reached a small locality called Cotta where in one of the mine tunnels



11. Festung Königstein: in the cellar of the fortress the Grünes Gewölbe collection was deposited



12. Transportation of the Grünes Gewölbe collection handed over to GDR by the Soviet Union in 1958

a repository for Dresden Gallery paintings had been prepared. Among that collection there was e.g. the *Sistine Madonna* by Raphael.<sup>30</sup> However, the coronation insignia of Augustus III were discovered elsewhere. Already in the course of the first years of WW II, the management of the Grünes Gewölbe were given access to the cellars of the Königstein Fortress (during the war it housed Oflag IV-B, where also Poles were imprisoned). The Saxon regalia were placed there. The Russians captured the repository, and found the collection on 14 May 1945.<sup>31</sup> The Grünes Gewölbe collection, similarly as the art works found by Sokolova and the Rabinovich group in other Saxony repositories, were transferred to the Pillnitz Castle in southern Dresden. There the collections were inventoried, and subsequently transported to the Pushkin Museum in Moscow.<sup>32</sup> Dresden museums had to wait some years for the return of their priceless masterpieces: the *Sistine Madonna* came back to Germany in 1955. The Russians brought the Grünes Gewölbe collection to Dresden in 1958: it included the coronation insignia of Augustus III and his spouse Maria Josepha. It is likely that the Soviets were not aware of the history behind those items and of the fact that the National Museum

in Warsaw had purchased them in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, it was only two years later that the regalia returned to Poland; for propaganda reasons, the party acting as an intermediary in the transfer was the Soviet Embassy in Warsaw.<sup>33</sup> No document suggesting who initiated the actions on the issue: whether the Dresden curators or the Warsaw ones, has been discovered in the archives of the National Museum in Warsaw. The only materials encountered by the Author demonstrate that in the building in Jerozolimskie Avenue the display of *the insignia of the royal power of Augustus II and Augustus III looted from the National Museums in Warsaw during WW II by the Nazis, saved by the Soviet Army, and passed by the USSR government to the government of the Polish People's Republic* was held on 6 November 1960.<sup>34</sup>

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I would like to extend my gratitude for the assistance in collecting the materials for the paper to Monika Myszor-Cieciela, PhD, and Aleksandra Mińkowska of the National Museum in Warsaw.

**Abstract:** During WWII, numerous precious art works from Polish public and private collections were looted, displaced and taken out of Poland. In view of the value of some of those pieces, the invaders' authorities decided to have them transferred to German museums, and this is what happened to the coronation insignia of King Augustus III and his spouse Maria Josepha. German officials took over the regalia which were property of the National Museum in Warsaw already in 1939. Some time after, they were transferred to Cracow, the capital of the General Government. Several months later

the insignia returned to Warsaw. In 1941, Dr Hans Lammers, Chief of the Reich Chancellery, requested them. On Adolf Hitler's decision they were to be transferred to Dresden's Grünes Gewölbe; in order to be transported there they were taken from Warsaw in 1942. By the end of the war, they were evacuated to a repository of artworks in the cellars of the Königstein Fortress. After WW II had ended, they were relocated, together with other cultural goods, to Moscow. It was only in 1960 that the Soviet regime returned the precious regalia to Poland.

**Keywords:** royal insignia of Augustus III, reclamation, Grünes Gewölbe, war vicissitudes of art works, war losses.

## Endnotes

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